

WORK-BASED LEARNING IN SERBIA – AN ASSESSMENT PER EU QUALITY STANDARDS

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PREFACE

The study ‘Work-based learning in Serbia – an assessment per EU quality standards’ has been produced by the European Training Foundation (ETF). The study was carried out between March and December 2024 by Ljubica Spiric, who also drafted this report. The report was quality checked by QA Expert Patrick Werquin and Project Director Michal Kowal (GREATVISORY).

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1. INTRODUCTION

Serbia's economy has shown steady growth in recent years, with a projected GDP growth of 3.8% in 2024. However, youth unemployment remains a significant challenge. Although the situation of young people (aged 15–29) is improving and the rates of youth unemployment and those not in employment, education or training (NEET) are falling, they are still high, standing at 18.5% and 15.2% respectively in 2023. Young people in Serbia are less active in the labour market compared to their peers in the EU and face a long transition – typically around 23 months – from education to stable jobs. While many employed young people have permanent contracts, a considerable number of young people work in short-term, informal or undeclared jobs. To address these challenges, enhancing employability frameworks and ensuring a quality of education that is relevant to the labour market are essential priorities in Serbia's youth employment policies.

One of the ways to provide comprehensive job support for young people across the EU is the reinforced Youth Guarantee (Council of the European Union, 2020). This is a key mechanism for ensuring a good quality offer of, for example, apprenticeships and traineeships for young people aged 15–29, and it directly underlines the importance of work-based learning (WBL). The Council Recommendation on a Reinforced Youth Guarantee advises Member States to ensure that apprenticeship and traineeship offer adhere to the minimum standards laid out in the two frameworks: the Quality Framework for Traineeships (Council of the European Union, 2014), and the European Framework for Quality and Effective Apprenticeships (Council of the European Union, 2018). Both frameworks, including the quality criteria which they define, are the basis for the analytical framework and the structure of this country report.

This report offers an overview and analysis of WBL in Serbia, providing insights into various aspects of its design and implementation. The key messages highlight the importance of aligning the country's WBL practices with the European quality criteria, emphasising the progress made in recent years, while identifying areas for further improvement. The findings cover WBL in initial vocational education and training (IVET), WBL in continuing vocational education and training (CVET), and WBL in active labour market programmes (ALMPs), corresponding to the three main chapters in the report.

In these chapters, based on the quality criteria from the two EU frameworks, the report addresses the key elements of WBL, including: types of programmes with a WBL component, contractual agreements, definitions of learning outcomes and assessment criteria, provision of pedagogical support to participants, social protection measures for learners, health and safety regulations in work-based settings, funding sources and cost-sharing arrangements for WBL initiatives, quality assurance, and learner tracking. The most important strengths and gaps/challenges are summarised at the end of each chapter devoted to IVET, CVET and ALMPs.

In addition, the report includes a brief clarification of the most important concepts used, an outline of the methodology applied, an overview of the country employment profile, as well as a short description of the strategic, legal and governance framework of vocational education and training (VET). Moreover, details of interviewees, a list of acronyms and references, and the quality criteria from the two EU frameworks are included at the end of the report.

Considering the structure and content outlined above, the report was conceived to inform policymakers, educators, employers and relevant stakeholders about the current state of WBL in Serbia and to contribute to the debate on WBL in the national and international sphere.

2. CONCEPTUAL CLARIFICATION

The term ‘work-based learning’ (WBL) in Serbia (učenje kroz rad) is associated with the establishment of the dual model of teaching and learning in initial vocational education and training. The Parliament introduced the Law on Dual Education (LDE) in 2017, the implementation of which began in 2019. In the same year, dual education was expanded to higher education (HE), and, together with the latest amendments to the LDE in 2023, they have further shaped the current state of dual education in Serbia.

Dual IVET programmes are offered in three-year and four-year programmes in which learners learn in two places: theoretical knowledge is acquired at school, while practical skills are acquired primarily at the workplace.

As mentioned in the Law on Secondary Education (LSE, 2023), practical teaching (*praktična nastava*) and occupational practice (*profesionalna praksa*) are other terms dealing with the practical component of IVET, which, in accordance with Article 30 of the LSE, can be implemented at a VET school or at an employer or at a combination of both, following the curriculum. Both terms used in the LSE (*praktična nastava*, *profesionalna praksa*) will be referred to in this report as ‘practical training’. In this report, the term ‘dual VET model’ (Dualni model *stručnog obrazovanja i obuke*) will be used for dual education at the secondary level of VET¹.

The share of WBL delivered in companies in the dual model represents a key distinction between the school-based VET model and the dual VET model (see Table 1).

Table 1: A summary of the main differences between the school-based and dual VET model at upper secondary level (IVET)

Dual VET model	School-based VET ²
Regulated by the Law on Dual Education	Regulated by the Law on Secondary Education
WBL is mandatory and must comprise at least 20% and no more than 80% of the total VET content (theory and practice) ³ .	WBL is not mandatory, while practical training is.
WBL must be at least 70% of total practical training (<i>praktična nastava</i> , <i>profesionalna praksa</i>) time ⁴ .	WBL can be max 25% of total practical training (<i>praktična nastava</i> , <i>profesionalna praksa</i>) time.
Companies must be accredited by the Chamber of Commerce and Industry of Serbia (CCIS).	Training companies do not have to be accredited but schools and companies conclude a contract for implementing practical training.
Companies must assign licensed in-company instructors.	Training companies must assign mentors.
School-company contracts and learner-company contracts are required.	If there is WBL, a school-company contract is required.

Source: Prepared by the author, based on: LSE, LDE, Rulebook (2020b), and Renold et al. (2024)

Despite the differences shown above, the curriculum structure and content, and the learners’ assessment, are almost identical for both the dual VET model and school-based VET, and they lead to the same qualification.

¹ The term ‘apprenticeship’ in its literal meaning (*šegrtovanje*) is not used in Serbian legislation or national policies.

² School-based VET focuses on learning that takes place mainly in schools and school workshops, while the dual VET model includes a significant portion of work-based learning with employers.

³ The Law on Dual Education envisages the percentages of work-based learning for three-year and four-year profiles. Changes to the WBL share are envisaged to take place starting from the 2026/2027 school year – see Table 3 in section 6.1.

⁴ Exceptionally, a portion of practical training may occur in schools or training centres through simulated work environments if a workplace is unavailable – up to 25% of the total practical training hours may be conducted in schools and up to 30% in training centres.

The dual HE model was introduced in 2019 through the Law on the Dual Model of Studies in Higher Education (LDMSHE, 2019). HE institutions can accredit a standalone dual study programme or modules in such a programme, which, alongside the requirements set by the HE laws and accreditation standards, includes a description and allocation of WBL in hours and European Credit Transfer System (ECTS) points (LDMSHE, 2019). WBL in the dual HE model integrates theoretical and practical training, requiring at least 450 hours every year for active teaching (lectures, exercises and other forms) and at least 450 hours for WBL under mentorship.

'Professional practice' (*stručna praksa*) and internships (*pripravništvo*) are two types of programmes provided by the National Employment Service (NES) under the 'Additional education and training' measure of the ALMP (Rulebook, 2018a). Both types of programmes include a WBL component. More detailed information is provided in Chapter 8.

3. METHODOLOGY

The methodology used mainly desk research, complemented by interviews with key stakeholders⁵.

The desk research involved a comprehensive review of existing legal frameworks and legislative documents, bylaws, strategies, relevant studies, reports and publications, guides for learners, schools, training providers, employers, governmental institutions' websites, online databases, and other sources⁶. The analysis also included use of the open data portal of the Ministry of Education (MoE), an overview of contractual arrangements templates for ALMP programmes, public calls launched by the NES, websites of training providers offering various training options and descriptions, an analysis of both school-based and dual-based curricula, the register of qualifications with its sub-registers of national qualifications, qualification standards, and publicly recognised organisers of adult education (PROAE), etc.

To gather qualitative insights and validate the findings, interviews were conducted with 11 stakeholder representatives. This approach was particularly important due to the challenge of accessing overall CVET training programmes provided by PROAE, which are not publicly available. This gap made it challenging to obtain a realistic overview of the WBL share in CVET, thereby necessitating a reliance on stakeholder input.

⁵ For more details, please see the 'Details of interviewees' section in Annex 1.

⁶ A full list of the sources consulted is presented in Chapter 10: References.

4. COUNTRY OVERVIEW

Serbia's population was estimated to be around 6.7 million (6 623 183) in 2023, which is half a million (495 975) fewer or approximately 7% less than the results of the 2011 census (SORS, 2024b). The estimates are made by the Statistical Office of the Republic of Serbia (SORS) based on the results of the 2022 census (SORS, 2023). The share of young people in the country's population is declining although relatively stable, representing around 15.4% of the active population (15/64 years old) in the past two years (ETF, 2024c, forthcoming). In addition to an ageing population and low natural growth, there is a steady outflow of people leaving Serbia. A recent regional study indicates that almost 75% of young people (15–29) wish or intend to leave the country (MoLEVSA, 2021). In 2023, Serbia reported an early school leavers (aged 18-24) rate of 5.8% (ETF, 2024a), which marks a decrease over recent years (7.5% in 2015), as reported in EC 2024 Serbia Report (European Commission, 2024). This is well below the average rate of early school leavers across the European Union, which was 9.5% for the same year (Eurostat, 2024a).

Table 2: Trends in employment, unemployment, activity, inactivity and NEET in Serbia over the last five years

Year	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023
Activity rate, ages 15-24	29.2%	28.0%	33.0%	32.0%	31.9%
Activity rate, ages 15-29			49.8%	49.6%	49.3%
Employment rate, ages 15-29			40.0 %	41.0%	40.2%
Employment rate, ages 15-64	60.7%	59.7%	61.7%	63.9%	64.7%
Unemployment rate, ages 15-29	22.7 %	21.6	19.7%	17.2%	18.5%
Long term unemployment rate, ages 15-64			5.7%	4.5%	4.4%
Out of labour force rate ages 15-29			50.2%	50.4%	50.7%
Out of labour force rate, ages 15-64			30.3%	29.1%	28.3%
NEETS rates, ages 15-29			19.1%	15.4%	15.2%

Source: SORS, Labour Force Survey <https://data.stat.gov.rs/?languageCode=en-US>, and KIESE

The situation of young people (aged 15-29) in Serbia is characterised by declining youth unemployment and NEET rates, although these are still relatively high (both standing at 11.2% in 2023) or at least higher than the EU averages. Young people's participation in the labour force in Serbia remains below the European average; their activity rate in 2023 was 49.3%, which is 6.7 percentage points lower than that of young people in the EU (Eurostat, 2024b).

The total net enrolment rate in upper secondary education declined from 86.2% in 2022 to 83.3% in 2023. The share of VET students in upper secondary education is also declining slightly, from 75.1% in 2015 to 73.8% in 2019, and down to 72.7% in 2022. However, the share of early leavers (aged 18-24) has been constantly decreasing over the past 10 years: from 7.5% to 5.8%, with the gender gap shrinking over time.

Young people in Serbia face a lengthy transition period of nearly two years (23.4 months) from school to a stable job (MoLEVSA, 2021). Most employed young people have indefinite-duration employment contracts (38%), whereas fixed-term contracts account for 26.7%, undeclared work accounts for 17.7%, and the remaining 17.6% have contracts through youth cooperatives and short-term contracts. When asked if they were employed in positions matching their education, only 22% of young people stated that they worked in jobs that aligned with their education, 14% responded that they were

somewhat employed in positions related to their education, while 64% were not employed in fields matching their education (Stojanovic et al., 2023).

