



# Widening participation in technical and vocational education and training: experiences from Romania

Among the numerous challenges that education in Romania has faced in recent, so-called transition, years is the effort to turn from a centralised, command-driven system, to a flexible and demand driven one, having as its main principle the attempt to widen the participation of different actors in all stages of vocational education and training. This paper investigates some successful examples of practice which contributed to bridging the gap between TVET schools and the beneficiaries of its services. Diversification of functions, involvement of stakeholders and creation of institutional capacities and structures in TVET institutions are realised to different levels at the moment, with a significant contribution from the EU funded Phare programmes.

## General context of educational reform

There are already different approaches and perspectives in literature on the key moments or milestones of educational reform in Romania. In order to depict the evolutions and transformations in recent years, we will offer a perspective which could help in understanding the general context of reform and transformation of governance in education. Birzea and Badescu (1998) tried to depict different stages of reform, but these should be also updated. The three main steps they identified are:

□ destructuring (1990); the main instruments of communist education (e.g. political indoctrination, over-centralisation and abusive control of individuals and institutions) were removed. General objectives of education and the structure of the education system were reconsidered;

□ stabilisation (1991-92); priority was given to defining a legal framework that would re-establish a coherent educational system, according to the new social, political and cultural values. The new Constitution stipulates the right to education for all, free access, diversification of education supply, equality of opportunities, additional private education provision and emergence of alternative schools;

□ restructuring (1993-95); in this period important reform programmes are launched in different sectors of education, with the financial and technical support of international organisations (World Bank, European Commission). In 1995 the Law on Education was adopted.

At least two stages could be added, according to the evolutions after 1995:

□ comprehensive reform (1996-2000); major changes are planned, coherent at component level (curriculum, management, evaluation, teacher training, etc.); the main intention was to pass from sector/domain oriented reform to systemic reform;

□ 'reform of the reform' (2001- ...); there are two components or directions of educational policy after the government change in 2000. One is to strengthen the achievements of the previous team and to build on their experience. The second trend is to rethink some of the important measures already under implementation. Some of these changes could be considered logical, even normal, but others are just changes of changes, predominantly justified by political reasons and not by evaluations of the policies in force.



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**The discussion about participation and partnership to ensure the quality of TVET is not new, but the capacity of the educational actors to establish effective and sustainable cooperation with the stakeholders, especially in transition economies characterised by instability and unpredictability, is still a challenge. We have tried to present here a participatory planning model for TVET which started to be used in Romania, and which, accompanied by appropriate support measures, should lead to bridging the TVET schools, the community and the social partners. The model is based on a regional approach and is supported by measures focused on cultural changes in TVET school management (a new vision on partnership, quality assurance, social accountability, etc.), changes at the level of teaching and learning practices (integration of work and learning, student-centred methodologies, inclusion of students with special needs, etc.) and creation of an institutional network to pilot this integrated approach (the so-called resource centres).**



Fortunately, this last situation is not so characteristic of vocational education and training, where the significant transformations after year 2000 have augmented, and are consistent with, previous reforms. A systemic approach to TVET reform is envisaged lately, trying to harmonise initial and continuous vocational training, to rationalise the system and to make it more flexible and responsive to the demands of the labour market.

One of the most important changes of this last period, impacting also on vocational education, was the extension of compulsory education from 8 to 10 years. This begins at the age of 6/7 years and comprises primary education (grades 1-4, according to ISCED 1) and lower secondary education (grades 5-10 according to ISCED 2) organised in two successive cycles: gymnasium (grades 5-8) and the 9th and 10th grades. The last two grades are organised in educational paths: a vocational path, the School of arts and trades, leading to level I of qualification and the lower cycle of high school (see also Annex 1).

