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**EBSOMED**  
ENHANCING BUSINESS SUPPORT ORGANISATIONS

# PERIODICAL SURVEY



**EBSOMED Employers  
thematic  
committees**

**Vocational training  
&  
skills development**

Volume 2



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## List of Acronym

<b>CEDEFOP</b>	Centre européen pour le développement de la formation professionnelle
<b>ETF</b>	European Training Foundation
<b>EU</b>	European Union
<b>GIZ</b>	Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit
<b>ILO</b>	International Labor Organization
<b>KPIs</b>	Key Performance Indicators
<b>MENA</b>	Middle East and North Africa
<b>NEET</b>	Not in Education, Employment and Training
<b>TVET</b>	Technical and Vocational Education and Training
<b>VET</b>	Vocational Education and Training
<b>UNIDO</b>	United Nations Industrial Development Organization
<b>USAID</b>	United States of America International Aid

## 1. Introduction

The Covid 19 pandemic has engendered significant complications to the education sector, including the vocational education and training (VET) sector which has faced challenges in maintaining a learning continuity plan through online and distance learning solutions quickly introduced to mitigate the risk of the pandemic by adopting social distancing measures. It was difficult for the VET sector to provide hands on practical training using online solutions. In addition, not all countries had the infrastructure in place and well-trained instructors able to rapidly shift to online instruction. The bad infrastructure that characterizes VET centers in developing countries did not facilitate the adoption of the new normal. Factors including limited internet connectivity, absence of learning platforms, limited number of digital devices and unprepared instructors to adopt the online teaching are behind the unsuccessful adoption of remote learning in the VET sector.

Although the pandemic accentuated the vulnerability of the VET sector, it has also encouraged many governments to turn to their VET sector and to suggest urgent solutions to reform the sector, which remains a valuable instrument of sustainable socio-economic development as it has actively participated in developing and delivering skilled labor force globally. In addition, the labor market has seen major changes during the last two decades and skills needs have shifted from production and manufacturing towards more digital and service-based occupations which usually require higher skills. Indeed, there is an apparent increasing demand for skills coupled with economic, social, and technological developments. Amid the ever-challenging context of globalization, technological progress and market economy development have dictated the upskilling and the reskilling of the existing and upcoming workforce to be able to improve productivity and enhance competitiveness.

The pandemic has accelerated the need for skills development, and it has become urgent for national policy makers and VET stakeholders to work on improving the VET sector role in coping with rapid technological changes, matching labor market demand for higher skills, attracting youth enrollment in VET programs and rendering the VET sector an instrument to reduce poverty, promote economic growth and increase competitiveness.

This second report is an attempt to reconstruct the new VET model that has been developed in Southern Mediterranean countries as a result of the implementation of the European dual model. The hypothesis used in this report states that the dual model implementation resulted in a new VET model that permeated with the actual realities and challenges of the country. This new model is characterized by improved curricula tailored according to the need of the private sector, trained instructors, private sector engagement through their representative chambers and business associations, and enhanced image of the

VET sector which increased its attractiveness amongst youth. However, the reform process that the VET sector followed remains partially implemented and has not yet impacted on the whole VET sector and its stakeholders. Impactful VET reforms are selective and are qualified as pilot projects that are difficult to scale up at the national level.

## 2. Towards reforming the VET system

Attempts to reform the VET sector in Southern Mediterranean Countries are mainly orchestrated by international donors' agenda to support governments improve their vocational system to facilitate professional insertion of youth and reduce youth unemployment rate especially from the NEET<sup>1</sup> population. Usually, governments of developing countries do not allocate significant budgets to reform the VET sector and rely on international grants, loans, and donors' contributions to conduct short term or midterm reforms.

Most MENA countries have planned a strategic reform program for their VET sector. According to a recent UN paper, the reform of the VET sector is perceived as *a gateway for building a skilled youth workforce in the Arab region, most reform policies adopted reveal similar patterns and focus on the same areas. These areas include: developing a TVET governance system; improving its infrastructure; enhancing its pedagogical approaches; improving teachers qualifications and capacities; upgrading overall service delivery and accessibility; improving the linkages between higher education, vocational and continuing education; addressing the negative perception of TVET education both by students and employer; better engaging the private sector; building entrepreneurial and life skills; accommodating technological developments; and better alignment with labor market needs* (UN, 2020: 14).

