



# Enhancing social protection by building capacities of the civil society organizations (CSOs) in Bosnia and Herzegovina 2020



PROJECT PARTNERS



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# ABOUT THE PROJECT

## **Enhancing social protection by building capacities of the civil society organizations (CSOs) in Bosnia and Herzegovina**

CARE International is an international non-government organization implementing its programs for fighting poverty and social injustice in more than 90 countries throughout the world. CARE's aim in the Balkans is to ensure recognition and fulfilment of social, economic and political rights of the vulnerable and marginalized groups, thus contributing to sustainable peace in the region.

The project "Enhancing social protection by building capacities of the civil society organizations (CSOs) in Bosnia and Herzegovina" contributes to strengthening the weak social welfare and social protection, as well as access to rights and social inclusion for the marginalized and most vulnerable groups in the social community. Poor economic performance and high unemployment rate cause shocks in the country's social welfare system which largely effects the socio-economic position of these citizens. The state and non-state service providers are under-capacitated and underfunded.

The project that seeks to protect the most vulnerable groups of population, but also to provide benefits for all BiH citizens, is implemented by CARE International, which has vast experience the CSO capacity building. The goal of the project is to professionalize and to enhance the mandate and role of civil society organizations (CSOs) in Bosnia and Herzegovina by building their capacities to provide services to marginalized and vulnerable populations and by enabling them to actively participate in the design and implementation of relevant policies.

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## SUMKA BUČAN

### DIRECTRESS OF CARE INTERNATIONAL BALKANS

CARE International Balkans has been for the third year already implementing the project “Enhancing social protection by building capacities of the civil society organizations (CSOs) in Bosnia and Herzegovina” with the financial support of the Government of the Czech Republic and CARE Czech Republic. The purpose of the project entails empowerment of seven civil society organizations in provision of services to that beneficiaries who are on the margin of the society. These beautiful stories from the brochure speak volumes about how we have empowered the civil society organizations in BiH. Four out of the seven partner organizations have their own social enterprises in which they employ people with disabilities, women who have suffered domestic violence or young people who just have not been able to find a job. This year, too, we have financed their jobs and bought the machines that are necessary for the functioning of social enterprises, thus providing a significant contribution to their economic empowerment. The Coronavirus pandemic in Bosnia and Herzegovina has significantly reflected on the lives of members of marginalized groups. Women and children who were suffering domestic violence in most of the situations could not be placed in the safe houses due to fear that the virus could spread to employees and users of safe houses. Roma families, who are mainly engaged in collecting secondary raw materials as a source of livelihood, have been prevented from doing this due to curfew and other restrictions imposed by the crisis headquarters. Their children rarely had access to the Internet, and adequate devices for online classes. The biggest challenges were food and hygiene supplies given the fact that several Roma families live under one roof.



The LGBTIQ people, who are otherwise discriminated against in BiH society and exposed to verbal and physical attacks, have during the pandemic been returned to their four walls from which they have been trying to get out and live life for years like all other citizens with equal human rights guaranteed by world and European conventions. In this year we have additionally recognized the importance of the new situation and have, in accordance with the possibilities, responded to the needs of partner organizations whose work with marginalized groups did not stop even during the Corona. According to information from the field, the endangered categories of the population needed hygienic and food packages, which we made available thanks to our partners from the Czech Republic. As in previous years, CARE International Balkans has strengthened civil society organizations through advocacy and digital marketing educational sessions, which were important for improving the visibility of the organizations, and has also provided technical and infrastructural support. This project will be completed at the end of this year, and in addition to the project goals and tasks it has even found answers to COVID-19. We can proudly say that we are leaving behind positive actions that, through strengthening of civil society organizations over the past three years, have made the lives of their beneficiaries, members of marginalized groups better, which was the ultimate goal that we wanted to achieve. The organizations that were involved in the project remain at the disposal of their beneficiaries, but now with improved services, knowledge, experience and resources that are an inseparable part of the organizations.



# Amica Educa

**EVERYTHING WE DO GETS MEANING WHEN BENEFICIARIES BECOME EMPOWERED AND START MAKING CHANGES**

Amica Educa in Tuzla has been, for more than 24 years, proving that difficult life's challenges we face can be overcome, and that we can come out stronger and more aware of ourselves and of our life's vision. Many children, young people and adults have been empowered through psychoeducation, psychotherapeutic support and counselling that this organization provides to marginalized groups. They have recognized their problems, addressed them and changed their lives.

One of them is **Dijana Branković**, who had suffered emotional abuse for years. She decided to seek help at time of severe depression. **"I had severe depression then. They immediately referred me to a psychotherapist and I started to attend individual psychotherapy sessions. My life turned around completely. I got a divorce after my husband became physically abusive, and now feel more stable, happier, simply more peaceful and stronger. I know that I always have support"**, says Dijana.



Tremendous efforts and work on self-sustainability of the organization go into securing adequate assistance to the beneficiaries. **Selma Aličić**, directress of the organization Amica Educa knows it best. **"During 2020, we have tried to connect as much as possible with the institutions engaged in the area of social work. We have intensified cooperation with the Center for social work and established cooperation with the Home for children without parental care concerning the support to young people who are leaving the system of care. Our organization became member of the Cantonal Board and the Working Group for preparation of the Tuzla Canton Development Strategy, as well as member of the working group for preparation of the gender action plan in Živinice, where we have established cooperation through education of employees working in the institutions on the territory of this city. This year was marked by advocacy, networking and increasing the visibility of the organization in the community,"** says Aličić.

The support of the organization CARE International Balkans through the project **Enhancing social protection by building capacities of the civil society organizations (CSOs) in Bosnia and Herzegovina** was of great importance in promoting organization's key ideas: **"We had education on marketing, promotion through social networks and advocacy, and it meant a lot to us. In addition to furnishing the therapeutic room for psychotherapy and the conference room for group psychoeducation, this year we have received support for construction of a ramp that makes our premises accessible for persons with disabilities.**

Furthermore, Amica Educa has sent a request to the Ministry of Labor, Social Policy and Return of Tuzla Canton for continuous financing of Family Counselling. **"Amica Educa has personnel, exceptional experts, 24-year long experience, adequate premises, and continuity of progress. At the same time Centers for social work are missing personnel and resources to respond to all needs in the community. We have so far cooperated through projects, but in order to improve the cooperation and maintain continuity of Amica Educa's work, we have sent a request to the Government of Tuzla Canton to partially**



finance this organization from the budget”, points out **Edin Šestan**, assistant to minister for social and child protection of Tuzla Canton.

This would surely contribute to this organization expanding its capacity and providing services to a larger number of citizens, but also to being stable and sustainable for its years-long beneficiaries, such as **Emina Slijepčević**. **“My brother was killed on May 25, 1995 in Tuzla massacre. I have carried a lot of sorrow and pain in my heart for a very long time, but have not work on that. When I came here, I painted my life and that event through three stages. Stepping back and looking at my painting had really struck me. I am happier today, especially because I learnt to recognize emotions and to talk about them and that is extremely important”**, says Emina, who works as an educator today and closely cooperates with this organization.

Hearing positive feedback of beneficiaries means a world to **Ivona Erdeljac**, program manager of the organization Amica Educa: **“It is a deluge of pleasant emotions. Everything we do gets meaning when a woman, a man, a child, make a change in life and become more satisfied and happier, and then start changing environment in which they live.”**

They did not even give up on helping beneficiaries in the situation caused by COVID-19 pandemic.



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**“We are very proud of how quickly we adapted to the crisis. We immediately turned to the online support. No beneficiary was deprived of support. We have developed a range of new online services, which is very positive. We have a stable team for years already, we support each other, just like our beneficiaries. They give something of themselves to us, we give a part of us to them, and therefore that connection becomes stronger and better,”** concludes Ivona.

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## Association 'Budućnost'

### WE HAVE NOT CLOSED OUR DOORS TO THE BENEFICIARIES DURING THE CORONAVIRUS PANDEMIC

**"During the work at the farm 'Eko Budućnost' I do not think about the problems; I relax my brain. I work in the greenhouse on vegetables, and on strawberries outside, all the farm work. I can say that I feel at peace here and more valuable, because I earn my own living,"** says Milica N., former beneficiary of the Safe House 'Budućnost' that has been opened since 2000 as part of the Association 'Budućnost' from Modriča.

Milica is one of the women who, after years of suffering domestic violence, was employed by this Association in the cooperative 'Eko Budućnost' with the assistance of CARE International Balkans.

**"No one who is financially stable or has any other possibility will certainly come to a safe house. These are mostly women who are not economically empowered, who depend on the abuser, and who do not have funds,"** says Jelena Mišić, directress of the Association 'Budućnost' adding that the financial independence of the beneficiaries was the main reason why they decided to support establishment of the cooperative 'Eko Budućnost' in 2014. Although they could not establish the cooperative on their own, they had found several people who think alike and today they each share the property for their own needs. Former and current beneficiaries are working on the farm and receive per diems for doing seasonal work.

**"Our analyses have shown that frequency of the violence cannot be reduced until a woman is economically empowered. In addition to the per diems they receive, socialization and getting fresh air means a lot to these women. The cooperative is their place for understanding, fun, relaxation, a space where they can be who they truly are,"** points out Ana Cvijanović, expert associate for economic empowerment of the Association 'Budućnost'.

CARE has recognized the importance of the activities of such an organization in the framework of project **Enhancing social protection by building capacities of the civil society organizations (CSOs) in Bosnia and Herzegovina**. In 2020, the Association 'Budućnost' received the support of the CARE organization for the drainage and supply of water to the farm, more precisely to the room, which will be used for drying of fruits. A new table, and a sink for sorting of products for packing was provided to them in order to make the work of women at the farm easier. As every year before, the Association received capacity building support through different training sessions.

**"We are pleased that we have never, even at this point, turned the back on our beneficiaries. We managed to ensure support packages: food, hygiene products, disinfectants and face masks.**



**We have managed to organize the work at the farm taking into account all protective measures. It is a tremendous success for us. We provided free consulting online, and were available for advice,”** says Mišić.

The Association 'Budućnost' has recognized the problem of violence against women from the very beginning and the time it provided free legal aid back in 1996. This is still focus of its work. **“At the beginning, the safe house was in a rented apartment, we set the funds aside regardless of fact that we did not know how safe houses' function and that there was no Law on Protection against domestic violence, but it was the only way to provide help to the women. Only five women reported violence at the beginning, and perception changed over the years,”** says Mišić.

According to her, this year, although challenging, did not close the doors of this safe house: **“We converted one room with yard access into the isolation ward. I believe that a safe house is an institution that should not stop working in this situation. Women feel safe and protected here. Here they do things that fulfill them: they make baskets, ornamental paper articles, they do decoupage, they have all the support. They can bake cakes, pancakes, celebrate birthdays, whatever they want,”** says Mišić.

Positive examples of empowered women speak about the significance of this association's work.



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**“We have several cases where our beneficiaries got happily married, started family, continued their lives here in Modriča. This year a beneficiary coming from a remote municipality has decided to stay in our city. She got a job at the beginning of pandemic and lives here with her disabled daughter. We are proud of our beneficiaries who managed to overcome difficult situation and come out stronger than they were when they came to us. That is why we exist and it is our objective,”** Mišić concluded.

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# Association 'Corporation of united citizens' actions'

## WITH CARE INTERNATIONAL BALKANS TO A HEROIC JOURNEY

The Association 'Corporation of united citizens' action' (loc. DUGA) came into being from the belief that the world can be a good place for every child, particularly for children with developmental disabilities. **"At the beginning, we were alone in the fight for social and educational inclusion of children with development difficulties, we tilted at windmills of system, but did not give up. From not being recognized by the system we have arrived to the point where the system uses our programs for children with development difficulties",** says Anka Izetbegović, directress of 'DUGA' organization.

In one segment of its work this organization became consultant, but still kept many activities relating to direct work with beneficiaries: **"We have started from early learning support, early rehabilitation, then we worked with children through elementary**

and high schools and ultimately saw them off to the labor market. It is interesting that I know some children for 15 years already. It is really great to follow somebody's path," points out Anka.

It is significant for a non-government organization to have financial support in the performance of its mission, which thanks to the Government of Czech Republic, organizations CARE Czech Republic and Care International Balkans DUGA received within the project **Enhancing social protection by building capacities of the civil society organizations (CSOs) in Bosnia and Herzegovina.**

**"We were on the verge of idea of commercializing our services and had discussed it a lot, but we did not have the courage to embark on that journey. We have done it this year thanks to the organization CARE. They understood us and provided support in training sessions and professional development. We developed new programs, their visual identity and have went public for the first time with the "Heroic journey", a program for development of social-emotional skills in all children,"** says Alma Kudra, project leader. In addition to the purpose of building an inclusive world this organization wants to provide additional resources to help children and families on the margins of society by commercializing its services.

The introduction of new services also required technological support, which was also recognized by CARE. **"This year we got a good computer with all accompanying equipment, professional microphones, mini microphones, lights, a smartboard, and we also bought a good video camera, so we can shoot workshops, mini-movies and animations,"** says Selma Šarka, financial manager of this organization.

Although 2020 is challenging to many due to the Coronavirus pandemic, the team of the organization 'DUGA' adapted successfully transferring all of its activities online. **"At the beginning we created Viber groups with parents of children who were seeing me, and then we came up with the idea that children call me via Skype and**





that we have online treatments with children who have speech and language difficulties. We have prepared a lot of materials, I have certainly written 40-50 texts on early growth," says speech therapist Arnes Šabanović.

This year the Association 'DUGA' participated in preparation of the Guidelines for online education for children with developmental difficulties, which the Ministry for Education, Science and Youth of Canton Sarajevo has integrated into the Methodology for realization of online education in Canton Sarajevo. **"We have made 32 educational videos for work with pre-school children. At time of pandemic we provided support to the parents in form of advice on how to work with children using unshaped materials we all have at home. Inspired by this experience we are now preparing two advocacy videos to be sent to the Ministry aimed at promotion of our programs, which we advocate to become part of the system as a catalogue for teachers' training. We also prepared two handbooks "The joy of growing up" and "Handbook for parents of pre-school children" with guidelines on how to prepare children for school,"** says Alma.

It is significant that they do not fight for children with disabilities alone, but that they are rather expanding the circle of people they work with and that there is mutual trust and perseverance in common desires. **"Cooperation and association of some common interests is good because we have faster results, greater visibility and greater respect. Our organizations have been working together for years and that is the most sustainable part of this entire story. If you cultivate the same values, have similar beliefs and similar solutions, then success is guaranteed "**, says the president of the Association "Life with Down Syndrome", Sevdija Kujović.



The team of organization 'DUGA' has learnt a lot through work with its beneficiaries, says Alma.

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When we look at some of the children who have grown up, are getting into colleges, entering the labor market, we are very glad that we have touched their lives, pushed them to achieve what they can, which they once did not believe is possible or did not have the support of the system. We told them: "Yes, you can do it, we believe in you" and even if we have just left a small mark, it is very important to us."

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Photos: Anka Izetbegović, Alma Kudra, Selma Šarka, Arnes Šabanović







## Citizens' Association 'Nešto Više'

### WE PLANTED VEGETABLES ON OUR BALCONIES DURING CORONA

Through work with the children, youth, adults, persons with disabilities (PWDs) and other marginalized groups the Citizens' Association 'Nešto Više' has been for more than 20 years recognizing their problems, changing lives, but at the same time growing and learning with them. **"Some ten years ago I didn't have an excessive feeling for people with disabilities because I didn't have such a case in my surroundings. Then we hired a person with disability and only then did I see what problems they face, from the simplest that you can't get into the toilet because the door is narrower than the wheelchair or enter the school because they only have stairs. The girl we hired was awarded a scholarship to finish high school and college. It's amazing to see how things like that make a difference. It is a motivation for me to work,"** says Duško Cvjetinović, authorized representative of the Association.

Such an experience has yielded numerous assistance projects for the PWDs. Only during this year 'Nešto Više' made the internship for 48 people with a university degree, of which 18 are PWDs, possible through the projects. **"Out of that number, 9 young people with a university degree got a job in the company/institution where they had done the internship, while 11 of them got a job in another company/institution. Out of 18 young PWDs, 7 found a job, 1 person in the company/institution where she had done the internship, while 6 of them found a job in another company/institution. That's a big deal,"** says Adem Lisičić, Project Manager at the Association.

They also do non-formal education of PWDs (graphic design, digital marketing, internet advertising), which can be a great advantage for them in employment. In addition, they carry out mapping activities in BiH, which includes more than 370 schools. **"We have created an interactive map that shows the current state of accessibility for children with disabilities in primary and secondary schools, in order to make it easier for parents of children with disabilities when making the enrollment decision,"** Adem points out.

