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# Seminar for EAfA partner countries

Belgrade Serbia

13–14 October 2022

Event report

*Employment,  
Social Affairs  
and Inclusion*



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# Background

The European Alliance for Apprenticeships (EAfA), in cooperation with the European Training Foundation (ETF) and with the support of the Serbian Ministry of Education, Science and Technological Development, organised a seminar for EAfA partner countries. This high-level event brought together government representatives, EU-level stakeholders, representatives from the European Apprentices Network (EAN), and other relevant stakeholders in the European vocational education and training (VET) sector.

The event took place in the city of Belgrade (Serbia) on 13–14 October 2022 and provided the opportunity to promote EAfA and its objectives. Namely, to strengthen the quality, supply, mobility and overall image of apprenticeships in the EU and among its neighbouring countries.

The event aimed to be a platform for participating countries to share their experiences and achievements in delivering apprenticeships. During the seminar, the latest policy developments and reforms in apprenticeships and work-based learning in the EAfA partner countries were presented. Peer learning and knowledge sharing among participants was encouraged.

Participants also had the opportunity to visit one vocational training site based in Belgrade, where they saw first-hand the latest developments on work-based learning. The first site visit was organised to the Chamber of Commerce and Industry, where participants learned about the implementation of Serbia's law on dual VET. The second visit was to the Qualifications Agency of Serbia. Finally, a third group of participants visited the Serbia Aviation Academy, an innovative and unique state school.



**Day 1**

# 1.0 Welcome and introductory remarks

The Mistress of Ceremony for the first day, **Ms. Ana Carrero** (Deputy Head of Unit, Directorate-General for Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion (DG EMPL) of the European Commission) opened proceedings by warmly thanking the Serbian partners for hosting the event, and the ETF for their close cooperation during the months prior to it. She briefly highlighted the agenda, encouraged participants to actively contribute to the day's discussions, as well as provided an introduction to the EAfA.

**Mr. Branko Ružić**, Minister of the Ministry of Education, Science and Technological Development in Serbia, introduced the progress achieved through the implementation of the Law on Dual Education, which came into force in the 2019–2020 school year. The results achieved include the accreditation of 32 study programmes at 9 higher education institutions, as well as of 75 companies involved in the work-based learning model. The aim of the work-based learning model is to allow students to achieve competencies in their field of study and transfer these skills into the working environment, thus speeding up their transition into the labour market. The speaker expressed his pride for the fact that the first generation of students enrolled in dual education has graduated from high school, with more than half of these students obtaining jobs in the field of their qualifications.

**Mr. Martin Klaucke**, Head of Cooperation and Representative of the EU Delegation to Serbia, highlighted the great progress achieved in terms of increasing the quality of apprenticeships in both formal and non-formal settings, as well as the positive results achieved in the area of qualification systems and improving the quality of VET. The speaker reiterated the Commission's support for Serbia in its continued development, and emphasised that education and training policies remain a high priority (as evidenced by the announcement of the President of the European Commission, Ursula von der Leyen, that 2023 will be the European Year of Skills). The current high-level of unemployment and the challenges related to the green and digital transition require education institutions to evolve and digitalise the learning environment and, therefore, establishing a functioning system of formal and non-formal VET is extremely important. In this context, the roll out of the Youth Guarantee in the Western Balkans will benefit young people, helping them to participate in society, and stimulating job creation and sustainable economic growth.

**Mr. Georgios Zisimos**, Head of Policy Advice and the EU Programming Unit at the ETF, praised the added value of the EAfA in bringing together all relevant stakeholders (national and European authorities, financial institutions, social partners, and education and training providers). The speaker underlined the role played by the ETF in working closely to support human capital development in countries outside the EU and commended the value played by partnerships in building sustainable networks, exchanging ideas and recommendations, and identifying future policies. Such recommendations on how to build successful apprenticeship systems were developed through the Copenhagen and Riga processes. Furthermore, following the Osnabrück Declaration on VET, many countries committed to improving the quality of apprenticeships. However, a key area that is gaining progressively more important due to the pandemic is digitalisation, an area in which this seminar aims to highlight the key related challenges and potential opportunities.

**Ms. Biljana Radonjic Ker-Lindsay**, Associate Director for Gender and Economic Inclusion at the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD), provided an overview of the EBRD's mission to fund infrastructure projects and encourage clients to invest in skills, youth and social inclusion. The EBRD aims to promote the transition to market economies and ensure the economic inclusion of young men and women in their move from school to employment. Despite the progress achieved, key challenges (such as skills gaps, inequality, youth unemployment and low female participation) remain in this region. Left unaddressed, these could have concrete implications for businesses and society as a whole. Moreover, the phenomena of ageing population, shrinking workforce, youth migration have a significant impact on companies of all sizes and sectors, hindering human capital and the capacity of economies to expand. To tackle these important challenges, EBRD's approach focuses on two key strategies, including concrete targets like 40% of investments including a gender component and 20% having a social inclusion component.

Another positive example is the private sector youth initiative introduced in Croatia in 2016 and rolled out to Bosnia, Kosovo and North Macedonia. This programme is linking businesses to employee associations to offer internships, networking and mentoring opportunities to graduates. Furthermore, the 2020 Memorandum of Understanding with the Ministry of Education in Serbia frames the EBRD's policy efforts designing information systems to provide data on labour and education outcomes which can contribute to informing policy and promoting the development of different sectors.

*'No matter how large and important the employer is, there is no country where a single employer can make a difference. We need to work on the wider systemic improvements to help policy development, build private-public partnerships to help shape effective policy responses in line with existing needs, and support clients to establish legislation on apprenticeship programmes and stipulate obligations for apprenticeships.'*



Ms. Biljana Radonjic Ker-Lindsay, Associate Director, Access to Skill and Employment, Lead Inclusion Economist, EBRD Headquarters

## 2.0 Objectives of the seminar

**Mr. Stefan Thomas**, Senior Human Capital Development Expert for the Work-Based Learning and Africa Team at the ETF, presented an overview of the seminar's main objectives and encouraged participants to exchange ideas and learn from each other (particularly the good practices implemented by the host country, Serbia, where the two main driving forces for change are the Ministry of Education and the Chamber of Commerce and Industry).

