

REGIONAL COOPERATION IN HIGHER EDUCATION IN WESTERN BALKANS

Case of Albania, North Macedonia and
Serbia

**Regional Cooperation in Higher Education in Western
Balkans:
Case of Albania, North Macedonia and Serbia**

This Policy Paper is prepared by the Regional Cooperation Team of the Regional Youth Leadership Mobility Programme 2025/2026 (RYLMP).

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The Regional Youth Leadership Mobility Programme is a collaborative effort between the Centre for Science and Innovation for Development (SCiDEV), the Youth Educational Forum (YEF) from North Macedonia, and the Youth Initiative for Human Rights (YIHR) from Serbia with the financial support of the Open Society Foundations in Western Balkans (OSFWB).

The views in this document are solely of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the views of the project cohort nor the Open Society Foundation Western Balkans (OSFWB).

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Executive Summary

Regional higher education cooperation in the Western Balkans is underdeveloped, despite its importance for economic integration and stability. Mobility and partnerships can boost employability and cohesion, but existing models in Albania, North Macedonia, and Serbia are unsustainable. This paper highlights the lack of institutionalized, regionally funded mechanisms for academic mobility.

This analysis compares public universities in the three countries, using official documents and data from 2019–2024 to map agreements, funding, mobility, and recognition procedures, evaluating how cooperation works in practice.

Findings show regional cooperation relies almost entirely on external funding, mainly Erasmus+ and CEEPUS, with no dedicated national funding. Bilateral agreements are common but weakly implemented, and mobility is limited and uneven, often involving staff over students.

Short-term mobility formats could broaden participation but remain sporadic and mostly depend on Erasmus+ initiatives. Despite their potential, they lack systematic support from national policies or institutional strategies.

Administrative fragmentation and inconsistent, decentralized recognition procedures create barriers to mobility, highlighting a lack of strategic alignment with regional goals.

Universities depend on European mobility frameworks but lack domestic capacity, resulting in an “EU-mediated” model that lasts only while external funding continues.

This paper proposes a regionally coordinated, nationally co-financed WB mobility scheme to provide stable funding and sustainable cooperation. Additional steps include integrating short-term mobility into national strategies and harmonizing recognition procedures.

Without reform, regional cooperation will stay fragmented and externally dependent. Investing in mobility mechanisms advances economic, educational, and political goals, making academic cooperation central to regional development.

List of Acronyms

AdRen	Automatic Recognition in the Adriatic Region
BIPs	Erasmus+ Blended Intensive Programmes
CBHE	Capacity Building in Higher Education
CEEPUS	Central European Exchange Program for University Studies
CEU	Central European University
CRM	Common Regional Market
ECTS	European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System
ERI SEE	Education Reform Initiative of South-Eastern Europe
ETF	European Training Foundation
EU	European Union
FOI	Freedom of Information
QSHA	Centre for Educational Services (Albania)
RCC	Regional Cooperation Council
RYCO	Regional Youth Cooperation Office
SEE	South Eastern Europe
SUNP	State University of Novi Pazar
UB	University of Belgrade
UBT	Agricultural University of Tirana
UCIPS	University of Criminal Investigation and Police Studies
UGD	Goce Delčev University of Štip
UKG	University of Kragujevac
UKIM	Ss. Cyril and Methodius University in Skopje
UKLO	University St. Clement Ohridski Bitola

UNI	University of Niš
UNIVLORA	University of Vlora “Ismail Qemali”
UOGJ	University of Gjirokastër “Eqrem Çabej”
UNPM	University of Priština based in North Mitrovica
UNS	University of Novi Sad
UNT	Mother Teresa University
UT	State University of Tetovo
WB	Western Balkans

1. Introduction

Regional cooperation in higher education and youth mobility represents an important instrument for advancing economic integration, labor market alignment, and long-term stability in the Western Balkans (WB). Universities function as key platforms for cross-border knowledge exchange, skills development, and interpersonal interaction. Through academic mobility and joint initiatives, students acquire transferable competencies, expand professional networks, and engage in sustained intercultural exchange (Angouri, 2023, pp. 9–18). In a region marked by political fragmentation, demographic decline, and ongoing youth emigration (Wankiewicz, 2025, pp. 1–10), such cooperation contributes directly to improving employability, addressing skills mismatches, and strengthening regional labor market integration. At the same time, mobility facilitates people-to-people interaction, mutual understanding, and trust-building (INT-05). Higher education cooperation is therefore both a developmental and socio-political investment in the region's future.

However, regional cooperation in higher education is structurally limited and unevenly developed. Existing mobility systems rely predominantly on externally funded programmes, particularly Erasmus+, which has played a central role in enabling student and staff mobility, academic partnerships, and regional networking across the WB. At the same time, the project-based structure and limited duration of funding cycles may affect the continuity and long-term predictability of cooperation, particularly in the absence of complementary national or institutional support mechanisms (Gaebel et al., 2018, p. 81; European Commission, 2026b). As a result, regional cooperation depends heavily on externally financed initiatives and priorities, while domestic coordination and long-term strategic ownership remain comparatively limited. This structural dependence is further reinforced by the absence of dedicated national co-financing mechanisms, limited policy coordination, and the weak implementation of bilateral agreements, which frequently remain formal rather than operational instruments. Additionally, universities within the WB frequently prioritize broader European partnerships over regional cooperation due to better funding opportunities, greater international visibility, and student preferences oriented toward Western European labor markets (INT-06, INT-07). The relatively limited attractiveness of regional mobility therefore reflects not only policy deficiencies, but also broader structural and economic asymmetries within European higher education.

These limitations cannot be explained by a single factor; rather, they result from the interaction of financial constraints, institutional fragmentation, and political prioritization gaps. The analysis is situated within the broader framework of the Berlin Process, an initiative mainly focused on infrastructure and economic ties, but one that also values people-to-people contacts, institutional cooperation, and youth engagement (Berlin Process, n.d.). Yet these objectives are not consistently translated into national policy instruments or sustainable funding structures. Consequently, regional cooperation remains largely externally driven, with limited domestic ownership and coordination.

Against this backdrop, the structure of mobility itself becomes a key policy issue. Semester-based exchanges remain the dominant model, but they are not accessible to a large share of

students due to financial, academic, or personal constraints. Short-term mobility formats (typically lasting from several days up to two months) therefore acquire particular strategic importance. By reducing participation barriers, they enable broader inclusion, increase overall mobility volumes, and provide an entry point for students who would otherwise be excluded. Moreover, their flexible and group-based nature makes them especially effective in the WB context, where building trust, fostering interaction, and strengthening regional networks are as important as academic outcomes. In this sense, short-term mobility should be understood as a scalable and policy-relevant tool for expanding regional cooperation.

This policy paper examines the current state of higher education cooperation and youth mobility in Albania, North Macedonia, and Serbia. Within this paper, regional cooperation in higher education is understood as the sustained operational capacity of universities and public institutions to facilitate mobility, academic exchange, recognition, and long-term institutional collaboration across the WB. In addition to formal frameworks, successful cooperation requires measurable implementation, accessibility, continuity, and institutional sustainability.

The paper aims to identify key structural gaps and to assess the extent to which existing frameworks support sustainable and inclusive regional mobility. Situating the analysis within the broader context of regional integration and EU accession processes, it stresses the role of higher education as an underutilized but strategically important driver of economic and social development. It concludes by proposing targeted policy measures to strengthen institutionalization, accessibility, and long-term sustainability of regional cooperation in higher education.

2. Methodology

This policy paper applies a qualitative, comparative approach combining desk research, institutional data collection, and targeted stakeholder input to assess regional cooperation in higher education across Albania, North Macedonia, and Serbia.

The analysis is primarily based on desk research of national legal and strategic frameworks, including higher education laws, youth strategies, and policy documents related to internationalization and mobility. This is complemented by a review of regional and European frameworks, including the Berlin Process commitments, Regional Cooperation Council (RCC) materials, Regional Youth Cooperation Office (RYCO) programmes, and EU programmes such as Erasmus+, in order to situate national practices within the broader regional and policy context.

To assess implementation at the institutional level, structured information requests were collected from public universities across the three countries.¹ These requests focused on bilateral agreements, mobility flows, funding sources, and recognition procedures over the

¹ See Appendix A for the questions submitted to the Ministries of Education.

period 2019-2024.² This enabled a comparative assessment of whether formal cooperation frameworks translate into measurable mobility outcomes. The 2024/25 academic year is excluded due to incomplete and inconsistent data resulting from institutional disruptions in Serbia, including student protests and related interruptions to teaching and administrative reporting. These conditions affected the reliability and continuity of mobility and cooperation data. In addition, several datasets for 2024/25 were not fully available or remained subject to revision at the time of analysis. To maintain methodological consistency and avoid distortions in trend analysis, the study is limited to the 2019–2024 period.

Where available, the analysis is further informed by targeted consultations with system-level stakeholders, including representatives of ministries and university leadership involved in international cooperation.³ All stakeholder consultations were conducted on a voluntary basis, with informed consent and confidentiality ensured where requested.⁴ These inputs provide contextual insight into policy priorities, funding constraints, and implementation challenges.

In the case of Serbia, the planned semi-structured interviews with representatives of the Ministry of Education, universities, and relevant experts were only partially completed, as several invited participants did not respond within the research timeframe. One expert interview was nevertheless conducted with an academic affiliated with the Central European University (CEU), Institute for Democracy. As a result, the Serbian case study relies primarily on desk research and institutional data obtained through formal information requests, supplemented by a single expert interview. A more fully triangulated approach combining institutional data, policy analysis, and multiple stakeholder perspectives was achieved in the Albania and North Macedonia case studies.

Several methodological limitations should nevertheless be acknowledged. Institutional reporting practices differ significantly across universities, while publicly available data are frequently incomplete, decentralized or inconsistently maintained. Freedom of information (FOI) responses additionally vary in scope and level of detail, limiting full comparability across institutions. The findings should therefore be interpreted primarily as indicative of broader structural patterns.

3. Normative and Institutional Framework

Higher education cooperation in the WB is shaped by a multi-layered normative and institutional framework that functions across EU accession requirements, regional political initiatives, coordination mechanisms, and funding instruments. These layers together define both the constraints and the enabling conditions for regional academic cooperation.

