

# Tracer Study

On electrician  
graduates' employability  
in the Republic of Moldova

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## BACKGROUND

Since 2008, within the framework of the VET project CONSEPT, LED has invested considerable resources to improve the delivery of Vocational Education and Training (VET) in its partner schools in Moldova. An important question the stakeholders ask themselves is whether the efforts make a difference to the provision of VET. What benefit does the project generate? Are the efforts bringing the promised fruits?

This study does not aim to measure the impact as the complexity concerning the question of impact is far beyond the possibilities of such a study. Instead we focus on one of the quality indicators of VET – that of the employability of the graduates after the completion of the training in our partner schools, i.e. the study takes an interest in the final beneficiaries. The key question we ask is as follows: what are the career paths the students are following one year after graduation from the VET school?

As part of the general monitoring activities CONSEPT employs, LED conducted this tracer pilot study. LED tried to find an optimal way of collecting useful data on the graduate employability and at the same time keep the costs low in order to be able to repeat this tracing exercise more regularly. LED was therefore not interested in conducting a scientifically rigorous study, instead it aimed to explore techniques for collecting evidence-based information about the VET graduate employability without investing a great deal of resources. This study is very timely as there is no tracking system of vocational graduates that collects systematically reliable data on the graduates' integration into the labour market.

## OBJECTIVES OF THE TRACER STUDY

The starting point of this study was the view that an improved vocational training may result in more skilled graduates who can easier find a job in their speciality area. The central purpose of VET schools is to prepare young people to enter the labour market. By providing relevant competencies the young people gain better options to integrate into the labour market. This study is expected to provide some useful insights into the rate of graduate employment after the completion of the electrician course of studies in the CONSEPT partner VET-schools.

However, the interpretation of the emergent findings has to be treated cautiously. For the successful integration into the labour market, high quality VET is only *one* factor. Obviously, there is also a need for a developed labour market which is ready to integrate the graduates. We underline this fact to make clear that there is no direct causal link between the rate of employed graduates and the quality of the VET delivery. A VET school can provide great training, but if there are very limited employment opportunities, the graduates have difficulty finding a suitable job regardless of their competences. On the other hand, if the labour market is in big need of specialists, VET graduates could probably find a job even if their competences are below the acceptable level.

In Republic of Moldova, the labour market services reported that electricians have a relatively good chance of getting employment.<sup>1</sup> The number of job vacancies for electricians reported to

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.anofm.md/>, (p. 20), accessed on the 25.06.2014

the labour market service, taken as of a snapshot exercise on 24.06.2014, was at 53 vacancies.<sup>2</sup> Seeing that there are jobs for well-prepared specialists in Moldova, we have to ask, how many of the graduates succeed to get these jobs and if they do not succeed - what obstacles there are?<sup>3</sup> It is of course very good to see that the graduates are employed according to their specialisation. But it is also interesting to find out why some VET graduates have not got such jobs. Is it because they do not have the right technical competences or is it because they do not meet certain (general) recruitment criteria (e.g. work experience, age, bad image of VET in general etc.)? What alternative career paths do they chose instead? Or maybe they choose another career path because the working conditions are unacceptable and they tend to resign right after getting a job in their field?<sup>4</sup> The study does not answer all these interesting questions. But it hopefully succeeds to provide some first evidence on the employability data, which serves as a basis for some preliminary conclusions to be drawn and further analytical work to be identified.

## TARGET GROUP

LED decided to run the pilot study focusing on the electrician graduates. Currently, the profiles of the various types of electricians are not clear and a clarification of the various types is overdue. There are four different types of electrician training programs taught in VET schools, which have huge overlaps in the taught content. These are:

- a. electrician-montator rețele de iluminat,
- b. lăcătuș-electrician în construcție,
- c. lăcătuș-electrician la repararea utilajului electric,
- d. electromontor la repararea și întreținerea utilajului electric.

For each of these programmes, there is a 1-year program and a 3-year program. In terms of professional training, the students on the 3-year program get more hours for theory, practice and a longer internship, but the study content of these programs is identical.

