

# EDUCATION REFORM INITIATIVE OF SOUTH EASTERN EUROPE – ERI SEE

## ACTIVITY REPORT 2023

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JANUARY 2024

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Education Reform Initiative of South Eastern  
Europe (ERI SEE) Secretariat

**ERI  
SEE** | Education  
Reform  
Initiative of  
South  
Eastern  
Europe



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# Strategic development

## Mission

*Mission of the Education Reform Initiative in South Eastern Europe is to support national reform processes in education and training through regional activities – projects, peer learning, conference, seminars, workshops etc., and through providing policy support, linking these to European Union trends and developments.*

The Education Reform Initiative in South Eastern Europe (ERI SEE) is a regional, South Eastern European platform for cooperation in the field of education and training. It supports national reforms in education and training through various regional activities – peer learning, conferences, seminars, workshops, joint projects etc, and linking these to the European frameworks for education development. It also provides support to policy making. ERI SEE focuses its activities on the priorities defined in the multiannual strategic documents of the participating economies, as well as on the assessments of the Economic Reform Programmes.

ERI SEE is based on the Memorandum of understanding on the Role and Organization of the Education Reform Initiative of South Eastern Europe (ERI SEE), and for the purpose of the effective management of the ERI SEE, the ERI SEE Secretariat has been established by the Agreement between the Government of the Republic of Serbia and the Other Members of the Education Reform Initiative of South Eastern Europe on the Seat of the Secretariat of the Education Reform Initiative of South Eastern Europe. Thus, ERI SEE's institutional structure consists of the Governing Board, Consultative Body and a Secretariat. The ERI SEE Governing Board is composed of the representatives of the signatory ministries in charge of education of Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Moldova, Montenegro, Republic of North Macedonia and Serbia; and of the representatives of international partners - Austrian Agency for Education and Internationalization (on behalf of the Austrian ministry in charge of education), and the Regional Cooperation Council (RCC).

## Management

*Education Reform Initiative in South Eastern Europe (ERI SEE) is governed by its Governing Board, composed of the representatives of ministries of education from the ERI SEE Member Countries.*

The Education Reform Initiative of South Eastern Europe (ERI SEE) is strategically managed by its highest governing body – ERI SEE Governing Board. In 2023, the Governing Board members – representatives of ministries in charge of education from the countries which signed the Memorandum of Understanding, and donors and international partners, that contributed to the ERI SEE Secretariat activities, were:

- Ms Ermelinda Durmishi, Albania
- Ms Aida Durić, Bosnia and Herzegovina
- Ms Loredana Maravić/Ms Ksenija Rukavina, Croatia
- Ms Tamara Tovjanin/Mr Goran Drobnjak, Montenegro
- Ms Ludmila Pavlov, Republic of Moldova
- Mr Ahmed Qazimi/Mr Jordačno Poposki, Republic of North Macedonia
- Mr Aleksandar Jović (the Chair)/ Ms Danijela Šćepanović, Serbia
- Ms Monika Mott, OeAD Austria
- Mr Ilir Deda, RCC

The Governing Board defined strategic priorities of the ERI SEE, adopted its main documents such as reports (activity and financial), plans and programmes (activity and financial), legal (Statute, Rulebooks) as well as made decisions that regulate strategic functioning and positioning of the ERI SEE (approval of projects, strategic partnerships, contributions etc.). The Governing Board met twice a year in blended format:

- the **35<sup>th</sup> Governing Board of the ERI SEE** was held on the 10 February 2023 in blended format: physically in Belgrade, Serbia, and online. Mr Aleksandar Jović, Assistant Minister of the Republic of Serbia, chaired the meeting. This event was used to present the Activity Report and Financial Report for 2022, as well as the audit report, and adopt them. Also, during the meeting, the Work Plan and Financial Statement for 2023 were discussed and adopted. An important topic of conversation was also the current level of annual country contributions and their potential increase, having in mind the inflation rate in the recent period as well as the fact that the current contributions were defined back in 2015. In addition, the amendments of the Internal Rules and Regulations of the ERI SEE were adopted to ensure the more functional day-to-day operations of the ERI SEE Secretariat.
- the **36<sup>th</sup> Governing Board of the ERI SEE** was organised on the 24 November 2023 in blended format with the physical part of the meeting was organised in Zagreb, Croatia. The Assistant Minister of the Ministry of Education of the Republic of Serbia Mr Aleksandar Jović chaired the event. The meeting was held with the purpose of discussing the realization of the current Work Programme and Financial Plan, discussing the proposals for the Work Programme and Financial Plan for 2024 and presenting updates on strategic developments of the ERI SEE member countries and on activities of the ERI SEE partners as well as discussing conditions for ERI SEE operations.

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At the operational level, the management of the ERI SEE was done through the functioning of the ERI SEE Secretariat, seated in Belgrade and managed by Ms Tina Šarić, Director. Ms Šarić was responsible for managing all day-to-day activities of the Secretariat in line with the wider framework provided by the ERI SEE Strategic documents as well as with adopted Work Programme and Financial Plan. She was also the legal representative of the Secretariat. In addition, she had the responsibility to ERI SEE donors to implement project activities in the manner and timeline defined by the approved project applications.

For the work of the Secretariat Ms Šarić submitted the Work Programme and Financial plan for revision and adoption, together with the audit report to the Governing Board, as well as the annual report, financial report and audit report to the Austrian Development Agency, ADA, which is the funder of the currently biggest ERI SEE regional project, Enhancements in the quality of education and training in South Eastern Europe – EQET SEE. Ms Šarić managed the team of 3.3 employees (including herself) which has successfully and committedly implemented a large number of activities in 2023, described in detail in this report. In this, Šarić and her team had the strong support and contributions from their partners (more than 30 institutions from the region) in the implementation of these activities and realization of project goals and outputs.