Through the Bazaar sessions, the aim was to present the latest developments in VET which have been adopted in the region, in order to provide inspiration for other participants and solutions to technical issues. The seminar also offered the opportunity to learn from good practices adopted by Italy and Finland, and how they implemented the Youth Guarantee in their countries in relation to traineeships and apprenticeships.



*'This is a story we can learn a lot from, and represents an example of an exciting reform process taking place in EAfA partner countries.'*

Mr. Stefan Thomas, Senior Human Capital Development Expert -  
Work Based Learning and Africa Team, ETF



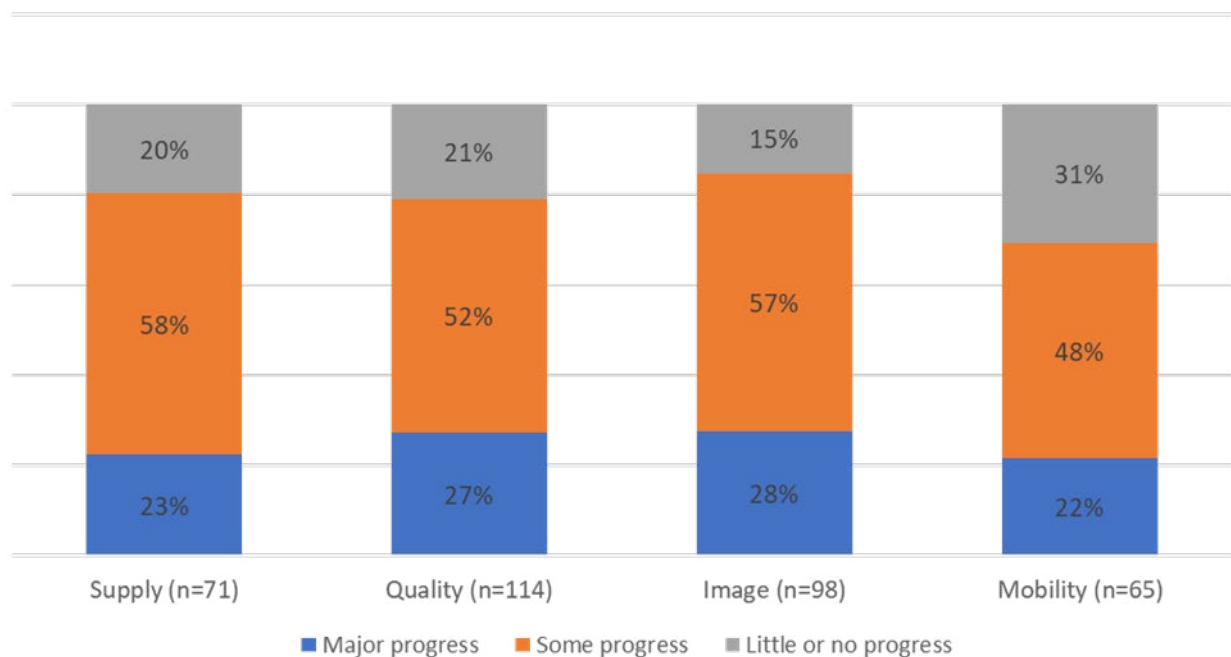
## 3.0 EAfA and latest developments

EAfA has secured a high level of engagement in recent years, both in terms of national commitments and pledges received. **Ms. Kjerstin Torpmann-Hagen**, DG EMPL emphasised that the membership base continues to grow, with 383 pledges received this year and 11,436 apprenticeship places pledged to the EAfA. The online social media presence is also increasing, with 3,002 LinkedIn members since November 2020.

According to the annual EAfA monitoring survey, for all four objectives of the Alliance, most respondents reported that major or some progress had been achieved, ranging from image (85%), quality (79%) and supply (80%), to mobility (69%). 29% of respondents indicated that little or no progress had been made in terms of mobility (12 percentage points higher than the average for the other three objectives), likely pointing to the difficulties posed by COVID-19 in relation to increasing the number of mobility experiences, as shown in Figure 1 (below).

Figure 1. Progress across the EAfA objectives

*How would you assess the progress you have made on the EAfA objectives you committed to in relation to your pledge over the past year?*

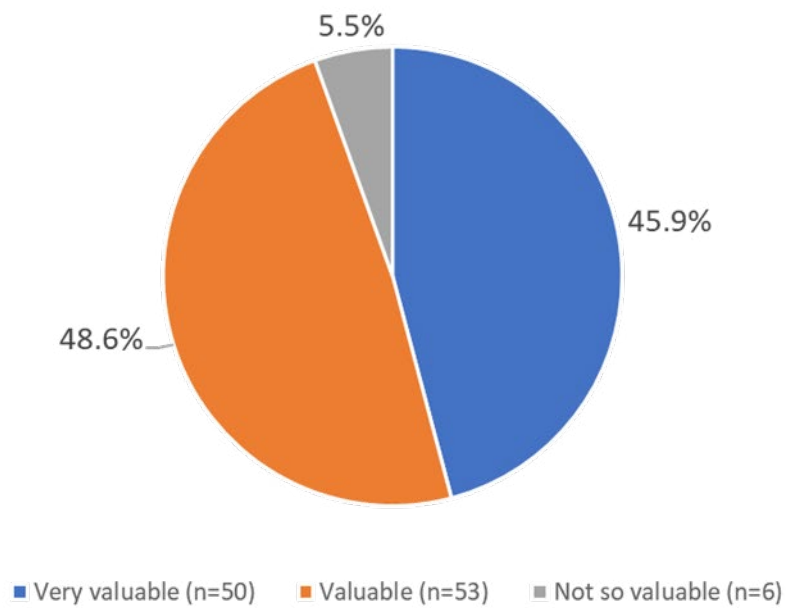


Source: EAfA annual monitoring survey

The survey also asked members to provide evidence of the progress made with supporting people fleeing the war in Ukraine. Of the respondents, 22% (n=29) have implemented activities linked to apprenticeships to provide support to Ukrainians fleeing the war, while 22% would like to or intend to implement such activities in the near future.

