

MONITORING VET RECOMMENDATION AND OSNABRÜCK DECLARATION

North Macedonia 2023

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COUNTRY BRIEF

Introduction

The first integrated monitoring exercise on the [Council Recommendation on VET for sustainable competitiveness, social fairness and resilience \(2020\)](#) and the [Osnabrück Declaration on VET as an enabler of recovery and just transitions to digital and green economies \(2020\)](#) was carried out in 2023. The monitoring was guided by an integrated framework connecting priorities of both policy documents and it focused on five EU priorities¹: agile and resilient VET, adaptive to labour market needs; flexible VET and inclusive, providing progression and lifelong learning opportunities; innovative and excellent VET; attractive VET, based on modern and digitalised provision; VET underpinned by quality assurance.

In North Macedonia, the pre-pandemic macro-economic policies had provided fiscal stabilisation, with both the budget deficit and public debt having been reduced, allowing for some increase in State support for employment, companies and socially disadvantaged groups. Employment rates and wages were slowly rising. However, these improvements slowed down due to the pandemic, with a total unemployment rate of 14.4% in 2022, rising to 32.5% for the population aged 15-24. The average salary in the country in 2002 was approximately EUR 550. The EU-accession process is ongoing, with obstacles linked to the achievement of the *acquis Communautaire* and others to regional disputes over the origin of the Macedonian language and identity. After the local elections in 2021, a Government was established, led by Mr. Kovachevski from the left-wing party Social Democratic Union (SDSM) as Prime Minister, whilst Mr. Shaqiri from the party Democratic Union for Integration took charge of the Ministry of Education and Science.

This country brief, drafted by Ognen Spasovski, summarises the main policy developments in North Macedonia in 2021 and 2022, with regard to the thematic priorities identified in the [national implementation plan](#). The aim is to inform ETF monitoring and analysis on the implementation of the VET Recommendation and Osnabruck Declaration, relevant EU monitoring and reporting (e.g. European Commission Education and Training Monitor and the European Semester) and to be a source of information on recent VET-related policy developments.

More information about the country's policy developments (PDs) covered by this report can be found in the PD fiches published on [ETF OpenSpace](#).

For a description of the national VET context, challenges and national VET priorities, please refer to the 2022 country brief: [Country Brief North Macedonia edited.pdf \(europa.eu\)](#).

¹ Those selected by each country in their NIP.

Main policy developments in 2021 and 2022

EU priority 1. Agile and resilient VET, adaptive to labour market needs

Relevant national institutions, as well as social partners, have long emphasised that the low level of practical vocational skills in graduates from VET is the most salient weakness of the VET system in the country. The Strategy on Education 2018-2025 (MOES, 2018) notes that the number of vocational subjects and practical training classes in the VET study programme (curricula) is lowest in Europe, making it more oriented towards general-educational than vocational. This limits the VET system potential to meet the labour market needs. Despite the high rates of unemployment, companies often complain that they have difficulties recruiting adequately trained VET graduates.

In 2021 and 2022, the Ministry of Education and Science (MOES), in consultation with the VET Centre and other relevant institutions, initiated reforms in regulation in order to improve the quality and responsiveness of VET to labour market needs. Such efforts resulted in a new draft law on VET and new draft law on secondary education, both still under public consultation prior to adoption by the Parliament. In both draft laws, significant focus is placed on improving work-based learning in companies and establishing a system of dual education. This resulted in a revision of VET programmes with an increase of classes taking place in a real working setting. All the students enrolled in these programmes with an “increased number of practice classes” receive MKD 3 500 (around EUR 55) as a monthly scholarship for nine months during the school year (PD fiche: Regulation on Work-based learning and Dual education).

After the adoption of the law, VET providers will have wider freedom in structuring the curricula of programs at NQF levels 2, 3, 4 and 5B (post-secondary education), and thereby in increasing the share of work-based learning.

