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FINAL INTERNAL EVALUATION OF THE PROJECT EU-ILO TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE FACILITY - INNOVATION IN YOUTH EMPLOYMENT POLICY THROUGH THE YOUTH GUARANTEE - PHASE I

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This evaluation has been conducted according to ILO's evaluation policies and procedures. It has not been professionally edited, but has undergone quality control by the ILO Regional Evaluation Officer

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LIST OF ACRONYMS

ALMM	Active Labour Market Measures
BiH	Bosnia and Herzegovina
EC	European Commission
EIP	Economic and Investment Plan
EO	Employers' Organization
ESA	Employment Service Agency
ETF	European Training Foundation
EU	European Union
FBiH	Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina
ILO	International Labour Organization
IPA	Instrument for Pre-Accession Assistance
LM	Labour Market
MIS	Management Information System
PES	Public Employment Service
RS	Republika Srpska
TAF	Technical Assistance Facility
ToR	Terms of Reference
TU	Trade Union

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Introduction

This document is a report on the Final Internal Evaluation of the project *EU-ILO Technical Assistance Facility - Innovation in youth employment policy through the Youth Guarantee - Phase I*. The evaluation was conducted by Natasha Mechkaroska Simjanoska, an ILO staff officer, and managed by Ms. Lejla Tanovic, ILO National Coordinator in Bosnia and Herzegovina, with inputs from relevant stakeholders. It assessed the project's progress, relevance, validity, efficiency, effectiveness, impact, and sustainability, during its implementation from August 2022 to September 2023. The evaluation, involving document review and interviews, took place between 01 August – 30 September 2023, and the findings were validated during a regional conference in October 2023 with participation of all key stakeholders.

The primary purpose of the evaluation is to promote accountability, organizational learning, and to better inform future ILO initiatives and actions.

Background and context

In October 2020, the European Commission introduced the Economic and Investment Plan for the Western Balkans (EIP), which emphasizes long-term economic recovery, transitioning to green and digital economies, regional integration, and alignment with EU standards. Flagship initiative #10 within the EIP focuses on establishing a Youth Guarantee (YG) in the Western Balkans, following the EU Youth Guarantee model. This initiative was a response to the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on employment in the Western Balkans, leading to increased inactivity, particularly among the 25-29 age group, resulting in a growing number of young people not engaged in education, employment, or training (NEET), with significant gender disparities.

To support the Western Balkans in implementing the YG, a joint EU-ILO Technical Assistance Facility (TAF) was set up in June 2021, involving the International Labour Organization, the European Commission, and the European Training Foundation. The TAF builds on prior efforts by the ILO and the EU to strengthen institutional capacities for YG implementation and monitoring in EU Member States. It also draws from the ILO's assistance to North Macedonia in developing and scaling up the Youth Guarantee. The project was funded by the European Commission, DG EMP – ESF+ Employment and Social innovation strand programme with a budget of EUR 500,000.00.

Project background and objectives

The EU-ILO Technical Assistance Facility employed a demand-driven approach, focusing on providing technical services and expertise to help Western Balkan economies introduce and implement the Youth Guarantee in alignment with European Integration Process, Economic Reform Programmes, and enlargement requirements. The goal was to support these economies in achieving key milestones that meet EU quality standards, ILO conventions, and EU Council Recommendation principles. Moreover, the TAF aimed to create positive regional dynamics by encouraging healthy competition among the Western Balkan economies, ensuring that none of them lags behind in YG implementation due to local challenges.

The **overall objective** of the 'EU/ILO Technical Assistance Facility - Innovation in youth employment policy through the Youth Guarantee (phase I)' was to contribute to easing the labour market integration of unemployed and disengaged young women and men in the Western Balkan economies, in a systemic manner, through the implementation of the Youth Guarantee.

The **specific objective** was: Framework conditions and capacities for the establishment and gradual implementation of the Youth Guarantee in the WB economies enhanced.

Evaluation background

The ILO considers evaluation as an integral part of its regular budget and technical cooperation activities to assess progress in implementing recommendations to enhance the sustainability of results achieved, as well as to ensure accountability to stakeholders and contribute to organizational learning.

The project *EU-ILO Technical Assistance Facility - Innovation in youth employment policy through the Youth Guarantee - Phase I* underwent a final internal evaluation following ILO principles and methods. This evaluation aimed to assess the project's relevance, progress toward its planned objectives, alignment with ILO's strategic goals, efficiency, effectiveness, and sustainability. It focused on reviewing the work done, changes introduced, factors contributing to those changes, and the project's overall achievements. Its scope covered all project activities and components from August 2022 to September 2023 in the Western Balkan economies.

The evaluation also emphasized the integration of gender equality, disability inclusion, and non-discrimination throughout the project, examining how these aspects were considered in methodology, strategies, data, and deliverables.

The main clients for this assessment include ILO management, technical specialists, project staff, tripartite constituents (especially Youth Guarantee coordinators), and the development partner. The insights gathered from this evaluation will inform future planning of activities with ILO constituents in 2023 and beyond.

The evaluation of project was based on review of secondary information, project documents, and was validated through interviews with the ILO constituents, beneficiaries, ILO project and expert teams.

Findings

Relevance

The evaluation assessed the extent to which the project activities comply with the national efforts.

The project contributes to the ILO's strategic policy frameworks i.e., the ILO Programme and Budget (P&B) 2022-2023, even though this link is not explicitly mentioned in the project document. The project is aligned with Decent Work Country Programmes of [Albania 2017-2021](#); [Montenegro 2019-2021](#); [North Macedonia 2019-2022, 2023-2025](#); and [Serbia 2019-2022](#).

The Action is aligned with the strategic priorities set out in the United Nations Sustainable Development Cooperation Frameworks for Bosnia and Herzegovina 2021-2025, Albania 2022-2026; Montenegro 2019-2021; North Macedonia 2021-2025; and Serbia 2019-2022. The Action directly contributed to the Sustainable Development Goal 8, and also contributed to the attainment of SDG 1, SDG 5, and SDG 10.

Furthermore, the Action contributed to the Western Balkan Declaration on ensuring sustainable labour market integration of young people, whereby the Governments of WB-6 economies committed to gradually establish, implement, and enhance Youth Guarantee schemes in the region, based on the EU Council Recommendation of 30 October 2020.

The project was also relevant to the *Economic Reform Programmes* (ERPs), concerning the reforms in the areas of employment, education and social assistance.

Validity of design

The available information shows that the project was backed by evidence from the conducted diagnostics of the national context and was constructed in response to the identified challenges, at the same time, offering flexibility to accommodate to the emerging needs of the beneficiaries.

The project can be considered as complex, since the outcomes depended on the political stability, commitment, and willingness to provide enabling conditions for the introduction of the YG. However, it was implemented in the set timeframe and with the foreseen budgets, owing to the well captured objectives, outcomes and outputs. The project was supported by a clear Theory of Change.

Effectiveness and progress

The project aimed to assist Western Balkans economies in understanding the concept of and establishing a comprehensive Youth Guarantee scheme. This involved development of YG implementation plans, legislation reforms, preparing relevant institutions, and addressing the unique needs of each economy. Activities included data collection and analysis for evidence-based policy development, technical support for drafting legislation, policies, and strategies, creating quality YG implementation plans, providing guidance on handling unemployed and inactive youth, and improving the capacities of relevant stakeholders through tailored training and peer-learning activities.

North Macedonia is the only economy outside the European Union that implements the YG. Under the current project, the country has been supported in the development of the new YGIP 2023-2026, as well as in the reforms and improvement of the services related to the implementation of the Youth Guarantee. During the project life, the number of persons registered in YG (entry level) marked an upward line with 17,394 in 2021, 20,182 in 2022 and 20,645 persons in 2023. The percentage of people successfully completing the YG ranges from 38 per cent in 2021, 46.9 per cent in 2022 and 38.1 per cent in 2023.

The support provided was customized to meet the specific needs of each economy, based on their requests to the TAF. However, in some cases, the EU-ILO TAF resources were not fully utilized. This was attributed to the presence of other technical assistance projects, changes in political leadership within YG planning and coordination structures, and a lack of awareness regarding the opportunities offered by the facility.

Moreover, the ILO facilitated the establishment and, further on, the activities and functioning of the YG Coordinators' Network, with the aim to exchange knowledge, information, and good practices.

Efficiency and management arrangements

The project was efficiently managed in terms of both human and financial resources, with the ILO contributing significant added value through its extensive resources and technical expertise. The ILO's Decent Work Team and Country Office for Central and Eastern Europe (DWT/CO) in Budapest provided administrative support and technical backstopping. A project office was established in Sarajevo to oversee and coordinate activities.

The ILO project team worked in collaboration with ILO National Coordinators and project officers in the WB-6, and reported to the Senior Employment Specialist in DWT/CO Budapest. The success of the project largely depended on the dedication, professionalism, and expertise of the ILO project staff and experts.

While staffing was to some extent sufficient, stakeholders suggested that having a country-based ILO presence in each economy would have been beneficial to enhance coordination, ensure sustainability,

and maintain institutional memory, especially given political instability and the potential for changes in YG coordination structures.

Orientation to impact and sustainability

The TAF employed a transparent and participatory approach in the project. Each economy had an equal opportunity to request technical assistance and receive tailored support. The project focused on comprehensive reforms in areas that could impede the implementation of the YG.

The TAF encouraged collaboration and best practices that could influence future activities. It aimed to break down institutional silos and improve coordination among organizations involved in youth-related initiatives.

To ensure sustainability, the TAF emphasized local ownership in establishing the YG. National institutions were supported to enhance their capacities, leading to improvements in planning, delivery, and monitoring of the YG. The assistance provided contributed to the overall enhancement of systems and structures within these national institutions.

Cross-cutting issues: Gender equality and tripartism

The project prioritized gender balance in various aspects. Technical/expert working groups and workshop participants had equal representation of both genders.

Furthermore, the ILO advocated for tripartite consultations on employment and labor-related legislation and regulations. The level of involvement of social partners varied across economies. Some economies fully integrated social partners into technical groups and involved them in the YGIP development process, while others only sought their input after the YGIP was drafted.

Conclusions

Key findings from the evaluation:

- ▶ Continued ILO technical support through the TAF is crucial for the Western Balkan economies in understanding the Youth Guarantee concept and identifying necessary reforms for its integration into national systems. The TAF offers a balanced approach of technical assistance, analysis, expert support, and experience sharing across all aspects of the Youth Guarantee.
- ▶ Beneficiaries recognize and appreciate the TAF's flexibility, which allows them to request ad hoc assistance when needed, filling gaps in technical expertise, funding, and training.
- ▶ Project success was driven by the commitment and expertise of ILO technical experts and YG coordinators, as well as the ILO project team's experience and transparent communication.
- ▶ Knowledge sharing among Western Balkan economies and exposure to experiences from EU Member States have been beneficial, fostering understanding and healthy competition to drive reforms.
- ▶ The TAF has strong potential for sustainability by enhancing the capacities of national institutions responsible for planning, delivering, and monitoring the Youth Guarantee.
- ▶ Multiple actors express interest in supporting Western Balkan economies, which may lead to overlapping activities and variations in the quality of technical assistance.
- ▶ Public Employment Services (PES) may lack sufficient capacity and specialized caseworkers to handle the influx of NEETs registering for the Youth Guarantee.
- ▶ The utilization of the TAF varies among Western Balkan economies, possibly due to limited awareness of the possibilities, resulting from the turn-over of staff. Furthermore, the application process was perceived as to some extent demanding and time-consuming.
- ▶ The involvement of social partners in the design and preparatory activities varies, with some economies underutilizing the potential role of employers and trade unions.

- ▶ In general, the project was implemented smoothly without significant obstacles, with the flexibility and demand-driven approach well-suited to the challenging context. Future project phases providing hands-on technical support for piloting, scaling up, and full implementation of the Youth Guarantee in the Western Balkans are recommended to further benefit these economies.

