

Models of Private Sector Involvement in Vocational Education and Training

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ABSTRACT

Since 2008 youth unemployment and poverty have been a challenge for many countries. In order to equip young people in practical knowledge and skills and help them in transition to labour market governments started to invest in vocation education and training (VET). However effective VET is hard to build. In the text I analyse qualitatively data from 23 national reports covering VET systems prepared during Torino Process for European Training Foundation (ETF). The analysis shows that there are many obstacles to overcome: low prestige and attractiveness of VET for youngsters and their parents, aging work force, pending reforms on school management, ability to form partnerships between public and private sector. The text describes successes and challenges connected to private sector involvement in VET and builds on a theory of partnerships from Marriot and Goyder (2009) and Hands (2005). Additionally the paper provides examples of good practices, such as: clear division of responsibilities between schools and employers, tax incentives for employers, cooperation between state, university and companies.

1 Literature review

1.1. Vocational education and training

After the global economic crisis of 2008 youth unemployment had been growing, leading young families to poverty. Moreover, experience of early adulthood unemployment affects later career negatively. In addition, employers reported a gap between skills obtained by youngsters at schools and qualifications required in the labor market. In order to resolve this problems many countries reforming educational systems aim to attract more students to vocational education and training (VET) to equip young people in practical knowledge and skills to ease their transition to labour market. Vocational education should be geared by the needs of the job market in order to prepare graduates become educated, trained and skilled personnel (Evans, 2014; Hamid, Aribowo, & Desmira, 2017) or to create their own business.

The European Commission (EC) launched in 2008 the initiative: “New skills for new jobs”, and persuades to include work based learning (WBL) in vocational education. Teaching practical skills and equipping youngsters in vocational competences is promoted not only in

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Member States, but also in partner countries who benefit from European help. Vocation education and training has been in focus of many donor organizations, such as GIZ (Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit), ILO (International Labour Organization), Swiss Founds and many others since a decade.

Although the recommendation to shift focus from acquiring higher education rather to vocational education and training is not new, still many countries struggle to implement effective solutions in this area. There are many reasons for this: low prestige of VET, poor infrastructure, outdated curricula. The paper elaborates on this in further sections. Moreover, engaging employers in modules of work based learning is complicated as they do not see immediate benefits for their business and are reluctant to engage in VET. Allowing students to learn and work in a company requires a change in the pattern of doing business, which is never easy, and can be costly (Gajda, 2004). There is a lot of attention given to underline the benefits of work based learning (WBL) for schools and students, but not so much about private sector benefits. WBL can be a way to recruit best employees and train them according to the rules of any particular company. Probation time in these circumstances can be paid by the state. Only if both parties' needs are addressed, this endeavor is sustainable.

1.2. Models of partnerships

Forming a partnership is always complicated and requires planning and needs' assessment of both parties. Cooperation is never easy and rarely happens on its own (Wilson&Nelson 2000). There are certain stages of partnerships:

- common understanding of situation and respect for mutual goals
- establishment of joint commitment and considering the implications of the program
- at the stage of implementation/ execution, carried out action planning, resource management, definition of roles and responsibilities each partner, as well as capacity building
- evaluation of the partnership in order to decide on renewal, improvement or termination of partnerships (Frakn&Smith 2000)

In order for the partnerships to be sustainable – it needs a realistic planning, detailed implementation, checking and determining feedback and follow-up program (Marriott & Goyder, 2009). However if we review partnership programs implemented in the education sector (Hands 2005), there are more focus on the needs of students, the achievement of school programs, not on employers benefits.

There are also obstacles on the administrative level: pending reforms, rapidly changing governments. Some countries lack appropriate law that enables cooperation between school and other partners, including private companies. In many countries educational law allows only teachers to contact with students, no NGO or employer can be invited to teach or lecture. Literature shows also challenges connected to partnerships in mental models that suggest partnerships as troublesome and fragile; low level of capacities and capabilities of partners; low trust between partners (UNESCO, 2013; Lannert, Munbodh, & Verma, 1999).

