

Education Reform Initiative of South
Eastern Europe (ERI SEE)
Work Programme
2017 – 2019

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Introduction

Education Reform Initiative of South Eastern Europe (ERI SEE) is the initiative started by the countries of the region: Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Macedonia, Moldova, Montenegro and Serbia, with the aim of enhancing regional cooperation in the area of education and training.

Countries of the South Eastern Europe have aligned the development of their education standards and systems with those of Europe; they have developed wide capacities, knowledge and experience in the region, establishing grounds for a more structured cooperation and further joint enhancement in the field of education and training, catering for the needs of regional societies. For that reason, ERI SEE is being established as a regionally owned organisation supporting sustainable education reforms on national levels through regional and international cooperation; acting as an interface to developments in relevant EU, European and international initiatives, and supporting capacity building for increased use of the European cooperation instruments.¹

ERI SEE gives strategic, formal and structured platform for the countries' cooperation, by encouraging sustainable education reforms and emphasizing importance of national priorities, regional cooperation and European trends and developments.

Through the ERI SEE mission statement, the ERI SEE member countries recognised that education and training are crucial in promoting knowledge based, competitive and socially cohesive societies in Europe, and play important role in responding to the chances and challenges of globalisation. They are therefore a key to sustainable development and prosperity, in particular in South Eastern Europe.

The initiative was started as a part of the political process – Stabilisation and Association Agreement for South Eastern Europe in 2003 (supported by the Enhanced Graz Process), as one of the instruments of ensuring stability in the region in its EU association process. Its goal was to create the strategic cooperation framework in the area of education and training, which was given by several Memoranda:

¹ „We, the Ministers responsible for Education and Higher Education of the Republic of Albania, the Republic of Croatia, the Republic of Macedonia, Montenegro and the Republic of Serbia, signatories to this Memorandum of Understanding, ... affirm our commitment to strengthen and broaden cooperation in the framework of ERI SEE and agree: 1. To develop ERI SEE into a sustainable, regionally owned organisation under the auspices of the RCC, to become a recognized and attractive partner in EU funded projects with a regional character, that will: a) support sustainable education reforms on national levels through regional and international cooperation; b) act as an interface to developments in relevant EU, European and international initiatives, in education and to adjust ERI SEE's current thematic areas to the changed cooperation context both in South Eastern Europe and the strategic framework for European cooperation in education and training (ET 2020); c) support capacity building for increased use of the European cooperation instruments“. Memorandum of understanding on the Role and Organisation of the Education Reform Initiative of South Eastern Europe, Brdo 2010.

The first Memorandum signed, specifying strong support to regional cooperation in the format of ERI SEE, was the Memorandum of Understanding between the Ministers of Education and Higher Education of South Eastern Europe (Nicosia, 2003), on the cooperation in the field of education and signed by Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Macedonia, Montenegro and Serbia. (It also included the commitment of signatory countries to accept Bologna declaration and Copenhagen Declaration).

The Memorandum of Understanding between the Ministers Responsible for Education, Science and Research in South Eastern Europe, signed in 2007 in Istanbul by Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Croatia, Provisional Institutions of Self-Government of Kosovo, Montenegro and Romania, renewed the commitment to regional cooperation in education, for mutual benefit, encompassing all aspect of lifelong learning, science and research, and insisted on regional cooperation activities considering relevant EU and European developments and trends in education, science and research, but also being closely linked to the national context and priorities of the signatory countries, also by involving the relevant stakeholders. ERI SEE is recognized as „the main implementation framework of the present Memorandum in education “², identification of joint common priorities and implementation of joint activities being of paramount importance. It is also stated that „Continuing support for ERI SEE is therefore critical and shall lead to full and independent regional ownership of ERI SEE activities and structure, also including financial commitment “³.

The more specific Memorandum of Understanding on the Role and Organisation of the Education Reform Initiative of South Eastern Europe (Brdo, 2010), reiterated the commitments of signatory parties to regional cooperation in the EU accession process and sustainable economic development, as well as recognized the ERI SEE achievements done so far (which included the work of the ERI SEE Agency in Croatia and regular organisation of regional workshops, conferences and other events). With this Memorandum, signed in Brdo 2010, more operational principles of functioning of ERI SEE were defined - such as the institutional framework, management structure, basic requirements for the establishment of the ERI SEE Secretariat, selecting the seat of the Secretariat, financial contributions and other relevant issues.

This Memorandum was signed by all the currently participating countries, Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Macedonia, Moldova, Montenegro and Serbia, in the period from 2010 – 2015, while the signatory parties of the Nicosia Memorandum of Understanding (2003) and the Istanbul Memorandum of Understanding (2007) who are not the signatory parties of this Memorandum, were invited to continue participating in ERI SEE activities under specified conditions.⁴

Following the requirements lined out in the Memorandum of Understanding (Brdo, 2010), Serbia expressed its willingness to host the ERI SEE Secretariat, which was accepted by the Governing Board in 2010. Following this acceptance, the Agreement between the Government of the Republic of Serbia and

² Memorandum of Understanding between the Ministers Responsible for Education, Science and Research in South Eastern Europe, 2007, Istanbul

³ Ibid

⁴ „ERI SEE members are signatory parties and acceding parties to this Memorandum. Signatory parties of the Nicosia Memorandum of Understanding (2003) and the Istanbul Memorandum of Understanding (2007) who are not signatory parties to this Memorandum are invited to continue to participate in ERI SEE activities under the conditions outlined in Annex 1“. Memorandum of understanding on the Role and Organisation of the Education Reform Initiative of South Eastern Europe, Brdo 2010

the other members of the Education Reform Initiative of South Eastern Europe on the seat of the Secretariat of the Education Reform Initiative of South Eastern Europe was signed by the ERI SEE member countries, in the period from 2013 to 2015, regulating the legal status of the Secretariat, support of the Government of the Host Country to the Secretariat and conditions necessary for effective performance, the procedure of entering into force of the Agreement and other relevant issues deriving from the status of the international organisation of the Secretariat.

The Agreement is currently in the process of formally taking effect in the host country (ratification procedure by the National Parliament is under way), and member countries (ratification procedure or decision by the Government).

In its current form of the Secretariat in the process of being established, and in cooperation and support of the Interim ERI SEE Secretariat – Centre of Education Policy⁵, ERI SEE is performing planned activities, thus contributing to the fulfilment of its mission and vision.

Organizational context

Implementation modalities

Following the information lined out in the Introduction part of this Work Programme, the establishment of the Secretariat of the Education Reform Initiative of South Eastern Europe, as envisaged by the above-mentioned Agreement between the Government of the Republic of Serbia and the other members of the Education Reform Initiative of South Eastern Europe on the seat of the Secretariat of the Education Reform Initiative of South Eastern Europe is currently under way. In order for it to be registered as an international organisation and have the proper legal status, as described in the Memorandum of Understanding, Brdo 2010, the act on its establishment is supposed to undergo the legal procedure which implies ratification by the host country (Serbia), and the ratification by national Parliaments, or adoption by national Governments, in the minimum of three participating countries.

As the procedure is still ongoing in most countries, ERI SEE Secretariat is still in its provisional form and performing its activities in cooperation with the Centre for Education Policy (CEP), the Interim ERI SEE Secretariat and in line with the Work Programme adopted by the Governing Board.

Operational, Financial and Political Challenges

⁵ By the Decision of the Governing Board of 14 July 2010, confirmed by the Decision of the Governing Board of 21 September 2016, Centre of Education Policy is performing the function of the Interim ERI SEE Secretariat until the Secretariat is fully established as an independent legal entity.

The Agreement between the Government of the Republic of Serbia and the other Members of the Education Reform Initiative of South Eastern Europe on the seat of the Secretariat of the Education Reform Initiative of South Eastern Europe (Host-country Agreement) is currently under the procedure in the Republic of Serbia, waiting to be listed on the Parliament agenda as of the 30th September 2016, whereas the internal procedures in other countries are not completed and are in different state of progress, without approximations of when the internal procedures can be finalized.

For that reason, it is almost evident that the process of establishing ERI SEE as a legal entity, much as the countries find it relevant and crucial for the support in achieving their strategic goals and priorities, is not likely to be finalized in the first half of 2017.

This in turn has consequences on the ERI SEE's ability to secure additional funding for its operation and content-related activities. Currently, ERI SEE is being financed via the countries' annual contributions as specified in the Annex 3 of the Memorandum of Understanding, Brdo, 2010⁶, which makes the annual budget amounts to 75.800,00 euro every year, in the best-case scenario (in case all the contributions are duly paid). Additionally, the only existing donor is KulturKontakt Austria, with its significant annual contributions⁷. The amount received in this way is limiting the implementation of more substantial content-related activities making a more significant impact on the education and training systems in the region.

As an additional instability factor, the countries of the region, in addition or consequent to economic challenges (obvious in the high rate of unemployment, low or no increase in GDP, closing down of business and high migration of labour force) are facing political challenges (witnessed by frequent changes in political arenas and rather frequent early elections).

All this adds to the relatively unstable position of the ERI SEE functioning and high level of uncertainties regarding the pace of development and growing into a stable, sustainable and reliable regional actor in the field of education and training. This Work Programme is written having all these circumstances in mind, planning activities in a way that they correspond to the realities of insecure legal status, financial constraints limiting expanding activities significantly, human constraints seen in the number of employees (currently, at the beginning of 2017, 1 FTE with financial and logistical assistance from COP amounting to additional 1 FTE), and insecure political support due to frequent changes in the political lives of member states. Therefore, it is advised to the Governing Board that all these factors are closely monitored throughout the programming period so that the adjustments to the Work Programme and related activities are made accordingly.

⁶ The amounts of the annual contributions, in euro, as stated and agreed by the Memorandum of Understanding, Brdo 2010, and additionally signed Protocols (for Bosnia and Herzegovina and Moldova) are as follows: Albania – 7,200.00; Bosnia and Herzegovina - 7,200.00; Croatia 14,400.00; Macedonia – 7,200.00; Montenegro – 5,400.00; Moldova – 5,400.00; Serbia – 9,000.00 euro; with Serbia as the host country allocating additionally 20,000.00 euro on annual basis for operational costs.

⁷ Based on the Annual Agreements between KulturKontakt Austria and CEP (Interim ERI SEE Secretariat), in the amount of at least 30,000.00 euro.

Policy context

Overarching documents and priorities

Education and Training 2020

As stated in the introductory part, the goal of ERI SEE is to act as the interface, a bridge between the national priorities and European trends, focusing on regional development in the area of education and training. ERI SEE is catering for the needs of the countries that can be met through regional cooperation, exchange and learning, in line with European trends.

For that reason, it is relevant to observe what happens at country-levels, what are common challenges and needs at regional level, as well as what directions European policies are taking. The purpose of matching all these developments are to bring benefit both to the region as a whole, but also to national settings.

As clearly stated in the Memorandum of Understanding, Istanbul 2007, countries are committed to the following ongoing EU, European and international initiatives, and their (possible) follow-up, namely the implementation of the Detailed Work Programme on the Follow-up of the Objectives of Education and Training Systems in Europe (Education and Training 2020), Copenhagen process, Bologna process and other relevant initiatives.⁸ These commitments were re-iterated by the subsequent Memorandum of Understanding, Brdo 2010.

Within the Education and Training 2020 Work Programme, as the strategic framework for European cooperation in education and training, cooperation inter alia takes the form of Working Groups. These Working Groups, established by the Commission under the Education and Training 2010 Work programme in order to implement the Open Method of Coordination⁹ in education and training, offer a forum for the

⁸ „The present Memorandum represents a commitment to the following ongoing EU, European and international initiatives, and their (possible) follow-up:

- The implementation of the Detailed Work Programme on the Follow-up of the Objectives of Education and Training Systems in Europe (Education and Training 2020)
- The implementation of the objectives of the Copenhagen Declaration and follow-up communiques (Copenhagen process), including mutual recognition of qualifications and issues of mobility;
- The implementation of the objectives of the bologna Declaration and follow-up communiques (of which all signatory countries are members), including mutual recognition of qualifications and issues of mobility;
- The development of sustainable research activities within the European Research Area;
- The Implementation of Education for All and of the education objectives of the Millennium Development Goals, Memorandum of Understanding, Istanbul 2007.

⁹ The open method of coordination (OMC) in the European Union may be described as a form of ‘soft’ law. It is a form of intergovernmental policy-making that does not result in binding EU legislative measures and it does not require EU countries to introduce or amend their laws. The OMC is principally based on:

- jointly identifying and defining objectives to be achieved (adopted by the Council);
- jointly established measuring instruments (statistics, indicators, guidelines);
- benchmarking, i.e. comparison of EU countries' performance and the exchange of best practices (monitored by the Commission). (http://eur-lex.europa.eu/summary/glossary/open_method_coordination.html)

exchange of best practices in these fields and bring together on a voluntary basis experts from the Member States¹⁰.

