

KEY POLICY DEVELOPMENTS IN EDUCATION, TRAINING AND EMPLOYMENT

2025

BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINA

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ABOUT THIS PAPER

Each year, the ETF monitors developments in education, skills and employment in its partner countries to support informed decision-making by identifying trends, opportunities and challenges. The results are reported by country, across countries and by selected theme.

This document is the 2025 country-level report (country fiche) for Bosnia and Herzegovina. Like all ETF monitoring, it draws on multiple sources of evidence and is the culmination of a year-long process of data collection, analysis and consultations. One key source of evidence is the ETF KIESE database, which provides internationally comparable indicators on areas such as country demography, economy, education and employment. The indicators are sourced mainly from international repositories, including UNESCO, the World Bank, the OECD, Eurostat and the ILO, while some come directly from partner countries, for instance, from their labour force surveys¹.

Another source of evidence is the Torino Process, a flagship monitoring initiative of the ETF which compiles system performance indices (SPIs) on the basis of KIESE data and expert surveys. The SPIs combine selected KIESE indicators to track policy and system performance in education and Vocational Education and Training (VET) in key areas such as access, quality and system management. Where KIESE data is missing, the SPIs rely on expert surveys, which help fill the gaps and contextualise the findings at the stage of analysis. ‘Performance’ in this context refers to the extent to which policies and systems deliver results in these areas². In 2025, the ETF compiled SPIs for a total of 32 areas and sub-areas of performance, including for groups of learners such as youth and adults, males and females, socio-economically disadvantaged young people and adults with no or low education.

ETF country missions complement these data sources by engaging with key policy stakeholders, gathering qualitative insights on policy developments, recently enacted legislation and major reform measures. Finally, where necessary, the ETF draws on third-party publications and analytical work to fill gaps in available evidence or to clarify developments that are not fully captured in the ETF monitoring evidence.

The country fiche begins with Chapter 1, which provides a country profile describing the demographic and socio-economic conditions in the country. Chapter 2 presents recent policies in education and training, together with the structure of the education system, including adult learning. Chapter 3 provides an overview of employment and labour-market policies and introduces the main strategies, institutions and programmes. Chapter 4, which is the final chapter, presents the results of policies and arrangements in education and training.

¹ The full selection of KIESE indicators for 2025 can be found here: <https://bit.ly/4j6taZW>.

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KEY TAKEAWAYS

- **Country Profile and Developments:** Bosnia and Herzegovina's population, estimated at around 3.2 million, has been shrinking due to low birth rates and a significant emigration trend, particularly among young adults seeking employment abroad. The country's GDP growth has averaged about 3 % annually but is challenged by regional disparities and a reliance on remittances. Urban areas such as Sarajevo drive economic development, while rural regions face higher unemployment and limited access to services.
- **Developments in Education and Training:** the education system is decentralised, with 13 administrative units responsible for schooling, leading to varied curricula and standards. Bosnia and Herzegovina has undertaken actions to modernise both general education and vocational education and training (VET). A key initiative from recent years is the development of the 'Improvement of Quality and Relevance of VET in Bosnia and Herzegovina in the Light of the EU Riga Conclusions (2021–2030)', which lays out a comprehensive roadmap for enhancing the attractiveness, competitiveness and alignment of VET with European standards. Efforts are also underway to develop Bosnia and Herzegovina's qualifications framework to better reference the European Qualifications Framework (EQF), while also engaging in EU and other donor-supported projects to strengthen quality assurance mechanisms, foster lifelong learning and improve teacher training.
- **Employment and Labour Market Developments:** Bosnia and Herzegovina faces ongoing challenges in harmonising employment policies due to its complex and fragmented governance structure. Preparation of implementation of the Youth Guarantee in Bosnia and Herzegovina is being followed at the state and entity level. Unemployment remains a persistent issue, standing at 12.6 % in 2024, with youth unemployment surpassing 30 %. Active labour market policies (ALMPs) seek to address these challenges through subsidised employment, retraining and other types of measures, showing increased numbers of participants in recent years (from 146 036 in 2019 to 236 940 in 2024). Efforts to strengthen collaboration between employment services, education providers and employers are advancing, though coordination difficulties persist. Meanwhile, implementation of the EU's EUR 6 billion Growth Plan for the Western Balkans remains incomplete in Bosnia and Herzegovina, with political obstacles slowing its progress. While the Reform Agenda was adopted at the end of 2025, Bosnia and Herzegovina was the last country in the region to submit it and it had already lost access to EUR 108 million for failing to meet the original deadline.
- **Trends in Access, Retention and Completion:** in Bosnia and Herzegovina, school participation is nearly universal in early education and lower secondary levels, but falls at upper secondary and tertiary levels, with net enrolment at 77.2 % for upper secondary and around 45.5 % for tertiary education in 2023, well below EU averages. Vocational education dominates upper secondary, with nearly 80 % of students enrolled in VET programmes. While most young people complete at least upper secondary education and early school leaving is low (3.8 % in 2024), adult participation in learning remains extremely limited at 1.6–1.8 %, far below the EU average.
- **Quality and Relevance of Learning:** in Bosnia and Herzegovina, educational systems struggle to equip learners with foundational skills and competences, including literacy, numeracy, transversal skills and job-relevant abilities. International assessments and surveys confirm widespread gaps in basic skills. Adults generally manage basic digital tasks like calls, social media and accessing online information, but advanced digital competencies needed for work, lifelong learning and civic engagement are limited.
- **System Management and Organisation:** Bosnia and Herzegovina spends about 3 % of its GDP on education, which is below the EU average. Secondary education receives just 21% of total spending, and while VET schools absorb most of the secondary funds, they remain underfunded. The decentralised system leads to regional disparities, and limited revenue retention hampers VET schools' ability to address gaps. Infrastructure, curricula, IT and human resources are weak;

teacher training is overly theoretical, professional development is inconsistent, and working conditions are poor. Data systems are fragmented, quality assurance is inconsistent and leadership development is insufficient. While opportunities like Erasmus+ and EmployVET exist, participation is uneven due to limited capacity, funding and support.

1. COUNTRY PROFILE

Table 1.1 Demographic and socio-economic context: key indicators, Bosnia and Herzegovina

Indicator	Value	Year	Source
Total population (in thousands)	3 185.1	2023	UN DESA, World Bank
Relative size of youth population (%)	16.2	2023	UN DESA
Population growth rate	-0.6	2023	World Bank, UN DESA
Dependency ratio	53.5	2023	World Bank, UN DESA
Immigrant stock as % of total population	1.1	2024	UN DESA
Emigrant stock as % of total population	50.8	2024	UN DESA
GDP growth rate	2.2	2023	World Bank
GDP per capita (PPP)	22 449.2	2023	World Bank
Migrant remittance inflows (USD mil.) as % of GDP	10.3	2023	World Bank
Inflation rate	6.1	2023	IMF
Poverty headcount ratio (USD 8.30/day)	8.1	2011	World Bank
Gini coefficient (income inequality)	33.0	2011	World Bank
Human development index (HDI)	0.862	2023	UNDP, World Bank

Source: ETF KIESE database

1.1 Demography

This section takes a look at a selection of indicators that describe the size and growth rate of the population, its age and its economic structure, as well as the scale and impact of inward and outward migration on population size, composition, and skills availability.

In 2023, Bosnia and Herzegovina had a total population of about 3.19 million. Annual population growth was -0.6 %, a sharper decline than in most countries in the SEET region. The working age population (15–64) made up around 65 % of the total. With a dependency ratio of 53.5, pressure on them to support dependants is already considerable and is likely to rise as the population ages.

Among those of working age, youth (age group 15–24) accounted for 16.2 %. This share is not necessarily small in comparison to international standards, but given the overall population decline, youth cohorts are expected to shrink over time. This will limit future inflows into education and training and ultimately into the labour market.

The national averages mask the fact that the distribution of youth across Bosnia and Herzegovina is uneven: larger cities attract and concentrate more young people, while in many smaller and especially rural municipalities, the youth cohorts are shrinking rapidly. As a result, rural regions tend to have a higher proportion of older adults and a smaller share of working-age youth (UNICEF, 2020).

Although demographic and territorial fragmentation is a distinct feature of Bosnia and Herzegovina, with implications in many policy areas, these youth-related disparities cut across political divisions. The more decisive contrasts are between urban and rural areas and between well-connected and remote regions, rather than strictly along the entity boundary line separating the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina from Republika Srpska.

This unevenness creates very different conditions for education and training provision across the country, as schools and VET programmes in some areas can rely on a steady intake, while others struggle to sustain class sizes that make their operation viable. For example, while over the last decade, first-year school enrolments have declined by more than 20 % nationwide (MoCA & UN BIH, 2022), the impact is felt most acutely in rural municipalities where underutilised or shrinking schools

face the realistic prospect of consolidation or closure. In contrast, demand for education in major urban centres remains much steadier.

For the labour market, the problem is not only the limited number of new entrants but also their concentration in cities, leaving many local economies with very few young workers to replace those leaving or retiring.

Surveys in 2021 found that nearly half of Bosnian youth aspired to leave the country for better opportunities, and around one-quarter were already actively seeking jobs abroad (USAID, 2023). For many, moving from smaller towns or rural areas to the cities is only the first stage of this journey. Urban centres offer access to further education and initial career paths, but they are often seen as a stepping stone towards emigration abroad.

This pattern reflects a wider demographic reality: migration is one of the main factors shaping the population trends in Bosnia and Herzegovina. Emigrants account for more than half of the total population, with an estimated 1.6 million people from the country living abroad in 2024 (Table 1.1). This exceptionally high share reflects not only recent labour migration but also the legacy of the 1990s war, when large numbers of Bosnians were forced to leave and many never returned. In contrast, immigrants make up only about 1 %, which confirms that the country remains mainly a place of origin rather than a destination.

1.2 Economy

The data in this section describes the economic context of the country in terms of GDP growth rate, GDP per capita (PPP), migrant remittance inflows as a percentage of GDP and the inflation rate.

In 2023, the economy of Bosnia and Herzegovina recorded modest growth of 2.2 %. GDP per capita in purchasing power parity terms was USD 22 449, which places the country in the middle range of income levels in the region. At this level, the country continues to face a sizeable gap with more advanced European economies.

Remittances from the diaspora accounted for 10.3 % of GDP in 2023 (Table 1.1). At this scale, they are a key source of household income and an important factor in the stability of external balances. At the same time, this high level of dependence reflects the limited capacity of the domestic economy to generate sufficient employment and income opportunities.

In the same year, inflation stood at 6.1 %. Bosnia and Herzegovina operates under a currency board arrangement, which limits the scope for domestic monetary policy to influence prices. Inflation therefore reflects external cost pressures, such as energy and food imports, which fed strongly into consumer prices. The rise in prices eroded purchasing power over the year, leaving fiscal and social policies as the main tools to cushion the impact on households.

1.3 Income and living standards

This section describes the economic well-being and living standards of the population in terms of poverty levels, income distribution and overall human development.

The Human Development Index (HDI) of Bosnia and Herzegovina stands at 0.804 (2023), which places the country in the category of countries with 'very high' human development. Of the three components that make up the HDI – health (life expectancy), education and income – the health dimension contributes the most to this positive result, as longevity in the country is relatively high. The education dimension, on the other hand, contributes the least due to shorter schooling duration and lower rates of tertiary enrolment (see also Section 4.1). The income component is moderate: the standard of living in Bosnia and Herzegovina is decent, but it is not yet on par with that of richer economies.

Up-to-date information on income inequality in Bosnia and Herzegovina is not readily available. Figures from 2015 suggest that 17.9 % of individuals were below the national poverty line (Agency for Statistics of BiH, 2023). For a country ranked in the very high human development category, such shares are significant because they point to a mismatch: although the country's human development outcomes are relatively strong, pockets of poverty persist, exposing parts of the population to material hardship and making them vulnerable to economic shocks.

