

KEY POLICY DEVELOPMENTS IN EDUCATION, TRAINING AND EMPLOYMENT

2025

ALBANIA

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ABOUT THIS PAPER

Each year, the ETF monitors developments in education, skills, and employment in its partner countries to support informed decision-making by identifying trends, opportunities, and challenges. The results are reported by country, across countries, and by selected theme.

The present document is the country-level report (country fiche) for 2025 for Albania. Like all ETF monitoring, it draws on multiple sources of evidence and is the culmination of a year-long process of data collection, analysis, and consultations. One key source of evidence is the ETF KIESE database, which provides internationally comparable indicators on areas such as country demography, economy, education, and employment. The indicators are sourced mainly from international repositories, including UNESCO, the World Bank, the OECD, Eurostat, and the ILO, while some come directly from partner countries, for instance, from their labour force surveys.¹

Another source of evidence is the Torino Process, a flagship monitoring initiative of the ETF which compiles system performance indices (SPIs) on the basis of KIESE data and expert surveys. The SPIs combine selected KIESE indicators to track policy and system performance in education and VET in key areas such as access, quality, and system management. Where KIESE data is missing, the SPIs rely on expert surveys which help fill the gaps and contextualise the findings at the stage of analysis. “Performance” in this context refers to the extent to which policies and systems deliver results in these areas². In 2025, the ETF compiled SPIs for a total of 32 areas and sub-areas of performance, including for groups of learners such as youth and adults, males and females, socio-economically disadvantaged young people, and adults with no or low education.

ETF country missions complement these data sources by engaging with key policy stakeholders, gathering qualitative insights on policy developments, recently enacted legislation, and major reform steps. Finally, where necessary, the ETF draws on third-party publications and analytical work to complement gaps in available evidence or to clarify developments that are not fully captured in the ETF monitoring evidence.

The country fiche begins with Chapter 1 – a country profile that describes the demographic and socio-economic conditions in the country. Chapter 2 presents recent policies in education and training, together with the structure of the education system, including adult learning. Chapter 3 provides an overview of employment and labour-market policies and introduces the main strategies, institutions, and programmes. Chapter 4, which is the final chapter, presents the results of policies and arrangements in education and training.

¹ The full selection of KIESE indicators for 2025 can be found here <https://bit.ly/4i6taZW>.

² The subset of KIESE indicators used for the calculation of the Torino Process SPIs in 2025 can be found here: <https://bit.ly/433OR8j>. The full list of questions used in the 2025 round of Torino Process system performance monitoring can be found here: <https://bit.ly/3YUlbxE>. For a full overview of the Torino Process system performance monitoring framework, see <https://bit.ly/47YGA6l>. The methodology for the calculation of the SPIs can be found here: <https://bit.ly/3XJg101>.

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KEY TAKEAWAYS

- Country profile and developments: Albania has been a candidate country for EU accession since 2014 and is currently undergoing profound economic, demographic and social changes that are influencing its education, training and employment policies. With a population of 2.79 million in 2023, the country is experiencing demographic decline due to low fertility rates and significant outward migration, particularly among young people and skilled professionals. This poses challenges to workforce availability and the sustainability of social systems. Although the economy has grown steadily, driven by services, tourism, construction and remittances, it remains vulnerable to external shocks and structural weaknesses such as informality, skills mismatches and regional disparities. Social inequalities and poverty persist, particularly in rural areas and among disadvantaged groups, and there are significant gender gaps in employment and labour force participation.
- Developments in education and training: In the field of education and training, Albania has introduced a series of headline reforms with the aim of aligning its system with European standards and the needs of the labour market. The Law on Higher Education, adopted in 2015, and the National Strategy for Education for the period 2021-2026 provide the strategic framework, focusing on access, quality, digitalisation and internationalisation. In vocational education and training (VET), the Law on VET and the establishment of the National Agency for Employment and Skills (NAES) in 2019 have restructured governance and reinforced labour market relevance. These efforts include strengthening the qualifications framework, aligning curricula with labour market demands, expanding work-based learning through dual programmes, and enhancing career guidance services in schools and employment offices. Quality assurance initiatives include developing centres of competence, reforming teacher training and integrating digital education, a process which has accelerated since the COVID-19 pandemic. The Youth Guarantee Implementation Plan 2023-2024 and targeted upskilling and reskilling initiatives, supported by active labour market measures and donor assistance, have been instrumental in this regard.
- Employment and labour market developments: In terms of labour market developments, Albania has seen positive trends in labour force participation and employment rates. However, challenges remain regarding unemployment, particularly youth unemployment, informality and low productivity. The Youth Guarantee is being rolled out to improve transition from school to work, with the support of active labour market programmes (ALMPs), which provide training, counselling and subsidised employment. However, the scope of these programmes is limited compared to demand. Social partners, employers and municipalities are playing an increasingly important role in implementing labour market and VET policies, although capacity and coordination challenges persist.
- Trends in access, retention, completion: Although participation in education has increased in terms of access, retention and completion, early school leaving remains an issue, particularly in rural areas and among Roma communities and other disadvantaged young people. Despite higher female enrolment in tertiary education, gender disparities persist, with women underrepresented in STEM fields and higher-paying jobs. Adult participation in lifelong learning is very low compared to EU averages, reflecting specific barriers to participation such as availability, relevance and motivation.
- Quality and relevance of learning: In terms of quality and relevance, graduate employability indicators highlight persistent mismatches in skills, with employers often reporting difficulties in finding workers with the right technical and transversal skills. Ongoing reforms aim to address this by aligning curricula more closely with market needs, increasing employer involvement and expanding work-based learning.
- System management and organisation: Both VET and lifelong learning are constrained by limited financial and human resources in terms of system management and organisation. Although implementation gaps remain, governance reforms, particularly the consolidation of agencies such

as the NAES, aim to strengthen accountability and improve data for decision-making. Stakeholder involvement is gradually increasing, supported by international cooperation with the EU, ETF, UNESCO, and bilateral donors, which provides both technical and financial support. Overall, Albania's education, training and labour market policies are evolving towards closer alignment with EU standards, with a strong focus on enhancing quality, relevance and inclusiveness across the system. However, persistent demographic pressures, migration and resource constraints continue to pose significant challenges to sustaining progress.

1. COUNTRY PROFILE

Table 1.1 Demographic and socio-economic context: key indicators, Albania

Indicator	Value	Year	Source
Total population (in thousands)	2 746.0	2023	UN DESA, World Bank
Relative size of youth population (%)	19.8	2023	UN DESA
Population growth rate	-1.1	2023	World Bank, UN DESA
Dependency ratio	50.0	2023	World Bank, UN DESA
Immigrant stock as % of total population	1.7	2024	UN DESA
Emigrant stock as % of total population	43.6	2024	UN DESA
GDP growth rate	3.9	2023	World Bank
GDP per capita (PPP)	21 263.2	2023	World Bank
Migrant remittance inflows (USD million) as % of GDP	8.6	2023	World Bank
Inflation rate	4.8	2023	IMF
Poverty headcount ratio (USD 8.30/day)	19.9	2020	World Bank
Gini coefficient (Income inequality)	29.4	2020	World Bank
Human development index (HDI)	0.810	2023	UNDP, World Bank

Source: ETF KIESE database

1.1 Demography

In 2023, Albania's population was estimated at approximately 2.75 million (Table 1.1). With a negative annual growth rate of -1.1 %, the country is experiencing a demographic decline. In addition to the long-standing low fertility rate, which has remained below replacement levels for decades, the main driver of this downward trend is the scale of outward migration. In 2023, emigrants represented 43.6 % of Albania's total population, forming a substantial diaspora, particularly given the very low immigration rate of just 1.7 %. Outward migration is the highest in the northern regions of Kukës, Dibër and Lezhë, where the remaining population is disproportionately older. Conversely, the central part or 'corridor' of the country (Tirana-Durrës) experiences population growth through internal migration and international returns (INSTAT, 2023; IOM, 2014).

People of working age (15-64 years) account for approximately two-thirds of the population, while dependants make up the remaining third. A dependency ratio of 50 indicates that the working-age population supports a significant proportion of children and older people. The share of young people of working age stands at 19.6 %, which is moderate by international standards — higher than in most EU countries, but lower than in contexts with very youthful populations, such as certain SEMED countries. Overall, the sizeable proportion of adults within the working-age population underscores the growing importance of upskilling and reskilling opportunities for Albania in the years ahead.

The overall trajectory in Albania points to a shrinking cohort of young people. However, these averages mask substantial disparities. Albania has long experienced rural depopulation, with younger people moving to cities such as Tirana and Durrës. Rural areas, particularly those in the north and mountain regions, have higher dependency ratios and ageing populations. In contrast, urban areas tend to have younger, working age populations (UNFPA, 2023; INSTAT, 2022).

1.2 Economy

Albania's economy expanded by 3.9 % in 2023. GDP per capita in terms of purchasing power parity was USD 21 263, placing the country in the middle range of global income levels. While this reflects the progress achieved, it also confirms that Albania still lags behind European Union standards (World Bank, 2024b).

Albania has one of the largest diasporas relative to its size, with more than 40 % of its citizens living abroad (Table 1.1). Yet the inflow of remittances, at around 8-9 % of GDP, is moderate relative to this figure. This partly reflects the long-term family resettlement patterns of Albanian migration (Barjaba & Barjaba, 2021), the economic challenges that migrants face in their countries of residence, and the use of informal transfer channels, which result in underestimation of official figures (Bank of Albania, 2018). Furthermore, weakening ties between migrants and their country of origin have reduced formal remittance flows over time (Vullnetari, 2012).

Inflation reached 4.8 % in 2023, which is higher than in previous years, but moderate compared to other countries in the region and the EU average. This increase was primarily due to rising food and energy prices on global markets, affecting Albania as well as many other economies (IMF, 2023).

1.3 Income and living standards

In 2023, Albania's Human Development Index (HDI) stood at 0.810, placing the country among those classified as having very high human development. Life expectancy at birth is 79.6 years, which is above the global average and strengthens the health component of the index. The education component is based on 10.2 mean years of schooling and 14.5 expected years of schooling. This also contributes to the overall score, although further improvements in higher education and increases in the mean years of schooling could enhance it even more. Albania's GNI per capita stands at USD 17 627 (PPP), which is modest compared to many other countries within the same HDI category and constitutes the main constraint (UNDP, 2024b).

Progress reflected in the HDI remains subject to certain limitations. In 2020, almost 20 % of the population lived on less than USD 8.30 per day (Table 1.1). More recent World Bank estimates suggest that approximately 22 % of the population lived in poverty in 2021, based on a poverty line of USD 6.85 per day, with a projected decline to below 20 % in 2022 as the economy rebounds (World Bank, 2023). However, the national average conceals significant regional disparities throughout the country. Poverty is far more prevalent in rural and remote areas than in cities. According to Eurostat data, nearly 60 % of the rural population was at risk of poverty in 2020, which is the highest rural poverty rate in Europe, compared to around 45 % of the urban population. Even within urban areas, there are differences in poverty rates: around 45 % of residents in large cities (including Tirana) were at risk of poverty, compared to about 29 % in smaller towns (Eurostat, 2021).

At the same time, with a Gini coefficient of 29.4 in 2020, income inequality in Albania is relatively low (Table 1.1). Since incomes do not differ widely across the population, the main issue is not a large divide between rich and poor, but that most households live on fairly modest incomes.

