

COUNTRY BRIEF – MONTENEGRO

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

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INTRODUCTION

The economy of Montenegro, which had been on a slow but steady path of improvement, was hit hard by the economic crisis brought on by the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020. However, Montenegro is rebounding from the COVID-19-induced recession of 2020, thanks to a faster-than-expected recovery in 2021. Boosted by a rapid recovery in tourism, Montenegro's economy is projected to rebound strongly by an estimated 10.8% in 2021. Being heavily dependent on the tourism and services sectors, a strong peak summer season in 2021 has supported a rebound in tourism revenues, which are likely to reach close to 75% of their 2019 levels, from the previously estimated 55%. An ambitious government economic programme called 'Europe now' also brought a significant increase in salaries by the end of the year. The programme has set the following objectives: increasing the standard of living of citizens; employment growth; reduction of the 'grey economy' in the labour market, and improving the environment for business and investment.

However, a new political instability caused by demands either for a new government to be formed or a general election to be held, paired with inflation and the higher cost of living due to the war in Ukraine, has created a feeling of uncertainty.

A comprehensive education sector review carried out by the United Nations Children's Fund has been concluded and its recommendations are expected to be released soon.

It seems that vocational education and training may play a decisive role in adapting to the rapid changes in the local, regional and global labour market and thus help the economy face the challenges of living in these difficult times. The Economic Reforms Programme 2021-23¹ emphasises the importance of the quality of practical training and career guidance.

In the context of EU enlargement, Montenegro is committed to the EU Council Recommendation on VET and the Osnabrück Declaration. This country brief is part of the process for the integrated monitoring of the EU Council Recommendation on VET and the Osnabrück Declaration, the latter adopted by the ministers of EU Member States and candidate countries who are responsible for the sector. It is a brief overview of the regulation and governance of initial and continuous VET (including adult education), and current reforms in these sectors, including changes in related legislation.

The objective of this document is to present the country VET context and assist the identification of the main processes, national priorities and main developments in VET, supported by key statistics. The purpose of the document is to further assist the process of development of the National Implementation Plan (NIP) for integrated monitoring of the EU Council Recommendations on VET and the Osnabrück Declaration, and more specifically, identification of the most significant measures – with indicators – to be monitored in the next few years.

¹ Montenegro Economic Reform Programme 2021-2023, <https://www.gov.me/en/documents/993f6bc7-bace-4ec7-b49a-f58419ec9804>

National VET context

Governance of VET

The development and implementation of Vocational Education and Training (VET) education policy in Montenegro is mainly the responsibility of the Ministry of Education, Science, Culture and Sports (MESCS). The following institutions and professional bodies take part in Montenegrin VET system organisation after the institutional re-organisation of 2021.

The MESCS is responsible for all levels of education. One of the organisational units of the ministry is the Directorate for Secondary General Education, Vocational Education and Lifelong Education within which a division for adult education operates. The Directorate carries out the activities of: planning, monitoring and analysing the situation in the area of secondary general education, vocational education and adult education. The Ministry of Education is responsible for planning, implementing and improving the educational policy. For the purpose of providing decision-making assistance, the National Council for Education, the Higher Education Council, and the Qualifications Council have been established.

The National Council for Education, along with the Qualifications Council, represents the largest professional body in the area of education. Standing working bodies of the National Council include: General Education Committee; Vocational Education Committee; Adult Education Committee.

The Qualifications Council works on the improvement of the system of qualifications, their approval and classification in the Qualifications Framework. Members of the Qualifications Council are representatives of: the National Council for Education, the Council for Higher Education, the Directorate for Secondary General Education, Vocational Education and Adult Education at the Ministry of Education, Science, Culture and Sports, the Department for qualifications at the Ministry of Education, Science, Culture and Sports, the Ministry of Finance and Social Welfare, universities, the VET Centre, the Bureau for Educational Services, the Examination Centre, the Employment Office, the Union of Employers, the Chamber of Economy and the Trade Union for Education. In order to make comprehensive analysis of the situation and tendencies in the labour market, analysis of existing qualifications, and identify the needs for certain qualifications and qualifications development, the Qualifications Council has established 15 sectorial commissions.

