



WORK PROGRAMME 2021 - 2022

**EDUCATION REFORM INITIATIVE OF SOUTH
EASTERN EUROPE (ERI SEE)**

ERI SEE ACTIVITIES – PROPOSALS FOR WORK PROGRAMME 2021 - 2022ⁱ

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INTRODUCTION

About Education Reform Initiative of South Eastern Europe

Education Reform Initiative of South Eastern Europe (ERI SEE) was initiated 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 defined by several Memoranda:

- 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, North Macedonia, Montenegro and Serbia
- 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, which renewed the commitment to regional cooperation in education, for mutual benefit, encompassing all aspect of lifelong learning, science and research. This Memorandum insisted on regional cooperation activities considering relevant EU and European developments and trends in education, science and research, but also close links to the national context and priorities of the signatory countries, also by involving the relevant stakeholders,
- And finally, Memorandum of Understanding on the Role and Organisation of the Education Reform Initiative of South Eastern Europe (Brdo, 2010), which reiterated the commitments of signatory parties (Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, North Macedonia, Moldova, Montenegro and Serbia – ERI SEE member countries) to regional cooperation in the EU accession process and sustainable economic development. The Brdo Memorandum recognized the ERI SEE achievements done so far, and also gave a clear and more operational principles of functioning of ERI SEE and ERI SEE Secretariat as the operational body, at day-to-day level implementing the strategic decisions made by the ministries of education as founders of the ERI SEE. This Memorandum forms the basis of today's operation, status and structure of ERI SEE.

Following the Memorandum of Understanding (Brdo, 2010), the Agreement between the Government of the Republic of Serbia and 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 (hereinafter the Host-country agreement) 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 Secretariat's status of the international organisation.

The procedure on ratifying the Host-country agreement was finalized in December 2017, while the accompanying financial and operational procedures were completed in January 2018, from when the Secretariat functions as an independent international organization seated in Belgrade, Serbia.

Short overview of the 2020

2020 was the year shaped by the COVID-19 pandemic, which made a huge impact on the way things are being done globally as well as in our region. However, in spite of all the challenges and unexpectedness of the situation the year behind us was still very productive and fruitful. It resulted in innovative approaches and methods that will be used even beyond the pandemic.

Some of the positive changes and developments that were used in the work of the ERI SEE included faster and more frequent communication channels among partners and colleagues, innovative online events, evidence gathering, more frequent sharing of practices within the region and stronger sense of connection between colleagues.

When it comes to the areas of intervention, ERI SEE was active in the area of vocational education and training and successfully managed to implement the activities envisaged by the TO REGOS project (*Towards Regionally-based Occupational Standards*). There were 111 national activities, 14 regional meetings, 144 experts from the region involved, 24 national inputs for regionally based occupational standards produced, 4 regionally based occupational standards produced, 17 national occupational standards developed, 4 project management meetings and seven national qualification standards developed in the course of 2020.

In the area of teacher education and training and quality assurance in general education ERI SEE organized three online events supporting education and training systems in their response to COVID-19. All of the ERI SEE participating economies participated in the events. In addition, 2 studies were implemented, one on the subject of teacher education and training and needs analysis, and the other on quality assurance systems in the region and external evaluation, resulting in the comparative overview in all of the ERI SEE participating economies. Another online meeting was organized to present the teacher education and training study. ERI SEE also participated in and supported the implementation of the ETF study on digital skills in the region, which included participation of the Albanian, Moldovan, Montenegrin, North Macedonian and Serbian ministries, schools and teachers.

In the area of higher education ERI SEE intensified its cooperation with RCC on the subject of recognition of qualifications. Two regional events were organized, gathering the regional working group for recognition of academic qualifications. Two studies were developed, one on the subject of qualifications framework in the region and the other on the compliance of quality assurance systems in the region with the European standards and guidelines for higher education. The internal digital system facilitating recognition of academic qualifications was developed in the testing version and connected to the joint information system launched in May 2020. The most interesting feature of

the joint information system is the register of higher education institutions accredited in the region and accredited study programs.

To conclude, 2020 was a successful year in spite of all the challenges. It is the year in which regional cooperation was expanded, partnerships with international partners strengthened, visibility increased and international project successfully implemented. With a team of 2.5 FTE, ERI SEE can express its satisfaction with the results and feedback received from partners. However, there is always room for improvement - further increase in visibility, additional expansion of activities through international projects, strengthening regional partnerships and more cooperation with international partners. These are the areas that will be in particular focus in the work of ERI SEE in 2021.

THEMATIC AREAS OF INTERVENTION

Thematic areas of intervention of ERI SEE in 2021 are aligned with regional and national priorities set by the strategic documents (see Annex 1. Strategic documents).

