

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.

ALFA Centar: Empowering inclusion and strengthening Regional Cooperation in Nikšić, Pljevlja, and Kolašin within the EMPOWERED Initiative

Actively engaged in the EMPOWERED initiative, **ALFA Centar implemented its first-phase activities** in the municipalities of **Nikšić and Pljevlja**, building foundations for a more inclusive Western Balkans.

ALFA Centar organized **initial meetings, formalized cooperation** by signing agreements with the municipalities, and **formed Working Groups for PwD inclusion**. Furthermore, a two-day training was successfully delivered in Kolašin to strengthen the capacity of local partners.

At the regional level, ALFA Centar actively participated in the **Regional Conference in Skopje**, and attended the Trilateral Conference in Sarajevo, **advocating for project goals at a ministerial level**. A visit from the **Deputy Head of the German Embassy** further **affirmed the project's significance**.

ALFA Centar will continue to support municipalities in **planning workshops, education, awareness campaigns, developing Local Inclusive Projects, psychosocial counseling, and career guidance**. Through these efforts, ALFA Centar plays a crucial role in **translating plans into action** and expanding opportunities for PwDs in **Montenegro and the wider region**.

www.empowered-wb.org