



EDUCATION REFORM INITIATIVE OF
SOUTH EASTERN EUROPE -

ACTIVITY REPORT 2022

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY – ACTIVITIES OF THE EDUCATION REFORM INITIATIVE OF SOUTH EASTERN EUROPE SECRETARIAT IN 2022

Education Reform Initiative of South Eastern Europe, as an international organization with the mandate of facilitating and enhancing regional cooperation in the field of education and training in the South Eastern Europe and Moldova, saw an additional expansion of activities undertaken in 2022 and additional deepening of cooperation with a number of regional partners.

The thematic priorities, as agreed with the establishing bodies – ministries of education from Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Moldova, Montenegro, North Macedonia and Serbia – were firmly kept in focus. In line with that, a great number of activities and regional outputs were achieved in the area of modernization of vocational education and training (VET) and enhancing cooperation between VET and business; in the area of quality assurance in both pre-tertiary and tertiary education, and in the area of teacher education and training.

Following the successful implementation of the TO REGOS project, the donor, [Austrian Development Agency](#), in October 2021 approved the Enhancements in Quality of Education and Training in SEE project ([EQET SEE project](#)) as its continuation and expansion, which is currently being implemented. The EQET SEE has the budget of approximately 2 mill EUR available for the activities of VET modernization and connection with the labour market, and improvements in the systems of Quality assurance - external evaluation of institutions. The implementation of the new project is marked by the strong commitment from regional partners to regional cooperation, improvements in education and training, exchange of expertise and development of joint regional outputs. The two regional networks – South Eastern European Vocational Education and Training (SEE VET) Network (network of VET agencies from the Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo*, Montenegro, North Macedonia and Serbia) and Western Balkans Alliance for Work-based Learning (WBA4WBL) (association of VET centers and chambers of commerce from the region) proved to be reliable, responsible and committed.

The EQET SEE also saw intense cooperation between the Quality Assurance agencies from Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo*, Moldova, Montenegro, North Macedonia and Serbia. Their cooperation throughout 2022 has been outstanding – dedicated, reliable and proactive, with a number of realized regional outputs that have already been or will be shortly integrated into national systems.

In the area of VET, the activities on the development of regionally based occupational standards and their further development in regionally based qualification standards, in the agriculture sector (agricultural technician of



traditional and organic production), and in the metal sector (locksmith) are well under way. Partnerships between the participating and implementing institutions – agencies for VET, qualifications, chambers of commerce, and individual experts coming from the field of education and business have been firmly established. 1 regional occupational standard, 6 national ones and 1 regional qualification standard have been developed, with national adjustments of regional qualification standard well under way. Due attention has been given to the cross-cutting (environmental, gender and social) aspects of the “products”. Additionally, aspects of continuing public-private partnership and effective ways of policy making and advocating for efficient VET have been investigated within the framework of the Western Balkans Alliance for Work-based Learning and with support from the Austrian Agency for Education and Internationalization, Austrian Federal Chamber of Commerce and Austrian Parliament.

Similarly, in the area of quality assurance in pre-tertiary education, a number of activities were organized and outputs developed, which brought the relevant partners – agencies for quality assurance in general education and VET from the participating economies – together for the first time in this extent and with this intensity. The results are fruitful, and a number of regional products have been jointly produced: vision and recommendations for the development of QA aspects and external evaluation of pre-tertiary institutions, standard of competences for external evaluators, trainings on data management, regional questionnaire for assessing training needs and a questionnaire for assessing competences, peer learning on methodologies for external evaluation and human resources management targeting external evaluators. Due attention is paid to national regulations and requirements and complementarity between regional and national practices and documents.

When it comes to the quality assurance in tertiary education, with great support of the Croatian Ministry of Science and Education, Slovenian Ministry of Education, Croatian Agency for Science and Higher Education, Slovenian Agency for QA in Higher Education and Regional Cooperation Council, a workshops and study visit for the recognition centres and quality assurance agencies were organized, with an additional opportunity for recognition and QA institutions and experts to exchange their views, practices and experiences.

And finally, for the teacher training agencies from the region, a study visit to Austrian Institute for teacher training was organized, with the possibilities of further exploring the benefits and practices of digital and blended pedagogy and tools.

With the great successes - expansion of regional involvement in 3 main areas: quality assurance in pre-tertiary education, quality assurance in tertiary education, and modernization of VET; greater visibility, partnership building and presence in the region; delivery of relevant regional outputs, came the challenges.