The research targeted the pupils who graduated from 4 partner schools in June 2013:

- ŞP Ungheni (electromontor, 3-year program)
- ŞP No 4 Bălți (lăcătuș-electrician la repararea utilajului electric, 3-year program; electromontor la repararea și întreținerea utilajului electric, 1-year program)
- ŞP No 2 Cahul (electromontor la repararea și întreținerea utilajului electric, 3-year program)
- LP No 2 Chișinău (electrician-montator rețele de iluminat, 3-year program)

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<sup>2</sup> <http://www.anofm.md/>, accessed on the 25.06.2014

<sup>3</sup> There seems to be a consensus that Moldova needs less academics and more VET students on one side and that the VET schools have to update their curricula in order to develop more relevant competences. See GOPA 2014: *Support for VET Sector in the Republic of Moldova. Inception Report*, p. 6; Berlin Economics 2013: *Proposals for a Demand-oriented Vocational Training System in Moldova*; ETF 2011: *HCD Review. Relationship Between Human Capital Development and Equity in the Republic of Moldova*, p. 11, 35; ETF 2010: *Labour Markets and Employability. Trends and Challenges in Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine*, p. 26; IOM 2008: *Migration in Moldova – A Country Profile 2008*, p.41;

<sup>4</sup> The availability of jobs is a complex issue to be interpreted. A high number of vacancies can either be a sign of a positively developing labour market where new jobs are created or a change of generation is happening, but it also can be a sign that the labour market has a problem with constant high fluctuation. How should we understand e.g. that the occupation *seamstress* is since many years on the top of the occupational barometer published by the Labour Service? Is it a sign of a promising labour career or on the contrary – jobs are vacant because people tend to leave these jobs as soon as possible?

The survey was undertaken in May 2014, i.e. almost a full year (11 months) after the graduation. The timing of the data collection is important as it can significantly influence the results obtained. The VET schools also collect information about the graduates' employment data after they complete their training. But most of them do this right after the graduation (usually when the graduates pick up their diplomas). Of course the employment situation may look different after one full year. This point in time is in fact highly recommended by the European Quality Assurance in VET (EQAVET) who recommends collecting the data after a full year from graduation.<sup>5</sup>

We managed to interview 53 out of 152 electrician graduates. There were only male graduates in the respective cohort, which reflects the overall student population enrolled on all four electrician programs in the partner VET schools.

## **SURVEY METHODOLOGY**

The study made use of phone interview to survey graduates. The interviewer followed a short guideline that explored graduates' status of employment, the nature of the job, if they had one, and their overall satisfaction with VET. At first we decided to make a sample in order to limit the necessary efforts for the study. The full list of graduates for sampling (including their current contact details, such as phone number and address) were obtained from the relevant schools and contained 152 names. In order to keep a 10 % margin of error, we aimed to interview 60 graduates. The sample was simple randomized using [www.randomizer.org](http://www.randomizer.org). We have listed and numbered all graduates of the partner schools. With the help of the randomizer, we identified 60 graduates for the interview.

Unfortunately, we could not reach by far all the graduates from the sample. We succeeded to contact only 25 people from the sample although we tried to reach them during working hours, in the evening and even during weekends. The reasons for low response rate could be manifold. The key explanation may be that the telephone numbers provided by the educational institutions most probably were outdated.

Even though we decided to call the rest of the graduates from the full distribution list of graduates, we did not succeed to talk to the proposed number of 60 graduates. Whether the graduates from the full list changed their addresses (and phone number) or whether they did not want to pick up the phone remains unknown.

## **PRESENTATION AND DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS**

### **1. Employment situation**

#### **1.1. Employed**

60% of respondents (32 out of 53) were employed with 20 of them working in Moldova and 12 abroad (10 of them in Russia, 1 in Belarus and 1 in Poland). This is in line with the overall tendency of male workforce migrating to Russia and former soviet countries to work predominantly in the construction sector. Further details about the employment status of the electrician graduates are presented below (Fig.1).