Figure 2. Satisfaction with EAfA and its added value

*What is your assessment of the value of the EAfA as a multi-stakeholder platform to boost the quality, supply, image and mobility of apprenticeships? (N=109)*



Overall, respondents' perception of the EAfA is largely positive. The vast majority of survey respondents (94.5%) consider the EAfA to be very valuable or valuable as a platform to boost the quality, supply, image, and mobility of apprenticeships.

### 3.1. Benefits of being an EAfA member

**Ms. Borka Visnic** from the Teachers' Union of Serbia (TUS) reflected on her organisation's experience of being an EAfA member since 2018. She highlighted TUS's pledge to improve the image of apprenticeships, as well as the quality of teaching and training and work-based education in general. The work of the TUS has been on promoting effective social dialogue and raising awareness on the European framework for quality and effective apprenticeships (EFQEA), and contributing to a better understanding of the new law on dual education.

TUS is the representative body for all teachers across all education levels and covers all territories of Serbia. The Union currently has 33,000 members, with 120 VET schools among them. As a recognised partner, TUS organises seminars and activities to establish social dialogue, and participates in working groups of the Ministry of Education (representing the interests of students, parents and teachers). To enhance the quality of apprenticeships in Serbia, the Union created networks of VET schools and students and continues to be active in the promotion of innovative teaching methods, as well as the promotion of VET schools and good practices through newsletters and the development of mobile applications. As an EAfA member, TUS is involved in international projects and promotes its membership of the Alliance among other relevant unions within the region

### 3.2. Welcoming newcomers to EAfA

The Seminar in Belgrade provided a unique opportunity to welcome the newest member of the EAfA, Georgia. Welcomed by Ms. Kjerstin Torpmann- Hagen, **Ms. Tamar Kitiashvili**, Director General of Georgia's Skills Agency, presented the important steps taken by the country in reforming its skills sector and overcoming the impact of the pandemic.

Georgia has experienced fast development in terms of skills, especially during the COVID-19 lockdown, when it managed to generate positive effects on the skills sector through the adoption of important reforms. During the pandemic, the private sector recognised the existing skills problems and challenges, and expressed its motivation to partner with the government to overcome them and discuss how to increase the efficiency of skills development policies. The innovative solution was created by the Skills Agency, and governed jointly by the government and private sector. As a result, its supervisory board is made up of six deputy ministers and six business organisations. With regard to apprenticeships, the Agency has been

delegated important functions, such as the approval of new qualifications and standards, the accreditation of training enterprises for dual education, and the organisation of the final examination for all students in Georgia. While the country still faces challenges and concerns regarding the quality of apprenticeships, the creation of the Skills Agency has ensured the shared responsibility, equal partnership and dialogue required to overcome any potential hurdles.

*‘Joining the Alliance gives the opportunity to gain insights on the interesting experiences from partners from different countries; Georgia is open to share and discuss their challenges and problems and is happy to be part of this family, and gain energy and motivation from the Alliance members.’*



Ms. Tamar Kitiashvili, Director General of Skills Agency, Georgia

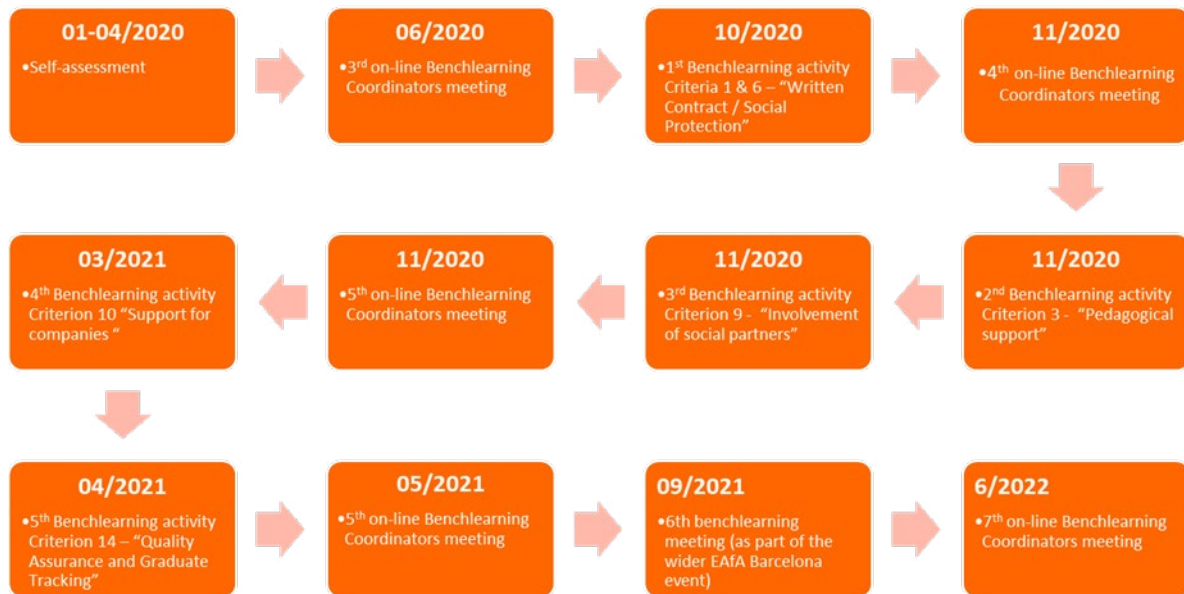
### 3.3. Apprenticeship benchlearning

#### Speakers:

- **Ms. Kjerstin Torpmann- Hagen**, DG EMPL, European Commission
- **Mr. Athanasios Tsagakatakis**, Head of Department, Ministry of Education and Religious Affairs-General Secretariat for VET, LLL and Youth, Greece
- **Mr. Stefan Thomas**, Senior Human Capital Development Expert - Work-Based Learning and Africa Team, ETF