The thematic focus in 2021 in 2022 is set on:

1. Vocational education and training, and increasing employability through contributing to cooperation between education and business sector.
2. Higher education, and assisting in quality assurance systems and facilitating recognition of academic recognition
3. General education, and supporting quality assurance systems and improvements in teacher education and training.

1. Vocational education and training

Highlights: closing of the current projects Towards regionally-based occupational standards and submission of the new one - focusing on regionally-based occupational and qualifications standards, curricula with work-based learning, and supporting implementation of these curricula.

Youth unemployment is one of the most challenging areas in the Western Balkans, intensified by the regionally identified issue of skills mismatch. The potential solutions include, among others, closer cooperation between the education and business sector in defining the missing skills and developing occupational standard in close cooperation. This is to ensure that the identified missing skills are later, in the process of curricula development, integrated into the curricula and taken into account when deciding on the learning outcomes. The strategic framework for ERI SEE's activities in this particular area is given by national strategic documents and relevant Economic Reform Programs and European Commission recommendations.

ERI SEE has been active in this area as of 2018, when the international project Towards regionally based occupational standards (TO REGOS), funded by the Austrian Development Agency, started. It is currently in its final stages and expected to finish in May 2020.

A new project is being negotiated with the same donor and expected to start in September 2021, with a 3-year duration. The new project is to continue along the same lines as the previous and go beyond. In cooperation with the VET agencies and chambers of commerce from the region, the regionally-based occupational standards and regionally-based qualifications standards are planned

to be produced, modified to national contexts and specificities and transferred into the national curricula.

To make the project a success, some preliminary actions are needed to be completed prior to the start of the project, and they include the regional analysis of the labour market identifying sectors and occupations with the regional development potential and mobility needs; reaching an agreement on the occupations and qualifications to be addressed within the project and defining the framework methodology as the basis for the regional work.

The project plans to contribute 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. As mentioned earlier, one of the reasons of high unemployment rates is the inadequacy of the education systems to deliver for the needs of the labour market. In order to change this, it is crucial to have strong cooperation mechanisms between private and public sector in VET, and strong involvement of adequate business representatives in the definition of the skills needed on the labour market. The project strongly relies on this.

In addition to enhancing cooperation mechanisms and involvement of businesses in the qualification standards development, another component within the project is making sure that the implementation of the curricula is high quality. This will be achieved by training within the pilot schools and companies and creating teaching and learning guidelines ensuring the integration of work-based components.

Thus, more concretely, the activities in 2021 and 2022 within this new planned project will include:

- Maintaining partnership between policy makers and policy implementers – national VET agencies from the region (SEE VET Net) and national chambers of commerce from the region (CIF) – sustaining Western Balkans Alliance for Work-based Learning
- Kick-off conference and networking, policy exchanges and peer learning among all the ERI SEE participating economies
- Regional fine-tuning meeting for the methodology of regionally-based qualifications standards
- Development of regionally-based occupational standards and qualification standards of relevance to the individual economies and the SEE region
- Development of national curricula, based on regionally-based standards of occupations and qualifications
- Integration of work-based learning into the national curricula
- Supporting the implementation of the new curricula through teaching and learning material and trainings for teachers and company instructors

The Western Balkans Alliance for Work-based learning will be the implementing partner in the project at national level of individual economies; and at the same time the project envisages inclusion of the Moldovan representatives in regional activities, practice sharing, peer learning and policy consultations.

The activities will continue beyond 2022 to include adjustment of regionally-based qualifications standards to national specificities, development of national qualifications standards and curricula,

development of teaching and learning material and trainings standards, and adoption of documents at national levels.

The partners in the process are VET agencies and Chambers of Commerce from the region, gathered under the Western Balkans Alliance for work-based learning (WBA4WBL), European Training Foundation and Western Balkans Chambers Investment Forum.

The project will also be strategically supported by the Austrian Federal Ministry of Education, Science and Research, and synergies with regional activities under the Danube Strategy (priority area 9, People and Skills, under the Ministry's authority) will be ensured.

OeAD will be a strategic partners in the project and included in the strategic planning, but also in some implementation segments. It will make sure that the synergies with other projects in the region, expertise and best practices are shared across the region and throughout the project. OeAD will be involved in both VET and QA areas – this refers to the Austrian experiences of high-quality VET and work-based learning, as well as quality assurance practices. Austrian expertise in different ways of organizing internal and external evaluation processes will be of use in regional policy discussions and dialogue, with particular emphasis on effectiveness and efficiency of internal and external evaluation processes and their complementarity.

OeAD will also organize a meeting for the Western Balkans Alliance for Work-based Learning Network, marking the ending of one project and beginning of the next phase. The project is planned for the 3rd or 4th quarter of 2021 and will depend on the pandemic situation.