At the highest level, EU enlargement policy provides the overarching normative framework. Through the accession process, WB countries are expected to align with the EU *acquis*,

² See Appendix B for the questions submitted to public universities.

³ See Appendix C for Interviewed participants; See Appendix E for Questionnaires.

⁴ See Appendix D for informed consent forms.

including provisions under Chapter 26 on education and culture (European Commission, 2026a). This framework promotes harmonization of higher education systems, alignment with Bologna Process standards (European Education Area, 2026), and adherence to principles of regional cooperation, good unneighborly relations, and functional regional integration (European External Action Service, 2025). In this sense, cooperation in higher education is implicitly embedded as a condition of progress toward EU membership.

The Berlin Process complements this by framing regional cooperation as both a political objective and a practical instrument for EU integration. It emphasizes connectivity, reconciliation, and mobility as central pillars of regional development (Berlin Process, n.d.). Within this framework, initiatives such as the Common Regional Market (CRM) Action Plan 2025–2028 seek to operationalize cooperation through measures including the mutual recognition of qualifications, reduction of mobility barriers, and facilitation of professional mobility across the region (Regional Cooperation Council, 2024). These efforts link higher education cooperation to broader economic integration and labor market alignment.

At the regional governance level, the RCC functions as a coordinating body that bridges national governments and EU-level initiatives. It supports the development of regional agendas in areas such as education, labor mobility, and economic integration (Regional Cooperation Council, 2026a). In higher education specifically, the RCC contributes through policy coordination, monitoring, and the promotion of regional initiatives. Notable outputs include the Declaration on Recognition of Higher Education Qualifications in the Western Balkans (Regional Cooperation Council, 2019), the SEE 2030 Strategy⁵ (Regional Cooperation Council, 2021, p. 41), and the Regional Platform for Benchmarking and Cooperation in Higher Education, which aims to support structural reform, administrative professionalization, and alignment with common standards while safeguarding institutional autonomy (The Core Expert Group of the STREW Tempus Project, 2012).

At the operational level, the primary mechanism for implementing higher education cooperation is the EU's Erasmus+ programme. Erasmus+ funds student and staff mobility, joint master's programmes, capacity-building projects, and academic partnerships. In the WB, most regional university cooperation is embedded within Erasmus+ projects, particularly through credit mobility (KA1), Capacity Building in Higher Education (CBHE), and related initiatives. Erasmus+ provides essential financial support and institutional linkages, but its project-based and time-bound nature (typically 2–3 years) limits the extent to which cooperation becomes structurally embedded within national systems (European Commission, 2026).

Additional coordination actors include the Western Balkans Steering Platform on Education and Training, which facilitates dialogue between EU institutions and national ministries, as well as organizations such as ERI SEE, ETF, CEEPUS, and alumni and programme offices that support implementation and networking (Western Balkans Info Hub, 2026). Despite this dense institutional landscape, existing analyses of CBHE projects highlight persistent challenges, including administrative complexity, fragmented national regulations, delays in procedures, and burdensome procurement requirements. At the same time, these programmes have contributed positively to curriculum reform, institutional capacity building, cross-border

⁵ Priority 8 on education and mobility.

cooperation, and people-to-people exchanges (European Commission, European Education and Culture Executive Agency, 2020).

The primary institutional actors examined in this policy paper are public universities. We focus on state-governed universities in Albania, North Macedonia and Serbia in order to map areas of cooperation across the WB. The universities included in the analysis are listed in Table 1.

Table 1. Public Universities in Albania, North Macedonia and Serbia

Albania	North Macedonia	Serbia
University of Tirana	Ss. Cyril and Methodius University in Skopje (UKIM)	University of Belgrade
Agricultural University of Tirana	St. Clement of Ohrid University in Bitola	University of Novi Sad
Polytechnic University of Tirana	Goce Delčev University of Štip	University of Kragujevac
University of Medicine, Tirana	State University of Tetovo	University of Niš
Sports University of Tirana	University for Information Science and Technology "St. Paul the Apostle" Ohrid	State University of Novi Pazar
University of Arts (Tirana)	University "Mother Teresa", Skopje (UNT)	University of Priština based in North Mitrovica
University of Shkodra "Luigj Gurakuqi"		University of Criminal Investigation and Police Studies (Belgrade)
University of Gjirokaštër "Eqrem Çabej"		University of Defence (Belgrade)
Aleksandër Moisiu University of Durrës		University of Arts in Belgrade
University of Vlora "Ismail Qemali"		
Aleksandër Xhuvani University of Elbasan		
Fan S. Noli University of Korçë		

3.1. Albania

Regulatory and Strategic Environment

Albania's framework for higher education cooperation is regulated primarily through Law No. 80/2015 on Higher Education and Scientific Research (2015), Law No. 75/2019 on Youth (2019), the National Education Strategy 2021-2026 (Ministry of Education and Sports, 2021),

complemented by broader internationalization policies implemented through university structures and international relations offices. Albania is also a signatory to the Berlin Process agreements on the mutual recognition of diplomas and professional qualifications signed in 2022 (Council of Ministers of the Republic of Albania, 2022).

Under the autonomy provisions of Law No. 80/2015, universities can independently conclude agreements with foreign institutions, while international cooperation is primarily managed through institutional international relations offices. According to the Ministry of Education and Sports, Albania's higher education internationalization framework is further supported through the Higher Education Policy Document 2030 (Ministry of Education and Sports, 2025), the National Education Strategy 2021-2026 (Ministry of Education and Sports, 2021) and participation in the Automatic Recognition in the Adriatic Region Network (AdReN, n.d.), which aims to strengthen automatic diploma recognition and regional academic mobility.

This policy context is increasingly relevant following the launch of consultations for the National Education Strategy 2027-2032 and the announced amendment of the Higher Education Law after ten years of implementation. According to Minister of Education Mirela Kumbaro, the reform process is expected to focus on quality assurance, university profiling and the internationalization of higher education, including stronger cooperation with foreign university groups and the further opening of Albanian higher education towards the European education market (Ministry of Education and Sports of Albania, 2026). These developments provide an important policy context for examining the role of regional academic cooperation within Albania's evolving higher education framework.

Institutional Mapping and Bilateral Landscape

The institutional mapping of Albania's 12 public universities indicates that bilateral cooperation with universities in Serbia and North Macedonia extends across much of the higher education sector, although the scope and implementation of this cooperation vary between institutions.

The University of Medicine, Tirana (UMT), the University of Vlora "Ismail Qemali" (UNIVLORA), the Agricultural University of Tirana (UBT) and the University of Gjirokastrë "Eqrem Çabej" (UOGJ) reported multiple active agreements and participation in regional academic initiatives involving institutions in Serbia and North Macedonia. These agreements cover a range of activities, including scientific research, staff cooperation, conferences, curriculum development and participation in international projects.

Responses provided by universities indicate differences in the implementation of bilateral agreements. Several institutions reported exchanges, joint projects or participation in regional initiatives, whereas others reported cooperation primarily through framework agreements without corresponding mobility activity during the period under consideration. Interview evidence collected during the research process points to a similar distinction between the existence of formal agreements and their practical implementation. According to one interviewee with extensive experience in higher education cooperation in the WB, many

regional agreements do not consistently translate into long-term academic cooperation or broader institutional outcomes (INT-04).

Active Bilateral Agreements of Albanian Public Universities (2019–2024)

Recorded exchanges with Serbia and North Macedonia only. Confirmed zero shown as 0; n/a = disaggregated data unavailable.

ALBANIAN UNIVERSITY	SERBIAN PARTNER INSTITUTIONS	NORTH MACEDONIAN PARTNER INSTITUTIONS
 University of Tirana	• University of Belgrade (Belgrade) Staff / student exchange, joint publications • 10 May 2023 – 10 May 2028 • RECAS Network High-level scientific research • Open-ended	• Ss. Cyril & Methodius University (UKIM) (Skopje) General cooperation • 16 Mar 2016 – 16 Mar 2026 • University of Tetovo (Tetovo) Scientific research (RECAS) • Open-ended
 The Agricultural University of Tirana	• University of Kragujevac (Kragujevac) Academic exchange, joint degrees • 5-year, from 15 Jun 2023 • Academy of Professional Studies of Southern Serbia (Leskovac) Foreign languages • From 2025 • University of Novi Sad (Novi Sad) Vet. medicine, economics, agricultural sciences • Erasmus+	• University of Skopje (Skopje) Staff mobility • Documented active 2025
 The Polytechnic University of Tirana	• University of Kragujevac (Čačak) Education and research • Open-ended • Seismological Survey of Serbia (Belgrade) Seismology, environment • Open-ended • Academy of Professional Studies of Southern Serbia (Leskovac) Education • 2025–2027 • University of Niš (Niš) Staff exchange • Erasmus+ 2023–2027	• University of Tetovo (Tetovo) Teaching and research • Open-ended • South East European University (SEEU) (Tetovo) Exchanges, curriculum development • 2019–2029 • UIST Ohrid (Ohrid) Exchanges • Erasmus+ 2024–2027
 The University of Medicine, Tirana	• University of Belgrade (Belgrade) Staff / student exchange, research • Open-ended (auto-renewal) • University of Novi Sad (Novi Sad) Staff / student exchange, research • Open-ended (auto-renewal)	• University of Tetovo (Tetovo) Staff / student exchange, joint research • Open-ended • Ss. Cyril & Methodius University (UKIM) (Skopje) Staff / student exchange, joint research • Open-ended • University of Struga (Struga) Staff / student exchange, joint projects • Open-ended • Goce Delčev University, Shtip (Shtip) Staff / student exchange, joint projects • Open-ended
 The Sports University of Tirana	— No active bilateral agreement documented	• University of Tetovo (Tetovo) Scientific projects, conferences • Signed 2008, open-ended
 The University of Arts	— No active bilateral agreement documented	— No active bilateral agreement documented
 The University of Shkodra "Luigj Gurakuqi"	• University of Belgrade (Belgrade) General cooperation • Open-ended • University of Novi Sad (Novi Sad) General cooperation • Open-ended	• University "Mother Teresa" (Skopje) General cooperation • Open-ended
 The University of Gjirokastrë "Eqrem Çabej"	• Universities of Belgrade (Belgrade), Niš (Niš), Kragujevac (Kragujevac) & Novi Sad (Novi Sad) Post-TeComp project cooperation • From 17 Oct 2022, open-ended	• International University of Struga (Struga) General cooperation • From 4 Jul 2025, open-ended
 "Aleksandër Moisiu" University of Durrës	• University of Belgrade – Faculty of Organisational Sciences (Belgrade) General cooperation • 5-year, from 2024	• Ss. Cyril & Methodius University (UKIM) (Skopje) General cooperation • 5-year, from 2022 • University "St. Kliment Ohridski" (Bitola) General cooperation • 5-year, from 2023 • Goce Delčev University, Shtip (Shtip) General cooperation • Open-ended, from 2024
 The University of Vlora "Ismael Qemali"	• University of Belgrade (Belgrade) General cooperation • 2024–2029 • University of Kragujevac (Kragujevac) General cooperation • 2021–2026 • College of Sport & Health Sciences (Belgrade) General cooperation • 2020–2025 • University of Novi Pazar (Novi Pazar) General cooperation • 2019–2024 • 5 Serbian institutions (consortium) Linguistics, ICT, nursing • Erasmus+ until 2027	• UIST Ohrid (Ohrid) General cooperation • 2025–2030 • Goce Delčev University, Shtip (Shtip) General cooperation • Open-ended • 5 North Macedonian institutions (consortium) Linguistics, ICT, nursing • Erasmus+ until 2027
 "Aleksandër Xhuvani" University, Elbasan	• University of Belgrade (Belgrade) General cooperation • 5-year, Erasmus+ until 31 Jul 2026	• University of Tetovo (Tetovo) General cooperation • Open-ended • South East European University (SEEU) (Tetovo) General cooperation • Open-ended • Agency for Language Implementation (Skopje) Language policy • 1-year agreement
 Fan S. Noli University of Korçë	• University of Niš (Niš) – Balkan University Centre Academic cooperation • From 21 Mar 2023, active	• University "St. Kliment Ohridski" (Bitola) General cooperation • From 2018, auto-renewal • UIST Ohrid (Ohrid) General cooperation • 2023–2028 • Ss. Cyril & Methodius University (UKIM) (Skopje) General cooperation • From 2018, auto-renewal

