

MONITORING THE VET RECOMMENDATION AND THE OSNABRÜCK DECLARATION

SERBIA 2025

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SERBIA COUNTRY BRIEF

Introduction

The Serbia country brief presents the results of the third cycle of the European Training Foundation (ETF)-led monitoring on the [Osnabrück Declaration on vocational education and training \(VET\) as an enabler of recovery and just transitions to digital and green economies \(2020\)](#) and on the [EU Council Recommendation on VET for sustainable competitiveness, social fairness and resilience \(2020\)](#). It represents a part of a broader exercise taking place simultaneously in five EU candidate countries (Albania, Montenegro, North Macedonia, Serbia and Türkiye). By 2022, each country committed to working on a set of priorities within five EU thematic areas, a commitment articulated in the respective National Implementation Plans (NIP). Aiming to align its reporting and monitoring activities with those of the EU Member States, Serbia joined this process in 2021.

The ETF-led monitoring is guided by an analytical framework structured along five EU thematic areas: (1) Agile and resilient VET, adaptive to labour market needs; (2) Flexible and inclusive VET, providing progression and lifelong learning opportunities; (3) Innovative and excellent VET; (4) Attractive VET, based on a modern and digitalised provision; and (5) VET underpinned by quality assurance.

This country brief is structured in two parts: the first part summarises the findings of the monitoring covering the Serbia's priority policy developments in 2024 and 2025 as articulated in the country's National Implementation Plan (available [here](#))¹. The second part provides an overview of the progress in delivering Serbia's NIP for each EU thematic area since 2021.

Serbia became an EU candidate country in 2012 and opened accession negotiations the following year. So far, the country has opened 22 out of 35 negotiation chapters, two of which have been provisionally closed. None have been opened since the revision of the enlargement methodology in June 2021². Following the collapse of the canopy at the entrance to the railway station in Novi Sad in November 2024, Serbia entered a period of a prolonged political crisis. It has been estimated that this has significantly affected education processes and the academic calendar over the last year. Such issues have included the suspension of classes, strikes, university blockades, interruptions and postponement of exams. As corollary, this has impacted planned reform activities. Despite these unfavourable circumstances, the VET-related reform efforts have continued, albeit at a slower pace.

This document was prepared by Ivana Aleksić in cooperation with key VET stakeholders in the country.

Complementary relevant publications are available here: [Transforming vocational education and training: ETF monitoring initiatives and deliverables | ETF](#).

¹ Serbia's NIP did not prioritise EU priority area 3 'Innovative and Excellent VET', which is therefore not covered in this report.

² European Commission. [The EU and Serbia Factsheet 2024](#), October 2024.

Main policy developments in 2024-2025

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

Serbia is about to complete its long-term engagement in the policy area linked to the modernisation of VET standards, curricula, programmes and training courses. Nearly all qualification standards have been revised or newly developed, and an increased share of VET profiles and programmes have been revised accordingly. Currently, three quarters of all VET profiles include programmes based on qualification standards.

In order to strengthen the link between education and the labour market and increase its capacity to service the process more efficiently in the future, during 2023 and 2024 the country worked on improvements to its Sector Skills Councils (SSCs), which are critical institutions for the above processes. Based on recent recommendations from an independent assessment (Office for Dual Education and NQFS, 2024)³, Serbia's SSCs will be a subject of the reform in the upcoming period to ensure more effective engagement of private sector stakeholders as key contributors to the continuous alignment of education and labour market.

While SSC work will continue to supply critical information about the technical skills and competences in demand in the labour market, Serbia has also opted for additional engagement linked to strengthening key competences of its learners. In a separate effort carried out by the Ministry of Education (MoE), the country has engaged in the process of integrating key competences into the National Qualifications Framework of the Republic of Serbia (NQFS).

Modernisation of VET standards, curricula, programmes and training courses

Serbia has continued its commitment to modernising qualification standards (Qs), VET profiles and secondary school programmes through continuous development of new standards and refreshing existing qualification standards by means of VET stakeholder engagement—both at secondary and at higher education levels.

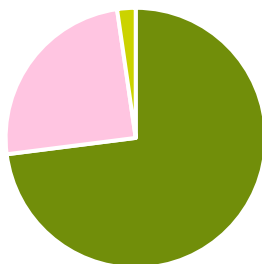
Since 2019, the long process in refreshing qualification standards, which was initiated back in 2012, has used a new methodology and a novel implementation arrangement (with the then-newly established Agency for Qualifications). According to the plan, this process continued over the past year, and it is expected to be completed by the end of the 2026 calendar year. The time needed for processing and adopting a proposal for the QS renewal was significantly reduced in 2024, making the process more efficient.