In case the project is not approved or is delayed, in 2021 and 2022 the sustainability of the WBA4WBL is still going to be ensured through the regular budget of the ERI SEE and organization of regional working meetings and seminar supporting national occupational and qualifications standards developments, exchange of material and good practices, and support to organization of teaching and learning activities in a partly digital format. Also, via meetings and seminars, more connection with the European policies (for example Osnabrueck Declaration) is going to be ensured. The ETF Network of Excellence is going to be promoted and supported in the region.

2. Higher Education

Highlights: Partnering with the Regional Cooperation Council (RCC) in the implementation of the Common Regional Market Action Plan, to reach the Western Balkans Framework Agreement on Access to Study; to enhance recognition of academic qualifications in the Western Balkans; to support QA agencies in higher education in their membership in ENQA and registration in EQAR; to encourage participation of the Western Balkans in the European Higher Education Area (EHEA)

The strategic framework for ERI SEE activities in this area is given by the Common Regional Market (CRM) 2021 – 2024 Action Plan, endorsed by the leaders of the Western Balkans 6 (Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo*, Montenegro, North Macedonia and Serbia), at the Berlin Process Summit held in November 2020 in Sofia. The process is fully supported by the European Commission, private sector, South East Europe economies and relevant regional and international stakeholders.

The Common Regional Market is seen as a tool for deeper regional economic integration and preparation for the EU Single Market, and is continuing on the achievements of the Multiannual Action Plan on Regional Economic Area (MAP REA), implemented from 2017 – 2020.

The CRM is divided into four key areas in which targeted actions are defined:

- Regional trade area: free movement of goods, services, capital and people, including crosscutting measures, such as the Green Lanes, to align with EU-compliant rules and standards and provide opportunities for companies and citizens;
- Regional investment area, to align investment policies with the EU standards and best international practices and promote the region to foreign investors;
- Regional digital area, to integrate the Western Balkans into the pan-European digital market; and
- Regional industrial and innovation area, to transform the industrial sectors, shape value chains they belong to, and prepare them for the realities of today and challenges of tomorrow.

The RCC is the leading regional organisation to facilitate the implementation of the Action Plan in the area of higher education and free movement of people and capital, while ERI SEE is included in specific actions in line with its scope of work and programme.

More concretely, the outputs which will be in the core of this thematic area of intervention include:

- Reaching the Western Balkans Framework Agreement on Access to Study by 2023, which includes the following actions to be taken in 2021:
 - establishment of the Western Balkans Working Group on access to study,
 - analysis of legal framework and assessment of necessary legal adjustments; and
 - a list of guidelines and recommendations to be followed further in order to meet this goal.
- Recognition of academic qualifications in the Western Balkans and enhanced quality of recognition of academic qualifications by 2023, through the implementation of the following activities in 2021:
 - Endorsement of the Feasibility study for recognition of primary and secondary level qualifications,
 - Endorsement of regional recommendations (including possible legal adjustments);
 - Feasibility assessment for recognition of VET completed;
 - Implementing negotiations on the WB Agreement on recognition of qualifications
 - Regular meetings and trainings for ENIC/NARIC Centres;

- Expansion of Joint Information System (JIS) and Regional Recognition Database (RRD);
- Endorsement of the Expert guidelines on domestic qualifications framework (NQF) to facilitate recognition of academic qualifications implemented;
- Support all Western Balkans Quality Assurance Agencies for membership in ENQA and EQAR by 2024, through the following activities to be implemented in 2021:
 - Endorsement of the Study on compliance with ESG
 - Endorsment of the regional recommendations and development of an action plan
 - Regular meetings of the QA Agencies' Network
 - Supporting aligning with the ESG through bilateral and multilateral exchanges with partners with mature quality assurance systems
- Encourage participation of the Western Balkans in the European Higher Education Area (EHEA), while preparing the region to benefit from the European Education Area (EEA): European Universities Initiative open to Western Balkans Universities by 2023, through the following activities in 2021:
 - Promotion of the European Universities Initiative in the Western Balkans
 - Dissemination of information and good practices

To conclude, the activities in this particular area of intervention will be implemented in close cooperation with the RCC, and will focus on the mobility of students within the region, closely connected to the enhanced quality of recognition of academic qualifications within the region, enhanced quality of higher education provision in line with the European Standards and Guidelines for Higher Education, and stronger participation of the Western Balkans in the European Higher Education Area.

In addition, the international conference on quality in higher education, funded by the North Macedonian Ministry of Education and organized in close cooperation between ERI SEE and the Ministry, is planned for the last quarter of 2021. Its delivery in physical format will depend on the situation with the pandemic.

3. General Education

Highlights: consultations on, preparation and implementation of the new project on quality assurance (QA) in general education, focusing on enhancements in quality culture, flexibility and adjustments of the QA frameworks, standards, needs analysis and trainings of external evaluators. In case of non-approval of the project, the work will focus on digital methods of external evaluation and standards of external evaluators' trainings.