Source: Official bilateral agreements of Albanian public universities. Compiled 2025.

Figure 1. Active Bilateral Agreements of Albanian Public Universities with Serbia and North Macedonia (2020–2025) Source: Authors' compilation based on official data provided by 12 Albanian public universities through FOI requests, covering the period 2019–2024.

Regional cooperation is concentrated around a relatively limited number of partner institutions, particularly universities in Belgrade, Novi Sad, Niš, Skopje, Tetovo, Ohrid and Bitola. Several Albanian universities additionally participate in wider regional academic structures and networks, including Erasmus+ partnerships, RECAS, the Rectors' Forum of Southeast Europe (University of Tirana, 2026) and the Balkan Universities Association (BUA) (University of Tirana, 2025a), reflecting a broader institutional orientation toward regional academic integration.

Mobility Dynamics and Funding

The mobility data reported by universities show that exchanges with Serbia and North Macedonia are implemented primarily through Erasmus+, CEEPUS and project-based cooperation schemes. None of the responding institutions reported the existence of a dedicated national funding mechanism specifically supporting academic mobility with Serbia and North Macedonia.

The highest levels of reported mobility were recorded by the Agricultural University of Tirana, the University of Vlora "Ismail Qemali" and the University of Gjirokastrë "Eqrem Çabej", all of which implemented exchanges through Erasmus+, CEEPUS, and regional cooperation projects. Several other institutions reported either isolated exchanges or no mobility during the period under consideration, despite maintaining bilateral agreements with universities in the region.

Staff mobility was reported more frequently than student mobility. Most universities reported participating in staff exchanges, training activities or project meetings, whereas student exchanges were reported less often. Universities with comparatively higher levels of reported mobility were the University of Vlora "Ismail Qemali" (UNIVLORA), the Agricultural University of Tirana (UBT) and the University of Gjirokastrë "Eqrem Çabej" (UOGJ).

In several cases, universities reported active bilateral agreements but no realized exchanges. The University of Tirana reported no staff or student mobility with Serbia and North Macedonia despite maintaining active agreements, while Aleksandër Xhuvani University, the Sports University of Tirana and the University of Arts reported either no realized mobility or no mobility cooperation at all during the period under review.

Universities consistently identified Erasmus+, CEEPUS and externally funded projects as the principal mechanisms supporting mobility. No institution reported a dedicated national funding scheme specifically designed to support mobility with Serbia and North Macedonia. This finding is also reflected in interview evidence (INT-04), according to which many regional academic initiatives in the WB continue to rely primarily on EU-funded projects rather than on permanent institutional or regionally financed mechanisms.

Staff & Student Mobility: Albanian Public Universities (2019–2024) Recorded exchanges with Serbia and North Macedonia only. Confirmed zero shown as 0; n/a = disaggregated data unavailable.						
ALBANIAN UNIVERSITY	SERBIA			NORTH MACEDONIA		
	STAFF OUT	STAFF IN	STUDENTS IN	STAFF OUT	STAFF IN	STUDENTS IN
 University of Tirana	0	0	0	0	0	0
 The Agricultural University of Tirana Serbia: 4 PhD + 1 lect. Novi Sad; 1 lect B.S. Serbia Acad.; 4 training (HORIZON). MKD: 4 staff (2025); 2 incoming students 2023–26.	10	0	1	4	0	2
 The Polytechnic University of Tirana 2 incoming staff from UIST Ohrid (Erasmus+).	0	0	0	0	2	0
 The University of Medicine, Tirana 3 persons exchanged in total across both countries (last 5 yrs). Short-term mobilities (<2 months) also implemented.	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
 The Sports University of Tirana Cooperation limited to conference participation only.	0	0	0	0	0	0
 The University of Arts No active agreement – no mobilities.	0	0	0	0	0	0
 The University of Shkodra "Luigj Gurakuqi" Serbia: 1 outgoing lecturer (4-week stay, Belgrade). MKD: 10 incoming PhD students (UKIM & UKLO).	1	0	0	0	0	10
 The University of Gjirokastrë "Eqrem Çabej" Serbia: 13 outgoing staff (2021–23); 8 incoming staff (2021–22); 8 current incoming students (Prespa Valley, tuition waived).	13	16	8	0	0	0
 "Aleksandër Moisiu" University, Durrës 1 incoming staff from Serbia (CEEPUS).	0	1	0	0	0	0
 The University of Vlora "Ismael Qemali" All mobilities funded exclusively through Erasmus+.	11	4	3	1	1	0
 "Aleksandër Xhuvani" University, Elbasan No mobilities recorded 2019–2024; institutional travel funds available.	0	0	0	0	0	0
 "Fan S. Noli" University, Korçë 2 outgoing teaching mobilities to Serbia (May 2024, Erasmus+). No student exchanges.	2	0	0	0	0	0
 Source: Official institutional responses Financing: Erasmus+ (primary), CEEPUS, HORIZON, Western Balkan Fund No dedicated national fund exists.						

Figure 2. Staff and Student Mobility between Albanian Public Universities and Universities in Serbia and North Macedonia (2020–2025) Source: Authors' compilation based on official data provided by 12 Albanian public universities through FOI requests, covering the period 2019–2024.

Innovation in Mobility Formats

Universities reported that short-term mobility formats were implemented primarily through Erasmus+ projects, bilateral cooperation agreements, and international credit mobility schemes.

Several universities report at least some experience with such short-term mobility formats in cooperation with institutions in Serbia and North Macedonia. The Agricultural University of Tirana, the University of Medicine and Aleksandër Xhuvani University report implementing short-term mobility through Erasmus+ or bilateral cooperation agreements, including training, workshops, and doctoral mobility schemes. The University of Shkodra additionally reports short-term doctoral mobility from North Macedonian universities within international credit mobility frameworks.

Practice nevertheless varies across institutions. The University of Tirana reports no short-term mobility schemes with Serbia or North Macedonia due to the absence of Erasmus+ mobility agreements, while the Polytechnic University states that such schemes have not yet been implemented with universities from the two countries despite existing cooperation agreements. Similarly, the University of Arts and the University of Gjirokastër report no implementation of short-term mobility formats during the period under review.

Recognition Frameworks and Harmonization

Recognition of credits and qualifications in Albania is formally regulated through Article 89 of Law No. 80/2015 (2015) and operationalized through institutional equivalency commissions, Learning Agreements and ECTS-based procedures. The Ministry of Education also refers to Albania's participation in the AdReN (n.d.) recognition network and to the Berlin Process agreements on recognition of qualifications (Council of Ministers of the Republic of Albania, 2022).

At the institutional level, recognition procedures appear relatively functional but remain decentralized and institution-specific. The University of Medicine reports an average recognition period of approximately 2 weeks, while the University of Vlora reports an average processing period of 15 days. The University of Shkodra applies recognition procedures based on Learning Agreements and a minimum of 70% course compatibility.

None of the responding universities reported establishing simplified recognition procedures specifically applicable to Serbia and North Macedonia. Recognition continues to be managed primarily through ordinary institutional procedures and the structures of the Centre for Educational Services (QSHA), rather than through coordinated regional systems. Several universities additionally report limited practical experience with recognition requests specifically involving Serbia and North Macedonia, a reflection of the generally low levels of mobility and academic exchange.

Several of these broader patterns are also reflected in the collected interview evidence (INT-04). One interviewee argued that academic cooperation in the WB remains significantly underdeveloped despite the existence of numerous bilateral agreements and regional initiatives, and identified three structural factors constraining regional academic integration: persistent nationalism and unresolved regional distrust, the economic limitations affecting higher education systems across the region, and the strong orientation of universities toward EU-centered internationalization frameworks at the expense of deeper regional integration.

The interviewee further observed that many universities in the region continue to approach cooperation formally rather than strategically, resulting in weakly institutionalized partnerships and limited long-term academic impact. Contrary to common assumptions, the interviewee did not identify language as a major structural obstacle, arguing instead that multilingualism is already widespread across the WB and that the principal limitation remains the lack of institutional willingness to deepen regional cooperation. According to the interviewee, many cooperation initiatives continue to depend more on individual academic engagement and

informal networks than on stable institutional mechanisms capable of supporting stronger regional harmonization, joint programmes and recognition-compatible academic structures.

