

NATIONAL CAREER DEVELOPMENT SUPPORT SYSTEM REVIEW – ALBANIA

March 2022

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1. CONTEXT AND SYSTEM OVERVIEW

Background

Education, training and labour market systems are increasingly challenged by global developments such as digital transformation, globalisation, demographic change, climate change and global disruptions such as the COVID-19 pandemic. All these have a profound impact on the lives of individuals and on society. The development of technology, especially information and communication technology (ICT), has boosted economic globalisation and opened new opportunities for people, but also new risks.

Among these developments with uncertain outcomes, there are some certainties: firstly, a fast-evolving world and a changing labour market require individuals to become real lifelong learners, to acquire new competences to cope with change and to adapt and further develop existing competences. Secondly, there is a growing demand for valid information on the changing labour markets and future prospects. In addition, there is a growing need for supporting people required to manage more frequent and complex transitions within and between education and work. In this context, there is a greater need than ever for career development support. At the same time, career development support – that is lifelong career guidance, and in particular career education, and career development support for workers – itself faces challenges in adapting to the new circumstances.

Against this background, the ETF engaged in reviewing the state of national/state-wide career development support systems in Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo, Montenegro, North Macedonia and Serbia. The objective of the reviews is to describe existing capacities and development potentials for career development support systems, not just services or policies, but to inform policy and practice enhancement in a systematic approach, to support the selection of country priorities for further system development and future planning, and to inform ongoing and future EU and ETF activities, such as the Youth Guarantee and IPA. For more information about the conceptual approach to the reviews, please refer to the ETF-ILO publication “Developing National Career Development Systems”.

The review process was led by local experts under the coordination of the ETF and included (a) desk research and individual consultation interviews, (b) a national consultation meeting that involved all relevant stakeholders to clarify open questions from desk research, to add details and triangulate desk research findings by listening to different points of views from Ministries of education, labour and youth, social partner representatives, youth organizations, practitioners, employer organizations, sector representatives, researchers, (c) finalization, translation and distribution of the review report, (d) discussion of findings with national authorities to identify priority areas for further system development, (e) a broad-ranging validation event to discuss the review findings and how to move forward in priority areas identified, and (f) a final revision of the report that is being published in both English and Albanian.

1.1 Context

Demographics

Albania is a country in south-eastern Europe on the southern Adriatic coast. The land has a total area of 28,750 km² (11,100 mi²) and a total coastline of 362 km (224.9 mi). The population of Albania was 2.829 million as of January 2021.¹ The population is slowly decreasing due to net emigration, and INSTAT therefore estimates the population to be 2.75 million by 2030. In 2020, there were 28,561 births and 27,605 deaths, so the birth balance, unlike in much of the rest of the region, is still positive. But the trend is radically down, and the median age of Albanians is rising. Two-thirds of the population reside in urban centres. The population of Albania is aging. The age group of the population 0-14

¹ www.instat.gov.al

years has decreased from 21.6% in 2011 to 16.5% in 2021. The age group of the population aged 15-64 has remained almost the same, experiencing a slight increase, from 67.4% in 2011 to 68.2% in 2021. The age group of the population 65+ years has increased from 11.0% in 2011 to 15.2% in 2021.

Regarding to the gender composition, on 1 January 2011, more men than women lived in Albania: 50.1% were men and 49.9% women. On 1 January 2021, the figures changed: 49.8% were male and 50.2% female.

Albania's population on 1 January 2021 is 2,829,741, representing a decrease of 0.6% during 2020.

Changes in population – at the end of the year

Years	Population		Natural increase		Net migration		Annual growth rate
	Men	Women	Men	Women	Men	Women	
2016	1 453 541	1 423 050	5 118	5 227	-10 060	587	0
2017	1 438 609	1 431 715	4 598	4 039	-19 530	4 628	-0.2
2018	1 429 594	1 432 833	3 358	3 772	-12 375	-2 655	-0.3
2019	1 420 613	1 425 342	3 112	3 512	-12 077	-11 005	-0.6
2020	1 409 982	1 419 759	-1 018	1 488	-9 615	-7 069	-0.6

Albania is characterised by a very high level of migration, ranking it among the top countries in the world for the share (as a percentage of the current population) and intensity of international migration. While groups from all social-economic backgrounds and levels of education have emigrated from Albania, brain-drain outflows have been on the rise in the past decades. Those in their 20s, the best educated and most qualified people, are emigrating to EU and North American countries.²

There is a close correlation between migration and education in Albania. The education system has contributed to two push factors for migration. Its low quality encourages many individuals to emigrate, with the aim of obtaining a better education for themselves or their children. Thus, the number of Albanian students studying abroad is high and Albania is ranked top in the number of students abroad among the Western Balkan countries.³

Economic outlook

Albania is still considered a transition economy but because of its strong economic performances it is defined as an upper middle-income country. It was hit by a devastating earthquake in November 2019, causing damage to physical assets and leading to losses equivalent to an estimated 7.5 percent of the country's GDP.

According to the updated IMF forecasts on 14 April 2020, and in view of the COVID-19 pandemic, the economy is likely to suffer from both a demand shock, fuelled by the spread of the virus across the EU, as well as a supply shock, for as long as the labour supply remains restricted due to social

² ETF_ Education, training, and employment developments 2021, Albania

³ ETF_ Education, training, and employment developments 2021, Albania

distancing measures. GDP growth fell to -3.96% in 2020⁴ and was expected to pick up to 8% in 2021, subject to the post-pandemic global economic recovery.⁵

Albania's economy has shown considerable resilience in the face of the 2019 earthquake and the pandemic. After the hardship endured in 2020, the real GDP has rebounded vigorously with a projected 7.8 percent in 2021. Policies have played a critical role in preserving lives and livelihoods and thereby are paving the way for the recovery. The key challenges now are to invest efficiently in people and the economy to support the continued development of the country and to rebuild room for fiscal policy manoeuvre by lowering the very high fiscal deficit and public debt.⁶

Albania recorded a Government Debt to GDP of 77.90 percent of the country's Gross Domestic Product in 2020. source: Ministry of Finance of the Republic of Albania. In the long-term, the Albania Government Debt to GDP is projected to trend around 75.10 percent of the GDP in 2022 and 72.00 percent of the GDP in 2023, according to our econometric models.⁷

The Albanian economy is dominated by micro-enterprises (with fewer than 10 employees), which make up to 87.9% of all enterprises. Micro-enterprises account for the single biggest share of workers in businesses of any size, while medium-sized enterprises generate slightly more employment (OECD et al., 2019). The GDP contraction for 2020 is -3.3% (INSTAT). According to the IMF (2021), 'Albania's economic activity in 2020 contracted much less than was originally expected, reflecting stronger domestic and regional tourism, policy support and earthquake reconstruction, as well as the absence of a second lockdown. In 2021, growth is projected to rebound to 5.3 percent on the back of the recovery of pandemic-affected sectors and continued earthquake reconstruction.

Albania's gross domestic product expanded 6.99 percent year-on-year in the third quarter of 2021, easing from an upwardly revised 18.38 percent rise in the previous period. There was a slowdown in all sectors: household consumption (3.33 percent vs 10.91 percent in Q2 of 2021), gross fixed capital formation (3.84 percent vs 36.84 percent) and government expenditure (7.59 percent vs 11.33 percent). Meanwhile, foreign demand contributed positively to growth as exports went up 62.73 percent (vs 130.55 percent in Q2) while imports rose at a softer 35.87 percent (vs 53.72 percent). On a quarterly basis, the economy expanded by 0.73 percent. Source: INSTAT

In recent years, the country has been conducting a series of macroeconomic and fiscal reforms with the objective of joining the European Union. The Economic Reform Programme (ERP) 2020 - 2022 outlines the main macroeconomic and fiscal policies aimed at establishing a clear balance between the internal strengths and external threats, with a view to enabling sustainable growth, increasing employment and reducing public debt.

Main sectors of industry

Agriculture is an important economic sector for the Albanian economy. It represents 19.25% of the GDP⁸ and employs 38% of the workforce⁹. However, the agriculture sector in Albania suffers from a lack of modern equipment, highly fragmented land ownership and a limited area of cultivation, all of which lead to a relatively low rate of productivity. Only 24% of its territory is classified as agricultural land, while 76% is non-arable land¹⁰.

The industrial sector accounts for 19.71% of the country's GDP and employs 19% of the active population. The sector is concentrated on food processing, textiles and clothing, timber work

⁴ www.instat.gov.al

⁵ <https://www.imf.org/en/Countries/ALB>

⁶ <https://www.imf.org/en/Countries/ALB>

⁷ <https://tradingeconomics.com/albania/government-debt-to-gdp>

⁸ <https://www.statista.com/statistics/444090/albania-gdp-distribution-across-economic-sectors/>

⁹ www.data.worldbank.org

¹⁰ <http://www.fao.org/countryprofiles/index/en/?iso3=ALB>

(construction), oil, cement, chemical products, mining, transport, and hydraulic energy. The manufacturing sector represents nearly 6% of the country's GDP.

The services sector represents 48.43% of the GDP, employing 43% of the workforce. The tourism, telephony, banking, and insurance sectors are all booming. According to a report by the World Travel & Tourism Council (WTTC), travel and tourism receipts in 2019 represented 20.5% of the GDP¹¹.

The pandemic-related domestic lockdown and international travel restrictions caused significant losses for the tourism and manufacturing sectors, but the economy started to rebound in the second half of the year. In June 2021, Albania has seen a considerable increase in the number of foreign visitors compared to the same time in 2020, according to the National Institute of Statistics in Albania (INSTAT). 604,381 foreign visitors entered Albania in June, a number that is 3.4 times higher compared to the same time in 2020, when the pandemic restrictions were stricter. This figure is closer to the 630,334 visitors that entered Albania in June 2019.

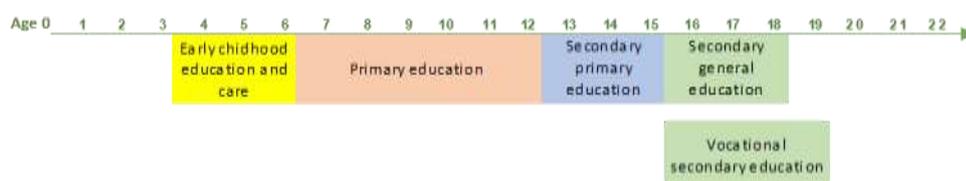
Administration

Counties are the first level of local governance. There are 12 counties in total. The second level of government is constituted by the municipalities. The municipalities are further subdivided into units of local governance. The new territorial reform, accompanied by the new law on the organization and functioning of local government, aims to improve the quality of the education service, by decentralizing some competencies and functions of central government in order to better administer the social services, employment and education at the local level.

Education system

The education system in Albania is managed by several different institutions: early childhood education (0-5 years) is mainly a municipal responsibility; pre-university general education (grades 1-12) falls mainly under the jurisdiction of the Ministry of Education and Sport (MoES); pre-university vocational education falls under the jurisdiction of the Ministry of Finance and Economy (MoFE) while the VET Law (15/2017) gives responsibility for the management and monitoring of public VET providers to the National Agency for Employment and Skills (NAES); and Higher education is organised largely by public – and some private – universities.

Figure 1: Overview of the education system in Albania¹²



Source : https://eacea.ec.europa.eu/national-policies/eurydice/content/albania_en

In pre-university education, Albania has adopted a new 'competence-based' curriculum – and developed a set of textbooks to match the new content and methodology - which has been implemented gradually from year 2014 until the school year 2020/2021. The MES focus on the completion of the curriculum reform has shifted towards assessment and further improvement of the curricula.

