

Building Resilient Communities Together

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In Serbia and across the Western Balkans, Arbeiter Samariter Bund has grown from delivering emergency relief to becoming a long-term partner for social inclusion, housing, and resilience. With EU and German support, ASB continues to bridge urgent needs with sustainable development



which areas do you plan to prioritise in the coming years?

— Since 1992, ASB South East Europe (ASB SEE) has implemented nearly 400 projects across seven countries of the Western Balkans, standing alongside those in need – rebuilding homes, providing economic opportunities, and enabling families to reintegrate or return to their places of origin with dignity. Since 1999, ASB SEE has grown from providing emergency relief to becoming a long-term partner in Serbia's and the region's transition, implementing projects worth nearly €200 million with funds from the European Union, the German Government, ADH and private donations. In Serbia, around 80,000 people have been assisted in 80 municipalities through more than 50 projects. ASB in Serbia has focused on providing durable housing solutions for vulnerable groups and refugees, both by supporting their integration in Serbia and their return to their places of origin. To date, through measures aimed at

economic sustainability, ASB has reconstructed or built nearly 1,200 houses and supported more than 600 families through business start-up programmes.

Today, our role is to bridge urgent needs and sustainable development – linking local communities with institutions, civil society with donors, and humanitarian responses with long-term solutions. In the coming years, our focus will remain on strengthening social protection and inclusion, empowering vulnerable groups through housing, training and livelihoods, and building the capacity of local communities to deliver resilient services. We will also prioritise advocacy, partnerships and policy dialogue, ensuring our work reflects local realities while contributing to Serbia's broader EU integration path.

The United Against Domestic Violence project in the Western Balkans, funded by the German Federal Foreign Office, illustrates how cooperation between ASB

SEE and the German Government can concretely improve social services at the local level. How do you assess the impact of such projects – and are there plans to expand or replicate similar initiatives in other municipalities or regions?

— This project shows how targeted cooperation can bring real change. It has strengthened coordination between local governments, social workers and health providers, improved living conditions and services in 11 shelters across the Western Balkans, and raised awareness at the community level. The results are clear: more effective local responses, stronger institutions, and safer living spaces for victims of domestic violence. At the same time, it created a unified regional network of social workers committed to improving shelter accessibility, enhancing caregiver support, and promoting preventive measures against domestic violence.

A highlight was the regional conference in Skopje, which brought together practitioners, policymakers and civil society from across the Western Balkans. It showcased successful approaches, encouraged dialogue, and laid the foundation for stronger regional collaboration.

We are aware that efforts to combat domestic violence and femicide still require legal reforms, better data collection and stronger institutional frameworks. Yet, this project has set a milestone and created space for future regional initiatives. Building on this foundation, ASB SEE plans to extend similar models to additional municipalities in the Western

Balkans, while integrating digital tools, rural outreach and policy advocacy to ensure sustainable impact.

The ASB SEE initiative Social Dimension Initiative promotes regional cooperation in employment, social protection and the inclusion of people with disabilities. What have been the main obstacles to establishing effective coordination between local authorities, donors and civil society – and what, in your opinion, could help to overcome these barriers?

— The obstacles are well known: fragmented institutional mandates, inconsistent do-

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nor priorities, limited administrative capacity and persistent stigma around disability and marginalisation. Overcoming them requires multi-stakeholder platforms at municipal and regional levels, stronger alignment between national strategies and donor agendas, and longer-term funding frameworks. Equally important is the role of the EU in investing in local capacities for inclusive planning and data systems, while promoting awareness that inclusion is not a cost but an investment in social and economic resilience.

With growing migration, demographic challenges and shifts in the labour market across the Western Balkans, how does ASB SEE – with the support of the German Government – plan to contribute not only to emergency responses, but also to the long-term resilience of local communities, through education, digital skills, inclusive policies and strengthened social cohesion?

— Emergencies will always require rapid action, but resilience is built in advance. Over the past decades, ASB has provided essential supplies such as food, medicine, clothing and blankets during earthquakes in Serbia and

Albania, as well as during floods in Serbia and Bosnia and Herzegovina. ASB has also delivered emergency equipment and established shelters for displaced people. This capacity to act with urgency and compassion has been recognised by donors, making ASB a reliable implementing partner in the Western Balkans for more than 30 years.

However, resilience must extend beyond crisis response, and it can only happen if governments and local administrations are fully engaged – uniting our efforts, creating synergy and ensuring that local systems are prepared to sustain change. That is why ASB SEE works closely with public institutions to reinforce their role as the backbone of sustainable development. Together with the German Government, ASB SEE is committed to preparing people and systems for the future. This means expanding vocational and digital training, ensuring inclusive access to education and social protection, and supporting policies that leave no one behind. It also means fostering social cohesion by building trust between migrants, returnees and host communities. By strengthening municipal services, investing in preparedness and promoting regional cooperation, we help local communities face demographic and labour market changes with confidence, dignity and long-term resilience. ●