3.2. North Macedonia

Regulatory and Strategic Environment

Regional cooperation is primarily shaped through EU accession requirements, regional integration initiatives and externally supported programmes (European Commission, 2023a; European Union, 2021). Additionally, the higher education system remains highly procedural and fragmented, while study programmes continue to face challenges regarding labor market relevance and structural coordination (Cedefop, 2022). As in Albania, North Macedonia's higher education cooperation framework shows a gap between formal openness to internationalization and the absence of dedicated national mechanisms for sustained WB regional cooperation (Republic of North Macedonia, 2018; European Training Foundation, 2025). In both cases, regional cooperation is enabled more through broader European programmes and institutional initiative than through a clearly articulated domestic WB-oriented strategy.

These structural patterns were echoed in the interview with one interviewee (INT-02), according to whom cooperation with Serbia is operationally easier because both countries are associated to Erasmus+, whereas cooperation with Albania remains more administratively demanding since mobility must currently be implemented through KA171 applications requiring predefined institutional partnerships and country-specific approval procedures.

Institutional Mapping and Bilateral Landscape

Institutional mapping of public higher education institutions in North Macedonia demonstrates that regional cooperation within the WB is broad in formal scope but uneven in implementation and strongly dependent on EU-funded frameworks. Most universities maintain extensive networks of bilateral agreements, memoranda of understanding, Erasmus+ partnerships, and memberships in regional academic associations and university networks. However, assessing the actual intensity and effectiveness of cooperation remains difficult due to limited transparency and inconsistent institutional reporting. Publicly available information is frequently fragmented, descriptive, or outdated, drawing little distinction between formally signed agreements and genuinely active cooperation. In practice, FOI responses provide the clearest insight into realized mobility, active partnerships and operational cooperation patterns.

The available institutional and FOI evidence points to substantial asymmetries in recognition-compatible mobility structures across Macedonian universities. University St. Clement Ohridski Bitola (UKLO) provides the clearest evidence of implemented regional mobility, reporting nine bilateral agreements with Serbia, six with Albania, alongside repeated Erasmus+ mobility cycles with Serbian institutions including the universities of Kragujevac, Niš and

Belgrade. FOI data further confirms concrete mobility flows, comprising both outgoing and incoming student and staff exchanges implemented across multiple academic years. In contrast, the State University of Tetovo (UT) reports extensive formal MoU coverage with universities in Albania and Serbia but confirms that Erasmus+ mobility with WB institutions has not yet been operationalized, despite applications under KA171. Goce Delčev University of Štip (UGD) reports more than 400 bilateral agreements overall, including cooperation with Serbian and Albanian partners, though FOI evidence indicates that mobility and project data are not systematically centralized or monitored. Similarly, the University of Information Sciences and Technology “St. Paul the Apostle” (UIST) and Mother Teresa University (UNT) demonstrate broad bilateral cooperation structures and Erasmus+ participation, although publicly available evidence on recognition implementation, mobility outcomes and institutional monitoring mechanisms remains limited.

The institutional landscape also reveals significant asymmetries between universities and partner countries. Ss. Cyril and Methodius University in Skopje (UKIM), University St. Clement Ohridski Bitola (UKLO) and Goce Delčev University of Štip (UGD) maintain the most extensive regional cooperation structures, combining bilateral agreements, mobility schemes, regional network participation and involvement in international projects. Serbia clearly emerges as the dominant regional partner across most institutions, particularly through Erasmus+ KA131 mobility, which enables more stable and reciprocal exchanges. Albania represents another important cooperation partner, especially for institutions with stronger Albanian-language or cross-border academic orientation, such as the State University of Tetovo (UT) and Mother Teresa University (UNT). Cooperation patterns are highly concentrated around a relatively small number of recurring regional partners, including the universities of Belgrade, Niš, Kragujevac, Novi Sad, Tirana, Vlora and Fan S. Noli. At the same time, some institutions demonstrate broad formal regional coverage through memoranda and protocols, despite having comparatively modest realized mobility and few systematically documented outcomes.

The institutional asymmetries identified in the desk research are also visible in the interview evidence. The previously mentioned interviewee (INT-02) noted that cooperation with Serbian universities, particularly the University of Belgrade, is considerably more intensive and continuous, especially through faculties such as medicine, whereas cooperation with Albania remains more project-based and less institutionalized. At the student level, another interviewee (INT-03) described regional student cooperation as still relatively limited, explaining that existing international engagement has so far focused more on examples from Vienna than on direct cooperation with neighboring WB universities.

A common structural feature across all analyzed institutions is the limited autonomous role of bilateral agreements themselves. Most realized student and staff mobility, joint activities and project cooperation are implemented through externally funded mechanisms, primarily Erasmus+, CEEPUS, IPA and related EU-supported frameworks. Bilateral agreements therefore function mainly as formal enabling instruments activated through externally financed calls, rather than as independently sustained cooperation mechanisms. The evidence points to

a regional higher education landscape characterized by expanding formal partnership networks but considerably weaker long-term academic integration, stable mobility flows and strategically coordinated WB wide cooperation structures.

Table 2. Comparative institutional profiles of public universities in North Macedonia

University	Main Regional Partners	Dominant Funding / Cooperation Instruments	Main Cooperation Characteristics
Ss. Cyril and Methodius University in Skopje (UKIM)	Serbia: University of Belgrade; University of Niš; University of Novi Sad; University of Kragujevac; Albania: Fan S. Noli University; University of Tirana	Erasmus+ KA131 and KA171; Horizon Europe; IPA; CEEPUS	Most structured and operationalised regional network; strong Serbia-oriented mobility; cooperation extends beyond mobility into research and academic networking.
University St. Clement Ohridski Bitola (UKLO)	Serbia: University of Kragujevac; University of Niš; University of Belgrade; Polytechnic University of Belgrade; Albania: Fan S. Noli University	Erasmus+ KA131 and KA171; CEEPUS	Dense but concentrated mobility structure; repeated exchanges with Serbian institutions; strong dependence on Erasmus+ frameworks.
Goce Delčev University of Štip (UGD)	Serbian universities (Not specifically stated in FOI); Epoka University; Regional WB partners	Erasmus+; Horizon Europe; Bilateral agreements	Large formal cooperation network; mobility and project activities more fragmented and less systematically monitored.
State University of Tetovo (UT)	Albania: University of Tirana; Aleksandër Moisiu University; Fan S. Noli University; Serbia: University of Niš; University of Novi Sad	MoUs; Erasmus+ KA171; CEEPUS	Strong Albanian-oriented cooperation structure; extensive MoU network; limited realised WB mobility so far.
University for Information Science and Technology (UIST)	Serbia: University of Kragujevac; Albania: Ismail Qemali University; Fan S. Noli University; Polytechnic University of Tirana	Erasmus+; IPA CBC; Bilateral agreements	ICT-oriented regional cooperation; project-based and bilateral cooperation dominates; broader MoU network confirmed through FOI.
Mother Teresa University (UNT)	Beder University College; UIST; UKIM; AAB College	Erasmus+; Bilateral agreements; Project initiatives	Predominantly bilateral and project-driven cooperation; strongest links with Albanian-speaking academic space; limited evidence of sustained regional mobility.

Mobility Dynamics and Funding

Mobility patterns within North Macedonian public universities reveal notable differences in the scale and intensity of regional cooperation. UKIM and UKLO demonstrate the most developed mobility structures, with repeated student and staff exchanges across multiple academic cycles and a broader range of partner institutions. UGD also maintains an extensive cooperation network, though mobility appears more project-dependent. By contrast, UT, UIST and UNT demonstrate broad formal cooperation coverage but comparatively lower levels of realized regional mobility. Publicly available evidence suggests limited transparency and little systematically documented information on institutionalized university funding dedicated specifically to regional mobility and cooperation. Existing funding patterns indicate strong dependence on Erasmus+ programmes, particularly KA131, complemented by KA171, CEEPUS, IPA and related EU-funded regional initiatives.

These partner asymmetries are also reflected in the character of the mobility flows themselves. Exchanges with Serbian universities, particularly Belgrade, Niš, Novi Sad, and Kragujevac, are relatively stable and repeated, often extending beyond mobility into broader academic cooperation and networking. By comparison, exchanges with Albanian partners, mainly Tirana, Vlora, Fan S. Noli, Aleksandër Moisiu, and Epoka University, remain more project-based and intermittent.

The interviews further reinforce the finding that regional mobility remains heavily dependent on externally financed mechanisms, particularly Erasmus+. One interviewee (INT-02)

emphasized that most realized mobility is implemented through Erasmus+, CEEPUS, and related frameworks, whereas independently financed regional mobility mechanisms are largely absent. From the student perspective, interview findings further suggest that mobility participation is constrained not only by funding but also by limited promotion and student awareness, arguing that many students are insufficiently informed about Erasmus+ opportunities and continue to perceive exchanges primarily as temporary travel rather than academically integrated mobility (INT-03).

Innovation in Mobility Formats

Innovation in mobility formats within Macedonian public universities remains largely embedded within Erasmus+ and related EU-funded frameworks. Cooperation with Serbian institutions appears institutionalized and strategically anchored, combining mobility with broader research alliances, academic networking and trilateral cooperation structures involving the University of Belgrade and the Polytechnic University of Turin. In contrast, cooperation with Albanian institutions is more strongly associated with digitally oriented and project-based innovation initiatives. Projects such as E-VIVA (Enhancing and Validating Service-Related Competences in Versatile Learning Environments in WB Universities) and VTECH@U (Accelerating WB University Modernization by Incorporating Virtual Technologies) introduce elements of virtual technologies, blended learning environments and modernized teaching approaches within regional university cooperation frameworks. Innovative mobility formats remain predominantly project-driven and externally financed, with limited evidence of independently institutionalized regional innovation mechanisms beyond EU-supported programmes.

