

AGENDA

EVENT NAME	ETF Regional Conference “Use it or lose it: how labour markets, human capital and migration interact in the Western Balkans”
LOCATION	Online conference, hosted in Zoom
DATE	1 December 2021, 10:00 – 13:00
REGISTRATION	Zoom link



CONCEPT

The six countries of the Western Balkans (Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo¹, Montenegro, North Macedonia, Serbia) are characterised by declining populations driven by low birth rates, ageing populations and ongoing emigration. Given its conflictual history interacting with a difficult transition from a centrally planned to market economy, emigration from the region has been constant since the 1990s, evolving from irregular, low- to medium-skilled labour migration to regular family reunification, students' mobility and, more recently, high-skilled labour migration.

As a result, migration trends from the region are highly topical and intensively debated, particularly the outflow of the most educated and talented ones. What is frequently forgotten in the debate is that migration is often the result from a range of internal dynamics rather than a cause by itself, largely shaped by poorly working labour markets, underutilisation of human capital stock and extensive skills mismatches. Individuals/families take migration decisions by weighting (job/life) opportunities available to them at home and in destination countries. Neighbouring to one of the richest regions (EU) with an accession perspective, restricting labour mobility is not a feasible option.

Migration should not be judged unequivocally good or bad, since there are both positive and negative aspects as well as a wide range of intermediate outcomes. For most individuals involved in migration, it means more opportunities in terms of income, career, skills and know-how gains and connections. That is the very reason for sustained migration flows despite ever increasing restrictions internationally. For the countries of origin, the picture is a more complicated one, with contributions towards paths of both 'vicious' or 'virtuous' cycles of development, depending on the structural characteristics of the economy, the level and composition of the human capital stock and the functioning of job markets and of policy frameworks (see also the diverse experiences of the Eastern enlargement countries).

How the characteristics of the labour markets and education systems affect migration trends and vice versa was the starting point of ETF's inquiry – with the contribution of distinguished national and international researchers under the coordination of the Vienna Institute for International Economic Studies (wiiw). The aim was to understand under which conditions this triangular relationship could turn into a 'virtuous cycle' for the longer-term economic development in the region, by assessing available

¹ This designation is without prejudice to positions on status and is in line with UNSCR 1244/1999 and the ICJ Opinion on the Kosovo declaration of independence.

facts and evidence and without taking *a priori* sides and forming judgements. A new analytical framework was developed to capture those interrelations between human capital formation, labour deployment and migration, but reliable and detailed migration data by education and skill levels has been the most challenging part to get.

ETF's research confirms net emigration from all six countries between 2010 and 2020, albeit with variations: highest in Bosnia and Herzegovina, followed by Kosovo and Albania, and lowest in Montenegro, North Macedonia and Serbia.² The main destinations for emigrants from the region are changing to some extent, with Germany continuing to recruit among the traditional destinations, besides the recently increasing outflows towards the new EU Member States (e.g., Croatia, Slovenia, Slovakia, Czechia, Bulgaria). Besides internal dynamics of low-quality/ low-paid jobs, policy changes in destinations contributed to this trend. Moreover, some countries of the region also started to attract immigrants and students due to the sustained economic growth (such as the tourism sector in Montenegro) and the uneven quality of educational facilities (e.g., Serbia, Montenegro).

It is obvious that migration has served to ease labour market disequilibria in the region and facilitated the exchange of knowledge, skills and know-how, remittances, and trade. At the same time, it has led to new labour and skill shortages in certain sectors. Some countries still suffer from high unemployment and/or inactivity, limited job openings and an (in parts) inadequate workforce lacking proper skills to spur innovation and growth, but it seems to go both ways in that these factors generate persisting migration and migration undermining further the functioning of labour markets. Documenting the outcomes of these interactions between job market, human capital stock and migration pattern in each country could provide us clues to break the vicious cycle and turn it into a virtuous one.

