



# Mapping of VET educational policies and practices for social inclusion and social cohesion in the Western Balkans, Turkey and Israel

## Country report: Albania

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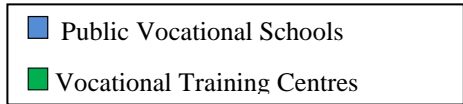
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## ALBANIA

### Geographic distribution of public VET in Albania (2011)



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## **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

The primary objective of this study is providing evidence on Vocational Education and Training (VET) policies and practices for social inclusion and social cohesion. This research has been accomplished using a Participatory Active Research (PAR) methodology with the involvement of all VET stakeholders. The creation of Advisory Boards at national and regional levels at the beginning of research activities enabled a better orientation on the main VET strategic documents, stakeholders and institutions, as well as receiving feedback on methodological instruments such as In-Depth-Interviews (IDI), focus groups (FG), teachers and students' questionnaires. The main research task and the respective findings are as follows.

The role of VET policies in addressing social inclusion and social cohesion in Albania is defined in the draft National VET Strategy 2013-2020, the first common strategy of the Ministry of Education and Sciences (MoES) and of the Ministry of Labour, Social Affairs and Equal Opportunities (MOLSAEO). Based on that, the VET schools/centres should design their strategies for approaching issues of social inclusion for special needs students, following the model of Economic School in Tirana, to be prepared in cases when such categories will be enrolled to the VET system. The reform of the VET system in the last ten years has improved its orientation to the labour market, but there has been little integration of the policies of the MoES with those of the MOLSAEO, at national and regional level, to engage the VET system in socially inclusive activities. Although the liaison person for social inclusion is operating in each Ministry in implementation of the Strategy on Social Inclusion, there is little integration of their activities in supporting vulnerable groups. The National Council of VET remains a formal tripartite consultative body, but the new Governing Boards of the VET schools/centres established in November 2012, with a broader representation from all community stakeholders, is a bottom-up approach for increasing the VET impact on social inclusion and social cohesion. Through international projects, the transformation of Vocational Education (VE) schools into multifunctional and flexible centres is being piloted, so as to increase access to lifelong learning and to facilitate the integration of vulnerable groups in the labour market. While vocational schools are distant to vulnerable groups, vocational training centres (VTC) have a focus on groups such as disabled, orphans, Roma, ex-prisoners, trafficked women, and returned migrants who are more interested in short-term courses. Even they provide data specified for training of such vulnerable groups. The experience of VTC in collaborating with various community-based organizations to provide training for vulnerable groups can also apply to VE schools, e.g. with Association for the Blind people, which is also active in books publications in braille writing. Until now the VE schools have been more focused on establishing relations with businesses to implement professional practice of their students.

In terms of equal access for all in VET system, eligibility criteria have been limited to a diploma of the compulsory 9-years education; the part-time system without number and age limits to entry has been introduced; scholarships for disadvantaged groups are offered, e.g. for those who choose VET schools more than 5 km away from their residence, for students from poor families, orphans, Roma and Egyptians, some categories of disabled such as blind people, and for those who are enrolled in specific profiles such as IT, forestry, veterinary and construction. Remodelling the structure and curricula of the

VET system is a priority, introducing entrepreneurship education and career orientation from low secondary level, at grades 7-9, to increase interest in following VET in high secondary level. The doubling of new entrants in some VET schools reflects the awareness of the community about the advantages of VET in employment. MoES and schools have carried out promotional campaigns for pupils of compulsory 9-year education, school open days with students, teacher and business representations, distribution of flyers and school brochures, as well as training firm fairs. The change during the academic year 2009-2010 of the compulsory education structure from 8 to 9-years reduced the number of students at high secondary level (10<sup>th</sup> - 12<sup>th</sup> grade), which was balanced by increased enrolment due to removing barriers on limited number of students and enrolment exams, typical VE school in Tirana, as well as division in profiles based on students' choice and not in their results. New female profiles should be introduced, as they show an interest in VET and have better results and happiness for VET, compared with males. The girls see VET as a way to increase their lower chances in the labour market. Also, the professional state graduation exams offered the same chances for university studies, a career path more preferred by girls. No free of charge training is offered in VTC for poor trainees and people with disabilities, except for blind ones. While some categories of disabled people such as the blind double their disability benefits if they attend the VET system, others, such as mute and deaf, have no benefits at all. So, we recommend free of charge courses to all trainees of short-term vocational training.

To increase the students' motivation for successfully choosing the VET school, the VET design and implementation should take in consideration that pupils entering the VET system are often those completing 9-year compulsory education with very weak school results. Those students have a low social profile with unemployed mothers, families with low level of income and education. To avoid dropout from VE schools, although it was not a problem at the three case study schools, the experience of Durres in offering extra teaching in subjects such as maths was a good example. The introduction of special catch-up classes for students in the first year is recommended for VET schools dominated by students with weak results and a low social background. Flexible programs are recommended for those who want to switch from general to vocational school, or for returned migrants.

The VET school programs are directed to normal students and have no special programs/facilities to those with disabilities, difficulties in learning, or returned emigrants. Improvement of equipment, school infrastructure, and text books should go in parallel with the introduction of a flexible VET curricula adjusted to vulnerable groups such as returned emigrants, to female orientation such as esthetician, and to new services like tourism in Durres, or insurance in Tirana. The integration of theory with practice is the main challenge for the VET system in order to attract the students with weak results. The recommendation is for cooperation of VE Schools with VTC in order to maximize the use of limited resources and technologies on integration of theory with professional practices, as well as collaboration with businesses. Businesses should be involved in curricula designed and in their implementation, as it was the case in Durres and Elbasan, should invest in the creation of professional associations and quality professional standards. The introduction of the occupational outcomes-based short-term training programs for those threatened by social exclusion as Roma and people with disabilities is applied in the VTC in Elbasan. However, teachers, even if they have training goals provided by National Institute for Education Development on concepts and methodologies of social inclusion, they need to be prepared in this regard. Both schools have the highest ratio teacher-students (20 students/teacher), which indicates that it is required the increasing of the quantity and the quality of teaching staff, to be able to approach

the vulnerable students' needs. The decentralization process is continuing at school level (with an eventual wider decision - making range) and local level (municipalities are becoming official owners of school buildings previously owned by MoES and are becoming responsible for school maintenance). Still, the degree of autonomy of the school/centres in budgeting is low as they have no incentives for generating incomes (since the legal framework is not complete) and the school maintenance by local authorities is missing at all.

The transition from school to work requires more collaboration of the schools with the local community and more occupational career guidance, based on strong labour market orientation, such as the example of the PASO project of KulturKontakt at economic schools. Employability of VET graduates is not evaluated, with the exception of some sporadic tracer studies, which we recommend to be conducted on a regular basis. At the same time, national programmes for in-job training need to be introduced, as the businesses can offer new technology and teaching approaches, referring to the Durres and Elbasan experiences. During the academic year 2012-2013, the Government decided to support the employers' social insurance for employment injuries occurring to the students during their professional practice. But private business is worried that students do not have adequate skills to be involved in their activities and VET curricula is not updated to reflect the rapid changes in labour market demand. Another attempt during 2012-2013 to promote close relations between businesses and VET schools was the introduction of the new Governing Boards of VET schools, headed by representatives of business. Businesses are expected to lead the decision-making process in curricula design and all aspects of teaching process and school administration. Schools need to be proactive to provide guidance for students' plans after graduation beyond looking for a paid work (90%), but also for self-employment, by increasing their confidence in their professional abilities.

Although VET schools in the case study areas operate at a national level, 80% of their students are from the region where the school is located. We recommend more regional resources to be directed for promotion those community initiatives that increase VET impact on social inclusion and social cohesion. VET curricula are a priority in some regional initiatives of District Councils, introducing new profiles such as fishery in Durres (IPA project), or of Municipalities to support disadvantaged groups such as Roma to enter VET (Durres, Elbasan, Tirana). The creation of a regional structure responsible for VET is recommended, possibly under NAVET (National Agency for Vocational Education and Training), to assist cooperation of regional stakeholders, mobilize regional resources, and respond to the community needs. VET Regional board in Elbasan was a good example in this regard. We recommend that donor projects should be focused on the regional level to promote closer collaboration of VET providers with community stakeholders, to have an impact on social inclusion and cohesion. The diversity of regional needs should be addressed through a fairer distribution of the VET providers across the territory, as rural students are more likely to enter VET. Sporadic NGO training projects in suburban and rural areas focused on vulnerable groups such as Roma, disabled or young unemployed should be sustainable with the support of regional/local community stakeholders and not only international donors. They should exchange experiences on VET and extend the pilot projects in all regions. At the end, the schools should organize various kinds of extracurricular activities, as they practice only sports (50% of students). This will have an impact on changing the community perception of VET schools/centres to be seen not only as education institutions, but also as an integral part of the community and as responsive to social needs. In this respect, a new role of social workers needs to be introduced in the VET system, complementary to the role of psychologist.

## **PËRMBLEDHJE**

Objekti kryesor i këtij studimi është të evidentojë politikat dhe praktikën e Arsimit dhe Formimit Profesional (AFP) që ndikojnë në përfshirjen dhe kohezionin social. Ky studim është realizuar duke aplikuar metodologjinë e Kërkimit me Pjesëmarrje Aktive (KPA), duke përfshirë të gjithë aktorët e interesuar në AFP. Krijimi i Bordeve Këshillimore në nivel kombëtar dhe lokal që në fillim të aktivitetëve të kërkimit, ka mundësuar një orientim më të mirë në dokumentet strategjike të AFP, aktorët dhe institucionet kryesore, si dhe ka ofruar shkëmbimin e mendimeve lidhur me instrumentet metodologjike të kërkimit si: Intervista të Drejtpërdrejta të Thelluara (IDTH), fokus grupe (FG) dhe pyetësorët e mësuesve dhe nxënësve. Më poshtë renditen objektivat kryesore të kërkimit dhe gjetjet përkatëse:

Roli i AFP në politikat e përfshirjes dhe kohezionit social në Shqipëri përmendet në Draft Strategjinë Kombëtare të AFP 2013-2020, e para strategji e përbashkët e Ministrisë së Arsimit dhe të Shkencës (MASH) dhe e Ministrisë së Punës, Çështjeve Sociale dhe Shanseve të Barabarta (MPÇSSHB). Mbi këtë bazë, edhe shkollat e arsimit profesional/qendrat e trajnimit të hartojnë strategjitë e tyre për t'iu përgjigjur nxënësve me nevoja të veçanta që po i drejtohen arsimit/formimit profesional, duke ndjekur modelin e Shkollës Ekonomike të Tiranës. Reformimi i sistemit të AFP dekadën e fundit, ka përmirësuar orientimin drejt tregut të punës, por jo dhe aq integrimin e politikave të MASH me ato të MPÇSSHB, në nivel kombëtar dhe lokal, në drejtim të ndikimit të AFP në përfshirjen sociale. Pavarësisht se në çdo Ministri është një person koordinues, përgjegjës për zbatimin e strategjisë së Përfshirjes Sociale, aktivitetet e tyre kanë nevojë të integrohen në nivel kombëtar. Këshilli Kombëtar i AFP ka mbetur një organ konsultativ formal, por vendosja e Bordeve të reja Drejtuese të shkollave/qendrave të AFP në Nëntor 2012, me pjesëmarrjen e gjerë të të gjithë aktorëve të komunitetit, përbën një ndërhyrje në bazë për rritjen e ndikimit të AFP në përfshirjen dhe kohezionin social. Me mbështetjen e projekteve ndërkombëtare po pilotohet transformimi i shkollave të Arsimit Profesional (AP) në qendra multifunksionale dhe fleksibël, në mënyrë që të rritet pjesëmarrja në të mësuarin gjatë gjithë jetës dhe të lehtësohet integrimi i grupeve vulnerabël në tregun e punës. Strategjia kombëtare për Përfshirjen Sociale si dhe strategjitë për mbështetjen e grupeve të veçanta vulnerable, e shohin formimin profesional si një nga ndërhyrjet kryesore për mbështetjen e grupeve në nevojë. Ndërsa shkollat profesionale janë më larg tërheqjes së grupeve vulnerabël të popullsisë, si personat me aftësi të kufizuara dhe Romët, qendrat e formimit profesional (QFP) i kanë vendosur në fokus grupe të tilla. Madje ato ofrojnë të dhëna të specifikuar për trajnimet e grupeve të tilla ku përfshihen personat me aftësi të kufizuara, Romët dhe Egjiptianët, jetimët, ish të burgosur, vajza të trafikuar dhe emigrantë të kthyer, të cilët janë më shumë të interesuar në kurse afatshkurtra. Eksperienca e QFP në fushën e bashkëpunimit me organizata të ndryshme të komunitetit për të ofruar trajnime për grupet vulnerabël mund të aplikohet gjithashtu dhe tek shkollat profesionale, përmes mbështetjes së tyre nga grupet e interesit, si p.sh. shoqata e të verbërve që është aktive edhe me botime të librave në shkrimin brishtë. Deri tani, shkollat e AP kanë qenë më shumë të përqendruara në vendosjen e marrëdhënieve me bizneset për të realizuar praktikën profesionale për studentët e tyre.



Në drejtim të rritjes së mundësive për t'u përfshirë të gjithë në AFP, kriteret e aplikimit janë kufizuar vetëm në diplomën e arsimit të detyrueshëm 9-vjeçar, është hapur sistemi i shkollimit me kohë të pjeshme pa kufizime regjistrimi në moshë dhe numër nxënësish, ofrohen bursa për grupet vulnerable, p.sh., për ata nxënës që zgjedhin AFP në një shkollë më larg se 5 km nga vendbanimi, për nxënësit nga familjet e varfëra, jetimët, Romët dhe Egjyptianët, për disa kategori të personave me aftësi të kufizuara si të verbërit, si dhe ata që janë regjistruar në profile të caktuara si IT, pylltari, veterinari dhe ndërtim. Ristrukturimi i kurikulës të APF ka qenë gjithashtu një përparësi, duke përfshirë njohuri mbi sipërmarrjen dhe orientimin në karrierë që në arsimin e detyrueshëm, në klasat e 7ta-9ta, me qëllim rritjen e interesit për shkollat e mesme profesionale. Dyfishimi i numrit të regjistrimeve në disa shkolla profesionale tregon për ndërgjegjësimin e komunitetit për përparësitë që ka AFP në punësim. MASH dhe shkollat profesionale kanë ndërmarrë fushata promovuese për nxënësit e arsimit të detyrueshëm 9-vjeçar, janë organizuar ditët e hapjes së shkollave profesionale ndaj nxënësve, mësuesve dhe përfaqësuesve të biznesit, janë shpërndarë fletëpalosje dhe broshura me informacione mbi shkollat profesionale, si dhe janë organizuar panairë të firmave ushtrimore. Ndryshimi i kohëzgjatjes së arsimit të detyrueshëm nga 8 në 9 vjet në vitin akademik 2009-2010, sollti një ulje të numrit të nxënësve në shkollat e mesme (klasa e 10<sup>te</sup> – 12<sup>te</sup>). Kjo u balancua me rritjen e regjistrimeve si rezultat i heqjes së kuotave dhe konkurseve për regjistrim, tipike kjo për shkollën e mesme ekonomike në Tiranë, si dhe profilizimit në bazë të zgjedhjes së lirë të nxënësve dhe jo sipas rezultateve me të cilat vinin nga arsimit të detyrueshëm. Rekomandohet që programet shkollorë të jenë më fleksibël në mënyrë që t'u ofrohet mundësia për t'u regjistruar nxënësve që duan të vijnë nga gjimnazi apo emigrantëve të kthyer. Ka nevojë të hapen profile të reja më të përshtatshme për vajzat, meqë në krahasim me djemtë, ato kanë rezultate më të larta, janë më të kënaqura me shkollën dhe e konsiderojnë AFP si një mundësi për të rritur shanset e tyre të integritimit në tregun e punës. Gjithashtu, provimet e lëndëve profesionale në maturën shtetërore, u ofrojnë të diplomuarve në arsimin profesional mundësi të njëjta me ato të gjimnazeve për t'u regjistruar në universitet, një drejtim karriere ky më i preferuar nga vajzat. Në QPF nuk ofrohet trajnim falas për nxënësit e varfër dhe ata me aftësi të kufizuara, me përjashtim të personave të verbër. Ndërsa të verbërit përfitojnë dyfishin e pagesës për aftësinë e kufizuar nëse ndjekin AFP, të tjera kategori si p.sh. personat shurdh-memecë, jo vetëm që nuk kanë përfitim nga aftësia e kufizuar, por edhe duhet të paguajnë tarifën e trajnimit. Rekomandohet që kurset e trajnimit profesional afat shkurtër të ofrohen falas për të gjitha kategoritë.

Për t'i motivuar nxënësit të përfundojnë me sukses shkollën, konceptimi dhe zbatimi i sistemit të AFP duhet të marrë në konsideratë faktin që shumica e nxënësve të regjistruar vijnë me rezultate të dobëta, nga familje me status të ulët social, me të ardhura dhe nivel arsimor të ulët. Eksperiencia e shkollës së Durrësit në ofrimin e orëve suplementare në lëndë si matematika, është një shembull i mirë me qëllim shmangien e braktisjes së shkollës, edhe pse braktisja nuk përbën problem në të tri rastet e studimit. Rekomandohet që në shkollat profesionale të realizohen programe suplementare që studentët me mangësi në lëndë të caktuara të mund të plotësojnë boshllëqet nga sistemi 9-vjeçar. Po ashtu, rrijtja e fleksibilitetit të programeve për ata nxënës që lënë shkollat e tjera për t'u përfshirë në arsimin profesional, si dhe emigrantët e kthyer.