¹¹ <https://wtcc.org/Research/Economic-Impact>

¹² Source: Eurydice 2018/2019

Table1: Enrolled in pre-university education

School year	Total Pupils Registered in Primary Education		Public				Private				High School Education	
			Basic Education		Low Secondary High School Education		Basic Education		Low Secondary High School Education			
	Total	Females	Total	Females	Total	Females	Total	Females	Total	Females	Total	Females
2006-2007	447.302	215.689	201.158	97.012	228.775	110.784	8.967	4.006	8.402	3.887	173.269	82.666
2007-2008	428.435	206.308	189.976	91.233	220.101	106.730	9.478	4.220	8.880	4.125	177.572	84.400
2008-2009	457.886	220.206	224.587	107.253	212.847	103.559	11.515	5.146	8.937	4.248	132.803	64.543
2009-2010	439.995	211.142	213.109	101.606	205.645	99.726	11.672	5.311	9.569	4.499	140.657	65.854
2010-2011	420.684	201.046	204.027	97.009	195.477	94.149	11.633	5.267	9.547	4.621	150.134	69.388
2011-2012	403.704	192.146	195.279	92.492	187.591	89.960	11.338	5.091	9.496	4.603	152.182	70.165
2012-2013	390.837	185.387	187.860	88.670	182.378	87.012	11.037	5.104	9.562	4.601	154.425	70.891
2013-2014	377.074	178.604	174.410	87.393	171.937	81.449	11.31	5.216	9.417	4.546	151.937	69.301
2014-2015	363.408	171.908	177.198	83.588	165.567	78.595	11.173	5.156	9.470	4.569	140.188	64.561
2015-2016	343.499	162.208	167.827	79.370	154.540	72.884	11.737	5.457	9.395	4.497	130.380	61.161
2016-2017	328.100	154.878	161.914	76.541	143.373	67.661	12.922	5.915	9.891	4.761	127.114	59.586
2017-2018	319.671	151.488	157.635	74.889	139.101	65.859	13.226	6.137	9.709	4.603	120.062	52.946
2018-2019	306.530	133.518	153.222	70.563	129.684	61.685	13.882	859	9.742	411	116.646	51.078
2019-2020	294.879	139.792	148.895	69.471	123.094	58.829	13.275	6.972	9.615	4.52	109.533	53.698
2020-2021	286.486	136.219	143.875	69.028	117.905	55.579	14.653	6.793	10.053	4.819	107.989	48.801

The education system in the country requires the resident population to complete the basic 9-year education, including primary (grades 1-5) and lower secondary (grades 6-9) education. In the meantime, the legal basis guarantees universal access to education from the Ministry of Education and Sports, which has the duty to ensure equal opportunities.

From the analysis conducted on educational participation by levels (GER), it was noted that approximately 78.5% of male children and 75.2% of female children attend kindergarten with no gender differences. The gross compulsory educational participation level is 99.9% for boys and 94.2% for girls. Participation in the upper secondary education is higher for boys than girls, namely 96.8% and 90.1%, whereas the ratio for higher education is rather reversed, as the participation scores higher for girls (71.9%) than boys (46.7%).

Educational participation by gender in the education cycles indicates the existence of gender differences at various education levels. The ratio of boys attending pre-university education is higher compared to girls, whereas 60.4% of students in higher education are girls. This is reflected in the gender equality index (on GER), amounting to 1.54 for higher education.

For the academic year 2020-21, the percentage of disabled girls among disabled students in the 9-year education system and upper secondary education is lower than the percentage of disabled boys, 31.4% and 49.7% respectively, whereas the percentage for higher education is as high as 60.4%.¹³

Employment

The labour market in Albania is characterised by low employment rates and relatively low labour force participation. Over the year 2020, according to Labour Force Survey estimates, the labour force participation rate for the population aged 15-64 years old was 69.1%. For the male population aged 15-64, the labour force participation rate was 15.9 percentage points higher than females.

The employment rate for the population aged 15-64 years old is 60.6%. The employment rate for females is 53.6% and for males is 67.8%. The gender gap in employment for this age-group is 14.2 percentage points¹⁴.

¹³ INSTAT, Women and men in Albania, 2021

¹⁴ Press release (Professional design) (instat.gov.al)

However, labour force participation rates also remain below European averages, with a significant difference between males and females of 16 percent. The youth participation rate (15-29) is lower than for the rest of the population (52.1% with a gender gap of 15%). Gender inequality remains problematic, with the male employment rate being about 15% higher than the rate for females, which may be a reflection of cultural norms regarding family structure and limited alternatives for child and elderly care.

Women and men belonging to the group of 15-64 years olds are mostly employed in the agricultural sector. In 2020, 41.4% of all employees in the agricultural sector were female, marking a reduction compared to 2019. Trade, transport, hospitality, business, and administrative services are the second sector with the highest volume of female and male employees (after the agricultural sector). 21.6% of employees in the services sector were female and 31.7% were male employees.

In 2020, according to the labor force survey data, the unemployment rate for men aged 15-64 was 12.0 % as against 12.4% for women. The unemployment rate has declined for men in the previous year. However, the unemployment rate has greatly improved for men compared to women, decreasing by almost 0.2-point percentage, while for women this increased by 0.6 point percentage¹⁵.

Table 2: Summary table of labour market indicators

		2017	2018	2019	2020
population		2 876 591	2 870 324	2 862 427	2 848 955
labour force	15 +	1 404 388	1 409 416	1 434 887	1 396 937
	15-64	1 352 381	1 356 878	1 369 789	1 337 751
	15-29	301 669	365 003	352 188	337 721
population working age	15 +	2 354 480	2 363 374	2 369 003	2 367 105
	15-29	220 937	214 636	207 192	197 333
employed	15 +	1 216 599	1 236 624	1 274 857	1 231 452
	15-64	1 167 785	1 184 413	1 210 615	1 172 988
	15-29	227 414	283 679	276 984	264 300
unemployed	15 +	187 789	172 792	160 030	165 485
	15-64	184 596	172 465	159 174	164 733
	15-29	74 255	81 327	75 203	73 195
labour force participation	15-29	45,6%	50,1%	52,5%	52,1%
	15 +	58,3%	59,4%	60,4%	59,5%
employment rate	15-29	33,8%	38,5%	41,2%	41,2%
	15 +	50,3%	52,1%	53,4%	52,5%
unemployment rate	15-29	25,9%	23,1%	21,5%	20,9%

¹⁵ INSTAT, Women and men in Albania, 2021

	15 +	13.70%	12.30%	11.50%	11.70%
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Sources: Quarterly Labour Force Survey, Q.3/17-Q.3/21

Employment promotion programmes

Pursuant to Article 11 of Law No.15/2019 of 13 March 2019¹⁶ "On Employment Promotion", Employment Promotion Programs (EPPs) are implemented by the institution responsible for employment and skills, in cooperation with other public institutions responsible for economic development and qualifications, and in cooperation with the private sector and civil society. Procedures, criteria and rules for the implementation of the employment promotion programmes are determined by the Council of Ministers.

Employment promotion programmes (EPPs) have evolved and increased in number over time. There are currently six programs that target different groups that are deemed to need support in the labour market, or to integrate better in society, and they are:

- employment promotion programs through employment;
- employment promotion programs through on-the-job training;
- employment promotion programs through professional practices;
- employment promotion programs through self-employment;
- public works program in the community;
- employment promotion programs through employment of unemployed persons because of COVID-19.

For the period January-December 2020, 751 entities and 4,146 individuals have benefited from the implementation of incentive programs for 2020. 171 of these entities and 1,319 of these persons submitted applications in 2019. In 2020, a fund was made available for these programs. of ALL 70,431,549.00. Of the total participants in EPPs during 2020, about 67% were women and 52% were young people aged 16-26.

At the end of August 2020, the procedures for the implementation of the new DCMs on employment promotion started. During 2020, 580 entities and 2,827 unemployed jobseekers were included in the new EPP programs.

Despite these improvements, Albania still faces significant challenges in ensuring productive employment for all those in the working age group and ensuring integration into the labour market of vulnerable groups, especially the poor, women, youth, and other disadvantaged groups. A major challenge for the country is to improve the quality of employment opportunities. Other challenges include:

High unemployment - the unemployment rate was 11.7% by the end of 2020 and still remains high, especially compared to EU countries. The youth unemployment rate in 2020 has fallen to 20.9%, the lowest level in the last six years, but it remains high. Young people are facing different challenges in their transition to the labour market.

¹⁶ Published in the Official Journal No.45 on 3 April, April 2019. It entered into force two weeks after publication in the Official Journal.

High level of informal work – the informal economy in Albania is high. Different surveys show that not all the labour force of surveyed enterprises is registered. For the agricultural sector, the informal work level is the highest.

Problems for vulnerable groups - although access to public services for people with disabilities (including infrastructure, logistics and communication) has been made possible in almost all ADISA centres (integrated one-stop-shop public service centres), reintegration into the labor market of vulnerable groups such as minorities, persons of different sexual orientation (LGBTI), women, persons with disabilities, asylum seekers and irregular migrants, etc. is still difficult to achieve fully (there are still no sustainable mechanisms of social inclusion).

To strengthen the capacity of the Government of Albania¹⁷ to successfully implement reforms in the area of social inclusion, an EU-funded technical assistance project is under implementation. The technical assistance will consist of three major strands of activity focused on the following key issues, corresponding to three specific objectives:

- To improve the accessibility and quality of integrated social care services at local level.
- To promote social inclusion in employment for youth, men, and women.

To enhance inclusive quality learning and promote educational attainment in pre-university education for all girls and boys - with a special focus on children from disadvantaged backgrounds.

Vocational Education and Training

The VET system is administratively under the responsibility of the National Agency of Employment and Skills (NAES), which is under MOFE. There are 45 public VET providers in total in Albania, 35 of which are vocational schools and 10 are vocational training centres (VTC). The VET schools offer training corresponding to upper secondary education, whereas the VTCs offer shorter courses – around 400 hours, mainly addressing the unemployed.

Despite the advantage of hiring VET graduates (compared to those with general secondary education), enrolment in public vocational high schools in the 2020-2021 academic year dropped to 17,000 students (from 18,164 in 2019-2020). Whereas demographic trends are largely the cause for the decline, the promotion of VET needs an increased focus. In addition, and more importantly, infrastructural investments in the sector need to increase in line with the action plan for the optimization of VET providers, particularly for the providers that face high demand (i.e., in the central region of Albania).

Municipalities have not advanced much with their efforts to improve the VET infrastructure that is under their responsibility (i.e. VET schools' dormitories). In the academic year 2020-2021, there was an increase in the number of students from rural areas and marginalized groups. More specifically, the participation of Roma and Egyptians reached 592 students (compared to 580 in the previous year), while the participation of people with disabilities increased from 128 to 143. About 45% of students are from rural areas. Despite the nominal increases, they do not represent a significant improvement in outreach.¹⁸

The reform of the vocational education and training (VET) system in Albania has largely focused on improving the attractiveness of the VET system, accessibility, and labour market linkages. Despite the achievements, institutional and implementation challenges persist:

Programme offered and attendance - only around one-fifth of young people and very few young women enter upper secondary vocational education. Vocational Training Centres offer a limited choice of short-term vocational training courses (with few programmes for unemployed persons from different educational backgrounds, for example) and coverage has been low.

¹⁷The Ministry of Health and Social Protection; Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports; Ministry of Finance and Economy and targeted municipalities.

¹⁸ Albania's Economic Reform Programme 2021-2023

Cooperation with businesses - In the past years, many schools have been able to establish successful cooperation with businesses, and work-based learning schemes are now much more common throughout the VET system. However, such initiatives still depend to a great extent on donor support, which means that only a limited number of students can benefit from them.

Weak alignment of the VET with the labour market - the skills, competencies, and attitudes that young learners gain in the VET institutions often fail to meet the needs and preferences of employers. Social partners are currently not systematically involved in vocational education and training.

Professional development of teachers and trainers - some vocational schools still lack basic learning resources, such as textbooks or consumables for practical training.

1.2 System overview

For several years, career guidance in Albania has been the focus of many different projects. They have given a boost to career orientation through their contribution to supporting institutional, organizational and individual capacities. Career counselling specialists are supported through donor projects. This has contributed to increasing the reputation of their work and has strengthened the attitude for evaluating investments in the field of career guidance. Career guidance service contributes to better education and employment choices. It can also help to better articulate the demand for learning, contribute to enhancing education access and completion and improve the match between labor market supply and demand.

Compulsory education institutions

In recent years, the entire education system has gone through several reforms, which at the same time has put a strain on the system by continually asking it to change. In pre-university education, Albania has adopted a new “competence-based” curriculum. Different career guidance modules have been used in the form of extracurricular activities. Competence-based education more than traditional education supports the development of transversal skills and attitudes relevant to acquiring career management skills.