In the 2022 PISA results, Serbia ranked 40th in reading and science, and 42nd in mathematics. The OECD indicates that most Serbian students were neither among the worst scoring group nor among the best scoring group of students who took the PISA test in 2022 (OECD, *Education GPS*). Over the past decade, the gap between high-scoring and low-scoring students in mathematics and reading has narrowed, and has remained relatively unchanged in science. Notably, 57% of students reached at least level-2 proficiency in mathematics (OECD average: 69%), and 4% were top performers (OECD average: 9%). Boys outperformed girls in mathematics, while girls outperformed boys in reading, reflecting global trends (OECD, 2023). Despite some progress compared to 2018, Serbia's average performance among 15-year-old students still falls about 1.5 years of schooling behind the OECD average, and the share of students below basic proficiency has increased in the past five to seven years (World Bank Group-UNICEF, 2022). Addressing disparities and enhancing educational policies remain crucial for improving student achievement in Serbia, which aligns with government strategies.

About half of the total population has a medium level educational attainment, while still more than one fifth has a low level (22.3% in 2023, ETF, 2024c). The participation rate in education and training (last four weeks) of 25 to 64 years olds was around 6.1% in 2023 (SORS, 2024a), less than half of the EU average of 12.8% (Eurostat, 2024c). According to the European Skills and Jobs Survey, which covers only employees, about one third (32%) of Serbian respondents stated that in the last 12 months they had participated in at least one form of education or training to learn new job-related skills; this is a much lower figure compared to the EU (62%) and Western Balkan 5 (41%) averages (ETF, 2023).

The Torino Process System Monitoring Report for Serbia (TPSMRS) 2023 (ETF, 2024b) indicates that as of late 2022, 35.1% of the unemployed in Serbia lack qualifications or have a low level of education, while 68.1% of unemployed people have been actively seeking a job for over a year, revealing the challenges for the long-term unemployed. Employers also struggle to find suitable job candidates due to shortages in specific occupations and of particular skills and due to candidates having a lack of work experience. Serbia's ALMPs provide broad and diverse learning opportunities for individuals with low qualifications. However, the education and training offered may not fully align with labour market needs, despite increased access, which points to the need for more targeted training and educational initiatives, as the TPSMRS (2023) suggests.

5. THE FRAMEWORK FOR WORK-BASED LEARNING IN SERBIA

WBL in Serbia is included in the national education strategy for up to 2030, which aims to improve the VET quality, enhance youth employment and employment in general, and align skills development with the needs of the labour market (MoESTD, 2021).

The Office for Dual Education and the National Qualifications Framework of Serbia (NQFS), hereinafter the Office, was established by the Government in 2022, and transferred monitoring obligations related to the dual VET model and the NQFS from the MoE to the Office. The responsibilities of the Office include providing support to the work of the Council for National Qualifications Framework (NQF), preparing proposals for bylaws and development projects related to NQF, monitoring and measuring the effects of the qualification system on employment and lifelong learning, and linking the NQF with the European Qualifications Framework (EQF). In addition, the Office monitors the work of the PROAE and ensures adherence to standards and guidelines established by regulations.

Two advisory bodies assist the MoE:

1. The Council for Vocational Education and Adult Education (CVE-AE): monitors, analyses, and advises on VET curricula and adult education programmes to align them with labour market needs.
2. The Council for National Qualifications Framework of Serbia (CNQFS): proposes qualification standards for all NQFS levels, proposes the establishment of sector councils (SC) to the Government, and advises on human capital development, in line with the strategic documents of the Republic of Serbia, and on the coordination of public policies on career guidance and counselling (CGC) in all sectors. Additionally, the CNQFS provides recommendations on improving the connection between education and labour market needs and provides opinions to the minister responsible for education on the recommendations of the sectoral councils regarding enrolment policies for secondary schools and higher education institutions. It monitors the work of sectoral councils, and makes recommendations for improving their work, based on regular reports. It also gives recommendations to the minister responsible for education to abolish teaching and learning programmes that do not meet qualification standards.

Two institutes provide expertise:

1. The Institute for the Improvement of Education (IIE) and its Centre for VET and Adult Education (CVETAE): based on the qualification standards, it develops VET curricula for secondary education and adult education, prepares final VET examinations, and develops training programmes and examinations for WBL instructors.
2. The Institute for Evaluation and Quality in Education (IEQE) and its Centre for Quality Assurance of Work of Institutions: monitors and evaluates education quality through regional school administrations using self-evaluation and external evaluation processes.

Quality assurance in all secondary VET (including the dual VET model) relies primarily on self-evaluation and an external evaluation of schools. While these processes are regulated closely by the rulebooks (Rulebook, 2019c and 2024), efforts are currently under way to improve assessments of skills acquisition in the workplace and finalise the framework for monitoring and evaluating the dual VET model (Office for Dual Education and the NQFS, Support to dual VET).

The Qualifications Agency (QA) was established by the Government in order to perform quality assurance tasks and provide expert support to the NQFS Council and other competent organisations in all aspects of the development and implementation of the NQFS. The Agency plays a crucial role in the development, maintenance and implementation of qualifications within the NQFS. The QA indirectly influences WBL by preparing qualification standards that form the basis for VET curricula, from which the WBL component is derived. The QA collaborates with government bodies, educational institutions and employers to facilitate the recognition of qualifications offered by training providers. The Agency also conducts an external quality evaluation of the work of the PROAE.

Sector councils are expert and advisory bodies whose main role is to define qualification needs in the labour market. The Government of the Republic of Serbia appoints the members of the sector council from the relevant sector. Their work, based on the principle of social partnership, is mainly to align qualifications with the needs of specific sectors of the economy. They deal with proposals for qualification standards, competences and expected learning outcomes required within their respective sectors. SCs facilitate dialogue between industry and education, and identify career pathways through opportunities for education, training and employment within the sector.

5.1 Vocational education and training strategies

The Strategy for Education Development and Upbringing in Serbia 2021-2030 (MoESTD, 2021) outlines the long-term vision and objectives for VET and the dual model at both secondary and tertiary levels (WBL is not specifically addressed in this context). It stresses the importance of social partners' active participation in the system of qualifications and lifelong learning. The strategy also focuses on adult education and the role of regional CVET training centres⁷ for the reskilling and upskilling of various population groups.

One of the objectives of the Employment Strategy of the Republic of Serbia 2021–2026 (MoLEVSA, 2021) is to enhance the quality of the workforce by strengthening partnerships with the business sector, aligning skills with labour market needs and expanding WBL opportunities. It emphasises the development of a network of training providers in non-formal education and the establishment of regional training centres within VET schools⁸.

The Strategy for Youth 2023-2030 (Government of Serbia, 2023b) addresses the challenges faced by young people in transitioning from education and training to employment and emphasises the importance of work experience in facilitating this transition.

The Economic Reform Programme 2024-2026 (ERP) outlines measures to improve youth employment by enhancing VET, CGC and partnerships between the education system and the labour market. It also aims to expand access to various forms of WBL, and to equip young people with the skills and experience needed to successfully enter the workforce (Ministry of Finance, 2023). The programme also addresses the gradual introduction of the Youth Guarantee Implementation Plan.

The Youth Guarantee Implementation Plan 2023-2026 (Government of Serbia, 2023a) aims to reduce the number of young people who are distant from the labour market and the number of NEETs, by means of a phased implementation. It describes the available financial support, engages young people in decision-making processes, and establishes a legal framework for traineeship. The plan focuses on improving young people's transition from education to employment via continuing education, participation in the dual VET model and other forms of WBL, as well as traineeships and internships. During the first year of the plan, efforts will focus on revising regulations, strengthening capacities at both national and local levels, and setting up a monitoring system.

5.2 Policy dialogue and the role of actors at national level

At the national level, an institutional partnership has been set up for the implementation of the dual VET model. This involves cooperation between the MoE, the Office, the CCIS, IIE, IEQE and QA, along with councils and nationally appointed bodies responsible for education (LDE, 2023). The Commission for the Development and Implementation of Dual Education (2018) was established for the purpose of implementing and improving the dual VET model and a three-year evaluation of the achieved results. According to the regulations on the establishment of the Office (Government of Serbia, 2022), its role appears central to all matters regarding coordination of the dual VET model and the NQFS. Its main activities include developing plans and implementing measures in the dual VET model, aligned with legal frameworks, national strategies and international agreements. The Office is responsible for drafting laws on the dual VET model, the CGC and the NQFS, while monitoring their

⁷ See footnote 16

⁸ Employment Strategy of the Republic of Serbia 2021–2026 (MoLEVSA, 2021), page 50

application and evaluating their impact. Additionally, it analyses enrolment policies, supports the PROAE and other entities in the field of dual education and monitors their work. It participates in strategic planning, coordinates international cooperation, monitors expenditure and acts as a coordination point for the NQFS with the EQF, among other tasks.

5.3 Legal framework

VET and WBL in Serbia are regulated by several important laws⁹. However, apart from the LDE and the Law on the Dual Model of Studies in Higher Education, these do not refer specifically to WBL (LDMSHE, 2019).

During the 2010s, the Serbian government showed an increased interest in adopting the dual VET model, supported by German-speaking countries¹⁰ and fuelled by efforts to access the European Union. In 2017, the Parliament introduced the LDE. Additionally, the dual model was expanded to HE in 2019 through the LDMSHE, and together with the latest amendment to the LDE in 2023, it has further shaped the current state of the dual VET model in Serbia. Both laws on the dual VET model – the LDE and LDMSHE – regulate the organisation and implementation of dual VET, mutual relations between educational institutions, employers and learners, the scope of WBL, the role of the mentor/instructor, and other relevant aspects.

The Law on the Foundations of the Education System in Serbia (LFESS, 2023) regulates the roles and responsibilities of the institutes (IIE and IEQE) and the quality assurance process for educational institutions. It also defines self-evaluation and external evaluation processes.

The Law on the NQFS (LNQFS, 2023) establishes the NQFS as a system and provides transparency and comparability for qualifications, outlining the various types, levels and attainment methods through formal and non-formal education or informal learning (by recognition of prior learning, RPL). It mainly covers qualification level descriptors, CGC, links to the labour market, and the competent bodies for NQFS implementation.

The Law on Adult Education (2020) governs education in relation to lifelong learning, including professional development for work and employment, through formal and non-formal education or informal learning.

The Labour Law (2005) governs employment contracts, work outside employment and professional training and development (*stručno osposobljavanje i usavršavanje*).

The Law on Employment and Unemployment Insurance (2009) regulates active employment policy as well as other important matters relating to employment.

The Law on Safety and Health at Work (2023) addresses health and safety measures at work.

The Draft Law on Traineeships (2023) (*Zakon o Radnoj Praksi*), which has not been adopted yet, should harmonise the national regulations on traineeships (as part of ALMP/practical training in the labour market) with the quality criteria established by the 2014 EU Council Recommendation. The draft law governs the acquisition of practical skills through work experience, including the organisation and duration thereof, and the roles, rights and responsibilities of both employers and trainees.

