

# COUNTRY STRATEGY PAPER 2020 UPDATE: NORTH MACEDONIA

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

Following the approval of the Comprehensive Education Strategy 2018–25 by the Ministry for Education and Science, the Republic of North Macedonia has now completed a framework for its various reform initiatives in the TVET sector (e.g. qualifications, work-based learning (WBL), validation of non-formal learning). The strategy joins the Ministry of Labour and Social Protection's multi-year Employment Strategy 2016–20 in creating a credible and enabling environment for reform in education and employment. After high-level negotiations, the country was also deemed ready for a Sector Reform Performance Contract (SRPC), which is to be funded by the Instrument for Pre-Accession Assistance (IPA) 2019 for the education, employment and social protection sectors.

The main upcoming aim in the TVET sector is to establish regional VET centres of excellence. The concept for the centres should be finalised by 2019.

Ongoing progress in the sector is the result of major EU- and World Bank-funded initiatives to modernise curricula and implement a National Qualifications Framework (NQF). WBL mechanisms have been expanded and bolstered. Employment policies have placed a greater focus on young people and vulnerable groups and an ambitious youth guarantee programme was launched in 2018.

The most active donors in the country are the EU, the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation and the World Bank.

The EU is launching two new support programmes in the form of a Sector Reform Performance Contract (SRPC) and a technical assistance (TA) project. The two initiatives will be launched in 2020.

The Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation is implementing the Education for Employment project. This project was launched in 2019 and will run for a period of 10 years. The main objective of the project is to make VET education more relevant in the private sector by increasing the involvement of employers in the sector.

The World Bank has extended the Skills Development and Innovation Support project, with a focus on the component aimed at establishing an observatory function within the Ministry of Education and Science.

The International Labour Organization (ILO) continues to provide technical assistance to the Ministry of Labour and Social Protection.



# AN ASSESSMENT OF MID-TERM PROGRESS TOWARDS THE ETF'S 2020 OBJECTIVES

**Specific objective 1: Support the Ministry of Education and Science and other actors (VET Centre, Adult Education Centre, Ministry of Labour and Social Protection) in introducing a validation system for non-formal and informal learning**

Legislation on the validation of non-formal and informal learning was approved and the Adult Education Centre will coordinate the pilot phase. The entire legislative framework for education is reviewed on an ongoing basis and the ETF is to support the review of the NQF law between the end of 2019 and early 2020.

**Specific objective 2: Improve the quality and relevance of VET provision**

The ETF facilitated a discussion on the establishment of regional VET Centres. It cooperated closely with the regional VET Centres working group to develop a concept for regional VET Centres. The ETF also produced studies on labour market demands and the situation of the VET schools network in three selected regions. On the basis of these studies, the concept for regional VET Centres and relevant discussions with all involved stakeholders, the ETF has proposed a number of recommendations on which schools could become regional VET Centres and the functions they would perform.

A VET Centre representative is active in the ETF Forum for Quality Assurance in VET.

**Specific objective 3: Support better links between initial and continuing VET and labour market demand between 2017 and 2020**

In 2019, the ETF followed up the pilot study that looked at several indicators of skills mismatch in the labour market. In particular, the ETF drilled down through the methodology at regional level to provide a clear picture of skills demand and mismatch in the three regions selected to host the new regional VET Centres.

The ETF started to support the revision of the VET financing framework in cooperation with Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation. As a follow-up to the work done by the ETF in revising the WBL framework in Macedonia, the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation has taken over the implementation of the new WBL mechanisms. In 2019, in line with a previous agreement, the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation requested ETF technical expertise in the area of VET financing. The request was broader than planned and it encompassed the whole VET spectrum. The collaboration began in 2019 with the establishment of a taskforce of national experts on VET financing and the organisation of a workshop.



The ETF also continued to support the EU Delegation to North Macedonia in defining new IPA programmes.

The ETF continued to support the EU Delegation in the development of the SRPC.

## ACTIONS PLANNED FOR 2020

### Specific objective 1: Support the Ministry of Education and Science and other actors (VET Centre, Adult Education Centre, Ministry of Labour and Social Protection) in designing, implementing and monitoring qualifications reform

The ETF will monitor the implementation of qualifications reform in the country but will not support specific actions in 2020.

### Specific objective 2: Improve the quality and relevance of VET provision

The ETF will cooperate with the Swiss-funded Education for Employment project in reviewing the VET financing framework. The activities will be launched in 2019 but the main implementation will take place in 2020.

The objective is twofold: to encourage greater engagement on the part of social partners in VET and to find better financing models for VET.

The ETF will monitor the establishment of the regional VET Centres and the overall reorganisation of the VET schools network. Although no specific activities will be implemented, the open dialogue on this governance issue could open up the possibility of a new mid-term intervention in the period between 2021 and 2027.

The ETF will map WBL developments in the country.

The ETF will continue to support the EU Delegation in the operationalisation of the SRPC (IPA 2018). It will also help to assess the relevance, credibility and progress of relevant sector strategies.

### Specific objective 3: Provide better links between initial and continuing VET and labour market demand between 2017 and 2020

In 2019, the ETF will focus its efforts on supporting the Ministry of Labour and Social Protection and the National Employment Agency in the following areas:

- redefining the employment strategic framework
- designing new IPA intervention
- increasing the capacity of skills intelligence gathering

