



Evaluation Summary



International
Labour
Office

Evaluation
Office

“Employment and Social Affairs Platform”

Independent Final Evaluation

Quick Facts

Countries: Western Balkans (Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo¹, Montenegro, North Macedonia)

Final Evaluation: June-November 2019

Evaluation Mode: Independent

Administrative Office: ILO DWT/CO Budapest

Technical Office: DIALOGUE

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Project Code: RER/15/03/EUR

Donor(s) & Budget: EU Contribution (IPA)
USD1,700,000

Keywords: social dialogue, labour dispute settlement,

Background & Context

Summary of the project purpose, logic and structure

The Economic and Social Affairs Platform (ESAP) is a 1,725,000 EUR project funded by the EU Directorate-General for Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion, with a contribution of 1,499,250 EUR from the EU 2015 IPA II Multi-

country Action Programme. It was implemented from April 2016 to October 2019. ESAP’s overall objective was to assist the governments from the Western Balkan region in advancing employment and social policy reforms as they work towards EU accession. Its specific objective was to create a sustainable platform for governments and the social partners to share good practices and lessons learned related to social dialogue, labour inspection and public employment services at the sub-regional and national levels. It was executed in Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH), the former Yugoslav Republic of North Macedonia, Montenegro, Serbia and Kosovo (as defined by the UN Security Council Resolution 1244).

The project was comprised of three components: (1) improving the effectiveness of bipartite and tripartite social dialogue processes, (2) strengthening national labour inspectorates, and (3) providing technical assistance to and cross-fertilization with the Regional Cooperation Council (RCC).

Purpose, scope and clients of the evaluation

The overall purpose of ESAP’s final evaluation was learning and program improvement. It provided an opportunity to reflect on the strategy and assumptions guiding the project, and to assess the extent to which the project’s actions have supported broader ILO strategies

¹ As per UNSCR 1244

and objectives. The evaluation uses the standard OECD and United Nations Evaluation Group (UNEG) evaluation approach while assessing ESAP along the following OECD/DAC criteria:

- a) relevance and quality of the design in relation to its logical framework;
- b) efficiency of implementation with respect to project output and activities;
- c) effectiveness (including impact, synergies with other initiatives, and project visibility);
- d) potential sustainability (the level of policy support provided, its ability to contribute to institutions, and capacity-building); and
- e) good practices and lessons learned for the ILO and the project stakeholders.

This evaluation is expected to inform future project strategy and operational design both within the ILO and for the project stakeholders.

The evaluation is written with the following recipients in mind: the ILO tripartite constituents and national project partners; the donor country or contracting authority; ILO management and technical specialists (in the ILO DWT/CO Budapest, and in cooperating departments at the Headquarters); and the project staff.

The evaluation reviewed the project as a whole from April 2016 to October 2019 in all target countries.

The evaluation includes a desk review of the project (analysing the detailed methodology, the data collection tools used and the implementation plan of the project) and a field phase consisting of in-person interviews with key stakeholders. Along with face-to-face interviews and remote interviews with ILO staff in Budapest, country visits were also organized in Albania, BiH, Montenegro, and Serbia in August and September.

Methodology of evaluation

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Main Findings & Conclusions

ESAP is a demanding project for several reasons. It engages complex issues such as social dialogue, social policymaking, and labour market governance, and does so at both the regional and national levels. It aims to build a mechanism of regional cooperation while ensuring national relevance, interacting with multiple stakeholders on numerous activities and in coordination with the RCC. This is all the more complicated given its modest budget and limited staffing. Yet, despite these high ambitions and some design imperfections, the ESAP's partners have noted its added value and have praised the quality of expertise brought in by the ILO. This success is largely due to the ILO's unique combination of in-house expertise and sensitivity to national-level priorities, thanks to the essential role of the ILO National Coordinators.

ESAP is the result of a consultation between the EC, the RCC and the ILO. A strong body of evidence led to the project's intervention into national institutions. All interviewed partners confirmed that the priorities addressed by ESAP were strongly relevant, and these are highlighted in the core EU, ILO and sub-regional strategies and frameworks.

Some of ESAP's shortcomings relate to the logic of the intervention, the insufficient description of the expected effects beyond the activity level, and a lack of indicators allowing parties to grasp the depth of these changes. However, the project delivered all of its planned activities in a timely

manner, and in some cases even exceeded the proposal's expectations. For instance, four labour inspectorate awareness-raising campaigns have been implemented instead of two as initially envisaged.

The activities (some 25 in total) have led to several key results. The social dialogue process has been improved upon with varying results across the region. Economic social councils (ESCs) have become empowered through highly effective peer reviews of their organization, functional capacity and visibility.

Alternative dispute resolution has also been mainstreamed as a practice through the capacity-building support provided by ESAP to agencies for the peaceful resolution of labour disputes (APRLDs). This has contributed to a significant number of cases rerouted from the traditional court system.

The area of occupational safety and health (OSH) also experienced some meaningful positive impacts. Labour inspection campaigns have powerfully raised awareness on the part of thousands of employers on issues related to occupational safety and health, and these campaigns also shed light on the phenomenon of undeclared work. This encouraged labour inspectorates to take a broader approach in tackling this phenomenon.

ESAP's virtual platform offers the potential for regional cooperation, though it has yet to be adopted by most of the project partners as a professional tool. ESAP Online thus could benefit from a revamping of its appearance and structure, making it more user-friendly and accessible to all of its users.

