

DEVELOPMENTS IN VOCATIONAL EDUCATION POLICY IN ALBANIA

**Progress towards the medium-term deliverables
of the Riga Conclusions in the period 2015–19**

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PREFACE

This report presents vocational education and training (VET) policy developments in Albania between 2015 and 2019. It covers all five 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 made by the EU candidate countries towards the MTDs. This document is based on the annual monitoring reports submitted by Albania to the ETF, the ETF's own assessments and observations from other stakeholders.

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ASPECTS OF VOCATIONAL EDUCATION AND TRAINING CONTEXT AND POLICIES IN 2019

Albania was granted EU candidate status in June 2014. The current government, which took office in 2013 (and was re-elected in 2017), has put the country on a firm path of comprehensive reform to advance preparations for EU accession. Although the European Commission recommended that negotiations start in 2016, Member States asked to delay the process pending certain condition

The population of Albania is estimated to hover around 2.8 million inhabitants (see Annex for key country statistics). The country's economy is largely service-oriented, with that sector accounting for almost half of gross domestic product (GDP); one-fifth of GDP is generated by industry. The employment structure follows the same pattern, with services accounting for the largest percentage of the employed workforce (43% in 2018), agriculture employing some 37% of the workforce, and industry accounting for the rest. The economy has been growing continuously since 2015 (3.7% in 2019 and a positive outlook for 2020).

Labour market performance has generally been improving in recent years but is still characterised by relatively low participation, a high degree of informality, and gender divides. The employment rate of those aged between 20 and 64 was 68.5% in 2019 (up from 66.9% in 2018) but remained, with a sizeable gender gap, at around 10 percentage points below the EU 28 average. This could be attributed partly to the fact that a relatively high proportion of the Albanian workforce is employed in subsistence agriculture. Employment in agriculture has declined in recent years, but has stayed comparatively high when compared to other candidate countries, which indicates sluggish job creation in other sectors. The unemployment rate stood at 11.4% in 2019; 8.3% of jobseekers fell into the 'long-term unemployed' category. Young people were particularly affected: 26.5% of the cohort aged between 15 and 24 were not in employment, education or training (highest NEET rate in South East Europe) and youth unemployment stood at 28.3% in 2018. The country's workforce was relatively low-skilled (some 43% in 2018), although the proportion of the population aged between 30 and 34 that has completed tertiary education has been increasing in recent years (27% in 2018, up from 11% in 2010).

Albania's performance with regard to the Education and Training 2020 (ET 2020) benchmarks has been mixed. The country visibly progressed in terms of two major education-related areas – reducing the rate of early leavers¹ from education and training from 21.3% in 2015 to 17.4% in 2018 and increasing tertiary attainment from 22.1% in 2013 to 27.3% in 2018. With regard to adult participation in training or lifelong learning, less than 1% of respondents (to the LFS survey) stated that they took part in some form of training in the previous month. This is well below the 11% EU average, which itself is below the 15% ET 2020 goal (INSTAT, Eurostat).

Despite continuous improvements in Albania's PISA results since the tests started in the early 2000s, the latest results (2018) demonstrate significant underachievement in reading, mathematics and

¹ Defined as youth between 18 and 24 years old who completed lower secondary education at most and are no longer in further education

science, with around 50% of 15-year-olds functionally illiterate in reading and mathematics and 42% functionally illiterate in science, well below the respective EU averages.

Two separate state-funded VET provider systems (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 into 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 and vocational programmes, gave access to post-secondary and/or higher education on attainment of the State Matura.

Cooperation between VET and industry was weak and curriculum implementation was mostly theoretical, often lacking the relevant practice. Continuing vocational training (CVET²) was limited. The participation rate in upper secondary VET was comparatively low (19.8% in 2018) although improving (17% in 2014). The upper VET student population was also limited (25 119 students in total), with females comprising about a fifth of this number (2018 data). This is the most prominent gender gap in all the candidate countries.