The current ET 2020 Working groups, functioning within the framework of the Open Method of Coordination in education and training, defined by the Education and Training 2020 – Working group Mandates 2016 – 2018¹¹ are as follows:

- **Working group on schools**
(addressing main concrete issues of **Management of school networks, Quality assurance and Staff development**);
- **Working group on the modernisation of higher education**
(addressing the main concrete issues of **Relevance** (societal and labour market relevance at all levels of higher education); **Innovation** (closer links between higher education, research and innovation); **Inclusion; Teaching; Internationalisation; Sustainable investment and governance**);
- **Working group on Vocational education and training**
(addressing the main concrete issues of **support for educators**, including **Governance and exchange of good practice** among stakeholders, with a focus on partnership arrangements between VET providers and companies; **Quality, relevance and attractiveness in work-based learning** through the professional development of teachers and trainers; and **Implementation of VET reforms** through knowledge sharing, development of policy guidelines etc.):
- **Working group on adult learning**
(addressing the main concrete issues of **Promoting and widening the availability of workplace learning of adults**; and **Increasing the supply and take-up of high quality adult learning provision** to respond to demands for u-and re-skilling of the workforce);
- **Working group on Digital skills and competences**
(addressing the main concrete issues of **Development of digital competences** at all levels of learning; **Fostering transparency, quality assurance, validation and recognition of skills and qualifications**; **Increasing synergies between education, research and innovation activities**; and **Promoting the use of ICT**).

Having in mind the relevance of the ET 2020 and its working groups to policy trends and developments; and at the same time the commitments the ERI SEE member countries have expressed to it as to the European strategic framework for the cooperation, it is advisable to take into consideration the issues identified by the above mentioned working groups when planning for the ERI SEE regional activities. More on this will be elaborated in the section of this Work Programme proposing more concrete ERI SEE activities (Areas of regional cooperation).

South Eastern Europe 2020 Strategy

¹⁰ According to the Education and Training 2020 – Working group Mandates 2016 – 2018, the participation in working groups is open to candidate countries as well.

¹¹ https://ec.europa.eu/education/policy/strategic-framework/expert-groups_en

South Eastern Europe 2020 Strategy (SEE 2020) is the overarching document accepted by Governments in South East Europe (Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Kosovo*, Montenegro, Serbia and The Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia) created with the goal of defining joint efforts expected to result in the socioeconomic growth necessary to improve the prosperity of all its citizens and to facilitate eventual integration with the European Union. The SEE 2020 Strategy provides a framework to assist governments in the region to implement their individual development strategies, including EU accession related goals, by enhancing national efforts through focused regional cooperation on those specific issues that can benefit from a shared approach. The SEE 2020 was developed under the auspices of the Regional Cooperation Council (RCC), national administrations, regional bodies and relevant initiatives, as requested by the region's Ministers of Economy in November 2012.¹² The Strategy itself is centred around 5 key pillars, which are interlinked in their nature (an action in one pillar is likely to have an impact on issues in most of the other pillars), and each of which focuses on specific sectoral dimensions suitable for regional cooperation.

The pillars are:

- Integrated Growth (focusing on the promotion of regional trade and investment linkages and policies that are non-discriminatory, transparent and predictable)
- Smart Growth (focusing on committing to innovation and competition based on value-added rather than labour costs)
- Sustainable Growth (focusing on raising the level of competitiveness in the private sector, developing infrastructure and encouraging greener and more energy-efficient growth)
- Inclusive Growth (focusing on emphasizing development of skills, creation of employment, inclusive participation in the labour market and health and well-being)
- Governance for Growth (focusing on enhancing the capacity of public administration to strengthen the rule of law and reduce corruption, on creating a business-friendly environment and delivering public services necessary for economic development)¹³

Each pillar is divided into dimensions, with each dimension focusing on specific objectives and actions within the given pillar. Dimension coordinators, regional bodies, are nominated as being in charge for the implementation of the objectives and actions.

ERI SEE has been identified as the Dimension Coordinator in the area of human resource development under the Dimension D „Education and Competences“ within the Smart Growth Pillar, which aims at increasing the share of highly skilled people in the region by improving regional knowledge and skills base. It sets specific objectives in two main domains:

- Reduction of early leavers from education
- Training and an increase in tertiary education attainment.

Actions to be taken with the goal of realizing the given objectives are:

¹² SEE 2020, Executive Summary

¹³ SEE 2020, Executive Summary

- Increase equitable access to, and participation in, high quality education at all levels, aligned with measures for a smooth recognition of qualifications supporting mobility in SEE;
- Implement measures to prevent early-school leaving and ‘drop-out’ and improve completion rates at all levels, thus contributing to the inclusiveness and nurturing of lifelong learning;
- Ensure education and training systems better meet economic and labour market needs (and provide learners with labour market relevant skills);
- Introduce entrepreneurship key competence development at all levels of education and training (curriculum, teacher training, and assessment). (for this action the Regional Dimension Coordinator is the South-East Europe Centre for Entrepreneurial Learning (SEECCEL).

These objectives and actions should be taken into consideration when defining the priorities for the ERI SEE activities in the forthcoming period.

Additionally, the SEE 2020 Programming Document 2017 – 2019, to be adopted by the Programming Committee at the beginning of 2017, focuses more specifically on the SEE 2020 Flagship initiatives serving as the implementing mechanisms for the realization of the Strategy objectives in the beneficiary economies. The Flagship initiative which is relevant for the ERI SEE activities is Skills and Mobility, which aims to tackle some of the main constraints identified during the development of SEE 2020 Strategy – the underdeveloped skills base and severely restricted mobility in the region.

In its draft form, the Actions proposed included (which have to be approved by the beneficiary economies and Programming Committee, about which at the point of drafting this Work Programme we have no indications):

- Creating preconditions for automatic recognition in SEE¹⁴
- Removing Obstacles to Mobility of Professionals in SEE¹⁵
- Strengthening regional cooperation in VET systems for employment through work-based learning¹⁶
- Support to enhancing quality of education systems in the region¹⁷

More elaborate information on the above-mentioned Actions and corresponding activities can be found in the sections of this Work Programme named Specification of activities based on the matched joint interests/challenging areas.

¹⁴ Activities within this Action are outlined in a project proposal to be submitted under the Erasmus+ Key Action 2 – Capacity Building in Higher Education, thus funding is not secured

¹⁵ Activities run by RCC and CEFTA with ERI SEE as a partner; funding secured within the RCC budget

¹⁶ Activities within this Action are supposed to be developed within a project proposal under the Erasmus+, Key Action 2, Strategic Partnership; still in its initial phase at the moment of drafting this Work programme

¹⁷ No funding secured, activities yet to be agreed by the Member countries

Countries strategic overviews

Introduction

In the previous section, we listed the main important elements of the overarching European and regional strategic documents.

Additionally, as previously agreed¹⁸, the main direction of ERI SEE priority activities to be enhanced by regional cooperation should focus on the areas of:

- Modernization of VET
- Cooperation between VET and Business sector
- Recognition of higher-education qualifications
- Recognition of professional qualifications
- Quality education (teacher training, quality assurance)
- Inclusive education.

The purpose of the analysis of countries strategic documents was to find common challenges/issues that appear in all or most of the countries, so that the priority areas listed above can be more concretely specified in terms of more concrete actions to be taken in the future work of the ERI SEE, (for those areas in which concrete actions are not defined yet). In this way, we wanted to map the action lines that are relevant for the region as a whole, as well as to substantiate these action lines by the concrete measures from the relevant and valid policy documents.

In the following country chapters, we aim to present a brief overview of the national situations, needs and priorities. As the source of this information several documents were used for each member country – strategy and/or action plans that are available, Economic Reform Programmes (if applicable¹⁹), and Country reviews.

Methodology

In the collection of data per countries the desk research (analysis of national documents available on the web – web pages of relevant Ministries and Agencies) was used, with the focus on the education sectors that were defined as core for ERI SEE activities in previous discussions with the Governing Board: Vocational education and training; Higher education and General education.

This means that, even if some national strategies existed for the sector of, for example, pre-school education, or adult education, they were not used within this document.

¹⁸ Governing Board meeting, 21st September 2016

¹⁹ Applicable for: Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Macedonia, Montenegro, Serbia

Given the number of countries to be analysed (7) and number of education sectors referring to (3), it was impossible to refer to all the priorities of education and training systems in the region. Instead, we focused on specific goals or measures identified by countries within those priority areas already mutually defined as relevant for the ERI SEE work, and only on those we estimated had the same level of importance for the regional cooperation. For example, one of the priorities for higher education in Serbia was the organization of studies in the field of arts; introduction of short programmes; introduction of possibility to apply modules at master studies... These were deemed as too specific for regional cooperation and therefore not included in the country overview. Similarly, for Croatia some goals included: ensure quality staffing of HE institutions; enhance the students' standard; ensure adequate spatial and IT resources of HE institution. All of these were estimated as too dependent on financial resources of the country and too specific for mentioning it in the country overview identifying themes for regional cooperation. Additional example is Montenegro, which plans a reform of studying model; adjustment of enrolment policy at the university level; or improving research work and increasing the level of participation in EU (research) projects; or establishing Agency for Mobility and EU programmes and strengthening National Office for promoting mobility and international cooperation of HEIs. Again, these measures are seen as something that is connected to strictly national conditions and investments and therefore not referred to in this document.

Additionally, since the strategies and action plans compared, analysed and desk-researched vary in their structure, concept, level of detail, and other aspects, in the process of analysis we tried to achieve the level of harmonization of details and concepts.

For example, the Montenegrin strategy for general education relies on very specific goals and measures; (one of the priorities is Monitoring, evaluating and assessing learning achievements of students, and one of this priority's goal is to arrange that the general success of the student is determined by the grades from certain subjects in proportion to the number of classes of that subject in a week, with even more specific measures). Therefore, this document did not go into the level of goals and measures in this particular case. On the other hand, in the Montenegrin Strategy for vocational education and training, the priority measures were less specific and deemed relevant for the regional cooperation planning (for example, the priority area Quality and efficient labour market relevant VET included a goal of ensuring labour market relevance of VET through measures implementing quality assurance system in line with EQAVET, enhancing work-based learning; or enhancing professional development of VET teachers.) For that reason, in this specific example analysis was based on priorities, goals and measures as well.

The list of more specific national realities (strategy, action plan, priority areas and priority actions) are presented in country chapters that follow.

National strategic documents per countries

ALBANIA

In Albania, there are two separate strategies: one for education (Strategy on development of pre-university education 2014-2020²⁰ of the Ministry of Education and Sport, and one for training (The Strategy for employment and skills 2014-2020) elaborated by the Ministry of Social Welfare and Youth²¹.

However, both documents are in Albanian, and no translation has been provided so far; therefore, the information from the Progress report 2016 and Economic Reform Programme 2016 – 2018 (ERP) are referred to in this document.

The Progress Report 2016 for Albania welcomes the adoption of pre-university education strategy and implementation of the higher education reform; and stresses the further efforts needed to develop liaison with employers, continuous curriculum development and integrated work-based learning schemes. As the recommendation for the coming year, Albania should ensure that the pre-university education strategy and the law on higher education are implemented effectively, and that the teacher trainings are improved; the law on VET, with implementing legislation and quality assurance mechanism is to be adopted; links between skills and labour demand should be enhanced (private sector needs to be involved in designing and implementing labour market and VET policies, since this remains a critical need); and databases and online resources should be made available for VET providers.

The priorities, as stated in the ERP, and relevant for the regional priority areas already identified within this Workprogramme²², include:

- Establishment of an independent accreditation system for all public and private universities;
- Ensuring the quality of higher education;
- Continuing with the restructuring of the vocational education and training system with a view to improving the relevance of the training for the needs of the labour market;
- Strengthening VET institutions needs to be fully matched with increasing quality and relevance of educational outcomes for the labour market;
- Adoption and implementation of new curricula (in pre-tertiary education) based on competences according to EU standards and improve the quality of education;
- Improve the professional quality of teachers at all levels through the training based on the new curricula;
- Ensuring better access to education (broader enrolment rate of children from marginalised groups and repatriating migrants at the pre-university level).

