



FINAL EVALUATION REPORT

*New economic opportunities for returnees and
vulnerable citizens in southern and eastern Serbia*

Financed by the German Federal Ministry for Economic
Cooperation and Development (BMZ)
(Donor Contract no. 4621)

Lead applicant:
CARE Deutschland e. V.

Project implemented by:
CARE International, Serbia office, NEXUS and ENECA

Project duration:
3 years (11/2020-10/2023)

Evaluation Report prepared by:
Branka Kresoja, Group Be One

ACRONYMS

CSO – Civil Society Organization

CSW – Center for Social Work

LDS - Latter-Day Saint Charities

NES – National Employment Service

POs – Partner Organizations

RS – Republic of Serbia

ToR – Terms of Reference

ToT – Training of Trainers

TABLE OF CONTENTS

ACRONYMS	1
1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY	3
2. DESCRIPTION OF THE ACTION	5
3. METHODOLOGY OF THE EVALUATION	7
4. FINDINGS	8
5. CONCLUSIONS	19
6. RECOMMENDATIONS	21
LIST OF ANNEXES	22

1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report is an external evaluation of “*New economic opportunities for returnees and vulnerable citizens in southern and eastern Serbia*” project, implemented by CARE International Balkans, Serbia Office and project partner organizations NEXUS from Vranje and ENECA from Niš, financed by the German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ); Donor Contract no. 4621. Part of matching funds have been provided by Letter-Day Saint Charities (LDS). Lead applicant of the project was CARE Deutschland e.V. Project implementation period under review was from the November 2020 to October 2023. The evaluation was carried out by the external evaluator at the end of the Project implementation period September – October, 2023.

Overall objective of the project was to contribute to the equal, socio-economic integration of vulnerable citizens and improve the general economic living conditions in the south and east of the Republic of Serbia. The goal of the project was that vulnerable population groups in Southeast Serbia recognize opportunities for socio-economic inclusion in their home region and question emigration more critically. The project has been implemented in six districts of south and east Serbia: Pčinjski, Jablanički, Nišavski, Pirotski, Zaječarski and Borski. Target project groups includes citizens who have returned via the readmission agreement, but also local economically disadvantaged population groups that tend to emigrate to Western countries and their family members.

The purpose of the Final evaluation was to analyse the achievement of the planned results and the impact of the named project on the level of the key stakeholders and to provide findings, conclusions, and recommendations for the future programming, as well as for development of new project proposals. In order to assess the relevance, effectiveness, efficiency and sustainability of the Action the evaluation was analysed the project’s achievements after the three years of the project implementation, based on the specific objectives and results as specified in the project proposal and ToR¹. The process of evaluation involved 64 participants, 54 of which are direct project beneficiaries. Evaluation was based on participatory approach since this approach can increase ownership of the program, evaluation findings, conclusions, and recommendations.

The context of project implementation and the fact that the project is developed and implemented in cooperation with partner organizations and based on the needs of the target group is confirmed and justified by assessment. Serbia as a country faced numerous challenges and crisis during past decades. Socioeconomic situation is marked by instability and uncertainty, high rates of poverty, high rates of unemployment and increasing population decline through emigration, especially emigration of youth and highly educated citizens. The aforementioned makes a project aiming at increasing the capacity of vulnerable population groups to recognize opportunities of socioeconomic inclusion into their home region and to question more critically their options of emigration to developed countries, significant and relevant. Both components of the project - psychosocial support and economic support - consisted of well-thought-through activities which resulted or contributed to improvements in general economic living conditions and psychosocial status of vulnerable citizens in the south and east of Serbia. Project measures created 206 jobs, donated equipment for 100 micro businesses, provided 100 internships, trained more than 700 people, so over 1000 people benefited from the economic component of the project. Indirectly, at least another 1000 relatives of the beneficiaries benefited through improved family income. Over 16500 services were provided as part of psychosocial measures. More than 5000 people benefited from psychosocial measures through various project activities - information and advisory work, social support, educational (re-) integration support and psychological support. All of these results are durable in nature. On an institutional

¹ Annex 1 - ToR for Evaluator

level, new methodologies have been introduced into educational system that will improve the position of vulnerable groups, cooperation between governmental and civic sector has been established, local and regional authorities are more aware of the need of vulnerable groups and are more sensitized to them. Results of the project should increase and become more evident in local communities and beyond with the passage of time.

Improvement of human and social rights, especially of children's rights (returnees, Roma) to equal access to education had been achieved through an intensive work with representatives of institutions, schools as well as through inclusion of local community in order to reduce prejudice and enhance inclusive practices. Through direct forms of empowerment and informing vulnerable groups, they have been enabled to gain heightened awareness of their rights and to exercise them to a greater extent. The project had a significant impact on poverty reduction, social inclusion and local economic development too.

Project investment into human capital is a sustainable investment since through increasing the employability, knowledge and development of skills of the beneficiaries it directly contributes to the economic development and sustainability.

This project was well designed, led and implemented. Having that all three project Outputs have been fully realized, the project implementation has been assessed as effective and successful. The results achieved until the end of the implementation of the project have been assessed as fully accomplished. The entirety of planned activities, in spite of some of them being delayed due to COVID19 pandemic, was realized until the end of the project cycle. The estimated number of beneficiaries that was to be covered with this Action was reached, while the number of beneficiaries of psychosocial component was surpassed. Sustainability has been achieved to a certain extent at different levels – at the level of individuals (returnees and other vulnerable groups, school experts) included in the project, as well as at the institutional level (local and regional institution, schools). Project has utilized the available resources, in terms of funds, staff and time, responsibly, thoughtfully and economically. With this kind of approach, an excellent risk management and changes made by the project team, the Project was successfully completed and the assessment from this Final evaluation is that a high level of efficiency has been reached.

This project did justify its slogan *"It's worth it! - New opportunities for a sustainable start"*.

2. DESCRIPTION OF THE ACTION

Basic project information

The project “New economic opportunities for returnees and vulnerable citizens in southern and eastern Serbia” is contributing to the equal, socio-economic integration of vulnerable citizens and improving the general economic living conditions in the south and east of the Republic of Serbia.

The goal of the project is that vulnerable population groups in Southeast Serbia recognize opportunities for socio-economic inclusion in their home region and question emigration more critically.

This three years project was initiated in November 2020 and lasted until the end of the October 2023, under a financial instrument of the German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ). In accordance with initial requirements of BMZ, part of matching funds have been provided by Latter-Day Saint Charities (LDS). LDS had its own requirements regarding the dynamic of project implementation, reporting, as well as regarding the choice of activities to be supported (which led to adjustments being made to the initial dynamic).

It is a joint initiative of CARE and its partner organisations NEXUS from Vranje and ENECA from Niš.

The following project results/outputs are expected:

Output 1 mutual exchange: Serbian decision-makers are informed about the economic and social needs of the target group and beneficiaries are aware of their rights

Output 2 by the end of the project, new fields of employment for returnees and vulnerable citizens will have been created in Southeast Serbia.

Output 3 Increased sensitivity and capacity of (local) authorities for a more successful integration of returnees.

The project basis its activities on constant context analysis among the beneficiaries, organises information campaigns for target populations, continuous individual counselling and support for returnees, including psychosocial support and seeks synergy with similar initiatives in the country.

