



TORINO PROCESS 2016-17

BELARUS

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Executive summary of the Torino Process 2016–17 Belarus report.

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Acronyms

Belstat	National Statistical Committee of the Republic of Belarus
CVET	Continuing VET
ETF	European Training Foundation
GDP	Gross domestic product
GSE	General secondary education
IVET	Initial VET
LMIS	Labour market information system
NQS	National Qualifications System
OECD	Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development
PES	Public Employment Service
PPP	Public-private partnership
RIPO	Republican Institute for Vocational Education
SSE	Specialised secondary education
TVET	Technical and vocational education and training
VET	Vocational education and training

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1. Introduction

This Torino Process country report describes the development of vocational education and training (VET) in Belarus from 2014 to 2016. It includes evidence-based analysis and assessment of the key trends in VET development and labour force replacement in the context of the changes in the labour market. It describes the mechanisms for the implementation of education policy that ensure that the VET system can respond effectively and efficiently to the economic, social and demographic changes in Belarusian society.

The report describes the economic and sociodemographic situation since 2014 and summarises Belarus' key regulations for the development of VET and the economy at large. Particular attention is paid to the identification and assessment of drivers of change.

Notably, this report includes an attempt to strengthen the links between the current socio-economic changes and the synergy between VET, the labour market, and the population's needs in terms of educational provision.

Conclusions are drawn based on official national statistics from the National Statistical Committee (Belstat), the Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Labour and Social Protection, as well as outputs from special studies and expert evaluations.

The contents of this report will be useful for international benchmarking, experience sharing between countries, the further enhancement of VET policy implementation mechanisms, and improving the accessibility and quality of VET

2. Main findings

Overview of VET and vision for VET

Belarus has entered a new stage of socio-economic development, the distinctive feature of which is the growth of the innovative economy. The prerequisites for the country's innovative development include the availability of specialists and workers capable of recognising, developing and applying innovative ideas and new technology and maintaining and supporting the resulting solutions. High-quality VET is the country's most important resource in this respect. Therefore, the VET system plays a vital role, and one that requires it to be updated with a view to optimising its adaptation to the current changes in the labour market and its transition to international standards of training for young workers and specialists, ensuring the accessibility and quality of education.

In the new socio-economic conditions in 2015–2016, a range of measures were taken to change VET policy. The most significant of these were:

- improvement of the system for forecasting the workforce needs of the economy, and the VET required by this workforce;
- improvement of the National Qualifications System (NQS);
- review of the National Classifier of the Republic of Belarus OKRB 011-2009 'Specialties and Qualifications';
- development of an occupational standard for vocational school teachers;
- introduction of a modular approach to course design and organisation of the educational process;
- promotion of inclusive education;
- introduction of field-specific education in general secondary education (GSE) institutions;
- development of the WorldSkills International movement in Belarus.

A set of regulatory acts has been adopted at national level that determine the state human resources and education policy, the conditions for its implementation, and its actors and their functions and roles.

The Resolution of the Council of Ministers of the Republic of Belarus No 250 of 28 March 2016 approved the national programme for 'Education and Youth Policy' for 2016–2020, which includes 11 sub-programmes:

- Development of the pre-school education system
- Development of the general secondary education system
- Development of the special education system
- Development of the technical vocational and specialised secondary education system
- Development of the higher education system
- Development of the postgraduate education system
- Development of the supplementary adult education system
- Development of the system of supplementary education for children and young people
- Ensuring the functioning of the education system of the Republic of Belarus
- Training the labour force for nuclear power
- Youth policy.

The goals and objectives of the state programme were shaped in accordance with the National Strategy for Sustainable Socio-Economic Development of the Republic of Belarus until 2030 and the Programme for Socio-Economic Development of Belarus for 2016–2020, taking into account changes in the educational system, programmes adopted in recent years and measures for the development of the education system.