As of mid-2025, there are 120 VET programmes based on qualification standards (Qs) designed in line with a new methodology; 44 of those are based on Qs designed in line with the old methodology; and 4 are without Qs, as shown in the following diagram⁴. At the same time, the process of refreshing the old and developing the new qualification standards has been largely completed.

³ People 1st. Serbian Sectoral Council Model Recommended Changes, Unpublished material, 2024. Office for Dual Education and NQFS, 2024.

⁴ The Institute for Improvement of Education.

Number of VET profiles in the 2025-2026 education system



- VET programmes with Qs in line with new methodology in 2025/2026
- VET programmes with Qs in line with old methodology in 2025/2026
- VET programmes without Qs in 2025/2026

Source: The Institute for Improvement of Education of the Republic of Serbia.

To enable teachers to adjust delivery of the modernised VET programmes, the Institute for Improvement of Education continues with regular teacher trainings matching all new VET programmes. Additionally, based on the Catalogue of teacher trainings, in the previous period, 20 of 462 teacher trainings on offer through the Institute for Improvement of Education were available for VET teachers teaching specific VET subjects. As of 2025, this number has increased to 24.

A similar process was initiated in the previous year in higher education at university institutions. As a result of the increased activities in this area, a draft bylaw with Methodology for the Development of Qualification Standards in Higher Education was prepared, and a consulting process was organised involving the MoE and Higher Education (HE) institutions, including colleges/post-secondary non-university educational institutions. Activities related to the development of 60 qualification standards at HE were initiated, to be completed by 2027.

Engaging VET stakeholders and strengthening partnerships in VET

To address some of the weaknesses of the existing Sector Skills Councils model in Serbia (SSCs)⁵ (e.g. limited independence, unclear tasks, structural concerns and challenges in decision-making), the Office for Dual Education and the NQFS was supported by the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD) in order to benefit from an external assessment aimed at refining SSC operations and improving private sector involvement in those processes. In collaboration with the Agency for Qualifications, the project task was carried out and resulted in an assessment of the current institutional and operational set-up of the Serbian SSCs, with recommendations for developing a framework for piloting a novel Serbian Sectoral Model. The guidance toolkit for SSC members was prepared to support this process. The Sectoral Council for Traffic and Transport was selected for piloting.

A set of recommendations for systemic improvements of SSC operations includes a need for greater involvement by business representatives/employers in the SSCs' work; a reduction in size of SSCs in order to make their work more effective and efficient; a potential reduction of the number of sectors per SSC; a possible new approach in combining sectors across different SSCs; and others. Recommendations suggested mapping key businesses/company representatives in the country to be involved in the work of SSCs, considering the strategic objectives of the Serbian economy.

Although implementing all the recommendations from the external assessment will require time, in 2024, membership in Sector Skills Councils was renewed due to the expiration of the term of the

⁵ Ibid.

previous SSC membership cohort. That same year, the Agency for Qualifications initiated a series of trainings for the new SSC members.

In 2025, the collaboration with [People 1st International](#) continued, resulting in a proposal for the structural reallocation of the industry branches/sectors within Serbia's Sector Skills Councils, based on the insights from the relevant international comparables⁶. The collaboration will be further extended to include preparation of key input items in order to amend the Law on the National Qualifications Framework, in reference to the work of SSCs.

Acquisition of key competences

During 2024, the Ministry of Education prepared a draft *Framework for Integration of Key Competences into NQFS* (Okvir za integraciju ključnih kompetencija sa kvalifikacijama u NOKS), which includes identification and allocation of key competences at different NQFS levels – making them a more visible part of the NQF. The Framework is expected to enter intra-institutional consultations in the form of a draft by-law.

Key competences have already been included in defining qualifications for levels 3 and 4, within the methodology for defining qualifications from the Agency for Qualifications (AQ) of the Republic of Serbia. Further work in this area is expected to contribute to: (a) harmonising qualifications with student achievement standards in pre-university education, (b) improving mobility between different levels of education, (c) achieving greater flexibility in professional careers and (d) increasing relevancy of qualifications in the labour market.

The need to include key competences in qualification standards was justified in the following manner: (1) key competences include those common to all qualifications at the same qualification level, making their inclusion into a qualification standard beneficial for the horizontal links among diverse qualifications at the same level, as well as for vertical harmonisation of qualifications at different qualification levels; (2) key competences improve alignment and connection of general education and professional/VET education at all levels of education, which provides the basis for horizontal and vertical mobility of students, especially in secondary and higher education; (3) the inclusion of key competences (the same key competences for qualifications at the same NQFS level) would allow recognition of partial qualifications for candidates changing qualifications within the same qualification level; (4) the inclusion of key competences would improve support for individuals in preparing for life and lifelong learning in addition to preparing for a specific qualification and occupation; and (5) it would improve alignment between education and the labour market where employers require candidates with more general competencies in addition to those required to perform a specific job.

