



**Berlin
Process**

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Work Plan on Employment and Social Policy

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The Berlin Process was set up in 2014 as a platform for high-level cooperation between official representatives of the Western Balkan Six (WB6) and other European partners. On the occasion of its tenth anniversary in 2024, participants underlined the need to enhance regional cooperation on employment and social policies in the Western Balkans as part of the Berlin Process. In this regard, the 2024 Chair's Conclusions announced the development of a work plan on employment and social policy (active labour market policies, the implementation of labour rights, including occupational safety and health and labour inspections, as well as on social dialogue) (here: „Work Plan“). The importance of this process was underlined in the 2025 Chair's Conclusions.

Employment and social policies promote people's well-being. They create opportunities for people to make progress and take control of their own lives and they establish the framework for decent work. They also promote equal opportunities and ensure that people will not be left behind when they need help the most. Employment and social policies are a cornerstone of European integration and thus play an important role in achieving the overarching goals of the Berlin Process.

This Work Plan aims at enhancing regional cooperation on employment and social policies in the Western Balkans. It is built on the commitment of the participants of the Berlin Process to international labour standards and the European Pillar of Social Rights. The Work Plan supports the social and employment reforms in the EU accession process. It initiates regional dialogues and exchanges of expertise on active labour market policies, the implementation of labour rights, including occupational safety and health and labour inspections as well as on social dialogue.

This Work Plan was developed in a comprehensive, inclusive and needs-based dialogue process of the WB6, Germany as the Chair of the Berlin Process 2024 (“The Partners”) and other participants of the Berlin Process. WB6 and Germany are committed to continue their active engagement and to successfully implement this Work Plan. Other Berlin Process participants are welcome to take part in this joint effort.

The Work Plan aims at creating added-value for the WB6 and the other partners involved in the Work Plan process. Activities in this Work Plan are designed to avoid duplication of activities and ideally create synergies with existing initiatives in the area of employment and social policy in the region. In particular, this Work Plan supports the goal of the Common Regional Market Action Plan 2025-2028 on attractive labour markets in the region.

A: Areas of Cooperation

The following activities have been proposed by the WB6 for inclusion in this Work Plan. Each activity will be hosted by one or more of the WB6 and supported by the others. This approach underlines the ownership of the WB6 and their commitment in the areas below.

Beyond the activities explicitly mentioned below, overarching topics, such as employment strategies, will also be part of the cooperation.

The Partners agree to the following activities on ten topics in the areas of active labour market policies, the implementation of labour rights, including occupational safety and health and labour inspections as well as social dialogue.

I. Active Labour Market Policies

Goal: promote employment by effective strategies and measures for resilient and inclusive labour markets.

Activities

1. Active labour market policy and effective instruments targeting different groups

Exchange of information and good practices on innovative employment programs and policies to enhance employability and labour market participation of different (vulnerable) groups, particularly women, people aged 50+, persons with disabilities as well as Roma as a national minority.

2. Support for long-term unemployed persons in the labour market

Exchange of experiences and good practices on services and measures to improve the position and (re)integration of long-term unemployed persons in the labour market, including on the modalities of local self-government units' participation in the implementation of employment policy that supports unemployed people at local level and in accordance with local needs and opportunities.

3. Understanding trends and addressing needs on the labour market

- a. Exchange on best practices and experiences on data processing and projection to better understand current and future trends and needs on the labour market.
- b. Cooperate in identifying skills shortages in sectors such as medical, geriatric and social care as well as training and skills demands, e.g. digital and green skills.
- c. Identify policy options and strategies (e.g. encourage investment into training and better alignment of training to employer needs).

II. Implementation of Labour Rights, including Occupational Safety and Health and Labour Inspection

Goal: strengthen decent work in the Western Balkans by protecting and enforcing labour rights

Activities

4. Raising awareness and expanding knowledge of labour standards and OSH

Exchange of best practices and examples on public awareness-raising campaigns, information materials and social media among employees and employers and the general public to promote respect for labour rights, adherence to occupational safety and health (OSH) standards in line with EU and ILO standards.

