



FROM CHALKBOARDS TO CHANGE-MAKERS: EMPOWERING YOUTH AND TEACHERS WITH SERVICE-LEARNING ADVENTURES IN NORTH MACEDONIA!

LEADERS FOR EDUCATION, ACTIVISM AND DEVELOPMENT (LEAD)

Through the LEADing Forward project, supported by the SMART Balkans programme, LEAD is transforming how education connects with civic engagement in North Macedonia. The project empowers teachers and students to turn classroom knowledge into practical community action, advancing inclusion, sustainability, and democratic participation across the country.

High school students in North Macedonia often leave the classroom equipped with theory but without opportunities to apply it in real-life contexts. Teachers face limited access to innovative professional development tools, and schools lack structured programmes linking education with community service. This gap leaves young people underprepared for civic life and communities without the benefits of youth creativity and problem-solving.

With the support of the SMART Balkans programme, the LEADing Forward project bridged this divide, creating pathways for students to learn through service and for teachers to guide them as mentors and changemakers. LEAD introduced Service-Learning, an innovative teaching method that connects academic learning with meaningful community action. Through the project, LEAD:

DISCOVER OUR IMPACT:
<https://smartbalkansproject.org>



- Expanded its Teacher Club programme, providing structured professional development for teachers and school directors;
- Introduced Service-Learning programmes in secondary schools, linking education with civic responsibility;
- Strengthened institutional sustainability through marketing, digital innovation, and financial diversification;
- Integrated AI tools to improve project design, communication, and fundraising efficiency.

Each participating student team received interactive training in project management, mentorship from trained teachers, and financial support to implement local initiatives addressing real community needs.

Following a national call, 10 high school teams were selected based on creativity, feasibility, and community impact. Their projects showcased how education can drive inclusion, solidarity, and environmental awareness across North Macedonia.

Teams and Their Impactful Projects

- Team Inkluzivci – “Kosta Susinov” Secondary School, Radovich
 - Project: “Theatre of Equality” – Promoted equality and inclusion through theater.
- Team Gerio Help – “Gjorce Petrov” Secondary School, Prilep
 - Project: “OLD but GOLD” – Supported seniors with workshops and companionship.
- Team GAJA – American High School, Skopje
 - Project: “First-Graders for Better Habits” – Encouraged healthy habits in young children.
- Team Zero Waste Heroes – State Vocational School “Vancho Pitosheski”, Ohrid
 - Project: “Zero-Waste Food for All” – Minimized food waste through community cooking events.
- Team Ednakvi (Equal) – “Vlado Tasevski” High School, Skopje
 - Project: “Equal in Learning” – Provided tutoring for students with disabilities.
- Team Wise Coins – “Arseni Jovkov” Secondary School, Skopje
 - Project: “Smart Money for Youth” – Offered financial literacy workshops for youth.
- Team CodExceed – “Gošo Vikentiev” High School, Kočani
 - Project: “Digital Inclusion” – Enhanced communication for a local club for people with disabilities.
- Team Young Gastro-Visionaries – “Mitko Pendžukliski” High School, Kratovo
 - Project: “Cooking without Barriers” – Held a cooking event with individuals with disabilities.
- Team Audio Inclusion – “Rade Jovčevski Korčagin” High School, Skopje
 - Project: “Audio Lessons for All” – Created audio materials for visually impaired students.
- Team Multiverzum– Gymnasium “Goce Delčev”, Kumanovo
 - Project: “Jewelry with a Cause” – Sold handmade jewelry to fundraise for children with rare diseases.

LEAD AT A GLANCE

- **189** teachers engaged in professional development through the Teacher Club—an **80%** growth
- **5** schools have already completed their Service-Learning projects, with five more on track for completion by December 2025
- **318** direct beneficiaries: students, teachers, and community members
- **35** trainings and workshops held across North Macedonia
- **100%** increase in LEAD's financial sustainability through diversified income

All tools integrated into operations for improved efficiency and innovation.

These outcomes demonstrate a shift from theory to practice, where students learn social responsibility by doing, teachers gain tools to lead innovation, and schools become engines of community development.

“Each project was an example of how knowledge can be transformed into concrete action with visible results. Both students and community members gained valuable skills and new perspectives.” - Vesna Trajkova Gikovska, Teacher and Mentor from ‘Arseni Jovkov’ school.



Beneficiaries shared:

“I REALISED HOW MUCH I COULD CONTRIBUTE TO MY COMMUNITY WITH THE KNOWLEDGE I HAVE. THROUGH TEAMWORK, WE TURNED OUR IDEAS INTO REAL CHANGE AND FELT THE HAPPINESS OF THOSE WE HELPED.”

HIGH-SCHOOL STUDENT,
SERVICE-LEARNING
PARTICIPANT



The project also strengthened LEAD as an organisation. With SMART Balkans' support, LEAD:

- Developed and implemented a marketing and communication strategy, expanding its outreach by 20%;
- Doubled its financial returns from the Teacher Club, ensuring long-term sustainability;
- Enhanced staff capacity in marketing, outreach, and AI-assisted project planning;
- Fostered a culture of innovation and digital transformation across its programmes.

“The topics are current, practical, and tailored to the real needs of teachers. Each training provides tools that can be applied immediately in classrooms and communities.” - Teacher, LEAD Teacher Club Member.

By linking education with civic engagement, the LEADing Forward project contributes directly to the SMART Balkans objective of building democratic, accountable, and resilient civil societies in the Western Balkans. The initiative nurtures active citizenship among youth, strengthens the professionalism of educators, and promotes values of equality, participation, and transparency, essential pillars of democratic governance.

Building on these achievements, LEAD plans to:

- Expand the Teacher Club nationwide and train additional mentors;
- Develop new learning modules for teachers and school directors;
- Scale up Service-Learning projects to more schools;
- Deepen the use of AI tools for efficient project management and communication.

These steps will further connect education with social progress, ensuring that young people and teachers remain active contributors to their communities' development.

“Through the support of SMART Balkans, we have built a stronger organisation that empowers teachers and youth to create change in their communities. Our journey proves that when educators and students work together, learning becomes service, and service becomes leadership.” - Ivan Jovanov, Executive Director, LEAD.