

ADULT LEARNING IN ALBANIA: WHY THIS FOCUS ON POLICY LEARNING?

Executive Summary¹ – Working document

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EU activities in area of human capital development and the ETF's role in Albania

In June 2006, Albania signed the Stabilisation Association Agreement (SAA) with the European Union (EU), an important step in the EU integration process. In order to further advance in the EU membership process, Albania must fulfil all obligations deriving from the SAA including: i) *Economic criteria*, which refers to the existence of a functioning market economy and the capacity to cope with the pressures and market forces within the Union; and ii) *Acceptance of a Community acquis*, which refers to the ability to take on the obligations of membership, including adhering to the aims of political, economic and monetary union.

The government of Albania has adopted a revised National Plan to implement the European Partnership priorities and the SAA and as a potential candidate country, it will receive EU support through the transition and institutional building component of the Instrument for Pre-accession Assistance³. The most important areas in the context of the priorities set out in the latest European Partnership⁴ relate to vocational education and training, improvement of secondary education dropout rates as well as integrated employment and vocational training strategies into social, education, enterprise and regional policies.

Since 2000, the major aims have been to address the following priorities:

(i) advancing the reform of the education and training systems to support the

¹ Based on the *Initial assessment of adult learning* draft report, ETF, 2007

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³ Council Regulation (EC) No 1085/2006 of 17 July 2006 establishing an Instrument for Pre-Accession Assistance (IPA, The Instrument for Pre-Accession Assistance (IPA) is the Community's financial instrument for the pre-accession process for the period 2007-2013. Assistance is programmed and implemented according to **the following components**: (a) Transition Assistance and Institution Building; (b) Cross-Border Cooperation; (c) Regional Development; (d) Human Resources Development; (e) Rural Development. (a) and (b) are accessible to Albania.

⁴ Albania becomes potential candidate country for EU accession following the Thessaloniki European Council of June 2003. The EU and Albania signed a Stabilisation and Association Agreement (SAA) on 12 June 2006. On 18 February 2008 the Council adopted a new European partnership with Albania.

development of the economy and society; (ii) creating links between the education and training system and the labour market; (iii) improving the capacity of the public employment service, and making it relevant to the Albanian context; (iv) developing relevant active labour market measures in order to combat unemployment. These reforms directly contribute to improving conditions in teaching and learning in VET, more concretely in secondary vocational education.

In 2008-09 the EU VET CARDS 2006 programme⁵ will be implemented with the “Support to improved operation of pilot vocational schools and vocational training centres” activity in Albania. The expected results of this intervention are: i) updated skills of VET policymakers for VET policy design, implementation and monitoring of VET reform policies updated; ii) enhanced capacities of VET institutions and VET bodies to deliver services in accordance with their mandate as given by Albanian legislation; and iii) more effective VET provision through updated programmes (curricula, teacher training, implementation of the Albania qualification framework) to correspond with the emerging economic development and the employment needs of the country.

In 2008-09 the Ministry of Labour will also benefit from CARDS 2006⁶ funds through the programme: “Strengthened labour market structures in inspection and employment services”. Expected results of the programme are related to the employment services and include: i) better skills and capacities of the regional labour offices; ii) more effective and integrated counselling and guidance for jobseekers; and iii) improved participation of women in the labour market encouraged by activities based on gender analysis.

The European Training Foundation (ETF), as an EU agency and with a mission to help transition and developing countries to harness the potential of their human resources through the reform of education, training and labour market systems in the context of the EU’s external relations policy, is committed to assisting Albania to address the issue of human capital development related to the government’s country strategy and the set of objectives emerging from European partnership priorities and the SAA. The focus is on measures to rationalise the provision of human capital development including improved education and training delivery in the country. The ETF approach in the country is to support and facilitate the work of different groups and networks of key stakeholders from different positions and interests inside the human resources development sector, such as policymakers and key stakeholders from education, labour and finance, different levels of public administration and social partners, in order to build active platforms for policy dialogue for national reforms and for the identification of initiatives to be supported by the IPA.

From 2006, the ETF has supported the capacity building of key stakeholders involved in the EU Education and Training 2010 agenda and, more specifically, linked to quality assurance in VET. Structured policy dialogue on EU Education & Training 2010 and the Copenhagen process policies for applying major EU instruments such as the Common Quality Assurance Framework, the European Qualifications Framework and key indicators for benchmarking, has been facilitated. A series of initiatives have been implemented in partnership with NAVETA in order to work out appropriate measures for the accreditation and assessment of VET providers.

⁵ Terms of reference of the CARDS 2006 VET programme in Albania

⁶ Terms of reference of the CARDS 2006 Labour market programme in Albania

As a part of policy learning initiatives, from 2006 the ETF has supported policy dialogue to better cope with the challenges of VET policy design and implementation. Dialogue on the decentralisation of education and school autonomy based on the outcomes of the ETF 2006 and 2007 peer learning exercises has been facilitated. Implementation of the Community of Practice in teaching and learning has been initiated in a number of vocational schools. In support of the implementation of the European Charter for Small Enterprises, targeted assistance and capacity building measures have been provided, in particular to determine entrepreneurship learning outcomes at each level of the education system.

