



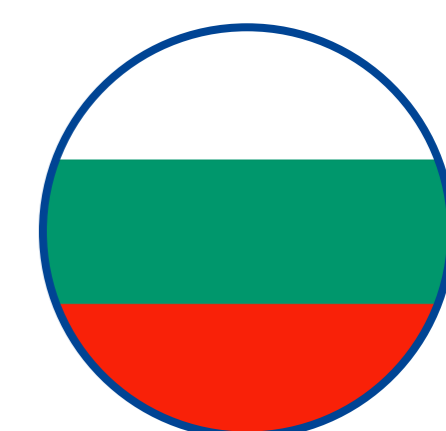
# CONFERENCE ON THE EVALUATION OF EU COHESION POLICY

## POLICY LEARNING FOR COHESION AND GROWTH

BRUSSELS, 12 FEBRUARY 2026

### EVALUATION OF MEASURES FOR THE MODERNISATION OF HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS

Executive Agency "Programme Education"



**BULGARIA**

#### FUNDS COVERED ESF

#### PROGRAMMING PERIOD

► 2014-2020

#### PROGRAMME COVERED

► Science and Education for Smart Growth

#### THEMATIC SCOPE

► Social Europe

#### TYPE OF EVALUATION

► Impact

#### YEAR OF COMPLETION

► 2024

#### MAIN OBJECTIVES



The primary goal of this report is to derive lessons from the modernisation of higher education institutions (HEI) to inform current and future implementation in this area.

#### METHODOLOGY USED



The evaluation takes a realist approach, to understand what works, for whom, in what contexts, and how, and examines how a programme's outcomes are influenced by the context in which it takes place. This report aims to understand the mechanism at work and to identify the factors that can explain observed changes in practice, behaviour, attitudes, and outcomes.

#### DATA SOURCES



Data collection methods included a strong focus on:

- In-depth qualitative interviews
- Review of programme documentation and evidence
- Focus group with 7 beneficiary institutions
- Site visits
- Review meetings with key stakeholders

#### Selection:

- The diversity of modernisation's goals and activities contributed to complexity and reduced efficiency in project application, assessment and selection.
- Greater use of qualitative indicators could have further prioritised the content and logic of proposed projects.

#### Implementation:

- Implementation was hampered by an insufficient enabling environment, despite high levels of collaboration and support from the MA.
- Competition for funding within and between HEIs was sometimes an impediment to the implementation of joint programmes.
- Administrative inflexibilities slowed beneficiaries but the targets were sufficiently met to avoid financial penalties.

#### Monitoring and reporting:

- Burdensome reporting and evidence collection procedures reduced efficiency.

#### Outcomes:

- Modernisation achieved substantial results when building on local practice and needs but faced more challenges when striving for innovation.

#### CONCLUSIONS



The evaluation provided insight for the planning and implementation of upcoming procedures and the choice of competitive versus non-competitive mode. For example, the planned procedure 'Strengthening the Competence Approach in Higher Education' had similar objectives, target population and main beneficiaries to Modernisation. However, given its scale, the evaluation recommended for it a direct award to specific beneficiaries. A direct award was applied through procedure „Modernisation of Higher Education Institutions – 2“ launched in October 2025 with 16 beneficiary HEIs determined through comprehensive assessments of their quality of education and their relevance to the needs of the labour market.

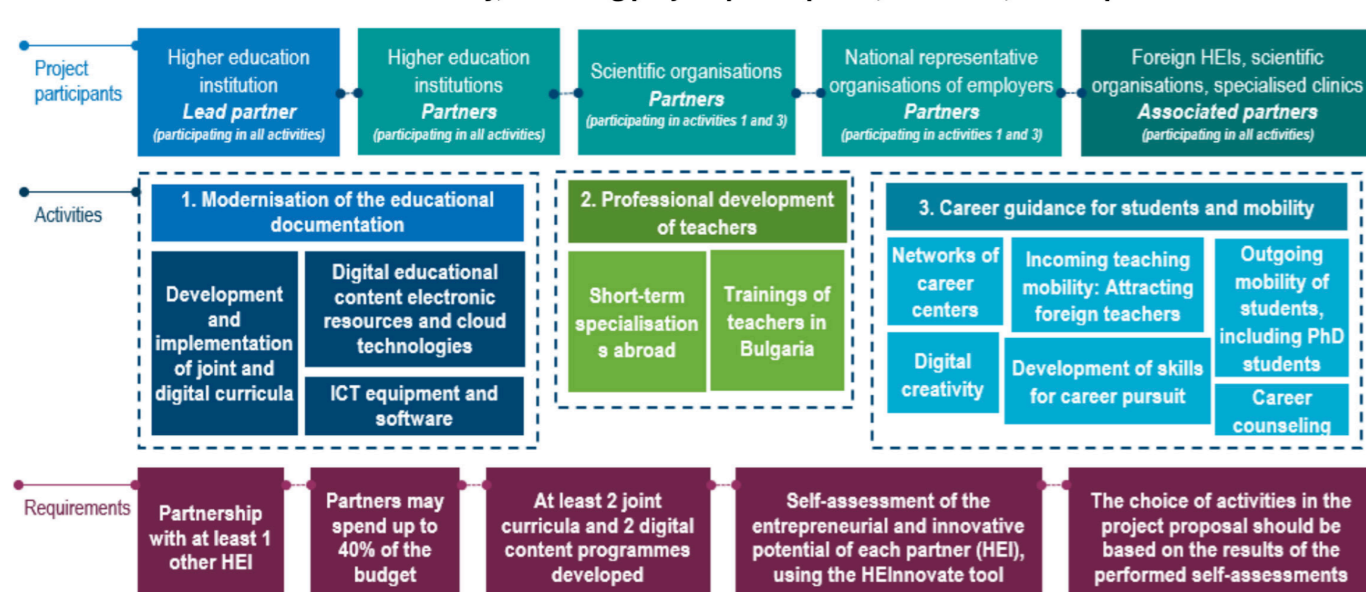
#### MAIN FINDINGS



##### Design of activities:

- Modernisation was well aligned with national and institutional needs and priorities, with very few areas left unaddressed.
- A broad focus combined with modest and institutionally-focused funding constrained opportunities for systemic and strategic impact.
- More sustained and specialised expert advice was needed at key points in addition to the existing guidelines.

Overview of the Modernisation activity, including project participants, activities, and requirements



Source: Executive Agency "Programme Education" (2021[14]), Round-table meeting between the EIT community and key Bulgarian national stakeholders. <https://sf.mon.bg/?go=news&p=detail&newsid=990>

#### AUTHORS OF THE EVALUATION

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#### LINK

<https://files.evaluationhelpdesk.eu/evaluations/BGE37.pdf>

