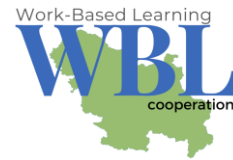




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Project: BALKAN WBL COOPERATION

THEMATIC AREA: GOVERNANCE

General report

WP 3 – Balkan WBL Cooperation recommendations development

Lead partner: NAVET

Partners involved: MEF, MCEC, IEK Delta, Municipality of Reșița City

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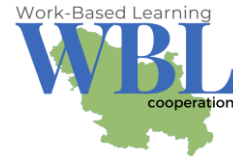
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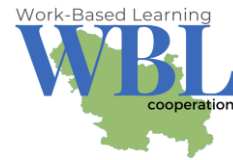
1. Introduction

This report summarizes information on the governance of Work-Based Learning (WBL) by the partner countries in the consortium created under the Balkan WBL Cooperation project: Bulgaria, Greece, North Macedonia, and Romania. The data included was collected through desk research and surveys conducted by the partner organizations.

Thanks to the active work of the teams from the four countries, specific recommendations have been formulated to address the identified challenges related to the following thematic areas: selection of professions to be included in practical training; curriculum design and updating; ways to identify internship positions; responsibilities of the state, educational and training institutions, businesses and trainees; as well as sources of funding for the effective implementation of WBL.



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2. Country profiles

Bulgaria

The Bulgarian VET Act establishes two schemes for WBL: dual system of training carried out at secondary education level and dual training for adults. However, the most common form of WBL is the dual education within the VET system while the dual training for adults is not that widespread.

Dual education is organised through partnerships between an educational institution (VET school or VET training centre) and one or more employers. The advantage of this form is that it combines practical training in a real work environment under the guidance of a mentor and theoretical training related to the respective profession, conducted in a vocational education institution.

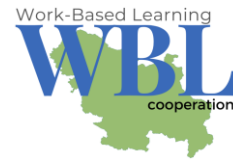
The model was introduced in 2015 and although the rapid increase of numbers of students in dual training in recent years, they are still under 10% of all VET students in the country.

Greece

Formal VET in Greece is state-regulated, combining school-based and WBL. It is offered at upper-secondary and post-secondary levels. Specifically, EPALs are vocational upper-secondary schools that last 3 years, in which an extra year called Apprenticeship Class, can be added, as post-secondary education. Students can choose their preferred field from a variety of 26 specializations. In 2021, a new type of EPAL was established, called PEPAL. PEPALs include general education courses, vocational orientation courses, sectoral courses, specialization courses, special courses that have a particular economic-developmental character for the region where the school is located, and an internship. EPALs and PEPALs offer formal initial VET education at level 4 of the EQF, while the apprenticeship year offers VET qualifications at level 5 of the EQF. Furthermore, at post-secondary level, VET programs that last for 2.5 years can be offered by either public or private vocational training institutes (SAEK-former IEK). SAEKs are VET training



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centres offering formal initial VET education at level 5 of the EQF and non-formal continuous VET education

North Macedonia

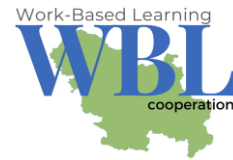
Formal VET in North Macedonia is conducted in 70 schools and 5 Regional VET Centres. VET is offered in 14 professions/sectors: there are 54 different qualifications in the four-year education (level 4 of MQF); 36 qualifications in the three-year education (level 3 of the MQF); and 2 qualifications in the two-year education (level 2 of the MQF). To bridge the gap between the supply and demand of the workforce, the implementation of dual education and increase in the volume of practical training have begun.

Romania

Initial VET in Romania is provided at upper secondary and post-secondary levels. Students may enrol in upper secondary VET at age 15. Qualifications can acquire in upper secondary VET through the following four types of VET programmes: three-year professional programmes - provide graduates with a professional qualification of 'skilled worker'; four-year technological programmes offer graduates an upper secondary school-leaving diploma 'technician' qualification. Short VET programmes provide learners, who have completed two years of a technological programme (completed grade 10) with a professional qualification at EQF level 3 in 720 WBL hours; four-year vocational programmes provide graduates with a professional qualification as well as with an upper secondary school-leaving diploma. Graduates who pass the baccalaureate examination may enrol in higher education. Most learners use this option. Post-secondary VET provides one- to three-year higher VET programmes leading to a professional qualification. At the request of companies or learners, technological schools or colleges/universities organize them.



