

ERI SEE Work Programme 2015 - 2016

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1. Background – ERI SEE context and strategic approach

The Ministers responsible for Education and Higher Education in the Memorandum of Understanding on the Role and Organization of ERI SEE (MoU) signed in June 2010 reiterated the importance of education as a key priority for the South Eastern Europe region for finding innovative ways to back the economic growth, sustainable development, competitiveness and for safeguarding equitable and inclusive societies. Through the ERI SEE mission statement the ERI SEE member countries recognised that education and training are crucial in promoting knowledge based, competitive and socially cohesive societies in Europe, and play important role in responding to the chances and challenges of globalisation. They are therefore a key to sustainable development and prosperity, in particular in South Eastern Europe.

Through its activities the Education Reform Initiative of South Eastern Europe (ERI SEE) supports sustainable education reforms through regional cooperation, while taking into account both country-specific needs and demands in education reforms, as well as European trends and developments.

In 2013 the role of ERI SEE as a regional organisation facilitating communication and cooperation in education in South East Europe was recognised in preparation of the South East Europe 2020 Strategy (SEE 2020 Strategy) developed by the Regional Cooperation Council (RCC). The SEE 2020 Strategy recognises the importance education plays in attainment socioeconomic growth of the region. The SEE 2020 Strategy resonates to a large extent with the commitments of the Ministers of Education and Higher Education expressed in the 2010 MoU as it recognizes the potential of the region to build new competitive edge driven by knowledge and innovation and based on its human capital and, therefore, calls for cooperation in promoting innovation and fostering knowledge – driven growth in the region. At the same time, the SEE 2020 Strategy offers a unique opportunity for coordinated and concentrated action of the all relevant policy making stakeholders in the region as well as ability to mobilise the efforts of diverse interests to achieve a common goal: sustainable and smart growth of the SEE countries. This model recognises that countries determine their own national education goals, but also commit to focusing on shared priorities in achieving SEE 2020 strategic goals.

The findings of the study "[The political economy of donor intervention in Western Balkans and Turkey: mapping and potential for stronger synergies](#)" commissioned by the DG ELARG, show that ERI SEE is in the group of the less supported regional initiatives and Dimension Coordinators of SEE 2020 in terms of both available financial resources and number of staff financed through the available budget. The SEE 2020 Strategy implementation process entails strengthening the dimension coordinators. This will need to be achieved urgently if the Strategy dimensions involved are to be effectively coordinated. By working on identifying additional funding options for regional cooperation in SEE, ERI SEE aims to support implementation of the SEE 2020 Strategy and to develop ERI SEE into a sustainable organisation that will become a recognized and attractive partner in donor funded projects with a regional character.

2. Introduction to the ERI SEE Work Programme for 2015 - 2016

The ERI SEE Work Programme for 2015-2016 is based on the achievements, experience and activities of ERI SEE over the past years, identified topics of interest and consultations with relevant ministries, organisations and other stakeholders.

This ERI SEE Work Programme, also, seeks, on the one hand, to contribute to the coordination and implementation of the SEE 2020 Strategy and, on the other hand, it seeks to develop further the ERI SEE activities with an aim of further strengthening and deepening regional cooperation in education.

More precisely, ERI SEE Work Programme for 2015-2016 aims to:

- **Shape** the regional cooperation in education in accordance with the diversified needs of the countries for mutual learning, regional exchange of experience and good practice and for encompassing the specific phases of national reforms in education and training;
- **Enhance** the support to the RCC and other responsible organisations and bodies in charge of implementation and monitoring of the dimension D. Education and Competences of the SEE 2020 Strategy;
- **Identify** additional funding options for regional cooperation in SEE such as EU assistance instruments, bilateral donors, and international organizations in order to increase its scope of activities and build capacity for increased use of the European cooperation instruments;
- **Develop** complementary activities to other regional initiatives (e.g. Western Balkans Platform on Education and Training, Bologna Follow-up Group, EU Strategy for the Danube Region etc.) in order to harmonise the activities and optimise use of human and financial resources at the ministries;
- **Increase** visibility of ERI SEE in light of the establishing the ERI SEE Secretariat.

As such, the ERI SEE Work Programme follows the ERI SEE strategic development plan to profile ERI SEE on, both, implementation and coordination level i.e. as the project implementing organisation and at the same time as the institution that continues to facilitate the policy dialogue and to promote mutual learning and exchange of experience.

To build ERI SEE as a sustainable regional organisation, improve ERI SEE's ability to enhance strategic relations with other regional organisations and develop potential regional projects in the field of education, the ERI SEE Work Programmes need to be prepared with a mid-term vision in mind.

Therefore, this Work Programme outlines the priorities for cooperation for the period of two years (2015 – 2016), rather than one year. A two year plan also enables the ERI SEE members to strategically plan their participation in ERI SEE activities over a mid-term period.

2.1. Implementation modalities

Centre for Education Policy (CEP) acting as the ERI SEE Interim Secretariat will support the implementation of the Work Programme through organisational, operational and financial management support¹ until a fully functional ERI SEE Secretariat is established and all obligations are transferred to the newly established body in the Republic of Serbia (as decided by the ERI SEE Governing Board at the 17th meeting of the ERI SEE Governing Board and Consultative Body, held in March, 2013).

As indicated in the ERI SEE statutory documents, the ERI SEE Governing Board members are appointed by the respective Ministries responsible for Education and Higher Education. The ERI SEE Governing

¹ Implementation of the activities planned within the Work Programme is highly influenced by available financial resources. Therefore, CEP will undertake only those activities for which the funds have been secured in advance and Work Programme is subject to revision depending on available funds.

Board is responsible for setting strategic direction and cooperation priorities of the ERI SEE, and coordination of the national participation in the implementation of the ERI SEE Work Programme.

In its activities, ERI SEE has continued to develop and enhance collaboration with other international organisations/agencies in order to ensure synergies and coordination between numerous regional initiatives in education. In particular, over the past few years, cooperation with KulturKontakt Austria, European Training Foundation and the Regional Cooperation Council has been deepened.

