

Challenges and recommendations for the improvement of vocational training in Southern European countries with a special focus on apprenticeships and work-based learning

Youth unemployment is a major challenge for the European Union and its member states. Especially in Southern European countries the percentage of unemployed young people is particularly high. Among others the improvement of vocational training systems is an important instrument to reduce unemployment of young people. But at the same time these countries have special framework conditions for vocational training.

Against this background, trade union representatives of Greece, Italy and Portugal discussed challenges and possible solutions for the improvement of vocational training in Southern European countries at a conference in Athens on November 28th/ 29th. The conference was part of the DGB's project Unions4VET which is funded by the German Federal Ministry of Education and Research. In the course of the conference representatives of the Greek trade union federation GSEE, the Italian trade union federations CGIL, CISL and UIL Piemonte, the Portuguese trade union federations CGTP and UGT as well as the German Trade Union Confederation (DGB) identified the following strategic fields of action for the improvement of vocational training and the promotion of work-based learning in Southern European countries:

Attractiveness/ Image of vocational training:

Vocational education and training (VET) is not attractive and has a bad image in comparison to higher education. It is necessary to increase the attractiveness by informing enterprises, schools, parents and pupils about the strengths of the VET system and the career opportunities involved. Important factors for increasing VET's attractiveness are an income for apprentices and the improvement of the quality of apprenticeships.

Company structure

The vast majority of companies in Southern European countries are micro enterprises with less than ten employees. These companies often have no resources and capacities for providing good apprenticeships. Moreover, they are often „closed shops“ due to family business. There is a special need for supporting structures and financial resources for apprenticeships in these companies. In addition, special incentives should be offered to family-owned companies when opening apprenticeships for non-family-members.

Lack of control

The VET system lacks adequate control mechanisms which protect apprentices of exploitation and guarantee good apprenticeship. So, it is important to clarify and document rights and obligations of apprentices and of apprenticing companies. Trade unions should have the possibility to control the performance of apprenticeships and apprentices should have the possibility to articulate their interests.

Funding and Financing

There are either limited or non-existing structures for financing apprenticeship. It is necessary to initiate a dialogue process with all relevant stakeholders in order to discuss solutions.

Governance

The existing governance structures neither consider the needs of the labour market nor the interests of apprentices. The reasons therefor are on the one hand that trade unions are not adequately involved in the governance of VET. On the other hand the VET system is governed top down. Thus local needs and interests are not considered adequately. It is necessary to involve the trade unions more actively in the governance structures and to strengthen the local level. Moreover, the governance should follow a long-term perspective and guarantee a long-term reliability.

Framework conditions

In some countries there is a lack of vocational orientation for pupils. Hence, a need for a better infrastructure of vocational orientation is required. Moreover, the apprenticeships in companies should be supported by educational services in a better way. It is necessary to promote a structure of educational services.

The partners agree on the need for transnational exchange and cooperation to promote good apprenticeship in Europe. They look forward continuing this process.