



# EVALUATION OF ETF ACTIVITIES IN THE FIELD OF VET GOVERNANCE FINAL REPORT

2017

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# LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

|                  |   |
|------------------|---|
| <b>AAR</b>       | <b>Annual Activity Report</b>   |
| <b>DG</b>        | <b>Directorate-General</b>  |
| <b>DG DEVCO</b>  | <b>Directorate-General for International Cooperation and Development</b>  |
| <b>DG NEAR</b>   | <b>Directorate-General for Neighbourhood and Enlargement Negotiations</b> |
| <b>CA/Russia</b> | <b>Central Asia and Russia</b>  |
| <b>CEDEFOP</b>   | <b>European Centre for the Development of Vocational Training</b>         |
| <b>CoP GOV</b>   | <b>Community of Practice in Governance</b>                                |
| <b>CVET</b>      | <b>Continuing vocational education and training</b>                       |
| <b>EC</b>        | <b>European Commission</b>  |
| <b>EE</b>        | <b>Eastern Europe</b>   |
| <b>EU</b>        | <b>European Union</b>   |
| <b>ETF</b>       | <b>European Training Foundation</b>                                       |
| <b>FTE</b>       | <b>Full Time Equivalent</b>   |
| <b>GIZ</b>       | <b>German Corporation for International Cooperation</b>                   |
| <b>ICT</b>       | <b>Information and communications technology</b>                          |
| <b>ILO</b>       | <b>International Labour Organization</b>                                  |
| <b>MLG</b>       | <b>Multi-level governance</b>   |
| <b>MoES</b>      | <b>Ministry of Education and Science</b>                                  |
| <b>Q-report</b>  | <b>Quarterly monitoring report</b>  |
| <b>PC</b>        | <b>Partner Country</b>  |
| <b>OMC</b>       | <b>Open Method of Coordination</b>  |
| <b>SEET</b>      | <b>South Eastern Europe and Turkey</b>                                    |
| <b>SEMED</b>     | <b>Southern and Eastern Mediterranean</b>                                 |
| <b>TA</b>        | <b>Technical Assistance</b>   |
| <b>SP</b>        | <b>Strategic Project</b>  |
| <b>SP EMPL</b>   | <b>SP Employment, Employability and Mobility</b>                          |
| <b>SP GOV</b>    | <b>Strategic Project Governance</b>                                       |
| <b>SP PROV</b>   | <b>SP VET Provision and Quality</b>                                       |
| <b>SP QUAL</b>   | <b>SP Qualification and Qualification System</b>                          |
| <b>SP TRP</b>    | <b>Strategic Project Torino Process</b>                                   |
| <b>UNDP</b>      | <b>United Nations Development Programme</b>                               |
| <b>VET</b>       | <b>Vocational Education and Training</b>                                  |

# EVALUATION OF ETF ACTIVITIES IN THE FIELD OF VET GOVERNANCE

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

### What was the purpose of the Evaluation?

The aim of this Evaluation was to provide an independent assessment of the relevance, effectiveness, impact, sustainability, added value and efficiency of ETF's activities in the area of Vocational Education and Training (VET) governance. The Evaluation covered the period from 2012 to late 2016 when data collection for the Evaluation started. It was based on the analysis of data collected through desk research, in-depth interviews, and a survey of VET governance stakeholders across ETF's Partner Countries.

### What is governance?

Governance refers to the activity of governing, which can be defined as the interactions within and between institutions, processes and traditions that determine how power is exercised, how decisions are taken on issues of public and often private concern, and how stakeholders, including citizens, have their say (Lynn et al, 2000).

### What role does ETF perform in the field of governance?

Following the 2010 Torino Process conference, the ETF started to work more systematically on the modernisation of VET governance in its Partner Countries. The Agency brought to the fore the principles of good **multilevel governance** and began targeted actions to facilitate exposure of Partner Country VET systems towards these principles.

Through its governance interventions, ETF is working to support the development of a critical mass of key stakeholders across levels of governments, departments or ministries representing public and private sectors who have a good understanding of national, sub-national or sectoral labour market needs, and are committed to working together as a team for the modernisation of VET. The Agency is helping to develop the capacity of these stakeholders to participate in the VET policy-making process and making well-informed choices.

#### Multilevel Governance

An arrangement for making binding decisions which:

- Engages a multiplicity of politically independent but otherwise interdependent [private and public] actors at different levels of territorial aggregation in continuous negotiation, deliberation, and implementation;
- Does not assign exclusive policy competence or assert a stable hierarchy of political authority to any of these levels.

*Schmitter, 2004*

### What is Strategic Project VET Governance (SP GOV)?

During the evaluation period, ETF's work on VET governance has gone through two major phases. In the first phase, ETF adapted the EU principles on good multilevel governance to the VET sector, developed methodological tools, and tested its approaches in several Partner Countries. This enabled the Agency to identify the importance of partnerships between national and sub-national

stakeholders (vertical coordination), as well as between relevant ministries, social partners and other non-governmental actors in VET policy (horizontal coordination).

The second, current phase began in 2015 (December 2014) with the establishment of a dedicated Strategic Project VET Governance (SP GOV). With this development, the Agency recognised VET governance as a distinct and a high-priority thematic area for its intervention, alongside another six Strategic Projects. The status of Strategic Project provided a longer-term perspective and resources to the ETF's VET governance team for pursuing the modernisation of VET systems in the Partner Countries.

### How does SP GOV add value to what other Strategic Projects are doing?

Participatory approaches and stakeholder engagement is at the core of all Strategic Projects (SPs) within ETF. This is because governance is a cross-cutting issue, relevant to all VET policy areas. Naturally, therefore, the work of other SPs also covers various aspects of governance within their interventions. However, these SPs focus on these issues narrowly within a specific area of their expertise. SP GOV, in contrast, focuses on governance holistically, at the level of VET system. Its interventions help integrate different VET policy areas, and concentrate on issues relevant to multiple lines of reform (e.g. VET costing and financing, VET laws and strategies). Moreover, mutual activities, tools and methodologies developed by ETF's VET governance team have encouraged other Strategic Projects to adjust their interventions closer to the principles of good and multilevel governance.

### What did ETF do well in VET governance?

#### Key Messages

- ETF's products and services in the area of VET governance were in line with the needs of Partner Countries. They have proved very useful to Partner Country stakeholders and were difficult to substitute with the products and services of other actors.
- ETF VET governance interventions were based on effective learning approaches. They have improved stakeholders' capacity, facilitated their participation in VET policy making, and made a considerable contribution to developing more effective teams of reformers.
- Active participation and improved capacity has led to consensus-building debates among key stakeholders. Partner Country stakeholders already share a broad consensus that multilevel governance is the way forward in modernising VET. ETF's governance actions have contributed to this outcome.
- Management of VET governance actions within ETF was found to be in a healthy state. Operational-level priorities were in line with the corporate approaches, with no visible issues in the delivery of planned outputs.

During the evaluation period, ETF demonstrated a very strong capacity for providing differentiated governance interventions to its Partner Countries. As a result, a large majority of interviewed and surveyed stakeholders indicated that all types of ETF activity in the area of VET governance were strongly in line with the needs of their organisation. We found that SP GOV's efforts to focus on a limited number of countries in which a window of opportunity for governance reforms existed, was a key driver for the high relevance of its interventions. Such prioritisation enabled the team to be flexible and adjust its interventions to the evolving context of each supported Partner Country. This

approach also proved highly efficient, and served as a warrant that resources are spent on those interventions that displayed a strong potential to yield the intended systemic change.

The Evaluation provided strong evidence that ETF's governance interventions were not only relevant but also made a considerable contribution to building teams of VET reformers in Partner Countries. SP GOV has facilitated these processes particularly well, through successful learning and capacity building actions. It developed unique VET governance products and services, which provided high utility and added value for the work of ETF's immediate stakeholders. Moreover, SP GOV has based its capacity-building actions on effective approaches, of which, stakeholders particularly appreciated learning from trainers or through moderated small groups. As a result, a large majority of stakeholders found SP GOV products and services useful for obtaining all the types of information they provided. Thematically, stakeholders particularly appreciated learning about the ways they could improve coordination in their countries.

Furthermore, survey and interview findings alike showed that ETF governance products and services have improved the capacity of the Agency's immediate stakeholders, representing all levels of VET governance system. Those who benefited most were the representatives of sub-national stakeholders, social partners and other non-state actors – the groups that were traditionally excluded from the decision-making process in most Partner Countries. As a result, coordinated activities of these stakeholders with other key actors (e.g. relevant ministries), coupled with ETF governance interventions (and sometimes those of other international organisations), have led to the consensus-building debates in a number of priority countries. Although we found that systemic reforms are yet to materialise, this is already an important progress which the Agency achieved in a remarkably short period of time.

Considering that SP GOV alone lacked the resources to provide interventions at the scale required, synergies with other Strategic Projects and international organisations active in the field of Human Resources Development in the Partner Countries were crucial for achieving progress in the modernisation of VET governance. But although the Evaluation revealed various examples of such synergies, they were somewhat sporadic and limited in scale. This was particularly evident when we considered to what extent the Agency met the Partner Countries' needs for capacity building. While stakeholders with whom SP GOV engaged directly improved their competencies, findings from both survey and interviews revealed that stakeholders who were beyond ETF's immediate reach still lacked capacity.

Internally, SP GOV collaboration was particularly fruitful in the case of the SP responsible for the implementation of Torino Process. Nearly all of the stakeholders we interviewed and surveyed had learned about the gaps in their governance systems from Torino Process reports, which included VET governance reviews based on methodology provided by SP GOV. Furthermore, partnerships that progressed from SP GOV's holistic focus on VET governance to other SPs' more specialised areas of intervention occurred infrequently, but were the most cost-effective. For example, SP GOV designed a pilot project in Serbia, the objectives of which included testing and demonstrating the value of a multilevel approach to skills foresight. Once the implementation of this project began, SP Employment immediately engaged and provided the necessary expertise to the stakeholders involved in the pilot action.

In terms of external actors, the Evaluation showed that SP GOV activities were the most complementary to the work of EU Delegations. Representatives of this group of stakeholders emphasised that good governance is a key criterion for activating EU financial support, and SP GOV activities were therefore highly relevant. As a result of SP GOV interventions, at least one priority country is already expecting a new, EU-funded technical assistance project with a strong VET governance dimension. More specifically, the EU has pledged 32 million euros for the IRADA initiative. This focuses on VET, and aims to boost the economy and decrease unemployment in eight (out of 24) Tunisian regions. With the support of ETF's Strategic Project responsible for assisting the EU institutions, this initiative will build on the methodology previously developed and piloted by SP GOV in two Tunisian regions (Medenine and Gabes).

Although follow-up in most countries is still pending, the Evaluation showed that SP GOV activities have created a positive context for wider VET-related technical assistance projects. SP GOV regional pilot projects were particularly successful in this respect, because they helped Partner Countries to introduce and test new VET governance approaches on the ground. They have raised awareness and demonstrated to key decision makers the modalities and initial benefits of multilevel governance models. Moreover, they have created expectations and demand for larger-scale support from international organisations. As a result, we observed in a number of countries that the activities of ETF's stakeholders brought good multilevel governance into the VET policy agenda. This is an important achievement, considering ETF only established SP GOV in 2015. It also means that even greater results can be expected in the years to come if the Agency addresses the gaps presented in the following section.

### What could have been done better during the evaluation period?

#### Key Messages

- Products and services in the area of VET governance could have reached more stakeholders if SP GOV had made some of its outputs more accessible and less complex, and established better communication with other international actors.
- Interventions would have yielded more sustainable results if SP GOV had more effectively addressed systemic conditions in the Partner Countries, and planned follow-up interventions well in advance.
- Key stakeholders would have derived greater benefit from ETF missions if they had been better sequenced.
- Synergies between strategic projects could have been more systematic if internal cooperation mechanisms had been better developed, and a consensus established as to the scope of SP GOV work.

The Evaluation demonstrated that SP GOV could have achieved considerably better stakeholder outreach if it had made some of its outputs more accessible and less technical. We found that a number of key products were too complex for Partner Country decision makers, who had limited time and capacity to understand and make use of them. Some analytical tools were not distributed widely enough. Despite high demand, they remained only in the hands of those stakeholders who had received them directly from the Agency. Across different actors, outreach to non-EU and Member State development organisations proved most limited, mainly because SP GOV had not yet established a sufficient line of communication with these organisations in all its priority countries.

Lack of advance planning in follow-up actions has also noticeably hindered the potential for sustainability of SP GOV interventions. This is particularly notable in the outcomes of pilot projects. Beyond the broad consensus that multilevel governance is the way forward, most projects struggled to sustain ETF-supported gains in the regions. Moreover, although systemic governance reforms supported by ETF's VET governance team were already on the political agenda in a number of Partner Countries, they had not yet materialised by the time the Evaluation was carried out. Given that SP GOV only began its interventions in 2015, it is too early to reach any final conclusion on the sustainability of these reform processes.

The major obstacles to stronger sustainability have been the systemic conditions inherent to specific Partner Countries. For example, developing the capacity for good governance at all levels of VET systems, and addressing gaps, required much greater effort than ETF alone could muster. SP GOV, and ETF as a whole, could have addressed this issue better with a more forward-looking planning approach to upscaling its interventions. SP GOV's interventions often resulted in an increased willingness to learn and develop capacity in the Partner Countries, but this could not be satisfied immediately by other EU sources.

Further assessment of internal process exposed four other key areas for improvement.

- AREA 1:** ETF's planning and monitoring practices were not sufficiently well developed to allow the Agency to continuously monitor cost-effectiveness of its governance interventions across different Strategic Projects. SP GOV planning and monitoring documents have not provided sufficient information about the costs of its activities.
- AREA 2:** Internal mechanisms for planning and monitoring cooperation between Strategic Projects in priority Partner Countries were not sufficiently well developed. ETF's Partner Country strategies provided very scant references to the modalities of cooperation across the SP teams.
- AREA 3:** The missions of different ETF strategic projects were not efficiently sequenced. In some priority countries, missions were scheduled too close to each other, often after a long period of absence. Such a schedule proved too overwhelming for key partner country stakeholders to take full advantage of ETF's VET governance, but also other interventions.
- AREA 4:** There has not been a sufficient discussion within ETF on the specific remits of SP GOV and its links with other SPs. This has created implicit tensions between the teams. Certain governance topics have been covered transversally across different Strategic Projects. However, due to their narrow specialisation, other SPs could not on their own address coordination mechanisms such as overarching VET laws or strategies, or tripartite cooperation.

## Recommendations for SP GOV

1. SP GOV should continue to develop methodologies and tools, as well as designing and piloting new VET governance models. It should, however, consider further specialising its interventions on:
  - Countries undertaking multiple lines of VET reform;

- Building the capacity and comparability of partner country policy modernisation teams that include representatives of different ministries, employers and other key stakeholders at national, regional and sectoral levels;
  - Supporting the development of VET policy coordination mechanisms;
  - Developing VET financing and costing systems.
2. A more detailed discussion on the complementarity between SP GOV and other SP teams should take place at all levels so that uncertainty is eliminated and ETF is able to better capitalise on the synergies between its different SP teams.
  3. SP GOV should continue to strengthen the sense of ownership among Partner Country stakeholders for reforms and priorities, using the following tools:
    - Agreements/charters in which stakeholders pledge concrete actions towards a reform.
    - Annual forums within and across PCs, at which stakeholders discuss their progress towards pledged lines of reform.
  4. To ensure continuity and increase the outreach of its interventions with limited resources, knowing that the governance domain requires a long-term perspective, SP GOV should:
    - Develop a consolidated VET governance toolbox;
    - Direct additional efforts into planning follow-up actions, and choose only those interventions that display the potential for continuity;
    - Seek opportunities for upscaling interventions through the actions of other donors and partner country stakeholders, and in close cooperation with ETF's other Strategic Projects;
    - Define criteria to prioritise Partner Countries (e.g. those that demonstrate a window of opportunity to undertake VET policy reform, etc.);
    - Expand joint activities for partner countries undertaking similar reforms.
  5. SP GOV should design any new pilot actions with built-in sustainability strategies. During implementation, it should monitor the outcomes of pilot actions and revisit sustainability strategy several times during a project lifespan. The strategy should consider the alternatives for further actions, such as whether (and how) the project should be:
    - Closed or handed over;
    - Transformed into a country-wide project; or
    - Further extended.

## Recommendations for all ETF

6. Careful consideration should be given to the ways in which ETF monitors the cost-effectiveness of its activities. Consistent monitoring of costs has the potential to (a) improve efficiency and (b) provide useful evidence for future evaluations and learning.
7. ETF should take action to sequence its missions in such a way that it avoids information overload for stakeholders and helps them to absorb the support provided.
8. The ETF should consider the introduction of “roadmaps” for the implementation of individual Country Strategies. These roadmaps would set out concrete action plans and establish the ETF country “taskforce” (consisting of team members from the relevant SPs and a country desk officer) for their implementation.

# 1. INTRODUCTION

The aim of this evaluation is to provide an independent assessment of the relevance, effectiveness, impact, sustainability, added value and efficiency of ETF's activities in the area of VET governance. The evaluation covers the period from 2012 to late 2016 when data collection for the evaluation started.

The report is divided into the following parts:

- Background, which briefly describes the concepts of VET Governance, sets out the general context and the scope of ETF's work in the field.
- Analysis, which provides key evaluation findings, conclusions and recommendations.
- Annexes, which include survey questionnaire and the aggregated data.

The evaluation report aimed to answer the following questions:

- How effective has ETF been in defining and shaping the area of VET governance, in the context of ETF work in partner countries?
- What has been the preliminary impact of the ETF actions in the field of VET governance towards cooperation and coordination of partner country (PC) actors at different level?
- How effective are the methodological tools developed by the ETF in the field of good multi-level governance from 2011-2015?
- What capacity building approaches have proven to be more effective in the field of VET governance?
- What has been the ETF added value to VET governance in the partner countries in the area of (i) VET legislation, financing and institutional arrangements; (ii) VET regionalisation and local level of skills development; and (iii) VET stakeholder's cooperation and coordination?
- How far have the different ETF actions at national, regional and corporate level met the objectives in the Annual Plans 2012 – 2016? Has the new Strategic Project VET Governance in 2016 integrated them, and brought them forward?
- How have other ETF projects benefitted from the governance methodological development?
- Recommendations as regards the ETF priorities in the partner countries with regard to the VET governance strategic project for the period 2018 – 2020?
- How relevant have ETF activities been to the needs of partner countries in the area of VET governance?
- Has ETF made the best use of resources that it had at its disposal in the area of promoting good and multilevel VET governance in partner countries?
- Have the gains of ETF partner countries in improving their VET governance been sustained?

The evaluation is based on the analysis of data collected through desk research, in-depth interviews, and a survey of PC stakeholders. The desk research included external policy documents, ETF's documents and reports, previous evaluations and audit reports. Interviews (41 in total) were carried out with ETF staff members, representatives of the European Commission and stakeholders from three selected ETF PCs (Serbia, Ukraine, and Tunisia). The latter included representatives of the EU Delegations active in these countries, employers, trade unions, national governmental

institutions and bodies, vocational education and training (VET) providers, NGOs and research organisations. The survey was carried out in three languages (English, French and Russian) and gathered the opinions of 210 respondents across all ETF's PCs.

## 2. BACKGROUND

### 2.1. General context of ETF's work on VET Governance

#### 2.1.1. VET governance

Governance can be defined as the “activity of governing”. Traditionally, this role was attributed to the state describing the governance ‘as regimes of laws, administrative rules, judicial rulings and practices that constrain, prescribe and enable government activities’ (Lynn et al, 2000: p. 235)<sup>1</sup>. More contemporary definitions are broader and take into account a wider range of factors and stakeholders. For example, according to Oliver (2010: p. 262)<sup>2</sup> governance can be defined ‘as the interactions among institutions, processes and traditions that determine how power is exercised, how decisions are taken on issues of public and often private concern, and how stakeholders, including citizens, have their say.’

Political restructuring in Europe contributed to the emergence of a new, so called “multilevel governance” framework in the study of governance (Pierre and Peter, 2005)<sup>3</sup>. MLG is ‘an arrangement for making binding decisions that engages a multiplicity of politically independent but otherwise interdependent actors – private and public – at different levels of territorial aggregation in more-or-less continuous negotiation/ deliberation/ implementation, and that does not assign exclusive policy competence or assert a stable hierarchy of political authority to any of these levels’ (Schmitter, 2004: p. 51)<sup>4</sup>.

Multilevel governance is based on an active partnership between all actors, ensured by horizontal and vertical coordination mechanisms. It may lead to effective resource allocation when these resources and decision making powers are allocated to the level which has the best knowledge of the local/ sectoral labour market needs and can make well-informed choices. It also encourages synergies between actions of state and non-state actors.

Introduction of the Open Method of Coordination (OMC) in the EU employment policy in 1997 (Treaty of Amsterdam) facilitated a gradual infusion of the multilevel governance framework into

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<sup>1</sup> Lynn, L.E., Heinrich, C.J. & Hill, C.J. (2000) Studying Governance and Public Management: challenges and prospects, *Journal of Public Administration Research and Theory*, 10(2), 233-261.

<sup>2</sup> Oliver, D., ‘Complexity in vocational education and training governance’, *Research in Comparative and International Education*, 5(3), 2010, pp. 261-73.

<sup>3</sup> Pierre, P. & Peters, B.G. (2005) *Governing Complex Societies: trajectories and scenarios*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.

<sup>4</sup> Schmitter, P. ‘Neo-neo-functionalism’, in Wiener, A. and Diez, T. (eds), *European integration theory*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2004, pp. 45-74.

various policy sectors, including education and training (Galvin Arribas, 2016)<sup>5</sup>. VET is a field where education intersects with training, as well as social, economic and labour market issues, therefore, VET systems need to meet the needs of multiple public and private actors (ILO, 1998)<sup>6</sup>. Taking this into account and following the multilevel governance framework, VET governance can be defined as a 'model for VET policy-making management based on involving stakeholders at all levels (sectoral, local/regional, national or international) for objective setting, implementation and monitoring, ... [which] aims to reinforce interaction between stakeholders and improve accountability, transparency, coherence, efficiency and effectiveness of policy' (Cedefop, 2011: p. 79)<sup>7</sup>.

Often the objective in the study of VET governance is to describe and map who are the stakeholders, what are their responsibilities, and how these responsibilities are shared within the VET system (e.g. see Stone and Lewis, 2010)<sup>8</sup>. Other objectives could include development of typologies or the analysis of the impact of different systems on the principles of good governance (e.g. see Oliver, 2010)<sup>9</sup>. Although objectives often diverge, the common denominator in such studies is that the level of analysis is the system and the functioning of this system. Here the system refers to stakeholders and their relationships organized around unitary level of management in the area of VET policy.

### 2.1.2. International trends and EU policy on VET governance

The European Commission points out that a public policy based on a multilevel governance model can promote elements of *good governance* (EC, 2001)<sup>10</sup>. According to the ETF's working definition, good governance in the field of VET comprises of six such elements: relevance, effectiveness, subsidiarity and proportionality, transparency, accountability, and participation (ETF, 2013)<sup>11</sup>.

Good and multilevel governance is the underlying principle of the Copenhagen process (enhanced European cooperation in VET). The process aims to raise the quality and attractiveness of accessible and inclusive VET at all education levels across the EU by reinforcing each-other's VET reforms through common goals, peer reviews and mutual learning. Cooperation and partnership between social partners, VET providers, learners, parents, companies, public employment services, chambers, teachers and trainers, guidance personnel and other stakeholders is seen as one of the

<sup>5</sup> Open Method of coordination 'is a model of multilevel governance which contributes as a policy making process in the transnational coordination at the EU supranational governance level and influences national policy priorities and agendas in the education and training policy area' (Galvin Arribas, 2016: p. 1).

<sup>6</sup> International Labour Organisation (ILO) (1998) *The Changing Role of Government and Other Stakeholders in Vocational Education and Training*. Geneva: ILO.

<sup>7</sup> Cedefop (European Centre for the Development of Vocational Training), *Glossary: Quality in education and training*, Publications Office of the European Union, Luxembourg, 2011

<sup>8</sup> Stone, J. R., & Lewis, M. V. (2010). Governance of Vocational Education and Training in the United States. *Research in Comparative and International Education*, 5(3), 274-288.

