



EDUCATION REFORM INITIATIVE OF SOUTH EASTERN EUROPE (ERI SEE) - ACTIVITY REPORT 2020 -

IMPLEMENTATION OF THE ERI SEE WORK PROGRAMME 2020

1 CONTENTS

2	Executive Summary	5
3	OVERVIEW/SUMMARY OF THE ACTIVITIES	7
4	Strategic priorities 2020	11
4.1	<i>Responding to the COVID-19 challenges to assure the quality of ERI SEE service</i>	11
4.2	<i>Supporting the economies of the Western Balkans in their response to the COVID- 19</i>	12
4.3	<i>Ensuring sustainability of activities and their expansion in 2021</i>	12
4.4	<i>Ensuring sustainable partnerships</i>	13
5	Thematic Priority Areas	14
5.1	<i>Vocational education and training and implementation of the TO REGOS project</i>	14
5.1.1	About TO REGOS project.....	14
5.1.2	Occupational Standards development.....	15
5.1.3	Planning further cooperation.....	15
5.1.4	Feasibility study on regionally-based qualification standards	16
5.1.5	TO REGOS 2020 in numbers:.....	16
5.2	<i>Higher education and supporting recognition of academic qualifications</i>	17
5.2.1	Supporting Quality Assurance agencies in their compliance with ESG	17
5.2.2	Regional comparison of qualifications frameworks.....	17
5.2.3	Regional Recognition Database	18
5.2.4	Joint Information System	18
5.3	<i>General education – teacher education and training and quality assurance</i>	19
5.3.1	Study on teacher education and training system	19
5.3.2	Supporting education and training systems in times of COVID-19.....	20
5.3.3	Study on External Evaluation systems and External Evaluators trainings and monitoring	20
6	Annex 1. List of activities organized by ERI SEE in the period 1st January – 31st December 2019 (by chronological order)	18
6.1	<i>ERI SEE core activities</i>	18
6.2	<i>ON-TOP ACTIVITIES (NOT ORIGINALLY PLANNED)</i>	22
6.3	<i>TO REGOS ACTIVITIES</i>	23

2 EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

2020 was the year globally shaped by the COVID 19 and looking for most effective responses in all areas of life. The same happened locally, or in our case, in the region of the South Eastern Europe.

The pandemic brought about important changes in the ways things are being done at regional level. And in spite of all the challenges, initial unpreparedness for and unexpectedness of the situation, it turned out to be a very productive and fruitful year in which innovative approaches and methods were used, that for sure will be in continuous use beyond the pandemic.

Some of the positive changes and developments that Education Reform Initiative of South Eastern Europe (ERI SEE) noticed among its partners and also applied in its everyday work included:

- Faster and more frequent communication channels among partners and colleagues

This can be explained by the fact that physical meetings were cancelled which resulted in a higher level of on-line availability of colleagues. In the absence of business travels, physical meetings and conferences, some positive consequences for communication channels were noticed.

- Innovative ways of conceiving on-line events

With no doubt, on-line setting differs from the setting of face-to-face events and conferences and consequently needs to result in a different organization concept. Keeping the focus of the participants on one subject and a number of speakers in digital format required looking for innovative ways. What was noticed was that the on-line events in the end tended to be much shorter, much more focused, with a smaller number of speakers and strictly limited presentation time. As a result, the on-line events tended to bring the condensed content to participants.

- Evidence gathering

As a result of the need to understand the consequences of the pandemic and how to adapt to the new reality, as well as the cancelling of physical conferences and events that were previously used for discussions, information sharing, networking and gathering, there was a strengthened trend to research and analyse the situation in the region in different areas of work – digital competences, skills analysis, compliance with European standards, comparative analysis of qualifications frameworks, quality assurance systems etc. Consequently, we now have a solid understanding and relevant data gathered on a number of topics, which makes it easier to plan further actions and improve the current processes. This is, of course, not to say that the evidence gathering wouldn't have happened without pandemic. However, the pandemic released more of the necessary time for research and analysis, that would otherwise be occupied with physical meetings, conferences and other event.

- Sharing of practices

Even though the sharing of the practices is a usual modus operandi in the region, and used to a great extent, the pandemic intensified this sharing and openness to admit one's own challenges. Since the response was needed to be fast and at the same time well thought of, learning from others' mistakes and successes seemed as a good way of saving time to find the most appropriate solution.

- Connecting at human level

The pandemic also increased the feelings of vulnerability and empathy. This also made the work adjust its priorities and be flexible to different ways of operating – well-being first, and efficiency and productivity second, allowing also for the new methods to immerge. The threat that was shared by everybody in the same way brought the colleagues closer together and made them more supportive and flexible among themselves.

All this can be applied to the work of the ERI SEE and its partners in the region. Despite the challenges, the activities of the ERI SEE were fully realised as planned, and in some cases even more than planned:

