



A SYNOPTIC VIEW OF ADULT LEARNING IN ALBANIA

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Abstract

Albania aims to further integrate into the European and global markets and diversify its economy, the knowledge, skills and attitude of its labour force. This will be a critical factor in encouraging investment and creating new employment opportunities. When the economy eventually moves into a more robust job-creation mode, the competitive advantage of firms will increasingly rely on innovative capacity, a key component of which is a workforce that has been educated and trained to work in a modern knowledge society. Education and training, however, have not kept up with the changing demands of the fast growing post-transition economy in Albania. Specifically, knowledge and skills imparted in most of the vocational training system are not properly developed and in most of the cases the schools and training institutions are outdated and inflexible. This research analyses the state of play of the Adult learning in Albania. During the research there were analysed a large number of relevant strategies and analyses and collected a number of data. In the conclusions of this study, it is important to know that is really important to develop a national strategy for adult learning in Albania, in order to build active platforms for policy dialogue on the priorities of adult learning. Also, equipping adults with competencies, knowledge, workplace skills and attitudes that could meet the demands of the fast changing competitive labour market remains a big challenge in Albania. Specific occupational skills should be provided at the post-secondary level or through training, preferably in the workplace.

Keywords: Adult learning, postsecondary, labour market, qualifications framework



INTRODUCTION

Institutional and legal framework in Adult Learning (AL)

The Ministry of Finance and Economy develops policy and legislation in the areas of employment, Vocational education and Training (VET), and the labour environment. The Ministry is formally responsible for the regional Vocational Training Centres (VTC) linked with the establishment, reorganization and closure of VTCs and licensing of private VET providers and monitoring their activity, for organizing ongoing training for VT instructors. The department responsible for developing employment policies (including vocational training), drafting the related legislative and regulatory framework, licensing private employment agencies and non public VT providers, and organizing National VET Council meetings is the Department of Employment and Skills Policies

The Ministry of Education and Sports (MoES) is the main governmental body responsible for preparing and implementing of educational policies and management of the education system, including overall resource management of the public education system and supervision of the non public education sector. The education system in Albania consists of: (i) pre-school education; (ii) basic education, (iii) secondary education; and (iv) higher education.

The National VET and Qualifications Agency is a subordinate institution of MoFE. Its mission includes the establishment of a unified VET system at nationally level and internationally recognized. The main functions of the Agency are as follows: developing the national list of occupations and occupational descriptions; developing the national vocational qualification framework and Frame Curricula; accreditation of VET providers; establishment of standards for initial and ongoing training for teachers and trainers; and establishment of student's evaluation and certification criteria. The role of National VET Agency is highly important for enabling the transparency and recognition of adult learning in Albania and in the same time achieving VET system quality assurance.

The National Employment Service (NES) is an autonomous body under MoFE established by Law no. 7995, and its function was regulated by the NES Statute. The highest decision-making authority of the National Employment Service is the Tripartite Administrative Council with the participation of three employer's representatives, three employees' representatives and seven representatives of the state. The services offered by the NES includes activities like, job matching, career guidance and qualification for the jobseekers; incentives for employers who create new jobs and employ persons with disabilities; and preparation of labour market surveys.

The VET Law¹ determines the operational principles of the system, distributive rules for access to education and training and the role of various subjects in the educational and training process with respect to the use of training benefits. The VET law regulates the allocation of qualification types to AQF levels. Progress routes are also regulated in this law as follows:

- (I) AQF level 2; programs for semi-qualified workers, 2 years duration, give access to employment or further VET at AQF level 3;
- (II) AQF level 3; programs for qualified workers, 1 year duration (after the second AQF level has been achieved), give access to employment or further VET at AQF level 4;
- (III) AQF level 4; programs for technical-managerial, 1 year, or 2 years durations after the second AQF level or 4 years in block after the first AQF level, give access to employment or access to university education;
- (IV) AQF level 5, postsecondary programs, up to two years give access to employment or access to university education.

Additionally, the responsibilities for different aspects of AL are split between other line ministries and incorporated into wider areas of responsibility, so the visibility of AL within ministries can be quite low.

Individuals, too, need to take responsibility for developing their skills both for career progression and to remain employable in more turbulent labour market. Continuous investment in skills throughout life is much more important today and requires an injection of substantial new financial resources from enterprises, government and individuals.

METHODOLOGY

This research analyses the state of play of the Adult learning in Albania. During the research there were analysed a large number of relevant strategies and analyses and collected a number of data. There is a wealth of such analyses by now – written with different purposes in mind, but they were nevertheless found useful for this study.

RESULTS

The experience of many countries (for example, Australia, Denmark and South Africa) shows that right approaches to adult learning must be based on sound institutions, without which learning and training investments run the risk of being ineffective and lacking impact. Ultimately, the task of these institutions is to develop a common culture of learning between all the parties concerned- government, social partners, enterprises, individuals and civil society.