1.4 Recent developments

Over the last year, Albanian politics have centred on Prime Minister Edi Rama's bid for a fourth term in office and the government's EU accession drive. In May 2025, the ruling Socialist Party won the election amid allegations of electoral unfairness and high-profile corruption scandals (Reuters, 2025a). While international observers from the OSCE applauded the logistical administration of the elections, they criticised the lack of a level playing field and called for a deeper judicial and media reform (OSCE PA 2025). In mid-May, Tirana hosted the European Political Community Summit, underscoring Albania's strategic significance while drawing attention to governance challenges, including concerns related to money laundering (Reuters, 2025b). Vetting in the judiciary continued under the 2021

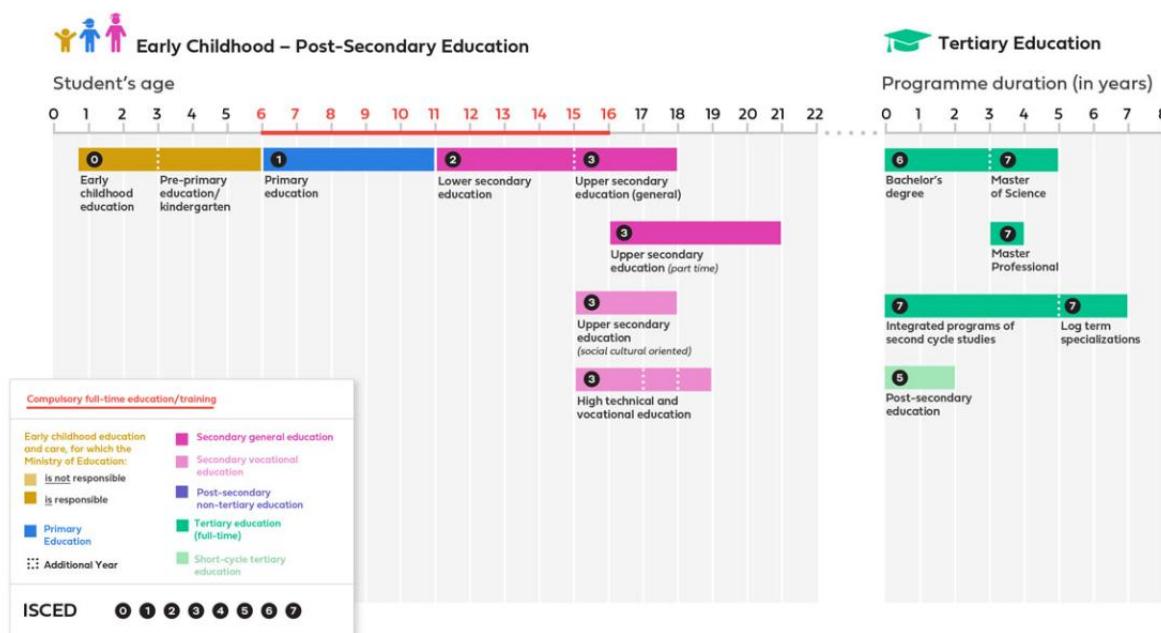
Justice Reform Package, resulting in the removal from office, by mid-2024, of more than 200 judges and prosecutors for unexplained asset growth or ethical breaches, which has served to reinforce judicial integrity (Venice Commission, 2024). In terms of digitalisation, the e-Albania platform expanded in 2024 to cover 80 % of citizen-state transactions, ranging from business registration to social security services, improving transparency and reducing bureaucratic delays (OECD, 2024). In August 2024, a gender quota amendment was introduced in Parliament, raising the minimum share of women candidates on party lists from 30 to 40 per cent. This yielded a record 42 per cent female representation after the May 2025 elections (OSCE PA, 2025). In June 2024, Albania finally ratified the Istanbul Convention, embedding stronger protections against gender-based violence in national law and establishing specialised support services for survivors (Council of Europe, 2024). Collectively, these measures mark significant progress towards more accountable, inclusive and modern governance. Since the EU opened accession negotiations with Albania in March 2020, five accession conferences have taken place. Negotiations have opened in four clusters: Cluster 1 (Fundamentals), Cluster 6 (External Relations), Cluster 2 (Internal Market), and Cluster 3 (Competitiveness and Inclusive Growth). The Albanian government aims to conclude the negotiations by 2027.

2. EDUCATION AND TRAINING: POLICIES AND DEVELOPMENTS

2.1 Structure and levels of education, including VET

This section provides an overview of how the education system is organised at the different levels, including pre-primary, primary, secondary (with a distinction between general and vocational tracks), tertiary and adult learning. It uses the UNESCO ISCED classification and is based on monitoring information collected via the Torino Process expert survey³.

Figure 2.1 Structure of the education system: Albania (2025)



Source: European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice. (2021).

Formal education

Early childhood education in Albania is available from birth, although it most commonly begins at the age of three. Nurseries cater for children up to the age of three and are under the joint responsibility of local municipalities and the Ministry of Health and Social Protection. Kindergartens are attended by children aged three to six years and are overseen by the Ministry of Education, Sports and Youth. Attendance at these institutions is voluntary and there are no admission requirements. Children automatically move on to primary education once they reach the age of six.

Primary education begins at the age of six and lasts for five years, covering grades 1 to 5. It is provided by both public and private schools and admission does not require entrance exams. Progression is based on annual performance, and successful completion of grade 5 provides direct entry into lower secondary education. Lower secondary education spans grades 6 to 9 and typically serves learners aged 11 to 15. Students are assessed continuously and sit a graduation exam at the end of grade 9. Passing this examination grants pupils a certificate and access to upper secondary education.

³ The full questionnaire can be found here: <https://bit.ly/418jfwC>. In this document, the survey may be referred to interchangeably as the 'monitoring survey', 'expert survey', or the 'Torino Process monitoring survey'.

Upper secondary education comprises grades 10 to 12 and typically begins at age 15. Learners can choose between academic tracks offered in general secondary schools ('gjimnaz'), vocational and technical programmes, or specialised schools focusing on areas such as languages, arts or sports. Admission requires successful completion of lower secondary education and passing the graduation exam. At the end of upper secondary education, all students are required to take the State Matura exam ('Matura shtetërore') in order to obtain the maturity certificate ('Dëftesë Pjekurie'), which is a requirement for university admission. Vocational students may also qualify with a vocational or professional diploma. Taking the Matura is optional for them unless they intend to pursue higher education.

Tertiary education begins at the age of 18 and is provided by public and private universities, academies and higher education institutions. Short-cycle programmes (ISCED 5) last between one and two years and lead to professional qualifications. Bachelor's degrees (ISCED 6) typically require three to four years of study, followed by a master's degree (ISCED 7), which take between one and a half to two years to complete. Depending on the discipline, doctoral degrees (ISCED 8) add a further three or more years of study. Admission requires a Matura certificate and, in most cases, successful completion of university entrance procedures. Compulsory education in Albania spans ages six to sixteen and encompasses both primary and lower secondary levels.

Both upper secondary and tertiary education offer learners the opportunity to pursue employment or further study through integrated vocational and academic tracks. Progression depends on continuous assessment and final examinations, which ensure a transparent transition between stages.

Adult education

Adults in Albania have access to a variety of non-tertiary learning opportunities. Post-secondary non-tertiary programmes (ISCED 4) play an important role in improving employability by offering both vocational courses and short-term programmes. These are primarily delivered through Vocational Training Centres (VTCs), which tend to target registered unemployed adults. Although they are open to learners of all ages. The courses have flexible schedules and cover a wide range of fields, including IT, healthcare, construction and business administration.

Adults in Albania have access to second-chance education, enabling them to complete primary or secondary schooling, obtain a maturity certificate, or prepare for the State Matura exam. Professional development is further supported through workplace training, employer initiatives and programmes provided by the National Agency for Employment and Skills (NAES). In partnership with public and private actors, the NAES implements vocational training, apprenticeships, and other skills development measures as an element of active labour market policies.

Non-formal adult education is also available through community organisations, NGOs and adult education centres. These initiatives focus on language learning, digital competences, entrepreneurship and civic education.

2.2 Strategy and legal framework

Albania is pursuing a series of reforms to modernise its education and training system. Guided by the Education, Training and Research Strategy 2021-2030 (Ministry of Education and Sports 2023), the National Strategy for Employment and Skills 2023-2030 is also aligned with the Albanian National Strategy for Development and Integration (NSDI 2030). A mid-term review (2023) emphasised digitalisation, inclusion and alignment with the European Qualifications Framework (EQF). This has resulted in an amendment to the National Qualifications Framework Law (June 2024), which aims to better integrate VET outcomes into higher education pathways.

In addition, the European Commission's Progress Report on Albania for 2024 recognised improvements in policy coherence, while also highlighting persistent challenges related to teacher salaries, regional disparities and the labour-market relevance of curricula (European Commission, 2024a). Ongoing pilot projects, inclusive education in pre-school settings and

competency-based assessments in secondary schools reflect a growing emphasis on equity and learning outcomes. These legal and strategic measures underscore Albania's commitment to transforming its education system to promote economic prosperity and align it with EU accession requirements.

Albania has also achieved significant progress in its EU accession negotiations, reaching important milestones in the areas of skills, education and employment. In October 2024, it opened negotiations on Cluster 1 (Fundamentals), which includes human capital reforms. This was followed by opening negotiations on Cluster 6 (External Relations) in December 2024, and Cluster 2 (Internal Market) in April 2025. Most notably, in May 2025 Albania began negotiations on Cluster 3 (Competitiveness and Inclusive Growth), which covers employment, education and social policy. In October 2024, the EU Growth Plan's Reform Agenda was approved with EUR 922.1 million in available support, explicitly targeting curriculum reform, digital skills and youth employment. Between 2021 and 2024, EUR 50 million in IPA III assistance was allocated to youth employment and vocational education and training (VET), equipping 627 schools with smart labs that benefit nearly 200 000 students each year.

General education

The reform of Albania's education system is guided by several key strategies and policies. The National Strategy for Education (2021-2026) focuses on improving quality, inclusion and attainment through equitable access, lifelong learning and digital transformation, and tracks relevant indicators for these areas. Meanwhile, the Law on Pre-University Education (44/2023) redefines the structure of the education system, addressing demographic shifts and regional disparities. Curriculum reforms emphasise a competency-based approach, aligning with international assessments such as PISA, TIMSS and PIRLS. Teacher policies have been strengthened through the National Programme for the Professional Development of Teachers, which targets approximately 16 000 educators with the objective of enhancing their core subject competences. Access to education is being improved through school rationalisation strategies and support for marginalised groups, including the Roma and Egyptian communities. The integration of Media and Information Literacy (MIL) into formal education has been expanded, with 699 teacher trainers now equipped to deliver MIL training for peers. Furthermore, the National Agenda for the Rights of the Child (2021-2026) promotes child-friendly systems and services that align with European and international standards. Collectively, these reforms collectively aim to modernise Albania's education system, ensuring quality, equity, and alignment with European standards.

Vocational education

In vocational education and training (VET), the 2021 Law on Vocational Education and Training (amended in 2024) introduced dual-system apprenticeships, strengthened employer-led curriculum development, and mandated career guidance services in all 32 vocational schools (World Bank, 2024). These reforms align with broader efforts to optimise the network of VET providers and expand collaboration with the private sector by introducing dual learning arrangements. Flexibility has also been enhanced by enabling student transfers between general and vocational secondary education up to the end of grade 10, thereby broadening pathways and reducing dropouts. Private sector engagement has been institutionalised through the establishment of Sector Skills Committees, which are currently active in the ICT and Hospitality and Tourism sectors. Committees for Energy and Agriculture are being established, while at the provider level, school development units support strategic planning, quality assurance, curriculum innovation, labour market alignment and staff development with a view to improving institutional performance and responsiveness and ensuring structured dialogue with employers across VET institutions. The Adult Learning and Lifelong Skills Development Strategy (2022) entered its first implementation phase in 2024 and 2025, focusing on expanding regional learning centres and modular courses tailored for unemployed youth and displaced workers (UNESCO, 2024). Together, these initiatives roll out a reform agenda that integrates initial VET, lifelong learning, and labour market responsiveness into a cohesive skills development system.

2.3 Main actors and governance

National level

In Albania, the Ministry of Education and Sports (MoES) is primarily responsible for pre-university education policy, curriculum design, teacher standards and school funding (Eurydice, 2024a). In January 2024, the Ministry of Economy, Culture and Innovation (MECI, or MEKI in Albanian) was established, assuming responsibility for employment and skills, which had been previously managed by the Ministry of Finance and Economy (MoFE).

According to the Law on Pre-university Education (2012), the MoES is responsible for issuing national curricula and ensuring compliance through Regional Education Directorates. These directorates are tasked with the day-to-day administration of public schools, conducting external evaluations, and supervising the financial and pedagogical performance of school principals (Eurydice, 2024b). Municipalities are responsible for maintaining school infrastructure and facilitating community engagement, and private actors may establish independent schools subject to MoES accreditation and inspection.

VET governance is shared between the Ministry of Education and Sports, which sets national VET standards, accredits programmes, and defines qualifications under the National Qualifications Framework, and the National Agency for Employment and Skills (NAES), an agency under the jurisdiction of the MECI responsible for operating public VET centres and administering work-based learning (UNESCO-UNEVOC, 2024). Employer representatives and social partners sit on collegial governing boards at each VET provider to ensure that curricula remain relevant to the labour market (Law on VET, 2021). Private training centres also deliver accredited short-cycle courses under NAES oversight.

