

COUNTRY BRIEF – ALBANIA

Integrated monitoring process of the
EU Council Recommendation on VET
and the Osnabruck Declaration

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CONTENTS

CONTENTS	3
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INTRODUCTION	4
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NATIONAL VET CONTEXT	5
Governance of VET	5
VET regulation	5
Policy background	5
VET development status	6

NATIONAL VET PRIORITIES	8
-------------------------	---

MAIN POLICY DEVELOPMENTS IN 2021	9
----------------------------------	---

KEY STATISTICS	11
----------------	----

CONCLUSIONS	12
-------------	----

ANNEX: ANNUAL DATA	13
--------------------	----

ACRONYMS	14
----------	----

REFERENCES	15
------------	----

INTRODUCTION

According to the National Institute of Statistics (INSTAT), in 2022, Albania has a population of 2,793,592 million people of whom almost 33 percent (919,511) live in Tirana region. The number of births per year in the country is shrinking (from more than 82,000 in 1990, 40,000 in 2004, to less than 28,000 in 2021, when, for the first time, the number of deaths exceeded the number of births. Although the number of Albanian emigrants has been declining since 2011 the figures are still concerning. Declining birth rates and ongoing emigration of young Albanians to work abroad has led to a decrease (7%) in the population size over the last two decades (INSTAT census 2001: 3,069,275 inhabitants)¹, translating into lower enrolment rates in both primary and secondary education.

The Government of Albania, now on its third consecutive mandate since 2021, has embarked on important structural reforms to ensure equitable growth, raise productivity and economic competitiveness, create more jobs, and enhance governance and public service delivery. Albania was severely affected by the November 2019 earthquake and the COVID-19 pandemic. Recovery from both earthquake and pandemic, while sustaining the pace of reforms, has been the main focus for the Albanian government. The energy and food crises as well as the ensuing economic consequence of the war in Ukraine on European markets, have put additional pressure on the Albanian economy. Consequently, the real GDP was contracted by 4% in 2020, but rebounded strongly by a projected 7.8% in 2021. Labour market indicators in 2021 improved, but failed to fully reach pre-pandemic levels. A spike in fuel and commodity prices has led to a contraction in consumption and production, but nevertheless the economic growth is expected to continue.

This country brief is part of the integrated monitoring of the EU Council Recommendation on VET and the Osnabruck Declaration, the latter adopted by the ministers responsible for VET in the EU Member States and candidate countries. This is a short overview of the regulations and governance of the initial and continuing VET (including adult education), and the current reforms in these areas, including the relevant legal changes. The aim of the brief is to present the Albanian VET context and help with the identification of the main processes, national priorities and main VET developments, supported by key statistics. Furthermore, this document seeks to assist the development process of the National Implementation Plan (NIP) of the integrated monitoring of VET Recommendations and the Osnabruck Declaration, more specifically, the identification of the most significant measures and their related indicators to be monitored in the coming years.

¹ <http://www.instat.gov.al/en/about-us/census-of-population-and-housing-2020-in-albania/activities-for-population-and-housing-census-2020/activities-for-population-and-housing-census-2020/census-of-population-and-housing-2011-and-the-innovations-of-census-2020/>

National VET CONTEXT

Governance of VET

Vocational Education and Training (VET) is part of the pre-university education system (levels 1 to 5 of the Albanian Qualification Framework – AQF) and is provided by vocational schools, vocational training centres, multifunctional centres, companies, and other licensed VET providers. VET falls under the Ministry of Finance and Economy (MFE), responsible for national policy formulation, development of the legal framework and supervision of its implementation.

There are two MFE-subordinate executive agencies that play a central role in VET development, management, monitoring and quality assurance (QA). The first is the National Agency for Vocational Education, Training and Qualifications (NAVETQ), whose scope is to establish a unified nation-wide system of vocational qualifications, based on the AQF, that supports the alignment of training programmes with the labour market demands. The NAVETQ is responsible for the development of the National Classification of Occupations (based on ISCO -08), occupational standards, qualification and assessment standards and the national frame curricula for the levels 2-5 of the AQF, the accreditation of VET providers, organisation of Continuing Professional Development (CPD) for VET teachers and instructors. The second is the National Agency for Employment and Skills (NAES), responsible for the administration of public VET providers (VET schools and VTCs).

Other relevant VET central agencies include the Ministry for Education and Sports (MES) and its subordinate institutions (the Agency for Quality Assurance in Pre-University Education – AQAPE – and the Centre for Education Services – CES), which are in charge of the recruitment and CPD of teachers of general subjects in VET and the organisation of the Professional State Matura Exams for upper secondary VET students, and the National Council of Vocational Education and Training (NCVET), a tripartite VET advisory body.