Lessons learned and emerging good practices

The ILO has in-house expertise and substantial influence in the area of employment, including the Youth Guarantee. These have been effectively leveraged both at the WB-6 and EU levels.

The project's strategy and design were well-informed about the specific conditions and circumstances in the WB economies. Consequently, the project design and budget were demand-driven, tailored to the actual needs of the beneficiaries, ensuring alignment with the dynamics of these economies.

The flexibility of the project offering technical assistance based on request has proven as very beneficial. This was supported by the finding that the introduction of the YG has found each of the WB economies at different stage of development and preparedness and necessitated different types of interventions.

The project faced external challenges that did not impede implementation but led to underutilization of the technical assistance portfolio. These challenges included political instability, changes in government, YG coordinators, and lack of awareness among technical/experts' groups about the TAF's potential.

The potential risks in implementing YG reforms, piloting, and scaling-up include, but are not limited to: political instability and varying commitment levels across institutions; changes of YG coordinators and in YG national structures; emigration trends and brain drain, coupled with a lack of interest among unemployed youth to register with PES.

Internal Evaluation Report – key recommendations for the ILO:

- Further support to the WB economies in the pilot and rollout phases and extend additional guidance to North Macedonia to overcome emerging hurdles in the implementation;
- Reinforce country-based presence of the ILO in each WB economy during the pilot and implementation phases;
- Ensure better promotion of the technical assistance packages among the beneficiaries;
- Simplify the application submission procedure (including digitalization of the process);
- Continue peer-learning events on different topics, including with triangular cooperation with EU Members States;
- Facilitate knowledge exchange workshops with focus on the social partners and their role.

Internal Evaluation Report – key recommendations for beneficiaries:

- Ensure constancy in the YG coordinator unit, as well as institutional memory;
- Improve coordination of different donors' projects/technical assistance;
- Ensure inter-institutional cooperation (including stronger role of the employers' and workers' organization);
- Increase the number and build capacity of PES caseworkers;
- Consider harnessing the potential of the social workers in outreach activities;
- Consider establishment/improvement of the tracking system for the VET school and university students.

1. INTRODUCTION

The current document presents a report of the Final Internal Evaluation of the Project *EU-ILO Technical Assistance Facility - Innovation in youth employment policy through the Youth Guarantee - Phase I* (EU-ILO TAF project).

The evaluation was conducted by Natasha Mechkaroska Simjanoska, ILO staff, in her capacity as certified ILO internal evaluator, not linked to the project. The Evaluation was managed by Ms Lejla Tanovic, ILO National Coordinator in Bosnia and Herzegovina. The evaluation benefited from consultations with and feedback from the constituents and beneficiaries in the six economies of the Western Balkan, as well as the inputs from the ILO project team, ILO national coordinators, and the ILO Decent Work Team and Country Office in Budapest.

The primary purpose of the evaluation is to promote accountability among the ILO and the key stakeholders. The evaluation attempts to contribute to organizational learning by identifying lessons learned and emerging good practices, and by providing recommendations that can inform future ILO initiatives and actions.

The project was subject to final internal evaluation, as envisaged in the agreed project document, scheduled in August and September 2023 to identify the achievements, to ascertain if the project was coherent with the ILO's strategic objectives, relevant and useful to the key beneficiaries, and conducted efficiently. The evaluation focused on the criteria of relevance, validity, efficiency, effectiveness, impact, and sustainability. The final internal evaluation focused on all the activities implemented by the project during the period 01 August 2022 – 30 September 2023.

The findings of the evaluation were validated by the key beneficiaries during the regional conference held on 03 October 2023 with presence of the national YG coordinators, representatives of the WB-6 PESs, ILO project team, and representatives of DG EMPLOYMENT and ETF.

2. BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT

In October 2020, the European Commission announced a comprehensive Economic and Investment Plan for the Western Balkans (EIP), emphasising the long-term economic recovery, a transition towards green and digital economies, regional integration, and alignment with European Union standards. Within EIP, Flagship initiative #10 suggests that the governments of the six economies of the Western Balkan (WB-6) should establish Youth Guarantee (YG) in line with the EU Youth Guarantee. The EIP outlines four stages of implementation for this initiative: (1) the formulation of a Youth Guarantee implementation plan (YGIP) under the responsibility of a Youth Guarantee Coordinator and in partnership with multiple stakeholders; (2) capacity-building among public authorities and stakeholders, including monitoring and evaluation frameworks, putting in place necessary systems/infrastructure and changing the legal and policy frameworks; (3) pilot implementation in selected localities; and (4) scaling up and reporting.

This came as a response to the effects of the Covid-19 pandemic on employment in the WB-6 economies, resulting in a higher proportion of inactive people rather than officially unemployed. This increase in inactivity, particularly among the age group 25-29, has led to a rising number of young people not engaged in employment, education, or training (NEET). Furthermore, gender differences in employment have been more prominent among young individuals compared to the entire adult population.

Hence, to support WB-6 economies in establishing the YG, in June 2021, a joint EU-ILO Technical Assistance Facility (TAF) on the Youth Guarantee was established, as a partnership among the ILO, the European Commission and the European Training Foundation (ETF). The TAF builds upon the EC-ILO Joint Action on the Youth Guarantee, where the ILO supported some of the EU Member States in strengthening their institutional capacities for YG implementation and monitoring. In addition, it showcases the assistance the ILO has been providing since 2017 to the Government of North Macedonia on the development and implementation of a pilot youth guarantee and its subsequent scaling-up. Numerous tools, knowledge resources, and lessons learned have emerged from these technical assistance initiatives, which can serve as guidance for the WB-6 during the establishment of their own youth guarantee programmes.

Phase I of EU-ILO TAF, initially financed by the ILO and other ILO initiatives at country-level (Austrian Development Cooperation and the United Kingdom Good Governance Fund), focused on supporting the WB-6 develop a solid Youth Guarantee Implementation Plan (YGIP). This was enabled through the provision of high-quality technical assistance (ILO expertise) and peer-learning opportunities. Upon the successful finalisation of the YGIPs (and in some cases their formal adoption) the project assisted in the implementation of preparatory actions (related to changes in the policy and legal frameworks) and overall capacity development of concerned institutions.

The project was funded by the European Commission, DG EMP – ESF+ Employment and Social innovation strand programme with a budget of EUR 500,000.00.

2.1. Project background and objectives

Employing a demand-driven approach, the EU-ILO Technical Assistance Facility focused on delivering technical services and expertise. The objective was to ensure that Western Balkan economies would make progress in introducing and implementing the Youth Guarantee at a pace aligned with the requirements of the European Integration Process, Economic Reform Program (ERP), and enlargement processes. The primary objective of the EU-ILO TAF was to facilitate the attainment of key milestones that meet the relevant quality standards established within the European Union, in accordance with

ILO conventions and recommendations, and the policy principles outlined in the EU Council Recommendation.

This initiative was designed to foster positive regional dynamics by promoting a productive 'competition' among the WB-6. This approach aimed to mitigate the risk that any of these countries would fall behind in the implementation of the YG due to local challenges. However, it is clearly mentioned in the project document that the regional-level technical assistance must be complemented by bilateral envelopes, predominantly through the Instrument for Pre-Accession Assistance (IPA), to achieve complementary outcomes in the implementation of the YG.

The **overall objective** of the 'EU/ILO Technical Assistance Facility - Innovation in youth employment policy through the Youth Guarantee (phase I)' was to contribute to easing the labour market integration of unemployed and disengaged young women and men in the Western Balkan economies, in a systemic manner, through the implementation of the Youth Guarantee.

The **specific objective** was: Framework conditions and capacities for the establishment and gradual implementation of the Youth Guarantee in the WB economies enhanced.

Outputs

Output 1: Policy framework and policy coordination mechanisms for the implementation of YG improved

Under this output, YG stakeholders in the WB-6 received support to analyse the key features of the policies underpinning the Youth Guarantee and receive tailor-made technical guidance and recommendations on necessary policy reforms to be undertaken (missing policies to be developed and adopted, existing policies to be changed or expanded etc.) in order to meet the requirements of the youth guarantee.

Output 2: Legislation amended in line with the guiding principles of YG

Under this output stakeholders in the WB-6 received technical assistance for the full review of the national legislative framework to identify whether there are provisions that would - de jure or de facto – hamper the implementation of the reinforced Youth Guarantee.

Output 3: YG monitoring system designed

Under this output stakeholders in WB-6 received support to establish data pooling systems as well as adequate performance monitoring systems within PES to populate the EMCO indicator framework and monitoring the performance of youth guarantee schemes.

Output 4: YG service delivery mechanism set up

Under this output stakeholders in WB-6 were supported to review specific features of the YG implementation mechanism, such as models of and approaches to statistical profiling, outreach practices and outsourcing of service delivery, and online delivery of basic services.

3. EVALUATION BACKGROUND

3.1 Evaluation objectives

ILO considers evaluation as an integral part of the implementation of regular budget and technical cooperation activities. The present evaluation was conducted under the framework of the regional M&E plan of the ILO Regional Office for Europe and Central Asia, so as to evaluate progress made in the implementation of recommendations on how to improve the sustainability of achieved results. It is, however, intended to contribute to the accountability towards the stakeholders and the ILO organizational learning.

As outlined in the project document and agreed with the development partner, the project *EU-ILO Technical Assistance Facility - Innovation in youth employment policy through the Youth Guarantee - Phase I* – underwent final internal evaluation, managed by an ILO appointed evaluation manager, and conducted by an ILO internal evaluator. The final internal evaluation took place in August and September 2023 following the ILO principles, methods, and the strategy of ILO's internal evaluation policy.

The purpose of the final internal evaluation was to assess the relevance of the project and the level of achievement of the planned objectives. This allowed assessment whether the project design addressed the identified needs, as well as if the project was implemented to meet these needs. In addition, the evaluation provided an insight in what stakeholders in the WB-6 identify as main challenges to the successful operationalization of YG schemes in their specific contexts.

The final internal evaluation was aimed to ascertain if the project was coherent with the ILO's strategic objectives; relevant and useful to the key stakeholders; conducted efficiently according to ILO standards and the agreed project documents. The project was evaluated in terms of efficiency, effectiveness, relevance and sustainability.

Specific objective(s) of the evaluation:

- Review the work done and determine the progress achieved during the indicated period in line with the stated objectives of the projects, the kind of changes produced so far, and the intended or unintended effects of the project, and an assessment of the reasons/factors that helped to produce these changes and effects.
- Review the efficiency and effectiveness of the projects' implementation;
- Review to what extent the project was relevant and met the needs of its original target groups;
- Review the likelihood of sustainability of the projects' outcomes;
- Review risks and opportunities that have emerged during the project life-time;
- Draw conclusions in terms of the achievements made.

These insights will be used as technical input for further planning of activities with ILO constituents in 2023 and beyond.

Scope

The scope of the evaluation encompassed all activities and components of the project for the period of 01 August 2022 and 30 September 2023 in Western Balkan economies. The evaluation pertained to all stages of the project, including initial project design, work planning, implementation, monitoring and reporting, and focuses on the criteria of relevance, validity, efficiency, effectiveness, impact, and sustainability. The evaluation took place in August and September 2023.

In line with ILO evaluation policy, gender equality, disability inclusion and other non-discrimination issues are important cross-cutting policy drivers of the ILO. The evaluation particularly looked at how gender equality concerns and tripartite consultations were integrated throughout its methodology, strategies/approaches, data and all deliverables.

Clients of the evaluation:

Main clients of this assessment are the

- ILO management, technical specialists, and project staff
- tripartite constituents, in particular the YG coordinators
- the development partner.

