

# IMPLEMENTATION OF SMART SPECIALISATION IN NORTH MACEDONIA

MAIN ACHIEVEMENTS AND CHALLENGES OF THE  
SMART SPECIALISATION APPROACH IN NORTH  
MACEDONIA

CURRENT DEVELOPMENTS IN THE IMPLEMENTATION  
PROCESS

# Smart Specialisation in North Macedonia

**Vision:** Promoting green and sustainable growth through knowledge, innovation and technology — creating high value-added products and services competitive in international and domestic markets.

## 4 VERTICAL PRIORITY DOMAINS

2 HORIZONTAL: Energy for the Future · Tourism




**Smart Agriculture & Food**

Higher value-added food processing · Smart farming



**ICT Sector**

Software development  
Advanced ICT services



**Electro-Mechanical Industry 4.0**

Electrical equipment  
Machine components & parts



**Sustainable Materials & Buildings**

Smart buildings  
Sustainable construction

## 6 STRATEGIC OBJECTIVES

**SO1**

**Scientific Excellence**

**SO2**

**Innovation Ecosystem**

**SO3**

**Business Competitiveness**

**SO4**

**Human Capital & Skills**

**SO5**

**Digital Transformation**

**SO6**

**S3 Governance & EDP Dialogue**

**JRC/EC** | Methodology & guidance partner

**4x** | Quadruple helix bottom-up EDP

**54%** | S3 Action Plan completed by 2024

**€12.7M** | Science budget aligned to S3 2026

**Horizon** | Europe synergy & ERA participation

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# S3 and VET

- ▶ In North Macedonia, Smart Specialization (S3) serves as a strategic framework that aligns vocational education and training (VET) with the country's economic development priorities. The VET system is undergoing significant development through the implementation of the new VET Law, the expansion of dual education, and the establishment of regional VET centers and Centers of Vocational Excellence. Through the S3-MK 2024–2027 Strategy, VET reforms are focused on developing the skills required in priority sectors such as ICT, smart agriculture and food, electro-mechanical Industry 4.0, and sustainable materials.

# S3 and VET

- ▶ A key element of this transformation is dual education, which currently involves more than 700 companies that collaborate with VET schools to provide work-based learning opportunities. Through these partnerships, students gain practical experience, develop skills in real working environments, and gain exposure to new technologies and modern production processes. In the coming period, the regional VET centers will play an increasingly important role in connecting schools, businesses, local authorities, and innovation stakeholders within their regions, creating ecosystems that support innovation, entrepreneurship, and sustainable development.

# S3 and VET

- ▶ By strengthening partnerships between education providers and the private sector, VET is becoming a key driver of Smart Specialization, ensuring that learners acquire relevant green, digital, and industry-specific competences while contributing to regional competitiveness and economic growth. Building on the successful experience of dual education in secondary VET, North Macedonia is also exploring opportunities to replicate and adapt this model within higher education, fostering stronger university-industry cooperation and improving graduates' readiness for the labour market.

# Short background

- ▶ The first S3 Action Plan 2024-2025 consisted of 35 measures and 63 activities with € 6.1 million budget
- ▶ According to Separate Analysis of S3 Action Plan 2024-2025 for Ministry of Education and Science (which was involved in 31 activities out of 63): -the realization was 83% overall (completed and ongoing actions due to end 2025)

# CURRENT ACTIVITIES RELATED TO THE NEW ACTION PLAN AND NEXT STEPS FROM S3

- ▶ The new Action Plan was prepared in line with the assessment recommendations received from the JRC.
- ▶ The new Action Plan 2026–2027 includes 21 measures and 33 actions, which will serve as a basis for initiating key activities and programmes, including the Just Transition Mechanism, the Cohesion Policy framework, and the implementation of the Europe 2030 Agenda. The activities foreseen under the Smart Specialisation measure within the Reform Agenda, with a deadline of December 2025, were successfully implemented.
- ▶ By the end of 2025, a Rulebook had been developed, integrating the provisions and support mechanisms related to both the European Institute of Innovation and Technology (EIT) and the European Innovation Council (EIC). The Rulebook provides a comprehensive explanation of the mechanisms through which domestic companies can access and benefit from European innovation and funding opportunities available under the EIT and EIC frameworks, thereby facilitating their participation in European programmes and strengthening their innovation capacity.