VET regulation

Law 15/2017 on VET is the primary law governing the VET system and it is supplemented by more than 12 bylaws that aim to regulate the activity and operation of VET providers, and their responsiveness to labour market needs. The Law contains novelties regarding the governance framework and an increased autonomy of VET providers. Other important laws regulating VET system are the Law on Employment Promotion (Law 15/2019), which designates NAES as the administration entity of the network of public VET providers (secondary VET schools, vocational training centres and multifunctional centres), the Law on the AQF (10247/2010, amended by Law 23/2018), the Law on Craftsmanship (70/2016) and the Law on Pre-University Education (69/2012, amended by Law 48/2018).

Policy background

The Employment and Skills Strategy 2014-2022 (NESS) is the main strategic and policy framework document concerning skill development and employment in Albania. The Strategy is fully aligned with the relevant EU strategies and processes and its overarching goal is to promote quality jobs and skills' opportunities for all Albanian women and men throughout their life. It counts four strategic priorities, namely: (i) foster decent job opportunities through effective labour market policies, (ii) Offer quality vocational education and training to youth and adults, (iii) promote social inclusion and territorial cohesion and (iv) strengthen the governance of the labour market and qualification system. Annual strategy monitoring highlights the achievements and challenges encountered, as well as provides recommendations for future implementation. While NESS 2022 is in its final year of implementation, in

February 2022, the MFE commenced the work on the development of the New Employment and Skills Strategy 2023-2030 through an official working group established by an Order of the Minister.

Recently, Albania has committed to working on the implementation of the EU Council Recommendation objectives of November 2020 and of the Osnabruck Declaration. Additionally, the country has endorsed the Western Balkans Declaration on ensuring sustainable labour market integration of young people and has committed to taking concrete steps to gradually establish and implement the Youth Guarantee scheme.

VET development status

There are 34 public and 12 private schools offering Initial VET (I-VET) in Albania. There are three VET schools that offer post-secondary professional qualifications (AQF level 5) in fashion design, diagnostics and management in auto-service in Vlora and Berat, respectively. Most I-VET programmes follow a 2+1+1 structure (2-year basic vocational training, 1 year of specialisation and 1 year of consolidation). Some of the VET programmes (mainly business administration, ICT and forestry) apply the 2+2 structure (a basic 2-year training followed by a 2-year specialisation phase). The third option is the 4-year structure, only available in three occupational areas – geodesy, veterinary medicine, elderly care services – and in some ICT programmes.

Continuous VET (C-VET) is less structured than I-VET. It consists of short-term training courses (3-9 months) offered by public VTCs or private training entities. The basic requirement to enter vocational training is completion of basic education. Nationally unified training programmes for vocational training courses are developed by the NAVETQ and approved by the MFE. In addition, VTCs have the opportunity to offer other short-term courses based on the request. There are 10 public VTCs and around 833 private training providers licenced to provide C-VET. Permeability in the VET and education system is limited due to lack of secondary legislation and rigid institutional structures and procedures imposed by the current Law on Pre-University education.

The AQF consists of eight levels, with level descriptors formulated as Learning Outcomes organised in three domains of knowledge, skills and broader competence. From 2018, an improved model of Occupational Standard is designed and properly used to better inform the translation of occupational data into qualification standards written in terms of Learning Outcomes. All the updated occupational standards are designed based on this improved model. Occupational standards and/or descriptions in the National List of Occupation are the basis for the development of Vocational Qualifications, part of the National Catalogue of Vocational Qualifications, which currently includes 122 vocational qualifications. National Frame Curricula are modularised, which is crucial in supporting a flexible delivery of qualifications that allow for permeability between different qualifications and between different learning contexts.

The Albanian VET system, from the legal perspective, relies on a comprehensive quality assurance framework, including opening and closing procedures and criteria for public VET providers, licensing procedures and criteria for private VET providers, self-assessment, accreditation, monitoring, and inspection. All 45 public VET providers, based on a clearly defined quality matrix including standards, criteria and indicators (currently supported by a digital platform) have completed the self-assessment process, which is the cornerstone for internal quality assurance. An accreditation model was adopted in 2021 and preparatory steps for the accreditation of VET providers are being taken, including the approval of the accreditation roadmap, selection and training of external assessors, capacity building of the NAVETQ staff, etc. A Council of Ministers Decision was issued in 2021 on the inspection of VET providers. Four comprehensive Skill Needs Analysis were carried since 2010 by NAES, with a new one under discussion. Tracing of VET graduates is conducted by VET providers and NAES, both at the provider and national level.