Adult learning is covered by an integrated framework overseen by the MoES and the NAES. The framework is guided by the Adult Learning and Lifelong Skills Development Strategy (2022) and the Law on VET, and extends to adult upskilling and reskilling programmes (Eurydice, 2023). Regional learning centres, operated by the NAES in cooperation with local authorities, deliver accredited non-formal courses. Meanwhile, NGOs and private providers may offer tailored training upon accreditation by the National Agency for VET and Qualifications (NAVETQ). Municipal social services also collaborate in outreach to vulnerable groups, ensuring that adult education contributes to social inclusion and employment resilience.

International level: donors

Albania has benefited from a diverse donor landscape that supports reforms in education, innovation, labour market integration and social inclusion. Since 2023, the EU has invested more than EUR 50 million through the IPA III, financing curriculum modernisation, digital learning infrastructure and inclusive education initiatives (European Commission, 2024b). Albania remains an active member of the European Higher Education Area (Bologna Process) and continues to participate in the European Solidarity Corps. The country also benefits from the international dimension of the 2021-2027 *Erasmus+ programme*. In 2023, 16 higher education capacity-building projects were selected for funding. Five of these are co-ordinated by Albanian higher education institutions. Albania also contributes to the European Education Area working groups (2021-2025). Alongside these EU-driven initiatives, the World Bank has supported the *Education for Results project*, strengthening teacher training and school management in disadvantaged regions (World Bank 2024). The GIZ has expanded its dual-system VET programmes, co-designing apprenticeships with local industries and contributing to the development of the National Qualifications Framework (GIZ, 2023). At the same time, the UNDP and the ILO, with financial support from the EU, have jointly piloted labour market activation schemes targeting unemployed young people and women. These schemes integrate skills development with support for micro-enterprises (UNDP, 2024; ILO, 2023). The support available from the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC) focuses on inclusive education for the Roma and Egyptian communities by investing in community-based preschools and adult literacy programmes (SDC, 2023). Taken together, these interventions promote and strengthen Albania's human capital

and social cohesion, while aligning the country's reform trajectory with the requirements for accession to the EU.

2.4 Policies and developments

Overview

Albania's education and training system is evolving in line with the Education, Training and Research Strategy (2021-2030) and the National Employment and Skills Strategy (2023-2030), both of which prioritise digitalisation, inclusion and lifelong learning. In 2024, the Law on the National Qualifications Framework was amended to better integrate VET outcomes into higher education and lifelong learning. Following the revision of the standards and procedures, 40 % of VET providers had completed their accreditation by mid-2025. The country is also piloting the Youth Guarantee scheme in three regions, with a national rollout planned by 2026.

Qualifications, validation, and recognition

Albania has taken measures to strengthen the development, reform and recognition of qualifications through its Albanian Qualifications Framework (AQF). First legislated in 2010, the AQF was revised in 2018 (ETF, 2025a). Structured in eight levels, the AQF has been fully referenced to the European Qualifications Framework (EQF) since 2021 and plays a central role in the National Employment and Skills Strategy (NESS) for the period 2023-2030, which prioritises lifelong learning, skills matching and labour market responsiveness. Recent legal measures have expanded the National Catalogue of Vocational Qualifications (NCVQ) by introducing new qualifications and revised standards, which integrate learning outcomes, assessment modalities and modular 'learning units' to promote transparency and the recognition of micro-credentials. In 2023, a ministerial instruction mandated that EQF levels be indicated on all VET certificates (AQF levels 2-5), thereby improving transparency and mobility. The validation of non-formal and informal learning (VNFI) was advanced by a Decision of the Council of Ministers, adopted in 2021, and operationalised through ministerial guidelines issued in December 2024 that established procedures for assessment, certification and provider accreditation. Lifelong learning qualifications are being integrated into the AQF, with programmes of at least 125 hours being recognised as partial certifications and initial applications for their inclusion already underway. The Sector Skills Committees continue to align qualifications with labour market needs, while NAVETQ oversees development, accreditation and quality assurance. These reforms collectively enhance the comparability, transparency and recognition of qualifications, thereby facilitating mobility across education pathways and supporting Albania's EU accession objectives.

Work-based learning

Albania has advanced a comprehensive work-based learning (WBL) agenda by combining structural reforms in VET with multi-level initiatives spanning initial VET (IVET), continuing VET (CVET) and active labour market programmes (ALMPs) (ETF, 2025b). Stakeholder engagement has been strengthened through Sector Skills Committees. New committees have recently been established in the energy sector, and preparations are underway to form a committee in agriculture. These will complement the existing committees in ICT and Hospitality & Tourism. At provider level, School Development Units (SDUs) act as hubs for employer engagement and student monitoring. A significant milestone was the introduction of the dual VET model in 2024-2025. This initiative was piloted in ten schools spanning eight regions and four strategic sectors (tourism, ICT, transport and energy) and was supported by a dedicated legal framework and adapted curricula at Australian Qualifications Framework (AQF) levels 3-5. This included a revised post-secondary hospitality management programme. The pilot, which currently involves 204 students, 107 companies, and 97 memoranda of understanding, is complemented by the NAVETQ's national programme Mentoring in Dual VET. This programme provides training for in-company mentors and supports teachers in developing their skills in WBL methodologies, sustainability and gender equality. Beyond dual VET, apprenticeships, locally termed 'dual programmes', are being piloted, with internships representing up

to 70 % of the curriculum time in post-secondary CVET programmes. These are supported by Swisscontact and the EHL Hospitality Business School. Internships are embedded in all IVET and CVET programmes under formal contracts, with mandatory insurance and oversight by the NAES and the NAVETQ. More than two hundred and fifty in-company trainers were certified in 2023 through donor initiatives. Employers are incentivised through wage subsidies and social contribution coverage, particularly under the Youth Guarantee scheme, which provides a six-month paid internship and subsequent employment support. Although challenges remain regarding cost-sharing, limited social partner involvement, and the absence of a centralised internship marketplace, career guidance and awareness campaigns, alongside national tracer studies and regional labour market analyses, reinforce system responsiveness and transparency. Looking ahead, Albania's priorities are to consolidate the pilot phase, roll out DVET nationwide and embed WBL as a sustainable pillar of the VET system. Albania is also an active member of the European Alliance for Apprenticeships and has hosted a regional seminar on the subject in 2024.

Career guidance

Albania has strengthened career guidance within its VET and employment ecosystem. All VET schools now have trained career orientation coordinators, who are supported by peer learning activities and a practical guide that clarifies their responsibilities and fosters collaboration with School Development Units and other stakeholders. To connect learners with employers and promote the attractiveness of VET, various events have been organised, such as national skills competitions, fairs, and open days, with a focus on opportunities for girls and underrepresented groups.

Digital platforms such as Frymeso and MesoVET.al are being increasingly used to share curriculum updates, provide counselling resources and guide students towards online learning opportunities. The Youth Guarantee Scheme complements this by integrating career services into its design, with local career offices offering targeted support to NEETs through partnerships with municipal actors. Awareness campaigns, supported by RISI Albania and UNICEF, have increased visibility by showcasing the success stories of young people who have benefited from guidance and skills development.

These initiatives have positioned career guidance as a vital tool for facilitating transitions from education to employment and supporting reorientation within the labour market. The next challenge is to ensure consistent quality and expand services beyond pilot municipalities, making career guidance accessible nationwide.

Quality assurance

Albania has introduced various measures to enhance the quality and effectiveness of education and training, placing a strong emphasis on accreditation, monitoring and evaluation mechanisms. Anchored in the Education, Training and Research Strategy (2021-2030) and the National Employment and Skills Strategy 2023-2030, these reforms align national policies with EU frameworks such as the EQF and the Osnabrück Declaration. A major milestone was the amendment to the National Qualifications Framework Law in 2024, which has strengthened the pathways between VET, higher education and lifelong learning. Institutional reforms have consolidated responsibilities, with the Albanian Quality Assurance Agency (ASCAL) now being the sole authority responsible for the quality assurance of higher education, while the NAVETQ oversees VET accreditation and quality standards, with the support of Sector Skills Committees. Quality standards have been upgraded through the National Vocational Qualification Catalogue, which was expanded in 2023 to include 22 new occupational standards and 33 new qualifications, such as two Level 5 programmes co-designed with industry.

Work-based learning has also been enhanced through the adoption of the European Quality Framework for Traineeships and the European Framework for Quality and Effective Apprenticeships. Monitoring and evaluation have been strengthened via the VET Governance Inventory and self-assessment tools, complemented by ETF support for piloting a diagnostic framework. The digitalisation of this framework is planned to be completed by 2026. At the provider level, VET

institutions have strengthened digital quality management by training management staff and designated digitalisation coordinators in the use of tools such as MesoVET and the Digital Archive. The NAVETQ has analysed self-assessment reports from 39 VET providers and published a National Summary Report, containing tailored recommendations. Accreditation processes have been reinforced, with 12 VET institutions accredited for 42 qualifications and 30 external evaluators trained to international standards. By March 2025, approximately 40 % of VET providers had achieved accreditation. Recognising the need for modernisation, the Ministry of Economy, Culture and Innovation approved Order No 845 of 3 July 2025, introducing revised accreditation standards, criteria, and procedures to ensure transparency, sustainability and alignment with international best practice.

Centres of excellence

Albania has made notable progress in promoting vocational excellence by adopting a multifaceted approach encompassing institutional accreditation, infrastructure modernisation and international networking. The National Employment and Skills Strategy 2023-2030 sets out plans for the development of flexible, inclusive and evidence-based VET provision, placing a strong emphasis on work-based learning and quality assurance mechanisms. In 2023, twelve vocational education and training (VET) institutions were accredited to deliver forty-two professional qualifications, with oversight provided by thirty trained external evaluators operating in line with international standards. Centres of Vocational Excellence (CoVEs) will be established in priority sectors, including mechanical and electrical engineering, agriculture, healthcare and computing. These centres will operate within multifunctional VET colleges offering modular, multi-profile programmes tailored to regional labour market needs.

Although not a formal VET provider, the Institute of Construction of Albania (ICA), exemplifies excellence through its specialised certification programmes in construction safety, project management and building information modelling. Albania is also an active participant in the ETF Network for Excellence (ENE) with two centres – the Hostelry Tourism School and the Hospitality and the Tourism Academy, which are already engaged in peer learning and social inclusion initiatives.

Digital education and skills

Albania has made significant progress in advancing its digital education agenda, particularly within VET, through national investment and donor support.

Guided by the Education, Training and Research Strategy (2021-2030) and the National Strategy for Employment and Skills (2023-2030), the country has aligned its reforms with EU frameworks such as the EQF and DigComp (Ministry of Education and Sports, 2023; European Commission, 2024a).

In 2024, the Ministry of Finance and Economy allocated EUR 3.9 million from the State budget to upgrade VET infrastructure, including buildings, laboratories and professional practice equipment. Meanwhile, donors contributed to ICT classroom enhancements and the procurement of digital equipment. During the 2024-2025 school year, the upgraded MesoVET.al virtual learning platform (Moodle Workplace 4.0) recorded 16 605 cumulative users and 8 704 active users, offering 126 subjects and 35 professional theory modules across 27 vocational schools. The development of 74 new subjects is underway, with 81 teachers contributing to digital content creation. In January 2025, the NAES established an inter-institutional working group to transition VET to national VET institutions, thereby ensuring system-wide adoption and sustainability.

Other initiatives include integrating Virtual Reality (VR) into teaching, using the Akelius platform for flexible language learning and implementing the DART project to promote digital agriculture in rural schools. The VET Management Information System (SMIP) is being enhanced with modules for professional practice and statistical reporting. Intensive teacher training has seen 46 new teachers complete the 'Basics of Didactics in VET' course and 44 gain certification in continuing professional education. A SELFIE-for-TEACHERS pilot in 17 VET schools revealed that most educators operate at A1-A2 levels of digital competence, particularly with regard to emerging technologies and inclusive digital practices. Training topics promoted by MECI, NAVETQ, and NAES include digital pedagogy,

gamification, blended learning and the twin transition. Tools such as Canva, Kahoot and Articulate Rise are being actively used. These reforms demonstrate Albania's strategic commitment to modernising its education system and aligning it with EU digital transition priorities.

