

ALBANIA

**EDUCATION, TRAINING AND EMPLOYMENT
DEVELOPMENTS 2021**

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KEY POLICY DEVELOPMENTS IN EDUCATION, TRAINING AND EMPLOYMENT

In the recent past, private-sector competitiveness and the production base have remained limited, which has hindered job creation. Moreover, the educational and training system still suffers from comparatively inferior educational attainment and performance, leading to an unsuitably qualified labour force, skills shortages and soaring youth unemployment.

Between 2020 and 2021, employment and social protection measures were rolled out to mitigate the needs of the newly unemployed population (including the informal sector) as a result of the Covid-related lockdowns and economic contraction. The Government has put in place numerous measures (amounting to 4% of GDP) to support the healthcare system, enterprises and households affected by the confinement measures. It received emergency financing support from the International Monetary Fund, the EU and other donors to help assist with the crisis response. Measures included a rapid shift to e-governance for unemployment benefits, with various extraordinary support measures for small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs). Both the participation and employment rates have slightly decreased. The labour force participation rate for the population aged 15-64 in 2020 was 69.1%. The labour force participation rate for men aged 15-64 was 15.9 percentage points higher than for women. Similarly, the employment rate decreased from 53.4% in 2019 to 52.5% in 2020 (INSTAT, 2021). It seems that the COVID-19 pandemic has mainly fuelled transitions into inactivity, not unemployment. This has significant policy implications, as in any case Albania, like several other EU Neighbourhood countries, is confronted with modest activation rates among working-age groups.

The COVID-19 crisis has also added complexity to the costly reconstruction efforts following the devastating high-magnitude earthquake that shook the country in November 2019 and destroyed several schools, including VET centres.

1. KEY DEMOGRAPHIC AND ECONOMIC CHARACTERISTICS

■ Political developments and health situation

Incumbent prime minister Edi Rama won the parliamentary majority in the April 2021 elections for the third consecutive time and, as such, is likely to remain the Head of Government until 2025.

Albania was granted official candidate status for accession to the EU in 2014. Negotiations are ongoing and the third cycle of the pre-accession fund is being implemented. On 25 March 2020, the EU opened accession talks with Albania. 84% of Albanians believe EU membership is a positive thing. 85% think that their Government should do more for relations with the EU (the highest figure in the region) (RCC, 2021). In March 2021, the European Commission informed the Council that Albania had met the remaining condition to be fulfilled prior to the holding of the first Inter-Governmental Conference of accession negotiations.

Covid's impact on health (specifically Sustainable Development Goal 3) has been drastic (UNWA, 2020). Restrictive measures by the Government have influenced both the coverage and outreach of non-Covid-related public health services. Numerous services have been put on hold. The state budget for 2021 demonstrates the emphasis on the health sector. Front-line medical staff have seen a 40% increase in wages since the start of the outbreak.

In November 2021 the vaccination rate (two doses) was just over 30%. The number of COVID-19-related deaths was in decline.

■ Demographics

The number of births in Albania barely compensates for the compounded mortality and migration rates. The population is rapidly aging, and its growth rate has been fluctuating around zero for the past two decades. The population stands at 2.8 million in 2021. Two thirds of the people reside in urban centres. Tirana (the capital) is by far the largest city with some 375 000 inhabitants. Just over 20% of Albania's citizens are within the youth category (15-24 age bracket) (INSTAT, 2021).

Demographic changes and migration also contribute to changes in the geographical distribution of people within the country. Some areas in Albania are facing severe depopulation while others are experiencing large-scale urbanisation (Betti et al., 2018).

Albania is characterised by a very high level of migration, ranking it among the top countries in the world for the share (as a percentage of the current population) and intensity of international migration. While groups from all social-economic backgrounds and levels of education have emigrated from Albania, brain-drain outflows have been on the rise in the past decades. Those in their 20s, the best-educated and most qualified people, are emigrating to advanced EU and North American countries.

There is a close correlation between migration and education in Albania. The education system has contributed to two push factors for migration. Its low quality encourages many individuals to emigrate, with the aim of obtaining a better education for themselves or their children. Thus, the number of Albanian students studying abroad is high and ranks Albania top among the Western Balkan countries. However, very few of them wish to return to Albania (ETF, 2021).

The proportion of youth population and out-of-working-age population has continuously decreased since 2010, reaching 21.8% in 2020. For the 2020-2021 academic year, 584 616 pupils and students attended formal education, a decrease of 4.6% compared to 2019-2020. The decrease in participation is noted at all education levels (INSTAT, 2021).

■ **Economic developments, informal economy, remittances**

The Albanian economy is dominated by micro-enterprises (with fewer than 10 employees), which make up 87.9% of all enterprises. Micro-enterprises account for the single biggest share of workers in businesses of any size, while medium-sized enterprises generate slightly more employment (OECD et al., 2019).

The GDP contraction for 2020 is -3.3% (INSTAT). According to the IMF (2021), 'Albania's economic activity in 2020 contracted by much less than originally expected, reflecting stronger domestic and regional tourism, policy support and earthquake reconstruction, as well as the absence of a second lockdown. In 2021 growth is projected to rebound to 5.3 percent on the back of the recovery of pandemic-affected sectors and continued earthquake reconstruction.'

A survey (Williams, 2020) found that 44.7% of businesses claimed to be competing with unregistered or informal businesses. Medina and Schneider (2018) calculate the undeclared economy in Albania as likely to comprise 32.7% of its GDP.

In 2019, in 28% of 10 042 visits to companies, an administrative measure (fine, suspension or warning) was applied (ILO 2019). In 2020, the State Inspectorate of Labour and Social Services (SILSS) continued its inspections through the e-Inspection portal. It also developed a matrix including all inspection and decision-making functions. This inventory of the legal and regulatory framework on labour inspection, as well as increased accessibility by all stakeholders (companies, organisations, inspectors) aim to strengthen its regulatory role and the performance of inspections. SILSS has also established mechanisms to increase awareness and enhance the processing of claims and the identification of labour market informality.

