

STRATEGIC PROJECT

# VET PROVISION AND QUALITY ASSURANCE

Implementation Plan 2018

# IMPLEMENTATION PLAN - WP2018

## 1. Summary

Of the top five priorities of the European Union for VET for the period 2015-2020 (Riga Council Conclusions), three are covered by the Strategic Project on VET Provision and Quality Assurance. The 2018 interventions in partner countries are therefore set in the frame of EU policy priorities, the strategic directions in the ETF Single Programming Document 2017-2020, as well as based on the specific needs of partner countries analysed in various ETF thematic reports and the Torino Process. The overarching goal of the strategic project is to make VET in partner countries more relevant to both labour market and individual needs and to raise its quality in a context of fast technological change and increasing globalisation, growing economic competition and digitalisation of all areas of life, including education and training.

Geographically, the project follows the prioritisation of countries by the Commission (DG EMPL) and makes use of both country specific interventions and regional and cross-regional approaches. Functionally there is an emphasis on capacity building for policy development and implementation. Thematically, the focus of the project is on VET provision while keeping a systemic perspective. The actions in 2018 build on the ETF's activities and achievements in the previous period and have largely a multi-annual perspective. Actions concentrate on three key areas:

- (i) Skills acquisition through work-based learning (WBL) for youth and adults;
- (ii) Skills improvement of VET teachers, trainers, mentors and managers through continuing professional development (CPD);
- (iii) Skills quality through Quality assurance (QA) in VET policies, systems and provision.

To enhance these three key areas, two transversal areas that are crucial for skills formation and VET modernisation, complement some of the actions planned:

- Digital skills and digital tools in VET;
- Skills for career management and better skills information through career guidance.

## 2. Progress to date and lessons learnt

Expertise development: A set of methodological tools on work-based learning (WBL), including a handbook for policymakers and social partners, a readiness tool for WBL implementation, a position paper, a handbook on financing WBL, were developed and tested in partner countries and will be applied in the next interventions. Ex-ante-impact assessments of WBL (in candidate countries) and mapping reports/country snapshots on WBL (in EaP region and Kazakhstan) have provided thematic country intelligence and made it possible to design tailor-made actions for 2018. The methods of focus groups and national working groups have proved to be useful and indicated scope for expansion to other countries in the future.

In the field of continuing professional development (CPD), expertise was developed through country reports and a comparative analysis of the state of play of CPD provision for VET teachers and trainers in SEET, mapping the provision of web-based networks and related guidance to support CPD.

On Quality Assurance (QA) in VET, the completion of country fiches for SEET and SEMED on the status quo of QA in 2017 provides an up to date knowledge base. The roll-out of the ETF working paper on QA to country desks and thematic experts has enhanced in-house knowledge and know-how on the ETF strategic approach in this area.

Outcomes of actions: All five candidate countries agreed on multi-annual ETF actions to support them in the implementation of the Riga MTD on WBL until 2020, to increase the supply and improve the quality of WBL in VET. They also joined the European Alliance for Apprenticeships (EaFA) and made

further commitments to strengthen WBL. A joint seminar with DG EMPL helped candidate countries to understand, how to benefit from and to contribute to EAfA. Seven countries (EaP region and Kazakhstan) benefited from a 3-year regional project on WBL, which included several PLAs, and identified priority actions at national level in the frame of a 'feasibility-check' process.

In the field of CPD, 17 demonstration projects were implemented and triggered innovation for more demand-based provision of CPD. An immediate national impact was achieved in Montenegro as the project on teacher placement in industry will be mainstreamed by the Ministry of Education.

In the area of QA in VET, focus group meetings engaging key stakeholders in SEET and SEMED have contributed to the needs-based design of the ETF Transnational Forum for QA in VET.

Contributions to EU and international debate: The project has contributed to the recognition of ETF as a centre of expertise and to the EU internal policy development through participation in several European Commission working groups. This includes, the ET2020 TWG on VET, the TWG on Adult Learning, TWG on Digital skills and DOL, the EQAVET Steering Committee and the Expert Group on VET Providers. Contributions were made to the EU Employment Platform for SEET in the context of Youth Guarantee workshops in all SEET countries. In the frame of the Interagency Group on VET, the project was leading the work on developing an advocacy tool for WBL which was agreed by all major organisations (i.e. UNESCO, OECD, ILO) and published in 2017. Co-operation with the ILO-ITC continued and the 5<sup>th</sup> edition of the career guidance policy course was well received by a number of partner countries and beyond. Experts from the project were frequently invited to make key note speeches at national and international events. ETF work has been quoted in EU and international publications.

