

# OUR WORK IN 2025

This overview of the Balkan Forum's (The BF) activities in 2025 reflects a year marked by deepened regional engagement, strengthened partnerships, and sustained advocacy across the Western Balkans and Europe. Throughout the year, The BF continued to design and implement impactful projects, convene policy and civil society dialogues, and support initiatives that advance **democratic governance, youth empowerment, sustainability, and regional cooperation**.

Our work in 2025 reaffirmed our commitment to **supporting civil society organizations** and fostering **cross-border collaboration**, while amplifying voices from the region in broader European discussions. These efforts were made possible through the continued support of our partners and donors, including our main donor the **Rockefeller Brothers Fund (RBF)**, alongside other institutional supporters who share our vision for an inclusive, resilient, and forward-looking Western Balkans.

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# Youth Empowerment

## Fast Forward

Launched in March 2024, the **Fast Forward** project, led by Build Green Group and implemented by a consortium of five organizations across the Western Balkans and Spain, fostered youth-led sustainability and environmental protection. Through youth exchanges, workshops, and training sessions, the initiative equipped young people with the tools and skills to drive positive environmental change.

### Youth Exchanges

#### Youth Exchange in Peja, Kosovo

The Youth Exchange in Peja, Kosovo, from 3 to 7 February 2025, **organized and implemented by The Balkan Forum**, engaged 30 young people from the Western Balkans and Spain in strengthening their understanding of climate change and environmental governance. Participants enhanced critical thinking, cross-border cooperation, and policy awareness, gaining skills to articulate climate concerns and engage in sustainability initiatives within their communities.

#### Youth Exchange in Durrës, Albania

Fast Forward Youth Exchange 4 that took place in **Durrës, Albania** during the dates 24 to 28 February, equipped young participants with practical knowledge of **climate policy, advocacy, and youth-led action**. Through applied learning and group work, participants strengthened their ability to translate international frameworks such as the Paris Agreement and the SDGs into concrete advocacy and community-based initiatives.



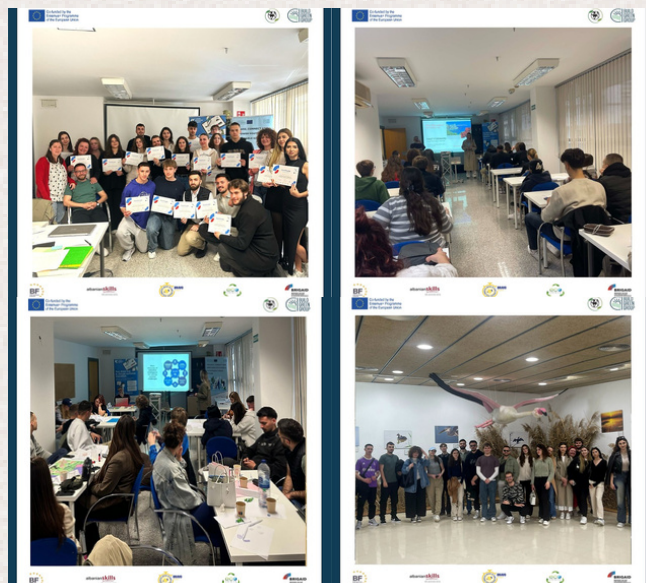


# Regional Cooperation

## Youth Exchanges

### Youth Exchange in Alicante, Spain

The final Youth Exchange of the Fast Forward project in **Alicante, Spain**, focused on transforming climate awareness into practical outcomes. Participants developed skills in **project design, stakeholder engagement, and digital innovation**, producing concrete project ideas and strengthening their readiness for cross-border collaboration in sustainable development.



### The Fast Forward International Conference

Held on 22–23 April 2025 in Pristina, Kosovo, the project's final regional event brought together over 50 participants from the Western Balkans **under the coordination and leadership of The Balkan Forum**. The conference provided a platform to reflect on project achievements and advance dialogue on sustainability, climate policy, and youth empowerment.

Through its role in designing and delivering the conference, The Balkan Forum convened representatives from six partner organizations, alongside youth beneficiaries, policymakers, academics, and experts, who engaged in cross-border exchange and shared lessons from youth exchanges and capacity-building activities. **Three thematic panels** addressed environmental protection, climate change education, and youth engagement, while youth participants highlighted gains in leadership, confidence, and advocacy skills.