- The TO REGOS project activities were done in the extent planned, by adjusting the regionally-based occupational standards methodology so that it fits the new, on-line format and way of discussing and working. There was a strong sense of partnership and willingness to complete the tasks despite difficulties. Practice sharing and communication channels were at a very high and effective level. As most of the TO REGOS national, and all regional meetings, were organized on-line, which is a very demanding environment for work on joint documents, what proved to be the key to success were skilled and experienced moderators and quality preparation of material for discussion.
- This was also the year of evidence gathering: two regional studies, relevant for evidence-built policy making and planning further regional cooperation – on teacher education and training and quality assurance in general education – were completed by ERI SEE.
- In addition, as a continuation of the study on teacher education and training and needs analysis systems in the region, the ETF launched another one, focusing particularly on digital skills and continuous professional development provision of these skills, with ERI SEE partnering
- Another two regional studies, in the area of higher education – on compliance with ESG and comparison of qualifications frameworks and how HE qualifications relate within the region – were completed by RCC, in partnership with ERI SEE
- Flexibility and support were shown in 3 webinars organized to support education systems in their quality response to COVID-19, with external experts and international organizations partnering or speaking at these events. They were positively assessed by the participants with a strongly expressed desire for tangible outputs such as on-line courses standard or blended learning standard
- In some ways, this was also the year of expansion: in spite of the challenges related to COVID-19, the communication with the partners was more intense, faster, and more frequents. As a result, the partnerships with other international organization and institutions were expanded or strengthened (ETF, RCC, European Commission)

To conclude, the 2020 was the year of expansion, flexibility, and support for the Education Reform Initiative of South Eastern Europe (ERI SEE) - in terms of the number of activities, budget and visibility, but most importantly, connection with the partners from the region.

3 OVERVIEW/SUMMARY OF THE ACTIVITIES

ERI SEE Activities	Date	Theme
VET – TO REGOS project		
National events – working sessions for the development of qualifications standars for hotel-restaurant technician	January – March 2020	Hotel – restaurant technician
National events - working sessions for the development of standards of occupations (construction industry)	March – October 2020	Dry-construction worker and painter
Project Management Meeting	April 2020	Project Management Meeting to discuss development of occupational standards for dry-construction worker and painter in an on-line environment, exchanges of ideas and practices.
Project Management Meeting	September 2020	Discussion with partners on the timeline and realization of activities under the COVID-19 circumstances and having in mind current delays.
National events per economy per occupation to finalize the process (5 occupations, 6 economies, 1 event per economy - 30 events)	October – November 2020	Tile-setter and floor layer
WBA4WBL Regional meeting	October 2020	Consolidation and endorsement of the regionally-based occupational standards for dry-construction worker and painter occupational standards.
Project Management Meeting	November 2020	Discussion with partners on the timeline and realization of activities under the COVID-19 circumstances and having in mind current delays.

WBA4WBAL Regional Meeting (mapping skills at regional level)	December 2020	Consolidation and endorsement of the regionally-based occupational standards for tile-setter and floor layer.
maintenance of portal WBA4WBL and ERI SEE website	Continuous	
Feasibility study on regionally-based qualification standards	July – December 2020	Assessment of the feasibility of establishing regionally-based qualification standards with recommendations, currently in process
Pre-tertiary Education – Teacher education and training and Quality Assurance		
Study on teacher education and training systems – focus on systems of needs analysis	March - June 2020	<p>The Study identified the framework in which currently teacher education and training takes place in the region, the good practices and improvement areas, and offered some recommendations for consideration.</p> <p>The Study was funded by the North Macedonian additional contribution</p>
Study on QA in general education: external evaluation	April – December 2020	<p>The Study deals with the organization of the external evaluation systems in 7 economies (Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, North Macedonia, Moldova, Montenegro and Serbia), and the system of external evaluators trainings and professional development, and potential ways of improvements.</p> <p>The Study was funded by the North Macedonian additional contribution.</p>
Developing a concept note/project proposal for external evaluation of institutions and teacher education and training	September – December 2020	The results of the two studies – on teacher education and training and quality assurance – were used when initial planning of the project. The project also included the further developments in VET.
Meeting of teacher education and training network (ETF and ERI SEE) (4 th meeting)	July 2020	Preseration of the results of the Study on Teacher Education and Training and agreement on the next steps
SEE TET meeting (5 th) Sharing of experiences relevant for planning the	July 2020	Sharing practices on organization of school year 2020/21 under the COVID-19 threat with speakers from

new school year under COVID-29 circumstances		Austrian and Croatian institutions and Serbian speaker from the Ministry.
SEE TET meeting (6 th) Quality of education under COVID-19 circumstance	September 2020	Support to policy makers in the region to discuss practices of blended learning and quality assurance of education under COVID-19
SEE TET meeting (6 th) Quality of VET under COVID-19 circumstance	November 2020	Support to policy makers in the region to discuss VET practices under COVID-19 circumstances
Higher Education – Recognition of Academic Qualifications		
7 th Meeting of the RCC – ERI SEE Joint Working Group on Recognition of Academic Qualifications	February 2020	Presentation of the current QA systems, agreement on the JIS updates, planning of the next steps
WG RAQ Study visit - presentations of the regional recognition database – experience sharing, best practice examples	May 2020	On-line study visit with the ENIC NARIC centre from France which presented their on-line system for digital recognition of academic qualifications
Study on qualification frameworks for WG RAQ	July – December 2020	The focus of the study is on the national qualifications frameworks in the region,
Study on implementation of ESG principles in the WB QAA	July – December 2020	Analysis of the compliance with ESG
Kick-off meeting for the implementation of the ESG principles in the WB QA agencies	July 2020	Launch of the analysis of the compliance of QAA with the ESG, description of the timeline and roles and responsibility.
Development of the Regional Recognition Database – internal processing digital tool for recognition of academic qualifications for WG RAQ	June – December 2020	Development of the digital tool facilitating recognition of academic qualifications submitted to the ENIC NARIC centres in the region.
8 th Meeting of the WG RAQ	October 2020	Presentation of the first version of the digital tool facilitating recognition of academic qualifications
ERI SEE Secretariat (general topics)		

ERI SEE Governing Board meeting	February 2020, Belgrade	Discussion and adoption of the Activity and Financial Report for 2019, and on discussion and adoption of the Work Programme 2020 and Financial Plan 2020.
ERI SEE Governing Board Meeting	October 2020	Focus on the activities and financial status and discussion for the Work Programme and Financial Plan for 2021.
Newsletter	December 2020	Overview of the most relevant activities (past and future)
Maintenance the ERI SEE website	Continuous	

4 STRATEGIC PRIORITIES 2020

4.1 RESPONDING TO THE COVID-19 CHALLENGES TO ASSURE THE QUALITY OF ERI SEE SERVICE

As mentioned in the opening chapter, the year 2020 was almost completely shaped by the pandemic outburst in March 2020, lasting till the end of the year. This required the adequate response to the realization of activities planned within the Work Programme 2020, which were no longer possible face-to-face.

