



Western Balkans Alliance for Work-based Learning:

**Towards regionally-based standards of occupations**

**TO REGOS**

**Kick-off Conference**

**Minutes**

Belgrade, 88 Rooms, Takovska 49

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**Minutes taken by:**

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The Kick-off conference was attended by 71 representatives of: the agencies in charge of VET developments which form the South Europe Network for Vocational Education and Training (SEE VET Net), Chambers of Commerce gathered under the Western Balkan Chambers Investment forum (WB CIF), Ministries of Education and Ministries of Labour and Economy, employers and employers' associations, education institutions, qualifications authorities as well as the representatives of international organizations and donors active in the region. The representatives of Moldova, delegated by the Ministry of Education, Culture and Research (the ERI SEE Member), also participated in the TO REGOS Kick-off Conference. The full list of participants is annexed to the Minutes (Annex 1).

The goal of the meeting was to present recent strategic developments in the EU and the SEE region regarding the development and trends in VET policies at the level of EU and the region, trends of developments in the area of standards of occupations and qualifications with specific reference to joint/transnational standards, to present the outline of the TO REGOS project and discuss the developed project methodology with the participants, to explore similar trends and developments in the neighbouring EU countries, and to establish a dialogue with the representatives of donor institutions and international projects in the field of VET modernization in the region.

#### **Ad 1. Opening Remarks and Welcome**

The Kick-off Conference participants were welcomed by Ms Tina Šarić, Director of the ERI SEE Secretariat, Gojko Banović as the SEE VET Net Chair, Ms Monika Mott from the KulturKontakt Austria, and Mr Matthias Themel from the Austrian Development Agency (ADA).

Ms Tina Šarić reflected on the TO REGOS project that is a product of the long-standing cooperation between the VET centres from the region (formalized in 2011 via a Cooperation agreement) and was developed through a number of consultation session rounds among relevant actors in the field of standards of occupations and qualifications. Ms Šarić stressed that the importance of the project lies in its connecting potential not only within the education sector but also within education and business sector in the region and its ability to produce the outcomes resulting from the inputs of the business sector from the whole region. Thus, the project will result in developed regionally-based occupational standards that meet the needs of not only individual economies, but of the whole region, contributing to the development of labour-market relevant skills and increasing the employability of young people in the whole region, as well as to their easier labour mobility within the region.

In his opening speech Mr Gojko Banović expressed his satisfaction with the fact that the number of relevant stakeholders from the region (agencies, ministries, organisations within different sectors) apart from the initiators of the TO REGOS project also recognize the need behind and importance of the project. Mr Banović also noted that the project has good timing as it comes at the stage when national procedures are developed to the point that allows the implementation of regional activities.

Ms Monika Mott noted that the total of 17 VET systems are taking part in the Kick-off Conference that reflects on the diversity that has to be taken into account. Ms Mott also noted that in order to increase the quality in VET there is the need to connect VET sectors with the private sector whose representatives are also present despite their diversity. Ms Mott also emphasised another unifying point that is the understanding that while VET reforms



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will always be national, it is always good to look at the development of other systems as challenges may be similar. Lastly, regional developments have to have sound basis in national systems so that results developed indeed help in national processes.

Mr Matthias Themel, Education and Science Advisor at ADA, opened his address with describing ADA's regional strategy for the Western Balkan region and Danube region that has two main objectives: to strengthen regional cooperation and to support the EU accession both of which are in line with the South East Europe 2020 Strategy and national priorities and objectives. He emphasised ADA's traditionally strong focus on VET that is seen as a driver of change and a driver of economic development and the fact that VET is also part of regional as well as national strategies. Mr Themel noted that occupational standards are the key ingredient of the VET and labour market system and that the process of their development is the process in which business sector is to agree on the skills and the competences that are required on the labour market. He also stressed that the occupational standards can be seen as the bridge of trust and cooperation between the world of work and the world of education; the bridge that is resting on the number of pillars among which one pillar is occupational standards while others include labour market information systems, mechanisms for quality assurance and accreditation standards and qualification standards. Lastly, Mr Themel stressed the significance of the regional cooperation in harmonising VET and labour market systems to which the TO REGOS project can contribute.

## **Ad 2. Strategic and policy framework of joint standards of occupations and qualifications**

Within the first working segment Mr Elido Bandelj, independent advisor and Ms Jolien van Uden, a specialist in VET Policies and Systems from the European Training Foundation (ETF) presented VET developments and strategic relevance of joint standards of occupations and qualifications.