3.2 Evaluation approach, methodology, and methodological limitations

The evaluation was carried out in accordance with the UN Evaluation Group (UNEG) Norms and Standards (updated in 2016), and OECD/DAC's recommendations, as well as the ILO's Evaluation Policy Guidelines¹, by adhering to the ethical standards and codes of conduct when gathering information in order to protect those involved in the evaluation process. Thus, the confidentiality of the respondents was respected. As much as possible, the evaluation applied triangulation/cross-checking and observations to increase the credibility and validity and to minimize any subjective conclusions.

The evaluation complied with UNEG evaluation norms, standards and followed the ethical safeguards, as specified in the ILO's evaluation guidelines and procedures. The evaluation was conducted in a participatory manner by engaging the stakeholders at diverse levels and ensuring that they have a say about the implementation of the project, can share their views, can contribute to the evaluation, and participate in the dissemination processes.

The methodology included multiple methods, both qualitative and quantitative. The internal evaluator reviewed the available literature and materials. An orientation meeting (on-distance) was organized with the ILO team, which was followed by in-person interviews with the Sr. Employment Specialist, field research, including interviews with the ILO National Coordinators and National Project Officers in WB-6, tripartite constituents, i.e. the government (Ministry of Labour), public employment services, trade unions and employers' organization, and other relevant government institutions. The list of recommended persons/institutions to interview was provided by the Project Team in consultation with the Evaluation Manager.

Information was collected by means of group and/or individual interviews with key stakeholders. Upon completion of the interviews, a presentation of preliminary findings was organized with the Sr. Employment Specialist. The findings from the evaluation were validated by the interviewed stakeholders at the regional event organized in Budapest, on 03 October 2023.

The evaluation examined the projects' Theory of Change in the light of the logical connection between the levels of results, and their alignment with the ILO's strategic objectives. Particular attention was given to the identification of assumptions, risks and mitigation strategies, and the logical connection between levels of results and their alignment with ILO's strategic objectives and outcomes at the global and national levels, as well as with the relevant SDGs and related targets.

The evaluation criteria and questions, as much as possible, considered stakeholder diversity and ensured gender equality.

¹ https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---ed_mas/---eval/documents/publication/wcms_571339.pdf

The evaluation was based on a desk review and interviews with the project staff, ILO specialists, development partner and beneficiaries. The evaluation used triangulation of data sources (e.g. document analysis, interviews, and direct observation) to ensure the validity and reliability of the findings.

The primary evaluation activities included:

- **Document review** – project documents and other relevant materials from secondary sources (see Annex 3 for a detailed presentation of the documentation reviewed).
- **Review of the results** of the project and discussions with the project team thereon;
- **Interviews with direct stakeholders** – project management team and stakeholders – conducted in person. The interviewees were selected on the proposal of the project teams and the evaluator, in consultation with the Evaluation Manager, and were relevant for the project implementation. The list of interviewees is provided in Annex 2.

3.3 Evaluation criteria and questions

The assessment applied the key OECD/DAC criteria of relevance, effectiveness, efficiency, sustainability and provided recommendations in the definition of the key actions to be undertaken. The potential for Impact was assessed to the extent possible, given the limited scope of the intervention.

The assessment sought answers to the following questions:

Relevance

1. To what extent are the project's objectives and approach relevant to the constituents' needs and present country context, as well as with development frameworks?
2. How well has the project adapted to the changes in the country context?
3. What is the relevance of the project's outcomes regarding improved access of youth to employment?

Effectiveness

4. What have been the major results and lessons learned during the project's implementation?
5. What has been the progress made in the achievement of the project's outcomes? Have there been any changes in the specific areas defined as the project outputs?
6. To what extent the project's activities have considered and contributed to the advancement of the ILO's cross-cutting policy drivers (CCPDs)?
7. What are the main constraints experienced by the project (both in terms of methodology and context)?

Efficiency

8. Have resources available (time, funds, partnerships, knowledge, expertise and tools) been used efficiently?
9. Are there any ways to enhance the efficiency?

Sustainability and impact potential

10. Are the results achieved likely to continue after the end of the intervention? Are they likely to produce longer-term effects and benefits to the target groups?
11. What is the expected long-lasting effect after the activities are completed?

Recommendations and next steps

12. What are the next steps to be undertaken? What is the best way to proceed? What would be the key issues to tackle?
13. Which actors and in which way should be engaged?

14. What action might be needed to bolster the longer-term effects and to come to further policy measures generating a positive change?

Based on the analysis of the findings, this assessment produced practical recommendations on the future steps to be taken by the ILO and the project beneficiaries.

4. FINDINGS

4.1. Relevance

The relevance of the project was evaluated based on a review of secondary information, project documents, and validated through interviews with the ILO constituents, beneficiaries and ILO management team. The evaluation assessed the extent to which the project activities complied with the national efforts.

The project contributed to the ILO's strategic policy frameworks i.e., the ILO Programme and Budget (P&B) 2022-2023 and related Policy *Outcome 3: Economic, social and environmental transitions for full, productive and freely chosen employment and decent work for all* and *Outcome 5: Skills and lifelong learning to facilitate access to and transitions in the labour market*, even though this link is not explicitly mentioned in the project document. The project was aligned with Decent Work Country Programmes of [Albania 2017-2021](#); [Montenegro 2019-2021](#); [North Macedonia 2019-2022](#), [2023-2025](#); and [Serbia 2019-2022](#).

The project was aligned with the strategic priorities set out in the **United Nations Sustainable Development Cooperation Frameworks** for Bosnia and Herzegovina 2021-2025, Albania 2022-2026; Montenegro 2019-2021; North Macedonia 2021-2025; and Serbia 2019-2022.

The project directly contributed to the Sustainable Development **Goal 8 Promote sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment and decent work for all**, *Targets: 8.5 - By 2030, achieve full and productive employment and decent work for all women and men, including for young people and persons with disabilities, and equal pay for work of equal value; and 8.6 - By 2020, substantially reduce the proportion of youth not in employment, education or training*, and also contributed to the attainment of **SDG 1 - End poverty in all its forms everywhere**; **SDG 5 - Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls**; and **SDG 10 - Reduce inequality within and among countries**.

Furthermore, the project contributed to the Western Balkan Declaration on ensuring sustainable labour market integration of young people, whereby the Governments of WB-6 economies recognised the disproportionate impact of the crisis on young women and men and committed to gradually establish, implement, and enhance Youth Guarantee schemes in the region, based on the EU Council Recommendation of 30 October 2020, *A Bridge to Jobs – Reinforcing the Youth Guarantee*.

The project was also relevant to the *Economic Reform Programmes* (ERPs), concerning the reforms in the areas of employment, education and social assistance.

4.2. Validity of design

The evaluation of the design validity was primarily based on secondary information, the project document, and further validated through interviews with ILO constituents, beneficiaries, ILO project teams, and expert teams.

The available information demonstrated that the project was backed by evidence from analyses of employment trends, the effects of COVID-19 on the labor market, the NEETs status in the WB-6 economies, as well as a diagnostic assessment of the WB-6 context, and was constructed in response to the identified challenges.

The project was inherently complex, as its outcomes were contingent upon factors like political stability, commitment, and the willingness to create enabling conditions for the introduction of the

Youth Guarantee (YG). Nevertheless, the project was feasible to implement within the specified timeframe and budget, partially due to the well-defined objectives and clearly articulated outcomes and outputs. These elements enabled an effective review of project performance and the accurate measurement of progress.

The project was supported by a clear Theory of Change, and supported by verifiable indicators.

If policy frameworks for the youth guarantee improve,

If legal frameworks are amended,

If YG monitoring system is designed,

If YG service delivery mechanism are set up...

...Then framework conditions and capacities for the establishment and gradual implementation of the Youth Guarantee in the WB economies will be enhanced...

...Leading to easier transition to the labour market of the unemployed and disengaged young women and men in the Western Balkans economies and improvement of key labour market indicators for NEET youth.

4.3. Adaptation during implementation

Despite the involvement of a sizeable number of beneficiaries, the project was implemented in line with the implementation plan. The project design was flexible and adaptive, since conception, to accommodate to the emerging needs of the beneficiaries and respond to the evolving context.

4.4. Effectiveness and progress

The **overall objective** of the *EU/ILO Technical Assistance Facility - Innovation in youth employment policy through the Youth Guarantee (phase I)* was to contribute to easing the labour market integration of unemployed and disengaged young women and men in the Western Balkan economies, in a systemic manner, through the implementation of the Youth Guarantee.

The **specific objective** was: Framework conditions and capacities for the establishment and gradual implementation of the Youth Guarantee in the WB economies enhanced

The project sought to support Western Balkan economies establish a fully-fledged Youth Guarantee scheme, which necessitated reform in the legislation and procedures, as well as preparation of the institutions in charge of implementing the YG pillars. These activities differed from economy to economy, depending on the national context and institutional settings, and ranged from collection and analysis of data for evidence-based policy making; direct technical support to framing of the legislation, policies and strategies; technical support to the elaboration of a quality Youth Guarantee Implementation plans; provision of guidelines, tools and protocols on how to deal with the unemployed and inactive youth population. Furthermore, the project assessed, and addressed where necessary, the limited capacities of relevant stakeholders through design and provision of tailored capacity building packages and, where applicable, through peer-learning activities on outreach, activation, piloting, monitoring and evaluation of YG.

The primary focus during the 14-month period of project implementation was on supporting WB-6 economies to:

(i) increase their knowledge-base to foster policy decisions relevant to the YGIP; ii) support the establishment/fine-tuning of mechanisms needed for implementation and monitoring of the YG; iii) increase capacities of all relevant stakeholders for the piloting of the YG.

The ILO also facilitated the establishment and, further on, the activities and functioning of the YG Coordinators' Network. The aim of the Network was exchange of knowledge, information, and good

practices among the WB-6. During the lifespan of the EU-ILO TAF, a total of three meetings of the Network took place (online, 1-2 February 2022, Tirana, 15-16 June 2022, Skopje, 24 February 2023).

The beneficiaries did not encounter any delays in terms of response to or implementation of activities. All the delivered outputs were prompt, adapted to the actual needs, and regarded as essential and of high quality.

The outputs delivered revolved around the following four categories of support:

1) Policy and legal reviews and guidance

- ✓ Legal framework for the introduction of the reinforced Youth Guarantee;
- ✓ Policy reviews for youth employment;
- ✓ Review of the financial allocations for youth employment;
- ✓ Review of the employment, continued education and training, apprenticeship and traineeship offers delivered to youth;
- ✓ Technical assistance to design the new regulation on employment promotion, including the Youth Guarantee Service delivery system;

2) Technical reports and guidance tools

- ✓ NEETs mapping and policy pointers;
- ✓ Capacity assessment of the YG implementation partners;
- ✓ Assessment of the management and monitoring information system;
- ✓ Technical support to develop and pilot statistical profiling.

3) Learning packages

- ✓ Technical support for the implementation of preparatory activities defined by the YG;
- ✓ E-learning platform for PES on design and implementation of ALMMs, profiling; M&E, quality of offers;
- ✓ Technical assistance to select youth organizations to deliver outreach measures.

4) Peer learning

- ✓ Skopje, 21-24 February 2023 – Outreach and Activation
- ✓ Tirana, 17-18 May 2023 – Monitoring of YG

In addition to the aforementioned, the EU-ILO TAF supported the technical/experts' groups in designing and validation of quality YGIPs.

The expertise provided by the ILO was deemed as essential in, initially, grasping the notion of the Youth Guarantee, and afterwards in the critical overview of the legislation, regulations, procedures and institutional setup that would be in charge of the YG. The WB-6 economies, furthermore, appreciated the exposure to the lessons learned and practices implemented by the EU Member States that have a long-standing experience in implementation of the Youth Guarantee.

North Macedonia is the only economy outside the European Union that implements the YG. Under the current project, the country has been supported in the development of the new YGIP 2023-2026, as well as in the reforms and improvement of the services related to the implementation of the Youth Guarantee. During the project life, the number of persons registered in YG (entry level) marked an upward progression with 17,394 in 2021, 20,182 in 2022 and 20,645 persons in 2023. The percentage of people successfully completing the YG ranges from 38 per cent in 2021, 46.9 per cent in 2022 and 38.1 per cent in 2023.

