



# Integrated Case Management for Employment and Social Welfare Services in the Western Balkans<sup>1</sup>

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Integrated case management (ICM) is understood as a practice, which is employed by actors collectively to serve the most vulnerable with all available resources from both the labour market and the social welfare system. The two main public institutions potentially engaging in ICM, the Public Employment Services (PES) and Centres for Social Welfare (CSW), are targeting users with complex needs requiring a range of services. In general, the extent to which even case management is practiced in the Western Balkans<sup>2</sup> is very limited: although PES and CSW work under the same umbrella in most countries (one ministry supervises both institutions), formal communication is often not established between these institutions. With some exceptions, even informal individual staff communication between the institutions is absent at the local level. PES and CSW often do not share information and do not know which measures and services are offered, respectively.

**Keywords:**  
**Integrated case management, Western Balkan, partnership, Public Employment Service, Centre for Social Welfare**

The labour market system and the social welfare system therefore result in policy silos. When case management is being applied in the Western Balkan countries, it is not implemented at the interface of these policies. Instead, it is employed either in the labour market system or in the social welfare system. A *shared* and thus *integrated* case management system that makes best use of all available resources in supporting clients throughout the entire inclusion process has not yet been implemented. Since PES and CSW often ‘share’ the same users, these public institutions – together with NGOs and municipalities – could agree on a rationale for joining forces within ICM.

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**2** The report builds on expertise gained especially for Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia (FYR Macedonia), Kosovo (References to Kosovo shall be understood to be in the context of Security Council resolution 1244 [1999]), Montenegro and Serbia.

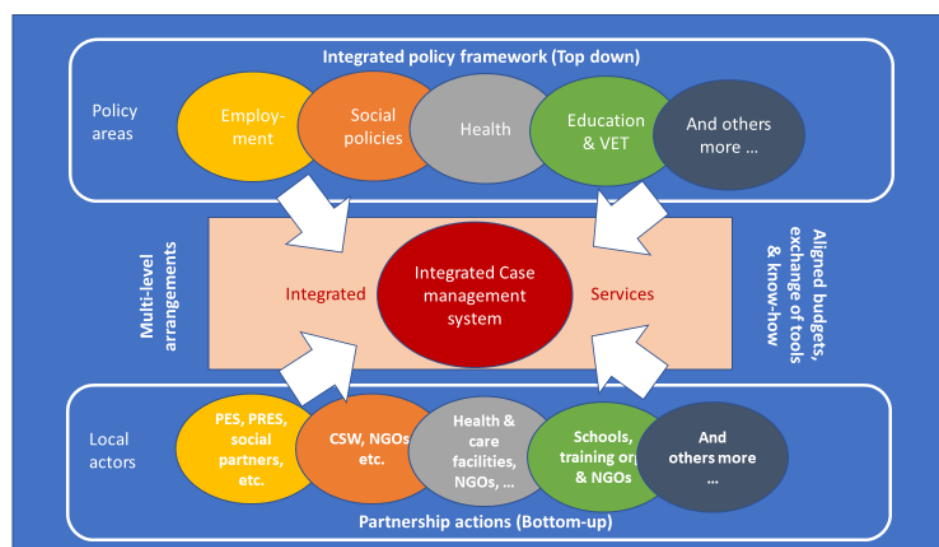
This Policy Brief describes the rationale for as well as potentials and caveats of implementing Integrated Case Management in Western Balkan countries. As neither the PES nor the CSW can deliver all services on their own, the setting-up of ICM systems that are embedded in partnership structures is recommended.

## Status quo of case management and cooperative practice in the Western Balkans

**The implementation of ICM requires an integrative policy frame, well-functioning partnerships and multi-level arrangements**

An ICM system that provides integrated services requires an integrative policy frame, well-functioning partnerships and multi-level arrangements. Next to other policy areas, employment, social policies, health, education and VET (Vocational Education and Training) must relate to each other and should be embedded in a coherent integrated policy frame. Moreover, local actors such as PES, PrES (Private Employment Service), social partners, CSW, civil society organisations, health and care providers, schools and training organisations, amongst other relevant stakeholders are required to cooperate in the form of a partnership. Partnership refers to collaboration where actors jointly define objectives, take decisions together and practice shared commitment. Finally, multi-level arrangements that enable a well-functioning interplay between the 'bottom' (the partnerships) and the 'top' (the integrated policy frame) are important (see Figure I). They are crucial for policies to be effective in an ICM system.

