

Better Employment Conditions for Seasonal Workers in South East Europe

The challenge

The labour market in various sectors such as agriculture, tourism, household services, construction, etc. is already a significant employment factor in all countries of the Western Balkans and, with the expected economic volatility because of the COVID-19 pandemic, is likely to gain further importance.

In many cases, however, access to seasonal work is more difficult: employers are confronted with complex administrative procedures, who often minimize the number of jobs or switch to the shadow economy. The seasonal labour market, which is therefore rather non-transparent, is more difficult to access for workers. The main problem is that in the countries of the Western Balkans the employment potential of seasonal work, especially for vulnerable groups is limited due to the bureaucratic and lengthy registration procedures. The already limited functional labour market for seasonal work also suspends the local economic growth.

Goal

The objective of this sub-project is to provide seasonal workers in SEE region with better employment opportunities through an electronic registration system.

Our approach

The implementation of the sub-project will take place in the six SEE countries. Because the core of the measure is based on the transfer of an approach that has already been successfully tested in Serbia, it lives through the successful transfer of experience and know-how between the partner countries. This means that the aspect of regional cooperation is at the center of this measure. The Business-Friendly Certification Network (BFC network) and other non-governmental organizations will play an important role in this, as in the dissemination of information on the results achieved so far.

Name	Sub-project: Better employment conditions for seasonal workers in South East Europe Open Regional Fund for South-East Europe – Modernisation of Municipal Services
Commissioned by	German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ)
Countries	Six countries of the Western Balkans - WB6
Lead executing agency	Regional Cooperation Council (RCC)
Duration	04/2021 – 03/2026
Project value	2.500.000 EUR



Seasonal workers in agriculture sector in Serbia

The methodology pursues a multi-level and multi-stakeholder approach to reduce barriers that limit the access of vulnerable groups to the labour market as well as plan job creation through improved legal and institutional framework conditions.

Due to the direct partner inquiry and the high willingness to reform, the project will initially pursue a transfer to Albania, Montenegro and North Macedonia as a priority. At the same time, the expansion to other sectors outside of agriculture in Serbia is being examined. Kosovo and Bosnia and Herzegovina will be included in the exchange and will be supported to also tackle the adoption of the system according to the tested model.

For the implementation, a model for a future system will be developed for the partner countries based on the completed feasibility studies, which builds on the successful model in the Serbian agricultural sector, but takes into account the country and sector-specific context factors. For this purpose, the national regulatory framework is analyzed and the existing IT systems are checked. This is accompanied by the establishment of cross-institutional working groups that ensure implementation and integration into the existing IT and institutional landscape. Working groups to combat the shadow economy have already been set up in three countries, Albania, Montenegro and North Macedonia, which have helped to shape the feasibility studies drawn up in the previous sub-project and also actively accompany the further implementation. In cooperation with the partners, specific legal recommendations for adapting the framework conditions for seasonal work will then be drawn up and fed into the legislative processes.

When setting up the systems, the technical preparatory work and specifications from Serbia can be used. After successful testing and ensuring all functionalities, the system can be released for the target group. It should be pointed out that the successful implementation of reforms are the prerequisite for the registration of seasonal workers.

All measures are accompanied by a systematic exchange of experience between political decision-makers and experts from the participating partner countries.

Results

Key impacts are improved access opportunities for workers to the seasonal labour market with formal employment relationships that include access to all given social benefits. In this way, the employment, perspective to stay and prospects, especially for vulnerable groups (including returnees), are strengthened. At the same time, local economic development in the partner countries will be further strengthened. This sub-project contributes to promoting sustainable economic growth, productive full employment, and decent work for all (SDG 8). The sub-project contributes to the integration of disadvantaged population groups (returnees, job seekers, Roma and the low-skilled) in the regular labour market and in corresponding social security systems in accordance with the Agenda 2030 principle Leave No One Behind. The project contributes to gender equality by giving priority to the needs of women when promoting formal employment. Women are particularly often affected by informal employment relationships characterized amongst other things by a lack of workers' rights and a lack of access to social security systems.

The cross-border exchange of experience also promotes regional cooperation and the harmonization of labour market-related instruments. This is a direct contribution to the goals of RCC's regional growth strategy and the Multi-annual Action Plan for a Regional Economic Area in the Western Balkans.

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