General high school education institutions

In addition to the core curriculum, general high school education institutions offer elective modules, specifically professional elective modules (on home appliance assembly works; mechanical repair works; dressing and decorating ethics; tourist guide work; gardening; office assistance; etc.) as well as subject elective modules (on career education, financial education; intellectual property; cultural heritage; etc.). Career education is one of the elective modules (36 teaching hours) aimed at providing students in the last grade with the ability to identify career goals, develop career research skills, plan further education/training or employment, and conduct career research procedures. The idea for the schools to start thinking of creating a positive attitude toward the possibility of self-employment and the spirit of initiative and entrepreneurship is part of all curricula in general high school education. The elective module on “Career education” is mainly for those who fail to go to university.

Vocational education and adult education institutions

Career education is an integral part of the school curriculum, which is frequently complemented by extra-curricular activities, often in co-operation with companies (visits to businesses, job fairs, internships). Its aim is to prepare students for the world of work by improving their career management skills and their abilities to seek and use information and make decisions. A development unit is part of the internal structures of each VET institution with the function of providing career guidance. The VET system provides services for its learners’ career education, counselling and guidance to facilitate their transition into employment or further learning. The total weekly hours of engagement of the members of the development unit depends on the number of students and the directions being offered.

Higher education institutions

All 43 universities (16 public and 27 non-public) have appointed full-time staff to manage the Career and Alumni Centers. They have made available an office within the institutions and are offering CG due to their obligation regarding institutional accreditation process, and to a growing awareness about the importance of career guidance services for student orientation in the labor market and in their academic and professional development.

Career and Alumni Offices facilitate the connection between the academic career and employment opportunities, and promotion in companies, organizations and various associations interested in finding employees. They also guide the student in career development, through the assessment of the personal interests of each student and matching these with job positions, salaries and conditions of interest to the parties to the employment agreement.

Career and Alumni Offices distribute to students information on labor market offers, internship opportunities, internships, qualifications, etc.; they organize meetings between graduate students and current students in order to exchange employment experiences and organize joint activities; graduate students provide information based on their personal experience, and career counselling for students who are currently part of studies.

Municipalities

The formal role and functions of the municipalities in the field of vocational education and training and employment is indirect, through their mandate to work for local economic development. From this point of view, the municipalities play a role as partners and associates for VET institutions and employment offices. The municipalities, in their capacity as providers of local social services, can also play an important coordinating role when it comes to participants in employment promotion programmes (EPP) of NAES. A career centre at city level (in Tirana) has been operational since 18 December 2020. The centre is open to everyone (for students and adults). The staff of this centre is specifically selected and trained.

Public Employment Service Offices

In addition to placement services, public employment offices offer career guidance services. Employment offices provide information and guidance related to all questions of career choices and career development, types of training or study course, occupational changes and mobility, further training and retraining, placement and self-employment, as well as to all labour-market related issues including labour market schemes and financial assistance. The service is mainly carried out by placement officers, who base their work on an analysis of strengths and weaknesses (profiling), they check skills, competences and aptitudes required for vacant jobs. An individual action plan describes the next steps and responsibilities of the officially registered unemployed jobseekers and the placement officer.

Chamber of Commerce and Industry

The Chamber of Commerce and Industry (CCI) is a non-profit organization that represents and protects the interests of its members as well as cooperates and exchanges information with the public administration. According to the law, membership of the CCI is mandatory for enterprises and legal entities registered in the commercial register and voluntary for individuals exercising commercial activities. The work plan of the CCI Tirana for 2020 includes the introduction of ideas and knowledge about entrepreneurship as a key competence in pre-university education curricula and increasing the business presence in the governing boards of vocational high schools. Tirana CCI, in cooperation with the Municipality of Tirana and the Ministry of Education and Sports, organized on September 10-13, 2020, the 11th edition of the Work & Study fair. The aim of the fair was to enable educational

institutions, universities, and VET providers to present to students the study offers and conditions of the new academic year 2020-21. During this event, career counseling activities were organized, where young people had the opportunity to choose their future career. The "Work & Study" fair was organized in 2021 (19 May – 1 June) in the main cities of Albania (Vlorë, Shkodër, Korçë, Elbasan, Tiranë). This edition was conceived as an event with a new dimension, where exhibitors came into direct contact with graduates and jobseekers.

Trade Unions

There is no direct involvement of the trade unions in Education and Training but as social partners they are consulted by the Government for important strategies related to employment and vocational training (e.g. the Labour Code defines the conditions for apprenticeship and internship contracts which are relevant for organizing work-based learning).¹⁹ Trade unions are not specifically involved in the field of CG to support workers in their skills' development.

Employers' Associations

Generally, the employers' associations operating in Albania are not engaged in CG issues. There is no clear role for this in the legislative framework. Considering the fact, that the majority of employers face skills' shortages and mismatches, the current structures (Development Units) functioning within all VET institutions would certainly benefit from a more formal cooperation framework that includes and assigns a clear role to the social partners.²⁰

¹⁹ Review of Albania's VET System, SDC-UNDP, May 2020

²⁰ Review of Albania's VET System, SDC-UNDP, May 2020

2. POLICY FRAMEWORK

Career guidance is a continuous process throughout life. It is critical to the smooth transition of young people as they make choices about education and training and to the mobility and (re)engagement of adults within the labour market. Guidance is provided to people in a wide range of settings: schools and training centres, tertiary and higher education institutions; employment services and career guidance centres; in workplaces, through trade unions and professional bodies as well as in local community settings.²¹

Career guidance is commonly defined as services to help individuals make education, training and occupational choices and to manage their careers. Career counselling and guidance (Këshillimi dhe udhëzimi në karrierë) is defined in the Vocational Education and Training (VET) Law and the Employment Promotion Law, which were both drafted with the contribution of all key stakeholders.

The National Strategy for Employment and Skills 2019 - 2022 (Decision No. 659, dated 10.10.2019), is the main policy document that guides the implementation of actions related to employment and skills development in the country. The overall aim of the strategy is to promote quality jobs and skills opportunities for all, both Albanian women and men, throughout the life cycle. The National Jobs and Skills Strategy focuses on the following four strategic priorities 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.

To achieve the priority of providing quality vocational education and development for young people and adults, the strategy envisages strengthening the links between learning and work and facilitating the transition to work, through improving the model of professional practices in business; setting up a career guidance system for VET providers; performing career-counseling functions within the development units; increasing the capacity of development units for counseling and career guidance; setting up a career guidance information system, as well as providing updated career information for learners in vocational and training.

Under the strategic objective "strengthening the links between learning and work and facilitating the transition to work", the establishment of a career guidance system is foreseen. The strategy envisages the implementation of career counseling functions within the development units (DU) of VET centres; capacity building of development units for career counseling and orientation; setting up a career guidance information system; making up-to-date career information available to VET students and trainees. The MoFE, VET Providers (Development Units) and NAES are in charge to achieve this specific objective.

Law No 15/2017, "On Vocational Education and Training in the Republic of Albania". The object of the law is to regulate aspects of the VET system in compliance with the general education system and the labour market. The law aims to create and develop a unified VET system, in full compliance with the needs of the local and global labour market, to create sustainable mechanisms of quality assurance, and to modernise the VET system, to make it a more effective and efficient mechanism for supporting the socio-economic development of Albania. The law also stipulates the role and functions of the main bodies managing and administrating the VET system, i.e. the responsible Ministry (currently the Ministry of Finance and Economy), MESY, NAES, NAVETQ, the National VET council, and the VET providers and their boards. Furthermore, the law defines the National List of professions and the National catalogue of qualifications, and defines principles for quality assurance and funding the VET system.

²¹ Investing in career guidance (EC, ETF, ILO, CEDEFOP, OECD, UNESCO)

Article 15(2) and Article 23 of Law No. 15/2017 "On Vocational Education in the Republic of Albania" and Articles 37, 41 and 45 of Instruction No. 11 of 03.03.2020 "The Way of Organization and Activity of Vocational Education" express the legal obligation of VET institutions to provide CG services.

The National Education Strategy 2021-2026 integrates the sub-sectors of pre-university education and higher education. MoESY's vision for the education sector aims to build an inclusive education system that successfully addresses the individual needs of all children, pupils and students, treating them equally and respecting diversity. The strategy is based on the lifelong learning paradigm, which covers all stages of learning, from preschool to the post-retirement period, and covers all forms of learning: formal and informal.

There are several laws regulating different levels and aspects of services in Albania. For VET and employment, the main laws and regulations are:

Law No. 69/2012: "On Pre-University Education System in the Republic of Albania" (amended 2017 and 2018). Although the law explicitly covers all pre-university education except vocational education and training, there are several general principles stipulated in the law that are valid for all kinds of education, including VET. The main principles underlying this law and respective secondary legislation is that education is a human right that must be guaranteed through a quality offer. The law defines the structure, activity and governance of the pre-university education system in Albania, including secondary vocational education, in addition to aspects of structure, activity and governance of the VET system that are regulated by the respective law on VET.

Law No. 15/2019 "On Promotion of Employment". The adoption of the law in March 2019 completed the legal framework related to employment policies/programs and skills development. The law foresees the establishment of NAES (DCM 554/2019). This agency will be responsible for the administration and implementation of the employment promotion and vocational training programmes, as well as the administration of vocational training providers. The mission of the NAES is to develop and support the Albanian workforce through the provision of Vocational Education, Training, Vocational Guidance and Employment Services. In addition, the law provides for the establishment of a Social Employment Fund as a public financial fund. The objectives of the Fund encompass the promotion, employment, integration, and social involvement of persons with disabilities.

Pursuant to Article 7 (employment services), public employment services provided by regional and local employment structures include a three-tiered service delivery model i) information services to jobseekers, employers, and others, ii) job matching and mediation, and iii) job counselling and guidance.

Pursuant to Article 8 (information services to jobseekers, employers, and others), the regional / local employment structure provides information on labour supply and demand for both jobseekers and employers. The service includes information on i) the national and local labour market; ii) employment services and programs for jobseekers' employers; iii) employment opportunities; iv) educational and qualifying offers of the institutions of vocational education and training; v) career and vocational orientation; vi) the right to benefit from support programs, income and application procedures; and vii) labour legislation.

Pursuant to Article 10 (Job counselling and guidance):

- Counselling and career orientation, employment and occupation is provided by the regional / local employment structures through special advisory services for jobseekers and students in relation to their choices and training in an appropriate profession, with individual qualities and orientation in the labour market.

- The Specialized Counselling Service provides in depth counselling services on an individual basis to those clients who may be at a disadvantage or have barriers in accessing employment opportunities, and their profile indicates that a more intense level of intervention is required.
- Counselling and orientation for career, employment and occupation is realized through:
 - career counselling aimed at assisting jobseekers with a selection of suitable occupations to match their individual features and in demand in the labour market.
 - job counselling aimed at assisting jobseekers by identifying skill gaps and suitable options to address this.
 - employment counselling aimed at assisting jobseekers to clarify their own employment goals, employment approach and qualification opportunities, as well as to be aware of the necessary skills to search for and retain a job.

Law No. 70/2016 "On Craftsmanship". The law is crucial to the development of vocational education and training because it regulates the dual education of crafts occupations. This legislation provides the opportunity to obtain selected vocational qualifications (mainly artistic craftworks) through a dual path, with the intention of diversifying the VET offer. Nevertheless, the law needs to be operationalized through secondary legislation, implementation guidelines and capacity building programmes for the responsible bodies.²² Pursuant to Article 13, only persons who have reached the minimum working age and do not attend studies at an educational institution and are not registered or attending studies at higher education institutions can be accepted as assistants (apprentices). Pursuant to Article 55, central and local government bodies cooperate with the Chamber for career counselling of participants in the craft training system.

Law No. 247/2010 "On Albanian Qualification Framework", amended 2018. This law has the objective of determining the levels of the Albanian Qualification Framework (AQF), and the types of qualifications, qualifying for these levels. The purpose is to establish the Albanian Qualifications Framework and to define the principles and procedures for its creation, development, implementation and updating. This in turn regulates the issuance and recognition process of qualifications in the Republic of Albania, so that the process is based on standards of knowledge, skills and competencies. This will facilitate the work of CG practitioners in informing about learning opportunities; and/or it will facilitate continuity in the education system, thus ensuring that each chosen path leads to further learning opportunities and does not create dead ends.

