

# STRATEGIC PROJECT SUPPORT TO EU ASSISTANCE IN THE CONTEXT OF EU EXTERNAL POLICIES

## IMPLEMENTATION PLAN - WP2018

### 1. Summary

The ETF provides support to the EC services and the EU Delegations (EUD) in its partner countries for the different phases of the external assistance project cycle and the external assistance related policy dialogue. Recast Council Regulation (2008, no 1339) mandates ETF to “*support the delivery of Community assistance to partner countries in the field of human capital development*” and to “*contribute, at the Commission’s request, to the analysis of the overall effectiveness of training assistance to the partner countries*”<sup>1</sup>.

Skills development remains high on the agenda of the 2014-20 programming period of EU external assistance, both in the Instrument for Pre-accession Assistance (IPA), the European Neighbourhood Instrument (ENI) and the Development and Cooperation Instrument (DCI). The ETF’s added value in supporting the EU external assistance consists in its in-depth country knowledge of the status and progress of reforms in VET and employment, the continuity of ETF’s presence in the partner countries and its country and international networks. It can deploy thematic expertise to support external assistance both in project and budget support<sup>2</sup> modality.

Upon request from EU Delegations, the Strategic Project Support to EU External Assistance (SUPEU) coordinates the internal opportunity analysis, ETF response and internal allocation of expertise resources from the thematic SPs to work with the Country Desks leading EUD support work in their respective countries. The SP SUPEU core team provides methodological support, backstopping, coaching and quality assurance. Requests from the Headquarters are dealt with in a similar way but do not go through an opportunity analysis (see [EU Request process mapping](#)). Since its start-up beginning 2015, the SUPEU has focused its efforts on ensuring that the ETF provides timely and high level expertise and standardised quality products to the EU requests, and on building ETF expertise in EU external assistance delivery methods and tools. In terms of management of the EU support function, the project has worked on improved coordination of the requests within the ETF and on efficient communication with the Commission services and the EUDs.

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<sup>1</sup> Functions E and G.

<sup>2</sup> Sector Reform Contract.

## 2. Progress to date and lessons learnt

### Progress in relation to Results 1-3 on implementing EU requests<sup>3</sup>

Since 2015, the ETF has supported a big majority of the EUDs in its partner countries.

Upon request from the EU Delegations, ETF has supported:

- Programming in Algeria, Georgia and Morocco.
- Identification and formulation in Albania, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Georgia, Israel, Jordan, Kosovo<sup>4</sup>, Lebanon, Morocco, Tajikistan, Tunisia and Turkmenistan.
- Operationalisation and implementation in Albania, Algeria, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Egypt, Georgia, Kosovo, Lebanon, Moldova, Turkmenistan and for an IPA multi-beneficiary programme in South Eastern Europe.
- Monitoring in Egypt and evaluations in Algeria, Georgia, and Jordan.
- Policy dialogue in Georgia, Jordan and all the SEET countries.

The ETF has also implemented the regional Governance for Employability in the Mediterranean (GEMM) project for DG NEAR and supported the implementation of the Central Asian Education Platform (CAEP) for DEVCO. Furthermore, the ETF has also provided numerous comments and inputs for EU interventions to DG NEAR. DG EMPL regularly consults the ETF for the Enlargement related policy dialogue (Economic Reform Programme assessment, Chapter Sub-Committees). Finally, the ETF has also supported the design and operationalisation of the EU4Youth initiative for Eastern Europe for DG NEAR/EMPL.

