

International mobility in apprenticeships: focus on long-term mobility

Slovakia

DRAFT

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CHAPTER 1. Introduction

VET system in Slovakia is traditionally school-based. In the past it contained a strong stream of schools affiliated to companies. A typical feature of organisation of VET in these schools was alternance training with periods of theoretical education and periods of training, often in companies' premises. Transformation of economy in the 1990s resulted in dissolution of these links, as new owners of former state companies were not interested in provision of IVET, partly also due to the missing support for school-business cooperation. With decreasing numbers of skilled workers registered with labour offices and with the changing labour market demand school-business cooperation has been revived based on contracts on provision of practical component of IVET between schools and companies. From 2015 a type of dual VET was introduced based on individual contracts between learners and companies on provision of training under the supervision of respective company complemented by theoretical education in schools based on a school-company contract.

Thus, there are three forms of provision of VET in secondary education.

- (a) school-based with theoretical and practical component offered in school premises;
- (b) mixed scheme – school-based with parts of training offered to a group of students by a company, based on a school-company contract on provision of practical education/training (*zmluva o poskytovaní praktického vyučovania*);
- (c) dual VET (Slovak version) based on individual learning contracts (*učebná zmluva*) between a VET school student (or a parent) and a company on provision of practical training and on a school-company contract on dual VET containing details on sharing responsibilities for provision of dual VET (*zmluva o duálnom vzdelávaní*).

The mixed scheme is still strong, and in many cases of strong involvement of companies in training it is often considered equivalent or even titled dual VET. Dual VET is currently very massively promoted by media and European funds, but despite a gradual growth it is still low populated. 1 615 out of 41 622 new entrants into upper secondary education in September 2018 (3.9%) entered dual VET by signing a learning contract with a company.

There was no specific law on VET until 2009. The Act on VET (184/2009) was the first specific legislation particularly important for introducing a fully new VET governance architecture. In 2015 it was replaced by a new Act on VET (61/2015)

introducing a Slovak version of dual VET. The 2018 amendment of this law ⁽¹⁾ focused on strengthening a role of employer representatives and on introducing fiscal incentives to attract companies (in particular SMEs) to participate in provision of dual VET.

Following the reduction of the number of programmes that is already in progress, 485 programmes including programmes under the responsibility of the health and interior ministries will be offered from October 2019, covering ISCED 2 to ISCED 5 levels of education and EQF 2 to EQF 5 qualification levels. The strongest VET stream are ISCED 354 (EQF 4) programmes entitling to apply for higher education. ISCED 353 programmes aimed at training craftsmen and skilled workers for direct entering labour market are in decline. Dual learners are in training at all the aforementioned ISCED and EQF levels. In the 2019/20 school year, a dominant share of dual learners were in training for EQF 4 qualifications. Similarly, a dominant share of outgoing mobilities are in training for EQF 4 qualifications. Creation of post-secondary VET programmes and tertiary professional bachelor studies is currently a challenge stressed by experts supported by authorities and European funding ⁽²⁾.

(1) A current wording of the Act on VET (61/2015) is available at <https://www.slov-lex.sk/pravne-predpisy/SK/ZZ/2015/61/20180901>.

(2) See more on VET system in a nutshell in the 2018 Cedefop spotlight compilation (Cedefop, 2019), and for details in the 2018 VET in Europe country report (Vantuch, J., Jelinkova, D., 2019).

CHAPTER 2. Exogenous factors influencing mobility of apprenticeship at upper secondary level

2.1. Economic sectors and actors

Table A1 in the Annex offers an overview of distribution of outgoing mobilities of VET school students by broad fields (two-digit codes of ISCED-F) in the last five years.

The top three fields (engineering, manufacturing and construction; business, administration and law; and services) cover over 60% of mobilities that in general corresponds with numbers of students in respective fields and numbers of schools in need to fight for attracting new entrants. Economic sectors and economic actors are less relevant for mobilities compared to the initiatives of schools. Nevertheless, two factors (novelty and potential working opportunities) play a role:

In engineering and manufacturing, the new equipment or know-how significantly matters, making outgoing mobilities attractive. This contributed to a solid increase of mobilities in this field (see Table A1).

In services, the opportunity to cover additional work demand matters. In tourism, restaurants and catering services, there is a strong demand for trainees who can complement the regular working staff, in particular in peak times of demand for these services: during May – September in summer resorts or in ski resorts in wintertime. These mobilities accounted for over 73% of all 1 878 service sector related outgoing mobilities (see Table A1). These two factors are also a key to the promotion of long-term mobilities. Mobility offering a novelty that is complementary to training not available at home, and work-based learning in attractive workplace opening the door for future employment opportunities could be seen as a relevant factor favouring long-term mobility over short-term mobility.

Top three broad fields accounted for 62% of outgoing mobilities (see Table A1). Two of them seem to be suitable, with a reference to the two factors mentioned above, for the promotion of long-term mobilities. The third one (business administration) seems to be less appropriate for long-term mobilities.

Table A2 in the Annex depicts the distribution of outgoing mobilities of VET school students by receiving countries: language is a dominant factor. Two neighbouring countries (Czechia and Hungary) with no language barrier and the United Kingdom with the most attractive foreign language are among top three destinations. These three destinations accounted for over 56% of all mobilities, and over 67% when adding Germany and Austria with the second important foreign

language and attractive places for potential future employment abroad, too. The rest of top 12 are countries from the South of Europe. In this case, cultural attractiveness as well as the aforementioned training opportunities in services have a role.

Comparison of outgoing mobility (9 714) and incoming mobility (3 673) indicates quite strong imbalance (Table A2 and Table A3 in the Annex). Czechia is again on the top accounting for 51% of all incoming mobilities (Table A3).

Not surprisingly, six Czech schools are among top ten sending institutions. On the top of sending institutions, there is a French school from the agriculture sector with 133 mobilities. Very active is also a Polish school with 118 mobilities ranking third. The rest are two networking institutions with the seats in the United Kingdom and Germany.