In the area of teacher education and training, focus will be put on webinars and seminars on quality of on-line courses, blended teaching and learning, digital pedagogy. Within the new project, teacher education and training will be enhanced by developing the needs analysis system and tools.

The activities in the thematic area of general education are divided into two sub-groups:

- a. Quality assurance in General Education
- b. Teacher Education and Training

Their primary focus lies in general education. However, as these subjects are most often not completely separable from the VET component, VET aspects are also going to be covered, though in a minor scale.

The strategic framework for the ERI SEE's work in these two sub-areas is given by the strategic documents of the South Eastern Europe economies, which stress the importance of increase in the quality of education, among others through the work of quality assurance agencies and process of external and/or internal evaluation, as well as the importance of the investment in teachers and their skills – be it professional/vocational or soft.

Moreover, ERI SEE has ever since 2018 been gathering two professional and expert groups from the region: one of the regional experts in QA in general education, and other on the teacher education and training. Both were composed of the representatives of relevant national bodies/agencies/institutes from all ERI SEE participating economies, mandated for the improvements in their respective areas. In regional cooperation, both groups have identified issues that need to be addressed further and in which regional cooperation can contribute to understanding and enhancing situations in their national contexts.

In addition, in 2020 two relevant studies have been implemented among all ERI SEE participating countries – one on the external evaluation systems, and systems of external evaluators' trainings; and the other on the teacher education and training systems and more particularly on the needs analysis systems in the region.

The relevant issues, identified by the economies and evidence, have been included in the planning of activities for 2021 and 2020.

- a. Quality Assurance in General Education

As mentioned earlier, increasing the quality of education is the strategic goal of all the economies in the region and the region as a whole. The economies in Albania, Kosovo*, Republic of Moldova, Montenegro, North Macedonia and Serbia have established specific QA agencies in charge of external evaluation of pre-tertiary education, mandated to improve the education systems and assure their quality. These agencies of all ERI SEE participating economies have been connected through the Regional group of experts in QA in general education, coordinated and managed by the ERI SEE as of 2018. The group was also joined by Croatian and Bosnian and Herzegovinian representatives, even though the systems of quality assurance are arranged differently in these two countries – in Croatia, the system of quality assurance relies on the external evaluation of knowledge, and not institutions, and pedagogical supervision of individual teachers, and the system

of external evaluation of institutions, which is at the core of the work of the regional work of experts, is not established. In Bosnia and Herzegovina, on the other hand, the systems are established at cantonal and entity levels and there is no one national coordination point or body with national mandate in this area.

The agencies forming the Regional group of experts in QA in general education have expressed their desire to continue with regional cooperation in terms of peer learning, experience sharing, and developing joint regional outputs through joint regional projects.

Having said that, ERI SEE in 2020 started planning a certain number of activities to be realised through a regional project, with the participation of quality assurance agencies from Albania, Republic of Moldova, Montenegro, North Macedonia and Serbia and with the observing status of Bosnia and Herzegovina. As the important source in the planning of these activities, the Study on the external evaluation systems in the region, and the systems of external evaluators' trainings and monitoring, developed in 2020, was used.

The project would be focusing on the existing quality assurance frameworks and potentials of their adjustment to be more flexible to respond to the unplanned situations (such as COVID-19 for example), and to identified critical issues in the systems. The approach to the external evaluation currently is more summative, penalizing or checking, whereas a more supportive or formative approach can be considered. The summative approach may result in the very rigid understanding of the external evaluation and schools not seeing the benefit of the evaluation cycles and quality culture. Therefore, the quality culture will be at the core of activities within the project, which will more specifically target QA institutions, QA evaluators and indirectly schools, and include:

- Kick-off meeting, connecting policy makers, stakeholders and project partners for the networking, exchange of practices and peer learning
- Regional meeting for fine-tuning the methodology of work
- Nominating national and regional groups
- Development of material accompanying the QA frameworks implementation, focusing on quality culture, flexibility of approaches and supportive role of the process
- Development of regionally-based guidelines for methodology for digital external evaluation process
- Development of regionally-based HR policy for QA agencies
- Needs analysis of the external evaluators
- Defining the standard of training for external evaluators
- Training external evaluators on relevant issues

With this approach the project will target the way the external evaluation is perceived by schools, focusing on the benefits of external evaluation cycles, and consequently changing the understanding of the external evaluation and quality culture. It is also important to add that, even though the main focus of the activities will be on general education, vocational education and training will also be targeted as in the process of external evaluation we can not separate one from the other. Vocational subjects go in parallel with general subjects and often the frameworks for evaluation are the same in general and vocational schools. It is also important to note that the European Training Foundation

(ETF) will be ERI SEE's partner in this component of the project, and will contribute with its expertise and information sharing.

