![POLICY ANSWERS]

Strengthening Research and Innovation in the Western Balkans: The POLICY ANSWERS project

POLICY ANSWERS is a strategic initiative funded by the European Commission through the Horizon Europe project "R&I POLICY making, implementation ANd Support in the WEsteRn BalkanS". The project focuses on enhancing research and innovation (R&I) policymaking and governance systems in the Western Balkans, while also addressing aspects of education, culture, youth, and sports. By providing essential support to the region's development, POLICY ANSWERS plays a crucial role in strengthening the Western Balkans' potential for successful participation in regional and multilateral research and innovation activities.

Partners

ZSI · DLR Projektträger · eiz the institute of economics, zagreb · formicablu · FFG Promoting Innovation. · INOVA · GSI

institute MIHAILO PUPIN · MIRO FOUNDATION · akkshi · RT INVEST · SCIENCE TECHNOLOGY PARK Montenegro · УНИВЕРЗИТЕТ У БАЊОЈ ЛУЦИ UNIVERSITY OF BANJA LUKA

Get in touch at
www.westernbalkans-infohub.eu

and follow us on LinkedIn and YouTube
WBInfoHub
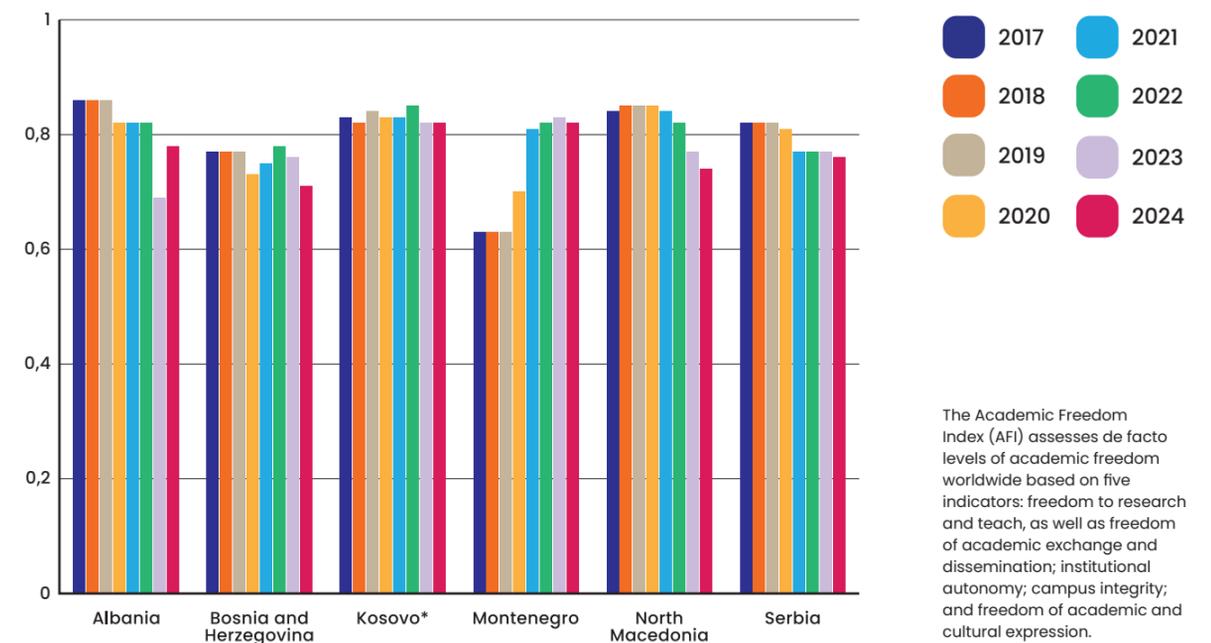westernbalkansinfohub1309

Education & Skills

The Western Balkans Agenda on Innovation, Research, Education, Culture, Youth and Sport is a long-term strategy from the EU and the Western Balkans (WB) for cooperation with the region. It will contribute to the region's economic and societal development, building on three main pillars: Political, Thematic, and Regional.

The project POLICY ANSWERS monitors the implementation of the Western Balkans Agenda, and the broader context, progress and achievements are summarised in regular reports. In this Monitoring Card, you find the results of the third round of data collection in 2025 and at the beginning of 2026, in comparison to the data collected in the previous third monitoring round.

