

Mapping of VET educational policies and practices for social inclusion and social cohesion in the Western Balkans, Turkey and Israel

Country report: Montenegro

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MONTENEGRO

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ACRONYMS

| | |
|------------|---|
| CEMI | Centre for Monitoring and Research |
| CIPS | Centre for Information and Professional Advising |
| COSSN | Commission for the Orientation of Students with Special Needs |
| EAM | Employment Agency of Montenegro |
| ESPAD | European School Survey Project on Alcohol and Other Drugs |
| ETF | European Training Foundation |
| EU | European Union |
| Government | Government of Montenegro |
| GDP | Gross Domestic Product |
| HDI | Human Development Index |
| IEP | Individual education plan for child |
| LEO | Local Employment Office |
| LFS | Labour Force Survey |
| LSE | London School of Economics |
| NEC | National Education Council |
| NGO | Non-Governmental Organization |
| PAR | Participatory Action Research |
| PISA | Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development |
| RAE | Roma, Ashkaelia, Egyptians |
| SEN | Students with Special Educational Needs |
| UNDP | United Nations Development Program |
| VET | Vocational Education and Training |

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The aim of this study is to contribute to the understanding of the role of VET in combating social inclusion and contributing to a more cohesive society in Montenegro. Besides the analysis of the institutional framework and the policy process at national and local levels, it focuses on practices in three vocational schools in the municipalities of Bar, Podgorica and Plav, located in regions with different geographic, cultural, economic and social environments. The report analyses issues related to social inclusion in vocational education, such as the selection and tracking of students, the quality of the learning process, drop out, and the transition from school to work.

The government of Montenegro began a comprehensive reform of the education system in 2000, which has increasingly focused on the reform of vocational education. Since then, sector commissions involving the main stakeholders in the creation of programmes and curricula have been introduced, new programmes aligned with the labour market have been established and the modularisation of curricula will begin from 2013/14. Two thirds of secondary students are enrolled in vocational schools, but enrolment in three-year courses is decreasing despite an excess demand for those occupations on the labour market. It is mainly students from families with lower socioeconomic status that enrol on those courses due to their generally weaker marks from primary school. However, students from lower income families receive support from local authorities and schools in the form of free textbooks, free transport, free excursions, and 24-hour access to school premises. Another trend is an increase in the number of vocational students who enrol in higher education due to their poor economic situation and expectations for better jobs.

The concept of social inclusion in education gives priority to students with special education needs and to Roma, Ashkaelia and Egyptian pupils, since these groups are the most educationally deprivation among all socially vulnerable groups. However, the corrective measures carried out up to now have mainly focused on inclusion at pre-primary and primary levels. The role of VET in social inclusion depends on the success of such social inclusion in primary education. For example, the RAE population has a high drop out rates from primary school, due to which the number of RAE students in VET schools is very low (confirmed in the case study schools).

Enrolment of students with special educational needs (SEN) in VET schools is based on the expert opinion and decision of the local Commissions for the Orientation of Students with Special

Needs, while their education is based on individual education plans developed in cooperation with teachers and parents. Even though interviewees assessed these institutional mechanisms as effective for social inclusion, they pointed out that there is a need for improvement in their expertise and in the alignment of practices and communication with schools. Another precondition for better integration of SEN students is improved competences of VET teachers as they are not very well informed, educated or trained to work with those students.

Drop out rates are low (2.3% nationally), but this simply indicates that the system often provides diplomas without the required knowledge and skills, and points to the need for a better alignment of grading systems, and for better quality control. Even though the study has shown that schools and their professionals put significant effort in prevention of school leaving by communicating with students and parents, additional efforts should be made to improve the school atmosphere through the use of modern teaching tools and techniques, creation of interesting projects, events and extra curricula activities. The support from international and non-governmental organisations is seen as one of the important contributions to this.

The analysis of the practical work in companies and the transition of VET student to the labour market indicated that there is a need for fostering communication with employers, which should be initiated by schools and supported by local governments. Career counselling should move on from its current focus on passive information dissemination to more active career education and guidance. Despite the subsidies for companies to employ SEN students, few employers do so, although there has been an increasing trend in the recent period. In addition, employers are increasingly willing to employ RAE students. However, this needs further support through improved dissemination of information and media campaigns.

The school in Plav has a majority of students from ethnic minority groups and has programmes in two languages. It provides the best example of school life, of communication with parents and the community, and of support to vulnerable groups and communication among students. In addition, students from this school are happier than those in the other two schools. This research found that the competence, motivation and dedication of the school principal is one of the most important factors for school achievement in all areas, including social inclusion and support to student from vulnerable groups. Thus, it is proposed that selection of principals should be based mainly on the criteria of his or her competences and qualifications.

INTRODUCTION

In order to introduce new models of high quality education, the government of Montenegro started a comprehensive reform of the education system in 2000. This resulted in significant changes in the institutional framework (adoption of new laws, creation of new institutions, development of quality indicators), and at the school level (new curricula, new textbooks, new teaching approach). As part of this comprehensive reform process the government adopted a Strategy on Vocational Education in 2010. The document sets out priorities and goals up to 2016 including “ensuring personal, social and professional development of every individual, encouraging fairness, social cohesion and active participation of citizens”. In addition to the overall education reform, Montenegro has made significant efforts to develop policies and legislation to enable socially excluded groups to fully integrate into society.

Despite these important improvements the labour market is characterized by significant unemployment, a high share of long term unemployed and a mismatch between supply and demand. Also, according to UNDP (2013) members of vulnerable social groups such as the long-term unemployed, persons with disabilities, Roma and Egyptians and others are still excluded from full participation in the education and training systems.

Thus, this study aims to deepen understanding of the main barriers and potential opportunities for building an inclusive and equitable VET system in Montenegro given the current social and economic challenges facing the country. It provides new evidence on the role of VET in combating social inclusion and contributing to building a more cohesive society.

The first part of the Report presents the institutional framework and the policy process at national level for VET and for social inclusion; the second part presents VET practices for social inclusion and social cohesion at the local level, setting out the main research findings from the participatory action research in three schools including the findings of research based upon in-depth semi-structured interviews and focus groups, and student and teacher questionnaires. The third part refers to proposed actions for the schools and the fourth part sets out recommendations for policy makers at national and local level, international donor organizations and NGOs.

1. THE INSTITUTIONAL FRAMEWORK AND THE POLICY PROCESS

1.1. Situation analysis

Montenegro spent 4.1% of GDP on education in 2011, or 212 Euros per head of population (out of which 44 Euros was spent on secondary education). Of the total number of students attending secondary education, around 70% in average attend vocational secondary education.

Secondary education is not compulsory and is free. The secondary vocational education infrastructure consists of 26 vocational and 11 mixed schools (gymnasium/vocational schools), while post-secondary education was just recently introduced (in 2012/2013) as a pilot project.¹ Those schools offer nearly 82 educational profiles; 35 are two- and three-year programmes and around 45 are four-year programmes. Qualifications in vocational education are classified in 14 sectors, for each of which a qualification framework is made by sectoral commissions (made up of members of state institutions, private employers and other relevant experts). The sectoral qualification frameworks are open for adding new occupations as required according to the needs and changes in the labour market. New VET curricula were introduced in the 2009/2010 school year. In addition, curricula are being modularised in order to raise the quality of VET and to better align it with the needs of the labour market. The curricula will consist of small modules that will be certified and recognised by employers. This supports social inclusion, since students will receive a certificate for the modules completed and so will have some qualification even if only a partial one. No assessments of the impact and results of these changes have yet been carried out.

The labour market suffers from several problems including a mismatch between supply and demand. According to data from the Employment Agency of Montenegro (EAM), the main sectors that experience labour shortages are construction, tourism and catering, agriculture and the trade sector. Labour market shortages are primarily a result of the transformation of the economy and its structure, the traditional reluctance of the population to accept specific vocations and the poor mobility of the workforce. Also, one of the reasons is the educational system, which is still not fully synchronized with the new needs of the labour market. As a consequence of

¹Vocational education in Montenegro is organised into *lower vocational education* (two years), *secondary vocational education* (three or four years) and *post-secondary vocational education* (up to two years, which is a continuation of secondary vocational education).

shortages for particular professions and sectors there has been a significant inflow of seasonal, mainly low-skilled foreign workers into Montenegro during the last ten years (around 20,000 in 2012).

However, the interest in enrolment in VET programmes in response to these labour shortages is very low. One of the reasons is the seasonal character of the work in these sectors due to which many of the students who finish vocational education continue to tertiary education and do not try to find a job with the required qualifications. Around 30% of secondary school graduates register with the Employment Agency Of Montenegro (EAM) to find a job, and around 70% continue their education for a higher degree in the same, similar or other professions. According to data from the Labour Force Survey (LFS) the unemployment rate of secondary VET graduates is 20.4% for three and four year programmes and 25.5% for two year VET (MONSTAT 2012).

In Montenegro, 9.2% of individuals are socially excluded, while 1.3% of individuals are exposed to severe exclusion. Areas in which individuals face the highest deprivation are income, access to healthcare services and education (UNDP 2009). The most vulnerable groups in Montenegro, according to the social exclusion criteria, are social welfare beneficiaries, population of Roma, Ashkali and Egyptians (RAE), persons with disabilities and displaced persons. Almost two-thirds (65%) of RAE people are deprived of education, while 31% of social welfare beneficiaries are deprived of education, as are 29% of people with disabilities and 28% of displaced persons. The needs of the most vulnerable groups are recognized by the government and are targeted by a number of strategic documents and programmes, such as Strategy for Poverty Reduction 2007-2011, the Strategy for the Improvement of the Position of RAE (2008-2012), the Strategy for Durable Solutions of Issues Regarding Displaced and Internally Displaced Persons (2008-2016), and the Strategy for the Integration of People Living With Disabilities, Strategy for Inclusive Education. These strategies are aimed at increasing the inclusion of vulnerable groups such as the RAE and children with special educational needs in mainstream education (ETF 2010).²

Only 7% of the RAE school-age population is enrolled in the school system - 85% of them in primary school, 8% in secondary school and 7% in tertiary education. Although the figures are

²The Strategy for Inclusive Education adopted in 2008 introduces the term 'children with special education needs' encompassing children with disabilities (with physical, mental and sensory, or combined impairments) and children with development difficulties (with behavioural disorders, severe chronic diseases, long-term illnesses, learning and other difficulties caused by emotional, social, linguistic and cultural deprivation).

low, the number of RAE children covered by primary education has been increasing during the last decade. The efficiency of the orientation process has been improved with the Commission for the Orientation of Students with Special Needs (COSSN) due to which Roma students are not separated in special schools but fully integrated in mainstream education (ETF 2010). Despite these positive trends, RAE children still face significant barriers among which the most significant are language barriers and negative attitudes towards education. Therefore, enrolment of this population in the education process needs significant support. The UNDP argues that the strategies and programmes for the RAE population should be continue to be implemented, and that the government should support the training of RAE teachers and educational assistants (UNDP 2013: 62).

