

Social Dimension Initiative

Political commitment to the EU accession process for the Western Balkans region made a move forward regarding political and economic reforms. For a decade, Western Balkan countries benefit from substantial EU assistance. Still, Western Balkan region is facing social risks associated with poverty, income inequality, unemployment and other forms of social exclusion.

Social Dimension Initiative has started in August, 2018 with the aim to point out the necessity for better social and employment policies in the enlargement process of WB countries, beyond the framework of the EU social *acquis*. This regional initiative is the outcome of ASBs 25 year's long humanitarian work in the region and the identification of plenty common potentials and obstacles for social prosperity and wellbeing of the citizens of these countries at their path to European Union membership.

Ministers dealing with the social policy in the Western Balkans will “jointly act to ensure that the quality of everyday life of the citizens in the Western Balkans progressively comes closer to the quality of life of the citizens in the European Union, that the growth in the Region is evenly distributed and that no one is left behind.”(*SDI Ministerial Declaration on Improving Social Policy in the Western Balkans*, initial text to be signed at Regional Conference in late 2018).

Within the SDI will be developed up to 180 ready-to-be-funded social project ideas from 6 WB countries. Projects will be prepared through expert mentorship to local actors from underdeveloped local communities. In each of the WB countries there will be organized high level consultations with relevant national stakeholders where the country specific topics will be discussed with the aim of setting the main priorities in social sphere related to national strategies, accession negotiations and IPA programming.

With full commitment of ASB and its WB partners, by the end of 2019, firm political support for the social dimension of the EU integrations in the WB countries will be established, and all authorities, including municipalities and social partners will be encouraged and/or strengthened for effective usage of available programs and funds in design and implementation of social policies at all levels.

SDI will be implemented by ASB SEE offices in BIH, Serbia and Kosovo with the support of local partner organisations - LIR CD B&H, SOS Montenegro, ARSIS Albania, Preda+ Kosovo, La Strada FYROM, IDC Serbia and regional IRIS Network and in close collaboration with EU parliament, national Parliaments and Governments in the WB countries and local NGO sector.