



# TORINO PROCESS 2016-17

## SERBIA

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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

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## Acronyms

<b>IIE</b>	Institute for Improvement of Education
<b>NQF</b>	National qualifications framework
<b>VET</b>	Vocational education and training

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### EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

#### 1. Introduction

There have been no major conceptual or strategic changes in the field of vocational education and training (VET) in Serbia since the previous Torino Process round in 2014. However, in 2016, certain changes were made in the way practical work is arranged in vocational schools and there was a perceived shift towards dual or cooperative education. These changes were initiated by the Serbian Chamber of Industry and Commerce.

The most significant area of activity was in the preparation of the national qualifications framework (NQF). The main document has been developed and a law on the NQF is currently being drafted.

#### 2. Main findings

##### Overview of VET and vision for VET

The reforms and changes implemented so far in VET have resulted in certain changes in legislation and curriculum development. Overall, however, the situation in VET has remained essentially unchanged since 2014. In practice, the changes that occurred in the pilot profiles have not translated into changes in the system as a whole and vocational secondary schools (across most of the system) still do not convey the knowledge and skills, and thus also the competences, that would give secondary school leavers faster and better access to employment and movement through the labour market.

Overall, other than initial progress on the development of an NQF, the initial moves towards more practical training and the pilot profiles, the VET system in Serbia remains school-oriented, with varying levels of practical training, which takes place mainly in real workplaces or in school laboratories and workshops. Exceptions to this are the 59 qualifications that involve a higher proportion of practical learning. These were introduced in the regular VET system as part of the pilot profiles. Indeed, the implementation of the pilot profiles based on new qualification standards is essentially the main step forward in the development of VET. Other than this development, the overall observation is that the secondary education enrolment policy, the school network and curriculum implementation in each school do not match local and regional labour market demand. Furthermore, no data on the employability and employment of VET school leavers is collected. The National Employment Service collects data only if specifically asked to do so.

One of the main weaknesses of the VET system in Serbia is the extent to which practical training is provided in vocational schools and the manner in which this is done.

Indeed, even the Strategy for the Development of Education 2020 has identified the issue of quality assurance in practical training outside of school (work-based learning) as a weakness. The existing practical training system is also characterised by a lack of accredited posts and trainers for practical teaching and by a lack of various incentives to companies to provide better quality practical training to pupils. Consequently, little interest is expressed by companies in this form of cooperation with VET schools. One conclusion that can be drawn is that the slow implementation of innovation in the system, both in the curricula and in practice (e.g. pilot profiles), and the insufficient spending on school equipment pose serious threats to the reform process.

Some of the innovations seen in the reporting period, in particular the increased involvement of employers in the provision of VET, have been achieved within the framework of international projects based on 'cooperative education'. This is built around a much higher share of practical learning and greater involvement of employers in the education system. This model of vocational education is also a form of work-based learning.

### Effectiveness and efficiency in addressing labour market demand

After losing 400 000 jobs between 2008 and 2014, employment in Serbia finally rebounded in 2015. Labour force survey (LFS) data shows a continued and marked improvement in 2016, with employment increasing by an additional 174 000 (6.7%) between Q2 in 2015 and Q2 in 2016 despite continuous job losses in the public sector. Two-thirds of these gains, however, were in informal employment. Overall, the unemployment rate continues to fall. It fell to 15.2% in Q2 in 2016, significantly down from a high of 23.9% in 2012 and the lowest rate in 15 years.

A growing issue for employers is the lack of appropriately trained human resources, which contributes to the high youth unemployment. It is also indicative of a lack of systemic and continual cooperation between the economy (industry) and VET (Belgrade Open School, 2015). The labour market transition study conducted by the International Labour Organisation in June 2016 found the highest unemployment rates (40.7%) among young people with only primary qualifications, compared to 29.9% for young people with secondary general education and 32.9% among university graduates. The lowest unemployment rates were found among young people with secondary and post-secondary vocational qualifications (6.0% and 18.4%, respectively), which suggests that technical skills are more closely correlated with labour market demand.

According to the National Employment Strategy for the period 2011–2020, VET should lead to higher employability of the workforce and a better match between supply and demand. It should also lead to a better match between the education and training system and labour market demand and an improved approach to lifelong learning, especially for vulnerable groups. Many documents call for the establishment of ongoing and systemic cooperation between VET schools and employers' representatives in the development of school enrolment policies and the organisation of practical training and final secondary school graduation examinations. Specific recommendations are listed below.

- Mechanisms to increase the effectiveness and relevance of enrolment policies, practices and final examinations in secondary education should be improved.
- Sector skills councils should be developed to ensure the participation of businesses in the programming, development and provision of VET.
- Procedures should be defined and methodologies developed for a systematic follow-up on the employment and further education of VET school leavers.