Moreover, the last official Gini estimate dates back to 2011, when its value was 33, suggesting that inequality at that point in time was moderate (Table 1.1). Alternative indicators, however, show that disparities may be significant nowadays. For instance, the income ratio of the richest 20 % of households to that of the poorest 20 % (income quintile share ratio) has been estimated to be at around 20:1 – a gap far above the EU average of roughly 5:1 (World Bank, 2025). The division of income across the population is skewed in a similar way: the top quintile captures close to 40 % of total income while the bottom quintile receives less than 8 % (ibid.).

1.4 Recent developments

In 2025, Bosnia and Herzegovina experienced a series of institutional and legal developments that have shaped its political landscape. A key event was the court ruling on the President of Republika Srpska (RS), which sparked significant debate over the role of state institutions and the interpretation of constitutional authority. This has prompted discussions about the balance between entity-level governance and State-level legal frameworks. Meanwhile, the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina (FBiH or 'the Federation') made strides in social policy by increasing the minimum wage, reflecting efforts to address economic disparities and improve living standards. Similarly, the RS Government adopted the Employment Action Plan for 2025, encompassing support to the economy and employment of target groups. Republika Srpska has also implemented a new differentiated minimum wage system, replacing the universal minimum with a four-tier model based on education qualifications, with net minimums ranging from BAM 900 to 1 300 (approx. EUR 460–EUR 665).

On the international front, Bosnia and Herzegovina continues to engage with the European Union, maintaining its candidate status while facing challenges in meeting reform benchmarks. The EU has emphasised the importance of judicial independence, anti-corruption measures and economic restructuring as prerequisites for further integration (European Commission, 2025a). Additionally, regional and global actors have shown increased interest in supporting Bosnia and Herzegovina's stability and development, with initiatives aimed at fostering cooperation and dialogue. These efforts highlight the country's ongoing journey to strengthen democratic institutions and align with broader European standards.

In October 2025, Bosnia and Herzegovina formally adopted its Reform Agenda to implement the EU Growth Plan for the Western Balkans, marking a pivotal step toward aligning national priorities with the European Commission's strategic framework. The Reform Agenda's adoption signals renewed political commitment, yet its success will hinge on inclusive implementation, inter-institutional coordination and the integration of human capital development as a cross-cutting priority.

Bosnia and Herzegovina continues to face the compounded effects of political and economic crises that have disrupted governance and strained essential services. The country's decentralised political structure, rooted in the Dayton Peace Agreement, has made coordinated responses to challenges more difficult, especially amid rising tensions between state and entity institutions. These tensions have impacted the delivery of public services, particularly in health and education, where inefficiencies and underfunding persist despite reform efforts. Employment remains a major concern, with youth unemployment exceeding 30 % and emigration draining the country of skilled labour at the end of 2024 (European Commission, 2025a). Economic instability, driven by low investment and high levels of corruption perception among the population, has further weakened institutional capacity and public trust, with over 70 % of citizens expressing dissatisfaction with political leadership (Basuener, 2025).

Vulnerable populations, including internally displaced persons (IDPs), returnees and ethnic minorities, are disproportionately affected by these systemic challenges. Displacement from past conflicts

continues to shape social dynamics, with many communities still lacking adequate housing, infrastructure and access to services (Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre, 2019). Social protection systems are under strain, and reforms have been slow to materialise. The World Bank has supported initiatives to improve governance and service delivery, including digital transformation and workforce management in public administration. However, progress is uneven, and the country's path towards EU integration remains contingent on deeper structural reforms. Addressing these issues requires inclusive policies, stronger institutions and sustained international support to ensure resilience and equity across all sectors of society.

2. EDUCATION AND TRAINING: POLICIES AND DEVELOPMENTS

2.1 Structure and levels of education, including VET

This section provides a brief description of how the education system is organised across different levels, including pre-primary, primary, secondary (distinguishing between general and vocational tracks), tertiary and adult learning. It uses the UNESCO ISCED classification and is based on monitoring information collected through the Torino Process expert survey².

Figure 2.1 Structure of the education system: Bosnia and Herzegovina



Note: Education between the ages of 5 and 6 is only compulsory on a part-time basis in the Federation of BiH and the Brčko District, but it is implemented in Republika Srpska on the same basis, although it is not mandatory.

Source: European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice (2021).

Formal education

The formal education system of Bosnia and Herzegovina is shaped by the complex governance structure of the country. Education is highly decentralised and managed by 13 authorities: one at the entity level in the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina, 10 cantonal ministries, one in Republika Srpska and one in Brčko District. At state level, the Ministry of Civil Affairs (MoCA) performs a coordinating role and represents the country in international forums, including the European Union. Despite this fragmentation, the education system of Bosnia and Herzegovina is broadly aligned with ISCED 2011 and the Bologna Process, providing a pathway from early childhood education to doctoral studies (Figure 2.1).

Early childhood education and care (ISCED 0) is not compulsory, although most jurisdictions have introduced a mandatory preparatory programme in the year before primary school entry. Children usually participate at age five and a half or six, with a minimum of 150 instructional hours designed to foster emotional, social and cognitive readiness. These services are delivered by public and private kindergartens.

Primary education (ISCED 1) is compulsory from age six and extends over nine years in a single structure divided into three cycles of three years each. It is delivered almost exclusively by public institutions and free of charge, with a focus on fundamental competencies in language, mathematics, science, arts and civic education. Completion is certified and enables progression to secondary education.

Secondary education (ISCED 3) begins at around age 15 and lasts three or four years depending on the programme. Students may choose between general secondary schools (gymnasiums), vocational and technical schools or specialised institutions such as art and religious schools. Four-year general and vocational programmes culminate in a final or Matura examination and open access to higher education. Three-year vocational programmes are oriented towards direct entry into the labour market, though bridging options allow graduates to continue their studies. Admission is based on performance in primary school and, in some cases, entrance examinations.

² The full questionnaire can be found here: <https://bit.ly/418jfwC>. In this document, the survey may be referred to interchangeably as the 'monitoring survey', 'expert survey' or 'Torino Process monitoring survey'.

Post-secondary non-tertiary education (ISCED 4) is not systematically developed, but various specialist vocational courses and professional programmes are available, mainly through vocational schools and adult education centres. Recognition and portability of these qualifications remain uneven.

Tertiary education (ISCED 6–8) is delivered by universities and higher education institutions, both public and private. The system follows the Bologna three-cycle structure: Bachelor's degrees (three to four years, 180–240 ECTS), Master's degrees (one to two years, 60–120 ECTS) and doctoral studies (at least three years). Entry generally requires a four-year secondary qualification, and in some cases, an entrance examination. Bachelor's and Master's graduates may enter the labour market or pursue further study, while doctoral programmes are oriented towards research and academic careers.

Adult learning

Adult learning opportunities in Bosnia and Herzegovina outside formal tertiary education cover a wide spectrum, ranging from programmes that enable adults to complete school-level education to non-formal training that develops professional or personal competencies.

Post-secondary non-tertiary programmes (ISCED 4) are offered mainly through vocational schools and adult education centres. These pathways allow adults who have completed secondary education to acquire additional occupational qualifications without entering higher education. They often focus on practical training and prepare participants for specific trades or professions.

Adults who did not finish primary or secondary schooling can enrol in dedicated education programmes that provide qualifications equivalent to school-leaving certificates. These are typically organised as evening or part-time classes and are crucial for enhancing employability and access to further learning.

Professional development and training linked to employment are also available. Public Employment Services at entity and cantonal levels implement Active Labour Market Policies (ALMPs) in cooperation with employers. These include re-skilling and up-skilling courses, on-the-job training, internships and wage subsidies tied to training, targeted in particular at unemployed adults and vulnerable groups.

A wide variety of non-formal education is provided by adult education centres, NGOs, private training institutions and international organisations. These include courses in foreign languages, ICT, entrepreneurship and soft skills. At the same time, recognition of non-formal outcomes remains limited. A Handbook for the implementation of validation of non-formal and informal learning in Bosnia and Herzegovina was developed by the Working Group for the Validation of Non-Formal Education and Informal Learning / Recognition of Prior Learning (VNFIL/RPL-WG), as part of the EU-supported Recognition of Prior Learning project (EU4VET)³. This includes building institutional structures, methodology and potential accreditation systems, with pilot schemes planned.

Moreover, on 2 September 2025, in Sarajevo, DVV International – Office for Bosnia and Herzegovina and the Ministry of Civil Affairs of Bosnia and Herzegovina launched a joint initiative. As part of this effort, the Working Group for developing a new Strategic Platform for Adult Education within Lifelong Learning began its activities. This inter-institutional and cross-sectoral group is responsible for outlining strategic goals for advancing adult education in Bosnia and Herzegovina through a professional and inclusive approach, taking into account insights from the previous strategy (2014–2020). Priority topics include improving the institutional framework, strengthening cross-sectoral coordination, promoting adult education, ensuring programme quality, recognising prior learning and developing sustainable financing mechanisms (DVV 2025).

³ For more information about the Handbook see: <https://www.eu4vet.org/index.php/files/27/Project-documents-Projektndokumentn--/24/Handbook-for-the-implementation-of-validation-of-non-formal-and-informal-learning-in-BiH.pdf>.

2.2 Strategy and legal framework

Given Bosnia and Herzegovina's decentralised governance, education legislation is addressed at three levels: a) state-level (framework legislation); b) entity level (Republika Srpska and the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina); and c) cantonal level, including for Brčko District. Vocational education is addressed within general education.

General education

The legal framework for general education in Bosnia and Herzegovina is anchored in the Constitution and the Framework Law on Primary and Secondary Education (2003), which sets out fundamental principles such as equal access, non-discrimination and respect for cultural and linguistic diversity. This law applies to preschool, primary and secondary education, including adult learning, and establishes standards for school governance, teacher qualifications and recognition of certificates across the country. While the framework law provides overarching guidelines, detailed regulations on curricula, assessment and school management are enacted at the entity, cantonal and Brčko District levels, reflecting the country's highly decentralised governance structure.

The following strategic documents are currently in effect in Bosnia and Herzegovina (Eurydice 2024):

- Guidelines for improving online teaching and combined teaching for educational systems in Bosnia and Herzegovina in the context of quality (and) inclusive education (2022);
- Improvement of Quality and Relevance of Vocational Education and Training in Bosnia and Herzegovina in the Light of Riga Conclusions (for the period 2021–2030);
- Priorities in the integration of entrepreneurial learning and entrepreneurial key competencies in education systems in BiH (2021–2030);
- Baseline of the qualification framework in Bosnia and Herzegovina (2011);
- Principles and standards in adult education in Bosnia and Herzegovina (2014);
- Roadmap for the implementation of the EU Directive on regulated professions 2005/36EC and 2013/55EU;
- Priorities for the development of higher education in Bosnia and Herzegovina for the period 2016–2026;
- Policy Recommendations with a Roadmap for Improving Inclusive Education (2019).

Vocational education

More specifically for VET, the 2003 Framework Law on Primary and Secondary Education defines the principles, levels and structure of secondary education. The 2008 Framework Law on Secondary VET addresses: a) the role of company and union representatives and the demands of the economy; b) the autonomy vocational schools have to respond to local economic needs; c) the potential for schools to form partnerships whilst retaining their autonomous legal status; and d) the diversification of the training offered to new target groups (e.g. adults) and the potential for schools to generate income. The VET framework legislation has been passed or adapted into local legislation in Republika Srpska, seven cantons of the Federation and in the Brčko District (ETF, 2020a).

In 2021, the Ministry of Civil Affairs released a document titled 'Improvement of Quality and Relevance of Vocational Education and Training in Bosnia and Herzegovina in the Light of Riga Conclusions (for the period 2021–2030)' (MoCA & OeAD, 2021). This document, developed in collaboration with Austria's Agency for Education and Internationalisation (OeAD) and international experts, focuses on enhancing the competitiveness and attractiveness of vocational education and training in the country between 2021 and 2030. The plan encompasses short-term (2021–2023), medium-term (2024–2026) and long-term (2026–2030) priorities, along with assigned responsibilities for each objective.