Within the support to economic self-reliance of the target beneficiaries, it is expected that the project will create new fields of employment for returnees and vulnerable citizens in Southeast Serbia. Employment support trainings will be provided for 660 beneficiaries and followed by the in-kind grant scheme for self-employment and employment of 150 people. It is planned that internships will be organised in cooperation with local companies, for 100 graduated students.

The project works on increasing sensitivity and capacity of local authorities and institutions, primarily educational, for a more successful integration of returnees. This encompasses trainings of school experts to integrate returnees into the school system, particular integration initiatives, usage of forum theatre methodology in recognising roles and problems and advocacy/awareness raising measures directed at stakeholders and decision-makers on all levels.

It is envisaged that the project will directly tackle around 2400 people from the target regions.

Target regions and groups of the project:

The project has been implemented in six districts of south and east Serbia: Pčinjski, Jablanički, Nišavski, Pirotski, Zaječarski and Borski.

Target project groups include citizens who have returned via the readmission agreement, but also local economically disadvantaged population groups that tend to emigrate to Western countries and their family members.



Direct beneficiaries of the economic component: > 1000

Direct beneficiaries of psychosocial project activities: > 1400

An accompanying measure will create around 250 jobs, provide 100 internships, organize vocational training for 360 people, train up to 300 people in the preparation of business plans, so that over 1000 people will benefit from the economic component of the project. Indirectly, at least another 1000 relatives of the beneficiaries will benefit indirectly through improved family income. The ratio between male and female final beneficiaries will be approximately equal. One objective of the project is to support primarily women from their underprivileged situation.

In addition, an average of 1,400 people will benefit from psychosocial project activities, more than 25 local school professionals (teachers, educators, psychologists, etc.) will be involved in the activities to create an inclusive school system, and it is expected that more than 1,250 students from the target areas, as well as their parents, will be positively influenced by the project.

Around 120 representatives of local authorities and institutions, from all project regions, are involved in the public debates. The activities of the Advocacy component will address local institutions in the target regions, local governments and national authorities, and will convey the main recommendations and messages.

3. METHODOLOGY OF THE EVALUATION

The main methodology for collecting data was focus group discussions with project beneficiaries in target regions, semi-structured interviews, field visits, questionnaires and desktop research and documents analysis. Evaluation was based on participatory approach since this approach can increase ownership of the program, evaluation findings, conclusions, and recommendations.

The process of evaluation involved 64 participants, 54 of which are direct project beneficiaries (84% women)².

Data Collection and Analysis³

Examination of project documents (provided by CARE and partner organizations NEXUS and ENECA) – Relevant background documents and reports have been reviewed and analysed as part of the preliminary research during evaluation, in order to build upon existing information, findings and evidence available (Project Proposal, Baseline data, Data bases of the beneficiaries – Evidence bases, Interim reports, List of participants, Photo/Video documentation, Internal Mid-term evaluation Report, etc.). More than 50 documents have been reviewed⁴.

Meetings and interviews with project staff – Semi-structured interviews were conducted at the three separate on-line meetings with CARE, NEXUS and ENECA project staff during inception evaluation phase, and after that during implementation phase two meetings were organized in ENECA and NEXUS premises with 5 project staff members, and one online meeting was organized with CARE Project Manager - Socioeconomic Advisor.

Focus group discussions - Three focus groups have been organized with 34 participants; with grant beneficiaries (5 women and 4 men) and with vocational training participants (8 women and 4 men) from Niš region, and one focus group with psychosocial activity participants (13 Roma women) from Pčinja region. Focus group participants have been selected from databases of partner organizations according to activities in which they were involved. In this way, the project activities related to business and vocational trainings, in kind start-up grants and psychosocial support have been analysed through direct discussion with participants and their own assessment of the effects of activities.

Interviews and questionnaires with project staff, project beneficiaries and representatives of the relevant local institutions - Exchange of numerous e-mails and phone calls was conducted in order to gather project documentation, set the time frame for evaluation, agree meetings etc. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with project staff members and one local institution representative (in Vranje). 16 school representatives from 6 cities fulfilled the questionnaire⁵.

Field Visits - Field visits have been made to four beneficiaries who, after business trainings, received a grant – one person in Leskovac (man) and three in Vranje (women).

Analysis of project staff feedback of the preliminary evaluation findings presented - Preliminary evaluation findings were presented to CARE, NEXUS and ENECA at a workshop in the final phase of the evaluation⁶. Workshop took place in Novi Sad on October 18, 2023. Project staff feedback was analysed and incorporated into the Final Report.

² Annex 2 – List of persons consulted and interviewed and Annex 3 – Registration lists of evaluation participants

³ Annex 4 – Evaluation plan and time frame

⁴ Annex 5 – List of reviewed project documentation

⁵ Annex 6 – Questionnaire

⁶ Annex 7 – Registration list of workshop participants

4. FINDINGS

Vulnerable population groups in Southeast Serbia recognize opportunities for socio-economic inclusion in their home region and question emigration more critically was the specific objective of the Action.

The following findings of the Final evaluation are described under the outputs and planned activities sections. What follows is a review of the project achievements against the indicators set in the project impact matrix.

Output 1 mutual exchange: *Serbian decision-makers are informed about the economic and social needs of the target group and beneficiaries are aware of their rights*

- Serbian decision-makers have increased their knowledge of the needs of returnees significantly⁷
- Six new local decisions formulated with sensitive attitude towards returnees (1 per project region)
- Number of local initiatives planned/initiated to support the returnees in the target areas.
- Local decision-makers answered questions and exchanged views with final beneficiaries in 96 group meetings.
- 80% Returnees participating in project organized information exchange report that they are better informed on how to access services and contact decision makers.

The project team members has established contacts with more than 140 representatives of various stakeholder instances: Ministry for Human and Minority Rights and Social Dialogue, Ministry of Labor, Employment, Veterans' Affairs and Social Affairs, The Commissioner for Protection of Equality, Institute of Mental Health, cities' administrations (9), educational institutions (22), National Employment Service (NES) in 6 target regions and on the central level as well, Health Insurance Fund (2), Centres for Social Work (CSW) (10), Commissariat for Refugees (6), Regional Chamber of Commerce in 4 target regions, NGOs (32), Migration centres (3), Legal Aid Offices, Youth Offices (5), Primary Health Care Centres (2), Schools for Adult Education, Cultural Centres, Patient Rights Advisors, Regional Centre for Professional Development in 6 target regions, Local Economic Development Office, Science and Technology Park Niš, Job centres (3) and numerous private companies (34). These stakeholders have been involved in the project through meetings, public debates, conference, as guests in the project organized support sessions, during which they have been informed, by the project team members and beneficiaries themselves, on the needs of returnees and other vulnerable groups and it would be reasonable to assume that this contributed to increase in their knowledge.

As a result of 6 Public debates (1 per project region) 6 reports had been formulated (not local decisions as planned) and 1 Summary report in which the primary needs and obstacles for economically and socially vulnerable groups to fully exercise their rights followed by concrete recommendations for increasing inclusivity of and create more adequate responses of community to growing needs of this population. These reports/conclusions were shared with decision-makers and can serve as an excellent basis for further activities aimed at improving the position of vulnerable groups in the south and east of Republic of Serbia.

In the course of the implementation of the project a large number of local initiatives to support returnees in the target areas have been implemented with minimum 30000 direct beneficiaries – information campaign (web media, local TV and newspaper media), support sessions (employment and psychosocial support), individual psychological support, grants, vocational trainings, internships, field visits by project staff members and local multipliers, public debates, forum theatre performances, meetings with all relevant local stakeholders etc.