In case the project is not approved, or is delayed, the cooperation in this thematic areas is still going to be sustained, but in a more limited extent. It will be funded from the ERI SEE regular budget and include regional meetings for the development of regional guidelines for the external evaluators' trainings and professional development, and methods of digital external evaluation.

b. Teacher education and training

The work in the area of teacher education and training is going to rely on continuing the activities of the SEE Teacher Education and Training Network (SEE TET). This is the regional network composed of the representatives of the teacher education and training agencies and ministries from Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Republic of Moldova, Montenegro, North Macedonia and Serbia, established in 2018 by ERI SEE and ETF and coordinated ever since.

In 2020 a Study was commissioned by the ERI SEE about the systems of continuous professional development/teacher education and training, and in particular how the needs for specific skills and knowledge are identified, and how this relates to the provision of the CPD courses.

The study was implemented in all the economies – members of the SEE TET. On the basis of this study, certain activities regarding teacher education and training have been incorporated in the project that is currently negotiated (at the beginning 2021) with the Austrian donor, expected to start in September 2021. As planned, the VET component of the project is going to tackle the skills mismatch existing among teachers and company instructors expected to be involved in work-based learning. A skills-identification tool is going to be developed, as well as the methodology to identify the missing skills, and on the basis of that the training programme targeting those skills. The tool is also going to be exploited further to include not only the work-based component of teaching, but also general skills for general subject teachers.

As a continuation of the Study on systems of continuous professional development/teacher education and training, and systems of needs analysis in the region, the ETF launched an additional study, focusing solely on digital competences, and how they are identified, what is missing, and how this relates to the current provisions of courses offering digital skills. The Study will be completed in 2021 and publicly presented, and on the basis of the results further actions are going to be planned.

In addition to the planned activities in the project, and cooperating with ETF on digital skills, in 2021 and 2022 two aspects of this thematic area will be particularly emphasized:

1. How to, from policy level, support schools and teachers in their response to COVID-19 (the consequences of which are expected to be felt until the autumn 2021). This is going to be tackled through the organization of webinars on relevant identified topics, such as blended learning, on-line trainings for teachers etc. It is also expected that these aspects – blended learning and on-line trainings – will not disappear from the education and training systems once the pandemic is over, but will be to a certain extent incorporated into the

systems. This is why they are the topics worth exploring and relevant for a longer period of time.

2. Intensifying the dissemination potential of individual best practices from the region, publications collecting best practices on teaching methods, and various other supportive material on digital and blended learning, on-line courses and on-line methodologies for courses, etc. This, in other words, means that ERI SEE will disseminate and use these means during the above mentioned webinars, but also through other dissemination channels – mailing lists, newsletter, websites etc.

The activities in this area are going to be realised in close cooperation with the European Training Foundation and will mostly rely on on-line cooperation, building on the good experiences and practices created in 2020.

Annex 1. Strategic documents

The pandemic put a number of planned activities in 2020 to a halt, asked for their re-scheduling according to newly defined priorities, and required flexibility in financial disbursements due to prioritizing health and entrepreneurial sectors. This had effect on strategic multi-annual planning in education and training sector, which requires numerous and multi-level consultations and certain funding. In addition to these re-scheduling and re-prioritization needs, the year 2020 was very dynamic in terms of political changes and creating new structures at ministries' levels in the region. Out of 7 ERI SEE economies, the ministries of education have seen changes in Albania, Croatia, Montenegro, North Macedonia and Serbia, whereas in Bosnia and Herzegovina and Moldova the changes at the ministerial level took place late and mid 2019 respectively. The combination of pandemic and ministerial re-structurings resulted in the multi-annual national strategies still being agreed for the post 2020 period. Most of the strategic documents of the countries in the region were agreed for the period ending with 2020, and now the new cycle of consultations is running and is in progress. This Work Programme will be updated throughout the year with the new strategic documents developed in the meantime.

In the paragraphs below, we relied on what is currently available and up-to-date – main European Commission recommendations from the Country Reports, main structural reform priorities from Economic Reform Programmes 2019 – 2021 relevant for education and skills, and national educational strategic document - when available, as well as information at the official website of the European Union – Eurydice portal¹.

¹ https://eacea.ec.europa.eu/national-policies/eurydice/national-description_en

Albania

The Economic Reform Programme for Albania, 2020 – 2022² lists structural reform priorities for Albania in the sector of education for the period of 2020 – 2022, which include:

- Finalisation of the pre-university curricular reform, training and hiring of teachers
- Inclusive education
- Modernisation of the early childhood education system financing
- Improving the quality and coverage of VET while ensuring linkages with the labour market

The European Commission recommendation within the Country Report Albania 2020³, in the area of education, include:

- drafting the new strategy on education, covering all levels;
- finalising the implementing legislation of the VET Law
- continuing with the optimisation of the VET system to develop services and competences in line with the needs of the private sector.

