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REPORT ON THE RESULTS FROM THE PERFORMED RESEARCH



**“E-Region Development Opportunity”
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RESEARCH OBJECTIVE AND TASKS

The main project objective is enhancing the social cohesion in the cross-border region of Macedonia and Bulgaria, through development of online learning tools and promotion of entrepreneurship. The project also aims to foster regional collaboration and increase employability through utilization of good practices in e-learning and entrepreneurship.

The project is focused on the regional needs in the employment and informational sphere. Through the development of a joint online web portal, data sources generated by both countries will be unified, leading to increased sharing and exchange of information and collaboration opportunities. The project will also contribute to the development of a social infrastructure for exchange and collaboration in the process for labour market adjustment through generation of vacant positions, as well as increasing the cross match of new skills with requests of new jobs and professions. The social cohesion is facilitated by integrating 3 key elements of social infrastructure, related to professional training and labour market development: E-Information, E-Learning and E-Entrepreneurship.

The project implementation activities include: research and analysis of the cross-border area vocational training centers (CVTs), conduction of a project team workshop, organization of public discussions, spreading of information and publicity measures. The currently offered in this field consultant services originate predominantly as private initiatives and are not able to serve as benchmarks for establishment of a comprehensive regional or national policy¹. As a separate subject of interest in this sphere should be mentioned the carried out researches for the necessity of developing qualified trainers for educational and training centers in Bulgaria². The currently existing information and data resources aimed at providing similar educational and training services are organized as General Information Exchanges, offering a large range of training courses intended to provide professional realization in a large, yet limited, range of job positions in rapidly developing labour markets³.

The project is focused on CVTs and Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs), conducting training courses on both sides of the border, as well as electronic media, news web portals, different blogs and regional departments of National Employment Agencies.

The implementation of the project is the first attempt to chart and evaluate the opportunities for providing vocational qualification and training aimed at developing the labour market in the cross-border area and achieving higher degree of cross match between acquired knowledge and skills on one hand and the requirements and needs of the developing labour market on the other.

1. Indicative experience of agencies offering similar services: http://informa-bg.net/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=5&Itemid=6

2. See, e.g.: http://e-center.uni-sofia.bg/TNA_vocational_trainers.pdf

3. See, e.g.: <http://www.nova-rabota.com/tag/>



I. METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this research is to specify a framework of the associations in the Bulgaria-Macedonia cross-border area, working in the field of vocational education and training qualification, allowing the accumulation of a comprehensive database, necessary for establishment and development of online learning tools. The project partners' intention is to enable an efficient utilization of the above-mentioned tools in the demand and supply of opportunities for acquiring skills, necessary in a dynamic labour environment, as well as for promotion of entrepreneurship, not only in the separate regions, but also between them.

A defining factor is the specific location of the surveyed area and for this reason the opportunities for cross-border collaboration and exchange of good practices should be utilized as fully as possible. With view to the improvement of the good-neighborly relations all such opportunities shall stem from the proximity between the towns and settlements in both countries. As a starting point for analysis of similar Macedonian structures, as well as for development of prerequisites for a good collaboration may be used the status of Bulgarian Centers for vocational training⁴ (CVT) and Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs).

A priority task of the research is establishment of an initial overview allowing effective measurement of the financial sustainability of the associations and centers for vocational training, as well as of the capacity, willingness and readiness for participation in the development of online learning tools and promotion of entrepreneurship. With respect to the above, all data and information gathered under this project will be used for identification of aspects, in which the efforts for increasing the sustainability and capacity of these organizations, serving as an important institutional structure component of the cross-border area labour market, shall be focused. The implementation of the project will be a source of new opportunities, ideas and contacts, which will be useful to the participants who took part in it.

The chosen approach combines desk research and questionnaire-based survey. The aim of the questionnaires is to examine the status of the vocational education and training qualification sector by means of internal and external evaluation, quantitative and qualitative methods, objective and subjective sources of information.

