

MID-TERM EVALUATION
KSV/020
 Support to Vocational Education and
 Training Reform in Kosovo

PROJECT SUMMARY DATA

Country	Kosovo
Long project title	Support to Vocational Education and Training Reform in Kosovo - Phase 2
Short project title	Support to VET Reform in Kosovo - Phase 2
LuxDev code	KSV/020
Version of the report	August 2021

RATING OF THE PROJECT BY THE EVALUATION MISSION

Global rating (Effectiveness)	3 On a scale of 1 (excellent results, significantly better than expected) or 6 (the project was unsuccessful, or the situation has deteriorated on balance).
Rating using other evaluation criteria	Relevance: 1 Efficiency: 2 Sustainability: 4

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The overall vision of Luxembourg's support to Kosovo is to contribute to the economic growth of Kosovo through the modernisation of its education system, more specifically through reforming the Vocational, Education, and Training system of the country. The overall objective of support to Vocational Education and Training reform in Kosovo, phase II (KSV/020) is to support the creation of a technical workforce that is relevant to the social and economic development of Kosovo. The specific objectives of KSV/020 are formulated as "improving the Technical and Vocational Education and Training system and delivery in Kosovo" and focus on three results, namely:

- Technical and Vocational Education and Training policies, systems, and legislation reviewed and strengthened;
- Vocational Education and Training institutions supported by the project are strengthened; and
- Information Systems for the Technical and Vocational Education and Training sector are upgraded.

Hence, the project aims to assist the Government of Kosovo and more specifically, the Ministry of Education, Science and Technology¹ to reform the Technical and Vocational Education and Training system. The total budget of the project is 5 million EUR over a four-year period. An extension defined during the inception period providing an additional 2.5 million EUR and an extension of the project period of half year has been proposed. The extension was approved by the Government of Luxembourg, but not realised, awaiting final verification from the Government of Kosovo. The project agreement between the Government of Luxembourg and the Government of Kosovo was signed on 15 May 2018 for a four-year period, i.e., up to mid-May 2022. At the time of the Mid-Term Evaluation the project was waiting for an extension of the project budget of 3.5 million EUR and an extension of time of half year, i.e., up to the end of 2022².

The objective of the evaluation was to undertake a Mid-Term Evaluation of the KSV/020 project, including to:

- analyse the results and the specific objective compared to targets;
- analyse the results achieved in terms of capacity strengthening;
- analyse management and monitoring of the project;
- analyse the project using the Development Aid Committee evaluation criteria;
- analyse specific questions, including assessment of the financial system, COVID-19, participation in working groups, and other questions; and
- provide recommendations and establish lessons learned.

The Mid-Term Evaluation was carried out by PEMconsult with a team comprising Hans Henrik Madsen, International Consultant and Team Leader, and Alban Hashani, National Vocational Education and Training Expert.

¹ The name of the ministry has changed to Ministry of Education and Science and later on to Ministry of Education, Science and Technology. However, in this report Ministry of Education, Science and Technology has been maintained as in the Technical and Financial Document.

² The extension was expected to be granted by Ministry of Foreign and European Affairs by the end of July/beginning August 2021. It is uncertain when the Government of Kosovo will verify the extension.

Kosovo was hit hard three-fold during the implementation phase:

- by the COVID-19 pandemic where the Vocational Education and Training schools have been closed or functioning at low levels;
- by a shrinking economic situation where enterprises have been working on low levels and been reluctant to work with internships or employ new staff; and
- by political crises where several governments during the implementation period led to delays in changing legislation.

This context has required a highly flexible and adaptive approach to managing the project. Achievements up to now are assessed as follows:

Specific objective: Improving the Technical and Vocational Education and Training system in delivery in Kosovo

The targets at objective level are a 30% reduction of the financial gap of Vocational Education and Training schools, a new Vocational Education and Training sector financing policy included in the Kosovo Education Strategy Plan 2022-2026, and at least 60% of companies are satisfied with the competence of students. It is too early to assess whether the targets for the specific objective are likely to be achieved by the end of the project. The support provided by the project to selected Vocational Education and Training schools on budgeting procedures and the establishment of the Vocational Education and Training school fund in the Ministry of Education, Science and Technology may have some effect on the reduction of their financial gap. This will be measured by the end of the project period. A Technical Working Group 3 under the Ministry of Education, Science and Technology, with support from the project, is in the process of providing suggestions for reforming the national Vocational Education and Training sector financing. The Ministry of Education, Science and Technology is currently also forming a working group for the next Kosovo Education Strategy Plan 2022-2026. Finally, an assessment of companies' satisfaction with the competence of students will be measured by the end of the project phase. However, as the Vocational Education and Training schools have operated with restricted hours, and few students could attend professional practice due to COVID-19, the targets may be difficult to reach. Some delays have been experienced (due to COVID-19, changes in government, etc.), and it is too early to assess whether the targets for the specific objective are likely to be achieved by the end of the project.