²⁰ <http://www.arsimi.gov.al/al/arsimi/shkolla/strategjia-e-zhvillimit-te-arsimit-parauniversitar-2014-2020>

²¹ <http://www.sociale.gov.al/al/dokumente/strategji/aftesi-me-te-larta-dhe-pune-me-te-mire-per-te-gjithe-femrat-dhe-meshkujt&page=1>

²² See Country Strategic Overview - Introduction

The Commission's Overview and Country Assessments²³, from July 2016, lists the main challenges in the area of education (particularly related to the labour market and employability) recognized, and states the following:

- positive achievements include the adoption of the laws on higher education and the power sector and the establishment of the National Business Centre to streamline business registration and licencing. Some steps have also been taken to improve the vocational education and training (VET) and higher education systems.
- An agreement was signed in 2015 between the Ministry of Education and Sport and the British Quality Assurance Agency for the independent accreditation of higher education institutions and to assist in capacity building of the national accreditation agency, in order to join the European Network of Quality Assurance.
- Measures to improve vocational education and training (VET) have been embedded in a National Employment and Skills Strategy, adopted in 2014, but much remains to be done to adapt training offers to labour market needs and to improve the quality and effectiveness of VET provision.
- Albania plans to address skills-mismatches and to improve the VET system. The Albanian Qualifications Framework is planned to be implemented by 2018 and a new law on crafts is to introduce a dual education system based on the German model. Establishing an apprenticeship system and tracking VET graduates are steps in the right direction. Nevertheless, implementation capacities may pose risks to effective implementation of the measures.²⁴

The information from these documents are relevant for planning regional cooperation within the framework of ERI SEE and are taken into account in the following section, dealing with mapping of joint priorities and challenges.

BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINA

The Progress Report for Bosnia and Herzegovina 2016²⁵ describes the current state of development as there is progress in the coordination between the country's education ministries; a state-level policy document setting priorities for developing higher education in Bosnia and Herzegovina for 2016-2026 was adopted in March and the *Republika Srpska* entity adopted its education development strategy for 2016-2021 in April, setting priorities for further education reform as well as next steps for teacher training and professional development; two cantons adopted laws on adult education; the State Agency for Pre-school, Primary and Secondary Education adopted the common core curricula for cross-curricular areas, and the

²³

http://www.google.hr/url?sa=t&rct=j&q=&esrc=s&source=web&cd=1&cad=rja&uact=8&ved=0ahUKEwiY2eOTgJ7RAhUVM8AKHc77CugQFggZMAA&url=http%3A%2F%2Fec.europa.eu%2Feconomy_finance%2Fpublications%2Feeip%2Fpdf%2Fip028_en.pdf&usg=AFQjCNGG61paGdVpHp3LYzymE-erxoOPzg&sig2=XE1YcZiD630fUCxgJrh20g

²⁴ From the Commission's Overview and Country Assessments

²⁵ Commission Staff Working Document – Bosnia and Herzegovina 2016 Report, Brussels, 9.11.2016,

http://ec.europa.eu/neighbourhood-enlargement/countries/detailed-country-information/bosnia-herzegovina_en

national pre-school enrolment rate for children aged 3-6 rose by 8.16 % compared to the previous school year.

Implementation of the action plan for implementing the 'baseline qualifications framework' has not started yet due to the lack of the state-level intersectoral commission responsible for implementing the action plan. An effective coordination mechanism has not been established in the Federation and the two existing coordination bodies are still acting in parallel.

Coordination between bodies responsible for quality assurance should be strengthened at the level of pre-school, primary and secondary education. In higher education, coordination and cooperation between the state-level Agency for Development of Higher Education and Quality Assurance and the *Republika Srpska* Agency for Accreditation should be improved. Further efforts should be made to establish national education statistics. Cooperation between education institutions and the business sector still needs to be improved. The relevance of education to the labour market remains weak.

The actions to be taken in particular, relevant for the areas of education and training, are:

- strengthen the capacity of state-level education agencies to develop EU standards and increase the level of quality assurance in education;
- building teaching capacities and creating links with enterprises in order to support vocational skills development as well as of training primary and secondary teachers in order for them to develop basic and transversal skills with students
- establish an effective coordination mechanism in the Federation entity to improve cooperation between bodies responsible for quality assurance across the country.

These findings are reflected in the Economic Reform Programme for 2016 – 2018²⁶ (ERP), which confirm the mismatch of education system and the labour market. The ERP proposes a reform consisting of the following measures: establishing a fund for mobility of students and teachers (academic mobility) with clearly listed milestones, and career orientation development also with the defined milestones.

The national strategic documents include:

- Action Plan for the Development and Implementation of the Qualifications Framework in Bosnia and Herzegovina for the period 2014 – 2020²⁷;
- Priorities for 2016 – 2026 Higher Education Development in BiH²⁸

²⁶ http://www.google.rs/url?sa=t&rct=j&q=&esrc=s&source=web&cd=1&ved=0ahUKEwi-mdvygZ7RAhVFicAKHftLAlgQFggeMAA&url=http%3A%2F%2Fwww.dep.gov.ba%2Fnaslovna%2F%3Fid%3D1723&authuser=1&usg=AFQjCNEU5myGo9iCaNiT4RDVvy4iQC_IWPQ&sig2=WU7DmGO94OJQYzVDVD2SOg&bvm=bv.142059868,d.ZGg

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http://www.google.rs/url?sa=t&rct=j&q=&esrc=s&source=web&cd=2&ved=0ahUKEwjamdLsgp7RAhWMAMAKHQ_W_AdSQFggfMAE&url=http%3A%2F%2Fwww.mcp.gov.ba%2Forg_jedinice%2Fsektor_obrazovanje%2Fdokumenti%2Fstrateski_doc%2F%3Fid%3D5299&authuser=1&usg=AFQjCNHMSOrxgwlhFGm7LSnkIRRIeA2KmA&sig2=l-SJxMDZQnuOO_o3RWpDTQ&bvm=bv.142059868,d.ZGg

²⁸ <http://www.sluzbenilist.ba/page/akt/e8wfEohz4nh78h77G7ohz4nh78h77yE=>

- Strategic Platform for the Development of Adult Education in the Context of the Lifelong Learning in Bosnia and Herzegovina for the Period 2014 – 2020 (not taken into consideration in this document since adult education was not listed as one of the priorities in the coming period).

In the absence of currently valid all-encompassing (covering all sectors of education) strategic framework, this Work Programme also collected relevant information from the most recent document covering the whole vertical of education - Strategic directions for education development 2008 – 2015²⁹. Even though this document is no longer formally valid, the reason that, together with all the relevant above mentioned document, this one was consulted, is the assumptions that the main directions of this strategic document are based on the identified challenges which have not changed dramatically in the meantime and therefore the educational development measures will not introduce a radical turn in the course of action defined for the previous period. In addition, the sectoral documents listed above - Action Plan for the Development and Implementation of the Qualifications Framework in Bosnia and Herzegovina for the period 2014 – 2020 and Priorities for 2016 – 2026 Higher Education Development in BiH are referred to, and for higher education, additionally the Development strategy of the Agency for the development of higher education and quality assurance 2014 – 2018 was consulted.

Having studied all the listed document, the list of priorities and measures for the development of education and training in Bosnia and Herzegovina include:

- Increase of the education level among the population, and efficiency of education (Increase the level of participation in education among the general population, and competences of the labour force; Increase the efficiency of the education and training system; Preventing social exclusion among the children and youth; Expanding opportunities for adult education and training, and ensuring quality and re-vitalization of research in education.
- Modernization and development of education and training at all levels (increase of the quality of teaching and learning, goals and outcomes-oriented programmes; establishment of the system of internal evaluation and external evaluation; establishment of the standards of achievements; increase of the IT education and foreign language learning)
- Equal access and fairness in education (enhancement of the position of minorities, people with fewer opportunities)
- Developing links between education and the world of work (development of real and virtual companies in VET schools; development of career guidance centres; introducing entrepreneurial learning; development of regional and inter-disciplinary networks ensuring cooperation between the education sector and world of work; creation of the social and economic partnerships at state, local and sectoral level)
- Encouraging continuous professional development of teachers, principals and other employees of education institutions
- Quality assurance and assistance to the education development at all levels (creation of standards in grading of students; of standards of achievements; development of a joint basis in the framework education plans and programmes; participation in international development projects and studies; establishing criteria and standards of the accreditation of higher education

²⁹ <http://www.herdata.org/documents/bosnia-and-herzegovina/37>

- institutions; establishment of the state register of the accredited institutions; establishing the quality assurance system)
- Statistics and indicators in education
 - International cooperation and EU integration

More specifically, the Priorities for 2016 – 2026 Higher Education Development in BiH and the Development strategy of the Agency for the development of higher education and quality assurance 2014 – 2018³⁰ (Strategija razvoja Agencije za razvoj visokog obrazovanja i osiguranje kvalitete 2014 – 2018), include:

- Good governance and management (defining a policy framework; analysis of the existing legislation and its impact in the implementation of strategies, policies, laws; quality assurance improvement and consistent implementation of QA principles and standards)
- Resources (introduction of the HE funding systems based on the objectives-oriented success measurement; other national measures for the increase of the share of the public budget for HE)
- Connection between labour market and higher education (improve legislation and practice in the field of recognition of higher education qualifications for employment purposes; modernise and increase the number of existing study programmes for qualification that are in demand in the labour market; develop consultations on careers; limit the number of students in programmes where there is overproduction of staff; harmonise new professions to make them usable on the labour market; establish consultative consortia at all HEIs with employers, employment bureaus, chambers of commerce etc.)
- Higher education in BiH, qualifications, knowledge, skills and competences are in line with the society and labour market needs (analysis and implementation of all Bologna principles; analysis of study programmes and acquired qualifications; establishing and strengthening cooperation with key partners on the labour market)
- The development of quality assurance systems and quality culture in higher education (strengthening the internal quality assurance system; defining roles for the external evaluation system; up-date of the data-basis; participation in the accreditation of the higher education institutions and programmes)

Additionally, understanding the significance of the European Qualifications Framework for its further socio-economic reform, and its education reform in particular, Bosnia and Herzegovina is undertaking activities aimed at developing its Qualifications Framework. The Council of Ministers of Bosnia and Herzegovina has adopted a series of decisions, which are necessary for the development of the Qualifications Framework in Bosnia and Herzegovina. This is a way to tackle the problem of skills mismatch between education and labour market and thus contribute to the economic and social development of BiH.

The implementation of the Qualifications Framework in Bosnia and Herzegovina supports the development of education based on learning outcomes and a system of internal and external quality assurance at all levels of education, mechanisms for the evaluation and recognition of non-formal and

³⁰ <http://hea.gov.ba/Aktivnosti/Strategije/Archive.aspx?pageIndex=1>

informal learning, increased access to education, social inclusion of all participants and coherence of the education system.

However, since the Progress Report adoption, some additional documents has been adopted at the state level such as:

Decision on criteria for higher education accreditation in Bosnia and Herzegovina³¹ and

Recommendation on recognition of non-formal education and informal learning³².

CROATIA

The Commission Staff Working Document – Country Report Croatia 2016³³ states that Croatia needs to improve the accessibility to and the quality of the education system. The PISA survey indicates that there are weaknesses in the education system’s ability to deliver basic skills; however, ambitious steps Croatia is taking to improve the quality of education are recognized (national curriculum is introduced, tackling basic skills deficits; including the upskilling of teachers; there are measures to increase the level of digitalisation). Another challenge is the labour market relevance of education (currently, there is a shortage of candidates with the right level of qualifications or relevant work experience; the entrance quotas for study programmes set by public institutions are not in line with demand; poor employment outcomes of recent graduates due to the outdated curricula and limited opportunities for high quality work-based learning).

With the purpose to modernise outdated curricula, and increase work-based learning, Croatia has adopted the Strategy for the development of VET; and the Croatian qualifications framework of May 2014 aims at aligning higher education and secondary VET outcomes with labour market needs so as to reduce skills mismatches, in its early stage of implementation.

These findings are addressed by the National Reform Programme 2016³⁴. To tackle one of the main problems of the Croatian education system, which is the lack of communication with the labour market, Croatia plans to

- Continue with the implementation of Curricular reform;
- Harmonize the educational programmes with labour market needs (through the implementation of the Croatian Qualifications Framework and implementation of the Vocational Education and Training Development Program)

³¹ „Official Gazette of Bosnia and Herzegovinas No 96/16“

³² „Official Gazette of Bosnia and Herzegovinas No 94/16“

³³ http://ec.europa.eu/europe2020/making-it-happen/country-specific-recommendations/index_en.htm

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http://www.google.hr/url?sa=t&rct=j&q=&esrc=s&source=web&cd=1&ved=0ahUKEWjn5O2xhZ7RAhXIA8AKHRpZBoIQFggZMAA&url=http%3A%2F%2Fec.europa.eu%2Feurope2020%2Fpdf%2Fcsr2016%2Fnrp2016_croatia_en.pdf&usq=AFQjCNH6VOciM-PMOXo50e2_ifZP99qojg&sig2=w7VT_WaG8qplbpm60e2kkQ&bvm=bv.142059868,d.bGg

- Implement programmes of adult education, lifelong learning and retraining schemes for workers.