1. Stages and scope of the research

The methodological work under the project will be carried out in three consecutive stages: desk research, sociological questionnaire-based survey and analysis of the results. Upon completion of each project stage an interim evaluation of the degree of meeting the set objectives has been performed.

4. Summarized data and information on the centers for vocational training is available at the existing web portal: <http://cpobg.com/catalogue.htm?ReadForm>



1.1. Desk research

The initial research includes a survey of the existing Centers for vocational training (CVTs) on the territory of Blagoevgrad and Kyustendil regions, as areas located in immediate vicinity to the Bulgarian-Macedonian border. During this stage is examined data from the National Agency for Vocational Education and Training's⁵ NAVET) database, and in particular – data included in the Register of licensed CVTs⁶. This database offers a good basis for evaluation of CVTs' dynamics with view to their license status, i.e. whether the license is active, temporary or permanently suspended, or even deleted from the register.

Past research practice shows that more general evaluations and dispositions towards the existing opportunities for vocational education and training have been subject of study⁷. Data included in this analysis reveals dispositions and readiness for active job search in the current Bulgarian labour market situation, which have developed in the course of receiving secondary education. Considering the fact that the students, subject of the survey in 2006, are currently actively engaged with their professional realization, a comparison of the results from both surveys constitutes a separate topic of research interest.

The available statistical data on vocational education and training in Bulgaria⁸ shows a trend for gradual increase of the number of trainees in this type of training programs, with the trend being more pronounced in private educational institutions. If in 2005 the total number of people who have attended similar programs and institutions accounted to 5 004, in 2013 13 508 persons have pursued such training according to data provided by the Bulgarian National Statistical Institute (NSI). The above-mentioned trend is similar for the various levels of vocational qualification recognized by NSI in conformity with the existing European standards. The trend for increase is most pronounced for the 3rd level of qualification, with the number of trainees who have completed this level in 2005 being 1 504, of them 943 persons doing so in private educational institutions, while in 2013 the total number of attendants for this training program accounted to 8 447 persons, of which 5 739 people achieving this in private educational institutions⁹.

1.2. Questionnaire-based survey

For the purposes of the survey a standard questionnaire was sent to organisations in this sphere who responded to the call for participation. It has been intended to gather information from the relevant training organizations and their employees, by taking into consideration their evaluations and accurate data. Representatives of non-governmental organizations with active license for training, qualification and re-training, as well as registration and scope of activity in the cross-border area, have been interviewed.

5. National Agency for Vocational Education and Training, <http://navet.government.bg>

6. National Agency for Vocational Education and Training, Register of licensed CVTs, <http://www.navet.government.bg/bg/licenz/Registers>

7. See, e.g.: http://www.ckoko.bg/upload/docs/2013-01/ANALIZ_1POO.pdf

8. National Statistical Institute, Vocational training in Centers for vocational training (CVTs) and vocational secondary schools and colleges, latest statistical survey, July 31st 2014, <http://www.nsi.bg/bg/content/3514>

9. For more details, please see Appendix No.1



The questionnaire sent to the relevant organizations has been prepared in a way that simultaneously ensures obtaining of the required information on the sector status and guarantees the necessary comparability of the accumulated data. The questions are divided in categories, including topics like organizational profile, manner of financing, employee team, communication channels and publicity, collaboration with other structures and organizations.

Each of the five categories comprises five questions intended to present a clearer picture of each organization's activity sphere and scope, sources of funding, average number of performed trainings and trainees who have achieved professional realization, as well as on the communication channels for attracting new customers.

Similar questionnaire-based surveys, but with more specific orientation have been handed out to Employment Bureaus (EBs) in the cross-border area, and more specifically in the towns of Blagoevgrad, Dupnitsa and Kyustendil, as well as to the Chambers of Commerce and Industry (CCI) in Blagoevgrad, Kyustendil and Gotse Delchev. The aim of the second questionnaire is to evaluate the collaboration between EBs and local CVTs and NGOs, as well as to provide a background for comparison of the data, gathered with the first questionnaire. Both questionnaires focus on the organizations' activity after Bulgaria joined the European Union (EU), since one of the initial research hypotheses is for a considerable change in the work volume, format and methods of these centers, resulting from the introduction of European standards. With view to the above, the accumulated data allows to lay down the anticipated scope and nature of the change which may occur at the labour market and in the education and training institutions' network after the expected accession of Macedonia to the EU. This information segment is of considerable significance with respect to the opportunities for exchange of experience and expertise through such cross-border collaboration between the two countries.