3. ERI SEE Work Programme 2015-2016

ERI SEE Work Programme is built within the framework of the following priority areas: (1) Quality Education For All – ensuring equitable access, full participation and high completion; (2) Removing Obstacles to Recognition of Qualifications; (3) Education, Economy and the Labour Market (4) Strengthening the Vocational Education and Training Systems and (5) Ensuring Quality Education through Teacher Education. The priority areas have been designed broadly to provide a wide and flexible coverage which can be adjusted easily to the national agendas of the ERI SEE members. Furthermore, the broad thematic framework is easily adaptable to the status of the members in the EU accession process, as well as the differences in ERI SEE members' participation in the SEE 2020 Strategy.

Within each thematic area that is identified as a priority area for the regional cooperation by the ERI SEE Governing Board a context for the regional cooperation activities is first provided. The context for the regional cooperation activities is followed by a detailed outline of the activities in 2015 and a brief outline for the activities envisaged in 2016.

3.1. Quality Education For All – ensuring equitable access, full participation and high completion

ERI SEE has continuously addressed the issues of equitable access, participation and completion in quality education in the past by organising annual regional conferences which addressed issues of equity and quality across different levels of education systems. The SEE 2020 Strategy identified increased tertiary educational attainment as % of population aged 30-34 as one of the two key targets of the Smart Growth pillar. Increasing the tertiary education attainment of population aged 30-34 is in direct correlation with widening access and increasing completion in higher education.

The SEE 2020 Strategy monitoring and evaluation exercise showed that the countries in the region are in most cases taking a comprehensive approach to widening access to higher education by combining general policies targeting all students and developing specific measures targeted at particular under-represented groups. Furthermore, a number of countries in the region have taken steps to build comprehensive datasets on the composition of the student body by taking part in the EUROSTUDENT survey. However, the data collected showed that mechanisms to evaluate and monitor policies and measures are mostly underdeveloped across the region. On the other hand, in accordance with Bologna strategic documents signatory countries should set measurable targets for widening overall participation and increasing participation of underrepresented groups in higher education. Access to higher education should be therefore widened by fostering the potential of students from underrepresented groups to enter the HE system and by providing adequate conditions and support for completion of their studies. Widening access to higher education and ensuring efficiency of the higher education system that will enable students who enter the higher education to successfully complete their studies remains crucial in a long-term perspective.

Activities

In December 2015, the Regional conference on Access, Equity and Retention in Higher Education will be held in Belgrade. The regional conference will provide an opportunity to present the state of the art of policies aimed at widening access and ensuring equity and retention in higher education in the region. Furthermore, it will provide an opportunity to discuss development of general policies to ensure access, equity and retention in higher education as well as targeted policies and measures for vulnerable students; data collection on access, equity and retention in higher education; financial, system and institutional support mechanism to ensure access, equity and retention in higher education; and developing and implementing policy and measures monitoring and evaluation systems.

By addressing the issues mentioned above the regional conference aims to contribute to the development of policies, systemic and institutional measures, data collection and development of monitoring and evaluation systems aimed at widening access and increasing attainment in higher education as well as to discuss possible regional project in this area to be further elaborated in 2016. Therefore, the regional conference, to be supported by the RCC, will contribute to the achievement of the SEE 2020 targets.

In 2016, ERI SEE will organise a regional workshop specifically aimed at discussing a possible regional Erasmus+ project proposal in the area of improving social dimension of higher education in SEE. The project proposal will be prepared based on the outcomes of the Regional conference on Access, Equity and Retention in Higher Education. The project proposal will be developed with an aim of submitting the proposal for Erasmus+ funding in 2017.

3.2. Removing obstacles to Recognition of Qualifications

The SEE 2020 Strategy aims to promote employment creation, the workforce mobility and to ensure that education better meets economic and labour market needs. Development of standardised frameworks of qualifications is one of the tools to achieve this aim and it builds directly on the work of the ERI SEE cluster on National Qualifications Frameworks led by Croatia for the past four years. On one hand, it is important to note that the work on development of the National Qualifications Frameworks is one part of tackling the obstacles to recognition of qualifications. On the other hand, the work on the development of National Qualifications Frameworks and removing obstacles to recognition in SEE region also contributes to the strengthening of connections between the education and labour market by creating transparency of awarded degrees and learning outcomes, as well as enhancing equity in education systems by providing clear and flexible learning paths across education levels and types of education.

Furthermore, within the framework of the Bologna process and with the objective to formalise cooperation among the SEE countries on the issues of recognition and to assure synergies with other regional initiatives (such as ERI SEE) a South-East European Working Group on Recognition of Qualifications (SEE WG Recognition) has been set up.

Activities

In September 2015, in line with the conclusions from the 2014 ERI SEE seminar “Removing obstacles to recognition of qualifications”, ERI SEE will continue to support activities on cross-recognition by organising a seminar on this theme in Zagreb. The regional seminar, to be organised by the Ministry of Science, Education and Sport of the Republic of Croatia, will provide the possibility to discuss the possible Erasmus+ project proposal by using the existing 'Bologna Follow-up Group Terms of Reference of the Regional SEE Working Group on Recognition of Qualifications' (Annex 1) as a base for elaborating a project proposal. Ministry of Science, Education and Sport of the Republic of Croatia will lead this process and coordinate the preparation of the content of project proposal (to be submitted in 2016) while ERI SEE Secretariat will handle administrative issues of preparing a project proposal.

In 2016, apart from submitting the Erasmus+ project proposal a follow up regional seminar will be organised by the Ministry of Science, Education and Sport of the Republic of Croatia in line with the conclusions of the 2015 regional seminar.

3.3. Education, Economy and the Labour Market

As identified by the Ministers responsible for Education in their MoU document from June 2010, close cooperation between the economic, education and labour market sectors is a central prerequisite for

the successful integration in a European area of education systems and labour markets and in line with joint efforts for making Europe the most competitive knowledge based economy, with more and better jobs and greater social cohesion.

The SEE 2020 Strategy recognised the need to bring education closer to the labour market needs and at the same time develop economies based on knowledge. One of the key cross-cutting issues of the strategy is enhancing greater labour mobility within the SEE region. Ensuring a comprehensive approach to the recognition of professional qualification as a cornerstone to labour mobility requires coordinated actions by institutions in charge of education, labour and trade. The SEE 2020 Strategy provides a platform for deepening cooperation between regional and national institutions in these areas and establishing joint work at the regional level between regional and national institutions and the RCC as the umbrella institution which can coordinate this work.

