



Implementation of the European Research Area in the Western Balkans

September 2024

Fact sheet

This fact sheet provides selected highlights and recommendations of the integration of the Western Balkans (WB) into the European Research Area (ERA). These findings are based on the ERA Country Reports for the reporting year 2023 for Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo*, Montenegro, North Macedonia and Serbia – all of which are associated to Horizon Europe. This fact sheet is part of the POLICY ANSWERS project activities to monitor and analyse progress made by the WB economies in their integration into the new ERA.

ERA Country Reports

The ERA Country Reports are prepared annually for the EU-27 and the countries associated to Horizon Europe by different contractors (among them POLICY ANSWERS and its experts). The ERA Country Reports monitor the progress towards achieving the ERA objectives set out in the European Commission's Pact for Research and Innovation and in the implementation of the ERA Policy Agenda. Quantitatively, the reports are based on the ERA Dashboard and its related indicators. Qualitative information is added to provide more context for the current state of ERA integration. The ERA Country Reports are published by the European Commission on the ERA Platform: <https://european-research-area.ec.europa.eu/era-country-reports-2023>.

* This designation is without prejudice to positions on status, and is in line with UNSCR 1244/1999 and the ICJ Opinion on the Kosovo declaration of independence.

Albania

 **Highlights**

- Albania is progressing towards priorities of the ERA Policy Agenda 2022–2024 (no formal commitment to the priorities yet)
- Participation in the European Innovation Scoreboard for the third time since 2022
- Key initiatives:
 - New Draft Law of Science (not published yet) includes the topics: open science, gender equality, ethical and integrity issues
 - Opening of the EURAXESS Portal
 - EIT Raw Materials Regional Innovation Centre opened in Elbasan in April 2024

 **Recommendations**

- Enhance research and innovation (R&I) funding to better implement strategies, laws and measures regarding R&I
- Improve professionalisation of research management to foster participation of Albanian researchers in international projects and the ERA
- Improve relationship between academia and the private sector to foster knowledge valorisation and transfer



 **Highlights**

- Progress regarding the implementation of ERA priorities (no formal commitment to the priorities yet): open science, gender equality, promotion of attractive research careers, international cooperation, research infrastructures
- Increased success in Horizon Europe: University of Sarajevo (UNSA) as a project coordinator; University Clinical Centre of the Republic of Srpska as a partner institution under the EU Cancer Mission
- EU4DigitalSME project: increased academia–industry collaboration in the digital sector
- Researchers are increasingly interested in EU R&I programmes

 **Recommendations**

- Further implement priorities of the ERA Policy Agenda
- Make the development process of the Smart Specialisation Strategy more effective
- Make use of the increasing interest of researchers in European programmes and foster their participation
- Improve cooperation of industry with research groups; provide incentives for R&I investments by the private sector



Bosnia and Herzegovina

Kosovo

 **Highlights**

- Gradual progress in aligning with the ERA priorities (no formal commitment to the priorities yet)
- Kosovo’s Research Programme 2023–2028: new opportunities to foster R&I (research excellence, internationalisation, open science)
- R&I as key priorities of structural reforms in the Economic Reform Programme 2023–2025
- Increasing participation of researchers in European R&I programmes

 **Recommendations**

- Align the R&I legal and policy framework to the ERA Policy Agenda
- Further develop the Smart Specialisation Strategy
- Provide more incentives for R&I actors regarding domestic and international collaboration
- Improve academia–business cooperation through initiatives stimulating private sector investment in R&I
- Create more financing instruments for R&I activities



Montenegro

 **Highlights**

- Implementation of the ERA Policy Agenda through several initiatives (no formal commitment yet); determination by internal capacities to reform the R&I system and mobilise resources
- Integration of the ERA priorities in the Strategy for Scientific Research Activity of Montenegro (2024–2028)
- Smart Specialisation Strategy 2019–2024: role model for the cooperation of different actors and for the strengthening of the academia–business cooperation and knowledge transfer

 **Recommendations**

- Facilitate stronger integration into the ERA by securing additional domestic and international sources; thus foster the sustainability of R&I reforms and the development of the R&I system
- Improve science–industry cooperation through higher investments by the public and private sector
- Systematically collect data and address data gaps to make progress in monitoring and benchmarking R&I performance easier



 **Highlights**

- Formal commitment to six ERA Actions under three priority areas of the ERA Policy Agenda in September 2023
- First EIT Innovation Hub launched at the Centre for Technology Transfer and Innovation in Skopje in June 2023
- Adoption of the Smart Specialisation Strategy 2024–2027 with action plan 2024–2025 in December 2023

 **Recommendations**

- Improve the implementation of key strategies, programmes and priorities to more efficiently use R&I funds
- Enhance funding from both the public and private sector to develop a knowledge-based society through green and digital transition
- Promote science and technology parks and thereby help the business sector to recognise its potential



North Macedonia

Serbia

 **Highlights**

- Advancements towards the priorities of the ERA Policy Agenda 2022–2024 (no formal commitment to the priorities yet)
- Integration into ERA through institutional funding reforms and introduction of policy measures; creation of a favourable environment for R&I and science–industry cooperation
- Establishment of a system for the further development of deep-tech: Law on Digital Assets, tax incentive schemes for high-tech companies, PhD programmes on artificial intelligence
- Increase in the innovation performance according to the European Innovation Scoreboard

 **Recommendations**

- Enhance R&I funding to further implement the ERA Policy Agenda
- Work on enacting the European Research Infrastructure Consortium Regulation into law
- Improve efficiency when implementing strategic policy documents and action plans (such as the Smart Specialisation Strategy)
- Improve the level of digital skills in the interaction between academia and business stakeholders to foster digital transferability



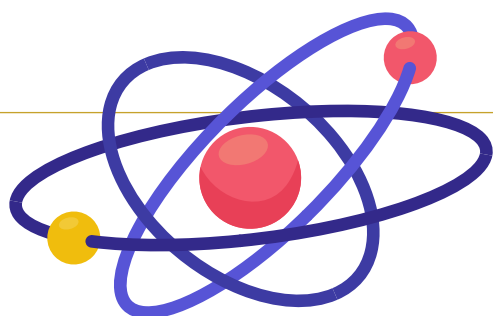
Key takeaways

Highlights

- Several new R&I related strategies and laws in the WB include topics of the ERA Policy Agenda
- General progress of WB economies regarding various topics of ERA priorities and regarding open science and gender equality in particular
- Improved interest and participation of WB researchers in ERA

Recommendations

- Show political commitment to ERA Actions to eventually improve participation in ERA
- Further align to ERA Policy Agenda by referring to it in research and innovation strategy documents
- Improve business-academia collaboration through targeted measures and activities



The POLICY ANSWERS project

The drafting of selected WB ERA Country Reports is part of the POLICY ANSWERS activities to monitor and analyse progress made by the Western Balkans' economies in their integration into the new ERA. The reports have been drafted with the help of external experts. POLICY ANSWERS is engaged in training and capacity building with regard to the ERA monitoring and has organised workshops and webinars regarding the integration of the WB into ERA.

Partners



The WB ERA Country Reports can be accessed here:



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