

# KEY POLICY DEVELOPMENTS IN EDUCATION, TRAINING AND EMPLOYMENT

## ALBANIA

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# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In 2023, Albania took significant steps to address longstanding challenges exacerbated by events such as the 2019 earthquake, the 2020 pandemic, and inflation driven by Russia's invasion of Ukraine. These crises severely impacted Albania's economy, labour market, and under-resourced education system. Despite these challenges, Albania achieved notable progress in education, vocational training, and employment policies.

The launch of the National Employment and Skills Strategy (2023-2030) underscored Albania's commitment to addressing infrastructure needs, digitalisation, environmental sustainability, and enhancing the quality of vocational education and training (VET). The strategy emphasises lifelong learning, work-based learning, and civic engagement. The public employment services were reinforced, with training and active labour market measures expanded to support vulnerable groups better.

Albania's employment landscape has recovered since the COVID-19 pandemic, with declining NEET (not in employment, education, or training) rates and moderate increases in employment and wages. While challenges persist, such as youth unemployment and job quality, the country is on a positive trajectory, bolstered by EU accession negotiations and significant foreign aid investments.

Demographic shifts, including rapid ageing and high emigration rates, pose significant challenges. Albania's population is ageing, with urbanisation concentrated in Tirana, while most regions face depopulation. The education system is struggling with declining enrolment, particularly in vocational education, and there is a critical need for lifelong learning initiatives to boost adult participation in education and training.

Politically, Albania remains steadfast in its commitment to EU integration, with significant reforms in governance, justice, and anti-corruption efforts. The government has also prioritised investments in infrastructure, energy sustainability, and economic development to foster long-term recovery and growth.

In conclusion, Albania has made substantial strides in reforming its education, training, and employment sectors. However, continued efforts are needed to address demographic challenges, expand vocational training and adult learning opportunities, and improve the overall quality and inclusiveness of education to ensure sustainable development.

# 1. KEY POLITICAL, DEMOGRAPHIC, ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL CHARACTERISTICS

## Political developments

The current Prime Minister, Edi Rama, regarded as ardent pro-European by most observers, secured his third consecutive victory in the parliamentary elections held in April 2021. He leads the government as prime minister in this parliamentary democracy until 2025. Notably, he has skilfully established himself as a key negotiator in the Serbia-Kosovo disputes throughout 2023 and is regularly quoted for his vocal and often constructive criticism of the EU accession process.

The Albanian government has been primarily focused on two significant challenges: recovering from the November 2019 earthquake and addressing the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic while maintaining the momentum of ongoing reforms. Albania approved a record-breaking 2024 budget focused on fostering sustainable economic development, increasing investments in infrastructure, and expanding public welfare programmes. Significant allocations were made towards wage increases, educational support, and public infrastructure projects.

In 2023, Albania focused on advancing its EU integration by implementing key reforms in governance and justice and strengthening its economic development through investments in infrastructure, tourism, and energy sustainability. Additionally, the government prioritised anti-corruption efforts and improved healthcare systems as part of its broader social and economic recovery strategy (EC 2023; IMF 2024).

In 2014, Albania was granted official candidate status for accession to the European Union (EU), and formal accession talks began in March 2020. The first intergovernmental conference occurred in July 2022. The European Commission submitted its screening report on Cluster 1 (Fundamentals) in July 2023, marking an essential step in accession negotiations. Additionally, Albania is aligning its national reforms with the EU's Growth Plan for the Western Balkans, which aims to accelerate socio-economic transformations, strengthen governance, and enhance digital and green transitions (European Commission 2024).

An overwhelming 92% of Albanians view EU membership as a positive development, with 85% expressing the belief that their government should intensify efforts to strengthen relations with the EU. This level of support for EU integration consistently ranks among the highest in the region (RCC, 2023).

## Demographics

The demographic landscape of Albania reveals several concerning trends. The number of births in the country only marginally offsets the combined effects of mortality and emigration rates. Consequently, the population is ageing rapidly, and its overall growth rate has hovered around zero for the past two decades. As of 2023 (the last estimates available), Albania's population stands at 2 771 785, reflecting a continued decline of approximately 1% compared to the previous year (INSTAT, 2024).

Depopulation has emerged as a pressing issue across most regions of Albania, while Tirana, the capital, experiences significant urbanisation. Approximately two-thirds of the population resides in urban centres, with Tirana hosting one-third of the total population. It is the sole prefecture in the country witnessing population growth (Betti et al., 2018; INSTAT, 2024).

Albania contends with a notably high level of emigration, ranking among the top countries worldwide in terms of emigration as a percentage of the current population. Although emigration witnessed a temporary dip during the COVID-19 pandemic, historical data reveals a consistent upward trajectory in emigration across diverse socio-economic strata and educational backgrounds. Notably, the brain drain phenomenon, particularly among well-educated and highly skilled individuals in their twenties, predominantly targets destinations within the European Union and North America (ETF, 2021). Recent

surveys indicate that 49% of respondents expressed a desire to leave the country, with only Kosovo surpassing this number amongst the Western Balkans accession countries. One contributing factor to emigration is the perceived inadequacies of the Albanian education system. Many individuals seek opportunities abroad to access higher-quality education for themselves or their children. This was illustrated by half of respondents answering they have a positive perception of EU accession as it would ensure the freedom to study and/or work in the EU and improve economic prosperity (RCC, 2023).

Consequently, Albania boasts a notable presence among Western Balkan countries in terms of the number of students studying abroad. Interestingly, there has been a slight increase in returning emigrants, amounting to 5.9% from 2021 to 2022 (INSTAT, 2022).

In the academic year 2023-2024, 533,711 pupils and students were enrolled in formal education, with a decrease of 3.7% compared to the academic year 2022-2023. This trend has lasted for many years and represents a 10% decrease since 2019. This decline across all education levels has far-reaching implications for educational institutions and workforce planning within the education sector (INSTAT, 2024).

### Key economic developments

Albania's economy, primarily composed of micro-enterprises with fewer than ten employees, has remained resilient despite several challenges over the past four years, including the 2020 earthquake, the COVID-19 pandemic, and the impact of Russia's war in Ukraine. After a 3.3% decline in GDP in 2020, the economy rebounded with 8.9% growth in 2021, followed by slower growth of 4.9% in 2022. The services sector, particularly tourism and construction, and increased private consumption due to rising employment and wages have driven this growth (OECD 2024).

Inflation remained moderate between 2019 and 2021 but spiked to 6.7% in 2022 due to Russia's war in Ukraine and surging global food and energy prices. By 2023, inflation eased to 4.3%; this downward trend is expected to continue, with Albania likely to achieve its 3% inflation target by early 2025 (IMF, 2024).

In 2021, informality was estimated at 37% of the economy, highlighting the size of the grey market. While there have been efforts to combat informality, such as wage increases and employment growth, informality remains a significant obstacle (OECD, 2024). An older study revealed a notably high proportion of informal employment, constituting 56.7% of total employment, with agriculture (63.9%), wholesale and retail trade (12.6%), and construction (7.6%) being the most prevalent sectors in the informal economy (ILO 2020). INSTAT (2023) further documented that, in 2020, informal employment accounted for 34.1% of employment in the non-agricultural sector. The incidence of vulnerable employment has increased in Albania from 48.2% in 2021 to 49% in 2022 but decreased to 46.8% in 2023 (INSTAT, ETF calculations). Despite recent trends, vulnerable employment remains very worrying, as half of the employed population works in precarious and informal jobs. The recent rise in employment has not been accompanied by a corresponding increase in social insurance contributors, suggesting a possible expansion of informal employment (European Commission, 2023)

Remittances sent to Albania in 2023 equated to 8.8% of its GDP, a slight decrease for a share hovering around 10% over a decade (INSTAT, 2024).

### Key social issues

Although employment trends in Albania are positive, the labour market faces significant challenges. These include a lack of high-quality job opportunities, elevated youth unemployment and inactivity rates, and a substantial number of vulnerable individuals who remain outside the workforce. These difficulties strain citizens' mutual support systems and pressure the social welfare system.

'Making ends meet' measures a household's ability to cope financially. ETF and Eurofound conducted a survey in 2021 which found that Albania has the highest rate in geographical Europe of citizens who claim to have 'difficulty making ends meet' at 87%, which is more than twice the EU-27 average (ETF

and Eurofound 2023, [Living, working and COVID-19 in the European Union and 10 EU neighbouring countries | ETF \(europa.eu\)](#)).