Law No. 75/2019 "On Youth". The object of this law is to protect the rights of young people in a comprehensive way, to create the conditions necessary for youth activism, participation, and support, to define the functions and competences of institutions at central and local level, and to cooperate with organizations that undertake activities for young people and in the field of youth. Pursuant to Article 7 (Local self-government units), local self-government units, in accordance with their functions, design and implement local policies in the field of youth, and are responsible for: i) reflecting and respecting the rights of young people, defining objectives and priorities, and to guarantee their implementation; ii) establishment of a local youth council; iii) organization and coordination of activities aimed at achieving local objectives in the field of protection and empowerment of young people; iv) organizing and providing activities to support the well-being and development of young people; and v) promoting the volunteerism of young people and their informal education.

Labour Code. The new Labour Code was adopted in December 2015 and started to be implemented in June 2016. Concerning VET, the Labour Code is especially relevant in the case of work-based learning implementation. As an overarching Law, the Labour Code has laid the foundation for tripartite social dialogue, which is anchored in the National Labour Council, which is the highest body of tripartite social dialogue on labour relations in the country.²³ The Labor Code makes no specific

²² [Review of Albania's VET System, SDC-UNDP, May 2020](#)

²³ [ETF-Torino Process 2018-2020 Albania](#)

mention to CG. The Labor Code respects the international conventions ratified by the Republic of Albania and is based on the generally accepted norms of international law (prohibition of forced labor, prohibition of discrimination, creation of individual employment reports, employment contracts, vocational training contracts, insurance and protection at work, work environment, the solution of disagreement, etc.).

3. COORDINATION AND COOPERATION

3.1 Promoting coordination, cooperation, and good governance

Despite career guidance being high on the agenda, it has never been addressed systematically. However, there is good collaboration between the key CG players, an increased awareness of CG in the country, and a willingness to merge databases and bring information sources about individuals. Recent legal changes (VET Law, Employment Promotion Law as well as the National VET Strategy 2019-2022) clearly show willingness and political support for CG, and a changing culture towards CG. The main institutions, organisations and bodies responsible for the management of career development services in the country as well as their main roles and functions are described in the paragraphs below.

Cooperation and collaboration on career guidance at national level

The Integrated Policy Management Groups (IPMG) were established in 2015. They were further extended and transformed into an integrated sector management mechanism. The IPMG sector approach is based on the need for improved coordination and efficient implementation of government priorities. As such, the IPMG serve as high-level forums for policy dialogue and partnerships to ensure leadership and coordination in the priority sectors and sectors of special importance. The IPMG on Employment and Skills (previously called the IPMG on Employment and Social Policies) was initially established as a pilot through an order of Prime Minister No. 129, dt. 21 September 2015, and subsequently revised in 2018. It has the two thematic groups (TG) on: 1) Employment and Skills, and 2) Social Inclusion and Protection. The TG on Employment and Skills is chaired by the Deputy Minister of Finance and Economy, and the Directorate of Employment and Skills Development Policies at MoFE acts as the Technical Secretariat for this group. The TG on Social Protection is chaired by the Deputy Minister of Health and Social Protection, and the General Directorate of Health and Social Protection Policies and Development at MHSP acts as the Technical Secretariat for this group. In addition, each IPMG acts as the steering committee for IPA projects in the respective sector. For this reason, it monitors progress on implementation, as well as the results of monitoring the Sector Reform Contract in the Employment and Social Sector. The IPMG on Employment and Skills has been convening regularly despite the COVID-19 pandemic. Updates on the current situation, measures taken and plans for the next COVID-19 emergency period were discussed in two IPMG meetings. In other IPMG meetings, the progress of government reforms in the employment and social sector (Progress Reports of 2019 of the NESS 2019 – 2022 and Social Protection Strategy 2019 – 2023) were discussed.²⁴

The Ministry of Finance and Economy (MoFE) develops policies in the field of employment and vocational education and training, and coordinates with other central institutions that are responsible for specific aspects of career guidance. It is the key institution that defines and monitors policies in the VET sector on behalf of the Albanian Government. The Ministry has responsibility for developing the sector strategy (NESS) aligned with the National Strategy for Development and Integration, and with the National Plan of European Integration. Based on the VET Law, the Ministry has responsibility for developing and monitoring policy implementation in the VET sector; for providing human resources for the functioning of the VET system; and for cooperating with social partners in the VET sector.

The National Agency for Vocational Education, Training and Qualifications (NAVETQ) is one of the key institutions in the development of the VET system. The reconstitution of NAVETQ, including all the new functions given by the VET Law and the Albanian Qualifications Framework Law, largely completes the institutional framework governing the VET sector. The Agency is responsible for developing the system of vocational qualifications based on the labour market needs and in line with

²⁴ National Employment and Skills Strategy 2019 – 2022 Annual Progress Report 2020

the Albanian Qualifications Framework. NAVETQ is in charge of developing the National List of Occupations based on ISCO 2008, to provide the market needs assessment for qualifications, develop occupation and qualification standards, develop national curricula (for long-term and short-term training courses, teaching materials, assessment instruments, etc.), develop continuing professional development of teaching staff in the VET system, design a mechanism for inclusion of lifelong qualifications in AQF levels, accreditation of VET providers and assessment centres for recognition of prior learning for levels 2-5 of the AQF, coordinate the activity of the Sectoral Committees, and monitor and support VET providers in the implementation of the self-assessment process. NAVETQ, in cooperation with the business sector, has developed a revised National List of Occupations, which was adopted by DCM No.154, dated 20.09.2017, and published on the NVATQ website.²⁵

The National Council of Vocational Education and Training is a tripartite advisory body established by the VET Law and regulated by the DCM No.729, dated 12.12.2018. The Council is a platform of tripartite social dialogue that contributes to reforming the VET system and enhancing cooperation with business. Some of the areas of purview of the National Council of VET are: i) strengthening of the social dialogue for the development of the VET system in central, regional and local level (including CG issues, ii) recommendations for a better coordination of the VET activities, iii) recommendations for policies and strategies of the development of the VET in Albania, and iv) recommendations for the improvement of the curricula, in accordance with the requests of the labor market and business community.

Cooperation and collaboration for career guidance at regional/local level

Municipalities are second-level administrative authorities in Albania. Since 2015, there are in total 61 municipalities. Municipalities are all divided into at least two "administrative units", which are sometimes referred to as "municipal units" or "units of local governance". Administrative units are composed of one or more cities, villages, or neighbourhoods and constitute the third- and final-level administrative authorities in Albania.

The Chamber of Commerce and Industry is organized at regional level. At national level, the Chambers are represented by the Union of Chambers of Commerce and industry. CCI, in cooperation with the municipalities, organizes every year the Work & Study fair. The aim of the fair is to enable educational institutions, employment offices and universities to present their offers. During this event, career-counseling activities are organized, where young people have the opportunity to choose their future career.

3.2 Key civil society stakeholders

Employers' Associations.

There are around 30 employers' organizations, the majority of them (24) have joined an umbrella organization called Business Albania. Other important employer associations include the Council of Employers' Organizations, the Confederation of Employers' Organization Council, and the Agro - Business Council of Albania and the Union of Business Organizations of Albania.²⁶ The current role of Employers' Associations in CG consists of cooperation with employment offices in providing LMI and with schools for work visits/ job shadowing. In addition, they support SMEs in the career development of their staff.

Trade Unions. There are around 80 recognized trade unions in Albania, most of them operating under the umbrella of two confederations: the Confederation of Trade Unions of Albania and the Union of the Independent Trade Union of Albania. The main tasks of the unions are to represent their members in negotiating collective agreements and working conditions. There is no direct involvement of the trade

²⁵ <http://www.akaftp.gov.al/lista-kombetare-e-profesioneve/lista-e-profesioneve/>

²⁶ Nikoll Doci, Annual Review of Labour Relations and Social Dialogue, Albania 2016

unions in Education and Training, but as social partners they are consulted by the Government on important strategies related to employment and vocational training (e.g., the Labour Code defines the conditions for apprenticeship and internship contracts which are relevant for organizing work-based learning).²⁷ Their role is still weak in terms of CG issues. Trade Unions need to be better aligned to support workers at risk of layoffs and guide them to possible new jobs or training.

The aim of the cross-border project "**Pathways to Career Development (PCD): Preparing Albanian and Montenegrin Youth for Career Opportunities in the Tourism Sector**" is to teach young people from Ulcinj and Shkodra new skills, prepare them for the labor market, impact economic growth, and reduce social problems in their communities. This project is funded by the European Union through the cross-border program IPA II, which is managed by the Ministry of Finance and Social Welfare (CFCU) of Montenegro and implemented by World Vision Albania in partnership with the NGO New Horizon, as well as high schools "Bratstvo Jedinstvo" from Ulcinj and "Hamdi Bushati" from Shkodra.²⁸

The purpose of the project is to give young people in the cross-border area between Albania and Montenegro access to CG services, labour market information, and the process of continuous learning and professional development. The main activities of the project are to: i) establish Youth Employment Lab (YEL) in each of the targeted areas, ii) undertake job readiness (soft skills) training events and meetings based on youth needs in each of the targeted areas, iii) conduct research on youth job market demands in each of the targeted areas, iv) design/improve and deliver professional/ VET courses in collaboration with local businesses, and v) mentor or encourage/connect youth with internship opportunities in local businesses.

²⁷ Review of Albania's VET System, SDC-UNDP, May 2020

²⁸ <https://www.cbc-mne-alb.org/projects-of-the-2nd-cfp/pathways-to-career-development-pcd-preparing-albanian-and-montenegrin-youth-for-career-opportunities-in-the-tourism-sector/>

4. MAIN SERVICES AND ACTIVITIES

4.1 Education, training and work-based learning for youth

General Education.

Various modules have been developed related to career guidance and are being addressed by caretaker teachers in collaboration with school psychologists in compulsory education institutions, while general high school education institutions are offering in addition to the core curriculum elective modules (specifically professional and subject elective modules).

Schools undertake a mandatory 30-hours per week of core and elective curriculum, while an additional 2 hours allow schools to implement the school-based curriculum in relation to cross-curricular activities. Modules, as part of the elective curriculum, are selected in the same way as other elective curriculum subjects. In the elective curriculum, schools offer modules only from the list of curricular modules published on the official website of the Agency for Quality Assurance on Pre-University Education (ASCAP). This list includes professional modules that develop the skills necessary for the labor market, and subject modules that develop cross-curricular topics.

The idea for schools is to start thinking of creating a positive attitude towards the possibility of self-employment and the spirit of initiative and entrepreneurship is part of all curricula for general high school education. Career guidance in general high school education is provided through a non-compulsory, or elective module which is called “Career education” and consists of 36 teaching hours in the last grade. In addition to providing some basic knowledge and developing skills, these modules provide information for certain professions and serve as a kind of career guidance for those who do not go on to university.

In addition to the core curriculum, general high school education institutions offer elective modules and specifically professional elective modules (on home appliance assembly works; mechanical repair works; dressing and decorating ethics; tourist guide work; gardening; office assistance; etc.) as well as subject elective modules (on career education, financial education; intellectual property; cultural heritage; etc.). Career education is one of the elective modules (36 teaching hours) aimed at providing students with the ability to identify career goals, develop career research skills, plan further education/training or employment, and conduct career research procedures.

In recent years, Albanian universities opened career development centres, which currently provide career information and organize educational activities for career management, such as workshops, lectures and training courses. Their services are available to their students, alumni and potential students. In addition to providing career guidance and counselling services, these centres also provide information on educational mobility opportunities and internships.²⁹

VET Institutions

The Development unit, which is part of the internal structures of each VET institution, has the function of students'/trainees' career guidance. The VET system provides services such as career instruction, counselling and guidance for its students and trainees to enhance their employment opportunities. The total weekly hours of engagement of the staff of Development units depends on the number of the students and the directions being offered. Career education or vocational orientation is an integral part of the school curriculum, which is frequently complemented by extra-curricular activities, often in cooperation with companies (visits in businesses, job fairs, internships). It aims at preparing students for the world of work by improving their career management skills and abilities to seek and use information and make decisions.

²⁹ Guidance and counselling in higher education | Eurydice (europa.eu)

Development units are set up and operate in all vocational education and adult education institutions. A manual is available for the day-to-day work of career orientation and counselling coordinators.