<sup>9</sup> Oliver, D., 'Complexity in vocational education and training governance', *Research in Comparative and International Education*, 5(3), 2010, pp. 261-73.

<sup>10</sup> EC (European Commission), *European governance: A White Paper*, COM (2001) 428 final, Brussels, 2001.

<sup>11</sup> ETF (European Training Foundation), *Good Multi-level Governance for Vocational Education and Training*, ETF, Turin, 2013

transversal principles vital for achieving the new set of EU medium-term VET deliverables for the period of 2015 - 2020 set out in Riga Council conclusions:

- Promote work-based learning in all its forms;
- Further develop quality assurance mechanisms in VET;
- Enhance access to VET and qualifications for all;
- Further strengthen key competences in VET curricula;
- Introduce systematic approaches to, and opportunities for, initial and continuous professional development of VET teachers, trainers and mentors.

Although good multilevel governance in VET is no longer a separate goal in itself for the EU as a whole, individual Member States are making further steps to improve and innovate in VET governance. For example, Germany - one of the world leaders in the VET sector – has launched a “Learning Regions Network”. It consisted in setting up local and regional networks to improve regional lifelong learning and employment strategies including guidance and counselling provision. All local stakeholders participated in these networks. Germany’s policy mostly focuses on guidance and counselling. The research sector has a role to play as well; special research projects are being funded by the government to ensure the update of VET policy. In the UK, another leading country in the field of VET, Studio Schools have been developed with the participation of multiple stakeholders: national and local employers, education agencies, the UK Department for Education as well as local partners from across the country. These schools involve both academic and vocational subjects, work experience and project-based learning to improve students’ skills.

ETF’s Torino Process may be seen as an extension of the European cooperation model to ETF partner countries. It relies on the participating country ownership and the participation of its relevant stakeholders in the analysis of VET and provides the basis for evidence-based self-reflection and mutual learning. Its goal is to improve policy making by raising the understanding of priorities and strategy for VET development. It also supports policy implementation, mainly by monitoring the progress of policy implementation and tracking policy performance. VET governance reforms are an integral element and a specific focus of the Torino Process.

## 2.2. Scope and the evolution of ETF activities in the field

Modernization of VET governance has always been the focus of ETF, but following the 2010 Torino Process Conference, the ETF started to work in this area more systematically. It has put to the fore the principle of *multilevel governance* that promotes sharing responsibilities and coordinated action between public authorities and private sector stakeholders, but also supporting national *decentralisation* efforts in VET governance. Decisions on VET organisation and provision could be taken at local or region level, which often has a more detailed understanding of specific local needs and circumstances (based on the principle of subsidiarity). Therefore, ETF sought to reinforce *stakeholder engagement* (private sector, regional/local authorities, social partners and other civil society NGOs, training providers) in productive partnerships at national, regional/local and sector level, and to improve the institutional arrangements for a more effective policy development, implementation and monitoring. It provided support in diagnosing the underlying issues, supplying

methodological tools, sharing evidence and good practices, supporting capacity building, networking and peer learning events, and providing advice for institution building.

One of the key strengths of ETF compared to other international development actors in the field is that ETF utilises a *differentiated approach* to collaboration with partner countries based on their levels of development/stages of implementation in VET governance. Therefore, ETF is able to provide targeted support that specific countries need most at their particular stages of development in VET. Constant review of PCs' progress through the Torino Process and the regular monitoring and evaluation processes within ETF help the Agency adapt quickly to situations in the partner countries as they develop and exploit the windows of opportunity for providing support that the countries need to move to higher stages of development in VET governance.

ETF has the following strategic *objectives* in its VET governance project for the period 2014 – 2017:

- Support ETF partner countries to review their institutional arrangements on key functions of the VET system including financing and mobilising methodological instruments developed by ETF - to identify strengths, weaknesses and gaps and facilitate the discussions among stakeholders on further steps;
- Support capacity development of key stakeholders (with particular emphasis on private sector, social partners, training providers) in the VET system to engage in more productive partnerships at national, sector, regional and local levels;
- Facilitate knowledge sharing and exchange across partner countries and between partner countries and the EU member states.

The objectives are planned to be implemented through the following *activities*:

- Analyses of institutional arrangements in the ETF partner countries - specifically in South Eastern Europe and Turkey and in the Southern and Eastern Mediterranean - capitalising on the experience of the FRAME and GEMM projects and in Eastern Europe to reinforce ETF policy advice and disseminate lessons learnt;
- Development of instruments and tools to support ETF operations targeting capacity building of sector bodies (councils, committees,) promotion of school-business cooperation, school development, introduction of foresight as change management tool and financing;
- Initiative on entrepreneurial communities to identify and analyse good practice of the territorial aspects in skills development so as to inform policy making in supporting the territorial dimension of VET governance.

After ETF started to work on VET governance thematic area more systematically, development of this area within the Agency has gone through two major phases. First phase started with the Community of Practice initiative in Governance (COP GOV), which aimed to strengthen the Agency's thematic expertise in the field. For this purpose, ETF assembled teams of experts to identify the EU principles and know-how on governance, which were subsequently adapted to the VET sector. ETF has integrated learning within its projects and programmes and applied the new concepts to partner countries through large actions such as GEMM, FRAME, and Entrepreneurial Communities (see Box 1).

### Box 1: Flagship projects related to VET Governance

**GEMM Project.** This project aimed at making VET systems more participative, responsive, transparent, accountable and inclusive. It concentrated its action on the management, financing and quality assurance of these systems. Its achievements in the SEMED region were local skills analysis, career guidance and counselling in Lebanon, apprenticeship and tracer study in Jordan and a tracer study of graduates in the labour market in Palestine. The GEMM project also gave a methodology for mapping and analysing VET multilevel governance. Eight pilot projects on local partnerships in the SEMED region were developed, followed by dissemination events. Capacity building was also enhanced since a specific capacity building methodology was developed and two related programmes were implemented.

**FRAME Project.** The FRAME project's overall objective was to support the development of skills of the EU enlargement countries' citizens in the medium and long term. It focused on four main components: a roadmap for skills 2020, the review of institutional arrangements, the development of a monitoring system and the improvement of regional cooperation. One of the impacts of FRAME was the drawing up of a new strategy and action plan by the Ministry of Social Welfare and Youth in Albania. It also helped establish an Inter-ministerial working group for the document "Visions for Skills 2020" in Bosnia and Herzegovina. It raised awareness on the need for better integrated information for planning and monitoring skills development in Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia. In Kosovo, the FRAME project helped foster inter-ministerial and inter-actor cooperation on skills issues. Serbia benefited from the project, which led to a stronger Inter-ministerial and inter-actor cooperation on skills issues.

**The Entrepreneurial Communities Initiative.** This project, launched by the ETF in 2013, aimed at identifying entrepreneurial communities in the ETF partner countries. They could be administrative entities, NGOs or VET providers. The goal of this project was to facilitate peer learning and inform policy development.

ETF has followed up the first phase with the establishment of the strategic VET Governance project (further - SP GOV) in 2014. Although expertise building is still in place and ETF continues its work on enhancing community knowledge in the field of VET governance, with the new dedicated Strategic Project (SP), ETF has begun more targeted activities. Hence, this development can be considered as a beginning of the second phase of ETF's work in the thematic area of VET governance. Roles and functions of SP GOV are summarized in the following policy change logic (see Figure 1).

Prior to targeted actions in the field of VET governance, ETF first identifies the needs of each PC and assesses if the political environment is favourable for its interventions. After the needs and opportunities are identified, the Agency then delivers those products and services in the field, which are relevant for each country context. As a result, most of SP GOV outputs are highly country specific, however, they are all based on the methodologies developed prior to reorganisation in 2014, under the community of practice on governance.

Given the diversity across countries it is impossible to generate a concrete list of such country specific products and services. However, it is possible to distinguish transversal products which are applicable across all partner countries (see Table 1). Most of these products are not only the stand-alone outputs in themselves, but also serve as the basis to develop and/or communicate other country specific outputs.

**Table 1. Transversal products and services of SP GOV**

| Type                                  | Products and services  | Short description  |
|---------------------------------------|--|--|
| <b>Methodologies &amp; tools</b>      | Social partners in VET; Multilevel governance methodology; FRAME methodologies (foresight, review of institutional arrangements, monitoring); VET Financing and costing methodology; Entrepreneurial communities; Criteria for smart territories; pilot project methodologies; country fiches and policy briefs. | A set of specific methodologies for good governance in VET. Ultimately, these methodologies represent analytical approaches developed by ETF. They consist of products that provide theoretical and conceptual basis for ETF's country specific products and services (e.g. Multilevel governance methodology), as well as analytical tools such a foresight methodology for long-term skills needs. |
| <b>Networking &amp; communication</b> | Workshops, conferences and direct consultations.   | Horizontal products which ETF uses for the facilitation of networking and information exchange among stakeholders, as well as for informing them about other thematic products in the area of VET governance.  |

**Source:** Project consortium based on ETF's inputs

Alongside SP GOV, other SPs also work on various aspects of VET governance systems in partner countries. This is because the governance is a cross-cutting issue applicable across all VET policy areas in which these SPs specialise. For example, during the evaluation period as a part of the VET system assessment, Torino Process reports<sup>12</sup> included an overview of VET governance systems for each PC. In a similar vein, the SP responsible for supporting the EU initiatives (SP EU SUPP) integrated a strong emphasis on VET governance in the methodology of IRADA initiative, which will provide technical assistance to eight Tunisian regions starting from late 2017.

Despite such similarities, SP GOV interventions considerably diverge from those of other SPs. In particular, SP GOV focuses on the governance holistically at the level of overall VET system, whereas other SPs (except the one responsible for the Torino Process) cover the governance issues within a specific VET policy area of their specialised expertise. Nonetheless, from the perspective of partner countries there is only one ETF, because stakeholders are not able to link interventions to the activities of a specific SP.

### 2.3. Policy change logic

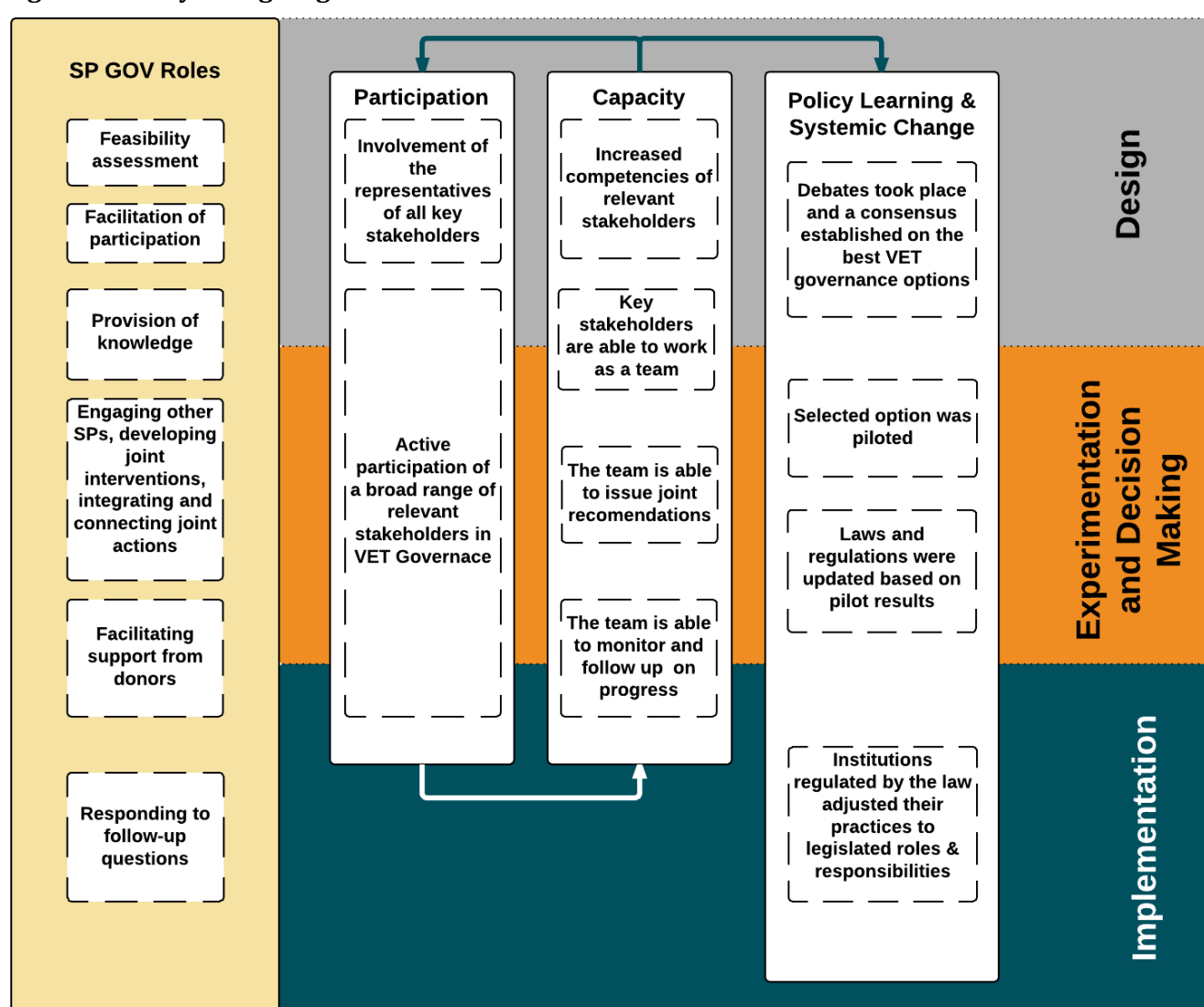
Through its governance interventions ETF aims to engage with the key stakeholders in the area of VET governance, improve their participation in VET policy making, and develop their capacity, as well as strengthen motivation to undertake policy reforms. Ultimately, ETF has to reach a critical

<sup>12</sup> Torino Process reports provide a holistic overview of partner countries' VET systems and cover all thematic areas of ETF's work. Although they are developed under another strategic project (SP TRP), the governance reviews in these reports are based on the methodology developed with a contribution from SP GOV team members. Through these reports all interested stakeholders can receive information on the gaps and the bottlenecks of VET governance system in each partner country. Considering that Torino Process is repeated every two years, the reports also provide information on the progress made in addressing these gaps. In turn, ETF builds on this information to identify the longer-term needs of its partner countries and develop tailored country specific products and services.

mass of individuals from different ministries and social partner organizations who are committed to change and can work together as a team of reformers. The continuous and meaningful engagement with these stakeholders translates into gradual convergence of partner countries' VET governance systems towards a good multilevel governance model through the chain of outcomes and impacts summarised in Figure 1.

As these stakeholders are empowered by SP GOV products and services, their subsequent actions, coupled with ETF's interventions in the field, can materialise into meaningful debates. This in turn can lead to the consensus on the best policy options to introduce principles, institutions and process for good multilevel governance. Successful piloting of the selected policy options can reinforce the consensus and facilitate the implementation of a reform.

**Figure 1. Policy change logic**



**Source.** Evaluation team based on SP GOV work programme 2012-2016

Roles of SP GOV are changing throughout the policy cycle that it is aiming to support. The team has a major role in the design phase, which decreases as the relevant VET governance reform approaches the implementation phase. As a result, SP GOV inputs are also the largest at the design phase during which the team carries out feasibility assessment, facilitates the involvement of the

key stakeholders, supports the development of evidence, helps to identify workable policy alternatives and promotes policy learning. Once the reform moves to the experimentation and decision making phase, SP GOV mainly concentrates on joint actions with other ETF SPs and donors. If (and once) a reform reaches the implementation phase, SP GOV's inputs are mainly limited to responding to follow-up questions of the key actors (e.g. partner country stakeholders, ETF SP members and the representatives of donor organisations).

## 3. RELEVANCE

### 3.1. Relevance of the activities to the needs of partner countries

#### 3.1.1. The emergence of ETF's strategy on VET governance

Differentiating its actions in accordance with the context of partner countries has always been one of the core principles of ETF's interventions. However, in 2012, ETF was not fully ready to plan customized actions in the field of VET governance. Although ETF was familiar with VET governance issues<sup>13</sup>, it had little experience of intervention entirely focused on this area. Moreover, the switch from country-based to thematic interventions had not been completed within the Agency. In the same way, the ETF partner countries were just discovering the concept of good multilevel governance and had difficulties to express their needs in this field. However, starting from 2014, a swift progress was seen and a number of diversified actions were launched by the Agency. This positive trend is reflected in the ETF's programming documents.

In the ETF Mid-Term Perspective 2014-2017, VET Governance has been for the first time presented among the Agency's "main interventions" as one of the seven "thematic areas". Moreover, linked to the overarching concept of multilevel VET governance, examples of diversified types of actions are presented in the document. On the other hand, however, VET Governance is not positioned as a strategic objective on its own<sup>14</sup>. In the Logical framework matrix, VET Governance - as one of the seven thematic areas - has a weak status since "*they [thematic areas] may change in successive work programmes according with the evolving EC priorities*"<sup>15</sup>. Lastly, in the operational chapter of the document, VET governance is hardly mentioned and only two actions (on VET regionalisation in Tunisia and Morocco) are briefly quoted.

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<sup>13</sup> Namely through the IPA projects, most of them included governance components.

<sup>14</sup> VET governance is only mentioned as a sub-category of the Strategic Objective n°2: "Modernise VET systems in a lifelong learning perspective".

<sup>15</sup> *ibid*, page 91

However, in further programming documents<sup>16</sup> updating each year the Mid-Term Perspective 2014-2017, the ETF's strategy on governance has been progressively improved and reinforced. The Work Programme for 2016 significantly clarified the strategy. VET governance was promoted as one of the ETF's "Strategic Project". Four groups of diversified types of targeted outcomes on VET governance are clearly identified<sup>17</sup>. The intervention is focusing on a reduced number of (eight) targeted partner countries in order to achieve significant results. Diversified actions have been planned.

*ETF's strategy on VET governance has progressively improved during the evaluation period by gradual clarification of objectives*

The evaluators conclude that the ETF programming documents demonstrate significant progress of VET governance as one of ETF's strategic objectives. It also includes a clear intervention framework favouring the diversification of actions in the field. The progress was done in a remarkably short period of time, less than three years. It was strongly supported by the robust analyses produced by the Torino Process 2012 and further. In addition, the new priorities of the EU for its external cooperation and assistance created a strong impulse. They emphasised good governance as the key driver for the sound implementation of national reform policies. At the turn of 2015, ETF benefited from additional resources from the EU through the GEMM and the FRAME projects. Their outcomes strongly helped ETF to collect evidence and to develop diversified actions in the field of VET governance. As a result, ETF increased the relevance of its strategy in the field both in line with the EU priorities and with the partner countries' needs and contexts.

The interviews with the representatives of DG DEVCO and DG NEAR showed that the ETF's actions on VET governance were relevant to the objectives of these DGs. A representative of DG DEVCO mentioned that until 2012, VET issues were not at the top of the agenda of this DG. However, they gained considerable importance in the following years. During the period, ETF helped DG DEVCO to elaborate its strategy on VET, including namely the six building blocks approach. Starting from 2015 and taking into account the Riga conclusions, this strategy placed emphasis on the involvement of the social partners and other non-governmental actors in the development of national VET systems. DG DEVCO highly appreciated that by developing a dedicated strategic project on VET governance, ETF put this cross-cutting issue at strategic and operational levels. It resulted in a particularly fruitful cooperation between ETF and EU Delegations as it was the case in Morocco and Tunisia, but also in other PCs at a very early stage of VET development (e.g. Turkmenistan).

Evidence collected throughout the Evaluation indicates that during the evaluation period the SP GOV progressively developed a high level expertise across two key dimensions of its intervention:

- **Holistic approach on VET:** successful SP GOV actions were implemented in PCs that were either at an initial stage of the design of a new overarching law aimed at modernizing their VET system (e.g. Albania, Georgia, Ukraine) or undergoing broad institutional reforms such as VET decentralization (e.g. Morocco, Tunisia, Ukraine).
- **Specialized expertise:** The SP GOV has also developed expertise on the cross-cutting

<sup>16</sup> In particular, the Work Programmes for 2014, 2015 and 2016.

<sup>17</sup> VET legislation, social partners and NGOs involvement, sub-national governance, and dissemination.

thematic issues that reinforced holistic focus of its governance interventions. For instance, the Team developed the capacity to support the design and implementation of innovative coordination mechanisms based on partnerships between the key actors in the VET system (e.g. the pilot projects developed in Morocco, Tunisia and Serbia). The SP GOV has also developed analyses and advice on financing of VET (e.g. in Ukraine).

Despite these positive developments, we have also observed that during the evaluation period within ETF there has been no clear consensus on what exactly SP GOV should focus on. Several ETF staff members thought alike that the scope of these interventions was not always clear. They wished that in the future SP GOV would concentrate its actions primarily on the system-level governance and the corresponding areas that are relevant for multiple lines of reforms (e.g. VET financing and costing; VET laws and strategies). To ensure continuous complementarity of SP GOV interventions, it is logical for other SPs to deal with governance issues related to policy areas of their expertise. In return, this will enable SP GOV to specialise mainly on overarching system-level governance related interventions, thereby creating the foundation and support for more specific interventions of other SPs.

***Consensus within ETF on the specific remit of SP GOV and its links with other SPs is yet to be established***

### 3.1.2. Overall assessment of relevance

Most of the key stakeholders from the three PCs visited expressed their strong approval that ETF has concentrated its interventions on VET governance. For instance, the ETF's decision to focus on VET decentralisation in Ukraine and in Tunisia is said to fully converge with broad national consensus. In the two countries, decentralisation or regionalisation was - as early as 2012 - mentioned<sup>18</sup> as the main option to engage in the modernisation of their VET systems. In Serbia, the ETF's focus on supporting the involvement of non-governmental stakeholders (particularly the social partners) in VET developments was considered as totally in line with the country's priorities.

***ETF demonstrated flexibility and a good capacity to adjust its governance interventions to Partner Country needs***

In the opinion of the interviewees met during the field visits, the ETF's strong capacity to adjust its intervention to the needs and contexts of PCs is twofold: its flexibility, and a set of appropriate activities.

Regarding the ETF's flexibility, most stakeholders interviewed spontaneously praised the way ETF swiftly adjusted its actions and schedule to the evolving context of the country. In Ukraine, where help and advice were needed at the policy and strategic level for drafting the country's first VET law, ETF immediately provided strong assistance in the elaboration of the Green Paper on VET. In addition, ETF's conceptual clarifications on decentralisation options largely supported the policy process.

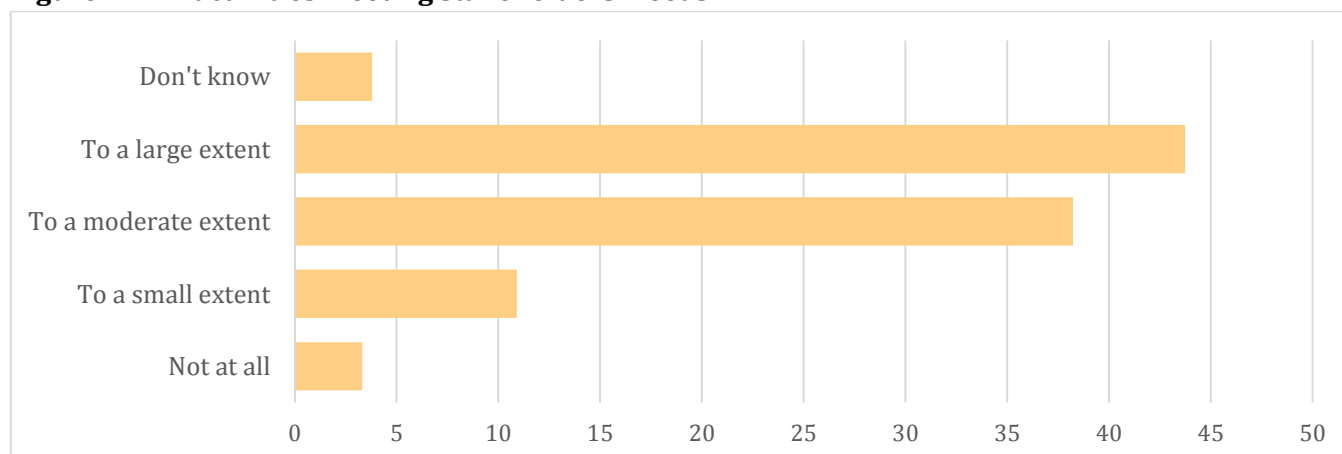
<sup>18</sup> In main policy papers, laws and/or strategies (passed or drafted).

