

QUALITY ASSURANCE IN VOCATIONAL EDUCATION AND TRAINING IN KOSOVO*

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National Qualifications Authority

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* This designation is without prejudice to positions on status, and is in line with UNSCR 1244/1999 and the ICJ Opinion on the Kosovo declaration of independence – hereinafter 'Kosovo'.

Quality Assurance Forum

THE ETF FORUM FOR QUALITY ASSURANCE
IN VOCATIONAL EDUCATION AND TRAINING

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1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 National context

Economic context and challenges

Kosovo's vocational education and training (VET) system must be placed within the context of the country's recent history and its resulting economic, social and education challenges and, specifically, the continuing political uncertainty. Unemployment levels remain high. Women's participation in the labour market is low. Growth is limited, the private sector is small and foreign investment limited. The country depends largely on remittances from the many Kosovars abroad and on donor activity and support.

Kosovo's small domestic market, limited integration into international markets and a suboptimal business environment, including infrastructure weaknesses (e.g. energy, transport, communications), an untransparent and cumbersome regulatory framework and poor support for business hinder job creation.

Demographic developments

Demographic developments show a steep drop in the youth population due to continuously declining birth rates, partly because of the emigration of young people and families.

Labour market context and challenges

Labour market indicators for Kosovo are bleak. The country lags far behind other countries in the Western Balkan region and the European Union (EU). The high number of new jobseekers each year and the lack of job vacancies translate into high inactivity and unemployment rates. Kosovo has the lowest female activity and the highest youth unemployment in the Western Balkan region, which together result in very low utilisation of these groups' skills. University graduates have better opportunities in the labour market, although many of them end up in jobs requiring lower skills or qualifications than those acquired through their studies. This, in turn, reduces job opportunities for people with medium or low qualifications, and reinforces the tendency of young people to enrol in higher education (aspiring to some form of employment even at a lower level than qualified for). Young people are also motivated to enrol in higher education institutions to defer their entry into a difficult labour market. Almost one in four employed people in Kosovo work in precarious employment conditions, resulting in an inefficient use of human capital. Furthermore, the high percentage of people not in employment, education or training poses a risk to proper human capital development.

1.2 Statistics

TABLE 1. POPULATION

	Size of population	Relative size of youth population (15–24, %)
2011	1 780 021	19,3
2014	1 816 891	19,2
2017	1 847 632	19,0

Source: Kosovo Agency of Statistics

TABLE 2. EMPLOYMENT

	Employment rate (15+, %)	Employment rate of young people (15–24, %)
2012	25,5	19,1
2014	26,9	8,5 (for 2015)
2017	28,8	10,0 (for 2018)

Source: Kosovo Agency of Statistics

TABLE 3. EDUCATIONAL ATTAINMENT OF ACTIVE POPULATION (% AGED 15+)

	Low	Medium	High
2015	19,2	58,0	22,9
2018	15,9	59,2	24,9

Note: Low – International Standard Classification of Education (ISCED) 0–2; Medium – ISCED 3–4; High – ISCED 5–8

Source: Kosovo Agency of Statistics

TABLE 4. PARTICIPATION IN VET (STUDENTS IN VOCATIONAL COURSES AS A PERCENTAGE OF TOTAL UPPER SECONDARY STUDENTS)

	Upper-secondary (ISCED 3) VET
2016	52,6
2018	52,9
2019	52,4

Source: UNESCO Institute for Statistics

1.3 The VET system

Governance and management

The VET sector is managed by the Ministry of Education and Science (MES), other ministries such as the Ministry of Labour and Social Welfare, the Agency for Vocational Education and Training and Adult Education (AVETAE), municipal education directorates, and various other bodies exercising VET functions. MES is responsible for policy development and for drafting general education legislation, including VET. It is supported by departments and divisions with a VET remit. The Council for VET and Adults (CVETA), a tripartite body that provides advice to government stakeholders in VET and adult education in Kosovo and approves occupational standards, is also a key player in the VET system. Although the council was established in 2014, however, it has struggled to become fully operational.