II. ANALYSIS AND SUMMARY OF THE RESULTS FROM THE PERFORMED RESEARCH

The analysis of the accumulated results describes the status and the activity of the CVTs and NGOs in the cross-border area. The final document aims to identify the advantages and the weaknesses, the popular practices, perspectives and needs of NGOs in the specific fields, in which they conduct their activity. Registered organizations from the Bulgarian-Macedonian cross-border area were invited to participate in the research. The number of participants from both countries is approximately equal.

The respondents cover fields of activity, which constitute a focus area for the centers for vocational training in the region, such as hairdressing, cosmetics, computer literacy. A large number of CVTs in Bulgaria and Macedonia did not respond to the call for participation in the research. On one hand this was a result of the fact that some CVTs were not functional or have changed their email addresses or contact phone numbers, and on the other – there were organizations that were reluctant to collaborate and be a survey subject.

Based on their answers, the organizations from both countries have been divided into groups



depending on their profile, as well as the practices they use and challenges they meet have been identified. The research results were used to evaluate the need and usefulness of the idea for establishing a joint Bulgarian-Macedonian social infrastructure for exchange of information and collaboration in the NGO sector.

The research results show the necessity for further efforts for development of effective communication between the labour market institutional structures in the cross-border area; for introduction of comparable standards in the vocational education and training; for more dynamic exchange of data and information, related to the requirements, opportunities and perspectives for professional realization of different social groups; for increasing the general degree of recognition and publicity of the structures and organizations involved in promotion of vocational training and qualification in the cross-border region.

1. Sphere of competence and performed activities

The registered organizations in the region cover a relatively large specter of public sphere activities, however certain fields are subject of marked interest by the CVTs. The results show a rather low degree of preliminary specialization of the offered training courses. As answer to the question „What is your field of activity?“ 50% of the respondents have pointed out „vocational training“. This result identifies a significant group of issues related on one hand to the readiness for offering a large range of training courses, adapted to the employer's expectations and on the other – to the lack of defined specialization and relevant efforts for developing of sustainable capacity in offering quality vocational education and training.

Among the remaining 50% there are more specific answers like “hairdressing and cosmetics” or „clothes manufacturing“. Here should be pointed up the relatively low degree of differentiation of the offered training courses. Simultaneously are being offered courses for further training both in the sphere of public services and manufacturing fields. In the international practice such an approach corresponds to the development of low-skilled workers, lacking the necessary qualification, who can occupy various line positions in established manufacturing structures. Both European and international practices are leaning towards utilizing similar training and qualification centers for developing specific skills and capacities, which can translate into a much more viable and successful realization on the labour market¹⁰.

In either case the above-mentioned organizations have to conduct training courses allowing the people attending them to accumulate additional knowledge and skills and become qualified for carrying out new activities, which will facilitate their professional realization on the labour market. The same applies for employers' organizations like the Chamber of Commerce and Industry (CCI) – Blagoevgrad, offering similar types of vocational training. The percentage of CVTs offering training

10. For more details please see: <http://www.unevoc.unesco.org/go.php?q=World+TVET+Database>, as well as the specific practices of OECD Learning for Jobs in certain countries: <http://www.oecd.org/education/skills-beyond-school/41738329.pdf> ; <http://www.oecd.org/education/innovation-education/41506628.pdf> ; <http://www.oecd.org/education/innovation-education/learningforjobs.htm> ; <http://www.oecd.org/education/skills-beyond-school/41631383.pdf> A separate subject of interest is the history and practice of such type of trainings in the United States: http://www.encyclopedia.com/topic/vocational_education.aspx



courses in the sphere of culture, human rights, computer literacy and foreign languages is lower.

