Shaping the Future of VET schools

Kosovar Youth Council

December 2017

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Solidar Suisse Kosova

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Methodology

The importance of investing in VET and skills' policies that, on one the hand, raise the employability of people, help to reduce current skills' mismatches and allow for smoother transitions into employment and, on the other hand, promote personal development of individuals and thus contribute to increasing quality of life.

As a reflection of the level of importance of VET schools already categorizied as very important by RIGA CONLUSIONS 2015[2] and by knowing the VET schools' conditions practiculary in Kosovo, Kosovar Youth Council with the support of SOLIDAR Suisse – Office in Kosovo undertook the survey "Shaping the Future of VET" which was conducted during September 2017 in the municipality of Peja with the 211 students of secondary vocational schools of "Shaban Spahija" and "Ali Hadri". The survey aimed to measure the quality of opportunities for practice within profiles as tourism, IT, food industry and wood/metal industry, looking from the students' perspective. Therefore, this analysis proclaimed to address the needs, gaps and recommended mechanisms to use for practical learning in order to improve the quality of VET schools in Peja.

In order to achieve the survey a questionnaire was conducted by an expert of the field and its contain was very clear and understandable expanded into four chapters: Guidance and Information for Choosing VET Schools; School

Environment and Teaching Process; Students' Personal Experiences at School; Career Perspective of Vocational Professions. In essence diveded chapters guidenced to successfully ascertain the situation of practical learning. The questionnaire gave us the 11th and 12th grade students views regarding the practical learning phenomena.

The facts are brought together after the responses of 211 students, out of which 59% were students of "Shaban Spahija" and 41% from "Ali Hadri" school. Besides, the gender balance stands at 57% of respondents were male while 43% were females. Moreover, the balance in the generation consisted 37% of the 11th-grade students and 63% of the 12th grade students.

Moreover, in order to get the reasonable situation for learning practice withing the framework of research KYC has organized 6 different focus groups. Eventually, 4 of focus groups aimed to discuss and get the glance of the learing practice conditions from the

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1. RIGA CONCLUSIONS 2015, Preamble, page 1, http://ec.europa.eu/dgs/education_culture/repository/education/policy/vocational-policy/doc/2015-riga-conclusions_en.pdf
2. As above

perspective of actual students of Shaban Spahija and Ali Hadri schools whereas 1 on them was conducted with graduated students and another one with teachers of these two schools metioned above.

Furthermore, 2 directors of the schools were interviewed in order for the survey to get completed with Director's information.

On the following pages will be presented the general data of completing this questionnaire.

Main Findings

The entearly survey established a remarkable manner on four main findings that will be extended in following explanations:

1. A telescopic observation, factorized the limited knowledge of students regarding learning practice.

The survey has expressed, that comparatively a huge number of students from these two VET schools are not familirazed with the education legislations and the curriculas. Their responses, evidence the fact that their sources of knowledge are very poor and they have lack of information about principles, conditions, their rights and the general process of practical learning. We perceive that information is very essential to every individual and their positive responses due to practical learning is concering.

A majority of students are well aware of the importance of practical work as a compulsory part of their study program. However, there is a gap of understanding between what the practical work, as required by the curriculum, is and the de facto practical work that students are engaged

For example:
A conversation between student A and moderator during focus groups: "Yes we do have practical learning! There are plenty of visits we had to different factories. And there we can watch the elaboration of processing for hours. For example, I remember one time we saw the packing process of meat" Moderator: "Have you had the chance to practice it by yourself?" Student: "No No, we just watch the process"

2. A sophisticated mentorship program is an immediate important subject to be developed.

We might naturally expect that students should receive practical learning process adapted by mentorship programs that help the improvement of their intelectual behavior regarding their profession. According the Law No. 04/L-138 for the Vocational and Training Education the role of mentors is poorly described, they are only mentioned as part of teaching staff but their duties are not sophisiticaly categorizied.

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3. Strategy for Improvement of Learning Practice in Kosovo 2017-2020, page 18, point 3.5, http://masht.rks-gov.net/uploads/2015/05/a-strategjia-e-pp-ne-kosove-2013-2020-shqip.pdf

In this case, teachers do not cover their responsibilities as mentors and even school within, has not developed a mentorship culture.