Similarly, also in 2023, the rate for people who are 'at risk of poverty'<sup>1</sup> stood at 20.6% (INSTAT 2024), and the World Bank (2024) estimates the 'Upper middle-income poverty rate (USD 6.85)' is 34.2%.

Inequality mainly affects the unemployed, low education attainment people, rural population, vulnerable women, persons with disabilities, and Roma and Egyptian minorities. The inequality in income distribution, as measured by the Gini coefficient, stood at 31% in 2022, a three-point decrease from 2019 (INSTAT, 2024).

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<sup>1</sup> The at-risk-of-poverty rate indicates the percentage of persons living in households where equivalent disposable income is below the at-risk-of-poverty threshold.

## 2. EDUCATION AND TRAINING

### 2.1 Trends and challenges

Over the last twenty years, Albania, previously one of the lowest-performing nations in Europe and the Western Balkans, has experienced a significant turnaround. It has made substantial progress in improving educational access and raising learning achievements.

The Human Development Index (HDI) values for Albania from 2000 to 2021 highlight steady growth, with the HDI value increasing from 0.660 in 2000 to 0.796 in 2021. This reflects continuous improvement in key areas such as life expectancy, education, and income. While showing significant progress, Albania's HDI is still below the European average. It is competitive within the Western Balkans but has room for growth compared to higher-performing European nations (UNDP, 2024).

The most recent European Commission report on Albania states that for education: "Some progress was made, further strengthening the new National Agency for Employment and Skills, and the continued restructuring of the National Agency for Education, Vocational Training and Qualifications. The new 2023-2030 national strategy on employment and skills and the new 2022-2029 national youth strategy emphasise improving the quality of Vocational Education and Training (VET) and increasing the skills of young people" (European Commission, 2023).

Recent and essential developments include a new education policy (adopted in 2022), effective until 2026, focusing on enhancing teacher development, fostering inclusivity and upgrading ICT infrastructure. The opening of Chapter 26 in Albania's EU accession negotiations in 2023, as well as a notable modification to the Law on Pre-University Education, which extends compulsory education, represent significant milestones in strengthening Albania's alignment with EU standards and fostering greater access to quality education for all.

Over the past four years, Albania has undertaken institutional reforms and restructured key agencies responsible for educational support and external evaluation. These efforts aim to decentralise governance mechanisms and enhance service delivery. For instance, the Albanian Quality Assurance Agency (ASCAL) emerged from restructuring the Public Accreditation Agency for Higher Education (PAAHE). ASCAL is the sole institution in the higher education sector entrusted with monitoring and evaluating the quality of higher education.

Additional recent advancements encompass the gradual introduction of competency-based curricula across various subjects and grade levels in basic education, the development of teacher training standards, and the implementation of a school evaluation indicator framework.

#### Education strategy and legal framework for education

Recent initiatives have encompassed the formulation of the new National Education Strategy and Action Plan from 2021 to 2026. Remarkably, this strategy now encompasses all educational stages, from preschool to higher education, marking a significant departure from previous approaches. The overarching vision centres on providing high-quality education grounded in inclusive principles and fostering lifelong learning, thereby facilitating individual potential development. Three overarching policy objectives underpin this vision: increasing access to preschool and ensuring compulsory education, improving quality assurance throughout educational levels, and achieving excellence in tertiary education. The section dedicated to higher education within this strategy entails goals associated with internationalising higher education, enhancing the quality of assessment frameworks for higher education programmes, advancing research infrastructure, and upgrading ICT infrastructure and services for public higher education institutions.

## Education expenditure

Government expenditure on education amounted to 2.75% of GDP in 2022, corresponding to 12.1% of total government expenditure (World Bank World Development Indicators, last available year). This is lower than the 5% EU average.

## Access, participation and early school leaving

Despite long-term underinvestment in education and training, the last decade has witnessed significant improvements. Early school leaving halved from 31.9% in 2010 to 15.2% of young men and 12.7% of young women in 2023. Moreover, the active population's low educational attainment rate fell from 51.6% in 2010 to 38.9% in 2023. Noteworthy for 2023 is the introduction of an Early Warning System for dropout prevention in 100 (15 VET; 85 upper secondary) schools benefited 911 school staff through capacity-building in the warning system, dropout prevention and socio-emotional learning.

In the academic year 2023/24, 416 538 pupils and children were enrolled in pre-university education (up to upper secondary education), marking a decrease of 3.8% compared to the 2022-23 school year, continuing a downward trend in recent years due to demographic decline (INSTAT, 2024).

The vocational education system in Albania is relatively modest and faces challenges in attracting female participants. Initial vocational education programmes are available in 34 vocational schools, some of which are quite small, offering only a limited range of profiles and accommodating a small number of students. Additionally, there are 10 vocational training centres.

In 2022, the total net enrolment rate for upper secondary education (ISCED 3) was 85.5%, with vocational education and training (VET) students (ISCED level 3) comprising 17.7% of the total enrolment (UNESCO). This demonstrates a relatively small enrolment in VET programmes at the secondary level.

Turning to the subject of lifelong learning, the participation of adults in Albania remains minimal. According to INSTAT (2024), the participation rate in formal and non-formal education and training in the past 4 weeks among individuals aged 25 to 34 stands at 1.8% and below 0.5% for other age categories. These figures are well below the EU-27 average, underscoring the need for targeted interventions and measures to enhance adult education and training opportunities.

Meanwhile, advocacy efforts were directed at improving pre-university law, aligning it with the recommendations of the Committee monitoring the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD), aiming to ensure inclusive settings in all schools and transform special schools into resource centres.

## PISA results

In the 2022 edition of PISA, Albanian 15-year-olds scored 368 points compared to an average of 472 points in OECD countries in Mathematics. They scored 358 points in reading compared to an average of 476 points in OECD countries. It was 376 points in sciences, compared to an average of 485 points in OECD countries. Overall, Albania scored lower than in 2018 in all subjects (OECD, 2023)

These results illustrate that education quality remains a challenge for the country. This is particularly true for schools in rural, mountainous and isolated areas, which struggle to attract well-qualified teachers.

Albania has participated in PISA since 2001. Despite sustained improvements, Albania continued to receive moderate scores. It experienced a significant dip in the last edition, which occurred in 2022 when average results were down in mathematics, reading, and science. Boys outperformed girls in mathematics performance with one of the most considerable score-point differences among PISA-participating countries. On the other hand, the gender gap in reading was one of the smallest in favour of girls, even though boys' performance in reading was one of the lowest among PISA participants. The analysis stipulates that "students reported spending significantly less effort on PISA in 2022

compared to 2018, and there are clear indications that students did not engage seriously throughout the test and questionnaire. Therefore, results must be interpreted cautiously" (OECD 2023).

Although results and analysis are not yet available, secondary data analysis of Progress in International Reading Literacy Study (PIRLS) and Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS) reports were conducted in collaboration with the National Centre for Education Quality including the Knowledge, Attitudes and Practices study on dropout rates in upper secondary schools.

## Young people not in employment, education or training (NEET)

Increasing educational attainment does not provide full insulation against labour market challenges for young people. The latest available statistics reveal that the incidence of young individuals not engaged in employment, education or training (NEET), age group 15-29, remains persistently high in Albania, standing at 24.6% in 2023 (INSTAT, 2024).

This NEET category predominantly comprises inactive young people who are discouraged and uninterested in pursuing work or education. While there has been a notable decline from the figures in 2015 (32.8%), the NEET share continues to exhibit gender disparities, with a higher prevalence among women (25.6%) as opposed to men (23.5%) in 2023. Moreover, an examination of the education profiles of NEET individuals indicates that those with low and high educational attainment levels face nearly equal risks of unemployment or inactivity (21% and 20.9%, respectively). In contrast, the highest proportion is for medium education, with 26.7% (INSTAT, 2024).

This underscores the necessity for a nuanced approach to policy measures tailored to each NEET subgroup's unique expectations and employability levels. Albania launched the National Implementation Plan for the Youth Guarantee in May 2024, bolstered by substantial EU IPA support, and is currently piloting NEET comprehensive approaches in selected municipalities. Additional policy reforms are being designed to enhance the relevance of initial education and training, access to career guidance and counselling and boost the effectiveness of active labour market measures, including apprenticeships and traineeships.

## 2.2 Initial VET and adult learning

The 2023 Torino Process system report for Albania reveals the strengths of the country's vocational education and training (VET) system and the ongoing challenges. Although the VET system can be perceived as a less popular educational pathway, young learners are nonetheless attracted to and participate very successfully in the system's initial VET programmes. Until now, continuing VET programmes have struggled to capture the attention of adult learners, but a range of initiatives should start to see an increase in participation in VET and other lifelong learning opportunities.

