

## IMPLEMENTATION OF DUAL VOCATIONAL EDUCATION AND TRAINING (VET) IN REPUBLIC OF MOLDOVA

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### EVOLUȚIILE ÎNVĂȚĂMÂNTULUI DUAL ÎN REPUBLICA MOLDOVA

**Rezumat:** Implementarea învățământului dual în Republica Moldova [14] a început în anul 2014, la inițiativa unei companii private și a unei școli profesionale. Pe parcursul următorilor ani, sistemul dual s-a extins gradual. La momentul actual, în cadrul învățământului dual activează 24 de instituții de învățământ profesional tehnic și 85 de agenți economici.

Începând cu anul de studii 2018-2019, formarea profesională tehnică duală se desfășoară în cadrul:

- programelor de formare profesională tehnică secundară;
- programelor de formare profesională tehnică postsecundară;
- programelor de formare profesională tehnică postsecundară nonterțiară.

Cadrul normativ cu privire la organizarea și funcționarea învățământului dual este reglementat prin Hotărârea de Guvern nr. 70/2018 [4], care stabilește mecanismul de organizare a programelor de formare profesională tehnică prin învățământ dual. În baza acestor prevederi, învățământul dual este definit ca o formă alternativă de organizare a învățământului profesional tehnic, care presupune instruirea în cadrul unei instituții de învățământ profesional tehnic și al unui agent economic, cu utilizarea mijloacelor acestora, în scopul obținerii de cunoștințe, deprinderi și competențe pentru calificări profesionale de nivel 3 ISCED, 4 ISCED și 5 ISCED, conform Cadrului Național al Calificărilor din Republica Moldova.

Obiectivul principal al acestei cercetări este de a prezenta experiența Republicii Moldova în domeniul implementării învățământului dual, începând cu 2014 și până în prezent, în special, pe componenta implicării directe a agenților economici în procesul de instruire, cu scopul formării viitorilor specialiști pentru piața muncii.

**Cuvinte-cheie:** Învățământ profesional tehnic, învățământ dual, dialog social, parteneriate, centre de excelență, comitete sectoriale, sector privat, cadrul național al calificărilor.

**Abstract.** The implementation of dual VET in Republic of Moldova [14] started in 2014 at the initiative of one private company and one professional school. During the following years, the dual VET system has extended gradually. As of today, it involves a number of 24 schools and 85 private companies.

Starting from 2018-2019, the professional training through Dual VET takes place within:

- secondary technical and vocational training programs;
- post-secondary technical and vocational training programs;
- post-secondary non-tertiary technical and vocational training programs.

The legal and normative framework is approved through the Government Decision no.70/2018 [4] which de-

scribes the organization of technical training programs through dual education. According to this normative act, the Dual VET is the alternative form of organization of technical training programs within VET institutions and companies, using the resources of both entities in order to provide the knowledge, skills and competencies for professional qualifications of ISCED, levels 3, 4 and 5, based on the National Qualification Framework of Moldova. The general objective of the research is to present and share the Moldovan experience, since 2014 until present, concerning the professional and vocational training, with the direct involvement of private companies in the training process of future specialists for the labour market.

**Keywords:** Professional education and training; dual vocational education and training, social dialogue, Centres of Excellence, Sectorial Committees, private sector, partnerships, National Qualifications Framework.

**Republic of Moldova. General context.** Republic of Moldova is a small lower-middle-income economy. Based on World Bank reports, “although Republic of Moldova is one of the poorest countries in Europe, it has made significant progress in reducing poverty and promoting inclusive growth since the early 2000’s. The economy has expanded by an average of 5% annually, driven by consumption and fuelled by remittances. The remittances account for 25-30% of GDP, which is among the highest shares in the world” [15].

In 2018, Republic of Moldova’s economic growth has slowed to 4 percent [16]. The World Bank analyses on the medium term estimate that “against the background of lower remittances, projected weaker foreign and domestic demand, economic growth will decelerate below historical values in 2019-2021” [16].