Programet e shkollave të AFP u drejtohen studentëve normalë dhe nuk ka programe/kushte të veçanta për nxënësit me aftësi të kufizuara, ata me vështirësi në të mësuar apo emigrantëve të kthyer. Përmirësimi i laboratorëve, infrastrukturës dhe librave shkollorë, duhet të realizohet paralelisht me prezantimin e një kurikule të përshtatshme për grupet vulnerabël si emigrantët e kthyer, apo më të

orientuar nga profesionet e preferuara nga vajzat si p.sh., profili estetiste, si dhe sipas sektorëve të rinj të ekonomisë si turizmi në Durrës apo sigurimet në Tiranë. Integrimi i teorisë me praktikën është sfida kryesore e AFP në drejtim të tërheqjes së nxënësve me rezultate të ulëta. Rekomandohet të nxitet bashkëpunimi i shkollave të AP me QFP në mënyrë që të përdoren më me efikasitet burimet e kufizuara dhe teknologjia, në kuadër të integritit të teorisë me praktikën profesionale, si dhe të nxitet bashkëpunimi me bizneset. Bizneset duhet të përfshihen që në hartimin e kurrikulave deri në zbatimin e praktikave profesionale të studentëve, sikurse është zbatuar në Durrës dhe Elbasan, duke investuar në krijimin e shoqatave profesionale dhe standardeve të cilësisë. Kurset e formimit profesional në Elbasan janë orientuar nga mjeshtritë e kërkuara për grupet e Romëve apo të personave me aftësi të kufizuara. Mësuesit, edhe pse nga Instituti për Zhvillimin e Arsimit kanë si objektive të kualifikimit të tyre konceptet e përfshirjes sociale dhe identifikimit të metodave përkatëse, kanë nevojë të përgatiten në këtë drejtim. Të dy shkollat kanë një numër të lartë nxënësish për mësues rreth 20, tregues ky i nevojës për rritje sasiore dhe cilësore të stafit pedagogjik që t'u përgjigjet nevojave të grupeve vulnerabël. Procesi i decentralizimit po vazhdon në nivel shkolle (me një diapazon më të gjerë vendimmarrje) dhe lokal (bashkitë dhe komunat po marrin në pronësi godinat e shkollave më parë pronë të MASH dhe po kthehen në përgjegjës për mirëmbajtjen shkollës). Sidoqoftë, shkalla e autonomisë e shkollave/qendrave në buxhetim është e ulët, meqë ata nuk kanë nxitje për të gjeneruar të ardhura si rezultat i një kuadri ligjor të paplotë. Ndërkohë, mirëmbajtja e shkollave nga autoritetet lokale mungon plotësisht në shkollat në fokus.

Tranzicioni nga shkolla në punë kërkon më shumë bashkëpunim të shkollës me komunitetin lokal dhe më shumë orientim karriere lidhur me profesionin, bazuar në informacion mbi tregun e punës, si shembulli i projektit PASO nga KulturKontakt në shkollat ekonomike. Niveli i punësimit i të diplomuarve nga AFP nuk është vlerësuar, me përjashtim të disa studimeve sporadike që rekomandohet të kryhen rregullisht. Në të njëjtën kohë, është e nevojshme të prezantohen programe kombëtare të trajnimit në punë, meqë biznesi mund të ofrojë metodologji mësimdhënie dhe teknologji të reja, rekomandim ky i bazuar në rastin e Durrësit dhe të Elbasanit. Gjatë vitit akademik 2012-2013, Qeveria vendosi t'u ofrojë mbështetje punëdhënësve lidhur me sigurimet shoqërore për dëmtimet në punë të studentëve gjatë zhvillimit të praktikës mësimore. Sidoqoftë, bizneset private janë të shqetësuara se nxënësit nuk kanë aftësitë e nevojshme për t'u përfshirë në aktivitetet e tyre dhe kurrikula e AFP nuk është aq e përditësuar sa të pasqyrojë ndryshimet e shpejta të tregut të punës. Gjatë vitit 2012-2013, me qëllim promovimin e marrëdhënieve të ngushta mes bizneseve dhe shkollave të AFP, u vendosën Bordet Drejtuese të shkollave të drejtuara nga përfaqësuesit e biznesit. Bizneset pritet të drejtojnë procesin e vendim-marrjes në ndërtimin e kurikulës që t'i përgjigjet nevojave të biznesit e njëkohësisht të rritjes së mundësive të punësimit. Shkollat duhet të jenë proaktive dhe të orientojnë planet e studentëve pas diplomimit, duke rritur besimin në aftësitë e tyre profesionale, që të mos kërkojnë vetëm punë të paguar (90%), por të konsiderojnë dhe alternativën e vetëpunësimit.

Pavarësisht se shkollat profesionale në studim janë kombëtare, 80% e studentëve të tyre janë të rajonit ku ndodhet shkolla. Prandaj rekomandohet të alokohen më shumë burime rajonale për promovimin e nismave të komunitetit që rrisin ndikimin e AFP në përfshirjen dhe kohezionin social. Kurrikula e VET është një prioritet në disa nisma rajonale të Këshillit të Qarkut, konkretisht prezantimi i profileve të reja si peshkimi në Durrës (përmes projektit IPA), apo mbështetje e ofruar nga Bashkia për grupet në nevojë si Romët për tu përfshirë në AFP (Durrës, Elbasan, Tiranë). Rekomandohet të krijohen struktura rajonale të AFP, mundësisht nën AKAFP (Agjensinë Kombëtare të Arsimit dhe Formimit Profesional),

të cilat do të mbështesin bashkëpunimin dhe do të mobilizojnë burimet rajonale, do të promovojnë marrëdhënie të ngushta të ofruesve të AFP me bizneset lokale, që t'u përgjigjen nevojave të grupeve vulnerabël në nivel lokal. Bordi Rajonal i AFP në Elbasan është një shembull i mirë në këtë drejtim. Rekomandohet që projektet e donatorëve të fokusohen në nivel lokal duke promovuar bashkëpunimin e ofruesve të AFP me aktorë të tjerë të komunitetit, në drejtim të përfshirjes dhe kohezionit social. Nevojat e veçanta të rajoneve duhet të merren në konsideratë përmes një shpërndarje më të drejtë të ofruesve të VET në vend, pasi nxënësit rural janë më të prirur të regjistrohen në AFP. Projektet e trajnimit sporadike të ofruara nga NGO në zona suburbane dhe rurale të fokusuar në grupe vulnerabël si Romët, personat me aftësi të kufizuar apo të vajzat e reja të papuna, të jenë të qëndrueshme e të mbështeten nga komuniteti rajonal apo lokal, jo vetëm nga donatorët ndërkombëtarë. Dhe së fundmi, vetë shkolla duhet të jetë proaktive ndaj komunitetit, me organizimin e veprimtarive jashtëshkollore, të cilat janë në nivele të ulëta, vetëm veprimtari sportive për 50% të nxënësve. Kjo do të ndikojë në ndryshimin e perceptimit të komunitetit për shkollat/qendrat e AFP, në mënyrë që ato të konsiderohen jo vetëm si institucione arsimore, por gjithashtu si pjesë integrale e komunitetit dhe t'u përgjigjen nevojave sociale. Në këtë kuadër, është e nevojshme të prezantohet në sistemin AFP, roli ri i punonjësit social, krahas atij të psikologut.

## ACRONYMS

DCM	Decision of Council of Ministers
ETF	European Training Foundation
EU	European Union
FASTIP	Theory Study Integrated with Practice Faculty
FG	Focus Group
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
GIZ	Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit
ICT	Information and Communication Technology
IDI	In Depth Interviews
IED	Institute of Educational Development
IPA	Instrument for Pre-Accession Assistance
INSTAT	Institute of Statistics
LAB	Local Advisory Board
LFS	Labour Force Survey
LLL	Live Long Learning
LSE	London School of Economics
LSMS	Living Standards Measurement Survey
METE	Ministry of Economy, Trade and Energy
MoES	Ministry of Education and Science
MoLSAEO	Ministry of Labour Social Affairs and Equal Opportunities
NAVET	National Agency for Vocational Education and Training
NES	National Employment Service
NGO	Non-Governmental Organization
NQF	National Qualification Framework
PAR	Participatory Action Research
PASO	Social Partners Relationship Coordinator
RED	Regional Education Directorate
SIMS	School Infrastructure Management System
VET	Vocational Education and Training
VETNC	Vocational Education National Council
VT	Vocational Training
VTC	Vocational Training Centre
VE	Vocational Education
UN	United Nations
UNDP	United Nations Development Program
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
YAPS	Albanian Youth Professional Services

## INTRODUCTION

Economic structural change during the transition in Albania has created demands for new skills which have not been adequately provided by the VET system. On one side, high rates of youth unemployment and persistent long-term unemployment have been the main causes of poverty and social exclusion in Albania. On the other side, the process of EU accession and the effects of open markets have increased the need for reforms in education and training systems to respond to the global technological change. In this context, this research aimed to identify how VET systems could adjust appropriately to the changing demands for skilled labour and what might be the role of VET in addressing social inclusion and social cohesion. These issues were in the focus of the research in national policy level and in local level focused on three case study areas nearby two vocational schools in Tirana and Durrës, and one VTC in Elbasan, regarding the group age 15-19 years old. The research has adopted an interactive inquiry process that balances practical problem solving with data-driven analysis in order to understand causes of social exclusion in VET and generate new evidence for future policy challenges. In the focus of this research were the VET policies from public agencies, social partners, civil society and donors and the practices of the VET schools/centres within their local communities.

In Albania, VET reform has been part of the Education Strategy (ES) 2008-2013 of the MoES, which defined the objectives and priorities of vocational education and the ways it can be developed, and of the Employment and Vocational Training Strategy 2007-2013 of MOLSAEO which was considering vocational training as a component of promoting employment.<sup>1</sup> For the first time in Albania there was prepared a common National VET Strategy 2013-2020 and Action Plan in education, training and employment, based on the *Europe 2020 Strategy*.<sup>2</sup> Although the intermediate role of donors in VET policy and practice still there is little integration of education policies with social policies.

Despite the support of donors in policy, legislation, curricula, capacity building, and direct investment in school infrastructure has been significant, the system is underfunded and lacks of sustainable financial mechanisms (Dibra and Memaj, 2012). Based on the 2011 budget, basic education received the biggest share of MoES budget accounting for 61%, secondary general education accounts for 13.3%, and university education for 16.1%. Conversely, secondary vocational education takes by far the smallest share with 5.9%. While the total expenditure on education per head of population during 2007-2011 was increased from 83.3 Euros to 96.3 Euros, the expenditure in vocational education was reduced from 6.0 Euros in 2007, to 5.6 Euros per head of population in 2011. Nevertheless, VE expenses per student were increased from 640.6 Euros to 832.0 Euros during 2007-2011 and VE recorded the largest increase of the MoES budget by 28.8% over the period 2011-2014 and VET policy is on the top agenda of the election programs for 2013-2017. A similar situation could be seen in VTC under the MoLSAEO, which was underfunded compared to other labour market policy programs.<sup>3</sup> In Albania, vocational training was developed only in the last 15 years, compared to vocational education, which has been more developed during the socialist regime.

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<sup>1</sup>Ministry of Education and Sciences, National Strategy for Education, 2008 – 2013; MOLSAEO, Strategy on Employment and Vocational Training 2007-2013.

<sup>2</sup> Referring to the draft National Strategy on VET 2013-2020 presented in a round table with social partners and civil society on October 8, 2012.

<sup>3</sup> Referring to the website: [http://www.minfin.gov.al/minfin/Buxheti\\_ne\\_vite\\_1268\\_1.php](http://www.minfin.gov.al/minfin/Buxheti_ne_vite_1268_1.php)

Vocational training was part of employment services, established for treating unemployment. In this regard, it was attracting mostly the vulnerable groups, among them the young which have the highest rate of unemployment and skills demands. Current policy aims including in vocational training not only the registered unemployed, but also the categories such as people with disabilities, Roma, trafficked woman, prisoners and returned emigrants. Vocational training was considered part of social inclusion policy for vulnerable groups as stated at the sector strategies of the MOLSAEO<sup>4</sup> and as it was reflected on the statistical data offered by the VTC with an increased number of trainees of such groups.

For the academic year 2012-2013, the Technical-Economic School in Tirana has developed action plans to implement national strategies dealing with students with disabilities and returned emigrants, although their number is very much limited.<sup>5</sup> For the academic year 2012-2013, the MoES<sup>6</sup> opened the part-time VET system and did not put limits in the number of new entrants. Although, the both schools on the research focus have not applied the part-time system, because they have limited capacities. “Overall, Albanian school institutions are operating at 93% of total capacity... The level of crowding for High Schools on the national scale is at 120%.”<sup>7</sup> Reflecting for two VET schools in our research, both were operating in two shifts, as there are not available classrooms. The new VET structure, offering vocational education in two or three levels (2+2 or 2+1+1) was increasing the interest of vulnerable groups to be prepared as semi-skilled workers for the labour market. State Professional Matura created equal opportunities for VET students to continue the university studies, too. Meanwhile, the new structure of compulsory education (1-6, 7-9) which will be applied during the academic year 2013-2014, will have higher emphasises of subjects fostering entrepreneurship knowledge and skills.

The main problems of VET system are the limited choice of programmes and lack of flexibility with respect to course selection, a curriculum which focuses on academic content and is overburdened, alongside teacher-centred ways of teaching...<sup>8</sup> MoES and MoLSAEO, as well as the respective VET schools/centre in their VET policies and practices have been supported by the donors from the EU, ETF, UN, German- GIZ, Swiss Government, Austria, Italy, and USA. The current Operational Program-IPA IV aims to improve the welfare and life chances for Albanian citizens in the context of integration into the European Union through increased employment, improved employability, and the development of an inclusive labour market. Lifelong learning is a component that will be improved primarily via multifunctional VET centres, widening participation of marginalized groups of the society.<sup>9</sup>

The research report is structured in four chapters, starting with an institutional framework and the VET policy process for social inclusion and social cohesion at the national level, followed by the second chapter on VET practices at the local level, which was also explaining the methodological issues. The most important here is the third section on the research findings. Based on these findings, the third chapter was giving the action proposals for schools and the fourth chapter shows the policy recommendations for all levels. Some conclusions are closing the Albanian country study.

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<sup>4</sup> See in References detailed strategies of the MOLSAEO.

<sup>5</sup> See in Annex the Social Map of the Technical-Economic School in Tirana.

<sup>6</sup> Based on the Decision of the MoES No.16, dated 24.07. 2012.

<sup>7</sup> EU Commission and MoES, Infrastructure Projects Facility in Western Balkans, “School Inventory and Conditions’ Survey”, Albania 2011.

<sup>8</sup> Veirtel, E., Nikolovska, M., (2010), “Albania Review of Human Resources Development”, ETF.

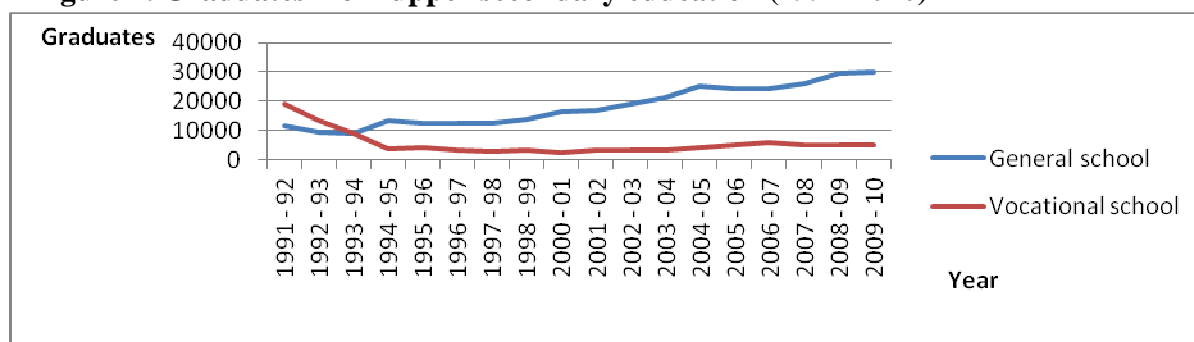
<sup>9</sup> Interview with Maria do Carmo Gomes, Human Resources Development Operational Program - IPA IV.

## 1. INSTITUTIONAL FRAMEWORK & THE POLICY PROCESS AT NATIONAL LEVEL

### 1.1 Situation analysis

Before the Second World War, the Albanian VET system was informal. On job training was adjusted to the undeveloped non mechanised business focused on craftsmanship. During the socialist regime, VET system was much centralised, responding to the needs of a planned economy. Teachers' autonomy was limited and curricula for each subject and track were decided by the Ministry of Education. During this period, along with the vocational education system, employees with low level of education could attend the part time vocational schools with a practice oriented programme. Skills categories were certified by the Categorisation Commission composed by teachers and supervisors. Until the academic year 1990-1991 there were 308 vocational schools (mostly in agriculture) with 148,185 students. VET system changed drastically after 1990s, under the influence of market economy. Closing of many vocational schools or turning them in gymnasiums reflected the decrease of demand for technicians due to the close of many previously state owned factories. This situation led to the drastic decrease of VET enrolment from more than 70% of secondary education before 1990 to less than 20% in our days.

**Figure 1. Graduates from upper secondary education (1991-2010)**



Source: INSTAT, MoES

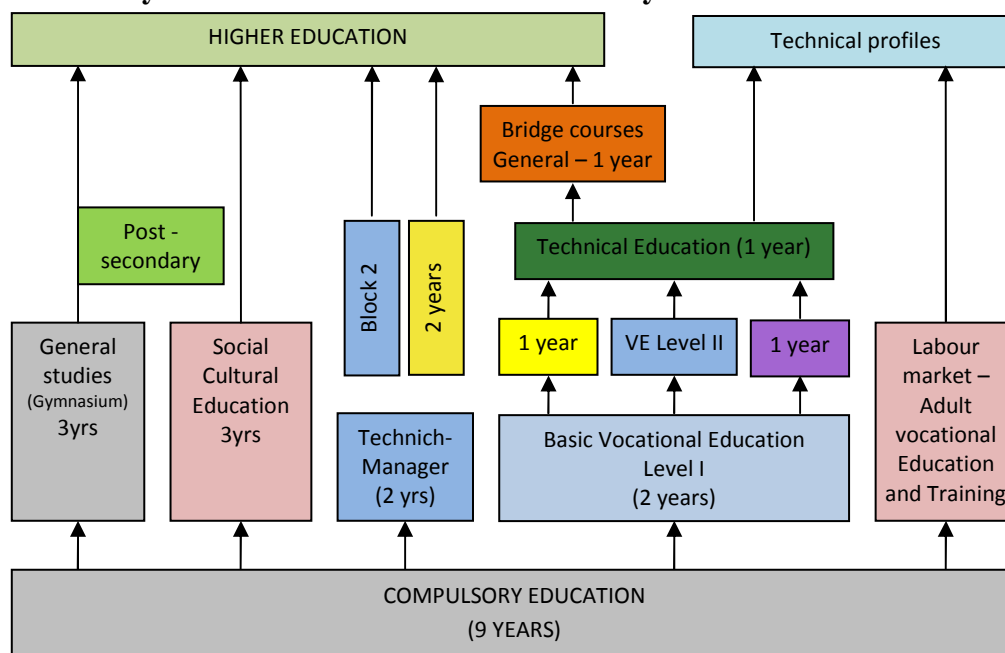
From the above data it is clear that vocational education has been very developed in the past and during the transition it became less attractive compared with general secondary education. This trend reflected the problems of transition from a planned to a market economy. With the economic stabilisation and structural reform of VET system after 2010 the interest on VET education was increased.

