

Conclusions of the roundtable

"The Future of Higher Education in Bosnia and Herzegovina"

Organized by Herzegovina University and
The Association of Rectors of Private Universities in Bosnia and Herzegovina,

Mostar, May 13, 2022

Roundtable participants, including three rectors of private universities (no representatives of public universities participated, some of them apologized, even though all of them were invited), representatives of the Agency for Development of Higher Education and Quality Assurance (HEA), representatives of the Centre for Information and Recognition of Documents in the Field of Higher Education (CIP), representatives of several competent education authorities, i.e. cantonal ministries from Travnik and Mostar (representatives of the Ministry of Civil Affairs of BiH, representatives of the ministry from Republika Srpska and other participants, either apologized or did not participate in the roundtable), have supported indicated conclusions after a discussion based on the following indicators

Today, slightly less than 83,000 (tertiary level) students study in Bosnia and Herzegovina, approximately 72% at public and 27% at private higher education institutions. The total number of students in Bosnia and Herzegovina **has decreased by 28.4%** or more than 32,000 students in the last ten years (from about 115,000 students in the academic year 2010/11, the number of students dropped to 82,744 in 2020/21). This number represents the total number of all students, in all academic years of study in all three cycles of study and all those who exercise student rights. For comparison, in neighbouring Croatia the number of students **has increased** from about 148,000 in 2010/11 to more than 155,000 in ac. year 2020/21, and in Serbia the number of tertiary students **has also increased** from 228,000 in 2010/11. to about 242,000 in 2020/21. In other words, in the last 10 years, in Croatia the number of students increased **by 4.7%**, in Serbia **by 6.1%**, and in Bosnia and Herzegovina DECREASED **by 28.4%** (!). The decline in the number of students is significantly shown in the last four statistically observed years, from 2017/18 to 2020/21 - a drop of as much as **17.4%** in just three academic years. In Bosnia and Herzegovina for the first year of study (freshmen) in 2020/21 only 19,280 students enrolled, while in 2017/18 the number was 24,876 students. Thus, in three years, the number of newly enrolled students DECREASED by about 5,600 students in total, or **22.5%**.

International statistics for Bosnia and Herzegovina show that university enrolment of high school (secondary) graduates has fallen sharply in recent years - in 2016 the percentage was 50.78% (more than half of high school graduates enrolled in some of the programs at universities or colleges), and in 2020, **only 37.92%** (just over a third of high school students enrolled). For comparison, in Croatia and Serbia the percentage of high school students enrolling in colleges, academies and colleges is about 68%, and in Slovenia as much as 78%. Globally, there has been a significant increase in the number of candidates enrolling in the last ten years, from 29% of the world average in 2010 to around 40% in 2020. Again, in 2020 Bosnia and Herzegovina is at about 38% of high school graduates, and the European Union average is **73%**.

It is important to add, the so-called "brain drain" has risen sharply since 2016, on the scale of the so-called "Human flight and brain drain index" (from 0, which represents a low level of "brain drain",

to 10, which represents a high level) Bosnia and Herzegovina jumped from 5.2 in 2016 to 6.5 index points in 2021. For comparison, the brain drain in Slovenia is at the level of 3.1 index points.

At the same time, more and more money is being allocated for higher education from public funds in Bosnia and Herzegovina. Compared to 2016, when expenditures for higher education amounted to about **294 million** KM, in 2019 this amount increased to about **334 million** KM, i.e. increase of about 40 million or **13.6%** more money for higher education, while the number of students is rapidly declining.

Unfortunately, one of the key findings is that the private sector invests more and more resources in higher education, as do students, their parents and others, but private higher education institutions are entirely deprived of almost any funding from public budgets, in all levels. In many cases, students at private institutions are not even provided with opportunities for scholarships from public sources, they cannot compete for the best student, institutions cannot receive funding for scientific research and application projects, and at the same time it is not transparent or visible for what purpose exactly public money is spent in the higher education sector.

