TRACER STUDY of graduates’ labour market integration

Background
The water and sanitation sector in Moldova is in great need of highly qualified labour force that would install, operate and troubleshoot waterworks. On the other hand, the market of training services for the watsan sector is rather scarce and unattractive. Attempting to generate better opportunities for skills development and upgrade, in 2011 the ADC-funded project “VET school as a training provider in the water and sanitation sector in Moldova”, implemented by “Institutul de Formare a Capacitatilor Profesionale” (IFCP) developed new curricula for the plumber and electrician occupations in close cooperation with a training centre from Romania, 8 VET trainers from 2 vocational schools and the Technical University of Moldova. The curricula were approved for the pilot run by the Ministry of Education in the academic year 2011-2012.

Need for the study
The need is actually twofold. First, Moldova does not have a tracking system of vocational graduates in place and there is no organization collecting the information that could lead to reliable statistics on the short, medium and long-term results of vocational training, and therefore the project could not rely on any institution for impact assessment. Second, the project strongly believes that in order to estimate the significant changes and lasting results of an intervention in the field of workforce training it is crucial to follow up further developments in the lives and careers of the former trainees.

Purpose of the study
(1) Monitor and document changes in the lives and careers of the former beneficiaries of the improved vocational training intervention; (2) understand if and how the new training curricula has contributed to better job opportunities and quality of life.

Target group
The focal point of this study are 52 graduates of 1-year vocational training from the 2 project partner schools – Vocational Lyceum no. 2 and Vocational School no.9 in Chisinau that have successfully finalized the pilot training program for the plumber and electrician occupations.

Methodology
The data was accumulated by close communication with the graduates themselves, information exchange with their VET trainers, questionnaires and interviews with their current employers, informal discussions with (extended) families and friends.

Tracer indicators
The intention of the study was to collect, analyse and structure information along the following benchmarks: (1) employed / unemployed, (2) employed in home country / employed abroad, (3) intention to emigrate within the next year, (4) job fits obtained qualification / job requires another qualification / job below qualification/skill set, (5) employed in urban area / employed in rural area (6) company-based employment / self employment, (7) satisfied with income / dissatisfied
with income, (8) difficulties encountered in job search, (9) job identification methods, (10) employer satisfaction.

These criteria for measuring the intervention success were carefully selected taking into account the indicators formulated in the project document and the realities of the graduate job market in Moldova.

Facts and Findings

The statistics gathered in the monitoring process of graduates’ labour market integration and organized in charts will be described for both occupations in parallel so that a certain comparison is possible and some conclusions become vivid.

The first indicator analyzed was whether the VET graduates managed to get a job within 4 months after graduation or are still unemployed. When looking at the information available both for plumber and electrician, the results are rather positive:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reason</th>
<th>Occupation</th>
<th>Under 18</th>
<th>Lack of vacancies</th>
<th>Low payment / bad work conditions</th>
<th>Further education</th>
<th>Military service</th>
<th>Health issues</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Electrician</td>
<td>2 (18%)</td>
<td>3 (27,5%)</td>
<td>0 (0%)</td>
<td>3 (27,5%)</td>
<td>2 (18%)</td>
<td>1 (9%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Plumber</td>
<td>0 (0%)</td>
<td>0 (0%)</td>
<td>1 (14%)</td>
<td>6 (86%)</td>
<td>0 (0%)</td>
<td>0 (0%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The reasons for not yet being employed, besides the fact that 4 months may be an insufficient period for youngsters in Moldova to find the desired employment, are the following:

The second and third indicators considered by the monitoring team were related to the issue of massive migration of skilled workforce to the European and CIS labour markets. It was important to estimate how many of the VET graduates found employment in Moldova, how many immigrated to get a job and how many plan to immigrate in the upcoming 6 months. Fortunately, the statistics showed that the majority of graduates (three fourths) are successfully employed in the country and only the minority are abroad, having been unwilling or unable to become engaged in professional activities at home.
Furthermore, the reduced intention to go abroad within the next year is rather encouraging, since there is always a risk in that many young graduates often prefer to stay in the country for a certain time period in order to accumulate some practical experience and then migrate, having better prospects on the foreign labour markets.

