

PRESS FACTSHEET

Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia

Reforming skills and education policy for a brighter future

The former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia is a country in transition, with the perspective of starting a negotiations for accession to the EU. The country, exiting from a serious crisis which led to a 46% youth unemployment, is fully committed in developing education and training to boost employability, increase access to opportunity and promote social cohesion.

Since 2003 the European Training Foundation, the only EU agency working in the EU's external relations, has been active in the country to complement the work of the EU, by supporting the reform of skills and education policies. The ETF sustains the process of education reform, reviews active labour market policies and creates bridges to ensure the match between demand and supply of skills.

Political context and priorities

Economic growth, job creation, fair taxation, support for small and medium enterprises and reform of social protection for the most vulnerable are key priorities of the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia. In June 2018 EU countries found a conditional agreement to open EU accession negotiations with Macedonia — and its western Balkan neighbour Albania — in June 2019. Government priorities will from now be closely linked to meeting EU requirements for each of the different sectors.

Socio-economic situation

The former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia ranks among the smallest and poorest economies of Western Balkans. Despite this, low wages and major improvements in doing business in the country have attracted sizeable amounts of foreign direct investment, strengthening export opportunities. To support export competitiveness, the local currency is pegged to the euro, forcing the government to run prudent fiscal policies. This monetary regime is reflected in limited budget deficits and relatively low public debt. Unemployment is falling, reaching a historic low of 22.8% in the first half of 2017, but youth employment and long-term unemployment is still high, at 46 and 81 % respectively.

Education and labour policies

There are two major strategies in force regarding education and labour policy. The Ministry of Education and Science are seeking to enhance the attraction of vocational education and training, match skill supply to labour market demands, improve work-based learning and strengthen teachers' knowledge of technology and entrepreneurship. The Ministry of Labour and Social Policy's Employment Strategy 2016-2020 aims to increase employment, job quality and productivity, with an emphasis on vulnerable groups traditionally on the margins such as women and young people.

EU support and the ETF

The EU is supporting the reform of skills and education policy in the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia through several interventions. Projects so far have supported the development of competence-based qualifications, the Macedonian National Qualification Framework and have supported and strengthened the revision of work based learning mechanisms in vocational education. Negotiations between the European Commission and national authorities regarding the launch of a Sector Reform Contract (SRC) are almost concluded. This contract will support the implementation of the strategies developed in the education, employment and social policy sectors.

As the only EU agency supporting the EU in external relations through human capital development, between 2018 -2020 the ETF will be supporting the country in the following reforms:

- Including more work-based learning in vocational education;
- Establishing a system of validation of non-formal and informal learning;
- Reviewing labour market measures targeting youth and vulnerable groups;
- Supporting the establishment of regional vocational education centres of excellences

Background

The European Training Foundation (ETF) is **an agency of the European Union** helping EU's neighbouring countries to reform their own education and training systems in line with the EU's external relations policies. By supporting human capital development, the ETF contributes to social and economic development and to long-term stability in neighbouring countries. The ETF is based in Turin, Italy, and employs 130 staff.

Success story: 20 jobs for 20 electricians

What happens when a company trains its own future staff? EVN Macedonia is an electronic company that launched a project to employ 20 students on completion of their studies and apprenticeship, offering them a salary of at least MKD 20 000. The project, named 'Project 202020', was realised together with the 'Mihajlo Pupin' electro-technical vocational school in Skopje.

Fifteen-year-old student **Jovana Nikoloska** has enrolled at the school as she wants to be an electrician. Her parents have signed a contract with the school and the company, which sets out the rights and obligations of both parties. Jovana will receive practical training in the company for 3 years, hoping to be one of the 20 students who will be taken on.

'I enrolled because I like the idea of receiving specialist training in a workplace environment,' she says. 'During my training at the company I will do my best and work hard to be one of the top in my class. I hope to work for the company where I am training, EVN Macedonia, when I graduate in 2020.'



To be successful in getting this job she will need to be one of the top students, of which there are 36 this year, a number which is on the increase. The high percentage of training in the workplace offered by the new course and the prospect of a job at the end have seen enrolment numbers soar by 400% in a single year.