**Figure I: Multi-level arrangements for an ICM system in the Western Balkans**



**The two systems, the labour market and social policies should become interconnected vessels**

Analyses of the macro (the policy level), the meso (organisational level) and the micro level (beneficiary level) have shown that much remains to be done for partnerships that deliver integrated services to flourish at the interface of labour market and social policies. According to the comparative assessment, the two systems in the Western Balkan countries might be directed into becoming interconnected vessels by the following activities (Scoppetta et al., 2018a):

- First, barriers that hamper collaboration between the institutions need to be removed based on existing collaboration and connections between PES and CSW. Partnerships already established at the local/regional geographical scale should be the starting point for discussing the best-fitting tools for ICM in each territory. Related instruments already used in the Western Balkans comprise needs assessment, individual employment plans and social mentorship.
- Secondly, a demand for transnational knowledge sharing and exchange of practices with EU Member States was observed.
- Thirdly, the establishment of ICM systems in the Western Balkans should be accompanied by a comprehensive capacity building, training and partnership programme for relevant stakeholders.

**Partnership formation and organisation between state and non-state actors is not a new practice**

In building up ICM, the countries do not start from scratch: partnership formation and organisation between state and non-state actors is not a new practice in Western Balkan countries. Cooperative approaches between PES and CSW can be found already to date. In Serbia, for instance, agreements between PES and CSW are established and monitored by the local PES. Joint activities include referrals between services as applied, for instance, in Kosovo, and measures implemented for specific target groups such as the Roma in FYR Macedonia. Another example, the *'Cooperation between Employment Agency and Centers for Social Work'*, was implemented in Montenegro and aimed at improving the situation for vulnerable groups. Beneficiaries of social assistance were successfully activated to enter the labour market. Another project outcome comprised a formalised agreement between the PES and the CSW at the central (national) level. Moreover, there are Territorial Employment Pacts (TEP) set up in some regions in the Western Balkans which are well suited for providing an overall setting for the implementation of locally modified ICM actions in the various contexts.

Legal regulations are an important driver for cooperation: whilst formal agreements have taken the form of a law between the PES and CSW in Kosovo, Serbia and Montenegro, other countries have not formalised cooperation at the national level. Practice, however, also tells that even with laws in place,

partnership formation is weak or even missing. Since responsibility for cooperative approaches must be taken by actors at all governance levels, the ball for setting up partnerships is also on the local level's court.

## Good practices from EU countries

**The vast array of experiences of case management from EU states can serve as a rich resource which the Western Balkans can learn from and adapt appropriately as solutions**

Examples of good practices implemented in the EU can assist in the process of setting up ICM in the Western Balkans. The differences and lack of coordination within and between the systems of employment and social protection have long been identified as obstacles in the EU and beyond. To ensure effective, client-centred support for job-seekers, including career development opportunities, ICM has been widely adopted over the past two decades. The vast array of experiences of case management from EU Member States, especially from the Western and Nordic region, but also from new Member States such as Slovenia, can serve as a rich resource from which the Western Balkans can learn and adapt appropriate solutions when designing and improving PES actions and their links with CSW.

The following three practices are widespread and rolled-out practices, which address relevant case management issues pertinent to the Western Balkan territories (Scoppetta et al., 2018b). They served as an initial orientation for improving integrated case management approaches and comprise the 'NAV Reform – One-stop Shops in Norway', the 'Cooperation in Cases of Clients with Complex Problems' in Slovenia, and the 'Coordination Associations' in Sweden (see Overviews I-III).

