

WORK-BASED LEARNING IN KOSOVO*: AN ASSESSMENT PER EU QUALITY STANDARDS

* This designation is without prejudice to positions on status, and is in line with UNSCR 1244/1999 and the ICJ Opinion on the Kosovo declaration of independence – hereinafter 'Kosovo'.

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Preface

The study “Work-based learning in Kosovo – an assessment per EU quality standards” has been produced by the European Training Foundation (ETF). The study was carried out between November 2023 and October 2024 by Kushtrim Bajrami.

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Introduction

Kosovo has the youngest population in Europe. The proportion of young people under 25 in the total population is over 40%. This demographic situation offers great opportunities but also enormous challenges. In the next few years, tens of thousands of young people will reach working age and be looking for decent jobs that pay a living wage.

Youth unemployment is very high in Kosovo, while labour force participation and employment rates are well below EU levels. Young people with all levels of education experience a difficult transition to their first job and many young people find themselves in precarious employment. Young people with a low level of education and young women are particularly disadvantaged.

Youth employment policy is therefore a high priority in Kosovo. The European Commission is supporting Kosovo's efforts through the Youth Guarantee. The Youth Guarantee aims to ensure that all young people under the age of 30 receive a good quality offer of employment, continued education, apprenticeship or traineeship within a period of four months of becoming unemployed or leaving education.

Apprenticeship and traineeship are two forms of work-based learning (WBL)¹. Apprenticeships - also known as dual programmes - are designed to develop occupational skills and lead to recognised qualifications. They combine school-based learning with workplace learning, with the latter typically accounting for a significant proportion of the programme duration. Apprenticeships usually have a longer duration, for example 2-4 years. Traineeships are workplace training periods that complement formal or non-formal education and training programmes. Traineeships can be a compulsory and integrated, or optional and supplementary component of a vocational training programme. They may last from a few days or weeks to several months but are generally shorter than apprenticeships. Both traineeships and apprenticeships may be offered as active labour market programmes, if they are organised and funded by public employment services.

Because of their particular importance for youth employment, the European Commission has developed quality standards for both traineeships and apprenticeships. The European Framework for Quality and Effective Apprenticeships² was developed in 2018 with the support of the European social partners and includes 14 criteria for high-quality and effective apprenticeships. These criteria are divided into two categories: learning and working conditions, and framework conditions. The 2014 Quality Framework for Traineeships³ contains a set of quality criteria relating to traineeships as part of active labour market policy (ALMP). However, the framework can also be used to guide the development and review of traineeships in other contexts, e.g. in initial or continuing vocational education and training.

This study provides a brief and clearly structured analysis of the main vocational education and training (VET) programmes in Kosovo against the criteria of the two EU frameworks. The two main chapters take a look at 'Work-based learning arrangements in initial VET' and work-based learning that is part of 'Active labour market measures'. The most important strengths and challenges are summarised at the end of the chapters.

These two main chapters are preceded by a brief 'Country overview' and a short description of the 'VET legal and governance framework', the main 'VET programmes' and Kosovo's 'Vision for VET and major reforms'. In addition, another short chapter presents the most important information on 'International donor support to WBL in Kosovo'. The 'Appendix' contains a glossary of the abbreviations and terms used in the report and the list of references.

¹ For more information on work-based learning see: Work-based learning: an introduction to key concepts. Inter-Agency Working Group on Work-based Learning (Cedefop, European Commission, ETF, ILO, OECD, UNESCO, World Bank Group) <https://www.etf.europa.eu/en/publications-and-resources/publications/work-based-learning-introduction-key-concepts>

² European Framework for Quality and Effective Apprenticeships (EFQEA) EUR-Lex - 32018H0502(01) - EN - EUR-Lex

³ Quality Framework for Traineeships EUR-Lex - 32014H0327(01) - EN - EUR-Lex

We hope that the document will contribute to the national and international debate on the quality and effectiveness of work-based learning.

Country overview

As of the end of 2022, Kosovo has an estimated population of around 1.8 million inhabitants and the youngest population in geographical Europe with approximately 43 % being under 25 years old. Only 8.8 % of Kosovo's population in 2022 was over 65 years of age – compared to 19 % in the EU-27. In the next five years, approximately 150 000 young people will reach working age, while 80 000 people will retire. Available population projections show that by 2031 the share of elderly persons in the population will start to increase steadily, while the working age population (i.e., persons aged 15-64) will begin to decline in a balanced way⁴.

Emigration flows to European countries have been growing, where in the past 10 years, 529 647 citizens, i.e. almost 30 % of the population, left the country⁵. According to the OECD, Kosovo has the second highest emigration rate among the six Western Balkan economies, with 22 % of its population living in OECD countries. More than half of the Kosovar migrants of working age in OECD countries have low levels of education (52 %), while the share of highly skilled migrants is relatively low at 13 %⁶.

Kosovo's labour market is characterised by low employment rates and relatively high unemployment and inactivity rates. In 2022, the labour force participation rate of the population aged 15-64 was 38.6 % – 55.5 % for men and 22 % for women – a declining trend compared to 2017 (42.9 %) and well below the EU average (72.7 % for the population aged 15-64)⁷.

Employment-to-population ratios in Kosovo ranged from 28 % in 2016 to 31.1 % in 2021 and reached 33.8 % in 2022 for the population aged 15-64. The employment-to-population ratio is particularly low among young people aged 15-24 (15.4 % in 2022, compared to 31.4 % in the EU countries) and among women (18.4 % in Kosovo and 62.2 % in the EU27 countries)⁸.

Individuals with a tertiary education are more likely to be employed compared to low-skilled individuals. In 2022, the employment-to-population ratios of individuals with primary education was 12.1 %, compared to 64.8 % for persons who have attained a tertiary education. In 2022, the employment gap for low-skilled women (15-64) compared to men was nearly 22 percentage points, while at tertiary level the employment-to-population ratio for women was 57 % and 72.8 % for men⁹.

The structure of employment shows that workers are mostly concentrated in the wholesale and retail trade (19.1 % of total employment), education and social work (17.1 %) and construction (11 %). Young workers (15-24) are mostly employed in the wholesale and retail trade, hotel and restaurant, manufacturing and construction sectors. Compared to men, women are mostly employed in education (22 % and 6.6 %, respectively), trade activities (19 % and 19.5 %, respectively) and in social work (14.6 % and 3.1 %, respectively)¹⁰.

The unemployment rate for the working age population in Kosovo has been declining since 2017. By 2022 the unemployment rate had levelled at 12.6 % of the labour force (11 % for men and 16.5 % for women). Young people (15-24) are more likely to be unemployed compared to the overall population, with the youth unemployment rate levelling at 21.4 % in 2022. A higher level of educational attainment

⁴ Kosovo Agency of Statistics: Kosovo Population Projection 2017 – 2061.

⁵ United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) 2020, Correlation between labour market in Kosovo and out migration.

<https://www.undp.org/sites/q/files/zskgke326/files/migration/ks/PPAnalysisEng.pdf>

⁶ Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), Labour migration in the Western Balkans: Mapping patterns, addressing challenges and reaping benefits – Two-pager Kosovo*, OECD publication, Paris, 2022.

<https://www.oecd.org/south-east-europe/programme/labourmigrationinthewesternbalkans-page.html>

⁷ Kosovo Agency of Statistics: Labour force survey 2022, downloadable at <https://askapi.rks-gov.net/Custom/f809b076-a9eb-4641-938c-d7f4d94f90bb.pdf>

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Ibid.

protects individuals from unemployment - since the unemployment rate decreases from 20.8 % for those with primary education to 10.7 % for those with tertiary educational attainment¹¹.

Between 2016 and 2019, the inactivity rate of the population 15-64 decreased slightly (from 61.3 % to 59.5 %) to then raise again in 2022 (to 61.4 %). High inactivity rates are due to the high inactivity rates among young people and women (78 %). In 2022, the share of young people (15-24) neither in employment nor in education and training (NEET) was 33 % of the total youth population (nearly ninety-nine thousand young people), representing one percentage point increase since 2021.¹² As regards to the NEET incidence among the age group 15-29 (reference category for Youth Guarantee), the latest datasets available (2022, 2021) show that almost three quarters are inactive youth (mainly due to discouragement, family and care responsibilities) and around half possess a tertiary education. Notably, young women are more exposed to joblessness or inactivity compared to their male counterparts.

These demographic realities pose significant challenges to the education system, particularly in vocational education and training, the school-to-work transition and the integration of the younger generation in the labour market.

In the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) conducted by the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) in 2015, 2018 and 2022, Kosovo consistently ranked among the lower-performing countries in mathematics, reading ability and science. The average results in 2022 showed a decline compared to those in 2018 across all three dimensions.

Table 1 (see below) illustrates the percentage of students in Kosovo who achieved at least Level 2 proficiency, alongside the OECD average. Most of Kosovo's students fall below Level 2 in reading, mathematics and science proficiency, the baseline required as a foundation for further learning and engagement with the labour market.

Table 1: PISA results 2018 and 2022

	Kosovo 2018¹³	Kosovo 2022¹⁴	OECD average 2018	OECD average 2022
Mathematics	23%	15%	76%	69%
Reading	21%	17%	77%	74%
Science	23%	21%	78%	76%

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) 2019, Results from PISA 2018 – Country Note Kosovo. https://www.oecd.org/pisa/publications/PISA2018_CN_KSV.pdf

¹⁴ Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) 2023, PISA 2022 Results: Factsheet Kosovo: <https://www.oecd.org/publication/pisa-2022-results/country-notes/kosovo-1f99d575/>

VET legal and governance framework

Vocational Education and Training (VET) in Kosovo is governed by various laws and sub-legal acts¹⁵. Kosovo was the first in the Western Balkan region to adopt, in 2013, a specific law on VET, departing from previous ex-Yugoslav practices which traditionally regulated pre-university education as single comprehensive system. The VET law was an attempt to re-design VET system governance structures under the Ministry of Education, inputs and processes in a way that VET provision better responds to labour market requirements and develops learners' vocational knowledge, skills and competences. However, this ambition has not yet been fully accomplished. The VET law is rather short and covers mainly initial VET delivered by public vocational schools and Centres of Competence (CoC). The public Vocational Training Centres (VTCs) which provide training for adults including jobseekers, stayed under the jurisdiction of the Ministry of Finance, Labour and Transfers (MFLT) and the Employment Agency of Kosovo (EARK).

The 2013 Law No. 04/L-138 on VET governs the national system, aligning it with the economic and social development needs, including technological changes, labour market demands and individual requirements in the transition to a market economy. This law addresses the structure, organisation and management of institutions providing VET. It advocates for a blended school-based and work-based VET, allowing the implementation of dual forms of VET where practical training is implemented in companies. The law defines VET as an activity that aims to equip learners with knowledge, practical ability, skills and required competencies in specific occupations or the broader labour market.

The 2008 Law No. 03/L-060 on National Qualifications establishes the legal basis for the national qualification system across all education levels, including formal and non-formal qualifications. It regulates the development and maintenance of the National Qualifications Framework (NQF) and the awarding of qualifications. The National Qualification Authority (NQA) is tasked with accrediting VET institutions.

Administrative Instruction No. 137/2020 on Work-Based Learning (WBL) in VET regulates the roles of the various players and the procedures for planning and implementing WBL, including the assessment of learners. The regulation also provides guidelines for VET schools and companies on the implementation of WBL, quality assurance and safety standards.