Green transition

Albania has taken a series of steps to integrate the green transition into education and training, focusing on developing green skills, promoting sustainable practices within institutions and aligning curricula with emerging green sectors. These efforts are guided by the National Employment and Skills Strategy (NESS) 2023-2030, the Smart Specialisation Strategy, and international commitments such as the Osnabrück Declaration on VET.

Several new VET programmes explicitly integrate sustainability and green skills. These include modular courses in renewable energy technologies (solar, wind and biomass), environmental protection, and sustainable tourism. These courses are available both from VET institutions and from the European University of Tirana, the latter having launched the first short-term courses in tourism with a focus on green and digital skills. Training in food chain development promotes sustainable agriculture and is guided by the Smart Specialisation Strategy. The non-profit organisation Centre for Competitive Skills has revised ten vocational qualifications and trained 120 teachers to deliver green and digital content across sectors such as energy, construction, tourism and agriculture. Sectoral dashboards and cluster mapping are used to align these courses with labour market needs. Pilot initiatives, such as the training courses in green and digital skills hosted by the Polytechnic University of Tirana in May 2025, demonstrate the practical implementation of these programmes.

Albania has committed to modernising VET infrastructure and promoting sustainability at the level of institutions. While progress in enhancing digital infrastructure for VET provision has been rapid, developments in greening and sustainability have advanced at a slower pace. Measures include integrating environmental considerations into the design and delivery of VET programmes, fostering sustainable practices within training institutions, and promoting flexible and inclusive learning pathways.

Policy and strategic alignment. Many national strategies and policy documents, including the NESS 2023-2030 and other employment, education and skills frameworks, explicitly identify the green transition as a key objective. As part of the Osnabrück Declaration, Albania developed a National Implementation Plan (NIP), which includes actions such as conducting Skills Needs Analyses for digital and green transition skills across occupations. These analyses will inform the development of curricula, qualifications and training programmes that are aligned with the green economy.

The integration of lifelong learning (LLL) qualifications and micro-credentials into the Albanian Qualifications Framework (AQF) enables short-term and modular training in green skills to be formally recognised, supporting continuous upskilling and reskilling. This creates flexible, demand-driven pathways for learners and workers seeking to engage with emerging green sectors.

However, despite these measures, the specific targeting of green jobs and green skills remains limited, with most initiatives being integrated into broader VET or digitalisation programmes rather than being explicitly dedicated to the green transition.

Adult learning

Between 2024 and 2025, Albania introduced policies and initiatives to strengthen opportunities for lifelong learning (LLL), including upskilling and reskilling of adults, in line with EU and international commitments. The NAVETQ has adopted a national roadmap for the validation of non-formal and informal learning (VNFL), following a UNDP-supported review of Albania's regulatory framework and a comparative analysis of EU and regional models. Instruction No 1109, adopted in December 2024, In 2023, twelve vocational education and training (VET) institutions were accredited to deliver forty-two professional qualifications, with oversight provided by thirty trained external evaluators operating in line with international standards.

The design of a national model for recognising LLL qualifications within the Albanian Qualifications Framework (AQF) has been informed by EU best practice. Programmes of at least 125 hours are now eligible for recognition as partial certifications, with micro-credentials integrated through ‘learning units’ in vocational standards. In early 2025, the NAVETQ began evaluating provider applications for inclusion in the AQF.

Operational measures have expanded adult learning opportunities through blended learning guidelines, reinforced career guidance, and awareness campaigns targeting employers and training providers. Employment promotion programmes have added modular digital skills training, subsidised ICT courses, self-employment schemes and community work initiatives. A new transfer policy improved flexibility between general and vocational education up to grade 10.

While Albania has established the legal and institutional foundations for recognising prior learning and integrating LLL qualifications into the AQF, the full operationalisation of VNFI remains a key challenge. Despite legal and institutional consolidation, adult participation in education and training remains modest at 1.7 % in 2024 (up from 0.7 % in 2023), well below the EU average of 9.3 %.

3. LABOUR MARKET AND EMPLOYMENT: POLICIES AND DEVELOPMENTS

3.1 Strategy and legal framework

Albania's labour market regulations and employment policies are anchored in a framework of strategies, legislation and institutional reforms that aim to strengthen employability, reduce skills mismatches and promote inclusive participation. At the heart of this framework lies the National Employment and Skills Strategy (NESS) for the period 2023-2030, which was launched in March 2023 following an evaluation of the previous strategy, which covered the period 2018-2023. The NESS is the primary planning instrument for employment and skills development and its first monitoring cycle is expected to begin by 2025. The NESS sets out goals to improve employability, enhance labour market institutions, and reduce mismatches between skills supply and demand, with provisions for regular updates.

The NESS is closely aligned with the National Strategy on Development and Integration (NSDI) 2030, which incorporates EU accession priorities and the Sustainable Development Goals. Other complementary frameworks include the Smart Specialisation Strategy, the Strategy on Science, Technology and Innovation (2023-2030) and the Business and Investment Development Strategy (2021-2027). Cross-cutting social inclusion policies are also play a central role, notably the Action Plan for Persons with Disabilities (2021-2025), the Action Plan for Equality, Inclusion and Participation of Roma and Egyptians (2021-2025) and the Social Housing Strategy (2015-2025). These policies are all due for evaluation in 2025.

The National Agency for Employment and Skills (NAES) is the lead body responsible for delivering employment services, managing ALMPs and coordinating reintegration measures for disadvantaged groups. Local administrative units are required to collaborate with the NAES through integrated case management systems to deliver coordinated support, not only for employment but also for housing, health and education. Supported by an integrated ICT system that generates labour market intelligence, strengthens performance monitoring and enables more efficient service delivery, the modernisation of public employment services has accelerated (World Bank, 2024f).

The Youth Guarantee scheme, which was introduced in 2024, has further expanded employment activation measures by offering a package of measures to NEETs, including six-month paid internships and employment support, under a multi-stakeholder implementation plan. Other ALMPs include employment subsidies, on-the-job training, self-employment support and community work programmes. Together, these measures are designed to align employment services with labour market demand while providing pathways for vulnerable groups.

Overall, Albania's employment policy landscape is characterised by a shift from strategy design to implementation, underpinned by legislative frameworks, institutional reforms and digitalisation. The period from 2023 to 2025 marks a consolidation phase, during which reforms in VET, LLL, youth activation and social inclusion will be implemented, thereby reinforcing Albania's trajectory towards a more demand-driven, inclusive, and EU-aligned employment and skills system.

3.2 Main actors and governance

National level

The institution responsible for employment policy and its implementation in Albania is the National Agency for Employment and Skills (Aqjencia Kombëtare e Punësimit dhe Aftësive, AKPA).

The Agency is a public institution operating under the authority of the minister responsible for employment and skills development. The AKPA was established by Laws No 15/2019 on the

Promotion of Employment and No 15/2017 on Vocational Education and Training. The structure and functioning of VET are governed by Decision No 554 of 31 July 2019.

AKPA's mission is to ensure that Albanian citizens, foreign nationals, stateless individuals, refugees, and asylum seekers have access to public employment services, self-employment programmes and vocational qualifications. These objectives are set out in the National Employment and Skills Strategy 2023-2030, which aims to develop skills, match labour market demand and supply more effectively, and promoting decent employment.

The AKPA is responsible for:

- Administering and implementing active and passive labour market programmes;
- Managing public vocational education and training providers;
- Overseeing regional and local employment offices and vocational training centres;
- Ensuring compliance with financial planning, implementation and reporting standards.

The Agency operates across Albania through:

- a central directorate;
- twelve regional employment directorates;
- forty local employment offices;
- ten regional vocational training directorates;
- thirty-one vocational schools.

The international level: donors

Albania has a dynamic landscape of donor-supported employment initiatives, with the AKPA collaborating with various international partners to strengthen labour market integration and vocational training. The World Bank's DORE project focused on enhancing the employability of vulnerable groups and improving the social assistance system. Meanwhile, UNDP Albania supported the development of the National Strategy for Employment and Skills 2023-2030, contributing to employment reintegration programmes and public events such as the Employment and Skills Fair. Swisscontact has played a pivotal role through projects such as BOOST EMPLOYMENT and 'Perspektiva të Reja', targeting employment and entrepreneurship in Kukës. This has included training employment counsellors using the C4EE methodology. Backed by the KfW, the Regional Challenge Fund (RCF) has enabled vocational institutions to collaborate with businesses on joint training projects, with 23 public providers applying in 2023. The EU-funded IPA III programme, coordinated by the Ministry of Finance and Economy, has advanced the Youth Guarantee Operational Plan. Expertise France has supported the provision of inclusive employment services for women in underserved areas, and the ILO has supported the integration of youth initiatives and trained AKPA staff in conflict mediation. GIZ Albania has provided services to returning migrants and supported the Employment and Skills Fair. Risi Albania has facilitated regional employer engagement, promoting decent work through events and webinars. Finally, RECONOMY, a programme funded by Sida and implemented by Helvetas, has focused its work on inclusive and green economic development, supporting AKPA in improving labour market information systems, service delivery and institutional capacity for better employment outcomes across Albania.

3.3 Policies and developments

Overview

Albania's national employment strategy and labour market policies are guided by the recently adopted National Strategy for Employment and Skills (2023-2030), which aims to promote LLL, reduce skills mismatches and ensure inclusive access to decent work. The strategy is structured around two main goals: improving the alignment between labour market demand and vocational training supply, and promoting inclusive employment for all. Key reforms included modernising public employment services and digitalising service delivery via platforms such as e-Albania and puna.gov.al, as well as restructuring regional employment offices to better serve local needs. The Youth Guarantee Implementation Plan has been integrated into the national strategy and piloted in Tirana, Shkodër and Vlorë, offering targeted training and employment pathways to young people not in employment, education or training (NEET). The government has also launched new active labour market programmes such as the Reintegration Programme for long-term unemployed individuals and the Coding Programme to support the development of digital skills. These initiatives were complemented by financial incentives for employers and tailored support for vulnerable groups, such as women, the Roma communities and people with disabilities (World Bank, 2025).

Labour market inclusion has been a central focus, with efforts made to integrate disadvantaged groups. In 2023, more than 3 300 beneficiaries of economic aid were employed or participated in employment promotion programmes, and more than 840 enrolled in vocational training. The operationalisation of the Social Employment Fund marked a milestone in supporting the employment of disabled persons, with more than 8 000 individuals now registered with the employment service. Programmes were also tailored for women in underserved areas and for returning migrants, with support from Expertise France and GIZ Albania respectively. Political and social developments, such as Albania's EU accession process, have influenced labour market reforms, particularly through IPA III funding and alignment with EU social rights frameworks. These efforts demonstrate a comprehensive and inclusive approach to employment policy that aims to build a resilient and equitable labour market in Albania.

Youth Guarantee

The Youth Guarantee Implementation Plan (YGIP) for the period 2023-2024 is a strategic commitment aiming to integrate young people aged 15-29 years, particularly NEETS, into the labour market, education or training within four months of registration. The YGIP is anchored in the National Employment and Skills Strategy 2023-2030 and is structured around four key phases: mapping, outreach, preparation and offer. The plan aims to establish a robust system for identifying and supporting NEETs through early warning systems in schools, a national digital portal for pre-registration and targeted reforms in VET. Institutional coordination is led by the National Agency for Employment and Skills (NAES), supported by interinstitutional and technical working groups, with a strong involvement of municipalities, NGOs and youth organisations. The pilot phase, launched in October 2023 in Tirana, Shkodër and Vlorë has already started delivering personalised services, including career counselling, soft skills training and job placement support.

Substantial progress has been made in the implementation of the Youth Guarantee scheme, with the development and launch of the portal and pre-registration system via e-Albania by the NAES, enabling young people to access services and begin their journey through the scheme. The early warning system has been expanded to cover 98 schools, including 14 vocational institutions, in an effort to prevent school dropouts. More than 50 staff members from employment offices and training centres have received training to deliver specialised services to NEETs. In addition, employment promotion programmes have been revised to prioritise NEETs and a new traineeship model has been introduced, offering on-the-job training followed by employment. Outreach efforts included establishing 61 Local Youth Councils and running extensive communication campaigns on social media and at local events. Although direct monitoring indicators are still being developed, the first year has

established a strong basis for expanding the Youth Guarantee nationwide, focusing on refining strategies and increasing accessibility to ensure long-term impact.