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<sup>5</sup> See indicator 5b ( [http://www.eqavet.eu/qa/tns/monitoring-your-system/evaluation/indicator\\_5.aspx](http://www.eqavet.eu/qa/tns/monitoring-your-system/evaluation/indicator_5.aspx), accessed on the 24.06.2014)

Figure 1: Employment situation

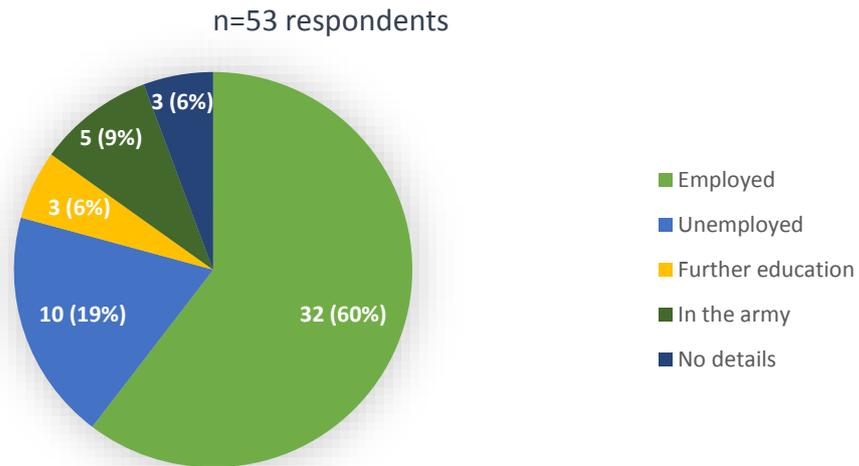
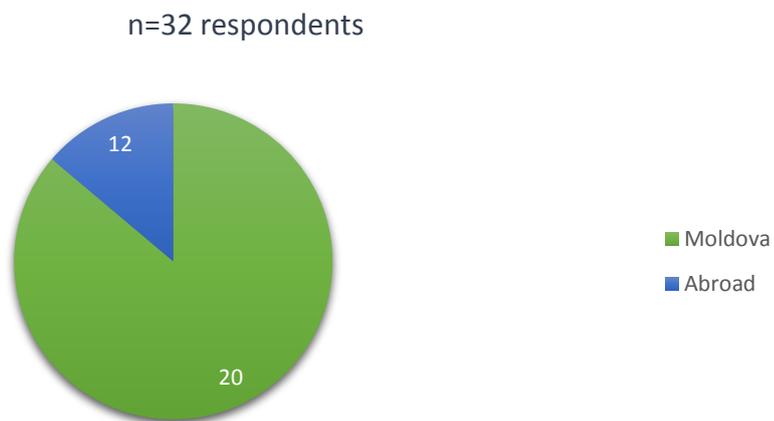


Figure 2: Employed respondents



18 out of the 32 employed respondents were working as electricians. This means that almost one year after graduation, 56% of the employed respondents worked as electricians, the other 14 respondents worked in other domains.

Figure 3: Areas of work

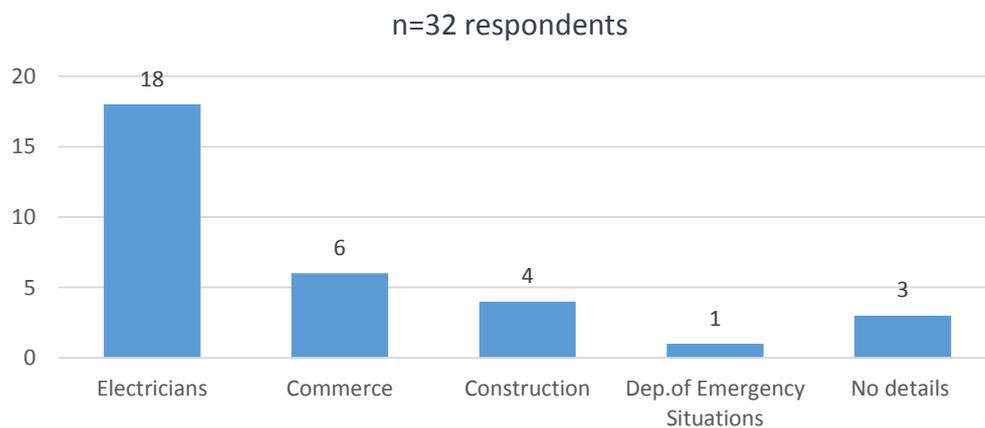
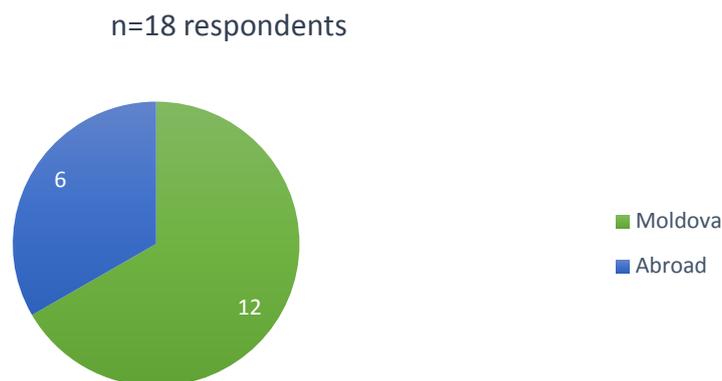