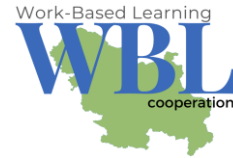
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All four partner countries have established mechanisms for organizing WBL. In most cases WBL is organised for students in the country VET school system. In all partner countries EQF principles are applied, taking into account the national characteristics of the qualification systems and the national qualification levels.



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3. Identification and update of WBL occupations in Bulgaria, Greece, North Macedonia and Romania

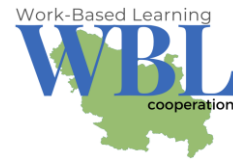
Bulgaria

According to the VET Act, there is a List of Professions for VET (LPVET) which is approved by the Minister of Education and Science in cooperation with the Minister of Labour and Social Policy and the national level employers' and employees' organisations. The rules and procedures for maintaining the list and its updating are proposed by the Governing Board of the National VET Agency (NAVET) and approved with an Order by the Minister of Education and Science. Up to now the List included professions and specialties of occupations for which VET could be organized. In March 2024 the VET ACT has been amended and a new List is currently under elaboration as it will contain only professions without the specialties to avoid the too detailed fragmentation.

There is no list of professions identified specifically for the dual training system which means that in principle dual training could be organized for any profession from the List. In practice, however, there are some other regulations in place that introduce specific requirements for some professions. For example, there are professions for which specific legislation does not allow learners under a certain age (different from the minimal labour contract age which is 16 for Bulgaria) as being considered too dangerous for the health or life of young learners. Other limitations are included in specific legislation for certain professions like, for example, elevator technicians, high voltage electrical technicians and workers in mines for which practical training cannot be organized for people under the age of 21. There are also professions which are not suitable for students due to different reasons like work with toxic materials, work in a radiation environment or work under extreme low or high temperatures, noise or vibrations, etc. These conditions are evaluated individually by the Labour Inspectorate Department when issuing the work permit for the work of the dual VET students.



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Greece

The Greek Government is making efforts to link VET and the labour market. There are special committees, identifying the specific needs of the labour market, to improve the connection between supply and demand and determine, based on these needs, what courses should be taught in the vocational training institutes. Due to the variety of local rather than national needs, VET centres are optimized to meet the local needs. The Hellenic Qualification Framework (HQF), which is aligned with the EQF, aims to create a coherent and comprehensive system of classification of all qualifications obtained through formal and non-formal education and informal learning in Greece. The governance of HQF is regulated by EOPPEP, which is the statutory body for the development and implementation of the HQF.

There is still insufficient data or analysis of labour market trends. This can lead to a lack of understanding of what skills employers truly need. WBL is traditionally offered by DYPA, through the dual training program (EPAS).

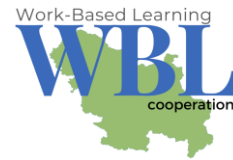
As of the latest update in 2023, in the EPAS schools, students can choose from a variety of 30 specialties with high labour market demand based on updated research on the labour market. In the Apprenticeship Class, the provided specialties are determined yearly based on the needs of the local labour market and the development priorities of the Greek national economy, taking into account the EPALs' specialties, as decided by the General Secretariat for Vocational Education, Training, Lifelong Learning and Youth, following the recommendation of the Central Council for Vocational Education. According to stakeholders from VET schools, they noted that the collaboration is not entirely effective and that there is a lot of room for improvement.

North Macedonia

The initiative to revise an existing standard or create a new one can be initiated by relevant chambers, ministries, employers' associations, educational institutions, Association of the Units of Local Self-government of the Republic of North Macedonia (ZELS), trade unions, the Vocational



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Education and Training Centre (VET Centre), or other organizations/institutions. The occupational standard is adopted by the Minister of Labour and Social Policy and recorded in a register.

To date, North Macedonia has adopted 360 occupational standards and 110 qualifications, which are describe through learning outcomes and evaluation criteria and are adapted to labour market needs. In line with these standards, the VET Centre revises the formal VET programs and designs them in a modular format. However, experts and companies consider that significant portions of the qualification standards are too academic in their descriptions and expectations, suggesting a need for revision.