In 2014, the Parties to the Central European Free Trade Agreement (CEFTA) started negotiations on services trade liberalization following the commitments spelled out in Articles 26-29 of the CEFTA 2006 Agreement. An important part of these negotiations is focused on enhancing greater mobility in professional services across the region. Mutual Recognition Agreements (MRAs) are seen as legitimate instruments, which facilitate the achievement of this objective as is the case in many other regional agreements. The MRAs are prepared and signed in the context of free trade negotiations with an aim of liberalising cross-border market access of services of mutual interest to the Parties, e.g. in professional services such as accounting, law, nursing, etc. The MRAs can cover any profession regardless of the level of education linked to the profession, in other words they are not confined to higher education professions. The aim of MRAs is to liberate access through additional provisions which ease up recognition of particular profession/s for which labour mobility is deemed relevant to the economy and the labour markets of countries signing the agreement. They are different in nature to recognition conventions and agreements developed in education (e.g. the Lisbon Recognition Convention, the European Commission Directive on the recognition of professional qualifications). However, they need to be designed so that they are complimentary to these documents, rather than contradictory, to ensure harnessing the best possible effects.

In accordance with the work of ERI SEE towards building the National Qualifications Frameworks and removing obstacles to recognition of qualifications, and in light of the multi-dimensional approach required to achieve the recognition of professional qualifications and the movement of labour, a need has emerged to interlink the work of three SEE 2020 Dimension Coordinators – Central European Free Trade Agreement Structures (CEFTA), ERI SEE, and the Social Agenda Working Group (SAWG), which operates under the auspices of the RCC.

Activities

In 2015, a formation of a Joint Working Group on Recognition of Professional Qualifications (WGRPQ) of the CEFTA, ERISSEE and SAWG, under the auspices of RCC as an important added value to the implementation of the SEE 2020, has been envisaged.

Joint WGRPQ will be operating under the auspices of the RCC in close collaboration with the CEFTA Secretariat, ERISSEE secretariat and the members of the SAWG, and will consist of the government officials represented in the CEFTA Subcommittee on Trade in Services, ERISSEE and SAWG or their representatives. The RCC Secretariat would play a role of the Chair of the Joint Working Group and will draft the initial Terms of Reference for the Working Group which will be discussed among the members of CEFTA, ERISSEE and SAWG.

During the 2015, Terms of Reference for the Joint Working Group of CEFTA, ERI SEE and SAWG will be developed to outline the roles of the participating organisations, national delegations and RCC, as well as the activities and accompanying timeline of the WGRPQ. The Terms of Reference will be submitted to the ERI SEE Governing Board for discussion and revision.

Activities of the Joint Working Group in 2016 will be further elaborated in the Terms of Reference for the Working Group to be submitted to the ERI SEE Governing Board members for adoption in 2015.

3.4. Strengthening Vocational Education and Training Systems

ERI SEE has identified VET development as an important factor for economic and social development. ERI SEE has identified the development of mutual policy learning practices through enhanced institutional cooperation in Vocational Education and Training in South East Europe as one of its core objectives and ERI SEE has supported the development of the SEEVET-Net in the past 7 years.

In 2011, the institutional network of VET centres – SEEVET-Net was established through signing of Cooperation Agreement between VET Centres in South East Europe. The SEEVET-Net was formed in order to foster a greater relationship between SEE VET institutions and to promote regional cooperation of the National VET institutions acting in the SEECP region. The overall SEEVET-Net objective is to support implementation of policies in the VET sector contributing to human capital development in a lifelong learning perspective, through policy learning in the context of the objectives related to the EU accession and the “Education and Training 2020”.

In addition, ERI SEE supported the work of the Cluster of Knowledge on Vocational Education and Training led by Romanian National Centre for TVET Development with the objective to support the regional cooperation in VET in accordance with the diversified needs of the countries for mutual learning, regional exchange of experience and good practice and for encompassing the specific phases of national reforms in VET.

The work of the CoK on VET and the SEEVET-Net are complementary to each other. To ensure synergies between the two initiatives ERI SEE has already organised joint meetings between the two initiatives.

The thematic focus of the last year joint event was work based learning – a topic that was identified as a priority by both initiatives. Additional reason for focusing on these topics is the fact that work-based learning is recognised in the SEE 2020 Strategy, within its Education and Competences component, as one of the strategies for ensuring that education and training systems better meet economic and labour market needs.

Activities

In October 2015, with the support of the KulturKontakt Austria, ERI SEE will organise a joint seminar of the CoK on VET and the SEEVET – Net, followed by a SEEVET-Net annual meeting. Joint seminar of the CoK on VET and the SEEVET – Net, will focus on the topics jointly identified during the previous meetings: concept of work based learning, promotion of work based learning in business sector, legal framework for work based learning (part in companies), quality assurance, company trainers’ pedagogical skills, as well the question of financial incentives.

Another activity which will take place within this thematic area is connected with ETF action “Continuing professional development for teachers and trainers in VET in the SEET region” and it is described in more details in [section 3.2.1](#).

In 2016, regular annual SEEVET-net meeting will be held, as well as continuation of joint cooperation, networking and peer learning on the topics to be identified during the 2015 annual meeting.

3.5. Ensuring Quality Education through Teacher Training

The SEE 2020 Strategy recognises the importance of ensuring provision of quality education in the region. One of the conditions for ensuring quality education is enhancing the quality of teacher training. Strengthening the quality of teachers has been a continuous focus of education policies in the region. A number of initiatives aimed developing standards for teacher competences, systems of career advancement and systems for teacher support and assessment have been launched and implemented. One important initiative in this field is the work under the EU's initiative Western Balkans Platform on Education and Training. Having in mind that the use of contemporary forms of teaching and learning by teachers has been gaining momentum in the region and that the creation of a new teaching and learning culture is under construction, ERI SEE has supported the development of a Cluster of Knowledge on Teacher Training since 2013 led by Montenegro.

Building upon the previous activities of the Cluster of Knowledge on Teacher Training and taking into account the work under the Western Balkans Platform on Education and Training and with the support of RCC, ERI SEE has initiated the development of the draft Regional programme on Teacher Education and Training in 2014.

