



COUNTRY STRATEGY PAPER 2019 UPDATE

NORTH MACEDONIA

1. A brief summary of key developments in VET and skills and EU and donor cooperation during 2017–18

With the approval of the Comprehensive Education Strategy (CES) 2018-2025 by the Minister for Education and Science (MoES), the Republic of North Macedonia has now completed a framework for its various reform initiatives in the TVET sector (qualifications, work-based learning, validation of non-formal learning etc.). The CES joins the multi-year Employment Strategy 2016-2020 of the Ministry of Labour and Social Protection (MoLSP) to create a credible and enabling environment for reform in education and employment. After high-level negotiations, the country was also deemed ready for a Sector Reform Performance Contract (SRPC) to be funded through the IPA 2019 for education, employment and social protection sectors.

The top upcoming development in the TVET sector is to establish regional VET Centres of Excellence. The concept for the centres should be finalised by 2019.

Ongoing sector progress is the result of major EU and World Bank-funded initiatives to modernise curricula and implement a National Qualifications Framework (NQF). Work-based learning mechanisms have been expanded and bolstered. Employment policies have put increased focus on youth and vulnerable groups and an ambitious youth guarantee programme got underway in 2018.

2. An assessment of mid-term progress towards the ETF's 2020 objectives

Specific objective 1: support MoES and other actors (VET Centre, Adult Education Centre (AEC), MoLSP) in introducing a validation system for non-formal and informal learning.

The focus in 2018 has been to review the regulatory framework governing the validation of non-formal and informal learning (VN FIL), create an ad-hoc working group of stakeholders to review Adult Education legislation and introduce specific articles to formalise the validation process. The AEC and MoLSP are discussing the introduction of validation as an active labour-market policy, but have reached no decision.

Specific objective 2: improve the quality and relevance of VET provision by supporting MoES and the VET Centre in introducing a strategic policy framework for work-based learning (WBL) in VET programmes. VET provision will be bolstered with continuing professional development (CPD) for teachers and trainers.

With ETF support, the national working group is developing solutions for all key aspects of WBL and will publish results in 2018. A long-term intervention targeting WBL will be launched with Swiss funding in 2018. The Swiss project will take lead responsibility for reviewing WBL mechanisms, while the ETF provides ad-hoc expertise.

The ETF's support of CPD ceased in 2018. After discussions with MoES, the ETF will focus on qualifications and WBL reform.

A VET Centre representative is active in the ETF forum for VET Quality Assurance.

Specific objective 3: support better links between initial and continuous VET and labour-market demand during the period 2017-2020. The ETF will implement capacity-building activities to improve knowledge of skills needs and inform initial and continuous VET provision.

In 2018, the ETF piloted several indicators of skills mismatch in the labour market. The aim was to test and implement indicators for a number of countries, devising a template for easy access and updating. Support to national stakeholders in this area will continue in 2019 and the results expected by 2020 remain realistic.

The ETF also continues supporting the EU Delegation to North Macedonia in the definition of new IPA programmes. In June 2018, the ETF delivered a comparative analysis of interventions planned under the IPA action document 2017 and the new SRPC, including recommendations in all major policy areas. In July, the ETF gave input on a proposal of areas to be covered by the SRPC.

The EU Delegation made a formal request to the ETF in September 2018 for support on the SRPC and the consultative process and assessment with MoES and stakeholders. The ETF facilitated a workshop with key stakeholders in October 2018.

3. Actions planned for 2019

Specific objective 1: support MoES and other actors (VET Centre, Adult Education Centre (AEC), MoLSP) in designing, implementing and monitoring qualification reforms.

The ETF will continue supporting the MoES implementation of NQF in three areas: revising NQF legislation; operationalising sector skills councils to address any private-sector involvement gap in the NQF and qualifications processes; and following up on the VNFI regulatory framework.

Specific objective 2: improve the quality and relevance of VET provision.

The ETF will continue supporting the review and strengthening of work-based learning (WBL) mechanisms, forging a partnership with national stakeholders and the Swiss embassy and providing expertise in areas like the integration of WBL mechanisms in the new regional VET Centres of Excellence.

The ETF will support the development of a concept of Regional VET Centres, through two main actions:

- The ETF will implement a survey to produce a reliable description of the current capacity of all VET providers (VET schools; providers of adult education) in three pilot regions to generate the skills that are currently required by employers and may be required in the medium to long term future. On the basis
- The ETF will facilitate the debate within the Regional VET Centres working group on functions and governance mechanisms of the new Regional VET Centres using the input of the research implemented in the three pilot regions

The ETF will support the Ministry of Education in the assessment of VET schools readiness to use digital learning tools and methodologies through the piloting of the “SELFIE” policy instrument.

Specific objective 3: provide better links between initial and continuous VET and labour-market demand during the period 2017-2020.

In 2019, the ETF will focus its efforts on supporting the MoLSP in medium-term skills identification in the three regions targeted by the VET providers survey, as follows:

- Roll-out of the model;
- Analysis of results, as requested by national stakeholders;
- Training of MoLSP technical staff to ensure the model's sustainability;
- Dissemination of all recent ETF activities in skills intelligence.

In terms of EU external assistance, support in the design of the SRPC is expected to continue throughout 2019. The form and duration of assistance will be discussed in late 2018, beginning 2019.

Regarding budget support, the Directorate-General for Neighbourhood and Enlargement Negotiations has asked the ETF to assess the progress, relevance and credibility of the sector strategy.

Upon request from the European Commission or EU Delegation, the ETF will provide support to bilateral policy dialogue:

- Inputs and progress reporting at bilateral sub-committee meetings;
- Yearly assessment of the Economic Reform Programme.

The ETF will assist in the Riga Assessment and run the Torino Process 2019 in cooperation with the MoES and its standing working group. This includes disseminating the findings of the 2018 Small Business Act assessment and the teacher training survey. The analysis of VET governance and funding will feed into the Torino Process.