The main responsible bodies in developing a regulation on work-based learning and establishing a system of dual education are the MOES, in cooperation with the VET Centre, the Ministry of Labour and Social Policy, the Employment Service Agency, the Bureau for Development of Education and the Economic Chamber. The Ministry of Education will have responsibility for the overall policy and the verification of institutions as providers of VET. The VET Council will make suggestions and formulate proposals to define the enrolment policies and students’ scholarships. The national VET Centre will be responsible for advising and monitoring VET schools in the vocational part of the study programmes. Under the new VET law, municipalities will have a significant role in proposing the programmes of the VET schools for specific qualifications required by the local labour market, while the State Educational Inspectorate will still have mandate to monitor and inspect the regularity of educational practices in VET schools, as per the legislation.

MOES, in cooperation with the VET Centre and other organisations (e.g., donors) bodies, initiated and realised several complementary activities aimed at strengthening work-based learning, which also serve as preparatory steps for the implementation of dual education.

Efforts aimed at establishing dual programmes in North Macedonia started in 2017, resulting from cooperation between the Macedonian Government and a German economic delegation, which resulted in piloting in several companies in the country, and the project “20/20/20” with the power distribution and supply company EVN. They continued with the support of the Swiss Embassy (NDC) and Helvetas through the project “Education for Employment”.

The number of classes organised in a real work setting also increased as a result of the augmented participation in VET, which grew from 60% to 64%² between the school years 2020/21 and 2022/23. This was a result of concerted efforts by Government and MOES to increase VET attractiveness and participation, which included:

- Intensive campaigns to increase the participation of companies available to host trainees: from 16 companies involved in 2020/21 to 450 in 2022/23.
- The number of schools included in VET programs with an “increased number of practice classes”, also raised significantly from 2020/21 to 2022/23, despite the pandemic: from 8 VET schools in 2020/2021, to 46 in 2021/22, and 61 in 2022/23 (out of 75 in the whole country).
- Training organised for employees to become in-company trainers for students in work place: around 1000 employees participated in such training activities, realised by the VET Centre in the framework of the project ‘Education for Employment’.
- Supported by the IPA project “Increasing attractiveness, inclusiveness and relevance of VET and Adult Education”³, MOES undertook complementary activities such as further developing Regional VET Centres, the VNFIL system and post-secondary education. The VET Centre prepared new templates for standards for 360 occupations and 110 qualifications based on learning outcomes, tailored to the needs of the labour market, which were further adopted by MOES.

The VET Centre also revised the study programmes in VET, designing them in a modular way. This means that the programmes consist of modules that constitute whole units, and are transferable between different, but related, study programmes.

The national authorities also worked on adapting VET to the needs of the green transition, although this was not a priority selected in the National Implementation Plan.

- The new draft law on secondary education states that every school is obliged to include activities aimed at developing ‘green competencies’ in curricula, and preparing students for climate-related challenges.
- To support the introduction of green technologies, MOES approved study plans and programmes prepared by the VET Centre for ‘green’ qualifications, namely for the electrician-energy technician, technician for environment protection in the sectors chemistry and technology, and agro-technician. At the same time, MOES is part of the project – under the Green Climate Fund – ‘Building capacity towards sustainable human capital development’, and the ‘EU4Green’ project – aimed at supporting the Western Balkan countries in implementing the Green Agenda. In the sphere of adult education, there is increased number of applications by providers to the Adult Education Centre, for official verification of programmes that lead to green jobs, such as the following: collector of used materials for recycling, installer of solar panels, or installer of systems for sustainable energy.

Relevant Policy development (PD) fiche⁴:

PD fiche 1. Regulation on Work-based learning and Dual education (thematic priority ‘Reinforcing work-based learning, including apprenticeships’).

² Source: MOES administrative data reports.³ IPA II Project: Increasing attractiveness, inclusiveness and relevance of VET and Adult Education, EuropeAid/140265/IH/SER/MK. This project has four main components: Mapping opportunities and establishing two new Regional VET Centres; Implementation of the system for VNFIL; Improving the system for post-secondary education; and Compatibility of the national system of VET and Adult Education with the European Quality Assurance Reference Framework for VET.

³ IPA II Project: Increasing attractiveness, inclusiveness and relevance of VET and Adult Education, EuropeAid/140265/IH/SER/MK. This project has four main components: Mapping opportunities and establishing two new Regional VET Centres; Implementation of the system for VNFIL; Improving the system for post-secondary education; and Compatibility of the national system of VET and Adult Education with the European Quality Assurance Reference Framework for VET.