In 2007, the ETF initiated activities related to adult learning. Structured policy dialogue was facilitated on the issue of adult learning with events taking place in Korca, Shkoder, Elbasan and Tirana in order to provide an initial assessment of the supply, demand and social dialogue in adult learning. In 2008, as a result of the policy dialogue, different policy options were explored together with key policymakers. In addition, the ETF provided policy advice to key national stakeholders related to the following issues: i) the draft law on VET (proposal for an update of the VET Legislation from 2002); and ii) a draft concept for a regional VET centre.

The challenge of integrating employment and vocational training strategies into social, education, enterprise and regional policies: the role of adult learning

Human resources are the principal asset of any country, and they are required mainly by the local and regional labour markets and therefore by the enterprises that shape these markets. In an economy where jobs and skills needs are constantly changing and where new technologies are introduced, citizens from Albania as elsewhere are confronted with the need and opportunity to adapt their knowledge and skills constantly. On a global scale, labour market conditions and working contexts are becoming more and more divided between knowledge-intensive jobs on the one hand and more repetitive, low-skilled work on the other. The labour market context in Albania is expected to show similar characteristics in the future.

Adult learning is an important policy issue for Albania, as it is for all South Eastern European countries. Its importance is even higher considering the path and the pace of the economic reforms implemented during transition and the respective consequences, the size, the structure and the development level of the private sector, the average skill level of the work force which far from guarantees the competitiveness of the economy and the labour force in a regionalised and globalised world. At present the concept of adult learning is not well introduced in education and training reform and awareness about it is still a challenge at all levels of governance of the system, as well as among Albanian citizens. The demand for it relates to adults that need to be trained and retrained in order to cope with the ever-changing world of work and is usually described in terms of age, gender, educational attainment, employment status, job characteristics etc⁷. Better knowledge of adult learning

⁷ "Designing adult learning strategies - the case of South Eastern Europe", ETF publication by Evelyn Viertel and Madeleine Gunny, 2007.

patterns in Albania including considering the barriers and motivations to engagement in adult learning is therefore critical to future policy development.

Encouraging employment, dealing with the long-term unemployed, addressing the gender gap in the labour market, addressing youth unemployment, are all complex challenges for Albania because they are all multi-sector phenomena which involve a mutual reinforcement of policies in a number of areas. However, raising education levels, helping adults to re-enter the labour market through pre-qualification and/or further qualification, supporting young people to cope more easily with the transition from school to work make the development of adult learning in Albania all the more urgent. The major objective for adult learning as a systemic issue is to reduce regional, rural and urban disparities, as well as to promote the employment and social inclusion of various vulnerable groups⁸. All adults should have access to learning opportunities to enhance their basic skills as well as to maintain, enhance or transform more advanced skills. They should also have access to easy-to-follow information about learning opportunities, and counselling should be readily available not only for unemployed job seekers, which is the case at present in Albania.

In the wider context of human resources development, in 2007 adult learning became one of the key areas identified in the ETF country plan that will require further attention within a broader framework of policies for human capital development. Based on a simple process developed and implemented at country level, the diagnosis of the situation and initial assessment of adult learning became possible. The process, that depends on the active participation and fruitful dialogue among key stakeholders, is based on three core issues – the supply of adult learning, the demand for adult learning and social partnership related to adult learning – was a key mechanism for facilitating the active participation and reflection on adult learning by all those involved and concerned at country level. The outcomes of this process, which began in 2008 and continue into 2009, will be presented in a report on adult learning in Albania.

There are many important issues to be discussed related to adult learning in Albania. Key questions include: i) a focus on the supply of adult learning - are different learning opportunities available to all citizens so that they can gain, refresh, extend or update their knowledge and skills at any time throughout their lives? ii) a focus on the demand for adult learning - if needs for adult learning are very evident, then what types of policy measure are in place to support the demand for adult learning? iii) a focus on social partnership and role it can play in adult learning - to what extent do social partners have a role in adult learning in Albania?

Institutional structure and roles of actors: quick overview

The key agents in terms of adult learning strategy include the Department of Employment Policies (as part of the General Directorate of Policies of the MoLSAEO), in charge of developing employment and VET policies and constituting meetings of the National VET Council. Additional actors who are to join the strategy table include the National Employment Service (NES) as the body in charge of

⁸ Evidence suggests that adult learning and raising literacy skills have the potential to significantly improve the economic well-being of those with relatively low initial education and skills. When learning is diffused throughout the less-educated members of the workforce, national prosperity is significantly enhanced. There should be policy focus on the people with the lowest skills as they are holding the economic development back. (See ETF HRD Albania Country analyses, 2008)

(designing and) implementing active labour market policies. Representatives from the employment service network of 12 regional offices and 24 district offices could offer a view on the labour market situation and needs within their areas. National and sector-specific economic development strategies, as designed by the Ministry of Economy and Finance, and other sector ministries, such as tourism, will have to inform Albania's adult learning strategy so that it reflects the specific sector needs. Finally, representatives from key branch employer organisations or major employers are called upon to contribute to the strategy, as it is they who can offer a view on the current and future skills that the Albanian economy needs.