The state programme is aimed at improving the quality and accessibility of education in line with the needs of the innovative economy, the requirements of the information society, the educational

demands of citizens, and the development of youth potential and its involvement in socially useful activities.

In the medium-term perspective, the main priorities in VET include the following:

- development of a forecasting system and elimination of the imbalance in workforce training at different levels of education;
- enhancement of the qualification structure for young workers and specialists, and establishment of the NQS and development of occupational standards;
- expansion of network-based and distance-learning models;
- establishment of scientific, educational and industrial clusters;
- ensuring the compliance of educational programmes with international approaches.

Effectiveness and efficiency in addressing economic and labour market demand

Labour market demand is affected by a number of demographic factors, namely the size and age structure of a population, the birth rate, the mortality rate and life expectancy at birth, and international migration. An analysis of these factors suggests that in recent years in Belarus there has been a slow-down in the natural decline of the population, and that population growth in the country is the result of net inward migration. Average life expectancy at birth has increased, resulting in an ageing population, including an ageing workforce.

Major economic factors that affect labour market demand include gross domestic product (GDP) and its growth rate, GDP per hour worked, output by economic activity, and capital investment. In 2015, these indicators were negative.

Economic restructuring in response to the unfavourable international economic climate resulted in layoffs and staff reductions, and an increase in part-time employment. However, focused efforts by the state aimed at retaining the labour force and providing social support to redundant workers enabled a high level of employment to be maintained among the population and a socially acceptable level of registered unemployment.

In 2014–2015, in order to increase the efficiency with which the labour capacity of the employed population is utilised, several legislative measures were adopted aimed at upgrading and increasing the efficiency of economic management in organisations, particularly by ensuring that workforce productivity outstripped wage increases (Presidential Decree No 5 of 15 December 2014 ‘On Strengthening the Requirements for Managers and Executive Employees of Organisations’, Resolution of the Council of Ministers No 744 of 31 July 2014 ‘On Labour Remuneration’).

Employers have implemented measures to increase labour discipline and strengthen the motivational aspect of labour remuneration. The Presidential Decree No 3 of 2 April 2015 ‘On Prevention of Social Dependency’ contributes to the identification and reduction of concealed unemployment and informal employment, and stimulates individuals to search for jobs. The measures taken have increased the number of people applying to the Public Employment Service (PES) for assistance in finding employment. The majority of these were declared unemployed, resulting in an increase in registered unemployment up to 1.0 % of the economically active population.

However, since 2014 there has been a gradual decline in labour demand. For example, as of 1 November 2015 the demand for employees on the part of enterprises was 85.4 % of that on 1 December 2014 (28 700 vacancies against 33 600). At the same time, there was a reduction in the share of vacancies for blue-colour professions from 77.6 % in 2011 to 50.9 % at the start of 2016.

As a result of the decrease in the number of vacancies and the increase in the number of unemployed people, the tension coefficient on the labour market at the end of 2015 was 1.5 unemployed person per vacancy. Labour market tension persists in 2016.

One of the main reasons for the imbalance on the labour market in terms of its occupational and qualification structure is the lack of consistency between the supply of and demand for skills. Despite the increasing demand for workers in blue-colour occupations, the education and training market is still oriented mainly towards producing specialists with higher education.

Belarus has created a well-defined system of labour market data collection and application. Its characteristics are presented in the European Training Foundation (ETF) report 'Labour market information system and skills anticipation in Belarus'. There are three large databases for forecasting the labour market and staff training, created by Belstat, the Ministry of Labour and Social Protection and the Ministry of Education.

In accordance with the Agreement on Information Exchange concluded between Belstat and the Ministry of Economy on 8 April 2009 and the Ministry of Labour and Social Protection on 21 April 2009, Belstat provides all statistical information used for the elaboration of the National Strategy for Sustainable Development of the Republic of Belarus, medium-term socioeconomic development programmes, annual socioeconomic development programmes, state programmes, etc.