The draft regional programme was presented at the regional consultation workshop held in Tirana in January 2015, gathering national delegations of the countries in the region, independent experts and regional and international partners active in this field.

Activities

In 2015, following the inputs taken at the regional workshop, an improved version of the Regional Programme will be developed by the external expert engaged by the RCC which would be then put for approval in accordance with the RCC's SEE 2020 programming guidelines, which means that the final version of the regional programme will be sent to the ERI SEE Governing Board for formal approval and then passed for the approval to the SEE 2020 Programming Committee, consisting of the representatives of the NIPAC Offices and SEE 2020 National Coordinators.

In preparation of the final version of the regional programme ERI SEE will seek synergies with the current and recent regional initiatives aimed at pre-service and in-service teacher education and training aimed at both primary and secondary teachers, including both VET and general education teachers developed at the regional level through initiatives of international organisations.

3.6. Policy development and monitoring for quality and equity in education - strengthening evidence based policy making in education in Western Balkans

Issues of equity and quality of education have to be addressed having in mind the overall education systems and not separately for each level of education, given that challenges in both equity and quality emerge and are most visible in transitions between different stages. A further underlying principle is that processes of policy development, implementation, and especially monitoring and evaluation have to be founded on evidence and that robust evidence base for education policy needs to be developed and utilised.

ERI SEE countries face a considerable challenge of significant lack of systematic data on various aspects of education. Although a number of projects/initiatives focusing on building robust data bases about education have been started in the ERI SEE countries (SEE 2020 monitoring, IPA monitoring, Bologna process, ETF FRAME Skills for Future Initiative, the Torino process, Bruges review, Small Business Act assessment etc.), almost all of them are facing significant problems in setting and/or filling up.

There is a need for an integrated approach for monitoring on the progresses in education at regional level and for regionally harmonised data submission requirements (e.g. compatible methodologies and indicators used in the region for different monitoring exercises). Such approach will contribute to availability, comparability and overall quality of the data. Apart from the challenges in data collection, data analysis, or rather the supply of evidence for policy making tends to be fragmented in small research projects, focusing on specific problems or at one education stage at the time.

For all stakeholders in education, more importantly for decision makers, information is required to monitor the expected results associated with the policies and to evaluate policy impact and all SEE countries emphasized the need for increased efforts to efficiently use the monitoring results into the policy cycle. There is a need for increased resources for data and evidence production, analysis and use in policy making (mainly, capacity building for institutions and other organisational actors involved in education policy development). The SEE countries should make further efforts to make a step from simple 'administrative' monitoring and reporting towards full capitalization of evidence and proper assessment of progresses towards the set objectives and targets.

Since 2010, ERI SEE jointly with the Task Force Fostering and Building Human Capital of the Regional Cooperation Council and KulturKontakt Austria supported country initiatives in the domain of mutual policy learning and cooperation in the field of developing policies informed by theory and research and based on evidence. This has been done through the support of the work under the Cluster of Knowledge on Evidence Based Policy Making in Education aimed to advance the mechanisms of regional cooperation in the fields conducive to the achievement of the following objectives: enhanced communication and cooperation between the research community and policy-makers; the identification of mechanisms for a better utilization of research findings by decision-makers; advanced research practice in education policy creation; mapping and launch of analyses relevant for education policy development; a more efficient utilization of EU mechanisms and funds for enhancing evidence-based policy making in education.

Numerous regional conferences were organised under this Cluster: Turning research into practice – learning from PISA (2011), Policy development and monitoring for quality and equity in education (2011), Regional Cooperation in Education Statistics (2012, supported by TAIEX), which lead to identification of priorities for further development of evidence based policy making in the region, adapted to national needs and joint agreement on possible project proposal in this field.

Prior to these meetings a multi-country research was commissioned Mapping Regional Capacities for Evidence-based Policy Making in Education in South Eastern Europe. Based on the Mapping exercise findings and recommendations, countries in the Western Balkans prepared the draft project Proposal to be funded under multi-beneficiary IPA. This initiative has been already communicated to national IPA coordinators and presented officially on the IPA Multi-Beneficiary Programme Coordination Meeting held in 2012.

As indicated in the Multi-country Indicative Strategy Paper that sets out the priorities for EU financial assistance for the period 2014-2020, *support should also be provided for building the capacity of statistical services to improve the conditions for evidence-based policy making and to harmonise the statistical methods and standards with EU norms, including the robust quality management now applied to European statistics. Geospatial data need to be collected, made available and processed in all beneficiaries in a coherent manner to underpin political choices.*

Activities

In March 2016, building upon the previous work of ERI SEE and in the light of the SEE 2020 Strategy targets of ensuring quality and equity in education in the region a Regional Workshop "Policy development and monitoring for quality and equity in education - strengthening evidence based policy

making in education in Western Balkans” will be organised. The Regional Workshop is aimed to update and further elaborate the existing project proposal.

This project should contribute to more effective education reforms by creating education policies based on relevant information which are contributing to set targets of national and regional reform agendas, targeting both researchers and policy makers and practitioners with the aim to improve the available and future data inputs for policy design in terms of quality, relevance and availability. It aims also to support monitoring of the SEE 2020 and capacity building of national bodies responsible for data collection and monitoring of education systems in order to meet EU standards and support countries in all the reporting requirements.

Based on the discussions at the Regional Workshop the expert will prepare a final version of the regional programme on evidence based policy making in education in Western Balkans which will be sent to the ERI SEE Governing Board for formal approval and lobbying purposes.

4. ERI SEE – bringing synergies to different processes

4.1. Open Method of Coordination (EC)

The Open Method of Coordination (OMC) represents an EU mechanism in the area of “soft” legislation. The themes defined as priorities at the EU level are of essential importance for further reform processes of the SEE countries in the field of education and are in accordance with the SEE 2020 objectives. There are six thematic groups agreed at the EU level: School Policy (with focus on Early School Leaving and the Teaching Profession); Modernization of Higher Education; Vocational Education and Training, including apprenticeships and work-based learning; Adult Learning, including reducing the number of low-skilled adults; Transversal Skills, including ICT and Entrepreneurial Skills; Digital and Online Learning. Among ERI SEE countries only the Republic of Croatia and the Republic of Serbia are participating in the work of OMC thematic groups in the field of education.²

ERI SEE as the regional platform for cooperation in the field of education and training can be used as an effective mechanism for sharing the results of OMC working groups in the area of education to other SEE ministries and relevant institutions which do not take part in the education related OMC working groups. Sharing the results of the OMC working groups to all SEE ministries and relevant institutions would provide the opportunity for mutual learning and it would increase synergies towards education reforms in line with EU standards and best practices.

