

Western Balkans Ministers' Regional Initiative DECLARATION ON IMPROVING SOCIAL POLICY IN THE WESTERN BALKANS

In order to further strengthen European integration processes and maintain a credible enlargement perspective for the Western Balkans, also through designing better social and employment policies in the Western Balkans...

In order to develop effective and efficient welfare states and promote inclusive growth in the Western Balkans, through creating equal opportunities and access to the labour market, fair working conditions and social protection and inclusion for all...

Stressing that people and economies in the Region have a common heritage and history and a future defined by shared opportunities and challenges...

We, Ministers in charge of social policy, express our full commitment to strengthening social dimension within the enlargement process of the Western Balkans. Together with our EU partners, we will strive for more support to employment and social policies on the EU integration path of the Western Balkans.

We commit ourselves and step up our efforts as regards combating social exclusion and discrimination, promoting social justice and protection, increasing equality between men and women, and boosting solidarity between generations and protection of the rights of the child.

We believe that the European integration process represents a unique opportunity for comprehensive improvement of the social policy in the Western Balkans. In that sense, we join our efforts to maximize the effects of EU membership negotiations process, related negotiation chapters and the EU acquis.

We believe that the development of the Economic Reform Programme for each of our economies should be a crucial tool for improving economic governance and modernisation of our economies, but also for ensuring social dimension of the European integration process. We will act jointly so that measures tackling social challenges and structural unemployment are prioritized within our Economic Reform Programmes.

We believe that the new European Pillar of Social Rights reflects principles and rights that are essential for fair and well-functioning labour markets and welfare systems. We will be guided by the European Pillar for Social Rights to further promote reforms in social sectors and thus align our labour markets and welfare systems with the EU.

Together with our EU partners, we will jointly act so that the EU pre-accession funds are even more tailored to the specific needs of each of our economies and societies and that specific key reforms are strengthened in order to accelerate transformation towards fairer and inclusive societies.

We are aware that the EU membership will significantly increase EU funding to social policy via the European Social Fund (ESF) and other instruments. We will speed up our efforts to adapt our legislation and structures in order to be able to successfully manage, control and audit ESF-type measures. The administrative capacity of all authorities involved, mainly government bodies, but also municipalities and social partners, will be strengthened.

We want to act jointly to improve governance in social sectors and strengthen institutional capacity as a precondition for effective and efficient social policies. In addition, we will continuously work on the improvement of the monitoring and evaluation systems which would provide sufficient evidence for improved social welfare policies.

We will redouble our efforts to address vital reforms in the social welfare areas, thus bringing all stakeholders on board from across the political spectrum and from civil society. We will encourage appropriate engagement from all levels of government, including local governments, which are closest to the citizens, but also social partners and civil society.

We call upon the EU to continue increasing cooperation with our region in the field of social policy through, among other things, increased participation of the Western Balkans in the Council meetings and European Commission working groups as indicated by the latest EU Enlargement Communication. Thus, we will be part of shaping European and our future policies.

On our side, we will regularly organize annual EU-Western Balkans Ministerial meetings on social and employment issues and actively participate in exchanging views and will also promote and boost exchanges between administrations, experts and civil society in the Region.

We, Ministers dealing with the social policy in the Western Balkans, have agreed today to 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.

Ministers from the Western Balkans:

Minister Ogerta Manastirliu, Minister, Ministry of Health and Social Protection,
Republic of Albania

Minister, Dragan Bogdanić, MD, Ministry of Health and Social Welfare of Republic of Srpska,
Bosnia and Hercegovina

Minister Vesko Drljača, Ministry of Labour and Social Policy Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina,
Bosnia and Hercegovina

Minister Mila Carovska, Minister, Ministry of Labour and Social Policy,
The Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia

Minister Skender Reçica, Minister, Ministry of Labour and Social Welfare, Kosovo*

Minister Kemal Purišić, Minister, Ministry of Labour and Social Welfare, Montenegro

Minister Zoran Đorđević, Minister, Ministry of Labour, Employment, Veteran and Social Affairs,
Republic of Serbia

6th November 2018 - Belgrade