2.3 Main actors and governance

National level

Bosnia and Herzegovina has a complex governance arrangement for education, comprising 14 institutions responsible for overseeing education developments (13 ministries and a state-level education agency), decentralised in two entities, Republika Srpska (RS) and the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina (FBiH), both of which have an education ministry. The Federation further comprises 10 cantons, each with an education ministry. Education affairs in a third administrative area – Brčko District – are overseen by a dedicated education department.

At the state level, the Ministry of Civil Affairs sets out the basic principles of how to coordinate education work, consolidates planning for the various authorities and defines the international strategy. The Ministry has no policy or legislative decision-making powers. It puts forward legislation and a state-wide strategy to the BiH Council of Ministers. A Conference of Education Ministers then provides a forum for exchanges on issues common to all education authorities. The Conference of Education Ministers is an important instrument of governance, although it meets irregularly.

Most of the education budget is used to pay staff salaries, with little funding available for technology, equipment and other resources. According to the OECD (2022), 'this disproportionately impacts VET institutions, which generally have higher costs in these areas than general education institutions. In fact, lack of equipment and materials, along with the lack of practical training, is considered the most significant constraint to VET in Bosnia and Herzegovina' (p. 146).

International level: donors

Bosnia and Herzegovina collaborates strongly with international partners on vocational education and training (VET) and employment reforms (see specific projects in annex). The EU Delegation and European Commission are actively supporting the alignment of VET policies with EU standards, contributing to broader education and employment reform efforts.

The International Labour Organization (ILO) plays a central role in modernising VET and reforming employment policies. Through EU-funded initiatives such as EU4Education and Employment, the ILO promotes employer involvement in developing occupational and qualification standards and provides technical expertise to enhance labour market institutions and promote decent work.

The OeAD's Regional Office in Sarajevo implements educational projects in close cooperation with the Ministry of Civil Affairs, the Ministries of Education of both entities and all cantons in Bosnia and Herzegovina, and the Agency for Pre-Primary, Primary and Secondary Education. The cooperation focuses primarily on the reform of vocational education and training, education management and quality management at schools and on improving cooperation between the business sector and vocational education and training.

The Strengthening the Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) System in Bosnia and Herzegovina project, funded by the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC) and implemented by GOPA Worldwide Consultants, seeks to improve the effectiveness, relevance and sustainability of vocational education by fostering efficient and evidence-based governance, stronger cooperation between supply and demand actors and closer alignment with labour market needs. Implemented in two phases – an inception phase (2023–2024) and a four-year implementation phase (2024–2028) – the initiative engages schools, the private sector and policymakers to reform curricula, build pedagogical and technical capacities and make TVET more attractive to youth and parents. Initially, interventions focus on tourism and catering, wood processing and metal processing – sectors with high growth potential – to demonstrate the project's approach, before expanding to other critical areas of the economy.

UNESCO and UNICEF, in partnership with the EU, OSCE and the Council of Europe, are spearheading long-term education sector reforms. They are leading the development of a 10-year Education Sector Action Plan focused on improving inclusiveness, quality and relevance across all

levels of education. Priority areas include early childhood education, inclusive education, entrepreneurship learning and lifelong learning.

GIZ (Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit) is a key contributor to education and employment policy development, with a strong emphasis on VET, digital transformation and the green economy. Its SEDEP project (2023–2026) aims to enhance employment opportunities through digital and green transformation. The initiative includes expanding dual VET to additional cantons, training in-company mentors and master trainers, developing strategic guidelines for company engagement, supporting legal reforms in Tuzla Canton and promoting the inclusion of women and disadvantaged groups. The project has already improved the employment situation for over 350 individuals and boosted competitiveness among Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises.

DVV International has been active in Bosnia and Herzegovina since 2000, working to strengthen adult education as a means of social and economic development. Its efforts include expanding opportunities for vulnerable populations, aligning vocational and adult education with labour market needs and fostering democratic participation. DVV supports teacher and trainer education, institutional capacity building, stakeholder development and legislative reform to establish sustainable, high-quality adult education systems. It also promotes public awareness and regional, European and international cooperation, especially in the context of EU accession.

2.4 Policies and developments

Overview

In recent years, Bosnia and Herzegovina has undertaken actions to modernise both general education and vocational education and training (VET). As presented above, a key initiative is the development of the ‘Improvement of Quality and Relevance of VET in Bosnia and Herzegovina in the Light of Riga Conclusions (2021–2030)’, which lays out a comprehensive roadmap for enhancing the attractiveness, competitiveness and alignment of VET with European standards. This strategy prioritises work-based learning, greater collaboration between educational institutions and employers and the integration of digital and green skills, while also addressing inclusiveness and transparency. Efforts are also underway to develop Bosnia and Herzegovina’s qualifications framework to better reference the European Qualifications Framework (EQF), while also engaging in donor-supported projects to strengthen quality assurance mechanisms, foster lifelong learning and improve teacher training.

Qualifications, validation and recognition

Bosnia and Herzegovina’s approach to qualifications, validation and recognition is governed by the Baseline Qualifications Framework, adopted by the Council of Ministers in March 2011. Although initial progress has been made with the Baseline and the Action Plan 2014–2020, these have now become outdated, and further work is urgently needed to be able to reference them to the EQF. As the development of the qualifications framework in Bosnia and Herzegovina is one of the main priority actions highlighted in the Progress Report of 2023, a working group has been established with representatives from all administrative units, including cantons, Brčko District, Republika Srpska, the Ministry of Education of the Federation and the Ministry of Civil Affairs, to develop a concept for the Qualifications Framework in Bosnia and Herzegovina (ETF, 2025a). This concept includes specifications on the quality assurance of qualifications, a register, validation of non-formal and informal learning, links to the EQF and the Qualifications Framework for the European Higher Education Area (QFEHEA) and implementation arrangements involving all administrative units and existing agencies. The EU Technical Assistance for VET education in Bosnia and Herzegovina supports the working group. The concept aims to ensure that qualifications are comparable, based on learning outcomes and common denominators, quality-assured and registered in a common register. It also includes the development and implementation of validation for non-formal and informal learning, recognition of validation results and the establishment of implementation mechanisms. The qualifications framework will be referenced to the EQF and self-certified to the Qualifications

Framework for Higher Education. Bosnia and Herzegovina actively participates in the EQF, and diplomas and certificates will state the EQF levels, with the common register linked to the EQF.

Work-based learning

Work-based learning (WBL) arrangements in Bosnia and Herzegovina take several forms. One common approach involves alternate learning at both schools and businesses. This entails students spending one to three days per week in practical training at companies throughout the school year, with the schools' and companies' rights and obligations set out in a contract. Another form of WBL occurs within school premises, where students use workshops, laboratories, kitchens or virtual companies that mimic real-life situations to develop practical skills. Additionally, WBL takes place during summer and winter holidays, with students spending a specified period at a company for intensive training. According to the recent ETF Torino Process report on Bosnia and Herzegovina (ETF, 2024), WBL is a priority for the country, but its implementation has varied across regions. For example, in the Gorazde canton, formal agreements between schools and companies ensure that education aligns with labour market needs. Noteworthy developments include the increase in practical training hours in IVET subjects and the introduction of experimental curricula, which has stepped up practical work hours in Republika Srpska. Efforts are being directed towards improving the practical aspects of VET education and fostering collaboration with industry partners, evidenced by enhanced coordination with chambers of commerce and protected crafts and employer associations.

Enhancing work-based learning is important, and it features in the Improvement of Quality and Relevance of VET in Bosnia and Herzegovina in the Light of Riga Conclusions (for the period 2021–2030) document. It states that the main priorities for work-based learning rely on promoting its attractiveness for both companies and students. Recognising the challenge of aligning educational content with job requirements emphasises using the workplace as a conducive learning environment. Close collaboration between schools and companies is essential, and there is a need for strong partner relationships to facilitate effective work-based learning. Involving the business sector, including employers and employer associations, policymaking is crucial in VET for increasing understanding and implementing work-based learning formats. Additionally, tripartite advisory committees would ensure well-structured and efficient dialogue between the education and employment sectors. Pre-requisites and support mechanisms, such as mentorship and insurance, were identified as necessary to ensure the quality and relevance of work-based learning. Coordinating work between local communities, educational institutions and businesses is also highlighted for identifying labour market needs and implementing policies that respond swiftly to economic requirements. The document also refers to the importance of cost-sharing arrangements, where companies bear responsibility for supervising and training students during practical training, as a sign of the shared commitment to creating a qualified workforce to underpin economic growth.

Moreover, Bosnia and Herzegovina is now actively engaged with the European Alliance for Apprenticeships (EAfA). The involvement began with the submission of the National Commitment to join the EAfA, which was followed by participation in various seminars and events organised by the European Commission and the European Training Foundation. The collaboration aims to strengthen the apprenticeship system in Bosnia and Herzegovina by aligning it with European standards and best practices, thereby improving the country's overall VET landscape.

Career guidance

Career guidance in BiH is shaped by a highly decentralised legislative framework, with over 60 laws across entities, cantons and districts (ETF, 2022). This fragmentation complicates harmonisation and coordination, resulting in inconsistent approaches to career guidance. While some cantons (e.g. Bosnia-Podrinje, Central Bosnia, Zenica-Doboj) have comprehensive legal provisions, others leave career guidance largely to schools, whose capacity and commitment vary widely.

Career guidance is most visible at the secondary education level, particularly in six cantons where vocational and general education are aligned with labour market preparation. However, the Federation of BiH lacks a systemic approach, and schools often rely on their own professional teams.

Cooperation with public employment services (PES) is essential but only legally defined in three cantons (Posavina, Herzegovina-Neretva and Canton 10).

PES are the most consistent providers of career development support across BiH. Their services include individual counselling for career planning and training, guidance for students in final grades and support for the unemployed and job changers, as well as training and retraining. PES reforms, supported by the Youth Employment Project (YEP), have standardised services and introduced school-based career information via professional associates, with PES counsellors providing support.

BiH's commitment to international frameworks, such as the European Social Charter, ILO Convention 142 and Agenda 2030, reinforces career guidance as a tool for inclusion and active labour market policy. Engagement with the European Alliance for Apprenticeships (EAfA) aims to align BiH's apprenticeship systems with EU standards.

Quality assurance

Although a legal framework for data collection and systematisation exists, the education system presently lacks robust, systematic mechanisms for measuring and monitoring the quality of educational inputs, outputs and outcomes (ETF, 2025b). This shortcoming impedes the formulation of evidence-based policies. A critical requirement is the harmonisation of legislation at all governance levels with the overarching framework laws on education. The absence of unified standards for some education levels (Quality Standards for Preschool Education have been developed by APOSO and UNICEF in recent years) and teacher training, coupled with the lack of a consistent approach to the application of the common-core curriculum based on learning outcomes, further exacerbates the challenges related to quality within the education system. To address these issues, it is imperative to enhance teacher training and ensure uniform compliance with curricular requirements. In recent years, Bosnia and Herzegovina has initiated the establishment of a quality assurance system for vocational education and training, aligned with the European Quality Assurance in VET (EQAVET) framework. Notably, a VET Quality Assurance Manual has been developed, encompassing standards for quality assurance, institutional self-evaluation and external evaluation procedures, systemic evaluation, training standards for external evaluators, and guidelines pertaining to the European Credit System for Vocational Education and Training (ECVET). Despite these advancements, further efforts are required to ensure systematic implementation and full realisation of this quality assurance framework. The document entitled 'Improvement of Quality and Relevance of VET in Bosnia and Herzegovina in the Light of Riga Conclusions (for the period 2021–2030)' underscores the importance of securing a legal mandate for a state-wide quality assurance framework in VET. Additionally, professional development initiatives are essential to support the effective implementation of quality assurance measures in vocational education and training.