Remittances sent to Albania in 2020 (USD 1.4 billion) represented 9.9% of its GDP, a figure that has remained around 10% for 5 consecutive years (World Bank, 2021).

2. EDUCATION AND TRAINING

2.1 Trends and challenges

Starting out as one of the lowest performers in the Western Balkans over the last 20 years, Albania has become one of the fastest improvers and achieved significant gains in access to education and in raising learning outcomes.

During this period, the mean number of years of schooling increased by 2.3 and the expected numbers of years of schooling increased by 3.1. Albania's Human Development Index for 2020 was 0.795. This puts the country in the high human development category, positioning it at 69 out of 189 countries. However, it remains the second-lowest in Europe after Bosnia and Herzegovina.

Albania ranks in 50th position when its Human Development Index is adjusted for inequality (the value for 2020 was 0.708 – HDR, 2020).

Over the last 3 years, Albania has taken institutional measures and restructured key agencies responsible for school support and external evaluation, aiming to further deconcentrate governance mechanisms and improve service delivery. Most notable are the Quality Assurance Agency in Higher Education, which manages the school evaluation framework, guidelines and training; and external school evaluators in regional education directorates who fall under the jurisdiction of the Ministry's new executive arm, the General Directorate of Pre-University Education (hereafter the 'General Directorate').

Recent developments include the gradual introduction of competency-based curricula for the different subjects and grades of basic education, the establishment of teacher training standards and the use of a school evaluation indicator framework. With regard to teacher training, in 2020, four soft skills training modules (communication, teamwork, positivity and integrity) were developed and training was offered to VET teachers. The National Agency for VET and Qualifications (NAVETQ) has (with ETF support) developed a draft concept paper for the continuous professional development (CPD) of VET teachers in Albania, to guide future institutional and legal changes in this component of the VET reform and to orient technical support in this process (NEES progress report 2021).

Key progress also included establishing a policy framework for pre-school education. Concerning vocational education and training (VET), key achievements are the establishment and functioning of the National Agency for Employment and Skills (NAES) and the expansion of the mandate of NAVETQ and the gradual implementation of the Albanian Qualifications Framework (AQF).

■ Education expenditure, access, participation and early leaving

Government expenditure on education amounted to 3.95% in 2019 (last available year; World Bank World Development Indicators), with incremental increases taking place over the last decade.

Albania maintains high access to primary education, with a net enrolment rate of 96% in 2020 (according to UNESCO). However, Roma children and children with disabilities do not always enjoy the right to education (Maghnouj et al., 2020). The (year) UN Human Development Report states that Albanian children who started schooling in 2019 may expect to receive 14.7 years of schooling. This figure has been continuously increasing since the 1990s.

Participation in upper secondary education is not universal but has been increasing over the years.

Some students drop out of school.

Initial vocational education programmes are currently offered in 34 vocational schools and 10 vocational training centres. Albania's vocational education system is comparatively small and attracts very few women.

In the 2020-2021 academic year, 589 604 pupils and students attended formal education, a decrease of 4.6% compared to 2019-2020 (when 612 534 were enrolled). The decrease in participation is noted at all education levels. Out of this total, only 19 024 enrolled in vocational education, illustrating the comparatively small proportion of VET students. Adult learning, however, remains well below the European Union (EU) average, with less than 1% of adults having taken part in education and training 4 weeks prior to the survey (LFS, 2019).

■ PISA results

Despite sustained improvements since 2009, Albanian students continue to perform poorly in Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) tests. In 2018, 50.3% of 15-year-olds performed poorly in reading and 53.3% in mathematics. Albania has a higher proportion (29.7%, OECD average: 13.4%) of students who are unable to demonstrate basic proficiency (Level 2) in all three core domains of PISA (OECD, 2020). These results illustrate that education quality remains a challenge for the country. This is particularly true for schools in rural, mountainous and isolated areas, which struggle to attract well-qualified teachers.

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

Albania's legacy of long-term underinvestment in education and training, coupled with a tendency for pupils to drop out of school early, had resulted in a high share of people with low educational attainment. However, there have been significant improvements over the last 10 years. Early school leaving halved from 31.9% in 2010 to 16.3% in 2019 (EUROSTAT, 2021). The low educational attainment rate fell from 51.6% in 2010 to 42.6% in 2019.

By the end of 2020, the share of NEETs in the 15-29 age group had increased only slightly compared to 2019 (27.9% vs. 26.6%). This presents a major improvement from 2015, when the rate stood at 32.8%. Increasing levels of educational attainment do not appear to insulate youth from labour market challenges, as the share of NEETs among 15-29-year-olds is highest among secondary school graduates (31.1%), followed by those with tertiary (27.5%) and primary (24.9%) levels of educational attainment. Albania's figures are some of the highest among EU and Western Balkan countries (ETF, 2021).

■ Education during the COVID-19 pandemic

Over half a million students from pre-school to higher education had their physical presence at school interrupted for 4 months in spring 2020. From September 2020, students attended school, whether going back physically, in a hybrid fashion or fully online.

Quick efforts were made to use online platforms, such as Google Classroom, Zoom and Edmodo, organised at school level. A range of lectures were developed for primary and secondary school students and aired on national television. However, at the onset of the pandemic, Albania's education system did not have the infrastructure and resources in place to ensure a smooth shift to digital online learning following school closures. Many teachers lacked ICT skills and were unable to provide adequate learning support. Inclusion, quality and work-based learning all suffered significantly.

A sizeable proportion of learners do not own the necessary tools and/or have limited broadband access. Most students used their smartphones, which limits online learning modalities. A study into the impact of COVID-19 on the well-being of Albanian children (World Vision, 2020) found that 1 in 10 children could not fully access online education activities. The same is true for 1 in 2 children with disabilities. Furthermore, a study on children's online experience during 2019 (UNICEF, 2020) shows that parents' digital skills are lower than those of their children, with parents from low socio-economic backgrounds being most affected.

