

**EU-Albania 13th Subcommittee on Innovation, Information Society and Social Policy
Tirana, Albania, 27/01/2022**

Press release

The 13th Subcommittee meeting on topics related to Education, Research and Innovation, Information Society, and Social Policy between the EU and Albania was held on 27 January. Representatives from the European Commission (Commission) discussed with relevant Albanian authorities the most recent developments in these areas. The meeting was co-chaired for the EU by Ms Michela Matuella, Head of Unit for Albania and North Macedonia, at the Directorate General for Neighbourhood and Enlargement Negotiations of the European Commission, and for Albania by Ms Enkelejda Muçaj, Deputy Minister of Infrastructure and Energy.

The Commission acknowledged the efforts done by the Albanian authorities to overcome the effects of the pandemic on the labour market as well as on the education and cultural sectors, in particular with regard to the most vulnerable groups. It underlined the need of increasing the financial allocation to employment policies, social protection, education, research and innovation and the important role of digital technologies in supporting the economy and mitigating the effects of the pandemic.

The Commission recognised the efforts made by Albania during 2021 in the field of employment and labour market and welcomed the progress that has been made in developing the Youth Guarantee Scheme. The importance of implementation of the adopted legislation, including through reinforcing the labour inspection, as well as sufficient human resources for employment and vocational training policies was underlined. The Commission commended the roadmap towards adjusting adequacy of Economic Aid benefits and establishing a mechanism for their annual review and encouraged Albania to implement it in a timely manner. The Commission encouraged Albania to step efforts in tackling child labour as in implementing the strategy on social protection, supporting local government in accelerating the reform of social services.

Albania's very good performance in the last year of the Horizon 2020 programme was recognised. The Commission encouraged the Albanian authorities to increase the efforts to finalise and adopt the Smart Specializations Strategy and welcomed the efficient Horizon Europe Association process. The Commission underlined the need to adopt the necessary amendments to the Law on Electronic Communication, aligning with the new European Electronic Communications Code and to finalise and adopt the Digital Agenda.

The Commission welcomed the adoption of the 2021 - 2026 Strategy on education and encouraged the authorities to increase the financial allocation to continuous teaching training. The Commission stressed the need to finalise and adopt the National Youth Strategy for the period 2022 - 2029 and to adopt all the bylaws implementing the Law on Youth.