In the area of quality assurance in higher education in Bosnia and Herzegovina, a significant development is that the Agency for Development of Higher Education and Quality Assurance has submitted a request for external evaluation. This step aims to gain membership in the European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA) and to be listed on the European Quality Assurance Register for Higher Education (EQAR).

Centres of excellence

Bosnia and Herzegovina is involved in the EU's Centres of Vocational Excellence (CoVEs) through initiatives such as the Danube Region Platform and participates in the ETF Network of Excellence.

Specific projects, such as the previously mentioned Strengthening TVET in Bosnia and Herzegovina, funded by the Embassy of Switzerland in Bosnia and Herzegovina, have focused on modernising curricula and expanding practical training in state-run vocational schools through close collaboration with businesses to ensure programmes meet labour market needs.

Moreover, the Regional Challenge Fund (RCF) is modernising vocational education and training in Bosnia and Herzegovina by promoting cooperative training models that link schools with businesses, upgrading infrastructure and equipment and building the capacity of educators and in-company

trainers. It supports inclusive and green development, ensuring training is aligned with labour market needs and sustainability goals. Funded by German and Swiss development agencies and implemented by KfW in partnership with the Western Balkans 6 Chamber Investment Forum, RCF fosters regional cooperation and enhances the employability of young people through practical, industry-relevant education.

Digital education and skills

The state-level working document titled ‘Priorities in integrating entrepreneurial and digital competence into education systems in Bosnia and Herzegovina 2019–2030’ (hereafter ‘Priorities 2019–2030’) aims to bring digital skills and competences (DSC) in line with the European Digital Competence Framework (DigComp) with a short-term goal of integrating DSC into International Standard Classification of Education (ISCED) levels 1, 2 and 3. The Priorities 2019–2030 should be a basis for the development of policy and reference documents at the different governance levels (ETF, 2020b).

The results of CILS 2023 (International Computer and Information Literacy Study) in Bosnia and Herzegovina highlight areas for improvement in digital literacy education, especially in translating digital device usage into meaningful skills and in addressing equity gaps. While the research was conducted without the participation of Republika Srpska and the West Herzegovina Canton, the results demonstrate the following (APOS0, 2024):

- students in Bosnia and Herzegovina demonstrate only basic Computer and Information Literacy (CIL) skills, with achievement levels below the ICILS 2023 average;
- high use of IT devices has not translated into the development of effective digital information skills, either as users or consumers;
- students lack sufficient skills for independent use of digital information, particularly in assessing credibility, relevance and usefulness;
- online learning during the COVID-19 pandemic, despite increased use of digital technologies, did not significantly improve students’ information literacy skills;
- female students outperform male students in CIL;
- there is a substantial achievement gap among students, strongly linked to socio-economic differences, especially between the highest and lowest performing groups;
- students from higher socio-economic backgrounds achieve significantly better CIL results than those from lower socio-economic groups; reliable internet access, multiple computers at home and continuous computer availability are key factors in higher achievement.

When it comes to integrating DSC in VET curricula, four modules were formulated under the EU VET II programme (2000–2014). The initial VET (IVET) system in Bosnia and Herzegovina, in which a modular approach has been implemented to some extent, includes four years of education in technical schools (ISCED 3A), with vertical transition to the next educational level, and three years of education in vocational schools (ISCED 3C), with no direct vertical transition to the next level. Digital competence is mainly acquired through traditional information and communication technology (ICT) courses. In IVET, informatics/computer science is a general subject with an allocation of two hours per week, usually in the first grade (Priorities 2019–2030). DSC is also included in other subjects if the necessary conditions for its development are in place.

Moreover, the current EU-funded EU4Education project, implemented by the ILO, is developing modular training for VET teachers (end of 2025–mid 2026), based on the DigComp framework.

Green transition

Bosnia and Herzegovina is advancing its green transition through strategic initiatives under the EU Green Agenda for the Western Balkans. The Federation of BiH, with the UNDP, has launched a five-year programme targeting decarbonisation, circular economy, air quality and biodiversity, offering

technical and financial support to over 100 companies – including women-led enterprises – for compliance with EU carbon regulations like CBAM (Spasić, 2024). The UNDP Green Transition Partnership Platform encourages cross-sector collaboration and capacity-building (UNDP, 2024), while the EBRD and EU's SME Go Green programme provides EUR 120 million (expanding to EUR 400 million) to help SMEs adopt green technologies, especially in agribusiness and climate resilience (WBIF, 2023). These measures support alignment with EU climate goals and aim for net-zero emissions by 2050.

In parallel, Bosnia and Herzegovina is embedding green skills and sustainability into its education and vocational training systems. The SEDEP project (GIZ, 2024), led by GIZ and co-funded by Germany and Switzerland, is a key initiative that integrates green and digital competencies into VET curricula, trains in-company mentors and supports dual-organised VET across several cantons. It also strengthens collaboration between schools, chambers of commerce and SMEs to align training with emerging green sector demands. Environmental awareness is being promoted through initiatives like 'Schools as Green Zones' from Save the Children (EKOPAK, 2022), which have engaged thousands of students and educators in Sarajevo Canton with hands-on workshops and sustainable school infrastructure. Additionally, the UNDP-Czech partnership (UN, n.d.) introduced composting education at universities, equipping students with skills in biowaste management and sustainable agriculture. These efforts collectively foster a culture of sustainability and prepare learners for the green economy.

Adult learning

The Framework Law on Primary and Secondary Education in BiH defines adult education as organised learning for professional or personal growth, including training, retraining and lifelong learning activities. Adult education is governed by entity, cantonal and Brčko District laws, following national principles. The Framework Law on Vocational Education allows schools to provide adult training with approval from education authorities; fees are set by the school board and approved by the ministry.

Entity/District laws

- Federation of BiH: adult education is regulated at the cantonal level under a federation framework, with quality assurance detailed by Eurydice (Eurydice, 2025).
- Republika Srpska: adopted a new Adult Education Law in late 2021, updating regulations on provider selection, documentation, mentor qualifications and employer registers. (United Nations Economic Commission for Europe, n.d.).
- Brčko District: Adult Education Law adopted in October 2018 (DVV International – Bosnia and Herzegovina, 2018).

Adult learning is mainly provided through vocational schools and accredited private centres listed in the APOO database. The ISKOOM platform supports programme registration and monitoring, increasing transparency. Public Employment Services offer active labour market measures like on-the-job training and employment subsidies. Dual and work-based learning models are expanding to adults. Recognition of prior learning is being developed via the EU4VET project to formalise informal skills within the Qualifications Framework.

However, it is important to highlight that, according to the data available in the ETF KIESE Database (see last chapter), the indicator that measures participation in training/lifelong learning in the previous four weeks (% aged 25–64) shows very limited and worsening participation of adults in education and training (1.6 % in 2024).

3. LABOUR MARKET AND EMPLOYMENT: POLICIES AND DEVELOPMENTS

3.1 Strategy and legal framework

Bosnia and Herzegovina has prioritised the alignment of employment policies with labour market evolution across its various levels of governance. Being able to adopt comprehensive employment strategies, implement the Youth Guarantee and improve the capacity of public employment services are key areas of focus for the country. The governance of employment policy involves multiple levels of responsibility, with primary policy competence resting with the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina, Republika Srpska and Brčko District. The Ministry of Civil Affairs provides overall coordination at the state level. Public institutions at various levels support employment developments, reflecting the complex governance structure from state to entity down to local levels.

The preparation of an integrated Youth Guarantee implementation plan has progressed in 2025, building on the plans developed by the employment authorities and other actors at the level of the three entities.

The Republika Srpska Employment Strategy 2021–2027 sets four goals: matching labour supply and demand, improving workforce mobility and accessibility, enhancing the labour market and social dialogue, and promoting social inclusion. Each is addressed through specific measures and annual plans (Sarajevo Times, 2024).

The Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina's Employment Strategy (2023–2030) focuses on skill alignment, formal job creation, integrating disadvantaged groups and strengthening governance. Notable measures include the Youth Guarantee and initiatives supporting the care economy, particularly for women (Federal Ministry of Labour and Social Policy, 2023).

Brčko District does not have a formal employment strategy, instead relying on work plans from its Employment Service that cover activities such as training, support for vulnerable groups and self-employment promotion over multi-year periods.

3.2 Main actors and governance

National level

At State level, the Ministry of Civil Affairs of Bosnia and Herzegovina holds a coordination mandate for employment and labour market policies across the country. While it does not have direct implementation authority, it ensures alignment with international obligations (e.g. EU integration, ILO conventions) and facilitates cooperation among entities and Brčko District.

In the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina, the Ministry of Labour and Social Policy is responsible for drafting and implementing employment legislation, active labour market measures and social dialogue within the Federation. It also oversees the Federation Employment Service and coordinates with cantonal employment offices.

In Republika Srpska, the Ministry of Labour, War Veterans and Disabled Persons' Protection manages employment policy, labour legislation and social protection in RS. It supervises the RS Employment Service and implements programmes for vulnerable groups, including war veterans and persons with disabilities.

In Brčko District, the Employment Service of Brčko District handles employment services and active labour market measures at the district level, operating under the district's autonomous governance framework.

International level: donors

Some of the main donors and projects from international organisations in Bosnia and Herzegovina are detailed below.

The aforementioned EU-funded EU4Employment project (2025–2029) is being implemented with the ILO and local partners, and it aims to launch 20 active-labour-market programmes, upskill/reskill 1 800 people and enable at least 600 direct job placements, with a focus on green/digital roles and vulnerable groups (European External Action Service, 2025). Moreover, the EU IPA III (2025–2027 window) is in the pipeline and it aims to include actions on competitiveness, human capital and green/digital transitions in BiH (European Commission, 2025b).

The Western Balkans SME Digitalisation Programme (2025), implemented by the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development, and the EU Western Balkans Investment Framework (WBIF), is investing EUR 377 million in regional facilities (loans + EU grants/TA) to digitalise/automate SMEs in the region. It is expected to assist 750 companies region-wide, with particular attention paid to women-led businesses, employment gains via productivity and skills upgrades (Reuters, 2025).

The World Bank is implementing the Second Employment Support Project for Bosnia and Herzegovina with the objective of increasing formal private sector employment among targeted groups of registered jobseekers. The project has two components. The first component, Support for Employment Promotion, aims to support jobseekers' return to the labour market, especially disadvantaged individuals, in a post-pandemic context. The second component, Support for Management Systems, Monitoring and Communications, aims to improve the capacity and support the efficiency improvements of Public Employment Services (PES) and make broader use of Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E) data for policy design (World Bank, 2025).

The EU for Private Sector Development (EU4PSD) project aims to drive competitive and sustainable growth in Bosnia and Herzegovina by empowering the private sector and building a stronger business environment. Co-financed by the European Union and Germany's Federal Ministry for Economic Co-operation and Development, this three-year project (2025–2027) is delivered by the OECD in partnership with GIZ. Its overarching aim is to accelerate economic reform and resilience, while advancing Bosnia and Herzegovina's path toward EU integration (OECD, n.d.).

3.3 Policies and developments

Overview

In 2025, the Growth Plan for the Western Balkans – a EUR 6 billion EU initiative to accelerate regional convergence – remains only partially implemented in Bosnia and Herzegovina, where political delays have slowed progress. While the country's Economic Reform Programme 2025–2027 is broadly aligned with the plan's priorities (competitiveness, green and digital transition and human capital development), Bosnia and Herzegovina was the last country in the region to submit its final Reform Agenda, a prerequisite for accessing funds. As a result, the EU imposed a 10 % cut to BiH's allocation (reducing potential support from roughly EUR 1.085 billion to EUR 976.6 million). In December 2025, the European Commission approved Bosnia and Herzegovina's Reform Agenda. The plan prioritises reforms to speed up the green and digital transitions, encourage private-sector growth, retain talent and uphold rights and the rule of law. Bosnia and Herzegovina must now promptly sign and ratify the Facility and Loan Agreements. Funding, including pre-financing, will begin once these agreements take effect and all conditions are met.