According to the group of private sector experts surveyed in this research, donors' funded reforms of the VET sector tackled several issues that are related to the main parameters that constitute a successful VET system. We suggest listing 8 parameters that most donors have tackled:

### 2.1. The Dual Model of the VET Sector

The Dual system illustrates a close partnership between the vocational center and private sector enterprises. Such partnership aims at [offering](#) a quality training that can facilitate the transition from vocational schools to the job market and can respond to private sector skills needs. The model has proven to be successful in European countries such as Germany, Austria, and

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<sup>1</sup> NEET stands for Not in Education, Employment or Training. In MENA, NEET population aged 15-29 years old represent more than 30% of the labor force and more than 60% of NEET population is unemployed and has no vocational qualification to secure a sustainable income.

Switzerland. European donors adopted the dual model when implementing reforms of the VET sector in the Southern Mediterranean Countries to improve the VET performance related to the curriculum, the training method, the engagement and partnership with the private sector and the VET sector governance. The Dual Model offers solutions to deal with the VET sector KPIs and enables the VET sector stakeholders from the public and private sectors to be engaged in the reform process.

## 2.2. Curriculum Development

One of the main issues related to VET reform is that most curriculum of VET centers are outdated and do not reflect the skills needed by the private sector. In addition, the existing curricula do not include hands on practical activities and only rely on theoretical knowledge. Most donors' reform helped modernize the VET curricula by using new curricula designed by VET specialists and private sector experts. These new curricula have proven to be successful in providing hands on training in addition to the up-to-date skills needed by future employers. Approaches to upgrade the VET curricula consisted in surveying market skills needs and conducting a value chain analysis for each economic sector that has the potential to create jobs that require sector-specific/technical skills. In addition, VET curricula development process encourages to alternate between theoretical learning delivered in the VET learning centers and practical learning delivered by experts in the companies where VET learners can conduct their apprenticeship.

## 2.3. Training of Trainers

VET centers suffer from the lack of qualified trainers to train VET instructors and ensure that they maintain continuous professional development to be able to upskill themselves on the skills and abilities most sought by employers. Besides, instructors need to receive regular trainings and coaching sessions on the VET sector pedagogy and on the importance of integrating practical and hands on activities to the VET curricula. Some European countries have become experts in designing and conducting vocational education and training. Several experts, trainers and researchers affiliated to renowned organization such as ETF and CEDEFOP have been approached to support donors-funded VET interventions to provide Training of Trainers programs for VET instructors or to develop and conduct capacity building programs for VET stakeholders.



## 2.4. Training VET Instructors

In all educational levels, it is important to schedule regular training programs to upskill vocational instructors pedagogical and technical skills. This necessitates the availability of qualified trainers and substantial financial and logistics resources including time. Also, trainees' motivation is important to successfully conduct these capacity building programs. Training VET instructors on how to conduct hands on activities in class and how to incorporate life/work skills in the curricula is one of the successful interventions conducted by donors' funded initiatives to reform the VET sector in Southern Mediterranean Countries. These upskilling schemes are usually conducted by European experts, or a cadre of local trainers created to scale up and cascade the training program to many local VET instructors.

## 2.5. Capacity Building of VET public stakeholders

VET governance is one of the major issues hindering the development of the VET sector. In developing countries, VET stakeholders request support from VET experts from countries where the VET system is successful. VET stakeholders expect to learn about best practices in managing the VET sector reform project. They aspire to learn more about the success stories and lessons learnt to be able to effectively run the VET reform initiative in partnership with donors. The successful implementation of the dual system in countries such as Germany, Austria and Switzerland attracted the attention of Southern Mediterranean Countries VET stakeholders who usually appreciate the feedback, coaching and consultation provided by experts originating from these European countries. Therefore, donors usually contract VET experts from European countries that successfully conducted VET consultations and implemented VET reforms in various developing countries to offer capacity building programs for VET stakeholders.

