



**STRONG WOMEN,  
STRONG COMMUNITIES**

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Dear Readers,

This booklet showcases five inspiring stories of women who have overcome socioeconomic disadvantages and have secured a future for themselves by gaining work experience and the opportunity to pursue fulfilling careers while being paid for their labour.

In the period from 2012 to 2016, 600 women in 49 municipalities took an active part in the Community Works Programme. Women accounted for 76% percent of the 769 people employed overall through the programme. All of them had previously been unemployed and, for many, the Programme provided their first work experience outside the home.

Over 16,000 people have already experienced the benefits provided through this Programme funded by the Government and implemented by the United Nations Development Programme, with each municipality launching schemes of part-time work experience in areas such as care for the elderly, services for children and people with disabilities and early childhood development.

Issues of unpaid domestic work and the care economy have gained importance in recent years. Throughout Eastern Europe and Central Asia, women perform much more unpaid domestic and care work than men. Expanding public care services can help relieve some of this unequal burden.

New research shows that investing in a social care infrastructure yields multiple economic and social benefits. It creates employment for men and women and promotes inclusive growth, while reducing gender inequalities and enhancing human development.

We believe that social care expansion is thus the right strategy to achieve several Sustainable Development Goals, reduce the burden of unpaid care work on women and advance women's economic empowerment. Approaches like the Community Works Programme are an excellent place to start.

Louisa Vinton  
UNDP Resident Representative





## Natasha

The small village of Dolneni near Prilep is a typical rural community in the south of the country. Under the pressure of economic circumstances, many young people have moved away to find work, while those who remain continue to work as farmers and cattle breeders.

For the elderly members of the community, retired life in Dolneni is not what they had hoped it would be. With their children and grandchildren gone, many live alone, spending all their days at home, immobile and unable to take care of themselves, often without the most basic means to keep alive.

One of these elderly residents is 80-year-old Rakida. She had always been the pillar of her family, but now she lives alone and cannot even open her own gate to enjoy the garden of her family house. Her only relief are the visits she receives from Natasha Risteska – a caretaker for elderly.

“Everything is so much easier when Nate comes around!” says Rakida. “She comes and gives me my pills, brings some bread and milk ... and most importantly she makes coffee and we drink and talk together. Her visits make my day.”

Natasha has been working already for a number of years as a caretaker for the elderly as part of the Community Works Programme in the Municipality of Dolneni.

Her engagement with the Programme involves daily visits to several elderly people in the village, providing for their most basic needs in their homes, including the company they so desperately crave.

Although Natasha trained as a nurse, jobs proved difficult to find and this engagement has provided her first formal work experience. “After all those years of not being able to find a job as a nurse, this is a really valuable experience for me.

Most importantly, I’m no longer sitting at home but really working and making a contribution to my family budget. That’s a priceless feeling.”

Natasha’s work is not only providing a great service to the elderly residents of Dolneni – it is also further proof of the success of the Community Works Programme, showing how projects work best when policies and

priorities are developed by the relevant stakeholders in the local community.

The Programme has met the needs of the times. In the past, young people were expected to take care of their older family members; but today all that has changed and the elderly are in need of help. Through the Programme, young professionals without employment are engaged by the municipality to help the elderly.

**“THE BENEFITS ARE TWOFOLD,” SAYS MUNICIPAL COORDINATOR AJSA MUAREMOSKA – TOPOLOSKA. “THE YOUNG PEOPLE ARE ACQUIRING WORKING EXPERIENCE, AND THE ELDERLY ARE RECEIVING THE SOCIAL SERVICES THEY NEED.”**





## Katerina

Katerina Jovanovic has been taking care of children since she was a child herself, babysitting her younger cousins and children from the neighbourhood in Skopje. "It was all I ever really wanted to do," she says.

"So when I went to university I took a degree in Early Childhood Development. But the career I planned for myself didn't work out the way I'd hoped..."

Tragedy struck when Katerina's husband died at an early age, leaving her to bring up their daughter alone. With no permanent job in an economy that offers limited

possibilities for employment, Katerina struggled hard to make a living.

All the same she continued to give up her time taking care of friends and neighbours' children – usually for free. And when, at 40 years old, the opportunity arose to receive part-time employment with the Community Works Programme, Katerina jumped at the chance.

"After everything that had happened, this chance of being formally engaged in the profession I trained for was a lifeline," she says.

"I'm not exaggerating when I say that the children and taking care of them has always given meaning to my life.

For many years I did this work for free. But now this part-time work has helped me realise the value of my skills. And that means a lot to me – every day it gives me new strength. It's helped me to finally move on."