40 representatives of various local institutions (CSW, municipalities, NES) from all six target regions were invited as guests to the project organised support sessions (within the psychosocial project component) and

⁷ Serbian decision makers can formulate at least 3 needs in focus group discussions on the challenges of returnees. Survey among employees in administration and local politics.

had a chance to directly communicate with returnees and vulnerable beneficiaries and respond to their questions.

The total of 104 group meetings - sessions have been implemented within the project duration, in the local communities of the target regions with 1590 beneficiaries (57% were women, 33% were returnees). 12 economical empowerment and 92 psychosocial empowerment sessions.

Over 16,500 services were provided as part of psychosocial measures. More than 5,000 people benefited from psychosocial measures through various project activities - information and advisory work, social support, educational (re-)integration support and psychological support.

Out of the total number of direct project beneficiaries 22% were returnees. The evaluation of whether “they are better informed on how to access services and contact decision makers” has been based on the project multipliers’ reports (evaluations of the group meetings-sessions and field work reports) and based on which Nexus came to findings that more than 80% have declared that they are better informed on how to access services and contact decision makers. All interviewed participants during evaluation process reported that they are better informed and they are aware of their rights.

Based on various sources (project reports and documents, media news, database, direct contact with beneficiaries during the evaluation process) it has been established that Output 1 was fully reached-Serbian decision-makers are informed about the economic and social needs of the target group and beneficiaries are aware of their rights.

Output 2 by the end of the project, new fields of employment for returnees and vulnerable citizens will have been created in Southeast Serbia.

- 50 start-up grants (in kind) for self-employed persons (one employee)
- 50 start-up grants (in kind) for self-employed persons (two employees)
- 360 beneficiaries took part in vocational trainings.
- 300 beneficiaries have participated in business plan design training
- 100 young school leavers have completed an internship.

All proposed indicators have been reached in their entirety. Employment support trainings were organized for more than 700 beneficiaries (business plan training for 312 and vocational training for 395 beneficiaries, according to Eneca’s data base) and 101 young school leavers have completed an internship. 100 persons in total received in-kind grants to start or enhance their own business which led to 150 persons being employed. Project measures created 206 jobs during the project period (ENECA’s data base).

Many activities have been implemented prior to and around the time of implementation of employment support trainings, grant awardance and internship activities. It is important to mention that it is an evaluators’ impression that previously well-done Feasibility Study that provided relevant information on the socio-economic status of returnees and vulnerable groups, their capacity for economic engagement and employment, as well as the economic potential of the local business environment, contributed to this success. Additionally, the media campaign and many meetings held in the initial phase of the project with the aim to present economic opportunities that can be brought upon by the project, as well as dissemination of information about the project startup grants and internships activities that are to be implemented by local stakeholders (NES, Chamber of Commerce, Youth Offices and the Regional Development Agencies in all 6 project regions) have made possible to inform a large number of persons about the opportunities that the project entails. For example, just one web campaign aimed at promoting Internship activities reached 23776 individuals for the first online meeting and up to 18772 people for the second online meeting (Facebook, December 2022). During the project implementation a number of meetings were held by the project team with the aim of exchanging information and experiences related to current programs and projects, in order to provide an adequate as possible support to beneficiaries within this Project, and to avoid overlap in the field. Continuous analysis of the economic needs and potentials of the beneficiaries and the capacities of

the local economy was performed by the Eneca team. Ex ante and ex post analysis of economic needs were conducted by Pro business Consulting doo Niš.

Most of all, high level of professionalism of project team members, their knowledge and experience as well as their commitment to this project reaching its goals have been of key importance to the success of the project. Based on various data sources used in evaluation- partner organizations' databases, participant lists, training sessions evaluations, partner organizations reports, photo documentation, focus groups, field visits and interviews with 25 direct beneficiaries of aforementioned activities, as well as interviews held with the project team- confirmed the following results:

The total of 312 beneficiaries participated in business plans trainings implemented by Eneca. Trainings have been evaluated by the participants of external evaluation as highly useful, of sufficient content and well organized, while some of them emphasized that this training, as well as experience and knowledge that they gained throughout the process of applying for grants within this project, have enabled them to complete applications to Development Fund of the Republic of Serbia for even greater funds and to employ even more people (grant recipient from Leskovac, during the field visit).

In order to identify and select beneficiaries with best business ideas ENECA and CARE in cooperation with NEXUS defined appropriate selection criteria, drawing on its extensive experience in similar projects. All target groups (returnees, Roma, local vulnerable groups) were able to apply for tender rounds and thus get the chance to participate in the project. The initial idea to give the beneficiaries a chance to choose professions according to their own potential and assets was truly put into practice throughout this project which can be evident in the variety of businesses supported - furniture making; food production; hairdressing and beautician salons; grooming salons; artwork shops; auto mechanic shops/services; laser and CNC gravure, cutting and production of different-purpose objects; production of natural cosmetic products; electrical equipment production; clothing production; recycling plastic services; daycare children centre; different servicing businesses.

The Selection Committee, consisting of CARE and Eneca, with Nexus staff as observers, selected 100 applicants for awarding the grants for starting or enhancement of their own businesses⁸. Total of 50 beneficiaries received in-kind grants for smaller start-ups with one of the preconditions for receiving the grant was to employ one person (up to EUR 1500) and 50 grants for start-ups with the precondition to employ two persons (up to EUR 3600). Out of the total number of grant beneficiaries 49% were women and 33% were returnees and members of national minorities. According to database and Eneca team all businesses were operational at the end of October 2023. All throughout the implementation of the project CARE and the project team continuously monitored the business start-up program and maintained contact with beneficiaries. Eneca team provided additional consultations with the aim of improvement of business practices and according to statements by focus groups participants as part of external evaluation (held in Niš, October 3, 2023) Eneca team members were available to beneficiaries for all kinds of questions which beneficiaries found to be significant and useful. The significance and benefits of the project were highly estimated by beneficiaries:

"I have experienced a boost in self-esteem and felt highly supported, which meant a lot to me at the very start of my business venture." (man)

"High quality equipment which helped me develop and advance my company as well as to develop personally as an entrepreneur." (woman)

"I am very happy that there are organizations that support women entrepreneurship since women entrepreneurship is less represented" (woman)

395 beneficiaries completed vocational trainings. The information campaign for vocational trainings and other project opportunities was initiated in April and again in August 2021, since the spring campaign did not bring about the wanted number of potential beneficiaries. The total number of applications received

⁸ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jaV7YI4Uo-Q>

was 667. Total of 395 beneficiaries were selected and did complete vocational trainings within the period 2022-2023, out of which 57% are women. The implementation of more than initially planned 360 trainings was possible given the budget constraints. „Simple“ vocational trainings have been organized for 155 beneficiaries (as per project database) - graphic design, digital marketing, office manager and accounting. 240 beneficiaries received „advanced“ vocational trainings professional drivers, accounting, male and female hairdresser, beautician, make-up artist, ICT, industrial mechanics etc.

During external evaluation, participants of focus groups expressed that the application process was clear, that trainings were organized professionally, that they gained significant knowledge and skills and that this will be of great help to them in finding a job and improving their economic situation.