In its objectives, the project attempts to bring about regional cooperation, social dialogue, social policy and labour market reforms, thereby implying that ESAP is more than a project and has responsibilities beyond the project level. Strategically, ESAP is more than a project as it tackles long-term, transformative processes that

can only be accompanied over multi-project cycles and whose direction needs to be guided by a longer-term vision backed by long-term commitment.

ESAP's commitment to these objectives also relates to accountability. Social dialogue and labour market reform changes are the result of multiple factors, including the capacity of key actors. However, increased institutional capacities do not systematically convert into formal outcomes, as they also require higher-level political validation. Consequently, ESAP should narrow its scope to those outcomes that lie within its area of responsibility, and use indicators that measure capacity, not formal outcomes (which also measure political influence). The limited influence of the project partners is also an indicator of their political weight and representativeness in national societies.

ESAP's strategic objectives also require that the project create a model of intervention. The evaluation has found that the project has outlined plans for a solid model, but that it has yet to be finalized. The intervention plan includes the following pillars, delivering national results with a regional approach: (1) establishing formal regional networks as a sustainable mechanism to ensure the continued capacity to advance on social dialogue and labour reforms; (2) stimulating improved practices through emulation and engagement tools such as peer reviews; (3) bringing knowledge and practice up-to-date with the help of the ILO and CEELEX experts; and (4) involving ILO National Coordinators to facilitate trusting and effective cooperation.

The ILO is uniquely qualified to satisfy the demands of the four pillars, and the commitment and competency of the ILO staff working on ESAP has to be commended.

While the engagement strategy of ESAP has played a crucial role in ensuring the active participation of all partners (allowing for the delivery of all activities), ESAP has shown some

limitations in terms of communication. A majority of the interviewed stakeholders never received a formal presentation about the overall ESAP project, and several people were not clear about the distinction between the respective roles of the ILO and the RCC. All project partners see the ILO National Coordinators as their primary source of information and the face of the partnership, although these coordinators seem to have been involved to some degree only. Partners have clearly stated their desire for greater consultation and more regular direct communication in future ESAP interventions

Relevance.

Effectiveness.

Efficiency..

Sustainability and Impact potential..

Recommendations

Main recommendations and follow-up

The following recommendations have been formulated based on the findings of the evaluation.

Key recommendation 1: A second ESAP phase is recommended.

A second phase was requested by the project partners and is justified according to the evaluation. The second phase's funding should be confirmed formally, to avoid gaps between Phases 1 and 2 and to maintain stakeholder commitment.

Key recommendation 2: Although the main lines of ESAP 2 have already been drawn, the evaluation strongly recommends that this be further elaborated in series of preparatory steps.

Through consultation with the stakeholders, it has become apparent that ESAP 2 is already in formation, The preparatory phase should provide an opportunity to increase the project's strategic relevance, improve the logic of the intervention,

and encourage more ownership through partner consultation.

This key recommendation suggests the following steps:

Sub recommendation 1: *Establish a simple but formal mechanism ensuring that the ILO National Coordinators are consulted for each important project decision or activity (such as the preparation of regional events) and are invited to local events to facilitate country-level consultations with national partners.*

Sub recommendation 2: *Seek the contributions of the ILO National Coordinators to improve ESAP 2 both in its content and approach. At the country level, the ILO National Coordinators, jointly with ESAP management, should consult the project partners to help formulate realistic expectations at the country level. This would allow for ESAP technical assistance to meet both national and regional demands while creating a knowledge base at the regional level.*

Sub recommendation 3: *Provide a formal description of the process leading to the longer-term objective of ESAP, and identify the steps needed to get there. This could be done jointly between the RCC and the ILO. Stakeholders should be given a clearer vision of the overall ESAP intervention and a more precise roadmap for achieving these goals.*

Sub recommendation 4: *Work jointly with the RCC to ensure strategic and operational coherence between both ESAP 2 projects so that they are perceived as one effort by national stakeholders. This should involve coherence in strategy and clearly defined operational modalities for the organizations' roles and coordinating mechanisms. For instance, the RCC could take advantage of the ILO's presence at the country level and established relationships with the partners by asking them to help relay information about the ILO-RCC activities.*

Sub recommendation 5: *Once ESAP 2 is developed in detail, the RCC and the ILO should hold a joint formal presentation on ESAP 1's achievements and introduce ESAP 2 to concerned stakeholders. (ESAP's long-term vision and process could be included in this presentation).*

Key recommendation 3: *Build an ESAP 2 Logframe with a clear description of the expected results, ensuring that these results do not overly rely on factors external to the project. (Results can be defined by the achievements of the partners as a result of their demonstrated capacity, for instance). Develop a monitoring and evaluation framework so that ESAP 2's results can be clearly identified and shared.*

Key recommendation 4: *Integrate gender equality and anti-discrimination into the design of ESAP 2. Set objectives and indicators so ESAP 2's achievements on these dimensions are measurable and more visible.*

Key recommendation 5: *Define a development strategy of ESAP Online that explains its expected outcomes and functions and allows for it to become more user-friendly in the future.*

Key recommendation 6: *Ensure that ESAP 2 maintains active communication with the project partners. ILO National Coordinators should be given a formal role in the direct communication efforts of ESAP 2, relaying information and facilitating national-level consultations in the countries of intervention. Regular implementation updates should be shared with all partners.*

Key recommendation 7: *Develop an engagement strategy targeting political decision-makers. Organize awareness-raising events, such as parliamentary information-sharing sessions, to obtain further involvement from influential stakeholders that are not project partners.*