All the outputs have been tailor-made to accommodate the individual needs of the economies, and based on the applications submitted to TAF. In specific cases, it can be established that the EU-ILO TAF was underutilized. According to the interviewed stakeholders, this is due to the offer of other technical assistance, political changes (including turn-over in the YG planning and coordination structures) and lack of awareness of the possibilities the facility can offer. The list of requests is summarized below per country:

Albania

- **Technical assistance to prepare the “Outreach Strategy for young Albanian NEETs”** based on the good practices from the EU countries as well as in line with the YG principles;
- **Technical assistance to select the Youth organisations and CSOs** to deliver outreach measures, to set the minimum quality and quantity of services to be delivered and the process through which the Youth organisations and CSOs will accompany the person to registration in the TG service delivery system.

Bosnia and Herzegovina

- **NEETs Mapping and Policy Pointers** - guidance to policymakers and practitioners on how to target investments around the YG;
- **Legal Framework Review for the introduction of the reinforced Youth Guarantee** - to assess whether there are provisions that would - de jure or de facto – hamper the implementation of the reinforced Youth Guarantee and provide recommendations on the amendment of specific by-laws and procedures;
- **Policy Review for youth employment** - to provide an analytical assessment of whether the policies that are being pursued are delivering the desired youth employment outcomes and draw implications for policy-making that enable the implementation of the YG;
- **Capacity Assessments of the YG Implementation partners** - to appraise capacities of the relevant institutions to target young people and deliver services and programmes in line with the for the Youth Guarantee standards and recommend measures to strengthen the capacity and improve the performance;
- **Review of financial allocations for youth employment** – to appraise the adequacy of financial allocation and its disaggregation among the different YG implementing partners and provide recommendations to meet functional and organizational needs for effectively operating the YG scheme;
- **Review of the employment, continued education and training, apprenticeship and traineeship offers delivered to youth** - to assess the compliance of the offers that are being delivered with the “quality” criteria of the YG and recommend changes for their inclusion under the YG;
- **Technical assistance to support the inter-ministerial technical team and Expert Group** in the designing the Youth Guarantee Implementation Plan;
- **Training Workshop on preparation of YGIP** - to support the inter-ministerial technical team and Expert Group in formulating a YGIP (in particular the action plans for the entities and Brčko District);
- **Technical workshop on monitoring and evaluation of the YG** – to enhance the capacities of public institutions and other relevant stakeholders in the YG indicator framework, monitoring and evaluation.

Kosovo

- **Legal Framework Review for the introduction of the reinforced Youth Guarantee** - to assess whether there are provisions that would - de jure or de facto – hamper the implementation of the reinforced Youth Guarantee and provide recommendations on the amendment of specific by-laws and procedures;
- **Policy Review for youth employment** - to provide an analytical assessment of whether the policies that are being pursued are delivering the desired youth employment outcomes and draw implications for policy-making that enable the implementation of the YG;
- **Capacity Assessments of the YG Implementation partners** - to appraise capacities of the relevant institutions to target young people and deliver services and programmes in line with

the for the Youth Guarantee standards and recommend measures to strengthen the capacity and improve the performance;

- **Review of financial allocations for youth employment** – to appraise the adequacy of financial allocation and its disaggregation among the different YG implementing partners and provide recommendations to meet functional and organizational needs for effectively operating the YG scheme;
- **Assessment of the management and monitoring information system** – to provide guidance in drawing up specifications for upgrading the PES ICT Platform
- **Training Workshop on preparation of YGIP** - to support the inter-ministerial technical team and expert Group in formulating a YGIP;
- **Technical assistance to design the new regulation on employment promotion**, introducing among others the Youth Guarantee Service delivery system (registration process, organizational setting, services and programmes, monitoring), as well as design of the Active Labour Market Measure Regulation.

Montenegro

- **NEETs Mapping and Policy Pointers** - guidance to policymakers and practitioners on how to target investments around the YG;
- **Legal Framework Review for the introduction of the reinforced Youth Guarantee** - to assess whether there are provisions that would - de jure or de facto – hamper the implementation of the reinforced Youth Guarantee and provide recommendations on the amendment of specific by-laws and procedures amendments;
- **Capacity Assessments of the YG Implementation partners** - to appraise capacities of the relevant institutions to target young people and deliver services and programmes in line with the for the Youth Guarantee standards and recommend measures to strengthen the capacity and improve the performance;
- **Review of financial allocations for youth employment** – to appraise the adequacy of financial allocation and its disaggregation among the different YG implementing partners and provide recommendations to meet functional and organizational needs for effectively operating the YG scheme;
- **Review of the employment, continued education and training, apprenticeship and traineeship offers delivered to youth** - to assess the compliance of the offers that are being delivered with the “quality” criteria of the YG and recommend changes for their inclusion under the YG;
- Enhance the capacities of institutions involved in the implementation of the YG, social partners and NGOs considering the recommendations of the YG technical reports and the experience of their peers from the WB Region or EU countries;
- **Assessment of the management and monitoring information system** – to provide guidance in drawing up specifications for upgrading and strengthening the PES ICT Platform;
- Technical assistance to support the inter-ministerial technical team and Expert Group in the design and finalization of the Youth Guarantee Implementation Plan;
- Technical support for the implementation of preparatory activities defined by the YGIP;
- Two Day Workshop to discuss the Plan for the implementation of the Youth Guarantee program.

North Macedonia

- **Policy Review for youth employment** - to provide an analytical assessment of the socio-economic context, labour market and consider whether the policies that are being pursued

are delivering the desired youth employment outcomes and draw implications for policy-making that enable the implementation of the YG;

- **Preliminary assessment of the Youth Guarantee Implementation Plan 2022**, including an analysis of the impact of Covid-19 crises on youth employment;
- Technical assistance to support the inter-ministerial technical team and Expert Group in the design of the YGIP;
- Review of financial allocations for youth employment – to appraise the adequacy of financial allocation and its disaggregation among the different YG implementing partners and provide recommendations to develop financial framework for the YG Implementation Plan;
- Deliver three hybrid type of trainings linked to YGIP (the topics will be additionally defined)
- Technical assistance in validating the YGIP and planning and launching the initiative (validation workshop);
- **Training Workshops** Review of the current YG monitoring system, especially in terms of data gathering for the follow-up monitoring indicators and refine the national YG monitoring and evaluation system;
- Technical assistance to enhance the capacities of the public institutions in monitoring the performance of the Youth Guarantee and carry out an in-depth analysis of the data;
- Technical assistance to enhance the capacities of ESA youth caseworkers on implementing the YGIP;
- A two-day training workshop delivered, aiming at discussing the main policy pillars included in the North Macedonian Reinforced Youth Guarantee and the roles and responsibilities of partners institutions; Review the details of the service delivery workflow envisaged by the YG implementation plan; Examine the main elements of the YG performance monitoring system;
- Technical assistance to support in developing the probability model for the piloting of the statistical profiling system under the YG scheme;
- A two-day training workshop delivered, aimed at strengthening the Employment Service Agency of the Republic of North Macedonia in developing and running the probability model for the piloting of the statistical profiling system under the YG scheme.

Serbia

- **NEETs Mapping and Policy Pointers** - guidance to policymakers and practitioners on how to target investments around the YG;
- **Policy Review for youth employment** - to provide an analytical assessment of whether the policies that are being pursued are delivering the desired youth employment outcomes and draw implications for policy-making that enable the implementation of the YG;
- Technical assistance to support the inter-ministerial technical team and Expert Group in the design of the YGIP;
- Technical assistance to select the Youth organisations and CSOs to deliver outreach measures, to set the minimum quality and quantity of services to be delivered and the process through which the Youth organisations and CSOs will accompany the person to registration in the TG service delivery system;
- **Training Workshop on preparation of YGIP** - to support the inter-ministerial technical team and expert Group in formulating a YGIP;
- **Technical assistance to support the inter - ministerial technical team and Expert Group in the finalizing the Youth Guarantee Implementation Plan** focusing on developing a realistic timeframe and accompanying budget;
- **Technical assistance to design the Law on Work Practices**, ensuring that this programme can be considered a quality offer.

4.5. Efficiency and management arrangements

While a limited financial assessment has been conducted, and the financial efficiency cannot be commented with specificity, the overall finding is that the project was well-managed in terms of human and financial resources, and that the ILO provided significant added value via its extensive resources base, technical expertise, project management backstopping, and made a good use of its comparative advantage.

The project was managed, and technically and administratively backstopped by the ILO Decent Work Team and Country Office for Central and Eastern Europe (DWT/CO), based in Budapest, which provided the necessary administrative support and technical and project-backup services. A project office was set up in Sarajevo to manage and coordinate the activities. The ILO team for implementation of the project consisted of:

- Chief Technical Advisor, Sarajevo (part-time, 14 months)
- Project Assistant, Sarajevo (part-time, 14 months)
- Administrative Assistant, Budapest (part-time, 14 months)

The project team worked in coordination with the ILO National Coordinators and project officers in the WB-6 and reported directly to the Senior Employment Specialist based in the DWT/CO Budapest.

Much of the success of project implementation can be attributed to the performance, professionalism, expertise and dedication of the ILO project staff and experts and depended highly on their commitment.

Staffing was to some degree adequate, given the ILO's capacity to provide backstopping and technical support. However, the interviewed stakeholders stated that each economy would have benefited from a country-based presence of the ILO. This was explicitly requested by Montenegro, justifying it with a better coordination, sustainability of the efforts and institutional memory, given the political instability and the risk of possible change of the YG coordinator.

4.6. Orientation to impact and sustainability

The TAF employed a transparent and participatory approach when implementing the project. Each economy was offered the equal opportunity to apply for a technical assistance and receive a tailor-made support and expertise. The activities focused on a comprehensive reform of the segments concerned, which might prevent or hinder the introduction of the YG.

The TAF promoted a collaborative approach and practices that can have an impact on future activities. The institutions were encouraged to abandon the silos operations, when it comes to youth actions, and better coordinate their initiatives.

In order to ensure sustainability, the TAF promoted local ownership over the process of establishing the Youth Guarantee. In this light, support to national institutions was provided to increase local capacities.

The rendered assistance contributed to the enhancement of overall systems and structures within the national institutions, in terms of planning, delivering, monitoring of the YG.

4.7. Cross-cutting issues: Gender equality and tripartism

The evaluation established that the gender balance was diligently maintained in the composition of the technical and experts' working groups, as well as among the participants in the workshops. Furthermore, a notable majority of YG coordinators were women, and the entire ILO project

management team consisted of women. The evaluation interviews also exhibited gender balance, with a higher representation of women.

The ILO actively promoted tripartite consultations concerning significant employment and labor-related legislative and regulatory reforms. However, the extent of engagement from social partners varied from one economy to another. In some instances, social partners were fully integrated into the technical groups and consulted in a timely manner during the development of the YGIPs. Conversely, in other cases, social partners were only approached for their inputs on the YGIP at a later stage, once the document had been drafted.

5. CONCLUSIONS

Evaluation criteria used to evaluate the project were the standard OECD-DAC evaluation criteria of relevance, effectiveness, efficiency, impact and sustainability. The preliminary stage consisted in defining key evaluation questions; the objectives of the evaluation and an understanding of evidence required. It also set out the generic and specific questions that would be asked. The interviewed stakeholders were nominated by the project team and proposed by the evaluator, based on their involvement in the project. Data collection activities primarily consisted of document reviews, discussion with ILO team and interviews with project stakeholders/beneficiaries. Conclusions have been drawn, after discussion with the project team, on the basis of the evidence available to the evaluator, and validated at a regional workshop.

Every WB economy progressed with the establishment of the YG structure and implementation plans at its own pace.