Mr Elido Bandelj presented the overview of the European trends and developments in the area of standards of occupations and qualifications, and relevance of joint qualifications for VET. He described existing policy context as well as implications that rapid society changes have on VET in the context of digitalisation, economic needs, changes on labour markets and how they jointly effect the education system and define future competences, skills, jobs and new occupational standards. Mr Bandelj also reflected on the EU priorities for VET for the period 2015-2020 and presented a vision for the future vocational education and training by 2030 as defined in the European Commission's [Opinion on the Future of Vocational Education and Training Post 2020](#). The vision has three core elements: (1) to foster acquisition of skills, competences and qualifications, (2) to provide accessible, attractive, valued and innovative quality assured provision for all and (3) they [VET systems – Ed.] are integrated, responsive, diversified and quality assured and they are underpinned by governance, funding and guidance which foster excellence, inclusion, effectiveness and shared responsibility. Mr Bandelj further on reflected on the importance of qualifications as well as the importance and utility of the European Qualifications Framework (EQF), National Qualifications Framework (NQF) and European Skills, Competences, Qualifications and Occupations (ESCO). Concluding his presentation Mr Bandelj reflected on joint qualifications as a relatively new concept that should have two main components: strong emphasis on work-based learning and a mobility component. Despite existing challenges in developing joint qualifications, in his opinion, the approach bringing

success is to focus on joint learning outcomes that can then be modified and combined within national qualifications.

The second part of the session was led by Ms Jolien van Uden of the European Training Foundation (ETF) who briefed participants on the relevance of qualifications and qualification frameworks for different social actors (learners, education, labour market, countries) and recent regional developments in the field. She described some common developments (such as the development of qualification frameworks and qualifications based on learning outcomes) and some differences in pace (such as the fact that some systems already referenced their qualifications with the EQF and some are in the process of doing so) that should be taken into account when developing joint standards of occupations. She also reflected on different number of qualifications included in the qualifications registers, different coordinating and implementing institutions (agencies and ministries), division between the development of occupational standards and standards of qualifications, different pace in the development of sector committees/councils/commissions and different stage of development of qualification registers. Further on Ms van Uden reflected on the unbreakable bond between skills and qualifications and the role and importance of occupational and qualification standards. Lastly, she described the path from (regional) occupational standards to (regional) qualification standards.

Presentations from this working session are available on the [Wba4Wbl](#) platform.

### **Ad 3. TO REGOS – presentation of the project and methodology**

The following segment of the meeting was dedicated to presenting the Towards Regionally Based Standards of Occupations - TO REGOS project and the methodology of developing regionally-based standards of occupations.

The segment was opened by Ms Ivana Živadinović of the Education Reform Initiative of South Eastern Europe (ERI SEE) Secretariat outlining the project activities in its 26-month implementation period. She noted that the TO REGOS project is funded by the Austrian Development Agency with funds of Austrian Development Cooperation and led by the ERI SEE Secretariat with the Western Balkan 6 Chambers Investment Forum Secretariat (WB 6 CIF) as the local project partner. TO REGOS is implemented by the VET agencies (the members of SEE VET Net) and the chambers of commerce/trade (the members of the WB CIF) from Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo\*, The Republic of North Macedonia, Montenegro and Serbia with KulturKontakt and Austrian Chamber of Commerce in advisory role. Upon providing the TO REGOS general project information Ms Živadinović described project goals and envisaged impact. She emphasized that the project aims at improving the socio-economic conditions of young people, increase their employability and increasing the relevance of skills and competences acquired during the formal education. Ms Živadinović explained that envisaged impact is to be achieved through delivering 6 project outputs:

- ◆ Increased cooperation between business and education sector in VET at regional and national level
- ◆ Developed Common Regional Framework (methodology) for the development of regionally-based occupational standards

- ◆ 5 regionally-based standards of occupations (Hotel and restaurant technician, Dry construction worker, Floor layer, Tile setter and Painter)
- ◆ Adoption of regionally-based standards of occupations on national level
- ◆ Transposing adopted standards of occupations into standards of qualifications at national level
- ◆ Feasibility study on developing regionally-based standards of qualifications and action plan

Lastly, she noted that the TO REGOS project will have extensive support from international experts as well as from business and educational sector.

A Methodology for regionally-based occupation standards developed by the TO REGOS project partners was presented by Ms Tina Šarić of the ERI SEE. Ms Šarić noted that the Methodology is a joint product of all project partners and it is one of the main project results. The methodology will be tested within the TO REGOS project while developing 5 regionally-based occupational standards that are envisaged to be nationally verified and adopted with the possibility of modification according to national specifications and further on transposed into standards of qualification following the national procedures. She emphasised the importance of the fact that every participating economy has its own national framework within which it develops its own standards of occupations and standards of qualifications that were considered while developing the Methodology.