3.4 Active labour market programmes (ALMPs)

Albania devoted just 0.035 % of its GDP to ALMPs, which is well below the EU average of 0.39 %. The NAES has continued to expand and implement its portfolio of ALMPs, including the Youth Guarantee Implementation Plan (YGP) 2023-2024.

In 2023, regulatory reforms (DCM Nos 17,535 and 264) introduced targeted measures for NEETs, including a new traineeship scheme offering three to six months of workplace learning, followed by six months of employment. The scheme was piloted in Tirana, Shkodër and Vlorë. Albania's ALMPs include employment subsidies (four, six or twelve months), on-the-job training (four months), internships (six months), support for self-employment and a community work programme, which absorbs the largest share of the ALMP budget.

In 2024, a total of 2 465 individuals benefited from the employment promotion measure, of whom 63 % were women. Of these, 57 % were over the age of 29 and 46 % had a low level of education. Almost half of the beneficiaries of the employment promotion measure participated in the community work programme. Almost 12 000 unemployed people participated in the training/retraining measure (a decrease from approximately 15 000 in 2023). The majority of beneficiaries had a medium level of education, while women and young jobseekers were slightly overrepresented. Another labour market measure implemented by the NAES in 2024 targeted direct job creation, with approximately 7 300 participants (a sharp decrease from around 12 000 in 2023). The Start Smart initiative that delivered opportunities to only 55 unemployed people in 2024, compared to almost 700 in 2023. While the Albanian public employment service has achieved full coverage in terms of job counselling, with all registered jobseekers benefiting from this service, the yearly fluctuations in participation in labour market policy measures show difficulties in mobilising sufficient financial resources, as well as staffing shortages that hinder consistent delivery of various activation measures. The transition rate from unemployment to employment reached 39.5 % in 2024 (up from 36.1 % in 2023), with higher percentages among women and jobseekers with higher levels of education (ETF ALMP data collection, 2025).

Throughout 2024, the NAES strengthened its institutional capacity to support these reforms, with a budget of ALL 2.471 billion (approx. EUR 24.3 million). This has enabled the restructuring of employment offices, the creation of mobile service units and the recruitment of 65 new staff members, including 30 working exclusively on the Youth Guarantee pilot (Council of Ministers of the Republic of Albania, 2024). Digitalisation has further improved the capacity of public employment services, which were integrated into the e-Albania platform. In addition, a dedicated Youth Guarantee portal was launched, the website puna.gov.al attracted around 14 000 monthly users, and the Pre-University Information Management System (SMIP) was upgraded to track student data. The NAES has also introduced a profiling tool to classify jobseekers and reorganised the distribution of counsellors to balance the client-staff ratio nationwide. Two mobile offices are being set up in Tirana and Durrës to reach underserved beneficiaries.

Staff development has remained a priority, with more than 50 Employment Office employees receiving training and support in career counselling methodologies from EU4SI (EU for Social Inclusion). The monitoring and evaluation systems have been reinforced through digital performance indicators and tracer studies. Collaboration with employers intensified via regional business forums and sectoral consultations in order to better align ALMPs with labour market needs.

According to vacancies registered by the AKPA, the following sectors led the demand for labour force in Albania in 2024: manufacturing (28 %), accommodation and food services (17 %), and trade: repair of vehicles and motorcycles (15 %). From an occupational perspective, demand remains concentrated in elementary occupations (27 %), crafts and related trades (23 %), the service industry, and sales staff for shops and markets (18 %). The current demand structure, particularly from an occupational

perspective, highlights the urgent need for economic development and innovation, the prioritisation of value-added activities, and the creation of employment opportunities that match Albania's existing human capital, while addressing labour market inefficiencies.

Scaling up investment in training and ensuring comprehensive support for vulnerable groups remain key priorities.

4. KEY INDICATORS: EDUCATION, SKILLS, EMPLOYMENT

4.1 Headline indicators

General education and VET

Monitoring a complex education and training system typically starts with three straightforward questions: who takes part, what do they achieve, and what supports the process?

The first question explores the extent to which learners engage in education or training. It is addressed by indicators grouped under *Participation and access* in Table 4.1. which include net enrolment rates at lower and upper secondary levels, the share of students in upper-secondary VET, the gross enrolment rate in tertiary education, and adult participation rates in lifelong learning. The second question, concerning what learners achieve, examines key educational outcomes such as learner progression and the skills or qualifications obtained. These are reflected in the *Attainment, Completion and Outcomes* indicators: the proportion of adults with tertiary qualifications, the rate of early leavers from education and training, and the percentage of 15 year-old pupils underperforming in mathematics. The third question considers the financial, physical and informational resources that support the education process. These are reflected in the indicators under *Resources and data* indicators: public expenditure on education as a percentage of GDP; the adequacy of infrastructure; and the availability of internationally comparable data.

Table 4.1 Headline indicators: education and VET (Albania, EU average) (2022-2024)

Participation and access	2022	2023	2024	EU (1)	Source
Total net enrolment rate (lower secondary)	97.3	94.6	M.D.	98.1	UIS UNESCO
Total net enrolment rate (upper secondary)	86.5	88.7	M.D.	93.6	UIS UNESCO
Students in VET as a % of total upper secondary students	17.7	17.5	M.D.	48.8	UIS UNESCO
Gross enrolment ratio (tertiary)	62.6	64.7	M.D.	79.7	UIS UNESCO
Participation in training/lifelong learning in the previous 4 weeks (% aged 25-64)	0.6	0.7	1.7	13.3	LFS
Attainment, completion and outcomes	2022	2023	2024	EU (1)	Source
Educational attainment of total population: % with ISCED 5-8	19.0	16.3	17.0	30.2	LFS (4)
Early leavers from education and training (% aged 18-24 years)	15.5	15.7	15.4	9.3	LFS (4)
Underachievers in maths (% aged 15 years)	73.9	N.A.	N.A.	31.1	PISA OECD
Resources and data	2022	2023	2024	EU (1)	Source
Public expenditure on education (as % of GDP)	2.7	2.9	M.D.	4.7	UIS UNESCO
Inadequate or poor-quality physical infrastructure (2)	37.1	N.A.	N.A.	27.9	PISA OECD
Availability of internationally comparable data on education	N.A.	42.1	57.8	N.A.	TRP (3)

Notes: 1. EU average, latest available year. PISA data: OECD average. 2. Percentage of students in schools whose principal reported that the school's capacity to provide instruction is hindered at least to some extent by inadequate or poor quality physical infrastructure. 3. ETF Torino Process (TRP).

Source: ETF KIASE database.

Albania has achieved broad coverage at the level of lower secondary education, despite a slight decline in enrolment in recent years. The net enrolment rate fell from 97.3 % in 2022 to 94.6 % in 2023, compared to 98.1 % in the EU (Table 4.1 Participation in upper secondary education increased during the reference period, although it remains lower than the EU average. The proportion of students choosing vocational pathways is strikingly low, with only 17.5 % of learners opting for a VET

pathway, compared to 48.8 % in the EU. Gross enrolment rates in tertiary education grew modestly between 2022 and 2023, yet progression into higher education in Albania remains limited in an international context. The rate reached 64.7 % in 2023, compared to 79.7 % in the EU. Adult participation in training and lifelong learning remains marginal, at just 1.7 % compared with the EU reference point of 13.3 %. However, the latest data indicates a modest upward trend.

The quality of educational outcomes remains a challenge. According to OECD's Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA), nearly three quarters of 15-year-olds underachieve in mathematics (73.9 %), which is more than double the EU average of 31.1 %. Attainment is also an issue. In 2024, only 17.0 % of the population had completed tertiary education, with this share fluctuating in recent years in response to long-term demographic trends and shorter-term enrolment patterns. More than 15 % of young people aged 18-24 years continue to leave education and training early, with the latest figure standing at 15.4 %.

The resources allocated to education are comparatively modest. Public expenditure on education stood at 2.9 % of GDP in 2023, which is well below the EU average of 4.7 %. The quality of physical infrastructure is a concern for more than a third of education providers in the country. According to OECD PISA questionnaires, 37.1 % of students attend schools that report inadequate or poor-quality facilities.

Nonetheless, the availability of internationally comparable data on education and training has improved markedly over the reference period, increasing from 42.1 % of planned indicators in 2023 to 57.8 % in 2024.

Employment and demand for skills

The set of labour-market indicators follows the same question-and-answer logic applied to education and training, but from the perspective of employment. The indicators are organised into two complementary groups: employment and labour-market outcomes and demand for skills (Table 4.2).

Table 4.2 Headline indicators: employment (Albania, EU average) (2022-2024)

Employment and labour market outcomes	2022	2023	2024	EU (1)	Source
Employment rate (% aged 15+ or similar age group)	55.5	56.5	58.2	54.7	LFS (1)
Employment rate (% aged 15-24 or similar age group)	29.0	28.6	30.2	35.0	LFS (1)
Employment rate of recent graduates aged 20-34 (ISCED 3-8)	61.9	64.4	66.2	82.4	LFS (1)
Unemployment rate (% aged 15+ or similar age group)	10.9	9.5	8.5	5.9	LFS (1)
Unemployment rate (% aged 15-24 or similar age group)	24.9	24.5	22.8	14.9	LFS (1)
NEET rate (% aged 15-29 or similar age group)	25.2	25.0	22.2	11.0	LFS (1)
Demand for Skills	2022	2023	2024	EU (1)	Source
Employment by broad economic sector (%): agriculture	33.9	37.2	36.7	3.3	LFS (1)
Employment by broad economic sector (%): industry	21.9	19.6	20.5	24.1	LFS (1)
Employment by broad economic sector (%): services	44.2	43.2	42.8	72.1	LFS (1)
Incidence of vulnerable employment (%)	49.0	50.7	51.0	10.0	LFS (1)
Employment by educational mismatch: % matched	70.3	69.8	M.D.	M.D.	ILOSTAT

Notes: 1. Data refer to 2019. 2. data refer to 2019, age group 15-59. 3. data refer to 2019, age group 16-24. 4. data refer to 2019, age group 15-24.

Source: ETF KIESE database

In recent years, labour market indicators for Albanians aged 15 and above have demonstrated steady improvement, reflected in rising employment and declining unemployment rates. The employment rate increased from 55.5 % in 2022 to 58.2 % in 2024, while the unemployment fell from 10.9 % to 8.5 % (Table 4.2). There was also a slight rise in employment among young people, reaching 30.2 %, while the employment rate of recent graduates aged 20-34 increased to 66.2 %. During this period, the

unemployment rate among young people fell to 22.8 %, while the proportion of NEETs in the age group 15-29 years dropped from 25.2 % to 22.2 %.

Taken together, these trends point to a gradual improvement in the capacity of the labour market to absorb new entrants. However, young people continue to face a less favourable situation compared to the wider population. In 2024, youth unemployment stood at 22.8 %, considerably higher than the EU average of 14.9 %. The NEET rate stood at 22.2 %, double the EU average, while the employment rate of recent graduates (66.2 %) lagged far behind the EU benchmark of 82.4%.

The structure of employment compounds these challenges. In 2024, agriculture still accounted for more than one-third of jobs (36.7 %), while the services sector employed just 42.8 % of the workforce, well below the EU figure of 72.1 % (Table 4.2). The industry sector employs one fifth of the workforce, which is only slightly lower than the EU average. The quality of employment is also an issue: 51.0 % of workers are in vulnerable employment, which is more than five times the EU average. Around 30 % of workers are in jobs that do not match their level of education, indicating a misalignment between the skills acquired through education and those that employers need.

4.2 System performance indicators

As noted in the introduction to this paper, “performance” in the context of ETF monitoring describes the extent to which VET systems deliver on their commitments to learners and stakeholders in support of lifelong learning. These commitments typically cover three key areas: ensuring broad and equitable access to opportunities for education and training; delivering high-quality and relevant education; and maintaining effective and efficient organisation and management of the education system, including adequate resourcing.

To measure performance systematically, the ETF uses System Performance Indices (SPIs), which summarise the extent to which education and training systems fulfil each of their commitments. Each SPI is presented on a scale from 0 to 100, with higher scores indicating stronger performance.

Both the headline indicators in Section 4.1 and the SPIs presented in this section are guided by the same core questions: Who takes part? What do they achieve? How do education and training systems support them? The main difference between these two sets of data lies in how these questions are answered. Headline indicators answer the questions with single, stand-alone measures drawn directly from international data sources. The SPIs, on the other hand, are evaluative, composite measures. They are designed explicitly to assess how well VET systems fulfil broader policy commitments that cannot be adequately captured through individual statistics.