Specific information on different segments of the labour market is provided by recruitment agencies and portals (e.g. RABOTA.tut.by), and consists of a review of available vacancies and CVs with a breakdown into professional areas and groups of users.

The automated 'State Order and Admission' system was developed to collect data on additional needs for skilled workers and to formulate the order for staff training. This system includes data on employers' requests for the training of specialists, workers and employees at higher education, specialised secondary education (SSE) and technical and vocational education and training (TVET) levels. Using this data, the Ministry of Education formulates forecast figures for educational profiles (directions) for the state programmes of VET development for five years. Estimated admission figures for higher education, SSE and TVET institutions are adjusted annually, taking into account the updated order for staff training, the results of graduate job placement, and information from the Ministry of Labour and Social Protection on graduates who are registered as unemployed with the PES as of 1 December of the reporting year.

One way in which the educational services market is matched to the needs of the labour market in Belarus is the development and adoption of medium-term regional human resources programmes aimed at the effective application and development of regional labour forces. Such programmes assess the current situation and parameters of the regional labour market and VET system, define the long-term staffing requirements of organisations, and implement measures aimed at enhancing the systems for training, retraining and upgrading of qualifications and at forming a labour reserve.

There are bottlenecks in the existing system in terms of the generation of labour market data and the analysis and use of such data for planning the structure and quantity of staff training at all levels of VET. This is despite the considerable informational and institutional capacity created by the joint efforts of the state, sectoral and regional administrations in Belarus.

At the request of the Council of Ministers, work has been carried out on establishing additional reliable mechanisms to identify skills demands. The intention is to improve the system for forecasting the workforce needs of the economy and their VET requirements. Moreover, provision is made for the creation of a three-level information and analytical system, which will be a coherent multi-factor model.

Belarus actively participates in the activities of the Eastern Partnership ‘Make it Match’ Network, which is supported by the ETF and European Commission under Platform 2 of the Eastern Partnership. In 2015, in the context of the network’s activities, the national working group in Belarus drafted the country fiche and roadmap, identifying the main priorities and rationale for a more integrated and effective labour market information system (LMIS). The ETF supports these aspirations through a dedicated independent and comprehensive baseline analysis of the current state of the LMIS and its contribution to skills anticipation and matching. The European Union has agreed to support Belarus through the ‘Employment and Vocational Education and Training’ project, which will include a specific component devoted to improving the LMIS in Belarus.

Over the next five years, careful attention will be given to providing to all higher education, SSE and TVET graduates with their first working place (see Part 11, Section 8.2 of Chapter 8 of the Programme for Socio-Economic Development of Belarus for 2016–2020 adopted by Presidential Decree No 466 of 15 December 2016).

To date, job placement for vocational school graduates is seen as a guarantee of provision of their first working place. Job placements are provided to graduates who gained a full-time place in higher education, SSE and TVET, paid for from state and (or) local budgets in accordance with the specialty acquired (direction of a specialty, specialisation) and qualification awarded. Graduates who receive a working place through job placement are provided with guarantees and compensations.

In the context of a challenging economic situation in the country, employers often refuse to employ young specialists and workers who are to receive a postgraduate work assignment. Against this background, many graduates who have received full-time VET through fee-based training actively seek help in acquiring their first job through job placement. The legislation foresees such an option; thus, graduates of such fee-based training can choose to be assigned to a job, but only subject to the availability of workplaces once government-subsidised students have been assigned places. Essentially, the guarantees and compensations foreseen by items 3.1–3.3 of Article 48 of the Code of the Republic of Belarus on Education also apply to these graduates.

The bodies in charge of VET exercise control over the job placement of graduates and their employment and retention in organisations, including those that are privately owned or engaged in micro-entrepreneurship.

VET supports the transition to work in order to reduce unemployment and economic inactivity. Individuals registered as unemployed are directed by the PES to VET schools for training or retraining in occupations that are in demand in the labour market. The employment rate for unemployed people who have been through training or retraining programmes is significantly higher than that for unemployed people without any training or retraining.