In the past, the education system segregated students with special needs into separate special schools, but now the government gives priority to the inclusion of students with disabilities (ETF 2010). According to official data, 199 students with special educational needs are enrolled in secondary education including regular education as well as education in resource schools, of which 65 students are enrolled in regular vocational schools.

The Constitution guarantees minorities the right to education, while national legislation guarantees the education of students from minority groups in their mother tongue and their literature. Secondary vocational education is provided in the Albanian language in three mixed secondary schools. The curricula are the same for the Albanian and Montenegrin programmes, except for part of the curricula (around 20%) that covers subjects such as mother tongue, literature and history. This part of the curricula is prepared in schools in cooperation with teachers, parents and the local community. This approach, which is also applied in elementary schools, promotes social cohesion and mutual tolerance. Civic education is not introduced as a subject in VET schools, only as an elective subject in gymnasiums and an obligatory subject in two years of elementary school.

1.2. The institutional framework for vocational education

The government has adopted an Inclusive Education Strategy (2008) to promote quality and accessible education for all those with special educational needs. In 2012 the government adopted a National Strategy on Employment and Human Resources Development (2012-2015), which inter alia aims to promote social inclusion. The Strategy for Development of Vocational

Education in Montenegro (2010-2014) and the Strategy for Development of VET in the Northern Region of Montenegro (2011-2014) provides the basis for the development of the vocational education system. The Strategy for Introduction of the Montenegrin Qualification Framework (2008–2013), the Strategy for Lifelong Entrepreneurial Learning (2008–2013) and the, Strategy of Lifelong Career Orientation (2011-2015) are also relevant for social inclusion in vocational education.

Several institutions of the government are important for the vocational education system. The main advisory institution at national level used to be the Council for Vocational Education. However, since 2010 this Council was merged with the Council for Adult Education and the Council for General Education into the National Education Council (NEC). The Council has 20 members proposed by the Ministry of Education and the Bureau for Education Services, universities and social partners (including employers' associations, unions, as well as student parliaments). It has three boards, among which is the Board for VET. The Council is in charge of passing the curricula for subjects and examination catalogues for vocational and other exams, methodology for the preparation of textbooks, the scope and content of the vocational education that is delivered with employers, establishing of curricula for vocational education and pupils with special needs, proposal of the profile and professional qualifications of the teaching staff responsible for vocational education. Representatives of the ethnic minorities are also members of the Council.

The Ministry of Education, as the main decision-making body in the area of education, is responsible *inter alia* for financing education, managing educational institutions, implementing legislation, teacher training, curricula and syllabi, and approval of textbooks and reference books. One of the aims of the reform of the education system was the decentralisation of finance, which has still not been implemented, due to which all VET systems are financed from the central budget at the national level.

In addition, one of the aims of the reforms was the devolution of certain functions from the Ministry of Education and Science to newly established institutions, including the Bureau for Education Services, the Centre for Vocational Education and the Examinations Centre. The Bureau of Educational Services is a component of quality assurance, and the drafting of curricula for vocational education. The Bureau for Educational Services has a Department for Education in the Albanian Language. The Vocational Education and Training Centre (VET Centre) is in charge

of the advisory, research and expert activities for vocational education including *inter alia* monitoring and analysing the education system; preparing curricula, catalogues and standards of knowledge, occupational standards, norms and standards for teaching aids and equipment; doing research and monitoring experiments; advising institutions in vocational education; preparing standards for textbooks and manuals for vocational subjects; preparing professional standards for teachers; and organising training for teachers and principals. The Examination Centre is responsible for external testing of standard of knowledge and skills.

The schools are autonomous in developing their annual plans and programmes of work. However, the curricula and textbooks are developed and adopted at the national level.

In order to improve the process of social inclusion in the education system, COSSN are established in 18 out of 21 municipalities. Work of the COSSN is financed from the local budget. The Secondary level Commission is established as part of the Ministry of Education. COSSNs support the orientation of students with special education needs and decide what is in their best interest. They also propose a plan for inclusion of children in school, which provides inputs for the creation of the individual education plan for the child (IEP) prepared by the school (an expert team established by the school and composed of professionals) in cooperation with parents. The Bureau for Education Services gives an opinion on the IEP proposed by the school. The IEP is adopted by the school and can be modified during the school year based on the performance of the student. The IEP Examination Centre develops an individual text for the external evaluation of the student's performance.

1.3. The policy process and the policy debate

Since the beginning of the education system reform, the social partners and participants in social dialogue have been involved at national level in drafting the main strategic documents. Also, the social partners are represented on national consultative bodies and commissions such as NEC, National Commission for Qualifications and Sectoral Commissions for Qualifications. Social partners also have their representatives on the VET Centre Governing Board. In addition, the social partners have their representatives on school boards of vocational schools. These facts show a high level of involvement of the social partners in the consultation and decision-making mechanisms related to VET. However, their impact on the final decision-making is limited by their minority representation in these bodies (ETF 2010b). Moreover, the contribution and

effectiveness of employers' participation relies on their ability to bring their perspective to the discussion. During our interviews, we found out that the business representatives display a low activity and initiative in some bodies, especially in sectorial commissions. According to the views of a few interviewees, a more active, faster and innovative involvement by business representatives would improve the VET programmes and the response of the whole system to labour market needs. On the other hand, employers referred to the composition of the business sector, which is mainly made by SMEs, and difficulties in articulation of the needs of such a wide and dispersed community.

The main focus of the current policy debate, according to the information provided during our interviews with policy makers, is on the better alignment of the VET system to the needs of the labour market and the further improvement of the programmes and curricula, the higher enrolment of pupils in vocational schools and their improved positioning in the labour market. Projects and programmes implemented recently have been focused on the promotion of vocational education (promotion campaign "VET is the key") and on improving the quality of education through the development of internal evaluations and training of teachers.

On the other hand, debates related to social inclusion are more focused on pre-school or elementary education, and more on the inclusion of students with special educational needs than on RAE or other vulnerable groups. Also, there is almost no data or analysis of social inclusion in VET. When it comes to the applying of the concept of inclusive education, the secondary school level is neglected and due to that staff preparedness for inclusion in secondary education is much lower than in elementary schools (ETF 2010a). The secondary education of SEN students is not sufficiently oriented towards the VET.

As it was explained earlier, the regulatory framework sets out the procedures for the involvement of the SEN students in the education system. However, during the fieldwork, teachers pointed out that it often happens that SEN students are enrolled in regular classes based on the opinion of the COSSN but they cannot fulfil their individual education plan and fully integrate in the class, due to which they cannot continue education in the school. It seems that reasons for this lie in the quality of the work of the COSSNs, but also in the teachers' capacity to implement a defined IEP. Few representatives of the state institutions recognized that in some cases COSSNs, especially in smaller municipalities, do not have capacity to perform their task on the required quality level. In addition, it was pointed out that communication between the COSSN, the expert teams from the

primary schools that have been creating and monitoring the IEP and those teams at the secondary school level should be improved in order to enable continuous and consistent education of the student.

Teachers are still not adequately supported and trained, according to both their own views and also the views of the representatives of the national institutions. Teachers in secondary vocational education are able to recognize the special needs of the student, but not able to provide the best approach to them (ETF 2010a). One of the reasons is that they do not obtain adequate knowledge for work with SEN students during their pre-service education. It is only recently, in 2011, that vocational school teachers were for the first time in the position to attend training on work with SEN students, organized as part of the project “Support to the inclusion in VET”, implemented by KulturKontakt and the VET Centre. Different groups of teachers also display differences in motivation and in their willingness to accept innovations and use their initiative to adjust their teaching methods to suit individuals. Thus, development and implementation of the IEP of students often depend on the attitude of the teachers and their personal initiative.

Mentioning personal initiative, motivation and willingness, it was stated by several of our interviewees that the climate in the school, the school activities and the educational results depend significantly on the ability of the Director of the school and his or her knowledge, capacities and motivation.

There is no established mechanism of communication between the Ministry of Education, Ministry of Health and Ministry of Labour and Social welfare on the SEN students (CEMI 2011). Each Ministry has its own database of those individuals but they are not connected and merged into one integral system. The creation of such a database would improve access to those children and follow their development.

The issue of social cohesion was not mentioned as problematic during the interviews. Discussions at the school level expressed satisfaction with the communication between different groups of students. The institutional framework sets a good basis for the implementation of education for ethnic minorities, and our field research showed an efficient implementation of those solutions in practice. In some rare cases teaching materials in the Albanian language are not available, but this issue is easily solved through communication with similar schools.

2. VET PRACTICES FOR SOCIAL INCLUSION AND SOCIAL COHESION AT THE LOCAL LEVEL

2.1. Methodology

The research adopted the methodology of Participatory Action Research (PAR), which involved key stakeholders including school directors, teachers, students, employers, community leaders and others in the research process. Research advisory boards were established at national and local level with relevant key actors. The meetings with advisory boards were useful in identifying relevant issues concerning the relationship between vocational education, social inclusion and social cohesion. They also assisted in developing an appropriate research strategy and commented on the research findings and their significance for improving VET policy and practice.

The schools that were selected for inclusion in the research were the Agricultural High School in Bar, the Secondary School of Civil Engineering "Ing. Marko Radevic" in Podgorica and the Secondary mixed school "Beco Pasic" in Plav.

In-depth interviews were conducted at national and local level. At national level, nine interviews were conducted with representatives of the Ministry of Education, Bureau for Education Services of Montenegro, Department for Continuous Development of Teachers, Centre for Vocational Education and Training, EAM and the Faculty of Philosophy (University of Montenegro).

