

QUALITY ASSURANCE IN VOCATIONAL EDUCATION AND TRAINING IN ALBANIA

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1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 National context

Albania is an upper-middle-income country with a population of 2.88 million. The economy continues to expand, bolstered by a favourable domestic and external environment. Real GDP growth reached 3.8% in 2017, reflecting an increase in capital investments but also growth in private consumption.

Labour market indicators have been improving over the past few years. The labour force participation rate (adults aged 20 to 64 years old) increased to 73.9% in 2017 and unemployment is on a downward trend, declining from a peak of 17.5% in 2014 to 13.7% in 2017.

1.2 Statistics

TABLE 1. POPULATION

	Size of population	Relative size of youth population (15–24, %)
2010	2 918 674	22.0
2014	2 892 394	25.8
2018	2 870 324	23.7

Source: Institute of Statistics of Albania (INSTAT)

TABLE 2. EMPLOYMENT

	Employment rate (overall, %)	Employment rate of young people (15–24, %)
2010	60.3	23.4
2014	56.6	17.7
2018	63.9	25.7

Source: INSTAT

TABLE 3. EDUCATIONAL ATTAINMENT OF ACTIVE POPULATION (%)

	Early school leaving (18–24)	Low	Medium	High
2010	31.9	51.6	35.9	12.5
2014	26.0	45.6	37.1	17.3
2018	19.6	43.2	36.8	20.0

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

**TABLE 4. PARTICIPATION IN VOCATIONAL EDUCATION AND TRAINING (VET)
(PERCENTAGE OF OVERALL AGE COHORT IN EDUCATION AND TRAINING)**

	Upper-secondary (ISCED 3) VET
2010	9.1
2015	16.4
2018	18.2

Source: Ministry of Education, Sports and Youth; Ministry of Finance and Economy

TABLE 5. SPENDING ON GENERAL EDUCATION

	2010	2014	2018
% of GDP	3.4	3.3	3.2
% of total public expenditure	13.0	10.5	10.9

Source: Ministry of Finance and Economy

1.3 The VET system

Secondary VET starts upon completion of nine years of compulsory schooling. Vocational schools offer formal vocational education. However, a few of these schools are mixed, that is, they provide both general education (known as gymnasium) and VET tracks at upper-secondary level. Both formal gymnasium and four-year VET programmes lead to State Matura exams, whose successful completion permits access to higher education and/or post-secondary education.

VET programmes offer exit points after two, three or four years (depending on the programme). Upon completion, graduates receive a Vocational State Matura certificate (if relevant, ISCED and Albanian Qualifications Framework (AQF) level 4), as well as a final certificate for their respective VET programme (usually ISCED 3 and AQF level 2, 3 or 4).

Governance and management

The Ministry of Finance and Economy is currently in charge of policymaking, the legal framework and all aspects of funding, appointment of directors, etc. The National Agency for Employment and Skills is in charge of managing VET providers. There are no administrative structures for VET at subnational levels.

The National Agency for VET and Qualifications (NAVETQ) is in charge of the implementation of the AQF, which includes a catalogue of occupations, vocational qualifications and related standards and descriptions; frame curricula for all VET programmes offered in the formal vocational education system; support for the development of courses in vocational training centres; curricula certification and accreditation, and continuing professional development for teachers and instructors.

Following a Prime Minister's Instruction, a tripartite inter-institutional body known as the Integrated Policy Management Group was established. The group includes the employment and skills sector. However, it meets rather infrequently.

Financing

The state budget is the main source of funding for public vocational schools and basic staff costs in vocational training centres, such as the salaries of the director and a few full-time staff. In addition, school funding is based on historical trends and takes into account the numbers of employed staff and enrolled students, but not the real costs of any specific VET programme.

Regulatory frameworks

The VET system is mainly regulated by Law 15/2017 on Vocational Education and Training in the Republic of Albania, though some sublegal acts are still to be adopted, in particular those concerning the recognition of prior learning.

In addition, the Albanian Parliament adopted the Law on the Albanian Qualifications Framework, which it amended in 2018. The law defines the AQF's objectives, functions and fields, its governing body, its levels and types of qualifications, and its alignment with the European Qualifications Framework.

Main provider institution types

VET is offered in both public and private institutions. According to a mapping carried out by the Ministry of Finance and Economy in 2019–20, there are 890 VET institutions, which are made up of 45 public and 845 non-public organisations.

In the academic year 2018/19, administrative data provided by the ministry indicated that 18,192 students were enrolled in vocational education programmes. Despite improvements in recent years, VET participation remains gender biased. Only one fifth of VET students are females.