The benchlearning concept has been developed as a systematic process to facilitate the improvement and increased effectiveness of apprenticeship systems. Within this process, national benchlearning coordinators are voluntary positions appointed for each country, and the benchlearning exercise is conducted across six stages. Benchlearning participants complete the self-assessment template, which has 14 indicators based on the criteria for 2018 Council Recommendation on quality and effective apprenticeships. They are asked to define the topics in which their country is seeking assistance, and those where they could offer assistance. Following this, online meetings are organised with other countries that participated in the process who presented best practices in a given area, and the criteria chosen as part of the self-assessment are discussed.

Figure 3. Greece's benchlearning journey



**Mr. Tsagkatakis** expressed his appreciation for the benchlearning journey, as it broadened knowledge on apprenticeships and allowed participants to exchange ideas.



*'It was fulfilling to hear what other Member countries said on the subject, and use that knowledge to introduce reforms in apprenticeship schemes.'*

Mr. Athanasios Tsagkatakis, Head of Department, Ministry of Education and Religious Affairs-General Secretariat for VET, LLL & Youth, Greece

During the seminar in Belgrade, it was announced that the benchlearning process was open for partner countries. The aim of this will be to provide a useful support system to help countries in their reform processes, and identify solutions based on the challenges encountered (as in the case of Greece). Benchlearning participants receive direct support from other Member States, coordinators and international experts, taking into account the country's unique system and its approach to apprenticeships and work-based learning governance structures.

## 4.0 Latest developments in work-based learning in Serbia: Successes and challenges

### Speakers:

- **Ms. Gabriјela Grujić**, Assistant Minister for Dual Education
- **Ms. Mirjana Kovačević**, Head of the Centre for Education and Dual Education, Chamber of Commerce and Industry of Serbia

In 2016, a common decision was made to create a dual education platform with the support of the ETF and the German and Swiss governments, as well as the involvement of SMEs, which are the foundation of the Serbian economy. An amendment to the legislation, which was first introduced in 2017, is currently under discussion, as Serbia is reiterating its commitment to fulfil all 14 EFQEA criteria. The amendment of the law will ensure the country's compliance with criteria 14 (*Quality assurance and tracking of apprentices*).

A key partner throughout the process has been the Chamber of Commerce, which monitors the progress made and ensures a transparent apprenticeship system. Representing more than 300,000 entrepreneurs and SMEs, the role of the Chamber in the implementation of the law has been to identify the needs of the economy, implement the dual education model in certain sectors, disseminate information, and support partners (such as the qualification agency) in updating or creating qualification standards and job descriptions. The Chamber of Commerce also has an important role in ensuring the high quality of apprenticeships. As defined by the law, the Chamber has two registers of accredited companies. Firstly, it is responsible for checking the ability of companies to enable students to fulfil all outcomes defined by the curriculum, and to provide a high standard of education and health and safety procedures. Secondly, the Chamber is responsible for the training of instructors based on the relevant legislation. It is aiming to digitalise this training in the future based on lessons learned from the pandemic.

Serbia has continued to make important progress in VET, and has become an attractive partner for the biggest companies in the world seeking a highly educated and qualified labour force. The latest results indicate that more than 10,000 students are involved in dual education and 3,000 have completed dual education (90% of the latter are currently employed). A large number of companies are now involved in dual education, and around 150 schools with dual profiles created occupational profiles according to the needs of the labour market



*'What is key is that we manage the system, redefine it and reap the benefits from the dual education model. The key is to enable young people to develop self-esteem for them to realise that they are useful in society, to realise that the dual model is a certain path of a successful career.'*

Ms. Gabrijela Grujić, Assistant Minister for Dual Education, Serbia



Important lessons learned for the effective implementation of dual education includes adjusting the system and making it easier for SMEs to participate in the process as encourage them to form alliances. Furthermore, it is essential for the rights and obligations of all parties involved to be defined through legislation. Similarly, enacting legislation to ensure a healthy and safety workplace is crucial. Other key factors contributing to increasing the quality of apprenticeships are the development of the curriculum in cooperation with companies and schools, and providing training to the instructors in order for them to transfer their skills and ambition to the students.



*'We don't want companies to see this as bad investment, so we need to work on strengthening the professional orientation of work for young people through the promotion of dual education and digitalisation.'*

Ms. Mirjana Kovačević, Head of the Centre for Education and Dual Education of the Chamber of Commerce and Industry of Serbia

## 5.0 Bazaar: Learn and exchange

During the afternoon sessions, seven workstations with speakers from EAFA partner countries were set up. Representatives for Albania, North Macedonia, Montenegro, Turkey, Israel, Moldova and Georgia presented the latest developments and achievements at the national level. Participants were able to move between workstations, which encouraged inspiring discussions and exchanges between countries in an informal setting.

### Albania

The Ministry of Finance and Economy (MoFE), with its Employment and VET department, is in charge of policies, the legal framework for and all aspects of funding and appointment of directors. The National Agency for Employment and Skills (NAES) is in charge of the day-to-day administration of VET providers.

Framework curricula for the different VET programmes (lasting 2+1+1, 2+2, or 4 years) consist of vocational theory and vocational practice. Practice parts within companies increase from the second to the fourth year across all programmes. National law allows for the provision of apprenticeships in companies, and this form of vocational practice has become increasingly common in recent years.