#### 1.1.1 Vocational education

Since the academic year 2009-2010, the vocational education system has been structured in three consecutive levels with a maximum duration of 4 years. Students can be enrolled in VE after completing the 9 years compulsory education. Below it can be shown VET in the context of the entire education and training system in Albania. Level I (2 academic years) prepares semi-skilled workers, level II (1 academic year) prepares qualified employees and level III (1 academic year) prepares technical/managers and provides opportunity through professional state exams to continue

university/post secondary studies.<sup>10</sup> The new VE structure enables the transitions to the labour market after completion of each level. This is reflected on reduced unemployment rate which is lower for those graduated in upper secondary vocational (2-3 years) in 11.4% in 2010, even lower for those graduated in upper secondary vocational (4-5 years) in 9.1% compared with the total of 14.2%.<sup>11</sup>

**Figure 2. VET system in Albania since the academic year 2009-2010**



Source: MoES

**Table 2. Enrolment in VE schools by different tracks (Grade X, 2009-2011)**

Year	Enrolment in VE Schools	2+1+1	%	2+2	%	4	%	Socio-cultural	%
2009*	5.616	1.059	19%	1.862	33%	0	0%	2.028	36%
2010	6.322	3.379	53%	1.469	23%	0	0%	1.474	23%
2011	6.682	3.407	51%	1.609	24%	96	1%	1.570	23%

\*In 2009, the last students of the old 2+1 track were taken in.

Source: MoES

The data shows that just one year after reform, the enrolment rate in 2010 was three times higher in the VE schools 2+1+1, inverted ratio of students in VE schools 2+2 and those socio-cultural. Vocational education in Albania is "school based" offered in 41 vocational schools and in some general secondary schools which operate as joint schools. Of these, there are three schools oriented towards agro business in the rural areas, in a country where the rural population consist of 46.50% of the population,

<sup>10</sup> Act No.8872, dated 29.03.2002 "For Vocational Education and Training in Albania", amended by Act no. 10011 dated 30.10.2008, and Act no.10434, dated 23.06.2011.

<sup>11</sup> INSTAT, LFS 2010.



dominated by self-employed in agriculture. (CENSUS 2011) Schools are divided into four main fields: electro-mechanical (18 schools), economic (9 schools), construction and carpentry (4 schools); agriculture, forestry, veterinary medicine (9 schools). There is a tendency to shift from manufacturing profiles to services, business, tourism, maintenance and repair, information technology and communication. In 2011, about 12.6% of VET students were enrolled in ITC, compared with 7.5% in 2010 and 0% in 2007; transport vehicle service enrolment increased from 7% of VET students in 2007 to 15.8% in 2011; while agriculture students' enrolment decreased from 12.9% in 2007 to 3.5% of VET students in 2011 and the same is for construction and geodesic students. The VET system has a low level of enrolment, with less than 20% of the pupils who finish compulsory 9-years education, despite the reforms that in principle allow vertical and horizontal flexibility.<sup>12</sup>

Regarding the VE schools conditions, based on the data of the School Infrastructure Management System (SIMS), database designed by the EC-funded TA-ALB-10 project, the last nation-wide inspection of the schools found that only 20% of them are in very good conditions, whereas 50% of are in need of reconstruction and maintenance and 10% are at dangerous conditions.

Since academic year 2011-2012, vocational schools are offering also the part time system, for students older than 17 years old and those already employed applicants who need the qualification for their job. "For the academic year 2012/2013 in pre-university education, the *part-time vocational schools will have no limits in acceptance regarding the number of students*".<sup>13</sup> There are 9 private vocational schools are operating in Albania, most of them with a limited number of students and a limited offer regarding the tracks. The most important private schools are Harry Fultz (offering electro technical, mechanic, and business) Peter Maringer Austrian School (offering ITC) and Don Bosko (offering electro technical and hydro sanitary equipment). While public VE is free of charge, students' payment at private schools varies from 30 up to 80 Euros per month.

### 1.1.2 Vocational Training

Public vocational training (VT) was delivered through 10 VTC, 9 of them in the main cities and one mobile centre in North East, offering short-term courses of 4-6 weeks and longer courses up to 7 months. VTCs approach not only registered unemployed, but also other vulnerable groups, who are trained free of charge such as Roma, trafficked women, ex/prisoners, orphans and people with disabilities, mainly blind ones. The registered unemployed pay 10 Euro fees for their training, and their number were doubled during the period 2007-2011. While training fee for all the others is about 20 Euro, and the total number of trainees was increased from about 7 thousands in 2007 to 9 thousands in 2011.<sup>14</sup> The group age 15-19 consisted of 24% of the trainees for 2011, whereas the youth unemployment rate in 2010 was 30.5%, with a high rate of females trainees increase from 16.6% in 2007 to 31.8% in 2010.<sup>15</sup> At the same rate were the trainees with the elementary level of education, compared to 10% of those with VET education and about 30% of those trainees with University degree in 2011. Females, as they have the highest rate of unemployment, were dominated trainees in the three regions of Durres, Elbasan, and Tirana.

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<sup>12</sup> MoES, Draft National Strategy on VET, 2013-2020.

<sup>13</sup> Based on the Decision of the MoES No.16, dated 24.07. 2012.

<sup>14</sup> NES statistics.

<sup>15</sup> INSTAT, LFS 2010.

**Table 2. The situation of trainees in public VTC, 2007-2012<sup>16</sup>**

Year	Total number of Trainees	Female	16-24 years old	25-34 years old	Over 34 years old	With 8-9 year level of education	With upper secondary level of education	With Vocational Education	With University
2007	7,400	3,899	4,923 or 66.5%	1,488	989	2,032 or 27%	2,795 or 38%	605 or 8.1%	1,968 or 26.5%
2008	7,752	4,409 or 56.8%	5,240 or 67.5%	1,609	903	1,902	3,170 or 40.8%	574	2,106 or 27.1%
2009	7,751	3,843	4,499 or 58%	1,538 or 19.8%	878 or 11.3%	1,782 or 22.9%	2,612 or 33.6%	518 or 6.6%	2,002 or 25.8%
2010	10,799	4,514	5,054 or 51%	2,192 or 20%	1,609 or 14.8%	2,013 or 18.6%	3,380 or 31.2%	949 or 8.7%	2,513 or 23.2%
2011	10450	4,751	5,334 or 51%	2,088 or 19.9%	1,527 or 14.6%	2,007 or 19.2%	3,554 or 34%	864 or 8.2%	2,524 or 24%
2012	8,703	3,798	4,749 or 55%	1,896	2,058	2,648 or 30%	3,280 or 37%	403 or 4.6%	2,372 or 27%

Source: NES

The training of vulnerable groups was realised in collaboration of VTC with community based NGO or interested groups, supported by various donors' projects. The focus on training of Roma and Egyptians, people with disabilities and returned emigrants was defined based on the interest of such categories.

**Table 1. Trainees of vulnerable groups graduated in public Vocational Training Centres**

Year	Total special categories	Roma and Egyptians	Traficed women	Ex-prisoners	Orphans	People with disabilities	Returned Emigrants
2012	386	166	26	6	17	82	89

Source: NES

The non-public VTC system was filling the gap in vocational training. During the year 2011, about 102 private companies offered *on the job training* and employment for about 1,170 unemployed job seekers.<sup>17</sup> Training curricula are prepared, financed and approved centrally by the MoLSAEO.<sup>18</sup>

<sup>16</sup> Information from National Employment Services, Mr. Neshat Zeneli, Director of Employment Services.

<sup>17</sup> MOLSAEO, referring the annual analysis of National Employment Service 2011.

<sup>18</sup> Based on DCM no.196, dated 20.03.2003.

### 1.1.3 VET Policies for social exclusion and social cohesion

Social exclusion in Albania is result of the social and economic problems encountered by certain groups of society such as low labour market accessibility in particular for women, people with disabilities, Roma and Egyptians, returned emigrants, etc. The primary goal of VET system is to increase the skills for the new entrants into the labour market, especially for vulnerable groups to escape them from poverty. The poverty rate in Albania is one of the highest in Europe.<sup>19</sup> As a result of high growth rates in recent years and social policies, the absolute poverty rate fell from 25.4% in 2002 to 12.4% in 2008.”<sup>20</sup> Among the registered unemployed, the majority of 57.8% are beneficiaries of social assistance, and 54.6% have up to 8/9-years level of education. From 2007-2011 the illiteracy rate was increased from 1.0% to 2.8%, especially for females from 1.2% to 3.7%. (CENSUS 2011) Long-term unemployment in 2011 comprises 62% of the registered unemployed, almost 90% of them are beneficiaries of social assistance, and about 58% of them lack a profession, and 50% are less than 40 years old. The situation of the jobseekers from the vulnerable groups as a percentage of the total registered unemployed is: Roma and Egyptian 5.3%, orphans 0.16%, disabled 1.7%, returned emigrants 0.7%, and trafficked women are only 55 people.<sup>21</sup>

Specialized VTCs and special courses for people with disabilities are lacking in the country, except some initiatives from NGOs and interested groups supported by international donors which are supporting VTC courses.<sup>22</sup> In December 2009, the Albanian Government signed the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and is working for its ratification.<sup>23</sup> Blind people are the only category of disabled who have incentives to participate in labour market, while other categories lose some disability benefits when hired. People with disabilities only in hearing, who receive disability payments until the age of 7, have access only to the compulsory 9-years education.

Albania does not have accurate data on the number of Roma population, because most of the children are not registered at birth and they have only basic education.<sup>24</sup> Albania has adopted the Declaration of the Decade of Roma Inclusion and is part of the Decade of Roma Inclusion 2005-2015.<sup>25</sup> In certain districts, there are local coordinators (not employed within their duty), enabling meetings Needs Assessment Committees at district level and, within these committees, technical groups have been set up on Roma issues. The local authorities are supported by NGOs projects, such as "Empowering Vulnerable Communities" (UNDP) for professional training and employment of the Roma. UNDP has signed an agreement for the project continuation 2010-2013.<sup>26</sup>

Empowering girls/ women through VET and promotion of employment was on the focus of AlbVET project that aims to develop appropriate courses for women. VET policies focused on abandoned

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<sup>19</sup> Strategy for Social Inclusion 2007-2013. Referring the LSMS 2008, as no data available for LSMS 2011.

<sup>20</sup> INSTAT, UNDP, the World Bank, Tendencies of Poverty in Albania, LSMS 2002, 2005, 2008, Tirana, 2009.

<sup>21</sup> MOLSAEO, referring the annual analysis of National Employment Service 2011.

<sup>22</sup> Some public VTC were reconstructed in Fier and Elbasan. Other initiatives, such as Youth Albania Parcel Service (YAPS), run by the Don Bosco in Tirana and funded by UNICEF, train young people with disabilities.

<sup>23</sup> Referring the Law no. 10221, dated 04.02.2010 "On Protection from Discrimination".

<sup>24</sup> Mrs. Ilda Rusha interview, Head of the Monitoring and Evaluation Unit, MOLSAEO.

<sup>25</sup> Council of Ministers Decision No 437, dated 08.04.2008.

<sup>26</sup> Interview in Durres with coordinator of UNDP project Bledina Bushi.

children are supported by UNICEF through the project YAPS (Youth Albanian Professional Services).<sup>27</sup> Another project was Aptitude for Life that aims at the inclusion of specific groups (children away from parental care; VT for Roma families with a direct impact on the quality of life of their children; and the integration of marginalized children such as drug abusers, victims of HIV/ AIDS, children with disabilities or trafficked, etc..).<sup>28</sup>

Prisoners' education and training is another VET social inclusion policy. Since 2008, prisoners have the possibility to finish compulsory education at least in five penitentiaries and can be enrolled in vocational training courses organised within the prison.

Despite the above social policies which include VET as an alternative to minimise social problems, last years, there is a tendency of considering social inclusion in education and training policies. With the strong influence of ETF policy recommendations, since 2011 the frame curricula for VE didn't have any more limitations regarding selection criteria. A special attention is given to the participation in VET system the students with disabilities. Eligibility criteria such as required skills and abilities are not any more obligatory and the schools are encouraged to develop necessary conditions for disabled students. Social inclusion is lately also a teacher training topic. Teachers in all education levels, including also vocational school teachers are encouraged first to understand social inclusion and social cohesion concept and then to develop more participatory teaching methodologies and school environment.

According to the Report Evaluation of the National Strategy on Social Inclusion, some of the achievements are: increased responsibility of the central government through new programs and services; engagement of civil society and capacity building at all levels. Some of the weaknesses are lack of resources, of inter-institutional cooperation and lack of accurate data on vulnerable groups.<sup>29</sup>

## **1.2 The institutional framework for vocational education**

### **1.2.1 Legal Framework**

The basic Act No.8872, dated 29.03.2002 "For Vocational Education and Training in Albania", amended by Act no. 10011 dated 30.10.2008, and Act no.10434, dated 23.06.2011, aims at supporting the development of a common system of vocational education and training which can adapt to social, economic and technological needs of the labour market. Then, the Albanian Qualification Framework<sup>30</sup> has defined all types of qualifications while recognizes all the respective diplomas/certificates. The new legal improvements allowed for the vertical and horizontal movement of students in the system from one level to the other, e.g. from level 2 to level 3 of another field of study, although it is not happening in practice. VET providers (schools/centres) are supposed to have larger autonomy to make use of their resources, but still they are underfunded, and there are no rules in place for self-management of their resources. The legal framework allows VE schools to be transformed into Multifunctional VET providers for different categories of students, but still it is only one school being piloted in Kamza,

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<sup>27</sup> <http://www.unicef.org/albania/YAPScasestudy.pdf>

<sup>28</sup> National Program of UNICEF for Albania (2006-2010), f.11.

<sup>29</sup> Draft Report Evaluation of the National Strategy on Social Inclusion 2007-2013 prepared by the Albanian Center for Economic Research, supported by UNICEF, September 2012, page 4-5 (for official use).

<sup>30</sup> Act No 10247, dated 04.03.2010, on "National Qualification Framework".

Tirana started in 2012. The VET legislation promoted the establishment of the VET providers boards in November 2012, with a broader participation from all community stakeholders, headed by the business representatives, which are appointed from the Chamber of Commerce (while the private employers have their own organizations). In such School Governing Board there is no parent representative. The representatives of community organizations such as the associations of people with disabilities, or other vulnerable groups, are missing at all. The representative of local government is from the social department of municipality, which can serve as a good point of reference for supporting the vulnerable groups from both sides, from local authorities and from school.<sup>31</sup>

The legislation has foreseen restructuring of the VET National Council through increasing representation of the social partners (6 members) as compared to that of government (4 members), but it still remains in paper. Teachers' continuous training and qualification was defined on the priorities, but there is little investment in this direction, referring also to the teachers' questionnaire conducted for this research, concretely their answer on formal teaching qualifications. Only 17 teachers answered yes out of 30 teachers' questionnaires in Tirana VE school, and even less in Durres VE school gave the answer yes for their qualifications, 15 out of 37 teachers; 8 trainers from 17 trainers that VTC in Elbasan have been filling the teachers' questionnaire.<sup>32</sup>

### **1.2.2 Hierarchical Executive Structures<sup>33</sup>**

The MoES is the main structure responsible for Vocational Education system through the Pre-University Education Department, the Vocational Education Development Sector, as well as Regional Education Directorates at district level, and Education Offices in the main cities operating under the authority of the MoES. There are other structures under the MoES authority such as: National Agency for Vocational Education and Training, Institute of Education Development, and National Inspectorate of Education. The MoLSAEO is responsible for VT system, and have a special unit on VT in its structure. The National Employment Service (NES) established in 1995 under the authority of the MoLSAEO for implementation of the employment service policies, includes a specific VT Department composed of two sectors: VT sector and the sector of Curricula. Vocational training is offered by 10 regional vocational training centres as part of active labour market policies, and one mobile centre.

The two main consultative tripartite bodies, National VET Council and National Labour Council, were supposed to involve the social partners and other interested groups in VET policy, but the participation of social partners such as employers' associations and trade unions is still weak.<sup>34</sup> Whereas the National Agency for Vocational Education that was established to assist both Ministries, is still financed out by the MoES and is not responding to the needs of VTC under the MOLSAEO.<sup>35</sup> The opinions of interviews were that it should be separated from the authority of the MoES and should operate as an autonomous body responsible for VET system. Furthermore, it was proposed the establishment of the VET regional structures (following the example of Elbasan), separated from the Regional Education

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<sup>31</sup> Referring to the discussions with social administrators in municipalities of Tirana, Durres and Elbasan.

<sup>32</sup> See in References the detailed legislation on VET.

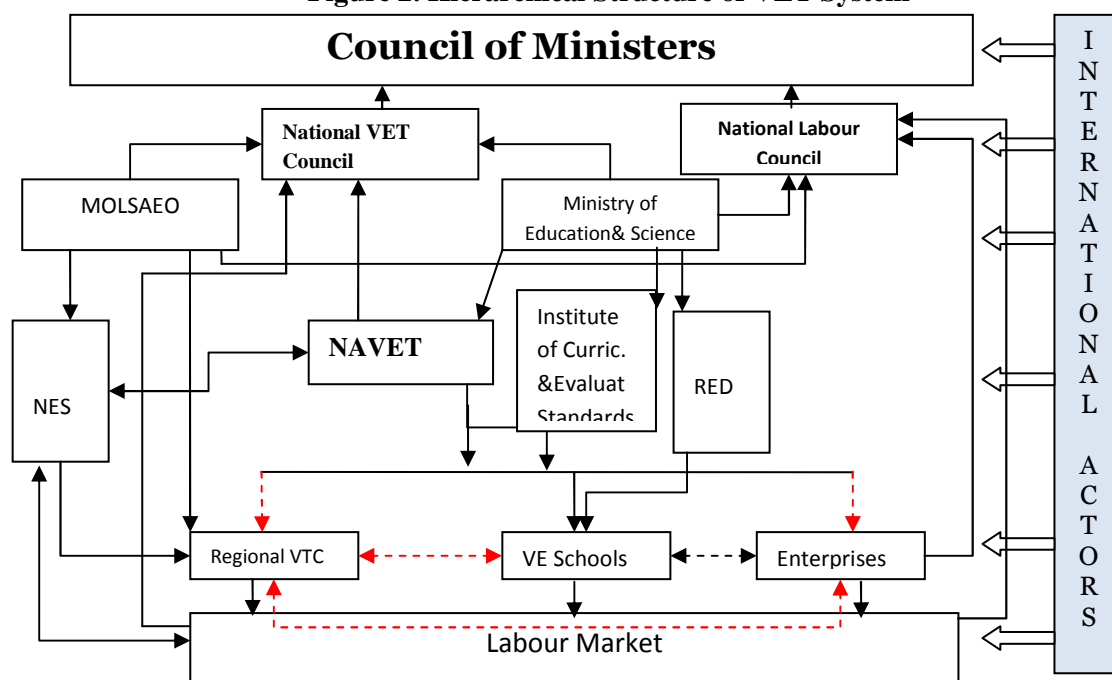
<sup>33</sup> See Annex 5 for a detailed description of the public actors in the VET system.

