

WORK-BASED LEARNING IN BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINA – ASSESSMENT PER EU QUALITY STANDARDS

Bosnia and Herzegovina

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The manuscript was completed in December 2025.

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Please cite this publication as: European Training Foundation (2025), Work-based learning in Bosnia and Herzegovina – an assessment per EU quality standards, Turin, Italy

PREFACE

The study, “Work-based learning in Bosnia and Herzegovina – an assessment per EU quality standards”, has been produced by the European Training Foundation (ETF). The study was carried out between May and December 2025 by Snježana Đuričić who also drafted this report that was quality checked by the QA Expert, Patrick Werquin, and the Project Director, Michal Kowal (GREATVISORY).

The study project was coordinated by Floriana Folisi (ETF). Technical input and ongoing support were provided by Floriana Folisi and Cristina Mereuta (ETF).

We would like to extend our gratitude to all the stakeholders who contributed to this study, either by helping with the data collection and policy insights or by providing feedback. We would also like to thank the Federal Employment Institute, the Republika Srpska Employment Institute, the Employment Institute of Brčko District of Bosnia and Herzegovina, the Una-Sana Canton Public Employment Service, the Bosnia-Podrinje Canton Goražde Public Employment Service, the Sarajevo Canton Public Employment Service, the Education Sector and the Sector for Labour, Employment, Social Protection and Pensions of the Ministry of Civil Affairs of Bosnia and Herzegovina, ILO and the Zenica-Doboj Canton Chamber of Commerce.

CONTENTS

PREFACE	3
CONTENTS	4
1 INTRODUCTION	5
2 CONCEPTUAL CLARIFICATION	6
3 METHODOLOGY	10
4 COUNTRY OVERVIEW	11
5 FRAMEWORK FOR WORK-BASED LEARNING	12
5.1 Relevant strategy frameworks	13
5.2 Policy dialogue and the role of its actors	15
5.3 Legal framework	16
6 WORK-BASED LEARNING IN AN ALMP	18
6.1 Types of programmes with a WBL component	22
6.2 Conclusion of a written traineeship agreement (Criteria 2 and 3)	23
6.3 Learning and training objectives (Criteria 4 and 5)	25
6.4 Working conditions applicable to trainees (Criteria 6, 7 and 8)	27
6.5 Rights and obligations (Criterion 9)	29
6.6 Reasonable duration (max. six months) (Criteria 10, 11 and 12)	29
6.7 Proper recognition of traineeships (Criterion 13)	31
6.8 Transparency requirements (Criteria 14 and 15)	32
6.9 Cross-border traineeships (Criteria 16 and 17)	34
6.10 Use of European Funds (Criterion 18)	34
6.11 Applying the Quality Framework for Traineeships (Criteria 19, 20, 21 and 22)	35
6.12 Conclusions	35
7 ACRONYMS	37
8 REFERENCES	38
ANNEX I: DETAILS OF INTERVIEWEES	43
ANNEX II: QUALITY CRITERIA FOR TRAINEESHIPS, BASED ON THE EUROPEAN QUALITY FRAMEWORK FOR TRAINEESHIPS	44

1 INTRODUCTION

Bosnia and Herzegovina is confronted with a declining working-age population, driven by sustained emigration and low fertility. Although the economy recorded periods of growth in the immediate post-COVID period, employment outcomes remain modest. While the share of young people aged 15–24 who are not in employment, education or training (NEET) fell from 21.4% in 2021 to 13.7% in 2025, young people continue to face limited opportunities for sustainable labour market integration. Policy makers agree that efforts should continue to focus on boosting quality education, training, reskilling and upskilling at all levels while preventing brain drain and supporting vulnerable groups. Strengthening the alignment between education and labour market needs, improving employment policies and labour rights in line with the European Pillar of Social Rights, and fostering a favourable business environment remain essential to enhancing labour market participation, reducing poverty, and supporting long-term economic and social stability (Reform Agenda for Bosnia and Herzegovina, 2025).

The state administrative framework comprises two state entities – the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina, which consists of ten cantons,¹ Republika Srpska and the unique administrative self-governing Brčko District of Bosnia and Herzegovina (the Brčko District). The multi-level governance of labour, employment, and education and training in Bosnia and Herzegovina calls for adequate institutional capacity and effective coordination mechanisms.

Skills gaps, mismatches, and shortages resulting from demographic change and worker outflows are only partly offset by inflows of foreign labour. While over 75% of secondary students are enrolled in technical and vocational education and training (TVET), performance indicators from Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) 2018 reveal serious structural challenges.²

These dynamics provide a strong basis for ensuring the quality of active labour market programmes (ALMPs) that combine education and training with work-based experience. The Recommendation on a Bridge to Jobs – Reinforcing the Youth Guarantee (Council of the European Union, 2020), directly underlining the importance of work-based learning (hereinafter WBL), is a key EU mechanism for ensuring good-quality offers of, among other things, traineeships for young people aged 15–29.

This study provides a review of WBL³-oriented ALMPs in Bosnia and Herzegovina, assessing their alignment with the 2014 European Union Quality Framework for Traineeships (the 2014 EU QFT). It examines the legal and institutional frameworks, programme design and implementation practices, identifying areas for further improvement. The focus of the review is on ALMPs with a work practice exposure accounting for at least 25 per cent of the total measure.

The structure of the document is as follows: in Chapter 2, *Conceptual clarification*, defines the key terms and concepts to be used throughout the report, including WBL and different types of ALMPs with a WBL component that can be classified as traineeships in line with the 2014 EU QFT, thereby ensuring a common understanding for the subsequent analysis. Chapter 3 – *Methodology* outlines the approach, data sources, and analytical framework applied in assessing the alignment of WBL-oriented ALMPs with the 2014 EU QFT. Chapter 4 – *Country Overview*, provides a concise overview of the country's socio-economic and labour market context, highlighting structural challenges. Chapter 5 – *Framework for work-based learning in Bosnia and Herzegovina*, reviews the legal and institutional framework governing WBL, as well as related labour, employment, and education and training regulatory frameworks, policies and governance. Chapter 6 – *Work-based learning in active labour market measures*, analyses the

¹ Una-Sana Canton, Posavina Canton, Tuzla Canton, Zenica-Doboj Canton, Bosnia-Podrinje Canton Goražde, Central Bosnia Canton, Herzegovina-Neretva Canton, West Herzegovina Canton and the Canton 10.

² Bosnia and Herzegovina did not participate in the 2022 and 2025 PISA cycles. So far, no systemic measures have been undertaken in response to the findings of PISA 2018 and TIMSS 2019 (Bosnia and Herzegovina Country Report 2025).

³ This report seeks to clarify the use of key terms and concepts in the chapter Conceptual clarification. However, the precise definition and potential legal positioning of the term *work-based learning*, translated by the author as “učenje zasnovano na radu”, should be subject to consultation and agreement among the relevant institutional and social partners, should they opt for such an approach, as has been the case in Slovenia, Croatia or Serbia.

design and implementation of WBL components within ALMPs, assessing their alignment with the 2014 EU QFT criteria, identifying systemic challenges, and highlighting existing strengths that can inform future reforms.

Moreover, details of interviewees, a list of acronyms and references, as well as the quality criteria from the pertinent EU framework are included at the end of the report.

Considering the structure and content outlined above, the report is conceived to inform policymakers, education and training providers, employers and other relevant stakeholders about the current state of WBL in Bosnia and Herzegovina, and to contribute to the ongoing debate on WBL at all relevant levels – from the state to the international level.

2 CONCEPTUAL CLARIFICATION

When considering ALMPs that include a WBL component in Bosnia and Herzegovina, it is essential to take into account, on the one hand, labour and social regulatory frameworks (namely labour codes, secondary legislation concerning employment relations, social dialogue mechanisms, etc.), and, on the other, the legal and policy frameworks governing employment policy, including labour market policy interventions, as well as the various legal frameworks in the field education and training and their respective definitions.

Table 1 provides an overview of the main types of WBL-oriented ALMPs implemented by public employment services (PESs) in Bosnia and Herzegovina.

As regards traineeships and their different types, the general framework is established by the labour laws of the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina, Republika Srpska and the Brčko District. Traineeships can be classified as: (a) compulsory traineeship considered entry-level employment, with full employment benefits, including pension and disability insurance contributions, required either for independent professional practice [*pripravnički rad*] or for access to a professional examination [*pripravnički staž*]; and (b) compulsory professional training considered work experience, required in cases where a professional examination or initial work experience is necessary to perform tasks in a specific occupation [*stručno osposobljavanje bez zasnivanja radnog odnosa*] (the SOR-type traineeship).⁴ Although compulsory traineeships do not fall under the scope of the 2014 QFT, they nevertheless represent first-entry work experiences, regardless of whether they are formally categorised as employment relationships or not. Available evidence indicates that these forms of traineeships are sometimes used interchangeably, for example in teaching professions and that, importantly, they require further work on the development of a structured learning component (Đuričić, 2023, ILO).

Some ALMPs offer short periods of work practice (including an education and training component) aimed at improving employability. These do not constitute SOR-type traineeships in the strict sense, but fall in between, combining elements of non-formal education and training and on-the-job training. All these types tend to be included in ALMP portfolios, as shown in Table 1.

Throughout this document, the term ‘traineeship’ is used as a generic term and, where necessary, to specify the measure or the contractual arrangement to which it refers [*pripravnički staž*]. The term ‘SOR-type traineeship’ refers to [*stručno osposobljavanje bez zasnivanja radnog odnosa*], as defined above. For other ALMP measures mentioned in this report, generic terms are used for the sake of analytical clarity, while full official names are retained where reference is made to a specific measure.

Civil service legislation does not provide for SOR-type traineeships, but instead refers to ‘volunteering’. This concept is further defined by subsequent volunteering legislation, which explicitly excludes volunteering from the categories of professional training, skills development, or the performance of

⁴ As will be further demonstrated in this document, the obligation attached to the type of traineeship under point (b) is not always clearly defined, and in practice, this type is sometimes applied in place of the type under point (a), despite the distinct purposes and policy frameworks they are intended to serve. Accordingly, this type is referred to in this document as an SOR-type traineeship, even though individuals in such contractual arrangements are not formally recognised as trainees under domestic labour legislation.

practical work without an employment relationship. Given the significant role of the state as an employer in public administration, health and education, this aspect warrants particular attention.

Finally, there is the so-called *open-market traineeship*, which is agreed directly between trainees and employers, without the involvement of a third party, and which is not the subject of this research.

Table 1. Overview of WBL-oriented ALMPs by coordinating Public Employment Institutes/Services

Public Employment Institutes/Services	Types of WBL-oriented ALMPs						
Federal Employment Institute	Employment co-financing programmes			Training and Employment			
	Employment of trainees	Young People with Prior Work Experience	Other programmes ⁵	Training programmes for acquiring necessary knowledge and skills for the labour market	Targeted training for employment with a known employer	Other programmes ⁶	
Bosnia-Podrinje Canton Goražde Public Employment Service	SOR-type traineeship			Formal upskilling, formal reskilling, training and further training			
Sarajevo Canton Public Employment Service	Co-financing of employment of trainees			Training, formal upskilling and formal reskilling	Targeted training for employment with a known employer		
Sarajevo Canton Public Employment Service	n/a						
Republika Srpska Employment Institute	Acquisition of specific practical knowledge and skills for independent work in the profession			Formal upskilling	Formal reskilling	Training	
	Traineeship	Professional practice programme				Labour market training	Employer-requested training
Brčko District Employment Institute	Traineeship, through government funding			Formal upskilling	Formal reskilling	Professional training and preparation for employment, including formal reskilling	
	Traineeship as a criterion					Labour market training	Employer-requested training

Source: Prepared by the author

⁵ According to interviews with representatives of the Federal Employment Institute, given that funding for the measures for *Employment of Trainees* and *Youth with Experience* is limited, young people without prior work experience (up to the age of 30) apply to other ALMPs, example.g. *Opportunity for All [Prilika za sve]*, through which they can access subsidised employment. In practice, this measure also serves a similar function to the first two measures, as it is primarily focused on employment support rather than on structured work-based learning.

⁶ Targeted training for employment with a known employer may also take place under other measures e.g. *Cooperation with Other Projects*. The roles of individual actors are defined separately for each project. An example of such cooperation is presented on p. 23.