VET governance in Kosovo is mostly centralised. As such, it represents a shared responsibility between two key ministries, namely the Ministry of Education, Science, Technology and Innovation (MESTI) and MFLT. While the initial vocational education falls under the education system managed by MESTI, vocational training is provided by both public (VTCs) and private entities, including companies. Engagement of social partners and private stakeholders is limited, and the involvement of sectoral and regional/local governance is largely not influential or effective enough.

The MESTI holds the overall responsibility for education policy and legislation, including VET and lifelong learning which it coordinates in cooperation with the MFLT. MESTI has a dedicated department for VET consisting of two divisions: Division for VET Standards, Curricula and Quality Assurance; and Division for Lifelong Learning.

As per the VET Law, the Agency for Vocational Education and Training and for Adult Education (AVETAE) is tasked with the administration and governance of public VET schools, regarding financial matters, human resources and infrastructure. AVETAE currently manages only six VET schools (known as Centres of Competence – CoC), while the remaining VET schools operate under the authority of the local municipal authorities. Different to the other VET schools, CoC have a

¹⁵ Law No. 04/L-138 on Vocational Education and Training (2013), Law No. 03/L-060 on National Qualifications (2008), Law No. 04/L-032 on Pre-University Education (2011), Law No. 03/L-068 on Education in the Municipalities (2008), Law No. 06/L-046 on the Education Inspectorate in Kosovo (2018), Administrative Instruction No. 14 for the Agency of Vocational Education and Training and Adult Education (AVETAE) (2014), Administrative Instruction No. 28 on Criteria and Procedures for the Verification of Occupational Standards (2014), Administrative Instruction No. 137 on work-based learning in VET (2020).

comparatively higher degree of self-management, and their budget is slightly more adequate for facilitating WBL.

The Council of Vocational Educational and Training and for Adults (CVETA) functions as a tripartite advisory body, offering guidance to government and stakeholders on the design and implementation of VET policies. CVETA advises MESTI on the overall direction of VET and adult education policy in Kosovo and has the authority to approve occupational standards.

The NQA serves as an independent public body established in accordance with the Law on National Qualifications. Governed by a board of thirteen members representing ministries, social partners, universities, civil society organisations and VET providers, the NQA plays an important role in developing and maintaining the NQF. Its responsibilities include approving VET qualifications, accrediting VET providers, establishing criteria for occupational standards development and verifying occupational standards up to level 5 of the NQF (equivalent to EQF level 5).

The MFLT focuses on functions related to the welfare state and the labour market, covering employment, vocational training, social protection and social transfers. The vocational training function operates under the Department of Labour and Employment which includes a dedicated division. Among others, MFLT is expected to conduct analyses of the labour market needs and support the MESTI in planning to meet the needs for VET. Also, MFLT, in cooperation with the Kosovo Agency of Statistics (KAS), is responsible for the classification of occupations.

The EARK is the public provider responsible for implementing employment and vocational training policies. It operates through 38 employment offices at the municipal level and 8 regional public VTC.

Municipalities bear the responsibility for the operation of public educational institutions, including vocational schools. Their duties include constructing education facilities, student enrolment, employment of teaching and management staff, training, supervision and more. Municipalities have education directorates and directors are appointed by mayors. In terms of administration, the Kosovo Education System is highly decentralised, with most responsibilities devolved to municipalities, whereas there are no lines of authority leading from municipal to central level.

VET programmes

At present, VET in Kosovo is primarily understood as (a) formal vocational education and training at upper secondary level provided by VET schools and centres of competences; (b) courses and programmes provided in the framework of active labour market policy instruments by vocational training centres belonging to the Employment Agency and targeting labour market integration; and (c) a variety of training programmes and courses offered by various private providers, NGOs, companies and under donor-supported projects.

Initial vocational education and training (IVET)

Vocational education typically starts in the first year of upper secondary school (grade 10) when learners make a choice between pursuing a general (gymnasium) or opting for a vocational school pathway. Currently, Kosovo has 68 vocational schools (including 6 CoC), each organised around occupational profiles. The number of VET schools is deemed excessive, with many being undersized (23 have less than 200 students and 16 have less than 100 students)¹⁶ and poorly equipped to deliver effective vocational education and training.

Recent years have witnessed a growing interest among young individuals in initial VET programmes, with 53.8 % of learners in upper secondary education attending VET schools¹⁷. In the school year 2023/24, statistics indicate that out of 65 757 learners enrolled in upper secondary education, 35 399 learners are pursuing vocational education, surpassing the 30 358 learners in gymnasiums. Despite this increase in VET enrolment, vocational schools often remain a secondary choice, especially for learners unable to enrol in gymnasiums. The data indicates that there is a gender disparity in the enrolment of learners in vocational education schools, with boys being more likely to enrol compared to girls. About 46.3 % of learners enrolled in vocational education are girls. An analysis of gender-based orientation in vocational education reveals that girls tend to gravitate towards profiles related to health and well-being (43 %), as well as business, administration and law (26 %). In contrast, boys tend to lean towards profiles related to engineering, manufacturing and construction (42.5 %), as well as information technology and communication (14 %). The rate of orientation of girls in technical profiles such as engineering, manufacturing and construction is only 14.6 %.

Table 2 shows the share of students enrolled in VET schools in Kosovo by broad fields of study, as defined in ISCED-F. Approximately 1/3 of VET learners have enrolled in engineering, manufacturing and construction profiles.

Table 2: Percentage of VET learners by ISCED fields 2019/20-2023/24

	2019/20		2020/21		2021/22		2022/23		2023/24	
	Boys	Girls								
Gymnasiums	40.01	55.53	40.21	54.81	39.68	53.58	39.84	54.70	38.65	53.69
VET	59.99	44.47	59.79	45.19	60.32	46.42	60.16	45.30	61.35	46.31
ISCED-F fields (%)										
Engineering, manufacturing and construction	42.74	17.45	43.09	15.98	41.41	14.80	43.71	15.19	42.46	14.60
Business, administration and law	24.61	29.33	24.04	28.16	23.52	26.01	23.62	27.43	22.53	26.01
Health and Welfare	11.39	36.08	12.09	39.57	11.69	38.97	12.34	42.81	12.90	42.84

¹⁶ Ministry of Education, Science, Technology and Innovation – Education Management Information System data 2024.

¹⁷ Ibid.

	2019/20		2020/21		2021/22		2022/23		2023/24	
	Boys	Girls								
Information technology and communication	12.65	6.67	12.89	5.63	12.19	4.10	12.87	3.92	14.14	4.86
Agriculture, forestry, fishing and veterinary	3.80	2.67	3.16	2.70	2.70	2.14	2.55	1.99	2.51	2.04
Services	2.71	1.51	2.59	1.55	2.64	1.39	2.61	1.47	3.09	2.23
Arts and humanities	2.10	6.29	2.15	6.41	4.93	11.46	2.20	7.12	2.15	7.43
Others	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.93	1.13	0.11	0.07	0.22	0.00

Source: Data provided by MESTI, 2024

Initial VET programmes in public VET schools typically have a duration of three years (two plus one): after two years of basic vocational training learners follow one year of specialisation and consolidation. Upon completion and assessment of the basic vocational education (year 2), learners receive a Semi-Qualified Worker Vocational Certificate. Subsequently, the successful completion of specialisation phase (year 3) leads to the attainment of a Qualified Worker Certificate. These VET qualifications serve as prerequisites for advancing to the next level of education (higher education) while also providing direct access to the labour market. The ETF tracer study suggests that 40-50 % of the VET graduates enter higher education in any field of study, irrespective of their profile in upper secondary VET¹⁸.

In the school year 2022/23, dual education was piloted in four profiles (hairdresser, cook, hotel hospitality, and bricklayer), implemented across four vocational schools and three municipalities. In the school year 2023/24, dual education was expanded to eight additional profiles (auto mechanic, wholesalers/retailers, heating technician, electrician, tailor, esthetician, carpenter, metallurgy), attracting up to 900 interested learners.

Table 3: Number of learners in dual VET programmes by profiles

Profiles	Grade 10	Grade 11
Auto mechanic	215	
Wholesalers/Retailers	103	
Heating technician	77	
Electrician	84	
Tailor	39	
Esthetician	29	
Carpenter	47	
Metallurgy	38	
Hairdresser	60	20
Bricklayer	31	22
Cook	39	26
Hotel hospitality	52	38
Total	814	106

Source: Data provided by MESTI, 2023

¹⁸ ETF (European Training Foundation), Tracer Study of Vocational Education and Training Graduates, 2019.

Significant changes in the structure of the new dual curricula for all the twelve profiles are based on newly defined frameworks tailored to meet the identified demands of the target groups. On one hand, there is an effort to bridge knowledge gaps for learners who have completed lower secondary education and are starting vocational education. This involves imparting basic knowledge from lower secondary school, including mathematics, the Albanian language, English and vocationally relevant knowledge in natural sciences. Building upon the closed knowledge gaps, the new dual curricula aim to provide advanced knowledge in relevant core subjects of general education beyond the ninth-grade level. The emphasis on a high proportion of vocational practice in the company, constituting at least 50 % of the total curriculum time, is a fundamental component of the new curricula. Discussions on other elements of the implementation of dual education, such as the contract format, payment modalities and the roles of chambers and associations, are still in the early stages.

Continuing vocational education and training (CVET)

The options for continuing VET are very limited. Most courses offered for out-of-school youth and the unemployed are at basic skills level. An offer for advanced and specialised vocational training is almost entirely missing. The focus of MESTI on adult education is primarily on catch-up education for early school leavers. This gives them a second chance to complete upper secondary education.

The VET law provides the option for level 5 programmes as post-secondary/non-tertiary qualifications. Currently, two level 5 programmes are provided in public VET schools/ Centres of Competence: "Special Educational Needs Teaching Assistant" and "Career Guidance Counsellor" (developed by donor funded projects). In addition, the NQA has accredited 17 providers/institutions and approved 23 occupational standards at NQF Level 5, along with 42 NQF Level 5 programmes. These programmes come from public VET schools/Centres of Competence (2), other public VET providers (10), private training institutes (21) and private higher education institutions (9)¹⁹.

Higher education is predominantly academic in nature. Study programmes with a more vocational or professional character, building on the foundations laid in upper secondary VET and providing advanced or specialised training in selected occupational fields, are, with a few exceptions, almost entirely missing.

CVET provided by EARK is organised in eight VTCs at the regional level (in Prishtina, South Mitrovica, North Mitrovica, Peja, Prizren, Gjilan, Ferizaj and Gjakova) with 69 workshops and in 30 different occupations. VTCs provide training and retraining for registered jobseekers, the unemployed and those registered jobseekers receiving career guidance services at Employment Offices throughout the municipalities. The overwhelming majority of VTCs trainees are registered jobseekers and receive (re)training and Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) as part of Active Labour Market Policies (ALMP) portfolio implemented by EARK.

Training provided in VTCs is offered in two modalities - either entirely based on VTCs or a combination, based on VTCs and in companies. Trainings last up to six months. Training courses provided in VTCs are much more practice-oriented than programmes in secondary vocational schools. Instruction is modular, with approximately 30 % of the programme being theoretical and 70 % practice-oriented. Equipment in the VTCs may not always be up to date but continuous efforts are being made to improve the learning environment. In cases where equipment is lacking, VTCs attempt to organise the respective part of training in companies where such equipment is available. Training provided in VTCs includes a variety of fields such as electrical installations, hairdressing, carpentry, ICT, mechanical services, tailoring and more.

Jobseekers are referred to vocational training programmes in VTCs by the employment offices. Each learner must pass a preliminary test before starting the course. VTC courses are fully modularised. Candidates undergo a test after each training module as well as a final test and upon completion of the training, they receive a certificate of acquired competencies. Two VTCs (in Gjilan and South

¹⁹ Data from National Qualification Authority, 2024.