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## Visibility

*Through its participation at regional and international activities and projects, ERI SEE has constantly been increasing its visibility among relevant stakeholders. ERI SEE organized 26 regional events and participated at 18 local, regional or international events organized by partner institutions. ERI SEE was awarded the Danube Region Flagship certificate.*

In 2023, the Education Reform Initiative of South Eastern Europe (ERI SEE) significantly increased its visibility throughout the region as well as at the international level. The increased visibility can be noted in the newly developed partnerships, such as with the German Development Cooperation - GIZ, with whom ERI SEE started implementing an education and training related component of the larger regional project – Green Agenda: Decarbonization of the energy sector in the Western Balkans. ERI SEE has been charged with the implementation of the component 3 of this regional project, called Renewable Energy Services in Education and Training – RESET, explained in detail in this report, under the respective chapter. This cooperation will further increase the visibility and reach of the ERI SEE in the business community, as well as in the public sector, dealing with renewable energy.

In addition, cooperation with some of the most relevant bodies in charge of quality of higher education at the European level, namely ENQA and EQAR, has been established, on the occasion of the Western Balkans Ministerial Conference „Quality and Quality Assurance in Higher Education – Trends and Developments in the EU and Western Balkans“, held in North Macedonia, Skopje on 26th and 27th September 2023. The conference brought together around 120 regional and international stakeholders and resulted in the Western Balkans Policy Recommendations for Quality in Higher Education on further directions for enhancing the quality and quality assurance in higher education in the Western Balkans, in accordance with the Bologna Process commitments and European Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance (European Standards and Guidelines – ESG).

The Western Balkans Policy Recommendations took into account not only the regional needs but also international developments that will be considered when planning future regional actions. This also includes further cooperation with ENQA and EQAR. In 2023, ERI SEE also had the opportunity to present itself to the Central and Eastern European Network of Quality Assurance Agencies in Higher Education – CEENQA, which raised great interest among the participants, relevant for quality assurance in higher education.

The ERI SEE reach was also noted in the civil sector. ERI SEE participated in the Western Balkans Civil Society Forum held in Thessaloniki in October 2023 and organized by the European Economic and Social Committee in Thessaloniki, Greece.

Cooperation with strategic partners of the ERI SEE, such as European Training Foundation, Regional Cooperation Council, and activities regarding the Danube Region Strategy, are ongoing. During the Seminar of the European Alliance for Apprenticeships (EAfA), organized by the ETF in October 2023, ERI SEE had the opportunity to present its activities regarding skills and Western Balkans Alliance for Work-based Learning to a number of international stakeholders, around 100 of them, among which the high level representatives of the European Commission. The



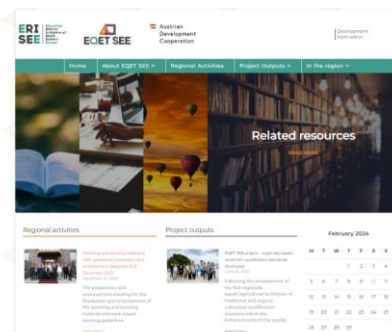
presentation resulted in the great interest in the ERI SEE activities and methodologies it uses for regional intellectual outputs.

The ERI SEE was also relevant in the planning of cooperation among Quality Assurance agencies in Higher Education in the Western Balkans for the implementation of the Multilateral agreement for the recognition of higher education qualifications in the Western Balkans, organized by the Regional Cooperation Council (RCC).

As for the visibility in the Danube Region, ERI SEE is the member of the Steering Committee and as such participates regularly at Steering Committee meetings, having the opportunity to update around 80 participants regularly on its news. In 2023, ERI SEE was proudly awarded the certificate of the Danube Strategy Flagship Initiative 2023 by the European Union Strategy for the Danube Region National Coordinators and Priority Area Coordinators, for work that has a clear macro-regional dimension and multi-level governance approach. The work of ERI SEE is seen as of high importance for the Danube Region's economic, social and territorial cohesion, improving the quality of life in the Danube Region.

ERI SEE also initiates and coordinates the on-line exchange of information among regional projects in education and training, funded by various donors, which gathers regularly around 50 most relevant international stakeholders and implementers from the region. In addition, at the end of the year ERI SEE publishes its Newsletter, disseminated on-line to around 2000 of recipients, that informs the audience on the activities implemented in 2023.

The increased visibility comes as a result of continuous and reliable presence of ERI SEE in the region at a number of national and regional activities, either initiated by or participated in by the ERI SEE – 44 events altogether (26 of which organized by ERI SEE). It is estimated that, through national, regional and international activities, more than 3000 persons were directly informed about the activities of the ERI SEE.



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## Strategic partnerships

*In 2023, ERI SEE has maintained and strengthened its partnerships with relevant international and regional organizations, which have a strong role in the ERI SEE's positioning in the region.*

As mentioned above, ERI SEE nurtures and highly values its partnerships with most relevant stakeholders across the South Eastern Europe, Republic of Moldova and European Union. ERI SEE sees these partnerships as the cornerstone of its presence and relevance in the region and invests its funding, time, management and network building into it.

ERI SEE is proud to having established and maintained partnership relationships with national agencies for general, VET and higher education, which are responsible for all the national reforms happening in their economies and cover a whole range of most pressing themes, such as occupational and qualification standards development, curricula development, teaching and learning material, teacher training, quality assurance mechanisms and others. In 2023, these partnerships have strengthened, and they enable ERI SEE to maintain its strong role and position in the region, supporting national priorities and reforms through regional joint work.

The important partnership is also achieved with the business sector through cooperation with national chambers of commerce which are a natural partner to education and training activities that include work-based learning and cooperation with employers, one of the ERI SEE's key focus area.

These partnerships are formalized through coordination of the South Eastern European Vocational Education and Training Network - SEE VET Net, with its new chair (after the retirement of Mr Duško Rajković, one of the founders of the SEE VET Net) being Ms Ejvis Gishti, director of the Albanian National Agency for VET and Qualifications (NAVETQ). The SEEVET Net, coordinated by the ERI SEE, is the engine of VET developments at regional level.

The SEEVET Net also formed a close alliance with the chambers of commerce, known under the name of the Western Balkans Alliance for Work-based learning (WBA4WBL), partnering on the current regional project run by ERI SEE – Enhancements in the Quality of Education and Training – EQET SEE.

For the implementation of the EQET SEE project, and its pillar focusing on quality assurance in pre-tertiary education, the partnership with agencies in charge of external evaluation of schools has been established and was going strong in 2023.