Lockdown measures also affected services to the most vulnerable children, such as protecting them against domestic violence or providing psychological support. Additionally, the OECD holds that the disruption in school attendance could lead to an increase in the school drop-out rate. The shock is likely to have a negative impact on learning outcomes and disproportionately affect the most vulnerable students, thus deepening existing learning gaps (OECD, 2021).

2.2 VET policy and institutional setting

■ Strategic and legal framework for VET and adult learning

Policy reforms in VET and employment are conducted as part of the 2019-2022 National Employment and Skills Strategy (NESS 2019) and the associated action plan. These reforms included the continuous development of the AQF and individual qualifications; the revision of framework curricula for VET; the organisation of basic pedagogical training for all VET teachers and instructors; the creation of multifunctional VET centres catering to the needs of both young people and adults; and the development of flexible offerings for VET delivery and jobs (including active labour market policies – ALMPs – and school- and work-based VET). According to the mid-term evaluation of the programme conducted in 2020, most of the milestones have been achieved on time, particularly the consolidation of the institutional framework in the employment and skills development sector (MoFE, 2021). With regard to the consolidation of the legal framework, by the end of 2020, 12 bylaws to the VET Law and 3 bylaws to the AQF Law had been adopted and are now in the implementation phase. Regarding the VET Law, significant improvements were achieved with the adoption of the bylaw on the organisation and functioning of VET providers, which introduced development units and improved hiring methods.

■ VET governance and financing arrangements

The Ministry of Finance and Economy (MoFE), with its Employment and VET department, is in charge of policies, the legal framework and all aspects of funding, appointment of directors, etc. The National Agency for Employment and Skills (NAES) is in charge of the day-to-day administration of VET providers. There are no administrative structures for VET at subnational level.

The National Agency for VET and Qualifications is in charge of implementing the AQF and maintaining the national catalogue of occupations, vocational qualifications and related standards and descriptions; devising curricula for all programmes offered in the formal vocational education system; supporting the development of courses in vocational training centres (VTCs); issuing guidelines and instructions for skills assessments and certification; and national activities related to continuing professional development (CPD) for teachers and instructors.

All three key implementing agencies – the National Employment and Skills Agency (NAES), the National Agency for VET and Qualifications (NAVETQ) and the State Inspectorate for Labour and Social Services (SILSS) – have recently undergone significant structural improvements. The new organisational structure of NAES, the institution that manages publicly funded VET providers and

employment policies, was approved in 2019 with a total of 90 staff at the head office, and partially completed in 2020. Similarly, NAVETQ has undergone a restructuring process, which resulted in a new organisational structure composed of 30 staff (from 16 previously). Lastly, SILSS completed its new organisational structure in 2020. The restructuring and hiring processes at all three agencies are expected to be completed by 2022.

Investments in infrastructure in VET providers amounted to ALL 956 million (ca. EUR 7.88 million). The infrastructure projects were initiated in 2019. No new investment contracts were awarded.

■ Quality and quality assurance

Updating and expanding a market-relevant VET offer continued in 2020. NAVETQ, in collaboration with the Union of Chambers of Commerce and Industry, drafted 19 new occupational standards (including 4 regional ones). In addition, 19 standards of vocational qualifications have been developed and/or revised, and 23 frame curricula have been drafted or revised for levels 2-5 of the Albanian Qualifications Framework (AQF).

Albania has established a taskforce to oversee the development and implementation of the AQF and to guide its EQF referencing process. The Director of NAVETQ and the Director of the Ministry of Education's Integration department are the co-chairs of this taskforce. Its mandate was renewed in 2020. The taskforce has approved the action plan for the further development and implementation of the AQF and has drafted a roadmap for the implementation of the AQF referencing process with the EQF (MoFE, 2021).

The bylaw on the mechanism for the inclusion of lifelong learning qualifications in the AQF was adopted; however, its implementation is closely linked to NAVETQ's institutional restructuring. With the support of the ETF, a study was conducted to assess the need and readiness of the VET system to introduce a credit system in VET. This study was further discussed in a consultative meeting with members of the AQF taskforce, business representatives and experts in the field. One of the main recommendations of the study is testing the credit system for professional qualifications at level 5 of the AQF (MoFE, 2021).

School self-assessments, using a systematic indicator framework, were successfully piloted in 2018 and implemented across all Albanian VET schools in 2019. They were further improved (with donor support) and in 2020, all VET providers conducted a self-assessment, which has served to propose further improvements to the process and concrete recommendations for each provider (MoFE, 2021).

The Integrated Policy Management Groups (IPMGs) were transformed into an integrated sector management mechanism and now serve as high-level forums for policy dialogue and partnership to ensure leadership and coordination in the wide priority sectors and sectors of special importance.

In 2020, 967 (692 women) out of 1 130 teachers in VET providers had participated in some type of training. With the support of S4J, four soft skills training modules (communication, teamwork, positivity and integrity) have been developed and training has been offered to VET teachers. NAVETQ has developed a draft concept paper for the continuous professional development (CPD) of VET teachers in Albania, to guide future institutional and legal changes in this component of the VET reform, as well as to orient technical support in this process. At VET provider level, the identification of teacher training needs is a regular process that supports their capacity development. At central level, NAES is attempting to standardise instruments for assessing training needs, and subsequently to institutionalise them (MoFE, 2021).

In 2020, NAVETQ, in collaboration with international UNDP expertise, designed the accreditation model for VET providers, which includes roles and responsibilities of institutions for accreditation, standards and criteria, accreditation procedures, and a roadmap to support the accreditation process roll-out (MoFE, 2021).

In addition, investments through the state budget in the infrastructure of seven school buildings continued in 2020, following the implementation of contracts awarded the previous year. Significant improvements in digital equipment and tools were crucial to facilitate the remote learning process.

■ **Work-based learning arrangements**

Framework curricula for the different VET programmes (lasting 2+1+1, 2+2 or 4 years) consist of vocational theory and vocational practice. Practice parts increase from the 2nd to the 4th year. National law allows for the provision of internships in companies, and this form of vocational practice has become increasingly common in recent years. Students typically rotate between different employers. However, there are not enough internship places available for every Albanian student, and hence, work-based learning is not compulsory in initial VET. When VET schools are unable to find suitable companies, vocational practice may take place in the VET schools' own workshops.