The challenges are identified mainly in the number of staff and budget for the implementation of the intense agenda and high number of activities. Further explorations of the sustainability of the current pace of work, and ways of maintaining the high level of bars set, in terms of quality and quantity of activities. ,

To conclude, Education Reform Initiative of South Eastern Europe (ERI SEE) continued to play a proactive and coordinating role in regional cooperation (in the field of education and training) thus fulfill its mission, in accordance with the priorities of establishing bodies, ministries of education from the region: facilitation of cooperation at regional level, considering relevant European developments and trends in education and training, while at the same time keeping a close link to national context and priorities. ERI SEE thus contributes to sustainable economic developments and education and training reforms at national and regional levels and will take appropriate action to ensure the long-term sustainability.

When drawing conclusions on 2022, the key messages remain that, when defining regional activities, close communication and cooperation with regional partners must be respected; national needs addressed and national approaches valued and respected. Regional products must allow a certain degree of flexibility, which further makes it possible for our partners to adjust regional products into their national circumstances.

For it is in the spirit of respect, commitment to regional cooperation, intention to improve and open to further learning, that regional cooperation in South Eastern Europe and Moldova can bring useful, impactful and sustainable results.



1. STRATEGIC MANAGEMENT

The ERI SEE Governing Board, the strategic-making body of the ERI SEE Secretariat, composed of the representatives of Ministries of education from the region from Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Moldova, Montenegro, North Macedonia and Serbia, and OeAD and RCC representatives, and chaired by the Serbian representative, met 2 times in 2022.

The first meeting was held in February 2022, in a blended format, in Belgrade and on-line. During the meeting the Work programme and Financial plan for 2022 were adopted, as well as the Activity and Financial reports for 2021. The second meeting was organized in November 2022, also in a blended format, and dealt with the matters of ERI SEE reporting for 2022, planning for 2023, and Secretariat management and sustainability.

The ERI SEE Governing Board was accompanied by the Consultative body composed of representatives of the European Training Foundation, Austrian Federal Ministry of Education, Science and Research.

The ERI SEE Governing Board and Consultative Body expressed their full commitment and support to ERI SEE initiative and Secretariat in the implementation of its mission – bringing the SEE region closer together in the area of education and training and supporting national reform processes through regional cooperation.

The governing structure continuously provided their support in expert, policy, political and strategic form to ERI SEE activities and developments.

In terms of its visibility, alongside with the 3 websites the ERI SEE Secretariat manages– 1 referring to all the work of ERI SEE (www.erisee.org) and 2 thematic- specific: www.wba4wbl.com on the themes of work-based learning and activities within the TO REGOS (Towards regionally-based occupational standards) project, and www.wb-qualifications.org on the themes of recognition of academic qualifications and quality assurance in higher education, a new site, for the implementation of the new EQET SEE project, was launched in December 2022 – www.eget.erisee.org . The websites are interlinked and refer one to another.

The annual Newsletter was published in December 2022. It offered a brief overview of the activities organized throughout the year and it was disseminated to more than 2000 regional and international decision-makers and education experts.

In 2022 an audit for the first year of the EQET SEE project, which showed the sound financial management of the project. The second audit, on the regular ERI SEE budget and activities, will start in December 2022.

2. THEMATIC AREAS OF INTERVENTIONS

Thematic areas of intervention of ERI SEE in 2021 were aligned with regional and national priorities set by the [ERI SEE Work Programme 2021 – 2022](#). (see Annex 1. Strategic documents).

The thematic focus in 2022 was set on:

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

2.1. General education

HIGHLIGHTS

The activities in the thematic area of general education are divided into two sub-groups: a. Quality assurance in General Education and b. Teacher Education and Training.

In the area of QA, 2022 was marked by the implementation of the regional project Enhancing Quality of Education and Training in South Eastern Europe (EQET SEE) which, in one of each components, focused on the systems and practices in the external evaluation of institutions as an important aspect of quality culture. During 2022, the regional project, gathering representatives of relevant agencies in charge of quality assurance in pre-tertiary education (general and VET), focused on the joint policy conclusions on the most important aspects of external evaluation, standards of competences for external evaluators, needs assessment and competence assessment, data management in external evaluation and exchanging practices on external evaluations methodologies.

In the area of Teacher Education and Training, the focus was placed on exchanging practices with Austrian partners – Austrian Agency for Education and Internationalization, University College of Teacher Education and Technical University Vienna – on the subjects of initial and continuous teacher education and training and the role digitalization has in this, as well as in teaching and learning.

Quality Assurance in General Education

With the enhancing of the quality of education as strategic goal of the South Eastern Europe region and expressed desire of economies to further regionally cooperate in terms of peer learning, experience sharing and developing joint regional outputs, a regional project Enhancing Quality of Education and Training in South Eastern Europe (EQET SEE) was implemented in 2022 by the ERI SEE Secretariat and partners – QA agencies from the region – with financial donations from the Austrian Development Agency.