<sup>34</sup> Referring to the opinions of Mr. Ismail Varoshi, President of Council of Employers Organizations and Mr. Xhaferr Dobrusha, President of the Trade Union Federation on Education.

<sup>35</sup> Referring to the interviews with the senior staff of NAVET.

Directories (MoES) and the Regional Employment Offices (NES-MoLSAEO). Such structures will assist the VET providers for closer relationships with local businesses and at the same time will increase the role of VET in assisting vulnerable groups in community. According to the VET law, enterprises are also considered as VET offer institutions, but their integration in the VET system is weak. Apart from some examples in the banking sector, as the FASTIP program, the cooperation between the VET school and the business is weak, the businesses are offering only occasional/preferential support. On the other side, the civil society organizations or the interested groups of people with disabilities, Roma, orphans, etc., are donor's driven, and have no other incentives to be actively involved in VET system.<sup>36</sup>

**Figure 2. Hierarchical Structure of VET System**



Llaci, et.al, (2009)

### 1.3 The policy process and the policy debate

#### 1.3.1 The policy process and the policy debate at national level

Through desk review of the strategic documents on VET policy and practices and the research field activities, we realized that the Albanian government is trying to follow a participatory approach. The international donors' projects have contributed to institutionalize the relationships between the Government and social partners or other interested actors, for the achievement of the strategic objectives on reforming the VET system. This was evident in the last months of 2012 during the consultation process of the Government with all the stakeholders for the first draft National Strategy on VET 2013-2020. In today's discussion on the draft Strategy on VET 2013-2020, the main idea is to open the doors of the VE schools for short term vocational training courses, which (VT) have been under the domain of

<sup>36</sup> Referring to the interviews with the representatives of NGOs in Elbasan and Durres, and the school directors.

the VTC/MOLSAEO. It means that vulnerable groups interested in such training courses can have more opportunities and choices, starting in this way a bottom up integration of education with social inclusion and social cohesion policies, which can facilitate integration of activities in the national level between the MoES and the MoLSAEO, as well as their respective agencies in regional level.

As the election campaign for the Parliamentary 2013-2017 mandate is developed, VET has been in the focus of the political forces in power, which have consider it as one of their main priorities. In media and TV all the political forces, especially the Democratic Party and the Socialist Movement for Integration, promised to increase the employment through extending opportunities for young generation to follow VET system. The investment in VET system will be increased, but without any particular attention to increasing the role of VET in social inclusion of vulnerable groups.

A more active role of National Council of VET is also considered as important by the interviewed at national level. This Council should not stay as a formal consultative body, but it should engage in the policy process all the interested groups. The Council has had no regular meetings in the last year and no debates at all.<sup>37</sup>

Orientation of VET system towards the labour market is clearly defined on the main objective of the new National Strategy on VET 2013-2020: *“To have a coherent, comprehensive and feasible VET and LLL system in Albania with a strong orientation towards the needs of the labour market”*. From the debates on round tables organized by the MoES and the MOLSAEO it seems a less focus on the role of VET for social inclusion and social cohesion. Although both objectives are clear on the tendency to transform VE schools in multifunctional centres, a model piloting in Kamza, through offering a variety of courses with different duration, for different categories of adults. The representatives of the Council of Employer’s Organizations raised the question of facilities that Government should provide for their involvement in such innovations that employers to offer internships and professional practice in the premises of local businesses.<sup>38</sup> The employers’ representatives were interested in increasing the quality of teaching in VE schools, whereas the VE schools’ directors were interested in cooperation not with any business, but with professional ones, and with representatives of professional organizations, not with just representatives of Chamber of Commerce.<sup>39</sup>

Almost all the interviewed, including those from NAVET, expressed the need for the restructuring of NAVET in an autonomous body, to enable it to equally assist all VET actors to better develop frame-curricula not only for VE schools but also for VT centres, as well as standards and training not only for school teachers, but also for trainers. It was stressed the need for business involvement in frame-curricula design, while school directors stated the need of a stronger business inclusion even in teaching process and offering modern equipment, technologies, and laboratories for teaching as well.

Promoting active labour market programs and services for those willing to establish their own small enterprise and become self-employed, was a point of discussion which is reflecting the results of students’ questionnaire that 90% were planning to find a paid job after graduation, and not taking their own initiatives for self-employment. The implementation of occupational guidance and counselling

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<sup>37</sup> Discussions with Xhafer Dobrusha, President of Federation of Education Trade Unions.

<sup>38</sup> Discussion of Mr. Ismail Varoshi mention also in the National Focus Group Discussion.

<sup>39</sup> Interview with the director of Beqir Cela VE school in Durres.

system based on strong labour market information was a new initiative of the National Employment Service, through their project supported by Swedish Government.<sup>40</sup> The new website for orientation of jobseekers in the labour market demand can be used by those who have internet access and know how. But the vulnerable groups need much more face to face contact and individual approach to treat their complex social inclusion problems.

Implementation of the "Social business movement in Albania" in 2012, based on the allocation of micro credits to the poor and vulnerable groups, who are excluded from other credit sources, is supposed to create opportunities for employment and self-employment.<sup>41</sup> Surveys show that of all poor households, female-headed households are less poor (6%) compared to poor families that are male-headed (8.9%).<sup>42</sup>

In the Albanian context, the international donors have played an important role in reforming the VET system. Currently they are trying to coordinate their activities on supporting VET and their projects on social inclusion referring the initiative of "DACH+" group.<sup>43</sup> The last meeting of "DACH+" group where the Albanian country research team participated, was held in December 2012, and hosted by GIZ, with representatives of the MoES. Among the main issues of donors discussions was increasing the role of VET on meeting social needs of vulnerable groups, especially on the poorest part of North Albania. VET Sector Working Group is another coordination initiative by most important donors in the field. This group is supposed to meet regularly with the participation of MoES representatives, according to the schedules decided by Department of Strategy and Donors Coordination with the goal of orienting the foreign assistance toward the Albanian education strategies and priorities.

### 1.3.2 The policy process and the policy debate at local level

The representatives of trade unions in the field of education were interested in increasing the enrolment rate in VET, which will increase the number of teacher employed. The teacher-pupils ratio in national level for VE schools was decreased from 15 pupils for one teacher in 2007 to 11 in 2011, compared with 18 the average in all schools. In both VE schools in our research focus this ratio was higher, about 20 pupils for one teacher. But above all, the trade unions were discussing the need for further professional qualification of the teaching staff. Trade unions have been organizing training activities for teachers, as well as have signed agreements with the government for the collective contracts and improving the teachers' salary system and working conditions. Considering the quite young teachers' age (referring the teachers' questionnaire the average age was 40 years in both VE schools), a major emphasise should be their professional qualification through close collaboration with the business community and donors support at the best.

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<sup>40</sup> [www.epunesim.gov.al](http://www.epunesim.gov.al)

<sup>41</sup> Workshop on Social Enterprise in Albania, Tirana, October 23, 2012, organized by TACSO, Technical Assistance for Civil Society Organizations of the European Commission in Albania. In support of women and women-headed households, there was signed an agreement between the MoLSAEO and the company "Yunus Social Business".

<sup>42</sup> National Report Position of Women and Gender Equality in Albania ", UNWOMEN, MoLSAEO 2011.

<sup>43</sup> DACH+ members are Swisscontact (with AlbVET project), the British Council (with Skills @ Work project), the EC (with CARDS AFP project), the Educational Centre Elbasan (ECE) foundation (supported by ICCO), the GTZ (with GTZ-AFP for North East Albania project), Kultur Kontakt Austria, PARSH (Adult Education in Albania, part of the network Adult Education in Southeast Europe), and NAVET from the Albanian side.



For the community actors being able to play a role, it was the responsibility of the regional and local authorities to involve them in the VET debates. The Durres District representatives proposed and we recommend establishing a regional structure responsible for VET, which can function as a regional branch of NAVET. Setting up and implementing innovative financing mechanism, where the regional/local authorities to better meet the needs of VET school maintenance and investment, was seen as a key point for increasing the quality of VET students. Local authorities are still waiting from the MoES to invest in schools infrastructure and to support with scholarship the vulnerable groups in attending the VET schools. On their side, no local government was planning in their own resources, investment in VET system. We couldn't see it as a question of money, but of their interest on VET, that was reflected on the indifference of the other community stakeholders. May be the interested groups, such as the associations of People with disabilities, Roma, parents of returned emigrants and other vulnerable groups, have to be more present in media, to attract their attention on VET investment. Especially the women associations could be more active to support opening the new profiles preferable for girls to encourage them to follow VET schools. There are some initiatives of international donors for empowering the vulnerable communities through VET and supporting employment of Roma and people with disabilities, orphans and trafficked women in the three research case studies. Increasing their involvement in training courses means that VET providers should cooperate with their representative associations, to provide courses tailored for their needs. Until now their representatives have been more interested in providing cash/material benefits than VET services, to respond to their emergency needs. While parents' associations created for people with mental disabilities are trying to provide by them the training for their children with mental health problems, VE schools and mainly VTC may assist them and work together for social inclusion of such categories.

## **2. VET PRACTICES FOR SOCIAL INCLUSION AND SOCIAL COHESION AT THE LOCAL LEVEL**

### **2.1 Methodology**

The Participatory Action Research (PAR) method has been adopted with the advisory boards, created from the beginning of this research, one at national level and three advisory boards in the selected case studies of Tirana, Elbasan and Durres.<sup>44</sup> This process was realized in close collaboration with the main stakeholders, such as the Ministry of Education and Sciences, (VET sector) which provided us with a letter of invitation for the two VE schools selected for this project. The first point of contact in the MOLSAEO (Department for Monitoring the Social Inclusion Strategy) provided us with information on the social inclusion indicators implemented through the National Strategy for Social Inclusion 2007-2013 and its Evaluation Report. Through discussions with experienced professionals in both Ministries, we gathered the necessary information on the strategies, legislation and institutions operating at national level and in three selected regions, with a special focus also on the role of VET in social inclusion and social cohesion.<sup>45</sup>

The desk review of the strategies and legislation was combined with an intensive fieldwork with FGs, IDI, teachers and students' questionnaires. Participation in various activities initiated by the Ministries and donors was also used as an opportunity to meet and establish contacts with the senior staff of the

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<sup>44</sup> See composition of the advisory boards in the Annex 2.

<sup>45</sup> All the referring documents, from the strategies to studies and reports reviewed are presented in the References.

main executive agencies from MoES and MOLSAEO, directors of VE schools/ VTC, social partners, NGOs, interested groups and international donors. All of them were ready to collaborate in our qualitative research to identify the key issues relating VET impact on social inclusion and social cohesion.<sup>46</sup> In the initial National Advisory Board (NAB) consultation meeting, the research team presented the aim of the research and the main topics of the in-depth interviews and focus group. We discussed the necessary adaptation to the Albanian context of such research instruments, including issues of monitoring the VET system, which was considered important by the MoES representatives.

The local research advisory boards (LAB) were established at the end of November, a period when the VE schools appointed the new Governing School Boards.<sup>47</sup> With advice of the school directors, we approached some of the Board members to be part of our LAB that included the school principal, teachers engaged in professional practices, local employers where students were invited to do their practices, members of the local authorities, of regional employment office and of regional education office. The VE schools principals in Tirana and Durres, and the director of VTC in Elbasan were very much active in establishment of the LAB in their regions, and the first meetings were organized in their offices. They approved the IDI, local focus group content and list of people to be interviewed, together with the teachers' and students' questionnaires.

### **2.1.1 Methodological instruments in national and regional level**

Instruction given in the project Inception Report as well as additional orientations upon the finalization of IDI and FG format has been the leading instrument for their implementation. The design of the methodological instruments, such as templates for IDIs, Focus Groups and Teachers and Students Questionnaires, was centrally coordinated by LSE with inputs from the country research team as well. These templates were translated into the Albanian language; they were revised in discussion with national/local advisory boards.

#### **a. Focus group**

The focus group at national level was organized since the beginning of the research activities with the idea of identifying the VET policies impact on social inclusion and social cohesion. The participants were key policy-makers including representatives of MoES and MoLSAEO, their agencies NAVET and NES, and representatives of the Federation of Education Trade Unions and Council of Employers Organizations. MoES offered the facilities inside the Ministry for a helpful discussion. Through interactive discussions, it was possible for the researchers to identify the key issues relating to VET impact on social inclusion and social cohesion in Albania. The main findings of the focus group discussions were reflected in the focus group report in national level.<sup>48</sup>

#### **b. In-depth interviews**

Once the key research questions had been agreed upon, a series of face-to-face interviews with the key decision-makers in the area of VET and social inclusion were carried out at various levels including:

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<sup>46</sup> See Annex 3 the list of persons interviewed.

<sup>47</sup> The MoES and the MOLSAEO Decision nr.15, dated 23.07.2012 "For Functioning the Boards of the Institutions providing Vocational Education and Training".

<sup>48</sup> A summary of the main issues discussed in each focus group you will find in the Annexes.

- (i) Central government level within the respective MoES, MOLSAEO, VET National Agency, National Employment Service, Institute for Educational Development (IED), and VETNC.
- (ii) Regional government level with representatives of those authorities engaged in VET sector, as the regional branches of MoES and NES in the three case study areas. IDIs were arranged also with the help of school principals.
- (iii) Non-governmental actors from employers associations, trade unions in field of education, business representatives, international donors and NGOs working for VET, social inclusion and social cohesion, at national/local level.
- (iv) School/centre representatives such as school administrators, teachers, parent representatives, and other board members.

In the interviews were invited the representatives of social partners in VET policy bodies, such as the National Council of VET. The President of the Federation of Trade Union of Education and the President of the Employers Organizations gave us a very important interview. At national level was interviewed a considerable number of actors, 10 interviews in total, because the VET system is still operating in a centralised way. As it was suggested, the actors participating in focus group at the national level have been different from those in advisory board. The rich list of actors at national level was made possible also by the researchers' previous experience and already built contacts. Through the interviews, the relationship between VET policy and social inclusion and social cohesion was investigated from the perspective of the different actors in the system.<sup>49</sup> According to LSE's guidelines, the summary of each interview was prepared following the research tasks, including the name, institution, position of the interviewed, location, date and time of the interview..

### **c. Data analysis**

Existing policy strategies on VET and Social Inclusion 2007-2013, and administrative data collected from INSTAT, MoES, MOLSAEO, NES and VET schools/VTC were analysed in order to investigate the relationship between VET policy and social inclusion and social cohesion. The level of analysis included the national administrative data on the structure and outcomes of the educational system as a whole: enrolment rates, resources available, teacher-pupil ratios, and the social composition of the student body, the teaching workforce including their qualification and age, and the degree of social differentiation between schools. Data on the indicators of social cohesion in various areas such as the labour market, poverty, crime and social participation were collected as well using sources of official institutions such as INSTAT, MoLSAEO, MoES, NES and the Ministry of Justice. Recently MoES has created a database with information on VET, and NES a new website for employment services.<sup>50</sup> The social maps of the schools have been very useful, too.<sup>51</sup> At the Ministry of Justice we could find detailed data on juvenile delinquency for the last ten years period. Studies of other organizations related with our topics have been consulted: the evaluation of Kultur Kontakt on PASO project, 2013; a Tracer Study of GIZ on the graduates from VET, 2010; and the School Inventory and Conditions' Survey – Albania 2011, as part of the Western Balkans Investment Framework-EU Funded.

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<sup>49</sup> Policy issues and different practices investigated are documented on one page for each IDI, national & local level, see Annex 7.

<sup>50</sup> [www.vet.al](http://www.vet.al) introduced in 2012, and [www.epunesimi.gov.al](http://www.epunesimi.gov.al) introduced on February 2013 which will facilitate the relations between the employers and the job seekers.

<sup>51</sup> A social map is a detailed statistics on the students' social status in the school with the goal of preparing concrete actions toward their inclusion. The social maps of schools you may find in the Annex 4.

An analysis of the labour market outcomes through LFS (Labour Force Survey) would provide information on the outcomes of the vocational education system, but the results from LFS 2011 as well as from LSMS 2011 are not yet available. There are no other data on social inclusion and social cohesion in the analysis of the MoLSAEO. The CENSUS 2011 data have been referred, but based on that database INSTAT is revising the data on population, so the indicators such as the ratio of students in VET as % of total population aged 15-24 years old and others like that were under revision during our research period.

### **2.1.2 Selection of VET and VTC<sup>52</sup>**

VET schools taking part in the research have been selected in consultations between the ETF and country stakeholders. Two schools were selected, one from the capital, Tirana, and one from a rural area, Shkozë, Durrës, and another VTC in Elbasan, an ex-industrial area. The three regions have the highest number of students/trainees in VET system, compared to other locations in Albania, with around 58% of the graduated trainees from public VTC. These are also the regions with the highest population in the country.<sup>53</sup> The selection of such case studies allows an analysis of the relationship between VET practice and social inclusion in a variety of socio-economic environments. The issues addressed include:

- RT2 the process of accessing vocational education (social background of the students, choice of schools, cost of school attendance, selection processes);
- RT3 drop-out rates and causes of drop-out;
- RT4 the educational processes within the vocational schools: resources available including both finance and equipment, social composition of the pupil body, teacher-pupil ratios, teaching methods, tracking or streaming within schools, degree of autonomy of the school in key areas including budgeting, course design and course mix, selection of students, choice of course by students in relation to gender bias, involvement of local community in life of the school, degree of social differentiation between schools;
- RT5 the transition from school to work: links of the school with local businesses, career guidance provided, employment rates and employability of graduates, destinations of graduates, matching of graduates between skills acquired and jobs attained;
- RT6 the role of VET in promoting social cohesion.

#### **a. Local focus groups and In-depth interviews at the case study sites<sup>54</sup>**

After established the LAB, the local FGs were organized thanks to the very active participation of the VET school's principals. In the local focus groups were invited teachers/trainers, local employers, and members of the school governing boards. The group discussions were helpful in the identification of specific VET issues in each region and in detecting the way in which the main actors cooperate in supporting each other. The discussions showed very clearly the interest of local actors in VET. This was also reflected in the IDI with the local actors, who have been very supportive, opened, and above all, quite easily to be contacted, differently from national level interviewees. As emerged from the interviews in Durrës district, we support the idea that intervention on VET for having an impact on social inclusion and social cohesion should be focused on the regional/local levels. The FGs in the

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<sup>52</sup> See Annex 1.

<sup>53</sup> Referring the statistical data from Ministries in the Annex 6.

<sup>54</sup> See Annex 2 the advisory boards and Annex 3 the selected people for interview.

respective regions were helpful for us to identify the possible actors in VET and social inclusion, such as businesses, NGOs etc. In the three chosen schools/centre, three respective local FGs were organized.<sup>55</sup>

Face-to-face semi-structured interviews in local level have been carried out with the school's principals, other managerial personnel and teachers, the senior staff of the regional and local authorities, regional employment offices, regional education directories, local employers, and NGO representatives. About 10 local IDIs were organized in each region, for a total of 30 IDIL in Tirana, Durres and Elbasan.