Mitrovica), have received accreditation to offer Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) for specific qualifications.

Priorities for publicly funded training offered by VTCs are determined based on available information regarding the demand for skills, as well as information gathered from employment offices and local businesses represented in VTCs advisory boards.

According to EARK, participation in vocational training declined in 2022 compared to the previous years (2019-2021). 2 859 job seekers started training in one of the eight VTCs (of whom 990 were women). By educational attainment, the overall trend shows that the largest group consists of those with medium education (1 830, out of which 837 are graduates from VET schools), followed by those with low education (719) and the smallest share goes to those with high education (223)²⁰. The data indicates that 39.4 % of trainees were aged 15-24, whereas 40.1 % were between 25 and 39 years of age.

Table 4: Job seekers having benefited from training provided in VTCs 2019-2022

	2019	2020	2021	2022
Training: total number of participants out of which:	6,925	3,832	3,151	2,859
■ - Training: based on VTCs	6,603	3,436	3,151	2,797
■ - Training: Combined based on VTCs and in companies	322	396	228	125

Source: EARK

The EARK Division for Vocational Training monitors the VTCs and the provision of training courses. Monitoring is carried out through VTCs reports and field visits. When a VTC subcontracts another provider for training or assessment and certification of learners, then the respective VTC is responsible for monitoring. The same applies when a part of a training program, assessment or certification is conducted in companies.

Trainers and instructors employed in VTCs are public servant employees of EARK. Typically, they have university degrees and practical skills to provide training in their field of expertise. All VTCs workers, including trainers, undergo annual performance assessments in accordance with Civil Service regulations. Due to the limited number of trainers in VTCs, a part of continuous professional development is offered by EARK itself.

²⁰ Note: Low level of education includes no education and basic education; Medium level of education includes High School gymnasium and Vocational secondary education; High level of education includes Bachelor, Master and PhD.

Vision for VET and major reforms

A better linkage between VET and the labour market stands out as a key strategic measure within the Human Development pillar of the National Development Strategy (NDS) 2030. The Kosovo Government considers dual education as a priority measure in the NDS 2030. In addition, the country's guiding document in education and training is the Education Strategy 2022-2026 which identifies the harmonisation of the VET system with labour market needs as one of five strategic objectives. In VET, the strategy focuses on improving the relevance of rather school-based VET programmes in line with labour market requirements. It also includes the development of a VET-specific national curriculum framework and systematic provision of high-quality work-based learning practices.

The government has established a High-level Executive VET Commission for better inter-institutional coordination and to develop a dialogue with all relevant stakeholders for the implementation of the VET reforms. The Commission is chaired by the Prime Minister of Kosovo and other members include Minister of Education, Science, Technology and Innovation, Minister of Finance, Labour and Transfers, Minister of Industry, Entrepreneurship and Trade and the Minister of Economy. The MESTI provides the role of the Secretariat of the Commission, in terms of the administrative procedures which facilitate the functioning of the commission. The commission has founded two taskforces:

- A task force on VET Governance reform aims to improve governance related to VET, namely the coordination and harmonisation of VET. The envisaged activities relate to the proposals for consolidation of the VET provision, between formal and non-formal education; including the VET schools that are under the supervision of the Municipal Directorates of Education, the CoCs under AVETAE and the trainings offered by the VTCs. Another activity relates to the financing model for VET to address the challenges faced with current flat financing. The members of this taskforce are representatives from the management of VET schools; Ministry of Education; Ministry of Finance, Labour and Transfers; Kosovo Employment Agency and Agency for VET;
- A task force on initiation of dual education which aims at the coordination of different partners for the initiation and implementation of dual education. This taskforce focuses on launching dual education within Kosovo in grades 10, 11 & 12. The targeted sectors are wood sector, food processing, metal working and information communication & technology. The identification of these sectors is based on the high willingness of companies to collaborate with VET and the high demand for the occupations from the labour market. The relevant members are representatives of Ministry of Education, private companies, sectors and industry, chambers of commerce, VET schools and donors.

In July 2021, Kosovo endorsed the Western Balkans Declaration on ensuring sustainable labour market integration of young people (aged 15-29) and committed to implementing a Youth Guarantee. The first Youth Guarantee Implementation Plan (YGP) focuses on policy reforms and interventions aimed at improving educational outcomes and employment opportunities in the short and medium term. Key initiatives include reforming and consolidating the VET system, enhancing career education and guidance, expanding the validation of non-formal and informal learning and increasing adult learning opportunities. The plan also involves revising and consolidating the VET legal framework, adjusting the funding formula to accommodate the costs of practice learning at school and developing occupational standards. To expand high-quality work-based learning opportunities for all VET learners in collaboration with companies, YGP measures include the assessment of capacities of companies for implementing WBL, building the capacities of workplace instructors, teachers and school leaders for implementing and monitoring work-based learning opportunities.

The MESTI has acknowledged the need for a comprehensive VET law reform and has initiated the drafting process. A concept paper for the new VET law (i.e. the basis on which the new law will be drafted) is likely to include proposals for a new structure of VET governance, dual education, teacher training and financing. In the framework of this reform process, the Agency for VET is likely to be attributed a new and more prominent role as a leading stakeholder for secondary VET. In addition,

there is a wide consensus on the crucial role of the private sector in VET, however, there is no common understanding approach on how to achieve same.

International donor support to WBL in Kosovo

Donor programmes have been contributing enormously to the improvement of the planning, design and delivery of VET in Kosovo. They have contributed substantially to revising the legal framework, improving training infrastructure and building the capacity of human resources, especially at the VET provider level within Kosovo's VET schools and VTCs. Projects funded by the EU, such as ALLED2 (2019-2024)²¹, with co-funding from the Austrian Development Agency (ADA) and ESVET-PRO (2020-2023)²² (with co-funding from Luxembourg Development – LuxDev), have been instrumental. Bilateral initiatives, including the concluded GIZ 'YES' project (2017-2021)²³, the ongoing GIZ 'Fit for Jobs' project (2021-2024)²⁴, various phases of the 'EYE' project (2017-2024)²⁵ funded by the Swiss Development Cooperation (SDC), the 'KSV-20' project (2018-2024)²⁶ funded by LuxDev and the German-funded KfW Regional Challenge Fund, have played a crucial role in VET development in Kosovo.

Efforts to introduce WBL for upper secondary VET learners also exist but they are almost all donor driven. Initiatives promoting work-based learning include the "Enhancing Youth Employment" (EYE) project funded by the Swiss Development Cooperation (SDC), the concluded GIZ "Youth Employment and Skills" (YES) project, the ongoing GIZ "Fit for Jobs" project and the Oead "Quality Assurance for the Work of the Business Liaison Coordinators" project funded by the Austrian Federal Ministry of Education, Science and Research.

The SDC "Enhancing Youth Employment" (EYE) project, implemented from 2017 to 2024, aimed to enhance job prospects for young individuals (aged 15-24) in Kosovo by bridging the gap between employers and job seekers. The EYE project provided trainings for young people in skills demanded by the labour market, facilitating sustainable changes in skills provision. The implementation of dual education, through a WBL scheme supported by the EYE project, was initiated in late 2017. This model introduced two elements to the system: (1) compensation of learners by companies (monetary payment, transport or food allowance), (2) development of a WBL training plan by VET schools in cooperation with workplace instructors. WBL commenced in early 2018 when EYE introduced the first pilots for 12th-grade learners (aged 17-18) at four VET schools. EYE facilitated meetings between VET schools and local companies to identify profiles, determine the number of learners that companies could accommodate and assess the willingness of companies to participate. Companies were required to pay for learners' productive work and either companies or schools were responsible for arranging learners' health insurance coverage for the six-month WBL placement. Out of 151 learners placed in 64 companies, 142 successfully completed WBL in 57 companies. WBL was integrated into various profiles such as auto mechanics, retail and wholesale, textiles, welding, CNC operation, sales assistance, waiter, cook assistant, wood processing, food technology, metal design, electrical installation, heating installation, informatics, telecommunication and web design. The WBL component has been implemented according to a set duration (one day/eight hours for 11th grade and two days/16 hours for 12th grade). In most of the VET schools, learners were not selected by companies but by the VET schools. All learners were compensated with EUR 50 per month.

The GIZ "Youth Engagement, Employment Promotion and Skills Development" (YES) project, implemented from 2017 to 2021, aimed to improve the employability of young Kosovars (aged 15-24), addressing the specific needs of women, returned migrants and various ethnic groups and minorities. The project primarily focused on improving the quality of VET and strengthening the alignment between labour supply and demand to enhance the employability of young individuals. A key objective of the project was to encourage private sector companies to actively participate in the VET system by providing WBL placements to learners in formal initial VET programmes. Over the project duration,

²¹ <https://alled.eu/en/project/>

²² <https://luxdev.lu/en/activities/project/KSV/801>

²³ <https://www.giz.de/en/worldwide/66634.html>

²⁴ <https://www.giz.de/en/worldwide/103577.html>

²⁵ <https://helvetas-ks.org/eye/en/working-approach/>

²⁶ <https://luxdev.lu/en/activities/project/KSV/020>

WBL was organised for more than 475 VET learners from 11 pilot vocational schools in 12 occupational profiles across 86 companies. The project's achievements include the establishment of Local VET employment networks which served as mechanisms for dialogue between relevant public and private stakeholders, creating opportunities for VET learners to gain work experience and build a skilled workforce. These networks were established around eleven pilot vocational schools, aiming to identify relevant companies, strengthen cooperation, support company involvement with vocational schools and foster collaboration among stakeholders. In addition, guidelines were developed for preparing training plans for teachers and workplace instructors in construction, mechatronics and retail. The guidelines included learner logbooks and schedules for implementing WBL in companies. The YES project also provided accident insurance for learners during WBL. Network facilitators supported the achievement of contractual agreements between companies and VET learners, as well as between companies and vocational schools.

The **GIZ “Fit for Jobs” project** commenced implementation from mid-2021 and is set to continue until mid-2024. The project's primary goal is to improve the employability of Kosovo's youth (aged 15-24), building upon prior initiatives in the realm of VET and career guidance in Kosovo, notably the YES project implemented from 2017 to 2021. The overarching objective of the project is to bolster employment opportunities for the skilled workforce and the self-employed, particularly focusing on skilled youth within the Kosovar labour market. Key areas of interventions for the project include fostering private sector involvement to enhance VET quality and strengthening the role and functionality of chambers and sector associations in facilitating cooperation between companies and VET schools. Throughout the project duration, 11 School-Business-Liaison Assistants (SBLAs) were placed in eleven pilot VET schools. SBLAs were primarily tasked with implementing WBL by supporting professional practice teachers in WBL placement. They took on the responsibility of ensuring that WBL documentation adhered to the legal framework, becoming the focal point for WBL documentation in each partner school. SBLAs played a crucial role in supporting professional practice teachers in various aspects of WBL implementation, including learner placement, addressing challenging cases or company complaints, assessment of learners, collecting WBL-related documents and summarising data. SBLAs were employed and compensated by GIZ based on the local salary of a teacher. Memorandums of Understanding (MoUs) were concluded between 11 VET schools and up to 900 companies. An obstacle encountered in learner placement was the low degree of harmonisation between the qualification needs of companies and the vocational education offered by schools at regional level. Out of the pool of 900 cooperating companies, 419 companies (48.9 %) qualified one or more learners through WBL. During the period from 2022 to 2023, up to 2 000 WBL placements were offered, with learners completing more than 40 % of their professional practice in cooperating companies. A total of 189 teachers have been trained on the procedures for WBL implementation according to the legal framework and operational guideline. The project supported the development of a standardised model for WBL lesson plan development and organised training for Teachers for Professional Practice to create standardised WBL lesson plans for grades 11 and 12.