ERI SEE also established strong partnership relationship with agencies for quality assurance in higher education, gathered as the Regional working group for quality assurance in higher education, and with Croatian Agency for Science and Higher Education which hosted a study visits in 2023 for the Regional working group, and greatly contributed to the Ministerial conference on Quality and Quality Assurance in Skopje, North Macedonia, in September 2023.

In addition, strategically important are the teacher education and training agencies, for which a study visit with Croatian Academic and Research Network (CARNET), was organized.

Strategic partnerships with international partners – Austrian Agency for Education and Internationalization (OeAD), European Training Foundation (ETF), Regional Cooperation Council (RCC), Standing International Conference of Inspectorates (SICI), are most relevant for planning ERI SEE activities and synchronizing presence and objectives in the region. In addition, international partners are a strong link to the European developments and practices.



## Vision for the future

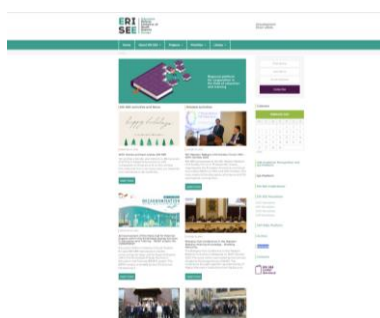
*Continuing the established pathways, while expanding on them, and searching for the new ones, are the vision for the future. Equally important are the relations with the partners, based on mutual respect and learning, and dedication to quality.*

ERI SEE has established a strong position in South Eastern European region as a reliable, innovative and relevant partner. This role should be further strengthened and secured in the future, by ERI SEE continuing its regional projects that involve cooperation with the most relevant regional actors in education and training. ERI SEE should continue to produce relevant intellectual regional products that are integrated into national practices, thus contributing to sharing and standardizing practices across the region, while respecting national specificities. A great potential in further activities lies in continuation of cooperation already established and its expansion through new types of activities, such as, for example, skills competition at regional level or development of digital teaching and learning material and digital learning platforms for specific VET sectors in which cooperation is already established and deemed relevant for the region.

At the same time, ERI SEE should strive to play a more important consultative role at service to national policy makers. This can be achieved by further strengthening of ERI SEE visibility and presence in the region, through further regional project, conferences, peer learning activities, policy discussions and so on.

In addition, there is a great area of further ERI SEE development in one very specific and very important sector – renewable energy sector. Cooperation with the German Development Cooperation (GIZ), established in 2023, plays a crucial role in positioning ERI SEE in this area and should be continued and extended through the development of innovative regional standards of occupations and qualification within the energy sector, accompanying trainings for education and training employees and teaching and learning material. ERI SEE has already developed its expertise in these intellectual outputs that can now be applied and transferred to this emerging and increasingly more and more important sector. Particularly in this emerging sector, ERI SEE should enhance its position in the area of non-formal education, more specifically adult education, which offers great opportunities for re-skilling and up-skilling and is bound to play a more and more important role in the future as it presents a flexible and fast response to the ever-changing needs of the labour market.

Last but not least, ERI SEE should strive to maintain its good cooperation with its strategic partners, both regional and international, that are shaped by mutual respect, genuine interest for the needs of the education and training sector and orientation to quality, and human and collegial relations.



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# Thematic priorities



*In 2023, ERI SEE has prioritized the following main themes: Modernization of VET and cooperation with business sector, Quality assurance of pre-tertiary education and training, Teacher education and training and Quality assurance in higher education*

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In 2023, ERI SEE has prioritized the following main themes:

- Modernization of VET and cooperation with business sector
- Quality assurance of pre-tertiary education and training
- Teacher education and training
- Quality assurance in higher education

These thematic priorities have been strategically selected on the basis of the strategic positions of ERI SEE member countries, following their national trends and developments. For all of these priorities mentioned above, the needs analyses together with strategic partners have been made. Actions described throughout this Activity Report 2023 have been aligned with the needs of the partners and shaped in cooperation with them.

With this approach, the actions have been adequate and relevant. ERI SEE particularly prouds itself with the fact that regional results are produced in strong cooperation and partnerships with the most relevant regional actors and are integrated into national processes, thus gaining a life of their own and sustainability throughout the region. This continued in 2023 as well.

The activities described below and relating to Modernization of VET and cooperation with business sector, and quality assurance of pre-tertiary education and training, are realized within the scope of the Enhancements of quality in education and training in South Eastern Europe – EQET SEE project, funded by the Austrian Development Agency (ADA) through funds of the Austrian Development Cooperation (ADC). The project itself has been going on from 1st October 2021, with the budget of around 2 mill EUR (with ERI SEE co-funding of 18%, around 180.000,00 EUR) and is expected to finish on 31st March 2025. Parts of activities described below are also funded through the regular ERI SEE budget.

All the activities can be followed on [www.erisee.org](http://www.erisee.org), and activities of the project are regularly updated on its dedicated website, [www.eqet.erisee.org](http://www.eqet.erisee.org).

## Modernization of VET and cooperation with business sector



*In order to modernize VET and enhance its cooperation with business sector, in 2023 ERI SEE undertook a number of activities that resulted in the development of regionally based occupational and qualification standards and teaching and learning material.*

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## ***Improved cooperation between business and education sector at regional and national level***

The collaboration arrangements within the EQET SEE project were formalised through signing the cooperation agreements that define roles of each partner within the EQET SEE project. They also show the commitment of all participating institutions to work on joint initiatives and further develop regional cooperation. In 2023 VET agencies from the region and Chambers of commerce continued implementing numerous regional meetings and initiatives connected to the EQET SEE project, explained underneath.

As a standard practice, throughout 2023, business representatives were selected and nominated to be parts of regional meetings within the EQET SEE project – meetings for the development of occupational and qualification standards and teaching and learning material. They also make a standard participation in national working groups that make sure that regional intellectual products are integrated into national practices.

### ***Regionally based occupational standards***

In 2023, 2 regionally based occupational standards (RBOS) were fully and successfully implemented. The main target groups, the VET and qualification agencies (QA) and chambers of commerce (CC) fully utilised this output. They have jointly organised national meetings for the development of RBOS, organised internal meetings with relevant national stakeholders to promote the standards and ensure their integration in national processes and procedures.