Figure 4: No of electricians



Of the 18 respondents working as electricians, 12 of them reported to work in Moldova and 6 abroad (4 in Russia, 1 in Belarus; the 6th person didn't offer us more details<sup>6</sup>).

The rest of the employed people in Moldova (8) were working as follows: 6 in commerce, 1 in construction and 1 in the Department for Emergency Situations (Serviciul Protecției Civile și Situațiilor Excepționale).

All 12 people who left the country had a job at the moment of the interview. Besides those 6 respondents who were working as electricians, 3 of them were working in construction; the other 3 did not want to disclose any additional information about their jobs.

None of the respondents in this study reported to be self-employed. These results differ considerably from the findings of the IFCP report on monitoring graduates' labour market integration (2012). The IFCP survey revealed that 10 out of 17 electrician graduates who held a job were self-employed. We do not have a concise explanation for this discrepancy. But it might be that some of the respondents, who didn't want to give us information about their current professional activity are working informally. And it might also be that some of the self-employed graduates mentioned in the IFCP study are also working informally.

No respondent who remained in Moldova changed their place of living after finishing their studies.

## 1.2. Unemployed

10 respondents (19%) were unemployed. 4 of them were searching for a job in their domain, 3 of them were ready to do any type of work and 3 people said that they were not searching for a job. The latter response is a little bit surprising and we can only suppose they had a reason for saying so - either they were involved in informal activities, or they did not want to reveal some of their plans or they did not consider necessary letting us know what their occupation at that moment was.

2 of the unemployed people worked previously as electricians. 1 of them was searching for any kind of job because he could not afford to have no income.

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<sup>6</sup> Migration is a sensitive issue in Moldova. There is a societal disapproval of migration and people who (temporarily) migrate are often seen as "unpatriotic". Therefore, these people often feel guilty. Also, some people are active in a more informal setting. These factors might, among others, be a reason why respondents were not willing to share information openly.

According to the study “Research and Analysis of Vacancies and Skills Needs in the European Union, in the Republic of Moldova and Ukraine”<sup>7</sup>, the main reasons for the imbalance between vacancies and the rate of unemployed people in Moldova are:

- a. low-quality of professional education,
- b. preference for different study levels, and
- c. low salaries.

From the limited information we gathered through the interviews, we can comment on the above mentioned factors as follows:

Ad a) The majority of the interviewed electricians employed in Moldova (12) noted that they were satisfied with the quality of the VET training programme. Only 2 mentioned that they required further instruction at their working place, as one of them worked as elevator electrician (and, of course, there were some specific technical knowledge and skills to learn), and the other respondent graduated from the 1-year programme, which could explain the need for additional instruction.

Ad b) We assume that graduates with a higher education degree have higher chances to find a job, because the employer would prefer a person with a university diploma to a VET graduate. As a result, the VET graduates do not even get a chance to show their competence. In addition, the fact that VET graduates are quite young (16-18 years) may play as a disadvantage.

Ad c) The salary seems to be a real issue. As some of our respondents mentioned that the main reason they did not work as electricians or they did not search for a job as electricians was because of low wages. It is hard for the authors to judge the accurateness of this argument: Do the respondents have unreasonably high expectations regarding the salary or is the labour market for electricians in Moldova actually so unattractive in terms of finance and/or working conditions that people rightly try to find work either abroad or in another domain?