Therefore, both of the parties do not have a correct idea on how to establish the mentoring program and this creates a very confusing sense on its appear.

A large number of students reported that their schools do not assist them or do any kind of facilitation on finding a place for a practical work.

For example:
Teacher B briefed: "Students are not safe during their practical work in companies, nobody mentors them and we teachers are not allowed to stay nearby"

3. Trainings for teachers and guidelines for learning practice and mentorship are a must!

According to the Strategy for Improvement of Learning Practice in Kosovo[3], school principals and teachers should get equipped with needed skills and knowledge as well as they should get provided with extra materials and guidelines in order for them to be able to correct the faded elements within their methodology of teaching. Keeping in view the study findings, a perception of the nature and quality of actions done so far have not met this goal.

VET schools in Peja do not provide extracurricular courses or activities for students.

A half of respondents reported not participating in any extracurricular activity within the school, while only a small portion reported playing sports – which is usually a hobby outside the school

For example:
During focus groups, teacher D briefed: "Curriculas are almost changing every day! But still, we don't have textbooks. Usually we use scripts from universities books or we get online textbooks from Albania and then print them and spend our money. Believe me, it is not that easy to get used to all of these constantly changes on curriculas."

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4. CORE CURRICULUM FOR UPPER SECONDARY EDUCATION IN KOSOVO, 2012, http://masht.rks-gov.net/uploads/2015/10/ang-working-3-masht.pdf

4. Lack of textbooks and equipments prevents the positive results of learning practice.

Many courses taught in VET schools do not have relevant textbooks, thus teachers having to create their own reading materials – either as scripts or through dictation and note-taking method. On the other hand, it is of importance to remark, that the standarts of Core Curriculum for upper secondary education in Kosovo[4] cannot meet the objectives of learning practice because of weak conditions of cabinets and the lack of equipments within the schools.

For example:
Student C brifed: "During the X grade, most of the time we had to take notes under dictation especially in one course because we did not have had textbooks. Afterwards, at the end of academic year we were evaluated from those notes."

Data Analysis

Background and Socio-Demographic Data

Regardless the fact that Vocational Education and Training (VET) schools are seen as less attractive for female students, the study sample shows that VET schools in Peja have almost an equal representation of male and female students. The study sample consists of over 43% of female students, and around 57% of male students.

Data show that 64% of the students live in urban areas, whereas 36% have to commute to school, more concretely they live in rural areas. Whereas rural areas represent similar demography with regards to gender, a greater difference between female and male students is observed in urban areas. According to the study sample, more than 17% of students are female from rural areas and around 18% are male students from rural areas. Quite different, female students from urban areas (25.59%) show less interest in VET schools as compared to male students who live in urban areas (38.86%).

A large portion of the sample reported being unemployed (71%) and school being their only commitment.

Almost 29% of respondents reported having either a part-time job (11.37%) or a full-time job (17.53). While at the unemployed category there is an equal representation of female (35.54) and male (35.54%) students, more male students (21.32%) are inclined to work as compared to female students (7.58%)

Educational Attainment of Students' Parents

The level of education most commonly completed by both the fathers and mothers of respondents is high school education or below, with over 50% saying that their father did not go beyond high school, whereas almost 40% reporting that their mother completed only high school studies. There is generally very little difference between fathers and mothers when it comes to educational attainment. Graduate studies – masters or Ph.D. – were completed by the fathers of 9% of respondents, and by mothers of 7% of respondents. Over 19% of respondents reported that their father completed university studies, and 17% of the reported their mothers having a university degree. More fathers (50%) completed high school studies compared to mothers (37%). However, a greater difference is observed with regards to elementary school completion. More mothers attended only high school

studies (20%) than respondents' fathers (8%). An average portion of the sample refused to answer their parents' educational attainment, with 8% of respondents refusing to report their fathers' educational attainment, and 11% refusing to do so for their mothers' educational attainment.