### Strategic and legal framework for initial VET and adult learning

Over the past decade, significant strides have been made in Albania's VET system through establishing a comprehensive legislative framework, which has defined essential principles, system structures, roles and responsibilities of key stakeholders, and overarching standards for VET provision, assessment and certification. Notable legislative milestones include the amended Labour Code in 2015, the enactment of the Law on Craftsmanship in 2016, the introduction of a new VET Law in 2017, revisions to the Albanian Qualifications Framework (AQF) Law in 2018, amendments to the Law on Pre-University Education in 2018 and the implementation of the Employment Promotion Law in 2019. However, the remaining challenge lies in this legal framework's full implementation and effectiveness.

The National Employment and Skills Strategy (NESS) 2014-2022 has been key to Albania's framework for skills development, employment services, and active labour market policies (ALMPs). Aligned with EU strategies, NESS focused on promoting quality employment and skill development for all Albanians through four pillars: (i) improving job opportunities via labour market policies; (ii) providing high-quality VET for youth and adults; (iii) enhancing social inclusion and territorial cohesion;

and (iv) strengthening governance in the labour market and qualification systems. At the end of its duration, it achieved advancements in the AQF, updated VET curricula, trained VET teachers, and developed flexible VET and job opportunities. The institutional framework for employment and skills development has also been consolidated (MoFE, 2022).

Then, in March 2023, Albania launched its new policy entitled National Employment and Skills Strategy 2023-2030.

Similar in structure to its predecessor, the NESS 2023-2030 is founded on four strategic priorities: (i) ensuring the efficiency of institutions, complete enforcement and further consolidation of the legal framework; (ii) promoting effective engagement of the private sector in VET and employment and enhancing the responsiveness of VET institutions to labour market demands; (iii) ensuring high VET quality and employability rates; and (iv) implementing a comprehensive learning agenda across all age groups and environments. This agenda leverages the advantages of the digital era, supports the green transition, and addresses global development challenges. At the time of drafting, no progress reports were yet produced to track its rollout.

Moreover, Albania remains steadfast in its commitment to achieving the objectives outlined in the EU Council Recommendation on VET from November 2020 and the Osnabruck Declaration. The country's integrated monitoring efforts are guided by its National Implementation Plan, involving the Directorate General for Vocational Training (DGVT) and the Albanian Council for Vocational Training (ACVT), with yearly detailed reporting on developments.

Albania formally signed association agreements for the Digital Europe Programme. Once in effect, businesses and public administrations will gain access to the programme's calls, which boasts an overall budget of €7.5 billion through 2027. Furthermore, Albania has endorsed the Western Balkans Declaration, emphasising the sustainable integration of young people into the labour market. It is dedicated to the gradual implementation of the EU Youth Guarantee scheme (further details provided below).

Lifelong Learning and Recognition of Prior Learning are part of Albania's policy commitments. Some envisaged actions to be implemented until 2025 are a baseline and feasibility analysis of lifelong learning in the country, a roadmap for lifelong learning, the development of different platforms for adult learning and diversified collaboration modalities between public and private partners, implementation of Employment Promotion Programmes with the focus on providing LLL opportunities, reskilling and upskilling measures of employees.

## VET governance and financing arrangements

The Ministry of Economy, Culture and Innovation (MECI) and its employment and VET Department hold responsibility for formulating strategies and policies, crafting legislation, managing funding, making appointments of directors and overseeing related matters. Meanwhile, the National Agency for Employment and Skills (NAES) assumes the day-to-day administrative duties of VET providers. Given Albania's size, no VET administrative structures exist at subnational levels.

The National Agency for VET and Qualifications (NAVETQ) plays a pivotal role in implementing the AQF. It manages the national catalogue of occupations, vocational qualifications, and associated standards and descriptions. Additionally, the NAVETQ devises framework curricula for all programmes within the formal vocational education system. The agency supports the development of courses in vocational training centres (VTCs), issues guidelines and instructions for skills assessments and certification, and oversees national activities concerning the continuous professional development of VET teachers and instructors.

The Agency for Quality Assurance in Pre-University Education (AQAPE) is responsible for national key competency frameworks, standards, curricula, and teacher training in general subjects. It also manages *State Matura* exams, including those in upper secondary VET. Furthermore, the Educational Services Centre, established by Council of Ministers Decision No 371 dated 26 April 2017, administers the *State Matura*, develops national exams, including the State Exam for Regulated Professions, and maintains the State database.

Integrated Policy Management Groups (IPMGs) have evolved into integrated sector management mechanisms, serving as high-level forums for policy dialogue and partnership. The government has established IPMGs and Sector Steering Committees (SSCs) in ICT and hospitality sectors to move the country closer to accession. IPMGs focus on cooperation at the steering level in good governance and public administration, competitiveness and investment, employment and skills, and integrated land management. SSCs focus on cooperation at the steering level within sectors of special importance for reforms and inter-institutional coordination. They ensure leadership and coordination in sectors of special importance, with participation from all key stakeholders, including the ETF.

The state budget is the primary funding source for the initial and continuing public VET. However, Law 15/2017 on VET allows VET providers to access a broader array of financing sources, including income generated by public VET providers (including revenues from training adults, except for unemployed jobseekers), donor contributions, and sponsorships. The VET system faces underfunding, particularly concerning teacher salaries, skill development needs, infrastructure improvements, funds for extracurricular activities, scholarships and dormitories. Innovative solutions are needed to explore additional funding sources beyond the state budget or donor interventions. Achieving equitable funding would be more feasible if the private sector were encouraged to invest in skills training, although this aspect is not explicitly addressed in current legislation.

In 2023, Guideline No. 23 was introduced to establish rules for how public vocational education and training (VET) providers generate and manage income, enabling them to function as economic entities with an organised fund management system. This measure aims to strengthen public VET providers' financial stability and operational effectiveness.

## Qualifications, validation and recognition

In 2023, the National Vocational Qualification Catalogue was upgraded with 22 new occupational standards 20 new qualification standards, and multiple vocational programmes and certificate supplements were developed to better align with industry needs and enhance educational quality. Additionally, the catalogue was expanded with 33 qualifications, including new offerings and collaborations with private providers, and two new level 5 qualifications were created in partnership with the private sector.

The National Strategy on Skills and Employment 2023-2030 and OD NIP 2022-2025 envisage as one of its strategic measures the further development of the Albanian Qualification Framework (AQF) by means of drafting new professional qualifications or updating the existing ones.

Albania adopted its national qualifications framework, the AQF, in 2010 and amended it in 2018 (AQF Law). It integrates and coordinates the national qualification areas based on the principles of the European Qualifications Framework (classifying qualifications in eight hierarchical levels) and regulates and improves qualifications in accordance with the economic, social and cultural needs of the country by developing, recognising and awarding them, based on standards of knowledge, skills and competencies to be achieved by the pupils, students or adults. Albania referenced its AQF to the EQF and self-certified against the QF-EHEA in 2021. Thus, the AQF has reached the activation stage (ETF, 2023).

The National Catalogue of Vocational Qualifications developed by NAVETQ is de facto the register of vocational qualifications in Albania. It is approved by the Minister of Finance and Economy (VET Law 2017 and Order of the Minister No 99, dated 25.5.2021 "On approval of National Catalogue for Vocational Qualifications"). Initially, AQF included qualifications provided by the formal education subsystems that strongly focus on initial education for young people. Provisions have already been made to include the qualifications for lifelong learning at all levels in AQF, such as short courses for adults.

Moreover, Continuing Vocational training (C-VET) consists of short-term training courses (three to nine months) offered by public Vocational Training Centres (VTCs) or private training entities. In 2018, the MFE adopted instructions on the templates and duration of nationally unified training courses. The programmes of these courses (national frame curricula) are developed by NAVETQ and adopted by

the Minister of Finance and Economy. In addition, public VTCs can provide short-term training – based on requests from different local actors. These courses do not need formal approval from a national body. Vocational training is offered as initial preparation for an occupation or as re-qualification (trainees are mainly referred to the vocational training centres (VTCs) by the Public Employment Service).

In February 2022, the Advisory Board of the European Qualifications Framework (EQF) approved Albania's report on referencing the AQF to the EQF and its self-referencing to the Qualifications Frameworks in the European Higher Education Area, which allows for certificates and diplomas awarded for AQF qualifications (obtained in VET, general secondary education or higher education) to be linked to the specific EQF level (MoFE, 2022).