The validation of non formal learning (VNFIL) system is formally in place (corresponding regulations are approved by the Government) and there is an institution authorised for its implementation. However, in practice this mechanism is not functioning, mainly due to financial but also procedural issues. One of the main weaknesses of the existing legislation. (Ar.586)

Therefore forming partnerships in education is complicated, because for a long time education and labour market were considered as separate systems. There can be different goals of those

partnerships: (a) infrastructure improvement (buildings, computers or special machinery to learn certain vocation), (b) knowledge, skills and competences development (both among teachers and students), (c) system change (new curricula, new learning approach).

The below figure shows actors, assets and goals of educational partnerships.

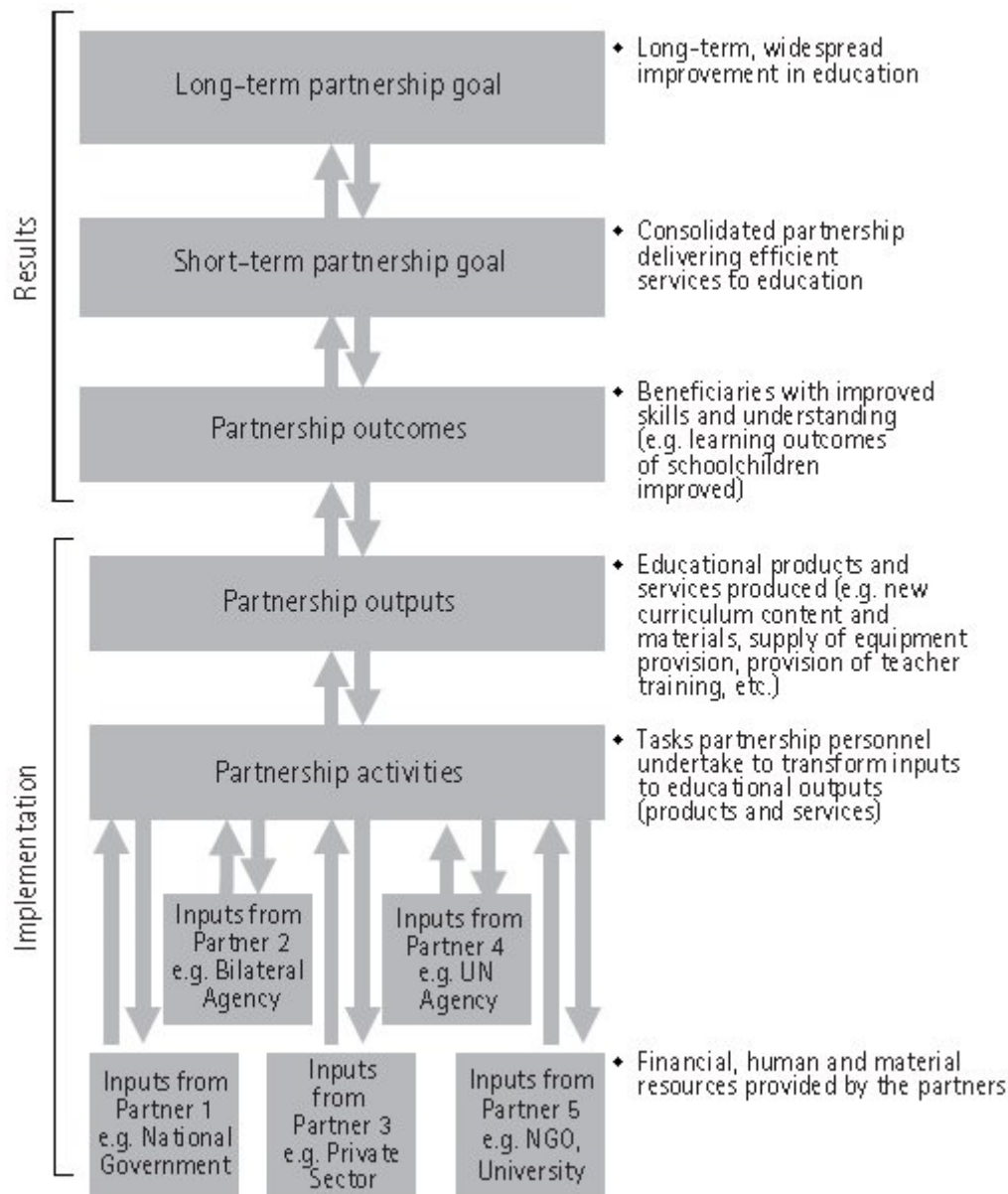


Figure 1. Chain of Multi-Stakeholder Partnerships in Education

Source: Chain of Multi-Stakeholder Partnerships in Education (Marriott & Goyder, 2009:21)

There are a few patterns for companies engagement: (a) enabling students to use companies' machinery (b) sending an employee to teach youngsters and/or teachers about novelties in the field, (c) sharing practical knowledge about doing certain business, (d) explaining case studies.

This paper will show some data about involvement of private sector in VET and some good practices as well as institutional framework that is essential to make educational partnerships work.

2 Methods

This cross-country overview was prepared on the basis of results from the Torino Process. The Torino Process is a biennial review of vocational education and training (VET), which countries in East and South-East Europe, Central Asia, South and East Mediterranean and the Southern Caucasus (further “partner countries”) are carrying out since 2010 under the coordination of the European Training Foundation (ETF).¹ Last process (2018-2020) covered 23 countries in these regions: Albania, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Egypt, Georgia, Israel, Jordan, Kazakhstan, Kosovo, Kyrgyz Republic, Lebanon, Republic of Northern Macedonia, Moldova, Montenegro, Palestine, Russia, Serbia, Tajikistan, Tunisia, Turkey, Ukraine and Uzbekistan. Inspired by the European Union (EU) Copenhagen-Bruges Process,² the focus of review is on VET policies and their impact on national VET systems, and on the ways these systems respond to and shape social and economic developments in these countries. Countries were publishing these reports at the beginning of 2020.