The analysis of the existing diversity of offered training and qualification courses shows that the sector is currently undergoing a serious changeover in search of new priorities and opportunities for their competent implementation. In separate cases there is an on-going passive attitude and inertness when it comes to demand and supply of such training. Some of the training courses are still focused on developing line personnel for the economic and industry sphere, which is no longer corresponding to the actual labour market trends. Courses offering partial and fragmentary training, insufficient for starting an independent business initiative or realization in some form of self-employment, constitute another issue.

2. Territorial scope

One of the significant indicators of this analysis is the territorial division and activity scope of the surveyed organizations. The participants in the survey have specified conducting of activity both at a regional and local level. Two of the organizations have pointed out only regional scope of activity. A very small part of the CVTs in Blagoevgrad and Kyustendil regions have mentioned conducting activity on national level.

The results indicate that adequate communication and a comprehensive system of centers for vocational training, effectively combining specialized competence with territorial scope and thus participate actively in the labour market structuring process, are still lacking.

Of primary importance for achieving the project objectives is the conclusion that the activity of all CVTs who took part in the research is conducted in the cross-border area, with only a small number of them being able to expand their scope and operate on national level. None of the organizations has specified conducting activity on international level. The sole exception in this sphere is CCI – Blagoevgrad, actively implementing joint projects with Greece and Macedonia, but also pointing out in the survey questionnaire a regional scope of activity.

At the same time, with the exception of CCI – Blagoevgrad, which has contacts with a large number of training centers, the research results do not indicate active institutional dialogue and interaction between these organizations. They still don't function as an integrated network or at least like segments of an integral labour market institutional structure. As such, it complicates the process of updating their methodology and increasing of expertise, simultaneously turning their limited territorial scope into an additional obstacle for potential and actual trainees. The lack of a comprehensive and exhaustive "map" of the offered vocational training possibilities impedes the development of individual "routes" for training and acquiring of additional qualification, which in turn may improve the access to the labour market and hence to relatively sustainable job positions.

3. Funding

Only one organization has described CVT's sustainability as "considerable". There is an equal number of answers from participant training centers which characterize it as "limited" or "medium".



It shall be noted that the most frequent answer to this question is “can’t decide”. Two thirds (2/3) of the Employment Bureaus however classify the sustainability of the training centers in their area (Blagoevgrad and Kyustendil regions) as “considerable”, which is also the answer provided by the Chamber of Commerce and Industry.

The overall assessment of the surveyed organizations’ financial sustainability confirms the drawn up conclusion that there is an on-going process of deep transformation and reorganization in the supply of vocational training and preparation for active professional realization. The low degree of financial stability stems from the market positioning of these organizations, the latent institutional and partnership relations, as well as the insufficiently developed demand and supply system for similar vocational education and training services.

With respect to their funding sources, the training centers point out predominantly the fees, paid by the trainees themselves, as well as the fees, paid by the employers for qualification of their employees. A lot of organizations also rely on funds received under Operational Programme Human Resources Development, as well as other European programmes. Approximately one third (1/3) of the training institutions point out as a source of funding „own financial means“. All training centers however seek to increase their financial capability by combining different funding sources. The majority of them relies both on fees paid by the trainees and the employers and on funds from various operational programmes. CCI is self-funded, with the means for covering the training costs coming via different projects, programmes and collaborations with the Employment Bureau.

The results show that CVTs’ funding strategies do not differ significantly from the way NGOs generally secure financing for their activity. A result-oriented public funding, which may structure the efforts of the organizations in this field, is still missing. At the same time ensuring financial means becomes a task that each CVT has to solve on its own. With view to the above a significant amount of the energy and efforts of the organization teams is employed in securing financial means for normal operation instead of being focused at increasing the trainers’ qualification, accumulation and updating of necessary data and information and development of sustainable partnership relations, including on international and regional level.