### North Macedonia

The VET Law, adopted in 2006, is the main legal framework for VET. In 2021, a new draft was prepared and submitted for public consultation. The main changes concern improved methods for inclusion of students with special needs, increased levels of work-based learning and practice-based education, and a separate chapter on Regional VET Centres (RVETCs).

The reformed four-year modular VET programmes have a mandatory work-based learning component. In the school year 2020/2021, the Minister and Deputy Minister campaigned throughout the country to promote partnerships between VET schools, business communities and municipalities, and to encourage students to join the new programmes. As a result, 86 new classes with a dual training component were launched, 1,384 students enrolled in 44 schools, and agreements were signed with more than 200 companies. In the school year 2021/2022, the ministry offered 2,000 scholarships to students who enrol in dual VET programmes, while 56 new occupational profiles for the academic year 2021/2022 have been verified in consultation with the business community.

### Montenegro

The VET law was amended in 2017 to focus on practical experiences and include a dual training scheme. The Montenegrin VET Strategy 2020–2024 and the related Action Plan 2021 responded to the priorities of the EU's Copenhagen Declaration on VET, and the skills needs of the economic sectors identified in the Montenegrin Smart Specialisation Strategy 2019. Prior to COVID-19, enrolment in dual VET was increasing considerably. However, the pandemic had an impact on the training carried out at companies, and enrolment in dual VET decreased from 834 students in 2019–2020 to 740 in 2020–2021.



## Turkey

Turkey has a comparatively large and highly centralised education system. Within the Ministry of National Education (MoNE), strategic planning practices are in place at central and local levels, guided by a five-year vision. Turkish employers' associations play a big role in skills development, both through their own funding, and through implementing EU- and donor-funded projects. Most of the big employers' organisations have VET departments that interact directly with public institutions, and work-based learning is a key part of the Turkish VET system. According to the age of the student and type of VET institution, this ranges from holiday-period WBL, to in-company training periods lasting three days per week, to full-time training in the company. An increasing number of students in Turkey participate in VET programmes and in 2017, the country introduced the concept of a 'mastership' (apprenticeship) within the scope of compulsory education. To support education-business cooperation, the MoNE established integrated online e-platforms, such as the Turkish VET Map and the 'My Job My Life' platform.

## Israel

VET governance is centralised under the Ministry of Economy and Industry (MEI), Labour Branch, which covers 90% of VET students and responsible for the Vocational Training in Israel, and the Ministry of Education (MoE). Both ministries work in collaboration with the Manufacturers Association of Israel.

The National Institute of Technological Education and Training (NITET) and the Division of Vocational Training and Human Capital Development are the units in MEI responsible for vocational and technological education and training, as well as for apprenticeships, which are part of formal education and training programmes.

Funding for education has significantly increased and includes funding for new day care centers, tech-related studies, and the starting salaries of teachers. There is a strong belief among those in the sector that the substantial shift to distance learning during the crisis may trigger a long-lasting revolution in the whole education and training system.

## Moldova

A number of important decisions have shaped the governance of the VET system, including the Law on Sector Skills Committees (2017); Government Decision No 201/2018 on the organisation and functioning of the National Agency for Quality Assurance in Education and Research; and Government Decision No 1234/2018 on remuneration conditions of the staff of educational institutions operating under a financial and economic self-management regime. The Ministry of Education and Research has started cooperating effectively with other relevant ministries, sector committees, VET institutions, businesses and other social partners.

Adoption of the Regulation on the Organisation of VET Programmes for Dual VET (2018) and the Regulation on the Framework Curriculum for Dual Secondary VET (2018) has completed the process of formally establishing dual education, which started in 2014. The number of enrolled apprentices doubled from 2016–2017 to 2017–2018. However, VET institutions still face difficulties in establishing long-term relations with companies, and companies do not yet have appropriate mechanisms to ensure the quality of WBL. In particular, WBL remains underdeveloped in the agri-food area owing to the shortage of large companies and the fact that small businesses and individual farms are neither motivated, nor fully prepared to provide WBL.

## Georgia

The Vocational Skills Agency was jointly established in 2021 by the Ministry of Education and Science (MoES) and the Chamber of Commerce and Industry to facilitate the introduction of new vocational programmes for the labour market, support innovative training initiatives, and promote employability. The establishment of the agency is an outcome of Georgia's priority to boost public-private partnerships (PPP). All agencies are important players in strengthening implementation capacity for education, training and employment policies in Georgia in the years to come.

Significant achievements were made in enlarging the network of VET providers and in improving the infrastructure of VET institutions and access to VET. However, problems of internal efficiency at institutional level remain, since many of the VET colleges have not taken the opportunity to provide higher quality or more diversified VET programmes. The introduction of modular programmes and involvement of business in the development of VET qualifications and occupational standards were a significant achievement, but it was too early to assess whether they improved the overall quality of VET provision.

In 2021, the MoES developed a new long-term strategy to ensure sustained development and progress of the entire education and training system (including research and innovation) covering the period 2022–2032. The new strategy builds on the achievements of the previous reforms, and addresses the challenges and opportunities arising within the sector and the operational environment, both in Georgia and globally.

**Day 2**

## 6.0 Site visits

On the afternoon of the first day of the conference, participants had the opportunity to visit three vocational training projects based in Belgrade: the Chamber of Commerce and Industry of Serbia, the Qualifications Agency of Serbia, and the National Aviation Academy. During the site visits, the participants were accompanied through the facilities of the three hosting institutions, where they experienced first-hand the latest developments in work-based learning in Serbia, and learned about the role each institution plays in the advancement of dual education. The site visits were followed by a dinner in the centre of Belgrade, during which participants had the opportunity to get to know each other and exchange ideas on the topics of the conference.