There are numerous important regulations¹¹ that ensure quality standards in the dual VET model. These regulations cover various aspects of WBL, including practical training (*praktična nastava, profesionalna praksa*) if implemented at an employer, and the method of assigning learners to training companies. They also encompass CGC, and standards for those activities in secondary schools and PROAE.

⁹ LDE (2023), LDMSHE (2019), LSE (2023), LNQFS (2023), LFESS (2023), Labour Law (2005). All sources are also presented in Chapter 10: References.

¹⁰ 'Reform of Vocational Education and Training in Serbia' project, under the auspices of the German Government and implemented by the German Organisation for International Cooperation (GIZ), April 2013. Since 2017, it has received support from the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC), the Chambers of Commerce of Austria and the Austrian Development Agency (ADA).

¹¹ All regulations are described more in detail under Chapters 6.9 and 7.9 and are presented in Chapter 10: References.

The procedures for obtaining PROAE status for other organisations and schools are outlined in guides developed for employers, schools, learners and parents participating in the dual VET model. Specifically, the guides are entitled: 'Guide for acquiring PROAE status' (SDC, Pejatovic et al., 2021¹²), 'Guide to dual education for schools' (SDC–MoESTD, 2021a), and 'Guide to the dual VET model for learners and parents' (SDC–MoESTD, 2021b).

The NES implements the 'additional education and training'¹³ measure under the ALMP, based on the law, the action plan for the implementation of the employment strategy, the concluded performance agreement of the NES, the NES Work Programme, and bylaws. For the implementation of the 'additional education and training' measure, the NES publishes a public call each calendar year, outlining the prescribed conditions for participation.

¹² 'Guide for acquiring PROAE status', available at: [Vodic-za-sticanje-statusa-JPOA.pdf](#)

¹³ This includes professional practice, internships for young people (with secondary education and with HE), acquiring practical knowledge, training for the labour market, training at the employer's request (for the unemployed and the employed) and functional elementary education of adults (FEEA).

6. WORK-BASED LEARNING IN INITIAL VOCATIONAL EDUCATION AND TRAINING

6.1 Typology of programmes with embedded work-based learning elements

In Serbia, dual VET programmes are offered at upper-secondary level (IVET) and tertiary level (basic and master applied studies in HE). Learners have student status during vocational upper secondary and university education.

Both the LDE and the LDMSHE emphasise WBL as an organised process, wherein learners gain practical experience under supervision in real working environments, acquiring competences relevant to the standards associated with the final qualification.

Article 1 LDE prescribes that the provisions of this law apply to three-year and four-year secondary VET and education programmes, crafts education (*majstorsko*) and specialist education (*specijalističko*) programmes, and two-year 'education for work' (*obrazovanje za rad*) programmes. There are no further provisions on crafts and specialist education or education for work in the LDE or in other regulations in terms of WBL share; the individual education programme defines how WBL is provided in each case.

HE institutions can accredit a standalone dual study programme or the individual modules of such a programme, which, alongside the requirements set by HE laws and accreditation standards, includes a description and allocation of WBL in hours and European Credit Transfer System (ECTS) points (LDMSHE, 2019, Article 5).

Dual programmes in IVET are offered as three-year and four-year programmes and are based on qualification standards registered in the NQFS, which ensures that the programmes meet the national education standards. The curriculum consists of: for three-year programmes – 30% general education subjects and at least 65% VET content (theory and practice); for four-year programmes – 40% general education subjects and at least 55% VET content (theory and practice). This structure is mandated by the LSE and applies to all VET programmes, whether school-based or under the dual VET model (SDC–MoESTD, 2021a). WBL currently amounts to at least 20% and no more than 80% of the total VET content (theory and practice) specified in the curriculum and is carried out entirely with one or more employers. However, the latest (2023) amendments to the LDE prescribe a revised WBL share, which is expected to come into force starting from the 2026/2027 school year. Table 3 provides information on the types of programmes with a WBL component, NQFS level, duration of the programme, provider and age of participants.

Table 3: Different programmes with a WBL component

Programme	NQFS level ¹⁴	WBL share			Duration	Provider	From age
Dual VET model	3	Currently: at least 20% and max. 80% of the total number of hours of vocational subjects*.	From school year 2026/2027: at least 60% and max. 80% of the total number of hours of vocational subjects.	From school year 2034/2035: 60% of the total number of hours specified in the curriculum.	3 years	IVET schools	14 or 15
Dual VET model	4		From school year 2026/2027:		4 years	IVET schools	14 or 15

¹⁴ See more - NQFS website: <http://noks.mpn.gov.rs/en/referencing-nqfs-with-%d0%b5qf/>, <http://noks.mpn.gov.rs/en/comparative-table-of-the-qualification-levels-and-types-of-education/>

Programme	NQFS level ¹⁴	WBL share			Duration	Provider	From age
			at least 40% and max 80% of the total number of hours of vocational subjects				
Dual VET model in HE: in basic applied studies in master applied studies	6.1 7.1.	at least 450 hours per year			3 to 4 years	HE institutions	19
Crafts and specialist education	5	unknown			1 to 2 years or min. 6 months in non-formal	VET schools/ training providers	20 and up

Source: Prepared by the author, based on: LSE, LDE, and Renold et al. (2024)

* The WBL share in the existing dual VET model programmes can be increased, provided that the employer has the capacity to implement additional hours of WBL.

Regarding the most recent data for the 2023/2024 school year, the total number of learners in upper-secondary education is 229 271, including 149 475 learners in upper-secondary VET (MoE, *Open Data Portal*).

The number of learners in the dual VET model is gradually increasing, according to the Open Data Portal: from 6 527 in the 2021/2022 school year, it grew to 9 006 in the 2023/2024 school year (6% of the total number of learners in upper-secondary VET) (MoE, *Open Data Portal*). A total of 206 secondary VET schools (CCIS, *Education tailored to the economy*) are now engaged in the implementation of the dual VET model programmes. The number of participating companies rose from around 700 (Paragraf Lex, 2022) in 2022 to around 1 100 in 2024 (CCIS, *Education tailored to the economy*). The availability of dual programmes has also expanded, with 73 programmes offered in the 2023/2024 school year and an increase to 83 for the upcoming 2024/2025 academic year in 11 sectors (CCIS, 2024).

The analysis below was guided by the 14 criteria of the European Framework for Quality and Effective Apprenticeships (EFQEA).

6.2 Written agreement (Criterion 1)

All contracting issues are regulated by the LDE (2023). The relationship between the school and the employer is governed by the 'dual education contract', which is signed for a period of at least three or four years (depending on the duration of the programme), depending on the curriculum. Another contract regulates the relationship between the employer and the learner (that is, the parent or other legal representative of the learner) and is called the 'WBL contract'.

The dual education contract outlines the responsibilities of both the school and the employer in providing WBL. The employer is obliged to cover the material and financial cost of WBL and provide a specified number of licensed instructors. The contract specifies the place and timetable for WBL, the maximum number of learners for the whole duration of the contract, the school's obligations in facilitating WBL, reasons for terminating a contract (this is defined in the LDE, but must also be included in the contract), and dispute resolution methods. Integral to the contract is the WBL programme ([see section 6.3](#)).

The WBL contract must include confirmation from a health institution that the learner meets the health requirements for their educational programme. The employer is obliged to organise and implement WBL in accordance with the curriculum, specifying the place and time of these activities. The learner

must regularly engage in WBL, adhere to its specified duration, and follow health and safety regulations.

6.3 Learning outcomes (Criterion 2)

Qualification standards are the basis for adopting VET curricula (valid for the school-based and dual VET model, see Chapter 2). Sectoral Councils (SC), whose members are appointed by the Government from the relevant field for which the council is established, include, among others, representatives of the economy for specific sectors. SCs make decisions on the development of qualification standard proposals. The QA coordinates the process of improving and revising qualification standards based on feedback from the SCs and in accordance with the NQFS. The NQFS is an open system that accommodates various pathways for obtaining qualifications and opportunities for both horizontal and vertical mobility, including academic and labour market mobility. SCs make decisions on the development of qualification standards within their sectors and provide opinions on the expected knowledge and skills outcomes.

The QA prepares the qualification standard proposal. The NQF Council approves the proposed qualification standard, and the Ministry responsible for education issues a decision on its adoption. The IIE is responsible for curriculum development.

The WBL programme is an integral part of the dual education contract. It is a document that gives a detailed insight into the method of implementing the educational programme at the employer, which is jointly developed and adopted by the school and the employer for the total duration of the educational programme. In accordance with the LDE, the WBL programme is described in a document that includes the following: the activities that the learner will undertake in WBL, the learning outcomes from the qualification standards and the parts of the curriculum covered by these activities. It also outlines the scope of WBL, the workplaces or jobs where WBL will be implemented, along with a list of equipment (e.g. machines, tools) that the learners will use. Additionally, it details how teaching in the language of a national minority will be ensured if WBL is conducted in such a language, the timeline for achieving and evaluating WBL, and any other factors relevant to implementing the curriculum, considering the specific conditions at the school or company. The WBL programme is reviewed after a complete cohort of learners has experienced it, i.e. after three to four years.

6.4 Pedagogical support (Criterion 3)

In accordance with Article 29 of the LDE, an 'instructor' (*instruktor*) – i.e. in-company trainer – is a person employed by an employer who, in cooperation with the 'WBL coordinator' from the school, implements, leads and supervises WBL at the workplace.

The instructor must have at least three years of relevant work experience and the same level of qualification as the learner is being educated/trained to in the dual VET model, be proficient in the language of any national minority if the curriculum is delivered in that language (unless another person is available to assist) and have a clean criminal record. He or she must also have completed instructor training and obtained a licence (Rulebook, 2018c). Instructors can receive a licence without attending training or passing the instructor examination if they meet one of the following three criteria: (i) possess basic pedagogical and didactic knowledge and skills and hold a valid instructor authorisation issued by the national or international regulatory bodies; (ii) are a teacher of practical training or vocational subjects in a secondary school with a valid teacher licence; or (iii) have been trained as a mentor/instructor through other projects related to WBL within formal and non-formal education.

The training programme for the instructor, lasting 40 hours, includes basic pedagogical and didactic knowledge and skills and is conducted at the CCIS premises. The CCIS selects instructors according to the General Act that provides for the functioning of the CCIS¹⁵ and establishes the commission for administering the instructor examination. This commission comprises experts in the relevant field and

¹⁵ The instructor licence examination is taken before the Instructor Examination Commission, established by the CCIS. A commission is formed for each round of examinations and has at least three members. (Rulebook, 2018c, Article 7)

representatives from the MoE and IIE, and they provide their services without compensation. After passing the examination, the CCIS issues licences to instructors and maintains a register of these licences. While the CCIS covers the costs of issuing licences and maintaining the register, employers bear the expenses for training and examinations. The fees for these services are determined by the CCIS. The training programme and examination conditions are set by the Minister, based on proposals from the IIE (LDE, 2023, Rulebook, 2018c). Regarding further training for instructors, the development of a portal for online connectivity and additional training for instructors is one of the components of a project implemented by the CCIS with the support of the ADA and SDC.

A company must have a licensed instructor accredited for dual education. Information on all accredited companies is available in the employer register on the CCIS website. A more recent study indicates that instructor licensing in Serbia shows positive trends over time (2018-2023), with 90% of WBL classes in dual model IVET programmes being delivered by licensed instructors (Renold et al., 2024).

The WBL coordinator is a teacher employed by the school with the relevant subject-specific education who – together with the instructor – plans, monitors, implements and evaluates WBL.

