



**Peace
Corps**
ALBANIA AND
MONTENEGRO

Annual Report

Reflections on Service in 2024

A Year of Firsts:
Making History together through
Partnership & Impact



20

HISTORY MADE TOGETHER

24

PODGORICA

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Dear Friends,

I am pleased to share a few remarks in this year's annual report from the Peace Corps, highlighting the remarkable contributions of our Volunteers and their partners in Montenegro. The unique model of community-based development and people-to-people relationships that the Peace Corps embodies has led to the warm reception of our Volunteers across the country. From north to south, they are invited to share their expertise, teach English—the language of opportunity—and support initiatives in youth education, and empowerment. Through their tireless efforts, they forge deep, lasting connections with local communities.

During their first two years of service in Montenegro, our Peace Corps Volunteers have become true personal ambassadors of the American people, immersing themselves in the local languages and customs of the communities where they serve. By living alongside Montenegrin families and engaging with their communities, they create opportunities for meaningful dialogue and understanding. This exchange enriches the Volunteers while also providing Montenegrins with a clearer perspective of who Americans are—people from a diverse nation committed to partnership and respect. Through their interactions, the Volunteers dispel stereotypes and build trust, illustrating the values of empathy, cooperation, and community that are central to the American spirit.

I want to especially acknowledge the first group of Peace Corps Volunteers who have just completed their service in Montenegro. Their commitment and efforts have laid a strong foundation for future Volunteers, ensuring that the legacy of partnership and service continues to succeed.

Message from U.S. Ambassador to Montenegro, Judy Rising Reinke



This year, I was honored to host Peace Corps Director Carol Spahn during her visit to Montenegro, where we celebrated the successes of our Volunteers in their first year of service. Together, we discussed the exciting plans for Peace Corps in Montenegro, aiming to expand our Volunteer presence across the country. This expansion will enable us to reach underserved areas and strengthen our impact on youth education and community development. Additionally, I have had the privilege of visiting several of our dedicated Volunteers and witnessed the impact they are making in their communities. I can personally attest that these amazing people have been excellent representatives of American values and champions of mutual respect and intercultural competence. Their work promotes knowledge exchange and honors the diversity of all cultures, helping to advance equity and grassroots development. I am truly inspired by their responsibility and devotion, just as I am honored and appreciative of the continuing support of our Montenegrin partners.

As we celebrate these achievements, I express my heartfelt gratitude to the Montenegrin people who have welcomed our American Volunteers and to all those who have worked collaboratively to make a difference in their communities.

Thank you for your invaluable support, and congratulations for the 2024 Annual Report!

Sincerely,

Judy Rising Reinke

Message from U.S. Ambassador to Montenegro, Judy Rising Reinke



Dear Friends,

As we reflect on another year of meaningful collaboration and impactful service in Albania, I am honored to offer an opening letter for the 2024 annual report of Peace Corps Albania and Montenegro (PCAM). This year, 44 dedicated Volunteers have served in communities across Albania, focusing on English and health education, as well as organizational development. These Volunteers have received over 500 hours of training provided by the Peace Corps, encompassing Albanian language skills, technical training, and cross-cultural understanding. Together, with their Albanian partners they have navigated challenges and celebrated successes, embodying the spirit of mutual understanding and cooperation for which the Peace Corps stands.

Peace Corps work closely aligns with Albania's education reform strategy, particularly the implementation of the core curriculum in pre-university education. By focusing on English language skills, and youth development PCAM Volunteers support the national goal of linking education to labor market needs. The demand for English in the global economy is undeniable, and Peace Corps efforts help pave the way for students to thrive in this competitive landscape. Additionally, as the Ministry of Education and Sports rolls out the *"National Program for the Professional Development of Teachers,"* Peace Corps Volunteers enhance teaching methodologies through their involvement in local classrooms. In addition, PCAM volunteers also support municipalities and community-based organizations in achieving their goals on a local level. This exemplifies how by working together we can achieve more.

I am new to Albania, but not new to the idea of volunteerism. In my first months here, I had the pleasure of meeting several Peace Corps Volunteers whose dedication truly inspires me. They are making a meaningful impact in key areas such as English education, youth health and well-being, and organizational development.

Message from U.S. Charge d'Affaires, to Albania Nancy VanHorn



Dear Friends and Partners,

Embassy of the United States of America
Tirane, Albania
November 22, 2024

As we reflect on another year of meaningful collaboration and impactful service in Albania, I am honored to offer an opening letter to the 2024 annual report of Peace Corps Albania and Montenegro (PCAM). This year, 44 dedicated Volunteers have served in communities across Albania, focusing on English and health education, as well as organizational development. These Volunteers have received over 500 hours of training provided by the Peace Corps, encompassing Albanian language skills, technical training, and cross-cultural understanding. Together with their Albanian partners they have navigated challenges and celebrated successes, embodying the spirit of mutual understanding and cooperation for which the Peace Corps stands.

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Message from U.S. Charge d’Affaires to Albania, Nancy VanHorn

Through their work, they help children and youth improve their health and life skills, enhancing teachers’ English proficiency, and strengthening local organizations. It’s wonderful to see how these Volunteers build relationships and promote knowledge exchange, fostering a deeper understanding between our cultures and inspiring positive change within communities.

As we move forward, let us continue to inspire one another and build a brighter future grounded in trust and collaboration. I extend my deepest gratitude to the Albanian people who have warmly welcomed Peace Corps Volunteers and to our Albanian colleagues who have partnered with Peace Corps for over 30 years. Your support and collaboration are the foundation of our shared success, and we look forward to continuing this journey together.

With thanks for our partnership,

Nancy VanHorn



Greetings From Country Director: Megan Wilson

Dear Friends,

2024 has been a year of firsts, partnership, impact and transition. Even with the transitions, one thing which remains the same is the powerful connection forged between our Volunteers and the communities we serve. This bond reflects our commitment to partnership and collaboration as we tackle challenges together.

In Albania and Montenegro, Peace Corps Volunteers are a key link that fosters local solutions to developmental needs, while building friendship ties. They work hand-in-hand with community members to enhance welfare, and health, adapt to shifting environments, and promote grassroots economic growth. This year, our Volunteers continued the Peace Corps' tradition of focusing on education and youth empowerment, collaborating to create leadership and more opportunities for the next generation of changemakers. Our work spans three sectors in Albania: **Organizational Development, Education, Health and Youth Wellbeing**, and the key sector of **Education in Montenegro**.



Message From Country Director

In terms of firsts, in 2024 we were proud to celebrate the first cohort of Volunteers post pandemic to complete two years of service. I want to especially acknowledge the hard work and commitment of our Volunteers who were the first ones to serve in Montenegro, whose efforts have laid a strong foundation for future service, ensuring that our legacy of partnership continues to thrive.

We are especially thrilled that four of the Volunteers from the first post pandemic cohort are extending their service within local communities in Albania, while another two are transferring to other Peace Corps programs worldwide. Their choices reflect the transformative impact of their experiences and the power of service—a testament to the mission we all share.