The PES holds regular regional job fairs for VET students and graduates, as well as for other interested individuals. Such events offer an opportunity for jobseekers to meet representatives of organisations that have job vacancies available. Since 2014, the PES, through its portal, has been providing free access to the database of professions, which includes information about general requirements for different occupations, together with information on opportunities for training provision for unemployed individuals, and the Nationwide Database of Job Openings, including the opportunity to subscribe to a service that regularly forwards jobseekers’ CVs to potential employers and sends e-mail notifications to jobseekers when a new job vacancy is posted on the portal. Changes and amendments were made to the Law ‘On Employment of the Population of the Republic of Belarus’ aimed at improving the relevance of the information in the Nationwide Database of Job Openings and enhancing the performance of the PES, including other agencies that provide recruitment services to the population. Belarus is also creating a Register of Employment Agencies.

The PES supports unemployed people to set up their own businesses. Unemployed individuals are given training on entrepreneurship, and upon completion of the training programme, trainees present their business plans in the relevant industry. The training programmes are open to everyone, but they are provided for free of charge only to unemployed individuals who were referred by the PES. Those who were trained at the request of the PES and who successfully present their business plans are eligible to receiving a loan to set up their business.

Effectiveness and efficiency in addressing demographic, social and inclusion demand

The demand for VET has been heavily influenced by the age structure of the population, especially in the acquisition of initial VET (IVET), as well as the increase in demand for continuing VET (CVET) in response to labour market changes and the increase in unemployment.

There is awareness on the part of society and the state of the necessity for more complex and complete VET provision to prepare individuals with mental and physical impairments.

In Belarus there are no significant inequalities in the socioeconomic development of the regions (districts) that could have an impact on VET accessibility for the population. Optimisation of the network of TVET institutions at regional level has not had a significant impact on either student admissions to educational institutions or the number of skilled workers and employees trained there. Some of the decrease in these indicators was due to the demographic situation.

The total number of young people aged 14–30, as of 1 January 2016, was 2 058 000, a reduction of 127 000 (5.8%) on the figure for 1 January 2014. Over the same period, the population in this age group in urban areas decreased by 4.5% to 1 737 000 people, while in rural areas it decreased by 12.5% to 321 000.

The number of young people aged 15–19, the main cohort acquiring IVET, decreased by 25 100 in this period, and at 1 January 2016 was 457 200. Some 82.0% of these individuals live in urban areas.

This was the main reason for the decrease in student admissions to VET institutions at all levels between 2014 and 2016. The overall decrease was 5 200 people (3.7%), with the figure for TVET institutions decreasing by 7.2%, for SSE institutions by 4.9% and for higher education institutions by 1.1%.

In 2015/16 there was a shift in the distribution of enrolled trainees and students by educational profiles. There was an emerging trend of an increase in the number and proportion of admissions to SSE and higher education institutions in pedagogical, technical, sport, and tourism and hospitality specialties. However, admissions decreased in the main educational profiles such as architecture and construction, and communications, law, economics, management, and business administration.

The country has implemented a number of measures aimed at promoting the attractiveness of VET. These include the introduction in 2015/16 of field-specific education in GSE institutions for students in grades 10–11; the design of the Concept of Development of the Career Guidance of Youth in the Republic of Belarus; the implementation of a number of career counselling and career selection activities; and holding annual competitions of professional excellence.

Demand for CVET is driven by technological changes in the economy, the considerable increase in the share of elderly people in the employed population, and the growth of unemployment as a result of layoffs of a substantial number of employees owing to the economic decline. The demand for qualification upgrading and training in a new profession or specialty is increasing.

