



European Training Foundation

# Developments in vocational education policy in 2015–17 in the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia

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 the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia 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 the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia submitted to the ETF.

## Aspects of vocational education and training context and policies in 2015

The former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia was granted candidate status by the European Council in December 2005. Since October 2009 the European Commission has recommended opening accession negotiations with the country several times. In 2015 it made this conditional on continued implementation of the Pržino Agreement and substantial progress in the implementation of the urgent reform priorities.

At the beginning of the reporting period, the population of the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia was 2 070 000 (see Annex for key country statistics). The country had a service-oriented economy, with this sector accounting for two-thirds of gross domestic product (GDP) and industry accounting for one-quarter. These differences were not directly mirrored in the structure of employment: the majority of the country's workforce was employed in services (51%, 2015), while the agriculture sector employed 18% of the workforce but only generated 11% of GDP. In the period between 2013 and 2015, the economy grew at an annual rate of at least 3%, making it one of the fastest growing in the region.

Employment and education policies faced many challenges as the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia underwent further economic restructuring and dealt with the combined influences of an emerging service economy, new forms of work organisation in small and medium-sized enterprises, an ageing population, the skills mix of the working age population and ongoing social vulnerabilities. The employment rate had increased since 2013 (in 2015 it stood at 51.9%) but was still low and remained strongly influenced by gender issues. The unemployment rate was high (26.1%, 2015) and youth unemployment in 2015 was the highest among the candidate countries (47.3%). The country's workforce was relatively low skilled, with three-quarters of the economically active population having a low or medium level of educational attainment, although the proportion of the population aged 30 to 34 that had completed tertiary education had been increasing. Due to weak employment demand, however, many tertiary education graduates took jobs below their formal qualifications.

The country's performance with regard to the Education and Training 2020 (ET 2020) benchmarks had been mixed. The country progressed visibly in terms of two education-related headlines – reducing the rate of early leavers from education and training (from 15.5% in 2010 to 11% in 2015) and increasing tertiary attainment (from 17.1% in 2010 to 28.6% in 2015). Limited progress was made in the employability of recent graduates. The figures for adult participation in training had remained very low and had not improved in recent years (2.6% in 2015 compared to 10.7% in the EU 28). Although declining recently, the percentage of young people aged 15 to 24 years not in employment, education or training (NEETs) remained very high: 24.7% in 2015 (compared to 12% in the EU 28). The PISA 2015 results provided updated data for another ET 2020 target –underachievement in reading, mathematics and science. Two-thirds of 15-year-olds in the country were functionally illiterate

in each tested subject area, far worse than the EU average, thus confirming concerns regarding the quality of education in the country.

The former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia had a relatively high participation in education and training for young people aged 15 to 24, with almost two in three younger adults participating (the EU average was 70% in 2015). The proportion of upper secondary students enrolled in vocational programmes in 2015 was 58% (48 100 students in total). Four-year programmes in upper secondary VET (providing certificates that allow learners enter higher education institutions) accounted for approximately 94% of all VET students while a minority of students participated in 3-year programmes.

VET provision in the country was predominantly state-led and school- and theory-based in 2015. It had not yet fully responded to the demands of a restructured economy that required employees with new types of soft skills and competences not previously catered for. To meet expectations, VET policy needed to improve practical learning in cooperation with enterprises, quality of its programmes and flexibility of access for various categories of learners.

The former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia's VET Sector Strategy (2013–2020) and the VET pillar of the newly developed Comprehensive Education Strategy (2016–2020) identified a number of challenges: the relatively low attractiveness of VET, the mismatch between VET supply and labour market demand, a lack of cooperation with the business sector, minimal work-based learning, and limited teacher knowledge of modern technology and entrepreneurial learning.

These priorities were all relevant to the Riga MTDs. The ETF suggested to the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia that it prioritise its choices for MTD 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 posed by the enlargement process, the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia 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

The Law on Vocational Education and Training (Official Gazette of the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia No 71/06, 117/08, 148/09, 17/11, 24/13 and 137/13) contains legal provisions for work-based learning.

At the beginning of the reporting period, work-based learning was conducted mainly within the framework of formal secondary VET. The share of practical learning in VET curricula (33% in three-year programmes, 9–22% in four-year programmes) was low, most of it taking place in vocational schools' workshops.