The framework curriculum allows for 30-35% of Work-Based Learning (WBL) during the first 2 years, 50% in the third year and 20% in the final year of secondary VET programmes to be implemented in real work settings. Vocational education students can pursue their vocational practice in the workplace

since in the 1st grade. Positive efforts have already been made to formalise school-business relations by establishing the School Development Units (SDU) in each public VET provider, and training the SDU coordinators and company mentors (ongoing). Ministerial Order No 220 of 16 September 2020 regulates: (i) responsibilities of central institutions, social partners, public VET providers and businesses engaged in the implementation of company-based vocational practice; (ii) procedures and tools for planning, developing and implementing vocational practices in business; and (iii) quality assurance aspects to ensure the achievement of learning outcomes of VET qualifications.

Responsibilities for strategic leadership, coordination and encouraging provision, quality assurance and recording with respect to Initial and Continuing Professional Development are shared between the MFE, the NAVETQ and the AQAPE. Presently, none of these institutions has full capacity to provide regular CPD for vocational teachers and instructors. Some structural improvements have been made at central level, with a new unit established within the NAVETQ that has a clear mandate on the CPD provision for VET teachers and instructors², and CPD coordinators appointed in each SDU. International donor organisations are active, in partnership with national agencies, in providing CPD as part of larger VET development projects. There are very few national organisations that provide specialised CPD to vocational teachers in Albania. Employers, higher education institutions and teacher associations make little contribution to CPD for vocational teachers.

The Law 15/2017 stipulates State budget, income generated by public VET providers, donor contributions and sponsorships as financial resources for VET providers. However, the main source of funding the public VET in Albania remains the State budget for both the I-VET and C-VET, with the only difference that the vocational training centres can collect some revenues from fees by participants who are not unemployed jobseekers. Despite the higher level of autonomy foreseen in the VET Law, financial self-sufficiency of VET providers is not yet a reality. Donor financing has been critical to VET throughout transition. EU IPA 2019, Swiss Development Cooperation, GIZ, Austrian Development Cooperation and other partners have contributed significantly to the VET reform process.

² 'Basics of didactics in VET' provided by the NAVETQ is introduced as initial qualification for teachers in their first year of work. Previously, this training programme was offered to more than 90% of all vocational teachers/instructors in VET. In 2021, The NAVETQ revised this programme with the aim of integrating digital competence and other relevant soft skills in teaching-learning and students' assessment practices. An ETF study published in 2018 provided evidence of the status of CPD development and areas for improvement.

NATIONAL VET PRIORITIES

In January 2022, the Government of Albania approved the Economic Reform Programme (ERP) 2022-2024, developed by the inter-ministerial group in cooperation with the European Union. The ERP addresses the macroeconomic and fiscal framework for Albania, as well as the medium-term structural reform priorities in eight areas including education and skills. Increasing VET quality and access aimed at integration in the labour market is one of the reform measures under ERP supported by the planned activities in 2022, 2023 and 2024, which include completion of the legal framework to ensure financial autonomy for VET providers, refining the Occupational and Qualifications Standards' development process, the process of translating Occupational and Qualification Standards into Assessment Standards, implementation of the Accreditation system, operationalisation of the National Vocational Education and Training Council, implementation of the Optimisation Plan for VET providers and implementation of infrastructure and institutional development plans (school infrastructure and well-equipped workshops/laboratories), establishment of sectoral committees, competency development of VET teachers, VET supporting staff and teacher trainers. The NESS 2023-2030 will be the main strategic and policy framework that elaborates future VET priorities. On February 18, 2022, the Working Group for the Development of the National Strategy for Skills and Employment 2023-2030 was established at an Order of the Minister of Finance and Economy.

The COVID-19 pandemic imposed significant challenges for the development and implementation of VET policies, and the delivery of VET programmes. During lockdown, all secondary vocational education providers had to switch from classroom and work-based learning to online learning, which created new opportunities for the role of digital competences to ensure a more efficient VET system, which NESS 2023-2030 will specifically address.

MAIN POLICY DEVELOPMENTS IN 2021

The NAVETQ has undergone a re-structuring process, which resulted with a new organisational structure of 36 staff (from 16 employees) (including the function of CPD of VET teachers and instructors). NAES, established in June 2019, underwent a restructuring process during 2020 and 2021 and expanded from 36 to 90 employees at the Head Office. Recruitment processes of new staff will continue throughout 2022 in both agencies, which are expected to become soon fully effective on the new functional areas.