Recognition Frameworks and Harmonization

Recognition and harmonization within Macedonian public universities are primarily embedded in Erasmus+, ECTS and broader European Higher Education Area frameworks rather than autonomous WB mechanisms. Universities such as UKIM, UKLO and UGD demonstrate stronger integration into harmonized European academic structures through participation in Erasmus+, CEEPUS, EUA and UNI-ADRION networks, while other institutions rely more heavily on bilateral and project-based cooperation. Recognition of diplomas from Serbian and Albanian universities is regulated mainly through national nostrification procedures coordinated by the Ministry of Education and Science, in line with the Bologna Process and the Lisbon Recognition Convention. Available evidence suggests that procedures are relatively standardized but remain administratively demanding and largely centralized at state rather than university level. Publicly available guidance from Macedonian universities indicates that recognition procedures generally take approximately 60–90 days depending on documentation completeness, translations, and legalization requirements.

Harmonization efforts increasingly extend beyond traditional credit recognition toward blended learning and digitalization through projects such as E-VIVA and VTECH@U. Although regional initiatives such as the Open Balkan Agreement aim to facilitate mutual

recognition of academic qualifications among WB, there is still limited evidence of coordinated and institutionalized WB specific recognition systems.

3.3. Serbia

Regulatory and Strategic Environment

The legal and strategic framework in Serbia formally permits international cooperation but provides no targeted instruments for regional integration within the WB. The Law on Higher Education enables cooperation in general terms, yet lacks specific incentives or funding mechanisms to support regional mobility (Republic of Serbia, 2025). Strategic gaps are also evident in the Law on the Dual Model of Studies, which neglects to link regional mobility with labor market integration (Republic of Serbia, 2019b), a key priority of the Berlin Process. Furthermore, the Law on Student Standard is designed for domestic or long-term international students, leaving short-term regional mobility without structural support (Republic of Serbia, 2019a, Art. 83).

National strategies, including the Education Strategy 2030 and the Youth Strategy 2023–2030, have likewise failed to institutionalize regional mobility mechanisms independent of EU programmes (Government of the Republic of Serbia, 2021; Republic of Serbia, 2023). Awareness of existing mobility opportunities stands at 81%, which is an issue exacerbated by the lack of stable financing (*Ibid.*, 2023). Policy support for regional cooperation remains indirect and underdeveloped. At the institutional level, all public universities hold the Erasmus Charter for Higher Education and rely on international offices to manage mobility, reinforcing an externally oriented model of internationalization.

This section should also be read against a specific contextual backdrop that distinguishes Serbia from Albania and North Macedonia during the period under study. The Serbian higher education system has been affected by ongoing student protests and broader civic mobilization, which have disrupted the normal functioning of universities and created conditions of sustained political contestation within the sector. These developments have direct implications for institutional governance, administrative capacity, staff engagement, and the feasibility of implementing cooperation initiatives. In this environment, universities operate under constraints that are qualitatively different from those in the other two countries, particularly in terms of continuity of administrative processes and institutional responsiveness. Accordingly, some of the structural weaknesses identified in this chapter, including non-responses to FOI requests from parts of the Ministry of Education and the absence of institutional interview participation in certain cases, may reflect this political environment.

Institutional Mapping and Bilateral Landscape

A key constraint in mapping bilateral cooperation is the lack of transparency, as observed in North Macedonia as well. Many universities do not publish consolidated lists of agreements, and where data exist, information on validity and implementation is often incomplete or

outdated. Responses to FOI requests therefore provide the primary basis for a more accurate assessment.

Most Serbian public universities maintain bilateral agreements with institutions in Albania and North Macedonia, although their scope and functionality vary. Notable exceptions include the State University of Novi Pazar (SUNP), whose cooperation remains limited to domestic institutions, and the University of Defense, which is institutionally restricted to cooperation in military education.

Across the system, agreements are typically broad in scope, covering all areas of academic and scientific cooperation, but are not consistently operationalized. Leading institutions such as the University of Belgrade (UB), University of Niš (UNI), University of Novi Sad (UNS), and University of Kragujevac (UKG) maintain multiple partnerships with key regional universities (e.g. Skopje, Bitola, Štip, Tirana, Vlora). However, the presence of agreements does not systematically translate into mobility or sustained collaboration.

Institutional evidence confirms this uneven implementation. UB and UNI demonstrate relatively higher levels of engagement, encompassing diverse cooperation formats such as joint research, curriculum development, and Erasmus+-based mobility. By contrast, institutions such as the University of Priština based in North Mitrovica (UPNM) and the University of Criminal Investigation and Police Studies (UCIPS) report active agreements with limited or no realized mobility. Data from UNS and UKG follow the same pattern: at UNS, agreements are general in nature and mobility is modest, largely limited to exchanges with North Macedonia and entirely absent with Albania. At UKG, three active bilateral agreements exist, yet mobility outputs remain low and concentrated within Erasmus+ and CEEPUS frameworks.

Crucially, all recorded mobility across institutions is implemented exclusively through external programmes, primarily Erasmus+ and CEEPUS. Bilateral agreements themselves do not function as independent mobility instruments, but as formal frameworks that are activated only when embedded within these EU-funded schemes, while institutionally driven cooperation remains limited. This reinforces a broader systemic issue: a disconnect between the formal expansion of partnership networks and the actual intensity of academic exchange within the region.

Mobility and Funding

The analysis of mobility flows is constrained by fragmented and inconsistent institutional data, which limits the ability to construct a comprehensive overview of exchanges between Serbia, Albania, and North Macedonia. However, available data indicate that mobility is concentrated in a small number of institutions, primarily the universities of Belgrade, Novi Sad, Niš, and Kragujevac, with other institutions reporting no activity.

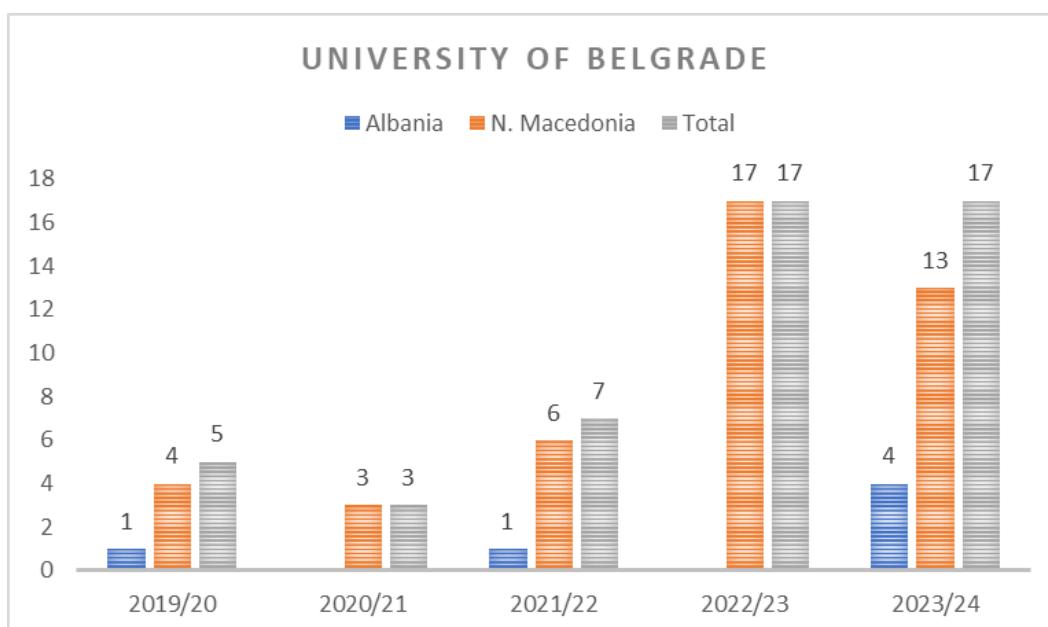


Figure 3. University of Belgrade: Number of exchanges with public universities in Albania and North Macedonia

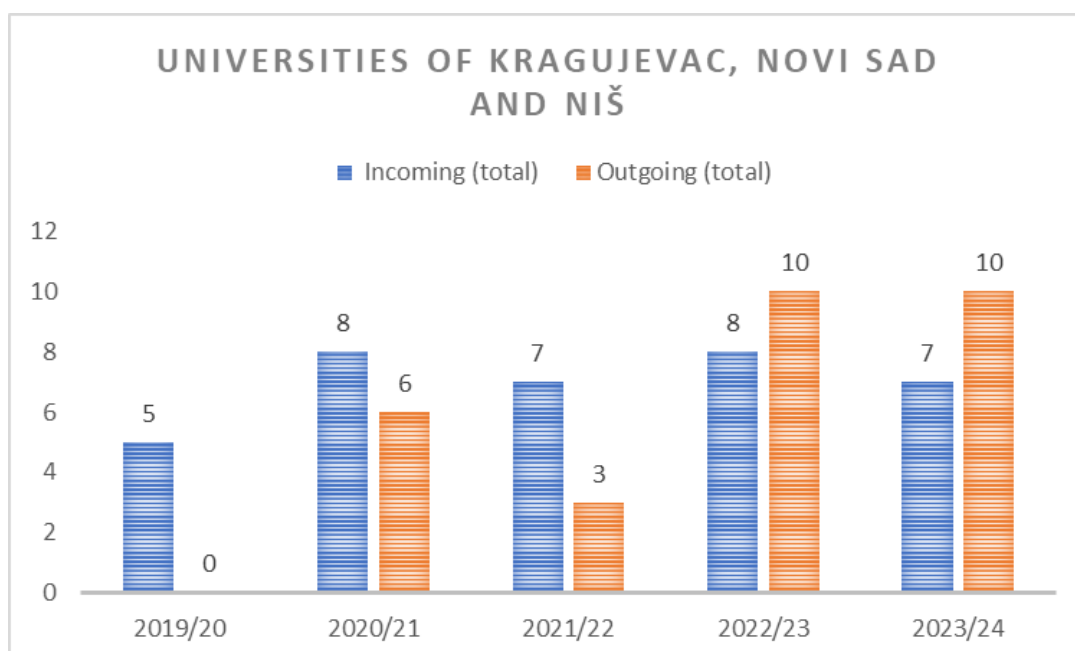


Figure 4. Universities of Kragujevac, Novi Sad and Niš: Number of exchanges with public universities in Albania and North Macedonia

Across all public universities, the financial structure of mobility is uniform and externally dependent. All recorded exchanges are funded exclusively through Erasmus+ and CEEPUS programmes. No institution reports the existence of dedicated national or internal funding mechanisms for regional mobility, consistent with the situation in Albania and North Macedonia.