The career guidance approach proposed in the manual goes beyond simple career acquaintance, career selection, and self-assessment tests. Orientation in this manual is conceived as a comprehensive counseling process, to give students the support and input they need to design and, wherever / whenever possible, to launch their careers and plans for the future.

The manual provides information, guidance, examples, practices and resources that are relevant to the day-to-day work of the Career Orientation and Counseling Coordinator or others interested in the field. It can be used as a practical guide to address specific questions and issues, as VET institutions may not have enough resources to provide quality career guidance and counseling services to students.

In the final year (grade 13), there is structured orientation for students. At this point, career guidance is offered. Structured advice on how to read job advertisements and how to visit different companies is given to students. Together with their career advisor, students take a decision to apply for a job, or to apply to continue their studies in third level education.

Since 2018, a new training component, a career orientation course called Start SMART, has been added to the Vocational Training Centres' service portfolio to complement their technical course offers. Start SMART has been developed by the National Employment Service (nowadays NAES) with the support of the German International Cooperation (GIZ, ProSEED Programme)³⁰. It is a 10 days (40 hours) training programme for registered young job seekers to unlock their personal strengths and potential to advise them about training options (based on the personal skills profile that is being developed during the course) and support their labour market entry. Start SMART is based on the action-oriented approach and focusses especially on soft skills that are relevant for a successful job search. Since 2018, more than 11 000 job seekers have been trained through the Start SMART module throughout Albania. After successfully piloting Start SMART in 5 VTCs, the training was upscaled on national level and is now provided in all 10 VTCs and is available to all unemployed job seekers all over the country. The project has trained more than 100 Start SMART Trainers to use this methodology, among them also is a pool of 15 Multipliers who are qualified to train and certify additional Start SMART trainers in Albania.

The provision of guidance services in VET schools is a legal responsibility. Pursuant to Article 23 of the Law No.15/2017 "On Vocational Education and Training in the Republic of Albania", the VET system provides career education, counselling, and guidance services to its students and trainees to facilitate their transition to employment or further learning. These services are provided by each VET provider's development unit. Pursuant to Article 15 of the law each VET provider has a development unit (DU), which in addition to various functions (referring to Article 15(2)) also has the function of career guidance for students'/trainees. The DU has the following functions: the continuous professional development of teachers within the institutions, development of the curricula at the level of provider, establishing links between providers and business, career guidance for students/trainees, design and implementation of development projects, development of the marketing of the provider, and collection of tracking data at provider's level.

Article 37 (of Instruction No 11, dated 03.03.2020, on "The way of organization and activity of VET") defines the composition of the development unit of VET providers as consisting of teaching staff in vocational schools (the number of total weekly hours allocated to the development unit is calculated based on the number of students and the number of programs being offered) or other members for functions that are not directly related to teaching. In vocational training centers, the development unit is part of the administration sector. Article 37 defines the composition of the development unit of VET providers, Article 41 explicitly defines the tasks of the development unit for career guidance for

³⁰ <https://www.giz.de/en/worldwide/43738.html>

students / trainees, and Article 45 of this Instruction defines the general criteria for appointing the members of the development unit.

Higher education institutions

Career and alumni offices in every institution of higher education facilitate the link between academic careers and the employment opportunities of graduate students. Universities have realized the importance of the role of Career and Alumni Offices in providing career guidance services to their students and have taken concrete steps in their placement. Most of the universities have appointed full-time staff to manage the Career Centers and have made an office available within the institutions. This is probably due to their obligations regarding the accreditation process, but it reflects to a growing awareness about the importance of career guidance services for student orientation in the labor market, and in their academic and professional development.

Career and Alumni Offices facilitate the link between the academic career and employment opportunities for graduate students, and encourage students after they complete their study program to participate in extracurricular activities of a scientific, professional, social and cultural nature. Exchanging ideas with graduate students, discussions on current topics, organizing competitive activities, organizing tours, participating in scientific conferences, humanitarian and awareness campaigns, are all part of the planning of the work of the Career and Alumni Offices. In addition, they orient, encourage and support students in their personal and professional growth through participation in extracurricular programs of a scientific, professional, social and cultural nature in accordance with the requirements of the labor market. The main function of the Career and Alumni Offices is to support students to better prepare for employment and to encourage their career development in certain fields of study.

Employment offices provide information and guidance on all aspects of career choice and career development, types of training or study courses, occupational change and mobility, further training and retraining, placements and self-employment.

Career counseling elements are also integrated into employment services. The NAES does not look at career counseling from the perspective of economic policies but from the perspective of adult assistance and their career orientation towards professions that make more sense for the level / set of skills they have, or orientation towards rehabilitation in areas which are more suitable for them.

Employment offices, in cooperation with vocational training centers have undertaken a series of meetings in general and vocational high schools to promote to the graduates of these schools the new Start Smart course that is being offered for the first time this year by VTC.

The labor market information system is a sensitive area, which includes gathering information to making this information accessible to different audiences in relation to CG activities. There is significant fragmentation of the labor market information and a lot of work needs to be done in relation to providing information in a structured way.

The UNDP has conducted an LMIS study. The results of this study will be used to redesign the labor market information system which together with the employment portal (investments of the Albanian state) will be finalized within this year. The information should be interconnected and better used for the CG activities.

Private companies. The role of private companies is not specifically defined in a separate paragraph in the VET Law except for Article 22, "VET dual form" – which is currently being piloted for some selected handcrafts occupations under the crafts law, but is not aligned to secondary VET. They are approached by VET providers to support them in implementing their programmes, especially with regard to work-based learning (placement of VET students as intern in their companies; provision of in-company instructors to supervise students during their internship; implementation of the internship programmes in line with the requirements of the national curricula).

The Chambers of Commerce and Industry in various regions, in cooperation with the Ministry of Education, Sports and Youth and municipalities, organize annual work and study fairs. Career counselling activities are included in the events.

RisiAlbania has cooperated with the Faculty of Social Sciences to train counsellors (advisors) and develop scientific research. This faculty is the only tertiary education institution that offers a master's degree programme in counselling (Career Counsellor). A joint five-year master's degree is offered by the Faculty of Social Sciences at the University of Tirana and the University of Lausanne. The partnership between the two universities consists of a collaborative research agenda and curricula revision activities.

Within universities, from the total number of public (16) and private (27) universities, all have a Career Centre which creates a link between the academic studies and employment opportunities for graduate students. The Career and Alumni Office encourages students to take initiative after the completion of their study program. The Career and Alumni Office orients, encourages and supports students in their personal and professional growth through participation in extracurricular programs of a scientific, professional, social and cultural nature in accordance with the requirements of the labor market.

The RisiAlbania project has collaborated with four universities. The focus of the work was training (three-week training) of career counsellors in these universities based on the international career system (global career development facilitators). Counsellors were taught to work with students (preparing a CV, preparing a cover letter, preparing for an interview, and conducting a self-assessment).

Eleven universities are involved in an EU project called GRADUA (Graduates Advancement and Development of University capacities in Albania) under Erasmus³¹ and in collaboration with the University of Bologna. The project developed a platform (AlmaLaurea) for students, which is accommodated by the Albanian Academic Network and can be accessed through the website of the GRADUA project under the Publication & Articles section. The platform brings universities closer to the labour market. GRADUA is an open-source platform and RisiAlbania took part in designing the module related to career guidance. Career services were moved online during the pandemic and training sessions were held.

The project has developed a manual for students on how to conduct a self-assessment and how to apply for a job³² (available on the university website), drawing on the best European experiences. It is accessible to students, who can work on their own or ask for individual advice. Of course, this will not be easy as the student-career counsellor ratio is disproportionate.

The development of career services and the professional provision of these services to enable well-informed decision-making is exactly the focus of the work done at the Faculty of Social Sciences of the University of Tirana. Researchers at this university have adapted for Albania the following three international career instruments: the Personal Globe Inventory (PGI), the Career Decision Difficulties Questionnaire (CDDQ), and the Demand-Oriented Analysis (ADOR).

The Personal Globe Inventory (PGI) measures people's interests in various activities and helps individuals relate these interests to important life decisions such as: what to choose as a career or what to choose as a branch of study. It also measures and provides information about what hobbies or other interests (beyond the professional interest) individuals may like and find motivating. The purpose of the PGI is to give the individual a model on which to think about personal interests and to compare how these individual interests are similar or different from those of other people. The Personal Globe Inventory (PGI) was designed by Dr. Terence J.G. Tracey (University of Arizona, USA) and has been adapted for the Albanian context by experts from the Faculty of Social Sciences, University of Tirana in collaboration with the University of Lausanne – UNIL.

³¹ <https://www.graduaproject.com/#>

³² <https://ubt.edu.al/sq/2020/05/20/aplikojme-per-pune/>

The Career Decision Difficulty Questionnaire (CDDQ) identifies and focuses on the difficulties that individuals face when making a career decision. Career decision-making is among the most important decision in the range of important decisions in life. The CDDQ identifies and considers key career decision-making tasks such as: I. Initial client examination, II. Diagnosing a client's difficulties, III. Needs assessment, and IV. Evaluation of interventions - evaluation of the effectiveness of the intervention before and after. The CDDQ builds on studies conducted at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem by Itamar Gati, Ph.D., and has been adapted to the Albanian context by experts from the Faculty of Social Sciences, University of Tirana in collaboration with the University of Lausanne - UNIL.

Demand-Oriented Analysis (ADOR) provides a system to identify the basic needs of people using career guidance systems, in order to help counselors to provide appropriate services to these individuals. This instrument (ADOR) provides the client and career counsellors with a detailed profile of their basic needs, which, in turn, contributes to the analysis of client demand. The ADOR is an instrument that helps individuals identify their needs in the field of vocational guidance. The information obtained from this questionnaire is the result of an individual self-assessment. This result needs more professional reflection and interpretation. Demand-Oriented Analysis was designed by Samuele Meier and Prof. Dr. Jérôme Rossier (University of Lausanne - UNIL) and adapted for the Albanian context by experts from the Faculty of Social Sciences, University of Tirana in collaboration with the University of Lausanne - UNIL.

4.2 Support for the unemployed and for NEETs

Following the recent administrative and territorial division in Albania, the development of one-stop-shop models for services has been supported and implemented. ADISA (Agency for the Delivery of Integrated Services Albania) provides public services through reception counters for citizens (front office) as well as integrated one-stop-shop public service centers, for services performed by central government institutions and agencies and / or of local government units. The ADISA centers increase access to public services for the disabled, and have improved the infrastructure, logistics and communication (with a sign language video in the deaf-mute category, and management system for the blind).

Tirana Municipality backed by the Swiss project, RisiAlbania, has opened the first career guidance centre to assist youngsters and adults who are seeking employment. The Career Guidance Office of Tirana Municipality opened on December 18, 2020, and offers a new service for young people and the wider community. It informs and advises young people and adults on their professional and educational decisions. The office cooperates with public institutions, businesses and youth associations to increase continuously its service quality. Different age groups receive specialized services, such as career education for pre-university students, group and individual guidance, and career development training for young people and interested adults.

The Municipality's organisational chart shows that the career counselling sector has been created in the directorate of employment promotion (which addresses the employment of young people and marginalised groups). Therefore, career guidance will be a permanent function. A training module has been designed for career counsellors in the project. Modules for grades 3, 4, 5, 7, 8 and 9 have been completed and will be delivered by caretaker teachers in collaboration with school psychologists.

Work is being done on the RisiAlbania project is to enable the provision of career services in schools through the municipal office, and to establish an online service. The project has developed a career portal with the information on professions (descriptions of about 60 professions are available). In addition, there are illustrations of professions through videos and information on potential education and employment. The portal contains a database of all the VET providers (public and private) in Tirana. It lists the offer of vocational schools, vocational training centres and universities. Links are used for each profession to connect with employment portals or recruitment companies.

Partners Albania for Change and Development in collaboration with RisiAlbania is working to advocate for career guidance services at municipal level in Albania. This initiative is part of the strategy of RisiAlbania to establish/improve career services in Albania, targeting youth in particular. The model is currently being piloted in the Municipality of Tirana. The initiative consists in a bottom-up youth movement, which will advocate for the importance of Career Guidance Services to youth and to decision-makers at municipality level. The ultimate goal of establishing career guidance services in municipalities is to reach young people and enable them to adopt their decisions and actions in terms of educational, training and occupational choices. This initiative envisages being extended to 9 municipalities, namely, Berat, Korça, Durrës, Pogradec, Elbasan, Shkodër, Vlorë, and Fier.³³

Public employment services provided by regional and local employment structures include a three-tiered service delivery model: i) Information services to jobseekers, employers and others; ii) Job matching and mediation; and iii) Job Counselling and guidance.