Lessons learnt: The ex-ante impact assessment exercise on WBL in candidate countries has shown its usefulness for both the identification of policy options for WBL development in the countries and for the identification of future ETF actions. Demonstration projects, like the ones on CPD, can help to mobilise additional actors. They be an effective approach, but only if opportunity exists at national level (an ETF evaluation is ongoing). Peer learning activities continue to be a highlight and a favoured form of cross-country collaboration, but are a costly and resource-intensive. Support to policy development and implementation has turned out to be more effective through tailor-made country specific actions. A regional approach is most useful when it comes to awareness raising actions and when it is combined with country actions. Capacity building for creation of active networks at national level seems to be beneficial, as shown by the QA project. Virtual networks at regional level still lack the attractiveness and participation expected. These need to be better conceptualised and further elaborated in design and content (e.g. to move towards digitalisation and open data), employing appropriate expertise and resources.

### 3. New opportunities, challenges and risks

The EU Riga Conclusions (2015) and its Medium-Term Deliverables (MTD) will continue to strongly determine the VET policy agenda of candidate countries at least until 2020. To a certain extent also in potential candidates and other partner countries that showed interest in this process. It will require targeted and incremental increase of ETF support if impact and tangible progress is to be achieved by 2020. A new opportunity is the exploration of options for implementing dual education in one or two of the partner countries who do not have it yet in place (e.g. Ukraine). This could pave the way for a larger EU support or other donor interventions. Another opportunity stems from the finding of the latest Torino Process that VET teachers are increasingly high on the policy agenda of most partner countries. This goes beyond the current focus of ETF work on CPD and calls for further analyses to shed light on what are the key challenges, appropriate policy responses and interventions needed.

The newly established European Expert Group and network on Career Guidance (managed by CEDEFOP), which includes candidate countries, offers a new opportunity for ETF to further develop

expertise and identify actions for partner countries to address skill needs and to raise social attractiveness of VET. International discussions on the fourth industrial revolution and digitalisation of the economy offer opportunities for modernisation and diversification of VET provision through digital and online learning and emphasising digital skills as key competence.

Partnerships with international agencies (e.g. UNESCO, ILO on WBL in SEMED) or national agencies (e.g. Kulturkontakt in Albania) may provide an opportunity to achieve higher impact of ETF analyses and policy recommendations. A major challenge is to find the right balance between working on policy development and implementation. There is a high risk of overload, shortage of resources and overlap with technical assistance if the latter is emphasised too much.

#### 4. Key priorities for 2018

The key priorities continue to be the same as in 2017 and most actions are on track from previous activities and related processes (e.g. follow-up actions of regional Skills Connexion project on WBL in EaP, continuation of actions related to QA and WBL in SEET). Investment is increasing in all three key areas. In terms of human resources it is decreasing in the area of CPD only with regard to Central Asia.

New opportunities are taken into account smoothly and gradually. For example, the work on CPD will be broadened thematically through the analysis of the VET profession and extended geographically to selected countries from all ETF regions. Findings and conclusions from the analysis will inform future actions of national and international actors, e.g. through policy dialogue or programming. The expertise development ongoing on digital skills and digital tools in VET will be deepened through wider discussions of the related ETF position paper. Further conceptualisation of this transversal area will be supported by the set-up of a virtual network of experts from candidate countries to 'test the ground' for future ETF actions. The transversal area of career guidance will test a new type of policy review in two selected countries, focusing on skills for career management skills and screening if current career information is based on sound labour market information and sufficiently up-to-date.

As in 2017, a combined regional, cross-country and country approach has been adopted for implementation and ETF thematic and country indicators will monitor progress in the respective policy areas. In terms of priorities and target regions, support to work-based learning will concentrate on the five candidate countries, the six countries of the Eastern Partnership, on Kazakhstan and on the Maghreb countries. Actions in the area of CPD for teachers and trainers will still focus on candidate countries but partially move also in EaP, SEMED and CA regions. Intra- and inter-region action to support quality assurance modernisation will be implemented through the ETF QA Forum, focusing on SEET and SEMED regions and gradually expanding to all ETF partner regions by 2020. All interventions concern VET in a lifelong learning perspective, covering to various degrees both initial and continuing VET.

As digital innovation action it is planned to pilot and pave the way for a take-up of video pedagogy into VET curricula, pedagogical practice and CPD of teachers and trainers for early adopters in three selected partner countries.