Companies have limited direct involvement in policy creation, including in identifying an occupation or qualification for which practical training could be provided (their level of influence is primarily through the chambers of commerce). Companies are often unaware that they can initiate a revision of an existing standard or prepare a standard for a qualification they need.

Training centres and chambers are more active. The needs of the labour market are studied, which helps to define new educational profiles. The Chamber of Crafts in Skopje has an active role in determining the need for developing professional qualifications for craft occupations.

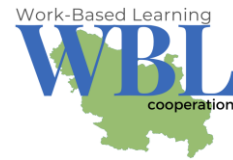
Romania

Initial VET qualifications are based on training standards. The national qualifications register currently comprises 136 qualifications at EQF level 3, 69 at EQF level 4 and 203 at EQF level 5.

Training standards describe learning units consisting of learning outcomes, based on occupational standards, and developed by representatives of companies from the respective sectors and of VET providers, with the methodological support of the National Centre for Technical and Vocational Education and Training Development, endorsed by National Authority for Qualifications. Employers and other social partners through sectoral committees validate them. The revision of standards carried out at least every five years or at the request of economic operators.



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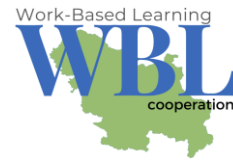
The LDC offers multiple benefits for companies, students and VET system. The employers can immediately have new and relevant competencies delivered to the students (without waiting for their inclusion in the standards and learning outcomes). The students' aspirations can be respect in a certain extent, and the experience of a LDC could offer the most relevant feedback for the system to update the national curriculum, standards. The VET schools are encouraged to diversify their offer with new qualifications, but their inertia is a serious obstacle.

VET systems in partner countries need to be updated in a timely manner to offer modern and in-demand qualifications. In addition to being clearly identified, the occupations for practical training should be widely publicised and promoted to potential learners in order to increase their interest in participating in WBL.

Involving business in identifying the qualifications needed is a key step in attracting them as an active partner in WBL.



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4. Design and update of the relevant WBL curricula in Bulgaria, Greece, North Macedonia and Romania

Bulgaria

The curricula for both theoretical and practical aspects of the profession is created in sync with the learning outcomes specified in the State educational standards for acquiring qualifications in professions. In the adult dual training sector, the curricula for practical training in a real work environment is developed jointly by teachers or instructors and mentors and are approved by the institution's director. The curricula include an overall presentation of the program, training objectives, allocation of training time, description of the educational content, and criteria and methods for assessing the expected learning outcomes. The VET Act requires that all VET curricula including the ones for dual VET should be updated every 5 years.

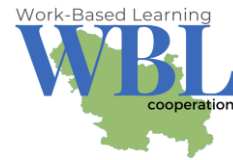
The development of the State Educational Standards for the Acquisition of Qualifications in Occupations is coordinated by NAVET. The VET Standards are developed by applying the units of learning outcomes approach.

Greece

The General Secretariat for Vocational Education, Training, Lifelong Learning and Youth, established through the Ministry of Education and Religious Affairs and Sports, is the main body for the coordination, overseeing, and evaluation of all policies, actions, and programs concerning VET education. The Committees have the responsibility of making sure the curricula are up-to-date and help decide which courses should be taught in VET schools. VET providers have some autonomy in curriculum design but should follow a special framework and incorporate relevant sectoral inputs. Curricula of WBL programs is develop in particular for every scheme and are distinct from each form of VET provision. Initial VET programs already drawn up in compliance with Law No. 4186/2013 remain valid until they are completed. The Central Council for Vocational Education and Training involves representatives from the Ministry of Education and other



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relevant ministries, employer and employee associations, and chambers. The partners do not have enough incentives to participate actively.