Regarding the main Strategic documents, the Government of the Republic of Croatia in 2014 adopted the Strategy for the period from 2015 – 2025 (New Colours of Knowledge)³⁵; suggesting measures aligned with the EU strategies and goals.

The priorities and measures in general education (primary and secondary) sector include:

- Establish the system of quality assurance (increase the quality of management; enhancing the system of self-evaluation and external assessment; external assessment of the learning outcomes)
- Implement the comprehensive Curricular reform (develop the national curricula; synchronize various education policy documents; establish and implement the complete evaluation and reporting system of the level of acquisition of learning outcomes).
- Increase the quality of work and social status of teachers (improve the system of initial teacher trainings; enhance the system of continuous professional development; establish the system of the complete quality assurance system of initial and continuous professional development)
- Create the support system for pupils (establish standardized mechanisms of early identification of development needs; early school-leaving, pedagogical measures; support to minorities)

For Vocational education and training, there is a separate strategy: *VET System Development program 2016-2020*³⁶, defining priorities and measures:

- improving the relevance of vocational education and training with regard to the labour market (creation of the National curriculum for VET; development of sectoral curricula for the acquisition of professional qualifications)
- improving the quality of vocational education and training (establishment of a unique QA system of VET; modernization of the self-assessment model and connection with the external evaluation system; monitoring the quality and efficiency of VET and enhancing the system established on the measurable indicators; building capacities of VET institutions for the implementation of the unique QA system)
- promoting vocational education and training excellence, attractiveness and inclusion (promoting skills of VET students; modernization and promotion of VET; enhancing professional guidance; enhancing inclusion among the categories prone to dropping-out; supporting innovation and projects aiming at capacity building and development of modern VET system in partnership with companies and society)
- internationalization of vocational education and training and encouraging international mobility of students and teachers (developing opportunities for greater mobility of teachers and students; supporting international dimension of VET)

³⁵ <http://www.novebojeznanja.hr/>

³⁶

http://www.google.hr/url?sa=t&rct=j&q=&esrc=s&source=web&cd=1&ved=0ahUKEwj4zKbEiJ7RAhULKcAKHTRxD3cQFggcMAA&url=http%3A%2F%2Fwww.asoo.hr%2FUserDocsImages%2FVET_Programme_EN.pdf&usg=AFQjCNFPTPMPdGBPk3wtW-Qt-AS2qSKmWw&sig2=yV4Yb_R2GTtJxEmcSnxX0A&bvm=bv.142059868,d.bGg

- increasing continuous professional development (building capacities of teachers of VET subjects; building capacities of mentors in companies)

For higher education priorities and measures include:

- Internationalization of HE (increase incoming and outgoing mobility of students and staff; increase the programmes in foreign languages; encourage development of joint studies with eminent HE institutions; increase the number of foreign academic staff)
- Ensure the importance of the quality culture and principles of responsibility (encourage the autonomy of HE institutions in their development of quality culture, while taking responsibility for QA matters and strategic goals of the institution; develop complete programme-based financing taking into account national priorities and institutional goals and QA; connect IT systems in HE; rationalize assessment procedures)
- Enhance the study programmes by the consistent application of the Bologna principles and re-define competences acquired in the process (adjust the content of study programmes to clearly defined learning outcomes).

MACEDONIA

The Commission Staff Working Document for the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia 2016 Report³⁷ states that progress was made, in particular on a strategic framework. Children from non-majority communities and children with special needs continue to face barriers to accessing quality education. In the coming year, the country should in particular:

- increase support for teacher training, the professional development of teachers and an effective assessment process;
- improve access to quality education for all, in particular children with disabilities and children from Roma communities;
- on the basis of the evaluation of previous reforms conducted in the education sector, develop and implement the new strategic framework for education, ensuring that all reform processes have fully consulted a wide range of stakeholders.

The National Qualification Framework (NQF) was adopted, National Board for the Macedonian Qualification Framework was established, and activities continued with the referencing to the European Qualification Framework; new training programmes are being verified; there are newly adopted occupational standards; preliminary study and tools for assessing the future needs for skills on the labour

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http://www.google.rs/url?sa=t&rct=j&q=&esrc=s&source=web&cd=1&ved=0ahUKEwi55szsiJ7RAhXHdIAKHawJCnoQFggeMAA&url=http%3A%2F%2Fec.europa.eu%2Fneighbourhood-enlargement%2Fsites%2Fnear%2Ffiles%2Fpdf%2Fkey_documents%2F2016%2F20161109_report_the_former_yugoslav_republic_of_macedonia.pdf&authuser=1&usq=AFQjCNG1f1tVTk1ghpVOICa-AkgT7_XRzg&sig2=py3uzt9a_c-vYySHzRPYXg&bvm=bv.142059868,d.ZWM

market and new teaching programmes for innovation and entrepreneurship for secondary schools are prepared.

Republic of Macedonia Economic Reform Programme for 2016³⁸ states that the educational system needs to be improved, in the way to generate know-how and skills according to the needs of employers. The quality of education (including the quality of higher education, including its responsiveness to labour market demands), the quality of curricula needs to be improved, and additional training of the teaching staff needs to be introduced. Transition from education to the labour market is difficult for young people. The reform process in education is continuing and is aiming at finalising the modernisation of 2- and 3-year secondary vocational education (with the need for modernisation of 4-year qualification in vocational education and higher education); as well as the improvement of the system of adult education. In addition, education and training system needs to ensure equal access for all children to all educational levels. Therefore, the focus in the next period will be on children from vulnerable groups to complete primary and secondary education.

The Commission's Overview and Country Assessments, from July 2016³⁹, lists the main challenges in the area of education (particularly related to the labour market and employability), and states the following:

- Skills mismatches are one of the main concerns in the areas of employment and education.
- The level of basic and transversal/soft skills of the labour force is insufficient, as is the quality of education. This is due to the low efficiency of education spending, limited opportunities for permanent in-service teachers training, oversized classes and a shift system operating in the country. The education system is not equipping students and graduates with skills needed in the modern labour market.
- Moreover, there is a need for better qualified and trained teachers, in particular given the recent introduction of the Cambridge Curriculum.

Main document in the educational process is the comprehensive Educational strategy 2016-2020, including action plan, financial resources and a clear timeframe⁴⁰. As specified by the document, "In the Strategy, the goals and objectives are established based on the most important challenges of the education system which are identified in the result of thorough analysis of the situation in each sub-sector. They are also in line with the objectives defined by the key documents related to the accession process both signed between the EU and the Republic of Macedonia and adopted by the Government".

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http://www.google.rs/url?sa=t&rct=j&q=&esrc=s&source=web&cd=3&ved=0ahUKEWj1_cGliZ7RAhXXdFAKHUndD9QQFggjMAI&url=http%3A%2F%2Fwww.finance.gov.mk%2Ffiles%2FERP_2016_en.pdf&authuser=1&usg=AFQjCNHzi_m95zdex92lBvyOJvGGsCB4NFQ&sig2=DIYoSmSJOamzbJqJZGFPPQ&bvm=bv.142059868,d.ZWM

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http://www.google.hr/url?sa=t&rct=j&q=&esrc=s&source=web&cd=1&cad=rja&uact=8&ved=0ahUKEwiY2eOTgJ7RAhUVM8AKHc77CugQFggZMAA&url=http%3A%2F%2Fec.europa.eu%2Feconomy_finance%2Fpublications%2Ffeeip%2Fpdf%2Fip028_en.pdf&usg=AFQjCNGG61paGdVpHp3LYzymE-erxoOPzg&sig2=XE1YcZiD630fUCxgJrh20g

⁴⁰ Even though the Comprehensive Education Strategy for 2016 – 2020 and Action plan were, at the time of drafting of this Work Programme, in its draft version and not officially adopted, in consultations with the national representatives of Macedonia it was agreed to include this document as the relevant source of information.

Comprehensive Educational Strategy 2016 – 2020 of and the Action Plan of the Republic of Macedonia 2016 – 2020 insist on the following:

Priorities in the primary education:

- **Improve the content of primary education** (clearly defined and relevant learning outcomes, development of children’s abilities to learn, to solve problems, to respect diversity and multiculturalism and acquire democratic values and skills; curricula aligned with the learning outcomes defined by the National Standard; quality textbooks)
- **Increase enrolment of pupils, improve inclusiveness and interethnic integration of primary education** (schools as inclusive environments; efficiency of funding of inclusion and learning process)
- **Improve the Learning Environment and Quality of Primary Education Provision** (improved learning environment allowing better focus on every pupil; ensured conditions for teachers’ self-development; schools as safe learning environments; pupils able to make informed choices of education pathways; feedback from all assessments of pupils’ achievement allow to take evidence-based policy decision; empirical data on mathematical and science literacy provided and compared to international prospects)
- **Improve Capacities of Human Resources in the Primary Schools** (improved quality of future teachers; novice teachers acquired the competences required by the professional and national standards and receive support in daily work; teachers licenced and competence; motivated to demonstrate better job performance; professional competences of the teachers are continuously improved; pupils and teachers receive continuous support from expert services; identified options and opportunities for in-service and pre-service training of teachers)
- **Increase Effectiveness of Primary Education Organisation and Management** (minimum requirements of professional competences of principals; improved impact and sustainability of innovations)

Priorities in secondary education:

- **Improve the Content of Secondary Education** (clearly defined and relevant learning outcomes, quality up-to-date textbooks, acceptance of multiculturalism, respect for diversity and democratic values by children, curricula aligned with the learning outcomes defined by the National Standard; Feedback from the State-Matura exams allows to take evidence-based decisions).
- **Increase Enrolment and Retention of Pupils and Improve Inclusiveness and Interethnic Integration in Secondary Education** (ensured physical conditions for enrolment of pupils with physical disabilities, ensured inclusive education, enhanced conditions for continuing and completing secondary general conditions; improved interaction between pupils from different languages of instructions).
- **Improve Capacities of Human Resources in the Secondary Schools** (improving professional competences of teachers, ensuring minimum requirements of professional competences among

principals; support services catering for the children’s quality learning and development process; novice teachers acquiring the required competences and receiving support in daily work).

- **Improve the Learning Environment and Quality of Education Services Provision** (improved learning environment, feedback from national assessments used for evidence-based policy decisions; use of valid empirical data on capacities of pupils to enter life and continue education, or enter the labour market)

Priorities in Vocational Education and Training:

- **Harmonise Vocational Education and Training with the Labour Market Needs** (Content of VET adapted to the changing skill needs in the Labour Market; learning focused on competences acquisition and achieving learning outcomes; decision-making process and the VET system development supported by the stakeholders; communication between the VET system and demand on the qualifications and skill needs; reforms in post-secondary VET in accordance with the Macedonian QF.)
- **Improve Learning Environment and Quality of Vocational Education and Training** (Efficiency and effectiveness of the VET system improved, Teaching and learning process supported, Competences of VET graduates in line with the employers’ requirements, VET students acquiring practical skills relevant to the real work requirements, Valid empirical data provided on the capacities of 15-years old pupils, Introduction and dissemination of VET innovations)
- **Increase Enrolment in Vocational Education and Training** (VET graduates able to make informed choices of education or career pathways; VET system enrolling higher number of students with better academic progression; Attractiveness and value of skilled work and of VET in general improved; Conditions for juveniles to participate in vocational education and training provided)
- **Improve Capacities of Human Resources** (Professional competences of teachers continuously improved, including in close cooperation with the business sector; Teachers motivated to demonstrate better performance; Principals of all VET schools satisfy the minimum requirements of professional competences, Education and training is accompanied with complete scope of support services necessary for students’ quality learning process)

Priorities in higher education:

- **Ensure Quality and Effectiveness of Higher Education in accordance with European good practices** (ensuring pre-conditions for external quality evaluation, quality assurance, effective functioning, improved efficiency and effectiveness, students acquiring practical skills; professional competences of staff continuously developed, graduates receiving information about career pathways)
- **Improve the Content of Higher Education** (established minimum requirements towards the content and outcomes; evidence-based policy decision based on information on graduates’ further educational and/or employment pathways; Academic development and mobility of Universities’ teaching staff improved; Higher Education system continuously informed about the

up-to-date demand on qualifications and skill needs to be used for Higher Education policy development)

- **Improve Availability and Enrolment System of Higher Education** (distance learning, conditions for enrolment of students with special educational needs, availability of higher education for vulnerable groups, decent accommodation conditions)

MONTENEGRO

The Commission Staff Working Document – Montenegro 2016 Report⁴¹, Brussels, 9.11.2016, regarding the area of education and Montenegro's progress in it, praises the good level of preparation of the Chapter 26 Education and Culture, and lists the recommendations for the next year:

- step up efforts on curricular reform in primary and secondary education to teach basic and transversal;
- continue with the revision of curricula based on learning outcomes
- revise enrolment policies for vocational and higher education

The Report reminds that the 2016 – 2020 strategy for early and pre-school education was adopted (even though it is not referred to in this document since this education sector is not listed as an ERI SEE priority sector at this point of time) with the challenge of increasing pre-school participation, especially among the groups facing exclusion. Additionally, curricula for secondary schools were revised, based on learning outcomes, so the challenge to focus on now is the increase the capacities of teachers to implement the new curricula, and to revise teacher training programmes. Strategy and Action Plan for the development of higher education 2016 – 2020 is adopted, which plans for the development of a sustainable model of financing, and the harmonisation of education output with labour market needs. There are also modernised programmes for vocational education and training, with the priority areas for teacher trainings defined for 2016/2017.