Important actors in terms of reviewing and completing the regulatory framework for adult learning include the Ministries of Labour, Social Affairs and Equal Opportunities (MoLSAEO) and of Education and Science (MoES) and their subordinate agencies. MoLSAEO's Department of Employment Policies is in charge of drafting the legislative and regulatory framework and licensing non-public VET providers. The National Agency for VET of the MoES establishes standards and accredits (public) VET providers. The issues that will require further attention include: i) consistency between initial and continuing VET structures and philosophies (linkages in terms of providers, trainers, a common qualification system, etc.), and therefore a clear understanding of the role of adult learning in that context; ii) the fact that there should be a seamless education system, so no restrictions in terms of age or previous educational attainment for individuals that can benefit from adult education and training; iii) incentives for both companies and individuals to participate in adult learning, including low-skilled or traditionally skilled workers, iv) incentives for all existing education and training providers to (also) offer adult learning services so as to make the use of resources efficient; v.) improved role of employers in terms of choosing the skills for which training should be offered.

Key actors from a content/ qualifications/ overall quality point of view are again the employment service and employers, or their representative organisations, who establish skill needs at national and branch levels. The survey of skills needs among employers, which was carried out with CARDS funding in 2004, will have to be repeated and updated with a view to informing adult learning development. Sectoral committees – or expanded curricula teams - formed as subordinate structures of the National Agency for VET could develop a view of the qualifications required in the country and advance the development of qualification standards and the building of a national qualification system. The National Agency for VET has a key role to play in terms of quality, as its task is to prepare the list of professions (specialities), qualifications and framework curricula, establish standards for teachers and trainers' and their training, and for evaluation and certification, which will eventually be important for adult learning.

Key adult learning providers include state schools (for example for second-chance, recuperative basic education for adults or basic skills courses), public or non-public training centres, NGOs, public and private universities (faculties) and enterprises for practical training, training for a qualification or re-qualification or skills upgrading of both employed or unemployed people, as well as other providers for all other forms including 'liberal' adult learning. The 10 public Vocational Training Centres located in eight Albanian regions (Tirane, Shkoder, Elbasan, Korce, Durrës, Vlore, Fier, Gjirokaster) are already quite experienced in delivering training courses, especially for young adults, in line with individual interests and labour market needs. With a view to involving state schools and public university faculties in the delivery of adult

learning courses, however, financial regulations would have to be reviewed so as to increase their financial autonomy and create incentives and possibilities for their participation in adult learning provision.

Decisions about what kind of education and training is to be financed through either public or donor funds shall be informed by adequate skills needs assessments at national, sector and/or regional levels or of specific target groups (in the case of socially disadvantaged groups of people). Targeting specific sectors or specific groups and their respective skills needs is paramount in the context of the scarce budgets available. Funding for training shall be provided following market principles, i.e. a competitive, transparent bidding procedure.

Partnerships involving key stakeholders and interested partners will become the principal working mechanism at all levels of the system (national, sector, regional, local) – be it for policy/strategy or implementation tasks. The aim of local partnerships would be to contribute to economic regeneration and employment growth. Good practice in terms of quality provision and improving the labour market prospects of trainees shall be explored and made known through public media or fora or at lifelong learning fairs so as to inspire other providers. Tracer studies may show whether training participants could use their newly acquired skills to find a job or be self-employed.

Opportunities for the future cooperation in adult learning: ideas to be explored further

In the period 2009-11 the ETF will continue its strategy of support to Albania in determining policy priorities, mobilising sectoral engagement, policy dialogue for decision making, providing systemic feedback and creating the necessary knowledge in the adult learning as a policy issue. The majority of ETF initiatives in Albania applies the concept of policy learning - aimed at sharing partner country knowledge on systemic issues and of the connection between education and training policies and broader socio-economic policy challenges (poverty reduction, transparency, migration, social participation and employment).

A good basis for that can already be found in this initial assessment report on the issue of adult learning. It is important to note that during the initial assessment process, as well as at the policy dialogue conference which took place in April 2008, the key stakeholder group identified the following issue that can be of further value to be worth further exploration with the European Training Foundation (ETF):

- Facilitate a better understanding of the implementation challenges that are related to the ongoing reforms in vocational training that will positively influence the adult learning system such as the approval of the national qualifications framework and its dissemination at all levels, a proposal for an appropriate accreditation mechanism for previous adult learning, an increase in the financial autonomy for vocational schools and their transformation into community resource centres etc.
- Undertake a quantitative and qualitative study to more thoroughly assess the supply, demand and social dialogue of adult learning at all levels to make proposals for the necessary measures for its further improvement. The

identification of an evaluation, monitoring and reporting system in line with EU practice should be part of the study.

- Carry out a qualitative assessment to analyse adult learning in Albania and its impact on society. An international seminar on the experiences of other countries in adult learning development including EU models on its financing should be organised.
- Undertake awareness raising seminars at local level on the different processes related to adult learning and the role of local actors in this respect. The content of adult learning should put the local community on its agenda. It is important that an assessment of teaching methods used in adult learning is implemented.