

**Employment and Social Affairs Platform 3 – ESAP 3  
Open Call for Consultancy Services**

**Reference Number: 012-025**

**Terms of Reference:** 2024 Review of the performance of Western Balkans Six economies regarding the European Pillar of Social Rights  
2023-2024 update of the Western Balkans Six Social Scoreboard

**Contracting Authority:** Regional Cooperation Council Secretariat

**Reporting to:** RCC Secretariat

**Duration:** indicatively March – September 2025

**Application Deadline:** 28 February 2025

**Reference Number:** 012-025

**Eligible:** Respective consulting companies/consortia or individual consultants within bidding consortia

## **I. BACKGROUND**

[The Employment and Social Affairs Platform 3 \(ESAP 3\)](#) is a regional project financed by the European Commission and jointly implemented by the Regional Cooperation Council (RCC) and International Labour Organisation (ILO) in the Western Balkans Six (WB6), i.e. Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo\* , Montenegro, North Macedonia and Serbia.

ESAP 3 project is the successor of [ESAP 1](#) and [ESAP 2](#) projects that have been operating in the WB6 since 2016, with an aim to assist the WB6 with labour market and social policy reforms in order to improve the employment opportunities and working conditions of citizens in the region. The overall objective of the ESAP 3 project Action is to promote fair and well-functioning labour markets in the WB6 in line with the European Pillar of Social Rights (EPSR).

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\* This designation is without prejudice to positions on status, and is in line with UNSCR 1244/1999 and the ICJ Opinion on the Kosovo declaration of independence

All WB6 are committed to joining the EU. This commitment also refers to the implementation of EPSR and to its derived initiatives on quality employment, informal economy, social dialogue and occupational safety and health. The alignment with EU social standards and policies, as foreseen in the EPSR Action Plan, as well as with the targets of the EU Porto Social Summit, will lead to resilient and sustainable decent working and living conditions.

In this context, the **DG Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion (DG EMPL)** of the EC is assessing the economic governance policy areas of *employment and labour market, social inclusion, poverty reduction and equal opportunities*, and *education and skills*. Furthermore, DG EMPL is monitoring the alignment of WB6 with the EU acquis in Chapter 19 (Social Policy and Employment). The EPSR principles are directly related to the EU acquis.

In 2019, DG EMPL produced the first overview of the situation and trends regarding the performance of Western Balkans Six in each of the 20 principles of EPSR. The review included available data for the indicators of the Social Scoreboard for WB6 economies and flagged areas where data were not available or were limited.

In 2020, **RCC ESAP 2** project produced the 2020 Overviews on the Performance of the Western Balkan economies regarding the EPSR. The following links include the 2020 reports for the WB6: **Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo\*, Montenegro, North Macedonia, Serbia**, and the **Overview Report for Western Balkans Six**. The review included available data for the indicators of the Social Scoreboard for the WB6.

In 2021, RCC ESAP 2 project produced 2021 Overviews on the Performance of the Western Balkan economies regarding the EPSR. The following links include the 2021 reports for the WB6: **Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo\*, Montenegro, North Macedonia, Serbia**, and the **Regional Overview Report for Western Balkans Six**. The 2021 reviews have included available data for the indicators of the Social Scoreboard for the WB6 and identified areas where data were either not yet available or limited. For the first time in the region, ESAP 2 developed an interactive **Social Scoreboard for WB6** modelled on EUROSTAT/ EC Social Scoreboard.

In 2022, RCC ESAP 2 project produced 2022 Overviews on the Performance of the Western Balkan economies regarding the EPSR. The following links include 2022 reports for the WB6: **Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo\*, Montenegro, North Macedonia, Serbia and Regional Overview Report for the Western Balkans Six**.

The **WB6 Social Scoreboard** is a data hub of WB6 performance across headline and breakdown indicators for the EPSR.

## II. OBJECTIVES

The overall objective of the ESAP 3 project, promoting fair and well-functioning labour markets in the WB6 in line with the EPSR, will be achieved through advancing alignment with the EU acquis and implementation of the EPSR in areas of undeclared work, health and safety at work and social dialogue.

