Call for Applications

Leadership for Inclusive Employment Capacitation Programme: Inclusive Practical HR & Retention Strategies for Employers and Municipalities in the Western Balkans to Secure Future Workforce

1. Context

At a time when employers in the Western Balkans are struggling with brain drain, shortages of appropriately skilled labour, and demographic decline, women and vulnerable groups still face structural barriers to the labour market. In this context, increasing women's and vulnerable groups' participation in the labour market is no longer just a social objective; it becomes an economic necessity!

In the framework of the EU integration, the Western Balkan countries are required to comply with EU standards and directives in the field of economic participation. For private businesses, aligning with these standards improves supply chain integration with EU partners and boosts access to export markets. Action is needed especially in regard to ensuring equal opportunities, secure and adaptable employment, work-life-balance, social dialogue, and involvement of workers.

While national governments are required to set the legal standards for better integration of women and vulnerable groups into the labour market as well as ensure alignment with EU standards, it is municipalities and businesses together that need to create an inclusive environment that enables women and vulnerable groups to find and retain employment.

In that regard, the regional project "Advancing Socioeconomic Participation in Municipalities in the Western Balkans" (SPARK), implemented by the Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ) GmbH on behalf of the German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ) aims to strengthen the institutional capacities of municipalities and private sector stakeholders to promote and introduce inclusive employment practices in their local contexts.

To this end, GIZ announces the **Call for Applications for the Capacitation Programme on Leadership for Inclusive Employment Promotion** (LEAP Programme).

2. The Programme at a Glance

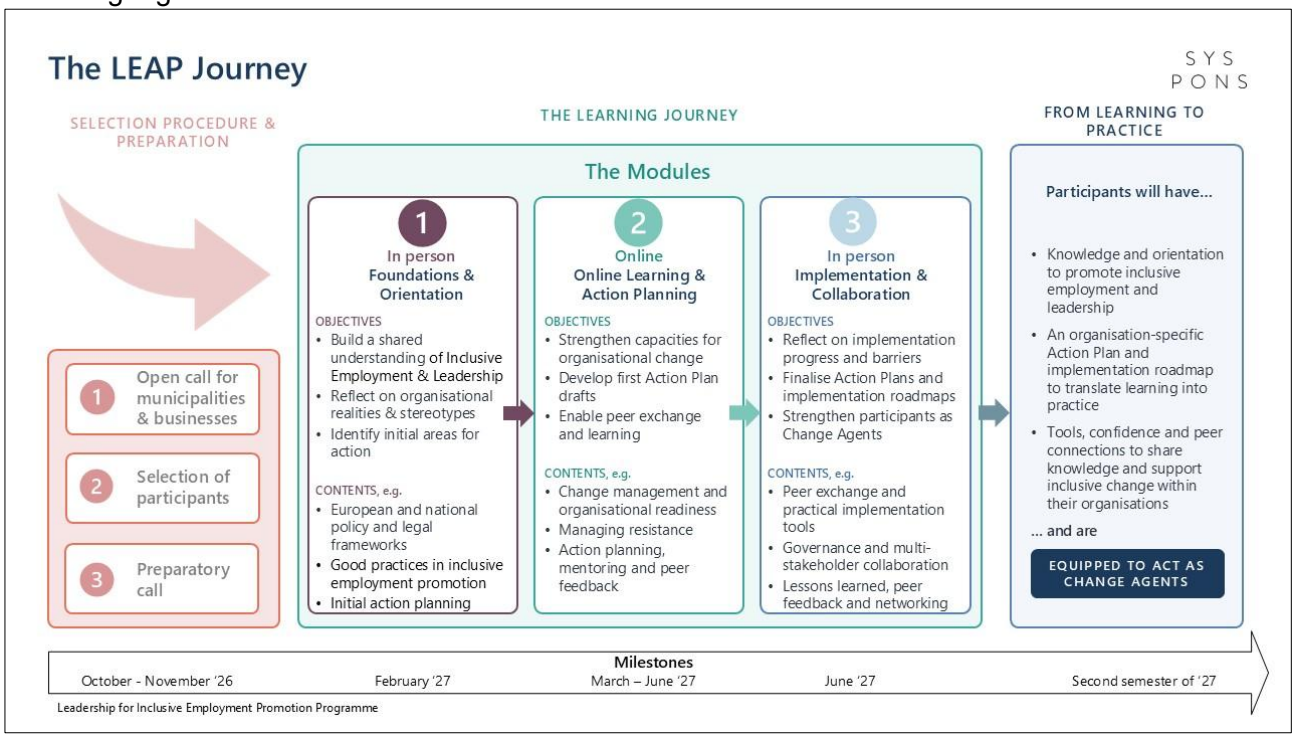
The LEAP Programme targets municipalities and their business partners across Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro, and North Macedonia.