A bylaw to regulate work-based learning was adopted in 2020. Implementation started with the 2020-2021 academic year. NAVETQ, with support from the Austrian Agency for Education and Internationalisation (OeAD), organized four regional round-tables for school and business representatives to introduce the regulation and its implications and to improve mutual understanding among schools and companies. This was accompanied by the key establishment of development units in all VET schools, including school-business coordinators and budgets. School-business coordinators are in charge of establishing links with companies and other partners. NAVETQ, with support from the regional Austrian-funded 'School meets Business' project, has developed a course and trained 21 coordinators in 2019 and 2020.

■ **Digital education and skills**

Various national policies explicitly refer to digital skills development. These include the Digital Agenda for Albania 2015-2020 (update being drafted at the time of writing), the National Employment and Skills Strategy 2019-2022, and the National Strategy for Education (under drafting). Measures aim at improving the digitisation of the learning process and include an upgrade of the digital school infrastructure, the provision of high-speed internet access for schools, digital communication channels between schools and regional education units, etc. Curricula are to include digital materials in the Albanian language. The contents will include also some awareness-raising about how to protect students from the dangers of the internet, etc.

According to an assessment that began in 2019, Albania has the lowest digital literacy rate in Europe, with only 21% of the population (aged 16-74) having basic digital skills (Eurostat, 2021).

ICT curricula were introduced in secondary schools in 2006 and in primary schools in 2014, and now cover grades 3 to 12.

Albania includes specific criteria related to digital education in its external school evaluation frameworks. No digital technologies are used in any national tests in Albania. Moreover, the existing teacher skills frameworks do not acknowledge digital skills (EC, 2019).

In 2020, the OeAD, as part of the AL Tour Project, helped create 24 teaching and learning materials for vocational programmes in the tourism sector. Also, following the success of the Austrian school in

Shkodër with its high-quality international standards and focus on network and media technology in its IT programme, there are now plans to establish a vocational school in Tirana, modelled on the Austrian higher technical institute (HTL) in Shkodër (Österreichische Schule “Peter Mahringer”).

The Swiss-funded Skills for Jobs project (S4J) helped supply four VET providers with the digital infrastructure needed. Similarly, GIZ’s ProSEED project helped equip workshops in the VTCs in Tirana, Vlorë, Fier, Gjirokastrë and Shkodër.

■ Donor support to education and VET for young people and adults

The ‘EU for Inclusion’ programme provides an IPA 2019 grant of EUR 70.65 million, including EUR 50.65 million in the form of budget support, and was signed in 2020. It aims, among others, at enhancing inclusive quality learning and promoting educational attainment in pre-university education for all girls and boys. There is a special focus on children from disadvantaged backgrounds. As regards ALMPs, it introduced a new employment programme for NEETs and strengthens education and training measures. For further details on this IPA programme, see the ‘Donor support’ section of Chapter 3.

Albania participates actively in the EU Erasmus+ programme. Since 2015, more than 4 000 staff and students have been involved in mobility programmes and in numerous capacity-building projects in the field of higher education.

The UNDP Country Programme for Albania (2017-2021; budget: over EUR 10 million) is broad and addresses most SDGs. Ensuring growth through increased competitiveness and innovation and investing in people and social cohesion (SDGs 1, 4, 5, 8, 10 and 11) are most relevant to skills and employment. Objectives included building an optimised skills development system that contributes to an adequately skilled labour force that meets private sector needs, as well as strengthened state institutions that are better able to develop, implement and monitor employment policies that seek the labour market integration of vulnerable groups. The intervention led to the NES rolling out employment promotion programmes tailored to the needs of most vulnerable groups. This also included the completion of a Skills Needs Analysis (2 560 enterprises surveyed in all economic sectors), the establishment of supports for self-employment (training for 255 youth led to the opening of 76 new registered businesses), and feasibility studies for various WBL models. Possibly most importantly, UNDP also conducted a functional review of the PES to assist the MoF and guide capacity-strengthening actions and advance the operationalisation of the National Agency for Employment and Skills. This was also linked to an optimisation exercise where the entire VET system was reviewed in order to identify efficiency gains and guide reform efforts.

UNICEF works closely with the Ministry of Education to help improve access to and the quality of education, making the system more equitable and effective and preventing school drop-outs. By bringing together different sectors – central and local government, civil society, etc., UNICEF aims to play a convening role in building a system for identifying and integrating out-of-school children, among others by upgrading the education management information system (EMIS).

The German GIZ Albania has been implementing the ‘Sustainable Economic and Regional Development, Employment Promotion and Vocational Education and Training’ (ProSEED) programme (2017-2021). The objective is to create new and better employment opportunities, specifically to improve the employment situation among young people in Albania and the social participation of marginalised groups, including returnees. The programme provides support, including policy advice, designing and implementing new VET offers by integrating the work-based learning principles in the Multifunctional Centre (MFC) Kamza, 10 Public Vocational Training Centres and about 30 private VET

providers all over the country; teacher training; and workshop upgrades with small-scale equipment. Key achievements have included more than 2 900 jobseekers being trained in short-term courses; over 500 students graduating from MFC Kamza; more than 5 000 young people taking part in Start SMART job-search skills and soft skills training; 1 400 marginalised young people participating in projects to strengthen social cohesion; over 1 100 young entrepreneurs being trained, of whom 250 have developed a complete business plan and around 80 received a start-up grant; and more than 900 young people finding employment thus far.

The Austrian Development Cooperation supported competence-based teaching and learning in VET in Albania with a focus on tourism and IT education, as well as school quality development and gender mainstreaming.

The 'Skills for Jobs' (S4J) project funded by the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation is implemented by Swisscontact and will run until 2023. The main goal is to offer improved VET to young people in Albania. It is supporting 10 VET providers in Albania with the aim of improving relations with private-sector companies and other partners, introduce market-oriented curricula, apply new learning methods and quality standards, and strengthen national institutions.