## 2.6. Private Sector Engagement

The innovative approach adopted by the dual system consists in promoting a work-based learning approach. A successful adoption of this approach can be possible only if private sector enterprises are fully engaged with VET institutions. This engagement can take several forms and consists mainly in apprenticeship offers and private sector experts' commitment in training and coaching VET learners. However, such engagement can only be effective if the economic setting represents a strong private sector network that has the potential to create job opportunities that require a workforce with VET qualifications. In developing countries such as Southern Mediterranean Countries and MENA countries, private sector firms are micro and small



enterprises that create limited number of jobs. In addition, there are thousands of initiatives to start up new businesses but these businesses are not registered and end up being and remaining part of the informal sector. Hence, jobs generated by private sector informal businesses are not sustainable and do not necessarily attract qualified labor force. In this regard, donors' funded programs to reform the VET sector work with economic development programs to promote private sector development. It is important to provide technical assistance to micro and small enterprises so that they can grow, become more competitive and create more jobs. Private sector employment generation can revive the VET sector provided that a strong partnership agreement is created between VET providers and enterprises.

## 2.7. Skills Mismatch and Skills Development

VET institutions cannot offer quality VET training if they do not update their curricula and include the vocational/technical skills needed by private sector representatives. Failure to adopt an up-to-date curriculum will lead to skills mismatch and VET graduates will not be employable because they do not have the right skills. In addition, VET institutions do not have the needed expertise and infrastructure to regularly conduct skills development to survey the skills needs of the labor market and to forecast sector-specific future skills needs and develop new curricula as a response to these skills. Donors- funded initiatives work towards reducing the skills mismatch and fund initiatives to develop future skills and update the VET curricula based on the skills forecast they conduct.

## 2.8. VET Communication and Outreach

There is a general belief that VET education has a negative image, and that society undermines the VET education path and perceives it as the ultimate path for low achievers. Youth tend to undermine the VET education path because it does not guarantee a successful career and is likely to limit them in a low social standing. It seems that there is a misconception of the VET education that, over time, has negatively impacted on the attractiveness issue which has become deeply rooted in the historical/cultural background of a given community. The stigma surrounding the VET education led to reducing it to a second choice to academic. However, this can be altered if the same fame that was built around academia can be transferred to the VET sector. If the message to be conveyed to youth is that a VET career is a symbol of successful career with decent salary, higher social status, comfortable working conditions, equality of opportunities, gender balance, possibility of promotion and success, it will be better perceived. Donors-funded initiative to reform the VET system in Southern Mediterranean Countries worked on improving the image of the VET

qualification by linking it to a successful professional career and a sustainable job. Donors invested in communication campaigns that aim at raising awareness of parents, learners, and professionals that the VET path can be successful and rewarding.

## 2.9. Quality Assurance and Certification

There is a need to standardize the requirements of a robust VET system. In this regard, European countries leaders in the VET system put in place a solid strategy to promote and improve the VET system have also strengthened a culture of quality assurance to monitor the reform process and observe its continuous improvement. Through the scrutiny of an effectively implemented quality assurance mechanism, several actors in the VET system reform process are considered: the policy makers, the implementers, the trainers, the leaders, the business owners, the trainees, and VET system advocates themselves. An adequately implemented quality assurance mechanism inspects the efficiency of the leadership, checks the effectiveness of stakeholders' engagement and coordination, and assess the validity of the curricula, the trainings, and the certifications. These provisions of quality assurance are important to guarantee a viable reform of the VET system. VET stakeholders in developing countries needed the support of donors- funded programs to work on the quality assurance of their VET institutions. In many countries, quality assurance bodies have been created to oversee the quality assurance process. These initiatives are usually donors-funded and work closely with international quality assurance bodies located in European countries with successful VET systems. The support can take the form of training the newly established quality bodies and working towards providing international quality certifications to different VET institutions involved in the reform process.

## 3. Challenges Facing the Reform Programs

The present report posits that attempts to reform the VET system in Southern Mediterranean Countries are triggered by donors-engagement in the VET reform process. However, it seems that efforts made by donors-funded programs to reform the VET systems have not succeeded in attaining the level of proficiency achieved in European countries such as Germany, Austria, and Switzerland. The reform process faces several economic challenges such as the weakness of the private sector and the scarcity of funds to undergo deep reform programs. It also faces social challenges such as the low attractiveness of the VET system and the increasing number of NEET population and political challenges

such as the ongoing political unrest in most Southern Mediterranean Countries in addition to unstable governments.

