

Torino Process Review of Policies for Lifelong Learning in Bosnia and Herzegovina

Thematic Proposal: Review of Policies for Lifelong Learning in BiH

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3,500 words (excluding references)

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1 Background

The European Training Foundation (ETF) has launched a new cycle of the Torino Process for Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH) for the period 2022-2024. Phase 1 focused on monitoring the performance of VET in providing opportunities for lifelong learning. Phase 2 aims to review education and training policies from a lifelong learning perspective, focusing on work-based learning (WBL) policies as a lead theme and the Youth Guarantee (YG) as a supplementary theme.¹ The proposed Policy Review will identify the policy areas relevant to interpreting ETF monitoring results and to improving the performance of the lifelong learning system in BiH. It will cover WBL policies for youth and adults in all settings in which they learn in Republika Srpska, the Cantons of the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina, and Brcko District (such as traineeships, apprenticeships, training at work, and retraining). It will also cover the Youth Guarantee, which foresees that young people under the age of 30 have access to good quality offers of continued education, apprenticeship, or traineeship within four months of registering as unemployed or leaving formal education. The review will analyse and assess policies at the intersection between WBL and YG with the ultimate purpose of concluding about two key questions:

Box 1-1: Guiding questions for the Policy Review

- (i) What is the situation concerning WBL opportunities in BiH for youth in formal education and training including young graduates, for the adult workforce, and what can be improved?
- (ii) How “fit” is the network of learning providers in BiH to deliver the commitments to youth not in employment, education, or training under the Youth Guarantee, and what can be improved?

This Thematic Proposal is the first stage in delivering the Policy Review. In developing this Thematic Proposal, we have reviewed the key literature from the past five years relevant to these two questions. Based on this review, we identify the key themes for the Policy Review relating to the availability and quality of WBL and the persistent challenges to developing WBL activities in BiH. Finally, we outline the structure of the Policy Review to be delivered at the end of the project.

The responsible education authorities have committed to implement the Riga Conclusions as elaborated in the document “*Improving Quality and Relevance of Vocational Education and Training in BiH in the Light of the Riga Conclusions for the Period 2021-2030*” (Working Group, 2021). This serves as a framework for education authorities to adjust their policies and standards in initial vocational education and training (IVET) and continuing vocational education and training (CVET) on BiH’s path to European integration. The EU Council Recommendations on VET for sustainable competitiveness, social fairness and resilience set out a target for EU Member States that “60% of recent graduates from VET benefit from exposure to work-based learning during their vocational education and training” (European Council, 2020). BiH as an EU candidate country since December 2022 will aim to meet this goal in the coming years. In its commitment to lifelong learning, the EU has also made adult education a key element of the WBL agenda. However, adult education opportunities are lagging in BiH in comparison to other countries in the region (OECD, 2021). The Policy Review will therefore also set out the current situation in relation to adult education and what can be done to improve it.

¹ Work-based learning (WBL) refers to a form of education and training where learners acquire skills and knowledge through practical experience in a workplace environment. It involves a combination of classroom instruction and on-the-job training and encompasses both youth in initial VET and the reskilling and upskilling opportunities offered to adult jobseekers. Work-based learning is a key component of the Youth Guarantee. In that context, WBL is meant to provide young people with practical experience and skills that are essential for entering the labour market.

In addition to interviews with key stakeholders, the Policy Review will take into account key documents such as Working Group (2021) referred to above, the “European Framework for Quality and Effective Apprenticeships” (European Commission, 2018), the “Quality Framework for Traineeships” (European Council, 2014), the ETF’s analytical framework for work-based learning (ETF, n.d.), the Osnabrück Declaration (2020), the Reinforced Youth Guarantee (European Commission, 2020), “Study on Youth Employment in the Western Balkans” (RCC, 2021), and strategic documents and reports of Republika Srpska, Cantons and Brcko District related to VET and lifelong learning, the laws and by-laws in VET and adult education and reports related to economic reforms and labour market analysis and prospects.

