

# Engagement of Small and Medium Enterprises in Work-Based Learning

European Alliance for Apprenticeships (EAfA) - Fourth Regional Seminar for Candidate Countries

— 25 – 26 September 2019

For the fourth consecutive year, the European Training Foundation (ETF), in collaboration with the European Alliance for Apprenticeships (EAfA), organised a seminar to discuss the latest policy developments in apprenticeships and work-based learning (WBL) in EU Candidate Countries. The focus of this year's event was on Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) and the experiences of the region in engaging them in WBL. About 90 participants joined the event, including delegations from each Candidate Country, stakeholders from North Macedonia, EAfA members and representatives of the European Apprentices Network and EU level institutions.

Arber Ademi, Minister of Education and Science of the Republic of North Macedonia, stressed the importance of opportunities such as this one, to exchange experiences and share good practices. Representatives of Albania, Montenegro, North Macedonia, Serbia and Turkey also presented the latest national reforms, and discussed the strategies implemented to support SMEs' engagement in WBL.



*"A priority for our country is to develop a VET system able to provide our youth with a variety of opportunities."*

Arber Ademi, Minister of Education and Science of the Republic of North Macedonia

*"Market needs are changing fast. That's why it is fundamental to work together with companies, and SMEs in particular, to ensure that curricula remain relevant."*

Elena Milevska Strbevaska, Economic Chamber of North Macedonia

## WORKSHOPS ON SMES ENGAGEMENT

Participants in the event split into groups and worked together to share good practices, and identify key issues and solutions in the fostering of SMEs' engagement in WBL:

### Effective SME engagement

- Prepare a communication strategy
- Raise awareness on apprenticeships' benefits and importance
- Set clear and realistic expectations



Different groups discussing how to better engage SMEs

### Development of relevant curricula

- Identify SMEs' skills needs
- Request input from the industry, and SMEs in particular, on the labour market's present and future requirements
- Include elements of flexibility in apprenticeship programmes, to match SMEs specific needs
- Increase the focus on entrepreneurship skills



Stakeholders sharing their experience

### Working with SMEs

- Group local SMEs into shared apprenticeship programmes
- Develop collaborations with larger companies to support SMEs
- Provide tutoring/mentoring to SMEs
- Establish incentives for SMEs



A participant summarising the key discussion points

## FINNISH PRESIDENCY AND PRIORITIES OF THE EDUCATION AND TRAINING SECTOR

As of July 2019, the presidency of the Council of the European Union is held by Finland. Sari Turunen-Zwinger, from the Finnish National Agency for Education (EDUFI), provided an overview of the priorities set by the Finnish presidency in the Education and Training sector: Advance Erasmus+ negotiations; Foster continuous learning; Promote future-oriented education; Promote investment in human capital; Strengthen equity, equality and effectiveness; and Enhance cooperation between education and research.



New EAFa members welcome ceremony - The EAFa welcomed new members from North Macedonia (Economic Chamber) and Turkey (SG AKADEMİ TRAINING)

## WELCOME FOR NEW EAFa MEMBERS

The event was also an opportunity to welcome new members to the Alliance. Norbert Schöbel expressed the importance of expanding the Alliance beyond EU borders, engaging stakeholders from candidate countries. To date, about 300 pledges (15 from candidate countries) have been submitted to the Alliance - around 10% by SMEs. EAFa members benefit from Apprenticeship Support Services (AppSS), which include online resources and networking opportunities, allowing them to connect, learn and act.

Representatives of the European Apprentices Network and of young people from North Macedonia delivered a message from the perspective of the learners.

Find out more [here](#).

## SITE VISITS - EXAMPLES OF GOOD PRACTICE

Participants to the event had the opportunity to join three parallel site visits showcasing WBL initiatives.

The electricity provider **EVN** has developed a three-year apprenticeship programme in collaboration with **VET school Mihajlo Pupinā**. The programme focuses on the development of skills required by both the company and the labour market, including soft skills and a good work ethic. Each apprentice is allocated to a trained, in-company mentor, and paid from the beginning of the second year of the apprenticeship. EVN has equipped classrooms in the school with the same equipment that apprentices use in the company, giving also non-EVN apprentices the opportunity to practice with it, too. EVN have also developed an interactive learning platform called Canvas. Apprentices are provided with tablets to access the platform, and during the visit, the first tablet was officially handed out to the School Director in the presence of the Minister.

The **Auto-Transport VET school, Boro Petrushevski**, is an example of how a VET provider can integrate a WBL element into the school itself. The school provides car repair and testing services allowing apprentices to acquire work life experience directly in the school's premises. The **Catering and Hospitality VET school Lazar Tanev** has established a successful partnership with the **Hotel Marriott**. The programme developed includes elements not common in VET curricula such as event management, and mobility opportunities for apprentices.



EVN presenting the tablets provided to all apprentices, allowing them to access the three-year curricula online, interact with their mentors and record their progress



EVN apprentices demonstrating an example of practical training

## THE EUROPEAN TRAINING FOUNDATION STRATEGY 2027

Didier Gelibert, representative of the European Training Foundation (ETF), recalled that in the ETF Strategy 2027 (adopted last June), the Foundation aspires to become a knowledge-hub in Human Capital Development. Co-working and sharing knowledge on the policies included in this broad objective, together with partnership and networking, are fundamental actions that will lead the ETF's work in the coming years. ETF commitment to continue working in the European Alliance for Apprenticeships (EAFa), therefore, is firmly based on experience and on a vision of progress for the future. The ETF would welcome extending the network, or organising events with countries that are not yet members of the Alliance, in order to increase the wealth of experiences being shared across borders.

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