#### 5. Expected Outcomes 2018

The expected outcomes of the strategic project in the targeted regions and partner countries are as follows:

1. Work-based learning in different forms will be enhanced, with special attention to apprenticeships and internships/traineeships, by involving social partners, companies, chambers and VET providers.

The project contributes to national policy developments by exploring policy options for WBL, facilitating national discussions and providing policy advice and expertise for preparing legal,

institutional and financial frameworks for WBL (e.g. Albania, Armenia, former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Georgia, Moldova, Montenegro, Serbia, Turkey, Ukraine). In relation to EU policies the goal is to strengthen WBL within VET and to diversify VET provision in partner countries. The project's contribution to expertise development and international debate lies in the further development of existing tools (i.e. handbook on financing) and in publishing findings and good practice examples.

It is expected that all candidate countries implement policy options for WBL and actively participate in the EAfA. A majority of EaP countries develop further or implement WBL schemes and at least one SEMED country follows-up the recommendations from the policy review.

2. Systematic approaches to and opportunities for continuous professional development of VET teachers, trainers and mentors will be introduced.

The project contributes to national policy developments by disseminating publications, a regional workshop sharing lessons learnt from CPD demonstration projects with policymakers, by piloting an innovative project on video pedagogy, through evidence creation on the state of the VET teaching profession and through policy advice to key stakeholders in CPD in the context of the Riga MTD. In relation to EU policies the project wants to achieve a more demand-oriented CPD provision for VET teachers and trainers in partner countries. The development of materials and guidance for video pedagogy contributes to expertise development and will be shared with the international community.

3. Further development and implementation of quality assurance mechanisms in VET in line with the EQAVET recommendation.

The project contributes to national policy development directly through the national liaison persons participating at the ETF QA Forum appointed by the respective Ministers. Indirectly, through the cross-country and cross-regional working mechanism of the Forum. In relation to EU policies the goal is to get commitment from countries to implement a systemic QA approach in VET or to focus on the systematic monitoring of QA improvement. Reports produced by the QA Forum will contribute to expertise development and to the international debate.

## 6. Actions and outputs for 2018 (including stakeholder cooperation)

The following are considered to be the five key actions planned for 2018, representing the key milestones for the project (see in annex the full list of project actions in the 'table of actions'):

- Country-specific support to all candidate countries in the implementation of the medium-term deliverable (MTD) on policy options for work-based learning in the frame of the EU Copenhagen Process and its Riga Council Conclusions.
- Country specific support to priority countries in the Eastern Partnership in policy development and implementation mechanisms for work-based learning, as a follow-up to the ETF regional 'Skills Connexion' project.
- Cross-country and cross-regional capacity building offer (modular blended learning course) on WBL for countries in the Eastern Partnership region and Kazakhstan and for SEET region. First distance learning and face-to face modules developed, validated and implemented.
- Study and survey of the state of the VET teaching profession in selected countries in all ETF regions (8-10 countries), including topics such as the condition and changing role of the profession, connection to the world of work, digital skills, curriculum, pedagogy, career development, assessment and CPD.

- Implementation of the Work-programme for the ETF Transnational Forum for quality assurance in VET and related e-Platform to support SEET and SEMED partner countries to address QA as an integral part of VET policy development (incl. governance and management, qualifications cycle, VET provision, VET staff).

The project will continue to contribute to the EU internal policy development through participation in several European Commission working groups, as mentioned in section 2. It will help to inform future developments in the respective thematic areas at EU level and subsequently review and revise ETF approaches to reflect new EU policy developments. This includes the promotion of EU good practices and instruments that aim to improve VET provision and quality assurance in partner countries.

Co-operation with international organisations will be strengthened (e.g. UNESCO, ILO, OECD) in the context of the Interagency Group and at bilateral level (e.g. joint ILO-ETF career guidance course for policy makers and implementers; UNESCO-ETF policy reviews of WBL in SEMED). In Turkey, co-operation continues with the EBRD on the apprenticeship study and its follow-up activities, with ERISSE on WBL, QA and CPD and in Albania a close co-operation is in place with Kulturkontakt Austria focusing on WBL. Links will be maintained with the Western Balkans Platform for Education and Training and regular information exchange on the thematic areas of the SP will continue with CEDEFOP (e.g. 'jour-fixe on WBL').

