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# Policy brief

**Project: "Facilitation of Regional  
Professional Education in Agriculture  
and Rural development in EaP countries"**



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The overall amount for the 2018 call for proposals is 250.000 EUR. Grants are available for CSOs from the EaP and EU countries. Key areas of support are democracy and human rights, economic integration, environment and energy, contacts between people, social and labor policies.

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## I. INTRODUCTION

In the last decade, especially after the signing of the Association Agreement (AA) with the European Union (EU) on 27 June 2014 in Brussels, there took place structural changes, the modernization and the vertiginous development of various sectors of the national economy. As efforts are consistent with the launch of various budget support programs, investment projects and EU-funded technical assistance, the immediate benefits are very relevant and palpable to the production and export of goods and services, and less to education and HEALTH. In these areas, structural changes are slower due to specificities, and the positive effects of change and development will be felt later in the medium and long term.

The sphere of science, education and vocational education is a major impact on the economic recovery and the national agricultural sector, especially agriculture and rural development.

The more developed and educated society, the more sustainable development of the economy and the country.

Speaking about Agricultural Technical Vocational Education (VET abbreviation "Education and training"), most of the students of this profile are certainly from rural areas, for whom the training of agricultural specialists is, in fact, the formation of the qualified resource in the environment rural areas, implicitly ensuring rural development and, in a wider context, sustainable rural development. During the last years, the migration of the young population from rural to urban areas has seen large increases, but access to major projects funded by the European Union (EU), the World Bank (WB), the International Fund for Agricultural Development (FIDA) and investments through the European Bank Investment (EIB) has enabled the Republic of Moldova to facilitate the start-up of small and medium businesses in such industries, as meat, milk, wine cellars, traditional products, agribusiness development and agro-tourism.

In this context, the role of VET agricultural education and formation is increasing and is to ensure labor market demand in line with the training needs required by young people and the business environment in rural areas. A major current problem of the agricultural sector and rural development of the Republic of Moldova is the lack of qualifications and youth, which ensure the quality, quantity and innovation of agricultural holdings in the process of modern market competition. According to data from the National Employment Agency (ANOFM), approx. 85% of business enterprises in the Republic of Moldova face with the problem of lack of skilled labor, enterprises require a higher level of professionalism or specific skills of the employers. In the agricultural sector approx. 55% of qualification certificates have a job incapacity that could be included in the production process.

Thus, in the current context, labor markets, agrarian and rural-related education require recasting, by adapting study programs and developing the skills required by the labor market and the business environment. Immediate efforts and actions are needed, to develop youth education in the field of agriculture through partnerships between educational institutions and the business environment with dual formation programs leading to practice and learning based on learning.

At present the study conducted by NGOs for regional cooperation to assess the existing situation and the needs of VET education in the northern region of the Republic of Moldova, in an area of 13 districts and 68 rural localities, represents the opinions, suggestions and potential solutions for improvement the situation in the field of background of 120 representatives of the business environment, civil society and local public administration, as well as 100 students and graduates of agricultural education institutions and related to rural development.

## II. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report includes the study results carried out by the NGO Pro Regional Cooperation of the Republic of Moldova to assess the existing situation, problems and needs of the Technical Vocational Education in the Northern Region of the Republic of Moldova being implemented between August - October 2018 within the Project "Facilitation of Regional Professional Education in Agriculture and Rural Development in Eastern Europe" financed by the European Union through the National Endowment for Democracy.

The concept of the study implementation was based on a quantitative and qualitative questionnaire by means of the direct interviewing of two categories of persons (Category I Stakeholders and Category II - VET students and graduates) and 4 representatives of the SME (NGO - Regional Consulting and Education Centers, Public Sector and students and graduates of VET) from 13 districts and 68 rural localities in the Northern region. The field work has been supplemented with interviews and meetings with key actors in the agricultural and rural development field and tangent or collaborating with VET institutions. The implementation of the study provided for the formal questioning at the headquarters of the entity or place of employment of 220 respondents from 4 groups to the beneficiaries.