Therefore, ERI SEE in cooperation with Social Inclusion and Poverty Reduction Unit, Government of the Republic of Serbia, will initiate an establishment of a regional OMC in education with the goal of creating effective mechanism for sharing and exchanging information and experience of national OMC participation in order to improve the implementation process of educational reform in the region, as well as the alignment of education reforms with European priorities and trends.

Activities

In 2015, activities under the initiative for the establishment of a regional OMC cooperation will be: 1) Regional Conference aimed at presentation of the basic directions and results of the EU OMC thematic working groups, 2) Establishment of a regional OMC on line platform under the ERI SEE website.

In 2016, ERI SEE plans to support: 1) Organisation of regional thematic round tables and working meetings for exchange of experience, 2) Creating a platform for regional cooperation in all education thematic areas of the OMC. ERI SEE will explore possibilities for funding these activities through the TAIEX instrument.

In implementation of the activities ERI SEE will seek synergies with the Western Balkans Platform on Education and Training aimed at sharing experience and increasing synergies towards education reforms in line with EU standards and best practices, making the best use of the EU-level Open Method for Coordination and of EU assistance.

4.2. Continuing professional development for teachers and trainers in VET in the SEET region (ETF)

² Information on the OMC at the EU level and in the Republic of Serbia is available on the website www.omk-obrazovanje.gov.rs

Continuous professional development (CPD) has a high policy priority for the European Commission, in respect to EU member states and European partners and has been identified by the European Commission as one of the core strategies for improvement of the performance of education and training systems. Also, ETF's FRAME project revealed that professional development of teachers is a priority across the SEET region. It has been announced by the ACVT that professional development will become a Bruges STD for 2015-18. Bearing that in mind, ETF launched an action with the aim to support CPD for teachers and trainers in VET by improving quality and demand-orientation, improving stakeholder co-operation and capabilities, supporting policy development and implementation and developing and implementing practical and innovative tools. This action will cover Albania, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Kosovo*, Macedonia, Montenegro, Serbia and Turkey.

Part of the ETF activities within this action are dedicated to the mapping of demand and provision of CPD for VET teachers and trainers by carrying out desk research, interviews with stakeholders and a survey of teachers and trainers in order to identify gaps and inform policy development for better matching supply and demand.

Activities

In 2015, the above mentioned survey, which is going to be conducted within the mapping exercise, should cover a significant number of schools/teachers in 7 SEE region economies (e.g. in Serbia two-level stratified random sample will be used covering more than 20 schools what will assure the coverage of approximately 1000 teachers). The survey will be administered in vocational schools and analysis will be conducted by the ETF. The administration and implementation of the survey would be greatly facilitated and supported by development of an on-line questionnaire directly connected to the electronic database (information can be gathered easily from the schools' staff and the feedback can be entered automatically into the database as a new record). To facilitate the process, ERI SEE will engage an IT expert who will develop an on-line questionnaire and the electronic database as described above. Except for the ETF analyses, the electronic database will be made available to all the countries (collaborative access - having access to the database at all times from multiple locations) which would enable countries to do additional analyses in accordance with their needs. Also, the countries will have an opportunity to add specific nationally determined questions or to easily add open questions into the questionnaire in line with their needs which could be the basis for the qualitative description of some CPD dimension (e.g. ways of implementation, potential problems in the implementation of the different aspect of CPD, school benefits of the interventions etc.). Existence of such database will allow policy makers to search CPD related data by topics, sections etc. and will be feature-rich and future proofed as it will be under continual improvement. In addition to that, possibility of data comparison between countries will be possible. This data collection is, also, cost effective, knowing that same on-line platform could be used for future (or additional) data collection. Except for the development, engaged IT expert will be in charge for administration of the database and data backups and will control who can edit, add or delete data.

5. Coordination and Monitoring of the SEE 2020 Strategy: Dimension D. Education and Competences

5.1. Coordination of the SEE 2020 Strategy: Dimension D. Education and Competences

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

In the implementation of the SEE 2020 Strategy, education is seen as a powerful tool to address the issue of growth and competitiveness as the main objectives of the strategy. At the 17th ERI SEE Governing Board meeting held in Sarajevo, in March 2013, ERI SEE has been appointed as the coordinator of the dimension D. Education and Competences of the SEE 2020 Strategy that focuses on strengthening capacities in the region in various areas contributing directly to achievement of the target of smart growth pillar to add 300 000 highly qualified people in the workforce. The dimension aims to improve the regional knowledge and skills base and sets specific objectives in two main domains: (1) reduction of early leavers from education and training and (2) increased educational attainment in tertiary education.

In implementation of the key strategy actions under this dimension, ERI SEE as a regional platform for cooperation in the field of education and training will remain dedicated to facilitation of the regional collaboration, promotion of peer-learning and focused support to the networking of national institutions in education and training and will continue to cooperate closely with the South East European Centre for Entrepreneurial Learning (SEECCEL).

RCC has encouraged dimension coordinators to develop regional programmes as means of planning regional activities which would contribute to the implementation of SEE 2020 Strategy and achievement of the SEE 2020 targets. The regional programmes would be used to fundraise with potential donors to ensure financing for the implementation of the activities planned in the regional programmes. To support the dimension coordinators in developing the regional programmes RCC has provided financial support to engage experts to draft the regional programmes and organise regional consultative workshops to discuss them. To facilitate the process of preparation of regional programmes RCC has prepared programming guidelines for the implementation of the SEE 2020 Strategy.

In line with these guidelines, ERI SEE developed Regional Action Plan for 2015 (Annex 2) specifying priority areas and activities which will contribute to the achieving of the set SEE 2020 goals.