As part of the Forum's facilitation of the event, a closed partner meeting finalized three policy recommendations on climate change education for youth, dual systems and work-based learning, and the internationalization of climate education. The conference reached over **1,500 online viewers** through livestreaming and received coverage from Ekonomia Online, KosovaPress, and RTV21, reinforcing the project's impact and establishing a strong foundation for continued regional cooperation.



To explore more updates and project highlights, visit The Balkan Forum's website [here](#).



# Sustainability – Advocacy

## Eco Champions

The **Eco Champions** project represents a collaborative effort to tackle one of the most pressing challenges of our time—sustainable waste management within the framework of the EU Green Deal. This dynamic initiative is designed to actively engage citizens and communities in discussions and activities centered on **sustainable waste management policies at both EU and regional levels**. This project aims to foster democratic participation in policy-making processes, encourage civic responsibility, and instill a sense of pride across local and regional landscapes.

## Eco Festival within Prishtina Sustainable Design Week

The Eco Festival, the flagship activity of the **Eco Champions project**, was organized and implemented by **The Balkan Forum, in collaboration with DYVO Lab**, within **Prishtina Sustainable Design Week** (29 September–3 October). The festival brought together sustainability, creativity, and innovation through a diverse program of conferences, workshops, challenges, and interactive activities.

Throughout the week, the event engaged **over 400 participants** from different generations and sectors, including professionals, NGOs, students, and community members, encouraging broad civic participation and creative collaboration. The Eco Festival also received strong national and local media coverage, with interviews across major outlets such as KTV, RTK, Koha Ditore, Klan Kosova, and RTV Dukagjini, reflecting growing public interest in environmental issues and sustainable initiatives.





## Opening Night – “Spaces of Possibility”

Prishtina Sustainable Design Week opened on 29 September at Kino Armata with the Eco Festival, marking the start of a week dedicated to sustainability and collaboration. The opening ceremony brought together institutional representatives, including the Mayor of Prishtina, Përparim Rama, alongside representatives of the French, Luxembourg, and Italian Embassies, partners, and participants.

The opening panel, **“Spaces of Possibility: How Creative Commons Transform Cities and Regenerate Futures,”** explored how creativity, community engagement, and cross-border collaboration can drive sustainable urban transformation and strengthen regional cooperation in the Western Balkans.



## Creativity as an Act of Repair

The second evening featured powerful presentations and in-depth discussions around **Creativity as an Act of Repair**, where panelists shared innovative sustainable methods and practices that link design with environmental responsibility.



## Art as an Act of Transformation

On the third night, conversations focused on **Art as an Act of Transformation**, emphasizing how art is not merely about aesthetics but a vital form of resistance, expression, and understanding. It was an evening that reminded everyone of art's transformative role in shaping the way we see and interpret the world around us.





# Citizen Engagement

## Fashion as an Act of Suture

The fourth day concluded with a discussion and the final conference of the edition under the theme **“Fashion as an Act of Suture.”** This session highlighted fashion’s often-overlooked connection to sustainability and celebrated the role of women leading environmental and social change through responsible practices and the empowerment of marginalized groups.



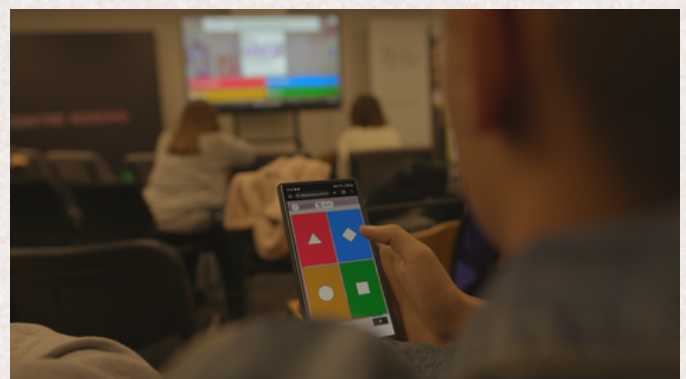
## Waste Management Challenge – A Call to Action

On October 1, attention turned to one of the most pressing local challenges, waste management, as **The Balkan Forum steered a community-focused initiative** addressing this issue. The day began with an open discussion with the Directorate of Public Services, followed by a symbolic city action marking where bins are missing and highlighting existing ones with the public call: **“When will we start recycling?”** The event brought together a diverse group of participants, including young people, seniors, and even a grandmother, reflecting a wide range of community voices united in addressing Prishtina’s waste management challenge. This initiative aimed to **spark dialogue, raise awareness, and encourage collective action** toward a cleaner and more sustainable Prishtina.