At the local level, 30 interviews were conducted in total in all locations. Interviews were carried out with the directors, deputy directors and professional workers³ and teachers in the three-selected case study vocational schools, as well as local employers, trade unionists, representatives of local governments and NGO representatives. Local advisory boards proposed the people for interviewing and issues for discussion. Findings for the interviews were presented to the local advisory boards.

³Professional work in schools is done by expert associates: psychologists, pedagogues and librarian (and in larger schools, speech therapists)

Table 1: Number of interviews

| | | number of in depth interviews |
|-----------------------|-----------------|-------------------------------|
| National level | | 9 |
| <i>Bar</i> | <i>School A</i> | <i>11</i> |
| <i>Podgorica</i> | <i>School B</i> | <i>10</i> |
| <i>Plav</i> | <i>School C</i> | <i>9</i> |
| Local level | | 30 |

Focus groups are group discussions organized to explore people's views and experiences on a specific set of issues. The moderator of the focus group followed a questionnaire to guide the topics, which were discussed during the session. One focus group was organised at a national level and three focus groups were organised on a local level (one per locality). Focus groups were organised in order to have more information about the topics, as well as confrontation of opinions. Sessions typically last from 60 to 90 minutes and focus groups included from 5 to 10 people. The idea was to keep the group small enough to allow everyone to speak, but large enough to capture a range of views and experiences.

Desk research refers to the collection, review and analysis of the existing data, policies, strategies, and programmes at national and local level. The existing policy documents and administrative data were analysed in order to present the relationship between VET policy and relating to VET and social inclusion and social cohesion. In total, **20 documents** were examined. The limiting factor was a lack of papers and analysis on VET and the social inclusion situation in Montenegro.

The quantitative segment of the research was based upon student and teacher questionnaire templates set up by the LSE team. Questionnaires were discussed and approved by schools before application of the survey, in December 2012. Teachers, together with ISSP researchers, conducted the survey among students during the classes. The survey took in average 20 minutes. The survey was conducted among 317 students, distributed as shown in Table 2. The survey was conducted with students from the first and final year of education and with students on three year and four-year courses. The courses covered by the survey were: Forwarding and customs agency technician, Architectural technician, Interior designer, Construction technician, Ceramist, Health technician, Nautical technician, Agricultural technician, Food technician, Tourism technician and Veterinary technician.

Table 2: Student and teacher questionnaires

| | | Number of respondents to student questionnaires | Number of respondents to teacher questionnaire |
|------------------|-----------------|--|---|
| <i>Bar</i> | <i>School A</i> | <i>109</i> | <i>30</i> |
| <i>Podgorica</i> | <i>School B</i> | <i>107</i> | <i>30</i> |
| <i>Plav</i> | <i>School C</i> | <i>101</i> | <i>26</i> |
| Total | | 317 | 86 |

The teachers' survey was conducted by ISSP researchers. The questionnaires were disseminated among teachers and collected a few days later. The average response rate was 70%. The survey was conducted with 86 teachers, of which 57% were males and 43% were females (Table 2). Data was entered into Excel database, and then processed and analysed using the SPSS program.

2.2. Situation analysis in the case study areas

The schools that were analysed under the project are in three different regions in Montenegro that differ in term of size and structure of population, economic development, social situation, level of social inclusion and migration patterns.

Bar is a city in the southern region of Montenegro. The region is predominantly urban with a well-developed tourism industry. It covers 11.5% of the territory of Montenegro. Bar has a well-developed infrastructure and it has the biggest port in Montenegro. The total population in Bar is 42,048 or 6.8% of the total population. Podgorica is in the central region, which is predominantly urban and industrialised. It covers 35.5% of the territory of Montenegro. Podgorica is the capital city with a population of 185,937 or 30% of the total population and contributes about 42.7% of the total GDP of Montenegro. Plav is a small city in the northern region. The northern region is mostly rural and makes up 53% of the territory of Montenegro. GDP per capita is significantly lower in the northern region than in other regions of the country. The population of Plav is 13,108, which is 2.1% of the total population. More than four-fifths of the population of Podgorica live in urban areas, while in Bar and Plav only two fifths live in urban areas of the

municipalities. The index of development in Podgorica is 146.0, in Bar is 92.0 and the lowest is in Plav 20.3⁴ (Montenegro =100).⁵

The regional Human Development Index (HDI) analysis carried out by UNDP shows that Podgorica and Bar have the highest HDI rating in Montenegro (0.86), while Plav has 0.76.

The number of socially excluded households and individuals in the northern region is higher in comparison with other regions. In total, 5.9% of households and 10.2% of individuals are socially excluded in the northern region compared to only 1% of households and 7.8% of individuals in the southern region, whilst only 3.2% of households and 9.2% of individuals are socially excluded in the central region (UNDP 2009). Additionally, households in the northern region have very low incomes and face challenges in accessing health services. In the southern region the biggest barrier to social exclusion is low income, while in the central region families experience more difficulty in paying utility, mortgage or any other bills. The ethnic structure of the population also differs, which leads to differences in culture, customs and habits.

According to the data from Census of population in 2011, the illiteracy rate in Montenegro is 1.5% (0.6% for male and 2.4% for female). In the northern region illiteracy rate is the highest and amounts to 2.2% (0.8% for male and 3.6% for female). In Plav the illiteracy rate is highest in comparison with other cities in Montenegro and amounts to 3.6% (almost 6% for female). In the southern region, the illiteracy rate is 1.1% (0.4% for male and 1.7% for female) and in the central region it amounts to 1.3% (0.6% for male and 2% for female).

Table 3: Population by nationality

| | Montenegrins | Serbs | Bosniaks | Albanians | Muslims | Roma |
|-----------|--------------|-------|----------|-----------|---------|------|
| Bar | 46.5 | 25.3 | 5.1 | 6.0 | 7.7 | 0.5 |
| Podgorica | 57.4 | 23.3 | 2.0 | 5.1 | 2.2 | 2.1 |
| Plav | 6.3 | 16.0 | 51.9 | 18.9 | 5.6 | 0.0 |

Source: MONSTAT

⁴Strategy of the Regional Development of Montenegro

⁵ The Index is calculated by the Ministry of Economy and presented in Regional Development Strategy. The aim of the index is to measure the development of municipalities based on: economic indicators, indicators of structural changes and demographic indicators.

The total number of Roma population in Montenegro is 6,251 or 1% of the population. In Podgorica live 3,988 or 63.8% of the Roma population, while in Bar live 3.2% of the Roma population; there are no Roma in Plav.

The most recent data on the secondary education of the RAE population in Montenegro show that only 19% of 24-65 years old have completed second grade, 7% of them have completed third grade, while only 0.2% of population have a high school diploma (UNDP 2011). According to the research conducted by the Ministry of Education in 2009, there have been only 36 RAE students on the national level enrolled in high schools. The small number of enrolled RAE students in secondary school is the result of the small number of those who finish primary school. According to the Census of population 2011, only 51% of Roma children between 6 and 17 attend primary school (average for Montenegro is 95%). The primary school completion rate of Roma is 32% compared to 98% for the population in general (World Bank 2011). Since there are no Roma people in Plav, there are no students in that school, while in school in Bar there are three Roma students, and the same number in Podgorica.

Data obtained from the Statistical Office of Montenegro show that in the academic year 2011/2012, there were 199 students⁶ with special needs enrolled in secondary schools (regular secondary schools and Special Resource Centres⁷ for children with special education needs), of which 42.7% are girls. This data did not vary a lot compared to previous years. The majority of them study trade, catering and tourism (42.7%), personal services (27.1%) and mechanical engineering and metal processing (15.6%), economy, administration and law (5.5%), textile (5.5%). In the regular secondary vocational school 65 students⁸ with special education needs are involved or 32.7% of the total number of students with special needs in secondary education.

The school in Bar has one student with special education needs who is involved in a regular four-year course, while in school in Podgorica there are three students with special education needs (one on a four-year course and two on a three-year course). There are no students with special needs in Plav, but according to the data from the school, there will be some students in the next period, because nine students currently attend primary school in that municipality.

⁶This makes 0.6% of the total number of students in secondary schools

⁷Resource Centers can organize some programmes for the children with special education needs

⁸Source: VET Centre

Absence of physical barriers for disabled students is often one of the preconditions for their enrolment. The fieldwork visits to schools revealed that in all three schools the entrances are adapted to the disabled students, but there are neither elevators nor other tools to help those students move inside the building (between floors).

2.2.1. Schools interactions with local stakeholders

Schools are administered by the school board and managed by the director. The school board consists of seven members (four representatives of the Ministry of Education, one staff representative, one representative of the social partners and a representative of the Parents' Council). The financing of VET is centralized at the Ministry of Education, which covers salaries, operating costs and maintenance, while the School Board adopts a financial plan for spending those resources. School revenues derived from renting out space, organising special exams and implementing projects finance cover only a small part of the overall expenses. The local government is not involved in financing schools except for scholarships for the best students and the provision of books and learning materials for students from poor families.

Each school adopts an annual work plan and programme. The total number of classes during the week is 32 and a maximum 7 classes during the day. The organisation of supplementary classes (for students for those who need extra classes to master the program) and additional classes (for talented students) is defined by the work plan and programme. Supplementary classes are organized for those subjects in which more than half of students have negative results, mainly during the second semester. Teachers also develop work plans to provide support to students in learning, behaviour, psychological development and conflict resolution. There is a close cooperation between teachers and parents. Support for talented students (recognized by teachers) is realized through additional classes, school competitions and extra curricular activities in different fields. For example, the school in Podgorica organized a national competition in occupational subjects for all schools that teach civil engineering. In addition, when there is an opportunity, students are included in different projects implemented by the schools. In all schools, students are involved in extracurricular activities according to their interests. The results of extracurricular activities are evident in the promotion of the school in the local community, the school newspaper, participating in different competitions, drama, recitation, journalism, architecture, construction, craft, art and sports.

Schools, independently or in cooperation with other agencies and non-governmental organizations, realise a variety of preventive and educational programmes for students through regular classes and interactive workshops. Some examples of workshops are preservation of reproductive health, protection of children's rights, environmental protection, violence, non-violent communication, cancer, drug prevention, promotion of healthy lifestyles, reproductive health, prevention of substance abuse, to fight AIDS, and road safety.

