

***Bosnia and Herzegovina
Labour and Employment Agency of
Bosnia and Herzegovina***



WAPES European Conference

Enhancing Skills for Public Employment Services
Challenges and Opportunities in a Transforming Labour Market

Sarajevo, Bosnia and Herzegovina | 20 – 21 May 2026



CONCEPT NOTE

The WAPES European Conference 2026, hosted by the Labour and Employment Agency of Bosnia and Herzegovina (LEA BiH), cordially invites you on the topic of Enhancing Skills for Public Employment Services, challenges and opportunities in a transforming labour market

Introduction

Public Employment Services across Europe are operating in an environment marked by persistent skills shortages, rapid technological change and increasing labour mobility. These challenges are shared by PES, policymakers, social partners, education providers, researchers and international organisations involved in shaping labour market responses. Digitalisation, demographic shifts and evolving expectations from employers and jobseekers are reshaping labour markets and, with them, the role of PES as key public actors supporting employment, skills development and social cohesion.

Against this background, the WAPES European Region, in cooperation with the Labour and Employment Agency of Bosnia and Herzegovina, will organise the WAPES European Conference 2026 in Sarajevo. The conference will provide a strategic platform for dialogue and exchange among PES leaders, practitioners, policymakers, researchers and partners, focusing on how PES can strengthen skills systems, adapt their services and build institutional capacities to respond to current and future labour market needs.

Conference objectives

The conference aims to explore strategic responses to labour and skills shortages in a context of structural and technological change; examine the role of partnerships and cooperation between PES, education providers, employers and international actors; discuss approaches to skills recognition and labour mobility across borders; strengthen understanding of future skills needs within PES, including the role of technology and artificial intelligence; and promote the use of research and evidence to inform policy, service design and capacity building in PES.

Conference structure and themes

The conference will be structured around three thematic panels, combining strategic reflection with practical perspectives from WAPES member organisations and partners.

- **Thematic block 1: Bridging workforce skills shortages – innovation, data and cooperation**

This panel will focus on how Public Employment Services can respond to skills shortages through improved use of labour market intelligence, innovative service delivery and strengthened cooperation with education systems, employers and social partners. It will explore the role of PES as coordinators within skills ecosystems and their contribution to aligning skills development with labour market needs.

- **Thematic block 2: Skills without borders – recognition, cooperation and a mobile workforce**

This panel will address the challenges and opportunities associated with labour mobility and the integration of foreign workers. Discussions will focus on skills identification and recognition, cooperation across borders and the role of PES in supporting transparent, efficient and fair labour mobility in Europe and beyond.

- **Thematic block 3: PES for the future – strengthening skills, technology and counselling excellence**

This panel will focus on the future role of PES staff and institutions in a rapidly changing environment. It will serve as the official platform for the presentation of the results of the WAPES research on the future skills needs of PES counsellors, conducted in cooperation with Leeds Trinity University and the University of Derby. The discussion will explore implications for staff development, training systems, digitalisation and the responsible use of artificial intelligence in PES.

Added value and target audience

The WAPES European Conference 2026 is open to all WAPES member organisations across all regions, and will also welcome a selected group of external stakeholders, including representatives of ministries, international organisations, researchers and partner institutions. By bringing together WAPES members and key partners, the conference will foster a shared understanding of emerging challenges and strategic options facing Public Employment Services.

The conference will encourage active participation and exchange among WAPES members and partners, combining policy dialogue, institutional perspectives and research-based evidence. In doing so, it aims to support PES in strengthening their capacity to respond effectively to labour market transformation.

The conference will contribute to ongoing discussions within the WAPES European Region and provide inputs for future cooperation, mutual learning and innovation among member organisations.

Please note that the working language of the conference will be English only.