## Interactive Eco Quiz

The festival concluded on 3 October with an **Interactive Eco Quiz**, developed by The Balkan Forum in collaboration with DYVO Lab, engaging participants of all ages in **sustainability, design, and environmental awareness** through learning and friendly competition, with symbolic prizes awarded to the top individuals .



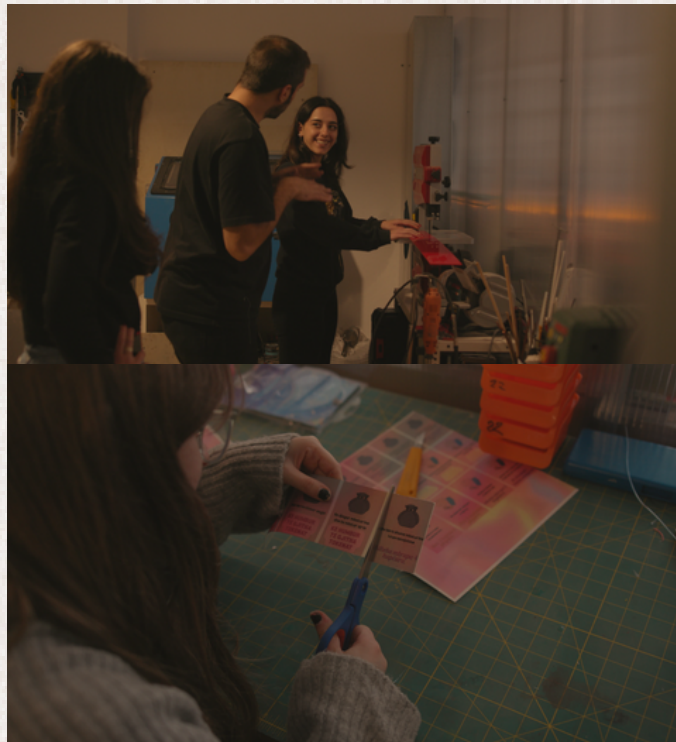


# Capacity Building

## Upcycling Workshops

Throughout the week, the **Upcycling Workshops** at the Prishtina Sustainable Design Week turned waste into creativity and new possibilities. For four days, participants transformed discarded materials into innovative and sustainable designs, proving that with imagination and purpose, even waste can find new life.

The festival concluded with an inspiring exhibition showcasing the creations produced during the workshop, symbolizing the power of collaboration and creative sustainability.



## Open Online Workshop

The project consortium organized the **Open Online Workshop** on the Needs of Waste Management on 3–4 April 2025, bringing together 159 participants from **Belgium, Kosovo, Italy, Greece, and Spain**.

The workshop enabled the exchange of good practices, identified key challenges and educational gaps in household and public waste management, and supported the development of more inclusive, community-based approaches to sustainable practices.

## Facilitators Workshop

In May 2025, facilitators from the partner countries gathered online for the **Facilitators Online Workshop for Active Citizens' Engagement**.

The workshop aimed to strengthen the capacity of community leaders to design and implement inclusive **ECO-CHALLENGES**, engaging citizens from all walks of life — particularly those often underrepresented in community initiatives, such as older adults, women, people with disabilities, and residents of rural areas. Total participants: 153 (94 women, 59 men).





# Education & Upskilling

## GREENBRIDGE

Is a regional initiative aimed at strengthening **Vocational Education and Training (VET)** systems in the Western Balkans by equipping providers with green and digital skills aligned with labor market needs. Contributing directly to the **European Green Deal**, the project addresses skills gaps by supporting modern training approaches, institutional capacity building, and closer alignment between vocational education and evolving economic demands. The project officially launched on 23–24 January 2025 with a kickoff meeting in Sofia, Bulgaria, hosted by **Cleantech Bulgaria**. The meeting brought together partners **from Bulgaria, Malta, Bosnia and Herzegovina, and Kosovo** to establish the project's strategic direction, coordination framework, and next implementation steps.