Moreover, and from a practical perspective, donors-funded initiative to reform the VET system encountered specific challenges that characterize the socio-economic context of Southern Mediterranean Countries. The present report attempts to list some of these major challenges faced by donors' led VET reform initiatives.

### 3.1. Linguistic Context

VET institutions in developing countries usually use the local language as a medium of instruction in VET classes. VET learners usually cannot pursue vocational studies in a foreign language. For this reason, the reform of the VET curricula required development of course modules in the local language to facilitate learners' understanding. This translation process reduced the possibility of a total immersion in the original culture of the VET system as it has been developed in European countries such as Germany, Austria and Switzerland using the German and English Language. For instance, in MENA countries, curriculum development is conducted in Arabic which required either translating original modules or developing new curricula that resembles the ones developed in Europe using local expertise for this matter.

### 3.2. Qualified Trainers

The VET sector cannot provide regular capacity building programs to its instructors and develop continuous professional development programs that focus on pedagogical and technical skills. The lack of qualified trainers in the VET sector makes it difficult for developing countries to continuously upskill VET instructors. Donors usually provide international experts to offer consultancy and training to VET stakeholders in the beneficiary country. Due to the high cost of these technical expertise, VET institutions cannot afford contracting international VET experts to train the large number of VET instructors.

### 3.3. Sustainability of the Reform Project Interventions

One of the main challenges of donors' funded interventions in the VET sector is the lack of sustainability and engagement of local VET stakeholders. This challenge tends to weaken the impact of the VET reform interventions. Due to the limited budget of donors' funds, VET reform interventions focus on pilot projects where only selected VET stakeholders benefit from these interventions that can take the form of consultancies or capacity building and training.

According to donors' approach, to scale up the reform project, local VET stakeholders must carry on the reform activities once the donors' project life cycle comes to an end. However, VET local authorities do not make provisions to take over donors' project and use their own human and financial resources to scale up the reform project. In addition, donors do not plan an exit strategy that clearly indicate the specific roles of project partners.

### 3.4. Absence of Incentives for Private Sector Partners

There is no doubt that a successful VET system relies on private sector enterprises engagement which takes several forms including conducting apprenticeships, teaching VET learners and co-designing the curricula, etc. However, private sector firms will not be engaged in fulfilling all these activities if they are not incentivized or if they do not see a win-win situation. In Switzerland, private sector companies are required to contribute to the corresponding VET value chain that they belong to by financing the VET fund. This fund covers the costs of the apprenticeship, the ongoing development of VET courses, the promotion of new courses/programs, etc. VET fund is mandatory for all companies. Host companies intervene in the learning and training process. Part of the training is delivered during the apprenticeship. As a return on investment, companies find qualified labor that corresponds to its skills needs and boosts its competitiveness. In Southern Mediterranean countries, the VET sector legal framework does not impose strict engagement terms on the private sector and does not offer any incentives to encourage companies to participate in the promotion and development of the VET system.

### 3.5. VET Path Attractiveness

There is a general belief that VET education has a negative image, and that society undermines the VET education path and perceives it as the ultimate path for low achievers. Youth tend to undermine the VET education path because it does not guarantee a successful career and is likely to limit them in a low social standing. There is a general preference toward selecting academia as an alternative pathway. It seems that there is a misconception of the VET education that, over time, has negatively impacted on the attractiveness issue which has become deeply rooted in the historical/cultural background of a given community. The stigma surrounding the VET education led to reducing it to a second choice to academia. In addition, VET reform initiatives are challenges but the lack of attractiveness of the VET sector. Some donors funded programs tend to allocate considerable budgets to improve the image of the VET sector and design a promotional campaign to attract youth to join VET educational paths. These campaigns try to associate VET training to employability and career success.

### 3.6. High Unemployment Rate in Southern Mediterranean Countries

Unemployment has become a challenge for youth in Southern Mediterranean Countries and MENA region in general because youth is not equipped with the necessary employability skills to enter the labor market. The educational system has failed to provide youth with the necessary skills set to respond to private sector needs. The private sector faces significant challenges because of the declining economic environment and the scarcity of qualified labor capable of driving private sector growth and competitiveness. Unemployment appears to be in the 20-35% range, and youth unemployment is an endemic issue across the MENA countries' economies and job growth is stagnant, worsening social and political tensions and heightening institutional vulnerability to extremist influences.