The regional / local employment structure provides information on labour supply and demand for both jobseekers and employers, and other information on career and vocational orientation.

Counselling and career orientation, employment and occupation is provided at the regional / local employment structures through special advisory services for jobseekers and students in relation to their choice and formation in an appropriate profession. The Specialized Counselling Service provides in-depth counselling services on an individual basis to those clients who may be at a disadvantage or encounter barriers in accessing employment opportunities, and their profile indicates that a more intense level of intervention is required. Counselling and orientation for careers, employment and occupations are given through the following:

- career counselling to assist jobseekers to choose a suitable occupation to match their individual features and that is in demand in the labour market.
- job counselling to assist jobseekers to identify skill gaps and suitable options to address them.
- employment counselling to assist jobseekers to clarify their own employment goals, employment approach and qualification opportunities and to be aware of the necessary skills to search and retain a job.

The National Agency for Employment and Skills (NAES) was created in 2019. The mission of the agency is to develop and support the Albanian workforce through the provision of Vocational Education, Training, Vocational Guidance and Employment Services. It also provides financial and career support to unemployed jobseekers. It aims to provide employers with jobseeker matching services and other supporting activities to meet the human resource needs of all employers.

The “Career Orientation Guide” regulates career guidance for jobseekers registered at the employment office. Career guidance is a process that takes place prior to their inclusion on a vocational training course, internship programme or on-the-job training programme. It includes the following services: i) explanation of the European Skills, Competences, Qualifications and Occupations (ESCO)–ISCO system and automatic matching, ii) the ‘Find Yourself’ test, iii) soft skills, iv) exploring the world of work, and v) short-term internships.

The NAES has collaborated well with the C4EE project for the successful integration of young adults into the world of work. The aim of the project was to integrate young people with marginalised or migrant backgrounds into the labour market. The project started in 2017. In 2019, the counselling cycle was attended by 568 young people of whom 54% were women. From 2017 to 2019, the counselling cycle was attended by 1 293 participants of whom 49% were female. To promote youth development, the project seeks to address limitations such as young participants’ lack of professional skills, their lack of knowledge and orientation regarding labour market opportunities, and the lack of access and appropriate services in this context at different levels. The beneficiaries are from Roma and Egyptian communities or have a migrant background. Through internships in different sectors,

³³ <https://partnersalbania.org/News/career-guidance-the-road-to-youth-employment/>

participants learn about their individual skills and how to improve them. To include unemployed jobseekers in the employment counselling cycle, 18 trainers were trained in 12 regional employment directorates.

In October 2020, the Albanian Council of Ministers announced a decision acknowledging the official recognition and application of key elements of the Coaching for Employment and Entrepreneurship (C4EE) methodology in the new organizational and processes' Manual of the Public Employment Services. Based on this decision, all unemployed jobseekers who register through the National Agency for Employment and Skills (NAES) will benefit from a more tailored employment program to help them find a more suitable and profitable job. The program applied by the NAES is built on an adaptation of the C4EE methodology, that was developed by Swisscontact in collaboration with the Lucerne University of Applied Sciences, and started in 2012.

Career guidance service providers in employment offices are responsible for matching unemployed jobseekers to business needs, based on the jobseekers' skills and experience. This brings with it the need to individualise the counselling approach for jobseekers and to tailor the intervention and counselling to their needs and those of the market. The individual employment plan and a structured approach are very important working tools in the hands of counsellors. The individual employment plan makes career guidance more personalised and supports unemployed jobseekers at their actual employment level.

Inspired by similar schemes in the EU Member States, the youth guarantee³⁴ is a commitment to support every young person under the age of 30 who is not employed, in education or training (so-called NEETs). This commitment entitles young people to receive a good quality offer of employment, traineeship, apprenticeship, or continued education and training within four months of leaving school or becoming unemployed.

On 14 October 2021, the European Commission, together with the International Labour Organization (ILO), the European Training Foundation (ETF), and the representatives of the Western Balkans launched the first stage of a process that will lead to the formulation of Youth Guarantee Implementation Plans³⁵ in all Western Balkan economies by June 2022. The launch follows the milestone endorsement of the ['Western Balkans Declaration on ensuring sustainable labour market integration of young people'](#) at the Brdo EU-Western Balkans Ministerial meeting on employment and social affairs in July 2021, and the subsequent establishment of the EU/ILO Technical Assistance Facility on the Youth Guarantee during the summer.

Under the EU/ILO Technical Assistance Facility, the relevant authorities and stakeholders from the Western Balkans will receive support from the ILO and the ETF for designing, implementing, and enhancing Youth Guarantee schemes. Informal employment and a lack of social dialogue take centre stage among the key issues on which the European Commission has asked the Western Balkans to show improvements in order to meet the EU accession criteria in the area of social policies and employment.

Phase 2³⁶ of the [Employment and Social Affairs Platform \(ESAP\)](#) will consist of three thematic components:

1. Informal Employment and Undeclared Work
2. Labour Inspection
3. Social Dialogue

The Informal Employment and Undeclared Work Component will generate quantitative evidence on what works and what does not work with regard to transition to formality in the region and to improve the availability and quality of data on the different dimensions of informality. The results will

³⁴ <https://www.ilo.org/budapest/countries-covered/albania/lang--en/index.htm>

³⁵ ILO/EU partnership: Youth Guarantee garners speed in the Western Balkans

³⁶ www.esap.online

create the basis for evidence-based policymaking supporting improved policy design and implementation to reduce informal employment and undeclared work.

In the **Labour Inspection Component**, informal employment and undeclared work will be the main policy areas for peer learning within the Network of Labour Inspectorates in the Western Balkans mirroring the EU's Senior Labour Inspectors' Committee (SLIC). A peer-review will increase the regional knowledge and understanding of the different labour inspection systems and practices. Based on the results of the peer review, tailored Inspection guidelines for detecting undeclared work will be designed and pilot tested. The results will lead to increased outreach of the Labour Inspectorates to prevent and combat undeclared work.

To foster increased effectiveness of tripartite and bipartite social dialogue, the **Social Dialogue Component** will include three strands of action:

1. Establishment of online performance-monitoring tools for Economic and Social Councils in their role in policy dialogue.
2. Development of regional guidelines for the promotion of collective bargaining in selected economic sectors, and
3. Promotion of labour dispute resolution and industrial relations.

CG activities are expected to provide a clear picture of current and future opportunities for young people in the labor market while anticipating how these challenges will affect different groups of young people. Employment offices are the main actors in the implementation of the Youth Guarantee as they have to cover a wide range of responsibilities in the management, coordination and direct provision of services, being the main providers of employment interventions.

4.3 Workers / Employed

Companies

There are some big companies with a clear vision of CG services and have foreseen in their business plans CG activities and have allocated funds for the development of their human resources. These companies are aware of the benefits of a Career Development System to their organization. Once an organization has a fair idea about an employee's strengths and weaknesses, attitude and behaviour, values and future aspiration and skills and competencies, they are able to make better use of employee skills and put them in the right place. These organizations are becoming more and more aware that aligning the employee's career goals with the strategic goals of the organization not only helps the organization achieve its goals but also helps the organization to differentiate itself from labor market competitors.

DM Consulting Services Company³⁷, which has made available the "DUAPUNE" portal – online jobs and career services³⁸, offers custom-made career guidance services. For individuals who need career counselling, a custom-made service is offered that is one-to-one and used in most cases for high-level individuals (top managers). The company has an education blog (blog.duapune.com or duapune.com/blog) under its Edu DP service. This is an open blog for everyone.

The manual Your Career Guide³⁹ (a company publication) and accompanying exercises is a publicly available document designed to assist those seeking a career counselling service. This manual is "an educational guide that provides structured information regarding the steps an individual must follow to have a sustainable and successful career". It is aimed at students who are at the end of their studies,

³⁷ <http://dm-consulting.biz/>

³⁸ <https://www.duapune.com/>

³⁹ <https://www.duapune.com/career-guide>

and professionals, and provides the necessary information for a better career start and to individuals who wish to change careers during their employment. The information is tailored to the employment market in Albania.

While career guidance modules are focused on employees, the company has also developed modules for employers on how to write a job description, and how to prepare an interview (services offered to the companies and also related to the "duapune" service). The plan is to establish the Employer Branding Academy, in collaboration with the Swedish company "Universum", which educates companies on how to improve their image in order to absorb talent in the market. The aim is to set up a one-stop-shop, with services for companies and individuals, in which CG is a very important element.

Dynamics Partners consulting and outsourcing⁴⁰, in cooperation with AIMS Albania⁴¹, has created Expert Lane – Career Platform⁴² to facilitate the transition from education to employment for young job seekers, for young professionals, and all those who are ready to enter the labor market or want a significant change in their career. Dynamics Partners helps jobseekers discover their potential and improve their skills, it offers online psychometric tests (interest, personality, skills, and motivation) and individual counselling by placing psychometric results in a practical career context. Psychometric assessment (personality, ability) is designed to gauge the suitability for a role. After the test, advice is given by specialized experts. Based on the evaluation of the candidate, courses are offered (employability skills development). JOBFIT programs are specifically designed to assess the potential for performing in specific job positions in a variety of industries. They show exactly how well a candidate's talent matches those most in demand in the market.

The **RisiAlbania** project recognises the potential dynamic and catalytic role of print and online mass media, TV and radio broadcasting for reaching and influencing large numbers of people. During phase I (2013–2017), the project's goal was to make mass media an ongoing provider of information on employment issues for young people. The project partnered with various forms of media to regularly design, produce and disseminate labour market information with attractive formats and contents for young people. A special focus of the project support was to build commercial incentives for the media to cover employment issues in an attractive way. During this phase, work with the media also resulted in the design, launch and running of a module on labour market reporting at the Faculty of Journalism and Communication. This optional module, which is still offered, is designed to show future journalists the importance of reporting on the labour market and to guide them on ways of reporting on this.

Support during phase II (2017–2021): the RisiAlbania project capitalised on successfully working with the media in the first phase. The support offered to the mass media during phase I of the project and the sustainability and scalability shown in the dissemination of labour market information, laid a strong foundation for applying a similar approach in the field of career guidance topics for young people and their parents during phase II. There are currently five media products that are active and are now run either with no further support or with very little support from the project. These media products include: Rruga drejt suksesit (Path to success) by Club FM Radio; Drejt Punës (Towards work) by Shqiptarja.com, a newspaper and online platform; Më i miri në vend (Best in the country) disseminated on RTSH (national radio); Puna që dua (The job that I want) disseminated on InTV, RTSH2; and Think Big by New Media Communications (media producer), disseminated online.

⁴⁰ <https://dynamicpartners.al/>

⁴¹ <https://aims.al/>

⁴² www.expertlane.al

5. FUNDING

Career Guidance services are funded from different sources, but generally covered by the state budget. In the education sector, services are funded by the state budget (for general education and VET schools) through funds allocated to the respective ministries (MoESY and MoFE). VET schools are supported by various donors or different companies (especially for textbooks, working materials, for incentivising companies to offer job shadowing, internships, etc.) that cooperate with them. In the employment sector, services of the public employment service are mainly funded by the state budget. Own institution resources cover the CG activities of HE institutions. Private companies offering career guidance are funded to 100% by service users.

Although there is no dedicated budget (a separate budget item) for career development activities in education, training, and employment, in all these institutions there are staff employed to carry out these activities and a fund is allocated for expenditure, for personnel, including salaries, and social and health insurance.

For example, for public vocational education institutions and training providers, in addition to the salaries of employees, the state budget has allocated funds for the continuous professional development of extra-curricular activities (under Article 32 of the VET Law)

On the other hand, under Article 31 of the VET Law (Income-generating activities of public VET providers), VET public institutions operate as economic units and generate income from educational activities. Income can be provided from the provision of services and goods in the market; from renting out premises and equipment; from funds for projects financed by international donors, by projects or other income allowed by law.

