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ACTIVITY REPORT

LINK 4 COOPERATION

2023

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PROJECT "LINK 4 Cooperation"

**"Strengthening local participation and cooperation
through partnership of Public Authorities and CSOs
in Bosnia and Herzegovina"**



December, 2023



ABOUT

For the conception of the ["Strengthening local participation and cooperation through partnership of Public Authorities and CSOs in Bosnia and Herzegovina"](#) project (further herein: **"LINK 4 Cooperation"**), Local Democracy Agency (LDA) Mostar, together with the project partners LDA Prijedor, LDA Zavidovici, Center for Development of Herzegovina from Trebinje, European Association for Local Democracy - ALDA, and ALDA Skopje, has formed a diversified and complementary consortium in order to maximize the impact of the action in each component. This valuable network has been shaped through various ties and relations built throughout the years: LDAs and ALDA are linked by a crossed and long term partnership and cooperation on different projects and initiatives from more than 20 years. LDAs from Bosnia and Herzegovina and the Center for Development of Herzegovina form Trebinje have joint contacts and previous work in different spheres, from local development, local communities initiatives, activities related to youth and other groups in the civil society, culture activities, and many others. The project has been co-constructed by the consortium taking into account the specific expertise of each partner focusing on promoting good governance at local level in Europe and in Western Balkans.

The Local Democracy Agencies have been established in the Western Balkans by the Congress of the Council of Europe since 1992, as a support program to strengthen local democracy, foster respect for human rights and further sustainable development. Today there are 15 active Local Democracy Agencies based in Western Balkans, South Caucasus and North Africa coordinated by ALDA, and three Agencies – Operational partners, based in Croatia. The Agencies function as self-sustaining, locally registered NGOs, but they are different from other local NGOs because of the international framework they operate in. Indeed, the Local Democracy Agencies develop partnerships with local authorities and NGOs from all over Europe giving to the whole network direct access to an international framework through the support of ALDA, the Council of Europe and the European Union.

LINK 4 Cooperation is a three year project funded by [European Union](#).



OBJECTIVES

Overall objective: to strengthen the capacities of CSOs engaged in public policy processes to become skilled and reliable partners in policy-making and reform processes in B&H.

Specific objectives:

- Create stronger links to citizens by engaging in public policy process, reaching out to society as a whole including marginalized groups and grass root communities and encouraging civic activism and public participation in policy-making;
- Capable, transparent and accountable LAs;
- Effective CSOs;
- LAs have enabling policies and rules for grass root organizations and civic initiatives;
- CSOs create Network for coalition-building for increased impact in campaigning and advocacy.



VISION

To strengthen the capacities of CSOs engaged in public policy processes to become skilled and reliable partners in policy-making and reform processes in Bosnia and Herzegovina.



PROJECT ACTIVITIES IN 2023

Exchange of information between LAs and the CSOs, first step in solving local challenges

The final year of the project started with a series of meetings in January, gathering representatives of civil society organizations and representatives of 12 local governments, the beneficiaries of our project. The aim of the meetings was primarily to inform the non-governmental sector about the findings of the ELoGE process that local governments went through as part of the "LINK4Cooperation" project, and the challenges detected by the ELoGE.

Acquaintance with detected challenges is essential for the non-governmental sector in the context of designing and adapting project proposals and implementing activities aimed at improving the living conditions of the local population, with a special focus on underrepresented and vulnerable groups.



On this occasion, the project consortium representatives presented to CSOs from 12 local communities project activities, the informal "Network for Participatory Democracy" formed within the project, announcing the grant scheme and related public call for project proposal submission for the joint action of civil society organizations and local authorities .



Sub granting scheme for civil society organizations supported by the local governments

As one of the key activities of the third year of the project "LINK 4 Cooperation" is the development and implementation of the project sub granting scheme to support the project ideas of civil society organizations in cooperation with local governments. In this regard, at the end of January, a [public call was published for project proposals intended for the joint action of civil society organizations and local authorities](#) with clearly defined guidelines.



The sub granting scheme aimed to support civil society organizations in 12 municipalities/cities (Berkovići, Jablanica, Kostajnica, Maglaj, Mostar, Nevesinje, Novi Grad, Prijedor, Ravno, Trebinje, Zavidovići, Žepče) in jointly solving problems at the community level. The call was open exclusively to civil society organizations that are registered in accordance with the Law on Associations and Foundations of Bosnia and Herzegovina, the Law on Associations and Foundations of the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina, the Law on Associations and Foundations of the Republic of Srpska and who operate in the area of cities/municipalities: Berkovići, Jablanica, Kostajnica, Maglaj, Mostar, Nevesinje, Novi Grad, Prijedor, Ravno, Trebinje, Zavidovići and Žepče. .