This pattern is consistent across institutional types. Larger universities rely on EU-funded programmes to sustain mobility, while smaller institutions either participate minimally or not

at all due to limited access to these funding channels. Even where bilateral agreements are in place, their implementation is contingent on external programme funding.

The absence of autonomous financing mechanisms indicates that regional cooperation in Serbia is not structurally embedded but remains project-based, externally driven, and temporally limited.

Innovation in Mobility Formats

The implementation of short-term mobility formats (up to two months) remains limited and inconsistent across Serbian public universities, with only three institutions reporting such activities. UB implements short-term student mobility through Erasmus+ Blended Intensive Programmes (BIPs), typically lasting between 5 and 30 days. The University of Arts also provides short-term mobility through its Summer School of Arts, while UCIPS reports isolated short-term cooperation with a partner institution in North Macedonia. Other institutions for which data is available report no implementation of short-term mobility schemes. Short-term mobility in Serbia is thus sporadic, programme-dependent (where it exists, it is primarily linked to Erasmus+), and not institutionally embedded, thus not used as a strategic tool for widening participation and strengthening regional academic integration.

Interview findings underscore the importance of this issue. One interviewee involved in regional educational programmes (INT-01) argued that shorter exchanges involving larger numbers of participants may produce stronger regional integration effects than semester-long mobility involving only a limited number of students. According to the interviewee, short-term exchanges reduce financial barriers, enable broader participation, and facilitate stronger interpersonal and institutional networks.

Recognition and Harmonization

Although recognition procedures at Serbian public universities are formally regulated, significant variation exists in their implementation, timelines, and data availability.

For ECTS recognition, procedures are generally aligned with Erasmus+ and CEEPUS frameworks but remain decentralized at the faculty level in several institutions (e.g. UNI, UNS, UKG). Processing times vary from 15-30 days (UKG, UCIPS) to approximately one to three months (UB, depending on documentation completeness). The University of Arts reports a shorter timeframe of around five weeks, while some institutions (UNI, UNS) do not centrally track recognition timelines. Simplified procedures are rare: UB applies a limited fast-track mechanism only in cases where programmes have been previously evaluated, while most institutions report no region-specific or simplified procedures.

Interview findings additionally suggest that recognition procedures frequently depend on informal arrangements. One interviewee (INT-01) stated that cooperation mechanisms largely “depend on individuals who invest personal effort and time, often without institutional support or compensation”. Even where cooperation agreements exist, ECTS recognition may ultimately depend on the willingness of individual professors to approve credits. As the interviewee noted, “every operation depends on individuals rather than institutions” (INT-01).

The interview also identified accreditation procedures as a major structural obstacle in that establishing regionally recognized programmes requires lengthy and complex accreditation processes involving multiple commissions and approvals.

Political constraints were also identified as an important limitation. According to the same interviewee, ministries and accreditation bodies may delay or obstruct initiatives perceived as politically sensitive or insufficiently aligned with dominant national priorities. Instead of formally rejecting cooperation initiatives, institutions often prolong procedures through administrative delays, creating what may be described as “passive institutional obstruction” (INT-01). This partially explains why most regional cooperation still depends more on EU-funded frameworks than on nationally institutionalized regional mechanisms. However, as this finding is not sufficiently developed elsewhere in the dataset, it should be treated as indicative rather than as a fully substantiated analytical category.

With regard to diploma recognition, timelines are relatively consistent but remain institution-dependent. Most universities report processing periods ranging from 1.5 to 4 months (UKG, SUNP, UNI, UNS), although formal legal frameworks (e.g. at UNS) prescribe a maximum of 90 days. UPNM reports an average of 3.75 months, despite a formally shorter procedural timeline, indicating administrative delays in practice, while UCIPS reports a shorter average of two months.

The volume of recognition requests varies significantly across institutions, reflecting asymmetries in mobility flows and institutional attractiveness. UB reports 5 applications from Albania and 85 from North Macedonia, while UNI processed 21 requests in total. UKG reports no applications from Albania and 7 from North Macedonia, and UPNM recorded 4 applications from North Macedonia. Some institutions, such as UCIPS and SUNP, report no requests, while the University of Arts does not maintain disaggregated records.

The data shows that procedures are often decentralized, data collection is inconsistent, and fast-track mechanisms are largely absent. Although processing times are not excessively long, the lack of coordinated systems and region-specific facilitation mechanisms indicates that recognition frameworks are not strategically aligned with the goal of strengthening regional mobility within the WB.

4. Synthesis of Findings at the Regional Level: Gaps in Regional University Cooperation

The comparative analysis of Albania, North Macedonia, and Serbia shows a persistent gap between formal regional integration frameworks and the practical realities of academic cooperation in the WB. Universities across the region participate in bilateral agreements, Erasmus+ partnerships, CEEPUS networks, and broader regional initiatives linked to the Berlin Process and European integration processes, but these mechanisms have not yet produced a stable, institutionally embedded, and sustainable regional mobility system. Instead, regional cooperation continues to function through fragmented, externally financed, and unevenly

implemented structures that remain heavily dependent on European funding mechanisms rather than long-term domestic strategic coordination.

One of the clearest structural patterns emerging across all three higher education systems is the predominance of externally mediated cooperation. Regional mobility and academic exchange are implemented primarily through Erasmus+, CEEPUS, and EU-supported project frameworks. On the other hand, autonomous national or institutionally financed regional mobility mechanisms remain largely absent. Bilateral agreements between universities are widespread, yet they rarely function as independently operational instruments of cooperation. In practice, mobility is realized predominantly when such agreements are activated through externally funded calls and programme frameworks, particularly Erasmus+ credit mobility schemes. As a result, regional cooperation remains closely tied to external financing cycles, programme priorities, and project duration.

The findings additionally reveal a substantial disconnect between the formal expansion of institutional partnership networks and the actual implementation of academic exchange. Public universities across Albania, North Macedonia, and Serbia maintain extensive portfolios of bilateral agreements and memoranda of understanding with regional partners, yet realized mobility remains limited, concentrated, and unevenly distributed across institutions. Larger universities with more developed internationalization offices, stronger administrative capacities, and greater access to European funding frameworks consistently emerge as the dominant regional actors. In contrast, smaller universities frequently maintain cooperation that remains primarily symbolic, weakly operationalized, or dependent on isolated project participation. The existence of formal agreements therefore does not necessarily translate into sustained mobility, institutional continuity, or deeper regional academic integration.

Furthermore, the analysis shows that regional cooperation patterns remain highly asymmetrical both institutionally and geographically. Cooperation is concentrated around a relatively limited number of recurring regional partners, particularly the universities of Belgrade, Novi Sad, Niš, Skopje, Bitola, Tirana, and Vlora. Serbia emerges as the most operationally integrated regional partner within the analyzed mobility landscape, particularly through Erasmus+ KA131 structures that enable more continuous and reciprocal exchanges. Cooperation involving Albanian institutions, while formally broad, remains comparatively more project-based, fragmented, and administratively demanding. These asymmetries suggest that regional cooperation intensity is shaped not only by political willingness, but also by differences in institutional capacity, programme accessibility, administrative infrastructure, and integration into existing European higher education frameworks.

Another key structural issue is that regional cooperation remains weakly institutionalized within domestic higher education systems. Although all three countries officially endorse international cooperation in their laws and strategies, regional mobility has not been established as a clear national policy priority. There are no stable funding mechanisms, coordinated implementation processes, or regionally rooted governance structures to support it. Cooperation consequently depends heavily on temporary projects, externally financed programmes, individual academic engagement, and informal institutional arrangements.

Interview findings additionally reinforce this pattern, indicating that many regional cooperation initiatives continue to depend more on personal initiative and informal professional relationships than on institutional mechanisms capable of sustaining long-term cooperation and regional integration (INT-01; INT-04). Across both institutional and interview findings, limited funding opportunities consistently emerge as one of the principal barriers constraining broader regional mobility participation and institutional continuity (INT-05).

Administrative fragmentation represents another major structural obstacle limiting the sustainability and accessibility of regional mobility. Recognition procedures are formally aligned with Bologna Process and ECTS principles, yet implementation remains decentralized, institution-specific, and frequently inconsistent in practice. Recognition procedures vary significantly between universities and faculties, while simplified or regionally coordinated fast-track recognition mechanisms remain limited across all three systems. The findings additionally indicate that institutional predictability and procedural clarity are often insufficiently developed, particularly regarding ECTS recognition, diploma equivalency procedures, and accreditation requirements. Administrative complexity therefore functions not merely as a technical issue, but as a structural factor reducing institutional trust, discouraging participation, and limiting the practical accessibility of regional mobility programmes.

Student mobility is still significantly less developed than staff exchanges across all three systems, while broader participation continues to be constrained by limited funding, recognition uncertainty, administrative burdens, and insufficient student awareness regarding available opportunities (INT-03). Within this context, short-term and blended mobility formats emerge as one of the most strategically important yet insufficiently institutionalized dimensions of regional cooperation. Although several universities participate in Erasmus+ BIPs and project-based short-term exchanges, these initiatives remain fragmented, externally financed, and weakly integrated into long-term institutional strategies.

The analysis also suggests that short-term mobility possesses particular strategic relevance within the WB context. Unlike traditional semester-long exchanges, shorter and more flexible mobility formats reduce financial and organizational barriers, enable broader participation, and facilitate repeated interpersonal interaction among students and academic staff across the region. Interview findings additionally reinforce the broader social significance of regional mobility beyond academic exchange alone. According to RYCO's regional experience, direct interaction between young people contributes to mutual understanding, reduced prejudice, and longer-term interpersonal connections across the region. Existing programmes such as Superschools further demonstrate that structured exchanges may contribute to sustained people-to-people interaction, trust-building, and regional networking even after mobility activities formally conclude (INT-05). Similarly, interview evidence from CEU suggests that shorter exchanges involving larger groups may produce stronger regional interaction effects than traditional semester-long mobility involving only a limited number of participants because they are more accessible and socially inclusive (INT-01).