Result 1: Technical and Vocational Education and Training policies, system, and legislation renewed and strengthened

Important achievements include the establishment and operation of a Core Working Group for reform of the governing structure of the Vocational Education and Training sector and three Technical Working Groups: Technical Working Group 1 on the optimisation of the governing structure, Technical Working Group 2 on the revision of legal framework, and Technical Working Group 3 reforming the national Vocational Education and Training sector financing. The project has prepared and submitted to the Ministry of Education, Science and Technology a short-term financing formula for Vocational Education and Training schools (which may be implemented from the fiscal year 2022). Other achievements are: training of Vocational Education and Training staff (31 versus a target of 50); curricula development (14 profiles versus a target of 10); development of Teaching and Learning Materials (10 sets versus a target of 10) for supported profiles (especially within the Information and Communication Technology sector); development of Administrative Instructions on incentive structure on the establishment of the office for economic cooperation, on final professional exam, and an Administrative Instruction aiming to increase the access to women in neglected Vocational Education and Training schools and implementation of business models at Vocational Education and Training schools. A major achievement is the creation and update of qualification sets, including occupational standards, and several standards are prepared within the Information and Communication Technology sector. The conclusion concerning result 1 is that many of the planned activities have been initiated; however, due to changes in leadership in Kosovo, closure of schools due to COVID-19, prohibition of in-person meetings, many processes have been delayed, especially in relation to changes in legislation, including changes in management and financing of the Vocational Education and Training sector. The level of response to proposals from the Government of Kosovo has been low. It is questionable whether all targets will be reached by the end of the project phase. Concerns are whether a sustainable financing policy of the Vocational Education and Training sector and a new management system for Vocational Education and Training institutions will be adopted by the Ministry of Education, Science and Technology and approved by the Government of Kosovo.

Result 2: Vocational Education and Training institutions supported by the project are strengthened

This result area covers 11 Vocational Education and Training institutions, namely

- the two Centre of Competences (in Ferizaj and Prizren) previously supported through the KSV/015 project;
- eight Vocational Education and Training schools that should be upgraded (with some renovation and new equipment, Vocational Education and Training school staff training, and financial monitoring mechanisms adopted);
- the Information and Communication Technology Centre of Competence in Pristina should be established and fully operational.

Findings concerning the two Centre of Competences: Visit to Ferizaj Centre of Competence and a virtual meeting with Prizren Centre of Competence revealed the following: in Ferizaj, the three physical “business model offices” (industrial relation and career guidance, Information Systems office and service provision unit) established under the KSV/015 project were closed, reportedly because no financing was provided by the Agency for Vocational Education and Training and Adult Education. The activities concerning the industrial relationship with enterprises were continued, including an advisory industrial board and a number of Industrial Bodies (related to the various profiles). In addition, a new agreement is made with another donor (the Swiss) to set up a career guidance project (in new offices) through the Enhancing Youth Employment project. Most of the partnership agreements with a number of enterprises (in Ferizaj) established as part of the KSV/015 were not continuing, reportedly because the enterprises did not get sufficient benefits from their participation. The major conclusions concerning the two Centres of Competences are that concerning management, including financial management and autonomy, they are by and large functioning as other Vocational Education and Training schools however, managed by the Agency for Vocational Education and Training and Adult Education and not by the concerned Municipality Education Directorate. This entails that the Centres of Competences do not have their own bank account and are not allowed to retain income from income-generating activities. It is well recognised that the two Centres of Competences have been involved in the development of curricula and learning and training materials within the (specialised) profiles of the two Centres of Competences. As also stated in the KSV/015 evaluation report, the two Centres of Competences still appear as very attractive and modern training institutions.