### **1.3. Further education**

3 respondents (6%) continued their studies, with only 1 person in a related field – electro-energetics at the University of Tiraspol in Chişinău. 1 respondent was studying at a Lyceum in Ungheni and planned to pass the BAC, and respectively another at the College of Medicine in Chişinău.

The respondent who continued his studies at the College of Medicine has graduated from the 1-year program. This most probably means that this respondent started the college from the very beginning. Unfortunately the authors do not know on which level the respondent continuing his studies in the lyceum was able to enter after graduating the VET school. It can be assumed that it is rather a big challenge to continue the studies and enter the fourth year in the lyceum.

What can be said is that the overall number of respondents continuing their studies right after graduation is very small.

### **1.4. Military Service**

5 persons (9%) reported serving in the Army in Chişinău. But none of them is from Chişinău. It is worth mentioning that the system of army recruitment is another factor to make VET less attractive. All students in higher education are automatically exempted from the 1 full year service in the army (they have some minor exercises during the study), whereas the graduates

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<sup>7</sup> ILO, 2013, p.45

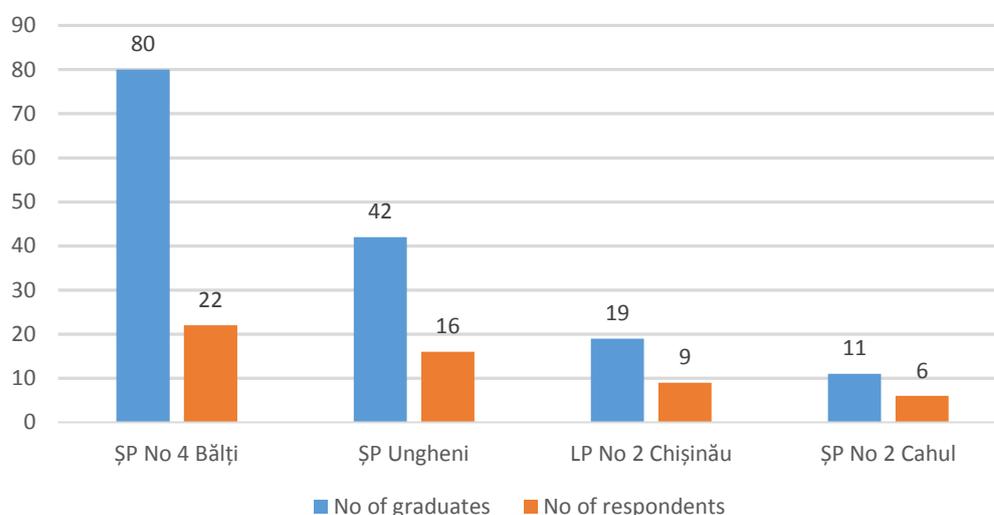
of VET schools or colleges do not have this privilege. However, obviously there are also ways for VET graduates to avoid the army – paying an official fee is one of them. We cannot exclude that joining army might also be a way to avoid unemployment.

3 respondents (6%) refused to be interviewed.

## 2. Local differences

The largest number of interviewed graduates (22) was from SP No 4 Bălți, followed by ȘP Ungheni (16), LP No 2 Chișinău (9) and ȘP No 2 Cahul (6), which can be explained by the fact that ȘP No 4 Bălți had the highest number of graduates (80), followed in the same order by the three institutions mentioned-above. Therefore we have to explain these results in association with the overall student population.