WBL coordinators, being mostly vocational subject teachers, have the opportunity for further professional training and development through courses offered by the IIE.

6.5 Workplace component (Criterion 4)

Some of the latest amendments (2023) to the LDE relate to the increased WBL share according to Table 2 ([see section 6.1](#)). As stated in Chapter 2, exceptionally, a portion of the total practical training hours can occur in schools (up to 25%) or training centres¹⁶ (up to 30%) through simulated work environments if a workplace is unavailable. A school with the training centre status can carry out practical training for its learners and learners from other schools, provide all forms of practical training with the appropriate equipment and resources, conduct vocational Matura and final examinations for its and other schools' learners, implement practical training in the dual HE study model, provide training and practical work for all adult education activities, conduct training upon the request of an employer, etc.

A student in dual VET may complete WBL in more than one company. Considering that the structure of the Serbian economy consists mostly of small and medium-sized enterprises, the LDE regulates training alliances, which are associations of at least two employers that facilitate the achievement of learning outcomes from qualification standards through WBL, in accordance with the curriculum. In schools where different parts of the curricula are covered by different employers, and all learners must complete part of the WBL with each employer, the method of learner allocation is determined by the dual VET model contract between the school and the employers.

WBL is aligned with the school calendar, with a maximum of eight hours per day and 24 hours per week, extendable to 30 hours per week in block schedules. It cannot occur between 22:00 and 06:00. Learners receive monthly non-taxable compensation paid by the employer ([see section 6.6](#)).

The preparation of the WBL plan is based on the curriculum. The WBL plan is an operational document that outlines the dynamics, schedule, location and timing of WBL activities throughout the school year. This plan is adopted by the school in cooperation with the employer, based on the WBL programme, and is an integral part of the school's annual work plan.

6.6 Pay and/or compensation (Criterion 5)

¹⁶ Training centre status can, in accordance with the LDE, be granted to a VET school that has been verified for the delivery of programmes in the dual VET model and that has relevant resources to ensure that young and adult learners may acquire skills in a simulated work environment, in accordance with labour market needs in particular regions/parts of the country. More detailed requirements for adoption of the act on granting training centre status, conditions regarding the way of working and of using the funds, and cooperation of a training centre with other public schools and employers, will be determined by the Government upon the proposal of the Ministry, in accordance with the opinion obtained by the Office. This act is being drafted.

Learners performing WBL are entitled to compensation, paid monthly for the hours worked. Employers bear the cost of this compensation, and adjust it based on the learner's year of schooling and knowledge level, starting from 30% of the minimum wage per hour as per the law. However, the average compensation must be at least 70% of the national minimum wage for the total duration of the programme. In addition, learners' travel costs from the school to the WBL place and back are reimbursed by the employer, at most in the amount of the price of a public transport ticket for each day, if the employer has not provided their own transport.

If a portion of WBL occurs at a training centre, learners are not entitled to compensation unless requested by the employer. Additionally, employers may offer scholarships alongside WBL contracts.

6.7 Social protection (Criterion 6)

For learners in dual VET model the employer must pay contributions of 2% for health insurance in case of work-related injury and professional illness and 4% to the Pension and Disability Insurance Fund for disability and physical damage, in accordance with the Law on Contributions for Mandatory Social Insurance (2024). Supervision relating to working conditions and occupational safety at the employer's premises for learners implementing WBL is carried out by the ministry responsible for labour affairs – through the labour inspectorate.

6.8 Work, health and safety conditions (Criterion 7)

When implementing WBL, the employer must ensure that all prescribed occupational health and safety measures are in place, in line with relevant national regulations governing health and safety at work. Additionally, the employer must adhere to the rules governing hazardous work for children. Protection of learners' health in the dual VET model is ensured in accordance with the LDE, LSE, Law on the Foundations of the Education System, the Labour Law and the occupational and safety regulations governing the prohibition of hazardous work for children. Health and safety regulations in the workplace are part of the curricula.

6.9 Regulatory framework (Criterion 8)

In addition to the statutory sources regulating WBL (see Chapter 5), the 'Rulebook on the realisation of practical teaching and occupational practice' (Rulebook, 2020b) regulates the implementation of practical training (*praktična nastava, profesionalana praksa*) when conducted at a VET school or partially at a VET school and partially at an employer¹⁷.

The 'Rulebook on the method of assigning students for WBL' (Rulebook, 2024) establishes the method of allocating learners for WBL in cases where different parts of the programme are carried out by different employers, ensuring that all learners complete part of their WBL with each employer.

The 'Rulebook on the fulfilment of the conditions for performing WBL at the employer' (Rulebook, 2020a) outlines the organisation, composition and functioning of the Commission responsible for assessing employers' or employer alliances' compliance with WBL-performance conditions. The Commission conducts risk assessments and provides expert reports on equipment and environmental conditions to ensure that learners are not assigned tasks that could harm their health, safety or morale.

Additionally, there are regulations on CGC, described under section 6.13. Those are the 'Rulebook on the conditions, way of working, activities and composition of the team for CGC in a secondary school

¹⁷ If the share of WBL exceeds 25% of the total hours specified for all practical training (at school and at the employer), the LDE and its related regulations will apply. If the share of WBL is 25% or less, the LSE and its related regulations shall be applied. The rulebook also defines the content and elements of the contract for implementing practical forms of teaching, which is concluded between the school and the employer.

that implements educational profiles in dual education' (Rulebook, 2019a) and the 'Rulebook on the standards of CGC' (Rulebook, 2019b).

The 'Rulebook on the training programme, conditions and other matters of importance for taking the instructor examination' (Rulebook, 2018c) prescribes the roles and duties of the instructor and lays down the necessary conditions for implementing WBL and informing learners and parents about internal rules and the application of health and safety measures at work, plus similar issues.

6.10 Involvement of social partners (Criterion 9)

At national level, an institutional partnership has been established for implementing the dual VET model ([see section 5.2](#)).

The CCIS and the Office act as key partners to the MoE in the implementation of the dual VET model. The Chamber ensures that dual VET model programmes align with the needs of employers and the labour market. The CCIS does this through the participation of its representatives in the Council for Vocational Education and Adult Education, the Council for NQFS, and the sector skill councils. It plays a role in the accreditation of companies and the provision of instructor training for. The CCIS establishes the commission responsible for administering and conducting instructor examinations and ensuring the quality and licencing of instructors. It prepares a plan for the involvement of employers and submits it to the Office, based on which final decisions are made regarding the enrolment structure of learners in dual VET model programmes. Enrolment policy planning is a strategic process in which schools, local governments and other interested parties plan the implementation of educational programmes for the next school year. Provisions related to deciding on the number of learners to be enrolled are found in Article 35 of the LSE.

Representatives of trade unions participate in the sector skills councils and the Council for NQFS. According to Langthaler, M. et al. (2023) they have no direct role in WBL implementation.

Social partners are members of the Council for Vocational Education and Adult Education, as well as the Working Group for the Preparation of the Annual Adult Education Plan.

6.11 Support for companies (Criterion 10)

In 2023, the Government of Serbia adopted the 'Decree on financial support for dual education' (Decree 2023) for high-demand (deficit) occupations. The first form of financial support provides learners with an additional compensation of RSD 5 000 (approx. EUR 43) per month from the Serbian Government budget during their education and training, on top of the legally prescribed compensation for WBL, which employers have to pay. This additional payment is given for nine months each year. The second form of financial support involves subsidising part of the compensation that employers pay to learners enrolled in the dual VET model programmes for high-demand (deficit) occupations. This subsidy can cover up to 50% of the learners' compensation, as per the decree (Va014.info, 2024). The Office announced a call to subsidise part of the compensation with the application deadline set for the end of 2024¹⁸. This measure aims to support micro and small enterprises that may lack the financial resources to expand their intake of learners. In addition to financial support to companies, the CCIS provides free-of-charge training for instructors.

6.12 Career guidance and awareness raising (Criterion 12)

The formation of local-level CGC teams¹⁹, and their activities, conditions and method of work in upper-secondary VET schools that implement the dual VET model, are regulated by the LDE and two

¹⁸ Open call available at: <https://dualnoobrazovanje.rs/subvencije-za-poslodavce/>

¹⁹ The CGC team is responsible for, among other things, organising counselling and training on career management skills, monitoring the satisfaction of learners and employers during WBL, supporting learners in documenting their experiences and achievements, evaluating career guidance programmes, and ensuring continuity in career guidance from primary to secondary education.

rulebooks (Rulebook, 2019a and 2019b) mentioned under 6.9. The CGC team includes representatives of professional associations, local government units and employers (the rulebooks do not provide information on whether this is mandatory or voluntary). Representatives of employers on the CGC team are persons employed by employers where WBL is implemented. The team collaborates with primary schools, especially regarding learner enrolment planning where there are equivalent teams for professional orientation (named as such by the LSE). However, CGC in primary schools has been indicated by the CCIS as one of the key challenges for the further development of dual education and training at secondary level.

Marketing and awareness-raising initiatives are very much present to promote the dual VET model programmes as an attractive learning pathway, through news and continuous information on the official websites of Government institutions.

6.13 Transparency (Criterion 13)

Information on dual programmes and companies offering WBL is provided on all official websites of the MoE, CCIS and IIE, and the schools offering dual programmes. Interactive web portals are accessible and regularly updated, providing information on programmes offered, curricula, companies and similar, including the portal for registering companies on the CCIS website, the NQFS register on the QA website and the Open Data Portal by the ME. Companies apply for participation in a dual programme usually in the same community or city. When they pass the accreditation procedure, the CCIS places them on the list of companies where WBL can be conducted for all programmes. Schools then select from among the accredited companies and sign 'dual education contracts' with them. Only afterwards, learners and employers conclude the 'WBL contract', as explained in 6.2.

6.14 Quality assurance and tracking of apprentices (Criterion 14)

The framework for monitoring and evaluation (M&E) of the dual VET model, intended to complement the existing quality assurance system (which is linked to the European Quality Assurance in VET network), was developed under the 'Support in the Development and Establishment of the National Dual Education Model' project funded by the SDC. However, following legal and institutional changes, it has been determined that the M&E Framework for the dual VET model requires revision, which is currently being addressed through the 'Support to dual vet and NQFS system reform in the framework of lifelong learning in Serbia' project (2023-2026) (Office for Dual Education and the NQFS, *Support to dual VET and NQFS system reform in the framework of lifelong learning in Serbia [online]*). By the end of 2024, the finalised framework is expected to be institutionalised through amendments to the following regulations: the 'Rulebook on standards of the quality of institutions' work'; and the 'Rulebook on the evaluation of the quality of institutions' work'. This will integrate the M&E framework for the dual VET model into the national quality assurance system through the processes of external evaluation and self-evaluation of quality. A capacity-building programme will also be organised for regional school administrations. In 2025 and 2026, the revised M&E framework will be implemented in 65 VET schools offering dual programmes.

6.15 Conclusions

While most of the framework quality criteria are met, with margins for improvement in some cases, part of the criteria for framework conditions may need further attention.

