



European Training Foundation

Developments in vocational education policy in 2015–17 in Albania

Progress towards the medium-term deliverables of the Riga Conclusions



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This report presents vocational education and training (VET) policy developments in Albania in the period 2015–17. It covers all five Europe-wide priority areas or medium-term deliverables (MTDs) agreed at Riga in June 2015. The report has been drafted within the terms of the mandate given to the European Training Foundation (ETF) by the Riga Conclusions to monitor and analyse progress of the EU candidate countries towards the MTDs. This document is based on the annual monitoring reports of Albania submitted to the ETF.

Aspects of vocational education and training context and policies in 2015

Albania was awarded EU candidate status in June 2014. The Albanian government, which took office in September 2013 and was re-elected in 2017, put the country on a firm path of comprehensive reforms, leading towards preparing for EU accession.

At the beginning of the reporting period, the population of Albania was 2 893 000 (see Annex for key country statistics). The country had a service-oriented economy, with that sector accounting for half of the gross domestic product (GDP) while one-quarter was generated by industry. The structure of employment did not follow the same pattern, as agriculture accounted for the largest percentage of the country's employed workforce (41.3% in 2015) but generated only 22% of GDP. Services employed 40.2% of the workforce, and industry accounted for the rest. In the period 2013–15 the economy grew at an annual rate ranging between 1.1% and 2.8%.

Labour market performance had generally been improving in recent years but was still characterised by relatively low participation, a high degree of informality, and gender divides. The employment rate increased after 2013 (59.3% in 2015) but remained, with a sizeable gender gap, at around 11 percentage points below the EU 28 average. This could be partly attributed to the relatively high proportion of employment of the Albanian workforce in subsistence agriculture. Employment in agriculture had declined in recent years, but stayed at a high level compared to the situation in the other candidate countries and indicated a lack of adequate job creation in other sectors. Unemployment rates stood at 17.1% in 2015, with some 70% of jobseekers being long-term unemployed in 2015 and almost 60% of unemployed people being first-time jobseekers. Young people were particularly affected: almost 33% of those aged 15–24 years remained not involved in employment, education or training (NEET). Youth unemployment increased from 27.2% in 2013 to 33.2% in 2015. The country's workforce was relatively low skilled, with four-fifths of the economically active population having a low or medium level of educational attainment, although the proportion of the population aged 30–34 who had completed tertiary education had been increasing.

Albania's performance on the Education and Training 2020 (ET 2020) benchmarks had been mixed. The country progressed visibly in terms of two major education-related areas – reducing early leavers from education and training (from 30.6% in 2013 to 21.3% in 2015) and increasing tertiary attainment (from 15.7% in 2013 to 22.1% in 2015). With regard to adult participation in training, the figures remained very low and had not improved in recent years (1% in 2015 against 10.7% in the EU 28). The NEET rate, although declining, remained very high, at 32.8% in 2015 (against 12% in the EU 28). The PISA 2015 results provided updated evidence for another ET 2020 target, 'Underachievement in reading, mathematics and science', with around 50% of 15-year-olds in Albania functionally illiterate in reading and maths and 42% functionally illiterate in science, far worse than the respective EU averages. This confirmed concerns regarding the quality of education in the country despite the improvement of Albania's results in all three tested subject areas compared to the PISA 2012 survey.

Two separate state-funded VET provider systems in Albania – vocational schools and vocational training centres – operated from 2014 until 2017 under the Ministry of Social Welfare and Youth. Initial VET (IVET, ISCED 3) was delivered at three levels.

- The first level, 2-year programmes, trained semi-skilled workers and led to a basic professional training certificate for entry to the labour market or continuing study.
- The second level, 2+1-year programmes, prepared technicians and led to a certificate of professional training.
- The third level, 2+1+1-year technical-vocational programmes, gave access to higher education on attainment of the State Matura.

Cooperation between VET and industry was weak and curriculum implementation often lacked adequate practice. VET provision was very theoretical. Continuing vocational training (CVET) was limited. The participation rate in upper secondary VET was low (19.5% in 2015) but had been increasing (it stood at 17% in 2014). The upper VET student population was still small (27 200 students in total), with females comprising only one-fifth of it (2015 data). This represented the most prominent gender gap in all the candidate countries.