Guidance and Information for Choosing VET Schools

Generally speaking, there is an increased interest among youngsters in Peja to attend VET schools. This trend was confirmed by school principal at Ali Hadri VET school. Nevertheless, the school principal also added that "despite the increased interest shown in last few years, this year "Ali Hadri" faced a lower number of students who were interested to attend our school.

The research data shows that close to half of the high school students in Peja (44.13%) are attending vocational education and training schools. Majority of respondents reported that the school they are attending at was chosen purposely. Over 73% of respondents say VET school was their first option after completing nine years of compulsory studies, and only 23% reported VET school not being their first option of choice. However, a great difference is observed between students living in urban areas and rural areas with

regards to school choice. While only 7.58% of students from rural areas reported VET school not being their first option of choice, around 28% of students from urban areas declared that they did not want to attend a VET school at the first place.

27%
74%

Chart 1

● No   ● Yes
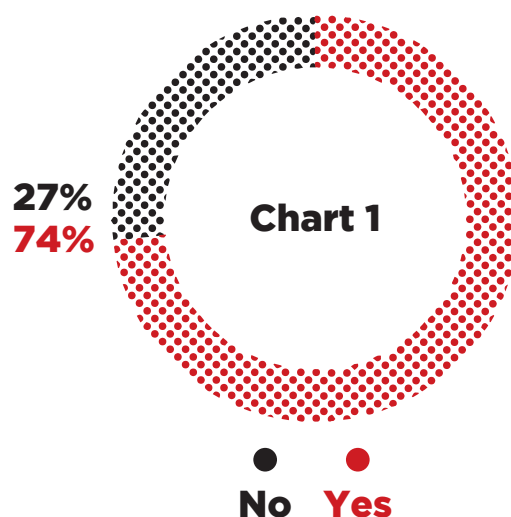
Chart 1 - Was the school that you are actually attending your first option?

In contrast, when students were asked about main reasons for choosing a VET school, 40% of respondents reported not having other options, respectively VET school being their only option. Considering that educational system in Kosovo provides two paths in high school – gymnasuiums and professional schools – it is assumed that students who reported VET school being their only option were not either able or eligible to apply for other schools (i.e. gymnasium). Around 25% said that they have chosen a VET school
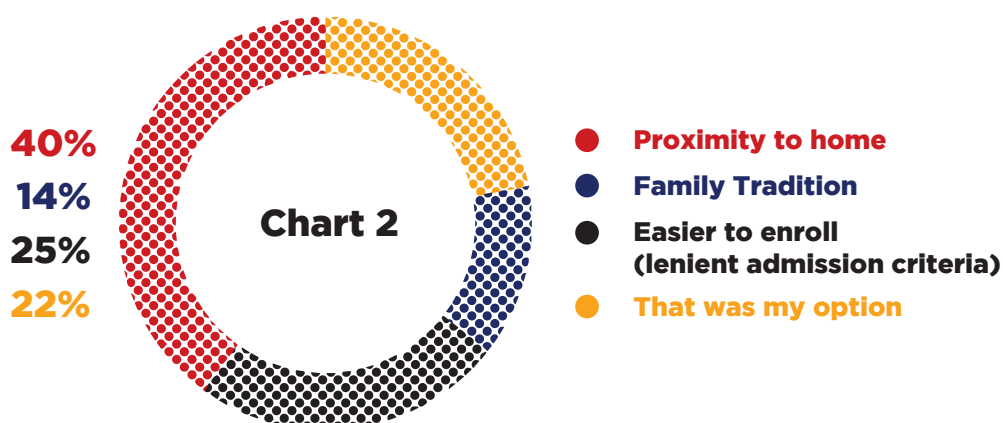
because of the lower admission criteria (i.e. easier to get admitted to school as compared to other high schools: lower grades, lower national examination scores etc). The third most important factor making students attend a VET school is the distance between the place where they live and school location. Around 22% of respondents reported that the distance between their house and school is an important factor. Only a small portion of respondents (14%) reported choosing a VET school due to the family tradition.