### **From command/supply-driven to demand-driven TVET.**

The command-driven TVET system in place before 1990 is a fact and needs no further argumentation and description. The reality is that the governing principles of organisation and functioning of vocational education did not change as quickly as expected and suggested by the new developments toward a free, market economy. Even the centralised command system progressively dissolved after the collapse of communism, vocational education remained - and this is still partly the case - a supply-driven (sub-)system, from the point of view of educational offer. This problem exists across the whole educational system, but the consequences are more direct and visible in the case of TVET because of expected immediate integration of its graduates into the labour market.

The change of perspective from mass to flexible production requires broader skills and knowledge than those offered by previous specialisation. Some countries from ECA <sup>(1)</sup> eliminated early specialisation after basic education, others did not, while others introduced it even earlier. (Hidden challenges to education systems in transition economies, 2001).

The characteristics of the TVET system in Romania at the beginning of the 1990s are mainly:

- early specialisation and fragmentation of qualification structure in a very large and narrow number of specialisations, which created a rigid and inadaptable TVET educational offer;
- a centralised decision-making system of policy development and, as a consequence, low participation of stakeholders;
- a prescriptive and outdated curriculum, based on the frequent direct relations between TVET schools and a major employer in the area;
- a poor partnership structure with employers and low capacity in schools to diversify the educational offer and to respond to the new challenges of the labour market.

A first Phare project to reform vocational education and training was initiated in Romania in 1995. Like all Phare funded projects, this one was meant to support national reform and offer two important contributions:

- finance for modern equipment and training materials for schools, plus their rehabilitation;
- technical assistance from the EU to contribute to the conceptual and methodological developments needed for a modern TVET system.

The transfer of TVET development know-how was, and still is, important for transition countries like Romania. The commitment to a market economy, and a new type of relationship between vocational school 'products' and employment, needs the lengthy experience of western countries to ensure consistency and sustainability. The quick passage from post-communism to post-modernism, from centralised economies to an information/knowledge based economy would be even more difficult if not assisted and advised by the more advanced.

A comprehensive TVET reform project started in 1995 (through the project Phare RO 9405), including the main aims of:

(1) ECA = Europe and Central Asia.



- adapting the structure of TVET delivery to the needs of the emerging market economy;
- switching from command to demand-driven educational planning;
- designing a new curriculum, in accordance with the needs of new qualifications required in the labour market;
- strengthening social partnership in VET, especially through setting up tripartite consultative bodies at county level (Local Development Committees).

This first reform project was implemented in 75 pilot schools across the country, representing all main vocational domains. The new institutional and qualification structure, and the curriculum produced in the framework of the project, were considered successful and extended from the pilot schools to the whole vocational education system.

Plotting the transition path from command-driven to demand-driven TVET was not an easy process; the work still continues in this respect, having in mind directing principles such as:

- preference to functional policies (development and improvement) and to systemic approach;
- learning as the centre of pedagogy, learners at the centre of educational policies;
- policy development and change process are driven by analysis and consultation;
- priority to individual and community demands, articulated at regional level (see also Rado, 2000).

The visible steps forward made through this programme, which was completed in 1998, are continued now under the new multi-annual Phare project. In order to reach social and economic cohesion, a new Phare project was launched in Romania, with multiple components; one of those (Phare RO 0108 TVET) is focused on modernisation of vocational and technical education and training and started effectively in 2003. In the same year, the structure of TVET was modified again, according to new policy developments and decisions, and particularly concerned extending compulsory education from 8 to 10 years.

Recent decisions from the Ministry of Education and Research aimed at creating facilities to improve access to initial education and training, by making vocational education and training more attractive and also offering equal opportunities to access for those from disadvantaged regions, such as rural areas. The main difficulty in organising TVET in rural areas comes from the economic gap between rural and urban areas and the restricted ability to produce prognoses regarding the economic development strategies for these areas.

The limited partnership between schools and enterprises and insufficient didactic equipment in schools (especially those in rural areas and small and medium size towns) are the main obstacles in the development of TVET.

A further issue is including students with special educational needs into mainstream education. Specific actions initiated in the Phare 2001 project aimed to strengthen the institutional capacity of vocational schools to offer the best opportunities to these students.