The pre-requisite for successful continuation of the activities was to make sure that ERI SEE Secretariat has the necessary technical equipment and infrastructural conditions to continue its day-to-day operations on-line. Very early on the Zoom platform was purchased and ERI SEE created its user profile to enable on-line meetings, and as far as the documents were concerned, ERI SEE already had the digital shared point with all the documents developed or being developed archived and available at any moment to ERI SEE staff. There is also a shared digital point of all the invoices and monitoring of costs as well as on-line banking available. From that perspective, transferring to the completely digital mode of working for ERI SEE staff did not represent a challenge.

The next step was to modify the way activities in the region, with regional partners, were going to be implemented. With TO REGOS partners, a project management meeting was organized, where the use of the Zoom platform for national meetings was agreed, using the ERI SEE user profile. The methodology was adjusted to the new circumstances.

Especially challenging was the fact that a couple of TO REGOS partners were infected by the virus and were recovering for a longer period of time. In addition to this experience, the concept of on-line regional meetings where interaction, discussions, joint work on documents, were required in order to produce the regional outputs, had to be modified and developed. With the support of experienced moderator and quality preparation of preliminary documents it was possible to have the agreement reached on the regionally-based occupational standards (for dry construction worker, painter, tile setter and floor layer) within the given time-frame.

The meetings of the Working Group for Recognition of Academic Qualifications were organized 2 times physically, first in February, before the pandemic, and then in October, in one of the virus withdrawal cycles. The meeting supposed to be organized in December was postponed at the request of the economies. The activities were going in a modified manner – regional studies (on European Standards and Guidelines implementation in the region, and the Qualifications Frameworks) that were planned were implemented on-line, with on-line interviews and desk research instead of field visits; and the on-line internal tool for recognition was being developed in parallel. However, due to the impossibility of a physical training, which was requested by the economies, the piloting of the tool has not yet started.

The international conference on higher education, in cooperation with the Ministry of education of North Macedonia had to be postponed for the after-COVID period.

The activities of the Teacher education and training network and group of experts in QA in pre-tertiary education were focusing on on-line meetings and webinars, with international and regional experts

sharing their practices and examples to the region on thematic issues, such as blended learning, quality assurance in on-line environment, preparation of COVID-19 scenarios for the next school year.

Despite the challenges, all the activities planned, with the exception of the international conference on higher education, which was postponed for the times when physical gatherings will be possible, were successfully organized on-line.

4.2 SUPPORTING THE ECONOMIES OF THE WESTERN BALKANS IN THEIR RESPONSE TO THE COVID-19

As mentioned earlier, webinars supporting the economies' response to COVID-19 were organized to support the education systems in the region, namely in the aspects dealing with teacher education and training and quality assurance in pre-tertiary education.

Even though the webinars weren't planned in the Work Programme 2019 and they formed an ad-hoc response to the real needs of the education systems in the region in light of the pandemic, they were deemed successful and needed and likely to continue in the same or similar format.

3 supportive webinars were organized, one on the preparation of possible scenarios for the school year 2020/2021, given the pandemic; one on the blended learning and monitoring of education in digital format, and one on the organization of VET activities during the pandemic.

The webinars proved to be a great way of exchanging practices among the experts from the region and EU, learning about new policy developments in terms of digitalization and digital response to the pandemic, and sharing best practices. The webinars also opened a number of new specific subjects, such as monitoring the quality of on-line teaching and learning, the work of the QA agencies in pre-tertiary education via on-line means, organization of blended learning, creating a quality framework for on-line continuous professional development courses, digital didactics, and similar, that also provide opportunities to continue with the exchange of expertise in this format beyond the pandemic.

4.3 ENSURING SUSTAINABILITY OF ACTIVITIES AND THEIR EXPANSION IN 2021

2020 was the year used for negotiating and planning actions for 2021. Based on the results of studies that were implemented in 2020, on the subject of teacher education and systems of needs analysis, and the other on the external evaluation systems and work of the external evaluators, a project with an international donor was being negotiated and drafted.

The project is planned with two main pillars – the first one seen as the continuation of the current one, focusing on regionally-based occupational standards, and extending further into the regionally-based qualifications standards, and the other pillar is planned to be focusing on the improvements in the quality assurance systems in pre-tertiary education. They would both include training and continuous professional development – the first strand of teachers and company mentors involved in the future implementation of the curricula based on the regionally-based occupational standards, and the other strand of external evaluators.

With this possible project, the activities under the thematic priorities of VET and general education would be greatly expanded in the next three-year period, involving continuous meetings and working groups at national and regional level producing a concrete set of outputs, such as regionally-based occupational standards, regionally-based qualifications standards, national curricula, supporting learning and teaching material and activities, training modules, modified external evaluation tools etc.

