

SEE QI Newsletter 6

Regional Consultancy Fund for Quality Infrastructure (QI) in South East Europe (SEE)

The SEE QI Fund is a demand-driven project implemented by the German national metrology institute, Physikalisch-Technische Bundesanstalt (PTB). It supports initiatives that foster the increased recognition of QI services in the Western Balkan (WB6) countries and thus facilitates their integration into the European Union (EU) common market and other markets. This newsletter provides updates on recent developments in the SEE QI Fund and the ongoing SEE QI Projects with the aim of motivating QI-stakeholders to take advantage of the opportunities and benefits of regional cooperation in this field.

1. Interview with the PTB consultant of SEE QI Project 8

In November 2020, the SEE QI Fund launched its eighth project: WB6 QI Response to Covid-19. The goal of the SEE QI 8 project is to support QI institutions in the Western Balkan countries to proactively tackle Covid-19 challenges. The project has three components: two focusing on economic and health-related QI aspects, respectively, and one on transitioning to new digital modes of work and cooperation. From PTB side, the SEE Q 8 project, which brings together various QI institutions from Western Balkan countries, is coordinated by Suzana Lange. She has supported the design and operation of the SEE QI Fund and has been involved in several of its SEE QI projects as an external expert since the launch of the Fund.

What motivated you to develop Project 8 of the SEE QI Fund?

I am personally very concerned about the health and economic consequences of the Covid-19 pandemic, on the one hand, and on the other hand excited about the opportunities for new ways of collaboration. This is why I joined the PTB taskforce on Covid-19 where responses to the new challenges were gathered and further developed. In the course of our work in the taskforce it became clear that circumstances and priorities of QI partners have changed and that we must adapt in order to remain relevant in the context of the pandemic. My participation in the taskforce inspired me to apply some of the ideas that were developed there in the context of the SEE QI Fund.



Suzana Lange

In your view, what has been the effect of the Covid-19 pandemic on the SEE QI Fund and QI more broadly?

In my view, QI institutions have received greater notice and visibility due to the pandemic. The pandemic has highlighted the importance of ensuring accuracy of measurements and tests, authenticity of products such as PPE, trust in capabilities of persons and institutions, etc. We have already seen some adaptations in the ongoing SEE QI projects. For example, SEE QI 6 on accreditation added exchanges of experiences on

remote assessments and SEE QI 4 on market surveillance expanded its focus to personal protective equipment (PPE) used in the fight against the coronavirus. However, because the challenges are so profound and extensive and as our QI partner institutions have an important role in responding to these challenges, a project dedicated specifically to the Covid-19 response seemed timely and appropriate. The members of our Consultative Committee welcomed the idea for the project and we also received positive feedback and many ideas for activities from the WB6 QI institutions.

In your opinion, how can QI institutions contribute to overcoming the Covid-19 pandemic and its consequences?

With regard to tackling economic challenges of Covid-19, training and consultancy on business resilience standards was determined to be a suitable way to support the Western Balkans local industry to withstand this and future crises. To achieve sustainability and a broader impact, we chose a Training-of-Trainers approach and drew on local expertise from the WB6 countries. In the healthcare area, new equipment for the calibration of non-contact thermometers for body temperature measurements in public was tendered for. Training for the accreditation of medical laboratories for the identification of Covid-19 was organized. Digital collaboration and innovation in a broader sense was identified as the third area of activity, with trainings and exchanges of experiences. The pandemic has profoundly changed the way we work, and some of the changes will take root and remain even after the pandemic subsides.

How important is regional collaboration in the current context of a pandemic? Can you give some concrete examples where sharing of experiences could be particularly beneficial to containing the outbreak?

The pandemic presented everyone with a lot of unknowns and uncertainties due to lack of data and prior experience. In such a situation, regional collaboration is especially valuable as we need to pool and piece together our data and learn from each other about what works and what does not. In the project, we focus on methods that allow for quick reaction and delivery such as exchanges of experiences and piloting and sharing of new approaches. I am really happy about the open and collaborative spirit of WB6 and EU experts involved in our activities.

2. Registration open for various SEE QI 8 events

The SEE QI 8 project approach is to bring together different QI institutions, QI service users and the political level from WB6 countries to exchange information and experiences on how to effectively deal with Covid-19 related challenges.