The EQET SEE project consortium agreed to develop the regionally based OS for agricultural technician for traditional and organic cultivation (ATTOOS) as the first OS in the project, and for locksmith as the second. In case of Serbia, the locksmith occupational standard was developed within another project (funded by Swiss Development Cooperation), so the consortium decision was made for Serbia to focus on the OS that is still missing in their economy, which was the CNC operator; and to use the already developed locksmith at national level as Serbian input for the regional OS. In this way, the synergies between 2 projects were made and the results of one project (SDC) were integrated into EQET SEE project.

### ***Regionally based qualification standards***

The regionally based qualification standards (RBQS) for agricultural technician of organic and traditional production and locksmith are finalized as the partners finalised both RBQS and implemented all of the national meetings planned for adjusting the RBQS to national specificities.

It is important to stress out that this was the first time that a regionally-based qualification standard was ever developed. As an innovative and piloting process, it took longer to prepare the regional material for qualification standard from the occupational standard. Also, the challenges included the fact that the developments of national qualification standards, based on the regional one, required more meetings than originally planned as national procedures needed to be adjusted to this new process.

Following the development of the first regionally based occupational standard, the EQET SEE project partners started with the development of the first regionally based qualification standard (RBQS) for the agricultural technician of the traditional and organic cultivation. This is the first major novelty of this project as there has never



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been a qualification standard at the regional level developed in Western Balkans. The process was run in accordance with the Methodology for the Developing Regionally-based Standards of Qualifications (QS Methodology) developed within the previous project, TO REGOS.

The activities regarding the national adoption of the agricultural technician qualification standards were finalized by June 2023, when the standard was published on the EQET SEE website in English with translations to Albanian and Serbian. The total of 36 national meetings were implemented between November 2022 and June 2023 (including face-to-face and online meetings).

The development of the second metal sector RBQS - locksmith RBQS, started in April 2023 and was completed by 01 June 2023 at the regional level. To that end, three regional meetings have been implemented in this period:

The First Locksmith RBQS was organised on 26 and 27 April 2023 in Tirana, Albania. The main goal of the meeting was to define the main framework for the development of the standard and make the first steps towards defining the units of learning outcomes.

The Second Locksmith RBQS was organised on 16 and 17 May 2023, in Bar Montenegro. The regional working group continued working on developing learning outcomes and units of learning outcomes.

The Third Locksmith RBQS was organised on 01 June 2023 online for the purpose of finalising and endorsing the standard.

Regional meetings had been concluded by publishing locksmith qualification standard at the EQET SEE website in English, with translations to Albanian, Macedonian and Serbian.

After that, national meetings for the adjustment and expansion to national specificities were organized. The EQET SEE consortium formed working groups at national level consisting of six qualification standard and education experts that were coordinated by the national qualification standards moderators with the vast experience in developing standards and extensive familiarity with national contexts. According to the QS Methodology each economy was to organise five meetings for adjusting the regional qualification standard to national specificities (according to the methodology, regional QS included the core and regionally shared content, while national expansion elaborated on other segments, not included regionally.)

Following the finalization of regional meetings for the development of locksmith qualification standard the total of 25 national meetings have been further organised in 6 economies. The process of completing national qualification standards, based on the regional one, was finalized in December 2023.



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## **Curricula**

The overall accomplishment rate of curricula development in 2023 has been around 50%, as the majority of economies developed the curricula for agricultural technician of traditional and organic cultivation while all economies initiated national procedures for the development of the locksmith/CNC technician curricula.

The main difference between the economies is the fact that Bosnia and Herzegovina (BA) does not develop curricula due to its national specificities. As educational jurisdiction belongs to entities and cantons, the central agencies (as is Agency for pre-primary, primary and secondary education - APOSO) are able to develop occupational and qualification standards and suggest to entities and cantons to incorporate them in their systems. However, the same is not the case with curricula that has to be developed based on the OS and QS adopted at lower administrative levels. Consequently, BA does not have national procedures nor internal capacities to produce curriculum at the central level. This fact has been taken into account in the cooperation agreement with BA partners from the beginning of the project.

The challenge is the overload of national partners and complicated national procedures for previous stages (OS and QS development) that took more time than envisaged. The process of developing national curricula is expected to be fully accomplished by mid 2024.

The curricula development was envisaged as the national contribution to the EQET SEE project, funded and organised by participating economies. The organisation of national meetings followed national procedures that differ between the economies. The number of meetings ranges between 5 and 15 per economy while the members of working groups are teachers, VET representatives of business and university professors. The EQET SEE project partners reported that the total of 38 national meetings had been implemented for the development of the agricultural technician of traditional and organic cultivation curricula and three national meetings for the development of locksmith curricula in 2023.

## **Teaching and Learning Material**

The activities related to the development of teaching and learning activities started in June 2023 when the project consortium met to develop the detailed methodology of developing teaching and learning material for the first time in the region. The project partners agreed that the teaching and learning material (TLM) and work-based learning guidelines (WBL) should be developed in parallel not and not consecutively (as was originally planned) due to their inevitable interdependence. It was decided that each economy will nominate one teaching and learning material expert who was also a member of OS and QS working groups, except for Montenegro that was to nominate two as there was not one expert that can cover the entire standard.

Additional agreement was made into putting more emphasis to social sustainability, gender equity and environmental sustainability, as teachers need more direct support in implementing contemporary ESG standards. To that end additional teaching material was developed for agriculture technician and locksmith curricula covering social sustainability, environmental sustainability and gender equity aspects.

As for the beginning of work on teaching and learning material, the process was organized so that the first work was done by external experts, who developed the material on environment, social and gender aspects. This material was presented to the consortium in June 2023, during the First regional meeting for the development of methodology of teaching and learning material in Budva, Montenegro.

Additional meeting output was agreement on the methodology for developing TLM and WBL guidelines for agricultural and locksmith content and the timeline of activities for both sectors. The steps were agreed and

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included the nomination of national experts, the focus of the TLM and WBL material – contemporary topics, core learning outcomes from the QS, relevant examples and inclusive language, and deadline for the process for agricultural technician being December 2023).