The term ‘*trainee*’ is used throughout this document to refer to individuals engaged in the types of traineeships described above. However, wherever this can be clearly identified, the terminology used in local languages reflects the relevant legal frameworks – [*pripravnik*], [*lice na stručnom osposobljavanju bez zasnivanja radnog odnosa*], and, where applicable, volunteer [*volonter*] – in line with the applicable regulations. The terms ‘*learner*’ [*polaznik*] and ‘*job-seeker*’ [*tražilac posla*]⁷ are used throughout this document to refer to unemployed individuals registered with PESs who participate in WBL activities (co-organised by employers). While these activities are initiated under specific contractual arrangements, these terms will apply regardless of the contractual status at later stages of the ALMP, including transitions into employment, as further elaborated in the document.

In this sense, a range of terms are used across ALMPs, reflecting the terminology of the relevant labour legislation. However, in certain cases, the employment policy frameworks provide for different definitions that combine elements of both the labour and education fields.

WBL-oriented ALMPs also include formal reskilling [*prekvalifikacija*], formal upskilling [*dokvalifikacija*], training [*obuka*] and further training [*usavršavanje*]. Adult education and learning remain largely focused on formal learning activities related to vocational education, formal reskilling, formal upskilling and the workplace (DVV, 2021). Adult education and learning programmes leading to formal qualifications are not developed as separate programmes. Within such programmes, practical training is treated as a stand-alone subject. As a rule, formal reskilling and formal upskilling pathways are reduced to shortening the overall duration of programme delivery, without substantial adjustment to content or approach, despite differences in learner profiles and needs. As a result, adult education and learning largely relies on the terminology used in secondary TVET. Within TVET regulatory frameworks, a range of terms is used, such as practical training, practical work, (student) practice [*(učenička) praksa*], practical part of the programme, dual education (Law on Secondary Education and Upbringing of Republika Srpska, 2018, 2020, 2023) and even work-based learning [*učenje kroz rad*] (Law on Secondary Vocational Education and Training of the West Herzegovina Canton, 2025). Regardless of the term used, ‘practical training and work’ may take place in school-based workshops or on the premises of other legal entities, on the basis of a contract or cooperation agreement (Framework Law on Secondary Technical and Vocational Education and Training, 2008). In some cases, practical training is complemented by summer practice [*ferijalna praksa*], which is mandatory for certain occupational profiles. In all cases, however, the share of practical training in teaching plans and programmes does not reach the minimum threshold of 25% work practice exposure.⁸

The 2014 state-level document, *Principles and Standards in the Field of Adult Education in Bosnia and Herzegovina*, defines practical work [*praktičan rad*] under the chapter Forms of Adult Education and Learning (Decision on Adoption of Principles and Standards in the Field of Adult Education in Bosnia and Herzegovina, 2014). Practical work, as further explained, is delivered for the full number of prescribed hours and applies to all adult learners. It may take place on the premises of the programme provider, at an employer’s premises, or on the premises of another authorised provider (Ibid). In this document, the terms practical training [*praktična nastava*] and practical work [*praktičan rad*] are used almost interchangeably. This analysis, however, does not include formal upskilling and reskilling within ALMPs, as these fall outside the scope of traineeship under 2014 EU QFT.

On the other hand, training [*obuka*] is implemented depending on the legislative frameworks of the twelve administrative units governing education and training, as well as on the design of the particular ALMP.

⁷ The PES registries in the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina and the Brčko District are not yet disaggregated into categories of active and inactive jobseekers, thus limiting the ability to focus on individuals who are genuinely seeking employment.

⁸ *Dual-oriented or dual-organised TVET* is used as a working term within certain international TVET projects. It refers to a model of secondary TVET that incorporates selected elements of dual systems, such as school–company cooperation, defined roles for chambers, formalised partnerships for work-based learning, contracts between schools and learners or their parents/guardians, curricula aligned with occupational standards, mentoring in companies, learner allowances, and the involvement of company mentors in assessment processes.

Education and training laws and by-laws use a range of terms, including practical training, work-based learning and also specific programmes implemented through practical work, whether delivered by an adult education provider or hosted by an employer. There is also employer-hosted training [*osposobljavanje kod poslodavca*] as well as a specific form of employer-hosted training, i.e. (occupational) training [*(stručno) osposobljavanje*] which represents short-term training provided after completing primary education and aimed at enabling individuals to acquire new knowledge, skills and competences for performing simple and less complex tasks pertaining to a specific occupation.

Thus, the training [*obuka*] can be broadly divided into: (1) publicly recognized non-formal training resulting in a publicly recognised certificate of competence (*de iure* formal but not resulting in a qualification); and (2) non-formal training that is not subject to regulations issued by the ministries of education.

Even in local languages, terminology occasionally overlaps, reflecting the very nature of ALMPs. For example, the term, ‘training for the labour market’ [*obuka za tržište rada*], which is the title of a specific ALMP, does not necessarily imply compliance with secondary legislation in the field of adult education and learning (where such by-laws exist) that regulates the conditions and delivery of adult training aimed at responding to so-called *urgent labour market needs*.⁹ Similarly, professional training [*stručno osposobljavanje*] offered within ALMPs should not be equated with occupational training [*osposobljavanje*] as defined under education legislation, which refers to skills development aimed at preparing individuals with completed primary education for employment. Instead, within the context of ALMPs, this term refers either to a broader set of activities providing opportunities to acquire additional knowledge and skills under a specific programme – including reskilling, upskilling and short courses for registered unemployed individuals, regardless of their level of education – or to an SOR-type traineeship.

Given the nature of practical training, it is also subject to other legal frameworks governing issues such as insurance, taxation and social contributions (due to various allowances or rewards that business entities may and/or are required to provide), occupational health and safety, sanitary supervision, healthcare, and personal data protection. This study does not examine in detail the terminology used within these regulatory frameworks. However, based on a comparative analysis of legal frameworks to secondary TVET (Kunić, 2021, 2022, 2023, GIZ-SDC) as well as a partial analysis related to adult education and learning frameworks (dmb legal, 2021, HELVETAS *Moja budućnost*), this area can be identified as one that requires further clarification.

3 METHODOLOGY

This paper draws on two main sources of evidence: (a) a comprehensive review of relevant documents influencing the design and implementation of ALMPs across all levels of jurisdiction, focusing on measures that include a WBL component accounting for at least 25% of work practice exposure. The review covers strategies, laws and by-laws, regulations, guidelines, studies and publicly available statistical data; and (b) a total of nine semi-structured interviews conducted with representatives of the following institutions and organisations:

- the Federal Institute of Employment;
- the Una-Sana Canton Public Employment Service;
- the Bosnia-Podrinje Canton Goražde Public Employment Service;
- the Sarajevo Canton Public Employment Service;
- the Republika Srpska Employment Institute;

⁹ This type of training is regulated through secondary legislation in the field of education in the Posavina, Tuzla, Zenica-Doboj, and Bosnia-Podrinje Goražde Cantons, which prescribes a total duration ranging from 70 to 150 teaching hours (including both theoretical and practical training), depending on the canton. The prescribed total duration may be reduced to a minimum of 40 hours. According to available evidence, this policy was introduced in response to newly created jobs and capital investments (Đuričić, 2023b, ILO). Considering the extremely low total number of instructional hours, although a high proportion of practical training is delivered under real workplace conditions, even formal alignment of active labour market measures with the aforementioned by-laws would be insufficient to ensure compliance with the quality requirements of the 2014 EU QFT.

- the Employment Institute of the Brčko District of Bosnia and Herzegovina;
- the Sector for Education and the Sector for Labour, Employment, Social Protection and Pensions of the Ministry of Civil Affairs;
- the International Labour Organization (ILO); and
- the Zenica-Doboj Canton Chamber of Commerce.

At the time of submission of this final draft, 2024 reports for the Federal Employment Institute,¹⁰ the Bosnia-Podrinje Canton Goražde Public Employment Service and the Sarajevo Canton Public Employment Service had not yet been adopted, while no official reports were available for the Tuzla Canton Public Employment Service. Nevertheless, the policy analysis on available documents, combined with the conducted interviews, provides a solid basis for assessing the current situation, although it does not allow for the identification of precise quantitative trends.

4 COUNTRY OVERVIEW

In 2023, Bosnia and Herzegovina's population was estimated at 3.21 million¹¹ (ETF, 2024). The country faces a shrinking labour force, largely driven by demographic changes, in particular sustained emigration and declining fertility rates. This trend has become a structural challenge to the country's social and economic development.¹²

Despite GDP growth of 42.8% between 2020 and 2022, economic growth slowed in 2023, with real GDP increasing by 1.9%. According to the Labour Force Survey (LFS), in 2024 the labour force in Bosnia and Herzegovina comprised 1.413 million persons, representing a 3.3% increase compared to the previous year. However, the employment rate (42.9%) remains modest, while nearly half of the population is inactive (50.9%)(Ibid). In the first quarter of 2025, the employment rate for the population aged 15–64 stood at 53.4% (LFS, 2025-Q1).

In Bosnia and Herzegovina, 76.8% of secondary school students enrolled in TVET programmes: 57.2% attend 4-year technical programmes and 3-year, with 19.6% attending vocational programmes (Agency for Statistics of Bosnia and Herzegovina, 2025).

The labour market is characterised by persistent skills gaps and mismatches, stemming from multiple factors on both the supply and demand sides, and further compounded by weak cooperation between the two. In recent years, significant labour shortages (EC, 2024), driven by pronounced worker outflows, have been partially offset by an influx of foreign labour.

Recent employer surveys in Bosnia and Herzegovina show mild fluctuations in employers' willingness to hire young people without prior work experience. While 68.2% of employers surveyed expressed readiness to do so in 2022/2023, this share increased to 68.8% in both 2023/2024, before slightly declining to 65.9% in 2024/2025, as shown in Table 2. These data suggest a relatively stable, though not linear, openness among employers to engaging young people without work experience, confirming the need for ALMPs that can sustain and expand such opportunities.

Table 2. Employers' willingness to hire young people without work experience

Year	Percentage of employers willing to hire young people without work experience
2022-2023	68.2%
2023-2024	68.8%
2024-2025	65.9%

¹⁰ The 2024 report of the Federal Employment Institute was provided during the report review and validation process in February 2026.

¹¹ One of the European Commission's recommendations currently under implementation concerns the adoption of a roadmap for the preparation of the next population and housing census (EC, 2024).

¹² The estimated total population for 2024 amounted to 2,144,748 in the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina (Institute for Statistics of the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina), 1,110,496 in Republika Srpska (Republika Srpska Institute of Statistics), and 80,371 in the Brčko District of Bosnia and Herzegovina (the Brčko Branch).

Source: Agency for Labour and Employment of Bosnia and Herzegovina, Federal Employment Institute, Employment Institute of Republika Srpska, Employment Institute of the Brčko District. *Labour Market Research 2022/2023, 2023/2024, 2024/2025*. Prepared by the author.

The NEET youth rate declined from 21.4% in the first quarter 2021 to 13.7% in the second quarter of 2025 (LFS¹³). NEET data presented here refer to the 15-24 age group, which typically records lower rates than the 15-29 age group relevant for the Youth Guarantee policy framework.

Education performance indicators reveal structural challenges. In the 2018 PISA survey, Bosnia and Herzegovina ranked 62nd out of 79 participating countries. Students performed below the OECD average in reading, mathematics and science, with the socio-economic status being a strong predictor of outcomes in mathematics and science (Serdarević, 2023, ILO). Of particular concern is the fact that a large number of students in three-year VET programmes achieve results that, on average, fall below the minimum achievement level. However, when compared with countries of similar GDP per capita, Bosnia and Herzegovina is not an outlier in terms of student achievement once available financial resources are taken into account (Bartlett, Puratić, Sarajlić, 2024, ETF). Despite education expenditure being higher than in other Western Balkan economies, Bosnia and Herzegovina faces inefficiencies in resource use linked to its complex governance structure (Guthrie, C. et al., 2022, OECD).

5 FRAMEWORK FOR WORK-BASED LEARNING

Bosnia and Herzegovina operates within a highly polycentric governance structure in the areas of labour, employment, and education and training, reflecting the country's constitutional framework.

There is no unified internal market in the country, nor state-wide legislation governing industrial relations. As a result, distinct strategic and regulatory frameworks operate largely in isolation from one another. In practice, however, they require structured dialogue and coordination, both within and across administrative units, in order to respond more effectively to the needs of learners, jobseekers and workers across the systems of labour, employment and the multi-layered governance of education. On the so-called demand side, the absence of a unified internal market remains a serious obstacle to private sector competitiveness (EC, 2022). For instance, registering a business in one part of the country does not automatically permit operations across the entire-territory.