Bosnia and Herzegovina

The Bosnia and Herzegovina 2020 Report⁴, European Commission working document, states the following as priority areas in education:

- ensure a fully functional system of (re-)accreditation of higher education institutions and study programmes across the country;
- develop a vocational education and training strategy addressing labour market needs;
- establish an inter-sectorial commission for the national qualification framework.

The Economic Reform Programme for 2019 – 2021⁵ for the area of education states the following reform measures:

- improving the competencies of inter-university, regional and international cooperation
- improving links between education and the labour market

A state-level policy document setting priorities for developing higher education in Bosnia and Herzegovina for 2016-2026 was adopted in March 2016 and the *Republika Srpska* entity adopted its education development strategy for 2016-2021 in April 2016. At the level of the Federation, the Strategic directions of Higher Education Development in Bosnia and Herzegovina were adopted for

² <https://new.financa.gov.al/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/Economic-Reform-Programme-2020-2022.pdf>

³ https://ec.europa.eu/neighbourhood-enlargement/sites/near/files/albania_report_2020.pdf

⁴ https://ec.europa.eu/neighbourhood-enlargement/sites/near/files/bosnia_and_herzegovina_report_2020.pdf

⁵ https://ec.europa.eu/neighbourhood-enlargement/sites/near/files/bih_erp_2019-2021.pdf

the period 2012 – 2022.⁶, which reiterates the commitments to the principles of the Bologna Declaration and strategic goals contributing to the Bologna process implementation.

Priorities for 2016 – 2026 Higher Education Development in BiH⁷ include the main measures and activities that need to be implemented in Bosnia and Herzegovina in order to strengthen the development of higher education on the one hand, and, on the other hand, achieve full inclusion in the European Higher Education Area. The priorities for the development of higher education are grouped into seven key areas: good governance and management, resources; the integration of the labor market and higher education; standards of qualifications, student experience, internationalization and statistics.

The Platform for development of preschool education in BiH for the period 2017 - 2022 was adopted - the Ministry of Civil Affairs of BiH, in cooperation with the competent educational authorities in BiH, in the period 2015-2016, with the support of UNICEF in BiH, worked intensively on the Platform document for the development of pre-school education in Bosnia and Herzegovina for the period 2017-2022.

The document Priorities in the integration of entrepreneurial learning and entrepreneurial key competences into the education systems of Bosnia and Herzegovina was adopted for the period 2020 - 2030⁸, stating the importance of introducing entrepreneurial behaviour early on.

Last but not least, the document Improvement of the quality and relevance of VET in Bosnia and Herzegovina, in the light of Riga Conclusions, for the period of 2021 – 2030⁹, was adopted. The document recognizes VET as a generator of economic development and societal progress, since it enables the acquisition of skills relevant for the labour-market, stimulates employability, social inclusion and prosperity of an individual, but also of the society as a whole.

Croatia

Council Recommendation on the 2020 National Reform Programme of Croatia¹⁰ recommends, as a part of the 2020 Semester:

- Labour shortages have continually affected some sectors of the economy, mainly because of skills gaps. Promoting the acquisition of adequate skills, including digital skills, during initial education and training and later via re- and up-skilling could raise productivity and close skills gaps. The quality and inclusiveness of the education and training system need to be improved at all levels, and the curricular reform needs to continue. The introduction of digital education has already proven its value in this crisis; further development of

⁶ http://fmon.gov.ba/Upload/Dokumenti/9fef4cd0-f57a-4b51-aaa0-aaeadd4da691_Strate%C5%A1ki%20pravci%20razvoja%20visokog%20obrazovanja.pdf

⁷ <http://www.sluzbenilist.ba/page/akt/e8wfEohz4nh78h77G7ohz4nh78h77yE=>

⁸ <http://www.sluzbenilist.ba/page/akt/RSjNohz4nh78h77BrEHKw=>

⁹ <https://epale.ec.europa.eu/en/node/168218>

¹⁰ <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:52020DC0511&from=EN>

infrastructure and material for digital education and training and of the digital skills of teachers, pupils and adults are needed.