Reforms of the VET sector have been triggered by the need to mitigate the increasing unemployment rate of youth in Southern Mediterranean Countries and MENA in general. Reforming the VET sector is one way to reduce skills mismatch and to prepare youth to master life/work skills that make them more employable.

### 3.7. Lack of Infrastructure

Recently, governments realized the important role of the VET sector in significantly reducing the endemic skills deficit and the soaring youth unemployment rate. Public funding and donors' engagements through European Commission funding and World Bank funding programs among others have recently prioritized their funding agenda to the development of the VET sector. Funding involves rebuilding the VET infrastructure to align it with technological needs of today's knowledge economy. It also includes developing new curricula that responds to the economic sector skills needs, training and upskilling instructors and VET administrators, and other related interventions aimed at developing the VET sector.

In developing countries, public expenditure is geared towards realizing economic growth and poverty reduction. Globally, public expenditure on education comes first and so is the case in developing countries with a particular focus on vocational education because it is considered as the adequate solution to realize social inclusion for excluded youth (NEET) as well as realize social resilience for women who face some form of social injustice such as GBV and who need to be socially and economically empowered.

Moreover, donors have been calibrating their funds to adjust to developing countries' priorities by injecting more money to realize significant impact on



selected interventions. For this matter, we have seen more focus from major donors on issues related to education and vocational education. For instance, the German donor, GIZ, the German Society for International Cooperation, utilizes its funds to promote the German dual system in developing countries in MENA and Africa when funding economic development and social inclusion projects. These funds are used to train the trainers, fund VET schools' infrastructure, hire VET experts to support in developing VET curricula, support private sector firms to grow and create sustainable jobs for youth.

## 4. Business Support Organization Role in the VET Reform Process

### 4.1. Focus Group Discussion with BSOs representatives

To gather authentic data concerning private sector perspective on the VET sector and its role in future skills development, a focus group discussion was organized to gather viewpoints of several business associations representatives from Egypt, Tunisia, Morocco, Lebanon, and Portugal.

Egypt VET system has benefitted from donors-support since 1998 when a long-term agreement was signed between Egypt and Germany. The Egyptian VET reform started with the program of "Mubarak-Kohl Initiative". Several international donors contributed to the reform of the Egyptian VET sector including the EU, ILO, UNIDO, GIZ, USAID programs. These donors focused on implementing interventions to reform vocational curricula, training instructors, engaging the private sector, and improving the governance and the quality assurance mechanisms. TVET I and TVET II programs were funded by EU (total budget is estimated at 180 million Euros). At least 70 million Euro represent the Egyptian government contribution. A total of €12.5 million (11% of TVET Egypt total budget) was allocated by the European Union for the purchase, installation, and operating training of state-of-the-art equipment in five key economic sectors. In addition, up to €46 million (39% of TVET Egypt total budget) from the Government of Egypt for infrastructure upgrades of technical schools, technical colleges, and vocational training centers.

Egypt VET sector has improved considerably, and pilot VET centers have been created to serve the needs of the labor market with regards to technical skills development, upskilling and reskilling of the labor force. However, the VET reform has not overhauled the entire sector and several public VET centers still need financial and technical support to improve its training services. Reform initiatives have targeted specific VET training centers in specific regions and in specific economic clusters. Pilot projects focused on the textile sector, construction sector and the technology sector. Egypt VET sector reform is on