The feedback we receive from our partners in various meetings highlights a common thread: Peace Corps in Albania and Montenegro builds and sustains meaningful relationships, strengthening America's presence at the community level. At the same time, we maintain strong relationships at the highest levels of government, partnering effectively with the Ministry of Education and Sport in Albania and the Ministry of Education, Science and Innovation in Montenegro. I was happy that Peace Corps Director Spahn could reiterate our appreciation to government partners including both Education Ministers during her visit to the Region in May following on renewal of our Memorandum of Understandings in both countries in 2024.

Message From Country Director



The impact of our Volunteers in Montenegro has been remarkable. This past year, 12 dedicated Volunteers engaged with local youth, co-organizing activities that reached 586 young people while fostering English language skills among 2,054 students in their classrooms. Education remains a cornerstone of the Peace Corps' mission, and as we look to the future, we recognize the growing demand for English language proficiency in an increasingly interconnected world. We are also deeply grateful to the MOESI for facilitating our move to a new office in Podgorica.



Our impact in Albania during 2024 showed that in the realm of organizational development, 14 Volunteers co-led efforts to expand opportunities for civic engagement, supporting 44 community organizations and co-organizing 142 activities that fostered community involvement and leadership. This collaborative spirit enabled the implementation of 142 impactful projects, positively affecting 2,428 participants across their communities. In youth health and well-being, 17 Volunteers partnered with 265 school staff members, employing innovative techniques to co-facilitate a gender-equitable health and life skills curriculum, reaching 4,193 participants through individual and small group training sessions. Our English education program flourished, supported by 16 Volunteers who empowered 193 teachers and engaged 3,679 students through co-taught lessons and enriching youth development activities, leading to significant improvements in their English language skills.

Message From Country Director

Peace Corps Albania and Montenegro remains committed to being responsive and accountable to community partners, bolstering our engagement with youth, and maintaining the critical infrastructure necessary to support Volunteer service in terms of health, security, and technical support.

As we end this year, we extend our heartfelt gratitude to the community partners, teachers, parents, students, and host families who collaborated with our Peace Corps Volunteers in 2024. We also wish well all those colleagues who left PCAM to continue their service journey elsewhere including Jeff Warner, Genti Leka, and Rikela Fusha.

Thank you for your continued support and belief in the work we do together to bring world peace and friendship closer to being achieved.

With Deep Appreciation,



Peace Corps Mission and Goals

In 1961, U.S. President John F. Kennedy established the Peace Corps to foster a better understanding between, and to promote friendship among, Americans and people of other countries.

The Peace Corps mission is to promote world peace and friendship by fulfilling three goals:

1. To help the people of interested countries in meeting their needs for trained men and women.
2. To help promote a better understanding of Americans on the part of the peoples served.
3. To help promote a better understanding of other peoples on the part of Americans.

Peace Corps changes lives—the lives of people in communities around the world and the lives of Volunteers.

- More than 240,000 Americans have served in the Peace Corps in 142 countries.



Peace Corps in Albania

In 1991, the Albanian government invited the Peace Corps to establish a program in the country. The first group of Volunteers arrived in 1992 to spend two years teaching English in secondary schools and universities. From 1993 to 1996, four additional groups of Volunteers arrived to teach English, support the development of small businesses, or support the management of agriculture and forests. Peace Corps closed its Albania program in 1997 due to political unrest and concerns about the safety of Volunteers.

The Albanian government invited Peace Corps to re-establish a program in 2002 and participated in an assessment conducted by Peace Corps. Based on this assessment, Peace Corps staff returned in March 2003 to set up an office and re-establish programs. Volunteers work with local governments, NGOs, schools, and health institutions in three project areas:

- English education
- Youth Health & Well-being
- Organizational development

The Peace Corps program in Albania operates according to an agreement between the United States and Albania that recognizes the importance of developing mutually advantageous relationships and cooperation. Throughout the years, Peace Corps has deeply appreciated the cooperation and warmth of the Albanian people. This partnership is vital for fostering educational and developmental initiatives and for building friendships and understanding between cultures. Since September 1992, close to 1000 Volunteers have served in Albania.



Peace Corps in Montenegro

In 2019, the Peace Corps signed a Bilateral Agreement with the Government of Montenegro, paving the way for a program in the country. The first group of Volunteer Trainees arrived in January 2020 to begin their 10-week Pre-Service Training. Unfortunately, this group was evacuated in March 2020 due to the COVID-19 pandemic, before they could reach their host communities.

After extensive preparations, Volunteers returned to Montenegro in the fall of 2022. Following a successful training period, they began their service in Montenegrin communities for the first time. This return represented a significant triumph over the challenges faced in the preceding two and a half years, revitalizing the Peace Corps mission and underscoring a strong commitment to cross-cultural exchange and community development. In the fall of 2023, an additional group of Volunteer Trainees arrived in Montenegro, beginning their service as Volunteers in December 2023. All 11 Volunteers currently engaged in Montenegrin communities are focused on English education, co-teaching alongside local counterparts.

The Peace Corps program in Montenegro is established at the invitation of the Montenegrin government and operates under an agreement that emphasizes the importance of fostering mutually beneficial relationships and cooperation. We look forward to welcoming a new group of Volunteers in January 2025 and are excited to expand our efforts into new communities, further enriching our impact and strengthening our partnership.

Service in 2024

- 58 Peace Corps Volunteers in
 - 11 Montenegro
 - 47 Albania
- 4 sectors
 - English education in Albania
 - English education in Montenegro
 - Health education
 - Organizational development
- Continuing to partner with schools, municipalities, ministries, and NGOs—and shifting to assignments in smaller communities that have fewer resources.
- Increased emphasis on youth health and wellbeing issues, English acquisition and strengthening schools, tourism development, and project sustainability through local buy-in and ownership.



PCAM Supports in-need communities



Near Rožaje

We serve across Albania and Montenegro, and place Volunteers in schools, municipalities, NGOs, and other local government organizations. During 2023 and 2024, the Peace Corps Albania and Montenegro Programming team has reached out to 66 new small communities. Our 'hub and spoke' approach creates opportunities for Volunteers serving in small communities or villages to episodically work on regional issues capitalizing resources in larger nearby towns.

Peace Corps Albania and Montenegro takes a need-based approach when it comes to placing Volunteers. It is the philosophy of Peace Corps to serve in communities with a lack of resources or underserved populations in order to support members with skills that could provide opportunities for community development, such as project design and management, youth leadership, life skills, English language, well-being, and similar.



Near Kallmet in Lezha region

First Volunteers Post Pandemic Finish their Service

The first Close-of Service (COS) conference after a few years at Post was not only an event full of administrative tasks, but also a space for the Volunteers and staff to reflect on the experiences so far.