Among top 10 receiving institutions in Slovakia, there are six schools, a networking institution cooperating with Germany (93 mobilities), Volkswagen Bratislava (77), a manor house hotel (73) and a wholesale Metro Cash & Carry (72). While in the two latter cases sending partners are schools, in the case of Volkswagen a strong international cooperation is visible organised by this multinational company itself cooperating with its daughters and schools in many countries. Significantly visible is also the partnership of two networking institutions – a Germany-based Europäisches Bildungswerk für Beruf und Gesellschaft gGmbH and Slovakia-based Euro – Projektservis, s.r.o. Among other networking institutions, Berufsförderungsinstitut Wien from Austria and Grampus Heritage and Training Ltd. from the United Kingdom are also worth mentioning.

Schools are dominant players in both outgoing and incoming mobilities. As visible from the information above, a gradual increase of activities of companies can however be expected. Any efforts to promote long-term mobilities should apparently target companies and school-company partnerships. VET schools per se are naturally more interested in short-term mobilities, *inter alia* due to the obligatory accompanying of students by the school staff requested by law. This problem can be easier to fix in the case of mobilities within dual VET and stabilised school-company partnerships. The following is one of the country first examples: the secondary VET school in Púchov cooperating with Continental Matador Rubber Púchov in provision of dual VET signed a Memorandum of Understanding with the mother company Continental Hannover with the aim to expand the international mobility of its dual learners ⁽³⁾.

⁽³⁾ See Trenčín self-governing region news *SOŠ v Púchove rozšírila aktivity systému duálneho vzdelávania na medzinárodný rozmer* [Secondary VET school in Púchov expands its activities within dual system to international dimension] at

2.2. Dynamics of skills demand and supply at the medium level occupation level

An overview of skills needs data ⁽⁴⁾ indicates lacking supply of the workforce caused by both increasing employment and a need for replacement of ageing population. In contrast to many innovative countries medium qualification level is predominantly required. More than a half of total job openings (including replacements for vacated jobs) till 2030 will need medium qualification level, according to Cedefop forecasting ⁽⁵⁾. According to the labour ministry estimations ⁽⁶⁾, 70% of job opportunities until 2023 will need secondary or even lower qualifications. While 308 000 job opportunities for secondary graduates are forecasted, only 190 000 secondary school graduates are expected in 2018 to 2023. The strongest lack of workers is expected in mechanical engineering, as presented in Table 1. Not surprisingly, only one occupation in surplus is among the top five occupation clusters featuring mismatch. A beautician is traditionally very attractive for girls. An increasing inflow of commercial academy graduates into tertiary education and ISCED 5+ education level required for nurses left hair and beauty services a very attractive destination for girls not interested in tertiary education.

Table 1. **Top five occupation clusters with mismatch in demand/supply of secondary graduates in 2018 to 2023**

(in thousands)

Occupation cluster	Number of workers
Mechanical engineering workers	-32
Shop assistants	-24
Logistics and distribution workers	-12
Construction workers	-8
Beauticians	+2.5

NB: - indicates a lack of workers, + indicates oversupply of graduates.

Source: Trexima (data). In: Ministry of Labour, social Affairs and Family, 2019.

https://www.tsk.sk/slovensky/aktualne-spravy/tlacove-spravy/2018/sos-v-puchove-rozsirila-aktivny-systemu-dualneho-vzdelavania-na-medzinarodny-rozmer.html?page_id=567714

⁽⁴⁾ See Chapter 3.1 Anticipating skill need in the 2018 VET in Europe country report (Vantuch, J., Jelinkova, D., 2019).

⁽⁵⁾ See <https://www.cedefop.europa.eu/en/publications-and-resources/data-visualisations/skills-forecast> > country filter Slovakia

⁽⁶⁾ Ministry of Labour, social Affairs and Family, 2019.

Dynamics of skills demand and supply has however not clear influence on mobilities. The number of mobilities in hair and beauty services (335 in 2014-18), within which job supply exceeds demand, was comparable with numbers of mobilities in manufacturing and processing (217), mechanics and metal trades (176) and motor vehicles (362), all representing jobs with a future shortage of workers.

Long-term criticism of the qualification system resulted in a proposal to create 'smaller' qualifications and the opportunity to accumulate units of learning outcomes. This translated into a proposal for the creation of the fourth sub-framework of the Slovak Qualifications Framework (7) intended to contain labour market driven qualifications focusing on learning outcomes directly relevant for jobs. The fourth sub-framework has been included into the Slovak Qualifications Framework containing this kind of qualifications titled occupational qualifications (profesijné kvalifikácie) (8). Populating the fourth sub-framework can be a very strong impulse for the promotion of the long-term mobilities relevant for medium level occupation level, as long-term mobilities could substantially better contribute to the adoption of internationally recognised qualifications than short-term mobilities.

2.3. Any other relevant factors

The following exogenous factors influencing mobilities have been identified earlier (see Chapter 2.1): novelty enriching training, employment opportunities, a geography/language factor, and flexibility in governance. This is to discuss some details of the strongest of the aforementioned factors and to comment other factors that play or may play a role in the future.

Foreign language command is one of crucial disablers of mobilities. This is also visible from Tables A2 and A3 in the Annex, where Czechia and Hungary (attractive for Hungarian minority schools in particular) with no language barrier are dominant. Foreign language acquisition and cultural aspects of visits are highlighted in almost all participants' reports as an important feature of the experience. Foreign languages are very relevant for professionalisation of participants from commercial academies and diverse service-oriented professions, and cultural diversity is very relevant for tourism and catering schools. Any complications related to the exit of the United Kingdom from the EU can create difficulties in placement of learners, as the United Kingdom is the third most

(7) Vantuch, J. et al. (2014).