Economic and social dialogue between public authorities and social partners remains underdeveloped (EC, 2024). The labour regulatory framework 'requires further improvement in several areas, particularly regarding protection against discrimination, as well as the effective enforcement of labour inspection (Ibid.). Strengthening the institutional and operational capacities of social partners should therefore be treated as a priority. Collective bargaining coverage remains limited, with only a small number of branch- or sector-level collective agreements, mainly in the public sector. Significant gaps persist in ensuring trade union freedoms and the right to collective bargaining, which should be addressed as a matter of priority (Ibid.).

Policies governing traineeships in Bosnia and Herzegovina are primarily embedded within labour and social protection policies at the level of the two entities and the district.

The organisation of the Public Employment Service (PES) mirrors this structure, with three separate PES systems operating independently, one of which further comprises ten.

In parallel, the relevant frameworks also include education legislation governing secondary TVET¹⁴ and adult education and learning, which define the forms and scope of practical training within the education and training systems. In this area, the distribution of competences is even more complex: while responsibilities in Republika Srpska and the Brčko District remain at the entity and district level respectively, in the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina full authority over education lies with the ten cantons. The Federal Ministry of Education and Science has a coordination role and performs

¹³ Data accessed from the official website of the Agency for Statistic of Bosnia and Herzegovina on 8 December 2025.

¹⁴ In Bosnia and Herzegovina, adult learners may access pathways leading to formal qualifications through alternative education routes. However, programmes largely remain the same as those used in secondary TVET, albeit with a reduced duration.

administrative and professional tasks as defined by law (Law on Federal Ministries and Other Bodies of the Federal Administration, 2011).

The Ministry of Civil Affairs of Bosnia and Herzegovina is responsible for performing activities and carrying out tasks within the competence of Bosnia and Herzegovina related to establishing the basic principles for coordinating activities, harmonising the plans of entity-level authorities, and defining strategies at the international level in the fields of labour and employment, health and social protection, pensions, science and education (Law on Ministries and Other Administrative Bodies of Bosnia and Herzegovina).

This governance model results in structurally differentiated systems in which policies and practices vary across administrative units. These differences stem from institutional capacities, administrative arrangements and the extent to which development projects have been scaled up and embedded into regular practice. For example, some administrative units have adopted by-laws regulating in-company practical training, others are still in the process of harmonising with state-level framework laws. In addition, one administrative unit has established an adult education institute, whereas in others adult education and training are assigned to a single official alongside other duties.

The education system functions in a polycentric manner which has practical implications: the registration of an adult education and learning provider in one administrative unit is limited to that unit. By law, providers wishing to operate across the country must register separately in each of the twelve administrative units and obtain the relevant licenses and programme accreditation accordingly. Although regulations are relatively similar in many cases, each unit functions in its own legal authority and procedures.

In adult education and learning, WBL is primarily implemented to meet the needs of individuals oriented towards labour migration, businesses integrated into value chains requiring rapid technological adaptation, and through donor-supported projects, which predominantly target unemployed persons registered with the PES.¹⁵ Cooperation between actors on the supply and demand sides, as well as policy mechanisms involving chambers of commerce, craft chambers of employers' associations ensuring the quality of in-company training conditions, has been introduced only to a limited extent. A good practice example that has evolved from an initially donor-supported initiative into a locally sustained practice is presented on page 24.

5.1 Relevant strategy frameworks

Three employment strategies are currently in force: the Employment Strategy of Republika Srpska (2021–2027), the Employment Strategy for the Brčko District of BiH (2024–2027), and the Employment Strategy for the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina (2023–2030). A modular planning approach has been applied in drafting a state-level document to cover the overlapping period 2024–2027, ensuring alignment with EU guidelines and maintaining entity- and district-level autonomy and responsibility for implementation. Adoption of this document is expected by the end of 2025,¹⁶ with EU technical assistance supporting the process.

In parallel, a country-wide strategic document, developed in 2021 with OeAD support and aligned with the Riga Conclusions (2015) was adopted through the Decision on the Adoption of the Document 'Improving the Quality and Relevance of Vocational Education and Training in Bosnia and Herzegovina – Based on the Riga Conclusions (2021–2030)'. While this document provides an overarching framework for VET development in line with EU policies, it does not include an action plan, SMART indicators or a committed budget. Within the framework of EU IPA Technical Assistance for Vocational Education and Training in Bosnia and Herzegovina, a strategic document entitled 'Improving the Quality and Relevance of Vocational Education and Training in Bosnia and Herzegovina – Based on the Conclusions of Riga and the Osnabrück Declaration 2021–2030' has

¹⁵ In the absence of publicly available administrative data, this finding represents an analytical assessment by the author, based on experiential insights gained through professional work across the country.

¹⁶ Based on the interview with the Ministry of Civil Affairs of Bosnia and Herzegovina. However, during the review and validation process in February 2026, it was confirmed that the document had not yet been adopted.

been developed. This document represents a proposal for revising the strategic framework adopted in 2021, aligning state-level priorities with the key objectives and recommendations of the Osnabrück Declaration (2020) and the Riga Conclusions (2015), thereby strengthening the strategic coherence of Bosnia and Herzegovina's VET policies with European policy directions for the current decade. The document is accompanied by pilot action plans for seven administrative units, aimed at operationalising the proposed strategic priorities, while the remaining administrative units are expected to develop their own action plans based on this framework.¹⁷

At the European level, the Herning Declaration on Vocational Education and Training (2025) represents the most recently adopted strategic document, setting new priorities for the post-Osnabrück period. Bosnia and Herzegovina will need to integrate these priorities into its strategic planning frameworks in the coming period, and, where relevant, reflect them in its legislative and policy frameworks.

The state-level Strategic Platform for the Development of Adult Education in the Context of Lifelong Learning in Bosnia and Herzegovina (2014–2020) has expired. While Republika Srpska has adopted its Strategy for the Development of Preschool, Primary and Secondary Education for 2022-2030, which also covers TVET (Government of Republika Srpska, 2021a), together with corresponding implementation action plans (Government of Republika Srpska, 2021b), as well as its Strategy for Adult Education for the period 2021-2031 (Government of Republika Srpska, 2020), other administrative units have not yet developed equivalent strategic frameworks. Recently, the Ministry of Civil Affairs of Bosnia and Herzegovina initiated a process to revise the aforementioned Strategic Platform, with the support of DVV International – Country Office in Bosnia and Herzegovina, through a multi-sectoral working group.¹⁸

Since late 2023, with support of the United Nations and in partnership with the EU, OSCE and Council of Europe, Bosnia and Herzegovina has launched the preparation of ten-year education sector development plans for all twelve administrative units. This process represents an important step towards strengthening human capital through improved strategic planning and long-term investment in education (UN Bosnia and Herzegovina, 2024). The action plans, inter alia, cover secondary TVET and lifelong learning, including adult education and training.

Youth Guarantee Action Plans have been developed for Republika Srpska, the Brčko District and the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina, while the finalization and adoption of a country-wide implementation plan is expected by the end of 2025,¹⁹ with pilot implementation anticipated in 2026. The European Commission, ILO and ETF have been providing technical assistance through the EU–ILO Technical Assistance Facility. The document to be adopted at the level of Bosnia and Herzegovina, entitled the Youth Guarantee Implementation Plan in Bosnia and Herzegovina, consists of the Action Plan of Republika Srpska, the Action Plan of the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina, and the Action Plan of the Brčko District. It is modelled on the Belgian approach and focuses on measures within the competencies of state-level institutions – primarily coordination and international reporting. The recently adopted Reform Agenda provides the basis for continued reform of PES systems to increase efficiency by ensuring that only individuals actively seeking employment remain registered. This process, already implemented by the Republika Srpska Employment Institute, is now planned for the Federal Employment Institute and cantonal public employment services as well as the Brčko District Employment Institute. The reform is expected to redefine counsellor workloads in order to enable more tailored support to jobseekers. In addition, a clearer definition of an ALMP and improved coordination between employment, social and health institutions are among the short-term objectives. The forthcoming pilot implementation of the Youth Guarantee represents a key test of PES reform, as it requires improved outreach, effective data exchange, strengthened labour inspections and enhanced service delivery. These efforts will primarily require technical assistance and continued capacity building rather than substantial financial investments (Reform Agenda, 2025).

Youth strategies have been adopted across the country, including the 2022-2026 Youth Strategy of the Brčko District, the 2023-2027 Youth Strategy of Republika Srpska and the 2024-2027 Youth Strategy of

¹⁷ At the time of submission of the final draft of this study, the document had been adopted by the Project Steering Committee.

¹⁸ At the time of submission of the final draft of this study, the aforementioned process was ongoing, and the time period for its completion had not yet been ascertained.

¹⁹ During the review and validation process in February 2026, it was established that the document had not yet been adopted.

the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina. In some administrative units, existing strategic papers, such as those in the area of higher education, or social inclusion of persons with disabilities, already provide a relevant policy basis for future implementation of the Youth Guarantee.

5.2 Policy dialogue and the role of its actors

Labour and employment policy dialogue in Bosnia and Herzegovina operates simultaneously at several levels:

- within each entity (Republika Srpska, the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina) and the Brčko District;
- within the ten cantons of the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina, some of which independently allocate funding for targeted ALMPs; and
- among all administrative units, which are required to cooperate and report internationally through the Ministry of Civil Affairs of Bosnia and Herzegovina/Sector for Labour, Employment, Social Protection and Pension.

Education and training policy dialogue functions:

- within the competent administrative units (the ten cantons, the Brčko District and Republika Srpska);
- among the cantons in the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina, through the Federal Ministry of Education and Science, within its coordination mandate; and
- among all administrative units, which are required to cooperate and report internationally via the Ministry of Civil Affairs of Bosnia and Herzegovina, Sector for Education.²⁰

Implementation of labour legislation remains uneven, with significant gaps in social dialogue, worker protection and labour inspection enforcement (EC, 2024). There are no general collective agreements, while only a limited number of branch and sectoral collective agreements are in force, primarily in the public sector. Entity-level Economic and Social Councils operate inconsistently, and no such body exists at the state level. Deficiencies in guaranteeing trade union freedoms and collective bargaining rights persist and require urgent attention (Ibid).

The PES mirrors the governance structure.

In the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina, the PES system comprises the Federal Employment Institute and the ten cantonal PESs. In line with their respective competences, annual work programmes and annual reports are adopted by the founders of these public institutions, namely the Government of the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina and the ten cantonal governments. ALMPs are generally adopted at the federal level and implemented in cooperation with the cantonal employment services. Within the limits of available resources, some cantonal employment services also implement their own measures, subject to approval by cantonal governments. The organisational structure and competences of the cantonal employment services include 79 municipal employment bureaux.

In Republika Srpska, the PES system is centralised under the Republika Srpska Employment Institute, operating through seven regional and 60 local offices.

The Brčko District has a stand-alone Employment Institute.

At the state level, the Agency for Labour and Employment of Bosnia and Herzegovina performs coordination, monitoring and international reporting functions, but has no executive authority.

The development of employment strategies, Youth Guarantee action plans, and education sector plans has relied heavily on EU IPA funding and technical assistance by international or development organisations.

²⁰ In addition, some local self-government units, although they have no significant competences in the fields of education and employment, have developed education- and employment-related plans and actions. This level of government, however, falls outside the scope of this research.

In line with regulatory frameworks, chambers of commerce and employers' associations play an important role in adult education and learning, particularly in identifying skills needs and facilitating company-based training – most notably in Republika Srpska, Zenica-Doboj, Sarajevo, Tuzla, and Una-Sana cantons. However, such demand-side structures are not equally developed across all administrative units.

While some administrative units have pedagogical institutes or departments responsible for adult education, or even specialised adult education institutions – as is the case in Republika Srpska – in such structures have not been established in other units, limiting institutional capacity and inter-agency cooperation.

Consequently, institutional arrangements and coordination mechanisms between supply- and demand-side actors vary considerably across administrative units.

Shared responsibility continues to pose challenges in the post-war and post-socialist context. Nevertheless, examples of good practice in intersectoral and interagency cooperation in secondary TVET – initiated in 2020 through a development cooperation project and subsequently expanded through additional initiatives – have demonstrated, particularly in the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina through the so-called Intercantonal Focus Group, that bringing together all relevant actors within a common framework to jointly address common challenges, supported by targeted technical assistance, can yield tangible results. The experience of this forum and existing coordination mechanisms could be leveraged to encourage similar cooperation in the field of WBL-oriented ALMPs. The state-wide Framework of Qualifications, together with its quality assurance mechanisms, has yet to be adopted. As a result, systems remain predominantly content-oriented rather than focused on learning outcomes- and lack a unified reference standard. However, ongoing curricular reforms in primary and general secondary education are creating momentum and expectations for more substantial reforms in TVET and adult education and learning.