Main provision/programme types

Public vocational training centres offer short and long courses, mainly to unemployed individuals. However, they are also open to employed individuals and young people. In addition, vocational training centres cater for 'at risk' groups, such as orphans, disabled people, returning migrants, Roma groups and former prisoners.

All VET curricula include work practice elements. Until a few years ago, however, implementation often fell short of what was stipulated. The National Employment and Skills Strategy 2014–2020 set out to develop the elements of a 'dual system'. In 2017, NAVETQ presented a roadmap to expand company internships for VET students. The Ministry of Finance and Economy and VET institutions, supported by donors, have given new impetus to the organisation of practical classes for students, including when they are engaged in company internships. The subject Basics of Entrepreneurship is now compulsory for VET students.

Main qualifications according to ISCED levels

VET is mainly provided in upper secondary schools (ISCED 3). Post-secondary (ISCED 4) VET programmes are still at an initial stage of development. In the academic year 2017/18, more than 20,000 students enrolled in secondary vocational education, which corresponds to ISCED 3. In the same academic year, only 1,800 students enrolled in post-secondary, non-tertiary VET, which corresponds to ISCED 4.

ENROLMENT IN VET PROGRAMMES BY QUALIFICATION LEVEL

	2012/13	2014/15	2017/18
Secondary vocational education (all programmes)	19,596	22,801	20,605
Post-secondary, non-tertiary VET	1,686	2,017	1,803

2. QUALITY ASSURANCE IN VOCATIONAL EDUCATION AND TRAINING

2.1 Overview

Quality assurance is viewed in terms of the accreditation of VET providers. Accreditation is an external quality evaluation process that determines whether a provider and programmes/vocational qualifications meet the standards set by law. The accreditation process presumes the existence of an internal quality assurance system, such as self-assessment. However, this system is still under construction and has not yet been put into effect.

The new accreditation system includes a school self-assessment, which was piloted in 2018 and implemented systematically in 2019.

2.2 General information on quality assurance at VET system level

The Law on Vocational Education and Training and the Law on the Albanian Qualifications Framework lay the foundation for developing an accreditation model for the Albanian VET system and serve as the legal basis for the quality assurance system.

NAVETQ is in charge of managing the accreditation system for VET providers.

2.3 Quality assurance related to key VET areas

Evidence – statistics, and research and development

A systematic labour market information system is in development. The National Agency for Employment and Skills carries out comprehensive skills needs analyses at national and regional levels in accordance with a tried and tested methodology, and it uses the information to direct vulnerable people toward courses. The agency has thus far conducted four skills needs assessments. It is also in charge of tracer studies that monitor the subsequent employment or education path of vocational school graduates. Other donor-funded skills needs analyses at national/sectoral and regional levels are done on a one-off basis. Such analyses are used to plan and steer the VET system's development, which includes making adjustments to the VET provider network, identifying the profiles offered in each region and monitoring enrolment numbers.

Elements of a VET management information system exist. In the past, not all VET providers submitted key data as required and the Ministry of Finance and Economy was not able to monitor and evaluate the system on a structured basis. Recently, however, the situation has improved. Data are now available, but the challenge is how to use them properly. The Agency for Employment and Skills is rolling out a tracer system that incorporates VET graduates. A manual has been completed (2016),

staff have been trained on the tracer system and a first national report is in preparation. Tracking is carried out by VET institutions with support from local employment offices.

Quality assurance and the qualifications cycle

NAVETQ has developed a framework for VET curriculum design based on descriptions of VET qualifications and occupational standards that are adjustable to local needs. The assessment of VET students focuses on written and practical tests. However, the appropriate assessment of practical skills is limited and industry representatives are rarely involved. The Ministry of Finance and Economy recognises certificates that have been awarded, but the monitoring of training standards and quality of provision is limited.

Following in-depth labour market research, NAVETQ, through the Decision of the Council of Ministers No 514/2017, has updated the 2009 National List of Occupations. NAVETQ develops and uses occupational descriptions as a basis on which to develop the descriptions of qualifications on the list. The list is also used as a classifier for statistical purposes. For example, employment services use the list to codify the skills and qualifications of jobseekers.

The adoption of the AQF is considered key to reforming the qualifications systems and enhancing the quality of its outcomes. In 2018, the Law on the Albanian Qualifications Framework was amended to define the levels and types of qualifications in the AQF, its governing structure and how it relates to the European Qualifications Framework. Three main sublegal acts were approved through a Decision of the Council of Ministers in 2019.