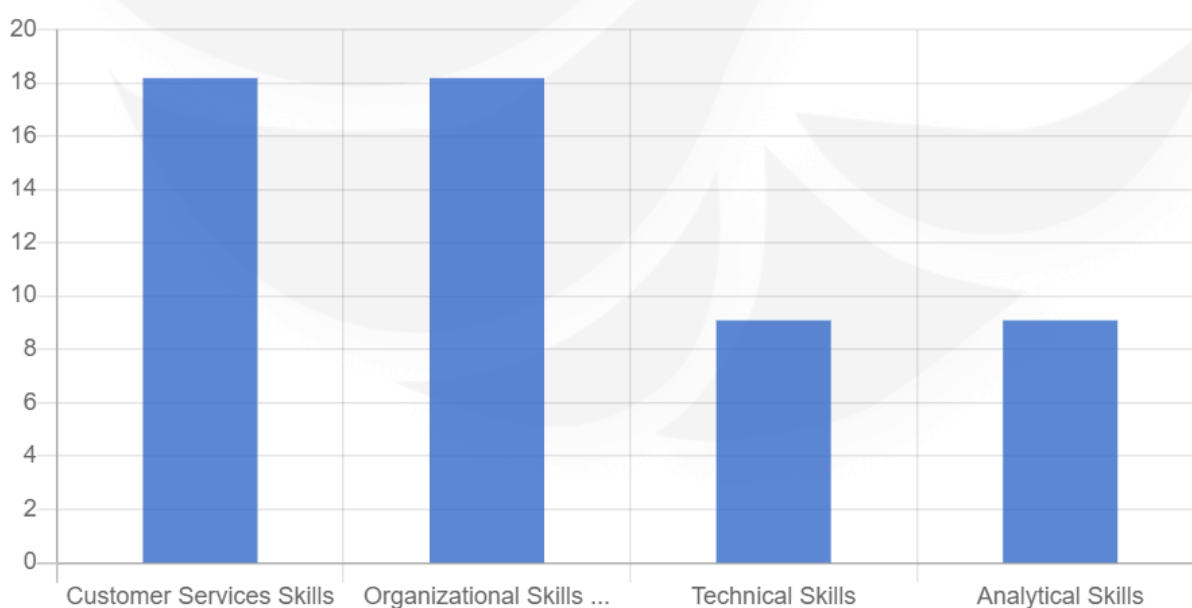
the right track, and it needs a solid partnership and active involvement of the private sector to succeed.

In the same direction, private sector experts from Morocco indicated that the country strategy towards reforming the VET sector has been clearly articulated during the last decade as a locomotive for competitiveness and a solution for youth integration in the labor market. Morocco VET sector reform is an ambitious project overseen by the King Mohamed VI. The creation of Cities of Professions and Skills in every region in the country provides private sector enterprises with qualified workforce. The centers offer vocational skills development for the needed workforce in key economic sector such as digital skills. Morocco VET sector is funded by State budget allocations, vocational training tax, international cooperation and donor assistance, and enrolment fees.

#### 4.2. Online Survey for VET experts and Private Sector Firms

In addition, Businessmed partner Business Support Organizations helped distribute a survey related to the expectations of private sector enterprises on skills development and vocational training. The following indicates the trends of some of the responses given by private sector firms.

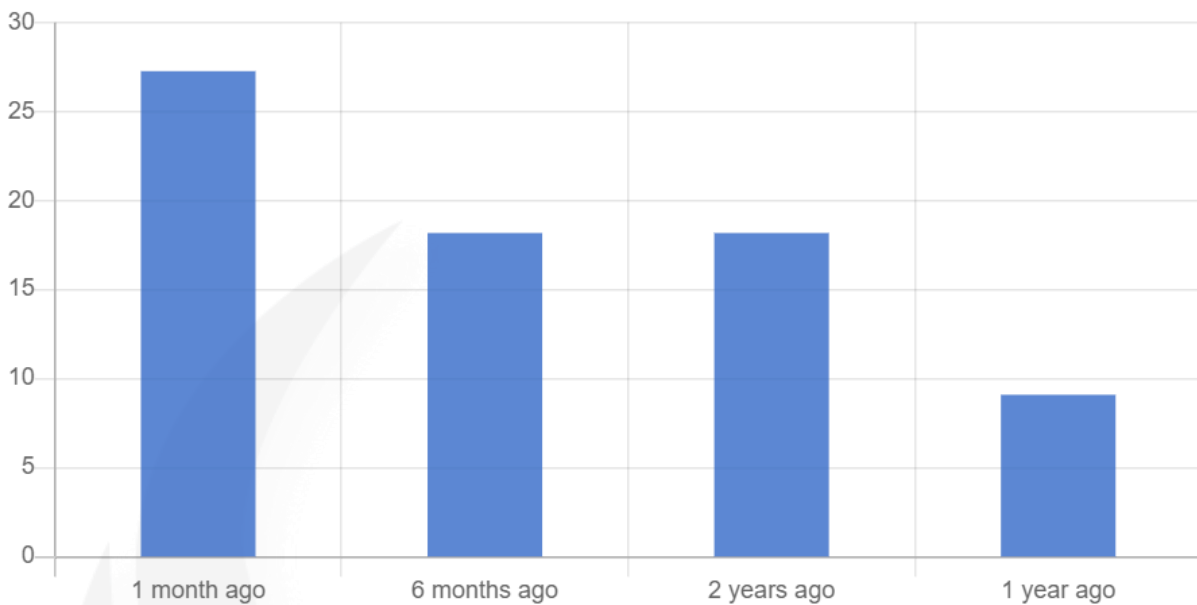
*Could you mention which type of skills your workers need to have to be able to perform their tasks effectively?*



