

SERBIA

VET GOVERNANCE ETF PARTNER COUNTRY PROFILE



1. GENERAL GOVERNANCE

Serbia is a parliamentary republic. It requested EU membership in December 2009, and is aligned with EU governance principles and concepts. Legislative, executive and judicial power is separated, as prescribed by the constitution in 1990. For policy-making, the key decision maker is the Cabinet of Ministers, headed by the Prime Minister. The Ministry of Finance and Economy is the strategic decision maker, as macro-economic policy is the core of social policy. Central government comprises ministries and their agencies, supported by institutions, councils, steering committees and relevant bodies. Public administration is organised on similar lines but its complexity is seen as detrimental to transparency and efficiency. A reform strategy adopted by government could enhance inter-ministerial co-ordination and simplify administrative procedures.

Social partners, including the sole fully representative national employer organisation, participate formally in key policy bodies. They include The Association of Employers of Serbia, The Nazavisnost Trade Union Confederation, the Confederation of Autonomous Trade Unions of Serbia, the Serbian Chamber of Commerce and the Regional Chambers of Commerce and local employee organisations. However, there is room to develop more effective engagement in VET policy making.

2. VET GOVERNANCE

Key roles and functions

At a national level, the Ministry of Education, Science and Technological Development (MoESTD) is involved in all the key roles and functions. The Council of VET and Adult Education (VET Council) is involved in all except mobilisation of financial resources. The National Education Council (NEC) is involved in formulating the national policy framework, provision of legislation, and adaptation of general part of VET curriculum. The Institute for Improvement of Education (IIE) plays a key role in drafting technical documents for VET

implementation and is partially involved in the other key functions, apart from mobilisation of financial resources. The Institute of Educational Quality and Evaluation (IEQE) contributes to defining educational standards for general education and is involved in support evaluation and review and R&D.

At the regional level, Regional Schools Administrations (RSA) monitor and evaluate schools (Including VET schools) and are involved in managing public-private partnerships for VET, and in R&D. Municipal and local government's role is limited to a specific part of mobilisation of financial resources.

Among sectoral organisations, social partners are represented on bodies such as the VET Council, and participate in consultation processes and all the key functions except management of VET providers and evaluation and review of policy. The Serbian Chamber of Commerce is involved in several processes and governance functions nationally and regionally and, with the VET Council, established four pilot sector skills councils (SSCs), though setting these up is still a challenge despite an action plan being available. Employers are involved in policy implementation, even in schools, and all the governance functions except management of VET providers and evaluation and review of VET policies. Despite several initiatives, neither the sectoral nor local dimension of VET governance is sufficiently regulated or substantially operational. VET providers include VET schools, adult education institutions, NGOs, lifelong learning centres and employers.

Financing

VET is financed through cost-sharing schemes including national/sectoral training funds, training tax incentives for companies and workers, and loans. TVET is mainly public-funded, with some funding from international stakeholders and, more informally, companies. The Serbia European Integration Office (SEIO) has a key role as it is in charge of drafting National Priorities for International Assistance in the Period 2014-2017. Budgets are formulated through consultations with ministries and stakeholders such as trade unions, leading to action plans. Budget allocation has been described



as inadequate for lack of objective orientation and over-emphasising input and activity-based budgeting and monitoring. Funds are allocated by the state (as for education as a whole) based on a formula for type of school, student numbers and salaries etc. School operating costs and staff development partly fall to local government, but lack of resources can mean municipalities do not cover these expenses fully.

Coordination mechanisms for VET policymaking

In legislative or normative-orientated mechanisms, overall goals for VET are set out in the Skills Vision 2020 and aligned with the EU2020 Strategy and Serbia's own needs, prioritising labour market needs. MoESTD leads on all national strategies related to VET, namely: development of education; development of vocational education and training 2007-15; and adult education 2007-15. It implements strategies indirectly related to VET, such as careers guidance and improving the status of Roma in Serbia. It also coordinates cooperation with the VET Council, NEC and IIE (in introducing new, and revising existing, curricula), as well as participating in consultation on national employment strategy.

Weaknesses in the sectoral approach to skills hamper more cooperation between sectors. But improvement in this could come through an ongoing EU-funded national programme within the IPA 2011, and the implementation of an NQF and the establishment of a national system for validating non-formal learning. This would require co-ordination at national and sectoral level.

From the perspective of institutionalised policy advice oriented mechanisms, the VET Council is the body closest to being a policy coordinator and initiator. All major social partners and key stakeholders are members and it is a legislated national actor in VET governance. The NEC has an important but comparatively limited role in governance and co-ordination. The IIE's Centre for VET and Adult Education is involved in policymaking and delivery, related to monitoring, quality assurance and development. While it complements the VET Council, their functions do potentially overlap, which could hamper policy coordination. The Socio-economic Council of Serbia also deals with VET and international stakeholders monitor progress. There is no Sector Working Group for development assistance focusing on

VET – a major shortcoming, as SWGs can promote programme-based and sector-wide approaches. Communities of practice (potential policy advisors and mainstreamers) are not institutionalised. MoESTD has no specialised department for policy monitoring and evaluation, and monitoring responsibilities between it, other ministries, agencies and stakeholders could be more defined.

Coordination mechanisms that are public-private structure oriented vary. In the public sector, collective bargaining tends to be sectoral, while in the private sector company level bargaining is more common. A sectoral approach in VET and lifelong learning has been developed in the context of a centralised collective bargaining mechanism, with sector representation at all levels from national (curriculum development, for example) to school level (employer involvement in Matura and Final exams). Industry is involved at all levels through sector committees. The VET Centre and Serbian Chamber of Commerce's four pilot SSCs came from this cooperation. Social dialogue is established at the national level but seems not to be effective at regional/local and sectoral level. Formalised cooperation between employers and policy makers in assessing skills needs also seems not to be effective enough. Social partners' involvement in policy, and a mechanism to monitor the relationship between VET outcomes and labour market needs, would be helpful.