1. The EU-ILO TAF has a **strategic importance attached to it**, which has been recognized by the European Commission and the governments committed to introduction of fully-fledged Youth Guarantee schemes, oriented towards improvement of employment prospects of the youth, in particular the young NEETs.
2. It is vital that the ILO continues to provide technical support to the WB-6 economies, through the EU-ILO TAF, throughout all the phases of implementation of the Youth Guarantee. The expertise provided is seen as essential in the understanding of the concept of the Youth Guarantee, as well as in the identification of the reforms to be pursued so that the YG can be integrated in the national systems. In the views of the beneficiaries, the **TAF offered an adequately balanced approach of technical assistance, analyses, experts support, and experience sharing across all pillars of the YG**.
3. The beneficiaries value the **flexibility rendered by the TAF, since it enabled them to request an ad hoc assistance** whenever a need for it emerged, filling the gaps for technical expertise, funding, and training.
4. The critical factors that underpinned the project results were the **commitment and the comparative advantage provided by the ILO technical experts, and the commitment of the YG coordinators**. The ILO project management and experts' team had a hands-on experience on the topics of employment and youth guarantee and had largely contributed to the successful initiation and implementation of the ambitious reforms. According to the interviewees the project team members fostered a professional, open and transparent communication.
5. The WB-6 economies **benefited from the experience sharing** among each other, which contributed to better understanding of the processes, and simultaneously to a healthy competition that motivated the economies implement the foreseen reforms and activities. They also benefited from the exposure to the experience from the EU Member States.
6. The TAF has a **strong potential for sustainability** due to the support provided to the national institutions to increase their capacities and enhance the overall systems and structures in charge of planning, delivering and monitoring the Youth Guarantee.
7. Multiple actors showed interest in supporting the WB-6 economies and their administrative units in the efforts to introduce the Youth Guarantee. This poses a **risk of overlapping in activities**, as well as of obtaining varying levels of quality of technical assistance.
8. **PES are generally under-capacitated** in terms of the number of caseworkers that will be specialized in working with YG beneficiaries, and might be overburdened with the inflow of NEETs registering for the Youth Guarantee.
9. The level of **utilization of the TAF was significantly diverse among the WB-6 economies**, which might be due to the insufficient awareness of the EU-ILO YG TAF and the opportunities that the facility can provide in the preparatory phase for introduction of the Youth Guarantee.

This was partially a result from the turnovers in the YG coordination units. Moreover, some of the YG coordinators consider the application form and procedure demanding and time-consuming.

10. The level of **involvement of the social partners in the design and preparatory activities is diverse**. In some WB-6 economies the role of the employers and trade unions has not been leveraged sufficiently, and they were consulted only at a late stage of YGIP development.

The project was implemented at a good pace with no significant obstacles. The flexibility of design and demand-driven approach were acknowledged as adequate for such a challenging context. Western Balkan 6 economies would benefit from subsequent phases of the project, so as to ensure continuous hands-on technical support in the upcoming phases of piloting, scaling-up and implementation of a fully-fledged Youth Guarantee in the region.

6. LESSONS LEARNED AND EMERGING GOOD PRACTICES

Lessons Learned

ILO has in-house expertise and significant influence over the topic of employment. The use of the comparative advantage of ILO in the field of employment, including the youth guarantee, is proven both in WB-6 and EU levels, and that adds significant value to the project. The ILO made effective and efficient use of technical backstopping and project management support that is validated as providing added security to the stakeholders.

The project strategy and design are deeply cognizant of the dynamics of the Western Balkan economies. Therefore, both the project design and the budget are demand-driven and based on the actual needs of the beneficiaries.

Good practices

The flexibility of the project offering technical assistance based on request has proven as very beneficial. This is supported by the finding that the introduction of the Youth Guarantee found each of the WB-6 economies at different stage of development and preparedness, and necessitated different types of interventions.

Challenges and limitations

The project encountered some external challenges during its lifetime, which did not hinder the implementation per se, but contributed to underutilization of the potential of the technical assistance portfolio. Such were the political instability, involving change of governments, change of YG coordinators and the assigned structure of the technical/experts' groups that were not necessarily informed on the existence and the potential of the TAF.

Listed below are some challenges and limitations that might pose a risk in the implementation of the reforms, piloting and scaling-up of the YG:

- Political instability and high variance in the level of commitment and interest to introduce and realize the Youth Guarantee (within and across institutions);
- Lingering threat of setbacks in the process, caused by the turnover of the YG coordinators and changes within the governance structures in charge of the introduction and implementation of the YG;
- Technical and human resources capacity of PES to absorb the inflow of youth, once the YG is piloted and scaled-up;
- Pronounced emigration trends and brain drain, in combination with a lack of interest among (young) unemployed people to register with PES and further on to take up the offers for employment, education and training. These factors aggravate the outreach activities.
- Lack of suitable data to map young NEETs (most prominent case in Albania), understand (dis)incentives to work, and monitor the quality of offers.

7. RECOMMENDATIONS

EVALUATION RECOMMENDATIONS FOR THE ILO

Recommendation 1: The EU/ILO TAF should be extended its support to the WB-6 economies throughout all the phases of introduction, scaling-up and fully-fledged implementation of the Youth Guarantee to overcome emerging hurdles and ensure that is in line with the principles set forth in the EU Council Recommendation.

Responsible Units	Priority	Time Frame	Resource implication
ILO	High	Next quarter	High

Recommendation 2: ILO should strengthen its country-based presence in each WB-6 economy during the pilot, scaling-up and implementation phases to ensure closer cooperation between the ILO and the national institutions. This would imply additional support to the YG coordinators in their efforts to manage the process of YG introduction and implementation, but also coordinate the different technical assistance, as not all offers are necessarily aligned or reveal a correct understanding of the dynamics and functioning of the YG.

Responsible Units	Priority	Time Frame	Resource implication
ILO	High	Next quarter	High

Recommendation 3: The ILO team should develop and distribute to all relevant stakeholders an informative catalogue with the types of assistance that can be requested from the TAF. In addition, the ILO should simplify and digitalize (to the extent possible) the process of application. This would reduce the time and efforts by the stakeholders in requesting assistance, but simultaneously enable the ILO to maintain an on-line database of the work done for the different institutions, with adapted guidelines and tools to reflect local circumstances.

Responsible Units	Priority	Time Frame	Resource implication
ILO	High	Next month	Low

Recommendation 4: The ILO should continue facilitating peer-learning conferences on different topics, including study visits to EU Member States that have successfully implemented the Youth Guarantee and have similar demographic and political context as WB-6. These knowledge exchange workshops may be extended to the other stakeholders, in particular, with focus on the social partners and their roles.

Responsible Units	Priority	Time Frame	Resource implication
ILO	High	Next semester	Medium

EVALUATION RECOMMENDATIONS FOR THE BENEFICIARIES

Recommendation 1: The beneficiaries should ensure constancy in the YG coordinator unit, as well as institutional memory concerning the processes entailed in the YGIPs. The turnover of staff causes delay in the implementation and repetition of activities.

Responsible Units	Priority	Time Frame	Resource implication
Governments	High	Ongoing	Low

Recommendation 2: The YG coordinators should ensure a transparent and open communication with all the relevant stakeholders involved in the planning, designing and implementing processes, as well as better inter-institutional cooperation (including stronger role of the employers' and workers' organization and leveraging their knowledge and influence). Furthermore, the YG coordinators should strongly coordinate the different technical assistance offered by multiple actors that have indicated an interest in supporting the WB economies, to avoid overlapping of activities and sidetracking from the principles/notions/terminology underpinning the YG.

Responsible Units	Priority	Time Frame	Resource implication
YG coordinators	High	Ongoing	Low

Recommendation 3: The Governments should consider harnessing the potential of the social workers in the outreach activities, in addition to the involvement of the youth organization and the civil society. The social workers are in direct contact with the most vulnerable categories of persons, including the NEETs. The idea is to steer them away from the social protection benefits schemes and motivate them to enter the labour market.

Responsible Units	Priority	Time Frame	Resource implication
Governments	High	Ongoing	Low

Recommendation 4: The Governments should consider establishment of tracing systems for the VET secondary school and university students, in order to be able to better reach out and motivate the youth to enter the labour market. This is justified by the fact that the institutions lose track of the students unless they register with PES once they complete their education.

Responsible Units	Priority	Time Frame	Resource implication
Governments	Medium	Next year	High

Recommendation 5: The Governments should increase the number and capacity of the councilors that will work with the young NEETs, due to the increased workloads that expects them with the roll-out of the Youth Guarantee. The PES councilors will have to deal with the stock of the unemployed, but also with a higher inflow of registered persons.

Responsible Units	Priority	Time Frame	Resource implication
Governments	High	Next year	High

ANNEX 1 TYPE OF TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE REQUESTED BY THE WB-6 ECONOMIES, AS OF 1 AUGUST 2023

Type of Assistance	Received request for technical assistance	Country
Technical Reports	NEETs Mapping and Policy Pointers - guidance to policymakers and practitioners on how to target investments around the YG	Bosnia and Herzegovina
		Kosovo
		Montenegro
		North Macedonia
		Serbia
	Legal Framework Review for the introduction of the reinforced Youth Guarantee - to assess whether there are provisions that would - de jure or de facto – hamper the implementation of the reinforced Youth Guarantee and provide recommendations on the amendment of specific by-laws and procedures	Bosnia and Herzegovina
		Kosovo
		Montenegro
	Policy Review for youth employment - to provide an analytical assessment of whether the policies that are being pursued are delivering the desired youth employment outcomes and draw implications for policy-making that enable the implementation of the YG	Bosnia and Herzegovina
		Kosovo
		Montenegro
		Serbia
		Bosnia and Herzegovina

	Capacity Assessments of the YG Implementation partners - to appraise capacities of the relevant institutions to target young people and deliver services and programmes in line with the for the Youth Guarantee standards and recommend measures to strengthen the capacity and improve the performance	Kosovo
		Montenegro
	Review of financial allocations for youth employment - to appraise the adequacy of financial allocation and its disaggregation among the different YG implementing partners and provide recommendations to meet functional and organizational needs for effectively operating the YG scheme	Bosnia and Herzegovina
		Kosovo
		Montenegro
	Review of the employment, continued education and training, apprenticeship and traineeship offers delivered to youth - to assess the compliance of the offers that are being delivered with the “quality” criteria of the YG and recommend changes for their inclusion under the YG	North Macedonia
		Bosnia and Herzegovina
Individual experts/Meetings	Technical assistance to support the inter - ministerial technical team and Expert Group in the designing the Youth Guarantee Implementation Plan	Montenegro
		Bosnia and Herzegovina
		Kosovo
		Montenegro
		North Macedonia
	Technical assistance to support the inter - ministerial technical team and Expert Group in the finalizing the Youth Guarantee Implementation Plan focusing on developing a realistic timeframe and accompanying budget	Serbia

	Assessment of the management and monitoring information system - to provide guidance in drawing up specifications for upgrading the PES ICT Platform	Kosovo
		Montenegro
		North Macedonia
	Technical assistance to prepare the “Outreach Strategy for young Albanian NEETs” based on the good practices from the EU countries as well as in line with the YG principles	Albania
	Technical assistance to design the new regulation on employment promotion, introducing among others the Youth Guarantee Service delivery system (registration process, organizational setting, services and programmes, monitoring), as well as design of the Active Labour Market Measure Regulation.	Kosovo
	Technical assistance to design the Law on Work Practices, ensuring that this programme can be considered a quality offer	Serbia
Training Workshops	Technical assistance to support in developing the probability model for the piloting of the statistical profiling system under the YG scheme.	North Macedonia
	Training Workshop on preparation of YGIP - to support the inter-ministerial technical team and Expert Group in formulating a YGIP	Bosnia and Herzegovina
		Kosovo
		Montenegro
		North Macedonia
		Serbia
		Bosnia and Herzegovina