⁴ All PD fiches are available on [ETF OpenSpace](#).⁵ PD fiche: Regulation and initiatives on Validation of non-formal and informal learning

EU priority 2. Flexible VET and inclusive, providing progression and lifelong learning opportunities

The main policy developments under this EU priority relate to the regulation and initiatives on Validation of non-formal and informal learning (VNFIL)⁵, and the development of inclusive VET⁶.

Both priorities were emphasised in the Strategy on Education 2018-2025 (MOES, 2018). In order to make VET and adult learning more flexible and inclusive, and to provide conditions for progression in lifelong learning, MOES drafted four new laws on National Qualification Framework (NQF), Adult Education (AE), Secondary Education, and VET. These are in a consultation phase as a part of parliamentary procedure for their adoption.

- The new draft law on NQF generally states that it will be possible to obtain qualifications through validation of prior learning, though it envisages the establishment of a system of validation of non-formal and informal learning. The law on AE defines the validation process, its scope, the responsibilities of providers and the eligibility of candidates, and allows for VNFIL, both in formal and non-formal education. It also envisages the opportunity for young people and adults who are not in employment, education, or training (NEETs) to enrol in “second chance” education and training programmes, thus expanding opportunities for flexible VET pathways. The new draft law on Secondary Education includes a particular chapter dedicated to further development of inclusive education. It states that each secondary school, including VET schools, will need to establish an inclusive school team, responsible for the inclusive policies in the school. The draft law also includes a need for educational mediators for Roma students who come from vulnerable families or who were out of education for a long time.

The main responsible bodies in developing VNFIL systems and implementing validation practices are MOES and the Adult Education Centre (AEC), together with the Coordinative Body on Validation and Working Group on Validation and the VET Centre. The established Regional VET Centres (RVETCs) will offer services in adult education and VNFIL.

In addition, and complementary to these legal reforms, several important actions were undertaken in the areas of this EU priority.

- During 2020 and 2021, AEC developed standards for the occupations and qualifications “Counsellor for VNFIL” and “Assessor in VNFIL”, and the process of validation was successfully piloted on a small number of candidates.
- In November 2022, MOES adopted the ‘Concept document on secondary education for adults’ (MOES, 2022), developed with support by UNDP, which proposes the VNFIL as one of the main pillars of adults’ secondary education, offering concrete arrangements both in formal and non-formal education.
- As part of the IPA project “Increasing Attractiveness, Inclusiveness and Relevance of VET and Adult Education”⁷, MOES and the VET Centre, with expert support from the project office, selected five qualifications⁸ and defined the related standards. These qualifications will be offered and “tested” for validation after the adoption of the new Law on AE. Another IPA project, “Improving the quality of education”⁹, focuses on professional development of teaching staff, inclusive education, and digital competencies. In 2022, in the framework of the project HEAD –

⁵ PD fiche: Regulation and initiatives on Validation of non-formal and informal learning

⁶ PD fiche: Developing Inclusive VET.

⁷ EUROPEAID/140265/IH/SER/MK. The period is financed under the 2017 Action Programme for the Republic of North Macedonia, part of the European Union Instrument for Pre-accession Assistance (IPA II), that was adopted by the European Commission on 29 November 2017. A Financing Agreement concluded between the European Commission and the Government of the Republic of North Macedonia in accordance with the Framework Agreement entered into force on 2 November, 2018. Available at: <https://mkvet.mk/about-the-project/>

⁸ Hairdresser/hairstylist, Auto body repair technician, Baker, Beekeeper and Dressmaker.

⁹ IPA 2017/040200.04.EU

- “Empowering School Principals for Inclusive School Culture”¹⁰, supported by the Erasmus+ Programme, an expert team prepared a roadmap policy paper on professional development of school principals – for creating inclusive school culture.
- The project “Education for Employment” supported by Helvetas and the Swiss Embassy in North Macedonia allowed the organisation of professional training for VET school teachers of vocational subjects, with a focus on staff from the three established Regional VET Centres.
 - In 2021/2022, with the support of the UNDP office in Skopje, 130 teachers and principals from the regional VET Centres were trained in inclusive education. These training sessions highlighted the vision that the Regional VET Centres should develop in models of inclusive educational environment.