(8) Pathóová, I. et al. (2017).

attractive country for outgoing mobilities. Acquisition of English is a strong motivator and, therefore, provision of instruction in English might be increasingly demanded also from other countries. Therefore, a substantial increase of mobilities and long-term mobilities expected in the future might be at risk.

Table 2 compares work-based learning offered in companies and training offered predominantly in schools.

Table 2. Outgoing mobilities of VET school students by learning opportunity type

	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018
Number of VET mobilities	1 841	1 805	1 839	2 143	2 086
In school (%)	19.0	23.9	33.9	34.3	33.9
Work-based learning in company (%)	81.0	76.1	66.1	65.7	66.1

NB: 2018 - preliminary data.

Source: Erasmus+ National Agency (Slovak Academic Association for International Cooperation, SAAIC).

The number of placements in companies is significantly higher than the number of placements in schools. The efforts to expand long-term mobilities might be endangered by a lack of places in companies (as a share of placements in companies is in decline), and, predominantly, by the need to offer a portion of theoretical education as requested by the national curricula.

Parents are another player that can be expected to be more relevant in case of long-term mobilities. Data in Table 3 indicate no substantial difference in participation in mobilities between males and females.

Table 3. Distribution of outgoing mobilities of VET school students by sex

	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	Total	%
Females	927	888	853	1 011	1 006	4 685	48.23
Males	914	917	986	1 132	1 078	5 027	51.75
Not specified	0	0	0	0	2	2	0.02
Total	1 841	1 805	1 839	2 143	2 086	9 714	100

NB: 2018 - preliminary data.

Source: Erasmus+ National Agency (SAAIC).

Although males slightly dominate over females, the difference is in fact in favour of females when compared with the sex ratio in VET schools (55% males compared to 45% females in 2018/19). This signals that parents have no problem with short-term absence of girls in families, but it is not clear what will happen in case of long-term mobilities. There are signals that parents will not be in favour of long-term mobilities, in particular concerning girls.

Table 4 below offers information about the distribution of mobilities by duration.

Table 4. **Outgoing mobilities of VET school students by duration in 2014-18**

Duration in days	Number of mobilities	%
Up to 20	6 410	66.0
Up to 40	3 152	32.5
Up to 60	62	0.6
Up to 89	30	0.3
90 and more	60	0.6
Total	9 714	100

NB: 2018 - preliminary data.

Source: Erasmus+ National Agency (SAAIC).

Out of all 9 714 mobilities, only 60 were long-term mobilities with the average duration of 116 days and 9 654 were diverse short-term mobilities with the average length of 17.8 days in 2014-18. Short-term mobilities are currently preferred by both schools and parents, as participants are secondary school students (and not employees or adults) and a long-term absence from schools or families is seen inappropriate. Longer mobilities are therefore hampered by the age of learners and the organisation of learning process in VET schools. Improvement can be expected from a more flexible dual VET with cooperating multinational companies, provided administration obstacles are reduced.

There are neither national data nor surveys about attitudes of employers towards expansion of mobilities. The only detailed data on enterprises are from CVTS ⁽⁹⁾, and on adult learning from adult education surveys (AES). The ReferNet Slovakia analyses of AES data confirmed the Mathew effect ⁽¹⁰⁾. Thus, it can be expected that long-term mobilities of both students over 18 years of age and adults will better affect trained people than those in need of substantial improvement. Thus, long-term mobilities are likely to develop into exclusive programmes.

There are no international qualifications offered within formal initial training, with the exception in the ICT sector, where international certificates can be obtained in addition to regular school leaving certificates. With a gradual development of ECVET, certification of units of learning outcomes occurs, however, no genuine qualifications can be obtained via ECVET-related mobilities due to dominance of short-time mobilities. No doubt, the acquisition of international qualifications might become a strongest incentive for participation in long-term mobilities.

⁽⁹⁾ Continuing Vocational Training Survey (Eurostat database at <https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/data/database> > Continuing Vocational Training in enterprises (trng_cvt)

⁽¹⁰⁾ See Section 2.3.1 in the 2018 VET in Europe country report (Vantuch, J., Jelinkova, D., 2019).

CHAPTER 3. The link between the apprenticeship scheme design and apprentices' mobility

Before exploring links between apprenticeships and mobility it is necessary to clarify specific features of apprenticeship-type education and training in Slovakia. It is important to bear in mind that the term equivalent to apprenticeship in fact does not exist. A Slovak word 'učeň' corresponding to apprentice is not used anymore and learners in apprentice-type programmes are strictly named 'žiak' (pupil/student) in the legislation. All secondary VET learners, regardless whether with an individual learning contract with a company or covered by a school-company contract on provision of practical education/training, enjoy the status of a regular student. Even dual learners are regular students, with some benefits ⁽¹¹⁾ compared to other students, and not employees of the respective company. The only employment related legal instrument is a contract on future employment that can be offered to a learner by the company interested in hiring him/her in the future.

In fact, it is not possible to speak about apprenticeship and apprentices now, in contrast to the past. The terms 'učeň' or 'učňovská príprava' (corresponding to apprentice or apprenticeship/training of apprentices) may occur in regular people debates, but not in professional discourse on secondary VET.

Nevertheless, there are schemes considered as close to apprenticeship, and, therefore, many VET programmes are classified as apprenticeship by different authors differently.

3.1. Apprenticeship type

In the earlier report on apprenticeship commissioned by Cedefop ⁽¹²⁾ there were eight apprenticeship-type cases described in detail. Since then, after substantial changes in legislation, three apprenticeship-related cases should be stressed

- (a) dual VET (a Slovak version not fully corresponding to the dual abroad, such as in Germany);
- (b) mixed scheme;
- (c) programmes leading to a certificate of apprenticeship.

⁽¹¹⁾ The most visible are financial benefits; see more in Vantuch, J., Jelinkova, D. (2019).

⁽¹²⁾ Vantuch, J., Jelinkova, D., 2014.