Figure 5: Total No of graduates and No of respondents



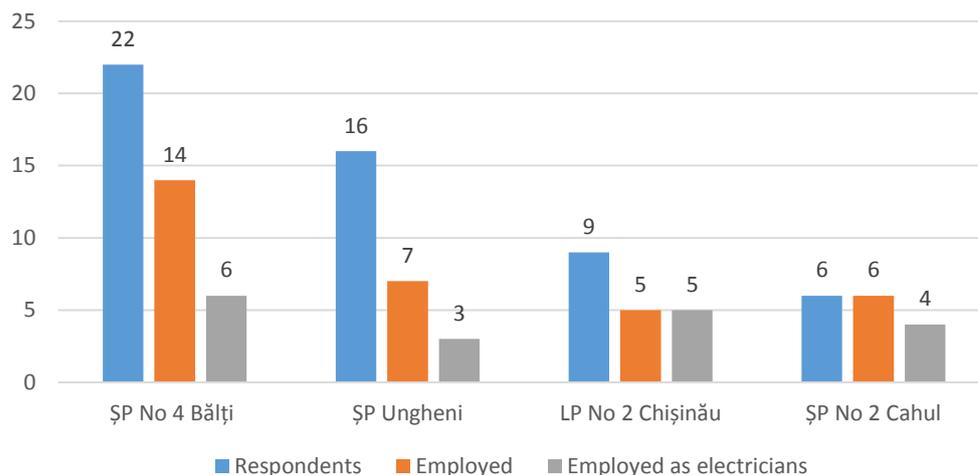
### 2.1. Internal migration

No respondent who remained in Moldova changed his place of living after graduation. The authors actually expected some internal migration towards Chisinau or Balti, where more economy is ongoing. This expectation proved wrong. One important factor may be that the sample has already included schools from relatively big cities and towns. The rate of internal migration might have been different for VET schools located in the small towns or villages. Yet, we have to be careful when interpreting these findings about the internal migration as there is a risk that we might have largely reached only those graduates who stayed in their places of origin, whereas the others we failed to contact might have moved somewhere else for work and consequently changed their contact details.

### 2.2. Location and employment

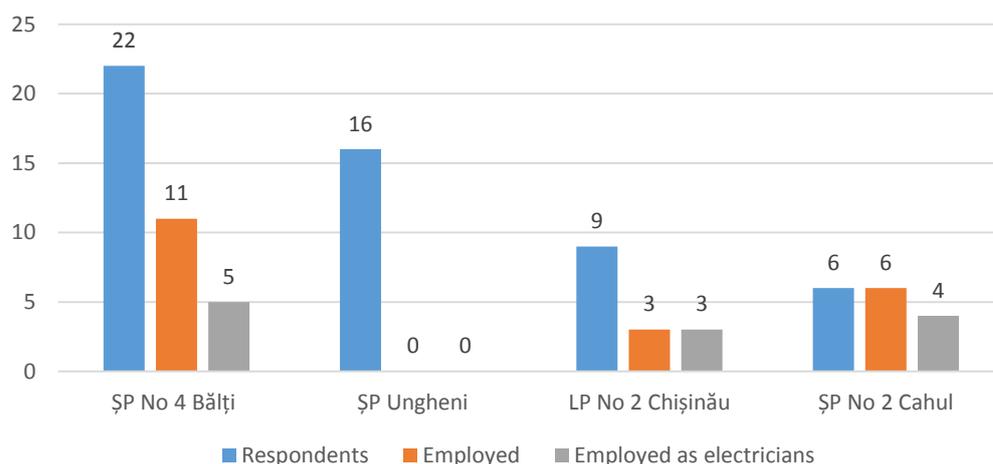
The following graph shows the number of employed respondents in comparison to the overall number of respondents from the respective school.

Figure 6: Overall No of respondents, employed people and employed as electricians



When analysing the context of those graduates who stayed in Moldova, the situation is the following:

Figure 7: No of respondents, employed in MD and employed as electricians in MD



ŞP No 4 Bălţi was the school with the largest number of employed respondents- 5 electricians and 6 people working in other domains, followed by ŞP No 2 Cahul- 4 electricians and 2 people working in constructions (but not as electrician) and LP No 2 Chişinău- 3 electricians. There was not even 1 graduate from ŞP Ungheni employed in Moldova neither as an electrician, nor in another domain.

If we look at the number of respondents who left abroad, we can see that ŞP Ungheni was the institution with the biggest number of respondents who left abroad (7), followed by ŞP No 4 Bălţi (3) and LP No 2 Chişinău (2). No respondent from ŞP No 2 Cahul left the country.