4. Trainings

To a large degree the training courses offered by the participants in the survey tend to overlap and cover the same fields. Most often the courses are in the field of economics and accounting, followed by the technical sphere. Of course, the percentage of centers offering training in the field of hairdressing and cosmetics also remains considerable. Among the other types of courses should be mentioned the educational ones, those aimed at increasing the computer literacy, qualification in manufacturing of clothes and learning foreign languages, which is the most rare option offered by just one of the surveyed centers for vocational training. The EBs’ answers confirm the observation that most common are the training courses in the service sphere.

With regard to the training courses, organized and carried out from the establishment of the institution till the present moment, only one CVT has given an „over 1000 courses“ answer. Relatively



small is the percentage of organizations, whose training courses exceed the figure of 200. The majority of the surveyed centers point out between 10 and 50 training courses conducted throughout their existence. These results indicate that the centers offering such types of training courses should be regarded as micro-enterprises requiring additional efforts for stabilization and sustainable position on the vocational training market.

As for the average number of annually conducted training courses the majority of the organizations – over 50 % of the them – answer the question with the option “up to 50 courses”. One participant has chosen the “can’t decide” option, one has indicated between 100 and 150 training courses and just one center has pointed out the “over 200 courses” option. The greatest number indicated by EBs is 130, while the lowest one is 30 courses. In average CCI – Blagoevgrad conducts annually 20 training courses.

According to 50 % of the respondents the average annual number of trainees is “up to 100 people”. One fourth (1/4) of the training centers point out between 100 and 200 trainees and another one fourth (1/4) indicate between 300 and 400 people annually. Only one CVT states that between 2000 and 3000 people have attended training courses throughout the year and again just one organization points out an annual number of trainees above 3000 people. CCI also indicates that the average number of attendants in one of its training courses is between 20 and 25 persons.

For more than 50% of the surveyed participant organizations the average duration of a training course is between three (3) and nine (9) months. There are very few training centers whose courses are below the three month threshold. None of the surveyed organizations offers training courses exceeding nine months.

The above-mentioned results show low intensity of the conducted training courses combined with relatively high degree of institutional insecurity and high level of dependency of the offered training courses on the existing market demands. The accumulated data indicates that currently is established a Buyer’s Market, where the amount, frequency and scope of the offered vocational training courses continue to depend to a substantial degree on the existing situational demand for such type of services. The above constitutes an element of strategic risk with regard to the existing organizations’ sustainability not only on regional, but on national level as well as.

The survey questionnaire also comprises a question aimed at obtaining information on the percentage of trainees who are later successful at achieving professional realization on the labour market. It’s worth mentioning that more than half of the respondents do not provide an answer to this question or point out that they “don’t have observations” on the topic, CCI – Blagoevgrad being included in this group. A small number of the centers keep track of the trainees and their further development, claiming that approximately 50 % of their clients achieve professional realization. Just one organization mentions that this percentage exceeds half of the trainees.

The results imply a shortage of comprehensive quality management system for the offered training courses, as well as interruption of the connection with the trainees upon the training completion. The lack of sustainable practice for keeping active contact with graduated trainees of the relevant training centers significantly hampers the adequate evaluation of the effectiveness of the existing institutional network of CVTs and similar organizations, engaged in the development of labour market opportunities.



5. Team

Special attention has been dedicated to the surveyed CVTs' training staff and teams. The number of employees in the organizations is relatively small. One third (1/3) of the training centers indicate that the team consists of „up to 10 employees“. Two of the surveyed participants point out a number of employees between 10 and 15. Only two organizations have stated that they employ more than 20 people. The Employment Bureau in the town of Dupnitsa states that the employees in a local CVT account to 20 people. CCI points out a figure of over 35 employees.

The survey questionnaire provides the possibility to separate the relevant employees on the basis of their contract type, i.e. contract of service or contract for the supply of services. There is also an option to indicate the number of probationers, if applicable, as well as the number of volunteers in the organization. As a whole, all training centers have employees engaged under both types of contracts, with the prevailing number working under contract for the supply of services. None of the surveyed Bulgarian CVTs offers the option for probationary employment, respectively there are no probationers in the training teams.

