

COUNTRY STRATEGY PAPER 2020 UPDATE: ALBANIA

A BRIEF SUMMARY OF KEY DEVELOPMENTS IN VET AND SKILLS AND EU AND DONOR COOPERATION DURING 2018–19

Following Albania's Law on VET in 2017, most of the by-laws have been prepared or already adopted. These lay the basis for a higher financial and institutional autonomy of multifunctional VET providers and for incorporating new development functions, such as career guidance, business liaison, quality assurance, curriculum development and teacher training coordination. The 2019 Law on Employment Promotion paves the way for setting up both a National Agency for Employment and Skills, which will manage also all VET providers, and a national "Social Employment Fund". In 2019 a new Action Plan 2022 was designed, amending and extending the National Employment and Skills Strategy 2014-2020. The Government and donors have aligned behind this new Action Plan, thus setting the path for further measures and reforms in the employment and VET policy fields.

The Ministry of Finance and Economy in charge of VET continues to optimise the network of public VET institutions, halting enrolment with no demand while launching new programmes, and turning suitable providers into Multifunctional VET Centres (MFCs). Currently, there are 35 vocational schools and 10 vocational training centres. MFCs will offer a wider range of courses for both young people and adults in a given region. In the academic year 2018/19 a total of 21,071 students were enrolled in vocational schools – a share of 18.1% of upper secondary school students. Nearly 15% of the vocational school students in Albania drop out¹; some of them continue their education abroad. Additionally in 2018, 8,770 unemployed jobseekers started a training course, lasting between two and six months. Issues with the access to VET persist for girls/women, people from rural and remote areas, students with disabilities and low-skilled adults. An achievement is the fact that well over 400 businesses are offering company internships to students now, thus making VET more practice-related.

However, reforms require time to take root across the system: the study tracing vocational school and training centre graduates from 2018 (GIZ, 2019) illustrates a persistent mismatch between labour market demand and graduates' knowledge and skills, but also their working attitudes.

Donor interventions include:

- EU IPA 2019-2020 programme: Sector Reform Contract (in the pipeline) for the social sector, comprising measures for inclusive education, community-based care facilities, and support to training and employment of disadvantaged people, and a related technical assistance project;
- Swiss Development Cooperation: Swisscontact Skills for Jobs project (€7.1 million); UNDP Skills for Employment Development II project; Risi Albania-Phase 2 project (€7.17 million) to create employment opportunities for young people; SECO programme for aspiring entrepreneurs;
- Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ): ProSEED programme (€16.5 million);
- Austrian Development Agency: NABER project to support dual training in the garment industry; KulturKontakt AI-Tour project to upgrade tourism and hospitality training; funding for the Hermann Gmeiner ICT school; introduction of a school management information system.
- The Albanian-American Development Foundation funds a junior achievement programme in secondary schools, an ICT resource centre and an agricultural school of excellence.

¹ No official statistics exist on this. See: <http://skillsforjobs.al/al/helping-risk-dropping-vocational-schools/>

AN ASSESSMENT OF MID-TERM PROGRESS TOWARDS THE ETF'S 2020 OBJECTIVES

Specific objective 1: Support EU external assistance.

The ETF compiled a progress report to prepare colleagues in DG EMPL and in the Directorate-General for Neighbourhood and Enlargement Negotiations (DG NEAR) for the relevant EU-Albanian Sub-committee meeting. We provided an assessment of key issues in education, training and the labour market, as well as comments to the Directorate-General for Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion (DG EMPL) on Albania's Economic Reform Programme 2019-2021. Furthermore, ETF assisted the expert team reviewing performance under the previous IPA 2016-2018 Sector Reform Contract for the employment and skills sector with information and comments on their Compliance Review.

Specific objective 2: Governance and legal framework for VET.

The ETF provided inputs and comments on draft sublegal acts to implement the 2017 Law on VET, notably the comprehensive Ministerial Instruction on the Operation and Activities of VET providers that contains also detailed provisions for the planned establishment of School Development Units.