In regard to employment trends, in 2017, Moldova’s labour market was characterized by a low activity rate (42.2%), low employment (40.5%) and low unemployment (4.2%) with no significant gender disparities [13]. The low unemployment rate is determined by significant migration and the specific definition of inactivity in the Moldovan Labour Force Survey.

The Youth Unemployment Rate (YUR) in Moldova (age 15-24) decreased to 5.5 % in the fourth quarter of 2018 from 6 % in the third quarter of 2018. By comparison, the (YUR) decreased from 13.1% in 2012 to 11.8% in 2017. Historically speaking, the Youth Unemployment Rate in Moldova averaged 15.71 % in the period 2000- 2018, reaching the highest level of 37 % in the fourth quarter of 2000 and the lowest of 5.5 % in the fourth quarter of 2018 [18].

According to European Training Foundation (ETF) experts, this decrease does not reflect

improved employment prospects, but rather a decrease in the young population, limited preparedness for the labour market and/or a reliance on remittances. In 2017, the rate of youth (age 15-24) unemployment, education or training (NEET) was persistently high, 20.2%, this being one of the most relevant data on this issue [13].

One of the most important sectors which has a potential to influence positively the development of the country is the Vocational Education and Training sector, of crucial importance for a country’s economy and development perspectives. For this reason, one of the 7 priorities from the National Development Strategy Moldova 2020 is related to “Aligning the education system to labour market needs in order to enhance labour productivity and increase employment in the economy” [2].

### **The VET system in Moldova**

The main concept of Moldova’s VET system is reflected in the Education Code [1], approved in 2014 by the Moldovan Parliament.

The vision of the Ministry of Education, Culture and Research on the current areas and priorities of the vocational education and training system is described in the VET Development Strategy for the years 2013-2020, the Action Plan for Strategy Implementation [5].

The overall objective of the VET Strategy is to modernize and streamline technical vocational education in order to increase the competitiveness of the national economy by preparing a competitive and skilled workforce in line with current and future labour market requirements.

In the context of the implementation of VET Strategy, during recent years, the VET system in Republic of Moldova has benefited from important support from development partners.

At macro level, the VET system benefited from European Union's assistance through Technical Assistance Projects [12], Budget Support Programs [10], etc. Also in this category could be included the ongoing support offered by the European Training Foundation.

Implementation of a EU Twinning project started following the completion of a EU Technical Assistance Project. Structural reform has already been implemented but the VET system still needs support to fully achieve VET strategy objectives.

Another category of support was provided by development partners through agencies and development foundations, both private and state-owned. The most important are: Liechtenstein Development Service (LED); Austrian Development Agency (ADA); KulturKontakt Austria; German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ); Swiss Development Cooperation (SDC).

Although progress has been made with the support of stakeholders, the VET system continues facing a lot of challenges. Based on the OECD policy studies, the educational sector in Moldova suffers from a persistent lack of efficiency and quality, including outdated curricula and learning materials and weakly trained teachers.

In Republic of Moldova's VET system there are 3 types of institutions.

The *Centres of Excellence* can provide combined programs: secondary vocational technical education; post-secondary and post-secondary non-tertiary vocational technical education. Based on the Regulation for the organization and operation of the Centres of Excellence [6] the functions that have been attributed to VET institutions that have been transformed into Centres of Excellence go beyond responsibilities strictly related to the provision of educational services. Under the new VET structure, they have acquired: (1) the social liaison function to ensure social dialogue with important players on the labour market; (2) the curriculum development function; (3) the function of continuous professional training of specialty teaching staff for staff from affiliated institutions (i.e. VET institutions that belong to the same sector as the Centre of Excellence) that teach the same qualifications; (4) the function of validat-

ing acquired skills in a non-formal and informal environment; (5) the function of promoting the image of the economic sector and professional education in this field.

The *Professional schools* provide only secondary vocational technical education, and the *Colleges* provide post-secondary and post-secondary non-tertiary technical and vocational education and training.

