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Mid Term Review

Skills for Jobs project (phase 2)

Report

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1 Reference Frame

1.1 Objectives and methods of investigation

According to the terms of reference (ToR; see annex 1), the mid-term review (MTR) pursues the following objectives:

- Assess the project based on the OECD evaluation criteria (relevance, effectiveness, efficiency, impact, sustainability);
- Provide recommendations for the remainder of the current phase;
- Advise on the design of the third and last phase (consolidation, but mainly exit phase), as well as on possible interventions/activities.

The following methods were applied:

- Document review: A comprehensive review of various documents provided by SDC was conducted.
- Focus group and one-on-one interviews: In addition, a total of 17 interviews with 41 participants was conducted (interview schedule, see Annex 2). All interviews were conducted online from 17st February – 1st March 2022. To incorporate as many perspectives as possible, a broad variety of stakeholders were interviewed. Participants represented all major VET stakeholders in Albania (MoFE, national agencies, school teachers and principals from VET schools, company representatives, international partners).
- Local consultant: Prof. Saimir Kristo accompanied all interviews. He served as a valuable sounding board, added country-specific data and put data collected in the interviews into context.
- Validation: Data stemming from different sources were triangulated. In a debriefing meeting with SDC and S4J representatives, preliminary findings were shared and discussed.

The MTR was very well organised. The provision of substantial documents was submitted well in advance. Before and during the interviews, we received constant support and the interview schedule went without a hitch.

1.2 Relevant Context

The Skills for Job (S4J) project with its objectives (see 1.3) is embedded in a complex network of economic and societal structures and developments in Albania as well as in interventions of other donor projects. Thus, the following reference frame is to contextualize the S4J approach and flags the position of the project in a broader landscape.

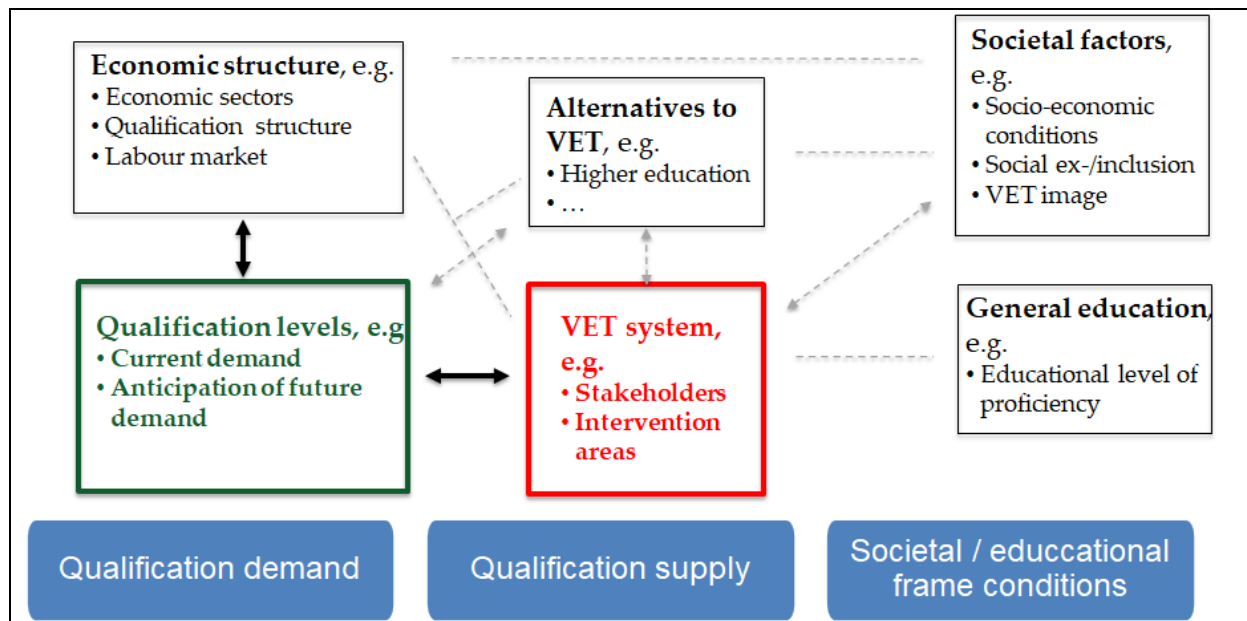


Fig. 1: Reference frame of VET in Albania

The chart illustrates that VET both depends and impacts on other areas of the economic and societal system. It shows the potential as well as the limitations of VET interventions on economic and societal developments.

An important reference point is the countries' economic structure which to some degree defines the demand for competences and qualifications. In particular, the qualification structure in different economic sectors determine the demand for respective qualification levels. For example, if companies in an economic sector primarily requires un- and semi-skilled employees, a VET system solely targeted to train high-skilled people would not be aligned to the articulated requirements of this sector. On the other hand, provision of high-skilled people for the sector could make companies re-consider their HR strategy and induce new ways of work-organization and staff recruitment. A major challenge in defining appropriate qualifications to be developed in respective VET-programmes is the fact that due to the fast pace of changes in economy and society, such programmes not only have to address current qualification demands but also future demands. In that respect, provision of VET programmes should have economic structures in mind but can also think beyond current demand.

Economic situation in Albania is characterized by a limited but steady growth up to 2018. The overall industrial and trade performance shows a lack of competitiveness due to the constraint in specialized and skilled labour force, and a still large informal economy (Swisscontact 2019, 9f.). Labour market is characterized by comparatively high unemployment, low participation of youth and women. The share of youngsters (age cohort 20-34 years) not in employment, education and training (NEET) was above 27% in 2017 (Swisscontact 2019, 10). Roma and people with disadvantages have extra difficulties to access education and the labour market. Women are underrepresented in almost every employment sector (Swisscontact 2019, 10).

With regard to achieve some positive impact on the qualification level which can indirectly affect the performance of the economic structure, VET is not the only player in the arena. There are other ways for companies to cover their demand of qualified labour. Apart from recruiting graduates from universities, they can set up training-on-the-job or other programmes customized to their specific qualification demand.

VET is not only expected to address economic requirements but should also respond to societal challenges. For example, VET often is supposed to promote social inclusion of disadvantaged and vulnerable groups, compensate for deficiencies from general education and contribute to the reduction of poverty. At the same time, VET has to build on existing cultural, social and educational circumstances without necessarily following the ambition to directly change these with the planned interventions.

Given these reciprocal dependencies the VET system is exposed to, any project intervention should have a clear understanding on what is going to be treated as frame conditions and what should be the target of change within this reference frame.

On a more detailed level, interventions can be focused on specific stakeholders and/or areas of the VET system. The following figure provides an overview on some key target fields for launching innovations in the VET system:

VET-system	
Key stakeholders (institutional / action level)	Intervention areas
Ministries <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Policy makers • Policy implementors 	VET governance <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Legislation / formal provisions • Institutions / implementation structure • Responsibilities / processes • Engagement / role of business sector • Finance Providers landscape <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Vocational schools, VTCs, (MFC) • Ressources, processes • Organisational development of VE, VTC • Business sector VET provision <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Programmes, profiles • WBL, dual VET • Ways of teaching and learning • Quality processes
National Agencies (NAES, NAVETQ) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Management • Facilitators, coordinators 	
VET Providers (Vocational schools, VTC) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Principals • Teachers, instructors • Management; administration 	
Business Sector (companies, business membership organizations) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In-company trainers, mentors • Management; administration 	
Donor Community	

Fig. 2: Key stakeholders and intervention areas in the VET system

With regard to Albania, key stakeholders on the institutional and functional level are well-depicted in different publications (e. g. Hilpert 2020; Swisscontact 2019). Based on the assumption that projects designed to improve the VET system in the recipient country should be aligned with the countries' needs and objectives, any decision on what intervention area should be prioritized is to base on an analysis of the current state-of-affairs. In Albania, the case is specific as the VET system is exposed to a comprehensive reform process covering all levels of the system. So far, the Albanian VET system followed a school-based, supply-oriented approach without participation of the business sector. There is no performance-based quality assurance on the VET provider level in place. Assessments are based on school curricula and not on occupational standards. Funding of the VET system is provided by state budgets and donors, the latter roughly equals the former (Hilpert 2020, 51). Image of VET programmes is comparatively low, attractiveness of young people after compulsory schooling to enrol in VET programmes is limited. In 2014, the government adopted the National Employment and Skills Strategy (NESS) which addressed employment promotion and VET as one entity. Two policy priorities defined in the NESS were dedicated to set up a quality

VET system to meet the demand of the labour market. This strategy has introduced a new dynamic in the complex VET reform and calls for a coordinated implementation strategy to meet the ambitious targets (Hilpert 2020, 6).

What follows is a description of the initiatives and ambitions taken within the Albanian VET reform process structured along the different levels of a VET system.

On the *macro-level* the governance of the VET system is regulated and managed. Most important, the following issues have to be settled:

- Regulatory framework in terms of VET law, by-law, (qualification) framework or guidelines define the vision, objectives, funding and constitute the characteristics of the VET system. They also define the degree of autonomy with regard to the various stakeholders in the system.

While a new VET law was introduced in 2017, an amended Albanian Qualification Framework (AQF) in 2018, there has been a slow process to make the legal framework operational. Among others, details on the envisaged introduction of an extended (financial) autonomy on the part of VET providers are still pending.

- Institutional settings define ownerships, responsibilities and potential for implementation of the vision and objectives set out in the regulatory framework. Apart from ministries and assigned government agencies, VET providers and the business sector can become major part of the institutional set-up.

On the national level, two agencies (NAES, NAVETQ) are assigned new tasks and responsibilities to support VET providers in their implementation of VET on the local level. In order to introduce work-based learning (WBL) components into the VET programmes, VET providers are obliged to adapt their internal organization and incorporate a completely new set of tasks to coordinate their programmes with the business sector. Correspondingly, companies expected to implement work-based learning stages in their premises need to be convinced and capacitated for this new task.

- Along with the outlined areas, key processes and responsibilities are defined as part of the VET governance.

Following-up to the previous points, processes of curriculum development, continuous professional development of teachers, quality assurance, recruitment of staff in VET schools, etc. scaffold and regulate work processes in a new way. Not all processes need to be defined and enforced on the national level. Many tasks may be just defined in principle or left completely at the discretion of local units.