Students can obtain information on continuing education through communication with the teachers or school Director, posters and brochures distributed by the Centre for Career Orientation (CIPS) and from faculties. Schools in cooperation with CIPS develop a plan of activities for support of students' career guidance. Those activities include presentations of job opportunities, workshops on professional orientation, cooperation with universities, visits to the fairs, distribution of brochures and flyers. The schools organize visits of representatives of higher education institutions, who present programmes at faculties to final year students. Additionally, schools cooperate with Local Employment Offices (LEOs) in organizing training, implementation of projects for the apprentices' enrolment policy, and career guidance.

The professional development of teachers is the responsibility of the Centre for Continuous Professional Development, part of the Bureau for Educational Service. However, training is also provided by external agencies, international or domestic NGOs (such as Save the Children, STAZE, UNICEF, and Union of Parents of Children with Disabilities).

School-employer cooperation is mainly limited to cooperation regarding practical training, which appears in two forms. Weekly practical lessons organized in companies are carried out during the whole school year, while a two-week "practical" work in a company is carried out annually. Schools, not employers, initiate this cooperation in most cases. The schools report that there is a lack of initiative and interest by employers in the organisation of practical classes. Also, according to the view of several respondents it is limited by the structure of the local business sector (more than 90% of companies are small and medium size enterprises), which makes communication difficult and mainly focused on business associations. The school-employer relation is also important in the area of enrolment policy and creation of the educational programmes and curricula in order to react to the needs of the local labour market. However, communication on those issues has to be executed at the level of national authorities.

Communication with parents is implemented in cooperation with the Parents' Councils that are established in each school. Those Councils are involved in the creation of main programmes and activity plans in the school. In addition, the schools inform parents about the achievements and progress of their children through regular parent-teacher meetings. According to the information from the schools, participation of parents at those meetings is not at a satisfactory level. However, communication with parents of individual students through individual meetings depends on the interest, engagement and motivation of partners and teachers, which should be improved, according to the information received from the interviewees.

2.2.1.1. Agricultural High School – Bar

The school has 580 students (70.5% male and 29.5% female). There are 22 classrooms (20 for four-year courses and 2 for three-year courses). The courses are divided in four occupational areas (2 in four-year courses and 2 in three-year courses). The school has 45 teachers (21 male and 24 female). There are 13 to 14 subjects for four-year courses and 8 to 12 for three-year courses. The school is well equipped with appropriate and necessary working tools. In addition, 7 out of 22 classrooms are fully IT equipped.

In recent years, as Bar is the biggest port in Montenegro, the number of jobs has increased in the areas of shipping and customs, and the school has opened courses for maritime occupations such as nautical engineering and nautical technician, as well as shipping and customs-agency technicians.

Table 2: The number of students by courses (2012/2013)

| | | course | Number of students |
|--------------------|---|--|--------------------|
| four-year courses | food agriculture, processing and veterinary | food technician | 71 |
| | | agricultural technician | 50 |
| | | veterinary technician | 69 |
| | mechanical engineering of ship nautical technician Shipping and customs-agency technician | mechanical engineering of ship | 99 |
| | | nautical technician | 117 |
| | | Shipping and customs-agency technician | 122 |
| three-year courses | mechanical engineering and metal processing | car mechanic | 23 |
| | services | hairdresser | 29 |
| total | | | 580 |

Source: Agricultural High School, Bar

The school has its own agricultural land (orchards and greenhouses) for practical lessons for agricultural technician students. For other students the school provides practice in local companies. Veterinary students have practical lessons in the Veterinary Centre. The school has agreements with private car mechanics and hairdressing salons where students have practical lessons, at least twice a week. The mechanical engineering of ship and nautical technicians have practical lessons in the Port of Bar and Transoceanic Shipping Company. Thanks to the good cooperation with the military and police, the school has two berths for boats and rowing boats. In that case students have everything on the spot. Shipping and customs-agency technicians have some ad hoc practical lessons in the Directorate of Customs in Podgorica, while the food technicians have practical lessons in bakery and have study visits in mills in other cities.

The school is involved in the project of organic production (in a consortium with schools from the neighbouring countries and the Agriculture Faculty from the University of Montenegro). During 2012/2013, the teachers took training in order to improve their skills in the teaching of agricultural production. The school cooperates with a VET school from Norway.

During the interview with the school principal it was mentioned that in general the school has good cooperation with local government but that there is insufficient participation of local government in the school activities through the School Board. In addition, according to the view of school management the local government should assist cooperation between schools and companies through initiation of communication with companies and by providing subsidies for those companies that cooperate with schools.

2.2.1.2. Secondary School of Civil Engineering "Ing. Marko Radevic" – Podgorica

The Secondary School of Civil Engineering "Ing. Marko Radevic" has 24 classrooms and 5 four-year courses and 3 three-year courses. There are 599 students (58.4% male and 41.6% female). All students on three-year courses are male.

Table 3: The number of students by courses and gender (2012/2013)

| | course | number of students | | |
|--------------------|---|--------------------|--------|-------|
| | | male | female | total |
| four-year courses | architectural technician | 70 | 59 | 129 |
| | Interior designer | 24 | 91 | 115 |
| | construction technician for building construction | 62 | 39 | 101 |
| | construction technician | 67 | 37 | 104 |
| | geodesy technician | 72 | 23 | 95 |
| three-year courses | ceramist | 29 | 0 | 29 |
| | installer in construction | 11 | 0 | 11 |
| | assembler of construction | 15 | 0 | 15 |
| total | | 350 | 249 | 599 |

Source: The Secondary School of Civil Engineering "Ing. Marko Radevic"

There are 56 teachers. The number of subjects varies, depending on the course. For the four-year course the number of subjects is 11 to 14, while in three-year courses the number of subjects is lower, 6 to 10.

The school in Podgorica has 60 computers that are continuously available to the students (about one computer per 10 students), four classrooms for practical lessons for the required tools, classrooms for design (every student has their own drawing board). Every student has practical

lessons in the school and in companies. Students of the three-year courses have 25% practical lessons in the first year of study, 50% at the second year, and 70% practical lessons in the final year of study. Students of the four-year courses have 10% practical lessons during their education. Teachers use modern teaching methods in the classrooms. Interviewees from school and companies expressed the opinion that companies where students have practical classes have problems with construction inspection due to the fact that students are not registered as regular workers. This is a result of discordance between legislation, which regulates the construction sector, and student's apprenticeship.

In interview, management of the school mentioned that the school pays attention to the students from poor families, students with special education needs and Roma students, who in most of the cases attend the three-year courses. Teachers are dedicated to children with special needs in order to increase their involvement in the school. Also, they make efforts to keep Roma children in school. There are several cases where the school covered the cost of exams and classes for additional training (if students previously finished three-year courses, the school cover costs for finishing additional four-year course).

The school obtains modest additional funds from projects including organizing training, retraining in cooperation with the EAM, projects with schools from Germany and France, donations of social partners and companies and so on. The school has a license for the education of adults.

2.2.1.3. Secondary mixed school “Beco Pasic” – Plav

The Secondary mixed school “Beco Pasic” in Plav provides two types of secondary education: general-high school and vocational. It has 18 classrooms for secondary vocational education hosting 7 four-year courses and 5 three-year courses. Some classrooms are mixed due to the small number of students for some courses. There are 85 teachers in the school. The number of taught subjects in the first year is 135, in the second year 11, in the third 92 and in the fourth year of study 79.

Table 4: The number of students by courses and gender (2012/2013)

| | Course | number of students | | |
|-------------------|--|--------------------|------------|------------|
| | | male | female | total |
| four-year course | health technician | 28 | 99 | 127 |
| | tourism technician (in Montenegrin language) | 50 | 61 | 111 |
| | tourism technician (in Albanian language) | 17 | 7 | 24 |
| | <i>tourism technician (total)</i> | <i>67</i> | <i>68</i> | <i>135</i> |
| | agriculture technician | 35 | 17 | 52 |
| three-year course | Car mechanic (in Montenegrin language) | 18 | 0 | 18 |
| | Car mechanic (in Albanian language) | 12 | 1 | 13 |
| | culinary technician/serving - mixed | 20 | 7 | 27 |
| | seller | 10 | 13 | 23 |
| | assembler of construction/ceramist - mixed | 24 | 0 | 24 |
| | electrician/car electrician | 21 | 0 | 21 |
| total | | 235 | 205 | 440 |

Source: The Secondary mixed school “Beco Pasic” - Plav

The Secondary mixed school “Beco Pasic” is the only secondary school in Plav. About 40% of students travel every day from the nearby remote villages and the school refunds them transport costs or organizes free transport. The school has good cooperation with employers and local government, cultural and sport institutions for organizing extracurricular activities, according to the statement of the management of the school. In addition, communication with employers is developed and some practical lessons are realized in their facilities. For example, the school signed a memorandum with the Tourist Organisation and an agreement with the hospital and a few craft firms regarding the organisation of practical lessons. With such cooperation and their own facilities (classrooms for practical lessons) the school meets the needs of the students. Practical lessons are also organized in school, as it owns agricultural land (60 ha) and the necessary agricultural machines. The school has equipment for car mechanics, IT equipment, computer labs, fully equipped classrooms for medicine technicians, waiters etc.

The school has participated in many international projects that have been successfully completed. An example of such a project is cooperation with schools in Switzerland, which have resulted in innovation in teaching in the field of tourism and hospitality. The school carried out several projects with the Austrian organization – Kulturkontakt. Also, the school is involved in the

project "Student Entrepreneurship" which has been implemented by a Norwegian organization Business innovation programmes in cooperation with the Agency for Development of Small and Medium Enterprises Montenegro. The school cooperates with the ETF in the field of inclusive education and training of teachers and took part in international research such as: PISA and ESPAD. In the report on determining the quality of educational work in May 2010 it has been noted that school has good cooperation with international institutions in the implementation of various projects and training of students and teachers.

From the interview with the school principal we found out that teachers are focused on every student individually in order to develop their critical thinking, creativity and research activities. Also, the school principal pointed out that despite the national and cultural differences between the students there is a nice atmosphere with successful interpersonal relationships in a spirit of tolerance and respect for differences by age, gender, special needs of students, level of education, and social, national and cultural specificities. Other interviewees and focus group participants, not only in this municipality but also at the national level, confirmed this. Additionally, according to the data from the students' questionnaire, average score of happiness of students on scale from 1 to 10 is 8.6.