The methodology of the Torino Process foresees a structured, formal process of self-reporting by partner countries with the aim of collecting and interpreting primary evidence on VET, as described next. The findings are documented in the form of country reports, which provide a basis for secondary thematic analysis, like the one presented in this paper. The questions in the analytical framework take stock of developments in five review dimensions: vision and VET strategy, economic and labour market context of VET, socio-demographic context of VET, internal efficiency of the VET system, and VET governance. The questions are organized in five groups (building blocks), one for each dimension.³

The reports were subsequently coded with below mentioned codes: **Policy Solution (PS).1** Qualification frameworks, **PS.2** Work-based learning (e.g., dual education, apprenticeship systems), **PS.3** Staff training (pre-service and in-service training of teachers, principals), **PS.4** Evidence collection systems (establishment, improvement), **PS.5** Financing of VET (e.g. per capita funding, public-private partnerships), **PS.6** Decentralisation of education system, **PS.7** Provider network adjustments (optimisation, establishment of new providers such as centres of VET excellence), **PS.8** Curricular reforms (e.g. modularisation, changes in programme content, etc.), **PS.9** Private sector involvement, **PS.10** Inclusive education, **PS.11** Provision of support for learners, **PS.12** Changes in VET governance and management modalities, **PS.13** RFIL (recognition of prior/informal and non-formal learning), **PS.14** Capital and infrastructure investments. There were 3629 codes total concerning these aspects of policy making in above countries. Further qualitative analysis concerned PS.2 Work based learning (90 codes) and PS9: Private sector involvement (151 codes). There were also 17 IDI with educational experts from various countries analyzed quantitatively.

