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CURRENT SITUATION OF THE PROFESSIONAL TRAINING SYSTEM AT THE LEVEL OF ROMANIA

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Abstract: *Vocational education and training systems are in the midst of changes and transitions to the knowledge-based economy and society and therefore their continuous adaptation is required. The relevance of vocational education and training (VET) for the labor market remains a challenge, but the new initiatives aim to improve the situation. In Europe, the economic and social developments of the last decade have shown the increasing need for a European dimension of vocational education and training. Moreover, the transition to a knowledge-based economy, capable of sustainable economic growth, with more and better jobs, with a higher degree of social cohesion, creates new challenges in the field of human resources development.*

Keywords: *education, professional training, vocational education, labor market*

JEL Classification: *I21, I25, I28, I29*

1. Introduction

Over the years, cooperation at European level in the field of vocational education and training has played a decisive role in the creation of the future European society. The enlargement of the European Union adds a new dimension and new challenges, opportunities and demands of the activity in the field of vocational training.

In general, vocational education and training (VET) contributes to the development of human capital, increasing the knowledge, skills and competences of people, as well as social, cultural and identity capital and has positive effects on a personal level, on the level of pay, career development, improving employability, health and quality of life.

Studies in the literature related to VET indicate that the implications of the process are even broader the training process continues to generate benefits and rates of return similar to those of the initial education process (EU cooperation in education and training - ET 2020).

Numerous quantitative studies and research conducted in several states show that VET brings numerous economic and social benefits such as higher wages for workers, increased productivity for organizations and economic growth in general (European Commission, 2017-2019; European Commission, 2015b; Eurofound, 2015; European Commission, 2017a, 2018, 2016b). Also, the VET process is considered a tool for promoting inclusion and social equity, contributing to health and job satisfaction. Also, at the level of the economic entities the process of vocational training leads to the increase of the labor productivity, it encourages the cooperation between the workers, thus creating a positive working environment. The workers respond positively to the “effort” of the company to invest in the training of human resources.

At the national level, the recognized economic and social benefits of VET include increasing competitiveness and sustaining economic growth, facilitating the integration of disadvantaged youth and other groups into the labor market, and promoting social inclusion, in general, by improving employment and promotion prospects for individuals.

2. Vocational training in the context of the Europe 2020 strategy

European cooperation on vocational education and training was launched in Copenhagen in 2002 (The Copenhagen Declaration, 2002) and was subsequently strengthened by the Bruges Communiqué (EQAVET, 2010) in 2010 and the Riga Conclusions in 2015 (European Commission, 2015a).

The Copenhagen process was launched with the Copenhagen Declaration (2002), approved on November 30, 2002 by ministers with responsibilities in the field of vocational education and training in the Member States, the candidate countries for accession, the EFTA-EEA states, the European social partners and The European Commission. They agreed on priorities and strategies for promoting mutual trust, transparency and recognition of competences and

qualifications in order to increase mobility and facilitate access to lifelong learning. The declaration aimed at improving European cooperation in the field of VET. This highlights the contribution of education and training to the challenges identified in the Lisbon strategy:

- strengthening the European dimension of VET;
- improving the transparency of information and counseling systems;
- recognition of competences and qualifications - including non-formal and informal education;
- promoting cooperation in the field of quality assurance.

The next three ministerial meetings – Maastricht (European Commission, 2004), Helsinki (European Commission, 2006), Bordeaux (European Commission, 2008) – reiterated the priorities set in Copenhagen and, in addition, specified the priority areas for the next period. The progress evaluation meeting, organized in Bordeaux at the end of 2008, set the objectives and directions of action for the period 2009-2010, the most important being:

- implementation of tools and schemes to promote VET cooperation;
- increasing the quality and attractiveness of VET systems – by promoting the attractiveness of VET within all target groups and excellence and quality;
- improving relations between VET and the labor market – by ensuring the involvement of social partners; developing the validation and recognition of non-formal and informal learning outcomes; increasing mobility;
- strengthening the cooperation arrangements – by increasing the efficiency of mutual learning activities; strengthening the relations between VET, school education, higher education and adult vocational training.