Youth Guarantee

The EU Youth Guarantee was launched in 2013 and reinforced in 2020 with a renewed emphasis on tackling youth joblessness and integrated policy design. It aims to provide all young people under the age of 30 who are neither in employment nor in education or training (NEET) with a good quality offer of employment, continued education, a traineeship or an apprenticeship within four months of either

leaving formal education or becoming unemployed. According to BHAS data, the NEET rate for 15–29-year-olds in BiH decreased from 23.5 % in 2022 to 20.1 % in 2024 (see table 4.2). However, it is still notably above the level in the EU for the same period, standing at 11.7 %. Many NEETs are low-skilled and need support in developing the skills needed on the labour market.

The Youth Guarantee, including its implementation plan and associated action plan, was adopted in Republika Srpska and Brčko District at the end of 2023, while the Federation of BiH adopted its plan in 2025.

The Youth Guarantee will be implemented in each area by the local public employment services (PES). According to a recent analysis by the ETF (2024), the PES in Republika Srpska does not offer training programmes to its clients, while training programmes in the Federation of BiH and Brčko District have limited reach and capacity. The WBL apprenticeships are not yet well developed and will need to be introduced on a more substantial basis to meet the requirements of the Youth Guarantee. According to a recent review developed by the European Training Foundation (2024, p. 4), training will be provided by learning providers, including VET schools, universities and private for-profit and not-for-profit providers. However, VET schools have limited interest in providing work-based learning in CVET programmes as they are unable to retain the income from such additional effort for their own account. Currently, there are over 600 private entrepreneurs offering educational services, with an average of two employees each, with the capacity to provide training services to an estimated 60 000 learners annually. Managing the additional 95 000 NEETs who are potentially eligible for training under the Youth Guarantee would require a substantial expansion in the capacity of learning providers. It is estimated that the capacity of the private training sector would need to increase by about 15 % each year to cope with the requirements of the Youth Guarantee, at least in the initial years.

3.4 Active labour market policies

Active Labour Market policies (ALMPs) in Bosnia and Herzegovina are primarily implemented by entity-level Public Employment Services and supported by international donors. The main programmes include vocational training, wage subsidies, entrepreneurship support and the Youth Guarantee initiative. Training and requalification programmes aim to address skills mismatches and are often linked to local labour market needs.

According to the data provided by the Labour and Employment Agency of Bosnia and Herzegovina, the total number of participants in labour market services in BiH showed significant fluctuations between 2019 and 2024, but trended upwards, with an increase in the number of participants from 146 036 in 2019 to 236 940 in 2024. This pattern indicates a volatile engagement with labour market services, likely reflecting broader economic or policy changes during this period, as well as limited resources, including in terms of PES staffing. Aggregate data covering all entities for specific groups such as males, females and those under 29 are missing, limiting further disaggregation of these trends.

In 2024, a total of 16 593 individuals participated in labour market measures across BiH. Of these, 1 442 were enrolled in training programmes, 11 631 benefited from employment incentives and 3 520 received start-up incentives. Gender and age-disaggregated data show that women and youth are priority groups. For example, in 2024, women made up over 55 % of participants in employment incentive schemes and 44 % in start-up programmes. Young people aged under 29 represented 49 % of employment incentive beneficiaries and 28 % of start-up recipients.

Public Employment Services in BiH continue to face significant capacity challenges due to fragmented governance and resource constraints. PES operate at entity and cantonal levels, coordinated by the Labour and Employment Agency at the state level. Spending on ALMPs remains low, with total expenditure on labour market measures in 2024 amounting to just 0.04 % of GDP, compared to 0.13 % in 2023.

4. KEY INDICATORS: EDUCATION, SKILLS, EMPLOYMENT

4.1 Headline indicators

Education and VET

Monitoring a complex education and training system typically starts with three straightforward questions: who takes part, what do they achieve and what supports the process?

The first question explores the extent to which learners engage in education or training. It is addressed by indicators grouped under Participation and access in Table 4.1: net enrolment rates at lower and upper secondary levels, the share of students in upper secondary VET, the gross enrolment ratio in tertiary education and adult participation rates in lifelong learning. The second question – what learners achieve – examines key education outcomes, such as learner progression and the skills or qualifications they obtain. These are reflected in the indicators under Attainment, completion and outcomes: the share of adults with tertiary qualifications, the rate of early leavers from education and training and the percentage of 15-year-olds underachieving in mathematics. The third question considers the financial, physical and informational resources that sustain the education process, reflected by the indicators under Resources and data: public expenditure on education as a share of GDP, the adequacy of infrastructure and the availability of internationally comparable data.

Table 4.1 Headline indicators: education and VET (Bosnia and Herzegovina, EU average) (2022–2024)

Participation and access	2022	2023	2024	EU (1)	Source
Total net enrolment rate (lower secondary)	99.5	98.3	M.D.	98.1	UIS UNESCO
Total net enrolment rate (upper secondary)	77.1	77.2	M.D.	93.6	UIS UNESCO
Students in VET as a % of total upper secondary students	79.0	79.5	M.D.	48.8	UIS UNESCO
Gross enrolment ratio (tertiary)	45.6	45.5	M.D.	79.7	UIS UNESCO
Participation in training/lifelong learning in the previous four weeks (% aged 25–64)	1.8	1.8	1.6	13.3	LFS
Attainment, completion and outcomes	2022	2023	2024	EU (1)	Source
Educational attainment of total population: % with ISCED 5–8	13.0	13.3	13.7	30.2	LFS
Early leavers from education and training (% aged 18–24)	3.6	4.2	3.8	9.3	LFS
Underachievers in maths (% aged 15)	M.D.	N/A	N/A	31.1	PISA OECD
Resources and data	2022	2023	2024	EU (1)	Source
Public expenditure on education (as % of GDP)	3.0	M.D.	M.D.	4.7	UIS UNESCO
Inadequate or poor-quality physical infrastructure (2)	M.D.	N/A	N/A	27.9	PISA OECD
Availability of internationally comparable data on education	N/A	47.4	33.3	N/A	TRP (3)

Notes: 1. EU average, latest available year. PISA data: OECD average. 2. Percentage of students in schools whose headteacher reported that the school's capacity to provide instruction is hindered at least to some extent by inadequate or poor-quality physical infrastructure. 3. ETF Torino Process (TRP).
Source: ETF KIESE database.

In Bosnia and Herzegovina, participation is nearly universal at the initial stages of education, though continuation into higher levels is weaker. Net enrolment in lower secondary education was almost universal in 2022 and 2023, at 99.5 % and 98.3 % respectively, which is broadly in line with the EU average (Table 4.1). However, participation drops at upper secondary level, where net enrolment was at 77.2 % in 2023.

Among those who do enrol, vocational programmes dominate: close to four in five upper secondary students were enrolled in VET in 2022 and 2023, compared with less than half in the EU. At tertiary level, participation is considerably more limited: the gross enrolment ratio was about 45.5 % in both 2022 and 2023, far below the EU average of 79.7 % and showing no signs of improvement. Adult participation in organised learning is also extremely low. Only 1.8 % of adults aged 25–64 reported taking part in training in the previous four weeks in both 2022 and 2023, and the rate fell slightly to 1.6 % in 2024, a level more than eight times lower than the EU average.

These figures are also reflected in the levels of educational attainment of the population. The share of those with tertiary education (ISCED 5–8) increased only slightly in the reference period, from 13.0 % in 2022 to 13.7 % in 2024, about a third of the share in EU countries on average. On the positive side, most young people stay in education and training until they finish at least upper secondary education. The rate of early leaving among young people of working age is low in comparison to international standards (3.8 % in 2024 for the age group 18–24), well below the EU average of 9.3 %. Information on student achievement is more limited, as Bosnia and Herzegovina has not participated in the OECD’s Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA). However, the country has taken part in the TIMSS assessment at both the 4th and 8th grade levels, and its results have been consistently below the international average. Across all cycles, student performance has remained below the TIMSS midpoint of 500, and very few pupils have reached the benchmark for high proficiency (von Davier et al., 2024).

Public resources devoted to education remain modest. In 2022, public expenditure on education was 3.0 % of GDP, which is well below the EU average. The absence of information on the quality of school infrastructure makes it difficult to gauge how spending on education translates into material conditions for teaching and learning. Overall, the availability of internationally comparable data on education and training in Bosnia and Herzegovina has weakened, falling from 47.4 % of indicators foreseen in the ETF Torino Process monitoring in 2023 to 33.3 % in 2024 (Table 4.1).

Employment and demand for skills

The set of labour market indicators follows the same question-and-answer logic applied to education and training, but from the perspective of employment. The indicators are organised into two complementary groups. The first group, Employment and labour-market outcomes (Table 4.2), addresses how effectively the labour market absorbs people. It consists of the overall employment rate (aged 15+), youth employment rate (aged 15–24), employment rate of recent graduates (aged 20–34, ISCED 3–8), unemployment rate of the overall population (aged 15+), youth unemployment rate (aged 15–24) and the NEET rate (aged 15–29). The second group, Demand for skills (Table 4.2), looks at the types of jobs and skills that the economy generates. It consists of employment by broad economic sector (agriculture, industry, services), the incidence of vulnerable employment and educational mismatch.

Table 4.2 Headline indicators: employment (Bosnia and Herzegovina, EU average) (2022–2024)

Employment and labour market outcomes	2022	2023	2024	EU (1)	Source
Employment rate (% aged 15+ or similar age group)	40.2	41.5	42.9	54.7	LFS (1)
Employment rate (% aged 15–24 or similar age group)	18.3	17.5	16.5	35.0	LFS
Employment rate of recent graduates aged 20–34 (ISCED 3–8)	55.6	60.4	63.5	82.4	LFS
Unemployment rate (% aged 15+ or similar age group)	15.4	13.2	12.6	5.9	LFS (2)
Unemployment rate (% aged 15–24 or similar age group)	35.1	30.1	30.2	14.9	LFS
NEET rate (% aged 15–29 or similar age group)	23.5	22.2	20.1	11.0	LFS
Demand for Skills	2022	2023	2024	EU (1)	Source
Employment by broad economic sectors (%): agriculture	7.3	7.6	7.7	3.3	LFS
Employment by broad economic sectors (%): industry	34.6	34.3	33.7	24.1	LFS

Employment by broad economic sectors (%): services	58.2	58.1	58.7	72.1	LFS
Incidence of vulnerable employment (%)	8.7	8.9	9.2	10.0	LFS
Employment by 'educational mismatch': % matched	68.8	68.1	M.D.	M.D.	ILOSTAT

Notes: 1. Data refers to 2019. 2. Data refers to 2019, age group 15–59. 3. Data refers to 2019, age group 16–24. 4. Data refers to 2019, age group 15–24.

Source: ETF KIESE database.

In Bosnia and Herzegovina, the headline indicators on employment shown in Table 4.2 have improved gradually since 2022, though they remain weaker than in many EU countries. The overall employment rate for the population aged 15 and above rose from 40.2 % in 2022 to 42.9 % in 2024, but it still remains considerably lower than the EU average. The situation is more difficult for young people, whose employment rate fell from 18.3 % to 16.5 % over the same period. In contrast, recent graduates aged 20–34 have been integrating more successfully into the labour market. Their employment rate increased from 55.6 % in 2022 to 63.5 % in 2024, though this still falls short of the EU average.

Unemployment has eased overall, from 15.4 % in 2022 to 12.6 % in 2024 among the adult population. For youth, unemployment stabilised at around 30 % in 2023 and 2024, which is about twice as high as the EU average. A more positive development is the decline in the proportion of young people not in employment, education or training, which fell from 23.5 % in 2022 to 20.1 % in 2024. Although positive, this is still higher than the EU average.