North Macedonia

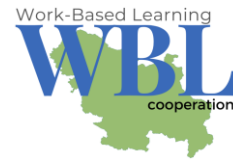
Before initiating the practical training process, schools and companies collaborate to prepare a program/curricula and plan for conducting the practical training at the employer or company. In three-year VET and four-year VET, the WBL programs are developed by a working group or commission established by VET Centre. This group/commission includes employers, teachers, and university professors. The programs are designed at the level of qualification. The programs are approximately 30% open that allows planning of new learning outcomes during the program implementation process, based on the needs of the company, local community, etc. The Minister of Education and Science adopts these programs. The programs for WBL in dual education and Ferial Practice are flexible and are prepared collaboratively by a representative from the school (the teacher and/or the WBL coordinator). The school director adopts WBL programs in dual VET. Schools and companies generally express satisfaction with their collaboration in the preparation of WBL programs. According to the chambers, there is a need for continuous curriculum upgrading, preparation of instructions, and training materials with active employer participation. This is especially important for WBL in four-year education.

Romania

The National Centre for Technical and Vocational Education and Training Development is responsible for several key functions. These include evaluating and suggesting changes to policies and strategies, coordinating their implementation, coordinating the design, implementation, and review of national curricula, assessing and certifying the initial VET component, supervising the development of professional training standards for qualifications validated by sectoral committees (coordinated by the National Authority for Qualifications) and approved by the education ministry, and developing methodologies for the quality assurance and monitoring of programs.



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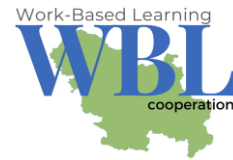
In the coming years, the new Pre-University Education Law no. 198/2023 includes additional provisions to strengthen the workplace-learning component. Technological pre-university education will be carried out exclusively in a dual system for all technological high schools starting from the 2029-2030 school year. Additionally, students who have reached the age of 16 can conclude individual part-time employment contracts with economic operators, according to the legal provisions in force.

It is important to ensure a better quality of practical instructions, not merely to increase the number of allocated hours. For the Local Development Curricula (LDC), we have the freedom to choose the content and design the curriculum. However, sometimes companies are not actively involved and only sign the LDC.

In all partner countries, a centralised approach to the development of training documentation prevails. There is a need to strengthen the involvement of employers, and their role should not be one of validation only. In this sense, the reasons for the low engagement of business should be analysed - whether they are not invited to participate, whether the requirements for the development of the training documentation are complex for business to understand, or for any other reason.



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5. Demand for WBL Apprenticeship Positions/Openings in Bulgaria, Greece, North Macedonia, and Romania

Bulgaria

The demand for dual students is expressed by the employers to the regional educational authorities and taken into account in the annual admission plan, approved by the Minister of Education and Science. When reviewing the draft admission plan, the Minister is taking into consideration the demands received by the enterprises as well as the List of professions with expected shortages in the labour market and the List of protected professions which are approved every two years by the Council of Ministers. Along with these two lists, the analyses and forecasts for labour market needs carried out annually by the Employment Agency are also taken into account. Sectoral studies on labour market demand are also conducted at industry level.

Another option for employers to announce open positions for dual students in their companies is the Database of employers offering dual education in cooperation with VET schools which is administered by the Ministry of Economy and accessible through the ministry's website.

Practice shows that best cooperation between VET institutions and companies is achieved by large companies that have marketing budgets and appropriate incentives for students.

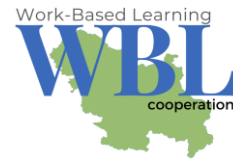
As for the adult dual system, there is no information campaign to attract people to join it. The initiative lies with the trainee or the employer, which is not sufficient to create more interest.

Greece

Throughout Greece, 30 Vocational Development and Career Offices (GEAS) have been established to connect vocational education to the workplace by placing students in suitable positions in both governmental and private sector businesses. Law 4763/2020 further supports the implementation of internship programs for Initial Vocational Education and Training (IVET) in Greece, aiming to align skills acquisition with practical application. Internships are now a



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mandatory component of IVET training in EPAL (with innovative programs), SAEK, and the Apprenticeship Class.

VET institutes and schools can collaborate directly with companies willing to offer WBL placements to tailor the learning experience. However, due to the economic downturn and the unintended consequence of making many Greek university graduates available at low labour costs, employers often prefer hiring workers with higher education instead of apprentices. Despite this, demand for apprentices, especially those studying in the Apprenticeship Class, is rapidly growing.