The first case is best fitting the definition of apprenticeship by Cedefop ⁽¹³⁾. In dual VET as regulated by the Act on VET (61/2015)

- (i) structured alternation of learning in a school and a company leads to the recognised qualification;
- (ii) focus on occupations or trades is particularly stressed by involvement of the contracted company;
- (iii) training is equivalent to the curricula offered within school-based programmes;
- (iv) provision of training in a company is backed by an individual learning contract and a school-company contract on provision of dual VET;
- (v) learners receive benefits from the contracted company.

Full compatibility with the definition of apprenticeship and also with the regular dual known abroad is not achieved due to the following:

- (i) neither a company nor any employee related institution are fully responsible for quality check and certification of achieving respective learning outcomes; the final responsibility for quality check lies with the school director and a certificate of apprenticeship is issued by the school ⁽¹⁴⁾;
- (ii) although a company can influence curricula, in particular provision of training in the company, the development of school curricula and accreditation and evaluation procedures are similar as in a typical school-based case, despite involvement of respective employer organisations (empowered by law).

Nevertheless, despite some differences compared to genuine apprenticeship, affiliation to the respective company is quite strong and meeting the respective company training needs is in place. This is why this type of VET that has been in process of implementation since 2015/16 can be considered apprenticeship.

The second case, the mixed scheme mentioned above

⁽¹³⁾ Apprenticeship: education and training underpinned by structured alternation of learning in an education and training setting with learning and working at a workplace and leading to a recognized qualification. There is a clear link with an occupation, trade and the length is long enough to ensure meaningful alternation. An apprentice has a contract with the employer and receives a compensation (wage or allowance) from the employer according to the relevant regulations. An employer is formally responsible (accreditation, training plan, etc.) for the on-the-job learning objectives.

⁽¹⁴⁾ This is also valid in the case a practical component of VET fully covered by company employees (instructors) and supervised by a head instructor who is also a company employee.

- (i) allows for alternance of learning in a school and a company that can be fully equivalent to dual VET in terms of provision of in-company training;
- (ii) focus on occupations or trades is particularly stressed by engagement of the company identified and contracted by the school; there is no contract between an individual learner and the company;
- (iii) training is fully based on the curricula developed by the school;
- (iv) provision of training in a company is backed by the school curricula; details are regulated by the school-company contract agreed between a school director and a relevant company representative without involvement of employer organisations, which is the case in dual VET;
- (v) learners receive only some benefits from the contracted company.

This case can be seen as school-based VET with spells of work-based learning offered in the company; the decision on the length of in-company training and supervision of in-company training is under the full responsibility of school in both process monitoring and learning outcomes validation. In many cases this mixed scheme is considered dual VET, in particular by involved companies, although this is not so from the legal point of view. The mixed scheme has a long tradition, and before implementing dual VET in 2015/16 it allowed for fruitful school-company cooperation.

Quite often, learners in programmes offering a certificate of apprenticeship (*výučný list*) are considered apprentices, in particular by foreign experts misled by the title of the certificate. In this third case, learners of all upper secondary VET programmes leading to a certificate of apprenticeship are considered apprentices. This violates the crucial feature of apprenticeship – existence of alternance training. Some apprenticeship certificate holders could have been trained exclusively in schools.

In all three cases, the same type of certificate is offered based on the same national curricula (state educational programme). We will further only refer to the first two cases (dual VET and the mixed scheme) as representatives of apprenticeship-type education and training in Slovakia.

Within the traditional mixed scheme schools are dominant actors (despite cooperation with a company) and this is also visible in mobility related activities. Schools being under strong pressure of the education ministry and the State School Inspectorate are fully aware of responsibility for wellbeing and security of students. Therefore, accompanying of students by school staff is inevitable in any kind of out-of-school activities, not speaking about mobilities abroad. This is the most important driver of preference of short-term mobilities over long-term mobilities. In the case of any harm of students below 18 years of age the school is made accountable. Legal solution allowing for the transfer of responsibilities for

students to a receiving institution is a fundamental precondition for expansion of long-term mobilities of students below 18 years of age. Adult students are either close to final examinations or in post-secondary programmes and, therefore, long-term mobilities are less suitable for them unless they see the opportunity to look for employment abroad. Short-term mobilities are more attractive for the mixed scheme than long-term mobilities due to curricular reasons. It is easier for a school to make an agreement specifying relevant learning outcomes with a receiving institution and it is easier to fit into a prescribed number of hours of practical component of VET in the case of short-term mobilities. In the fight for attracting new students, a big number of short-term mobilities is also better for school marketing than a lower number of long-term mobilities. The Slovak version of dual VET requests cooperation of two actors (a school and a company) that can create obstacles for flexibility in organising any kind of mobility. A school is not fully free to send abroad a student with a signed learning contract with the company, and the company is not fully free to decide upon an appropriate time for mobility, as a dual learner is a student and not an employee of the company. Furthermore, legal responsibility for sending a dual learner abroad is even more complicated. On the other hand, involvement of companies can open the door for both improved quality of mobility and longer periods of stays abroad. Companies in Slovakia are, as a rule, subsidiaries of multinational companies and this can allow for further progress including higher frequency of long-term mobilities. However, also in this case the numbers of hours prescribed by the national curricula for a practical component of VET might hamper organising long-term mobilities. Moreover, long-term training abroad might lead to acquiring learning outcomes not covered by the school curricula and therefore not validated by the national authorities due to the absence of a genuine validation scheme (see more in Section 3.9). Companies are certainly interested in long-term mobility of students in the case of future employees and training abroad fitting specific company's needs. They can be demotivated to send regular students for long-term mobilities in the case of risk of reducing financial benefits from the state budget due to the inability to meet the prescribed length of training provided by them.

Two issues are common for both forms of apprenticeship-type of training. Shorter mobilities are administratively easier to handle and they are less risky concerning a brain drain abroad. This aspect has also been highlighted by the national authorities, considering long-term mobilities currently disadvantageous: it is estimated that Slovakia is not able to attract enough apprentices and future employees from abroad to balance an expected outflow of apprentices and young professionals from Slovakia.