The National Reform Programme 2020¹¹ state, as priority measures:

- Reform of general education through comprehensive content-related and infrastructural changes, digital transformation and additional support to pupils
- Reform of vocational education and training by assuring quality through regional centres of competences and quality assurance system and alignment with the needs of economy and regional development
- Increase in the quality and relevance of higher education study programmes
- Increase the employability of students
- Increase in the percentage of highly educated citizens
- Enhance the system of quality assurance in adult education, aligned with the needs of society and economy

Moldova

The Moldova – Country Partnership Framework for the period 2019 – 2021¹², document of the World Bank Group, states the following priorities in the area of education and skills:

- Enhancing quality and relevance of education and training institutions to enable acquisition of job-related skills. In order to achieve this, teacher performance is identified as priority for future, and skills identified by private sector and public consultations as second priority
- Education, as well as other public services, will be efficient, equitable and transparent

Montenegro

Montenegro 2020 Report¹³ by the European Commission recommends the following as a priority for the coming year:

- continue to improve enrolment in early childhood education and care and minimise dropouts, especially of vulnerable groups;
- improve education sector governance and continue with relevant reform measures to improve the overall quality of education;
- establish an adequate monitoring and evaluation mechanism of practical learning at vocational and higher level education.

¹¹ https://ec.europa.eu/info/sites/info/files/2020-european-semester-national-reform-programme-croatia_hr.pdf

¹² <https://documents.worldbank.org/en/publication/documents-reports/documentdetail/604221499282920085/moldova-country-partnership-framework-for-the-period-fy18-21>

¹³ https://ec.europa.eu/neighbourhood-enlargement/sites/near/files/montenegro_report_2020.pdf

The Economic Reform Programme 2019 - 2021¹⁴ envisages the following:

- Development of qualifications and education curricula in accordance with the labour market needs
- Implementation of apprenticeship with employers

The vision of the Montenegrin education system is to develop Montenegro as a society of knowledge, where education, as the key factor of economic and social development will be of high-quality, flexible, efficient, with the professional human resources who will have competitive knowledge, skills and competences and who will be qualified to take part in the labour market, where each individual has equal opportunities for personal and professional development. Most significant recommendations and steps which should ensure the sustainability of the education reform and enable the implementation of this vision are as follows:

1. Further development of social partnership and active involvement of partners in planning, organization and implementation of education and training, thus providing faster response to the labour market needs.
2. The improvements of flexibility of VET through development of modularized curricula based on vocational and key competences, which ensure wide basic vocational knowledge and which, by the means of elective modules, satisfy special interests and affinities of pupils.
3. The development of indicators for institution quality assessment, defining procedures for curricula evaluation, as well as the evaluation itself, will contribute to the improvement of quality of education.
4. Early school leaving prevention, taking into account its complexity and influence on individuals and society in general. Develop career guidance system for all types of education.
5. The improvement of initial and continuing professional training of teaching staff has been recognized as a key factor of education quality. Special attention will be dedicated to the education of teachers of practical training.
6. Finding out the way to involve local community representatives and employers in the financing of education to the possible extent, which should encourage better cooperation between school and local community.
7. Preparation for the implementation of a model of financing per capita, which would ensure more efficient expenditures, with greater autonomy of both school and local community. Developing role of school will be encouraged.
8. One of the priorities in the upcoming period has been defining of enrolment policy which will reflect labour market needs as well as Montenegrin mid-term and long-term development policy requirements, along with further work on the creation of relevant working conditions at schools,

¹⁴ https://ec.europa.eu/neighbourhood-enlargement/sites/near/files/montenegro_erp_2019-2021.pdf

school equipment and teaching aids upgrading and development of textbooks and relevant learning materials.

9. International context will be taken into account in the envisaged activities.

10. Linking higher education and labour market and increasing entrepreneurial and innovation character of education,

11. The share of population with higher education degrees aged 30-34 should be at least 40% in 2020,

12. Establishing a model of lifelong learning based on a good international practice,

13. Research oriented higher education,

14. The National Qualification Framework will ensure the quality of qualifications, the connection and comparability of the outcomes, achieved through different learning types.

When it comes to Teacher Education and Training, the 2017-2024 Strategy for teacher education¹⁵ has the objective to create policies and practices of initial and continuous teacher education and training, which will offer support to teachers in performing their complex role as educator, on whose work the quality, persistence and application of knowledge which the students will gain, depends on, at all levels of education, their personal and professional development, social inclusion and readiness to become active citizens.

North Macedonia

North Macedonia 2020 Report¹⁶ identifies following priorities:

- implement the new strategic framework for education, particularly the targets for preschool education;
- increase support for teacher training and teacher professional development and ensure an effective assessment process;
- improve access to quality education for all, in particular preschool enrolment, children with disabilities and children from Roma communities.

Economic Reform Programme¹⁷ envisages further development of the qualification system, which includes continuing cooperation between higher education institutions and the private schools, as well as secondary vocational schools and the private sector in order to ensure practical work for students in companies; validation of non-formal education – recognition of previous learning, and development of qualifications at level 5 and the opportunity for self-employment in craft activities.