18% of respondents indicated that customer services skills and organizational skills are the skills their workers need to perform well.

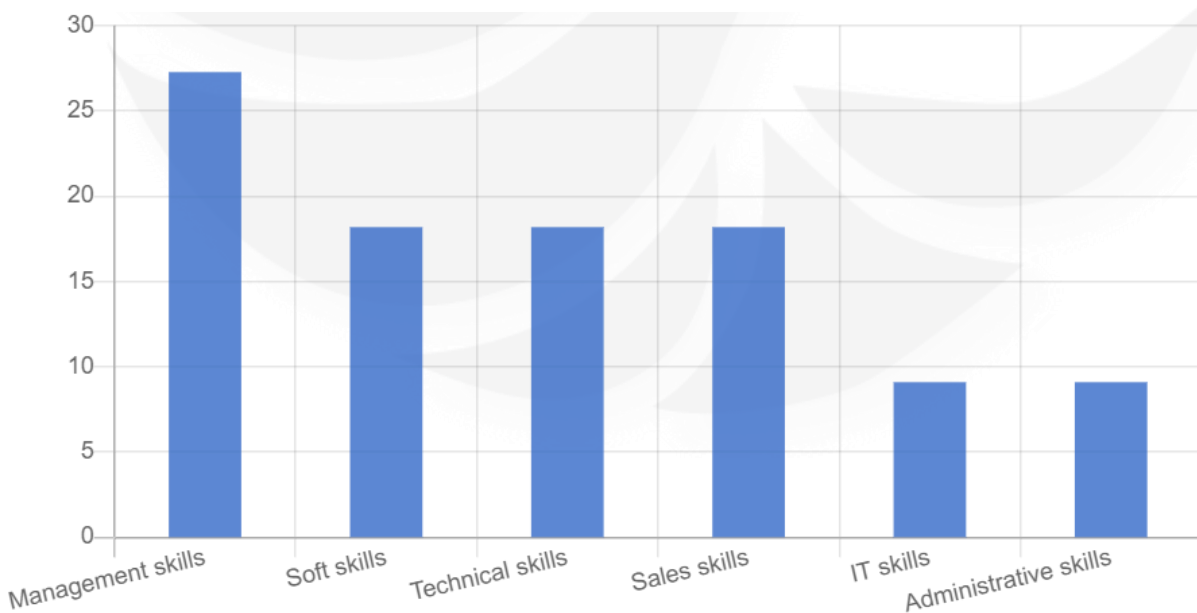


When was the last time you offered on the job training to your workers?



28% of respondents indicated that they regularly conduct trainings for their workers and that they completed training workshops a month ago. However, more than 60% of the respondents indicated that they have not conducted training for more than 6 months. Some argued that they have not organized a training session for more than two years.