3.2. Apprenticeship governance

Employers' criticism of schools as not able to match labour market needs led to establishment of a new detailed VET governance architecture in 2009 ⁽¹⁵⁾. Furthermore, a full network of VET programmes is covered by the so-called 'sectoral assignees'. They were selected from chambers and employers' associations and set by legislation ⁽¹⁶⁾ to represent employers' interests and expertise. Currently, there are 15 'sectoral assignees', with main responsibility and supportive function for the respective major fields of study ⁽¹⁷⁾. 'Sectoral assignees' should play an important role in adjusting VET to labour market needs and in assuring its quality: they should support the central labour office in analysing and forecasting labour market development. State curricula that are being prepared by the State Institute of Vocational Education in cooperation with expert commissions must be discussed with 'sectoral assignees'. VET schools must submit their school curricula to 'sectoral assignees' unless they were elaborated in cooperation with companies participating in dual VET or discussed with companies offering practical training within the mixed scheme. They can delegate an employer representative to the school-leaving examination commission. From 2017/18, 'sectoral assignees' check assignments related to school-leaving examinations.

'Sectoral assignees' play a prominent role in dual VET by provision of training of in-company trainers (instructors), assessing and certifying companies interested in offering practical training based on the prescribed preconditions of provision of VET (material, spatial and equipment-related requirements) in development of which they should also participate. 'Sectoral assignees' however only assist the State School Inspectorate in quality checking of practice-oriented training provided by companies within dual VET.

They also award a title VET centre to outstanding VET schools according to their criteria ⁽¹⁸⁾.

⁽¹⁵⁾ See Section 2.5.1 the 2018 VET in Europe country report (Vantuch, J., Jelinkova, D., 2019).

⁽¹⁶⁾ § 32 (1) to (3) of the Act on VET (61/2015).

⁽¹⁷⁾ See Annex 9 to the Decree of the Education Ministry on the system of education branches for secondary schools and on institutional responsibility towards branches (251/2018)

⁽¹⁸⁾ A VET school complying with quality requirements in terms of learning environment, equipment, staff and school-businesses cooperation is identified based on approval of establisher, Regional VET Council and a final decision of the 'sectoral assignee'.

The Employer Council for Dual VET ⁽¹⁹⁾ encompasses ‘sectoral assignees’ involved in dual VET and coordinates their activities. It is a voluntary association of representatives of all relevant professional organisations, self-regulated by its own statute.

The National VET Council and Regional VET Councils contribute to strategic decisions, *inter alia* to regulation of secondary VET. Provision of school-based VET and of apprenticeship within the mixed scheme is subjected to consideration, while the apprenticeship within dual VET is exempt from the regulation, as the preference of companies is fully respected.

The current architecture of VET governance is very complex. Respective players have no impact on mobilities so far, apparently due to strong dominance of short-term mobilities, within which schools are dominant actors. It must be however expected that in case of massive promotion of long-term mobilities employer representatives will become alerted about obstacles signalled by companies. This is relevant in particular for the ‘sectoral assignees’. Legislative changes or fiscal instruments in support of long-term mobilities will be discussed within the ‘National VET Council’ provided ‘sectoral assignees’ will see the need for rewriting the rules.

3.3. Duration of apprenticeship / company placement

In both cases, dual VET and the mixed scheme, duration is the same as in school-based alternative: three to five years depending on the respective programme. The share of training in the company depends on the respective school-company contracts. The table below presents the minimum obligatory hours ⁽²⁰⁾ to be covered by the types of programmes offering the apprenticeship-type VET.

Table 5. Distribution of hours by apprenticeship-type programmes

ISCED	SKKR/ EQF	Length (years)	Hours per study	General	VET		Free* (%)	Max. practice (%)
				Theory (%)	Theory (%)	Practice (%)		
353	3	3	3 168	22.22	18.18	47.98	11.62	59.6
		4	4 224	18.56	22.73	49.24	9.47	58.7
354**	4	4	4 224	34.85	13.64	33.33	18.18	51.5
		5	5 280	35.15	18.18	26.67	20	46.7
554	5	3	3 168	0	26.26	33.33	40.40	73.7

⁽¹⁹⁾ The Employer Council for Dual VET is set by § 32 (4) to (6) of the Act on VET (61/2015), <http://www.rzsdv.sk/wordpress/>.

⁽²⁰⁾ Additional hours might emerge due to coincidence of national holidays with Saturdays and Sundays in a respective school year. In the case of dual VET, additional working days are as a rule allocated for training in a company.

NB: 2018 - preliminary data.
SKKR – Slovak Qualifications Framework (NQF), EQF – European Qualifications Framework.
Max. practice – a maximum share of hours that can be allocated for practice or even training in the company; it is the sum of the previous two figures (practice and free).
* A share of hours available for the autonomous decision and/or agreement between a school and a company concerning allocation for general subjects, VET theory of practice.
** Programmes offering a certificate of apprenticeship.
Source: State Institute of Vocational Education, state educational programmes (national curricula), calculated and tabled by ReferNet Slovakia.

The column labelled 'free' indicates the share of hours that can also be used for theory or practice based on a school-company agreement. In the case of dual VET they are as a rule used for VET practice. Thus, the sum of the last two column data indicates a maximum company placement. This is however only a theoretical number.

The last column in Table 5 indicates the limits of hours suitable for mobilities, as theoretical parts of education are, as a rule, considered less suitable for mobility than the practical component. Limits within the mixed scheme vary being more sensitive to the decision of school and a ceiling of practical component is as a rule lower compared to dual. Within dual, free hours are as a rule used for in-company training while in the mixed scheme some free hours are also used for theoretical education. Nevertheless, the limits induced by the national curricula (and presented in Table 5) do not harm shorter mobilities, but can create an obstacle for organising long-term mobilities.

