



Talking Points by the RCC Secretary General *Majlinda Bregu*
at the
WHO Europe Regional High-Level Forum on Health in the Well-being
Economy
/2 March, Copenhagen, UN City/

Session 6: A Well-being Economy Approach to Addressing Cost-of-Living Increases

How investing in human capital is key for inclusive sustainable development. Issues of youth migration (including from mental health perspective), as well as its effects on the ageing population/workforce. What kind of policies is RCC promoting around these issues?

Duration: 5 min

Dear participants,

Dear guests,

Not long ago, at the peak of the dreadful Covid-19 pandemic, *Saving Lives and Livelihoods* was the Mantra of the Day.

The post-pandemic recovery aspirations for Building Back Better clashed with the new scary realities of a full-scale *war raging in Europe, steep inflationary pressures, food crisis and energy security fears, realities of tighter financing conditions and strained public debt.*

The *ambitious aspirations for strong rebound and inclusive and green growth subsided against the crunch of existential aspirations.* They crushed against the *stark realities of our fellow citizens in SEE who struggle to manage with 2 digits galloping inflation, and energy and food bills that consume half of their income.*



A large portion of the energy shock continues to be absorbed by the public sector, with ***health and social services being among the first to suffer.***

Yet, ***no matter the hardships***, it is ***important in such a context to keep the focus on values that truly matter: our health, environment, education and our communities.*** To uplifting our ***key asset that doesn't depreciate – our human capital, talented youth, resolute women, sage elders... To provide light and hope.***

Especially in the SEE region that we at RCC operate in. One that suffered a decrease of 5.7% due to the pandemic, with 12.5% of people living below the mid-high income economy poverty line, with an average unemployment rate of 16% and youth unemployment reaching 34%. A region feeling ***first-handedly the brunt of demographic pressures and daunting brain drain! 67% of Western Balkans citizens state their willingness to live and work abroad***, a growing trend captured in our regular BB editions.

By ***putting people and human capital at the core of our actions to tackle the challenges, RCC-coordinated regional strategic frameworks: SEE2030 Strategy, Common Regional Market and Green Agenda*** are the ***main blueprints for inclusive and sustainable development.*** They entail regional actions that boost connectivity, mobility, research & development, digitisation, women economic empowerment, entrepreneurship, diaspora knowledge transfer, green growth.

To give just a ***glimpse of some of our relevant regional actions:***

- We support ***unlocking of new academic and professional opportunities*** by brokering international agreements on recognition of qualifications and supporting quality assurance in education within WB.
- We ***slash communication costs*** by eliminating roaming fees and we ***enable unobstructed flow of essential goods*** through green corridors at borders/boundaries.
- We support development of ***regional research infrastructure***, recognise and support ***digital start-ups*** and our talented ***women entrepreneurs and scientists.*** We empower and ***unlock the potential of women*** in our region and reduce gender gaps in digitalisation and STEM - as an economic, social and security imperative. Women who make up just 27.5% of business owners, 14.2% of companies' top managers, perform three times as much unpaid work than men and occupy just 14% of jobs in the STEM field – clearly hold the key to unlocking the economic potential in WB.
- We build the ***institutional and administrative capacities for employment and social policies and leverage on regional peer-learning and EU models.***
- We ***integrate substantive youth perspectives in regional policy-making through Youth Policy Labs.*** Under our steer, youth mental health policy solutions are being co-created in all WB economies, with direct relevance for our citizens' well-being.

We build bridges, togetherness and purposeful and value-based collaborations in WB and SEE.



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Our region's *citizens are spot on* when it comes to prioritising government investments. They are, even perhaps unconsciously, *intrinsic and genuine supporters of the well-being economy approach*. Nearly a quarter of the region's population (22%) believe that governments should prioritise investments in social infrastructure, up three times from earlier regional surveys.

Dear all,

Economic growth can't be the only and ultimate policy objective. Collective wellbeing, healthy and thriving population where no one is left behind should be the foundation of every growth policy.

Hence the *appreciation and importance of this High-Level Forum* that I am happy to contribute on RCC's behalf - to galvanise, catalyse and inspire broader set of stakeholders on the shift to a genuine well-being and caring economy approach.