5.3 Legal framework

Traineeship policies in Bosnia and Herzegovina are primarily linked to labour and social policy legislation, reflecting the constitutional division of competences. An overview of the relevant provisions of the labour laws is presented in Table 3.

In the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina, competences in social and employment policy are shared between the federal and cantonal levels. Functions are exercised: (a) jointly; (b) separately at the cantonal level; and (c) at the federal level with cantonal coordination. In Republika Srpska, labour and social policies are enacted at the entity level. In the Brčko District, these competences rest with the district government.

Table 3. Traineeship and SOR-type traineeship under relevant labour legislation

Entity/district	Labour law
Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina	Labour Law of the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina (<i>Official Gazette of the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina</i> , Nos. 26/2016, 89/2018, 23/2020 – Constitutional Court decision, 49/2021, 44/2022 and 39/2024), Section III – Education, Training and Professional Development, Articles 32, 33, 34, 171
Republika Srpska	Labour Law of Republika Srpska (<i>Official Gazette of Republika Srpska</i> , Nos. 1/2016, 66/2018 and 91/2021 – Constitutional Court decision of Republika Srpska No. U-66/20 of 29 September 2021; 119/2021, 112/2023 and 39/2024), Articles 48, 49, 50, 125, 206, 264
Brčko district of Bosnia and Herzegovina	Labour Law of Brčko District of Bosnia and Herzegovina (<i>Official Gazette of Brčko District of Bosnia and Herzegovina</i> , No. 12/2025 – consolidated text), Articles 42, 43, 44, 173

Source: Author's compilation

Apart from specific legislation governing regulated professions, admission conditions, procedures and additional aspects of traineeship and vocational training without establishing an employment relationship are regulated differently across administrative units:

(a) by collective agreements or internal labour rulebooks (Labour Law of the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina);

(b) by law, general acts or employment contracts (Labour Law of Republika Srpska); and

(c) by general acts (Labour Law of Brčko district).

With regard to employment legislation, Republika Srpska applies the Law on Mediation in Employment and Rights During Unemployment (last amended in 2023), the Brčko District applies the Law on Employment and Rights During Unemployment from 2023, and the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina applies the Law on Mediation in Employment and Social Security of Unemployed Persons in the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina (last amended in 2008). In the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina, a new draft law was adopted at the beginning of 2025, and a law proposal is currently under preparation.

The regulatory frameworks governing mediation in employment in Republika Srpska and the Brčko District do not explicitly refer to traineeship but include professional training and preparation for employment [*stručno osposobljavanje i pripremu za zapošljavanje*] and employment programmes as types of ALMPs. In the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina, the cantonal PESs further regulate these issues through their own rulebooks. Additional details have already been presented in the *Conceptual Clarification*. Interviews indicate that the domestic legal framework recognises trainees [pripravnike] but does not define traineeship as a separate legal category, pointing to the importance of applying the 2014 EU Quality Framework with due consideration of domestic legislation and institutional context.

Within the Youth Guarantee framework, continued education is considered essential for youth employability. Training is regarded of good quality when it matches the participant's profile, responds to labour market demand and leads to sustainable employment (EC, 2018, in Đuričić, ILO, 2023b). However, in Bosnia and Herzegovina, the transition toward fully learning outcomes-based formal programmes is still ongoing. Following a 2020 OSCE report (OSCE, 2020), and with OSCE support (OSCE, 2023), curricular reform processes have been launched in most administrative units in primary and general secondary education, with the aim of introducing a learning outcomes-based and competency-based paradigm. Over time, and with the establishment of appropriate mechanisms, these processes may lay the groundwork for similar development in secondary TVET. As noted, 'vocational subjects are specific: they first require the development of standards of occupation,²¹ followed by standards of qualifications, and only then can curricula be designed to reflect learning outcomes'.²²

As previously mentioned, formal upskilling and reskilling programmes largely rely on compressed secondary TVET teaching plans and programmes rather than being adapted to adult learners and their specific needs. At the same time, non-formal education and training, in its current form, require stronger input from the demand side of the labour market, while adult education and training as a whole would benefit from more effective quality assurance by the competent ministries (Reform Agenda, 2025).

Under adult education legislation across all administrative units, practical components may be delivered by the primary adult education provider, another accredited provider or an employer. Where training takes place outside the primary institution, contracts between providers and employers regulate mutual rights and obligations, while a separate agreement defines the rights of learners (dmb legal, 2021, HELVETAS *Moja budućnost*).

By-laws regulate procedures for verifying employers where practical training or practice is delivered, as well as the maintenance of employer registries, which are often held by chambers of commerce. Not all administrative units have adopted such by-laws, and existing registries differ in terms of completeness

²¹ In 2020 and 2021, the Government of Republika Srpska adopted a decree and subsequent amendments regulating the development of standards of occupation, thereby initiating curricular reform processes in secondary TVET. It should be noted, however, that the mechanism for developing standards of occupation is not regulated by law.

²² As confirmed by APOSO in an email dated 18 November 2025.

and functionality, which – according to interviews with employment institutes and services – directly affects the design of ALMPs. A good practice example is provided on page 24.

Overall, the system is currently in a transitional phase, combining interpretation and partial implementation of traditional, content-based curricula with emerging learning-based frameworks. Ongoing EU IPA support has facilitated the development of a Draft Framework of Qualifications, alongside the establishment of a Union of Qualification Registers, aligned with the constitutional framework. This issue has also been incorporated into the recently adopted Reform Agenda. Once fully established, it is expected to improve alignment between skills, labour market needs and broader development goals.

6 WORK-BASED LEARNING IN AN ALMP

Identifying WBL components in ALMPs requires examining programme design in the context of employment strategies, labour and employment legislation and relevant education and training legislation.

ALMP-supported traineeships and SOR-type traineeships are entirely work-based. They are implemented in line with (1) labour laws and further regulations and (2) regulatory frameworks governing employment and employment mediation, as operationalised by the competent authorities. These measures include both traineeships [*pripravnički staž*] that establish an employment relationship and, to a significantly lesser extent, SOR-type traineeships [*stručno osposobljavanje bez zasnivanja radnog odnosa*], which do not result in the establishment of an employment relationship. The two schemes target different beneficiary groups – ranging from secondary VET graduates to university degree holders – yet in practice they are sometimes used interchangeably. In practice, these measures are designed so that host employers receive financial incentives – primarily wage subsidies – to offset part of the costs incurred during traineeship or SOR-type traineeship. Most ALMPs targeting traineeships and SOR-type traineeships predominantly involve unemployed university graduates placed in public sector. An exception is the Brčko District, where such measures implemented by the Brčko District Employment Institute cannot be applied in the public sector.

The duration of ALMPs generally follows provisions set out in labour laws and related regulations, although in some cases it may be shortened or extended. For example, where a traineeship is legally prescribed for a duration exceeding 12 months, ALMP co-financing typically covers only 12 months. In other cases, the duration is shortened when an ALMP is designed solely to support the completion of the traineeship period prescribed by regulation.

Other WBL-relevant ALMPs include: formal upskilling and reskilling education and training²³ and non-formal education and training – either through on-the-job training with employers or short programmes delivered by adult and training providers. These measures are primarily oriented towards direct employment or job placement, while only a smaller share is designed to enhance participants' overall employability. As previously noted, ALMPs focused on formal upskilling and reskilling are not included in this analysis. An additional criterion for classifying an ALMP as WBL-relevant is a minimum work-based component of at least 25%.

Employers' representatives participate in advisory councils of the employment institutes and the public employment services, thereby providing a formal channel for contributing to the design and monitoring of ALMPs.

Table 4 below presents a breakdown of ALMPs that include WBL component and are implemented by the Federal Employment Institute, the Republika Srpska Employment Institute, the Brčko District Employment Institute and cantonal public employment services. Identifying consistent trends is particularly challenging for traineeships and SOR-type traineeships, as these measures are often

²³ In accordance with adult education and training legislation in Bosnia and Herzegovina, two types of formal programme are recognised: upskilling [*dokvalifikacija*] and reskilling [*prekvalifikacija*]. In addition, programmes of occupational training [*programi stručnog osposobljavanja*], which may be granted the status of publicly recognised programmes.

embedded within broader ALMPs targeting hard-to-employ groups, as observed in the Federal or the Brčko District Employment Institutes. This is partly due to the fact that funding earmarked specifically for traineeships is insufficient to meet existing demand, as highlighted by representatives of the Federal Employment Institute. In addition, discrepancies were identified across annual reports, as data for a given year are fully consolidated only in the subsequent reporting cycle. For example, differing figures for 2022 were recorded in the 2022 annual report and in the 2023 report referring to 2022. Without further examining the underlying causes of these inconsistencies, the analysis relied on the most recent data available.²⁴

²⁴ In Bosnia and Herzegovina, local self-government units (LSGUs) also contribute to the implementation of traineeship as well as education and training initiatives. Their engagement is most commonly realised through local employment action plans developed in cooperation with local employment offices. LSGUs also participate in projects such as the ILO's *Local Employment Partnerships*,²⁴ as well as other project-based initiatives aimed at improving school-to-work transitions and supporting first employment through locally implemented traineeship schemes. In some cases, LSGUs cooperate with other initiatives to combine financial resources from alternative sources – such as the Federal Employment Institute or the Republika Srpska Employment Institute – with the aim of expanding the coverage or duration of these measures.

Table 4. Overview of ALMPs with work-based learning component²⁵

PES/ALMP	2022	2023	2024
Bosnia – Podrinje Canton Gorazde Public Employment Service (own funding)			
Professional training programme	10	8	n/a
Co-financing of Employment of Trainees (VSS)	n/a	1 ²⁶	n/a
Federal Employment Institute			
Co-financing of Employment of Trainees	408	453	304
Young People with Prior Work Experience	201	127	126
Training and Employment ²⁷	108	-	-
Targeted training for placement with a known employer	-	189	309
Training for Labour Market	-	204	958
Cooperation with other projects ²⁸	n/a	n/a	n/a
Republika Srpska Employment Institute			
Support to employment of trainees overall ²⁹	1004	967	192
Training, formal upskilling, formal reskilling	0	17	5
Brčko District Employment Institute			
Traineeship (govt funding)	n/a	n/a	n/a
Traineeship (as a criterion for hard-to-employ and women; 2 SSS, 1 VŠS)	-	-	3
Sarajevo Canton Public Employment Service			
Co-financing of employment of trainees – firefighters	40	10	disc.
Training, formal upskilling and formal reskilling	9	33	disc.
Targeted training for placement with a known employer	0	0	85
Employment Programme ‘Golden Badge’	2	2	n/a
Co-financing of Employment of VSS trainees with employers with predominantly private ownership	103	92	0
Co-financing of Employment of VSS trainees with employers with predominantly public ownership	100	102	0
Co-financing of Employment of SSS trainees	-	-	41
Co-financing of Employment of VSS trainees	-	-	94

²⁵ The overview is not exhaustive, as traineeship-related elements are sometimes embedded within other measures of the Federal Employment Institute and are therefore not distinctly identifiable in official reporting, or are presented as eligibility criteria under measures of the Brčko District Employment Institute. Similarly, on-the-job training may be implemented under the federal measure Cooperation with Other Projects, for which disaggregated information on training types leading to employment is not available.

²⁶ Through the Federal Ministry of Displaced Persons and Refugees provided funding for the participation of one trainee [pripravnik] in the programme (Annual Report on the Work of the Government of the Bosnia – Podrinje Canton for 2023).

²⁷ The programmes “Training and Work” and “Training and Work with a Known Employer” refer to the same type of active labour market measure; the difference in terminology results from a nomenclature change introduced in 2023.

²⁸ This measure may also include traineeships, as well as training for placement with a known employer. However, this information is not explicitly reported in official documents.

²⁹ Discrepancies were identified between data published in official annual reports and figures provided upon request.

Tuzla Canton Public Employment Service (own funding)	n/a	n/a	n/a
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Source: Author's overview, based on official reports and inputs provided upon request during the targeted research period

6.1 Types of programmes with a WBL component

ALMPs that include a WBL component are implemented by the Republika Srpska Employment Institute, the Brčko District Employment Institute, the Federal Employment Institute – jointly with the cantonal PESs, as well as by several cantonal PESs through their own resources, such as the Bosnia-Podrinje Canton Goražde, the Sarajevo Canton and the Tuzla Canton Public Employment Services.³⁰ The Una-Sana Canton Public Employment Service also operates as a registered adult education and training provider - the Centre for Occupational Training – which offers its services to a broad range of stakeholders.