As for the volunteers a small number of CVTs, including CCI – Blagoevgrad, have stated that they rely on such services. Another small group of organizations has mentioned that they don't use volunteer services, while 50 % of all respondents state that they rarely take advantage of such services.

The structure and format of the team permanently engaged in the activity of CVTs and similar organizations and offering vocational education and qualification for more successful establishment on the labour market on regional and local level, display a high degree of disorganization, as well as lack of comprehensive policy for team consolidation and increasing their professional competence.

Another question that had to be answered is whether the training centers have a separate PR position, considering that such function is customarily related with better publicity and respectively better sustainability of the organization. There is a perfect 50/50 distribution of the answers to this question. Half of the organizations state that they have an employee fully engaged with this aspect of the company activity, while the other half claim that they don't have such position.

Another interesting question is whether the team includes people who have first passed the training course and after that have been invited to work for the given CVT. A third of the respondents state that there have been such cases in the past. The same number of CVTs claim that currently there are members of the team who have been employed after completing the training course. Two of the organizations have never employed former trainees.

The accumulated data indicates that encouraging cross-border collaboration in the surveyed area may become an incentive for promoting vocational training system development and stabilization of the activity of the organizations and institutions engaged in the implementation of this process. To a certain degree this may be regarded as an exceptional chance both for the existing Bulgarian cross-border area organizations and for their potential and actual partners from FYR of Macedonia.



6. Communication channels

The questions in the last survey segment aim to shed a light on the communication channels through which the CVTs in the surveyed area spread and get the necessary information for their planned and conducted trainings. Such information constitutes a significant component of the general evaluation of the perspectives for active cross-border collaboration, predominantly because effective labour market management, as well as development of the necessary expertise on local and regional level, requires active exchange of information, structured and organized on the basis of comparable criteria for economic growth in both countries.

According to the survey results, the most preferred communication channel for promoting future training courses is the local press, followed by the web pages and internet. One fourth (1/4) of the respondents state that they reach their clients through personal contact and phone calls. Only one CVT indicates that for such purposes relies on the Employment Bureaus in the relevant town. CCI utilizes all above-mentioned communication channels, while EBs have at their disposal an information board or choose to establish direct contact with unemployed people.

Among the communication channels used by the organisations the biggest percentage – over 50% – belongs to internet. The other preferred option is the television, as well as the press, pointed out by one fourth (1/4) of the respondents. The results from the answer to the question whether the CTVs use social networks as communicational channels however are quite interesting. There is a perfect distribution of the surveyed organizations' answers, with half of them being affirmative and the other half – negative. The results also include feedback provided by EBs and CCIs.

With view to this standard picture of the currently available communication channels it can be assumed that we'll be witnessing a trend for progressive profile customization of the demand and supply of information for access to specialized training for job positions. This trend will be more and more pronounced and the research results indicate that achieving the set objectives will depend on the ability of the surveyed institutions to play a leading role in the formulating and development of the specialized training and vocational education market. Should the surveyed institutions' publicity and communication strategy in the following years be directed towards formulating distinctive and differentiated profiles of groups seeking specialized training on one hand and on the other – of organisations and larger associations, offering specialized educational, training and qualification profiles, the result may be a qualitative leap in the development of the existing opportunities in the cross-border region.

After reviewing the results it becomes clear that a very small percentage of the surveyed CVTs carry out their own surveys regarding the type of training topics that are in demand, and it should be also noted that the organisations which have given a confirmative answer, have not indicated any topics in the field provided for this purpose. The only exception is the Chamber of Commerce and Industry, which has listed the programmes for cross-border collaboration between Bulgaria and Greece, Bulgaria and Macedonia, as well as Operational Programme Human Resources Development. At the same time the percentage of institutions approving the development and introduction of an integrated information network with regard to the CVTs and the organized training courses is exceptionally high. Such primary inclination is encouraging with view to the opportunities for ensuring sustainable development in the cross-border region.