In Tunisia, urgent action was required in order to demonstrate the country's capacity to initiate concrete actions as a follow-up of the broad VET strategy officially approved in 2013. ETF immediately responded by designing and implementing a pilot VET regionalisation project in the Medenine region, followed by another one in the Gabes region.

In Serbia, where the institutionalisation of the Sectoral Councils suddenly froze due to political reasons, ETF helped to overcome the blockage by providing useful assistance to design, and conducted a pilot regional partnership project (in Vojvodina region) focused on development of skills foresight in the ICT sector. This development largely helped to design a model for VET governance at regional and sector levels.

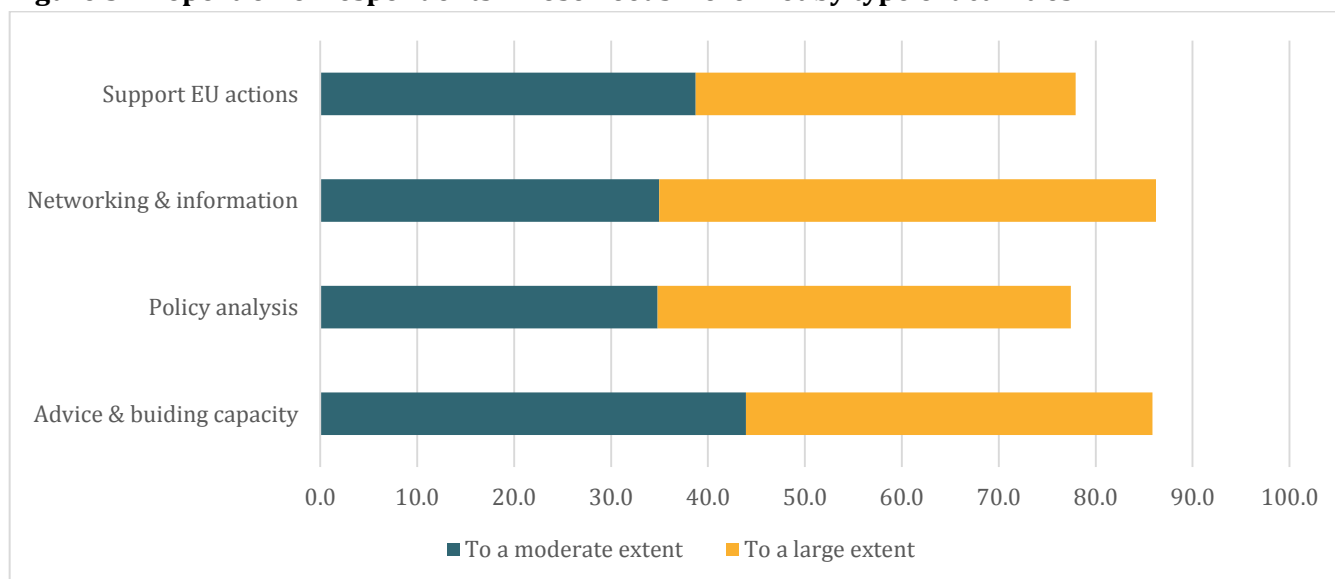
This positive overall assessment is largely confirmed by the results of the survey. More than 80% of the respondents consider that ETF's activities met their needs to a large/ moderate extent.

**Figure 2. ETF activities meeting stakeholders' needs**



**Source:** Consortium survey

As regards the activities ETF undertook in the field of VET governance, the survey results indicate they generally met the needs of the PC stakeholders with slight differences. More than 80% of the respondents benefitting from Policy advice and capacity building and Networking and information exchange activities considered their needs were met to a large or moderate extent. More than 50% of the respondents found the latter activity largely relevant. This can be attributed to ETF's long-lasting presence in the PCs, which helped ETF acquire a deep knowledge of their stakeholders' networks and their needs (as emphasised by most of the interviewees during the field visits). In addition, the ETF's strong international connections were another factor explaining the success of this activity.

**Figure 3. Proportion of respondents whose needs were met by type of activities**

**Source:** Consortium survey

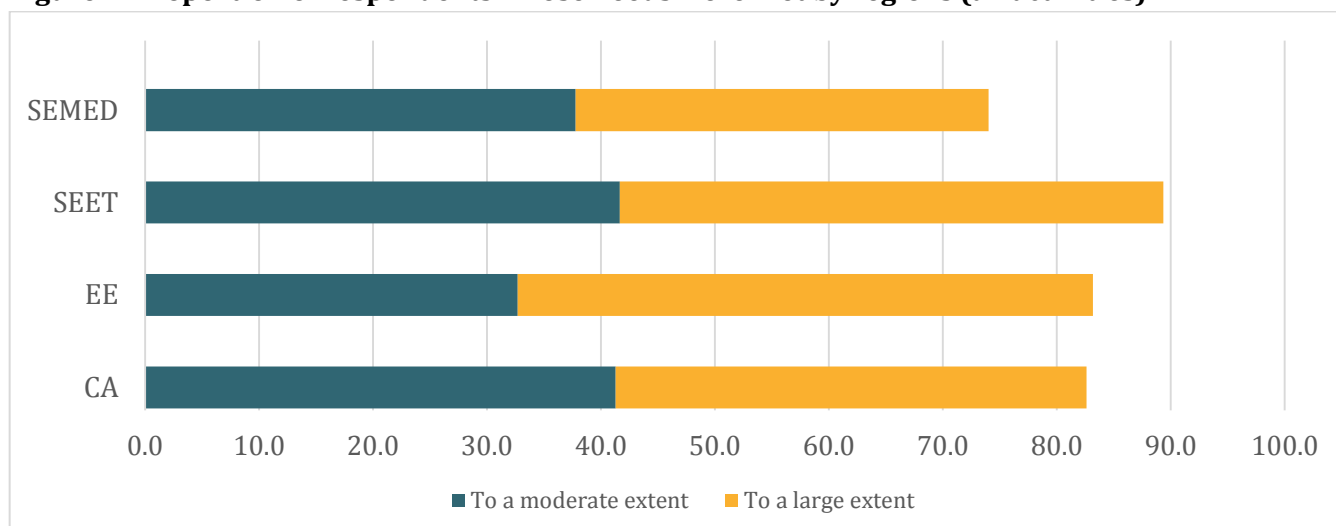
### 3.1.3. Assessment of specific aspects of relevance

Beyond the overall result, the evaluators noted some differentiated opinions among the respondents from the broad geographical regions and also by types of stakeholders.

#### Assessment by geographical regions

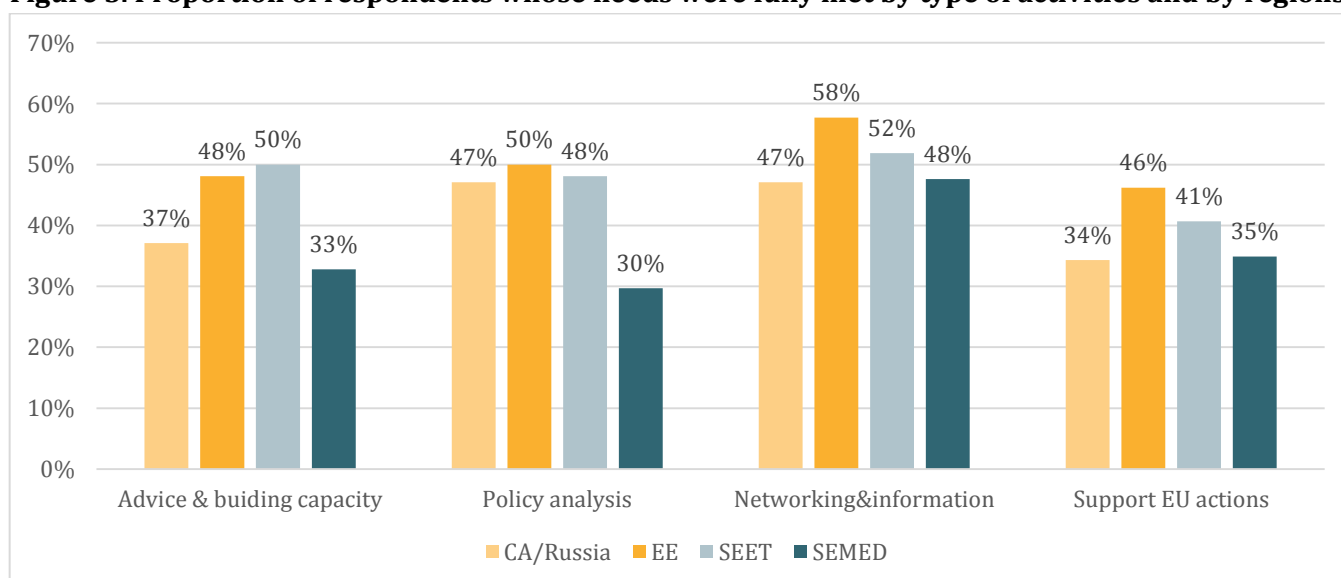
The survey results by regions are roughly similar to the overall assessment, with however some peculiarities. A higher score is noted from the SEET region respondents, with more than 90% considering their needs were met to a large or moderate extent. The proportion decreases to 75% among respondents from the SEMED region. The reason for the lower proportion in the SEMED region can be largely attributed to the difficult political contexts, which seriously hampered the ETF activity on VET governance in some countries - namely Egypt and Algeria. Moreover, the ETF's decision to concentrate its active intervention to a reduced number of PCs (e.g. Morocco, Tunisia and to a lesser extent to Jordan) also explains the moderate assessment from respondents in countries where no or few ETF actions were actually performed. On the other hand, in the SEET region, ETF's active intervention was spread in a higher number of countries and benefited from political contexts<sup>19</sup> favourable to actions in the field of VET governance.

<sup>19</sup> Including the EU priorities directed to the region.

**Figure 4. Proportion of respondents whose needs were met by regions (all activities)**

**Source:** Consortium survey

Regarding the relevance by types of activities, the survey results do not indicate major differences among the regions. Networking and information exchange among stakeholders receives the highest score across all four geographic regions. However, slight differences appear. For the reasons mentioned above, in the SEMED, Providing Policy Analysis less than 30% of the respondents consider their needs were met to a large extent. On the contrary, the proportion reaches around 50% in the EE and CA/Russia. Detailed results indicate for instance a particular high score for Kazakhstan (which is consistent for a country being at an early stage of its VET policy formulation). Lastly, it is noteworthy that in EE Supporting EU actions met the respondents' needs in a relatively higher proportion. These countries are expecting EU decisions for significantly increasing its support to VET developments which remained so far at a limited level for instance in Ukraine.

**Figure 5. Proportion of respondents whose needs were fully met by type of activities and by regions**

**Source:** Consortium survey

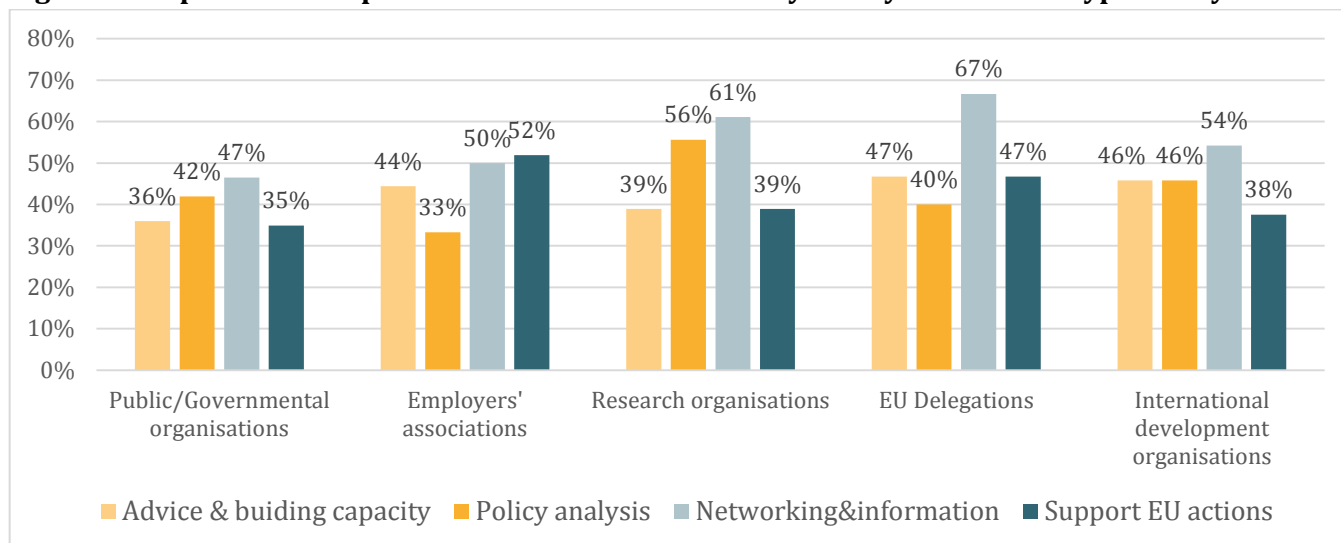
## Relevance by types of stakeholders

The various groups of stakeholders largely share the same view about the relevance of the ETF activities in the field of VET governance. However, some differences appear in the results of the survey as presented below (Figure 6).

- The first noticeable difference is the overall lower level of satisfaction of the Public and the Governmental bodies. According to the evaluators, this lower score reflects very different contexts. In countries with a challenging or “frozen” political situation the public stakeholders were less likely to find “very relevant” the assistance of ETF. In contrast, when the political situation was better, their level of satisfaction was also significantly higher. Moreover, the survey results presented in the Section 4.2.1 indicate that stakeholders from regional, sector or local level found the ETF intervention met their needs better than those of national government officials. The former have traditionally been left out of VET governance systems expressed their satisfaction being more involved in the VET modernisation process (please see Figure 13).
- Another notable difference is the impressive level of satisfaction expressed by the respondents from the EU Delegations with Networking & Information exchange (more than 66% answered that needs were largely met). Answers from open-ended questions and interviews indicate that EU Delegations appreciate this type of activity for two main reasons. Firstly, because it particularly favours the policy dialogue between the relevant ministries on VET modernisation. Secondly, they have benefited from fruitful information exchanges between stakeholders from different PCs. For example one of the interviewed EU delegation particularly appreciated analysis on “what works and what does not work” collected in regional workshops in SEET, EE, and SEMED.
- More than 50% of respondents from Employers’ associations considered that ETF met their needs to a large extent through supporting the actions of the EU institutions and initiatives. Interviewees pointed out that the Employers’ associations often saw the EU Delegations as key institutions for exerting “pressure” on the national governments in order to push forward the expected reforms. This could explain the high level of interest of the employers’ group with strengthening their links with the ETF SP GOV, which is perceived as a very relevant mediator between them, the EU Delegation and the Ministry in charge of VET.
- Lastly, the respondents of research institutions express a significantly higher level of satisfaction regarding Policy analysis. This result is consistent with their own professional interests.<sup>20</sup> Answers to open-ended questions underline respondents’ strong interest in methodology to evaluate and monitor on-going VET reform processes. Some also consider that the methodology helps strengthen their capacity to translate country employers’ needs into policies, by-laws or action-plans and help identify VET modernization priorities.

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<sup>20</sup> Mentioned in the survey open-ended answers.

**Figure 6. Proportion of respondents whose needs were fully met by stakeholder type and by activities**

Source: Consortium survey

### Relevance and capacity building approaches

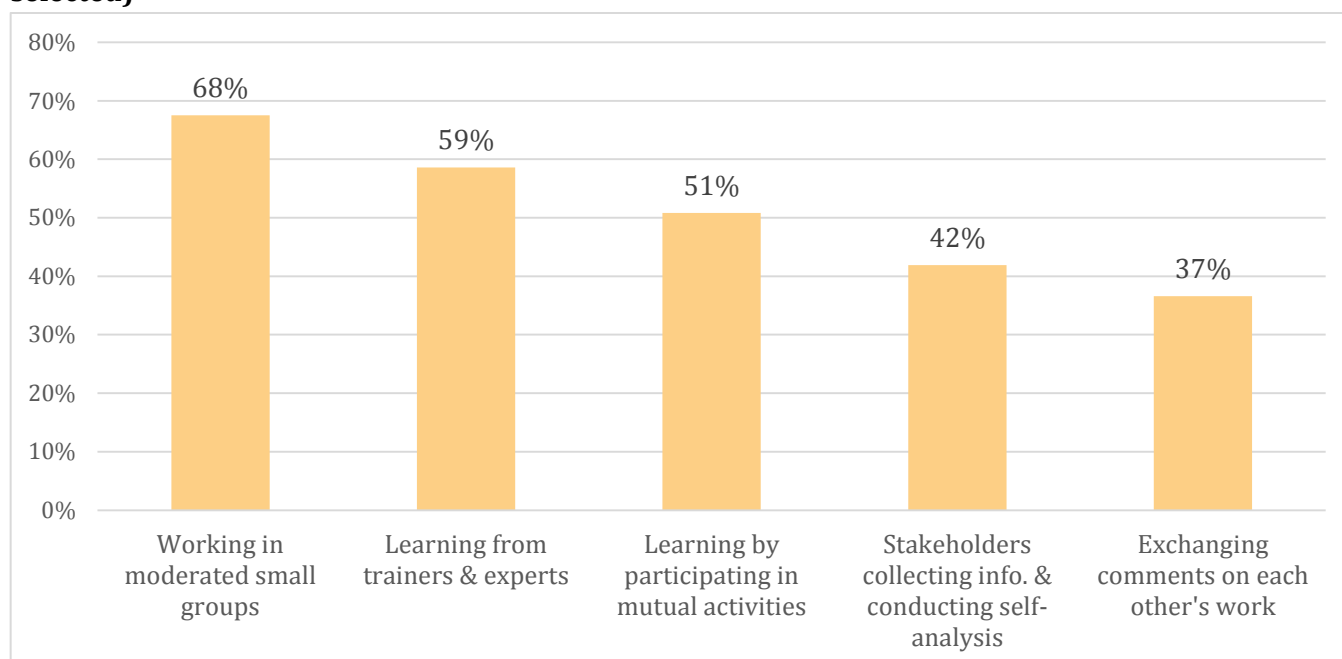
The evaluators also surveyed stakeholders on which capacity-building approaches were considered as the most relevant in the field of VET Governance. The respondents shared the view that embedding capacity building into mainstream work through moderated small groups was the most relevant approach. This trend was confirmed since Learning by participating in common activities also attracted a relatively high number of choices<sup>21</sup>. Nevertheless, the more traditional capacity building approaches like Learning from trainers and experts were also highly appreciated (ranked at the second highest number of choices).

***SP GOV has adopted highly relevant approaches to capacity building in good and multilevel governance***

On the other hand, two capacity building approaches – Collecting information and conducting analysis, as well as Exchanging comments on each other's work - were considered highly relevant by a smaller number of respondents. The former approach was very demanding in terms of time and level of involvement from the stakeholders. The latter required a good level of trust between the participants exchanging feedback - and possible critique - on each other's professional practices.

<sup>21</sup> The respondents were invited to select up to three approaches out of the six proposed.

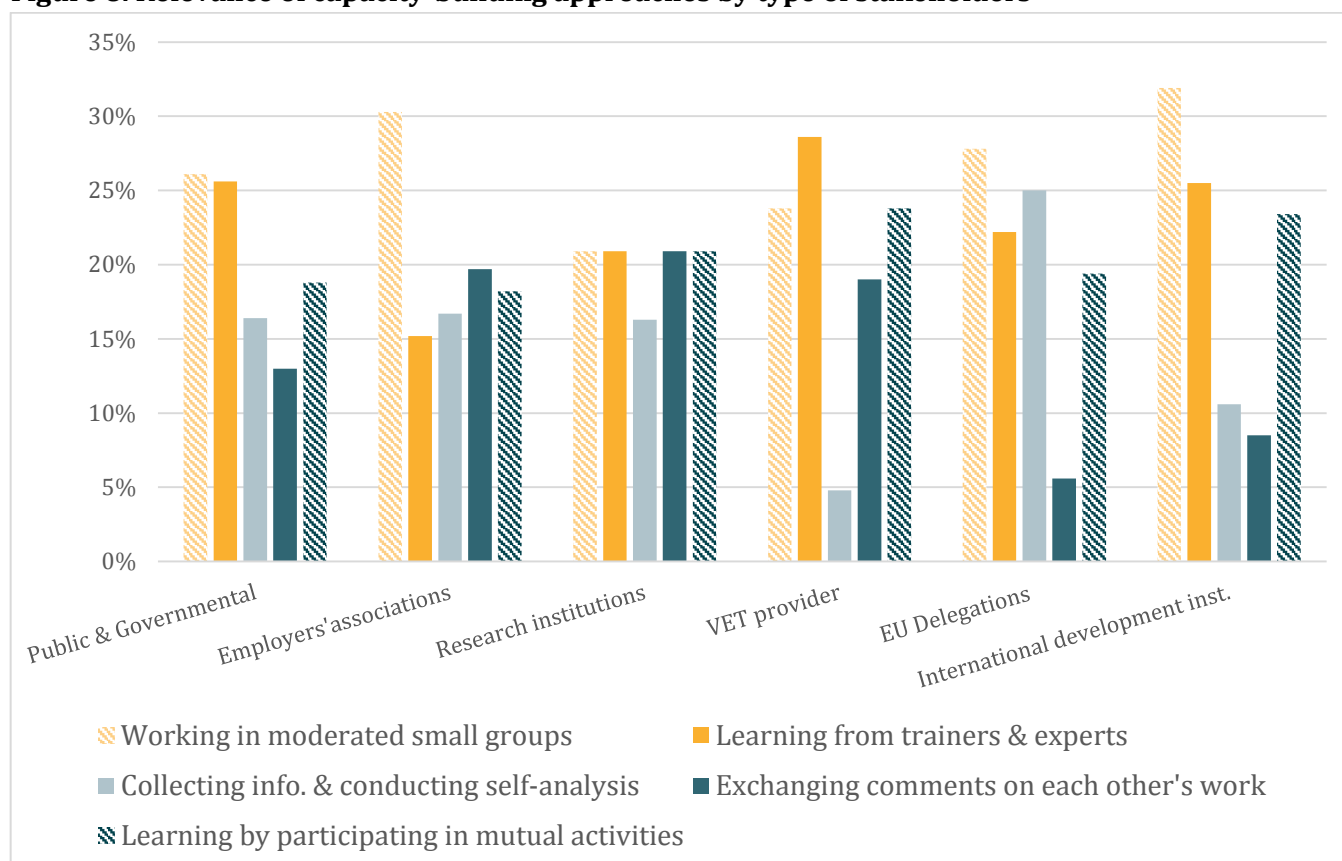
**Figure 7. Capacity-building approaches considered as highly relevant (by number of approaches selected)**



**Source:** Consortium survey

The survey results also provided information about the common views and differences between the various stakeholders groups.

**Figure 8. Relevance of capacity-building approaches by type of stakeholders**



**Source:** Consortium survey

The survey results identified some common opinions:

- All groups of key stakeholders shared the view that capacity building through moderated small groups on real problems was a good approach. This preference is particularly strong among respondents from Employers' associations, International development institutions and the EU Delegations.
- There was also a high degree of consensus that the more traditional learning approaches like Learning from trainers and experts were considered as highly relevant. This opinion was particularly strong among the representatives of Public and Governmental bodies, VET providers and International development institutions.