Katerina is now permanently engaged in an Early Childhood Development Centre - part of the Community Works Programme in the Municipality of Gazi Baba working every day with children between 2 and 6 years of age.

The young children who attend the Centre are immediately drawn to Katerina's warmth and sincerity. Four-year-old Bojana proudly boasts about how she has spent the morning with 'Auntie Kate': "We coloured pictures in colouring books with watercolours," she says,

"Then we did a puzzle. And then she taught me how to write the most difficult letter in the world – 'Љ' [Lj] like in 'Ljupka loves lilies!"

The children's parents and the municipal officials are more than satisfied with Katerina's work: "She's an excellent example of a person who has achieved an ideal combination of her profession and her personality," says CWP coordinator, Svetlana Kojcevska, "And that's a godsend for this kind of job."

**"WITHIN THE PROGRAMME WE'VE HAD AN OPPORTUNITY TO ASSESS KATERINA'S SKILLS AND HELP HER MOVE ON FROM UNPAID LABOUR TO DECENTLY PAID WORK. FOR THE FIRST TIME SHE'S BEEN RECOGNISED AS A PROFESSIONAL FOR HER SKILLS."**





Ana

Ana Orozovic Aleksic is a young woman from Kumanovo who graduated as a speech therapist from the Medical Faculty in Skopje.

“All my life I’ve wanted to help people with disabilities,” she says, “especially children. The idea that I can get into a completely different world, where things are seen differently, has always excited me.

And it is still an unexplored area in which you need to be dedicated, both for your own sake and for the sake of others.”

After facing the harsh realities of looking for work in an economy beset by high unemployment, Ana is now finally working in her chosen profession as a speech therapist at the Kumanovo daily centre.

Her engagement is part of the Community Works Programme in Kumanovo.

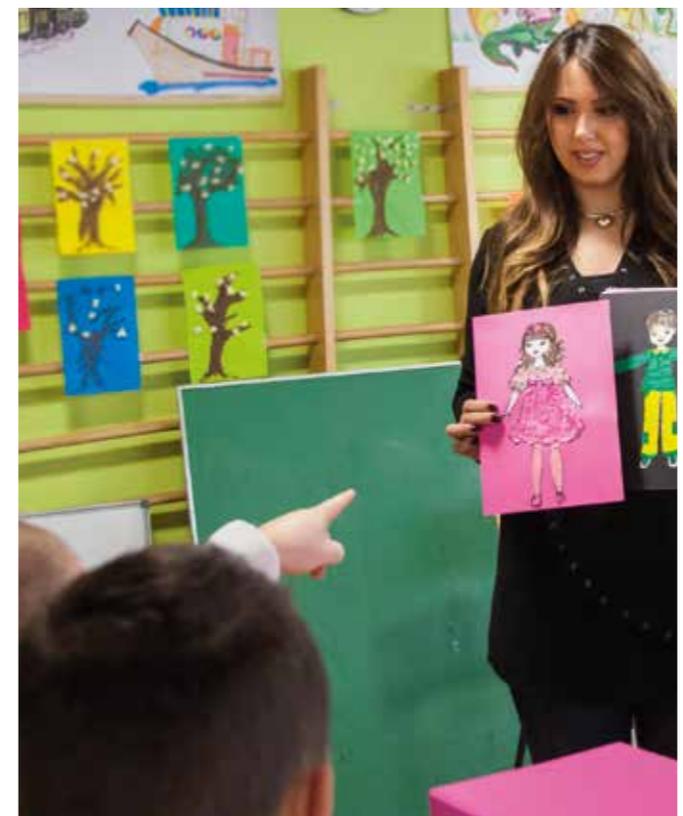
With a team of other specialists, she works on a daily basis with 26 children with moderate to severe developmental disabilities.

“I’m so pleased to have this opportunity to work with children directly. We prepare musical performances. We sing. We learn small poems. It’s not an ordinary job by any means.

Every day presents a new challenge - and that’s the beauty of it!” says Ana. “It fulfils me.”

The parents of the children are delighted to see the results of Ana’s work as a speech therapist.

“My child didn’t speak at all before the Programme started,” says one parent. “We used to come to the Centre, but he didn’t work with a speech therapist. During these few months of working with Ana, my son has made incredible progress.



“AND THAT SHOWS WHAT PROFESSIONAL HELP CAN DO – AND HOW IMPORTANT IT IS FOR CHILDREN WITH DISABILITIES TO GET SUCH TREATMENT EVERY DAY.”



Vera

When Vera Stoilova's husband fell seriously ill a few years ago and was no longer able to move, Vera stayed by his side throughout his treatment.

