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UNLOCKING OPPORTUNITIES

NON-FORMAL TRAINING
FOR YOUTH EMPLOYMENT

In partnership with:



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PARTNERSALBANIA
FOR CHANGE AND DEVELOPMENT



CASE STUDY

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Executive summary	3
1 Introduction 4	
2 Background 5	
2.1 Youth unemployment in Albania	5
2.2 Zooming in the non-public non-formal training in Albania.....	5
2.3 Evolution of RisiAlbania	6
3 RisiAlbania's training provider intervention	9
3.1 Strategic support	9
3.2. Financing and delivery strategies for training providers	12
3.2.1 Juridical form, ownership, and steering	12
3.2.2 Financing: costs and income generation	13
3.3 Innovation in non-formal training	14
3.3.1 Improving the employer connection	14
3.3.2 Promoting green skills.....	16
3.4. Industry links, quality assurance and mobility of qualifications.....	18
4 How the system has changed.....	20
5 Young people get employed	22
6 Lessons and conclusions.....	24
6.1 Analysis of systemic challenges and successes	24
6.2 Lessons for training providers	25
6.3 Recommendations.....	25
Annex	27

Tirana, 28 May 2025

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FOR CHANGE AND DEVELOPMENT

Executive Summary

Equipping young Albanian jobseekers with the right skills serves a dual purpose: the young people increase their employability and eventually find employment or self-employment; the companies get the workforce they need for sustainable growth. Through the work of RisiAlbania, between October 2017 and May 2025, 4,444 young people have acquired technical, entrepreneurial and soft skills through practical training. 1430 of them found a job six months after completing the training. RisiAlbania is a youth employment project of the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation SDC, in partnership with Ministry of Economy, Culture and Innovation, implemented by Helvetas and Partners Albania for Change and Development. The project has been operating from October 2013 through October 2025, in three implementation phases.

This case study looks at how RisiAlbania has worked with private training providers in ICT, tourism, soft skills and green skills over the last eight years. As the formal and public education system takes time to respond to labour market demand, RisiAlbania's focus was on the non-public, non-formal niche market, which is more responsive to employers' needs. Strengthening links between training providers and employers and promoting innovation through effective training methodologies was at the core of RisiAlbania's intervention. RisiAlbania followed its facilitative approach and focused on building up the partners. RisiAlbania tailored the support to the needs of each partner.

This case study zooms in on innovations in training provision, but also shows the complementary macro-level efforts that were equally important in enabling systemic change. In parallel with its support at the provider level, RisiAlbania promoted the integration of non-formal training into national systems by facilitating access to public funding for private providers, supporting the piloting of Sector Skills Committees in ICT and later in tourism, and contributing to the alignment of non-formal qualifications with the Albanian Qualifications Framework (AQF), thereby strengthening professional mobility. This multi-level approach laid the foundation for a broader set of lessons.

Introduction

Alma Gjylaçi's journey into the world of organic products began in an unexpected but deeply meaningful way. Reflecting on her experience, she shares

"My journey with the ACE school started in a very special way and gave me the opportunity for a unique profession — producing organic products. I was so enthusiastic to have won this opportunity, and that enthusiasm only grew during the course. The instructor never extinguished my desire, expectations, or curiosity to create and learn such special skills. I was welcomed into a warm, collaborative environment where theory was combined with practice — where we could touch, make mistakes, learn, and experiment in creating organic soaps. I will never forget the dedicated instructor who explained every detail in the laboratory. It was a beautiful journey, because the best lessons don't come from books, but from people with good hearts, who reach out to give you a hand."

RisiAlbania is a youth employment project of the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC), in partnership with the Ministry of Economy, Innovation and Culture, implemented by Helvetas and Partners Albania. The project has run from 2013 to 2025, and since 2018 RisiAlbania has been supporting non-public non-formal education providers (hereafter referred to as training providers) in the ICT, tourism, soft skills and green skills sectors. To date, 4,444 young people have acquired technical, entrepreneurial and soft skills through practical training. 1430 young people have found a job six months after completing their training.

In 2022, RisiAlbania published a case study highlighting its individual collaboration with nine training providers. Three years later, the context has evolved considerably. This updated case study not only captures the new innovations introduced at the provider level - from employer linkages to different business models, as well as the integration of emerging thematic areas such as green skills - but also reflects on the progress made at the system level. It highlights how structural changes, including the establishment of Sector Skills Committees and the alignment of non-formal training provision with the Albanian Qualifications Framework, have strengthened the enabling environment for non-formal skills development. Taken together, these advances demonstrate how coordinated efforts at all levels - micro, meso and macro - can improve the quality, relevance and recognition of non-formal learning in Albania.

Background

2.1 Youth unemployment in Albania

As of the fourth quarter of 2023, Albania's official unemployment rate for individuals aged 15-29 stood at 22%. Youth unemployment remained a significant concern, particularly among marginalized groups such as the Roma, Egyptians, and individuals with disabilities. The proportion of young people aged 15–24 not engaged in employment, education, or training (NEET) was 24.6% in 2023¹, more than double the EU-27 average of 11.7%.² The persistently high youth unemployment and NEET rates were primarily attributed to low labour demand, ineffective job matching services, and a lack of relevant skills. Addressing youth employment has continued to be a high priority for the Government of Albania in 2025 and the foreseeable future. Albania contends with a notably high level of emigration, ranking among the top countries worldwide in terms of emigration as a percentage of the current population.³ Albania has experienced significant youth emigration, with approximately 46,460 individuals leaving the country in 2022—a 10.5% increase from the previous year.⁴

2.2 Zooming in the non-public non-formal training in Albania

Professional education in Albania encompasses a range of learning opportunities designed to equip individuals with the skills and knowledge necessary for the labour market. This educational sector includes vocational education and training (VET)

¹ INSTAT, 2024

² Youth Guarantee: A guarantee for opportunities | United Nations Development Programme [25.02.2025]

³ European Training Foundation, 2025. Key Policy Developments in education, training and employment – Albania 2024 [04.03.2025]

⁴ wfd-youth-emigration-albania_final_0.pdf [25.02.2025]

schools, universities offering professional programmes, and private non-formal providers delivering specialized courses. The Albanian VET system consists of 29 vocational schools and 10 vocational training centres.⁵ These institutions offer initial vocational education programmes aimed at providing practical skills aligned with labour market demands. Private non-formal providers contribute by offering specialized training courses tailored to specific industry needs.⁶ The non-public non-formal niche market is expected to be more responsive to the needs of employers and the constant changes in the labour market. The market segment is fee-based and competitive.⁷ Over the past decade, Albania has made significant progress in VET and adult education by establishing a comprehensive legislative framework, including key laws and amendments to support system structures, assessment, and certification. However, full implementation remains a challenge. The National Employment and Skills Strategy (NESS) 2023-2030 continues this effort with priorities such as legal enforcement, private sector engagement, VET quality, and lifelong learning, incorporating digital and green transition strategies. The country is also committed to lifelong learning and recognition of prior learning, with planned initiatives to expand reskilling, upskilling, and employment promotion programmes.⁸