Three consecutive meetings for the development of TLM and WBL guidelines were organized in the period from September till December 2023, resulting in the teaching and learning material for agricultural technician with additional guidelines for work-based learning. The material was approved by the larger regional group, consisting of VET agency representatives, Chambers of commerce representatives and TLM experts, in December 2023, during the Endorsement meeting on 14th December 2024.



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## Quality Assurance of education and training through external evaluation of schools



*In order to quality assure education and training through external evaluation, a regional standard of competences for external evaluators, and the corresponding training needs analysis were developed, while the training programme is being developed.*

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## ***Regional standard of competences for external evaluators***

Regional standard of competences for external evaluators was developed in the previous reporting period, defining the competences that are needed for the successful external evaluators' work. In 2023, the national activities of external evaluation agencies across the Western Balkans 6 and Republic of Moldova were undertaken to integrate this regional standard into national practices, or in case of Bosnia and Herzegovina where the national system differs, the document is recommended to the educational authorities and published on the website of the national agency in charge of early child care and education, primary and secondary education so that it is accessible to interested parties.

## ***Training Needs Analysis***

In 2023, for the purpose of assessing the training needs referenced to the agreed competence standard, a training needs analysis (TNA) questionnaire was designed and implemented across the region. The questionnaire was prepared by the ERI SEE Secretariat and first presented to the external evaluation agencies from the region during the Workshop on the Training Needs Analysis Questionnaire (Tirana, 04-05.10.2022). After that, the fine-tuning process, testing and implementation followed: the questionnaire was translated into the local languages, placed on the online platform (Lime Survey), tested it among the NCPs, and then to implemented among selected external evaluators across the South Eastern Europe region and Moldova. The questionnaire was filled out in September 2023 by the total of 150 external evaluators from the SEE and Moldova. In this period, an external evaluator for analysis of the responses to the TNA questionnaire was selected in line with the Open Call procedure of the ERI SEE. The results of the regional TNA questionnaire implementation were presented in October 2023. The results were used for the preparation of the training programme for external evaluators, described below.

As a supplementary document, a questionnaire for the assessment of competences was also developed in 2023. The purpose of this questionnaire is to serve either as self-assessment tool, or to be integrated into the system of assessment of work of external evaluators. Its use and integration into the national systems will be in accordance with needs and possibilities of the QA agencies, as not all economies are able to conduct evaluation of work of external evaluators.

## ***Training Programme Development for External Evaluators***

2023 also saw the beginning of activities related to the development of the Training Programme for trainers of external evaluators – the external trainers were selected, initial meetings on the content and structure of the Training Programme were organized and the first draft of the Training Programme was delivered to the ERI SEE Secretariat in December 2023. the training programme was also discussed with partners during a regional planning mission in Moldova in July 2023.

The draft Training Programme takes into consideration the Regional Standard of Competences and results of the Training Needs Analysis impemented among the regional external evaluators selected by the agencies in charge of quality assurance and external evaluation. The work on further development of the Training Programme, in cooperation with the project partners, continues in 2024. The Training Programme will lead to the implementation of regional Trainings for trainers of external evaluators, where approximately 30 regional external evaluators will be trained as trainers, for the organization of further trainings at national level.

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## *Methodology of external evaluation – sharing of practices*

This activity was initially designed as development of a regional methodology for external evaluation. However, due to the specific national circumstances and regulations, partners – quality assurance agencies in pre-tertiary education - expressed the need to focus on examples of good practices in the implementation of external evaluation methodologies instead of developing a regional methodology, because a regional methodology couldn't be integrated into national regulations. Therefore, the document called Good European practices in the implementation of external evaluation methodologies, was developed, focusing on areas in which implementing partners recognized their needs for improvements and their own best practices they wish to present to others. In addition, a large number of EU good practices has been identified by the implementing partners that they wanted to learn about and based on this, improve their external evaluation practices. With the large collection of good practices in the needed areas, each economy would choose from the practices they need the most, and then integrate them into their national processes when they implement their external evaluation methodologies (practices like, for example, environmental, social and gender aspects, bullying, digitalization, thematic evaluation, peer reviews, etc.). In line with this change, the publication was prepared in 2023. The consortium was working on developing the collection of practices describing different stages in the implementation of external evaluation methodologies that will inspire and influence improvement of national implementation practices. European institutions were contacted to contribute with their practices. The final document consists of around 75 examples of good practices from all over Europe, including the South Eastern Europe, and has been composed with the inputs from more than 20 different, regional and European, institutions. In concrete terms, this output is the result of the following activities: 2 Regional meetings for the development of External Evaluation Good practices in the implementation of external evaluation methodologies (28. and 29.03.2023. in Belgrade, Serbia and 23. and 24.05.2023. in Bar, Montenegro), Follow up work on best practice examples included the review and communication among the project partners, ERI SEE Secretariat and external expert, and writing of practices by experts from WB6 and EU institutions (on-line).

National Coordination Points for the implementation of the EQET SEE project in charge of QA aspects also expressed that they share the need for development of indicators for work-based learning and more specific indicators for VET. For this purpose, 2 meetings: Regional meeting for analysis of QA Methodologies (Preparatory meeting, on-line), which initiated the process in October 2022; 2 Joint QA-VET components' Regional meetings exploring the quality aspects of practical learning (in 03.03.2023 in Belgrade, Serbia and 17. and 18.10.2023. in Chisinau, Republic of Moldova) were organized, resulting in regional quality standards and indicators for VET and Work-based learning (WBL) which will be integrated into the Good practices publication.



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## Quality of Higher Education



*In 2023, ERI SEE organized a Ministerial conference on quality and quality assurance in higher education with Ministry of Education and Science of the Republic of North Macedonia, and a peer learning activity with the Croatian Agency for Science and Higher Education.*

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## **Advocacy for quality in higher education**

One of the thematic priorities of the ERI SEE Secretariat is higher education and its quality through supporting quality assurance developments and recognition of higher education qualifications.