In recent years, the school in Plav regularly prepares a "Plan of internal social inclusion" based on the analysis of students' performance in school as well as their life outside the school (what they do after classes, who are their friends, what they do in their free time and so on). Social workers from the Centre for Social Work are also involved in these activities. The school is transparent in activities and the local TV station presents the program of school activities in order to inform the public of the work of the school.

Besides the full-time teachers, the school has assistants in teaching. Teachers and students have established a Centre of Learning where students and teachers can improve their special skills and knowledge.

Also, the school established a "Student cooperative" in order to promote entrepreneurship. Within the "School cooperative" restaurant and car repair shop are opened in which students have practical lessons. Money earned from these activities is not paid to the students but invested in materials, improvement of premises and additional activities in the school. Every student has access to the library and computer labs all day, which is important for the students who do not have good conditions for learning at home.

Since many refugees and internally displaced persons live in Plav, the school provides free textbooks and other relevant literature in order to help them integrate in the educational process. Also, the school participates in the cost of graduation trips for students who are unable to pay the full amount.

2.3. PAR research process and research findings

2.3.1. Selection and tracking

Enrolment in vocational schools is done on the basis of an open call, which is announced twice a year (in June and August). If there are fewer applicants than is stated in the admission procedure, all of those who comply with the conditions can enrol in the school. If there are more applicants than the admissions procedure, the ranking list is defined based on the general performance of students in the last three years of study in primary school and success in external assessment in the primary school, as well as special talents, or skill that are relevant to gain education. There is no qualification exam. The student is enrolled in school as a full-or part-time student. Full-time students have regular attendance, while part-time students have attendance in preparatory classes (classes for instruction and consulting) and examinations. Additionally, students have rights to acquire parallel education, or to attend more education programmes. Foreign students can enrol in school, in accordance with international conventions and Law on Vocational Education. The Ministry of Education may determine the number of enrolled foreign students who are educated on the principle of reciprocity, in accordance with international agreements, as well as the number of students in the program for exchange students. According to the Law, vocational education is free for all and there are no restrictions for entry into vocational schools for any social group. This was also confirmed in most of the interviews conducted.

Due to the fact that there are no formal restrictions for entry to vocational school for any social group and also due to the fact that the number of students who may enrol in general schools is almost half the number of students who may enrol in vocational school, differentiation takes place in the choice of vocational schools (courses).

Interviewees from schools declare that the more successful students (rated by grades in primary school) usually enrol in the four-year courses, which are more attractive than three-year course.

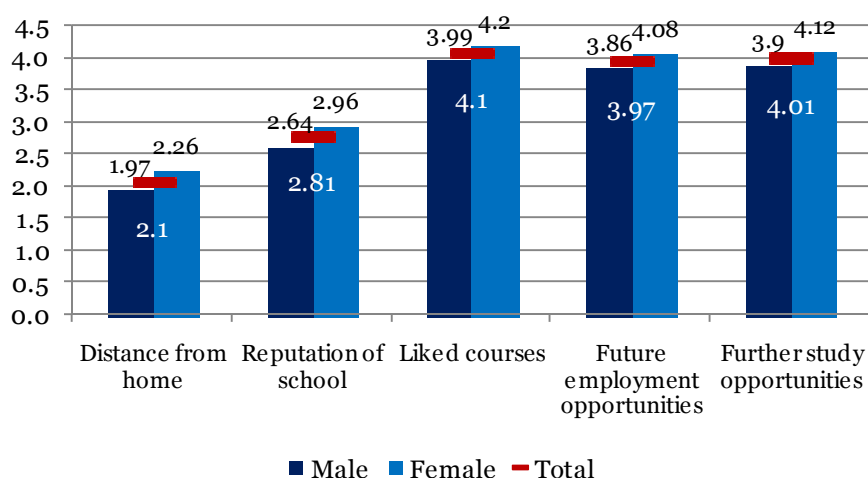
Also, according to the interviews, most of those students are from richer families in comparison with students who enrol in three-year courses. In recent years there is a trend of an increasing number of students in four-year courses. According to the view of some interviewees, there are several reasons for this: (i) vocational schools are seen as an easier way towards higher education, (ii) vocational schools are thought to provide better practical knowledge than gymnasias for those students who have defined plans for future education, and (iii) vocational schools provide an occupation no matter what would be the decision of the student after graduation.

In general there is low enrolment in the three-year courses (9.2% in Podgorica, 9% in Bar and 28% in Plav), despite the fact that there is an excess demand for those occupations in the labour market. However, after finishing three-year courses, students may continue their education and obtain a diploma from the four-year courses. In that case, they have to pass certain exams from the first three years of education and all exams from the fourth-year. The reasons for the low enrolment in three-year courses mentioned by interviewees are (i) the seasonal character of work for some occupations such as agricultural workers, construction, tourism and related services, (ii) they require hard physical work and (iii) they do not provide high social status despite being often very well paid. According to the interviewees from schools and other institutions, the students who enrol in three-year courses mostly have low grades in primary school, come from poorer families, have parents with a low level of educational, are Roma children or will continue a family craft business. The results of the student survey support some of these statements. For example, only 32% of students (for all schools) have fathers with a higher education, and only 25% of students have a mother with a university degree. In addition, in 74% of cases at least one of the parents is employed. However, differences are significant among municipalities⁹ mainly due to the lower level of economic development in the northern region. The social background of those students is one of the reasons for their low performance in primary schools, which then presents a main barrier for enrolment in certain vocational courses (for example the more popular four-year courses).

⁹Data shows that in Podgorica 44% fathers and 36% of mothers have higher education, while this percent in Plav is much lower (in 25% of cases their fathers and in 8% of cases their mothers have university degree). This percentage differs across schools. In Podgorica in 90% and in Bar in 80% of cases at least one of the parent is employed, while in Plav this percent is much lower and at least one parent is employed in 53% cases. The reasons lie in much lower level of economic development of the northern region.

In addition, as mentioned by a few interviewees, in some cases the financial situation of the family can be a limitation if a student wants to enrol in a vocational course which does not exist in his or her home town (in our case study localities, in Bar and Plav). However, this was not confirmed by students, as according to the survey, the main reason for choosing the particular vocational school is a specific course that they like (4.1 on the scale from 1 to 5). Distance from home, as a reason for school selection, has the lowest score (2.1 on the scale from 1 to 5). Average distance of the schools from students' home is 7.03 kilometres¹⁰. However, in the cases where distance from school is presenting a problem for inclusion, local governments and schools organize transport, or refund of travel costs. For example, 97% of students in the school in Plav are from the town or nearby villages and settlements and the school provides special buses for some students from remote villages. Also, in the cases where students come from other municipalities, there are student dormitories for which students pay modest fees that cover food and accommodation costs.

Figure 1: Reasons for choosing this vocational school



Source: Student questionnaire

SEN students are enrolled based on the decision of the COSSN. However, according to information from schools there are still cases in which parents do not inform schools about the special education needs of their children, and they are enrolled without a COSSN decision. Also,

¹⁰Source: Student's questionnaire

some interviewees mentioned non-compliance in the work of the COSSN due to an inappropriate decision in several cases. All such situations resulted in the enrolment of children that were not able to follow and attend the courses. Due to the fact that some vocational courses require certain physical and mental capabilities, the accessibility of disabled students in those courses is limited. Also, some courses are typically considered as “male” or “female” which may influence the choice that students make.

CIPS are being established across Montenegro with the main goal to help children in primary and secondary school in their career orientation.

2.3.2. Drop out

In general, the dropout rate in Montenegro is low 2.3%¹¹ (or according to some studies¹² it is 3.2%). However, according to the opinion of some interviewees at the national level the low level of dropout is not an indicator of an inclusive system, but it rather indicates that the system is too lenient in providing diplomas without the required knowledge and skills. This was also a conclusion pointed out in the document on the Torino Process-Montenegro 2012.¹³ Namely, all students who drop out during the school year have the possibility to take a special exam at the end of the school year and return to regular education, which in most cases they do. According to the information from schools, in most of the cases those pupils pass this special exam. This was also confirmed by the data collected from interviewees in schools. For example, in school in Podgorica, only 0.5% of students drop out of school, while an additional 3% have the right to take a special classroom exam and are returned to school. In Plav, the dropout rate is around 1%. However, dropout during the year varies from 4.1% to 8.2%, but most (95%) of those students return to regular education at the end of the school year by taking special exams.

The main reason for this situation, mentioned by several interviewees, is the low grading criteria in the regular education system, particularly during those special examination procedures. This indicates that there is a need for standardisation and improvement of the grading system in

¹¹Upper Secondary (ISCED 3) – general and VET, data received from VET Center

¹²VET Centre, Ministry of Education and Luxembourg Agency for Development Cooperation (2011), A study on the prevention of early school-leavers without qualifications in vocational schools in Montenegro

¹³ ETF and Ministry of Education of Montenegro (2012), Torino Proces-Montenegro 2012, draft report, page 18

schools, during the school year and during special exams, which is also one of the recommendations pointed out in the Analysis of the Early Drop Out from VET Schools.¹⁴

According to a study on the prevention of early school-leavers without qualifications in vocational schools in Montenegro¹⁵, students who tend to drop out include students from marginalised groups/families, poorer families, dysfunctional families, boys more than girls, students on three-year courses more than those on four-year courses and students from the first year of study rather than later on. The main reasons for dropping out from schools are voluntary, absence and low marks, bad behaviour, migrations, marriage and sport. Unexcused absences are one of the main reasons of drop out (Mitrovic-Radosevic 2013). If students have 30 or more unexcused absences, and if they have more than half negative marks of the total number of subjects, they are excluded from regular education. The biggest portion of exclusions (more than 50%) happens due to a high number of unexcused absences, which was also confirmed by the data collected during the interviews in the case study schools. In the school in Podgorica, the proportion of excluded students at the end of the first semester in 2009/2010 was 0.7% and in 2010/2011 was 2.5%. In the school in Bar, the proportion of excluded students because of absences in 2009/2010 was 2.5% and in 2010/2011 was 1.5%.