5. Capacity building and training for labour/OSH inspectors, policy makers and experts

Exchange best practices in the area of training; develop/share models, guidelines, practices, practical manuals and quality control for the training of occupational safety and health (OSH) experts and labour/OSH inspectors; and organise joint training sessions and study visits, including on the identification of human trafficking for labour exploitation.

6. Reforming the occupational safety and health system (policy perspective)

- a. Exchange of knowledge, experiences and best practices on OSH, e.g. through an interministerial collaboration/regional network of key policymakers; this includes to provide legislative orientation, guidance to implement the amendments and supplements to OSH legislation and to identify common strategic goals and enhance joint action.
- b. Promote to share information about the OSH system, sectoral initiatives, national statistical/reporting systems and recommendations for improving OSH in alignment with the EU acquis.

7. Effective enforcement of labour rights, including OSH

Exchange information on systems and practical approaches/examples for the notification and investigation of workplace accidents, including through digitalisation and for the reporting of occupational diseases in various sectors; and on effective communication and coordination with social partners and other stakeholders, as well as sharing good examples on prevention in OSH, including in the construction and agricultural sector (e.g., certification).

8. Policies and implementation of labour rights (besides OSH)

Exchange experiences on the implementation and enforcement of labour rights, e.g. on the prohibition of violence and harassment at work deriving from the ratification of ILO Convention 190.

III. Social Dialogue

Goal: find joint solutions by strengthening social dialogue as a key pillar of sustainable economic development

Activities

9. Raising awareness on social dialogue, capacity-building and networking among social partners, and informing the public

Connecting trade unions, employers and governments, with the objective of exchanging opinions, information and discussing proposals. This network could, for example, identify training needs, develop an online platform and provide options for webinars and online training on the topic of social dialogue. It could also provide information to the wider public.

10. Establishment of a functioning system of social dialogue

Exchange on how to promote and strengthen enterprise level and regional level social dialogue, exchange on regulation and implementation of respective laws and reforms and analysing the mechanisms and role of social dialogue in shaping employment and labour policies.

B: Principles and Mode of Cooperation

1. Steering Group

A Steering Group will be established consisting of one representative and his/her deputy from each participant of the Western Balkan Six (WB6) and of Germany's Federal Government. In the future, additional Berlin Process participants can also be represented if this is consented to by the group.

The role of the Steering Group is to support the implementation of the Work Plan. The individual members will act as the central point of contact, inform the Steering Group about the current situation and processes of the activities for which each party is responsible. They will also reach out to and maintain contact with national stakeholders and others in order to arrange the hosting of the activities.

The Steering Group will meet three times a year (virtually or hybrid). Germany will organise these meetings.

2. Implementation

The implementation of this Work Plan will be a joint effort of the WB6, Germany's Federal Government and other participants of the Berlin Process. It will also draw on the expertise of various international and European partners and regional organisations, including the social partners, in the Western Balkans.

The Work Plan will be implemented over the next two years. It will run until May 2028. Well in advance of the end of the implementation period, and not later than October 2027, the Steering Group will discuss whether to continue the cooperation.

The cooperation is not limited to the agreed activities. Additional activities can be included into the Work Plan at a later time if need be and if consented to by the Steering Group.

3. Responsibilities

All participants share the responsibility for the successful implementation of the Work Plan. The participants who have committed to the organising of an individual activity (“hosts”) are responsible for its realisation. The other participants as well as the Steering Group are to support the host by providing guidance, in particular with identifying experts and participants.

4. Funding

All activities are subject to funding. The host is also responsible for funding, or securing funds, for the activity.

5. Inclusion/cooperation with other partners

The Work Plan and its activities are inclusive - all participants of the Berlin Process are invited to participate. If WB6 and the German Government (Steering Group) agree, further supporters of the Work Plan process can be included in realising the activities.

6. Other considerations

This Work Plan is neither legally binding nor is it the basis for any obligations under international law.

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