In this text I will not share the names of countries I will treat them as responders in interviews and give a special codes to anonymize the content, f.e. G.151 – where G stands for a country, and 151 for number of paragraph from the report.

¹ The European Training Foundation is an Agency of the European Union with a mandate to support non-EU members in their efforts to reform their systems for skills and human capital development. See www.etf.europa.eu for more information.

² For more information see <https://www.eqavet.eu/What-We-Do/European-Policy/Copenhagen-Process> and http://ec.europa.eu/dgs/education_culture/repository/education/policy/vocational-policy/doc/brugescom_en.pdf.

³ A full overview of the guidelines and analytical framework of the Torino Process 2016 can be found here: https://www.etf.europa.eu/sites/default/files/m/56C067652F13DD66C1257F76005AFA6B_Torino%20Process%202016-17.pdf

3 Results

3.1. Challenges in making VET effective

3.1.1. Low prestige of VET

The role of VET in improvement of youngsters situation on the labour market is unquestionable. However, countries report that attracting students to VET is not easy. VET is considered as less prestigious than higher education both for students and their parents. After decades of encouragement for university degree and suggestions that higher education increases chances in the job market, people withdrawn their attention from vocational education and training. Meanwhile research show (Cedefop 2017) that VET graduates are successful and much needed in labour market. Their skills are sought by employers and incomes of VET graduates are satisfying.

How to change the maintainability of the parents even before the students? If you ask the parents about the future of their children, maybe you'll find 80% and they will tell you "yes, I would like to see my children a doctor or an engineer", even their children are not successful in this, but they dream to see them as doctor or an engineer, even they know that there are no jobs. So this is a part of the culture and it's not easy to change. (P.IDI)

The image of low prestige of VET is strengthened by outdated equipment in many schools and poorly trained teachers. Years of neglecting vocational education brought shortages in infrastructure investment. Moreover teachers are not trained adequately. Many countries struggles with aging workforce (TALIS 2018). Majority of observed countries mentioned that their teachers are mostly people trained in different educational and economical setting when technology was not developed to current extend. Their knowledge is not relevant to requirements of modern world. Due to the lack of state resources for teachers training they have few opportunities to update their knowledge and skills.

3.1.2. Educational strategies

In recent years, governments have made efforts to increase the involvement of the trade unions and employers' organizations in the skills development system, as to use their inputs into education and labour market policymaking. This has been done through different initiatives, such as National Qualification Frameworks and occupational standards. The need of involving private sector is stated explicitly in revised reports and national strategies when updating and reforming vocational education and training occurs. 23 strategies have been analyzed and there are three categories of planning modernization of vocational education: (1) strategy only, (2) establishment of new bodies, (3) action plan.

Strategy only

Some of the analyzed documents include only strategic visions:

- *The sector will be more involved in the vocational and technical education processes and the cooperation opportunities with the sector leaders will be increased (G156),*
- *The role of the private sector is to assist VET institutions in curriculum development, including training through enterprise participation in curriculum review, student assessment, widespread use of hands-on exercises, and assistance in career guidance decisions. (Uz.963)*

- *Trade Unions Confederation, Employer Association and the civil society organizations are the recognized partners of the Ministry and their engagement in VET is guaranteed at policymaking process (G.608)*⁴

Although it is important to acknowledge the role of private sector, its engagement rarely happens unaided.

Establishment of new bodies

Other documents focused on establishing new bodies or committees to manage mainly qualification frameworks or implementing earlier strategies. Those bodies, such as sector councils, can be responsible for consulting curricula, evaluation of new qualifications, developing National Qualifications Systems, checking whether the learning outcomes of presented programs are adequate to current world of work, developing quality assurance in VET schools. Work of those councils is often supported by donor organizations (Twinning).