Existing work-based learning modalities treated the learner predominantly as a student and took the form of work practice and internships in companies or simulated work-based learning (virtual enterprises in vocational schools that focused on business as their main subject) or real school companies (producing real goods or services for the local market).

The approach used by real school companies was adopted by around half of vocational schools, and a number of sustainable results were achieved. Internships in initial VET (IVET) were rare but

internships in continuing VET (CVET) were increasing. These were offered by the public employment services to a small number of jobseekers.

No formal apprenticeship system was in place; apprenticeship experience, supported by donors, was offered in a small number of cases but the process was not streamlined.

There was a lack of willingness and/or capacity on the part of employers to engage with VET learners. The companies that offered work-based learning had to cover all the costs and although the Law on Vocational Education and Training provided for financial incentives for employers, these had not worked well in practice.

Driven by an awareness of the benefits of work-based learning for learners, employers and society, and by the fact that it had only been modestly applied in the country, the Macedonian policy makers prioritised it in the follow-up to the Riga Conclusions in 2015. The policy options considered in that regard related to the improvement in and quality assurance of work-based learning elements and modules (internships and placements) in revised and new VET programmes (3-year and 4-year programmes). They also focused on improving the assessment system for work-based learning (assessment of students) and enhancing the capacity of employers' associations to support and promote work-based learning.

## 1.2 Policy developments between 2015 and 2017

The actions taken by the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia in relation to work-based learning since 2015 relate to new strategy development, new legislation and implementation measures.

The Technical VET Concept Paper (2016) and the Comprehensive Strategy for Education (2016–2020) and Action Plan highlighted the importance of work-based learning. They also contain measures to improve the practical training of VET learners, including learning in a working environment. New apprenticeship legislation was developed: the Law on Crafts (adopted in December 2015) sets out the conditions for apprenticeships for CVET learners in the crafts and trades. The former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia also joined the European Alliance for Apprenticeships.

One of the components of the Skills Development and Innovation Support Project (funded by a USD 17 million World Bank loan) targeted the modernisation of technical VET (TVET) with regard to its quality and labour market relevance. The project provided for grants for school-industry collaboration (joint projects between secondary vocational schools and enterprises aimed at improving the practical training of students through internships, training in companies and other forms of work-based learning). The first public call for submission of applications from the schools was announced in March 2016; 54 grant contracts were signed in September 2016, activities were to be finalised by June or July 2017.

In March 2017 the Minister of Education and Science set up a National Working Group on Work-based Learning. Its mandate was to develop concrete policy options to advance work-based learning in VET.

## 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

As of 2015 vocational schools in the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia were subject to the same quality assurance system that existed for primary and secondary education as a whole. This quality assurance system included school self-assessments and external school evaluations (by the State Inspectorate of Education), based on seven aspects of school performance (and indicators). However, these areas did not include VET-specific indicators or features. Quality assurance for adult education had been in place since 2011, based on the verification of programmes by the Centre for Adult Education and the accreditation of providers by the Ministry of Education.

No systematic tracer studies of VET graduates were conducted. There was no system in place to monitor their transition to the world of work; nor were state funds allocated to develop or launch such a system. The International Labour Organisation (ILO) conducted a major survey of youth labour market transitions (2012, published in 2013). The State Statistical Office collected labour force survey data on employment and unemployment rates by level of education.

### 2.2 Policy developments between 2015 and 2017

In 2015–16 the country devised a national quality assurance approach compatible with the European Quality Assurance in Vocational Education and Training (EQAVET) Framework. The approach was applicable to both IVET and CVET but did not address the work-based learning associated with either IVET or CVET. The quality assurance approach was formally agreed and its partial implementation began in 2016. Three to four EQAVET indicators (out of a total of 17) are regularly applied to assess IVET quality. A National Reference Point had not yet been established at that stage.

A nationwide tracer study for TVET and higher education employment outcomes of graduates was launched in 2016 within the framework of a World Bank project and with the methodological support of the ETF. The final report was published in 2017. The study was intended to be used as a capacity-building opportunity to allow such activities to be conducted regularly in the future.

The same World Bank project provides for the establishment of a skills observatory. The aim is to serve as a management information tool for the Ministry of Education to address the dynamics of labour market conditions and the supply of training programmes. The observatory was developed in 2016.