The Phare 2001-02 programme is due to be implemented in 100 schools, distributed over 11 areas of economic restructuring with potential for economic growth and 22 resource centres (schools involved in the previous project and with potential for assistance and networking according to regional and field/qualification structure).

The overall objectives of the new project envisage:

- consolidating the achievements of the reform acquired through the Phare VET RO 9405 programme and supporting the rationalisation and modernisation of the present TVET system;
- reviewing responsibilities, governance and accountability mechanisms in the provision of initial TVET in line with the social and economic development, in a regional perspective;
- ensuring equal opportunity for all young people to obtain a good professional qualification at a level equal to European standards by providing vocational education which responds flexibly to the needs of each individual.



After one year of implementation, very intense and rich in activities targeted toward the broad objectives mentioned before, the first results/achievements are already visible.

A new curriculum was developed for level 1 qualification. The important aspect here is that a new methodology for curriculum development is now in place, based on vocational training standards, modular approach, competences and a credit system. This new approach tries to ensure the flexibility of vocational training, mobility/transfer of competences between qualifications and coherence between initial vocational training (IVET) and continuous vocational training (CVT).

A system of TVET quality assurance was developed, based on the European Framework of Quality Assurance <sup>(2)</sup> and the main tools of this system were piloted in the 22 resource centres. The necessary revisions will be made after this year and the system will be extended to other TVET schools.

A comprehensive human resource development programme was launched, based on specific methodologies, according to the training needs identified in different areas: student-centred learning, inclusion of students with special needs, partnership development and working with enterprises, vocational counselling and guidance, educational planning on demand, etc. Teachers, school directors, inspectors and representatives of social partners participated in training stages during this first year.

Development and initial implementation of a new model for educational planning, with three tiers, situated at regional, local (county) and school level. If a rationalisation of the TVET offer is envisaged, this has to be based on careful evaluation of needs in the labour market, the individual needs of students, and the capacity of schools to meet all these needs.

Areas in which further intervention for improvement is strongly needed, the project as yet unable to produce satisfactory results, include:

□ the yet limited participation of social partners (especially employers and employer organisations, trade unions) in planning and developing vocational qualifications. The

difficult situation of small and medium enterprises, engaged in a 'survival economy', unstable, sometime chaotic, with high levels of taxation makes it difficult to motivate involvement in education and training. The debates about setting up a system of incentives for employers, at least for participating in organising learning at the workplace for students in TVET, have produced no results for the time being;

□ the level of coherence between initial vocational education and training (IVET) and continuing vocational training (CVT). The new curriculum, based on standards, competences and credits is expected to bring a significant contribution in this respect, but mainly the creation of an agency for qualifications, which will be in charge of a national framework of vocational qualification, to be the reference both for IVET and CVT;

□ the limited number of TVET schools assisted by the project (122) <sup>(3)</sup>. This creates examples of good practice, but dissemination and generalisation of results across of the whole TVET system is difficult to ensure, both in terms of human resources and financing. Careful consideration of this issue is needed to avoid creation of potential gaps between assisted and non-assisted schools. The broad aim of the project is to contribute to social and economic cohesion, not to deepen the differences.

### **Widening the participation of different actors**

Transparency, accountability and participation in TVET are governing principles of the reform efforts. The following could be mentioned in relation to participation:

#### **Participation of social partners**

This is especially for enterprises developing sound and relevant work experience for students, but also for curriculum development and validation and planning the educational offer. Improving the quality of vocational education is not a goal to be achieved by the sole efforts of schools and the education sector, even supported by the know-how and financing of Phare projects. The participation of social partners in planning and delivery of TVET was a priority from the first vocational education reform project. The main social partners considered crucial to the sustainable development of TVET are:

<sup>(2)</sup> See the work of Technical Working Group for quality assurance in TVET, European Commission.

<sup>(3)</sup> i. e. the 100 supplementary TVET schools integrated in the new programme Phare 2001-02, and the 22 TVET schools involved in the first Phare reform project and functioning as resource centres because of their potential for assistance and networking due to their previous experience [editor's note].