### Progress in relation to Result 4 on coordination, quality assurance, expertise development<sup>5</sup>

- Internal coordination: The ETF has approved the “EU request process map” detailing the roles, responsibilities and processes from the arrival of a request to its completion. Opportunity analysis and assessment of resource implications upon the arrival of a new request from an EUD foresee SP-CD cross-consultation and management approval for accepting a request. Teams with experts from different thematic fields are set up when the request is a complex one.
- External coordination: A procedure has been set-up at HQ request to keep DG EMPL, NEAR and DEVCO constantly informed of any new requests (not included in the annual Work Programme) from the EUDs.
- Quality assurance: [Quality check guidelines](#) have been drafted and are being applied to major EU support deliverables. In addition to final quality check, the SUPEU core team members work together with Country Desks providing methodological and hands-on support, in particular when a larger scale request is made by a EUD. Core team support has been provided to requests in 18

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<sup>3</sup> 1/ The relevance of EU interventions in the partner countries on human capital development is enhanced with the ETF's support to programming and project design, 2/ The efficiency and effectiveness of EU interventions in the partner countries on human capital development is enhanced with the ETF's support to implementation, monitoring and evaluation, 3/ EU policy dialogue on HCD issues is enhanced in partner countries through ETF policy and thematic contributions

<sup>4</sup> This designation is without prejudice to positions on status, and is in line with UNSCR 1244 and the ICJ Opinion on the Kosovo declaration of independence – hereinafter “Kosovo”.

<sup>5</sup> EU requests are well coordinated within the ETF and with the Commission services and ETF products to support the EU are standardised, quality ensured and resourced with highly competent ETF expertise in a timely manner.

countries (AL, AZ, EG, RS, MA, DZ, JO, LB, TN, BY, UA, MD, GE, AM, TJ, TM, UZ, XK) since 2015 and the SPL has, in addition, supported several regional thematic requests.

- **Expertise development:** Since 2015, the SUPEU has delivered ten Cappuccinos and three Ristrettos for ETF staff on various topics. First, on IPA, ENI and DCI instruments and ETF's role in the EU project cycle in 2015, second, on Taiex-Twinning-Erasmus, IPA multi-beneficiary programme on inclusive education and budget support modality in 2016. Finally, already two Cappuccinos have been delivered in 2017 on Stabilisation and Association Agreements and M&E methodologies and practices. A three-day training course on the budget support modality, adapted to the ETF needs, was also delivered for ETF operational staff in 2016 and another one on financing is planned end-2017/beginning 2018. M&E skills have also been reinforced by external trainings attended by four core team members. An on-line [Toolkit](#) including all the Commission templates, guidelines, methodological notes etc. for EU support was set up in 2016.

### **Outcome of the actions**

Satisfaction with ETF support has led to other requests from the EU Delegations. The number of EU Delegations requesting ETF support has indeed increased since 2015, and in particular, the ETF has witnessed an increase of longer-term and larger scale requests such as full design of an intervention or evaluation of projects (instead of commenting on the work of external expert teams or providing ad-hoc inputs and advice). Longer-term substantial support provides better visibility for the ETF with the EUDs and Commission services.

The ETF is regularly consulted by DG NEAR on new EU interventions being submitted to the Quality Support Group (QSG) for assessment and on sector budget support disbursement files. DG NEAR and EMPL have also jointly asked the ETF to organise a seminar for all the EU Delegations in the Western Balkans and Turkey on EU policy dialogue in the field of skills development and employment, disbursement files the progress of reforms/skills issues and the cooperation modalities to make best use of the ETF in the EU external assistance in the region. Feedback surveys to EU services also give constantly positive response.

### **Lessons learnt**

- The EU external assistance is more and more sector oriented and different types of thematic expertise are needed in dealing with complex requests. This necessitates an interdisciplinary working culture to efficiently deploy the ETF's human resources to respond to Commission and EUD requests.
- Regarding working methods, in particular for complex requests, setting up teams with complementary expertise (thematic and methodological) under the leadership of the Country Desk (CD) has been effective. CDs have an overview and coordinate with the EUD. Thematic experts provide inputs and the core team member ensures methodological support according to the needs.
- For proper quality assurance, a throughout involvement of the core team has proven to be necessary in many cases. This demonstrates to which extent quality assurance cannot focus only on the final product. Providing methodological and hands-on support/coaching throughout the requests, working in a team with CDs and experts, sometimes also in the field, is essential. The core team has also sometimes substituted to overcome the lack of availability of thematic expertise.

