



# Design, implementation and sustainability of the Emergency button pilot in North Macedonia InCARE Short Report

*Red Cross of the Republic of North Macedonia, October 2023*



Supporting **IN**clusive development of community-based long-term **CARE** services through multi-stakeholder participatory approaches



**Co-funded by  
the European Union**

This document has received financial support from the European Union Programme for Employment and Social Innovation “EaSI” 2014-2020 (VS/2020/0258). For further information please consult <http://ec.europa.eu/social/easi>. The information contained in this publication does not necessarily reflect the official position of the European Commission.

# InCARE Short Report

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InCARE (Supporting Inclusive development of community-based long-term CARE services through multi-stakeholder participatory approaches) aims contribute to the design of a coordinated approach to the development of national long-term care policy and care services at local and regional level, by establishing socially innovative and participatory decision-making processes. We work with care users, care providers and policymakers in Spain, Austria and North Macedonia to design, implement and scale-up innovative care services.

More information on the project's website: <https://incare.euro.centre.org/>. For updates on our progress and publications please subscribe to our newsletter [here](#) or send an email to [cc@eurocarers.org](mailto:cc@eurocarers.org).



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**Recommended citation:** Design, implementation, and sustainability of the Emergency button pilot in North Macedonia, InCARE Short Report, Red Cross North Macedonia, October 2023.

# Short Report on design, implementation, and sustainability of the Emergency button pilot in North Macedonia

## 1. Short Overview

The Red Cross of the Republic of North Macedonia (RCNM) focused on piloting an innovative community-based approach to care for dependent elderly, through the integration of an Emergency Button Service within its home care package.

In 2019, a feasibility study with the support of Austrian Red Cross, Austrian Development Agency and Swiss Red Cross has been conducted in the city of Skopje, North Macedonia. The structured interview was conducted on 449 elderly persons. Stratified random sampling was applied for the structured interview by stratifying the main target group by two criteria – age and geographic location. The survey showed that the elderly have various needs for services that are currently not covered by the national and local health and social institutions. Research results indicated both high usage of social services (45.7%), and high demand for such services (90.2%) by the elderly. Most used services were maintaining home hygiene (24.7%), and services related to the emergency support (emergency care - vehicle transport and ambulance (20.7%), and SOS line/personal emergency call system 24\7 (12.7%))

The whole feasibility study report can be found on: [https://ckgs.org.mk/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/FF\\_Feasibility-Study\\_eng\\_final-2019\\_31\\_10\\_final-za-web.pdf](https://ckgs.org.mk/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/FF_Feasibility-Study_eng_final-2019_31_10_final-za-web.pdf)

The Red Cross team, in 2020 has started with the InCARE – EaSI call project, merging it with an Austrian Development agency project, where both focus on piloting the Emergency button service on different social target groups.

## 2. Design of the Pilot

In October 2020, a kickoff meeting involving the Ministry of Labor and Social Policy as policy partner and RCNM was held. During this meeting, discussions occurred to plan the next steps for the design of the pilot. However, due to CoVID19 pandemic and the government restrictive measures on social gatherings, several activities related to the pilot program, like selecting emergency button service users and visiting them at their homes, had to be postponed. Likewise, the restrictions also affected the preparations of training activities for caregivers.

-As an implementing partner, the RCNM initially focused on activities that did not pose increased risk covid 19 infections of vulnerable individuals. Since 2021, RCNM started to seek for an adequate monitoring solution for the Emergency button software. After research on the national market, it was concluded that a ready to be set up product did not exist, and international solutions were not sustainable due to high prices and maintenance costs which in the long run would affect the sustainability of the service. To address this, an IT company was hired to design monitoring software, with support from the Austrian Red Cross experts. The design phase also involved the procurement procedures for alarm devices, staff recruitment and workplace preparation.

Collaborating with the Ministry of Labor and Social Policy, a two-day Theory of Change Workshop was organized, involving various stakeholders to define the pilot's strategic direction, develop relevant interventions and plan pilot monitoring and evaluation. The RCNM team afterwards developed Standard Operative Procedures for the pilot service with the support of the Ministry of Health. As COVID-19 measures eased, RCNM emergency button service staff were trained in various areas, including how to conduct proper assessments to older persons on the field based on previously developed criteria in order to become part of the 12-month Emergency button pilot.

### 3. Implementation of the pilot

The promotion of the EB started with an interview on a national TV station. The EB Manager introduced the service to the wider public. Following this, an online newspaper published an article about the introduction. The service was further promoted at an online event for Social Entrepreneurship, "Let's talk SE". ([SEtalks #6 – Innovation in Social Entrepreneurship?](#)). The service was also presented at the First Fair for Social Entrepreneurship in North Macedonia. Visitors at the fair had the opportunity to get more information on the service and how to apply in case of interest. A promotional video and a photo session were created for the service by a professional marketing agency. An article explaining the new service was published in a newspaper.