Strengths

- There are written contracts defining the rights and obligations of the learner, the employer, and the VET school – a dual VET model contract between the school and the employer, and the WBL contract between the employer and the learner. (Criterion 1)
- An integral part of the dual VET model contract is the WBL programme, which includes learning outcomes based on the qualification standards. Industry representatives from different sectors are involved in shaping the learning outcomes. (Criterion 2)
- An instructor (in-company trainer) is appointed at the employer to implement, lead and supervise WBL in the dual VET model. (Criterion 3)
- The WBL proportion will increase gradually, starting from the 2026/2027 school year. WBL will amount to at least 60% of the total number of hours of vocational subjects for three-year programmes, and at least 40% of the total number of hours of vocational subjects for four-year programmes. (Criterion 4)
- Learners in the dual VET model participating in WBL are entitled to monthly compensation and the cost is borne by the employer, who also reimburses the learners for their travel costs. (Criterion 5)
- Learners are entitled to social protection: the employer must cover health insurance for work-related injury and pay contributions to the Pension and Disability Insurance Fund. (Criterion 6)
- The employer must ensure that the occupational health and safety measures prescribed by law are in place. Health and safety regulations in the workplace are part of the curricula. (Criterion 7)
- A comprehensive regulatory framework for the dual VET model is in place, including the main law (LDE) as well as various by-laws on WBL. (Criterion 8)
- Collaboration between schools and companies is visibly improving. The CCIS plays a key role in accrediting companies, training instructors and facilitating cooperation between schools and employers. Company accreditation rates are increasing over time and company accreditation processes are improving. (Criterion 9)
- As part of the cost-sharing arrangements for high-demand occupations, monthly financial support is available for learners, paid from the State budget on top of the legally prescribed compensation for WBL paid by employers. There are also subsidies covering up to 50% of the compensation for WBL paid by employers (this will support small and medium-sized enterprises which do not have sufficient resources to accept more learners). (Criterion 10)
- CGC teams (including professional associations, local governments, and employers) are established in VET schools implementing the dual VET model. (Criterion 12)
- Information on dual VET model programmes and companies offering WBL is provided on the official websites of the MoE, CCIS and IIE and of the schools offering dual VET model programmes. (Criterion 13)
- There are ongoing efforts to integrate the M&E framework of the dual VET model into the national quality assurance system. (Criterion 14)

Challenges / gaps

- At system level, there is no further training available for instructors in the dual VET model to update their skills, knowledge and competences. However, there are some initiatives at project level. (Criterion 3)
- While trade unions participate in the sector skills councils and the Council for NQFS, they are not directly involved in WBL implementation. (Criterion 9)
- While flexible pathways for VET students are assured by the NQFS, there are no specific provisions for dual VET. (Criterion 11)
- CGC in primary schools has been indicated as one of the challenges for the further development of dual education and training at secondary level. (Criterion 12)
- EQAVET principles are still not implemented in the country. (Criterion 14)

7. WORK-BASED LEARNING IN CONTINUING VOCATIONAL EDUCATION AND TRAINING

7.1 Types of programmes with a work-based learning component

The offer of CVET programmes provided by a PROAE is diverse. Some are aligned completely with the qualification standards ([see section 6.3](#)), some only partially and some are not based on the qualification standards at all. Official documents are issued accordingly, which may be either a certificate (*сертификат*) or an attestation (*уверење*). A PROAE can also issue a confirmation (*поверда*), but this is not an official document that grants a partial or full qualification (see examples in Table 4).

The share of WBL depends on the qualification standard and vocational training programme developed. The extent of WBL in training programmes is not prescribed in the regulations, nor is it specified as a separate component in the available PROAE Register. Information on the WBL share could be obtained by reviewing the CVET programmes, but they are not publicly shared, except for brief descriptions available on the websites of different providers (Akademija Oxford, *Burek maker*, etc.). Nevertheless, on the official website of the QA, the 'Instructions for drafting non-formal adult education programmes' guide is available and provides the essential steps for developing a comprehensive training programme (Qualifications Agency, 2022). This guide is based on the LNQFS, the Rulebook (2021) and the 'Methodology for developing training programmes based on qualification standards' (SDC, 2021). WBL is not specifically addressed in this guide.

CVET is delivered by VET schools, on top of their upper-secondary VET offer, or training centres or companies. In all cases, training providers have to be accredited.

Article 1 of the LDE mentions that its provisions are applicable to crafts education (*majstorsko*), specialist education (*specijalističko*) and 'education for work' (*obrazovanje za rad*), but there are no further details on this in the Law.

According to the LNQFS, NQFS level 2 can be acquired by completing the education for work (*obrazovanje za rad*) programme lasting up to two years, through non-formal adult education lasting from 120 to 360 hours of training, or through RPL. The access requirement is NQFS level 1.

Post-secondary non-tertiary VET (NQFS level 5), in accordance with the LNQFS, requires prior work experience of at least two years, and can be acquired by completing the crafts education (*majstorsko*) and specialist education (*specijalističko*) programmes. It may be offered by VET schools or non-formal adult education providers (including QA-accredited companies). In the first case, it lasts one or two years and leads to NQFS level 5 qualifications. In the second case, non-formal programmes are offered by accredited providers and last a minimum of six months. Access requirements are at NQFS level 3 or 4 or RPL through the official validation procedure of work experience of at least two years.

The QA website's national qualifications search engine provides basic information about standard-based or non-standard-based qualifications. Information is also provided on whether these qualifications can be acquired through formal education, non-formal learning or RPL. The qualifications are described in a general, essay-like format, without providing information on the share of theoretical and practical parts.

The Law on Adult Education (2020) introduced the concept of PROAEs as training providers, detailing the conditions and procedures for accrediting adult education and training providers. The MoE oversees the process for schools, while the QA manages it for other types of providers. The approval procedure for PROAE status began in 2015 with the adoption of the 'Rulebook on detailed conditions regarding programmes, personnel, space, equipment and teaching aids for acquiring PROAE status'. According to data provided at the MoE website about PROAEs, which is regularly updated, there are 185 schools and other organisations with PROAE status and 844 adult education programmes. According to information from QA representatives, approximately 30-40% of the training programmes offered by PROAEs are provided in collaboration with companies or by companies accredited as

PROAE. These programmes include a minimum of 25% WBL or practical training at the workplace as part of the overall training.

The role of companies in providing WBL is not provided for in legislation, except that the abovementioned rulebook states that they, as legal entities, can be contracted for the implementation of WBL by PROAEs.

According to the Continuing Vocational Training Survey (CVTS)²⁰ conducted by the Statistical Office of the Republic of Serbia (SORS, 2022) from March to May 2021, nearly half of companies in Serbia (49.2%) provide some form of CVET for their employees, with 24.8% of all employees attending training sessions. Courses were usually conducted away from the active workplace, in locations specifically designed for learning, such as classrooms or training centres, while 'other forms were related to active work or active workplaces' (no proportion is given for these two different types).

The analysis below was guided by the 14 criteria of the European Framework for Quality and Effective Apprenticeships (EFQEA).

7.2 Written agreement (Criterion 1)

To perform WBL, the training provider / PROAE signs a special business-technical cooperation contract with the employer (the Rulebook does not mention whether learners must sign this contract). The regulations do not include any provisions regarding the content of the contract, such as details about compensation, working hours or contractual obligations between trainees and the training provider (Rulebook, 2021)²¹.

7.3 Learning outcomes (Criterion 2)

The relevant regulations prescribe the development of learning outcomes. For non-formal VET, providers are required to design and structure their training programmes based on learning outcomes. The 'Methodology for developing training programmes based on qualification standards' (SDC, 2021) and the 'Guide for acquiring PROAE status' (Pejatovic et al., 2021) provide step-by-step explanations on how to develop a training programme, starting from the qualification standards and leading to a structured training programme that includes modules and specific learning outcomes.

Article 4 of the Rulebook (2021), concerning the conditions for the implementation of the training programme, stipulates that if the programme is conducted at the employer, the learning outcomes and the content of the programme's practical part, which is carried out as WBL, must be specified in the programme.

7.4 Pedagogical support (Criterion 3)

Instructors / in-company trainers are not specifically mentioned in CVET regulations in the context of WBL.

Article 12 of the Rulebook (2021) stipulates that PROAEs should have, among other staff, instructors who have at least three years of work experience in jobs or occupations relevant to the programme and hold at least the same level of qualification for which the participant is being trained.

Instructors of CVET programmes are required to obtain at least three out of five andragogic competences related to adult education skills within three months of acquiring PROAE status. This

²⁰ The CVTS is part of EU statistics on lifelong learning. The survey aims to compile comparable statistical information on continuing vocational training in enterprises; more details available at: [Continuing vocational training survey - Eurostat \(europa.eu\)](https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/tgm/table.do?tab=table&init=1&language=en&code=sdg_8_4_1)

²¹ Article 20 of the Rulebook stipulates: 'A PROAE may, under implementation of the programme, conduct certain forms of educational work in collaboration with other PROAEs or with legal entities where practical work is carried out. For this purpose, a special contract must be signed.'

can be achieved through a training programme lasting at least 50 hours, with a minimum of 10 hours dedicated to each andragogic competence.

Andragogical competencies can also be proven through the recognition process led by the HE institutions accredited for study programmes in the field of andragogy, and the professional associations for andragogists.

7.5 Workplace component (Criterion 4)

Information on the scope of the WBL component in CVET programmes in Serbia is not available. There is a requirement to specify the total duration and the distribution between theoretical and practical training/exercises when developing the programme to achieve the learning outcomes, but the WBL component is not specified. In the PROAE Register, which is available on the QA website, general descriptions of training offered can be obtained, including an overview of training where companies are involved in providing it and where WBL is conducted. The Register provides details such as PROAE registration number, address and other details, short descriptions of the training programmes, entrance level preconditions, duration of the programmes with division into theoretical and practical parts in class hours, and type of certificate (see Table 4).

Table 4: Examples of training descriptions accessed in the PROAE register

Programme	Entry level	Theoretical part in hrs	Practical part in hrs	Certificate
Training for butchers	NQFS level 1	30	246	Certificate for Partially Achieved Standard of Vocational Competences
Training for serving beverages, drinks, appetisers and meals	NQFS level 1	42	222	Certificate for Partially Achieved Standard of Vocational Competences
Training for industrial mechatronics specialists	NQFS level 3 and 4	248	552	Certificate for Fully Achieved Qualification Standard
Training for bakers	NQFS level 1	184	776	Certificate for Achieved Standard of Vocational Competences
Training for locksmith welders	NQFS level 1	220	880	Certificate for Fully Achieved Qualification Standard

Source: Prepared by the author, based on the PROAE Register

7.6 Pay and/or compensation (Criterion 5)

Allowances and wages are not regulated in the legislation and not addressed in the available documents.

7.7 Social protection (Criterion 6)

Health and pension insurance and social protection for training participants are provided according to their status, whether they are employed or unemployed, in line with the Law on Safety and Health at Work (2023) and the Law on Contributions for Mandatory Social Insurance (2025). Information about protection against accidents is part of the obligatory module in CVET programmes, including those with a WBL component.

7.8 Work, health and safety conditions (Criterion 7)

The premises of any PROAE offering WBL must meet hygienic and technical standards in terms of lighting, visibility, noise protection, acoustics of teaching rooms, heating and cooling, water supply, electrical installations, IT equipment installations, fire protection and similar. This comes under the conditions provided for in Article 16 of the Rulebook (2021). Based on the information from the interview, all CVET programmes begin with an initial module on health and safety at work. Specifications about the delivery of this module and its duration are outlined in the PROAE training programme.

