

Western Balkans: Regional Cooperation and Social Inclusion through Sport

Project name	Social Inclusion through Sport in the Balkan Region
Commissioned by	German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ)
Project Region	Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo, North Macedonia and Serbia
Term	September 2018 – December 2021



Background and context

According to the European Union the most pressing issue for the Western Balkans (WB) is addressing reforms in the area of rule of law, fundamental rights and good governance. Moreover, the countries are recommended to work together on reconciliation and good neighbourly relations. The project ‘Social inclusion through Sport in the Balkan Region’ aims to use sport and physical activity as a tool to work towards more cohesive and inclusive societies. A cohesive community focusses on the well-being of all its members, it reduces marginalization and exclusion, manages diversity, enhances trust while building a sense of belonging.

The ‘Sport for Development’ approach

The United Nations recognise sport internationally ‘as a means to promote education, health, development and peace’. ‘Sport for Development’ (S4D) is a broad social field which uses sport, physical education and physical activity intentionally to pursue non-sporting development outcomes. Sport allows children and young people to interact and learn in a playful environment. Taught in an educational and context sensitive manner, sport and

physical activity improve a healthy lifestyle, foster participation of all gender, prepare coping with success and defeat, teach the relevance of team work as well as ways to resolve conflicts peacefully key skills that support young people positively on their way forward in personal and professional life.

Together with local and international partners from the fields of policymaking, civil society, business and academia, German development cooperation has built up a sustainable S4D portfolio that strengthens civil society and promotes intersectoral cooperation. In this way, sport serves as an innovative instrument that drives change and sustainable development – for each individual and for society at large.

‘Sport for Development’ in the Western Balkans

Sport is a social experience: Like almost no other area, it reaches civil society, enables participation and creates a sense of belonging across ethnic and social boundaries. The S4D project in the WB aims to strengthen competence development of children and young people through physical activity. Sport and play are an active learning environment for communication, commitment and trust building. Young people learn to take responsibility for themselves and others, they experience a sense of belonging, (re-)build relationships and learn to understand and acknowledge diversity.



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Regional training of local S4D instructors in Vrdnik (SER).

Children in Karpos (MKD) actively participate in a S4D training including social distancing.

Primary school teachers in Fushe Kosove (KOS) apply playful approaches to involve physical activity into their teaching.

The project with its partners creates those learning environments and offers capacity development for sport coaches, teachers, youth and social workers enabling them to apply the sportpedagogical concept in their work. This is supported by trained S4D instructors and staff of the Sports University of Tirana and the Faculty of Physical Education and Sport at the University of Pristina.

The formation of multi-actor networks on community level was supported by the project to increase the collaboration between the sport, educational and social sector and to join forces between public authorities and civil society, to better reach out to younger generations. Local strategies and action plans, using S4D as a tool for inclusion and youth development, were developed and guide the implementation of a variety of local, national and regional activities (trainings, summer schools, open school and community days, tournaments and leagues etc.). Furthermore, exchange and reciprocal learning between members of the local networks are an essential strategy to sustain the project outcomes.

Through regional trainings neighbourly relations between individuals, communities and organisations across the WB are strengthened. This encourages also local governments and other relevant stakeholders to contribute and consequently take collective ownership of a social inclusion through sport agenda. In addition to that, the project fosters the dissemination of the S4D approach into other technical cooperation programmes and advocates for its recognition and application within regional organisations and national institutions in the WB.

National implementation insights

In **Albania**, the aim of the local network within the Municipality of *Fier* is to create opportunities especially for girls and young women to develop and achieve their potentials through physical activity and play. S4D is used to raise community awareness and participation for more gender equality.

In **Bosnia & Herzegovina**, the local network of the *Brcko District* supports socially disadvantaged members of the community through physical activity. The aim is to safeguard children who experienced violence and overcome prejudices especially towards vulnerable and marginalized groups. By experiencing and developing joint playful activities teachers are enabled to contribute to a more inclusive school and classroom environment.

In **Kosovo**, the Municipalities of *Fushe Kosova* and *Obiliq* combined resources and promote the inclusion of marginalised

groups, especially girls and children from ethnic minorities into the communities. In cooperation with the local governments, S4D trainings are offered to primary and secondary school teachers and different inclusive sports activities are run by sport clubs and civil society organisations.

In **Serbia**, organisations and individuals in the Municipality of *New Belgrade* grouped together to increase conditions of using sport as a tool for different population categories being at risk of social exclusion. An alliance to share the expertise from different sectors offered great potential but diverging interests and target groups were perceived as a main challenge.

In **North Macedonia**, two municipalities established a S4D network, *Kriva Palanka* and *Karpos*. Sport and play are used to reach out to children and youth with diverse social backgrounds as well as to create an inclusive learning environment for physical, mental and social development. The capacities of trainers, teachers, social workers and young leaders are strengthened to apply S4D within their work with the community.

Successes to date

The potential of S4D in adopting and promoting positive social development is recognized in more than seven municipalities in five Western Balkan countries. Together with the local partners S4D is implemented in schools, sport clubs, and youth organisations. S4D training material is regionally co-created with partners to improve the knowledge transfer. Local communities of practice are strengthened and ensure the equitable representation and commitment of many local stakeholders.

To date, the project has succeeded in equipping over 550 trainers and teachers with practical experience to systematically apply S4D in school classrooms and training sessions to improve the social sport environment and cohesion processes among students and athletes. Approximately 32.000 young people participated in S4D activities and further developed their self-, social and sport-specific competences. Moreover, within and beyond the involved communities awareness was raised for gender equality, physical and mental well-being and the benefits of being active. Through the project, partners are linked across borders with an increased ownership and a commitment towards common goals where future ideas for and with young people are developed.

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