Migrations and early marriages as reasons for drop out were particularly noticed in one of our case-study schools (Plav). These social patterns are more characteristic of some ethnic groups such as Bosniaks, Albanians and Muslims who are a majority in some municipalities such as Plav. The explanation for the ethnic composition of external migration of the population should be sought in the specific circumstances of the nineties and corresponding population movements, economic aspect as well as already established networks of kinship, friendship and hometown connections.¹⁶

According to the interviewees from schools, school management, teachers and professionals take actions in order to decrease drop out rates. Those actions include individual talks, sessions and

¹⁴ Mitrovic-Radosevic Vjera (2013), Analysis of the Early Drop Out from VET Schools in 2011/2012, VET Centre, Montenegro

¹⁵ The Study is prepared by VET Center, Ministry of Education and Luxemburg Agency for Development Cooperation

¹⁶ Kaludjerovic J., Grečić V. (2012), The Impact of Emigration and Rural Urban Migrations in Central and Eastern Europe, European Commission- Report on Montenegro, European Commission

meetings with students and communication with parents through meetings, phone or using written communication in order to inform them and jointly help children to prevent school leaving. The school in Plav is a very good example in this area. Besides mentioned activities this school, in cooperation with the Centre for Social Work, made “social cards” for all students. The “social card” consists of information about students: number of family members, employment status of the parents, possible problems in the families, health situation of the parents etc. These social cards enable the school to carry out better and more efficient monitoring of students during their education. Additionally, teachers visit parents in order to talk and solve some problems that students have.

In recent years, with a network of pedagogical and psychological services at a vocational school, a monitoring system of students who are at risk of leaving school has been established, as well as a system of counselling of students who decide to leave school early. Generally, schools are satisfied with systems for monitoring of students during their education. However, during the interviews at the national level, the need to improve the school environment through the modernisation of buildings, provide more interesting projects and other activities were seen to be ways to prevent drop out and early school leaving.

2.3.3. Transition from school to work

Generally, the system of tracing students after they leave school is still underdeveloped; there are actually no tracer studies or reports at all. However, in the case-study schools some positive movements in this direction were noticed. For example, schools in Podgorica and Plav conducted research related to graduate students. According to data from this research in the VET school in Podgorica, 70% of the students on four-year courses continue their education at university. Out of those, two thirds (66%) continue education at a Faculty in the same field of study. Almost two fifths (19.2%) of graduate students find a job (7.7% of them work in the same field, while 11.5% work in other sectors) and 10.8% stay unemployed. From the total number of graduate students in Plav, according to the data from the school presented during interviews¹⁷, 80% continue education, 10% find a job and 10% stay unemployed. The school in Bar does not do this research, but based on the information received from the school and local actors (local employment office)

¹⁷Data is collected based on the survey conducted among children on their future plans

the situation is similar in the school in Bar, where about 80% of the students continue in education, while the remaining 20% find jobs during the season.

Table 5: Transition from school to work

| | % of students who continue education | | % of students who find the job | | % of unemployed students | |
|-----------------------|--------------------------------------|--------------------|--------------------------------------|-------------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------|
| | Four year courses | Three-year courses | Four year courses | Three-year courses | Four year courses | Three-year courses |
| Bar (School A) | 80.0 | 0.0 | About 20% find job during the season | | n.a. | |
| Podgorica (School B) | 70.0 | 0.0 | 19.2 | 60.0 | 10.8 | 15.0 |
| | | | | (about 25% periodically work) | | |
| Plav (School C) | 80.0 | 0.0 | About 10.0 | | About 10.0 | |

Source: Data received from schools in Bar, Podgorica and Plav

However, those patterns were not confirmed by the results of our students' questionnaire. According to the data two thirds of the students (68%) plan to search for a paid job after finishing secondary vocational school. In case they do not plan to find a job right after school, most of them (90%) plan to go into further education.

Table 6: Plans for the future (in %)

| | plans to look for paid work | Go to further education or university | Look after family at home | Work in family business | Do voluntary work | Emigrate |
|---------------------------------|-----------------------------------|---|---------------------------------------|-------------------------------|-------------------------|-----------|
| 16 or under | 67 | 94 | 20 | 35 | 13 | 31 |
| Over 16 | 71 | 84 | 12 | 27 | 23 | 32 |
| Male | 65 | 85 | 24 | 44 | 18 | 38 |
| Female | 72 | 97 | 10 | 16 | 13 | 21 |
| Parental employment status | | | | | | |
| Either parent goes out to work | 67 | 90 | 8 | 31 | 17 | 22 |
| Father unemployed | 78 | 83 | 44 | 33 | 20 | 88 |
| Mother unemployed | 78 | 80 | 29 | 31 | 24 | 40 |
| Parental education | | | | | | |
| Father has university education | 59 | 89 | 10 | 31 | 21 | 23 |
| Mother has university education | 47 | 91 | 12 | 32 | 25 | 23 |
| Total | 68 | 90 | 17 | 32 | 17 | 31 |

Source: Student questionnaire

A few reasons for this situation were noticed by interviewees at the national and local level, including (i) vertical mobility from secondary and tertiary education, (ii) the bad economic situation due to which vocational students do not have the possibility to find a job and then decide to continue education, (iii) expectations of students that they will get better jobs after finishing tertiary education in a Faculty and (iv) the general social and cultural climate focused on creation of a knowledge based society.

In finding a job, students find the help of their families and friends to be crucial. On a scale from 1 to 5 (where 1 represents 'none' and 5 represents 'very much') they ranked the importance of the help of family as being of significant importance (4.21) and the help of friends as moderately important (3.33). When it comes to teachers, the EAM or career centres, students find their help insignificant to moderate despite the fact that teachers report that many activities on dissemination of labour market information and career counselling are conducted in the schools in cooperation with local actors (CIPS; LEO). Students whose parents are unemployed seem to have

more confidence in the help of their teachers, career centres, and public agencies than those whose parents are employed. However, both groups still believe that the family and friends connections are the most important in getting a job.

Table 7: Transition from school to work (mean score)

| | How much help expected in finding a job from: | | | | |
|---------------------|---|-------------|-------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|
| | Family | Friends | Teachers | Careers centre in school | Public employment agency |
| 16 or under | 4.21 | 3.39 | 2.93 | 2.68 | 3.05 |
| Over 16 | 4.21 | 3.25 | 2.25 | 2.21 | 2.67 |
| School in Bar | 4.15 | 3.38 | 2.55 | 2.5 | 2.9 |
| School in Podgorica | 4.19 | 3.09 | 2.17 | 1.85 | 2.45 |
| School in Plav | 4.29 | 3.52 | 3.19 | 3.1 | 3.31 |
| Total | 4.21 | 3.33 | 2.63 | 2.48 | 2.88 |

Source: Student questionnaire

The main issue related to the transition from school to work is the level of knowledge and skills gained during the vocational education. Employers argue that students lack appropriate practical skills due to which they can not be immediately involved in work, and that there is a discrepancy between what they learn in school and what are they expected to perform at the workplace. On the other side, teachers believe that students are well prepared for the labour market, but also that employers have very high and sometimes unrealistic expectations. They also stated that based on statements of employers it would be realistic to expect their higher involvement and initiative in practical lessons and apprenticeship programmes, but that this does not happen in practice. However, it seems that the situation differs from one educational programme to another. For example, according to the information from one of the case-study schools there is a very high level of employability (almost 100%) of students who finish courses related to mechanical engineering of ships, or as a nautical technician. In addition, those students in most cases find jobs with international shipping companies (which means on the global labour market), which may be considered as a good indication of the quality of the work and skills they acquire during their schooling.

Regarding the issue of transition from school to work of disabled students it is important to notice that employers who employ persons with disabilities receive subsidies (part of the salary is subsidised by the state). Data from EAM shows that 31 employers who employed 42 persons with disabilities received this kind of subsidy during 2012. Also, one of the measures implemented by EAM is the involvement of persons with disabilities and other hard-to-employ persons in public works. However, this employment is only temporary, for the duration of the particular public work. According to the EAM in 2012, out of the total registered unemployed persons, 3.2% were RAE, out of which 94% had no qualification, while 5.6% had a vocational qualification. According to the same source, 141 of RAE registered at EAM were employed through active labour market measures (public works and seasonal employment) in 2012. According to the regular Survey of Employers conducted by EAM, conducted in 2012, two-fifths (19%) stated that they were willing to employ a RAE person (in 2010 this was just 5%).

When it comes to discrimination difficulties in finding a job, students are in general not worried. On a scale from 1 to 5, the mean score that they will be discriminated by gender is 1.8, ethnicity 1.9, disability 1.6 and by religion by 1.7. The two factors they find as a possible obstacle in finding a job are qualifications (mean score 2.6 on the scale from 1 to 5) and the school that was attended (mean score 2.5 on the scale from 1 to 5), where the older students and females are concerned more with these issues.