## Multiplier Events and Policy Dialogue in Prishtina

On 26–27 June 2025, The Balkan Forum hosted **GreenBridge Multiplier Event** in Prishtina, strengthening regional dialogue on green and digital skills in VET education. An internal partners' meeting reviewed project progress and refined preliminary findings from the **Needs Analysis Study**, ensuring alignment on upcoming deliverables.

The public component included a press conference and roundtable discussion bringing together policymakers, VET institutions, economic chambers, business representatives, civil society, and youth. Discussions focused on identified **skills gaps, employer needs, and systemic challenges** facing VET providers in addressing climate and digital transitions.





# Sustainability

In July, The Balkan Forum successfully completed and submitted the **GreenBridge Needs Analysis**, a key project deliverable assessing green and digital skills within Vocational Education and Training (VET) systems across the Western Balkans. The study identified critical gaps in curricula, infrastructure, and institutional cooperation, while providing actionable recommendations to better align vocational education with the European Union's green transition objectives and labor market needs.



## UNIGreen

The **UNIGreen project**, funded under the Erasmus+ Capacity Building in Higher Education programme, officially begins this month, launching a regional effort to embed sustainability across higher education institutions in the Western Balkans and the EU.

The project will strengthen sustainability in higher education through improved managerial and administrative practices, the development of three academic courses and three MOOCs, and the creation of a practical handbook supporting sustainable initiatives and green job opportunities. UNIGreen will also establish a network of academic and non-academic sustainability agents to better connect universities with the labor market and society.

The consortium brings together eight academic and non-academic partners, led by AAB College, including higher education institutions and civil society organizations from **Kosovo, Albania, Greece, and Poland**. The project will officially launch with a three-day kick-off meeting on 17–19 December 2025 at AAB College, marking the start of coordinated implementation.





# Regional Cooperation – The Social Dimension within EU Growth Plan

In September 2025, within the framework of the **Pact for Growth project**, a regional capacity-building training was held from 9–12 September in Ohrid, bringing together 14 participants from **Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro, Serbia, Albania, Kosovo, and North Macedonia**. The training addressed identified capacity gaps among partner organizations and focused on key social and economic priorities, including labor rights, EU instruments and funding opportunities, education and skills development, youth employment, brain drain, and cross-sector partnerships between civil society, public institutions, and the business sector.

Through comparative discussions and the exchange of national perspectives, participants identified three shared regional priorities: strengthening labor inspectorates, addressing brain drain, and improving labor union representation. The interactive format fostered cooperation and generated ideas for follow-up initiatives, while participant evaluations confirmed high satisfaction with the content, facilitation, and overall organization.

The initiative concluded with a four-day **regional meeting** held from 7–11 November 2025 in Tetovo and Skopje, focused on the **Social Dimension of the EU Pact for Growth**. Partners reviewed project activities, engaged in policy discussions, and conducted institutional visits, including meetings with the Ministry of European Affairs and the European Policy Institute, to examine EU accession reforms and the role of civil society.

The central outcome of the meeting was the finalization and signing of the Tetovo Declaration, a joint commitment by regional partners emphasizing social inclusion and equality within the EU integration process. Partners also agreed on a concept note for scaling up future cooperation, establishing a shared roadmap to advance the social dimension of the EU Growth Plan across the Western Balkans. Overall, the initiative strengthened regional partnerships, aligned collective priorities, and reinforced a unified regional voice on social cohesion in the EU accession process.