Access and participation

This section presents system performance in VET and adult learning against two specific policy outcomes: 1) support for equitable access and participation for young people and adults; and 2) support for young people in IVET to successfully complete their programmes.

The scope of SPIs tracking access varies according to the target group of learners. For young people, the SPI assesses access specifically to IVET, while for adults, it captures access to CVET and other adult learning opportunities, such as those provided through active labour market policies (ALMPs). A separate SPI assesses the extent to which young learners in IVET are supported in progressing through their programmes and successfully achieving graduation.

In both cases, performance depends on the policies and measures implemented by the country. These policies provide the necessary opportunities, incentives and guidance to encourage participation and successful completion. The SPI results, therefore, reflect how effectively these policies deliver on the intended objectives.

Access by age and gender

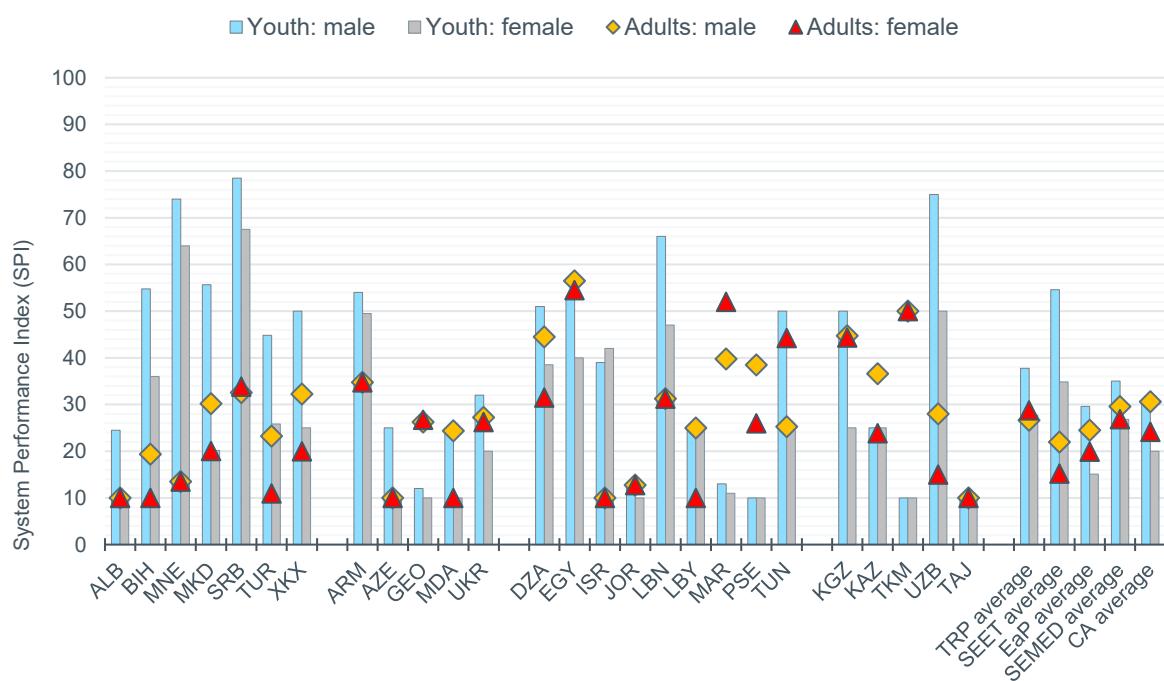
In Albania, system performance in providing access to VET varies considerably according to the age of prospective learners. Although the entry requirements for young people are not restrictive, barriers

to access remain. The Torino Process monitoring survey highlights strong geographical disparities: urban centres offer a wide range of IVET programmes, whereas rural and remote areas have much more limited provision, restricting participation for learners who cannot commute or relocate. In addition, the infrastructure and support services are often inadequate for students with disabilities and those from disadvantaged backgrounds. Indirect costs, such as transport and learning materials, also hinder access for students from low-income households. Despite tuition-free public programmes, system performance results are at the lower end of the scale, below the international average and considerably below the SEET regional average (Figure 4.1).

System performance in supporting access also varies according to the gender of learners. Girls are more than five times less likely than boys to enrol in IVET (KIESE SPI Indicator 4), and those who do tend to be concentrated in traditionally 'female' fields such as textiles, tourism and hospitality, while being underrepresented in engineering, construction and ICT. The monitoring survey attributes this to stereotypes, limited awareness of career opportunities and a lack of female role models in technical professions. Official data shows that only around 15 % of upper-secondary VET students are female. The monitoring results reflect this imbalance (SPI 10 for girls compared to 25 for boys, Figure 4.1). Although awareness campaigns and gender-sensitive policies exist, but their impact has so far been limited.

Adult participation in VET is low for both genders (SPI 10, Figure 4.1). Participation rates are below 2 % of the adult population (KIESE SPI Indicator 16), with men being slightly less likely to enrol than women. The monitoring survey cites the limited range of public provision, the small number of private providers, inadequate infrastructure, and low awareness as the factors contributing to these results. Additional barriers, such as transport difficulties, inflexible schedules and a lack of systematic guidance, restrict participation even further.

Figure 4.1 Access to learning opportunities by country, age and gender of learners - system performance index, ETF partner countries and international average (2025)



Note: Theoretical index range: min/low performance=0, max/high performance=100⁴.

Source: ETF KIESE and Torino Process databases

⁴ The Torino Process makes a distinction between theoretical (full) index range and index range used for reporting purposes. For reporting purposes, rare instances of extreme values on the low end (SPI<10) and on the high end (SPI>90) of the index scale are truncated at the upper (10) and lower (90) decile end. This means that the reporting does not discriminate SPI values below 10 and above 90. The international average, on the other hand, is calculated using the full range of the index.

Although women's participation is not lower in quantitative terms, structural constraints limit the scope of their participation in CVET and ALMPs. The unequal distribution of care responsibilities within families, limited childcare support and the persistence of gender norms and stereotypes restrict women's options, even though they make up approximately 45 % of the labour force. Although national strategies and donor-supported projects are increasingly targeting women and vulnerable groups, results are still modest.

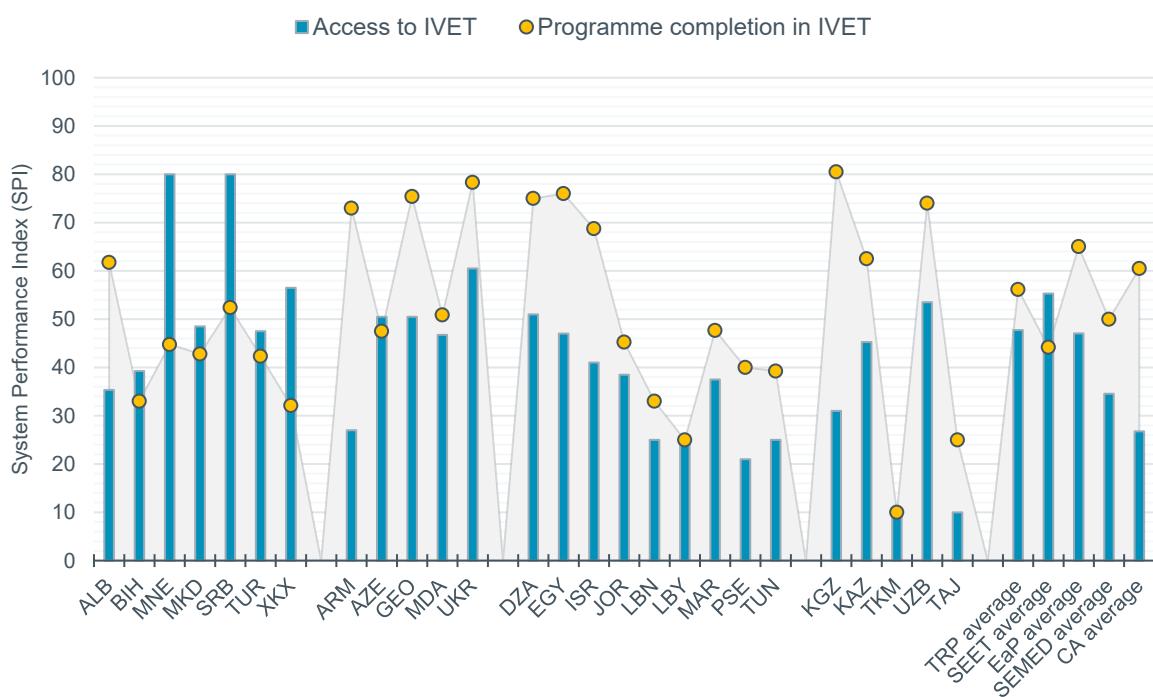
Active labour market measures provide some opportunities for adults, particularly the unemployed and NEETs. These initiatives include vocational training courses, apprenticeships and job placement services, which are offered by the National Agency for Employment and Skills and its regional offices. Financial incentives, such as training vouchers and wage subsidies, aim to reduce barriers. Pilot initiatives, such as the Youth Guarantee, have reached several hundred young beneficiaries, and further expansion is planned. Despite this, the overall impact remains limited.

Retention and programme completion

IVET in Albania provides solid support to help learners complete their programmes. With an SPI of 65, the monitoring outcomes exceed both the regional (SPI 44) and the Torino Process (SPI 48) averages (Figure 4.2). Both the data behind this composite result and the monitoring survey suggest that dropout rates in compulsory education are low, graduation outcomes are stable and transitions within and across programmes are well established.

The monitoring survey highlights several features common to IVET programmes and contribute to this outcome. The VET offer is made more attractive by a structured design, modular curricula, scholarships and fee waivers, as well as opportunities for work-based learning and career guidance. According to INSTAT data published in May 2025, a total of 3 174 students graduated from secondary vocational schools in 2024, a figure that is broadly consistent with that seen in recent years.

Figure 4.2 Access and programme completion in IVET – system performance index, ETF partner countries and international average



Note: Theoretical index range: min/low performance=0, max/high performance=100

Source: ETF KIESE and Torino Process databases

Nevertheless, some challenges remain. The share of early leavers from education and training (including IVET) is comparatively high (15.4 %, KIESE SPI Indicator 19), and the issue is more prevalent among boys who are about 40 % more likely than girls to leave education and training early.

Some aspects of the learning conditions in IVET continue to hinder learners' prospects of progressing and successfully completing their studies, even if they do not always lead directly to dropping out. Although supportive practices are in place, many learners still lack systematic help with their day-to-day studies. The monitoring survey highlights uneven infrastructure, outdated learning materials and limited access to digital tools in some schools, all of which undermine the learning experience and may indirectly affect retention rates. Support for participation and graduation at school level is also uneven. Only around one third of principals (31.8 %, KIESE SPI Indicator 20) report that their schools have dedicated rooms for homework, and just over half (57.3 %, Indicator 21) confirm that staff support is available. By contrast, peer-to-peer tutoring is offered in almost three quarters of schools (73.4 %, Indicator 22), suggesting a stronger tradition of learner-driven support.

Quality and relevance of learning outcomes

In this section, the SPIs assess the provision of basic skills and key competences to learners in IVET, as well as the level of foundational skills among adults. These results are complemented by selected KIESE indicators, which examine the relevance of learning outcomes by tracking the employment rates of individuals aged 15 years and over, disaggregated by educational attainment, in ETF partner countries.

ETF monitoring keeps quality and relevance separate because, although the two often reinforce each other, they do not always coincide. For example, learners with strong foundational skills may still struggle to find suitable employment, while individuals may secure jobs without acquiring a comprehensive skillset. By tracking these aspects separately, the reporting aims to identify the intrinsic benefits of education and its alignment with the needs of the labour market.

Quality of learning by age and gender

The monitoring survey notes that initial VET in Albania is mandated to provide young people with a broad foundation of key competences for work and life, in line with EU recommendations. Literacy, numeracy, digital skills, and transversal competences are embedded as goals in the curricula, but the achievement of these goals is uneven. Students' learning outcomes are negatively affected by limited teacher capacity, outdated materials and a lack of digital infrastructure. Although pilot initiatives such as the Skills for Jobs programme have strengthened digital, entrepreneurial and soft skills among selected providers, employer surveys continue to highlight weaknesses in advanced problem-solving and digital competences.