Through these documents the European Union, the candidate countries, the countries of the European Economic Area, the social partners of the EU, the European Commission and the European providers of education and training have agreed on a set of objectives for the period 2015-2020 (European Commission, 2008):

a) “promoting learning in the workplace in all its forms, paying particular attention to the apprenticeship (by involving social partners, businesses, chambers and VET providers) and by stimulating innovation and entrepreneurship;

b) further development of quality assurance mechanisms in VET;

c) increasing access to VET and qualifications for all, through more flexible and permeable systems, and by facilitating the validation of non-formal and informal learning;

d) further strengthen key competences in VET programs and provide more effective opportunities to acquire or develop these skills through initial vocational education and training (VET-I) and continuing education and training (VET-C) .

e) introduction of systematic approaches and opportunities for the initial and continuous professional development of teachers, trainers and mentors of VET, both in the school environment and in the workplace ”.

These European Commission actions in the field of VET are supported by the European Center for the Development of Vocational Training (Cedefop) (which contributes to the development and implementation of European VET policies) and the European Training Foundation (ETF) (which contributes, in the context of EU policies). in the field of external relations, in the development of human capital).

The VET systems in the member countries are supported by the European Union either through various instruments, such as:

- through the European Credit System for Vocational Education and Training (SECEFP), the VET students are helped to obtain the validation and recognition of the competences and knowledge acquired in different systems and countries;
- member States are supported in promoting and monitoring the continuous improvement of VET systems (based on commonly agreed references) through the European Quality Assurance Reference Framework (EQAVET);
- the 14 criteria contained in the Council Recommendation on a European Framework for Quality and Effective Apprenticeship Programs (European Commission, 2017b) that EU countries and stakeholders should use to develop efficient and high quality apprenticeship programs;
- starting with 2016, every year, the European Week of professional competences is being carried out, with the aim of improving the attractiveness and image of VET;
- in 2013, the European Alliance for Apprentices was established, which effectively mobilized EU Member States, countries of the European Free Trade Association and EU candidate countries and over 230 stakeholders to take part in strengthening the offer of apprenticeship programs. and increasing their quality and image;
- the European network of apprentices, created in 2017 in order to support its members in adopting measures at VET and apprenticeship programs;

- in developing policies and practices for teachers and trainers to enhance their potential, as well as to improve apprenticeship programs and workplace learning, the decision-makers are supported by the ET2020 Working Group for VET;
- the interagency group on technical and vocational education and training (IAG-TVET), led by UNESCO, ensures the coordination of activities between the main international organizations, which are involved in the policies, programs and research activities regarding vocational and technical education and training;

or through financial instruments, of the type:

- ✓ the Erasmus + program, which has an indicative (initial) financial package totaling EUR 14.774 billion. For the period 2014-2020, almost 3 billion euros of this amount will be allocated to the VET and every year, about 130000 students and 20,000 VET staff benefit from the mobility opportunities offered by Erasmus +;
- ✓ the European Social Fund (ESF): between 2014 and 2020, around € 15 billion was allocated, among other things, to strengthening equal access to lifelong learning and promoting a flexible career path, as well as improving the relevance for the labor market of systems. of education and training.

As a key instrument for the modernization of vocational education and training, the Strategic Framework for European cooperation in the field of vocational education and training (EU cooperation in education and training - ET 2020) elaborated in 2012 by the European Council, can make a major contribution to achieving the objectives of the Europe 2020 strategy (European Commission, 2010). But for this, ET 2020 needs to be adjusted by updating its work priorities, tools and governance structure.

In this context, the long-term strategic objectives of EU vocational training policies are:

- i) to improve the quality and efficiency of vocational education and training;
- ii) to promote equity, social cohesion and active involvement of citizens;
- iii) to increase creativity and innovation, including entrepreneurship, at all levels of education and training.

But, in order for lifelong learning and mobility to become reality, there is a need for flexible access to new learning and qualifications, the development of a strategic approach regarding the internationalization of EFP-I and EFP-C, but also the promotion of international mobility.