The project is expected to last until October 2024, and with the total budget of approximately 2 mill EUR, it aims to contribute to the reduction of youth unemployment in South-eastern Europe by supporting the development of high-quality, labour-market oriented and socially inclusive education in Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo¹, Moldova, Montenegro, the Republic of North Macedonia and Serbia.

The EQET SEE project is run by the ERI SEE, in close partnership and cooperation with the ministries of education, agencies for VET, quality assurance and chambers of commerce from the South Eastern Europe and Republic of Moldova, as well as with strategic contributions from the European Training Foundation (ETF), Austrian Agency for Education and Internationalisation (OeAD), Western Balkans 6 Chambers Investment Forum and Standing International Conference of Inspectorates.

To improve quality analysis and use of evidence for policy making, strengthen the quality culture at the school level and quality of work of external evaluators in pre-tertiary education in the SEE region, the Quality Assurance component of the project in 2022 is focused on supporting external quality developments and quality culture at the school level, through internal quality developments at the quality assurance agencies, regional standards of competences for external evaluators, their needs analysis, and the revision of QA (external evaluation) methodologies.

The 2022 outputs of the QA component are:

1. Policy vision on the External Evaluation principles for the region
2. Data management training
3. Developed regional competence standard for external evaluators
4. Developed tool for training needs analysis
5. Developed tool for the assessment of competences
6. Developed proposal for regional guidelines for Human resources procedures regarding external evaluators (including evaluation, recruitment, initial training, continuous professional development etc.).
7. Analyzed and compared QA methodologies, accompanying instruments and tools, for further proceedings



The regional outputs have been or will be adjusted for national use and integrated into national practices.

To achieve the outputs listed above, the following activities were undertaken:

[EQET SEE Kick off Conference](#) was organised on 08 February 2022 online. It gathered 167 stakeholders, experts and the representatives of regional and international projects, donors, international organisations and international projects active in the field of VET and quality assurance in pre-tertiary education. It resulted in familiarizing all the relevant stakeholders from the SEE region and Moldova (VET and QA- related institutions)

with an outline of the EQET SEE project and planned activities. The participants of the meeting (VET agencies, Qualification agencies, QA agencies in pre-tertiary education, chambers of commerce, business representatives, ministries, donors and international agencies working in the field of VET and QA) benefited from the content part, in which the trends in developing, comparing, and renewing qualifications in the international and regional context was presented, along the European developments in external evaluation of pre-tertiary education, and social sustainability and gender equity in education and training. The Kick-off conference also provide a platform for communication with other international projects active in the region. The representatives of [Austrian Development Agency](#), [GIZ](#), [OeAD](#) and [SDC](#) presented their projects and initiatives and results accomplished in the region.

[EQET SEE Policy vision meetings](#) were organised on 03.03.2022. (Belgrade, Serbia) and 12.04.2022. (Podgorica, Montenegro); back-to-back with the Data management training. The two meetings gathered relevant policy makers, including ministries' representatives, representatives from quality and VET agencies and practitioners from seven economies participating economies, international experts and representatives of the ERI SEE Secretariat to explore the role of external evaluation of institutions and approaches to continuously improve quality, efficiency and effectiveness of the QA processes, and reach the shared positions or regional vision on common aspects of the external evaluation. They finalized and all fully endorsed the Policy vision document, [Guidelines and suggestions for optimizing \(the impact of\) external evaluation of institutions in the SEE and Republic of Moldova](#).

[EQET SEE Training on data management and evidence-informed policy making](#) took place on 12 and 13.04.2022. in Podgorica, Montenegro, aiming at enhancing the process of data collection, analysis and use in the external evaluation process and facilitating experience exchange between policy makers and quality assurance experts from the SEE economies and Moldova. More than 30 relevant representatives from QA agencies and ministries of education attended the meeting, along the international experts on quality assurance and data management, representatives of the ETF and ERI SEE Secretariat. The participants expressed the need for further training on this topic, which will be addressed in the later project stage.



[EQET SEE Meeting for the development of a regional standard of competences for external evaluators in pre-tertiary education](#) was held in Bečići, Montenegro, on 17 and 18 May 2022. During the two days the Regional Working group, comprising of relevant members from Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo*, Moldova, Montenegro, North Macedonia and Serbia, along the ERI SEE representatives and Dutch expert on external evaluation Mr Herman Franssen worked on development of a joint, regional proposal of standard of competences for external evaluators, in line with the proposed methodology and principles, and previously agreed guidelines for optimizing the impact of external evaluation of institutions in the SEE and Moldova.

[EQET SEE Second EQET SEE Project management meeting QA component](#) took place in Bečići, Montenegro on 17 May 2022, back-to-back to the [regional meeting for development of a regional standard of competences for external evaluators in pre-tertiary education](#). It served to discuss the activity plan of the QA Component for the period from July to December 2022. Next regional activities: development of new, regional methodology for external evaluation and preparation of the questionnaire for trainings needs analysis for external evaluators, in line with newly elaborated standard of competences, were agreed on this occasion.