As mentioned in the ETF report 'Labour market information system and skills anticipation in Belarus', the following measures have been selected with the aim of achieving a more effective coverage of economically active population by the system of continuing adult education, improving its efficiency

and impact for the national economy and employees, and ensuring its coherence with the needs of economic entities (enterprises and organisations):

1. harmonising occupational and educational standards (development of the National Qualifications Framework and occupational standards in cooperation with educational institutions and business representatives);
2. encouraging employers to increase expenditure for workforce training (for example, through reimbursement by the state of employers' expenses for training new employees hired within the framework of the structural reforms);
3. strengthening public-private partnerships (PPPs) in the sphere of continuing adult education.

Up to now there has been no complete official statistical information in Belarus about economic entities that offer services in formal and especially informal and non-formal education, about the directions and results of their activities, which limits the scope for further analyses.

Individuals with a mental or physical disability belong to a special population group in terms of acquiring VET. Therefore, measures must be taken to ensure that GSE programmes are accessible for them.

The number of students in special education institutions and special needs classes at the start of the 2016/17 academic year was 9 253. In recent years, these students have accounted for 0.9–1.0 % of the total number of GSE students.

Of the total number of such students, 7 735 (83.6%) are trained according to the educational programmes at GSE level. In addition, around 3 000 persons with mental or physical disabilities (hearing impairments, vision disorders, musculoskeletal disorders, severe speech impairments and learning disabilities) acquire their first vocational education in TVET and SSE institutions. More than 70% of individuals with a mental or physical impairment who are trained in TVET institutions are those with a learning disability. In 2015/16, individuals with a mental or physical impairment were trained in 235 TVET and SSE institutions.

In 2015 the Concept of Development of the Inclusive Education of Persons with Mental and Physical Impairments and the plan for its implementation for 2016–2020 were developed and adopted in Belarus. It is expected that the implementation of the concept will facilitate the provision of equal rights to education for all students and maximise the inclusion of students with mental or physical impairments in the education and training system.

The current legislation in Belarus guarantees and consolidates the right to education for all citizens in terms of accessibility and free-of-charge provision of GSE and TVET, as well as SSE and higher education being free of charge on a competitive basis.

Belarus is a multi-ethnic state in terms of the composition of the population, with ethnic Belarusians being the dominant group (84%). The availability of VET for all, irrespective of ethnicity, is demonstrated by the data concerning levels of education, especially those of the young people aged 16–30.

The level of vocational education of women, in both urban and rural areas, as well as their level of economic activity, exceeds that of men. This fact denotes a gender balance in both the labour market and VET accessibility.

This confirms that the policy on GSE and VET in Belarus is based on guaranteeing equity and access for all citizens, regardless of gender, place of residence, ethnicity, social status and mental and physical capacity.

Internal efficiency of the VET system

In the current sociocultural and economic context, a special responsibility is imposed on the teacher-training system, as it establishes the quality of education at all levels, eventually determining the level of human welfare and the future of society and the country.

The strategy for the development of teacher training in Belarus is determined by a number of documents adopted by the Ministry of Education that reflect international trends in HE development, including the country's entry into the Bologna Process. The Concept of Teacher Education Development for 2015–2020 and the action plan for its implementation were developed and approved after extensive discussions. The concept provides for the shift of the national system of continuing teacher training towards the cluster development model, which is built on the use of clusters as the mainstream elements for the development of vocational training, retraining and qualification upgrading for teachers. It promotes the establishment of a training, research and innovation cluster for continuing teacher training. The main objective of this cluster is to bring together the training, research and innovation capacity and expertise of its members in order to improve the quality of training provided to modern educators. The Regulation on the Training, Research and Innovation Cluster for Continuing Teacher Education was approved by the Ministry of Education.

Government human resources policy currently offers a number of opportunities for continuing teacher training. First, the state offers an opportunity for qualification upgrading, retraining and internship paid for by the national (local) budget (or, in the case of teaching staff from private schools, paid for by the schools themselves). Second, educational institutions have tutorial committees, and at the regional and national level, there are educational and methodological associations.