4.4 ENSURING SUSTAINABLE PARTNERSHIPS

The year 2020 was also used to consolidate existing partnerships with the regional actors most relevant for ERI SEE – European Training Foundation (ETF) and Regional Cooperation Council (RCC).

Through a number of joint activities – webinars supporting economies in their response to COVID-19, implementation of Study on teacher education and training, and implementation of the Study on digital skills, participation in each other's events, and dissemination of information, the cooperation with ETF was frequent, effective and reliable. The year ended with re-confirming the Declaration on Intent of cooperation in 2021.

Regarding the cooperation with RCC, it entailed close cooperation on the implementation of the Study on compliance with the ESG, Study on comparison of Qualifications Frameworks in the region, development of the on-line tool for ENIC NARIC offices facilitating the everyday process of recognition, and organization of joint events. The cooperation is going to continue under the Berlin process and in line with the Common Regional Market (CRM), which is the agenda/Action plan for the implementation of the Berlin process in the next 3-year period. ERI SEE is envisaged as the partner in the implementation of the activities regarding the Free Movement of People agenda, and more specifically: WB Framework Agreement on Access to Study, recognition of academic qualifications in the WB and enhanced quality of recognition of academic qualifications; supporting the WB Quality Assurance Agency for membership in ENQA and EQAR, encouraging participation of the WB in the European Higher education Area and European University Initiative, open to Western Balkans Universities.

The cooperation with the European Commission was strengthened by the participation of EC representatives in webinars supporting the region in their response to COVID-19, in presenting the latest EC developments and reports about the situation.

5 THEMATIC PRIORITY AREAS

5.1 VOCATIONAL EDUCATION AND TRAINING AND IMPLEMENTATION OF THE TO REGOS PROJECT

5.1.1 About TO REGOS project

The project contributes to the enhancement of the employability and labour mobility of young people (aged 14 – 18) by investing in quality and labour market relevance of VET in the SEE region.

Regional cooperation, regional initiative and regional outputs form the foundation of this project, which thematically focuses on the standards of occupations to be developed in strong partnership between business and education, thus ensuring the definition of the labour market-relevant skills. In turn, standards of occupations make the core of standards of qualifications and consequently curricula taught at schools, which contributes to the learning outcomes being responsive to the needs of the labour market, and employability of young people.

In more concrete terms, the project is resulting in enhanced cooperation between private and public sector in VET at regional and national level, Common Regional Framework for the development of regionally-based occupational standards, 5 regionally-based occupational standards, adoption of regionally-based standards of occupations on national level, translation of adopted standards of occupations into standards of qualifications at national level and adoption, and analysis of the feasibility of developing regionally-based standards of qualifications and action plan.

The project has been focusing on the following target groups:

- VET centres from the region, currently in charge of the development of standards of occupations and qualifications at the national level and implementation of curricula, as implementing partners
- Chambers of commerce from the region, presenting the liaison to the adequate representatives of the business sector from whom the input on skills is needed; also playing an important role in the implementation of the work-based learning in some economies, as implementing partners
- Private sector organisations and companies from identified priority sectors, as implementing partners

Other target groups relevant at national levels for the modernization and adoption of standards of occupations and qualifications, include:

- Ministries of Education, in charge of the process of modernizing the standards at the policy level
- Ministries of Labour, in some economies in charge of the standards of occupations
- Employment services, providing input on the unemployment figures and market trends and needs
- National Qualification Agencies, national Quality Assurance Agencies, in charge of the adoption/monitoring the implementation of the new standards, as local partners, involved in national consultations regarding the adoption, potential adaptation and implementation of regionally-based standards of occupations.

5.1.2 Occupational Standards development

2020 was the year in which most of the project activities were supposed to take place and be completed.

The activities that were planned for 2020 included finalization of the qualification standards for hotel-restaurant technician, a large number of national meetings for collecting inputs and proposals for 4 occupational standards in the construction sector (painter, dry construction worker, tile-setter and floor layer), a number of regional meeting consolidating national inputs, finalization of those 4 occupational standards within the construction sector and the transposition of minimum 2 of them into the qualifications standards

The implementation of activities faced challenges throughout the year: the COVID-19 crisis hit when the first national meetings for the construction sector were organized, which forced the whole project to re-think and re-shape the methods of cooperation and methodology for the development of regionally-based occupational standards. The methods and methodology of work had to be adjusted to the new circumstances – meaning organizing all of the national and regional meetings that were originally planned physically, in the on-line environment, making sure that all of the partners can be included and that the on-line methodology enables quality discussions, exchanges and production of regional outputs which can be regionally-endorsed.

In addition to the adjustment to the methodology, some major actors in the project implementation were seriously hit by the virus and were not able to contribute for a couple of months.

As a consequence, the timeline had to be adjusted, as certain activities were delayed. However, in the end all of the occupational standards were agreed and endorsed at regional level.

The process of national validation of the regionally-based occupational standards from the construction sector is now planned for early 2021, and transposition of occupational standards into qualification standards for the final 3 months of the project (March – May).

During the year, the same challenges were shared by all the partners, which resulted in a homogeneous, supportive, flexible and effective cooperation, intensified by the quality moderator who managed to lead the on-line discussions efficiently, and the quality preparation of the working material, which saved time in quality discussions.

5.1.3 Planning further cooperation

In addition, the planning of the next phase of the project took place via a series of regional on-line consultations, consultation meetings with the donor and drafting first concepts of the new project.

The partnership with the partners – VET agencies and chambers of commerce from the region – was strengthened, the partners very positively reacted to their mutual cooperation as well as cooperation with ERI SEE, clearly stating their intentions to continue with intense regional cooperation via the new project. They also expressed benefits of these regional consultation and cooperation processes and showed willingness to support regional activities with additional national contributions, as well as to

explore possibilities of continuing regional cooperation in the area of standards even beyond the project cooperation.