7.9 Regulatory framework (Criterion 8)

The regulatory framework regulates CVET in general, rather than WBL specifically. Desk research showed that there are no WBL-specific regulations in CVET, and that the term 'WBL' is not used in guides for continuing training programme development.

The Law on Adult Education (2020) covers CVET and lifelong learning initiatives, ensuring opportunities for adults to upgrade their skills and qualifications. Articles 39 to 43 of the LNQFS regulate acquiring PROAE status, RPL and adult education activities. The Rulebook (2021) is the most important regulation. It elaborates on the activities needed for the establishment of PROAE, how training programmes should be structured, CGC provided by PROAE, examination, personnel, training of personnel, equipment and carrying out of WBL, and the employer. The 'Methodology for developing training programmes based on qualification standards' (SDC, 2021) considers and elaborates on the issues that are relevant to developing non-formal vocational training programmes in accordance with the previously mentioned rulebook. The Rulebooks (2022a and 2022b) regulate PROAE quality assurance, which is monitored by the QA, while quality assurance of primary and secondary schools with PROAE status is the responsibility of the MoE (Rulebook 2019c). More information on quality assurance can be found in [section 7.13](#).

7.10 Involvement of social partners (Criterion 9)

Employers and industry representatives participate in the development of qualification standards. By defining the vocational skills required for specific sectors, they influence the nature and scope of WBL in VET curricula and training programme development. Social partners are also represented in councils and advisory bodies, as detailed in Chapter 5.

Local partnerships in CVET are envisaged under the regulations (Rulebook, 2021). For example, a training provider or PROAE may, within the implementation of the programme, conduct WBL in collaboration with other PROAEs or with employers where WBL is carried out, provided that an agreement is concluded for this purpose.

7.11 Support for companies (Criterion 10)

Financial and/or non-financial support for companies providing CVET is not regulated in the legislation and not addressed in the available documents.

7.12 Transparency (Criterion 13)

The PROAE Sub-Register is available on the QA website, while the list of PROAEs is available on the MoE website in Excel format. In addition to data on training programmes, the NQFS Portal also provides data on employers where practical training is conducted. These websites contain documents describing the procedure for acquiring PROAE status. The 'Guide for Acquiring PROAE status' (Pejatovic et al., 2021) is available on the QA website, while the document 'Procedure for acquiring PROAE status for primary and secondary Schools for the activity of non-formal adult education' is

available on the MoE website. The QA website also provides guides for self-evaluation and external evaluation of PROAE, as well as regulations that important for operating a PROAE. The websites of different training providers and training centres offering a broad range of vocational trainings are easily accessible. They offer a general description of the course, such as duration, number of classes of theory and practice, prices and certification.

7.13 Quality assurance and tracking of apprentices (Criterion 14)

Quality assurance mechanisms in schools and training centres offering CVET are grounded in bylaws that regulate the standards and procedures for self-assessment and external assessments of educational institutions. (Rulebook, 2024)

For non-formal education, an external evaluation of a PROAE is mandatory and conducted by the QA at least once during the five-year approval period of their status. PROAE also conduct self-evaluation of the quality of their work, assessing the achievement of indicators for standards in these areas: quality management at PROAE level, the programme and learning process, participants' achievements and support for participants in their career and personal development (Rulebooks 2022a and 2022b). The bylaw prescribes support for participants in career and personal development as a separate quality area. PROAEs collect data on the career development of participants after the training. There is a specific indicator, and a system has been established to monitor participants/candidates position in the labour market upon completion of the programme, the quality and relevance of the acquired competencies and the effects on further career development.

However, the quality standards for non-formal education currently do not include specific areas or indicators for CVET with WBL, such as quality areas related to companies. Efforts are currently underway to improve assessments of skills acquisition in the workplace and finalise the M&E framework of the dual VET model.

7.14 Conclusions

Strengths

- The training provider / PROAE must sign a written contract with the employer for implementation of the WBL component. (Criterion 1)
- Training providers of CVET programmes are required to design and structure their programmes based on learning outcomes. (Criterion 2)
- Social protection, including health and pension insurance for training participants, is provided according to status (employed/unemployed) in line with the relevant laws. (Criterion 6)
- The premises of any PROAE offering WBL must meet the relevant health, safety, hygienic and technical standards. (Criterion 7)
- Social partners play a crucial role in shaping the framework for WBL by defining sector-specific vocational skills and contributing to standards development, which enhances the adaptability of CVET programmes to meet labour market needs. (Criterion 9)
- The PROAE Sub-Register is available on the QA website, and the list of PROAEs is available on the MoE website. Websites of different training providers and training centres provide information about available training. (Criterion 13)
- WBL is offered by accredited providers offering CVET, i.e. PROAEs, a status introduced by the Law on Adult Education (2020). (Criterion 14)

Challenges / gaps

- Contracting arrangements for WBL, particularly the mutual rights and obligations of learners, training providers and employers, are not sufficiently covered in the legislation, which does not include provisions on the minimum obligatory content of the contract. (Criterion 1)
- Instructors / in-company trainers are not specifically mentioned in CVET regulations in the context of WBL. There are insufficient pedagogical guidelines for instructors / in-company trainers in workplace settings. (Criterion 3)
- The scope of WBL within CVET programmes is currently not clearly defined. (Criterion 4)
- Compensation for learners is not regulated in the existing legislation. (Criterion 5)
- The existing regulations on the work of PROAEs are rather related to non-formal education in general, and do not cover aspects related to WBL, such as clear contractual arrangements, cost-sharing and other support. (Criterion 8)
- Financial and/or non-financial support for companies providing CVET is not regulated in the existing legislation. (Criterion 10)
- The existing quality assurance standards for non-formal education do not specifically address WBL. (Criterion 14)

8. WORK-BASED LEARNING IN ACTIVE LABOUR MARKET POLICIES

ALMP measures in Serbia aim to connect supply and demand in the labour market and are offered by the NES. These measures include active jobseeking measures, additional education and training, employment and self-employment support, activation measures for persons with disabilities, and support measures for persons with disabilities who enter into employment under special working conditions.

8.1 Types of programmes with a work-based learning component

The 'Additional education and training' measure is the only ALMP with a WBL component. It includes a set of programmes offering access to professional training (*stručno osposobljavanje*) and skills-development opportunities tailored to the needs of learners and the demands of the labour market (see Table 5).

The NES Work Programme for 2024 includes the measure 'Additional education and training', encompassing a set of programmes with a WBL component, as shown in Table 5, which have been in place for around 10 to 15 years and will continue in the future. According to the information collected during the interviews, all programmes have a minimum of 25% WBL, although there is no official document specifying the WBL share.

Table 5: Types of programmes with a WBL component within the 'additional education and training' measure

Programmes	Beneficiary ²²	Duration	WBL share
Professional practice (<i>stručna praksa</i>)	Unemployed under 30 yrs of age, with a secondary education or HE qualifications and no work experience in their field of education.	Up to 6, 9 or 12 months ²³	Conducted entirely at the workplace
Internship (<i>pripravnništvo</i>) for young people with HE	Unemployed under 30 yrs of age, with HE qualifications and no work experience in their field of education.	From 6 to 12 months	Conducted entirely at the workplace
Internship for young people with a secondary education	Unemployed under 30 yrs of age with secondary education qualifications and no work experience in their field of education.	Up to 6 months	Conducted entirely at the workplace
Acquiring practical knowledge (<i>sticanje praktičnih znanja</i>)	Unemployed with secondary education qualifications or having completed the Functional Elementary Education of Adults (FEEA) programme, dropouts from secondary education, low level of qualifications.	3 + 3 months 6 + 6 months	Conducted entirely at the workplace
Training for the labour market	Hard to employ persons, with a low level of or no qualifications, individuals who have not completed secondary school and those completing the FEEA programme.	Up to 6 months	70-80% WBL

²² Certain categories of unemployed individuals (such as persons with disabilities and Roma men/women) are included under preferential conditions. See the action plan for 2024–2026 for implementation of the Employment Strategy in the Republic of Serbia for the period 2021–2026.

²³ Depending on the qualification level of trainees: up to NQF level 4, up to NQF level 6, and at least NQF level 6, respectively

Programmes	Beneficiary ²²	Duration	WBL share
Training at the employer's request – for unemployed	Unemployed who meet general and specific training requirements, if there is no person with the necessary knowledge and skills on the NES unemployment register.	1 week to 6 months	70-100% WBL
Training at the employer's request - for employees	Employed (for at least 6 months and on the basis of an indefinite-duration labour contract), to upskill or reskill for the needs of the work process and to maintain employment with the employer.	Up to 6 months	at least 25% WBL
Youth employment promotion programme 'My First Salary'	Unemployed under 30 yrs of age, with at least secondary education qualifications and no work experience in their field of education.	Up to 9 months	conducted entirely at the work place

Source: Prepared by the author, based on the website of the National Employment Service and interviews.

'Professional practice' and 'Internships' are both forms of professional training (*stručno osposobljavanje*) aimed at preparing individuals for independent²⁴ work in a specific occupation, with the goal of acquiring the necessary competencies and meeting the requirements for taking a professional exam, if such an exam is mandated by law or in a by-law for certain jobs. In both cases, the individual must have previously obtained the appropriate – at least secondary-level – education. The main difference is that 'Internships' are conducted under an employment contract, while 'Professional practice' can be carried out without establishing an employment relationship, as a form of practical training in accordance with the Labour Law (2005).

'Professional practice' prioritises healthcare, social protection, education and the judiciary in the public sector, while in the private sector, all employers can participate regardless of their sector, and no employment contract is signed (NES, *Professional practice*). 'Internships' are conducted on the basis of an established employment relationship and implemented by employers in the private sector only (NES, *Internship measure*). Employers providing a 'My First Salary' implemented through four cycles in accordance with the Government Regulation can be from both private and public sectors. These three programmes are intended for unemployed young people with no work experience. Providers are obliged to possess adequate staffing capacity for professional training, including a full-time mentor, and have the necessary technical, spatial and other capacities to carry out the programme²⁵.

According to the 2023 report on the position and needs of young people in the Republic of Serbia (Stojanovic et al., 2023), provided by the National Youth Council (KOMS)²⁶, approximately one-quarter of young individuals (26%) was engaged in paid practical training in 2023, with this number halving in 2024 (13%).

Training providers for other programmes under 'Additional education and training' must be accredited as PROAEs by the QA, MoE or the Provincial Secretariat for Education, Regulations, Administration, and National Minorities – National Communities. 'Training for the labour market' is conducted according to the training catalogue issued for every calendar year²⁷, based on labour market needs and following a public procurement process. Some training provided by PROAEs is based on the qualification standard and provides a certificate of acquired professional skills. The number of such training courses is publicly available via the PROAE Sub-Register.

Training at the employer's request – for the unemployed' refers to training initiatives delivered by private sector employers and enterprises, primarily aimed at the professional rehabilitation and employment of persons with disabilities. While these entities operate under private sector frameworks, they are predominantly state-owned and therefore do not require accreditation from the Quality Assurance authority. For 2024 and 2025, under the Youth Guarantee, the public calls of the NES

²⁴ This should be understood as working without supervision, not as self-employment

²⁵ NES public calls for mentioned programmes available on the NES website: <https://www.nsz.gov.rs/sadrzaji/nzs-konkursi/10>

²⁶ KOMS represents an alliance of 111 associations of young people and for young people from the Republic of Serbia, which advocates for improving the position of young people in Serbia.