The **OEAD “Quality Assurance for the Work of the Business Liaison Coordinators” project** has been implemented from 2021 until December 2024. This regional project, led by OEAD Austria and funded by the Austrian Federal Ministry of Education, Science and Research, aims to improve the quality of WBL in Albania, Kosovo and North Macedonia. Key achievements include the establishment of “Learning Communities” for the professional development and support of Business Liaison Officers (BLOs), the development of a toolkit for effective communication with businesses and the implementation of quality assurance systems for BLO activities, all of which contribute to improving the quality of work in SMEs. Additionally, the project is preparing a report on the available human resources, key development areas and the needs within Kosovo's VET system. This analysis examines current human resources and explores options for integrating them into the organisational structure of schools. A training program, approved in 2020, focuses on improving WBL by providing comprehensive training to vocational education teachers and school-business liaison officers. The programme trained 129 coordinators from vocational schools across five modules and supported 137 teachers from all VET schools. Other key activities included the development of quality criteria for BLOs, mapping relevant companies and organising peer learning visits for ten pilot schools to six VET schools with strong private sector collaborations. The project also reviewed effective tools for WBL,

offered individual coaching to pilot schools and facilitated outreach efforts to attract new business partners for Kosovo's VET schools. Furthermore, it organised nine national and regional networking workshops to promote collaboration and improve WBL implementation. The project was involved in analysing processes, identifying lessons learned and sharing best practices to create a more consistent approach across schools and regions.

In addition, Kosovo is actively participating in the regional project “[Enhancements in the Quality of Education and Training in South Eastern Europe](#)” (EQET SEE), led by the ERI SEE Secretariat. Co-financed by the Austrian Development Agency and ERI SEE, the project aims to reduce youth unemployment in South-Eastern Europe by supporting labour-market oriented, inclusive and high-quality education across Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo, Moldova, Montenegro, North Macedonia and Serbia. Strategic partners include the ministries of education, OeAD, with local support from the ETF and WB6 CIF. The project focuses on two main components: VET and quality assurance (QA). The VET component aims to enhance national curricula by integrating WBL elements and regionally agreed occupational standards, while also improving the competences of teachers, mentors and company instructors. The QA component focuses on revising external evaluation methodologies and enhancing quality culture at the school level. Regional guidelines, standards and training modules for external evaluators were developed, piloted and integrated into national systems. Key outputs include regionally developed occupational standards, such as the agriculture technician and locksmith standards which were validated through a series of national and regional meetings. These outputs will be adapted for national use to ensure consistency and quality across the region.

Work-based learning arrangement in IVET²⁷

Written contract / agreement (criterion 1)

The implementation of VET programmes which include WBL and dual programmes is based on an individual 'WBL Contract' concluded between the learner, the VET school and the employer. These contracts are of a rather generic nature and regulate the mutual rights and obligations of the learner, the vocational school and the employer and details like the beginning and duration of the learner's education, the amount of WBL and the competences that the trainer must impart to the learner, the schedule of WBL during the school year, learner's monthly compensation during WBL, if compensation is provided by the employer for learners who take part in WBL phases as part of the traditional VET programmes. Compensation for learners who take part in WBL phases as part of the traditional VET programmes is optional and contingent upon the capacities of the employer. Prior to the learner reaching a decision about the WBL contract with the employer, the school provides guidance on the rules and procedures set by the employer. It is typical for learners in WBL to conclude just one contract with one company throughout the entire training period (usually three years).

Unlike learners in traditional VET programmes who participate in WBL phases and are not considered employees, learners in dual programmes are regarded as employees. Their employment contracts reflect this status in accordance with Article 7 (2) of Law No. 03-L-212 on Labour which defines that an employment relationship may be established with a person between fifteen (15) and eighteen (18) years of age, who may be employed for easy labour that do not represent a risk to their health or development and if such a labour is not prohibited by any law or sub-legal act²⁸. Learners participating in dual programmes can enter multiple contracts with different companies over the course of their training period and may also enter multiple contracts with just one company.

Learning outcomes (criterion 2)

VET qualifications are developed by MESTI, VET schools and providers, business associations, etc. always in collaboration with social partners. These qualifications undergo validation and approval by the National Qualification Authority (NQA) to be included in the NQF (National Qualification Framework). Qualifications are structured in a modular format to facilitate credit accumulation and transfer, allowing candidates to receive certification for partial as well as full qualifications. Occupational standards are the starting point for outcomes-based curricula and outcomes-based qualifications. While the Council for VET and Adult Education (CVETAE) ideally approves these standards, in practice, NQA often handles their approval due to operational challenges within CVETAE. These standards ensure that learning outcomes are clearly defined, reflecting the knowledge, skills and competences required in specific occupations. For professional qualifications, the learning outcomes derive directly from the competences identified in the occupational standards.

The NQA is responsible for standard-setting for the validation (approval) of qualifications and the accreditation of providers (authorisation to develop, offer and assess qualifications). However, as most public VET providers have difficulties in meeting the challenging criteria for accreditation, their qualifications largely remain outside the NQF and only MESTI approves the qualifications they offer. Public VET schools develop the qualifications they provide based on what is currently available within the schools i.e. the prevailing conditions in the schools and the availability of subject teachers determine the programme, rather than what may be identified as labour market need.

VET schools and their governing boards, as a rule, cannot freely adjust the courses they provide but they have the flexibility to adjust curriculum content (learning outcomes) approved by the MESTI by up to 20 % and VET schools utilise this clause. At the end of a school year, teachers associated with the

²⁷ Assessment based on the criteria of the European Framework for Quality and Effective Apprenticeship (EFQEA).

²⁸ Law No 03-L-212 on Labour. <https://gzk.rks-gov.net/ActDetail.aspx?ActID=2735>

profile often gather and discuss the changes required to be made in the curriculum, in line with local economic needs. In the implementation of WBL in recent years, schools adapt curriculum content to the capacities of the employers and prepare training plans for WBL.

Curriculum development for all vocational qualifications involves defining professional competencies, learning outcomes, module descriptors, assessment criteria and implementation guidelines. VET programmes consist of general theoretical part, vocational theory part and professional practice modules which may be delivered in workshops or through WBL in cooperative enterprises. Additionally, there is an emphasis on integrating transversal competences such as communication, digital literacy and entrepreneurship alongside technical skills to better prepare students for both the workforce and broader life challenges.

Learning outcomes for professional practice modules for both school-based and company-based (WBL) are defined for each module in the description of modules within the curriculum for each occupational profile.

WBL involves the development of a training plan, a joint effort between the professional practice teacher and the workplace instructor where the student undergoes WBL. At the beginning of the school year, the professional practice teacher identifies relevant professional modules within the curriculum suitable for WBL, considering the capacities of employers to provide such opportunities. Together with the VET school's WBL Coordinator and the employer, they establish a timeline for WBL implementation. Furthermore, in cooperation with the workplace instructor, they prepare the WBL training plan, ensuring alignment with the specifics of the curriculum modules and the resources available within the company. This plan includes the primary activities, learning outcomes and necessary tools/materials essential for WBL. Schools have to conduct this planning individually for each company.

During WBL, the workplace instructor assumes responsibility for supervising the learner and conducting continuous assessment once a month in accordance with the individual training plan. The professional practice teacher continuously assesses the learners learning progress within the company monthly based on feedback provided by the workplace instructor. Upon completion of WBL phase, the employer issues a proof (letter of recommendation) to the learner regarding their performance in WBL and the skills acquired.

Pedagogical support (criterion 3)

The legal framework does not regulate the position and responsibilities of workplace instructors, nor does it outline any requirements regarding their qualification and competences. The training of workplace instructors is not mandatory and there are no regular funds earmarked for training-the-trainer activities. Consequently, there is no mandatory requirement for companies offering WBL to have certified workplace instructors. Furthermore, there are no formalised requirements for continuous professional development for VET teachers involved in WBL and such programmes have not been developed yet. Additionally, mechanisms for cooperation and exchange between workplace instructors and school teachers are lacking. Only a small number of VET teachers have received training on the implementation of the WBL Operational Guidelines.

The Ministry of Education has developed a formal workplace instructor training programme which offers three consecutive levels of training (workplace instructor, workplace trainer and master trainer) to companies, Business Membership Organisations (BMOs), VET schools and VTCs. This programme targets professionals who are working as supervisors, trainers, instructors and in human resources in companies, trainers at VTCs, freelance trainers and teachers. It aims to enhance their capacities to instruct and transfer knowledge and skills to VET learners and to new employees in professional work situations. To complement their existing technical skills, workplace instructors gain a high level of pedagogical and methodological skills to guide and motivate learners and to assist them in developing technical and personal competencies. Sustainability has been ensured by attaining approved

occupational standards for all three levels and supporting organisations to get validated by the NQA to deliver the training in the future.

- The **workplace instructor** is at level 4 of the NQF and certifies candidates who, in addition to their regular work, may supervise participants engaged in WBL and perform their functions in analysing job tasks and determining learning objectives, planning and preparing training, conducting training and assessing the performance of learners/candidates. Workplace instructors generally may have a qualified worker qualification and often have continuous technical or commercial qualifications and several years of work experience in the professional field. As of 2024, a total of 230 individuals have attained certification as workplace instructors.
- The **workplace trainer** is at level 5 of the NQF and has four functions: administration, training, development of WBL, quality assurance and networking. In addition to the professional aspect, they have an important role in the professional socialisation of young people. They also contribute to teaching professional ethics and virtues. In-company trainers generally have a Bachelor's degree or higher qualification and specific work experience in the designated professional field. As of 2024, a total of 64 individuals have attained certification as workplace trainer.
- The **master trainer** is at level 5 of the NQF and are experienced trainers who prepare necessary training materials and conduct sessions on a specific curriculum topic, considering that adult candidates vary in age, prior experiences, educational backgrounds and social statuses. master trainers generally hold a Bachelor's degree or higher qualification and have specific work experience in their designated professional field. As of 2024, a total of 42 individuals have attained certification as master trainer.

The Kosovo Chamber of Commerce (KCC) is an accredited institution from the NQA to deliver and certify Workplace Instructor training. Furthermore, KCC is authorised to certify companies for the provision of WBL which depends on the availability of certified workplace instructors. Although there is a handbook for workplace instructors, important content in the teaching materials is still missing.

Workplace component (criterion 4)

Traditional VET programmes

In the traditional VET programmes, the professional practice component is largely standardised and can be delivered both in school workshops and as work-based learning in cooperating companies. In terms of general education, traditional VET programmes contain varying numbers of subjects (8 to 14) with diverse compositions. All curricula share four core subjects: Albanian language and literature, English language, Mathematics and Physical Education. These core subjects' amount to a total of 918 Teaching Hours (TH) for the three years of education, distributed across the subjects.

The duration of WBL is stipulated in the curriculum, specifically within the professional modules of the respective qualifications. The organisation of school-based VET and WBL for all fields and VET educational profiles is outlined as follows:

- Level I (grade 10): 35 weeks with 1 day per week dedicated to WBL and 4 days a week for school-based VET;
- Level I (grade 11): 35 weeks with 1.5 days per week for WBL and 3.5 days a week for school-based VET;
- Level II (grade 12): 32 weeks with 2 days per week for WBL and 3 days a week for school-based VET.