3. LABOUR MARKET AND EMPLOYMENT

3.1 Trends and challenges

■ Labour market and employment challenges in general

Labour market outcomes gradually improved over the few years before the pandemic: in 2019, Albania had the highest employment rate among Western Balkan economies (61.2%). The COVID-19 pandemic in 2020 and 2021 led to a slight and temporary reduction in the employment rate, but it quickly went back to its initial increasing trend (60.6% in 2020). The labour force participation rate for the male population aged 15-64 is 15.9 percentage points higher than for the female population.

The key challenges to the Albanian labour market remain high youth unemployment (26.5% in 2020), a high NEET (youth not in employment, education or training) rate (27.9% in 2020) (INSTAT, 2021), and a very high level of informal employment (57% in 2019 – ILO, 2021).

The Government has been addressing this issue through multiple initiatives linked to prevention, reintegration, and compensation for concerned citizens. But more remains to be done, particularly as the prolonged periods of Covid-related distance learning and lockdowns are highly likely to have reversed previous gains, as reported in most countries (OECD, 2021).

■ Employment

Before the onset of the Covid crisis, Albania had made progress in ensuring access to employment. The positive trend started in 2014 and continued across all labour market indicators until early 2020. Nonetheless, a significant gender gap and a low employment rate amongst vulnerable groups persist, as do regional disparities (e.g. employment rate in Gjirokastër was 69.0% in 2020, while it stood at 33.7% in Lezhë that same year). The Covid crisis reversed some of the positive trends for most labour market indicators, yet the toll in the labour market has been moderate given the unprecedented economic shock (INSTAT, 2021).

In 2020, the average employment rate for the population aged 15-64 was 60.6%. The employment rate was 53.6% for women and 67.8% for men. The service and agricultural sectors have the highest share of employees, with 43.4% and 36.1% of the total employment respectively. According to the 2020 survey estimates, 46.1% of people in work are paid employees, 33.3% are self-employed (with or without employees) and 20.6% are contributing family workers (INSTAT, 2021).

■ Unemployment

Over the past few years, unemployment among young people (aged 15-29) declined sharply from a high of 39.6% in 2015 to 26.5% in 2020 (INSTAT, 2021). Nonetheless, many young people struggle in their school-to-work transition, resulting in low levels of activity (52.1% in 2020 – EUROSTAT) and a disproportionately high share (27.9% in 2020) (INSTAT, 2021) of NEETs.

Unemployment (for people aged 15 and over) in Albania has remained surprisingly stable throughout the Covid crisis (12.3% in 2018, 11.5% in 2019 and 11.7% in 2020). Regional neighbours all experienced a more significant increase in 2020 (INSTAT, 2021).

■ **Statistical data collection and labour market information**

The Albanian INSTAT carries out labour force surveys in line with EUROSTAT methodologies and publishes results quarterly and annually. The National Agency for Employment and Skills maintains a labour market information system. The NEES plans to establish a sophisticated 'unified' VET information system. In 2020, NAES conducted a first analysis of the VET Management Information System (VET MIS) and found that, problematically, most data and information at provider level is collected and processed manually.

The Centre for Education Services has initiated work to establish an integrated information system for the entire pre-university education system.

■ **Poverty**

Poverty in Albania is intricately linked to employment status, age, gender, geography, ethnicity and levels of educational attainment. Groups that are reportedly at higher risk of poverty are unemployed people, those with lower educational attainment, people living in rural areas, the elderly, vulnerable women, people with disabilities, and people from the Roma communities.

INSTAT published the results of the 2019 Income and Living Conditions Survey (EUSILC), which measures living conditions, relative poverty and material deprivation in Albanian households.

The at-risk-of-poverty rate in Albania was 23.0% in 2019, a decrease of 0.4 percentage points compared with 2018 and 0.7 percentage points compared with 2017.

Severe material deprivation is defined as the percentage of the population with an enforced lack of at least four out of nine material deprivation items. This indicator was estimated at 37.1% in 2019, compared to 38.3% in 2018, a decrease of 1.2 percentage points.

Social exclusion refers to individuals who are either at risk of poverty or severe materially deprived or living in a household with exceptionally low work intensity. In 2019, this indicator was estimated at 46.2%, compared to 49.0% in 2018.

Despite minor improvements on all these fronts, the poverty situation remains problematic and unless more is done, Albania is unlikely to achieve its SDG1 targets by 2030.

Regrettably, under Eurostat's new indicator 'People at risk of poverty or social exclusion' (online data code: ILC_PEPS01N), Albania ranks last in Europe at 50.8% in 2019 (Eurostat, 2019).

3.2 Employment policy and institutional setting

■ **Strategy and legal framework in the employment policy field**

In 2019, following the midterm review of the National Employment and Skills Strategy, the main activities were revised and the implementation timeframe was extended until 2022. The overarching goal of the strategy is pursued through a number of complementary and interconnected actions that simultaneously support labour supply and encourage labour demand, as well as addressing social inclusion issues.

Other longer-term challenges include the need to reduce the qualitative gap between rural and urban areas in the supply of education and employment; improve the investment climate and unleash private sector growth; remove barriers to employment for job creation; and implement the smart specialisation strategy to ensure that Albanian regions identify and develop their own competitive advantages and generate employment demand locally.

In 2020, visible progress was achieved in consolidating the institutional framework in the employment and skills development sector. The central implementing agencies (NAES, NAVETQ and the State Inspectorate for Labour and Social Services (SILSS) made structural and institutional improvements.

The initial steps of this process started in 2019, but NAES staffing (90 in total) and SILSS's structural improvements were finalised in 2020. NAVETQ will eventually have 30 staff (compared to 16 at the last count). This endeavour is scheduled to be finalised by 2022.

On the subject of the legal framework, by the end of 2020, 8 bylaws to the Employment Promotion Law, 12 bylaws to the VET Law and 3 bylaws to the AQF Law were adopted and their implementation started.

With regard to the consolidation of the legal framework, by the end of 2020, eight bylaws to the Employment Promotion Law were adopted and are being implemented. The adoption of the ALMPs and the new Decision of the Council of Ministers (DCM) on Social Services were especially crucial to the operationalisation of the envisaged reforms.