Inspired by the EQF, the AQF consists of eight levels whose descriptors are written in learning outcomes organised in the three domains: knowledge, skills and competences. The eight levels include all types and levels of qualifications and certification and correspond to those of the EQF on a one-to-one basis. Article 4 of the AQF Law stipulates that flexibility and consideration of lifelong learning in formal and non-formal contexts are some of the main principles of the AQF. Furthermore, in Article 5, the improvement of access to qualifications and assuring flexibility of routes to qualifications are listed among the objectives of the AQF.

The AQF is open to all types of qualifications. There are three main categories of qualifications identified in the AQF handbook and the 2018 AQF Law: (i) general and higher education qualifications, (ii) professional or VET qualifications, and (iii) Lifelong Learning (LLL) qualifications catering to adults and people undertaking specialised courses for professional development. The term 'qualifications for LLL' in the AQF Law is used to distinguish between the formal qualifications that are regulated in the corresponding laws on higher education, general education and VET and that are automatically included in the AQF on the one hand and all other qualifications on the other hand.

The AQF Law stipulates that the AQF should facilitate the accumulation and transfer of credits. The European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System (ECTS) is operational only in higher education.

The AQF is seen as an enabler of LLL, meaning that, in principle, all types of qualifications available in the country can be included in the AQF if they meet specific quality criteria. This involves structuring qualifications based on qualification standards and procedures regulated in DCM No 427 of 26 June 2019, which stipulates criteria and procedures to assign such qualifications to AQF levels. This regulation should open the way for applications for qualifications obtained outside the formal subsystems to be assigned to levels in the AQF (ETF, 2023). Thus, provisions are already made (through DCM No 427) in view of qualifications for LLL to be included in the AQF (these can be short courses for adults, special courses for continuous professional development or study programmes for continuous education provided by the higher education institutions), but the AQF is not yet fully operational, and the focus is currently on full implementation.

Validation of non-formal and informal learning (VNFIL) is part of the vocational education and training (VET) system in Albania. It is defined by two Laws: the Law on Vocational Education and Training in the Republic of Albania (the VET Act), adopted by the Albanian Parliament in 2017, and the Law on the Albanian Qualifications Framework (the AQF Act), adopted in 2010 and amended in 2018. Both laws recognise different types of learning, including formal, non-formal and informal learning. VNFIL is not yet fully operational in Albania, but policymakers, employers, employees, and unions broadly accept the instrument as important in increasing flexibility in the VET range and fostering inclusion and mobility in the labour market. Therefore, VNFIL is one of the priority measures in the National Employment and Skills Strategy (NESS) 2023-2030 (Priority Measure 1.2.2) and is expected to be fully operational by the first quarter of 2026.

## Quality and quality assurance

Quality and relevance of learning is the area of monitoring that identifies the extent to which the VET system succeeds in providing basic skills and key competences to young and adult learners. It

highlights the relevance of VET programmes to the world of work and the success with which VET graduates enter the labour market.

The VET system formally relies on a comprehensive quality assurance framework encompassing various facets, such as opening procedures and criteria for public VET providers, licensing procedures and criteria for private VET providers, self-assessment, accreditation, monitoring and inspection.

In 2020, NAVETQ devised an accreditation model for VET providers, which outlined the roles and responsibilities of institutions, accreditation standards and procedures, and a roadmap to support the accreditation process rollout. After extensive consultations involving the MoFE and NAES, pre-university education institutions, social partners, and public and non-public VET providers, this model was officially adopted in 2021. Subsequently, NAVETQ developed a roadmap to guide the implementation process, which commenced with the capacity-building of 38 external evaluators and NAVETQ staff. Since then, six VET providers have received formal accreditation (MoFE, 2023).

The Council of Ministers' decision in 2021 laid out new procedures and criteria for inspecting non-public and public VET providers. The ministry overseeing VET will be responsible for developing and approving detailed internal regulations governing VET inspections. An online platform has been instrumental in facilitating the self-assessment process of VET providers in 2023, serving as a cornerstone of their ongoing efforts to enhance institutional development and overall quality. The initiation of the VET accreditation process led to the accreditation of the first six VET providers, which included five public and one private institution, with more providers commencing the accreditation journey.

In pre-university education, the Quality Assurance Agency of Pre-University Education (QAAPE) is responsible for guaranteeing and evaluating the performance of both public and private pre-university education systems. It also plays a key role in curriculum development, employee professional development and quality assurance for pre-university education, whether public or private.

Additional bodies involved in pre-university education include the Centre for School Leadership, tasked with supporting the professional development of in-service and aspiring principals and vice-principals in public or private pre-university educational institutions. The Centre for Education Services (CES) is responsible for developing, administering, and analysing national and international test results. The National Council of Pre-University Education (NCPE) is an advisory body to the minister, focusing on the development policies of pre-university education. Similarly, the National Council of Parents operates as an advisory and independent body representing the interests of parents at the national level.

A survey of VET users was conducted in 2022 and found that learners generally perceive the services they receive positively, with most students expressing satisfaction with their education's theoretical and practical aspects. They believe their curriculum equips them with the necessary skills for the labour market and provides better preparation for university than general education. However, students also highlighted areas needing improvement, such as infrastructure, access to up-to-date technology, and the availability of extracurricular activities (UNDP, 2022)

During 2022-2023, significant upgrades were made to several vocational schools in Albania, including the 'Hospitality and Tourism' School in Tirana and the 'Nazmi Rushiti' School in Dibër, with further infrastructure improvements planned for fourteen more schools in 2024. Additionally, several schools received funding under the Regional Challenge Fund in 2023 to boost competitiveness through investments in equipment and infrastructure.

NAVETQ has enhanced the accreditation process for VET providers by revising internal procedures, creating tailored questionnaires for stakeholders, and updating the national register and website. In 2023, three public and one private provider underwent the accreditation process, resulting in the accreditation of three new VET providers.

Following the approval of Decision No 755 on defining the documentation, procedures, and criteria for state inspections of the VET system, a VET inspection sector has been established within the

Directorate of Vocational Skills Policies and Social Security at MECI, with recruitment efforts currently underway.

## Work-based learning arrangements

Following the Riga Summit<sup>2</sup>, Albania took decisive action to expand and consolidate WBL. The regulatory framework for establishing WBL is in the Law on Vocational Education, adopted in 2017. This was followed in 2020 by Ministerial Order No 220, which regulates (i) the responsibilities of central institutions, social partners, public VET providers and businesses engaged in the implementation of company-based vocational practice; (ii) procedures and tools for planning, developing and implementing vocational practices in businesses; and (iii) quality assurance aspects to ensure the achievement of learning outcomes of VET qualifications.

WBL is included in the vocational education programmes (NQF 2, 3 and 4/EQF 2, 3 and 4). An education programme, consisting of theoretical and practical parts, is developed for each qualification. The programme may be implemented entirely in the school (school-based learning), including the practical part, or by combining school-based learning with the employer (work-based learning). The practical part is integrated into employers' organisational and business schemes during the academic year. The share of WBL in the total number of lessons in Albania is 45% - 50% for two-year programmes, 50% for three-year programmes and 20% for four-year programmes (ETF, 2022).

Students typically rotate between different employers. However, businesses offer internship places to an insufficient number of students, which is why WBL has not been made compulsory in the initial VET. When VET schools cannot find suitable companies, vocational practice may take place in the VET schools' workshops.

Each VET provider establishes a special development unit, and its school-business coordinator for business relations must identify and contact employers to place students in companies. The NAVETQ, with support from the regional Austrian-funded 'School Meets Business' project, has developed a course and trains coordinators. It also organised regional round tables for school and business representatives to introduce the regulation and its implications and to improve mutual understanding among schools and companies. Several meetings took place between Business Relations Coordinators and Quality Assurance Coordinators to improve quality criteria in school-business relations and other aspects of their activity. Finally, VET schools have concluded cooperation contracts with private entities that offer work placements in the school's programmes. In these contracts, the obligations of the parties in this cooperation are clearly defined.

In 2023, NAVETQ provided extensive training for Development Unit coordinators, including six-day sessions for 15 Business Relations Coordinators and 40 Quality Assurance Coordinators, supported by OeAD. Additional three-day training on project development, marketing, and tracking for around 40 coordinators each was conducted, with further support from S4J to enhance school-business relationships and quality standards. In addition, a network of professionals supporting the Employment Agency and VET system was established to strengthen the connection between VET education and the private sector. The ETF develops a mapping of Work-Based Learning arrangements and programmes in IVET, CVET and as part of the ALMPs portfolio in Albania, against the quality criteria set out in the European Frameworks for quality apprenticeships and traineeships.