To increase the chances of success in life, to support equitable, sustainable and inclusive growth and to guarantee social cohesion, it is necessary to increase the level of skills, promote cross-cutting skills and find ways to better anticipate future needs in the force market. for work.

In this context, in June 2016, the European Commission (2016a) adopted a comprehensive New Agenda for competences in Europe. Its purpose is to guarantee the assimilation of a wide range of skills from an early age and to maximize the human capital of Europe, which will ultimately lead to increased professional insertion and competitiveness, as well as stimulation. economic growth in Europe. Also, in 2017, EU leaders proclaimed the European Pillar of Social Rights, as a guide for increasing employment and social convergence and for promoting better opportunities especially for young people in Europe (European Commission, 2018).

2.1. Vocational training in Romania from the perspective of targets and indicators derived from the Europe 2020 Strategy

As a member state of the European Union, Romania is actively contributing to the strategic framework for European cooperation in the field of education and training - ET 2020. In this context, the objectives assumed by Romania in the field of education and lifelong learning, for 2020, are:

- reducing the early school leaving rate to a level below 11.3%, the EU target being 10.0%);
- reaching at least 26.7% of young people between the ages of 30-34 who have a tertiary or equivalent education level (EU target: 40%);
- promoting lifelong learning and increasing the participation rate of the population in vocational training continues up to 10% (EU target: 15%);
- increasing the impact of career counseling services offered to secondary school students, which would significantly contribute to informing and raising awareness of students' native abilities, both by themselves and their families and by teachers;
- reducing the level of functional illiteracy;
- increasing the employment rate of graduates between the ages of 20 and 34, at most 3 years after graduation. With an employment rate of 70.6% of graduates in 2017, on the whole of the ISCED education levels 3-8, Romania is below the European average of 76.2% and far from the target of 82%, proposed at European level for the year 2020;
- the participation rate of adults in lifelong learning programs was, in

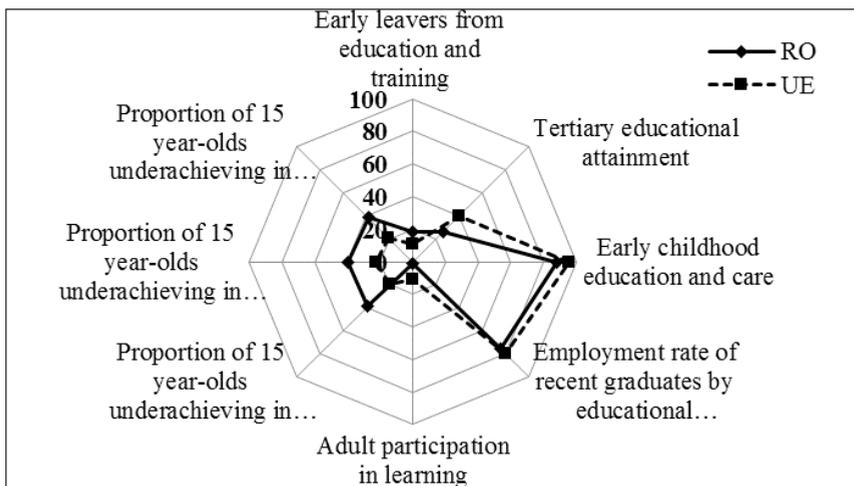
2017, 1.1%, well below the European value of 10.9% and far from the target of 12% proposed by Romania for 2020.

Therefore, the analysis of the indicators and benchmarks underlying the elaboration of policies in the field of vocational education and training in Romania indicates that the initiatives adopted in the last years have led to an improvement of the situation, but the differences with the EU average are still significant (Figure 1), (European Commission, 2017-2019). The relevance on the labor market of vocational education and training (VET) is, for Romania, still a challenge, but the new initiatives adopted in recent years are aimed at improving the situation.

Romania, as a Member State, elaborated, by an act of the Chamber of Deputies, the Decision no. 92 of 4 October 2016, opinions on the Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions A new agenda for competences in Europe (NACE) COM (2016). By this statement of principle of the Romanian legislative, the main axes of the European initiative are supported (European Commission, 2016b).