The Ministry of Economic Development performs activities which are directed at enhancing competitiveness, investment in the environment and cooperation with the business community. It also adopts programmes of education that lead to the acquisition of national professional qualifications, as well as programmes of education for professional training, retraining, additional training, professional development and specialisation, following the proposal of the National Council for Education. The ministry is also leading Montenegro's work on preparing for the Youth Guarantee Scheme for which VET is an important component. Also, the latest strategy for entrepreneurship development has its home in the ministry.

The national VET agency, the VET Centre, carries out developmental, advisory, research and expert activities, as well as quality assurance and evaluation of educational work quality in the area of vocational education and adult education. The centre is in charge of the development of vocational education qualifications and curricula, advisory support, and research within the vocational education of young people and adults.

VET provision

After leaving compulsory, 9-year primary education, students can choose between 4-year general secondary education (*gymnasia*) and VET. Around two thirds of students in Montenegro choose VET. Secondary vocational education in Montenegro is provided in accordance with the provisions of the General Act on Education and the provisions of the Vocational Education Act.

In line with the legal provisions, vocational education in Montenegro can be provided as:

- lower vocational education (2 years), completion of which results in attainment of a lower vocational education qualification (these programmes have not been offered recently);
- secondary vocational education (3 or 4 years), completion of which results in attainment of a 3-year or 4-year secondary vocational education qualification. The 3-year programmes are offered in both school-based (most of the practical training is done at school workshops) and dual mode (all of the practical training is done at employers) settings, and these programmes do not allow for university schooling.

However, the 4-year VET courses allow for both labour market entrance and for further study at universities and faculties. A good number of VET students do enrol for tertiary studies. The most popular 4-year VET courses are in the sectors of Medicine and Health, Tourism and Catering, and Economics.

- Post-secondary vocational education (2 years, as continued secondary vocational education), completion of which results in attainment of higher vocational education qualification. These programmes have not been offered recently except by the Police Academy.

The master craftsman's exam also belongs to post-secondary vocational education. This exam can be taken by graduates from 4-year VET programmes with 2 years of professional experience or graduates from 3-year programmes with 3 years of professional experience.

Continuing vocational education and training or to use the preferred term in Montenegro, adult education, has been promoted among different target groups (those who have dropped out of education, the unemployed without a qualification or with a qualification not needed in the labour market, the employed, and unemployed persons who need education and training for adaptation to the labour market). It is provided in line with the Adult Education Act and other national short-term or long-term documents setting priorities in adult education.

Adults who wish to attain a qualification have access to adapted publicly recognised educational programmes for formal education. More than 100 different programmes of education for retraining and additional training, also known as training programmes, after which a national vocational qualification may be attained through assessment, have been adopted so far.

Adult education can be organised at schools, specialised adult education organisations, institutions for care and accommodation of persons with special needs, as well as other legal entities that meet prescribed conditions and have a licence to work issued by the MESCS, in accordance with the law and relevant rulebook. A total 119 licenses for implementation of adult study programmes have been issued to education providers by the MESCS. They are also recognised at the same time as service providers for active labour market policies delivered by the Public Employment Service.

National VET priorities

National VET priorities in Montenegro are mainly defined by national VET strategies covering 4-year time periods and accompanying action plans which cover 2-year time periods. Currently, VET Development Strategy 2020-2024² is in place and the Action Plan for 2022-2023 is being drafted.

The strategy proclaims that the strategic goal of the development of vocational education is a *quality and inclusive system of vocational education which is the basis for lifelong learning, economic and social integration, personal and professional development of an individual, with an effective system of management and financing.*

It sets three operational objectives which are further divided into measures to be implemented. There are also eight indicators to be reached for the defined objectives. The objectives are as follows:

1. Vocational education that provides skills, competencies and qualifications for employability, lifelong learning, inclusion, personal development and active citizenship of individuals.

