

Alqi Mustafai

Institute of Curricula and Standards, Tirana, ALBANIA

VET TEACHER TRAINING SYSTEM IN ALBANIA

I. BACKGROUND

Albania is a small country with a population of 3.07 million and a surface area of 28800 km², situated in the central Western part of the Balkan Peninsula. After five centuries of being part of the Turkish Empire, Albania became independent in the aftermath of the Balkan Wars (1912). During the Second World War, Albania participated on the side of the Anti-fascist Allies and after the war a communist regime was set up in Albania.

Since the 1991 opening to the outside world, Albania is striving to take its place in the community of nations as a full member. Fundamental social and systemic reforms have been initiated and quick progress was achieved in liberalisation and private sector development. An entirely new legal and institutional framework is rapidly being elaborated. Albania became an active member of Council of Europe and OSCE and these improvements were the basis for opening the negotiations for an EU/Albania Stabilisation and Association Agreement.

Population and economic activities are unevenly distributed in the territory of the country, with large waves of internal migration to urban areas (55% of population still living in rural areas), combined with a massive outward migration (about 1 million emigrants are estimated since 1990). In the last years, the economy has been rapidly growing (5,5% growth of GDP per capita in 2005, reaching about 2100\$). Macroeconomic indicators remains stable (inflation 3-4%), however not sufficient jobs have been created and unemployment remains high at 15%. Exports are increased but still balancing only 25% of imports. The majority of employment remains within the agriculture and fishery sector (72% of the total) and a negligible manufacturing sector (5%). Almost 80 % of all private enterprises are run by self-employed people with only 1-2

employees and just 20% of businesses have more than 49 employees. A large portion of these micro-enterprises operates in the informal sector.

The international community has made significant interventions in strengthening public administration, fighting organized crime and terrorism, the adoption of key sector policies.

Recently, a coalition lead by Democratic Party won general elections (July 2005), promising rapid economic development and a special attention to education sector (VET in particular).

II. THE CURRENT SITUATION IN VET TT

1. VET IN THE GENERAL EDUCATION SYSTEM

VET in Albania is composed of two main sub-sectors: Vocational Education (VE) under the responsibility of the Ministry of Education Science (MES) and Vocational Training (VT) under the responsibility of Ministry of Labour, Social Affairs and Equal Opportunities (ML). The public sector of VET is represented by 40 vocational schools and 9 vocational training centres.

Vocational Education is considered as part of secondary education, starting after 8 years of obligatory education¹. The current VET system in Albania is quantitatively small and qualitatively poor, generally characterised by low level of infrastructure, lack of human and financial resources and outdated curricula. This sector was not able to appropriately respond to the drastic socio-economic changes of the last 15 years, evidently loosing reputation. Internal initiatives and donor support² have resulted in positive changes that are mainly affecting the delivering part of the system (didactic infrastructure, curricula and teacher training).

The new VET Law (2002), establishment of a National VET Council (2003), development of the Strategy for Employment and VT (2003) and implementation of the EU CARDS 2002 Program (2004-06) are substantial events that have given new impulses to the VET reform processes. The idea for establishing a VET Agency is fully elaborated and has recently, been seriously considered.

¹ According to the new education reform strategy, obligatory education will be with 9 years duration.

² EU, German, Swiss and Austrian donors are the most active ones.

VE schools offer long-term courses in two levels: skilled workers (3 years duration) and technical-managerial level (3+2 years or 5 years, resulting in maturity diploma). During the school year 2005-06 the VE sector is being attended by about 15.300 full-time students (13% of secondary education) in about 35 purely vocational profiles and more than 8.000 students (7% of secondary education) in so-called “social-cultural” schools (4 years duration), such as foreign languages, arts, sports, pedagogy. Considering both types of initial vocational qualifications, only about 20% of secondary level full time students are enrolled in VE sub-sector. The private sector of VE is very small, represented by 4 vocational schools enrolling about 11% of VE students.

The public Adult Training Centres offer short-term courses (3-9 months duration) in about 20 profiles, mostly in foreign languages, computing and secretarial work and less in other types of services. More than 8.000 trainees attended such courses during 2004 and a comparable number of trainees (6.300) attended similar courses offered by non-public training providers accredited by the ML.