Volunteers were invited to think and share about future opportunities, consider the benefits and challenges that come after service and learn how to stay connected with Peace Corps after their service.

The Volunteers are also reminded about their commitment to the Peace Corps mission of world friendship and peace, through the Third Goal: *To help promote a better understanding of other peoples on the part of Americans*. For two years, they invested tremendous efforts into the first two goals, but it is especially after returning to the US that their mission to share about the host countries starts. What we learned at the COS conference is that our Volunteers surely have a lot of positive stories to share with fellow Americans and the world about both Albania and Montenegro – their service does not stop when they leave their country of service.



The first group of Peace Corps Volunteers post pandemic who were sworn-in in December 2022 completed their two-year Peace Corps service in 2024. Of the 17 Volunteers, four are extending their service in Albania for another year, two are extending their service in other countries, while the rest are off to new exciting things.

A New cohort of Volunteers finish Training and begin Service



42 new Volunteers arrived to Post in October 2023. After a week of Orientation sessions, they were sent to our training communities where the 10-11 weeks long pre-service training (PST) began. Our community-based PST is an intensive training focused on learning about the local language and culture, while living with a host family, as well as technical skills necessary for the Volunteer's later work at the permanent sites. During this period, Volunteers came back together in four occasions for their hub trainings, which cover topics on safety, security, medical, intercultural experiences, Peace Corps policies, etc.

The PST participants were sworn-in as Volunteers at the beginning of December 2023. The Volunteers got to know their assigned permanent site only a few days prior and got to meet their local counterparts at the two-day Counterparts Conference. The counterparts introduced the Volunteers to their new sites, their Host Agencies and their new Host Families. In January 2024, they started the new year off in their sites and working with their host agencies.



Volunteer training throughout their service

Peace Corps Albania and Montenegro is committed to continual training of the Volunteers. After the 11 weeks of Pre-service training, there are many opportunities in which we invite the Volunteers back from their sites for further training and sharing of their experiences during a given period, in addition to various online learning opportunities and resources available to them. Our trainings are comprehensive, designed to equip the Volunteers with skills, knowledge, and tools necessary to serve in the diverse communities of both countries.

Apart from the technical focus on the skills and expertise required for a Volunteer to successfully cover their role, there is an array of topics covered during these trainings including:

- Culture of the host country ;
- Language learning progress;
- Health and medical topics ;
- Safety and security training to mitigate risk;
- Technical topics to further their abilities to do their job.

One training called the Project Design and Management (PDM) training, is also open for the community members, whether those be the Volunteer's primary counterparts or other members of the community eager to join forces with the Volunteer to address their community's most burning needs.



Volunteers live with host Families

Your relationships will run much deeper, and you will probably start behaving like one of their tribe.

Volunteer

Volunteers in Albania and Montenegro are placed in host families for the pre-service training period and for a period of 6 months in the town or village where they are assigned to work for 2 years. The Volunteer is considered a new family member. The process of adjustment requires patience, understanding and flexibility on both sides. Housing situations facilitate cultural adaptation and exchange, and promote language acquisition, integration of Volunteers into the local community, and Volunteer safety and security.

Placing our Volunteers with host families is a way for Peace Corps and the host agency to give them more linkages in the community besides their co-workers, and help Volunteers learn more about their town and its social norms through the eyes of more than just the workplace colleagues.

Learning about and understanding local society, traditions, family norms, and roles of family members in the Volunteer's town will give them a valuable window into serving their community more effectively during the months ahead of them. Volunteers are encouraged to view host families not only as cultural resources but also as a source of personal support.



A Volunteer with HF

Reconfirmed Partnership With Montenegrin and Albanian Governments



MOU signing in Montenegro

The Ministry of Education and Sport is our closest government partner in Albania. Over the past three decades, this partnership has been a beacon of collaboration and progress, shaping the lives of Volunteers and local communities in profound ways. On April 23, 2024, we reconfirmed this partnership with the renewal of the Memorandum of Understanding.

Together, we have witnessed the transformative power of education. Our Volunteers, alongside dedicated Albanian teachers, have taught English and invaluable lessons in health education, nurturing the development of Albanian youth. In doing so, we have laid the foundation for a generation that is academically proficient but also equipped with the knowledge and skills to thrive.

As we embark on this renewed journey, let us celebrate the significance of our collective efforts for the best of our students and teachers!

PCAM and the Ministry of Education, Science, and Innovation (MOESI) of Montenegro renewed the Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) on March 6, 2024. The document outlines our shared goals and objectives, paving the way for future collaboration through support of schools, teachers, and communities in Montenegro. PCAM is deeply grateful for the MOESI support including offering us office space to support our operations in Montenegro.

Our strong partnership is only growing stronger each day, as we see Peace Corps Volunteers partnering with Montenegrin schools and communities. This MoU indeed paves the way for the advancement of English language learning in Montenegro, as well as cultural exchange between Montenegrins and U.S. Americans through teaching English, sharing knowledge, skills, and the U.S. culture, while learning about Montenegro and its culture as well.



MOU signing in Albania

935 Volunteers in Albania and **23** Volunteers in Montenegro have served mostly in rural communities supporting students, teachers and schools. **10** Volunteers are currently serving in Montenegro and **44** are currently serving in Albania

Cooperation with our partners



MOU signing with Junior Achievement
Albania

After a long time of collaboration, Peace Corps in Albania and the NGO Junior Achievement of Albania have signed a Memorandum of Understanding.

This cooperation agreement is focused on training Peace Corps Volunteers on how to implement Junior Achievement programs in interested partner schools in Albania.

Peace Corps Volunteers are joining forces with the Junior Achievement program to empower youth in areas such as employability skills, career development, public speaking, research and writing, teamwork, and leadership. This partnership is another important step in fostering a brighter future for the youth of Albania by providing them with essential skills and opportunities for growth.

PCAM has deepened its collaboration with the Cabinet of Minister of State for Local Government. This collaboration is mostly focused on ensuring the efficacy of Volunteer placements in Albanian municipalities for impactful contributions on local development.

This structure will serve as a liaison between PCAM and interested Municipalities. Peace Corps remains committed to contributing to capacity-building efforts by providing additional training or resources that could benefit both municipal staff and our Volunteers.



Meeting with Mr. Mazniku, Minister of
state for local Government,

2024 Goals by Sector

Health Education

1. **Increase the knowledge and skills of children and youth** to improve their health and well-being through health and life skills education.
2. **Increase the capacity of school-based staff** to provide health and life skills education.
3. **Develop and increase collaboration** with service providers and community partners to effectively support health and well-being of children and youth.

Community and Organizational Development

1. **Strengthen the capacity** of organizations to improve the services to their constituents.
2. **Strengthen the capacity** of organizations to offer professional development and civic engagement opportunities for community members.