System performance results confirm these gaps, positioning Albania below both regional and international benchmarks in the quality of foundational competences delivered (Figure 4.3). With SPI scores of 13 for boys and 18 for girls, IVET outcomes fall below SEET averages (18 and 19, respectively), and remain well under those observed in the wider monitoring sample (24 and 40, respectively). Deficits in basic skills help explain these low scores: in reading, more than four out of five boys (81.6 %) and nearly two thirds of girls (65.2 %) perform at or below Level 1 on the OECD PISA scale (KIESE SPI Indicator 24). Underachievement is similarly widespread in mathematics and science (Indicators 25-26).

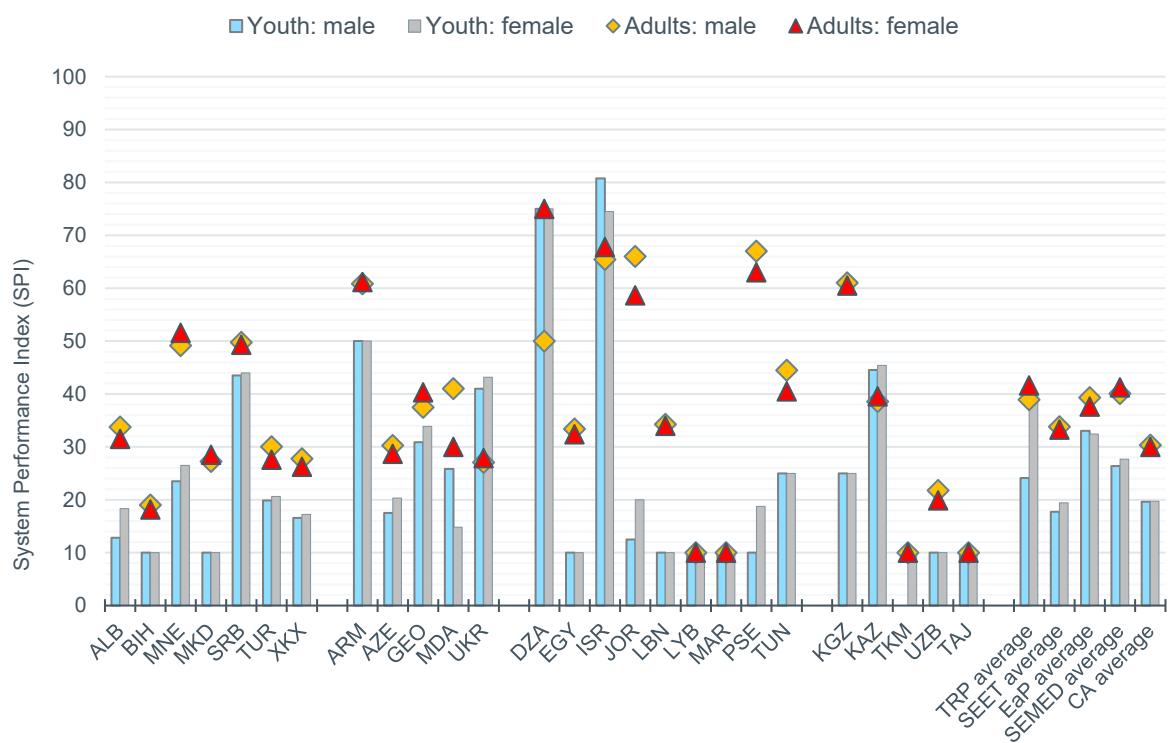
Learning outcomes also vary also by gender. While girls acquire basic skills on a par with boys, they often display strong organisational and communication abilities. However, occupational choices remain strongly gendered, and employers report that female graduates frequently hesitate when faced with technical tasks. The particularly low SPI for girls compared to the monitoring sample average reflects the constraints that gendered patterns impose on the breadth of competences female learners can develop.

Adults in Albania generally possess high levels of basic literacy (98.5 % in 2022; with 98.7 % of men and 98.3 % of women were literate, according to the World Bank and the UNESCO Institute for

Statistics, 2022). However, literacy alone is insufficient for successful participation in a modern economy. System performance indices point to relatively weak outcomes in this area: with an SPI 34 for men and 32 for women, Albania aligns with SEET averages (34 and 33, respectively) but falls below the broader monitoring sample average (Figure 4.3). Despite widespread literacy, gaps in other foundational competences undermine adult skills.

The KIESE evidence used to calculate the SPIs indicates where these weaknesses lie. Educational attainment remains limited, with only 18.9 % of women and 15 % of men having completed tertiary education (Indicator 35). Digital competences are particularly weak: just 10.1 % of women and 8.7 % of men can use basic spreadsheet formulas (Indicator 47), and 16.3 % and 17.6 %, respectively, can create electronic presentations (Indicator 45). Only around one in five can transfer files between devices or configure software and apps (indicators 53 and 55), and fewer than 5 % have completed an online course (Indicator 57). These results are consistent with international assessments that place Albania towards the bottom of European rankings for the digital skills of adults.

Figure 4.3 Quality of skills and competences by country, age and gender of learners – system performance index, ETF partner countries and international average (2025)



Note: Theoretical index range: min/low performance=0, max/high performance=100

Source: ETF KIESE and Torino Process databases

Participation in lifelong learning is limited, with fewer than 1 % of adults engaged in education or training prior to 2024, restricting opportunities for upskilling or reskilling. While many adults use digital tools for communication – nearly all report making Internet or VoIP calls (Indicator 42), and 69 % of women and 78.3 % of men participate in social networks (Indicator 43) – more advanced digital tasks are less common. Women face additional barriers, with weaker numeracy and digital skills, and more limited access in rural areas. The National Employment and Skills Strategy 2023-2030 acknowledges these deficiencies and prioritises the development of transversal and digital competences. However, implementation gaps and very low adult participation continue to hinder progress.

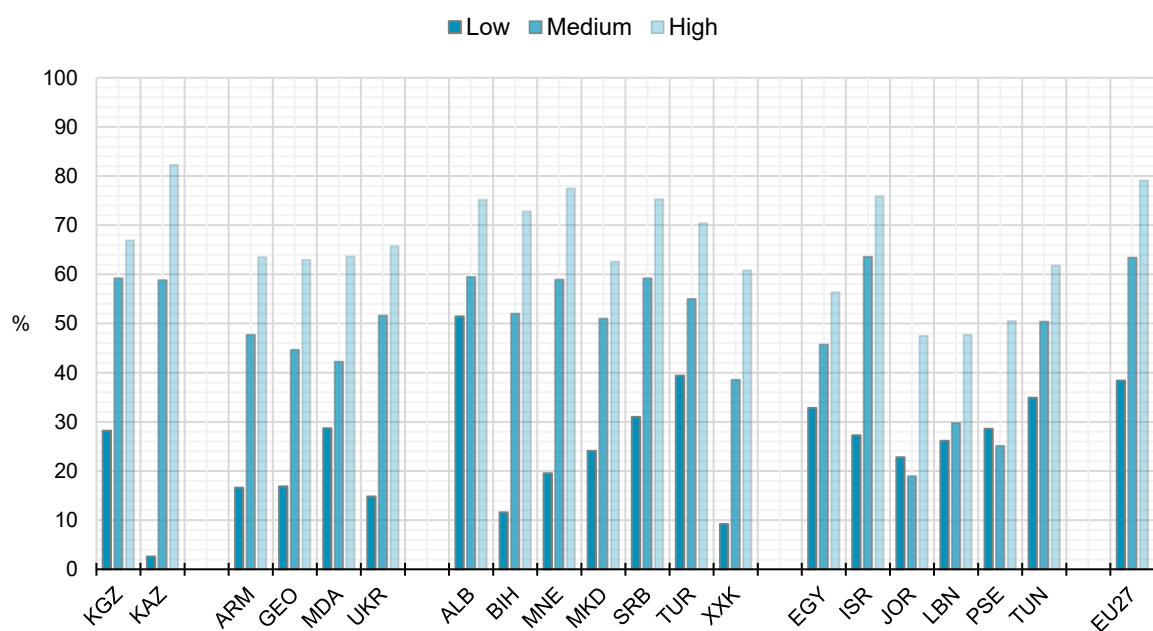
Relevance and labour market outcomes

This section uses employment data to assess the effectiveness of education in Albania in meeting labour market needs. Specifically, it compares employment rates according to the highest level of education achieved by adults, to EU-27 averages.

In almost every context, education is expected to influence the employment prospects of working-age adults. Albania is no exception. Among adults with low education, more than half are employed (51.5 %), which is considerably higher than the EU-27 reference point of 38.4 %. For those with a medium level qualifications, the share in employment is 59.5 %, which is lower than the EU-27 average of 63.4 %. Adults with tertiary qualifications have an employment rate of 75.2 %, which is also below the EU-27 reference of 79.1 % (Figure 4.4).

These results suggest that Albania differs from the EU-27 in terms of the relationship between employment and education. As in most contexts, the proportion of working adults in work is higher among those with tertiary qualifications than among those with a low level of education. In Albania, however, the difference between the two groups is just 23.7 %, which is considerably smaller than the 40.7 % gap in the EU-27.

Figure 4.4 Employment rate (age 15+) by educational attainment, ETF partner countries (2024)



Source: ETF KIESE database

The reason is that adults with a low level of education in Albania are more likely to be in work than their EU-27 peers, while those with medium or tertiary qualifications are less likely to be employed. The narrower gap thus reflects the comparatively high employment rate among adults with lower levels of education, rather than better employment opportunities for those with higher qualifications. Nevertheless, as in other countries and in the EU, completing tertiary education offers the most significant advantage in finding work. In Albania, progressing from medium to tertiary qualifications increases employment prospects by 15.7 %, which is similar to the EU-27 benchmark.

System management and organisation

In the final section on policy and system performance, the focus shifts to the organisation and management of the education and training system, paying particular attention to VET.

The analysis presents data on system performance in the form of SPIs in three areas: effective allocation and use of financial resources in VET; allocation, use, and professional capacity of human

resources, including the leadership skills and professional competence of school management and staff, and system steering and management, including data, quality assurance, school leadership and the internationalisation of VET.

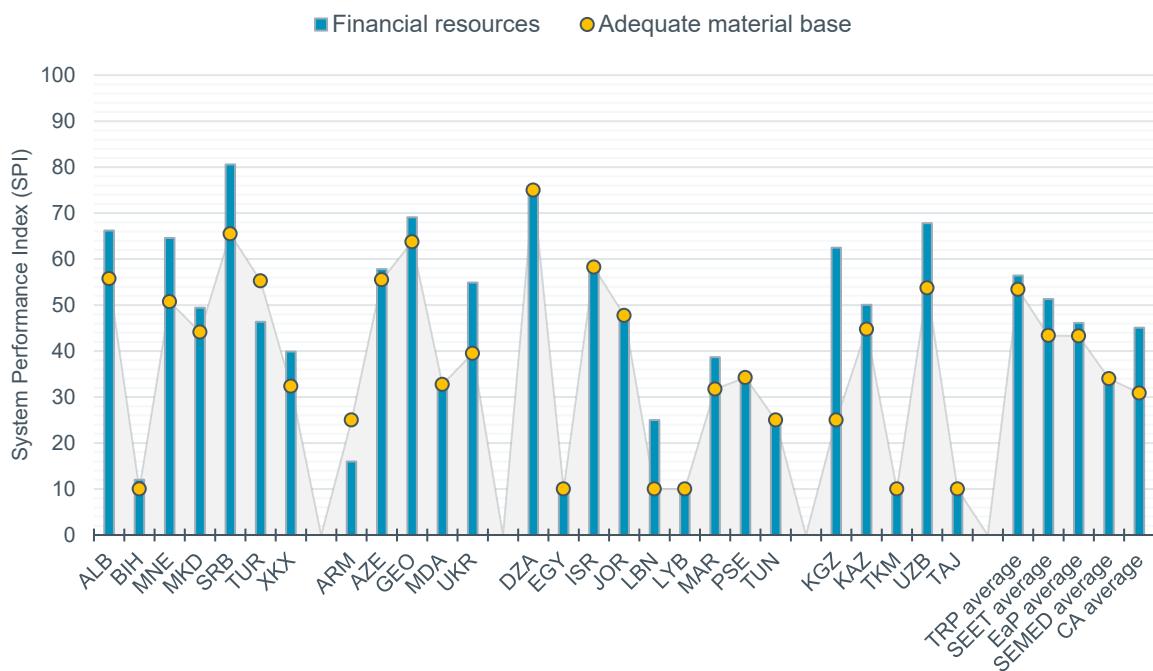
Financial resources in VET and lifelong learning

This section examines the availability of funding for VET in Albania and discusses how effectively this funding translates into tangible resources, such as well-equipped teaching facilities, workshops and appropriate instruction materials.