CSOs from other cities/municipalities could have also applied, with the obligation to implement the project's activities on the territory of 12 mentioned cities/municipalities

It is important to emphasize that the sub granting scheme of the project is co-financed from the budget of the cities/municipalities covered by the project, and in this way the local governments gave a direct incentive to the implementation of activities for the benefit of their citizens.

Public Call Info Meetings

In a period from 13 - 16 February 2023, four informative meetings were held in connection with sub granting scheme and the Public call for the submission of project proposals of the civil society organizations from the territory of Bosnia and Herzegovina, which is implemented within the frame of the project "LINK4Cooperation".



Info meetings were held in Prijedor, Zavidovići, Trebinje and Mostar, where the Public Call was presented in detail, and representatives of CSOs had the opportunity to receive answers to all questions.

At the beginning of March, the answers to the questions raised by potential applicants during the info sessions, as well as those asked via the official email, were published via project web page.

The final ranking list of the Public Call for project proposals submission for joint actions of CSOs and LAs within "LINK 4 Cooperation" project

Upon closing of the Public Call, on March 16, the committee evaluation and scoring of all applications was carried out according to the administrative, general and qualitative criteria of the Public Call. Based on the evaluation of the received applications, a final ranking list of the applications selected for financing was made. Altogether 41 project proposals were received, and 22 projects of civil society organizations were approved, whose activities will later on be carried out on the territory of local communities covered by the project.



Representatives of 22 CSOs successfully completed the PCM training

Within the framework of the project "Strengthening local participation and cooperation through partnership of Public Authorities and CSOs in Bosnia and Herzegovina - LINK 4 Cooperation", financed by the European Union, training on project cycle management was conducted for the representatives of 22 civil society organizations, beneficiaries of grants of the grant scheme of the project. In the period from April 27-28, training was held in Kozarska Dubica for representatives of organizations from Prijedor, Novi Grad, Kostajnica, Zavidovići, Maglaj and Žepče, while in the period from 4-5 May the training was held in Mostar, for the representatives of organizations from Berković, Jablanica, Mostar, Ravno and Trebinje.



Both events began with a ceremony of signing contracts between the contracting authority and grantees, which will implement their project ideas in the next six months in cooperation with local authorities.

It is important to emphasize that the sub granting scheme of the project is co-financed from the budget of 12 cities/municipalities, "LINK4Cooperation" project beneficiaries, and in this way the local governments gave a direct incentive to the implementation of activities for the benefit of their citizens.



The goal of these trainings were to build the capacities and to strengthen networking of civil society organizations (CSOs), whose project ideas were rated as the **best** within the framework of the **Public Call** for Project Proposals for the allocation of grants intended for the joint action of CSOs and LAs.

The training program included identification of tools for the successful implementation of approved project activities and budgets, narrative and financial reporting, internal and external communication as well as the project visibility guidelines.



Implementation of the sub granted project's activities

Upon signing of the contract with grant beneficiaries, the implementation of numerous activities of 22 projects began on the territory of local communities involved in the "LINK 4 Cooperation" project.



The topics of the projects cover a wide range of actions focused on positive changes in local community, and concern the development of the capacity of target groups, with an emphasis on underrepresented groups, the development of the capacity of civil society organizations with the aim of raising the quality of life of the local community, creating and upgrading new contents, environmental protection, development of the sports activities, support of the development of local traditions, etc. All these activities are carried out in close cooperation and with the support of local governments.



Sub granting scheme activities presented to LAs

An activity, not foreseen by the project, but encouraged by the project consortium, was the arrangement of the series of meetings in local communities where granted projects are implemented. Meetings brought together representatives of local governments and representatives of CSOs, beneficiaries of grants as well as representatives of relevant departments and services of local governments. Thus, in June and early July, project consortium visited most of the cities and municipalities that are the beneficiaries of the “LINK 4 Cooperation” project.



The aim of this activity was to give the non-governmental sector the opportunity to present their projects and their activities to local government representatives, and in cooperation to find ways to connect activities with the needs of the local community.

In the long term, the intention of such meetings is to create opportunities for solving challenges in local communities even after the completion of project implementation, and additional networking of the non-governmental sector with local authorities in order to better coordinate work on issues of common interest.



Stories that shape our communities

One of the most important activities of the "LINK 4 Cooperation" project is the implementation of the sub granting scheme. The grants were awarded to the 22 best project proposals of civil society organizations and implemented in cooperation with the local governments.



When, in a segmented manner, those who directly benefited from these “small” projects are added up, the results reveal 205 women who brought changes to their communities and 232 students and young people who improved their skills or improved the quality of life for the residents of their communities.

The projects drew attention to marginalized groups in communities, so 36 people with intellectual disabilities got a new opportunity for active inclusion.