¹ Law No. 15/2017

The **social dialogue** in adult learning is related to the active role of the social partners in framing and implementing the respective policies. The networks of cooperation between the all stakeholders are not in such a desired level. MoFE attempts to establish a framework for effective social dialogue and partnerships in adult learning and employment, which includes various ministries, sector and professional bodies, training institutions and providers, non-governmental organizations, local government etc. The employers' and employees' organizations have their representatives in all advisory and decision-making bodies at national and local level such as the National Council for VET, National Council for Labour, boards of regional VET centres and boards of VT Centres. Despite this widespread representation of social partners, decisions taken at national level are influenced primarily by government. The role played by trade unions is quite weak. Improvement of social partnership in VET still remains one of the priorities of VET reform in Albania. However, there is need to further develop a continuing communications with social partners and other stakeholders, in order that social dialogue be developed in all levels-national, regional, local, and in all fields of VET organization and implementation (VET and employment policy-making, VET planning, organizing, developing, implementing and monitoring). This should result in a coordinated education and training policy at national level, and long-term strategies, which are formulated in consultation with the social partners and are integrated with economic and employment policies.

Post-secondary education for all adults, including those with special needs, provides opportunities for increased personal growth, employment and social activities. Post secondary education opens the door to people with disabilities to more fully participate in the labour market. Considerable research has shown that people with disabilities accessing post secondary education are employed at a much higher rate than those with just a secondary school diploma. As a result, individuals with special needs who do not have access to post-secondary education lose the associated benefits of increased employment and personal growth opportunities.

In Albania, post-secondary VET (AQF 5 level) and adult learning, which used to be highly developed before 90-ies, currently remain very attractive and sound issue in national agenda. For the first time the establishment of a post-secondary cycle in formal education system was introduced in the National Strategy on education (2004), and then it was further elaborated in the new educational structure (2007), representing the fifth level in AQF, and currently one of the priority measures in the Strategy for Employment and Skills 2014-2020. Alignment of postsecondary entry requirements and adult education content is challenging because there is no one standard for postsecondary education and training readiness. Therefore, there must be better alignment between secondary school graduation requirements

and postsecondary entrance requirements. Such alignment will increase understanding of what is needed to transition from secondary school to postsecondary education and increase the likelihood of student success once admitted. Alignment is also necessary between postsecondary education and employer expectations.

The focus on post-secondary education begins with ensuring that our nation's secondary education system adequately prepares students with the skills necessary to succeed. Beyond expanding access to post-secondary education is the need to ensure that students are benefiting from such experience regardless of the type of education they pursue. The options for post-secondary education are numerous including industry recognized certifications, apprenticeship programs, or two-year degrees. Equally diverse and innovative are the types of institutions which provide post-secondary education. Regardless of their type, all institutions must be held accountable for their performance and provide transparency to allow students to make educated choices on what institution and program best fits their needs

"Two year postsecondary" qualifications are allocated at AQF level 5, but a strict distinction is made between VET and HE qualifications at level 5. The inventory includes 19 "Two year postsecondary" qualifications at level 5. Currently, Higher Education institutions provide 74% of qualifications, while 26% are part of VET, mainly supported by different projects. One post-secondary VET qualification has been introduced as a joint cooperation model between a VET school and a university college in the field of Information technology.

Figure 1 below shows the division between qualification types for VET and for HE qualifications.

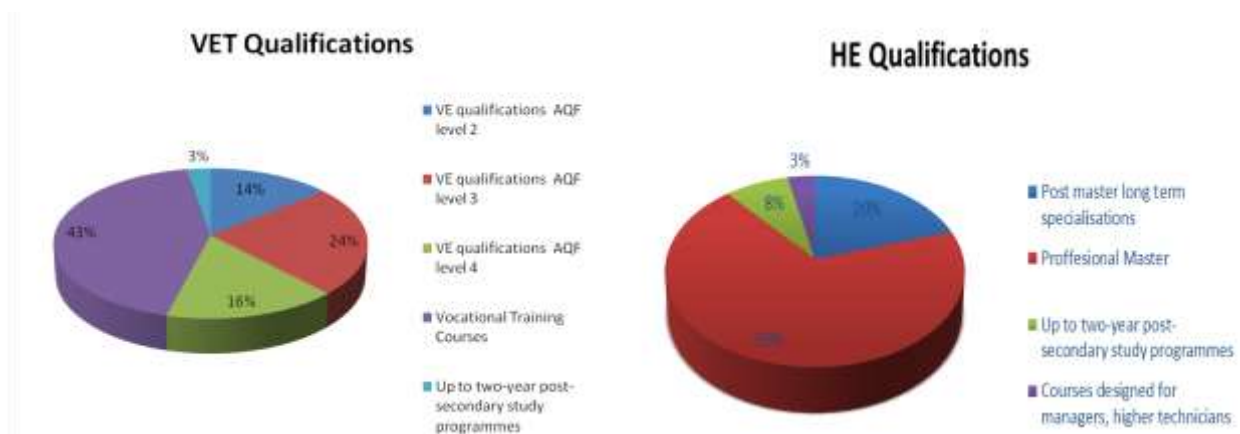


Figure 1. The typology of qualifications in both VET and HE sectors
(Source Inventory of qualifications, 2017)

² Post-secondary qualifications are mentioned in both the VET law and the new HE law, as well as in the AQF law.