In 2016 a methodology for aligning VET and adult education with labour market intelligence was developed within the framework of an EU project and submitted to the Ministry of Education for approval. The project supported the VET Centre in revising existing curricula in line with labour market needs.

## 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

Upper secondary education (of which VET is a part) became compulsory in 2008. VET students traditionally account for a high share of upper secondary enrolments (58%), although this figure had been declining in the decade before 2015.

Vocational schools and the social partners conducted various promotional activities to attract students from primary education, such as lifelong learning days, open days in vocational schools, days dedicated to certain occupations and educational rendezvous. Since 2010 the Chamber of Crafts had been organising Craftspeople Days (yearly, duration of two months, countrywide).

In accordance with the law, evening classes for adults were proposed by certain vocational schools to provide training for adults. Some organised after-hours study support for adult was provided at weekends. Vocational schools were requested to include additional classes for mentoring adult learners in their annual work programmes. The Law on Adult Education and a number of national strategies (covering adult education and employment) specified campaigns to raise awareness of VET among adults.

The VET Strategy (2013–2020) addressed career guidance from a lifelong learning perspective. The Employment Service Agency provided guidance and counselling to jobseekers and registered unemployed people. United States Agency for International Development (USAID) methodological and financial support helped to establish career guidance centres in many vocational schools.

Work on the national qualifications framework (NQF) was under way. The NQF Basic Concept and the NQF Law were adopted in 2013. Implementation of the new NQF Law began in 2015 and established an eight-level NQF with several sub-levels. Qualifications from adult and non-formal education were also considered. The methodology for the development of qualifications standards for VET was adopted and manuals on formulation and the use of learning outcomes were designed for higher education institutions. In early 2013 the country became a member of the European Qualifications Framework Advisory Group.

Although efforts were made to support non-formal and adult education policy and structures, there was little awareness of and information about the validation of non-formal and informal learning. The Law on Adult Education stipulated the possibility of obtaining qualifications outside the existing formal education system.

### 3.2 Policy developments between 2015 and 2017

The actions taken by the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia in relation to MTD 3 since 2015 concern mainly policy formulation (drafting and adopting new strategic documents) and policy implementation.

The newly developed Comprehensive Education Strategy (2016–2020) provides for access to education and training for all (irrespective of their age, sex, religious or ethnic affiliation, medical condition and social or financial situation) and for the introduction of professional orientation and career guidance and advisory services in all secondary vocational schools. The strategy also seeks to improve the admission system for secondary vocational education by developing a new admission



concept and amending the legislation in accordance with the new concept. The Technical VET Concept Paper (approved in December 2016), on the other hand, foresees the preparation of a methodology to develop standards for educational profiles, the modularisation of VET curricula and the implementation of the European Credit System for Vocational Education and Training (ECVET). A draft Adult Education Strategy (2016–2020) was also prepared. It focuses on increasing the opportunities for adult learning.

Awareness-raising activities on the attractiveness and importance of VET and adult education continued to take place. Measures for strengthening interethnic integration (with a special focus on Roma) were implemented in all vocational schools. Progress was made on the implementation of a number of pilot projects targeting the employability of specific vulnerable groups (e.g. Roma, students with disabilities, convicts).

The NQF Law was amended in 2016 and implemented effectively. With Instrument for Pre-accession Assistance (IPA) and World Bank support, a large number of new qualifications standards were developed for VET in 2016 and 2017. VET stakeholders and employers contributed to their development. The country successfully presented its European Qualifications Framework (EQF) referencing report in February 2016. A roadmap aimed at establishing a fully fledged validation system for non-formal and informal learning by 2018 was developed in 2016.

## 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 language, mathematics and science, have always been part of the curriculum of secondary VET in the country and their place was preserved or even strengthened in the process of developing new curricula.

The former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia was the only candidate country that made an effort to introduce new soft skills, going beyond the eight key competences defined in the 2006 Recommendation of the European Parliament and of the Council: new VET curricula incorporated green skills, while the VET Strategy (2013–2020) envisaged the reinforcement of critical thinking and creativity. The Innovation Strategy emphasised the need to increase risk-taking and self-awareness.

Opportunities to acquire previously underdeveloped key competences in CVET were offered to unemployed people and vulnerable groups (e.g. Roma) primarily through active labour market policies. Such policies helped them to catch up with functional literacy, ICT skills and foreign languages.