This work has been supported through the EU's ongoing Instrument for Pre-Accession Assistance (IPA)-funded project '[Increased Offer and Diversification of Accredited Non-formal Training Courses and Adult Training Providers](#)'.

⁶ [Serbias-Sector-Skills-Councils.pdf](#)

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

Within this thematic area, Serbia has made mixed progress during 2024 and 2025.

Whereas there are challenges in setting up an effective system for recognition of prior learning (RPL), [the ongoing EU IPA-funded programme](#) is oriented towards supporting systemic improvements in non-formal education, broadly speaking, and it includes the objectives related to strengthening the RPL system.

Aiming to improve the offer of non-formal education and training opportunities to the young people in Serbia, work on the establishment of the mechanism for Youth Guarantee is ongoing with no changes in the implementation plan as of 2025 (for more details, see the [ETF's Country Brief for Serbia 2024](#)). Piloting of the Youth Guarantee has now been initiated in three NES branch offices covering 20 cities and municipalities in the country, with the expectation that lessons learnt will feed the final YG design. Among other things, the Youth Guarantee aims at establishing the legal and institutional framework for further development of the National Standard Classification of Occupations.

Learners' possibilities of accumulation, validation and recognition of learning outcomes acquired non-formally and informally

While the legislative framework for RPL exists and the country has passed the stage of piloting the RPL mechanisms, RPL has not been used extensively. With rare exceptions linked to highly specialised skills in some industry branches, employers mostly do not recognise RPL public documents. There are few providers with accreditation to carry out RPL within their institutions and the prospective beneficiaries have low levels of awareness about the main purpose of RPL and its potential benefits. [The EU's new IPA-funded project](#) is expected to cover the work on RPL, to ensure that the process moves forward in the upcoming years.

During 2024, draft quality assurance standards for self-evaluation and external evaluation of the public providers of non-formal education were developed but are yet to be endorsed. One of the key objectives of this exercise is to ensure horizontal linkages/harmonisation between quality assurance systems across formal and non-formal education. This is of particular significance for VET schools within the formal education systems that are also accredited to provide adult education/training opportunities and RPL options (as part of a broader non-formal training and educational landscape in the country).

Diversifying learning modes: face-to-face, digital and/or blended learning; adaptable/flexible training formats

The Youth Guarantee programme is a major investment into the diversification of learning and employment opportunities in the country, and it follows the positive experience set by the EU model. It is aimed at young people up to age 30 who will be receiving quality job offers and/or continued education or traineeship opportunities within four months of entering unemployment or leaving or completing formal education.

In line with the [Youth Guarantee Implementation Plan](#) from August 2023 (adopted in December 2023), in January 2025, the Youth Guarantee pilot was initiated and the National Employment Services (NES) published a call for young people from the cities and municipalities covered by three pilot NES branch offices, located in the cities of Sremska Mitrovica, Kruševac and Niš, to get involved in the scheme⁷. The selected NES branches are located in three regions: the region of Southern and

⁷ National Employment Services. [Garancija za mlade – Nove mogućnosti i prilike za mlade do 30 godina starosti](#) (Youth Guarantee – New opportunities for young people aged 30 years or younger), 2024.

Eastern Serbia, the region of Šumadija and Western Serbia, and the region of Vojvodina. They cover about 10% of the territory of the Republic of Serbia with 12.6% of its total population and 14.2% of the total youth population registered with NES. Young people under 30 years of age can access information on opportunities via the [NES website](#), [a specialised brochure](#) as well as through [the Viber channel 'Youth Guarantee—Stay Informed!'](#). Information about the Youth Guarantee (YG) is also available on [the website of the MoLEVSA – Youth Guarantee](#).

As part of the Youth Guarantee offer, through the NES branch offices, young people at pilot NES branch offices covering 20 cities and municipalities are now able to access the following services: (i) offers of employment, (ii) offers of continued education and training, and (iii) offers of traineeship.

Based on the insights from the first year of YG implementation, one of the key challenges is represented by the lack of sufficient number of publicly recognized organizers of adult education activities (PROAEA/JPOA), as well as the lack of accredited training programmes aligned with labour market demands. The challenge is further exacerbated by the uneven spread of available PROAEA and accredited programmes. As a result, during 2024, training was available only in an online format⁸.

For more details on the Youth Guarantee, see the [ETF's Country Brief Serbia 2024](#).

Ensuring equal opportunities and inclusiveness in education and training

Despite challenges in implementation, Serbia's practice of inclusive education has been institutionalised since 2009 and is not a subject of separate reporting herein.

⁸ MoLEVSA.

