

COUNTRY STRATEGY PAPER 2020 UPDATE: MONTENEGRO

A BRIEF SUMMARY OF KEY DEVELOPMENTS IN VET AND SKILLS AND EU AND DONOR COOPERATION DURING 2018–19

According to the European Commission's assessment of the Employment and Social Reform Programme (2018–20) and the annual Enlargement Package, Montenegro is making good progress in the EU accession process. The skills mismatch at higher education level and the job creation shortfall remain challenges for inclusive growth and competitiveness. In 2017, youth unemployment and the proportion of young people not in employment, education or training (NEETs) fell to 31.3% and 16.7%, respectively. These rates are still high compared to the 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%. The provision of employment services and active labour market policies (ALMPs) remains weak.

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

The Ministry of Education has been rolling out the Vocational Education and Training Strategy (2015–20) and the Adult Learning Strategy (2015–20). The aim is to meet EU 2020 targets in education and training and implement the Riga Conclusions. The National Employment Strategy (2016–20) identifies obstacles to employability: the lengthy school-to-work transition, skills mismatch and the ad hoc review of skills intelligence. The Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Labour and Social Policies have started discussions on their post-2020 strategies. The Smart Specialisation Strategy, under the lead of the Ministry of Science and Economy, was approved by parliament in June 2019.

In 2018 and 2019, the government emphasised practical learning opportunities throughout the education system and in ALMPs and this will continue in 2020. Revised VET legislation includes an apprenticeship system. Deficit occupations (in which demand from employers is higher than the labour supply in a given year) have been identified and funds allocated to attract students. Initial feedback from the Ministry of Education and the Chamber of Economy indicate promising take-up by students and companies (200 compared to 100 in the first year). The government's practical training programme for graduates reports good results (roughly a 50% insertion rate).

The EU continues to assist with education and labour market reforms. Priorities are: ALMPs and local employment initiatives; educational improvement focusing on science, technology, engineering and mathematics subjects; and the development of practical experience in educational programmes. The SCOPES programmes (scientific cooperation programme of Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation) (2015–17) were launched in the first half of 2019 and activities are expected to be implemented in 2020.

In addition to support from the EU, increased support for VET and skills development has been received from international donors and organisations like the International Labour Organization (ILO) (decent work agreement and labour market information system in 2019); Council of Europe; UNDP; UNICEF (education sector review, 2019); World Bank (loan for comprehensive reform, forthcoming in 2019); and the British Council (21st Century School programme, focused on digital skills).

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 mindset

In its assessment of the Small Business Act, published in 2019, the ETF recommended making entrepreneurial learning an integral part of the education system and developing small and medium-sized enterprise (SME) skills. The findings were presented on 20 September 2019 in Montenegro for follow-up in the implementation of future strategies, including post-2020 VET and employment strategies.

Between July and December 2019, at the request of the Ministry of Education, the ETF and the ILO conducted an evaluation of the first phase of the implementation of the dual system, including recommendations for the next phase of dual education planning and implementation.

The ETF continued to support the continuing professional development (CPD) of VET teachers through its work at regional level with the Education Reform Initiative of South Eastern Europe (ERI SEE) and the teacher training institutions in the countries in the region. The focus of its work was on exchange and dialogue regarding CPD needs. Each VET school has a CPD coordinator. A person for dealing with CPD was appointed in the VET Centre in May 2019 to underline the commitment to teacher training reform.

The ETF, together with the Ministry of Education, launched the SELFIE pilot initiative in 10 schools (including primary, general secondary and VET schools) to support the schools in making the most of digital technologies for teaching and learning and to support the provision of digital skills.

Specific objective 2: Expand intelligence on skills needs and improve school-to-work transition

The ETF disseminated the skills gap measurement survey and issued recommendations to address the skills mismatch in the labour market. In June 2019, as a follow-up, it launched an in-depth skills measurement survey in the areas of energy and tourism, which are priority sectors in the Smart Specialisation Strategy. This work will lead to the development of a methodology to be applied in other sectors and will inform future strategy planning as well as qualification development.

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

As a follow-up to the ETF-piloted project on VET governance and funding, conducted with the EU Delegation for the Ministry of Education, the ETF was asked by the Ministry of Education to help design the post-2020 VET strategy. This also included work on financing VET schools and proposals for viable options for public-private partnership.

The ETF supported Montenegro with the Riga Assessment and ran the 2019 Torino Process in cooperation with the Ministry of Education. The reports have been finalised and disseminated and have informed the design of the post-2020 VET strategy as well as the new employment strategy.

In 2018–19, the ETF supported the Ministry of Education with quality assurance development by involving the VET Centre in the ETF quality assurance platform. The ETF also worked with the ministry to conduct a review of the validation of non-formal and informal learning (VNFIL).

In 2019, the ETF provided expertise to the Economic Reform Programme Assessment (ETF comments were taken on board) and provided input to the Ninth Subcommittee Meeting on Innovation, Human Resources, Information Society and Social Policy.

ACTIONS PLANNED FOR 2020

The priorities in the ETF's country strategy paper will continue to apply in 2020, and support for the enlargement process will be provided to the European Commission and the EU delegation, with the areas of education, training and employment given priority.

The ETF will further 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 fostering regular dialogue with in-country donors, especially UNICEF, the ILO and the World Bank.

Specific objective 1

The ETF will continue to provide policy advice on the dual system and skills development as a follow-up to the 2019 evaluation in cooperation with ILO.

The ETF will continue to raise awareness of and support adoption of the European Commission self-assessment tool, SELFIE, based on the 2019 findings, helping schools to reflect on and analyse their digital readiness and support digital competence development.

The ETF will continue to encourage the CPD of VET teachers through its work with ERI SEE at regional level.

Specific objective 2

The ETF's activities will build on the survey results and recommendations in the energy (renewable energy) and tourism (health tourism) sectors. This will include providing policy advice on skills intelligence and monitoring labour market developments and evidence of skills relevance.

Specific objective 3

The ETF will continue to provide policy advice on the governance setting for the monitoring and evaluation of the post-2020 VET strategy.

The ETF will provide input to the assessment of the Economic Reform Programme, the EU Regular Progress Report 2020 and the Tenth Subcommittee Meeting on Innovation, Human Resources, Information Society and Social Policy. If requested, the ETF will support the European Commission and the EU delegation with IPA II in education and employment and/or with the planning of IPA III.

The ETF will continue to involve Montenegro in the ETF quality assurance platform. The ETF will continue its work with Montenegro on the Riga Assessment to conclude the 2020 cycle and prepare for future policies.