A typical teaching week consists of 5 days with 30-32 hours of instruction. A school-based lesson lasts 45 minutes, while an hour of WBL lasts 60 minutes. The unit of measurement for the learning load is the credit (C), equivalent to 20 hours of instruction (1C = 20 hours). The schedule is jointly determined by the school and employer, considering sector and profile specifics and the capacity of the employer.

Depending on employer capabilities and qualification requirements, WBL may also be organised within a so-called “block schedule” format, where it’s exclusively arranged for Grade 12 (Level 2) for an entire semester, without any school-based VET.

Detailed instructions for the implementation of the Regulation on WBL are outlined in the WBL Operational Manual issued by the Ministry of Education. This manual includes details on the roles and responsibilities of all involved parties, including vocational schools, employers and learners. It provides step-by-step procedures and necessary templates to ensure a consistent implementation of WBL. However, there remains a diverse status of WBL implementation in selected vocational schools that are supported by donors, characterised by variations in the use of different templates, adherence to the new operational guidelines for WBL and the availability of human resources.

Dual education programmes

The dual education programmes were developed based on the foundation of traditional VET programmes. The Ministry of Education initiated the development of standardised dual education programmes and a guideline for curriculum development for dual education has been prepared which outlines the necessary steps based on defined criteria that the dual curriculum must meet.

Transformation of the traditional curriculum to the dual curriculum involved significant changes, particularly in the areas of professional practice and general education. In the traditional curriculum, a total of 909 teaching hours (TH) are allocated for work-based learning throughout the entire education period (Grade 10 = 210 TH, Grade 11 = 315 TH and Grade 12 = 384 TH), constituting an average of 27.8 % of the total curriculum time of 3,264 TH. The dual curriculum seeks to increase the share of work-based learning to at least 50 % of the total curriculum, both in days (an average of 2.5 days per week per year of education) and in teaching hours (at least 1,632 TH out of the total 3 264 TH allocated to professional practice). Professional practice is exclusively conducted in companies and is regulated by a standardised plan to ensure credit award requirements and training quality. This plan transfers content from the traditional curriculum into job-specific actions with assigned timeframes.

Table 5: Comparison of professional practice in companies: traditional vs dual curricula

	Work-based learning	
	traditional	dual
Number of days in companies	on average 1,5 days	on average 2,5 days
Teaching units per week	9	16,66
Total amount of TH	909 out of 3264	at least 1632 out of 3264
Share of overall TH	27,8%	50%

The transformation of general education in the dual curriculum involves a reduction in the hours for the three core subjects and the freed-up teaching hours are utilised to introduce new subjects: Applied Albanian Language, Applied English and Applied Mathematics, all assigned to vocational theory. The aim is for learners to acquire professional knowledge and apply it in various professional situations. The new applied subjects focus on closing knowledge gaps and building a bridge between vocational theory and practice.

Table 6: Comparison of general and applied subjects: traditional vs dual curricula

	General education		Applied subjects	
	traditional	dual	traditional	dual
Number of subjects	14	4	/	5-6
Teaching units per week	14	6.67	/	4.33
Total amount of TH	1434	673	/	455
Share of overall TH	43.9%	20.6%	/	13.9%

In the new dual curriculum, vocational theory is divided into Applied subjects (455 TH) and Vocational subjects (approximately 450 TH).

Table 7: Comparison of vocational theory: traditional vs dual curricula

	Vocational theory			
	Applied subjects		Vocational subjects	
	traditional	dual	traditional	dual
Number of subjects	/	5-6	10	10
Teaching units per week	/	4.33	9	4.33
Total amount of TH	/	455	889	455
Share of overall TH	/	13.9%	27.3%	13.9%

The implementation of the dual curriculum at vocational school follows a structured approach:

- **Grade 10:** The first semester focuses on training in school, with professional practice in companies beginning in the second semester (two days per week). Applied subjects and professional subjects are emphasised in the first semester (closing the knowledge gaps and preparation for the professional practice in the company). Applied subjects can be taught by both general education and professional practice teachers or by a tandem of both teachers.
- **Grade 11:** Learners spend three days per week in the professional practice in companies, with a shift in the focus of vocational theory to general education.
- **Grade 12:** Learners spend three and a half days per week in the professional practice in companies, with an increased emphasis on general education to prepare learners for the Matura exam. No teaching units are allocated for professional theory in Grade 12.

Pay and/or compensation (criterion 5)

As per the WBL regulation, learners who take part in work-based learning phases as part of the traditional VET programmes aren't regarded as employees, though providing compensation for learners is optional and subject to the employer's capabilities. Occasionally, this compensation includes covering learners' transportation costs to and from the company, with donor projects sometimes providing this support. It is typical for employers to remunerate learners in dual programmes and the pay is usually below the minimum wage.

Social protection (criterion 6)

According to WBL regulations, VET schools and municipal education authorities are responsible for providing accident insurance to learners participating in WBL. The Ministry of Education bears the responsibility for allocating funds to VET schools for accident insurance for WBL learners, although the fund is not yet fully operational. In current practice, employers and occasionally donor projects cover the costs of accident insurance. Since learners in traditional VET programmes who participate in WBL phases and are not considered employees, they do not receive any health or pension insurance benefits. Unlike those in traditional VET programmes, learners in dual programmes are considered employees and receive pension insurance benefits.

Work, health, and safety conditions (criterion 7)

The Ministry of Education has drafted Regulation No. 135/2020 for the protection and health safety during professional practice in schools and workplaces²⁹. The regulation sets out the responsibilities of VET schools and companies for the protection and preservation of learners' health and safety during training in schools or companies, for informing and raising learners' awareness about health and safety protection and preventing possible injuries in the workplace.

- VET schools are responsible for providing training for learners on health protection during practical training in schools' workshops, placing risk prevention signs in workshop areas in school and on machinery/tools, providing necessary protective equipment for training in relevant profiles offered by the school, possessing equipment for providing first aid and fire-fighting equipment, as well as prohibiting learners from operating in work/machinery/materials with high risk;
- Companies are responsible for informing learners on the first day of WBL about the work environments, the workplace, the operation of machinery/tools and the emergency plan. They are also responsible for placing risk prevention signs in company areas and on machinery/tools, providing necessary protective equipment for learners, possessing equipment for providing first aid and fire-fighting equipment, as well as prohibiting learners from operating in work/machinery/materials with high risk.

Regulatory framework (criterion 8)

Administrative Instruction No. 137/2020 on WBL in VET regulates the roles and procedures for planning and implementation of the WBL, including the assessment of learners involved in WBL. The regulation also provides guidelines for VET schools and companies on the implementation of WBL, quality assurance and safety standards. It extends its scope to cover various aspects, including:

- Planning of the WBL process;
- Defining the roles and responsibilities of VET institutions as partners in WBL implementation;
- Defining the responsibilities and obligations of learners in the WBL;
- Defining the roles and responsibilities of companies as partners in WBL planning and provision;
- Defining the responsibilities of instructors in charge for WBL in companies;
- Defining the involvement of social partners in WBL implementation;
- Defining procedures for learners' admission into WBL;
- Defining the duration and implementation of WBL;
- Defining the assessment, completion and documentation of WBL;
- Defining the monitoring and reporting of WBL;
- Defining the financial aspects related to the financing of WBL.

The key players in the school-employer cooperation process in WBL include VET schools, the school coordinator for WBL, professional practice teachers, employers, workplace instructors, learners and parents. The VET school assumes responsibility for organising WBL and designates a WBL coordinator to oversee and coordinate the process. The professional practice teacher cooperates with the workplace instructor in preparing and implementing the WBL training plan.

²⁹ MESTI, Regulation No.135/2020 for the protection and health safety during professional practice in schools and workplaces. <https://masht.rks-gov.net/wp-content/uploads/2022/05/udhzimi-administrativ-me-nr-135-2020-per-mbrojtjen-dhe-rujtjen-e-shendetit-te-nxensve-qjate-mesimit-praktike-ne-shkolle-dhe-ne-vendin-e-punes.pdf>

The WBL Coordinator coordinates activities for WBL implementation, reporting both achievements and challenges to the school director during the process. Additionally, the coordinator provides suggestions for improvement to enhance the effectiveness of the programme. As such, the WBL Coordinator is responsible for coordinating WBL implementation at all stages with all involved parties, including professional practice teachers, employers, learners, parents and other relevant stakeholders.

WBL is overseen by the workplace instructor, who supervises no more than five learners (or no more than three for high-risk profiles). The workplace instructor participates in drafting the WBL training plan in cooperation with the professional practice teacher. The workplace instructor monitors task implementation, offers practical instructions during the work process, assesses quality, verifies and approves recorded data in the learner's work diary and guides the learner in maintaining a portfolio with relevant evidence of the work process and WBL assessment, including self-assessment.

The Kosovo Chamber of Commerce (KCC) and MESTI have defined WBL criteria for companies interested to engage in WBL initiatives. However, despite the existence of these criteria, they are not adhered to in the implementation of WBL. Instead, the selection of companies is typically conducted by the VET school without any regard for predefined criteria.

The criteria for companies seeking participation in WBL are categorised into three sections (Engagement, Quality and Responsibility) and are outlined below:

- **Administrative Criteria:** Private sector companies must be registered in the Kosovo Business Registration Agency and operate actively.

Engage:

- Place VET learners for WBL within the company;
- Designate a workplace instructor, who has completed certified training as a workplace instructor;
- Develop a WBL training plan for each learner, aligning with the relevant curriculum and in consultation with the VET school;
- Actively participate in the final assessment of learners, reflecting the results they have achieved during WBL in the company.

Provide Quality:

- Ensure that learners participating in WBL maintain a work diary;
- Supply learners in WBL with all necessary free training materials, especially tools, raw materials, etc;
- Offer learners in WBL appropriate compensation for their work.

Take Responsibility:

- Implement the provisions of the Law on Labour, the Law on Safety and Health at Work and other pertinent legal requirements;
- Adhere to the maximum number of working hours for learners participating in WBL;
- Ensure a balanced number of WBL learners in proportion to the number of currently qualified workers.

A regulatory framework for the work-based learning component of dual programmes is lacking and there are no established accreditation procedures or criteria for employers to participate in dual programmes. Quality assurance measures are also not regulated.

Involvement of social partners (criterion 9)

As outlined in the Law on VET, the Kosovo Chamber of Commerce (KCC) holds a membership in the Council for Vocational Education and Training and for Adult Education (CVETAE). Additionally, KCC is a member of the governing board of the National Qualification Authority (NQA). Having participated in the pilot phase of WBL programmes, KCC has developed competencies as a certified training provider for workplace instructors who are responsible for training learners in WBL.

The regulations related to WBL specifically identify the KCC as the representative of the private sector responsible for participating in the implementation and monitoring of WBL. The regulation acknowledges the role of KCC and sectoral associations in facilitating communication between employers and VET schools. KCC is tasked with collecting data on WBL agreements and contracts, monitoring their implementation and updating a database of companies involved in WBL.

Much of the responsibility to identify potential employers and involve them in WBL falls on the shoulders of VET schools and their staff. Nevertheless, VET schools often lack the capacity to identify employers capable of delivering WBL. Therefore, the Ministry of Education has been advocating for increased involvement of the Kosovo Chamber of Commerce (KCC) and employers' associations in actively identifying and selecting employers that are capable to offer WBL.

While other industry associations, such as the Kosovo ICT Association (STIKK), Association of Wood Processors of Kosovo (AWPK) and Metal Industry and Renewable Energy Cluster of Kosovo (MIRECK), represent specific branches like ICT, wood processing and metal processing and renewable energy, their involvement in VET sector remains limited. KCC stands out as the sole organisation with legal status, seven regional offices and a large membership, representing the private sector in education and training matters. Its unique position, closely linked to its members, enables it to understand and communicate the needs of the private sector to VET schools and other relevant bodies.