In the spirit of the recommendation, the Ministry of Labor and Social Justice has also assumed the role of coordinator of its implementation at national level and a series of recent changes to the Romanian legislation have taken into account the need for the training of persons with low qualifications, including of persons with level 1 qualification.

Figure 1. Indicators of vocational education and training in Romania in a European context



Data source: Education and Training Monitor (EU Commission, 2017-2019)

According to the data provided by the National Institute of Statistics (TEMPO-online database, 2017), in the last years there has been a tendency of decrease of the employed population that has primary studies or has no studies at all (from 3.54% in 2015 to 2.79% of the population occupied in 2017). Thus, approximately 5-6% of the unemployed are without education or only with primary education.

In this context, by GD no. 92/2018 (2018) for amending the Government Decision no. 1.352/2010 regarding the approval of the structure of the Classification of occupations in Romania, the Government established the renaming of Major Group 9 of the COR, so that it is no longer called “Unqualified Workers”, but “Elementary Occupations”. Through these changes, the need for training for persons with low qualification level was identified and the possibility of authorizing vocational training courses for level 1 qualification is ensured.

An important step in the Romanian legislation was the transposition of the European Qualifications Framework (CEC-EQF), revised in May 2017 (European Commission, 2017c), in the national regulations through the approval of Order no. 5039/2126 of September 05 (2018) regarding the approval of the correspondence between the levels of the National Qualifications Framework, the documents of studies/qualifications that are issued, the type of education and vocational training programs in Romania through which the qualification levels can be acquired, the reference levels of the Framework European qualifications, as well as the access conditions corresponding to each level of qualification.

The problem of the competitiveness of human resources has been put back on the decision agenda as a priority area of intervention in the short and medium term in the context of Romania’s efforts to counteract the effects of the global economic crisis. Also, the context of the training policies is marked, in the last years, by the elaboration of the Strategy of education and vocational training (VET) that promotes the smart growth, achievable through major investments in education, research and sustainable innovation, inclusive growth, with emphasis on the creation of places. employment and poverty reduction (Ministry of Education, 2016). This is complementary to the National Strategy for Lifelong Learning 2015-2020 (Ministry of Education, 2015a) and the Strategy for reducing early school leaving (Ministry of Education, 2015b) and together with them aims to achieve the common objectives at European level regarding the increased participation in the labor market. a highly skilled and adaptable workforce, improving the education system and increasing its adaptability to the demand of the labor market, promoting lifelong education,

increasing the adaptability of employees and businesses, ensuring the qualifications and knowledge necessary for integration and mobility in the labor market and facilitating development economic.

Regarding the initial vocational training, in Romania, the high share of young people enrolled in vocational and technical education in the total of the students enrolled in the upper secondary education demonstrates the importance of the initial vocational training for the Romanian labor market. In the 2017-2018 school year, the percentage of students who opted for the profiles in the vocational sector was 8.0% and 2.5% of the total school population were included in vocational education.

Continuous vocational training ensures the growth and diversification of professional skills, by initiating, qualifying, retraining, perfecting and specializing people in search of a job, in order to achieve their mobility and (re) integration into the labor market. The vocational training programs for people looking for a job, according to the law, are coordinated at national level by the National Agency for Employment, which also organizes vocational training programs for these categories of adults through their own centers, through private centers or through authorized training providers. Also, companies can develop programs for continuous training of employees.

Statistical data available for 2015 indicate that the provision of vocational training programs to the employees in order to correlate the level of education and qualification with the demands of the labor market was a priority objective for 13586 companies (representing 26.7% of the total enterprises from Romania). The continuous professional training offered by the Romanian companies focused more on the training of the employed personnel through other forms of CVT (other than the courses) of the type: guided training, training or practical experience in the workplace; rotating staff to different jobs, by exchanging experience, temporary posting for specialization; training at conferences, lectures, seminars, the main purpose of which is the professional training of the employees; participation in training / knowledge improvement circles, quality circles; self-instruction including by electronic means of learning.