Career guidance in education and training is frequently under-funded, without any clear yearly allocation and it is not necessarily associated with any type of assessment of needs. Another issue is the lack of clarity regarding the administrative responsibility for career guidance activities.

6. ACCESS

Individuals of all ages have access to, and support for career development services, although their access depends on their place of residence, e.g. in rural areas this service is less accessible. The fact that there are 12 regional offices and 36 local employment offices, and educational and training institutions that cover the entire territory, shows that there is good coverage of the territory in terms of career guidance services.

There is increased caution regarding social inclusion policies (with a focus especially on the most vulnerable) and commitment by local governments to attracting various non-governmental organizations to support these individuals or groups at risk. Of course, the object of their intervention has not directly targeted CG services, but indirectly this cautious approach has also affected specific elements of these services.

There is high awareness at decision-making levels of the fact that everyone should have an offer that addresses their needs, and about the obligation to deploy professional services in essential sectors such as education, training, and employment.

There are still no information services for people who have difficulty accessing standard career development support, e.g., persons in geographical isolation, inactive persons or those working in informal sectors, although recent legal changes (through the obligation to be present and to report their status in the employment office every 3 months) have put this category of persons in contact with these services. However, it can be concluded that the current availability of CG services is insufficient to meet increasing needs, e.g. of inactive youth, vulnerable groups, and workers moving to new jobs due to economic post-pandemic changes.

7. USE OF TECHNOLOGY

The country has seen a growing use of digital tools and on-line portals – both in the public and private sectors. For practitioners in VET institutions, capacity-building activities on the use of ICT in career guidance have been conducted/implemented by the donors/projects.

Modernization of the infrastructure and IT systems in the National Employment Service are geared towards ensuring the quality of services by monitoring the phases of delivery, at three levels⁴³, in order to provide services according to the needs of jobseekers, and give more priority to unemployed jobseekers at the risk of exclusion from the labor market. Therefore, the information system of public employment services was further developed during 2017, and focused on the following new developments and improvements:

- Changes to all three registers (jobseekers, employers, and vacancies) to increase the quality of the profiling and targeting process.
- Changes to the mediation process for a more efficient adaptation to vacancy requirements.

The changes to the information system were made known to all the staff of the Employment Offices, who were trained in the use of the new system, and also participated in its testing. Changes to the system were introduced in November 2017.

In 2016, the system became part of the state data⁴⁴ and allows exchanges of information with the Civil Status Information System, Tax System, Compulsory Health Insurance System, System of Economic Assistant, throughout the country. However, it is only accessible at the level of MFE, by unemployed jobseekers, and employers through the online part of the system. The system does not interact with any provider of Vocational Education and Training, both public or private, or with any private employment agency inside or outside the country in relation to employment in other localities both in Albania and abroad.

In cooperation with the maintenance company, work is underway to build the new module on "Reports", as part of the developments included in the maintenance contract.

The module focuses on reports on:

- Balance of vacancies
- Defining and achieving monitoring objectives and indicators at the office level
- Use of services by former beneficiaries of the economic assistance scheme who have lost this support in the framework of the reform.

The NAES (as part of the e-Albania government platform of interaction that connects the systems of institutions with each other) has worked to include some online services offered to jobseekers and employers as well as to interact with other institutions. Several problems of this system have already been identified, of which can be mentioned:

- The system was originally intended as a register and as such all the changes made affect its performance and render it slow and difficult to work with.
- Despite the initial training of the staff, the levels of use of the system among specialists are different, which has led to problems in entering information in the system. Although the changes in

⁴³ Jobseekers searching for a job through the NAES will undergo an in-depth interview with the NAES staff (step No.1), followed by a profiling process (step No.2), aimed at creating an individual employment plan that reflects their skills profile (step No.3).

⁴⁴ DCM No. 191, dated 9.03.2016

the system were accompanied by training for all user groups, it is necessary to have individual training in the workplace.

- The changes brought by the new law "on the jobseeker" on the legal obligation for unemployed jobseekers to come (once a month) to employment offices, increased the workload of specialists and the volume of work in the system, although the number of staff has not changed. This affects not only the quality of the services provided but also the quality of the information entered in the system. The NAES system has about 1.5 GB of data and the number of users has been increasing.
- The system architecture provides limited opportunities for changes and personalizing reports and work procedures. The system does not enable the definition of these procedures and consequently does not generate performance management reports at the specialist level making them very difficult to evaluate.
- The architecture and technologies used do not rely on any of the new software development standards.

Numerous changes in the system have led to complications in its proper functioning, so the NAES is assessing the current system to see if it can continue to intervene, or if a system needs to be upgraded from scratch. As above, the NAES in cooperation with AKSH⁴⁵ is working on drafting TORs for the complete re-engineering of the current system with a focus on:

- Improving the information documented in all 3 databases through the introduction of new fields, or the addition of search fields.
- Introducing automatic job search profiling.
- Adding new modules for monitoring all programs implemented by the NAES.
- Improving the interaction of the system with other systems by adding information exchanged with those institutions and adding other institutions.

⁴⁵ National Agency for ICT

8. QUALITY OF THE PROVISION OF CAREER DEVELOPMENT SUPPORT SERVICES WITHIN A CULTURE OF CONTINUOUS IMPROVEMENT

8.1 Standards

The Faculty of Social Science at the University of Tirana offers a master's degree programme for career counsellors. RisiAlbania has cooperated with the Faculty of Social Sciences to train counsellors (advisors) and develop scientific research. This faculty is the only tertiary education institution that offers a master's degree programme in counselling (Career Counsellor). A joint five-year master's degree is offered by the Faculty of Social Sciences at the University of Tirana and the University of Lausanne. The partnership between the two universities consists of a collaborative research agenda and curricula revision activities. The RisiAlbania project has engaged the collaboration of four universities. The focus of the work was training (three-week training) for career counsellors in these universities, based on the international career system (global career development facilitators).

There is no legal regulation on the qualifications, training and professional status of career guidance practitioners and counsellors in Albania. Each provider of career guidance defines its own requirements – normally a higher education degree and some training is a prerequisite.

To embrace the innovation and change brought by ICT, CG practitioners need adequate training and support. Training modules which specifically support facilitating changes in attitudes to ICT for those working in CG services are needed. Training modules should be developed and followed by CG practitioners. The skills required for CG practitioners to use ICT in CG activities, such as managing user-friendly web sources, using electronic tools, processing client information, etc. need to be updated. The competencies of the practitioners on how to use ICT and how to properly evaluate and use online content needs further support/development.

8.2 Staffing

The National Agency for Employment and Skills (NAES) was created in 2019 (DCM No.554, dated 31.07.2019). The mission of the agency is to develop and support the Albanian workforce through the provision of Vocational Education, Training, Vocational Guidance and Employment Services. It also provides financial and career support to unemployed jobseekers. It aims to provide employers with jobseeker matching services and other supporting activities to meet the human resource needs of all employers.

The Employment Service Support and operational directorate is the key directorate for employment, since it is at the core of all employment service activity and provides practical support for operations to Regional Directorates, and local offices. This includes holistic profiling, mediation, activation strategy, vocational guidance and counselling, placement of jobseekers, migration services, active labour market programmes and measures, services for people with disabilities, services for employers, youth employment measures and administration of unemployment benefits. The directorate has in total 21 persons employed out of 90 employees in total.

The NAES staff in the employment offices at regional and local levels consists of 298 employees in total, of whom 245 employees are in the sector of employment services, vocational guidance, and employment services, and 53 employees are in the support services sector. The staff in the sector of employment services, vocational guidance and employers services in relation to the total number of employees in regional offices are: Tiranë, 37 out of 46; Berat, 18 out of 22; Dibër, 16 out of 20; Durrës, 24 out of 28; Elbasan, 21 out of 25; Kukës, 15 out of 19; Fier, 20 out of 24; Gjirokastrë, 16 out of 20; Korçë, 23 out of 27; Lezhë, 17 out of 21; Shkodër, 19 out of 23; Vlorë, 19 out of 23.

In terms of existing initiatives and contributions related to CG, there is no lack of synchronization and no overlap, because projects are the drivers in CG (RisiAlbania and Skills for Jobs) and they have different target groups.

There is a group of schools that have been supported by various projects and capacities have already been created. So the core practices are in place. These practices implemented in schools or centers supported by these projects have been generalized and extended to all schools. Based on these experiences, further training programs are designed (career management skills development are part of this training).

In support of young people, the aim of project C4EE, 2017-2020 (Coaching for employment and entrepreneurship) is to resolve constraints such as a lack of professional and life skills of young participants, a lack of knowledge and orientation regarding labour market opportunities, and a lack of access to proper services in this context at different levels. This is achieved by training coaches who implement a coaching cycle developed in collaboration with HSLU - Hochschule Luzern. The coaching cycle is implemented by a total of 20 coaches in 12 regional employment offices. The Coaching Cycle Model is recognized by the NAES for disadvantaged young adults and is included in the state vocational training offer.

The first group of 20 career counsellors from 4 Albanian universities attended a 3-week-long journey and obtained the international certification – Global Career Development Facilitator. This is a big step towards improving career services at universities and also lays the foundations for the creation of a first group of experts and facilitators of career services for the Albanian market – an indispensable role for the quality employment of youth. The new group of 20 has started working and awareness is growing about the importance of career guidance services for student orientation in the labor market and in their academic and professional development.

In the second half of 2019, the profiling process started according to the new changes made in the public employment services system. This process started with the training of 225 specialists of employment offices, and then with their monitoring and assistance for the correct profiling of unemployed jobseekers.

In General Education, career guidance is addressed by caretaker teachers in collaboration with school psychologists in compulsory education institutions, and general high school institutions offer CG in addition to the core curriculum elective modules (specifically in professional and subject elective modules). In VET Institutions, the development unit, which is part of the internal structures of each VET institution, has the function of career guidance for students/trainees. In higher education institutions, career and alumni offices in every higher education institution facilitate the link between academic careers and employment opportunities for graduate students. Employment offices provide information and guidance on all aspects of career choices and career development, types of training or study courses, occupational change and mobility, further training and retraining, placements and self-employment. Practitioners receive support for their work through donor projects as well as training which contributes to the reputation of their work and strengthens an attitude of valuing investments in CG. For school practitioners, there was no structured training for the staff of development units. The on-the-job-training approach was used.

School practitioners: a group of school practitioners have been supported by various projects and capacities have already been created. So, there is a relatively good basis in place. Based on these experiences, training programs for practitioners should be designed (career management skills development should be part of those training).

University practitioners: the first group of 20 career counsellors has attended a training course and obtained the international certification – Global Career Development Facilitator thus marking a big step towards improving career services at universities. This also lays the foundations for the creation of a first group of experts and facilitators of career services for the Albanian market.

NAES practitioners: 20 coaches in 12 regional Albanian employment services (NAES) have been trained in the framework of the C4EE (Coaching for employment and entrepreneurship) project by implementing the Coaching Cycle Model (a model recognized by the NAES for disadvantaged young adults and is included in the state vocational training offer).

8.3 Quality of data and information

The labor market information system is a very sensitive area, from gathering information to making this information accessible to different audiences. There is fragmentation of the labor market information and a lot of work has to be done in relation to providing information in a structured way. The UNDP conducted an LMIS study in 2021. The results of this study will be used to redesign the labor market information system together with the employment portal. The new structural changes (because of the recent legal changes) highlight the need for a complete overhaul of the current employment services information system. The NAES is cooperating with the National Agency of ICT and is working towards a unique system of employment services, the integration of the database with other national databases, and the reorganization of the online application portal.

The project **SREPVET** (Supporting the Reform on Employment Policies and Vocational Education and Training) started on 20 October 2020, as a 23-month project, and is scheduled for completion on 19 September 2022. The project is funded by the European Union. The project has two main purposes covering employment services and vocational education and training: i) to provide capacity development support to the NAES for the efficient and effective management of the employment programme and policies, ii) to support relevant institutions responsible for vocational education and training in the context of the National Employment and Skills Strategy revised Action Plan 2019-2022.

As a result of the "Design and development of a new VET MIS", the following activities are planned:

- Analysis and review of the existing information systems, databases, models, and templates.
- Analysis of the functions, procedures, and hierarchies between the different VET actors.
- Design and revise the data structures and templates for the new VET MIS.
- Development of a shared, online, VET MIS.
- Preparation of handbooks and guidelines and development of training packages for administering and using the MIS.
- Providing around 80 staff from public VET providers to work on the VET MIS.

