

SUCCESS FACTORS OF THE SWISS VOCATIONAL EDUCATION AND TRAINING SYSTEM IN THE WESTERN BALKANS



Students in thermo-hydraulics, Albania (2014)

The Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC) implements various Vocational Education and Training (VET) projects in the Western Balkans. These projects have the purpose of meeting the salient need to increase youth employment during the transition from centrally planned systems to modern market economies. With the collapse of the solid public enterprises from earlier times, public vocational schools have lost their traditional partners for workshop-based training and have not been able to meet the requirements of the private sector. In this context, the SDC has applied the success factors of the Swiss VET system as an effective approach to improving the relevance and performance of the VET systems.

Evolution of the Swiss VET system

In order to understand the Swiss VET system's basic features, it is important to know that the system is the result of a long history. The non-formal type of vocational training in Switzerland can be traced

back to the 16th century, where the guilds provided vocational training at the work place. However, access was restricted and there was no formal trade school until 1884, when the Swiss parliament decided to promote and subsidise the formal dual or apprenticeship training. As a consequence, the dual-track system, where students work as apprentices in a host company and attend classes at a VET school or college became the most common form of VET. In trades for which no enterprises committed themselves to train apprentices, public vocational training centres were opened.

Success factors of the Swiss VET system

Nowadays, the Swiss VET system successfully promotes youth employment and has an excellent reputation. It is an attractive alternative to basic academic education and allows access to higher academic education at a later stage. The main success factors are:

- Content and training methods are jointly determined by the industry and vocational training centres. They reflect business practice and include soft skills in the curricula.
- Training of trainers targets both full-time vocational instructors and part-time instructors from the industry and masters.
- The dual modality, consisting of theoretical classes combined with practice opportunities, is of high quality and practical relevance.
- The private and public sector cooperate closely not only in the identification, preparation, delivery, assessment and steering of the training, but also in providing practical opportunities, in financing the VET system and in shaping policies and regulations.
- Professional counselling and job search services with targeted support measures are offered to youth with special needs.

Application of the Swiss VET success factors in the Western Balkans

- **Attractiveness of the VET System**

In order to increase the attractiveness of VET training programmes, the SDC conducts public events. In Bosnia and Herzegovina for instance, the SDC has led a youth employment forum and produced films that present the success stories of young entrepreneurs trained at VET schools.

- **Curricula and training methods**

Curricula need to be responsive to the demands of the economy in general and to the targeted trades in particular. With this purpose, company representatives were included in so-called sector boards in Serbia to define curricula for wood processing and for exploiting forest plants. In Kosovo, together with industrial boards, the SDC has developed new curricula for car mechanics, construction, heating and plumbing, electronics, ICTs, agriculture and food processing.

- **Training of trainers**

In the Western Balkans teacher centred training is common practice and the students are not encouraged to participate actively. Also, many VET teachers are not up-to-date with technological developments in their trades. Therefore in Albania, the SDC has successfully carried out trainings of trainers in pedagogical skills to promote student participation and has provided them with technological refresher courses.

- **Promoting the dual modality**

The dual model or apprenticeship training according to the Swiss model cannot be replicated in the Western Balkans yet. To find interested and capable small and medium enterprises (SMEs) that could offer suitable learning places is difficult and there are not enough adequately trained instructors available. But there are valid alternatives which allow combining theoretical classes with practice opportunities. In Bosnia and Herzegovina, the SDC organised short-term internships in the wood and metal sectors that met with great interest by participating firms and will be institutionalised and rolled out on a larger scale. In Kosovo, practice firms simulate experiences in the working world with virtual money and goods, allowing participants to practice administration, marketing, purchase, sales and accounting.

- **Private and public sector cooperation**

The private sector in the Western Balkans still has some reservations with regard to internships as far as formal VET is concerned. Consequently, a relationship with the private sector first had to be established. Thus, in Albania the SDC launched a nation-wide campaign to debate the important role the private sector should play in the VET system. The SDC has also been successful in making sure that the private sector is involved in developing curricula and in offering internships and project-based learning opportunities. But private sector involvement is also strongly needed in the assessment of VET training programmes in order to convince prospective employers of the quality of VET graduates. Thanks to the SDC, representatives of the private sector in Bosnia and Herzegovina participate in assessing the learning outcomes at the training centres.

- **Job search services, professional counselling and social inclusion**

Job search services represent a crucial interface between VET and both employment and start-ups. In support of such services, professional counselling makes it possible to match the aspirations and aptitudes of the job-seekers with the labour market. Young adults from vulnerable groups are in particular need of such support because of the discrimination they often face. Thus, in Albania the SDC has supported its partners in providing labour market information via the media, has trained coaches from NGOs and the National Employment Services (NES) to accompany young adults in the early stages of employment and has developed an employment, coaching cycle specifically for vulnerable groups.

Implications

A sustainable implementation of the dual-model in the Western Balkans is not possible yet, but the SDC is actively promoting it. On the system level, the SDC supports the standardisation, accreditation and certification of "practical" VET courses in the National Qualification Framework (NQF). On the practical level, the SDC fosters the cooperation of training providers and employers for the modernisation of curricula and training methods and seeks collaboration opportunities with private and public employers to provide on-the-job learning and practices.

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