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

Within this EU thematic priority, Serbia has been engaged across different education levels—both secondary and higher education—with activities ranging from increasing offers to higher education students pursuing professional degrees, continuous professional development (CPD) opportunities for different categories of teaching staff and school leaders, to planned revisions of core teacher competences, which are expected to affect both initial education and continuous professional development.

Expanding VET programmes to European Qualifications Framework (EQF) levels 5-8

In line with activities over the past couple of years (see the [ETF's Country Brief Serbia 2024](#)) at the higher education (HE) level, there are now more opportunities for studies based on the dual education model. In the ongoing 2024/2025 academic year, nearly 700 students (674) entered the existing 54 dual education programmes at higher education (both academic and non-academic post-secondary education), as shown in the table below. While the number of students per programme remains low (with roughly 10 students per dual education programme at HE), the number of accredited programmes is increasing.

Table 1: Students attending study programmes according to the dual model of HE

Initial value	Base year 2022	Target value 2024	Realised value 2024
0	267	650	674

Source: Author's presentation based on the Fourth Report on the Implementation of the Action Plan of the Strategy for Development of Education in Serbia by 2030, Reporting period: Jan 2024-Dec 2024, 2025.

Systematic approaches to and opportunities for initial and continuing professional development of school leaders, teachers and trainers

During 2024, an investigation into the educational needs of adult education advisors was carried out as part of the EU's [IPA-funded non-formal education project](#). Findings are expected to inform the design of the continuous professional development programmes of adult education educators.

The MoE has been considering a review of the Rulebook on Teacher Competences, particularly in view of the need to balance teachers' pedagogical and technical/subject knowledge, skills and competences. The prospective revisions of teacher competences will directly affect both initial and continuous education and training of teachers.

In November 2024, a catalogue with a renewed offer of CPD courses was published, to be used starting in the 2025/2026 school year. The catalogue covers the CPD offerings for teachers across all levels of education, school leaders, and professional associates working in primary and secondary schools, including in VET. The current catalogue includes 34 accredited professional development courses in the area 'VET subjects at the secondary level', although no data is available on the actual uptake of the courses in 2024 and 2025.

Lifelong guidance (not prioritised by Serbia in NIP)

Initial steps in the development of a system for career guidance and counselling have been made within the work on the Youth Guarantee. During 2024, the work on the competency standards for career counsellors was initiated, with the objective of creating a certification system for these professionals. Youth organisations operating in local communities are being trained for YG outreach activities focused on career guidance/training and education opportunities available through YG.

EU priority 5: VET underpinned by quality assurance

In the previous reporting period, the quality assurance-related policy developments were not reported separately but rather as an integral part of the report on Serbia's commitments from the NIP across the EU thematic areas 1 through 4.

Serbia has become a member of the European Quality Assurance in VET – National Reference Points (EQAVET-NRP) network and benefits from strategic engagement with the European Education and Culture Executive Agency (EACEA) in the area of VET quality assurance. Additionally, the most recent EU IPA-funded non-formal education project (Increased Offer and Diversification of Accredited Non-formal Training Courses and Adult Training Providers), will include a sizable component aimed at strategic alignment of formal and non-formal quality assurance systems, including in secondary VET.

Further development of national quality assurance systems

As part of the project '[European Quality Assurance in Vocational Education and Training – National Reference Points](#)', Serbia has joined the European EQAVET-NRP network⁹. A multi-agency Working Group (WG) for the implementation of the project 'National Reference Point for Serbia 2 – VET for the Future (VET4F)' was formed in late 2023 (Erasmus Plus, 2023-2026). The project aims at advancing the quality of VET in Serbia with a focus on: (i) promoting the development and preservation of the quality culture of institutions providing VET educational services in both formal and non-formal education; (ii) promoting and implementing self-evaluation as an important element in the quality assurance cycle at the institution level; and (iii) developing digital tools to support and improve the quality of VET at the national level and at the level of VET providers¹⁰. During 2024, the WG carried out activities in line with the guidance of the EACEA.

During 2024, draft quality assurance standards for self-evaluation and external evaluation of public providers of non-formal education were developed but are yet to be endorsed. One of the key objectives of this exercise is to ensure horizontal linkages/harmonisation between quality assurance systems across formal and non-formal education. This is of particular significance for VET schools within the formal education systems that are also accredited to provide adult education/training and RPL opportunities (as part of non-formal training and educational landscape).

In 2025, the EQAVET-NRP organized an EQAVET peer review on the role of school leaders in developing a quality culture in vocational education institutions. The host was the Ministry of Education, which manages the EQAVET-NRP. EQAVET network members from Greece, Portugal, Slovenia, Spain and Slovakia participated as reviewers. The peer review focused on the quality assurance of the national system for training school leaders. The review specifically looked at the competences expected of school leaders, the national training and licensing process and the development of a quality culture in vocational schools¹¹.