2.3 Evolution of RisiAlbania

Back in 2017, RisiAlbania commissioned research to identify the main constraints that underpinned the performance of the sector:

- **REGULATORY PROCESSES:** Licensing by the Ministry of Finance and Economy was the only regulatory requirement, but it did not ensure training quality. In the absence of industry-specific international standards (e.g., Cisco), providers lacked a reference framework for their programmes. The National Agency for Skills and Employment had only basic procedures and was in the process of reviewing them to strengthen its market monitoring role.
- **TRAINING PROGRAMME DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY:** Curricula were rarely developed in cooperation with business representatives, limiting relevance to labour market needs.
- **FINANCING MODELS:** Private training was primarily funded by employers or individuals, making it inaccessible for many unemployed young women and men with limited means.
- **TRACING SYSTEM:** Without systems to track graduate employment, providers lacked feedback loops to improve training quality and tailor outreach strategies.

⁵ https://www.etf.europa.eu/sites/default/files/document/CFI_Albania_2021.pdf [04.03.2025]

⁶ Non-formal education or training refers to learning which takes places outside of formal learning environments - such as schools, TVET colleges, and universities - but within some kind of organisational framework (i.e. the training does follow some form of curriculum and syllabus and may or may not have accreditation or certification).

⁷ Z. Kongoli Consulting Office, Research to explore and analyze prevailing financing models and recommend feasible financing models in ICT, Tourism and Agribusiness Skills Development, 2019.

⁸ European Training Foundation, 2025. Key Policy Developments in education, training and employment – Albania 2024 [04.03.2025]

Figure 1 summarizes the training provision system at the beginning of RisiAlbania's intervention.

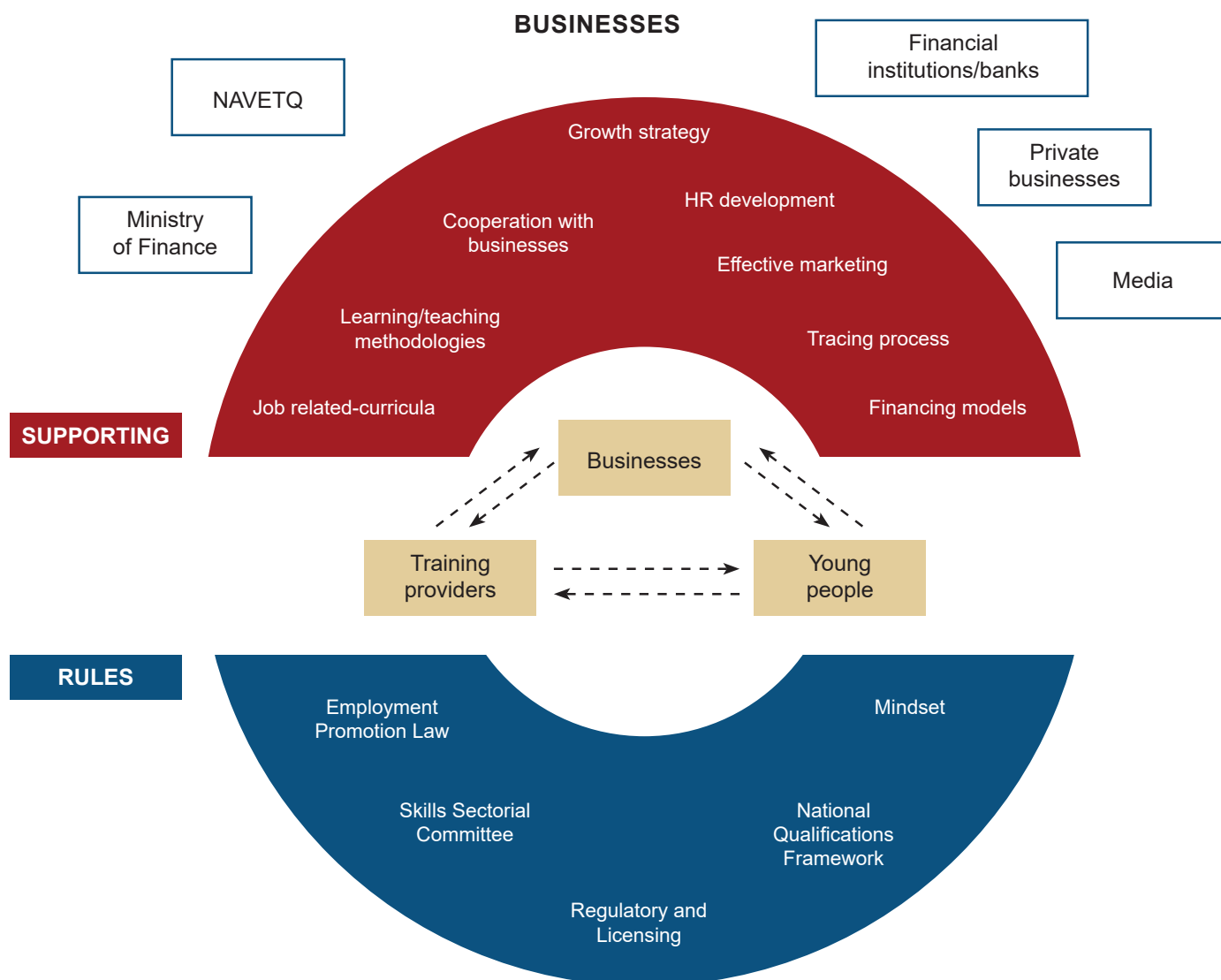


Figure 1: System at the beginning

Phase 1 highlighted the vital role that non-public, non-formal training can play in developing economic sectors such as tourism and ICT. To address the key constraint of a shortage of skilled workers in targeted sectors, RisiAlbania initiated collaborations with training providers through various skills-related interventions. Building on the success of positioning skills development as a cross-cutting enabler in economic sectors, Phase 2 established it as a standalone outcome—emphasizing both geographic and thematic expansion as well as innovation in training content and delivery methods. Phase 3 continued to foster innovation in training offers (e.g., cybersecurity and green skills), with an increased focus on ensuring quality assurance.



Figure 2: Evolution of RisiAlbania

RisiAlbania's Training Provider Intervention

This chapter outlines RisiAlbania's strategic support to non-formal training providers by first presenting the overall intervention model and the seven core areas of support. It continues with financing and delivery models of training providers, looks at selected innovations in training content and employer engagement, and concludes with system-level contributions to quality assurance and the recognition of qualifications.