In the academic year 2018 - 2019, the number of VET institutions was 86, including 12 Centres of Excellence, 32 Colleges (including 4 private institutions) and 42 Professional schools. In the VET system, 46.6 thousand students are trained, of which 13.8 thousand - in Centres of Excellence, 17.4 thousand - in Colleges and 15.4 thousand - in Professional schools. Educational and training activity in technical vocational education is provided by 4.2 thousand teachers.

As part of the VET system, *the dual vocational education and training is defined as an alternative form of organisation of VET, involving simultaneous training in VET institutions (Professional school, College or Centre of Excellence), as well as within training companies* [9].

### **Role of social partners in the development and implementation of VET policies**

The social dialogue platform represents a communication and cooperation framework between social partners (trade unions, employment associations, sectoral committees, professional association, Chamber of Commerce and Industries (CCI), etc.) and the government (MECR; MHLSP; MF; MEI, etc.) for the management and development of VET system.

The main stakeholders of the social dialogue regarding the planning of labour force in VET system are the following:

The Ministry of Education, Culture and Research (MECR) is responsible for the development, promotion and monitoring of the implementation and impact evaluation of the national policy in the education area. Regarding the Vocational Education and Training sector, based on the Regulation of MECR's VET Department approved in 2018 by Ministerial Order, the main responsibility of the unit is to coordinate the processes of elaboration, monitoring and evaluation of the sectoral policies

in the field of technical vocational education and to coordinate the activities of the technical vocational education institutions.

It is important to mention that the MECR has the role of founder of VET institutions and is responsible for the management of the VET system. The Ministry is also responsible for the development of the enrollment plan of VET institutions.

The Ministry of Health, Labour and Social Protection (MHLSP) in partnership with the National Employment Agency provides specific labour market information. It is also responsible for the labour market forecast and profession/trade barometer, using methodologies developed with EU support. These instruments aim to identify trends for jobs and skills requirements in the near future in order to plan training activities for unemployed. During the enrolment process the MHLSP has a central role in this activity, in coordination with MECR.

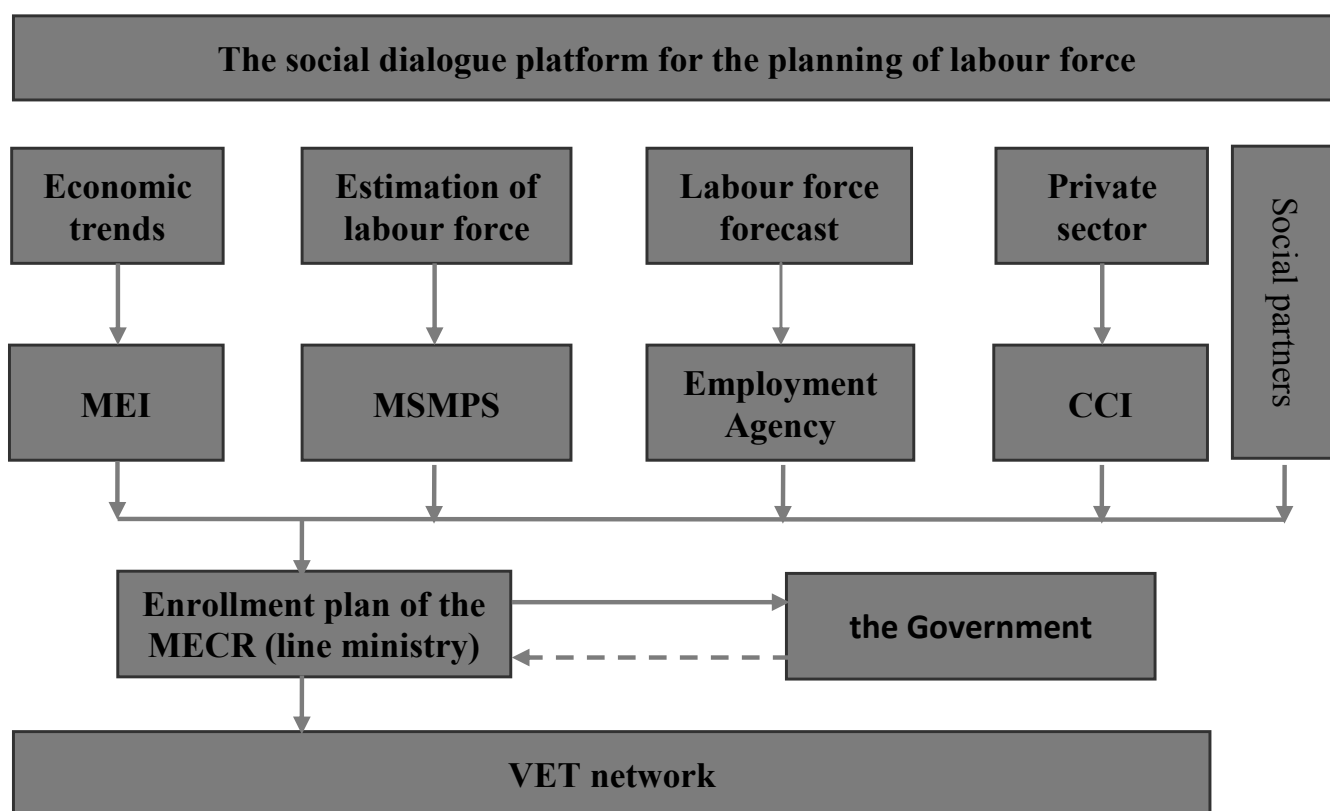
The Ministry of Finances (MF) is responsi-