When it restructured ministry portfolios in 2013, the government transferred all VET responsibilities from the Ministry of Education to the Ministry of Social Welfare and Youth. Despite limited resources, the National Agency for VET and Qualifications (NAVETQ) led these reforms. The EU and bilateral donors supported about half of the VET institutions, aiming to bring VET provision up to modern standards in certain occupational profiles. 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 conducted within the framework of the National Employment and Skills Strategy and Action Plan (2014–2020), adopted in November 2014. These reforms included the development of an Albanian qualifications framework (AQF) and individual qualifications; the revision of framework 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 offerings for jobs and VET delivery (including active labour market policies and school- and work-based VET).

In 2017, responsibility for public VET provider administration was shifted again, this time to the Ministry of Finance and Economy. Staff shortages in the VET and employment departments of the latter ministry limit its capacities to effectively monitor and steer the system.

These reform efforts were all relevant to the Riga MTDs. Based on the ETF's guidance, the specificities of the national context and the challenges of the enlargement process, Albania selected

² Continuing Vocational Training is defined as measures or activities which have as their primary objectives the acquisition of new competences or the development and improvement of existing ones and which must be financed at least partly by the enterprises for their persons employed who either have a working contract or who benefit directly from their work the enterprise.

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 201

In 2015, the legal provisions in the VET law allowed for the organisation of internships in companies, but this form of vocational practice was not common and was piloted largely through some donor-funded initiatives (e.g. Swiss AlbVET project, GIZ). NAVETQ developed a framework curriculum, consisting of vocational theory and practice, for each occupational profile. Most of the practice took place in workshops in VET schools, where these were available.

The concept of training firms (simulated work-based learning) was introduced in all business education programmes (in 11 secondary schools, with the support of KulturKontakt Austria). The initiative 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 that required the teaching load of PASOs to be reduced was applied in the above-mentioned 11 schools but did not materialise for the rest.

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

1.2. Policy developments between 2015 and 2019

The National Employment and Skills Strategy and Action Plan (2014–2020), now revised and extended to 2022, provides for the introduction of work-based learning in the Albanian VET system and for the involvement of social partners in curriculum development. In 2015, policy makers acknowledged the importance of work-based learning, prioritising it in the context of the follow-up to the Riga Conclusions. That same year, Albania became a member of the European Alliance for Apprenticeships. Since 2015, policy developments in the area of work-based learning have aimed at preparing the ground for introducing company internships for VET students in the country. A particular emphasis was placed on the institutionalisation of the role of school-business liaison persons (PASOs). As part 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 was conducted to rank the most successful work-based learning practices implemented between 1992 and 2014. A roadmap for establishing a dual VET system was elaborated, which identified the primary need for amendments to the existing legal framework.

The Law on Craftsmanship was adopted in June 2016, providing for the establishment of both a National Chamber of Handicrafts and apprenticeship schemes in the field of handicrafts. A new VET law was adopted in February 2017 (Law No 15/2017). It provided for the introduction of dual elements in VET and for recruiting school-business liaison persons (PASOs) in all major VET institutions. Various by-laws were adopted to implement this law. However, at the time of writing this report, neither the Decision of the Council of Ministers on the Activities and Organisation of VET providers (regulating

the school-business liaison function, among others) nor the Ministerial Instruction on work-based learning had been formally adopted.

A recent survey among teachers and instructors in vocational schools and vocational training centres in Albania shows that access to work-based learning still exists for only a minority of vocational learners. According to teachers, only 38% of students receive at least 10% of their learning in the workplace, and 46% say that only some of their students have placements in companies (see report of the Human Development Promotion Centre (HDPC), 2019). Once the regulatory framework has been adopted, a decisive shift towards the expansion of work-based learning in Albania is expected.

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, Albanian VET schools were subject to the quality assurance procedures and external education inspections that existed for primary and secondary education as a whole. A holistic, national approach to quality assurance that takes into account the specificities of VET and is more development-oriented was absent. Albania did not participate in the European Quality Assurance in VET (EQAVET) network. There were no systematic tracer studies of VET graduates.

2.2. Policy developments between 2015 and 2019

In 2016, with the support of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), NAVETQ developed and piloted a self-assessment manual in a number of public VET schools. Based on these self-assessments, donors supported the design of development plans in specific VET schools and centres. Following the pilot, criteria and the manual for the self-assessment of VET providers were finalised.