[EQET SEE QA Workshop for Questionnaire on Training Needs Assessment](#) was held in Tirana, Albania, on 04 and 05 October 2022. At the meeting a proposal of the Questionnaire for training needs of external evaluators in pre-tertiary education in the region ERI SEE prepared beforehand was presented, discussed and amended. Additionally, the participants discussed the use of training needs analysis questionnaire use, existing and needed practices of self-evaluation and evaluation, as well as the steps for human resources development and improvement of human resource policies of QA agencies in the region.

[EQET SEE QA Third Project Management Meeting \(PMM\)](#) was held in Tirana, Albania, on 05 October 2022, back-to-back to the [Workshop for the Training Needs Analysis Questionnaire](#). This meeting served to the EQET SEE appointed National Coordination Points (NCPs) from participating economies and representatives of the ERI SEE, to discuss the state of play within the QA component and agree on implementation of the subsequent regional and national activities: use of the questionnaire and adaptation to national contexts, trainings of external evaluators, as well as revision of quality assurance methodologies.

Teacher education and training

The work in the area of teacher education and training continued in 2021 through the activities of the South Eastern Europe Teacher Education and Training (SEE TET) network - a 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, coordinated by the ERI SEE - aiming at addressing the questions of digitalization and teacher trainings and intensifying of collecting and

disseminating the best practices from the region on digital and blended learning, on-line courses and their methodologies.

ERI SEE, in cooperation with the Austrian Agency for Education and Internationalization, organized a study visit to Vienna, on the subject of digitalization and teacher education and training.

The main focus of the study visit was to understand digital culture, its development and preparing of schools and teachers in digitalization process, along the concrete tools that support digital culture and good practice examples from the region.



Conclusions – successes and challenges

Within the EQET SEE project, the QA agencies in pre-tertiary education from 7 economies from the region got the opportunity to work together on a very intense level. Their continuous and authentic focus on the improvements in the processes, which is also a characteristic of the QA process, has been inspiring and made the cooperation very motivating and productive. The tangible results are a number of regional outputs produced. Even though this is the first time they cooperate together on such a large scale, the achieved level of communication, productivity, discussions, exchange of ideas and suggestions, is a role model for any future actions in this area.

On the other hand, the intense pace of the QA activities within the EQET SEE project put a heavy burden on national activities of the QA agencies as well as on the ERI SEE Secretariat staff, and for a brief period put aside the activities dedicated to teacher education and training. Having in mind the limited time and human resources within the ERI SEE Secretariat, more balanced planning of activities must be considered in the future.

2.2 VET

HIGHLIGHTS

2022 was marked by the implementation of the new regional project, Enhancing Quality of Education in Training in South Eastern Europe – EQET SEE. A number of activities, resulting in developing the regional occupational and qualification standard for Agricultural Technician for traditional and organic production; supported by national activities aiming at integrating these standards into national education and training systems. The project is composed of the representatives of VET centres/agencies from the region (South Eastern European Vocational Education and Training Network – SEE VET Net), joined by the Chambers of commerce from the region, under the Western Balkans 6 Chambers Investment Forum – together forming the Western Balkans Alliance for Work-based Learning (WBA4WBL).

The WBA4WBL met also in Vienna, exploring the effective public-private partnerships, policy making in VET and making VET an attractive career choice.

Modernization of VET and connection with the business sector

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 qualification standard and 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.

After the successful implementation of the Towards Regionally Based Occupational Standards (TO REGOS) project, funded by the Austrian Development Agency and co-funded by the ERI SEE, the expanded continuation started at the end of 2021 and continued in 2022, in the form of the **Enhancing Quality of Education and Training in South Eastern Europe (EQET SEE) project**, negotiated with the same donor. It was approved in November 2021, with the budget of approximately 2 mill EUR, and is planned to run for until October 2024, focusing on the quality the reduction of youth unemployment in South Eastern Europe by supporting the development of labour-market oriented, socially inclusive and high-quality education in the Western Balkan region.

The project is tackling two strands: the VET and Quality assurance in pre-tertiary education. The reason for VET intervention lies in the need for a higher cooperation between business and education sector in the region, acquisition of labour-market relevant skills in education and training, greater representation of work-based learning elements in the curricula and adequate support to teachers and company instructors to implement these curricula. All this is to enhance the VET provision and consequently the employability of young people in the region. To tackle the challenges identified above, the VET strand of the project is focusing on:

1. Development of regionally based, labour market oriented occupational (OS), qualifications standards (QS) and VET curricula incorporating work-based learning, and
2. Assuring quality of VET provision through developing supporting measures and material (guidelines for work-based learning, trainings for teachers and company instructors and teaching and learning material). All this will have an impact on the skills acquired by teachers, company instructors and pupils.

