

MONTENEGRO

Cultural Grant Assistance to Montenegrin Music Center



Mr. Fukuda, Chief Representative of JICA Balkan Office, and Ms. Damjanovic, Business Director of the Montenegrin Music Center at the signing ceremony

On February 12, JICA signed the cultural grant agreement with the Montenegrin Music Center. This grant will contribute to the improvement and modernization of the production in the Montenegrin Music Center through provision of musical instruments and equipment. Ms. Isidora Damjanovic, Business Director of the Montenegrin Music Center, pointed out that the grant from the Japanese government will significantly improve the operations of the Montenegrin Music Center, both at the technical level and at the level of new knowledge and skills. "As a future user of the funds, we had to meet extremely high standards and conditions in order to compete for the grant," said Ms. Damjanovic. "This grant reflects our commitment to support development of cultural and educational opportunities for Montenegrin citizens, as well as to strengthen cultural relationship between Montenegro and Japan. Music center plays an important role in promoting music education, culture, and art, and it is our honor to support their efforts in that regard." - said Mr. Fukuda, Chief Representative of JICA Balkan Office.

Albania

Amendment to the Grant Agreement signed with the National Historical Museum of Albania

On March 25, the Director of National Historical Museum (NHM) of Albania, Ms. Elenita Roshi, and the Chief Representative of JICA Balkan Office Mr. Fukuda Hajime, signed the Amendment to the Grant Agreement (GA) for the Project for Improving equipment for conservation, restoration, and exhibition environment at the NHM of Albania. Through signing of the amendment of the GA the preparation of procurement of equipment under the Cultural Grant Aid Project has been secured.

The signing ceremony has been held in the impressive venue of the "Albanian Night" cultural and commercial center in Tirana.



Ms. Elenita Roshi, Director of NHM of Albania, and JICA Balkan Office team

Follow-up session on the Invitation Program in Japan on Tourism Promotion

On February 24, the regional workshop “Regional Cooperation in Western Balkan for Sustainable Tourism” was organized at JICA Balkan Office in Belgrade. The participants of the Invitation Program in Japan on Tourism Promotion, successfully conducted by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan in November 2024, had a chance to meet again and actively participate in this follow-up session. Mr. Furihata Kakeru, JICA Expert in sustainable tourism, provided the presentation and introduced Japanese good practice for the regional cooperation. In line with the interest of all the attendees, the focus was on formulation of regional Destination Management Organization (DMO) in Japan. The background of establishment of DMOs in Japan, their role, challenges as well as good examples, platforms of cooperation and role of all stakeholders has been presented. The participants, main stakeholders from the tourism sector of all Western Balkans 6, had a chance to discuss the common challenges of regional cooperation in WB region and share successful experiences of regional cooperation.



Participants of the regional workshop

MONTENEGRO AND NORTH MACEDONIA

Short Japanese language and culture course for EXPO 2025 pavilion teams held in Skopje and Podgorica



Members of the Macedonian Pavilion Team at EXPO Osaka 2025

On February 19 and 20 and on March 11 and 12, two-day Japanese language and culture courses for the EXPO 2025 Macedonian and Montenegrin Pavilion teams were held at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Skopje and the Ministry of Economic Development in Podgorica, respectively.

Mr. OGUCHI Kaio, JICA volunteer for Japanese language and education, held two sessions on Japanese language, manners and useful expressions for greeting Japanese visitors at the pavillion, while Ms. Lukešević



Session on Japanese language and culture for the Montenegrin team

Doris, from JICA Balkan Office, held a session on the introduction into basics of Japanese culture.

Visit to the Western Balkans pavilions at Expo 2025, Osaka, Kansai, Japan

On May 1st, the North Macedonia National Day was grandly celebrated at the Expo 2025, Osaka, Kansai, Japan, with Mr. Kei Toyama, Director General of Europe and Middle East Department, attending the event. Traditional music and dance performances filled the venue with vibrant energy, offering visitors a unique opportunity to experience the richness of Balkan culture. Mr. Toyama met with H.E. Mr. Or-han Murtezani, Minister for European Affairs of North Macedonia, to discuss the future cooperation between JICA and North Macedonia. Mr. Toyama also visited the pavilions of Kosovo, Montenegro, and Serbia.

At Kosovo's pavilion, the history and culture of Kosovo were introduced, as well as the success of Kosovo's judo, which continues to make great strides in international competitions. Montenegro's pavilion showcased its beautiful natural landscapes and tourist attractions through immersive videos and photographs, attracting many visitors. Meanwhile, Serbia's exhibition featured achievements in science, sports, and the arts under the theme of "Society at Play," which will lead to the Expo 2027 Belgrade. The restaurant in the Serbian pavilion was bustling with people enjoying Serbian wine and foods.



H.E. Mr. Murtezani, Minister of European Affairs of North Macedonia and Mr. Toyama, Director General of Europe and Middle East dept.