At the end of 2016, with GIZ support, the National Employment Service set up a tracer system to track graduates leaving public VET providers (vocational schools and vocational training centres). The first tracking survey was carried out the following year.

The overarching Law on VET, adopted in February 2017, provided for the introduction of quality assurance mechanisms of all public VET providers. A working group was established to elaborate criteria and procedures for the accreditation of (both public and) private VET providers.

On the other hand, the amended Law on the Albanian Qualifications Framework (AQF), adopted in May 2018, lays the basis for ensuring the quality of qualifications and the institutions delivering them.

During 2018–19, NAVETQ coordinated the self-assessment process for all public VET schools. Reports were published on the NAVETQ website and meetings were organised to discuss performance and improvement measures.

The updated and extended National Employment and Skills Strategy and Action Plan 2019–22 aims to further modernise employment services and policies, and the VET system and its governance arrangements. Work is advancing on all envisaged measures. Progress is made on the action plan on an annual basis.

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

3.1. Baseline situation in 2015

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

General and VET provision in rural, mountainous and isolated areas was either absent or delivered with a more limited scope than in the cities. The quality was also lower. Young people and adults living in the villages needed to travel in order to participate in VET, but not all of them could 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 in society, deeply gender-stereotyped occupational profiles and courses, the location of vocational schools in the towns, lack of regular transportation and inadequate 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 Law on the Albanian Qualifications Framework (AQF) 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 revise the AQF law and prepare a report referencing the AQF to the European Qualifications Framework (EQF).

Finally, no system for the validation of non-formal and informal learning has yet been established.

3.2. Policy developments between 2015 and 2019

The VET law (2017) foresees the establishment of career guidance in all schools to help students make choices on whether to continue their education or enter the labour market. Aiming to improve access and participation, the Albanian government and donors continuously invested major sums in the physical infrastructure of VET institutions. Awareness-raising activities on the attractiveness and importance of VET and adult education were organised every year. These activities included media campaigns focusing on the importance of VET and lifelong learning and the opportunities they offer, as well as skills and job fairs.

Albania's 2017 VET law re-confirmed the legal provisions for 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.

A roadmap for referencing the AQF against the European Qualifications Framework was drafted in September 2016. Several workshops were conducted in 2016 and 2017, discussing the different European Qualifications Framework referencing criteria. An AQF handbook was developed, describing all arrangements related to the AQF. Based on an inventory and analysis of vocational qualifications, NAVETQ revised the National List of Occupations, which was adopted in 2017. The National List of

Vocational Qualifications is updated every year. Amendments to the AQF law were adopted in May 2018, while three Decisions of the Council of Ministers – on sector skills councils, level descriptors and the inclusion of lifelong learning qualifications in the AQF – were adopted in 2019. With the adoption of a by-law on the recognition of prior learning under the VET law, the legal framework is now complete. Furthermore, Albania took steps towards setting up the first sector skills council in the field of tourism. However, all other legal provisions are still awaiting implementation and the actual European Qualifications Framework referencing report needs to be drafted.

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 either preserved or 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 2019

Albania defined seven key competences as part of the National Pre-University Curriculum Framework, which in turn is prescribed by the 2012 Law on Pre-University Education. The framework includes 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 secondary general and vocational education as of the 2016/17 school year. They are partially aligned with the eight key competences defined in the corresponding EU Recommendation issued in 2006³.

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 big (with up to 40 students) in schools in bigger urban centres, which makes active types of learning and the development of the competences of individual students a difficult undertaking. Because of the lack of materials and the relatively weak skills of teachers and instructors in general and/or 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 studying the basics of entrepreneurship and environmental and sustainable development, and by engaging in practical

³ 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 an 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).

modules delivered in work environments. Many private providers and donors delivered non-formal entrepreneurship or business management courses.