On the *meso-level*, all implementation and management issues regarding the contribution of VET providers for running the VET system are focused. In the Albanian context, this comprises VET schools, Vocational Training Centres (VTCs) as well as the business sector with training companies and Business Membership Organizations (BMO) engaged in the running and support of work-based learning. This includes the establishment of Development Units (DU) at VET schools to coordinate relationship with the business sector, organize continuous professional development of staff and negotiate curricula and training plans with companies to structure WBL.

On the *micro-level*, the planning, design and implementation of the teaching and learning environments at schools and companies are spotlighted. This focus covers the design of vocational programmes and profiles, their delivery in school and companies, methods of delivery including the support of digital technologies, development of teaching and learning material, and methodologies of quality development.

The S4J project started when the Government of Albania launched the VET reform. Reform aims at increasing the quality of VET, developing adequate qualifications, improving the attractiveness and relevance of VET and identifying needs for new profiles that match the economies' qualification demand. The governance framework, structures and processes have been revised, including a stronger decentralization of tasks and responsibilities to VET schools. However, some of the frame conditions are anything but ideal: VET sector is under-financed and there is a high degree of donor dependency; teachers' salaries are comparatively low; the institutional infrastructure is fragile; decentralized, autonomous decision-making is not familiar; limited capacities in ministry and sub-ordinated agencies; disruptive factors such as Covid-19 and increasing migration of young people (Hilpert 2020). However, a momentum to improve the VET sector could be recognized. Within this context, S4J took on the ambition to support and strengthen these developments along with other Swiss-funded projects (especially Skills Development for Employment – SD4E). S4J has been designed to address reform issues on the micro-level with some extensions to the meso-level.

1.3 Objectives and approach of S4J

The objectives of S4J can be summarized by stating the project goals, the intended outcomes and the lines of intervention (Swisscontact 2019, 24ff.):

Project goal:

Young women and men from all social groups in Albania find attractive and gainful employment thanks to improved skills.

Outcome 1:

Young women and men have access to a performing, labour market-oriented education and training offer in sectors with growth potential. As part of this outcome, S4J will pay special attention to socially vulnerable individuals and groups.

Outcome 2:

The private sector takes responsibility in the definition, provision and financing of VET on provider level.

Intervention Lines:

1. Employers' and Partner's Relations: Partner VET providers establish and/or expand and further consolidate 1:1 network relation with the private sector and other partners.
2. Diversification of Providers Offers: Partner VET providers act as multifunctional providers offering diversified, gender neutral and labour market-oriented vocational education and training (long and short).
3. New ways of learning and Quality: New ways of learning and training which foster inclusiveness and meet world of work standards are applied by partner providers.
4. Work-Based Learning with Employers: Partner VET providers and businesses jointly develop and offer WBL programmes (apprenticeships and internships) based on ILO and EU framework for quality apprenticeship.
5. Provider Management / Organizational Development: Partner VET provider management structures, resources and processes fit and are operational for new functionalities.

Each component of this normative framework is operationalized by indicators.

In phase 2 of the project, there has been an extension from 7 providers (6 VET schools, 1 VTC) to 9 (2019) and 11 (2021). S4J continues to focus on priority sectors identified in phase 1 with big economic potential for generating more and better jobs for youth and to contribute to economic growth: tourism & hospitality, ICT, textile and construction.

In phase 2, S4J is supposed to apply a balanced approach of consolidation and scaling-up. Scaling-up relates to a small increase in the number of schools and the extension of support to other courses of a partner provider. Also, S4J is to refocus from direct delivery of services to supporting the actors doing things on their own.

During phase 2, S4J received an additional credit to react on the closure of schools by implementing the “MesoVET platform”. Due to this investment and existing networks built up previously, the project was able to respond very rapidly to the new challenges posted by Covid-19.

The project approach can be summarized by the following characteristics:

- S4J activities closely connect to the ongoing VET reform process launched by the Albanian government.
- S4J understands own activities as part of a holistic, systemic approach striving for improvements on the macro-, meso- and micro-level of the VET system. The focus of S4J lies primarily on the micro-level with some extensions to the meso-level.
- S4J pursues a change approach attempting to establish a collaborative partnership in a history of separation and mistrust. The project strengthens the established part of the VET system, namely VET schools, to gradually improve their programmes by incorporating WBL provided by companies. This implies to convince, support and monitor companies to engage in (high-quality) WBL. Once a considerable number of companies could be recruited, VET schools can intensify a process of quality development.

From ...	To ...
Purely school-based VET	School-based VET with an increasing and significant component of WBL
Centralized system without much autonomy on the local level	Introduction of (partial) autonomy on the local VET school level
Widespread notion of control, top-down regulation and micro-management	Notion of quality development with strong elements of self-assessment, empowerment of stakeholders (on national and local level), strategic management on the macro-, operational management on the local level
Lack of evidence-based decision-making tools	Establishing instruments and tools to base quality processes and decision-making on relevant evidence

Fig. 3: Key areas of change

Given the cultural and institutional framework, this change approach is most promising for the following reasons:

- Establishing trust as a key component of cooperation requires an opportunity for partners to experience common interests, mutual reliability and self-efficacy.
- Changes in times of uncertainty and disruptions require a balance of familiar structures and incremental steps of innovation. The chosen approach allows to scale the degree of innovation by adjusting it to changing circumstances.
- Beyond, the approach allows the integration of all available resources on the local *and* the national level. Although the balance of power / autonomy stills needs to be finetuned, there is a good chance that win-win-achievements can

be harvested.

- S4J regards sustainability as a major component of the project. In phase 2 this requires to increasingly shift from a service provision to a facilitation approach. In principle, the project will less implement activities itself but capacitate the stakeholders to identify and address the potential and achieve systemic change by their own actions.

2 Review findings

Review findings are structured along the latest version of the OECD evaluation framework (2019) with the criteria: relevance, coherence, effectiveness, efficiency, impact and sustainability. They go beyond those set out in the ToRs for this MTR which do not include the ‘coherence’ criterion. Detailed sub-questions are provided both in the ToR and the assessment grid in annex 3.

2.1 Relevance: Is the project doing the right things?

‘Relevance’ addresses the extent to which the projects’ objectives and design respond to beneficiaries’ needs, policies, and priorities, and continue to do so if circumstances change.

S4J’s objectives – as outlined in chapter 1.3 – are clearly defined and explicated in the “Logframe for Phase II 2019-2023”. In the interviews with the S4J team it was pointed out that the logframe has been the basis for all activities in phase 2 of the project.¹ Assessment of documents as well as interviews with beneficiaries from government, national agencies, VET providers, companies and students revealed that the objectives and the change approach of the S4J-project are well recognized, appreciated and broadly shared by these groups. It is self-evident that different stakeholders emphasize different objectives. Against this backdrop, ‘relevance’ means that the objectives and initiatives pursued by the project address significant needs and priorities of the various beneficiaries on the different levels of the VET system.

The normative framework with vision, project goals, intervention lines, impact hypothesis seems to be quite ambitious, but highly relevant and in line with the VET policy of the Albanian government. Both the former and the current Deputy Minister of Finance and Economy in charge of VET explicitly confirmed the relevance and importance of the project for the implementation of substantial reform goals. The change approach is regarded as well-founded and convincing in Albanian context, interim results are assessed as encouraging and beyond expectation. Intervention lines cover key areas of promoting change on micro-level. The engagement of a large and increasing share of companies in the selected professions indicate interest, benefits and thus relevance for the business sector (for numbers, see chapter 2.3). As one interview partner from the national level put it: “You can easily distinguish S4J-schools from others!”.

What can be regarded as the ‘Swiss-factor’ of the innovations in progress? Although it has been clear right from the start that any VET innovation cannot be conceived along the lines of copying a successful system like the Swiss one to a different one like the Albanian, some Swiss specific factors have had considerable impact on the design and implementation of the VET reform in Albania:

- The increasingly strong engagement of the business sector in the delivery of VET programmes goes back to the key role of this component in the Swiss system. In the Albanian context this is a major shift from a purely school-based system to one alternating phases at school with those in companies. The flexible introduction of adaptive forms of WBL and apprenticeships reflects the experience in the Swiss VET system that every sector creates its specific way of realization.

¹ In an internal audit of the Swiss Embassy some questions were raised on whether S4J deviated from the logframe model and instead turned to a result chain model. The S4J team explained that in the design of phase 2 they started by using a different model but after exchanges with SDC they came back applying the logframe model.

- The pragmatic, but structurally rooted introduction of quality development approaches in the continuous improvement of the VET system also leans on Swiss experiences.
- Strengthening decentral capacities is also strongly rooted in the Swiss experience that a high degree of autonomy on the local level provides a good frame condition for innovation and customized solutions for demanding problems.
- The assignment of responsibilities to local actors is accompanied by capacitating them to take on their role effectively. The intensive promotion of school management structures and competences derives from key insights of Swiss experiences.
- The orientation of VET towards labour market relevance without ignoring the social dimension of VET can also draw on corresponding mindsets and approaches in the Swiss context. For example, striving for a balance between economic productivity and social inclusion is considered by ways of positive discrimination of vulnerable groups and female students.
- Swiss approach of the management of diversity with bridging programmes, career guidance, orientation courses for special needs groups are incorporated in the development of VET programmes and training of VET personnel.
- The project management approach of S4J also reflects many aspects of how innovation projects are conducted in Swiss context. Go ahead pragmatically and ignore ideological barriers, learn from experience, think visionary and systemic but implement stepwise, use proven management tools, are just some principles which have been clearly visible in the project.

As the current approach of the project is assessed as highly relevant, rooms for improvement can only relate to issues which can strengthen existing initiatives or which could be emphasized with a higher priority within the project portfolio. Against this background, the following points are to provide some food for thought for the further advancement of the project:

- Differentiate profiles with regard to engagement of the business sector
Companies may have different motives for engaging in WBL. If they follow an investment motive and regard their engagement as a measure for the recruitment of qualified staff, they would expect graduates of the VET programme to stay on in the company and start working as an employee. Interviews with students revealed that for some profiles (e. g. ICT, economy and business) this expectation can easily be disappointed as many of them plan to move on to university. A tracer study conducted 2019/20 revealed that 11% of the students were attending higher education or further trainings upon graduation. This doesn't necessarily make an engagement useless but expectation management gains a higher importance and should be considered when approaching companies for their participation in WBL activities.
- Balance present and future qualification demands
Time horizon of many companies – especially SMEs – in HRM is short-term. They demand competences they need today and assess the relevance of VET programmes and graduates against this short-term perspective. However, VET also needs to keep up with the pace of change. Accelerated innovation in digital technology, new demands in sustainability and environmental protection, and new business models increasingly online are just a few areas where VET systems are under pressure to respond more rapidly than in the past to modernize its infrastructure, capacities, and practices. We need to look no further than the COVID-19 pandemic for a convincing

example of the need for education systems to provide skills in the context of unprecedented and unpredictable disruptions. For the design of VET programmes this requires to find a balance between present and future qualification demands, and to convince (some) companies on the use of skills which go beyond the actual demand but prepare people for times of accelerated change.