This objective targets VET curricula and talks about development of qualifications in accordance with the principles of the National Qualifications Framework. Educational programmes are to be flexible, modularised and credit-evaluated, of broad profiles, based on learning outcomes including professional and key competencies. The VET Centre developed 65 modularised educational programmes in the period from 2017 to 2021, and we can say that it has been one of the key areas in the previous period. Ten programmes are being modularised in 2022 and a dozen remain to be modularised in 2023.

2. Innovative and accessible vocational education which is relevant to the individual, labour market and society

This objective focuses on a few interconnected measures, the first of which is in relation to work-based learning in a real work environment, accompanied by improving the professional development of teachers and management staff in vocational education. Strengthening mechanisms for improvement of work-based learning in all forms (school-based, company-based, and a combination of the two) remains high on the agenda of VET reforms.

It also suggests further development of a quality assurance system in vocational education at the national and school level, in accordance with the European Framework for Quality Assurance in Vocational Education (EQAVET) and emphasises the need to make adult training and qualifications available.

3. All-embracing and effective vocational education, with management and funding that fosters excellence and efficiency.

In order to provide excellent VET, the system needs to secure optimum conditions for delivering VET programmes, so that improving infrastructure and technical conditions at VET providers is an urgent issue. However, as equipment for VET programmes is often very expensive, more innovative solutions have to be sought. Therefore this objective should also aim to enhance participation of social partners in the defining of policy, planning, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of vocational education, and make a clear division of responsibilities between stakeholders in the management and financing of vocational education. An attempt to connect all the stakeholders at the local level is being tested through the Local Partnerships for Employment initiative.

It also states that there is room for improving international cooperation in the field of vocational education.

As for adult education, the Strategy for Adult Education of Montenegro 2015-2025³ and Annual Plans of Adult Education, which are designed every year, are the governing strategic documents. The

² VET Development Strategy 2020-24, <https://wapi.gov.me/download/3f8ece83-b549-4c84-8ae9-a8620ff67928?version=1.0>

³ The Strategy for Adult Education of Montenegro 2015-2025, <https://www.euprava.me/ResourceManager/FileDownload.aspx?rId=318&rType=2>

leading principle of the Strategy for Adult Education of Montenegro 2015-2025 refers to creating an environment for involving citizens in the lifelong learning process with a view to developing a competitive market economy, reducing unemployment and social exclusion.

In the beginning of 2015, the former Ministry of Education, appointed the VET Centre as Electronic Platform for Adult Learning in Europe (EPALE) National Support Service for Montenegro. The implementation of the 'EPALE National Support Service for Montenegro' project started in 2016. The EPALE network, i.e. the portal, has been designed for teachers, trainers, researchers, policymakers and anyone having a professional role in adult education throughout Europe. However, in 2021 three quarters of all adult education training took place in the capital Podgorica. Only 7.6% of all the training at State level was delivered by schools.

Main policy developments in 2021

As the Montenegro Report 2021 (European Commission, Regular Progress Report)⁴ states, some progress was made on the 2020 recommendations on continuing education reform, in particular on VET. However, the establishment of the new MESCS, and related staff changes, paired with the COVID-19 pandemic led to a slowing-down in reforms. The focus was on provision of a hybrid system of classroom and online schooling. What suffered most of all was work-based learning as there was limited provision of practical training at enterprises due to a complete or partial lockdown.

Reforms of VET continued in line with the current VET strategy (2020-2024) and related action plans. It involved VET qualifications development and related practical experience, quality assurance, and key competences development, involving cooperation with the Chamber of Economy and the business community.

Legal framework

The only change related to laws was the one prescribing teaching time for teachers working in the VET sector. The teaching time has been reduced by 10% for all the teachers working in VET, which means that teachers are to deliver between 16 (certain general subjects) to 20 teaching hours per week. For VET theoretical subjects it is 18 hours and for practical training 20 hours of teaching time a week (a teaching hour is 45 minutes in Montenegro; however, due to the COVID-19 pandemic their duration is still 30 minutes).