However, there are 35 VE schools and 10 VT centres operating in Albania. Number of adults trained during 2017 is 17297 persons.

In 2017, there were more than 400 private training providers (included NGOs, businesses, etc) licensed. The major part of private training providers is placed in the main cities of Albania. So, around 54% of training providers are placed in main cities, such as Tirana, Durrës, Iushnjë and Vlorë.

Universities, line ministries also facilitate training provision for adults, but no evidence exists so far. Career guidance³, in particular for adults, has so far been a forgotten element in education and labour market reform. Due to the central planning regime common during the communist era, there is no tradition of career guidance to build on, no specialized staff who have an interest in promoting the service, and apparently no great demand for it by potential clients. University departments have not taken any initiative to promote local research or expertise in the field, and while the notion of guidance is occasionally referred to in strategic documents, it is often confused with counselling (and hence with support given to clients having to deal with emotional or relational difficulties), and even with vocational training. Career guidance is often considered to be a field being promoted by external operators and donors, rather than responding to—and resonating with—a strongly felt internal need. No strong or systematic demand for the service seems to be made by any sector of civil society, whether these are parents, teachers' unions, or other non-governmental organizations.

Much of the educational/career guidance takes place informally, and the wide-spread perception is that Albanians find work thanks to their personal and family networks, rather than through some kind of 'rational choice' that is underpinned by personal inclination and ability. There are very few private employment agencies, and where they exist, they act mainly as job brokers rather than career guidance providers. Career guidance is predicated on the idea of a meritocratic society, and several interviewees noted that this is an assumption that cannot be taken for granted in Albania. It is a belief in meritocracy that drives people to aim beyond circumstances of birth and to consider 'particularly in rural areas—end up working in family-owned concerns. This is both a tradition and an economic necessity, and certainly reduces the relevance or appeal of career guidance. The family is also very powerful in determining what their children do in life. Decisions, I was told, are often made by parents, with little input on the part of the children. Other social forces that could potentially have an impact on the development of career guidance—namely the professional and middle classes—focus their energies on getting their sons and daughters through the system, with a view to sending them to

³ Report on Career Guidance Field Visit, Ronald G. Sultana

finish off their studies and find employment overseas. This not only constitutes a serious brain drain, but also diverts the attention of this class from putting pressure on the education and labour market systems to provide the kinds of services that they would have otherwise wanted and made use of.

The system of labour market information is underdeveloped, so that data about vacancies and trends, in the form of an 'employment barometer', is largely missing. Less than 47% of job vacancies are notified to the employment services, despite the fact that this is a legal requirement. There is insufficient information on the demand for learning and on skills needs of enterprises and individuals. There is some, limited information on current needs and trends but there is no research into future skill needs of the economy and society. This makes it virtually impossible to determine rationally what the priorities in AL should be.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

EU and EU accession countries are increasingly moving towards post-secondary VET while enhancing upper secondary general education to provide students with broad skills and competences which can be built on and adapted in labour market and/or through post-secondary education. A critical element in broad skill development for less academically inclined secondary students will be information and communications technologies – not only as a subject or study but also as a medium for learning. The high private return of every incremental year of schooling (which is an international trend) argues for greater cost recovery in post-secondary education. This would call for the development of loan and credit instruments to promote access to financing for students and families.

Accelerating the implementation of AQF in order to better develop the postsecondary VET level as an important part of lifelong learning, and also taking into account the good practices of developed countries in this purpose.

Developing a national strategy for adult learning in Albania, in order to build active platforms for policy dialogue on the priorities of adult learning is crucial. Linked with this, should be done a quantitative and qualitative study in order to assess more deeply the AL supply, demand and social dialogue at all levels in order to propose the needed measures to reform the whole adult learning. It will be useful to conduct: (i) employer surveys and (ii) graduate tracer studies on a regular basis so that the employability of VET schools/centre, secondary school and university graduates could be assessed.

Encouraging the growth of private training institutions and the provision of practical training in enterprises will be important. Given that the majority of firms in Albania are small- to medium size, this may not be achieved in the short-term. However, as economy develops and

labour market becomes more dynamic and formal, enhancing the roles of the private sector in provision of training is a critical strategy in increasing access and quality of VET and making it fiscally sustainable

Career guidance and counselling are becoming an essential element of the learning process. Openness to lifelong learning, increased personal responsibility, flexibility and adaptability, although important at every stage of a career, are now essential attributes for graduates and entry-level workers. New labour market entrants, seasoned workers, the unemployed, etc., need assistance in making informed decisions about ways to gain and maintain skills and employment.

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