

Supporting Vocational Education & Training by engaging the private sector in curricula development and Work-based Learning (WBL)

Our Aim:



Public-private dialogue for improved skills is enhanced and private sector is engaged in delivering (dual) training models to youth.

How we did it:

1. Promote importance of engagement of the private sector companies in curricula development process and work-based learning implementation;
2. Identify priority profiles with interest to private sector companies and initiate the development of occupational standards;
3. Ensure buy-in of the private sector for engagement in the development of occupational standards;
4. Support VET schools to promote WBL and to identify companies willing to partner in the implementation of the WBL;
5. Develop capacities within VET schools and companies to develop WBL training plan and implementation of WBL;
6. Develop capacities of in-company instructors within the private companies;
7. Institutionalize Work-based learning (WBL) within the VET system;

Context

In Kosovo, one of the most persistent challenges in the labor market is the mismatch between the supply and demand of labor. This is called a skills-gap, where the education system does not qualify students with the skills the labor market demands. This is particularly problematic for Vocational Education and Training (VET). Despite VET professions' huge potential for boosting economic development in Kosovo, and despite the sector's ever-increasing demand for employees, there's still a grave lack of qualified workers.

Even with a startling amount of unemployment in Kosovo, especially among youth—49% of whom are jobless¹—an adequately-skilled VET workforce is scarce. The education system, training institutions and businesses do not communicate enough amongst each-other. Nobody is better qualified than the private sector to talk about the skills that the labor market demands. Yet, their participation in VET curricula development is rare. In order for VET to respond to labor market needs, the involvement of the private sector in.

1. VET curricula development, and
2. Implementation of Work-Based Learning (WBL) is crucial. Hence, a strong and institutional relationship between the VET system and the private sector is a necessary precondition for a successful VET system.

Our Approach

When we started our project at EYE, due to the lack of engagement of the private sector in the curricula development process, most VET profiles did not respond to labor market needs. Students had limited opportunities to practice their professions during their education and there was no system in place to monitor their professional practice within private sector companies. There were also no regulated accident insurance for the students or qualified in-company instructors to monitor and support the students.

At EYE, our aim was clear: to enhance public-private dialogue for improved skills between formal education/training providers and the private sector through encouraging the involvement of the latter developing occupational standards/curricula. We also wanted to engage the private sector in delivering (dual) training models, which is why we needed to support education institutions to proactively engage with the private sector in WBL delivery, and promote work-based learning as a model for improved linkage of the industry with the VET sector.

After we identified key bottlenecks hampering close collaboration between institutions and the private sector, the Ministry of Education took action to address the inconsistencies in the system. At the same time, EYE supported the development of 22 national occupational standards (OS) with the inputs provided by the private sector and requested by the labor market. The 22 standards were developed so that they can inform the revision and development of formal and non-formal curricula that better reflect labor market needs. These standards will pay dividends far beyond the life of the EYE project. To help us promote WBL in the local private sector, we made use of the school-based career centers which we were working to expand in VET schools across Kosovo, and which worked as intermediaries between the private sector and students.



As a result, VET schools managed to sign agreements with 115 companies and place 337 students in local companies. The scheme introduced 3 new elements to the VET education system: compensation of the students, in-company instructors and a WBL training plan. We also supported the Ministry of Education to develop an administrative instruction and operational manual for the implementation of WBL.

Throughout a 4 year period, EYE specifically targeted the changing of 20 curricula in the VET sector, and our efforts contributed greatly in the development of new occupational standards. Although EYE's WBL intervention was small-scale, we managed to introduce and embed crucial new elements within the VET system, and we managed to place 337 students in 115 companies.



Key Outcomes

- At the system level EYE managed to raise awareness among stakeholders on the need for clarification of roles in governance structure related to curricula development process. The Ministry of Education established a Core Working Group which will, among others, map the changes needed to take place in order for the education system to become more responsive to the requests of the private sector.
- 22 National Occupational Standards (OS) demanded by the labor market were developed with inputs coming from the private sector. The approved OSs (5 are already approved) will be used not only for the revision of formal VET curricula, but also for training providers that provide non-formal training courses.
- A profile of wood processing started to be provided for the first time by the VET school in the Municipality of Vushtrri as a result of discussions facilitated between the wood processing association in Kosovo, private sector companies and Ministry of Education. EYE managed to create a program which will provide wood-processing companies with a steady flow of skilled labor force.
- Ensured compensation of students engaged in the WBL scheme by the private sector and established in-company instructors within partner host companies.
- Introduced a WBL training plan and other documentation to be used by companies/in-company instructors to identify and evaluate students throughout the implementation of modules of the formal curricula that correspond to the company's field of activity.
- Supported Ministry of Education to develop the bylaw for the implementation of WBL based on which all formal VET schools would implement WBL in the future. The procedure and features elaborated in the bylaw were based on the learning from the pilots;
- Supported the Ministry of Education to develop the operational manual for the implementation of WBL, which will be used by both VET schools and businesses;
- Contributed in the development of bylaw for protection and health safety in schools during practice in school and workplace;
- Supported Vocational School in Vushtrri to use the allocated funds for accident insurance for students placed in the companies for work-based learning by facilitating discussions between MES-Municipality Education Directorate (MED) –Vocational School;
- Coordinated all donor projects working in this field throughout the process of development of the bylaw and operational manual for implementation of WBL;

Lessons Learned

- The project cannot initiate a broader reform if the Ministry of Education has no interest. Indeed, the Ministry of Education showed little interest to include the private sector in curricula development, although the support we provided the Ministry for the creation of occupational standards was done in close cooperation with the private sector.
- Changes at the Ministry/system level could be initiated when donor projects agree on common approaches, e.g. streamlining the curricula development process;
- WBL scheme must continue to be offered, but limited to the sectors that have a high need for skilled labor and show willingness to cooperate.
- Although as a result of MES lobbying, the Government of Kosovo allocated around 1 million Euro additional budget for 2019 for improvement of professional practice (part from the budget to be used for accident insurance), MES did not show interest to promote the experience of Vocational School of Vushtrri which utilized properly the allocated funds for accident insurance. As a consequence the allocated fund for 60 schools were used for other purposes.
- The WBL in-company training plan proved crucial. It translated formal curricula into real-work curricula and helped companies during the implementation of WBL, increasing the interaction between the companies and VET schools.

Contributors:

Majlinda Rizvanolli, Lisar Morina