3.1 Strategic support

The core of RisiAlbania's strategic support is to enhance the training providers offers in tourism and ICT in terms of relevance, outreach, and inclusiveness. To reach this, RisiAlbania identified the following areas to intervene in phase 3 (see Figure 3):

RisiAlbania primarily targets young Albanian women and men aged 15 to 29, including:

- Jobseekers aiming to enter the labour market
- University students and graduates—particularly in the ICT sector—who require specialised courses to enhance their employability
- Young employees acquiring specific skills through tailor-made upskilling or reskilling offers
- Individuals seeking to strengthen their soft skills
- Hotel owners and managers engaged in green skills training.

RisiAlbania's support followed a dual-level strategy, designed to operate both at the service provider level and the system level — a combination that was essential for driving systemic change. On the one hand, the project worked closely with training providers, helping them improve their teaching and learning content, methods, outreach, and employer engagement. Business cases were co-developed with these providers and

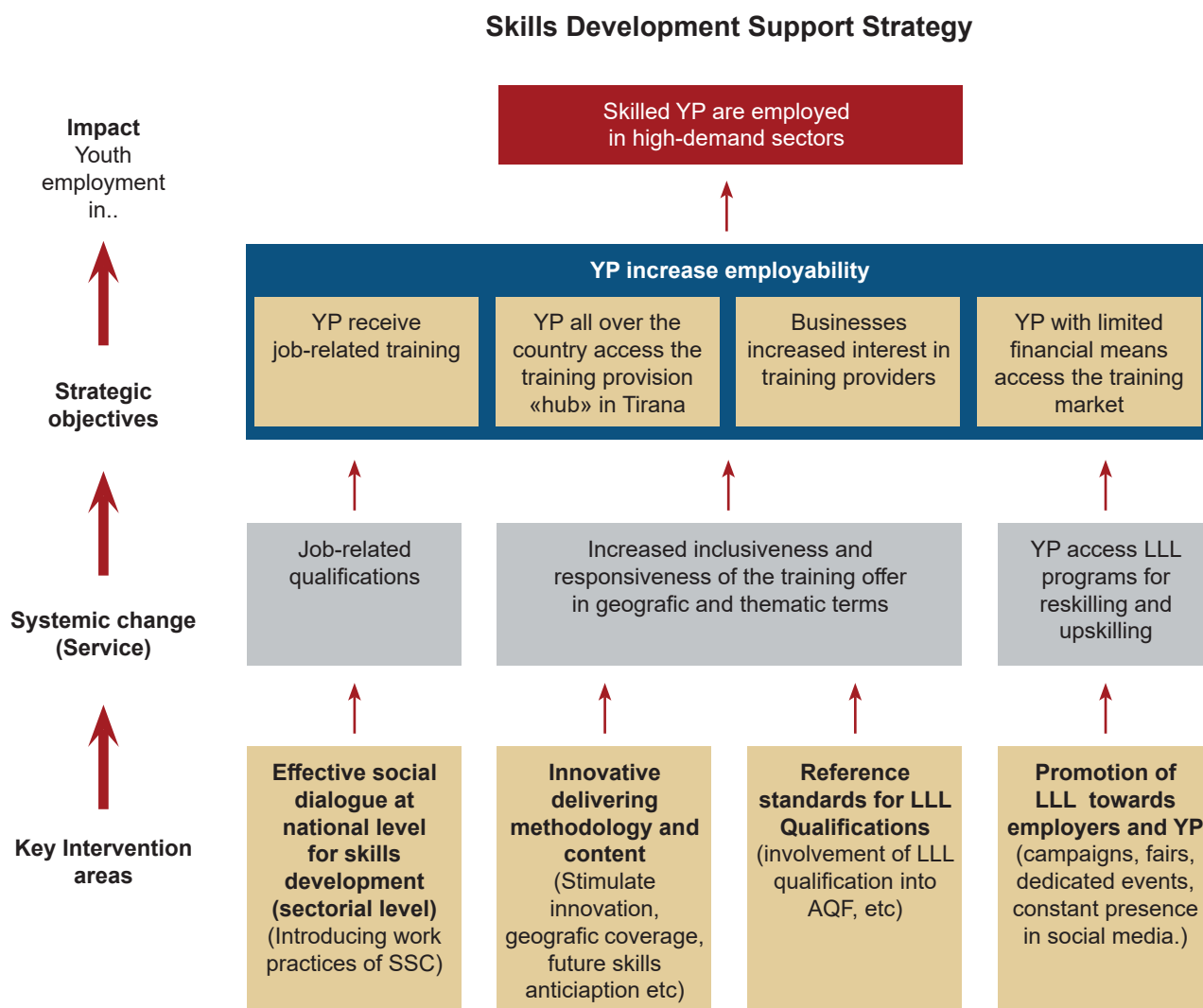


Figure 3: Skills development support strategy

co-financed by them, with co-financing levels carefully set to ensure that the business models were not only viable but also replicable, supporting both sustainability and potential for scaling up.

On the other hand, RisiAlbania also intervened at the system level, strengthening key framework conditions such as the Sector Skills Committees and the Albanian Qualifications Framework (highlighted in blue in Figure 4; cf. chapter 3.4).

The collaboration with training providers is summarized in the business model shown in Figure 4. At its core, the model illustrates how improved interactions and connections between training providers, businesses, and young people were central to the intervention. The orange shapes in the figure represent the seven areas of support that catalysed change in collaboration with the training providers, while the blue elements highlight the system-level conditions that enabled wider impact.

