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**Talking Points by the RCC Secretary General *Majlinda Bregu***  
**at the**  
**WHO Europe Regional High-Level Forum on Health in the Well-being Economy**  
**/2 March, Copenhagen, UN City/**

*Session 6: A Well-being Economy Approach to Addressing Cost-of-Living Increases*

**How investing in human capital is key for inclusive sustainable development. Issues of youth migration (including from mental health perspective), as well as its effects on the ageing population/workforce. What kind of policies is RCC promoting around these issues?**

*Duration: 5 min*

Dear participants,

Dear guests,

Not long ago, at the peak of the dreadful Covid-19 pandemic, *Saving Lives and Livelihoods* was the Mantra of the Day.

The post-pandemic recovery aspirations for Building Back Better clashed with the new scary realities of a full-scale *war raging in Europe, steep inflationary pressures, food crisis and energy security fears, realities of tighter financing conditions and strained public debt*.

The *ambitious aspirations for strong rebound and inclusive and green growth subsided against the crunch of existential aspirations*. They crushed against the *stark realities of our fellow citizens in SEE who struggle to manage with 2 digits galloping inflation, and energy and food bills that consume half of their income*.



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A large portion of the energy shock continues to be absorbed by the public sector, with ***health and social services being among the first to suffer.***

Yet, ***no matter the hardships,*** it is ***important in such a context to keep the focus on values that truly matter: our health, environment, education and our communities.*** To uplifting our ***key asset that doesn't depreciate – our human capital, talented youth, resolute women, sage elders... To provide light and hope.***

***Especially in the SEE region*** that we at RCC operate in. One that suffered a decrease of 5.7% due to the pandemic, with 12.5% of people living below the mid-high income economy poverty line, with an average unemployment rate of 16% and youth unemployment reaching 34%. A region feeling ***first-handedly the brunt of demographic pressures and daunting brain drain!*** ***67% of Western Balkans citizens state their willingness to live and work abroad,*** a growing trend captured in our regular BB editions.

By ***putting people and human capital at the core of our actions to tackle the challenges, RCC-coordinated regional strategic frameworks: SEE2030 Strategy, Common Regional Market and Green Agenda*** are the ***main blueprints for inclusive and sustainable development.*** They entail regional actions that boost connectivity, mobility, research & development, digitisation, women economic empowerment, entrepreneurship, diaspora knowledge transfer, green growth.

To give just a ***glimpse of some of our relevant regional actions:***

- We support ***unlocking of new academic and professional opportunities*** by brokering international agreements on recognition of qualifications and supporting quality assurance in education within WB.
- We ***slash communication costs*** by eliminating roaming fees and we ***enable unobstructed flow of essential goods*** through green corridors at borders/boundaries.
- We support development of ***regional research infrastructure***, recognise and support ***digital start-ups*** and our talented ***women entrepreneurs and scientists.*** We empower and ***unlock the potential of women*** in our region and reduce gender gaps in digitalisation and STEM - as an economic, social and security imperative. Women who make up just 27.5% of business owners, 14.2% of companies' top managers, perform three times as much unpaid work than men and occupy just 14% of jobs in the STEM field – clearly hold the key to unlocking the economic potential in WB.
- We build the ***institutional and administrative capacities for employment and social policies and leverage on regional peer-learning and EU models.***
- We ***integrate substantive youth perspectives in regional policy-making through Youth Policy Labs.*** Under our steer, youth mental health policy solutions are being co-created in all WB economies, with direct relevance for our citizens' well-being.

***We build bridges, togetherness and purposeful and value-based collaborations in WB and SEE.***



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Our region's **citizens are spot on** when it comes to prioritising government investments. They are, even perhaps unconsciously, **intrinsic and genuine supporters of the well-being economy approach**. Nearly a quarter of the region's population (22%) believe that governments should prioritise investments in social infrastructure, up three times from earlier regional surveys.

**Dear all,**

**Economic growth can't be the only and ultimate policy objective.** Collective wellbeing, healthy and thriving population where no one is left behind should be the foundation of every growth policy.

Hence the **appreciation and importance of this High-Level Forum** that I am happy to contribute on RCC's behalf - to galvanise, catalyse and inspire broader set of stakeholders on the shift to a genuine well-being and caring economy approach.