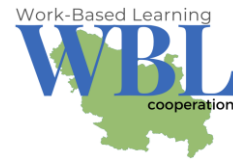
A dedicated website lists calls from private and public institutions willing to take on apprentices. Additionally, a more comprehensive digital information portal (GES) is being developed. This portal will include information on specializations offered by each educational institution, the institutional framework for Practical Training/Apprenticeship, frequently asked questions, contact details for trainees and enterprises, a list of local professionals/businesses with contact details, and a section for businesses to search for students/apprentices/trainees/graduates for Practical Training/Apprenticeship.

North Macedonia

The Employment Agency of North Macedonia conducts an annual labour market analysis, surveys required skills, and identifies skill shortages. In response to the market's expressed skill needs, the state subsidizes training through non-formal education via the Agency. Since August 2022, the "Practice" Portal has been established, which connects verified companies (which offer practical training to students) and secondary vocational schools. The portal fosters transparency, connection, and active cooperation between companies, the Chamber of Commerce of North Macedonia, educational institutions, creators of educational policies, teachers and mentors from companies, as well as students and parents.



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Municipalities, as the owners of the schools (including VET schools), play a crucial role in establishing and strengthening the cooperation between the economy and education. They organize meetings, fairs and presentations between companies and schools to discuss supply and demand at the local level, potential cooperation and partnerships between companies/businesses and schools, and the number of students that can be trained in a certain company. Based on this information, the municipality requests the enrolment of students in the first year of VET, and those requests are entered into the enrolment competition by the Ministry of Education and Science.

Romania

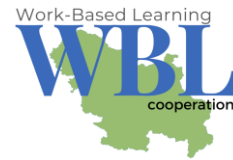
To supply the labour market with VET qualifications that are relevant, the National Centre for Technical and Vocational Education and Training Development, supported by stakeholders and experts, has developed a strategic planning model for VET supply. The model based on a decentralised decision-making at regional, county and local levels. Strategic planning is characterised by the collective action of multiple social partners, representing the interests of employers, professional associations, employees/trade unions, public administration, relevant government and civil society organisations.

The evolution of the offer of qualifications influenced by the school's ability to offer diverse and attractive qualifications for students, by the human and material resources available to the school to authorize new qualifications, by the continuously decreasing number of students.

Improving awareness of the opportunities offered by WBL should be supported by fair measures and initiatives. Active digitisation is an opportunity to implement activities to support the development and attract more participants to WBL.



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6. The responsibility of the state, the school, the business and the students in the WBL ecosystem in Bulgaria, Greece, North Macedonia and Romania

Bulgaria

Each stakeholder in dual VET in Bulgaria has its clearly defined role. The State, through its relevant institutions, provides the legal framework for the effective implementation of dual VET, its funding and administration.

VET schools and vocational training centres provide admission and theoretical training while the companies provide the practical training in real working environment. The companies also provide salaries to the students as they work under labour contracts. The companies are responsible to provide and organise a working place for each dual student. The companies provide also the mentors for the students. The VET school/training centre together with the partner company elaborates the curricula for the practical training.

The students are obliged to follow strictly their labour contracts and abide with the internal rules of the company as well as with the safety regulations.

As far as adult dual training is concerned, the regulatory framework covers only unemployed individuals registered in the public employment offices.

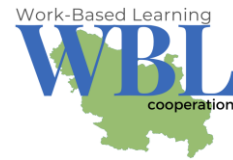
Greece

The participants in the Work-Based Learning (WBL) ecosystem in Greece have clear and defined roles and responsibilities. The State, through the Ministry of Education, oversees the VET system, including WBL regulations, qualifications, quality assurance, and funding. VET schools and VET centres are responsible for providing theoretical training and guidance to support their students.

A body called Apprenticeship Support Groups, coordinated by DYPA representatives, has been established to manage apprenticeship programs across all educational structures. Businesses involved in the WBL ecosystem are required to sign cooperation agreements, organize the



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implementation of each apprenticeship, offer training and mentoring, ensure the quality of working conditions, monitor the apprentices' progress, and provide financial compensation.

Students play a crucial role in the WBL ecosystem by actively participating and gaining essential skills and experience. They are expected to take initiative in their learning, meet learning objectives, and contribute to the program's ongoing improvement through feedback. Additionally, students must sign individual contracts for their apprenticeships, adhere to the contract and employer's requirements, comply with health and safety rules, respect the employer's property, and maintain a diary of all completed tasks.