Ms Šarić described four main steps for the development of regionally-based standards of occupations:

1. National activities based on the Common framework agreed among the participating partners, with national inputs
2. Consolidation/harmonization of national inputs at regional level
3. Adjustment to national specificities (if needed) and verification
4. Adoptions at national levels

The segment was concluded by Ms Šarić inviting the representatives of each economy participating in the TO REGOS project to comment on the presented Methodology and the project itself. Their feedback was as follows:

- ◆ Ms Ejvis Gishti of the National Agency for Education, Vocational Training and Qualifications Albania, on behalf of the Albanian delegation, stated that the methodology is a product of joint work and that it is a good reflection on the agreement made between economies. She also emphasised that this is a learning-by-doing exercise which will be tested throughout the project and which will show how it is possible to go from the regionally-based occupational standards to regionally based standards of qualifications.
- ◆ Mr Siniša Gatarić of the Agency for Pre-primary, Primary and Secondary Education from Bosnia and Herzegovina on behalf of the delegation emphasised the importance of the project and its methodology that respects the need to collect inputs at national level in its initial phase but also to return outputs to be elaborated on national level in its final phases in order to respect all specifics of participating systems. Ms Gatarić also expressed his belief that this procedure will lead to occupational standards that will be acceptable for participating economies.

- ◆ Mr Agon Jusufi from the Ministry of Education, Science and Technology and - LuxDev Project from Kosovo\* on behalf of the Kosovo\* delegation also expressed their agreement with the methodology and stated that it is in line with processes already established in Kosovo\*.
- ◆ Mr Zoran Jovchevski of the Centre for Vocational Education and Training on behalf of the North Macedonian delegation stated that this project is seen as one of the first steps in the future cooperation between economies. He noted that presented methodology is in line with jointly agreed steps but emphasised the importance of having standardisation and mutual agreement on both terms and definitions used in the development of occupational standards and on the length and volume of descriptions used to describe those standards.
- ◆ Ms Sandra Brkanović of the Center for Vocational Education from Montenegro on behalf of the Montenegrin delegation stated it is going to be a challenge to adjust occupational standards on the regional level due to different national procedures which have to be respected. She also described the differences in procedures in Montenegro in comparison to other economies as well as the ways in which they can be overcome with full respect of existing national rules and regulations.
- ◆ Ms Maja Todorović of the Institute for the Improvement of Education on behalf of the delegation from Serbia noted that the methodology is acceptable from the perspective of national procedures. She also reflected on the plans to cooperation with other relevant stakeholders including the Qualification Agency during the process of developing occupational standards.

TO REGOS presentations are available on the [Wba4Wbl](#) platform.

#### **Ad 4. Development of a Joint Qualification – Experience of the Project SHVET**

The following session was led by Mr Danijel Đekić of the Crafts College in Croatia – Institution for Adult Education presented the Erasmus+ KA3 *Smart Development of HVET for Highly Skilled and Mobile Workforce* (SHVET) project that is being implemented in Croatia, Italy and Slovenia. In his presentation Mr Đekić gave a short overview of the EQF level 5 targeted in the project, SHVET methodology and the project perspective on joint of educational program.

Following the description of the EQF 5 from the perspective of providing access to employment and career advancement and enabling further learning and progression to higher education Mr Đekić described the main features of the SHVET project. The project goal *to deliver a new joint HVET qualification of the Expert in building automation (EBA) which is in line with employers' present and future needs, based on WBL and integrating mobility of learners and workers* is to be achieved by the consortium of 7 partner institutions with the support of three associated partners from Croatia, Italy and Slovenia.

Mr Đekić further on described the SHVET project methodology and its four main steps:

- ◆ Development of the qualification profile of EBA
- ◆ Development of a joint curriculum of EBA
- ◆ Design of assessment standards

- ◆ Piloting and Setting up of Sustainable Cooperation Structures Development

Lastly, Mr Đekić reflected on the development of the joint educational program and its levels of integration and international cooperation.

SHEVET net presentation is available on the [Wba4Wbl](#) platform. More information about the project can be found on the [project website](#).

#### **Ad 5. Launch of the Western Balkans Alliance for Work-based Learning Platform – WBA4WBL platform**

In this session, Ms Tina Šarić of the ERI SEE presented the background behind the development of the WBA4WBL online knowledge-sharing and learning platform ([www.wba4wbl.com](http://www.wba4wbl.com)) that was developed in cooperation with VET centres and chambers of commerce from the region following the meetings held in 2017 and 2018. Ms Šarić described the process of development of the platform that is first and foremost a regional output resulted from a long-standing cooperation in the region with the main goal to offer one central point that will follow the regional developments in the area of work-based learning. The platform is envisaged to:

- ◆ Provide information about developments in the area of Work-based Learning (WBL) in the region, as well as how to access it for businesses and schools
- ◆ Be the repository of relevant nationally-developed documents (strategies, laws, rule-books, guidelines, manuals etc.)
- ◆ Be the repository of relevant tools and materials developed in the region and EU (within other bodies or projects)
- ◆ Provide information about national and regional activities and products within the TO REGOS project

Ms Šarić stated that the main target groups are ministries, VET agencies, chambers of commerce, VET providers, businesses, professional associations, parents, mentors, students as well as the general public.