5.1.4 Feasibility study on regionally-based qualification standards

The feasibility study on regionally-based qualification standards was being developed in the period from June 2020 till December 2020. It was presented in its final draft version to our partners in December 2020.

It showed that the regionally-based QS are feasible under certain pre-conditions: agreement on the core elements of the qualification standards; clear definition and understanding on the meaning of those elements; regional groups made of relevant and expert representatives per economies; the occupations and qualifications chosen are defined at the same qualification level in all of the economies; and in the development of these qualification standards there is strong reliance on the descriptors defined at the EQF level.

The Study proposes first steps and framework for the development of regionally-based qualifications standards, whereas the details have to be agreed with the economies.

5.1.5 TO REGOS 2020 in numbers:

In the year 2020, the following quantitative targets were met:

- Number of national meetings across the region: 111
- Number of regional meetings: 14
- Number of experts from the region involved: 144
- Number of national inputs for regionally-based OS-s produced: 24
- Number of regionally-based OS-s produced: 4
- Number of national OS-s developed: 17
- Number of national QS-a developed: 7
- Number of project management meetings: 4

5.2 HIGHER EDUCATION AND SUPPORTING RECOGNITION OF ACADEMIC QUALIFICATIONS

As mentioned earlier, the 2020 witnessed strengthening the partnership with Regional Cooperation Council on the implementation of the MultiAnnual Action Plan for Regional Economic Area (MAP REA). New activities for the following 3-year period were also planned and agreed, as a part of the Common Regional Market Agenda within the Berlin Process, endorsed by the highest levels of the Western Balkans economies.

5.2.1 Supporting Quality Assurance agencies in their compliance with ESG

To understand the challenges, and with the purpose of assisting the economies and QA agencies for higher education in becoming members of the ENQA and being registered by EQAR, which is conditioned by the compliance with the European Standards and Guidelines (ESG), the first step is to identify the critical areas.

With that purpose, a study was commissioned by RCC, with ERI SEE as a partner, to identify the areas of mis-alignment with the ESG and to develop a set of recommendations. The Study comprised a number of intense activities across the region, that were originally planned to be undertaken in physical presence, however were replaced by on-line meetings and interviews.

Apart from the on-line meetings and interviews, the Study also included the desk research of the relevant documents from the region, dealing with higher education and quality assurance, implementation and analysis of the self-assessment report, and developing the individual reports for individual economies, as well as regional report with collective summary and recommendations. It was implemented by the external company and external experts with long-lasting experience in reviewing quality assurance agency and their compliance with the ESG.

The study was finalized in December 2020 and is currently being verified by participating economies, with the expected endorsement of recommendation in January 2021.

5.2.2 Regional comparison of qualifications frameworks

In order to explore potential of faster and automatic recognition of higher education qualifications, it is important to identify at what stage of development qualifications frameworks in the region are, how they determine the higher education qualifications (at what level of their individual qualifications frameworks) and how that relates to the European Qualification Framework (EQF). The referencing of national qualifications frameworks to the EQF makes the comparison of the status of qualifications, and consequently recognizing qualification, easier and more reliable.

This is particularly relevant as one of the directions of the Bologna process and Ministerial conclusions is to move forward to the automatic recognition, meaning recognizing a qualification at the same level at which it is recognized in the original country. In order to make that commitment or direction a reality, it is important to analyze if the understandings behind

assigning qualifications to a certain level are the same and if there is adequate level of trust among the economies and their assessment of qualifications.

In this process, particularly challenging are the qualifications that are issued prior to the Bologna process, the so-called pre-Bologna qualifications, to which EQF levels were not originally assigned. The Study also dealt with that aspect.

The Study was commissioned by the RCC in partnership with ERI SEE. It was implemented from July to December by an external group of experts. The final draft was sent to the economies in the region for their inputs, and the endorsement of conclusions and recommendations is expected to take place in January 2021 after the regional consultation meeting.

5.2.3 Regional Recognition Database

Currently, an internal tool facilitating the recognition procedures in the Western Balkans economies is being finalized. The purpose of this internal tool – called Regional Recognition Database (RRD) – is to automatize and facilitate the administrative process of qualification recognition for the purpose of employment by ENIC / NARIC offices; to exploit the data inserted for internal purposes (various statistics, reports, evidence-based policy making etc.); and external purposes (creation of the database of qualifications submitted for recognition and possible comparison of results of the recognition process; use of generic data for reporting within the Berlin process, use of the generic data for public statistics, search on the qualifications in the database etc.)

The piloting of the RRD is envisaged for first quarter of 2021 when the ENIC NARIC offices from the region will be invited to use the tool in their everyday work in a trial period.

The RRD is connected to the Joint Information System and the generic public data collected from the RRD will be shown in the JIS.

5.2.4 Joint Information System

This is the system which is designed to offer information about recognition processes, bodies, and contacts, as well as about quality assurance processes, bodies and contacts, from the region. It also contains information about higher education institutions and study programmes that are accredited in the region.

It requires regular communication channels with the agencies for Quality Assurance, which is not always the case. For that reason there is a risk of data shown in the JIS not completely corresponding to the real accreditation status.

More investment in terms of communication with officers in charge from the region must be made in order to have a 100% reliable system and register, which is one area of action planned for 2021.