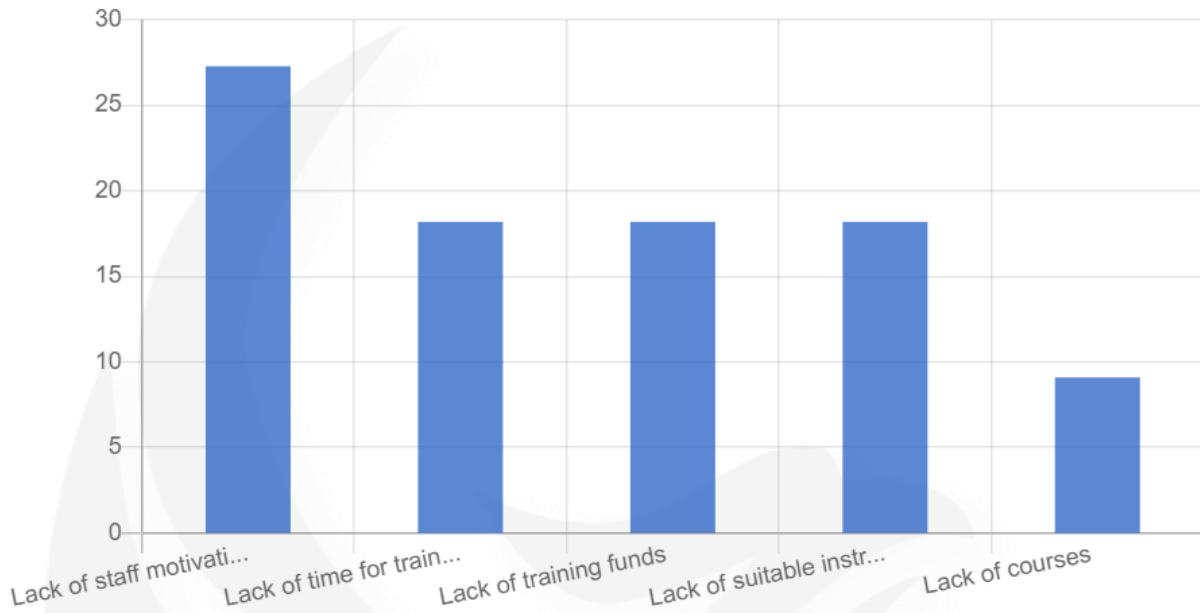
What kind of training did you offer?



27% of respondents who indicated that they regularly offer training to their workers mentioned that they tend to focus on management skills. However, 17%

indicated that they focus on soft skills and the same percentage of respondents opted for technical skills and sales skills.

*What are the major challenges you face that hinder offering continuous professional development and training for your workers to have a team of skillful workers in the future?*



As per the challenges facing private sector firms to organize vocational skills development training sessions for their workers, the survey indicated that they face several challenges ranging from lack of motivation of the trainees, lack of time allocated to training, unavailability of funds, and lack of qualified instructors and content.

## Conclusion

The present analysis revealed that donors' initiatives to reform the new VET system in Southern Mediterranean countries resulted in the creation of an improved version of the VET sector that resembles the European model implemented in Germany and Austria but it is not necessarily characterized by the key features responsible for the success of the European model. The analysis showed that the socioeconomic context of the Southern Mediterranean Countries has shaped the VET reform initiatives. The qualitative analysis conducted through the organization of focus group discussions with private sector partners of the VET sector and online interviews conducted with VET stakeholders revealed that the particularities of the VET context dictated and shaped the reform. Although donors tried to duplicate the European Model of the VET system known as the Dual System, they reported the development of a modified version of the VET system. A new VET model where the private sector remains a precarious sector that needs technical support to be more competitive to create jobs and where the informality remains the prevailing business model. In addition, the low attractiveness of the VET education amongst youth and the weak governance of the sector have not facilitated the adoption of the new VET model. Besides, most donors' initiatives have limited funds to overhaul the whole VET sector and they usually underestimate the importance of prioritizing a sound exit strategy to guarantee the sustainability and scalability of the project by local stakeholders.

To conclude, initiatives undertaken by donors-funded projects have considerably improved the VET sector in various Southern Mediterranean Countries, however, the implementation process, the particularities of the socioeconomic context of these countries coupled with the challenges facing donors throughout the project implementation phases shaped the VET reform initiatives and created a new form of VET that can attract youth to pursue a vocational path and guarantee a sustainable career. Recent reforms of the VET sector enabled developing countries governments to promote the VET sector as an educational path that can contribute to the social stabilization, economic development, and growth provided that a multi-stakeholder's strategy is developed, and a collective governance is implemented. The engagement and the involvement of the private sector is key to ensure the success of the apprenticeship scheme and the role of social partners is important to raise awareness of social and economic actors to get involved in the VET sector to encourage youth and women to take the VET path and guarantee a smooth transition to work. In addition, implementing a collective governance will further strengthen stakeholders' engagement in the VET system.

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