It is coordinated by the ERI SEE Secretariat and implemented by VET agencies, chambers of commerce and quality assurance (QA) agencies in the cooperation with the strategic partners – ministries of education, [European Training Foundation](#), [WB6 CIF](#), [OeAD](#) and [Standing International Conference of Inspectorates \(SICI\)](#).

Regarding the OeAD, it is a strategic partner in the project and included in the strategic planning, but also in some implementation segments. It made sure that the synergies with other projects in the region, expertise and best practices are shared across the region and throughout the project. The OeAD was involved in both VET and QA areas thanks to the Austrian experiences in implementing high-quality VET and work-based learning, as well as quality assurance practices. Austrian expertise in internal and external evaluation processes is of use in regional policy discussions and dialogue, with particular emphasis on attractiveness of VET, transparent policy making practices and quality work-based learning.

Additionally, the project is 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) are taken into consideration.

In 2022, the project was officially presented to the wide number of relevant stakeholders during the [Kick-off conference](#) in February 2022. Among the total of 167 representatives that attended the conference, the VET sector was represented by the business and education representatives of the VET and qualification agencies and chambers of commerce as well as international donors, organisations and projects active in the Western Balkans in the field of VET. The main focus of the event was to present the VET component of the project and to establish a regional cooperation platform for the exchange of experience at regional level.



[Second Project management](#) meeting within the VET component was organised online in two sessions, on 08 February 2022 and 11 February 2022. The main objective of the meeting was to discuss the upcoming activities within the VET component of the EQET SEE project, primarily project management activities and activities connected to the development of the first regionally based occupational standard for the agricultural technician of traditional and organic cultivation occupational standard (ATTOOS).

[Third Project management](#) meeting within the VET component was organised in April 2022 with the goal to discuss the development of the ATTOS at regional level and its national validation, national activities for the development of the second OS and to reflect on the ongoing project management and dissemination activities.

Preparatory meeting for the consolidation of the ATTOOS was organised on 24 May 2022. The main goal of the meeting was to discuss the proposal for the ATTOOS that was developed by the ERI SEE Secretariat and external experts for environmental and social sustainability, gender equity and occupational standard development based on national inputs and to consolidate it for the upcoming regional meeting.

Final regional meeting for the validation of the ATTOOS was organised on 25 May 2022 and 26 May 2022 with the main goal for the business and education experts to validate the ATTOOS at regional level.

Fourth Project management meeting within VET component was organised on the margins of the preparatory and final regional meeting in two sessions on 25 and 26 May 2022. The main goal of the meeting was to discuss the organisation of national validation meetings and the national adoption of the ATTOOS and, for the first time in the region of the Western Balkan, the development of the regionally based qualification standard based on the [methodology](#) developed within the [TO REGOS project](#).

Information exchange on international projects in South Eastern Europe gathered representatives donors, international projects and international agencies active in the SEE on 13 July 2022. The main goal of the meeting was to exchange of experiences and activities of international SEE stakeholders, to discuss potential overlaps in activities and potential for joint action.

First regional meeting for the development of the regionally based qualification standard for agricultural technician of traditional and organic cultivation (ATTOQS) was organised on 04 and 05 July 2022 in Montenegro. It was attended by education and business experts from the EQET SEE economies who worked on the development of the ATTOOS at national level. The first day of the meeting was dedicated to fine-tuning the [Methodology for the Developing Regionally-based Standards of Qualifications](#) while the second day was devoted to the development of the standard itself.

Fifth project management meeting was organised on 05 July 2022. Aside from the project management topics the main focus of the meeting was development of the regionally based qualification standard at regional level and the organisation of the national activities towards the QS development

Second regional meeting for the development of the regionally based ATTOQS was organised between 20 September and 22 September 2022 in the Republic of North Macedonia. The regional working group continued developing ATTOQS by elaborating unites of learning outcomes.

Third regional meeting for the development of the regionally based ATTOQS was organised between 20 October and 22 October 2022 in Serbia. The meeting was utilised for the finalise the regionally based ATTOQS by elaborating unites of learning outcomes and learning outcomes. [Public-Private Partnership for Meeting Skills Needs](#) and Making Vocational Education and Training an Attractive Learning Pathway was jointly organised by [ERI SEE](#) and the [OeAD](#) within the framework of the [Western Balkans Alliance for Work-based Learning](#) and in cooperation with the [Western Balkans Chambers Investment Forum](#) (WB6 CIF), the [Austrian Economic Chamber](#) (WKO) and the [Austrian Parliament](#) on 10 October and 11 October 2022 in Vienna. It aimed at providing a platform for sharing experience on the ways in which public – private partnership was developed during the process of introducing dual and other forms of work-based learning in the VET systems in the Western Balkans since 2016. At the same time, the regional workshop looked at the future of WBL especially in the relation to how to attract students to VET, raise company awareness, quality assurance of the WBL and efficiency of the legal framework.