Apart from recent positive developments, the reputation of the Albanian VET system remains low and demands a profound systemic reform supported by enlargement and modernization of the delivering part of it. For the situation of Albania (a small country with limited resources) *efficiency* is very important. Harmonisation of VET policies, the creation of a unique VET system as part of the lifelong learning perspective, VET responsiveness to the needs and rational use of resources are considered as the main focus of current and future reform initiatives.

2. TEACHERS WORK

In the Albanian VET sector there are several *categories of teachers* involved in different types of VET providers, as in the following:

In vocational education schools (under the MES), there are three categories of teachers (according to three curriculum areas):

- *Teachers of academic subjects* (mathematics, social sciences and natural sciences). Their background is similar to the teachers of the lower secondary schools and gymnasiums.
- *Teachers of theoretical vocational subjects* (such as electro-techniques, mechanics, traffic, economy, etc). Normally, they have a technical university degree.

- *Teachers of practical subjects* (practical instructors). They are graduated in secondary technical schools and normally have some practical work experience in the respective occupation.

There are cases where the same teacher delivers both theoretical vocational subjects and practical subjects also (particularly in schools implementing the modular curricula).

In vocational training centres (under the ML), there are similar categories of vocational teachers (theory teachers and practice instructors) and, normally, academic subjects teachers are missing due to the fact that short vocational courses lack this type of subjects. Massive implementation of modular courses in the public training centres has increased the number of teachers delivering both vocational theory and practice.

Teachers of *non-public VET providers* have the same characteristics as their colleagues of the public sector.

According to the statistics of 2005, the number of full-time teachers in the public vocational education is about **990** (430 teachers for general subjects) and in the public vocational training centres there are about **80** full-time, complemented by a considerable number of part-time teachers also. The non-public part of vocational education represents only 11% of this sector but the non-public part of vocational training is comparable with the public one. So, in general, the total community of VET teachers in Albania (excluding academic teachers and the teachers of social-artistic schools) is estimated less than **800** teachers (theoretical and practical).

Working conditions of VET teachers are different, according to the specific particularities of each vocational school or training centre. Theoretical teachers deliver 20-24 lessons/week and practical instructors 30-36 sessions/week. In general, the teaching-learning environment is not appropriate. There are old and non-renovated buildings, outdated furniture and lack of didactic equipment and materials. Teachers have difficulties to find textbooks and to access IT for collecting information related to their subjects. They teach in classrooms having relatively high number of students with low entrance level. Administrative and management procedures in the schools are outdated. In-service training is weak and sporadic. There are exceptions in some pilot schools where work conditions have improved with the contribution of donors.

Salaries in the overall pre-university education sector, including VE, even with the continuous increase (about 10% every year), still remain comparatively low (150-200 euro/month). The teacher salary scale is divided in 4 levels, according to the work experience of teachers (5, 10, 20 and more than 20 years of experience) and do not respond to their individual level of qualification. There are not clear *career* routes for VET teachers. A teacher can apply for the positions of school/centre principal and vice-principal, according to the work experience and qualifications attained.

Such work conditions, salary indicators and relatively low social esteem does not make the VET teaching profession very attractive, resulting in a considerable “brain drain” towards more profitable sectors, during the last 15 years.

3. INITIAL TEACHER TRAINING

There is no formal initial teacher training (pre-service) system for the VET sector in Albania. For vocational subject teachers the typical requirement is a university degree in the relevant field, without any complementary pedagogical education. The same principle is applied for practical instructors. Universities provide pre-service pedagogy-psychology programmes only for teachers of general subjects in VE. There is no legal frame and no institutions responsible for initial VET teacher training. Proposals for introducing a formal pre-service training of VET teachers in Albania are not yet presented as an official reform policy.

4. IN-SERVICE TEACHER TRAINING

The current in-service public VET teacher training in Albania is based on the “Law on pre-university education in Albania” (1995), “The VET Law in Albania” (2002) and a package of respective by-laws and other normative acts. There is not a special sub-system for in-service VET teacher training and their training is part of the overall in-service teacher training system. The responsibility for in-service VET teacher training is distributed among several actors and institutions.

- National Centre for Training and Qualification of Teachers³ is responsible in the national scale for developing certification schemes and programming of in-service teacher training for all levels and

³ This Centre became fully operative during 2005.

categories of pre-university education. Until now, no special focus is given to the VET sector.