Developing and monitoring the acquisition of key competences in both IVET and CVET remained a weak point. The State Matura exam constitutes a centralised external assessment for Albanian language and mathematics skills. Albania's PISA results have improved considerably over time, but roughly half of all 15-year-olds are still low performers in reading (52.2% in 2018), mathematics (42.4%) and science (47%).

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 VET subject teachers was their poor pre-service preparation and the outdated technical skills of VET instructors in Albanian vocational schools. Both lacked contemporary pedagogical skills. According to a baseline survey of public VET providers conducted by GIZ and the ETF in 2014, only 80 out of 700 instructors in the country had some (pre-service) pedagogical training. A continuing professional development (CPD) system for VET teachers and instructors was absent.

NAVETQ had no explicit responsibility for this training and therefore did not receive separate funding for it. In reality, however, all the key donors involved 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 individual company. There was no strategy in place for initial and continuing professional development of instructors, trainers or mentors in enterprises.

5.2. Policy developments between 2015 and 2019

The National Employment and Skills Strategy and Action Plan (2014–20), now extended to 2022, provides for the institutionalisation of CPD and specific related measures for VET teachers and instructors. The Law on VET (2017) envisages the setting up of School Development Units (SDUs), which will be responsible for the CPD of VET teachers and instructors, among other functions. In 2017, NAVETQ analysed the training needs of VET teachers and trainers and undertook a pilot that tested systematic approaches for CPD in VET schools. The corresponding by-law on VET providers, which includes detailed provisions concerning the introduction of SDUs in all VET schools, is still to be adopted.

In 2016, 42 VET teachers and instructors (out of a total of 700) underwent a 24-day basic pedagogy programme. A training handbook was developed and printed. By the end of 2018, 467 out of 700 VET teachers and instructors (or 67%) had attended the programme. At the time of writing this report, it was unclear whether suggested revisions would be incorporated and the programme would be continued for other staff, including new teachers and trainers in the VET system.

A more systematic approach towards the professional development of VET teachers and instructors hinges on NAVETQ and VET providers having adequate resources, the adoption of the above-

mentioned by-law, and cooperation between VET providers and businesses, allowing teachers and trainers to also enhance their practical skills.

CONCLUSIONS

Since 2015, Albania has further reformed its VET system in the area of work-based learning, and taken steps to introduce formal apprenticeships for adults in the crafts sector by working towards the adoption of relevant legal provisions. A tracer system for VET graduates was introduced and is expected to provide valuable inputs for adjusting VET provision to labour market needs. The VET system is 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 to promote entrepreneurship learning and enhance 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:

- consolidate work-based learning in VET;
- further 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, capacity building and monitoring of key competences in IVET curricula and through CVET;
- ensure a systemic approach and more opportunities for CPD in relation to both the technical and pedagogical skills of VET teachers and practical instructors in vocational schools.

ANNEX: ALBANIA – LABOUR MARKET, EDUCATION AND CONTEXTUAL INDICATORS, 2018 OR MOST RECENT YEAR AVAILABLE

Total population		2 893 000
Relative size of youth population (15–24) [%]		19.5
Activity rate (20–64) [%]		74.8
Employment rate (20–64) [%]		65.6
Employment rate of recent graduates from ISCED levels 3–8 (20–34) [%]		n/a
Employment rate of recent graduates from ISCED levels 3–4 (20–34) [%]	Total	n/a
	General	n/a
	Vocational	n/a
Unemployment rate (15+) [%]		12.3
Unemployment rate (15+) by education [%]	Low	9.9
	Medium	14.3
	High	14
Youth unemployment rate (15–24) [%]		28.3
Expenditure on education as share of GDP [%]		3.2
Students in VET programmes in upper secondary [%]		19.8
Students in VET programmes in upper secondary		25 119
Participation in lifelong learning (25–64) [%]		0.9
Tertiary educational attainment (30–34) [%]		27.3
Underachievement (15 years) [%]	Reading	50.3
	Mathematics	53.3
	Science	41.7
Early leavers from education (18–24) [%]		17.4
Persons not in employment, education or training (NEET) (15–24) [%]		26.5
Educational attainment of active population (15+) [%]	Low	43.2
	Medium	36.8
	High	20

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

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

Where to find out more

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