Overall national education strategy and key objectives

¹⁵ <https://mps.gov.me/biblioteka?query=strategija%20obrazovanja%20nastavnika&sortDirection=desc>

¹⁶ https://ec.europa.eu/neighbourhood-enlargement/sites/near/files/north_macedonia_report_2020.pdf

¹⁷ https://ec.europa.eu/neighbourhood-enlargement/sites/near/files/north_macedonia_erp_2019-2021.pdf

In January 2018 the Government of the Republic of Macedonia has adopted the new Strategy for Education for the period 2018-2025 and corresponding Action Plan, and consequently it was published by the Ministry of Education and Science in Macedonian, Albanian and English language. The process of adoption has been preceded by public debates and analysis of the content of the document by experts, national and international, stakeholders and working groups.

The new Strategy for Education and its Action Plan encompass all fields and levels of education. The vision of the Strategy itself is that the education is key for the strengthening of the national economy and the wellbeing of the Macedonian citizens and therefore it is essential to put efforts for development of inclusive and integrated education system which is “student-centered”, which implements modern programmes that will enable the future generations to acquire knowledge, skills and competencies compliant to the needs of the democratic multicultural society, labor market and for the new challenges of the global scientific and technological setting.

Education strategy 2018-2025

According to this vision, the Strategy will be mainly targeted to the improvement of:

- Quality of education and its relevance to North Macedonia’s society development priorities (particularly in terms of having productive and engaged citizens) and the needs of the labour markets, guided towards the expected learning outcomes, as well as acceptance of multiculturalism, interethnic integration, respect for diversity and democratic values;
- Development of generic and core competencies of pupils (and all learners), in order for them to develop into critical thinkers, active and relevant participants in social life;
- Education system infrastructure, including building facilities, equipment and teaching and supportive technologies in order to ensure appropriate learning environment in general and inclusion of persons with special education needs in particular;
- Capacities of human resources including managers, teaching and support staff;
- Quality and results of the educational process by means of improving the assessment/evaluation at all education levels: pupil, teacher, school and system;
- Autonomy of institutions in education, particularly of universities, as well as autonomy of entities in the education process;
- Legislation, Management and Funding.

Serbia

Country report Serbia 2020¹⁸ states recommendations in the area of education:

- increase participation in early childhood education and care, in particular of children from disadvantaged backgrounds;

¹⁸ https://ec.europa.eu/neighbourhood-enlargement/sites/near/files/serbia_report_2020.pdf

- make the institutional set-up of the NQF fully operational;
- ensure full compliance of the policy and institutional framework for quality assurance in higher education with the recommendations of the European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education.

In addition, the Economic Reform Programme 2019 – 2021¹⁹ identifies the following priorities:

- Qualifications oriented to labour market requirements (Establish an analytical system for monitoring and evaluating dual and entrepreneurship education; Ensure cooperation between education training centres and excellence centres for the purpose of supporting dual education in the Republic of Serbia; Establish the system of validation of nonformal and informal learning, which will enable the qualifications also to be acquired based on work or life experience, in a special procedure, to be followed by the issuance of a certificate as a public document)

Annex 2. Activity plan 2021

CORE ERI SEE Activities	Timeline 2021
9 th Meeting of the RCC – ERI SEE-RCC Joint Working Group on Recognition of Academic Qualifications	January
Consultative meeting with QA agencies	January
ERI SEE Governing Board meeting	February
Submitting the project proposal	February
Meeting of Teacher education and training network (SEE TET)	February

¹⁹ <https://www.mfin.gov.rs/UserFiles/File/strategije/2019/Economic%20Reform%20Programme%202019-2021.pdf>

Recognition of academic qualifications - 10th meeting of the Workgroup on the recognition of academic qualifications	March
Quality assurance in higher education meeting	March
WBA4WBL Regional meeting	April
Meeting of the QA agencies in general education	May
Meeting of SEE TET network	May
International Conference on QA in higher education	October
11 th meeting of the WG RAQ	October
WBA4WBL Regional meeting	November
ERI SEE Governing Board meeting	November
Newsletter	December
12 th meeting of the WG RAQ	December
maintenance of portals WBA4WBL	continuous
maintenance of portals JIS	continuous
Project activities TO REGOS	
National events - working sessions for the development of standards of qualifications (construction industry)	January - April
Regional consultation on the Feasibility Study on regionally-based qualifications standards	February
Project Management Meeting	March
Evaluation of the project	April
Audit	May
Presentation of the Feasibility Study on regionally-based QS	May
Closing conference	May
Updating the WBA4WBL on-line portal with the activities and results achieved within the project and in the area of Work-based learning	continuous
Project activities – new project	
Project management meeting - VET	September
Project management meeting – QA in general education	September
Kick-off meeting	October
National meetings for regionally-based OS	November - December
Regional meeting for QA frameworks analysing	November

ⁱ Work Programme for 2021 – 2022 was developed on the basis of consultations with the Governing Board members and Consultative Body members, as well as consultations with the regional partners and potential donors.

**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.*