Further modernisation of qualifications

Montenegro referenced its National Qualifications Framework - the Montenegrin Qualifications Framework to the European Qualifications Framework for lifelong learning and the Qualifications Framework for the European Higher Education Area, and thus indirectly to national qualifications frameworks of other European countries in 2012. Ever since, designing new and redesigning existing qualifications has been the focus of VET, financed partly through EU IPA II funds.

In 2021, 31 occupational standards, 32 standards of professional qualifications and 12 standards of qualifications at the level of education were adopted by the Qualifications Council, which was followed by 12 educational programmes, adopted by the National Council for Education. Also 20 examination catalogues were designed but they have not been adopted yet due to a stall in the functioning of the National Council for Education⁵.

Among those, a certain number of qualification standards (Painter, Floor-layer, Tile installers, Drywall installer and Hotel-restaurant technician) were developed within the regional project 'TO REGOS - Towards regionally based occupational standards' funded by the Austrian Development Agency from Austrian Development Cooperation and agreed between the six regional economies: Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo, Northern Macedonia, Serbia and Montenegro.

Quality Assurance

The VET Centre (a national VET agency) has been officially nominated by the Ministry of Education, Science, Culture and Sport as a reference national institution for quality assurance in vocational education within the EQAVET networks.

⁴ Montenegro Report 2021, https://ec.europa.eu/neighbourhood-enlargement/montenegro-report-2021_en

⁵ MESCS data

In February 2021, the annual online meeting of the European Training Foundation Forum for Quality Assurance in Vocational Education was held, which was attended by the national contact persons of the member countries of the forum.

A new methodology for assessing the quality of educational work in institutions, designed in cooperation with the Bureau for Educational Services (BES), which is in charge of all levels of pre-university general education, was adopted in December 2021. The major change is that evaluations of VET and 'mixed' schools (delivering both VET and general education programmes) will be conducted by joint teams of the VET Centre and BES evaluators as these schools have until now been subject to independent school evaluations by both the VET Centre and the BES. The quality framework is common for all the primary and secondary schools but there are 13 quality indicators typical for VET schools, based on the EQAVET framework. Due to COVID-19 the number of regular school evaluations has been reduced. In 2021, three VET schools and one adult education provider were the subject of external school evaluation.

In order to create a wider pool of external school evaluators for VET schools, criteria for their selection were designed and an open call for external associates (-evaluators) was issued. There are about 70 applicants who have met the eligibility criteria and their training is underway. The quality assurance department within the VET Centre is also working on clarifying and describing the quality indicators defined by the new methodology.

MESCS and the VET Centre also conducted various research activities in 2021.

Regarding work-based learning, an Analysis of dual education in Montenegro from 2017 to 2021⁶ has been carried out and the project 'Perception of employers participating in the dual education system on the implementation of this process in Montenegro'⁷, which was done jointly by the Chamber of Economy and Ministry of Education, Science, Culture and Sports, in cooperation with the VET Centre.

Analysis and tracking of VET students after completing the 2019/20 school year was conducted by the VET Centre. Graduate tracking system analysis, supported by the International Labour Organisation, was carried out in 2021. This study also suggested a roadmap to Montenegro on the establishment of a tracking system (to be published soon). The VET Centre designed an e-questionnaire to be used for tracking purposes.

All the analyses were used to inform policies in 2022. Strengthening cooperation with employers and generating high-quality data on VET outcomes and labour market needs have been suggested by these analyses.

A manual for self-evaluation of adult education institutions by the VET Centre of Montenegro 2021 was produced in order to facilitate this process at adult education provider level.

The Self-reflection on Effective Learning by Fostering the Use of Innovative Educational Technologies (SELFIE) tool, and SELFIE for work-based learning, which allow for annual self-evaluation on the use of digital technologies in teaching, was being implemented in all primary and secondary schools as well in 2020.

The strategy on lifelong entrepreneurial learning (2020-2024)⁸, which is under the Ministry of Economic Development, and covers entrepreneurial learning through formal education at all education levels, as well as through non-formal education, is being implemented. The vision set by the strategy is development of entrepreneurial spirit and entrepreneurial competencies throughout society and at all levels of education, so that the entrepreneurial knowledge, skills and creativity of individuals are directed towards transforming ideas into economic activities, and creating values of sustainable individual, social and economic prosperity. To fulfil the vision, the following strategic goals have been set: 1. improve the development of entrepreneurial competence at all levels of formal education; 2.