***Learning from  
trainers/experts and in  
moderated small groups met  
the needs of partner country  
stakeholders particularly well***

The survey indicates also the preference profile of each stakeholders group:

- The respondents from Employers' associations tended to prefer "active" learning approaches. Compared to other stakeholder groups, they were less attracted by Learning from trainers and experts. They favoured the Exchange of comments on each other's work (peer learning). However, they were less attracted by the active approach of Learning by participating in common activities - most probably because it was considered time consuming.
- The VET providers favoured the traditional approach of Learning from trainers and experts but also appreciated learning through Exchanging comments on each other's work. At the same time, they were particularly reluctant to engage in collecting information and conducting self-analysis. A possible explanation could be that VET providers' are less familiar with this type of activity and have a limited access to the data collected by public bodies (Ministries, agencies) or other organisations (chambers, other employers' organisations etc.).
- Public and governmental bodies also particularly appreciated the Learning from trainers and experts approach. They were, however, less attracted by Exchanging comments on each other's work, probably because the exchange of professional practices has been perceived riskier in the political environment they work in.
- Respondents from research institutions were particularly attracted by the Exchange of comments on each other's work. This preference is linked with their interest in methodologies from other national or international experts. Compared to other stakeholder groups, they are less attracted to Working in moderated small groups on real problems and solutions.
- The representatives of the EU Delegations strongly emphasised the Collection of information and conducting self-analysis as a relevant approach. This preference obviously reflected the EU Delegations' strong expectation for being provided with the most relevant and up-dated information about the country background. It is the basis for the design of the EU intervention in the country as well as a proof of the country decision makers' involvement in the reform process. The representatives of the EU Delegations were much less attracted by the exchange of comments on each other's work.

- Lastly, respondents from International development institutions showed an attraction to Learning by participating in common activities, but did not really favour Collecting information, conducting self-analysis and exchanging comments on each other's work – a pattern characteristic to public authorities.

### 3.2. Lessons learnt and further developments

This section sums up the main lessons learnt regarding the relevance of ETF's intervention in the field of VET Governance. It is based on complementary information collected through desk research, interviews, and survey.

#### ***VET Governance: a specific area of intervention or a cross-cutting issue?***

##### POSITIVE ASPECTS

ETF demonstrated that establishing VET governance as a specific area of intervention was a good decision. It brought a much stronger attention to the governance issue. It also encouraged ETF to develop its expertise on issues of a growing importance such as financing for VET, skills councils, innovations or legal matter. Moreover, the VET governance approach matched very well with the way partner countries tended to elaborate their VET strategies around broad strategic objectives, such as decentralisation or involvement of non-governmental stakeholders in VET. In this regard, ETF's holistic approach on governance proved to be particularly relevant. This approach was also progressively fine-tuned during the evaluation period. As a result, the SP GOV implementation plan for 2017 clarified the ETF's strategic objectives and outcomes.<sup>22</sup>

***Establishment of VET governance as a separate thematic area has helped ETF to adopt more holistic approaches to modernization of VET governance than before***

##### LIMITATIONS

Some stakeholders expressed regrets that ETF's experts did not sufficiently complement their advice with activities focused on implementation<sup>23</sup>. This issue raised a more general issue for ETF to address: how could ETF deliver assistance, while at the same time, encourage PCs' stakeholders to perform their "share of the tasks". In other words, how to avoid ETF's "influential role" being confused with the role of a technical assistance Agency in charge of implementing projects.

<sup>22</sup> SP VET governance implementation plan 2017.

<sup>23</sup> This was for instance the case in Ukraine where the Ministry in charge of drafting the VET law regretted that the Green Paper produced with the assistance of ETF did not include an implementation road map. Some other cases were also mentioned, for instance lack of training assistance to present and promote useful tools and guidelines produced by ETF (Serbia).

### ***Progressing through pilot projects.***

#### **POSITIVE ASPECTS**

Most of the ETF's activities in the field of VET governance were developed in the form of pilot projects. The evaluators collected strong evidence that this approach was a good choice. It demonstrated that something "could be done" without waiting for the lengthy and hazardous legal decisions on a very sensitive issue: power sharing. Considering the politically unstable countries in which most of the ETF's interventions take place, the approach proved to be very fruitful.

***SP GOV pilot projects successfully demonstrated the benefits of multilevel VET governance to partner country stakeholders***

#### **LIMITATIONS**

It is true, however, that a pilot project approach also involved risks. The main one was to create artificial activities disconnected from the mainstream administration work. To some extent, ETF's interventions mitigated the risks. For instance, in Tunisia and Morocco the pilot projects were directly managed not by external experts but by the regional manager from the concerned administration. In Serbia, the pilot project was initiated and monitored by regional representatives of the Serbian ICT industrial branch, and local authorities. In addition, the long-lasting ETF presence in the PCs helped to keep ETF's assistance alive even when the project came to its end. However, the SP GOV was well aware that the pilot project-based approach had its limitations. This is the reason why the SP GOV felt the need in 2016 to encompass pilot project activities within two broader objectives (decentralisation and involvement of social partners and other stakeholders in VET)<sup>24</sup>.

### ***Coordinating national and sub-national levels.***

#### **POSITIVE ASPECTS**

The importance of a multilevel good vertical coordination was strongly emphasized in the 2017 SP GOV programming document<sup>25</sup>. In this regard, however the ETF's actions were still at an initial stage. The most obvious reason for this was that decentralised (pilot) activities were just emerging or were not sufficiently disseminated (at least to more than two regions). In this situation, the country administration at national level felt "no pressure" for active redefinition of the roles and responsibilities of national and sub-national level institutions. However, there are also deeper reasons. ETF's experts and the PCs' stakeholders pointed out that "cultural attitudes" references to "values" played a strong role for initiating multilevel cooperation within one administration. In PCs

***SP GOV activities were in line with the principles of good and multilevel VET governance.***

<sup>24</sup> In the ETF SP VET Governance implementation plan 2017, "VET decentralisation" replaces the "territorial" and pilot project-based approach of 2014.

<sup>25</sup> The same document (footnote above) clearly emphasized this coordination issue: "introducing mechanisms for national and sub-national coordination in VET" is mentioned as one of the key targeted outcomes.

where ETF intervention takes place, the decentralisation process is often hindered by an explicit but also invisible (cultural) hierarchy that have to be at least alleviated.

### LIMITATIONS

This is the reason why ETF recently felt the need for developing a new area of expertise and a related methodology to address this “soft” but decisive issue<sup>26</sup>. This new expertise based on cultural behaviour and small cooperation successes, is to be added to the more traditional intervention focused on identification of roles and responsibilities and related legal provision.

***Promoting relevant ministries, social-partners and non-governmental stakeholders in VET policy making.***

### POSITIVE ASPECTS

This has been the second broad objective of ETF’s intervention in the field of VET governance. It has not been a new issue. But it gained a considerable importance toward the second half of the evaluation period. The international donors, encompassed more and more support to VET modernisation in broader interventions - namely on regional development or social inclusion. This put cooperation with other ministries, employers’ organisations, employees’ unions and with other socio-economic stakeholders at the top of ETF’s agenda. As a result, the Agency demonstrated a very good capacity to initiate innovative multi-stakeholder activities. Models of regional public/private cooperation mechanisms on skills analysis, training and employment were successfully tested for instance in Tunisia, Morocco and Serbia. Participative approaches were developed in the drafting of main policy papers on VET in Ukraine.<sup>27</sup>

### LIMITATIONS

However, even if successful, these actions remained limited for two reasons. Firstly, ETF has very limited resources compared to the enlarged circle of stakeholders requesting advice. The second reason was the ETF’s privileged relations with the lead ministry for VET. Hence, representatives of other ministries or employers’ associations expressed wishes were sometimes expressed during the field that ETF could pay more attention to their needs. But they did not question the strong overall relevance of ETF’s actions in their country. In terms of future developments, the evaluators considered that the new set of technical assistance projects planned<sup>28</sup> for 2017/2018 and further, will open windows of opportunity. Encompassing VET and regional development, they will create an additional motivation making progress towards good multilevel governance for VET.

## 3.3. Conclusions

Between 2012 and 2016, ETF demonstrated a high level of capacity to promote good multilevel governance for VET. It did so by swiftly adjusting very relevant interventions to the evolving

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<sup>26</sup> For instance, a « building trust » approach that is being developed at the time of the evaluation.

<sup>27</sup> ETF involved regional stakeholders and social partners through several focus groups in the drafting of the Green Paper for VET.

<sup>28</sup> The IRADA project that will be launched in the second half of 2017 in eight Tunisian region is a good example of the new type of technical assistance project combining regional development and VET modernisation.

contexts of the PCs. This was all the more remarkable having in mind that in 2014, VET governance was just emerging as a core issue for promoting the modernisation of VET systems.<sup>29</sup> Hence, ETF had at the time limited experience for elaborating a solid strategy on VET governance and a diversified set of actions.

Nevertheless during the evaluation period ETF continuously progressed in the elaboration of its strategy on VET governance. At the turn of 2015, the strategy has been based on solid concepts which were further clarified in the 2016 programming document. This work performed in a remarkably short period of time enabled ETF to fully establish VET governance as one of its key strategic projects. Evidence collected through the survey and interviews demonstrate that this now clarified holistic governance-based approach on VET is welcomed by the main ETF's partners and stakeholders.

These achievements resulted from ETF's three main assets: i) a very flexible programming procedure, ii) in-depth analysis of the state of VET governance in PCs (namely based on Torino process, GEMM and FRAME projects) and iii) constant direct contacts with the decision makers for VET in most of the PCs.

The results of desk research, interviews and the online survey of stakeholders provided the evaluators with strong evidence that the ETF's actions to promote multilevel VET governance were extremely relevant and adjusted to the needs and state of development of the PCs and to the profile of the different groups of stakeholders.

Stakeholders from PCs have identified the following areas where ETF can do more in the years to come to address their needs better. Firstly, the evaluators consider that a large part of these expectations is beyond the ETF's very limited resources or its role as a centre of policy expertise rather than a donor organisation.

Based on the findings from the interviews with the key stakeholders, the priority areas for further intervention of SP GOV team could be as follows:

- Multilevel (vertical) cooperation between administrative bodies in charge of VET (namely in decentralisation processes) including development of innovative cooperation mechanisms and related methodology.
- Inter-ministerial cooperation namely in policies or projects involving VET and regional development and/or social inclusion.
- Dissemination of regional/sector models including cooperation with other SPs, namely with: SP TRP (regional diagnostic and related regional VET policies), SP EMPL (for skills needs foresight) and/or SP QUAL.

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<sup>29</sup> Mid-term perspective 2014-2017, Page 19.

- Exchange of experience and further development of experimental institutional cooperation agreements<sup>30</sup> to initiate cooperation activities while official political and legal discussions are still at the discussion stage.
- Further work on financing for VET including innovative public and private cost-sharing at sector, regional/local and school level including exchange of best practices across PCs.
- Increased integration of the local/school level into regionalisation process.

The evaluators were convinced that the ETF SP GOV team have already identified the importance of the above issues and have begun to engage in some development works to address them.

## 4. EFFECTIVENESS AND ADDED VALUE

In line with the policy change logic (see Figure 1), to evaluate the effectiveness of the Agency's activities in the area of VET governance, we first assess the extent to which SP GOV immediate stakeholders utilised the products and service in their work (section 4.1). Next, we evaluate the extent to which these have translated into specific effects on the ground (section 4.2). We then look at the extent to which these effects have been sustained in PCs (section 4.3). Following this, we assess whether such results could have been achieved without SP GOV interventions (section 4.4). Finally, in the last section we present conclusions of this chapter (section 4.5).

### 4.1. Products and services

In the context of this evaluation, stakeholders' ability to utilise SP GOV products and services is understood in terms of how useful and used these outputs were by ETF's immediate stakeholders. Overall the interview and survey findings show that these stakeholders have highly utilised most of the products and services.

***Stakeholders have highly utilized SP GOV products & services***

In the online survey, we have asked the respondents to assess the extent to which ETF's products and services they are familiar with were useful for them to obtain information related to VET governance. A large majority of surveyed stakeholders found them useful to a moderate or to a large extent for obtaining all types of information they aimed to provide (see Table 2). Thematically,

ETF's products and services were the most successful in informing PCs about the ways and means for improving coordination between stakeholders.

<sup>30</sup> An interesting example of such provisory agreement, mentioned above, is the one established in Serbia between the Ministry for Education and the employers' regional association of the ICT sector while the law on skills council was still pending.

**Table 2. Usefulness of ETF's products and services for obtaining different types of information about VET governance issues.**

|   | Do not know | They did not contain this information | Not at all | To a small extent | To a moderate extent | To a large extent |
|---|-------------|---------------------------------------|------------|-------------------|----------------------|-------------------|
| Feasibility and effectiveness of different VET governance options                 | 5%          | 4%                                    | 4%         | 14%               | 45%                  | 27%               |
| Progress made on the implementation of VET governance options                     | 6%          | 3%                                    | 3%         | 15%               | 45%                  | 28%               |
| Ways and means to identify VET governance options                                 | 3%          | 3%                                    | 3%         | 10%               | 48%                  | 34%               |
| Options for addressing the problems and gaps in VET Governance system             | 2%          | 3%                                    | 3%         | 12%               | 42%                  | 39%               |
| Roles and functions of your organization and other stakeholders in VET Governance | 1%          | 3%                                    | 5%         | 9%                | 42%                  | 41%               |
| Existing problems and gaps in VET governance                                      | 1%          | 1%                                    | 4%         | 8%                | 44%                  | 42%               |
| Ways and means to improve coordination between stakeholders                       | 2%          | 1%                                    | 4%         | 10%               | 39%                  | 45%               |

**Note:** Based on the survey question “to what extent have ETF's products and services that you are familiar with been useful to the organisation you represent to obtain the following types of information.” The shading scheme indicates the extent to which respondents responded to a particular answer category. The darker the shading, the more respondents chose that particular answer category.

In line with the survey respondents, interviewees also highly appreciated ETF's products in the area of VET governance. There was an agreement across all focus countries that these products provided highly useful information. For instance, public authorities as well as social partners from Serbia and Tunisia noted the usefulness of ETF's methodology for surveying employers and identifying labour market needs. In turn, social partners from Ukraine emphasised the usefulness of ETF's VET financing report. Moreover, respondents in Ukraine considered ETF's events not only useful for increasing their knowledge but also for facilitating informal networking. For instance, stakeholders pointed out that participation in the events has helped regional authorities to form new “information network for sharing experiences.” In a similar vein, all interviewed representatives of the EU Delegations and the Commission emphasised the high quality of ETF's expertise in the field of governance and the usefulness of the Agency's inputs for the development of their interventions.

## Box 2. Green Paper in Ukraine

The Green Paper was the first major report from ETF on VET decentralization. It fine-tuned country diagnostics and lessons learned from ETF intervention in other partner countries. The Green Paper provided Ukrainian decision makers with a detailed picture of the advantages and constraints of the VET decentralization reform and process.

In terms of the content, most respondents emphasized that although the problems raised in the Green Paper were not new, it made a correct emphasis and suggested interesting policy options for decentralisation through regionalisation. Some regrets were expressed that the Green Paper did not address the issues of continuing vocational education and training (CVET), as well as the curriculum development at the regional level. In addition, representatives of MOES also regretted that the Green Paper did not provide sufficient information on how to incorporate contextual factors of the regions in the process of decentralisation.

Moreover, representatives of VET provider, Ministry of Social Policy, and the Kiev City Council, thought that the Green Paper was timely because the information they have received will enable them to inform the discussions on the upcoming “law on VET”. In contrast, representatives of a sector, employers and the Ministry of Education and Science (MoES) alike thought that the Green Paper was belated and had a limited utility because drafting the Law was in the final stage.

**Source:** In-depth interviews in Ukraine

It is noteworthy that not all products were praised alike in the countries selected for in-depth analysis. More specifically, there was a mixed appreciation for the Green Paper which was ETF’s flagship product aiming to assist Ukraine’s efforts for decentralisation of VET governance (see Box 2 above). Furthermore, stakeholders in all three countries were in agreement that some of ETF’s products (the following specific examples were mentioned –Green Paper, and FRAME guides) were too technical and mostly useful for those immediate stakeholders who have participated in the Agency’s events.<sup>31</sup> High degree of technicality of these products could be an important constraint on the Agency’s efforts to build a critical mass of multiplayers in the area of VET governance.

***Some products were too complex and constrained stakeholders from acting as effective multipliers***

Indeed, in Ukraine complexity of ETF’s products somewhat constrained some stakeholders from acting as effective multipliers. As emphasized by a civil servant, the materials that local stakeholders develop on the basis of ETF’s inputs are not as trusted as the ones developed by the Agency itself. This is because the ETF has “European prestige” and a high trust in

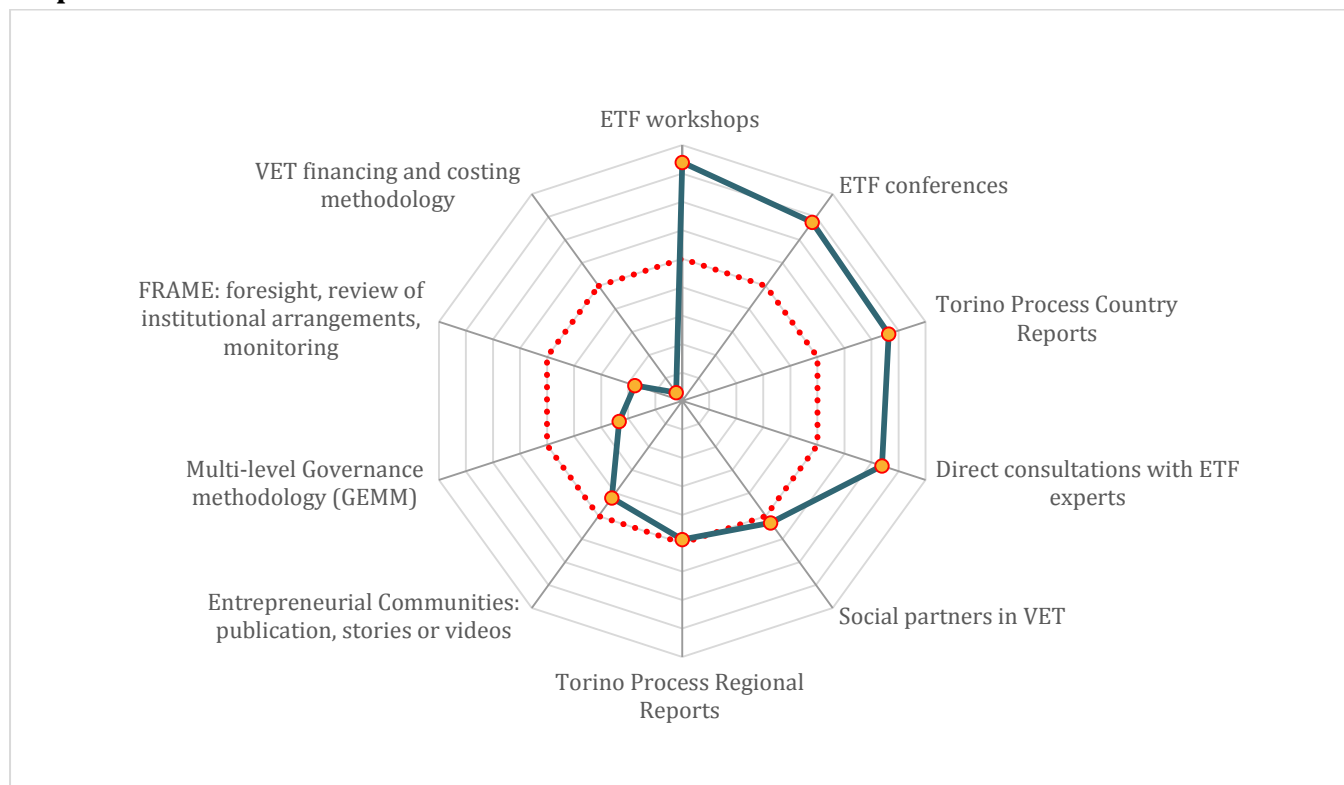
the eyes of national and regional decision makers, whilst local stakeholders are thought to have limited capacity. Interviewees pointed out that stakeholders would be more effective in convincing the key decision makers on the utility of ETF’s participatory approaches if they immediately presented them materials developed by the Agency in collaboration with the relevant national actors. In a similar vein, stakeholders in Serbia and Tunisia also pointed out that ETF should focus more on the stakeholders beyond the Agency’s “immediate counterparts” by providing products that do not consist of “heavy detailed texts.”

Furthermore, the survey results show high uptake of ETF’s products and services across partner countries. On average 78% of respondents have used transversal products in their work occasionally or every time when there was an opportunity to do so (see Figure 9). Separately taken

<sup>31</sup> Considering that the stakeholders surveyed were from this group, high level satisfaction among them on the usefulness of ETF’s products and services is not surprising.

each of these products were used by more than half of the surveyed respondents, however, it is also evident that certain products were significantly better utilised than others.

**Figure 9. Comparative usage of ETF's transversal products and services among survey respondents**



**Note:** Based on the survey question “when there was an opportunity, how frequently have you used the following ETF’s products and services in the field of VET Governance for your work in 2012 – 2016.” Each ring represents  $\pm 5\%$  shift from the average number (78%) of respondents who have used ETF’s key products and services in their work “occasionally” or “every time” when there was an opportunity to do so (red dotted ring). Rings inside the red dotted ring are below the average, whereas the rings outside the red dotted ring are above the average. Whilst, the workshops (95%) were the most used type of ETF products, VET financing and costing methodology (55%) was the least used one.

A clearly visible tendency is that stakeholders have used the networking and communication products more than methodological products (see Figure 9). This is not surprising considering that workshops, conferences and consultations are horizontal products where various thematic products are discussed or presented, thereby appealing to a widest range of stakeholders with diverging interests. Another visible tendency is that Torino Process reports were also more used than most methodological products (except social partners in VET). This as well could have been expected given that country specific products are likely to resonate better among PC stakeholders than broader methodological products.

Interestingly, Torino Process country reports were used as horizontal products, meaning that these reports can satisfy the needs of partner country stakeholders to a same extent as for example direct consultations with ETF experts. This singles out Torino Process reports as the most successful type of publication that has a VET governance dimension. All meaning that the methodology provided by the SP GOV for carrying out Torino Process VET governance reviews were also highly useful. The importance of the Torino Process is further re-affirmed in the country and EU level interviews. For

instance, the majority of the interviewees in all three focus countries identified Torino Process reports as the most useful product, linking its success to its ability to address their pressing need for the identification of gaps in the governance systems of their country, as well as to the provision of comparative perspectives from other countries and regions.

The key transversal methodologies developed by ETF in the field of VET governance also diverge in terms of their uptake. In particular, notably fewer surveyed respondents have used ETF's work on the VET financing and costing methodology, products of the FRAME project, and multilevel governance methodology than other such products (Social Partners in VET and Entrepreneurial Communities).

A possible explanation for the relatively low uptake of GEMM and FRAME methodologies could be that they are less visible in some countries because the windows of opportunity to communicate them has not yet materialised (we return to the usefulness of VET financing and costing methodology later in this section). Multilevel governance methodology, mainly developed and tested via GEMM project that was carried out in SEMED region, was used by 83% of surveyed stakeholders representing this region. In contrast, only 48% of surveyed stakeholders representing CA/Russia region reported using this product in their work. In a similar vein, products of FRAME project carried out in SEET region were used by 74% surveyed stakeholders in the region. In turn, in the SEMED region it was used only by 40%.