And all that time she listened carefully to the doctors' advice and recommendations - about how to dress wounds, how to measure blood sugar, how to insert catheters, how to move a person into a wheelchair properly ...

By learning how to take care of her husband on her own at home, Vera managed to acquire valuable skills that have turned a tragedy into an opportunity to improve her life. „I would have never thought that this family drama would open a new opportunity to earn for my family,” she says.

“But now there is nothing that is too difficult for me. I visit several families a day ... In some places it's true that I need more physical strength to do my job. But that's okay. What matters is that people are satisfied.”

Vera has now been engaged in two cycles of the Community Works Programme in Makedonska Kamenica and has been hired to help retired miners at home.

It is a job with its own particularities, especially since these are elderly people with serious health problems who in most cases stay at home and need serious care and basic medical treatment.

With her hard-earned experience, and now in constant communication with the family doctors of the patients, Vera performs an extraordinary job.

“With no significant working experience at my age in a small town with limited opportunities, I knew it would be really difficult to find any job.

The engagement within the Programme means a lot to me,” says Vera. “It's a major positive change in every sense.”

**THE PROGRAMME'S PROVISION OF CARE FOR RETIRED MINERS WHO ONCE GAVE SO MUCH TO THIS SMALL COMMUNITY IS AN EXCELLENT EXAMPLE HOW SOCIAL SERVICE PROVISION CAN HELP BOTH THE UNEMPLOYED AND THE ELDERLY.**





## Katerina

Katerina Trajcevska is a young woman from Resen who, like many graduates, struggled to find work after completing her BA degree in Philology.

“It’s a kind of torture,” she says. “Having studied hard to get a university degree and wanting to work but instead being stuck at home doing nothing.”

The Community Works Programme was designed to help people like Katerina gain valuable work experience while helping the most vulnerable members of society.

She has now participated in two cycles of the Programme as a personal assistant to people with disabilities.

Together with a professional team she now spends her days taking care of ten people with disabilities at the Daily Centre for People with Disabilities in Resen. The carers organise excursions to picnic sites, visits to interesting places in the Prespa region, social gatherings and art classes.

These social activities have greatly increased the quality of life of persons with disabilities and helped bring them into the community.

Not long ago, many people with disabilities were socially isolated, often suffering a lack of acceptance from the surrounding community.

Addressing these problems by fostering greater social inclusion for people with disabilities was one of the key aims of the Community Works Programme.

By giving work to unemployed people while at the same time extending care for vulnerable people, the Programme has taken on two of the country’s most pressing social problems.

“Taking part in the Programme has turned my life around,” says Katerina. “I’ve gained work experience in a field I’d really like to learn more about. With this practical experience, I hope I’ll soon get a chance to train and get full-time employment as a professional carer.”