■ **Initiatives to boost employment (including the Youth Guarantee)**

The budget projected for employment and labour market programmes in 2020 was ALL 1.7 billion (approx. EUR 13.7 million). The actual expenditure amounted to ALL 1.55 billion (approx. EUR 12.5 million), or a utilisation rate of 91%.

At the start of 2020, the state budget for the implementation of employment promotion programmes was first set at ALL 390 million (a significant reduction from the past 3-year average of ALL 490 million).

The onset of the COVID-19 crisis and the consequential job-shedding that followed highlighted the need for a swift response. Accordingly, the budget was increased by ALL 200 million halfway through the year and new distribution methodologies were approved (Ministerial Order No 25 of 16 June 2020).

Regrettably, this government commitment encountered significant challenges in its roll-out, and by the end of 2020, ALL 70.4 million was disbursed.

Active Labour Market Programmes (ALMPs) were re-designed to integrate the individual-centred approach. Three existing ALMPs (the wage subsidy, on-the-job training and the internship programme) were improved to better target unemployed jobseekers and employers alike and to include additional benefits for vulnerable groups (single parents, people with disabilities, ethnic minorities).

Inspired by EU Member States, two new programmes, the Self-Employment Programme (SEP) and the Community Employment Programme (CEP) were introduced. The SEP supports registered unemployed jobseekers with robust business plans through grants. The CEP focuses on professional training with nearby SMEs.

Moreover, two new programmes to support the re-integration of workers who suffered from COVID-19-related layoffs were designed and adopted in 2020.

■ **Initiatives to increase the capacity of the public employment services**

A key challenge for the NAES during 2020 was the restructuring process at central, regional and local levels, which is supported by the IPA II TA programme.

The restructuring of all Regional Directorates and Local Employment Offices was addressed by clarifying the division of roles and responsibilities and work optimisation, in order to improve service quality for both jobseekers and employers. 40 employment offices were reorganised and now align their standards to the national model of employment services.

The revised manual of employment services, which summarises multiple sets of guidelines covering the modalities for each service (endorsed by the Employment Advisory Council at the end of 2020), was published, and trainings are ongoing (with ILO support).

With regard to the strategic National Employment and Education Strategy objective of strengthening business-sector engagement, a pilot collaborative methodology was successfully piloted in Elbasan, Durrës and Fier, and will be institutionalised with RISI support.

■ Donor support to the employment policy field

The IPA 2019 EU for Inclusion programme aims to strengthen social inclusion by increasing the coverage, inclusiveness and effectiveness of social care services, as well as the provision of inclusive education and employment opportunities. It supports the NESS 2019-2022 by promoting employment and employability with new service models, introducing a new employment programme for NEET, expanding coverage of welfare-to-work programmes, and strengthening education and training programmes throughout the country. The specific objectives are as follows:

1. improve the accessibility and quality of integrated social care services at local level;
2. promote social inclusion in employment and employability for youth, men and women; and
3. operate through a combination of instruments including sector budget support, grants and technical assistance.

In response to the COVID-19 crisis, social protection and employment measures were expanded to keep people in employment and support groups at risk of exclusion and poverty.

For further information please contact Romain Boitard, European Training Foundation, email: Romain.Boitard@etf.europa.eu

STATISTICAL ANNEX, REFERENCES, ACRONYMS- ALBANIA

Annex includes annual data from 2010, 2015, 2019 and 2020 or the latest available year.

	Indicator	2010	2015	2019	2020	
1	Total Population (,000) ⁽¹⁾	2 913	2 880.7	2 854.2	2 837.7	
2	Relative size of youth population (15-24 age group and denominator age 15-64, %) ^{(1) C}	27.3	25.1	22.5	21.8	
3	GDP growth rate (%)	3.7	2.2	2.2	-3.3	
4	GDP by sector (%)	Agriculture added value	18.0	19.8	18.5	19.3
		Industry added value	24.9	21.8	20.2	19.7
		Services added value	44.0	46.3	48.6	48.4
5	Public expenditure on education (as % of GDP)	M.D.	3.4	3.6 (2017)	M.D.	
6	Public expenditure on education (as % of total public expenditure)	M.D.	11.3	12.4 (2017)	M.D.	
7	Adult literacy (%)	96.8 (2011)	M.D.	98.1 ⁽¹⁾ (2018)	M.D.	
8	Educational attainment of adult population (aged 25-64 or 15+) (%) ⁽²⁾	Low ⁽³⁾	51.6	44.1	42.6	M.D.
		Medium ⁽⁴⁾	35.9	37.2	36.2	M.D.
		High ⁽⁵⁾	12.5	18.7	21.3	M.D.
9	Early leavers from education and training (aged 18-24) (%)	Total	31.9	21.3	16.3	M.D.
		Male	31.0	22.9	17.5	M.D.
		Female	33.0	19.6	15.1	M.D.
10	Gross enrolment rates in upper secondary education (ISCED level 3) (%)	80.1	94.7	92.7	M.D.	
11	Share of VET students in upper secondary education (ISCED level 3) (%)	14.2	16.3	18.2	M.D.	
12	Tertiary education attainment (aged 30-34) (%)	11.4	22.1	M.D.	M.D.	
13	Participation in training / lifelong learning (25-64 age group) by sex (%)	Total	2.1	1.0	0.8	M.D.
		Male	2.1	1.0	1.0	M.D.
		Female	2.2	1.1	0.7	M.D.