Respondents were asked to identify a list of external factors that might have influenced their decision when choosing to apply for high school. Overall, respondents reported better employment opportunities, self-motivation, and their parents being the main influencing factors. Specifically, almost 80% of respondents agreed that higher employment opportunities were an important factor for choosing to attend

a VET school; while the second most important factor is students' parents – 75% of respondents agreed that their father influenced their decision for choosing the high school, and slightly less reported so for their mothers (73%). However, while at least 40% of respondents reported that they have decided to attend a VET school because of not having other options. While, 73% of surveyed students agree that self-motivation was an important factor for choosing to attend the school that they are at now.

School Environment and Teaching Process in VET schools in Peja

Regarding VET schools, the school infrastructure is considered as one of the essential components for creating an enabling environment for support students either in theory based learning process or hand on engagement in the field they study. Thus, more than

40%   ● **Proximity to home**
14%   ● **Family Tradition**
25%   ● **Easier to enroll (lenient admission criteria)**
22%   ● **That was my option**

Chart 2

Chart 2 - What was the single most determining factor in the selection of the VET school you are currently attending?
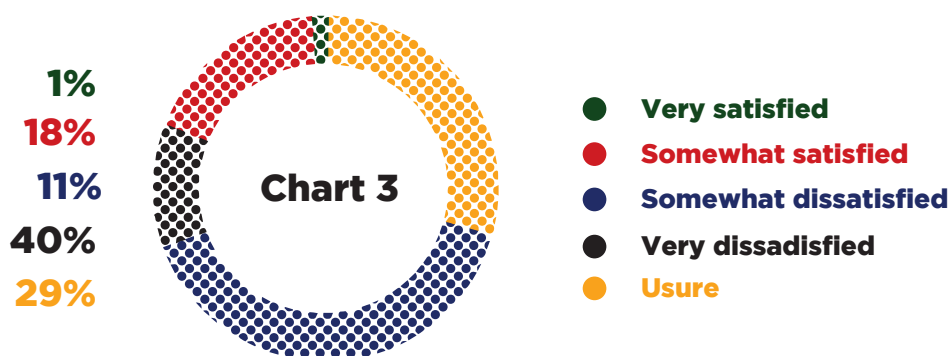
only having basic school infrastructures, such as fully equipped classrooms, school hygiene, and textbooks, it is essential that schools provide with areas where students would exercise their practical courses.

VET students in Peja reported being somehow satisfied with their school environment and facilities. Over 29% reported being very satisfied with their school infrastructure and 40% said that they are only somehow satisfied. While almost 30% of respondents showed being dissatisfied with school infrastructure – 11% reported being somehow dissatisfied and 18% being very dissatisfied.

school is not considered at the right level. One can barely use a toilet while at school, say it due to uncleanliness, or the lack of soap and water which are essential products. Another worrying thing is that we still use a wood stove for heating during winter season" (male/female, student from Peja).

Due to its specific nature, the curriculum for VET schools mandates schools to make available to students that in addition to theory-based courses they attend practical teaching sessions too. In essence, students in grade 10 should take at least 6 hours of practical learning per week, while 11th graders should attend to at least 8 hours of practical

1%
18%
11%
40%
29%

Chart 3

- ● Very satisfied
- ● Somewhat satisfied
- ● Somewhat dissatisfied
- ● Very dissadisfied
- ● Usure

Chart 3 - Are you satisfied with the infrastructure in your school?

The school infrastructure has been mentioned during focus groups discussion too. Almost in unanimity, participants in focus group discussion agreed that their schools are old and not so well maintained buildings, thus creating a shabby environment. Moreover, participants raised concern for basic infrastructure needs: "The hygiene in my

learning per week. As they reach grade twelve, practical learning hours per week increase progressively, in that order, 12 graders should take 12 hours of practical learning during the week.
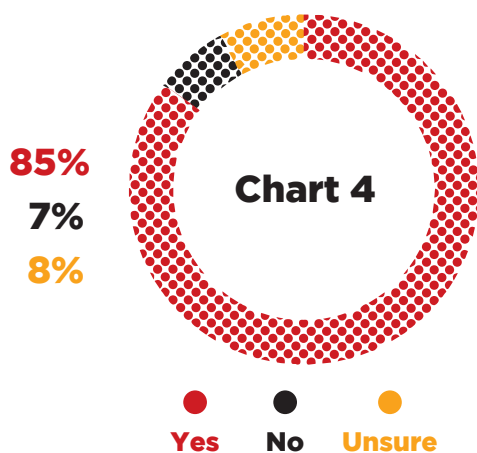
In this regard, respondents were asked whether workplace learning (known as a practicum or practical work) is a com-

-pulsory component of the study program. Around 85% of respondents said that they are aware of practical work being compulsory component of their study program, while the remaining part of respondents reported either saying no, practical work is not a mandatory component of my program (7%), or I am not sure whether we are asked to do a practical work during our studies (8%).