### 6.1. Chamber of Commerce and Industry of Serbia

The Chamber of Commerce and Industry of Serbia (CCIS) is an independent, modern and non-budgetary national association of all Serbian business people and institutions. CCIS serves the best interests of its members and the Serbian economy, owing to its tradition, experience and knowledge. Its key commitment is to make Serbia visible as a market economy country, rich in investment opportunities and with open borders, that is ready to join the European trends competitively.

During the site visit, participants were informed about CCIS and the responsibilities, duties and role of the Ministry of Education, Science and Technological Development in the management of dual education and education policies and the implementation of law on dual VET, in addition to its participation in other activities and projects in the field of education. The hosts also presented two of the key tools and activities conducted by the Chamber of Commerce: the web portal of dual education, a tool developed to track information regarding dual education and provide regularly updated statistics that are relevant to national needs and tailored to Serbian regulations; and the digitalised didactic and pedagogic training provided to instructors and in-company trainers in dual VET.

### 6.2. Qualifications Agency of Serbia

The Qualifications Agency was established on 7 September 2018 by the Government of the Republic of Serbia on the basis of Article 14, Paragraph 1 of the Law on the National Framework of Qualifications of the Republic of Serbia. The main competence of the Agency is to provide professional support in the process of developing qualifications, with particular focus on adult qualifications and requalification for the unemployed. The Agency provides up-to-date online information regarding career profiles and related standards and qualifications. Since 2018, 4,600 qualifications have been awarded, with over 1,000 qualifications being active.

The Agency ensures quality in the implementation of the National Qualifications Framework of the Republic of Serbia and connection of the qualifications system with the European Qualifications Framework. Its mission is to regulate the system of qualifications by improving the flexibility of the pathways through which qualifications are acquired in order to meet the needs of the individual, labour market and society as a whole.

### 6.3. Serbian Aviation Academy

The National Aviation Academy of Serbia is a unique aviation school educating aviation personnel in the region. Located in both Belgrade and Vršac, the school was established within the educational system of the Ministry of Education, Science and Technological Development, and has been approved by the European Aviation Safety Agency. The practical training at the Academy is conducted within a number of national and international companies that the school partners with. It aims to bridge the gap between the needs of the industry and national and international requirements. The ultimate goal is to create the biggest integrated aviation personnel education system in south-eastern Europe.

The Academy comprises of three bodies. The Vocational Secondary School, host of the site visit in Belgrade, currently trains approximately 240 students yearly across 11 different dual education programmes in civil and military aviation. The College of Applied Studies offers the study programmes at the bachelor's degree level across three distinct paths: air transport, air traffic control, and aircraft engineering. Finally, the Training Centre for Aviation Personnel offers practical training for a variety of aviation personnel (e.g. Maintenance, Repair, and Overhaul (MRO), services, pilot school, ground personnel, etc.) that closely mirrors day-to-day aeronautics.



Source Serbian Aviation Academy: Photo © Ecorys

## 7.0 Feedback from the site visits

### Speakers:

- **Magda Bolotashvili**, Deputy General Director, Georgian Chamber of Commerce and Industry
- **Claudio Masotti**, Ambassador, European Parents' Association
- **Kristoffer Nilsson**, Teaching Council, Swedish National Agency for Education
- **Niklas Wilhelmsson**, Director of Education, Swedish National Agency for Education



In the first session of the second day of the conference, the speakers were welcomed back and offered the opportunity to share feedback from each of the three site visits under the moderation of **Ms. Floriana Folisi**, Human Capital Development Expert and Country Liaison for Algeria at the ETF. The speakers celebrated the great achievements attained by host institutions in the advancement of work-based learning and dual education in Serbia. They highlighted the need to recognise the specificities of each country, such as the particularities that distinguish the Serbian system, and expressed their excitement at implementing good practice examples inspired by Serbia's experiences.

## 8.0 Work-based learning in the Western Balkans

In the first session of the day, **Jelena Manić**, Deputy Team Leader for the Regional Challenge Fund (RCF) outlined the role of the RCF in promoting work-based learning in the Western Balkans, discussing its recent activities, objectives, and challenges. The work of the RCF aims to improve the VET landscape in the region, supporting evidence-based policy discussions on VET in the Western Balkans.

The RCF finances investments for training providers that jointly engage in cooperative training activities with partnering enterprises in the Western Balkans, thus promoting dual cooperation within and across countries in the region. Through its investments, the RCF provides support to the successful consortia for the implementation of projects aimed at skills development and the improvement of the VET offering. Investments can include support for developing new programmes or enhancing existing offers; improving equipment and infrastructure; delivering training to VET teachers, in-company trainers and cooperative training coordinators; as well as providing advisory support during the implementation of the project.<sup>1</sup>

Established in late 2020, the Fund launched its first two open funding calls in 2021 and 2022, which have already gained significant attraction in a short period of time, and is expected to operate for five years in total. The key goals of the Fund are to strengthen the labour market relevance of VET, as well as to increase the employability of VET students by bridging the gap between skills demand and supply, reducing youth unemployment in the Western Balkans.<sup>2</sup>

The motivations of enterprises for joining cooperative training activities include the opportunity to access skilled employees to increase their productivity, competitiveness and innovation. VET students can also help enterprises by offering a fresh perspective and problem-solving capabilities.

The speaker proceeded to highlight a number of key challenges in relation to work-based learning in the Western Balkans, among which were the need to improve the image and attractiveness of VET, as well as to guide students through smooth career transitions. Innovative solutions are necessary to encourage enterprises to join and maintain partnerships for dual learning and training. Innovations are also required to support VET schools in navigating the twin green and digital transformation, helping to provide training for the green and digital skills development.

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1 <https://rcf-wb6.org/rcf-what-we-do/>

2 <https://rcf-wb6.org/about-the-rcf/>



## 9.0 Digitalisation and work-based learning

The first thematic session was introduced by **Ana Carrero**, Deputy Head of Unit, DG EMPL. Digital skills are increasingly required by the majority of jobs today. As set out by the European Commission within the Digital Compass and the European Pillar of Social Rights Action Plan, 80% of adults in the EU should have at least basic digital skills by 2025. However, only 46% of the EU adult population has sufficient digital skills, well below the ambitious target envisioned. The lack of sufficient digital skills remains a key challenge that hinders economic growth, competitiveness and innovation.