Compared to the EU, employment in Bosnia and Herzegovina is more concentrated in industry and agriculture and less in services. In 2024, 33.7 % of workers were employed in industry and 7.7 % in agriculture, while services accounted for 58.7 % (Table 4.2). This profile suggests that there is relatively strong demand for technical and vocational skills in industrial and agricultural sectors, while the service economy is less developed than in most EU countries. At the same time, the incidence of vulnerable employment has edged upwards, from 8.7 % in 2022 to 9.2 % in 2024, which is close to, but still slightly below, the EU average. Data on educational mismatch indicate that roughly two-thirds of employed persons were in positions matching their qualifications in 2022 and 2023 (information for 2024 is not available).

4.2 System performance indicators

As noted in the introduction to this paper, 'performance' in the context of ETF monitoring refers to the extent to which VET systems fulfil their commitments to learners and stakeholders in support of lifelong learning. These commitments typically cover three key areas: ensuring broad and equitable access to educational and training opportunities; delivering high-quality, relevant education; and maintaining effective and efficient organisation and management of the education system, including adequate resourcing.

To measure performance systematically, the ETF uses System Performance Indices (SPIs), which summarise the extent to which education and training systems fulfil each of their commitments. Each SPI is presented on a scale from 0 to 100, with higher scores indicating stronger performance.

Both the headline indicators in Section 4.1 and the SPIs presented in this section are guided by the same core questions: Who takes part? What do they achieve? How do education and training systems support them? The main difference between these two sets of data lies in how these questions are answered. Headline indicators answer the questions with single, stand-alone measures drawn directly from international data sources. The SPIs, on the other hand, are evaluative, composite measures. They are designed explicitly to assess how well VET systems fulfil broader policy commitments that cannot be adequately captured through individual statistics.

Access and participation

This section presents system performance in VET and adult learning against two specific policy outcomes: support for equitable access and participation for young people and adults, and support for young people in initial VET (IVET) to successfully complete their programmes.

The scope of SPIs tracking access differs according to the target group of learners. For youth, the SPI assesses access specifically to IVET, while for adults it captures access to continuing VET (CVET) and other adult learning opportunities, such as those provided through active labour market policies (ALMPs). A separate SPI measures how effectively young learners in IVET are supported in progressing through their programmes and reaching graduation.

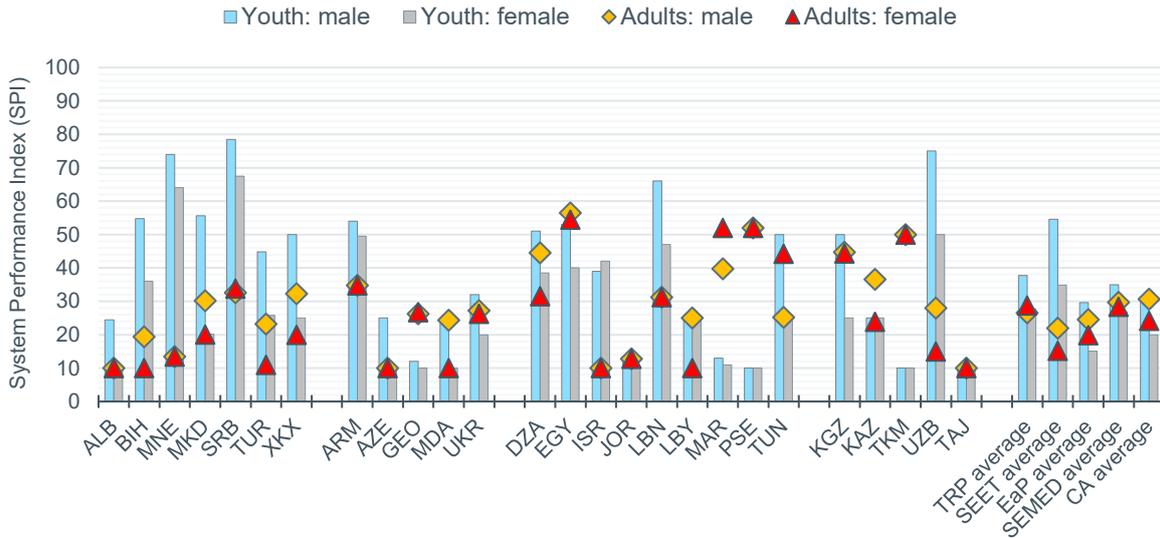
In both cases, performance depends on the policies and measures the country is implementing. They provide the opportunities, incentives and guidance needed to encourage participation and successful completion. The SPI results therefore reflect how effectively these policies deliver on their intended objectives.

Access by age and gender

VET in Bosnia and Herzegovina is open to all in principle, yet access is constrained by financial, geographic, institutional and cultural barriers. Students have the right to enrol in initial VET upon completing primary education, and enrolment is high on average, with 85.5 % of boys and 73.7 % of girls in upper secondary enrolled in VET (KIESE SPI Indicator 4). However, disparities persist due to the uneven distribution of schools, long travel distances in rural areas, hidden costs and negative social perceptions. As a result, system performance in support of access to IVET is only average (SPI of 55, Figure 4.1), in line with the SEET regional results. This reflects the fact that ‘access’ is not only about overall enrolment, but also about equity across gender, geography and socio-economic groups.

According to the monitoring survey, in 2024/2025, 57.2 % of students attended technical schools, 19.7 % gymnasiums and 19.6 % vocational schools. Total VET enrolment amounted to 21 155, of whom 6 226 were girls. Social perceptions influence these choices: three-year programmes are often regarded as a second-choice option compared to gymnasiums, while technician-level programmes remain comparatively attractive. Access to initial VET is also marked by gender disparities (SPI of 36 for girls versus 55 for boys). Traditional gender roles continue to steer girls and boys not only towards different secondary pathways (general and VET), but also into different fields within VET. Girls are concentrated in nursing, tailoring, beauty services and economics, while boys dominate in engineering, transportation, construction and mechanics. Cultural expectations, particularly in rural areas, reinforce these patterns, discouraging girls from non-traditional sectors.

Figure 4.1 Access to learning opportunities by country, age and gender of learners – system performance index, ETF partner countries and international average (2025)



Note: Theoretical index range: min/low performance=0, max/high performance=100⁴.
 Source: ETF KIESE and Torino Process databases.

⁴ The Torino Process makes a distinction between theoretical (full) index range and index range used for reporting purposes. For reporting purposes, rare instances of extreme values on the low end (SPI < 10) and on the high end (SPI > 90) of the index

Access to continuing vocational education and training faces a different set of challenges. Provision by public schools and registered adult providers is inconsistent across entities and cantons, and participation is low – around 4.2 % in 2024 (KIESE SPI Indicator 17) – largely because adults are required to pay fees. System performance is correspondingly low (SPI of 19 for men and 10 for women), below the averages for the ETF monitoring sample (27 and 29). Non-formal opportunities are expanding, particularly through private providers and donor projects, and new programmes address emerging labour market needs, such as solar cell installation. EQF level 5 programmes are available to IVET graduates after work experience, and digital learning has potential, but infrastructure and support remain limited.

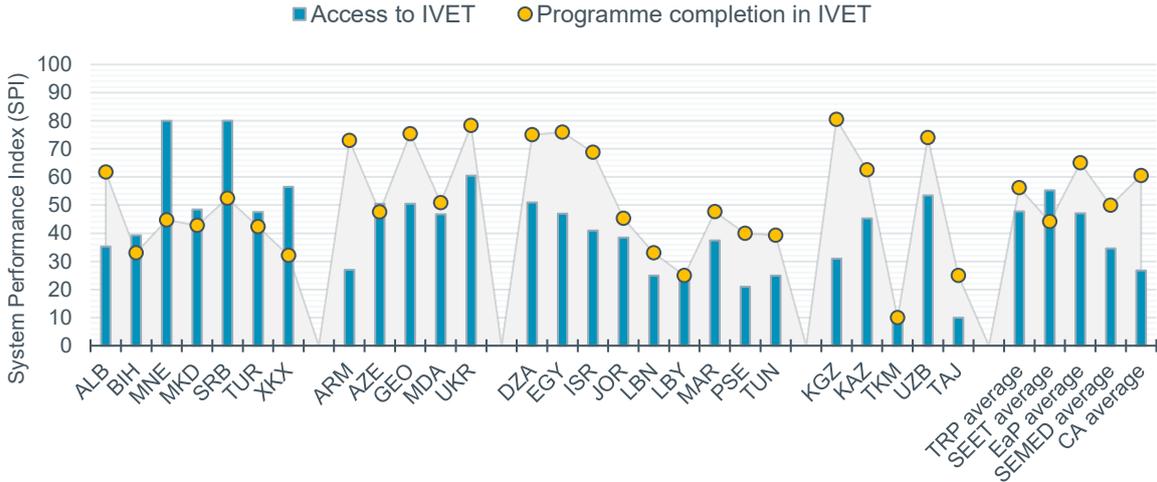
Patterns of adult participation also reflect entrenched gender inequalities. Men participate more frequently in CVET as age increases, while women’s participation is lower overall, especially in rural areas. System performance in support of women is only around half that of men (SPI of 10 vs. 19). Where women do enrol, they are concentrated in stereotypically ‘female’ occupations such as cooking, sewing, childcare or hairdressing. This reflects not only immediate barriers but also longer-standing disadvantages: 49 % of women, compared to 29 % of men, complete only primary education, and labour force activity rates remain much lower for women (45 % vs. 65 % of men in the 20–64 age group).

Policies that could address this situation appear of limited effectiveness. Active labour market measures are underdeveloped and poorly targeted, often prioritising quick statistical results over long-term empowerment, with subsidies granted to employers without regard for the specific needs of unemployed women. The lack of gender-sensitive support – such as childcare, flexible schedules or proactive outreach – further reduces female participation. Structural weaknesses in adult education provision also contribute to gender gaps: despite strategic documents such as the Gender Action Plan for Bosnia and Herzegovina, coordination is weak, counselling services are limited, staff overstretched and institutional capacity for individualised guidance insufficient.

Retention and programme completion

System performance in support of progression and programme completion in Bosnia and Herzegovina is weak (SPI of 33, Figure 4.2), well below the average for the Torino Process monitoring sample (SPI of 56) and the SEET regional average (SPI of 44).

Figure 4.2 Access and programme completion in IVET – system performance index, ETF partner countries and international average



Note: Theoretical index range: min/low performance=0, max/high performance=100.
 Source: ETF KIESE and Torino Process databases.

scale are truncated at the upper (10) and lower (90) decile end. This means that the reporting does not discriminate SPI values below 10 and above 90. The international average, on the other hand, is calculated using the full range of the index.

According to the monitoring survey, learners face several obstacles that limit their ability to remain in and complete VET, including rigid programme structures, insufficient learner support services and inconsistencies in quality assurance across regions. While the dropout rate of 3.8 % in 2023 (KIESE SPI Indicator 19) is relatively modest, the reasons for dropout are challenging and often linked to conflict with the law, lack of interest in education and financial hardship. The non-compulsory status of secondary education plays a role as well.

Learners who do manage to complete VET often lack opportunities or incentives to progress further. Only 35.8 % of IVET graduates continue their studies (KIESE SPI Indicator 18). Gender adds another dimension: although female early school leaving has declined to 3.1 % in 2023, compared to 5.2 % for males, traditional gender roles and societal expectations still shape participation patterns in IVET. Initiatives such as IT Girls, which promote digital skills among girls, remain small in scale, and gender-responsive support services like mentorship or career counselling are rare.