Despite recent increases in public expenditure and a stronger policy emphasis on the sector since 2023, investment in VET in Albania remains limited in both adequacy and efficiency. The system performance index for the adequacy of financial resources (SPI 66) places Albania above both the TRP (56) and the SEET (51) averages, confirming that funding is stronger than in many contexts, yet still insufficient to meet policy ambitions (Figure 4.5).

In 2024, annual spending on education amounted to around EUR 550 million, or 3.1 % of GDP and approximately 10 % of total government expenditure. Some of this was allocated to vocational infrastructure, including dormitories, workshops, laboratories and digitalisation, as set out in the National Employment and Skills Strategy 2023-2030 (extended to 2026). Nevertheless, overall funding continues to fall short, with continuing VET being particularly underfinanced and largely dependent on participant fees.

Figure 4.5 Allocation and use of financial resources in education and training – index of system performance, ETF partner countries and international average (2024)



Note: Theoretical index range: min/low performance=0, max/high performance=100

Source: ETF KIESE and Torino Process databases

Efficiency in the use of resources remains a challenge and helps explain the solid but overly strong performance results. Outdated equipment, inadequate data systems and limited school autonomy undermine the effectiveness of substantial resource mobilisation. While the government provides around three-quarters of the funding for State schools (75.9 %, KIESE SPI Indicator 96), many providers still struggle with the efficient use of these funds. Principals report that instruction is hindered by a lack of educational materials (53.9 %, Indicator 97), poor-quality materials (47.3 %, Indicator 98), and inadequate physical infrastructure (Indicators 99-100). Staffing shortages also matter, with nearly one in five students attending schools where a lack of support staff is reported as a barrier.

(Indicator 103). Efficiency is further limited by the absence of performance-based budgeting and outcome-linked allocation mechanisms.

The gaps are mainly addressed through generous but fragmented donor support. The Regional Challenge Fund has committed more than EUR 10 million to 21 partnership projects in ICT, hospitality and tourism. Meanwhile, the Skills for Jobs programme, which is supported by Switzerland with CHF 7.7 million for the period 2023-2027, collaborates with ten vocational schools and more than 100 companies to strengthen dual VET and digitalisation. While these initiatives provide valuable support, their scope is limited and they cannot replace systemic and predictable financing arrangements overseen by the national authorities.

Human resources: allocation, use, professional capacity

The availability and management of human resources in VET in Albania are broadly adequate. System performance in this area (SPI 74) is well above both the SEET average of 59 and the wider Torino Process sample average of 61. According to the monitoring survey, teacher availability has improved compared to previous years. However, principals in around 15 % of schools still report that instruction is hindered by teacher shortages (KIESE SPI Indicator 107, sourced from OECD PISA). Regional and sectoral imbalances persist, affecting rural areas and smaller providers in particular. In 2022, around 8 % of teachers in VET left their posts, which is at the higher end of the international scale and indicates challenges with staff retention in VET (Indicator 116, sourced from PISA).

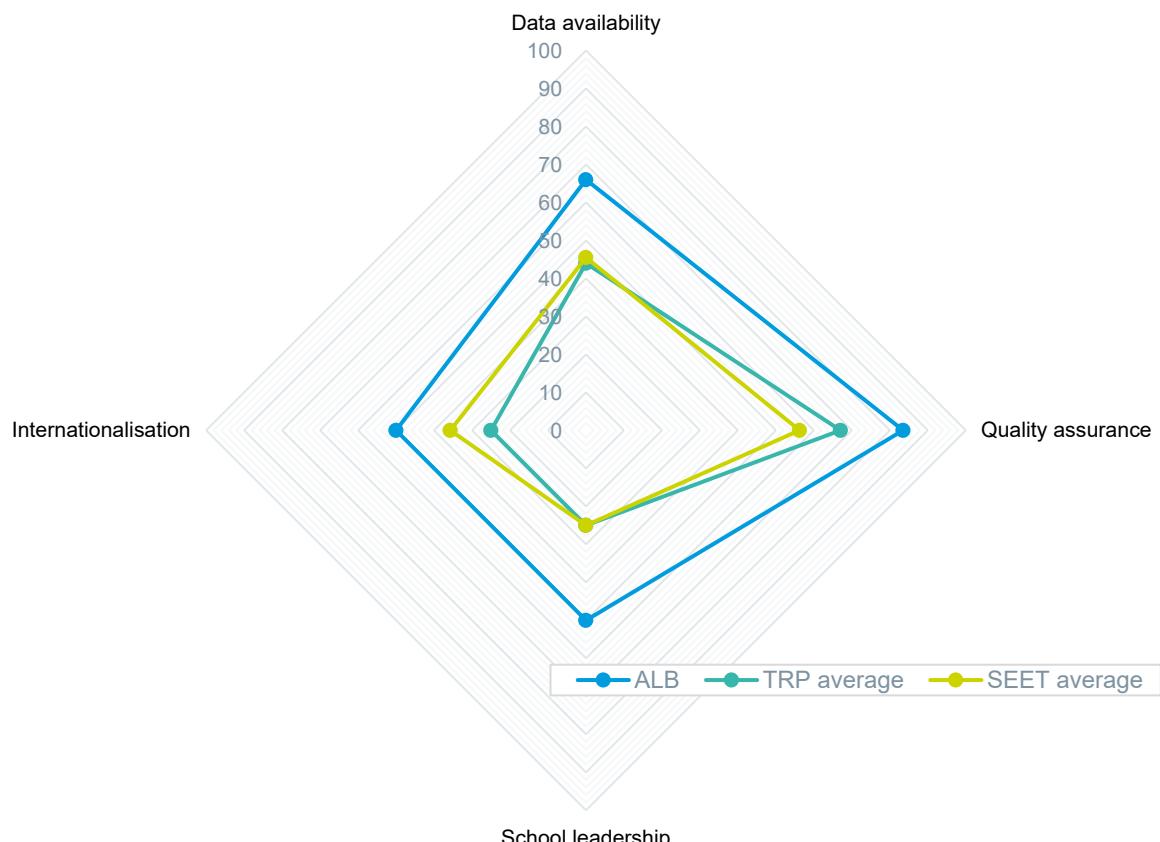
Apart from that, the solid performance in this monitoring domain reflects the presence of a largely qualified teaching force and a structured framework for managing staff and its professional development. National agencies such as the NAVETQ and the Agency for Quality Assurance in Pre-University Education play a central role in same.

Consequently, more than 80 % of teachers are fully certified by the relevant authority (Indicator 111), and approximately two-thirds had recently participated in professional development (Indicator 112) in 2022. According to the monitoring survey, the formal career system requires at least three days of accredited training each year. Progression through three career categories, which are linked to exams, experience and continuous training, offers a transparent pathway that is accompanied by salary increases. However, the survey also notes that reforms designed to improve working conditions and strengthen teacher career pathways are still emerging at scale and are not yet sufficient to overcome the combined challenge of uneven deployment and retention.

System steering and management

This section summarises the results of system performance in terms of data availability and capacity, as well as in terms of informed decision-making, quality assurance, school leadership and internationalisation in VET in Albania.

Figure 4.6 System steering and management – index of system performance, selected dimensions, ETF partner countries and Torino Process average (2024)



Note: Theoretical index range: min/low performance=0, max/high performance=100

Source: ETF KIESE and Torino Process databases

Albania has improved the availability of data on education and training (see also Table 4.1). Unlike in many other countries participating in the ETF monitoring exercise, evidence is also available for socioeconomically disadvantaged young people and domains that are typically harder to document, such as human resources and funding. With an SPI of 66, Albania's performance is well above both the wider monitoring sample (44) and the SEET average (46) (Figure 4.6). The administrative systems managed by the NAES and the NAVETQ offer a wealth of information on participation, programme offers, labour market outcomes and dropout risks. Specialised tools such as early warning systems for dropouts and NEET profiling, as well as initiatives like Skills for Jobs, have expanded data collection and analysis. However, challenges remain with incomplete data integration, limited real-time analytical capacity and inconsistent quality across institutions.

Quality assurance in VET has also advanced, in line with European practice and the National Employment and Skills Strategy 2023-2030. Recent reforms introduced by the NAVETQ, with international support, have established updated accreditation procedures that combine provider self-assessment via an online platform with external evaluations based on transparent standards. System performance in this area is strong (SPI 84, Figure 4.6). Several providers have already been accredited, and quality assurance is widespread. Almost all schools apply internal self-evaluation (99.6 %, KIESE SPI Indicator 84), external evaluation (93.1 %, Indicator 85), systematic recording of student results (99.3 %, Indicator 89) and teacher mentoring (97.4 %, Indicator 91). However, QA remains uneven: only 12 % of principals report that achievement data are made public (Indicator 81), and approximately one fifth of schools do not use available information for planning and improvement (Indicators 92-94). Learner feedback, teacher evaluation and the accessibility of QA data to the public also remain limited.

The professional capacity of VET school leaders is comparatively strong (SPI 50). A formal framework requires advanced qualifications, teacher certification, and a nine-month training programme aligned with the National Education Strategy. Recruitment follows regulated criteria, and professionalisation is supported through continuous training, including areas such as minority sensitivity and digital competences. Nevertheless, leadership capacity remains uneven across providers.

Albania has also committed to strengthening the international dimension of VET in its Employment and Skills Strategy (2023-2030) and 2030 Higher Education Policy Document. Participation in Erasmus+ and other EU programmes has enabled partnerships, mobility schemes and the alignment of curricula with European standards. Projects such as V2V-AL and ALLIANCE have introduced twinning, job shadowing and the establishment of international offices in VET schools. Meanwhile, national reforms are supporting the recognition of qualifications and the integration of digital and green competences. However, domestic funding for internationalisation remains unstable, mobility varies between providers, and legal frameworks for recognition and cooperation are still incomplete. These gaps prevent the system from performing beyond the average (SPI 50).

ABBREVIATIONS

AKPA	Agjencia Kombëtare e Punësimit dhe Aftësive (National Agency for Employment and Skills)
ALMPs	Active Labour Market Programmes
AQF	Albanian Qualifications Framework
ASCAL	Albanian Quality Assurance Agency
CC	Candidate Country
CoE	Council of Europe
CoVEs	Centres of Vocational Excellence
CVET	Continuing Vocational Education and Training
DCM	Decision of the Council of Ministers
EACEA	Education, Audiovisual and Culture Executive Agency
ECTS	European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System
EHL	EHL Hospitality Business School
ENE	ETF Network for Excellence
EQF	European Qualifications Framework
ETF	European Training Foundation
EU	European Union
GIZ	Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (German Agency for International Co-operation)
HDI	Human Development Index
ICT	Information and Communication Technology
ILO	International Labour Organization

IMF	International Monetary Fund
INSTAT	Institute of Statistics of Albania
IPA III	Instrument for Pre-Accession Assistance III
ISCED	International Standard Classification of Education
IVET	initial vocational education and training
KIESE	Key Indicators on Education, Skills and Employment
LFS	Labour Force Survey
LLL	Lifelong Learning
MECI/MEKI	Ministry of Economy, Culture, and Innovation (Ministria e Ekonomisë, Kulturës dhe Inovacionit)
MIL	Media and Information Literacy
MoES	Ministry of Education and Sports
MoFE	Ministry of Finance and Economy
NAES	National Agency for Employment and Skills
NAVETQ	National Agency for VET and Qualifications
NEET	Not in Employment, Education, or Training
NESS	National Employment and Skills Strategy
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisation
NSDI	National Strategy for Development and Integration
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
OSCE	Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe
PISA	Programme for International Student Assessment
PPP	Purchasing Power Parity

RCF	Regional Challenge Fund
SDGs	Sustainable Development Goals
SDUs	School Development Units
SDC	Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation
SEET	South Eastern Europe and Turkey
SMIP	VET Management Information System
SPI	System Performance Index
STEM	Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics
TRP	Torino Process
UIS	UNESCO Institute for Statistics
UN DESA	United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
UNICEF	United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund
VET	Vocational Education and Training
VNFIL	Validation of Non-Formal and Informal Learning
VR	Virtual Reality
VTC	Vocational Training Centre
WBL	Work-based Learning
WHO	World Health Organization
YGIP	Youth Guarantee Implementation Plan

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