The **European Pillar of Social Rights** is the major initiative of the European Commission (EC) for building a fair and more social Europe.<sup>2</sup> The EPSR lays down 20 principles and rights considered essential for fair and well-functioning labour markets and welfare systems in 21st century Europe. The 20 principles are grouped in three areas: (1) *equal opportunities and access to the labour market* with principles and rights on education, training and life-long learning, gender equality, equal opportunities and active support to employment, (2) *fair working conditions* defined by secure and adaptable employment, wages, information about employment conditions and protection in case of dismissals, social dialogue and involvement of workers, work-life balance, healthy, safe and well-adapted work environment and data protection, and (3) *social protection and inclusion* covering childcare and support to children, social protection, unemployment benefits, minimum income, old age income and pensions, health care, inclusion of people with disabilities, long-term care, housing and assistance for the homeless, as well as access to essential services.

The **European Pillar of Social Rights Action Plan (Action Plan)** outlines concrete actions to implement the principles of EPSR as a joint effort by the Member States and the EU, with the active involvement of social partners and civil society. The Action Plan has employment, skills and social protection headline targets for the EU to be achieved by 2030. The European Commission foresees to present a new Action Plan to implement the European Pillar of Social Rights by the end of 2025.

The key monitoring tool relevant for the EPSR used in the European Semester is the **European Pillar of Social Rights - Social Scoreboard**.

The EPSR is of very concrete relevance for the Western Balkans Six in their reform efforts for advancing the delivery of social rights. The EU enlargement process covers employment and social inclusion areas which are part of the EPSR, namely through the economic governance and under the Chapter 19 (Social Policy and Employment) of the EU accession negotiations. This includes a focus on employment and social reforms through monitoring of relevant policies, including in the **Economic Reform Programmes (ERP)**. In order to bring the ERPs closer in line with the European Semester, the monitoring of the social situation and policies includes the principles of EPSR. Therefore, for the WB6 it is key to understand the remaining gaps and progress in alignment with the EPSR in terms of the EU accession process. It is important to highlight that in the enlargement process, the Social Scoreboard is used in the ERP process to monitor progress on the implementation of EPSR, subject to data availability.

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<sup>2</sup> [https://ec.europa.eu/commission/priorities/deeper-and-fairer-economic-and-monetary-union/european-pillar-social-rights\\_en](https://ec.europa.eu/commission/priorities/deeper-and-fairer-economic-and-monetary-union/european-pillar-social-rights_en)

The purpose of this specific assignment is to continue the practice of its predecessor, ESAP 2, and produce 2024 reviews of the performance of WB6 (for 2024) in each of the 20 principles of EPSR, Regional WB6 Comparative Overview Report for 2024 and 2023-2024 Update of the WB6 Social Scoreboard (2023 and 2024 data, as available).

The 2024 WB6 individual economy reports and the regional overview will include the latest data for the indicators of the Social Scoreboard and all policy developments, actions, legislation and implementation with regard to the realisation of the EPSR principles, including any proposed policies and actions in legislative procedures and/or drafting stages. Furthermore, the reviews need to identify the main gaps in policy making, legislation and implementation with regard to EPSR principles in order to provide relevant policy and analytical input as to the prioritisation of topics in the economic governance process (employment and social) and the EU acquis alignment (Chapter 19).

### III. SCOPE OF WORK

#### Objectives and Scope of the Assignment

The objective of this assignment is to produce:

- Six (6) reports, for each WB6 economy: the 2024 review reports on the current situation and trends regarding their performance in each of the 20 principles of EPSR;
- 2024 Regional Western Balkans Six Comparative Overview Report for the EPSR;
- 2023-2024 Update of the Western Balkans Six Social Scoreboard (2023 and 2024 data, as available);
- Presentation of key findings of 2024 Review of the performance of Western Balkans Six economies regarding the EPSR, illustrated by updated data from WB6 Social Scoreboard, at the RCC ESAP 3-organised event, dedicated to EPSR.

