



THE 11TH EDITION OF THE INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE
**EUROPEAN INTEGRATION
REALITIES AND PERSPECTIVES**

The European Projects in the Support of Albanian's VET

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Abstract: The main objectives of Albanian society are economic development and integration into the European Union. These aspirations need the acceleration of structural reforms that will allow to Albania to be adapted to modern societies. In this contest, the improvement on the role played by education, especially by VET system, is very important for the economic and social development of the country. Generally, VET is seen as a key factor in the economic growth because he equips people with the skills needed to be protagonists in the labor market. This system in Albania has undergone toward many changes in structure and content, with the aim of improving his approach to the requirements of the labor market. However, to provide a vocational education of high quality it's important to invest more in it, but the Albanian investments in this sector are among the lowest. In these conditions, the partnership with EU offers a great opportunity for the country to develop the VET system. This paper tries to show how has Albania used the opportunities that derive from integration process. The method used is qualitative. In consideration are taken the reports, studies and statistics get into the sector of vocational education.

Keywords: vocational education; unemployment; labor market; European Union

JEL Classification: I2; I29

1. Introduction

The development of globalization and changes in technology has transformed the world of work. In order to be competitive in the global market a country needs qualified workforce. So, more and more the emphasis is placed on the importance that human capital has on the economic growth. For these reasons, it is given greater significance to vocational education. He represents a field of education, which includes all those programs that are related to the development of specific skills for work. (Billet, 2011, p. 6). Precisely this is his main purpose the identification of the necessary knowledge, which increases effectiveness in a particular profession. Numerous studies have shown its positive effects. Within the socioeconomic dimension the benefits that vocational education brings to society are associated with: reducing unemployment, improving labor market, improving social cohesion, increasing productivity, improving the quality of life, etc.²

VET help in the sustainable youth employment, because in comparison with other education and training systems, is closest to the labor market, something that facilitates the transition of young people at work. So, it is seen as a tool to mitigate youth unemployment, which constitutes one of the main problems of the current societies. The latest data onto the European level indicate that, graduates

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²Cedefop. (2011). Research paper no 10, The benefits of vocational education and training. pg.7 file:///C:/Documents%20and%20Settings/Internet/My%20Documents/Downloads/5510_en.pdf.

from vocational education are more successful in finding a job and better paid than candidates coming from general education¹.

Also, for Albania the reformation of VET system has a great importance for economic growth and social development of the country. However, the system in Albania is problematic and fails to play the proper role in the current developments in the labor market. With the aim of improving it in recent years they have been carried out some changes in its structure and contents. Changes are set to reach some targets; to create a system that will allow young people to gain a basic profession, to provide the possibility for further training and education and also to establish a large and continuous contact with the world of work. To achieve these goals, vocational education should optimally utilize financial, human and infrastructural, resources. In this circumstance, the cooperation with the European Union is a great opportunity to increase the quality offered.

2. Actual Problems of Vocational Education in Albania

Youth unemployment is a concern for Albania. This problem is often associated with unprepared individuals in comparison to the needs of the labor market. Youth (15-29 years old) unemployment rate in 2014 was 32.5%, (35.6% for males and 27.4% for females). Compared to the previous year, youth unemployment rate was increased by 5.3 percentage points². So it is important to develop the labor market with the aim to reduce the unemployment rate.

One of the solutions is to improve vocational education schools, which aim to prepare technicians and skilled workers. But, contrary to the rest of Europe the data show that vocational education in Albania faces many difficulties. This is worrisome if we consider that qualified human resources are indispensable factors to face the challenges of an increasingly competitive world. In fact, Albania's competitiveness in the regional arena is still very low and is based mainly on the factors of production costs. As we said above, the collaboration with the EU is a great opportunity to fill the gaps that VET has, in order to enhance the quality of education and training offered.

The vocational education system in Albania has undergone toward many changes in structure and content, with the aim of improving his approach to the requirements of the labor market. However, it should be noted that it continues to face a number of shortcomings which affect its quality level.

If we make a comparison with other European countries the percentage of students attending vocational schools continues to be very low. The statistics for 2007-2008 show that the percentage of students in secondary vocational schools in Albania were 19% and at European level was 62.7%³. Suffice it to recall that for the 2009-2010, students graduated from vocational schools were only 4839 compared with 29 984 students graduated from general schools⁴.