## Digital education and skills

in 2020, the availability of computers in schools for 15-year-old students was just slightly above 0.2 per student, making it one of the lowest rates in Europe, above only Montenegro (UNESCO, 2023). Albania's internet penetration rate in 2020 stood at 91% (Eurostat). However, the country is grappling with a significant urban-rural divide in broadband coverage and underdeveloped digital infrastructure,

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<sup>2</sup> At the Riga Summit in June 2015, EU Member States, EU Candidate Countries, the European Social Partners and the European Commission committed to a set of medium-term deliverables (MTD) between 2015 and 2020. The first of these commitments centred on work-based learning in Vocational Education and Training (VET), which highlights the importance of apprenticeships.

posing challenges to fully harnessing the benefits of digitalisation. According to ITU data from the same year, 72.2% of the population in Albania used the Internet (with a relatively small gender gap: male 73.2%, female 71.2%), which is considerably lower than the European regional average of 84.9%. Nevertheless, there has been a steady increase in the number of Internet users year on year. Based on the 2021 Survey on Information and Communication Technologies in Households and by Individuals, 79.3% of the population aged 16-74 use the Internet, with 91.7% using it daily. The ICT sector in Albania is known for its well-paid professions, making it a focal point in the country's employment market. Students pursuing ICT-related fields are highly sought after, and many secure employment opportunities during their undergraduate studies.

In 2021, Albania witnessed an overall increase in technological and computer skills, with the most significant growth recorded in skills related to 'software/application installation' and 'materials transfer'. The former saw an 8.6 percentage point increase, while the latter increased by approximately six percentage points (INSTAT, 2021). Additionally, Albania has the highest per capita number of workers using online platforms such as freelancers.com or upwork.com among its regional neighbours (ETF, 2022).

The digital skills indicator is a crucial tool for monitoring the EU's Digital Decade target, aiming to ensure that at least 80% of adults in EU countries possess at least basic digital skills by 2030. This indicator has unpacked digital skills into six levels: none, limited, narrow, low, basic and above basic.

In Albania, the data for 2023 reveals that 23.32% of adults have at least basic digital skills. Although this percentage is the lowest in Europe for that year, it is noteworthy that this rate is relatively consistent between men and women, indicating a unique aspect of digital skill distribution (Eurostat, 2024).

In the 2022-2023 school year, the implementation of the ICT subject commenced from the first grade in 100 pilot schools across 34 cities, benefiting 7 079 students. In the same academic year 2022-23, out of 121 352 enrolled students, 9 297 opted for courses related to ICT, marking a consistent increase over several years (INSTAT, 2023).

In 2023, the EU-funded UNDP-ran EU4Schools supported the digital ecosystem, with 1,070 teachers and school network leaders receiving training. Courses included subjects such as 'Blended learning in practice', 'Infrastructure for blended learning', 'Planning for a successful lesson in blended learning'; 'Student assessment in blended learning' and many more. The online learning platform [Akademi.al](https://akademi.al) was further developed (524 783 students used it while it offered 29 741 interactive video lessons). Moreover, 17 Smartlabs were provided in upper secondary schools. This was complemented by multiple small-scale donations of IT equipment from diverse public and private sources. In the framework of the National Coordinators for Implementing the EU Agenda, NAVETQ rolls out programmes to develop tools and train instructors to design blended learning strategies and perform teaching classes.

Several national policies explicitly emphasise the development of digital skills, including the Digital Agenda of Albania, ICT Priorities 2022-2026, the National Employment and Skills Strategy 2023-2030 and the National Education Strategy 2021-2026. Albania also aligns with the Digital Agenda for the Western Balkans, an EU-funded initiative aiming to enhance digitisation in the learning process, which encompasses upgrading digital school infrastructure, providing high-speed internet access for schools, and establishing digital communication channels between schools and regional education units, among other initiatives.

In 2023, with GiZ support, the NAES launched the "Digital Skills" training programme in all Public Vocational Training Centers. The curriculum is divided into two levels and contains the five basic digital competencies aligned to the EU Digital Competencies Framework 2.0. Skills such as online job search or use of the e-Albania portal are provided. The IT laboratories implemented the curriculum and included 2,400 job seekers in this course. In addition to training, work has been done to increase the teaching staff capacities of these Centres.

The MësoVET platform, an open and free resource in Albanian for vocational education institutions, supports synchronous and asynchronous remote learning with interactive tools like Big Blue Button.

With 4,540 users and 107 digitised courses, it facilitates blended learning by offering dynamic content that teachers and industry experts continuously update.

### **Statistics on education and training**

The National Statistics Office (INSTAT) regularly publishes quality data on all dimensions of societal development, including education and employment. The institution regularly exchanges with ETF through events and data collection initiatives.

Recently and increasingly, more is being done to ensure evidence-based decision-making, e.g. tracer studies for VET students have now been run two years in a row by NAES (with S4J support), and the recently established Sector Skills Council for Hospitality and Tourism has led a skills demand analysis in 2023. In 2024, ETF supported similar exercises in the energy and agri-food sectors.

According to the ad hoc NAES Tracer study, the employment rate of VET graduates (excluding those who continue higher education) rose from 57.5% in 2021 to 59.5% in 2023. Additionally, the share of students enrolling in VET programmes increased from 17.5% in 2022-23 to 18% in 2023-2024, with the percentage of girls in VET schools also rising from 14.7% in 2021 to 15.8% in 2022-2023, as reported by INSTAT. These data points all show an improvement in the VET sector performance.

## 3. LABOUR MARKET AND EMPLOYMENT

### 3.1 Trends and challenges

#### Labour market characteristics

In 2023, the activity rate for individuals aged 15 and 64 was 75.1%, with a notable disparity between the rate of 81.8% for men and 68.6% for women. The gender gap in activity rates of the population aged 15 and over has however witnessed a positive trend, from 15 percentage points in 2019 to 12 percentage points in 2023.

Among the same population group in 2023, the employment rate reached 57.2%, with rates of 63.0% for men and 51.7% for women. The unemployment rate was 11.2% – 11.1% for men and 11.3% for women. The unemployment rate stood at 10.7% in 2023, a minor but continuous decreasing trend over the past years (INSTAT). These statistics reflect a consistent upward trend, in the employment and activity rates, albeit remaining below the EU-27 averages, primarily due to significantly lower rates among female, youth and persons with low education attainment level.

In the first quarter of 2024, the average monthly gross wage for employees in Albania was ALL 73,641, which is approximately €730, marking a 13.8% increase from the previous year (INSTAT, 2024). Over the years, unemployment has affected both genders equally and there is only 0.3 percentage point gender gap in 2023. When broken down by educational attainment, the highest rate is amongst the medium educated population (12.7%), followed by high (9.2%) and then low (9.6%) (INSTAT 2024). Unemployment data should be correlated with significantly lower activity rates among women and persons with low education attainment, triggering less incidence of unemployment among these groups.

In 2023, out of the 61,173 vacancies advertised by the Public Employment Service of Albania, namely the National Agency for Employment and Skills (AKPA), the largest share of 33.8% was in the Manufacturing industry, followed by 'repair of vehicles' (8.9%) and then 'accommodation and food services' (8.6%). Regarding registered unemployment, during the first quarter of 2024 (the latest available data at the time of drafting), the number of registered unemployed was 75,486, a lower value compared to previous years when it stood at 78,114 (INSTAT, 2024).

#### Statistics on the labour market and employment

INSTAT now carries out labour force surveys in line with Eurostat methodologies and publishes results quarterly and annually. The NAES maintains a labour market information system. The NAES plans to establish a sophisticated unified VET information system as part of the National Employment and Skills Strategy. Additionally, the Centre for Education Services has initiated work to establish an integrated information system for the entire pre-university education system. In 2020, the NAES conducted a first analysis of the VET Management Information System (VET MIS) and found that, problematically, most of the data and information at the provider level is collected and processed manually.

### 3.2 Employment policy and institutional settings

#### Strategy and legal framework in the employment policy field

As pointed out earlier, the country is currently in a transitional policy phase. The previous Employment and Skills Strategy, in effect from 2018 to 2023, underwent a comprehensive assessment that resulted in numerous recommendations for addressing the ongoing needs of the labour market and skill development systems. Building upon this evaluation, the government launched in March 2023 the new National Employment and Skills Strategy. This strategy will serve as the primary strategic planning

framework for the employment and skills sector, with all support programmes aligning with its objectives. It will undergo regular monitoring and receive periodic updates to ensure its effectiveness.