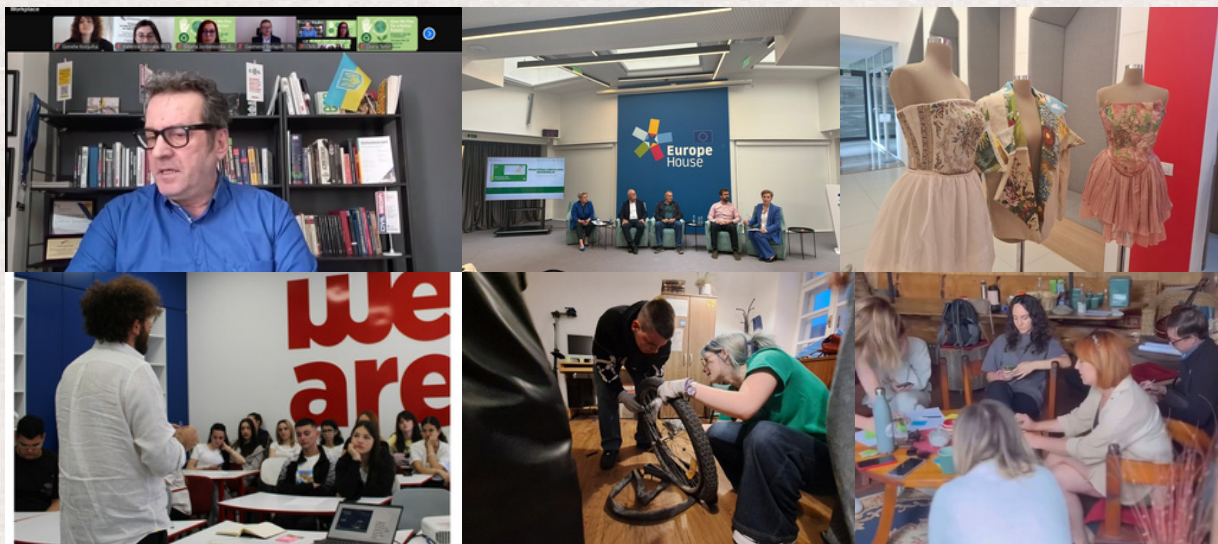
# CEW 2025

From 26 May to 1 June 2025, the **LogEx Community** partners marked the fourth edition of Circular Economy Week (CEW 2025), **led and coordinated by The Balkan Forum** as a regional initiative promoting circular economy in the Western Balkans. Implemented under the theme “**From Local Fixes to Regional Impact**,” the campaign engaged youth, entrepreneurs, educators, civil society, and policymakers through partner-led actions in multiple countries.

Across the region, partners delivered workshops, trainings, exhibitions, policy discussions, and community actions addressing circular economy principles in practice.

- **CIVIL** led a weeklong campaign focused on the 5Rs of circular economy, publishing educational articles, drafting policy recommendations, hosting a virtual stakeholder event, and serving as a regional media hub for CEW content.
- **CENER21** organized a circular economy workshop in Sarajevo, bringing together SMEs, academia, policymakers, and donors, and launched a Compendium of Best Practices highlighting successful circular business models.
- **Universum International College** hosted a Circular Design Exhibition and Community Swap Fair, showcasing over 20 student-led projects and enabling the reuse of more than 300 items, strengthening collaboration between academia, eco-businesses, and NGOs.
- **Build Green Group** delivered training on sustainable tourism and circularity for vocational students in Tirana, resulting in three student-developed project ideas focused on **sustainable travel and fashion**.
- COD Jajce implemented youth workshops on upcycling and bicycle repair, published educational content, and organized a Green Economy Promotion Fair highlighting women-led green businesses and local entrepreneurship.
- **Zero Waste Montenegro** hosted a three-day eco-camp for young activists, combining capacity building on waste management, advocacy, and movement building, and contributing to dialogue around Montenegro’s State Waste Management Plan.

Through decentralized yet coordinated actions under the leadership of The Balkan Forum, **CEW 2025** demonstrated how local initiatives can drive regional impact, reinforcing circular economy principles, community engagement, and cross-border cooperation throughout the Western Balkans.





# Regional Blogs

Human Rights Die in Silence



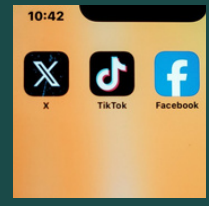
Education and Skills Gap



Peace arises yet it takes time



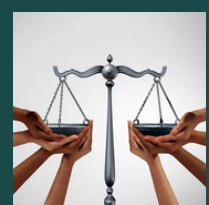
The impact of Network X on spreading intolerance, hatred, and polarization in the Western Balkan societies



DANGEROUS POWER GAMES IN THE BALKANS: Nationalism, Hegemonism, and Russian Ties



From Hope to Despair: The Struggle for Justice in Bosnia and Herzegovina



Matrescence and butterflies...



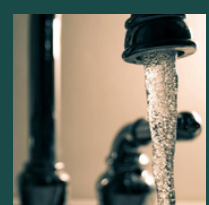
The (not so) silent war: Russia's hybrid warfare operations and the threats to Western democracy



How Colonialism Shaped Racial Discrimination and What Is Our Role in It Today?



