

Developments in vocational education policy in 2015–17 in Montenegro

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 Montenegro 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 Montenegro submitted to the ETF.

Aspects of vocational education and training context and policies in 2015

Montenegro was awarded EU candidate status in December 2010. The accession negotiations with the country started in June 2012.

The population of Montenegro was 622 000 in 2015 (see Annex for key country statistics). The country had a service-oriented economy, with that sector accounting for 70% of the gross domestic product (GDP), while about 20% of GDP was generated by industry. The structure of employment followed nearly the same pattern: 74.8% of the country's workforce was employed in services in 2015; industry employed 17.5% of the workforce, while the agriculture sector employed 7.7% and generated 10.2% of GDP. Between 2013 and 2015 the economy grew at an annual rate ranging between 1.8% and 3.5% (3.2% in 2015).

Labour market performance had generally been improving in recent years but was still characterised by relatively low participation and a high degree of informality. The employment rate increased after 2013 (56.7% in 2015) but remained around 13 percentage points below the EU 28 average. Unemployment had been decreasing since 2013 and stood at 17.5% in 2015. Young people were particularly affected: one-third of the registered unemployed were first-time jobseekers, and one in five of those aged 15–24 years remained not involved in employment, education or training (NEET). Although decreasing in recent years, youth unemployment still stood at a high level (37.6% in 2015). An International Labour Organisation (ILO) study (2015) on youth transition from school to work showed that only a quarter of young people were employed and that the most important barrier to finding a job was lack of vacancies. The country's workforce was relatively low skilled, with nearly three-quarters 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 was increasing.

Montenegro'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 – increasing tertiary attainment (from 28% in 2013 to 31% in 2015) and reducing early dropout from education and training (Montenegro already scored below the EU 2020 benchmark of 10% in this respect, despite recording a slight increase from 5.1% in 2013 to 5.7% in 2015). With regard to adult participation in training, the figures remained low and had not improved in recent years (3% in 2015 against 10.7% in the EU 28). The country did not manage to decrease the NEET rate, and it remained high, at 18.1% in 2015 (against 12% in the EU 28). Limited progress was achieved in the field of recent graduates' employability (from 46.4% in 2013 to 50.2% in 2015). The PISA 2015 results provided updated evidence for another ET 2020 target, 'Underachievement in reading, mathematics and science', with around 50% of the 15-year-olds in the country functionally illiterate in mathematics and science and 41% functionally illiterate in reading, far worse than the respective EU 28 averages. Montenegro had slightly improved its results in reading and mathematics as compared to the PISA 2012 survey (albeit from very high levels), but results in science had worsened.

The current VET provision in the country was predominantly state-led and school-based. Initial VET (IVET) offered three types of programme: a two-year lower secondary track and three- and four-year upper secondary programmes. In 2015, there were no students in the two-year programmes, while approximately 67% of upper secondary students (19 700 students in total) were enrolled in the three- and four-year upper secondary VET programmes. Four-year programmes in upper secondary VET (completed by sitting an examination that gave access to post-secondary VET of up to two years and to higher education) accounted for approximately 90% of all VET students, and the rest followed three-year programmes. Seventy per cent of all secondary graduates enrolled in universities and almost 60% of those came from vocational schools. VET reforms in the recent decade had targeted mainly secondary VET, with less consideration given to post-secondary, higher or continuing VET (CVET). The main driver behind the reform processes in VET, substantially supported by EU pre-accession assistance funds, had been the need to develop a VET system that was more demand-driven and based on learning outcomes.

VET reforms in Montenegro were framed by the Vocational Education Development Strategy (2015–2020) and Action Plan, adopted in December 2014. The priority areas in VET for the period 2015–2020 included ensuring high-quality and efficient VET provision, which would be relevant to labour market demands and would provide equal opportunities to all citizens, enabling them to acquire qualifications and enhance their employability, social integration, lifelong learning and labour mobility.

All these priorities were relevant to the Riga MTDs. The ETF suggested to Montenegro 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, Montenegro 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 Law on Vocational Education (amended in 2010) defined practical training in VET programmes as a combination of training in a vocational school and a company and provided the legal basis for apprenticeships.

All curricula allowed for practical training in schools and in businesses. Where employers had adequate resources, the practical training could be implemented entirely in the company. Thus, students in catering, food processing, transportation, auto mechatronics and services schools conducted the majority of their practical training with employers. In other sectors, for instance construction, textile or agriculture, practical training took place predominantly in school workshops.