The main incentives for continuing teacher training include the following:

- obligation to systematically improve their skills;
- admission for performance evaluation subject to having education that complies with the qualification requirements;
- remuneration dependent on the qualification category;
- bonuses for participation in experimental and innovative activities.

Educational institutions in the country have in place a single mechanism for teacher performance evaluation and review, which is approved by a decree of the Ministry of Education and described in the Regulations for the Performance Evaluation of Teachers of the Education System. A draft occupational and qualification standard for teachers has been developed and submitted for approval to the Ministry of Education.

The country routinely makes an effort to supply the educational process with skilled teachers and to build the capacity of the teaching staff. A system of premiums and salary increases is in place for educators. The Ministry of Education constantly monitors the retention of young professionals and their social support.

Despite the measures taken to support teaching staff, Belarus has a shortage of teachers and instructors of industrial training in the VET system. The main reasons for the shortage of teaching staff in the country include the low prestige of teaching, the ageing teaching staff and the outflow of skilled teachers to better-paid jobs.

Despite the relatively high levels of expenditure on education in terms of international indicators and the OECD average, salary levels in the education sector remain insufficiently competitive, and this significantly reduces the prestige of the teaching profession and limits the recruitment of highly skilled

and motivated students into the teacher education system. According to Belstat, the average teacher salary in May 2016 was 68.3% of the average wage earned in the industrial sector.

New mechanisms are currently being developed to improve the social status of teaching staff by implementing timely pay rises and by enhancing the mechanism for the protection of employees' social and economic rights and their professional interests, in order to attract gifted young people into the education system. Such actions are also foreseen by the Programme for Socio-Economic Development of Belarus for 2016–2020.

In order to improve the learning and teaching environment in VET schools, efforts are being made to optimise the network of VET schools and thereby determine the optimal number of educational institutions and the proper distribution of specialties, establish resource centres, set up scientific, educational and industrial clusters for CVET, etc. VET provision is being reorganised; this will include integrating colleges and lyceums with higher education institutions, and integrating inter-school educational and industrial training centres and career guidance centres with TVET and SSE institutions.

In recent years, Belarus has significantly increased the use of the modular approach to course design and the organisation of the educational process during the delivery of TVET, SSE and adult education programmes. The Republican Institute for Vocational Education (RIPO) has developed the conceptual rationale for introducing the modular approach. Such approaches are validated during their piloting.

The normative legal base that regulates the use of modern teaching and learning techniques in VET schools is being developed in the country. For example, according to the restated Code of the Republic of Belarus on Education, distance learning is singled out as a separate form of acquisition of IVET and CVET: the concept of 'distance-learning technologies' (Article 17) is institutionalised, as is the possibility of using a modular approach in presenting the content when implementing educational programmes (Article 16). Significant attention is paid to the training of VET teachers in how to apply innovative technologies in educational practice. Every year around 15% of teachers and masters of industrial training undergo qualification upgrading courses in applying interactive and digital technologies in order to master the best teaching practices.

VET quality is secured through the organisation of the educational process on the basis of standard curricular documentation and centralised standards on the availability and use of training literature, computers, and training and industrial machinery. If a school fails to meet the national standards, its licence for the delivery of education and training in the relevant specialty may be rejected or revoked.

In the VET system, students' learning outcomes are currently assessed by means of state examinations, qualifying papers and the defence of diploma theses. The bottleneck that results from the use of such mechanisms to evaluate the quality of learning outcomes is caused by the absence of justified and clearly defined standardised criteria, since there are no occupational and qualification standards in place. The development of the new NQS will contribute to the development of assessment practices that employers will view as credible, transparent and trustworthy. The new generation of educational standards, which will be developed at the pilot level on the basis of occupational standards for the education and management field, will enable the use of new mechanisms for qualification certification and educational programme content development in line with the criteria for a competence-based approach.