Some of the key measures outlined in this strategy encompass the following:

- enhancing the relevance, flexibility and evidence-based nature of the VET offerings while ensuring continuity;
- strengthening the quality assurance mechanisms of the VET system;
- systematic involvement of the private sector in VET governance and provision;
- promoting inclusive lifelong learning opportunities;
- recognising and validating prior non-formal and informal learning experiences;
- advancing the digital transformation of employment services and the VET system;
- establishing a skills intelligence system to inform decision-making;
- expanding services for employers and jobseekers to foster better matches in the labour market; and
- facilitating labour force mobility to align the workforce with labour market needs.

In essence, the overarching goal of this strategy is to revamp existing programmes, reorienting them to provide swift, effective and short-term training solutions that respond to the urgent demand for new skills and the upskilling of the current workforce. This transformation necessitates a shift towards a demand-driven system.

However, other policies affect the employment, including: Albania's Smart Specialisation Strategy, the Action Plan for Persons with Disabilities (2021-2025); Action Plan for LGBTI People (2021-2027); Strategy for Gender Equality (2021-2030); Action Plan for Equality, Inclusion, and Participation of Roma and Egyptians in Albania (2021-2025); Strategy for Social Housing (2015-2025). Albania has a Strategy on Science, Technology and Innovation (2023-2030)<sup>60</sup> and Business and Investment Development Strategy (BIDS) (2021-2027) including its Action Plan.

Achievements in modernising employment services resulted from the previous policy (NESS 2023) roll out:

- development of service manuals detailing services, standards and tools for employment offices;
- reorganisation of all employment offices according to the national service model, which maintains uniform standards and instruments;
- training of management staff in the implementation of individual employment plans for special groups; and
- establishment of an integrated ICT system for use by all employment offices, incorporating a performance evaluation module with indicators at all levels (MoFE, 2022).

Since 2022, the preparation for implementation of the EU Youth Guarantee scheme has been a central topic of policy discussions involving various state institutions and the EU. With EU-funded technical support, Albania conducted a comprehensive mapping of NEETs and reviewed the existing legal framework. A multi-stakeholder group and a technical expert team were assembled to craft the Youth Guarantee Implementation Plan, finalised during the summer of 2023 and launched in the spring of 2024.

## Initiatives to boost employment

The main labour market measures NAES implements are training, direct job creation and employment promotion. In 2023, out of the 76,580 registered unemployed, all received counselling, 12,088 received job matching services, and 15,134 received training of various sorts. Furthermore, 2,635 beneficiaries received employment support services. The expenditure for labour market policies administered by the PES (known as AKPA in Albania) amounted to almost ALL 2.5 million, showing a continuous yearly increase (it was just ALL 2 million in 2022 and ALL 1.5 million in 2019)<sup>3</sup>.

The implementation of active labour market programmes (ALMPs) underwent a comprehensive reform in 2019 and 2020, primarily focusing on addressing the specific needs of the NAES client base and enhancing the implementation procedures. This reform sought to create a service portfolio rooted in a balanced approach that caters to both demand and supply aspects, while also recognising and nurturing the potential of diverse groups of jobseekers through personalised action plans and mediation measures. The full-scale execution of the reformed ALMPs commenced in 2021, with ongoing expansion efforts since.

As part of NAES's overarching strategy to bolster employment, there has been a concerted effort to broaden the scope and reach of ALMPs. These endeavours encompass a range of measures summarised as follows:

- conducting an analysis of the needs of special groups within the jobseeker population;
- reviewing the legal and regulatory framework governing ALMPs to diversify programme offerings;
- designing and launching a self-employment programme;
- rolling out specialised ALMPs aimed at addressing the needs of NEETs;
- overseeing the development, coordination and implementation of the National Implementation Plan for the Youth Guarantee.

Active Labour Market Programmes have undergone a redesign process informed by evidence from past programmes and international best practices. As a result, the range of programmes offered now closely resembles those commonly found across Europe. In 2020, three decrees of the council of ministers (DCM) were enacted, introducing eight novel ALMPs. Five of these were meticulously crafted based on prior assessments and international best practices, while the remaining three were formulated in response to the challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic. All programmes offer subsidies for childcare services and transportation costs to integrate vulnerable jobseekers into the labour market. In addition, subsidies for reasonable accommodation are also provided for jobseekers with disabilities.

Moreover, numerous job fairs were organised for different sectors: just in 2023, the 5<sup>th</sup> edition of the skills competition 'International Food and Drink Expo' was organised where all twelve vocational high schools that offer hospitality-tourism majors participated. That same year, Automotive Fair Albania and the Agrotech Fair were also organised to introduce students to the automotive market, their qualification and training requirements, and VET centres and NAEs had key roles in liaising between private sector and training providers.

The UNDP implemented programme S4J has been supporting the capacity needs for developing the Labour Market Information Observatory, especially the staff of the employment offices, like counsellors, Directors of EOs, Heads of Services. The main components (policy themes, analytical highlights in the labour market), features (data visualisation, dashboards, personalised user experience, etc.), data collection institutions, the institutional location of LMIO and respective users designed and developed. The observatory currently processes data based on profession, gender, and region. This tool has started generating signals on the job market. This project also supports the NAES to run National Tracer Surveys of upper secondary VET graduates in 2023 tracing graduates from the 2021-2022 academic year. Data was published for the third consecutive year. Moreover, the consolidation of Skills Intelligence through analysis for skills needs on economic priority sectors continues with ICT, Energy and Tourism and hospitality in the recent past.

<sup>3</sup> ETF e-survey on working and learning, 2023, publication upcoming.

NAES has enhanced the digital portal [puna.gov.al](http://puna.gov.al) to improve access to employment and training services, with support from Expertise France for user-friendly features. By the end of 2023, the portal reached around 14 000 monthly users, reflecting NAES's focus on leveraging digital solutions to enhance service accessibility and user experience.

In 2023, NAES enhanced the Employment Services System (ESS) by improving its integration with the VET system, refining the job mediation module, and developing Youth Guarantee and Employment Promotion modules. The system now enables fully online processes for vocational training applications, with updated modules for programmes, employees, courses, and trainees.

### Initiatives to increase the capacity of the public employment services

The implementation of the previous strategy (NESS 2022) led to a comprehensive formal reorganisation of all employment offices, the alignment with the National Services Model, ensuring uniformity in standards and service delivery across the board. A service manual was developed, detailing the services provided, the associated standards and the tools used by employment offices. But challenges remain.

To equip employment office staff with the necessary skills and knowledge to implement the service manual effectively, a total of 643 training sessions were conducted. These training sessions covered various aspects, including counselling and individualised in-depth employment plans. Furthermore, in collaboration with partners, NAES organised an additional 360 training sessions addressing migration services, service quality development and counselling. However, the ratio between the employment offices specialists and the number of registered jobseekers at these offices is approximately 1 to 600, four times higher than the EU average and double the regional average (NESS 2023-2030).

As part of the modernisation efforts, periodic employability plans were drafted and implemented in accordance with predefined tiers. Managerial staff received training to ensure the successful execution of the employability plans for special groups. The quality of services provided by each office was assessed and monitored. To enhance the physical infrastructure of public employment services offices and promote technology integration into employment programmes, NAES initiated improvements across all offices. An integrated ICT system was designed and introduced, supported by staff training throughout the network of employment services. Furthermore, a call centre was established to enhance communication and outreach.

In a concerted effort to ensure equitable services for individuals from disadvantaged categories, mainly persons with disabilities (PWDs), NAES invested in improving Employment Office No 2. This office was transformed into a more accessible, comfortable, and inclusive space, equipped with adapted technological devices that facilitate job seekers' access to essential services and vocational training.

Regarding job placement performance, the transition rates from unemployment to employment have been improving since 2020 (27.9%) reaching 34.9% in 2022, still below the pre-COVID level of 42.8% (2019). In 2022, the transition rate of females was lower than males (32.1% vs 38%), while the percent was higher for young unemployed people (47.8%) compared to adults (31%). By level of educational attainment, the highest probability to transition to employment is among jobseekers with tertiary education attainment (64.9%) and the lowest is among jobseekers with low educational attainment (26.7%). This is a trend consistent over the years (NAES statistics, 2023).