The findings indicate that regional higher education cooperation in the WB remains structurally dependent on externally financed programmes, uneven institutional capacity, fragmented

administrative procedures, and limited domestic strategic ownership. Existing frameworks facilitate academic exchange and regional interaction, but they have not yet produced a stable and accessible regional mobility system capable of sustaining long-term cooperation independently of temporary project cycles. Strengthening regional cooperation therefore requires not only expanding mobility opportunities, but also improving institutional coordination, administrative harmonization, accessibility, domestic co-financing, and long-term strategic ownership capable of transforming formal cooperation frameworks into a more operationally integrated and sustainable regional higher education space.

The table below brings together key indicators for Albania, N. Macedonia, and Serbia. It combines information previously presented in separate country chapters into a single comparative overview.

Table 3. Comparative Summary – Regional Cooperation in Higher Education (Albania, North Macedonia, Serbia)

Indicator	Albania	North Macedonia	Serbia
Number of realized mobilities	Limited, uneven; concentrated in a few universities (Agricultural Univ. Tirana, Vlora, Gjirokastër)	Moderate flows, especially with Serbia; UKIM and UKLO most active	Concentrated in Belgrade, Novi Sad, Niš, Kragujevac; other institutions minimal
Funding sources	Erasmus+, CEEPUS, external donors; no national schemes	Erasmus+ (KA131/KA171), CEEPUS, IPA; no domestic funding	Erasmus+, CEEPUS only; no national or institutional funding
Short-term formats (summer schools, preparatory visits, exchanges)	Sporadic, project-based; inconsistent across universities	Present but project-driven (e.g. E-VIVA, VTECH@U); limited institutionalization	Rare; UB uses Erasmus+ BIPs, few summer schools; mostly absent elsewhere
Institutional platforms	University of Tirana, Vlora, Agricultural Univ., Medicine Tirana	UKIM, UKLO, UGD; Tetovo and UNT more Albania-oriented	UB, UNS, UNI, UKG as hubs; others weak or inactive
Recognition frameworks	Decentralized, institution-	Centralized, 60–90 days; Bologna/Lisbon	Decentralized at faculty level; timelines vary (15

	specific; no WB fast-track	standards; project-driven harmonization	days–3 months); informal arrangements common
Key gaps	Agreements often formal, not implemented; staff > student mobility	Broad formal coverage but weak transparency; project dependence	Bilateral agreements symbolic; mobility only via EU programmes; political/administrative delays

5. Benchmark for Sustainable Regional Cooperation in Higher Education

The research confirms that numerous bilateral agreements and regional initiatives are signed between universities in Albania, North Macedonia, and Serbia. However, as the previous section showed, their existence does not necessarily translate into sustained mobility, institutional continuity, or deeper regional integration. Thus, assessing the effectiveness and long-term sustainability of regional cooperation requires a clearer benchmark framework identifying the institutional, financial, administrative, and accessibility conditions necessary for a functional regional mobility system.

Institutionalization and Governance

A sustainable system of regional higher education cooperation requires stronger institutional embedding within national higher education systems and regional governance structures. Current cooperation across the WB relies heavily on externally financed initiatives, temporary project frameworks, and individual institutional engagement. These mechanisms have significantly expanded mobility opportunities and regional networking. However, long-term sustainability depends on greater ownership and strategic commitment from regional governments, universities, and public institutions. Interview findings additionally indicate that the region still lacks sufficiently institutionalized and predictable regional mobility opportunities capable of ensuring continuity beyond isolated projects and temporary initiatives (INT-05).

Comparative European experience proves the importance of stable governance structures in sustaining regional mobility. Particularly relevant is the Nordic Nordplus model, which combines regional coordination, recurring mobility cycles, institutional co-financing, and simplified administrative procedures within a long-term governance framework (Nordplus, n.d.). Unlike the predominantly project-based structures in the WB, Nordplus functions as a complementary regional mechanism alongside Erasmus+, financed collectively through the Nordic Council of Ministers and participating states. Each year, Nordplus distributes approximately €10.1 million in funding for mobility, projects, and institutional networks (Nordplus, 2025, p. 2). Although the Nordic region differs significantly from the WB in

political and financial capacity, the model nevertheless illustrates how coordinated regional financing and institutional continuity can strengthen long-term ownership of higher education cooperation. Even a minimal WB co-financing mechanism could provide important structural support. For Albania, North Macedonia, and Serbia, a relatively modest regional fund of approximately €0.6 million annually could already sustain several hundred short-term mobility exchanges, preparatory visits, regional summer schools, and small joint academic initiatives (European Commission, 2023b, pp. 24–45).⁶ Such a mechanism would not replace Erasmus+ funding, but could reduce exclusive dependence on EU project cycles and provide greater continuity for regional cooperation initiatives.

Within the WB itself, RYCO's Superschools programme represents one of the clearest regional examples of structured youth mobility contributing to sustained people-to-people interaction, trust-building, and regional cooperation through direct interpersonal exchange (RYCO, 2026). At the higher education level, Erasmus+ continues to function as the central operational framework enabling regional academic mobility, institutional networking, and cooperation across the region (INT-05).

Stable Financing

A sustainable regional mobility framework requires a financing structure combining European funding instruments with complementary domestic support mechanisms. Erasmus+ and other EU-funded programmes remain essential drivers of mobility and academic cooperation across the WB, enabling student and staff exchanges, institutional networking, and regional partnerships. However, long-term sustainability is more effective when external funding mechanisms are supported by stable national and institutional co-financing structures capable of ensuring continuity beyond individual project cycles (European Commission, 2026d).

European experience suggests that hybrid financing approaches can strengthen accessibility, reduce inequalities between institutions, and improve long-term planning capacity (Nordplus, n.d.). In practice, this could involve nationally supported regional mobility schemes, institutional mobility support funds, simplified grant procedures, and targeted financial assistance mechanisms addressing socio-economic barriers to participation. Additional support for short-term and blended mobility formats would further improve accessibility, particularly for students unable to participate in semester-long exchanges due to financial, academic, or personal constraints.

Interview findings additionally reinforce the importance of stronger domestic ownership in regional cooperation frameworks. According to RYCO's regional experience, external funding has been crucial for establishing and expanding regional mobility opportunities, yet long-term

⁶ The estimate is derived by applying Erasmus+ unit costs to typical participation scales: short-term mobility exchanges are calculated by multiplying travel and daily support rates across several hundred participants; preparatory visits use the flat-rate allowance per visit; summer schools are costed at €20,000–30,000 each for 20–30 participants; and small joint initiatives follow lump-sum project rates. Aggregating these indicative amounts shows that an annual envelope of roughly €0.6 million would realistically sustain the mix of exchanges, visits, schools, and initiatives between Albania, North Macedonia, and Serbia.

sustainability requires more stable and internally supported regional mechanisms capable of ensuring continuity independent of temporary donor cycles (INT-05).

Such an approach would not replace Erasmus+ or other existing European programmes. Instead, it would complement them through stronger domestic ownership and more stable institutional support structures adapted to regional priorities.

Accessibility and Short-Term Mobility

A functional regional mobility system must prioritize accessibility and broader participation. Existing mobility structures across the WB remain dominated by semester-long exchanges, which frequently limit participation due to financial, administrative, and academic barriers. More flexible mobility formats represent an important instrument for widening access and strengthening regional interaction.

Short-term mobility formats are particularly relevant within the WB context because they are generally more accessible, affordable, and easier to organize than traditional long-term exchanges. They allow wider participation among students and young people who may face financial, academic, or family-related constraints (INT-01). According to RYCO's regional experience, shorter mobility and volunteering formats often achieved higher participation and engagement levels than longer-term exchanges primarily because of lower financial and organizational barriers (INT-05).

Beyond accessibility, short-term mobility additionally possesses broader social significance within the WB context. Their flexible and group-based structure facilitates repeated interpersonal contact between students and academic staff across the region while supporting people-to-people interaction, mutual understanding, and trust-building in societies still affected by political fragmentation and limited regional connectivity (INT-01). Programmes such as Superschools further show that structured exchanges may contribute to reduced prejudice, sustained communication between participants, and longer-term regional networking even after mobility activities formally conclude (INT-05).

A more accessible regional mobility framework should therefore support the systematic integration of short-term, blended, and hybrid mobility schemes into university internationalization strategies and national higher education policies. Simplified administrative procedures, clearer institutional guidance, and stronger student outreach mechanisms would further improve participation and reduce institutional selectivity.

Recognition and Administrative Harmonization

Administrative harmonization and recognition efficiency represent essential conditions for sustainable regional cooperation. Although recognition systems across the WB are formally aligned with Bologna and ECTS principles, implementation remains fragmented, decentralized, and institution-specific. Administrative complexity, inconsistent procedures, and lengthy processing timelines continue to discourage participation and weaken the practical accessibility of mobility programmes.

A more effective regional cooperation framework requires harmonized recognition standards, simplified procedures for ECTS and diploma recognition, and stronger coordination between universities, ministries, and national recognition bodies. The development of regionally coordinated digital information systems and standardized recognition protocols could significantly reduce administrative uncertainty and improve transparency for students and institutions.

Administrative simplification is particularly important because mobility participation depends not only on financial support, but also on institutional predictability and procedural clarity. More coordinated recognition systems would therefore contribute directly to improving participation levels, institutional trust, and the overall sustainability of regional cooperation.

6. Recommendations

Based on the findings presented throughout the paper, several policy recommendations emerge for governments, universities, regional organizations, and European partners involved in higher education cooperation in the WB.

1. Strengthen Domestic Co-Financing Mechanisms

Governments and ministries of education should introduce modest co-financing schemes for regional mobility alongside Erasmus+ and other EU instruments. Even limited national funding would improve continuity, reduce dependence on short-term project cycles, and broaden access, especially for smaller institutions and disadvantaged students. This is politically feasible under existing EU Growth Plan commitments, which already provide a framework for implementing such measures without new treaties or institutional arrangements.

2. Institutionalize Regional Mobility Within National Strategies

Regional mobility should be more systematically integrated into national higher education and internationalization strategies. Ministries and universities should establish clearer systems for monitoring mobility flows, recognition outcomes, and cooperation effectiveness. This is feasible within existing RCC frameworks, including its education and digital agendas, which are already government-mandated and can support coordination without additional political agreements.