Activities

In 2015 and 2016, the ERI SEE Secretariat will continue to facilitate the communication and the dissemination of information on SEE 2020 to the members of the Governing Board, in particular those relevant to the dimension D. Education and Competences of the SEE 2020. Furthermore, the ERI SEE Secretariat will continue to contribute to the coordination of the implementation of the overall SEE 2020 Strategy by taking part in the meetings of the Coordination Board of the SEE 2020 Strategy organized by the RCC Secretariat.

5.2. Monitoring of the SEE 2020 Strategy: Dimension D. Education and Competences

The monitoring framework developed by the OECD in cooperation with RCC, regional organisations and Ministries responsible for each of the dimensions includes set of quantitative and qualitative indicators developed to assess policies used to implement the SEE2020 strategy and impact/outcome indicators that will enable tracking of progress, not only related to the headline targets of the Strategy.

The quantitative indicators will be collected annually, while the qualitative indicators will be collected bi-annually. Therefore, the ERI SEE Ministries of Education will be expected to collect the quantitative indicators every year and to carry out the self-assessment every two years.

Each regional organisation acting as a dimension coordinator acts as a single contact point responsible for co-ordinating the monitoring tasks with all seven economies through:

- Validating the assessment grids for the monitoring process
- Distributing the grids to the contact points in the national governments and explaining the modalities to each question
- Collecting the answers to the grid questions from the countries
- Sending filled-out grids to the OECD for assessment
- Collecting quantitative data for the Impact/Outcome indicators from National Statistical Offices, Central Banks and Chambers of Commerce of the countries
- Analysing data and trends for Annual report (under RCC coordination and OECD guidance)
- Communicating OECD requests/inquiries to the contact points in the national administrations and vice versa
- Organizing the meetings with country representatives (including private sector consultation as needed)

This rather challenging work on the monitoring tasks as well as on supporting the development of the regional programmes require significant financial and staff resources. In 2014, this work was fully financed through regular membership fees of ERI SEE member countries which should be used for implementation of the ERI SEE activities. RCC is working on the modalities to support the regional dimension coordinators in implementing this.

Activities

In 2015, the quantitative data collection will be carried out from 1st March to 30 April 2015 and these will be analysed and presented in the Annual Report on Implementation that will be produced by the RCC while ERI SEE will be contacted to provide comments/inputs in Education and Competences dimension. Following consultation process, the Annual Report on Implementation will be offered for adoption to the SEE 2020 Governing Board at the meeting to be held in late May 2015.

Following the first cycle of qualitative and the second cycle of quantitative data collection these will be analysed and presented in the first SEE 2020 Competitiveness Outlook. ERI SEE Governing Board members will be consulted on draft material in mid-April and again on the second draft during September. The publication will be launched in early December 2015. The aim of the Outlook is to allow the countries to see where they stand in comparison to neighbouring countries and hence promote peer learning and a common effort towards realizing the SEE 2020 objectives.

In January 2015, RCC has set up the Task Force of the SEE 2020 Monitoring which brings together the relevant representatives of national administrations, statistical systems and the European Commission (DG NEAR and Eurostat) with the aim to agree on the outline of the monitoring process, review existing targets and indicators and make them as relevant to the current context of the participating economies. The draft SEE 2020 Monitoring Guidelines will be sent for inputs and comments to the regional dimension coordinators and then put for adoption to the SEE 2020 Governing Board.

In addition, the RCC has already developed the [SEE 2020 Scoreboard](#) (in beta version) which includes all the quantitative and qualitative indicators collected thus far and in the future. The scoreboard will be publically available on the RCC website and it will allow easy search through different indicators nationally or comparatively between the countries. The scoreboard will be launched by the end of May 2015.

Based on experiences from 2014 cycle of data collection, ERI SEE will jointly with SEECCEL provide the input to the SEE 2020 Monitoring Guidelines asking for regionally harmonised data submission which do not require any overlapping data, and which are fully in line with the EU and other international requirements.

6. Increasing visibility of ERI SEE in light of the establishing the ERI SEE Secretariat

Apart from networking activities related to the coordination and monitoring of the education dimension of the SEE 2020 Strategy, the work of ERI SEE will be presented at different meetings and other events of the ERI SEE institutional partners (ETF, “People and skills” priority in the Danube Strategy etc.).

ERI SEE Web presentation (erisee.org) is currently powered by a Drupal 6 platform. As a consequence of various factors, including new developments in IT area, this platform has a raising number of concerns (it does not allow customization of the site, such are adding new custom pages and database content, as well as adjusting to the latest standards of website design etc.). Besides, Drupal as a platform does not guarantee full security according to the newly developed criteria in IT world. Therefore, ERI SEE will restructure and redesign its website allowing adhering to the latest standards, technological trends, and accommodate ERI SEE needs for new content, in order to further facilitate information exchange and reach its widely set objectives of supporting the education related reforms in South East Europe.

In 2015 and 2016 the ERI SEE Secretariat with the support of the RCC will facilitate the organisation of regular meeting of the ERI SEE Governing Board and Consultative Body. Regular updates on ERI SEE activities through the network of national contact points and with the members of the Governing Board and Consultative Body will be continued.

With respect to the institutional transformation process under the responsibility of the Ministry of Education, Science and Technological Development of the Republic of Serbia and the Governing Board members, CEP will provide a detailed hand over to the ERI SEE Director and hand over all the relevant ERI SEE documentation to the newly established ERI SEE Secretariat in the Republic of Serbia.

