



POLICY BRIEF

Towards Education that Creates Changes in Bosnia and Herzegovina

On the path from traditional to contemporary curricula based on student learning outcomes

How can equity and quality of education in BiH be improved through the introduction of curricula based on student learning outcomes to reach the standards of leading education systems and enable young people to lead successful lives and careers in an increasingly competitive world?

Despite notable changes in the last two decades, the approach to formal education in schools in Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH) remains primarily traditional.

Outdated programmes, teaching and learning in classrooms, and assessment practices in schools do not represent a favourable educational context in which students are enabled to acquire the knowledge, skills, and attitudes (competences) necessary for the 21st century. Development of critical thinking, multi-perspectivity, inclusivity, and respect for diversity are not adequately addressed, and neither are problem-solving skills, innovation and creativity, entrepreneurship, and co-operation among the young generations of citizens and future leaders.

Through its project “Quality Education through Curriculum Reform”, the OSCE Mission to Bosnia and Herzegovina (the Mission) found that the education systems across the country generally lack coherence and long-term goal-oriented elements. They are, in comparison to the foundational frameworks of contemporary education systems, woefully inadequate for equipping students with the knowledge and competencies required in today’s world.

CAN BIH CATCH UP WITH COUNTRIES WITH CONTEMPORARY EDUCATION SYSTEMS?

YES, IT CAN. For this, systemic change in education must be a top priority for education authorities across BiH.

Such **systemic change** requires a clear **vision of a young person upon completion of education**. Such a vision would inspire and guide the development of education as a **coherent cyclical system, geared towards its fulfilment**. It requires a **strong shift of focus** from content to learners and from memorization of facts to the development of higher cognitive and behavioural competencies that would enable young people to lead successful lives and careers.

Based on the experiences of other countries, the education authorities need to take the following interconnected steps to achieve such systemic change:

- development of a clear **vision, purpose, and objectives of education**;
- **harmonization of policy documents regulating pre-primary, primary, and secondary education** (e.g. through strategies, laws, bylaws, subject curricula,

pedagogical standards and normative framework);

- systemic introduction of a **curricular approach**, that is, the well-thought out, systemic regulation and planning of teaching, learning and assessment of specific subjects throughout education;
- development and implementation of **subject curricula based on student learning outcomes**;
- introduction of efficient **systems of monitoring and evaluation of the education process, as well as of assessment and grading of student achievements**;
- creation of new **teaching and learning materials**, including textbooks and digital education aids;
- improvement of **initial teacher training** and establishment of effective models of **continuous professional development** for in-service teachers;
- establishment of an **inclusive and transparent process of change** in a way that all relevant actors and the public can participate and have their voices heard;
- decision-making based on **measurable data** obtained through **continuous monitoring and evaluation**, including through participation in international large student assessments (e.g. PISA, TIMSS, PIRLS).

A carefully designed, planned, implemented, and managed process of change would ultimately enable new methodologies and modalities of learning, teaching, and assessment in classrooms. It could foster a change that truly provides young people the knowledge and competences they need to succeed.

Finally, such a change could realize the immense potential of BiH youth, enabling **education that initiates tangible change**, benefiting not only students, but ultimately the society and the economy as a whole.

This challenging yet rewarding endeavour requires **determination and a co-operative approach** of all authorities and institutions, as well as the active participation of teachers, experts, and the wider education community, along with support from parents and students.

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“QUALITY EDUCATION THROUGH CURRICULUM REFORM” PROJECT

The Mission supports education authorities across BiH in ensuring inclusive and non-discriminatory high-quality education for all children.

Stemming from the Dayton General Framework Agreement for Peace in BiH, the Mission’s education co-ordination role within the international community as well as the Mission’s unique field presence, this endeavour aims to foster sustainable security and long-lasting peace in BiH.

As part of these efforts, the Mission is implementing the “Quality Education through Curriculum Reform” project, supported by the Kingdom of Norway and Italian Republic.

The project has yielded three unique tools tailored to the domestic context that, along with targeted capacity building, provide a solid basis for fostering comprehensive, coherent, and transparent change in education, in particular in subject curricula development. These tools are:

- *Analysis of documents regulating primary and general secondary education in BiH (Analysis);*
- *Key foundations for development of subject curricula (Key Foundations)¹; and*
- *Online platform for subject curricula development and publication (Online Platform).*

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ANALYSIS OF DOCUMENTS REGULATING PRIMARY AND GENERAL SECONDARY EDUCATION IN BIH

The purpose of the *Analysis* was to compare and determine whether the documents regulating primary and general secondary education in BiH meet the standards of contemporary education systems. The initial analytical step was the examination of existing policy solutions in an international context, resulting in the identification of key elements of the curriculum in leading education systems. The final and crucial analytical step was the identification of the existence and quality of those elements in the systems in BiH.