### 3. New opportunities, challenges and risks

#### External challenges and opportunities

- *Sector approach:* The ETF may have to consider how best to respond within its mandate to requests covering various sectors (Neighbourhood) or education sub-sectors from basic to higher education and employment and social policies (Enlargement). IPA II targets reforms within the framework of pre-defined sectors. These sectors cover areas closely linked to the Enlargement Strategy, such as democracy and governance. The relevant IPA II sector for the ETF is *employment, social policies, education, promotion of gender equality, and human resources development*. This sector approach promotes structural reforms that will help transform a given sector and bring it up to EU standards. IPA II also allows for a more systematic use of sector budget support. On the other hand, in the Neighbourhood region, the first step is sector definition, and a programme may cover several sectors (e.g. private sector development or environment including skills development, employability, social inclusion, etc.).
- *EU external assistance related policy dialogue:* The EUDs lead the policy dialogue with the ETF partner countries. However, the ETF can support the process with its thematic knowledge and long-term country intelligence to complement the EU Delegations' expertise. Unlike assignments related to the project cycle phase, policy dialogue cannot be contracted out; hence, the importance of the role the ETF can play.
- *Public sector eligibility assessment:* Taking into consideration the ETF's already existing country knowledge, experience and expertise in sector analysis and different studies and analysis (thematic analyses, Torino Process etc.), the ETF is in an ideal position to conduct the sector policy eligibility assessment. For completing its expertise, ETF is to extend its competences in financing, costing and public sector financial management to assess the credibility of sector skills development and employment strategies also from the financial point of view.
- ETF could also play a crucial role in providing upstream support to EU external assistance, i.e. supporting the process of *formulation of national sector strategies* that can subsequently be backed by EU external assistance. This necessitates a holistic view on countries' skills development and employment system, not limited to VET.

#### Internal challenges and opportunities

- *Non-availability of FTEs.* The initial allocation of 3.4 FTE in September 2017 is no longer available for SUPEU. Therefore, during the year, when requests come in, the management may have to find additional human resources on an ad-hoc basis. The risk for the EU support function is that these human resources are simply not available as ETF staff members are fully allocated to other activities.
- *Planning of resources* within the annual Work Programme is a challenge as new requests may come in or requests may change nature during the year. Therefore, SUPEU is trying to incentivize the EUDs to foresee and send their requests to the ETF well in advance. However, it is important that some reserve be planned into SUPEU financial and human resources and to the other ETF SPs. Otherwise the risk is that the ETF may have to turn down some EU requests during the year. Alternatively, the ETF would have to be ready to cancel some of its other planned activities.
- The internal on-going strategic reflection on using *complementarities* between ETF and EU interventions to leverage the combined efforts to reforms in a given country is also an opportunity that the project will seek to boost. The reinforcement of the linkage of ETF activities and projects to EU interventions, i.e. how they feed into the EU interventions is a condition for contributing to change through larger scale external assistance interventions. The thematic work by the ETF should become a frontrunner to guide new EU interventions.

#### 4. Key priorities for 2018

- Continue efforts to forecast requests, notably with regular communication with DG EMPL, NEAR, DEVCO and EUDs.
- Provide repeated learning opportunities for ETF thematic experts regarding EU external assistance tools and methodologies. The aim is to enhance the involvement of thematic experts in responding to requests from the EC and EUDs by increasing the number of thematic experts conversant in EU external assistance tools and methodologies.
- Continue the in-house reflection on the complementarity of ETF interventions with EU external assistance and the key role ETF can play as a frontrunner for innovative EU intervention proposals.
- In cooperation with SP Governance, reinforce internal expertise in financing and costing of VET in order to be able to assess the credibility of national strategies and action plans in the partner countries. This expertise will also allow the ETF to back its policy advice to partner countries with financial sustainability arguments.
- Work on new types of services for the EU Delegations such as:
  - Integration/mainstreaming of skills and employability in other sector interventions
  - Comprehensive support package during the implementation of an intervention (i.e. content and methodological advice).
  - Facilitation of sector EU Joint (+) Programming
- Develop the on-line mechanisms for feedback on the quality and relevance of ETF's support and products, notably aiming at a higher response rate to the survey.

