

Donor Committee for dual Vocational Education and Training (DC dVET): Founding Event and Symposium, April 14th 2016, Luzern (Switzerland) Workshop 3: Experiences and Challenges with the dual System Reforms

Opening Presentations

The workshop started with three presentations:

- Silviu Gîncu, Director of the Vocational Training Department, Education Ministry Republic of Moldova, presented the current situation and the reform plans of the Moldovan Ministry of Education in the field of vocational education and training (VET).
- Viorica Corlat-Turcan, manager of the Callidus association, described the operation and the results of a project of the ADA business partnerships to build a vocational centre for the Moldovan construction industry.
- Pius Frick, Head of the Coordination Office of the Liechtenstein Development Service (LED) in the Republic of Moldova, presented the project "CONSEPT - Strengthening of Vocational Training in Moldova".

Presentations and Additional Information

Silviu Gîncu: VET in the Republic of Moldova

- The Moldovan economy is heavily dominated by the agricultural sector, while other sectors are considerably smaller in an international comparison. The agricultural sector is mainly dominated by small business structures; only 2.6% of farms are large companies.
- The Moldovan VET system is currently in a very unsatisfactory state, and therefore the Ministry of Education faces enormous reform tasks, both in terms of legal requirements as well as in practical implementation. A major goal in this context is, for example, the creation of the legal basis for the development of vocational secondary education.
- Currently, Moldova has more than 85 vocational schools at different levels: there are programs of one to three years at secondary level. The focus of the reforms is on the further development of the three years programs which lead to a university-entrance diploma (Matura/Abitur) and therefore open the access to tertiary education. In addition, there are five centres of excellence, recognised by the government, amongst others in information technology, construction and logistics.
- The VET Development Strategy 2013-2020 includes agreements with the European Union.
- The development of dual VET is currently still largely based at the level of pilot projects. Besides the "Job Centre of Moldovan Construction" another pilot project was launched in 2014 in cooperation with a German Corporation in the textile sector.
- According to the reform plans of the Moldovan Ministry of Education, the dual training courses shall take place 70% in a company and 30% at school. At the same time, the duration of an apprenticeship are planned to be extended to two years (previously one year). The main challenges for implementation are the low wages for apprentices as well as the lack of willingness of Moldovan companies to engage in practical learning.
- Further goals of the Moldovan Ministry of Education in the field of VET include enhanced capacity building both, at the level of schools as well as in administration, the introduction of quality assurance and the establishment of a platform for dialogue, to facilitate the exchange of experiences and best practice models.

Viorica Corlat-Turcan: The professional centre for the construction industry in Moldova

- The overall goal of the project is the establishment of a vocational training centre for the implementation of dual VET in those professions that are of particular importance for the Moldovan construction sector: engineers for road construction, cement workers and bricklayers. This project shall serve as an example to illustrate how theoretical and practical training can be better coordinated.

- The key project components are:
 - Cooperation with international and national companies in the Moldovan construction sector.
 - Training offers in cooperation with the Moldovan Employment Service.
- Project partners are:
 - Strabag (Austrian Construction company with offices in Moldova),
 - *Berufsförderungsinstitut Burgenland*,
 - Concordia,
 - L&R Sozialforschung,
 - Moldovan Employment Service, Ministry of Construction and Regional Development Republic of Moldova,
 - Center of Excellence Chişinău (*Baukolleg*),
 - Employers representation in the Moldovan construction industry,
 - Union of Moldovan construction industry.
- Beneficiaries:
 - Moldovan construction sector,
 - Unemployed youth and employees of construction companies, who want to acquire new or better skills in the construction sector.
- Social Aspects: Integration of job coaching, job assistance and counselling for disadvantaged youths.
- Financing:
 - Total budget for the three years of inception and implementation: nearly 1 million Euros.
 - Half of the budget is covered by the Austrian Development Agency (ADA business partnerships), half by private sector partners (in particular Strabag and the Moldovan partner companies).
- Training priorities:
 - Development of the organisational structure
 - Training of the Trainers trainings
 - Training of mentors in partner companies
 - Career counselling and job coaching
 - Pilot trainings for construction workers and professionals
 - Accompanying measures (conferences, seminars, study trips)

Pius Frick: CONCEPT – Strengthening of VET in the Republic of Moldova

In contrast to the project, which was presented by Viorica Corlat-Turcan, the program CONCEPT is active in the field of initial VET. The project of the LED aims at the improvement of the VET system in Moldova. Existing, public vocational training schools are supported with numerous measures. Thus, the project is not about interventions in dual VET in a narrow sense. Selected elements of dual VET are implemented and attempts are made to increase the involvement of the private sector. The program includes 22 partner schools throughout Moldova, including rural areas. The project support consists of a multi-layered package at different levels. School principals and managerial staff receive for example trainings in school management. They develop their own school development plan in order to take the development of their school into their own hands, to think strategically and to take on opportunities actively.