Occupational Standards (OS) are developed in cooperation with MESTI, NQA, EARK and other relevant ministries and other social partners. OS provide basis for VET curriculum development and assessment. OS are approved by Council for VET, whereas verification of OS is carried out by the NQA. Assessment of students' achievement is based on qualification standards for the specific profile. Curriculum development for vocational qualifications involves defining professional competencies, learning outcomes and assessment standards. These curricula are developed by VET school teachers in collaboration with MESTI and social partners.

A structured and systematic dialogue with social partners – for instance through sector skills committees – is not in place. Private sector-led skills committees are formed recently by USAID-funded project on pilot basis, in the sectors of wood processing, agrifood, ICT and energy³⁰. The role of labour unions is entirely absent in the VET sector.

Support for companies (cost-sharing arrangements) (criterion 10)

The funding for WBL and dual programmes is not regulated. Employers providing WBL cover all associated costs, including consumables and equipment. Additionally, all expenses for workplace instructors are borne by the employers. There are no public funds or incentives such as subsidies or tax deductions provided by the state.

VET teachers are funded through the public budget and VET schools receive funding from the state budget. Teaching and learning materials in VET schools are also financed from the state budget.

³⁰ USAID funded project – Private Sector Workforce Development (PSWD).

Flexible pathways and mobility (criterion 11)

The transition between VET and general education pathways in Kosovo is currently underdeveloped, with no clear guidelines or procedures in place. Consequently, learners often face difficulties when attempting to transfer from one pathway to the other, emphasising a need for greater coordination between the two systems and the development of clear pathways for learners who wish to switch between them³¹.

Permeability within the VET system, allowing transitions between programmes within the same sectorial field, is possible in the first year of education (grade 10), though improvement is needed to streamline and simplify these transitions. For example, a learner enrolled in the IT technician programme can transfer to the software design programme during the first year of education. However, transitioning between programmes in different sectorial fields is not regulated. This applies across all VET programmes, including traditional VET programmes, those incorporating WBL components and dual education programmes.

Since most public VET schools struggle to meet the demanding accreditation criteria set by the NQA, their qualifications largely remain outside the NQF. Nevertheless, all VET programmes enable learners to access programmes at higher qualification levels.

Career guidance and awareness raising (criterion 12)

Career guidance and counselling services are missing in lower secondary education. Career guidance is included as a concept in the curriculum for upper secondary education, within the subject area "Life and Work". However, the relevant content is expected to be provided as part of the subject "Information and Communication Technology" which is unusual. Individual and group counselling activities are rare and are only conducted in some schools supported by donors.

In recent years, two models of career guidance and counselling have been piloted. One is the school-based career guidance model promoted by donor projects, where the career guidance centre staff (teachers) are placed in VET schools and funded by municipal authorities. The school-based Career Centre model has been implemented in 23 different VET schools and has shown positive results in VET schools in terms of increasing awareness for VET profiles, improving school cooperation with local companies, offering soft skills training for learners, etc.

Another model is the establishment of career guidance centres at the municipal level, to serve all upper secondary schools within their jurisdiction. One such centre has been established by the Municipality of Prishtina. Both models, school-based career centres and those based in municipalities, collaborate with employment offices, for example, in: (a) using their information for internship opportunities; (b) inviting VET school graduates to participate in job fairs organised by local employment offices; and (c) organising soft skills training for VET learners which is jointly conducted by the career centre and employment office staff, etc.

The school-based Career Centre model has been institutionalised, and the role of career advisors have been formalised through Administrative Instruction No. 18/2023 for Career Advisors and Standards on the organisation and functioning of Career Advisors in VET institutions³². The occupational standards and qualification programme for career advisors were developed and validated by NQA, with currently 15 certified career advisors. The position of the career advisor is integrated into the organisational chart of VET schools and is included in the law on salaries in the public sector.

The role of career advisors is defined to assist VET learners in making informed decisions about their profession and career development, utilising their full potential for life and work, establishing career

³¹ ETF, Torino Process System Monitoring Report: Kosovo* (2023), p.11. <https://www.etf.europa.eu/sites/default/files/2023-10/System%20monitoring%20report%20-%20Kosovo%20EN.pdf>

³² Administrative Instruction No. 18/2023 for Career Advisors: <https://masht.rks-gov.net/udhezim-administrativ-mashti-nr-18-2023-per-keshilltaret-per-karriere-ne-iap/>

clubs with learners and collaborating with VET school WBL Coordinators to prepare learners with soft skills for successful WBL implementation. Additionally, in cooperation with VET school WBL Coordinators, career advisors organise at least one job and career fair per school year to engage relevant local and regional businesses, higher education institutions, training providers, as well as other potential participants such as local employment offices, NGOs and youth centres. Career advisors inform VET learners about employment opportunities, training and WBL opportunities, scholarships and university programmes, voluntary services, events and other career development-related information. The number of Career Advisors is determined based on the number of learners in VET schools. Municipal Education Departments and the VET Agency (AVETAE) are responsible for providing career advisors' salaries and other resources for the implementation of their activities, including their qualification and professional development.

Career education topics for grades 10, 11 and 12 are delivered in three classes per semester, covering subjects such as connecting personal knowledge and skills with labour market needs, building personal qualities for life and work, preparing for professional life and future careers and communication in/for life and work.

Transparency (criterion 13)

The selection and distribution of learners for WBL and dual education is done by the VET schools, sometimes jointly with employers. While individual applications by learners for WBL and dual education at a specific employer are possible, they are not common. In such cases, a contract involving the VET school, the employer and the learner or their parents/caregiver must be signed. It is mainly left to the VET schools to secure sufficient places for WBL and dual education. It is not possible to place all learners in companies and it is common for the WBL to take place in groups of learners. Selection criteria for learners often include their school performance (grades).

Throughout the school year, employers can communicate WBL opportunities to VET schools, providing learners and their parents access to this information. This approach is also used in dual education programmes.

Quality assurance and graduate tracking (criterion 14)

At the system level, the NQA plays a crucial role in ensuring quality and access to quality assurance in VET system. The NQA is responsible for ensuring that quality assurance processes exist, aiming to preserve the quality of registered qualifications in the NQF and provided to students/candidates.

As per applicable legislation, the implementation of the NQF and the creation of the qualifications system necessitate that all qualifications undergo the validation process, and all VET providers should be included in the accreditation process³³.

For integration into the NQF, VET qualifications must be offered by an accredited provider and based on occupational standards which serve as a bridge between labour market demands and qualifications. As most public VET schools have difficulties in meeting the challenging criteria for accreditation, their qualifications largely remain outside the NQF. Public VET schools face challenges in meeting accreditation criteria which include proper institutional structures, strategic development planning, effective evaluation and quality management approaches, adequate staff development policies and procedures and the necessary space and resources to provide qualifications.

The NQA has admitted 193 VET qualifications into the NQF. Of these, only 22 qualifications are from public VET schools, Centres of Competence and public VTCs, while the majority, 171 qualifications, come from private training providers. In addition, NQA has accredited 107 providers/institutions and approved 126 occupational standards³⁴. Some qualifications have occupational standards but still

³³ Criteria and procedures for the validation and approval of qualifications and accreditation of institutions (VET schools, private training providers) providing qualifications is defined in an administrative instruction by the Ministry of Education.

³⁴ Data from National Qualification Authority, 2024.

need curriculum review and the development of teaching materials. The development of occupational standards for qualifications offered by public vocational schools remains a challenge.

In recent years, labour market needs analyses have been conducted for various sectors, including ICT, key agribusiness subsectors, the construction sector, traditional confectionery producers, wood processing, mechanical engineering and others. Projects funded by donors undertake such analyses to gather information on qualifications, curricula and training provision. However, the impact of these efforts on VET provision is questionable, as there is no evidence indicating that the outcomes of these studies influence VET provision. VET schools typically offer what they can offer because of their teachers, facilities and equipment. The programmes offered are determined by the prevailing conditions in the schools and the availability of subject teachers, rather than identified labour market needs.

Data compatible with some European Quality Assurance Reference Framework (EQARF) indicators are collected. For example, data on secondary VET participation (public and private), broken down by gender, age, ethnicity, grade, educational outcomes and dropout rates are collected and published. Additionally, teachers are monitored based on gender, age, location and qualifications. However, the management information system lacks the capacity to track the destinations/career paths of VET graduates.

At the intermediary level, the NQA has accredited the Kosovo Chamber of Commerce (KCC) to deliver and certify Workplace Instructor training. Additionally, the KCC is authorised to certify companies for the provision of WBL. Criteria for WBL engagement by companies have been defined by the KCC and the MESTI.

At the provider level, VET schools are legally obliged to conduct a self-assessment process and publish annual self-assessment reports to enhance national quality standards in VET. MESTI regulations also stipulate that VET schools must have quality assurance offices responsible for tasks such as monitoring implementation, providing advice, coordinating data processing, observing teaching and coordinating institutional evaluations. Although most vocational schools in Kosovo have quality coordinators, there is minimal communication or information exchange between MESTI, municipal education directorates and quality coordinators.

The NQA has adopted a National Quality Assurance Framework (NQAF) for VET providers, encompassing six quality principles defined by various quality indicators. These principles include management responsibilities, resource management, qualification design and development, provision of qualifications, assessment and certification, self-evaluation processes and continuous improvement.

In Kosovo's VET schools, pedagogical staff includes both teachers and professional practice teachers. Teachers are responsible for both theoretical and practical aspects of modules or subjects, while professional practice teachers assist only with practical training. However, the role of professional practice teachers is insufficiently defined in secondary legislation. Generally, MESTI requires newly hired VET teachers to hold a Master's degree, whereas professional practice teachers are required to possess a post-secondary qualification and at least five years of experience in their respective fields.

Teacher recruitment is primarily the responsibility of municipal education directorates, except for six CoC operating under the AVETAE. MESTI establishes a general procedure for the appointment of new teachers, while municipalities are free to determine specific recruitment criteria. Teachers are typically required to complement their university education with in-service training, but the provision of in-service training is hindered by limited training providers and scarce resources. This limitation is reflected in VET schools where teachers are required to provide practical training alongside theoretical instruction. However, a considerable number of teachers lack previous practical experience.

A structured monitoring and evaluation system for assessing the quality of WBL is absent. There is no quality assurance framework for WBL and VET schools usually serve as the main coordinating body for WBL. Common standards for administering and supervising learners during WBL do not exist. Professional practice teachers from VET schools typically assess and validate the suitability of the training environment at employers. Both VET school teachers and workplace instructors supervise VET learners during WBL, with some cases of workplace instructors participating in learner

assessments. Donor projects have introduced the use of diaries for documenting WBL in companies which VET schools utilise to monitor learners' WBL activities.

Public authorities do not maintain statistics on the transition rate from, for example, dual programmes to employment and impact evaluations of WBL schemes have not been conducted thus far.