The 2024 WB6 individual economy reports and regional overview will include the latest data for the indicators of the Social Scoreboard and all policy developments, actions, legislation and implementation with regard to the realisation of the EPSR principles (including policies at the legislative drafting stage[s]).

The structure of the six WB-economy reviews should be as follows:

I. Executive summary (1.5-2 pages) – update the overall performance of the reviewed economy, the performance in each of the three chapters of the EPSR and Action Plan and the areas with particularly strong challenges for the economy.

II. Introduction (1.5-2 pages) – provide an updated introduction to and contextualisation of the review for each economy.

III. The economy’s performance in the 20 principles of EPSR and Action Plan (max. 35 pages) – provide an updated assessment of where each WB6 economy stands with regards to the realisation, in law and practice, of the rights and standards enshrined in EPSR principles. It must include the latest available data (2023 and 2024, as available), in particular focusing on the (headline) indicators included in the Social Scoreboard, also taking into account the 2024 EU Social Scoreboard.

It must also contain up-to-date information where there is any major policy initiative or change in the economy’s agenda affecting a principle, whether in legislative drafting or consultative stage.

IV. Conclusion (2-4 pages) – updated summary assessment of the main strengths and weaknesses/gaps of the economy’s performance and a proposal for policy prioritisation in the short-to-medium term to advance alignment with the EPSR and Action Plan.

Annex I -Updated Social Scoreboard for each WB6 economy based on the updated EU Social Scoreboard, with most recent data (2023 and 2024, as available); this is an Excel file for each WB6, as downloadable from the **WB6 Social Scoreboard**. The Excel file should serve as illustration of the type of required data. Since the launch of WB6 Social Scoreboard in 2021, there have been several changes to the EU Social Scoreboard of the EPSR. The current version is at **EPSR SOCIAL SCOREBOARD**. The European Council has endorsed the headline indicators in June 2021, while the proposed secondary indicators are currently under review. Eurostat provides the data for most of the indicators of the Social Scoreboard. Where Eurostat data is not available the contractor can refer to data of the National Statistical Institutes of the Western Balkans Six. Thus, for the 2023-2024 update to the WB6 Social Scoreboard, data will need to be collected and submitted in an Excel file following the format of the **EU Social Scoreboard**. Once the contract is signed, the selected Applicant will receive the latest version of the WB6 Social Scoreboard file from the RCC ESAP 3 project, modelled on the EU Social Scoreboard as well as relevant guidance on this deliverable.

The structure of the 2024 Regional Comparative Overview Report for Western Balkans Six should be as outlined below and aligned with the 2020, 2021 and 2022 Regional Comparative Reports for the Western Balkans Six. This Report is a regional comparative report and needs to draw on comparative analysis and trends from the WB6 individual economies; analyse each EPSR principle across the WB6 and in comparison with EU 27; include a summary assessment of the main strengths and weaknesses/gaps in terms of regional performance and trends in relation to the alignment with the EPSR and its Action Plan; and a draft proposal for regional priorities and actions in the short-to-medium term.

I. Executive summary (1.5-2 pages)

II. Introduction (1.5-2 pages)

III. The WB6 performance in the 20 principles of the European Pillar of Social Rights (EPSR) and Action Plan (max. 25 pages)

IV. Conclusion (3-4 pages)

Annex I -Updated **WB Social Scoreboard** with the most recent data for WB6 (2023 and 2024, as available), based on the **EU Social Scoreboard** model

**Important Note:** The cut-off date for reporting is Q4 2024 (December 2024) for individual WB6 economy reports and the WB6 regional comparative report (data and policy developments), as well as updates to the WB6 Social Scoreboard.

Additionally, the selected Applicant will present the key findings of the 2024 WB6 performance reviews as well as the WB6 Social Scoreboard data at the event organised by the RCC ESAP 3 project, dedicated to 2024 EPSR performance in the WB6.