- *Members of Trade Unions are present in School Boards of the VET schools, management of the VET Centre and VET Council, Boards for Cooperation and Public Confidence in HEIs, sectoral committees for qualifications, etc. (M.224)*
- *The increase of the private sector involvement in identifying training needs, and development of occupational standards and TVET programs' curricula through their participation in technical committees. (NM.325)*
- *The framework emphasizes that the involvement of stakeholders should be ensured at each level of VET governance. (U.426)*
- *The concrete steps taken by the state are expected (Sectoral Coordination Council, Framework for Enhanced Social Partnership in VET, Tripartite Memorandum of Understanding, National VET council, sector committees and etc.) to have positive influence on the further development of the system. (G.608)*

Action plan

The third group of documents include implementation plans. Some partnerships are only between state and social partners – trade unions, and others directly refer to employers.

- *National and international sectoral cooperation protocols and education projects, which can be used as a good practice model will be implemented. (G.230)*
- *Signing agreements between TVET institutions and private sector for cooperation/partnership in implementing training, developing curricula and learning materials, providing of equipment, management of the training process/facilities (J.86)*
- *It is crucial to come up with a platform for initiating social partnerships at the micro level: between a specific educational institution and a specific enterprise or several enterprises in a specific administrative unit (district, city or region). For this, the relevant ministries should identify a point of contact – a speciality (one or several) of a vocational profession – that the labour market demands most in the target area. The respective educational institutions can be given the status of 'experiment-supporting stations' for the development of social partnerships (T.651)*

As the engagement of civil society and employers in the management of VET institution is still weak, the ministries of various countries are working to simplify engagement of stakeholders and to define stimulating mechanisms for them. Implementing an action plan seem to be the most effective tool and gives hopes for sustainable effects. Some countries develop different incentives for employers, such as tax release or tax immunity.

⁴ These are quotes from national reports.

3.1.3. Partnership goals

Infrastructure

Partnerships may have different goals. I will present four main of them. The easiest way to support VET is to invest in schools' infrastructure. Almost all countries mentioned equipment shortages and poor infrastructure as one of main VET problems. International organizations are active in this field and provide modernization of buildings, equipment for vocational schools and centers for career development. This is a popular area of donors support, those investments are needed for two reasons – first to provide updated equipment and materials for students to learn, secondly – the state of infrastructure are part of VET's image. If the buildings and equipment remember previous century – it is hard to attract students to vocational education.

Investments from the State Budget (except those made within the EU SBS program) to improvement of the VET institutions infrastructure are extremely limited. In fact, all other institutions not involved in the support mentioned in the above paragraph, are still in the conditions inherited from the 1980s or have only little parts of premises renovated during the last decades, or extremely limited training equipment which can be considered as relatively modern. Some budgetary investments for improving the building conditions are foreseen for 2019-2023. (Ar.608)

Upskilling and reskilling

Other type of investing in infrastructure is establishing new vocational and training centers for excellence available also for adults. These centers offer short courses and vocational training. Digitalization of certain branches forced people to change their occupation obtaining new qualification by adults. Today a standard person will change occupation seven times during lifetime – so it is crucial to make possible obtaining new skills and qualifications in a flexible way (Cedfop 2017). Apart from its training function, those centers could perform certain 'hub services', which could support industry responsiveness and the VET system reform through facilitation of skills innovations in the selected sectors and the design of additional services, including sector cooperation and knowhow exchange. Most VET centers implement dual training practices with a proportion of 40% of theory and 60% of practical training. This approach is aimed at solving the problem of mismatch between the skills of job seekers and the needs of the labour market. It also helps to increase the responsibility of employers for the quality of workforce training (U.145).

However, sometimes the centers are forced to close down due to unsustainable founding.

The ideas of the multifunctional VET centres, the introduction of development functions and the organisation of work-based learning have been or are being piloted in several donor-supported institutions and programmes. However, to date, the status of only one multifunctional VET centre in K. has been put on a legal basis. Even there problems remain, such as the possibility to hire and pay (higher fees to) specialist trainers for adult courses and to generate and reinvest own income, which impede the widening of target groups and training offers. (Al.768).