²⁷ Catalogues for 2023 are available at: <https://nsz.gov.rs/sadrzaji/katalog-obuka-za-trziste-rada/4122>

require this programme to be conducted by a PROAE or an employer with this status, in accordance with EC Guidelines.

Employers receive instructions on how to develop the training, which comprises six levels based on its complexity and duration. For each level, guidelines are provided on the total number of 'theory-practical classes' (without separating theory and practice), their duration, the cost per candidate and a brief description of the training. The NES is the body which approves those programmes. For instance, for level six, for training such as for traditional crafts, hand weaving, welding, plastic moulding, laser cutting/engraving, auto mechanics, auto diagnostics, etc., the proposed number of theory-practical classes is 960 class hours, the duration is up to six months, and the cost per candidate is RSD 200 000 (approx. EUR 1 700). The training description includes acquiring knowledge, skills and competences by covering multiple subjects or learning areas, appropriate theoretical preparation and intensive practice, applying knowledge and skills to work on more complex tasks with multiple operations in a specific industrial field using highly complex tools, equipment or machines, and a broader scope of tasks in certain activities. The assessment method is not described.

'Training at the employer's request – for the employee' is implemented with private sector employers, in accordance with a public call and regulations detailing criteria and conditions for involving employees in employer-required training, prescribed by the Minister responsible for employment. The training provider must be accredited as a PROAE (or be widely recognised as relevant provider in the sector, such as Microsoft in the IT industry), and the NES's role is to contribute with up to 50% of the eligible costs.

FEEA learners (unemployed without primary education), after completing the basic education cycles, are referred to the 'Acquiring practical knowledge' and 'Training for the labour market' programmes.

Table 6: Number of trainees in each 'additional education and training' programme in the period 2019-2022

Programme	2019	2020	2021	2022
Professional practice	4,581	3,013	2,150	3,068
Internship for young people with HE	138	479	590	566
Internship for young people with a secondary education	264	322	279	249
Acquiring practical knowledge	910	775	622	614
Training for the labour market	1,257	136	63	811
Training at the employer's request – for the unemployed	622	527	708	588
Training at the request of the employer – for the employee	25	36	42	29
Functional elementary education of adults (FEEA)	1,305	1,049	1,062	1,032
'My First Salary' programme	-	8,224	8,976	9,387
TOTAL	9,102	14,561	14,492	16,344

Source: Prepared by author according to data obtained from NES

The analysis below was guided by the criteria of the European Quality Framework for Traineeships (QFT).

8.2 Conclusion of a written traineeship agreement (Criteria 2 and 3)

The NES implements programmes under the 'Additional education and training' measure through a public call (NES, *Public calls*) for employers interested in providing training tailored to their needs or needs of the unemployed (in the case of 'Professional practice' or 'Internships'²⁸). The public call describes, among other things, the contractual arrangements between the NES, the employer and the learner, outlining their mutual rights, obligations and the compensation/wage terms for each programme.

After a decision on the implementation of the programme, the Director or a representative of the NES and the employer sign a contract (in the case of 'Professional practice', 'Internships', 'Acquiring practical knowledge', and 'Training at the employer's request').

Additionally, the employer is obliged to sign a contract with the learner stipulating their mutual rights and obligations. These can be: a 'Training contract' (*уговор о стручном оспособљавању*), 'Internship contract' (*уговор са приправником*) or 'Fixed-term employment contract'. For most of the programmes, the legal basis for these contracts is the Labour Law (2005), Articles 10, 31 and 201, stipulating contracts for professional training and development (*stručno osposobljavanje i usavršavanje*), and the Rulebook (2018a). However, the Labour Law does not apply to contracts signed under the programmes 'Training for the labour market' (no employer involved, the NES signs a contract with the learner), and 'Training at the employer's request' (the NES signs contracts with both the employer and the learner).

Moreover, the Labour Law does not apply to contracts under the 'My First Salary' programme (governed by the Regulation on the Youth Employment Incentive Programme 'My First Salary') where a tripartite contract is signed between the NES, the employer and the learner.

Finally, the NES and the learner also sign a contract which stipulates mutual rights and obligations and determines compensation, training duration and working hours (in the case of 'Professional practice', 'Training for the labour market' and 'Training at the employer's request'). It is the employer's obligation to provide a report to the NES on the learner's progress.

8.3 Learning and training objectives (Criteria 4 and 5)

The NES annual work programme provides an overview of the objectives for each programme (NES, 2024) and they are defined in a general manner. For example, the learning and training objectives for 'Professional practice' and 'Internship' are defined as 'improving the quality of the workforce, e.g. increasing competitiveness and enhancing the employability of unemployed individuals in the open labour market'. In the public call for this programme, one of the conditions states that the employer, when submitting the application, must also provide a training programme for the unemployed person as part of the documentation (in a free format, with the programme content outlined on a monthly basis).

The contract includes general provisions related to the obligations of employers. For example, in the contract for 'Internship' it states: 'The employer is obliged to enable the trainee to carry out work independently in the occupation'. In the contracts for 'Professional practice', 'Internship', 'Acquiring practical knowledge' and 'My First Salary', general educational objectives are provided. Learners signing the 'Contract for the inclusion of an individual in the labour market measure training' are informed about the training objectives and skills to be achieved at the beginning of the training.

²⁸ Whenever the term 'Internships' (plural) is used, it refers to both the internship for young people with a secondary education and the internship for young people with a higher education.

8.4 Working conditions applicable to trainees (Criteria 6, 7 and 8)

Participation in the 'Internships' and 'Acquiring practical knowledge' programmes leads to the establishment of an employment relationship, whereas participation in other programmes does not. In the case of 'Training at the employer's request – for the unemployed', at least 50% of those who successfully complete the programme are employed. During the implementation of the programmes, the NES reimburses the employer on a monthly basis for the applicable taxes and contributions for mandatory social insurance.

Apart from the NES reimbursement discussed above:

- During the 'Internships' and 'Acquiring practical knowledge' programmes, the NES reimburses the employer on a monthly basis for the net minimum wage of the learner (for full-time work hours) and the corresponding taxes and contributions for mandatory social insurance (NES, *Internship measure*). If it concerns an 'Internship for young people with a HE', the amount is increased by 20%.
- For 'Professional practice', 'Training at the employer's request' and 'Training for the labour market' programmes, secondary education graduates receive monthly financial assistance of RSD 30 000 (approx. EUR 255), and higher education graduates get RSD 35 000 (approx. EUR 300) for full time participation, along with funds for travel expenses (except for 'Professional practice'), and are insured in case of work injury and occupational disease (NES, *Professional practice, Training at the employer's request, Training for the labour market*).
- For the 'My First Salary' programme, the monthly financial allowance is paid directly to the learner's account: RSD 28 000 (approx. EUR 240) for secondary education graduates and RSD 34 000 (approx. EUR 290) for those with a higher education. In addition to the amount paid by the NES, employers may provide additional funds. The NES also covers the costs of contributions for work injury and occupational disease insurance, in accordance with the law (NES, *'My First Salary' programme*).

8.5 Rights and obligations (Criterion 9)

The contract signed between the NES, the employer/training provider and the learner governs their mutual rights and obligations. In public calls, descriptions of the obligations of the parties involved are provided, such as the obligation of an employer to offer the learner the tasks needed to gain experience and skills, to supply a mentor/instructor, to provide assessment/examination, to pay a compensation and similar.

The public call also ensures obligations regarding confidentiality and ownership of intellectual property rights. All personal data provided to the NES is processed solely for participation in the public call, in accordance with the Law on Personal Data Protection. Access to personal data is limited to authorised NES personnel, who are obligated to maintain confidentiality.

8.6 Reasonable duration (Criteria 10, 11 and 12)

Most ALMPs last up to six months. These include 'Professional practice' and the 'Internship for young people with a secondary education', as well as the various training programmes mentioned: 'Training for the labour market', 'Training at the employer's request – for the unemployed', and 'Training at the employer's request – for the employed'. The programmes intended for young people with a higher education tend to last longer, such as 'Professional practice' and 'Internship for young people with a HE' (up to 12 months) and the 'My First Salary' programme (up to nine months).

8.7 Proper recognition of traineeships (Criterion 13)

The assessment of knowledge, skills and competences in ALMPs with a WBL component is clearly outlined in the contractual obligations, as described in public calls. On completion of the programmes under 'Additional education and training', different public documents are issued, of a defined type if the training provider is a PROAE. These may be a confirmation (*потврда*), an attestation (*уверење*) or a certificate (сертификат).

8.8 Transparency requirements (Criteria 14 and 15)

'Training for the labour market' is conducted through public procurement, while all other programmes are implemented through public calls, available on the official website of the NES (NES, *Public calls*).

The official NES website also includes the 'Instruction to employers for the development of training programmes' (National Employment Service, undated).

8.9 Use of European Structural and Investment Funds (Criterion 18)

Serbia has access to a range of EU funding instruments and donor projects to support human capital development and preparation for EU accession. The main EU funding provided for ALMP came via the following projects: IPA 2012 'Increasing the effectiveness of employment policy towards vulnerable groups' (MoLEVSA, *IPA 2012 direct grant...*); IPA 2013 'EU support for the National Employment Service in employment policies' (NES, EU support...), with 352 learners in 'Training at the employer's request' and 'Training for the labour market'; and IPA 2020 'Youth Guarantee', aimed at the piloting and future mainstreaming of integrated policy approaches to young people not in employment, education or training, including by offering quality-assured apprenticeships and traineeships opportunities. Within the IPA 2020 programming cycle, the technical support project 'Technical assistance for the implementation, monitoring and evaluation of employment policy at the national and local level', including capacity building for participation in the European Social Fund, as well as the direct grant to the NES 'Implementation of innovative ALMP measures and approaches to increase the integration of the long-term unemployed, young people, women, people with disabilities and harder-to-employ groups in the labour market' are being implemented.

Other donors support the development of work-based learning opportunities for the young workforce, such as Swiss Development Cooperation through the project E2E – Education to Employment (Phase 2).

8.10 Applying the quality framework for traineeships (Criteria 19, 20, 21 and 22)

When adopted, the draft Law on Traineeship (*Zakon o Radnoj Praksi*) will harmonise existing national regulations regarding traineeships (as part of ALMP / practical training in the labour market) with the quality criteria established by the 2014 EU Council Recommendation. The objective of the draft law is to improve the position of young people on the labour market, as well as older long-term unemployed persons registered with the NES, through the implementation of quality work practices to ensure a faster transition of young people from school to work, and for the older long-term unemployed, faster integration into the labour market (MoLEVSA, undated). At the beginning of 2025, a new working group was formed to work further on the draft law on traineeships.