The fourth indicator of interest for the study implementers was to track whether all the employed graduates carry out job activities in line with the qualifications (plumber or electrician) for which they have been certified by the project partner school during the academic year 2011-2012. The end result of investigation showed that the situation of plumbers looks more optimistic than the one of electricians. An issue of concern is that a higher number of graduates than expected are underemployed, performing jobs of lower qualification, most frequently in the construction sector. Others carry out jobs of different qualifications for which they have previously been trained and certified. The explanations for both phenomena are presented below.
Reasons for being underemployed

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Occupation</th>
<th>Reason</th>
<th>Lack of “professional” work experience</th>
<th>Low payment / bad work conditions</th>
<th>Lack of job vacancies</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Electrician (6 graduates)</td>
<td>3 (50%)</td>
<td>3 (50%)</td>
<td>0 (0%)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Plumber (3 graduates)</td>
<td>2 (67%)</td>
<td>0 (0%)</td>
<td>1 (33%)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The fifth indicator was meant to determine whether the graduates prefer to find employment in urban or rural areas. The outcome was rather predictable since the cities usually offer a larger variety of job opportunities and better working and living conditions. Nevertheless, it was a pleasant surprise to realize that a significant number of former students selected the rural area as the place of their employment and habitation.

Reasons for practicing a different occupation

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Occupation</th>
<th>Reason</th>
<th>Attractive payment and working conditions</th>
<th>Available job vacancies</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Electrician (2 graduates)</td>
<td>3 (50%)</td>
<td>3 (50%)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Plumber (3 graduates)</td>
<td>0 (0%)</td>
<td>1 (100%)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The sixth indicator investigated whether graduates have found a company-based job or they rather prefer to provide freelance services as plumbers and electricians. The entrepreneurial qualities have surfaced strongly and the justification is that it is much easier to organize yourself alone or in a team of two and market your services, make up a network of (potential) clients, and have a flexible work schedule than to convince an employer to accept you with limited or no work experience for a low remuneration and with a rigid work programme.
The **seventh indicator** was targeted at measuring the graduates' degree of satisfaction with their current wages. Since most of them have started as an apprentice for several months, given that 1-year training is insufficient for a fully fledged qualification backed up with solid practical skills, today they consider their income rewarding enough, especially in the case of **plumbers**.

The **eighth indicator** focused on identifying the difficulties encountered by the graduates in the process of searching for a job. Some of the graduates decided to continue their education or to join the army and did not even start looking for employment. In the case of **electricians**, the 23 graduates that initiated the job seeking procedure encountered quite different experiences as reflected in the figure below:

![Electrician Satisfaction](image1)

The **ninth indicator** monitored the job hunting methods most frequently used by the graduates and concluded that the vast majority (about 95%) rely on a network of relatives, colleagues and friends, acquaintances and only a small number (about 5%) turn to mass-media and internet for possible job opportunities.

Finally, for the **tenth indicator** the data was collected via questionnaires and phone interviews with employers and the focus was on the graduates' knowledge, skills, worker behavior and work performance (productivity, planning skills, problem solving, teamwork etc.). It was possible to contact only a limited number of employers, therefore the information available is not entirely representative. Nevertheless, the average level of employer satisfaction for both occupations is rather high: for **electrician** – 85% and for **plumber** – also 85%. For detailed feedback per employer in terms of **satisfaction level** and **appreciation for knowledge, skills, work attitudes, work planning and teamwork** see **Figure 1 and 2** on the next page.

![Plumber Satisfaction](image2)
**Conclusions**

The overall impression of this survey is that the 1-year vocational training graduates try to make best of their situation, since the national labour market is not so easy to reach for them. Having received rather a short introduction to an occupation than a comprehensive training that should end in a marketable qualification, being unaware of basic job searching methods and having to deal with employers’ demand for more “professional” work experience, it is less likely for a “fresh” graduate to succeed in getting employed, unless he/she comes up with a “survival” strategy. In most cases, this results in self-employment or migration to foreign labour markets. Nevertheless, these graduates register a rather high employment rate, since they are genuinely determined to work, having chosen the 1-year training course in favour of the 3-year one that would allow for pathways towards academic studies, just because the first is the shortest way to a qualified job.

The tracer study developers would like to believe that the new competence-based curricula implemented by the project and the teaching staff with improved training methods have equipped the target group with both “employable” skills on the job as well as other valuable “tools” - “soft” skills and “green” skills - that today are of high priority worldwide. The relatively high satisfaction of employers with their new employees and the quite good opinion of their practical skills, worker behaviour etc. proves that the curricula now available in school is more demand-oriented, quality-driven and provides for a certain adaptability and flexibility of the graduates on the job market. The fact that many graduates have been employed by the companies where they have had their internships is also a signal that in such a short training time in order to be able to deliver good results one has to “learn by doing”, a concept embedded in the modernized project curricula that was approved by the Ministry of Education for nationwide implementation.