In line with the efforts made around building an inclusive learning environment, in 2018 North Macedonia became the first non-EU member state to join the programme Youth Guarantee (YG). This scheme is realised by the state employment service agency (ESA), which offers new education and training opportunities to NEETs. The ESA also provides apprenticeship programmes for NEETs. In 2022, 1063 young people included in YG, participated in such programs¹¹. In line with these measures, the pilot measure “second chance” programmes for NEETs was introduced in 2022 and will be realised by institutions accredited for adult non-formal education, and will be funded by the state budget.

Some progress is also noted in areas that were not identified as priorities in the country NIP.

- To modernise and diversify the modes of learning and to expand them to digital opportunities, during 2022, around 800 teachers participated in a training session for distant learning/teaching, using an internet app and learning platform (thematic priority ‘Diversifying modes of learning: face-to-face, digital and/or blended learning; adaptable/flexible training formats’).
- In the context of developing partial qualifications, preliminary discussions on micro-credentials was initiated in MOES and in the VET Centre. The VET Centre is a partner in an Erasmus project¹², with a task to produce 10 micro-credentials that will be included in the EU base of micro-qualifications. Further developments and concrete measures are expected in this area.

Relevant PD fiches:

PD fiche 2. Regulation and initiatives on Validation of non-formal and informal learning (thematic priority ‘Learners’ possibilities of accumulation, validation and recognition of learning outcomes acquired non-formally and informally’)

PD fiche 3. Developing Inclusive VET (thematic priority ‘Ensuring equal opportunities and inclusiveness in education and training’).

EU priority 3. Innovative and excellent VET

Following the strategic goal to improve the quality and attractiveness of VET and to strengthen the cooperation and engagement of VET stakeholders, MOES and the Government initiated a process of establishing Regional Vocational Education and Training Centres (RVETCs). This development was among the most important VET-related goals in the national Strategy on education 2018-2025 (MOES, 2018).

¹⁰ Source: <https://head.edupolicy.net/>

¹¹ Source: <https://av.gov.mk/godishni-izveshtai.nspix>¹² 101092429 — BEM — ERASMUS-EDU-2022-CB-VET

¹² 101092429 — BEM — ERASMUS-EDU-2022-CB-VET

The Strategy envisaged that such centres – as learning communities bringing together students from secondary and higher education, teachers, academia, and members of the business community – will contribute in bridging the gap between the supply of VET and the demand on the labour market, and will foster an innovative culture at the local, regional and national levels.

In 2021, on the basis of the amendments on current VET law¹³, MOES selected¹⁴ three VET schools from different regions, in the cities of Ohrid, Tetovo and Kumanovo, to be assigned the status of RVETCs under the jurisdiction of MOES.

During 2021, MOES in consultation with relevant stakeholders – VET Centre, National Qualification Framework (NQF) Board, Bureau for Development of Education (BDE), Employment Services Agency (ESA) and Economic Chamber – worked on the regulation of RVETCs, as part of the new Law on VET. This will define the models for their establishment, as well as their structure and functions.

The draft new law on VET (currently in a Parliamentary procedure) postulates three models for establishing RVETC: 1. as a state/public institution, 2. as a public-private partnership (PPP), or 3. as an institution funded by private business initiatives (business-led centre)¹⁵. RVETCs will consist of sectors (departments) responsible for services and developments in the following areas: formal VET; adult education and VNFIL; research, development and innovation; collaboration with the business community; networking, international cooperation and marketing. In order that the sectors for AE and VNFIL will be operational, the new draft law on AE must also be adopted.

The concept document on secondary education for adults (MOES, 2022b) described in the second section of this report (under EU priority 2. Flexible VET and inclusive, providing progression and lifelong learning opportunities, p. 5), is highly relevant for the functioning of the RVETCs. It proposes a methodology for the upscaling and validation of knowledge and skills in adult candidates, and may serve as a guide for the sector for adult education and VNFIL in the RVETCs.

In 2022, MOES adopted the Concept Document for Establishing Regional VET Centres (MOES, 2022b) the preparation of which was supported by UNDP. This document serves as a guide in the process to further operationalise the existing RVETCs and to create new ones.

In 2021 and 2022, several other activities were realised to develop the RVETCs, thus contributing to VET excellence and innovation.