ble for the allocations from the state budget for the elaboration of workforce lists of employees needed within the country, or the so-called Work Force State Order.

The Ministry of Economy and Infrastructure (MEI) develops the analysis of economic trends for Republic of Moldova.

At the same time, the Ministry of Health, Labor and Social Protection is the founder of the VET institutions specialized in Medicine (1 Center for Excellence and 4 colleges). The Ministry of Agriculture, Regional Development and Environment has the role of the founder of the VET institutions specialized in Agriculture (2 Centres of Excellence and 6 colleges), and the Ministry of the Internal Affairs is the founder of the Centre for Excellence in Border Security.

From this perspective, the social dialogue platform regarding the planning of labour force in the VET system can be illustrated in Figure no.1 here below:



**Fig. no. 1 Dialogue platform: Planning of labour force**

Social dialogue is largely focused on the elaboration of the State Order (Enrolment plan). This plan is proposed by the Ministry of Education, Culture and Research to the Government for approval after a large consultation with interested social partners (Fig.no.1). After Government approval the Enrolment plan is implemented by all founders of VET institutions.

**Main social dialogue partners in the VET system**

One of the main actors in the implementation of social dialogue are Sectorial Committees. Their legal status (Law on Sectorial Committees [3]) was recently approved in 2017 after a long process of public consultations with the support of external partners. These entities are public utility associations with the status of a legal person and are responsible for:

- the elaboration and development of social partnerships at the level of the branches of the economy in the field of vocational training in order to support vocational and initial education and continuing training and to correlate vocational education and training of employers and employees with the requirements of the labour market;
- the elaboration and implementation of an informational and analytical support system for vocational education and training, based on the needs of the labour market.

These functions are implemented through the updating of the Occupational Classifier and the Vocational Training Nomenclature; participation in the development of Occupational Standards; participation in validation of professional quali-

fications. Sectorial Committees are also actively involved in promoting partnerships between VET institutions and private companies.

