

NEWSLETTER NO. 2

We are proud to mark the first, exceptionally successful year of the "**Empowered – Inclusion of Persons with Disabilities, Regional Cooperation and Development in the Western Balkans**" project.

This comprehensive initiative, funded by the **Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and development BMZ**, and led by **ASB**, in partnership with local organizations (**LIR Civil Society, IDC - Initiative for development and cooperation, PREDA Plus, Alfa Centar, Community Development Institute CDI, Albanian Disability Rights Foundation ADRF**), runs from **September 1, 2024, to April 30, 2028 (44 months)**.

Our core objective is to create a society of equal opportunities for persons with disabilities.

During this first year, our efforts have spanned across **15 municipalities in the Western Balkans**. Partnerships with local self-governments, civil society, and key stakeholders have been established and strengthened. Through intensive **advocacy for the rights of persons with disabilities**, connecting with stakeholders, and promoting **inclusive values**, the **first inclusive projects** have already been created in numerous communities, **psychosocial support** and **career counseling** have been launched, and **mechanisms for inclusiveness** have been strengthened. All of this contributes to creating an **Empowered community** dedicated to improving the position of PwDs across the region.

By the end of the project, significant and lasting impact is expected:

- **21,500 PwDs** will access improved community services and infrastructure, with **1,500 PwDs** directly benefiting from support programs.
- **600 PwDs** will receive psychosocial support and career counseling, while **300 PwDs** will gain vocational training and job placement opportunities.
- **15 municipalities** will adopt inclusive policies and action plans.
- Over **1 million citizens** will be reached through advocacy campaigns, increasing public awareness and challenging stereotypes about PwDs.

This newsletter provides an overview of the project's first year and invites you to follow our continued progress towards achieving these ambitious goals.

ADRF: A strong partner in the regional EMPOWERED initiative in Tirana and Shkodër

As the Albanian partner in the EMPOWERED project, **ADRF - Albanian Disability Rights Foundation** has actively shaped the project's first phase in **Tirana and Shkodër**. We established robust cooperation structures, formalizing partnerships with both municipalities to strengthen local disability inclusion.

Technical Working Groups, comprising diverse local stakeholders, are already identifying needs and enhancing inclusiveness mechanisms on the ground.

ADRF also ensured Albania's active regional presence, participating in key EMPOWERED meetings across the Western Balkans. These gatherings fostered valuable knowledge exchange, positioning Albania's experience in the broader regional dialogue on disability inclusion.

From January 2026, work accelerates. ADRF will support municipalities in revising **Local Social Plans** and developing concrete **Local Inclusion Projects** for improved services and accessibility. Parallel programs for **career counseling, psychosocial support, vocational training, and job integration for PwDs** will launch. With strengthened partnerships, **ADRF is focused on translating plans into action**, expanding opportunities for persons with disabilities in Tirana and Shkodër.

www.empowered-wb.org