When it comes to research funding and the scientific dimension, which is strongly linked to higher education, the following self-explanatory indicators are sufficient to understand the position of Bosnia and Herzegovina:

	Percentage of GDP spent on research and development	The amount spent on research and development	The share of business sector in costs of research and development	Number of researchers per 1 million inhabitants
Bosnia and Herzegovina	0.3 %	102.416.000 \$	19%	292
Slovenia	2.4 %	1.505.700.000 \$	77%	4.147
Croatia	0.8 %	732.000.000 \$	48%	1.437

(Source: UNESCO)

Roundtable conclusions:

At the legal and legislative level it is necessary to:

- o Prepare a fundamental analysis of the overall legal regulations of the higher education sector at all levels in BiH (RS, cantons, Brčko district) with recommendations for harmonization and coordination among the competent education authorities, agencies and higher education institutions,

- o Implement without delay the key elements of the Framework Law on Higher Education that are feasible (for example, including the provision on the constitution of the *Rectors' Conference* in BiH, stipulated by Article 43, as repeated several times by competent bodies, even international ones, primarily European representatives) but also from relevant laws at levels of competent education authorities,

- o Urgently approach with the amendments and changes to the Framework Law on Higher Education in BiH, in a way that will eliminate the identified weaknesses and omissions, which will take into account the recommendations given by the network of European quality assurance agencies ENQA in 2017, and then to harmonize other laws at levels of competent education authorities (RS, cantons and Brčko District),

- o Enable the implementation and monitoring of the principle of **equity** (which will ensure that neither institutions, nor students nor teachers are privileged or discriminated against anywhere, and

that the political impact on higher education and public sector corruption is kept to a minimum - if possible completely eradicated!), then the principles of **efficiency** and **meritocracy** (based on which the quality of work and the quality of outputs will be evaluated, in accordance with the criteria dominant in the European Higher Education Area EHEA) but also the principle of **inclusiveness** of all those in need, so that all vulnerable and marginalized groups would be given a dignified opportunity in the higher education sector, in accordance with their assessed abilities and motivations),

- o In accordance with key performance indicators in higher education, enable revision and amendments of the "Priorities for the Development of Higher Education in BiH (2016-2026)", for which there are no results or assessment of monitoring the level of achievement of "Priorities" is known to the public,

- o Take into account other recommendations of international bodies aimed at developing and strengthening the sector of higher education in BiH,

- o Strengthen international cooperation through the revision and adjustment of laws and regulations related to student and teacher mobility and scientific research, which regulate the conditions for incoming mobility,

- o Enable changes in labour and pension legislation that are inevitable due to the specifics of higher education sector, which will take into account the needs and interests of students, all employees, all institutions and the society as a whole,

- o Urgently enable the analysis of previous achievements based on external evaluation procedures, adjust the model of institutional accreditation and establish a fair and efficient model of accreditation of study programs,

At the level of funding and financing:

- o It is extremely important to do a study of the value that society in Bosnia and Herzegovina receives for the money invested in the higher education sector,

- o It is necessary to develop a strategic document that will determine the values according to which spending on higher education will be allocated and monitored, determine criteria for funding and adopt indicators for monitoring efficiency and quality, all in line with the European Higher Education Area (EHEA) standards,

- o It is necessary to change the matrix of financing of higher education that will result in fair and efficient financing of labour market needs, including into account the development of the society as a whole and taking into account the quality of studies (not discriminating against the fact whether higher institution is public or private) in other words to finance "the costs of the student's studies" not "the costs of the work of the institutions",

- o It is necessary to regulate and harmonize regulations that determine the status of all higher education institutions as non-profit institutions (in accordance with the law) and provide tax relief to ensure better conditions for funding quality academic teaching and scientific research,

- o It would be urgent task to raise allocations for research and development from today's 0.2-0.3 to at least 0.7% of GDP in the next two years, and by 2030 to over 1.5% of GDP.

At the level of staff and institutional capacity:

- o To develop a comprehensive coordination mechanism among competent entities in higher education system (competent educational authorities, agencies and centres, rectors' conference and higher education institutions) that will provide a fair, efficient and inclusive approach, aimed primarily at the welfare of students but also at the development of society as a whole, a mechanism to be coordinated by the BiH Ministry of Civil Affairs, or as determined by law,

- o To establish clearer and more precise criteria for access to the labour market in the higher education sector, for all employees and engaged individuals, including teachers, assistants, administrative staff, managers, experts in various fields, employees in ministries and other public administration bodies, based on academic, ethical and professional competencies,

- o To further educate and provide professional development to all employees related to the higher education sector in the Agency for Development of Higher Education and Quality Assurance, Centre for Information and Recognition of Documents in Higher Education, Ministry of Civil Affairs of BiH, competent education authorities, higher education institutions and other bodies,

- o To use all available resources for institutional strengthening, structural reforms and systemic empowerment, especially through European programs (such as Erasmus +).

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Sources:

UNESCO

Agency for Statistics of BiH

The GlobalEconomy.com

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