AVETAE is responsible for the administration of the donor-funded VET institutions called competence centres, and of the VET institutions for adults, specifically the finances, human resources and the construction of facilities and infrastructure for all public VET institutions. Currently, AVETAE manages six such institutions, whereas the remainder operate under the authority of their respective municipal education directorates. AVETAE's other tasks include: initiating the development of occupational standards, developing core curricula, developing teaching materials, teachers' professional development, etc.

Municipal education directorates are responsible for the operation of public educational institutions, including vocational schools. Their responsibilities include: construction of education facilities, enrolment of students, employment of teaching and management staff, training, supervision, etc. Municipal education directorates' directors are appointed by the respective mayors.

The Ministry of Labour and Social Welfare is responsible for drafting employment and vocational training policies, while the Employment Agency of the Republic of Kosovo organises, coordinates and implements employment and vocational training policies through seven regional vocational training centres, which support adult jobseekers by providing them with training.

Financing

The main source of VET funding is the public budget. A grant is allocated to municipalities based on a specific formula and municipalities allocate these funds to schools. Teacher salaries are paid through a payroll system managed by the Ministry of Finance, capital expenditure is managed directly by MES or municipalities, and the budget for goods and expenses is allocated directly to schools on a per-student basis.

Vocational schools are also allowed to generate income through economic activity, such as manufacturing and services, and they can use the income to meet their own needs, including the remuneration of staff for overtime work.

In the last three years, staff salaries have accounted for more than 90% of the total grants, leaving municipalities and schools with little room for manoeuvre to invest in developmental activities.

Regulatory frameworks

The legal framework for VET and adult education and training consists of national laws, administrative instructions and strategies.

Laws

- Law No 04/L-032 – 2011 on Pre-University Education in the Republic of Kosovo
- Law No 04/L-138 – 2013 on Vocational Education and Training, which regulates the structure, organisation and management of institutions providing VET
- Law No 04/L-143 – 2013 on Adult Education and Training in the Republic of Kosovo, which regulates the process of adult education as an integral part of the education system in Kosovo
- Law No 03/L-060 – 2011 on National Qualifications, which regulates the development and maintenance of the national qualifications framework (NQF) and award of qualifications. The objectives of this law are to improve the recognition of qualifications at all levels of formal and non-formal education and training; to ensure that qualifications meet the requirements of the labour market, economy and society; to regulate qualifications, assessment and certifications based on quality standards etc.
- Law No 2004/37 – 2004 on the Education Inspectorate in Kosovo
- Law No 03/L-018 – 2008 on the Final Exam and State Matura Exam
- Law No 03/L-019 – 2008 on Vocational Skills, Rehabilitation and Employment of People with Special Needs
- Law No 03/L-068 – 2008 on Education in the Municipalities of the Republic of Kosovo

National strategies

The Kosovo Strategic Education Plan 2017–2021 serves as the basic document for the development of the education sector in the country.

The specific VET-related strategic objective is as follows: 'Harmonising vocational education and training with labour market requirements in the country and abroad, and creating an open system for adult education.' The strategic focus is on enhancing the relevance of school curricula to labour market needs, developing a VET-specific core curriculum that is aligned to the Kosovo Curriculum Framework and systematically providing high-quality work experience and professional practice. The plan determines nine outcomes related to the VET-specific strategic objective and identifies a number of measures (activities) for each outcome to monitor progress toward its achievement.

Budget deficiencies and organisational issues are an obstacle to the implementation of the strategy.

In secondary legislation, a considerable number of administrative instructions have been developed, depending on the scope of activity, to implement the applicable laws in force. They are related to the verification of occupational standards, the recognition of prior learning (RPL), internal processes for quality assurance in VET institutions, the validation and approval of national qualifications and accreditation of institutions providing qualifications in Kosovo, and accreditation of institutions that implement the RPL in Kosovo.

Main provider institution types

Currently, both public and private institutions provide formal secondary, post-secondary, higher and adult education. After completion of formal or adult education, students/candidates/graduates may enter the labour market, post-secondary education or university education. The majority (about 60%) of upper-secondary school students are enrolled in formal vocational schools. In total there are 76 public vocational schools, offering 17 vocational fields and 140 profiles.

There are over 60 public and private VET providers with accreditation from the National Qualifications Authority (NQA) and over 88 qualifications validated under the NQF.

Formal VET provision includes:

- upper-secondary vocational education (vocational school grades 10–12);
- post-secondary VET.