Responses from the questionnaires indicate that for VET education and WBL to continue growing and improving in quality, Greece needs to support companies more effectively. This support should include increased cooperation and communication between the formal education system and the workforce, as well as providing incentives for businesses.

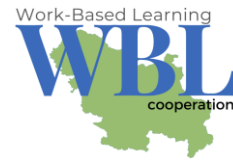
North Macedonia

Institutions that provide conditions and create policies include: the competent ministries of education and science, labour and social policy, finance; the Centre for Vocational Education and Training, the Centre for Adult Education, the trade union, municipalities, and chambers of commerce/employers' organizations. These institutions are responsible for preparing strategies, concepts and methodologies, providing mechanisms, standards, guidelines, recommendations and conditions for the implementation of practical training.

Actors in the implementation of practical training include the vocational education institutions and the companies/employers. The school's responsibilities in WBL include monitoring the development and needs of qualifications in the labour market, cooperating with the company to create a program and plan the implementation of practical training, preparing the student for practical training at an employer/company, appointing a coordinator, and preparing a schedule of students by company.



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The employer/company's responsibilities include: planning the implementation of the practical training in cooperation with the school, appointing a mentor for students and providing mentor training, providing verification by the relevant chamber of commerce, providing a workplace and materials for students and adjusting the workplace for students, providing working conditions for students, monitoring the progress and participating in the evaluation of the student.

The students and trainees' responsibilities include signing an individual contract for practical training, fulfilling the obligations of the contract under the professional guidance of the mentor and the teacher, respecting the prescribed order at the employer/company, performing work and tasks according to the mentor's instructions, keeping a diary for the completed tasks, and evaluating their own progress.

Romania

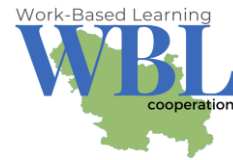
The Ministry of National Education is responsible for the development and implementation of national education and training policies and strategies, including initial VET. The ministry designs and executes legislation in cooperation with stakeholders (academia, trade unions, teachers' associations, students, parents, public administration, businesses and NGOs).

National Centre for Technical and Vocational Education and Training Development is accountable to the education ministry with specific responsibilities in governance, in development and functioning of stakeholder partnerships at national, regional and local levels. The Romanian Agency for Quality Assurance in Pre-university Education is in charge of authorization (license), accreditation and external quality evaluation of schools at pre-university education level, including initial VET schools.

The Institute of Educational Sciences is a national institution for research, development, innovation and training in education and youth. Regional consortia are advisory partnership bodies of the National Centre for Technical and Vocational Education and Training Development, without juridical status.



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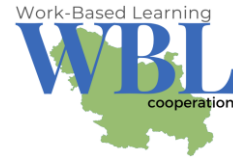


School inspectorates, in cooperation with advisory partnership bodies at local (country) and regional levels (local committees for the development of social partnerships and regional consortia) propose to the education ministry (in January- February) the VET enrolment plan for the next school year. This based on proposals from schools and taking into consideration labour market needs, defined through direct requests from employers. The local committees for the development of social partnerships are advisory managerial structures that aim at improving VET relevance and quality.

In all partner countries there is a clear division of roles and functions of the participants in the WBL, but there is still room to improve the effectiveness of the model. The leading role of the State does not always prove its effectiveness and the regional management approach should be strengthened. Business associations, branch chambers and employers' organisations should be more involved and have bigger role and responsibilities in the process.



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7. Funding for effective implementation in Bulgaria, Greece, North Macedonia and Romania

Bulgaria

Dual VET was introduced in Bulgaria in 2015 with the pilot DOMINO project, funded under the Bulgarian-Swiss Cooperation Programme. Following its successful completion in 2019, the dual system continues to be supported on a project basis. In 2020, a new large-scale project called "Support for the dual system" was launched, implemented by the Ministry of Education and Science (MES). It is financed under the Operational Programme "Science and Education for Intelligent Growth," co-funded by the European Social Fund. Another project "Dual education in Bulgaria" is supported by the Austrian Federal Economic Chamber / Advantage Austria. It was launched in 2014, and by 2023, students have been trained in 15 specialties in over 30 schools in 21 locations across the country. A DOMINO 2 project is also under preparation with a budget of approx. 5 million EUR under the Bulgarian-Swiss Cooperation Programme with a duration till 2029 planned as a continuation of the program that laid the foundations for the dual education system in Bulgaria in 2015.