⁹ MoE & COP. [Guidelines for implementation of horizontal learning among the schools in VET secondary education, 2024](#).

¹⁰ [MoE, Ministerial decision 119-01-00386/2023-03](#) (Odluka o imenovanju članova Radne grupe za implementaciju projekta Nacionalna referentna tačka Srbija 2 – stručno obrazovanje i obuka za budućnost (VET4F), 2023).

¹¹ [Improving VET leadership in Serbia at their EQAVET peer review - Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion](#)

Performance against EU targets

The Republic of Serbia is in the position to report on two out of three quantitative indicators set in the European Council Recommendation of 24 November 2020 on VET for sustainable competitiveness, social fairness and resilience (2020/C 417/01).

As the table below illustrates, in 2022 and 2023 (the most recent data for different indicators are available for different years), the employment rate of the country's recent graduates (20 to 34 years old) improved from under 60% in 2021 to 72.2% in 2022 – to drop again to 65.6% in 2023¹². The value of this indicator remains significantly lower than for the EU-27 (82.4% on average), as well as lower than in some of the Serbia's neighbouring EU member states, such as Croatia (78.5%) or Bulgaria (72.4%). A more challenging sign may be the second observed indicator in 2022 with only 17% of recent Initial VET (IVET) graduates in Serbia with work-based learning (WBL) experience as part of their VET training, in contrast to Croatia's 40% in 2022.

VET Recommendation Indicator	Serbia	EU-27	EU target (2025)
1. Employment rate for recent IVET graduates (20-34 years age group) (%)	65.6% (2023) ¹³	79.7% (2022)	82%
2. Recent IVET graduates (20-34 years age group) with work-based learning experience as part of their vocational education and training (%)	17.1% (2022)	60.1% (2022)	60%
3. Learners in IVET who benefitted from learning mobility abroad (%)	/	2.1% (2021)	8%

Source: Key indicators on VET, CEDEFOP (europa.eu) (for indicators 2 and 3) & the European Commission's Serbia 2024 Report (for indicator 1).

¹² European Commission. Commission Staff Working Document, [Serbia 2024 Report](#), 2024 Communication on EU Enlargement Policy, 2024, p. 82.

¹³ Ibid.

Serbia's NIP implementation 2021-2025: an overview

Recap of NIP commitments

Serbia's NIP was expected to contribute to: (i) furthering harmonisation of the Serbian VET system with the modern labour market through offering regularly updated qualification standards (QS) and VET programmes, to include a balanced mix of vocational and key competencies, including strong work-based learning (WBL) components developed in cooperation with a wide group of stakeholders; (ii) furthering flexibility of VET through the establishment and use of the RPL system, i.e. the recognition of learning outcomes acquired through non-formal and informal learning, career and learning progression, and increase of vertical and horizontal permeability within the VET system; and (iii) further development of the national quality assurance system for VET.

The NIP's general objectives included: increasing the relevance of VET at all levels of education; increasing flexibility and permeability of VET at all levels of education; and strengthening the culture of quality assurance in VET. They were presented in the following clusters:

Cluster 1: Harmonisation of VET offerings with labour market needs through sustainable partnership

Specific objective 1.1: Strengthening social partnership in the modernisation of qualification standards, VET programmes and graduate tracking.

Specific objective 1.2: Accelerating the process of developing new and improving existing qualification standards, IVET curricula and Continuing VET (CVET) programmes based on qualification standards.

Specific objective 1.3: Improving the relevance of higher education, through improved offerings of vocational (applied) and dual study programmes.

Cluster 2: Expanding the network of RPL providers and increasing permeability within the VET system

Specific objective 2.1: Increasing possibilities for RPL implementation.

Specific objective 2.2: Enhancing permeability of VET at the secondary and higher education levels.

Cluster 3: Improving quality assurance policies and practices in VET

Specific objective 3.1: Improving the quality assurance system in IVET (school-based and dual VET).

Specific objective 3.2: Improving quality assurance system in non-formal CVET.

Progress has been tracked using an Integrated Monitoring Framework¹⁴. Serbia's planned activities correspond to the following EU priorities and thematic categories of the framework:

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

Modernising VET standards, curricula, programmes and training courses

integrating digital skills and competences in VET curricula and programmes

Engaging VET stakeholders and strengthening partnerships in VET

Acquiring key competences

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

¹⁴ See the introduction.