NORTH MACEDONIA

JICA Alumni of North Macedonia held a Thematic Seminar and General Assembly



On February 19, JICA Alumni of North Macedonia organized a Thematic seminar and General Assembly at the premises of the Faculty of Mechanical Engineering in Skopje. The event was attended by H.E. Kawahara Setsuko, the Ambassador of Japan to North Macedonia and Mr. FUKUDA Hajime, Chief Rep-

resentative of JICA Balkan Office. More than 40 members of MAK-JAMS, Alumni Association of North Macedonia, attended the event. The first presentation was held by Ms. Lara Tashkovska, an artist, and Ms. Elena Prendzova, poetess on Haiga- Japanese painting technique combined with Haiku poetry. The sec-

ond presentation was held by Mr. Goran Gjorgjevski, participant of KCCP "Sustainable Food System Strategy for Local Industry Development" in 2024. The event was concluded with the annual General Assembly.

KCCP participant held a follow-up presentation on best practices in waste management.

On February 7, the follow-up presentation on best practices and lessons learned through Knowledge Co-Creation Program (KCCP) "Solid Waste Management in Partnership with Private Sector and Civil Society" was held by the participant Ms. Sejla Mahmutovic from CENER 21 -Center for Energy, Environment and Resources in Sarajevo. The KCCP was organized from November 11 to December 18, 2024, on Japan's advanced practices in waste management, circular economy principles and the 3R framework. Based on the lessons learned from Japan, CENER 21 plans to improve its work by organizing additional educational activities, promoting more detailed separation of waste into several categories, and intensify cooperation with local authorities and the private sector.



Ms. Mahmutovic (fourth from the left) at KCCP in Japan

SERBIA

Ceremony on the retirement of yellow buses



On March 29, the Embassy of Japan in Serbia held a farewell event for the yellow buses. During the ceremony, attendees shared their memories of the yellow buses, affectionately referred to as "Japanac". In 2003, the Government of Japan donated 93 yellow buses to the City of Belgrade. From 2020 to 2023, JICA conducted the "Project for the Modernization of Public Urban Transport in the City of Belgrade" to optimize existing assets and improve public transportation in Belgrade. For over 20 years, the buses have been well maintained and have supported citizens' daily transportation needs.

Yellow bus- "Japanac"

Western Balkan Forum held in Tirana



From March 5 to 7, the conference “SYNERGY among local governments towards regional cooperation and EU integration” was held in Tirana, organized by Western Balkans Fund and supported by Embassy of Japan in Albania. Public officials from local authorities, representatives of media, business sector, academia and civil society organizations from Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro, North Macedonia, Serbia and Kosovo were invited. JICA made a presentation online about Regional Cooperation and Sustainable Tourism Development and introduced examples from Japan and other countries that are promoting tourism community development corporations to revitalize the economy in rural areas.

Message from New Short-term JOCV

Dobar dan. My name is Takuma Sakurai and I have been assigned to Zajecar as a short-term Japan Overseas Cooperation Volunteer (JOCV) to support marketing activities at an NGO. I arrived in Serbia in April 2025, and this is my first time living in Europe. Before coming here, I studied marketing and communication through my experience as a freelancer in Japan. I am very excited to work with the people of Zajecar and to learn more about Serbian culture, history, and traditions. During my stay, I hope to contribute to the community through my skills and grow both professionally and personally. I look forward to working with everyone and experiencing all that Serbia has to offer.



Mr. Sakurai at his arrival

Follow-up on the first training in Japan on Urban Public Transport Management and Operation in Western Balkans held in Skopje

From May 13 to 16, Follow-up on the first training in Japan on Urban Public Transport Management and Operation in Western Balkans was held in Skopje. On May 14, the first regional seminar was attended by the representatives and project counterparts from Kosovo, Albania, North Macedonia and Bosnia and Herzegovina, the representatives from Toyama City, Toyama Chihou Railway and Toyama University in Japan, Embassy of Japan in North Macedonia and JICA. After the outline of the first training, the representatives of Toyama city presented the major findings of the first training in Japan and the concept of Compact City Policy of Toyama. The project counterparts from Western Balkans presented their updated action plans and discussed with the Japanese counterparts about the upcoming activities. The following day was dedicated to the group site visits to the Public Transport Company in Skopje, Transport center and Railway station in Skopje, Vodno cable car and Matka by boat.