The usefulness of the theoretical knowledge received and the accessibility of the professional information from the training institution in the professional training process is considered useful and absolutely useful by approx. 82% of respondents in the VET category students and graduates and only 52% in the category of stakeholders. In this chapter are given some deficiencies in the practical training of the future employees, which implies additional expenses for the employers to work in this field;

Regarding the evaluation of the programs' quality provided by the regional VET institutions only approx. 47% of respondents in the Stakeholder category, and approx. 68% of the VET category students and graduates consider it affordable and good. These qualifications and percentages indicate the existing deficiencies and average quality of studies in VET institutions in the North of the Republic of Moldova, or that the level of education in VET centers does not correspond to the labor market requirements and is to a small extent adjusted to the needs of the real economy. Thus, the unsatisfactory level of professional training of VET graduates and the future labor force represents a major impediment to the development of the Moldova economy;

Regarding the evaluation of VET programs and the study process in VET institutions and the finding of major problems in the field of agricultural education, the following feedback was recorded:

- approx. 66% of the stakeholders category and 78% of the VET graduates estimate the education programs as relevant to their profession and correspond to the needs of the labor market;
- 63% of the stakeholders category and 65% of the VET graduates estimate that the study materials correspond to and admit that they can provide a qualitative training of the future specialists;
- approx. 59% of the stakeholders category and 66% of the VET graduates consider that the study program are using effective teaching methods and the teaching staff have the necessary experience and knowledge to train qualified specialists;
- approx. 59% of the stakeholders category and 72% of VET graduate students find that the study program offers an effective learning opportunity with a good combination of theory and practice;
- 70% of the respondents of the VET category students and graduates believe that vocational training focuses on relevant skills and the development of expected skills in the labor market.

The category of students and graduates of VET institutions have a good and very good attitude towards VET institutions, being confident about the quality of the studies received and the future opportunity to get in the workforce: approx. 82% of the respondents state that the VET education system prepares professionals; for approx. 65% vocational education is useful for future employment; for 75% of the studies are accessible and free of charge, and 72% mention that enrollment in a vocational school is quite easy.

The evaluation of the teachers professionalism - trainers within the VET institutions by the VET category of students and graduates have revealed that the students trust and are professionally trained in the professional field, and have the following opinions: approx. 64% of teachers have necessary knowledge to ensure the teaching of sub-projects; 84% of respondents say that teachers dispose of high professional experience and skills; approx. 82% state they can communicate easily with teachers, and 87% of respondents relate that modern languages are taught by professionals. Regarding training needs and better education programs in VET institutions to prepare qualified and labor-intensive specialists, respondents in the stakeholder category account for a percentage of 74-88%, it is necessary and quite necessary to provide training in the fields of: Marketing & Sales issues; Technological operations; Product Quality Management; Management and business planning issues; Agricultural methodologies and specific skills related to various functions in the agricultural sector. At the same time, major changes are suggested in the study curriculum and practice to ensure the development of useful competencies necessary for the real economy: 87% consider the inclusion of more practical activities, 74% of the respondents support the introduction of the specific training program the agricultural sector and rural development, and 15% support the development of language skills.

More than 69% of all respondents considered that the intervention and efficiency of the programs of International donors supporting education in the agricultural sector and especially in the field of dual training in the Republic of Moldova were effective and highly effective, the main projects and financiers mentioned as follows:

1. The project "Technical Assistance for Education and Training in the Republic of Moldova", Europe aid / 133799 / C / SER / MD / 12, funded by the European Union;
2. The eTwinning Plus project and Erasmus + Program funded by the European Union.
3. The Education for Agriculture (Ed Agri) project, implemented by The Liechtenstein Development Service (LED);
4. The "VEN - Generating Income at VET Schools and Colleges" project, implemented by the non-governmental organization "KulturKontakt Austria";
5. The project "Structural Reform in Technical Vocational Education (VET) in the Republic of Moldova", implemented by GIZ - International Cooperation Agency of Germany;

In the context of problem evaluation associated with the efficiency of studies at VET vocational education and training centers, it was distinctive that the sample of VET students and graduates was much more open and more objective and more oriented towards solving the problems of technical vocational education compared to the stakeholders involved in the research.

This study carried out is a momentary radiography of the existing situation, problems and needs of VET education in the Northern region of the Republic of Moldova, on the basis of which were developed 11 relevant conclusions, 5 recommendations and 5 practical solutions in improving studies efficiency and the practical dual training process.