In February 2022, the Advisory Board of the European Qualification Framework approved the Albanian referencing report to European Qualification Framework (EQF) and self-referencing to QF-EHEA, which allows for certificates and diplomas awarded for AQF qualifications (VET, General Secondary Education and Higher Education) by education and training institutions in Albania to have a reference to the specific EQF level. In May 2021, the National Catalogue of Vocational Qualifications, including 122 vocational qualifications of levels, 2 through 5, of the AQF was approved. The first Sector Committee (SC) in the IT sector was established in March 2021. The NAVETQ has developed internal regulations of the Technical Secretariat, and regulations on selection of SC members and other supporting documents. Members of SC and the Technical Secretariat have already been nominated.

In May 2021, the instruction of the Minister of Finance and Economy on the organisation and activity of the VET providers, management of human resources, composition of the SDU and CPD of the VET staff was approved. Following the adoption of this bylaw, the SDUs are established in all public VET providers. The NAVETQ has trained all coordinators and school managers on school-business relationships, CPD, curriculum development and 15 coordinators on career guidance.

In May 2021, a model for initial professional development of VET teachers was approved and is being implemented for all newly hired teaching staff in the public VET institutions.

The self-assessment tool of VET providers was revised by the NAVETQ to reflect feedback from implementation and include new aspects of the regulatory framework for public VET providers, including organisational changes in VET Providers, to support internal quality development efforts (head of SDU as quality coordinator). These steps informed the improvement of the respective secondary legislation on self-assessment. In 2020, the NAVETQ designed the accreditation model for VET providers, including roles and responsibilities of institutions for the accreditation, standards and criteria, accreditation procedures, as well as a road map to support the accreditation process roll-out. The proposed accreditation model was adopted by Order No 128/2021 of the Minister, following consultations with the MFE, the NAES, pre-university institutions, social partners, public and non-public VET providers. The NAVETQ has designed a road map to support the implementation, starting with the capacity building of 38 external evaluators and NAVETQ staff. Five VET providers are expected to undergo the accreditation process during 2022.

The optimisation of VET providers remains a priority and the working group resumed its activities to support its implementation.

The DCM on the establishment of the system for the recognition of prior learning was adopted in December 2021. This decision defines the rules for the recognition of previous formal and informal learning for the achievement of vocational qualifications in levels 2 to 5 of the AQF.

In December 2021, the DCM on new procedures and criteria for the inspection of non-public and public VET providers entered into force. The ministry responsible for VET will develop and approve detailed internal regulations for VET inspection.

The Albanian Government has committed to establish a Youth Guarantee scheme. Actions to support this initiative include the establishment of both an inter-ministerial and technical group, which will serve as the coordination mechanism for the development of the Youth Guarantee Implementation Plan with

the involvement of all relevant stakeholders and strengthening capacities of the NAES for the implementation of the youth guarantee scheme.

A review of the regulatory framework and provision of post-secondary and higher VET in Albania conducted in 2021 found out that the number of post-secondary study programmes offered by private Higher Education Institutions (HEI) continue to grow. A survey conducted on post-secondary programmes in three selected sectors (ICT, tourism and construction) in 2021 confirmed the potential of post-secondary programmes and showed that most of the surveyed companies are interested to cooperate with the educational providers in the design, delivery and assessment of post-secondary programmes. Another study on inclusive VET for persons with disabilities published in December 2021 provided a clear overview of the challenges students with disabilities face in VET, and the barriers to the implementation of quality and inclusive VET for persons with disabilities, recommending specific actions for the government and other stakeholders.

KEY STATISTICS

VET in Albania is offered in 32 upper secondary public and 2 joint General Secondary-VET schools mostly concentrated in the Durrës-Tirana-Elbasan corridor. There are 16 516 students enrolled in VET in the current academic year 2021-2022 (or around 17% of the total number of students enrolled in upper secondary education), which is 3% less than in the previous academic year and 15% less than 4 years ago and is mostly for demographic reasons. The number of vocational profiles offered in VET schools totals 85 under 21 programmes. ICT (11 VET schools) and Hotelier-Tourism (15 VET schools) are the programmes in the Albanian VET system that are most widely offered. A total of 63% of VET students are involved in the WBL and 64.5% of VET students are employed immediately after graduation. The types of training offered in private VET schools is very limited and mainly concentrated in Tirana.