Learners' possibilities of accumulation, validation and recognition of learning outcomes acquired non-formally and informally

3. Attractive VET, based on a modern and digitalised provision

Permeability between IVET and CVET and general and vocational pathways, academic and professional higher education

Expanding VET programmes to EQF levels 5-8

Systematic approaches to and opportunities for initial and continuous professional development of school leaders, teachers and trainers

4. VET underpinned by quality assurance

Further developing national quality assurance systems¹⁵

Summary of policy developments 2021-2025

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

Progress has been recorded in increasing the relevance and responsiveness of the VET system in the country and, more specifically, regarding actions leading to advancements in:

- a. Continuous development of new and refreshing existing qualification standards through VET stakeholder engagement
- b. Continuous development and revision of the VET curricula, teacher training provision, preparations of teaching and training materials; and
- c. Dual education reform of VET at the secondary education level¹⁶.

Serbia is about to complete its long-term engagement in the modernisation of VET standards, curricula, programmes and training courses. Nearly all qualification standards have been revised or newly developed with an increased share of VET profiles and programmes that have been revised accordingly. Currently, three quarters of all VET profiles include programmes based on qualification standards.

Although Serbia's NIP did not formally prioritise reporting on developing and updating learning resources and materials, as part of its work on 'continuous development and revision of the VET curricula, teacher training provision, preparations of teaching and training materials', over the years the country has significantly progressed in this respect¹⁷. Similarly, regarding the integration of digital skills and competences in VET curricula and programmes, steps have been taken to improve the infrastructure enabling digital transformation and to introduce information and communication technology (ICT)/digital VET profiles at the secondary level, although more work remains to continuously improve teachers' digital skills and the digital capacity of schools.

In order to strengthen the link between education and the labour market and increase its capacity to service the process more efficiently in the future, the country worked on improvements to its Sector Skills Councils during 2023 and 2024. Based on recent recommendations from an independent assessment, Serbia's SSCs will be the subject of a reform in the upcoming period to ensure more

¹⁵ Over the reporting period, a thematic priority area associated with quality assurance (TP 5) has not been monitored separately given that various quality assurance measures constituted an integral part of the observed policy developments (across TP1, TP2 and TP4).

¹⁶ Reinforcing work-based learning, including apprenticeships was not formally prioritised in NIP.

¹⁷ For more details, see [Monitoring VET Recommendation and Osnabrück Declaration – Serbia 2023 ETF](#)

effective engagement of private sector stakeholders as key contributors to the continuous alignment of the education sector and the labour market needs.

While SSCs continue to supply critical information about technical skills and competences in demand in the labour market, Serbia has also opted for additional engagement linked to strengthening key competences of its learners. In a separate effort carried out by the MoE, the country engaged in the process of integrating key competences into its NQFS.

Across the policy developments, engaging VET stakeholders and strengthening partnerships in VET were instrumental to achieving the reported results. This has entailed both horizontal cooperation across public institutions (for example, across the ministries of education and labour), and collaboration with universities (aimed at introducing dual education at higher/tertiary education levels) and the business community (as part of continued collaboration with the Serbian Chamber of Commerce and Industry on WBL; and, the collaboration of the Agency for Qualifications with the country's Sector Skills Councils). For information about the latter, see the table that follows.

Number of companies involved in dual education at the secondary level per school year (2021-2025)

School year	2021/22	2022/23	2023/24	2024/25
Number of companies	700	850	950	1 100

Source: Office for Dual Education and NQFS

Over the years, through the dual education system at the secondary level, Serbia has educated nearly 35 000 students (a total of 34 689), as the table below shows.

Number of students enrolled in dual education at the secondary level per school year (2021-2025)

School year	First grade	Second grade	Third grade	Fourth grade	Total
2021/2022	2 326	2 615	2 674	581	8 196
2022/2023	2 848	2 529	2 245	950	8 372
2023/2024	2 778	2 599	2 450	1 232	9 059
2024/2025	2 894	2 625	2 305	1 238	9 062

Source: Office for Dual Education and NQFS

Box 1: The Registry of Qualifications made available online

The Registry of Qualifications as a sub-registry of the NQFS Registry, run by the Agency for Qualifications, has been publicly accessible through a digital portal since 2021. A list of qualifications has been regularly updated on an annual basis since December of 2020, when it was revised for the first time since the '90s.¹⁸

¹⁸ The Registry updates are published every April of the ongoing year at <https://noks.azk.gov.rs/pretraga-registara/pretraga-nacionalnih-kvalifikacija.html>

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

Serbia has made mixed progress in the areas indicated as priorities within the country's NIP. Notably, fairly slow progress was recorded in the advancement of the system for recognition of prior learning (RPL), although significant steps were taken in setting up the Youth Guarantee, a mechanism that is expected to expand opportunities for further education and training in both formal and non-formal training and education settings.