Components of CONCEPT are:

- Management courses and support in the preparation of school development plans
- Technical and educational development as well as coaching for teaching staff,
- Measures to increase practical elements in the curricula,
- Material support incl. equipment, supplies and infrastructure improvements,
- Development of training content (occupational standards, curricula),
- Development of teaching and learning materials such as texts, videos, presentations,
- Contributions to the design of examinations: final assessment, end of module assessment, and in the future also diagnostic assessment,

- Involvement of the private sector: Generally strengthening of the cooperation between schools and companies; involvement of companies in examination and the development of training materials.
- Partner of the project:
 - Ministry of Education,
 - Technical University of Moldova,
 - ProDidactica,
 - Child Rights Information Centre,
 - Industry Association of the Moldovan construction industry
- Financing:
 - LED, Medicor Foundation Liechtenstein und Hilti Foundation Liechtenstein
 - EUR 5.2 Mio. (2008-2015)
- Duration of the program: 2008 - 2018

Extracts from the Discussion

The Following Thematic Priorities were highlighted in the Subsequent Discussion:

- Dual VET projects in the Moldovan construction sector are in particular important, because the construction sector is a growing sector of the Moldovan economy that suffers particularly from a lack of skilled staff. The VET centre for the Moldovan construction sector is owned by an international corporation (Strabag), but has also 30 Moldovan partner companies that benefit from the qualifications. Therefore, a knowledge transfer has taken place in the framework of trainings as such as well as between the partner companies. Furthermore, Strabag was willing to finance essential assets such as materials and equipment. Through this, the Moldovan companies were familiarised with new technologies. By working with the *Baukolleg* as Centre of Excellence, high qualifications in the selected construction trades have been assured. Moreover, also women could be involved in the trainings provided by the centre, which was a particular asset also for ADA, the co-funding body for the centre.
- More problems than in the construction sector can be observed in training measures in other economic sectors in Moldova. For companies it is still not self-evident to provide in-house efforts as for instance practical trainings places for apprentices. In a larger textile project for example, neither co-financing of a mentoring training nor cooperation in curricula development (nil paid) could be achieved. This led to lengthy and permanent discussions about finances that ultimately hindered a positive development of the projects. However, the Moldovan textile industry is challenging in general as there is a high labour turnover due to very low wages
- A participant in the workshop confirmed that the problems and challenges in Georgia are quite similar as in Moldova. In her experience it is particularly difficult to convince companies of cooperating in the field of qualification - in order to establish a sustainable training program for the urgently needed qualified workforce. The question of which incentives shall be offered to the companies is of particular concern for the participant. She suggested, that in the future donor agencies shall put a stronger focus on the interface between educational institutions and companies. In addition, she suggests that companies that provide trainings shall receive financial incentives. According to her dual VET is an important development path for Georgia in the longer run. Georgia creates incentives for companies, by exempting wages of apprentices from taxes and by offering training of trainers for free.
- The vocational school principal stated, that the introduction of a dual system can only be successful if the economy has already reached a certain strength. However, also in Moldova the private sector does often not respond to the schools offers, despite the fact that companies often complain, that they can't find qualified workforce on the job market.
- According to experts, the high labour fluctuation is among the reasons why the Moldovan private sector lacks willingness to provide training as it makes investments in qualification of staff risky. At the same time there is a fear of betrayal of trade secrets by staff changing positions. However, it is harmful to see apprentices only as "cost factor" instead of an investment in the future. It was also noted that companies often do not recruit professionals / skilled staff due to higher salaries they need to pay.

- It is often difficult to initiate trainings according to the “dual principle”, because it is difficult to motivate companies. They lack confidence in the state and therefore are not willing to take responsibility and ownership. According to experts it has to be accepted, that it will be a long process. In this context it is important to mention so called *Prime Movers*, thus companies that are actively involved and serve as a role model. Another challenge is the integration of smaller companies that offer the majority of jobs available.
- However, experts largely agree that the implementation of dual components in VET can only be successful, if companies are willing to contribute financially, for instance by paying apprentices a salary. Despite this basic principle, the cooperation with companies can be manifold: the right constellation needs to be identified depending on the context and framework conditions. It was also mentioned, that not only low wages and existing qualifications are incentives for investors, but also the *rule of law*, thus legal security for the investment.
- The role of the state in transition countries in the development of vocational training was to some extent critically assessed in the discussion. Often, there are announcements, strategies and declarations of intent, but no practical consequences. In Moldova, a state strategy on how to actually introduce dual VET is missing despite the pressure from the labour market. Again, reference was made to the importance of best practice models. The role of the state should not be underestimated. However, the question was raised if it makes sense to generate demand by law. In Moldova, a law is planned that prohibits companies in the building sector to hire unskilled workers.
- Also for vocational schools it is difficult to adapt to the new challenges. One of the challenges is that teacher’s salaries are very low (a teacher in electronics earn less than an electronic professional), another that teachers are not yet familiar with new technologies.
- With regards to the level of qualification, it was noted that dual VET is most suitable for qualification at a middle qualification level.