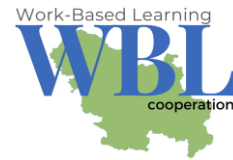
At the end of 2023, the MES announced its plans to launch a comprehensive 5-year project for the pilot implementation of dual education in the higher education system.

All these examples show that WBL in Bulgaria is mainly project based and relies on EU funds or other international donors.

Within the projects, students in dual training receive small monthly grants. Companies are also supported to cover part of the salaries of mentors. Despite that more measures and incentives are needed to encourage companies, including SMEs, to join the dual system and become partners to VET institutions.



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Greece

The funding model for WBL in Greece relies primarily on public funding. Some European funds have also been allocated to WBL programmes. National or EU funds may subsidize the student's apprenticeships. According to stakeholders, data on the allocation and utilization of money designated for WBLs is not easily accessible. Many companies receive financial incentives to offer training places to students in VET programmes or graduates of them. In this way, they contribute to the education of learners, for example in the EPAL and EPAS DYPA apprenticeship schemes.

The efficiency of the present financing schemes is difficult to evaluate because of this lack of openness. More specifically, there is no specific mechanism for neither businesses nor schools to access the state funding for WBL. VET schools and VET centres do not receive, as a whole, any additional financial support. Nevertheless, for the last two years, the principal and teachers of a school where courses of the Apprenticeship Class are taking place, receive a small monthly financial compensation, depending on the number of students.

North Macedonia

The funding for formal vocational education, including the realization of WBL in schools, is by the state. The Ministry of Education provides fund to local governments, who further distribute it to schools under their jurisdiction. Additionally, municipalities participate in school funding, and schools themselves have the right to acquire funds from operational companies.

Companies financially participate by covering the costs for providing an employee as a mentor and his training, participating in the preparation of WBL programs, adjusting the workplace, providing materials for training at the workplace, etc. Covering costs related to the realization of practical education is part of a tripartite agreement between the student, school and company.

Schools and companies have suggested several mechanisms to access state and additional funding for WBL and practical training, including:



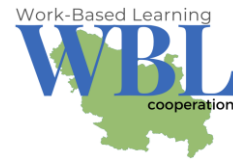
- Activating the article in the Law on Vocational Education and Training that states "the employer has the right to acquire financial, customs, and tax incentives."
- Introducing financial incentives for innovative and efficient VET schools and training centres.
- Recognizing, promoting, and stimulating good practices for engaging employers in education.
- Providing financial incentives for excellent partnerships between educational institutions and employers.
- Supporting micro and small enterprises through subsidies for training materials, equipping specific classrooms, and training centre premises.
- Joint public and private sector investment to pay for student work during the first two years of practical training for all VET students.
- Offering financial support for upgrading mentoring skills after initial training, including networking and opportunities to exchange experiences with other mentors in similar sectors.
- Regulating financial support through a special legal act that precisely defines the rules, such as the number of students, types of tax exemptions, criteria for applying for subsidies, and other forms of assistance.

Romania

In 2018, the financing per capita was EUR 1115 for three-year professional programmes (all qualifications), EUR 1057 for four-year technological programmes (all qualifications) and EUR 1330 for four-year vocational programmes (except music and sports). Incentives are available to support young learner participation in VET. The Ministry of Education in cooperation with other national authorities mainly offers them.



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Professional scholarship for three-year professional programmes offers approximately EUR 43 per month for all three-year professional programme learners. This scholarship can be combined within grants provided by training companies. The grants usually cover transportation and meals.

In addition to a professional scholarship, dual VET learners receive at least approximately EUR 43 (RON 200) per month in allowances from the company where they undergo training. Companies also pay for work equipment for learners, their insurance and medical examinations, if obliged to do so by the occupation requirements.

The students receive scholarships from the state and from the partner company, but for the students with difficult social background, an important financial support is needed, to cover the cost for accommodation, meals during the program and maybe for the first years of employment.