The Policy Review will cover the following thematic areas:

1. Education systems, the labour market and lifelong learning in BiH
2. WBL for youth in formal education and training, including young graduates
3. Vocational training programmes for adults
4. The Youth Guarantee policy framework in BiH
5. Fitness of the learning providers in BiH to deliver the commitments under the Youth Guarantee
6. Conclusion and Recommendations

2 Education systems, the labour market and lifelong learning in BiH

The education system in BiH follows the Constitutional structure of BiH as a country of two entities and Brčko District BiH. Responsibilities for education lie with Republika Srpska, the ten Cantons of the Federation, and Brčko District. Most students in upper secondary education in BiH are enrolled in 4-year TVET schools (*tehničke škole*) or 3-year VET schools (*stručne škole*). VET lies at the intersection of education and the labour market and should meet the requirements of both students and employers. Work-based learning is a part of the vocational education system in BiH but is weakly developed. The literature is not entirely clear about the definitions of different forms of WBL, referring variously to internships (Ademi, 2018), apprenticeships (Branković, 2022) or dual education (Kovačević et al., 2021) to cover similar issues, while there has been little discussion of traineeships.²

Although the complexity of the system presents a challenge, BiH has shown that it is possible to implement reforms in the fields of WBL and lifelong learning. Nevertheless, the WBL systems in BiH face persistent challenges and policymakers seek solutions to make sure their systems provide high quality education and meet the needs of a demanding labour market. However, ministries of education lack the capacity to implement WBL and to direct the reform process, leading to weak engagement and support of other ministries and other stakeholders (chambers, schools, companies). The absorption capacity of stakeholders is often stretched though engagement with donor projects. Furthermore, the Torino Process Monitoring Report has shown that professional capacity of staff in leadership positions is below the international average (ETF, 2023: Figure 6).

Public expenditure on education fails to provide sufficient school infrastructure investment especially in the smaller Cantons in FBiH and differences between schools are becoming more and more noticeable. Some good schools continue to improve and benefit from development opportunities, while others lack sufficient equipment to provide in-school practical learning. A lack of updated statistical data, including on financing, limit the information on the availability of WBL, which in turn hinders evidence-based policy reforms to improve quality.

Labour market challenges persist, with a high rate of youth unemployment and emigration of skilled individuals. Consequently, skill mismatches pose a significant hurdle for businesses. Secondary school graduates are overrepresented among the unemployed population. The Labour Force Survey for 2022 shows that while 57% of the working age population graduated secondary school (including VET), a much higher proportion of the unemployed population (70%) were from this educational attainment group.³ More effective WBL is needed to address this poor performance.

Close coordination between governments, employers' associations and trade unions through social dialogue is crucial to the success of some more complete forms of WBL such as apprenticeships. However, the tripartite councils established in BiH have not participated actively in designing regulations on working conditions for WBL and the rights and duties of companies and students. In most Cantons and Brčko District, occupational safety is not regulated. The Social Partners could play a more active role in licensing in-company mentors in company selection, providing guidance for companies, as well as in monitoring and evaluation.

² A clear discussion of the differences between the various forms of WBL is given in Poulsen and Eberhardt (2016), and an application to BiH is given by Schmid (2018).

³ In March 2023, there were 352,890 registered unemployed in BiH, including 205,179 women. Positively, unemployment decreased by 5.1% over the year. Source: Agency for Statistics BiH, Social Statistics

Box 2-1 Key themes and persistent challenges relating to the vocational education system and the labour market: questions for further research

1. What are the existing forms of WBL in BiH? How can they be improved?
2. What are the main differences in the provision of WBL among the different Cantons in FBiH?
3. What are the key challenges in designing and implementing policy reforms in WBL?
4. How can the social partners become more involved in policy and practice for WBL?
5. Statistical data on the availability on the availability and financing of WBL is limited, which hinders evidence-based policy reforms to improve quality of WBL. How can this be improved?

3 WBL for youth in formal education and training, including young graduates

Work-based learning (WBL) involves teaching practical skills in a work environment. If well organised, it can augment the knowledge, skills, and competences of students, meeting the needs of employers and easing the transition from education to work. Yet, employers continue to report significant skill mismatches. For example, a 2018 study tracking VET graduates showed that only half (51%) of employed VET graduates were engaged in jobs that corresponded with their education (GIZ, 2018).