OUTLINE OF THE ERI SEE ACTIVITIES IN 2015 AND 2016

ACTIVITIES IN 2015	MONTH AND PLACE	ACTIVITIES IN 2016
19th meeting of the ERI SEE Governing Board and Consultative Body	April, Belgrade	20th meeting of the ERI SEE Governing Board and Consultative Body
Seminar on Removing obstacles to recognition of qualifications	September, Zagreb	Submitting Erasmus+ project proposal Further support to the Regional SEE Working Group on Recognition of Qualifications
Joint seminar of the CoK on VET and the SEEVET – Net, followed by a SEEVET-Net annual meeting	October, TBD	SEEVET-Net annual meeting Continuation of joint cooperation of the CoK on VET and the SEEVET
Regional conference with the aim of establishment of the regional OMC in education and presentation of the basic directions and results of the EU OMC thematic working groups Establishment of a regional OMC on line platform under the ERI SEE website	June, TBD November	Organisation of regional thematic round tables and working meetings for exchange of experiences, Creating a platform for regional cooperation in all thematic areas of the OMC
Regional conference on Access, Equity and Retention in Higher Education	December, Belgrade	Regional workshop aimed to discuss the possible Erasmus+ project proposal in improving social dimension of higher education in SEE countries Elaborating a project proposal to be submitted in 2017
Formation of a Joint Working Group on Recognition of Professional Qualifications between CEFTA, ERI SEE, and SAWG, under the auspices of the RCC	By the end of 2015	Activities elaborated in the Terms of Reference of the Joint Working Group
Development of the final Regional programme on Teacher Education and Training	By the end of April 2015	n/a
n/a	n/a	Regional workshop on evidence based policy making in education in the Western Balkans Development of the Regional programme to be submitted for multi-beneficiary IPA support
Coordination and Monitoring of the SEE 2020 Strategy: Dimension D. Education and Competences	Ongoing	Coordination and Monitoring of the SEE 2020 Strategy: Dimension D. Education and Competences

Overview on Funding Possibilities for Regional Projects for ERI SEE

The table below shows the availability of the four targeted EU programmes for each of the economies.

	IPA II	ERASMUS+	TAIEX	HORIZON 2020
Albania	✓	✓	✓	✓
Bosnia and Herzegovina	✓	✓	✓	✓
Croatia	×	✓	✓	✓
Macedonia	✓	✓	✓	✓
Moldova	×	✓	✓	✓
Montenegro	✓	✓	✓	✓
Serbia	✓	✓	✓	✓
Kosovo*	✓	✓	✓	✓
				✓ - Available × - Not available

Nota bene: In the case of Erasmus+, full participation in all programme actions is available only for Croatia and Macedonia, which gained a status of the Programme Countries. Other countries, which were granted a status of Partner Countries, can take part in certain Actions of the Programme, subject to specific criteria or conditions stated in the part B of the [Erasmus+ Programme Guide](#).

When it comes to Horizon 2020, there are following categories: EU Member States, the Overseas Countries and Territories linked to the Member States, Associated Countries and Other Countries - countries which are neither EU Member States nor associated to Horizon 2020. Legal entities from Associated Countries can participate under the same conditions as legal entities from the Member States. Participating legal entities from Other Countries may also be able to get EU funding under certain circumstances. Other Countries are divided into automatically eligible and not automatically eligible ([Guide for funding for non-EU countries](#)), and they can participate unless there is explicit exclusion in the very text.

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

ANNEX 1. Terms of Reference of the Regional SEE Working Group on Recognition of Qualifications

Name of the Working Group

South-East European Working Group on Recognition of Qualifications (SEE WG Recognition)

Composition

Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Kosovo*, Montenegro, Serbia, Slovenia and observers.

Co-Chairs: Croatia and Slovenia

Members

Ministry of Science, Education and Sports of Slovenia (Tjasa Bericic, Sabina Zajc), Ministry of Science, Education and Sports of Croatia (Ana Tecilazic Gorsic, Loredana Maravic), Agency for Science and higher Education of Croatia (Katarina Simic Jagunic, Emita Blagdan), Ministry of Education and Science of the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia (Borco Aleksov), Ministry of Civil Affairs of Bosnia and Herzegovina (Aida Duric) and Centre for Information and Recognition of Qualifications in Higher Education of Bosnia and Herzegovina (Borko Sorajic and Dzenan Omanovic); Kosovo* (names tbc), Ministry of Science, Education and Technology Development of Serbia (Natalija Konjevic, Katarina Randjic, Jelena Kalezic).

Observers: Regional Platform for Benchmarking and Cooperation in Higher Education and Science (Prof. Ladislav Novak), Regional Cooperation Council (Mladen Dragasevic).

Context

The Bucharest Communiqué committed participating countries to setting up a fast track to recognising each other's qualifications, ultimately paving the way for a realising the long-term goal of automatic recognition of comparable academic degrees. Ministers proposed that a Pathfinder Group of countries would explore ways to achieve this. The European Commission is facilitating the work of the group, which is composed of representatives from 10 countries: BE-fr, BE-fl, DE, DK, EE, HR, LU, NL, PT, SE, and SI. The Pathfinder Group looks for the best practice in the Benelux, Nordic and Baltic and SEE (South-East European) regions.

With the objective to formalise cooperation among the SEE countries on the issues of recognition and to assure synergies with other regional initiatives, most notably with the Education Reform Initiative of Southern and Eastern Europe (ERI SEE) that has been designated for the monitoring of the implementation of the Education and Competencies dimension of the South East Strategy 2020³, the SEE Working Group on Recognition of qualifications has been set up.

In order to secure synergy with existing regional government initiatives in education, as well as funding for the meetings of SEE WG Recognition, a reference to the SEE WG Recognition has been made in the 2014 Work Programme of (ERI SEE)⁴.

Purpose

The purpose of the SEE WG Recognition is to contribute to improved recognition of qualifications in the SEE with the use of Bologna transparency instruments and based on increased trust in reliable quality assurance arrangements.

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

³ SEE 2020 Strategy – Jobs and Prosperity in a European Perspective was adopted in November 2013.

www.see2020.rcc.int

⁴ www.erisee.org

The Group is keen to see how the existing Bologna tools can be better used and articulated more effectively with recognition procedures, in particular quality assurance systems and mechanisms, such as qualifications frameworks, ECTS, grading tables and the Diploma Supplement.

The SEE WG Recognition will look on both, academic recognition and the recognition with the purpose of employment in another country. The latter includes both qualifications for non-regulated professions and those that provide access to regulated professions (as regulated for the EU MS by the Directive 2005/36/EC on the recognition of professional qualifications). Given the fact that, two out of seven participating countries are the EU MSs, both Croatia and Slovenia have separate recognition procedures for qualifications providing access to regulated professions according to the Directive 2005/36 and for those gained in the third countries. Therefore the group has agreed that the complex issue of recognition of qualifications will be discussed as a whole.

With a view of being in line with the overall task of the Pathfinder Group, the SEE WG Recognition will explore the potential of improving academic recognition of bachelor and master degrees towards possible automatic recognition. While not cutting across the autonomy of institutions to make decisions about admitting individual students, the possibilities will be explored of granting an individual the automatic right to be considered (though not necessarily admitted) for entry into a programme of further study at the higher level in another country. In addition cross-border quality assurance will be discussed and the possible repercussions it might have on recognition (possible automatic recognition at the system level).