	Technical workshop on monitoring and evaluation of the YG - to enhance the capacities of public institutions and other relevant stakeholders in the YG indicator framework, monitoring, and evaluation	North Macedonia
	Technical assistance in validating the YGIP and planning and launching the initiative (validation workshop)	North Macedonia
	Technical assistance to enhance the capacities of ESA youth caseworkers on implementing the YGIP	North Macedonia
	Deliver three hybrid type of trainings linked to YG implementation phases (the topics to be defined).	North Macedonia
	A two-day training workshop delivered, aimed at strengthening the Employment Service Agency of the Republic of North Macedonia in developing and running the probability model for the piloting of the statistical profiling system under the YG scheme	North Macedonia
Guidance Tools/ Learning packages	Technical support for the implementation of preparatory activities defined by the YGIP	Montenegro
	Technical assistance to select the Youth organisations and CSOs to deliver outreach measures - to set the minimum quality and quantity of services to be delivered and the process through which the Youth organisations and CSOs will accompany the person to registration in the TG service delivery system	Serbia
		Albania
Peer Learning and Country Policy Exchanges	Enhance the capacities of institutions involved in the implementation of the YG, social partners and NGOs considering the recommendations of the YG technical reports and the experience of their peers from the WB Region or EU countries.	All

ANNEX 2 LIST OF INTERVIEWS

No.	Name and Surname	Organization	Role	Date of Interview
Serbia				
1.	Neda Milanovic	PES	Head of Department for Employments Support	04.09.2023
2.	Biljana Paspalj	PES	Task Manager - Employment	04.09.2023
3.	Milan Djuretanovic	PES	Head of IT, Development and Analytics	04.09.2023
4.	Zoran Markovic	Confederation of Independent Trade Unions	Vice president of the	04.09.2023
5.	Irma Lutovac		ILO Expert	04.09.2023
6.	Dragica Ivanovic	Ministry of Labour, Employment, Veteran and Social Affairs	Head of Department for Active Employment Policies YG Coordinator	05.09.2023
7.	Liljana Pavlovic	Employers Association Serbia		15.09.2023
Bosnia and Herzegovina				
8.	Tamara Duvnjak Mitrović	PES Brcko	Director	05.09.2023
9.	Almedina Kevric	PES Brcko	Councilor/Assistant for Unemployed Persons	06.09.2023
10.	Ognjenka Spasojevic	PES Brcko	Head of Sector for Employers	06.09.2023
11.	Tea Ruzic	Mayor's Office Brcko	YG Coordinator	06.09.2023
12.	Biljana Semiz	RS Ministry of Labor, War Veterans and Disabled Persons' Protection	Head of European Integration Unit Department for Labour and Employment YG Coordinator	07.09.2023
13.	Darko Telic	Ministry of European Integration and Regional Cooperation		07.09.2023
14.	Liljana Dabic	Trade Union of RS		07.09.2023
15.	Stanislava Cvoro	PES RS		07.09.2023
16.	Aleksandra Simovic	PES RS		07.09.2023
17.	Sasa Acic	Employers Association RS	Director	19.09.2023
18.	Ratko Suzic	Ministry of Scientific Technological Development, Higher Education and Information Society	Department for student standards	22.09.2023

19.	Andrea Konjevic	Ministry of Civil Affairs of BiH	Deputy YG Coordinator, BiH	08.09.2023
20.	Senada Bibic	PES FBiH		08.09.2023
21.	Ismira Kalkan	FBiH Ministry of Labour	YG Coordinator for FBiH	08.09.2023
22.	Dino Midzic	FBiH Ministry of Labour	Sector for Employment	08.09.2023
Montenegro				
23.	Edina Desic	Ministry of Labour and Social Welfare Government of Montenegro	State Secretary, YG Coordinator	11.09.2023
24.	Fadil Zejnelagic	Ministry of Labour and Social Welfare Government of Montenegro	Independent Advisor	11.09.2023
25.	Granica Simićević	Ministry of Labour and Social Welfare, Montenegro	Division for programming and implementation of EU funds	11.09.2023
26.	Aleksandar Rakočević	PES Montenegro	Head of the local employment office Kolasin	11.09.2023
27.	Gzim Hajdinaga	PES Montenegro	Acting Director	11.09.2023
28.	Jelena Mitrovic	Independent Trade Union	Advisor for Training	11.09.2023
29.	Marina Jovanovic	Employers' Association	Advisor for international cooperation	11.09.2023
Albania				
30.	Dikensa Djokutaj	National Youth Council	Manager of M&E	13.09.2023
31.	Genta Prodani	Ministry of Finance and Economy	Head of Migration Policy Sector	13.09.2023
32.	Albin Gega	Ministry of Finance and Economy		13.09.2023
33.	Jonida Lika	PES Albania/National Agency for Employment and Skills	Head of Project Coordination Unit	13.09.2023
34.	Hajrush Collaku	Confederation of Trade Unions		20.09.2023
Kosovo				
35.	Muhamet Klinaku	PES Kosovo		14.09.2023
36.	Gani Ismajli	PES Kosovo	VET Centers	14.09.2023
37.	Leunora Ahmeti	Ministry of Finance	YG Coordinator	14.09.2023
38.	Mrika Hoxha	Ministry of Finance		14.09.2023
39.	Dafina Mehaj	Confederation of Independent Trade Unions of Kosovo		14.09.2023
40.	Atdhe Hykolli	Confederation of Independent Trade Unions of Kosovo	President	14.09.2023
41.	Besrat Krasniqi	Chamber of Commerce Kosovo		14.09.2023

North Macedonia				
42.	Goran Petkovski	ESA	Head of IPA department	14.09.2023
43.	Mladen Frchkovski	Ministry of Labour and Social Policy	YG Coordinator	18.09.2023
44.	Svetlana Ristovska Antikj	Organization of Employers of Macedonia	Executive Director	19.09.2023
45.	Slobodan Trendafilov	Federation of Trade Unions of Macedonia	President	19.09.2023
46.	Aleksandra Slavkoska	Ministry of Labour and Social Policy	State Advisor	21.09.2023
International Labour Organization				
47.	Sajmira Kopani	International Labour Organization	Technical Officer – Youth Employment Policies	04.08.2023
48.	Jovan Protic	International Labour Organization	National Coordinator – Serbia	04.09.2023
49.	Lejla Tanovic	International Labour Organization	National Coordinator – Bosnia and Herzegovina	08.09.2023
50.	Katarina Crnjanski-Vlajcic	International Labour Organization	Chief Technical Officer of YG TAF	08.09.2023
51.	Nina Krgovic	International Labour Organization	National Project Coordinator - Montenegro	11.09.2023
52.	Blerim Murtezi	International Labour Organization	National Project Coordinator – Kosovo	15.09.2023
53.	Daniela Zampini	International Labour Organization	Senior Employment Specialist	15.09.2022
54.	Emil Krstanovski	International Labour Organization	National Coordinator – North Macedonia	15.09.2022
54.	Zhulieta Harassani	International Labour Organization	National Coordinator – Albania	20.09.2023

ANNEX 3 LIST OF REVIEWED DOCUMENTS

1. Project Document
2. YG TAF Database
3. Learning packages
4. Workshop and conference materials

ANNEX 4 LIST OF ACTIVITIES THAT NEED TO BE IMPLEMENTED IN THE COMING PERIOD

1. ILO country-based presence during the piloting, scaling-up and implementation phases.
2. Functional assessment of the PES to implement, monitor and evaluate the YG.
3. Assessment of the PES IT systems and provision of recommendations for their upgrading.
4. Organization of regional networking events on different topics (including study visits, preferably to EU Member States).
5. Development of Outreach and Activation strategies, and minimum standards for quality of outreach services provided by the youth organizations.
6. Development of Guidelines for monitoring, reporting and quality of offers.
7. Review of the ALMM and recommendations for their potential redesign.
8. Provision of packages for training and capacity building of PES councillors on YG implementation and dealing with young NEETs.
9. Review of the piloting phases of the YG, identification of lessons learned, and provision of recommendations for improvement during the scaling-up phases

ANNEX 5 TERMS OF REFERENCE FOR THE INTERNAL EVALUATOR

TERMS OF REFERENCE

FINAL INTERNAL EVALUATION OF THE PROJECT

Title of project:	Provide technical assistance to Western Balkan countries for the implementation of the Youth Guarantee EU/ILO Technical Assistance Facility - Innovation in youth employment policy through the Youth Guarantee - Phase I
Project DC Code:	RER/22/02/EUR
Geographical coverage:	Western Balkan 6 economies
ILO Administrative Office:	Decent Work Team/Country Office for CEE (DWT/CO-Budapest)
ILO Technical Unit:	DWT/CO Budapest
Type of evaluation:	Internal
Timing of the evaluation:	Final
Duration of the evaluation:	1 August – 30 September 2023
Preparation date:	27 July 2023
Duration of the project:	14 months (1 August 2022 – 30 September 2023)
Links to ILO Programme and Budget (P&B) Policy Outcome:	P&B 2022-2023, Policy Outcomes 3 and 5
Budget:	US\$ 560,102.30 (EUR 558,442.00)
Donor (Contracting Authority):	US\$ 501,504.51 (EUR 500,000.00)
ILO contribution:	US\$ 58,597.79 (EUR 58,442.00)
Beneficiaries' contribution:	n/a
Donor (Contracting Authority):	European Commission, DG EMP – ESF+ Employment and Social innovation strand programme

I. INTRODUCTION

This is a final internal evaluation of the EU-funded project undertaken in the framework of the regional M&E plan of the ILO Regional Office for Europe and Central Asia 2022-2023 and in line with the ILO Evaluation Policy and ILO Policy Guidelines for Evaluation². The final internal evaluation is also envisaged by the agreed project document.

In the Western Balkan (WB-6) economies, the loss of jobs due to the Covid-19 pandemic has translated into inactivity more than into unemployment. The rate of young people not in employment, education, or training (NEET) has been increasing, particularly among those 25–29 years of age, because of the rise in inactivity. Additionally, gender differences in employment indicators are more pronounced among young people than in the adult population as a whole.

² 6 ILO policy guidelines for evaluation: Principles, rationale, planning and managing for evaluations, 3rd ed. (Aug. 2017) https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---ed_mas/---eval/documents/publication/wcms_571339.pdf

In October 2020, the European Commission announced a comprehensive Economic and Investment Plan for the Western Balkans (EIP), with a focus on long-term economic recovery, a green and digital transition, regional integration, and convergence with the European Union. The EIP introduced Flagship initiative #10, suggesting that WB-6 governments should establish Youth Guarantee schemes in line with the EU Youth Guarantee. The EIP proposes four stages of implementation, which include: (1) the formulation of a Youth Guarantee implementation plan under the responsibility of a Youth Guarantee Coordinator and in partnership with multiple stakeholders; (2) capacity-building among public authorities and stakeholders, including monitoring and evaluation frameworks, putting in place necessary systems/infrastructure and changing the legal and policy frameworks; (3) pilot implementation in selected localities; and (4) scaling up and reporting.

In order to support WB-6 economies in their efforts to establish YG, a joint EU/ILO Technical Assistance Facility (TAF) on the Youth Guarantee was established in June 2021, in partnership with both the European Commission and the European Training Foundation (ETF). The TAF builds on the EC/ILO Joint Action on the Youth Guarantee, whereby the ILO assisted EU Member States in enhancing institutional capacities for the implementation of the YG, including monitoring. Additionally, starting in 2017, the ILO has been working with the Government of North Macedonia on the preparation and implementation of the pilot youth guarantee and its scaling up. A number of tools, knowledge resources, and lessons learned have emerged from these technical assistance packages, which can provide guidance to the WB-6 during the establishment of a youth guarantee. Initially financed by the ILO and working in synergy with other ILO's initiatives at country-level financed by the Austrian Development Cooperation and the UK's Good Governance Fund, the EU/ILO TAF has supported the WB-6 up to the point where the majority of them will be in a position to submit a solid Youth Guarantee Implementation Plan (YGIP) to the European Commission by the end of June 2022. While some additional support with the analytics and further refinements to the YGIP was provided during the second half of 2022, it is expected that the WB-6 will need additional technical assistance to move, each at their own pace, from the first stage (planning the YG) to building the actual policy delivery infrastructure for implementing the YG.