Given the completion of most part of this research, it is time for ETF to share the results with the country and regional authorities in the region, the EU institutions and the wider community of international organisations and donors at a high-level policy event. Gathering all relevant stakeholders at the national, regional and international levels, the key objectives of the conference are:

- To discuss the types of interactions between job markets, human capital stock and labour mobility based on the findings of the recent ETF regional and country studies;
- To stimulate an open policy debate among the national, regional and international actors on the conditions of virtuous and vicious interactions and show good practices for policy options;
- To bring together the national, regional and international actors from migration, labour market and education fields that otherwise remain distant to each other, and encourage them to develop joint actions for win-win-win situations.

The participants of the conference include the representatives of the relevant institutions and authorities from the six Western Balkan countries and regional organisations, researchers and practitioners alike from public, private and non-profit organisations, labour market and education/training actors, youth representatives and associations from civil society, a wide range of EU institutions and agencies (DG EMPL, NEAR, HOME, INTPA, EAC, EEAS, Cedefop, Eurofound, JRC, etc.), and international organisations and donors which are active in the region (ILO, IOM, ICMPD, World Bank, Centre for Global Development, OECD, UNESCO, UNICEF, EBRD, etc.).

The online conference will be held in English, with simultaneous interpretation into languages of Albanian, Macedonian, and Bosnian-Serbian-Croatian-Montenegrin. Registered participants will receive a *link to join the Zoom meeting*. Please access it already at 9.45 in order to test your technical compatibility, video and audio settings.

² For interested readers, a list of all papers and country reports published within this ETF's research project is provided in a box at the end of this conference agenda.

ETF Regional Conference “Use it or lose it: how labour markets, human capital and migration interact in the Western Balkans”

1 December 2021 (Wednesday), 10:00 – 13:00

AGENDA

Chairperson: Aleksandar Petrovski, Digital Stage Manager (on behalf of ETF)

09:45 – 10:00	The host open to allow participants checking technicalities (ie. video, sound)
10:00 – 10:15	Welcome and introduction <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Mr Cesare Onestini, Director, ETF• Mr Lluís Prats, Head of Unit, International Issues, EMPL.E.3, European Commission
10:15 – 10:55	Presentation of the ETF study on the interactions between labour markets, human capital and migration <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Ummuhan Bardak, Senior specialist on labour market and migration, ETF• Professor Michael Landesmann, Senior research associate and project coordinator, the Vienna Institute for International Economic Studies Questions and discussion
10:55 -11:00	Short break for coffee and legs stretching
11:00 – 11:55	Panel Discussion 1 – Opportunities and risks of labour and skills mobility: can mobility be part of a virtuous cycle to better match jobs and workers in the region’s growing economies? <p>This panel brings together discussants from different fields to reflect upon the results of the regional study. Upon questions posed by moderator, each panellist will share own experience and perspective regarding the benefits and risks of labour and skills mobility in the region and provide illustrative examples for reflection: can labour and skills mobility be part of a virtuous cycle to better match jobs and workers in the region’s economies?</p> Moderator: Professor Nermin Oruc , Coordinator of the Western Balkans Migration Network (WB-MIGNET) and Director of the Centre for Development Evaluation and Social Science Research (CREDI) <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Ms Tatjana Shterjova Dushkovska, General Secretary of Western Balkans 6 Chamber Investment