***Increased visibility of methodologies will improve their uptake***

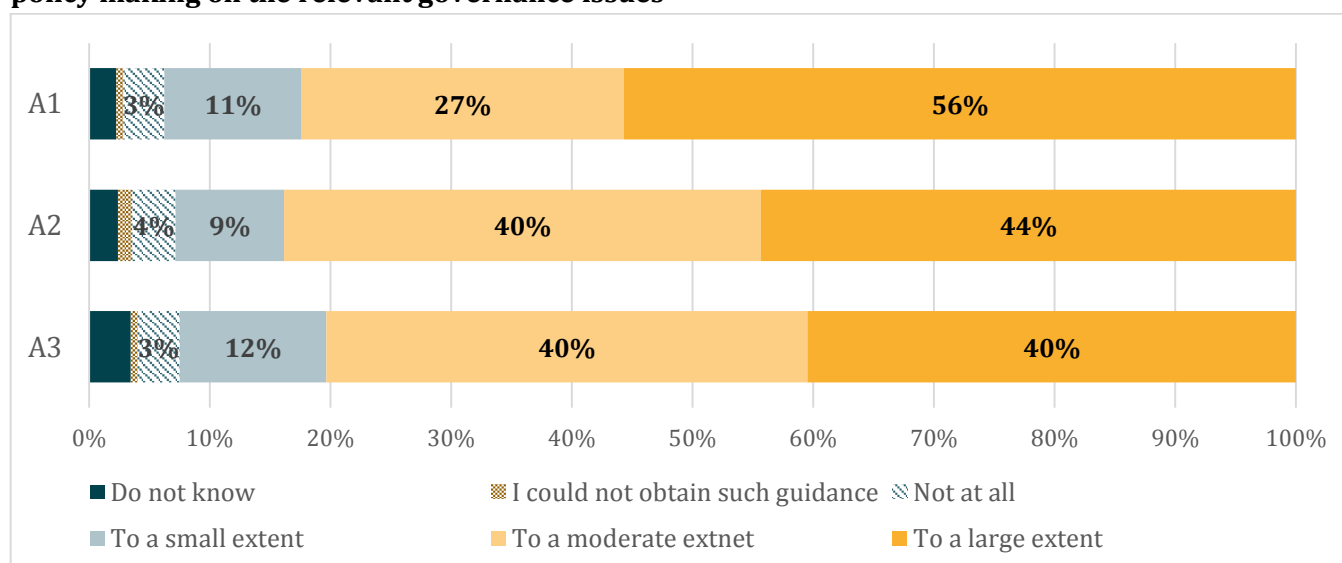
***Stakeholders found analytical tools highly useful***

The Table 3 below shows that alongside transversal products the ETF has offered useful analytical tools in the field that the majority of surveyed stakeholders have successfully utilised in their work. At least half of the respondents used these tools for each purpose they targeted. Only a very small number thought that the tools are not useful for them (not more than 7%). Comparatively, ETF's analytical tools were most utilised for "mapping processes and coordinating them" and least utilised for "mapping VET financing and funding systems." Given our earlier finding that "VET financing and costing methodology" is also significantly less used by the survey respondents than other methodologies (see Figure 9 above) there seems to be some space for ETF to improve its approach to this area.

**Table 3. Stakeholders' ability to utilise analytical tools in their work**

|  | Do not know | They were not intended for this activity or purpose | Not at all | To a small extent | To a moderate extent | To a large extent |
|--|-------------|---|------------|-------------------|----------------------|-------------------|
| Mapping VET financing and funding systems  | 15%         | 7%  | 7%         | 23%               | 37%                  | 12%               |
| Unfolding the innovation potential of institutions, organizations, sectors, etc.                           | 11%         | 6%  | 7%         | 22%               | 34%                  | 20%               |
| Mapping the institutional arrangements in the VET sector   | 8%          | 4%  | 4%         | 16%               | 39%                  | 30%               |
| Identifying skill development initiatives of entrepreneurial communities and actors                        | 7%          | 3%  | 4%         | 20%               | 34%                  | 32%               |
| Monitoring the implementation of VET policies  | 6%          | 3%  | 3%         | 13%               | 38%                  | 37%               |
| Conducting analysis and issuing recommendations related to VET Governance system                           | 4%          | 2%  | 3%         | 12%               | 40%                  | 39%               |
| Mapping processes and coordinating them (e.g. skills needs assessment and qualifications improvement, etc) | 5%          | 1%  | 3%         | 12%               | 34%                  | 44%               |

**Note:** Based on the survey question “to what extent have the ETF’s analytical tools that you are familiar with been useful to the organisation you represent for the following activities and purposes.” The shading scheme indicates the extent to which respondents responded to a particular answer category. The darker the shading, the more respondents chose that particular answer category.

**Figure 10. Usefulness of ETF’s products and services which guide stakeholders on how to inform VET policy making on the relevant governance issues**

**Note:** Based on the survey question “How useful was ETF’s guidance for you to obtain necessary skills for using analytical tools in your work.” The figure excludes those respondents who did not seek such guidance. Following are the categories: A1 = “Special events presenting the tools, explaining how to use them, or applying them in practice”; A2 = “Individual consultations”; A3 = “Written guidance manuals accompanying the tools”.

***Stakeholders seeking guidance on analytical tools have received and found it useful***

Survey respondents' ability to successfully utilise ETF's analytical tools corresponds well with their perception on the usefulness of ETF's guidance accompanying these tools (see Figure 10). The majority of the respondents who sought such guidance, were actually able to obtain it (only less than 1% reported that they could not). Not only was the guidance

available for them but it also proved highly useful in equipping stakeholders it reached with necessary skills for utilising the tools. The majority of the respondents thought that all three types of guidance that ETF has offered was useful for them to a moderate or large extent to obtain necessary skills for using analytical tools in their work. The figure also shows that the stakeholders were able to improve their skills through group work better than through individual or written guidance. This is because, ETF's events were useful to a large extent to the largest share of survey respondents (56%).

## 4.2. Effects of SP GOV interventions on the modernisation of VET Governance

ETF can only act as an indirect catalyst for systemic change, whereas the ownership for change is in the hands of decision makers in PCs. As a result, it is impossible to attribute the developments (or their lack) in governance systems of PCs to the Agency's interventions. Despite this difficulty, as the survey findings show, following the logical sequence of effects, it is possible to demonstrate ETF's contribution to the modernisation of VET governance systems.

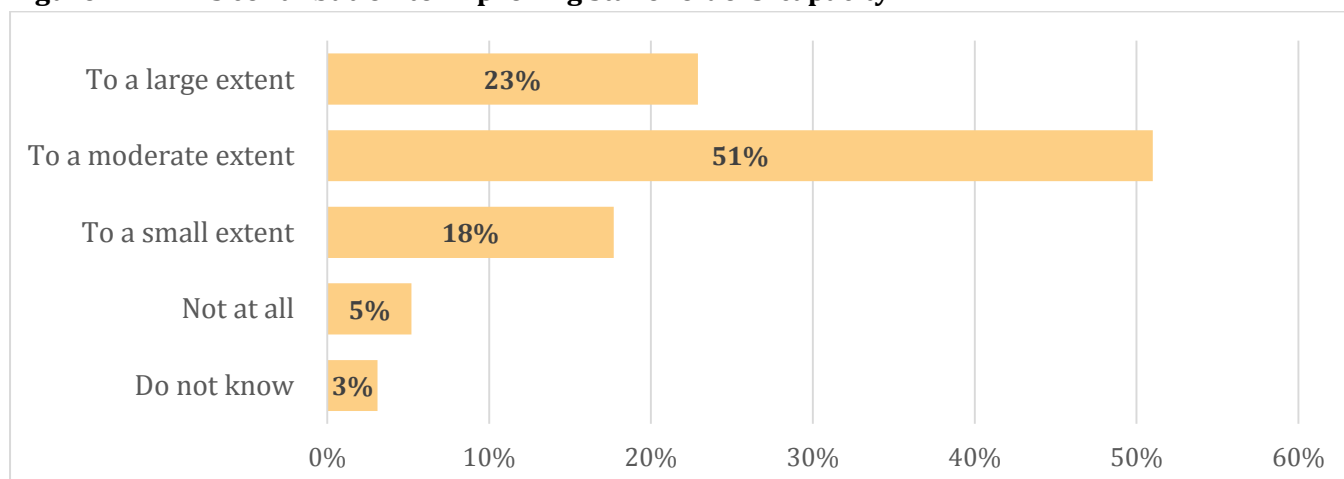
Overall, the findings show that ETF has already made a considerable contribution to the modernisation of VET governance systems in PCs. Contribution is strongest at the level of improving capacity and facilitating participation of relevant stakeholders in VET policy making. However, it decreases when we consider actual reforms on the ground.

***SP GOV interventions have improved stakeholders' capacity and facilitated participation in VET policy making***

### 4.2.1. Stakeholder Capacity

Interview and survey findings indicate that ETF's governance interventions have strongly increased stakeholders' capacity to take part in VET policy making. However, the findings also show that the lack of capacity is still one of the key obstacles to the modernisation of VET governance systems (we return to this issue in the section 4.3). This means that despite positive results there is still a high demand for capacity building products and services.

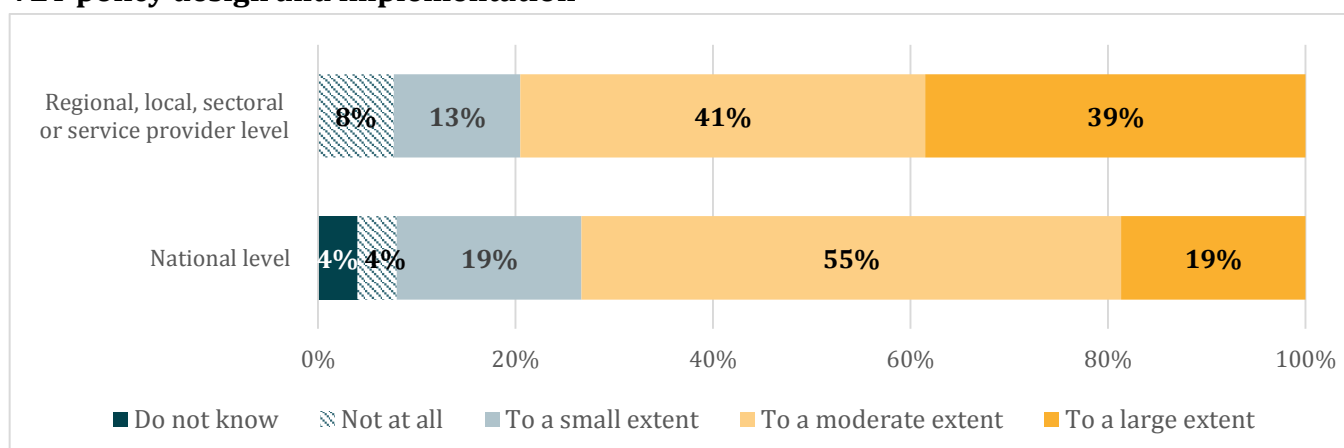
The majority of surveyed respondents think that the capacity of their organisation to contribute to the design and implementation of VET policies has increased to a large or moderate extent due to ETF's products and services (see Figure 11). Only 5% of the respondents thought that ETF has not made any contribution in this regard.

**Figure 11. ETF's contribution to improving stakeholders' capacity**

**Note:** Based on the survey question “to what extent have ETF products and services increased the capacity of the organisation you represent to contribute to the design and implementation of VET policies”.

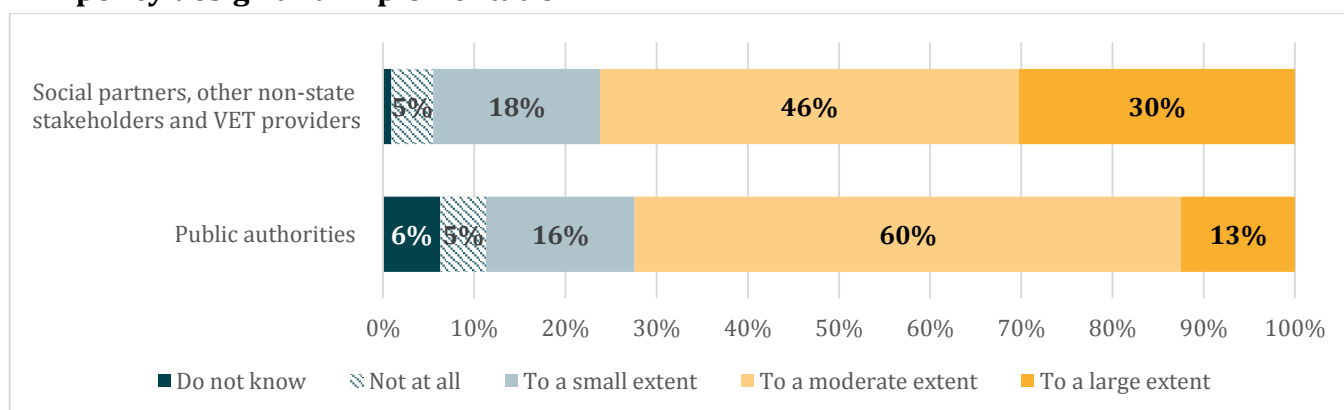
More detailed look at the survey results show that the actors who have been traditionally left out from the VET governance systems in partner countries have improved capacity more from ETF's governance interventions than more established actors (see Figure 12 and Figure 13). The share of stakeholders who thought that ETF increased their capacity to a large extent is twice as high at regional, local, sectoral or service provider level (39%) than at the national level (19%). In a similar vein, about twice as large share of social partners, other non-state stakeholders and VET providers (30%) thought that ETF increased their capacity to a large extent than the share of public authorities (13%).

***Capacity of those stakeholders who have been traditionally left out from decision making process has improved the most***

**Figure 12. ETF's contribution to the increase of stakeholders' capacity to act effectively in VET policy design and implementation**

**Note:** Based on the cross tabulation of the survey question “to what extent have ETF products and services increased the capacity of the organisation you represent to contribute to the design and implementation of VET policies” with “Which of the following levels best describe the main focus of your organisation's activities in your country”.

**Figure 13. ETF's contribution to the increase of stakeholders' capacity to act effectively in VET policy design and implementation**



**Note:** Based on the cross tabulation of the survey question “to what extent have ETF products and services increased the capacity of the organisation you represent to contribute to the design and implementation of VET policies” with “what type of organisation do you work in or mostly work for”. The responses in the second survey question were grouped as follows: (Public authorities) = “Public/governmental institution”; (Social partners, other non-state stakeholders and VET providers) = “Employer’s association/ Business/ industry/ chamber of commerce”; “Trade union”; “Other non-state association”; “Research and/ or higher education institution”; “VET provider”; “EU Delegation”; “International development actor”; “Other”.

At country level, we have observed various examples that are in line with survey findings showing that the capacity of stakeholders increased. For instance, nearly all respondents interviewed in Tunisia were in agreement that pilot projects led by ETF in Medenine and Gabes regions (see Box 3) have improved the capacity of regional private and public stakeholders. Interviewees emphasized that due to the direct “coaching” by ETF, stakeholders highly progressed in their ability to analyse their environment, develop partnerships and informal networks, as well as to coordinate the design and implementation of VET regional projects.

### Box 3. VET governance pilot-project in Gabes, Tunisia

With the support of ETF, between 2013-2015 Ministry of Vocational Training and Employment in Tunisia has implemented the regional pilot-project in Gabes. It was funded in the context of GEMM and was based on ETF’s methodology tested in the Medenine region. The project aimed to strengthen the capacity of regional stakeholders in the design and implementation of strategies to develop human resources in general and to address the employability of young people in the region. The pilot-project focused only on the construction and maintenance sectors in the region.

The project established two partnership groups at regional (Regional Committee) and national (National Committee) level representing a range of state and non-state stakeholders including the Ministry, trade unions, employers and VET providers. The Regional Committee operated locally in Gabes region and reported to National Committee, which oversaw the overall implementation of the pilot-project. Through these partnerships stakeholders carried out labour market needs analysis in the focus sectors. Furthermore, to ensure successful implementation, the project envisioned two other components – (1) the capacity building for stakeholders, and (2) the actual pilot-training for the jobseekers.

The first component involved coaching of “Regional Directorate of Vocational Training and Employment” – a regional representatives of the Ministry responsible for the coordination of

the pilot-project locally. It also included the training of employment counsellors, apprenticeship counsellors and human resources managers who were responsible for the actual analysis and the utilisation of ETF's analytical tools. The second component also consisted of two phases, first being the mapping of jobseekers and their qualification level, followed by the provision of actual training based on the identified labour market needs.

**Source:** ETF (2016), Compendium of Pilot Projects, GEMM Governance for Employability in the Mediterranean.<sup>32</sup>

Stakeholders in Ukraine and Serbia emphasized the lack of their own capacity to take part in VET policy making. Stakeholders' ability to identify internal gaps means that their capacity has actually grown. For instance, social partners in Ukraine pointed out that ETF governance reviews helped them understand that their regional representatives lacked necessary skills to get involved in the regional governance initiatives. Furthermore, across different types of stakeholders in all three countries the most requested type of intervention from ETF was training and capacity building events. Growing demand for ETF's assistance in this area further proves that the stakeholders' are becoming more self-reflective and knowledgeable about the gaps in their governance systems.

#### 4.2.2. Participation, Design and Implementation

Alongside improving capacity, ETF governance interventions also made a strong contribution to facilitating participation of relevant actors in VET policy making (see Table 4). More than half of the surveyed respondents indicated that ETF's support was important or the main driver for the involvement of new types of stakeholders and for more active participation of a broad range of relevant stakeholders in the design and implementation of VET policies.

The active participation and increased capacity of the relevant stakeholders translated into more effective debates about the design of the governance systems leading to the consensus on the best ways forward. More than half of the survey respondents thought that ETF provided strong support for establishing such consensus. The interview findings confirm that ETF's actions helped achieve a broad consensus among the stakeholders on some VET governance reforms. For instance, in Tunisia and Ukraine, state and non-state actors were in agreement that decentralisation of VET governance should happen through delegating more functions to regional actors. In turn, interviewees in Serbia thought that the stronger involvement of social partners and local actors is the key to the good VET governance in their country. Hence, the stakeholders already understand and value the benefits of multilevel governance model. Moreover, they also recognise the relevance of actors at different levels of their VET systems.

***Active participation and improved capacity has led to meaningful debates among key stakeholders***

<sup>32</sup> Available at:

[http://www.etf.europa.eu/webatt.nsf/0/22BFC01175CEA81AC125803A003082F2/\\$file/GEMM%20compendium.pdf](http://www.etf.europa.eu/webatt.nsf/0/22BFC01175CEA81AC125803A003082F2/$file/GEMM%20compendium.pdf)

**Table 4. ETF's contribution to the modernisation of VET governance systems in partner countries**

|  | Do not know | There were no developments in this area | ETF did not provide any support | ETF provided some support | ETF provided important support | ETF was the main driver of change |
|--|-------------|---|---------------------------------|---------------------------|--------------------------------|-----------------------------------|
| More active participation of a broad range of relevant stakeholders in design and implementation of VET policies     | 6%          | 2%                                      | 3%                              | 31%                       | 44%                            | 15%                               |
| Involvement of new types of stakeholders in design and implementation of VET policies                                | 9%          | 3%                                      | 2%                              | 33%                       | 42%                            | 11%                               |
| Debates took place and a wide consensus established on the best VET governance options                               | 8%          | 2%                                      | 2%                              | 34%                       | 39%                            | 15%                               |
| Laws and regulations were updated to establish the principles, institutions and processes for good governance in VET | 13%         | 6%                                      | 12%                             | 36%                       | 25%                            | 8%                                |
| Implementation of these laws and regulations   | 16%         | 7%                                      | 13%                             | 38%                       | 24%                            | 3%                                |

**Note:** Based on the survey question “to your knowledge, how important was ETF's contribution to the following developments in your country”. The shading scheme indicates the extent to which respondents responded to a particular answer category. The darker the shading, the more respondents chose that particular answer category.

***Debates have translated into consensus that MLG is a way forward, however, systemic reforms are yet to materialize***

Moving from outputs to long-term impacts the share of stakeholders who thought that ETF's contribution was high decreased. This is not surprising, because the level of ETF's control and influence is diminishing in comparison to external factors such as the decisions made by the

governments of the PCs or forces that are even beyond their control (we return to this issue in the section 4.3). With this consideration, it is remarkable that even at a policy implementation level, a notable share of surveyed stakeholders thought that ETF's interventions have made strong contributions. About a third of the surveyed stakeholders thought that ETF's interventions were important or the main drivers for translating the established consensus into corresponding laws or regulations. Moreover, about a quarter of the respondents also thought the same regarding the implementation of these laws and regulations by VET institutions.

It is noteworthy that the majority of those respondents who observed ETF's contribution in all abovementioned areas, thought that the Agency was not the main driver for change. This is a very positive result because it means that the main driver for change was a critical mass of partner country stakeholders, whereas, the ETF was an important facilitator of change. Considering that ETF aims to build a team of key stakeholders committed to

***Interventions have made a considerable contribution to building a team of reformers in Partner Countries***

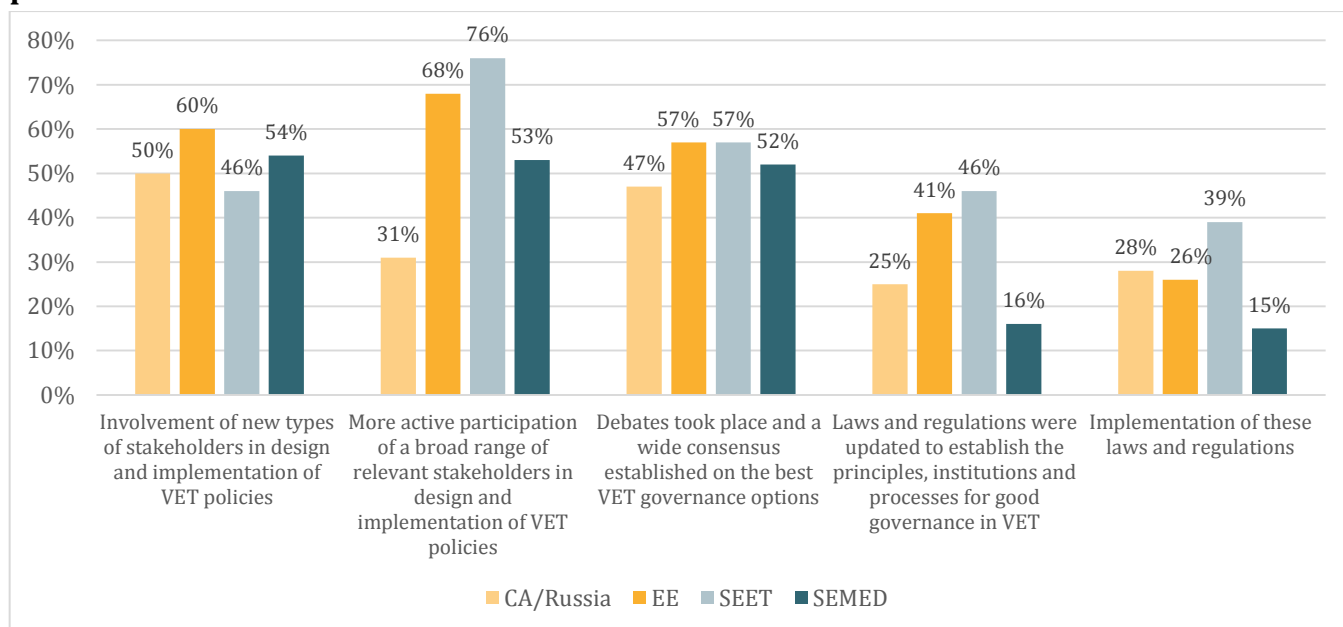
and competent for reforming VET systems, this finding is not surprising and shows that the Agency has already had a considerable success towards this objective.

#### 4.2.3. Contribution across geographic regions

Impact of ETF governance interventions was not isolated in one PC or in one geographic region (see Figure 14). This could have been expected given our findings that ETF was successful in differentiating its governance interventions based on PC needs (see Chapter 3). The figure also shows that the impact in CA/Russia and SEMED region was slightly lower than in EE and SEET regions. This is because the share of respondents who highly appreciated ETF contribution...

- A. ...to facilitating active participation of stakeholders in VET governance is about twice smaller in CA/Russia (31%) than in EE (68%) or SEET (76%) regions;
- B. ...to updating relevant laws or regulations is about twice smaller in CA/Russia (25%) and SEMED (16%) than in EE (41%) or SEET (46%) regions;
- C. ...to implementation of updated laws and regulations is about twice smaller in SEMED (15%) than in any other geographic region (between 26-39%).

**Figure 14. ETF's contribution to the modernisation of VET governance systems across partner countries**



**Note:** Based on the cross tabulation of the survey question “to your knowledge, how important was ETF’s contribution to the following developments in your country” with “which ETF partner country are you based in”. The figure presents the share of those respondents who marked “ETF provided important support” & “ETF was the main driver of change” cumulatively.