#### **b. Students and Teachers questionnaire**

The policies and practices of case study schools were analysed through a variety of data on the social composition of first year students provided by the school social map. The statistical data of the VTC in Elbasan provided a database with a variety of information on the social situation of the trainees, too. Based on that, we identified the students who would participate in the students' questionnaire. In the survey were involved the students of the first and the last years of study, presenting all school profiles. In VTC in Elbasan, all the trainees of age 15-20 filled the questionnaire. The students were selected from all profiles in the first and the last year of each school, respectively 124 in Durres, 120 in Tirana and 37 trainees in Elbasan VTC. We approached all the trainees of age group 15-19 being trained during October 2012-January 2013. This age group represents about 20% of the trainees in VTC Elbasan. In Durres, the questionnaire was filled by the 10% of the students, whereas in Tirana, where the total number of students is lower than in Durres, 15% of all the students completed the questionnaire. The dataset collected through questionnaires, enabled an assessment of the relationship between social exclusion and participation in VET system from the students perspective.

The teacher questionnaire was submitted to all teachers. The teacher questionnaire was filled during their teaching breaks, with the assistance of the school principals, who have been very cooperative during all phases of the research activities. We were able to reach almost all the teachers, respectively 37 in Durres, 30 in Tirana and 17 in Elbasan VTC. The database with students and teachers questionnaire, and the tables with cross indicators was provided for each school and in total. (Annex 7)

**Table 3. Completed field survey**

	Advisory Boards	Focus group	Students questionnaire		Teachers questionnaire	IDIs
			completed	% of total students		
<b>National</b>	1	1	281		84	10
<b>Tirana</b>	1	1	120	15	30	10
<b>Durres</b>	1	1	124	10	37	10
<b>Elbasan</b>	1	1	37	20	17	10

<sup>55</sup> A summary of the main issues discussed in each focus group is in the Annexes.

## 2.2 Situation analysis (in the case study areas)

### 2.2.1 Tirana region

The region of Tirana is situated in central Albania and is composed of 5 municipalities (urban) and 14 communes (rural). Tirana, the capital city, is also located there.

#### *Demography and social situation*

The population of Tirana region has rapidly increased in the last 10 years, rising from 597,899 to 763,634 inhabitants, in urban and rural areas, representing the 27% of the total population of the country. The population density in Tirana Region is the highest in the country, 454 inhabitants/ km<sup>2</sup>, compared to the national population density of 97 inhabitants/ km<sup>2</sup>.<sup>56</sup> The municipality of Tirana has the highest population at regional level (421,286 inhabitants) with the highest population growth. 70.3% of Tirana population live in urban areas and only 29.7% live in rural areas, a different view from the average of the country, reflected also on the composition of the students in VE school. The gender ratio is almost equal with a slightly greater percentage of females (50.3%) than males (49.7%). The population of Tirana has increased during the last decade as a result of population migration from whole Albania. The poverty rate in urban areas is the lowest in Albania (8.7%), 12% of families were beneficiaries of social assistance, which has slightly increased recently due to increase of population in urban areas as a result of population migration from rural areas.<sup>57</sup>

#### *Education*

A considerable number of pre-schools institutions are situated in Tirana, about 12.7% at national scale. Around 15.3% of 9-year schools in Albania are situated in this region – in total 246 schools. There are 100 high schools (51 public and 49 private schools), composing the 20% of the total number of high schools in Albania. Only 21 high schools are VE schools and most of high schools (77%) are situated in the urban areas corresponding with the population distribution in Tirana, concentrated in urban areas.<sup>58</sup>

#### *Labour Market*

Tirana offers greater employment opportunities compared with other regions of Albania, even though, due to the high population density, the unemployment level is relatively high. Unemployment level in the first 9 months of 2012 was 15.5%, while at national level it was 13.8% (INSTAT, 2012, p.10).

#### *Economy*

Tirana has an important role in the development of the country with a GDP index of 150. GDP per capita is 545,000 ALL while GDP per capita at national level is 360,000 ALL (INSTAT, 2009, p.1). The GDP structure is composed mainly by service sector (46.4% of economy), agro business (20.7%), industry (9.7%), construction (14.3%) and transport (8.9%) (METE, 2010, p.5). A considerable part of active enterprises in the country (38.7%) operate in Tirana region (METE 2010, p 39). Here are concentrated 41% of service companies, 39.5% of construction, and 33.3% of production companies in the country.

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<sup>56</sup> INSTAT, Albania Census 2011, p.11.

<sup>57</sup> Tirana District, Region of Tirana Development Strategy

<sup>58</sup> Tirana District, Region of Tirana Development Strategy

### **Technical Economic School of Tirana**

This school was opened in 1947 under the name “Economic Technicum” and since its foundation it has encountered many changes by adjusting the curricula and the academic program to the market needs. From the academic year 2009-2010, a new curriculum has been applied in Economy and Business profile for the first year students, and for the Banking and Accounting in the third level. During the academic year 2012-2013, a new track was opened in Office Management and Business Administration for the third level.

There are 874 students attending this school in academic year 2012-2013, slightly less than five years ago when 979 students attended the school. Female and male ratio is approximately the same, with female students being the 51.5%. Since the school is operating in national level and has also dormitory, students from other regions attending it were about 9% of the total students. Very interesting information can be retrieved by the school social map of academic year 2012-2013. There are 17 students with special needs, 11 of them blind, 4 of them with physical/motor problems, one deaf and one mute. Analysis through interviews and questionnaires enabled us to identify that school has no special arrangement for these categories and they attended classes with other normal students, with a special attention by the teacher and especially their family. According to this social map, only one student belongs to Roma ethnicity, around 2% (19 students) are more likely to use drug or smoke, 8 students tend to drop the school and a total of 66 students have very low results. Moreover, 17 students are repeating the class, 45 have excellent results, 11 students are in need for psychologist and 8 students show aggressive behaviour. Data related to the family situation shows that 6% of students come from families with very low economic level, 4.2% have at least one parent dead, only 15 have the orphan status and 16 have divorced parents. Regarding the parents education level, data shows that the majority of students’ parents (61.6%) have secondary education level, 30.8% have a university degree and only 7.7% have finished elementary school. More information regarding the students’ school map can be found in the school social map at Annex 4.

The school also operates as a training and information centre for all high school teachers of economic profile at national level. This school is also the centre of “ALBIZ “- KulturKontakt project Austria – financed by the Austrian Government in collaboration with the Ministry of Education in the framework of the project for the increase of quality in economic schools 2009-2013. Based on this project, a teacher was selected in each school as PASO (Social Partners Relationship Coordinator) to ensure and enhance the collaboration between schools and social partners who can offer professional practices. There are several agreements between Economic School and Raiffeisen Bank, retail companies, General Directory of Custom, Directory of Taxes and other medium sized companies where the students spend their professional practice hours. There are other organisations that the school collaborates with, but there are no formal agreements signed. PASO and the school staff have approved the 2012-2013 collaboration plans with Alfa and National Commercial Bank.

### **2.2.2 Durres Region**

Durres region lies in the middle of the Western Lowland of Albania and consists of two districts: Durres and Kruja and has a total surface of 766 km<sup>2</sup>, 10 communes and 8 municipalities. One of the most important ports in Albania is situated in the Durres bay, in the coast of this region.

### ***Demography and social situation***

Durres region's population like the one in Tirana increased in the last 10 years from 245,179 to 265,330 inhabitants, especially in urban area where the 79% of the total population is concentrated. (INSTAT, 2011) Durres region was affected by the internal chaotic and not formal migration especially in rural areas where the population doesn't have equal opportunities to access social services in education and health. The rural population reduced as halved in the last 10 years in Durres region. School drop out is higher among pupils in rural areas. About the 10.87% of the population in this region live with pensions. Out of these, 4938 live with a family pension, 5117 with a disability pension and the rest with old-age pension. Also, in the district of Durres there are 2,261 beneficiaries of social assistance. Municipality of Durres has a social housing program and 10% of the beneficiaries come from the Roma community.<sup>59</sup> Durres District has a ten year Regional Development Strategy (2005-2015) with nine objectives, one of which is to "improve social infrastructure and increase the kids and youngsters in the region" (p. 103).

### ***Education***

The district of Durres has an average of 5.5 kindergartens for each municipality and 6.3 kindergartens for each commune. In pre-school education, the public sector is dominant with a cover of 93.2% of the total number of kindergartens. Nine-year schools, spread throughout all the region of Durres, consist of 43,193 students. Less than 5% of students attend non-public nine-year school, which means that over 95% of students attend public education. 10,257 students attend general secondary education, while the rest of them (around 23%) attend professional education. Comparing this figure with the objective set for 2010 to increase the enrolment in VET schools to 45% (of students who finish 9-year education), we can reach the conclusion that enrolment is lower than expected. There are 615 teachers available for 13,395 students, which means, an average of 1 teacher for every 21-22 students.

The only post-secondary vocational school in Albania operates under the umbrella of Aleksander Moisiu University in Durres, the Faculty of Professional Studies offering 2 years study diplomas in nursing, legal assistant, construction manager, practical informatics etc. As part of the AlbVET-supported Swiss program, a new IT branch was opened during the academic year 2010- 2011. The theoretical curriculum is organized by the University of Durres, while the practical curriculum is provided by the VE School Beqir Cela. About 30 students are enrolled in this program. The VET legislation allows for a dual form of VET, which is provided by the Faculty of Integrated Studies with Practice in the Durres University. It has 3 managerial branches of "Bachelor" studies: Bank, Tourism and Entrepreneurship Management.<sup>60</sup>

### ***Labour Market***

Regarding the employment rate, 2009 statistics from the Durres district indicate a labour force of 74,927 people, which are divided into 45,465 males and 29,462 females. Of these, there are 66,443 of total employees (including public employees), 41,654 males and 24,789 females. There are 8,484 unemployed, where 55% are low skilled, followed by 17% of high technical occupations and around 10% of agriculture workers. Durres Municipality is implementing a project on the youth empowerment

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<sup>59</sup> <http://www.qarkudurres.gov.al/new/durres/index.php?pg=fage&id=10&menuid1=8>

<sup>60</sup> Draft Strategy on VET, 2013-2020.



through providing professional support for young people with social problems, who follow the development of a business plan for the purpose of employment in the future.<sup>61</sup>

### **Economy**

Durres is a region with a developing economy and the tourism is the main sector. However, in the district of Durres a large number of businesses spread across the entire county exert their activity. Only in Durres there are 6,970 registered entities operating in trade activities, transport, construction, community services, social activities, as well as fishing and processing industry. Based on sectors and activities there are: around 622 activities in the manufacturing sector, 371 activities in building, 689 activities in transport, 3,256 activities in trade and 2,032 activities in services.

### **Beqir Cela Vocational School**

"Beqir Cela" school is located in the neighbourhood of Shkozë, Durres. This school operates in the building of an ex- agricultural engineering school closed after the year 1990. This school in 2009 was elected as the best technical school in Albania. The school was reconstructed in 1993 as a result of governmental agreement with Swiss Government. The collaboration with Swisscontact was continuing.

Number of students has rapidly increased during last year's. In the academic year 2009-2010, the number of students was 521, and in the first year 243 students were enrolled. In the academic year 2012-2013, the number of students is 1,134 and in the first year 446 students were enrolled. There are four profiles offered in this school: auto-agro-mechanic, electro-mechanic, installers of plumbing and heating equipment, and ICT. The school provides workshops, where practices and theoretical classes are offered: four workshops for auto mechanic and one under construction, workshop of commanding technique, electro domestic, installation techniques, mix electricity (under construction), working at the counter, welding, leather, agricultural, hydraulics, heating unit installations; three computer labs, two post-secondary lab, multimedia room, meetings and activities room, cabinet of autos, cabinet of technical drawing, electrical cabinet, electrical cabinet technology, cabinet of hydraulics, general cabinets as: mathematics, physics, chemistry, etc. Beqir Cela students are quite attractive to the business sector. It is the sector itself that requires the third year students to conduct the practice hours nearby them. In this way the school has a very good collaboration with professional businesses. The school is currently collaborating with 37 businesses.

## **2.2.3 Elbasan Region**

### **Demographic data**

Elbasan region is located in the centre of Albania, on the border with Tirana and Durres, with an area of 3,292-kilometre square and includes 7 municipalities and 43 communes. Its population decreased in the last ten years from 362,736 to 296,082 inhabitants with an average age of 32.8 years old, dominated by rural population (179,111). Most of the territory is comprised by mountains and hills (respectively 38% and 34% of the territory).

### **Education**

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<sup>61</sup> Draft Report Evaluation of the National Strategy on Social Inclusion 2007-2013 prepared by the Albanian Center for Economic Research, on October 2012, page 28.

There are education institutions of all levels in Elbasan: (i) kindergartens (a total of 182 kindergartens, out of each six of them are private ones, with 8,520 children); (ii) nine- years schools providing the compulsory education (a total of 274 schools attended by 49,506 pupils, out of each 549 pupils are attending the private schools) with approximately 61.6% (30,524) of pupils in the rural area; and (iii) high schools.

The high school education level is offered by 53 schools and only eight of them are vocational education schools with an attraction rate of only 14% of students (2310 students), compared with 86% (13953 students) who prefer general high schools. Based on this reality, a Strategy for Vocational Education has been prepared at district level by the Regional VET Board, aiming to orient the VET offer in most required specialists fields such as in construction, hospitality, furniture, sawing artisans, etc. In 2009 it was created a Regional Committee for VET with the mission of assessing VET needs and of developing a qualitative supply of VET.

In Elbasan region there is also the public Aleksander Xhuvani University. Based on the 2010 statistics, there are a total of 9,547 students enrolled (dominated by a 66% female students) in faculties of natural sciences, economic, human science, foreign language, education, social science and nursing. Since the academic year 2010 -2011, other post-secondary programs are offered for Laboratory Technicians by the University of Elbasan (about 50 students).

### **Labour Market**

Based on official data, the unemployment in Elbasan region is one of the highest in the country and the majority of employees result as self-employed in agricultural sector. Based on the district calculations of employability (without agriculture), the majority of employment is in public entities (56%), than self-employment or small businesses with one employee (24%) and 12% are employed in big enterprises. This last sector is very important for the region economy and will be discussed in further paragraphs.

### **Economy**

Based on INSTAT data of 2011, the structure of the economy in Elbasan region is oriented toward services and trade, respectively 42% and 22% of the enterprises. Other sectors such as producers of goods, hotels, coffee and restaurants, transport and communication, compose a total of 22.3%. This region used to be an industrialized area before the 1990s with the metallurgic factory processing steel and iron, employing approximately 16,000 employees. Only 5.2 % of enterprises operate in the industry sector (heavy, processing and light & food industry), producing construction materials (iron, cement, bricks etc.), furniture, food, fresh drinks etc.

### ***Vulnerable groups***

The poverty is spread in this region with about 9,19% of families living in poverty, 1 out of 6 children live in families who benefit from economic assistance. This region has a lot of social problems related with vulnerable groups such as children, women, limited abilities persons, elderly and Roma population. This is why a regional social plan is formulated with the involvement of interested stakeholders with the aim of reducing social exclusion. A Committee for Evaluation and Orientation on Social Policy was also created under the District Council with 15 members representative of district, municipality, Social Security Service, NES, Regional Education Directory, media, business and NGOs.

### **Elbasan Vocational Training Centre**

Elbasan Regional VTC offers different types of courses in auto mechanic, plumbing, electrician technician, brick layer, welding, TV-repair, hairdresser, cooking, sewing, social animator, foreign languages such as English and Italian, computer, household equipment repair, babysitting, computer repair, secretary. In the Annex 4, is provided a detailed overview of the social excluded groups following these courses. Compared with 2011, during the first 9 months of 2012, the percentage of 16-19 years old trainees was increased from 15% to 20% of the total trainees. In 2011, approximately 15% of registered unemployed of 15-24 years old were following the courses, or 2,085 persons of the group age 15-19. The number of Roma people trained was increased from 18 in 2007 to 166 persons in 2011; people with disabilities trained were increased from 2 persons in 2007 to 31 persons in 2011. Around 13% of trainees in 2012 were prisoners. Most of the trainees are from rural areas. The majority of courses belong to professional category versus complementary ones (computer and foreign language).

This centre was newly renovated and transformed into a modern training centre close to European standards, as a result of a total of 1.5 million dollars investments for the period 2007-2012, by donors and government. There are 11-12 classrooms in the centre and 14-15 workstations, a dormitory with 180 beds and a eating court and bar as well. A sports area is in its final stage of construction with a basketball, volleyball and football field.

VTC in Elbasan has a close collaboration with different actors such as EU, Forli –Cesena municipality, NGOs (such as World Vision, Other Vision, “A dream more”, “Help for children”, “In family for the family”, etc., and business in the area such as “DOKO” construction, “Asllani” clothing, “Flobest” etc.

### **2.3. PAR research process and research findings**

PAR research process has been crucial and very helpful to gather data and information, with the assistance and inputs of the advisory boards at national and local level. Insights into the six research tasks in the three case study areas are provided through combination of students and teachers’ questionnaires, IDIs, FGs and desk research as well. Advisory boards have informed us regarding the main strategic documents, such as the Draft National Strategy on VET 2013-2020, district VET strategy (Elbasan), IPA VET project (Durrës), PASO project in Tirana Technical Economic School and many other VET projects with impact on social inclusion and social cohesion. Focus groups, IDIs and teachers and students’ questionnaires have provided us with detailed information for arguing the research tasks. Although the aim of the questionnaire was to identify mechanisms of social exclusion at entry to the school and during the school experience, from the students and teachers view. Information about the transition from school to work is obtained from the IDI with other local stakeholders.

The role of VET for social inclusion and cohesion is evaluated at several stages. The first stage is the policy design referring to the strategic document. The second stage is entry into the VET system and the impact of choices concerning general versus vocational secondary education tracks. The third stage is whether a student completes the VET path or drops out. The fourth is the experience inside the school, and the level of knowledge and skills gained during professional experience in businesses or within virtual classes in school. The transition from school to work and the determinants of the first job that a

graduate of VET obtains, whether this is well matched, or whether the student finds a job at all, is considered as the main challenge for VET in relation to social inclusion of students with a low background. Then, the role of VET for social cohesion is evaluated in a broader context, referring to the connection of school with the whole community and integration of activities in community level.

The research has identified the main barriers to policy reform to the VET systems which are holding back the development of the social inclusion and social cohesion role of VET in Albania. Lack of solid and reliable evidence (data) on vulnerable groups to inform policy is the first one.<sup>62</sup> The participatory approach of integration the activities of different actors is the second, and the third is school infrastructure and the adequate teachers' qualification.