- representatives of employers and employer organisations,
- trade unions,
- governmental organisations/agencies,
- parents.

It is a high priority to break the vicious circle in which employers claim that schools are not providing high quality professionals and schools complain about the lack of interest and low participation in education by enterprises. More structured cooperation, with clear roles and responsibilities, with an effective system of incentives and disincentives in place, could prevent this mutual blame and create a platform for working towards common goals. School managers and teachers were involved in training activities in which they learned how to work with enterprises and how to develop together partnership plans. The needs of the employers, both in terms of qualifications and competences are the main tools in planning education on demand.

For the first time in Romania, vocational training standards for each domain, developed mainly by educationalists, were validated through panels by representatives of the world of work. This created a platform for debate regarding the competences required by employers and the structure of each qualification.

'The link between school and workplace is the milestone for any vocational education system. If the links are weak, there is a risk that system will produce graduates difficult to place on the labour market, the results being youth unemployment and expensive vocational conversion programmes; if the links are too much centred on individual needs of employers, the system becomes difficult to modernise and the mobility on the labour market (...) becomes difficult' (Deij and Badescu, 2003, p. 48).

### **Participation of support services providers**

This particularly includes guidance and counselling services and in-service teacher training institutions. Career guidance is crucial for further development and improvement in Romanian TVET. The inappropriate social perception of TVET among parents, coupled sometimes with unclear policy meas-

ures, creates problems in effective distribution of students in the system and their future employability in the labour market. There is in place a national network of counselling and vocational guidance centres, one for each county delivering services to all educational customers in their area (teachers, students, parents). As well as these centres, almost every vocational school has its own counselling and guidance specialist(s) and a counselling and guidance office in school, at the service of students and teachers. The county centres network is coordinated and financed by the Ministry of Education and Research and aims to deliver services to pre-university public schools. Another important network of support service providers is represented by the so called Teacher's Houses: these are county in-service teacher training centres also financed by the Ministry of Education. In addition, in recent years, a free market of training providers, both for teachers and for CVT, has started to appear. Different types of providers, such as NGOs, private companies, universities, VET schools, etc. have become more involved in this area.

### **Participation of regional bodies**

This refers mainly to a newly created consultative structure, as an outcome of the new Phare project: the Regional Consortia. This is established at the level of each region and comprises representatives of local public authorities in the region, representatives of regional development agencies, representatives of school inspectorates and universities, employers and trade unions. It is chaired by the Regional Development Agency and their main task is to produce the regional action plans for TVET, based on analysis of trends and evolution of the social and economic environment in their region. Analysis of the social and economic environment in the respective region should allow the Regional Consortia to produce a long-term action plan for development of vocational education and training.

A general description of the regions and their development role would clarify the above ideas. Since 1998, Romania has been split into eight development regions, with social and economic development goals and without administrative functions. In each region there is a Council for Regional Development, with a deliberative role regarding the coordination of regional development policy. This body is composed, for each region,



of county council presidents and representatives of different types of administrative structures: cities, medium/small towns and villages; it coordinates the activity of the Regional Development Agency (RDA). The RDA is in charge of elaboration and implementation of policy documents for the respective region. The projects proposed by RDAs are financed, after approval, from the National Fund for Regional Development and other sources, identified by each RDA.

One of the most evident features of economic development in Romania in recent years was the growing importance of the Bucharest Region. The trend in all transition countries is more visible in Romania because of the dimensions of the country, both in terms of territory and population. Having 5.4 % of the whole population of the country, Bucharest brings 21 % of the GDP; 20 % of the small and medium size enterprises are registered here and 51.1 % of the total foreign investments are made in the region.

In contrast, the North-East Region is highly dependent on agriculture, with a high percentage of rural population, situated in proximity with Moldova and the Ukraine.

The planning and development of vocational education and training in a regional perspective is seen as one of the tools to diminish the regional disparities and to contribute to social and economic cohesion.