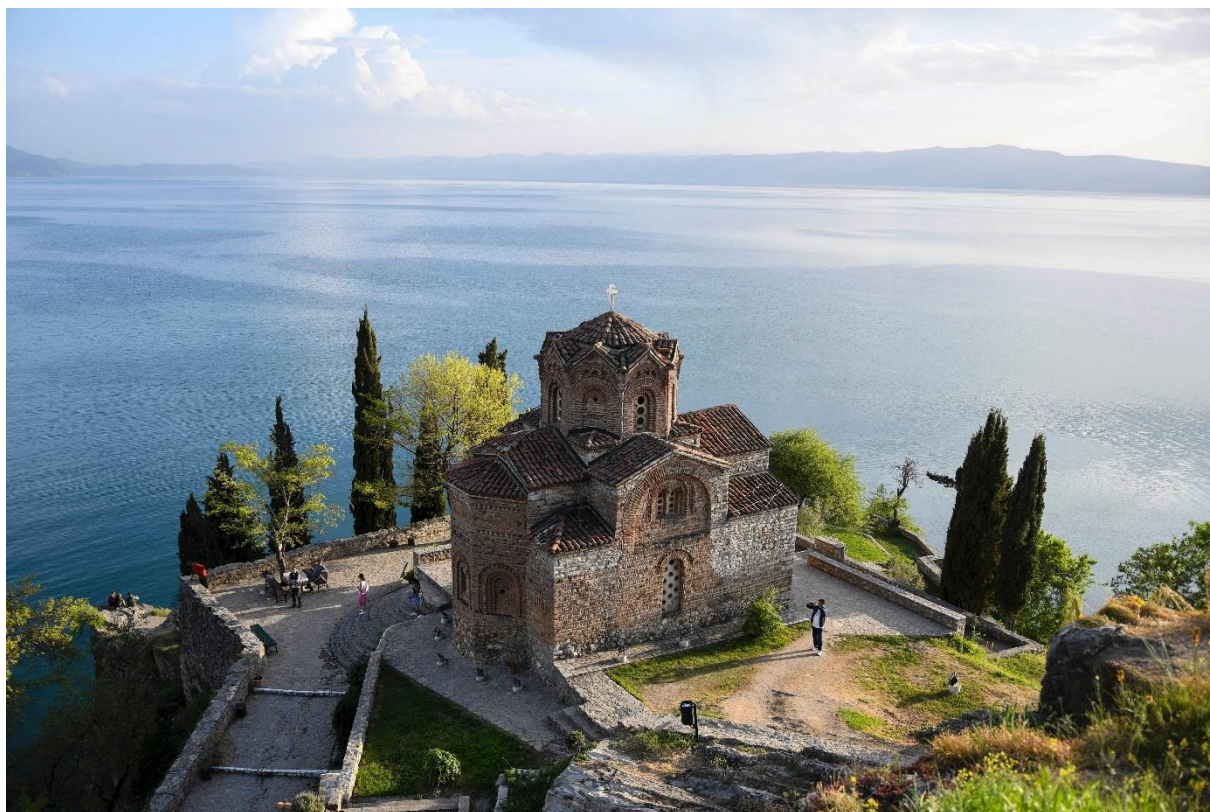
*'The success of the project with EVN Macedonia shows that there is a demand for high-quality training courses among young people,' explains **Eftim Pejovski**, head of the school. 'We have managed to meet the needs of both training and employers with a new, flexible approach that involves employers in the course design. The positive momentum generated by this pilot project should continue and serve as a model for the future, providing new opportunities for vocational schools in this country, and for students.'*