# LAST UPDATES

- ▶ During October 2025, workshops were held with the experts for S3 and the working coordination group.
- ▶ During November 2025, four separate Consultative thematic workshop for defining proposed measures for creating a new S3 action plan 2026-2027 as part of the Continuous Entrepreneurial Discovery Process (EDP) within the implementation of the Smart Specialization Strategy (S3) 2024-2027 according to the main domains in S3 for North Macedonia were held, and one final for general conclusions. The representatives from the business sector, academia, and government, and NGO were invited. Continuous dialogue is one of the key obligations in the Smart Specialization Strategy and the basis for adopting a new action plan for 2026-2027

# LAST UPDATES

- ▶ Held in Skopje from November 4 to 13, 2025, these workshops on policy measures (Policy mix) aimed to support the advancement and shaping of the measures for the S3 Action Plan for the period 2026–2027. Over 150 representatives from the so-called quadruple helix – public institutions, the private sector, the academic community, and civil society – actively participated in the workshops.
- ▶ Collective Results and Key Insights:

Across all four domains, participants confirmed that the existing strategic and specific objectives of S3-MK remain relevant. The main priority identified is the need to streamline and consolidate overlapping measures to improve efficiency, clarity, and focus in implementation.

# CURRENT ACTIVITIES

- ▶ The new Action Plan 2026–2027 includes activities related to the Economic and Investment Plan for the Western Balkans, ensuring a more comprehensive alignment with regional development priorities.
- ▶ The document effectively identifies and refers to relevant national policies and strategies. Given that several national strategies are directly or indirectly linked to the Smart Specialisation Strategy, its implementation has also been prioritized within the National Development Strategy 2024–2044, under the first pillar dedicated to building a sustainable, innovative, and competitive economy.

# General overview

- ▶ Responsible institution for implementation, monitoring and reporting on the steps achievement is the Agency for Innovation, Scientific and Technological Development and Entrepreneurship INOVA.
- ▶ Also at a policy level, leader of the process for creation and implementation of S3 is the Ministry of Education and Science.
- ▶ Ministry of Education and Science will follow the implementation of Law on Innovation Activity and do the monitoring of the process. Reporting for the measure stays by INOVA.

# General overview

- ▶ The Revised “Roadmap for research infrastructure”, gives the overview and potentials of the existing research infrastructure in the country. It emphasizes the importance of further investments in infrastructure such as equipment, databases, laboratories, licenses, networking opportunities, and support services to start-ups and SMEs, encouraging knowledge sharing, technology transfer, and partnerships to accelerate innovation and commercialization of new ideas, as well as support to green and digital transition.

# General overview

- ▶ A feasibility study for Science and Technology Parks (STP) already exists, alongside projects aimed at developing Digital Innovation Hubs (DIH) and Centres of Excellence (CoE) within several faculties. These existing initiatives serve as a foundation and starting point for the subsequent phases of pilot projects intended to support the establishment of 2 centres in the country offering comprehensive services for companies.
- ▶ Creation of Centre of excellence is planned as a measure in all S3 domains, as an entity that provides leadership and best practices, research, support, and training within the focus areas. In the country, two Digital Innovation Hubs (DIH) are active
- ▶ Stimulate and support digital transition in the economy and society, the Smart Specialization Strategy envisions further investments and development support for existing DIH to realize their full potential, as well as the creation of new ones.

# INVESTMENTS IN RESEARCH AND INNOVATION

Serial No.	Activity	Institution
1	Calls for scientific research projects	<b>Ministry of Education and Science</b>
2	Awarding of scholarships for doctoral studies under the sub-fields of S3	<b>Ministry of education and Science</b>
3	The Green Business Facilities Project	INOVA
4	Competitions for SMEs for collaboration with the academy	Ministry of Economy
5	Establishment of the Digital Hub at FEIT (EDIH)	FEIT (Faculty of Electrical Engineering and Information Technologies)
6	The Artificial Intelligence Project VEZILKA	FINKI (Faculty of information sciences and computer engineering)
7	IPA project for supporting S3	Ministry of Economy and <b>Ministry of education and Science</b>

Thank you for attention



**SMART  
SPECIALISATION  
STRATEGY**