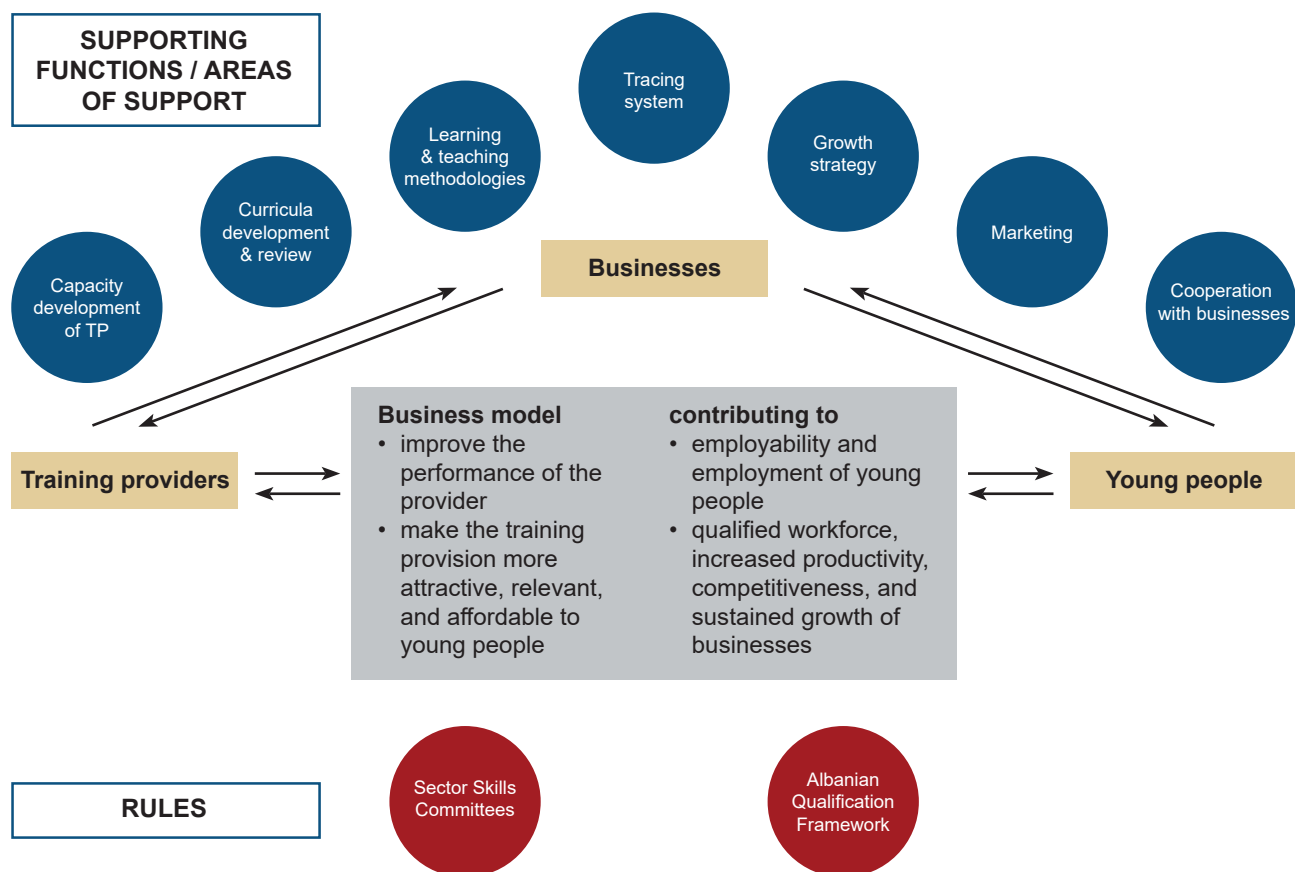


Figure 4: Business model

Together with RisiAlbania, the training providers carefully identified the types of support that would enhance their performance while making the training more attractive, relevant, and affordable to young people—especially women from rural areas or with limited financial means. Most training providers received support in several of the identified areas. RisiAlbania signed cooperation agreements (contracts) with all training providers, outlining what was expected from both the project and the partner, including deliverables, milestones, types and amounts of support. Each contract also included a business plan detailing the new business model. Co-financing was required throughout the process, with little direct financial support and a stronger focus on networking and collaboration, ensuring that the approach remained light and replicable for other actors.



Supporting Function	RisiAlbania supported the training providers to / facilitated
Capacity development of training providers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Training of trainers (ToT) to enhance instructional quality - Specialized ToTs on green transition and sustainability, soft skills and career readiness, digital and remote teaching methods - Continuous professional development for educators and facilitators
Curricula development and review	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Research emerging skills and occupational trends - Consult with businesses to understand talent needs - Design new training offers in cybersecurity, green tourism, digital marketing - Upgrade and modularize existing curricula - Embed green and digital skills into technical and service-oriented courses
Learning and teaching methodologies	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Develop blended and online formats - Develop flexible training methods tailored to geographic and socio-economic contexts - Create video modules and e-books - ToTs on green transition, soft skills, and digital methods - Continuous professional development of trainers and facilitators
Tracing system	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Design and implement Student Administration and Tracing system
Growth strategy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Develop innovative delivery models - Improve business planning - Create job matching and career support services
Marketing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Tailor outreach to youth and women - Use digital and local media - Production of promotional videos and testimonials
Cooperation with businesses	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Build partnerships with employers to support internships, job placement, and workplace learning - Develop job matching services

Overall, RisiAlbania supported 17 training providers in tourism, ICT, soft skills and green skills in phases 2 and 3.

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Albacademy • Albanian Gastronomy Academy • Arber Avdija Professional Courses • Hospitality and Tourism Academy (HAT) • Elite Academy • SHUM - Association of Food and Wellbeing 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Albanian ICT Academy • IkubINFO Academy • BetaPlan bootCamps by Coding Dojo • Tirana Center of Technology (TCT) • Fisa Sh.p.k • Blinks 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • UNIPRO Academy • ACE (Albania Craftsman Education Centre) • IMAA (Innovation Management Academy Albania) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • European University of Tirana • Albacademy • IMAA (Innovation Management Academy Albania)
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Table 1: Overview of supported training providers

3.2 Financing and delivery strategies for training providers

3.2.1 Juridical form, ownership, and steering

The supported training providers operated under a variety of juridical forms, including private companies, academies, associations, and university-affiliated initiatives. Some training providers emerged as spinoffs from existing businesses, such as FISA Academy, which was developed as part of First Group, IkubINFO, Elite Travel Academy, Blinks to meet the growing demand for cybersecurity and digital marketing professionals. Others operated as partnerships between businesses and government programmes, like UET University's initiatives in adult training and lifelong learning.

Governance structures varied but generally included in-house management, collaboration with industry experts, and employer engagement mechanisms such as advisory boards and industry round tables. These structures helped ensure that training programmes remained relevant to labour market needs.

3.2.2 Financing: costs and income generation

Development costs

Training providers incurred significant development costs, often covered through external funding, such as:

- **Market research and curriculum development** to ensure that courses align with market demand (e.g., ICT Academy's market study and curricula updates)
- **Infrastructure investments** to develop e-learning platforms and blended learning solutions (e.g., Hospitality and Tourism Academy's online course development)
- **Instructor capacity building** to ensure high-quality instruction (e.g., Albacademy's training for hotel management and front desk staff)

Running costs

Ongoing operational costs included:

- **Staff salaries:** Hiring and retaining trainers and administrative personnel
- **Marketing expenses:** Digital and traditional marketing strategies to attract students (e.g., SHUM's targeted outreach campaign)
- **Technological infrastructure:** Maintaining online learning platforms and tools (e.g., TCT's investment in remote learning software)

Income generation strategies

The main revenue models were:

- **Tuition fees and course payments:** All training providers cited the training fees as their main source of income. In most cases, it is the individual - the training participant - who pays the fees; hence, ensuring access to training in terms of

affordability remained an important challenge. Some providers offered financial assistance, scholarships, or subsidized fees to targeted groups, such as ICT Academy's training for girls who lost parental care.