Non-formal VET provision includes:

- vocational training (employment or job-related), provided in public and private vocational training centres;
- adult compensatory education courses for those who have not completed primary or secondary education, based on formal education programmes and offered mainly by public schools;
- a variety of other types of VET provision for adults in areas such as foreign languages, information and communication technologies, handicrafts, arts, music and culture offered by private providers, non-governmental organisations, etc.

2. QUALITY ASSURANCE IN VOCATIONAL EDUCATION AND TRAINING

2.1 Overview

The comprehensive quality assurance system for VET covering the main policy areas (including administration, qualifications cycle, continuing professional development, registries, and VET provision) needs to be improved. Whilst quality assurance measures supporting these areas exist, they are either still at the development level, or only partially implemented, or merely provided for by secondary laws and legislation.

The qualifications cycle seems to be the policy area that is best covered by quality assurance measures. However, the alignment of these policy areas requires that all of them are 'under control' to ensure that the system delivers quality VET.

2.2 General information on quality assurance at VET system level

The NQA plays an important role in quality and access to quality assurance in the country's VET system. Other important components of the quality system include:

- evaluation of vocational schools through administrative and professional inspections by the MES Inspection Department;
- quality assurance of Ministry of Labour and Social Welfare centres for vocational training and mobile centres by the Employment Agency;
- internal evaluation of schools through the latest practice of self-evaluation;
- role of quality assurance by the Office for Standards and Evaluation in MES;
- role of municipalities – according to the Law on Local Self-Government and the management of school funds, staff and infrastructure, with the exception of the six competence centres, managed by AVETAE;
- involvement of social partners and stakeholders through the CVETA in developing occupational standards.

2.3 Quality assurance related to key VET areas

Evidence – statistics, and research and development

Demand for training is identified through research sponsored by the Ministry of Labour and Social Welfare, business associations and donor-funded projects. However, the research is conducted on an ad hoc basis and it is limited in scope.

In recent years, analyses of labour market needs have been carried out for a variety of sectors including information and communication technologies, key agribusiness subsectors, the construction sector, traditional confectionery producers, wood processing, mechanical engineering and others. Donors conduct such analyses to collect information on qualifications, curricula and training provision.

These efforts are of dubious value, however, as there is no evidence that the outcomes of studies carried out by donors influence VET provision. Vocational schools, especially public schools, simply offer what is available; it is the conditions prevailing in the schools and the subject teachers who are

available which determine the programme, rather than what may be identified as labour market needs. Vocational schools and their governing boards cannot, as a rule, decide freely about which courses to provide.

Implementation of the VET management information system began in 2012. Data compatible with some European Quality Assurance Reference Framework (EQARF) indicators (3, 4, 7 and 8a) are collected. For example, extensive data are collected and published on secondary VET participation (public and private), broken down by gender, age, ethnicity, grade, educational outcomes and dropout rates. In addition, teachers are monitored by gender, age, location and qualifications. A new database has been established to facilitate the licensing of teachers. In terms of quality assurance, however, the management information system lacks the capacity to track the destinations/career paths of VET graduates.

Quality assurance and the qualifications cycle

The NQA is responsible for ensuring that quality assurance processes exist, aiming to preserve the quality of registered qualifications in the NQF and provided to students/candidates through:

- quality assurance during the provision, evaluation and awarding of valid and approved qualifications within the framework;
- quality assurance by accredited institutions for their awarding; and
- verification of occupational standards.

The NQA has been established by Law and has a 13-member Steering Council representing government ministries, organisations, social partners and universities responsible for policy development at NQF level.

To date, the NQA has verified 88 qualifications for inclusion in the NQF and accredited more than 60 VET providers. It has verified 116 occupational standards, which serve as a link between the labour market demands and qualifications. In 2020, 19 occupational standards were going through the process of verification.

The NQA website has a national registry of occupational standards – approved standards (as a result of a verification process), unapproved standards (those that do not meet the criteria), and standards that are being processed – as well as accredited institutions and qualifications registered on the NQF.

Kosovo is an active and full member of the European Qualifications Framework (EQF) Advisory Group. Kosovo referenced its NQF to the EQF in 2016. In 2020, the NQA presented a one-off report that summarises the country developments and implementation regarding the validation of non-formal and informal learning.