Figure 8: No of graduates and No of respondents abroad

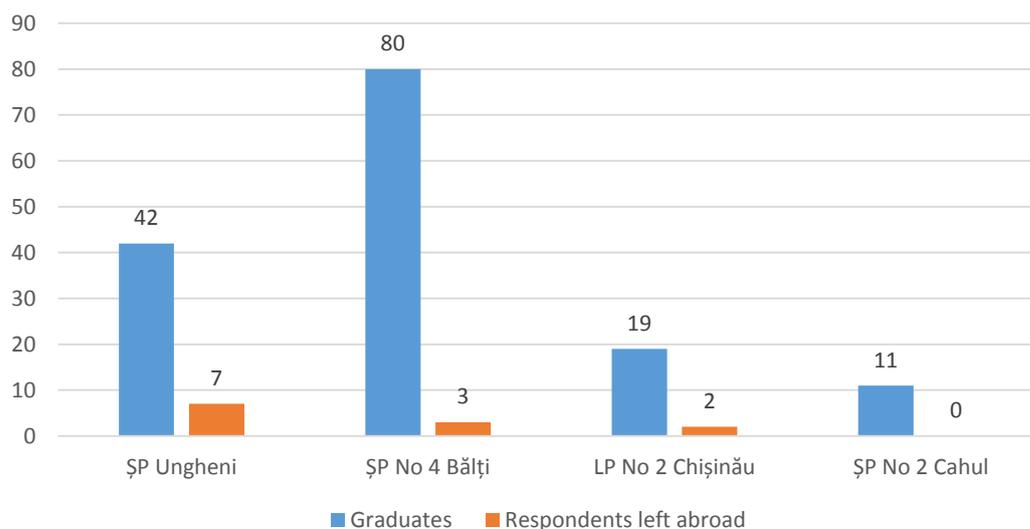
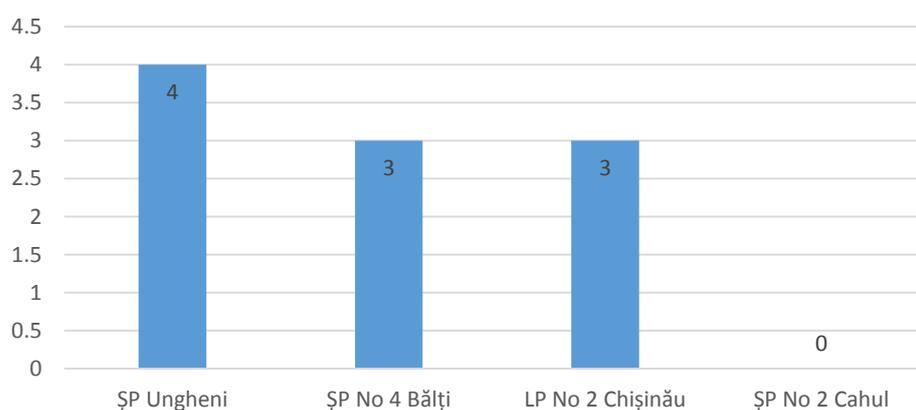


Figure 9: No of unemployed people in each school



### 3. Overall satisfaction of students regarding the training programme

When asked whether the skills and knowledge acquired were sufficient enough to prepare them for the jobs they are performing, 8 electricians employed in Moldova stated that the studies were relevant to their jobs and considered themselves sufficiently trained when they started working, while 2 electricians needed additional instruction at their working place.<sup>8</sup> That means the VET programme combines training with practical skills in a fairly efficient way in order to prepare electricians to perform the job.<sup>9</sup>

#### 3.1. Time needed to find a job after graduation

Whilst 7 respondents were employed immediately, 3 got a job after doing an internship and respectively, 5 had been searching for a job from 1 to 5 months.

<sup>8</sup> One of these two respondents is working as elevator electrician, an occupation which is not taught in any VET school of Moldova.

<sup>9</sup> Of course, this is only the opinion of the respondents. It would be interesting to compare this opinion with the opinions of the employers.

## CONCLUSION AND REMARKS

The aim of this tracer study was to gather evidence on further career paths of the graduates. The interpretation of the findings is difficult.

The emergent findings portray a slightly discouraging picture of the electrician graduate employability after the completion of their VET. On the first sight, one number sticks out: only 34% (18 of totally 53) of the respondents were working in the occupation they got trained. A considerably big number of people are employed, but they do not tend to work as electricians. Besides these numbers, the study reveals several very interesting findings. Unfortunately we do not have enough information to provide robust interpretations of the project findings. Nevertheless the authors want to propose some remarks/thoughts on various findings.

