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Varaždin, 20th March 2025

President of the County Assembly
Josip Križanić PhD /signed/

14.

In accordance with Article 33(34) of Varaždin County's Statute ('Varaždin County's Official Gazette' Number 14/18, 7/20, 65/20 - Consolidated Text and 11/21.), Article 56 of Varaždin County's Rules of Procedure ('Varaždin County's Official Gazette' Number 26/18, 7/20, 65/20 - Amended Text and 11/21.), Varaždin County's Assembly at the Session held on 20th March 2025 approved the following

CONCLUSION

on Adoption of the Strategy for Improving the Quality of Life for Older People as Part of the 'Varaždin County - Friend of the Golden Age' Project for 2024 - 2030

The County Assembly adopted the Strategy for Improving the Quality of Life for Older People as Part of the 'Varaždin County - Friend of the Golden Age' Project for 2024 - 2030

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Varaždin, 20th March 2025

President of the County Assembly
Josip Križanić PhD /signed/



Varaždin County

STRATEGY FOR IMPROVING THE QUALITY OF LIFE FOR OLDER PEOPLE AS PART OF THE 'VARAŽDIN COUNTY - FRIEND OF THE GOLDEN AGE' PROJECT FOR 2024 - 2030

February 2025

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1. Introduction

The Strategy for Improving the Quality of Life for Older People as part of the 'Varaždin County - Friend of the Golden Age' Project for 2024 - 2030 (hereinafter referred to as 'the Strategy') is being developed with the goal of improving the implementation of public policies relating to the care of older people within Varaždin County.

In addition to publicly available statistical data and relevant national and county strategies, plans and publications, the Strategy was developed using the results of the 2024 Preliminary Analysis of the Quality of Life Survey of Older People in Varaždin County (Authors: Associate Professor Marijana Neuberg PhD, Associate Professor Tomislav Meštrović PhD, University North's Nursing Department), which included 1,127 older people residing within Varaždin County and the Analysis on the Quality of Life of Older People with Limited Mobility, which included 220 older people with limited mobility.

The Strategy defines measures relating to the improvement of health and social care, promotion of active aging and social inclusion, improvement of infrastructure and accessibility, promotion of human rights and safety and increasing digital literacy and computer skills for older people.

These measures defined by the Strategy will be financed by county, national, local and regional government budgetary funds, European Union funds, donations and regular funds from institutions and organisations involved in their implementation.

The coordinating role for implementation of the Strategy at the Varaždin County level shall be Varaždin County in cooperation with the 'Varaždin County - Friend of the Golden Age' Project's Coordination Committee. Varaždin County's Administrative Department for Health, Social Welfare and Croatian Veterans, in cooperation with the 'Varaždin County - Friend of the Golden Age' Project's Coordination Committee shall connect all stakeholders involved in care provision for older people and shall monitor implementation of the Strategy.

The Strategy was adopted by Varaždin County's Assembly at the behest of 'Varaždin County - Friend of the Golden Age' Project's Coordination Committee.

If the individual measures and/or activities defined by the Strategy cannot be implemented due to changing circumstances that arise during implementation of the Strategy, or if there is a need to adapt to new circumstances, such changes shall be agreed upon through consultations between the relevant bodies and organisations involved in the work of the 'Varaždin County - Friend of the Golden Age' Project's Coordination Committee.

The Strategy is aligned with key developments at European, national and regional levels:

- The 2030 Republic of Croatia's National Development Strategy
- The 2021-2027 National Social Care Services Development Plan
- The 2021-2027 Varaždin County's Development Plan
- The 2021-2027 National Plan for Combating Poverty and Social Exclusion
- The 2021-2027 National Plan for Social Protection Development
- The 2023-2027 National Plan for Older People
- The National Recovery and Resilience Plan (*NPOO* in Croatian).
- The 2021-2027 Adult Education Strategy

2. A Picture of Varaždin County's Demographics

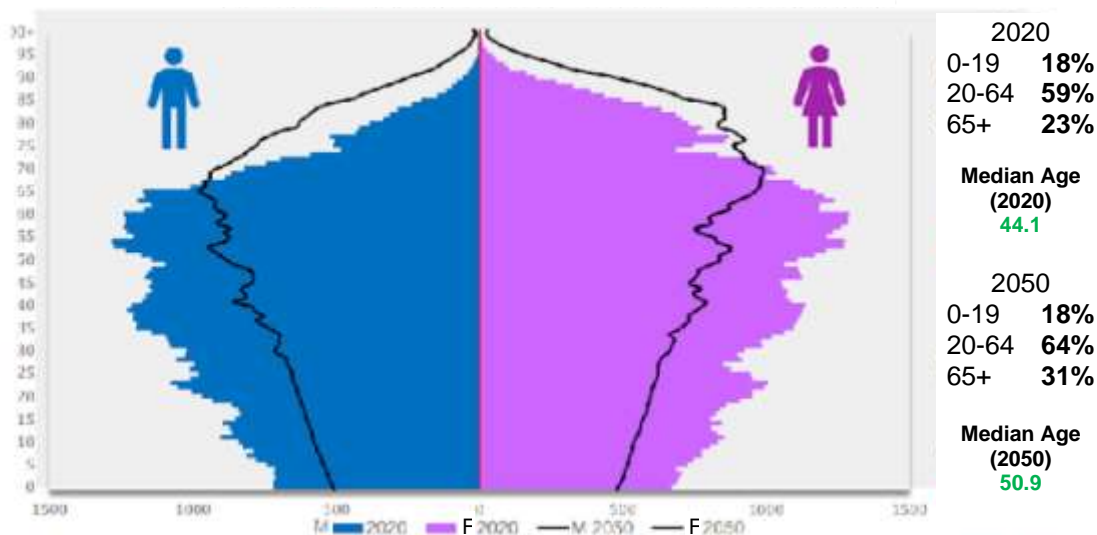
According to the 2021 Census, Varaždin County has 159,487 residents, which amounts to 4.12% of overall Croatian population. The population density of 126.37 residents per km² is significantly above the Republic of Croatia's average population density of 68.41 residents/km², and ranks as the second most populated Croatian county, right after Međimurje County. The difference between the County's most densely populated City, Varaždin (736.45 residents/km²), and the County's least populated Municipality, Breznički Hum (43.36 residents/km²), shows a highly dispersed population. Varaždin County has a particularly large number of small settlements, and is mostly made up of settlements of 1,000 residents or fewer, where almost half the County's population lives in predominantly rural areas.

According to the 2011 Census, Varaždin County had 55,483 households, which is a decrease of 612 households in comparison to the 2001 Census. These are predominantly households with 2 members (22.36%), single-person households (20.42%) and households with 4 members (18.41%) and 3 members (18.30%). The number of single-person households has increased in comparison to the 2001 Census, where they accounted for 17.92%.

Over the last twenty years the demographic picture of Varaždin County has been characterised by a continual decline in its number of residents. During the 2001-2021 period the number of residents decreased by 25,282, or 13.68%.

According to data from the Croatian Bureau of Statistics, during the 2011-2021 period the number of residents under 20 (30,413) decreased by 6,934 residents, while the number of residents aged over 60 (44,984) increased by 4,901 residents. According to the same data the percentage of people over 65 within Varaždin County is 20.79%, which is lower than the national average of 22.9%. At the county level the average age is continuously increasing.

Varaždin County's Demographic Pyramid



Source: https://dzs.gov.hr/UserDocsImages/Popis%202021/PDF/POPIS%202021.%20prezentacija_Prvi%20rezultati.pdf

Table 1 Census by City and Municipality for the 65+ Age Group

CITY/MUNICIPALITY	65+	75+	Proportion 65+ (%)	Proportion 75+ (%)
Ivanec	2,572	1,039	20.22	8.17
Lepoglava	1,292	482	18.60	6.94
Ludbreg	1,792	660	21.14	7.79
Novi Marof	2,232	902	18.92	7.65
Varaždin	10,177	4,613	23.24	10.54
Varaždinske Toplice	1,167	420	21.08	7.59
Bednja	750	335	22.13	9.88
Beretinec	367	140	17.91	6.83
Breznica	371	138	18.83	7.01
Breznički Hum	254	104	22.44	9.19
Cestica	1,140	506	21.01	9.33
Donja Voća	357	152	17.59	7.49
Gornji Kneginec	1,020	409	20.82	8.35
Jalžabet	685	255	21.52	8.01
Klenovnik	298	129	16.62	7.19
Ljubešćica	330	120	19.54	7.10
Mali Bukovec	368	167	20.34	9.23
Martijanec	590	247	22.37	9.36
Maruševac	1,174	445	20.66	7.83
Petrijanec	745	316	16.36	6.94
Sračinec	824	332	17.61	7.10
Sveti Đurđ	700	281	21.05	8.45
Sveti Ilija	642	256	19.80	7.90
Trnovec Bartolovečki	1,221	492	19.87	8.01
Veliki Bukovec	293	126	22.11	9.51
Vidovec	922	416	18.76	8.46
Vinica	582	183	19.27	6.06
Visoko	286	110	21.42	8.24
Total	33,151	13,775	20.79	8.64

Source: Croatian Bureau of Statistics, 2021 Census of Residents, Households and Housing.

According to Varaždin County's Social Plan for 2024-2026, smaller municipalities, such as Veliki Bukovec and Beretinec, face significant demographic challenges, such as a higher percentage of an older population and a high percentage of residents receiving social benefits (over 10%). Of the County's cities, Varaždin (43,782 residents) stands out as having 23% of its residents over 65, while 8% of its residents receive social benefits (more than 3,500 use the social care system), while Novi Marof (11,872 residents) has recorded a population decline of 10.4%, a high percentage of its residents are older people and 8% of its residents receive social benefits. The increasing percentage of older residents within Varaždin County further increases the demand for social and health services, such as long-term care, home care and mobile teams. Current capacity is unable to meet these needs, especially in rural areas, as confirmed by research conducted for Varaždin County's Social Plan for 2024-2026. User needs are becoming increasingly acute while the availability of such services in these communities remains limited.

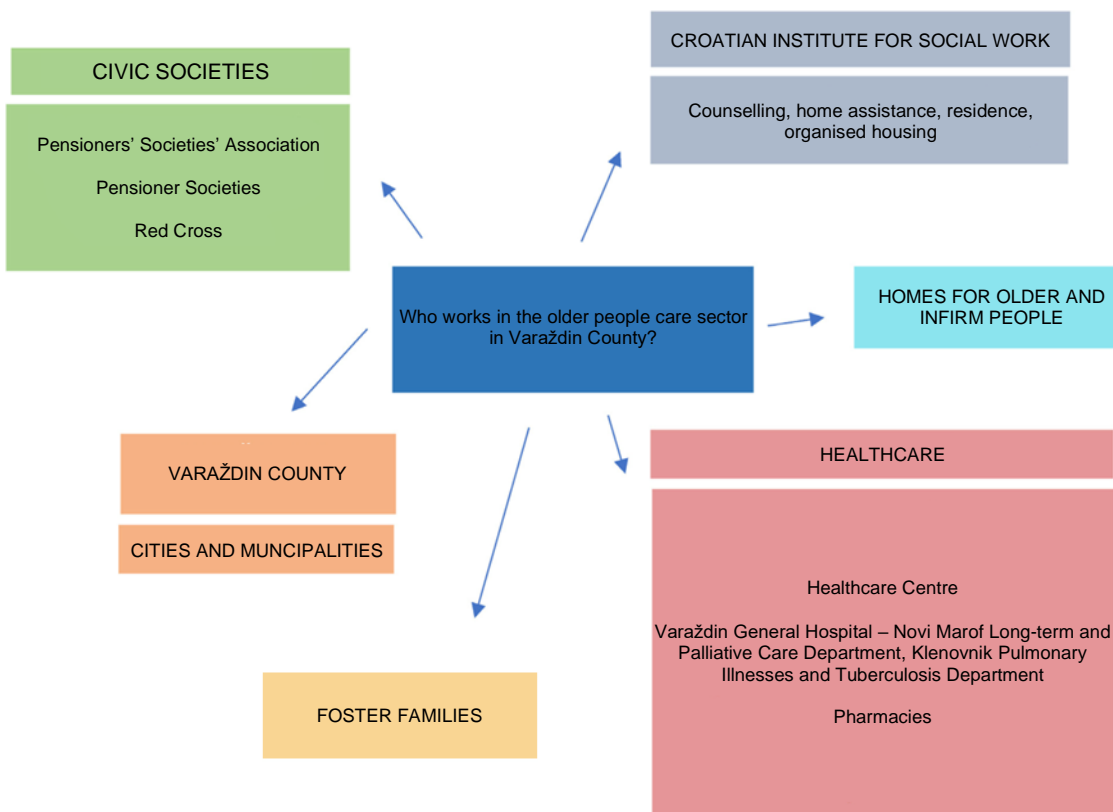
Research conducted within Varaždin County's Social Plan for 2024-2026 showed that representatives of local social care indicated the need for expanded capacity in day care centres, nursing homes and home care programmes. Aside from this, although the Ordinance on the Basic Conditions for Social Care Provision obliges local authorities to provide basic and specialised services for older people, their limited financial and infrastructural capacities across Croatia, especially in rural areas, are unable to respond to these growing demands. (Varaždin County's Social Plan for 2024-2026)

The Ordinance on Social Services and the National Plan for Social Services Development both recognise the importance of decentralisation and the adaptation of services to meet the needs of local communities. However implementation of these measures often encounter financial restrictions, which makes it difficult to match capacity with the needs of an ageing population.¹

Recommendations for action stated in Varaždin County's Social Plan for 2024-2026 relating to older people and the need to mitigate negative demographic trends include:

- Strengthening social services and infrastructure, especially in rural areas, through additional investment in day care centres, mobile teams and home care.
- Developing active ageing policies through increased availability of programmes for older people and service modernisation in accordance with the provisions of the Ordinance on the Basic Conditions for Social Service Provision.

3. Stakeholder Structure in Care Provision for Older People



¹ Varaždin County's 2024-2026 Draft Social Plan

The Croatian Institute for Social Work has four branch offices across Varaždin County (*Područni uredi županijske službe Varaždin*):

- The Ivanec Branch Office covers the area of the T Ivanec and Lepoglava and the Municipalities of Bednja, Donja Voća, Klenovnik and Maruševec
- The Novi Marof Branch Office covers the area of the Towns of Novi Marof and Varaždinske Toplice and the Municipalities of Ljubešćica, Hum Breznički, Breznica and Visoko
- The Ludbreg Branch Office covers the Town of Ludbreg and the following Municipalities: Donji Martijanec, Mali Bukovec, Veliki Bukovec and Sveti Đurd
- The Varaždin Branch Office, as the County's seat, covers the City of Varaždin and acts as the central coordinating and supervising office for all social service activities across the County.

Regional offices provide the following services:

- Basic social assistance programmes, including financial support
- Accommodation in social institutions
- Psychological and legal assistance
- Employment and education programmes to increase social inclusion

Other stakeholders within Varaždin County include:

- Homes for older and disabled people (1 County funded and 7 privately owned homes), family-owned homes for older and disabled people and foster families
- Health
 - Healthcare Centre, Varaždin General Hospital, the Novi Marof Service for Extended Treatment and Palliative Care, and the Klenovnik Service for Pulmonary Diseases and Tuberculosis
 - Varaždinske Toplice Specialist Hospital for Medical Rehabilitation
 - Pharmacies
- Civil Society
 - Associations providing non-institutional care for older and disabled people
 - Varaždin County's Union of Pensioners and Older Persons' Associations
 - Pensioner associations (32 associations across Varaždin County)
 - Red Cross
- Varaždin County's cities and municipalities

Despite the numerous institutions operating across Varaždin County, a quality-of-life survey of older residents living in Varaždin County revealed that more than half of the respondents replied 'Association of Pensioners' when asked 'what services do you know that exist in your place of residence to help older people?'. They were also aware of other services (such as the Croatian Institute for Social Work for advice on legal and social questions). However, as many as 9.6% of respondents said that no services existed to help older people, and as many as 7.2% of respondents said they did not know if any services existed.²

With regards to the role of family in the provision of care for older people, the importance of supporting families and informal caregivers was recognised during development of Varaždin County's Social Plan for 2024-2026. Families caring for older people face great emotional and physical pressures, so it is necessary to provide support to caregivers so that they can provide better care to older family members, recognise changes in their mental state and seek professional help when they need it.

Inter-sectional cooperation between the stakeholders within Varaždin County is extremely important if the quality of care for older people is to be improved. It is therefore necessary to encourage cooperation of all stakeholders (public institutes, civil society organisations and the private sector) to ensure integrated and effective long-term care for older people.

4. Status Analysis by Area

4.1 Healthcare

The Healthcare Act ('Official Gazette' Nos. 100/18 and 125/19) defines healthcare measures, highlighted amongst which are special healthcare measures for people aged over 65. Furthermore, for persons aged over 65 the Compulsory Health Insurance Act ('Official Gazette' Nos. 80/13, 137/13 and 98/19) ensures full payment of healthcare costs for insured individuals exercising their right to healthcare covered by compulsory healthcare insurance regarding preventative healthcare.

² Preliminary Analysis of the Quality-of-Life Survey of Older People in Varaždin County (Authors: Associate Professor Marijana Neuberg, PhD, Associate Professor Tomislav Meštrović, PhD, University North's Nursing Department)

Primary healthcare is provided through three institutions - the Varaždin County Healthcare Centre, the Varaždin County Public Health Institute and the Varaždin County Emergency Medicine Institute which were founded by Varaždin County - as well as by private general practitioners and paediatric and gynaecology practices, the Varaždin County Pharmacy and privately-owned pharmacies.³

Professional medical teams operate within the primary level healthcare system, the number of which (in most instances) is different or less than the requisite number of teams determined by the Public Healthcare Service Network. In areas where the minimum number of insured persons required for a general practice cannot be ensured, Varaždin County co-finances the work of sectoral outpatient clinics (Kamenica, Vrbno, Cvetlin, Završje Podbelsko and Gornja Voća) which aim to ensure that healthcare is available throughout the County.

Healthcare at the secondary level includes specialist (consultative) healthcare and hospital healthcare.⁴ The secondary level of healthcare is provided by the Varaždin General Hospital, the Varaždinske Toplice Specialist Hospital for Medical Rehabilitation and healthcare institutions - individual private practices. Varaždin General Hospital has 934 beds for patients needing hospitalisation, while the Varaždinske Toplice Specialist Hospital for Medical Rehabilitation has 677 beds.⁵

Given the ageing population and the leading causes of death within Varaždin County, the following healthcare areas were made priorities in Varaždin County's Proposed Healthcare Plan for 2021- -2023:

1. Cardiovascular disease prevention
2. Mental health protection for younger people in addition to addiction prevention
3. Early detection and prevention of breast cancer
4. Early detection and prevention of colon cancer
5. Long-term and palliative care
6. Diabetes and obesity prevention

Geriatric care at the national level and across Varaždin County has not been adequately addressed. Geriatric specialisation is rarely announced and even then, the response rate is very low. There are also no established geriatric departments. The only official geriatric specialist within Croatia works at the Duga Resa Special Hospital for Extended Treatment. A geriatric department should be formed as an acute department and/or as part of a department for extended treatment. Older patients are generally treated at the Departments for Internal Medicine and, if indicated, the Departments for Neurology, Surgery and/or Traumatology. People over 65 fall more frequently, and these falls are more likely to result in fractures caused by fragility in old age and associated chronic conditions. It is necessary that a geriatric department should be formed at Varaždin General Hospital and that announcements of geriatric specialisations should be encouraged. It is necessary that a geriatric department should be formed at Varaždin General Hospital and that announcements of geriatric specialisations should be encouraged.

Preventative medicine is provided through the primary care system and continuous public health campaigns in cooperation with the local community and educational institutions in accordance with national preventative medicine campaigns. The response to these preventative medicine campaigns for malignant diseases is lower than the desired level, so there is still room for improvement when it comes to preventative medicine programmes and initiatives aimed at the most common causes of death.

As part of the National Breast Cancer Early Detection Programme women aged between 50 and 69 are invited to have a mammogram every two years. Screening for colon and rectal cancer for people over 65 is carried out using the faecal occult blood test (Hemoccult).

The most common cancers within Croatia for women are breast, colon and lung cancers. For men these are prostate, colon and lung cancers. It is important to encourage people to stop smoking at a young age through public health campaigns and encourage preventative measures for lung cancer that include an annual X-ray of the heart and lungs, a complete blood count and the determination of tumour markers. For example, a malignant disease is often detected in (visibly) anaemic patients after certain examinations.

In Croatia, in 2021 cancer was diagnosed in 13,207 men, of which 5,907 died. Incidents of cancer for men were the highest in Varaždin County. It is important to note that 1/3 malignant diseases can be prevented by controlling risk factors and taking regular check-ups.

Monitoring chronic diseases in older people is extremely important. There is certainly a need for better control of risk factors involving chronic diseases, as they are the main causes of death in Croatia, which are: 1. cardiovascular disease (cardiac infarction and heart failure), 2. cerebral vascular disease (strokes), 3. diabetes (the main cause of death in diabetes is cardiovascular) and 4. peripheral arterial disease, which is directly linked to diabetes and smoking.

Risk factor control is the most important, and this includes activities such as quitting smoking, reducing fatty food intake, increasing physical activity, reducing body weight and better regulation of blood pressure and blood fats.

³ Varaždin County's Proposed Healthcare Plan for 2021- 2023

⁴ <https://www.hzzo.hr/zdravstveni-sustav-rh/zdravstvena-zastita-pokrivena-obveznim-zdravstvenim-osiguranjem/ugovoreni-sadrzaji-zdravstvene-zastite-u-rh/>

⁵ http://www.zjzvv.hr/articlefiles/zjzvv_ljetopis_2020.pdf

General practitioners are extremely important in the prevention and early detection of malignant diseases, but due to a lack them in primary healthcare and the large number of chronic patients, it is proposed that part of these education programmes should be directed towards other specialities and health professionals.

It is proposed that public forum events should be encouraged to gather experts (internal medicine specialists, cardiologists and endocrinologists) to provide detailed and specific information or lectures in small groups or smaller communities with the aim of educating the target group about dietary habits and other risk factors. Special attention should be paid to people on low incomes who often have difficulties implementing experts' recommendations due to their limited financial resources.

The mental health of older people is directly linked to loneliness. It is believed by providing better social support can reduce incidents of anxiety-depressive syndromes in older people. It is recommended that day care centres that provide transportation of older people from and to their place of residence should be provided for people with dementia. Psychologists are certainly important for people with mental health issues and should be part of any hospital palliative team as well as mobile palliative teams and an indispensable part of Healthcare Centre teams.

Within Varaždin County a great deal of importance is given to **palliative care** and investment in the palliative care system. Varaždin General Hospital, the Novi Marof Advanced Treatment and Palliative Medicine Service and the Varaždin County Healthcare Centre provide specialist palliative care, while other services other services provide more general palliative care. The County provides funds for the work carried out by the Palliative Care Project Team, purchases equipment for the rental shop and provides IT support for the computer system that enables functionality of Varaždin County's palliative care system. In addition to this, on 29th November 2018 Varaždin County Assembly adopted the Palliative Care Development Strategy for 2018- 2021.

The Novi Marof Palliative Care Department is now located in a new, centrally connected facility with 89 beds in total.⁶ In addition to the beds contracted by the Croatian Health Insurance Institute, there is also a Hospital Department for privately paid care of older people with 20 beds.⁷ As part of its palliative care activities the Varaždin County Healthcare Centre has 2 palliative care coordinators who have been contracted to the Palliative Care Coordination Centre and 1 mobile palliative care team consisting of 1 doctor and 1 nurse.

Within Varaždin County continuous training is provided to palliative care professionals, but in order for palliative care to develop further within Varaždin County education needs to focus on the following key points: early identifications of people needing palliative care, methods of inclusion in palliative care and understanding of the function and scope of work carried out by specialist services (the Palliative Care Department, equipment rental shop, volunteers, the Mobile Palliative Team and the Palliative Care Coordinator).

It is necessary that guidelines are developed that allow for the early identification of people in need of palliative care who can then be referred for specialist palliative care. It is also necessary that public healthcare education of the target population lessens the stigma and raises public aware of palliative care.

In order that palliative care can be development further within Varaždin County work must continue to develop the National Centre for Palliative Care, invest in the recruitment of adequate staff and encourage the opening of day centres for palliative patients (in cooperation with the Croatian Institute of Health Insurance). It is also necessary that the care provided by the Mobile Palliative Care Teams and the Palliative Care Coordinator at the National Centre are linked so that people can have continuous and high-quality care regardless of where they receive it.

Table 2 Disease Groups for Assessing Minimum Palliative Care Needs

Disease Groups for Assessing Minimum Palliative Care Needs	Year			
	2017	2018	2019	Total
Neoplasms (C 00-D 48)	588	545	562	1,695
Heart Failure (I 11, I 13, I 50)	144	129	185	458
Renal Failure (N 10, N 11, N 12, N 13, N 18)	26	21	35	82
Liver Failure (K 70, K 71, K 72)	51	75	61	187
Chronic Obstruction Lung Disease (J 40- J 44)	59	67	65	191
Spino-muscular Atrophy and Related Syndromes (G 12)	1	1	0	2
Parkinson's Disease (G 20)	17	14	13	44
Alzheimer's Disease (G 30)	16	15	15	46
Overall Total:	902	867	936	2,705

⁶<https://zdravlje.gov.hr/UserDocsImages/2018%20Programi%20i%20projekti/NP%20RAZVOJA%20PALIJATIVNE%20SKRBI%20RH%202017-2020-%20usvojen%2018.10.2017..pdf>

⁷ <https://obv.hr/organizacijska-struktura/sluzba-produzeno-lijecenje-i-palijativnu-skrb-novi-marof-18/>

Number of Deaths Registered in the County's Palliative Patient Registry	212	199	213	624
TOTAL DEATHS FROM ALL DISEASES	2,254	2,179	2,230	6,663
Total Deaths of Patients Receiving Palliative Care	26.09	25.01	25.20	25.44

Source: Varaždin County's Healthcare Plan for 2021- 2023

The results of the quality-of-life research for older people, relating to healthcare access and support (according to age/retirement) are as follows⁸:

- **General Practitioners:**
 - o **p-value:** 0.0014
 - o **Statement:** *'My general practitioner is close to where I live'*.
 - o Older respondents reported a being more distant from their general practitioner than younger respondents.
- **Pharmacies:**
 - o **p-value:** 0.041
 - o **Statement:** *'My pharmacy is close to where I live'*.
 - o Older respondents reported experiencing difficulties accessing pharmacies and reported then being more distant.
- **Availability of Healthcare Support:**
 - o **p-value:** 0.0025
 - o **Statement context:** the impact of healthcare services availability (pharmacies/doctors) on quality of life.
 - o Older respondents reported a greater impact on quality of life with regards to the availability of listed healthcare services.
- **General Practitioners:**
 - o **p-value:** 0.017
 - o **Statement:** *'My general practitioner is close to where I live'*.
 - o Respondents receiving lower pensions reported being further away from their general practitioner than those receiving higher pensions; a possible impact of financial status on access to healthcare.
- **Knowledge of Access to Professionals:**
 - o **p-value:** 0.032
 - o **Statement:** *'If I am lonely, I know professionals in my place of residence who I can contact'*.
 - o Respondents receiving lower pensions are less familiar with regards to available professional support - a possible impact on social support and mental health.

When talking about ensuring adequate healthcare for older people, it is important to emphasise the issue of prescribing drugs that are subject to additional charges (especially more expensive drugs on the B List). These are mainly medications used by diabetic and heart patients to better control diabetes, heart failure and anti-clotting therapies (primarily for cardiac arrhythmias and deep vein thrombosis). As some of these medications reduce mortality by 25%, they are certainly necessary for these patients, but in practice they are often not used by older people due to their low incomes.

It is also important to note that addiction, primarily alcohol addiction, is an important factor on the quality of life of both young and older people. Addiction is associated with higher mortality, a reduced quality of life, domestic violence and other similar problems. It has been proposed to encourage as many preventative activities as possible.

4.2 Social Care

Varaždin County has a developed social care system which is based on the national framework defined by the Social Care Act ('Official Gazette' No. 150/24) and the 2021- 2027 National Social Care Services Development Plan. These documents emphasise the importance of providing social care to at-risk groups, including older people.

The Croatian Institute for Social Work has four branch offices across Varaždin County - the Varaždin, Ivanec, Novi Marof and Ludbreg Branch Offices - which provide services such as guaranteed minimum allowance, maintenance allowances, care allowances and access to personal disability allowances. According to data from the Administrative Department for Health, Social Welfare and Croatian Veterans, within the County there are eight large social care homes for older and disabled people, one of which is in the County's seat and remaining seven are homes established by private individuals which all together provide accommodation for 963 users. A network of small family nursing homes has developed within Varaždin County, each with accommodation for up to 20 older and disabled people. There are currently 28 such family nursing homes, which means that the number of such homes

⁸ Preliminary Analysis of the Quality-of-Life Survey of Older People in Varaždin County (Authors: Associate Professor Marijana Neuberg, PhD, Associate Professor Tomislav Meštrović, PhD, University North's Nursing Department)

has increased by 5 in the previous 8 years, and their total accommodation capacity amounts to 502 users. Non-institutional care for older and disabled people is provided by three associations with 198 users. Home assistance for older and disabled people is provided by one association with 17 users. Due to the reduced functional capacity and the impaired health of the older and disabled people requiring assistance, it is necessary to ensure that appropriate long-term care services at home are provided in addition to adequate accommodation capacity. Varaždin County does not have a large accommodation capacity in its rehabilitation and long-term care institutions and is also lacking better organisation of resources and the long-term care system integration at the community and home care levels, where any improvements would not only significantly improve patients' quality of life and standard of care but would also keep pace with European trends for deinstitutionalisation.⁹

Given the high proportion of older people, the County has been financing a home care programme implemented by the Varaždin County Red Cross since 2002. In 2020 this programme included 158 older users across Varaždin County. Since 2011 this programme has provided employment for people with reduced employability, mainly middle-aged women and so-called 'geronto-housewives' (*gerontodomačica*) through public work co-financed by the Croatian Employment Service. Currently this programme employs 4 people: 1 nurse and 3 geronto-housewives.¹⁰ According to data provided by the Minister of Labour, Pension System, Family and Social Policy for the period from 2011 to 2018, the number of users of institutional accommodation within Varaždin County increased by 15.5%, and the number of requests for such accommodation is constantly increasing in line with the current trends for older population across the country. Varaždin County's initiative to develop non-institutional care for older people has led to the Day Centre for Older and Disabled People opening, and this currently has capacity for 12 users. During 2019 the half-day service was used by 17 users, and in 2020, up to the end of November, 15 users used the service.¹¹

Given these increased demands, it is necessary to work on increased capacity for institutional and non-institutional accommodation for older people, especially non-mobile older and disabled people who are often unable to access this service in public homes due to their full capacity.¹²

The Croatian Institute for Social Work has four branch offices across Varaždin County which provide:

- Basic social assistance programmes, including financial support
- Accommodation in social institutions
- Psychological and legal assistance
- Employment and education programmes to increase social inclusion

This network offers a holistic approach to the needs of users, thus contributing to a reduction in social exclusion which is also a priority of the National Plan for Combating Poverty and Social Exclusion for 2021-2027.¹³

People at Risk of Poverty

One relevant indicator of poverty risk is the percentage of the total population within the County receiving social assistance. According to the National Poverty Report for 2023 (Croatian Bureau of Statistics), 1.27% of Varaždin County residents received social assistance, which is lower than the national average of 1.4%. However at-risk groups such as children, older people, the homeless and disabled people remain at serious risk of poverty. The National Plan for Social Protection Development for 2021-2027 proposes various measures to combat poverty, including increased availability of social services in rural areas and the development of integrated services for older people, such as home care and mobile teams. Within Varaždin County older people make up a significant proportion of the population which is dependent on social transfers, and their limited mobility and lower incomes further increase their risk of poverty.¹⁴

In 2019, the highest rates of risk of poverty were recorded in single households, in particular single households of people aged 65 or over (50.3%) and single female households of any age (48.7%).¹⁵

Amongst older people's households, people receiving a pension represent a particularly at-risk group and are exposed to a five-fold higher risk of poverty than the national average. Even people receiving a pension are exposed to a two-fold higher risk of poverty in comparison to the national average. Pensioners in rural areas are more at risk of poverty than pensioners in urban areas. Rankings of regions by poverty incidence levels shows that Varaždin County belongs to the middle percentiles, i.e. a region of moderate to high risk of poverty, depending on whether this is in an urban or rural area.¹⁶

As part of the development of Varaždin County's Social Plan for 2024-2026, an analysis of the needs and capacities of service providers was conducted in accordance with the Ordinance on Uniform Needs Assessment Methodology ('Official Gazette' No. 90/23). Data were collected from various sources, including the policies of the Croatian Institute for Social Work's four branch offices, the Public Health Institute and social service providers. Data on the availability of social services for older people are listed below:

⁹ Varaždin County's Development Plan for 2021-2027

¹⁰ Varaždin County's Administrative Department for Health, Social Welfare and Croatian Veterans, 2020

¹¹ Varaždin County's Administrative Department for Health, Social Welfare and Croatian Veterans, 2020

¹² 2021-2027 Varaždin County's Development Plan

¹³ 2024-2026 Varaždin County's Draft Social Plan

¹⁴ 2024-2026 Varaždin County's Draft Social Plan

¹⁵ www.dzs.hr; Pr 14.1.1; Poverty and Social Exclusion Indicators for 2019

¹⁶ 2014-2020 Varaždin County's Social Plan

OLDER PEOPLE WITH REDUCED FUNCTIONAL CAPACITIES¹⁷**Social Services Stipulated by the Social Care Act**

Within Varaždin County there are 2,122 older people with reduced functional capacities, for whom certain social services are planned in accordance with the Social Care Act. The home care service, which includes '*meals on wheels*', is planned for 615 people, but is currently only used by 93 users. The home care service without '*meals on wheels*' is prepared for 615 people and is used by 325 users.

At the same time, accommodation or sheltered housing services have shown a significant increase in the number of users in comparison to that expected. The projected number of users was 785, while the accommodation service is actually used by 1,438 users; there is accommodation in homes for the elderly for 1,289 users, private accommodation with physical entities or foster families for 149 users. Varaždin County has a very good network of social services for older people but, owing to socio-demographic demands, waiting lists for homes are long and demand is increasing.

Other Innovative and Project Financed Services within the Social Care System

Varaždin County has prepared an organised transport and escort service for 615 older people with reduced functional capacities which is currently used by 181 users. The alarm notification system, which features SOS bracelets, is prepared for 870 people but not used by anybody, which represents a serious shortcoming in this system's implementation. Intensive and continual support for people living in their own homes was planned for 170 people, but actual number of users is 548, which indicates that demand was higher than expected.

Other Innovative and Project Financed Services within the Social Care System and Other Health Sector Services

Home care services¹⁸ are provided to 29% of the total number of older people with reduced functional capacities. The expected number of users of this service is 615. The current number of users is 48.

OLDER PEOPLE WITH MENTAL HEALTH DISORDERS¹⁹**Social Services Stipulated by the Social Care Act**

Varaždin County has 19,263 older people with mental health disorders. The difference between the expected number of users (5,779) and current users (79) is 5,700 people, which suggests a significant mismatch between anticipated needs and the service's current availability. For the counselling or psycho-social support services, the difference between the expected number of users (3,853) and the current number of users (318) (counselling: 9 users, psycho-social counselling: 46 users and psycho-social support for older people: 263 users) amounts to 3,770 people, which further confirms a serious lack of access to these key services for older people with mental disorders.

Other Innovative and Project Financed Services within the Social Care System or across the Civil Society Sector

In Varaždin County there are clubs and social centres for older people that are intended for 50% of people with mental health disorders who are motivated to participate, and the expected number of users is 9,632. However, currently nobody is using this service. These data show the need for additional strengthening and improvement of social service providers so that this service could be implemented.

OLDER PEOPLE WITH DEMENTIA**Other Healthcare Sector Services**

Varaždin County has 670 older people with dementia. Continuous home care is expected for 30%, or 201 of these people. Currently nobody is using this service. It is recommended that a home-based care service should be established for people with dementia so that appropriate support can be provided to this group and their families and the standard of care can be raised.

¹⁷ Older people depending on help and care from others, in accordance with the Ordinance on Uniform Needs Assessment Methodology ('Official Gazette' No. 90/23) https://narodne-novine.nn.hr/clanci/sluzbeni/2023_08_90_1398.html

¹⁸ In accordance with the Ordinance on Uniform Needs Assessment Methodology ('Official Gazette' Number 90/23) https://narodne-novine.nn.hr/clanci/sluzbeni/2023_08_90_1398.html

¹⁹ Older people with neuroses and other mental disorders (N=204 049) in accordance with the Ordinance on Uniform Needs Assessment Methodology ('Official Gazette' Number 90/23) https://narodne-novine.nn.hr/clanci/sluzbeni/2023_08_90_1398.html

OLDER PEOPLE WITH CAREGIVERS IN NEED OF SUPPORT

Social Services Stipulated by the Social Care Act

It is estimated that 424 people live in Varaždin County with caregivers who need support. The service of family counselling, psycho-social counselling and psycho-social support is provided for 110% of this number, i.e. for 424 users. There are currently 3 users of this service. It is recommended that the service is developed and implemented in order to ensure the necessary support for caregivers, which would improve their quality of life and facilitate care for the older people.

Other Innovative and Project Financed Services within the Social Care System

Within Varaždin County temporary or occasional respite accommodation for caregivers is provided for 30% of older people with caregivers, which amounts to 127 users. Currently nobody is using this service. The temporary respite service for caregivers at home is expected to be of the same percentage, which amounts to 297 users, but currently nobody is using this service. These differences indicate a complete failure to implement envisaged services that are key to easing the burden of caregiving and providing much-needed respite from their demanding role. These data indicate a complete failure to implement envisaged services that are key to supporting caregivers and relieving their burden. It is recommended that non-professional caregivers are educated about the possibilities this service provides and that these services are adapted and established to respond to the needs of caregivers and to improve the quality of care provided to older people.

PEOPLE IN NEED OF PALLIATIVE CARE²⁰

Social Services Stipulated by the Social Care Act and Other Innovative and Project Financed Services within the Social Care System

Since the formal establishment of palliative care in 2016, Varaždin County has provided assistance to around 4,500 users and their families, and an average of 450 users are assisted every year. On 31st August 2023, the County's Palliative Care Register included 455 users who received care at home and 10-15 users who were hospitalised. It is estimated that annually 940 users need palliative care, which indicates that there is a need for early recognition and inclusion in the palliative care system and inclusion in the healthcare and social system that are available in the user's place of residence. Given the ageing population, increasing co-morbidities and increasing life expectancy, the development of geriatric palliative care requires the development of services in the social needs' domain.

The following are highlighted as key challenges for the development of palliative care through the 2024-2026 Varaždin County Social Plan: enable users to exercise their social rights as a priority in order to avoid delays caused by administrative procedures; service coordination (each service/office should have a contact person in charge so that services such as psycho-social support, home help, equipment rental and specific services for children can be rapidly mobilised); financing (explore different funding sources to ensure free service provision within the social care domain for users of the palliative care system and their families and to ensure support for the informal care the families provide in their homes, through social care services, such as 'meals on wheels', delivery of medicines, cleaning, preparation of meals and other household chores).

The 2024-2026 Varaždin County's Social Plan also proposed a vision for future development of the palliative care system which included the National Palliative Care Centre, the expansion of specialised services, including the National Centre Respiratory Diseases, expansion of the capacities of the Varaždinske Toplice Specialist Hospital for Medical Rehabilitation's National Rehabilitation Centre for People with Spinal Cord Injuries and establishment of a fund for additional support for palliative care to users and their families.

As an example of good practice, we can cite the activities of the Palliative Care Coordination Centres/the Palliative Care Coordinator and the Mobile Palliative Team which, since 2016, have been ensuring continuity of healthcare for people in need of palliative care wherever they are in Varaždin County. It is important to highlight their exceptional cooperation with Varaždin General Hospital and the Novi Marof Palliative Care Department. There is a visible connection between healthcare and social services to improve home care, cooperation with local and regional authorities with regards to the provision of support to users in need, educational cooperation with the science community and the competent chambers and ministries in the development of guidelines and documents concerning the improvement of care provision.

A unique example of inpatient palliative care is the Novi Marof Palliative Care Development, which opened in 2018 as part of the 'Construction of a Connecting Facility between Department II and Department III with an Internal Service Road and Equipping the Novi Marof Extended Treatment and Palliative Care Service' Project, which used funds provided the EU's Competitiveness and Cohesion Operational Programme for 2014- 2020.

Varaždin County's Healthcare Centre's Palliative Care Coordination Centre received the 2023 'Special Recognition for Best International Practice' in Portorož, Slovenia. To improve the quality of care, the Manual 'Dignity until the End of Life' was published by the Varaždin County's Healthcare Centre and is intended to assist the work

²⁰ Terminally ill people, in Accordance with the Ordinance on Uniform Needs Assessment Methodology ('Official Gazette' No. 90/2023) https://narodne-novine.nn.hr/clanci/sluzbeni/2023_08_90_1398.html

of those providing palliative care, and the Brochure 'Through a Half-open Door: Let's Get to Know Volunteering' was published by the 'Srce' (Heart) Palliative Care Association in Novi Marof and shows the importance of volunteering in palliative care.

As part of the Varaždin County's 2024-2026 Social Plan, an assessment was made of older people's social service requirements (Table 4).

Table 3 Older People's Social Service Requirements Assessment

NUMBER OF OLDER PEOPLE AT RISK WITHIN THE COUNTY	% OF OLDER PEOPLE AT RISK IN NEED OF SOCIAL SERVICES	Number of Older People at Risk Requiring Social Services (Expected Number of Users)	Number of Older People at Risk Using the Specified Service	The Difference between the Number of Older People in Need and those Receiving the Service
OLDER PEOPLE WITH REDUCED FUNCTIONAL CAPACITIES	SOCIAL SERVICES STIPULATED BY THE SOCIAL CARE ACT			
	Home care service including 'meals on wheels' 29% of older people with reduced functional capacities	615	73	542
	Home care service excluding 'meals on wheels' 29% of older people with reduced functional capacities	615	325	290
	Accommodation (crisis or in other circumstances) or organised housing for older people 37% of older people with reduced functional capacities	785	Accommodation in the home 1,289 Accommodation organised by a religious association/society Private accommodation with physical entities or foster families 149 Organised housing	423
	OTHER INNOVATIVE AND PROJECT FINANCED SERVICES WITHIN THE SOCIAL CARE SYSTEM			
	Organised transport and escort service for older and disabled people 29% of older people with reduced functional capacities	615	181	434
	The alarm notification system for older people (e.g. an SOS bracelet) 41% of older people with reduced functional capacities	870	0	870
	Intensive and continual support for people living in their own homes 8% of older people with reduced functional capacities	170	548	378
	OTHER INNOVATIVE AND PROJECT FINANCED SERVICES WITHIN THE SOCIAL CARE SYSTEM OTHER HEALTHCARE SECTOR SERVICES			
	Home care 29% of older people with reduced functional capacities	615	48	567

NUMBER OF OLDER PEOPLE AT RISK WITHIN THE COUNTY	% OF OLDER PEOPLE AT RISK IN NEED OF SOCIAL SERVICES	Number of Older People at Risk Requiring Social Services (Expected Number of Users)	Number of Older People at Risk Using the Specified Service	The Difference between the Number of Older People in Need and those Receiving the Social Service
OLDER PEOPLE WITH MENTAL HEALTH DISORDERS	SOCIAL SERVICES PROVIDED IN ACCORDANCE WITH THE SOCIAL CARE ACT			
	Residence 30% of people with mental health disorders are motivated to use the service	5,779	94	5,685
	Counselling or psycho-social counselling or psycho-social support for older people 20% of people with mental health disorders are motivated to use the service	3,853	Counselling 9 Psycho-social counselling 46 Psycho-social support for older people 263	3,535
	OTHER INNOVATIVE AND PROJECT FINANCED SERVICES WITHIN THE SOCIAL CARE SYSTEM OR ACROSS THE CIVIL SOCIETY SECTOR			
	Club/centre for older people 50% of people with mental health disorders are motivated to use the service	9,632	0	9,632
OLDER PEOPLE WITH DEMENTIA	OTHER HEALTHCARE SECTOR SERVICES			
	Continuous home care for people with dementia 30% of older people with dementia	201	0	201
NUMBER OF OLDER PEOPLE WITH CAREGIVERS IN NEED OF SUPPORT	SOCIAL SERVICES PROVIDED IN ACCORDANCE WITH THE SOCIAL CARE ACT			
	Counselling or psycho-social counselling or psycho-social support for older people's family members 100% of older people with caregivers/carers in need of support	424	Counselling 3 Psycho-social counselling Psycho-social support	421
	OTHER INNOVATIVE AND PROJECT FINANCED SERVICES WITHIN THE SOCIAL CARE SYSTEM			
	Temporary or occasional care respite accommodation 30% of older people with caregivers/carers in need of support	127	0	127
	Temporary care service at home for care respite 70% of older people with caregivers/carers in need of support	297	0	297
TERMINALLY ILL PEOPLE	OTHER INNOVATIVE AND PROJECT FINANCED SERVICES WITHIN THE SOCIAL CARE SYSTEM			
	OTHER HEALTH SECTOR SERVICES			
	Palliative care at home 80% of users require palliative care			
	Hospice palliative care 20% of users require palliative care			

Source: Varaždin County's 2024-2026 Social Plan

Analysis of the available data shows that there is significant potential for further improvement of Varaždin County's social services on the basis of good practice and a strengthened approach to meeting the needs of all users. Systematic development and better coordination can provide sustainable support models and improve the quality of life of all at-risk groups.²¹

The following recommendations were made on the basis of this analysis to improve the social services system with the aim of reducing the gap between demand and available services that increase the quality of life of Varaždin County residents:

1. Improving existing services: further strengthening of well-developed programmes, such as child mental health, home help and palliative care, to enable greater user coverage.
2. Developing new services: establishing additional social mentoring programmes, temporary accommodation and support for care givers and innovating programmes for refugees and members of the Roma community.
3. Collaboration between sectors: strengthening coordination between the social, healthcare and education sectors to ensure comprehensive user support.
4. Education and information: increasing investment in professional staff education and informing users of existing services.
5. Infrastructure development: directing funds to expand home care service capacities, temporary care and specialised programmes for older and disabled people.

Varaždin County's 2024 - 2026 Social Services Development Plan aims to improve the quality of life of social service users, increase service availability and strengthen provider capacity. Key priorities include: increasing accommodation capacities for the most at-risk groups, developing innovative services, such as mobile teams and counselling centres, and expanding the availability of services in rural areas. The focus is also on strengthening preventative measures, empowering users and improving the coordination of users within the social care system.

Table 4 Social Care Providers within Varaždin County

INSTITUTION NAME	SERVICE	NUMBER OF SERVICE USERS
Ben d.o.o. – Benko Home	Residence - older people	30
Varaždin Diocese Caritas	Canteen and/or 'meals on wheels' (not included in the home care system)	220
'St John the Baptist' Caritas Home for Older and Disabled People in Ivanec	Accommodation or organised housing - at-home accommodation for older people	Accommodation in the home 120
Varaždin Community Services Centre	Residence - disabled people	13
	Specialised transport and escort service - disabled people	9
Varaždin Rehabilitation Centre	Accommodation or organised housing - disabled people	Organised housing 33 Social Care Home 91
Dom greda d.o.o.	Accommodation - older and seriously ill adults	14
Levanić Home for Older and Disabled People	Accommodation or organised housing - older people	Accommodation in the home 20
Ljuba voda Home for Older and Seriously Ill People	Accommodation or organised housing - older people	Accommodation in the home 60
Dom Mraz d.o.o.	Accommodation or organised housing - adults with mental disabilities and addiction issues	49
Novi život (New Life) Home	Accommodation or organised housing - older people	Accommodation in the home 69
Varaždin Social Care Home for Older and Disabled People	Accommodation or organised housing - older people	Accommodation in the home 138
'St Joseph' Home for Older and Disabled People	Accommodation or organised housing - older people	Accommodation in the home 18
'St Therese' Home	Accommodation or organised housing - older people	Accommodation in the home 19

²¹ Varaždin County's 2014-2020 Social Plan

INSTITUTION NAME	SERVICE	NUMBER OF SERVICE USERS
Vuković Home	Accommodation or organised housing - older people	Accommodation in the home 10
Bistričak Home for Adults	Accommodation or organised housing - adults with mental disabilities and addiction issues	Organised housing 16 Social Care Home 200
Jalžabet Home for Adults	Accommodation or organised housing - adults with mental disabilities	Organised housing 5 Social Care Home 101
'St Ana' Home for Older and Disabled People	Accommodation or organised housing - older people	82
Matija Home for Older and Disabled People	Accommodation or organised housing - older people	Accommodation in the home 85
	Home care service including 'meals on wheels' - older people	51
Varaždin Home for Older and Disabled People	Residence - older people	9
	Accommodation or organised housing - older people	Accommodation in the home 360
Iris Home for Older and Disabled People	Accommodation or organised housing - older people	Accommodation in the home 19
Varaždin County Red Cross Society	Home care service excluding 'meals on wheels' - older people	67
Varaždin Society for the Disabled	Psycho-social support - disabled adults	32
	Home care - disabled people	2
	Home care service excluding 'meals on wheels' - older people	58
	Personal Assistance Service - disabled people	25
	Specialised transport and escort service - disabled adults	87
Croatian Red Cross City of Varaždin Red Cross Society	Home care service excluding 'meals on wheels' - older people	1
	Personal Assistance Service - disabled people	3
	Organised transport and escort service for older and disabled people	181
	Canteen and/or 'meals on wheels' - residents in food poverty	2
	Orthopaedic and Medical Devices Loan Service - people at risk of poverty with chronic diseases	241
Croatian Red Cross Town of Ludbreg Red Cross Society	Psycho-social support - older people	35
	Psycho-social counselling - older people	35
	Home care service excluding 'meals on wheels' - older people	133
	Intensive and continual support for people living in their own homes - older people	133
	Orthopaedic and Medical Devices Loan Service	Unknown number of users

INSTITUTION NAME	SERVICE	NUMBER OF SERVICE USERS
Croatian Red Cross Town of Ivanec Red Cross Society	Psycho-social support - older people	48
	Home care - disabled people	48
	Home care service including 'meals on wheels' - older people	42
	Intensive and continual support for people living in their own homes - older people	157
	Social self-service and/or grocery delivery/distribution - adult residents	574
	At-home care - older people	48
	Orthopaedic and Medical Devices Loan Service - people at risk of chronic disease	7
	Employment support - citizens in severe material and social poverty	8
<i>Naš dom</i> (Our Home) 365, Dragica Home Unit	Accommodation or organised housing - older people	Accommodation in the home 20
Family Nursing Home for Older and Disabled People, owner Gabrijela Kosanović	Accommodation or organised housing - older people	Accommodation in the home 7
Jamnik Family Nursing Home for Older and Disabled People	Accommodation or organised housing - older people	Private accommodation with physical entities or foster families 19
Jelenski Family Nursing Home	Residence - older people	15
Liber Family Nursing Home	Accommodation or organised housing - older people	Accommodation in the home 20
Milja Family Nursing Home - a home for older and disabled people	Accommodation or organised housing - older people	Accommodation in the home 20
Sanja Family Nursing Home	Accommodation or organised housing - older people	Accommodation in the home 17
Seketin Family Nursing Home	Accommodation or organised housing - adults with mental disabilities and addiction issues	Accommodation in the home 20
Smiljan Family Nursing Home	Accommodation or organised housing - adults with mental disabilities and addiction issues	20
Smiraj Family Nursing Home	Accommodation or organised housing - older people	Accommodation in the home 20
St. Florian Family Nursing Home	Accommodation or organised housing - disabled people	family nursing home 20
St. Vincent Family Nursing Home	Accommodation or organised housing - older people	20
St. Rita Family Nursing Home	Accommodation or organised housing - older people	Private accommodation with physical entities or foster families 11
St. Antony Family Nursing Home	Residence - older people	20
The <i>Zlatne godine</i> (Golden Age) Family Nursing Home	Accommodation or organised housing - older people	5
Željka Ljubić Family Nursing Home	Accommodation or organised housing - older people	Private accommodation with physical entities or foster families 20
Petrijanec Municipality	Home care - disabled people	5
	Home care service excluding 'meals on wheels' - older people	66
'Sunce' (Sun) Varaždin, society for people with mental disabilities	Residence - adults with mental disabilities and addiction issues	11
	Accommodation - adults with mental disabilities and addiction issues	Organised housing 3

INSTITUTION NAME	SERVICE NUMBER	SERVICE USERS
Sveta Rozalija j.d.o.o.	Residence - older people	20
'Nada' ('Hope') Foster Care Society in Ivanec	Accommodation or organised housing - older people	Private accommodation with physical entities or foster families 19
Bednja Women's Society	Social self-service and/or 'meals on wheels' - residents in food poverty	37
	Orthopaedic and Medical Devices Loan Service - people at risk	3

Source: Varaždin County's 2024-2026 Social Plan

4.3 Life-long Learning

Life-long learning refers to any learning activity throughout life with the aim of improving knowledge, skills and competences within the framework of an individual's civic, social or professional activities.

Varaždin County's educational institutions provide education in over 60 educational fields and a number of programmes as part of the regular process, but it also provides adult education and training which is attended by an average of 200 participants. The parts of the life-long learning framework that stand out are the activities of Public Open Universities in Varaždin, Novi Marof, Ludbreg and Ivanec (adult education, various courses, foreign languages, training, advanced training, retraining and the like), which provide programmes attended by a hundred participants annually (individually). Varaždin Public Open University organises programmes intended for pensioners, namely courses in basic computing, English and German. Across the County there are also a number of private schools providing computing and language courses. In addition to these retraining programs are implemented by secondary schools (the Varaždin Vocational Secondary School, the 'Opeka Arboretum' Secondary School, the Varaždin Medical Secondary School, the Varaždin Secondary School of Economics, the Varaždin Electrical and Mechanical Engineering School, the Varaždin Mechanical and Traffic School, and the Construction, Natural Sciences and Mining School), other educational institutions, schools and institutions for adult education and faculties (Faculty of Organization and Informatics (FOI) and University North).²²

Varaždin County's 2024-2026 Social Plan recognises the need for additional encouragement for the inclusion of older age groups within training programmes.

Older people are often inadequately involved in the life-long learning process, and one possible reason why older people do not participate adequately in the life-long learning process is the insufficient number of programmes and workshops in which older people can participate.

According to numerous publicly available publications and research, inclusion of older people in educational programmes has a positive effect on the quality of their physical and mental health and allows for better socialization of older people. Acquiring new skills and engaging in creative hobbies results in better and more active lifestyles and gives older people better satisfaction and greater confidence.

4.4 Social Life, Quality of Life and Civil Society

One of the basic tasks of a local community is to provide activities and programmes that provide its residents with opportunities for a high-quality, active, healthy and rich **social life**, and this is especially important for older residents. Pensioners are an inexhaustible source of social capital for a local community. Their capital is their experience, knowledge and love for their local place and their time. It is extremely important that pensioners find their place during this period of their lives to develop personally and share their experience.

Loneliness amongst older people is one of the most common and biggest problems in local communities today, and various studies have shown that loneliness is often a cause of poor health and increased mortality in older people. For example, in Slovenia effective programmes for the prevention of loneliness are being developed, namely volunteer groups for high-quality ageing and inter-generational sociability.

Loneliness is defined as an extremely unpleasant mental state that occurs when a person feels rejected or misunderstood by others and lacks company for social activities and emotional intimacy, which is an important problem older age that poses a significant public health challenge.²³

In 2020 a study was conducted as part of a cross-sectional study of social and emotional loneliness amongst older people in northern Croatia, the goal of which was to investigate older people's social and emotional loneliness (both those living in institutions and in their own homes) and to determine the connection between loneliness and socio-demographic characteristics. The results showed that both groups of respondents were lonely and that the occurrence of loneliness differs with respect to socio-demographic characteristics. Furthermore, it was proven that

²² Varaždin County's Development Plan for 2021-2027

²³ Cross-sectional Study of Social and Emotional Loneliness amongst Older People in NORTHERN CROATIA, M. Neuberg, I. Kosir, T. Meštrović, R. Ribić, T. Cikač

there was a connection between the experience of older people's loneliness and their place of residence, with women being more frequently affected and people aged over 85 showing higher levels of loneliness.

Furthermore, it was found that social loneliness and loneliness in the family are significant more common in older people living in their own homes, while emotional loneliness is more common in older people living in a nursing home. In educational terms, people with secondary school diplomas feel less lonely than those with primary school diploma, and social, emotional and overall loneliness is more intense in married people than unmarried people. It has been shown that even a lack of physical activity can contribute to feelings of social and overall loneliness in older people, as well as feelings of loneliness within the family. On the other hand it is interesting that respondents who more frequently visit their general practitioner more often have pronounced feelings of loneliness in love as well as overall feelings of loneliness.

Additionally a study conducted in 2018²⁴ showed that nurses, as health professionals who are most likely to come into contact with older people, are irreplaceable in providing care to older people and promoting healthy lifestyles. Older people living in nursing homes should be made equal partners in the provision of healthcare so that their autonomy and dignity remain preserved. Nurses are key link for older people living at home because they connect them with the local community, encourage various forms of preventative measures (measuring blood sugar levels, blood pressure and education on the importance of preventative examinations) and recreational activities for older people with the goal of preserving their functional abilities. Inter-generational connectivity is also an important topic when dealing with the problem of social isolation and loneliness amongst older people.

The **Civil sector** significantly contributes to the protection of older people's rights and promotes older people's interests with regards to improving quality of life and ensuring dignified ageing. Organisations that bring together older people, organise their free time and help them overcome every-day functional difficulties contribute to older people's quality of life. Civil organisations are capital for local communities because they best identify the needs of fellow citizens and most quickly initiate activities to meet these needs. Civil organisations also provide social services and thus influence the reduction of the number of users who are being systematically provided with these services.

Varaždin County has recognised the need to contribute to the strengthening civil organisation through its activities. The County has established advisory bodies within the County Assembly which, through their activities, promote and raise public awareness of the importance and possibilities of promoting societal change through their activities. There are 746 such organisations within Varaždin County that cover a wide spectrum of activities: humanitarian, social, health, environmental and sports activities, arranging gatherings of and protection for children, youth and families, arranging gatherings and protection of women and Homeland War associations. The most active of these organisations within the County are in the areas of sports, culture, technology, health and society.

Pensioner societies within Varaždin County, as some of the most active societies that focus on older people, provide a range of activities that aim to bring together and help their members. They provide information about health and pension insurance and, in cooperation with competent authorities, they can propose measures that improve the material and social position of pensioners. They develop cooperation with other organisations and the Croatian Pensioners' Union, actively work on developing the cultural, recreational and entertainment lives of their members and organise numerous activities for their members relating to recreation, health and creative activities.

Some these activities include regular coordination, assemblies, forums and retirement parties, as well as celebrations for 50th and 60th wedding anniversaries and sporting events. The Varaždin County's Union of Pensioners and Older Persons' Associations have been operating for over 20 years and bring together 32 associations and 7,500 members. The County financially supports programmes of these organisations, i.e. the work plan produced by the Varaždin County Union of Pensioners and Older Persons' Associations.

Aside from pensioner associations there are a large number of organisations within Varaždin County, such as cultural, sporting and women's organisations, humanitarian organisations, fire brigade associations, Red Cross, Caritas etc., that are specifically dedicated to older people in local communities. These organisations' activities for high-quality ageing are systematically supported by local governmental units and Varaždin County. According to the Republic of Croatia's Register of Associations there are a total of 61 such associations within Varaždin County that focus on pensioners and/or retirees as target groups.

Local governmental units within Varaždin County have supported the work of pensioner associations for many years by co-financing their programmes, organising various events and providing one-off assistance.

Furthermore, the International Day of Older People is celebrated every year, and within this framework special events and pensioner gatherings are held throughout the week.

Ensuring **quality of life** for older people is of exceptional social and economic importance. In December 2024 a survey was conducted of less mobile older people within Varaždin County.²⁵ The results painted a complex picture of the quality of life of older people with significantly limited mobility living within Varaždin County. The average quality was recorded as 2.8, with the median being 3, suggesting that the quality of life can generally be described as solid,

²⁴ Does an impaired capacity for self-care impact the prevalence of social and emotional loneliness among elderly people?, Irena Canjuga, Danica Železnik, Marijana Neuberg, Marija Božičević, Tina Cikač, 2018

²⁵ Analysis of the Quality-of-Life Research of Less Mobile Older Residents in Varaždin County, Associate Professor Marijana Neuberg, PhD and Associate Professor Tomislav Meštrović, PhD, 2025

but the research shows a tendency towards lower scores. A comparison with a previous study of the mobile population showed that the average score was 3.4 with a median of 3, and it is evident that the perception of quality of life by less mobile older people is lower. This difference in the assessment of quality of life may reflect changes in living circumstances and the lack of resources available to older people with less mobility. In this research financial challenges were also often highlighted as a key problem, with most respondents citing difficulties saving or obtaining bare necessities such as fruit or fish.

Particular attention should be paid to the fact that people with limited mobility have reduced opportunities to participate in social activities, which further affects their perception of their quality of life. Health challenges are also a strong factor, with a large number of respondents reporting difficulties in maintaining independence and physical activity. Furthermore, there is a perception of limited access to transport and poor access adaptation of public services that further exacerbate this situation.

Positive aspects were identified in spite of these challenges. Satisfaction of living conditions and feeling safe in respondents' own homes were highly rated. These results indicate the importance of creating a stable and safe environment for older people which can partially compensate for the impact of other factors, and this has been recognised in the formulation of subsequent public policies.

However, in each instance, the average quality of life score indicates a need for specific interventions that target the key challenges identified in this research that place an emphasis on the less mobile older population. Increasing the availability of health and social services, organising social activities adapted for people with limited mobility and financial support for the most at-risk groups could improve significantly the quality of life of this population. These preliminary results provide a strong basis upon which future policies and programmes to support older people can be built.

4.5 Human Rights and Safety

There are two binding documents at the Council of Europe level that protect the rights of older people: The 1950 Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms and the 1961 European Social Charter. The provisions of these documents concern the right of life, the prohibition of torture and inhuman or degrading treatment and respect of the right to privacy and family life are extremely important for older people.

Within the Republic of Croatia the human right of every individual are prescribed by the Republic of Croatia's Constitution, international treaties to which the Republic of Croatia is a signatory and its fundamental laws.

Older people encounter various situations in which their rights may be violated. One frequent theme are lifelong support and support until death agreements.

According to data from the Croatian Ministry of Justice and Administration, in 2022 within the Republic of Croatia some 1,231 lifelong support and support until death agreements were concluded, while according to data produced by the Croatian Notaries Chamber, in 2022 there were 1,604 lifelong support agreements and 4,855 support until death agreements concluded before notaries, making a total of 7,690 support agreements. According to a 2019 survey by the competent ombudsman, approximately 63% of respondents who were considering concluding lifelong support and support until death agreements did not consult anyone about additional information before doing so. Therefore it is believed that citizens, especially older citizens, should be better informed about such agreements, for example through targeted campaigns. It is particularly important to inform those deciding to conclude such an agreement of their rights and obligations in more detail in advance through legal aid. In this way concluding the agreement remains at the discretion of the people concluding it and ensures that all concluding parties are more informed.

Data on domestic violence, as well as data on violence against older people with in the Republic of Croatia, are compiled in a report published annually for the previous year by the Commission for Monitoring and Improving the Work of Criminal and Offence Procedure Bodies and the Execution of Convictions. The Commission's 2021 Report contains only two pieces of data that relate specifically to older people - the fact that there were 255 offences regarding neglect of older people recorded in the Ministry of Labour and Pension System, Family and Social Policy's (MRMSOSP) records and data provided by the Ministry of Justice and Administration from the unified court records on domestic violence offences which also mentioned 834 victims of domestic violence who were older people.

The Commission's data shows a large increase in the number of older victims of domestic violence in comparison to 2020. In 2021 (according to the aforementioned data from the Ministry of Justice) there were 834 older victims, an increase on 165.6% from 2020 when there were 314. There is also a lack of systematic monitoring of these trends of violence against older people, not only at-home but also within institutions. Research by the 'Zajednički put' ('A Joint Path') Foundation showed that both users and employees at homes for older and disabled people rarely record violence.

Ageism is a term describing discrimination against a person on the basis of their age. Ageism can be directed at any age group, but is most often directed towards older people. Ageism significantly affects the social interaction and behaviour of older people and their position in society.

According to the 2018 study conducted by the Centre for Development of Non-Profit Organisations in cooperation with Zagreb University's Faculty of Law entitled 'Action-oriented Research on Violence against the Older People within Northern Croatia', discrimination against older people exists in the labour market, affects access to healthcare and social services, and older people have difficulty accessing information, goods and services, while healthcare and social services are often unavailable to them. Furthermore, older people feel they are considered a societal burden and are underestimated and ridiculed, noting that inter-generational relations were different in the past when older people were more respected.

Abuse and neglect of older people can be defined as the refusal or failure by a caregiver to meet the needs of an older person or to punish or harm them. According to the results of a survey conducted on the abuse and neglect of older people²⁶ in 2019, which included 171 caregivers and 245 older people in residential nursing homes, showed that caregivers and older people have different views when discussing abuse and neglect. The research results showed that caregivers tended to recognise unnecessary and/or inappropriate medical/care procedures as indicators of the abuse and neglect of older people, while older people reported the taking away of personal belongings or inappropriate physical contact as evidence of the same. A comparison by type of residence showed that residents were more likely to report abuse/neglect in extended care units (21.4%) than in the County's homes for older and disabled people (11.4%) or in private nursing homes (12.1%). Similarly, caregivers were more likely to report abuse/neglect in extended care units (75.4%) than in the County's homes for older and disabled people (24.6%) or in private nursing homes (0%). Shift work was also a significant factor. Those working the morning shift reported abuse/neglect more often. This study showed that residents and caregivers had differing perspectives when it came to reporting abuse/neglect of older people. Considering the increasing number of older people worldwide, the results of this study highlight the need for additional research that targets and identifies the optimal approach to preventing abuse and assisting the victims of abuse and neglect within institutions.

In 2020 a study was conducted on the topic of abuse and neglect of older people within healthcare institutions from the perspective of Croatian nurses within Croatia²⁷. Abuse/neglect of older people was observed by 13.8% to 57.4% nurses, depending on the type of incident. The most commonly reported incidents were ignoring calls by older people (57.4%), shouting in anger at older people (41.1%) and force-feeding an older person (34.5%), while the least reported incidents were withholding food or privileges as a form of punishment (13.8%). Male respondents reported more significantly various forms of abuse than female respondents without any statistically significant differences in their ages. Furthermore, abuse of older people is more frequently observed in homes for older and disabled people than in extended care units/hospices. This study confirmed that neglect and abuse of older people is a growing public health problem and awareness of this problem should be raised. Therefore systematic and continual education of all healthcare professionals on the prevention, recognition and response to such abuse is required to improve the quality of life of this at-risk group.

Research in 2023 on abuse of older people within the Republic of Croatia²⁸ aimed to explore the perceptions and attitudes of the Republic of Croatia's general population regarding abuse of older people. Research included 822 respondents aged between 18 and 64 who were active participants in social networks. It was observed that the majority of respondents held a prevailing neutral view that older people were themselves responsible for any abuse they received. When presented with scenarios that illustrate abusive behaviour towards older people, participants displayed a nuanced recognition of different forms of abuse, with the exception of financial abuse, where most respondents indicated that there was no abuse or that such abuse was not possible. These findings highlight the need for increased public education initiatives about the different manifestations of abuse and neglect within the Republic of Croatia's older people community. Additionally there is an urgent need for advisory services that foster a deep understanding of the individual needs of older people and the underlying factors that contribute to violent behaviour. These measures can strengthen social awareness and support mechanisms and foster a culture of respect, empathy and protection for older people.

4.6 Infrastructure and Transport

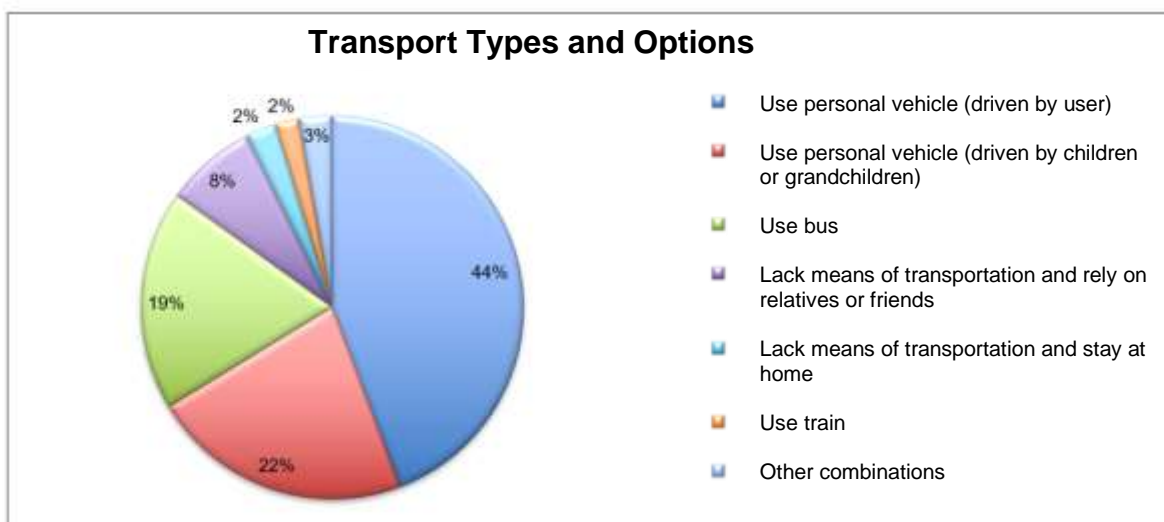
Within Varaždin County there has been a trend over recent years of cancelling bus lines due to their unprofitability and unsustainability. The same is true of transport permits. Implementation of such public road passenger transport system service has resulted in a decline in its quality, both due to its inadequate financing and the insufficient number of departures and the inadequate information available to citizens. All this has resulted in a lack of interest in using the public transportation system. Bus transport is organised as county, inter-county, international and specially scheduled (chartered) transportation. County lines connect all larger administrative and business centres within the County with the surrounding municipalities. There is a pronounced lack of connectivity between the County's centre and periphery due to the small number or complete absence of bus lines and inaccessibility of public transport due to high ticket prices.

The results of this survey on the quality of life of older people show that most people use a private car or bus. Respondents rated transport connections to the County's larger cities with a score of 3.17.

²⁶ Contrasting vantage points between caregivers and residents on the perception of elder abuse and neglect during long-term care, Marijana Neuberger, Tomislav Meštrović, Rosana Ribić, Marin Šubarić, Irena Canjuga & Goran Kozina, 2019

²⁷ Abuse and neglect of older people in health facilities from the perspective of nursing professionals: A cross-sectional study from Croatia, Marijana Neuberger PhD, Veronika Pudmej Ešegović MSc, Mateja Križaj MSc, Tina Cikač MSc, Tomislav Meštrović MD, PhD, MPH, 2022

²⁸ A Nationwide Exploration of Knowledge and Attitudes toward the Abuse of Older Individuals: A Cross-Sectional Study among the General Population of the Republic of Croatia by Dino Skupnjak, Marijana Neuberger, Sonja Obranić and Tomislav Meštrović, 2024.



Source: Preliminary Analysis of the Quality-of-Life Survey of Older People in Varaždin County (Authors: Associate Professor Marijana Neuberg, PhD, Associate Professor Tomislav Meštrović, PhD, University North's Nursing Department)

The Varaždin County 2021-2027 Development Plan places a particular emphasis on the lack of mobility and accessibility of socially sensitive groups with regards to everyday activities which result from a lack of public transportation in deprived areas inadequate infrastructure.

The Integrated Passenger Transportation Master Plan aims to connect all urban and rural areas through a high-quality network with accurate timetables and lower prices which will result in a higher number of passengers using public transportation.

Within Varaždin County the Croatian Red Cross and the Varaždin City Red Cross Society are implementing their 3rd 'Pelamo se?' ('Fancy a Ride?') Project, which is financed by the Ministry of Labour, Pension System, Family and Social Policy. As part of this project a free transportation service is being implemented for people over 65 within Varaždin and the surrounding area. Free transportation is available for people over 65 who live Varaždin or its 100 surrounding municipalities (Beretinec, Cestica, Jalžabet, Gornji Kneginec, Petrijanec, Sveti Ilija, Sračinec, Trnovec Bartolovečki, Vidovec and Vinica). This Project's transportation service is a social service available exclusively to at-risk older people who cannot afford or organise transportation to access places that are important to them, such as doctor visits, therapy, church, visits to relatives or the like. This service does not include escorting the user, but this can be arranged if the user requires it (limited mobility etc.) and cannot arrange it for themselves. The user is required to arrange an escort in advance when making the appointment.

This Project is an example of good practice as it has been well received by older people. Development of similar projects across Varaždin County is necessary and there should be a general push for the establishment of public transportation in areas where such a service is unavailable and an improvement must be made of the accessibility and adaptation of transportation for older people. In addition to this, it has been proposed that subsidised fares for older people and flexible routes and schedules should be implemented to allow older people to have easier access to key services, such as health facilities, shops and community centres. Such changes would encourage the mobility of older people, allowing them greater independence and raising their level of social inclusion, digital literacy and awareness.

4.7 Digital Literacy and Awareness

Digital and communication technology is an umbrella term that includes all communication devices or applications such as radio, television, mobile phones, computers, software and hardware, satellite systems and the like, as well as relevant various services and applications, such as video conferencing and distance learning. This type of technology can be used as an aid in providing care to older people.

These new technologies can help people who would otherwise be dependent on assistance from others to maintain their long-term independence due to physical obstacles. The Covid epidemic showed how useful modern innovations are in the field of ageing: video communication (e.g. with relatives, friends and interest groups, social networks and social alarms), purchasing and arranging medical and financial services (E-health, E-banking and E-government) and assistance for a more independent and safer life (smart refrigerators, boilers, cameras, fall detectors and the like). A certain precondition for using such technology is appropriate education, so learning how to use communication technology has been recognised as a priority in many countries.

Trends have shown that each successive generation is increasingly proficient in new technologies and eager for knowledge of this technology. Regular monitoring and development of this area is important for a community as a whole to develop.

WHO suggests some guidelines for establishing effective digital awareness system that includes all age groups. Examples include presenting information at places where older people often meet (post offices, religious

buildings, community centres and the like), informing socially isolated older people by telephone or by home visit or by ensuring the availability of computers connected to the Internet free of charge or a nominal fee in public spaces (libraries or community centres). It is also proposed that digital technology acquiring courses, adapted for access by older people, should be available.

In 2024, Varaždin County started a pilot project that included the implementation of educational workshops entitled 'Development of Digital Literacy for Pensioners and Vulnerable Groups'. The first four educational workshops were organised for more than 50 pensioners in December 2024 by the 'European Talent Centre Croatia', an adult education institution founded by Varaždin County. Some of the workshop's topics were: how to search for information on the Internet and use E-citizen websites and how to use E-banking services and various social networks. Given the satisfaction and interest shown by the participants, implementation of this project is planned to be continued and expanded across Varaždin County.

5. Development Goals and Strategy Implementation Measures

The Strategy for Improving the Quality of Life for Older People as Part of the 'Varaždin County - Friend of the Golden Age' Project for period 2024- 2030 - is being developed with the goal of improving implementation public policies relating to the care of older people within Varaždin County.

Analysis of the current situation has shown a significant need for improvement of health and social care services and promotion of active ageing and social inclusion. Increasing older people's digital literacy and awareness will facilitate their communication and access to information. Improving the infrastructure and accessibility of buildings and public areas for older people is necessary to ensure accessible public transportation and better road safety. By ensuring better cross-sectoral connectivity of all stakeholders providing care to older people it will be possible to expand and improve services and needs-focused care. Additional support for employment will enable the creation of new opportunities for older people who want and can continue to participate in the labour market.

Strategic alignment with key development documents at the European, national and regional levels, including the Republic of Croatia's National Development Strategy up to 2030, the 2021-2027 National Social Services Development Plan, the Varaždin County 2021-2027 Development Plan and operational programmes within the EU Multi-annual Financial Framework for 2021-2027, must be ensured when defining the objectives and measures for implementation of the Strategy.

Implementation of the Strategy aims to create conditions for better quality of life and dignified ageing for older people with Varaždin County.

5.1 Overview of Goals, Measures, Indicators and Activities

HEALTHCARE				
Goal 1: Better Care Provision for Older People				
Measure	Implementation Success Indicator	Activities	Activity Leader/Co-leaders	Financial Sources
Improving geriatric care quality	Creation of a Geriatric Department at Varaždin General Hospital Number of geriatric specialists	Initiating creation of a Geriatric Department at Varaždin General Hospital Encouraging announcements of geriatric specialist positions	Varaždin County, Varaždin General Hospital	Varaždin County budget, state budget
Improvement of health programmes for older people	Number of new preventative examinations Number of users in nursing homes receiving preventative examinations	Ensuring organised preventative examinations for older people in nursing homes Ensuring regular health checks for older people Encouraging lung cancer prevention programmes	Varaždin County, healthcare institutions, nursing homes, local governmental units	Varaždin County's and local governmental units' budgets
Monitoring older people's chronic illness	Number of people including in education Number of public forums arranged	Educating older people regarding the control of risk factors for chronic diseases (individually or in small groups) Organizing public forums (ensuring the participation of internal medicine specialists, cardiologists and endocrinologists)	Healthcare centre, Varaždin County Public Health Institute, general practitioners, University North's Centre for Health Metrics	EU funds (ESF+), Varaždin County's and local governmental units' budgets

Improving the mental health of older people	Number of people included in day care programmes Number of workshops and counselling sessions held	Organising day care for people with dementia (transportation provided) Organising workshops and counselling sessions to strengthen mental health Engaging educational and health institutions to strengthen social services	Homes for older people, healthcare institutions, educational institutions	EU funds (ESF+), Varaždin County's and local governmental units' budgets
Improving palliative care	Number of new mobile teams Number of organised training activities Number of psychologists in health teams Number of social services provided to older people in need of palliative care	Introduction of new mobile palliative teams Education of palliative care professionals on Inclusion of psychologists in the Hospital's palliative team, mobile palliative care teams and Healthcare Centre teams Public education activities Establishing the National Palliative Care Centre	Healthcare institutions, higher education institutions (education), social institutions, civil society - volunteers	EU funds (ESF+), Varaždin County's and local governmental units' budgets

SOCIAL CARE

Goal 2: Ensuring Social Service Availability and Accessibility for Older People

Measure	Implementation Success Indicator	Activities	Activity Leader/Co-leaders	Financial Sources
Increasing accommodation and care capacity for older people and social service capacity	Current number of users	Additional activities for nursing home users (trips to the theatre, library and similar gatherings) Developing and expanding accommodation capacity for older people in rural areas Increasing home care and home help services	Social service providers (Homes for older and disabled people), local governmental units, associations	EU funds (ESF+), Varaždin County's and local governmental units' budgets, private investment
Developing social inclusion services	Number of implemented services Number of service users Number of established centres Number of users included centres' programmes	Developing new forms of services through inclusion of social care users (cooperation of social care users via the Croatian Institute for Social Work's regional offices with the aim of empowering and informing users of their rights) Developing respite care services (for example Alzheimer cafe - an opportunity for respite and mutual empowerment for family members) Establishment of Varaždin County's Support Centre	Varaždin County, local governmental units, associations, Croatian Institute for Social Work's regional offices, Varaždin County Red Cross Society, Varaždin City Red Cross Society	Varaždin County's and local governmental units' budgets, EU funds (ESF+), donations, public-private partnerships
Increasing social service coverage and accessibility for targeted groups	Current number of users of mobile social service teams	Establishment of the Varaždin County Home Help Centre which will organise volunteers within primary and secondary schools to visit older and disabled people in rural areas Organising field teams to provide services and counselling in remote areas Conducting public information campaigns and workshops to raise awareness of available services	Varaždin County Red Cross Society, Varaždin City Red Cross Society, primary and secondary schools and higher educational institutions, Croatian Institute for Social Work's regional offices, local units, non-governmental organisations	Local governmental units' budgets, ESF+ funds, donations

Providing psychological support	Number of organised workshops and group therapy sessions	Organising regular workshops and group therapy sessions that provide emotional and psychological support for older people, especially those who lost loved ones	Varaždin County Red Cross Society, Varaždin City Red Cross Society, non-governmental organisations, healthcare institutions	Local governmental units' budgets, ESF+ funds, donations
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LIFE-LONG LEARNING, DIGITAL LITERACY AND AWARENESS**Goal 3: Increasing the Number of Older People Included in Life-long Learning Programmes**

Measure	Implementation Success Indicator	Activities	Activity Leader/Co-leaders	Financial Sources
Developing and promoting new life-long programmes for older people	Number of educational courses and workshops held for older people	Introducing multi-generational programmes (an example programme in which older people can share their knowledge and skills with younger generations is University North's pilot programme which connects secondary school and university students through a knowledge exchange programme) Implementation of a public information programme to encourage the inclusion of older people in life-long learning programmes Organising free training courses, workshops and adapted programmes for older people in rural areas. Establishing an information centre for older people to provide details of available services, programmes and support	Varaždin County, local governmental units, the Public Open University, educational institutions, homes for older people and associations	Varaždin County's and local governmental units' budgets, state budget, EU funds

Goal 4: Increasing Older people's Digital Literacy

Measure	Implementation Success Indicator	Activities	Activity Leader/Co-leaders	Financial Sources
Promoting the use of ICT technologies by older people	Number of IT workshops and courses / Number of users Number of locations with Internet access for older people	Encouraging better presentation of information in places where older people often meet (post offices, religious buildings, community centres and the like) Ensuring the availability of freely available computers in public spaces connected to the Internet (libraries and community centres) Organisation of IT workshops and courses adapted for older people Adaptation of digital platforms and the provision of support older people using technology	Varaždin County, local governmental units, nursing home associations, educational institutions	Varaždin County's and local governmental units' budgets, state budget, EU funds

SOCIAL LIFE, QUALITY OF LIFE, CIVIL SOCIETY, HUMAN RIGHTS AND SAFETY				
Goal 5: Active Inclusion of Older People in Society with the Goal of Reducing Social Isolation and Loneliness amongst Older People				
Measure	Implementation Success Indicator	Activities	Activity Leader/Co-leaders	Financial Sources
Organising social programmes and activities for older people adapted to their interests and needs	Number of activities held for older people Number of older people included in social activities	Organising social and volunteer programmes for older people Organising recreational, creative, cultural and similar activities in accordance with older people's interests (for example dance and literary evenings, excursions and the like) Ensuring more favourable ticket prices for cultural (and similar) events held at Varaždin County (and local governmental) institutions	Varaždin County, local governmental units, nursing home associations, educational institutions	Varaždin County's and local governmental units' budgets, state budget, EU funds
Strengthening the capacities of civil society organisations working with older people	Number of educated members of civil society organisations Financial resources secured to strengthen the capacities of civil society organisations	Education for members of civil society organisations Financial resources for civil society organisations Networking civil society organisations Implementation of the 'Pensioner for a Pensioner' Assistance Programme - establishing a network of volunteers in educational institutions	Varaždin County, local governmental units, educational institutions, associations	Varaždin County's and local governmental units' budgets, state budget, EU funds
Promoting active ageing	Number of events organised Number of disseminated publications and promotional materials Number of older people included in social activities	Commemorating dates relating to older people Organising events that promote older people's active and healthy ageing Informing older people by disseminating various publications and promotional materials Organising financing for free financial advice for older people to inform them of available support, pensions, subsidies and other benefits	Varaždin County, local governmental units, nursing home associations, educational institutions	Varaždin County's and local governmental units' budgets, state budget, EU funds
Goal 6: Informing and Raising Awareness of Older People' Rights and Preventing Discrimination and Violence against Older People				
Measure	Implementation Success Indicator	Activities	Activity Leader/Co-leaders	Financial Sources
Establishing clear mechanisms for reporting and resolving instances of discrimination and violence against older people	Established protocol for reporting and resolving instances of discrimination and violence against older people	Developing and implementing a protocol to resolve instances of violence against older people (defining procedural steps, identifying competent and responsible organisations and establishing a contact number) Providing information on how to proceed in instances of violence (producing and placing posters at places where older people gather, such as bus stops, general practitioners' offices, shops and the like)	Educational institutions, healthcare sector, local governmental units, non-governmental organisations	Varaždin County's and local governmental units' budgets, state budget, EU funds

Informing and raising awareness of older people's rights and needs	<p>Number of public forums and similar activities that aim to sensitise the public to the topic of protecting older people from all forms of violence</p> <p>Number of publications and promotional materials intended for older people</p> <p>Number of co-financed civil society organisations that programme activities for older people</p> <p>Number of training sessions held on older people's human rights for employees of homes for older people</p>	<p>Enabling older people to access information about their rights and how they can protect those rights</p> <p>Issuing publications and other promotional material that better inform older people of their rights</p> <p>Organising public forums and similar activities that aim to sensitise the public to the topic of protecting older people's human rights</p> <p>Ensuring financial support for civil society organisations that programme activities for older people</p> <p>Organising education on older people's human rights for employees of homes for older people</p>	Varaždin County, local governmental units, nursing home associations	Varaždin County's and local governmental units' budgets, state budget, EU funds
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INFRASTRUCTURE AND PUBLIC TRANSPORTATION ACCESSIBILITY

Goal 1: Ensuring Safe Mobility for Older People to Improve their Quality of Life, thus Enabling them to Stay in their Own Homes for as Long as Possible

Measure	Implementation Success Indicator	Activities	Activity Leader/Co-leaders	Financial Sources
Ensuring accessible transportation for older people	<p>Number of new transport services/adapted vehicles</p> <p>Number of subsidised tickets</p> <p>Number of projects that ensure free transportation for older people</p>	<p>Establishing public transportation in areas where transportation is unavailable</p> <p>Implementing flexible routes and schedules that allow older people easier access to key services, e.g. healthcare institutions, shops and community centres</p> <p>Encouraging the introduction of vehicles adapted for people with reduced mobility (such as vehicles with a low floor and wide doors that allow easier access and disembarkation)</p> <p>Encouraging the introduction of subsidised tickets</p> <p>Encouraging the implementation of projects to provide free transportation for older people (for example the Varaždin County Red Cross Society's 'Pelamo se' Project)</p>	Varaždin County, local governmental units, educational institutions, Varaždin County Red Cross Society	Varaždin County's and local governmental units' budgets, state budget, EU funds
Ensuring accessibility of public spaces road safety for older people	<p>Number of adapted public spaces and buildings</p> <p>Number of installed traffic signals</p>	<p>Ensuring accessibility of public spaces and buildings, including adapted pedestrian crossings, benches, ramps and public toilets</p> <p>Encouraging a programme to co-finance the installation of lifts in multi-apartment buildings</p> <p>Increasing road safety in settlements, especially near residential areas and health and social centres, with a focus on better signage and speed adjustment</p>	Varaždin County, local governmental units, County Department for Roads	Varaždin County's and local governmental units' budgets, state budget, EU funds

6. Strategy Evaluation and Monitoring

Varaždin County, in conjunction with 'Varaždin County - Friend of the Golden Age' Project's Coordination Committee shall continuously monitor the success of implementation of the defined goals and measures. To this end, data on achieved predetermined indicators for successful implementation used in monitoring the progress of implementation of these measures shall be collected, analysed and processed.

Varaždin County, as the authority responsible for this implementation, shall prepare annual reports on the progress of implementation of set goals and any challenges to implementation of the Strategy.

The coordinating role for implementation of the Strategy at the Varaždin County level shall be Varaždin County in cooperation with the 'Varaždin County - Friend of the Golden Age' Project's Coordination Committee. Varaždin County's Administrative Department for Health, Social Welfare and Croatian Veterans, in cooperation with the 'Varaždin County - Friend of the Golden Age' Project's Coordination Committee shall connect all stakeholders involved in care provision for older people and shall monitor implementation of the Strategy.

If the individual measures and/or activities defined by the Strategy cannot be implemented due to changing circumstances that arise during implementation of the Strategy, or if there is a need to adapt to new circumstances, such changes shall be agreed upon through consultations between the relevant bodies and organisations involved in the work of the 'Varaždin County - Friend of the Golden Age' Project's Coordination Committee.

Annex 1 Calculated Capacity of Social Service Providers for the Sustainable Development of High-quality Social Services as Defined by Varaždin County's 2024-2026 Social Plan

The Croatian Institute for Social Work's Ivanec Regional Office stated that all social care services within its jurisdiction can be provided through its existing social services network and that there are no user groups to which it cannot provide these services. Furthermore, it did not record any situations in which implementation of these services would not be possible due to a lack of financial resources or other reasons.

It did state however that there was a significant lack of accommodation spaces for all user groups. They highlighted the issue of crisis situations, such as separating children from their parents or accommodating older people after discharge from hospital without prior notice. Such situations require swift and flexible resolution and existing capacity is insufficient.

They do not deal with the implementation of preventative programmes through their work, but believe that informing the public and educating people could significantly improve social care in their area. They also stated that professional and organisational capacities need to be strengthened so that they can better respond to the needs in their area. They consider continuing professional training to be key in improving their daily work and stated that this enables them to better respond to the challenges they encounter.

The Croatian Institute for Social Work's Ludbreg Regional Office, identified several key challenges in the provision of social care in their area. One of the biggest problems they face is the lack of accommodation for mentally ill adults, which affects around five users per year. Furthermore groups, such as those with physical and learning disabilities, the homeless and those in need of palliative care, are particularly at-risk, as there is currently no suitable accommodation for them.

Additional challenges are faced by single pensioners, especially those with small pensions and poor housing, who require additional support. Aside from this, those convicted of domestic violence against whom there a restraining order often do not have alternative accommodation, which further complicates crisis situations, especially those facing serious health issues.

Professionals at the Ludbreg Regional Office have stated that they can only devote about an hour a week to preventative programmes, which mainly takes the form of referring users to programmes implemented by family centres and organisations. They believe that better connections with associations implementing preventative programmes would significantly improve the quality of the social care they provide.

The need to increase professional capacities was also highlighted as one of their key priorities, as professional training is considered necessary for a better response to the challenges they face in practice. Despite these identified challenges, stated that all social care services within its jurisdiction can be provided through its existing social services network without financial or other limitations.

In conclusion, the Ludbreg Branch Office identified the need for increased accommodation capacity, especially for the most at-risk groups, as key to improving social care. Strengthening professional teams and expanding preventative programmes are key step in improving social care provision for users.

The Croatian Institute for Social Work's Novi Marof Regional Office identified key challenges in the provision of social care within Varaždin County. Although the basic services fulfil the needs of many users, certain groups and specific users remain under-served which creates significant challenges in everyday work.

One of the main problems is the lack of home care service provision in homes for older and disabled users and at-home disabled users. Although they are provided with a food service, such as prepared and delivered meals, services that deal with personal hygiene, housework and other everyday chores are not provided.

Additionally homeless people and people with addiction issues are user groups that cannot currently be provided with adequate services within the social care network.

Additional challenges are presented by the lack of service providers within the County, which limits the availability of key forms of care such as organised transportation for pensioners, accommodation capacity for homeless people, day and half-day care for older people, people with disabilities, and primary school children with behavioural issues. These services are key in providing high-quality support to at-risk groups, yet they are currently underdeveloped.

As for on-site services, they additionally face problems with accommodation in crisis situations due to limited capacities, which make the provision of emergency care to users difficult. Furthermore, older people single households isolated from transportation links face serious challenges due to their inaccessibility to basic services and transportation to nearby cities. Also, Croatian veterans often refuse to use social services as they do not see themselves as part of this system, which further complicates their integration into the existing system.

Addressing these problems requires an increase in the number of social care providers, establishing mobile teams to work with different user groups and developing accommodation and day care capacities. Mobile teams, in cooperation with healthcare and social care systems, would be better able to provide support to users, especially those in rural areas. Preventative programmes, although not currently implemented, could play a key role in raising user awareness and strengthen their resilience to the challenges of modern life.

Aside from this, they stated a need to strengthen professional and organisational capacities and intensify inter-departmental cooperation between all stakeholders involved in the provision of social care. Professional training has been recognised as an important tool in improving the work of professional employees and the quality of care.

In conclusion, addressing these challenges requires a systematic approach that increases resources and develops innovative services that are able to respond to the specific needs of user groups. This would significantly improve the availability and quality of social care across Varaždin County, especially for the most at-risk users.

Smiljan Home provides accommodation for mentally ill adults. During interviews with users it was found that they found it difficult to engage in communication because they often did not know understand what was being asked or how to express their needs. According to their responses they seemed to be satisfied with their conditions at the home and did not make any additional requests, which may indicate a limited awareness of their potential needs or rights.

Users participated in occupational therapy, which was attended by all those who wished to and were able to do so, and this contributed to their daily activities and involvement. However, they were able to point out one of their main issues: insufficient communication with their social worker (case managers) and *ex officio* guardian social workers. This situation indicates a lack of cooperation with the Croatian Institute for Social Work's competent regional office.

Users received one-off payments twice a year for basic needs such as clothing and footwear. These payments were based on a discretionary assessment made by respective social workers, which may have led to inequality amongst users. This practice highlights the need for clearer standards and better cooperation between the Home and the relevant institutions.

Lekić Home accommodates older people who expressed their satisfaction with the services provided during interviews. They believed that the Home recognises their needs and strives to provide them with high-quality living conditions. Users did not verbalise other needs, which may either indicate their satisfaction with their accommodation or show their limited awareness of any possible improvements.

Despite general satisfaction, users recognised the shortage of cleaners and carers as a significant challenge. This can affect the quality of service and everyday care, especially in institutions with a large number of users.

Private homes, such as the Lekić Home, define their own rules, prices and services, which allows users a certain amount of choice, but also limits the availability of accommodation to those who can afford it. Despite this, the Home strives to provide the best possible conditions, which is recognised and appreciated by its users.

In both homes users expressed satisfaction with their basic conditions and services, but key challenges were also identified:

1. **Smiljan Home:**

- It is necessary that better cooperation is made with the Croatian Institute for Social Work and more frequent visits are made by social workers so they can provide better support to users.
- The practice of discretionary assessment of one-off payments could be standardised to ensure fairer distribution of funds.

2. **Lekić Home:**

- The shortage of cleaners and carers requires that additional employees are employed so that adequate can be provided to all users.
- Continuous adaptation is required to ensure that the needs of specific users can be met.

Despite these existing challenges, both of these homes strive to provide their users with high-quality living conditions and care, which the users recognise and appreciate. It must be stated that additional investment in staff service standardisation and improved cooperation with external institutions could significantly improve the quality of life of their users.

Jamnik Family Nursing Home

Users feel that they are part of a family, which contributes to their satisfaction and sense of belonging. The Municipality is actively engaged in providing support to its users. The County has failed to show significant engagement. The Centre for Social Care should be more involved in activities and providing support. The biggest problem users face is the lack of financial resources, which directly affects their quality of life and potential access to better care. Users were generally satisfied with their living conditions. They particularly enjoy activities relating to gardening and caring for animals. Various activities, such as hunting and fishing, are available for users. They also participate in joint activities within the local community, such as visits from children and the local priest, which further contributes to their feeling of inclusion and satisfaction. Greater engagement by the Centre for Social Care and additional financial support would be key to improving conditions and user satisfaction.

'St John the Baptist' Caritas Home for Older and Disabled People

Seven users and a caregiver were interviewed. Users expressed satisfaction with their life at the home and highlighted to activities that were available to them. They participated in organised activities every day and have access to a variety of activities, such as masses, choir practice and acting classes. They especially enjoy gardening, which contributes to their satisfaction and sense of belonging. Their basic needs are met, and the Home strives to adapt activities on the basis of individual users' interests and affinities, thus continuously striving to improve their quality of life.

The Home receives a large number of enquiries about accommodation, both through the Institute for Social Work and privately. The Home's lack of capacity, which reflects the sector-wide problem, poses a challenge. This situation further complicates implementation of emergency accommodation, and employees often work under pressure due to this overload.

In addition to increasing capacity, the need to expand medical transportation was also highlighted, as this would significantly improve the day-to-day running of this Home. Despite these challenges, the Home remains committed to continuously improving its users' quality of life.

Varaždin Rehabilitation Centre - Lekić Home

Users of the Lekić Home, people with disabilities living in an organised community, face a number of challenges which make their daily lives difficult. Among the biggest problems are the lack of staff, inadequate structural infrastructure, language barriers, long waits for medical examinations and the lack of adapted transport.

Users stated the need for personal assistants, psychological therapies and engagement with nurses and caregivers. Improving mobility through purchasing adapted vehicles and greater involvement with the local community are key to increasing their social inclusion. Financial problems, especially those related to the additional costs of medication, are a further burden to this group.

Preventative programmes which include sport, social activities and employment opportunities have been recognised as priorities for their greater societal inclusion.

'St Ana' Home for Older and Disabled People

Users of the 'St Ana' Home expressed their satisfaction with their life in the community and with the various activities available, such as group exercises, chess, handicrafts and bingo. They highlighted the importance of organised transportation to medical appointments, which significantly facilitates their access to health services. They also emphasized the quality of their relationships with staff and professional support, including the services of physiotherapists, which contribute to their psycho-physical well-being.

They particularly appreciate the availability of co-housing for married couples, which enables them to maintain family ties. They believe the local community recognises their needs and actively supports their activities.

Varaždin Home for Older and Disabled People

Users of the Varaždin Home also expressed high levels of satisfaction with the services available, emphasising the staff's professionalism and the variety of content that contributes to their quality of life. The employees were described as kind, communicative and always ready to help, and users were actively involved in activities that enable their greater social inclusion.

The local community recognises the needs of those using the Home, and organised exercise and other activities contribute to their health and sense of fulfilment.

Varaždin County's Healthcare Centre - Palliative Care

Mrs Nataša Dumbović, MSc. Med.Tech., who is the Varaždin County Healthcare Centre's Palliative Care Coordinator, points to the key challenges in providing palliative care which, in addition to health, also includes social, psychological spiritual care. Key challenges include the lack of priority inclusion of social services and services requiring palliative care, especially in rural areas, and efforts should be made to better link the health and social systems and develop an individual plan for each patient upon discharge from hospital that involves hospital social workers and addresses social issues. It is also important to further develop the role of the Palliative Care Coordination Centre/Palliative Care Coordinator as a contact point for information about rights and a place where rapid assistance can be provided to users so that they do not feel lost in the system. Raising public awareness about the development of compassionate communities with an emphasis on palliative care is particularly important.



THE REPUBLIC OF CROATIA
MINISTRY OF HEALTH

Class: 024-01/25-01/45
Reg. No.: 534-03-1-2/7-25-2
Zagreb, 12th May 2025

THE REPUBLIC OF CROATIA
VARAŽDIN COUNTY
COUNTY PREFECT

Dear County Prefect,

The Ministry of Health expresses its full support for Varaždin County's initiative to obtain the status of an *age-friendly county*, in recognition of its long-standing commitment to improving the elderly population's health, safety, and quality of life.

We are particularly pleased to note that the development of these activities is fully aligned with the World Health Organization's criteria for age-friendly cities and communities (Global Network for Age-friendly Cities and Communities), including the implementation of an initial needs assessment, the development of a strategic framework, and the active involvement of the elderly in the planning and monitoring of measures.

We would especially like to highlight the outstanding achievements in:

- the establishment of mobile healthcare teams
- the coverage provided by visiting nurses and home care
- the availability of geriatric and preventive programmes
- the digital and functional inclusion of the elderly in the healthcare system

The Ministry of Health is pleased to support this initiative and to work together in improving the quality of life of citizens in Croatia through this and similar efforts. For this reason, we support your proposal for the development of a national plan to improve the health and quality of life of the elderly, in cooperation with the Croatian Institute of Public Health and the Ministry of Labour, Pension System, Family and Social Policy.

Sincerely,

MINISTER OF HEALTH

[Signature]

doc. dr. sc. Irena Hrstić, dr. med. spec.
(Irena Hrstić, PhD, MD, Specialist, Assist. Prof.)



REPUBLIKA HRVATSKA
MINISTARSTVO ZDRAVSTVA

KLASA: 024-01/25-01/45
URBROJ: 534-03-1-2/7-25-2
Zagreb, 12. svibnja 2025.

REPUBLIKA HRVATSKA
VARAŽDINSKA ŽUPANIJA
ŽUPAN

Poštovani župane,

Ministarstvo zdravstva izražava punu podršku inicijativi Varaždinske županije za stjecanje statusa *županije prijatelja osoba zlatne životne dobi*, kao priznanja dugogodišnjoj posvećenosti unaprjeđenju zdravlja, sigurnosti i kvalitete života starije populacije.

S osobitim zadovoljstvom prepoznajemo kako je razvoj ovih aktivnosti u potpunosti usklađen s kriterijima Svjetske zdravstvene organizacije za gradove i zajednice prilagođene starijima (Global Network for Age-friendly Cities and Communities), uključujući provedbu početne procjene potreba, izradu strateškog okvira i aktivno uključivanje starijih osoba u planiranje i praćenje mjera.

Posebno ističemo izvanredne rezultate u:

- uspostavi mobilnih timova zdravstvene skrbi,
- pokrivenosti patronažnim sestrama i kućnom njegom,
- dostupnosti gerijatrijskih i preventivnih programa te
- digitalnoj i funkcionalnoj uključenosti starijih u zdravstveni sustav.

Ministarstvo zdravstva sa zadovoljstvom podržava ovu inicijativu te da zajednički unaprjeđujemo kvalitetu života građana u Hrvatskoj kroz ovu i slične inicijative te iz tog razloga podržavamo Vaš prijedlog izrade nacionalnog plana unaprjeđenja zdravlja i kvalitete života osoba starije životne dobi u suradnji sa Hrvatskim zavodom za javno zdravstvo te Ministarstvom rada, mirovinskog sustava, obitelji i socijalne politike.

S poštovanjem,

MINISTRICA ZDRAVSTVA
doc. dr. sc. Irena Hrstić, dr. med. spec.





THE REPUBLIC OF CROATIA
MINISTRY OF LABOUR, PENSION SYSTEM,
FAMILY AND SOCIAL POLICY

Class: 053-01/25-01/50
Reg. No.: 524-08-04/1-25-2
Zagreb, 12th May 2025

VARAŽDIN COUNTY

Attn: County Prefect, Mr. Anđelko Stričak

SUBJECT: Varaždin County – Age-friendly County
- a letter of support is hereby delivered

Reference: Class: 550-01/25-01/3, Reg. No.: 2186-02/1-25-7 of 22nd April 2025

Dear Sir/Madam,

In 2024, Varaždin County launched the project ‘Varaždin County – Age-friendly County’ (hereinafter referred to as: the Project), with the aim of improving the quality of life for retirees and older people. The Project focuses on increasing engagement among the elderly, identifying community services that are lacking or inaccessible to them, and raising awareness among the elderly about their rights in all areas of life.

As part of the Project, research was carried out to assess the needs of the elderly and determine the current level of social inclusion among older people and retirees in Varaždin County. A Coordinating Committee was appointed to oversee the preparation and implementation of the Project. This Committee developed a central planning document: the Strategy for Improving the Quality of Life of the Elderly. The Strategy was adopted by the Varaždin County Assembly at its session held in March 2025.

Further activities are planned within the Project, including joining the World Health Organization’s Global Network for Age-friendly Cities and Communities. Maintaining the health of the elderly has been identified as one of the key objectives set out in the Strategy, and membership in this network would support the exchange of experiences and the adoption of new innovative solutions.

The Ministry of Labour, Pension System, Family and Social Policy is committed to improving the quality of life for the elderly in Croatia through a range of projects and initiatives. In December 2024, the Croatian Parliament adopted the Declaration on the Rights of Retirees and the Elderly, which addresses essential aspects of life for senior citizens. These include increased investment in healthcare, co-financing of treatments and medications, and the expansion of accommodation for people living with dementia, Alzheimer’s disease, and those requiring palliative care. The Declaration also highlights the importance of health tourism and rehabilitation programmes, as well as the need to improve the status of both formal and informal caregivers. It marks a significant step forward in strengthening the position of the elderly in Croatia — a step that was both recognised and endorsed by the Croatian Parliament.

One of the most successful projects supported by the European Social Fund has been the ‘Zaželi’ Project, which, across four phases, has helped more than 30,000 hard-to-employ individuals enter the labour market while also providing care for over 200,000 older people. To date, EUR 750 million has been invested in this project. This year, as previously announced, a new Pension Insurance Act will enter into force, introducing a revised formula for adjusting pensions. In addition, pensioners will begin receiving an annual supplement, and new measures will be introduced — including an extra year of service credit per child and higher bonuses for those who choose to remain employed after becoming eligible for an old-age pension.

The Government of the Republic of Croatia, in cooperation with local and regional authorities, is building, upgrading and equipping 18 centres for the elderly across the Republic of Croatia. These centres will provide accommodation for more than 1,800 users, along with expanded access to community-based services such as in-home assistance, half-day or full-day care, and psychosocial support for more than 4,500 users.

These efforts clearly show that retirees and the elderly are among the top priorities of this Government and the Ministry. Having built the society we live in today through their work and sacrifice, they deserve to live with dignity, safety, and high quality of life.

In view of all this, the Ministry of Labour, Pension System, Family and Social Policy fully supports the ‘Varaždin County – Age-friendly County’ Project and strongly endorses all measures and activities aimed at further improving the lives of retirees and the elderly.

Sincerely,

MINISTER

[Signature]

Marin Piletić



REPUBLIKA HRVATSKA
MINISTARSTVO RADA, MIROVINSKOGA SUSTAVA,
OBITELJI I SOCIJALNE POLITIKE

KLASA: 053-01/25-01/50
URBROJ: 524-08-04/1-25-2
Zagreb, 12. svibnja 2025.

REPUBLIKA HRVATSKA
VARAŽDINSKA ŽUPANIJA
VARAŽDIN

Primljeno:	13 -05- 2025		
Klasifikacijska oznaka:	Org. jed.		
Urudžbeni broj	Pril.	Vrij.	

VARAŽDINSKA ŽUPANIJA

n/p župana, gospodina Anđelka Stričaka

PREDMET: Varaždinska županija – prijatelj zlatne dobi
- Pismo potpore, daje se

Veza: KLASA: 550-01/25-01/3, URBROJ: 2186-02/1-25-7 od 22. travnja 2025.

Poštovani,

U cilju unaprjeđenja kvalitete života umirovljenika i starijih osoba, dodatnim angažmanom i detekcijom usluga u zajednici koje nedostaju ili su nedostupne starijim osobama te podizanjem razine svijesti starijih osoba o njihovim pravima u svim segmentima života, Varaždinska županija je tijekom 2024. pokrenula Projekt „Varaždinska županija – prijatelj zlatne dobi“, u daljnjem tekstu: Projekt).

Aktivnostima unutar Projekta provedena su istraživanja potreba i utvrđeno je trenutno stanje socijalne uključenosti starijih osoba i umirovljenika Varaždinske županije; imenovan je Koordinacijski odbor za pripremu i provedbu Projekta koji je pripremio krovni planski dokument: Strategiju za unapređenje kvalitete života osoba starije životne dobi. Strategiju je usvojila Županijska skupština Varaždinske županije na sjednici održanoj u ožujku 2025.

U okviru Projekta se planiraju daljnje aktivnosti, a jedna od njih je pristupanje Mreži gradova i zajednica prijatelja starijih osoba Svjetske zdravstvene organizacije („The Global Network for Age-friendly Cities and Communities“) budući da je održavanje zdravlja starijih osoba prepoznato kao jedan od najvažnijih ciljeva koji se žele postići aktivnosti definiranim u strategiji. Članstvo u ovoj organizaciji olakšalo bi razmjenu iskustava i usvajanju novih, inovativnih rješenja.

Ministarstvo rada, mirovinskog sustava, obitelji i socijalne politike kroz razne projekte i inicijative nastoji unaprijediti kvalitetu života starijih osoba u Hrvatskoj. Nadalje, u prosincu 2024. godine u Saboru je donesena Deklaracija o pravima umirovljenika i osoba starije životne dobi, koja obuhvaća ključne aspekte života starijih građana, uključujući ulaganja u zdravstvenu skrb, sufinanciranje liječenja i lijekova, te proširenje kapaciteta za smještaj osoba s demencijom, Alzheimerovom bolešću i palijativnih bolesnika. Poseban naglasak stavljen je na zdravstveni turizam i rehabilitacijske programe, kao i na bolji status formalnih i neformalnih njegovatelja. Deklaracija predstavlja važan korak prema unaprjeđenju statusa osoba treće životne dobi u Hrvatskoj, što je prepoznao i podržao Hrvatski sabor.

Projektom „Zaželi“, jednim od najuspješnijih projekata iz Europskog socijalnog fonda, u četiri je faze na tržište rada uključeno više od 30 tisuća teško zapošljivih osoba, a pritom je osigurana skrb za više od 200 tisuća starijih osoba, u što je do sada uloženo 750 milijuna eura. Tijekom ove godine, sukladno prethodnim najavama, na snagu će stupiti novi Zakon o mirovinskom osiguranju u okviru kojega stupa na snagu i nova formula za usklađivanje mirovina. Uz to, počinju i isplate godišnjeg dodatka te dodatne mjere kao što je godinu dana dodatnog staža po djetetu te povećana bonifikacija za sve one koji odluče ostati na tržištu rada i nakon što ostvare uvjete za starosnu mirovinu.

Vlada Republike Hrvatske, u suradnji s lokalnom i regionalnom upravom, gradi, nadograđuje i oprema 18 centara za starije diljem Republike Hrvatske, kojima će se osigurati smještajni kapaciteti za više od 1,800 korisnika te širenje mreže izvaninstitucijskih usluga poput pomoći u kući, poludnevnog ili cjelodnevnog boravka i psihosocijalne podrške za više od 4,5 tisuće korisnika.

Sve ove mjere jasno pokazuju da su umirovljenici i starije osobe jedan od ključnih prioriteta ove Vlade i rada Ministarstva. Oni su svojim radom i odricanjem izgradili društvo u kojem danas živimo, stoga zaslužuju dostojanstven, siguran i kvalitetan život.

Slijedom svega navedenoga, Ministarstvo rada, mirovinskoga sustava, obitelji i socijalne politike u cijelosti podržava Projekt „Varaždinska županije – prijatelj zlatni dobi“ te snažno podupire mjere i aktivnosti usmjerene daljnjem unaprjeđenju kvalitete života umirovljenika i starijih osoba

S poštovanjem,

**MINISTAR**
Marin Piletić



HZJZ

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ZDRAVLJE PRVO.

THE REPUBLIC OF CROATIA
VARAŽDIN COUNTY
Count Prefect
Mr. Anđelko Stričak
Franjevački trg 7
42000 Varaždin
email: Ljubica.Bozic@vzz.hr

Class: 541-01/25-17/5
Reg. No.: 117-17-170-25-2

In Zagreb, 12th May 2025

Subject: Initiative for the Formal Recognition of Varaždin County as an Age-friendly County
- is hereby delivered

Reference: Your Class: 550-01/25-01/3, Reg. No.: 2186-02/1-25-11 of 9th May 2025

Dear County Prefect,

From a professional standpoint, the Croatian Institute of Public Health supports Varaždin County's initiative for the formal recognition of its status as an age-friendly county, based on the criteria of the World Health Organization (WHO) for age-friendly cities and communities (Global Network for Age-friendly Cities and Communities).

Your county has carried out an initial assessment of the needs of the older population, developed a strategic framework for action, and actively included older persons in the decision-making process. The integrated approach encompassing health, social care, safety, participation, and intergenerational solidarity represents an example of good practice at the national level.

The Institute looks forward to continued professional cooperation in building sustainable support systems for the elderly population and is prepared to support the inclusion of Varaždin County into the WHO Global Network. We will gladly support this initiative and participate in the further joint development of the national plan to improve the health and quality of life of the elderly, in cooperation with the Ministry of Health and the Ministry of Labour, Pension System, Family and Social Policy.

Sincerely,

Director General

[Signature]

izv. prof. dr. sc. Krunoslav Capak, prim. dr. med.
(Krunoslav Capak, PhD, MD, Chief Physician, Assoc. Prof.)

CC:

- 1) Ministry of Health, attn. to Minister doc. dr. Irena Hrštić, dr.med (Irena Hrštić, MD, Assist. Prof.)
- 2) Ministry of Labour, Pension System, Family and Social Policy, attn. to Minister Marin Piletić



HZJZ

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ZDRAVLJE PRVO.

REPUBLIKA HRVATSKA
Varaždinska županija
Župan
g. Anđelko Stričak
Franjevački trg 7
42000 Varaždin
e-mail: Ljubica.Bozic@vzz.hr

KLASA: 541-01/25-17/5
URBROJ: 117-17-170-25-2

U Zagrebu, 12. svibnja 2025.

Predmet: Inicijativa za formalno priznavanje Varaždinske županije kao županije prijatelja osoba zlatne životne dobi
- odgovor, dostavlja se

Veza: Vaša KLASA: 550-01/25-01/3, URBROJ: 2186-02/1-25-11 od 9. svibnja 2025. godine

Poštovani župane,

Hrvatski zavod za javno zdravstvo sa stručnog aspekta podržava inicijativu Varaždinske županije za formalno priznanje statusa županije prijatelja osoba zlatne životne dobi, temeljenu na kriterijima Svjetske zdravstvene organizacije (WHO) za gradove i zajednice prilagođene starijima (Global Network for Age-friendly Cities and Communities).

Vaša županija je provela početnu procjenu potreba starije populacije, izradila strateški okvir djelovanja i aktivno uključila starije osobe u proces donošenja odluka. Integrirani pristup kojim se obuhvaćaju zdravlje, socijalna skrb, sigurnost, sudjelovanje i međugeneracijska solidarnost predstavlja primjer dobre prakse na nacionalnoj razini.

Zavod se raduje daljnjoj stručnoj suradnji u izgradnji održivih sustava podrške za stariju populaciju i spreman je podržati uključivanje Varaždinske županije u globalnu mrežu WHO-a te ćemo sa zadovoljstvom podržati ovu inicijativu i sudjelovati u daljnjem zajedničkom razvoju nacionalnog plana za unaprjeđenje zdravlja i kvalitete života starijih osoba u suradnji s Ministarstvom zdravstva i Ministarstvom rada, mirovinskog sustava, obitelji i socijalne politike.

S poštovanjem,

Ravnatelj



izv. prof. dr. sc. Krunoslav Capak, prim. dr. med.

Na znanje:

- 1) Ministarstvo zdravstva, n/p ministrice doc. dr. Irene Hrstić, dr.med
- 2) Ministarstvo rada, mirovinskog sustava, obitelji i socijalne politike, n/p ministra, gđin.-a Marina Piletića