

Internship Programme of the German Business for the Countries of the Western Balkans

The challenge

Following the assassination attempt on the Serbian Prime Minister Zoran Djindjic, the German Committee on Eastern European Economic Relations joined forces with the Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ) to set up the Zoran Djindjic Internship Programme in 2003. The aims of the programme were, and still are, to do justice to the legacy of the murdered Serbian premier, to give the people of Serbia and the other countries in the region a closer understanding of the European Union, to impart education and values, and to promote regional reconciliation.

The countries of the Western Balkans continue to be affected by high levels of youth unemployment. At the same time, the shortage of skilled workers is seriously hampering the business activities of companies in the region. The lack of practical input and professional guidance in university education means that university graduates often lack the necessary experience to make the leap into working life and carve out a successful career.

Goal

The employability of those enrolled in the internship programme from the countries of the Western Balkans has improved.

Our approach

The Internship Programme of German Business for the Countries of the Western Balkans provides up to 75 scholarships each year, offering young graduates and students from Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Kosovo, North Macedonia, Montenegro and

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Commissioned by	German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ)
Countries	Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Kosovo, North Macedonia, Montenegro, Serbia
Duration	2014 – 2019
Project value	6.55 million Euros

Serbia the opportunity to do internships for three to six months in leading German companies. The scholarship holders gain an insight into the corporate culture in Germany and get to know management methods and working processes in modern organisations.

After completing their internships and returning to their home countries, scholarship holders can make a greater contribution there, duly applying the knowledge and skills which they have acquired. The experience and contacts which they have gained help to boost the economic development of their countries and promote bilateral relations with Germany but also the economic relations in the region. In order to exploit this potential in the long term, an alumni network has been set up which organises various activities. The programme therefore has an important contribution to make in this way and through the resulting networking in terms of encouraging regional reconciliation, strengthening economic relations and establishing a cross-sector network of open-minded young professionals.

The programme is run by the German Committee on Eastern European Economic Relations; in Serbia, the programme is run by the Zoran Djindjic Foundation.



Left to right:

Internship Programme of the German Business for the Countries of the Western Balkans participants; 2012 interns at the orientation programme in Berlin

Results

First established in Serbia, the programme was extended to all countries of the Western Balkans in 2007 and 2009. Since 2004, more than 80 German companies have accepted over 600 interns on scholarships, more than half of whom are women.

The scholarship holders integrate their experience of German corporate culture into their everyday occupations. The programme therefore makes an important contribution to the professional development of young people who think across borders and want to help shape the economic development in their home countries. A successful alumni network with over 600 former interns has been established, with more than 60 per cent of the members playing an active part in the network and in local alumni clubs.

A 2015 survey shows that more than two thirds of the participants in the scheme in 2013 and 2014 who had already completed their studies at the time of the internship found a job after returning home. About a quarter continued their studies. At the beginning of 2016, 59 companies and chambers of commerce had already registered free of charge in order to have access to the CV database and to the extensive pool of alumni from the programme when looking to recruit personnel.

The programme has had a major influence on regional understanding. Almost all the participants stated that they had strengthened their regional connections and networks through the internship programme. The programme will therefore make a significant contribution to regional understanding. The quality of the new professional relationships is just as positive as that of the social relationships which have developed. All the countries in the region are equally involved.

Additional Information

- Internship Programme of the German Business
<http://www.stipendienprogramm.org>

- The Committee on Eastern European Economic Relations of the German Business (OA)
<http://www.ost-ausschuss.de>
- Dr. Zoran Djindjic Foundation
<http://www.fond-djindjic.org>

Contact: Kirsten Brehm
Kirsten.Brehm@giz.de

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Registered offices Bonn and Eschborn, Germany
GIZ Office Sarajevo
Zmaja od Bosne 7-7a
Importane Centar 03/IV
T +387 33 957 500
F +387 33 957 501
GIZ-BosnienHerzegovina@giz.de
www.giz.de/bosnia-herzegovina

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