The priorities for WBL in BiH are outlined in the document “*Improving Quality and Relevance of Vocational Education and Training in BiH in the Light of the Riga Conclusions for the Period 2021-2030*” (Working Group, 2021). The document notes that Republika Srpska, the Cantons of FBiH and Brcko District are willing to promote WBL according to the needs of students and companies; to increase the involvement of social partners in planning and management; to modernise curricula together with social partners; to improve contract arrangements and financial contributions; and to ensure the accreditation of companies. It provides an overview of various formats of WBL in BiH, with action plans for their implementation. The most prevalent form of WBL or “practical training”⁴ is school based, with students spending one to three days per week in a company and the rest of practical and theoretical hours at VET schools. Other formats such as virtual companies within schools and summer or winter practical training are available.

The fields of priority action identified in the document are (i) promoting WBL and making it attractive for companies and students, (ii) involving social partners in WBL policymaking (where social partners are defined as employers and schools, without mention of the state or trade unions), (iii) support to WBL implementation (i.e., how to implement WBL by involving tripartite advisory committees, mentors, chambers of commerce, and how to define learning outcomes and methods of assessment) (iv) arranging finance for WBL. Section 2 of the document analyses the development of quality assurance mechanisms, Section 3 analyses the qualification systems for VET with reference to the European Qualification Framework (EQF), Section 4 covers key competences in VET with reference to EU standards, and Section 5 covers arrangements for the continuous professional training of teachers, trainers and mentors in VET.

Due to the support of donor organisations a format of WBL known as “dual education” has been promoted but not yet implemented in BiH. Dual education is regulated by the Law on Secondary Education in Republika Srpska, and an experimental phase has started in certain occupations in cooperation with companies and Chamber of Commerce and Industry of Republika Srpska. Dual education is governed by a contract, follows a full learning cycle for a registered occupation, and leads to a recognised qualification.

“Apprenticeship”, as a format of WBL, has not yet been recognised in law in BiH. In the past, in the countries of the former Yugoslavia, it was a part of the regular VET system (Hadziomerović, 2018). Apprenticeship (*naukovanje* or *šegrtovanje*) was associated with specific occupations, mostly to traditional crafts, and VET profiles of 3 year duration with obligatory practice at small craft firms or industrial enterprises. Due to the promotion of apprenticeship across the EU, and since BiH has joined the EU Alliances for Apprenticeship, it is one of the challenges for the education authorities, employers, and social partners that apprenticeship as a form of work-based learning should be taken into consideration for future planning of VET policies.

For the success of dual education and apprenticeship it is important that education authorities and employers are aware of the positive effects on employability. Companies have confirmed that dual

⁴ As it is referred to in legislation on secondary education

education is effective for transferring the skills needed in the occupation: school-based dual VET students with in-company placements perform better than students in entirely school-based VET (e.g., using school workshops), although few companies are willing to provide the required training places (Schmid & Gruber, 2018). The Policy Review aims to gather employers' opinions on the employability of VET graduates and the barriers to in-company placements.

Based on previous reports, employer participation in WBL is limited because companies do not receive sufficient information and wish for more guidance in implementing dual education, and on their rights and obligations. Small and medium enterprises (SMEs) face difficulties covering the training curriculum, providing protection at work, and providing financial compensation to students. **Secondly, companies** are tired of intangible results and endless concepts as they mostly see the costs but not the value of the current practical in-company training practices, except few exceptions. **The increased number of requests coming from VET schools for in-company training creates negativity in host companies, who perceive they are being used to make up for inadequate teaching in schools.**

The quality of WBL is a key issue. Issues of quality assurance for are covered in the biannual ETF Torino Process reports, and in practice through EU projects on VET. The ETF has also prepared an analysis of VET qualifications and curricula, which will be useful to identify the improvements needed in developing new qualifications and curricula based on learning outcomes and whether they meet the needs of the labour market. **The deadlock in the implementation of the baseline Qualification Framework hinders the application of many quality assurance mechanisms arising from it.**

Cooperation between learning venues is another area that needs improvement. Usually, the planning of WBL is a joint activity of school coordinators and mentors in companies. In the past, Manuals for coordinators for practical training were prepared, but it seems from the perspective of employers that there is lack of involvement of school coordinators for in-company training. One reason among others could be that school coordinators lack up-to date knowledge of technologies and work processes used in companies.