### Participation of students

This is envisaged in at least two directions: participation in creating their own learning and participation in building career pathways according to their competences and the needs of the local/regional labour market. In order to strengthen the feeling of ownership of students in relation to their learning experiences, teachers were trained in modern teaching/learning methodologies, based on the principle of student-centred learning. Individual learning materials are now being developed, with a special focus on adapting learning to students with special needs. Specific measures have been designed to create an inclusive learning environment in and out of school, to support the integration of students with special needs. More than 2 500 teachers and managers from vocational schools in the Phare 2001 proj-

ect were trained in the first year of the project on different topics, including those mentioned above. More than 60 training stages were organised at regional level, to facilitate networking and cooperation between schools, and delivery was ensured in teams by the experts of the technical assistance and local teacher and management trainers, trained in the programme.

*Finally, new management techniques and contemporary forms of work organisation are taking the individualisation process into the workplace where, in the wake of a serious quest for value added, traditional hierarchies and the formalised work procedures which traditionally brought order to the operations are being softened or even abandoned.*' (Brater, 2000, p. 46).

### Participation of parents

This is largely still to be achieved, though there are domains of school activity in which parents can definitely play a greater role:

- micro-policy making at school level;
- career guidance;
- participatory school development planning;
- organisation and delivery of work experience.

### General aims

Widening participation in different processes and domains of vocational education and training is seen as a key tool in bridging supply and demand, and in creating strong links and effective cooperation between all stakeholders. In addition, the actual social perception of TVET should be challenged.

TVET in Romania faces an image deficit, caused by several factors:

- memories of the old communist system, such as:
- the social experience of parents as TVET graduates: even if the communist ideology claimed that 'working people' (*oamenii muncii*) are the owners of all goods, they had quite low social status and not very rewarding financial benefits,



□ the structure of the previous system (narrow specialisation at an early age, outdated skills, etc.), which created a high risk type of qualified young people in the context of the new market economy.

□ the unstable economy of transition, where the extreme dynamic of the economic sectors and reduced long-term perspective creates fear of unemployment. (Fear of changing workplace and fear of unemployment are widespread especially among adults who qualified during the previous system, when it was quite common to have only one or two work locations during the whole active life).

□ The embedded idea that TVET is for those students not able to attend general/academic high schools. A paradoxical process happened, between two interesting evolutions. On the one side, in recent years, the formal educational expectations of parents and their ambitions for their children increased. It was taken for granted that a higher level of education means a greater chance of a better social-economic status. At the same time, a kind of elitist trend spread among parents and students and oriented their options after the end of compulsory education towards academic high schools, considered 'better' and having a superior image. Since the number of places in this type of education is limited, those remaining 'out' had to go to TVET schools, against their initial will and first option.

Even though unemployment figures show that graduates from general high schools are in the largest unemployed group, the majority of parents are still willing to orient their children towards this educational path and, in many cases, to impose it. This option may be a reaction to the negative factors but it also reflects the conviction that this type of 'elite' high school may provide more opportunity for entrance to further/higher education (\*).

In fact, the existing realities of existing TVET schools sometimes contributed to this image deficit, through outdated equipment and endowments for practical training, lowly qualified staff, and inability to address the new type of qualifications required by employers in a free market.

### **Participatory planning TVET development: a regional approach**

One of the significant achievements and innovations in educational planning is the move to an articulated approach in a regional perspective. As shown by Davey (2003, p. 151),

'In the run-up to accession to the EU the debate over reform and development in the candidate countries has had a strong but often confused regional dimension. This has been encouraged by the EU and has had three interlocking strands:

□ regional government: the possible creation or reform of an upper tier of self government, both to complete the reforms of public administration begun in 1990 and to stimulate socio-economic development;

□ regional policy: the desirability of directing public investment and encouraging private investment to reduce the growing territorial disparities in income and employment;

□ regional development planning: basing increasing proportions of public investment on regionally conceived and focused strategies and priorities rather than nation-wide sectoral programmes and targets.'