In this year they have also focused on empowering women as one of the marginalized groups in BiH. With the support of the Embassy of the Kingdom of the Netherlands, the Association worked to strengthen the capacity of organizations, public and private sector in eight local communities to effectively lead the process of improving the position of women, as well as active participation in social and political life, which resulted in preparation of eight Local Gender Action Plans (LGAPs). In addition, they are implementing a project to support highly educated women without work experience, in performing practical work. A total 899 applied to the call this year 38 of them were selected.

In 2016 the association founded the social enterprise 'Eko dizajn', which provides landscaping services, teaches about permaculture, attitude towards nature and healthy eating. Everyone is welcome to the farm in Mostar, which has two greenhouses and many planted fruit trees. The importance of such an inclusive place, adapted to PWDs, was recognized by the Embassy of the Czech Republic and the Czech Development Agency within **Enhancing**



social protection by building capacities of the civil society organizations (CSOs) in Bosnia and Herzegovina, implemented by CARE International Balkans.

**"This year we received a new mower, trimmer, large containers for the irrigation system. These containers unfortunately cost a lot; they are not as harmless as they look. The CARE team knows us and understands why we need it all. We also received a computer that is very important to us. Earlier, they supported us to build a façade on the farm house where we hold training sessions and to equip sleeping facilities for those who come to visit us or to volunteer,"** says Sanja Đermanović from the social enterprise 'Eko dizajn'.

This farm is known for its beautiful baskets of seasonal vegetables and fruits. **"This year we decided to change our course. We are thinking of introducing perennials, whose yield will increase over time. They will be great for us as examples for the education we have throughout the year,"** Sanja points out.

As she says, they used the time of the pandemic to direct the citizens' fear of the Coronavirus to positive activities such as planting vegetables in the balconies: **"We launched the campaign "I plant, and you?", within the project "Think about nature!", which is implemented by the Center for the Promotion of Civil Society, and financially supported by the Kingdom of Sweden. The focus was for people to use the balcony or terrace to grow food. In addition to training, they also received packets of seeds to start growing on their own. We also made manuals on how to plant on the balcony. We should soon start with a social seed bank, where we will exchange and reproduce seeds of the indigenous species and thus keep them in their original form."**



All of this would be impossible if the 'Nešto Više' team did not love what they were doing.

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**A long time ago we had a donor who said "Do what works/gives results." We listened to him,"** concluded Adem.

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# Citizens' association for the promotion of Roma education 'Otaharin'

**A PLACE WHERE ROMA PEOPLE WILL NOT EXPERIENCE HATE, DISCRIMINATION AND ACCUSATIONS**

All children have dreams, but not equal opportunities to live them in the future. Recognizing discrimination, poor economic situation, and living conditions of the Roma population in Bijeljina, the Citizens' Association for the promotion of Roma Education 'Otaharin' has 15 years ago began the fight for equal rights of Roma children in education, but also in the society in general. **"We want all Roma children to find a place in the society through their personal development,"** says the director of the Association, **Dragan Joković**.

This desire has been recognized, not only in the city where they



operate, but also throughout Bosnia and Herzegovina and Europe, and they received prestigious awards from the European Commission for their work. **"We were among the first in the Balkans to include anti-Gypsyism (racial intolerance towards Roma people) in the Action Plan for Roma Education we were developing with the Government of Republika Srpska, and which is soon to be adopted in RS. That is really the answer to all these years of fight against discrimination,"** Dragan points out.

The response of this organization was also significant at the time of the Coronavirus pandemic, which had a significant impact on the Roma population in 2020. **"We distributed more than thousand aid packages and we were constantly present in the field. We overcame the crisis together and have shown that non-governmental organizations are better at managing crisis than the government institutions,"** says Dragan

And while many lost their jobs, Roma women and men were earning money to sustain their families by working in the fruit and vegetable greenhouses of the social enterprise **'Agro Plan'** that has been functioning since 2017 as part of the Association 'Otaharin'. **"We recognized that in addition to the need of providing education to Roma, they also need economic stability. Roma gain continuity of regular employment through work, receive regular monthly income, and thus gain a sense of equality. We currently have four employees. We do everything together. We don't want them to think that we are above them, and they are below us,"** says Ljiljana Janković, directress of the social enterprise.