### Overview 1: The NAV reform – one-stop shops in Norway

<b>Coverage</b>	Implemented across all municipalities
<b>Rationale</b>	The division between employment and social welfare administrations and services has been a major challenge in Norway. Policy-makers perceived the separate administration of pensions (including disability pensions) as a major obstacle to the effective implementation of strategies for activating workers rather than paying (disability) pensions or social assistance benefits. By merging three institutions – i.e. employment services and pension administration at national level, social welfare offices at local level – all service staff in one-stop shops would be able to provide a more integrated service with a larger array of solutions for individual cases.

<b>Level of intervention</b>	Multi-level governance reform based on ‘mandatory partnership agreements’
<b>Transferability</b>	National contexts play a significant role regarding transferability. For the Western Balkans it is important to take the concept of integration on board. Once the division of tasks has been established it will become “a challenge to create a new cultural identity based on three rather different, sector-based cultures with a long and separate previous history” (Lægreid & Rykkja, 2013: 11). Another issue concerns the balance between the generalist role of a case-worker and the need to provide specialist knowledge with a view to productivity and effectiveness. It moreover remains a challenge to strike the right balance in terms of the proximity between case-workers and clients, and the use of ICT systems (including call centres) as against face-to-face meetings. Finally, it is important to remain flexible and adaptable during the reform process.

## Overview 2: Cooperation in cases of clients with complex problems in Slovenia

<b>Coverage</b>	Implemented across all regions
<b>Rationale</b>	PES and the CSW staff hold regular meetings to jointly discuss cases of unemployed clients with complex problems that cannot be solved by the PES on its own (e.g. drug or alcohol abuse, mental health problems, serious social problems). They have set up committees made up of experts from the two organisations and rehabilitation specialists. The committee meets twice a year. It assesses the unemployed person’s problems, submits its opinion concerning the reasons for the person’s temporary inability to work, and proposes measures and activities aimed at the quickest-possible improvement in the unemployed person’s employment opportunities.
<b>Level of intervention</b>	Micro and meso level, based on national guidelines and policies at the macro level
<b>Transferability</b>	This form of institutional cooperation does not require major financial investment but can contribute to knowledge exchange and thus to a more effective service offer to clients. The model is regarded as useful for further investigation of transfer to the Western Balkans since the countries can build on forms of cooperation that are already in place.

### Overview 3: Coordination Associations (*Samordningsförbund*) in Sweden

<b>Coverage</b>	Covering all counties and nearly all municipalities
<b>Rationale</b>	Coordination Associations are a voluntary scheme at the local level aiming to facilitate institutional coordination between the PES, the social and health sector and municipalities. Coordination Associations are independent legal entities, led by a local political board, harmonize the goals of the participating organisations and launch joint projects (e.g. for the integration of immigrants). They maintain inter-organisational teams in the form of Boards that support the reintegration of the long-term unemployed.
<b>Level of intervention</b>	Micro and meso level, based on national guidelines and policies (macro)
<b>Transferability</b>	Regarding the transferability of the practice to other national contexts, the lack of employer involvement is worth mentioning (Prins, 2006).

## Improving cooperation step by step

**Careful preparation  
is key to the success  
of a partnership**

To build up partnerships as a fundament for establishing ICM, we recommend the following three main steps to be taken at local/regional geographical levels:

### »»» STEP 1: Preparatory work

**Clearly define  
communication and  
interaction between  
partners**

Preparatory work must be conducted to form the basis for signing partnership agreements. It may be helpful if the primary partners of an ICM system, such as the PES and CSW (together with NGOs and municipalities) first meet and pre-discuss the scope of their potential collaboration, in particular when starting from scratch and in those cases/territories in the Western Balkans that cannot build on existing forms of cooperation. Extending collaboration to additional stakeholders such as schools, social partners, etc. needs to follow.

### »»» STEP 2: Signing a partnership agreement

**Consensus,  
commitment and  
understanding between  
partners is crucial**

At the end of this preparatory process, a partnership agreement will be drafted in the form of a document comprising the views of the various partners, the detailed commitments by each member, and practical proposals. The partnership agreement specifies the interventions required for ICM.