The financing of WBL is defined in by-laws of each administrative unit but not in a unique way. The issue of financing is a major challenge and is not yet resolved (Association of Employers of Republika Srpska (2023). In the EU, students are more interested in practical training in companies when they are paid for their work. This should motivate decision makers in BiH to provide such financial arrangements. Working Group (2021) proposes financing school-based education by competent authorities, financing work-based learning by involved companies through an allowance to students, and arranging finance through general funds financed by contributions from all companies. The Policy Review will further explore financial an arrangements for WBL (e.g., costs of transportation, meals, occupational health and safety standards, taxation policy) with recommendations for improvement.

Box 3-1: Key themes and challenges for WBL in formal education: questions for further research

1. Dual education: what the incentives are there for companies to get involved in the process?
2. The legal framework and policy initiatives to establish *apprenticeship* programmes are absent. How can this be overcome?
3. What are the gaps in the provision of WBL in post-secondary non-tertiary vocational education?
4. There is a deadlock in the implementation of a Qualifications Framework. What other means can be found to provide for assessment and quality assurance in WBL?
5. Do new curricula based on learning outcomes meet the needs of the labour market?
6. Which financing arrangements can serve to improve the availability and accessibility of WBL?

4 Vocational training programmes for adults

Skills, competences, and qualifications needed by individuals are changing rapidly, requiring individuals to possess a mix of transferable skills including competences such as digital and entrepreneurial skills. Skills need to be upgraded throughout an individual's working life, and lifelong learning is therefore a necessity. The education authorities in BiH have regulated the area of adult education/lifelong learning with laws and rulebooks. Although it is in the interest of employers and public employment institutes, BiH is faced with low participation in lifelong learning, in particular by youth not in employment, education or training (NEETs), women of different age groups, and the long-term unemployed and young graduates. The Policy Review will explore the opportunities for lifelong learning such as training at work, retraining, work-based learning and apprenticeship for these groups of workers. It will also explore the policy towards training and retraining employees at work.

Validation of non-formal and informal learning is still a critical issue for the systems of lifelong learning in BiH and it is often a barrier to individuals to access the labour market despite the knowledge and competences they have gained through informal learning or other learning pathways (Pilav-Velić et al., 2019). The Policy Review will therefore consider *The EU Council Recommendation on the Validation of Non-Formal and Informal Learning* (European Council, 2012), which offers a foundation for recognising learning outside formal settings, benefiting an individual's career and further learning prospects. It will also review the recent *Council Resolution on a New European Agenda for Adult Learning* (European Council, 2021) which emphasises enhancing adult engagement in all learning forms.

Box 4-1: Key themes and challenges for WBL in adult education: questions for further research

1. What is the scope and availability of adult workforce education programmes? How can these be improved?
2. What is the scope and availability of training at work and upskilling? How can these be improved?
3. What is the scope and availability of retraining programmes and reskilling? How can these be improved?
4. What are the gaps in the policy framework and governance structures for adult education?
5. How can quality assurance for adult education be improved?
6. Which financing structures are in place for adult education? How can they be improved?

5 The Youth Guarantee Programme for BiH

The Youth Guarantee (YG) in the EU countries was launched by the European Commission in 2013 and reinforced in 2020 as a political commitment of all EU Member States to give all young people under the age of 30 not in employment, education or training (NEETs) a good quality offer of employment, continued education; an apprenticeship or a traineeship within 4 months of either leaving formal education or becoming unemployed (European Commission, 2020). It has been widely adopted in the EU new members states of Central and Eastern Europe (Neagu, 2022). Within the successor states of former Yugoslavia, the Youth Guarantee has been implemented in Croatia and North Macedonia. These experiences will be analysed to derive lessons learned and policy recommendations for BiH, and will be presented in the Policy Review.