The curriculum specified the amount of time to be allocated to practical training – up to 40% in the three-year programmes and a minimum of 12% in the four-year programmes – but no differentiation was made between practical training taking place in vocational school workshops and work-based learning in companies. The assessment of students' achievement was done by the school regardless of whether the practical training was conducted at school or at the employer's premises.

For students who had not done their practical training with employers, the curricula envisaged a period of professional practice to take place in companies, usually during summer and ranging from 10 to 30 days. Internships, although stipulated by law, were not systematically implemented, and

vocational schools had difficulties in finding partners in the world of work. Internships were usually conducted in high-performing sectors of the national economy such as tourism or catering. Often, however, interns tended to work rather than to learn or be trained within the firms.

In 2015, no formal apprenticeship system was in place yet, only a few islands of apprenticeships established more than 10 years previously. There had been an unsuccessful attempt to introduce apprenticeships in the past: legal provisions were laid down in the Law on Vocational Education in 2002 and the scheme was piloted in 2004–06 in two occupational profiles. Despite the initial interest, problems related to the motivation of both employers and students, as well as to the organisation and financing of the apprenticeship scheme, emerged, and its implementation was suspended as of the 2006/07 school year.

Virtual training firms (simulated work-based learning) were established from 2005 onward in all economic vocational schools, based on the initiative and support of KulturKontakt Austria. Positive outcomes were reported.

1.2 Policy developments between 2015 and 2017

In 2015 Montenegrin policy makers acknowledged the importance of work-based learning in VET, prioritising it in the context of the Riga Conclusions follow-up. Three policy options were chosen for ex-ante assessment:

- improving the relevant database in Montenegro, aiming to improve the quality of VET programmes;
- defining the roles and responsibilities of partners in work-based learning through structured dialogue, leading to the production of a document clearly outlining the needs and requirements of all stakeholders with regard to work-based learning;
- developing a sustainable system for the training of in-company instructors in practical learning.

In line with the work-based learning goals set out in the Vocational Education Development Strategy (2015–2020), the developments in the reporting period aimed to provide a stimulating environment for cooperation between companies and vocational schools. A stronger role for intermediary organisations such as employers' associations or chambers of commerce had been identified as a key priority. Another key priority was to strengthen the training of in-company instructors.

An EU-funded project, Employer Engagement and Reform of Vocational Education and Training, implemented by the British Council, was launched in October 2015 in partnership with the Ministry of Education. An analysis of incentives and disincentives for education–business cooperation was carried out, as well as training of in-company instructors for VET students.

A web portal (www.obrazovanjeprivreda.me) was developed, with the support of KulturKontakt Austria, to facilitate links and cooperation between employers and schools on the practical education of secondary vocational school students in a real-work environment.

Monitoring and evaluation of internships was identified as a major challenge. The tourism sector was selected as a pilot for implementing new measures to improve the quality of internships and for collaboration between vocational schools and companies.

The number of practical learning classes conducted in the workplace was increased in both three- and four-year VET programmes. In the first semester of the 2016/17 school year, for the three-year

VET programmes, 45% of the classes envisaged for practical learning were held in companies, while this share in the four-year programmes was 28%.

In the first quarter of 2017, a set of amendments regarding apprenticeships and referring to different laws in the area of education (including the Law on VET) was prepared. The amendments, adopted in July 2017, provide for the health and pension contributions of apprentices to be paid by the state in the first two years of apprenticeship, as an incentive for employers to engage in cooperation with vocational schools and particularly in apprenticeship schemes.

Montenegro 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

The General Law on Education (2002), the Law on Vocational Education (2010), the Law on Adult Education, and some acts of secondary legislation defined quality assurance activities for the VET system and schools and quality standards for curricula and teachers.

Montenegro started to participate in the activities of the European Quality Assurance in VET (EQAVET) Network around the second half of 2012. It reported that it had devised a comprehensive national framework for quality assurance in VET that was legally binding and compatible with the priorities and tools of the EQAVET Recommendation. Montenegro's approach was based on external and internal assessment mechanisms introduced in 2006 and 2010 respectively, the application of common indicators for assessing targets, methods, procedures and results, and the involvement of relevant stakeholders. The national VET Centre had prepared a methodology for internal evaluation, approved by the National Council for Education, and had analysed school plans for quality improvement. In 2012 Montenegro established a national reference point in the Ministry of Education to support the quality assurance aspects of IVET, CVET, adult education, the European Qualifications Framework (EQF), the European Credit System for VET (ECVET) and other areas. Legislation required CVET providers to be licensed by the Ministry of Education and for training programmes by the Council for Adult Education to be accredited.