A particular question is why so many electrician graduates are not employed as electricians. The authors can think of three reasons, which of course are not mutually exclusive:

- a. Salary: other occupations could be better paid and the graduates go for the better paid jobs (e.g. commerce).
- b. Preference of employers for applicants with higher education diploma: At least the ILO study on Labour Migration (published in 2013) suggests that a lot of working places, which actually are for people with a VET diploma, are in fact taken by people with a university diploma. If this is the case, there is a high competition between applicants from VET and applicants from university. Given the difference in age and considering the rather young age of VET graduates, it would not be surprising to see that the employers opt for the older and predominantly more mature university graduates.
- c. Lack of professional orientation and career guidance: within the framework of the LED funded MEEETA project, which assists VET graduates to open their own business, it has been noticed a shockingly high percentage of persons, who right after graduation open a business not related to their specialty. The cook graduate, for instance, opens a business as photographer, the welder starts a production of wood toys etc. This indicates that there is a problem with the professional orientation. A qualitative study on the wellbeing of students in the VET system, done by the faculty of sociology of the Moldova State University together with LED and the Child Rights Information Center also suggests that the professional orientation and career guidance is a serious problem. The choice is often done arbitrarily, e.g. because in the VET school there are vacant places for certain occupations.

These views beg the question about whether the VET graduates manage to develop adequate employability skills and what VET schools can do to support these students to function more successfully in a highly competitive environment where there is a prominent demand for higher professional experience, i.e. university diplomas and where the job vacancies may be located in specific geographical areas of their home country.

The authors would like to reiterate that both military services and further education can be strategies graduates used to avoid unemployment.

Finally, there might be a bias in our sample, which could have distorted the findings. Having being unable to contact a randomly assigned sample, the authors tried to contact each and every graduate on the distribution list sent by the VET schools. The fact that we have reached far more graduates who did not change their place of living than those who changed their place of living might have been related to the employment status. As such, we believe that unemployed might stay more at their place of origin than employed graduates who might have moved somewhere else for work. This means we would have a bias, having more respondents

who stayed at their original place of living and more likely being unemployed. In one word, the sample might not be representative. It could be therefore that the overall employment situation (and specifically the number of graduates working as electricians) is better than reflected in the findings of the study.

Acknowledging the limitations of the study, we would also like to highlight that there is hardly any research that looked at this topic in Moldova. There are no systematic and robust tracking practices. This study generated valuable insights into the employability experience of a specific sample of VET graduates.

### Lessons learnt for the next tracer study

As mentioned at the beginning, this study is a pilot study and LED is trying to find a way to do such tracer activities with modest resources. There is certainly room for improvement and a specific part of the results are the lessons learnt. For the next study, LED wants to consider the following changes:

- a. Stick to the sample, which is done in a way to ensure representativeness. Additional ways to contact the persons have to be found. Evt. the parents or classmates can be contacted in order to get the current contact data. Also the social media (odnoklassniki, facebook) can be utilized for this purpose.
- b. Always ask, what the person is doing for a living more specifically. The dichotomy electrician/non-electrician is not always clear (e.g. working in a shop selling equipment for electricians etc.). Also it would be very good to have a clearer picture of the alternatives chosen by the respondents.
- c. Ask the people working as electrician about the type of company they are working. Electrician is a very general occupation (construction, food industry, textile industry etc.)

## Annex

### Questionnaire

- 1) Living
  - a) Where? [Country, Raion]
  - b) If abroad: Country? Planned duration?
- 2) What are the graduates doing 12 month after graduation?
  - a) Job/employed:
    - i) in the respective sector, related to the study?
      - (1) Since when (how did it took to find a job)?
      - (2) Were the skills and knowledge acquired sufficient enough to prepare them for the jobs they are performing?
    - ii) in another sector?
      - (1) Which?
      - (2) Why?
      - (3) Salary?
  - b) Further education:
    - i) In a related field, i.e. related to the college study?
      - (1) What exactly?
      - (2) Why?
    - ii) In another field?
      - (1) What exactly?
      - (2) Why?
  - c) Unemployed:
    - i) Looking for a job in which sector?
  - d) Self-employed:
    - i) In business related to the VET study?
    - ii) In business not related to the college study? Why?
  - e) Other: