



Employment and Labour Market Developments in the Western Balkans and Opportunities for Enhanced Regional Cooperation

Consultative Meeting

Brussels, 19 June 2018

Concept Note

Background

The SEE 2020 Strategy – *Jobs and Prosperity in a European Perspective Strategy*, approved by the governments of South East Europe in 2013, pursues a holistic pattern of development for the region and seeks to stimulate the key long-term drivers of growth. The inclusive growth pillar of the SEE 2020 strategy aims to bring the participating economies around a common agenda that emphasizes the creation of employment, development of a skilled workforce, inclusive participation in the labour market and health and wellbeing for all. One of the headline targets of the strategy is the commitment by the participating economies to create 1 million new jobs until 2020.

Under this framework, RCC is implementing, jointly with ILO, a 3 year regional project, the “*Employment and Social Affairs Platform*” (ESAP). The project is financed by the EU and covers the 6 Western Balkan economies: Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo*, Montenegro, Serbia and The Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia. The project, which began its implementation in 2016, works to strengthen regional cooperation and institutional capacities of national administrations, enabling them to develop and effectively implement labour market and social policy reforms in their EU enlargement process.

The RCC-led component of the project has worked with Ministries of Labour (MoL) and Public Employment Services (PES) to implement two important processes: mutual learning on employment policies and programmes and benchmarking among PES. These processes have created a momentum of knowledge sharing and mutual exchange and have introduced these institutions to similar EU-wide processes and tools.

The activities of this project are implemented in the context of a renewed emphasis on employment and social issues both within the EU and in the EU communication to the Western Balkans.



The recently adopted European Pillar of Social Rights aims to deliver new and more effective rights for citizens through equal opportunities and access to the labour market, fair working conditions and social protection and inclusion. The Pillar reflects 20 key principles that should be central to the process of EU legislative harmonization for the Western Balkans.

In the latest communication from the European Commission ‘A credible enlargement perspective for and enhanced EU engagement with the Western Balkans’, one of the six flagship initiatives that will support the transformation of the Western Balkans relates to socio-economic development and the new reinforced social dimension will see more focus on employment and social policies, with increased financial assistance to support the social sector.

The aims of the meeting

The meeting will provide an opportunity for face-to-face dialogue among government representatives in order to:

- present and discuss main trends and challenges in employment and labour markets as well as the preliminary results of peer reviews on employment policies and benchlearning;
- review and agree on common challenges and priorities for regional cooperation;
- propose options and modalities for reflecting these priorities in future regional cooperation frameworks;

These topics will be examined in plenary and group sessions and inform the process of reinforcing existing and identifying emerging regional cooperation priorities on employment and social affairs.

**Coordination meeting with representatives of Western Balkan Ministries of Labour and
Public Employment Services
Draft Agenda**

19 June 2018
Brussels, Belgium

Monday, 18 June 2018

Arrival of Participants to Brussels

Tuesday, 19 June 2018

Venue: RCC Liaison Office

09.00 – 10.00 Welcome remarks and presentation of main employment trends and labour market developments

- Vanja Ivošević, Senior Expert on Skills and Mobility, RCC
- Nand Shani, ESAP Team Leader, RCC

10.00 – 12.00 Working groups on prioritizing joint actions on employment and social affairs

Participants will participate in two working groups depending on the area of interest and expertise to share common challenges and priorities for regional cooperation and propose options and modalities for reflecting these priorities in future regional cooperation frameworks on employment and social affairs

Topic 1

Support institutional capacities to improve evidence based design, implementation and monitoring of employment and social policies in order for better labour market outcomes

Participants will discuss ways to define, map, interpret and communicate labour market intelligence at the regional level based on a system that collects and analyses labour market information and statistics that feed into guiding policies and decision-making. Participants will discuss the scope for enhancing labour market and social statistics collection, classification and analysis.

The discussion will also focus on priority policies aimed at, but not limited to, (1) supporting increased formal employment through formalisation of undeclared work; (2)



supporting the transition from economic inactivity to employment and (3) employment of youth, long term unemployed and vulnerable groups and the enhanced role for active labour market measures.

Topic 2

Enhancing the Performance of Public Employment Services

The benchmarking initiative among Western Balkan Public Employment Services revealed the main strengths and areas for improvement for each office. The strongest areas include sustainable activation and managing transitions between unemployment and employment, the design of operational procedures, employer relations and Partnerships. On the other hand, areas such as evidence based design and implementation, strategic performance management and resource allocation can be further enhanced, though with much variation across the countries.

Participants will reflect on the main issues, challenges and lessons learned from the implementation of the benchmarking exercise. The discussion will inform the future round of benchmarking as well as agree on joint actions for addressing common needs to enhance the performance of Public Employment Services.

12.00 – 13.00 Lunch

13.00 – 15.00 Presentation of Working Group Results

Discussion

15.00 – 15.30 Summary and Conclusions

19.30 Dinner (hosted by RCC)