Since 2010 Montenegro has made efforts to harmonise its national indicators for assessing quality in VET with EQAVET indicators. In early 2014 it reported having achieved compatibility of national with EQAVET indicators 1A, 2A, 8A and 10B, while the work on the alignment of the rest was in progress.

A systematic labour market information system was lacking in the country. There was no system to monitor the employability of VET graduates and their transitions, nor were any state funds allocated to launch it. The State Statistical Office collected data on employment and unemployment rates by level of education from labour force surveys. The ILO carried out a survey of young people's transitions in the labour market (2015).

2.2 Policy developments between 2015 and 2017

In the period 2015–17 Montenegro continued to implement its national approach to quality assurance in VET, combining regular external and internal evaluations of VET institutions, participating in EQAVET Network activities and harmonising national with EQAVET quality indicators. The indicators

used most frequently by Montenegro, together with the other candidate countries, included indicators 1A and 1B (in both IVET and CVET), 3 (in IVET) and 4 (in CVET); outcome indicators were less often used.

Montenegro made preparations for launching a tracer system IVET graduates. The focus of the reported developments between 2015 and 2017 was placed on creating the appropriate tools and procedures for collecting information on VET graduates' labour market entry and career, aspects that had been lacking previously.

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

Montenegro has traditionally had high IVET enrolments (despite a recent slightly declining trend, in which nearly 70% of all upper secondary students followed VET programmes in 2015) and low CVET participation (3% participation in adult learning, 2015). Vocational schools were licensed to provide adult learning programmes.

The education authorities and vocational schools carried out varied promotional activities to attract students from primary education, such as open days in vocational schools; a media campaign entitled 'Vocational education is the key', launched in 2010; fairs; and skills competitions among VET students, especially in sectors such as tourism, vehicle maintenance and mechanical engineering. An Adult Education and Lifelong Learning Festival has been held annually since 2001.

Guidance and mentoring for potential IVET learners were carried out through specialised services offered by school psychologists, pedagogues and specially trained teachers. The horizontal and vertical permeability of VET had been ensured to create possibilities for progression within and beyond the VET system. Four-year vocational education was completed by sitting a Matura examination that gave access to post-secondary VET as well as to higher education.

A national qualifications framework (NQF) had been under development since 2010. Legislation provided for the development of a comprehensive NQF, encompassing all types and qualification levels for general, vocational and higher education, based on learning outcomes and referring to the eight EQF levels. A number of outcome-based qualifications were already available; the development of new ones was in progress. Montenegro referenced to the EQF in 2014.

Montenegro has adopted relevant legislation on the basis of which it has developed procedures and identified institutions to conduct validation of non-formal and informal learning for qualifications levels 1–5.

3.2 Policy developments between 2015 and 2017

Recent developments in this area have focused on improving participation in VET through better guidance services; enhancing the flexibility and accessibility of VET through modularisation of curricula and wider use of distance/e-learning; and further implementation of the NQF and validation of non-formal and informal learning procedures.

In addition to the regular promotional activities and campaigns and the development of VET programmes for specific vulnerable groups such as Roma and people with disabilities, Montenegro aimed in the reporting period to improve access to VET by introducing individual transition plans in secondary schools and developing more modularised programmes for adults. In the framework of the EPAL¹ project, it also considered how to use e-tools and platforms better to enhance adult learning. Furthermore, again with the objective of enhancing the transfer and flexibility of learning, amendments to the Law on National Vocational Qualifications were adopted in June 2016, introducing the possibility of gaining partial qualifications. This would offer adults more options to obtain vocational qualifications over a period of time in accordance with their interests and availability.

Montenegro undertook some steps to strengthen guidance and counselling services in vocational schools, so as to steer young people towards VET and qualifications that would be suitable and relevant to the labour market. In 2016–17, it implemented a training programme for teachers from 23 vocational and mixed schools on career guidance. As a result, most vocational schools had trained teams of teachers for career guidance advice, to complement the main delivery of the services by the eight centres for professional information and guidance operating within the employment agency system. Furthermore, Montenegro adopted a Strategy for Lifelong Career Development (2016–2020), together with action plans for 2016, 2017 and 2018. A coordinating body to monitor the implementation of the Action Plan 2017-18 was established, including representatives of line ministries, employers, universities and schools.