World Water Day



Zero Waste in Climate-Resilient Development of the Western Balkans



World Health Day – Reality Check Day



New alliances in a divided region: Confronting the Kremlin's aggression and the Balkans' old ghosts



Air for Me – Ashes for You





# Regional Blogs

[From Local Fixes to Regional Impact: Circular Economy Week 2025 in the Western Balkans](#)



[Green Agenda and Circular Economy](#)



[Born to dream, not to Labor: Every child deserves a childhood](#)



[From Illusion to Implementation: Confronting Failures and Charting a Circular Future for the Western Balkans](#)



[Building leaders for Tomorrow](#)



[Eco Festival – Prishtina Sustainable Design Week 2025: Where Sustainability Meets Creativity](#)



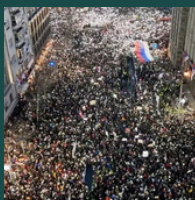
[Western Balkans 2025: A Rollercoaster Ride Toward the European Union](#)



[North Macedonia's 2025 Local Elections: Political Victory Regardless of Civic Concerns](#)



[Serbia's Year of Protest: A Movement that Will Not Die](#)



[An Unusual Cause of Fear: A Solitary Street Event in Podgorica, Montenegro](#)



**Towards 2030** is a regional storytelling and analysis initiative initiated and coordinated by The Balkan Forum, amplifying voices from **Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo, Montenegro, North Macedonia, and Serbia**, and connecting Western Balkan perspectives with global debates.

The initiative addressed key themes including security, sustainability, democracy, human rights, innovation, climate change, and social progress, offering context-driven insights rooted in local realities. By linking **regional experiences with global moments**, the platform strengthened cross-border dialogue and positioned Western Balkan narratives within **broader international conversations**.

More than a publication series, Towards 2030 functioned as a platform for regional exchange and public reflection, enabling diverse voices to contribute to discussions shaping the future of the region and its role in global developments.





## Awareness Raising - Media

Behare Bajraktari – Journalist,  
founder of Green Journalism



“Greening  
the WB”

Hatixhe Zeka – Executive  
Director at TOKA



“Bold  
Balkan  
Women”

Brikena Avdyli – Advocate for  
gender equality and inclusion



“Bold  
Balkan  
Women”

Nikki Murseli – DYVO & DYVO  
Lab



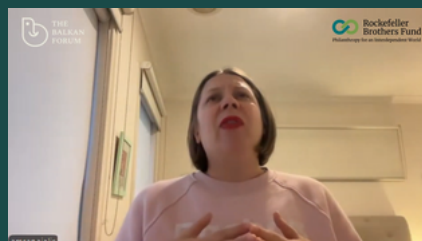
“Bold  
Balkan  
Women”

Shqipe Neziri-Vela – Co-founder of  
Kosovo Women in Energy and Mining



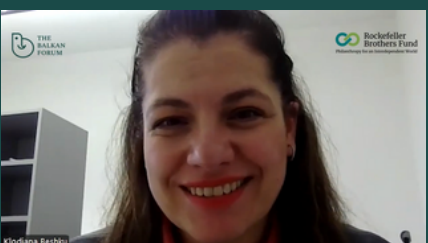
“Bold  
Balkan  
Women”

Amra Pajalić – Author, educator



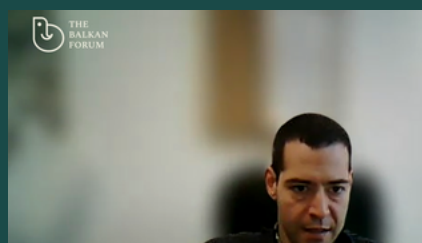
“Bold  
Balkan  
Women”

Klodiana Beshku – Associate Professor of  
Geopolitics & European Integration



“Balkans  
and  
Beyond”

Stefan Ristovski - Researcher at  
European policy Institute



“Balkans  
and  
Beyond”



# New partnerships

## Pristina Innovate Healthcare Hackathon

From 4 to 6 April, The Balkan Forum participated in the **Pristina Innovate Healthcare Hackathon**, hosted by ICR LAB, an event that brought together innovators, researchers, and young professionals to address **key health-related challenges in Kosovo** and the region.