	Indicator		2010	2015	2019	2020
	Participation in training / lifelong learning (25-64 age group) (%)	Low	0.9	0.2	0.1	M.D.
		Medium	2.5	1.2	0.8	M.D.
		High	6.9	3.0	2.5	M.D.
	Participation in training / lifelong learning (25-64 age group) (%)	Inactive	3.6	2.0	2.2	M.D.
		Employed	1.6	0.6	0.3	M.D.
		Unemployed	1.1	1.6	1.7	M.D.
14	Low achievement in reading, mathematics and science – PISA (%)	Reading	52.3 (2012)	50.3	52.2 (2018)	N.A.
		Mathematics	60.7 (2012)	53.3	42.4 (2018)	N.A.
		Science	53.1 (2012)	41.7	47.0 (2018)	N.A.
15	Activity rate (aged 15+) (%)	Total	55.2	55.7	60.4	59.5
		Male	64.0	64.3	68.0	66.9
		Female	46.9	47.2	53.0	52.3
16	Inactivity rate (aged 15+) (%)	Total	44.8	44.3	39.6	M.D.
		Male	36.0	35.7	32.0	M.D.
		Female	53.1	52.8	47.0	M.D.
17	Employment rate (aged 15+) (%)	Total	47.5	46.2	53.4	52.5
		Male	55.9	53.3	60.1	59.2
		Female	39.5	39.2	46.9	46.1
18	Employment rate by educational attainment (% aged 15+%)	Low ⁽³⁾	43.0	41.4	48.6	M.D.
		Medium ⁽⁴⁾	50.1	47.9	53.7	M.D.
		High ⁽⁵⁾	66.9	59.2	66.4	M.D.
19	Employment by sector (%)	Agriculture	42.1	41.3	36.4	M.D.
		Industry	20.6	18.6	20.1	M.D.
		Services	37.3	39.9	43.5	M.D.
20	Incidence of self-employment (%)		56.7	59.0	54.3	M.D.
21	Incidence of vulnerable employment (%)		55.1	56.6	51.2	M.D.
22	Unemployment rate (aged 15+) (%)	Total	14.0	17.1	11.5	11.7
		Male	12.6	17.1	11.6	11.5
		Female	15.9	17.1	11.4	11.9

	Indicator	2010	2015	2019	2020	
23	Unemployment rate by educational attainment (aged 15+) (%)	Low ⁽³⁾	12.9	13.4	8.7	M.D.
		Medium ⁽⁴⁾	15.7	20.4	14.4	M.D.
		High ⁽⁵⁾	13.7	19.4	12.3	M.D.
24	Long-term unemployment rate (aged 15+) (%)	10.6	11.3	M.D.	M.D.	
25	Youth unemployment rate (aged 15-24) (%)	Total	30.5	39.8	27.2	M.D.
		Male	29.6	39.2	27.8	M.D.
		Female	31.7	40.8	26.3	M.D.
26	Proportion of people aged 15-24 not in employment, education or training (NEETs) (%)	Total	29.3	29.6	25.5	26.6
		Male	25.4	28.2	25.8	27.1
		Female	33.2	31.1	25.3	26.2

Last update: September 2021

Sources:

Indicators 8, 9, 12, 13, 15, 16, 17, 18, 19, 20, 21, 22, 23, 24, 25, 26 – INSTAT

Indicators 5, 6, 7, 10, 11 – UNESCO, Institute for Statistics

Indicators 1, 2, 3, 4 – The World Bank, World Development Indicators database

Indicators 14 – OECD PISA Database

Notes:

(1) Estimation.

(2) Active population aged 15+

(3) Low – ISCED 0-2 (primary and basic general education)

(4) Medium – ISCED 3-4 (general secondary and vocational-technical education)

(5) High – ISCED 5-8 (secondary special and higher education)

Legend:

C = ETF calculations

N.A. = Not applicable

M.D. = Missing data

ANNEX: DEFINITIONS OF INDICATORS

	Description	Definition
1	Total population ('000)	The total population is estimated as the number of people having their usual residence in a country on 1 January of the respective year. When information on the usually resident population is not available, countries may report legal or registered residents.
2	Relative size of youth population (age group 15–24) (%)	This is the ratio of the youth population (aged 15–24) to the working-age population, usually aged 15–64 (74)/15+.
3	GDP growth rate (%)	Annual percentage growth rate of GDP at market prices based on constant local currency. Aggregates are based on constant 2010 U.S. dollars. GDP is the sum of gross value added by all resident producers in the economy plus any product taxes and minus any subsidies not included in the value of the products. It is calculated without making deductions for depreciation of fabricated assets or for depletion and degradation of natural resources.
4	GDP by sector (%)	The share of value added from Agriculture, Industry and Services. Agriculture corresponds to ISIC divisions 1–5 and includes forestry, hunting, and fishing, as well as cultivation of crops and livestock production. Value added is the net output of a sector after adding up all outputs and subtracting intermediate inputs. It is calculated without making deductions for depreciation of fabricated assets or depletion and degradation of natural resources. The origin of value added is determined by the International Standard Industrial Classification (ISIC), revision 3 or 4.
5	Public expenditure on education (as % of GDP)	Public expenditure on education expressed as a percentage of GDP. Generally, the public sector funds education either by directly bearing the current and capital expenses of educational institutions, or by supporting students and their families with scholarships and public loans as well as by transferring public subsidies for educational activities to private firms or non-profit organisations (transfer to private households and enterprises). Both types of transactions together are reported as total public expenditure on education.
6	Public expenditure on education (as % of total public expenditure)	Public expenditure on education expressed as a percentage of total public expenditure. Generally, the public sector funds education either by directly bearing the current and capital expenses of educational institutions, or by supporting students and their families with scholarships and public loans as well as by transferring public subsidies for educational activities to private firms or non-profit organisations (transfer to private households and enterprises). Both types of transactions together are reported as total public expenditure on education.
7	Adult literacy (%)	Adult literacy is the percentage of the population aged 15 years and over who can both read and write a short simple statement on his/her everyday life, and understand it. Generally, 'literacy' also encompasses 'numeracy' – the ability to make simple arithmetic calculations.