Conclusions

Strengths

- Emphasis on outcomes-based curricula and qualifications ensures that learning outcomes are aligned with occupational requirements. In addition, modular qualifications allow for flexible learning and recognition of partial achievements, promoting lifelong learning (Criterion 2);
- Formal workplace instructor training offers structured programmes at three levels, equipping instructors with pedagogical skills alongside technical expertise (Criterion 3);
- Traditional VET programmes offer a clear division between school-based learning and WBL. Transformation of the traditional VET programmes to the dual VET programmes increased the share of WBL to at least 50 % of the total curriculum, exclusively conducted in companies (Criterion 4);
- Regulation mandates training companies to uphold work, health and safety standards for learners in the workplace (Criterion 7);
- Comprehensive framework for WBL planning and implementation defines roles and responsibilities of key actors (Criterion 8);
- Recognition of KCC's role in the implementation of WBL bridges the gap between education and employer needs, fostering cooperation. Ministry of Education has been advocating for increased involvement of the Kosovo Chamber of Commerce (KCC) and employers' associations in actively identifying and selecting employers that are capable to offer WBL (Criterion 9);
- All VET programmes enable access to higher qualifications, ensuring educational and career progression (Criterion 11);
- Piloted career guidance models demonstrate proactive support for upper secondary learners. The school-based career centre model has been institutionalised and the role of career advisors have been formalised (Criterion 12).

Challenges

- Concerns arise regarding the treatment of learners in dual programmes without rights emerging from the employment relationship, potentially leading to exploitation (Criterion 1);
- Public VET schools struggle to meet accreditation criteria, impacting qualification recognition, whereas and leading to potential mismatches between programmes and labour market needs (Criterion 2);
- Lack of regulation and training for workplace instructors in WBL may result in inconsistent quality experiences. Only a small number of VET teachers have received training on the implementation of WBL (Criterion 3);
- Variations in WBL implementation suggest challenges in standardisation and resource allocation (Criterion 4);
- In the traditional VET programmes, there is no obligation for the training companies to compensate the learners financially or in any other way. Although it is common practice for companies in the dual programmes which have a 50 % share of WBL, to compensate their learners, exact figures are not available. It is also not clear which guidelines or benchmarks are used by training companies when determining compensation (Criterion 5);
- Unlike learners in dual programmes, who are considered employees and receive pension insurance benefits, learners in traditional VET programmes participating in WBL phases are not

regarded as employees and therefore do not receive any health or pension insurance benefits (Criterion 6);

- Absence of a regulatory framework for the work-based learning component of dual programmes and established criteria for employers to participate in dual programmes poses challenges in ensuring quality and consistency in dual education initiatives. Instead, the selection of employers is typically conducted by VET schools without adhering to any predefined criteria (Criterion 8);
- Limited capacity of VET schools to identify suitable employers for WBL and lack of dialogue with social partners hinder alignment with labour market needs. The role of labour unions is entirely absent in the VET sector (Criterion 9);
- Unregulated financing places a significant burden on employers, leaving them responsible for covering all expenses related to WBL and dual programmes (Criterion 10);
- Lack of clear pathways between VET and general education systems hinders learner transitions (Criterion 11);
- Career guidance and counselling services are missing in lower secondary education (Criterion 12);
- Challenges in securing sufficient WBL placement may limit learner participation or impact learning quality (Criterion 13).

Quality assurance measures face impediments in their effectiveness due to incomplete implementation and development. Despite the NQA's crucial role in ensuring quality, obstacles remain. The impact of labour market analyses on VET provision is uncertain and the management information system lacks the ability to monitor VET graduates' career paths (Criterion 14).

Active labour market measures (ALMMs)

Institutional governance of ALMMs in Kosovo

The Employment Agency of Kosovo (EARK) as an independent body within the Ministry of Finance, Labour and Transfers (MFLT) is the main provider of ALMMs. As defined by Law No. 04/L-205 on the Employment Agency of Kosovo, this agency is the public provider of services aiming to implement employment and vocational training policies. As defined by Regulation No. 01/2018 on Labour market measures for the registered unemployed and jobseekers³⁵ (aged 18-64), EARK implements the following ALMMs: vocational training (through VTCs); training at work/on-the-job training; wage subsidy; practice at work/internship; self-employment and promotion of entrepreneurship; and public works.

The Ministry of Culture, Youth and Sports (MCYS) supports the following ALMMs specifically targeting youth (aged 18-24): internship, soft skills trainings and self-employment programme (entrepreneurship training and grant provision). The internship scheme supported by the MCYS is implemented by EARK, while the soft skills training and the self-employment programme are implemented by private providers.

The Kosovo Investment and Enterprise Support Agency (KIESA) is the public agency under the Ministry of Industry, Entrepreneurship and Trade (MIET) mandated to promote and support investments, exports, tourism and Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs). For several years, KIESA has been supporting an internship scheme for higher education graduates aged under 30. From 2017, this scheme has been implemented through EARK.

The Ministry of Internal Affairs supports employment/wage subsidy and a self-employment programme for repatriated persons. Repatriated persons have also access to free-of-charge vocational training, provided at VTCs. The wage subsidy scheme has been implemented by EARK (jointly with UNDP). Since 2018, EARK has also overseen implementation of self-employment program.

Participation in ALMMs

Among the 80,775 job seekers registered with employment services in 2022, only 2,012 individuals, constituting a mere 2.5 % of the total, benefited from ALMMs. The biggest beneficiaries were those with medium level of education (47.6 %). Regarding age groups, beneficiaries aged 25+ had the highest utilisation of various ALMMs at 63.7 %. The percentage of women benefiting from ALMMs was notably higher at 62 %, compared to 37.9 % for men.

Table 8. Participants in ALMM by sex, age and education 2019-2022

	2019	2020	2021	2022
On-the-job training	420	1498	28	125
Internship	2705	3446	2788	805
Public work	827	540	9	9
Wage subsidy	445	51	462	1073
Self-employment	214	96	10	/
Total	4611	5631	3297	2012
Male	2413	2716	1232	763

³⁵ According to Law No. 04/L-083 For Registration and Records of Unemployed and Jobseekers: unemployed are all persons aged 18 to 65 years who are unemployed (neither salaried employees, neither self-employed) who are seeking employment actively and are willing to work; 1.2. Jobseekers – all job seekers including those who work full time or part time and those who are temporarily suspended from work.

	2019	2020	2021	2022
Female	2198	2915	2065	1249
Under 25 years	1273	2273	1014	730
25 + years	3338	3358	2283	1282
Low level of education ³⁶	932	1229	269	317
Medium level of education ³⁷	2268	3110	1586	958
High level of education ³⁸	1411	1292	1442	737

Source: EARK

On-the-Job Training (OJT) is a training programme provided by an employer to a job seeker while engaging in productive work which develops essential knowledge or skills for performing a specific job. Thus, the main objective of OJT is to increase the skills and prospects of the job seeker for employment. In 2022, 125 participants took part in such training but the peak was in 2020 with 1 498 participants.

Table 9. Participants in on-the-job training by sex, age and education 2019-2022

	2019	2020	2021	2022
On-the-job training total	420	1498	28	125
Male	187	733	18	48
Female	233	765	10	77
Under 25 years	96	587	10	95
25 + years	324	911	18	30
Low level of education	111	446	10	47
Medium level of education	270	951	11	77
High school gymnasium	76	402	-	29
Vocational secondary education	194	549	11	48
High level of education	39	101	7	1

Source: EARK

Internship programme is a measure of the labour market aimed to provide participants with the skills and knowledge necessary to perform a specific job within the work environment. The measure aims at increasing employment prospects for unemployed people looking for work for the first time (recent graduates). Although the years 2019 to 2021, in which the number ranged from 2 705 to 3 446, show relatively strong participation, 805 participants were reported for 2022

Table 10. Participants in internship by sex, age and education 2019-2022

	2019	2020	2021	2022
Internship total	2705	3446	2788	805
male	1088	1407	993	187
female	1617	2039	1795	618
under 25 years	281	880	627	328
25 + years	2424	2566	2161	477
Low level of education	211	447	159	5

³⁶ Low level of education includes no education and basic education.

³⁷ Medium level of education includes high school gymnasium and vocational secondary education.

³⁸ High level of education includes Bachelor, Master and PhD.

	2019	2020	2021	2022
Medium level of education	1232	1842	1314	266
High level of education	1262	1157	1315	534

Source: EARK

Public works programme provides short-term employment opportunities through occupational activities aimed at improving local infrastructure. The purpose of the public works programmes is to generate temporary employment for the registered unemployed through the implementation of projects that absorb workforce, as well as the maintenance and rehabilitation of municipal assets and public spaces. Compared to the period from 2019 to 2020, the number of participants was very low (nine people) in 2021 and 2022.

Wage subsidy is a labour market measure that aims to create employment opportunities for job seekers by subsidising employers to recruit them on a long-term basis. Participants in this scheme are expected to remain in the workplace after the end of the subsidy period. These are direct transfers to employers to encourage them to hire certain groups of jobseekers. In 2022, the number of jobseekers benefited from this programme was 1 073; more than double compared to 2021.

The self-employment programme is a labour market measure which helps the unemployed to start a business or the provision of training and counselling to the self-employed to develop and manage a business and financial support to help the unemployed to start a business activity. The self-employment measure aims to address unemployment through self-employment and thereby creating new jobs in small companies. Self-employment incentives took up a much smaller share of total ALMM participants from 2019 to 2021 and there are no reported participants in 2022.

EARK through its employment offices performs monitoring of all schemes mentioned above at least once in three months or more frequently, depending on the duration of the placement. However, a regular and systematic evaluation system is not yet in place. Although according to EARK's operational manuals employment counsellors have to trace beneficiaries from six months up to one year after the completion of the ALMM, to date there is no system in place to track/monitor/measure outcomes (e.g. in terms of employment, income, etc.)³⁹. So far, some independent evaluations have been conducted mainly commissioned by donors and other organisations and they covered only the beneficiaries of those organisations.

Work-based learning in OJT training and internship programmes⁴⁰

On-the-job training (OJT) scheme is an ALMM that aims to develop skills through training at the workplace, with the final aim to support employment prospects of unemployed individuals. All registered unemployed individuals at Employment Offices have access to this scheme. The scheme can be implemented in private, public and non-profit employers. The Operational Manual specifies that newly registered unemployed and those that have become active recently⁴¹, have to initially be counselled and assisted in job search and if after three months they are unsuccessful they become eligible to participate in the OJT scheme.

Internship is an ALMM that aims to provide work experience to jobseekers who opt to start their career in a specific field. More specifically, it aims to support knowledge and skills development to carry out specific tasks at the workplace. The scheme also intends to develop jobseekers' contacts with labour market which would enhance their employment prospects. Internship targets unemployed persons who graduated from Higher Education, Upper Secondary Education, VTCs or other vocational training

³⁹ GIZ, Report "Active Labour Market Measures: Are they effective tools for addressing Kosovo's skills and employment challenges?", September 2019.

⁴⁰ Analysis of OJT training and internship programmes against criteria of European Quality Framework for Traineeships (2014) [Council Recommendation of 10 March 2014 on a Quality Framework for Traineeships \(europa.eu\)](http://ec.europa.eu/careers/sites/careers/files/council-recommendation-10-march-2014-on-a-quality-framework-for-traineeships_en.pdf)

⁴¹ The registered unemployed become 'inactive' and are not considered as clients of the public employment services unless they renew their registration within a maximum of 6 months.

institutions. Given that the internship scheme aims to provide work experience to recent graduates, the criterion of 3 months of job search is not applied.

OJT and internships programmes often include a classroom-based component conducted in a VTC. This blended approach combines practical, hands-on experience with theoretical and technical instruction.

OJT and internships do not typically lead to the attainment of formal qualifications or certifications for skills. These programmes are generally designed to provide practical experience and skill development rather than formal credentials.

Conclusion of a written traineeship agreement

OJT training programme

A written agreement is concluded at the beginning of the traineeship between the trainee, the VTC and the employer. The duration of the traineeship is defined in the agreement. Trainees can be compensated to ceiling set at 70 % of the national minimum wage. The exact compensation is determined by the MFLT at the beginning of the financial year based on the available budget. In many cases, employers contribute financially to the compensation of trainees.