3.4. Organisation of alternance

Organisation of alternance training is fully up to a school and a company. It must be however noticed that even in dual VET the practical component can be placed in a school or in other certified premises. The last column in Table 5 indicates a maximum possible share of practice (and company placement, which can be in reality lower). In the case of dual VET, maximum 50% of hours of practice can be placed in school workshops, according to law. In the case of the mixed scheme, the share of company placement fully depends on the agreement between the school and the company or companies, as organisation of alternance is not regulated by law. Modules in IVET are still rare and, therefore, ad hoc developed units of learning outcomes, that are suitable for shorter mobilities, are applied. Up to 90% of applicants indicate using ECVET within their international mobility proposals. Organisation of alternance is more challenging in the case of long-term mobilities due to the limits of available hours suitable for mobility prescribed by the national curricula (see Table 5).

3.5. Type of contract and status of apprentices

In the case of dual VET, a learner (or a parent) signs an individual learning contract (*učebná zmluva*) with a company. From the 2018/19 school year, individual learning contracts can be signed by the end of first half of the school year to make entering dual VET more flexible. The company must be entitled to offer dual VET based on a prior assessment by a 'sectoral assignee' (see Section 3.2) of compliance with prescribed requirements. This company signs a contract with the relevant school on dual VET, containing details on sharing responsibilities for provision of dual VET (*zmluva o duálnom vzdelávaní*) to contracted learners.

Dual VET learners are regular students of this school and not employees of the company offering them practical training.

In the case of the mixed scheme, provision of in-company training is based only on a school-company contract on provision of practical education/training (*zmluva o poskytovaní praktického vyučovania*). There are no individual contracts between a learner and the company.

Sending students abroad is easier in the case of the mixed scheme, as the existence of learning contracts in the case of dual VET induces the need for an agreement between more actors.

3.6. Remuneration

The Act on VET ⁽²¹⁾ stipulates a difference between 'training work' and 'productive work', the latter giving entitlement to remuneration of learners in amount equal to at least 50% of hour minimum wage ⁽²²⁾, while the former not. In contrast to the past ⁽²³⁾, the remuneration for productive work has no ceiling to allow companies to better value quality performance of learners, and it is also exempted from levies (up to 100% of a minimum wage).

Long-term mobilities could be seen as not attractive only in case the loss of remuneration for 'productive work' at home is not compensated by the income received abroad.

⁽²¹⁾ § 5 and § 27 of the Act on VET (61/2015).

⁽²²⁾ EUR 2.989 (gross) in 2019.

⁽²³⁾ The amendment of the Act on VET has introduced many financial incentives to companies including this one.

3.7. Provisions on occupational health, safety and social insurance

In both apprenticeship-type cases the provision of occupational health, safety and social insurance is the same as concerning other students. The Act on Social Insurance (461/2003) explicitly states that also during in-company training they are not considered employees. Although neither students nor schools are obliged to pay social insurance, students who have sustained an accident during in-company training qualify for benefits from accident insurance, according to law ⁽²⁴⁾.

Companies offering in-company training are obliged to provide students with the personal protective equipment for free ⁽²⁵⁾. Companies offering dual VET are obliged to elaborate and make visible internal regulations on practical training that include also measures to protect safety, health and property, and other details related to the participation of learners in practical training ⁽²⁶⁾.

Schools are experienced in this issue and the length of mobility does not matter.

3.8. Curriculum / training standards specification

In both cases, the same national curricula (state educational programmes) apply. National curricula offer the framework for individual schools that are obliged to develop detailed school curricula (school educational programmes). After the introduction of dual VET in 2015/16 detailed syllabuses were prepared by the State Institute of Vocational Education on request of employer representatives. As a consequence, different curricula were applied: learning outcome-based for non-dual VET and syllabus-based for dual VET. From the 2018/19 school year, the same learning outcome-based curricula apply for non-dual and dual VET. The difference between dual, the mixed scheme and school-based forms is in provision of practice and in particular in a place of training (in the school; in the school and the companies contracted by this school; in the company having an individual contract with the learner; and/or other premises including the school, if agreed so).

Long-term mobilities might be hampered by the national curricula as schools prefer mobilities targeting learning outcomes related to practical component of VET that is limited by the national curricula.

⁽²⁴⁾ Act on Social Insurance, <https://www.slov-lex.sk/pravne-predpisy/SK/ZZ/2003/461/>.

⁽²⁵⁾ § 26 (1) a) of the Act on VET.

⁽²⁶⁾ § 21 (6) of the Act on VET.

3.9. Use of validation in apprenticeships

The apprenticeship-type scheme focuses on VET school students, thus, as a rule, on young people below 18 years of age. Currently, apprenticeship programmes are only rarely offered to adult students. A genuine apprenticeship for adults interested in receiving a certificate on apprenticeship is not yet in place. Non-qualified adults interested in starting a business regulated by the Trade Licencing Act (455/1991) must pass an examination regulated by the Act on Lifelong Learning (568/2009) to receive a certificate verifying 'professional competence' (*osvedčenie o odbornej spôsobilosti*). This certificate is not equivalent to a certificate of apprenticeship, but it entitles to run a business otherwise requiring a certificate of apprenticeship. Thus, there are no genuine processes of validation of acquired learning outcomes. ⁽²⁷⁾ In fact, traditional examination is still a dominant instrument also in this case of 'not fully equivalent validation'.

A systemic solution for validation of learning outcomes to be achieved within in-company training is still missing. This might hamper long-term mobilities, as a stronger link to the respective company might be inevitable. Learners not interested in employment in that company (or in a domestic company cooperating with this receiving company) might face the difficulties to get prior learning recognised in the full extent, as some learning outcomes achieved within the long-term mobility might go beyond the respective school programme of the sending school.