A key EU-led initiatives in which Albania is also part includes the IPA regional project Employment and Social Affairs Platform III (ESAP III, implemented by RCC and ILO) that will run until 2029 and includes European Pillar of Social Rights, PES benchmarking and cooperation between Western Balkans PES with EU PES Network and ELA, and undeclared work including labour inspections.

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# STATISTICAL ANNEX – ALBANIA

The Annex includes annual data from 2015, 2019, 2020, 2021, 2022 and 2023 or the last available year.

	Indicator	2015	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	
1	Total population (in thousands) <sup>(1)</sup>	2880.7	2854.2	2837.8	2811.7	2777.7	2746.0	
2	Relative size of youth population (age group 15-24 and denominator age 15-64, %) <sup>(1) c</sup>	25.2	22.2	21.5	20.7	20.1	19.6	
3	GDP growth rate (%)	2.2	2.1	-3.3	8.9	4.9	3.4	
4	Gross value added by sector (%)	Agriculture	19.8	18.4	19.2	18.4	18.6	18.3
		Industry	21.8	20.6	20.1	20.7	21.4	21.2
		Services	46.3	48.4	48.3	47.9	47.4	48.0
5	Public expenditure on education (as% of GDP)	3.4	3.9	3.3	3.0	2.7	MD	
6	Public expenditure on education (as% of total public expenditure)	10.4	11.4	10.1	9.8	MD	MD	
7	Adult literacy (%)	MD	MD	MD	MD	98.5	MD	
8	Educational attainment of total population (aged 15 and over) (%)	Low <sup>(2)</sup>	51.4	48.2	48.1	48.4	47.2	46.7
		Medium <sup>(3)</sup>	34.4	34.8	34.4	34.1	33.9	35.2
		High <sup>(4)</sup>	14.2	17.0	17.6	17.5	19.0	18.1
9	Early leavers from education and training (aged 18-24) (%)	Total	21.3	16.3	15.6	16.8	15.5	13.9
		Male	22.9	17.5	15.7	17.1	16.3	15.2
		Female	19.6	15.1	15.5	16.6	14.7	12.7
10	Total NET enrolment rate (%)	Lower secondary	99.0	98.1	97.4	96.8	96.0	MD
		Upper secondary	88.2	86.7	83.8	86.8	85.5	MD
11	Share of VET students in upper secondary education (ISCED level 3) (%)	16.3	18.2	18.0	17.6	17.7	MD	
12	Low achievement in reading, mathematics and science – PISA (%) <sup>(5)</sup>	Reading	50.3	52.2	N/A	N/A	73.7	N/A
		Mathematics	53.3	42.4	N/A	N/A	73.9	N/A
		Science	41.7	47.0	N/A	N/A	67.4	N/A
13	Total	55.7	60.4	59.5	59.8	62.4	64.1	

	Indicator		2015	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023
	Activity rate (aged 15 and over) (%)	Male	64.3	68.0	66.9	67.2	68.4	70.3
		Female	47.2	53.0	52.3	52.6	56.5	58.1
14	Inactivity rate (aged 15 and over) (%)	Total	44.3	39.6	40.5	40.2	37.6	35.9
		Male	35.7	32.0	33.1	32.8	31.6	29.7
		Female	52.8	47.0	47.7	47.4	43.5	41.9
15	Employment rate (aged 15 and over) (%)	Total	46.2	53.4	52.5	52.9	55.5	57.2
		Male	53.3	60.1	59.2	59.5	61.2	63.0
		Female	39.2	46.9	46.1	46.4	50.1	51.7
16	Employment rate by educational attainment (aged 15 and over) (%)	Low <sup>(2)</sup>	41.4	48.6	46.3	45.9	48.3	48.3
		Medium <sup>(3)</sup>	47.9	53.7	54.0	54.9	57.9	60.1
		High <sup>(4)</sup>	59.2	66.4	66.6	68.0	69.4	74.7
17	Employment by sector (%) <sup>(6)</sup>	Agriculture	41.3	36.4	36.1	33.8	33.9	32.3
		Industry	18.6	20.1	18.2	19.3	21.9	21.0
		Services	39.9	43.5	45.7	46.9	44.2	46.7
18	Incidence of self-employment (%) <sup>(6)</sup>		59,0	54.3	53.9	52.1	53.0	51.0
19	Incidence of vulnerable employment (%) <sup>(6)</sup>		56,6	51.2	50.4	48.2	49.0	46.8
20	Unemployment rate (aged 15 and over) (%)	Total	17.1	11.5	11.7	11.5	10.9	10.7
		Male	17.1	11.6	11.5	11.3	10.6	10.5
		Female	17.1	11.4	11.9	11.8	11.4	10.9
21	Unemployment rate by educational attainment (aged 15 and over) (%)	Low <sup>(2)</sup>	13.4	8.7	9.5	10.6	9.9	9.6
		Medium <sup>(3)</sup>	20.4	14.4	13.6	13.2	12.4	12.7
		High <sup>(4)</sup>	19.4	12.3	12.6	10.5	10.5	9.2
22	Unemployment rate (aged 15-24) (%)	Total	39.8	27.2	26.5	27.1	24.9	25.6
		Male	39.2	27.8	27.0	25.5	24.1	24.8
		Female	40.8	26.3	25.9	29.2	25.9	26.6
23	Proportion of people aged 15-24 not in employment, education or training (NEETs) (%)	Total	29.6	25.5	26.6	24.1	23.3	22.6
		Male	28.2	25.8	27.1	22.2	21.4	21.9
		Female	31.1	25.3	26.2	26.0	25.2	23.3
		Total	32.8	26.6	27.9	26.2	25.2	24.6

	Indicator		2015	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023
	Proportion of people aged 15-29 not in employment, education or training (NEETs) (%)	Male	29.4	24.3	25.8	23.2	22.6	23.5
		Female	36.6	28.9	30.0	29.1	27.8	25.6
24	Participation in training/lifelong learning (% aged 25-64) <sup>(7)</sup>	Total	1.0	0.8	0.8	0.8	0.7	MD
		Male	1.0	1.0	0.6	0.8	0.6	MD
		Female	1.1	0.7	0.7	0.8	0.6	MD
25	Human Development Index		0.797	0.800	0.784	0.785	0.789	MD

Last update: 13/08/2024

#### Sources:

Indicators 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7: The World Bank, World Development Indicators database

Indicators 10, 11: UNESCO, Institute for Statistics

Indicators 8, 9, 13, 14, 15, 16, 17 (2015-2019; 2022-2023), 18 (2015-2019; 2022-2023), 19 (2015-2019; 2022-2023), 20, 21, 22, 23, 24: INSTAT, LFS

Indicators 17, 18, 19: 2020 and 2021 ETF Calculations based on Instat Labour Market 2021 (<http://www.instat.gov.al/media/10066/tregu-i-punes-2021.pdf>)

Indicator 12: OECD PISA 2018 Results (Volume I) Annex B1; OECD PISA 2022 Results (Volume I)

Indicator 25: UNDP

#### Notes:

(1) Estimation.

(2) Low – ISCED 0-2.

(3) Medium – ISCED 3-4.

(4) High – ISCED 5-8.

(5) PISA: 2019 refers to 2018.

(6) Calculated (2020-2021).

(7) Participation in training/lifelong learning refers to the last 4 weeks and not to the last 12 months.