Internship programme

The Internship agreement is signed by all parties (intern, employment office and employee). The duration of the internship is defined in the agreement. Interns may receive a compensation in the form of monthly financial assistance, not lower than the national minimum wage. Employers are not legally obliged to cover compensation but could do so at their discretion; though the internship scheme supported by different donors required employers to cover one third of compulsory payments for the participants.

Learning and training objectives

OJT training programme

The Individual Training Plan (ITP) should be developed jointly by the trainer from the VTC and the employer. For every trainee, the ITP is developed, approved and signed by the trainee, the employer and the VTC trainer. The ITP is a formal document which sets out necessary knowledge, skills and competences to be acquired in a defined occupation during the traineeship and clearly sets out activities and means to complete the acquisition of core competencies. The Employment counsellor fills in administrative information, whereas the VTC trainer develops the content of the ITP together with the employer. According to the Operational Manual, the VTC trainer is required to obtain the signature of the employee and the employer on the plan⁴². Based on an assessment carried out by the GIZ, in many cases trainees reported that they did not sign such a plan, whereas, in cases ITP was formally signed, this plan remained only on paper and the trainees were not aware of its contents and/ or the parties did not pay sufficient attention to it during the traineeship⁴³.

The employer must nominate an experienced worker to supervise and instruct the trainee. According to an evaluation conducted by the GIZ involving 300 beneficiaries of OJT, it was found that two thirds (67 %) of trainees had a supervisor or trainer who provided guidance, instruction and assessment of their work and learning. Among the trainees with an assigned supervisor or trainer, 76 % stated that they were fully competent in instructing and training, while 23 % felt that their mentor was competent to some extent. Less than half of beneficiaries were required to record their professional learning progress (keep a diary on professional learning) and were assessed on their learning progress and 41

⁴² MFLT, Operational Manual for the On-the-job training, 2019.

⁴³ GIZ, Report "Active Labour Market Measures: Are they effective tools for addressing Kosovo's skills and employment challenges?", September 2019.

% reported to have been supported in preparing exams or professional qualifications⁴⁴. On average, the supervisor/trainer spent thirteen hours a week with the trainees. Most of the trainees participate in trainings or short courses in the company that mainly cover occupational skills development and, in some of cases, are provided in the form of job instruction/hands-on training.

Internship programme

The Internship programme does not require the parties to have an individual internship/training plan or similar document which specifies the tasks to be completed by the intern and/or skills to be developed during the internship. However, some of interns placed in private sector reported to having agreed on these issues informally (verbally) with the employer upon starting the programme⁴⁵.

The employer must nominate an experienced worker to supervise and instruct the intern and interns are required to attend their places of work regularly. However, only in some cases interns have a supervisor/trainer assigned by the employer, despite the fact that the regulation obliges the employer to assign one. On average, the supervisor/trainer spent eleven hours a week with the intern. Many interns participate in training or short courses during internship that mainly cover occupational skills.

Working conditions applicable to trainees

Participants in OJT and internships are typically covered by health insurance. This is part of the support provided to ensure the well-being of trainees and interns during their training period. Sick leave provisions are generally included for participants in these programmes. The specifics can vary based on the exact programme and the agreement with the employer, but the aim is to ensure that participants have the necessary support if they fall ill during their training. In addition, participants are usually entitled to holiday leave, although the amount and conditions might differ depending on the length and nature of the training or internship. These entitlements are designed to mirror regular employment benefits as much as possible to provide a comprehensive training experience.

OJT training programme

The on-the-job training programme is provided on a full-time basis, eight hours a day, five days a week, whilst the unemployed with disabilities are offered more flexibility in terms of the number of hours per day. MFLT is responsible for covering the costs of accident insurance for trainee. Average monthly compensation of trainee is EUR 174 and around one third of trainees reported that their employer contributed financially as a top up to their remuneration.

Monitoring the programme is the responsibility of the VTC trainer and has to take place at least once in three months (if OJT lasts more than three months, monitoring has to take place at least twice). The aim of monitoring visits is to verify whether the training is being provided in accordance with ITP and to check on the satisfaction of employers and trainees. During the monitoring visits, discussions are conducted with the trainee and the assigned supervisor. If the VTC trainer observes any problems or irregularities, this is reported to employment offices and measures for resolving matters are undertaken.

Internship programme

Interns are compensated of not less than the national minimum wage. According to an evaluation conducted by the GIZ involving 259 beneficiaries of internships, it was found that the monthly compensation for interns varies from EUR 50 to EUR 350. The most reported compensation is EUR 150 (for 32 %); EUR 250 (22 %); EUR 100 (13 %); and EUR 350 (8 %). There are significant differences between private and public sector in terms of compensation: the average compensation in private sector is EUR 171 whilst it was recorded at EUR 239 in public sector. In private sector, compensation ranged from 50 to 330 EUR and in public sector it ranged between EUR 100 to

⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵ Ibid.

EUR 350. In public sector most beneficiaries (83 %) received EUR 250 or more, compared to only 18 % in private sector⁴⁶.

The regulation provides for accident insurance for interns which ensures that interns are covered in case of any accidents or injuries that occur during their internship. The responsibility to provide accident insurance for interns typically falls on the employer hosting the internship.

The regulation sets forth a probation period of ten calendar days (though there is no specific mention of 'probation'), within which period the employer can ask for replacement if they are not satisfied with the intern. The regulation does not refer on how to process instances where beneficiaries are dissatisfied with the placement.

Employment counsellors monitor interns once in three months. The aim of monitoring is to check the progress in implementing the internship and assess the satisfaction of employer and intern. Most of the interns reported to have been monitored by Employment Offices (EO) during the internship. The aspects that were monitored also varied, with most of interns reporting that attendance was monitored and a few reporting that the counsellor asked about various aspects of the scheme during these visits, including working conditions, treatment by the employer, what they were learning, etc.

Reasonable duration

OJT training programme

The traineeship typically lasts between two to six months. The training period is defined by the trainer, who is expected to consider the complexity of the job and the skills and experience of the unemployed. Based on an assessment carried out by the GIZ, the average duration of traineeships is 4.3 months⁴⁷.

Internship programme

Internship placements can cover a period between six and twelve months, with a possibility for extension for another year. The duration of internship is defined by employment counsellor based on the complexity of the occupation and skills as well as on previous experience of the beneficiary. Based on an assessment carried out by the GIZ, the average duration of internships is six months. A longer duration is more prevalent in public sector⁴⁸.

Proper recognition of traineeships

OJT training programme

At the end of the traineeship, all trainees are assessed by employers/ supervisors and VTC trainer. For successful candidates, VTC issues a certificate acknowledging the completion of OJT and the acquired knowledge and skills.

Internship programme

Upon completion of internship, employers issue a reference letter indicating that the intern has successfully completed the internship in a specific occupation. In addition, an assessment sheet is filled and signed by the employers for each intern, with the score from 1 (unacceptable-poor performance) to 5 (excellent performance) against four criteria (1) how important is internship for developing the skills of future workers in your company; (2) how skilled has the intern become to work

⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸ Ibid.

in the profession; (3) how satisfied are you with the intern's performance; (4) how effective has the internship been in developing the skills of future workers.

Transparency requirements

The public employment service in Kosovo provides information on [OJT programme and internship programme](#). This includes programmes descriptions, eligibility criteria, application processes, programmes duration and structure.

The selection of beneficiaries is designed to be transparent. Opportunities are widely advertised to ensure accessibility and applications are reviewed based on clear, predefined criteria to ensure fairness. The selection process ensures that all eligible candidates, including underrepresented groups, have equal opportunities.

Participants are provided with information on the terms and conditions of the OJT and internship programmes, including details on financial compensation, health and accident insurance provided during the training and potential job placements post-completion.

Employment Offices (EOs) under EARK have a crucial role in participant selection process. Moreover, they work with employers in private sector to create relevant and beneficial training opportunities. Counselling and guidance services are an integral part of the support provided by EOs, including assisting participants in understanding their career options; providing support with job searching and job matching; evaluating participants' skills and interests to align them with suitable training and job opportunities; and offering one-on-one support to address specific needs and challenges.

Conclusions

Strengths

- Both OJT and internship programmes require a written agreement signed by all parties, clearly defining the duration and compensation, ensuring mutual understanding and formal commitment;
- The OJT programme mandates the development of an Individual Training Plan (ITP), ensuring clear learning objectives and structured training;
- Participants in both OJT and internship programmes are typically covered by health and accident insurance, with provisions for sick leave and holiday entitlements, ensuring a supportive training environment;
- Both OJT and internship programmes have defined durations that are flexible to account for job complexity and participant experience, ensuring sufficient time for skill acquisition;
- Processes of appraising knowledge, skills and competences acquired in OJT and internship programmes are in place. The VTC and employers are involved in the assessment of learners, leading to a certificate;
- The selection process for beneficiaries is transparent, with clear eligibility criteria and public announcements, ensuring equal opportunity for all applicants.

Challenges

- Employers are not legally obliged to cover compensation in internships, potentially leading to inconsistent financial support for interns;
- Many trainees report not signing or being aware of the ITP contents, indicating a gap between formal requirements and practical implementation;
- There are significant disparities in compensation between private and public sector internships, potentially affecting the attractiveness and equity of the programmes;

- The average duration of internships varies significantly between the private and public sectors which could affect the consistency of training experiences;
- The assessments of learners from OJTs/internships do not lead to a formal (partial) qualification;
- Monitoring and evaluation processes, although established, vary in effectiveness and consistency, potentially leading to discrepancies in programme quality and participant satisfaction.

Acronyms

ADA	Austrian Development Agency
ALMMs	Active labour market measures
AVETAE	Agency for Vocational Education and Training and Adult Education
BLOs	Business liaison officers
BMOs	Business member organisations
CoCs	Centres of competence
CVET	Continuing vocational education and training
CVETA	Council of Vocational Educational and Training and for Adults
EARK	Employment Agency of the Republic of Kosovo
EFQEA	European Framework for Quality and Effective Apprenticeship
EO	Employment offices (under EARK)
EOs	Employment offices
EQAVET	European Quality Assurance in Vocational Education and Training
EQET SEE	Enhancements in the quality of education and training in South Eastern Europe
ERI SEE	Education Reform Initiative of South Eastern Europe
ETF	European Training Foundation
EU	European Union
EYE	The SDC-funded “Enhancing Youth Employment” project
ITP	Individual training plan
KAS	Kosovo Agency of Statistics
KCC	Kosovo Chamber of Commerce
KIESA	Kosovo Investment and Enterprise Support Agency
MCYS	Ministry of Culture, Youth and Sports
MEDs	Municipal Education Departments
MESTI	Ministry of Education, Science, Technology and Innovation
MFLT	Ministry of Finance, Labour and Transfers

NDS	National development strategy
NEETs	Neither in employment nor in education and training
NQA	National Qualification Authority
NQAF	National Quality Assurance Framework
NQF	National Qualification Framework
OEAD	Austrian Agency for International Cooperation in Education and Research
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
OJT	On-the-job training scheme
PISA	Programme of International Student Assessment
QA	Quality assurance
SBLAs	School to business liaison assistants
SDC	Swiss Development Cooperation
SMEs	Small and medium enterprises
TH	Teaching hours
VET	Vocational education and training
VTCs	Vocational training centres
WB6 CIF	Western Balkans 6 Chamber Investment Forum
WBL	Work-based learning
YES	The GIZ “Youth Engagement, Employment Promotion and Skills Development” project
YGIP	Youth Guarantee implementation plan

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