



## SDC IED

Expert Team Inclusive Economic Development

# COVID-19 Special Series

## Good Practices Learnt by SDC Projects in Responding to COVID-19

### Series Case No 3

# LEARNING AND TRAINING ANYWHERE, ANYTIME: HOW *SKILLS FOR JOBS* BOOSTED ITS INTERVENTION TO MAKE ONLINE- LEARNING COUNTRYWIDE AVAILABLE

COUNTRY	ALBANIA
PROJECT	SKILLS FOR JOBS, 7F-08727
PERIOD	2019-2023
THEME	VOCATIONAL SKILLS DEVELOPMENT



## Background

*Skills for Jobs (S4J)* is a project of the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC), implemented by Swisscontact Albania. It is designed to address key challenges in Vocational Education and Training (VET), such as low quality and status, poor management, inadequate labour market orientation and weak private sector engagement and therefore the lack of relevance of the training offer. The project focuses on ensuring systemic change, capacity development and empowerment of key actors (young students, trainees, vocational education institutions, economic actors). *Skills for Jobs* is now in its second phase, which started in April 2019 and will last until June 2023. During this phase, the project aims at supporting 10 000 students (6 360 more compared to phase I) and 6 000 trainees (1 500 more compared to phase I).

At the core of the *Skills for Jobs* approach are work-based learning, the application of industry standards in VET trainings and a business mindset in the management of VET institutions. In addition, the use of technology in the classroom (ICT4VET) and blended and individualized learning approaches are promoted. Overall, the project aims to make the VET offer relevant for students and the economy.

The vision of *Skills for Jobs* is that:

- More students will choose VET
- Blended learning (which combines face-to-face learning with technology in the classroom, virtual coaching, gamification etc.) will become a common practice
- The private sector will lead the design and delivery of relevant VET programmes
- Trainees and students will find attractive and gainful jobs

## Impact of COVID-19

Whereas the immediate response of the Albanian authorities focused on health-related issues, impacts on employment, the VET system and the students and trainees are not clear and still under analysis.

Yet, one major impact of Covid-19 was **the closing of schools and vocational education institutions** since 9<sup>th</sup> March 2020 until the end of the school year in June 2020. VET schools are planning to restart with presence-based teaching by mid-September 2020. However, Albanian authorities instructed schools to continue teaching and students to attend classes. This despite all deriving challenges for students and trainees in assuring remote learning and education and organising the state exams in June 2020. Beyond the access to class and preparation for the most vulnerable and disadvantaged students, key challenges identified in an assessment among teachers revealed that challenges to conduct online learning are: access to internet, lack of digital learning material and lack of digital skills. As about 80% of the students do not own a laptop but only a mobile phone, learning is happening mainly via WhatsApp (or for the most privileged via other tools like Zoom and Google Classroom).



Figure 1: A student attending an online class

## Project's response

*Skills for Jobs* had already started a pilot project of the **online learning platform (MESOVET)** before the Covid-19 crisis. If at the beginning this platform was not seen as a major priority, the earthquake in

November 2019 acted as a push factor for online learning (as schools were also closed for two weeks after this tragic event).

The [MESOVET online platform](#) has now become the core answer to assure distance learning and therefore learning progression of Albanian students and trainees. It is an open source platform, friendly to mobile phone use – which is important since many students have only mobile phones as devices to be used for online learning – and comes with low maintenance costs. Therefore, the national agencies and line ministry have requested the project to immediately up-scale the platform and make it available to all VET providers countrywide. The project has also benefitted from closely engaging the national authorities in designing, planning and operationalising the platform from the beginning on.

To respond to the particular Covid-19 situation, the approach of the MESOVET platform was slightly revised in five areas:

- Make the online-learning platform available to all, thus increase its capacity
- Increase capacity building (on technical and pedagogical level) for all VET providers countrywide
- Develop and share contents for all profiles, specialisations and subjects, prioritizing Matura students' needs
- Raise awareness on health-related issues (communication on social media)
- Built-in feedback mechanism to measure the results of the learning and adjust the platform to improve performance and user friendliness.

It was only thanks to the prior investment in MESOVET and piloting in S4J partner schools, that the project was able to respond very rapidly to the new challenges posted by Covid-19 and scale-up its activities to all 33 public VET schools in Albania. Developing an online training platform from scratch would have required more time and effort.

## Outlook

*Skills for Jobs* was designed as a project to boost new ways of inclusive learning, including blended learning approaches in VET. The earthquake in 2019 and the Covid-19 pandemic in 2020 have been a major push into this direction. The developed approaches and resources have proven to be very useful and fit for purpose. In close consultation with SDC, the project will now continue to engage together with the Albanian authorities to help students, trainees and VET providers – management and teachers – to cope with the situation and to allow learning progress and labour market integration of youth. On the medium and long-term perspective, *Skills for Jobs* together with its partners will engage to build on the experiences gathered during the pandemic and help the Albanian VET system actors to modernise VET delivery by applying blended learning approaches where appropriate and by using the potential of ICT-supported learning approaches for all actors involved.



Figure 2: A glimpse into the MESOVET Platform