5.3 GENERAL EDUCATION – TEACHER EDUCATION AND TRAINING AND QUALITY ASSURANCE

Activities organized for the South Eastern European Teacher Education and Training Network (SEE TET) (regional group of experts composed of the representatives of national agencies in charge of teacher education and training issues from Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Montenegro, Moldova, North Macedonia and Serbia) and Regional group of experts in QA in general education (composed of the representatives of agencies for external evaluation of education and institutions from the same group of economies) can be divided into two directions:

- First one were supportive activities for the response to COVID-19, and ways of operating under these changed and challenging circumstances
- And the second one as research activities gathering data and evidence on the established systems for teacher education and training and quality assurance, and some key aspects: systems for teachers' needs analysis and quality of work of external evaluators and how they are monitored in their work

Therefore, 2 studies were produced, which will be further used for planning of the regional activities. In addition, 4 regional meetings for the networks were organized using the on-line tools which will be described in more detail in chapters below.

Based on the evidence gathered in the two studies, new activities are planned as a part of the new project, which was being negotiated in 2020, as described in the Chapter 4.3. Ensuring sustainability of activities and their expansion in 2021.

5.3.1 Study on teacher education and training system

The Study on teacher education and training system with focus on systems of needs analysis was ordered in April 2020 by ERI SEE, as it was important to gather information about how the systems of teacher education and training are organized across the region, who the main actors are, as well as how the teachers' needs for continuous professional development are analysed and decided upon in the economies of the region.

The Study was the result of the discussion from the last physical meetings of the SEE Teacher Education and Training Network, which was organized in May 2019. It was implemented by external experts in the period from March – June 2020 and was published on the ERI SEE website.

It gave important information about what systems are missing, what their good sides are and what needs to be done in the region further. It explored the situation in Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, North Macedonia, Kosovo*, Moldova, Montenegro and Serbia in terms of systems of teacher education and trainings and how their needs are analysed. It identified the framework in which currently teacher education and training take place in the region, the good practices and improvement areas, and offered some recommendations for consideration.

The results of the Study were presented to the group on the 4th Meeting of the SEE TET Network in July 2020. The results of the Study were also taken into consideration when drafting the first rationale for

the ADA next project proposal. The Study will also be used for planning the future work of the SEE TET in cooperation between ERI SEE and ETF.

5.3.2 Supporting education and training systems in times of COVID-19

The 5TH meeting of the SEE TET Network was organized in July 2020 as a support to policy makers in the region to share practices on organization of school year 2020/21 under the COVID-19 threat. It gathered speakers from Austrian and Croatian institutions, presenting their examples of good practices, scenarios for planning the school year 2020/21, what possibilities to take into account when planning the new school year, and a Serbian speaker from the Ministry presenting the framework for digital schools under the circumstances of a complete lockdown.

The 6th Meeting of the SEE TET Network was organized in October 2020 with the main goal of providing some new and relevant information to the members of the SEE networks, policy makers and stakeholders on the issues that were recognized as challenging in the previous COVID-19 wave (quality of on-line teaching and effectiveness of digital learning, assessment in digital environment, monitoring the quality of provision. The purpose was also to inspire reflections and cooperation at national and regional level for the increase quality of the education provision in school year 2020/2021

The webinar presented EU initiatives regarding blended learning that may be of use to the region, enabled sharing of the good practices from the region, presented the results on teachers' needs analysis systems in the region and digital skill study update and provided a platform for discussions, brainstorming and networking. It was organized with the participation of European Commission representatives, Dutch School Inspectorate, and BiH, Serbian and North Macedonian examples of various approaches to pandemic. The participants were from Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Kosovo*, North Macedonia, Montenegro, Serbia.

7th Meeting of the SEE TET Network was organized with the aim of supporting specifically VET, and work-based learning, in times of COVID-19 The webinar provided the European perspective on developments in VET during COVID-19 and beyond, enabled sharing examples of good practices from the region – EU and non-EU, and identified areas of additional concern by the participants. The participants were from Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Kosovo*, North Macedonia, Montenegro, Serbia. The speakers were international expert in VET, European Commission representative, representative of Croatian Agency for VET and Adult Education, and representative of the Albanian project Skills for Jobs.

The webinars were organized in cooperation between ERI SEE and ETF.

5.3.3 Study on External Evaluation systems and External Evaluators trainings and monitoring

The Study was being developed in the period from March – December 2020 and faced many difficulties, such as the researcher being hit by the virus and also many relevant interviewees and contacts not responding to requests to participate for different reasons. However, eventually the Study reached its final draft in December, which was shared with the relevant agencies for possible interventions. The

activities that are pending are consultation meetings for the the feedback from the economies on findings and recommendations. The Study will be published once the consultation process and feedback from the economies is received.

The conclusions of the study are used to plan the activities of the regional group of experts in QA in pre-tertiary education, within the new project that is currently being planned and is described under the Chapter 4.3.

*This designation is without prejudice to positions on status, and is in line with UNSCR 1244 and the ICJ Opinion on the Kosovo Declaration of Independence.

