

Final Report

Evaluation of Qualifications activities in ETF partner countries

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CONTENTS	PAGE
Executive summary.....	7
Aim of the evaluation.....	7
Conclusions.....	7
Recommendations.....	9
 1 Introducing the evaluation of ETF activities on NQFs and qualifications	 11
1.1 Policy background.....	11
1.1.1 Qualifications Frameworks	11
1.1.2 European Training Foundation (ETF) work on qualifications.....	12
1.2 Aim of the evaluation.....	13
 2 Evaluative framework, approach and methodology.....	 15
2.1 Evaluation-matrix.....	15
2.2 How to evaluate effective approaches: what works for whom in which circumstances?	16
2.3 Methodological approach.....	18
 3 Overarching view on contexts, mechanisms and outcomes.....	 21
3.1 Context and clustering countries.....	21
3.2 ETF's work in the partner countries.....	23
3.2.1 Mechanisms and interventions	23
3.2.2 Perceptions on the role of ETF and ETF interventions by partner country stakeholders	24
3.2.3 Perceptions on effectiveness of ETF interventions by partner country stakeholders.....	28
3.2.4 Relation with other organisations and donor organisations	30
3.3 Outcomes of ETF interventions	32
3.3.1 General progress of qualifications reform.....	32
3.3.2 Outcomes of ETF interventions	33
 4 Countries at an initial stage of development	 37
4.1 Context description of countries at an initial stage of development	37
4.2 ETF interventions in countries at an initial stage of development.....	39
4.3 Progression of countries at an initial stage of development	41
4.4 What mechanisms work best?	41

5	Countries at an intermediate stage of development	43
5.1	Context description of countries at an intermediate stage of development	43
5.2	ETF interventions in countries at an intermediate stage of development.....	45
5.3	Progression of countries at an intermediate stage of development.....	49
5.4	What mechanisms work best?	50
6	Countries at an advanced stage of development	52
6.1	Context description of countries at an advanced stage of development	52
6.2	ETF interventions in countries at an advanced stage of development.....	55
6.3	Progression of countries at an advanced stage of development.....	56
6.4	What mechanisms work best?	57
7	Linking contexts, mechanisms and outcomes (CMO).....	59
7.1	Different patterns regarding context-mechanism-outcome	59
7.2	Assessment of what works in what situation.....	62
7.3	Emerging themes.....	66
8	Conclusions and recommendations.....	68
8.1	Conclusions	68
8.1.1	Relevance of ETF interventions in the partner countries.....	68
8.1.2	Implementation of ETF interventions in the partner countries	69
8.1.3	Effectiveness and sustainability of ETF interventions in the partner countries.....	69
8.1.4	Efficiency of ETF interventions in the partner countries.....	70
8.1.5	Impact of ETF interventions in the partner countries.....	70
8.1.6	Added value of ETF interventions in partner countries	71
8.2	Recommendations.....	71
	Annex 1: Data collection formats.....	75
	Checklist ETF staff interviews	75
	Checklist partner country stakeholder interviews.....	77
	Survey questionnaire under partner country stakeholders	78
	Annex 2: Comparative analysis for country clustering	87
	Annex 3: List of interviewees.....	90
	Annex 4: References.....	91

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1: Key evaluation questions	14
Figure 2: Evaluation matrix	16
Figure 3: CMO approach	18
Figure 4: Background characteristics respondents' survey under partner country stakeholders	19
Figure 5: Clustering of Partner Countries	22
Figure 6: Mapping countries on stages of development of NQF/qualifications systems	22
Figure 7: Overview ETF mechanisms	24
Figure 8: Characterisation of ETF's involvement in NQF developments in the partner countries	25
Figure 9: Indication of involvement in ETF supported activities related to the country's qualifications	25
Figure 10: Indication of how ETF was involved in interventions stakeholders assessed to be most effective	26
Figure 11: Assessment of the implementation of the intervention/activity	27
Figure 12: Assessment whether the intervention meets expectations	27
Figure 13: Ranking ETF activities from most effective to least effective with regard to NQF/qualifications developments	28
Figure 14: Users' assessment of the Qualifications Platform	29
Figure 15: Factors for success of ETF activities	30
Figure 16: Themes on which work of ETF and donor organisations overlap	31
Figure 17: Five stages of change (Cedefop)	32
Figure 18: Progress achieved in the period 2010–2013 in relation to specific topics	33
Figure 19: Assessment of impact of the overall ETF work of specific policy areas	34
Figure 20: Assessment of ETF's contribution to the progress made differentiated by factor	35
Figure 21: Stage of implementation in Jordan	38
Figure 22: ETF interventions in Lebanon	40
Figure 23: Specific ETF-work-related outcomes in Jordan in the period 2010–2013	41
Figure 24: NQF and 'Statut Avance' in Morocco	44
Figure 25: Phased approach in Morocco	46
Figure 26: ETF interventions in Ukraine	47
Figure 27: Regional project: Qualifications for the Mediterranean	48
Figure 28: Shifts in ETF support in Serbia	48
Figure 29: Specific ETF-work-related outcomes in Ukraine and Morocco in the period 2010–2013	50
Figure 30: ETF interventions on VET-related themes in Georgia	53
Figure 31: NQF developments in Kosovo	54