- Strengthen links between vocational education and short vocational courses
VET in Albania stages two types of provision: vocational education programmes of a duration of up to four years provided by VET schools, and short courses of a duration up to 18 months provided by Vocational Training Centres (VTCs). One of the reform ideas relates to the ambition to transform the two institutions to so-called “multifunctional centres (MFCs)” and to connect the offerings into some kind of coherent unit. So far, there is just one MFC in place while the establishment of further MFCs is planned to become a facet within the so-called optimization plan currently under discussion. Obviously, the process of linking different types of provision is still in its infancy stage. Apart from the institutional dimension of this process, conceptual energy could be devoted to a closer curricular link and the permeability between short courses and multi-annual vocational programmes.
- Strengthen social dimension of VET
The distinction between vocational education at VET schools and short courses at VTCs to some degree also defines social segregation. Disadvantaged and vulnerable social groups are more likely to join VTCs than VET schools. While the S4J project explicitly commits itself to the promotion of disadvantaged social groups (see outcome 1), this could be highlighted and focused more in the implementation activities.
- Sharpen notion of quality apprenticeship
Part of the strategic approach of the project has been to attract a larger proportion of the business sector to enter a partnership with the local VET school and offer WBL in terms of apprenticeships or internships. As this strategy is increasingly successful, next step would be to raise the bar and gradually introduce measures of quality development. While the first step has been necessary but not sufficient, the second step is important to not only attract companies to buy-in but also to attract and convince youth and their parents that VET is a valid alternative to academic education. The project team might check whether the shift towards quality apprenticeships requires some accommodation of the public ‘VET-narrative’.

2.2 Coherence: How well does the project fit?

‘Coherence’ verifies the compatibility of the project with other interventions in the country. Internal coherence addresses the synergies and interlinkages between the project and other interventions carried out by SDC while external coherence considers the consistency of the project with other donors’ interventions in the Albanian VET system. The criterion wants to avoid a patchwork of individual activities without a strategic cohesion.

As the VET reform in Albania is a comprehensive change endeavor, one project cannot cover all facets of the overall reform. As pointed out in the previous chapter, the S4J project addresses relevant components in the reform process. ‘Coherence’ asks to what extent the S4J approach harmonizes with complementary initiatives taken by initiatives funded by SDC or other donors.

Coherence of donor interventions is both demanding and important. For internal coherence, the link between S4J and Skills Development for Employment (SD4E) is on focus. Another

Swiss project, RISI Albania – Enhancing Youth Employment, was operational. SD4E is implemented by UNDP, started one year earlier than S4J, and is now in its final stage. The project is designed to provide policy support and capacity building on ministries and the two National Agencies NAES and NAVETQ. Among others, the aim is to improve the policy framework and VET governance to enable the stakeholders to provide coordinated and demand-driven services (Hilpert 2020, 49). With its focus on the macro- and meso-level, it is to operate complementary to S4J. RISI Albania was to foster business growth in sectors like hotel & tourism, agro-processing and ICT.

As SDC and SECO jointly define and implement the Swiss Cooperation Strategy in Albania (SDC, SECO 2018), SECO initiatives can also be considered when appraising internal coherence of SDC's projects. SECO interventions focus on areas such as economic development and employment, urban infrastructure and energy supply. Among others, it supports Albania to improve the investment climate and to achieve a more competitive private sector. All these intervention areas are complementary to SDC's project ambitions and contribute to the improvement of framework conditions for the business sector which ultimately nurtures the ground for the commitment of local enterprises to engage in WBL within S4J.

Regarding external coherence, the following donor activities have been relevant for S4J:

- Since the early 2000, the EU has become an important donor in the VET development of Albania. The EU Instrument for Pre-accession Assistance (IPA) provided considerable funding, part of which went into the promotion of employment and VET. Most of the projects are located on the macro-level. For example, the European Training Foundation (ETF) as an EU agency supported orientation of VET and Employment policies towards EU priorities and recommendations.
- The German Development Cooperation (GIZ) with its ProSEED programme has placed one focus on infrastructure improvement and capacity building of VET teachers and instructors. On the national level, it has contributed to the development of the legal framework for VET, conducted studies (e. g. on the optimization of VET institutions) and contributed to the design of quality assurance instruments. It put much effort into the development of VTCs and – supported by investment in the agricultural infrastructure of the KfW – has focused on the development and upscaling of the MFC Kamza. GIZ is currently in the process of designing ProSEED-2, which partly continues its focus on further advancement of VTCs, but also puts a stronger emphasis on the incorporation of digitalization and greening skills into the institutional set-up and the curricula.
- Until 2020, the Austrian Development Cooperation (ADA) ran several VET-projects in Albania with a strong focus on the tourism sector. The last VET project in Albania was “AL-Tour: Supporting Quality and Access to Tourism Education and Training”, implemented by OeAD (Agentur für Bildung und Internationalisierung; previously: KulturKontakt). Within this focus on a specific sector, the project developed occupational standards, curricula, organized exchanges with Austrians twinning schools and provided teacher training to implement the new curricula. Now the Austrian focus has shifted from bi-lateral to regional projects. One such project (“EQET SEE – Enhancements in quality of education and training in SEE”) covers six South Eastern European States (Albania, Bosnia & Herzegovina, Kosovo, North Macedonia, Moldova, Serbia). Activities will focus on development of labour market oriented occupational standards and VET curricula, provision of supporting measures and material, introduction of external quality development and development of regional quality standards, procedures and trainings for quality agencies. A second project located in

Kosovo and Albania focuses on the social inclusion of Roma in VET and employment.

- There are further donor projects from Italy, the UK, the US, and others, mostly of comparatively short duration, a narrow scope and limited impact on the overall VET system.

In principle, internal coherence between S4J and SD4E is well realized, as the design of both projects strived for a complementary, mutually reinforcing approach. The two projects sit in the respective Steering Committees with a consultation role, the yearly plans of operations are shared and aligned, and exchanges on management level are held on a regular basis. It is reported that “SD4E has provided support for the upscaling and national rollout of several S4J initiatives piloted at the individual providers’ level; while the latter has provided valuable input to SD4E for VET self-assessment and accreditation level” (Ymeri & Risler 2021, 41). Interviews with the S4J and the SD4E team nurtured the impression that the mode of cooperation is primarily one of information and coordination, less on collaboration. A collaborative approach and leveraging synergies would require a closer harmonization and planning of concerted activities to bundle resources for achieving objectives one of the projects alone cannot accomplish.

Despite the broad scope of activities and the extensive interventions of the donor community in different areas of the VET system, the scenery is clear and transparent for the project members. Overall, the donor activities work on a complementary basis, sharing of experiences and conceptual ideas basically runs well on an informal basis. Occasionally, processes could run more smoothly, but obviously missing information or overlapping approaches don’t become detrimental for the effectiveness of S4J. For example, in the Operational Progress Report 2021/1 (p. 11), the S4J complained about not being invited by GIZ in the consultation process for the design of the ProSEED-2 project.

The so-called “Integrated Policy Management Groups (IPMGs)” provide a platform for coordination of donor activities. IPMGs were established by the Government of Albania within priority areas to move the country closer to EU-accession. IPMGs focus on cooperation at the steering level in good governance and public administration; competitiveness and investment; employment and skills; and others. Interviews with donor representatives mention this platform to be a useful environment to share issues of common interest for donors.

With regard to the three modes of cooperation, the relationship between the donors is primarily one of information sharing with rudimentary examples of coordination but hardly any practices of collaboration. Overall, this is not surprising as every donor wants to shape its identity and make the difference with its projects. With regard to S4J, the project team generously provides its results and makes use of other project’s achievement as much as possible (for some examples, see Inbas 2018, 7).

In sum: Both internal and external coherence between S4J’s activities and SD4E and activities of other donors active in the Albanian VET sector can be taken for granted on the level of mutual information and high degree of coordination. Coordination bodies such as the project’s Steering Committees (for internal coherence) and the IPMG (for external coherence) seem to be beneficial to realize these modes of cooperation.

In case, the SDC wants to go further than this, the following recommendations could be considered:

- Consider planning of synergetic, concerted activities through pooling resources of S4J and SD4E. A pre-condition for such an increase of cooperation intensity would be the

definition of activities which require resources / expertise of both projects and yield in achievements one project alone cannot accomplish.

- Consider joint steering committee or working groups with a focus on exploring ways to reinforcing employment of project's resources

2.3 Effectiveness: Is the project achieving its objectives?

'Effectiveness' addresses the extent to which the project achieved, or is expected to achieve, its objectives, and its results, including any differential results across groups. As objectives of the project are clearly spelled out (see chapter 2.3) and data on their achievement provided in the ongoing progress reports, an appraisal of the effectiveness can be conducted in detail.

Regarding *outcome 1* ("Young women and men have access to a performing, labour market-oriented education and training offer in sectors with growth potential. Special attention is paid to socially vulnerable individuals and groups") the following data are reported:

- Of the 10.000 targeted young people to enroll in formal education programmes, 8.670 (87%) have already used such a programme by the end of 2021. It is highly likely that the target number will be exceeded. The share of female students in formal VET programmes is around 20% which shows some increase but has further room for improvement.
- Of the 6.000 targeted adults to enroll in non-formal training (5.200 to access vocational training courses, 800 to access vocational education short courses) only 1.652 (27%) have done so by the end of 2021. A major reason for this gap is the fact that the MFCs were not established in 2021, thus refraining S4J partner providers still from offering non-formal training for adults (S4J progress report January – June 2021). Due to these circumstances, it seems unlikely that the project reaches the targeted numbers.
- For the six partner-providers in S4J phase 1, the number of graduates has increased from 497 (2016) to 681 (2021).
- Number of apprenticeships has reached 4.836 by the end of 2021. This goes beyond the targeted number of 3.000. 1.117 (23%) of the apprentices are women. In contrast, number of internships remain below target. Of the 600 targeted interns, 279 have been enrolled by the end of 2021 (170 of which are women).
- Drop-out rate has dropped from 9,4% (2018/19) to 5,1% (2020/21) regarding the nine provider schools.