## Effectiveness and efficiency in addressing demographic, social and inclusion demand

Social inclusion as an education policy is incorporated in the 2009 Law on Fundamentals of the Education System. According to Article 3 of the law, the education system 'must provide all children, students and adults with equality and accessibility of education and pedagogy without discrimination and segregation based on gender, social, cultural, ethnic, religious or other background, place of residence or domicile, financial or health status, developmental difficulties and impairments and disabilities, as well as other grounds'. This principle is also incorporated and enshrined in the Strategy for the Development of Education in the Republic of Serbia by 2020.

Even with the measures and actions that have been implemented to ensure the enrolment of pupils from families of a lower socioeconomic status (e.g. affirmative action), the system is still not sufficiently inclusive. Enrolment in secondary schools and higher education institutions is almost exclusively based on prior attainment and the score earned in the final secondary school examination or the entrance examination.

Certain categories of persons who have difficulties finding employment and are in a particularly difficult position in the labour market have benefited in recent years from special service packages offered by the National Employment Service. The aim of these packages is to activate these groups and intensify the promotion of their employment and social integration. These groups include young persons; redundant employees; persons with disabilities; persons without qualifications; low-skilled persons; and long-term unemployed persons. Overall, the results of the active labour market policy measures implemented in Serbia in recent years have not produced significant net results and their intensity is modest. However, they tend to be more economical for, and beneficial to, persons with insufficient or lower education levels.

## Internal efficiency of the VET system

Continuing professional development of teachers is a legal requirement under the Law on Fundamentals of the Education System. The inspectorate of the Ministry of Education, Science and Technological Development and the Institute for Education Quality and Evaluation perform an external evaluation. This is based on an analysis of reports and documents, direct inspection of teaching (an external evaluator attends at least 40% of teachers' classes for a minimum of 20 minutes at a time) and discussions with employees and principals.

The effects of teachers' continuing professional development are difficult to monitor and the question is how this should be done, e.g. whether it should be based on changes in teachers' behaviour, or on pupils' performance or communication skills or professional empowerment. There are no agreed measuring instruments at national level. One of the options for the future is to assess the current situation and define three-year priorities based on this assessment.

The organisation and implementation of practical teaching is the most important component that determines the competence levels of pupils in secondary vocational schools. Financial and material conditions and the venue where practical teaching is conducted are seen as major factors influencing these processes. In the case of initial practical teaching, the by-law provides for the use of school workshops and underscores the importance of the quality of their equipment for the proper training of pupils. Regarding practical work or professional practice, it is recommended that this type of teaching is organised only when required by the specific nature of the course, i.e. when such teaching cannot be performed in schools.

## Governance and policy practices in the VET system

At national level, the Ministry of Education, Science and Technological Development is involved in all key roles and functions. The Council of VET and Adult Education (VET Council) is involved in everything except the mobilisation of financial resources. The National Education Council is involved in formulating the national policy framework, providing opinions on laws and regulations, and evaluating and reviewing VET policies. The Institute for Improvement of Education (IIE) plays a key role in drafting technical documents for VET implementation and is partially involved in other key functions, apart from the mobilisation of financial resources. The Institute for Education Quality and Evaluation helps to define educational standards and is involved in evaluations and reviews, and in research and development activities in the field of education. Providers have a certain degree of freedom in designing curricula.

From the perspective of institutionalised policy advice-oriented mechanisms, the VET Council is the body closest to being a policy coordinator. All major social partners and key stakeholders are members and it is a legislated national actor in VET governance. The National Education Council has an important but comparatively limited role in governance and coordination. The IIE's Centre for VET and Adult Education is involved in policy making and delivery in relation to monitoring, quality assurance and development. The Socio-economic Council of Serbia also deals with VET, and international stakeholders monitor progress. There is no Sector Working Group for development assistance focusing on VET – a major shortcoming, as Sector Working Groups can promote programme-based and sector-wide approaches. Communities of practice (potential policy advisors and mainstreamers) are not institutionalised. The Ministry of Education, Science and Technological Development has no specialised department for policy monitoring and evaluation. Monitoring responsibilities between it, other ministries, agencies and stakeholders could be more defined. Representatives of employers (individually or chosen by the Chamber of Commerce), relevant schools and higher education institutions are involved in the development of standards for qualifications, curricula and final examinations (programme, instruments and implementation).

## 3. Recommendations for action

The Serbian government's work programme for the next four-year period sets out priorities in the field of education which are based directly on the economic reform programme. The following activities have been planned:

- establishing a national qualifications framework, which should provide records of the education profiles needed in the labour market, ensuring that education programmes match labour market demand and ensuring recognition and acknowledgment of skills and knowledge acquired outside of formal education;
- emphasising the development of entrepreneurial skills and practical and applicable knowledge in the context of developing new integrated teaching programmes in vocational education;
- focusing on the dual education model as a means of matching the education system with the economy's demand for labour.



# MORE INFO

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