In 2023, the focus was strongly put on quality through the Ministerial conference organized by the Ministry of Education and Science of the Republic of North Macedonia, in cooperation with the Education Reform Initiative of the South Eastern Europe (ERI SEE) Secretariat, titled “Quality and Quality Assurance in Higher Education – Trends and developments in the EU and Western Balkans“, held on 26<sup>th</sup> and 27<sup>th</sup> September 2023 in Skopje, Republic of North Macedonia and gathering a number of region’s ministers and other high ranking government officials, representatives of competent institutions, academia and experts from the Western Balkans and European Union (EU).

The conference was opened by the Ministers of education and science of the Republic of North Macedonia, Mr Jeton Shaqiri, who was joined on the Ministerial panel by Mr Miomir Vojinović, Minister of Education of Montenegro, Mr Aleksandar Jović, Assistant Minister of Education of the Republic of Serbia and Vice-Minister of Education, Science and Sport of Lithuania Ms Agne Kudrauskiene. The Conference was attended by over 80 conference participants from the region and North macedonia, who discussed on this occasion the quality and quality assurance of higher education in the region and the steps to be taken to increase it.

In his opening address, Minister Shaqiri underlined the significance of such an event and expressed the expectation that the conference will result with the roadmap that will improve the quality of higher education in each of the economies of the region.

The directors of the European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA), Mr Douglas Blackstock and the European Quality Assurance Register for Higher Education (EQAR), Ms Magalie Soenen took an active role in the conference.

“Quality assurance is a collaborative process and brings together all students and members of the academic community so that we can, through collaboration, build a much higher quality in higher education. I am here not only to share good practices from other countries, but also to hear experiences from the Western Balkans, to learn how the system works and to use them in my future work“, said on this occasion Mr Douglas Blackstock, president of the ENQA, gathering 46 agencies for ensuring the quality of education in Europe.

The Director of EQAR, Ms Magali Soenen reminded that the European framework is the basis for cooperation between European higher education institutions and for the recognition of diplomas, which allows for greater mobility of people in the Europe.

The event also hosted two key speakers, Ms Ellen Hazelkorn, PhD, Professor Emerita at the Technological University Dublin and Ms Danijela Horvatek Tomić, PhD, the Director of the Croatian Agency for Science and Higher Education.

The two-day event comprised the presentations from the high-level European experts, panel discussions with policy makers and representatives of key institutions competent for quality assurance in the Western Balkans, European and regional experts from academia, workshops, as well as the study visits to the University Kyril and Method and International Balkans University in Skopje, where participants of the conference were hosted by the Rectors: professor Biljana Angelova, PhD and professor Lutfi Sunar, PhD. who presented their latest achievements and experiences in encouraging a culture of quality among professors and students.

The Western Balkans Ministerial Conference “Quality and Quality Assurance in Higher Education – Trends and developments in the EU and Western Balkans“ resulted in the „Western Balkans Policy Recommendations for Quality in Higher Education on further directions for enhancing the quality and quality assurance in higher



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education in the Western Balkans“, in accordance with the Bologna Process commitments and European Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance (European Standards and Guidelines – ESG).

## Peer learning

One of the ways ERI SEE supports quality in higher education is creating a platform for peer learning and exchanges regarding topics that Quality Assurance Agencies find relevant. One of such activities, a peer learning workshop on Integration of European Standards and Guidelines (ESG) into the work of Quality Assurance Agencies (QAA) in higher education from the Western Balkans 6 was organized on 6th and 7th July 2023 in cooperation with the Ministry of Science and Education and Agency for Science and Higher Education of the Republic of Croatia, and with the support of the Regional Cooperation Council (RCC). The activity is organized under the Regional Common Market Action Plan for Western Balkans 6 within the Berlin Process.

The main goals of the workshop was to learn from Croatian practices on the topics of internal quality assurance, external quality assurance and cooperation with higher education institutions.

The first day of the meeting was devoted to discussing the ESGs for internal and external quality assurance and ESGs for quality assurance agencies. Ms Vesna Dodiković Jurković, PhD, Ms Sandra Bezjak, MSc, and prof Danijela Horvatek Tomić, the director of the Agency for Science and Higher Education presented their experiences and examples of good practises as the basis for discussion on the ESG implementation by the WB6 QA Agencies.

During the second day, Mr Ilir Deda of the RCC, presented the activities of the Reginal Cooperation Council in the higher education area, Ms Ivana Živadinović of the ERI SEE presented the latest developments regarding the Joint information system and Ms Tina Šarić opened discussion about future regional activities in the field of quality assurance.



## Teacher Education and Training



***In 2023, ERI SEE organized a study visit to Croatian Academic and Research Network (CARNET) and to a school Stjepana Radića, Brestovac Orehovički – regional centre of Applied Digital Technology for representatives of teacher training agencies from SEE and Moldova.***

## Peer learning

ERI SEE has long been supporting teacher education and training agencies from the Western Balkans 6 and Moldova regarding digitalization of teacher training activities and teaching and learning. For that purpose, the South Eastern European Education and Training (SEE TET) Network was established, composed of representatives of teacher education and training agencies from the region. In 2023, permanent representatives and their substitutes were appointed by the institutions, which presents a good step for the sustainability of lessons learnt and planning of future cooperation.

The 11th Meeting of the South Eastern European Education and Training (SEE TET) Network and Study visit to Croatia, funded by the ERI SEE Secretariat and organized in cooperation with the Croatian Academic and Research Network (CARNET) on the subject of digitisation in teaching and learning and systems of teacher education and training (best practices and potential improvements) took place on 29th and 30<sup>th</sup> June 2023 in Zagreb, Croatia. The purpose of the event was familiarising with Croatian experience in digitisation in education: facilitation of progress in new information technologies use, methodology of e-education, methodology of e-learning and learning material, in order to consider how the lessons learned in Croatia could be used to the benefit of economies in South Eastern Europe and Moldova. Participants of the meeting were recently appointed permanent representatives to the SEE TET Network from the regional economies.

CARNET hosted the first part of the study visit, when Ms Aleksandra Mudrinić, Assistant Director, and her colleagues Ms Maja Quien, Ms Ljerka Čulina, Ms Renata Šimunko, Ms Jasminka Maravić, Ms Mojca Makovac and Ms Klara Bilić Meštrić presented CARNET most impactful projects and results, as well as ongoing activities, within each thematic area of interest: education, development of digital educational contents, demonstration laboratories, research and other.