Researchers have shown that there are significant differences in the level of infrastructure construction, environment and teaching tools. The quality of specialist teachers remains a problem for many schools. Another problem of vocational education in Albania is the lack of basic criteria in determining student admission. Usually students enrolled in vocational education have very low scores school.

¹ Commission Staff Working Document. (2012). (*Vocational education and training for better skills, growth and jobs*). pg.2 <http://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:52012SC0375&from=EN>.

² INSTAT, <http://www.instat.gov.al>.

³ *Strategjia Kombetare e Arsimit Parauniversitar 2009-2013/ National Education Strategy 2009-2013*. <http://planipolis.iiep.unesco.org/upload/Albania/Albania-Strategy-Pre-university-2009-2013-alb.pdf>.

⁴ Source, INSTAT, <http://www.instat.gov.al>.

About 69% of the students attending VET are boys, with a decrease in the number of girls. In fact, vocational education serves as a very simple way to get access to University for at least 50% of its graduates. In most cases are girls who use VET as a path to higher education, while boys mainly enter the labor market.

Investments in this sector are lower than in other countries. Mostly its financing is done from the state budget for education, while schools, economic activities or business sponsorships are negligible. The majority of the cost of education is taken by primary schools with 61% and vocational education has the lowest with only 5.9% of spending¹. Most of the vocational education funds are used to pay staff, leaving limited resources for the improvement of work equipment.

And also it should be noted that the fragmentation of the labor market is an obstacle to the development of VET system. The private sector in the country is dominated by the economic activities of small and medium size (99.2%), of which approximately 95.7% of them have from 1 to 9 employees². These businesses are less cooperative with vocational education schools, e.g. about students' practices. This position does not help vocational education to improve the quality of their programs so that they would be important to the labor market. In fact, VET in Albania is not oriented toward labor market demands, 1/3 of his pupils attend programs for which there does not exist a suitable employment market. As stated above, obviously it affects the quality of the labor force in terms of qualifications and skills.

Various surveys of business climate have shown that a significant proportion of firms admit that the lack of a skilled work force constitutes a major obstacle to business development. There are discrepancies between the skills required by businesses and graduate fields of study. For more qualifications there is little or no training, while other courses are followed up and graduates have difficulty finding work. These are the main issues to be resolved.

3. European Assistance on VET

As we noted above, integration into the EU is one of the goals of the Albanian society. In this way, the main achievement has been receiving candidate status in June of 2014. On the whole the process carries a set of criteria and conditions that must be met to become a full member. One of them is to bring Albanian legislation with the EU. Now, this condition is reflected on the new rules of the IPA (Instrument for Pre-Accession) adopted in March 2014.

A new base law is set for financial assistance instruments, in order to make sure that “assistance for pre-accession will be closely linked to the priorities of enlargement, and will be based on a more strategic approach oriented towards results of key reforms in the countries that are candidates for expansion³”. Their main demand is “decentralized management” or more accurately the full responsibility of the candidate countries for funds management. Another characteristic is that funds can be spent only in areas that have been designated by the EU as appropriate with European accession strategy. The more a candidate country approaches to the membership, the more the focus should be on projects related to areas belonging to the European acquit. Among other things, social

¹ Final Report, (2014). *Baseline Survey of Public VET Providers in Albania*.

http://www.sociale.gov.al/files/documents_files/ALB-Report-Survey-Public-VET-Provider_20_06_14_FINAL.pdf.

² Source, INSTAT, <http://www.instat.gov.al>.

³ Koeth, Wolfgang. (2014). *The new Instrument for Pre-Accession Assistance (IPA II): less accession, more assistance? p. 4*, http://www.eipa.eu/files/repository/product/20140507143645_WorkingPaper_2014_W_01.pdf.

welfare services, vocational education and training and the labor market, are priority areas to be financed by IPA funds.

In the EU-Albania partnership documents are always stated that the Albanian government should improve the education system and create a modern vocational education system. According to the Stabilization and Association Agreement (2009), in the chapter on education and training, is determined that the parties should cooperate in order to raise the level of education and training in Albania, also improve policies on youth employment.

As we have shown in this paper, youth employment is a major challenge for the country. Young people should be helped to be ready for the labor market, possessing the skills required from him. In this way, vocational education is the instrument to face this challenge and partnership with the EU is a great opportunity. The investment in construction and rehabilitation of schools is the first step to transform and improve the structure of VET. At this point, donor projects have had an important role.