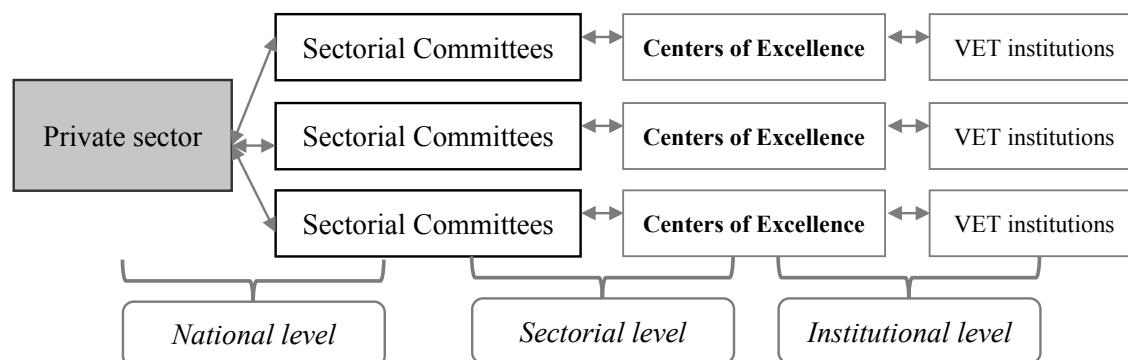
Another important form of social dialogue is the direct relation between the VET institutions and private companies. Based on the provisions of the Code of Education [1] the VET institutions are responsible for organizing the internships for pupils/students. The internships are carried out within the workshops, labs and households of the respective education institutions, in enterprises, companies, institutions and other organizations interested to serve as basis for internship, including the creative ones.

Private companies may provide internships for pupils/students in VET institutions, in line with the agreements and contracts concluded with the respective educational institutions.

The Code of Education provides that partnerships between the VET institutions and economic actors are carried out through:

- distribution of graduate pupils/students on the labour market;
- providing places for internships;
- organization of dual education;
- organization of job fairs;
- employment of highly qualified representatives from the professional environment in the development of the Nomenclature of professional training fields, and of trades/ professions and the Nomenclature of professional training fields, specialties and qualifications and the Classification of occupations and occupational standards.

From this perspective, the social dialogue platform can be illustrated in the Figure no.2



**Fig. no. 2 Platform of social dialog in the VET System**

### **The governance of dual VET in the Republic of Moldova**

Concerning the dual VET, the Ministry of Education, Culture and Research based on the Government Decision no.70/2018 [4], is responsible for:

- coordination of the Enrolment plan in dual education according to the requests of companies and to the capacities of vocational education institutions, specifying the number of places (by professions /specialties) required for the next year of education, as well as the duration of the training;
- coordinating the curriculum for dual education, developed on the basis of occupational standards or occupational profiles for the profession / profession;
- monitoring of the admission and enrolment process in dual education;
- financing of training in VET institutions.

Based on the Government Decision no.70/2018 [4], the Chamber of Commerce and Industries:

- organizes upon request of companies of training courses for instructors in production at enterprises;
- organizes upon request of the MECR and of companies of training courses for instructors in VET institutions which are involved in dual VET;
- approves in co-decision with the MECR the curricula for professions in Dual VET;
- establishes the Commission for the determination of the degree of compliance of the company for carrying out the training activity in dual education;
- recommends to the Ministry of Education, Culture and Research the appropriate economic agents for the development of dual education;
- keeps track of the companies participating in the implementation of the technical training programs through dual education;
- delegates the members of evaluation and qualification boards in dual education;
- provides support and assistance to the companies interested in or involved in the implementation of dual training programs;
- upon request of the apprentice or companies,

provides support and assistance in the preparation of the contract between apprentices and companies;

- provides support and assistance to companies in the process of setting up consortia with other companies.

The Chamber of Commerce and Industries legal status was adjusted for the purpose of the explicit provision of CCI's roles in the area of dual education at the CCI Congress on 10.08.2017.

The National Agency for Quality Assurance in Education and Research (ANACEC) is responsible for the accreditation and quality assurance external evaluation of the VET institutions that provide dual VET.