- **Corporate and employer-sponsored training:** Businesses paid for specialized training to upskill their employees. For example, Albacademy offered sector-specific training for hotel and service industry workers, while BetaPlan bootcamps provided high-tech training for employees in the ICT sector.

Some **innovative income models** included:

- **Voucher schemes** as a form of government subsidies that allow unemployed individuals or employees to access training at reduced or no cost.
- **Blended learning and remote training** reduced operational costs while increasing accessibility, as seen in Albanian Gastronomy Academy's hybrid learning model.
- **Recruitment of young professionals** through own academy: An exception to the fee-based model was the IkubINFO Academy, its only cost-free training programme. University students who passed a competitive selection process could complete the full training and, if deemed suitable by IkubINFO—the leading software company in Albania—undertook a three-month internship. On average, six to eight out of 20–30 participants per cohort were hired as junior software developers. Artan Malka, Key Account Manager of IkubINFO, summarizes it as follows: *“One of the most effective ways to deal with the constant need of software engineers is to recruit young professionals through our own academy.”*
- **Certification cost-sharing** by partners that helped cover international certification costs, enhancing graduates' employability (e.g., Digital Academy's support for SAS, Java, and .NET certifications).
- **International partnerships** like the one between the Hospitality and Tourism Academy and one of the world's leading hospitality schools the Business & Hotel Management School in Switzerland, which allowed Albanian students to benefit from the paid internships, while working in the leading Swiss and International hotels and resorts.

3.3 Innovation in non-formal training

Selected key innovations supported by RisiAlbania relate to strengthening the employer link and emerging thematic areas of as green skills, digital marketing, and cyber security.

3.3.1 Improving the employer connection

Establishing and improving the link between training providers and businesses/employers has lied at the heart of RisiAlbania's intervention. To this effect, training providers have been supported in core steps in the education to employment transition: industry's inputs when creating or revising curricula and teaching/training material and methods, engaging trainers from the industry, enabling internships in businesses, and ultimately promoting recruitment by employers (see Figure 5).

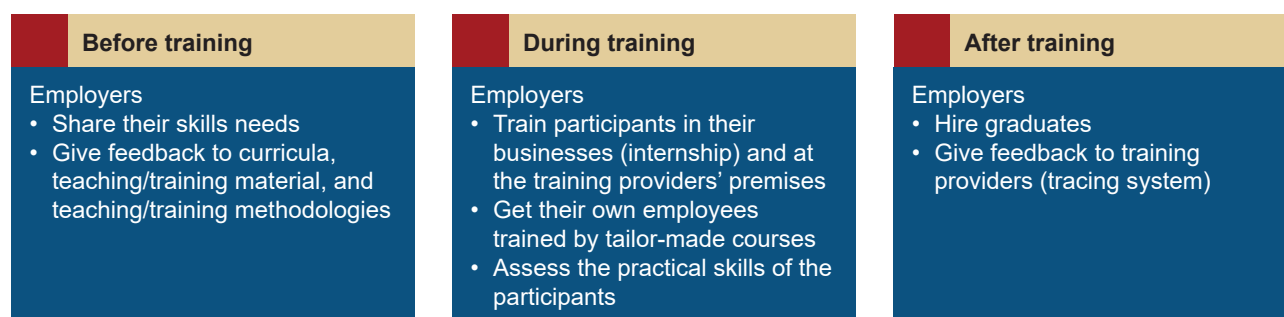


Figure 5: Role of employers in training

RisiAlbania aimed triggering innovation in training content and learning methods, reflecting the reality in the world of work. Only experts from the industry can train according to the state-of-the-art. At the Tirana Center of Technology (TCT), for instance, it was a requirement for trainers to be actively working in a company. In the case of SHUM, the associations of food and wellbeing and the chefs/cooks training center were behind the training initiative and used the center to develop skilled staff. The trainers came from the industry and imparted their hands-on experience in the training, which was primarily practice-based. Training providers relied on a network of businesses for training delivery, as trainees accomplished internships at these companies.

RisiAlbania supported the Innovation Management Academy Albania (IMAA) in becoming a key player in strengthening the link between education and employment in the ICT sector. As the first academy in Albania to combine advanced soft skills training with a talent matchmaking platform, IMAA followed a “Ready to Work” model that helped students and young professionals develop essential soft skills, scale-up capacities, and practical know-how. By working closely with employers as mentors and tailoring learning pathways to individual needs, IMAA ensured its training offer responded to real labour market demands. RisiAlbania’s support included the development of a data-driven talent acquisition platform, market research, and capacity building of IMAA instructors to offer innovative, employment-oriented courses. The academy also collaborated with university career offices and promoted ICT career opportunities through strategic partnerships.

Additionally, the Albanian ICT Academy has established a closed network of 25 companies in the ICT sector to identify the skills in demand and effectively inform the training planning process. In the culinary sector, the AA Culinary Course in Lezha is emerging as a key player in the region, not only by equipping young people with valuable skills, but also by facilitating their placement into decent employment, thanks to its strong connections with local employers.

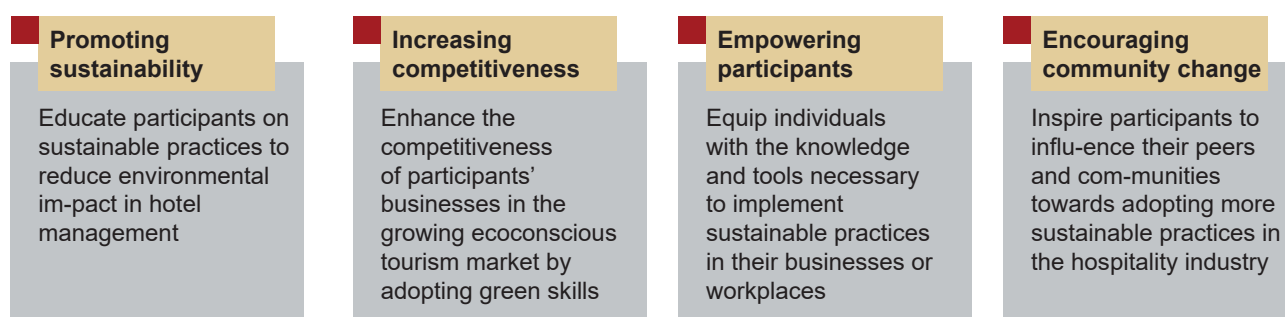
None of the training providers had a proper tracing system in place. RisiAlbania contracted the Tirana Center of Technology to develop a *Student Administering & Tracking software*, based on their own and the other training providers’ articulated needs and experience with trainees. The other training providers gave feedback to the demo version, so that the software fits to all training providers. According to the Founders & CEOs of Tirana Center of Technology, Mr. Rezart Alija and Mr. Gentjan Mejdani “*We and the other training providers were bottlenecked on the data and information flow. This is when RisiAlbania came into play. Now we can admin the students’ data, track the students, track and*

save requests from companies and collaborate with them, and make survey questions to students to see how their experiences, life and career has moved on. It will help to keep history of everything.”

On an individual basis, such a tracing system will generate crucial information to continuously adapt the courses according to the trainees and businesses’ feedback and can as such provide inputs for marketing strategies. Ms. Gladiola Dona of the Hospitality and Tourism Academy says that *“it’s a system that makes you better. It asks you to implement a lot of new things.”* On a more collective level, the development of this system led the training providers – who hardly seek exchange among themselves and see themselves as competitors in their economic sectors – bring together on a concrete issue and jointly contribute to solving it.

3.3.2 Promoting green skills

RisiAlbania actively contributed to the green transition by fostering the integration of green skills into Albania’s labour market, particularly in the tourism and agribusiness sectors. Recognising the growing demand for sustainable practices, RisiAlbania began working in early 2023 to stimulate a market for green skills training. This effort involved supporting private non-formal training providers in assessing training needs, raising awareness about the importance of green skills, and designing tailored training programmes. The intervention aimed to contribute to the following:



The following three collaborations reflect RisiAlbania’s practical engagement in promoting innovation in green skills development.

The **European University of Tirana (EUT)**, a higher education and research institution in Albania that also offers post-secondary programmes, shifted its focus toward shorter, skills-oriented courses that meet the evolving needs of students and the labour market. With support from RisiAlbania, EUT developed a new short-term course in tourism, designed to equip students with practical, job-ready skills. Reni Ndreko who managed the programme stated: *“The curriculum is designed to integrate both digital and green skills, responding to market demands and aligning with EU requirements. This programme is an opportunity for us — to expand, diversify, and reach a wider audience.”* RisiAlbania’s contribution included training EUT’s pedagogical staff on green skills through a ToT, developing 11 new curricula that integrate green transition and digital elements, and shaping a new marketing strategy to promote the university’s green skills focus.

The second example is **Albacademy**, a training provider in the hospitality and services sector with a strong foundation in courses such as housekeeping, hotel management, and front desk operations. With support from RisiAlbania, Albacademy significantly expanded its reach by launching MiniAcademies in Korça, Gjirokastra, and Saranda - regions with high tourism potential. This geographic expansion brought high-quality, practice-oriented training closer to local communities and tourism businesses.

To better meet the evolving needs of the labour market, Albacademy developed modern curricula for roles such as waiters, bartenders, chefs and hotel managers by integrating six green skills modules into its hotel management training (see table below). RisiAlbania also supported ToT programmes to strengthen the capacity of Albacademy's instructors in green skills and hotel management. Additionally, a marketing strategy with a special focus on green competencies was created to raise awareness among businesses and learners.

Albacademy's approach targeted three main groups: hotel owners and managers, unemployed individuals, and those in need of reskilling. Many hotel managers actively participated in the training themselves, later passing on knowledge to their teams. The organization also collaborated with local municipalities, tourism networks, and employment offices to identify training needs and promote sustainable practices.

Thirdly, RisiAlbania has helped **IMAA** position itself as a promoter of green skills among youth and businesses. As part of this effort, IMAA developed and revised training curricula focused on sustainability, resulting in six dedicated modules covering topics such as greening industries, sustainability strategies in business, labour market segmentation by green skills, and effective communication for green transition. To ensure relevance, IMAA conducted a training needs assessment among youth and companies and launched an awareness campaign to raise understanding of the importance of green skills and the green transition.



EUT	Albacademy	IMAA
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Digital Marketing and Online Communication • Web Design and Online Page Maintenance • Tourism Innovation: Technology, Sustainability, and Creativity • Sustainable Development in the Hospitality Industry • Digital Transformation and Sustainable Tourism • Problem Solving and Teamwork • History and Culture of Albania • Communication and Ethics in the Workplace 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Minimizing energy and water consumption • Waste management and reduction • Sustainable food and beverage practices • Sustainable tourism certification and labelling • Sustainable tourism policy and planning • Digital skills for sustainable tourism 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sustainable Development Goals and their relevance for business. • Green skills for SDGs & labour-market segmentation by green skills. • Greening industries. • Strategies to integrate sustainability into your business-as-usual. • Sustainability strategies in action. • Sustainability in focus-effective communications for a greener tomorrow.

Table 2: Overview of green skills related training modules

3.4 Industry links, quality assurance and mobility of qualifications

An important focus of phase 3 was on quality assurance of training offer and training mobility.

Establishment and Strengthening of Sector Skills Committees (SSCs):

Recognizing the need to align non-formal education with industry demands, RisiAlbania facilitated the creation of SSCs, particularly in the ICT and Tourism sectors. These committees serve as formal high-level mechanisms that bridge the gap between educational institutions and the labour market, ensuring that vocational curricula are responsive to current industry needs.

In the ICT sector, the SSC demonstrated significant business engagement by actively participating in the review and design of vocational qualifications. This collaboration resulted in the development of updated and newly designed qualifications directly informed by industry needs, thereby enhancing graduates' employability. A notable example is the new post-secondary qualification in Cyber Security, classified



Sector skills committees are vital bridges between the world of work and education—they ensure that qualifications remain relevant, responsive, and future-focused. By fostering ongoing dialogue among employers, trade unions, educators, policymakers, and qualifications practitioners, they enrich the national catalogue for vocational qualifications and strengthen the social partnership essential for effective skills development. NAVETQ thank RisiAlbania for its valuable support in empowering the sectorial committee in ICT to play a strategic role in shaping a more inclusive and dynamic skills ecosystem.

Ejvis Gishti (Shehi), General Director of the National VET and Qualifications Agency (NAVETQ)

at Level 5 of the Albanian Qualifications Framework (AQF). The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) acknowledged Albania's efforts in establishing SSCs as a key area of progress, highlighting their role in addressing labour market gaps.

To further enhance the effectiveness of SSCs, RisiAlbania organized knowledge exchange initiatives, including study visits to countries like Estonia. These exchanges provided SSC members with insights into successful models of sectoral collaboration, enabling them to adopt best practices in the Albanian context.

Integration of Lifelong Learning Qualifications into the AQF:

RisiAlbania also played a pivotal role in enhancing the quality and mobility of qualifications by supporting the integration of lifelong learning qualifications into the AQF. Aligned with the European Qualifications Framework (EQF), the AQF serves as a comprehensive tool for classifying qualifications across various education subsectors, including higher education, vocational education and training, pre-tertiary general education, and adult learning.

