

Employment and Social Affairs Platform 3 Project | #ESAP



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The ESAP III project has the pleasure to inform you by this Newsletter on recent project activities. For further reference please revert to <https://www.esap.online/home>

RCC Highlights

Strengthening Public Employment Services through Benchlearning

Under ESAP 3, implemented by the Regional Cooperation Council (RCC) with EU funding, the third cycle of Public Employment Services (PES) Benchlearning has started across the Western Balkans Six (WB6). Building on earlier cycles under ESAP 1 and ESAP 2, the process supports modernization of employment services and their gradual alignment with EU PES Network standards.

Benchlearning combines quantitative benchmarking with qualitative self-assessment, peer review, and exchange of practices. Rather than ranking institutions, it helps identify strengths, address gaps, and improve performance through evidence-based learning.

The 2026 cycle introduces new policy areas, including Youth Guarantee implementation, digital transformation and artificial intelligence, the green transition, skills intelligence, and multi-level performance management. The process will produce six individual PES assessment reports and one regional comparative report. The exercise is being implemented in cooperation with the ICON Institute.

<https://www.esap.online/themes/2/advanced-alignment-with-the-eu-acquis-and-european-pillar-of-social-rights-epsr>

Mutual Assistance Projects to Tackle Undeclared Work in Construction

Undeclared work remains a major labour market challenge across the WB6, affecting fair competition, workers' rights, public revenues, and social protection systems. Through ESAP 3, RCC continues to support the Western Balkans Network for Tackling Undeclared Work, which brings together enforcement authorities from across the region.

As part of this work, ESAP 3 is launching a new cycle of Mutual Assistance Projects (MAPs) focused on the construction sector, where undeclared work and labour law violations are especially widespread. Experts and practitioners from Cyprus, Lithuania, Norway, and Romania will share experience and practical approaches with regional counterparts.

<https://www.esap.online/news/244/rcc-esap-3-western-balkans-six-and-eu-experts-join-forces-to-tackle-undeclared-work-in-the-construction-sector>

<https://www.esap.online/docs/237/rcc-esap-3-tackling-undeclared-work-in-the-digital-age-focus-on-platform-work>

ILO ESAP 3 Highlights

Montenegro policy brief highlights social dialogue challenges and opportunities

ILO ESAP 3 is preparing briefs on social dialogue and collective bargaining across the Western Balkans 6. During this period, the rapid assessment and summary brief for Montenegro were published. The assessment notes that Montenegro has a solid legal and institutional framework, but points to the need for stronger influence of tripartite consultations on policymaking and broader collective bargaining coverage. Work also progressed on the Kosovo brief, while data collection for Albania has begun.

[ESAP | Social Dialogue and Collective Bargaining in Montenegro - A Rapid Assessment](#)

Albania pilot project on formalisation

Following consultations in Albania's tourism sector, ESAP 3 and the UN Joint Programme LEAP launched a formalisation pilot in Korça municipality to support short-term rentals and related tourism businesses.

ESAP 3 also advanced dialogue on extending social protection to seasonal workers in tourism. A high-level tripartite meeting in Tirana gathered around 60 representatives of government, social partners, and international experts to discuss barriers identified in a new ILO report.

[ESAP | ILO ESAP 3: Albania advances dialogue on social protection for seasonal workers in tourism](#)

[ESAP | ILO ESAP 3: Improving Access to Social Protection for Seasonal Workers: Challenges and Good Practices](#)

Strengthening accident investigation and prevention

ILO ESAP 3 continued to build the capacities of labour and occupational safety and health inspectors. A regional training brought together 17 inspectors, including 10 women, from Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro, North Macedonia, and Serbia.

Participants worked through the full accident investigation cycle, from notification and evidence collection to analysis, reporting, and prevention planning. The training promoted a stronger focus on root causes, weak supervision, insufficient training, and poor risk assessment, helping shift inspection from reaction to prevention.

[ESAP | ILO ESAP 3: From Accident Investigation to Prevention: Labour Inspectors Strengthen OSH Capacities in the Western Balkans](#)

[From the accident scene to prevention: labour inspectors from the Western Balkans strengthen skills in investigating work accidents | LinkedIn](#)

Albania strengthens smarter Labour OSH-enforcement through Open-Source Intelligence

In Albania, ESAP 3 supported capacity building on Open-Source Intelligence for institutions involved in labour inspection, enforcement, policymaking, and data analysis. The training brought together 18 participants, including 14 women, from the State Labour Inspectorate and Social Services, the Ministry of Economy and Innovation, the General Directorate of Taxes, the General Inspectorate, INSTAT and AKSHI.

ESAP | ILO ESAP 3: Albanian institutions strengthen Open-Source Intelligence capacities for smarter enforcement

From open sources to stronger enforcement: Albanian institutions strengthen OSINT skills | LinkedIn



North Macedonia builds on pilot results to reduce informality

In North Macedonia, ESAP 3 built on evidence generated through the ESAP 2 formalisation pilot, which showed that tackling informality requires not only enforcement, but also better incentives, stronger institutions, and more productive enterprises. ESAP 3 supported the Organisation of Employers of Macedonia in further exploring the links between productivity and informality.

The ILO supported a high-level national conference (180 participants, including 83 women) where 20 public institutions and the representative social partners committed in a declaration to coordinated action to address informality.

ESAP | ILO ESAP 3: North Macedonia steps up tripartite cooperation to reduce informality

ESAP | ILO ESAP 3: A Comprehensive Analysis of Productivity and Its Drivers in Firms in North Macedonia