Regarding *outcome 2* ("The private sector takes responsibility in the definition, provision and financing of VET on provider level") the following data are reported:

- By the end of 2021, 934 companies participate in the VET network and co-finance vocational skills development (target value: 500). 668 offer WBL (apprenticeships or internships) to students and trainees (target value: 420). Given the difficult economic situation many companies have to face, these developments can be commended as major achievements of the project.
- Companies are also engaging in updating and developing new curricula. Beyond, some of them also participate in level and final exams, provide equipment, fund transport of students and participate in school boards.
- Contact to Business Membership Organisations (e. g. chambers of commerce, business associations) is still in the initial phase.

Regarding the five *intervention lines*, the bi-annual progress reports provide plenty of activities assigned to each of the intervention lines. The following ones are highlighted:

- Support for the national tracer study conducted by NAES.
- Support development of national training programme launched by NAVETQ.
- Building capacities on career orientation for respective coordinators.
- Various types of training to introduce new ways of learning: for teachers to improve teaching planning, develop (digital) learning material, use the MesoVET platform.
- Setting up of online communities of practice for VET teachers.
- Compiling new publications on innovations in teaching during the pandemic and inspiring students.
- Capacitating school instructors to develop WBL plans and to monitor students enrolled in apprenticeships.
- Assisting in-company mentors to improve quality of delivery of apprenticeships.
- Supporting school management to design and implement annual work plans.
- Developing concepts for continuous professional development as part of the Development Unit (DU) portfolio.
- Coaching DU coordinators on conducting various task of their portfolio.

In the interviews with principals and teachers from school and company representatives, many stories were reported which can be regarded as success stories. Just a few examples: companies approached VET schools themselves and offered apprenticeships; in some profiles offered apprenticeships exceeded demand which allowed schools to select those with the highest quality; many students get hired after graduation by their training company; students appreciated access to broader range of learning content via MesoVET platform.

The establishment of MesoVET for VET schools resulted in the development and upload of digital content in many vocational subjects which so far couldn't rely on textbook or other quality learning material. While the availability of such digital content has been highly appreciated, securing of quality is still in progress. Here, many low-hanging fruits can be harvested if systematic quality assurance processes get implemented.

Still an open issue is the definition and implementation of autonomy for VET schools. While the principle of assigning more autonomy to schools is articulated as part of the VET reform, it remains open what shall be covered under this notion. Schools emphasize financial autonomy as one crucial component for them, namely the eligibility to run a secondary level bank account to administer own revenues and carry budget into the new year. Obviously, it is not up to the S4J project to decide on the scope and areas of school autonomy, but as many processes within the intervention line "provider management / organizational development" are affected by this frame condition, a clarification in due course is highly desirable.

Despite the impressive results in many areas, there are still a couple of challenges which should be addressed in the coming stages of the project:

- As the establishment of MFCs so far hasn't materialized, the objective of providing 6.000 places in non-formal VET programmes needs to be re-assessed. Within this context, coordination with GIZ on the ProSEED-2 project with a strong focus on the establishment of further MFCs is recommended.
- MesoVET platform provides a high potential to introduce new ways of learning, but there is also a risk to fall back to 'traditional ways of learning'. MesoVET represents a LMS with broad functionalities to provide digital content but also to organize inter-

active ways of teaching and learning. If the only application focus lies on the provision of content and the conveyance of knowledge, MesoVET falls short of its potential and strengthens the old style of teacher-centered instruction. One way to prevent such shortcomings would be to stronger focus on the development of (blended) learning environment rather than just on the development of learning content. Within respective settings, digital technologies are (just) a part of learning programmes alternating sequences of self-organized phases with teacher-learner-interaction phases (either in present or via online devices), structured by demanding learning tasks and learning material which learners can access to work on the tasks.

- The notion of apprenticeship and its differentiation to internships in the project sounds clear-cut: Both terms are used as specifications of WBL – apprenticeship as WBL in formal, internships in non-formal VET programmes. As soon as the concept is communicated to international partners or audiences, this usage of terms should be explicated to avoid confusion and promote clarity. At a later stage, the definition of (high-)quality apprenticeships seem to become relevant, with clear criteria for coordinators at VET schools to assess and decide on the suitability of companies. Obviously, respective criteria need to be shared and communicated with NAVETQ.
- From a larger perspective, the relation between (explicitly or implicitly) exercising control and providing support to VET providers and companies needs deeper reflection. This issue is less obvious for the project, but highly important with regard to National Agencies (NAES, NAVETQ). The tasks assigned to these agencies comprise those which may be perceived by the schools as control and others which are labelled as supportive. It is common wisdom in (organizational) psychology that these tasks cannot be fulfilled by the same institution or actor. Within this context, the inspection task has not clearly been assigned to any governmental body.
- The completion of the regulatory framework is not at the discretion of the project but affects some of its interventions.

2.4 Efficiency: How well are resources being used?

‘Efficiency’ addresses the extent to which the project delivers, or is likely to deliver, results in an economic and timely way.

Funding and efficiency are key challenges in running a VET system. Proponents of WBL and dual system approaches emphasize the effect such systems have on (reduced) public funding. Efficiency in VET systems is an important, but also a complex issue, as the discussion on the optimization of VET providers in Albania teaches. However, this sub-paragraph doesn’t address efficiency issues on the VET system level, but analyzes efficiency on the S4J project level.

Project set-up in terms of monitoring and steering mechanisms in S4J is substantial and adequate. In S4J phase 1, a comprehensive Monitoring and Results Measurement (MRM) system was established. The system ensures that evidence is systematically monitored, measured and reported. A full time MRM staff manages and ensures the validity of the system. Regular reports provide updated information on the underlying objectives and the project’s progress. A key recipient of the reports is the Steering Committee which provides strategic direction, oversight over the project, and advice to S4J team. Overall, project management and steering mechanisms provide a good balance between strategic and operational management.

Based on the framework of the MRM, evidence with regard to relevant indicators is captured, partly on a continuous, partly on a periodic or one-off basis. In phase 1 of the project, S4J tested the application of a Cost-Benefit Analysis (CBA) Tool for VET projects developed by the e+I SDC network. Among others, the tool comprises a set of modules with cost- and benefit factors which can be customized in the project and is to serve as a reference for a targeted collection of relevant data. While this tool is highly valuable to systematically capture relevant data, limitations of such tools should be considered when using them. Just to highlight two such limitations: (1) Any data need to be interpreted and contextualized, which leads to the requirement to organize a structured process of interpreting data, drawing conclusion, and deciding on follow-up activities; (2) the CBA Tool serves to collect data on measurable factors, but has limitations in addressing qualitative factors. Such qualitative data would have to be considered in the process of interpretation and drawing conclusions.

While the tool is already in operation, two follow-up questions need further consideration:

- How can the application of the tool be embedded into a broader process of quality development incorporating interpretation, enrichment and contextualization of data as well as taking decisions on necessary follow-up activities?
- Considering necessary resources to run and maintain the tool: how can the process be made sustainable once the S4J project has ended?

Specific approaches and activities have potential implications on the efficiency of the project and beyond:

- Introduction of WBL can have implications on the use of (always confined) funding to VET. If a considerable part of the curriculum is provided by companies, the corresponding teaching load at VET schools can be reduced and respective resources be used for quality development or other purposes. To a minor degree, sponsorship of companies can also relieve school budgets and open perspective for quality development activities.
- Introduction and further advancement of digital learning can have major efficiency effects both for the professional development of teaching personnel and the learning processes of VET students. With MesoVET, content can be uploaded faster and distribution costs reduced.

Synergies with other donor projects and the two national agencies have so far been partly realized. S4J is closely connected and crosslinked with relevant stakeholders and actors in the Albanian VET community and in principle is well informed on the ongoing activities. This allows the project to recognize possible overlapping of initiatives and waste of resources. As pointed out in chapter 2.2, modes of cooperation going beyond sharing information are less frequent. A comparatively close cooperation happens with SD4E, while room for improvement is reported with the GIZ ProSEED project. Cooperation with the two national agencies has been established, although the agencies themselves are in a process of re-design and consolidation. Moving the currently case-based types of cooperation into a systematic, stable working process could be a high priority in the coming phase of the S4J project.

As pointed out in chapter 2.2, the intensity of cooperation can cover a spectrum

- from dissemination and sharing of information,
- to agreement of taking concerted action with split responsibilities,
- up to collaboration in projects with joint responsibilities.

Given the frame conditions of projects often under severe time pressure and with crammed agendas, at least some kind of 'jour fix' with all key institutions seems necessary and feasible to share information, identify issues of common concern, and figure out areas for taking concerted action.

One issue raised in the Internal Audit of the Swiss Embassy relates to the impact/influence of the financing of equipment and PR measures on the performance of the partner VET providers. Auditors acknowledge the effect on the attractiveness of respective VET providers but wonder if these investments will be sustainable and could possibly lead to some market distortion in comparison to other VET providers.

Basically, there is a strong point on not to spend project money for activities which should either be funded from state budget or run the risk of remaining a one-off straw fire. In discussing the case with the S4J, some strong reasons for justifying the investment were put forward. The ultimate goal of equipping VET providers and running a PR campaign was to attract companies and students for the newly designed VET programmes. While the PR was to display an appealing ‘package’, supplying VET providers with modern equipment was part of the attempt to create a high-quality product inside the package. Besides modern curricula, modern teaching and learning environments, and an efficient school management, an equipment somewhat up to normal standards should convince students to learn under conducive circumstances. Insights from research give rise to the fact that the personal and material learning space has a significant impact on the quality of learning. Based on the assumption that at the beginning of the project, VET started in a “poor man’s land” with a negative public image and low status, it was important to lift both the image and the standard of available learning resources by taking adequate measures. Interviews with students pointing to a still “modest infrastructure” at the schools indicate that the material standard at place is anything but luxury. Given the pursued objectives and the specified frame conditions, the investments taken seem to be justified.

2.5 Impact: What difference does the project make?

‘Impact’ addresses the extent to which the project has generated or is expected to generate significant and potentially transformative effects (e. g. social, environmental and economic effects). Beyond the immediate results, this criterion seeks to capture the indirect, secondary and potential consequences of the project.