#### 5. Expected Outcomes 2015-2020

1. The relevance of EU interventions in the partner countries on human capital development is enhanced with the ETF's support to programming and project design.
2. The efficiency and effectiveness of EU interventions in the partner countries on human capital development is enhanced with the ETF's support to implementation, monitoring and evaluation.
3. EU policy dialogue on HCD issues is enhanced in partner countries through ETF policy and thematic contributions.
4. EU requests are well coordinated within the ETF and with the Commission services and ETF products to support the EU are standardised, quality ensured and resourced with highly competent ETF expertise in a timely manner.

#### 6. Actions and outputs for 2018

The full list of project actions is detailed in the logframe. The following are examples:

1. Identification and formulation
  - Support to 2017-2020 Programming through transversal integration of employability and promotion of new professions in different sectors of interventions in Algeria.

- Completion of the design of a new Sector Reform Contract for the EUD in Georgia (agreed policy matrix and indicator passports, two Twinning fiches, TORs for Technical Assistance, Grant Scheme Guidelines for Applicants).
  - Support to the formulation of an EU intervention in VET to the EUD in Ukraine (Action Document).
  - Identification and formulation of an EU intervention in skills anticipation and workforce planning for the EUD in Azerbaijan (draft Action Document).
  - Technical cross-country expertise for VET mobility piloting SEET and Africa (for DEVCO).
2. Implementation, monitoring and evaluation
- Content and methodological advice to the EUD in Algeria for the implementation of the AFEQ programme (continuous technical advice, first monitoring report).
  - Content and methodological advice to the EUD in Egypt for the implementation of the TVET II Programme (continuous technical advice and third content monitoring report).
  - Content and methodological advice to the EUD in Azerbaijan for the EU Support to the Education Programme (continuous technical advice, second monitoring report).
  - Content and methodological advice to the EUD in Belarus for the implementation of the EU Employment and VET Project (continuous advice, observer in the project steering committee).
3. Policy dialogue
- Support to the European Commission for the assessment of the Economic Reform Programmes of the Enlargement countries (set of inputs according to EC template).
  - Support to Sector Reform Contract policy dialogue to the EUD in Jordan.
  - Support to the Sector Reform Contract policy dialogue to the EUD in Albania.
4. Coordination, communication, expertise development and quality assurance
- Quality review of all the major draft final reports and products
  - Revised feedback survey to EU institutions on EU requests
  - Expertise development on EU tools and methodologies with focus on sector policy credibility assessment and financial aspects in 2018
  - Development of coaching function to CDs on methodologies, communication etc. based on needs analysis

**Support to regional EU interventions, i.e. CAEP, EU4Y and YEM are not within the SUPEU.**

## 7. Knowledge Management, Communication and Dissemination

In terms of knowledge creation and sharing, the SP organises three to four dedicated Cappuccinos per year for ETF operational staff. Cappuccinos by SUPEU are normally built on in-house knowledge and sharing of experiences and lessons learned from SUPEU work. Depending on needs, SUPEU may outsource specific tailor-made training for targeted group of staff (e.g. on budget support modality in 2016 and financing and costing planned for end-2017/beginning 2018).

For knowledge management, an [on-line toolkit](#) for EU support containing links to all the major EU external assistance guidelines and templates is kept up to date.

The EU Requests database provides central recording of all the official requests and deliverables, linking with Dashboard and Share Point. The project also prepares statistics and short analysis on the EC and EUD requests for ETF quarterly reports, Governing Board meetings etc.

The communication objectives of the project are to demonstrate how the ETF can add value to the EU project cycle and policy dialogue and to clearly and consistently communicate ETF services, products and expertise to EU institutions and EU Delegations.

The ETF leaflet on EU support was sent in September 2017 again to all the EUDs, including Central Asia.

## 8. Monitoring and Evaluation

### Evaluations planned for 2018-20

2018 – SUPEU

2019 – EL, QUAL

2019 – EMPL

The project will ensure access to all the information and deliverables of the EU support function for the evaluation team undertaking the planned evaluation of 2018.