Site visit to the Public Transport Company in Skopje

KOSOVO

Regional Seminar on the Project on Capacity Building for Disaster Risk Reduction through National Forest Fire Information System (NFFIS) and Eco-DRR



Site visit to Restelice and planting trees

From May 13 to 15, 2025 the Regional Seminar on the Project on Capacity Building for Disaster Risk Reduction through National Forest Fire Information System (NFFIS) and Eco-DRR was held in Prizren. The seminar was attended by the representatives and project counterparts from Kosovo, Montenegro, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Albania, and North Macedonia. This seminar was an opportunity to share achievements and lesson learnt from the NFFIS and Eco-DRR Project in Kosovo, Montenegro as well as to present the status of natural disasters and progress of the projects in Bosnia and Herzegovina, Albania and North Macedonia. The participants had opportunity to visit the pilot project site in Restelice where the explanation about avalanche prevention forest activities has been provided. On the final day of the seminar, participants discussed and explored practical ideas for bilateral or regional cooperation with a focus on border areas.

Joint Coordination Committee for the 3rd phase of RTK project held in Prishtina



Joint Committee Meeting at RTK

On April 22, The key focus of the 3rd phase of the “Project for Capacity Development of Radio Television of Kosovo” is the opening of a regional RTK office in Peja, with the continuous support of local municipality. Chief Representative of JICA Balkan Office, Mr. FUKUDA Hajime, and other officials praised the cooperation, emphasizing the office’s role in enhancing local media coverage and providing timely, accurate news. RTK Acting Director General, Mr. Hysen Hundozi, acknowledged JICA’s long-standing support, which has helped modernize RTK’s infrastructure and professionalize its staff. Television Director and Project Manager, Mr. Rilind Gervalla, highlighted the strategic importance of the Peja office, noting it will extend RTK’s reach to over 40% of Kosovo’s territory. JICA Senior Advisor, Mr. Keiichi Hashimoto also praised the inclusive efforts involving all ethnic groups in this latest phase of co-operation.

JICA hosts Seminar on Combating Fake News and Promoting Media Literacy in Collaboration with RTK

On April 23, JICA hosted an insightful seminar on the topic “Combating Fake News and Media Literacy – How Should Public Broadcasting Respond? Insights from the Japan Case Study”. This event took place at the RTK premises and marked a valuable opportunity for knowledge exchange between RTK staff and esteemed Japanese media experts, as part of the project activities. The seminar featured two distinguished speakers, Dr. Keiichi Hashimoto, JICA Senior Advisor for Peacebuilding, presented a compelling session titled “Flood of Disinformation and Skepticism toward Mass Media – Global Challenges Journalism Faces”. He shed light on the global scale of misinformation and its impact on public trust in media. Mr. Kei Matsui, from the NHK Foundation and a former documentary producer, shared his expertise in the presentation: “NHK Combats Fake News and Enhances Media Literacy Among Children”. He outlined NHK’s innovative approaches to educating younger audiences on identifying fake news and understanding media content critically. The seminar sparked engaging discussions on the responsibilities of public broadcasters in the digital age, strategies for strengthening media literacy, and lessons RTK can adopt from NHK’s experience in Japan.



Presentation at the seminar

The startup ecosystem fosters collaboration between Serbia and Japan through the successful completion of Phase 2 of Project NINJA in Serbia and Special Online Lecture on Innovation

JICA supports the Serbian startup ecosystem through various channels to promote healthy economic growth and innovation in anticipation of future EU accession. Since last year, JICA has provided an acceleration program, online lectures, and an invitation program for the ecosystem. On February 6, ICT Hub, DSI, and the JICA team organized a Demo Day to conclude the two-month acceleration program for the second phase of Project NINJA in Serbia. Five startups presented their projects and received valuable feedback from the audience. H.E. Ambassador Imamura and H.E. Ambassador Kovač also attended the event.

On March 3, Director Miyawaki from UToyo IPC delivered an online lecture for students at the University of Belgrade. The

lecture focused on how innovative ideas can lead to technology transfer and problem-solving through entrepreneurship and startups.

From May 5 to 15, the JICA team invited a delegation from the Serbian startup ecosystem, including stakeholders, supporters, and startups, to Japan and Singapore. In Japan, startup supporters held a series of meetings with their counterparts, including the Metropolitan Government of Tokyo, public and private incubators and accelerators, venture capitalists (VCs), University of Tokyo Technology License Organization (TODAI TLO), and relevant governmental organizations that support the ecosystem. At the same time, startups attended SusHI TECH Tokyo 2025, one of the largest conferences for innovation

and startups in Asia. Participants engaged in brief meetings to develop further business relationships. In Singapore, Professor Virginia Cha from the National University of Singapore delivered a concise lecture on the development progress of the Singaporean ecosystem. Following this, the startups participated in a pitch boot camp with the professor. Meanwhile, startup supporters discussed with public and private organizations related to innovation and incubation in Singapore. Through these meetings, the delegation observed the structured and competitive approach of the Singaporean ecosystem. JICA will continue to commit to these fields for a better future.



Group photo in front of Serbia booth, SusHI Tech

We are pleased to announce that JICA Balkan Office Facebook page has reached more than 1,000 followers. Please check the latest JICA project activities in the region on www.facebook.com/jicabalkanoffice



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