“It has opened up new opportunities for me and I have developed an engineering way of thinking.” (man)

“I have learned how to advance my business.” (woman)

“It has opened new opportunities to move forward and I have perfected the knowledge I gained during schooling.” (man)

101 young school leavers have completed internship. The project team led by Eneca introduced the concept of the internship to local companies in the project target regions in the second year of project implementation (2022). Public tender was announced to the graduates (high schools or universities) from the target region and they were invited to apply for an internship (temporary employment) in local companies. Despite many meetings being held with representatives of local companies as well as campaigns aiming to inform potential beneficiaries of the program, only 8 internships started in 2022. The implementation of internship program proved to be the greatest challenge within the overall project implementation, especially regarding the size planned. Many additional campaigns and meetings were held by the project team which eventually made reaching the defined indicator possible. For example, Eneca organized the Job fair⁹ (April, 2023) visited by over 300 young people with 11 representable companies also being present (Johnson Electric, Philip Morris Operations, Spintec Precision, Vossloh MIN Skretnice, Naissus technologies etc.). Due to the occurrence of other more attractive internship programs after the initiation of project implementation, (for example NES and CARITAS which offer much larger allowances of monthly payments for the interns), and that, in spite of numerous promotional activities undertaken, candidates showed a lack of interest in internships offered by this project, it was necessary to adjust this activity to a developing situation. In the project proposal it was proposed that the internship would last “three to six months“ and the project team reduced the number of months of the internship program in 2023 from 6 to 4 months, to have a competitive monthly reimbursement for the interns. This decision was judged a good one taking into account that the project team took appropriate steps and mitigated the risk and eventually was able to implement the activity. Total of 101 participants completed an internship of which 54% were women. 13 beneficiaries were employed of which 12 continued to work for the same employer they completed internship with (9 women). Even though all beneficiaries did complete the internship it wasn't possible to give a precise estimation of effects of this activity during evaluation. A positive aspect is the fact that 13% beneficiaries of this program found employment so we can assume that this program will significantly influence the employability of most of the beneficiaries.

Some of the activities weren't implemented as previously planned. For example, one part of business trainings (April-May 2021) was implemented prior to psychosocial empowerment and the majority of internship activities was realized in the third year of the project. During the evaluation it was established that these deviations were justified, that they were communicated to the donor in time, that they didn't affect the implementation of the project as well as that the project team made good judgments, adjusted

⁹https://www.google.com/url?sa=t&rct=j&q=&esrc=s&source=web&cd=&cad=rja&uact=8&ved=2ahUKEwjs5vj2N6CAXBwAIHHTVVBzYQz40FegQICRAK&url=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.youtube.com%2Fwatch%3Fv%3DAH17AgpHeE0&usg=AOvVaw1LJmpr54Lk6FwB_QuYz8v6&opi=89978449

measures to the existing situation and made additional effort to ensure that these measures are properly realized. Deviations from the initial project activity plan were influenced by the donor (LDS) request to use their funds exclusively for in-kind grants and by the donor time frame, by other more financially attractive internship programs, as well as by COVID19 pandemic restrictions. This will influence the assessment of the final impact of the project to a certain extent since positive results in terms of improvement in the socio-economic status of beneficiaries can't be fully assessed in the last month of the project but it can be safely assumed that they will only increase in the forthcoming period. Additionally, a slight deviation from planned is evident in the number of women included in the project- it was planned to include about 60% of women while 53% were eventually included. This still constitutes a high percentage of women included in this type of project.

In accordance with what has been stated so far, the results of evaluation confirm that the Output 2 was fully accomplished and that the Project created new fields of employment for returnees and vulnerable citizens in Southeast Serbia.

Output 3 *Increased sensitivity and capacity of (local) authorities for a more successful integration of returnees.*

- 24 school experts have participated in training courses on the integration of returnees into the education system.
- 12 mini-projects by schools included in the project trainings have been implemented successfully (awareness raising).
- 1200 students were able to express their needs through their active participation in the Forum Theatre. (In the Forum Theatre the children design the play themselves)
- 120 local decision-makers were sensitized to the needs of returnees through targeted advocacy.

In order to contribute to increased sensitivity and capacity of (local) authorities for a more successful integration of returnees many activities have been implemented - trainings for school experts, workshops, media campaigns, mini-projects by schools, advocacy/awareness raising campaign directed at stakeholders and decision-makers, meetings, advocacy conference in Belgrade on the integration of returnees and economic migration in general, etc. Even though there was a slight delay in implementation of some activities, caused by COVID19 epidemic restrictions, all activities planned had been implemented and thoroughly documented via participant lists, very detailed reports on activities, evaluation reports, photo and video documentation.

In total, according to Nexus' database, 3622 participants of which 50% were women, 11% were returnees and 88% were children and youth, participated in various activities within School reintegration measures.

In the first year of the project 24 school experts from 12 primary schools (from 6 target districts and 11 cities - Vranje, Zaječar, Leskovac, Knjaževac, Negotin, Vlasotince, Pirot, Bela Palanka, Bujanovac, Bor, Niš) participated in the training (November, 2021)¹⁰. Nexus, in cooperation with CARE, designed a special training for school professionals: teachers, educators, psychologists, which deals with the topics/issues of integrating returning children into school environment. Training school experts from the target region to integrate returnees into the school system and knowledge transfer in schools (training participants, workshops, advocacy tribunes, creative/communication mini projects - radio, newspaper articles, digital story telling, public education) were exclusively based on the experience of the partner organisation Nexus, which has knowledge and experience in creating and implementing support programs for school children and students, especially in the programs that support integration of returnees and vulnerable children. One of important aims of this training was to develop professional competencies of school employees for introducing intercultural education and planning intercultural actions while securing transparency.

¹⁰ <https://www.facebook.com/media/set/?vanity=nvonexus.vranje&set=a.4459670527454146>

12 mini-projects by schools included in the project trainings have been implemented successfully by June 2022, with the total of 2365 participants (46% female, around 7% returnees and 88% were children and youth) and covered by local media in their communities. After the training, the participants received a small budget (400 EUR for each of the 12 participating schools) to carry out the action in their schools. CARE and partners took over the purchase, based on the schools' cost statement. Nexus monitored this process together with local project leaders and evaluated its impact.

The actions aimed at contributing to the integration of children from minority groups, with special reference to the integration of returnee children, in the education process. During the evaluation meeting with Nexus team (October 4, 2023), a special emphasis was put on the significance of these activities as well as very interesting, successful and meaningful mini projects created and implemented by schools (school representatives along with students), even though more than a year passed since their realization. School representatives showed great interest and a high level of engagement in successful integration of returnees as well as in spreading the concept of interculturality which might indicate that the project has contributed to increased sensitivity and capacity of (local) authorities. The transfer of knowledge was achieved through practical application of knowledge acquired in trainings, as illustrated by participants answers to evaluation questionnaire (September, 2023):

„We have gained knowledge and skills that will substantially improve our work and relationships with vulnerable populations within our school.“ (Vranje)

“The realization of the project in our school, the participation of students, as well as the effect of broadcasting a podcast that was created as part of the project and its effect on other students as a new form of work have all been a success. Coming to an idea itself as well as the realization of it within our school would not have been possible without participation in this project.” (Niš).

A forum theatre play was designed through a participatory process - workshop held on November 9-13 2022, with 10 youth actors/activists (4 girls, 6 boys), one trainer, one associate of Nexus (facilitator of the forum play) and 3 Nexus project team members.

14 forum theatre plays were performed in the six target regions (12 in 2022 and 2 in 2023), in front of the audience of 1207 spectators/participants (57% female; 89% children). 1079 (planned 1200) students were able to express their needs through their active participation in the Forum Theatre.