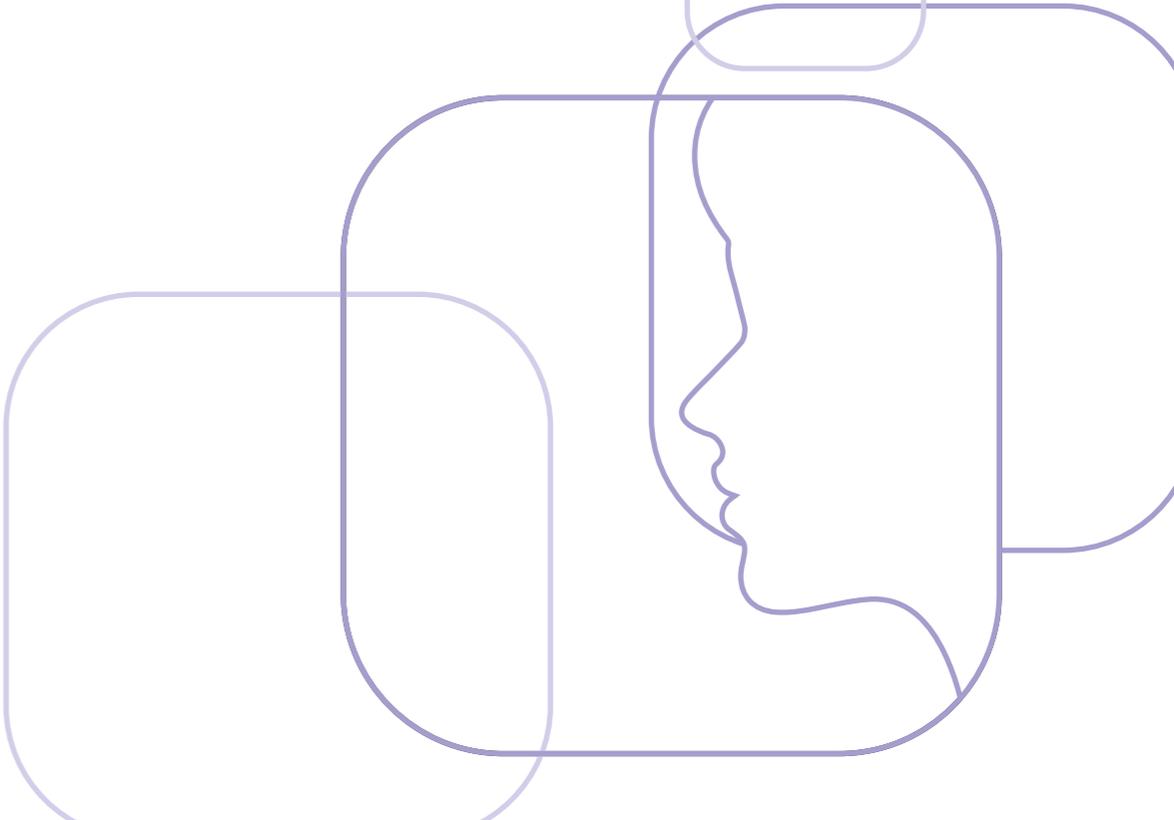
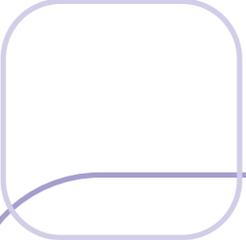
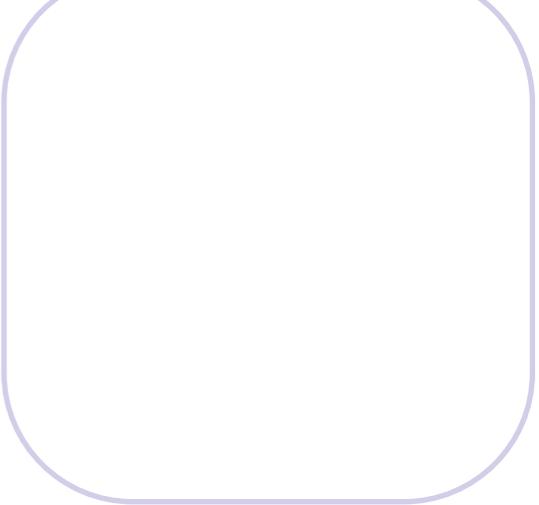
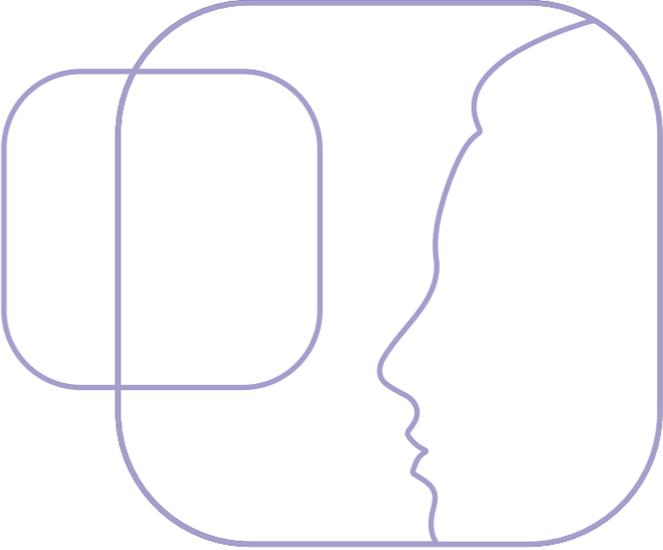
Gordana Peshevska, the mother of Svetlana, a 16-year-old girl with a physical disability who attends the Centre where Katerina works, says the improved services have had a transforming impact on her daughter’s life. “It seems like only yesterday that people here didn’t even notice my daughter was living in isolation,” says Gordana.

“But Katerina has shown Svetlana how she can lead an active life – not hiding away from the world but enjoying friendships and nature and learning.”

The services offered by the centre also give Gordana the chance of a welcome respite from the constant burden of care for Svetlana.

**LIKE MANY PARENTS OF CHILDREN WITH DISABILITIES, HER CARE RESPONSIBILITIES PREVIOUSLY KEPT HER BUSY MORE OR LESS AROUND THE CLOCK. NOW, WHEN SVETLANA IS HAPPILY OCCUPIED AT THE DAILY CENTRE, SHE FINALLY HAS THE PEACE OF MIND TO ENJOY A FEW HOURS FOR HERSELF AND THE REST OF THE FAMILY**







Empowered lives.  
Resilient nations.

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