- The IPA project “Increasing attractiveness, inclusiveness and relevance of VET and Adult Education”¹⁶ further supported the mapping and review of VET supply in five other regions (other than those of established RVETCs), aiming to select and support the establishment of two new regional VET Centres. Recent consultations by MOES, the VET Centre and other relevant stakeholders lead to the decision that the two new RVETCs would be in the cities of Bitola and Strumica. The EU-supported project “EU for Youth”¹⁷, currently implemented by MOES and the Ministry of Labour and Social Policy (MLSP), envisaged measures that would contribute to higher youth employability through improved quality of VET and VNFIL services provided in the Regional VET Centres. The project plans to revise and prepare standards for six qualifications which will

¹³ The legal basis for the establishment of the first three RVETCs is the current law on VET.

¹⁴ The selection was based on an analysis of the state-of-the-art in the field of VET and labour market needs in the country, carried out by MOES and VET Centre and supported by the European Training foundation.

¹⁵ General Secretariat, Government of RNM, 2023. Proposal for Law on VET

¹⁶ IPA Project: Increasing attractiveness, inclusiveness and relevance of VET and Adult Education, EuropeAid/140265/IH/SER/MK. The main goal of the project is to support establishing centres where students in formal VET, adults and persons with special needs would have equal opportunities to develop their competencies, through 2-, 3-, and 4-year VET programmes, post-secondary education, non-formal training, as well through a process of validation of non-formal and informal learning.

¹⁷ This project represents complementary technical assistance to the Sector Reform Performance Contract (SRPC) in Education, Employment, Social Protection (EESP) with the purpose to provide overarching capacity support to the key line Ministries and stakeholders as well as undertaking ongoing and systematic monitoring and assessment of the sector reform process. More information is available at: <https://eu4youth.mk/en/objectives-pourpuses-expected-results/>

be “tested” for VNFIL, and which will be used in RVETCs after adoption of the new law on AE. Two qualifications were selected for each RVETC: Waiter and Cook for the RVETC in Ohrid; Web-editor and Locksmith for the RVETC in Tetovo; Tractor driver and Producer of milk products for the RVETC in Kumanovo. In addition, eight new qualifications were developed in the existing RVETCs: mechanical technician for motor vehicles and electrical technician for computer technology and automation in Tetovo, catering technician, waiter and cook in Ohrid, food technician, herbal medicine technician, and agricultural technician in Kumanovo.

Progress is also noted in the area of modernising digital and green infrastructure for VET, which was not identified as a priority in the country NIP. Initiatives were taken to integrate, not only green transition and sustainability elements, but also digital skills and competences in VET teachers. The latest reforms allow for schools and RVETCs administrative work (usually referred in schools as pedagogical evidence) to be digitalised. This could serve as a basis for further digitalisation of infrastructure in the Centres.

Relevant PD fiche:

PD fiche 4. Regulation on developing Regional VET Centres (thematic priority ‘Supporting Centres of vocational excellence (CoVEs)’).

EU priority 4. Attractive VET, based on modern and digitalised provision

The country records policy developments in the expansion of VET programmes to EQF levels 5-8, i.e. at post-secondary education level, which is traditionally considered a potential driver for effective and flexible VET.

There is a decades-long pattern in the country of a strong academic drift towards higher education, and consequently towards 2- and 3-year VET programs. Also, post-secondary education faces difficulty attracting students.

To increase the historically low levels of participation in post-secondary programmes, the new draft law on VET would abolish the existing access requirement for general-education graduates to have at least three years of working experience. The new draft law on VET (still to be adopted) regulates the programmes and conditions for application and provision of post-secondary education.

Post-secondary education leads to EQF level 5B qualifications, which are awarded by VET institutions, or by other VET providers, like a company, the Chamber of Crafts or social partners, who are accredited for post-secondary education. Graduates from post-secondary education take a specialist exam or masters exam, leading to diploma for specialist or masters, that is recognised on the labour market.

Besides the developments in the regulation of VET, the following activities have been carried out to further improve the attractiveness of VET.