Additionally, whilst not initially planned but approved by the donor, in the end of September 2023 Training for Trainers (ToT) in Forum theatre methodology was organized for 16 school experts from 6 towns: Vranje, Negotin, Zaječar, Niš, Vlasotince, Bujanovac. The main aim of this activity was to increase sustainability of the project component through building capacity of and local ownership by the school staff. Nexus project coordinator: *“Local communities were left with lasting resources for working with children within the educational process that will additionally enable and a more successful integration of children from minority groups.”* All training participants have been included in external evaluation process through a questionnaire regarding the effects of participation of schools in the project. The significance of the participation of schools in the project has been highly estimated by the participants of ToT with an average score of 9.4 given on a ten-point scale. This is how participants clarified the given score:

„The specificity of our school is that a large number of students are of Roma nationality of which some are also returnees. By being able to participate in this project our Roma children were empowered to speak about their customs, culture, learning, needs for support, which meant a lot to them. Additionally, cooperation with parent through our field worker has contributed to better informing and connecting beneficiaries with institutions that are instrumental for the implementation of their rights. The trust and the fact that there is someone who they can turn to in any instance has been of great significance.“ (Niš)
„Participation of our school in this project has enriched our school program and contributed to inclusion of students in school work as part of human rights promotion.“ (Zaječar)

The significance of subjects covered in training has been highly estimated by the participants of ToT with an average score of 9.6 given on a ten-point scale. This is what they said regarding how they are planning to apply the acquired knowledge:

- „We are going to introduce the teachers in our school with what we have learned, enhancing the development of our work from inside our school; We will establish a Forum theatre as part of our Drama Club.“(Negotin)*
- „We will use this knowledge in numerous situations when it is needed to include children from vulnerable groups into our school.“ (Zaječar)*
- „It is important to raise awareness about the concept of interculturality among our employees, as well as our students, especially when it comes to multicultural communities. We will be working on creating opportunities for joint activities of all students, with the emphasis on including children returnees. In this respect, Forum theatre seems to be an excellent method, highly applicable with children“. (Bujanovac)*

The activities of the Advocacy component addressed local institutions in the target regions, local governments and national authorities with more than 200 direct participants. Minimum 131 local decision-makers (120 planned) were sensitized to the needs of returnees through targeted advocacy.

According to database and list of participants over 120 participants were involved in Public debates¹¹, with one debate organized per region (six debates in total), with approximately 23 participants per each debate. Public debates on the subject of „Creating conditions for equality based socio-economic integration of vulnerable categories of citizens and improving overall economic life conditions in south and east of Republic of Serbia“ were organized from April to March 2023 with the aim of 1. identifying primary needs and obstacles for economically and socially vulnerable groups to fully exercise their rights, 2. defining concrete recommendations for increasing inclusivity and more adequate responses of community to growing needs and 3. selecting priorities for advocacy to decision-makers on a state level, which will be presented at the Regional conference in Belgrade. Public debates in all of the cities were attended by representatives of all relevant public institutions in local communities (local governments, centers for social work, NES, Roma coordinators, schools, local CSOs and local media). Recommendations and conclusions were well formulated in the Report and according to estimation of evaluators can represent an excellent basis for further activities aimed at improving the position of vulnerable groups in the south and east of RS. They were also presented to a great extent in the Conference report and have been distributed to participants in order to facilitate their future work within their own communities. The Advocacy conference *“It’s worth it! challenges, obstacles and opportunities for the integration of returnees and vulnerable citizens – experiences from South-East Serbia”* was organized in June 2023 in Belgrade with the aim to present the preconditions of and obstacles to successful integration of returnees and the inclusion of vulnerable categories of citizens. Opening remarks were given by Mr. Tomislav Žigmanov, Minister for Human and Minority Rights and Social Dialogue, H.E. Anke Konrad, Ambassador of Germany in Serbia and Mr. Stefan Evers, Deputy Director of CARE International Germany. According to the list of participants 90 participants were involved in the Conference, of which 39 were local and national decision-makers.

Aforementioned indicators are a direct result of planned activities, however, during the process of evaluation it was estimated that additionally, a far higher influence was achieved (in terms of a greater number of local decision makers) through various other project activities (media campaigns, info sessions, many meetings that CARE, Eneca and Nexus organized with the aim of presenting the project and implementing different actions within the project.

¹¹ 141 participants according to database and registration lists, with regards to the fact that some participants were present in every debate (facilitator, project staff members)

Results of the evaluation confirm that Output 3 had been achieved in entirety, both quantitatively and qualitatively - sensitivity and capacity of (local) authorities for a more successful integration of returnees has been increased. As planned, 24 school experts have participated in training courses; 12 mini-project by schools have been implemented; around 1100 students (90% of planed) have been participated in Forum theatre and minimum 131 local decision-makers have been involved in project. All planned activities were fully implemented by the end of project. Added value is ToT on Forum theatre for 16 school experts.

Key findings

Relevance of the Action. Serbia as a country faced numerous challenges and crisis during past decades. Socioeconomic situation is marked by instability and uncertainty, high rates of poverty, high rates of unemployment and increasing population decline through emigration, especially emigration of youth and highly educated citizens. Every new global crisis, such as the crisis caused by COVID19 pandemic or the war in Ukraine, further complicates an already difficult situation while those who are being most affected are members of vulnerable population groups such as those who come from less developed regions of our country. Additionally, Serbia faces ongoing challenges when it comes to returnees from EU countries, primarily due to lack of adequate programs supporting readmission and processes of reintegration. The aforementioned makes a project aiming at increasing the capacity of vulnerable population groups to recognize opportunities of socioeconomic inclusion into their home region and to question more critically their options of emigration to developed countries, significant and relevant. The important indicator of Action relevance is the choice of project implementation region, having in mind that previous support programs implemented in Serbia were mostly centralized (mainly focused on the capital).

Beneficiaries of the project were the main focus of the project. The needs and rights of beneficiaries were assessed during the planning phase of the project but also continuously throughout the implementation phase. Additionally, continuous monitoring of economic, social and healthcare situation in target regions has ensured that project activities are adequate and contextually relevant. Both components of the project - psychosocial support and economic support - consisted of well-thought-through activities which resulted or contributed to improvements in general economic living conditions and psychosocial status of vulnerable citizens in the south and east of Serbia. Through providing an opportunity for more than 1000 people to complete vocational trainings, internship programs, trainings for business development, and to receive in-kind grants for business start-ups the project increased employability of beneficiaries in their current place of living and created new fields of employment for returnees and vulnerable citizens. Through many activities within the psychosocial component (School reintegration measures, psychosocial support, information session) in which over 5000 persons took part, project beneficiaries raised awareness of their rights and Serbian decision-makers have been informed about the economic and social needs of the target group. Based on concrete qualitative and quantitative indicators presented in this report, the project has been assessed as fully relevant to the context in which it was implemented as well as to the assessments of needs of target groups.

Effectiveness. To assess the effectiveness of the project, the extent to which the project has achieved its desired project outcome, in accordance with indicators, has been analyzed. Having that the project achievements against all indicators set in the project impact matrix have been analyzed in detail and that all three Outputs have been assessed as fully accomplished, the effectiveness has been highly estimated. Additionally, assessment of the current values of the logframe indicators by the end of October 2023 are presented in Annex 8¹².