The lower impact in CA/Russian is due to the reason that ETF was not involved in this region as intensively as in the remaining regions. As for the SEMED countries, it can be hypothesised that a relatively lower impact is due to the aftermath of the “Arab Spring” which brought a turbulent transitional period in the region. The fact that the share of respondents highly appreciating ETF’s contribution decreases when moving to higher order of effects on ETF’s intervention logic, strongly supports this hypothesis. This is because, as the effects become more distant from the intervention, the more susceptible they are to the external constraints. Indeed, as we find in the following section,

in contrast to any other region, political changes and instability are among the top three main obstacles to the modernisation of VET governance systems in the SEMED region.

### 4.3. Sustainability

In the context of this evaluation, sustainability is understood mainly in terms of the extent to which improvements in VET governance are being sustained in PCs. Overall, the information collected throughout the evaluation suggest that the sustainability is a major challenge for ETF's interventions. However, the causes for poor sustainability are mainly related to the conditions in the PCs rather than ineffectiveness of ETF's governance interventions itself.

These interventions had a strong effect in bringing a broad multi-level participatory approach to VET policy making as a way forward for the modernisation of VET governance systems in PCs. This effect is likely to be sustained given that it affects the mindsets of local stakeholders. Moreover, the effects of capacity building and networking actions are also likely to persist and even bring unintended but highly positive outcomes. For example, in Ukraine a civil servant from Kiev City council who has been involved in regional pilot-actions, has been promoted to lead the VET Department within the Ministry of Education and Science. According to the interviewee, the information networks and the knowledge of regional issues that he has developed during his participation in ETF's pilot-actions has proved "extremely" useful in his new position.

***Multi-level approach to VET systems is likely to hang as a targeted model of good governance in a number of PCs***

The main driver of sustainability is a persistent engagement of a critical mass of stakeholders. However, within the available resources SP GOV team faces difficulty to maintain its presence in each and every pilot region after the projects are over. In the absence of systemic conditions success gained through pilot actions are likely to fade away in the region without such continuity. Indeed, several stakeholders in Tunisia observed that even in the most successful Medenine and Gabes regions, after the ETF concluded pilot actions, without direct assistance regional stakeholders were "confused" and "demotivated" to set-up follow up actions.

***Sustainability was a major challenge for SP GOV interventions***

It is evident that at this stage the gains of pilot actions have been poorly sustained in the regions and this has already been well recognized within the ETF. Interviews with staff members show that the Agency aims to boost the sustainability of regional governance pilot actions by facilitating ownership. Information collected in Tunisia shows that some SPs have not

only acknowledged the problem but already made concrete steps to address the issue. For instance, the EU Delegation pointed out that ETF's (particularly SP EU SUPP) assistance was "pivotal" for the design of IRADA initiative, which gives more say to local stakeholders in the identification of regional projects (see Box 4). The success of this bottom-up approach is yet to be tested, but if proven effective, SP GOV team should consider feasibility of accommodating it on a broader scale within their interventions.

#### Box 4. IRADA initiative

The initiative is funded by the EU (for 32M Euros) and aims to: (i) boost the economic competitiveness of eight (out of 24) Tunisian regions; (ii) increase the employability of the citizens; and (iii) tackle the high rate of unemployment. The design of this initiative has a strong multilevel governance dimension.

Once operational (late 2017), the financing mechanism will support public-private initiatives through “grant scheme” mechanism. The regional and local VET centres will formulate innovative projects and can only apply for grants in partnership with other private actors (sector, NGOs, etc.). In the view of ETF team members, such bottom-up approach has a potential to boost ownership and hereby facilitate more persistent partnerships and cooperation between stakeholders.

**Source:** Interviews in Tunisia and with ETF staff

The difficulties in sustaining changes are particularly visible when we consider the extent to which PCs institutionalise the processes for good multilevel governance. Stakeholders interviewed in the three selected countries think that there is a very limited and delayed follow-up to ETF’s interventions. According to the information collected throughout the evaluation, factors that cause poor sustainability are strongly related to systemic conditions in PCs. After synthesising all the available information, we have identified seven such factors:

*Limited follow up to interventions and PC systemic conditions were the key constraints of sustainability*

- **Political changes and instability.** Unstable and changing political environment hinder effective implementation of reforms. Political changes are also accompanied with discontinuation of actions, as well as high turnover of the personnel, which requires ETF to re-establish links with local stakeholders, re-gain their trust and the access to leadership.
- **Scarcity of financial resources allocated to VET sector.** Limited national funding makes it challenging for authorities to replicate ETF’s governance interventions (such as pilot projects) on a larger scale.
- **Lack of priority of VET sector among stakeholders.** Due to the low priority of the VET sector, the high momentum for reforming governance systems is often lost. This delays implementation of these reforms over a long period of time and creates uncertainty whether it will materialise at all.
- **Lack of trust between stakeholders.** Involvement of new sub-national stakeholders in VET governance is associated with the allocation of new managerial functions, which will increase their power and autonomy. Interviewed stakeholders thought that increased power could be misused for personal gains. Such mistrusts between stakeholders creates resistance to change.
- **Lack of competences among stakeholders to assume new roles and functions.** Increasing responsibilities of horizontal and vertical actors in VET governance requires relevant competencies of these stakeholders to implement new roles and functions effectively. State and non-state stakeholders across focus countries were in agreement that actors at a broad scale are not ready to take such functions. As a result, the perception of missing competencies also creates resistance to change.

- **Lack of consensus between stakeholders on distribution of roles and functions.** Although there is consensus that broadly defined multilevel governance is a way forward, consensus on who should be doing exactly what is yet to be achieved. Redistribution of responsibilities is thought to create winners and losers and is therefore resisted among stakeholders. This was most visible in Tunisia and Ukraine, where at least two ministries considered the sector development as their own prerogative. Lack of such consensus particularly hampers the sustainability of inter-ministerial cooperation. This obstacle brings forward the need to address “cultural attitudes” and alleviate the adverse effects of values formed by long-established hierarchies in PCs (see Lessons learnt in Chapter 3).
- **Insufficient dialogue between stakeholders.** Some stakeholders in Ukraine thought that beyond ETF’s actions, sectors have no formalised platforms for delivering information to relevant authorities. As a result, sectoral stakeholders are still using less effective private channels to follow up agreements that they achieved during ETF’s actions with public authorities.
- **Lack of coordination between international development actors.** The landscape of foreign aid in PCs is highly complex. Each development actor comes with its own agenda, which if not sufficiently coordinated can lead to damaging and overlapping activities. Despite ETF’s efforts in the area (e.g. Torino Process report, which can be used as the basis for the interventions of other actors) the findings suggest that the lack of coordination persists.

Considering that conditions diverge across countries, we have observed significant cross-regional differences on what constitutes the key obstacles to the modernisation of VET governance systems (see Figure 15). Survey respondents from CA/Russia and SEET regions were in agreement that the **scarcity of financial resources (A)**, **lack of competencies (B)**, and **the lack of consensus (C)** are the top three factors that hinder effectiveness and sustainability of ETF’s governance interventions in their countries. Respondents in EE, thought that **insufficient dialogue between stakeholders (D)** was a more important constraint in their countries than the lack of consensus.

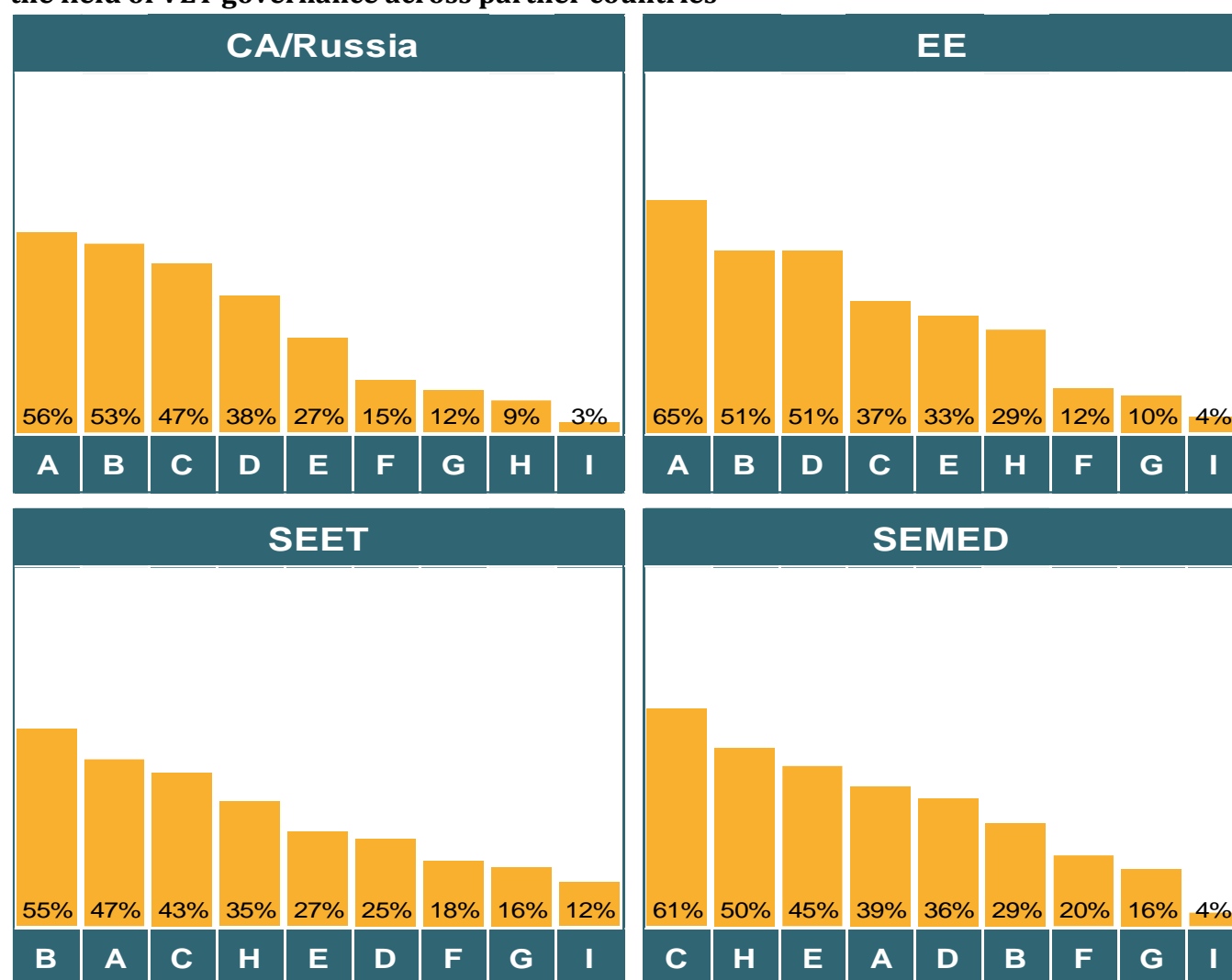
In turn, respondents from SEMED region observed that lack of competencies and scarcity of financial resources are significantly less important constraints than the **lack of consensus (C)**, **low priority of VET sector (E)**, as well as **political changes and instability (H)** in their countries. The latter factor has received the larger variance across geographic regions. Compared to the number of respondents from CA/Russia region, about three times more from EE region, four times more from SEET and five times more from SEMED region thought that the political changes and instability is the key constraint to ETF’s effectiveness and sustainability in their countries. In the context of democratic deficit, in nearly all CA/Russia countries, the lack of political changes can be a constraint rather than a window of opportunity.<sup>33</sup>

It is beyond SP GOV capacity to influence the democratic deficit, low priority of VET sector as well as political changes and instability. In the context of limited resources, priority should be given to those countries where the constraints can be overcome and the interventions are unlikely to be rendered useless. Other top three most important constraints inherent to PCs are susceptible to external interventions. For instance the lack of competencies, lack of consensus and insufficient

<sup>33</sup> According to Freedom House, all countries in the region except Kyrgyzstan rank at or near the bottom of the rating on political rights and civil liberties. Available at: <https://freedomhouse.org/regions/eurasia>

dialogue can be addressed by such interventions as trainings, study trips, conferences and networking events. However, considering that the ETF is not managing development aid, the SP GOV team is rather limited in its capacity to provide such interventions on a scale necessary to mitigate adverse effects of these factors.

**Figure 15. Specific factors that could hinder sustainability and effectiveness of ETF's work in the field of VET governance across partner countries**



**Note:** Based on the cross tabulation of the survey question “please choose up to three main obstacles to modernization of VET governance in your country” with “which ETF partner country are you based in”.

|          |   |          |   |
|----------|---|----------|---|
| <b>A</b> | Scarcity of financial resources allocated to VET sector                           | <b>F</b> | Lack of coordination between international development actors |
| <b>B</b> | Lack of competences among stakeholders to assume new roles and functions          | <b>G</b> | Lack of trust between stakeholders                            |
| <b>C</b> | Lack of consensus between stakeholders on the distribution of roles and functions | <b>H</b> | Political changes and instability                             |
| <b>D</b> | Insufficient dialogue between stakeholders  | <b>I</b> | Other   |
| <b>E</b> | Low priority of VET policy sector among policy makers                             |          |   |

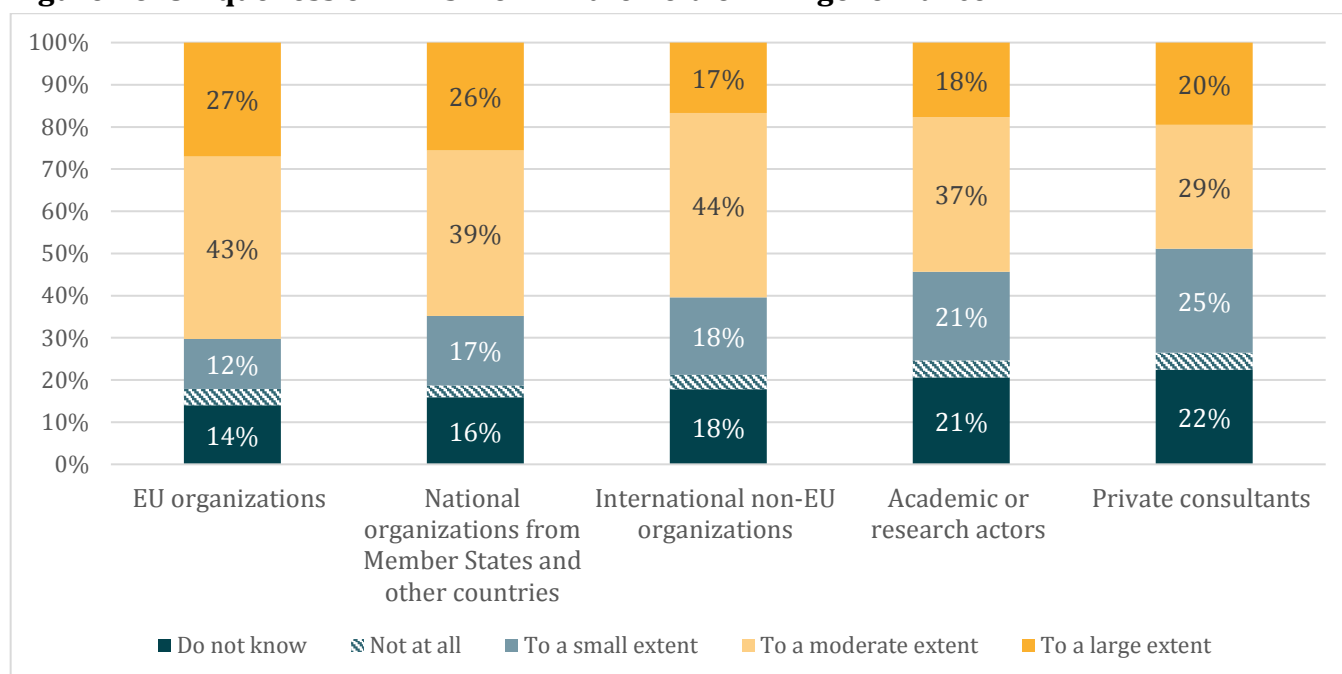
In light of this issue, SP GOV interventions can mainly influence the key obstacles indirectly through such actions as (i) assisting EU institutions in programming development aid; (ii) coordinating the

technical assistance of other donors (e.g. through governance needs assessment), and (iii) working continuously with the broadest possible range of key horizontal and vertical stakeholders to form an effective critical mass of multipliers. These actions coupled with ETF's efforts on advising PCs about modern participatory systems for VET financing and costing can also influence the constraints caused by the scarcity of resources allocated to VET sectors in PCs.

#### 4.4. Added Value

Overall, interviewees as well as survey respondents alike were highly positive on the assessment of the added value of ETF's governance interventions. The findings show that ETF had high added value in building the foundations for the modernization of VET governance systems by supporting the process in ways that other actors could not.

**Figure 16. Uniqueness of ETF's work in the field of VET governance**



**Note:** Based on the cross tabulation of the survey question “to what extent are ETF products and services in the field of VET Governance unique compared to other international actors active in your country”.

***ETF governance interventions are not easily substitutable by those of other actors in PCs***

Indeed, the survey shows that ETF has offered such unique products and services in the field of VET governance that were not easily substitutable by other international actors. At least half of the survey respondents considered that products and services of ETF are unique to a large or moderate level in comparison to those of other actors (see Figure 16). Only a very small number of respondents thought that this was not the case (not more than 4%).

After synthesising all the available information, we can distinguish 10 elements which are the key added values of ETF's work in the field (see Table 5). It is noteworthy that these elements directly

feed into the added value categories identified in the Agency's External Evaluation (ECORYS, 2016)<sup>34</sup>.

**Table 5. Added value of ETF activities to what other stakeholders were doing in the field of VET governance**

| # | Added value                         | Short description   |
|---|-------------------------------------|---|
| A | Stakeholders' engagement            | ETF has <u>established open discussion on VET governance with broader range of stakeholders</u> than other international development actors. This is because within bilateral and multilateral cooperation the connection often happens through the government, whereas with ETF, "there are no intermediaries" involved.   |
| B | Accessibility of expertise          | ETF has <u>provided fast access to knowledge and information</u> on VET governance. Another implication of not having intermediaries is that all types of stakeholders are able to address ETF directly and obtain relevant information in a short time-span.   |
| C | Thematic scope                      | ETF has <u>covered a broad range of VET governance issues</u> . This is because participatory approaches underpinning ETF's work are transversal to all VET policy areas enabling the Agency to focus on a broad range of governance issues including (i) VET legislation, financing and institutional arrangements, (ii) VET regionalisation and local level of skills development; (iii) cooperation and coordination between VET stakeholders. |
| D | Comparative perspective             | ETF has <u>brought comparative perspective from multiple countries and regions</u> on the thematic issues related to VET governance. This is mainly linked with the Torino Process and regional governance reviews, interviewees were unable to identify other actors providing them with such comparative perspectives within or across partner countries.   |
| E | Impartiality                        | ETF has provided more <u>critical views on VET governance</u> as opposed to such institutions as EU Delegations or other donor organisations. This is because bilateral or multilateral cooperation are often limited to such diplomatic practices as conditionality attached to the external assistance.   |
| F | Focus on VET governance             | ETF has <u>brought a specific focus on VET governance</u> in partner countries.<br><br>Focus of other international actors is often on the "narrow projects", which are indirectly linked with governance (e.g. civil servants' capacity building projects to facilitate more transparent procurement practices). In turn, ETF is focused on a systemic change of governance models.  |
| G | Continuity                          | ETF has <u>provided continuous support related to VET governance over a long period of time</u> . As pointed out in the recent Evaluation, "unlike most bilateral or multilateral donors, the ETF's provision of expertise and support is not limited by a budgetary timeframe and is ongoing" (ECORYS, 2016: p. 101) <sup>35</sup> allowing ETF to focus on more long term and gradual interventions.  |
| H | Responsiveness to the country needs | ETF has <u>accommodated the needs of VET governance systems in a flexible way</u> . Interviewees thought that ETF is very "flexible and faster" than other international actors, it was pointed out that there is a very short time span  |

<sup>34</sup> ECORYS (2016), External Evaluation of the European Training Foundation, Framework contract: EAC/22/2013, European Commission – DG education and Culture

<sup>35</sup> ECORYS (2016), External Evaluation of the European Training Foundation, Framework contract: EAC/22/2013, European Commission – DG education and Culture

| # | Added value        | Short description  |
|---|--------------------|--|
|   |                    | from the identification of the need and the actual receipt of expertise in the field of governance.  |
| I | Level of expertise | ETF has <u>offered higher level expertise</u> on VET governance than other international actors. ETF's expertise builds on the European experience in VET governance, it also incorporates perspectives of developing countries, which are often more relevant to the context of partner countries. In turn, donors such as Member State development agencies usually bring only one type of perspective, which as some stakeholders pointed out are not necessarily applicable to the local contexts. |
| J | Fast change        | ETF has <u>sped-up modernisation of VET governance systems</u> in partner countries. ETF's higher flexibility to partner country needs on VET governance and the accessibility of expertise coupled with higher level expertise, greater thematic and geographic scope facilitates the materialisation of faster change, than if only the actions of other development actors were implemented.  |

**Note:** Key descriptors of each element (underlined text under the column "short description") were used in the survey to collect broader perspective on the added value. Letters under the column "#" correspond to the elements in the **Figure 17**.

Despite the divergent cross-national contexts SP GOV activities were able to add value across all four broad geographic regions. Only in CA/Russia as few as 6% of stakeholders thought that ETF's actions had no added value to what other international actors were doing in the field of VET governance. Furthermore, in line with the interview findings there is a wide consensus across the regions that ETF's most important added value in the field is the establishment of open discussions on VET governance issues with a broad range of stakeholders (see Figure 17).

***SP GOV activities are complementary and add value to the work of ETF as a whole***

The most recent External Evaluation of ETF has observed that "stakeholders' involvement and participatory approaches" employed by the ETF was a key factor that determined the Agency's overall added value.<sup>36</sup> This is because multilevel governance is a transversal issue relevant for all VET policy

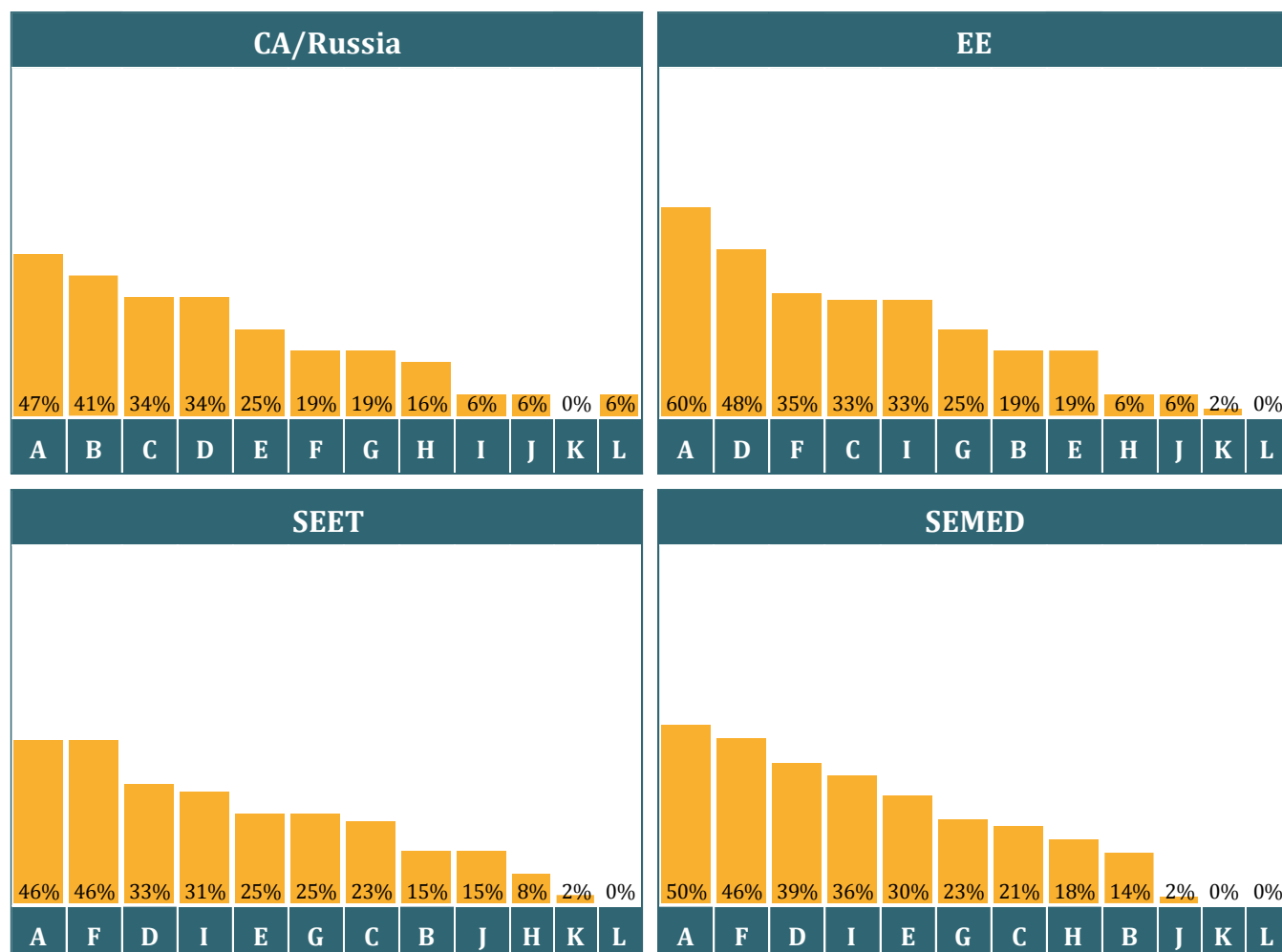
areas covered by other SPs of ETF. Considering that the development and facilitation of such approaches is at the core of SP GOV activities, the establishment of a separate governance thematic area has strongly contributed to the formation of ETF's overall added value. This means that SP GOV activities are not only complementary to other SPs but also strongly contribute to the achievement of the specific objectives of ETF (we further return to this issue in the Chapter 5).

