

Building up contacts for collaboration with trade unions in Costa Rica in vocational education – study visit and workshop, 10th – 16th January 2018

The former Federal Education Minister, Johanna Wanka, signed a joint declaration of intent with Costa Rica's Education Ministry (MEP) in 2016. She thereby created the basis for collaboration in vocational education. The BMBF is supported here by GOVET, which coordinates the bilateral cooperation in this field as the German government's central office for international cooperation in vocational education. The goal is to implement a scientific-technical collaboration. Costa Rica requires more skilled labour to meet the demands of the economy.

The Unions4VET project, which is sponsored by the BMBF, contributes trade union perspectives to the bilateral cooperation. The Unions4VET project is engaged in Costa Rica with the aim of improving the quality of vocational education and better involving the trade unions in the vocational education system.

There is a wide-ranging system of vocational education in Costa Rica. An important role here is played by the MEP for the (formal) path of school vocational education and the National Training Institute (INA) for non-school (non-formal) areas. The system is quite stable, particularly because all undertakings employing more than 5 people must pay 1.5% of the gross wage sum into a fund. This fund finances the more than 50 training centres run by the INA and also partly the vocational schools. Although Costa Rica can proudly point to the long existence of its vocational education legislation, various sides are looking for changes in the training system, which include a greater orientation of vocational education to the needs of the economy.

The dual education system in Costa Rica has been discussed extensively in the social dialogue for more than a year now. Various "dual" pilot projects have been started in recent years.

A trip to Costa Rica with study visits and a workshop was held under the Unions4VET project. A meeting was organised with representatives of the MEP, the INA, the Friedrich-Ebert Foundation, the Konrad-Adenauer Foundation, the German Chamber of Foreign Trade, the German Embassy, the international cooperation (CIM specialist integrated in the INA), trade unions and employer organisations to enable a wide-ranging exchange of views on the training system in Costa Rica.

Selected items of the visit

The first date was held in the "Westin Golf Resort & Spa, Playa Conchal" hotel in Guanacaste on 10th January, which already has experience with vocational education in the kitchen, barkeeping and housekeeping. The apprentices sign an employment contract with the hotel at the start of their work, they receive remuneration and are thus insured under social security. The Westin firstly aims to attract skilled labour and is secondly aware of its own social responsibility of offering young people a perspective.



A joint workshop was held with the International Labour Organisation (ILO/OIT) on 12th January, which was attended by representatives of various trade unions. From the trade unions' view, the following items have great relevance in the negotiations within the social dialogue: Die Wahrung der Interessen der jungen Menschen in der Ausbildung

- Safeguarding the interests of young people during their training
- Applying legal regulations in practice (such rules foresee that an employment contract is made out for an apprenticeship)
- Existing workplaces may not be threatened by apprenticeships
- Vocational education requires a clear legal framework and remuneration
- Apprenticeships must still be subject to social security contributions, although the rules may be adapted (e.g. the contributions could be staggered)

Visits to a bodywork shop on 11th January and a garage on 13th January made clear that there is a high requirement for skilled labour. Some students complete the practical part of their training in the two enterprises. However, the contract is concluded solely with the school. The students are not insured under social security and do not receive remuneration, although they partly receive help from the employer for their way to work or for meals. The enterprises themselves develop the concepts and contents of the practical part of the training because there are no standards on which they can rely. There are also cross-company cooperation agreements to achieve better qualifying for employees.

Assessment

From the trade unions' view, Costa Rica offers good opportunities for improving the quality of vocational education. A training surcharge (which is already paid by undertakings) provides a financial basis that can be built upon. The requirement for high-quality training is recognised by various actors in vocational education and there is a will to implement changes. The Unions4VET project can support the teamwork between the actors in vocational education, the stabilisation of the social partnership and the involvement of trade unions in the system of vocational education.