Currently, there are five open calls for participants. Interested people can register on the SEE QI 8 website: <https://see.ptb.de/see-qi-fund/upcoming-see-qi-events-please-register-here>

When: 18.02.2021
What: Application deadline for Training of trainers participants
Title: Training of Trainers on Business Resilience Standards: Helping businesses address Covid-19 related economic challenges (March–June 2021)
For whom: Current or aspiring technical auditors, technical assessors, and consultants/trainers for businesses
Registration: <https://see.ptb.de/see-qi-projects/wb6-qi-response-to-covid-19/training-of-trainers-on-business-resilience-standards/>

When: 02.03.2021
What: Exchange of experience
Title: Covid-19 triggered innovations in QI institutions/ services
For whom: QI institutions staff, especially from management
Registration: <https://see.ptb.de/see-qi-projects/wb6-qi-response-to-covid-19/exchange-of-experience-covid-19-triggered-innovations-in-qi-institutions-services/>

When: 12.03.2021
What: Training
Title: Conducting impactful virtual trainings and remote consulting events
For whom: Trainers, training departments, advisors etc. from QI institutions
Register: <https://see.ptb.de/see-qi-projects/wb6-qi-response-to-covid-19/see-qi-8-e-trainings-participative-and-empowering-virtual-collaboration/>

When: 18.03.2021
What: Training
Title: Successfully leading extended virtual collaborations
For whom: Managers, project and team leaders from QI institutions
Register: <https://see.ptb.de/see-qi-projects/wb6-qi-response-to-covid-19/see-qi-8-e-trainings-participative-and-empowering-virtual-collaboration/>

When: 26.03.2021
What: Training
Title: How to effectively run virtual meetings and events
For whom: QI institutions staff
Registration: <https://see.ptb.de/see-qi-projects/wb6-qi-response-to-covid-19/see-qi-8-e-trainings-participative-and-empowering-virtual-collaboration/>

All events will be implemented virtually and are offered free of charge through the financial support of the German Federal Ministry of Economic Development and Cooperation (BMZ).

3. Needs assessment

The economic havoc wrought by the Covid-19 pandemic underscored the importance of business resilience. A number of standards, such as business continuity, risk management or supply chain management, are relevant to equipping companies with the right tools to survive periods of economic shocks or downturns such as the one brought about by the spread of the coronavirus and the ensuing national lockdowns. Component 1 of the newly launched SEE QI Project 8 "WB6 QI response to Covid-19" aims to support QI institutions in precisely this area.

The first activity – a needs assessment exercise in the six WB countries coordinated by the respective National Standards Bodies – is already completed. It collected information on the relevance of seven standards related to business resilience for WB6 including extent of implementation and certification by companies as well as activities of QI institutions in this field. The results show that there is a good basis for action in this area as well as a strong interest in capacity building activities and resources. The findings of the needs assessment (here: https://see.ptb.de/fileadmin/documents/see/SEE_QI_Visibility/Visibility_material/SEE_QI_P8_C1_Needs_Assessment_Report_20210113.pdf) will inform the design and planning of further activities under Component 1 of the project, namely a WB6 Training-of-Trainers programme on business resilience.

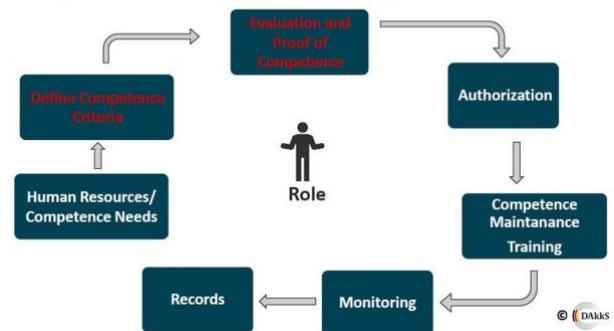
4. Busy final weeks of the year for the SEE QI 6 project

Within only four weeks, the SEE QI project 6 on accreditation held three virtual workshops, gathering between 20 and 46 participants each. They all aimed to harmonise accreditation practices and covered a broad variety of topics: from an urgent response to Covid-19 challenges over horizontal institutional questions to very specific topics of NABs work.

Particularly relevant in the context of the Covid-19 pandemic was a two-day virtual training focusing on accreditation of medical laboratories for Point-of-care-testing which was held on 12-13 November 2020. Another two-day virtual workshop was held on 30 November and 1 December 2020. It focused on accreditation of Conformity Assessment Bodies (CABs) for sampling as standalone activity, for

opinions and interpretations and for statement of conformity. The last two-day virtual workshop, held on 9-10 December 2020, focused on the establishment of competence criteria for each accreditation scheme and on effective methods for demonstrating the competence of accreditation-body personnel.

Competence Management Cycle for AB staff



Case studies and presentations were held by accreditation experts from Germany (Barbara Pflugbeil, Andreas Hönnerscheid and Ursula Ellerbeck), Greece (Aiki Stathopoulou, Ioannis Sitaras, Maria Papatzikou and Georgios Kallergis) and Serbia (Natalija Jovičić Zarić). The participants concluded that this kind of open exchange of experience is mutually enriching for both the EU speakers as well as the WB6 accreditation bodies and participants. They stated that they got some good ideas from the practices of the other NABs on how to improve their competence management activities.

5. SEE QI 7 on building ISO 17043 capacities started

SEE QI project 7 with the objective of building ISO 17043 capacities in the region started with a virtual kick-off workshop from 17–19 November 2020. The first two days of the workshop consisted of a training on the requirements of ISO 17043, with a focus on practical experiences and knowledge sharing on the implementation of interlaboratory comparisons (ILC) for calibration laboratories and inspection bodies active in the area of legal metrology.

