

The status of Western Balkans countries within the ERA

This year's 20th anniversary of the European Research Area is an opportunity to highlight some very important developments as regards Western Balkans countries.

Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, North Macedonia, Montenegro and Serbia are the Western Balkan countries currently serving as observers within the [European Research Area and Innovation Committee](#) (ERAC). Meeting four times a year in plenary sessions, the committee represents the partnership between member countries, Horizon 2020 associated countries and the European Commission. It is a policy advisory body assisting the Council, the Commission and Member States in the field of research, innovation and technological development.

To measure the implementation of ERA, Member States developed a set of 24 core indicators. The latest [ERA progress report](#) mentions diverse developments that each of these five Western Balkans countries have achieved so far.

Albania

The 'Land of Eagles' may be one of the most laggard as regards its national research system (together with Bosnia and Herzegovina and Montenegro), Albania presents good results in terms of open access to scientific knowledge. Based on the "Share of life sciences papers to which a country contributed and that have at least one open data set in Figshare" indicator, Albania shows the strongest increases in ranks (from 40th to 28th).

Bosnia and Herzegovina

Bosnia and Herzegovina allocated only about 0.2 % of Gross Domestic Product (GDP) to the Government Budget Allocations for Research and Development (GBARD). Based on the report, this ranks the country at the bottom of the list. Also, in terms of co-publications with other ERA countries, the country displays a sharp decline of 31 %. The picture is much better when considering the gender dimension in research. Bosnia and Herzegovina moved up the ranking by more than 20 places. Also, the most notable change is seen in the share of public research financed by the private sector, as the country cruised from 29th to 1st place.

North Macedonia

North Macedonia is among the countries that increased performance th in terms of international cooperation and in growth rates. For instance, North Macedonia's annual average growth is 103 %. As regards gender equality and gender mainstreaming in research, the country displayed a high score of 67 % (2012) which must be interpreted carefully, as it was based on a very small population of only 9 researchers. However, it appears that on average, women are paid more than men in scientific Research & Development activities. The country is also noted as the strongest performer in shares of non-EU doctoral students.

Montenegro

A [report dealing with Montenegro's performances](#) was published in 2018. It notes that Montenegro achieved substantial progress in enhancing the optimal circulation and transfer of scientific knowledge. Nevertheless, it is mentioned that a significant focus in the future should be given to enhance labour market openness and international cooperation. Based on the [technical report](#), Montenegro led an Action Plan to implement the Strategy for Scientific Research Activities (2012-2016) and Strategy of Innovation Activity (2016-2020). However, the country didn't conduct a research and innovation strategy on smart specialisation.

As regards the share of female PhD graduates (between 2013 and 2016), Montenegro displays the highest score (64 %). The country has indeed promoted female participation in decision-making processes, having a good representation of women as deans, directors and rectors of research performing organisations (RPOs). Like other ERA countries, Montenegro is adopting regulatory frameworks for protecting intellectual property.

In terms of international cooperation, Montenegro experienced the strongest drop in the ranking (22nd to 28th) with one of the largest average annual declines.

Serbia

The [report dealing with Serbia's performance](#) notes that the country has progressed in enhancing excellence and relevance of its national scientific research system. A Strategy on Scientific and Technological Development of the Republic of Serbia for the period 2016 – 2020 was adopted. It is therefore expected that the quality of research will be enhanced. In 2018, Serbia adopted a national science policy called the Open Science Platform. In terms of knowledge circulation, Serbia displays a good score as it moved up sharply, from last place (31st) to 13th rank, with an average annual growth rate of 139 %. However, Serbia achieved its weakest performances in terms of transnational cooperation. For example, Serbia is one of the countries which advertised less than one job through EURAXESS for every 1 000 public sector researchers.

What's next for ERA?

The European Commission has proposed some programmes for the next financing period (2021-2027) including regional funds, a European reform delivery tool, and the EU's next research and innovation framework programme, Horizon Europe, which includes a dedicated pillar to help strengthen the ERA.

What's more, [Mariya Gabriel, European Commissioner for Innovation, Research, Culture, Education and Youth, is planning to revamp ERA](#), along with proposals for expanding excellence in research and innovation to poorer regions.

"If we want a revitalised ERA, obviously we will propose new actions," she said in an [interview with Science|Business](#). "Excellence will always be at the heart of ERA. We have to preserve it but we need to acknowledge the new realities," she added.

More information

[Information about ERA](#)

[Factsheet about ERA](#)

[Information about the European Research Area and Innovation Committee \(ERAC\)](#)

[ERA progress report 2018](#)

[Progress report Montenegro](#)

[Progress report Serbia](#)

[ERA 2018 Technical report](#)

[Click here](#) for more information on actions supporting the integration of Western Balkans into the ERA.

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