Within knowledge creation oriented mechanisms, indicators are mainly for financial issues and part of MoESTD and agencies' reporting rather than for assessing performance, impact and efficiency. Standards for qualifications haven't yet developed broadly. Nor is there a unified document covering qualifications at all levels, or a defined, up-to-date list, or descriptors, of occupations. This is because of the delay in finalising and institutionalising the National Qualifications Framework (NQF), and the lack of a national validation system. The ongoing initiative to revise education profiles in VET is an opportunity to develop recognised standards, as it is related to revised occupational standards.

MoESTD and SORS take the lead roles in collecting and processing data. The VET Council is in charge of monitoring and analysing education and VET, and other stakeholders are indirectly involved by being its members. MoESTD's regional school administration offices are involved in data collection and processing. VET providers help align knowledge creation with policy making by

collecting data on internal parameters of the VET system and submitting results to the MoESTD. Data on Matura and final exams goes to the IIE. While the Institute for Education Quality and Evaluation is part of coordinating utilisation of data for policymaking, other institutions' lack of capacity hampers a more coherent approach to this. Major stakeholders like the Serbian Chamber of Commerce could be more integrated in these processes. The government's General Secretariat has recently taken a lead role in creating a data-based empirical basis, which provides an opportunity to enhance evidence-based policymaking.

Country typology

Serbia can be characterised as hybrid. It has a strongly centralised tradition but is moving towards a more decentralised approach, with increased involvement of stakeholders and social partners in policy making and delivery. The essentials of an NQF are agreed, SSCs have been piloted and the VET Council has approved several VET pilot profiles for systemisation. However, strategies are not implemented effectively and budgets remain limited. Central government controls the funding and financing framework and relevant processes. MoESTD is still the key decision maker in VET, in practice leading VET governance. Serbia is still defining a clear strategic vision for VET, which will help to build on its capacity and will to reform with more bottom-up joint ventures, either between ministries or between regional authorities and sectoral actors, and with better regulation and impact assessment.

Development assessment

VET governance fully matches the definition of structured. A number of factors combine to inhibit the development process required for progress towards a defined multilevel governance of Serbia's VET system. These include shortfalls in policy coordination, the involvement of stakeholders throughout governance functions, resources to support policy implementation and capacity building, and data policy. The persistence of centralised governance in finance and funding, along with cases of fragmentation and implementation gaps, amplifies these issues.

Ongoing work in policy development

Developing and institutionalising 15 major strategies for socio-economic development, including three

related substantially to VET, provides – with Skills Vision 2020 – a policy framework for VET. Involvement from many government institutions, employers' associations, NGOs and international stakeholders strengthens the mainstreaming of policy and makes gaps in implementation less likely. The Strategy for the Development of Education in Serbia to 2020 relates to all facets of policy making and implementation. It also emphasises strengthening the relationship between VET and the labour market and empowering social partnership, and addresses adult education and VET, with a lifelong learning perspective on education and training.

These strategies have led to a legal framework on education, broadening access to VET, emphasising the needs of disadvantaged groups, aiming to develop key competencies, and regulating exams, so facilitating VET students' entry to HE. Long-term initiatives have produced results, for example reforming educational profiles in VET. Competence-based, outcome-oriented and approved by the VET Council for piloting in VET schools, these modular curricula show multi-level governance can improve the whole policy domain.

3. POLICY POINTERS

Policy makers may wish to consider the following points for reflection, with a view to working towards their implementation in line with national priorities and in the context of national, regional, and local needs.

Overall planning and management

1. Enhance formal cooperation between employers and policy makers to understand labour market needs, and adapt VET programmes and modules to meet them.
2. Institutionalise social partners' involvement in curriculum design and qualification standards development.
3. Institutionalise sectoral committees and communities of practice to develop policy proposals.
4. Revise the rest of the VET programmes' profiles based on the economy and labour market's needs by strengthening the sectoral approach to skills development and involving sector councils.



5. Develop a credit system and establish sector working groups for VET.
 6. Make stakeholders' involvement in policy development more active and systematic.
 7. Deliver training for stakeholders in VET policy making at national, regional and sectoral level.
 8. Empower, enhance and motivate social dialogue at local level.
 9. Make impact assessment a requirement for policy planning and legislation.
 10. Develop a national VET database, fed by regional and sectoral equivalents.
 11. Develop information channels between the state, regions and stakeholders.
 12. Publicise Skills Vision 2020 through conferences and media activity.
5. Revise the action plan for implementing the strategy, including budget, stakeholders' responsibilities and financial plan for implementation between central and local government.

Finance and funding

1. Strengthen cooperation between the MoF's budget departments and ministries.
2. Increase resources for VET in the budget.
3. Involve local government in financial planning to decentralise financing.
4. Simplify procedures for obtaining financial information from MoF for policy planning.
5. Move towards programme budgeting and performance measurement in financing and funding.

Coordination mechanisms for VET policy making

1. Formalise inter-ministerial coordination through regulation.
2. Foster cross-sectoral cooperation with a VET coordinating agency bringing ministries and institutions, social partners and other stakeholders together.
3. Empower the General Secretariat to enforce regulations and planning parameters with ministries.
4. Clarify ministries' monitoring responsibilities and establish specialist department in the MoE and others involved in VET.