

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.

IDC: A driving force for local inclusion and regional advocacy in the EMPOWERED Initiative

As a partner dedicated to development and cooperation, **IDC - Initiative for Development and Cooperation** actively implements the EMPOWERED project in **Novi Pazar, Leskovac, and Dimitrovgrad**. In the first phase, we initiated Local Inclusive Projects and conducted numerous working group meetings.

Early successes include **launching career guidance and counseling programs** and delivering **project writing trainings** in these municipalities, strengthening local actors. **Psychosocial workshops** are also planned, all aimed at **building capacity and reinforcing inclusion mechanisms**.

Crucially, as the partner for visibility, advocacy, and policy, IDC has achieved outstanding results. Our campaigns have garnered over **520,000 views of information**, actively engaging the public in the advocacy process, raising awareness, and fostering a **more inclusive understanding of PwDs**.

IDC is committed to transforming plans into concrete actions, expanding opportunities for persons with disabilities in its target municipalities, and ensuring their voices are heard regionally.

www.empowered-wb.org



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