Key areas monitored under thematic priority 2 include the following:

- a. expanding non-formal education/adult education opportunities
- b. developing a system for recognition of prior learning (RPL); and
- c. creating conditions for establishing the Youth Guarantee.

Whereas there are challenges in setting up an effective RPL system, the ongoing EU funded IPA programme is oriented towards support for systemic improvements in non-formal education, broadly speaking, and it includes objectives related to strengthening the RPL system.

One of the main intentions of the legislative changes in the Law on NQFS in September 2023 was to accelerate the process of accreditation of public providers of adult education (AE), which was expected to contribute to the expansion of the AE offer in Serbia, its flexibility and accessibility of AE to a wider pool of beneficiaries. While the pool of public providers of AE has been gradually expanded, it has not succeeded in attracting a significant number of beneficiaries. Barriers to access include the lack of knowledge and understanding of the advantages of non-formal education, as well as the high cost of private access to non-formal training opportunities¹⁹.

Critical progress in this area was made by the finalisation of the Youth Guarantee (YG) Implementation Plan, which was adopted in late 2023. Piloting the Youth Guarantee (2024-2026) is expected to generate lessons to inform the final YG design and lay the grounds for its full implementation as of January 2027.

Box 2: A new phase in the works on expanding non-formal education in Serbia

To address the challenges associated with the development of non-formal education in Serbia, during 2023-2024 a new multi-annual EU IPA 2020-funded project was designed. It covers three broad strands of activities, including: (i) revision of the concept of adult education; (ii) support for capacity building of public providers; and (iii) advancement of the system for validation of non-formal and informal learning (recognition of prior learning - RPL).

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

The advancement in this area has been mixed, with some remaining challenges linked to missing implementation of legislative and institutional efforts. This area, however, includes some large-scale reform efforts requiring time to materialise, for example, measures for continuous professional development programmes of teachers and adult education instructors. In some instances, reporting is not possible due to the lack of data on activities affecting end users (teacher training, lifelong learning). The following policy developments were documented over the monitoring period:

- a. development of the State Matura exam at the end of secondary education; and
- b. introduction of dual education at higher/tertiary education.

Within this EU thematic priority, Serbia has been engaged across different education levels—both secondary and higher education levels—with activities ranging from increasing offerings to the higher education students in pursuing professional degrees; continuous professional development (CPD)

¹⁹ For more details, see [Monitoring VET Recommendation and Osnabrück Declaration – Serbia 2023 ETF](#)

opportunities for different categories of teaching staff and school leaders; and planned revisions of core teacher competences, which are expected to affect both initial education and continuous professional development.

Although the MoE's multi-annual engagement in the design and piloting of State Matura were completed in 2023, its introduction at the end of secondary education (encompassing VET matura) has been delayed. Over the years, this activity was given significant attention, including through the multi-annual period for the design and consensus-building on the final format of the final exams at the end of secondary education and the State Matura piloting across the entire system of secondary education. Additionally, the MoE, supported by other public agencies, carried out two mock final examinations at the end of secondary education (2023 and 2024). For secondary VET matura, pilots also included assessments of practical skills acquired through WBL. Currently, there are no plans for full State Matura rollout. Its introduction has been delayed due to strong negative public reactions in response to the MoE's announcement of the initial plan, which has effectively stalled the process²⁰.

The only final examination that was rolled out by the end of 2022/23 school year (in June 2023) was the one at the end of three-year VET secondary education.

Following the 2019 adoption of the Law on Dual Model of Studies in Higher Education (HE) and the amended rulebook on the standards and the procedure for accreditation of the study programmes (2019), the dual model of studies in HE was given legal framework. In March 2021, legislative activities continued resulting in the new revision of the rulebook on standards and the procedure for accreditation of the study programmes regulating both academic and professional/applied programmes in HE. The first accredited dual study programs in Serbia were implemented in the 2021/22 academic year in a number of study fields, including in IT, textile industry, mechanical engineering and aviation. By the 2022/23 academic year, there were 34 dual study programmes and modules delivered at 10 HE institutions, with 95 accredited companies involved in the dual model of higher education. The number of HE dual study programmes in the 2024/25 academic year increased to 54, as well as the number of students benefiting from these programmes during the same academic year (a total of 674 HE students). This marks a significant increase in the size of the HE dual study programmes, especially considering they were introduced only a few years ago.

Box 3: ICT-related/digital VET profiles at secondary level

As of the 2023/2024 school year, the ICT-related fields in vocational schools are clustered around five educational profiles: (1) information technology electrician, (2) air traffic information systems communication technician, (3) digital graphics technician, (4) mechatronics technician, and (5) technician for computer numerical control machines.

