



# Independent evaluation of the ILO's Decent Work Country Programme strategies and actions in the Western Balkans (2012-2015)

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## What type of work has the ILO been doing in Western Balkan countries?

Over the past two decades, economic recessions have hit Western Balkan countries with underperforming labour markets, particularly in terms of persistently high unemployment rates. Such sluggish economic growth was due to a number of factors, including poorly established labour market institutions and a lack of flexibility in a more modernized economy. In an effort to promote productive recovery, the ILO introduced Decent Work Country Programmes (DWCPs) in Western Balkan countries. Specific focus is placed on developing effective employment and labour market policies, providing strong social security measures, in addition to supporting gender equality and social dialogue, among other priorities.

The purpose of this high-level evaluation was to assess the extent to which the ILO's DWCPs, strategies and actions in the Western Balkans from 2012-2015 have structural achieved their intended results. The goal of the evaluation was to also inform future ILO strategies and DWCPs by providing recommendations for their improvement. Evaluated DWCPs were for Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro, Serbia and the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia (FYROM).

### What is a Decent Work Country Programme?

A DWCP is the primary framework for delivering ILO support to member countries in an effort to promote decent work as a key national development strategy. Each DWCP reflects specific country programme priorities and outcomes.

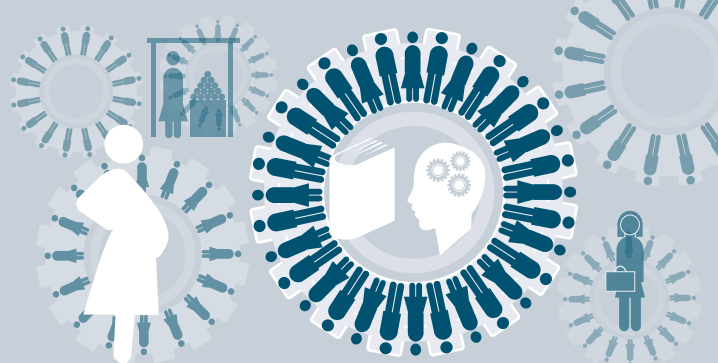
## What are the main *findings* from the report?

**Adaptive approach:** Much of the ILO works in the Western Balkans is in the areas of: employment, social dialogue, social protection, strengthening workers' and employers' organizations, and international labour standards. The ILO often took an adaptive approach to development cooperation, tailoring its work to the country context and the specific needs of the constituents. This approach appears to have been relatively effective.

**Gender and non-discrimination:** Women actively participate in non-discrimination and other activities which helped support gender equality. This led to several significant results: the addition of the first gender dimension in an Albanian skills needs report; the development of a FYROM document on maternity protection; and the Serbian Employers' Federation made recommendations for supporting women entrepreneurship.

**Impact:** Some of the interventions implemented in the Western Balkan countries had potential for leading to wider changes. Impact results were observed in law reform and institution building, but less so with respect to strengthening the capacity of its social partners despite considerable efforts. Factors that hindered impact included limited resources and a lack of awareness and ownership of constituents about changes that were adopted as part of the EU's accession process.

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**Factors in luencing sustainability:** The sustainability of the ILO's work is partially influenced by external factors over which the ILO has no control. These factors include labour market conditions, structural rigidities and restrictive government budgets. There is an urgent need to eliminate obstacles to employment creation, improve flexibility in the labour market, and increase the participation rate.

**Coherence:** The number of country programme outcomes (CPOs) was determined by factors besides a country's specific priorities. Additionally, the ILO's internal reporting systems were not always aligned in terms of accuracy or harmonization.

**Capacity-building:** the ILO provided technical assistance and helped strengthen the institutional capacities of employers' and workers' organizations. In Serbia, for example, numerous workshops and trainings helped improve national employment services.

**Resources:** One of the main challenges is the capacity and office configuration of the DWT/CO-Budapest team. The evaluation recommended it should be reviewed for potential improvements and compared with other subregions, including achieving a better understanding of the special role played by national coordinators.

## What did the evaluators *recommend* the Office do?



Stakeholders should be more active participants in programme cycles.

**Consistency:** The ILO needs to improve consistency between planning, monitoring and the reporting in order to better prioritize country programme outcomes.

**Long-term planning:** The ILO should outline exit strategies during the early stages of a projects' implementation in order to improve national ownership and sustainability, as well as to help constituents assume a leadership role.

**Resource mobilization:** Securing resources and implementing new projects and partnerships needs to be re-energized in order to maintain the ILO's activities in the Western Balkans, while also ensuring appropriate organizational capacity for their implementation.

**Organizational capacity-building:** The ILO should review the DWT/CO Budapest office for appropriate levels of resources in an effort to suggest improvements for programme implementation.

**Stakeholder participation:** Stakeholders (which includes the ILO's tripartite constituents) should become more active participants in all phases of programme cycles, in addition to considering a greater focus on strengthening social dialogue at the local level.

### VOICES FROM CONSTITUENTS

- "The ILO National Coordinators are very knowledgeable when it comes to labour markets...."
- Governments tend to treat social partners "as observers, not as dialogue partners."

### VOICES FROM ILO STAFF

- "The number of CPOs have nothing to do with ILO National Coordinators. I assume the creation of CPOs is affected by multiple factors (e.g. strategic or political, as well as with the availability of funds) mixed with the real needs in the field...how and why they are awarded a certain status we at the country level don't know...."
- "The ILO' technical cooperation in the country has been downsized to almost nothing compared to the portfolio ILO had 10 years ago."