### Speakers:

- **Tamar Kitiashvili**, Director General, National Skills Agency, Georgia
- **Michal Katznelson Levy**, Ministry of Economy and Industry, Business Development, VET Division, Israel
- **Karsten Frøhlich Hougaard**, Director, Production and Innovation, Danish Technological Institute
- **Oliver Gabrielsen**, Danish Union of Business Students
- **Arja Krauchenberg**, Vice President, Lifelong Learning Platform, and Project Coordinator, European Parents' Association
- **Claudio Masotti**, Ambassador, European Parents' Association

VET can play a key role in achieving the digital skills targets set out by the Commission and facilitating a successful digital transition. In this context, it is necessary to adapt VET programmes to new digital needs, also through innovative training, pedagogies, and tools. Among these, the Commission has developed tools like DigComp or SELFIE, that can be instrumental for policy-making, in particular, to assess digital skills and school readiness for the digital transition. The EAFA has also developed a number of freely accessible online tools and webinars on digitalisation and apprenticeships.

The thematic discussion was moderated by **Lida Kita**, Senior Human Capital Development Expert in Social Inclusion and Country Liaison for Israel, Serbia and Turkey at the ETF. Digitalisation is aiding VET providers in the delivery of their learning offer. The knowledge developed across different fields within the private sector plays a key role in shaping policy-making in VET and work-based learning.



The panel was dedicated to the discussion of the policies, practices and innovative examples in relation to the use of digital pedagogies and technologies in work-based learning and apprenticeships.

## 9.1. Technologies in education and work-based learning

The use of technologies in education and work-based learning has allowed for the establishment of **blended learning** opportunities, where in-person and online learning (including self-paced courses) are combined to foster an inclusive environment where students can easily access formative opportunities. **New subjects** have also been introduced by institutions to help students develop digital skills, such as classes on coding and machine learning.

However, the use and expansion of digital pedagogies does not come without its challenges. A key point for consideration here relates to the necessity for adapting the **role of teachers** to complement online learning; teachers should thoroughly guide students as their mentors, working together as a team to ensure their learning. On the other hand, digital and online tools can efficiently provide students with the learning content.

The **COVID-19 pandemic** has not only accelerated the process of digitalisation in VET provision, but has also contributed to the **digitalisation of specific sectors**. New professions and skills have become relevant in a number of fields (i.e. e-commerce, personal services), and work-based learning must adapt to them. The digitalisation of public services has also facilitated the **accessibility of information** regarding jobs and qualifications; for instance, the 'Job data' tool in Israel allows citizens to obtain relevant knowledge on job profiles and thus make informed decisions regarding their career paths.

The progress made in the expansion of technologies in education and work-based learning has been uneven across countries and industries, with small countries like Denmark being compelled to innovate quickly, and some industries still having room to further evolve the application of technologies to facilitate work and improve efficiency (e.g. agriculture, retail and sales).

## 9.2. Success factors and barriers to the use of technologies in apprenticeships

The successful use of technologies in apprenticeships delivery depends on a number of enabling factors. Additional training is needed to boost **teachers' self-confidence** in using technology in apprenticeships. Teachers should also make students aware of the benefits of engaging with and improving digital tools. Thanks to their confidence with technology, young people can then be stimulated to use digital tools in playful and innovative ways. The digitalisation of administration can also increase the engagement of the private sector in dual education by removing the burden of heavy bureaucracy related to participation in work-based learning.

For digital tools to be successfully integrated in work-based learning, digitalisation needs to be considered as a key component of lifelong learning which allows to connect people and foster human cooperation. Digitalisation should be understood as a tool to fulfil the purpose of education: to achieve **transformation**. This process should be understood and mediated by teachers and parents.

Nonetheless, the use of technology in apprenticeships is hindered by several challenges. The digitalisation of work-based learning may also negatively affect the **inclusion** of certain groups of youths. Young people in rural and mountainous regions may not have widespread access to an internet connection and to digital devices. Similarly, digital learning is opposed by stakeholders from sectors that are less digitalised (i.e. agriculture).

## 10.0 The perspective of the learner

The next session, introduced by **Emmanuelle Roure**, Team Leader for DG EMPL, provided a space for **Scott Kelly**, representative of the National Society of Apprentices (UK) and the **EAN**, to share his experience as an apprentice in groundwork and heating, and plumbing engineering. EAN plays a crucial role in creating a bridge between apprentices and national and European institutions to make sure that their ideas and concerns are heard by policymakers, while also boosting the representation of apprentices at national and local level. The discussion focused on the topics of respect towards apprenticeships, the representation of apprentices, their mental health, and best practices.

EAN aims to promote **respect towards apprenticeships**. To change societal attitudes to apprenticeships and vocational careers, it is necessary for VET institutions to raise greater awareness of the huge potential apprenticeships have. There are many apprenticeship opportunities across a wide range of industries, and they can provide variety of qualifications and transferrable skills, enabling apprentices to diversify their experience and increase their employability.

Another key issues highlighted is the **representation** of apprentices in decision-making processes, which EAN is working together with the EAfA to improve. Apprentices should have a seat at the table to participate in open discussions with stakeholders. In this context, it is necessary to represent a variety of views, ensuring that diversity in ethnicity, class, and gender, among other characteristics, are encouraged.

Young people are more likely to complete their studies when receiving the **mental health** support they require. Against this backdrop, it is crucial to improve mental health provision by increasing the funding for and capacity of mental health professionals, as well as to remove the stigma associated with mental health, particularly among young men. As an example of effective collaboration between apprentices and stakeholders to work together in this realm, Scottish apprentices conducted a campaign to extend the mental health support package offered to university students by the Scottish government to encompass apprentices.