A VET system is not an end in itself. As pointed out in chapter 2.2, it is designed to have an impact on economic and societal goals. Therefore, interventions into the VET system can be assessed with regard (1) to their effectiveness in the system (see chapter 2.3), and (2) to their impact on economic, societal, and other objectives. For the S4J project, the following *impact hypothesis* states the ambition: “The S4J project will contribute to increased competitiveness and social inclusion of the Albanian society and economy, and to developing towards a smart economy, by enabling its labour force, especially young women and men, to seize the opportunities offered by growing sectors” (Swisscontact 2019, 24). In terms of keeping the expectations realistic, it is worth mentioning that there is not a mono-causal relationship between interventions in the VET systems and outcomes in the economic and/or social system. There can always be intervening factors preventing effective outcomes of VET interventions transform into broader impact in economy or society. For example, the VET system may generate highly skilled graduates who due to disruptions in the economy won’t succeed in finding an adequate employment.

Beyond, intended impact needs to be specified, as VET cannot impact on all and everything. The following chart shows the intended link between S4J interventions into the VET system and the impact on the labour market:

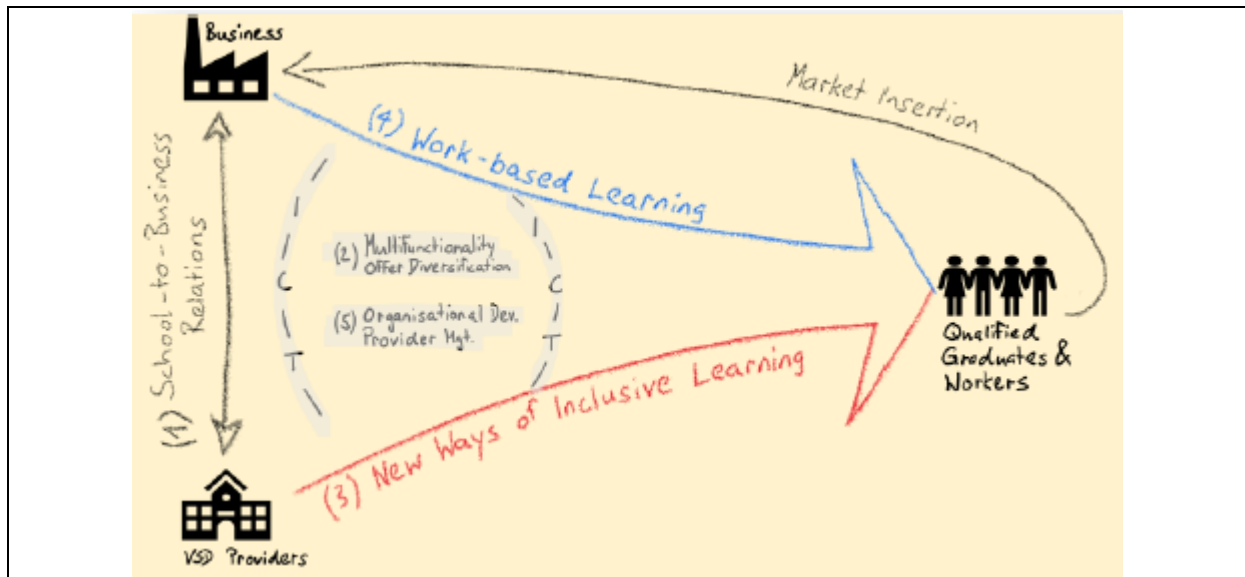


Fig. 3: Simplified Impact Hypothesis (Swisscontact 2019, 24)

Impact thus will primarily be assessed with regard to the labour market. Although social inclusion is mentioned in the impact hypothesis, elaboration in the project documents and reporting in the progress report leave this dimension of the project on the backseat. To some degree it is touched by the gender parity criterion, although overall it seems to remain low key in the project.

- Employment rate of graduates of the six partner schools within phase 1 has increased from 34% (2016) to 63% (2020) one year after graduation. Rate vary between the economic sectors from 68% in Tourism & Hospitality to 56% in ICT and 52% in Economy & Business.
- According to a tracer study, for the 2020 graduates 48% of females were employed or self-employed compared to 65% for men.
- Compared to 2017, in 2020 those employed earned higher salaries. However, due to the uncertainty imposed by the pandemic, less graduates report to have a work contract. Also, fewer report to be 'satisfied' or 'very satisfied' with their current job. According to a tracer study, 84% of the 2020 graduates would again choose the same field of study, while 81% would also choose the same school.
- A striking result is the decrease in the share of those who are out of jobs from 36% (2016) to 25% (2020). With trainees unemployment after training decreased from 47% (2016) to 35% in 2020.
- Attractiveness of employment as compared to academic studies has increased with graduates. The share of those targeting for further studies has decreased from 23% (2016) to 11% (2020). Again, in economic sectors such as ICT (20%) and Economy & Business (14%) rates are above average. There is also a difference between females (20%) and men (9%).

In a broader perspective, impact can also be assessed against criteria which cover effects on the structure of the VET system with some potential for durability and stability. In this respect, the following components can be mentioned:

- Establishment of a digital platform MesoVET, designed to provide digital content for different subjects and support the development of blended learning environments incorporating digital technologies.

- S4J has introduced a community of practice platform called Frymeso for VET teachers who join to share experiences, share ideas, and gain new perspectives from each other. It started as a simple networking platform, but evolved into a professional learning community with some 700 teachers registered.
- In the VET schools, the establishment of a Development Unit (DU) has introduced a structural anchorage for launching and implementing innovative approaches and uplift them to a part of a dynamic school management. Within this structural frame, promoters for change can thrive and contribute to sustainable developments (see chapter 2.6).
- S4J contributions for NAES and NAVETQ provided support for the design and implementation of a conceptual and regulatory framework at the national level. In particular draft regulations, conceptual papers, draft guidelines for teaching process, apprenticeships, business relations, institutional marketing, draft frame curricula, draft methodology for national level tracer, are just examples for the prolific work of the project team with some impact on VET policy making and implementation.

2.6 Sustainability: Will the interventions of the project last?

‘Sustainability’ addresses the extent to which the benefits of the intervention continue, or are likely to continue. It includes an examination of the financial, economic, social, environmental, and institutional capacities of the systems needed to sustain benefits over time.

Ideally, sustainability starts with day 1 of the project. One first step is the assessment on which interventions can survive under ‘normal’ circumstances in the actual environment, to what extent selected institutions and people can be expected to take ownership of the innovations, and which steps need to be taken to complete the project with arrangements and precautions to make the continuation of innovations most likely.

Being in the middle of the S4J duration, sustainability can be approached from two angles: (1) What has already been launched by the project with potential implications for sustainability? (2) Which initiatives are important for the coming phase of the project and should be prioritized?

In the current state of the project, there are many promising approaches and starting points providing an excellent springboard for the conceptualization and consolidation of sustainability in the remaining time of the project. Some key approaches will be structured along a framework which may be used to be further elaborated and used for deciding on priorities:

- Structures:
Structures and institutions are necessary to shift temporary and tentative arrangements into lasting regulations and responsibilities. One way to use structures for sustainability would be to assign important tasks to existing institutions. An obvious case here could be the attempt to convey suitable tasks to one of the two national agencies NAES or NAVETQ. Such a step needs to check whether the agencies can cover the respective task under their mandate and whether they have the resources and expertise to take on the tasks on top of their current portfolio. Analogous considerations may be devoted to institutions still in the process of becoming operational (e. g. Sector Skills Committees) or not yet utilized in a systematic way (e. g. Business Membership Organizations – BMO). With BMO, the project is well aware on the potential these institutions could have for the engagement of companies and the sustainability of WBL. However, current experiences are sobering, as most of the existing

BMO so far are not inclined to put VET promotion on their agenda. Two exceptions (American Chamber of Commerce, Women's Economic Chamber of Albania) seem to be promising and will be followed up by the project.

Beyond, in other areas the project has already created some important structures:

- On the level of VET providers, a so-called Development Unit (DU) has been established as a focal point for steering and implementing key change tasks on the local level. Staff still embedded in the regular processes of the institution receive some reduction of workload to carry out specific tasks such as shaping partnerships with companies, continuous professional development, quality development etc. Based on the experiences gained, it should be investigated which organizational model is most suitable to make DU sustainable.
- The project has introduced and consolidated an Online Community of VET teachers. This professional learning community allows teachers various ways of knowledge sharing and collaboration. Some of the topics are already hosted and facilitated by selected VET teachers.
- Cooperation between VET providers and companies is stipulated with agreements. Although these in a legal sense are hardly binding, they can increase the sense of duty and commitment on the part of the companies.

- Processes:

Definition of processes can determine a succession of tasks which are deemed important for the maintenance of key operations. Within the project, a number of guidelines and regulations have been drafted which after being proven and tested can be made binding. For example, guidelines on Teaching Process Planning and Monitoring, on Developing Digital Learning Materials, on Apprenticeships have been made available for checking out.

As development processes in TVET usually don't work in a linear upward way, regular reflection and feedback processes based on valid data are vital for long-term sustainability of the innovation. One approach to capture evidence on the impact of the interventions would be tracer studies. Conducting such comparatively expensive studies in a reliable and meaningful way requires professional expertise. In most cases, such expertise is not available at TVET providers. Thus, there should either be a body on the central level (e. g. within NAES or NAVETQ) equipped with adequate resources, or external institutions should be mandated with the conduct of these studies.

- People:

In phase 2, S4J has intended to shift the focus from service provision and intense support to facilitating and capacitating actors doing things on their own. In interviews with teachers and principals of VET providers, we gained the impression that despite many S4J activities of training and empowering different target groups (teachers, directors, DU staff) there is still some way to go to achieve this objective.

A specific approach within this type of promoting sustainability is to involve pioneer provider as scaling-up actors (Swisscontact 2019, 45). One example for realizing this approach is the gradual extension of the Online Community for VET teachers which at least partly is facilitated by engaged VET teachers. Beyond, it is reported that selected teachers and staff from S4J partner schools are intensively involved in working groups at national level to develop and revise regulations, training manuals, and case studies (S4J 2021a, 28).