## IV. LOGISTICS AND TIMING

### Timeline

<b>Deliverables</b>	<b>Draft Timeline, (to be agreed with RCC ESAP 3 project)</b>
Methodology, approach & technical work plan with timelines and interim deliverables, addressing all RCC feedback	3 weeks 5 April 2025, final, addressing all RCC feedback
Six (6) <u>draft</u> 2024 WB6 economy level reviews of the performance of Western Balkans Six (WB6) regarding the European Pillar of Social Rights (EPSR), with six (6) annexes on the Social Scoreboard with 2023/2022 data for each of the WB6 economies	9 weeks 31 May 2025 (depending on feasibility)
<u>Draft</u> 2024 Overview Report for Western Balkans Six, with annex on Social Scoreboard with 2023/2024 data (excel file) average for WB6	3 weeks 21 June 2025 (depending on feasibility)
6 <u>Final</u> 2024 Performance reviews of the WB6 economies regarding the EPSR, with annexes on Social Scoreboard with 2023/2024 data	4 weeks 18 July 2025, final, addressing all RCC and stakeholder comments (depending on feasibility and extent of feedback)
<u>Final</u> Updated 2024 Overview Report for the Western Balkans Six, taking into account all comments after reviews	2 weeks 1 August 2025, depending on the feedback timeline and extent of feedback
<u>Proofread</u> 6 individual + regional overview report ready for design	1 month, to accommodate for holiday season

	31 August 2025
<u>Final Social Scoreboard</u> for WB6 based on the updated EU Social Scoreboard, with 2023 and 2024 data and other most recent data. This is an excel file with data collected for WB economies, WB6 averages, EU 27 and reference hyperlinks included on sources of data (the excel file template will be provided by the RCC ESAP 3)	31 July 2025, depending on availability of data
Power-point presentation with findings and recommendations, both electronic copy and delivery at the event (time TBC)	Timing to be confirmed with RCC ESAP 3 team, subject to organisation of the event details

The indicative timeframe is stated above; the exact schedule will be agreed upon with the ESAP 3 project as part of the work plan and timeline approval; also the delivery of the final reports will depend on the timeline of the internal and external reviews of draft reports by partners and other, thus above timelines are illustrative only.

The period of implementation of the contract is stated as above to ensure that draft WB6-economy reports and the regional WB6 comparative report are reviewed by stakeholders and all feedback is addressed by the Applicant. In addition, the event where the presentation of the reports will take place will be on the date specified by the RCC. The experts need to be available at required times during the contract period to address the feedback on draft WB6 economies' reports, the WB6 comparative report as well as the WB6 Social Scoreboard update.

Note: The illustrative Level of Effort (LoE, number of consulting days) is in the range of up to 12-15 consultancy days per each WB6 economy, plus the Level of Effort for the Team Leader for overall quality control of deliverables and preparation of the regional WB6 report (up to 15-16 days).

The above stated Level of Effort (number of consulting days) is **illustrative only** and the Applicant is expected to propose in its Offer the Level of Effort (number of consulting days) per each WB6, the Level of Effort (number of consulting days) for the Team Leader and the overall Level of Effort (total number of consulting days) in order for the ToR deliverables to be provided at the highest standard.

## Methodology

The experts are expected to come up with the best approaches for undertaking this task, to be approved by the RCC ESAP 3 project as part of the work plan. The following guiding principles should be taken into consideration:

- i. Desk review of primary and secondary information;
- ii. Interviews with relevant officials;
- iii. Any other methods applicable.

## Lines of Communication

The Applicant will submit all deliverables to the RCC ESAP 3 project for review and approval. The Applicant will work closely with the RCC ESAP 3 project team from whom the Applicant will seek guidance to efficiently conduct the work.

The draft deliverables will be shared with the WB6 stakeholders and final deliverables will be presented and discussed in an event organised by the RCC ESAP 3.

## V. Profile and Competencies

The Applicant needs to have a team in place consisting of the Team Leader with international or regional expertise and experts from each of WB6 economies: Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo\*, Montenegro, North Macedonia and Serbia with relevant expertise, per below.

