

Interview with Ms. Ana Zacharian

a) *What are your views on the structure and functioning of the apprenticeship system in your country? Do you think it is possible to improve it? How?*

In the context of Albanian legislation and the VET system, the terms "Apprenticeships", "Internships" and "Learning in the Workplace" (or Work-Based Learning WBL) can be used interchangeably. Both terms refer to the integrated approach of combining theoretical education in vocational schools with practical, hands-on training provided by employers in a real-world work environment and/or near the school premises especially in the first year of the Vocational Education (VE) cycle.

Apprenticeships in Albania are becoming an important component of vocational education and training (VET). They provide practical skills and work-based learning opportunities to young individuals, integrating theoretical education with real-world experience. The VET system and apprenticeships themselves are indeed experiencing significant changes, driven by various factors such as technological advancements, evolving workforce needs, and policy reforms. The current structure involves collaboration between vocational schools, businesses, and public authorities. This collaboration among stakeholders can be described more in details:

Vocational Schools: These institutions deliver the theoretical component of the training and coordinate with businesses to ensure that the practical training meets the required standards.

Businesses and Organizations: Employers provide workplace training, offering apprentices real-world experience and practical skills that are directly applicable to their future careers.

Public Authorities: Entities such as the Ministry of Education and Sports, and Ministry of Economy, Culture and Innovation, National Agency for Employment and Skills and National Agency for Vocational Education and Training and Qualifications (NAVETQ) oversee the implementation and regulation of the apprenticeship programs.

Like any education and training system, the apprenticeship system in Albania faces various challenges, such as ensuring sufficient participation from

Project no.

101092147-V2V-AL-ERASMUS-
EDU-2022-CB-VET

Duration

31/01/2023 – 30/01/2025

Coordinator

Apro Formazione S.c.a.r.l. (Italy)

Partners

- SEPR (France)
- Hoteleri (Albania)
- Kamza MFC (Albania)
- Albanian Skills (Albania)
- Build Green Group (Albania)
- EFVET (Belgium)



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employers, maintaining the quality of training and motivation of the apprentices, and addressing skills mismatches in the labor market.

To create a supportive environment for apprenticeship programs, encourage greater participation from the private sector, and enhance the overall quality and relevance of apprenticeship training in Albania. The Government of Albania is implementing several employment promotion programs and incentives. Examples of these initiatives include:

Financial Incentives: to employers who participate in apprenticeship programs like subsidies of taxes and social contribution, and salaries for 6 months of apprentices when employed from the same company / business.

Regulations on Teachers Continuous Development through the involvement of them in the formal internships in the business or companies related to their teaching field and the workload of the staff of the VET providers (especially Vocational Secondary Schools) who cover specific functions in the Development Unit.

Marketing and Promotion: The government actively promotes apprenticeship opportunities through various channels, including job fairs, social media campaigns, and industry events. By raising awareness about the benefits of apprenticeship, the government encourages more young people to pursue this career path.

Monitoring and Evaluation: The government, through its relevant institutions improves the monitoring and evaluation elements of apprenticeship programs regularly.

Irrespective of the current success and results, in my opinion all engaged stakeholders should work continuously to the improving the Apprenticeship System to:

1. **Enhance Collaboration between stakeholders:** Strengthening partnerships between vocational schools and businesses to ensure that the skills taught are aligned with industry needs.
2. **Curriculum Modernization:** Updating the curriculum to reflect current technological advancements and industry standards and to make vocational education more relevant.
3. **Increased Funding and Resources:** Providing more financial support to resources and equipment for VET programs to improve their quality and accessibility.
4. **Professional Development for Teachers and Business Coaches:** Offering continuous professional development for educators, trainers and companies' tutors to help maintain high teaching and mentoring standards.
5. **Promotion and Awareness:** Increasing awareness about the benefits of apprenticeships to attract more motivated students and businesses to participate in these programs.
6. **Connect and involve intensively with the apprenticeships EU initiatives and platforms like Pact for Skills, EAfA, EfVET, etc.**

b) The system-level arrangements for the certification of apprentices: based on public authorities or managed through the social partners/professional organizations/ chambers?

Certification of the apprentices per se, at the end of the apprenticeship does not happen in the Albanian context. The main certifying body at the end of the Vocational Education cycle are schools. However, there is a varying

degree of involvement of the businesses in the continuous monitoring, assessment and evaluation of Learning Outcomes or achievements but there is not a separate certification, just at the end of a specific apprenticeship experience. In practical terms of the evaluation of the apprenticeship the apprentice goes through the continuous assessment during professional practice in business and the final evaluation with the engagement of businesses in assessment commissions for final professional practice exams across various qualifications and courses.

At the end of the year 2, 3 or 4, depending on the structure of the curricula (2+2, 2+1+1 or 4 years) the students have to take exams (practical and theoretical exams). The schools invite representatives of the business, experts, or mentors to serve as member of the commissions, and in this way the businesses are involved in the final evaluation of the students also.

c) Is there a minimum level of education that people should reach before entry into apprenticeships in Albania?

In general Albania doesn't have a standardized national apprenticeships system, scheme in place. However, individual apprenticeship programs or industries may have their own requirements or preferences when applicable. The apprenticeships/internships in VE and HE apply different regulations and models. In VE all students have to enter into apprenticeships/internships during the VE cycle.

d) How to improve the cooperation between employers' organizations, enterprises, trade unions, VET providers and national authorities?

Improving cooperation among employers' organizations, enterprises, trade unions, vocational education, and training (VET) providers, and national authorities is essential for creating a cohesive and effective workforce development ecosystem. Here are some of the strategies which are applied but also strengthen like:

Establish clear communication channels such as regular meetings, forums, or online platforms, where representatives from each stakeholder group can exchange information, share insights, and address common challenges. Clear communication fosters mutual understanding and trust among stakeholders.

Promoting a Culture of Participation and Collaboration in apprenticeships: Foster a culture of collaboration and partnership among stakeholders by celebrating successful collaborations, highlighting shared accomplishments, and emphasizing the value of working together towards common goals. One of this initiative will be the series of the event that us, the Albanian Skills together with Digital Nomad Association Albania will start this June, called: [Apprentices of Today. Leaders of Tomorrow.](#)

Develop joint training programs that bring together employers, VET providers, and trade unions to design curricula that align with industry needs and standards. Cross-sector training programs ensure that education and training are relevant to the labor market and meet the needs of both employers and workers.

And one of the most important one to increase the performance of both employers and apprentices will be the paid internships. Several experiences from the field reinforce my belief that the internships should be paid

experience. Who's going to pay for it? Of course, both employers and government have to contribute to that.

By implementing these strategies, stakeholders can enhance cooperation and collaboration among employers' organizations, enterprises, trade unions, VET providers, and national authorities, leading to more effective workforce development outcomes and better opportunities for all involved.

e) How can apprenticeship be used as a tool for social inclusion?

Apprenticeships can serve as a strong tool for social inclusion by providing pathways to employment, skills development, and economic empowerment for individuals from marginalized or disadvantaged backgrounds. As a such have to put efforts on removing barriers to participation, tailored support and mentorship, involvement of paid work experience, career progression opportunities, etc.