- **Concepts:**
Within the project, many conceptual papers and material of different kind have been devised (e. g. WBL curricula, training packages, methodology for conducting tracer studies, CBA tool, MRM tool). While teaching and learning material can be accessed via the MesoVET LMS, other documents are not systematically available. For that purpose, kind of knowledge management process could be considered in order to make experiences and results of the project broadly and readily accessible.
- **Narratives:**
As VET is suffering from poor image and lacks some reputation both by the business sector and school graduates with their parents, working on the attractiveness is an ongoing challenge. The S4J is generating good practices and attracting disseminators who could spread the word and become ambassadors of change. The S4J is preparing case studies which can be used as good practices and contribute to improve the image and attractiveness of VET in the country.

While there are already many promising activities underway, some further considerations could be reflected on.

- There are some pre-conditions for achieving sustainability which need further consideration in the project:
 - The already launched process of promoting WBL / apprenticeships to (high-)quality WBL is crucial in the long run. VET graduates will let their peers know about their experiences of the practical learning. Ultimately, bad assessments will spread like wildfire and cannot be compensated by any public campaign.
 - VET providers need some assurance on the frame conditions of their engagement. This includes clarity on the degree of autonomy, the strategic direction of WBL and their implication for teaching and management resources within VET schools, and decisions with regard to the pending optimization of VET providers.
 - Attractiveness of VET is highly affected by the existence of pathways into attractive employment. Thus, such pathways such be worked out along with forward-looking companies and be published as good practices.
- One of the ideas put forward to strengthen the VET provider sector is the creation of an “Association of VET Providers” to generate joint position statements from the implementation level to be heard at the national level (Hilpert 2020, 10).
- An issue raised in the Internal Audit of the Swiss Embassy relates to the role of policy dialogue to impact on some challenges of VET on the macro-level (e. g. low state financing, weak BMO as obstacle to more efficient private sector engagement). Auditors recommend to further reinforce the policy dialogue on these challenges. Although this is not primarily an issue of the S4J project, we had some discussions on the current level of policy dialogue also with interviewees from the national level. We gained the impression, that so far policy dialogue has been conducted on a systematic, continuous and ongoing basis resulting in open and trustfully relationships with different stakeholders on the national level. The Swiss Embassy is participating in many formal bodies and is networking informally in many ways.
- A further suggestion raised within the Internal Audit states the view that in the remaining time of the project, a focus should be put “on sustainability and scalability or already realized achievements, without engaging in new pilots”. In principle, this

view is comprehensible. However, this general direction needs both some specification and elaboration. Specification in the sense that on one hand the project should not extend its direct support to further VET providers. On the other hand, there is need for a concept spelling out how the project's results can be transferred to other VET providers. Elaboration would then focus on how the components of the above framework can be addressed to work out a transfer strategy not only for the continuation of the 11 VET providers in the S4J project but also for further VET providers not yet directly benefitting from the project.

Within this context, the project should take care to consolidate developments with the VET providers by strengthening and completing the innovation processes, documenting them, and building capacities among partners for transferring.

3 Conclusions and Recommendations

3.1 Main conclusions

Based on the findings presented in chapter 2, the following conclusions shall be highlighted:

- S4J is highly relevant and fully in line with the policy of the Albanian government regarding VET reform and employment promotion.
- The normative framework with vision, project goals, and intervention lines meets core challenges of the ongoing VET reform in Albania.
- Different stakeholders on the local and national level highly appreciate and support the implementation steps taken and commend the results already achieved.
- Coherence and cooperation with the SD4E project are satisfactory while coordination and synergies especially with the GIZ ProSEED project could be improved.
- One of the major achievements of the project is the extent to which the business sector could be attracted to support the change process from a largely school-based VET system to one with an increasing and significant component of WBL. Despite the great success in this area, one should not forget that engaging the business sector is a fragile process with progress and setbacks. Keeping companies onboard seems to be as challenging as attracting them for the first time.
- Data on many outcome and impact indicators (e. g. enrolment rate in VET programmes, number of apprenticeships, reduced drop-out rate, employment rate, reduced unemployment rate) have revealed promising progress.
- Overall, S4J delivers the results cost-effectively and timely. Based on specific tools, the project collects data which are used for monitoring and steering the implementation process.
- S4J has already commenced with some approaches to promote sustainability of the achievements. Capacities of stakeholders especially on the local level could be improved by various activities in the project. Organizational arrangements (e. g. establishment of Development Units) have provided a good basis to organize changes on a continuous basis. Overall, activities resulted in a good foundation to bring the various approaches together and create a coherent framework of sustainability.
- Nevertheless, there are some open issues to be reflected and possibly be taken up in the coming phases of the project (see chapter 3.2).

Overall, the project team has accomplished an impressive account of achievements. The team meets the expectations with a clear vision on their objectives, a convincing change approach, a high degree of expertise in the area of operational and strategic management, and a broad networking with stakeholders on the local and national level. It pursues a good balance between vision and pragmatism, keeps the ambition high without always going the easy way. The S4J project takes on different roles which are all important for the success of the project:

- Supporter role in assisting practitioners in conducting their conceptual and operational tasks (e. g. structuring training plans, preparing professional training, drafting guidelines);
- Advocacy role in the VET community (as one interviewee from VET school stated: “voice of S4J is heard!”);
- Change promoter role by daring new and innovative approaches; thinking out-of-the-box, and pursuing an implementation strategy based on a transparent change approach; keeping momentum up in the project, making participants in the project move forward;

- Motivator role by encouraging practitioners and raising their confidence.

3.2 Recommendations

The analytical part in chapter 2 of this report already outlines several open issues and options which can be taken up and conceptualized as recommendations for the remainder of project's phase 2 and a final phase 3.

For the *remainder of phase 2* in the project, the following steps are recommended.

Consolidating and strengthening core activities

- Strengthen the implementation of approaches to increase enrolment of both female students and socially disadvantaged groups in the various programmes. Put some more emphasis on the social inclusion dimension of the project.
- Conceptualize and communicate the notion of *quality* apprenticeships by validating a set of quality criteria which could guide the selection of companies and the implementation of WBL in the companies.
- Strengthen existing approaches to attract suitable Business Membership Organizations to engage in the promotion of WBL and to offer appropriate support to their membership in the implementation of WBL.
- Consider joint steering committee or working groups of S4J and SD4E with a focus on exploring ways to reinforcing synergies of project's resources.
- Share thoughts with the coming ProSEED-2 project to identify potential for synergies and collaboration in the promotion of MFCs.
- Follow up on the promising developments with regard to the introduction of digital learning environments, strengthen the approaches towards the creation of digital learning material by encouraging more teachers to join in and introducing quality assurance mechanisms for high quality teaching and learning material.
- Increase the ambition in gradually exploit the potential of digital technology for learning purposes by developing blended learning environments with a high degree of interactivity among the students and between students and teachers.
- Based on the existing political framework, discuss role and key activities of national agencies (NAES, NAVETQ) in accompanying the developments on the local level. Address potential conflicts of (perceived) control / inspection and support / guidance.

Study options for priority setting in follow-up phase

- With regard to considerations pointed out in chapter 2.1 ("balance present and future qualification demands"): Check existing curricula to what extent they address present requirements of the business sector as well as future qualification demands. Draft guidelines on how to balance present and future requirements and how companies can be convinced to accept or even support curriculum components going beyond immediate utilization and promotion of future skills.
- As one emerging new competence area introduced by the Deputy Minister MoFE is greening / environmental protection, check on how this area can be incorporated into current approaches and activities.
- Investigate the implications on the companies' engagement in WBL if a high share of students decides to transit to university or migrate abroad after graduation.
- In case, the optimization plan of the government will be decided and endorsed later this year, figure out what implications and new opportunities would result from its

implementation. In particular, the development of MFC might become new momentum and could put a stronger emphasis on the promotion of socially disadvantaged groups.

- Conceptualize a process addressing the following question: How can the application of the tool be embedded into a broader process of quality development incorporating collection, interpretation, enrichment and contextualization of data as well as taking decisions on necessary follow-up activities?
- Investigate how VET providers and national agencies can make use of the tools applied in the S4J project (MRM, CBA-tool). Identify options to secure necessary resources to run and maintain the tools.
- Launch a study which spells out the main advantages of the WBL-approach for companies, students and government. What makes the VET approach attractive in what segment of the VET system? What motives of companies can be addressed? What could prevent graduates of VET programmes moving abroad or transit to university? To what extent can savings in government funding be used for the further quality advancement of the VET system? Results of the study may be used to further promote and upscale the new concepts and experiences.

Draft sustainability concept

Based on the experiences gained in the remaining phase 2 and the results from the different types of investigation, priorities for key activities flow into the draft sustainability concept. The concept makes up the reference for discussion the priorities and key component of the last phase of the S4J project.

The *final phase 3* should have a clear focus on activities promoting the sustainability of the project's achievements. In that respect, we share the view that basically new pilot areas or an extension to new providers should not *directly* be taken up by the S4J team. However, within the sustainability approach there should be some ideas on how such extensions could be launched by those institutions and people in charge of the innovation transfer.

Sustainability activities can be structured along the five dimensions set out in chapter 2.6:

- In terms of *structures*, one key priority should be put on the anchorage and resourcing of Development Units within the organization of VET providers. In order to remain the focal point for shaping external relations with companies and serving as an innovation hub within the school, the DU needs a clear profile, adequate resources and strong backing by the school's leadership. Experiences and different ways in running the DU should be documented and shared with other schools, the national agencies, and others.

MesoVET platform and Online Communities of VET teachers should also be institutionalized by resolving technical issues (hosting of the platform, software updating, etc.) and organizing (institutional, personal) ownership for the individual community threads and areas of the MesoVET platform.

Support of suitable Business Membership Communities should be secured and commitment organized within an efficient framework. Models of low- and high-threshold types of support should be devised and tested. Establishment of public-private-partnership components should be investigated.

There are also good reasons to establish a formal body such as an "Association of TVET providers" or a "School Principle's Club" as a platform to share common interests, advocate TVET concerns in public and strengthen TVET in the political arena.