2.3.4. Patterns of education, apprenticeship system and social inclusion

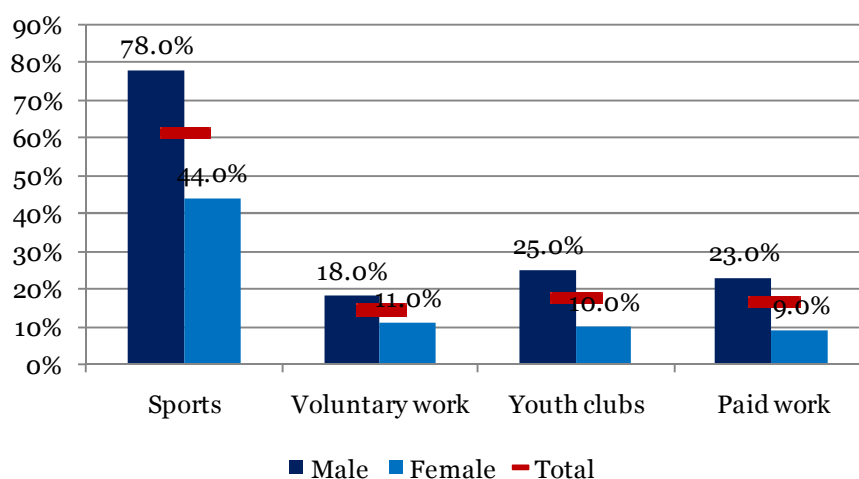
According to the Law on vocational education, practical teaching is organized in school (classrooms, laboratories, school cooperatives) and in facilities outside schools (institutions, enterprises and entrepreneurs). Also, the Law defines conditions for education in companies (dual system of education), but currently such a type of education does not exist in Montenegro, although it was practiced seven years ago for the two programmes, out of which one turned out to be very successful. According to the statements of the school and national actors one of the possible reasons for non-existence of dual programmes could be very comprehensive and required organisation of such a program, especially for employers. However, some employers stated that there were initiatives by companies for similar programmes, for example that students have practice during the summer season (from May to October) while the rest of the school year would be dedicated to theoretical classes, but that they were not implemented due to formal constraints. All case study schools have practical classes in school and practical work in

companies. In addition, it is noticeable and was confirmed by school actors that classrooms for practical lessons are very well equipped and that students are able to have extensive practical work in school. There are no formal strict regulations on the establishment of in-company training, and due to that it is based on the efforts and communication of schools and employers. Before the establishment of such a practice the agreement between schools and employers is signed. In some cases there are formal (legal) barriers for some companies to be involved in the practical work (such as already mentioned example with a construction company in Podgorica). Teachers reported that mentors in the companies do not have a high level of pedagogical skills and as a result a lower level of knowledge gained during the practical classes in companies. Also, a lack of motivation of both sides, students in gaining new knowledge and employers, is one of the reasons for inefficient company-based training. Also, some interviewees at the national level pointed out the lack of quality assurance in company-based training, as well as the low level of communication between schools and companies which is mainly limited to formal, officially required, communication. According to the information received from teachers, final marks from practical work are based on the information that teachers receive from companies in which practical work is realized. In some cases, teachers of practical classes (in the case of Plav including the school principal) visit employers in order to monitor the work of students, which then helps them in the creation of a final mark.

From the aspect of social inclusion it should be pointed out that, according to the statements of school actors, all students are included in practical in-school or in-company work, including SEN students. This situation was also noticed during the school visits.

All schools organize extra-curricular activities (debates, various presentations, workshops in physics, biology, chemistry, and entrepreneurship). Some schools are more active in this area, such as the school in Plav where there are 24 different extra-curricular programmes. In addition to activities within the school, some programmes are related to the local community (for example: students of the medicine courses are visiting older families in the community and measure blood pressure, bring medicines etc.). According to the views of national stakeholders, the organisation of extra curricula activities strongly depends on the motivation and dedication of the school management (in the first instance the principal) and teachers.

Figure 3: Participation in extra-curricular activities



Source: Student questionnaire

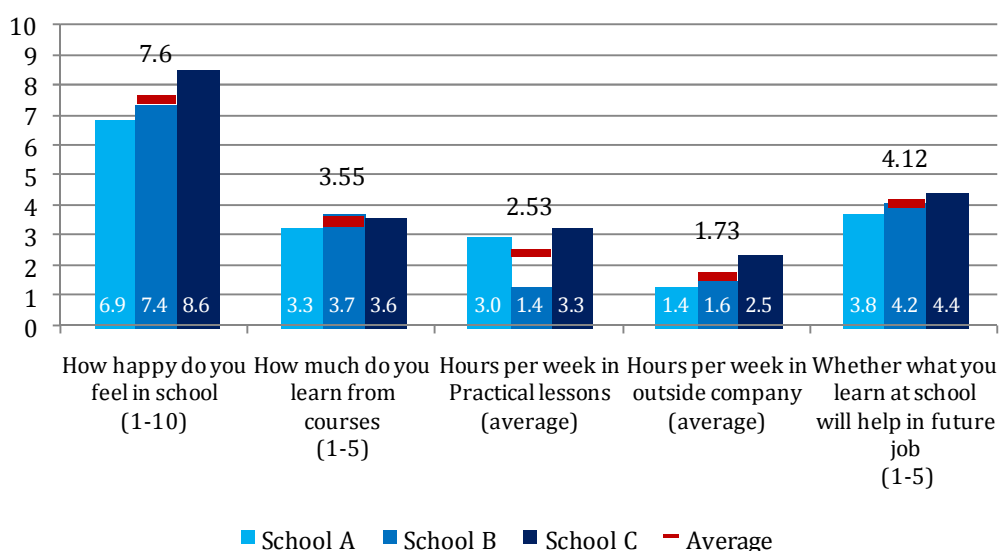
When it comes to extra-curricular activities, 62% of students do sports, while voluntary work, youth clubs and paid work are not as popular. One of the possible reasons for this may be that voluntary clubs are not in well developed in Montenegro. Due to that, promotion of these activities is not significant and students are not interested in involvement.

2.4. Comparative analysis of vocational education, social inclusion practices and social cohesion

The educational patterns in all three schools are similar. However, slight differences may be observed in the organisation of practical work in school and in companies, the organisation of different school activities and communication with students. In these aspects the school in Plav showed a better performance than the other schools, which was also confirmed by the students who have more practical classes, more practice in companies and higher expectations that knowledge they acquired during schooling would help them in finding job (Figure 4). Also, the school in Plav is most active in the organisation of activities within the school as well as community initiatives, which are also reflected in the answers of students. Namely, students from Plav feel the happiest with their school, with an average score of 8.6 out of 10 (Figure 4).

Additional reason for this satisfaction, besides active school management and teachers, could be that Plav is a very small community in which social and cultural life is very modest in comparison with Podgorica and Bar. That could be why school life and everything it offers present the main source of communication, social life, cultural activities and fun for them.

Figure 4: Experience in school¹⁸

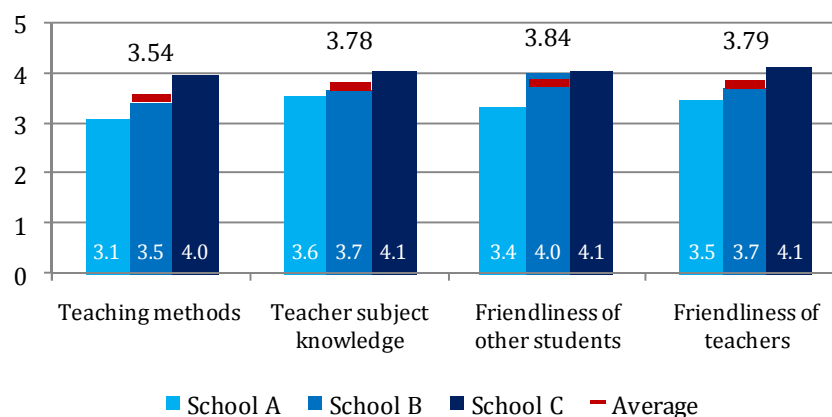


Source: Student questionnaire

In addition, students from Plav graded highest the level of teacher knowledge, teaching methods and friendliness of teachers (Figure 5).

¹⁸School A - Agricultural High School in Bar, School B - Secondary School of Civil Engineering "Ing. Marko Radevic" in Podgorica, School C - Secondary mixed school "Beco Pasic" in Plav

Figure 5: School ratings (mean scores)

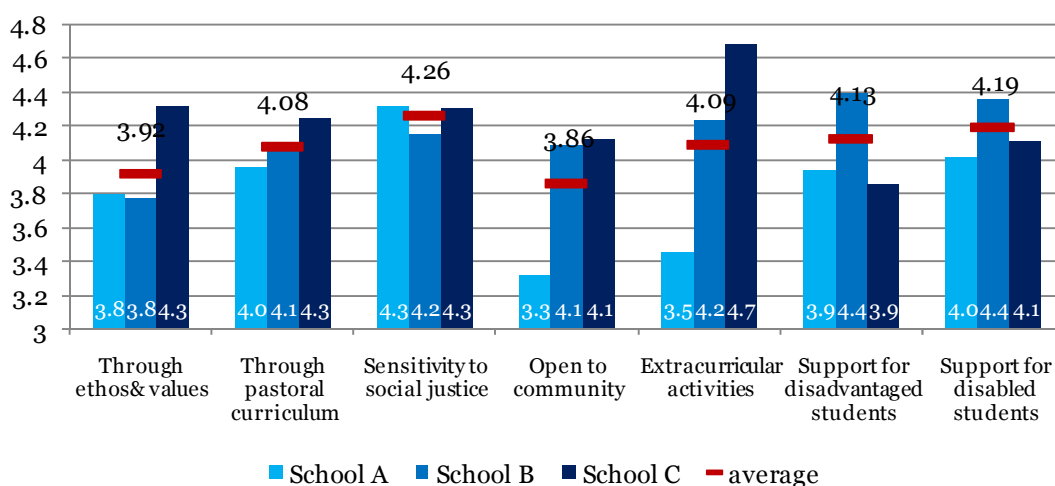


Source: Student questionnaire

The economic and social situation in case-study localities defines who are the most vulnerable student groups. In Podgorica and Bar, those are SEN students and RAE students. However, in Plav, as there are no RAE and SEN students in school, students from remote villages, refugees and students from poor families are considered to be most vulnerable. In addition, the fact that the school in Plav is the only school in that municipality requires from the school management higher responsibility and consequently higher responsibility for actions. Due to that, more activities that aimed at the inclusion of certain social groups were seen in this school (organisation of free school transport, provision of free textbooks, school open 24 hours for students to enable use of classrooms and IT equipment, teachers and principal visit parents, social cards are created for each student). Teachers from the school in Podgorica scored the highest grades in the promotion of social inclusion in their school through providing support to disadvantaged and disabled students, in comparison to teachers from other schools. Teachers from Plav graded the promotion of social inclusion through school ethos and values and extra curricular activities highly. According to the opinion of teachers from Bar their school promotes social inclusion mostly through sensitivity to social justice. However, it should be noted that teachers graded lowest the openness of the school towards the community as one of the tools for social inclusion (Figure 7). Also, more than 90% of teachers in all schools replied that their school offers equal opportunities in admission, and within school to female students, students from poor families, Roma and other

ethnic minority students, students with special needs and disabled students and other socially excluded groups.

Figure 7: Promotion of social inclusion in schools (mean score¹⁹)



Source: Teacher questionnaire

The issue of social cohesion was not mentioned as problematic in any of these three localities, despite the fact that different ethnic groups live in those. From that aspect the Plav locality is most interesting for observation since ethnic minorities make up a majority of the population. Due to that, the school in Plav organized courses in the Albanian language. No problems were mentioned regarding the implementation and organisation of those programmes. In addition, according to the students' questionnaire, students in Plav gave highest grades for friendliness of other students, which also maybe considered as an indicator of good communication and social cohesion.