RisiAlbania supported the National VET and Qualifications Agency (NAVETQ) in operationalizing the legal framework necessary for incorporating lifelong learning qualifications into the AQF. This process involved establishing quality criteria that qualifications must meet to be included in the framework, thereby ensuring they address labour market and societal needs. By strengthening non-formal training providers and assisting them in aligning their offerings with the AQF standards, accessibility and recognition of vocational qualifications get expanded.

ILLUSTRATION: ALIGNING A PILOT QUALIFICATION

As part of the piloting process, the Hotel Management qualification offered by AlbAcademy — a partial qualification within the broader Management of Accommodation Structures full qualification — was successfully aligned with Level 5 of the ACQ.



How the System Has Changed

RisiAlbania's overall strategy was to start working with a small number of innovators to pioneer and prove innovations and to expand this to the wider Albanian non-public non-formal training sector. The project aimed at facilitating models that are replicable and to support selected partners in such a way that the markets does not get distorted.

The non-formal, non-public training market in ICT and tourism has become increasingly significant in the country, with businesses adapting to these trends. Collaboration between companies and training providers has grown, focusing on hiring new employees and upskilling existing staff. Training providers have leveraged their extensive business networks to help place trainees and actively encouraged companies to offer on-the-job mentoring for smoother workplace integration.

The training offers have expanded both thematically to areas such as green skills, digital marketing, and cybersecurity and geographically across districts like Elbasan, Shkodra, and Gjirokastër. The thematic expansions illustrate the strong link between RisiAlbania's job creation efforts (Outcome 1) and the targeted support provided through skills development (Outcome 3). By aligning with sustainability standards and certifications, tourism entrepreneurs have been able to access more quality-conscious market segments. This momentum has also encouraged academic institutions, vocational schools, and universities to revise their curricula to reflect emerging trends, standards, and best practices in sustainable tourism. As tourism training providers have begun to integrate green skills and actively promoted their importance, this is contributing to a wider shift in attitudes towards sustainability.

In general, the training providers continued to innovate and explore new lines of business to remain competitive and responsive to market needs. For instance, SHUM developed an employment portfolio to strengthen its service offer, while the Hospitality and Tourism Academy increasingly targeted CEOs and executives, recognising that demand for entry-level training was declining. The Albanian ICT Academy expanded its focus by investing in career orientation services. A broad range of training offers—including executive-level

programmes and tailor-made courses for companies—allowed providers to reach a wider customer base. Additionally, the integration of job matching and intermediary services into training provision not only enhanced their value proposition but also provided alternative revenue streams, demonstrating how providers adapted and refined their business models to sustain operations and respond to evolving labour market demands.

The quest for high-quality training has also led to new partnerships. The agreement between the Hospitality and Tourism Academy (HAT) and the Business & Hotel Management School (BHMS) in Switzerland creates an educational pathway that enables HAT students to follow a curriculum aligned with that of BHMS. Ms. Gladiola Dona, founder and CEO, stated: “This partnership with the Business & Hotel Management School in Switzerland offers young people the opportunity to enhance their skills and pursue their careers at an international level.”

Quality assurance, identified as a key bottleneck by training providers, has gained importance through the support provided to NAVETQ in developing the model and all necessary modalities for integrating lifelong learning qualifications into the Albanian Qualifications Framework (AQF). In 2021, Arber Avdija, founder and CEO of AA Vocational Culinary Courses, stated: “It’s important to ensure that our standards are the European standards.” Pilots conducted by supported training providers to align their qualifications with the AQF—aligned with the EQF—offered valuable inputs for its subsequent revision and improvement.

The SSC in ICT and Tourism have demonstrated the commitment of businesses to the revised and new offerings of VET in ICT. As a result, VET in ICT now offers updated and new qualifications defined by businesses, making them accessible to youth.



Young People Get Employed

Between 2017 and 2025, 4,444 young people received training, 48% of whom were women. 850 people from marginalized groups¹ improved their skills and increased their employment opportunities. Of those who completed the training, 1,430 found a job within six months (48% of whom were women), while 376 were from marginalised groups. The tourism and ICT sectors show similar patterns when it comes to the ratio of young people trained versus young people employed. RisiAlbania distinguishes between training that led to employment in tourism and ICT, and training that contributed to employment in soft skills. Therefore, while young people who participated in soft skills training improved their employability — and, given the future of work, likely to a considerable extent — RisiAlbania does not claim employment in this category.

The primary sector of employment remains ICT-cybersecurity, where 54% of the graduates are employed. Additionally, 34% of these young professionals are now employed in the thriving tourism sector, serving in roles such as bartender, front desk managers, kitchen chef, waiter, and in hotel management. Most of these employment opportunities are concentrated in Tirana, Gjirokaštër, Korca and Saranda. Notably, these positions offer full-time employment with standard, ongoing contracts. Furthermore, 12 % are working in the craftsmanship sector, excelling as professionals in skin care, garden maintenance, perfume-making, as well as jewellery and hat crafting.

In 2024, RisiAlbania carried out a qualitative assessment on training programmes and employability among graduates. The assessment reviewed the experiences of 30 young beneficiaries who took part in training programmes across various fields, including Digital Marketing, Cybersecurity, Hotel Management, and Handcrafts, and who subsequently secured employment. Regardless of their prior experience in these fields, 95% of

¹ Marginalized groups are defined based on their social background, such as: internal migrants; rural women; Roma & Egyptians; orphans; returnees; women victims of domestic violence; formerly trafficked women and LGBTQI.



“After finishing high-school I had no idea what to do in my life. One day, although I was not 100% convinced, I decided to give it a try and follow AA Cook-ing Course in Lezhë. I learned that cooking is not on-ly frying a couple of eggs in the kitchen at home. I found employment one week before finishing the course thanks to the skills I gained there and the high demand in my profession in Lezhë. Now I am also able to create my own dishes”.

Ladovik Syku, Chef at Poseidon Restaurant, Lezhë

respondents found the skills gained during training to be directly applicable to their jobs, with an overall satisfaction rate of 86%. According to participants, the training positively impacted their employability: each of them found employment or new opportunities within six months, and eight individuals pursued self-employment or freelance work, highlighting the programme’s role in strengthening both technical and soft skills. All participants reported that the skills acquired, along with increased self-confidence, contributed to higher income and career advancement. Satisfaction with the quality of trainers was high, with many praising the interactive and hands-on approach of the courses. Several respondents were inspired to start their own businesses, reflecting the training’s transformative effect on their entrepreneurial mindset. These findings underline the effectiveness of the training offer in equipping young people with relevant skills and encouraging them to explore self-employment and new career trajectories.