Because of being a required component for VET school students, schools should offer in-house opportunities or assist students finding proper places where they can exercise they practical learning, also called as practical work.

Students were asked where do they do their practical work.

Around 71% of respondents said that they do their practical work in the school where they attend, 17% reported doing their practical work in companies that have a formal cooperation with the school, 9% of respondents do their practical work in other business with whom school does not have any formal cooperation agreement. Also, only 3% said that they do not do practical work at all. However, when compared to focus groups discussions, a gap of understanding is observed with regards to what students consider a practical work. More specifically, focus group discussions show that as long as students are engaged in any activity outside the school, regardless whether that activity is realted to their study program or not, they tend to call it a practical work.

85%
7%
8%

Chart 4

● Yes ● No ● Unsure

Chart 4 - Did your program of study require you to do practical work?

71%
17%
9%
3%

Chart 5

● **In the school environment**
● **In businesses that have an institutional agreement with the school**
● **In businesses that do not have an institutional agreement with the school**
● **Other**

**Chart 5** - Where do you do your practical work?

However, less than a half of respondents reported that their school assists them or supports finding a place for practical work (46%), and the other half of respondents reported that their school does not assist them finding a place for practical work (27%), or they were not sure whether their school helps them finding a work placement or not.

Considering the fact that schools, generally, are not well equipped so to provide students with an environment where they can exercise their practical work, a great majority of students (71%) reporting that they do their practical work within school environment seems somehow inconsistent. When cross-

The lack of up to date and adequate textbooks is one of the biggest concerns for VET school students as well as their teachers. Unfortunately, many school curriculum courses do not have targeted textbooks, thus teachers having to create their own reading materials – either as scripts or through dictation and note taking method. Moreover, in focus group discussions teachers reported being highly concerned with the approach and pace of the school reform that they are going through. Specifically, a teacher participant in the focus group said:

"Most of the times I have this feeling that we are going through curriculum reform every year. Once we adapt to newly introduced policy, suddenly,

46%
27%
27%

Chart 6

● **Yes**   ● **No**   ● **Unsure**
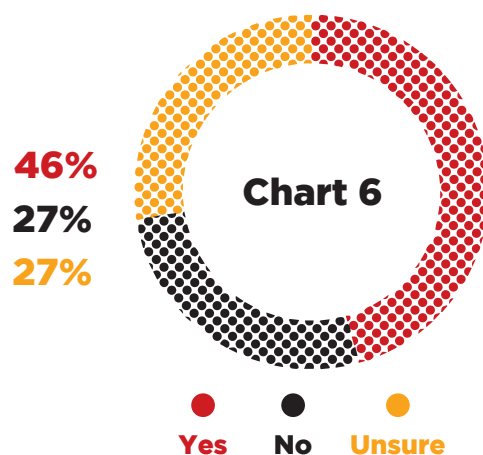
Chart 6 - Does your school help you find work placement?

tabulating data, it is observed that majority of respondents who answered doing practical work in their school belong to Information and Technology program (48.40%).

everything changes and we are asked to start from the beginning" (male/female, teacher from Peja)
Even though finding a place to do practical work is a difficult task for VET stu-

dents in Peja, once they find it, generally, they think that the work they do in the companies aligns with their school program. In this regard, around 76% of respondents either agree (56%) or strongly agree (20%) that their practical work is relevant to their study program. However, focus group discussions show that actually students are not well informed about what practical work is and the necessity for being aligned with the program they study. For example, students studying Information and Technology and other programs, reported doing their practicum at private companies, such as ETC – where they fold clothes all day long.

at. In this respect, respondents were asked if they are mentored during the practical work. A great majority of students responded being mentored during their practical work (78%) either by their professors or workplace officials/professionals. Another 17% of students reported not having any kind of mentoring during their work. Nevertheless, focus group discussions show that students tend to misuse mentoring and supervising, thus building up the presumption that, in fact, most of the students are only supervised during their practical work.