As shown in Table 4, the largest share of ALMPs with a WBL component relates to the employment of trainees, while the available data suggest that SOR-traineeship (without the establishment of an employment relationship) is implemented in the Bosnia Podrinje Canton Goražde.

For analytical purposes, and ease of presentation, the ALMPs reviewed in this study are grouped into the following categories:

- Traineeship [*pripravnički rad*] and SOR-type traineeship [*stručno osposobljavanje bez zasnivanja radnog odnosa*];
- On-the-job training; and
- Training, upskilling and reskilling.

Further training [*usavršavanje*], although recognised during the research and listed in Table 1, has not been observed in the actual implementation of ALMPs.

A range of adult education and training providers offer market-based or project-funded training aimed at improving employability or facilitating job placement; however, these do not constitute ALMPs and are therefore not included in this analysis.

ALMP-supported traineeship and SOR-type traineeship are implemented in accordance with labour legislation; however, the specifics arrangements may vary by sector and employer. Certain professions are regulated, meaning that sector-specific legislation prescribes the conditions that must be met in order to practise the profession concerned. This applies to a wide range of occupations in sectors such as health, education, veterinary services, judiciary, mining, forestry, and geology, which are further regulated by relevant laws and by-laws.

In some cases, a traineeship [*pripravnički rad*] is mandatory; in others, an SOR-type traineeship [*stručno osposobljavanje bez zasnivanja radnog odnosa*]. These two arrangements are sometimes used interchangeably, despite differences in contractual arrangements and in the rights afforded to participants (Đuričić, ILO, 2023a).

By way of illustration, the Republika Srpska Employment Institute implements a traineeship [*pripravnički rad*]-related ALMP entitled *Programme to Support the Employment of Young University Graduates as Trainees*. The programme comprises two components: *Co-financing the employment of young people with a university degree* and *Co-financing the employment of young people with a university degree – children of fallen soldiers*. Table 5 presents an overview of participants employed under both components, disaggregated by sector, based on data provided upon request.

Table 5. Employed persons under the Republika Srpska Employment Institute traineeship ALMP

Year	Total Trainees Employed	Public Sector	Private Sector
2022	967	768	199
2023	14	10	4
2024	350	279	71

³⁰ See study limitations in the Methodology section.

Source. Input from the Republika Srpska Employment Institute, provided upon request

Available data indicate that in 2022, under traineeship measures coordinated by the Federal Employment Institute, 64% of signed contracts within the ALMP *Employment of Trainees* originated from the private sector. However, public sector employers host a significantly higher number of trainees per signed contract. Similar patterns were observed under the ALMP *Employment of Young People with Work Experience 2022*.

With regard to traineeship and SOR-type traineeship, official reports do not provide programme-level disaggregation, presenting only aggregate participant number. This limits the possibility of analysing the distribution of participants between professions regulated under Directive 2005/36/EC³¹ and other regulated or non-regulated professions.

Similarly, for ALMPs in the field of education and training, official reports do not differentiate by type of programme; reporting only the total number of participants.³²

The Republika Srpska Employment Institute did not issue a public call in 2022. Instead, various WBL-related ALMPs were implemented under the *Programme of Support to the Economy through the Refund of Paid Taxes and Contributions for Newly Hired Workers*; however, most of these measures were discontinued.³³

Table 6. Overview of ALMPs with continued education component in Republika Srpska

ALMP component	2023	2024
Training through a licensed institution	9	5
Training with a known employer	6	disc.
Support programme for employing youth in BPO industry	1	disc.
Support programme for training young people for employment in creative industries (focus on programming)	1	disc.
TOTAL	17	5

Source: Prepared by the author, based on the official reports and input provided upon request

The analysis below was guided by the criteria set out in the 2014 European Quality Framework for Traineeships.

6.2 Conclusion of a written traineeship agreement (Criteria 2 and 3)

The labour laws of the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina, Republika Srpska, and the Brčko District define the conditions and contractual arrangements applicable to trainees and persons undergoing professional training without the establishment of an employment relationship (SOR-type traineeship).

Table 7. Types of traineeship in labour legislation frameworks

Type of traineeship	FBIH	RS	BD
Traineeship policies stemming from the labour laws and further regulations	√	√	√
SOR-type traineeship policies stemming from the labour laws and further regulations	√	√	√

³¹ Regulated professions here refer to professions whose practice, access or title is controlled by law under Directive 2005/36/EC.

³² In some ALMPs, such as the Federal Employment Institute's '2025 Training and Work for a Known Employer', the programme design includes indicators for monitoring implementation and assessing the effectiveness of outcomes, with the potential for disaggregation by type of programme, profile, etc. However, such breakdowns are still not reflected in the officially available reports.

³³ A review of annual reports (2016–2021) shows inconsistent programme implementation and low fund utilisation. No funds were spent in 2015–2017 due to employer ineligibility and low interest. In 2018, 347 unemployed persons were trained and employed, and in 2019 the number dropped to 114. By 2020, only 4 individuals benefited. Training was provided under two components: (1) through verified institutions, and (2) employer-requested training (up to 1,500 BAM per person). Persistent issues – such as complex procedures, employment obligations, payment delays, and inadequate initial skills of candidates – were cited in interviews as barriers to programme uptake. In 2021, the Republika Srpska Employment Institute did not implement any training-oriented measures (Đuričić, ILO, 2023b).

	Contract submitted to relevant PES office for evidence and supervision within a period of 8 days		
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Source: Adapted from Đuričić (2023a), ILO

These legal provisions, in turn, influence the design of ALMPs. For the implementation of such measures, two types of agreements are required: (1) a relevant contract between the unemployed person and the employer, forming part of the documentation required for approval of the measure; and (2) an employment co-financing agreement concluded between the employer and the competent employment service or employment institute. Whether an employment contract follows the completion of a traineeship or SOR-type traineeship depends on the design of each individual ALMP.³⁴ However, individual contracts were not available for analysis. Given that a significant share of trainees are engaged in the public sector, the contracts they sign (particularly in cases of civil service traineeship) may fall outside general labour legislation but instead be governed by *leges speciales*. In such cases, trainees are often treated as *volunteers*, which contradicts the applicable laws on voluntary work, as discussed earlier in this report.

By contrast, contractual arrangements for on-the-job training vary depending on the specific ALMP. For example, under the ALMP implemented by the Federal Employment Institute entitled *Training and Work with a Known Employer*, three agreements are required: (1) a co-financing agreement for training and employment (under variants A, B, C and D) between the Federal Employment Institute and the employer, (2) a training agreement without establishing an employment relationship between the unemployed person and the employer; and (3) an employment contract following completion of the training, the duration of which depends on the selected programme variant (6, 12, 18, 24 months or indefinite duration), concluded between the unemployed person and the employer. During the mandatory employment period, the employer initially finances employment independently for a duration depending on the selected programme variant, after which, depending on the variant, the Federal Employment Institute either pays a lump sum or reimburses the agreed share of employment costs on a monthly basis after the expiry of the contracted period.³⁵

The ALMP *On-the-job Training with a Known Employer*, implemented by the Sarajevo Canton Public Employment Service, does not specify the type of contract to be concluded between the unemployed person and the employer, although it clearly defines the co-financing agreement. If the on-the-job training period is followed by the conclusion of an employment contract, co-financing continues at a reduced level. It is assumed that, in such cases, this agreement between the unemployed person and the employer may take the form of a training-without-employment contract, as in the federal ALMP. *Employer-demand training* constitutes one component of the relevant ALMPs implemented by the Republika Srpska Employment Institute. As in the case of the Sarajevo Canton Public Employment Service, the public call does not specify the type of contract to be concluded between the unemployed person and the employer; however, the measure is explicitly designed to promote the establishment of an employment contract. The measure also envisages the conclusion of a contract between the employer and a licensed adult education and learning provider.

PESs in other observed administrative units, apart from the cases described above, do not have specifically developed employability measures. In contrast, similar measures in Republika Srpska require the subsequent conclusion of an employment contract with a known employer for a minimum duration of 12 months and follow the logic outlined above (Rulebook on Amendments to the Rulebook on the Conditions, Criteria and Manner of Implementation of Active Employment Policy Measures, 2017, 2019, 2022). For example, *Training for the Labour Market* is an ALMP of the Federal Employment Institute implemented via training voucher. The types of agreements are clearly defined: agreement on the provision of training services concluded between the employer and the unemployed person, and an

³⁴ The measure, however, relies on the proactivity of unemployed individuals and their personal networks, as private sector employers are not obliged to publicly advertise job or traineeship openings, which may limit equal access to information and reduce the process transparency.

³⁵ Federal Employment Institute (2025), Programme for "Training and Work with a Known Employer 2025", Sarajevo.

agreement between the employer and the competent public employment service. In Republika Srpska, no public call was issued in 2022 for programmes dedicated to training, upskilling, and reskilling, resulting in the absence of activities under this measure. In 2023, several ALMPs were introduced under the umbrella ALMP entitled *Programme for supporting businesses through reimbursement of paid taxes and contributions for newly hired workers*, which was continued in 2024.

Interviewees from the PES generally stated that their activities are implemented within the existing legal frameworks, while simultaneously recognising the need for their further improvement. This includes, for example, establishing clear requirements for traineeships work and examinations, defining occupation-specific work experience requirements, and ensuring the quality of demand-driven non-formal education and training.

A good practice example: chamber-led synergies

For six years, the Zenica-Doboj Canton Chamber of Commerce, together with the Federal Employment Institute and the Zenica-Doboj Canton Ministry of Labour, Social Policy and Refugees, has implemented an ALMP combining training with guaranteed employment. In 2025 it targets unemployed persons registered with the Public Employment Service in occupations such as CNC operator, welder, tailor, and electrician. Training consists of 32–64 hours of theory in schools and 100–160 hours of practice in company workshops, with mentors proportionate to candidate numbers. Companies must employ participants for at least four months; recent cohorts include around 35 people annually.

Initially, the programme was co-financed through donor funding under the federal ALMP *Cooperation with Other Projects*. Since 2023, it has been co-financed by the Zenica-Doboj Canton Government and the Chamber, striving to achieve sustainability. Implementation relies on three contracts: with companies, with partnering schools and tripartite training agreements (Chamber, company, candidate). The Chamber matches candidates and employers through interviews, manages funds, and coordinates public calls.

The program consistently achieves a full employment rate among participants. Nevertheless, challenges remain due to its project-based rather than systemic framework, as well as the limited formal recognition of workplaces as learning environments. In this context, a register of employers (25 occupations, ~20 companies) has been established, currently representing a unique example in Bosnia and Herzegovina and demonstrating strong cooperation among competent authorities, the Chamber, and enterprises.

6.3 Learning and training objectives (Criteria 4 and 5)

Below is an overview of traineeship policies stemming from the labour laws and further regulations as assessed through the prism of the 2014 EU QFT.

Table 8. Learning and training objectives in traineeship

Criterion		Traineeship policies stemming from the labour laws and further regulations		
		FBIH	RS	BD
Learning and training objectives	Objectives clarified	Programme is not mandatory through labour law Different approaches in different branches Delegated to employers	Programme is mandatory through labour law Delegated to employers	Programme is mandatory through labour law Delegated to employers
	Mentor/supervisor assigned	Different approaches in different branches Delegated to employers	Delegated to employers through sample contract/guideline	Delegated to employers

Source: Adapted from Đuričić (2023a), ILO

Below is an overview of SOR-type traineeship policies stemming from the labour laws and further regulations as assessed through the prism of 2014 EU QFT.

Table 9. Learning and training objectives in SOR-type traineeship

Criterion		SOR-type traineeship policies stemming from the labour laws and further regulations		
		FBiH	RS	BD
Learning and training objectives	Objectives clarified	Programme is not mandatory through labour law Delegated to employers	Programme is mandatory through labour law Delegated to employers through sample contract specifying it/guideline	Programme is mandatory through labour law Delegated to employers
	Mentor/supervisor assigned	Different approaches in different branches Delegated to employers	Delegated to employers through sample contract specifying it/guideline	Delegated to employers

Source: Adapted from Đuričić (2023a), ILO

Within ALMP-supported traineeship and SOR-type traineeship measures, requirements related to mandatory training programmes and the appointment of mentors vary across administrative units and individual measures. For example, the Republika Srpska Employment Institute requires submission of a traineeship training programme, including justification of needs and reasons for engaging a person from the target group as well as information on the employer's human and material-technical capacities, thereby confirming readiness to implement the traineeship. Applications are assessed based on the submitted traineeship programme, prepared using a predefined template, and on the employer's human and material-technical capacities. However, the criteria against which the submitted documentation is evaluated remain unclear. In the Brčko District, the appointment of a mentor represents one of the mandatory programme criteria, while the public call does not explicitly require submission of a training programme. Conversely, the relevant Rulebook stipulates that 'along with the request for the use of fund under the professional training programme, the employer shall [...] also submit [...] the professional training programme' (Rulebook on Employment Incentive Measures, 2020, 2023).

Within ALMP-supported SOR-type traineeships, the Bosnia-Podrinje Canton Goražde Public Employment Service requires neither a training programme nor the appointment of a mentor. Similarly, the Sarajevo Canton Public Employment Service does not prescribe either requirement in its ALMP-supported traineeships. According to the available documentation, there is no explicit provision by the Federal Employment Institute requiring the appointment of a mentor. However, interviews with institutional representatives indicated that such a requirement is, in practice, applied informally. It was also recognised that formal regulation of the mentor role and strengthening mentor capacities would represent an opportunity to improve the overall quality of these measures.

On-the-job training ALMPs differ with regard to requirements related to training programmes and mentor appointment. For example, under the Federal Employment Institute-implemented *Training and Work with a Known Employer* measure, submission of a training programme and a training cost specification through a dedicated form, alongside a decision on mentor appointment, the mentors' CV and proof of professional qualifications. The design of the Sarajevo Canton Public Employment Service ALMP entitled *On-the-job Training with a Known Employer* provides for employer financing for the first six months. Upon expiry of this period, partial reimbursement is granted, subject to submission of proof of completed training, consisting of a report on successfully implemented training signed by the mentor and certified by the employer.

Public employment services in other observed administrative units do not support employability-oriented measure, whereas similar ALMPs implemented by the Republika Srpska Employment Institute require follow-up employment with the known employer and follow the logic described above. The Federal Employment Institute-coordinated *Training for the Labour Market*, implemented through training vouchers, requires mandatory submission of a training programme, a decision on mentor appointment and proof of the mentor's professional qualifications. The training programme must be aligned with the unemployed person's individual employment plan, as confirmed by the advisor's opinion on the justification for participation in the training.

The majority of interviewees agree that the structured learning and training component of traineeships is not sufficiently visible. There is anecdotal evidence that traineeships are at times implemented outside the field of the acquired qualification or without clear boundaries distinguishing them from regular employment (Đuričić, ILO, 2023a). Only a small number of respondents noted that mentoring is perceived as an additional burden in an already strained economy, while others pointed out that site visits and quality monitoring fall outside their institutional mandates. Although employers' associations were not available for consultation, the interviewed chamber of commerce likewise emphasised the importance of mentors – particularly trained mentors – in ensuring quality traineeship implementation. At the same time, improved enforcement of adult education and training legislation, especially regarding adequate conditions for in-company practical training, is widely recognised as an opportunity to develop more comprehensive education- and training-oriented ALMPs, according to the majority of the informants involved in this research.

The state-wide Framework of Qualifications, together with its quality assurance mechanisms, has not yet been adopted. As a result, quality assurance systems continue to lack a unified reference standard. Once adopted, it is expected to enable mechanisms for the recognition of prior learning, allowing competences acquired through non-formal and informal learning pathways to be validated and linked to qualifications. At the time of the final draft submission, the Draft Framework of Qualifications was undergoing public consultation, after which it shall be submitted to the Council of Ministers of Bosnia and Herzegovina for consideration.

6.4 Working conditions applicable to trainees (Criteria 6, 7 and 8)

Labour laws specify the conditions and contractual arrangements for traineeship and SOR-type traineeship, as demonstrated in Tables 10 and 11 respectively.

Table 10. Traineeship policies stemming from the labour laws and further regulations

Criterion		FBiH	RS	BD ³⁶
Working conditions applicable to trainees	Health/accident insurance and sick leave clarified	√	√	√
	Allowance/compensation and amount clarified	√	√	√
	Limits to maximum weekly working time, minimum daily and weekly rest periods	√	√	√

Source: Adapted from Đuričić (2023a), ILO

Table 11. SOR-type traineeship policies stemming from the labour laws and further regulations

Criterion		FBiH	RS	BD ³⁷
Working conditions	Health/accident insurance and sick leave clarified	Health insurance as guaranteed for unemployed Mandatory pension and disability insurance		

³⁶ In Brčko District, there is no separate law governing pension and disability insurance; instead, rights are exercised under the applicable legislation of Republika Srpska or Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina, depending on the fund to which contributions were paid.

³⁷ Ibid.

applicable to trainees	Allowance/compensation and amount clarified	No salary but employer and trainee may agree on financial remuneration	Employer may decide on financial remuneration and other rights, as per law, general act of contract: financial remuneration is not to be considered a salary	Employer may decide on financial remuneration as per general act or contract
	Limits to maximum weekly working time, minimum daily and weekly rest periods	Daily rest between two consecutive working days and weekly break	√	Daily rest between two consecutive working days and weekly break

Source: Adapted from Đuričić (2023a), ILO

Traineeships derive from both labour legislation and sector-specific regulations. Depending on the allowance, traineeships can be classified into: (a) paid traineeships, where the allowance is set at 70% or 80% of the basic salary for the relevant tasks – higher by agreement, or, in some cases higher when targeting shortage occupations;³⁸ and (b) unpaid traineeships, where no legal obligation to pay an allowance exist

ALMP-supported traineeship and SOR-type traineeship apply these policy frameworks. For example, under the federal programmes “Co-financing of Employment of Trainees 2025” and “Young People with Prior Work Experience 2025”, the Federal Employment Institute reimburses the employer the agreed monthly amount upon submission of supporting documentation for the previous month. The programme provides that co-financing primarily covers contribution costs, while any amount exceeding those costs is used to cover part of the net salary.

By contrast, regarding on-the-job training ALMPs, conditions vary depending on the implementation phase and the associated contractual agreement. When the arrangement is based on a contract for on-the-job training without an employment relationship, participants are considered unemployed persons and retain health insurance (as guaranteed for registered unemployed persons), as well as mandatory pension and disability insurance coverage (for persons insured under specific circumstances).

For SOR-type traineeships, there is no legal obligation to provide an allowance. In certain cases, such as Bosnia-Podrinje Canton Goražde, a cash allowance is regulated through the ALMP, provided on a monthly basis and including personal income tax at a rate of 10%. In addition to the monetary allowance, the programme also provides a monthly amount covering insurance in case of occupational injury and occupational disease. Under the federal programme “Training and Work with a Known Employer”, an allowance is provided to the unemployed person. This amount is aligned with the applicable legal framework under which an unemployed person is defined as a person whose monthly income does not exceed 25% of the average salary in the previous year, according to data from Federal Institute for Statistics, thereby allowing the unemployed status to be retained throughout the training period. During the training component of the programme, the unemployed person receives an allowance defined by the programme, which does not constitute a salary, as the training takes place without establishing an employment relationship. Once employment is established, the employer assumes responsibility for salary payment in accordance with the concluded employment contract, while the Federal Employment Institute, depending on the selected programme variant, reimburses or co-finances part of the employment costs during the agreed period. Benefits and entitlements arising from employment status, such as meal allowances, transport allowances and other benefits, are regulated in accordance with collective agreements and the internal labour rules of individual employers.

³⁸ In the case of Una-Sana Canton, a paid traineeship for teachers is considered equivalent to full-time employment (Đuričić, 2023a, ILO).

Finally, participants in training, upskilling, and reskilling measures are considered both unemployed persons and learners. They retain all rights related to health insurance and mandatory pension and disability insurance coverage as unemployed persons.

If and when – an ALMP transitions into a new phase involving the conclusion of an employment contract, all rights stemming from that contract shall apply.

With regard to allowances, on-the-job training ALMPs coordinated by the Federal Employment Institute are designed as co-financing in the form of per-capita reimbursement. For example, Variant A of one such ALMP (three months of training followed by six months of employment) provides for a financial framework per participant that includes the allowance paid during the programmes, as well as the related income tax, pension and disability insurance contributions during the employment phase, together with training costs. This amount is reimbursed to the employer as a lump-sum per person upon completion of the mandatory six-month employment period.

There are ongoing initiatives to amend tax and contributions legislation related to practical training in the context of so-called dual-oriented secondary TVET. These changes create room for further harmonisation and may also affect other regulations, particularly those governing in-company practical training and employment. In Republika Srpska, under amendments to the Personal Income Tax Law in early 2024, allowances paid to secondary TVET students undertaking in-company practical training are exempt from personal income tax up to a maximum amount of 50% of the minimum wage. In the Draft Law on Mediation in Employment and Social Security of Unemployed Persons in the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina, allowances under ALMPs – including urgent employment, professional training without an employment contract, and formal reskilling or training – are not considered taxable income. It remains to be seen whether this provision will be retained in the adopted proposal.

6.5 Rights and obligations (Criterion 9)

The rights and obligations of the trainees, learners, jobseekers as well as those of traineeship and on-the-job training providers/employers – including provisions on confidentiality and ownership of intellectual property rights – are defined in accordance with applicable legislation. In the case of ALMPs, these elements are not always explicitly embedded in the design of measures, but they may be regulated through contractual arrangements between employers and trainees/learners, where applicable.

6.6 Reasonable duration (max. six months) (Criteria 10, 11 and 12)

Labour laws specify duration of traineeship and SOR-type traineeship, as demonstrated in Tables 12 and 13 respectively.

Table 12. Traineeship policies stemming from the labour laws and further regulations

Criterion		FBiH	RS	BD
Reasonable duration	Duration limited to 6 months	Maximum 12 months, or longer	6 to 12 months, or longer	Maximum 12 months, or longer
	Conditions of longer duration clarified	Through sector-specific legislation		
	Termination allowed	Yes, but not specified		

Source: Adapted from Đuričić (2023a), ILO

Table 13. SOR-type traineeship policies stemming from the labour laws and further regulations

Criterion		FBiH	RS	BD
Reasonable duration	Duration limited to 6 months	Calculated under and for the purposes of the traineeship and work experience as	Calculated in accordance with and for the purposes of work experience as	Maximum one year, unless otherwise specified by law

		required in the designated occupation and cannot last more than the required traineeship	required in the designated occupation	
	Conditions of longer duration clarified	Through sector-specific legislation		
	Termination allowed	Yes, but not specified		

Source: Adapted from Đuričić (2023a), ILO

ALMP-supported traineeships do not exceed 12 months. However, there are cases where, within the design of ALMPs targeting SOR-type traineeship for secondary education qualification, the duration is aligned with that applied to higher education qualification. One such example is the *Programme of Employment of Trainees and SOR-Trainees with Higher Education and Secondary Education Degrees* implemented by the Sarajevo Canton Public Employment Service. It should be noted that occupation-specific data are not available, nor is it clear whether this measure complies with sectoral regulatory requirements, where applicable, or whether it results in postponement of first employment in practice. In addition, an ALMP coordinated by the Federal Employment Institute entitled *Young People with Prior Work Experience* provides co-financing for the employment of individuals who have some work experience but not sufficient to fully enter the labour market. In this case, the duration of the measure is six months regardless of qualification level, and twelve months for participants with higher or university-level education.

On-the-job training arrangements depend on the specific ALMP. For example, under the Federal Employment Institute–implemented *Training and Work with a Known Employer*, the duration varies depending on the sub-measure: (A) up to 3 months of training + 6-month or open-ended employment contract, (B) up to 3 months of training + 12-month or open-ended employment contract; (C) up to 3 months of training and up to 18-month or open-ended employment contract; and (D) up to 3 months of training and up to 24-month or open-ended employment contract.

The Sarajevo Canton Public Employment Service implemented the ALMP entitled *On-the-Job Training with a Known Employer* is designed for a minimum duration of six months, with the possibility of extension for an additional six months.

Under the ALMP coordinated by the Federal Employment Institute, *Training for the Labour Market*, the training duration is limited to a maximum of 4 months.

For example, all short courses offered through ALMPs in the Brčko District last 72 school lessons. In Bosnia-Podrinje Canton Goražde, ALMPs aimed at increasing employability specify that formal upskilling for a first qualification lasts up to 24 months, while reskilling (i.e. education for a second qualification) as well as upskilling to a higher qualification. may also last up to 24 months, in line with legal requirements for formal adult education and learning. Training measures in this canton may last up to 12 months. In Republika Srpska, within the 2024 *Component III: Training, Formal Upskilling and Reskilling*, training duration is not specified, while formal upskilling and reskilling are regulated by adult education and learning legislation. As noted earlier, formal upskilling and reskilling are not subject to this exercise.