When it restructured ministry portfolios in 2013, the government transferred all responsibilities for VET to the Ministry of Social Welfare and Youth. This led to changes in the institutional routines for administering the VET school system, which were yet to be completed. Despite limited resources, the National Agency for VET and Qualifications (NAVETQ) was leading on VET reforms. The EU and bilateral donors supported about half of the VET institutions in Albania, aiming to bring VET provision in at least some profiles up to modern standards. Interventions typically included the revision of qualifications and curricula, teacher training, the upgrading of workshop facilities and the organisation of students' work practices.

VET and employment policy reforms were framed by the National Employment and Skills Strategy and Action Plan (2014–2020), adopted in November 2014. VET reforms included the development of an Albanian Qualifications Framework (AQF) and individual qualifications, the revision of frame curricula, the organisation of basic pedagogy training for all VET teachers and instructors, the creation of multifunctional centres catering to the needs of both young people and adults, and the development of flexible offers for jobs and VET delivery (including active labour market policies and school- and work-based VET).

These priorities were all relevant to the Riga MTDs. The ETF suggested to Albania that it prioritise its choices for medium-term deliverable implementation and undertake an ex-ante impact assessment of the deliverable selected as the top priority. Based on the specificities of the national context and the challenges of the enlargement process, Albania selected MTD 1 – work-based learning – as its top priority and conducted an ex-ante impact assessment, facilitated by the ETF.

1. MTD 1 – Work-based learning with special focus on apprenticeships

1.1 Baseline situation in 2015

At the beginning of the reporting period, the legal provisions in the VET law allowed for conducting internships in companies, but this form of vocational practice was not common and was piloted largely through donor-funded initiatives (e.g. Swiss AlbVET project, GIZ). For each vocational profile, the

NAVETQ had developed a frame curriculum consisting of vocational theory and practice, but most of the practice took place in vocational schools' workshops.

Donors used their own curricula for selected craft and trade occupations. Frequently, once the donor-funded project expired, more practice-oriented curricula of this kind tended to be discontinued because there was insufficient funding to engage qualified trainers or staff to organise internships, or to purchase materials.

The concept of training firms (simulated work-based learning) had been introduced in all business education programmes (in 11 secondary schools, on a KulturKontakt Austria initiative and with its support). In addition, the project targeted the training and coaching of teachers as school–business liaison persons (known as PASOs in Albania). Their cooperation with local business included the mediation of student internships. However, the legal provision requested to reduce the teaching load of school–business liaison persons had not materialised.

No formal apprenticeship system was in place. Informal apprenticeships were arranged by trades (e.g. bakery, hairdressing) and by donors (Swiss AlbVET project until 2014). Pilot dual study programmes at post-secondary level (banking, tourism and small and medium-sized enterprise (SME) management) were implemented. Very positive outcomes for the first round of graduates in 2014 were recorded: of around 30 graduates, 100% gained employment in the banking sector. There was less success in tourism and SME management in the initial years of the project, due to the lack of interest shown by companies.

1.2 Policy developments between 2015 and 2017

In 2015 Albanian policy makers acknowledged the importance of work-based learning in VET, prioritising it in the context of the Riga Conclusions follow-up. The policy option chosen for ex-ante assessment was the institutionalisation of the role of the school–business liaison person).

The National Employment and Skills Strategy (2014–2020) provides for the introduction of work-based learning in the Albanian VET system and for the involvement of social partners in curriculum development. The policy developments in the work-based learning theme since 2015 aimed to prepare the ground for introducing company internships for VET students in the country.

A UNDP feasibility study, carried out in 2015, defined strategies for private sector involvement in VET and work-based learning, following consultations with numerous employers.

In the framework of a project co-funded by the EU Erasmus+ programme and the Albanian government, an analysis of the state of work-based learning in the secondary and post-secondary VET system in Albania was conducted in 2015, and the best work-based learning practices implemented in the period 1992–2014 were identified. A feasibility study was carried out and a roadmap for establishing a dual VET system was elaborated. The feasibility study identified the need for amendments to the existing legal framework.

The new Law on Craftsmanship was adopted in June 2016, providing for the establishment of a National Chamber of Handicrafts and apprenticeship schemes in the field of handicrafts. A new VET law was adopted in February 2017 that allows for the introduction of dual elements in VET and for recruiting school–business liaison persons in all major VET institutions.

Albania became a member of the European Alliance for Apprenticeships in 2015.

2. MTD 2 – Quality assurance mechanisms in line with EQAVET and continuous information and feedback loops to initial and continuing VET

2.1 Baseline situation in 2015

At the beginning of the reporting period, vocational schools in Albania were subject to the quality assurance procedures that existed for primary and secondary education as a whole. A holistic, national approach to quality assurance in VET was absent. Albania did not participate in the European Quality Assurance in VET (EQAVET) network.

No systematic tracer studies of VET graduates were conducted. There was no monitoring system on the employability of VET graduates and their transitions. The State Statistical Office used labour force surveys to collect data on employment and unemployment rates by level of education.

2.2 Policy developments between 2015 and 2017

The new Law on VET, adopted in February 2017, provides for the introduction of quality assurance mechanisms for (public or private) VET providers. However, by-laws need to be developed to complete the legal framework. Albania has established a working group to elaborate criteria and procedures for the accreditation of VET providers.

In 2016, with UNDP support, the NAVETQ developed a self-evaluation manual for public VET providers and prepared documentation for institutional arrangements, defining roles and responsibilities and a set of national standards needed to implement the inspection of VET providers. Several pilot activities have been undertaken in the introduction of self-assessments and the design of development plans in specific, donor-supported vocational schools and centres. However, none of these efforts has been sustained or mainstreamed yet.

At the end of 2016, with the support of the German technical assistance agency, GIZ, Albania set up an electronic tracer system to track, at national level, graduates leaving public VET providers (vocational schools and vocational training centres). The first tracking survey was carried out in 2017. The tracking was carried out by vocational training institutions and supported by the local employment offices. The National Employment Service is in charge of managing the overall tracer system.

3. MTD 3 – Access to VET and qualifications for all through more flexible and permeable systems, guidance and validation of non-formal and informal learning

3.1 Baseline situation in 2015

Despite the increase in upper secondary VET enrolments since 2013, general education remained the more attractive education stream among students and their families: in 2015 only one-fifth of all upper secondary students followed VET programmes.

VET provision in rural, mountainous, isolated areas of the country was either absent or irregularly delivered, and was of more limited scope and/or lower quality than in the cities. Young people and

adults living in the villages needed to travel in order to participate in VET, but not all of them could always afford it.

There was a sizeable gender gap in VET participation: only 21% of upper secondary VET students were female. The key discouraging factors for the low participation of Albanian girls in VET included gender norms and perceptions of gender roles in society, deeply gender-stereotyped occupational profiles and courses, location of the vocational schools in the towns, lack of regular transportation and unsafe dormitory accommodation.

There was no national career guidance system for students in schools. Parents had a major influence on students' further education choices. However, there were elements of career education in the curricula and some schools carried out guidance activities on their own initiative.

The Albanian Qualifications Framework (AQF) Law was adopted in 2010. An AQF Taskforce was established with a formal two-year mandate (until September 2017) and included representatives of the social partners. The Taskforce was expected to prepare the revision of the AQF law and a report referencing the AQF to the European Qualifications Framework (EQF).

No system for the validation of non-formal and informal learning had yet been established.

3.2 Policy developments between 2015 and 2017

The new VET law in Albania (2017) envisages the establishment of career guidance in all schools to help students make choices on whether to continue their education or enter the labour market, or both. With the aim of ensuring better access and participation, Albania invested efforts in improving the physical infrastructure of VET institutions. Awareness-raising activities on the attractiveness and importance of VET and adult education were organised every year, including media campaigns focusing on the importance of VET and lifelong learning and the opportunities they offer.

The government also took action to enhance the appeal of VET to young people and adults by making VET systems permeable and by opening pathways between VET and general or higher education. In the reporting period Albania developed appropriate legal provisions (the 2017 VET law and draft amendments to the 2010 law on the AQF) allowing horizontal transfers from general secondary education to VET and vice versa, as well as vertical progression from VET to higher education by sitting the State Matura exam.

Further actions to attract learners included measures for increasing VET provision: a feasibility study on the expansion of the post-secondary VET system was conducted in 2016 and an implementation plan (not taken forward yet) was developed and submitted to the Ministry of Social Welfare and Youth.

In 2016 the NAVETQ prepared a considerably revised National List of Vocational Qualifications for adoption by the Council of Ministers. The outputs to date of the AQF Taskforce are a revision of the AQF law of 2010 (amendments prepared by November 2016, not yet adopted), an AQF handbook describing all arrangements related to the AQF, and an inventory and analysis of vocational qualifications. Secondary legislation to regulate operational arrangements for the implementation of both the AQF law and the VET law is in preparation. A roadmap for referencing the AQF against the EQF was drafted in September 2016, but the actual referencing report has not been drafted yet.

4. MTD 4 – Key competences in both IVET and CVET

4.1 Baseline situation in 2015

Some of the key competences, especially those concerning basic skills such as mother tongue, foreign languages, mathematics and science, have always been part of the curriculum of secondary VET in Albania and their place has been preserved or even strengthened in the process of developing new curricula.

In CVET, the majority of learners in the vocational training centres took either foreign language or ICT courses to complement the knowledge and skills they had acquired in secondary general or vocational education.

4.2 Policy developments between 2015 and 2017

Albania defined seven key competences as part of the National Pre-University Curriculum Framework, which in turn is prescribed by the Law on Pre-University Education. The National Pre-University Curriculum Framework includes the following key competences: competences in communication and expression; thinking and learning to learn; competences regarding life, entrepreneurship and the environment; personal competences (focusing on health and other personal responsibilities); civic competences; and digital competences. These key competences were introduced in general secondary education and IVET as of the 2016/17 school year. They embrace, fully or partially, the eight key competences defined in the corresponding EU Recommendation from 2006¹.

While national curricula prescribe the acquisition of the above competences, implementation differs from school to school, depending on available conditions, school culture, the competences of staff, class sizes, and so on. Class sizes can be very high (up to 40) in vocational schools in bigger urban centres, which makes active types of learning and the development of the competences of individual VET students a difficult undertaking. Because of the lack of materials and the relatively weak skills of teachers and instructors in vocational subjects and modules, traditional ways of teaching prevail. Key competences are not frequently developed as an integral part of the teaching process.

All IVET students were involved in entrepreneurship learning activities by means of the study subjects Basics of Entrepreneurship and Environment and Sustainable Development, and through practical modules delivered in work environments. Many private providers and donors provided non-formal entrepreneurship or business management courses.

Monitoring the acquisition of the key competences in both IVET and CVET remained a weak point. A centralised external assessment existed for Albanian language and mathematics skills through the Matura exams.

¹ The key competences defined by the Recommendation of the European Parliament and the Council of 18 December 2006 on key competences for lifelong learning consist of communication in the mother tongue, communication in foreign languages, mathematical competence and basic competences in science and technology, digital competence, learning to learn, social and civic competences, sense of initiative and entrepreneurship, cultural awareness and expression. The Recommendation also refers to the fundamental basic skills of language, literacy, numeracy and ICT as essential foundation for learning. Learning to learn, social and civic competences, initiative taking and entrepreneurship, and cultural awareness and expression are considered 'transversal key competences' (Council Conclusions 2010 on competences supporting lifelong learning and the 'new skills for new jobs' initiative).

5. MTD 5 – Systematic initial and continuing professional development of VET teachers, trainers and mentors

5.1 Baseline situation in 2015

A major issue related to the pre-service preparation of VET subject teachers and VET instructors in vocational schools in Albania was the poor quality of their pedagogical skills. According to a GIZ-ETF baseline survey of public VET providers (2014), only 80 out of 700 instructors in the country had some (pre-service) pedagogical training.

The training of VET teachers and instructors took place predominantly in the framework of donor projects. The NAVETQ had no explicit responsibility for this training and therefore did not receive separate funding for it. In reality, however, all the key donors in VET included VET teacher training as one of the elements in their pilot projects, in which NAVETQ staff were also involved as trainers.

Given its dependence on donor projects, VET teacher training in Albania was not systematic or universally available.

There were no commonly accepted specific requirements for becoming a trainer or mentor in a company. Some criteria or standards existed but were developed and valid only within each company. No strategy was in place for initial and continuing professional development of instructors, trainers or mentors in enterprises.

5.2 Policy developments between 2015 and 2017

The National Employment and Skills Strategy and Action Plan (2014–2020) provide for actions related to the continuing professional development of VET teachers and instructors. The Law on VET (2017) envisages the setting up of School Development Units, which will be in charge of the continuing professional development of VET teachers and instructors, among other functions. However, a corresponding by-law to set up these units will still have to be drafted.

GIZ supported the elaboration of a concept paper on in-service pedagogical training for VET teachers and instructors, which was approved by the Ministry of Social Welfare and Youth.

In 2016, 42 VET teachers and instructors (out of 700 in total) underwent a 24-day basic pedagogy programme. A training handbook was developed and printed. The aim is to have all VET teachers and instructors trained by the end of 2018.

The NAVETQ launched a pilot project with the support of the ETF aiming to set up teacher training units in three schools and vocational training centres. Methodologies were developed to analyse the need for continuing professional development and organising or coordinating its provision.

Conclusions

Since 2015 Albania has further reformed its VET system in the area of work-based learning, and taken steps towards the introduction of formal apprenticeships by adopting relevant legal provisions. An electronic tracer system for VET graduates was introduced and is expected to provide valuable inputs for adjusting VET provision to labour market needs. Action was taken to make the VET system horizontally and vertically permeable. Further progress has been made in the development of the

AQF, and a legal basis was established for introducing a system for the validation of non-formal and informal learning in the country. Measures were taken for the promotion of entrepreneurship learning and for enhancing the pedagogical skills of VET teachers and instructors.

The actions performed show that Albania has been addressing the main themes of the Riga Conclusions. The country could make further progress along these lines if it takes into consideration the following issues in the period remaining up to 2020:

- introduce elements of dual education in VET;
- develop and apply a national quality assurance approach in line with EQAVET;
- expand VET provision to cover unserved or underserved areas and increase participation in adult learning, while implementing the AQF and introducing procedures for the validation of non-formal and informal learning in practice;
- strengthen the promotion and monitoring of key competences in VET curricula, with special focus on the opportunities to acquire those skills through CVET;
- ensure more opportunities for continuing professional development concerning both the subject matter and pedagogical skills of VET teachers and practical instructors in vocational schools.

Annex: Albania – Labour market, education and contextual indicators, 2015

Total population		2 893 000
Relative size of youth population (15–24) [%]		18.8
Activity rate (20–64) [%]		71.3
Employment rate (20–64) [%]		59.3
Employment rate of recent graduates (20–34) [%]	Total	n/a
	General	n/a
	Vocational	n/a
Unemployment rate (15+) [%]		17.1
Unemployment rate (15+) by education [%]	Low	13.4
	Medium	20.4
	High	19.4
Youth unemployment rate (15–29) [%]		33.2
Expenditure on education as share of GDP [%]		3.1
Students in VET programmes in upper secondary [%]		19.5
Students in VET programmes in upper secondary		27 200
Participation in lifelong learning (25–64) [%]		1
Tertiary educational attainment (30–34) [%]		22.1
Underachievement (15 years) [%]	Reading	50.3
	Maths	53.3
	Science	41.7
Early leavers from education (18–24) [%]		21.3
Persons not in employment, education or training (NEETs) (15–24) [%]		32.8
Educational attainment of active population (15+) [%]	Low	44.1
	Medium	37.2
	High	18.7

Notes: n/a – not available. Low: ISCED 0–2; Medium: ISCED 3–4; High: ISCED 5–8.

Sources: Instat, Eurostat, OECD, UNESCO Institute for Statistics.

Acronyms

AQF	Albanian Qualifications Framework
CVET	Continuing VET
EQAVET	European Quality Assurance in VET
EQF	European Qualifications Framework
ET 2020	Education and Training 2020
ETF	European Training Foundation
EU	European Union
GDP	Gross domestic product
ICT	Information and communication technology
ISCED	International Standard Classification of Education
IVET	Initial VET
MTD	Medium-term deliverable
NAVETQ	National Agency for VET and Qualifications
NEET	Not in employment, education or training
PISA	Programme for International Student Assessment (OECD)
SME	Small and medium-sized enterprise
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
VET	Vocational education and training

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