In each of the seven development regions with schools involved in the new Phare project (Phare RO 0108 TVET) for modernisation of vocational education and training, Regional Consortia were created.

The activities of these Regional Consortia are related to:

□ supporting vocational schools and vocational training providers in developing and offering qualifications relevant at national and regional level;

□ monitoring the system of TVET quality assurance in cooperation with local school inspectorates;

□ ensuring communication and interface between regions and national responsible bodies for early identification of qualifications needed in the labour market and occupational profiles emerging in the respective regions;

(\* For a comparative perspective, see tables 1 to 3 in Annex 2.



□ guidance for rationalising and optimising allocation of resources for vocational education and training in the regions.

Nevertheless, one of the main roles of these bodies was to develop the regional education action plans (REAPs) for TVET that should address the key development areas for the period 2003 to 2010. REAPs should be demand-led and should be underpinned by a sound labour market and supply-side capacity analysis.

*'A standard planning approach has been proposed for the REAPs. This includes a statement of the policy context, an analysis of the current and future forecast position in relation to employment, skills, and training in the region and a plan for the development and improvement in TVET to address the market and individual needs in perspective of 2010.'* (Swainger, 2003).

The main contribution of REAPs is expected to be in identifying regional priorities and designing specific actions to be taken to respond to these priorities. These action plans contain objectives and priorities covering a large spectrum of issues related to vocational education and training, according to the specifics of the region, but all the plans, in all regions, are expected to provide actions related to:

- the types and levels of qualification needed in the region, to respond to envisaged changes in the labour market in the perspective of the year 2010;
- the structure and distribution of the vocational schools network in the region to ensure a more efficient and adaptable TVET system, securing equal access for everybody;
- the measures needed for strengthening the partnership between schools, students and companies.

Starting from the regional level, with the REAPs, a system of planning is in place which continues with development of local action plans for TVET (at county level) and school action plans (at TVET institution level).

The local education action plans for TVET (LEAPs) represent the second tier of educational planning.

The local committees for development of social partnership in TVET are consultative structures of the county school inspectorates created initially under the first Phare RO 9405 project. They are tripartite bodies that support TVET schools in implementing national strategies, also providing assistance to inspectorates in designing scholarship plans and structuring the educational offer according to local needs.

In the new paradigm, they are responsible for developing local education action plans for TVET on the basis of the REAPs, completed and adapted in accordance with local conditions and needs. This ensures a coherent link between regional and local educational planning in TVET.

Further on in this approach we have School Action Plans (SAPs). Each individual school is trained and then expected to develop action plans at the school level on the basis of regional and local priorities. Networking between schools is encouraged by addressing together the local and regional needs for vocational education and training; cooperation between schools and companies takes a more structured form. The local partnership in TVET aims to create effective learning communities, capable of planning and implementing self-development and continuous improvement actions.

This comprehensive planning process is based on previous training of those involved and on common guidelines, jointly developed and agreed by regions. We are now in a piloting phase, in which 122 schools will start the process, learn from it and improve the tools and conditions for implementing the system generally. The expected results of this are a significant contribution in addressing the key challenges now confronting TVET:

- building the 'real image' of TVET in social perception and derived social behaviour: not promising more than is possible, but also not accepting the role of second-hand education;
- adapting TVET to the challenges of economic transition and to global challenge;
- building a new identity for TVET schools, more open and close to enterprises, more flexible and adaptable to internal and external changes. This aims to create com-



munity resource centres, with a wide spectrum of services and activities directed to diverse beneficiaries;

- reshaping the professional identity of TVET teachers, according to the new curriculum, the new role of TVET schools and the requirements of a learning-centred educational process;
- implementing the principles of regional development in educational planning;
- creating sustainable and effective partnerships with the world of work, to the benefit of both sides;
- impacting on initial training of teachers in TVET in all the directions mentioned above.

