



# ROLE OF INTERNATIONAL COOPERATION IN VOCATIONAL EDUCATION DEVELOPMENT IN UKRAINE

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# AGENDA

1. Introduction
  2. Conceptual framework
  3. Mehtodology
  4. Ukrainian context
  5. Results and discussions
  6. Concludions
- References

# INTRODUCTION

- International governmental and non-governmental organisations (IOs):
- advance global policies, philosophies, and discourses in education (*Moutsios, 2009*),
- have, thus, assumed an expanding role in VET systems (*Jakobi, 2009; McGrath, 2012; Mikulec, 2021*),
- particularly in developing countries and those undergoing transitions (*Ayonmike, 2019; Fuchs, 2020; Komatsu, 2021; Shahbaz & Tahir, 2014; Valiente, Sepúlveda, & Zancajo, 2021; Watson, 1994*)

# INTRODUCTION

- Since Ukraine gained its independence, there have been ongoing efforts to reform the country's VET system to better align with new economic realities and its intended orientation towards Europe (*Deissinger & Melnyk, 2019; Tūtlys, Bukantaitė, Melnyk, & Anužis, 2021; Zinser, 2015*).
- **2014:** decentralisation reforms → transferring governance and financing to the local level and property rights on VET institutions to communities
- **2015:** development of vocational standards based on the competency approach (220 standards in 2021)
- **2016:** launching private-public partnerships with employers since 2016
- **2018:** piloting elements of the dual system to increase the relevance of training in the VET system, resulting in 235 VET institutions out of 711 in 2021 (*Ministry of Education and Science of Ukraine & Institute of educational analytics, 2021*).

# INTRODUCTION

- The ongoing fundamental reforms and changes in the Ukrainian VET system have coincided with an increase in international cooperation in the field *(Ministry of Education and Science of Ukraine & Institute of Educational Analytics, 2021)*.
- This intensification of international cooperation can be attributed to the Ukrainian government's pro-European stance and commitment to aligning its education system with global best practices.
- IOs have become increasingly involved in the development of vocational education, providing normative level consultations to the MES of Ukraine (e.g., "Decentralizing vocational education and training in Ukraine: Momentum for action" issued by the European Training Foundation [ETF], 2017), and implementing various small and large projects, programs, initiatives, and key actions with VET institutions *(Ministry of Education and Science of Ukraine & Institute of Educational Analytics, 2021)*.

# INTRODUCTION

- **Aim:** to examine the impact of IOs and cooperation programmes, projects, and initiatives on the changes that took place in the Ukrainian VET system from 2014 to 2022, with a particular focus on normative and institutional changes.
- **Research question:** how did international cooperation, from the perspective of international donor organisations, influence VET reform processes and changes in VET institutions prior to the war that took place in 2022 and after the war broke out?

# CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

- IOs are central in promoting liberal and neoliberal cultural principles and education reform in national systems (*Bromley, Overbey, Furuta, & Kijima, 2021*).
- Tools of influence on the policymaking of nations: setting education agendas and standards, discursive dissemination, determining reform processes, coordinative activities and using funding mechanisms and aid conditionality (*Lueze et al., 2008; Verger, Novelli, & Altinyelken, 2012*). The degree of institutionalization of a country's VET system is a defining factor in the selection of these instruments (*Melnyk, 2023*).
- Core concepts, disseminated by IOs: quality assurance and control, good governance and accountability, privatization, benchmarking, and the measurement of learning outcomes (*Akkari & Lauwerier, 2015*).
- Key directions of change driven by international actors in VET on a global scale: systemic governance reform qualification frameworks, quality assurance systems, new funding mechanisms and managed autonomy for public providers (*McGrath, 2012*).
- National actors aim to leverage IOs to address internal challenges, while IOs are driven by their own agendas and philosophies (*Fulge, Bieber, & Martens, 2016; Niemann, 2009*).

# METHODOLOGY

- Desktop research of websites and available documentations of IOs, international projects and initiatives, which have been active in Ukraine since 2014 on their goals, objectives and activities
- Semi-structured interviews conducted with pertinent specialists who were/are affiliated with IOs, international initiatives, and projects that have been involved in the changes of the VET sector in Ukraine
- Eight semi-structured interviews with expert representatives from five international programmes and organisations operating in the Ukrainian VET sector
- Language: Ukrainian and Russian
- Duration: 40-90 minutes
- Method: qualitative content analysis (Mayring) with inductive category development using QCAmap



# UKRAINIAN CONTEXT

## DIRECT INFLUENCE

<b>European Training Foundation (ETF)</b>	Green Book on decentralisation of VET; recommendations on aligning VET with labour market; developing digital skills; National Qualification Framework
<b>United Nations Development Programme (UNDP)</b>	Promoting VET in Eastern Ukraine in conflict-affected areas; investment in VET institutions; development of public-private partnerships between stakeholders and VET; promoting entrepreneurial thinking
<b>EU4Skills: Better Skills for Modern Ukraine</b>	Promoting national-level reform of VET to enhance its effectiveness, improve quality and attractiveness and align with labour market needs; providing equipment to VET institutions; regional analysis of VET councils

## INDIRECT INFLUENCE

<b>Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD)</b>	Supporting reforms on decentralisation and multi-level governance; strengthening partnerships and communities; fostering organisational autonomy and accountability
<b>World Bank (WB)</b>	enhancing capacity for decentralised management; strengthening systems for accreditation and quality assurance; promoting competition, performance and excellence, and incorporating these principles into the corporate culture of VET institutions as well as national legislation

# RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS



Country's priorities	Country's goals	IOs' goals	IOs' priorities	Priorities and goals
<b>Improvement of governance and funding in VET</b>	Creation of comprehensive and effective system of governance and funding		<b>Improvement of governance and funding system</b>	
	Improvement of the network of vocational institutions			
	Ensuring accessibility and continuity of VET			
	Strengthening the autonomy of vocational institutions			
	Introduction of a career counselling system	Implementation of a career guidance system		
		Implementation of digital solutions for accountability and better governance		
		Policy advise on strategic governance		
<b>Content development and quality assurance</b>	Assuring compliance of educational content with the needs of the labour market	Updating the content in line with the needs of the labour market	<b>Content development and quality assurance</b>	
	Modernization of infrastructure and equipment	Modernization of the educational environment		
	Participation of vocational institutions in international projects and programs			
		Development of the qualifications system		
<b>Strengthening cooperation with stakeholders</b>	Development of public-private partnership on national, regional and institutional levels	Development of public-private partnership on regional and institutional levels	<b>Strengthening cooperation with stakeholders</b>	
		Support of professional networks and public-private partnership initiatives		
		Expert support on implementation of best European practices and innovations		
		Support of retraining programs		
		Introduction of new occupations		
		Capacity building initiatives for VET institutions' staff	<b>Human capital development</b>	
		Support of entrepreneurial initiatives and entrepreneurial training	<b>Development of regional and local markets and employability</b>	
	Analysis of compliance of VET programs with regional labour markets			

# RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

- Interaction is characterised by collaborative approach: open communication, mutual understanding of goals and joint project development tailored to the specific needs of Ukraine
- Selection of relevant local as well as foreign experts who possess a thorough comprehension of the local context
- Risk of relying too heavily on the same experts for multiple projects or actions
- Standard-setting due to Ukraine's candidacy for EU membership and obligations to align its legislation with EU legislation in the field of VET
- Conducting assessment and providing feedback to ensure that the VET reforms are effective, sustainable and in line with EU standards
- Promoting some practices by IOs, which may not be adaptable due to Ukraine's specific context



**Interaction  
with  
national  
actors**

# RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

- **Good governance:** establishment of partnership governance structures, the formulation of a strategic vision for VET development at the regional and institutional levels
- **Digitalisation:** adoption of digital solutions for evidence-based decision-making, such as automated accounting systems, data-based management mechanisms, an Online Content Repository Platform for VET, an Electronic Admission System, and an Information Education Management System
- **Quality assurance:** updating curricula jointly with stakeholders, developing competency-based educational programmes
- **Qualification framework development:** the National Qualifications Agency of Ukraine, introducing micro-credential and qualification recognition systems, facilitating interoperability between Ukrainian and European qualification systems, developing the Register of Qualifications, comparing European Skills, Competences, Qualifications, and Occupations (ESCO) with the description of qualifications in Ukraine, digitizing qualifications, and automatically recognizing digitized qualification documents



Outcomes  
and  
impact

# RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

- **Policy advice:** drafting the draft Law of Ukraine "On Vocational Education", the statute of the National Qualifications Agency, the VET Reform Strategy of Ukraine, and the Provisions on State Electronic Database on Education (SEDE), all of which are essential components of the country's post-war recovery, integration of career guidance methodology into the State Standards of Primary Education
- **Expert support:** developing micro-credentials, VET standards, and modular programmes
- **Risks:** lack of coordination among various IOs, resulting in overlaps or gaps in the implementation of projects → Donor Coordination System



Outcomes  
and  
impact

# RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

- Postponement of priority actions due to the war
- Meeting the humanitarian needs of internally displaced persons (IDPs) who were temporarily settled in vocational institutions, including the provision of equipment and generators for VET hubs that housed IDPs
- Providing psychological support to IDPs and the staff of vocational institutions that interacted with them
- Retraining and partial qualification programmes to increase the employability of IDPs and victims of the conflict
- Maintaining the VET system, which has been substantially impacted by the hostilities and the mass migration, by providing access to the educational process
- Creating online courses and additional short-term courses for acquiring war-relevant occupations (such as "Drone operator")



Priority  
during the  
russian-  
Ukrainian  
war

# RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

- Providing policy advice to the MES of Ukraine concerning the development of a new VET strategy during the war and post-war reconstruction period
- Resuming the implementation of some initiatives that were formulated before the hostilities, specifically the development of regional VET strategies in cooperation with the MES of Ukraine, Regional Employment Services, and the Federation of Employers in line with post-war reconstruction
- Geographical focus of IO activities: extending their activities to cover the entire country



Priority  
during the  
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war



# CONCLUSIONS

- IOs prompted an emergence of new global patterns in vocational education policy-making (McGrath, 2012).
- Engagement of IOs and implementation of their initiatives have played a significant role in shaping the VET system of Ukraine.
- The considerable impact of IOs on VET reforms is intrinsically linked to the alignment between their activities and the key areas of reform in the Ukrainian VET sector. In certain instances, the efforts of IOs complement the national goals. While certain objectives may be specific to the agendas and priorities of IOs.
- During the war, international projects, programmes and initiatives adapted their goals and activities to respond to the urgent needs of local actors.
- **Added value of the study:** perspective from a post-socialist country undergoing rapid democratic transformations and tragic events
- **Limitations:** small number of interviewed experts; subjective evaluations; focus on the perspective of international actors
- **Suggestions for further research:** perspectives of both international and national actors including VET learners and employers; comparison to other post-soviet countries or countries, which experienced war conflicts; evaluation research

# Thank you for your attention!

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