The external assessment of key competences was a relatively new area and was only recently established in the country. The external assessment of the entire student population had been obligatory since 2013 and covered several key competences (1–4, 6–7). Three key competences – mother tongue, mathematics and a foreign language – formed an integral part of the final (Matura) examinations of vocational school graduates.

Teacher training to promote key competences was conducted by the USAID-supported Youth Employability Skills (YES) project and by the Bureau for the Development of Education.

## 4.2 Policy developments between 2015 and 2017

New strategies that underscore the need to promote the acquisition of key competences were adopted during the reporting period: the Technical VET Concept Paper (2016) highlights the acquisition of key competences as a priority; the Competitiveness Strategy and Action Plan (2016–2020) emphasises the importance of entrepreneurial talent for competitiveness and growth, but also the need to promote innovative thinking, creativity, attitudes towards risk-taking and openness to change in all types of education (formal and non-formal); the Ministry for Informatics, Society and Administration's Strategic Plan (2016–2018) focuses specifically on ICT skills.

The Roma Inclusion through Social Entrepreneurship (RISE) pilot project, funded by the European Commission, kicked off in December 2016 with the aim of promoting the social inclusion of young Roma by providing training in social youth entrepreneurship (180 young Roma were to be trained in social entrepreneurship).

Reporting on the promotion of key competences in CVET was limited.

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

### 5.1 Baseline situation in 2015

At the beginning of the reporting period, public policies were primarily focused on the competences, roles and professional development of teachers and trainers in IVET, and to a much lesser extent in CVET.

A major issue related to the pre-service preparation of VET subject teachers and VET instructors in vocational schools was the quality of their pedagogical skills that continued to be poor. Legislation in the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia was changed to oblige those with a non-pedagogical higher education qualification to pass an examination in pedagogical, psychological and methodology skills at an accredited higher education institution in order to be able to apply for a teaching position.

Another issue in pre-service teacher education was the gap between theory and practice. Cooperation between teacher training faculties and schools was weak, which prevented student teachers from gaining satisfactory teaching practice and hands-on experience prior to their employment as teachers.

The in-service training of VET teachers in the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia was underfunded and designed in a way that provided more training opportunities for general education teachers than for VET teachers. On-the-job and in-company teacher training was the exception rather than the rule. Thus, professional development opportunities for VET teachers were not only few in number, but the skills and competences that they offered had limited relevance and applicability to their vocational specialism.

There was a lack of commonly accepted specific requirements for becoming a trainer or mentor in a company; some criteria or standards existed but were developed and valid within that particular company only. There was no strategy in place for the initial professional development or continuing professional development of instructors, trainers or mentors in enterprises. There were no strategies

or structured approaches for the initial or continuing professional development of instructors, trainers or mentors in enterprises, mainly due to the limited scale of apprenticeships and workplace learning.

## 5.2 Policy developments between 2015 and 2017

The developments reported between 2015 and 2017 reveal the changes made in the pre-service preparation of VET teaching staff and the positive developments in the continuing professional development of VET teachers and trainers in both schools and companies.

In 2016 a review of the study programmes for the initial education of VET teachers in the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia were initiated in accordance with the requirements of the Law on Teachers for Primary and Secondary Education and the Law on Higher Education, adopted in 2014 and 2015 respectively. The focus of the changes will be on increasing practical training and providing more choice within modularised study programmes. In 2017 a university-level study programme for adult learning was accredited in Skopje University.

The new TVET Concept Paper (2016) highlights the importance of the measures used to design and monitor the quality of continuing professional development for TVET teachers and trainers based on assessing the training needs of teachers and strengthening the capacities of the training providers.

The VET Centre in Skopje developed a programme for the company-based training of teachers who teach vocational-theoretical subjects and practical training; the programme was implemented as a pilot with the intention of mainstreaming it. The pilot, donor-supported Youth Employability Skills (YES) project, implemented from 2010 to June 2016, trained mentors in companies; the training included a module for working with students with special education needs to enable them to be included in the process of company-based practical training.

