

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.

CDI: A Catalyst for regional cooperation and local action in Valandovo and Demir Kapija within the EMPOWERED Initiative

CDI - Community Development Institute Macedonia played a pivotal role in the EMPOWERED project's launch, proudly hosting its first regional conference in May 2025, marking the start of our joint journey.

Following this, the CDI team conducted extensive preparatory meetings and **capacity building trainings in Valandovo and Demir Kapija**. This strengthened local stakeholders and inclusiveness mechanisms, laying a robust foundation for future activities. CDI also actively engaged in regional EMPOWERED meetings, fostering knowledge exchange and integrating local experiences into the wider Western Balkans dialogue.

From January 2026, work intensifies. CDI will support Valandovo and Demir Kapija in revising **Local Social Plans and developing concrete Local Inclusion Projects**, leading to tangible improvements. Parallel programs for **career counseling, psychosocial support, vocational training, and job integration will launch, transforming plans into practical changes for PwDs**.

With solid foundations, CDI is now focused on impactful actions, expanding opportunities for persons with disabilities in Valandovo and Demir Kapija.

www.empowered-wb.org