In addition to mentoring and/or super

8%
10%
7%
56%
20%

Chart 7

● **Strongly Agree**
● **Agree**
● **Disagree**
● **Strongly Disagree**
● **Usure**
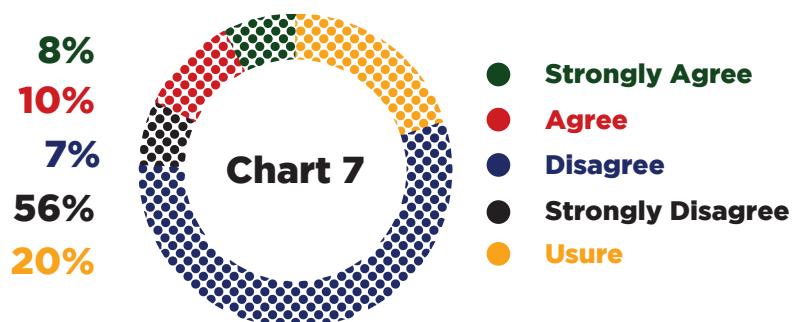
Chart 7 - To what extent do you agree or disagree that practical work is related to your program of study?

A structured and proper mentorship is considered essential during practical work in order for students to understand how things work and become competent in the field they are working

vising students during the practical endeavor, their performance should be assessed as well as their progress should be measured accordingly. In this regard, 81% of respondents reported

reported being assessed for their practical work, while 11% reported not being assessed. Students who reported being assessed for their work were asked assessmenttools respectively forms utilized by mentors or supervisors.

A great majority of respondents reported being assessed during their job – performance assessment (82%), whereas 10% of respondents reported being assessed via written examination and only 6% reported being assessed through oral examination. However, the questionnaire does not ask questions regarding the evaluation forms, therefore, an indepth research is needed for further clarification.

Besides exercising their theoretical knowledge in practice, and building upon their experience, students are eager to be engaged in work placements that do offer some kind of certification upon successful completion of the practical work. However, not many students are certified at the end of their practical work. Less than 30% of respondents reported being certified at the end of their practical endeavor, 51% reported not being certified at all, and 19% reported not being sure whether they will be certified or not. Also, it was observed that majority of respondents who reported being certified at the end of the practical work-study Information and Technology (16.24%).

6%
2%
10%
82%

Chart 8

- ● We are monitored during the practice
- ● The Written Examination
- ● The Oral Examination
- ● Usure

Chart 8 - How is your practical work assessed?

Students' Personal Experiences at School

The general opinion about VET schools is that there are lower quality standards, either as admission criteria or overall quality of students attending VET schools. Unfortunately, vocational schools are not seen, yet, as a way to accelerate one's skills so to become competent as well as competitive in the labor market. Therefore, going to school under the stigma that you are as good as your peers from the other (non) VET school is a serious concern for the overall development of the youngsters. In addition to that, VET schools do not offer many extra-curricular activities where students would attend and either express their talents, socialize, or learn new skills.

In this regard, students were asked whether they attend extracurricular activities in their school or not. Results show that majority of respondents do not participate in extracurricular activities at all (59%). Only 16% reported attending to students' council meetings and activities, while another 22% said that they are active in sports clubs.
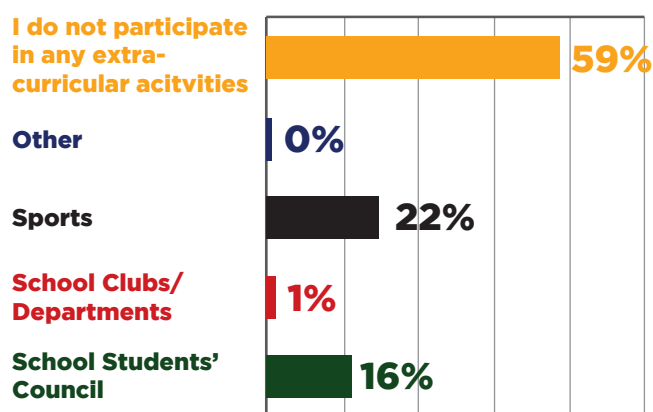
Chart 9 - Do you participate in any of the above listed extra-curricular activities at your school (Please circle all that apply and/or type in your response at Other)?

