

Highlights 3 October - December 2023



Wrapping up 2023: first round of Beneficiary Steering Committee Meetings held

The European Union and the Council of Europe have been supporting the authorities of the Western Balkans and Türkiye in their efforts to align with European standards, as these reforms are pivotal for improving people's lives. Thanks to the co-operation under the Horizontal Facility programme, significant results have already been achieved, paving the way to further activities on the reform path of Beneficiaries in human rights, rule of law and democracy. The first meetings of the Beneficiary Steering Committee within the third phase of the programme were held in all Beneficiaries in the second half of 2023 and they gathered main partners to summarise achievements and discuss plans for the future.

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STRENGTHENING JUSTICE



Marking 60th anniversary of the Constitutional Court of the Republic of Serbia

Protecting human rights in line with European standards

One of the main aims of the European Union and Council of Europe co-operation in the Western Balkans is to ensure better protection of human



Judges, public bailiffs and other legal professionals - regional conference

Strengthening the independence of the judiciary in the Western Balkans

Increasing the independence of the judiciary remains a primary focus of Horizontal Facility actions. More

rights, in line with European standards and the case-law of the European Court of Human Rights (Court). Horizontal Facility actions have been working with authorities in the Western Balkans with the aim of strengthening their capacities to implement the judgements of the Court and to enable better access to justice for individuals.

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independent and accessible justice increases the trust of people in justice systems across the Western Balkans and allows them to have their rights protected through domestic justice systems in line with European standards. Learn more about the activities organised in Albania and Montenegro with the aim of strengthening capacities of the justice systems.

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Children's corner in Kumanovo Prison

Children's corner and bakery oven inaugurated in Kumanovo Prison

The 220 inmates of the Kumanovo Prison will benefit from the new bakery oven, and some 90 children will be able to use the children's corner when visiting their parents and family members. The bakery equipment and the children's corner, with a total value of over €17,000 were provided by the European Union and Council of Europe, in co-operation with the Directorate for the Execution of Sanctions, and the Kumanovo Prison.

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Institutions of Montenegro send a strong message of zero tolerance of all forms of ill-treatment and impunity

A roundtable held in Budva on 22 - 23 November gathered key investigating bodies in Montenegro to identify systemic shortcomings and collaboratively explore optimal solutions for the prevention of ill-treatment and to combat impunity.

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FIGHTING ECONOMIC CRIME & CORRUPTION



“Travelling with more than €10,000 in cash? Declare it!”

The Albanian customs and police, with the support of the European Union, Council of Europe and German government have launched the awareness raising initiative to prevent cash smuggling. The initiative informs travellers that they must declare cash amounts of over €10,000 in value to customs when entering or leaving Albania, or risk breaching laws to combat the illicit transportation of currency and money laundering.

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PROMOTING DIVERSITY AND EQUALITY

Promoting equality and fighting discrimination in the Western Balkans

The protection of the rights of vulnerable groups and promotion of equality have remained at the core of the Horizontal



Human rights approach to religion - discussion in Zenica

Facility programme since its beginning. The protection, value and respect of the rights of all individuals is of the utmost importance for progress in this field. The fight against hate speech, inclusion of vulnerable groups, religious tolerance and dialogue have been some of the themes that were covered by the programme at the end of last year.

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IT equipment delivered to actors in Serbia

Building capacities to fight trafficking in



Supporting women’s access to justice in

human beings

Combatting trafficking in human beings requires the well-co-ordinated and multi-disciplinary work of many actors - local authorities, civil society organisations and international organisations. The European Union and the Council of Europe have been supporting the crucial actors in fight against trafficking in human beings, with the aim of strengthening their capacities in this pivotal area.

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Türkiye

An international conference brought together key representatives of the Union of Turkish Bar Associations, the Presidents of eight local bar associations (from Adıyaman, Malatya, Kahramanmaraş, Hatay, Sinop, Bilecik, Bursa, Tunceli) and representatives of the Council of Europe, the European Union, public institutions, civil society organisations, and the international community with an interest in women's access to justice.

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photo by: Elementary school "Mića Stanojlović", Koceljeva

Ensuring quality education for all

Ensuring quality education for all means investing into the future and nurturing a more just, equal, and prosperous society. The European Union and the Council of

Europe have been supporting authorities, civil society organisations, local communities, schools, students, and their parents in establishing and nurturing more inclusive environment in schools, free of discrimination, where democratic culture and education for democratic citizenship are at the heart of school programmes.

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PROMOTING FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION AND MEDIA



Workshop on reporting on gender-based violence

Advancing freedom of expression and freedom of the media in the Western Balkans

An essential component of the Horizontal Facility programme remains promoting and

protecting freedom of expression and freedom of the media. The main actors in advancing these two freedoms in the Western Balkans have been co-operating, building their capacities, and learning about how to protect and promote freedom of expression and of the media in line with European standards.

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EXPERTISE CO-ORDINATION MECHANISM



Venice Commission publishes the Opinion on the draft Law on the Government of Montenegro

The [Expertise Co-ordination Mechanism](#) (ECM) enables the provision of legislative expertise and policy advice in the areas covered by the Horizontal Facility programme, as well as on constitutional issues falling within the mandate of the European Commission for Democracy through Law, known as the [Venice Commission](#). In this context, the Venice Commission adopted the [Opinion on the draft Law on the Government of Montenegro](#), during its 136th plenary session.

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New publications available online

Below you can find the latest publications and materials published within the Horizontal Facility programme, either by actions or by the main partners and stakeholders, with the support of the European Union and the Council of Europe.

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