The final certification procedure is to validate whether students' learning outcomes comply with the requirements of educational standards and (or) curricular documentation for the corresponding educational programmes.

Final certification is currently the main mechanism for recognising learning outcomes and for issuing the state-recognised diploma or other certificate. The latter, along with work experience that is

recorded in the labour book, provides the basis for employers to assess an employee's level of qualification when hiring staff.

In accordance with the rules for conducting the final assessment and certification, the State Examination Board can include representatives of employers, enterprises and national state administration bodies, employees of the education institution, and academic and teaching staff from other higher education institutions.

Nowadays higher education, SSE and TVET educational standards are updated at least once every five years. Owing to intensive development of new techniques and technologies, there is often a need for more prompt introduction of changes in curricular documentation.

Governance and policy practices in the VET system

Since the preceding round of the Torino Process, there have been no major changes in the distribution of functions and responsibilities for governing the VET system.

Signs of both centralisation and decentralisation can be observed in Belarus. However, the prevailing trend is towards decentralisation, with a transfer of many of the functions of the Ministry of Education to regional authorities and educational institutions.

Authority is delegated to lower levels of governance by making regional rather than national budgets responsible for funding VET institutions, and by transferring ownership of national property to the regions. The regional level of governance is responsible for the property and financial resources of VET. In recent years, a large number of SSE institutions have been freed from direct institutional subordination and reorganised into structural units of higher education institutions and other educational organisations. Some of them have been transferred to the regional level or into municipal ownership.

Scientific and methodological provision at the national level is provided by RIPO, including the development of state standards and of scientific and methodological provision for the educational process.

Providers have freedom in terms of their educational process arrangements, and conduct their financial, economic and other operations on the basis of the provisions of legal acts, standard regulations on educational institutions and their charters.

Over the past two years, significant steps have been taken to coordinate the activities of the state bodies that are responsible for the development and implementation of state policy in forecasting the staffing needs of the economy, funding, the organisation of training provision and the employment of VET school graduates. The issues of VET improvement and its collaboration with the labour market are regularly addressed by a working group that was set up by the government to carry out a comprehensive review of the education system, at the collegium of the Ministry of Education. As a result, the Ministry of Education, the Ministry of Labour and Social Protection, the national bodies of state administration, other organisations subordinate to the government, regional executive committees and Minsk City Executive Committee have designed comprehensive measures to promote collaboration between the labour market and the VET system. In order to improve the forecasting mechanism and to formulate the order for staff training in higher education, SSE and TVET institutions, in October 2015 the Work Plan for Short-Term Planning of Staff Training and Enhancing Medium- and Long-Term Forecasts of Staff Needs was adopted and two working groups were set up. These are mandated to design approaches to formulating and optimising enrolments to higher education, SSE and TVET institutions, to define common requirements for the system of information and analysis on workforce needs forecasting and to coordinate its development and introduction.

At the national level, the National Council on Labour and Social Affairs is a vital interface between the government, the national employers' associations and the trade unions in relation to the implementation of socioeconomic policy and the protection of labour rights and the economic and social interests of citizens. In December 2015, at the meeting of this council, the government, the national employers' associations and the trade unions signed the General Agreement for 2016–2018, which fixed the commitments made on economic development, labour remuneration, social protection and social guarantees, employment promotion and social partnership development. This document contains measures aimed at improving training and retraining assistance for employees dismissed as a result of downsizing or organisation dissolution, and includes provisions for a gradual increase in all types of scholarships paid to young learners and an increase in food expenditure rates for TVET students.

Belarus has a regulatory and legal framework governing relations between state and non-state actors in shaping and implementing VET, and this contributes to the active involvement of social partners and enterprises in the quality assurance of training provision. Quality in VET is controlled centrally. The main role in this process is played by the Ministry of Education and, in the regions, by the educational departments of regional executive committees and the Education Committee of Minsk City Executive Committee. Employers' representatives are involved in the state qualification awarding commissions of TVET, SSE and higher education institutions. Educational standards for the delivery of TVET, SSE and higher education programmes are endorsed by the line ministries.