The speaker stressed the importance of sharing best practices across countries, as it allows them to learn from each other and improve the situation of apprentices. The support provided by the Scottish government to businesses for funding apprenticeships constitutes a **good practice example** that has helped to reduce youth unemployment in the region. The funding contributes to covering the training costs for apprentices, allowing companies to offer young people regular labour contracts and pay their wages as employees. Through such schemes, it is possible to improve young people's future employment prospects while also safeguarding their working conditions, which in turn incentivises them to partake in apprenticeship programmes.

# 11.0 The reinforced Youth Guarantee

The second thematic session on 'The Reinforced Youth Guarantee' was moderated by **Emmanuelle Roure**, Team Leader, DG EMPL. The Reinforced Youth Guarantee is a commitment by all Member States to ensure that all young people under the age of 30 receive a good quality offer of employment, continued education, apprenticeship and traineeship within a period of four months of becoming unemployed or leaving education<sup>3</sup>. Building on the achievements of the Youth Guarantee, the reinforced Youth Guarantee extends the support available to young people up to 29 years old, reflecting higher youth unemployment rates for the 25-29 age group stemming from the longer school-to-work transition, which was further accentuated by the pandemic.

## Speakers:

- **Ben Kinross**, Secretariat of the European Apprentices Network
- **Baptiste Bouyer**, Head of Representation and Institutional Relations French National Association of Apprentices
- **Mladen Frckovski**, Labour Market Expert and Youth Guarantee Coordinator, Ministry of Labour, North Macedonia
- **Jani Lehto**, Senior Specialist, Ministry of Employment and the Economy, Finland
- **Tiziana Lang**, Senior Officer, Secretary General Office of the Minister of Labour, Italy

The session covered the features and lessons learned through the implementation of the Youth Guarantee in North Macedonia, Finland and Italy. The discussion also focused on the importance of fostering dialogue between social partners and young people, including apprentices, to assess what works in the Youth Guarantee and what can be improved to better address their needs. This should be done in a language that young people are comfortable with. In this way, apprentices should play a role in the decision-making process of the Youth Guarantee.



## 11.1. Youth Guarantee implementation in North Macedonia

As the experience of the Youth Guarantee in North Macedonia shows, it is a key strategy for young people to obtain qualifications and increase their competitiveness in the labour market. The **new Youth Guarantee Plan for the 2023–2026 period** was recently submitted to the European Commission, and is now awaiting approval by the end of 2022.

Several years after its first implementation, the Youth Guarantee effectively increased the total number of young people receiving a quality offer of employment, qualification, apprenticeship or traineeship. As of 2021, approximately 40% of North Macedonian youths are enrolled in the Youth Guarantee scheme, well above its target of 30%.

One of the key lessons learned through North Macedonia's experience relates to the importance of **good promotion**. To raise awareness of the many benefits the Youth Guarantee entails and successfully increase the number of Youth Guarantee beneficiaries, promotion activities should target young people in their preferred environments, allowing for informal discussion. Youth organisations are influential in reaching target groups effectively.

## 11.2. The reinforced Youth Guarantee in Finland

In collaboration with several ministerial bodies, **one-stop guidance centres** play a key role in the roll out of the Youth Guarantee in Finland. The centres offer easily accessible information, advice and guidance services related to employment, education and participation, and aim to meet young people's individual needs and aspirations. New services and practices are continuously developed together with young people and stakeholders.

The several **regional pilot projects** that are currently being implemented by the centres represent a good practice example stemming from the Finnish experience. The pilots are targeted toward improving the provision of supporting services that prepare both students and employers for apprenticeships through coaching and training, work-based learning opportunities, and tailored pathways.

## 11.3. Improving the employability of young NEETs in Italy

The Youth Guarantee was first implemented in Italy between 2014 and 2020 through the national Public Employment Services, ANPAL, in close cooperation with the Regions (which are responsible for VET and active labour market policies). The evaluation carried out by ANPAL in 2022 shed light on the milestones achieved by the Youth Guarantee in Italy in relation to young people 'not in education nor training' (NEETs). 1.6 million NEETs were enrolled in the programme between 2014–2021, with over 800,000 young NEETs being enrolled in active labour market measures. Apprenticeships and traineeships are among the active policies provided by the Youth Guarantee in Italy to increase youth employability.

Youth Guarantee measures in Italy will be integrated in the new ESF+ National Programme 'Youth, Women, Work' (2021–2027), within which more than half of the budget (EUR 2.8 billion) will be devoted to youth unemployment, and EUR 600 million will be allocated to strengthen the dual system and apprenticeships in the Regions.

The lessons learned through the implementation of the Youth Guarantee in Italy highlighted several key factors to ensure the offer of **high-quality traineeships**, including adequate traineeship grants to sustain young trainees; constant monitoring to avoid workplace abuses; and the provision of experienced tutors for the trainees.

## 12.0 Conclusion of the seminar

### Speakers:

- **Georgios Zisimos**, Head of Policy Advice and EU Programming Unit, ETF
- **Ana Carrero**, Deputy Head of Unit, DG EMPL, European Commission
- **Gabrijela Grujić**, Assistant Minister for Dual Education, Serbia

The speakers thanked all contributors and participants for their engagement, lively discussions, and meaningful inputs through the seminar, as well as the apprentices who shared their first-hand experiences, and the partner countries for the knowledge and best practices they shared. They also highlighted the key message emerging from the seminar, which is that young people are key actors in work-based learning. Stakeholders and decision makers need to listen to young people and learn from their experiences, confidence, and passion. As emerged in the conclusions of the seminar, participation in the EAfA and collaboration with the partner countries has greatly enriched Serbia.



Gabrijela Grujić, Assistant Minister for Dual Education, Serbia