An additional event was organized to support the work of the Western Balkans Alliance for Work-based learning and plan the next steps relevant for work-based learning in the region. The WBA4WBL was established in 2016, it consists of the representatives of VET agencies and Chambers of commerce from the region, and is coordinated by the ERI SEE and Western Balkan 6 Chambers Investment Forum. In October 2022, the Alliance

gathered in Vienna for a workshop exploring the effective public-private partnership in VET for assuring the quality of work-based learning. The workshop was also joined by the parliamentary representatives – members of the educational committees, influencing educational policies in the Western Balkans. The workshop also included a study visit to companies, as innovative places of learning, and a visit to the Austrian Parliament and discussion between the Parliamentarians from Austria and Western Balkans. The workshop was organized by OeAD and ERI SEE, and in strong cooperation with the Austrian Parliament and Austrian Chamber of Commerce.

Conclusions: Successes and challenges

Similar to the area of QA in pre-tertiary education, the cooperation in the sector of VET is marked by participation of highly professional and expert individuals, representatives of institutions that hold the same qualities and values. Dedication, hard work, proactiveness and flexibility of project participants resulted in a number of regional and national products that will bring improvements into the education and training systems.

The challenges again refer to the regular workload of partners, which, joined with the workload resulting from the project, makes the planning of activities difficult and stressful. More realistic planning of activities is needed.

In addition, the challenge was faced in agreeing on the second occupational standard which started being developed in 2022, where the majority of economies expressed their need for the occupation of locksmith, whereas one economy, due to the national planning and processes, will not be able to join this group. The compromise was thus made, where the majority of economies will be working on the occupation of the locksmith, whereas one economy will be developing a CNC technician occupation, using the written contributions of already developed occupational standards from other economies, thus integrating the regional aspects into their national product.



2.3 Higher education

HIGHLIGHTS

During the 2022 the ERI SEE Secretariat continued its partnership with the [Regional Cooperation Council \(RCC\)](#) in the implementation of the [Common Regional Market Action Plan](#), to enhance recognition of academic qualifications in the Western Balkans and to support QA agencies in higher education in their membership in ENQA and registration in EQAR.

Activities

Activities in the area of higher education were implemented in close cooperation with the RCC and were focused on supporting the process of recognition of academic qualifications within the region, enhancing understanding of QA processes and procedures as defined by the European Standards and Guidelines, and increasing their visibility through the QA register.

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), within the framework of the [Berlin Process](#). The process is fully supported by the [European Commission](#), private sector, South East Europe economies and relevant regional and international stakeholders.

The longstanding hard work of the economies, supported by RCC, has been rewarded by signing of the Agreements on mutual recognition of higher education qualifications and professional qualifications of Doctor of Medicine, Dentists and Architects, signed in November 2022 in Berlin. The Agreements will facilitate the recognition of the said qualifications in the region, whereas the concrete procedural steps need to be elaborated further.

ERI SEE continued to maintain the Joint Information System (JIS), the portal dedicated to the recognition and QA issues. One of the segments of the JIS system is the QA register, which contains the list of accredited institutions in the region and relevant documents supporting the accreditation system. To facilitate the process of national data collection and transfer to the regional portal, ERI SEE organized bilateral meetings with the agencies in charge of quality assurance in higher education in Bosnia and Herzegovina, Serbia and Montenegro. The meetings were focusing on challenging areas, out of which the need for a data management training was identified. This training was shaped and organized by ERI SEE, to support the agencies in their data collection processes.

In addition, the ERI SEE and RCC Joint Working Group for the Recognition of Higher Education Qualifications identified a number of priority topics to be discussed and a number of needs for trainings. To answer those needs, in cooperation with the Croatian Ministry of Science and Education, Slovenian Ministry of Education, and Croatian and Slovenian agencies in charge of higher education, accreditations included, and Croatian and Slovenian ENIC NARIC offices, in October 2022, a [workshop was organized for the representatives of ENIC NARIC and QA agencies](#) from Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo*, Montenegro, North Macedonia and Serbia. The workshops focused on connecting the work of recognition and quality assurance offices, implementation of the Lisbon Recognition Convention, accreditation procedures and accompanying data and tools.