English Education

1. **Increase teacher English proficiency** and capacity to use general English and gender-equitable teaching practices.
2. **Increase student achievement** in English and strengthen life skills.
3. **Increase the ability of community members** to support students' access to learning

PCAM Projects:

Organizational Development (OD)

Project Goal: Empowered Albanian communities, organization, and individuals will effectively manage community development

PCAM's Organizational Development project seeks to strengthen organizational capacity at the local level by assigning Volunteers to work in governmental agencies and NGOs. Volunteers promote asset-based approaches to community development, civil society engagement, good governance and networking among stakeholders.

Success Story: Revitalizing Domino Square: Sparking a Bold New Future.

PCV Rakesh together with his local counterparts and the support of other Organizational Development Volunteers, transformed "Domino Square" from a neglected area into a vibrant, safe space for over 10,000 residents, including pensioners, mothers, children, and Roma community members.

Activities

The project was completed in various phases. For Earth Day 2023, volunteers cleaned, planted greenery, and prepared surfaces for murals, culminating in a community fair. On World Youth Skills Day, young artists unveiled murals and hosted an opening ceremony with music, city officials, and media, celebrating the park's transformation.

Impact

More than 100 volunteers from three local schools contributed, empowering youth to advocate for a greener city. This initiative resulted in creation of an all-inclusive community space which contributes to the advancement of social and recreational activities for residents of Fushë Krujë, especially for the Roma community. With flooring improvements alongside other infrastructure upgrades, installation of bins and garden maintenance, the square now offers lasting value.



14 Volunteers serving in this sector in 2023/2024.

44 Community Organizations supported by Volunteers to expand opportunities for civic engagement.

2428 Participants in activities co-organized by Volunteers and their counterparts.

142 Projects implemented by OD Volunteers and Counterparts.

PCAM Project:

Youth Health and Wellbeing (YHW)

Project Goal: School children and youth are informed and empowered to lead a healthy life and effectively transition to productive and engaged adults.

By placing Volunteers *in schools to work alongside Albanian teachers and community counterparts*, the YHW project seeks to increase the knowledge and skills of children and youth to improve their health and well-being, increase the capacity of school-based staff to provide health and life skills education, and increase collaboration with service providers and community partners.

Success Story: Raising awareness about the environment, the Greenhouse project.

Agriculture is one of the main sources of income for the Albanian villages. PCV Ashlyn, together with her Counterparts and students joined their efforts in building a greenhouse in the school yard.

Activities

Through the Project Design and Management training organized by PCAM, Ashlyn and her Counterparts worked together to finalize the project proposal for the greenhouse. Ashlyn activated talented children and youth in her community to participate at the 'Environment Club', where trash picking, recycling activities, planting of trees events were organized. The community members collaborated closely with the school staff to make possible the greenhouse construction.

Impact

By the end of the school year, 180 children and community members improved their knowledge and skills about healthy eating, food safety and environmental awareness. 100 students were actively involved in the Environment Club and contributed to the improvement of the green spaces in school and community.



17 Volunteers serving in this sector in 2023/2024

265 School staff guided in using innovative techniques to co-facilitate gender equitable health and life skills curriculum

4193 Participants reached in individual or small group trainings on Youth Health and Wellbeing

PCAM Project: English Education in Albania

Project Goal: Develop teaching and learning capacities in English language in Albanian students and teachers.

The English Education program in Albania seeks to improve student and teacher English proficiency, increase the capacity of teachers to use general and English teaching skills, and increase school community members' ability to support student learning. Volunteers in Albania co-teach alongside Albanian teachers and co-develop extracurricular activities and projects aimed at providing local youth with leadership and life skills.

Volunteer Activity: *Write On! – a creative writing contest*

In addition to direct support to teachers and students in classes, English Education Volunteers implement activities that empower and inspire students' creativity and teach critical thinking skills. This year, after the leadership of English Education Volunteers Rylie and Kira, we were able to launch the *Write On!* project which culminates with a contest on a national and international level.

As a result, 1132 students from 30 communities practiced writing skills, got inspired to be creative and competed with their peers in Albania and beyond. For English teachers, this was an opportunity to develop the English language skills of their students through thought-provoking ways not often included in the curriculum, and what is more, *Write On!* provided students with an outlet for freedom of expression and an incentive for further English language development.



An English teacher and a Volunteer co-teaching a class together

16 Volunteers serving in the English Education sector in 2023/2024

193 Teachers supported with in and out of the class projects and in trainings and conferences

812 Youth who participated in youth development activities co-organized by Volunteers and local counterparts

3679 Students were co-taught English in classrooms and clubs, camps or extracurricular activities.

PCAM Project: TEFL in Montenegro

Project Goal: Develop teaching and learning capacities in English language in Montenegrin teachers and students.

The TEFL program, through the work of Volunteers placed in schools around Montenegro to serve as co-teachers, seeks to improve student proficiency in English, increase the capacity of teachers to use general and English teaching skills, and increase the English proficiency of English teachers. Volunteers in Montenegro also support the need for extracurricular activities and projects aimed at providing local youth with leadership and life skills.

Success Story - Empowering Educators and Students: Enhancing Learning Through Multimedia Literacy Training

Peace Corps Volunteer Angela, together with her school director and fellow teachers, put an idea into practice by getting a grant to enhance the computer literacy skills of students, teachers, staff, and select community members through comprehensive multimedia training. Through hands-on learning experiences, participants developed proficiency in utilizing computer applications for various tasks, including *project management*, *note-taking*, *presentations*, and *test preparation*. Equipped with these acquired skills, students can smoothly transition and thrive in higher education or the workforce, while teachers and staff will be better equipped to integrate technology into their classrooms, leading to increased student engagement and better learning outcomes.



Students attending Multimedia Literacy Training in the classroom equipped through PCV Angela's grant

12 Volunteers serving in this sector in 2023/2024

586 Students attending extracurricular English clubs, tutoring sessions, and/or camps

2054 Students in Volunteer classrooms who demonstrated achievement in English.

Summer Camps in Albania and Montenegro



"GLOW Code" in Albania



"Taking the Lead" in Montenegro

In Albania and Montenegro, Volunteers organized a variety of themed summer camps based on the specific needs of local schools, organizations and communities. These camps aimed to inspire young learners to engage with topics related to community development, including critical thinking, governance, environmental awareness, technology and sports/recreation. Some activity included community walks or informal conversation at coffee shops providing safe space for youth to discuss relationships, life goals, and personal boundaries.

Some examples of 2024 camps include:

Life Skills Camp, First Grade Ready! Camp

My Future City! Camp

Walking Together Camp: Skills based camps

Theatre Camp

Art Camp

Taking the Lead - International Computer Driving

License certification Camp

English Summer Camp for Children and Adults

Practical computer skills

1063 participants in Albania and Montenegro.

38 Summer Camps.

More than **50%** of the Summer Camps included technology and digital literacy skills.

Summer Camps in Albania and Montenegro (GLOW Code)

During the summer months, PCAM Volunteers actively engage in creative activities with children and youth. A key feature of these efforts is the Summer Camps, which involve careful planning, collaboration and implementation with various community stakeholders.

The GLOW Code Summer Camps offered a 2-week program where girls learned coding while developing essential leadership and empowerment skills. These camps provided a fun, engaging introduction to technology and leadership, helping participants build a strong foundation of positive values to support their future aspirations.



Topics covered during the camps included:

- Introduction to leadership and coding, communication and teamwork.
- Product design through city planning.
- Creating positive relationships and setting SMART goals. .
- Developing soft skills such as public speaking and effective communication.

7 communities across Albania.

105 students were engaged in camps.

30 community members contributed to organizing the camps.

25 PCVs engaged

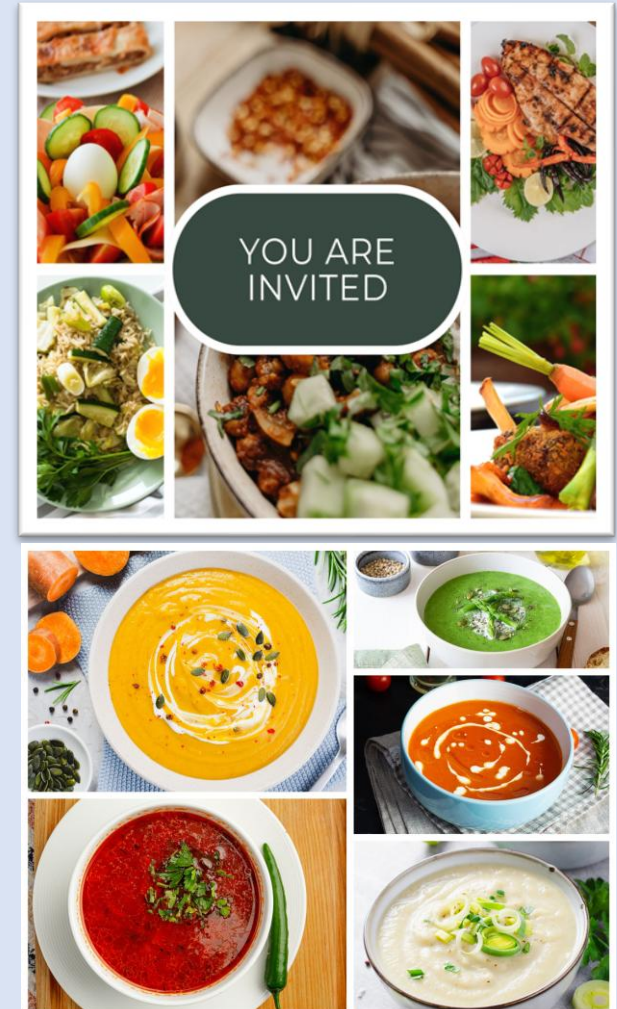
Sharing Traditions From Montenegro

by: Peace Corps Volunteer Eric B.

In my community, Iftar is the meal eaten after sunset during Ramadan, and families, extended families, neighbors, and friends often celebrate it together.

One day during Ramadan, one of the schoolteachers spontaneously messaged me asking if I had any plans that evening for dinner. “No,” I replied. She was delighted and informed me that her husband would come pick me up in an hour! Her daughter was one of my 8th grade students, and later I learned that it was her idea to invite Teacher Eric – it was very sweet and kind of her. From previous iftar experiences, I figured there would be a crowd, but I had no idea there would be so many. As the evening went on and more people arrived, I saw more students of mine, and I learned that their parents were also teachers. Then a man who owns one of the small food stores in the village showed up. It turns out that he was someone’s brother-in-law. Everyone that night seemed to be related somehow, maybe even the woman there who works at the bakery! One teacher’s husband was a politician in the city. The hoxha (imam) had also been invited, which made that more special for the family. There were so many people that they had two shifts for eating! In the living room, the men convened together separately from the women. The evening started with dates and beverages before heading to the dining room, all stopping first at the hallway sink to wash their hands. At the long dining table, I was tucked away in the corner next to the hoxha. All paused for a moment while he led the room in a prayer for the evening.

Iftars are a time to celebrate as the community collectively fasts and collectively enjoys breaking the fast. Iftars are like having a Thanksgiving dinner several times during the month, with an abundance of food and lots of leftovers. Each iftar I attended was a little different, but all were a pleasure to be invited to and welcomed into their homes.



Sharing About Food in Albania



Haley preparing Byrek

by: Peace Corps Volunteer Haley H.

When joining the Peace Corps, one of the first things I remember looking at is what kind of food was going to be in Albania. I knew that if I was going to be living somewhere for 2 years I had to like the food! Upon arrival one of the first things I ate was byrek and this has now become a staple in my diet. I have some days that I crave it. Not only is byrek just delicious, but it is a food that brings the traditions of Albania together. Whether it's friends coming over, brothers leaving for Tirana, a holiday or just a regular ole' day in the neighborhood, byrek will be there. Not only that but byrek, if made the traditional way, takes quite a while to make. Making the thin bread that goes in between each layer, leads to an excellent conversation environment. The layers take about an hour at minimum, if you know what you're doing... My host mom had the patience to stay with me as I slowly tried to roll out the dough thinly and as smoothly as she showed me. She did it so effortlessly I couldn't even understand. But after making all the layers, there is an option to slather it in the topping of your choosing; cheese, meat, spinach or whatever your heart desires. It's kind of like lasagna pie, well at least that's how I described it to my host mom. Then after some careful layering, it goes in the oven to get all crispy and delicious. 30 minutes later you have the most delicious and family oriented meal you could have. I know when I go back to the states I won't be able to go without it... good thing I have such a good host mom as my teacher!

Sharing Innovative American Activities

How We Started Our School's First English Spelling Bee: A How-to Guide

In spring 2023, an elementary school in Montenegro, held its first schoolwide English Spelling Bee, an event inspired by student requests and spearheaded by Peace Corps Volunteer Eric, who was working as an English teacher at the school. Alongside his dedicated local colleagues, they led the initiative, which aimed to improve spelling, vocabulary, pronunciation, and confidence, while offering healthy competition for students in grades four through nine. Participation was mandatory, ensuring all students experienced the challenge and excitement of the event.

The competition was structured in three rounds: classroom, grade-level, and regional. Classroom rounds began with two practice sessions to help students familiarize themselves with the format and build their confidence. For grades four and five, a more supportive system was used, where students earned ticks for correctly spelled words, offering positive reinforcement and a non-elimination approach.

The grade-level competition, held in the school library, featured the top five students from each class, with stricter rules and time limits. Winners received certificates, and the event culminated in a regional competition with another Elementary School, where students from different language backgrounds competed successfully.

The Spelling Bee was carefully planned, involving multiple roles: a pronouncer, judges, a timekeeper, and a clear system for fairness. Students prepared by practicing spelling, learning the English alphabet, and studying word lists. Teachers, integrated spelling activities into regular lessons. This successful initiative was not only a rewarding educational experience but also a testament to the impact of Peace Corps volunteers working alongside local teachers to enhance students' English skills and foster a sense of community. The event set a strong foundation for future competitions and spelling activities at the school.