Quality and relevance of learning outcomes

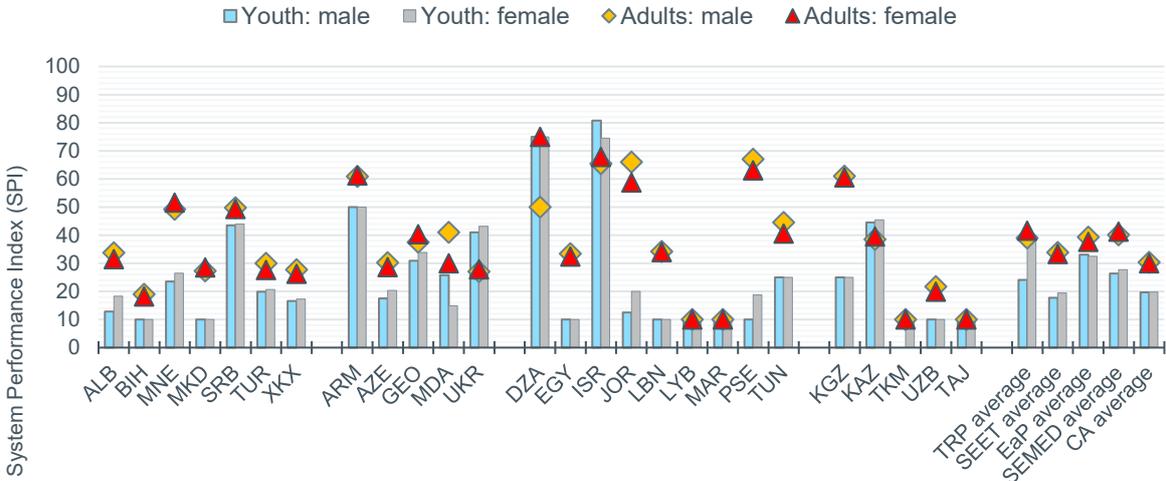
In this section, the SPIs capture the quality of the provision of basic skills and key competences to learners in IVET, as well as the degree to which adults possess foundational skills. These results are complemented by selected KIESE indicators, which track the relevance of learning outcomes by examining employment rates of individuals aged 15 and older, disaggregated by educational attainment in ETF partner countries.

ETF monitoring keeps quality and relevance separate because, although they often reinforce each other, they do not always coincide. Learners with strong foundational skills may still struggle to find suitable employment, while individuals might secure jobs without acquiring a comprehensive skillset. By tracking these aspects separately, the reporting hopes to identify both the intrinsic benefits of education and how effectively it aligns with the needs of the labour market.

Quality of learning by age and gender

Initial VET in Bosnia and Herzegovina struggles to equip learners, irrespective of gender, with foundational skills and competences such as literacy, numeracy, transversal abilities and job-relevant skills (SPI of 10 for both boys and girls, Figure 4.3). Evidence from international assessments such as PISA 2018 (Bosnia and Herzegovina did not participate in 2022) and TIMSS 2023 confirms that many students do not master basic literacy and numeracy, and that functional illiteracy is widespread. According to the monitoring survey, the problem is particularly pronounced in three-year VET programmes.

Figure 4.3 Quality of skills and competences by country, age and gender of learners – system performance index, ETF partner countries and international average (2025)



Note: Theoretical index range: min/low performance=0, max/high performance=100.
Source: ETF KIESE and Torino Process databases.

Employers also report persistent gaps in foreign language knowledge, digital competences and social skills, while critical thinking and problem-solving are underdeveloped. Strategic documents such as Priorities 2019–2030 and the Improvement of the Quality and Relevance of VET 2021–2030 set out commitments to align digital competences with the European DigComp framework, validate non-formal and informal learning and support gradual acquisition of qualifications, but implementation is slow. Digital skills are still taught mainly through ICT subjects, and work-based learning remains limited by a shortage of mentors and the absence of structured apprenticeships.

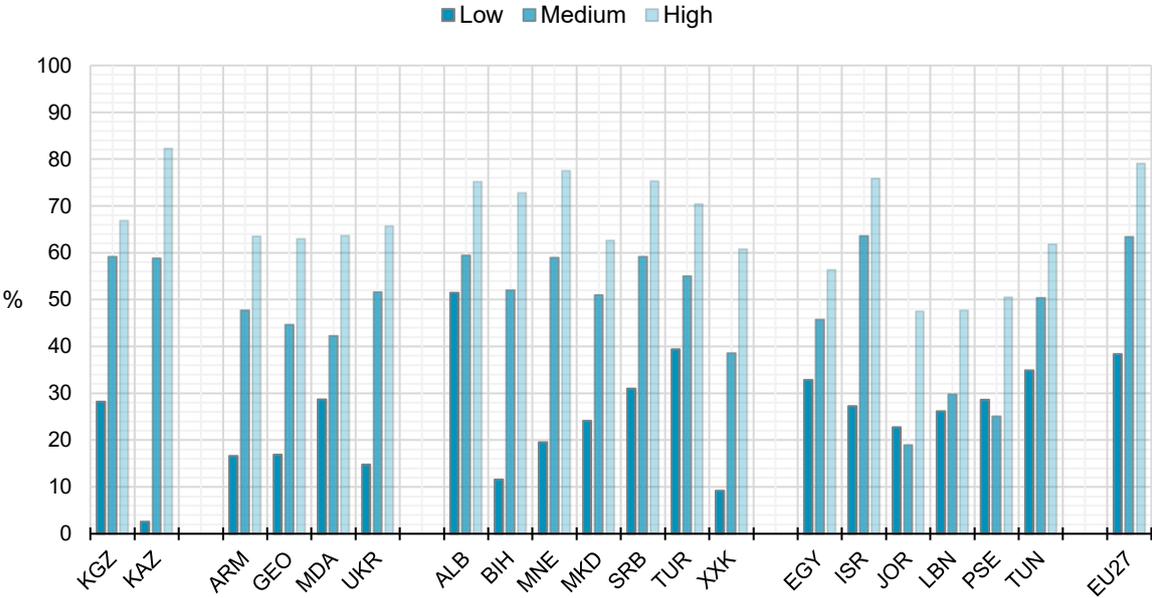
The SPI scores for adults (19 for men, 18 for women) are somewhat higher than for youth, but remain low compared with the Torino Process monitoring sample (39 for men and 42 for women) and the SEET regional average (34 for men, 33 for women). Of the reasons documented with data, deficits in digital competences appear to play a major role. Adults are comfortable with everyday uses such as calls, social media and online information, but struggle with complex, productive and secure applications. While many make online calls (94.1 %, KIESE SPI Indicator 42), use social networks (66.8 %, Indicator 43) or read digital publications (76.7 %, Indicator 39), only small minorities create digital presentations (13.6 %, Indicator 45), configure security measures (7.9 %, Indicator 52) or participate in online learning (5.5 %, Indicator 57).

Relevance and labour market outcomes

This section uses employment data to gauge how effectively education in Bosnia and Herzegovina meets labour market needs. Specifically, it compares employment rates by the highest education level adults have reached, to EU-27 averages.

In Bosnia and Herzegovina, the chances of having a job depend very strongly on the level of education those in working age have completed. Only 11.6 % of adults with low attainment are in employment, compared to 52.0 % among those with medium attainment and 72.8 % among those with high attainment. The corresponding EU-27 averages are 38.4 %, 63.4 % and 79.1 %, respectively (Figure 4.4).

Figure 4.4 Employment rate (age 15+) by educational attainment, ETF partner countries (2024)



Source: ETF KIESE database.

The gap with the EU is widest at the lower end of the education spectrum. Adults with low attainment in Bosnia and Herzegovina have an employment rate that is less than one-third of the EU average, which signals that this group has very limited chances of entering employment. For adults who finished upper secondary or tertiary education, the difference with the EU remains but is narrower:

employment among those with upper secondary or post-secondary qualifications is 11 percentage points below the EU average, while among tertiary graduates the gap is just over 6 points.

What stands out in Bosnia and Herzegovina is the very large difference in employment rates between adults with low attainment and those with higher attainment. The gap is 61 percentage points, compared to 41 points in the EU. This means that while higher education opens access to the labour market in both contexts, completing upper secondary or tertiary education is particularly decisive in Bosnia and Herzegovina. For adults with low attainment, the labour market offers almost no opportunities.

System management and organisation

In the final section on policy and system performance, the focus shifts to the organisation and management of the education and training system, with particular attention to VET.

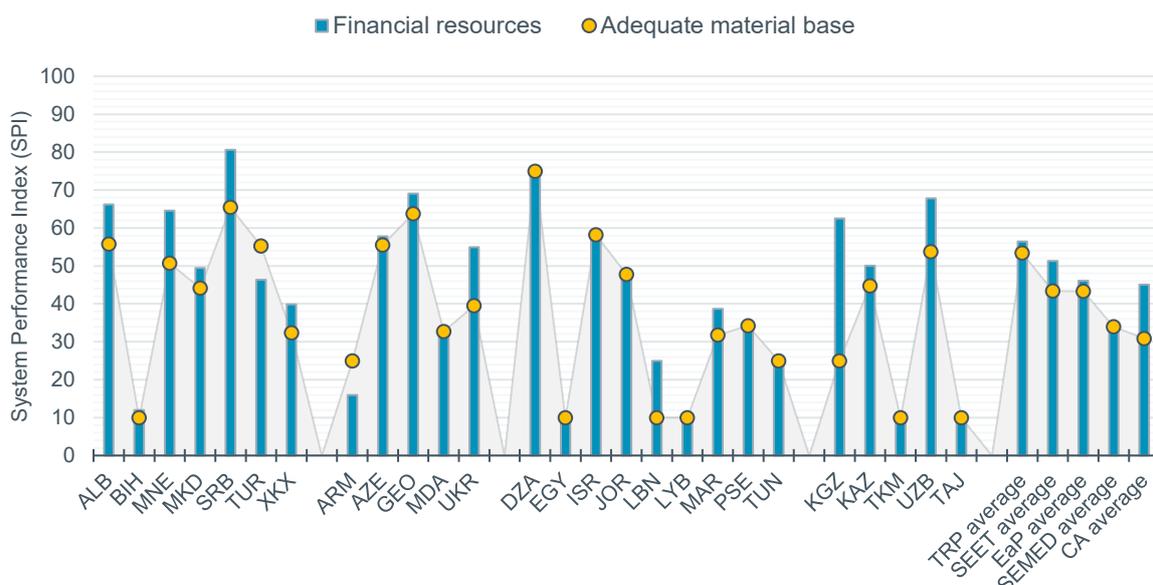
The analysis presents data on system performance in the form of SPIs in three areas: effective allocation and use of financial resources in VET; allocation, use and professional capacity of human resources, including leadership skills and professional competence of school management and staff; and system steering and management, which includes data, quality assurance, school leadership and the internationalisation of VET.

Financial resources in VET and lifelong learning

This section examines the availability of funding for VET in Bosnia and Herzegovina and discusses how effectively this funding translates into tangible resources, such as well-equipped teaching facilities, workshops and appropriate instructional materials.

The country allocates about 3 % of its GDP to education (2022), which is considerably lower than the EU average (Table 4.1). System performance in this area is also lower than in other countries in the ETF monitoring sample and the SEET region. Although VET absorbs more than 90 % of secondary education spending on average, secondary education as a whole accounts for only 21 % of total education expenditure (KIESE SPI Indicator 105). The monitoring survey notes that an allocation of this size is not sufficient to meet the needs of VET providers and that many VET schools operate in poor conditions as a result, despite headline spending levels that may appear sufficient at first glance.

Figure 4.5 Allocation and use of financial resources in education and training – index of system performance, ETF partner countries and international average (2024)



Note: Theoretical index range: min/low performance=0, max/high performance=100.

Source: ETF KIESE and Torino Process databases.

These results reflect the way financing is organised and managed across the country. The monitoring survey notes that the highly decentralised financing system, with 12 education authorities setting their own budgets, reinforces disparities across regions. Education spending as a share of GDP ranges from about 6 % in the Federation of BiH to 4 % in Republika Srpska, and 11.2 % of the budget in Brčko District. VET schools can generate some revenue themselves through adult training and production activities, but they may retain only 20–30 % of these funds, which is insufficient to compensate for structural underfunding.