The Programme is designed as a modular capacitation programme consisting of two (2) in-person and one online training, complemented by mentoring sessions, leading up to implementation of developed activities.

The Programme runs over a course of nine (9) months from February 2027 until October 2027 with 3 trainings planned in total: February 2027 (in-person), April 2027 (online), and June 2027 (in-person), followed by implementation of activities. The estimated time commitment expected from the participants is: 3-4 days each for the in-person trainings, 1 day for the online training and up to 1 day for the mentoring sessions – in total around 10 days spread over 9 months.

The in-person trainings are planned to take place in Montenegro and Albania. The travel costs for attendance of the in-person trainings will be covered by GIZ.

The Programme will be conducted mainly in English with simultaneous translation provided into the local languages.



The Programme focuses on good practices and successful approaches and practices in inclusive employment promotion, the legal context both on national level and in regard to EU accession criteria, the challenges and benefits of inclusive employment and leadership, and practical tools and processes to promote inclusive employment.

3. Target Audience of the Programme

The LEAP Programme brings together representatives of 8 municipalities across 4 countries and at least one local business partner per municipality. Up to 4 C-level or mid-management staff, HR, council members, and similar representatives per application will be nominated as participants in the LEAP Programme.

The Programme provides an opportunity for forward looking municipalities and businesses that are committed to inclusive employment practices and policies, thus becoming leaders of prosperous, inclusive communities. We are looking for change agents within the private sector and local governments, interested in creating multi-stakeholder partnerships for inclusive employment. Either the municipality or the business partner may initiate and lead the draft application process.

At municipal level, the Programme targets mid-level municipal staff, such as department heads and municipal council members. These individuals will be trained to act as change agents, with an emphasis on building their capacity to advocate for and/or implement inclusive employment policies at the local level.

In the private sector, the Programme targets C-level, such as HR Directors, or mid-level managers, aiming to equip them with the skills and knowledge to act as positive change agents and champion and implement inclusive employment policies within their companies and business networks.

The consortium made up of the municipality and business partner(s) can name up to four representatives in total that will participate in the Programme. We advise for two representatives per municipality and, in case of applying in partnership with two businesses, one representative per business.

4. Objective and Outcome of the Programme

The LEAP Programme creates a structured platform for dialog and cooperation between public and private actors to jointly identify practical solutions for inclusive employment promotion and labour market participation. It strengthens the capacities of leadership and management staff to design and introduce inclusive employment policies and practices and enables them to create multi-stakeholder partnerships.

The Programme enables them to:

- Act as change agents for inclusive employment, implementing initiatives and raising awareness on inclusive employment practices
- Introduce new or revise existing human resource management practices
- Create multi-stakeholder partnerships for inclusive employment practices and policies.

5. Benefits of the Programme

Participating municipalities and businesses will benefit from:

- Practical tools and methodologies as well as individualised mentoring and technical support from national and international experts in developing action plans for inclusive employment policies and practices, enabling businesses to reach and attract underrepresented talent pools, to reduce staff turnover and to ensure retention of qualified workforce;
- Peer exchange and networking opportunities with municipalities and businesses from across the Western Balkans;
- Enhanced understanding of EU standards and good practices related to equal opportunities and labour market inclusion;
- Opportunities to establish and strengthen local partnerships for inclusive employment promotion;
- Increased regional visibility as local champions of inclusive employment and workforce participation.

6. Commitment and Requirements

The nominated representatives are expected to:

- Hold a mid-management or C-level, HR (Director), or similar role or be a municipal council member or similar
- Participate actively in all modules of the LEAP Programme
- Supported by the Programme, commit to prepare and implement action plans on inclusive employment policies and practices.

The participating municipalities and businesses are expected to:

- Ensure that the nominated representatives can attend the trainings and the mentoring sessions – the schedules are designed with flexibility in mind to accommodate busy management calendars
- Demonstrate institutional commitment to advancing inclusive employment practices within their organisation/institution
- Support the establishment and functioning of local multi-stakeholder partnerships on inclusive employment.

7. Application Process

Participating municipalities are required to apply jointly with at least one local business partner. Applications can be prepared in English or in the local language, in accordance with the requirements set out in the Application Form and must include all requested information.

Interested municipalities should submit the completed Application Form by e-mail to the following address: biljana.dijanisieva@giz.de.

Deadline: 13.11.2026

Subject Line: Application: LEAP-Programme, NameOfMunicipality, Country

Incomplete applications or applications submitted after the deadline will not be considered.