Efficiency. There were several challenges and changes in the environment during implementation of the project that required expert analysis by the project team as well as efficient and fast decision making. For example, prices significantly changed after the crisis caused by the war in Ukraine, which affected the procurement of equipment for grant beneficiaries and the expenses of vocational trainings, new programs funded by other donors with better paid internship programs or larger grants have emerged etc. Additionally, during Mid-term evaluation the project team assessed that “the project funds are rather scarce for this size of activities” which is in accordance with external evaluation assessments. It is important to take this into account as lessons learned and there are some recommendations regarding in the Recommendation section. However, based on the review of documentation and interviews held with project team members and beneficiaries, it has been concluded that project has utilized the available resources, in terms of funds, staff and time, responsibly, thoughtfully and economically. All relevant issues, problems and obstacles that

¹² Annex 8 - Log frame matrix of the project

appeared during the implementation, have been discussed among team members, as well as with the representatives of the donors. As was planned, all project activities were based on the needs of direct beneficiaries, matching those needs to available resources, supporting and nurturing communication and cooperation between all relevant stakeholders. It seems important to emphasize that all of this was made possible by the high level of expertise and professionalism, as well as excellent risk management by all members of CARE, ENECA and NEXUS teams. The final assessment from this evaluation is that a high level of efficiency has been reached.

Sustainability has been achieved to a certain extent at different levels – at the level of individuals (returnees and other vulnerable groups, school experts) included in the project, as well as at the institutional level (local and regional institution, schools). Socioeconomical status of project beneficiaries has been improved. Their knowledge, skills and employability were increased, which will continue to be their permanent resources. Project measures created 206 jobs, donated equipment for 100 small business, provided 100 internships, trained more than 700 people, so over 1000 people benefited from the economic component of the project. Indirectly, at least another 1000 relatives of the beneficiaries benefited through improved family income. Over 16500 services were provided as part of psychosocial measures. More than 5,000 people benefited from psychosocial measures through various project activities - information and advisory work, social support, educational (re-)integration support and psychological support. All of these results are durable in nature. On an institutional level, new methodologies have been introduced into educational process in the target schools (Forum theatre methodology ToT) that will improve the position of vulnerable groups, cooperation between governmental and civic sector has been established, local and regional authorities are more aware of the need of vulnerable group and are more sensitized to them. Results of the project should increase and become more evident in local communities and beyond with the passage of time.

Impact. Improvement of human and social rights, especially of children's rights (returnees, Roma) to equal access to education had been achieved through an intensive work with representatives of institutions, schools as well as through inclusion of local community in order to reduce prejudice and enhance inclusive practices. Through direct forms of empowerment and informing vulnerable groups (especially children), vulnerable groups have been enabled to gain heightened awareness of their rights and to exercise them to a greater extent. Enhanced social inclusion of vulnerable groups has been achieved and that was confirmed in conversations with direct beneficiaries during the evaluation process. When looking at the aforementioned results it becomes clear that the project had a significant impact on poverty reduction (capacity building and raising employability, informational and psychosocial support, financial support). Additionally, through supporting the development of entrepreneurship and increasing employability of vulnerable groups, engaging a large number of associates at the local level, as well as investing large portions of project funding into trainings and procurement of equipment, the project contributed to a local economic development. The ecological dimension was also taken into account - the beneficiaries had to elaborate the influence of their businesses to the environment and only those with no harmful eco-effects have been selected as candidates for funding, and furthermore, project encouraged businesses with products or activities beneficial for the ecology. The impact of the project was evaluated highly positively.

Management systems and staffing structure. CARE had coordinating role during the entirety of project cycle. The orientation and planning workshop/meeting was organized at the beginning of project implementation, in order to make a detailed implementation plan and clear lines of responsibility for the project team members. CARE administrative/financial officer conducted a training session on administrative and financial requirements of measures. Regular meetings of the project team members have contributed to the activities being realized in accordance with the implementation plan, and problems have been solved highly efficiently. Majority of meeting has been held online, due to the pandemic, and even though they have been efficient, the conclusion is meeting in person are still more significant in terms of having more opportunity for joint learning but also for members of the team to provide support to each other while doing such a challenging and complex work regarding vulnerable population groups. The

project also involved local part-time staff from project target districts (6 project multipliers) and over 40 external project associates who had an active role in various activities such as trainings, psychosocial sessions, activity facilitation, design of promotional material etc. It required extensive engagement, primarily by the Nexus team, in terms of human resource management, and the conclusion from the mid-term evaluation as well is that the project engaged minimum number of staff for that size of operation, which should be considered when planning future projects and actions. Regular meetings of the project team, high level of commitment and professionalism contributed to the fact that project implementation produced results as planned. CARE has a reputation of an organization which effectively implements projects as it was the case with this project as well.

Monitoring and learning. To measure the progress of specific project activities and outcomes/outputs the project implemented monitoring tools based on defined indicators, information and recommendations from the feasibility study and the data collected in the first project phase as planned. CARE and its partners kept each other informed about the progress of the project and documented all the results. Project team was in constant contact with CARE Deutschland e.V. All qualitative and quantitative data collected provided a basis for the final project evaluation. The results, problems and obstacles were discussed at regular partner meetings. This continuous participatory activity has been led by CARE in a manner that enabled a self-learning process for the entire project team. Following the completion of the first half of the project period, the Internal Mid-term evaluation led by CARE Project Manager has been done, which contributed to an improved implementation of project activities all the way to the end of the project cycle. Additionally, CARE Deutschland e.V. organized 2 out of 3 project monitoring visits planned (due to pandemic restrictions) in order to provide overall project support and advise the project team. Eneca and Nexus stated that monitoring and learning process would have been enhanced if there was a possibility within the project to engage CARE to a greater extent. It can be concluded that the system, established within this project, enabled adequate monitoring of results and of the learning process, and it has been assessed after this evaluation as positive and efficient.

Partnership model and quality of partnership relationships. The project has been implemented under a new partnership model, where Nexus and Eneca implemented their project components with minimal intervention from CARE (as per donor's request, CARE has been limited to staff engagement). This presented a potential risk, since CARE had to rely on professionalism of partner organizations, mutual trust and prior positive experiences with partners. Additionally, partner organizations have stated that greater engagement by CARE in implementing certain segments of the project would have been of great benefit to them (for example, advocacy, monitoring etc.). Still, CARE proved to have chosen highly respectable, expert and reliable partners. All of the interviewed project team members emphasized excellent internal cooperation and a high level of commitments by all of the project team members. They also emphasized that readiness of CARE to support and develop activities consistent with the need of beneficiaries as well as understanding for problems that emerged and were not under control of partner organizations (pandemic, delays in delivery of equipment etc.) greatly contributed to good functioning of field work.

Technical support to partners. Technical assistance has been provided to partner organizations by CARE, while shortcomings stated by partners regarded a long period of decision making when Bengo needed to be consulted, which led to prolonged realization of certain activities like, for example, vocational trainings. On the other hand, in every instance, CARE responded in a timely manner to the needs of partners for information and support.

5. CONCLUSIONS

“New economic opportunities for returnees and vulnerable citizens in southern and eastern Serbia” project, implemented by CARE, NEXUS and ENECA is fully relevant to the context in which it was implemented and based on actual needs of vulnerable groups in the target areas.