Quality assurance and VET provision/provider institutions

Vocational schools have a legal obligation to organise a self-assessment process and the publication of annual self-assessment reports, as an important step to enhance national quality standards in VET. The MES Administrative Instruction issued in 2014 also stipulates that VET institutions must have quality assurance offices that perform tasks such as ensuring the annual and periodical implementation of monitoring; providing advice to teachers and others on their quality assurance responsibilities; coordinating and processing the data; coordinating teaching observation/mentoring scheme; and coordinating the internal and external institutional evaluation.

Most vocational schools in Kosovo have quality coordinators, but there is almost no communication or exchange of information between MES, municipal education directorates and the quality coordinators.

Qualifications are generally developed by MES, the Ministry of Labour and Social Welfare, VET providers, business associations, etc. To be part of the NQF, VET qualifications must be based on occupational standards. The qualifications developed to be included in the NQF must be submitted to the NQA to undergo the verification and approval process. VET qualifications are placed in the NQF through a mechanism developed and managed by the NQA. This consists of procedures for verifying and approving qualifications for inclusion at the defined levels of the framework and criteria, as well as the processes for accreditation of providers offering these qualifications.

The validation process, defined by law, is transparent and consists of four stages: (1) the institution requesting the validation of a qualification/module submits a request, which clearly presents the justification for the qualification/module; (2) an appointed team of experts, supported by the NQA, evaluates the request; (3) the report and recommendations of the experts are presented to the NQA Steering Council for the final decision; and (4) the approved qualification/module is placed in the NQF and published. Moreover, according to the applicable legislation, providers who want to offer qualifications validated under the NQF must be included in the accreditation process.

The accreditation process also includes four phases. The applicant institution submits a complete application, including an application for verification and accreditation, a self-assessment report and other additional documentation based on the criteria set by the NQA. Then an expert team evaluates the application, the self-assessment report and the additional documentation, visits the applicant institution, drafts an evaluation report and makes recommendations, and submits the draft report to the NQA. In the third phase, a draft evaluation report is sent to the applicant institution for comments. The final report is then submitted to the NQA Steering Council, which makes decisions on accreditation by a majority decision. Finally, the NQA publishes the decision and issues the necessary documentation confirming the status of the institution.

According to the applicable legislation, implementation of the NQF and creation of the qualifications system, all qualifications should undergo the validation process and all VET providers should be included in the accreditation process. However, qualifications developed by public authorities and public vocational schools are *de facto* exempt from the requirement. A significant number of qualifications offered by public schools fail to meet either the evaluation criteria or the accreditation criteria or both. The development of occupational standards for the profiles offered by public vocational schools remains a challenge.

Quality assurance and VET teacher/trainer qualifications standards and continuing professional development

The pedagogical staff in Kosovo's vocational secondary schools include both teachers and instructors. Whereas a teacher is responsible for both the theoretical and practical parts of a particular module or subject, an instructor provides assistance only with the practical training. That said, the role of the instructor is not sufficiently clarified in the secondary legislation.

With some exceptions, MES requires newly hired VET teachers to hold a master's degree. Instructors, by contrast, are required to hold a post-secondary qualification and have at least five years of experience in their respective fields.

Responsibility for teacher recruitment rests with the municipal education directorates, except for six schools (the competence centres) operating under the umbrella of the CVETA. MES sets out a general procedure for the appointment of new teachers. Municipalities are free to determine their own specific criteria for the recruitment process.

As a rule, teachers in Kosovo are required to complement their university education with in-service training, but there is insufficient capacity for the provision of in-service training due to the limited number of training providers and scarce resources. This situation is also reflected in vocational schools where, in addition to the theoretical part of the course, teachers are also required to provide practical training to their students. A considerable number of teachers have no previous practical experience.

The findings of a study sponsored by the European Training Foundation (ETF) indicate that the provision of in-service teacher training is not sufficient in volume to meet the requirements set by the licensing process for VET teachers, which calls for 100 contact hours over five years. The study also concludes that the design of in-service training is not tailored to meet teachers' current needs, nor are schools able to plan training in such a way that it contributes to their priorities.