In the case of the aforementioned mixed scheme of secondary VET, validation of learning outcomes to be achieved within in-company training is not considered necessary, as the practical component of training is under the full control of the school. The provision of training in the contracted company is strictly supervised by the school staff. In the case of dual VET, the final responsibility for outcomes remains unclear. In-company training per se is under the full control of the company, as instructors and a head instructor are the company employees. The full responsibility for validation of learning outcomes and/or quality check of provision of practical training by the world of business side is hampered by lacking capacities ⁽²⁸⁾ and by non-existence of a genuine validation scheme. Making long-term mobilities work requires implementation of a genuine validation scheme. Otherwise, learners in long-term mobility might be trapped by limits of the respective company and/or school.

⁽²⁷⁾ Vantuch, J. (2019).

⁽²⁸⁾ In contrast to many countries with dual VET, there is no obligatory memberships in chambers and other professional or employer organisations in Slovakia. This is why 'sectoral assignees' suffer from a lack of personal capacities and financial sources.

CHAPTER 4. Lessons learnt from existing policies, initiatives, projects

There is neither a specific policy nor an instrument in support of the cross-country mobility of learners in apprenticeship-type schemes. Neither Erasmus+, currently the strongest mobility scheme, nor the other regional or local initiatives have such a focus. Nevertheless, practice-oriented learning outcomes are highly valued by mobility participants from VET schools, regardless whether from school-based or apprenticeship-type VET. Here are some examples of authentic expressions of mobility participants (Box 1).

Box 1. **Personal statements of some short-term mobility participants from secondary VET schools**

'The (*partner*) school ... has a studio with 3D technology ... (*and*) ... better technical equipment than our school, because they have been focusing on it (*multimedia*) for many years, and our school has only recently opened such a programme.'

'I learned how a company works, how marketing is done in practice. It was very good experience.'

'I learned how to insert a cannula ... the mentor showed me how to make disinfection, what is the exposure time for alcoholic and non-alcoholic disinfectants ... I still use this knowledge today.'

'They taught me how to cut curved arches, we weren't taught this much at home, as well as making leaded stained glass, which is the original medieval technique.'

Source: Erasmus+ National Agency (SAAIC).

The *Mid-term evaluation report of the Erasmus+ programme and predecessor programmes Slovak Republic* ⁽²⁹⁾ criticised that 'support for the cohesion of European and national policies and related political support was never formulated for education and training'. It was even found that strategic youth-related documents reflected European initiatives concerning education and training better than national education-related documents. Indeed, there is no specific support and there is no additional funding for VET mobilities in contrast to higher education mobilities. This leads to rejection of funding quality mobility projects on the secondary level and a surplus of means for tertiary level mobilities. The Erasmus+

⁽²⁹⁾ Vantuch at al., 2017.

National Agency signalled the intention to transfer one seventh of the budget of tertiary mobilities to secondary mobilities ⁽³⁰⁾.

As already commented earlier, mobilities of secondary learners often contribute to adoption of specific skills, making use of the opportunity to complement learning in better environment offered by partner schools. VET schools in Slovakia consider mobilities also an advantage in competition with other VET schools in terms of the strong competition for new entrants. The Erasmus+ National Agency confirmed increasing quality of mobility projects and applying ECVET technicalities in mobility projects. There are no doubts that the increased budget can be used effectively, and it would be worth rethinking to offer national sources in addition to European sources for VET mobilities.

Currently, three-week mobilities seem to be best fitting schools and learners. It is long enough to enjoy cultural diversity as well as to achieve agreed learning outcomes. There is only a limited preference for long-term mobilities. The reasons are discussed in Box 2.

Box 2. **Short-term versus long-term mobilities**

VET school learners are as a rule below 18 years of age and neither schools nor parents welcome their long absence from schools or families. The absence of accompanying school staff would be also more critical for a sending school compared to the absence of school staff in the case of short-term mobility.

VET school programmes are not modular and, therefore, schools must develop ad hoc modules suitable for the respective mobility. It is more complicated for schools to develop longer ad hoc modules, to accept validation of learning outcomes envisaged for longer mobilities and to fix the absence of learners in the theory component.

Although long-term mobilities are more efficient in terms of unit costs, shorter mobilities are more attractive for schools, as more learners can be served.

Long-term mobilities are also seen as risky in terms of brain drain. Not surprisingly, long-term mobilities are preferred by fresh graduates or older students.

It is too soon to assess pros and cons of long-term mobilities, as this activity is too fresh. It can be however estimated that schools will prefer short-term mobilities over long-term mobilities. A different attitude could be expected from a not yet existing apprenticeship scheme for adults and/or from a genuine dual VET, within which learners with a status of employee as well as employers themselves might also be interested in long-term mobilities.

⁽³⁰⁾ Statement from a meeting with the Erasmus+ staff on 17 May 2019.

CHAPTER 5. Conclusions

Although there is no genuine apprenticeship in Slovakia there are two apprenticeship-type schemes in place. Dual VET implemented from 2015/16 is much closer to the apprenticeship as defined by Cedefop and addressed by *Proposal for a European framework for quality and effective apprenticeships* ⁽³¹⁾.

Dual VET (and also the mixed scheme) are supportive for short-term mobilities and less for long-term mobilities. It is visible from data (Table 4) and also from the VET schools' attitudes as discussed in detail in Box 2 above.

The strongest short-term mobility enabler is the fight of schools to attract students, within which well-developed international mobilities are an important advantage. The strongest short-term mobility disabler individually is the age of students (in essence, less than 18) and a limited command of language. Further expansion of mobilities was hampered by a lack of financial sources from the EU and the reluctance of national authorities to support mobilities from the state budget.

Long-term mobilities are questioned from the national point of view, as a potential to lose qualified workers is higher than a potential to gain qualified workers as a consequence of participation in (outgoing and incoming) mobility. Individually seen, the strongest enabler is testing working opportunities abroad and gathering working experience abroad. The strongest disabler is low compatibility of long-term mobilities with organisation of secondary VET (including dual VET).

There are no specific national policies in support of cross-country mobility. In fact, they are not needed, as the motivation of secondary VET students and VET schools to participate in mobility is very high. A supportive national scheme for dissemination of best practice can be, however, recommended. Currently, only schools participating in mobility harvest from the project results, as the exchange of experience between active schools and assistance to less active schools is not supported by the national or regional authorities in a systemic way. It would be helpful to support experience sharing in addition to activities conducted by the Erasmus+ National Agency on a regular basis.

Short-term mobilities within Erasmus+ currently function very well and there is no need for change except increasing the budget, as many quality projects must

⁽³¹⁾ See Proposal for a Council recommendation on a European framework for quality and effective apprenticeships at <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=COM%3A2017%3A563%3AFIN>

be rejected due to the lack of sources ⁽³²⁾. Long-term mobilities are currently problematic, as explained above. Any additional promotion of long-term mobilities is currently seen as counterproductive, being at risk of harming short-term mobilities (by further reducing of available budget) and creating difficulties for schools (see Box 2). Long-term mobilities might gain in attractiveness with the improved flexibility of apprenticeship-type schemes, and also further progress in development of the national qualification system. The fourth sub-framework of the Slovak Qualifications Framework has been designed to encompass labour market driven 'occupational' qualifications that can be seen either as a component of 'larger' formal qualifications ⁽³³⁾ or units of learning outcomes already identified as relevant for the labour market. Supporting creation of occupational qualifications and expanding the apprenticeship scheme for adults are the most relevant future policies in support of long-term mobilities.

⁽³²⁾ According to the Erasmus+ National Agency data, 194 mobility projects were submitted in 2019, out of which only 10 were rejected due to insufficient quality. In 184 quality projects, 4 423 individual mobilities of diverse types were envisaged. Only 120 projects (62% of quality projects) and 2 884 individual mobilities (67%) are currently covered by the Erasmus+ budget.

⁽³³⁾ The first three sub-frameworks correspond to qualifications in general, VET and higher education streams of formal education system.

List of abbreviations

AES	Adult Education Survey
CVTS	Continuing Vocational Training Survey
ECVET	European Credit System for Vocational Education and Training
EQF	European Qualifications Framework
EU	European Union
ICT	Information and communication technology
ISCED	International Standard Classification of Education
ISCED-F	International Standard Classification of Education: Fields of Education and Training
IVET	Initial vocational education and training
NQF	National qualifications framework
SAAIC	Slovak Academic Association for International Cooperation
SME	Small and medium-sized enterprise
SKKR	Slovak Qualifications Framework
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
VET	vocational education and training

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Annex

Table A1. **VET school students* in outgoing mobilities by ISCED-F 2013 broad fields** ⁽³⁴⁾

Broad field/Year	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	Total	%
Education	246	240	213	204	182	1 085	11.2
Arts and humanities	48	123	101	87	156	515	5.3
Social sciences, journalism and information	12	0	24	13	23	72	0.7
Business, administration and law	347	352	406	473	474	2 052	21.1
Natural sciences, mathematics and statistics	40	7	31	26	3	107	1.1
Information and communication technologies (ICTs)	207	135	174	171	127	814	8.4
Engineering, manufacturing and construction	286	429	372	513	494	2 094	21.6
Agriculture, forestry, fisheries and veterinary	129	154	74	100	110	567	5.8
Health and welfare	100	75	100	140	115	530	5.5
Services	426	290	344	416	402	1 878	19.3
Total	1 841	1 805	1 839	2 143	2 086	9 714	100

NB: 2018 - preliminary data.

* Including students in arts programmes that are considered the third stream of secondary education (general, VET and arts) from the 2019/20 school year.

Source: Erasmus+ National Agency (SAAIC).

Table A2. **Top 12 receiving countries (outgoing mobility of VET school students) in 2014-18**

Country/Year	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	Total	%
Czechia	407	474	556	737	726	2 900	29.9
United Kingdom	509	331	224	223	264	1 551	16.0
Hungary	94	334	210	217	182	1 037	10.7
Italy	188	234	240	209	162	1 033	10.6
Germany	155	121	115	120	140	651	6.7
Spain	88	70	120	145	185	608	6.3
Austria	87	63	90	126	60	426	4.4
Poland	102	42	38	108	71	361	3.7
Portugal	18	17	33	118	61	247	2.5
Malta	0	12	26	50	77	165	1.7
Greece	42	18	51	0	0	111	1.1
France	0	43	16	16	25	100	1.0
Together	1 690	1 759	1 719	2 069	1 953	9 190	94.6
Total*	1 841	1 805	1 839	2 143	2 086	9 714	100

NB: 2018 - preliminary data, * including additional 15 countries from 99 mobilities to Ireland to 4 mobilities to Denmark.

Source: Erasmus+ National Agency (SAAIC).

⁽³⁴⁾ UNESCO Institute for Statistics, 2015.

Table A3. **Top 12 sending countries (incoming mobility) in 2014-18**

Country/Year	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	Total	%
Czech Republic	516	188	477	384	310	1 875	51.0
Germany	83	53	40	99	54	329	9.0
Poland	70	65	77	13	17	242	6.6
France	48	40	41	68	27	224	6.1
Hungary	50	22	49	36	26	183	5.0
Turkey	0	0	105	62	10	177	4.8
United Kingdom	28	0	37	81	29	175	4.8
Austria	22	8	24	0	14	68	1.9
Slovenia	10	19	3	21	6	59	1.6
Bulgaria	0	22	0	22	0	44	1.2
Finland	9	11	10	7	1	38	1.0
Italy	0	8	20	8	2	38	1.0
Together	836	436	883	801	496	3 452	94.0
Total*	872	491	949	820	541	3 673	100

NB: 2018 - preliminary data, * additional 12 countries including 38 mobilities from Latvia down to one mobility from Belgium.

Source: Erasmus+ National Agency (SAAIC).