8.4 Monitoring, evaluation and policy feedback

There is no monitoring and evaluation strategy for career development support. Tracer studies to evaluate the impact of education programs are not in place, and there are no client satisfaction surveys (despite some tracer study initiatives having been implemented with donor support). There is no mechanism to monitor the operation of the delivery services and activities.

There have been very significant analyses (e.g. Career Guidance and Counseling Service Level at Public and Private Universities in Albania, L. Rama & E. Polo, and Review of current state of Career Guidance and counseling in Albania, V. Ademi & S. Avxhiu) which have been initiated and supported by donors in order to plan various interventions, but there has been no initiative taken to build evidence on guidance provision, and the policy system, or to identify the effectiveness or the impact of CG services.

There has not been any research / analysis on cost-benefits of CG to governments, communities and individuals, or of career and financial resources for career guidance from the perspective of customer needs or requirements, customer characteristics or customer satisfaction. It is important to develop a

legal framework for M&E, to define the roles of public, private and civil society actors, and in particular of practitioners and clients / users in M&E.

9. CONCLUSIONS AND WAY FORWARD

Key findings

Career counselling and guidance (Këshillimi dhe udhëzimi në karrierë) is understood as services that assist individuals to make education, training and occupational choices and to manage their careers. Recent legal changes (VET Law, Employment Promotion Law as well as the National VET Strategy 2019-2022) clearly show a willingness for CG, political support and a changing culture towards CG.

Career education or vocational guidance is an integral part of the school curriculum and a common guiding activity in most high schools, aimed at preparing students for the world of work by improving their career management skills and their abilities to seek and use information for making decisions. The VET system provides career instruction, counselling, and guidance to facilitate their students finding employment. Development units are set up and operate in all vocational education and adult education institutions have the function of learners' career guidance. Career and alumni offices in every institution of higher education facilitate the link between academic careers and the employment opportunities of graduate students. Universities have realized the importance of the role of Career and Alumni Offices in providing career guidance services to their students and have policies in place to provide these services.

The provision of vocational guidance for youth and adults in relation to all issues of career choices and career development and the relevant educational paths is the task of the employment offices. They provide information and guidance on all aspects of career choices and career development, types of training or study course, occupational change and mobility, further training and retraining, placements and self-employment. Individual capacities have been set up. Practitioners (school practitioners, university practitioners, and employment services practitioners) receive support for their work through donor projects as well as training. This contributes to the reputation of their work, improves the provision of CG, and highlights the value of investing in CG services.

Many citizens in Albania have no access to guidance and counselling services during their lifetime, such as NEETs, PWDs, people living in remote areas, etc. This denies them the opportunity to manage their educational and working life effectively and make well-informed decisions about their careers. Despite the continuous support of various projects, career guidance issues have not been addressed in depth because of the simple fact that it lacks an overall strategy. A strategic (policy) document is necessary to build a solid system in the field of CG. European experience should be taken into account.

There has been a lack of cooperation between different government agencies, and in particular between education and employment portfolios, and between different levels of government in providing and sharing career information. This leads to overlap, fragmentation and a lack of transparency and inclusiveness. A challenge for policymakers is to ensure that career guidance is part of community-based services being targeted at early school-leavers. Career orientation should be a part of a school's strategy to detect and assist young people leaving school early or without qualifications, to help them stay in school and provide planned exit strategies that will enable them to re-engage in learning and successfully complete secondary education and training.

Three key Priorities stemming from the review include:

- Develop a strategic (policy) document such as a career guidance strategy across policy areas and sectors, or a lifelong learning strategy or skills strategy with a clear integration of lifelong career guidance for all to ensure a coherent and systemic approach in the field of career guidance in the sectors of education, youth, health, social services and employment, aimed at long-term sustainability.
- Establish a national level cross-ministerial working group on career development support, which brings together all relevant stakeholders. Ensure the involvement of public stakeholders, private sector, civil society, research and social partners, as well as donors.

- Develop a consistent approach to career education from primary school onwards to general education, VET, and higher education: review the various career education programmes and activities in place.

DETAILED RECOMMENDATIONS

The recommendations do not represent final solutions but are aimed at guiding policy and practice discussions. They follow the key pillars of this report and cover system, provider and practitioner levels:

Policy framework

Short-term

- Develop a strategic (political) document such as a career guidance strategy across policy areas and sectors or a lifelong learning strategy or skills strategy with a clear integration of lifelong career guidance for all, to ensure a coherent and systemic approach in the field of career guidance in the sectors of education, youth, health, social services and employment, aimed at long-term sustainability.

Medium term to long term

- **Ensure leadership** - The main challenge is the absence of a single agency responsible for career guidance. Of course, best international practice demonstrates cases where career guidance is implemented successfully, even though the function is shared between various agencies. The strategic document has to introduce a clear mandate for coordination in an entity or working group after the process of consulting with key stakeholders.

Coordination and Cooperation

Short-term

- Establish a national level cross-ministerial working group on career development support, which brings together all the relevant stakeholders. Ensure the involvement of public stakeholders, private sector, civil society, research and social partners.
 - Analyse the possible use of the Integrated Policy Management Groups (IPMGs) for sectoral cooperation on career guidance while making sure all relevant stakeholders are involved.
 - Ensure cross sectoral cooperation.
- Building on national coordination, ensure regional and local level coordination for career guidance.
 - Analyse the possible leadership role of the 12 Regional Directorates and 24 Local Employment Offices in coordinating all relevant stakeholders per level.
 - Build on the experience of existing private sector participation in VET and streamlining WBL practices among VET providers, and the work of sectoral skills committees to ensure cooperation and collaboration between education and employer organisations for career education and career guidance.
- Develop collaboration strategies between employment offices, private guidance services, and local education and training institutions, to enable unemployed jobseekers to manage transitions to employment and to re-engage with learning. Build on and extend the approach of RisiAlbania to build commercial incentives for the media to cover employment issues in an attractive way. Continue the module on labour market reporting at the Faculty of Journalism and Communication, in order to engage the media as a provider of information on employment issues for young people. Extend the scope to all the population, by addressing in particular SMEs and the need for skills

development in the context of the digital and green transition, and addressing the issue of the informal economy.

Medium to long term

- Articulate a vision and develop a strategy for delivering lifelong career development support to all. Such mechanisms are required within government, where responsibility for guidance services is fragmented across several ministries.
- Ensure co-operation and co-ordination between education and employment institutions for career education and career guidance activities.

Services

Short-term

- Develop a consistent approach to career education from primary school onwards to general education, VET and higher education: review the various career education programmes and activities in place (from donor projects such as RisiAlbania, to existing learning activities in VET and general education and universities), identify what works and what is missing for each education level, and develop a coherent approach to career education that focuses on three key pillars (learning about self, i.e. personal and social-emotional competence development including learning to learn competence, entrepreneurial mindset; learning about the economy, the labour market and trends and their critical reflection in relation to the self in the labour market; learning about education pathways and lifelong learning opportunities). This should contribute to the reduction of the high youth unemployment rate.
- Develop a strategic approach to career development support for workers in the informal economy to support their transition to formal economy – in line with plans within the framework of Phase 2 of the Employment and Social Affairs Platform (ESAP). This requires generating quantitative evidence on what works and what does not work with regard to transition to formality in the region and improving availability and quality of data on the different dimensions of informality, in order to reduce the high rate of informal work; this requires cooperation with NGOs, public social workers, etc. for reaching out to those target groups can be fruitful.
- Ensure career counselling services for SMEs. CG should be activated in companies by introducing incentives (e.g. making CG an allowable expenditure under training levy schemes); or introducing schemes that give public recognition to enterprises that provide exemplary programmes.

Medium term to long-term

- Supplement the existing and prevailing NAES classical matching employment approach focused on filling vacant positions with a service approach, moving towards career guidance as conversations with a career guidance practitioner, respecting trends in the labour market and personal interests and skills of individuals. This would address future employment in a spirit of aspiration, and develop career management skills (CMS) for managing future transitions – as a key response to adapting services to the new requirements in the context of changing labour markets.
- Develop integrated services covering career guidance, social services, health services, unemployment services, etc. to tackle the challenges faced by vulnerable groups with reintegration into the labour market; outreach strategies are key to going beyond opening hours in a centre where people need to actively drop in to receive services.

Funding:

Short-term

- Consider policy options such as devolving funding either to regions and localities as part of decentralization, or to individual educational institutions. This can result in stronger local ownership and customisation of services, if strict quality assurance measures are adopted to monitor the quality of services (in particular through professionalisation, see below).
- Ensure an adequate number of career guidance staff in NAES to manage the increased work load coming with the changes brought by the new law "on the jobseeker" with the legal obligation for unemployed jobseekers (once a month) to attend employment offices, to ensure quality of the services provided, and the quality of the information entered into the ICT system.

Access:

Short-term

- Use tracking and data exchange approach to trace inactive and disengaged young people, establish first contact and offer career development support. Establish the first contacts through the partnerships with organisations catering to young people, and recruit outreach or youth workers to carry out fieldwork.

Medium-term to long-term

- Develop a strategy for identifying disengaged and inactive young people, bringing them to career guidance services and offering them an individualised reintegration programme.

Use of technology:

Short-term

- Better integrate existing ICT services into the traditional face-to-face work of NAES career guidance practitioners.

Medium-term to long-term

- Develop a strategic approach for the use of ICT in career guidance, using ICT to strategically bring services from across sectors and policy areas together, have an online one-stop-shop entry point at national level with sections for parents, schools, teachers, PES staff, employers etc., adapted to their needs, as well as self-learning sections adapted to the needs of client groups.

Quality, professionalisation and continuous improvement:

Short term

- As a high priority, review all the existing training concepts, curricula/ modules, materials for career guidance practitioners (from donor projects like StartSmart, RisiAlbania career guidance office training module to existing ones at universities (5 year Master degree programme), private providers, etc.). Identify what works, what is missing in the various practitioner roles in the various institutions (NAES, schools, VET, universities, municipalities etc.), analyse training needs due to new challenges for the profession in the context of changing labour markets (use of ICT, catering for employed/workers as well etc.) and develop a draft list of required skills, knowledge, and attitudes for different career guidance roles per institutional setting (NAES, school, VET etc.).
- Mandate the Agency for Quality Assurance in pre-university Education to monitor career education input, output and outcome, as well to draw a baseline for further M&E work.

Medium term to long-term

- Develop a competence framework which can embrace but also differentiate a variety of career guidance practitioner roles – and provide career development guidelines for guidance staff themselves. The framework could be developed through a process of consultation between all the professional groups involved.
 - Derive occupational standards for practitioners at certificate, Bachelor and Master levels.
 - Ensure official recognition in the national NQF.
 - Ensure that private providers have to fulfil the requirements (through accreditation, register of practitioners, etc.).
 - Ensure training is provided for career guidance practitioners on the use of ICT for career guidance.
- Add to the VET provider development unit (DU) functions, to ensure the integration of career guidance and career education into its existing mandate: i.e. develop the curricula at the level of provider considering career education (as part of existing subjects, as extracurricular activity, or as a standalone subject), establish links between providers and business also for career education and career guidance, and use tracking data to inform career guidance of potential future VET students and VET students.
- Develop a legal framework for M&E.

ACRONYMS

ADISA	Agency for the Delivery of Integrated Services Albania
ASCAP	Agency for Quality Assurance on Pre-University Education
CCI	Chamber of Commerce and Industry
CG	Career Guidance
DCM	Decision of Council of Ministers
ERP	Economic Reform Programme
ESAP	Employment and Social Affairs Platform
ETF	European Training Foundation
ILO	International Labour Organization
MoES	Ministry of Education and Sport
MoFE	Ministry of Finance and Economy
NAES	National Agency for Employment and Skills
NAVETQ	National Agency for Vocational Education and Training and Qualifications
NEET	Neither in Employment or in Education and Training
NESS	National Strategy for Employment and Skills
SLIC	EU's Senior Labour Inspectors' Committee
VS	Vocational schools
VTC	Vocational Training Centre
WBL	Work-Based Learning
WTTC	World Travel and Tourism Council

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