- *Key processes* for running and continuously improving the VET programmes should be documented. Supportive material (e. g. checklists, guidelines, charts) should be compiled and made available digitally. Respective documents should not only define high-end realizations of processes, but also interim steps towards the achievement of ultimate goals. Implementing bodies or persons may be deterred if they are just facing ideal concepts placed beyond their current resources without recognizing their next level of development.
- *People* are crucial for the continuation of existing developments and their transfer to other people and institutions. While in phases 1 and 2 the emphasis in capacitating people was put on making them capable to develop and / or implement new approaches, capacity building in phase 3 is primarily focused on those people who can act as a disseminator, multiplier and promoter in transfer processes. As relevant institutional references both distinguished people from the VET providers and staff from the national agencies come to the fore. Ideally, a group of promoters or change agents will be identified and organized as a community of professional practice early in phase 3. They would be prepared and accompanied by the S4J team in their task to consolidate structures and processes in their own institution and transfer concepts and experienced to other institutions. At that point, extension of the project's achievements come into play, operated by well-prepared change agents. The establishment of such a community of change promoters is crucial for the sustainability and transfer of the project. It might be useful to institutionalize the community to some extent (e. g. as a formal professional working group under the auspices of the MoFE or one of the national agencies). In that case, a portfolio of tasks along with corresponding resources need to be defined.
- *Concepts* should be captured systematically and provided on a kind of knowledge platform. The platform would also require some maintenance and quality assurance processes and should be hosted and made accessible on the national level.
- *Narratives* should be drafted as part of a continuous effort to improve the image and reputation of VET in Albania. As such, a communication strategy should be developed, covering relevant target groups with their respective motives and interests in VET, good practices addressing their needs, and channel to communicate.

4 References

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Annex 1: Terms of Reference (objectives)

I. Context

The economic growth of Albania slowed to 2.2% in 2019, due to a drought slashing hydro-power production and the devastating 6.4-magnitude earthquake with the epicentre around 40 kilometres of Tirana. As the country started the reconstruction phase, the COVID-19 pandemic has severely affected the social and economic activities. The sectors most hit by the crisis are: manufacturing, mining industry, retail trade, tourism and services.

Until the fourth quarter of the year 2019, the labor market indicators in Albania were in an improving trend. Due to two consecutive shocks (a devastating earthquake in November 2019 and the Covid -19 crises from March 2020- onwards) this positive the trend is reversed. Official INSTAT data for Q3 2020 shows that 81'000 people lost their jobs, resulting in an increased unemployment rate at 11.6%² and a corresponding decline in labor force participation (1.7%). Young people, women and those with the lowest monthly wages were mostly affected by the immediate layoffs by the private sector. Youth unemployment reached 21.4% in Q2 2020 (2019: 20.9%). The share of at least 30% informal employment in different sectors remains significant, and the majority of the informal workers did not receive any social protection benefits during the lock down measures. The inequality in income distribution (35.4 % in 2018) and other forms of disparities may further wide.

Against this background, the reform agenda and investments in the VET sector continued. The implementing institutions streamlined their actions to consolidate the legal framework that regulates the labour market and VET sector. Recent restructuring of the National Agency on Employment and Skills (NAES), aiming to promote quality jobs and skills opportunities for all Albanian citizens, is encouraging. The employment promotion programmes were re-conceptualized based on the individual-centred approach. Because municipalities often lack the financial means (e.g. to invest in the VET infrastructure), the disparities between urban and rural service coverage remain.

II. Swiss support to VET sector

The longstanding Swiss support targets the modernisation and the improvement of labour market orientation of the VET sector. Currently, SDC is funding two complementary projects to strengthen VET sector in Albania.

Thanks to the Swiss support through *Skills Development for Employment Programme (SD4E)*, implemented by UNDP, progress in the strengthening of the Albanian VET system has been achieved. A VET review mapped out the current VET model in order to generate a common understanding about the system set-up and governance. An accreditation model of the VET providers in line with international criteria was elaborated, and is being consulted with key stakeholders. A VET optimization plan for the institutional re-organization and improvement of the offer is finalized. The institutional development process of the two executive agencies progressed significantly.

In tandem with the work at macro level and in the framework of *the second phase of the Skills for Jobs (S4J)* project, Switzerland expanded its direct support to 10 public VET providers (2 VET schools and 1 Vocational Training Center in Vlora; 1 VET school in Berat; 2 VET schools in Elbasan; 1 VET school in Lezha; 1 VET school in Shkodra and 2 VET schools in Tirana). The

² Other sources estimate a higher negative impact on unemployment.

work-based learning, the application of industry standards in VET trainings and a business mind-set for the management of VET institutions advanced in all targeted providers. The progress with the engagement of the private sector in VET is successfully sustained. In addition, the use of technology as well as blended and individualized learning approaches have also significantly advanced, highlighted for example by the online learning platform MesoVET. 9'738 students and 6'367 trainees benefited from an improved VET offer; with a 8.7% drop-out rate (over 25% at national level); 590 companies hosted 2'316 apprentices and 51% of graduates were employed one year after completing their studies.

III. Objectives and scope of work

Given that this project phase will come to an end in June 2023, the Embassy in Tirana mandates a team of consultants to perform a Mid-Term Review. With a specific emphasis on the assessment of the contribution to the creation of an Albanian VET system – inspired by the Swiss model and consistent with European standards –, the main objectives of the mandate are to:

- Assess the project based on the OECD evaluation criteria (relevance, effectiveness, efficiency, impact, sustainability);
- Provide recommendations for the remainder of the current phase;
- Advise on the design of the third and last phase (consolidation, but mainly exit phase), as well as on possible interventions/activities.

Through this mandate, the Embassy of Switzerland is looking for responses to the following guiding questions³:

Review

I. *Assessment of relevance*

- To which extent are the objectives of the S4J project consistent with the demands and the needs of the target groups (including gender-specific requirements)?
- To which extent are the objectives of the S4J project consistent with the demands and the needs of Albania (institutions respectively society) as well as the national sector policies and strategies of Albania?
- To which extent is the design of S4J project adequate to achieve its goal and objectives (definition of the target groups; choice of approach and operational elements; articulation of components; choice of partners; consistency with SDC policy and experience)?
- Has Switzerland brought any added-value (including Swiss experience, comparative advantages)? And, if yes, what are they?

II. *Assessment of effectiveness*

- To which extent have the planned objectives at outcome level been achieved taking into account their relative importance? If possible distinguish the quality and quantity of results achieved.
- What are challenges faced by S4J project in achieving its targets? What are the projections of the project to reach the targets?
- Has the project responded or adapted adequately to the COVID-19 situation (with regards to team management, but also to project activities)?

³ Please note that the contracting agency does not expect answers to all these questions, but they are rather meant to guide the mandate.

- To which extent do the outcomes achieved contribute to improved governance from a system perspective?
- To which extent do key stakeholders share a common understanding of the VET system set-up and governance? Where do they see the biggest challenges in implementing it? How could S4J benefit from better informed key stakeholders in implementing its activities?
- To which extent are the practices and initiatives on the ground complemented with reform actions to embed them in the whole system? And also to which extent does the project account for reforms from the system-level in its on-the-ground work?
- To which extent has the utilisation of the MesoVET platform boosted the digitalisation of VET education in Albania?
- To which extent the outcomes achieved contribute to gender-specific results?

III. Assessment of efficiency

- Is the management model/project set-up adequate for achieving the set objectives?
- Are the project management and steering mechanisms (including risk management) in place and adequate for the efficient implementation of project activities?
- Is there an established results-oriented monitoring system at outcome level for evidence-based steering?
- To which extent has the project made use of possible synergies with other Swiss projects (in particular the SD4E project) and other relevant donor activities in the sector?
- To which extent has the project made use of possible synergies with the two national agencies and private sector (companies and organized business structures) to achieve project goals?
- To which extent is the relation between resources (mainly financial and human resources) and time (e.g. delays compared to planning) required and results achieved appropriate (cost-benefit ratio)?

IV. Assessment of impact

- Is the project having long-term effects on its overall goal?
- Are the interventions/practices/approaches designed to allowing systemic change?
- What is the likelihood for achieving scale? And, how this scale is reached?
- Has the project contributed to the creation of an Albanian VET system inspired by the Swiss dual VET and aligned with the European standards? If yes, in what way?
- To which extent does the S4J project contribute to poverty reduction, inclusion and/or reduction of vulnerabilities?

V. Assessment of sustainability

- To which extent will the positive results (outputs and outcomes) be continued beyond the end of the external support? What are the necessary steps in the remaining project duration to ensure this?
- To which extent are the targeted partner institutions capable to carry on the activities without any external support (Swiss or other)? Capacities include technical, financial capacity, human resources and importance of the activity for the organisation.
- To which extent are the VET efforts scalable and can be embedded into the Albanian education system?

Remainder of the current phase

- What are the lessons learnt for SDC and its implementing partner?
- What are the possible implication and impact (other than digitalization) that the COVID-19 related crises has generated for the project? (e.g. new target group, new challenges for schools/companies involved, etc.)
- In order to continue responding to implication from the pandemic, what further adaptations could be necessary until the end of phase 1?
- What are the possible implication that the VET optimization plan has generated for the project? Please have a look at the changes and new elements it brings about, and analyze to what extent these might have an impact on the S4J project.
- What are the main actions/changes to existing activities recommended for implementation during the remainder of the current phase to achieve a more system-wide impact?

Forward looking⁴

- How can the school level experiences be better used to inform and influence policy-making and national reform actions?
- How to better scale experiences from S4J in order to increase system-wide impact?
- What kind of approaches and initiatives should continue during the exit phase? Are there recommendations to change / adapt certain of those approaches?
- Are there important gaps in the VET sector that are highly recommended to be addressed in an exit phase?
- What kind of complementary activities/interventions (e.g. digitalization, blended learning, social inclusion and gender equality strengthen, private sector engagement, apprenticeships, school to work transition, industry solution, etc.) could be incorporated in the exit phase to achieve a greater system-wide impact?
- How can the sustainability of the project's intervention (in existing schools/potential new schools) be further ensured in the exit phase?
- What recommendations and potential interventions can be drawn from the COVID crisis in order to strengthen the resilience of the VET sector at provider level?
- Please provide recommendations on how can and should the project respond to the changing nature of work and the changing needs in skills.
- Please provide recommendations on partnership approach – schools and private sector - not directly PSE, but on how to intensify importance of private sector across the board for leveraging resources.

These guiding questions might serve to broadly structure the MTR exercise and the resulting report.

IV. Tasks and methodology

The Mid-Term Review exercise will be conducted through an interactive process between the team of consultants and the Swiss Embassy. Under the current restrictive conditions which do not allow for a proper classical field mission, it is envisaged some degree of flexibility to accommodate the process. The methodology and review process shall include, but does not have to be limited to:

⁴ The forward looking part should not be made in isolation, but rather under consideration of the whole VET portfolio that Switzerland has in Albania.