Finally, the Group members will use the opportunity to learn from each other to see what may be improved in their own national systems.

Reference to the Bucharest Communiqué

At the European level, in preparation of the Ministerial Conference in 2015 and together with relevant stakeholders, we will...

- Coordinate the work of ensuring that qualifications frameworks work in practice, emphasising their link to learning outcomes;
- Support the work of a pathfinder group of countries exploring ways to achieve the automatic academic recognition of comparable degrees.

At the national level, together with the relevant stakeholders, and especially with higher education institutions, we will:

- Allow EQAR-registered quality assurance agencies to perform their activities across the EHEA, while complying with national requirements;
- Ensure that qualifications frameworks, ECTS and Diploma Supplement implementation is based on learning outcomes;
- Invite countries that cannot finalize the implementation of national qualifications frameworks compatible with QF-EHEA by the end of 2012 to redouble their efforts and submit a revised roadmap for this task;
- Review national legislation to fully comply with the Lisbon Recognition Convention and promote the use of the EAR-manual to advance recognition practices.

Reference to the South East Europe 2020 Strategy:

Key Strategy actions in Dimension D 'Education and Competences':

- Increase equitable access to, and participation in, high quality education at all levels, aligned with measures for a smooth recognition of qualifications supporting mobility in SEE (first out of four Key strategy actions).

General objectives

- Consider and make recommendations on specific issues of regional and national policy and practice related to quality assurance, qualifications frameworks, recognition of qualifications and transparency instruments and their mutual interaction;
- In consultation with the ENIC and NARIC offices in the region and the countries' representatives in the Network of National QF correspondents, develop policy proposals aiming to improve the interaction between qualifications frameworks and the recognition of qualifications;
- Consider developments in relation to EQAR-registered quality assurance agencies operating in countries other than their countries of origin and make policy proposals or recommendations;
- Improve cooperation with stakeholders (social partners, professional associations, chambers and employers) in recognition processes.

Specific tasks

- Analyse **cross recognition** based on questionnaires prepared by Slovenia, discuss the analysis of cross recognition at the seminar/PLA in order to elaborate measures for enhanced regional cooperation, drafting a handbook on levels of qualifications in the SEE Region and cross recognition of pre-Bologna and Bologna qualifications, adoption of the handbook by the national authorities, on-line publishing, printing out the handbook and its wide dissemination;
- Analyse **national legislation** on recognition in the SEE Region with a scope of peer learning, peer review and exchange of experience and practice at the policy level (seminar/PLA); Identify obstacles to recognition and propose measures for simplifying recognition procedures for the purpose of employment and continuation of education (including cooperation on amendments to national legal framework for recognition);
- Enhance **IT tools** and improve information infrastructure for a more efficient recognition practice at the ENIC/NARIC offices and the HEIs in the region;
- Enhance regional cooperation among ENIC/NARIC offices through a setting up of and facilitating work of **a regional ENIC/NARIC network** (meetings at regional level, seminars, PLA, visits with a purpose of sharing experience and knowledge on the recognition policies and practice, implementation of the LRC and the use of the Bologna tools). Introduce automatic recognition as a policy experiment, share information and experience on developing and implementation of existing bilateral agreements on automatic recognition with a view to explore further possibilities for bilateral and multilateral agreements on automatic recognition. Improve internal procedures of the recognition authorities, in particular HEIs.
- Improved transparency of recognition of foreign qualifications by providing clear and accessible information on recognition to potential applicants (development of on-line tools and other information and promotion material). Compiling a list of national quality assurance agencies/links to accredited study programmes.
- Cooperation on the recognition of professional qualifications in reference to the Directive 2005/36/EC on the recognition of professional qualifications.

Events

The co-chairs will propose and organize at least one seminar/PLA per year on issues related to recognition, back to back with the Group meetings.

Meeting schedule:

The Working Group will meet at least once a year (back to back with the ERI SEE annual seminar on removing obstacles to recognition or back to back to the Governing Board Meeting, respectively).

Past meetings:

- 19-20 June 2013 – Novi Sad, Serbia:
Meeting of the BFUG members from the participating countries and consultative members (RCC and the EC) – setting up the framework for cooperation;

- 27-28 September 2013 – Dubrovnik, Croatia:
First meeting of the regional representatives to the working group dealing with recognition of qualifications (back to back with the meeting of the BFUG Path Finder Group);
- 25 March 2014 – Ljubljana, Slovenia:
Co-chairs meeting on assuring synergies between various regional initiatives, more particularly ERI SEE, on the recognition policy; agreeing on the future steps;
- 22 September 2014 – Zagreb, Croatia:
In synergy with ERI SEE, seminar on 23 Sept on Removing Obstacles for Recognition of Qualifications.

Liaison with other WGs' and networks' activities

- BFUG Pathfinder Group on automatic recognition
- Education Reform Initiative of Southern and Eastern Europe (ERI SEE)
- Regional Cooperation Council, coordinator of the implementation of the South East Strategy 2020
- Council of Europe – SEE Network of National Correspondents for NQFs

Additional remarks

This Terms of Reference represents a framework for cooperation on the policy of recognition of qualifications. Activities will be elaborated in the ERI SEE Work Programme 2015.

ANNEX 2. Regional Action Plan for 2015- Education and Competencies dimension of SEE 2020

Description of action	Period	Partners
Regional Workshop on Teacher Education and Training	22-23 January 2015	ERI SEE/Ministries of Education, ETF, EC, CoE, ETUCE
Consultation process and finalization of the Regional Program on Teacher Education and Training	End of April 2015	ERI SEE/Ministries of Education
ERI SEE Governing Board meeting	24 April 2015	Ministries of Education, OECD, ETF
Joint Working Group meeting on mutual recognition of professional qualifications	June 2015	ERI SEE/Ministries of Education, CEFTA/Ministries of Trade, SWG/Ministries of Labour
Regional conference on Access, Equity and Retention in Higher Education	December 2015	Ministries of Education, EC
Monitoring of the SEE 2020 Strategy: Dimension D. Education and Competences	January-December 2015	ERI SEE interim Secretariat