### III. POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS AND ACTION STEPS

1. According to the Education Index, with a result of 0.725 points, in the year 2016 Moldova ranks 61<sup>st</sup> out of 188 countries included in the United Nations Development Program classification. According to the International Monetary Fund's data, Moldova's GDP per capita ranks 140<sup>th</sup> out of 186 countries with a result of \$ 1803 in 2017 (world average of \$ 10023). These two indices show that in terms of education the Republic of Moldova has relative capacities which, consequently, in the long run lead to the diminution of the economic development. Thus, on the one hand, the low level of development has the effect of limiting investment in education and human capital development, and on the other hand the lack of human resources diminishes the quality and productivity of labor, the main factors of economic growth.  
<http://hdr.undp.org/en/content/education-index>.
2. While spending on education amounted to 7.2% of GDP in the period 2000-2017, these expenditures remain insufficient due to low GDP. Consequently, pupil performance remains one of the lowest on the European continent and investment in education does not ensure the competitiveness of the national economy.
3. The survey generally revealed that the level of education in VET centers corresponds to the requirements of the labor market but needs to be adjusted to the needs of the real economy. Thus, the unsatisfactory level of practical training of the VET graduates and the future labor force may present a major impediment to the development of the economy of the of Moldova.
4. Employers' (stakeholders') opinions reflect that the quality of vocational training at VET centers is relatively acceptable but not the enough satisfactory, that directly affects the qualification of the future workforce and implicitly the development of the enterprise. For these reasons, they do not give priority to taking students to dual practice or education, and it is cheaper and more useful to educate their own employees than to hire new ones.
5. Approximately 47% of respondents consider that the level of education / qualification of students graduating from vocational and specialized education institutions correspond to the requirements of the labor market and to the needs of enterprises in the country, but additional practical training is required for their employment.
6. Approx. 73% of research stakeholders say that the level of education / qualification of students graduating from institutions preparing agricultural specialists does not correspond to the requirements of the labor market. Thus, employers face major difficulties in identifying people with a satisfactory skill in the agricultural field or in the development of rural entrepreneurship on the labor market. Thus, we can say with certainty that at approx. 60% of the entities operating in the agricultural and rural sector still have the problem of finding skilled workers who could be immediately included in the production process.
7. The main problems faced by the stakeholders in hiring young labor specialists are 70-80% due to lack of practical skills, motivation of candidates to work in rural areas and low wages, and 49% state that the required qualifications of the employees not provided by vocational schools or colleges;
8. Approx. 52% of enterprises do not have a training budget and do not work with VET institutions, while 45% of them occasionally collaborate with VET institutions consequently no collaboration is being made for the recruitment of new employees. Only 64% of the

occasional entities work with educational institutions in selection and hire of young professionals.

9. Studies conducted so far suggest that education in VET centers contributes to the economic development and advancement of agricultural production at farm level only due to ensured efficient co-operation in the implementation of dual learning, with the involvement of the business environment in taking students to production practice.
10. Without mutual cooperation between VET centers and the business environment in the implementation of dual education, adjustment of formation to labor market will be delayed instead of anticipatory one.
11. Mutual collaboration between VET centers and business to implement dual education, adjusting education to the labor market will be delayed rather than anticipatory.
12. The most affected by the low quality of the workforce are enterprises with more than 50 employees. In this context, approx. 80% of the most demanded employees for immediate employment are specialists with specific professions for lower-cost agricultural and technical workers (simple workers). The level of employees' demand for the average and upper management level is approx. 50%

#### Recommendations:

1. Increasing investment in education and making it more efficient by funding the areas - the priority sectors of education in VET centers, with their gradual increase according to the degree of employment of graduates in relation to sectoral economic growth.
2. Adjust the education system of VET centers to the requirements of the labor market by involving all stakeholders, especially the state, in developing coherent policies (Ministry of Education, MADRM), education centers and employers in business and rural areas. In this context, within VET centers, paying more attention to the development of cognitive skills, professional skills and knowledge of modern languages that are insufficient.
3. Encourage employers to invest more actively in the future workforce by creating partnerships between businesses and VET-related education institutions.
5. Stimulate entrepreneurship and support the creation of SMEs in rural areas, capable of creating as many productive and competitive jobs. In this context, the development of national programs to facilitate the employment of youth.
6. Broad implementation of the vocational guidance system at all levels of education (school, high school, university) and further professional training.