Joint Principles for Investment Facilitation in the Western Balkans Six

Background information

The Joint Principles for Investment Facilitation in the Western Balkans Six (WB6) represent an important initiative under the Business Enabling Environment and Competitiveness Pillar of the Common Regional Market 2 (CRM 2) Action Plan 2025–2028. Developed through the Joint Working Group on Investments (JWGI), under the facilitation of the Regional Cooperation Council (RCC), the Principles aim to provide a coherent regional benchmark for improving the investment and business environment across the WB6.

Anchored in international frameworks, most notably the WTO Investment Facilitation for Development (IFD) Agreement and UNCTAD's framework on investment facilitation, the Principles reflect the commitment of the WB6 to aligning with global standards, while also taking into account the state of play in the region based on a previously conducted analysis.

The document sets out a set of common principles designed to streamline administrative procedures, enhance transparency, and reduce barriers to investment, while also integrating sustainability considerations. It serves as the first regionally agreed articulation of the core elements underpinning investment facilitation efforts in the WB6. The Principles are intended to guide reforms in the region and inform regional cooperation, serving as a baseline for legal and institutional advancements.

The Principles are proposed by the JWGI and endorsed by high-level government representatives in the WB6.

Preamble

RECALLING our shared commitment to advancing regional economic integration, fostering convergence with the EU Single Market, and promoting inclusive and sustainable development across the Western Balkans Six (WB6);

ACKNOWLEDGING the importance of improving the business and investment climate as a strategic driver of economic growth, job creation, and competitiveness in the region;

RECOGNISING that effective investment facilitation, including simplified procedures, transparent regulatory frameworks, and institutional coordination, is essential to attracting and retaining quality investments;

UNDERSCORING the role of the Common Regional Market 2 (CRM 2) Action Plan 2025–2028, and in particular its Pillar V on Business Enabling Environment and Competitiveness, in guiding joint regional efforts to create a more predictable and investor-friendly environment;

EMPHASISING the relevance of global best practices, including the WTO Investment Facilitation for Development (IFD) Agreement and UNCTAD's framework on investment facilitation, in shaping our regional approach and aligning it with international standards;

NOTING the consultative process undertaken by the Joint Working Group on Investments (JWGI), which included a comprehensive assessment of the current state of investment facilitation in the WB6 and extensive engagement with relevant stakeholders;

WE, high-level government representatives the WB6, upon the proposal of the JWGI, endorse the following Joint Principles for Investment Facilitation in the WB6:

1. Promote accessibility and transparency in investment policies, regulations, and procedures relevant to investors

1.1. Publish all laws, regulations, and policies affecting investment. Where possible, these should also be available in English.

1.2. Ensure that information provided to investors is accurate, up to date, and available in English.

1.3. Make investment screening standards publicly available, where applicable.

1.4. Ensure that authorisation procedures are objective, transparent, and impartial.

2. **Streamline administrative processes to foster a conducive investment environment**

   2.1. Simplify and streamline government procedures for authorisations, licence applications, and related processes, where appropriate.

   2.2. Provide timely and relevant administrative guidance to investors.

   2.3. Maintain administration fees limited in amount to the approximate cost of services rendered and authorisation fees at a reasonable level.

   2.4. Establish clear and predictable timelines for processing investment-related applications.

   2.5. Use ICT tools and services to enhance the efficiency of administrative and other related processes.

3. **Ensure vertical and horizontal investment facilitation through appropriate mechanisms (e.g. Investment Promotion Agencies, focal points, other coordination mechanisms), in particular:**

   3.1. Provide services across all stages of the investment lifecycle, including entry, establishment, operation, and exit.

   3.2. Inform relevant government institutions about recurring challenges faced by investors.

   3.3. Promote proactive engagement to respond to investor needs and support aftercare services.

   3.4. Address investor grievances through dedicated mechanisms that include early-warning systems and clear escalation channels.

4. **Establish and strengthen monitoring and evaluation mechanisms for investment facilitation**

   4.1. Adopt diagnostic tools and indicators to assess the efficiency of administrative procedures.

   4.2. Promote the use of public-private dialogues to gather investor input on the functioning of investment procedure.

   4.3. Benchmark and monitor the performance of institutions involved in investment facilitation.

   4.4. Conduct regular investor satisfaction surveys to gather investor feedback.

5. **Enhance regional and international cooperation on investment facilitation**

   5.1. Strengthen cooperation and coordination between relevant agencies in the region and beyond to facilitate investment.

   5.2. Exchange information on investment laws, regulations, and procedures to enhance transparency and predictability for investors.

   5.3. Contribute to the regular updating of the WB6 Investment Incentive Platform.

   5.4. Explore opportunities for harmonisation of administrative procedures, where appropriate.

6. **Cooperate with the EU on facilitating investment through technical assistance, capacity building, and experience sharing**

   6.1. Increase the capacity of IPAs and relevant authorities to provide investor facilitation services, including support in administrative and compliance processes.

   6.2. Build and/or strengthen capacity for the preparation of regulatory feasibility studies for potential investment projects.

   6.3. Support peer learning and exchanges of good practices between IPAs and EU counterparts.

   6.4. Facilitate alignment with EU standards and procedures relevant to investment facilitation, where applicable.

7. **Promote sustainable investment**

   7.1. Encourage investments that support prioritised Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in the context of the WB6.

   7.2. Promote awareness among investors of sustainability-related standards, practices, and international commitments.

   7.3. Facilitate access to information on policies, incentives, and support measures related to sustainable investment.

   7.4. Encourage responsible business conduct and adherence to internationally recognised environmental, social and governmental (ESG) standards, in particular those related to human rights, and labour and environmental standards.

   7.5. Strengthen institutional capacity to identify, promote, and facilitate sustainable investment projects.

7.6. Promote linkages and spillovers between investors and local suppliers through programmes helping SMEs to meet international industry standards and best practices.

7.7. Identify and promote priority sectors in line with comparative advantages and development priorities.

8. Leverage digitalisation to enhance investment facilitation

8.1. Where possible, develop digital investment platforms or portals that provide information and services across the investment lifecycle.

8.2. Expand online access to key procedures, including registration, licensing, permitting, and compliance, with system interoperability (on a regional level where feasible).

8.3. Strengthen digital infrastructure and data governance to ensure secure and transparent handling of investor information.

8.4. Use digital tools, such as AI and analytics, where possible, to streamline approvals, support aftercare, and perform investor services.

8.5. Build digital skills within IPAs and/or other relevant institutions to manage and improve digital services.