	Description	Definition
8	Educational attainment of adult population (25–64 or aged 15+) (%)	Educational attainment refers to the highest educational level achieved by individuals expressed as a percentage of all persons in that age group. This is usually measured in terms of the highest educational programme successfully completed, which is typically certified by a recognised qualification. Recognised intermediate qualifications are classified at a lower level than the programme itself.
9	Early leavers from education and training (age group 18–24) (%)	Early leavers from education and training are defined as the percentage of the population aged 18–24 with at most lower secondary education who were not in further education or training during the four weeks preceding the survey. Lower secondary education refers to ISCED 1997 levels 0–2 and 3C short (i.e. programmes lasting under two years) for data up to 2013 and to ISCED 2011 levels 0–2 for data from 2014 onwards.
10	Gross enrolment rates in upper secondary education (ISCED level 3) (%)	Number of students enrolled in a given level of education, regardless of age, expressed as a percentage of the official school-age population corresponding to the same level of education.
11	Share of VET students in upper secondary education (ISCED level 3) (%)	Total number of students enrolled in vocational programmes at a given level of education (in this case, upper secondary), expressed as a percentage of the total number of students enrolled in all programmes (vocational and general) at that level.
12	Tertiary education attainment (aged 30–34) (%)	Tertiary attainment is calculated as the percentage of the population aged 30–34 who have successfully completed tertiary studies (e.g. university, higher technical institution). Educational attainment refers to ISCED 1997 level 5–6 up to 2013 and ISCED 2011 level 5–8 from 2014 onwards.
13	Participation in training/lifelong learning (age group 25–64) (%)	Participants in lifelong learning refers to persons aged 25–64 who stated that they received education or training in the four weeks preceding the survey (numerator). The denominator is the total population of the same age group, excluding those who did not answer the question on participation in education and training. The information collected relates to all education or training, whether or not it is relevant to the respondent's current or possible future job. If a different reference period is used, this should be indicated.
14	Low achievement in reading, maths and science – PISA (%)	Low achievers are the 15-year-olds who are failing to reach level 2 on the PISA scale for reading, mathematics and science.
15	Activity rate (aged 15+) (%)	The activity rate is calculated by dividing the active population by the population of the same age group. The active population (also called 'labour force') is defined as the sum of employed and unemployed people. The inactive population consists of all people who are classified as neither employed nor unemployed.
16	Inactivity rate (aged 15+) (%)	The inactivity/out of the labour force rate is calculated by dividing the inactive population by the population of the same age group. The inactive population consists of all people who are classified as neither employed nor unemployed.
17	Employment rate (aged 15+) (%)	The employment rate is calculated by dividing the number of employed people by the population of the same age group. Employed people are all people who worked at least one hour for pay or profit during the reference period or were temporarily absent from such work. If a different age group is used, this should be indicated.
18	Employment rate by educational attainment (% aged 15+)	The employment rate is calculated by dividing the number of employed persons by the population of the same age group.

	Description	Definition
		<p>Employed persons are all persons who worked at least one hour for pay or profit during the reference period or were temporarily absent from such work. If a different age group is used, this should be indicated.</p> <p>Educational levels refer to the highest educational level successfully completed. Three levels are considered: Low (ISCED level 0–2), Medium (ISCED level 3–4) and High (ISCED 1997 level 5–6, and ISCED 2011 level 5–8).</p>
19	Employment by sector (%)	This indicator provides information on the relative importance of different economic activities with regard to employment. Data are presented by broad branches of economic activity (i.e. Agriculture/Industry/Services) based on the International Standard Industrial Classification of All Economic Activities (ISIC). In Europe, the NACE classification is consistent with ISIC.
20	Incidence of self-employment (%)	The incidence of self-employment is expressed by the self-employed (i.e. employers + own-account workers + contributing family workers) as a proportion of the total employed.
21	Incidence of vulnerable employment (%)	The incidence of vulnerable employment is expressed by the own-account workers and contributing family workers as a proportion of the total employed.
22	Unemployment rate (aged 15+) (%)	The unemployment rate represents unemployed people as a percentage of the labour force. The labour force is the total number of people who are employed or unemployed. Unemployed people comprise those aged 15–64 or 15+ who were without work during the reference week; are currently available for work (were available for paid employment or self-employment before the end of the two weeks following the reference week); are actively seeking work, i.e. had taken specific steps in the four-week period ending with the reference week to seek paid employment or self-employment, or had found a job to start later (within a period of, at most, three months).
23	Unemployment rate by educational attainment (aged 15+) (%)	The unemployment rate represents unemployed people as a percentage of the labour force. The labour force is the total number of people who are employed or unemployed. Unemployed people comprise those aged 15–64 or 15+ who were without work during the reference week; are currently available for work (were available for paid employment or self-employment before the end of the two weeks following the reference week); are actively seeking work (had taken specific steps in the four-week period ending with the reference week to seek paid employment or self-employment, or had found a job to start later (within a period of, at most, three months)). Educational levels refer to the highest educational level successfully completed. Three levels are considered: Low (ISCED level 0–2), Medium (ISCED level 3–4) and High (ISCED 1997 level 5–6, and ISCED 2011 level 5–8)
24	Long-term unemployment rate (aged 15+) (%)	The long-term unemployment rate is the share of people in the total active population who have been unemployed for 12 months or more, expressed as a percentage. The duration of unemployment is defined as the duration of a search for a job or as the period of time since the last job was held (if this period is shorter than the duration of the search for a job).
25	Youth unemployment rate (aged 15–24) (%)	The youth unemployment ratio is calculated by dividing the number of unemployed people aged 15–24 by the total population of the same age group.

	Description	Definition
26	Proportion of people aged 15–24 not in employment, education or training (NEETs) (%)	The indicator provides information on young people aged 15–24 who meet the following two conditions: first, they are not employed (i.e. unemployed or inactive according to the ILO definition); and second, they have not received any education or training in the four weeks preceding the survey. Data are expressed as a percentage of the total population of the same age group and gender, excluding the respondents who have not answered the question on participation in education and training.

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FOR FURTHER INFORMATION ABOUT
OUR ACTIVITIES PLEASE CONTACT:
COMMUNICATION DEPARTMENT
EUROPEAN TRAINING FOUNDATION
VIALE SETTIMIO SEVERO 65
I - 10133 TORINO
E: INFO@ETF.EUROPA.EU
T: +39 011 6302222
F: +39 011 6302200
WWW.ETF.EUROPA.EU