- *Kick off meeting.* Conduct a conference call with the Embassy to develop a common understanding on the scope of work.
- *Desk review.* Review the relevant material related to VET sector and gain information on the national VET policy framework in Albania as well as on the different initiatives/experiences ongoing or planned in the area of skills and jobs in Albania.
- *Briefing session.* Have a briefing session with the Embassy of Switzerland in Tirana.
- *Field Mission.* Conduct workshops with S4J team to kick off and agree on communication lines; to analyse the achievements, drawbacks and pending issues for each project component; as well as to brainstorm on the preliminary ideas for the third and exit phase. Conduct individual and/or group discussions with the key partners including central government, national agencies and public VET providers, as well as private sector. Consider also individual and/or group discussions with direct beneficiaries such as teachers and students.
- *Debriefing session.* Have a debriefing session with the Embassy team as well as the S4J team in Tirana to present the preliminary findings, lessons learnt and recommendations.
- *Reporting & capitalization:* Prepare a draft MTR report and submit it to the Swiss Embassy. Based on the Embassy's feedback (via a capitalisation meeting), the consultants will deliver a final report, which is the main product of this mandate.

The exercise's methodology aims at fostering a participatory approach so as to nurture a reflection from the project team. The programme of the field mission will be elaborated by the consultants in collaboration with Swiss Embassy in Albania.

The consultants shall receive the following documents in electronic form:

- Terms of Reference.
- Swiss Cooperation Strategy with Albania 2018-2021.
- VET Typology of SDC.
- Credit proposal and Reports related to the S4J project, including the Mid-Term Review of the phase 1; Yearly Plan of Operations and other documents produced by the project in this phase.
- Credit proposal and reports related to the Skills Development for Employment (SD4E) project, implemented by UNDP Albania.
- Documents related to national policy framework.
- Outline of the structure of the final report for this mandate.
- Template of the assessment grid for the evaluation of the SDC projects.
- Other documents upon request.

V. Deliverables

The consultants are expected to produce the following deliverables:

- 1) A brief 'script/program' before the field mission, including the stakeholders to meet and topics to be addressed during the meetings.
- 2) Presentation of findings, lessons learnt and recommendations which will be discussed during two separate debriefing sessions with: (i) the Embassy of Switzerland in Albania, and (ii) the S4J project team.
- 3) Draft Review Report to be submitted electronically within 15 working days after the mission to Albania to the Swiss Embassy in Tirana.
- 4) Final Report, revised based on comments and remarks of the Embassy of Switzerland in Albania and the implementing partners, shall be submitted within 15 working days

after the capitalisation meeting. It shall be written in English (Arial 11) and not exceed 20 pages (excluding annexes). Electronic copies of the final operational report must be submitted to the Embassy of Switzerland in Albania.

The consultants shall not disclose to third parties the information made known to him/her under this mandate without an explicit authorisation of the Swiss presence in Albania. It is not in the responsibility of the consultant to promise any kind of future activities with financial consequences for Switzerland.

VI. Work time schedule

The field mission is planned to take place during the period January 2022 and the mandate last until June 2022, latest. The tentative amount and distribution of work days for this contractual assignment comprehends:

	International Consultant (Time Frame)	Local Consultant (Time Frame)
Preparation, review program, documentation, desk study, quality assurance <i>Week 44</i>	5	4
Mission to Albania, including briefing/debriefing in the Embassy of Switzerland in Tirana <i>Week 5</i>	7	7
Preliminary report <i>Week 9</i>	7	5
Reserve day <i>Week 11</i>	1	1
Final Report <i>Week 10</i>	5	2
Total	25 Days	19 Days

VII. Responsibilities

The Mid Term Review and Forward Looking mission will be conducted by a team composed by one international consultant accompanied by a local one. The overall responsibility will be with the international consultant who will be the team-leader. The international consultant will have a contract with the Embassy of Switzerland in Tirana, and in the capacity of team leader will hire the local consultant. The international consultant is also responsible for engaging and managing any additional support staff deemed necessary (like interpreter etc.) The international consultant will report to the Embassy of Switzerland in Tirana.

Annex 2: Interview schedule - internal only

Annex 3: Assessment Grid for project/programme evaluations of the SDC interventions

(Version: 30.06.2020)⁵

Rating of the sub-criteria in the column 'score':

0 = not assessed

1 = highly satisfactory

2 = satisfactory

3 = unsatisfactory

4 = highly unsatisfactory

Key aspects based on DAC Criteria	Score (0, 1, 2, 3 or 4)	Justification (short explanation for score or why a criterion was not assessed)
<p>Relevance</p> <p>Note: the assessment here captures the relevance of objectives and design <i>at the time of evaluation</i>. In the evaluation report, both relevance at the design stage as well as relevance at the time of evaluation should be discussed.</p>		
<p>1. The extent to which the objectives of the intervention respond to the needs and priorities of the target group.</p>	<p>1</p>	<p>S4J activities closely connect to the ongoing VET reform process launched by the Albanian government. Normative framework of S4J is highly relevant and in line with the VET policy of the Albanian government.</p>
<p>2. The extent to which the objectives of the intervention respond to the needs and priorities of indirectly affected stakeholders (not included in target group, e. g. government, civil society, etc.) in the country of the intervention.</p>	<p>1</p>	<p>S4J understands own focus as part of a holistic approach striving for improvements on all levels of the VET system. While most interventions of S4J affect specific stakeholders on the micro-level, many of them also indirectly benefit those on the meso- and macro-level.</p>

⁵ For information on the 2019 revisions of the evaluation framework see: Better Criteria for Better Evaluations. Revised Evaluation Criteria. Definitions and Principles for Use, OECD/DAC Network on Development Evaluation, 2019.

3. The extent to which core design elements of the intervention (such as the theory of change, structure of the project components, choice of services and intervention partners) adequately reflect the needs and priorities of the target group.	1	S4J addresses relevant components of the Albanian VET reform process. All stakeholders interviewed stated that the change approach with the intervention lines is sound and encouraging as it reflects the context and needs of the defined target groups.
Coherence		
4. Internal coherence: the extent to which the intervention is compatible with other interventions of Swiss development cooperation in the same country and thematic field (consistency, complementarity and synergies).	2	Conceptually, the intervention lines of S4J and SD4E are compatible. Coherence works well in terms of information-sharing and coordination, more intensive modes of collaboration are less frequent.
5. External coherence: the extent to which the intervention is compatible with interventions of other actors in the country and thematic field (complementarity and synergies).	2	Conceptually, there are some overlapping between the S4J interventions and those of other donors. In practice, due to an effective information sharing on the working level, these overlapping don't become detrimental for the effectiveness of S4J. Formal coordination works on a high level within the IPMG for employment and skills.
Effectiveness		
6. The extent to which approaches/strategies during implementation are adequate to achieve the intended results.	1	Approaches applied to achieve intended outcomes and effects with the intervention lines are sound and can be employed in the defined eco-system.
7. The extent to which the intervention achieved or is expected to achieve its intended objectives (outputs and outcomes).	1	Overall effectiveness is convincing, in particular with regard to outcome 2. As to outcome 1, figures on the enrolment in <i>vocational education programmes</i> , number of apprenticeships reached, and decrease of drop-out rate also indicate broad effectiveness.
	3	On contrast, achievements with regard to <i>non-formal training</i> so far remains considerably below target numbers.
8. The extent to which the intervention achieved or is expected to achieve its intended results related to transversal themes.	1	S4J contributes considerably to the broader implementation of the Albanian VET reform by supporting national agencies

		and (indirectly) MoFE. Its conceptual and intellectual support is highly appreciated by the recipients.
Efficiency		
9. The extent to which the intervention delivers the results (outputs, outcomes) cost-effectively.	2	Establishment of WBL and introduction of digital learning with MesoVET has <i>potential</i> to improve efficiency of VET system. S4J is highly attentive to efficiency issues and runs the project on a satisfactory level. Synergies with external donor projects show some room for improvement.
10. The extent to which the intervention delivers the results (outputs, outcome) in a timely manner (within the intended timeframe or reasonably adjusted timeframe).	2	To some degree, S4J has to rely on decisions taken outside their responsibility but which have some impact on the operation of the project (e. g. optimization of VET providers, notion of autonomy). Time management of the project is on a satisfactory level.
11. The extent to which management, monitoring and steering mechanisms support efficient implementation.	1	Comprehensive MRM was established, application of a CBA Tool tested. Operational management is based on comprehensive collection of relevant data.
Impact		
12. The extent to which the intervention generated or is expected to generate 'higher-level effects' as defined in the design document of the intervention. Note: when assessing this criterion, the primary focus is the intended 'higher-level effects'. In the event that <i>significant</i> unintended negative or positive effects can be discerned, they must be specified in the justification column, especially if they influence the score.	1	Convincing evidence on impact beyond the arrangement of a modern VET system: Employment rate of graduates increased, decrease of unemployment rate, higher salaries. Despite some improvements, still a gap between men and women. Considerable impact on the robustness of innovations in VET reform (MesoVET platform, community of practice platform, establishment of Development Unit, contributions to the implementation of a conceptual and regulatory framework at the national level.
Sustainability		

13. The extent to which partners are capable and motivated (technical capacity, ownership) to continue activities contributing to achieving the outcomes.	2	Fertile ground for continuation of activities laid. However, it needs further robustness and habituality, in particular with regard to the broad engagement of the business sector.
14. The extent to which partners have the financial resources to continue activities contributing to achieving the outcomes.	3	As the Albanian VET system heavily relies on donor support, provision of financial resources is still a fragile issue. Partial shift of practical learning to companies may reduce the pressure, but part of the saved resources should be devoted to quality development measures.
15. The extent to which contextual factors (e.g. legislation, politics, economic situation, social demands) is conducive to continuing activities leading to outcomes.	2	Effective interventions may be jeopardized if relevant frame conditions are no longer favourable. As S4J is part of a comprehensive VET reform, sustainability relies on the continuation of conducive contexts. So far, political support is high while both the pandemic and global political disruptions can put heavy pressure on economic developments.

Additional information (if needed): [Click here to enter text.](#)

Title of the intervention: Skills for Jobs project (phase 2)

Assessor(s): Prof. Dr. Dieter Euler

Date: March, 14, 2022