Findings concerning the eight (which in the Technical and Financial Document was planned as seven) Vocational Education and Training schools: four targets have been “overachieved” related to exams passed by students; cooperation agreements signed; staff trained in Vocational Education and Training related skills areas; and a financial monitoring mechanism is adopted in all schools. Good progress has been made towards the targets concerning the number of workshops renovated and/or equipped, and decreased Vocational Education and Training school dropout rates. Key activities include the purchase of office and didactical equipment; hardware tools for business model initiatives; Technical Assistance and capacity development for the management staff and teachers; creation of Industrial Bodies and promotion of their links with the private sector. Twenty computer labs for six Vocational Education and Training schools have been established by the project. The conclusion concerning the project’s support to eight Vocational Education and Training schools is that implementation of activities is well underway, although some delays have been experienced due to the COVID-19 pandemic where schools and enterprises have been closed or reduced their activities. The support to the eight Vocational Education and Training schools will likely achieve its specific objectives by the end of the project phase. Long-term financial sustainability (including autonomy) of the supported Vocational Education and Training schools will be subject to changes in the legal framework and the financial models.

Findings concerning the establishment of the Information and Communication Technology Centre of Competence in Pristina: the target of the indicator is “Information and Communication Technology Centre of Competence in Pristina has been established and is fully operational”. Preparation of the Information and Communication Technology Centre of Competence includes that procurement processes for the architectural planning, demolition, and renovation of the centre is completed. An international partner from Austria has been identified. It was earlier assessed that the establishment would require an extension of the KSV/020 budget of 2.5 million EUR and an extension of time of half year, i.e., up to the end of 2022. The current situation is that additional funding will be required as it is unlikely that counterpart funding of 800 000 EUR from Pristina municipality will be available in the near future. To be fully operational by the end of 2022, the project should be approved (3.5 million EUR) by the Government of Kosovo and the Government of Luxembourg, so construction can start before September 2021. The Mid-Term Evaluation team is of the opinion that in case that Government of Kosovo and Government of Luxembourg decide to go ahead with the establishment of the Information and Communication Technology Centre of Competence, the time frame of the project should be extended by 12-18 months, i.e., up to the mid or end of 2023. Also, before continuing support to the establishment of the Information and Communication Technology Centre of Competence in Pristina the management structure of the institution should be agreed upon by concerned partners.

Result 3: Information Systems for Technical and Vocational Education and Training sector are upgraded

The main findings are that the Information System (Busulla.com) is developed and functional, and more than 405 000 students (compared to the target of 150 000) have used the platform at this point in time. Five Information Systems modules as planned have been developed. These include the development of tools facilitating the update of the occupational standards and curricula, acquisition, and elaboration of the labour market information available to feed the education management Information System of the Ministry of Education, Science and Technology, as well as the establishment of the industrial liaison services. Extensive training sessions were held using the digitalised tools and Information Systems. The conclusion concerning result 3 is that it is likely that all planned interventions will be implemented, and the objectives are likely to be achieved. There is, however, a need to ensure the sustainability of the use of the digital tools through follow-up interventions, as necessary.

Ratings according to Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development - Development Aid Committee evaluation criteria

Global rating: 3, relevance: 1, efficiency: 2, sustainability: 4. The reason why the global rating is assessed as 3 is that the financial sustainability of the project is at stake and that management systems of the Vocational Education and Training sector is not in place. The relevance of the project is very high (1) as the interventions and goals address major challenges in the Vocational Education and Training sector and are in line with Government of Kosovo’s strategy for the development of the sector. The project has the potential to fulfil the objective of the Vocational Education and Training sector if the legal and financial framework would be adjusted as envisaged in the programme documents. The efficiency of project implementation has generally been good (costs compared to similar projects). However, due to frequent changes in government and the COVID-19 pandemic, the efficiency has been impacted (delays). It is a major concern that the overall management of the Vocational Education and Training sector has been discussed for years, including long-term financial sustainability of the sector without substantial improvements. It is uncertain whether changes in this situation will be reached within the timeframe of the project.

Lessons learnt

The following major lessons have been learnt:

- the principle of applying a “project implementation unit” system has been effective in the construction/renovation of workshops and procurement and installation of equipment and Technical Assistance as it follows LuxDev’s own procurement rules. The risk is that important experience in managing Vocational Education and Training schools, including procurement of equipment and services, will disappear when the project comes to an end. Consequently, there is a need to consider the implementation modality in a possible new Government of Luxembourg support to the Vocational Education and Training sector in Kosovo;
- reforming the Vocational Education and Training system in Kosovo takes time and effort, and long-term impact requires long-term engagements. The challenging context in Kosovo (the COVID-19 pandemic, the shrinking economic situation and political crises) has required a flexible and adaptive (and time-consuming) approach to project management;