This 14-month project (phase I) focuses on enabling a successful transition between the first and the second stage of the Youth Guarantee in the WB-6 through the provision of high-quality technical assistance (ILO expertise) and peer-learning opportunities. More specifically, this project shall lead to the successful finalisation of the Youth Guarantee Implementation Plans and their formal adoption together with the implementation of prior actions (related to changes in the policy and legal frameworks) and overall capacity development of concerned institutions.

The project is subject to final internal evaluation scheduled to take place from August to September 2023 to identify the progress achieved so far, to ascertain if the project is still coherent with the ILO's strategic objectives; relevant and useful to the key beneficiaries, and conducted efficiently according to ILO standards and the project document. The evaluation focuses on the criteria of relevance, validity, efficiency, effectiveness, impact, and sustainability. The final internal evaluation focuses on all the activities that have been implemented by the project during the period August 1, 2022 – September 30, 2022.

The project is funded by the European Commission, DG EMP – ESF+ Employment and Social innovation strand programme with a budget of EUR 500,000.00.

Project links to ILO's strategic framework and country strategic documents

The project contributes to the ILO's strategic policy frameworks i.e., the ILO Programme and Budget (P&B) 2022-2023 and related Policy Outcomes 3 and 5 even though this link is not explicitly mentioned in the project document. The project is aligned with DWCPs of Albania 2017-2021; North Macedonia 2019-2022, 2023-2025; Montenegro 2019-2021, and Serbia 2019-2022.

The Action is aligned with the strategic priorities set out in the United Nations Sustainable Development Cooperation Frameworks for Bosnia and Herzegovina (2021-2025), Albania 2022-2026, North Macedonia 2021-2025; Montenegro 2019-2021, and Serbia 2019-2022.

Theory of Change

If policy frameworks for the youth guarantee improve,

If legal frameworks are amended,

If YG monitoring system is designed,

If YG service delivery mechanism are set up

Then framework conditions and capacities for the establishment and gradual implementation of the Youth Guarantee in the WB economies will be enhanced

Leading to easier transition to the labour market of the unemployed and disengaged young women and men in the Western Balkans economies and improvement of key labour market indicators for NEET youth.

Brief description of the project

The **overall objective** of the 'EU/ILO Technical Assistance Facility - Innovation in youth employment policy through the Youth Guarantee (phase I)' will contribute to easing the labour market integration of unemployed and disengaged young women and men in the Western Balkan economies, in a systemic manner, through the implementation of the Youth Guarantee.

The **specific objective** is: Framework conditions and capacities for the establishment and gradual implementation of the Youth Guarantee in the WB economies enhanced

The Action will support WB-6 economies to bridge the gaps and challenges they face with regards to lack of data for evidence-based policy making, lack of tools, protocols, and services to deal with the unemployed and inactive youth population. The Action will also address limited capacities of relevant actors through design and provision of tailored capacity building packages.

Having in mind the proposed time-frame for the Action, the primary focus during the 14-month period will be on supporting WBs economies to:

(i) increase their knowledge-base to foster policy decisions relevant to the YGIP; ii) support the establishment/fine-tuning of mechanisms needed for implementation and monitoring of the YG; iii) increase capacities of all relevant stakeholders for the piloting of the YG.

In connection with the above, the ILO will also facilitate the activities and functioning of the YG Coordinators' Network. The Network is chaired and led by the European Commission and supports exchange of knowledge, information, and good practices among the WB-6. YG Coordinators' Network meetings will take place on the side of the two Peer-Learning events foreseen under this Action. This will be in-person events (with the 'hybrid' option to accommodate any emerging circumstances). Additional YG Coordinators meetings can take place on-line in order to maintain close contact and respond to emerging needs. to contribute to support to Bosnia and Herzegovina in mitigating the economic effects generated by the COVID-19 pandemic.

Outputs

Output 1: Policy framework and policy coordination mechanisms for the implementation of YG improved

Under this output, YG stakeholders in the WB-6 will receive support to analyse the key features of the policies underpinning the Youth Guarantee and receive tailor-made technical guidance and

recommendations on necessary policy reforms to be undertaken (missing policies to be developed and adopted, existing policies to be changed or expanded etc.) in order to meet the requirements of the youth guarantee. This would include, for instance, guidance and support to develop strategies to address activation, outreach, expansion of work-based learning, etc.

Output 2: Legislation amended in line with the guiding principles of YG

Under this output stakeholders in the WB-6 will receive technical assistance for the full review of the national legislative framework to identify whether there are provisions that would - de jure or de facto – hamper the implementation of the reinforced Youth Guarantee. Some of the WB-6 already conducted preliminary reviews of the legislative framework during the preparation of the YGIP (focusing on main laws). Technical solutions will be discussed with the Experts Group and/or staff in the legal departments of specific institutions around different options (such as selected amendments to the existing legal framework or the enactment of specific new legislation for the introduction of the YG). The technical assistance will cover primarily the review of employment promotion legislation (where it exists), other pieces of legislation linked to the YG, as well as guidance on the adaptation of specific by-laws and procedures.

Output 3: YG monitoring system designed

Under this output stakeholders in WB-6 will receive support to establish data pooling systems as well as adequate performance monitoring systems within PES to populate the EMCO indicator framework and monitoring the performance of youth guarantee schemes. This will entail development of guidelines and manuals on how to collect, share and analyse data and how to monitor performance of the measures included in the implementation plans of the national YG schemes. Additionally, training of relevant stakeholders and capacity development for specific institutions will be provided. This will occur in person (if needed), on-line (hybrid), or through the ILO's "PES Learning Journey" platform.

Output 4: YG service delivery mechanism set up

Under this output stakeholders in WB-6 will be supported to review specific features of the YG implementation mechanism, such as models of and approaches to statistical profiling, outreach practices and outsourcing of service delivery, and online delivery of basic services. The ILO will provide support to policymakers and practitioners to adjust and improve existing delivery mechanisms to support implementation of the YG.

Management set-up of the project

The project is managed, and technically and administratively backstopped by the ILO Decent Work Team and Country Office for Central and Eastern Europe (DWT/CO), based in Budapest, which will provide the necessary administrative support and technical and project-backup services. A project office is set up in Sarajevo to manage and coordinate the activities and the ILO team for implementation of the project is consisted of:

- Chief Technical Advisor, Sarajevo (half-time, 14 months)
- Project Assistant, Sarajevo (half- time, 14 months)
- Administrative Assistant, Budapest (40%, 14 months)

The project team works in coordination with the ILO National Coordinators and project officers in the WB-6, and reports directly to the Senior Employment Specialist based in the DWT/CO Budapest.

II. PURPOSE, OBJECTIVES AND CLIENTS OF THE EVALUATION

Purpose

The evaluation is conducted under the framework of the regional M&E plan of the ILO Regional Office for Europe and Central Asia to evaluate progress made so far in the implementation

recommendations on how to improve the sustainability of achieved results. It will ensure accountability to the stakeholders and organizational learning.

The internal evaluation consultant should review and assess the progress and achievements of the project from August 1, 2022 to September 30, 2023. The objectives and outputs as mentioned in the project document will be the starting point of the evaluation. The project should be evaluated in terms of efficiency, effectiveness, relevance and finally sustainability of the projects, as they are briefly described further in the text.

Objectives

- Review the work done and determine the progress achieved during the indicated period in line with the stated objectives of the projects, the kind of changes produced so far, and the intended or unintended effects of the project, and an assessment of the reasons/factors that helped to produce these changes and effects.
- Review the efficiency and effectiveness of the projects' implementation;
- Review to what extent the project was relevant and met the needs of its original target groups;
- Review the likelihood of sustainability of the projects' outcomes;
- Review risks and opportunities that have emerged during the project life-time;
- Draw conclusions in terms of the achievements made.

These insights will be used as technical input for further planning of activities with ILO constituents in 2023 and beyond.

Clients

The main clients of this analysis will be ILO management, technical specialists, project staff, tripartite constituents, and the donor.

III. EVALUATION SCOPE

The scope of the evaluation will encompass all activities and components of the project for the period of August 1, 2022 and September 30, 2023 in WB-6.

In line with ILO evaluation policy, the evaluation will integrate gender equality, disability inclusion and other non-discrimination issues as cross-cutting concerns throughout its methodology and all deliverables.

IV. EVALUATION CRITERIA AND QUESTIONS

The assessment will apply the key OECD/DAC criteria of relevance, effectiveness, efficiency, sustainability and will provide recommendations in the definition of the key actions to be undertaken. Impact potential will be assessed to the extent possible given the limited scope of the interventions. The assessment will seek answers to the following questions:

Relevance

8. To what extent are the project's objectives and approach relevant to the constituents' needs and present country context, as well as with development frameworks?
9. How well has the project adapted to the changes in the country context?

10. What is the relevance of the project's outcomes regarding improved access of youth to employment?

Effectiveness

15. What have been the major results and lessons learned during the project's implementation?
16. What has been the progress made in the achievement of the project's outcomes? Have there been any changes in the specific areas defined as the project outputs?
17. To what extent the project's activities have considered and contributed to the advancement of the ILO's cross-cutting policy drivers (CCPDs)?
18. What are the main constraints experienced by the project (both in terms of methodology and context)?

Efficiency

19. Have resources available (time, funds, partnerships, knowledge, expertise and tools) been used efficiently?
20. Are there any ways to enhance the efficiency?

Sustainability and impact potential

21. Are the results achieved likely to continue after the end of the intervention? Are they likely to produce longer-term effects and benefits to the target groups?
22. What is the expected long-lasting effect after the activities are completed?

Recommendations and next steps

23. What are the next steps to be undertaken? What is the best way to proceed? What would be the main issues to tackle?
24. Which actors and in which way should be engaged?
25. What action might be needed to bolster the longer-term effects and to come to further policy measures generating a positive change?

The list of questions can be adjusted by the internal evaluation consultant prior to field research in coordination with the Evaluation Manager.

Based on the analysis of the findings this assessment will aim at providing practical recommendations on the immediate next steps to be taken.

V. EVALUATION METHODOLOGY

The evaluation will comply with UNEG evaluation norms, standards and follow ethical safeguards, as specified in the ILO's evaluation guidelines and procedures. The evaluation will be conducted in a participatory manner by engaging the stakeholders at different levels and ensuring that they have a say about the implementation of the project, can share their views and contribute to the evaluation and participate in dissemination processes.

The methodology should include multiple methods, both qualitative and quantitative. The evaluation consultant will review the available literature and materials. An orientation meeting (on-distance) may be organized with the ILO/Budapest.

It will be followed by on-distance interviews with the DWT/CO Budapest staff (Senior management, Sr. Specialists, Programme Officer and other officials as appropriate), field research, including interviews with the ILO National Coordinators and National Project Officers in WB-6, tripartite constituents, i.e., the government (Ministry of Labour), public employment services, trade unions and employers' organization, other relevant government institutions, and other development cooperation partners as appropriate.

Information will be collected by means of group and/or individual interviews with key actors. Interviews will be arranged on-distance in the case of travel restrictions. A stakeholders' survey questionnaire might be also applied if relevant and appropriate. Upon completion of the interviews, a presentation of preliminary findings might be organized remotely to the ILO/Budapest.

The methodology will include examining the projects' Theory of Change in the light of the logical connection between the levels of results, and their alignment with the ILO's strategic objectives. Particular attention will be given to the identification of assumptions, risks and mitigation strategies, and the logical connection between levels of results and their alignment with ILO's strategic objectives and outcomes at the global and national levels, as well as with the relevant SDGs and related targets.