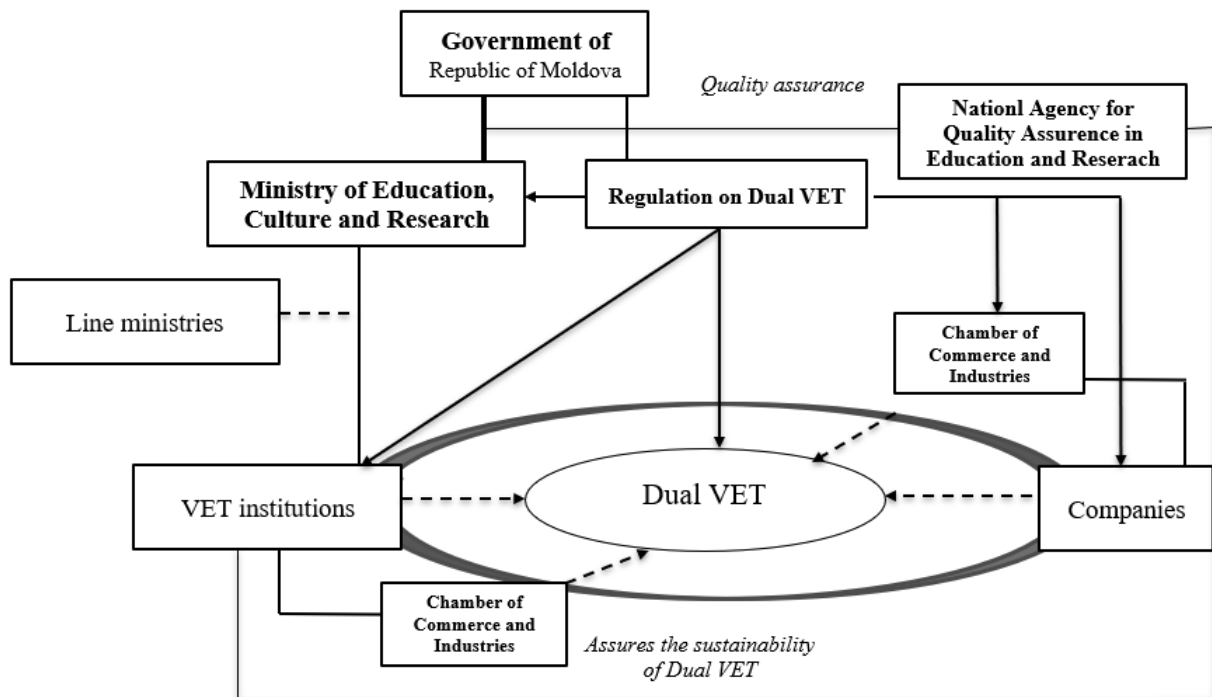
From this perspective, the stakeholders involved in Dual VET can be illustrated in the Figure no.3.

### **The main elements of dual normative framework include:**

(1) the sharing of responsibilities between the Ministry of Education, Culture and Research, the Chamber of Commerce and Industries, the National Agency for Quality Assurance in Education and Research, and other stakeholders; (2) the rights and obligations of the training companies and of the VET providers; (3) the responsibilities of the in-company trainers and teachers within VET schools; (4) the rights and obligations of apprentices; (5) the system of remuneration of the apprentices' work within the training company during the practical training through the "apprenticeship salary"; (6) the template of training contract between apprentices and companies; (7) the template of cooperation agreement between VET providers and companies, etc.

Regarding the educational process within Dual VET, the MECR approved in 2018 the Framework Plan for dual VET. There is a document that represents a regulatory framework at the national level for the development of secondary (ISCED 3), post-secondary (ISCED 4) and non-tertiary (ISCED 5) dual VET. Although this document is called "Plan", it is actually a regulatory frame for the organization and delivery of dual VET education.

The document provides information concerning the following aspects within dual VET education, both for ISCED 3 and ISCED 4-5 levels.



**Fig. no. 3 Stakeholders involved in Dual VET**

The subjects covered in this document are the following: (1) organization of educational process in dual VET: Overview; Calendar of the study process; Structure of the educational process; Organizing the process of assessing professional skills; Extracurricular activities; Institutional responsibilities regarding the elaboration and implementation of the Education Plan; (2) Structure of a one-year education plan; Structure of the two-year education plan; Road map through the Learning Plan components; Training plan in the educational institution; Training plan for the economic agent; Indicative list of optional courses / modules recommended for one-year training program; Indicative list of recommended optional courses / modules for the two-year training program.