As regards NQF developments in the reporting period, Montenegro produced common methodologies for occupational standards and began integrating outcome-based approaches across VET qualifications and curricula. Since March 2015, it has adopted 35 occupational standards and 37 qualification standards. The NQF website included the register of VET qualifications. Capacity building of stakeholders in education and training was regularly implemented to support the learning outcomes approach. The 15 sectoral commissions actively participated in the qualifications development cycle. In 2016, the Qualifications Council established procedures and criteria for levelling qualifications in the Montenegrin Qualifications Framework.

In June 2016, amendments to the Law on National Vocational Qualifications were adopted, governing the recognition of non-formal and informal learning and the acquisition of national vocational qualifications. Responsibility for the verification process required to acquire national vocational qualifications (testing and certification) was transferred from the Examination Centre to licensed training providers.

4. MTD 4 – Key competences in 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, science and computer literacy, have always been part of the curriculum of secondary VET in Montenegro, and their place has been preserved or even strengthened in the process of developing new curricula. Qualifications standards promoted further key competences as an integral part of any qualification.

¹ EPAL is the Electronic Platform for Adult Learning in Europe, an initiative of the Directorate-General for Education, Youth, Sport and Culture of the European Commission.

At the beginning of the reporting period, the opportunities for acquiring and further developing key competences in CVET were offered primarily through active labour market policies for the unemployed and vulnerable groups (e.g. Roma), helping them to catch up with functional literacy, ICT skills and foreign languages.

The external assessment of key competences was a relatively new area, only recently established in Montenegro. Three key competences – mother tongue, mathematics and a foreign language – formed an integral part of the final (Matura) examinations of vocational school graduates.

4.2 Policy developments between 2015 and 2017

The actions reported by Montenegro during the reporting period in the sphere of key competences concerned mainly their promotion, with a special focus on entrepreneurship.

National competence standards were adopted by the Bureau for Education Services in 2016. These applied to teachers and principals in all types of school, and required that teachers promote the acquisition by students of the key competences and other soft skills (critical thinking and decision-making, cooperation, problem solving, creativity, adaptability, persistence, empathy and solidarity). The Annual Plan for adult education in 2017 promoted the inclusion of the key competences in programmes for basic and vocational education of adults.

Key competences in the reporting period were also promoted by other means, including students' competitions and events (e.g. the fourth National Fair of Student Practice Companies and Entrepreneurial Clubs from Montenegro) and launching bilingual secondary education. A pilot general secondary school was established in September 2016 in Podgorica; depending on results, the option of introducing a similar concept in vocational schools will be considered.

With regard to the implementation of the Strategy for Lifelong Entrepreneurial Learning (2015–2019), the Eurydice study *Entrepreneurship education at school in Europe* and the 2015 Small Business Act assessment showed evidence of good progress with integrating key competences in entrepreneurship into the Montenegrin education system, including VET. Further mainstreaming of entrepreneurship as a key competence, and the creation of sustainable change in teacher training, continue to pose challenges.

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

5.1 Baseline situation in 2015

Public policies focused primarily on the competences, roles and professional development of teachers and trainers in IVET, and to a much lesser extent in CVET.

A major issue in pre-service teacher education in the country 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 in schools. Another issue concerning the pre-service preparation of VET subject teachers was that usually it lacked courses in pedagogy, psychology, special needs education or adult learning, and these gaps had to be filled in once the teachers' employment began.

The in-service training of VET teachers in Montenegro was underfunded and designed in a way that provided more training opportunities for general education teachers than for VET subject teachers. On-the-job and in-company teacher training was minimal. The professional development opportunities for VET teachers were fewer in number and less relevant to their vocational specialism.

Commonly accepted specific requirements for becoming a trainer or mentor in a company were lacking; some criteria or standards existed but were developed and valid within some companies. There was no strategy in place for either the initial or the continuing professional development of trainers or mentors in enterprises.

5.2 Policy developments between 2015 and 2017

The policy developments reported in the period 2015–17 are related to the design of new strategic orientations for the professional development of VET teaching staff in Montenegro and to particular actions taken in the field of continuing professional development for VET teachers and trainers in both schools and companies.

The Strategy for Teacher Training in Montenegro (2017–2024), with action plans for 2017 and 2018, was adopted in December 2016. It sought to improve initial and continuing development for teachers. Eight new competency standards for teachers and principals in all types of school were developed and adopted at the end of 2016; these will be taken into account when designing and implementing programmes for pre- and in-service preparation of teachers.