The screenshot displays an Excel spreadsheet titled "Data management training day 2". The main data table has the following columns: No, Economy, University title, Category, Type, Number of students, Number of teachers, and Number of non-academic staff. The data is organized by country (Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo, Montenegro, North Macedonia, Serbia) and university type (Private, Public). A summary table on the right provides statistical analysis for the data, including Total, Minimum, Maximum, Average, Mode, and Median for both private HEIs in Albania and the overall dataset. The summary table also includes formulas used for these calculations, such as =SUM, =MIN, =MAX, =AVERAGE, =MODE, and =MEDIAN. A video call interface is visible on the right side of the screen, showing several participants including Ersi Dako, ERI SEE, Milica Grahov, Ivana Zivadinovic, Aleksandra Xhamo, Aviola Bardhi, and Alma Arapi.

Last but not least, a number of priority issues were identified, for which the Review on the implementation of the European Standards and Guidelines (ESG) 2015, prepared by the Regional Cooperation Council in cooperation with the external experts, served as the basis.

Conclusions: Successes and challenges

The signature of the Agreements for recognition of higher education qualifications and for professional qualifications for Doctor of Medicine, Dentists and Architects is by far the biggest success of the Working group for the recognition of qualifications, coordinated by RCC.

Additionally, the identification of the main topics or priorities for further work regarding the alignment with the European Standards and Guidelines has been very relevant for recognizing the status quo and steps needed to go further.

On the other hand, the work on the maintenance and improvements in the QA Register has proven to be very challenging, due to different national systems for data gathering and maintaining, and for different stages of data management that exist in the economies. Combined with the heavy workload that exists in the economies, for national activities, regional activities and processes seem even more demanding and complex.

Thus, additional efforts and human, but also financial investments, are needed to regulate the regional QA Register and processes of data management, for transparent and reliable QA processes.

Annex 1. SHORT OVERVIEW OF ACTIVITIES¹

CORE ERI SEE Activities	Timeline 2022 planned	Timeline 2022 realized	Short description of deliverables
ERI SEE Governing Board Meeting	February	February	Adoption of ERI SEE Work Programme 2022, Financial Plan 2022; Activity Report 2021 and Financial Report 2021
Meeting of Teacher education and training network (SEE TET)	April/May	December	ERI SEE and OeAD, in cooperation with the Teacher Training Faculty and Technical University of Vienna are organizing the 10th Meeting of the South Eastern European Teacher Education and Training Network (SEE TET Network) and the Study visit on the subject of digitalization in teaching and learning – best practices, and systems of teacher education and training – improvements.
Meeting of the RCC – ERI SEE Workgroup on the recognition of academic qualifications	June	May	Harmonisation of the CRM education agenda and Western Balkans Agenda on Innovation, Science, Education, Culture, Youth and Sports Working Group on Recognition of Academic Qualifications - State of play and way ahead in 2022
Higher education study visit to Croatia	July	October	Exchanges about the recognition processes and data

¹ The realized activities are compared to the activities planned in the ERI SEE Work Programme for 2022.

Peer learning higher education activity with Croatia	September	October	Exchanges about the accreditation processes and data
Regional SEE meeting of the ENIC NARIC network	September	October	Exchange of everyday situations, case studies
International Conference on QA in higher education	October	Postponed	Not applicable.
Meeting of the RCC – ERI SEE Workgroup on the recognition of academic qualifications	October	October	Presentation of the results of the analysis of alignment with ESG
ERI SEE Governing Board meeting	November	November	Reporting on the realization of the Work Programme 2022 and Financial Report
Meeting of SEE TET network	November	December	Study visit about the digital teaching and learning methods and digital material
Meeting of the RCC – ERI SEE Workgroup on the recognition of higher education qualifications	December	December	Presentation of the study on joint masters degrees and identification of priorities for QA
Newsletter	December	December	On-line dissemination of ERI SEE Activities
Project activities EQET SEE	Timeline 2022 planned	Timeline 2022 realized	
Kick off meeting EQET SEE	February	February	Familiarizing all the relevant stakeholders from the SEE region and Moldova (VET and QA-related institutions) with an outline of the EQET SEE project and planned activities. In addition, trends in developing, comparing, and renewing qualifications in the international and regional context were presented, along the European developments in external evaluation of pre-tertiary education, and social sustainability and gender equity in education and training.
Project management meeting	February	February, April, May, July	The 2 nd and 3 rd Project management meeting of the QA Component of the EQET SEE project

			served to agree on the next project activities with implementing partners and to assure that the project is on track with implementation according to the project application and budget.
National meetings for OS1	February/March/April	February/March/April	Development of key functions and activities for agricultural technician – 6 national outputs
Regional meetings for OS1	May/June	May	Analysis of 6 national outputs and development of regional occupational standard
QA Policy vision conference	March and April	March and April	Relevant policy makers, including ministries' representatives, representatives from quality and VET agencies and practitioners who influence or are included in policy making from seven participating economies, international experts and representatives of the ERI SEE Secretariat fully endorsed the Policy vision document Guidelines and suggestions for optimizing (the impact of) external evaluation of institutions in the SEE and Republic of Moldova.
QA Data management training	May	April	The meeting was dedicated to enhancing the process of data collection, analysis and use in the external evaluation process and facilitating experience exchange between policy makers and QA experts from the SEE economies and Moldova.
Regional meetings for external evaluators' standards	May/June	May	The Regional Working group reached consensus on the structure and content of a joint, regional standard of competences for external evaluators, in line with the proposed methodology and principles, and previously agreed Guidelines for optimizing the impact of