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Dr Petrit Beqiri, CEO and Co-founder of Heimerer College of Health and Nursing in Kosovo • Assistant Professor Dr. Renata Petrevska Nechkoska, Head of the Research team at the Western Balkans Alumni Association, Faculty of Economics, Prilep, University St. Kliment Ohridski Bitola (North Macedonia) and Faculty of Economics and Business Administration, Ghent University Belgium • Professor Dr. Dimitar Nikoloski, Western Balkans Alumni Association Collaborate, Faculty of Economics, Prilep, University St. Kliment Ohridski Bitola (North Macedonia) <p>Questions and discussion</p>
11:55 – 12:00	Short break for coffee and legs stretching
12:00 – 12:45	<p>Panel Discussion 2 – What could be potential policy actions from the national, regional and international actors to maximise the benefits and reduce the risks from labour and skills mobility?</p> <p>This panel bring together discussants to reflect upon potential policy actions from the national, regional and international actors based on the study results presented. Upon questions posed by moderator, each panellist will discuss their perspectives on how to grasp opportunities and mitigate challenges of labour and skills mobility.</p> <p>Moderator: Georgios Zisimos, Head of Policy Advice and EU Programming Unit, ETF</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ms Tanja Jakobi, Executive Director, Public Policy Research Center, Serbia • Ms Adrienn Kiraly, Adviser – Western Balkans Strategy, DG NEAR.D, European Commission • Ms Magdalena Jagiello, Head of Unit, HOME.C.2, Legal Pathways and Integration, European Commission • Ms Amira Vejzagic Ramhorst, Project Team Leader, Employment and Social Affairs Platform (ESAP), Regional Cooperation Council (RCC) <p>Questions and discussion</p>
12:45 – 13:00	<p>Conclusions</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ms Slavica Černoša, Head of the Division for Upper Secondary and Short-Cycle Higher Education, Ministry for Education, Science and Sport (Slovenia Presidency of the Council of the EU Team)

- **Ms Jasmina Poličnik**, Secretary at the Upper Secondary, Short-Cycle Higher Vocational and Adult Education Directorate, Ministry for Education, Science and Sport (Slovenia Presidency of the Council of the EU Team)
- **Mr Xavier Matheu de Cortada**, Head of Knowledge Hub Department, ETF

BOX: A list of published papers and country reports within the project

ETF (2021), *How migration, human capital and the labour market interact in Serbia*, [How migration, human capital and the labour market interact in Serbia | ETF \(europa.eu\)](#)

ETF (2021), *How migration, human capital and the labour market interact in North Macedonia*, [How migration, human capital and the labour market interact in North Macedonia | ETF \(europa.eu\)](#)

ETF (2021), *How migration, human capital and the labour market interact in Bosnia and Herzegovina*, [How migration, human capital and the labour market interact in Bosnia and Herzegovina | ETF \(europa.eu\)](#)

ETF (2021), *How migration, human capital and the labour market interact in Kosovo*: <https://www.etf.europa.eu/en/publications-and-resources/publications/how-migration-human-capital-and-labour-market-interact-2>

ETF (2021), *How migration, human capital and the labour market interact in Montenegro*: www.etf.europa.eu/en/publications-and-resources/publications/how-migration-human-capital-and-labour-market-interact-3

ETF (2021), *How migration, human capital and the labour market interact in Albania*: www.etf.europa.eu/en/publications-and-resources/publications/how-migration-human-capital-and-labour-market-interact-4

ETF (forthcoming), *Use it or lose it: How do labour markets, human capital and migration interact in the six Western Balkan countries*

Landesmann, Michael and Isilda Mara (2021), *Interrelationships between human capital, migration and labour markets in the Western Balkans: an econometric investigation*, wiiw Working Paper No. 196, <https://wiiw.ac.at/interrelationships-between-human-capital-migration-and-labour-markets-in-the-western-balkans-an-econometric-investigation-p-5694.html>

Leitner, Sandra (2021), *Net Migration and its Skill Composition in the Western Balkan Countries between 2010 and 2019: Results from a Cohort Approach*, wiiw Working Paper No.197, <https://wiiw.ac.at/net-migration-and-its-skill-composition-in-the-western-balkan-countries-between-2010-and-2019-results-from-a-cohort-approach-analysis-dlp-5695.pdf>

Leitner, Sandra (2021), *A skill-specific dynamic labour supply and labour demand framework: A scenario analysis for the Western Balkan countries to 2030*, wiiw Working Paper No.200, <https://wiiw.ac.at/a-skill-specific-dynamic-labour-supply-and-labour-demand-framework-a-scenario-analysis-for-the-western-balkan-countries-to-2030-p-5820.html>