6 ANNEX 1. LIST OF ACTIVITIES ORGANIZED BY ERI SEE IN THE PERIOD 1ST JANUARY – 31ST DECEMBER 2019 (BY CHRONOLOGICAL ORDER)

6.1 ERI SEE CORE ACTIVITIES

CORE ERI SEE Activities	Timeline originally envisaged	Status	Comment/Note
7 th Meeting of the RCC – ERI SEE Joint Working Group on Recognition of Academic Qualifications	February 2020	Realized: 5 th February 2020	<p>The 7th Meeting of the WG RAQ was organized by RCC and ERI SEE in Tirana, Albania. It gathered representatives of the ministries in charge of education, ENIC NARIC offices, and QA agencies from the participating economies (Albania, BiH, Kosovo*, North Macedonia, Montenegro and Serbia).</p> <p>The meeting focused on the realization of the obligations within the Multiannual Action Plan on Regional Economic Area and more specifically on:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Updates on the developments in QA systems in the region - Further development of the Join Information System and Register of Accredited HEI and study programmes - Planning of the mock review of the alignment of QA Agencies with ESG - Planning of the comparative analysis of national qualification systems and impact on recognition of qualifications - Planning of the on-line tool for processing recognition requests

ERI SEE Governing Board meeting	January 2019	Realized: 11th February 2020, Belgrade	<p>The 28th ERI SEE Governing Board meeting was organized in Belgrade, Serbia, with the face-to-face participation of representatives from Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, North Macedonia, Montenegro, Serbia, OeAD and Austria; and on-line participation of Albanian representative.</p> <p>The meeting focused on the discussion and adoption of the Activity and Financial Report for 2019, and on discussion and adoption of the Work Programme 2020 and Financial Plan 2020. All the documents were adopted.</p>
Study on QA in general education: external evaluation	February / April 2020	Realized: December 2020	<p>The Study faced difficulties in realization due to the COVID – 19 pandemic and non-availability of respondents to the interviews or questionnaire (in some cases) and due to different national prioritization (focus on the organization of education provision).</p> <p>The Study deals with the organization of the external evaluation systems in 7 economies (Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, North Macedonia, Moldova, Montenegro and Serbia), and the system of external evaluators trainings and professional development, and potential ways of improvements.</p> <p>The Study will be used for further planning of the activities of the SEE Network of experts in QA in general education (regional guidelines on the profession of an external evaluator, proposal for initial trainings, monitoring of work etc.).</p> <p>The Study was funded by the North Macedonian additional contribution.</p>
Study on teacher education and training systems – focus on systems of needs analysis	February / April 2020	June 2020	<p>The Study faced slight delays due to the COVID-19 pandemic. It explored the situation in Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, North Macedonia, Kosovo*, Moldova, Montenegro and Serbia in terms of systems of teacher education and trainings and how their needs are analysed.</p> <p>The Study identified the framework in which currently teacher education and training takes place in the region, the good practices and improvement areas, and offered some recommendations for consideration.</p>

			<p>The results of the Study were presented to the group on the 4th Meeting of the SEE TET Network in June 2020. The results of the Study were also taken into consideration when drafting the first rationale for the ADA next project proposal.</p> <p>The Study will also be used for planning the future work of the SEE TET. The Study was funded by the North Macedonian additional contribution.</p>
International Conference on QA in Higher Education	March / April 2020	Postponed	<p>The International Conference was supposed to be organized in Skopje, with the funding from North Macedonia. However, due to the COVID-19 pandemic it was postponed. The consultations with the North Macedonian Ministry are in order to decide how to proceed – whether to organize the conference on-line in 2021, or to wait until the situation with the virus stabilizes.</p>
Developing a concept note/project proposal for external evaluation of institutions and teacher education and training	April – October 2020	September – December 2020	<p>The results of the two studies – on teacher education and training and quality assurance – were used when initial planning of the project. The project also included the further developments in VET.</p> <p>Thus, the project draft focuses on 2 components:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. VET and development of regionally-based qualification standards and curricula (with elements of WBL) 2. Support schools in the implementation of the QA framework/guidelines <p>The project ideas and activities are currently being discussed and consulted with the partners – VET agencies, QA agencies in pre-tertiary education and Chambers of commerce from the region.</p>
Meeting of teacher education and training network (ETF and ERI SEE) (4 th meeting)	May 2020	July 2020	<p>The meeting was organized on-line. It served as a platform for:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Presenting the results of the Study on teacher education and training systems, and systems of needs analysis - Presenting the next phase of the research – Digital Skills Study - Agreeing on the next steps in regional cooperation

Recognition of academic qualifications - 8th meeting of the Workgroup on the recognition of academic qualifications	May 2020	October 2020	<p>The meeting was organized in October 2020 physically.</p> <p>The testing version of the Regional Recognition Database was shown to the participants and their inputs were collected.</p>
WBA4WBL Regional meeting	May 2020	October - November 2020	<p>The meeting, originally planned to take place in physical environment, will be organized on-line with the on-line participation of representatives from 6 participating economies (with the possibilities of some economies being absent due to the COVID-19 infection). The meeting was organized on-line in a series of shorter sessions.</p> <p>The meeting dealt with the consolidation and endorsement of the regionally-based occupational standards for dry-construction worker and painter occupational standards.</p>
WBA4WBAL Regional Meeting	October 2020	December 2020	<p>The meeting, originally planned to take place in physical environment, will be organized on-line with the on-line participation of representatives from 6 participating economies (with the possibilities of some economies being absent due to the COVID-19 infection).</p> <p>The meeting dealt with the consolidation and endorsement of the regionally-based occupational standards for tile-setter and floor layer.</p>
Recognition of academic qualifications - 9 th meeting of the RCC – ERI SEE WG RAQ	October 2020	Postponed for 2021	Validation of the results of the studies and agreements on the next steps of the WG RAQ, postponed for 2021 by the request of the economies.
ERI SEE Governing Board Meeting	October / November 2020	November 2021	Focus on the activities and financial status and discussion for the Work Programme and Financial Plan for 2021.
Newsletter	December 2020	December 2020	Overview of the most relevant activities (past and future)
maintenance of portals WBA4WBL	continuous	As planned	maintenance of portals WBA4WBL

maintenance of portals JIS	continuous	As planned	<p>The JIS portal was extended to include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Entry point for the Regional Recognition Database (on-line tool for digital processing of recognition requests) - Qualifications Database – overview of all the general information on qualifications received for recognition - Statistical Data on recognition
----------------------------	------------	------------	---