Quality assurance and VET provision/provider institutions

NAVETQ develops formal VET programmes and frame curricula, which are then adjusted and broken down into lesson plans by vocational schools. Vocational training centres are encouraged to develop their own curricula and course materials and have received training to do so. In the past few years, no VET inspections have taken place due to the Inspectorate's lack of resources. New inspection criteria and processes have yet to be defined for VET. A self-assessment system for schools was piloted in 2018 and subsequently implemented in 2019.

Private VET providers undergo a licensing procedure with the National Business Centre in cooperation with the Ministry of Finance and Economy, but quality criteria are unclear and follow-up is lacking.

The donor-funded Baseline Survey of all public VET providers (2014), which was undertaken to assess their internal efficiency and external effectiveness, provided data against 10 key assessment benchmarks. The assessment found that the majority of public VET providers fell into the low performance category.

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

There are general competence standards and standard recruitment procedures for all teachers in general subjects. These are not specific to VET or the various vocational profiles and they are centrally managed for all new teachers through the Ministry of Education, Sports and Youth. VET teachers typically have a degree or (advanced) diploma in a technical field, such as engineering, and so partly do instructors (of practical classes), who are nevertheless not required to have a university

diploma. The competences and performance of teachers and instructors are not assessed systematically.

According to new regulations, new VET teachers and trainers must have two to three years of industry-based experience. In 2015–16, NAVETQ launched a 24-day Basics of Didactics programme. By the end of 2019, roughly 70% of all teachers had gone through the programme.

According to an ETF survey on VET teachers and trainers carried out in 2018, one third of respondents had between 0 and 5 years and another third had between 6 and 15 years of work experience. Close to 10% of teachers have more than 25 years of work experience.

The new by-law 673 of 16 October 2019 to implement the Law on VET (15/2017) assigns formal responsibilities for VET teacher training to NAVETQ and requires VET institutions to appoint continuing professional development coordinators. This change will help to put continuing professional development in VET on a more systematic basis. NAVETQ is currently coordinating teacher and instructor training on the Basics of Didactics programme.

Adequate quality assurance mechanisms are still lacking.

3. DEVELOPMENTS, EMERGING NEEDS AND CHALLENGES

New developments – in progress/in the pipeline

The following TVET developments are underway or planned:

- The renewed National Employment and Skills Strategy 2019–2022 proposes to improve the quality and gender sensitivity of labour market information, develop information-sharing instruments for labour market data, and establish sectoral skills forecasting mechanisms.
- Next steps proposed for the continuing professional development of VET teachers include resourcing NAVETQ to coordinate continuing professional development, adopting competence standards and career paths for VET teachers and trainers, and establishing school development units with responsibility for continuing professional development within VET providers.
- Reinforcement of the VET qualifications quality chain, starting from labour market needs to the awarding of a qualification, entails (i) the establishment of sector skills committees with representation from the private sector to identify qualifications tailored to private sector needs; (ii) internal and external quality-assured qualifications in the AQF; and (iii) stronger emphasis on VET models that integrate work-based learning.
- The strengthening of external quality assurance mechanisms involves determining the accreditation model for public and private providers and setting up the inspection of public VET providers.

Needs and challenges

To improve quality assurance in VET there is a need to:

- continue the implementation of the overarching legal framework for VET and the AQF, and address quality assurance systemically;
- consolidate the institutional structure for quality assurance in VET (Law on VET 15/2017) by ensuring that both human and financial resources are made available to perform the respective responsibilities;
- consider establishing an integrated labour market information system to improve VET labour market relevance and a management information system to support overall monitoring of VET at system and provider levels;
- continue the development and implementation of the AQF, including external quality assurance mechanisms;
- prepare and upskill VET teachers and trainers within a quality assurance framework;
- improve mechanisms for the external monitoring and evaluation of VET providers and provision;
- improve VET providers' capacity for self-assessment and quality assurance overall.

4. GOOD PRACTICE EXAMPLE

In 2017, NAVETQ, with support from the UNDP Skills Development for Employment (SD4E) programme, developed the Guideline for the Self-Assessment of VET providers that is being piloted in the Multifunctional Centre Elbasan with the support of IPA 2013. Over the last two years, the self-assessment process has been implemented system-wide in Albania. Next steps will include capacity building in NAVETQ and VET providers and establishing a digital infrastructure to support implementation in all VET providers. The self-assessment process is considered a first step toward the accreditation of VET providers.

LIST OF ACRONYMS

AQF	Albanian Qualifications Framework
ETF	European Training Foundation
EU	European Union
GDP	Gross domestic product
IPA	Instrument for Pre-accession Assistance
ISCED	International Standard Classification of Education
NAVETQ	National Agency for VET and Qualifications
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
VET	Vocational education and training

Where to find out more

Website

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