			external evaluation of institutions in the SEE and Moldova.
National meetings for external evaluators' standards	July - August	July – December	Seven national standards of competences for external evaluators were prepared by adjusting the proposal of the regional standard at the national meetings that took place in all seven economies during summer 2022.
Regional meetings for QS1	July - September	July – September - October	Development of the regional qualification standard for agricultural technician on the basis of the regional occupational standard
National meetings for QS1	October-December	October - December	Adjustment of the regional QS for agricultural technician to national regulations
Regional meetings for external evaluators' needs analysis	September - October	October	The proposal of the Questionnaire for training needs of external evaluators in pre-tertiary education in the region, previously prepared by the ERI SEE was presented, discussed, and amended, by Regional Working group comprising of relevant experts from seven regional economies.
Project activities EQET SEE	Not originally planned	Realized	
EQET SEE Monitoring visit working group for the development of the OS1 in Montenegro		March	Monitoring visit to the national processes in OS development for agricultural technician
EQET SEE Monitoring Visit to the MK national WGs for the OS1 development		March	Monitoring visit to the national processes in OS development for agricultural technician
Bilateral visit to the HE Accreditation Agency Banja Luka		March	Agreement on the update of the JIS Register of accredited institutions and study programmes
EQET SEE Monitoring Visit to the BA national WGs for the OS1 development		March	Monitoring visit to the national processes in OS development for agricultural technician

Regional training on data management for QA in higher education		September	Capacities of employees of quality assurance agencies working on the higher education data in the field of data management were increased during the two-day meeting organised by the ERI SEE Secretariat on 15 and 16 September 2022 online.
EQET SEE QA Workshop for Questionnaire on Training Needs Assessment		October	The proposal of the Questionnaire for training needs of external evaluators in pre-tertiary education in the region, previously prepared by the ERI SEE was presented, discussed, and amended, by Regional Working group comprising of relevant experts from seven regional economies.
Public-Private Partnership for Meeting Skills Needs and Making Vocational Education and Training		October	Western Balkans Alliance for Work-based learning meeting on policy making, developments in VET and further regional activities regarding WBL
Activities organized by other partner institutions, in which ERI SEE actively participated (on-line of f-2-f)	Not originally planned	Realized	
Danube Region Monitor Workshop		February	The ERI SEE team familiarised at the Danube Region Monitor Workshop on 2 March 2022. At the workshop with the data from the Danube Region on key labour market and education indicators.
SICI Workshop on 'The impact of inspection on Equity and Excellence'		March	The representatives of the ERI SEE learned about how the inspectorate in Scotland uses inspection evaluation, data and policy work to ensure the education system continues to improve at on-line SICI-workshop on Educational Equity and Excellence on 22nd March 2022.

Western Balkans Ministerial Conference: Lifting Barriers for Sustainable Tourism Development		May	Presentation of the regionally based Hotel and Restaurant technician occupational standard
10th International Stakeholder Conference of Priority Area 9 “People and Skills” of the EU Strategy for the Danube Region and 22nd Steering Group Meeting of PA 9		June	Participation at the Danube Region Strategy – Stakeholders’ conference and presentation of the ERI SEE work
Green Perspectives for Economic Development and Education		June	Presentation of the ERI SEE work on the qualification for the agricultural technician and environmental requirements
Skills for Enterprise Development Launch event - Skilling up the Western Balkans agri-food sector: digitalising, greening		June	The ERI SEE representatives participated at online event Skills for Enterprise Development Launch event – Skilling up the Western Balkans agri-food sector: digitalising, greening, organised within the framework of the European Training Foundation (ETF) project Skills for Enterprise Development .
Closing conference of the Dual VET in Serbia		September	Participation as guests
The challenges of quality and inclusive education towards European integration - Albania		September	Presentation of the ERI SEE thematic focus on teacher education and training, through the evidence-based policy recommendations and the ERI SEE study: Needs analysis systems for teacher education and training programmes , as well as the Teacher Education and Training Network for South East Europe (SEE TET Network) and Quality Assurance (QA) network.
GIZ Workshop for the revision of the occupational standard locksmith		September	Participation in the GIZ-run revision of the locksmith occupational standard

¹This designation is without prejudice to positions on status and is in line with UNCSCR 1244 and the ICJ Opinion on the Kosovo declaration of independence.