6.2 ON-TOP ACTIVITIES (NOT ORIGINALLY PLANNED)

REALIZED ON TOP OF PLANNED	Timeline	Status	Comment/Note
Study on qualification frameworks for WG RAQ	Not planned originally	Completed – December 2021	<p>Study led by RCC, ERI SEE partner; planned finalization December 2020.</p> <p>The focus of the study is on the national qualifications frameworks in the region, and the relationship with the academic qualifications and recognition</p>
Study on implementation of ESG principles in the WB QAA	Not planned originally	Completed – December 2021	<p>Study led by RCC, ERI SEE partner. Planned finalization in December 2020. The focus of the Study is on how much QA agencies in the region comply with the European Standards and Guidelines in accrediting HEI and study programmes, and what they need to improve in order to comply fully. Compliance with ESG is a prerequisite for membership in ENQA.</p>
Kick-off meeting for the implementation of the ESG principles in the WB QA agencies	Not originally planned	July 2020	<p>Launch of the analysis of the compliance of QAA with the ESG, description of the timeline and roles and responsibility. The meeting was organized by RCC in partnership with ERI SEE, and the presenters were the experts contracted to implement the analysis (which will consist of a desk research and on-line interviews instead of field visits).</p>

WG RAQ presentations of the regional recognition database – experience sharing, best practice examples	Not planned originally	Completed in May 2020	On-line study visit with the ENIC NARIC centre from France which presented their on-line system for digital recognition of academic qualifications. This on-line study visit served to clarify what the regional recognition database would be and what functionalities it would have.
Development of the Regional Recognition Database – internal processing digital tool for recognition of academic qualifications for WG RAQ	Not planned originally	In progress	Development of the digital tool facilitating recognition of academic qualifications submitted to the ENIC NARIC centres in the region. September – October is the testing of the database; and the planned launch is December 2020.
SEE TET meeting (5 th) Sharing of experiences relevant for planning the new school year under COVID-29 circumstances	Not planned originally	July 2020	The meeting was organized as a support to policy makers in the region to share practices on organization of school year 2020/21 under the COVID-19 threat. It gathered speakers from Austrian and Croatian institutions, presenting their examples of good practices, and a Serbian speaker from the Ministry.
Study on digital skills of teachers	Not originally planned	In progress	The Study is led by ETF, and ERI SEE is a partner in implementation. It focuses on the identification of digital skills and digital provision missing for the teachers of the 21 st century, especially with COVID-19 in mind.

6.3 TO REGOS ACTIVITIES

Project activities – TO REGOS	Timeline	Status	Comment/Note
----------------------------------	----------	--------	--------------

National events - working sessions for the development of standards of occupations (construction industry: dry-construction worker and painter)	January – September 2020	March - October	<p>In the period from March – September 2020 the national working groups were developing the occupational standards for the dry-construction worker and painter. The 4 economies completed the process by September; however 2 (Serbia and Bosnia and Herzegovina) were heavily delayed by the COVID-19 cases among the occupational standards experts moderating the discussions and leading the groups.</p> <p>The whole process demanded a lot of flexibility and new methodologies – switch to on-line consultations, which were shorter but more frequent, and included screen work but also exchange of material over e-mail and commenting in this way.</p> <p>The work on the occupational standards for dry-construction worker and painter started in March and was finalized in November.</p>
Project Management Meeting	March 2020	On-line, April 2020	Project Management Meeting to discuss development of occupational standards for dry-construction worker and painter in an on-line environment, exchanges of ideas and practices.
Project Management Meeting	Originally not planned	September 2020	Discussion with partners on the timeline and realization of activities under the COVID-19 circumstances and having in mind current delays.
Project Management Meeting	Originally not planned	October 2020	Consultations on the new project
Regional events per occupation (mapping skills at regional level) (2 regional events)	April – September 2020	October – November 2020	The regional events to consolidate national inputs and endorse the final output for dry construction worker and painter were organized on-line.
Project Management Meeting	Originally not planned	November 2020	Discussion with partners on the timeline and realization of activities under the COVID-19 circumstances and new project proposal.
National events per economy per occupation to finalize the process (5	May – October 2020	December 2020	Thus, the process of national validation of dry-construction worker and painter started in November, after the regional endorsement.

occupations, 6 economies, 1 event per economy - 30 events)			
National events for the development of standards of occupations: floor-layer and tile stter	January – September 2020	September – December 2020	The process was finalized in December 2020
Regional events mapping skills at regional level for floor layer and tile stter	September – December 2020	December 2020	Regional consolidation of the inputs for floor-layer and tile setter, regional endorsement of the regionally-based occupational standards for floor layer and tile setter
National validation of the regionally-endorsed occupational standards	October – December 2020	January 2020	Some economies nationally-validated the regionally-endorsed occupational standards, however a number of them transferred the work for 2021.
National events per occupation for qualification standards	October – December 2020	December 2020 – March 2021	National events for the qualifications standards started being organised once the national process for validation of the OS-s is finalized; thus it started in December and goes on in 2021s.
Updating the WBA4WBL on-line portal	Continuous	Continuous	Updating the WBA4WBL on-line portal with the activities and results achieved within the project
Feasibility study on regionally-based qualification standards	Originally planned in 2021	July – December 2020	Assessment of the feasibility of establishing regionally-based qualification standards with recommendations, currently in process