Synergies and close co-operation will occur with the SP Torino Process in terms of developing a new analytical framework, thematic country intelligence and monitoring of country progress indicators in the respective thematic areas (incl. information gathering, statistical support and analysis). Co-operation will take place with the SP EU Support regarding content support for EU external assistance (e.g. programming cycle, policy dialogue, reporting and training). Specific support will be given to the monitoring of grants under the EU grant scheme in EaP (tbc). Synergies and interlinks will be sought with SP Employment on areas of skills needs analyses, labour market information and career guidance), with SP Entrepreneurship and Enterprise Skills (e.g. skill needs from companies, WBL, key competences), SP Qualifications (e.g. QA of qualifications, teaching staff qualifications, WBL element of qualifications) and SP Governance (e.g. financing of WBL).

To ensure transparency and facilitate monitoring of synergies and co-operation modalities with EU services, bilateral and international organisations as well as with other SPs in ETF, a separate table will be prepared prior to implementation of the project.

## 7. Knowledge Management, Communication and Dissemination

Based on the communication strategy outlined in annex 1, a more detailed and operational communication plan will be developed before implementation, based on the template the project developed in 2017. This communication plan will identify the single communications activities (including timing and estimated costs), the specific communication channels and indicate which communication activities can be provided internally by the project and for which the support is needed from COMM services. It will be differentiated by policy areas, addressing both internal and external communication and differentiate between primary and secondary audience / target groups.

External communication will build upon existing ETF contacts and communication channels in partner countries, EU Member States, the European Commission and beyond, including revamped project pages on the ETF web. It will utilise the networks newly established by the project (e.g. QA Forum and e-Platform) and continue to populate, activate and further elaborate in design and content the Virtual Networks/Platforms on CPD (for SEET) on WBL (for EaP, Kazakhstan and Candidate Countries) and the digital and online learning (extranet) community. The project will promote, make visible and accessible our products (e.g. policy briefs, briefing notes) through digital tools (e.g. video messages) and make frequent use of online communication with experts from partner countries. At least one webinar will be organised. It will draw upon and deepen existing collaboration with EU and

international networks, such as EQAVET, Network of National Authorities responsible for VET quality assurance, Network of VET Providers, ICCDPP and INAP.

Internal communication will be structured as usual through monthly team meetings, additional bilateral and ad-hoc meetings as necessary and through frequent personal and informal communication. Close co-operation will be ensured with other SPLs and country desks through formal and informal meetings, through involving them in strategic and operational planning as well as in implementation and follow-up of joint activities, where appropriate.

The ETF policy on knowledge management will be followed, also making use of the latest document management system (SharePoint) to preserve and build new thematic and country knowledge. Internal knowledge sharing sessions will be organised in a flexible way according to progress in project implementation. These will include at least two classic 'Cappuccino' sessions, a number of smaller and more targeted actions ('Café Ristretto' session, bilateral meetings with colleagues) and regular briefing notes (e.g. CPD and QA newsletters) to keep ETF colleagues informed and to seek feedback and input. Information on EU policy developments and outcomes from the ET2020 working groups of the Commission to which ETF contributes will be systematically shared in written form and discussed in ETF at different meetings. The project will continue to use open-ended and user-friendly information media (e.g. virtual platforms) which store and will gradually build up the ETF's thematic intelligence for all partner countries (i.e. thematic country fiches), for the operational use by thematic specialists, country desks, project officers and managers.

## 8. Monitoring and Evaluation

During implementation, the project will systematically collect examples and stories of policy influence or impact achieved by the project in order to identify strengths and weaknesses in implementation, possibly change direction and to facilitate evaluation. This will require involvement of stakeholders from partner countries. Use of the ETF qualitative and quantitative indicators will be made to monitor progress in the respective VET policy areas (e.g. work-based learning schemes, CPD for VET teachers and trainers), to learn lessons and to anticipate improvements. An evaluation of the thematic area of CPD of the project took place in 2017 (Q3-4) and preliminary results will be taken into account. An evaluation of the thematic areas of WBL and QA is recommended for 2019/20, in line with the timetable for the Riga Process.

The main internal monitoring tools will be standard ETF instruments, such as Dashboard and Q-reporting. As a specific monitoring tool a common project implementation chart will be used to gather more detailed information concerning milestones, timetable and deviations from the initial plan. Regular communication about progress and implementation challenges within the team as well as between the team members responsible for the respective thematic policy area, respective country desks, the SPL and project officers will ensure transparency of action. Further to dashboard, the team developed a detailed table for budget monitoring providing both more accurate quantitative and updated qualitative information. Regular budget reviews are planned for the middle of each quarter to allow for corrective action in time.