- The IPA project ‘Increasing attractiveness, inclusiveness and relevance of VET and adult education’¹⁸ includes a distinct set of activities to improve post-secondary education: a feasibility study for the capacities of providers of post-secondary education; a roadmap for the implementation of post-secondary education; the development of two new programmes at post-

¹⁸ EUROPEAID/140265/IH/SER/MK. The period is financed under the 2017 Action Programme for the Republic of North Macedonia, part of the European Union Instrument for Pre-accession Assistance (IPA II), that was adopted by the European Commission on 29 November 2017. A Financing Agreement concluded between the European Commission and the Government of the Republic of North Macedonia in accordance with the Framework Agreement entered into force on November 2, 2018. Available at: <https://mkvet.mk/about-the-project/>

secondary level; and a campaign to increase attractiveness and awareness of post-secondary education. Progress was also made in the area of teachers' and trainers' continuous professional development – which was identified in the country NIP under the section on quality assurance in VET. Supported by EU funds, MOES established a digital platform for professional development of teaching and professional service staff and principals from VET schools and RVETCs.

- Finally, the IPA project 'Improving the quality of education'¹⁹ implemented activities aimed to development of professional and digital competencies of teaching staff in all schools, including VET.

Progress was also made in some areas that were not identified as priorities in the country NIP, under the thematic priorities focused on supporting teachers for green and digital transition, and lifelong guidance.

- The ongoing reform in the digitalisation of the administrative work and pedagogical evidence in schools is actively supporting teachers and trainers in this transition. With reference to lifelong guidance, the new draft law on secondary education introduces for the first time the category of careers adviser in schools as a distinct category. The draft law regulates careers guidance, and sees the establishment of a careers guidance team in each school, coordinated by the careers adviser. This team will be responsible for the realisation of a career advice programme for students. Around 180 teachers and professional associates are already trained in career guidance.

Relevant PD fiche:

PD fiche 5. Regulation on Post-secondary education (thematic priority 'Expanding VET programmes to EQF levels 5-8').

EU priority 5. Quality of VET: VET underpinned by quality assurance

MOES, in consultation with the VET Centre, State Educational Inspectorate (SEI) and other relevant stakeholders, initiated particular reforms in the area of Quality Assurance (QA) in VET to improve the quality of skills obtained through VET, and to close the gap against those skills needed on the labour market.

These reforms in the area of QA in VET – identified as priorities in the country NIP – pertain to regulating the continuous improvement of standards for qualifications, and reforms in the methodology of evaluation of VET schools.

- In relation to improving standards for qualifications, the new draft law on NQF postulates that standards for qualifications should be revised at least every five years. The VET Centre is the responsible institution for developing new standards for qualifications, or for verifying them in the case that they have been proposed by other institutions. The usual practice is that the VET counsellors from the Centre develop or supervise development of the standards. With regard to improving VET schools' evaluation methodology, the new draft law on VET would introduce a new chapter in the regular 'integral evaluation' taking into account the specificities of VET schools, based on the cooperation between schools and the business community (labour market). The mode and the guide for this chapter in evaluation will be defined after the adoption of the new law on VET.

In addition to the new draft law, the Concept document on secondary education for adults (MOES, 2022) adopted in 2022, also contributes to developing measures for quality assurance in VET. It proposes study programmes for adults to be developed based on key competences (recommended by

¹⁹ IPA 2017/040200.04.EU

the Council of the EU) and provides an explanation on how key competences relate to the subjects in the regular secondary education study programmes. The document also proposes how they could be further incorporated into the national standards and expected learning outcomes.

There are also several activities implemented by national institutions in cooperation with international partners. One such activity is the EU-funded Twinning project “Further support to the implementation of the National Qualifications Framework”²⁰, currently being realised. It aims at supporting NQF effectiveness by further developing and implementing QA procedures, transparency, and governance of skills and qualifications in a lifelong learning perspective, and better adaptability of education and training in line with labour market needs. The Twinning project supports the upgrading and maintenance of the digital qualifications register, as well as the digital procedure of submitting and adopting an initiative for the development of an occupational standard.

Notable progress was also made in areas that were not identified as priorities in the country NIP, which contributes to the QA in VET.