Beneficiaries of the project were the main focus of the project. Project investment into human capital is a sustainable investment since through increasing the employability, knowledge and development of skills of the beneficiaries it directly contributes to the economic development and sustainability. Project measures created 206 jobs, donated equipment for 100 small business, provided 101 internships, trained more than 700 people, so over 1000 people benefited from the economic component of the project. Indirectly, at least another 1000 relatives of the beneficiaries benefited through improved family income. More than 5000 people benefited from psychosocial measures through various project activities - information and advisory work, social support, educational (re-)integration support and psychological support. More than 30000 persons from target regions have been directly or indirectly included in project activities.

On an institutional level, new methodologies have been introduced into educational system that will improve the position of vulnerable groups, cooperation between governmental and civic sector has been established, local and regional authorities are more aware of the need of vulnerable group and are more sensitized to them. Sensitivity to and capacity of (local) authorities for a more successful integration of returnees have been increased. As previously underdeveloped in Serbia, the cooperation between the business sector and the civic sector has been promoted and introduced through the project and it can represent a good ground for future community development and open new fundraising opportunities for vulnerable groups. Results of the project should increase and become more evident in local communities and beyond with the passage of time.

Improvement of human and social rights, especially of children’s rights (returnees, Roma) to equal access to education had been achieved through an intensive work with representatives of institutions, schools as well as through inclusion of local community in order to reduce prejudice and enhance inclusive practices. Through direct forms of empowerment and informing vulnerable groups, vulnerable groups have been enabled to gain heightened awareness of their rights and to exercise them to a greater extent. The project had a significant impact on poverty reduction, social inclusion and local economic development too.

The aforementioned makes a project aiming at increasing the capacity of vulnerable population groups to recognize opportunities of socioeconomic inclusion into their home region and to question more critically their options of emigration to developed countries, significant and relevant.

This project is complex in terms of activities planned, demanding and large in terms of the number of direct beneficiaries, the number of associates and the size of the region where direct work with beneficiaries took place. Consequently, the implementation of it required excellent management skills, high level of professionalism, high level of commitment and hard work, as demonstrated by the project team. High commitment of project staff has been particularly recognized and appreciated by direct beneficiaries. Mutual interests of all parties to achieve better results with the project, excellent cooperation between all partner organizations, and the appreciation of the needs of project beneficiaries is the underlying characteristic of the project.

The context of project implementation and the fact that the project is developed and implemented in cooperation with partner organizations and based on the needs of the target group is confirmed and justified by assessment. This project was well designed, led and implemented. Having that all three project Outputs have been fully realized, the project implementation has been assessed as effective and successful. The results achieved until the end of the implementation of the project have been assessed as fully accomplished.

The entirety of planned activities, in spite of some of them being delayed due to COVID19 pandemic, was realized until the end of the project cycle. The estimated number of beneficiaries that was to be covered with this project was reached, while the number of beneficiaries of psychosocial component was surpassed. As was planned all project activities were based on the needs of direct beneficiaries, matching those needs to available resources, supporting and nurturing partnership and cooperation between all relevant stakeholders. Project has utilized the available resources, in terms of funds, staff and time, responsibly, thoughtfully and economically. With this kind of approach, an excellent risk management and changes made by the project team, the Project was successfully completed and the assessment from this Final evaluation is that a high level of efficiency has been reached.

This project did justify its slogan *"It's worth it! - New opportunities for a sustainable start"*.

6.RECOMMENDATIONS

Appropriate greater grant amounts for entrepreneurs. If the funding requirement is that a business is operational for 2 years and that 2 persons get employed, grant amounts should be increased to up to a minimum of 2500 Euro for smaller and 5000 Euro for bigger businesses.

Plan for mentoring support for beneficiaries/entrepreneurs. It would be of great importance to provide support in the form of mentoring to grant beneficiaries in the course of minimum of six months. The mentoring support in terms of providing information, legal support, expert support as well as additional trainings would help beneficiaries, especially in the first year of their work as the one that entails most risk, in order for them to better understand the market and its principles of functioning, to anticipate changes and to manage risks. In order to help sustain these small businesses, during the next Project planning process, plan to include a 6 - 9 months of mentoring support following grant approval.

Include success stories/beneficiaries' feedback into promotional activities and advocacy to a greater extent. Communicating with decision makers and wider community through success stories, at one hand, has a motivating effect for future beneficiaries from the target population and, at the other hand, provides an opportunity to familiarize the local community with socioeconomic circumstances of beneficiaries, influences prejudices and consequently improves the position of marginalized target groups.

To continue with development of projects that aim at providing psychosocial support, especially psychological support and counseling, since it is evident, from the number of persons who expressed the need for this kind of support in the course of this project, that there is a great need for it. We are at the beginning of investigating mental health consequences of the recent pandemic and even preliminary data show that there is a heightened need for psychological support. Therefore, our recommendation would be to plan for a greater number of this kind of expert staff to be engaged within future projects.

Create more exact indicators in order to simplify documenting and monitoring of the achievement of indicators by the project management, or for the indicators that can't be measured in a simple way it could be useful to plan for research activities or engage external expert to conduct the assessment.

Whenever possible, in accordance with donation scheme, for longer-term projects *plan for minimum of 3 months for analysis and summation of results, monitoring impact and for promoting the examples of good practice* which should be performed by partner organizations. By this time, activities concerning direct beneficiaries should be completed.

Plan for a larger number of project staff members for projects of this level of complexity, number of beneficiaries and the size of the region it covers. This will improve management and monitoring as well as reduce the possibility of staff burnout.

Include team building activities and retreat sessions for the project team as burnout prevention activities. There is a greater incidence of burnout among CSO workers since their work concerns the most vulnerable groups of citizens, while working in the context of constant struggle to ensure core funding for organizational functioning.

LIST OF ANNEXES

- Annex 1 – ToR for Evaluator
- Annex 2 – List of persons consulted and interviewed
- Annex 3 – Registration lists of evaluation participants
- Annex 4 – Evaluation plan and time frame
- Annex 5 – List of reviewed project documentation
- Annex 6 – Questionnaire
- Annex 7 – Registration list of workshop participants
- Annex 8 – Log-frame matrix of the project updated

Annex 8 – Log-frame matrix of the project updated

Outcome	Indicators		Current situation according to the project evaluation
	<i>baseline value (quantitative & qualitative)</i>	<i>Target value (quantitative & qualitative)</i>	<i>Current values, October 2023</i>
<p>Vulnerable population groups in Southeast Serbia recognize opportunities for socio-economic inclusion in their home region and question emigration more critically.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Low employment opportunities for returnees - The unemployment rate among returnees is 70% (13.5% for the rest of the population) - local population groups with a tendency to migrate 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • At the end of the project 200 up to 250 final beneficiaries are in employment (both self-employed and in employment). • Less than 10% of the final beneficiaries (grant recipients) have migrated or are planning to migrate during the project period • 30% of beneficiaries participating in the project organized information campaigns declare that they question their plans to migrate. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ successful 100% finalized 206 employed persons (both self-employed and in employment). <i>Sources:</i> PO reports, data base, interviews with project staff and beneficiaries, focus groups discussions, list of participants ✓ successful 100% finalized 0 project beneficiaries (VETs, practice, grants...) have migrated this far according to partners database. <i>Sources:</i> PO reports, data base, interviews with project staff and beneficiaries, focus groups discussions ✓ successful 32% of beneficiaries participating in project organised campaigns and sessions declare that they question their plans to migrate, based on the evidence and estimation from the project multipliers. <i>Sources:</i> PO reports, data base, interviews with project staff and beneficiaries, focus groups discussions ✓ successful