According to the 2021 report on digital competence programmes in Serbia, vocational schools at the secondary level that are not focusing on the ICT/digital sector have mandatory classes in computer science and informatics only during the first year of the study programme²¹. Vocational schools at the secondary level focusing on electrical engineering tend to have more ICT-related subjects/content in comparison to other VET schools and profiles²².

EU priority 5. VET underpinned by quality assurance

Serbia has become a member of the EQAVET-NRP network and benefits from a strategic engagement with the EACEA in the area of VET quality assurance. Additionally, the most recent EU funded IPA non-formal education project (Increased Offer and Diversification of Accredited Non-formal

²⁰ For more details, see [Monitoring VET Recommendation and Osnabrück Declaration – Serbia 2023 ETF](#)

²¹ Matović, M. Digital competence programs in the Republic of Serbia, 2021, p. 22.

²² Ibid.

Training Courses and Adult Training Providers), will include a sizable component aimed at a strategic alignment of formal and non-formal quality assurance systems, including in secondary VET²³.

²³ In the previous reporting period, the quality assurance-related policy developments were not reported separately but rather as an integral part of the report on Serbia's commitments from NIP across EU thematic areas 1 through 4.

Conclusions

Overall, Serbia has made progress towards meeting its NIP objectives, with some delays in implementation. The current report, though, highlights fewer policy developments in 2024-2025 compared to previous years. This is a result of the relatively short monitoring period coupled with the slower pace of reforms due to the specific political context that has disproportionately affected the education sector actors at all levels. Yet, progress has been recorded in advancing legislative and institutional frameworks related to the observed priorities along with the technical work that takes place in the key education-related government agencies.

The main policy developments in 2021-2025 largely correspond to the planned activities of the country. They are focused on the EU thematic areas prioritised in the NIP: (1) agile and resilient VET, adaptive to labour market needs; (2) flexible and inclusive VET, providing progression and lifelong learning opportunities; and (4) attractive VET, based on a modern and digitalised provision. In EU thematic area 5 (Quality Assurance), during 2024 and 2025 we have recorded additional activities with the potential to positively affect the VET system at large.

Although most of the observed reform measures fall under the mandate of the Ministry of Education, they are typically implemented in cooperation with other public institutions and agencies, as well as with non-governmental stakeholders. Private sector stakeholders have also been part of the overall government efforts—either as its partners in setting up the WBL/dual education arrangements (by offering work placements to students in dual education as well as by training company instructors, for instance), or in securing business actors' involvement in identifying the ever-changing demand for sector skills through the Sector Skills Councils.

In general terms, while legislative and institutional frameworks within the observed thematic areas are gradually being improved over time, there is a systemic lack of data on implementation outcomes. Similarly, country data on ongoing and past activities and the planned deliverables are not always available. The key weakness of the current tracking system is the lack of data on learning and employment outcomes of VET students. An opportunity to overcome this weakness is expected to be the introduction of State Matura, which is currently on hold.

Some of the specific challenges to be addressed in the future include the need to set up monitoring practices to allow tracking both school-based and work-based learning practices in VET schools at both secondary and higher education levels. This is coupled with the need to increase involvement of companies in work-based learning for both secondary and higher education students. Other opportunities include enhancing support to expand the pool of non-formal providers of VET and adult education as well as strengthen their diversification. These objectives could be advanced by the efforts around setting up the Youth Guarantee for Serbia, which is currently being piloted in the country.

In their assessment of participation in the Osnabrück process, Serbia's stakeholders emphasise the need to streamline VET reform-related processes to avoid duplication of activities. They recognise the need to join efforts across ministries and other public agencies in meeting the NIP commitments. They are calling for greater visibility of the results of the integrated monitoring exercise so as to provide an opportunity to engage with a wider range of interested parties and end beneficiaries in exchanging information about the VET reform outcomes – and, most importantly, to reflect and perhaps then develop responses based on their implications for VET students' learning pathways.

Abbreviations

AQ	Agency for Qualifications
CEDEFOP	European Centre for the Development of Vocational Training
CPD	Continuous professional development
CVET	Continuing VET
EACEA	European Education and Culture Executive Agency
EBRD	European Bank for Reconstruction and Development
EU	European Union
EQAVET	European Quality Assurance in VET
EQAVET-NRP	European Quality Assurance in VET – National Reference Points
EQF	European Qualifications Framework
ETF	European Training Foundation
HE	Higher education
IPA	Instrument for Pre-Accession Assistance
IT	Information technology
IVET	Initial VET
MoE	Ministry of Education
NES	National Employment Service
NQFS	National Qualifications Framework of the Republic of Serbia
QS	Qualification standard
RPL	Recognition of prior learning
SSC	Sector Skills Council
TP	Thematic priority
VET	Vocational education and training
VET4F	VET for the Future
WG	Working group
YG	Youth Guarantee

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