The sub granting scheme has activated 60 biologists who were involved in researches, 150 volunteers who are indispensable in such mini-projects, where much is done on a voluntary basis, 30 environmental actions were initiated, 100 cyclists drove the bicycle races to popularize this sport in a local community, two scientific-research camps were held, five public advocacy campaigns were launched and much more shown in substantial statistics that point to valuable work and enviable results.



[The European Union \(EU\)](#) financed 60% of the value of the sub granting scheme, while the rest was co-financed by local governments on whose territory the projects were implemented.

Find out more on the results of the sub granting scheme in the publication ["Stories that shape our communities"](#) as well as on the [project's website](#).

Overview of the projects implemented within the sub granting scheme "Cooperation" is captivated in video clips: [VIDEO 1](#) , [VIDEO 2](#) , [VIDEO 3](#) .

Local governments as the most important instances in providing services to the citizens must continuously build their capacities

A three-day training was held in Trebinje for the representatives of local governments from Bosnia and Herzegovina, beneficiaries of the "LINK 4 Cooperation" project.

The education was organized in the period from October 24-27, 2023, and its goal was, to educate representatives of local governments on participatory processes, which include, the active participation of citizens and CSOs in decision-making processes at the local level.

This education relies the process of self-assessment based on the 12 principles of good democratic governance according to the [ELoGE \(European Label of Governance Excellence\) of the Council of Europe](#), conducted in 12 cities/municipalities of Bosnia and Herzegovina, through which the specific problems faced by local governments were identified. The ELoGE process was later on followed by the [Leadership Academy Program \(LAP\)](#). This education was focused precisely on these problems so that the participants were given the knowledge and skills necessary to overcome them more easily.



The aim of the training was to present participative solutions for the problems of local governments, such as: development of ideas and solutions for economic development processes – including women and youth; common solutions for environmental challenges (waste management, waste facilities, recycling and circular economy); raising citizens' awareness of environmental issues and increasing their responsibility; solutions for critical neighborhoods with security issues and difficult integration of different communities; support for social integration and the inclusion of more vulnerable groups/groups of people (unemployed people aged 18 to 30, people with disabilities, etc.).



The importance of citizen participation

By continuing cooperation and strengthening the capacity of local governments and CSOs, along with the mandatory inclusion of citizens in decision-making processes, Bosnia and Herzegovina can make steady progress on its way to the EU. In the context of the abovementioned, an [animated video](#) was created explaining the process of citizens' participation in local communities in a simple way.



Smart benches as an innovative communication tools between citizens and LAs

In the period from 10 - 16 November 2023, 12 local authorities in Bosnia and Herzegovina received smart benches that form a unique online network or digital HUB and serve as a communication tool between local governments, CSOs and citizens. The smart benches, worth over **105.000 BAM** are procured within the "Strengthening local participation and cooperation through partnership of Public Authorities and CSOs in Bosnia and Herzegovina – LINK 4 Cooperation" project, financed by the European Union.



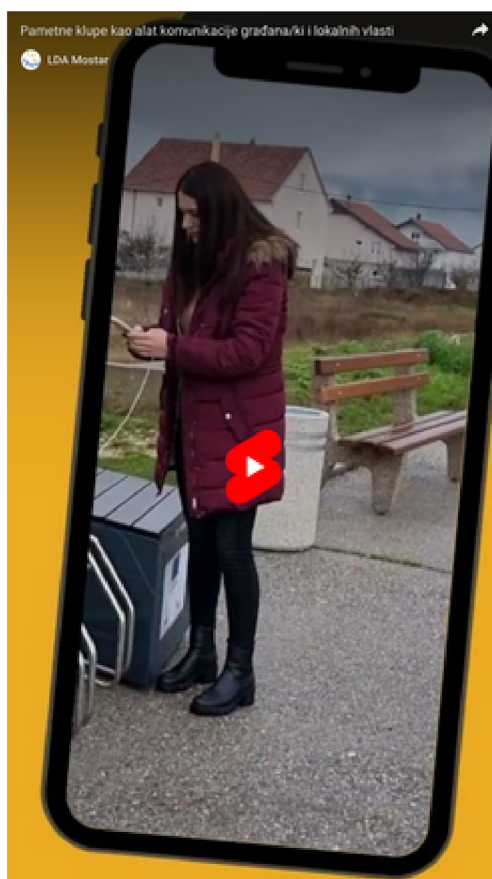
In cooperation with local authorities, a total of 12 smart benches were installed and are now available to citizens of Berkovići, Jablanica, Kostajnica, Maglaj, Mostar, Nevesinje, Novi Grad, Prijedor, Ravno, Trebinje, Zavidovići and Žepče.



