
Time & Date: 30 November 2021, 14:00-15:30, online (via Zoom).

Agenda:
14:00-14:15: Introductory input by Mihail Arandarenko, University of Belgrade, Faculty of Economics (Serbia)

14:15-14:50: Brief reflections by:
- Bernd Wild, European Commission, DG NEAR (Belgium)
- Amira Ramhorst, RCC (Bosnia and Herzegovina)
- Rahel Kahlert, European Centre (Austria)
- Veronica Sandu, European Centre (Austria)

14:50-15:30: Q&A and discussion with the audience

Moderator: Magdi Birtha (European Centre)

The inaugural BBinar (short for Bridge-Building Webinar) focused on social spending in times of Covid-19 in the Western Balkan region. Members of the Eastern European Social Policy Network (EESPN), European Centre colleagues, and a wider audience participate in these BBinars to exchange at a practical level about common challenges and progress on different social policy areas.

Mihail Arandarenko (University of Belgrade) gave an introductory input on social spending in Serbia. While Serbia has a high percentage of government spending in the Region, the public measures used still do not correlate with much vertical redistribution. Veronica Sandu (European Centre) took a comparative look on social spending in the Western Balkan Region. Measures such as the universal one-off cash grants may not be sufficient in reducing inequalities within society and reducing poverty due to the enormous social challenges created by the Covid-19 pandemic and other factors.

Amira Ramhorst (Regional Cooperation Council) and Rahel Kahlert (European Centre) presented the status quo of the Western Balkan region regarding the European Pillar of Social Rights, building on the recently published country reports and the cross-country overview report. A highlight was the showcasing of the newly developed interactive Social Scoreboard that allows for a comparative perspective.
This BBinar fostered a lively discussion on the impact of social assistance programmes in the Western Balkan region and concluded with ideas how to overcome challenges exacerbated by the Covid-19 crisis.

The next BBinar will take place in February 2022 and will focus on social policies in the Eastern Partnership region. Please stay tuned for the exact time and topic!