⁶ Dual education in Montenegro: Practical training in three-year educational programmes, https://www.etf.europa.eu/sites/default/files/2020-09/dual_education_in_montenegro.pdf

⁷ https://www.privrednakomora.me/sites/pkcg.org/files/multimedia/pages/files/2012/09/istrazivanje_2021_-_dualni_sistem_obrazovanja_final.pdf

⁸ The strategy for lifelong entrepreneurial learning (2020-2024), <https://wapi.gov.me/download/59a998e8-af01-4e54-a205-fc81584163f8?version=1.0>

improve the realisation of entrepreneurial learning within non-formal education; 3. increase the efficiency of the functioning of the entrepreneurial learning system.

Professional competences of VET staff

During 2021, numerous training courses were held for educators in the VET sector (with IPA II support to a great extent). A total of 1 347 VET teachers attended the courses based on 25 professional development programmes for teachers accredited in the Catalogue of Professional Development for VET Teachers.

A new Catalogue of Professional Development programmes for VET teachers and educators, containing a total of 173 training programmes that can be offered to VET teachers in 2021/22 and 2022/23, was adopted.

The VET Centre organised a good number of training courses for teachers, coordinators, pedagogues / psychologists and principals / assistant principals for the implementation of newly-adopted modularised educational programmes, as well as the training of members of the working group for writing standards of professional qualifications that are the basis for the development of educational programmes.

The check all were delivered either online or face-to-face, depending on the COVID-19 related measures in place at the time.

Regional cooperation and mobility

As part of the Erasmus+ project 'Connected through Mobility', the Project Team of the VET Centre and Training announced a call for participation in the mobility process for students attending educational programmes in the field of tourism and hospitality. The selection of teachers and students is underway.

The Montenegrin national VET agency has signed separate agreements on educational, scientific research, professional and technical cooperation in VET with its counterparts in Serbia and Croatia. Joint activities in curricula design and quality assurance in VET are being considered.

2021 saw the beginning of the new regional project, led by the Education Reform Initiative of South Eastern Europe secretariat: Enhancing the Quality of Education and Training in South Eastern Europe. The project officially started on 1 October 2021 and is expected to last until 30 September 2024. It is financed by the Austrian Development Agency with funds from Austrian Development Cooperation, with a total budget of around EUR 2 million, and co-financed by the Education Reform Initiative of South Eastern Europe.

At national level, the project will be implemented by VET agencies and chambers of commerce and quality assurance agencies in pre-tertiary education from the region. The project outputs are regionally based occupational standards and qualification standards, integrated into nationally adopted versions; national curricula integrating work-based learning elements, teaching and learning materials for teachers and company instructors, and accompanying training courses. In addition, the project aims to develop regional recommendations for external evaluators' standards, with accompanying training courses, and regional recommendations for processes of external evaluation of institutions, supporting enhancement of the culture of quality in schools.

Two IPA projects, 'Development of educational programmes in accordance with the needs of the labour market' and 'Integration of key competences in the education system of Montenegro', ended in 2021. The former was completely devoted to VET and the latter included a good number of VET teachers and staff being trained on key competences as mentioned above.

Excellence in VET

With the Regional Challenge Fund, vocational training providers partner with companies to customise cooperative training programmes that teach students the skills companies need. The Regional Challenge Fund will fund investments in the equipment and infrastructure that VET schools need to help their students build those skills.

A consortium consisting of Vaso Aligrudic High School of Electrical Engineering from Podgorica with partners Bild Studio, Alicorn, Data Design, Amplitudo, and Mont-Engineering received a grant of EUR 511 509 000, while a consortium of Danilo Kiš Mixed High School from Podgorica Budva with partners Hotel Group Montenegro Stars, Budva, Gospoština Lux, Budva and Spencer & Hill Team, Bečići has been awarded a grant of EUR 425 740 000.