The training was also open to participants not only from the WB6 countries but also from other EURAMET National Metrology Institutes (NMIs). The key expert for this activity was Dr. Olaf Schnelle-

Werner from ZMK Wolfen, an accredited calibration laboratory and ILC provider from Germany. On the third day of the workshop, WB6 participants identified and planned future ILCs to be conducted by four less-experienced NMIs from the region. The entire cycle of these ILCs from preparation to data evaluation and final reporting of results will be supported by the PTB expert.

6. Joint action goes virtual

When WB6 market surveillance inspectors planned their activities under SEE QI project 4 in the end of 2019, they decided not only to organise common trainings in EU legislation, but also to go from theory to practice in the form of joint actions.

This format offers a hands-on way to learn to properly read standards and regulations, make checklists out of them, use them in market surveillance controls, sample and test products, and decide (in a harmonised way) on follow-up actions based on the test results and risk assessments.

When the Covid-19 pandemic broke out, this hands-on exercise seemed no longer feasible. However, recently the SEE QI 4 team set up a dynamic plan to implement the joint action through a virtual way of collaboration. This dynamic plan foresees various elements such as online trainings to develop a harmonised checklist and a harmonised approach, individual coaching by an expert (the Croatian market surveillance inspector Ante Fuzul) and filming/explaining the process in the laboratory. The SEE QI 4 team will focus on the personal protective equipment (PPE) item of high visibility vests, which is covered by the standard EN ISO 20471:2013/A1:2016. The online training was held on 3-4 February 2021. The joint action is now ready to be launched.

7. SEE QI Fund at CEFTA Week

The Central European Free Trade Agreement (CEFTA) Secretariat invited the SEE QI Fund to participate in a panel discussion on mutual recognition programmes in the context of the CEFTA Week 2020.

The panel discussion was held semi-virtually on 17 December 2020, with some of the participants being present at the venue in Bosnia and Herzegovina, whilst most panelists and participants attended the event virtually.



The PTB project coordinator for the SEE QI fund Stefan Wallerath contributed to the panel that discussed trade implications of the pandemic situation for the CEFTA parties and the region's response to the Covid-19 pandemic. The speakers were invited to share their views on how the recently adopted Action Plan for the Common Regional Market for 2021-2024 could support and accelerate the recovery of the CEFTA region. The PTB project coordinator elaborated on the concepts used in the EU to facilitate trade of industrial products. Referring to the possibilities of a mutual recognition of test results in the region, he emphasized the importance of an internationally recognized Quality Infrastructure.

Annex: Overview of ongoing SEE QI Projects

Name	Coordinator	Timeframe	Objective
1. Interlaboratory comparison for small volumes		completed	
2. Adjustment of certification programs in organic production to the modified EU legal basis 2018/848	Mersida Musabegović, Organska Kontrola, BiH	10/2019–09/2021	SEE certification bodies acquire competence about the new EU Regulation 2018/848 and are able to implement the changes required and know how to work with the new list of compliant CBs
3. National normative aspects (NNA) for standardization of overhead electrical lines	Tatjana Bojanić, Institute for Standardization, Serbia	09/2019–08/2021	Standardisation institutes and technical experts develop specifications for a regionally harmonized draft NNA document for overhead electrical lines (EN 50341-1 09/2019–08/2021)
4. New EU legislation on market surveillance	Samir Bekto, Market Surveillance Agency, BiH	10/2019–06/2021	Market surveillance authorities build capacity and exchange knowledge on the safety requirements resulting from newest horizontal and vertical EU legislation: Regulation (EU) 2019/1020, Regulation (EU) 2019/515, Regulation (EU) 2016/425 on Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) and Machinery Directive 2006/42/EC
5. Metrology for medical devices	Bianka Mangutova Stoilkovska, Bureau of Metrology, North Macedonia	04/2020–03/2021	The capacities of NMIs for calibration / verification / control of the most relevant types of medical devices with measuring function in WB6 countries are strengthened
6. Capacity building for harmonization of accreditation activities with the European rules in selected areas	Jasna Stojanović, Accreditation Body of Serbia (ATS) Dejan Stojkovski, Institute for Accreditation of the Republic of North Macedonia (IARNM)	04/2020–09/2021	WB6 region implements, on market demand, accreditation schemes (policies, requirements, procedures) in compliance with the practices of the national accreditation bodies that are members of EA
7. Capacity building for the implementation of interlaboratory comparisons (ILC) and proficiency tests (PT)	Stilian Habibi, National Metrology Institute DPM, Albania	04/2020–06/2021	The goal of the project is to support the applying NMIs in gaining knowledge on the ISO 17043:2010 standard requirements and enable them to develop competence in the complementary operation of ILC/PT schemes at national and regional level
8. QI response to Covid-19 challenges	NN	11/2020–07/2021	QI institutions in the Western Balkan countries proactively tackle Covid-19 challenges related to QI

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