The study trip continued with the visit to the Primary school Stjepana Radića in Brestovec Orehovički – Centre of Applied Digital Technology, an exemplary school where numerous innovations have been introduced, as shown by the school principal Mr Zdenko Kobeščak, teachers and pupils. Another visit was paid to the School of Geodesy – Regional Educational Centre iz Zagreb, where principal Ms Zdravka Šimić and teacher Mr Zlatan Soldo explained how e-education has evolved in their school and why they are consider leader among schools in digitisation in Croatia.

The study visit was concluded with the joint exploration of interest and potentials for a future regional project and identification of themes of common interest that will be tackled in further cooperation within the SEE TET Network.



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## Green Agenda for the Western Balkans



*ERI SEE focuses its activities in the sector of Renewable Energy to developing recommendations and action plan for education and training sector, and to increasing understanding and awareness about the relevance of the transition to the renewable energies among the education and training sector*

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## ***Education and Training in Renewable Energy Sector***

The European Green Deal and the Green Agenda for the Western Balkans, through the Sofia Declaration and the Action Plan for the Implementation of the Sofia Declaration on the Green Agenda for the Western Balkans 2021 – 2030 (endorsed by the Western Balkans leaders at the summit held in Slovenia, Brdo, on 6th of October 2021), set the energy transition process, environmental protection and climate change as the priorities for the Western Balkan countries.

To join other European countries in striving for climate neutral continent by 2050, the whole region needs to actively engage in the implementation of the Green Agenda for the Western Balkans. In comparison with the EU countries, where the CO<sub>2</sub> emissions per capita are on the level of the EU average, CO<sub>2</sub> emissions are still several times higher than the EU average. Currently, the two thirds of the CO<sub>2</sub> emissions balance is coming from the energy sector of which 60% from the coalfired power generations, which highlights the importance and urgency of decarbonization of the energy sector.

To respond to the increasing demand by the key actors in the electricity sector for technological, regulatory and HR solutions for the implementation of an environmentally and climate-friendly energy transition, the German Development Cooperation project “Decarbonization of the Electricity Sector in the Western Balkans” foresees the threefold action related to 1. renewable energy grid integration, 2. renewable energy regulatory framework, and 3. promoting TVET and education for renewable energy services.

In 2023, arrangements were made for the ERI SEE particular involvement in the Green Agenda for the Western Balkans project, in the above Component 3., Promoting TVET and education for renewable energy services. ERI SEE is the project lead for the duration of activities from 1st October 2023 till 31st September 2025. The project is of regional character, with goal to prepare the adequate response from the education and training sector to the changing demands on the labour market caused by growth of the renewable energy sector.

### ***Recommendations for decision makers***

The overall objective of this project is to support the developments of the adequate response from the education and training sector to the introduction of the renewable energy professions into the Western Balkans. One of the project’s packages, in order to address this objective, is dealing with the development of recommendations to TVET decision makers to accelerate the Labour market and energy developments for Renewable energy.

These recommendations should take into consideration the good practices existing in more advance economies, and should be adjusted to specific Western Balkans circumstances, including educational legal framework and regulations. They should also be supported by the analysis of the effects of the increased Renewable Energy sector demand on education and labour market, taking into consideration both labour market needs and current and future education provision.

The recommendations should include the framework of regionally uniform learning content and reference to the technical equipment needed for training needed by continuing education institutions for Renewable Energy.

2 project objectives within this package are defined:

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- Project objective 1: To create a common understanding between the policy makers in the business and ET sector regarding the opportunities and needs that come as the result of increased development of the renewable energy (electricity sector)
  - Project objective 2: To create a common action plan and set of recommendations for the gradual increase of the RE energy sector professions in the WB

The actions that should be taken are:

- regional conference for the presentation of the conclusions of the LM and ET studies (The conclusions of the LM and ET studies broadly presented to the relevant actors in the WB6 (policy makers and stakeholders), promoting policy discussions
- Preparation of the material for the learning content for 2 selected profession in the Renewable energy sector, based on the labour market analysis
- Preparation of the material for the learning content for
- Regional meeting for the recommendations and adjustment of regionally uniform learning content/framework
- Regional meeting for the development of action plan for the further developments in the Labour Market and Education and Training sector targeting renewable energy

In 2023, preparatory activities were taken to enable the realization of these activities in 2024 and 2025.

### ***Raising awareness and promoting TVET for Renewable Energy Services***

The awareness-raising and promotion campaign should increase the level of general understanding of the energy shift in the Western Balkans, as well as the level of specific understanding among policy makers, policy implementers and stakeholders. It should aim at creating a positive climate towards the RE transition and inform about the future potentials and opportunities that RE transition brings to the education, labour force and labour market.

The project work package has as its objective:

Project objective 3: The relevant target groups are included in information and awareness raising campaign and informed about and aware of the relevance of the RE sector and possibilities it offers in Education and Training and business

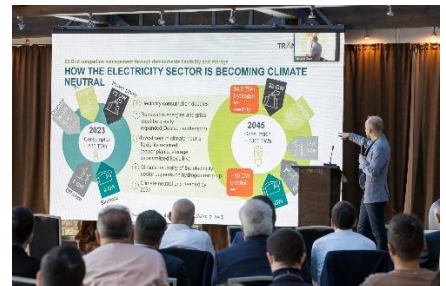
The information and awareness raising campaign shall conceptualize the information and promotional, gender-sensitive activities to the benefits of energy sector and vocational training sector of WB countries to facilitate their implementation of employment and labour market measures among the upcoming energy transition. It shall also include on-site advisory to project partners, in particular TVET organization, on campaigning and advocacy to train and recruit more interested people for energy professions.

The activities that will be taken include:

- online regional conference on the relevance of RE and its impact on ET and business, promoting RE occupations, qualifications and career prospects and joint regional actions
- 6 National events face-to-face by the national education agencies
- 6 online National events by the national education agencies

- PR: National and regional press work on all fields of action

In 2023, preparatory activities were undertaken to allow for the realization of the above activities in 2024 and 2025.



