

## Declaration on the launch of the Regional Network of Women in Entrepreneurship

Recognising the linkages between women economic empowerment and sustainable growth as well as the importance of joint collaboration, today WE have agreed to launch the *Regional Network of Women in Entrepreneurship* to further support the advancement of women entrepreneurs from diverse backgrounds in the Western Balkans.

WE acknowledge the importance of incorporating a gender perspective into the promotion of sustainable economic growth, and the key role that women play in the post-pandemic recovery, particularly considering that WE amount to nearly one third of companies in the region that call for systematic approach towards women economic empowerment.

For too long WE have been relentlessly tackling a number of challenges, including access to finance, unfavourable business regulation, educational and occupational segregation, social and cultural norms and expectations, lack of (and access to) social and support networks, and many others.

WE are aware of the importance of regional cooperation and joint initiatives at the regional level that could bring a desired transformation to our local communities and change our situation for the better.

WE are committed to contribute to the establishment of the Common Regional Market that aims to deepen regional economic integration, building on EU rules and standards and bringing the region and its companies closer to the EU single market. By fostering women entrepreneurship, among others, Common Regional Market seeks to upgrade industrial and innovation base to promote economic growth and create more jobs.

WE will promote regional networking and agenda setting by engaging the largest possible number of beneficiaries and key stakeholders, empowering the voice of local networks and creating a platform for joint actions at regional level.

Likewise, WE recall the RCC-UNDP Joint Initiative on Women Economic Empowerment and hereby express our commitment to fulfil its objective to accelerate women's entrepreneurship through this Network.

WE acknowledge the existing work of women entrepreneur organisations at local level or any other similar initiative seeking to foster co-operation, knowledge exchange and best practice sharing, encouraging more actively the collaboration between each and every women entrepreneur in the Western Balkans.

Sharing our respective experiences and knowledge on similar initiatives is of utmost importance for all of us, women entrepreneurs, as WE strive to move towards the best European practices and bring innovative solutions to our region.

Over the next months, jointly with RCC, WE will set in full motion the Network as a one-stop source of knowledge, data and best practices for women entrepreneurs of the Western Balkans, with the first set of activities as follows:

- ✓ Assessing the progress of women entrepreneurship in Western Balkans, including a review of the entrepreneurship ecosystem support for women.
- ✓ Enhancing women economic empowerment perspective under the regional economic agenda and framework and the Berlin Process.
- ✓ Improving regional enabling environment, including opportunities and solutions for women's entrepreneurship.
- ✓ Supporting and sharing best practices and knowledge among women business support organisations.
- ✓ Devising mentorship and coaching programmes and training modules for women entrepreneurs with other stakeholders, international partners and private sector so as to nurture and support growth.
- ✓ Supporting digital upskilling and reskilling through tailor-made training and mentorship programmes to reap benefits of digitalisation and enhance capacities to use innovative digital tools and platforms.

Our responsibility for taking on challenges, while at the same time accepting selfless role to help each other strive, is at the heart of our initiative.

WE remain an inclusive platform and remain open to welcome all women entrepreneurs across the region who share our vision and values. WE will work towards the establishment of a physical Network in the region but will – against the background of the post-pandemic environment – start our virtual gatherings immediately.

WE have both the right and obligation to chart our own path by making informed decisions that would benefit ourselves, our families and our communities and make our societies better, fairer and more resilient.

As WE can thrive only by supporting each other, WE herewith today proudly LAUNCH our Regional Network of Women in Entrepreneurship.