Similarly, the Economic Reform Programme for Montenegro 2016⁴² (ERP) defines, in the area of education and training, the following recommendations:

- Actively continue education reform with a view to better aligning education and skills with labour market needs (since currently there is a mismatch between supply and demand of labour, in the sense that the supply of educational and occupational profile does not match the demand of employers), and strengthen cooperation between education and business; which includes

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http://www.google.rs/url?sa=t&rct=j&q=&esrc=s&source=web&cd=2&ved=0ahUKEwivhsujjZ7RAhXHAMAKHdM4CZsQFggfMAE&url=http%3A%2F%2Fec.europa.eu%2Fneighbourhood-enlargement%2Fsites%2Fnear%2Ffiles%2Fpdf%2Fkey_documents%2F2015%2F20151110_report_montenegro.pdf&authuser=1&usq=AFQjCNGF5JyTCuFYp_hrv0-Ux564rpcZRQ&sig2=66hH5xMotTaVahYM1ZyF8g&bvm=bv.142059868,d.bGg

⁴² <http://www.gov.me/en/News/157668/Montenegro-Economic-Reform-Programme-2016-2018.html>

development of qualifications based on learning outcomes in accordance with the needs of the labour market (at secondary and higher education level); planning admission policy based on the data regarding the demand in the labour market; providing equal opportunities to achieve a qualification in order to ensure employability and social inclusion; starting the Program of professional training of university graduates.

- Increase the quality of education and strengthen the quality assurance mechanisms through internal and external evaluation of institutions

The Commission's Overview and Country Assessments, from July 2016⁴³, lists the main challenges in the area of education (particularly related to the labour market and employability) recognized, and state the following:

- The unemployment rate remains high, hindered by poor labour mobility, labour market rigidities and widespread skills mismatches.
- There was some formal progress in developing employment strategies and aligning education and skills with labour market needs. A comprehensive Employment and Social Reform Programme 2015- 2020 and Employment Strategy 2016-2020 were adopted, but implementation has not yet started.
- Educational programmes are being reviewed and a programme for professional training of university graduates is being rolled out.
- There is a need to improve vocational education and training outcomes in line with labour market needs. By 2017, Montenegro plans to carry out activities to develop new or modify existing qualifications and programmes - based on learning outcomes - accompanied by training for teachers. Educational programmes are being reviewed and Sectoral committees and the Qualifications Council provide a link with employers over the development of qualifications.
- Focus needs to be given to introducing work-based learning, promoting entrepreneurship and career guidance.
- A programme for professional training of university graduates is in place and a similar programme is planned for vocational training. A feasibility study was conducted into establishing a tracking system for university graduates.

Furthermore, weak learning outcomes in basic education and soft skills are a further element of concern, in particular as these not only affect performance on higher educational levels, but also impact future employment and social situation of the population.

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The main strategic document, the Strategy for the development of general secondary education in Montenegro (2015 – 2020)⁴⁴, and the Action plan for implementation of the Strategy, reflect the findings of the Progress Report and Recommendations listed within the ERP.

For general education, priority areas and goals include:

- Enhance the structure of the education programme and class planning and relationship between the obligatory and optional part of the programme (continuous improvement of educational programmes, with the purpose of increasing their quality)
- Increasing the quality of classes, teaching, and educational work of institutions (increased realization of the initial trainings of teachers; establish standards of competences for the profession of teacher, expert associates and managers; establish a sustainable system of continuous professional development; enhanced quality of teaching and learning as the result of the external and internal evaluation; supporting special-needs students)
- Monitoring, evaluating and assessing of learning achievements of students (develop the whole system of monitoring, evaluation and assessing of learning outcomes)
- Vertical and horizontal mobility of students throughout the system (enhancing international cooperation and mobility possibilities; harmonize the state matura exam with the enrolment system to certain faculties).

For vocational education and training, the Strategy of the development of vocational education and training in Montenegro (2015 – 2020)⁴⁵; and the accompanying Action plan include the following priority areas, goals and measures:

- Establishing a quality and efficient labour market relevant VET, with goals of building a flexible VET system, based on the learning outcomes and in line with the needs of individuals and society; (and measures including analysis and improvement of existing tools for labour market research; development of qualifications in line with the National qualifications framework; development of flexible and modernized educational programmes of wide profiles and based on the learning outcomes;) and goal of ensuring labour market relevance of VET through measures including quality assurance system in line with EQAVET; evidence based decision making; work-based learning; enhancing professional development of VET teachers; enhancing competences of management structures)

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http://www.google.rs/url?sa=t&rct=j&q=&esrc=s&source=web&cd=3&ved=0ahUKEwjiXqef0jp7RAhUmC8AKHZpbCQQQFggpMAI&url=http%3A%2F%2Fwww.mps.gov.me%2FResourceManager%2FFileDownload.aspx%3Frid%3D207298%26rType%3D2%26file%3DStrategija%2520razvoja%2520strucnog%2520obrazovanja%2520u%2520Crnoj%2520Gori%2520&authuser=1&usg=AFQjCNGAzHDg1137deMJZ9SuQpynEK_X1g&sig2=jrUCnKKilXqvpO_8oS3VYw&bvm=bv.142059868,d.bGg

- Ensuring equal opportunities for qualifications acquisition in VET with the purpose of employment and social inclusion (make initial and continuous education available to various target groups with measures including adjusting educational programmes to the advanced pupils and special-needs pupils; enabling access to training and qualifications for various target groups).

In the field of higher education, the Strategy for the development of Higher Education⁴⁶ outlines the following objectives and measures:

- Improving the quality of higher education and creating competitive human resources (strengthening quality assurance system; improving the quality of teaching process and the quality of teaching staff; improving the quality of study programmes by introducing adequate relationship between general and professional competences; self-evaluation procedure; procedure of licensing of institutions; development of interdisciplinary studies; further improvement of higher education quality through consistent application of Bologna Declaration principle, trends and recommendations)
- Harmonizing education with labour market needs (implementing practical teaching through curricula with a view to improving learning outcomes; learning a foreign language)
- Internationalization of higher education (increasing outgoing mobility of students and academic staff; increasing incoming mobility of students; promotion of Montenegrin institutions in the EHEA).

MOLDOVA

The Annual Action Programme 2015⁴⁷ was aiming at increasing the capacities of the Government of Moldova to implement EU-Moldova Association Agenda in, among others, the priority area of education. The reform of the Education sector remains high in the governmental agenda. Moldova is continuing its educational reform, and has approved a new Educational Code and its 2014-2020 education development strategy ('Education 2020').

Modernisation of the higher education sector is supported through the Erasmus+ programme. Quality assurance has already been addressed through Tempus projects and support in this field should build on

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[http://www.google.rs/url?sa=t&rct=j&q=&esrc=s&source=web&cd=4&ved=0ahUKEwjznsSpjp7RAhUBK8AKHafXC_MQFggsMAM&url=http%3A%2F%2Fwww.neomontenegro.ac.me%2Fuploads%2Ffile%2FStategy%2520for%2520the%2520Development%2520of%2520Higher%2520Education%2520in%2520Montenegro%2520\(2016-2020\).pdf&authuser=1&usg=AFQjCNGmF8hMhLUwcnxZqWQclQZs_ilm5w&sig2=uZ2MQ6exjiSfz4ZjtoB5pQ&bvm=bv.142059868,d.bGg](http://www.google.rs/url?sa=t&rct=j&q=&esrc=s&source=web&cd=4&ved=0ahUKEwjznsSpjp7RAhUBK8AKHafXC_MQFggsMAM&url=http%3A%2F%2Fwww.neomontenegro.ac.me%2Fuploads%2Ffile%2FStategy%2520for%2520the%2520Development%2520of%2520Higher%2520Education%2520in%2520Montenegro%2520(2016-2020).pdf&authuser=1&usg=AFQjCNGmF8hMhLUwcnxZqWQclQZs_ilm5w&sig2=uZ2MQ6exjiSfz4ZjtoB5pQ&bvm=bv.142059868,d.bGg)

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<http://www.google.rs/url?sa=t&rct=j&q=&esrc=s&source=web&cd=2&ved=0ahUKEwiH4OGd0p7RAhXmDMAKHRKaCesQFggfMAE&url=http%3A%2F%2Fec.europa.eu%2Fneighbourhood-enlargement%2Fsites%2Fnear%2Ffiles%2Fneighbourhood%2Fpdf%2Fkey-documents%2Fmoldova%2F20160321-annual-action-programme-moldova-2105.pdf&authuser=1&usg=AFQjCNEtBaUIBx4n0gEYN0ZAfdG54w7Cog&sig2=EQ1qMkKZkTB- FygnXLuZg>

recent developments in this field taking into account the revised version of the “Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area” – the reference document for internal and external quality assurance systems in higher education - adopted at the Yerevan Bologna Ministerial Conference in May 2015 and the European Quality Assurance Register (EQAR).

The key challenges in the education sector are the following:

- Modernisation of the education system in line with the Bologna principles and EU best practices;
- Efficient functioning of the Moldovan National Agency for Quality Assurance;
- Reinforcement of links between research and higher education, VET education and private sector (employers);
- Reinforcement of the quality of the education structures, content and methods.

Progress Report ⁴⁸ on the implementation of EU-Moldova Association Agreement of 2015 praises the achievements in the education sector, among others:

- Strategy on development of education for 2014 – 2020 was approved (14.11.2014).
- National School Inspectorate for General Education was established.
- National Agency for Ensuring Quality in Vocational Education was created;

And lists the priorities:

- To finalise and to pass draft Law on youth.
- To develop the Strategy on life-long learning.
- To establish centres for evaluation of non-formal and informal learning.
- Develop and promote concept of e-admission.

In Moldova, the main strategic document in education is Education 2020 - Sectoral Development for the years 2012-2020.

Its general objective is the modernization of education at the level of the whole system.

In general education, the quality and access to education is to be improved from the perspective of child-friendly schools, with specific objectives being, among others:

- Increase the gross enrolment rate in primary education
- Optimization of the network of general education institutions according to the number of children/pupils, demographic situation and the development prospects of localities, the availability of human resources, the capacity of communication channels
- Training of teachers and management staff on inclusive education and child-friendly schools

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http://www.google.rs/url?sa=t&rct=j&q=&esrc=s&source=web&cd=2&ved=0ahUKEwjw4PB0p7RAhWeF8AKHR0yC6MQFggfMAE&url=http%3A%2F%2Fwww.mfa.gov.md%2Fdata%2F9386%2Ffile_502127_0.pdf&authuser=1&usg=AFQjCNFeDGMgy4tPwTFGdTiuJ0JR4afEGg&sig2=ly7A1c2nL7EgKNMzo-dBsg&bvm=bv.142059868,d.ZGg

- Train at least 5% of the total number of management staff 5% annually in order to improve the general education management at the national, local and institutional level

More specifically in the area of vocational and technical education system:

- the trainings of specialists in secondary and post-secondary vocational and technical education should be adjusted to the current and perspective needs of the labor market
- the attractiveness of and access to vocational/technical education should be increased
- Ensure the scientific, methodological and curricular aspects in the secondary and post-secondary vocational and technical education.
- redesign the process of initial and continuous professional training of the teaching staff for the secondary and post-secondary vocational and technical education
- extend and strengthen the connection between the vocational and technical education and the labour market
- create and implement a quality assurance system in vocation and technical education in line with country's economic growth indicators and the process of graduates' employment

in higher education, modernization in line with the labour market, European HE standards and Bologna process requirements are envisaged through the following objectives:

- Create and implement the quality assurance system in higher education linked to country's economic growth and the problems of graduates' employment
- modernize the university curriculum to make it competence-centred, learner-centred and centered on the needs of the economic environment

SERBIA

The Commission Staff Working Document Serbia 2016 Report, regarding the area of education and training, states that there is a good level of preparation in the area of education; that some progress was made in curriculum development, and that further reforms need to continue according to the adopted Action plan. Additional investment in education is most needed at pre-school and basic education levels. Reforms for the training of primary and secondary school teachers are planned and should focus on improving basic and transversal skills of pupils. There has been progress in curriculum development in vocational education and training to better meet the needs of the labour market. The plans for reducing VET enrolment should continue. The national qualifications framework needs to be finalised and cross-referenced with the European Qualifications Framework; the relevant law is being drafted. The ongoing reform of higher education needs to put particular emphasis on the relevance of its study programmes. Emigration by young, skilled people remains high.

The Economic Reform Programme for Serbia for the period 2016 – 2018⁴⁹ plans the following measures regarding the area of education and training:

- Higher education reform should place special emphasis on the importance of study programmes, with the aim of reducing the unemployment rate among graduates and improve counselling methods in dealing with the unemployed
- The National Qualifications Framework should be fully developed, aiming at increasing competences (establishment of the Qualifications Register and the Qualifications Agency; development of qualifications standards in two sectors and their accreditation and the development of education programs/curricula in compliance with qualification standards)

The Commission's Overview and Country Assessments⁵⁰, from July 2016, lists the main challenges in the area of education (particularly related to the labour market and employability) recognized, and state the following:

The main challenges include:

Reforms in the education and training system at all levels are needed in order to ensure a better match of skills supply with future labour demands. The reform measures for responding to these challenges focus on strengthening labour market institutions, in particular employment services and initiating longer-term reforms in the education system.

Around 60 % of unemployed have completed upper secondary education, pointing to considerable gaps between skills and labour market demand.

The policy guidance on finalising the National Qualifications Framework (NQF) and adopting a comprehensive and well-targeted set of active labour market policies has been partially addressed.

On the basis of existing qualification frameworks for vocational and higher education, an integrated NQF has been developed which is under consultation with relevant national bodies.

The identified risk of inadequate support from social partners in the course of adoption of the NQF and the necessary establishment of sector councils requires further work by the government to involve the social partners in order to ensure progress. No indication is given how the risks mentioned about establishing the Qualifications Agency could be addressed early on in the process. Finalisation of the NQF is presented mainly as an objective in itself and not linked with steps for a progressive reform of the education system at all levels, including expanding pre-primary education, improving the level of basic

⁴⁹ <http://www.google.rs/url?sa=t&rct=j&q=&esrc=s&source=web&cd=1&ved=0ahUKEwjwtp6-7p7RAhXKWBQKHbd2AI0QFggXMAA&url=http%3A%2F%2Fwww.mfin.gov.rs%2FUserFiles%2FFile%2Fdokumenti%2F2016%2FEconomic%2520Reform%2520Program%25202016%25202018.pdf&authuser=1&usg=AFQjCNEub9rWE39hHnHgD3G9YQSL4J69TA&sig2=TxpgH5TjR-ovWTJ6Vwikeg>

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http://www.google.rs/url?sa=t&rct=j&q=&esrc=s&source=web&cd=1&ved=0ahUKEwjZ0Z737p7RAhVFPBQKHeRM-DLYQFggXMAA&url=http%3A%2F%2Fec.europa.eu%2Feconomy_finance%2Fpublications%2Fecip%2Fpdf%2Fip028_en.pdf&authuser=1&usg=AFQjCNGG61paGdVpHp3LYzymE-erxoOPzg&sig2=9UD3s6Ps4hKDs3pfV-HIFw&bvm=bv.142059868,d.bGg

skills to be acquired by all students, and strengthening teacher training in order to improve the outcomes and relevance of the system for the labour market.

The Strategy for Education Development in Serbia 2020⁵¹, and the accompanying Action plan, envisage the following priorities and measures, corresponding to the ERP and the Progress Report findings:

General education (primary and secondary general education)

- Education standards implementation and improvement (Analysis and improvement of standards; Promotion of implementation of standards at school; Development of training/programmes for implementation of standards; Development of training/programmes for evaluation of students according to standards)
- Improvement of the existing educational standards and applications (Creating database for national testing of educational standards; Modification of curriculums in order to make outcome-based and focused on achieving the standards; Organizing national testing and result analysis; Improvement of educational standards based on analyses; Training of advisors for support of implementation of educational standards; Forming the list of advisors-external associates in accordance with regional needs, training and establishing the system of advisory work).

Secondary vocational education (SVE):

- Development of educational programmes based on the qualification standards (outcome based vocational education programmes)
- Matching the vocational school network and offer of educational programmes (profiles) with the needs of businesses
- Inclusion of employers in the process of programming, development and implementation of SVE
- Defining a clear division of responsibilities, roles and tasks of all the actors in management of SVE

Higher education:

- Building public responsibility of HEI for quality of higher education
- Introducing quality indicators into HE
- Promotion of cooperation with employers and businesses
- Promotion of international accessibility of higher education system
- Established international mobility of teachers, students and researchers

There is another, cross-sectoral priority, dealing with teacher training, aiming at:

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http://www.google.rs/url?sa=t&rct=j&q=&esrc=s&source=web&cd=1&ved=0ahUKEwj_iMyo7p7RAhWG7RQKHg3CtUQFggnMAA&url=http%3A%2F%2Ferasmusplus.rs%2Fwp-content%2Fuploads%2F2015%2F03%2FStrategy-for-Education-Development-in-Serbia-2020.pdf&authuser=1&usg=AFQjCNEnt7dXcxUY87nQmmVdHriMnpnNFA&sig2=L_b8-mABIJYX6A0NWEAANw&bvm=bv.142059868,d.bGg

- Development of study programmes for initial teacher training
- Improving teacher development system (Establishing teacher development system; Establishing sustainable models of funding for continuous teacher development; Introducing teacher training focusing on the application of teaching methods helping to develop students' key competences; Producing analyses of the effects of professional development; Improving accreditation criteria for professional development programmes based on teaching effects)

Areas of regional cooperation

Methodology

In the previous section, we focused on and referred to the following documents:

- Education and Training 2020 Working Groups mandates (in the framework of Open Method of Coordination)
- South Eastern Europe 2020 Strategy
- Economic Reform Programmes per countries for the period 2016 – 2018, specifying the structural reforms planned at national levels and responding to the identified challenges
- European Commission Overviews and Country Assessments, listing the key areas of intervention and progress
- Progress/Country Reports (if applicable), summarizing the current state of affairs and main areas in which countries need to progress further
- National Strategies, Action Plans or Programmes focusing on education and training and listing priorities, goals and measures to be implemented in the coming period (exact period depending on the country) and addressing the identified challenges and recommendations.

In this section, we are going to compare the defined priorities and find the common grounds for regional activities to be planned and further developed, in relation to the ERI SEE priority areas that were defined previously as strategic direction.

So, the priorities are going to be cross-checked and compared per countries, per specific strategic documents and in relation to the previously defined strategic directions of ERI SEE regional cooperation.

Mapping common interests/challenges

Comparison between ERI SEE Priority areas and overarching strategic national documents relating to the EU accession or membership:

<u>ERI SEE Priority area</u>	<u>Education and Training 2020</u>	<u>South Eastern Europe 2020</u>	<u>ERP / PROGRESS REPORT</u>	<u>ERP / PROGRESS REPORT</u>	<u>National Reform Programme / PROGRESS REPORT</u>	<u>ERP / PROGRESS REPORT</u>	<u>ERP / PROGRESS REPORT</u>	<u>Annual Action Programme/ PROGRESS REPORT</u>	<u>ERP / PROGRESS REPORT</u>
<u>ERI SEE Priority area</u>	<u>ET 2020</u>	<u>SEE 2020</u>	<u>ALBANIA</u>	<u>BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINA</u>	<u>CROATIA</u>	<u>MACEDONIA</u>	<u>MONTENEGRO</u>	<u>MOLDOVA</u>	<u>SERBIA</u>
<u>Modernization of VET</u>	Implementation of VET reforms through knowledge sharing, development of policy guidelines etc. -Support for educators		Continuous curriculum development Availability of databases and online resources Adoption and implementation of new curricula based on competences	Support vocational skills development through creating links with enterprises	Modernise outdated curricula	Continue with the modernisation of secondary vocational education programmes	Revise enrolment policies for vocational education modernise programmes for vocational education and training, with the priority areas for teacher trainings defined Develop new or modify existing qualifications and programmes based on learning outcomes		Continue with curriculum development in vocational education and training to better meet the needs of the labour market
<u>ERI SEE Priority area</u>	<u>ET 2020</u>	<u>SEE 2020</u>	<u>ALBANIA</u>	<u>BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINA</u>	<u>CROATIA</u>	<u>MACEDONIA</u>	<u>MONTENEGRO</u>	<u>MOLDOVA</u>	<u>SERBIA</u>

<u>Cooperation between VET and Business sector</u>	Partnership arrangements between VET providers and companies	Ensure education and training systems better meet economic and labour market needs (and provide learners with labour market relevant skills)	Develop liaison with employers Integrate work-based learning schemes Enhance links between skills and labour demand Involve private sector needs into designing and implementing labour market and VET policies Match the quality and relevance of educational outcomes for the labour market	Improve cooperation between education institutions and business sector Match the skills produced by the education system and needed on labour market	Increase the labour market relevance of education Align secondary VET outcomes with labour market needs to reduce skills mismatches Increase work-based learning	Generate know-how and skills according to the needs of employers	Continue education reform with a view to better aligning education and skills with labour market needs Strengthen cooperation between education and business Introduce work-based learning	Reinforcement of links between research and higher education, VET education and private sector (employers);	Ensure a better match of skills supply with future labour demands
<u>ERI SEE Priority area</u>	<u>ET 2020</u>	<u>SEE 2020</u>	<u>ALBANIA</u>	<u>BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINA</u>	<u>CROATIA</u>	<u>MACEDONIA</u>	<u>MONTENEGRO</u>	<u>MOLDOVA</u>	<u>SERBIA</u>
<u>Recognition of higher-education qualifications</u>	Internationalisation	Smooth recognition of qualifications supporting mobility in SEE		-Increase mobility in higher education				Modernisation of the education system in line with the Bologna principles and EU best practices	

<u>ERI SEE</u> <u>Priority</u> <u>area</u>	<u>ET 2020</u>	<u>SEE 2020</u>	<u>ALBANIA</u>	<u>BOSNIA AND</u> <u>HERZEGOVINA</u>	<u>CROATIA</u>	<u>MACEDONIA</u>	<u>MONTENEGRO</u>	<u>MOLDOVA</u>	<u>SERBIA</u>
<u>Quality</u> <u>education</u> <u>(teacher</u> <u>training,</u> <u>quality</u> <u>assurance)</u>	Staff development Quality, relevance and attractiveness in work-based learning through the professional development of teachers and trainers Development of digital competences in quality assurance		Improvement of teacher trainings (based on new curricula) Quality assurance mechanisms to be adopted Establish an independent accreditation system for all public and private universities -Improve the quality of education Adoption of new curricula based on competences according to EU standards	Setting further steps for teacher training and professional development Implement common core curricula for cross-curricular areas Strengthen coordination between bodies responsible for quality assurance Increase the level of quality assurance in education Building teaching capacities of primary and secondary teachers so to develop basic and transversal skills among students	Improve the quality of the education Upskilling of teachers Increase the level of digitalisation	Increase support for teacher training, professional development of teachers and effective assessment process Improve the quality of education and the quality of curricula Increase the level of basic and transversal/soft skills of the labour force	Step up efforts on curricular reform in primary and secondary education to teach basic and transversal skills and focus on learning outcomes Increase the quality of education and strengthen the quality assurance mechanisms through internal and external evaluation of institutions Revise teacher training programmes	Reinforcement of the quality of the education structures, content and methods Efficient functioning of the Moldovan National Agency for Quality Assurance	Strengthen teacher training in order to improve the outcomes and relevance of the system for the labour market
<u>ERI SEE</u> <u>Priority</u> <u>area</u>	<u>ET 2020</u>	<u>SEE 2020</u>	<u>ALBANIA</u>	<u>BOSNIA AND</u> <u>HERZEGOVINA</u>	<u>CROATIA</u>	<u>MACEDONIA</u>	<u>MONTENEGRO</u>	<u>MOLDOVA</u>	<u>SERBIA</u>