Spelling Bee!

- Study the word lists in the back of your workbooks and the extra words in the back of your student books.
- You might have to spell a different form of a word. For example, if the word *make* is in the book, you might have to spell *make*, *makes*, *making*, or *made*.

Rules

- You will hear the word two times before you spell it.
- Say the word, then spell the word, then say the word again.
 - EXAMPLE: "Water. W - A - T - E - R. Water."
- Speak slowly, clearly, and loud enough.
- Use English letter names only.
- You have 1 minute to spell the word.

Options. You can use most of these only one time.

- Ask to repeat the word. *You can do this *two times*.
- Ask to hear the word used in a sentence.
- Ask for a definition or the meaning of the word.
- Ask for the part of speech of the word (noun, verb, adjective, adverb, preposition).
- Start over.
 - You must say, "Start over".
 - If you already made a mistake, you can't start over.

Elimination. You will be out if you misspell the word, if you take too long to spell the word, if you do not use English letters, and if you do not speak clearly.

Winning. When there are two people left, if the other person misspells the word, you must spell your own word correctly to win.

Studying and preparing

- Study the word lists at the back of the workbook. Study the extra words at the back of the student book. Study all the words in the units.
- Study English spelling rules. Look for spelling patterns.
- Study how verbs change in different tenses and how nouns become plurals.
- Use an online spelling game.
- Practice with a friend or family member.
- Practice spelling out loud.
- Practice writing the words.
- Practice saying the English alphabet names.



Spelling Bee Guide

Innovative Service Models & Reimagined Service: -Virtual Service-

Virtual Service Initiative:

The Peace Corps launched the Virtual Service Pilot (VSP) in 2020 as an innovative way to continue to deliver on the PC mission and goals during the COVID-19 pandemic. VSP was designed to test the feasibility of virtual engagement and was at first open to any Returned Peace Corps Volunteer. Since recently, Virtual Service engagements are open to all U.S. citizens who wish to donate their voluntary services. Virtual Service Pilot Participants (VSPPs) are private citizens who donate their time and voluntary services to the agency to engage virtually five to 15 hours per week in three- to six-month long engagements with community partners.

Virtual Service in Albania and Montenegro:

Since the beginning of the Virtual Service Pilot in 2020, Peace Corps Albania and Montenegro has co-developed 13 Virtual Service engagements alongside local partner organizations in both countries, 12 of which have already been completed. These engagements have allowed PCAM to establish partnerships, support current partners, and support partner organizations located in Tirana or Podgorica, where PCVs are not able to serve.

The 13 individuals who have dedicated their time to serve virtually have contributed to activities related to curriculum development, English language acquisition, leadership development, fundraising, and much more. As of January 2024, three Virtual Service Engagements are ongoing.



Virtual service orientation in 2024

- 12 Virtual Service engagements in Albania and Montenegro since the beginning of the pilot with schools, higher education institutions, NGOs, and governmental agencies
- 1 Ongoing Virtual Service engagement

Innovative Service Models & Reimagined Service

-Service Improvement Committee-

Service Improvement Committee

The Service Improvement Committee (SIC) in 2024 continued its important role as a platform for constructive dialogue between Peace Corps staff and Volunteers. This committee brings together one Volunteer from each sector in Albania and Montenegro elected by their colleagues to provide insight and feedback on how to improve our programming, training, and operations. Through quarterly meetings and ongoing engagement, the committee successfully facilitates discussions on issues of concern by the PCAM community.

Thanks to the dedicated efforts of Volunteers, including Amelia, Paul, Sebastian, Parker, Katie, Maria, Angela and Rylie, the SIC has become a vital mechanism for fostering mutual support and ensuring that Peace Corps' goals align with the needs of Volunteers and host communities alike. We send our special appreciation to our outgoing Chairperson Katie and our incoming chairperson Rylie!



Service Improvement Committee members and PCAM Leadership in 2024

Innovative Service Models & Reimagined Service

-Peer Support Network-

Peer Support Network

The Peer Support Network (PSN) plays a central role in supporting the mental and emotional well-being of Peace Corps Volunteers. This formalized group of trained Volunteers provides essential peer-to-peer support, offering a safe and confidential space for individuals to share challenges and seek advice. The PSN promotes resilience but also connects Volunteers with the appropriate resources when needed, whether for personal well-being or professional guidance.

The PSN also collaborates closely with the Medical and Safety Teams to address emerging concerns and strengthen the overall well-being infrastructure.

Special thanks to team members like Abigail, Kira, Aleksandra, Adrell, Patti, Kourosh, and Robert for their commitment to fostering a culture of care and empathy. Through their work, the PSN has made an impact on the Volunteer experience, helping to ensure that Volunteers feel supported, resilient, and prepared to overcome the unique challenges of service.



Peace Corps Albania and Montenegro PSN members collaborated with our Medical Officers during 2024

Innovative Service Models & Reimagined Service

-Communications Work Group-

Communications Working Group

In 2024, Peace Corps Albania and Montenegro continued working with the dynamic Communications Working Group, bringing together staff and volunteers to enhance collaboration and amplify the impact of their efforts in local communities.

One of the group's most effective tools has been reaching out to peer Volunteers to share updates and highlight achievements via social media, ensuring that both external audiences and local communities are informed and engaged. Additionally, the group has played a pivotal role in improving internal communications through the bi-weekly newsletter, which serves as a vital resource for volunteers and staff to stay connected and informed about ongoing projects and initiatives.

By fostering both external outreach and internal dialogue, the Communications Working Group has strengthened the bond between Peace Corps and the communities it serves, while enhancing the visibility and impact of volunteer work in the region.



Following an Invitation from the Communications working Group, Volunteers and their students proposed designs for a mural painting outside the Peace Corps Albania and Montenegro office. The above proposal won this competition and is now decorating our office wall. Thanks to PCV Eric and Students for their winning design!

Effective Administration Support for Peace Corps Operations

In 2024, the Administration and Management Operations Unit of Peace Corps Albania and Montenegro played a crucial role in ensuring the smooth functioning of day-to-day operations, allowing volunteers and staff to focus on their mission of peace and friendship. From managing logistics and housing to overseeing the financial operations and compliance with local regulations, their behind-the-scenes work supports every piece of Peace Corps Albania and Montenegro's operations.

A standout initiative this year was the successful integration of new digital tools like PEEPS to simplify timesheet processes, making it easier for staffers to manage their assignments and track and report progress.

The unit also facilitated professional development opportunities, and event organizations helping both Volunteers and staff build skills that will benefit them during and after their Peace Corps service. Their commitment to creating a well-organized, responsive, and sustainable operational environment has been vital in strengthening Peace Corps' presence and impact in Albania and Montenegro.