The WB6 experts need to have excellent understanding of labour markets, employment and social policies in the respective Western Balkan economies and excellent knowledge of the European Pillar of Social Rights. In addition, WB6 experts should be well versed and experienced in labour market and social data collection and analysis and in drafting high quality reports.

### Criteria related to the experts delivering the service:

<b>Education:</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Post-graduate degree in economics, statistics, social sciences or related field</li> </ul>
<b>Experience:</b>	<p>Qualifications and skills required</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ 10 years of relevant experience in the fields of labour market, employment and social policies for WB6 experts;</li> <li>▪ 15 years of relevant experience in the fields of labour market, employment and social policies for the Team Leader;</li> <li>▪ Excellent knowledge of labour markets and labour policies in the Western Balkan economies;</li> <li>▪ Excellent communication and report writing skills;</li> <li>▪ Analytical skills and ability to conceptualise and write concisely and clearly;</li> <li>▪ Able to interact with professionals and representatives from the national administrations in the WB6 region;</li> <li>• Knowledge of the EU Pillar of Social Rights, Social Scoreboard (required) and experience in reviewing policies relevant to the EU Pillar of Social Rights for WB6 economies (desired).</li> </ul>
<b>Language</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Fluency in English, as the official language of the RCC and fluency</li> </ul>



<b>requirements:</b>	in WB6 language (as relevant for each WB6 economy)
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### **Core Values**

- Demonstrates integrity and fairness by modelling RCC values and ethical standards;
- Displays cultural, gender, religion, race, nationality and age sensitivity and adaptability.

### **Core Competencies**

- Demonstrates professional competence to meet responsibilities and post requirements and is conscientious and efficient in meeting commitments, observing deadlines and achieving results;
- Ability to provide an analytical analysis in the the sub-sectors of the European Pillar of Social Rights and an indication on how to move forward.
- Result-oriented: Plans and produces quality results to meet the set goals, generates innovative and practical solutions to challenging situations;
- Communication: Excellent communication skills, including the ability to convey complex concepts and recommendations clearly;
- Team work: Ability to interact, establish and maintain effective working relations in a culturally diverse team;
- Ability to establish and maintain productive partnerships with regional and national partners and stakeholders.

### **Quality Control**

The selected Contractor should ensure an internal quality control during the implementing and reporting phase of the assignment. The quality control should ensure that the draft reports comply with the above requirements and meet adequate quality standards before sending them to stakeholders for comments. The quality control should ensure consistency and coherence between findings, conclusions and recommendations. It should also ensure that findings reported are duly substantiated and that conclusions are supported by relevant judgment criteria.

The views expressed in the report will be those of the contractor and will not necessarily reflect those of the Regional Cooperation Council. Therefore, a standard disclaimer reflecting this will be included in the report. In this regard, the contractor may or may not accept comments and/or proposals for changes received during the above consultation process. However, when comments/proposals for changes are not agreed by the contractor, they should clearly explain the reasons for their final decision in a comments table.

### **Quality Control by the Regional Cooperation Council**

The selected Contractor's outputs shall undergo external reviews by relevant stakeholders, including the representatives of the ESAP 3 project team and the Regional Cooperation Council.

## Application Rules

The application needs to contain the following:

- Technical Offer;
- Financial Offer.

### Technical Offer

#### **For companies and consortia of individual consultants:**

- Company profile including a brief description (up to 2 pages) of the company. In case of a bidding consortium, the team leader should submit the profile of the consortium;
- Copy of Company's Registration Certificate (in case of consulting companies);
- In case of bidding consortia of individual consultants participating in this Call, they must indicate the members and show how the work is divided between them. Specifically, all members must name the team leader and authorise this member to represent the consortium and receive payments on behalf of the other members. A corresponding written authorisation, power of attorney must be attached to the bid;
- Financial records - company's balance sheet and profit-and-loss statement for the past 2 years (only in case of a bidding of consulting companies);
- CV of experts, outlining relevant knowledge and experience as described in the Terms of References, along with contact details of referees;
- Concept note describing the main issues, information, data sources, research and analytical tools to be employed, as well as the timeline;
- List of references for relevant activities implemented over the past years demonstrating relevant experience in the subject matter;
- Signed Statements of Availability (Annex I).