As a challenge owner, The Balkan Forum introduced the **Air Guard challenge**, which focused on developing innovative, technology-based solutions to address air pollution, a major environmental and public health issue. Participants explored approaches at the intersection of health, environment, and technology, proposing solutions aimed at improving air quality monitoring, awareness, and prevention.

Throughout the three-day hackathon, teams worked intensively to refine their ideas and present practical concepts with potential for real-world application. The engagement of young innovators highlighted the role of collaboration and **youth-driven innovation** in responding to complex societal challenges. The Balkan Forum's participation in the hackathon underscored its ongoing commitment to supporting initiatives that link environmental sustainability, public health, and innovation.





# New partnerships

## Kosovarness Through Cinema

The panel discussion “**Kosovo Has Many Stories to Tell: Cultural Narratives as Self-Representation,**” hosted by The Balkan Forum, was held on 10 June and brought together artists, cultural practitioners, and researchers to examine **Kosovo’s cultural identity** and the role of the arts in self-representation, diplomacy, and social change.

The event was inspired by a policy paper co-authored by Jeta Abazi Gashi and Juan Manuel Montoro, which explores the concept of “**Kosovarness**” through cinema, language, and storytelling as key instruments for shaping national narratives and increasing international visibility.

Through perspectives drawn from film, documentary, writing, and acting, panelists Eroll Bilibani, Kaltrina Krasniqi, Lum Çitaku, Azem Deliu, and Armend Smajli discussed how artistic expression serves as a powerful form of cultural narration and public engagement, challenging dominant narratives and contributing to Kosovo’s cultural presence abroad.

The discussion concluded with reflections by Juan Manuel Montoro on culture as soft power and the importance of closer interaction between scholars, artists, and the public in fostering inclusive and authentic cultural narratives.





# Building Connections and Shared Impact

## Regional Dialogue on the Green Agenda for the Western Balkans

On 24 November, The Balkan Forum participated in the regional forum “**Regional Dialogue on the Green Agenda for the Western Balkans and Renewable Energy Communities**”. The forum focused on the implementation of the Green Agenda commitments and the role of civil society organizations in promoting renewable energy, advancing environmental reforms, and contributing to a sustainable transition in the region. The participation strengthened regional connections and contributed to discussions on the operational and policy challenges shaping the Green Agenda.



## Participation in EPALE Networking and Registration Event

On 25 November 2025, The Balkan Forum participated in an **EPALE information and networking session** held at the Ministry of Education, Science, Technology and Innovation. The event brought together institutional and civil society representatives to discuss the role of the EPALE platform in supporting lifelong learning. Representatives of the Erasmus+ Office Kosovo and the Ministry opened the session, followed by a presentation by Kristina Zimaj on platform priorities for 2025 and opportunities for engagement through Erasmus+.





## Conference on Building a Culture of Volunteerism

The Balkan Forum participated in the conference “**Building a Culture of Volunteerism from Individuals to Institutions,**” which brought together youth, public institutions, schools, businesses, and community organizations from across Kosovo to promote volunteerism and civic engagement. The event featured inspirational speeches, panel discussions, and the presentation of the Volunteer of the Year Awards, highlighting the social value of voluntary action.

Through discussions on education, mental health, and community engagement, the conference showcased successful initiatives and collaborative models that strengthen civic participation and encourage greater institutional and grassroots involvement in volunteerism across Kosovo.



## Media presence

Throughout 2025, The Balkan Forum maintained a **strong and consistent media presence** to support the visibility of projects implemented within various consortium frameworks. Engagement across national and regional television, radio, print, and online media ensured that key objectives, thematic priorities, and results reached a broad public audience. Media coverage included appearances and features on outlets such as **RTK, KTV (Kohavision), Klan Kosova, RTV Dukagjini, RTV 21, Koha Ditore, Ekonomia Online, and KosovaPress**, reinforcing public awareness and understanding of the initiatives in which The Balkan Forum is involved. This sustained outreach contributed to transparent communication, strengthened stakeholder engagement, and supported the wider dissemination of project outcomes across the Western Balkans.





## TEAM:

**Gazmend Berlajolli** - Executive Director

**Enis Selimi** - Finance and Administration Manager

**Erina Rrahmani** - Project Manager

**Arta Haxhixhemajli** - Research Officer

**Gonxhe Konjufca** - Communications Officer

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**Frank Morawietz**

**Sreten Koceski**

**Stephanie Fenkart**



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