Circumstances and conditions for extending or renewing an ALMP are generally regulated. Traineeship and SOR-type traineeship, as defined in the legal frameworks in Bosnia and Herzegovina, cannot be renewed, as this could result in the postponement of first employment. These measures are intended as a direct transition to employment or to readiness for a professional examination and entry into the labour market. However, there are cases, as noted above, where PESs recognise that young people may lack the length of work experience required to access a professional exam or secure employment. For example, the Federal Employment Institute’s ALMP *Young People with Prior Work Experience* targets young people under the age of 35 who have already acquired some work experience, but for a shorter duration in the occupation or profession for which they were educated. This measure enables

them to acquire the length of work experience required to sit a professional exam or obtain employment in their field.

For ALMPs implemented by the Federal Employment Institute in cooperation with the cantonal PESs, at least one on-site inspection during training is mandatory, alongside the collection of trainee evaluations and inspection reports. If irregularities are identified, or if the employer fails to fulfil contractual obligations or submit documentation on implemented training within 60 days of completion, the Institute initiates contract termination procedures.

Some ALMPs further define employer eligibility criteria. For example, the Sarajevo Canton Public Employment Service stipulates that employers who have already employed the applicant and whose employment ended within three months prior to the publication of the public call are not eligible for co-financing.

Overall, in public calls for targeted ALMPs, provisions relating to employers' rights tend to be more clearly defined than those concerning unemployed persons. This is partly expected given that these measures predominantly rely on wage subsidies.

A review of the draft Youth Guarantee Action Plan of Republika Srpska indicates that consideration is being given to aligning the design of youth employment programmes for persons in traineeship status with the 2014 EU QFT, primarily by reducing traineeships duration from twelve to six months for individuals with higher education qualifications. It may be assumed that a similar approach is being considered in other parts of the country.

6.7 Proper recognition of traineeships (Criterion 13)

Labour laws specify the recognition of traineeship and SOR-type traineeship, as presented in Table 14.

Table 14. Traineeship and SOR-type traineeship policies stemming from the labour laws and further regulations

Criterion	Type of traineeship	FBiH	RS	BD
Proper recognition through certificate	Traineeship	√	√	√
	SOR-type traineeship	√	√	√

Source: Adapted from Đuričić (2023a), ILO

However, as there is currently no registry of occupations for which work experience is required prior to accessing first employment or a professional examination, this issue can only be assessed on a case-by-case basis, depending on the applicable collective or branch agreement, or the employer's rulebook, where one exists. Such a registry is expected to be introduced in the near future, but only for so-called regulated professions under Directive 2005/36/EC.³⁹

In the case of ALMP-supported SOR-type traineeships, employer eligibility criteria do not include an obligation to demonstrate that work experience is required for the specific position, for example through a branch agreement or, at the very least, an internal rulebook. Additionally, under labour law, rulebooks on labour are mandatory only for employers with more than 15 employees in Republika Srpska and the Brčko District, or more than 30 employees in the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina. In situations where a branch agreement is absent and the employer does not submit a rulebook as part of the ALMP design, it remains unclear on what basis it can be concluded that work experience is indeed necessary.

By contrast, all observed ALMPs targeting on-the-job training require the provision of a certificate confirming training completion or attendance.

³⁹ A project Terms of Reference for the analysis and mapping of professional qualifications for regulated professions across all levels of government in Bosnia and Herzegovina has been developed. The aim is to compile a nationwide, comprehensive overview and propose a unified list of regulated professions. These activities are intended to support institutions at all levels in identifying and aligning their respective regulated professions. However, the launch of the related EU-funded tender has been postponed until visible progress is made in the implementation of IPA 2019 projects in the areas of pre-school education and vocational education and training (Ministry of Civil Affairs of Bosnia and Herzegovina, 2023).

Nevertheless, given the limited transferability of such certificates, individuals may acquire competences and experience that cannot be formally recognised or applied in other context. As highlighted during the interviews, it also remains unclear what happens in cases where learners are legally prevented – for example, due to intellectual property rights – from further using the competences acquired if an employment contract does not materialise upon completion of the obligations stemming from the ALMP.

On-the-job training programmes hold significant, yet still underutilised, potential. If these programmes are linked with adult education and learning legislative frameworks, particularly through clearly defined roles for chambers of commerce, craft chambers or employers' associations, such as maintaining registries of employers meeting minimum requirements for practical training, organising in-company mentor's training and similar functions, the focus could shift from meeting formal eligibility criteria towards competence development and recognition. Achieving this would require substantial progress in adopting a country-wide framework of qualifications, improving and fully implementing adult education and learning regulations and fostering interagency and cross-sectoral cooperation. In the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina, given its governance structure and the division of competences, vertical cooperation would be essential, but this applies to the country as a whole.

With regard to ALMP-supported measures related to training, upskilling, and reskilling delivered through licensed institutions, these activities are, in principle, regulated by adult education and learning legislative frameworks. However, due to differing levels of implementation, the degree of publicly guaranteed quality varies significantly. (Đuričić, ILO, 2023b)

For example, within the Bosnia-Podrinje Canton Goražde Public Employment Service ALMP entitled *Upskilling, reskilling, training and further training*, the public document issued corresponds to the type of educational programme completed.

While ALMPs require a certificate of competence or attendance for non-formal training, the absence of a framework of qualifications and mechanisms for recognising prior learning prevents ensuring both learners' vertical mobility and their employability in the labour market (Ibid).

As for the recognition of prior learning, regular procedures apply in the case of formal qualifications, with the relevant ministries of education responsible, regardless of whether the purpose is employment or further education. Consequently, for learners who have benefited from ALMPs, the recognition of certificates obtained through non-formal education remains in a grey area – at the discretion of employers for employment purposes, and a barrier to further education and vertical mobility until the Framework of Qualifications and accompanying mechanisms for the recognition of prior learning are adopted and implemented (Đuričić, 2021; ISSP; RCC).

6.8 Transparency requirements (Criteria 14 and 15)

ALMPs are governed by regulatory frameworks on employment mediation and the rights of unemployed persons. Calls for participation are issued in line with individual ALMPs and, depending on their type, are open to eligible employers and unemployed persons. Eligibility criteria are published on the official websites of the respective institutions and further disseminated via chambers of commerce, development agencies, media outlets, and other actors. The results of public calls are also made publicly available.

In the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina, Republika Srpska and the Brčko District, private sector employers are free to recruit without informing public employment services of their open job vacancies, including positions for traineeship or professional training without an employment contract prior to first employment.

Nevertheless, PESs design ALMPs to facilitate employment mediation, protect the rights of unemployed persons through employer screening and selection while supporting matching processes by setting clear eligibility criteria for both registered jobseekers and participating employers. For example, under the Federal Employment Institute ALMP targeting the co-financing of employment, including traineeships, employers are required to register through the online portal. However, they may opt out of employment

mediation if the matching with a jobseeker registered with the employment bureau has been arranged independently. By contrast, an ALMP entitled *Professional training implemented by the Bosnia-Podrinje Canton Goražde Public Employment Service* specifies in the public call the amount of the monthly financial allowance, including personal income tax at a rate of 10% as well as a monthly amount allocated for insurance in the event of work-related injury or occupational disease, in accordance with pension and disability insurance regulations. An additional challenge lies within adult education and learning frameworks, particularly the need for visible and up-to-date registries of licensed adult education and training providers and quality-assured programmes, which several informants identified as a systemic concern.

Under an ALMP targeting traineeship implemented by the Sarajevo Canton Public Employment Service, eligible unemployed persons are required to obtain a voucher and independently identify a training employer meeting the prescribed criteria. This voucher-based approach does not fully meet the 2014 EU QFT transparency requirements, as key elements are formalised only after the unemployed person and the employer have been matched.

By contrast, a Federal Employment Institute-coordinated ALMP allows unemployed persons, once a voucher has been obtained, to identify an interested training employer and submit an application under the public call (the “Training for the Labour Market 2025” Programme). While basic procedural information is available via the web portal and through telephone and email contact, the level of detail available to unemployed participants regarding training content and expected learning outcomes remains limited.

The ALMP implemented by the Federal Employment Institute entitled *Training and Work with a Known Employer 2025* demonstrates a higher degree of transparency aligned with the 2014 EU QFT. The measure specifies the amount and structure of financial support, including the monthly trainee allowance, associated taxes and social contributions, as well as reimbursement amounts per programme variant, and clearly sets out eligibility criteria for employers and jobseekers. The programme also requires a structured application process, and mandatory mentoring arrangements supported by documented qualifications. Contact points are clearly defined and accessible through multiple channels. However, there remains space for improvement to achieve full alignment with the 2014 EU QFT. While the obligation to retain at least 60% of trainees after the training period is a positive feature, historical data on employers’ post-training employment rates are not published. In addition, information on working hours, work location, and other practical employment conditions is not included in the public call and could be explicitly stated to support informed decision-making. Under this ALMP, employers established or co-established by public entities are not eligible (Ibid.).

Similarly, the *Public Call for the Training, Formal Reskilling and Formal Upskilling of Unemployed Persons for a Known Employer* by the Sarajevo Canton Public Employment Service clearly defines the objectives, scope and maximum training duration (six months), as well as eligibility criteria for employers and unemployed participants. It specifies the amount and structure of financial support and obliges employers to retain participants for at least six months following training completion. The public call also outlines the application process, required documentation and evaluation procedures. Requiring a training plan, cost estimate and justification represents a strong quality element, ensuring relevance and structured planning. From the perspective of the 2014 EU QFT transparency requirements, however, certain gaps remain. The public call does not include details on tasks, responsibilities or learning outcomes, nor does it specify working conditions (such as working hours, location, and type of contract during the post-training employment period). Historical data on employer retention rates is also absent. Including this information directly in the public call (rather than relying solely on contractual arrangements) would strengthen transparency, enable candidates to make fully informed decisions, and align the programme more closely with EU best practices.

The Republika Srpska 2024 *Public Call for Unemployed Persons to Use Funds under Employment Programmes, Component III: Training, Additional Qualification and Requalification through a Licensed Provider*, and the *Programme for Supporting the Employment of Young University Graduates as Trainees* also clearly state objectives, target groups, maximum training duration, and basic employer

obligations, including mandatory employment for a minimum of six months following training completion. They provide information on procedures for employers, eligibility criteria, and available contact points. However, these calls lack sufficient detail on specific tasks, working conditions, location, working hours, or mentorship arrangements during training. Information on participants' rights, obligations, and remuneration during training, as well as precise contractual terms post-training, is also absent. Making this information available prior to application submission would better align the call with the 2014 EU QFT transparency requirements.

While the 2014 EU QFT encourages providers to clearly state key terms and conditions in traineeship vacancy notices, such information remains publicly available in Bosnia and Herzegovina, particularly in the private sector. As noted earlier, private employers are free to recruit independently without publishing traineeship and SOR-type traineeship vacancies through employment mediation legislation. In addition, by design of certain measures, matching between participants and employers may occur independently of PES mediation.

6.9 Cross-border traineeships (Criteria 16 and 17)

Although this criterion primarily refers to cross-border traineeships within the European Union, the analysis also considers available practices in Bosnia and Herzegovina to the extent possible. The study did not find any evidence of systematically organised cross-border traineeships, except for individual cases initiated independently. Previous analyses likewise noted that the availability and practice of cross-border traineeship could not be comprehensively assessed. Nevertheless, several identified cases suggest that such arrangements do occur in practice.

6.10 Use of European Funds (Criterion 18)

As already noted, in the context of preparing and piloting the Youth Guarantee, the EC, ETF and ILO have been providing technical assistance to the competent authorities through the EU–ILO Technical Assistance Facility. The Youth Guarantee Implementation Plan is expected to be adopted by the end of 2025, with piloting anticipated to begin in 2026.

Additional opportunities for intervention may be explored in the field of adult education and training, particularly with a view to strengthening quality assurance of supply, engaging possible intermediaries and facilitators, such as chambers of commerce, and enhancing inter-agency and intersectoral cooperation in the provision of Youth Guarantee preparation services. According to available information, these issues have been raised by the Ministry of Education and Culture of Republika Srpska⁴⁰ while the Republika Srpska, the Brčko District and the Federal Employment Institutes, as well as the Zenica-Doboj Canton Chamber of Commerce, have reaffirmed the importance of continued engagement in this area.