Students were also asked whether they miss classes, on purpose, or not. Around 47% of respondents reported missing classes throughout a school year, while 53% of them said that they do not miss classes, on purpose, at all. Also, respondents who reported missing classes were asked for the frequency, respectively how often do they miss or skip a class. Around 18% of respondents reported not attending 1-2 classes per week, while 14% reported missing 3-5 or more classes per week. With

- 1 - 2 classes a week
- 3 - 5 classes a week
- More than 5 classes a week
- I do not skip classes
- Refuse to answer

Chart 10 - How often (if at all) do you skip classes?

respect to gender differences, more males reported missing classes than females. For example, among students missing 3-5 hours per week, 83.61% were male students, while only 18.18% were female students. Similar ratio stands valid for other categories too. Interestingly enough, 15% of respondents refused to answer this question – which was not the norm in this survey. Also, among respondents who refused to answer, 80% were male students and 20% female students. Regarding reasons for not attending classes, in focus group discussions students reported that classes are too boring to stay in class all day long. Specifically, one group reported that sometimes they have two – three classes in a row with a single professor – "you can't imagine how boring that day is". Also, VET teachers reported that "students miss most of the classes during cold, winter days".

Students in VET schools in Peja generally feel good and safe while they are at school. A great majority of respondents reported feeling good and happy at their classroom – 53% strongly agreeing with the statement, and 33% agreeing only. However, when they were asked how do students of your school feel when they are at school, 16% of respondent reported that they do not feel happy. Students were asked to rank their opinion whether teachers in their school are competent for the courses they teach or not. More 86% either strongly agreed (50%) or agreed (36%) that their teachers are competent in their work. A similar percentage of respondents agreed that teachers in their school are supportive (89%).

Career Perspective of Vocational Professions

A majority of respondents from VET schools in Peja believe that they will graduate, get a VET diploma and that their study program helped them/is helping to build necessary skills for the labor market. Most of these individuals (42%) tend to strongly agree that they will finish their program, while 39% agree. Also, after graduating from school, 43% of respondents agree that they will be ready for the labour market, with 26% strongly believing so. However, 24% of students disagree with the statement that after graduation they will be ready for labor market; of these, 19% tend to disagree and 5% totally disagree

Respondents show a very wide difference of opinion about whether VET leads to jobs as well as to jobs which are well paid. A majority of respondents tend to agree that they will be able to find a job within six months after graduation, from these, 29% tend to agree only, while 22% strongly agree.

However, there is a large number of respondents (24%) who are not sure whether they will be able to get a job after graduation. Also, 24% disagree that they will find a job within 6 months after graduation.

Similar to finding a job, data show a wide difference of opinion about respondents' expectations with regard to payments.

One third of students (37%) reported being doubtful regarding their potential payment once they get a job. Only a small percentage of students believe that their salary will vary somewhere between 100 EUR to 200 EUR, while 19% believe that they will be paid up to 300 EUR. Nevertheless, a solid number of respondents (12%) are confident that they will be up to 400 EUR or more than 400 EUR (27%). After an in-depth analysis, it was observed that male students are significantly more confident