**Dragana Nešković**, who runs the farm with Ljiljana, points out that they have quite expanded the product range in 2020. **"We introduced new vegetable crops, besides tomatoes and peppers, we had potatoes, green beans, eggplant, cabbage, cucumbers and other products that we placed on the market,"** she says, adding that all products are certified as organic and sold at the local market.



This much energy requires motivation that, as Dragana says, they get from the Czech Government and CARE organization through project **Enhancing social protection by building capacities of the civil society organizations (CSOs) in Bosnia and Herzegovina**: “Expansion of our capacities was one of more significant things that the CARE support. CARE and Czech Development Agency have recognized our needs and had completely furnished our Resource education center through the project, and have improve work of social enterprise. It is very important for us that we managed to get a container through this Czech project, which is equipped and serves as a cold storage without which we would have problem with marketing of our products as we did not have any option for their proper storage. CARE also provided special support during the COVID-19 pandemic both by providing help our beneficiaries and necessary protective gear for the employees of 'Otaharin'. It meant a lot to us and to our beneficiaries”.

All the efforts of this organization and the support of the Czech government and the CARE organization are best seen in the personal examples, happiness and satisfaction of those whose lives have been changed. **Selma Sajtanović** is a single mother who schools children and provides them with better living conditions by working in 'Agro plan'. **“I had no income to live off until I started working here. People in Otaharin have helped me a lot in my life and they help with children, schooling and everything we need. What I can provide to my children now I couldn't before,”** says Selma.



Before he started working in 'Agro Plan' **Dejan Mičić** was a child of the street. He slept in abandoned buildings, and today he is a tenant and thanks to the income he earns by working, his life has significantly improved.

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**“I am still trying to learn a lot and to work. Now I have money for food and all other necessities. My life has changed radically. Organizations like Otaharin mean a lot to Roma,”** concluded Dejan.

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## Sarajevo Open Center

### LOVE HAS NO BORDERS

**"A while ago, I was going through the archive of photos from 2016 when the Sarajevo Open Center (SOC) had organized an event that I really wanted to attend. I was living in Travnik at the time and my parents would not let me come, but coming to Sarajevo and getting to know the community had played a great role in my empowerment. I believe it is the essence of SOC, to empower the community",** says Amina Imamović, former beneficiary of SOC's services, and employee of this organization today.

Advocating the full respect of human rights and social inclusion of lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans and intersex people and women has been set as the SOC's goal in 2007 and it is the goal on which this organization's team tirelessly preserves and moves the borders every year. Even this year, marked by the Coronavirus pandemic, did not divide the community.

**"We were again sent back to our homes, and many of us lived with homophobic parents, which negatively affected mental health of some community members. During the quarantine we tried to maintain the communication with the LGBTIQ community and with women through live videos on the social networks and through discussions about mental health. We continued to offer free psychological and legal counselling of which we are particularly proud",** says Nejra Agić, communication coordinator of the organization.

Seeing that the community lacked socializing, kind words and understanding, as soon as epidemiological measures allowed, they organized their monthly gatherings again, launched initiatives that make LGBTIQ people visible in the local communities, and organized an exhibition on outing of LGBTIQ people.

**"This year we have also launched a call for the community through which we finance the initiatives that generate changes related to the LGBTIQ issues in their local community. Three initiatives have been implemented. A mural was made on Zetra with the words "Love has no borders" as one initiative, another initiative was a workshop on bicycle maintenance because we have many representatives of the LGBTIQ community who love and do sports, and the third was an exhibition of works of art "Moments",** says Nejra.

The SOC has recently organized the first exhibition of LGBTIQ persons on outing in Bosnia and Herzegovina, and most likely in the region. The exhibition was opportunity for all citizens to



learn more about lives of the LGBTIQ population.

With the assistance of the CARE International Balkans the SOC continued to work on promoting the adoption of gender action plans in all cantons of the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina as part of the project **Enhancing social protection by building capacities of the civil society organizations (CSOs) in Bosnia and Herzegovina**.

“Two gender action plans have been already adopted, in Canton Sarajevo and Central Bosnia Canton. We have started working on advocacy activities this year, because our aim is to see the plans adopted in other cantons of the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina. We have so far held meetings with representatives of Tuzla Canton, Goražde Canton, Herzegovina-Neretva Canton and all were interested in gender action plans. We got computers that made our work much easier”, says **Amina Dizdar**, project coordinator.