#### **Financial Offer** (Free format)

The financial offer should reflect the following:

- All figures should be expressed in EUR;
- VAT amount, if applicable, should be presented.

When preparing the financial offer, the applicant should take into account the following:

- Use a free format for the Budget providing the lump sum for the services to be provided.

NOTE: The expert fees should be consistent with those applicable in the region.

## Submission of applications:

**Applications need to be submitted by 28 February 2025 through the website link Apply now.**

Please make sure that the application is submitted in two separate folders one containing Technical Offer and the other Financial Offer. The documents should be submitted in a form of copies of the originals.

## Evaluation and Selection

- The consultancy will be awarded to the highest qualified bidder based on the relevance of skills and expertise to this assignment;
- The applications are evaluated following these criteria:

<b>EVALUATION GRID</b>	<b>Maximum score</b>
<b>A. Technical Offer (A.1+A.2+A.3)</b>	<b>100</b>
<b>A.1. Work experience, references list:</b> Relevant work experience; evidence of other contracts of the size comparable to that of the tender; experience with clients comparable to the Contracting Authority.	35
<b>A.2. Quality and professional capacity of the consultant(s):</b> CV(s) satisfy the criteria set forth in the Terms of Reference, education and experience demonstrate professional capacity and experience required.	35
<b>A.3 Quality of the concept note:</b> Concept note describing the main issues, information, data sources, research and analytical tools to be employed by the author, as well as the timeline.	30
<b>B. Financial Offer/ lowest price has maximum score</b>	<b>100</b>

Score for offer X =

**A: [Total quality score (out of 100) of offer X / 100] \* 80**

**B: [Lowest price / price of offer X] \* 20**

In addition to the results of the technical and financial evaluation, a competency-based interview will be held with the selected bidder.

## Information on selection of the most favourable bidder

The RCC Secretariat shall inform candidates and bidders of decisions reached concerning the award of the contract as soon as possible, including the grounds for any decision not to award a contract for which there has been competitive tendering or to recommence the procedure.

Standard letter of thanks for participation to unsuccessful bidders shall be sent within 15 days after the contract is signed with the awarded bidder.

The candidates and bidders wishing to receive a feedback may send a request within 15 days after receipt of the standard letter of thanks.

The request may be sent to the e-mail address [ProcurementforRcc@rcc.int](mailto:ProcurementforRcc@rcc.int) or to the address of the RCC Secretariat:

Regional Cooperation Council Secretariat  
Attention to: Administration Department  
Building of the Friendship between Greece and Bosnia and Herzegovina  
Trg Bosne i Hercegovine 1/V  
71000 Sarajevo  
Bosnia and Herzegovina

### **Appeals procedure**

Bidders believing that they have been harmed by an error or irregularity during the award process may petition the RCC Secretariat directly. The RCC Secretariat must reply within 15 days of receipt of the complaint.

The appeal request may be sent to the e-mail address [ProcurementforRcc@rcc.int](mailto:ProcurementforRcc@rcc.int) or to the address of the RCC Secretariat:

Regional Cooperation Council Secretariat  
Attention to: Administration Department  
Building of the Friendship between Greece and Bosnia and Herzegovina  
Trg Bosne i Hercegovine 1/V  
71000 Sarajevo  
Bosnia and Herzegovina

**ANNEX I: STATEMENT OF AVAILABILITY**

**REF:012-025**

By representing the Entity \_\_\_\_\_ we agree to participate in the above-mentioned tender procedure. We further declare that we are able and willing to work for the period(s) foreseen for the position for which our CVs have been included in the event that this tender is successful, namely:

Full Name	Available from (Date)	Available until (Date)	Acceptance by signature	Number of man-days associated to the ToR