3. STRENGTHS, DEVELOPMENTS, NEEDS

3.1 Needs and challenges

Challenges in relation to improving quality assurance in VET include the need to:

- strengthen links between VET and the labour market, including analysis of labour market skills needs in a labour market information system and the addition of a graduate tracer module to the management information system;
- continue development of NQF-related measures, including quality assurance mechanisms as well as VET standards, curricula and teaching materials;
- put in place a comprehensive strategic framework for the professional development of teachers and trainers and support the performance assessment of all teachers;
- continue to develop and implement the quality assurance framework for VET;
- review and improve the summative assessment conducted by MES through the State Matura exam;
- fully implement the MES Decision of 2016 to accredit public schools;
- address the insufficient human resources of the MES Inspectorate (in 2018, the law on the Inspectorate was put on hold, pending government approval);
- increase NQA staff to levels commensurate with the NQA workload.

4. GOOD PRACTICE EXAMPLES

The centres of competence in Ferizaj and Prizren, drawing on support from Lux-Development and MES, have become leading examples of modern VET institutions. For their educational profiles, these centres of competence have developed several occupational standards with modular curricula, teaching materials, the necessary infrastructure and workshops equipped with specific tools for the proper organisation of professional practice.

In general, the centres of competence have carried out a process to harmonise existing professional standards and curricula. Some profiles have occupational standards but still require curriculum review and the development of teaching materials.

The centres of competence are pioneering public-private partnerships with modern facilities, capable of responding to a strong demand for specific profiles. For example, the Ferizaj centre offers nine profiles in health-related sectors and the Prizren centre offers seven profiles in economics, trade and tourism.

In addition, the Prizren centre is continuously building its capacity and adapting its curriculum and teaching materials in order to become an approved Pearson centre and offer its students the opportunity to obtain internationally recognised BTEC qualifications. The Ferizaj centre has embarked on a long-term partnership Heimerer Academy (Germany) in order to review its curricula and teaching materials. The Ferizaj centre and the Prizren centre have, respectively, two and six qualifications validated in the NQF by the NQA and are both accredited to provide these qualifications.

Recent developments in VET quality assurance

In 2019, the Administrative Instruction on criteria and procedures for the accreditation of institutions implementing the RPL in Kosovo was adopted. With a view to implementing the RPL, the NQA carried out various awareness-raising and capacity-building activities, such as training the teams who will evaluate the providers issuing qualifications through the RPL, and training the providers implementing the RPL (practitioners such as coordinators, mentors and evaluators (internal and external)). An accreditation process is ongoing for the first wave of providers who have applied for the RPL accreditation process.

The ETF has supported the RPL development in Kosovo.

It is worth mentioning that as a result of the Covid pandemic the NQA, by decision of the NQA Steering Committee, has issued a circular on procedures related to the conduction of virtual and customised meetings during the qualification/module validation and institutional accreditation processes, accreditation for RPL provision and the process of verifying the standard of the profession via virtual means.

The NQA has also started the remote monitoring process for accredited institutions by gathering relevant information about hired teachers/trainers, number of candidates, evaluation and certification, credits, etc.

Research and review of quality assurance mechanisms, including relevant stakeholders and providers, is supported by an EU-funded project. It aims to assess the current situation at country

level. Twenty vocational schools are included in this activity aimed at capacity building and implementation of internal quality assurance.

The Labour Market Barometer platform was recently launched in cooperation with the Ministry of Labour and Social Welfare, the Agency of Statistics, MES and relevant partners in order to identify the labour market needs at national level. This instrument contains national statistics on employment, education and employers.

The Administrative Instruction for Workplace Learning in VET Institutions has been adopted. It aims to regulate the way in which workplace learning for students/candidates of initial VET is organised, implemented and evaluated.

LIST OF ACRONYMS

AVETAE	Agency for Vocational Education and Training and Adult Education
CVETA	Council for VET and Adults
ETF	European Training Foundation
EU	European Union
ISCED	International Standard Classification of Education
MES	Ministry of Education and Science
NQA	National Qualifications Authority
NQF	National qualifications framework
RPL	Recognition of prior learning
VET	Vocational education and training

Where to find out more

Website

www.etf.europa.eu

ETF Open Space

<https://openspace.etf.europa.eu>

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LinkedIn

linkedin.com/company/european-training-foundation

E-mail

info@etf.europa.eu



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