Concerning the dual secondary VET, the educational time repartition is based on the proportion: 20-30% in the VET institution and 70-80 % within the company. Based on the document, the professional training for one study year includes 3 components: (1) The first component is General preparation; it has a scope to develop the general competencies relevant in different contexts. Course Units are compulsory for the

educational process; (2) The second component is Professional Profile Preparation; it has a scope to develop general and specific professional competencies. Within this component the theoretical aspects of the course prepare the ground for the practical training within the company.

This component can be delivered only based on module curricula; (3) The third component is Optional preparation; it has the objective to teach students general or specific competencies based on the profile of the company or to answer to the learning requirements of the students. This component can be structured by modules or disciplines. Students can choose the optional component until the date of 10<sup>th</sup> of September each year.

Regarding the post-secondary and non-tertiary dual VET, the duration of the study programme in the company cannot be less than 50 % of the student's time. The professional training contains the same components: (1) General subjects (20 % of total number of hours); (2) Professional technical subjects (53 % of total number of hours) and (3) Optional classes (20 % of total numbers of hours).

The General Framework Plan for dual VET includes also the Consultation for students, which represent 5% of the total educational program

and the consultations for exams – which represents 2 % of the study time. The examination of students can be organized at VET institutions or within the company. Based on the provisions in dual VET the exam has to be organized during a study year. The final qualification exams will be organized at the end of the educational program.

Concerning the improvement of the image of dual VET due to its promotion during the past several years, the number of companies, pupils and schools participating in implementing dual VET increased significantly: from 29 students in 2014-2015 to 1355 students in 2018-2019. Regarding the partnerships established between VET institutions and companies, this number increased according to the information in Fig. no 4.

Another important element of attractiveness of dual VET is that based on the normative framework, the employer can benefit of tax deduction expenses related to dual VET, for the following categories: the salary of trainers in enterprises and the salary of the student involved in dual VET; procurement of teaching materials for students (equipment, tools, etc); assurance of working space for students. The main idea is that all financial resources invested in dual training benefit of tax deductions and exemptions.

Regarding the salary of students involved in

dual VET, they usually earn 2/3 from the average economy salary in Moldova and can benefit from transportation to and from the workplace, food, accommodation, etc.

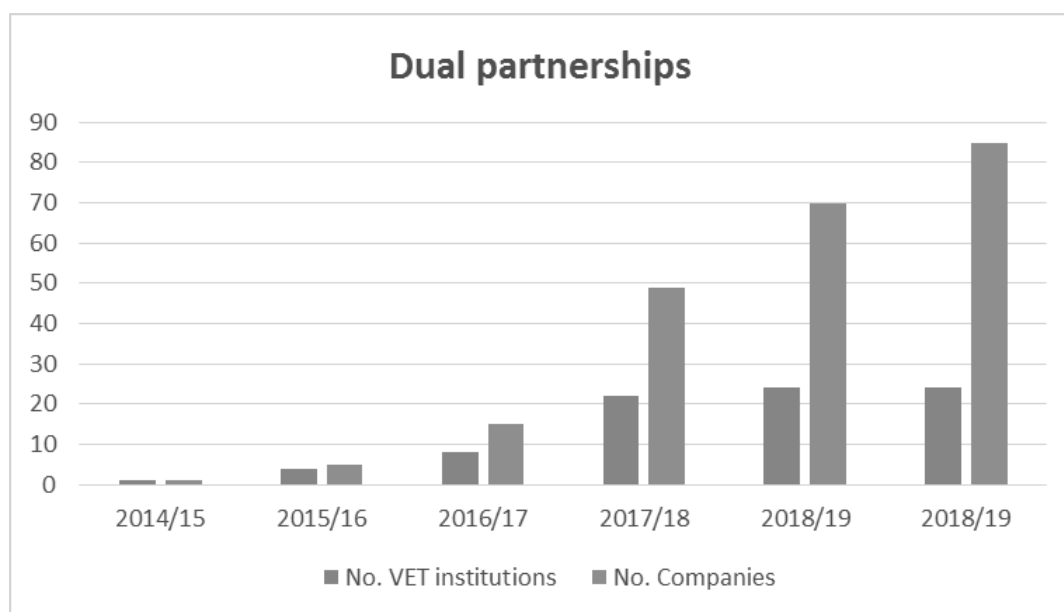
The employability of young men and women is improved. According to a survey of companies involved in dual VET [9], the recruitment rate of graduates remains consistent, at more than 50 per cent, which is considerably higher than in the traditional training system.