Overall, the current distribution of roles and responsibilities among national, regional and provider levels for the implementation of VET has proved to be rather effective in recent years.

However, owing to changing economic development priorities, rapid changes in technology and the active development of the regions, there is a need to improve VET governance by achieving better dialogue and coordination at all levels. Thus, the inclusion of VET providers in the structure of higher education institutions, their transfer to the regional level, or in the municipal property, and the establishment of scientific, educational and industrial clusters for CVET represent an effective response to the workforce and qualification needs of the regions and individual enterprises, the institutionalisation of the system of continuous education and the provision of individual pathways for citizens' professional development.

The first steps are being taken to implement PPPs in the country. In December 2015, Belarus adopted the Law 'On Public-Private Partnership', with education one of the PPP dimensions. Current experience suggests that PPP projects in VET are implemented only in exceptional cases, if at all. Both the government and society at large are interested in the promotion of PPP projects. However, the private sector is reluctant to invest in VET projects.

The shortage of funding resources influences the quality of training of specialists and workers, hinders the development of the material and technical infrastructure of educational institutions, slows down the updating of curricular documentation, reduces the number of labour market studies in the VET system and causes an outflow of teachers.

Meanwhile, given the real opportunities for funding the VET system from different sources, the funds available are allocated with due regard to the fulfilment of the most important strategic tasks of VET development.

3. Recommendations for action

The results of this analysis suggest there is a need for further synchronisation of the processes taking place in society, the economy and VET.

An efficient way to synergise these processes is through the development and implementation of a modern NQS model that embraces specific characteristics of the national economy and international trends in this area. The following proposals are made:

- to develop the concept of a new NQS and, based on this, to design a state programme for the successive gradual transformation of the current qualifications system in Belarus; this programme will define the goals, objectives and timing of the introduction of the NQS, the basic terms and their interpretation, the various stages, the action plan and arrangements for implementation, the resources required, the coordinating agencies and responsible executing agencies, the pattern of interaction between all stakeholders, and criteria for the socioeconomic performance evaluation of the NQS following its introduction;
- to design and pilot mechanisms for the distribution of roles and responsibilities among public authorities in charge of the development and implementation of the state policy in the area of skills anticipation, funding and training provision, and employment of VET graduates; the VET system should match long-term training plans to the priorities of the state's economic development and secure the supply of a skilled labour force;
- to resume regular employers' surveys in order to assess their current and future workforce needs and incorporate these surveys as a tool in staff supply forecasts broken down by major occupations and qualifications; this will be necessary to reliably determine the skills that are most in demand;
- to update the knowledge and skills of individuals of pre-retirement and retirement age who are still active in the labour market through a system of qualification upgrading and retraining; this will require the establishment of a sustainable and continuous lifelong learning system;
- to implement a wider awareness-raising and media campaign for the concept aimed at supporting education and training for persons with mental or physical impairments and persons with disabilities;
- to further optimise the network of VET providers and their training provision taking into account the difficult economic situation, which requires a more efficient use of the available financial resources allocated to VET;
- to intensify career guidance, counselling and the promotion of the advantages that TVET and SSE offer to young people at the beginning of their employment, in response to a significant reduction in the number of young people enrolling in VET programmes;
- to eliminate the disconnection between the training, research and innovation capacity of educational, scientific and methodological institutions in order to improve the quality of teacher training and reduce the fragmentation of education and training providers in the area of the training, retraining and qualification upgrading of teaching staff.

MORE INFO

To find out more about the Torino Process, compile reports, and much more, visit the Torino Process dedicated website at:

www.torinoprocess.eu

Torino Process blog: blog.torinoprocess.eu

For information on ETF activities please visit:

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