***Research Task 1: to map the different policies towards VET, social inclusion and social cohesion and assess the relationship between them***

The VET schools/centres have opened their doors for attracting people from disadvantaged backgrounds. In the framework of other sector strategies of the MOLSAEO, in Tirana VE School was designed the *Strategy Supporting the Disabled Students in School, and the Strategy of Integrating the Students Returning from Migration*. The schools have developed their own action plan to identify possible problems with students. Every school has now a part-time school psychologist responsible to create the social map with social and economic data of all new entrants. School psychologist together with the school administrators, create a participatory action plan toward inclusive teaching and social environment. These documents, as other strategies, are designed carefully, but, to be successfully implemented, a greater interest and action of different community actors is necessary. The new Governing Boards of Schools with a broader participation from community stakeholders was expected to better mobilize the local resources in supporting the school activities for social inclusion of vulnerable students. Curricula have also been reformed to make VET more attractive and equip VET students with the necessary skills of being included in labour market or business community. Below is cited the interview with the head of Curricula and Teacher Training Sector in IED (Institute for Educational Development).

In every 9 year school, as well as in secondary schools, including VET schools, there is a special subject: career guidance (54 teaching hours per year). In this subject are gained skills such as (i) labour market study; (ii) how to know one self, to set and develop personal goals; (iii) the financial aspect of personal plan. This way the students can get a realistic view of the vocations offered and demanded in the labour market (including their speciality). Knowing themselves and setting clear realistic personal goals is supposed to lead them to a more realistic decision about their future. Having basic information on financial planning makes the students' decision more realistic because they will be able to financially evaluate the alternatives of going to university, opening their own business, or finding a job. (cit: Mirela Andoni, IED)

Such changes will better prepare the students who enter the VET school with entrepreneurship skills, to take more initiatives after their graduation. *Referring the data from students' questionnaire, regarding their plans for the future (S33), 86% of students are looking for paid work.* More specifically, this is the opinion of 87% of students in Economic School, 86% of students in Durres (where 89% of students in

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<sup>62</sup> LSMS and LFS as the two main national surveys based on a correct methodology are not providing their data on time; still in March 2013 there are not available the data of such surveys done in 2011.

electro-mechanics and 80% in auto-mechanic) and 86% of trainees in VTC in Elbasan. The tendency to emigrate is the least chosen alternative, by only 28% of students and 32% of males.<sup>63</sup>

As a new agency, NAVET needs more support to be transformed into an independent agency for supporting all VET providers with new curricula. This agency has limited resources to mobilize professionals in preparing curricula also for VTC, as NAVET is currently funded only by the MoES budget.

**“The curriculum that is provided by NES is in much need of update.** The field I teach (auto mechanic) has evolved very much the last years. Everything is going through modernisation and electronic & IT have replaced the mechanic and manual defect’s identification. Less and less our business deals with repair of spare parts, we mostly deal with defect’s identification and changing of spare parts. This reality requires a fundamental update of the curricula if we want these kids to be prepared for labour market. But the curricula update should be centrally managed and requires additional funds, which are not available. Following the above concern, offering properly modern and up to date training courses in auto mechanic, requires not only well-equipped workstations but also computers to teach the software in this regard. This equipment cost is difficult to be provided by the VTC in Elbasan. The auto mechanic course curricula also include practise hours. The centre has workstations equipped with “teaching materials” which mainly are old cars. In order to be updated with the latest technology, the students are sent to businesses. Since I own a business operating in this field, which is the only one with defect detection electronic equipment, I spend some teaching hours there with my students.” (IDI with Xhaferr Vercani, a businessman engaged as trainer in Elbasan VTC).

The above opinion was a typical one given by the business engaged in training courses offered in VTC, whose curricula are not supported by NAVET, as the MOLSAEO is not providing any budget for it. The cooperation with the businesses offered to support the VET system, is seen as the best way for changing the situation of VET structure and infrastructure. Through donors projects (EU-IPA, ETF, KulturKontakt Austria, Swiss-contact, GIZ), the new tendency of VE schools to be opened to their communities was enforced. In Durres district, the IPA project is directed to Beqir Cela School in improving its profiles and curricula based on the assessment of the regional labour market demand as well as financing new laboratories. While in Elbasan there is a collaboration of the VTC with vocational schools toward a more efficient capacity usage – the Ali Myftiu vocational school will use the workstations at Elbasan VTC in automotive repair. In the case of VTC, the collaboration with community based NGOs for supporting vulnerable groups such as Roma, people with disabilities, returned emigrants, ex-prisoners and trafficked women, have been part of their practices.

Fragmentation of the VET policy until now is expected to be replaced by an integrated approach of MoES and MOLSAEO, and their collaboration with all interested stakeholders. In local level, it can be reflected on closer collaboration of VE schools with VTC, which is the idea of multifunctional VE school.<sup>64</sup> The multifunctional model of VET schools aims not only orientation of VET offer towards the labour market demands, but also increasing the role of VET in social inclusion and social cohesion. Introducing occupational outcomes-based on short-term programs for those threatened by social exclusion such as people with disabilities or Roma, based on the example of VTC Elbasan, or UNDP Durres project, (hairdresser, bread-maker) will be more attractive for such categories. Appointing the teacher/ trainer from their group being trained/toughed (following the example of Roma trainer in hairdressing courses in Durres) would increase the motivation of them to the VET system.

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<sup>63</sup> It is important to note here that students responded to question 34 of the questionnaire even if the response to question 33 was yes.

<sup>64</sup> The idea expressed from IDI with representatives from both MoES and MOLSAEO.

***Research Task 2: The influence of selection & tracking on social inclusion***

VET policies toward social inclusion at entry to the school were measured through the students and teachers' questionnaire, statistical data, IDI, focus groups, and school social map by which we concluded that there are no barriers in terms of opportunities, access, and treatment of pupils applying to VET system. Even if all students who finish the compulsory education, less than 17 years old are allowed to be enrolled in VE, access for disabled students remains problematic. According to the School Inventory and Conditions' Survey - Albania 2011 "4.1% of School Buildings in Albania are wheelchair accessible, 2.4% are accessible to the ground floor only. Only 1.7% of buildings have classrooms that are easily accessible without a ramp. Only 5% of School Buildings in Albania have at least one toilet adapted for handicap use, most of these are in urban areas".<sup>65</sup> Some of the school are doing their best to accommodate disabled students in the existing infrastructure. Economic school for example is accommodating the physical disabled students in the first floors and dedicates one bathroom to them – even if neither of solutions meets the EU standards.

There is evident a gender gaps in VET participation in Albania, less than 15% of students are female. In one of our case study schools (Beqir Cela), all students were males. Some of the vocations the students choose are considered more as male domains. The vulnerable groups supported with scholarships are: students of the ex-political persecuted, disabled, orphans, poor, Roma and those leaving more than 5 km distance from VE schools. Removing enrolment exams at entry to VE schools (Tirana) and issued scholarships for special profiles such as veterinary, forestry, construction, and IT, aiming to promote these vocations required in the market have increased the number of students in VE schools.

The enrolment of students in academic year 2012-2013 has increased by 20% in Tirana school and almost doubled in Durres school, compared with 2011-2012, as a result of many initiatives such as: (i) promotional campaign (school open days with students, teacher and business representation, distributed flyers and school brochures, training firm fair in Tirana); (ii) limitation of selection criteria only to age (maximum 17) and education (compulsory education of 9-years should be completed). Previously, students were selected also on the basis of their compulsory education average grade, the city/village where the students come from (since there were précised quotas for students coming from different areas); enrolment exam. (iii) Opening of new profiles– office administration in Tirana and IT in Durres, attracted more students. Regarding tracking, students are free to choose their preferred profile. The initial differences in academic results, associated with differences in socio-economic background of VET students, are managed by extracurricular teaching in math, physics and chemistry since the entrance to school.

Although formally is not allowed enrolment in the VET system without finishing compulsory 9-years education, there are cases of concessions to allow Roma to follow training courses. The main problem for the Roma education is the lack of elementary education, at least basic literacy skills. The Roma children are registered in training courses at VTC if they are 14-16 years old, with permission from the Labour Inspectorate. There are promoted good models of the previous successful Roma girls (hairdresser) and boys (bread-maker) in Durres training program of UNDP.

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<sup>65</sup> Final results presentation on the 2.12.2011 Conference.

After finishing VET school, the graduates who wish to continue higher education, have the same opportunities and follow the same procedure to be enrolled in university, as students in gymnasium. That is another reason why VET has become more attractive last years. From the students' questionnaires, we revealed that "further study opportunities" was an important reason to follow this school, especially for females of Economic School (4.5 points). Traditionally in the Albanian families and also in the education policy of the previous regime, was followed a preferential policy for females education compared with males. Students with low family status, in cases of unemployed mother and father, choose VET with the hope to find employment and have more money. Almost 80% of students in the case study schools have at least one unemployed parent, mostly their mothers. The students' questionnaire showed a moderate level of family influence in school selection (S20.e mean score 2.8), compared with other reasons. Last years the VET schools reputation has increased with the support of District Council projects, and Regional Education Departments' awareness campaigns.

A second chance is given through part-time VET for those above 17 years old, and there are no numerical limits in the acceptance of students. In both case study schools there are no part-time programs, as the schools are operating in full capacity during morning and afternoon, due to the teaching in shifts in a situation of increased number of students.

***Research Task 3: To map the extent of dropout from vocational education and assess the influence of drop-put on social inclusion.***

In order to be enrolled in VE second or third level (2+1+1) (2+2), the students should have an average of at least 8, but this criterion is not applied any more as VET students have low results. Their average mark is 6 since the entrance.<sup>66</sup> From the interviews with VET school/centre directors resulted that all of the students are completing the four year studies to be more favoured in their employment, which is also the main motivation for the selection of such schools, as resulted from students' questionnaire. Students in Economic School have a very low rate of drop out, less than 1%. This is also reflected in the level of happiness in the school that is high 7.76, while only for economy and business freshman students is 8, meaning that during the school years, the level of happiness slightly decreases but still remains high.

Beqir Cela students drop rate is low. During the academic year 2011-2012, this rate was 5%. The main reason why the students leave the school is because they have low grades and loose the motivation to repeat the year, since they have difficulties to catch up with their peers. Students' questionnaires also confirms this statement of school director based on students results school statistics, according to which the students average grade is middle-low (S32 mean score 2.3). The majority of these students are in the first year and have low academic achievements from compulsory education (S32 mean score for freshmen are 2.5). To prevent the school dropout, Beqir Cela school has organized assessment exams for the first year students in math, chemistry and physics and in this way the teachers identify who are the students more in need for extra hours of teaching (which currently are offered as supplementary unpaid working hours). The school principal wants to implement a project focused in assisting problematic students with extra-hours after their classes, with assistance of teachers and their peers.

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<sup>66</sup> The Albanian education evaluation system varied from 4 – the negative mark, 5 – the lowest pass mark to 10 the maximum mark, excellent.

Other reasons of drop out in the first year might be that even if the students' expectations changed during the first year, they are practically "stuck" in the system. The actual system of high school enrolment prevents the students of VET schools to be transferred to gymnasium and vice versa at the end of first year, leading so to a lower level of drop out, but to an eventual low motivation. As most of the VET students have scholarships, they may change the school, but not drop-out of the VET system. The same situation is in VTC, vulnerable groups are trained free of charge in principle and they have finished the short-term courses to receive the Certificate. The argument of introduction the training fee was that drop-out cases from VTC trainees happened when training was offered free of charge.<sup>67</sup>

All VET schools/centre share the same situation on the behaviour problems (motivation, discipline, absenteeism and bullying). The major problem was students' motivation, whereas bullying doesn't result as a problem. From the students' questionnaire we find out that students are very happy with their schools and their motivation is not related with school environment, distance, cost, but with their interesting courses and developing professional skills. Both schools and VTC have a good reputation in their communities. Both schools were operating in two shifts, as there are not available classrooms. Usually the first classes X-XI begin teaching in the morning and class XII and XIII begin teaching in the afternoon. This is considered problematic for the parents since, the second shift ends late in the afternoon, whereas for the students, the school environment and transport is not an issue at all.

***Research Task 4: To map the different patterns of school-based vocational education and apprenticeship systems and assess their influence on social inclusion***

As the VET is more oriented to the market, its curriculum is too narrowly focused on subject specific skills, competencies, and attitudes. It is leading to poor quality education for lower ability groups. Curricular differences and organization of professional practices is different in the two VE schools, and of course in VTC in Elbasan, so it was seen appropriate to treat this issue separately for each of them.

#### **4.1 Economic School - Tirana**

Economic School curricula have a composition of theoretical and practical modules. In the theoretical curricula group are included general knowledge subjects (38% to 52%) and professional subjects (25% to 31%) such as accounting, firm management, banks etc. In the practice curricula group are included professional practices modules (15% to 36%) developed in-school, in classes designed like offices where the students have their own file and learn about different manager and accountant tasks. Training firms are also part of the curricula. Students are organized in groups and manage virtual firms, connected in a wider international network of training firms of schools in other states. Once a year, these training firms organize a fair and the best training firm (selected by the school administration and teachers of professional subjects) participates to international training firms fairs. In practice, curricula group, are included also elective professional practice modules (3% to 9%), organized nearby different businesses and institutions. Theory-practice proportions change according to the different years, levels and tracks. Students' questionnaire show that around six hours per week are spent in the school for practice and approximately three hours/week are spent in the companies. Regarding practice hours in the company, the variance is high since students of different years have different curricula. Training

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<sup>67</sup> Opinion from the interview with the Director of VTC Elbasan.



firms and “office hours”<sup>68</sup> are considered as very good for students practice but still these are school based. Practices near the public and private institutions on the other side have a major influence in the students gaining practical skills. This is the goal of ALBIZ project of Kultur Kontakt Austria financed by Austrian Government in collaboration with MoES in the frame of increasing the quality of economic schools 2009-2013. Part of the project assistance is the creation of PASO (Social Partners Relationship Coordinator), an appointed schoolteacher responsible to ensure and enhance the collaboration between school and social partners. Economic School PASO was able to sign formal contracts with banks such as Raiffeisen Bank, retail companies such as Megatek, General Directory of Custom, of Taxes and other SME where the students spend their practice hours. Some of students are being enrolled nearby the family businesses for their professional practice.

#### **4.2 Beqir Cela - Durres**

Beqir Cela School has a curriculum of 50% practice as reflected also in the high number of hours reported by the students’ questionnaire (14.8 hours per week). Teaching hours are given to the school workstations as well as to the businesses. There are at least 17 teachers for practice classes only and three of them are responsible for building relations with businesses. All this process is coordinated by the Workstation Directress. Students are organized in groups and spend two weeks per month (during the third year) in different organizations. Beqir Cela was awarded as the best VET school for two years in row, mainly because of its good relationship with private companies. It was considered as an important hub linking VET students and potential employers through practical work in the premises of local businesses. It is expected that by these on-job training hours, students gain a lot of life skills because learn a lot regarding intrapersonal relationships in the work environment.

It can be noted that some businesses are positive and welcome students for practice.<sup>69</sup> There are a lot of businesses in the area operating in the fields the students study and the workstation & practice coordinator states there was never a problem of allocating the students for practice not only to the big, but also to the small businesses. Some of the school instructors are also running their businesses and students spend the practice hour near these businesses. This is a practice followed much more by electric & plumber instructors who are managing small business contracted by construction firms which were prospering these years especially building hotels and apartments in the seaside. There are sporadic cases of students doing their practice near their family businesses.

#### **4.3 Regional Vocational Training Centre**

Training courses have a type of curricula focused more on practice as reflected also in the high number of hours reported by the students’ in their questionnaire (16.8 hours per week). The centre has all the necessary equipment for the practice hours, but when necessary (for example to see how modern equipment function in automotive defect detection) the students go to the businesses. Still, there is a problem regarding the students practice near the business sets. Students are required to have a life insurance, which for the moment is paid by the students. This can be considered as a barrier for them, especially for the ones coming from poor families. Another problem related with the students’ acceptance for practice is the business opinion regarding low level of skills the students have and the

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<sup>68</sup> Office hours are the practice hours. Are called office since the classroom is organized as an office and the students perform different tasks of bank officers, accountants etc.

<sup>69</sup> From the interview with the new elected Governing Board of the Beqir Cela School, owner of one of businesses hosting students for practices, Mr. Arben Puhumi.

resistance of businesses to include the students in different tasks, as their clients can refuse receiving the service by a “kursant”, as they called trainees.

***Research Task 5: To map the transition from VET to work and assess the different ways in which this transition reflects differences in social inclusion***

Based on the statistical data of the Albanian Agency of Evaluation of State Matura,<sup>70</sup> approximately 10% of students from VE schools are following the universities. The same figure is confirmed from the interviews with the teachers in Beqir Cela, differently from the situation in Economic school in Tirana, where about 90% of their graduates are continuing the universities. It was confirmed from the students' questionnaire, where the girls are more likely to follow post secondary studies compared with boys, which is the case of Tirana school, as the Durresi school has no girls students at all. While Elbasan and Durres present a good example of collaboration with VET school/centre with employment offices, in Tirana this link is weaker, related with the fact that majority of graduates from Economic School are following the university and are not registered as job seekers.

### **5.1 Economic School - Tirana**

The Economic School student main interest is to continue university and be employed in the economic field in a higher level, not just as qualified workers. Among the main reason why the students selected this school, there was that of “further study opportunities” (mean score 4.5 in school level and 4.5 in economy & business branch (1<sup>st</sup> year)) which corresponds with the students' behaviour in reality. The students' questionnaire shows that students consider this particular school important for their further studies, in the question “Reason for choice of vocational school in preference to other type of school”. IDI with the parent representative also supported this result “I want my child to be a good economist, this is why we choose this school”, she says. Still, 90% of students express their opinion of searching for a paid job after finishing the school – might be the case of applying for part time job or attending the university part time.

Business representatives believe that Economic School students can be very good employees for the entry level positions. PASO initiatives have approached different companies, even big ones who are interested not only for practice, but also for full time employees, since students employment is actually the final goal of this initiative. Raiffeisen Bank selected the most prominent students and offered them a part time job. Enterprises are interested in employing technicians with a high school (not the university) diploma because the turnover rate of these employees will be lower since they won't aspire promotion. But what is happening in reality is that the firms aim to choose the best students who actually don't want to stay in the assistant positions but have expectations (and actually capacity) to be promoted. This is why the students rather leave the job and go to university.

Even if programs of the VET school prepares technicians ready to enter into the labour market and different private companies would be willing to employ them in entry positions (since they are not likely to increase the employee turnover rate by not having aspirations of promotion), approximately

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<sup>70</sup> Based on the statistical data of the Albanian Agency of Evaluation of State Matura, in 2011 from 21,451 winner students, 2,618 of them were from VET schools; in 2010 from 19,826 winners 2,590 were from VET; in 2009 from 18,872 winners in total 2,824 were from VET; and in 2008, from 15,724 winners, 2,565 were from VET.