The dual VET is correlated with the needs of companies. The companies participate at the enrollment process; recruit the students, and participate in the development of Educational Plan and other Educational documents.

### **Relevant experience on dual VET implementation in Moldova**

Dual VET was initiated in 2014 based on the partnership between a professional school and a company with German capital. Up to 2018 the dual VET system was piloted with the support of German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ) and the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC) through the project [11].

The implementation of the project was oriented on 3 major Pillars.



**Fig. no. 4 Number of dual VET partnerships**



Pillars	Achieved results
Development of legal, normative and methodological framework	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- The Government Decision no.70/2018 [4]</li> <li>- The Framework Plan for dual professional education and training[7];</li> <li>- The tax deduction expenses of the companies related to dual VET;</li> <li>- The changes in legal status of CCI through the adjustment of responsibilities concerning the Dual VET;</li> <li>- The Practical Guidelines for the implementation of the Framework Plan for dual professional education and training;</li> <li>- The Guide on organization and implementation of Dual VET for companies.</li> <li>- Regulation regarding training of in-company instructors in production for the Republic of Moldova factories;</li> <li>- The educational plans developed in cooperation between VET institutions and companies.</li> </ul>
Development of institutional framework, especially strengthening of the role of The Chamber of Commerce and Industries	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Training and certification of 79 in-company instructors in production;</li> <li>- Training of about 40 examiners for the qualification exams of the dual VET system;</li> <li>- Representation/participation in the commissions for the qualification exams;</li> <li>- Confirming the eligibility of economic operators providing dual VET programs;</li> <li>- Keeping records of apprenticeships, dual VET cooperation agreements, and in-company trainers;</li> <li>- Promotion of dual VET among Moldovan companies;</li> <li>- Consultancy to companies regarding the initiation and development of dual VET cooperation programs on a regular basis.</li> </ul>
Extension of dual VET by increasing the number of VET providers, students and companies which are involved in dual VET	<p>The number of students increased annually:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- 2014/15 – 29;</li> <li>- 2015/16 – 107;</li> <li>- 2016/17 – 280;</li> <li>- 2017/18 – 661;</li> <li>- 2018/19 – 1355;</li> <li>- 2019/20 – 938 students enrolled.</li> </ul>

**Main conclusions for the implementation period of dual VET in 2014 – 2019**

1. The Ministry of Education, Culture and Research managed to implement the dual VET due to financial support of external partners and active involvement of private companies, including CCI.
2. Due to an enlarged dialogue involving of development partners (GIZ and SDC), the MECR managed to inform, and to raise the awareness of the companies regarding the dual VET system. An important role was played by two large communication campaigns. The first VET campaign called „Meserii pe plac – viitorasigurat” (*Professions we like for a sure future*)

was implemented by the European Union’s Technical Assistance Project during the period 2017 – 2018. The second media promotion campaign refers to dual education, under the heading „Inveti, Muncesti, Castigi” (*Study, Work, Win*). This campaign was carried out during the period of admission for the study year 2018 – 2019 within the framework of the Project” Structural Reform in Vocation Education and Training in the Republic of Moldova”, implemented by Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit GIZ through the German Cooperation.

3. The implementation of the dual VET received full support of the Government of the Republic of Moldova.

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