BiH has recently endorsed the YG and some introductory meetings have been held with representatives of the European Commission, the International Labour Organization, and the ETF. A Task Force group has been established. The implementation of the YG will start under EU IPA III programming. The Policy Review will present the modalities of YG implementation and the roles of work-based learning, in particular apprenticeships and traineeships in enhancing opportunities for NEETs to be trained, access the labour market, and further develop their careers.

Box 5-1: Key themes to be covered in the Policy Review relating to YG in BiH

1. The general framework of the EU Youth Guarantee. Is it applicable to BiH?
2. Experiences of YG in Croatia and North Macedonia. What lessons do they hold for BiH?
3. What are the main proposals and issues for the design of the YG in BiH?

6 Fitness of learning providers in BiH to deliver commitments under the Youth Guarantee

A key guiding question for the policy review is “How fit is the network of learning providers in BiH to deliver the commitments to youth not in employment, education, or training under the Youth Guarantee, and what can be improved?” This section of the Policy Review will therefore set out our findings related to the current situation concerning the network of providers for the YG, based upon a review of the learning providers in BiH and interviews with relevant policymakers and representatives of the education and business sectors.

Box 6-1: Key themes to be covered in the Policy Review relating to fitness of learning providers

1. Mapping the network of learning providers
2. Capacity of the network: how can it be improved?
3. Fitness of the network of learning providers to deliver the commitments of the YG: is it adequate?

7 Summary: Key themes arising from the literature review

From our review of relevant reports that have been published over the last five years we have identified several key themes relating to the availability and quality of WBL and the persistent challenges that face WBL in BiH. These themes provide the background to the sub-questions that will be analysed in the Policy Review, and which have been set out in Box 2-1 to 6-1 elaborated above.

8 Table of Contents of the Torino Process Policy Review for BiH 2023

A draft structure for the Policy Review is set out in the following Table of Contents:

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1.2	EMPLOYMENT, UNEMPLOYMENT AND NEETS BY EDUCATION, SEX AND AGE GROUPS	ERROR! BOOKMARK NOT DEFINED.
1.3	THE CHALLENGE OF WORK-BASED POLICIES FOR LIFELONG LEARNING	ERROR! BOOKMARK NOT DEFINED.
2	WBL FOR YOUTH IN FORMAL EDUCATION AND TRAINING, INCLUDING YOUNG GRADUATES.....	ERROR! BOOKMARK NOT DEFINED.
2.1	SITUATION ANALYSIS OF WBL FOR VOCATIONAL SCHOOL PUPILS AND YOUNG GRADUATES ...	ERROR! BOOKMARK NOT DEFINED.
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2.4	FINANCING WBL IN IVET.....	ERROR! BOOKMARK NOT DEFINED.
3	VOCATIONAL TRAINING PROGRAMMES FOR ADULTS (CVET) ...	ERROR! BOOKMARK NOT DEFINED.
3.1	SITUATION ANALYSIS OF ADULT EDUCATION	ERROR! BOOKMARK NOT DEFINED.
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3.3	QUALITY ASSURANCE	ERROR! BOOKMARK NOT DEFINED.
3.4	FINANCING WBL FOR ADULT EDUCATION AND CVET	ERROR! BOOKMARK NOT DEFINED.
4	THE YOUTH GUARANTEE POLICY FRAMEWORK IN BIH.....	ERROR! BOOKMARK NOT DEFINED.
4.1	THE YOUTH GUARANTEE IN THE EU AND THE WESTERN BALKANS	ERROR! BOOKMARK NOT DEFINED.
4.1.1	<i>General framework of EU Youth Guarantee</i>	<i>Error! Bookmark not defined.</i>
4.1.2	<i>Case study: Youth Guarantee in Croatia</i>	<i>Error! Bookmark not defined.</i>
4.1.3	<i>Case study: Youth Guarantee in North Macedonia</i>	<i>Error! Bookmark not defined.</i>
4.2	DESIGN OF YOUTH GUARANTEE IN BIH	ERROR! BOOKMARK NOT DEFINED.
4.2.1	<i>Mapping, Outreach, Preparation and Finance</i>	<i>Error! Bookmark not defined.</i>
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6	CONCLUSIONS AND POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS	ERROR! BOOKMARK NOT DEFINED.

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