E-participation and digital democratization is made possible through software integrated into smart benches, and it gives citizens the opportunity to express their opinions on issues related to their local community. The collected data will be presented to the local governments, project beneficiaries, for the purpose of concrete actions of participatory democracy. This approach means faster and more direct communication between citizens and local authorities, in just a few clicks.

In addition to this valuable communication tool, smart benches are equipped with free Wi-Fi connection, the possibility of charging mobile devices and electric scooters, as well as parking spaces for bicycles and electric scooters.

VIDEO - SMART BENCHES AS THE COMMUNICATION TOOL



Strengthening the capacity of local communities on the Bosnia and Herzegovina way to the European Union

Final Conference “Local authorities and citizens together for better communities”, taking place in Sarajevo, on December 8th, marked the last activity of the three year long “LINK 4 Cooperation” project, financed by the European Union.



The Conference gathered over 80 participants, representatives of local authorities and CSOs from 22 local communities of BiH, as well as representatives of donors, relevant state institutions, NGOs and the international community, with the aim of pointing out the importance of building and strengthening the capacities of local authorities and CSOs as of the main partners in the construction of participatory democratic processes.



The central event of the conference was the awarding of the Council of Europe's European Label of Governance Excellence (ELoGE) to local government that successfully completed the ELoGE program, based on the self-assessment of local governments in relation to the 12 principles of good democratic governance. Out of a total of 12 local governments that participated in the ELoGE process, the Municipality of Jablanica, the City of Prijedor and the Municipality of Žepče received this prestigious designation.

The publication "["ELoGE in Bosnia and Herzegovina - Results and Recommendations"](#)" was published and disseminated providing a detailed cross-section of the ELoGE process, implemented for the first time in Bosnia and Herzegovina through the "LINK 4 Cooperation" project, based on the self-assessment of the local governments covered project.



Project Newsletter No 5

In July, 2023, the [fifth](#) Newsletter of the "LINK 4 Cooperation" project was created, disseminated and promoted, which provides an overview of the activities implemented in the first half of 2023 with a special focus on the sub granting scheme. The Newsletter is also created, disseminated and promoted in [English](#).



Local Initiatives

The "LINK 4 Cooperation" project provides the promotion of successful initiatives which originated from civil society organizations or informal groups, that have brought progress in the field of good governance in local communities. If you have already implemented or intend to implement an initiative of this type through your work, submit your initiative by filling out a simple [online form](#), and you will thus get space for promotion through the official project web platform and social networks.



Participatory Democracy Network

Within the framework of the project, the informal **Participatory Democracy Network** was established gathering 12 local governments included in the project as well as the civil society organizations registered on the territory of these 12 local communities. The goal of the Network is the exchange of experiences, networking and the establishment of closer cooperation between CSOs and local authorities.

All interested CSOs are welcomed to join the Network by filling a simple [online form](#).



Participatory Democracy Network

Regular communication and dissemination, as well as targeted promotion of project activities, is carried out in accordance with the adopted communication strategy and communication plans of the project, and is implemented through the [project's official website](#) and online tools, [FB page](#) and [Instagram profile](#).

Information related to the implementation of the project activities is delivered to the general public in the form of press conferences, press statements, press releases or media invitations, and are generally well promoted through traditional and new media within the borders of Bosnia and Herzegovina. In addition to the regular dissemination of information, in 2023 targeted promotional campaigns on social networks were carried out, which aimed to increase the visibility of the project and project activities.

For example, the FB page of the project with **760** followers recorded at the end of 2022 gained a total number of **1.050** followers at the end of 2023, with the comparison of the page visits from 2.176 (228.7%) at the end of 2022 to **8.680** (298.9%) at the end of 2023. The number of followers of the Instagram profile increased from **116** followers at the end of 2022, to **171** followers at the end of 2023.



More information on the "LINK 4 Cooperation" project and its activities are available at www.link4cooperation.ba, [FB page](#) and [Instagram profile](#) or contact us by e-mail: info@link4cooperation.ba.

"LINK 4 Cooperation" project aims to strengthen the capacity of local authorities and civil society organizations in conducting participatory processes in order to jointly identify specific problems of communities and, thanks to a participatory approach, find the best solutions.

Implementation began on **January 1, 2021** and will last until **December 31, 2023**. Project value is over **540,000 euros**, of which the [European Union](#) provided over **490,000 euros** in grants.

The project consortium consists of the [Local Democracy Agency \(LDA\) Mostar](#), the [Local Democracy Agency \(LDA\) Zavidovići](#), the [Local Democracy Agency \(LDA\) Prijedor](#), the [Center for the Development of Herzegovina \(CRH\) Trebinje](#), the [European Association for Local Democracy \(ALDA\)](#), and associate partner [ALDA Skopje](#).



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