Staff participates in ongoing training, but also in wellbeing activities during the year

Provision of comprehensive medical services to our Volunteers

The health and well-being of the Peace Corps Volunteers serving in Albania and Montenegro is of a paramount importance for us. Volunteers are provided with all necessary and appropriate medical care during Peace Corps service. A comprehensive health care program is managed and implemented in country by the post Peace Corps Medical Officer (PCMO) under administrative supervision of the Country Director and with professional guidance and oversight from the Office of Medical Services in Peace Corps Washington.

The health care program includes:

- Pre-service immunization and prophylaxis as described in the Office of Medical Service Technical Guidelines, as well as regular immunization and prophylaxis as necessary throughout the term of service.
- Clinical care throughout service.
- Health orientation and education throughout service.

Evaluation of health conditions at potential sites for Volunteer placement

- Other health support for Volunteers at their sites through staff site visits, when appropriate.

All necessary medical care and services are provided primarily through, or under the direction of, the PCMOs and through local health care providers in country, as necessary.

Accessing medical care: Peace Corps Medical Officers assess volunteer health concerns by evaluating urgency and providing advice through telemedicine and the PCV medical kit. If in-person care is necessary, they determine whether the volunteer should be seen by them, a backup PCMO, or a local provider. They review medical history, conduct physical exams, and discuss treatment options.

Medical training: Volunteers receive medical training during Pre-Service, In-Service, and Close of Service training events. PCMOs teach them about maintaining health, including prevention, first aid, and treatment of common illnesses. Training covers COVID-19, nutrition, food and water safety, emotional health, alcohol awareness, prevention of HIV/AIDS and other STIs, domestic violence, emergency response, among other topics.



Peace Corps Albania and Montenegro medical team with colleagues from HQ and the Country Director.

Peace Corps Volunteers Safety and Security and Empowering Staff with Safety and Security Expertise

The Peace Corps recognizes that Volunteer service involves risk. To mitigate the risk, a Volunteer's overall well-being is a shared responsibility. Community members, Peace Corps staff, and Volunteers all play a role. As the Peace Corps can't eliminate all risks Volunteers may face, and the safety and security of Volunteers is of the utmost importance, there are programs, resources and system in place to support Volunteers throughout service.

PCAM's Safety and Security Team is responsible for working with other staff and safety and security partners to implement rational and practical solutions to safety and security problems that Volunteers and Trainees might face during their service.

The Peace Corps is committed to providing Volunteers with the training, guidance, support, and information they need to remain healthy, safe, and productive throughout their service. The Peace Corps' broad and systematic approach to keep Volunteers safe during their service is based upon several fundamental tenets of Volunteer safety and security, including

- building relationships;
- sharing information & training,
- site development,
- incident reporting and response; and
- emergency communications and planning.

Volunteers are supported 24/7 and all emergency systems remain fully operational all the times including Duty Officer system, Sexual Assault Liaisons, and support to PCVS who are traveling outside of their site.



Safety and Security team delivering trainings to Volunteers

Peace Corps Volunteers Safety and Security and Empowering Staff with Safety and Security Expertise

PCAM's Safety and Security program

The Peace Corps closely monitors, on an ongoing basis, the safety and security environment in every country in which Volunteers serve.

Peace Corps security team in cooperation and in consultation with key safety and security authorities in the country of service conducted annual detailed risk assessments of potential threats to Volunteers and Post such as: natural disasters (earthquake, floods, fires, snow/storms), traffic accidents, epidemiological diseases, terrorism and other hazards, which might have a potential impact on Volunteer well-being and Post's operations.

As a result of this in-depth security assessments, Post prepares the Emergency Action Plan (EAP), which outlines all mitigation measures to reduce the likelihood of the risk, preparedness, action to counter the threat and all response steps/actions if threat is unavoidable. Also, risk assessment informs adjustments to Volunteer placement decisions in different communities all over the country, policies, training, transportation and communication in case of an emergency.

How in-country staff support Volunteer safety and security

Monitoring Safety and Security Environment – the Security Team monitors daily, the safety and security environment in Albania and Montenegro and provides timely recommendations or mitigation measures to Country Director, Response Team, staff and HQ. Subsequently, it develops and provides safety and security advisories to staff/Volunteers as needed to mitigate potential risks or threats to Volunteers or post operations.

Relationship building- Throughout the year, the Security Team continues to build, maintain the relationship and cooperate with key safety and security actors in both countries (law enforcement, embassies, Civil Protection Agencies, Red Cross) for timely support of Volunteers/Trainees in case of need.

Assessment of Work and Housing placements: In-country staff assess and approve the communities where Volunteers live and work to ensure that placements are appropriate and secure housing and work sites are available. Peace Corps staff visit Volunteers at their sites to monitor their health and safety. If Volunteers' safety or well-being is at risk or compromised, Peace Corps staff will work to resolve the situation, and provide timely support to victims of the crime.

Peace Corps Volunteers Safety and Security and Empowering Staff with Safety and Security Expertise

Safety and security training

The Safety and Security Team makes sure that Volunteers, Trainees and staff are adequately trained for their safety and security responsibilities and are able to implement them.

The Peace Corps takes an integrated approach to Volunteer's safety and security. With integrated approach, we do provide regularly safety and security training to Trainees/Volunteers, Counterparts, Host Families and staff.

Before assignment to the communities where they will live and work, Trainees participate in up to 12 weeks of intensive pre-service training in their country of service. Topics include language, culture, health, and safety and security.

During Safety and Security training, in order to prepare Volunteers for new environment, several topics are covered such as Security Risk reduction, Transportation Safety, Home Safety, Earthquake Preparedness, Emergency Action Plan, Sexual Assault Awareness and Report, Gender Roles, Bystander Intervention, Unwanted Attention etc.

Trainees develop an awareness of their new environment, build their capacity to cope with the challenges they may face, and practice skills that help them adopt a safe and appropriate lifestyle. Trainees are also instructed on Peace Corps policies and procedures and their associated responsibilities.

After swearing in, the Peace Corps provides integrated safety training throughout Volunteer service to help Volunteers better understand their surroundings and develop personal safety strategies.

Also, the Security Team facilitates different safety and security trainings and workshops with Volunteers' counterparts/ community members and host family members.

Furthermore, annually, the Security Team provides/facilitates several safety and security trainings in different topics for Post's staff.



During pre-service training

Our Permanent Staff in 2024

Peace Corps Albania and Montenegro is proud to have a dedicated staff comprised of Americans, Albanians, and Montenegrins, comprising some of the best talent in the two countries we serve. The team is focused on helping our Volunteers to achieve their greatest potential during their service. They are passionate about their work and about making a difference for children, communities, and people throughout Albania and Montenegro. This is the team that is responsible for the good work we have achieved in Albania since 1992, and the management of the new opportunity to serve in Montenegro.

