Novi Pazar & Bijelo Polje: Building Economic Bridges for Unemployed Women

🇷🇸 Novi Pazar, Serbia   🇲🇪 Bijelo Polje, Montenegro

Planning   **Pilot Projects**

Introduction

The Skilled Women's Workforce for Better Future project was funded under the Instrument for Pre-Accession Assistance (IPA) II Cross-Border Cooperation Program Serbia-Montenegro 2014-2020. The project aimed to enhance the employability of unemployed women through targeted training and work practice. It was implemented from June 8, 2019, to January 7, 2021 in the Raški district of the City of Novi Pazar, Serbia, and the Municipality of Bijelo Polje in northern Montenegro. The lead applicant, PI Home for the Elderly in Bijelo Polje, collaborated with the Social Welfare Centre Novi Pazar, the Ministry of Labour, Employment, Veteran and Social Affairs of Serbia, and the Ministry of Labour and Social Welfare of Montenegro. The target group comprised 80 unemployed women, first-time job seekers, and long-term unemployed, registered with the Employment Agency of Montenegro and the National Employment Agency of Serbia. 40 women completed training as geriatric caregivers, with 20 from Bijelo and 20 from Raški.

[Problem Statement]

The project addressed gender disparities in the labour market, with a focus on the underrepresentation of women in employment, particularly for this case, paid care-giving roles. In Novi Pazar and Bijelo Polje, unemployed women faced barriers such as limited access to skills training and a mismatch between the supply of and demand for the workforce. Labour market segregation further exacerbated these issues, with women often excluded from leadership roles and underrepresented in care sectors, leading to untapped potential and reduced employability. The challenge was to empower these women, enhance their competitiveness, and meet local labour market needs, particularly during the COVID-19 pandemic when demand for elderly care surged.

[Implementation and Actions]

The project implemented a gender-focused intervention to train and integrate women into the labour market as geriatric caregivers. It developed a tailor-made training program, piloted for accreditation, and provided work practice opportunities. Key activities included capacity-building for 80 women, training 40 as caregivers (20 from each region), and employing at least 6 women (3 in each region) at the Home for the Elderly Bijelo Polje and the Centre for Geriatrics in Novi Pazar.

The project implementation began with a Memorandum of Cooperation that established the partnership framework. The Social Welfare Centre Novi Pazar and PI Home for the Elderly "Bijelo Polje" selected 80 women based on local labour needs, followed by capacity-building events. The Ministry of Labour supported the development of a caregiver training program, which trained five educators and five mentors. A one-month training and three-month work practice were conducted for 40 women, comprising 20 from Novi Pazar and 20 from Bijelo Polje. The Home for the Elderly and Centre for Geriatrics employed at least 3 women each.

The project budget was €168,835.26, with an 85% EU contribution (€143,509.97), which funded training, staff, and outreach. City officials can replicate this by engaging labour and social welfare departments, securing EU funding, and using unemployment registries to target participants.

[Lessons Learned]

The Cross-border collaboration enhanced impact, especially during crises like COVID-19, when elderly support was critical.

❖ Checklist for Replication:
  1. The use of unemployment registries to identify participants.
  2. Stakeholder identification and engagement for coordination.
  3. Developing training in collaboration with employers to meet local needs.
  4. Adapt the delivery to local contextual circumstances
  5. Monitor and employ participants through local institutions.
  6. Quantitative Impact (with Infographic or Evidence)

❖ Evidence: 40 women completed training as geriatric caregivers (20 from Novi Pazar, 20 from Bijelo Polje)

❖ Employment: At least 6 women employed—3 at the Home for the Elderly Bijelo Polje and 3 at the Centre for Geriatrics Novi Pazar.

❖ Skills Development: 80 women acquired job-seeking skills, and 40 completed caregiver training.

[Key Takeaways]

The project's model is transferable to other regions with high female unemployment, particularly in the care sector or similar. Cities can adapt the training framework by involving local labour ministries and care facilities, as seen in Novi Pazar and Bijelo Polje. Scalability requires securing funding and expanding to other professions or larger groups. The roadmap for workforce matching can be tailored to other sectors, and the awareness strategy can boost community support. The success in both regions demonstrates how targeted, gender-focused interventions can transform labour markets and offer a replicable blueprint for sustainable urban development.