There are 10 public Vocational Training Centres (VTCs) offering training programmes for adults located in eight counties. Most training courses delivered in public VTCs are technical and short term with a duration of 3-6 months. From 2018, the national framework curricula for the training courses has been developed by the NAVETQ. Currently, vocational training courses are not included in the AQF. There were around 15 000 persons enrolled in the 10 public VTC courses in 2018, the year before COVID-19 pandemic. Currently, there are 930 licensed private vocational training offers, 65% of which located in Tirana. The courses delivered most often are in foreign languages, hairdressing, culinary skills and computing. There are no exact figures available showing the number of persons trained in private training institutions. The Adult Education Survey of 2017 shows that 9.2 % of the population aged 25-64 have participated in formal and non-formal education and training in Albania.

CONCLUSIONS

The implementation of the NESS 2014-2022 has created a solid foundation for offering quality vocational education and training to youth and adults in Albania. Significant results have been achieved over recent years with regard to consolidation of the institutional and legal frameworks. As things currently stand, it is necessary to strike a balance between improving these frameworks and delivering results for end beneficiaries.

VET governing institutions have been strengthened, their functions are well aligned and monitoring and evaluation frameworks have been improved. However, it is paramount that VET institutions are more involved in proper planning and delivery of results.

Good progress was noted in the development and implementation of the AQF, and quality assurance mechanisms in VET have started to work, initially with the self-assessment carried out in all VET providers and with the approved model for accreditation in line with EU standards. Efforts need to be put into implementing the activities planned in the roadmap for the accreditation of VET providers.

A VET optimisation plan is being implemented, while the regulation on organisation and activity in VET schools is in place. Increased autonomy for VET providers and operationalisation and strengthening of the inspection system should be in the focus of future activity.

ICT SSCs shall become effective to support the NAVETQ in developing and approving the occupational vocational qualifications standards included in the National Catalogue of Vocational Qualifications. The establishment of SSCs should continue in the other priority sectors. NCVET should also become operational and dialogue with the private sector should be improved.

Recognition of prior informal and non-formal learning should continue in the coming years, while establishing a new lifelong learning culture, the relevance of C-VET and digitalisation and sustainability, and a green link in VET will be the areas of future VET challenges in Albania.

ANNEX: Annual data

Indicator	2010	2015	2019	2020	
Total Population (,000)	2 913.0	2 880.7	2 854.2	2 837.8	
Relative size of youth population (age group 15-24 and denominator age 15-64, %)	27.8	25.2	22.2	21.4	
GDP growth rate (%)	3.7	2.2	2.1	-3.9	
Public expenditure on education (as % of GDP)	M.D.	3.4	3.3	3.4	
Adult literacy (%)	96.8 (2011)	M.D.	98.1 (2018)	M.D.	
Gross enrolment rates in upper secondary education (ISCED level 3) (%)	80.1	94.7	92.7	91.9	
Share of VET students in upper secondary education (ISCED level 3) (%)	14.2	16.3	18.2	18.0	
Participation in training/lifelong learning (age group 25-64) by sex (%)	Total	2.1	1.0	0.8	0.7
	Male	2.1	1.0	1.0	0.8
	Female	2.2	1.1	0.7	0.6
Participation in training/lifelong learning (age group 25-64) (%)	Low	0.9	0.2	0.1	0.1
	Medium	2.5	1.2	0.8	0.8
	High	6.9	3.0	2.5	1.7
Participation in training/lifelong learning (age group 25-64) (%)	Inactive	3.6	2.0	2.2	1.5
	Employed	1.6	0.6	0.3	0.4
	Unemployed	1.1	1.6	1.7	1.1
Employment rate by educational attainment (% aged 15+%)	Low	43.0	41.4	48.6	46.3
	Medium	50.1	47.9	53.7	54.0
	High	66.9	59.2	66.4	66.6

Source: Institute of Statistics

ACRONYMS

AQAPE	Agency for Quality Assurance in Pre-University Education
AQF	Albanian Qualification Framework
CES	Centre for Education Services
CPD	Continuous Professional Development
C-VET	Continuous Professional Development
DCM	Decree of Council of Ministers
EQF	European Qualification Framework
ERP	Economic Reform Programme
HEI	Higher Education Institutions
I-VET	Initial VET
MES	Ministry for Education and Sports
MFE	Ministry of Finance and Economy
NAES	National Agency for Employment and Skills
NAVETQ	National Agency for Vocational Education, Training and Qualifications
NCVET	National Council of Vocational Education and Training
NESS	The Employment and Skills Strategy 2014-2022
SC	Sector Committee
SDU	School Development Units
VET	Vocational Education and Training
WBL	Work Based Learning

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