Agim Dyrmishi	Jeffery Warner
Arben Cako	Jelena Tripkovic
Arben Loci	Julian Pando
Ardita Qosja	Luka Bobicic
Artenca Collaku	Lumturi Piciri
Benard Babaj	Marie
Besa Arapi	Aughenbaugh
Darina Kaltani	Marjeta Zavalani
Diana Djaloshi	Megan Wilson
Dorontinë	Mira Luca
Berishaj	Mirela Tahiraj
Elsona Tuncer	Milena Pejovic
Florian Muhaj	Monika Mukja
Gentian Leka	Qazim Hoxha
Geri Martiri	Rikela Fusha
Ilir Memlikaj	Suida Shima
Ilir Ziu	Tiana Covic
Iris Dollia	Ylli Cupi
Ivana Rackovic	



Staff members at teambuilding event in April 2024

PCAM's Partner Organizations

Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs)

- Agro-Puka
- Albanian Local Capacity Development Foundation
- American Councils
- ARKA Center—Shkodër
- CSDC Durrës
- Darien Book Aid
- English Language Teachers Association
- English Speaking Union
- Foundation Food Bank Albania
- Friends of Albania
- Junior Achievement of Albania
- Mary Ward Loreto
- Children are the future (CAF Albania)
- Albanian Consumer Center (ACC)
- New Bridges
- Qendra Marredhenie
- Regional Development Agency—Korçë
- Sidi Education
- Terre des Hommes
- Touristic Dibra
- Water Charity
- World Association of Girl Guides and Girl Scouts
- World Connect
- World Vision
- Youth Center—Vlorë
- Youth in Free Enterprise

Government and Independent Organizations

- Albanian Ministry of Education and Sports
- Montenegrin Ministry of Education, Science and Innovation
- ASCAP (Quality Ensuring Agency for Pre-University Education - Albania)
- DPAP (General Directorate of Pre-University Education - Albania)
- Regional Education Directorate for North, Albania
- Health for All Project - Albania
- Association of Paraplegics of Montenegro
- Albanian institute of Public Health
- Forum MNE
- English Learning Teachers Association of Montenegro
- Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Montenegro
- Ministry of Interior of Montenegro
- United Nations Children Fund (UNICEF) in Albania and in Montenegro
- United Nations Population Fund
- United States Agency for International Development
- United States Embassies in Albania and in Montenegro and American Corners
- University of Shkodër, English Department
- University of Tirana, English Department

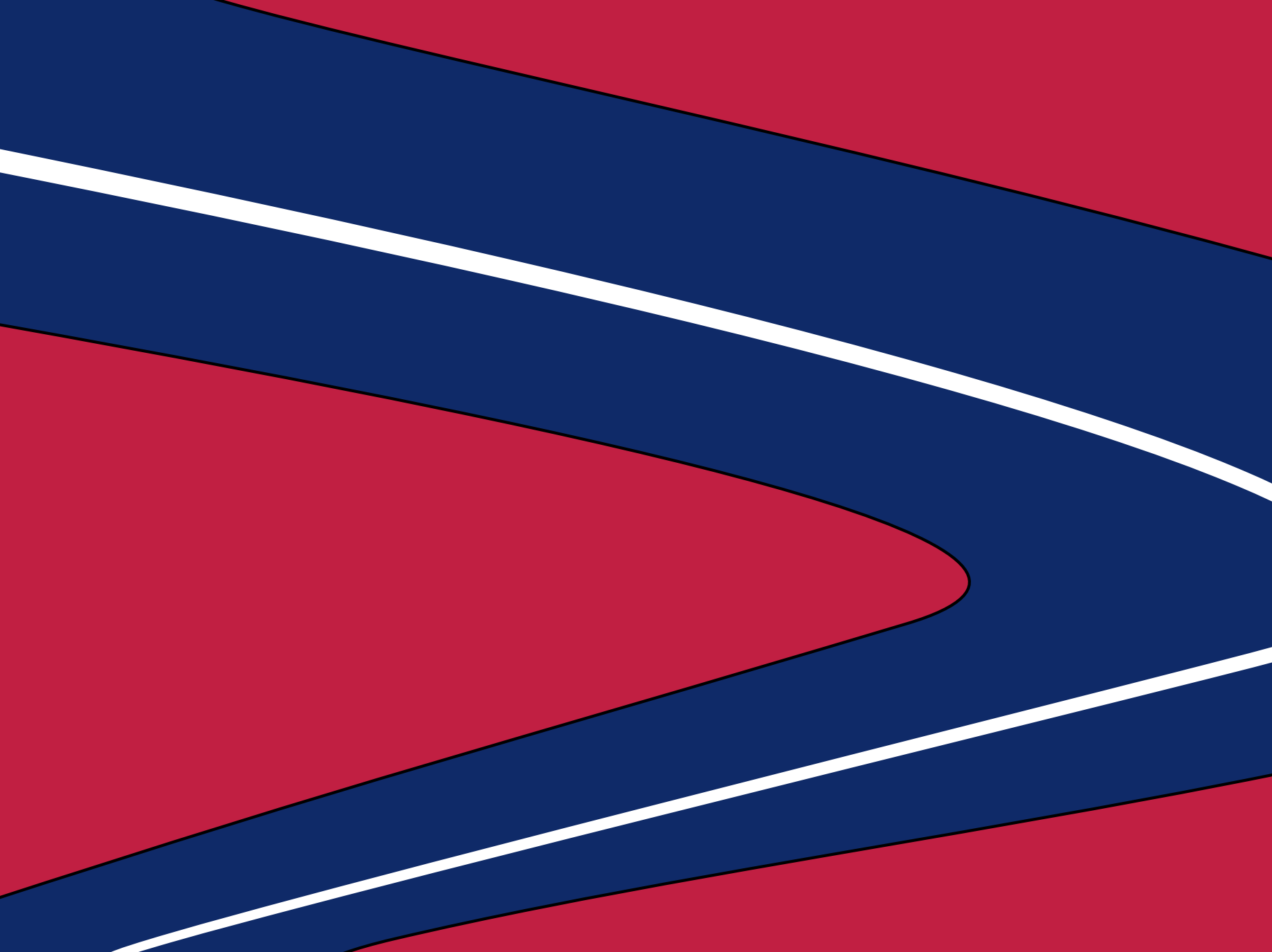
Municipalities & Schools

We appreciate our partner municipalities & schools
across Albania & Montenegro.

PCAM's Partner Organizations

Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs)

- New Epoch Center
- Environmental Center for Studies and Implementation-
- SOS Village of Children - Tiranë and Shkodër
- Another Vision -
- Open Gov Hub Albania
- Leadership Development Association Balkan
- YEC
- Psycho-Social Center "Vatra"
- Regional Development Agency -
- Argonaut - Tepelenë
- Social Inclusion for Development
- Youth Movement Center
- The International Association for Solidarity
- Youth of Ura
- Community Center Nish Tulla
- Liberi di Viaggiare – Udhëtimi i Lirë
- With a community for a change
- Roma Gate for Integration



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