Staff training

Other partnerships aim in staff training. Companies provide trainings for teachers. Teachers are also invited to study visits in partner countries to learn new didactics and acquire new materials for teaching. The feedback of these project is positive as both teachers and students appreciated the content of the new programs, which made students more engaged and active (NM.393, Az.402).

This pilot provided a successful example of integrating entrepreneurship within the VET teaching system, and how students can be supported to sharpen their creative skills. In fact, Minister of Education & Higher Education, as per the meeting with the association, requested funding to have this Entrepreneurial learning in VET schools, and 50 teachers will be trained as a pilot project to be expanded to other schools. The implementation date and process is yet to be determined. (L.345)

Although changing teachers' and principals' mindsets seems to be a challenge in many cases. New approaches for teaching require constant learning which is inconvenient for many teachers. New technologies applied in schools also force teachers to terminate with patterns they used to.

The aim is to have coder maker integrated in all VET schools. However, the process was not smooth and main challenges relate to the sustainability of this initiative given its dependency on donor funds, the mentality of the schools directors to integrate creative learning among students, and the binding structure of the VET system. Lebanon, poz.345

Work based learning

Other partnerships are focused on work based learning (WBL). State must enable and encourage private sector involvement. First there have to exist legal procedures for private companies to get in touch with students. Relations between schools and employers have to be regulated, f.e. how many hours for apprenticeship is given to the students, who is in charge of student while at employer's, is work based learning obligatory, or voluntary for each student – these are questions that must be addressed.

Employers are often reluctant to engage in VET, they do not see positive aspects of inviting students to work in their companies. However, donors' mediation has a positive impact on engaging stakeholders, especially employers, in VET reforms. There are successful cases of facilitating agreements between employers, students and schools in implementing apprenticeship programs (preparing contracts, explaining the rules to all parties of the process). An agreement between the company organizing the industrial practice, the student (and his / her family), municipal authorities (for the provision of a job and industrial practice) to guarantee its sustainability. A mentor is assigned to each student undergoing internship, who supervises and monitors the progress of the internship. Employers can be also directly involved in evaluating vocational college graduates for technical proficiency, both in theory and practice (Uzb.961).

It is important for employers that they can select candidates. In some cases schools do not provide this opportunity and those partnerships are evaluated as less effective and more fragile. If the company is allowed to select their own candidates it is easier to develop individual learning plans with in-company trainer and school instructor. After the apprentice company staff can evaluate students' progress. Nevertheless all parties have to be prepared for a their new role. Azerbaijan reported over 60% of graduates able to either remain in the companies as an employee or get full time employment in the sectors in the same occupations (Az.386).

Engagement of employers can be divided according to the scale of private company. Bigger corporations can be involved in the process of organizing career guidance. For example, a company in Uzbekistan has developed and implemented the *Find Your Vocation* program, which will help high school students choose their future profession (Uz.667). Other companies may be involved in apprenticeships programs, teachers training and consultation of learning materials.

Positive shifts in the process of engaging stakeholders, especially employers, in the process and appraisal of qualifications, which have happened as a result of the implementation of project initiatives of international organizations. (T.650).

3.1.4. Good practices of public private partnerships

Other partnerships may aim in development and implementation of wide educational change. Those concerns especially cooperation of universities with big companies (Kaz.190). An example from Tajikistan is a good practice. A partnership was signed between Ministry of Education, the Union of Chambers and Commodity Exchanges and Economics and Technology University in 2019 for 10 years. This partnership would coordinate 81 vocational and technical High Schools – one in each provinces of the country to apply a new curriculum. It is aimed to facilitate the adaptation of the students to digital transformation, and to create environments where they can learn by developing robotic literacy and entrepreneurship, critical and creative thinking skills by establishing R & D, Design and Skills workshops in schools. Successful students will have access to scholarships. Local Chambers and Commodity Exchanges will help those students to find employment in a short time after graduation (T.750). Partnerships between universities and companies aim also in exchanging the know-how, knowledge and R&D findings – to transmit those findings into business quicker.