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The involved job centers in the 6 target regions have established contact points for returnees for further counselling, at least 3 consultation hours per month. • The schools involved in the 6 target regions have established contact points for returnees for further counselling, at least 3 consultation hours per month 	<p>Contact points have been appointed by DIMAK and NES in Bor and Nis. All NES local bureaus have a staff member responsible for working with returnees</p> <p>A number of beneficiaries have been informed about various employment programs of NES and other parties by project multipliers.</p> <p><i>Sources:</i> PO reports, data base, interviews with project staff and beneficiaries, focus groups discussions, NES and DIMAK website</p> <p>✓ successful 100% finalized</p> <p><i>Sources:</i> PO reports, data base, interviews with project staff</p>
	<p>High psychosocial burden for returnees and other vulnerable population groups who cannot (re-)enter the labor market</p>	<p>The psychosocial stress for the target group is reduced through the creation of advisory and exchange platforms. (Measurable through focus group discussions with the target group; on a traffic light scale the stress level is reduced by 30%)</p>	<p>✓ successful</p> <p>Assessment of the success of the achievement of this indicator was possible directly through the focus group discussion with the direct project beneficiaries and indirectly based on the assessment of the Advisor psycho-social. Almost all external evaluation focus group participants reported that their stress levels have been significantly reduced.</p> <p>According to Advisor estimations: The project targeted stress level of the beneficiaries was reduced through various types of support which improved their status in a significant way (over 30%): mental health status of 11% of session participants improved through their economic empowerment; for 2% of beneficiaries who are in a state of need mental health status improved through their conversations with the NEXUS psychologist and through connecting with relevant services and institutions; mental health status of</p>

			<p>25% beneficiaries has been improved through the support of project multipliers - direct support in exercising rights in the field of social protection, education and health.</p> <p><i>Note:</i> measurement hasn't been performed as it was initially planned, traffic light scale hasn't been used. Evaluator accepted the explanation provided by Nexus experts (psychologist) stating that it wasn't possible to use this measure due to the specificity of activities themselves as justified- individual psychological support has been provided to a large number of beneficiaries but not in continuity per individual beneficiary; psychosocial support has been provided via open sessions which meant that group membership varied from session to session.</p> <p><i>Sources:</i> PO reports, data base, interviews with project staff and beneficiaries, focus groups discussions</p>
--	--	--	--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------

Output	Indicators		Current situation according to the project evaluation
	<i>Baseline value (quantitative & qualitative)</i>	<i>Target value (quantitative & qualitative)</i>	<p><i>Current value, October 2023</i></p> <p><i>Note: for a more detailed information please refer to Evaluation Report, Chapter 4 - Findings</i></p>
<p>1. mutual exchange: Serbian decision-makers are informed about the economic and social needs of the target group and beneficiaries are aware of their rights</p>	<p>Serbian decision-makers have little knowledge of the interests and needs of returnees.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Serbian decision-makers have increased their knowledge of the needs of returnees significantly • Six new local decisions formulated with sensitive attitude towards returnees (1 per project region) 	<p>✓ Successful The project team members has established contacts with more than 140 representatives of various stakeholder instances. Stakeholders have been involved in the project through meetings, public debates, conference, as guests in the project organized support sessions, during which they have been informed, by the project team members and beneficiaries themselves, on the needs of returnees and other vulnerable groups and it would be reasonable to assume that this contributed to increase in their knowledge</p> <p>✓ Successful 6 round tables – public debates in 6 project target districts / 6 reports had been formulated (not local decisions as planned) and 1 Summary report in which the primary needs and obstacles for economically and socially vulnerable groups to fully exercise their rights followed by</p>

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Number of local initiatives planned/initiated to support the returnees in the target areas. 	<p>concrete recommendations for increasing inclusivity of and create more adequate responses of community to growing needs of this population.</p> <p>✓ Successful A large number of local initiatives to support returnees in the target areas have been implemented with minimum 30000 beneficiaries – information campaign (web media, local TV and newspaper media), support sessions (employment and psychosocial support), individual psychological support, grants, vocational trainings, internships, field visits by project staff members and local multipliers, public debates, forum theatre performances, meetings with all relevant local stakeholders etc.</p>
	<p>Returnees have little information on their rights, on procedures for accessing available services and on how to contact decision-makers.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • local decision-makers answered questions and exchanged views with final beneficiaries in 96 group meetings. 	<p>✓ Successful 100% finalized 104 group meetings - sessions have been implemented within the project duration, in the local communities of the target regions with 1590 beneficiaries (57% were women, 33% were returnees). 12 economical empowerment session and 92 psychosocial empowerment.</p>

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 80% Returnees participating in project organized information exchange report that they are better informed on how to access services and contact decision makers. 	<p>✓ Successful From the project multipliers' reports (evaluations of the sessions and their field work reports), Nexus estimates that more than 80% of participants, including returnees, declared that are better informed on how to access services and contact decision makers. All external evaluation participants (38 project beneficiaries) report that they are better informed on how to access services and contact decision makers.</p>
2.by the end of the project, new fields of employment for returnees and vulnerable citizens will have been created in Southeast Serbia.	Returnees and unemployed people in the project region are confronted with high obstacle for (re-)entering the labor market, no state support for self-employment is available.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ 50 start-up grants (in kind) for self-employed persons (one employee) ✓ 50 start-up grants (in kind) for self-employed persons (two employees) 	<p>✓ Successful 100% finalized.</p>
	Lack of job-related training opportunities for returnees and unemployed citizens on the ground.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 360 beneficiaries took part in vocational trainings. • 300 beneficiaries have participated in business plan design training • 100 young school leavers have completed an internship. 	<p>✓ Successful 110% finalized (395 beneficiaries)</p> <p>✓ Successful 104% finalized (312 beneficiaries)</p> <p>✓ Successful 101% finalized (101 young school leavers have completed internship)</p>

<p>3. Increased sensitivity and capacity of (local) authorities for a more successful integration of returnees.</p>	<p>Lack of information and knowledge of school staff about the specific learning needs of returning children</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 24 school experts have participated in training courses on the integration of returnees into the education system. • 12 mini-projects by schools included in the project trainings have been implemented successfully (awareness raising). 	<p>✓ Successful 100% finalized (24 school experts have participated in training courses)</p> <p>✓ Successful 100% finalized (12 mini-project have been implemented)</p> <p><u>Added value: Training of Trainers – Forum theater</u> -16 school experts have participated in training</p>
	<p>The needs of students for reintegration into the Serbian school system have not yet been given specific attention by teachers.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 1200 students were able to express their needs through their active participation in the Forum Theater. (In the Forum Theater the children design the play themselves) 	<p>✓ Successful 90% finalized (1207 participants; 1079 students)</p>

	<p>No civil society lobby or advocacy activities on the needs of returnees in the target region.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 120 local decision-makers were sensitized to the needs of returnees through targeted advocacy. 	<p>✓ Successful The activities of the Advocacy component addressed local institutions in the target regions, local governments and national authorities with more than 200 direct participants. Minimum 131 local decision-makers were sensitized to the needs of returnees through targeted advocacy. -Over 120 participants were involved in Public debates -90 participants were involved in the Working Conference in Belgrade, of which 39 were local and national decision-makers -40 representatives of various local institutions (Centres for Social Work, municipalities, NES) from all six target regions were invited as guests to the project organised support sessions.</p>
--	------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------	----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------	-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------