<u>Inclusive education</u>		<p>Increase equitable access to, and participation in, high quality education at all levels</p> <p>Implement measures to prevent early-school leaving and 'drop-out' and improve completion rates at all levels, thus contributing to the inclusiveness and nurturing of lifelong learning</p>	<p>Ensure better access to education</p>		<p>Improve the accessibility to education</p>	<p>Improve access to quality education for all</p>	<p>Increase pre-school participation, especially among the groups facing exclusion</p>		
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Comparison between ERI SEE education sectors and national strategic documents with the focus on respective education sectors:

	<p>Strategy for employment and skills 2014 – 2020 (In Albanian only)</p>	<p>Strategic directions for education development 2008 – 2015</p> <p>Priorities for 2016 – 2026 Higher Education Development in BiH</p>	<p>Strategy for 2015 – 2025 (New colours of knowledge)</p> <p>VET System Development Programme 2016 – 2020</p>	<p>Comprehensive Educational Strategy 2016 - 2020</p> <p>Competitiveness strategy and Action plan 2016 – 2020</p>	<p>Strategy for the development of general secondary education (2015 – 2020)</p> <p>Strategy for the development of VET (2015 – 2020)</p>	<p><u>Education 2020 - Sectoral Development for the years 2012-2020</u></p>	<p><u>Strategy for Education Development 2020</u></p>
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<u>ERI SEE Priority sector</u>	<u>ALBANIA</u>	<u>BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINA</u>	<u>CROATIA</u>	<u>MACEDONIA</u>	<u>Strategy for the development of Higher education</u> <u>MONTENEGRO</u>	<u>MOLDOVA</u>	<u>SERBIA</u>
<u>Vocational education and training</u>		<p>Increase the efficiency of education</p> <p>Prevent social exclusion</p> <p>Modernization and development of education and training at all levels (increase the quality of teaching and learning; establishment of the system of internal and external evaluation...)</p> <p>Developing links between education and the world of work</p> <p>Encourage continuous professional development of education institutions employees</p>	<p>Improve the labour-market relevance of VET</p> <p>Improving the quality of VET (quality assurance standards)</p> <p>Promoting VET</p> <p>Internationalization of VET</p> <p>Increase continuous professional development</p>	<p>Harmonise Vocational Education and Training with the Labour Market Needs (contents adapted to the needs of the LM, learning focused on competences and learning outcomes, stakeholders supporting the decision-making process)</p> <p>Improve Learning Environment and Quality of Vocational Education and Training</p> <p>Improve Capacities of Human Resources (competences of teachers, close cooperation with the business sector; requirements of professional competences)</p>	<p>Establishing a quality and efficient labour market relevant VET</p> <p>Build a flexible VET system, based on the learning outcomes</p>	<p>The trainings of specialists in secondary and post-secondary vocational and technical education should be adjusted to the current and perspective needs of the labor market</p> <p>The attractiveness of and access to vocational/technical education should be increased</p> <p>Redesign the process of initial and continuous professional training of the teaching staff for the secondary and post-secondary vocational and technical education</p> <p>Extend and strengthen the connection between the vocational and technical education</p>	<p>Development of educational programmes based on the qualification standards</p> <p>Matching the vocational school network and offer of educational programmes (profiles) with the needs of businesses</p> <p>Inclusion of employers in the process of programming, development and implementation of SVE</p> <p>Defining a clear division of responsibilities, roles and tasks of all the actors in management of SVE</p>

		Quality assurance standards International cooperation and EU integration Statistics and indicators in education Development of Qualifications Framework				and the labor market	
ERI SEE Priority sector	ALBANIA	BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINA	CROATIA	MACEDONIA	MONTENEGRO	MOLDOVA	SERBIA
Higher education		The same as above (cross-sectoral priorities)	Internationalization of HE (mobility of students and staff; increase the programmes in foreign languages; joint studies; increase the number of foreign academic staff) Ensure the importance of the quality culture and principles of responsibility Enhance the quality of study programmes	Ensure Quality and Effectiveness of HE in accordance with European good practices (external quality evaluation, quality assurance, practical skills, professional development of staff) Improve the Content of HE (academic development and mobility of staff; minimum requirements for content and outcomes)	Improve the quality of higher education Harmonize education with labour market needs Internationalization of higher education	Create and implement the quality assurance system in higher education linked to country's economic growth and the problems of graduates' employment Modernize the university curriculum to make it competence-centered, learner-centered and centered on the needs of the economic environment	Introducing quality indicators into HE Building public responsibility of HEI for quality of higher education Promotion of cooperation with employers and businesses Promotion of international accessibility of higher education system Established international mobility of teachers, students and researchers

ERI SEE Priority sector	ALBANIA	BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINA	CROATIA	MACEDONIA	MONTENEGRO	MOLDOVA	SERBIA
General education		The same as above (cross-sectoral priorities)	<p>Establish the system of quality assurance</p> <p>Implement curricular reform</p> <p>Increase the quality of work and social status of teachers</p> <p>Create the support system for pupils</p>	<p>Improve the content of education (focus on learning outcomes, quality of textbooks)</p> <p>Improve capacities of Human Resources (improving professional competences, existing support services for novice teachers, students and regular teachers)</p> <p>Improve the Learning Environment and Quality of Education Services Provision</p>	<p>Increasing the quality of classes, teaching, and educational work of institutions</p> <p>Vertical and horizontal mobility of students throughout the system</p> <p>Monitoring, evaluating and assessing of learning achievements of students</p>	<p>Training of teachers and management staff on inclusive education and child-friendly schools</p>	<p>Education standards implementation and improvement</p> <p>Development of study programmes for initial teacher training</p> <p>Improving teacher development system</p>

Conclusions

Having analysed all the above mentioned documents, strategically defined priorities, goals and/or measures set by national governments, ministries in charge of education, and the European Commission, their mapping shows the many significant overlaps relevant for the planning of regional cooperation. It is evident that all of the countries face similar challenges, but their stages of development and phases of tackling those challenges may vary. For this reason, the ERI SEE platform for regional cooperation should ensure constant, continuous, structured and well-designed activities aiming at the exchange of the practices, ways and methods by which countries deal with these challenges. Additionally, ERI SEE should also aim at the creation of working group/networks of experts in various areas that would plan the way further.

The next step in the definition of ERI SEE activities within this Work Programme is to elaborate on the priority areas that were agreed previously, by using the information on the strategic goals and measures defined by the countries in their strategic document, always having in mind the regional possibilities and feasibility of cooperation (taking into account the circumstances in which ERI SEE operates, described in the Organisational context section of this Work Programme).

Therefore, we can envisage that the ERI SEE priority areas can be elaborated more specifically with the below listed measures:

- ***Modernization of VET***
 - Implementation of VET reforms through knowledge sharing, development of policy guidelines etc.
 - Support for educators
 - Modernisation of curricula/vocational education programmes (based on learning outcomes)

- ***Cooperation between VET and Business sector***
 - Improve cooperation between education institutions and business sector
 - Partnership arrangements between VET providers and companies
 - Involve private sector needs into designing and implementing labour market and VET policies
 - Integrate work-based learning schemes into education

- ***Recognition of higher-education qualifications***
 - Developing systems for a smooth recognition of higher education qualifications, supporting mobility in SEE and exploring fast-track recognition for non-regulated professions.

- ***Recognition of professional qualifications***
 - Creating system for a smooth recognition of professional qualifications, supporting mobility in SEE

- ***Quality education (teacher training, quality assurance)***
 - Improvement of teacher trainings (based on new curricula)

- Building teaching capacities of primary and secondary teachers so to develop basic and transversal skills among students
 - Quality assurance mechanisms to be adopted
 - Increase the quality of education and strengthen the quality assurance mechanisms through internal and external evaluation of institutions
 - Increase the level of digitalisation
- ***Inclusive education***
- Ensure better access to education

Specification of activities based on the matched joint interests/challenging areas

Priority areas and corresponding activities

Modernization of VET and Cooperation between VET and Business sector

The priority areas of Modernization of VET and Cooperation between VET and Business sector is suggested to be tackled jointly, through the work of the South Eastern Europe Vocational Education and Training Network – SEEVET-NET – established by the ERI SEE initiative and formalised by the Agreement on Cooperation signed by the participating countries and institutions, namely the VET centres from Albania, Croatia, Montenegro, Macedonia, Serbia, Moldova and Bosnia and Herzegovina; with the associating participation of Romanian, Bulgarian and Kosovo VET centres. The focus of the work of regional experts participating in this Network is the enhancing connections with the private sector with the purpose of enhancing work-based learning systems in the region, as well as adjusting the educational programmes to the acquisition of skills needed on the labour market.

As seen in the relevant documents analysed in previous sections of the Work Programme, they all specify the need of vocational education and training systems being more responsive to change and wider world, creating stronger links and communication with the business sector and developing skills matching the needs of the labour market. Work-based learning, focusing on creating different opportunities for practical work during the education and training periods, creates opportunities for the development of practical competences, needed in the real sector, and thus increases the employability of young people. The issue of the employability of young people is more than urgent - in the region the unemployment among young people varies from 40% up to even more than 60%.

As a way of tackling the issue of high unemployment in the region, and lack of skills needed on the labour market, recognized in the strategic documents, it is important to define the sectors with growth potential and continuous need for labour force, relevant for the whole region, and focus the ERI SEE and SEEVET Net work-based learning activities there. Within these sectors, to train the labour force with adequate skills, it is needed to ensure stable communication pathways between the education and training sector and business sector, with clearly defined needs and designed trainings for the young. In these communication pathways, there are many impediments and stronger efforts are needed to be invested in their removal, which can be achieved in cooperation with regional Chambers of commerce, acting as intermediaries between VET centres and schools on the one hand, and representatives of the business sectors on the other. In these joint action, work-based learning is to be promoted among employers, emphasizing the importance of their inclusion in defining the needs and providing training opportunities; mechanisms for an easier anticipation of future skills are to be developed, and regional occupation standards within the chosen priority sectors are to be elaborated. Joint occupational standards are then to be adjusted for national purposes and/or used at the regional level, boosting the mobility of the labour force in the region.

Therefore, what is envisaged within the framework of the SEEVET-Net is:

- Continuous strengthening of regional cooperation in VET systems focusing on the exchange of practices (via regular annual meetings/workshops/seminars of the SEEVET Net members)
- Expanding the cooperation to the social partners and business sector (through participation of Chambers of Commerce and representatives of business sector in the SEEVET Net meetings/workshops)
- Development of the joint regional project promoting work-based learning and regional occupational standards.

The joint regional project is planned in cooperation between the SEEVET Net, relevant ministries and the Chambers of Commerce under the framework of Western Balkans Chambers Investment Forum, with the focus on:

- Development of Labour-market-relevant occupational standards supporting economic development and labour mobility in the region (in the sectors jointly defined as priorities – tourism and catering; food industry and processing, transport and logistics, construction industry), aiming at enhancing the co-operation between social partners and VET sector in the development of occupational standards, contributing to increased mobility in the region by developing joint occupational standards, and enhancing the methodology of developing occupational standards.
- Enhancing the quality of Work-based Learning, aiming at exchanging the experiences, capacity building of the partners included, defining roles and responsibilities, adjusting the legal framework, and creating or adjusting the relevant documents needed for the successful implementation of WBL and its integration into the systems.
- Piloting the implementation of joint occupational standards with strong elements of WBL

Sources of funding:

For the purpose of continuous strengthening of regional cooperation, the ERI SEE activities continue to rely on the donors, namely KulturKontakt Austria.

For the purpose of development of the joint regional project, the project proposal is going to be submitted to funding programmes/schemes (Erasmus+, Austrian Development Agency). The funding is therefore not secured and depends on the selection results.

Timeline:

The project is to be developed in the first quarter of 2017, with the assistance of (an) external expert/s and feedback from participating countries. The project proposal is to be submitted by the end of March, for the Erasmus+ scheme, and by the end of June, for Austrian Development Agency. In case of positive evaluation and grant awards, the project is supposed to start in October, with the duration of three years, and continuous implementation of activities planned by the project.

During 2017, the project is to be developed, submitted and started (if approved) in the last quarter. The project is of three-year duration, so the activities, with its regular constant pace as defined in the activity plan of the project proposal, should be lasting until the last quarter of 2020. ERI SEE is actively included in the implementation and coordination activities throughout the project.

Risks and constraints:

The project needs to be elaborated in two ways for two different funding mechanisms, one focusing on the activities of the EU Member States, for the purposes of Erasmus + Call, and the other focusing on the activities of the non-EU Member States, for the purposes of the Austrian Development Agency. The right way of combining these activities, and presenting them as mutually interlinked and dependable, has to be developed. The funding is not ensured; and in order for the project to kick off, both funding schemes need to approve it.