As regards pre-service preparation of VET teachers, the University of Montenegro introduced as of September 2017 a Master's programme for teachers to address the existing lack of pedagogic, didactic and psychological training for VET subject teachers.

A requirement was introduced that trainers may become persons with Master of crafts or trades examination and an examination in child and adult learning. All the necessary infrastructure for taking these exams was established. Changes to the rulebook on the organisation of teachers' professional development were made, so that, in addition to accredited teacher training courses, a much wider range of continuing professional development activities could be recognised, such as conducting action research projects, participation in professional networks at different levels, observing lessons, participation in conferences, and so on.

Greater importance was attached to the practical experience of teachers in industry. A Teacher Placement Programme, led by the Ministry of Education, the Chamber of Commerce and the VET Centre, and supported by ETF, was piloted in 2016. The government has shown that it is willing to mainstream the initiative.

Formal training for in-company trainers and training of trainers working in the private sector is still rare in Montenegro. As the majority of companies in the country are small and medium-sized enterprises, with small numbers of employees and a limited choice of potential trainers, the system is still trying to come up with the best solution for introducing this concept. In the meantime, training of instructors from companies was carried out in 2016 in the framework of the EU-funded project Employer Engagement and Reform of Vocational Education and Training. It was implemented by the British Council in partnership with the Ministry of Education.

Conclusions

Since 2015 Montenegro has further reformed its VET system. In the area of work-based learning, it has adopted a set of legal stipulations providing incentives to employers to engage in apprenticeships. Further efforts were made to improve the quality of VET by means of harmonising the national quality assurance approach with the EQAVET Recommendation and ensuring feedback loops by launching a tracer system for IVET graduates. The flexibility and accessibility of VET was improved thanks to the introduction of individual transition plans in secondary schools, more modularised curricula and wider use of distance learning and e-learning for adults, as well as through the implementation of the Montenegrin Qualifications Framework (introducing possibilities for gaining partial qualifications) and improving the procedures for the validation of non-formal and informal learning. Measures were taken to improve the preparation of teachers: a new Strategy for Teacher Training in Montenegro (2017–2024) was adopted in 2016; actions were carried out in pre-service education to address the gaps in the pedagogic skills of VET subject teachers; the promotion of key competences was included in the new teacher standards adopted in 2016; and a programme for the placement of teachers in industry was piloted.

The actions performed show that Montenegro 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 apprenticeships in the formal VET system and increase the range and quality of internships and placements;
- strengthen the use of EQAVET indicators for quality monitoring and ensure that VET tracking mechanisms are put in place quickly and function regularly;
- enhance participation in adult learning while continuing with NQF implementation and scaling up the arrangements for the validation of non-formal and informal learning;
- further strengthen the promotion of key competences in VET curricula, with particular focus on opportunities to acquire and develop those skills through CVET, and reinforce monitoring of the acquisition of key competences;
- implement the Strategy for Teacher Training in Montenegro (2017–2024) with special focus on in-company training of VET teachers and the continuing professional development of trainers and mentors in enterprises.

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

Total population		622 000
Relative size of youth population (15–24) [%]		19.6
Activity rate (20–64) [%]		68.5
Employment rate (20–64) [%]		56.7
Employment rate of recent graduates (20–34) [%]	Total	46.9
	General	n/a
	Vocational	48.9
Unemployment rate (15+) [%]		17.5
Unemployment rate (15+) by education [%]	Low	26.3
	Medium	17.4
	High	10.2
Youth unemployment rate (15–24) [%]		37.6
Expenditure on education as share of GDP [%]		n/a
Students in VET programmes in upper secondary [%]		67.2
Students in VET programmes in upper secondary		19 700
Participation in lifelong learning (25–64) [%]		3
Tertiary educational attainment (30–34) [%]		31
Underachievement (15 years) [%]	Reading	41.9
	Maths	51.9
	Science	51
Early leavers from education (18–24) [%]		5.7
Persons not in employment, education or training (NEET) (15–24) [%]		19.1
Educational attainment of active population (15+) [%]	Low	24.3
	Medium	47.4
	High	28

Notes: n/a – not available. Low: less than primary, primary and vocational education after primary; Medium: secondary education; High: tertiary education.

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

Acronyms

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
ILO	International Labour Organisation
IVET	Initial VET
MTD	Medium-term deliverable
NEET	Not in employment, education or training
NQF	National qualifications framework
PISA	Programme for International Student Assessment (OECD)
VET	Vocational education and training

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