98% of them follow the University (part time or full time) and a very small percentage of them enter into the labour market.

### **5.2 Beqir Cela – Durres**

According to a tracer study conducted in 2010<sup>71</sup>, 60-70% of the students finishing this school are employed in the proper vocation. Actually, one of the most required profile by companies is the auto mechanic branch, because in Albania there will always be needed technicians to repair cars – which are products with a long life cycle compared with households (which can be repaired by technicians prepared by the other main branch, electrician) that now are having a shorter life cycle and in cases of defects it is more probable to change spare parts and sometimes cheaper to buy than to repair.

Students academic results influence also the type of institutions students are employed. Best students go to bigger companies. Actually four of the AG Motors best employees are coming from BC school. The region between Tirana & Durres is being developed day by day and more and more opportunities are being available, especially in automotive industry. From the business side its considered that students finishing this school have the basic necessary skills to be employed in these businesses operating with the newest technology. Students with low results, after graduation, are employed in the places of their internships or family business or are self-employed. Around 10-15% of graduates continue the higher education (university). A small percentage of them, choose to change vocation.

When asked about any eventual help to find a job, students indicate family as the most successful channel and then friends (respective S.36 mean scores are 3.9 and 3.3). Employment offices, even if they have such an intensive job offering and coordination, are not seen by the students such an important factor in helping finding a job.

### **5.3 Regional Vocational Training Centre**

Based on the statistics of the Centre, the 30-40% of trainees are employed or self-employed after finishing the course. There are also cases of already employed trainees who need the certificate to keep their job and this might be a reason why the employment rates after attending the courses are pretty low. This might also be as a result of the low economic situation of the area.

There are also VE schools operating in the area. Ali Myftiu is one of these schools. The interview with this school director was useful to get a more complete overview of the real possibilities VET students/trainees have. It results that more and more students prefer being enrolled in universities, especially in the business economy branch. There were many cases of the economy track students employment in company entry levels, such as teller, cashier in QTU (Trade Centre).

With the goal of not only attracting VET students, but also assisting them to find a job, YES (Youth Employment Service” project financed by UNICEF), aims increasing employment opportunities through organized trainings, for example helping in how to prepare a CV & letter of motivation and other formal communication skills. Trainings in the field of “How to open and manage a business” are also offered in order to increase the percentage of those who after finishing a VE school or professional course can be self-employed.

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<sup>71</sup> Referring the study done by Edlira Muhedini VET expert.

Some good cases were documented at NGOs operating in the area. “*Useful to Albanian Women*” NGO, (through its centre “Today for the Future”), offers to young trainees (i) working during training and/or (ii) the necessary skills to search for a job or open a small business. The training centre is operating as a social business for the chef training course. The trainees are preparing catering services for different events (mainly to international organizations). The last event was in January 2013, an OSCE 3 day conference in Elbasan, for which the trainees prepared a total of six meals for more than hundred participants. Besides its learning value, it increases the self-confidence of trainees. The results are very promising, as 100% of the chef trainees are employed after the course completion.<sup>72</sup>

### ***Research Task 6: The role of VET in promoting social cohesion***

VET schools promote intercultural exchanges and social cohesion at national level. Whereas the VTC in Elbasan operates at regional level, it is applying to be a national VTC to take advantage of the greater resources available to a VET school/centre operating at national level and the greater autonomy from the regional/local authorities.

Referring to the question on school rating (SQ 29), all of the students give high scores on several categories. Friendliness of other students is rated higher in VTC, which suggests that the solidarity, support and respect for the others were higher among the most vulnerable groups. Spending more practice hours, (Durrës and VTC Elbasan about 15 hours/week, referring both students and teachers’ questionnaire) the students develop friendships as a good start for network of professionals in the future.

The extracurricular activities are a tool for combating all forms of discrimination between young people, for example in sports where they are mostly engaged, more than 50% referring to (SQ31), especially boys of Beqir Cela. On the other side, the school is not offering extracurricular activities, so their social engagement is very low in volunteer work, etc.

Based on the teachers’ opinion on the school environment, all the schools tend to provide a positive environment. Beqir Cela and Vocational Centre shows higher rate than the Economic school on care and trust welcoming students, respect for the community and students. VTC rates respect for the community as the highest (S17.c mean score 4.8) among all criteria. Economic School consultation with parents is higher, which corresponds also with the school administration and the parents’ representative interview - conforming that parents are an important supporter in school life, e.g. investing for heating.

To identify the extent to which VET policies have been oriented towards addressing social cohesion issues such as ethnic problems including ethnic discrimination in education systems, the opinions of all key policy makers and local stakeholders show that there is not any discrimination at all, although the Roma and Egyptians usually are not following the secondary level of education, not VE schools. Regarding the preference for students, Economic School is more seeking for privileged background students (70% of teachers state this). For the same category, VTC teachers rate the lowest (only 29% of them state that the centre is seeking for privileged trainees) and the majority of them respond that are oriented towards the less privileged background students, those with learning difficulties, students with disabilities and ethnic minorities. This corresponds with the centre orientation toward vulnerable

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<sup>72</sup> Ms. Bukuroshe Manaj, Directress of this NGO considers this is a very good experience for the trainees.

groups. Beqir Cela teachers confirm the school gender orientation pro boys vs. girls, since 68% of teachers answered “yes” to the question whether the school seeks to attract boys more than girls.

New part-time position of psychologist to assist the students with problems is considered helpful, but not adequate for the students’ background of such VE schools. Counselling and career guidance centre are missing inside the schools, and the teachers are assisting as much as they can. Friendliness of teachers is considered high, about 4 points from the students’ questionnaire, of course higher for the students of the first year (4.2/4.15). For sure, it is related with the teacher subject knowledge, which is considered very high in all cases, average 4.5, and for VTC trainees is considered even higher, 4.86. It can be explained even with the very low level of knowledge of the trainees. Because of the high reputation of both schools, they benefit from attracting better teachers and have higher quality teaching. Good teachers could reduce the student differences from the beginning with extra teaching for those in need. But it is not enough the schools should be opened and proactive in collaboration with other community institutions, such as local authorities, employment services, NGOs and business organizations.

Statistics from Ministry of Justice have also shown a positive relationship between VET and reduced levels of criminal activity, as most of the juvenile delinquency have no secondary level of education and dominate the rural population. In this context, VET has an important role in social integration as most of VET students are from suburban and rural areas. The part-time psychologist should be supported by a social worker to deal with relations of school with families and other community stakeholders.

## **2.4 Comparative analysis of vocational education, social inclusion practices and social cohesion**

### **1. Selection and tracking (RT 2)**

Referring to the students’ questionnaire, employment results as the main reason the students choose the VET system vs. other systems (S20.d mean score 4.4). When asked about this particular VE school, the reason was the same, but a stronger one (S19.e mean score 4.4). This leads to the conclusion that both schools selected have a high reputation. Beqir Cela courses (auto mechanic and electro mechanic) have this as a main reason (S19.e mean score respectively 4.2, 4.1) which corresponds also with their employment opportunities. The reason becomes strong when father is unemployed (mean 4.3) and stronger when both parents are unemployed (mean 4.4). The doubled number of students in the academic year 2012-2013 should increase the responsibility of school to respond to their diversity of needs, through flexible curricula, and new female profiles, which was their weakest point compared with Economic school.

Further study opportunities have also resulted as an important reason for choosing this VE school (S19.f 4.1 in total) but, here, Economic school students have a major result (4.5) and girls have “further studies reason” stronger than boys (4.5 vs. 4). Increasing the opportunities for university studies for students of Durres school to be reflected on improving the students’ results through their extra teaching project.

Teachers are somehow expressing the school policy to attract special categories of students, and differently from B.Cela, the Economic school have 17 special need students and a school-based strategy for their treatment. It can also be noticed the VTC orientation toward more vulnerable groups, reflected the situation of Elbasan region with high level of unemployment and people with disabilities. Beqir Cela

orientation toward student's professional profile, a strong reason for attracting the rural students who can easily find a job in a coastal region in rapid development, especially in tourism. Regarding question (S.21), Economic School and VTC are the ones who dominate on the promotion of social inclusion based on their teachers' opinion. Economic School is operating in a favourable social environment, with a lot of opportunities, easily to be accessed in the centre of Tirana, while Beqir Cela is more concerned about developing technicians in specific profiles, which are not suitable for people with disabilities.

The schools do not divide the students according to their abilities or results. Even if the teachers questionnaire shows us that this happens (40% in Economic School and 43% in Beqir Cela school), the school administrators do not confirm this as a formal procedure. Probably we have a case of misunderstanding where the teachers refer to individual work. They indicate that this wouldn't be a successful strategy because the segregation of students will influence first in their motivation to learn (the weakest students are less eager to learn) and also in not objectively evaluation, because the teachers will somehow be influenced and be more tolerant in the "bad students class" and more severe in the "good students class". While 88% of VTC teacher confirmed also this division, probably referring to specialized training courses for Roma.

## **2. Drop out (RT 3)**

Drop-out rate in all case study areas is low but with a variety of reasons. Economic school and Beqir Cela students don't drop-out because they need to finish all levels to accomplish their goal of entering school (respectively university enrolment and employment). VTC trainees have short term courses and there was no reason to drop out as they have highest level of happiness with the training, (S21 average mean score 7.9/ VTC 9.2), because courses are more practice based and adjusted to the trainees needs. Students feel that they are learning from the courses they follow. The total result is 3.5 but there are differences between schools. VTC trainees show the highest results (4.5) while Beqir Cela students answer is the lowest (3.1). A deeper analysis performed in the school level indicate for which branch students think they are learning less, and these are the plumbing students (mean score 2.9).

## **3. School-based VE and apprentice systems (RT 4)**

VET schools curricula have been reformed and more emphasis is put on practice hours to be developed near the workstations and preferably to the business sites. This has required well-equipped workstations and good relationships with private businesses, the typical case of Durres VE School. Due to limited state budget funds, international donors contributed in both directions. In all the school sites visited, it could be noted the plaques which acknowledge their support (for example AlbVet-Swisscontact at Beqir Cela, KulturKontakt at Economic School). While on the school based professional practice systems, the donors in Beqir Cela financed more school building and workstations, in Economic School apart from equipped office classes, it was intervened also in institutionalizing the relationship with local business, which was more difficult for the economic profile, compared with auto-mechanic and electricians. The business involvement in VET is weak because of the short-term vision of companies not willing to invest in human resource development and their low level of social responsibility. But in a collaborative situation, the synergy effect will happen since the business will gain trained employees and will increase the employment opportunities for vulnerable groups following VET system.

Economic School is rated high in almost all criteria listed (teaching methods, teacher subject knowledge, friendliness of students, friendliness of teachers), most of them over 4. Teacher subject

knowledge is rated the highest in total but it remains the highest in all levels of analysis (school based, course level, gender, age and parental education & employment status). Economic school has quite an interesting behaviour regarding school rate questions. Students rate school technical criteria teaching methods and teacher knowledge (respectively 4.1 and 4.4) higher than social environment – friendliness of students & teachers (respectively 3.917 and 3.933). Still, the differences are very small and probably the urban environment of Tirana capital has an influence in this “colder” relationship.

Regarding the schools equipment/ laboratories to perform this school-based practice, the students indicate that some improvements are needed (S.28.b mean score 3.1). On school-based analysis, Economic School students’ opinion is that there is more need for improvement (3.4), while other schools indicate that fewer improvements are needed (Beqir Cela 3 and 2.7 for VTC). The same rank but with a lower rate of improvement needed results also on the opinions for building improvement. In our view, the buildings need much investment to be accessed by people with disabilities, no elevator at three schools, no heating system in place, etc.

#### **4. Transition to work (RT 5)**

Based on the students’ questionnaire (S24 mean score 4.3), they think that what they learned in school will help them to find a job in the future. The same opinion was expressed also when asked about their future plans where almost 90% of them plan to look for a paid job. The evidence from students’ questionnaire was showing a big difference in hours per week between Economic school in Tirana (6 hours) and Beqir Cela school (15 hours), which is similar with VTC in Elbasan. Based on the school data, students of Economic School plan to apply for university, while Beqir Cela students, almost 70% of them are employed in their vocation, the same for VTC trainees who aims to find employment.

Regarding the help that students expect in finding a job, family is notably identified as the highest expected assistance in all cases. Friends and teachers are ranked as another supporter. But what can be noted is the low expectancy from career centres (which actually don’t exist) at the school and the employment offices that are not so supportive to VET graduates at all. Here should be mentioned that VTC in Elbasan has closer relations with employment office, compared with VE school in Tirana.

### **3. ACTION PROPOSALS FOR SCHOOLS**

RT1. Based on national VET Strategy 2013-2020, the VET schools/centres should design school-based strategies for approaching issues of social inclusion for vulnerable groups, such as people with disabilities and returned emigrants e.g. Economic School in Tirana, and be prepared in cases when such categories enrol in the VET system. Parents should be invited on the School Governing Boards.

RT2. Adjusting curricula and programs should be designed to allow adequate vertical and horizontal flexibility, referring to the cases of returned emigrants in Durres, or others who change their mind to follow VE school after finishing the first year of gymnasium. Proposing relevant female profiles, as the female students gave more points on the reason for their choice of VET in preference to other type of school. Students’ composition shows that the “national” coverage of such VE schools was replaced by the “regional” coverage, as 80% of their students belong to their region. So, schools should be interested in close collaboration with the regional stakeholders to increase their reputation and students’ enrolment.

RT3. Schools should offer individual treatment to increase the motivation of students that have low results and a higher risk of drop out. The Beqir Cela school principal proposed projects focused on assisting problematic students with extra-hours after their classes, with the assistance of teachers and their peers.

RT4. The experience of Durres school for testing the first year students at the beginning of school to plan the necessary interventions for those with low results was a good experience for increasing students' motivation and should be associated with individual plans. A wider flexibility for the schools and centres curricula is needed to better respond to the diverse students' composition. In Beqir Cela school in Durres, since most of the students have low results and might drop since they can't absorb all the required programme, a more reduced academic programme can be developed focussing only on the necessary knowledge needed and more professional practice oriented. At VTC in Elbasan, a wider flexibility is needed to adjust the training programs according to the different vulnerable groups with a wide range of basic knowledge for trainees such as Roma or disabled. The experience of VTC in collaborating with various community-based organizations to provide training for vulnerable groups can also apply to VE schools, e.g. Economic school in Tirana to respond to the needs of blind students, a close collaboration with association of blind people can be developed, which is also active in books publications in braille writing.

While in both VE schools in our research the teacher-student ratio was doubled, about 20 students for one teacher, compared with the average at national level that was 11, schools should ask for increasing the quantity and above all the quality of their teaching staff. Teachers' continuous training and qualification should be on the top priorities for the VET providers, as there was little investment in this direction, referring the teachers' questionnaire, less than 50% of them have had a formal qualification as teacher. Knowledge and methodologies on social inclusion can be also introduced.

RT5. While VET school policies encourage professional practice of students to their family businesses it might lead to increase social exclusion for those students from disadvantaged backgrounds. We propose the experience of PASO with Economic schools to be applied in all VET schools. So, all VET students should benefit from institutionalized school-business relationships and have equal employment opportunities. Businesses should be invited to be involved in the teaching process. Career development centres should be created in VET schools for continuous students' orientation on their post-graduation plans, and a close collaboration with employment services is necessary.

RT6. To increase the students' motivation, the schools should organize various kinds of extracurricular activities. Both VE schools have enough free space in their territories, which can be used for school and community activities. Participation in extra-curricular activities is low, and the maximum of sport practiced is 50%. It means that the schools need involvement in community activities, such as voluntary work (24%). We propose the introduction of the role of social workers who are able to work with family, community and businesses to build close communications and organize common activities.



## 4. POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

### 4.1 Policy recommendations for policy makers at national level

A functional National VET Council and an independent NAVET may assist in the integration of education policies with social policies for vulnerable groups and in cooperation between MoES and MOLSAEO as well as between their respective institutions responsible for VET such as NAVET and NES.

Each line ministry has an official liaison for social inclusion and social cohesion and the independence of NAVET from MoES will help to increase its role in better coordinating policies and action plans of different ministries in order to increase the impact of VET in social inclusion and social cohesion, among other roles. NAVET independence from MoES will also ensure a balanced supporting role to the whole VET system, not only to the VE as it is now. NAVET should play the role in sharing the best experiences in the country.

Referring to the National Strategy on VET 2013-2020, the main aim of the VET system is to have a *strong orientation* towards the needs of the labour market. From the interviews and focus groups it emerged that links between VET schools and employers are weak, because there is not much interest on the business side. Our recommendation is not only to institutionalize the relationships between the VET providers and business, such as in the Governing Boards of Schools, but also to actively involve business in curricula designing, implementation, monitoring and evaluation.

In the frame of students' career guidance, it is needed a consolidation of this subject. Teachers responsible for this subject assisted by the school administration and school board should present to the students the real employment opportunities in the local labour market in order to influence the decrease of university enrolment of VET students.

Vocational schools should establish regular cooperation with businesses and their professional organizations by appointing a responsible person such as the PASO teacher in Economic schools, or it may be a part-time position as a psychologist.

The evidence from the quantitative research shows that girls gave more points, on average 4.5 out of 5, for the reason for their choice of VET in preference to other type of schools. Based on this evidence, we propose the curricula of VET should be more gender-balanced, introducing new profiles preferred by girls such as aesthetics.

The students questionnaire, S27 shows that girls give more importance to doing well in school for themselves, personally (4.7) compared with boys (4.3), although both have a strong equal motivation from family (4.72 for girls and 4.57 for boys). In the Governing Boards of VET schools the parents' representative should be included, as family influence of the VET students is still high.

The definition of the Chamber of Commerce as the representative of business should be revised, as private employers have had their own organizations based on their professions for twenty years. As the

IDI with the Durres school principal shows, the schools are more interested in collaboration with professional organizations than with such formal employer organizations. We propose revision of the composition of the School Governing Boards.

The school principal in Tirana emphasised that blind students are assisted by their parents. This suggests that VET could be made more attractive and available to disabled students if special education programs as well as trained teachers were available. Interested groups, such as associations of people with disabilities, or associations of Roma people could be approached to assist in this direction.

VET could be made more attractive and available to all if their curricula were more flexible and more easily adjusted to the needs of applicants coming from other schools with the same profile (or from abroad in the case of returned emigrants), or after the first semester in gymnasium. Schools should have more autonomy in decision making for specific cases, respecting the basic principles of VET legislation.

Another recommendation is to offer text books for professional subjects and free of charge entrance to vocational schools, for those interested young persons coming from poor families, without a prior selection criteria.