- involvement of the private sector in Vocational Education and Training delivery is of crucial importance for matching skills provided at the Vocational Education and Training schools with the demand for skills and competencies of the industry. Due to the challenging context, enterprises have been reluctant to engage in internships, employing graduates and participate in Public Private Partnership arrangements. The private sector has been adequately involved in the establishment of Industrial Bodies and Industrial Advisory Boards in supported Vocational Education and Training institutions;
- the legal framework and the financial formula have proven to have more influence on project development than envisaged at inception. Presently, the legal framework of the Vocational Education and Training sector does not allow Vocational Education and Training institutions to retain income from income-generating activities, and funding of consumables are challenging. Some creative arrangements (including Public Private Partnerships) concerning income-generating activities and financing of important activities of Vocational Education and Training schools were found. However, the sustainability of such arrangements appear challenging;
- the Centre of Competence concept that was the basis for LuxDev to support the establishment of two Centre of Competences (in Ferizaj and Prizren) has not been fully implemented as envisaged in the Kosovo Education Strategy Plans.³

The major difference between Centres of Competences and other Vocational Education and Training schools is that the Centres of Competences are managed by the Agency for Vocational Education and Training and Adult Education following largely the same principles according to which the Municipality Education Directorate are managing the Vocational Education and Training schools. This entails, among others, that little financial and managerial autonomy has been transferred to the Centres of Competences. It is well recognised that the two Centres of Competences have been involved in the development of curricula and learning and training materials within the (specialised) profiles of the two Centres of Competences. The two Centres of Competences still appear as very attractive and modern training institutions.

³ According to Kosovo Education Strategy Plan (2017 - 2021), "... Centre of Competences are a new concept of Vocational Education and Training institutions aimed at facilitating a significant departure from content-based to competency-based curriculum and providing excellent preparation for the labour market. ...and are supposed to serve as a model for vocational schools in Kosovo and the region...". Kosovo Education Strategy Plan also acknowledges that "...with the support of development partners, investments have been made in these institutions' infrastructure and human resources. Still, their financial and managerial sustainability remains a challenge...". To that end, Kosovo Education Strategy Plan envisages that "...the financing formula needs to be reviewed and adapted to the needs of..., in particular the Centre of Competence. Regulations for generating and using their own source revenues should be developed, and continuous professional development should be carried out for the CoC managers and the teaching staff...". The Evaluation Team assesses that most of these elements have not been fully implemented and may be taken up by the upcoming Kosovo Education Strategy Plan (2022-2026).

Recommendations

- Government of Luxembourg and Government of Kosovo should approve the proposed extension of the project - budget-wise with an additional 3.5 million EUR and timewise with 12-18 months;
- before continuing support to the establishment of the Information and Communication Technology Centre of Competence in Pristina the management structure of the institution should be agreed upon by concerned partners - Ministry of Education, Science and Technology, Municipality Education Directorate of Pristina, the Austrian partner and the Agency for Vocational Education and Training and Adult Education (if involved);
- the work of the Core Working Group and the three Technical Working Groups should be accelerated, and recommendations from the groups should be approved by the Government of Kosovo authorities;
- the Ministry of Education, Science and Technology and the donors supporting the Vocational Education and Training sector should more effectively coordinate their support to the sector to ensure that lessons learnt from each other's programme are utilised and no overlaps take place (for example, concerning career guidance support);
- the business model initiatives should only be initiated in the Vocational Education and Training schools if there is a commitment to continue these initiatives after LuxDev support ends;
- an exit strategy should be prepared by taking into account the recommendations of the upcoming prospective study (initiated by LuxDev). The exit strategy should outline a process whereby a clear strategy for the sustainability of the supported Vocational Education and Training schools is made and lessons learned can be extracted for the use by government and possible development partners interested in supporting the Vocational Education and Training sector in Kosovo in the future - including LuxDev;
- the budget for the remaining project period should be revised in accordance with the exit strategy - more emphasis on establishing sustainable mechanisms at the Vocational Education and Training school level and assisting Government of Kosovo to change the legal framework should be given;
- a steering committee meeting should be arranged as soon as possible to discuss exit challenges of the programme and agree on the activities to be initiated during the remaining period of the KSV/020 project. It should be considered to establish relevant sub-committees of the steering committee to ensure timely approval of necessary interventions;
- the two Centre of Competences established with the support of KSV/015 should be utilised as initially planned, e.g., as "pilots" for the reform initiatives coming out as a result of the working groups - especially related to more managerial autonomy, including financial management;
- the indicators and targets in the matrix of the logical framework of the project should be disaggregated by gender;
- following Luxembourg's general development cooperation strategy, more emphasis should be given to strengthening the communication of Luxembourg's support to the Vocational Education and Training sector in Kosovo to enhance Government of Luxembourg's profile vis-à-vis international partners and stakeholders while further supporting awareness-raising at home.