Indeed, until 2014, while the SP GOV was still in the form of a Community of Practice it has developed participatory governance methodologies, which since provided the basis for more specific policy level interventions of other SPs. Since the establishment of SP GOV in 2014, the project team has closely collaborated with other teams within ETF. According to the ETF staff, this collaboration has led to the appropriation of a good multilevel governance perspective across ETF's

<sup>36</sup> ECORY (2016), External Evaluation of the European Training Foundation, Framework contract: EAC/22/2013, European Commission – DG Education and Culture

projects and strengthened the attention of ETF's staff to the importance of regional and local governance dimensions for VET modernization in certain PCs.

**Figure 17. Specific ways ETF's work in the field of VET governance adds value across partner countries**



**Note:** Based on the cross tabulation of the survey question “how did ETF add value to what other international actors were doing in the field of VET governance in your country” with “which ETF partner country are you based in”. Respondents were invited to choose up to three most important elements of added value.

|          |   |          |  |
|----------|---|----------|--|
| <b>A</b> | Established open discussion on VET governance issues with a broader range of stakeholders | <b>G</b> | Provided continuous support related to VET governance over a long period of time |
| <b>B</b> | Provided fast access to knowledge and information   | <b>H</b> | Accommodated the needs of partner countries in a flexible way                    |
| <b>C</b> | Covered a broad range of VET governance issues  | <b>I</b> | Offered higher level expertise   |
| <b>D</b> | Brought comparative perspective from multiple countries and regions                       | <b>J</b> | Speeded-up modernization of VET governance system                                |
| <b>E</b> | Provided a critical view of VET governance  | <b>K</b> | Other  |
| <b>F</b> | Brought specific focus on VET governance  | <b>L</b> | ETF's actions had no added value   |

Since its establishment, SP GOV has mainly focused on macro level initiatives in PCs. Before 2012, ETF's governance related interventions were narrowly focused on one or another VET policy area. In turn, SP GOV has integrated all the governance components together at the systemic level

providing PCs such transversal assistance as a strategy for decentralisation of the VET governance system. In Ukraine, this transition has been well noticed. Two interviewees argued alike that the latest interventions are “not comparable” to what ETF was doing before, because since 2012 the Agency has started to address more “global” issues. Interviews in Tunisia also point out that in 2009 when ETF started working on the development of a qualification framework social partners were “not convinced” with ETF’s assistance. However, the GEMM project proved them “wrong”, because it helped them understand the importance of the Employer Unions in the management of VET centres.

Furthermore, facilitation of participatory governance approaches at a macro level has a potential to spill over to more specific policy areas. Interviews in Ukraine provide evidence that this linkage is indeed valid. For instance social partners, as well as the VET research institute and the Ministries of Education and Social Affairs alike reported that ETF’s efforts on engaging a broad range of stakeholders have inspired the creation of a working group on Occupational Standards involving various state and non-state stakeholders. Although concrete results on the adoption of new Occupational Standards have not materialised yet, it is already an important achievement that a range of stakeholders engage with each other on specific issues.

#### 4.5. Conclusions

Information collected through the evaluation provides strong evidence that SP GOV interventions performed well in empowering a critical mass of stakeholders in PCs. This was achieved by delivering such unique products and services which were offered neither by other development actors, nor by other SPs within the Agency. At the same time, these products and services proved highly useful to immediate stakeholders, who then successfully utilised them in their work. However, some stakeholders thought that the ETF could have done better in reaching out beyond its immediate stakeholders by providing less technical products. In the context of limited trust and capacity, such simplified and plain products are rather important to ensure that the critical mass is able to multiply the results.

This issue has not constrained stakeholders to notice ETF’s contribution to the modernisation of VET governance systems in PCs. Overall, it is hard to measure impacts of ETF governance intervention, however, there are indications that successful knowledge transfer and consistent involvement of actors who have been traditionally left out from the decision making process in the VET sector have already had positive effects on the policy process. More specifically, ETF’s interventions were most successful in (i) establishing a multilevel governance model as the way forward, (ii) increasing capacity of stakeholders to take part in VET policy making effectively, and (iii) facilitating more active participation of all relevant stakeholders in the policy making process. However, in terms of longer-term effects these outcomes have seldom materialised into relevant laws and regulations institutionalising process of good multilevel governance, which would ensure sustainable participation of all relevant actors in VET policy making.

At the same time we have also observed that gains at the regional level have been poorly sustained. On the positive side, we have noticed that in some cases pilot-projects have been replicated across other regions, however, we have also observed that in those regions where these projects have been

concluded, the meaningful follow up has not materialised. All the evidence collected indicates that the poor sustainability is mainly an outcome of systemic constraints most of which are susceptible to external interventions. This means that the ETF could do better to mitigate the adverse effect of these factors. Moreover, SP GOV could prioritise investing its resources only in those regional projects that are continuous not only at the national or cross-regional level but also within the regions where this project is implemented.

## 5. EFFICIENCY

Previous external evaluations underlined the particular difficulty to accurately assess the efficiency of ETF activities. Most actions of ETF are of an influential nature. They are not easily or directly translated into measurable results and impacts which are also often deferred over a long period of time. Moreover, ETF indicators focus on process and immediate outputs rather than outcomes and results. This means that the traditional cost effectiveness approach is impossible. These considerations related to the ETF corporate performance do not differ when it comes to ETF's activities in VET governance. This is why this report evaluates the efficiency of the ETF's activities on VET governance through a qualitative assessment. The assessment is based on perceived effectiveness and impact with regards to internal management of resources and synergies with other internal and external actors.

***ETF's internal planning and monitoring documents provide very limited information for monitoring and evaluation of cost-effectiveness of SP GOV interventions***

### 5.1. Implementation of the planned activities and outputs

***SP GOV has delivered all planned outputs within the allocated budget and mostly on time***

The evaluators did not identify any major problems in the implementation of planned ETF's activities and outputs in VET governance. The review of the programming documents (Work Plans) against the monitoring ones (Q-reports<sup>37</sup>) indicates "strong convergence" between the planned activities and outcomes and their actual achievements. There were, however, some cancelled actions in order to concentrate on priorities - namely in 2014 and

2015 - or to undertake unexpected requests from EU Delegations, such as expertise prior to the identification/formulation of technical assistance projects. The changes were minor and did not significantly modify the planned VET governance activities. It also happened that key activities were held up, sometimes for several months. In these cases, the Agency managed to keep the work-plan on-track or to postpone the planned achievements to the first months of the following year. Delays were largely due to external reasons, primarily to the evolution of the political context in concerned PCs - such as the temporary diplomatic constraints between Morocco and the EU, or the political elections in Serbia. Internal reasons are also to be mentioned, but were limited (such as ETF experts'

<sup>37</sup> Q-report is the acronym for the document presenting the four quarterly monitoring reports of a given year on activities directly managed by the Strategic Project team on VET Governance.

maternity leave). In one case, the recruitment process of an external expert specialised in VET governance took considerably more time than planned<sup>38</sup> (for instance, the recruitment of the external international expert for the “VET Governance Inventory Framework”). However, the evaluators collected no evidence questioning the ETF’s recruitment procedures of external experts.

On the other hand, the Agency frequently delivered unplanned additional works, advice or expertise at the request of some PC stakeholders. Those additional outputs were often not mentioned in the monitoring reports. An example of such additional work from Tunisia is presented below. It must be noted that some unplanned work generated the following year further work in line with the SP GOV strategic outcomes. For instance, in Ukraine the ETF’s key assistance regarding the drafting of the first VET law was triggered in 2015 by an unplanned ad-hoc country request on “legal advice”.

The field visits implemented by the evaluators fully confirmed the above considerations. The three targeted PCs expressed their satisfaction with the actual achievements of the country work plans. The sole major change with the programmed activities was mentioned in Serbia where the drafting and the implementation of the legal provision on Skills Councils were practically “frozen” by the Serbian Ministry. However, as already mentioned in the Relevance chapter, the way ETF swiftly switches its activities to a pilot sector/regional partnership project in the ICT sector largely contributed to overcoming the institutional obstacle. It provided, through an example in one sector at a regional level, a basis for subsequent review of cooperation mechanisms in skills needs foresight and improvement of the VET content by concerned stakeholders. Hence, it provided lessons and outcomes for clarifying the future Skills Councils mechanisms and its legal aspects.

#### **Box 5. An example of “unplanned additional outcome”**

This example was mentioned by the representative of Tunisian Employer’s Association for Hotel and Tourism. They highly appreciated the ETF expertise regarding the sector work seasonality issue and CVET training aimed at helping hotel workers find a “second qualification” in another sector in order to find a job during the low season for tourism. The ETF advice and expertise helped the Employer’s Association in drafting a HR development policy to be discussed with the trade unions and the Ministry for Tourism. In terms of efficiency, the example demonstrates the ETF’s capacity to provide useful unplanned additional advice while developing its assistance focused on its main objective (VET regionalisation).

**Source:** Interviews in Tunisia.

In one case, however, a PC - Ukraine - expressed mixed feelings about the way the Green Paper on VET was produced. On one hand, most interviewees highly appreciated the ETF’s “participatory” approach that enabled regional and local stakeholders to be involved in the drafting of the policy document. On the other hand, some stakeholders said the work would have been more useful and efficient if it had been launched earlier, around January 2016, because the process of decentralisation had already started. They also considered that ETF could have invested more balanced expert resources between the review of decentralisation options for the country and the implementation approaches. In their opinion, the latter has not been developed enough.

<sup>38</sup> In this example, a first round of recruitment for Morocco proved to be “unfruitful” and the expert eventually selected through the second round proved to be “unavailable”.

## 5.2. Budgeting, HR allocation and management efficiency

The total amount of financial resources budgeted for the VET governance activity is provided by the analytical approach implemented in 2014. This approach distributes the totality of the Agency's yearly expenses among its seven "strategic projects", VET governance being one of them.

Over the last three years of the evaluation period, the resources budgeted to the VET governance activities were<sup>39</sup>:

| 2014       | %*  | 2015       | %*  | 2016       | %*  |
|------------|-----|------------|-----|------------|-----|
| 1,975,000€ | 10% | 1,937,000€ | 10% | 2,485,000€ | 12% |

\* Note: % of the ETF overall budget which is broadly constant for the three years considered.

The above data reflects the increased proportion of the activities on VET governance in the Agency's total activities. In terms of human resources, the total activities on VET governance benefited (in 2016<sup>40</sup>) from a budgeted amount of 16.9 Full Time Equivalent (FTE) staff. A first conclusion can be drawn-up from the data. The total activities on VET governance benefited in 2016 from a share of financial resources slightly under the proportion of the staff (FTEs) involved in these activities (respectively 12% and 12.8%). In other words, the VET governance activities used slightly fewer financial resources than the amount they could have benefited from if the total budget had been evenly distributed on the basis of the staff involved.

Another way of looking at these financial issues is to compare the resources directly allocated to the SP GOV team with the resources allocated to the six other SPs. In 2016, the SP GOV team was allocated a staff of 6.6 FTEs and a budget (staff not included) of 410 K €<sup>41</sup>. This means that the SP GOV benefited from a budget "per FTE" of 62 K €. This ratio is around 8% under the average of 67.5 K € calculated from the total budget allocated to the seven SPs<sup>42</sup>.

As a first conclusion, the internal comparison indicates that the activities on VET governance benefited from resources slightly under the average allocated to the other ETF Strategic activities (on a basis of resources per FTE). If this consideration does not provide conclusive proof about the "higher efficiency" of the VET governance activities, it indicates at least that there is in all probability, no abnormality.

The Evaluators also assessed whether the activities have been implemented within the planned budget. Starting from 2015, reference on financial resources has been included in the yearly monitoring SP GOV Q-reports. It has to be noted that this financial information only covers the activities directly managed by the SP team.

<sup>39</sup> Source: « Work Programme » for 2014, 2015 and 2016 (annexes).

<sup>40</sup> Data only available for 2016 due to the progressive implementation of the monitoring approach by strategic projects.

<sup>41</sup> Amount including the project budget and the mission budget (data source: WP2016, Annex 1).

<sup>42</sup> Source: WP 2016, annex 1.

Available information - for the years 2015 and 2016 - indicates that there are no major difficulties for the SP GOV to deliver its planned outcomes in compliance with the original budget in terms of: staff inputs (FTEs), project budget and mission expenditures. It is true however that for the year of 2015 the actual spending on project expenditures reached an amount well above the planned budget (around 472 K€ against 320 K€<sup>43</sup>). The reasons for this were not clearly explained in the report<sup>44</sup>. But information from the following year (2016) indicates the “overspending” of 2015 has been mastered. In 2016, the SP GOV budget expenditures moved back to the previous level (actual spending of 366 K€ against 357 K€ budgeted). Regarding the staff (FTE’s consumption), the only information is available for 2016, which indicates a slight under consumption (6.09 FTEs used against 6.64 planned).

In terms of external comparison, it would be very difficult to assess the financial efficiency of the ETF’s VET governance activities against examples from other institutions. Nevertheless, as a very broad comparative approach, the overall ETF budget for VET governance activities in all its PCs<sup>45</sup> is “in the order” of the resources generally allocated to two to three Technical Assistance projects<sup>46</sup> of an average size, each developed in a single country. Given the recognized relevance of the Agency’s outcomes on VET governance modernisation in a large number of PCs (produced with very limited resources), a broad positive assessment of the overall ETF’s efficiency in the field has to be made.

In conclusion, the Evaluators consider that the financial management of the ETF activities on VET governance indicates *a priori* no major difficulties and reflects a good level of efficiency. Planned budgets are respected. The ratio staff/financial resources is even slightly under the ETF average. It would have been interesting, however, to further inform this analysis on efficiency with a more detailed approach. Some activities whose cost-effectiveness are more easily assessed could have been considered in this regard<sup>47</sup>. However, this type of information was not available in the monitoring documents provided to the Evaluators.

### **Efficiency of the use of the Agency’s resources (management efficiency)**

The review of the programming documents over the evaluation period indicates the progressive evolution of the VET governance activities toward use of resources to the “most effective” types of priorities, actions and PCs.

The strategy was progressively clarified. At the end of the evaluation period (2016), the strategy<sup>48</sup> on VET governance was more clearly concentrated on three main areas of intervention: i) Broad

<sup>43</sup> SP GOV Project budget which does not include staff and mission expenditures.

<sup>44</sup> This over-spending might result from the SP GOV unplanned involvement in the production of institutional visibility materials (including videos) run by the ENT COMM project.

<sup>45</sup> The total number of partner countries having benefited from ETF support in the field of VET governance was not clearly mentioned in the monitoring documents provided to the Evaluators. They noted however that 23 partner countries are listed in the “Inventory of VET arrangements in ETF PCs”.

<sup>46</sup> Broad comparison based on examples of EU funded Twinning and TA projects focused on capacity-building in the areas of VET, Employment, social-inclusion in Croatia, Serbia, Morocco, Turkey, Tunisia (sources EuropeAid database).

<sup>47</sup> For instance, events, workshops etc. with regards to resources used against outputs produced.

<sup>48</sup> Presented in the Work plan 2016.

legal and institutional arrangements of the VET system (including financing); ii) Promoting/strengthening VET decentralisation (including vertical coordination); iii) Developing governmental and non-governmental coordination capacity at national and sub-national levels.

This evolution was supported by examples of actions the SP GOV considered <sup>49</sup> as worth disseminating to other regions of the PC and/or to other PCs. Such actions included for instance the broad approach for the design of the VET architecture in Albania, the institutional mechanisms on VET regionalisation in Morocco and Tunisia, the institutional mechanism for sector skills foresight and VET improvement decisions in Serbia, the enlarged involvement of social partners and civil society representatives in VET in Moldova. In addition, the Green Paper developed in Ukraine concentrated for the first time the SP GOV knowledge on VET decentralization process management and as such is used by ETF as a model report on VET decentralization.

In terms of targeted PCs, the strategy also progressively concentrated its intervention on a limited number of countries, which demonstrated significant willingness to move toward VET decentralisation and/or multi-stakeholders involvement in the design and implementation of their VET system. This strategy is reflected in the SP GOV work plan for 2016. The document presents, for the first time, a list of well-defined outcomes with related measurable performance indicators. This move was fine-tuned in the SP GOV work plan for 2017. In the view of the Evaluators, this was a positive development because focusing on fewer countries meant that SP GOV had to spend less time on its own learning and preparatory activities and therefore could devote a larger proportion of their time on actually supporting and advising PC stakeholders. At the same time, it served as the warrant for SP GOV that the resources were allocated to those interventions that had necessary PC conditions, which increase the likelihood of achieving intended outcomes.

***SP GOV has concentrated its interventions on a limited number of countries, which demonstrated a potential for reforms***

The field visits widely confirmed the above considerations. Main interviewees from the three PCs pointed out that the SP GOV demonstrated its capacity to reach very significant outcomes with limited resources (in terms of expert working days and financial inputs). Nevertheless, some wishes or suggestions were expressed in order to further improve the efficiency of the ETF's activities. They are summarised in the boxed text below.

#### **Box 6. Suggestions of stakeholders for improving the efficiency of ETF's activities**

- Country work plan and ETF expert missions: Decision makers wish ETF spends more time and resources to better discuss and design the country work plan with them *“a couple of brief working meeting is not enough for such a strategic discussion”*.
- Events: Suggestion is made for a more efficient way of programming them for instance through *“a questionnaire given to potential participants with a list of topics to be chosen for the year to come”*. Other remarks are expressed by some stakeholders (namely from employer's associations). They consider some events *“too lengthy”* for their own availability and sometimes *“too general”*, *“not enough focused on their practical areas of interest”*. It was also mentioned that events should be better

<sup>49</sup> Information collected by the Evaluators in the programming and monitoring documents or through the field visits.

followed up by ETF. Some stakeholders noted that *“Often, decisions agreed by governmental representatives during events are not implemented”*.

- **Events:** Local providers subcontracted by ETF for organizing events might sometimes ask too much coordination and validation work from partner country stakeholders.
- **Tools:** Some regrets were expressed that *“policy briefs and useful tools produced by ETF”* were not published in the country in national language (Serbia) at least in the form of summaries. Moreover, suggestions were made for a better dissemination through *“short, half-day trainings to enable stakeholders to learn how to use the tools produced”*.
- **National experts:** Questions were raised on the Agency’s key criteria for national expert recruitment. *“Command of English language and previous International experience”* might exclude *“good and experienced local experts”* (Ukraine).
- **Stakeholders:** The participants to ETF’s activities are sometimes perceived as “the same group of people” over a period of several years. This increases their expertise and cooperation, but on the other hand limits contacts with a wider audience and types of stakeholders.

**Source:** Interviews in Ukraine, Serbia and Tunisia.

***The missions of different ETF’s teams were often too close to each other and too overwhelming for key partner country stakeholders to take advantage of, but followed the long periods of ETF’s absence on the ground***

The evaluators also assessed to what extent the ETF new SP based organisational structure has improved the efficiency of the Agency’s intervention with regards to VET governance. Opinions collected reflect mixed feelings. On the one hand, PCs’ stakeholders consider that the ETF’s new organisational structure provides more opportunities for direct contacts with a highly qualified ETF expert in VET governance. On the other hand, stakeholders wonder why the ETF experts in

charge of different areas of activities tend now to come together for missions in the country. Hence, working meetings on various topics are organized on several days in a row. Interviewees find this working arrangement *“too dense”* and challenging in terms of stakeholders’ availability (especially for decision-makers who want to have a view on the ETF various intervention areas). In brief, they question the efficiency of such schedule of meetings.

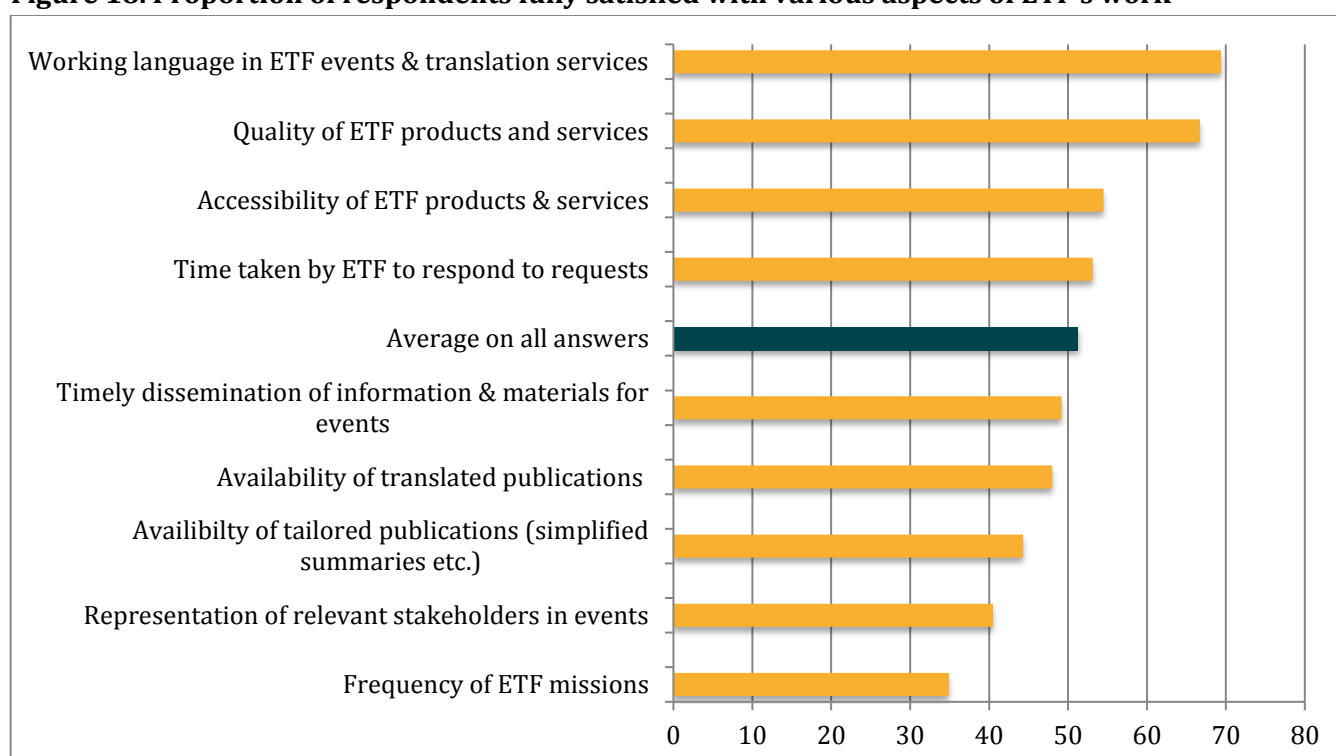
The Evaluators learned that the interviewed representatives of EC DGs were satisfied with the ETF’s new organisational structure that significantly reduced overlapping of tasks and responsibilities and favoured efficient communication with the EC namely through an identified contact person. However, interviewees pointed out that ETF’s communication with the EU Delegations had to be more structured. Particularly, ETF should, in their opinion, pay more attention not to over-burden EU Delegations with unplanned information requests. A yearly information exchange is suggested to reduce the difficulty.

