

Regional Cooperation for EU Integration

Context

The Western Balkan economies—Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo, Montenegro, North Macedonia, and Serbia—are **accession candidates and potential candidates to the European Union (EU)**. A prerequisite for their accession is better cooperation within the region. **The Berlin Process**, an exchange between high-ranking representatives of the EU and the Western Balkans, has already contributed to this goal.

However, further measures are needed in the Western Balkans to boost the skills of the authorities. These include the regional exchange of knowledge, cross-national training, and the communication of best practices. Additionally, the region faces specific challenges related to digital infrastructure, limited access to digital services, and insufficient regional digital cooperation—all crucial for advancing EU integration. Addressing these challenges is essential for improving digital transformation and overall connectivity in the region.

Objective

The initiative is focused on **enhancing regional cooperation** in the Western Balkans, with the goal of **accelerating the process of EU integration**.

Approach

The RCEI project supports four regional institutional networks—the **Network of Ministries of Foreign Affairs, EU integration authorities, IPA (Instrument for Pre-Accession) structures, and Parliamentary Committee Secretariats responsible for EU integration**. These networks collaborate to develop unified positions on EU integration and regional cooperation, particularly within the Berlin Process.

Project name	Regional Cooperation for EU Integration
Commissioned by	Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ)
Project region	Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo, Montenegro, North Macedonia, Serbia
Political partner	Regional Cooperation Council (RCC)
Duration	2012-2026

By fostering coordination among these institutions, the project aims to create a cohesive regional strategy for engaging with the EU.

- The project facilitates the alignment of Western Balkan authorities on EU policies by encouraging **joint positions** toward the European Commission and EU member states. Proven through previous module, this approach strengthens regional cooperation, a cornerstone of EU integration.
- Another focus is the agreement on **minimum standards** like the National Programme for the Adoption of the Acquis (NPAA), helping countries at different stages of EU integration meet EU Commission requirements. Strengthened cooperation ensures peaceful progress, even amid regional tensions.
- The project also focuses on **capacity building**, offering specialized training programs to enhance the skills of decision-makers and experts in the region's institutions. These programs foster mutual learning and knowledge sharing, ensuring that the region is better equipped to manage the complexities of EU integration.
- Additionally, the project promotes a regional **dialogue on gender and inclusion**, increasing the visibility of these issues in the EU accession process.



Regional Conference on the Effective Role of Parliaments in EU Integration Process

2024 Vlora, Albania



Gender Equality Forum within the Berlin Process 2024

2024 Berlin, Germany

EU4Digital

To address the region's challenges regarding digital infrastructure, limited access to digital services, and insufficient regional digital cooperation, the RCEI project has expanded its scope to include EU4Digital—a multi-donor action. Co-financed by the European Union and the German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ), EU4Digital aims to enhance digital connectivity, accelerate the region's digital transition, and support the integration of the Western Balkans into the EU Digital Single Market. BMZ has commissioned GIZ to implement this action as part of the Regional Cooperation for EU Integration project.

An example from the field

On September 19, 2024, the RCEI project organized the **the Gender Equality Forum** within the Berlin Process on behalf of the German Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ), that also hosted this event.

Representatives from the Western Balkan six (WB6), including government officials, local-level participants, and civil society members, engaged in discussions on gender-based violence, women participation in decision-making, and the role of feminist perspectives in reconciliation processes.

Most importantly, the Forum's participants put forward key recommendations - creation of a **regional funding mechanism** to provide sustainable resources for gender equality initiatives and **institutionalization of the Gender Equality Forum** as a permanent component of the Berlin Process. On October 14th, 2024, during the Berlin Process Summit, the heads of government from WB6 endorsed **these recommendations**.

The Gender Equality Forum was a crucial step toward ensuring that gender considerations are integrated into the Berlin Process, promoting a more equitable and inclusive approach to EU integration for the Western Balkans.

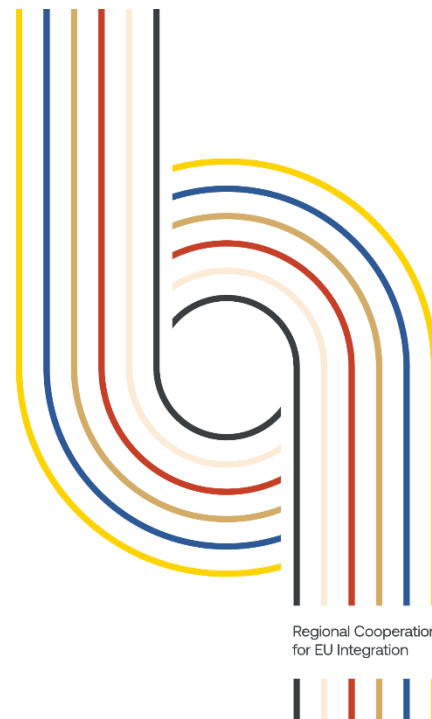
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The United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) that the Project focuses on in its implementation are:



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