**Vocational education key to employability & preventing young people dropping out of school**

**A newly published ETF report presents an overview on education, skills and employment in the EU neighbouring countries**

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Vocational education is addressing the skills mismatch between what is being taught in traditional secondary education and what is needed in the jobs market. This is one of the findings of the “Key Indicators on Education, Skills and Employment” report, which has just been published by the European Training Foundation (ETF).

**Developing Skills for the Labour Market**

Youth unemployment continues to remain high in many EU neighbourhood countries. In 2018 it affected about half of young people in Kosovo\*, North Macedonia, Jordan or Palestine\*\* and about one in three in several other countries, including Albania, Algeria, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Georgia, Montenegro and Serbia (the EU average is 15%).

Youth transition remains problematic in most EU neighbouring countries, with persistently high numbers who are not in employment, education or training (NEETs)**.**In 2018, one in three young people in Algeria, Kosovo\* and Palestine\*\* and one in four young people in most of the other countries for which there is data available (including Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Egypt, Georgia, North Macedonia and Turkey) were classified as NEETs. Young girls are typically over-represented in this group, and in some countries the proportion of young girls who are NEETs is close to 40%. NEETs are at higher risk of being socially and economically excluded, and so are more likely to become vulnerable in the long term.

However, vocational education can be effective in developing skills and ensuring a smooth and successful transition into the labour market.  In nearly all countries for which there is data available, employment rates tend to be higher among young adults who graduated from vocational training than among those who pursued an upper secondary general programme.

For example, in 2018 around half of recent graduates from vocational education and training programmes in Montenegro, North Macedonia, Serbia and Turkey were employed. This shows that vocational skills can fast track young adults from education to the world of work.

**Keeping Young People in Education**

Vocational programmes can be successful in preventing early leaving from education and training. The proportion of early leavers remains high in some countries, affecting one in three young people in Turkey and Palestine and two in five young people in Albania and Moldova (the EU average is 10.6%).

Keeping young people in education while upskilling them through vocational qualifications has proved to be a successful policy option for some countries. Fewer than 10% of 18-24-year-olds dropped out of school in countries such as Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro, Serbia and North Macedonia in 2018. All these countries are similar in that they have a very high proportion (up to 75%) of upper secondary students enrolled in vocational programmes.

Conversely, in Palestine, the incidence of early leaving remains higher (one in three young people are early leavers) while the number of vocational students is relatively lower. Reducing the incidence of early leaving is an important element in mitigating the risk of social exclusion. High-quality vocational education systems can help in this respect by providing second-chance education programmes for young people who have dropped out of school and are more at risk of having low skill levels and becoming unemployed.

**The Power of Skills**

“On the eve of a new decade it’s imperative to focus on relevant training and skills that will help young people enter the workforce and survive and thrive.  As we face the challenges and opportunities of globalisation, digitisation, migration and the green transition head on, the power of skills should be recognised.  It can help young people find jobs or start their own business, underpin economic and social development and lay the foundation for stability and prosperity in the EU’s neighbouring countries”, said **Cesare Onestini**, Director of the ETF. ‘As we start the countdown to the deadline for the Sustainable Development Goals of 2030, without the clear engagement of all relevant actors the goals will not be achieved and we will miss the opportunity to provide better jobs for all’.

**Background**

The ETF is the EU Agency supporting countries in the EU neighbourhood to undertake reforms in education and training and employment policies.  Over the last 25 years, the ETF has supported over 40 countries in modernising their education, training and labour market systems. Thirteen of them are now members of the European Union and another seven are at different stages on the path towards EU accession.

The ETF publishes an annual report, the ‘Key Indicators on Education, Skills and Employment’ publication, which offers cross-nationally comparable statistics to assess developments in vocational education, skills and labour market topics.

The 2019 ‘Key Indicators on Education, Skills and Employment’ can be found [here](https://www.etf.europa.eu/sites/default/files/2019-12/kiese_2019.pdf).