Shortage is the only shortcoming in the domain of financing for VET for which there is evidence in Bosnia and Herzegovina. However, given the fragmentation of financing and the absence of data on spending efficiency, it is also important to acknowledge that, as well as shortages, inefficiency in the allocation and use of resources cannot be overlooked as an additional challenge, especially given the high level of decentralisation and fragmentation of the VET sector. Pockets of adequacy and shortage may coexist across cantons/entities.

The consequence in any case is that the material base of VET remains inadequate: curricula are outdated, practical workshops rely on obsolete equipment and IT infrastructure is often insufficient for the integration of digital tools. System performance in this area is correspondingly low (Figure 4.5). While donor initiatives such as the Regional Challenge Fund have supported some improvements, Bosnia and Herzegovina shows the lowest absorption of such external funding in the region, in part because schools lack staff with the expertise to prepare project applications and communicate their needs.

Human resources: allocation, use, professional capacity

In Bosnia and Herzegovina, system performance in ensuring that VET has adequate levels of human resources is below average (SPI of 40), and lower than the averages for the SEET region (SPI of 59) and the ETF Torino Process sample (SPI of 62). The main challenges in Bosnia and Herzegovina concern the uneven and under-resourced provision of continuous professional development, the limited practical orientation of initial teacher education and the lack of systemic investment in teachers' working conditions.

Continuous professional development (CPD) is legally mandated across entities and cantons, but the monitoring survey notes that provision is fragmented, uneven in quality and resourced rather poorly. Responsibility for CPD lies with pedagogical institutes and ministries of education, yet they often lack the staff and financial resources needed to deliver it effectively. The absence of a unified framework for teacher appraisal and career progression restricts opportunities to strengthen teaching quality and does little to support teacher motivation.

Initial teacher education is available through a wide range of universities and institutions, but teacher training programmes remain heavily theory-oriented, according to the survey. This gap leaves new teachers poorly prepared for the realities in their classrooms. Programmes also lack uniformity across the country, which hampers mobility and complicates quality assurance. The OECD Western Balkans Competitiveness Outlook 2024 assigns Bosnia and Herzegovina a score of 1.5 (on a 1–5 scale) for initial teacher education, the lowest in the region, reflecting weaknesses in candidate selection, curriculum design and accreditation (OECD, 2024).

Teachers are expected to assume wide responsibilities, including the implementation of policy goals and reforms, yet these expectations are not matched by systemic investments in the profession. Working conditions remain weak, and opportunities for professional growth are limited, particularly for VET teachers of practical subjects, who rarely engage in company-based training.

System steering and management

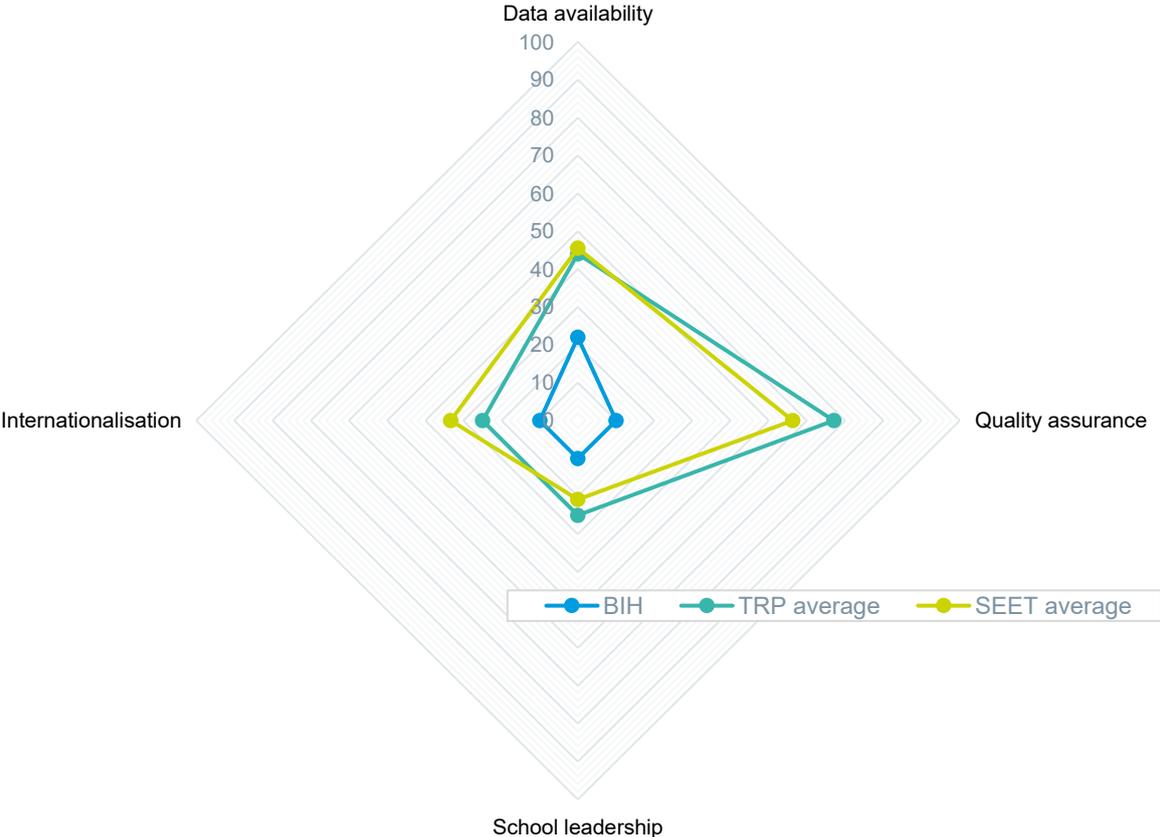
This section summarises the system performance results in the domains of data availability and capacity for informed decision-making, quality assurance, school leadership and internationalisation in VET in Bosnia and Herzegovina.

Bosnia and Herzegovina has made progress in establishing administrative data systems, including VETIS developed by APOSO and several entity- or canton-level systems, which provide information

on schools, teachers, students and employment outcomes. Their coverage and integration remain limited, however, and the absence of a functioning state-level EMIS restricts consolidation across the country. BHAS and the entity-level statistical agencies collect important indicators, but methodological differences hinder comparability. Bosnia and Herzegovina also lacks an external standardised assessment system, and international sources such as UNESCO or Eurostat fill some gaps, though their use in policymaking is modest. The decentralised context thus limits consistency and effective use of data, which is reflected in monitoring results (Figure 4.6).

As noted in Section 4.1, the share of internationally comparable headline indicators declined from 47.4 % in 2023 to 33.3 % in 2024. This measure, however, captures only part of the picture. Unlike the data-availability metric in Table 4.1, the SPI on data and informed decision-making reflects the extent to which indicators provide disaggregated, decision-grade evidence on VET delivery. Once the focus shifts to whether evidence covers priority learner groups – males, females, socioeconomically disadvantaged youth and adults with low or no education – the picture becomes even less complete. The SPI in this domain is 22, well below both the Torino Process sample average (44) and the SEET regional average (46).

Figure 4.6 System steering and management – index of system performance, selected dimensions, ETF partner countries and Torino Process average (2024)



Note: Theoretical index range: min/low performance=0, max/high performance=100.
 Source: ETF KIESE and Torino Process databases.

In the area of quality assurance, responsibilities are fragmented across 12 education systems at different stages of development, and the absence of national-level coherence contributes to weak results. A VET Quality Assurance Manual and the state-level Action Plan for the Qualification Framework (2014–2020) set out standards and procedures, but these frameworks have not translated into consistent practice. Structured data collection, evidence-based policymaking, systematic self-evaluation and application of the EQAVET cycle are not established features of VET. External evaluation is irregular and focused more on inspection than improvement, with results not publicly

available. Peer review remains limited to donor-driven initiatives, and continuous professional development is underdeveloped, particularly for practical subject teachers who have little opportunity to update knowledge in companies.

System performance is also affected by the limited professional capacity of VET school leaders. Vacancies are publicly announced, but recruitment is not based on occupational standards or leadership qualifications. Many school leaders acquire competencies informally or through ad-hoc initiatives rather than structured training. Continuous professional development is mandated by the 2003 Framework Law on Primary and Secondary Education, but the law does not specify frequency, duration or content, and pedagogical institutes lack the resources to provide systematic opportunities. A revised national guide for school directors, in-service training and networking initiatives, especially in Republika Srpska and Brčko District, have offered some support. International partners, particularly the OSCE, have also contributed through training workshops and conferences.

In internationalisation, Bosnia and Herzegovina participates in Erasmus+ and other mobility schemes, with projects such as EmployVET (2023–2025) and INTERVET Western Balkans (2020–2023) opening opportunities for learners and staff, particularly in green and digital skills. Students and teachers also join networks, mobility programmes and international events, sometimes earning recognition abroad. The National Erasmus+ Office supports this agenda through workshops and guidance, yet participation remains modest, good practices are not widespread and uneven implementation, limited funding and weak institutional support hold back broader engagement. As a result, while VET is present in international cooperation, performance in this domain remains modest (Figure 4.6).

ABBREVIATIONS

APOO	Agency for Adult Education
APOSO	Agency for Pre-Primary, Primary and Secondary Education
BAM	Bosnia and Herzegovina Convertible Mark
BHAS	Agency for Statistics of Bosnia and Herzegovina
BiH	Bosnia and Herzegovina
CBAM	Carbon Border Adjustment Mechanism
CIL	Computer and Information Literacy
COVID	Coronavirus Disease
CPD	Continuous Professional Development
CVET	Continuing Vocational Education and Training
DSC	Digital Skills and Competences
DVV	Deutscher Volkshochschul-Verband (German Adult Education Association)
EACEA	Education, Audiovisual and Culture Executive Agency
EaFA	European Alliance for Apprenticeships
EBRD	European Bank for Reconstruction and Development
ECTS	European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System
ECVET	European Credit System for Vocational Education and Training
EEAS	European External Action Service
EKOPAK	Bosnia and Herzegovina's first licensed packaging recovery organization
EMIS	Education Management and Information System
ENQA	European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education
EQAR	European Quality Assurance Register for Higher Education

EQAVET	European Quality Assurance in Vocational Education and Training
EQF	European Qualifications Framework
ETF	European Training Foundation
EU	European Union
EUR	Euro (currency of the European Union)
Eurydice	Eurydice network (European information network on education)
FBiH	Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina
FMRSP	Federal Ministry of Labour and Social Policy
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
GIZ	Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (German Agency for International Cooperation)
GOPA	GOPA Worldwide Consultants (international development consultancy)
GRID	Global Report on Internal Displacement
HDI	Human Development Index
ICILS	International Computer and Information Literacy Study
ICT	Information and Communication Technology
ILO	International Labour Organization
IMF	International Monetary Fund
IPA	Instrument for Pre-Accession Assistance
ISCED	International Standard Classification of Education
ISKOOM	Information System for Monitoring Adult Education Programmes
IT	Information Technology
IVET	Initial Vocational Education and Training
KIESE	Key Indicators on Education, Skills and Employment
NEET	Young people Not in Employment, Education or Training
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development

OSCE	Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe
PES	Public Employment Services
PIRLS	Progress in International Reading Literacy Stud
PISA	Programme for International Student Assessment
PPP	Purchasing Power Parity
QFEHEA	Qualifications Framework of the European Higher Education Area
RCF	Regional Challenge Fund
RPL	Recognition of Prior Learning
RS	Republika Srpska
SDC	Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation
SEDEP	Sustainable Economic Development and Employment Promotion
SEET	South-Eastern Europe and Turkey
SME	Small and Medium-sized Enterprises
SPI	System Performance Index
TA	Technical Assistance
TIMSS	Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study
TRP	Torino Process
TVET	Technical and Vocational Education and Training
UN BIH	United Nations Bosnia and Herzegovina
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNECE	United Nations Economic Commission for Europe
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
USAID	United States Agency for International Development
USD	United States Dollar

VET	Vocational Education and Training
VETIS	Vocational Education and Training Information System
VNFIL	Validation of Non-Formal and Informal Learning
WB	World Bank
WBIF	Western Balkans Investment Framework

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