Another good practice is one implemented in Egypt by USAID. In 2018, the Ministry of education commenced with establishing “a new brand of schools” called Applied Technology Schools, under a public-private partnership with private sector companies. The project linked businesses and technical schools in order to understand the skills need for employment – reducing the current skill mismatch, creating a pool of qualified candidates and linking students with jobs. The project also partners with private sector companies to introduce and implement productivity improvement strategies and improve human resources systems that reduce staff turnover. In addition, the project is building the capacity of business associations to promote reforms related to labor market efficiency. USAID project works in 11 regions, in five sectors: RMG, textile, food products, furniture and tourism. Stakeholders engaged in the project perform (among other things) such actions:

- Unit for Transition to Employment in 60 School an 11 local municipalities
- 1000 trained teachers
- linking students to employers through an internship program, resulting in 13,000 internship and 22,500 employment.
- Established 24 innovation clubs in participating schools – 10 are equipped with state of the art fabrication labs, and designed and implemented the model Fanni Mobtaker Innovation Competition (E.151).

Different scenarios are available for various companies, companies have three agreement options depending on the level of responsibility they can and/or want to undertake. This includes

- Full Partnership Agreement, is suitable for large and labour-intensive companies as well as with mega national projects
- Consortium Partnership, is suitable for medium size enterprises,
- Associate Partnership. allows small and micro enterprises to participate in the apprenticeship programs.

4 Conclusion and discussion

Many countries are struggling with rising unemployment rates among young people. In order to resolve it and also address issues from employers who reported skill gaps among graduates many countries decided to reform their educational systems and attract more people to vocational education and training. However, school systems are changing slower than the needs of the labour market – therefore it is important to engage private sector companies in modification of educational services. There are different roles that employers and chambers of commerce can perform: consultation of curricula, advise on the demand for qualifications, job counseling, teachers training, apprenticeship.

Sustainable public-private partnerships require the actors to be prepared for their roles in this process. The roles have to be described precisely. Governance mechanisms of partnerships need to be clear and commonly understood: who should be involved, when involved, what the roles and responsibilities of each (who does what). State could be a trigger in initiating partnerships between schools and companies and a facilitator in the negotiations, but from the data collected, it occurs that international donors are effective mediators in these agreements. International support also focuses on providing teaching and learning materials (mainly textbooks). Projects financed by international partners aim at updating schools for modern economy, introducing more practice oriented curricula.

Analysis of sustainable partnership shows that the models of public-private agreements should be adjusted to the scale of company and type of partners. There are different goals in front of partnership between university and big tech company, and high school and small company. Small companies can offer apprenticeship and bigger ones may widen their cooperation to job counseling, teachers training. Chambers of commerce or trade unions could consult curricula or convey information on qualifications demand.

Involvement of private sector makes changes in VET more effective, however – this cannot happen in every school by the same pattern. Programs and solutions must be tailored to the region, adjusted to local labour and educational market. For example in Poland the overall number of students in VET is 58%, but in some regions 25% of students are in VET (for various reasons), and in other – 90% attend VET schools (BKL2019). There are different branches of economy (f.e. mining vs. shipyards), different sized companies in particular regions, structure of ownership (private vs. state owned).

There are certain stages of partnerships (Frank & Smith 2000) that follow a logical sequence, starting from an early development stage (seed and initiation), execution/implementation, and ending with the accountability assessment/ evaluation and determining the next direction. However – in the field of vocational education it is hard to tell that they finish the cycle. Evaluation, checking and determining feedback and follow-up program (Marriott & Goyder, 2009) is rare. Only in one country there was a need for labour market information and research/forecasting mechanisms on the local and regional levels.

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