- Regional Educational Directories and Local Educational Offices⁴ are responsible for in-service training of teachers at the regional and local level. Qualification Sections in such bodies organise teacher-training sessions on general didactic aspects. VE teachers participate in such trainings together with general education ones. Only in some regions having a considerable number of vocational schools, VE teachers are separately trained for specific didactical aspects.
- For the teachers/trainers of VT sub-sector, the ML and the NES (its Department for Vocational Training) have not yet developed any formal mechanism for in-service teacher training, at least at the national level.
- Vocational schools and vocational training centres are formally responsible for training of the teaching personnel at the school/centre level. But, in reality, there are no formalised mechanisms at this level for analysing training needs of VET teachers and supporting them to upgrade professionally.
- There is also a large number of other actors and bodies contributing to the in-service VET teacher training, such as the VET Department at the Institute of Curricula and Standards, several donor projects and programmes operating in VET, universities, NGOs, etc. They provide ad-hoc training sessions or courses according to particular needs of teachers or specific objectives linked with their activity. Non-public VET providers have to care themselves for training of their teaching staff.
- Social partners (enterprises) do not really contribute in training of VET teachers. Some teachers that accompany students during their practical stages in enterprises are informally benefiting by having direct contacts with the world of labour.

In general, in-service VET teacher training is characterised by sporadic and isolated interventions of several actors and bodies, not well programmed and not co-ordinated. Such activities are more supply driven than needs oriented. In most cases, participants receive attendance certificates that do not have any formal recognition. The major part of training is focused on general pedagogy, didactics in VET, curriculum and teaching materials development,

⁴ There are 13 Regional Educational Directories and 24 Local Educational Offices.

the use of educational media, and very limited training is offered on the respective occupation aspects.

In all cases, VET teacher training is free of charge and part of resources for such activities are provided by the state budget, although there is not a particular budget line for in-service training in the overall education budget and it is difficult to find reliable figures. It is evident that most of the in-service training for VET teachers is financed by different donor projects operating in this sector.

In regards to in-service training of VET school managers (principals and vice-principals), the situation is very similar to that of the teachers. Some sporadic management training is offered by several donors (CARDS program recently) and a more structured one-month course is delivered by the ex-Institute of Pedagogical Studies, but very few VET managers attended this course.

III. CHALLENGES, DEVELOPMENTS AND TRENDS

During the last years, several strategic documents on VET teacher training have been developed, but still there is not any formally agreed strategy. The VET community in Albania is aware of the problematic situation in this area, which can be summarised as: *a total lack of pre-service teacher training system, weak mechanisms for training needs analysis and programming, not clear distribution of responsibilities for in-service training, a donor supply driven training offer, no accreditation of achievements, a limited number of teacher trainers, limited public resources, etc.*

The above mentioned problems and obstacles can be considered as the main *challenges* to be faced in the near future. Although the future “model” of the VET teacher training system in Albania is not clearly and definitively conceptualised, there is a broad consensus on the following principles and trends:

A *pre-service* VET teacher training system must be established and gradually, the pedagogical background must become an obligation for vocational teachers. Tailored courses for different categories of such teachers could be delivered in Faculties for Pedagogy, offering respective formally recognised certificates.

In-service VET teacher training should be strengthened through:

- establishing (or defining) a public body responsible for specialised parts of in-service VET teacher training;
- developing qualification levels (maybe 3 levels) and respective standards, represented by certificates for different categories of VET teachers;
- developing of national programs (modular and credit based) and mechanisms for assessment and certification, according to respective levels and categories;
- improving the delivering mechanism (creation of a national team of teacher trainers, improving the financial regulations, etc.);
- establishing the school/centre level mechanism for in-service VET teacher training (appointing *mentors* in each school/centre having the appropriate status and competence to investigate training needs and support teacher professional upgrade);
- establishing of institutional links between schools/centres and local business/industry to allow periods of “on the job training” of VET teachers, in their respective occupation.

The teacher salary scale should be based on both important factors: work experience and accredited level of their individual qualification. The institutional, legal and financial frame of the VET sector should be adapted to come in line with and support the changes in VET teacher training.

Considering the difficulties for establishing a pre-service VET teacher training system and the fact that the number of teachers in this sector is relatively low (less than 1000), another (short-term) option is *to design the first level of in-service VET teacher training with the intention to apply it as a pre-service qualification mechanism.* (obligatory entrance level).