about getting a well-paid job as compared to female students. For example, 60% of respondents who reported believing that theymonthly salary, after graduation, will be between 100 EURO – 200 EUR are male, and 40% female. However, the gender differences increase as the amount of salary per month goes up. For example, 61.11% of respondents who believe that they will earn more than 400 EUR are male, while 38.88 female.
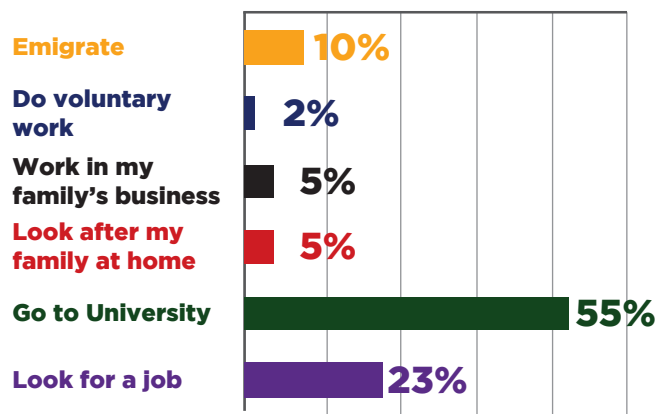
With respect to differences between monthly salaries and programs of study, data show that respondents studying Information and Technology tend to believe that they will have higher monthly income as compared to other programs of study, while respondents studying Tourism or Food Industry are inclined to have lower expectations as far as monthly salary is concerned.

5%
19%
12%
27%
57%

Chart 11

● 100 Euro - 200 Euro
● 201 Euro - 300 Euro
● 301 Euro - 400 Euro
● Morethan 400 Euro
● Unsure
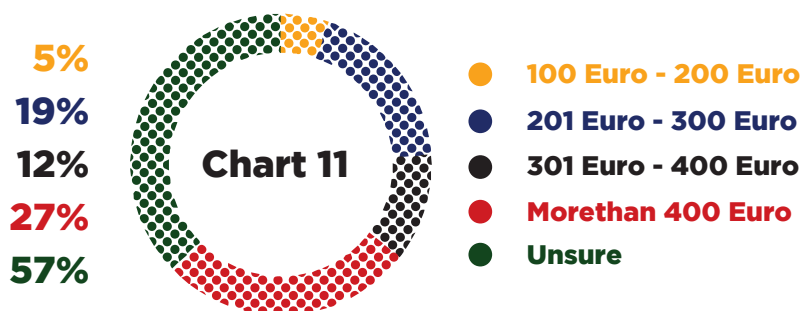
Chart 11 - How much do you expect to earn in your first job after leaving school?

Regarding the period after graduation, a majority of respondents (55%) reported that they are planning to continue with higher education, respectively enrolling in the university. Respondents studying Information and Technology, and Food Industry are more likely to continue with further education than other VET programs. Over 23% of respondents said that their target after graduation will be labor market – getting a job. After an in-depth analysis, data show a significant gender differences among respondents who reported to be looking for a job after graduation. Specifically, 70% of male respondents reported that after graduation they will be looking for a job, while only 30% of female respondents reported so.

A substantial number of respondents (10%) reported that they will emigrate after graduating from VET school. Among them, 85.7% are male students, and 14.3 are female students.

Category	Percentage
Emigrate	10%
Do voluntary work	2%
Work in my family's business	5%
Look after my family at home	5%
Go to University	55%
Look for a job	23%

Chart 12 - After graduating from high school, I am planning to:

Recomandations

1. Raising students' awareness about legislative obligations of school regarding the practical learning;

2. The role and the duties of the mentors should get specifically described and regulated within the Law No. 04/L-138 for the Vocational and Training Education;

3. A mentorship program should get developed together with guidelines that would set the first principles of teaching learning practice;

4. Organising adequate tranings for teachers that would attribute on immediate needed skills and knowledge regarding mentorship and practical learning within VET schools;

5. Government should either review the Core Curriculum that would match the current conditions at school, or dedicate funds and investments to make schools match the Core Curriculum requirements;

6. Relevant textbooks for each VET subjects should be published or updated;

7. Infrastructural conditions whithin schools should get improved, in order for learning practice to prepare students for labour market needs;

8. The enrollment criteria in vocational schools must be applied as provided by the Law No. 04/L-138 on Vocational Education and Training, Articles 8, 9 and 10;

9. It should be highlighted as very important the implementation of the Article 9.1 of Law No. 04/L-138 regarding the certification of students after finalizing the learning practice;

10. Carrier guidance and better promotion of the importance of VET schools should be established at the very early grades at primary school, to build a positive image of the future offered by these schools.