

## WESTERN BALKANS Play2Employ – Building Youth Skills Through Play



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The project aims to improve the social and economic inclusion of marginalised youth in rural areas across the Western Balkans by enhancing their employability through innovative, high-quality, and inclusive educational programs that integrate sport-based methodologies.

### CONTEXT

The Western Balkans is a region shaped by complex historical, ethnic, and political factors, deeply influenced by its turbulent past, which continues to impact its political and economic stability. This instability directly affects the development of young people in the region and hinders cooperation among the countries within it. The Balkans is one of the regions with the highest proportion of young people in Europe. Despite numerous policies and initiatives, youth unemployment rates in the region remain high, reaching up to 30%. Barriers to employment, education, and social inclusion are most pronounced for youth from marginalised groups, particularly those from rural backgrounds or disadvantaged socio-economic conditions, further increasing their risk of unemployment and poverty. Consequently, many young people from the region emigrate in search of better educational opportunities, which in turn increases the risk of brain drain and further contributes to the depletion of skilled labour within the Western Balkans.

### DESCRIPTION

An increasing number of government policies and initiatives by organisations working in the region recognise sport as a powerful tool for helping young people develop entrepreneurial skills. By engaging various stakeholders, such as sports clubs and associations, government bodies, educational institutions, and NGOs, it becomes possible to create a multi-dimensional approach to youth development. This approach aims not only to enhance employability but also to foster greater social and economic inclusion for marginalised youth across the Western Balkans. The Play2Employ project is seen as a necessary initiative to address the significant challenges faced by marginalised youth across the Western Balkans, particularly in terms of employability and skill development. By engaging young people in activities that foster their personal and professional growth, the project aims to help them overcome these barriers, enhancing their employability and equipping them with the skills needed to succeed in the workforce. The Play2Employ project provides several key benefits across three different levels: Individually, it will enhance the employability of marginalised youth by developing both soft and hard skills, boosting their confidence, and preparing them for job opportunities and entrepreneurship. At the same time, it will empower teachers with inclusive educational practices and sport-based tools to better support marginalised youth. Organisationally, the project will build the capacity of consortium partners to deliver effective, inclusive programs that improve youth employability outcomes. Regionally, the project has the potential to foster cooperation in the field of youth by creating lasting networks.

#### COUNTRIES

**Albania, Kosovo, Montenegro, North Macedonia**



Convention signing date  
**27/03/2025**



Field  
**Education / Infrastructure and diverse social services**



Localisation  
**Fier (Albania), Podgorica (Montenegro), Pristina (Kosovo), Skopje (North Macedonia)**

Financing duration  
**15 months**



Financing tool  
**Subgrants AFD**



Financing amount  
**59 996,8 €**

#### Beneficiaries

**Epoka e Re (Lead Applicant), Together Advancing Common Trust (Co-applicant), PLAY International (Co-applicant), Regional Sport Initiative – Playing Together REFSP0 (Co-applicant)**

#### Contracting authority

**ALDA – European Association for Local Democracy**

Key Sustainable Development Goals addressed



## RESULTS

Through the implementation of the Play2Employ project, the expected impact is an improvement in key employability skills among youth, such as teamwork, communication, and problem-solving, thereby opening up greater job and educational opportunities. A key outcome is that consortium organisations and trainers will be fully equipped to deliver inclusive and tailored employability activities for marginalised youth. In total, four partner organisations and their 12 trainers (three per country) will be comprehensively prepared, both theoretically and practically, to implement innovative sport-based programs aimed at overcoming systemic barriers to employment and social inclusion for marginalised youth. These efforts will culminate in the launch of four inclusive employability programs, ensuring lasting impact. Moreover, the skills of 40 teachers (10 per country) will be strengthened through national workshops to ensure the sustainability of the programs on the ground. Subsequently, around 600 marginalised youth (aged 14–18) will directly participate in sport-based workshops designed to develop their professional skills, self-confidence, and social inclusion, thus improving their employment or training prospects. At least 80% of participants are expected to demonstrate significant progress in employability, self-confidence, and social inclusion, increasing their chances of employment or continuing education. Finally, active collaboration with at least 20 local stakeholders, including educational institutions, youth associations, and educators will provide strong support for this socio-sport methodology, ensuring its integration and sustainability within communities. The involvement of families and local leaders in promotional events will further strengthen this supportive environment for youth social inclusion and employability.

## STAKEHOLDERS AND OPERATIONAL APPROACH

The project involves several key actors: around 600 marginalised youth aged 14 to 18, teachers, educators, as well as various stakeholders such as youth leaders, local experts, and educational institutions. These participants will actively contribute to the design and implementation of the program. The project will start with a co-creation workshop bringing together these actors to develop an innovative sport-based toolkit tailored to the needs of marginalised youth. This toolkit will then be tested during pilot sessions involving at least 50 young people to assess its effectiveness and adjust the methodology accordingly. A regional training will be organised in Albania for about thirty teachers and educators from the partner countries, aiming to strengthen their skills in facilitating “Sport for Employability” activities. These trainers will then be responsible for disseminating the methodology to at least 10 teachers per country, who will implement activities with a minimum of 50 young participants each. This collaborative approach ensures the quality, relevance, and sustainability of the project while reinforcing transnational cooperation among all involved actors. The four consortium organisations will be equipped with the skills and knowledge necessary to work transnationally, thereby improving employability outcomes for marginalised youth through high-quality, inclusive programs. Epoka e Re, as the lead coordinator, will be responsible for overall project management, financial oversight, and ensuring the project proceeds according to the approved plan. It will also organise the Training of Trainers (TOT) in Albania, managing logistics and coordination for this activity. TAKT will oversee the final meeting and stakeholder event in Skopje, ensuring active participation. Play International Kosovo will lead the design of the toolkit and the co-creation workshop, as well as organise the kick-off meeting in Pristina. REGSPO will handle the project’s visibility, preparing and monitoring the communication plan. Each partner will contribute to the design, testing, and dissemination of the toolkit within their country, as well as to the drafting of the final evaluation report.

## FINANCING PLAN

The European Association for Local Democracy – ALDA, as the lead partner, in partnership with LEADER France, Pulse SOS, Pulse Balkans, Local Democracy Agency Mostar, Local Democracy Agency Kosovo, Local Democracy Agency Nikšić, Local Democracy Agency Zavidovići, Local Democracy Agency Prijedor Local Democracy Agency Subotica, Local Democracy Agency Central and Southern Serbia, and the Urban Research Institute Albania is implementing the Project: BOOST - Balkans for Optimising Opportunities, Sustainability and Transformation of Civil Society co-funded by the Agence Française de Développement (AFD). The Grantor (ALDA) under the BOOST subgranting scheme provides the financial resources for the implementation of the project activities of the Grantee. The total budget allocated to the Grantee is EUR 59.996 (80% of the total budget for the action). The Grantee should submit a financial report for its activities in the total amount of EUR 75.000, which includes EUR 14.999,20 as co-funding (20% of the total budget of the action) of the Grantee, clearly identified and evidenced. If the co-funding is reduced the direct funding will be reduced proportionally. The total amount (EUR 59.996) to be transferred by the Grantor to the Grantee will be distributed in three (3) instalments. When the first instalment is processed, each of the remaining instalments will be processed upon approval of interim/final re-ports sent by the Grantee and the submission of the request of payment.