The implementation of the EU Local Employment Partnership project in Bosnia and Herzegovina has been led by the ILO since 2016.

The country has officially joined the Employment and Social Innovation (EaSI) programme.

The country's Reform Agenda was adopted by the Council of Ministers of Bosnia and Herzegovina on 30 September 2025, which was a precondition for accessing the first round of financing under the Growth Plan (Directorate-General for Enlargement and Eastern Neighbourhood, 2025)

Also, the country participates in ESAP, a regional project financed by the EU and jointly implemented by the Regional Cooperation Council and ILO, currently running its third phase.

⁴⁰ Based on the interview with the ILO.

In addition to IPA-funded initiatives, the World Bank, through one of its ongoing projects, has supported employment services in Bosnia and Herzegovina in the area of impact evaluation of ALMPs, thereby contributing to the development of evidence-based policymaking.

6.11 Applying the Quality Framework for Traineeships (Criteria 19, 20, 21 and 22)

As a rule, the implementation of ALMP-type traineeship programmes is monitored from an administrative perspective, with primary emphasis on the fulfilment of contractual obligations. This is largely due to the fact that such programmes involve wage subsidies for employers. As a result, monitoring systems tend to focus on compliance with formal criteria – such as contractual status, duration and supporting documentation – during the placement period.

A similar approach applies to ALMP-supported education and training programmes. Whether classroom-based or on-the-job – the same approach applies, although individual criteria are examined differently depending on the type of measure.

Some ALMPs, such as the Federal Employment Institute–implemented *Training and Work for a Known Employer* (2025), include monitoring and evaluation indicators. This practice provides a sound basis for the systematic tracking of results and their publication in officially available reports.

The Republika Srpska Employment Institute conducted evaluations on the impact of the *Support Programme for the Employment of Young University Graduates as Trainees* in 2019 and 2022, using the Propensity Score Matching Method (hereinafter PSM). The Federal Employment Institute regularly conducts evaluations of different measures.

While the 2014 EU QFT is not yet explicitly embedded in existing programmes, emerging policy initiatives – particularly the ongoing preparation of the Youth Guarantee – indicate initial alignment efforts and growing references to the framework.

6.12 Conclusions

Measured against the 2014 EU QFT criteria, Bosnia and Herzegovina displays a growing but uneven landscape of WBL-oriented ALMPs, reflecting both incremental policy progress and persistent structural constraints inherent to its multi-level governance system. Analysis across legal frameworks, programme design and practice indicates that, from a policy perspective, form a contractual arrangement and basic protection mechanisms are largely in place from a legal and administrative perspective, while learning design, transparency for job seekers and the portability of acquired skills remain key priorities for further development and consolidation. The analysis draws on available data from official reports and information obtained upon request. However, in some cases the scope and level of detail of the data were limited.

Strengths:

- Written agreements are systematically required across the observed measures. Traineeships, SOR-type traineeships and on-the-job training-oriented ALMPs thus provide a formal basis for all WBL-oriented ALMPs. (Criterion 2)
- Basic safeguards related to working conditions, including insurance, compensation/allowances and limits to working time, are embedded in core labour legislation and are duly reflected in the design of ALMP measures. (Criteria 6, 7, 8)
- Duration parameters of traineeship and SOR-type traineeship is often aligned with sector-specific legislation, providing predictability in some cases. On-the-job training phases generally fall within the 2014 EU QFT guidance. (Criterion 10)

- Recognition of traineeships and, in some instances, SOR-type traineeships, is formally ensured through a professional examination process before a commission prescribed by labour legislation and other relevant regulations. (Criterion 13)
- Transparency regarding employer eligibility and obligations is generally ensured through public calls and procedural guidelines issued by employment institutes and services, thereby partially meeting transparency requirements. (Criterion 14)
- Participation in various development projects demonstrates a certain level of institutional capacity for upcoming cross-border cooperation. (Criterion 15)
- IPA and other donor funds have supported capacity building and multi-stakeholder cooperation through mechanisms like Local Employment Partnerships, providing funding and pilot initiative for innovation. (Criterion 15)
- Monitoring and Evaluation elements are already incorporated in several measures (e.g. the Federal Employment Institute's 2025 Training and Work with a Known Employer), while the Republika Srpska Employment Institute has commissioned impact evaluations using PSM – both serving as useful footholds for system-wide evaluation practice. (Criteria 19- 22)
- World Bank support to employment services in developing impact evaluation methodologies has further enhanced the potential for evidence-based policy making in active labour market programming. (Criterion 15)

Challenges, gaps:

- The content of traineeship agreements does not consistently reflect the 2014 EU QFT standards. (Criteria 2, 6, 8, 12)
- Learning and training objectives and mentor roles are often absent or vaguely defined from ALMP design. (Criterion 4)
- In the absence of occupational registries, standardised professional exams and feedback mechanisms beyond labour inspection, systemic quality assurance cannot yet be ensured. Provisions related to working conditions are not consistently or explicitly integrated into the design stage of all measures under review. (Criteria 3, 5, 6, 7)
- The duration of traineeship and SOR-type traineeships exceeds the 2014 QFT recommendations in some cases, although this may be justified by sector-specific regulatory requirements. (Criterion 10)
- The use of SOR-type traineeships beyond clearly regulated traineeship pathways is not systemically grounded. As for a number of occupations, there is no clear legal or sectoral basis confirming the necessity of work experience or a professional examination. (Criterion 13)
- Recognition of on-the-job training with a known employer (as well as non-formal education and training for employment purposes), is left to the discretion of future employers, thereby limiting the portability of skills. (Criterion 13)
- Transparency requirements remain weak from the perspective of jobseekers, with insufficient intersectoral and interagency coordination in ALMP design. (Criterion 14)
- There is no coherent state-wide or other relevant overarching framework for recognizing cross-border WBL-oriented ALMPs, leaving SOR-type traineeships, on-the-job training, and non-formal education and training opportunities in a regulatory grey zone. (Criterion 15)
- Interventions related to the development of evidence-based active labour market policy measures are not yet systematically integrated into the regular functions of public employment services, which limits their full utilisation in the design of work-based learning-oriented ALMPs. (Criterion 19-22)

7 ACRONYMS

ALMP	Active labour market programme
BD	Brčko District of Bosnia and Herzegovina
BiH	Bosnia and Herzegovina
DVV	International Cooperation of the Deutscher Volkshochschul-Verband e.V.
EC	European Commission
ESAP	Employment and Social Affairs Platform
ETF	European Training Foundation
EU	European Union
EU QFT	European Union Quality Framework for Traineeships
FBiH	Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina
GIZ	Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit GmbH
ILO	International Labour Organization
IPA	Instrument for Pre-accession Assistance
LFS	Labour Force Survey
LSGU	Local self-government unit
NEET	Not in Employment, Education and Training
OeAD	Austria's Agency for Education and Internationalisation
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
OSCE	Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe
PES	Public Employment Service
PISA	Programme for International Student Assessment
RS	Republika Srpska
SDC	Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation
SOR	Traineeship scheme without an employment contract
SSS	Secondary Vocational Education [<i>srednja stručna sprema</i>]
TVET	Technical and vocational education and training
VSS	University degree / higher education [<i>visoka stručna sprema</i>]
VŠS	Post-secondary / higher vocational education [<i>viša stručna sprema</i>]
WBL	Work-based learning

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ANNEX I: Details of interviewees

Name	Organisation	Position	Date
Interviewee 1 Interviewee 2	Federal Employment Institute	Head of the Sector for Active Labour Market Programme Head of the Department for Mediation Development and Employment Preparation	2 June 2025
Interviewee 3 Interviewee 4	Brčko District of Bosnia and Herzegovina Employment Institute	(two institutional representatives)	3 June 2025
Interviewee 5	Republika Srpska Employment Institute	Senior Expert Associate for Training, Employment Preparation and Adult Education	5 June 2025
Interviewee 6	Una-Sana Canton Public Employment Service	Head of the HR Department	9 June 2025
Interviewee 7	Bosnia- Podrinje Canton Goražde Public Employment Service	Head of the ALMP Department	23 June 2025
Interviewee 8	Sarajevo Canton Public Employment Service	Head of the ALMP Department and IT Affairs	1 July 2025
Interviewee 9 Interviewee 10	Ministry of Civil Affairs of Bosnia and Herzegovina	Head of Department for Statistics, Analytics and Reporting, Education Sector Expert Advisor for International Cooperation in the Field of Labour, and Employment	22 July 2025
Interviewee 11	ILO	Senior Technical Officer/ Project Manager on the EU-ILO Technical Assistance Facility for the Youth Guarantee in the Western Balkans	30 July 2025
Interviewee 12	Zenica-Doboj Canton Chamber of Commerce	Secretary General	15 August 2025

ANNEX II: Quality criteria for traineeships, based on the European Quality Framework for Traineeships

1. Improve the quality of traineeships, in particular as regards learning and training content and working conditions, with the aim of easing the transition from education, unemployment or inactivity to work by putting in practice the following principles for a Quality Framework for Traineeships:

Conclusion of a written traineeship agreement

2. Require that traineeships are based on a written agreement concluded at the beginning of the traineeship between the trainee and the traineeship provider;
3. Require that traineeship agreements indicate the educational objectives, the working conditions, whether an allowance or compensation is provided to the trainee by the traineeship provider, and the rights and obligations of the parties under applicable EU and national law, as well as the duration of the traineeship, as referred to in recommendations 4-12;

Learning and training objectives

4. Promote best practices as regards learning and training objectives in order to help trainees acquire practical experience and relevant skills; The tasks assigned to the trainee should enable these objectives to be attained;
5. Encourage traineeship providers to designate a supervisor for trainees guiding the trainee through the assigned tasks, monitoring and assessing his/her progress;

Working conditions applicable to trainees

6. Ensure that the rights and working conditions of trainees under applicable EU and national law, including limits to maximum weekly working time, minimum daily and weekly rest periods and, where applicable, minimum holiday entitlements, are respected;
7. Encourage traineeship providers to clarify whether they provide coverage in terms of health and accident insurance as well as sick leave;
8. Require that the traineeship agreement clarifies whether an allowance or compensation is applicable, and if applicable, its amount;

Rights and obligations

9. Encourage the concerned parties to ensure that the traineeship agreement lays down the rights and obligations of the trainee and the traineeship provider, including, where relevant, the traineeship provider's policies on confidentiality and the ownership of intellectual property rights;

Reasonable duration

10. Ensure a reasonable duration of traineeships that, in principle, does not exceed six months, except in cases where a longer duration is justified, taking into account national practices;
11. Clarify the circumstances and conditions under which a traineeship may be extended or renewed after the initial traineeship agreement expired;
12. Encourage the practice of specifying in the traineeship agreement that either the trainee or the traineeship provider may terminate it by written communication, providing advance notice of an appropriate duration in view of the length of the traineeship and relevant national practice;

Proper recognition of traineeships

13. Promote the recognition and validation of the knowledge, skills and competences acquired during traineeships and encourage traineeship providers to attest them, on the basis of an assessment, through a certificate;

Transparency requirements

14. Encourage traineeship providers to include in their vacancy notices and advertisements information on the terms and conditions of the traineeship, in particular on whether an allowance and/or compensation and health and accident insurance are applicable; encourage traineeship providers to give information on recruitment policies, including the share of trainees recruited in recent years;
15. Encourage employment services and other providers of career guidance, if providing information on traineeships, to apply transparency requirements;

Cross-border traineeships

16. Facilitate the cross-border mobility of trainees in the European Union inter alia, by clarifying the national legal framework for traineeships and establishing clear rules on hosting trainees from, and the sending of trainees to, other Member States and by reducing administrative formalities;
17. Examine the possibility to make use of the extended EURES network and to exchange information on paid traineeships through the EURES portal;

Use of European Structural and Investment Funds

18. Make use of the European Structural and Investment Funds, namely the European Social Fund and the European Regional Development Fund, in the programming period 2014-2020, and the Youth Employment Initiative, where applicable, for increasing the number and quality of traineeships, including through effective partnerships with all relevant stakeholders;

Applying the Quality Framework for Traineeships

19. Take appropriate measures to apply the Quality Framework for Traineeships as soon as possible;
20. Provide information to the Commission by the end of 2015 on the measures taken in accordance with this Recommendation;
21. Promote the active involvement of social partners in applying the Quality Framework for Traineeships;
22. Promote the active involvement of employment services, educational institutions and training providers in applying the Quality Framework for Traineeships;