## Conclusions

Since 2015 the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia has further reformed its VET system. A national working group was created in the area of work-based learning (March 2017). Its mandate was to develop concrete policy options to advance work-based learning in VET in the country. A Law on Crafts was adopted (December 2015) setting out the conditions for apprenticeships for CVET learners in the crafts and trades. An EQAVET-compatible national approach for quality assurance was devised in 2015–16 and its partial implementation began in 2016; a tracer study of TVET and higher education employment outcomes for graduates was carried out in 2016. Measures for strengthening interethnic integration were implemented in all vocational schools. Pilot projects targeting the employability of specific vulnerable groups (e.g. Roma, people with disabilities, convicts) were implemented. The NQF was successfully referenced to the EQF in February 2016 and a roadmap was developed in 2016 to establish a fully-fledged system for validating non-formal and informal learning by 2018. New strategies that underscore the need to promote the acquisition of key competences were adopted. Measures were taken to improve the initial education of VET teachers, and a programme was developed and piloted for the company-based training of teachers who teach vocational-theoretical subjects and practical training.

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

- introduce work-based learning on a larger scale in the formal VET system; increase the scope and quality of internships and placements;

- proceed further with the implementation of the quality assurance approach and increase the use of EQAVET for quality monitoring, while ensuring the regular functioning of the newly launched VET tracking mechanisms;
- enhance participation in adult learning, continue with the implementation of the NQF and implement the roadmap aimed at introducing a system to validate non-formal and informal learning;
- further strengthen the promotion of key competences in VET curricula, with a particular focus on opportunities to acquire and develop those skills through CVET and reinforce monitoring of the acquisition of key competences;
- increase the opportunities for continuing professional development relevant to the vocational specialism of teachers (including the scaling up of the company-based training scheme) and strengthen the capacities of mentors in enterprises that provide students with practical training.

## Annex: Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia – Labour market, education and contextual indicators, 2015

|  |            |             |
|--|------------|-------------|
| Total population   |            | 2 069 000   |
| Relative size of youth population (15–24) [%]                        |            | 19.2        |
| Activity rate (20–64) [%]  |            | 70.2        |
| Employment rate (20–64) [%]  |            | 51.9        |
| Employment rate of recent graduates (20–34) [%]                      | Total      | 48          |
|  | General    | 34.1 (2016) |
|  | Vocational | 42.1 (2016) |
| Unemployment rate (15–74) [%]  |            | 26.1        |
| Unemployment rate (15–74) by education [%]                           | Low        | 29.9        |
|  | Medium     | 26.6        |
|  | High       | 21.1        |
| Youth unemployment rate (15–24) [%]                                  |            | 47.3        |
| Expenditure on education as share of GDP [%]                         |            | 4.3 (2014)  |
| Students in VET programmes in upper secondary [%]                    |            | 57.7        |
| Students in VET programmes in upper secondary                        |            | 48 100      |
| Participation in lifelong learning (25–64) [%]                       |            | 2.6         |
| Tertiary educational attainment (30–34) [%]                          |            | 28.6        |
| Underachievement (15 years) [%]                                      | Reading    | 70.7        |
|  | Maths      | 70.2        |
|  | Science    | 62.9        |
| Early leavers from education (18–24) [%]                             |            | 11.4        |
| Persons not in employment, education or training (NEETs) (15–24) [%] |            | 24.7        |
| Educational attainment of economically active population (15+) [%]   | Low        | 23.1        |
|  | Medium     | 54.2        |
|  | High       | 22.7        |

Note: Low: ISCED 0–2; Medium: ISCED 3–4; High: ISCED 5–8

Sources: National Statistical Office, Ministry of Education and Science, Eurostat, OECD

## Acronyms

|                |   |
|----------------|---|
| <b>CVET</b>    | Continuing VET  |
| <b>EQAVET</b>  | European Quality Assurance in VET                     |
| <b>EQF</b>     | European Qualifications Framework                     |
| <b>ET 2020</b> | Education and Training 2020                           |
| <b>ETF</b>     | European Training Foundation                          |
| <b>EU</b>      | European Union  |
| <b>GDP</b>     | Gross domestic product                                |
| <b>ICT</b>     | Information and communication technology              |
| <b>ISCED</b>   | International Standard Classification of Education    |
| <b>IVET</b>    | Initial VET   |
| <b>MTD</b>     | Medium-term deliverable                               |
| <b>NEET</b>    | Not in employment, education or training              |
| <b>NQF</b>     | National qualifications framework                     |
| <b>PISA</b>    | Programme for International Student Assessment (OECD) |
| <b>TVET</b>    | Technical VET   |
| <b>USAID</b>   | United States Agency for International Development    |
| <b>VET</b>     | Vocational education and training                     |



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