In terms of investment in vocational training, this was more pronounced at the level of large companies (67.4%), the share of medium-sized enterprises that offered CVT to employees in 2015 was 38.0%, and of small ones of 21.7%.

By economic activities, 25.1% of the total number of companies that provided training to employees through courses (internal and / or external) belonged to the manufacturing industry, 23.0% to the commercial ones (23.0%) and 12.8% to the from construction.

By size classes, the share of small enterprises in the total of companies that offered CVT was 55.8%, while large enterprises represented only 11.0%.

The overall participation rate for CVT courses in 2015 increased by 3.5 pp compared to 2010 and by 3.9 pp compared to 2005, thus reaching 21.3%. Regarding the overall participation rate of women in CVT courses, this was slightly higher compared to that of men (21.5% for women compared to 21.1% for men). By economic activities, the highest values of the overall participation rate were registered in financial and insurance intermediation (52.9%); production and supply of electricity and heat, gas, hot water and air conditioning (45.8%); the extractive industry (37.3%); respectively information and communications (32.2%). The lowest overall participation rates were found in other service activities (6.9%), respectively hotels and restaurants (8.7%).

And the rate of participation in CVT courses registered slightly higher values in 2015 than in 2010 (42.3% in 2015 compared to 41.2% in 2010) The participation rate of women in CVT courses was superior to that of men, both at the level of all enterprises, and by their size classes.

The highest level of participation in CVT courses (51.7%) was observed among small enterprises, with medium enterprises registering the lowest level of participation rate (36.5%).

The analysis of the evolution of the participation rate in CVT courses by age groups shows that within the 25-54 years age segment the highest value was recorded, regardless of the size of the enterprise (Figure 2), followed closely by that of young people under 25 years.

Figure 2. Participation rate for employees from companies that offered continuous vocational training courses, by size classes of companies and age groups, in 2015



Data source: TEMPO-online database (2017), National Institute of Statistics

The highest values of the participation rate were registered in the activities of financial and insurance intermediaries (67.0%); the production and supply of electricity and heat, gas, hot water and air conditioning (49.3%); information and communications (49.2%); trade (47.3%); respectively the extractive industry (46.5%). The lowest participation rates were found in constructions (27.4%), respectively other service activities (29.7%).

In 2015, only 4.0% of the companies offered initial vocational training courses (FP-I), by economic activities, their choice regarding the FP-I offer varied according to the specifics of each one, but also of the resources, financial and material available. Most of the companies that provided FP-I were those in the manufacturing and trading industries. The main reason for which the companies offered the FP-I was “the qualification of the potential employees according to the needs of the company”. Characteristic for the companies that carry out information and communications activities, namely the production and supply of electricity and heat, gas, hot water and air conditioning, is the fact that, usually, they employ 88.7 participants in the FP-I %, respectively 80.0%.

3. Conclusions

The role of vocational education and training in the labor market is still a challenge, both at European and national level. The new initiatives adopted aim to improve the situation. Implementation of EU recommendations regarding the education and training system, the measures adopted by the Member States regarding the professional development and updating of the qualifications and standards of vocational training aim at increasing the quality and efficiency of the workforce.

Statistical data shows that, in Romania, the share of investments made by enterprises for continuous training in total labor costs is very low.

Despite the urgent need to improve the qualification and retraining of the workforce at both national and regional levels, participation and access to learning among adults remain very low. Moreover, the participation in adult learning was 0.9% in Romania in 2018, well below the EU average of 11.1%. Also, although the digital skills of the population are improving, however, Romania continues to remain among the lowest in the European Union.

Regarding the continuous vocational training, 26.7% of the Romanian companies compared to 72.6% in the EU-28 offered vocational training courses to their employees in 2015, 42.3% of their employees participating in this activity. For the next period, with all the measures and policies adopted, there remain a

series of challenges, which can be mentioned: i) limited supply of non-formal education and training; ii) mobilization / reduction of the number of inactive adults; iii) insufficient coordination between stakeholders; iv) restrictive access to professional qualification programs for persons with reduced qualifications; v) monitoring, quality assurance and staff training; and so on.

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