

Western Balkans Agenda on Innovation, Research, Education, Culture, Youth and Sport

Building on the Joint Declaration “A Western Balkans Agenda on Innovation, Research, Education, Culture, Youth and Sport” this document presents the specific objectives, priorities and a tentative roadmap of key actions of this Agenda.

Fostering the stability and prosperity of the region remains a key priority for the EU, taking into account the effect of the COVID-19 pandemic which is hitting hard the Western Balkan societies and economies. As outlined in the European Commission priorities, green transition, digital transformation and an economy that works for people are crucial for relaunching and modernising the economies of the Western Balkans, helping to create jobs and growth, addressing the long-standing challenges faced by young people in the region such as limited job prospects, and inequality. Research, innovation, education and culture are essential drivers in this process - underpinned by evidence-based policymaking. Culture and inter-cultural dialogue processes also have an outstanding role in creating an enabling environment for strengthening and reconciling communities.

The Western Balkans Agenda on Innovation, Research, Education, Culture, Youth and Sport outlines a comprehensive, long-term strategy for cooperation with the Western Balkans. It will contribute to the economic development and regional cooperation in the Western Balkans alongside the overall EU support for a rapid restart of the region's economy. The Commission has launched an ambitious Economic and Investment Plan for the region proposing to mobilise up to EUR 9 billion of IPA III funding for the period 2021-2027, including a new Western Balkans Guarantee facility, with the ambition to potentially raise investments of up to EUR 20 billion¹. This is complemented by the European Commission's proposal on vocational education and training for sustainable competitiveness, social fairness and resilience² as well as the New European Skills Agenda³ as well as the European Pillar of Social Rights. The challenges posed by climate change call for an urgent effort to decarbonise the energy supply, systematically improve air quality and the implementation of smart mobility solutions⁵, as well as for investments in enhancing resilience to climate change impacts and disasters. In addition, the circular economy is the key to reduce the increasing consumption of natural resources and harmful waste disposal⁶. Also depollution of air, water and soil, is a political priority with a view to protect citizen health and biodiversity in the long term⁷. The focus of the actions of this Agenda is accomplished through three main axes: political, regional and thematic, which set the framework for cooperation with the Western Balkans while remaining flexible with a view to adapting the actions to new developments or emerging priorities. Foresight, technology transfer, capacity building activities and evidence-based policymaking will guide this Agenda.

This Agenda and proposed implementation actions will contribute to a number of priorities and missions in the region:

- Stimulating a sustainable economy (post COVID-19) and help to create jobs;
- Transforming research and innovation eco-systems towards EU standards;
- Enhancing research and innovation eco-systems to boost the region's innovation capacities
- Counteracting climate change and supporting the digital transformation;
- Promoting the implementation of the external dimension of the EU Green Deal and a sustainable agriculture in the Western Balkans;
- Providing vocational education and continuing training for upskilling and reskilling of young and adults;
- Establishing European vocational education and training as a global reference for skills development;
- Nurture knowledge-based societies;
- Enhancing the quality of education and training including also the lifelong learning context;
- Boosting human capital development in priority economic and investment sectors;
- Reducing the gender and digital divide as well as promoting and implementing new technologies in line with priority fields in education;
- Improving sustainable mobility and connectivity;
- Fostering cultural cooperation within the region and the EU;
- Strengthening regional cooperation and the Common Regional Market.

FOCUS ARTICLE

The continued assessment of this Agenda is based on the completion of precise actions underpinned by a set of indicators with base lines and targets well identified. Given its inter-disciplinary and cross-sectoral nature, the successful implementation of this Agenda will require a broad, comprehensive and synergetic implementation process at various levels, including European, regional, and local.

The involvement of various actors, including EU institutions, Western Balkans authorities, various stakeholders such as SMEs, higher education institutions (HEIs), research organisations and research infrastructures, vocational training providers, schools, cultural and creative sector and youth and sport organisations will be key elements for the achievement of the priorities and missions of this Agenda.

[Read the full document here](#)

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