7. Collaboration

The majority of the Bulgarian organisations state that they do not participate in networks/social partnerships on local, regional, national or European level. Only 3 of the surveyed CVTs have confirmed membership in such networks and as an example indicate: the Association of the Licensed Centers for Vocational Training (ALCVT), AKAP, the Bulgarian Association of Apparel and Textile Producers and Exporters (BAATPE), the Confederation of the Employers and Industrialists in Bulgaria (CEIBG), the Federation of the Scientific Engineering Unions (FSEU), the National Agency for Vocational Education and Training (NAVET).

The relative isolation of the surveyed organizations appears to be a permanent negative trait when assessing their effectiveness and sustainability. The lack of functional models of organizational partnership, both in Bulgaria and FYR of Macedonia, will be a negative impact factor on the opportunities for rapid development of a specific type of “network competence”.

At the same time more than 50 % of the respondents claim to be collaborating with NGOs. Two of CVTs have given a negative answer to this question and only one organization mentions occasional collaboration with NGOs. Two thirds (2/3) of the surveyed training centers however point out that they are actively collaborating with the National Employment Agency. Only three organisations have answered the question negatively. The “I can do more” program also draws attention with approximately 90 % of the CVTs in the surveyed region participating in it, according to the provided answers. Only one organization has denied such participation. When it comes however to achieving results and development and implementation of projects CVTs tend to rely predominantly on their own activity and efforts.

CONCLUSION

The research results confirmed the expectations of the partners under this project with respect to the need of development of online learning tools and promotion of entrepreneurship. The active exchange of information in the conditions of a growing supply standardisation, combined with assessment of the labour market trends’ quality may create a dynamic environment for regional development.

The results show the necessity of a general evaluation of the processes, structures and trends in the vocational education and training sector, which may later serve as a basis for development of a comprehensive national strategy . As a full member of EU Bulgaria is responsible for the establishment of standards, preparation and promotion of projects, oriented towards an active and efficient development of cross-border collaboration.

11. An actual example in this aspect is the initiated by the US Department of Education assessment of vocational education and training on national level: <https://www.bing.com/search?q=profil+end+assessment+study+of+vocational+training+centers&go=%D0%98%D0%B7%D0%BF%D1%80%D0%B0%D1%89%D0%B0%D0%BD%D0%B5&qs=n&pq=profil+end+assessment+study+of+vocational+training+centers&sc=0-1&sp=-1&sk=&cid=e8e1446bb9604b1782780896d3dcd0a8&first=11&FORM=PORE>



The chosen methodology points out the similarities among the cross-border area training centers and particularly the large number of organisations, both in Bulgaria and Macedonia, offering overlapping or even identical services. The need for development of a joint online web portal is additionally emphasized by the fact that in both countries the training organisations as a whole shy away from carry out own surveys on the type of training courses sought by the clients. The development of a joint online web portal and the unification of data sources generated by both countries will lead to increased sharing and exchange of information and collaboration opportunities. This is even more valid with respect to the fact that when it comes to spreading information on new courses and trainings, cross-border area training organisations rely predominantly on mass media communication channels, and particularly on internet.

In the long term, effective collaboration with civil sector organizations, as well as active participation in different types of institutional partnerships, will formulate opportunities for adequate expert, communicational and organisational collaboration. Considering that these are the prerequisites for effective cross-border collaboration we have reasons to believe that the obtained results indicate a significant development potential, as well as actual opportunities for sustainable regional development in the cross-border area between Bulgaria and FYR of Macedonia.

Bulgarian non-governmental organizations, consultant companies, as well as professional organisations and associations, playing an important role in the labour market structures' development at local and regional level, will be of deciding significance for the formulation of vocational education and training environment. Under these circumstances the research results conclusively indicate that cross-border collaboration may offer the necessary environment for an adequate assessment of the opportunities for sustainable development at local and regional level. In this respect the current research lays down significant development guidelines, which may become a basis for formulation of a comprehensive strategy for sustainable development of local and regional growth potential in the cross-border regions of Bulgaria.