- The new draft law on VET postulates for a vocational exam after finishing each of the levels of VET studies (NQF levels II, III or IV), as well for VET matura after finishing four-year studies. According to this regulation, VET matura should start from academic year 2025/26. In addition, the State Examination Centre prepares a concept document on VET matura. It is envisaged that VET matura will be piloted prior to becoming established as a regular measure.
- In accordance with the strategy on education 2018-25, in the framework of the project “EU for Youth” and with support from the European Training Foundation, in 2022 MOES commenced the realisation of the study for evaluating employability of graduated students from VET (Tracer study)²¹, which provides information on academic achievements and further information on career paths and employment. The tracer system was established as a web-based platform for communication with graduates. All VET and AE graduates can easily register on the system on the official MOES website. It consists of questionnaires administered over a six-month period. The first phase/questionnaire was carried out before the end of the 2022/23 school year, with the next one planned for the first semester of the 2023/24 school year. The system also consists of a questionnaire for employers – seeking their opinion on the skills demand. In January 2023, MOES commenced an informational campaign on the Tracer study, which included six events held with principals and representatives from all VET schools in the country.
- The IPA project “Increasing the attractiveness, inclusiveness and relevance of VET and AE” has a distinct component that focuses on implementation of the EQAVET system. The objective of this component is to help with the understanding of the indicators of EQAVET and the requirements it brings, prioritising the indicators in line with country-specific needs, and to prepare feasibility analysis on the country’s level of preparedness for EQAVET.

Relevant PD fiches:

PD fiche 6. Regulation of Quality Assurance in VET (thematic priority ‘Further developing national quality assurance systems’).

Performance in relation to EU targets

No data is available to measure progress against the three VET recommendation indicators²².

²⁰ More information about the MK IPA 17 SO 01 21 project can be found on: <https://mon.gov.mk/en/content/?id=4539>

²¹ <https://eu4youth.mk/en/objectives-pourposes-expected-results/>

²² The quantitative indicators are:

- Employment rate for recent IVET graduates (age group 20-34 years) (%);

Conclusions

In the monitoring period (2021-2022), policy developments in many crucial areas for VET strategic improvement were put on hold by the slow process of adoption of the crucial laws that would allow for the necessary reforms.

Progress is noted in all the areas prioritised in the country NIP, as can be seen below, organised according to the monitoring EU priorities:

1. Agile and resilient VET, adaptive to labour market needs (VET Recommendation A, OD 1):
 - Modernisation of VET standards, curricula, programmes and training courses
 - Regulation on work-based learning and establishing dual education, with increased participation of students in VET
2. Flexible and inclusive VET, providing progression and lifelong learning opportunities (VET Recommendation B and E, OD 1 and 2)
 - Regulation on establishing a system for VNFIL
 - Improvements in inclusive VET
3. Innovative and excellent VET (VET Recommendation C and OD 1)
 - Supporting Regional VET Centres
4. Attractive VET, based on modern and digitalised provision (VET Recommendation D and OD 2, 3 and 4)
 - Expanding VET programmes to EQF levels 5-8 through reforms in post-secondary education
5. VET underpinned by quality assurance (VET Recommendation F)
 - Regulation on qualification standards and integral evaluation of VET schools.

In 2021 and 2022, the country has put most efforts on developing RVETCs, improving work-based learning and establishing dual education.

While some results started to manifest in the past two years, despite the national authorities' significant efforts and investments, the following areas for further improvement may be identified:

- Progress in the adoption of the crucial regulation
- Making VET more attractive, particularly for 2- and 3-year programmes, as well as for post-secondary education
- Collaboration with companies in order to improve work-based learning
- Increasing proportion of practice classes in relation to general-education classes
- Building trust in VNFIL in relevant stakeholders
- Deeper collaboration with the social partners in the development of VET, and strengthening partnerships
- Arrangements and measures in the frames of the Youth Guarantee scheme.

Finally, there is progress, however limited, in several areas with priority in the EU agenda, although not identified by North Macedonia as priorities in its NIP. These include the digital and green transition, diversification of modes of learning, and the introduction of micro-credentials.

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- Recent IVET graduates (age group 20-34 years) with work-based learning experience as part of their vocational education and training (%);
 - Learners in IVET who benefitted from a learning mobility abroad (%).

References

Detailed lists of references are available in the policy development fiches that are published on [ETF OpenSpace](#).

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