

Employment and Social Affairs Platform

Background note

The “*Employment and Social Affairs Platform*” (ESAP), is a regional project financed by the European Commission in the amount of 3 million Euro and jointly implemented by RCC and ILO in the Western Balkan economies. The project, which begins its implementation in 2016 and lasts for 3 years, aims to strengthen regional cooperation and institutional capacities of national administrations, employers’ and workers’ organizations, enabling them to develop and effectively implement labour market and social policy reforms in their EU enlargement process. The project team is based in Sarajevo, Bosnia and Herzegovina.

The Western Balkan economies share similar structural characteristics and features of labour markets, including high unemployment and labour force inactivity, underfunded active labour market policies, limited resources of public employment services and a mismatch between the demand and supply of labour. Employment creation remains an important challenge for all economies.

The increased focus of the enlargement process on enhanced economic governance is accompanied by the introduction of new instruments such as the Economic Reform Programmes (ERPs) and the Employment and Social Reform Programmes (ESRPs). These initiatives will contribute to bringing the economies closer to EU practice, building strong ties in the process of EU integration and preparing them to fully participate and capitalize on future cooperation opportunities within the EU.

Regional cooperation remains an essential element of the WB economies' stabilization and association process towards EU membership. Specifically, in the area of employment and social affairs, economies can share their experiences, learn from each-other, and through this optimize their policy making and implementation practices. Additionally, economies can work together to improve the preparation, monitoring and follow-up processes related to the ERPs and ESRPs.

The four specific objectives of **RCC-implemented action** of the Employment and Social Affairs Platform project are directed towards:

1. Enhancing regional cooperation and establishing of a structured regional Employment and Social Affairs Platform

Activities will build on the previous work of the Social Agenda Working Group established by RCC in order to continue structured and dynamic regional dialogue on employment and

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social reforms. The platform will aim to contribute to evidence-based policy making and will include a broad and active membership base including ERP national and key line ministries' coordinators, ESRP coordinators, RCC Social Agenda Working Group members, representatives of Public Employment Services, civil society organizations and experts, and social partners.

2. Supporting the processes for preparation, monitoring and follow up of the integrated ERPs (employment and social component) and monitoring of the current ESRPs

The contribution towards improved ESRPs'/ERPs' processes will be realized through regional peer reviews, experience exchange, mutual learning, identification of best practices, hands-on targeted expertise, improved insight, adaptation and use of EU level tools and instruments and a relevant study visit in an EU member country. A particular focus will be placed on supporting the monitoring of the reforms outlined in the already adopted ESRP and the ESRPs in advanced drafting stage.

3. Enhancing the capacities of the relevant administrations for improved policy outcomes and policy reviews related to the prioritized employment, human capital and social policies

A variety of instruments, including seminars, trainings, workshops, research, analysis, peer reviews and study visits will be used to enhance public policy making capacities on employment and social affairs. Such activities will be closely aligned and contribute to the objectives included in the existing ESRPs and ERPs.

4. Strengthening the capacities and the existing PES Network with a view to facilitating the SEE 2020 labour mobility objective and preparations for future participation in the European Employment Services (EURES)

Activities will aim to support cooperation among PES offices of the Western Balkans in the framework of the Centre of Public Employment Services of the SEE economies. Studies, capacity building events and harmonized data gathering and sharing will contribute to improved performance and cooperation among PES offices. The experience of EU members of CPESSEEC and other EU countries will be highly valuable for the PES offices from the Western Balkans economies.

The three specific objectives of the **ILO-implemented action** of the Employment and Social Affairs Platform project are directed towards:

1. Improving the effectiveness of bipartite and tripartite social dialogue processes

Activities will add to on-going efforts of the ILO for developing governments' and social partners' institutional capacity to engage in effective social dialogue. The activities will seek to identify, capture and disseminate national experiences and good practices regarding social dialogue institutions and processes.



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International Labour Organization

2. Strengthening national labour inspectorates

Activities will contribute to developing close relationships and trust between labour inspections in the Western Balkans, promoting information and knowledge sharing related to the alignment of national legislation to international labour standards and EU directives in the field of occupational health and safety, strategies and tools for the formalization of the informal employment and undeclared work, and institutional responses to compliance problems. Annual meetings between the six target economies will be organized inspired by the EU Senior Labour Inspectorates Committee model. National level actions, such as thematic campaigns, will be also supported.

3. Technical Assistance and cross-fertilization with the Regional Cooperation Council (RCC)

The ILO will provide technical assistance to the Regional Cooperation Council to ensure the effective involvement of employers' and workers' organizations in the Council's work and in the advisory boards of public employment services following the modern European model. The ILO will provide its technical expertise and share relevant experiences and practices with the RCC, including those acquired during the process of economies' review of employment policies, which contributed to the establishment of a public employment service network between the Western Balkan economies and introduced the peer review practices.