¹⁹Teacher questionnaire

3. ACTION PROPOSALS FOR SCHOOLS

- Due to the low enrolment in three-year courses, improved promotion of these courses in communication with the LEO and VET Centre should be achieved. Data from EAM shows that even though there are vacancies in these occupations, students still do not show any interest in them.
- Students from Bar rated teaching methods at 3.14 (on a scale of 1 to 5), students from Podgorica 3.45 and students from Plav with 3.99, which shows that there is room for improvement. This suggests that schools in Bar and Podgorica should offer additional training for teachers (and for mentors from companies in which practical work is conducted) to improve their teaching methods and pedagogical skills, perhaps through internal seminars.
- Training on special educational needs was recently introduced for vocational teachers, but according to experience of similar training for other teachers, motivation and personal interest of participants play a crucial role for the success of the program. This training would be important for teachers in Plav, as although they do not have SEN students, such students are expected to enrol in the future.
- The research has shown that students do not expect much help from career centres or the EAM in finding a job. On a scale from 1 to 5, students rated help in finding a job from career centres at 1.85 in Podgorica, 2.5 in Bar, and 3.1 in Plav; they rated help from the public employment agency at 2.45 in Podgorica, 2.90 in Bar, and 3.3 in Plav. This suggests that the effectiveness of those centres could be improved and that career centres should focus their activities more on education guidance and counselling than simply on dissemination of information.
- The research has shown that the number of hours students spend in practical work in companies is very low: 1.38 in Bar, 1.55 in Podgorica and 2.45 in Plav. This suggests that school should improve their cooperation with employers in order increase the amount of practical work in companies, especially in Bar and Podgorica. This could be done through more frequent meetings and more communication with employers and their associations, and organising events with companies at which students would present their knowledge and skills.

- Continue and improve existing tracer researches (for schools in Podgorica and Plav) and establish a tracer study (school in Bar) in order to get information on students' choices that can be used as inputs for the initiation of further changes and improvements in the school.
- Establish/improve cooperation with primary schools as well as COSSNs regarding the enrolment and education of SEN students. It was mentioned by social inclusion specialists that this communication is crucial for successful integration of those students and their continuous and successful education.
- Put significant effort into the creation of a better atmosphere in the schools, by organising events, interesting projects, extra-curricula activities, and using modern teaching tools to motivate students and prevent absenteeism, dropping out and early school leaving.
- Support vulnerable groups, especially those from poor families, through actions such as those that are implemented in the Plav school, which opens some facilities within schools for 24 hours in order to enable students who do not have space and conditions at home to learn and to use IT.

4. POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS FOR POLICY MAKERS AT NATIONAL LEVEL AND LOCAL LEVEL, INTERNATIONAL DONOR ORGANISATIONS AND NGOS

4.1. Policy recommendations for policy makers at national level

- The evidence from qualitative and quantitative research has shown that there is a mismatch between the labour market needs and the education system, especially in relation to the three-year vocational courses. Therefore it is recommended that vocational education should be focused more on the future needs of the economy and that enrolment policies and new study programmes and modules should be aligned with labour market needs. In addition, it would be appropriate to continue with the promotion of three-year courses, as those occupations are in high demand in the labour market.
- The research has shown that training of VET teachers for work with SEN students is in its initial phase. Moreover, according to the opinion of all interviewees, teachers lack pedagogical skills in this field, especially those who teach practical classes. Based on this it is proposed to establish permanent national programmes for education and training of vocational teachers on work with SEN students. In addition, it is proposed that a significant effort should be put into further organisation and implementation of training of teachers in pedagogical skills.
- The research has shown that the motivation, competences and skills of school directors play a significant role in motivating teachers and professionals in their work performed in classes, communication with student and partners, communication with local actors, creation of actions which support the most vulnerable social groups, and their further education and training, all of which contribute to the creation of a positive and motivating school atmosphere. Therefore we propose the development of the national system of selection of school directors that will be based on their previous achievements, education, skills and competences.

- Our qualitative research based on interviews with teachers and national actors revealed gaps in the work of the COSSN. Therefore we recommend actions that would improve the quality of work of these bodies, through development of a quality control system for the work of COSSNs at the national level, improving the expertise of professions who work in these bodies (through training and counselling), supporting communication among commissions to align their practices and exchange knowledge and expertise through annual expert meetings and the organisation of seminars for exchange of good practices.
- The research has shown that drop out rates are because the system is too lenient in providing diplomas without the required knowledge and skills, suggesting that grading at the special exams is not aligned with the grading system during the year. Based on this evidence, we propose that the grading of special exams should be better aligned with grading during the year. In addition, a monitoring system for the organisation of special exams should be implemented.
- As the preparation of the tracer research depends on initiative at the school level, we propose that schools should be obliged to implement this kind of research. Based on the inputs from schools, some of the national institutions, such as the VET centre, could prepare the tracer study at a national level.
- Even though the legal framework allows organisation of a dual system of education in practice it is not implemented. Our qualitative research has shows that one of the reasons for this could be the overly complex organisational procedure, while several initiatives of employers to organise such a system were noticed. Therefore it is proposed that the procedures for organisation of the dual system should be analysed and assessed in close collaboration with employers and that this model should be adopted in practice.
- During one of the visits to the construction school it was pointed out that workplace practice in big construction companies cannot be organised for vocational students due to legal constraints (students do not have the work permits which are required by the construction inspection). Based on this evidence, we propose the reform of the relevant legislation to enable and promote students' practical work in construction companies.

4.2. Policy recommendations for policy makers at local level

- According to the current legislation, local governments are not involved in the financing of vocational education. The research has shown that local governments support schools by providing scholarships to talented students and by providing free textbooks to students from poor families. Besides this, local governments do not implement any other activities or measures aimed at supporting vocational schools. Therefore we propose that local governments, within the current legal framework, initiate and create a model of cooperation between schools, local enterprises and local authorities which would be primarily focused on organisation of practical work in companies. Also, as local governments finance COSSN it is important that they enable constant financial support to those bodies as a precondition for their efficient work.
- The qualitative research has shown that activities of CIPS are currently mainly focused on career information dissemination. In addition, quantitative research has shown that students do not expect significant support from career centres and employment offices in finding a job. Based on this evidence, we propose that CIPS should focus their activities on career education and career counselling. Following the good example observed in Plav, communication between centres for social work and schools should be improved in order to follow and support students at risk of dropping out of school.
- Several issues were noted relating to employers during the research: their inactivity in bodies in which they should articulate their needs for labour and certain occupations (sectorial commissions), lack of motivation for offering practical work for vocational students in companies and to communicate with schools in general, in some cases during the practice in companies employers and mentors are not devoted to students and provision of a best work experience for them. Thus, it is proposed that companies be more involved in school life and focus on providing support for students, as it will have positive effects on their recruitment of employees in the future. In addition, they should make more use of legal opportunities for employment of SEN students. However, LEOs should work more on the increase of awareness among companies in relation to this issue.
- The research revealed a good example of communication between a school and a local Centre for Social Work. This cooperation was based on the creation of a Social Card for

the children from the school to enable those students who are at risk of dropping out to be monitored and approached. Other schools should follow this good example, especially as an IT database of children who receive social assistance is being created.

4.3. Policy recommendations for international donor organisations and NGOs

- Based on the qualitative and quantitative research and issues already pointed out, we propose that donor organisations provide financial support for the organisation of training of teachers (for work with SEN students, for increase of pedagogical skills), provide support to the organisation of the tracer studies and analyse future labour market needs, provide adequate equipment to VET schools (such as elevators, IT tools, tools for practical classes, modern teaching tools), provide technical support in the establishment of quality assurance and a monitoring system and provide support in the creation and implementation of permanent programmes which would enable higher enrolment of RAE students in primary and secondary schools and to support sustainable local partnership for sustainable vocational education .
- One of the explanations of the low involvement of employers in the work of different bodies and school life was the economic structure in which SMEs account for more than 90% of all companies. The role of business associations in articulating the voice of the business community is therefore very important. These associations should make greater effort to communicate with schools, play a more active role in national bodies related to the creation of vocational programmes, and collaborate with schools through organisation of joint events.
- The qualitative research with employers revealed that they are not fully satisfied with the knowledge and skills of vocational school graduates. This implies that there is a need for improvement in students' practical skills through the organisation of training programmes by professional NGOs. For example, the Union of Beekeepers and Union of Olive Producers could organise seminars for the agriculture technicians, Tourist Organisations could organise training for the tourist technicians and so on.

CONCLUSIONS

The institutional framework for vocational education in Montenegro offers a good basis for social inclusion at all stages of students' educational experience. However, policies focus largely on the inclusion of students with special educational needs rather than RAE population or other vulnerable and disadvantaged groups, and are found mainly in pre-school and at elementary school level. On the other hand, policy debates on vocational education mainly focus on the harmonisation with labour market needs and changes in the programmes and curricula in order to respond to those needs. Also, special attention is dedicated to the improvement of the quality of education in vocational schools through improvement of facilities, evaluation processes, training of teachers and so on. However, several recent activities and initiatives are more focused on social inclusion in secondary vocational education, which can be seen as a promising trend. Those include modularisation of the education programmes as well as the introduction of teacher training in social inclusion.

Several students from the RAE population and students with special educational needs are enrolled in the surveyed schools. The research has shown these students attend classes and are involved in almost all activities as other students, while disabled students often face physical barriers and are less likely to attend vocational school as a result. However, the fact is that a number of SEN students start education in regular vocational schools but cannot complete it, which raises issues of not sufficiently developed capacities of the schools (teachers and professional workers) as well as efficiency of the work of COSSNs. Therefore, it can be concluded that there is room for improved social inclusion at this level of education and future efforts should be focused on further education and training of teachers (pre-service and in service), improvement of the work of COSSNs and improvement of the process of preparation and implementation of the individual educational plans. However, the general conclusion is that positive results of the social inclusion process are noticeable. Also it is important to notice that social cohesion is not seen as an issue. Study programmes and textbooks in the Albanian language are available, and each year new specific vocational programmes in Albanian are established, which is seen as a great improvement.

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