#### Legend:

C = ETF calculations

N/A = not applicable

MD = missing data

## ANNEX: DEFINITIONS OF INDICATORS

	Description	Definition
1	Total population (in thousands)	The total population is estimated as the number of people having their usual residence in a country on 1 January of the respective year. When information on the usually resident population is not available, countries may report legal or registered residents.
2	Relative size of youth population (age group 15-24) (%)	This is the ratio of the youth population (aged 15-24) to the working-age population, usually aged 15-64 (or 15-74 or 15 and over).
3	GDP growth rate (%)	Annual percentage growth rate of GDP at market prices based on constant local currency. Aggregates are based on constant 2010 USD. GDP is the sum of gross value added by all resident producers in the economy plus any product taxes and minus any subsidies not included in the value of the products. It is calculated without making deductions for depreciation of fabricated assets or for depletion and degradation of natural resources.
4	Gross value added by sector (%)	The share of value added from Agriculture, Industry and Services. Agriculture corresponds to ISIC divisions 1-5 and includes forestry, hunting, and fishing, as well as cultivation of crops and livestock production. Value added is the net output of a sector after adding up all outputs and subtracting intermediate inputs. It is calculated without making deductions for depreciation of fabricated assets or depletion and degradation of natural resources. The origin of value added is determined by the International Standard Industrial Classification (ISIC), revision 3 or 4. Industry corresponds to the International Standard Industrial Classification (ISIC) tabulation categories C-F (revision 3) or tabulation categories B-F (revision 4), and includes mining and quarrying (including oil production), manufacturing, construction, and public utilities (electricity, gas, and water). Services correspond to ISIC divisions 50-99 and they include value added in wholesale and retail trade (including hotels and restaurants), transport, and government, financial, professional, and personal services such as education, health care, and real estate services. Also included are imputed bank service charges, import duties, and any statistical discrepancies noted by national compilers as well as discrepancies arising from rescaling.
5	Public expenditure on education (as % of GDP)	Public expenditure on education expressed as a percentage of GDP. Generally, the public sector funds education either by directly bearing the current and capital expenses of educational institutions, or by supporting students and their families with scholarships and public loans as well as by transferring public subsidies for educational activities to private firms or non-profit organisations (transfer to private households and enterprises). Both types of transactions together are reported as total public expenditure on education.
6	Public expenditure on education (as % of total public expenditure)	Public expenditure on education expressed as a percentage of total public expenditure. Generally, the public sector funds education either by directly bearing the current and capital expenses of educational institutions, or by supporting students and their families with scholarships and public loans as well as by transferring public subsidies for educational activities to private firms or non-profit organisations (transfer to private households and enterprises). Both types of transactions together are reported as total public expenditure on education.
7	Adult literacy (%)	Adult literacy is the percentage of the population aged 15 years and over who can both read and write a short simple statement on his/her everyday life, and understand it. Generally, 'literacy' also encompasses 'numeracy' – the ability to make simple arithmetic calculations.

	Description	Definition
8	Educational attainment of total population (aged 15+) (%)	Educational attainment refers to the highest educational level achieved by individuals expressed as a percentage of all persons in that age group. This is usually measured in terms of the highest educational programme successfully completed, which is typically certified by a recognised qualification. Recognised intermediate qualifications are classified at a lower level than the programme itself.
9	Early leavers from education and training (aged 18-24) (%)	Early leavers from education and training are defined as the percentage of the population aged 18-24 with at most lower secondary education who were not in further education or training during the four weeks preceding the survey. Lower secondary education refers to ISCED 1997 levels 0-2 and 3C short (i.e. programmes lasting under two years) for data up to 2013 and to ISCED 2011 levels 0-2 for data from 2014 onwards.
10	Total NET enrolment rate	Total number of students of the official age group for a given level of education who are enrolled in any level of education, expressed as a percentage of the corresponding population.
11	Share of VET students in upper secondary education (ISCED level 3) (%)	Total number of students enrolled in vocational programmes at a given level of education (in this case, upper secondary), expressed as a percentage of the total number of students enrolled in all programmes (vocational and general) at that level.
12	Low achievement in reading, maths and science – PISA (%)	Low achievers are the 15-year-olds who are failing to reach level 2 on the PISA scale for reading, mathematics and science.
13	Activity rate (aged 15+) (%)	The activity rate is calculated by dividing the active population by the population of the same age group. The active population (also called 'labour force') is defined as the sum of employed and unemployed people. The inactive population consists of all people who are classified as neither employed nor unemployed.
14	Inactivity rate (aged 15+) (%)	The inactivity/out of the labour force rate is calculated by dividing the inactive population by the population of the same age group. The inactive population consists of all people who are classified as neither employed nor unemployed.
15	Employment rate (aged 15 and over) (%)	The employment rate is calculated by dividing the number of employed people by the population of the same age group. Employed people are all people who worked at least one hour for pay or profit during the reference period or were temporarily absent from such work. If a different age group is used, this should be indicated.
16	Employment rate by educational attainment (aged 15 and over) (%)	The employment rate is calculated by dividing the number of employed persons by the population of the same age group. Employed persons are all persons who worked at least one hour for pay or profit during the reference period or were temporarily absent from such work. If a different age group is used, this should be indicated. Educational levels refer to the highest educational level successfully completed. Three levels are considered: Low (ISCED level 0-2), Medium (ISCED level 3-4) and High (ISCED 1997 level 5-6, and ISCED 2011 level 5-8).
17	Employment by sector (%)	This indicator provides information on the relative importance of different economic activities with regard to employment. Data are presented by broad branches of economic activity (i.e. Agriculture/Industry/Services) based on the International Standard Industrial Classification of All Economic Activities (ISIC). In Europe, the NACE classification is consistent with ISIC.
18	Incidence of self-employment (%)	The incidence of self-employment is expressed by the self-employed (i.e. employers + own-account workers + contributing family workers) as a proportion of the total employed.

	Description	Definition
19	Incidence of vulnerable employment (%)	The incidence of vulnerable employment is expressed by the own-account workers and contributing family workers as a proportion of the total employed.
20	Unemployment rate (aged 15 and over) (%)	The unemployment rate represents unemployed people as a percentage of the labour force. The labour force is the total number of people who are employed or unemployed. Unemployed people comprise those aged 15-64 or 15 and over who were without work during the reference week; are currently available for work (were available for paid employment or self-employment before the end of the two weeks following the reference week); are actively seeking work, i.e. had taken specific steps in the four-week period ending with the reference week to seek paid employment or self-employment, or had found a job to start later (within a period of, at most, three months).
21	Unemployment rate by educational attainment (aged 15 and over) (%)	The unemployment rate represents unemployed people as a percentage of the labour force. The labour force is the total number of people who are employed or unemployed. Unemployed people comprise those aged 15-64 or 15 and over who were without work during the reference week; are currently available for work (were available for paid employment or self-employment before the end of the two weeks following the reference week); are actively seeking work (had taken specific steps in the four-week period ending with the reference week to seek paid employment or self-employment, or had found a job to start later (within a period of, at most, three months)). Educational levels refer to the highest educational level successfully completed. Three levels are considered: low (ISCED level 0-2), medium (ISCED level 3-4) and high (ISCED 1997 level 5-6, and ISCED 2011 level 5-8).
22	Unemployment rate (aged 15-24) (%)	The unemployment rate represents unemployed people as a percentage of the labour force. The labour force is the total number of people who are employed or unemployed. Unemployed people comprise those aged 15-24 who were without work during the reference week; are currently available for work (were available for paid employment or self-employment before the end of the two weeks following the reference week); are actively seeking work, i.e. had taken specific steps in the four-week period ending with the reference week to seek paid employment or self-employment, or had found a job to start later (within a period of, at most, three months).
23	Proportion of people aged 15-24/15-29 not in employment, education or training (NEETs) (%)	The indicator provides information on young people aged 15-24 who meet the following two conditions: first, they are not employed (i.e. unemployed or inactive according to the ILO definition); and second, they have not received any education or training in the four weeks preceding the survey. Data are expressed as a percentage of the total population of the same age group and gender, excluding the respondents who have not answered the question on participation in education and training.
24	Participation in training/lifelong learning (% aged 25-64)	Participants in lifelong learning refers to persons aged 25-64 who stated that they received education or training in the 12 months preceding the survey (numerator). The denominator is the total population of the same age group, excluding those who did not answer the question on participation in education and training. The information collected relates to all education or training, whether or not it is relevant to the respondent's current or possible future job. If a different reference period is used, this should be indicated.
25	Human Development Index	The index is a summary measure of average achievement in key dimensions of human development: a long and healthy life, being knowledgeable and have a decent standard of living.

## ABBREVIATIONS

ACVT	Albanian Council for Vocational Training
AQAPE	Agency for Quality Assurance in Pre-University Education
ASCAL	Albanian Quality Assurance Agency
ALMPs	Active Labour Market Policies
CES	Centre for Education Services
CPD	Continuous Professional Development
DGVT	Directorate General for Vocational Training
EC	European Commission
ECTS	European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System
EPPs	employment promotion programmes
EQF	European Qualification Framework
HDI	Human Development Index
IPMGs	Integrated Policy Management Groups
LLL	lifelong learning
MoFE	Ministry of Finance and Economy
NAES	National Agency for Employment and Skills
NAVETQ	National Agency for VET and Qualifications
NCPE	National Council of Pre-University Education
NCVET	National Council of Vocational Education and Training
NEET	not in education, employment, or training
NESS	National Employment and Skills Strategy
PAAHE	Public Accreditation Agency for Higher Education
PISA	Programme for International Student Assessment

PWDs	persons with disabilities
QAAPE	Quality Assurance Agency of Pre-University Education
SSCs	Sector Steering Committees
VET	vocational education and training
WBL	work-based learning

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