

Joint Workshop

SEEVET Net – Western Balkans Chamber Investment Forum

Promotion of Work-Based Learning and Development of Occupational Standards – towards a joint regional project

6th and 7th December 2016, Belgrade

The Workshop was organized by the Education Reform Initiative of South Eastern Europe (ERI SEE), KulturKontakt Austria and Centre for Education Policy, with the support of the Chamber Investment Forum and Ministry of Science, Education and Technological Development. It gathered 61 participants, composed of representatives of regional ministries in charge of education, chambers of economy, agencies for vocational education and training, ETF, Austrian Development Agency, Erasmus+ foundation, and business sector.

In the opening session, the participants were welcomed by Ms Gordana Predić, State Secretary of the Ministry of Science, Education and Technological Development of the Republic of Srbija; Ms Mirjana Kovačević, Director of the education sector at the Chamber of Commerce and Industry of Serbia, Dragana Graonić, Director of the Department for VET of the Agency for Pre-Primary, Primary and Secondary Education of BiH and the Chair of the SEE-VET Network and Monika Mott, Head of Education within the KulturKontakt Austria.

In the next session, the participants were reminded by Ms Šarić (ERI SEE) on the conclusions from the previous meeting of the SEEVET Net regarding the activities to be developed – identification of the priority sectors for the SEE region, receiving input on the current situation regarding the WBL in the SEE region, identification of concrete areas of cooperation and laying basis for the future project proposal.

Ms Djurica (RCC) presented the economic sectors of regional relevance, based on the analysis of competitiveness of the Western Balkans sectors in the global marketplace, potential for regional cooperation and value added potential. Upon analysis, Tourism and Food and Beverages were selected as the priority sectors with the greatest regional potential. Within these two sectors, mismatch of skills supply with market demand were identified. Additionally, Ms Djurica concluded that there are no obstacles for SEEVET Net group to focus on these two sectors as well, since the work of RCC and SEEVET Net can be combined, particularly taking into consideration that RCC activities do not tackle educational aspects.

In the following session, the participants were presenting economic sectors most relevant for their national interests, after which there was a discussion aimed at narrowing down the focus into preferably 2 sectors relevant for the whole region. It was concluded that, given the differences between the countries, the focus of future activities should be on 4 sectors which are most relevant: tourism and catering; agriculture, food processing and food industry; transport and logistics; and construction industry.

Mr. Thomas (ETF) in the next session presented the ex-ante impact assessment of the status-quo of WBL in the candidate countries, specifying that the role of ETF is to support candidate countries to implement VET reforms through ex-ante impact assessment and follow-up support; as well as to monitor and analyze progress in VET through a streamlined monitoring system. The current situation in the SEE is that the internship is the main form of WBL, covering 3-year and 4-year programmes; that

social partners are becoming more active at different levels of the VET system; that countries have developed occupational standards which serve as the basis for many VET programmes/qualifications; the legislation regarding WBL is improved but that still there is a need to strengthen capacities for WBL in schools. Additionally, further work is required in making VET of more consistent quality, which, among others, includes clearer definition of roles and responsibilities of different partners in WBL; better training of in-company trainers, secured financing of WBL; creating clearer regulations in the implementation of WBL (such as alternation of school based learning and WBL).

The second day of the seminar started with the presentations of the funding options:

Ms Ožegović Filipović (Tempus foundation) focused on the Erasmus+ options that may be interesting for the SEEVET Net, which include the KA2 Strategic Partnership in VET (through which VET-business partnerships promoting work-based learning can be developed, and the quality of VET provision can be increased), and capacity building in Higher Education (which can focus on developing vocational aspects at tertiary level).

Gunter Schall (Austrian Development Agency) stated that the priorities of the SEEVET Net are in line with the priorities of ADA and that ADA is opened to receiving more information regarding the further development of the project idea. The ADA funding scheme is open throughout the year and it covers only the non-EU member states.

The participants were, throughout the first and second day of the seminar, being divided into working groups streamlining their reflections and discussions on the existing situation in their countries, in the region, with the goal of proposing steps to be taken within the future project.

The conclusions of the working group dealing with the development of occupational standards, included that the first step in screening of existing standards should be the analysis of compatibilities in NQFs or existing lists of occupations (in the absence of NQF in some of the countries) – mapping of occupations descriptions/standards in all 10 countries. Based on this analysis and analysis of inputs provided by the national economy sectors (through analysis of sector profiles and consultations of sector skill councils where they exist, or through using existing mechanisms of cooperation with relevant employers' associations and CoCs' representatives) it will be possible to decide which new occupations should be developed in four selected sectors and which should be improved/modernised. The participants also stressed the importance of developing an online platform for sharing ideas, experiences, methodologies, procedures, regulations, curricula, teaching material, manuals and so on.

If project scope allows, standard of qualification should be developed later and educational profiles based on these standards can be developed in line with national methodologies and procedures, considering methodology and guidelines for implementation of WBL (that will be developed under the project as well). The question of possibilities for piloting of new curricula (based on the joint occupational standard) and WBL was raised and it was mentioned that, given the complexity of piloting activities, a new project will probably be needed.

The working group dealing with the Work-based learning identified the actors relevant for the WBL (the Ministry of Education; VET Centers/Institutions/Agency; VET Councils; Ministry of Labors; Chambers; Sector Committees; Schools; Companies; Teacher/ Instructors; Local communities/authorities; Center for Career Guidance; Parents) as well as stressed the importance of clearly defining the roles and responsibilities of each player in the process. (for example, Ministries of education – in charge of creating legal framework supporting the WBL; VET centers ensuring trainings of teacher and instructors, creating programmes and guidance, new curricula and implementing needs identification in cooperation with the Chambers. Chambers would oversee the needs identification in

the labour market; identification of profiles suitable for WBL; organization of WBL; ensuring quality standards in companies involved in WBL – capacity building of instructors, licensing of instructors, accreditation of companies involved in WBL..., participating in student final exam and creating the register of companies and instructors.

The importance of capacity building activities was stressed for all the actors involved.

Procedures and instruments relevant for WBL that should be developed and shared include modular curricula based on competencies; models for bilateral or tripartite MoU should be developed (Chamber – School – Company); as well as contracts (school, parents, companies).

The project should also tackle open questions, such as how to equip the teachers for WBL; how to create the pool of external experts / mentors; who is responsible for monitoring school-to-work transition and how to establish the tracking system; teachers not being well equipped for WBL; how to establish the accreditation policy; how to ensure sustainable funding for these processes, and how to regulate the position of under aged children in working environment.

In the concluding remarks, it was stated that the work of these working groups will serve as the basis for the development of the concept note of the project, upon which all the participants will be invited to comment and suggest. The concept note should be delivered to the participants for their comments during January 2017. It was also concluded that the Call under which the project should be submitted is Erasmus+ Key Action 2 – Strategic partnerships, with the deadline of 29th March; and to the Austrian Development Agency, following their specific respective requirements. The modality must be found on how to distribute activities combining EU and non-EU members into two project proposals under two funding schemes. It was also concluded that additional workshop will be needed to reach a full consensus on the project proposal.