8.11 Conclusions

Strengths

- Contractual agreements between the NES and the employer and between the NES and the learner (contracts with or without an employment relationship) outline the rights and obligations of all parties. (Criteria 2 and 3)
- National laws and regulations ensure that the rights of learners concerning working conditions, social insurance and insurance for work-related injuries and occupational diseases are protected. Additionally, contractual agreements detail the provision of an allowance or compensation. (Criteria 6, 7 and 8)
- Mutual rights and obligations are defined in the contractual arrangements, and confidentiality policies are required as an integral part of the contract in each programme. (Criterion 9)
- Most programmes last up to six months, while some programmes intended for young people such as 'Professional practice' and 'Internships for young people with HE' last longer, in line with national regulations. (Criterion 10)
- The assessment of learners is outlined in the contractual obligations, and a confirmation, an attestation or a certificate are issued on completion of a particular programme. (Criterion 13)
- Public calls for all the programmes under 'Additional education and training' are launched each year and are available on the official NES website. (Criterion 15)
- The programmes included within the ALMP measure 'Additional education and training' mostly align with the recommendations outlined in the quality framework for traineeships. Assessment and examinations are integral to the ALMP programmes, ensuring that learners' progress and skills are evaluated. (Criterion 19)

Challenges / gaps

- Learning and training objectives are not specified in a detailed manner specific to each programme. Contractual provisions related to employers' obligations include mainly generic formulations related to learning objectives. (Criterion 4)
- The duration of the 'My First Salary' programme, which is up to nine months, exceeds what is recommended by the European Quality Framework for Traineeships, which suggests a maximum duration of six months. (Criterion 10)
- There are no provisions for cross-border mobility of learners. (Criterion 16)

Finally, another challenge not strictly connected to any criteria of the quality framework for traineeships is that the Law on Traineeships has still not been adopted. This limits the possibility of addressing gaps in safeguarding the work rights of both young individuals and adults during training outside the scope of the NES.

ANNEX 1: DETAILS OF INTERVIEWEES

#	Organisation	Position	Date
#1	Qualification Agency	Various positions	30/08/2024
#2	National Employment Service	Head of Department of the Directorate	22/08/2024
#3	Office for Dual Education and National Qualification Framework of Serbia	Director Various positions	26/08/2024
#4	NIRAS International Consulting	Consultant	23/04/2024
#5	Ministry of Labour, Employment, Veteran and Social Affairs	Head of the Department for Active Employment Policy in the Sector for Labour and Employment Senior Advisor for Active Employment Policy Measures in the Department of Labour and Employment	01/04/2025
#6	Chamber of Commerce and Industry of Serbia	Head of the Centre for Education, Dual Education and Educational Policy	01/04/2025

ANNEX 2: QUALITY CRITERIA FOR APPRENTICESHIPS, BASED ON THE EUROPEAN FRAMEWORK FOR QUALITY AND EFFECTIVE APPRENTICESHIPS

Criteria for learning and working conditions

Written agreement

1. Before the start of the apprenticeship a written agreement should be concluded to define the rights and obligations of the apprentice, the employer, and where appropriate the vocational education and training institution, related to learning and working conditions.

Learning outcomes

2. The delivery of a set of comprehensive learning outcomes defined in accordance with national legislation should be agreed by the employers and vocational education and training institutions and, where appropriate, trade unions. This should ensure a balance between job-specific skills, knowledge and key competences for lifelong learning supporting both the personal development and lifelong career opportunities of the apprentices with a view to adapt to changing career patterns.

Pedagogical support

3. In-company trainers should be designated and tasked to cooperate closely with vocational education and training institutions and teachers to provide guidance to apprentices and to ensure mutual and regular feed-back. Teachers, trainers and mentors, especially in micro-, small and medium-sized companies, should be supported to update their skills, knowledge and competences in order to train apprentices according to the latest teaching and training methods and labour market needs.

Workplace component

4. A substantial part of the apprenticeship, meaning at least half of it, should be carried out in the workplace with, where possible, the opportunity to undertake a part of the workplace experience abroad. Taking into account the diversity of national schemes, the aim is to progress gradually towards that share of the apprenticeship being workplace learning.

Pay and/or compensation

5. Apprentices should be paid or otherwise compensated, in line with national or sectoral requirements or collective agreements where they exist and taking into account arrangements on cost-sharing between employers and public authorities.

Social protection

6. Apprentices should be entitled to social protection, including necessary insurance in line with national legislation.

Work, health and safety conditions

7. The host workplace should comply with relevant rules and regulations on working conditions, in particular health and safety legislation.

Criteria for framework conditions

Regulatory framework

8. A clear and consistent regulatory framework should be in place based on a fair and equitable partnership approach, including a structured and transparent dialogue among all relevant stakeholders. This may include accreditation procedures for companies and workplaces that offer apprenticeships and/or other quality assurance measures.

Involvement of social partners

9. Social partners, including, where relevant, at sectoral level and/or intermediary bodies, should be involved in the design, governance and implementation of apprenticeship schemes, in line with national industrial relations systems and education and training practices.

Support for companies

10. Financial and/or non-financial support should be envisaged, particularly for micro-, small and medium-sized companies, enabling cost-effective apprenticeships for companies, taking into account, when appropriate, cost-sharing arrangements between employers and public authorities.

Flexible pathways and mobility

11. To facilitate access, entry requirements for apprenticeships should take into account relevant informal and non-formal learning and/or, if relevant, the accomplishment of preparatory programs. Qualifications acquired through apprenticeships should be included in nationally recognised qualification frameworks referenced to the European Qualifications Framework (1). Apprenticeships should allow access to other learning opportunities, including at higher education and training levels, career pathways and/or, where relevant, the accumulation of units of learning outcomes. Transnational mobility of apprentices, either at the workplace or education and training institutions, should be progressively promoted as a component of apprenticeship qualifications.

Career guidance and awareness raising

12. Career guidance, mentoring and learner support should be provided before and during the apprenticeship to ensure successful outcomes, to prevent and reduce drop-outs as well as support those learners to reengage into relevant education and training pathways. Apprenticeships should be promoted as an attractive learning pathway through widely targeted awareness-raising activities.

Transparency

13. The transparency of, and access to apprenticeship offers within and between Member States should be ensured, including with the support of public and private employment services as well as other relevant bodies, and, when appropriate, by using Union tools such as EURES as provided for in the EURES regulation.

Quality assurance and tracking of apprentices

14. Quality assurance approaches should be in place taking into account the European Quality Assurance Reference Framework for Vocational Education and Training (EQAVET) (2), including a process allowing a valid and reliable assessment of the learning outcomes. The tracking of employment and career progression of the apprentices should be pursued, in accordance with national and European legislation on data protection.

ANNEX 3: QUALITY CRITERIA FOR TRAINEESHIPS, BASED ON THE EUROPEAN QUALITY FRAMEWORK FOR TRAINEESHIPS

1. Improve the quality of traineeships, in particular as regards learning and training content and working conditions, with the aim of easing the transition from education, unemployment or inactivity to work by putting in practice the following principles for a Quality Framework for Traineeships:

Conclusion of a written traineeship agreement

2. Require that traineeships are based on a written agreement concluded at the beginning of the traineeship between the trainee and the traineeship provider;
3. Require that traineeship agreements indicate the educational objectives, the working conditions, whether an allowance or compensation is provided to the trainee by the traineeship provider, and the rights and obligations of the parties under applicable EU and national law, as well as the duration of the traineeship, as referred to in recommendations 4-12;

Learning and training objectives

4. Promote best practices as regards learning and training objectives in order to help trainees acquire practical experience and relevant skills; the tasks assigned to the trainee should enable these objectives to be attained;
5. Encourage traineeship providers to designate a supervisor for trainees guiding the trainee through the assigned tasks, monitoring and assessing his/her progress;

Working conditions applicable to trainees

6. Ensure that the rights and working conditions of trainees under applicable EU and national law, including limits to maximum weekly working time, minimum daily and weekly rest periods and, where applicable, minimum holiday entitlements, are respected;
7. Encourage traineeship providers to clarify whether they provide coverage in terms of health and accident insurance as well as sick leave;
8. Require that the traineeship agreement clarifies whether an allowance or compensation is applicable, and if applicable, its amount;

Rights and obligations

9. Encourage the concerned parties to ensure that the traineeship agreement lays down the rights and obligations of the trainee and the traineeship provider, including, where relevant, the traineeship provider's policies on confidentiality and the ownership of intellectual property rights;

Reasonable duration

10. Ensure a reasonable duration of traineeships that, in principle, does not exceed six months, except in cases where a longer duration is justified, taking into account national practices;
11. Clarify the circumstances and conditions under which a traineeship may be extended or renewed after the initial traineeship agreement expired;
12. Encourage the practice of specifying in the traineeship agreement that either the trainee or the traineeship provider may terminate it by written communication, providing advance notice of an appropriate duration in view of the length of the traineeship and relevant national practice;

Proper recognition of traineeships

13. Promote the recognition and validation of the knowledge, skills and competences acquired during traineeships and encourage traineeship providers to attest them, on the basis of an assessment, through a certificate;

Transparency requirements

14. Encourage traineeship providers to include in their vacancy notices and advertisements information on the terms and conditions of the traineeship, in particular on whether an allowance and/or compensation and health and accident insurance are applicable; encourage traineeship providers to give information on recruitment policies, including the share of trainees recruited in recent years;
15. Encourage employment services and other providers of career guidance, if providing information on traineeships, to apply transparency requirements;

Cross-border traineeships

16. Facilitate the cross-border mobility of trainees in the European Union inter alia, by clarifying the national legal framework for traineeships and establishing clear rules on hosting trainees from, and the sending of trainees to, other Member States and by reducing administrative formalities;
17. Examine the possibility to make use of the extended EURES network and to exchange information on paid traineeships through the EURES portal;

Use of European structural and investment funds

18. Make use of the European Structural and Investment Funds, namely the European Social Fund and the European Regional Development Fund, in the programming period 2014-2020, and the Youth Employment Initiative, where applicable, for increasing the number and quality of traineeships, including through effective partnerships with all relevant stakeholders;

Applying the quality framework for traineeships

19. Take appropriate measures to apply the quality framework for traineeships as soon as possible;
20. Provide information to the Commission by the end of 2015 on the measures taken in accordance with this Recommendation;
21. Promote the active involvement of social partners in applying the quality framework for traineeships;
22. Promote the active involvement of employment services, educational institutions and training providers in applying the quality framework for traineeships;

ACRONYMS

ALMP	Active labour market policies
CCIS	Chamber of Commerce and Industry of Serbia
CGC	Career guidance and counselling
CVEAE	Centre for Vocational Education and Adult Education
CVET	Continuing vocational education and training
EIB	European Investment Bank
ECTS	European Credit Transfer System
ERP	Economic Reform Programme
ESRS	Employment Strategy of the Republic of Serbia
ETF	European Training Foundation
EQF	European Qualification Framework
EFQEA	European Framework for Quality and Effective Apprenticeships
HE	Higher education
IIE	Institute for Improvement of Education
IVET	Initial vocational education and training
IEQE	Institute for Evaluation and Quality in Education
LDMSHE	Law on the Dual Model of Studies in Higher Education
LDE	Law on Dual Education
LFESS	Law on the Foundations of the Education System in Serbia
LSE	Law on Secondary Education
LNQFS	Law on the National Qualification Framework of Serbia

MoERD	Ministry of Economy and Regional Development
MoLEVSA	Ministry of Labour, Employment, Veterans and Social Affairs
MoE	Ministry of Education
MoESTD	Ministry of Education, Science and Technological Development (until 2022)
NES	National Employment Service
NQF	National qualifications framework
NQFS	National qualifications framework of Serbia
PROAE	Publicly recognised organiser of adult education
RPL	Recognition of prior learning
RS	Republic of Serbia
SC	Sector councils
SEDS	Strategy for Educational Development in Serbia
SORS	Statistical Office of the Republic of Serbia
QA	Qualifications Agency
QFT	Quality framework for traineeships
WBL	Work-based learning

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