Key statistics

VET is a key education offer in Montenegro. Around two thirds of all the secondary education opt for VET courses whereas one third chooses the general education programme. In 2020/21, 30.9% attended gymnasium schools whereas 69.1% were in VET courses⁹.

Of the students enrolled in VET programmes, 22.70% were enrolled in trade, catering and tourism courses; 18.80% were enrolled in courses covering economics, law and administration; 15.40% chose health and safety programmes; 13.10% went for electrical engineering courses; traffic attracted 9.99% and mechanical engineering and metal processing was the choice of 6.29%. Only 3.10% of VET students chose agriculture and 0.36% went for a course on forestry and wood processing¹⁰.

The percentage of students enrolled on 3-year courses has been increasing steadily in the recent past. In 2016/17 the level was 8.70%, but in 2019/20 it was, in fact, 19.10% of all VET students. There may be several reasons for this: most of these programmes are offered in both company-based (dual) mode and school-based mode; for some of the 3-year courses, scholarships have been granted by the MESCS and Chamber of Economy; the minimum number of points needed for enrolment on 4-year programmes (the rule was introduced in 2018) left no other option for some students but to go for 3-year programmes¹¹.

Students from 4-year VET programmes often enrol at universities. Expressing these students as a percentage of VET graduates who continue their education gives 57.63% in 2014, 55.02% in 2015, 55.17% in 2016 and 57.70% in 2017. However, a significant proportion of these students drop out from their studies in the first 2 years of university¹².

⁹ MONSTAT data

¹⁰ Ibid

¹¹ MESCS data

¹² Draft Higher Education Strategy 2020-2024, <https://wapi.gov.me/download/7e5ba4ba-79df-48e7-8334-6ed324fb4d15?version=1.0>

Conclusion

There has been some progress in VET in Montenegro in 2021 but the COVID-19 pandemic has also had a significant impact on the whole system. The focus was on delivering teaching and learning (either online or in a hybrid mode).

As there were many issues regarding online teaching (lack of equipment and internet connection for some students, poor digital competences of teachers, underdeveloped skills in the lockdown period, etc.). It was clear that a lot of extra work was needed once the schools were reopened. As schools reopened with face-to-face teaching and learning, medical authorities suggested organization of teaching with shorter 30-minute lessons instead of standard 45-minute lessons (as of April 2022 the measure is still in force). Practical training suffered most as there were periods of complete or partial lockdown for most enterprises so that students had to have their practical training in school workshops. It will take some time to fully understand the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on students but one lesson has been learnt: the VET system has to be more resilient to all the changes going on in the modern world.

Strengthening mechanisms for improvement of all forms of work-based learning (school-based, company-based, combination of the two) should be given proper attention and there should also be reinforcement of partnerships with all the stakeholders involved in VET. Setting up VET centres of excellence might be one of the solutions.

Development of qualifications in demand in the labour market, including those needed for re-skilling or upskilling, and matching labour market needs with VET provision, will be a challenge for VET stakeholders and needs to continue.

Monitoring of VET outcomes, including tracking of VET graduates, along with improved career guidance and counselling using up-to-date labour market information, is one of the paths to success. Using these data to make informed decisions at system and provider level about VET development in the long-term is a must.

The analysis of the activities defined by the VET Strategy Action Plan for 2020-2021 has clearly demonstrated what has been achieved and, more importantly, what needs to be accomplished in the forthcoming preparation of a National Implementation Plan. This analysis will be an asset both to short-term VET planning (Action Plan for 2022-2023) and strategies over the long term.

ACRONYMS

BES	Bureau for Educational Services
EPALE	Electronic Platform for Adult Learning in Europe
EQAVET	European Quality Assurance Reference Framework for Vocational Education and Training
ETF	European Training Foundation
EU	European Union
IPA II	Instrument for Pre-Accession
MESCS	Ministry of Education, Science, Culture and Sports
SELFIE	Self-reflection on effective learning by fostering the use of innovative educational technologies
VET	Vocational Education and Training
VET Centre	National VET agency

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