

COUNTRY STRATEGY PAPER 2019 UPDATE

MONTENEGRO



1. A brief summary of key developments in VET and skills and EU and donor cooperation during 2017–18

According to the European Commission's assessment of the Employment and Social Reform Programme (2018–2020) and the Annual Enlargement Package, Montenegro's progress in the EU accession process is good. The skills mismatch at higher education levels and the job creation shortfall remain challenges for inclusive growth and competitiveness. In 2017, youth unemployment and young people not in employment, education or training fell to 31.3% and 16.7%, respectively, but remained high compared to EU averages of 16.8% and 10.9%. Employment (58.2% compared to the EU's 72.1%) and activity rates (69.3% compared to the EU's 78.0%) are improving. Participation in lifelong learning remains low at 2.8% compared to the EU's 10.9%. Provision of employment services and active labour market policies (ALMPs) remains weak.

To join the EU by 2025, Montenegro is committed to reforms in education, employment and social policies. Priorities include: reforming curricula with the support of sector councils; improving school-to-work transitions through work-based learning; promoting vocational professions; supporting apprenticeships; and providing effective employment services and ALMPs.

The Ministry of Education (MoE) is rolling out the Vocational Education and Training Strategy (2015–2020) and the Adult Learning Strategy (2015–2020). The focus is to meet EU 2020 targets in education and training and implement the Riga conclusions. The National Employment Strategy (2016–2020) identifies obstacles to employability: the lengthy school-to-work transition, skills mismatch and the ad-hoc review of skills intelligence.

In recent months, the government has emphasised practical learning opportunities throughout the education system and in ALMPs. Revised vocational education and training legislation includes an apprenticeship system. Deficit occupations have been identified and funds allocated to attract students. Initial feedback from the MoE and Chamber of Economy indicate promising take-up by students and companies (200 compared to 100 in first year). The government's practical training programme for graduates reports good results (roughly a 50% insertion rate).

The EU continues assistance in education and labour-market reforms. Priorities are: ALMPs and local employment initiatives; educational improvement focusing on STEM subjects, and development of practical experience in educational programmes.

Beyond the EU, VET and skills development received support from international donors and organisations like the ILO, Council of Europe, UNDP, UNICEF, World Bank and British Council.

2. An assessment of mid-term progress towards the ETF's 2020 objectives

Specific objective 1: establish a practice-oriented VET system focused on relevant skills and an entrepreneurial mind-set.

In the Small Business Act assessment of 2018, the ETF recommended making entrepreneurial learning an integral part of the education system and developing small and medium enterprise (SME) skills. The ETF also provided input on the SME strategy.

The ETF discontinued support for the National Entrepreneurial Partnership, which is no longer a priority, but supported the design and delivery of a pilot in-company mentor training programme, which has received accreditation and now appears in the training catalogue for VET teachers and trainers.

Specific objective 2: expand intelligence on skills needs and improve school-to-work transition support.

The ETF finalised the skills gap measurement survey and recommendations to address the skills mismatch in the labour market. The survey is available for follow-up discussions with the Ministry of Labour and Social Welfare (MoLSW) and other partners in 2019.

Specific objective 3: support EU external assistance and EU bilateral policy dialogue and help Commission services and local actors maximise benefits from participation in EU processes.

Following a request in 2017 from the Directorate-General for Neighbourhood and Enlargement Negotiations, the ETF piloted a project on VET governance and funding with the EU Delegation to Montenegro and the MoE. The innovative methodology and assessment report have been shared with stakeholders and policy recommendations will inform 2019 activities.

In 2018, the ETF provided expertise to the Economic Reform Programme Assessment and European Commission Progress Report and gave input to the 8th Sub-Committee on Innovation, Human Resources, Information Society, Social Policy. Support to the MoE on the Riga deliverables featured a roundtable on progress and next steps and the launch of the Torino Process 2019. Also, the EU Delegation requested the ETF to assist the MoLSW and MoE in their formulation of operational identification sheets for education, VET and employment.

3. Actions planned for 2019

In 2019, the priorities in the ETF's country strategy paper remain valid, but supporting the European Commission and the EU Delegation with IPA programming in education and employment has become paramount.

The ETF will deepen its relationship with country stakeholders and reach out to new partners, including the Ministry of Sport, Ministry of Finance and private-sector representatives, while continuing exchanges with in-country donors, especially UNICEF.

Specific objective 1

The ETF will continue to support work-based learning and skills development through private-sector cooperation, focusing on mentors and teachers.

The ETF will raise awareness and support adoption of the EC self-assessment tool 'SELFIE' to help schools to reflect and analyse their digital readiness and support digital competence development.

Specific objective 2

The ETF's activities will build on the survey results and recommendations, including policy advice on skills intelligence, monitoring of labour-market developments and evidence of skills relevance.

Specific objective 3

The ETF will follow-up the pilot on VET governance and funding and develop a per-capita funding model and/or establish a multi-stakeholder working group to design the post-2020 VET strategy.

The ETF will provide input to the assessment of the Economic Reform Programme, the EU Regular Progress Report 2019 and the 9th Sub-Committee meeting on Innovation, Human Resources, Information Society, Social Policy.

The ETF will support Montenegro with the Riga Assessment and run the Torino Process 2019 in cooperation with the MoE. This includes disseminating the 2018 Small Business Act assessment findings and the results of the ETF's teacher training survey.

Upon request, the ETF will support the European Commission and the EU Delegation with IPA programming in education and employment and/or with IPA II.

The ETF plans to support Montenegro in smart specialisation and related skills. The ETF's contribution will build on its ongoing activities in the areas of skills anticipation and matching with the Ministry of Labour and Social Welfare s and go more in-depth to sub-sectoral level and bring in the dimension of skills relatedness and SME skills.