The assessment was used to inform a campaign aimed at promoting lifelong learning to young people. Success stories of training providers and their graduates were continuously promoted through digital marketing to demonstrate the advantages of lifelong learning for a seamless transition into the labour market. Through this campaign, the project and its partners reached 23,000 unique users.

Lessons and Conclusions

6.1 Analysis of systemic challenges and successes

RisiAlbania's engagement in non-formal, private training provision has demonstrated that systemic change is possible even in a largely unregulated and competitive market. Through its facilitative approach, the project has effectively built the capacity of training providers, supported innovation, and strengthened employer linkages. Over time, RisiAlbania has made significant progress towards its vision of a demand-driven, innovative non-formal training market, resulting in a broader range of higher-quality and more relevant training opportunities for young people pursuing careers in key sectors such as tourism and IT.

The tailored support provided to each training provider based on their business model and market potential worked well. This flexibility enabled a high level of responsiveness to market demands, particularly in ICT and tourism, and contributed to positive employment outcomes. Another factor contributing to success was strong employer engagement, which was embedded in training design, delivery, and placement strategies.

Limited collaboration among training providers was an issue – not surprisingly - largely due to competition in the same market. Although RisiAlbania encouraged joint learning and exchange, cooperation only emerged when there was a shared need, such as the development of a joint student tracing system. Financial sustainability remains a challenge, too. Many providers depend heavily on student fees and are struggling to diversify their income streams or secure stable public funding.

Additionally, while SSCs and the AQF offer great potential, their full operationalisation remains a work in progress. Delays in institutional processes, lack of regulatory clarity, and limited capacity at the national level continue to hinder the widespread integration of non-formal training into the national system. There is a recognised need for clearer

regulation and oversight to ensure the quality of training offered by private institutions. The upcoming accreditation processes, planned to start in 2027, are an important but demanding step in this direction.

6.2 Lessons for training providers

Several important lessons emerged for private training providers and employers:

- Closeness to the labour market has proven to be essential. Training providers with strong networks and regular contact with employers have been able to develop training programmes that reflect real workplace requirements, facilitate job placement and guarantee ongoing relevance.
- Training that is modular and tailored to emerging occupational profiles has increased alignment with labour market dynamics. Training programmes in areas such as digital marketing, cybersecurity and green tourism have responded to developments in these sectors and attracted young people seeking targeted, practical learning opportunities.
- Blended learning formats have become an integral part of training delivery. Early investments in online and hybrid approaches have enabled providers to reach learners beyond Tirana, overcoming logistical and financial barriers, particularly during the pandemic.
- Graduate tracing systems have contributed to the continuous adaptation of training. Systematic follow-up with former trainees has allowed providers to gather feedback, adjust their offerings and showcase success stories in their outreach and communication efforts.
- Training that integrates soft skills and career orientation alongside technical content has helped young people enter the labour market. Elements such as communication, teamwork and job readiness have been particularly relevant in sectors such as tourism and ICT.

6.3 Recommendations

Based on these insights, the following recommendations can help further improve systemic impact and expand the reach of non-formal training in Albania:

Strengthen quality assurance and regulation

- Accelerate the development and implementation of the accreditation framework for private non-formal providers.
- Support NAVETQ to operationalise the AQF for lifelong learning qualifications, ensuring consistent quality standards.

Promote access and inclusion

- Encourage training providers to expand their presence in underserved regions and design inclusive outreach strategies.

Focus on sustainability and innovation

- Encourage providers to diversify revenue models through job placement services, corporate training, or certification. Existing approaches developed over the past years can serve as inspiration for new or emerging providers.

Support the green transition

- Support the continued integration of green skills into training offers by facilitating collaboration between training providers, municipalities, and tourism-related businesses, and by strengthening the capacity of trainers to embed sustainability aspects in course content and delivery.

Support evidence-based decision-making

- Promote the use of data from tracing systems and labour market analysis to continuously improve training content and delivery.
- Promote research on outcomes of non-formal training, especially in terms of long-term career progression and entrepreneurship.



Annex

The following list shows the supported training providers in alphabetical order.

Albania Craftsman Education Centre (ACE)

Offers short-term courses in handicrafts and design. RisiAlbania supported e-book development, publication of training materials, virtual trainer ToTs, and a marketing strategy.

Albacademy

Provides tourism-related training in regions with high tourism potential. RisiAlbania supported the setup of MiniAcademies, curriculum development (including green skills), ToTs, and a marketing strategy.

Albanian Gastronomy Academy

Introduced blended training in culinary arts using a mobile lab. RisiAlbania financed online curriculum design and 60 instructional video productions.

Albanian ICT Academy

Offers ICT courses co-designed with 25 companies. RisiAlbania financed market research, curriculum upgrades, marketing activities, and career orientation, with a focus on vulnerable youth.

Arber Avdija Professional Courses

Based in Lezha, provides bartender, waiter, cooking, and language courses. RisiAlbania supported curriculum development and the implementation of a targeted marketing strategy.

beta-Plan Coding Bootcamps

Intensive bootcamps in cooperation with Coding Dojo. RisiAlbania financed the ToT of three instructors, which allowed the company to double its training capacity.

Blinks

A digital marketing agency in Korça. RisiAlbania supported market research, ToTs, and curriculum development in digital marketing competencies.

Elite Academy

Part of Elite Travel Group, offering dual-model courses in tourism, ICT, and marketing. RisiAlbania supported ToTs, curriculum reviews, and a tailored marketing approach.

FISA Academy

Specialized in cybersecurity. RisiAlbania supported market research, ToTs, curriculum development, and the organization of a national cybersecurity hackathon.

Hospitality and Tourism Academy

Offers online hospitality courses. RisiAlbania supported the development of an e-learning platform and financed the production of 100 learning videos for four online courses.

IkubINFO Digital Academy

ICT-focused, including Java and .NET courses. RisiAlbania supported the formation of technical knowledge communities, international certifications, marketing strategies, and ToTs.

Innovation Management Academy Albania (IMAA)

Provides ICT training and job matchmaking services. RisiAlbania supported curriculum and green skills development, market research, ToTs, and awareness-raising on green transition.

Association of Food and Wellbeing (SHUM)

A network of over 200 tourism-related businesses. RisiAlbania supported the development of a targeted marketing strategy, including website creation and testimonial videos.

Tirana Center of Technology (TCT)

A pioneer in online/blended IT training. RisiAlbania supported platform development, curriculum updates, instructor recruitment, business linkages, marketing campaigns, and student tracking systems.

UniPro Balkan Academy

Albania's first platform for online soft skills training. RisiAlbania supported market research, course development, staff capacity building, and platform promotion.

European University of Tirana (UET)

Focuses on adult training in tourism and green skills. RisiAlbania supported curriculum development, ToTs for pedagogical staff, and the design of a new marketing strategy focused on green transition.

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