IV. DONOR REFORM INITIATIVES AND OWN RESOURCES

During the last 10-15 years several initiatives have been carried out in the field of VET teacher training. Some *national bodies*, such as REDs, LEOs and the VET Department at ICS have organised training events according to the occasional requirements and availability. In many cases, they have co-operated with other actors. *Donor projects* (international, governmental and NGOs) have considerably contributed to fill the gap created by the weakness of the formal system for VET teacher training in Albania. To a certain extent, all pilot projects have operated at the school/centre level, providing training

for VET teachers (in the country and abroad) according to the specific objectives of each project. To be mentioned here, are:

- The VET PHARE programmes⁵ have trained teachers of some pilot vocational schools/centres (agriculture and construction) in regards to VET didactics, modular curricula development and implementation, professional upgrade.
- The German GTZ (economic and electrical schools) has trained teachers mainly for didactic aspects of practical activities, trying to create a group of “multipliers” for dissemination of experience to other similar schools.
- Kulturkontakt, Austria (hotel-tourism and economy) is training teachers on didactic aspects of practical activities, development of teaching materials, project work and recently, operating to disseminate this experience in other schools.
- The project for Adult Education (PARSH), Germany, is operating in the field of adult training, supporting teachers/instructors of public VT centres with training on VET didactic basis.
- Swisscontact, Switzerland, has initially contributed with didactic, curricula development and professional training of teachers/instructors of one pilot industrial school, establishing a “training resource centre” in this school. Another contribution was the training of 5 “job analysis facilitators”. Recently, through the ISDO Project (operating in the area of non-formal VT) several initiatives are carried out to design and implement a “pilot system for VET teacher training”, through:
 - preparing of a national program (3 levels, modular and credit based) for in-service VET teacher training on didactic basis;
 - establishing and training of a “national team” of VET teacher trainers (13 trainers);
 - carrying out of training courses on a didactic basis for VET teachers/trainers of formal and non-formal VET system.
- EU-CARDS 2002 Program, operating in 4 vocational schools and 4 training centres, is training groups of teachers/trainers on didactics, occupational standards and curricula development, piloting a “coaching” mechanism at the school level.

As mentioned above, the “piloting philosophy” has characterised all internal and donor contribution in regards to VET teacher training, *not suc-*

⁵ AVATAR, ALBAVET and VET PHARE 95.

ceeding in the establishment of a strong and sustainable system. The next step should be to transcend this piloting phase, to analyse what is done, and based on the positive experience to design and institutionalise a *sustainable system for VET teacher training* in Albania. The pre-requisites for this intervention exist: there is an awareness of all stakeholders for this change (the HRD Commission under the VET Council have clearly supported this solution); there is a positive attitude of the new government towards VET Reform; there is an experienced and active national team of VET teacher trainers; a national modular program for in-service VET teacher training is under preparation; there is a considerable technical and financial support from donors and there is a guaranty to continue in the future.

The establishment of such a system for VET teacher training in Albania will create better conditions for enabling all contributions in this field (including donor projects) to be better channelled according to the training needs of the VET teachers' community in Albania in response to the final goal: a broader and high quality VET provision.

REFERENCES

- 1 *Albanian National VET Observatory* (2002), Report on need analysis of VET teachers/instructors in Albania.
- 2 *Albanian National VET Observatory* (2004), VET Report 2004.
- 3 *DIPF: International Handbook of Vocational Education* (2002), Report on Albania.
- 4 *Ministry of Education and Science* (2005), Annual Statistical Education Report 2003- 2004.
- 5 *The World Bank* (2005), Albania at a glance.

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

CARDS	Community Assistance for Reconstruction, Development and Stabilisation
DORKAS	German Foundation
EU	European Union
GTZ	German Association for Technical Cooperation
HRD	Human Resource Development
ICS	Institute of Curricula and Standards

ISDO	Improve Skill Development Opportunities – Swiss project
IT	Information Technology
Kulturkontakt	Austrian Governmental Organisation
LEO	Local Education Offices
MES	Ministry of Education and Science
ML	Ministry of Labour, Social Affairs and Equal Opportunities
NES	National Employment Service
NGO	Non governmental organisation
PARSH	Project for Adult Education in Albania – German project
RED	Regional Education Directorates
Swisscontact	Swiss Organisation
VE	Vocational Education
VET	Vocational Education and training