Major European projects until 2008 included technical assistance for the reform in the VET system and the reconstruction of vocational schools. During this period the European Union has provided support to complete the legislation of VET and Albanian Qualifications Framework. The Albanian Qualification Framework is fully in line with European framework and giving in this way the possibility of education system in Albania to be compared with most education systems in Europe.

Various European agencies, in particular the European Training Foundation (ETF) has supported initiatives in Albania in VET sector through qualifications, guides for career, support initiatives aimed at developing human resources, etc. While through IPA funds is made possible the reconstruction and rehabilitation of many vocational schools equipped with the necessary infrastructure.

To be mentioned, during 2008 they were reconstructed 5 schools and in 2011 were rehabilitated 3 other schools in Lezha, Fier and Cerik. At a cost of 2.2 million Euros, the goal was to improve learning conditions for the students of these schools. Another IPA project in 2010 has provided technical support for the reform in the vocational education system, particularly in the preparation of national strategy in VET and the strengthening of services provided by the national employment service. This project was implemented with ILO's assistance¹. The overall IPA support over the period 2007-2013 amounts to over 24 million Euro². Other donors assisting the sector are Germany, Austria, Italy and Switzerland.

For the years 2014-2020 European assistance to Albania will focus on seven priority sectors: democracy and governance; rule of law and fundamental rights; environment; transportation; competition and innovation; education, employment and social policies; agriculture and rural development. Strategy for Albania, confirmed that IPA funds will continue to co-finance projects in strategic sectors and the negotiating chapters of membership. For example; participation in EaSI program (Program for Employment and Social Innovation) – will support government initiatives and strategies to modernize the labor market and social security, to increase the proportion of employment and social inclusion, in particular for the younger generation.

¹ European Commission, (2012). *National Programme for Albania under the IPA - Transition Assistance and Institution Building component for the year 2011*. http://ec.europa.eu/enlargement/pdf/albania/ipa/2011/1_en_annexe_part1_v3.pdf.

²Instrument for Pre-Accession Assistance (IPA II) (Indicative Strategy Paper for Albania 2014-2020). http://ec.europa.eu/enlargement/pdf/key_documents/2014/20140919-csp-albania.pdf, p. 30.

The effective implementation of European programs is provided through service contracts, TAIEX or may be implemented in combination with other donors' funding¹. The aim is to support the management capacities of Albanian institutions in order to benefit as much as possible from European initiatives.

4. Conclusions

Albania's aspiration to be part of the European family is generally based on the approximation approach to European standards; one of the most important aspects is the education. To be developed economically, to be competitive and to attract foreign investment, Albania needs a population equipped with the knowledge and skills required by the labor market. The Reformation of the vocational education system has a huge impact on economic growth and social development of the country. However, from the above, the VET system in Albania continues to be problematic.

It should be noted that VET schools do not offer an attractive environment to the students because they do not possess the necessary resources both material and human. In the vocational schools are mainly enrolled students who have not been enrolled in other high schools, as a result the quality of this sector is weak. The lack of qualified teacher and administrators has negatively affected the quality of VET. Financial dependency, has become an obstacle for proper implementation of professional practices. The relationship between vocational schools and the business is weak, etc.

Researches done in this area show that the VET system needs changes to increase its quality. This requires close cooperation between the various levels of the education system and society. Objectives are clear: we need to invest in human resources, improving vocational policies, investing in construction and rehabilitation of schools, etc. In this context, cooperation with the European Union is an important factor for the development of rapid and sustainable VET.

As we said above, despite the progress made, the challenges in this sector are numerous. In order to improve access and quality of education and training for young people is necessary that the objectives set in VET system must be linked with economic and regional development goals.

In this work we have tried to show what Albania has benefited from European investments in this sector. We have made a brief description of the main European projects, but obviously this paper is not exhaustive. Other works are needed to be carried out in order to assess the results achieved and recognize other issues that require solutions.

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¹ Instrument for Pre-Accession Assistance (IPA II), (Indicative Strategy Paper for Albania 2014-2020). http://ec.europa.eu/enlargement/pdf/key_documents/2014/20140919-csp-albania.pdf, p. 31.

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