### 5.3. Level of satisfaction regarding the efficiency of the various aspects of ETF’s work

Evidence collected from the survey indicates high efficiency on all aspects of ETF’s work on VET governance. Overall, 80-85% of the respondents declare to be satisfied (out of which over 50% to a large extent) with the efficiency of ETF’s activities in the area of VET governance.

Working language in ETF events and the availability of translation services attract the highest level of satisfaction (69.4% of respondents are fully satisfied). Two-thirds of the respondents declared to being fully satisfied with the Quality of ETF's products and services. The survey results confirm the evidence collected during the field visits. The ETF events and workshops have been generally favoured because of their organisation, the selection of participants and the quality of their inputs. The ETF products and services were also highly appreciated, particularly the quality of ETF's advice based on strong and vast knowledge of international experiences in VET governance approaches. The analytical tools and methodologies (i.e. for skills analysis, country or regional context analysis, VET governance mapping) were also largely appreciated as well as the accessibility to the helpdesk service through the ETF website.

**Figure 18. Proportion of respondents fully satisfied with various aspects of ETF's work**



**Source.** Consortium survey

On the other side of the scale, three of the ETF's work aspects arouse a lower rate of satisfaction.

- The least satisfying work aspect is the Frequency of ETF missions, 34.9% of the respondents considered it fully satisfying. However, the answers indicate that more than 80% of the respondents are satisfied to a large or moderate extent with this work aspect.
- Two other aspects of the ETF's work also received a rate of satisfaction below average: Representation of relevant stakeholders in events and Availability of tailored publications (e.g. simplified summaries and policy briefs). Regarding these work aspects, the proportion of respondents fully satisfied is 40.4% and 44.3%, respectively. However, the level of overall satisfaction is still considerably high (around 85%).

The above, relatively less satisfying results are consistent with the findings from the evaluators' field visits. They point out some areas for improvement that might increase the efficiency of ETF's intervention. It must also be noted, however, that the need for improvements are probably not

evenly shared among PCs. For instance, wishes for tailored publications (in local language) and summaries were particularly expressed by stakeholders from Serbia and less mentioned in the two other PCs visited. In Tunisia, stakeholders highly appreciated the set of concise guidelines and tools presentations developed by ETF summing-up methodologies successfully implemented in the country pilot actions on VET regionalisation.

Regarding the respondents' wishes for "more frequent" ETF expert missions, the Evaluators are not convinced such a request can be addressed while keeping the ETF expert day resources within the limits allocated. However, it might be worth considering alternative possible options (for example, more distance contacts, more balanced inputs between ETF staff and national experts).

The other work aspects assessed in the survey are more or less situated around the average of 50% of the respondents satisfied to a large extent and around 85% to 90% when encompassing satisfactions to a moderate extent. It indicates an excellent level of satisfaction.

#### 5.4. Synergies within the SP GOV team, with other ETF Strategic Projects and other actors in the field

##### **Synergies within the Strategic Project on VET Governance**

ETF staff interviewed mentioned that, in the last two years, the SP GOV team very much increased its internal synergy. Team work was enhanced. SP GOV members progressively shared a more holistic approach on VET governance. The first step taken in the first half of the evaluation period was to deepen its expertise in areas of VET governance. As a result, each team member tended to concentrate in one or two specialised area(s) such as: legal matters, skills councils and other institutional VET coordination mechanisms, financing, decentralisation process. Individual expertise building on these issues left less space for inter-team exchange. However, in the second half of the evaluation period the tendency to work in silos subsided and cooperation among team members proved to be much easier. As a result, ETF staff mentioned efficiency gains in SP GOV's work. For instance, a better coordination and cooperation between specialised workshops (i.e. on financing, decentralisation) helped save time and resources.

##### **Synergies with other ETF Strategic Projects**

In the monitoring Q-report 2015, the SP GOV team underlined that *"VET Governance is a transversal policy area that underpins development of VET systems in partner countries. Improving good multilevel governance is necessary for better qualification, better provision and better integration of education and employment."* This is why the SP GOV team insists in the document on the necessity *"to continue and strengthen the cooperation between [ETF's] Strategic Projects"*.

The review of monitoring reports indicates that the SP GOV developed a particularly active cooperation with SP Qualifications, SP Employment, SP Provision and SP Torino Process. We have observed such examples across interventions in a number of PCs (see Box 7). Alongside these interventions several key concept papers, studies and major events on VET Governance also benefited from the inputs of ETF experts from SP Qualifications and SP Employment.

**Box 7. Examples of synergies between SP GOV and other SPs.**

- **Albania:** cooperation with SP Qualifications and SP Provision in the review of the first draft of the law on VET.
- **Serbia:** cooperation with SP Qualification in sectoral/regional pilot project on ICT sector and with SP Employment on skills foresight methodologies and related workshops in the country.
- **Ukraine:** cooperation with SP Torino Process and SP Employment.
- **Morocco and Tunisia:** cooperation with GEMM project<sup>50</sup>, which was closely associated with the activities on VET Governance developed in the countries.

**Source:** Annual Activity Reports 2015 and 2016 and interviews with PCs stakeholders

The field visits and interviews with SP GOV team members show that such cooperation significantly increased the overall efficiency of the ETF intervention because it created good synergies across different SPs. The strong synergies mainly stemmed from the following three-step process:

- STEP #1.** The SP GOV identified the priorities of the VET reform in a given PC and defined a targeted intervention;
- STEP #2.** The SP GOV provided the support to a PC for the implementation of the relevant coordination mechanisms for addressing those priorities.
- STEP #3.** Another relevant SP assisted the implementation of a coordination mechanism with its own specialized expertise.

An example from Ukraine and Serbia illustrates such synergies particularly well. In both countries the SP GOV identified that the best way to push forward the on-going VET reform process<sup>51</sup> was to develop stakeholder dialogue and partnership on skills needs assessment. Once the SP GOV has designed in each country the relevant pilot coordination mechanism and mobilised stakeholders, the SP Employment assisted the stakeholders with its specific expertise in skills foresight. In Serbia the methodology helped the stakeholders of the pilot project initiated in the Vojvodina region identify the skills needs until 2020 in the regional ICT sector.

This three-step process proved particularly efficient because it facilitated a swift and smooth transition from SP GOV's holistic focus on the VET system to a more specialised area of intervention. In return, this ensured a strong integration of the specialised activities and outputs of the pilot action into the broader objectives and milestones of the on-going VET reform in the country. Moreover, success of such synergies brought forward the importance of SP GOV's specific expertise in VET governance analysis and policy coordination mechanisms for effective interventions of other SP teams within ETF.

***Cooperation between ETF's SPs resulted in useful synergies, better quality products and services to partner country stakeholders***

<sup>50</sup> GEMM was an EC funded project focused on VET Governance in the SEMED region. Due to its objectives it has shared common activities with the ETF SP GOV mainstream intervention, namely in the Medenine regional pilot project in Tunisia.

<sup>51</sup> Focused in Ukraine on decentralization and in Serbia on "skills councils like" experimentation.

Furthermore, during the evaluation we have also collected other examples of effective synergies. For instance, in Ukraine and Tunisia, main stakeholders particularly mentioned the very useful VET context analysis they developed at regional level through the assistance of ETF experts from SP Torino Process and/or GEMM project. In their opinion, this type of cooperation largely contributed to push forward the involvement of regional stakeholders in the decentralisation process. It also helped SP TRP to fine-tune some indicators namely on non-formal VET.

In Serbia, governmental stakeholders - who were members of the commission in charge of drafting the new National Employment Plan- said they strongly benefited in their tasks in the Ministry from the capacity building activity they acquired<sup>52</sup> in the SP GOV run sectoral/regional pilot project in the Vojvodina region.

### **Planning and monitoring synergies with other ETF Strategic Projects**

During the evaluation period, in terms of planning at country level, ETF produced annual and multi-annual Country Strategic Papers. These documents were well structured and provided clear country background, progress made by ETF during the previous period, strategic objectives, and expected outputs. However, they did not provide concrete action-plans for the implementation of future interventions. Neither did they foresee specific ways for internal cooperation across the ETF SPs during the implementation of a given Country Strategy.

***Internal mechanisms for planning and monitoring cooperation between Strategic Projects in priority partner countries are not sufficiently well developed within ETF***

In terms of monitoring, starting from the year 2015 mutual activities of SP GOV and other SPs were systematically reported in the SP GOV Quarterly-reports. This certainly contributed to various internal discussions and mutual activities. However, mentions of these synergies were most of the time “minimalist” with no descriptions of the content and modalities of the cooperation among the SPs. In light of these issues, we see an opportunity for developing better internal

mechanisms of systematic cooperation between SPs.

### **Synergies with other actors active in the field (EU Delegations and other donors & EU agencies)**

- *Contribution to the EC project cycle.* Due to its transversal expertise, the SP GOV plays a pivotal role in supporting EU Delegations to identify and formulate new technical assistance projects fully or partially focusing on VET issues. Examples of this type of action were collected during the field visits. In Ukraine, main stakeholders explained that the SP GOV activities created a positive context for a still expected EU decision to launch a first technical assistance project on VET in the country. SP GOV support was considered as all the more relevant that “governance capacity” is the key criteria for the activation of EU financial support. In Tunisia, the

***SP GOV has actively cooperated with the EU institutions and other international development actors. Cooperation with the EU Delegations has proved particularly important for achieving the impacts and sustainability of SP GOV interventions***

<sup>52</sup> Particularly the skills foresight methodology and the applied concept of smart territories.

SP GOV was the main actor in the identification and the formulation of IRADA initiative, the new EU funded program on VET decentralisation which will be implemented - in the second half of 2017 - in eight Tunisian regions. The initiative will build on and further develop the two regional pilot projects previously initiated by the SP GOV. The EU Delegation to Tunisia has requested ETF to actively coordinate with the organisation, which was awarded the drafting of the methodology for this project. On some points, the coordination work proved to be a bit challenging. The ETF's view on the design of the project (based on lessons learnt from the previous ETF pilot projects) did not totally match the view of the organisation in charge. Hence, this situation led to relatively difficult negotiations between them. From a general point of view, this example raises the issue of the ETF's role. Discussions are still ongoing within the EC whether ETF might or might not be appointed for direct "consultancy missions" in addition to its more traditional role as a "neutral expert". Concerns were expressed<sup>53</sup> that extending ETF's role to consultancy activities (namely on behalf of the EU Delegations) could reduce the ETF's "uniqueness"<sup>54</sup> and its concentration on policy analysis and capacity-building.

- *Cooperation with other donors or EC agencies.* The monitoring ETF documents (AAR 2015<sup>55</sup> and SP GOV Q-reports) mention efficient cooperation with key international donors in the field of VET Governance. For instance, the SP GOV developed with ILO a training module on financing for VET. In Ukraine, the Cedefop contributed to SP GOV activities by providing advice and models for modernization of VET centres. In SEMED countries, cooperation was developed with the Anna Lindh Foundation on civil society involvement in VET. The SP GOV was also involved in works on education investment indicators and sectoral skills councils launched by the EC DG EAC.

Regarding the SP support to the EU projects' implementation, examples indicate the SP GOV capacity to facilitate smooth transition from its advisory role and ETF pilot actions development to the implementation of technical assistance projects conducted by other donors. A particularly fruitful example is the cooperation with GIZ in the development of the VET draft law and institutional arrangements review in Albania. Other examples demonstrate, however, that transition from ETF pilot projects to mainstream technical assistance programs are not necessarily smooth. ETF has sometimes to engage in negotiations to match its own approach on decentralisation with those adopted by other international donors. An example of such negotiations is mentioned above with regards to the IRADA project.

***SP GOV has not yet established sufficient communication with non-EU and Member State development organizations in all priority Partner Countries***

Moreover, if the SP GOV demonstrated an overall very positive cooperation with projects run by other donors, examples collected during the field visits, indicate that cooperation/communication in some countries could have been better. In Serbia, the GIZ team running a VET project at regional level appeared to have little or no information about the FRAME project developed by the Agency in the country. In Tunisia, the team leaders of two regional

<sup>53</sup> Issue reported during an interview held by the Evaluators with a member of an EC Directorate.

<sup>54</sup> Namely, compared to that of the technical assistance agencies.

<sup>55</sup> Annual Activity Report for the year 2015. It is the last available AAR, the one for the year 2016 was not yet published at the time of the evaluation.

development and inclusion projects, one conducted by ILO and the other by UNDP, regretted there had been no or not enough exchange of experience with ETF on common issues (i.e. regional project methodologies, employment and regional developments, decentralised governance).

An interesting issue was also raised in Ukraine, which is currently struggling to swiftly address existing low capacity of civil servants from all ministries to switch to the new decentralisation-based objectives. A broad training project is being considered. This could open a new window of opportunity to the SP GOV provided synergies are created with its own capacity-building activities on VET decentralisation.

## 5.5. Conclusions

ETF delivers effective interventions for promoting good multilevel governance of the VET systems in PCs and does so by managing its limited resources in a good efficient manner. Starting its work on VET governance at the turn of the year 2012, the efficiency of ETF's intervention in the field regularly increased during the evaluation period. This very positive process was supported by the following factors:

- A continuous clarification/refining of the priorities, objectives and targeted outcomes reflected in the ETF programming documents for the years 2013 to 2016 further consolidated for 2017 (through three clear strategic outcomes and three broad measurable indicators).
- An intervention mainly focused on a relatively limited number of selected PCs (eight to ten) from different geographical regions and at different level of VET system development, but each with window opportunities for change (namely, move toward VET decentralisation and/or the involvement of various types of stakeholders in the design and implementation of VET systems).
- The successful implementation of the SP-based organisation favouring the concentration of the SP GOV resources on the targeted outcomes within PCs with windows of opportunities for the promotion of good multilevel governance in VET.
- A monitoring methodology that enhanced the follow-up of the SP GOV efficiency of its activities (particularly starting from 2015).

From an operational point of view, the good level of ETF's work efficiency for promoting good VET governance is reflected by:

- A strong convergence between outcomes planned and outcomes actually delivered (few and non-major actions cancelled as well as the SP GOV's ability to keep postponed actions on track, the latter most often due to reasons external to ETF).
- The overall capacity to stay within the limits of the resources budgeted for SP GOV.
- The increasing synergies between the team members of the SP GOV, with the other ETF's SPs and with the technical assistance projects funded by the EU or the other main international donors. In this regard, ETF is widely considered by PCs as an effective "front-runner" (or as one stakeholder said, "a strong locomotive") pushing forward the modernisation of VET governance.

The evaluation brought to light also areas for further efficiency improvements:

- More efficient programming procedures that could better involve key stakeholders in the design of the country work programmes on VET governance and related events.
- An increased attention to facilitating the implementation and the dissemination of ETF outcomes. For instance, through policy briefs, simplified summaries in local language, implementation guidelines, short presentation and training facilitating the ownership by the concerned stakeholders.
- Planning ETF's missions in PCs that avoid too dense set of working meetings mixing various topics, VET governance being one of them. More attention to be paid to the availability constraints of the key country stakeholders.
- Further research on alternative options to counteract the limited ability of ETF to extend the frequency of its missions in the PCs.
- Further increased synergies with technical assistance teams developing projects in areas close to VET governance (e.g. regional development, inclusion and/or employment) conducted in the same country and at the same time than ETF's intervention.
- Enhanced strengths/weaknesses identification regarding the efficiency of activities in the field of VET governance and broad improvement objectives. The Evaluators recommend the inclusion of this identification work in the SP GOV monitoring reports and in the form of a summary in the ETF's Annual Activity Report.

## 6. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This section presents the most important overall conclusions of the evaluation and corresponding recommendations. The detailed conclusions related to each specific evaluation issue are presented at the end of each evaluation chapter.

During the evaluation period ETF has progressively fine-tuned its approach and, in 2014, established VET governance as a separate thematic area of intervention. The evaluation demonstrated that this was a good decision, because SP GOV has made a considerable contribution to ETF's added value:

- It integrated methodologies and approaches developed during preceding ETF Community of Practice on VET governance and brought forward VET governance more holistically in the partner countries. As a result, SP GOV interventions went well beyond the scope of other individual SPs focusing on system level governance and thematic areas relevant for multiple lines of reforms, such as VET financing or government and social partner cooperation.
- It encouraged ETF to develop its expertise on issues of a growing importance such as: financing of VET, coordination mechanisms and institutional arrangements for good governance.
- Continuous collaboration between SP GOV and other Strategic Projects has also encouraged other teams to attribute more importance to sub-national dimensions within their interventions, hereby facilitating more inclusive participatory approaches to VET policies in PCs.

The evaluation also demonstrated that SP GOV provided differentiated interventions to PCs, which has translated into highly relevant policy advice in the field of VET governance. Moreover, the interventions have successfully targeted a group of key stakeholders in the selected countries, building their capacity and confidence to undertake reforms. The team delivered useful, unique and high-quality products and services in the field, which were successfully utilized by stakeholders in their work. Furthermore, the Agency demonstrated a very good capacity to initiate innovative multi-stakeholder activities which were successfully implemented in PCs.

Overall, the SP GOV team made a good choice to develop regional pilot projects to support wider national reforms and help improve them based on regional feedback. Through these interventions SP GOV has demonstrated the usefulness and importance of participatory approaches to national and regional decision makers. Arguably, this could have been the key driver for the establishment of a consensus that multilevel governance model is the way forward. At the same time the pilot stage created strong expectations and revealed a vast need for capacity building at regional level that SP GOV and possibly not even ETF as a whole can meet on its own.

It is also noteworthy that SP GOV is supporting governance reforms in PCs only since 2015. Therefore, if these reforms are to make a difference to the quality of VET provision will be seen only in the years to come. Even in case of success it will be very difficult to attribute it to ETF or SP GOV actions because one of the key principles of the Agency's work is building the confidence and

ownership of reforms among the local stakeholders. Nonetheless, SP GOV work has already made a considerable contribution to the modernisation of VET governance systems in PCs, mainly in terms of improving capacity and facilitating participation of all key stakeholders in VET policy making.

The team demonstrated a good capacity to reach the intended outcomes within the boundaries of budgeted resources by:

- Establishing synergies internally with other SPs;
- Collaborating externally with other international development actors in the field;
- Concentrating its interventions on a limited number of PCs, which demonstrated significant windows of opportunity for VET governance reform.

Entrepreneurial communities good practice initiative was a project on VET governance not focused on any specific ETF partner countries. The project showed the potential of bottom up initiatives for improving VET governance and contributed significantly to stimulating the debates within ETF and in partner countries on the value of local and regional dimension in VET governance. A wider discussion needs to take place within ETF on the value added of such an innovative approach and its broader replication in ETF's work.

The work of SP GOV is complementary to the Agency's more specific interventions, however, the ETF should take further steps to capitalise on the holistic focus, specialist expertise and tools developed by the SP GOV team. The table below focuses on several areas where SP GOV and ETF could still make some improvements.

| Conclusions  | Recommendations   |
|--|---|
| <p>Insufficient discussion on the scope of SP GOV interventions has created an uncertainty within the ETF on the added value of this highly relevant and successful operation.</p> | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. SP GOV should continue to develop methodologies and tools, as well as designing and piloting new VET governance models. It should, however, consider further specialising its interventions on:               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Countries undertaking multiple lines of VET reform;</li> <li>– Building the capacity and comparability of partner country policy modernisation teams that include representatives of different ministries, employers and other key stakeholders at national, regional and sectoral levels;</li> <li>– Supporting the development of VET policy coordination mechanisms;</li> <li>– Developing VET financing and costing systems.</li> </ul> </li> <li>2. A more detailed discussion on the complementarity between SP GOV and other</li> </ol> |

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|   | SP teams should take place so that uncertainty is eliminated and ETF is able to better capitalise on the synergies between its different SP teams.  |
| Stakeholders tend to confuse ETF's interventions with technical assistance projects which have increased stakeholders' expectations that SP GOV should also do the part of the work which is expected from them (e.g. to help develop and implement concrete action plans). Although this issue is characteristic to ETF as a whole, SP GOV should contribute to managing these expectations.   | <p>3. SP GOV should continue to strengthen the sense of ownership among Partner Country stakeholders for reforms and priorities, using the following tools:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Agreements/charters in which stakeholders pledge concrete actions towards a reform.</li> <li>– Annual forums within and across PCs, at which stakeholders discuss their progress towards pledged lines of reform.</li> </ul>   |
| <p>In some countries the actions of the SP GOV team lacked stronger continuity and scale when partner countries entered the implementation phase and needed further support. Moreover, interventions remained limited in their ability to reach out to wider groups of stakeholders due to the:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Complexity of some SP GOV products which were difficult to understand for those decision makers who were not directly engaged in ETF's actions;</li> <li>– Limited visibility of products, which usually remained in the hands of only those stakeholders who received them directly from ETF;</li> <li>– Very limited resources of ETF as compared to expanding audience needing advice and capacity building as the reforms reached the implementation stage.</li> </ul> | <p>4. To ensure continuity and increase the outreach of its interventions with limited resources, SP GOV should:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Develop a consolidated VET governance toolbox;</li> <li>– Direct additional efforts into planning follow-up actions, and choose only those interventions that display the potential for continuity;</li> <li>– Seek opportunities for upscaling interventions through the actions of other donors and partner country stakeholders, and in close cooperation with ETF's other Strategic Projects;</li> <li>– Define criteria to prioritise Partner Countries (e.g. those that demonstrate a window of opportunity to undertake VET policy reform, etc.);</li> <li>– Expand joint activities for partner countries undertaking similar reforms.</li> </ul> |
| Follow-up to pilot actions in the regions both from SP GOV/ETF, other international actors and the national stakeholders should be ensured. The implementation of reforms without follow-up support might lead to their discrediting with high political cost to their promoters, and possibly reversal to old governance practices.  | <p>5. SP GOV should design pilot actions only with well-developed sustainability strategies. During implementation, it should monitor the outcomes of pilot actions and revisit them several times during a project lifespan. The strategy should consider the alternatives for further actions, such as whether (and how) the project should be:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Closed or handed over;</li> </ul>  |

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|--|---|
|  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Transformed into a country-wide project; or</li> <li>– Further extended.</li> </ul>  |
| <p>Although we have not observed any issues with the way human and financial resources of SP GOV are managed (pointing out that the management is in a healthy state) there are several areas where the efficiency of SP GOV (and all ETF operations) could still be improved:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Programming and monitoring documentation of the SP provide very limited information for monitoring and evaluating cost-effectiveness.</li> <li>– PC stakeholders have expressed dissatisfaction with more than one SP team coming to their country during the same or the next week (often after a longer period of not coming). The key national stakeholders would rather prefer a more gradual and continuous sequencing of ETF's missions and support, which would enable them to absorb better the support received, act on it before the next visit or a follow up event.</li> <li>– Country Strategies currently serve only as tools for information exchange, but are not effective tools to manage and coordinate ETF actions in a specific country. Cooperation between SPs could be improved particularly when partner countries are undertaking multiple lines of reform, which require well sequenced and times support from more than one ETF's SP.</li> </ul> | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>6. Careful consideration should be given to the ways in which SP GOV monitors the cost-effectiveness of its activities. Consistent monitoring of costs has the potential to (a) improve efficiency and (b) serve as a useful tool for future evaluations and learning.</li> <li>7. ETF should take action to sequence its missions in such a way that it avoids information overload for stakeholders and helps them to absorb the support provided.</li> <li>8. The ETF should consider the introduction of "roadmaps" for the implementation of individual Country Strategies. These roadmaps would set out concrete action plans and establish the ETF country "taskforce" (consisting of team members from the relevant SPs and a country desk officer) for their implementation.</li> </ol> |

# ANNEXES

## ANNEX 1. Survey Questionnaire

<Please see “MS Word” file attached to this report as a separate document>