

# Webinar for candidate countries: Key developments on WBL since Riga Summit

European Alliance for Apprenticeships

— 24 September 2020

In a new normal, the European Training Foundation (ETF) and the European Alliance for Apprenticeships (EAfA) organised the 5<sup>th</sup> regional seminar, in a webinar format, to discuss policy developments in apprenticeships and work-based learning (WBL) in EU candidate countries. About 70 participants joined the online event including EAfA members, EU-level stakeholders, social partners, representatives from the European Apprentices Network and other relevant stakeholders in the European vocational education and training (VET) sector.

**Xavier Matheu de Cortada**, Head of Policy Unit, ETF, began setting the scene by reflecting on candidate country developments since the 2015 Riga declaration, which agreed on a new set of medium-term deliverables (MTD) for 2015–2020 in the provision of VET. Today, candidate countries have made impressive progress in all areas defined by the Declaration, while demonstrating a significant and growing interest for WBL.

**Norbert Schöbel**, Team Leader, Directorate-General for Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion, European Commission, highlighted new European policies in the areas of youth employment and skills, and the upskilling and reskilling of adults, including the Youth Employment Support and the new Pact for Skills within the new European Skills Agenda. The EAfA, a 300-member-strong multi-stakeholder network, stands committed to strengthening the quality, supply and image of apprenticeships in Europe, and promoting the mobility of apprentices.



## THE FIRST PANEL ON KEY DEVELOPMENTS IN ALBANIA AND NORTH MACEDONIA

The first panel discussion focused on the latest national reforms in Albania and Macedonia, attended by Ejvis Gishti, Director-General the National Agency for Education, Vocational Training and Qualifications of Albania, Ministry of Finance and Economy of Albania, and by Zoran Jovcevski, Advisor from the Vocational and Education Centre 'Goce Delcev' of North Macedonia. Both representatives highlighted key achievements in the development and implementation of WBL, including reforms and new regulations, the development of dual education and the joint role of schools and companies.

### ALBANIA

- The new Strategy for Employment and Skills 2014–2020 was extended until 2022. The strategy aims to strengthen links between learning and work, facilitating the transition from education to work.
- In 2017, a new national legal framework was implemented, defining quality standards, procedures and responsibilities for all stakeholders involved in the development and implementation of WBL.
- A stronger involvement of social partners has been envisaged through the reactivation of the National VET Council in 2019 and stronger representation of the private sector in the providers' boards.
- Plans have also been made to establish up to 10 sectorial committees (SCs). At the moment, the first SC has been set up as a pilot.

### NORTH MACEDONIA

- Since 2015, both the three-year and four-year vocational education paths have been reformed, strengthening the WBL element. The four-year course counts for about 90% of the total of VET students.
- A concept for a WBL process was adopted, aiming to provide basic information and guidance for the implementation of VET and WBL.
- Stronger cooperation between schools and companies is being encouraged, in particular to ensure that qualifications reflect businesses' needs.
- A programme on health and safety at work was adopted, foreseeing all apprentices undergoing mandatory training before starting the WBL part of their programme.

## THE SECOND PANEL ON KEY DEVELOPMENTS IN MONTENEGRO, SERBIA AND TURKEY

The second panel discussion highlighted recent policy developments in Montenegro, Serbia and Turkey, and was attended by Ana Markovic, Head of Department for Education and Members Support from the Union of Employers of Montenegro, Mirjana Kovačević, Head of Centre for Education, Director of Academy, from the Chamber of Commerce and Industry of Serbia, and by



European  
Commission

Süleyman Akgül, Head of Work- Based Vocational Education Department from the VET General Directorate, Ministry of National Education of Turkey. The three representatives presented the progress made in the areas of dual education and public-private cooperation, and in the adoption of WBL, including new reforms and regulations.

#### MONTENEGRO

- The Law on vocational education (2017) was amended to introduce: the rights and obligations of VET partners; written contract between the apprentice and the school; minimum wage for apprentices; and accredited training programmes for in-company trainers.
- Statistics show that the number of students in 3-year dual education constantly increased since 2017.
- The role of employers' associations will be strengthened in relation to the accreditation of workplaces and the assessment of student.

#### SERBIA

- Two key laws on dual education were fully implemented in September 2019. A 2020 amendment aimed to facilitate companies' participation in WBL programmes.
- A 'Implementation of Dual Education' master plan was developed. The plan includes information on the process, responsibilities and monitoring of dual education.
- A cost-benefit analysis has been launched and will be used to attract more companies to take part in dual education.

#### TURKEY

- Apprenticeship training was included in the framework of compulsory education and vocational education centres were restructured as formal secondary education institutions.
- Financial public support was introduced to support companies hiring apprentices.
- Journeyman and Mastership theoretical e-exam, and skill exams were camera-recorded.
- A cost-benefit analysis was carried out in the first half of 2020 in cooperation with the ETF.

### KEYNOTE INTERVENTIONS BY STEFAN THOMAS (ETF) AND SAFET GËRXHALIU (WESTERN BALKANS 6 CHAMBER INVESTMENT FORUM)

In light of the evident progress made since the Riga declaration five years ago, the ETF praised the candidate countries for their efforts and the significant accomplishments achieved. **Stefan Thomas**, specialist in VET Policies and Systems at the ETF, highlighted how, now more than ever, it is crucial to ensure close monitoring and good stakeholder cooperation. **Safet Gërxhaliu** Secretary-General of the Western Balkans 6 Chamber Investment Forum, reiterated the importance of cooperation and dialogue in public-private partnerships. To facilitate smoother transitions between education and workplaces, more awareness is needed regarding VET opportunities in the business community and among young people and their parents.



Oliver Diehl

*'In times of economic turmoil, the VET-sector has proven again and again to be a life saver'*

**Oliver Diehl**, EU Presidency Assistant Head of Division, Federal Ministry of Education and Research, Germany

### THE EU PRESIDENCY LOOKING FORWARD – THE FUTURE OF WBL AND APPRENTICESHIPS IN EUROPE

**Oliver Diehl**, EU Presidency Assistant Head of Division, Federal Ministry of Education and Research, Germany, highlighted the VET priorities of the current presidency: innovative and flexible VET, a new culture and lifelong learning, sustainability and green VET, and internationalisation. Dr Diehl remarked with optimism the potential of VET in being highly adaptable and therefore able to support Europe to re- and upskill its labour force and help to boost a post-pandemic economic recovery.

### CONCLUSIONS AND A FINAL INVITE

Taking the floor one last time, **Xavier Matheu de Cortada** stated the ETF's commitment to fully contribute to European policy objectives and that it will continue to support the increased participation of candidate countries. **Norbert Schöbel** closed by stressing how important VET is in the new normal and welcomed innovations that had emerged during the webinar – notably the cost and benefit analyses presented. Finally, an invite to all participants was extended for the EAFA European Vocational Skills Week event 9–10 November: *Apprenticeships and the twin green and digital transition: challenges and opportunities ahead*.

Participants are invited to follow the online events of the [European Vocational Skills Week 2020, 09-13 November](#).

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