Additionally, since ERI SEE still does not have the legal status of an independent international organisation, the application role is supposed to be agreed with one of the partners in the process, with ERI SEE actively supporting, preparing, coordinating activities of preparing the project and later on, in case of approval, managing it. The current staff status of ERI SEE can be limiting to the successful implementation of these activities.

Recognition of higher-education qualifications

Recognition of higher education qualifications is one of the priorities of the South Eastern Europe 2020 Strategy, and a part of the Skills and Mobility Flagship Initiative of the Regional Cooperation Council.

„The Ministers responsible for higher education at the Yerevan Ministerial summit under the Bologna process framework: “to develop more effective policies for the recognition of credits gained abroad, of qualifications for academic and professional purposes, and of prior learning” and to ensure “that qualifications frameworks work in practice”. Development of the national qualifications frameworks, in line with the commitments made, should boost changes in the legislation regulating both recognition and quality assurance. The work on automatic academic recognition calls for an integrated policy approach to developing and implementing structural reforms designed around: qualifications frameworks, recognition of foreign higher education qualifications and quality assurance, the so-called Bologna triangle, as a coherent whole.

Within this framework, the RCC’s focus on fast-track recognition supports the national efforts in developing comprehensive approach to implementation of qualification frameworks, quality assurance and recognition policies and legislation, as well as facilitating and removing obstacles to mobility within the region. The automatic recognition model developed through the action with the respective governments will be based on the implementation of national qualifications frameworks and quality assurance systems, having characteristics to support modernisation, accessibility, internationalisation and quality of the HE system.⁵²

For this reason, a project under the Erasmus+ is planned to be submitted in February 2017, with the expected results of Quality assured automatic recognition of foreign higher education qualifications model (QAAR-FHEQ) developed and implemented in the region.

⁵² From the SEE 2020 Programming Document 2017-2019, Draft concept, developed by the Regional Cooperation Council

The project applicant is the University of Split; and ERI SEE is envisaged to participate in the project as a partner, and ensure the sustainability once the project is over by taking over the Register of the accredited programmes/institutions for fast-track recognition of higher education qualifications.

Additionally, the database of the results of the external quality assessment of HEI in the region is planned to be established prior to the beginning of the project, following the principles of the planned database of the European Quality Assurance Register (EQAR).

Sources of funding:

The preparation of the project is supported by the Regional Cooperation Council, and the project is to be submitted under the Erasmus+ funding scheme.

Timeline

The deadline for submission is mid-February 2017; the results are to be known by July, and the project, in case of its approval, is expected to start in October 2017. The project is a three-year one, with the activities planned into work-packages and divided among partners for the three-year period.

ERI SEE is planned to be actively participating in the activities planned throughout the project.

Risks and Constraints:

The project not approved.

Removing Obstacles to Mobility of Professionals in SEE

Removing Obstacles to Mobility of Professionals is one of the SEE 2020 priority, and also one of the measures within the RCC flagship initiative Skills and Mobility.

„The action on **recognition of professional qualification** is based on the commitments spelled out in Articles 26-29 of the CEFTA 2006 Agreement, and in particular on achieving the progressive liberalisation in trade in services and gradual opening of services markets across the CEFTA region by reducing the barriers in temporary movement of natural persons (GATS Mode 4). Enhancing the intraregional trade in services depends on eliminating the barriers on (short-term) free movement of experts and professionals which include removing obstacles to recognition of professional qualifications in the region. The action aims to create conditions for recognition of professional qualifications through facilitating conclusion of mutual recognition agreements (MRAs), works towards enhancing transparency of national and regional arrangements on recognition of professional qualifications and aims to enhance regional data exchange on the mobility of professionals and future skills needs in selected professions.

Expected results:

- A regional agreement on automatic recognition in one of the priority professions of mutual interest to the WB economies;

- Data collection on mobility of professionals in the SEE region and between the SEE and the EU improved
- A joint database on the mobility of professionals modelled after the EU database developed⁵³

ERI SEE is a partner in these activities, which are coordinated by RCC.

Sources of funding:

RCC operational budget

Quality education (teacher training, quality assurance)

The strategic framework analysed in previous sections specified improving the quality and efficiency of education and training as one of the strategic objectives, crucial for the success of Europe and the region, and for enhancing employability. The education systems should develop along the lines of policy guidance directed at, among others, adopting and implementing quality standards in education, introducing internal assessment and external evaluation of education, improving education systems outcomes for greater employability and greater achievements, improving access to education, skills matching the labour market needs, increasing levels of basic and transversal/soft skills among teacher and consequently students, and creating opportunities for permanent in-service teacher trainings. Increase in the level of digitalisation is also deemed necessary for the increase in the quality of education and better preparation for students for the life and work in the modern era.

Therefore, within the framework of ERI SEE, the activities are proposed to be enhancing regional cooperation

- in the area of quality assurance standards
- in the area of teacher trainings (for basic and transversal skills, inclusive education, or other skills/themes deemed necessary).

Given the aim of increasing the level of digitalisation and the ever increasing role of IT on the one hand, and the financial constraints on the other, the cooperation is proposed to examine the possibilities for on-line exchange and on-line cooperation in the form of webinars and communication platforms.

More concretely, in the area of Quality Assurance standards, what is proposed is the following:

- Establishment of the regional platform for the cooperation of education experts in the region dealing with quality assurance in general education (QA network) and addressing recommendations of the European Quality Assurance Reference Framework in general education, with the particular focus on the internal and external assessment of education
- Synchronizing the work of this QA network with the work of the Education and Training 2020 Workgroups - Open Method of Coordination nominees - from the countries of the region

⁵³ From the SEE 2020 Programming Document 2017-2019, Draft concept, developed by the Regional Cooperation Council

- Use the TAIEX funding scheme⁵⁴ for the organization of conferences and seminars about QA in general education, with the goal of peer learning and exchanging knowledge about QA status and implementation in the region
- Establishment of an on-line regional platform offering possibilities for communication and sharing between experts.

The proposed activities would be realized in 2017, (depending on the financial resources available), and would continue and expand in 2018 in 2019 (with further workgroup meetings and mapping of more specific areas of cooperation – state matura, QA standards implementation or any other issue that is considered as most relevant by QA Network members). A potential project proposal is to be developed in 2018 and possible funding identified.

It is important to note that activities described in this section would tackle the QA in general education. The QA assurance in higher education is tackled through the planned activities within the QUASAR project (please see the section *Recognition of higher-education qualifications*), whereas the QA in VET in the region is covered by the ETF activities planning on the establishment of the QA VET Forum including the countries in the region, as well as partially by the ERI SEE activities described under the *Modernization of VET and Cooperation between VET and Business sector section* of this Work Programme Potentials for cooperation between ETF and ERI SEE in the area of QA in VET are to be explored.

More specific activities are to be defined upon the consultations with the QA members and formalized in the annual revisions of the ERI SEE Workprogramme.

In Teacher training, what is proposed is the following:

- Intensify cooperation with European Training Foundation ETF about training needs analysis (TNAs) to specify concrete areas of intervention; explore potentials of using the TNAs developed for national purposes at regional level
- Create the network of experts in general education (from relevant ministries and/or national agencies in charge of general education) dealing with Teacher trainings to provide expert input
- Examining the current availability of trainings on the subject of joint interests and exploring possibilities to expand them regionally, by organizing on-line trainings⁵⁵ (possibly on the subject of basic skills, transversal skills, outcome-based curricula etc.)
- Exploring possibilities for the introduction of recognition mechanisms of regional teacher training programmes

In the forthcoming period, it is suggested that the ERI SEE activities regarding the Teacher Trainings focus on continuous professional developments (CPDs), rather than initial teacher trainings, since the initial

⁵⁴ http://ec.europa.eu/neighbourhood-enlargement/tenders/taieux_en

⁵⁵ On-line trainings can be in the form of interactive webinars, and several implementing modalities can be taken into account – possibilities to use eTwinning for training purposes, CARNet webinars, Moodle options provided by different providers in the region.

teacher trainings would interfere with the higher education curricula, which would require a more complex analysis of the current status in the region, and more complex coordination mechanisms.

As the example of good practices, the models of training programmes organized on-line by the British Council (on IT in education⁵⁶) or South East Europe Centre for Entrepreneurial Learning (on entrepreneurial learning) can be followed.

For the time being, the on-line trainings could satisfy both the financial constraints of ERI SEE on the one hand, as well as the need for the digitalization in education on the other.

What is also important to take into consideration when organizing on-line training programmes is the language(s) in which they are given, and/or the translation of these trainings, considering multi-linguistic characteristics of ERI SEE countries.

Timeline:

The cooperation in the area of teacher training with the regional actors, the network of experts established and first attempts of identifying training needs at regional level are to be implemented in 2017; whereas in 2018 the IT tools, as well as the content aspects of the trainings, are to be examined. The trainings should be tested in 2018 and 2019, and the activities in 2019 should also be expanded with the investigating possibilities of recognizing formally the learning outcomes of these trainings.

Organizational priority areas

Given the new phase in the development of the ERI SEE Initiative, hereby referring to the establishment of the ERI SEE Secretariat⁵⁷, it is necessary to increase the visibility and sustainability of the ERI SEE. Therefore, we suggest more intensive activities, along the lines of financial resources available, in three priority areas: Visibility and Positioning of ERI SEE, Capacity building, as well as finding additional funding mechanisms supporting the ERI SEE activities.

Visibility and positioning of ERI SEE

Strengthening of ERI SEE position is to be increased by several lines of action:

- Regular meetings with the Governing Board members, and joint planning of actions
- Regular meetings with the SEEVET Net members and further expanding of activities already started in the area of VET

⁵⁶ <http://www.britishcouncil.rs/new-technologies>

⁵⁷ For challenges in the establishment please consult the Organizational, Financial and Political Challenges section of the Workprogramme.

- Establishing structured cooperation with other education experts from the region (Members of the Open Method of Coordination working groups; teacher training experts, quality assurance experts)
- Meetings with the relevant regional ministries, informing them about the ERI SEE activities and potential challenges
- Cooperation with relevant international stake-holders

Visibility of the ERI SEE can be enhanced through:

- Development of the new ERI SEE website
- Creation of the more extensive regional database of relevant institutions and individuals (state officials and sectors in ministries in charge of education and training; educational agencies; education institutions, education institutes, governments, chambers of commerce, educational experts, NGOs dealing with education and training...)
- Creation of an on-line newsletter to be published and disseminated on-line to the extensive database
- Presenting ERI SEE at various international education-related events
- Participating at various international education-related events

The positioning of ERI SEE as a reliable and sustainable regionally owned organization relies on the above mentioned activities and can be further intensified through a more extensive networking and joint activities with the relevant stake-holders, such as ministries, chambers of commerce, other international organisations, educational experts, educational agencies and so on. It is also advisable to re-iterate the communication with the previous donors and inform them about the ERI SEE activities and plans, to map the common interests.

Capacity building

Having in mind the expanding of ERI SEE activities, and the subject areas of interest (general education, VET, higher education) with fast developments in policy making, it is necessary to start planning the expansion of the ERI SEE staff as well as additional activities regarding the acquisition of knowledge on specific subjects ERI SEE is going to focus on, such as QA standards, creation of occupational standards, recognition of qualifications and so on. Additionally, having in mind the vast number and profile of the partners in the dialogue process of establishment and work of ERI SEE, it is also important to have in mind specific trainings in negotiating skills, diplomatic skills and alike.

Even though the necessity of hiring and training new staff is evident and growing, it is also important to take into consideration the risks of the ERI SEE planned activities (projects not being funded, ERI SEE Secretariat not being legally established, contribution fees not being paid on time), which may jeopardise the functioning of the Secretariat and employment of the staff. All these have to be carefully examined prior to making the final staffing decision.

Financial sustainability

With the view of ensuring the financial sustainability of ERI SEE Secretariat, it is necessary to ensure the:

- Annual contribution fees of the participating countries on a regular basis, by the 30 April as envisaged by the Memorandum of Understanding, 2010, Brdo
- Donations of foreign donations on a regular basis
- Participation in projects funded by various funding schemes (Erasmus+, Austrian Development Agency...)
- Continuous communication with the ministry representatives with the purpose of planning the budget for the following financial periods (usually 3-year prospective); exploring the possibilities to increase the contribution fees and exploring the possibilities of including new members in the ERI SEE initiative
- Contact with various organization potentially interested in the cooperation with the SEE region in the area of education and training and explore the possibilities of renewing the cooperation (Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation, Norway Agency for Development Cooperation; Swedish Agency for International Cooperation, UNICEF...)

Financial planning

Financial planning is done on the annual basis, depending on the current situations and taking into consideration challenges listed beforehand.

For Financial planning for the period of 2017, please consult Budget - Annex 1.