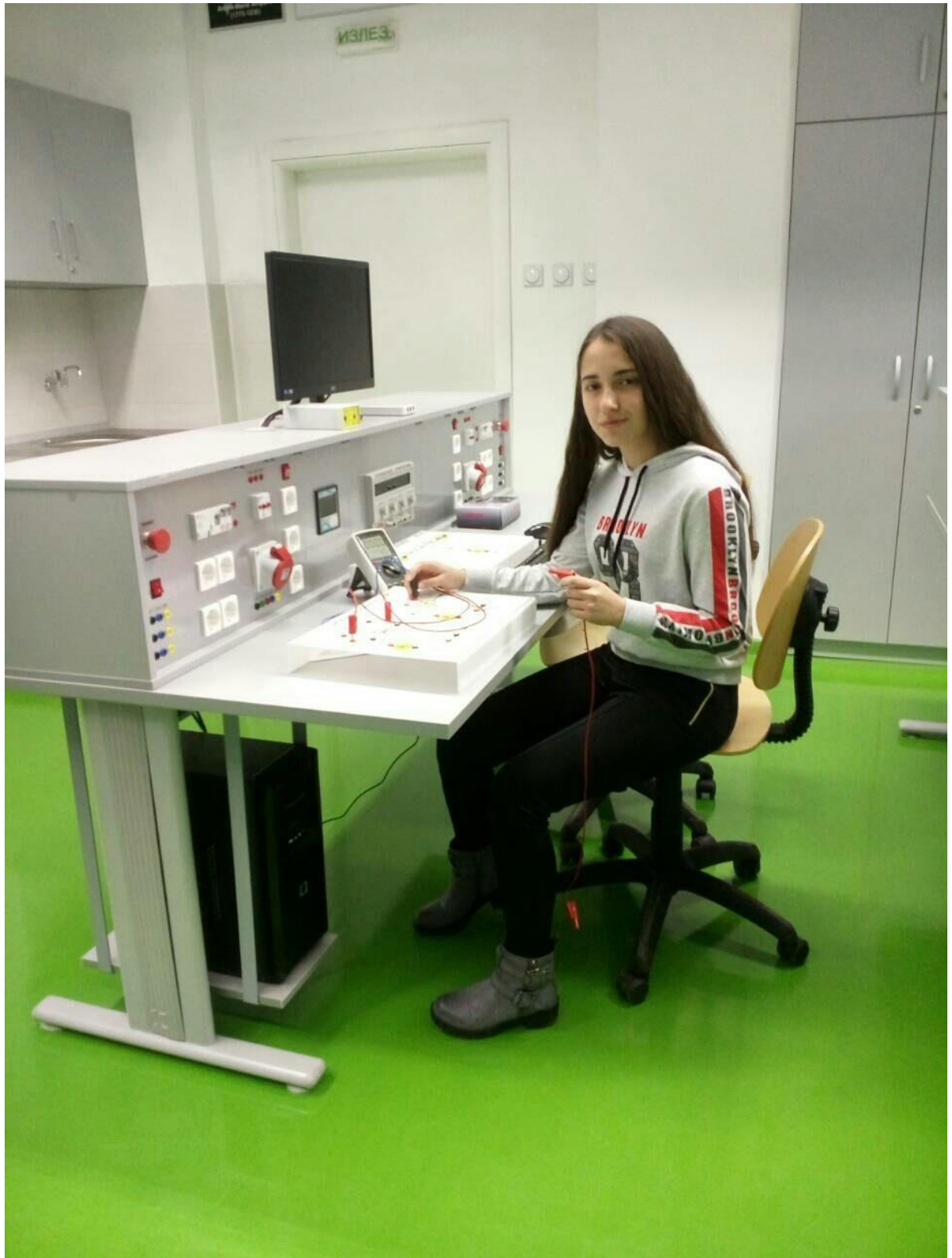
To ensure that the training provided in the workplace is to a high standard, the company personnel who provide the training are themselves trained to European standards. Furthermore, the importance of quality is a message reinforced at all levels of the company, including electricians, engineers and managers who supervise the students.

Background Mihajlo Pupin electro-technical vocational school is based in Skopje, in the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia. Its 56 teachers provide training for over 500 students. Project 202020 is the fruit of collaboration between the school, EVN Macedonia, the National Centre for Vocational Education and Training and the Ministry of Science and Education. It has led to the creation of this new training course. The project has received strong support from the Macedonian Employers' Association and the Trade Union for the private energy sector, and is raising awareness of the career prospects offered by vocational training.

The project has the support of the European Training Foundation (ETF), the European agency for fostering the development of human capital in the countries bordering the EU, which has facilitated the exchange of best practices and provided technical guidance.

Information: EVN Macedonia www.evn.mk - Mihajlo Pupin school <http://mihajlopupin.mk/en/> - National Centre for Vocational Education and Training <http://csoo.edu.mk/index.php>





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