In the second part of the Ms Ivana Živadionović of the ERI SEE presented the structure of the platform and information that it provides.

The presentation from this segment is available on the [Wba4Wbl](#) platform.

#### **Ad 6. The WBA4WBL and Donors Meeting (for WBA4WBL project partners and representatives of international projects and donors' institutions)**

This working session of the Conference was opened to the donors, international organisations and representatives of international projects being implemented in the region in the area of VET modernization, to present their projects and initiatives and exchange information. The session was chaired by Ms Tina Šarić of the ERI SEE who noted that this is a good opportunity for establishing synergies and increase visibility of regional initiatives.

During the session the following participants briefly presented their currently active projects:

- ◆ Ms Šejla Mujačić of Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit GIZ from Bosnia and Herzegovina, working on the project of EU integration promotion in line with the Berlin process priorities.
- ◆ Ms Isabel Rapp of Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit GIZ from Bosnia and Herzegovina, working on the project dealing with technical Vocational Education and Training and curricula modernization, and strengthening connections between education and business sector in Bosnia and Herzegovina
- ◆ Ms Lejla Širbubalo, KulturKontakt Austria, based in Bosnia and Herzegovina, working on national and regional projects, in her intervention focused only on regional ones, in which Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro and Serbia cooperate on the subjects of quality assurance and quality management in VET schools, with special focus on capacity building in leadership and management, and strengthening cooperation between school and business sector
- ◆ Ms Monika Mott added to Ms Širbubalo's intervention that there are a number of results that could be regionally shared – guidelines and quality criteria for cooperation between schools and companies, especially on how this cooperation could be integrated in school quality developments. Also, she offered to share the results of recently conducted surveys on the implementation of work-based learning in Albania, Republic of North Macedonia and Kosovo\*, with Serbian survey under way.
- ◆ Mr Kurt Wuethrich and Ms Ivana Georgijevska of Helvetis, based in the Republic of North Macedonia, presented the 10-year long project funded by the Swiss government, dealing with the VET sector, and focusing the following components: non-formal vocational skills development for young people (to bring them to employment); formal VET education aiming to bring VET closer to labour market needs; and on regulations to the changing reforms.
- ◆ Mr Ivan Stojanović of Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit GIZ from Serbia, presented the project dealing with establishing dual education in Serbia for a number of VET qualifications. He announced that the current project ends in 2019 and is planned to be merged with another project, focusing on youth and employment.
- ◆ Ms Ana Stojanović coming from Chamber of Commerce in Serbia, presented the Austrian development agency-funded project in which the Chamber participates, that deals with the implementation of the Dual education law and by-laws in Serbia



- ◆ Mr Agon Jusufi representing LuxDev – MEST project implemented in Kosovo\*, presented the projects supporting the VET reforms, and focusing on health and trade, implemented in cooperation with the Ministry of Education, Science and Technology. The project will result in the development of the new set of qualifications in ICT and metal construction sector.
- ◆ Mr Matthias Themel, Austrian Development Agency (ADA), added that ADA has VET related country strategies for Albania, Kosovo\* and Moldova; as well as that ADA funds regional projects with UNDP for inclusive solutions for labour markets, and UNICEF on social inclusion of Roma children. Mr Matthias Themel also mentioned an initiative of Austria, Germany, Liechtenstein and Switzerland for the promotion of dual VET, which operates under the name of Donor Committee for Dual Vocational Education and Training (DC dVET, <https://www.dcdualvet.org/en/>).

The donors, international organisations and representatives of international projects welcomed the possibility to exchange information about various projects happening in the region and the opportunity to present their work to other colleagues, as well as expressed interest in being informed about further TO REGOS developments. Following presentations of listed projects and participants' interventions, Ms Tina Šarić concluded that there is the interest among projects representatives to share the projects results on the WBA4WBL platform, as well as to be included in further sharing of information via on-line exchange, newsletter or in formats similar to this Conference.

The presentation from this segment is available on the [Wba4Wbl](#) platform.

## List of Annexes

Annex 1: List of Participants

\* This designation is without prejudice to positions on status and is in line with UNCSCR 1244 and the ICJ Opinion on the Kosovo declaration of independence.