### »»» STEP 3: Implementation

Most important tasks in the implementation phase include sound planning and management (including financial management) of the activities jointly agreed

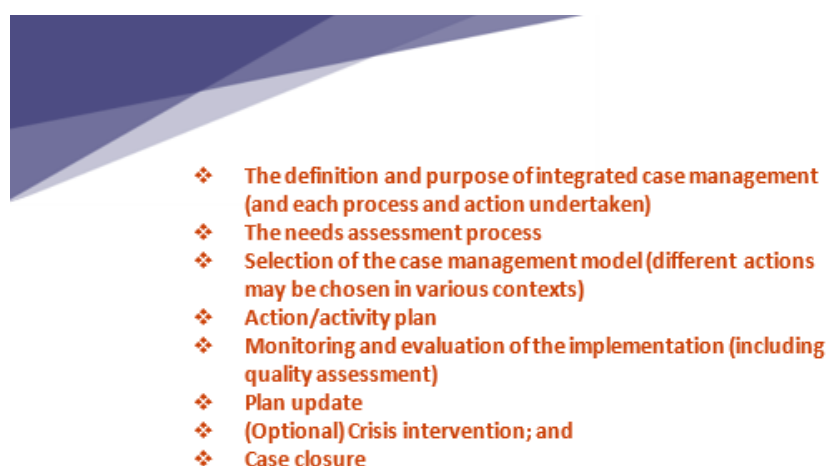
in the partnership work programme. Partnership success factors include the establishment of fruitful learning environments in which partners may reflect upon their actions via feedback loops to enable improvements.

## Policy recommendations

### Develop Integrated Case Management Standards across all countries

When instituting ICM across the Western Balkans, we recommend the development of Integrated Case Management Standards for partnerships (see, for instance, CMSUK, 2009) to support streamlined implementation and to facilitate institutionalised models of interventions. Suggestions for standards required for case management processes start from the definition and purpose of ICM and describe the entire process from needs assessment to case closure (Figure II).

Figure II: Case management standards



### Case managers are the core for ICM

Within the ICM model proposed, case managers are core. Case managers coordinate the services for the pathway of clients throughout the entire social inclusion and integration chain. Case managers may be PES counsellors, CSW staff or other local experts trained and experienced to use the ICM method. To ease the implementation of case management, we recommend starting with case managers who are employed either at PES or CSW. As soon as the ICM systems are set up and working smoothly, the institutions may also consider making use of other local stakeholders for assisting or providing ICM.



It is important to note that the ICM model to be implemented must be discussed, developed and *agreed upon jointly between all actors* at local level to ensure ownership. Although some leeway should be given to the local/regional level, we recommend the joint development of a pool of actions/activities from which the actors can choose practices that are fit for purpose. It is furthermore recommended to conduct regular reflection on activities by means of, for instance, critical questions for analysing innovative practices in the field of labour market and social policy.

**There is no one-size-fits-all model that can be applied for ICM since actors, contexts and settings vary**

A one-size-fits-all approach for ICM, however, is not recommended since actors, contexts and settings (social relations, available resources, know-how) vary. Stakeholders should take their local requirements into account and make best use of available resident potentials (know-how, resources, etc). They too should learn from already experienced practices in their own territories, exchange know-how on practices with others and, consequently, build up their *area-specific ICM system*.

## Conclusion

To sum up, the identified lack of well-established cooperation between local actors has hampered the implementation of ICM in the Western Balkans. It is therefore necessary to enhance, as a first step, the formation of partnerships and collaboration in daily practice, especially at the interface of labour market and social policy, to deliver integrated services. The Territorial Employment Pacts (TEPs) set up in some regions of the Western Balkans as part of the UNDP project 'Promoting Inclusive Labour Market Solutions in the Western Balkans' (2017-2018) are well suited for providing an overall setting for the implementation of local ICM models that are adapted to the various contexts.



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