## Annex 1. Regular ERI SEE activities in 2023

Timeline 2023	CORE ERI SEE Activities	Deliverables	Status
February	ERI SEE Governing Board Meeting, on-line	Adopted Work Programme 2023; Financial Plan 2023, Activity Report 2022, Financial Report 2022	Delivered
March	Meeting of the RCC – ERI SEE-RCC Joint Working Group on Recognition of Academic Qualifications	Training on the Regional Recognition Database	Delivered
April/May	Meeting of Teacher education and training network (SEE TET), blended	Guidelines for digital material	Delivered
May	International conference on higher education North Macedonia	Recommendations on QA in higher education	Delivered
June	Meeting of the RCC – ERI SEE Workgroup on the recognition of academic qualifications	Procedures for the Commission for recognition	In progress
September	Higher education study visit / workshop, blended	Recommendations on the aspects of ESG	Delivered
October	Meeting of the RCC – ERI SEE Workgroup on the recognition of academic qualifications	Implementation of the Agreement on recognition of HE qualifications - guidelines	Cancelled
November	ERI SEE Governing Board meeting	Reporting on the implementation of the Financial Plan and Work Programme 2023	Delivered
December	Newsletter	December	Delivered



## Annex 2. EQET SEE Project activities

### ENHANCEMENTS IN THE IMPROVEMENTS OF EDUCATION AND TRAINING IN SEE:

#### VET component

Project Management		
February 2023	Sixth Project management meeting	Agreements on next steps
June 2023	Seventh Project management meeting STAND ALONE	Agreements on methodology for teaching and learning material
September - November 2023 (deadline 30/11/23)	ERI SEE - Second project reporting and audit	Reporting to donor, audit report
Developed quality assurance recommendations for the implementation of curricula with work-based learning equality and sustainability elements		
By 15 February 2023	Nomination of participants for the regional meeting	Nominated working group
03 March 2023	Regional identification of quality risks - regional meeting	Standards and indicators for VET
16-19 October 2023	Joint VET - QA components regional meeting for the development of recommendations and tools for external evaluation of the WBL	Standards and indicators for VET and WBL
The occupational standard locksmith		
By 28 February 2023	OS 2 - National adjustment meetings	Locksmith OS adjusted to national needs
March - April 2023	OS 2 - Adoption at national level	Locksmith OS nationally adopted
The first Agricultural technician of traditional and organic cultivation qualification standard - ATTOQS		
by 28 February 2023	QS 1 - National meetings for the for the finalisation of the regional QS	Qualification standard nationally adjusted
March - April 2023	QS 1 - Adoption/integration in national procedures	Qualification standard nationally adopted
Curricula based on the first qualification standard – national processes: development between May 2023 - December 2023		
Implementation of the agricultural technician curricula: school 2023/24 year and school 2024/25		
The qualification standard locksmith		
By 25 March 2023	Nominations of experts for national working group meetings	National working groups
25-27 April 2023	Three working days - regional meeting for learning outcomes (regionally based QS)	Regional Qualification standard
16-17 May 2023	Two working days regional meeting for learning outcomes (regionally based QS)	Regional Qualification standard
1 – 2 June 2023	Regional finalization and endorsement of the regionally based QS	Regional Qualification Standard endorsed
By December 2023	QS 1 - National meetings for the for the finalisation of the regional QS,	National qualification standard
December 23 - January 2024	QS 1 - Adoption/integration in national procedures	National qualification standard adopted
Curricula based on the second qualification standard – national processes: development between December - March 2024		

Developed teaching and learning material and WBL guidelines for the agricultural technician		
12-15 June 23 Budva	Regional development of teaching and learning material - meeting one	Teaching and learning material
04-07 September 23 Belgrade	Regional development of teaching and learning material - two	Teaching and learning material
09-12 October 23 Skopje	Regional development of teaching and learning material - three	Teaching and learning material
06 - 09 November 23	Regional development of teaching and learning material - four	Teaching and learning material
12-13 December 2023	Final regional consolidation meeting	Teaching and learning material endorsed
Developed and implemented training modules for trainers for teachers and company instructors - agricultural technician		
December 2023	ERI SEE Subcontracting experts	Contracts

## QA component

TRAINING NEEDS ANALYSIS ACTIVITIES		
May 2023	Finalization of questionnaires for TNA and competences at regional level	ERI SEE, online consultations
June 2023	Implementation of the tools (TNA questionnaire) at regional level	Survey monkey/other platform, coordinated by the ERI SEE
May – September 2023	Adjustment of regional questionnaires to national level	National meetings: 7 economies, 2 meetings, 1 days, 4 participants per meeting
October 2023	Analysis of results of the regional questionnaire	External expert
October/November 2023	Regional presentation of the results of the data analysis and identification of missing needs	1 regional meeting online for the presentation of the TNA analysis
September – December 2023 (flexible, depending on national circumstances)	National meetings for the adjustment of regional questionnaires to national level	National working groups  National meetings: 7 economies, 1 meeting per economy,
IMPLEMENTATION OF METHODOLOGIES ACTIVITIES		
February 2023	Regional identification of quality risks (VET + QA on WBL quality)	1 regional meeting
March 2023	Development of regional methodology, guidelines and instruments - 3 days	1 regional meeting,
April 2023	Integration of recommendations for WBL (discussed with VET) into the QA regional methodology	1 regional meeting about VET practices in the publication
June 2023	Adjustment of regional products to national circumstances	2 national meetings
July 2023	Project planning meeting - Finalization of methodology and agreements on training programme and implementation	1 regional meeting,

October 2023	Quality Assurance of WBL	1 joint regional meeting of the VET and QA components of the EQET SEE project to discuss QA of WBL through external evaluation
November 2023	Finalization of Good Practices and integration of WBL elements, if required	Online meeting
December 2023	Proof-reading and design of Good Practices publication	Final edits, proof reading, design, publication
AS A RESULT OF THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE ANALYSIS OF NEEDS OF EXTERNAL EVALUATORS, A REGIONAL TRAINING PROGRAMME FOR EXTERNAL EVALUATORS CAN BE DEVELOPED:		
November 2023 – January 2024	Development of the regional training programme for trainers of external evaluators	External expert