National programmes for in-job training need to be introduced, as the businesses can offer new technology and teaching approaches. Since vulnerable groups tend to follow short training courses, they could be supported with in-job training if they have already a job. The NES show evidence that Albanian small businesses and self-employed were also engaged in training activities. (See Annex 6)

#### **4.2 Policy recommendations for policy makers at local level**

The evidence from the qualitative and quantitative research shows that the regional and local stakeholders have more readiness, openness and easy way of contacting and discussing the impact of VET on social inclusion and cohesion. It is related to their interest to be attractive to their communities and could contribute to increase their reputation to their electorate. We support the proposal of Durres district interviewer that intervention on VET for social inclusion and social cohesion should be focused on the regional/local levels. The VET Regional board in the District of Elbasan is a good example in this regard.

VET institutions are supposed to influence the human resource development of the area, and every actor should be involved and contribute to a better management of the whole system. Local government units should fulfil their obligation to cover the maintenance cost of the school buildings and workstations. Business representatives, as school board directors, should influence a better orientation of VET based on market needs but at the same time cover their social responsibility of including vulnerable groups not only on schools but also at their work environment.

Based on the evidence from the students' questionnaire (S19), the reason for the choice of school being future employment was dominant with more than 4 points for all students: boys and girls, among all profiles and of all parental status in the three case studies. We therefore recommend the establishment of an effective occupational guidance and counselling system, based on strong labour market information, through collaboration of VET providers with employment offices.

VET schools have fewer resources than general schools, compared with their needs to be adjusted to the market demands and social inclusion of the students coming from a disadvantaged background. Increased support is needed from all the community stakeholders to expect an impact of VET in social inclusion and social cohesion.

Local authorities should play the intermediate role in the new Governing Boards of VET schools for integrating activities of all local public agencies to improve school infrastructure and investments that are under their responsibility.

### **4.3 Policy recommendations for international donor organisations**

Based on the IDI with directors of VET schools, they should collaborate with professional businesses in all phases of teaching process, from curricula design, teaching, professional standards to technologies. Based on this evidence we recommend that international donors support the creation of professional organizations e.g. mechanic or electricians' professional bodies through piloting and exchange projects based on successful experiences abroad.

During the research we found investment in the same laboratories in Durres VET school and VTC. This suggests that better donor coordination is needed at regional level to avoid overlapping between projects and MoES initiatives. Donors should facilitate the integration of activities between VE schools and VTC at the same location.

Based on the successful experience with PASO project, already tested in Economic VE Schools to reach the business community, we recommend that donors continue to assist with extending the pilot phase with sharing the good model to all VET providers.

Donor initiatives should be based on examples from previous successful projects, and should be adjusted to regional, local and specifically school needs. Based on experience the three case studies have had with donors, their projects on VET should be integrated with those for supporting vulnerable groups, e.g. Elbasan VTC project for training Roma.

Based on the evidence from UNDP project in Durres for empowering the vulnerable local communities through vocational training, we recommend that donors should continue their assistance introducing models of integrating VET with social inclusion and social cohesion.

VET staff gain experience from their study tours abroad, and school directors in our interviews with them proposed twinning projects between Albanian and foreign VET schools. Such a programme could for example assist building a regional network of VET providers in South East Europe.

The teacher questionnaires revealed a lack of training in special needs education. Donor intervention should continue with training teachers in the concept of inclusive education.

#### **4.4 Policy recommendations for NGOs/CSOs**

The research found evidence of successful collaboration of NGOs with the VTC in Elbasan and Durres, and we recommend the NGOs should have closer relations with professional VET providers such as VTC and VE schools. NGOs fill a gap in training for vulnerable groups as part of their mission toward social inclusion of groups at risk. Especially the Associations of persons with disabilities, such as the association of the Blind people, which have invested in books publications in brail writing to assist blind students, referring to the difficulties they face in the Tirana economic school.

The qualitative research revealed that groups such as business representatives, trade unions, women's and disabled persons' associations have been not engaged in the VET policy process. Based on this evidence, we propose a wider and more effective engagement of them in supporting the VET system, especially at school/VTC level.

The research found that VET courses are held everywhere and everyone, as for example in the case of hairdresser training, issues certificates. This is due to the lack of a specific institution where exams can be given to all those who request professional certificates in a certain profile. Therefore, we propose that professional certificates should be standardized. The VET system should be better monitored and professional businesses should be active in establishing quality assurance standards in their profiles.

The Economic School of Tirana has difficulties dealing with blind students (2 cases), so interested groups such as the association of Blind people which operates throughout the country should orient their services through collaboration not only with VTC, but also in supporting VET schools to have an impact on social inclusion of such vulnerable groups.

Since businesses are leading the Governing Boards of VET schools, they should be more familiar with professional requirements of the school program and should assist in successful implementation of school programs offering professional expertise.

Based on the evidence from students questionnaires concerning their low participation in extracurricular activities, the support of NGOs to involve VET students in community projects will have a positive impact on their social inclusion and on community awareness in supporting the VET system.

### **CONCLUSIONS**

The conclusions concern firstly the students, who are the object and subject of the VET system. The common features of all students/trainees following the VET system are weak school results, low family status, male and rural domination, interest in finding paid employment and not taking their own initiative, as they expect to be supported in finding a job by their families, which are not in a strong position themselves. (S36)

VET schools are considered to be a strong point of reference where students expect to find support (teachers are ranked after family). In this regard, schools should increase their activities in assisting their students to attain better results through extra hour teaching and peer learning. In addition, VET schools should better organize extracurricular activities to establish close relations of the students with their

communities, to increase their self-confidence and encourage their own initiatives. In such a way, schools will further increase their reputation in the community and be attractive for other categories of students.

Even if the VET enrolment barriers are minimised just to the age and compulsory education completion, and some vulnerable groups are incentivised through scholarships and increased economic assistance, still the presence of vulnerable groups in the system is very low. This might be as a result of lack of proper school infrastructure and adjusted didactic equipment for disabled, lack of basic education of Roma students, or lack of proper teacher training. Vulnerable groups are more present in training centres than in vocational schools. This is because training centres are more flexible to special adjustments in programs needed for these trainees, while interventions in school curricula are more difficult. But with the transformation of schools in multifunctional centres, it should be possible to offer a wider range of training courses to vulnerable groups.

Students' enrolment in VE has increased in the last academic years as a result of many initiatives from the school, local and regional institutions as well as donor funded projects. It seems that the joint efforts and the synergy effect led to a wider enrolment in VET. VE students are attracted more and more by university enrolment. This is a tendency observed not only to the Economic School in Tirana with high results students, but also Beqir Cela students in Durres are becoming more interested in university. Further research is needed to explain the real reasons for this behaviour, but we believe that the actual economic situation of the country and the low rate of new job creation leads students to consider progression to higher education in order to increase their employment opportunities in the future.

The involvement of VET students in professional practice and their eventual employment after programme completion varies according to the region and speciality. In less developed regions, with a higher rate of unemployment such as Elbasan, it is more difficult for students to find a job. If the school specialities correlate with business orientation in the area as in Durres with the automotive sector, businesses are more eager to collaborate with the school and students have higher employment opportunities. Here was evident the different statement of the businesses, openness to students of VE school in Durres, and more sceptical of trainees of VTC in Elbasan. In vocations such as economy and business, where the integration in labour market is more difficult, especially in Tirana due to the large competition, a professional assistance is needed such as PASO to link the school with businesses.

The common features of teachers/instructors in VET system is the average age 40, which facilitates their further qualifications; their experience in the private sector which can easily approach to the community stakeholders for promoting school initiatives and collaborations with businesses; their welcoming of students which is a good starting point for working with vulnerable categories of students, and with special need students, after some specific trainings. Domination of female teachers may enable VET schools to deal with gender stereotypes and imbalances in terms of occupational choices of female students. Relevant profiles, special curricula and programs for girls and vulnerable groups, will increase enrolment to VET and their impact on social inclusion. As their mothers were mostly unemployed, typical for females in Albania, girls are looking for a better position on labour market, which means a better position in the family and society as a whole.

Institutional support and collaboration with the local community actors is crucial to increase the employability of VET graduates/ trainees on the labour market, to meet the expectations of student and the strategic objectives of the Government. Promotion for those willing to become self-employed can be realized through better collaboration of the VET providers with employment offices, increasing in this way the trust of the young generation in such public agencies, as ranked by those students who expect help in finding a job after graduation. Promotion of measures on improving and updating vocational information and guidance in career planning for job seekers and offering new services and programs better adapted to the demands of the world of work, will be better pursued by employment agencies operating at regional level, as one of their functional duties.

International donors, on their side, can assist on increasing the role of VET for social inclusion and social cohesion through community-based projects. The pilot project of multifunctional VET school in Kamza can be used as a model of responding to the crosscutting needs of the community and labour market throughout the country. The concept of multifunctional VET schools should be associated with a legal framework for a clear definition of roles and responsibilities at the regional level. The involvement of interested groups and local NGOs will increase the motivation of vulnerable groups such as Roma and Egyptians to be involved in training activities.

Developing evidence-based VET policies with an impact on social inclusion and social cohesion requires an adequate system of statistics and database, which have a good starting point with the VET website of the MoES - [www.vet.gov.al](http://www.vet.gov.al). But it needs further elaboration to be used effectively for analysis and evaluation of the VET system. Capacity development in this direction should be combined with involvement of universities and other research oriented institutions interested on VET policy analysis.

It should be the main responsibility on the side of MOLSAEO, which along with its efforts for developing proactive labour market policies (the new website on employment: [www.epunesimi.gov.al](http://www.epunesimi.gov.al)), should offer detailed data on social inclusion and social cohesion. Its weakest point is the lack of adequate data on social excluded categories in Albanian society. MOLSAEO is still waiting for INSTAT to provide the LSMS and LFS results, whereas it should provide administrative data on vulnerable groups based on a close collaboration with local authorities and community-based social services. Based on such evidence, MOLSAEO should develop adequate strategies on social inclusion.

Although the VE schools operate at national level as a legacy of the previous centralised system, the evidence shows that in practice VE schools attract mainly students from their own regions (80%). As in other aspects of social life, the decentralization process will require more focus on regional VET policies and school autonomy. Such decentralization tendencies in employment, health and education require new regional VET structures, such as regional education directories (under the MoES), or regional employment services (under the MOLSAEO). The independence of NAVET, as a central authority for governing the VET system, may open the road for the establishment of its VET structures at a regional level. In this way, the VET system may be at the centre of attention from all stakeholders, and the programs of the two main Ministries of Education and MOLSAEO will be better coordinated to increase the VET impact on social inclusion and social cohesion. The establishment of regional structures of NAVET will assist the VET system to be more oriented not only to the regional and local

market needs, but at the same time to better respond to the social needs of local and regional communities.

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- The **Instruction Nr. 867/3**, Dated 30.12.2002 defines the criteria and rules of examinations and tests in the final vocational training assessment.
- The **Instruction No. 867/4**, Dated 30.12.2002 defines the Content, form and procedures for the issuance of diplomas and certificates in vocational training provided by public and accredited private centres providing vocational training.
- **Instruction No. 2222**, dated 31.10.2002 focus on Vocational Training counselling and orientation establishes the framework of vocational training, career guidance, full individual counselling, mediation between them and the vocational training centres and promotion of professional training in special cases when necessary.
- The **Decision No. 196**, dated 20.03.2003 establishes the standards for the development of the Vocational education and training curriculum, specifically the curricula structures of professional qualifications (profiles and specialities) for different levels offered in vocational technical schools, public, and non public vocational training centres.
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## APPENDICES

### Appendix 1: The pilot schools selected for the VET project in Albania

School Name Albanian/ English	Address	Director	Phone 00355	E-mail
Shkolla e Mesme Teknike Ekonomike  Technical Economic High School	Rr. Xhorxhi Martini, Tirana	Merita Zylaj	682414364  4 223 310	<a href="mailto:meritazylaj@yahoo.com">meritazylaj@yahoo.com</a>
Shkolla e Mesme Profesionale Beqir Cela Vocational High School Beqir Cela	Shkozet Durrës	Bashkim Shkëmbi	682258406	<a href="mailto:shkëmbib@yahoo.com">shkëmbib@yahoo.com</a>
Qendra rajonale e e Formimit Profesional Regional Vocation Training Centre	Lagjia : Shenkoll Elbasan	Rasim Balliu	54 25 86 28 696313550	<a href="mailto:elbasandrfpp@yahoo.com">elbasandrfpp@yahoo.com</a>

## Appendix 2: Advisory Boards

### National Advisory Board

No	Name	Stakeholder Category	Position	E-mail	Phone; Mobile
1.	Mrs Dorina Rapti	Ministry of Education and Science	Head of VET unit	<a href="mailto:Dorina.Rapti@mash.gov.al">Dorina.Rapti@mash.gov.al</a>	+355 682086460
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6.	Mr. Ismail Varoshi	The Council of Employer's Organization of Albania	President	<a href="mailto:ivaroshi@albnet.net">ivaroshi@albnet.net</a>	+355 42234350 M: +355 682020178
7.	Mrs. Merita Xhumari	University of Tirana, Faculty of Social Sciences	Lead Researcher of ETF	<a href="mailto:mxhumari@icc-al.org">mxhumari@icc-al.org</a>	+355 682218010
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No	Name	Stakeholder Category	Position	E-mail	Phone; Mobile
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3.	Mr. Albion Lila	Pupils Representative	President of the Pupils' Senate		
4.	Mr. Arben Puhumi	Business Representative	Head of the Governing Board of School B.Cela	arben@bmwalbania	+355 682070000
5.	Mr. Nesti Shuke	Regional directory of Education	Inspector of VET	anestishuka@gmail.com	+355 674080434
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### Regional Advisory Board ELBASAN

No	Name	Stakeholder Category	Position	Address	Mobile
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4.	Mati Çela	Regional directory of Education of Elbasan	Executive Director	Lagja:”Dyli Haxhire”	+355 696194439
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**Appendix 3: Institutional Stakeholder Interviewed**

Code	National	Name Surname	Institution	Position	Location Address	CONTACTS		Date
						E-mail	phone/ +355	
NIDI/10		Ilda Rusha	MoLSAEO	Head of Monitoring and Evaluation Unit	Rr. Kavajes,53, Tirana	ildaboza@yahoo.com	682084067	07.12.12
NIDI/07		Illir Kalemaj	NVETA	Executive Director	Rr. N. Frasheri, 37, Tirana	ikalemaj@akafp-al.org	689038439	14.01.13
NIDI/02		Alqi Mustafai	NVETA	Head of Frame-curricula & VET Teacher Training Standards	Rr. N. Frasheri, 37, Tirana	amustafai@akafp-al.org	684053841	26/11/12
NIDI/06		Ejvis Gishti	NVETA	Head of Occupation and Qualification sector	Rr. N. Frasheri, 37, Tirana	egishti@akafp-al.org	04 2256440	14.01.13
NIDI/08		Mirela	IED	Head of Curricula	Rr. N. Frasheri,	andonimirela@izha.edu.al	042256440	17.01.13

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		Andoni		and Teacher Training	37, Tirana	m2andoni@yahoo.com		
<b>NIDI/O4</b>		Ilir Ibrahim	NES	Director	Bulevardi B. Curri, Tirana	ir.ibrahimi@shkp.gov.al , ilibrahimi@yahoo.com	042340056	30/11/12
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LIDI/EO3		Eduard Shehu	Employment Office	Director	Zyra e Punesimit :Lagja "Emin Matraxhi		0692046751	18.12.12
LIDI/EO4		Suzana Dedja	Employment Office	YES project manager	Kombinati Metalurgjik Elbasan		0682075700	18.12.12
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<b>LIDI/E01</b>		Kadrie Kruja	Municipality	Social Assistance Unit	Bashkia:Lagja:"1 1 Nentori		694412741	18.12.12
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#### Annex 4. Social Map of the VET Schools

**Table 1. Statistical data from Elbasan VTC**

Year	Number of Trainees	Number of registered unemployed	% of the group-age 16-19 / total	Roma	People with Limited abilities	Prisoners	Male – female	Rural – Urban	Professional – Complementary courses
2011	970	221	15 %	116	13	31	60-40	65-35	65-35
2012	813	218	20 %	58	15	104	65-35	60-40	65-35

**Table 2. Social map of Technical Economic School of Tirana**

<b>Technical- Economic High School, Tirana - Social Map 2012-2013</b>							
Number of students in school		<b>874</b>	<b>CI.X 336</b>	<b>CI .XI 230</b>	<b>CI XII 179</b>	<b>CI XIII 129</b>	<b>Total 874</b>
Number of female in school			163	123	104	60	450
Level of Education of Parents		<b>University</b>	69	93	65	42	269
		<b>High</b>	<b>232</b>	122	105	79	538
		<b>Elementary</b>	35	15	9	8	67
No.	Situation						
1	With divorced parents		8	4	2	2	16
2	With orphan status		1	12	-	2	<b>15</b>
3	With one parent dead		13	10	10	4	37
4	Students repeating		<b>15</b>	1	1	-	<b>17</b>
5	Students with aggressive behaviour		3	-	2	3	8
6	Students likely to use drugs/smoking		-	2	3	14	19
7	Students of the Roma ethnicity		-	-	1	-	1
8	Family with low economic level		<b>18</b>	13	6	16	53
9	Students coming from other schools		-	2	2	2	6
10	Students who tend to drop out		2	-	6	-	8
11	Excellent students		7	7	14	17	45
12	Students with very low results		<b>19</b>	18	20	9	66
13	Students in need of psychologist		2	6	-	3	11
	Special needs students: ( <b>TOTAL</b> )		<b>9</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>-</b>	<b>17</b>
14	Mental		-	-	-	-	-
15	Physical /Motor		2	1	1	-	4
16	Mental+ Physical		-	-	-	-	-
17	Blind		<b>7</b>	3	1	-	11

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18	Deaf		-	1	-	-	1
19	Mute		-	1	-	-	1
20	Autism		-	-	-	-	-

**Table 3. BEQIR CELA School, Social – Economic Map, 2012 – 2013**

Classes	Number of students	Parents	Level of Education				Employed				Assistance	Unemployed	Pensioner	Dead	
			University	Secondary	Elementary	Primary	Owner	Intellectual		Worker					
								Public	Private	Public					Private
I	446	Father	56	224	157	6	24	65	83	82	140	1	45	3	3
		Mother	41	95	160	149	5	5	78	20	22	7	308	-	1
II	276	Father	13	171	82	1	11	22	32	30	135	1	35	1	9
		Mother	27	120	127	2	-	8	25	6	82	-	153	2	-
III	235	Father	12	111	110	-	15	7	7	11	162	5	21	5	2
		Mother	23	98	89	25	4	4	3	7	37	10	164	6	-
IV	177	Father	13	103	56	1	6	9	6	23	112	6	9	2	4
		Mother	6	67	63	39	-	7	3	5	28	3	129	-	2
Total	1134	Father	94	609	405	8	56	103	128	146	549	13	110	11	18
		Mother	97	380	439	215	9	24	109	38	169	20	754	8	3