The *Analysis* encompassed two levels of documents in nine of the 12 constitutional units in BiH that have direct education competences (Brčko District BiH, the entity Republika Srpska, and seven cantons in the entity Federation of BiH):

- 1) policy and legislation regulating education; and
- 2) 96 subject programmes for six subjects.

These units and documents were selected carefully to ensure representativeness for the whole country and the different areas of teaching, learning, assessment and development of children and young persons.

Key finding 1 Analysis of policy and legislation documents indicates a lack of vision for education and the inadequate determination of educational goals across BiH. This results in disharmonized education system that do not offer a learning experience tailored to the needs of each student across education levels.

Key finding 2 Key competences are either omitted or declaratorily stated without further elaboration or linking to education vision, objectives, or values. This confirms the traditional nature of education in BiH and the lack of consideration of necessary competences for life and work in the contemporary world. Such an approach does not do justice to young people's potential and their right to quality education that would allow them to compete and co-operate with peers from across the world.

Key finding 3 Inclusivity is addressed superficially, without adequate elaboration on how to effectively implement solutions in classroom settings. Students with difficulties in development and learning, those who fall behind and those who are gifted and talented remain a neglected resource and development potential for BiH.

Key finding 4 Subject programmes do not represent a comprehensive and coherent regulation of teaching and learning in specific subjects across education levels. They remain strongly oriented to content rather than to individual students and their development. Such programmes further the irrelevance of teaching and learning for students, fuelling into the system's chronic inability to foster individual development. This results in low levels of achievement and disjointed educational experiences, including loss of motivation in later stages of education, especially at transition points between education levels.

Key finding 5 Where formulated, learning outcomes in subject programmes do not meet the minimal professional standards - they are used inconsistently, inadequately, and mostly contain expectations at the lowest cognitive levels. The result is teaching practices aimed at the memorization of facts, and a lack of development of higher cognitive and behavioural competences.

Key finding 6 Assessment practices are not sufficiently elaborated either at general policy or subject programme level, resulting in inadequate use of monitoring and evaluation. The lack of contemporary assessment concepts fosters the students' strong orientation towards grades and formal qualifications rather than mastery of the subjects and personal growth.



Analysis of policy and legal frameworks

I. VISION OF EDUCATION

Vision defines what society wants to achieve with education, that is, an idea of students and their competences upon completion of education. As a foundation of a coherent education system, vision guides the development of education purpose, objectives, and other elements of the curricular approach.

- A useful vision statement can be found in only one of the constitutional units analysed. In most units it was completely absent, while in other units any vision statements are woefully inadequate, being poorly defined and incoherent.

The lack of a clear and coherent vision signals the absence of systemic thinking and a failure in designing education that prepares young people for life and work in today's complex world.

II. PURPOSE OF EDUCATION

Purpose defines the role of each educational level (e.g. pre-primary, primary, secondary) and type of education (e.g. general, vocational) in attaining the set vision. A clear definition of purpose serves to define objectives of education.

- Purpose is defined in most of the analysed cantons in the Federation of BiH (adopted from the BiH Framework Law on Primary and Secondary Education), while it could not be found at all in Republika Srpska and Brčko District BiH.

The lack of a clear purpose breaks the chain between the vision and the objectives, which results in incoherent and disconnected education system.

III. OBJECTIVES OF EDUCATION

Objectives define what knowledge, skills, and attitudes students should have at the end of an education level in order to achieve the overall vision and purpose of education.

- Objectives are present in all analysed units; however, they are mostly not adequately formulated or harmonized with the purpose.

This further highlights the incoherent nature of the education system, carrying implications for the teaching and learning experiences of both students and teachers.

IV. VALUES OF EDUCATION

Values depict principles, standards and virtues society wants to promote and foster within education system (e.g. human rights, equity, solidarity, meritocracy, respect of differences).

- Values of education are not mentioned in most of the analysed units, while in others they contain vague formulations without any elaboration.

The absence of an idea of values that define society and should be nourished from an early age represents a missing opportunity to foster the fundamental values of democratic societies among young generations.

V. KEY COMPETENCIES

Key competencies are complex sets of knowledge, skills, and attitudes that are developed throughout a lifetime. These include literacy, communication, learning to learn, mathematical, digital, social, and cultural competences, entrepreneurship, among other.

- Although declaratively mentioned in some analysed units, key competencies are not clearly defined, connected to the objectives, purpose, and vision of education, or functionally incorporated into subject curricula.

This confirms the traditional orientation of education and inconsideration of competencies necessary for life and work today. Such an approach is a disservice to the aspirations of young people and their right to a quality education.

VI. LEARNING AREAS' STRUCTURE OF CURRICULUM AND CROSS-CURRICULAR THEMES

Learning areas are groupings of related subjects aimed at aligning and gearing them towards the achievement of the vision, purpose, and objectives of education (e.g. STEM, humanities and social sciences, ICT area).

Cross-curricular themes represent competencies that are not covered by any particular subject, or that are shared between subjects (e.g. personal and social development, sustainable development, health, entrepreneurship).



- Learning areas were mentioned in only one document, while cross-curricular themes were not found at all.

The absence of learning areas' structure and cross-curricular themes confirms a strong subject fragmentation. This outdated approach disallows the interconnection of subjects, deep learning², and development of important competencies.

VII. INCLUSIVITY OF EDUCATION

Inclusivity of education assumes flexibility in learning, teaching and assessment aimed at adapting to students' different needs and abilities. This is in order to respond to the diversity of needs through increasing participation in learning, cultures, and communities and to reduce and eliminate exclusion within and from education.³

- Inclusivity of education is regulated narrowly in all analysed units - only in regard to the inclusion of students with developmental or learning difficulties, or gifted and talented students, but without adequate elaboration on how to implement it in practice.

This points to a lack of understanding of what inclusivity of education involves, including how to accomplish change in classroom practices to better meet the diverse needs of all learners.

VIII. ASSESSMENT

Assessment refers to the monitoring and evaluation of student achievements aimed at diagnosing difficulties in learning to improve the learning process and reach student outcomes and overall education objectives. Leading education systems feature defined assessment principles that guide learning and student development.

- Key assessment principles were found in all analysed units, but only at the level of bylaws and without elaboration at the level of subject curricula.

In practice, the lack of well-defined contemporary assessment concepts continues to foster students' orientation towards grades and formal qualifications, rather than nurturing and valuing learning and personal growth.

² Fullan, M., Quinn, J. & McEachen J. J. (2018). *Deep Learning: Engage the World Change the World*. Thousand Oaks, California: Corwin.

Analysis of subject programmes

1. SUBJECT DESCRIPTION

Subject description defines the place of a subject within an education system and its role in achieving the overall objectives, purpose, and vision of education.

- Only around one third of analysed subject programmes contain subject description. These, however, narrate the academic discipline instead of the subject's relevance to the broader educational context and students' development. **This limits understanding of the subject's purpose among teachers, students, and parents.**

2. OBJECTIVES OF THE SUBJECT TEACHING AND LEARNING

Objectives represent the most general broad expectations of students' knowledge, skills, and attitudes within a specific subject.

- Most of the analysed subject programmes contain objectives; however, these are often too specific and not adequately formulated, and thus **fail to communicate what is expected of students.**

3. KEY COMPETENCIES⁴

- **Key competencies** are not specifically defined in the analysed subject programmes, but their elements can be recognized through subject specific knowledge, skills, and attitudes (e.g. numerical competences in mathematics).

4. STUDENT LEARNING OUTCOMES

Student learning outcomes are clear and precise expectations on the knowledge, skills, and attitudes students should acquire at the end of each school year.

- They are more present in the analysed subject programmes for primary than for secondary general academic upper secondary schools (gymnasiums). Where formulated, they do not meet the minimum professional standards, which **leads to teaching practices aimed at the memorization of factual knowledge and the subsequent lack of development of higher cognitive and behavioural competencies.**

³ UNESCO. (2009). *Policy Guidelines on Inclusion in Education*, p. 9. Paris: UNESCO.

⁴ See under V. *Key Competencies*.

5. PRINCIPLES OF TEACHING AND LEARNING PROCESS

Principles of teaching and learning are general guidelines for teachers on how to organize the teaching process to more effectively achieve subject objectives and student learning outcomes (e.g. principles of flexibility, inclusivity, social interaction, contextualization).

- The analysed programmes do not contain coherent and elaborated principles. A student-oriented approach and general methodical instructions are mentioned declaratively without any correlation with vision, purpose and objectives of education or subject teaching and learning. **This may increase already existing inequality within the systems, especially between advantaged and disadvantaged schools.**

6. INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGIES (ICT)

Digital literacy is essential for life and work in the 21st century, therefore the subject curricula of

leading contemporary education systems clearly define and emphasize the role and place of ICT in teaching and learning of all subjects.

- Only a few of the analysed programmes mention ICT in reference to homework, while its role in the teaching process and the achievement of objectives is not considered at all. **This further contributes to the present irrelevance of subject programmes in BiH.**

7. OTHER KEY ELEMENTS

Some vital elements of contemporary subject curricula are absent from all the subject programmes analysed, e.g. contribution of teaching and learning of a subject in development of the key competences, correlation between/with other subjects, and flexibility of programmes in addressing specific educational needs of all students. It is particularly worrying that not a single analysed subject programme offers guidelines for monitoring, assessment, and grading.

This policy brief has been prepared based on the document *Towards Education that Creates Changes: The report on the analysis of documents regulating primary and general secondary education in Bosnia and Herzegovina – on the path from traditional to contemporary curricula based on student learning outcomes*, that has been developed in 2020 by a group of authors, experts in the area of education, who were engaged by the OSCE Mission to Bosnia and Herzegovina within the project titled “Quality Education through Curriculum Reform” that is run by the OSCE Mission to Bosnia and Herzegovina with financial support of the governments of the Kingdom of Norway and the Italian Republic.

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