Specific objective 3: Implement the Albanian Qualifications Framework.

The ETF reviewed draft sublegal acts on the recognition of prior learning, non-formal learning and the insertion of lifelong learning qualifications into the Albanian Qualifications Framework (AQF), as well as the establishment of sector skills committees. These sublegal acts were adopted in July 2019.

Specific objective 4: Improve VET provision and quality.

In 2018 the majority of staff from 34 (out of 35) vocational schools and 10 training centres took part in the ETF International Survey of VET Teachers, Instructors and School principals. In May 2019 ETF/HDPC completed the final report that summarizes results concerning staff qualifications, professional development, their teaching methods and the conditions in schools. Furthermore, ETF is helping a group of VET teachers in Albania to improve their capacities to make use of digital video - particularly in their teaching and the development of instructional materials. In September 2019 and in collaboration with the Swisscontact Skills for Jobs project, teacher trainers were trained who are willing and able to multiply this training to other teachers.

In the area of work-based learning, the ETF, jointly with KulturKontakt Austria, assisted the National Agency for VET and Qualifications in finalising a national regulation on the work-based learning of VET students in companies. ETF encourages institutions and employers to participate in the European Alliance for Apprenticeships and in platforms to exchange experiences.

ACTIONS PLANNED FOR 2020

Specific objective 1: Support EU external assistance

The ETF will monitor progress in VET, employment and social inclusion, and support sector policy dialogue and donor coordination. The ETF will assist the EU Delegation to monitor the implementation of the IPA II Sector Reform Contract for the social sector, in particular in the training and employment policy fields.

Regarding budget support, DG NEAR has asked the ETF to assess the relevance, credibility and progress of relevant sector strategies.

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

- inputs and progress reporting for bilateral sub-committee meetings;
- annual assessment of Albania's Economic Reform Programme;
- inputs into relevant sections of the Commission Progress Report.

The ETF will support Albanian actors to participate in European platforms and dialogue processes.

Specific objective 2: Albania support to VET reform institutional arrangements.

In line with Albania's NESS Action Plan 2022, the ETF will provide policy advice for the full operationalisation of the new National Agency for Employment and Skills, including inputs to a National VET Provider Development Plan and a related Roadmap, based on existing information. Also, ETF will contribute to analysing the current situation with regard to the information system in VET and to designing a new unified VET management information system.

Specific objective 3: Implement the Albanian Qualifications Framework.

As stipulated by the NESS Action Plan 2022, ETF will collaborate with the AQF taskforce on the completion of the legal framework for implementing the AQF, the assessment and certification of qualifications, mechanisms for the inclusion of non-formal qualifications in the AQF, a national AQF action and communication plan, as well as the European Qualifications Framework referencing report. ETF will accompany the setting up of one pilot sector committee and review its operational mechanisms and the vocational qualifications suggested. ETF will help to make sure that the roles assigned to institutions implementing the recognition of prior learning are clear and follow RPL pilots in two occupations. Furthermore, ETF will assist the country with the assessment of capacities of VET providers to provide post-secondary vocational qualifications.

Specific objective 4: Improve VET provision and quality

Continuous professional development: A training package on video pedagogy in teaching and teacher training will be developed for use in Albania and beyond.

Work-based learning: In line with the NESS Action Plan 2022 ETF will provide advice on possible indicators to evaluate company internships of VET students. Successful cases of business

involvement in VET will be promoted via the European Alliance for Apprenticeships. Furthermore, ETF will provide comments on the legal framework and a roadmap for the establishment of a dual training system under the National Chamber of Crafts.

Developing digitally competent education institutions: A number of pilot institutions will participate in the EU SELFIE exercise - a tool designed to help schools embed digital technologies into teaching, learning and student assessment.

Quality assurance in VET: Albanian experts will participate in the ETF Forum for Quality Assurance in VET and review the Albanian situation vis-à-vis specific quality indicators.