In terms of Education & Skills, the monitoring focuses on the context indicator "Academic Freedom Index" and various achievements outlined in the WB Agenda (see next page).

Achievements in a wider context of the Western Balkans Agenda

Academic Freedom Index

Legend: 2017, 2018, 2019, 2020, 2021, 2022, 2023, 2024

The Academic Freedom Index (AFI) assesses de facto levels of academic freedom worldwide based on five indicators: freedom to research and teach, as well as freedom of academic exchange and dissemination; institutional autonomy; campus integrity; and freedom of academic and cultural expression.

Source
Academic Freedom Index https://academic-freedom-index.net/ (accessed 10 November 2025).

* 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.

Regional Indicators

Western Balkans Steering Platform meetings on Education and Training ↗	Regional policy dialogue on education and training under the Berlin Process ⬆	Participation in ERA Forum group meetings & workshops ⬇

Western Balkans Economy Indicators

Indicator and overall assessment of the region	Integration and stronger participation in EU programmes and initiatives				Fostered capacity building for R&I, education and Vocational Education and Training (VET)	
	Supporting the Implementation of the EU acquis ➡	Stronger participation in VET processes ↗	Promotion of WB participation under the MSCA ↗	WB participation in Erasmus University Alliances ⬆	Encouraging education-driven and skills-based innovation ⬆	Capacity building in POLICY ANSWERS ⬆
Albania	No Twinning project Not aligned with the Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG) ➡	No meetings organised No commitments reported ➡	Increased number of promotion and info meetings Increased number of MSCA projects including staff exchange (SE) projects ⬆	Increased participation in 4 University Alliances ⬆	Increased number of awareness/capacity building events and participants Participation in Digital Education Hackathons (DigiEduHack), national DigiEduHack ambassador assigned ⬆	Increased number of capacity building activities and beneficiaries ⬆
Bosnia and Herzegovina	No Twinning project Not aligned with the ESG ➡	Increased number of meetings and commitments reported ⬆	Increased number of promotion and info meetings Increased number of MSCA projects, no new SE project ↗	Increased participation in 5 University Alliances ⬆	Increased number of awareness/capacity building events No participation in the DigiEduHack, no national ambassador assigned ↗	Increased number of capacity building activities and beneficiaries ⬆
Kosovo	No Twinning project Not aligned with the ESG ➡	Information on meetings not provided Increased number of commitments reported ↗	Increased number of promotion and info meetings No new MSCA projects, including SE projects ↗	Participation in 1 University Alliance ⬆	Increased number of awareness/capacity building events and participants No participation in the DigiEduHack, no national ambassador assigned ↗	Increased number of capacity building activities and beneficiaries ⬆
Montenegro	Twinning project started Partially aligned with the ESG ↗	Increased number of meetings and commitments reported ⬆	No information on promotion and info meetings provided Increased number of MSCA projects, including SE projects ↗	Participation in 1 University Alliance ↗	No new events reported No participation in the DigiEduHack, national DigiEduHack ambassador assigned ➡	Increased number of capacity building activities and beneficiaries ⬆
North Macedonia	No Twinning projects Not aligned with the ESG ➡	Increased number of meetings and commitments reported ⬆	Increased number of promotion and info meetings No new MSCA projects, including SE projects ↗	Increased participation in 4 University Alliances ⬆	Increased number of awareness/capacity building events and participants No participation in the DigiEduHack, national DigiEduHack ambassador assigned ⬆	Increased number of capacity building activities and beneficiaries ⬆
Serbia	No Twinning projects Not aligned with the ESG ➡	Increased number of meetings and commitments reported ⬆	Increased number of promotion and info meetings Increased number of MSCA actions, including SE projects ⬆	Participation in 3 University Alliances ↗	Increased number of awareness/capacity building events and participants Participation in DigiEduHack, national DigiEduHack ambassador assigned ⬆	Increased number of capacity building activities and beneficiaries ⬆

Legend: ⬆ On track or maintaining achievement | ↗ Moderately improving Challenges remain | ➡ Stagnating Significant challenges | ⬇ Decreasing Major challenges | Information not available

Highlights

POLICY ANSWERS capacity building programmes carried out successfully - highlights include: technical assistance for Ministries, advancing thematic curricula, private-sector collaboration, Green and Digital Agenda implementation, creating synergies through Quadruple Helix Coordination Forum