Creation or consolidation of regional and local bodies representing the interest of stakeholders in TVET aims to help institutionalise the participation of different actors. 'Many countries have realised the advantages of local institutionalisation of stakeholder interests. (...) Local government, union and employer representatives negotiate local training arrangements and regulate interactions between publicly-financed educational institutions and company-based initial training' (Drake, 1994, p. 159).

### **TVET schools as community resource centres**

The intended new image of TVET cannot be created out of the global trends in organisational development. The new conditions created by the evolution toward a knowledge-based economy, conducted and regulated by the flexible specialisation and post-Fordist working relationships, is based on trust, competences and added value. The inner dynamic of the global economic and social environment take particular forms in transition countries, creating mobile and flexible labour markets, characterised most of the time by instability and unpredictability.

Learning organisations and neo-institutionalism - new trends in organisational theory - still make their impact on schools. The organisational behaviour of schools has significantly changed in two directions: structurally and functionally. We are talking in transition countries about the new type of management and a new internal organisation, more flexible and responsive to the de-

mands and challenges of the environment and a broad diversification of functions and services.

A learning organisation can come into being only where the decision-making and decision-taking structures in all organisational areas - including educational theory, personnel, finance and school organisation - comply with the principle of self-organisation. It must be possible for those involved to develop forms of organisation which reflect the prevailing social and economic requirements and independently established key priorities. (*Teacher and trainer training. 3rd workshop on curriculum innovation*, 1999, p. 3).

As a first step in setting up community resource centres, the programme for modernising TVET selected 22 vocational education schools and started to consolidate their institutional capacity. Strengthening this capacity will enable them to become learning champions of the project and methodological support providers for the other schools in the system. The 22 TVET schools have the experience of the first Phare reform project and they came with a certain level of institutional and human resource development. They have been selected based on representing TVET domains and on regional distribution.

The major roles of the resource centres are to:

- transfer the conceptual and methodological knowledge as well as good practices acquired from participation in the previous project (Phare RO 9405) and in their activity as a whole;
- assist the changes and developments proposed for the participant schools in the new Phare RO 0108 TVET project;
- provide methodological support and consultancy to other schools and to become 'resource centres' for peer learning;
- become regional centres for continuous vocational education and training, in cooperation with enterprises;
- act as 'local' support for the Project Implementation Unit and to ensure a communication interface between the school in the programme and the programme management;



□ organise and deliver in-service training activities for TVET teaching staff and managers, according to their capacities and to the needs of the vocational education and training system;

□ bring together in learning networks the local community, the regional resources and stakeholders for strengthening social partnership in vocational education and training;

□ promote a collaborative, associative management, focused on participation, quality assurance and accountability.

It is obvious that the organisational development perspective envisaged for the resource centres implies changes in the whole learning environment and especially in the management and teaching/learning practices.

*'This new learning context implies a different role for teachers and trainers. Teachers need to learn new skills and become lifelong learners themselves to keep up to date with new knowledge, pedagogical ideas and technology. As learning becomes more collaborative, so too must teachers' professional development, which needs to promote professional networks and learning organisations within schools and institutions.'* (Lifelong learning in the global knowledge economy: challenges for developing countries, May 2003).

### The way forward

We have tried to capture in this paper the main orientations and actions directed towards widening the participation of different actors in planning, development and functioning of vocational education and training.

The experience and efforts of 13 years of educational reform of different concentration and magnitude showed that at least two types of change are needed at policy level:

□ shift the focus from 'big' structural and systemic changes to targeted development programmes and to regional and local approaches, closer to beneficiaries of vocational education and training services and closer to the intimate functioning of educational process at grassroots level;

□ the expected impact and the sustainability of educational change at school level (basic, grassroots level) cannot be achieved if the school culture does not change. Even the structural-systemic measures undertaken up to now implicitly or explicitly produced some cultural changes in schools; what we are talking about here is that type of cultural change that starts from inside the organisation, as an intrinsic need for its own development. Cultural change as a decision of the school staff, assumed and accepted by the critical mass of the teachers and carried out in cooperation with local community, can ensure the sustainability of reform measures. This change should be a result of internal school development, started and conducted from inside the organisation.