To operationalize the pilot, staff were recruited and trained in various areas again such as advanced first aid, workshop for dementia, depression and panic attacks, psychosocial support, training for primary and secondary assessment of injuries, training for standard operative procedures (SOP) etc.

In August 2022 the installation of monitoring devices at clients' residences and the instalment of monitoring devices and four devices for testing were installed at client's homes. During the testing phase adaptations of the software were necessary therefore the beginning of the pilot phase was delayed to the end of September 2022.

By end of August 2023, 57 (13 male, 44 female) clients had joined the pilot phase and devices were installed in their homes. After the installation of the devices among the clients, the method of using the device and the conditions in which they can press the button on the bracelet are explained to them.

The total number of emergency button calls is 744 (65% female, 35% male), most of which were pressed due to medical consultation, first instalment check alarm, wrong alarm, or the need for psycho-social support. These types of calls are registered as calls from users with minor health conditions.

In 20 cases, emergency medical intervention by the First Responders was required. After providing first aid and measuring vital parameters, 2 people needed the help of the Emergency Medical Service.

After completing the medical interventions, the employees fill out a medical report on the basic information about the patient's condition and the procedures undertaken.

Patients Health Condition/Activities	Emergency Button Calls
Minor Medical Conditions	722
Emergency Response	20
Calling EMS(Emergency Medical Service)	2
<b>Total</b>	<b>744</b>

In the period April 2022- July 2023 through the caregiver program, organized four training courses and ensured 60 caregivers to receive extensive support to enhance their theoretical, psychosocial and practical skills. Public announcements for participation were published on the social media channels.

52 participants successfully finalized the training and were awarded with a State-recognized Certificate for caregiver.

As part of the pilot implementation phase, in August 2023, a study visit for sharing knowledge, experiences and ideas was carried out in Red Cross Styria in Graz with four participants from the Emergency Button Service of Red Cross of North Macedonia.

Partnerships were signed with the City of Skopje, local municipalities in Skopje, in order to provide social services including the Emergency button to the older population, increasing the level of dignity and safety of their life.



In September 2023, Meetings were held with the Policy partners (Ministry of Labor and Social Policy, Health Insurance fund under the Ministry of Health) for future sustainability and integration of the service in the social and health system.

The pilot implementation project in North Macedonia took 12 months. Within the Emergency button service, 57 older persons took participation, and 52 participants successfully finalized the four caregivers at home training.

Based on the evaluation and satisfaction surveys, using the Quality-of-Life assessment tool **EuroQoL** (EQ-5D Paper version), the health condition of the users of the Emergency button service during the pilot implementation improved from 61,4% to 64 %. It is important to note that the Emergency button as a service, provided security and safety in the older persons home, pointing out the need of psychosocial support of the older population, and it did not have direct implications in their psychical condition, so the measurements of the EuroQoL could not be considered as much significant in the evaluation processes. Therefore, internal Satisfaction surveys were developed and carried out by the Red Cross team with external expertise, where 64.9 % of the pilot users gave their highest rate in regards of the improvement of the quality and safety of their life, and 80.7 % gave the highest rate for the Emergency button as a innovative social and health service. 90 % of the caregiver participants in the evaluation survey gave their highest ratings of satisfaction in regards of the caregiver at home training & program.

## 4. Sustainability of the pilot

When it comes to ensure sustainability and possible integration of the Emergency button service it is proper to mention that the received results from the evaluation, were presented at the Policy group meeting with participants from the Ministry of Labor and Social Policy , Ministry of Health in North Macedonia. The sustainability of the Emergency button service after the project duration was also discussed and various options were considered.

A conclusion has been made that the successful implementation of the Emergency Button Service in Skopje, alongside the homecare package, one more time, showed us the need for innovative community-based services that can add additional value to the health and social systems.

Continuing to scale up outreach and promotion efforts is essential to ensure that Emergency Button Service reaches its target population. This includes comprehensive community outreach activities, strategic partnerships with healthcare providers, and leveraging digital platforms for effective promotion.

Ensuring a resilient technological framework and Sustainability are fundamental for the long-term success of the Emergency Button Service.

The positive reception from caregivers signifies the importance of our training model. It is therefore recommended to Invest on ongoing training and development opportunities for caregivers and staff members.

In order to ensure sustainability and integration of the service in the system, it is crucial to explore viable funding models, such as partnerships on local and national level or additional grant opportunities to secure financial support for continued operation and possible expansion, a change in the national legislation in the country, meaning Including the paramedics as profession, recognizing the Emergency button as a social or health service within the state laws/rulebooks etc. And afterwards extend it to the possibility of a complete or partial coverage from the state system and the user itself.

## 5. Summary

The Emergency button pilot was a successful attempt of providing a long-term care service example in North Macedonia. Although its design and implementation phases faced various obstacles due to the Covid19 situation, technical difficulties and sustainability concerns, it has raised the bar of long-term care provision in the country. Actions need to be carried out in the future in order to establish the service and secure its potential expansion in the long run.



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