The internal evaluation consultant will be given a list of recommended/potential persons/institutions to interview that will be prepared by the Project Team in consultation with the Evaluation Manager.

Thirdly, the Evaluation Consultant may use **online surveys** to collect data for the evaluation from the target groups, if applicable.

The internal evaluation consultant will be expected to follow EVAL's Guidance material on appropriate methodologies to measure key cross-cutting issues, namely the ILO EVAL [Guidance Note 3.1 on integrating gender equality and non-discrimination](#); and the ILO EVAL [Guidance Note 3.2 on Integrating social dialogue and ILS in monitoring and evaluation of projects](#).

All this information should be accurately reflected in the final internal evaluation report.

VI. MAIN DELIVERABLES

All deliverables and outputs will be in English.

Deliverable 1. Draft final internal evaluation report in the first half of September 2023

Deliverable 2. Debriefing/Presentation of preliminary findings

Deliverable 3. Final version of the final internal evaluation report (with Title Page, the Executive Summary and Annexes including lessons learned and emerging good practices in the ILO Template) in the second half of September 2023.

Deliverable 4. An Evaluation summary.

D1. Draft Final Report (initial draft to be submitted to the Evaluation Manager within **10 days** of completion of the data collection)

The internal evaluation consultant shall submit to the Evaluation Manager the initial draft of the final internal evaluation report. This draft will be app. 40 pages plus executive summary and appendices.

D2. Debriefing/Presentation of preliminary findings

D3. Final Evaluation Report (to be submitted to the Evaluation Manager within **7 days** of receipt of the draft final report with comments). The Final Report should be submitted along with all relevant Annexes as indicated in ILO Guidance Note on the evaluation report (including executive summary, good practices, lessons learned and etc.).

The final report will be disseminated to all key project stakeholders as well as concerned ILO officials.

D 4. An evaluation summary using the ILO Summary template.

Suggested Report Format

The final version of the report shall follow the below format in accordance with the ILO Evaluation Office guidelines (see Checklist 6 on Rating the quality of evaluation reports and be no more than 40 pages in length, excluding the executive summary and annexes:

1. Title page
2. Table of Contents
3. Acronyms
4. Executive Summary
5. Project Background
6. Evaluation Background
7. Evaluation criteria and questions
8. Evaluation Methodology
9. Main Findings
10. Conclusions
11. Lessons learned and Emerging Good Practices
12. Recommendations
13. Annexes (TOR, lessons learned template, list of interviews, meeting notes, relevant country information and documents)

For detailed information, please follow this page:

Checklist preparing the evaluation report: [Checklist 4.2: wcms_746808.pdf \(ilo.org\)](#)

The process of the finalization of the Evaluation report:

- The Evaluation Manager will provide inputs/comments to the draft final report,
- After reflection of the inputs/comments into the draft report, the draft report will be shared with the donor and the stakeholders to receive their comments.
- After consideration of comments of stakeholders to the report, the final draft of the report will be subject to approval by the ILO Evaluation Focal Points both at the DWT-CO Moscow and at the RO/Europe, for consequent submission to the ILO Evaluation Office for filling in the central database. The final report shall be delivered not later than **one week** after receiving the comments to the draft report.

VII. MANAGEMENT ARRANGEMENTS AND PROFESSIONAL REQUIREMENTS

Management arrangements

The evaluation will be conducted by an ILO official who is ILO certified evaluation consultant and who will report to the Evaluation Manager appointed by the ILO. The assignment will require approximately 32 working days, in August and September 2023. The ILO office will cover the costs related to the field missions, meetings organization and interpretation. Interpretation during the meetings will be provided if necessary.

A tentative timeline is available below:

Task	Time	# days
Desk review and online briefing	1 – 31 August 2023	10
Conduct interviews, surveys with relevant project staff, stakeholders, and beneficiaries.	1 – 15 September 2023	15

Data analysis and draft report	20 - 24 September 2023	4
Revision and finalization of the report	24 – 30 September 2023	3
Total		32

The **final internal evaluation** will be managed by the ILO National Coordinator in Bosnia and Herzegovina, as Evaluation Manager.

The *internal evaluation consultant* is responsible for conducting the evaluation according to the terms of reference (ToR). He/she will:

- Review the ToR and provide inputs, propose any refinements to assessment questions, as necessary
- Review the project background materials (e.g., project document, progress reports)
- Develop and implement the assessment methodology (i.e., prepare interview guides, conduct interviews, review documents) to answer the assessment questions
- Conduct preparatory consultations with the ILO prior to the assessment mission
- Analyse interview notes/recordings
- Prepare an initial draft of the evaluation report
- Conduct briefing on findings, conclusions, and recommendation of the assessment
- Prepare a final report based on comments obtained on the initial draft report

The *Evaluation Manager* is responsible for:

- Planning the evaluation and preparing the ToR
- Circulating the ToR for comments and inputs with input from the Project Manager, ILO DWT/CO Budapest Management Team; and Employment and Labour Market Specialist
- Submitting the final draft ToR to RO Europe evaluation focal point for approval and EVAL for database filing
- Providing the Internal evaluation consultant with the project background materials
- Assisting in the implementation of the assessment methodology, as appropriate (i.e., participate in meetings, review documents)
- Reviewing the initial draft report, circulating it for comments and providing consolidated feedback
- Reviewing the final draft of the report
- Submitting the final draft report to RO Europe evaluation focal point for approval and EVAL for database filing
- Disseminating the summary of the final report to all the stakeholders
- Coordinating follow-up as necessary

The *Project Coordinator (PC)/CTA* is responsible for:

- Reviewing the draft ToR and providing input, as necessary
- Providing the Evaluation Manager with the project background materials
- Preparing the programme of interviews

Professional requirements

The Internal evaluation consultant should meet the following requirements:

- Advanced university degree in social sciences or economics
- Understanding of the ILO's tripartite foundations and standards
- Adequate expertise in gender, diversity and non-discrimination issues
- Experience in evaluation of international development initiatives
- Knowledge of evaluation methods, qualitative and quantitative research
- Knowledge of the region
- Analytical skills
- Fluency in English
- Knowledge of one of the official languages in the Western Balkans is an advantage

VII. LEGAL AND ETHICAL MATTERS

The evaluation will be carried out in adherence with the ILO evaluation policy guidelines, UN Evaluation Group (UNEG) Norms and Standards and OECD/DAC criteria for evaluating development assistance.

Ethical considerations will be taken into account in the evaluation process. As requested by the UNEG Norms and Standards, the internal evaluation consultant will be sensitive to beliefs, manners and customs, act with integrity and honesty in the relationships with all stakeholders.

The evaluation consultant will not have any links to project management or any other conflict of interest that would interfere with the independence of the evaluation.

ANNEX 5 LESSON LEARNED

ILO Lesson Learned

Project Title: EU-ILO TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE FACILITY - INNOVATION IN YOUTH EMPLOYMENT POLICY THROUGH THE YOUTH GUARANTEE - PHASE I

Project TC/SYMBOL: RER/22/02/EUR

Name of Evaluator: Natasha Mechkaroska Simjanoska

Date: 30 September 2023

The following lesson learned has been identified during the course of the evaluation. Further text explaining the lesson may be included in the full evaluation report.

LL Element	Text
Brief description of lesson learned (link to specific action or task)	Leveraging the ILO in-house expertise, in areas where it has substantial influence, coupled with the knowledge of the specific conditions and circumstances, yields better results and builds stronger position of the ILO in a given context and among the development partners.
Context and any related preconditions	
Targeted users / Beneficiaries	
Challenges /negative lessons - Causal factors	
Success / Positive Issues - Causal factors	
ILO Administrative Issues (staff, resources, design, implementation)	

ANNEX 6 EMERGING GOOD PRACTICE

ILO Emerging Good Practice

Project Title: EU-ILO TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE FACILITY - INNOVATION IN YOUTH EMPLOYMENT POLICY THROUGH THE YOUTH GUARANTEE - PHASE I

Project TC/SYMBOL: RER/22/02/EUR

Name of Evaluator: Natasha Mechkaroska Simjanoska

Date: 30 September 2023

The following emerging good practice has been identified during the course of the evaluation. Further text can be found in the full evaluation report.

GP Element	Text
Brief summary of the good practice (link to project goal or specific deliverable, background, purpose, etc.)	The flexibility of the project offering technical assistance based on request has proven as very beneficial. This is supported by the finding that the introduction of the Youth Guarantee found each of the WB-6 economies at different stage of development and preparedness, and necessitated different types of interventions. Therefore, the demand-driven design and budget, tailored to the actual needs of the beneficiaries, ensured alignment with the dynamics of these economies.
Relevant conditions and Context: limitations or advice in terms of applicability and replicability	This identified practice can apply to all projects that entail establishment of a single scheme/programme/initiative in a regional context.
Establish a clear cause-effect relationship	
Indicate measurable impact and targeted beneficiaries	
Potential for replication and by whom	
Upward links to higher ILO Goals (DWCPs, Country Programme Outcomes or ILO's Strategic Programme Framework)	
Other documents or relevant comments	

ANNEX 7 ALL RELEVANT ILO EVALUATION GUIDELINES AND STANDARD TEMPLATES

- ILO Policy Guidelines for results-based evaluation, 2020
https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---ed_mas/---eval/documents/publication/wcms_571339.pdf
- Code of conduct form (To be signed by the Evaluation Consultants)
<http://www.ilo.org/legacy/english/edmas/eval/template-code-of-conduct.doc>
- Checklist No. 3 Writing the inception report
http://www.ilo.org/eval/Evaluationguidance/WCMS_165972/lang--en/index.htm
- Guidance Note on Integrating gender equality in monitoring and evaluation of projects, and UNEG documents: https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---ed_mas/---eval/documents/publication/wcms_165986.pdf
- Checklist preparing the evaluation report: Checklist 4.2: [wcms_746808.pdf](https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---ed_mas/---eval/documents/publication/wcms_746808.pdf) ([ilo.org](https://www.ilo.org))
- Checklist 6 rating the quality of evaluation report
http://www.ilo.org/eval/Evaluationguidance/WCMS_165968/lang--en/index.htm
- Guidance note 7 Stakeholders participation in the ILO evaluation:
http://www.ilo.org/eval/Evaluationguidance/WCMS_165986/lang--en/index.htm
- Guidance Note on Evaluation lessons learned and emerging good practices:
https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---ed_mas/---eval/documents/publication/wcms_165981.pdf
- Template: Emerging Good Practice (submitted by Evaluation consultant):
<http://www.ilo.org/legacy/english/edmas/eval/template-goodpractice.doc>
- Template for title page of the evaluation report:
<http://www.ilo.org/legacy/english/edmas/eval/template-titlepage-en.doc>
- Template for evaluation summary:
<http://www.ilo.org/legacy/english/edmas/eval/template-summary-en.doc>
- Lessons Learned (submitted by Evaluation consultant):
<http://www.ilo.org/legacy/english/edmas/eval/template-lesson-learned.doc>
- Implication of COVID-19 on evaluations in the ILO: Practical tips on adapting to the situation: https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---ed_mas/---eval/documents/publication/wcms_744068.pdf
- SDG related reference material at: <http://www.ilo.ch/eval/eval-and-sdgs/lang--en/index.htm>
- ILO EVAL: [Guidance Note 3.2 on Integrating social dialogue and ILS in monitoring and evaluation of projects](https://www.ilo.org/eval/guidance-note-3-2-on-integrating-social-dialogue-and-ils-in-monitoring-and-evaluation-of-projects)
- Protocol to collect evidence on ILO response to COVID-19:
https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---ed_mas/---eval/documents/publication/wcms_757541.pdf
- i-eval Connect: Knowledge sharing platform -- Evaluation Office (EVAL)
- <https://intranet.ilo.org/collaborate/evalksp/Pages/default.aspx>
- ILO Library guides on gender <https://libguides.ilo.org/gender-equality-en>