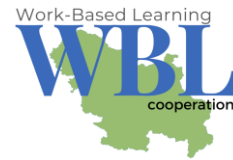
There is a need to support in a differentiated manner the big and the small companies, which have no capacity to develop and maintain a distinct department for learning and development, and the result is a huge discrepancy in their access to correctly qualified workforce. The small companies need to work together and to obtain specific support, including financial ones; otherwise, they will become less competitive in comparison with their competitors, the big companies.

Apparently, there are multiple financial sources, but they are not sufficient. The state support for companies is not attractive and difficult to manage.

Funding for targeted measures to increase the attractiveness of WBL, as well as specific incentives for companies, should be planned in the partner countries. Managing funding solely by the state is not the best recipe and should be reconsidered.



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8. Conclusions and Recommendations

Country-specific recommendations

Bulgaria

- Establish the dual training model as a stable state policy in VET rather than depend only on projects.
- Establish a mechanism for quality assurance and effective monitoring of the quality of dual training.
- Update the regulatory framework according to digital and green priorities.
- Increase the options for flexibility and adaptability of the dual system to meet the needs of the labour market
- Increase the role and participation of branch chambers in the decision-making process and the implementation of WBL.
- Strengthen regional initiatives and the role of local authorities in the field of WBL.
- Offer more incentives to companies to expand the scope of the dual system.
- Develop measures to increase participation in dual training for adults over 16 years in licensed VET centres.
- Increase awareness in all stake holders with a national promotional campaign for dual VET.

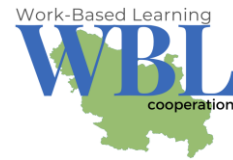
Greece

- Conduct regular skill assessments to identify needs in emerging sectors and update WBL occupations and curricula accordingly.
- Develop further incentive programs to strengthen state-private sector partnerships.
- Collect and systematically use program evaluations and stakeholder feedback to ensure the WBL ecosystem remains relevant and effective.
- Increase awareness and outreach among VET stakeholders through awareness campaigns and conferences that share best practices from other European countries.

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- Enhance the involvement of local authorities in the WBL process.

North Macedonia

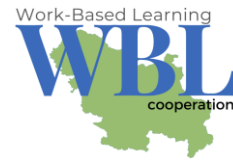
- Establishing and improving coordination mechanisms between all relevant stakeholders to develop an effective system that produces relevant skills.
- Strengthening current links through genuine collaboration and involvement in all activities, rather than merely formal membership in committees and boards.
- Measuring the performance and effectiveness of these links and sharing good practices and experiences.
- Regularly revise standards for qualifications and occupations with greater and direct participation from companies, focusing more on practical skills than academic skills. This should include a revision of the curricula.
- Improve quality assurance and control in WBL through joint development (by the public and private sectors) of appropriate indicators, proper data collection, regular analysis, and improvement activities.
- Evaluate the adequacy and effectiveness of existing financing mechanisms, considering the provision of funds, distribution of financial obligations among stakeholders, and transparency of financing processes. Identify financial barriers to effective WBL application and propose solutions to overcome them.

Romania

- Encourage Local authorities to provide data on the local economy, future development trends, and support for initiating and managing local debates.
- Facilitate dialogue between stakeholders, including access to financial resources, promotion of dual VET, and monitoring the implementation of WBL.



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- Although various types of financial support exist, they are insufficient to ensure attractiveness and overcome existing social obstacles; thus, additional funding measures are necessary.

General recommendations

1. Update Legal Regulations: In all partner countries legal framework for the implementation of WBL exists. However, it needs to be regularly updated in order to respond to the dynamic changes in the labour market and to the digital and green transition.
2. Reconsider the role of the State: The leading role of the state should be reconsidered by proposing more active involvement of business through sectoral organizations and taking into account regional specificities, rather than applying a centralized approach.
3. Improve WBL Image: Concrete initiatives are needed to improve the image of WBL among young people, focusing on attractive professions and providing financial incentives.
4. Introduce Dual System for Adults: Considering the demographic situation in the partner countries and at EU level, introducing a dual system for adults could be a good solution to provide a workforce for various economic sectors.
5. Enhance Flexibility and Adaptability: Greater flexibility and adaptability of WBL systems would contribute to a more effective implementation of the model in national VET systems.