The SOC is one of few organization, as Amina pointed out, that is visible in the public and whose work is recognizable, and at the same is a safe home to all LGBTIQ persons and women.



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When I started working in SOC I was happy that I can be part of this activist process oriented towards attainment of gender equality and elimination of all forms of discrimination against the LGBTIQ people. We want changes and are working on them for our community. SOC is more than a three-letter abbreviation, SOC is family. I believe that all our beneficiaries now that.”

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# Association of persons with cerebral palsy and muscular dystrophy of Goražde Canton

## PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES CAN DO EVERYTHING THEY WANT

**"When we first started working in such a small community, we had a situation where some citizens perceived persons with disabilities, i.e. persons with cerebral palsy, as less valuable and were prejudiced against them. That is no longer the case today",** says **Mirsada Čulov**, president of the Association of persons with cerebral palsy and muscular dystrophy of Goražde Canton, which was established back in 1996.



Changing people's perception isn't easy. Something like that required years of tireless work of Mirsada, who is also suffering from cerebral palsy, as well as of her team. It is a postulate that never weakens, but rather becomes much stronger. It is proved by this turbulent 2020, which has brought many challenges due to the Covid-19 virus, which the persons with disabilities face as well.

**"We have provided monthly food packages to our beneficiaries with more complex social needs, as well as firewood to those who needed it. Although we were not allowed to assemble, we regularly visited our beneficiaries, of whom there are about 60, and brought them gifts. Thanks to the CARE project, we delivered diapers to those who needed them and gift packages with hygiene supplies. Although diapers are not on the essential medicinal product list, we managed to have the costs of diapers reimbursed by a decision of the director passed at the level of cantonal Institute during the first seven months of this year,"** Mirsada points out, adding that two scooters i.e. electric wheelchairs had brought smile to the faces of two young men suffering from cerebral palsy. The scooters were donated to them with the assistance of CARE International Balkans.

Furthermore, the Association received a new laptop and a printer this year within the project **Enhancing social protection by building capacities of the civil society organizations (CSOs) in Bosnia and Herzegovina**, implemented by CARE, and earlier they had received mobile phones, which facilitate online sales of products from their workshop **"Life aid for occupational work with persons with disabilities"** where ten employees earn salary regardless of the disability. Their skillful hands make slippers, pillows, bed linen, aprons, linen bags, and from this year protective face masks as well.

**"There was a shortage of masks in our canton. We had very little time to research the market, the material and the way they are sewn, but we succeeded. Our masks and aprons have even reached the US market, and we are particularly proud of that",**



points out **Amela Imamović**, sales manager of this Association and adds that the workshop team has grown in size this year, engaging more employees.

A new machine, which was necessary for the new employees, was added to their workshop recently. They plan to purchase another machine with which they would do embroidery on tablecloths and tablecloth hamming, thus introducing a new product into their offer.

Persons working in the workshop do not just see it as a workplace, although that is the way they earn their living, but they rather see it as a place for socializing, understanding, getting to know each other, as their second home. **“At the beginning of pandemic we made a 15-day break, and then we made a group “Team for ten” on the Facebook through which we communicated. They were eagerly waiting for me to tell them to come back to work. Love is also happening in our workshop. We employed a young men and a young girl with cerebral palsy, they got to know each other, fell in love, got married and now we have a beautiful, healthy baby. There was a lot of disapproval and fear having in mind that they are persons with disabilities. Ultimately, thanks to his mother, this family is living happily, and of course has support of us from the workshop”**, says Mirsada.

Association of persons with cerebral palsy and muscular dystrophy in Goražde has through its activities made possible for the persons with disabilities to be independent, happy, to feel as part of the society and to earn their own living.



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Persons with disabilities, when working, have the opportunity to leave the house. They feel valuable and useful. They go beyond the family circle, have a salary, and provide a livelihood for themselves. We have proven that persons with disabilities can be hard working employees, skillful and punctual in all segments, and this encourages me a lot. We dream of BiH in which people with cerebral palsy and dystrophy, as well as all those who belong to marginalized groups today, will live as equal members of the community and have their place in the society. Help us make it happen, says Mirsada.

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