Building a culture of associative management and partnership in vocational education and training could be the key for widening participation in TVET in a joint effort at ensuring high quality services in the challenging environment which characterises Romania at the moment. Such ideas are not new from a theoretical perspective (or even from the practical one, if we look to the countries with a long democratic tradition); they remain key challenges for TVET development in the future in transition countries like Romania. The distance from what we know we should do to what we actually do in practice is still considerable and, sometimes, well-known solutions to the problems lack coherence in policy approach and persistence in implementation.



Structure of education system in Romania				Annex 1		
Age	Grade	ISCED		Educational level		
		5, 6		Higher education		
		4		Post high school (technical education)		
18	XIII	3		Upper cycle of lyceum (technical education)		
17	XII					
16	XI			Upper cycle of academic high school	Upper cycle of technological high school	Vocational education completion year
15	X			Lower cycle of lyceum	Vocational education (school of arts and trades)	
14	IX					
13	VIII	COMPULSORY EDUCATION	2	Gymnasium		
12	VII					
11	VI		1	Primary		
10	V					
9	IV					
8	III		0	Pre-primary		
7	II					
6	I					
5	3					
4	2					
3	1					

Participation rate in initial education and training							Annex 2 Table 1	
School year	Technical and vocational education			High school education				
	TOTAL	Vocational education	High school education - the technological path	High schools for students with specific abilities (art, sport) - the vocational path	General/theoretical	Total high school education		
	Total number of students enrolled (% in rural areas)	Total number of students enrolled (% in rural areas)	Total number of students enrolled (% in rural areas)	Total number of students enrolled (% in rural areas)	Total number of students enrolled (% in rural areas)	Total number of students enrolled (% in rural areas)		
2001/2002	565 665 (11,26 %)	252 347 (15,8 %)	313 318 (7,6 %)	51 042 (2,6 %)	346 303 (5,9 %)	710 663 (6,4 %)		
2002/2003	596 531 (11,47 %)	270 215 (15,9 %)	326 316 (7,8 %)	53 951 (2,3 %)	360 137 (6,2 %)	740 404 (6,6 %)		
2003/2004	618 951 (12,09 %)	279 124 (17,3 %)	339 827 (7,8 %)	53 756 (2,1 %)	365 334 (6,7 %)	759 917 (6,9 %)		

Source: National Institute of Statistics, 2004.

Graduate occupation distribution between 1999-2003							Table 2	
Occupational fields	Type of education -qualification level	1998-99	1999-2000	2000-01	2001-02	2002-03		
Industrial/ technical	Vocational education- level 1 and 2	53 063	49 423	52 598	44 681	55 464		
	High school - level 3	52 147	47 861	45 620	39 793	46 044		
	Post-High school - level 3	7 570	6 109	5 987	4 102	3 887		
Agriculture	Vocational education - level 1 and 2	3 892	3 556	3 455	2 698	4 243		
	High school- level 3	10 314	7 903	7 200	5 491	3 684		
	Post-High school. - level 3	1 336	1 578	1 352	1 394	1 143		
Services	Vocational education - level 1 and 2	21 420	17 333	22 616	20 614	23 587		
	High school- level 3	15 286	15 277	14 070	13 733	18 228		
	Post-High school - level 3	26 052	31 479	26 130	22 960	20 307		

Source: National Institute of Statistics



Structure of employment, according to education/qualification level (%)

Table 3

Education/qualification level	Romania		
	2000	2001	2002
Primary or no school graduated	14,2	13,5	8,5
Lower secondary	21,6	21,2	22,8
Vocational education (level 1 and 2)	21,6	22,3	22,1
High school (including technological, level 3)	29,1	29,1	29,3
Post-high school and foremen (level 3)	4,4	4,5	4,2
Higher education	9,1	9,4	12,9

Source: National Institute of Statistics, Eurostat Yearbook 2002

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### Key words

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