3. Expand Short-Term and Blended Mobility Formats

Universities and policymakers should prioritize the development of short-term, blended, and hybrid mobility schemes as accessible instruments for widening participation and strengthening regional interaction. Such formats reduce financial and administrative barriers, enable broader inclusion, and may produce stronger people-to-people connectivity through repeated and group-based interaction.

4. Improve Administrative Harmonization and Recognition Procedures

Universities, ministries, and national recognition bodies should strengthen coordination regarding ECTS and diploma recognition procedures. The development of simplified regional recognition protocols, clearer institutional guidance, and more standardized

administrative procedures would significantly reduce uncertainty and improve accessibility for students participating in regional exchanges.

5. Strengthen Regional Coordination and Data Collection

Regional organizations and higher education institutions should improve the systematic collection and publication of comparable mobility and cooperation data. More transparent and harmonized reporting would strengthen policy evaluation, facilitate benchmarking, and improve long-term strategic planning for regional cooperation initiatives.

7. Conclusion

Regional higher education cooperation in the WB shows both clear achievements and structural limitations. Comparative evidence indicates that Erasmus+ and CEEPUS have enabled most of the realized mobility flows, but the absence of domestic co-financing has left these activities heavily dependent on external funding cycles. For that reason, cooperation remains unstable: once funding ends, initiatives are rarely sustained, and universities lack the internal capacity to maintain mobility, joint programmes, or consistent recognition practices. Bilateral agreements already cover both students and professors, yet their implementation remains uneven, with staff mobility often privileged over student exchanges.

A limited co-financing mechanism at WB level would not require substantial resources. Using Erasmus+ unit cost structures as a benchmark, an annual envelope of roughly €0.6 million could already support several hundred short-term mobilities, preparatory visits, regional summer schools, and smaller joint academic initiatives. This would mirror the logic of the Nordplus model, albeit adapted to the significantly smaller fiscal and institutional capacities of the region. The advocacy scope here is clear: long-term mobility will continue to depend on EU frameworks, but the proposed solution prioritizes short-term formats as the most feasible entry point, and it applies equally to students and faculty. Such a scheme could be implemented through existing regional and ministerial channels and would not depend on EU accession timelines.

The institutional foundations for such cooperation are already in place. Universities have established bilateral agreements, mobility instruments exist, and regional policy platforms such as the Berlin Process, the RCC agenda, and the EU Growth Plan commitments already provide operational entry points. Yet if universities and ministries have struggled to operationalize bilateral agreements, oversight of a new co-financing mechanism must be clearly assigned. Implementation should be coordinated by education ministries and the RCC, with EU delegations providing monitoring support. This ensures accountability beyond individual institutions and embeds cooperation in regional governance structures.

Accordingly, the main gap is not technical, but political. A modest, jointly coordinated co-financing scheme could be introduced without new treaties or institutions, relying instead on existing governance structures. Its implementation would strengthen academic cooperation and signal a shift towards more autonomous regional policy capacity. Ministries of education, the

RCC, and EU delegations would be the primary actors capable of advancing such a mechanism. Its implementation would strengthen academic cooperation and signal a shift towards more autonomous regional policy capacity.

Overall, the WB already possesses the necessary agreements, platforms, and administrative frameworks for cooperation. What remains absent is sustained domestic investment. Establishing even a modest co-financing mechanism would convert existing but fragmented activities into a more stable and continuous system of regional academic exchange.

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Appendices

Appendix A: Formal Information Requests to Ministries of Education

1. Is regional academic cooperation with Serbia and North Macedonia defined as a strategic priority in national higher education policy documents? If yes, please indicate the relevant document(s).
2. Does the Ministry operate a national financial mechanism, independent of European Union programmes (such as Erasmus+ or CEEPUS), that supports mobility or joint programmes with universities in these countries?
3. During the last five years (2019–2024), have national budget funds been specifically allocated to support regional academic cooperation? If yes, please specify the annual amounts.
4. Does the Ministry have measurable objectives (indicators or numerical targets) related to increasing regional cooperation in higher education?
5. Is there a coordinating mechanism or structure at the ministerial level responsible for monitoring and harmonizing regional cooperation among public universities?
6. Are there harmonized or fast-track procedures in place for the mutual recognition of credits and higher education qualifications between Albania, Serbia, and North Macedonia?
7. Does the Ministry have any policy or programme aimed at increasing the availability of study programmes in foreign languages in order to facilitate regional mobility?

These questions are designed to test whether regional cooperation is structurally institutionalized at the national level or remains largely EU-driven and project-based.

Appendix B: Formal Information Requests to Universities

1. How many active bilateral cooperation agreements does your university have with public universities in Albania, Serbia, and North Macedonia, and could you please provide the list of these agreements, including the partner institution and their duration (validity period)?
2. For each bilateral cooperation agreement with public universities in Albania, Serbia, or North Macedonia, please indicate the main areas of cooperation covered by the agreement, and whether it has resulted in student or staff mobility during each of the last five academic years (2019/2020–2023/2024), specifying the number of mobilities if applicable.
3. For each of the last five academic years, what was the total number of outgoing and incoming students and academic staff exchanged with public universities in Albania, Serbia, and North Macedonia (regardless of funding source)?
4. During the last five academic years (2019/2020–2023/2024), through which funding mechanisms were these mobilities financed (e.g., Erasmus+, CEEPUS, national funds, institutional funds, other)?
5. Does your university allocate internal or national financial resources specifically to support cooperation or mobility with public universities in Albania, Serbia, or North Macedonia? If yes, please specify the annual amounts allocated during the last five academic years.
6. Does your university implement short-term mobility formats (less than two months) with public universities in Albania, Serbia, or North Macedonia?
7. What is the average time required for the recognition of credits obtained at public universities in Albania, Serbia, or North Macedonia, and are there simplified procedures in place?
8. During the last five academic years (2019/2020–2023/2024), how many applications for recognition of diplomas or study periods obtained at public universities in Albania, Serbia, or North Macedonia were submitted to your university, and what was the average processing time? Are there any simplified or fast-track procedures in place for recognition between these three countries?

Appendix C: Interview List

Code	Location	Interviewee Affiliation	Mode	Date
INT-01	Belgrade	Central European University (CEU), Democracy Institute	Online	20. 05. 2026.
INT-02	Skopje	Ss. Cyril and Methodius University in Skopje (UKIM) International Relations Office	Online	23.05.2026
INT-03	Skopje	University Students' Assembly of the "Ss. Cyril and Methodius" University in Skopje (USA-UKIM)	Online	22.05.2026
INT-04	Tirana	Professor at the University of Tirana; former Rector of the University of Tirana; former Dean of the Faculty of History and Philology; lecturer at the University of Tetovo	Onsite	22.05.2026
INT-05	Tirana	RYCO	Online	25.05.2026.
INT-06	North Macedonia	RYCO	Onsite	10. 03. 2026.
INT-07	Tirana	Rectorate (UT)	Onsite	14. 05. 2026.

Appendix D: Informed Consent Form (Template)

INFORMED CONSENT FORM FOR PARTICIPATION IN RESEARCH

This interview is part of a research process aimed at developing an analytical report on regional cooperation and the university-level collaboration between Albania, N. Macedonia, and Serbia. The research is conducted within the Regional Youth Leadership Mobility Programme (RYLMP), funded by Open Society Foundation in Western Balkans, and implemented by Center Science and Innovation for Development (SCiDEV) from Albania, Youth Educational Forum (YEF), and Youth Initiative for Human Rights (YIHR) from Serbia.

The purpose of this interview is to gather your perspectives, insights, and opinions as a representative of a relevant institution regarding the regional university cooperation (with a focus on Albania, North Macedonia and Serbia), current challenges, institutional capacities, and potential solutions for improving mobility and collaboration in _____.

Your participation is entirely voluntary. You may withdraw at any point without providing any explanation. The interview will be audio recorded solely for the purpose of accurate transcription. Once the transcription is completed, the recording will be permanently deleted.

The transcript of your responses will be anonymised – your name and personal information will not appear in any public document, report, or publication. If quoting your input becomes necessary, your name will be replaced with a neutral identifier such as “interviewee,” along with a general reference to your functional role (e.g., “government representative”).

All questions in the interview are open-ended, and there are no right or wrong answers. We are interested in your genuine views and experiences. We encourage you to speak openly, even if your views differ from those of other institutional actors. We also kindly ask you not to share the contents of this interview with third parties.

If you have any questions before we begin, please feel free to ask – I’ll be happy to clarify.

CONSENT STATEMENT

I, the undersigned, declare that I understand the information provided above and I give my informed consent to participate in this interview under the stated conditions.

Full Name:

Place and Date:

Signature:

Appendix E: Questionnaire

1. Could you briefly describe your current position and role in the field of higher education or international cooperation?
2. In what way are you professionally involved in issues related to regional cooperation or mobility in higher education?
3. How would you describe the current level of cooperation between Serbia, Albania, and North Macedonia in higher education?
4. Based on your experience, what are the main obstacles affecting the development of regional cooperation in higher education?
5. To what extent do administrative procedures (e.g. recognition of diplomas and ECTS credits) influence student and staff mobility?
6. How would you assess the effectiveness of existing mechanisms for the recognition of qualifications in the region?
7. To what extent do current initiatives and agreements translate into practical cooperation, and to what extent do they remain at a formal level?
8. How would you describe the role of international programmes (e.g. Erasmus+) in shaping regional cooperation?
9. In your view, what would an effective model of regional cooperation in higher education look like?
10. What characteristics should a qualification recognition system have in order to better support mobility in the region?
11. Which level (national, institutional, regional) should play the primary role in improving cooperation, and why?
12. How do you see the relationship between EU-supported programmes and potential regionally driven initiatives?
13. What concrete measures could be implemented in the short term to improve the current framework of cooperation?
14. How feasible is the introduction of simplified or fast-track procedures for the recognition of qualifications within the region?
15. What types of financial or institutional mechanisms could contribute to more sustainable cooperation?
16. Where do you see the main barriers to implementing such improvements?
17. How do you see the development of regional cooperation in higher education in the coming years?
18. Are there any examples of good practice (from the region or beyond) that you consider relevant for improving cooperation?
19. If you had to prioritise one change, what would have the greatest impact on enhancing mobility and cooperation in the region?