Figure 32: Specific ETF-work-related outcomes in Kosovo in the period 2010–2013	57
Figure 33: Linking CMO for ETF interventions on NQF development 2010 to 2013 in Morocco, Kosovo, Jordan and Ukraine	61
Figure 34: Overview of objectives, role of ETF and mechanisms differentiated according to stage of development	63
Figure 35: Key issues, pointers and implications for ETF interventions	65
Figure 36: Checklist with semi-structured questions for ETF staff	76
Figure 37: Country fiche template	77
Figure 38: Country mapping for in-depth study	89
Figure 39: List of interviewees	90

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

CA	Central Asia
CMOC	context-mechanism-outcome configurations
CoP	Communities of Practice
Copqual	Communities of Practice Qualifications
CVT	Continuing Vocational Training
DG DEVCO	European Commission Directorate General Development Co-operation
EC	European Commission
EE	Eastern Europe
ENPI	European Neighbourhood and Partnership Instrument
ETF	European Training Foundation
EU	European Union
GIZ	Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit
HE	Higher Education
HR	Human resources
IOM	International Organisation on Migration
IPA	Instrument for Pre-Accession Assistance
LO	Learning Outcomes
MTP	Mid-Term Perspective
NQF	National Qualifications Framework
PC	Partner Country
QF	Qualifications Framework
SEET	South Eastern Europe & Turkey
SEMED	Southern and Eastern Mediterranean
SP	Social Partners
TED	Thematic Expertise Development Department

ToR	Terms of Reference
TQF	Transnational Qualifications Framework
VET	Vocational Education and Training
VQs	Vocational Qualifications
WB	World Bank

Executive summary

Aim of the evaluation

The aim of the evaluation consisted of an assessment of the effectiveness and impact of the European Training Foundation (ETF) work on the reform of qualifications systems in partner countries during the period 2010–2013. This included an assessment of how far the different ETF actions in the partner countries and at regional level met the objectives in the Annual Plans 2010–2013. The ETF work on reforming qualifications systems does not exclusively focus on NQF developments – the work is broader including reforming occupational profiles, quality assurance in VET, and qualification development. In this evaluation a broad scope is taken to capture the whole area in which reforms related to qualification developments take place.

The European Training Foundation is a decentralised agency of the European Union (EU) based in Turin, Italy. It was established by Council Regulation No. 1360 in 1990 recast No. 1339 in 2008 to contribute to the development of the education and training systems of the EU partner countries. Its mission is to help transition and developing countries to harness the potential of their human capital through the reform of education, training and labour market systems in the context of the EU's external relations policy.

The evaluation focused on evaluation criteria concerning effectiveness and impact of the ETF interventions. These evaluation criteria need to be seen in relation to other evaluation criteria as well. Therefore, besides effectiveness and impact, also the questions concerning relevance, implementation and efficiency are taken into account. A realistic evaluation approach (Pawson, Tilly, 1997) was taken. To learn lessons for the future, the evaluation team mapped, for ETF partner countries, linkages between context, mechanisms and outcomes to find out what works under which circumstances.

The evaluation was carried out between August and December 2014, and involved: desk research; interviews with ETF staff; site visits in four ETF partner countries (Kosovo, Morocco, Jordan, Ukraine); and an online survey among stakeholders of partner countries. The data and information collected was collated, analysed, synthesised. The results, together with conclusions and recommendations to assist with the types of interventions that ETF should focus on, in the future, are documented in this report.

Conclusions

The evaluation team attempted to tease out emerging themes that would allow, specifically, the provision of answers to the operationalised research questions developed in relation to the evaluation criteria. Within this executive summary, there are also specified 'pointers for the future', that are related to each conclusion.

1. Relevance of ETF interventions on NQF development/qualifications reform in the partner countries

The ETF has, related to its mandate, several functions, such as providing information, policy advice, supporting stakeholders, capacity building, and encouraging networking and providing analytical support. In the field of NQFs and reforming qualifications – these functions all seem to provide value to stakeholders in partner countries. What is lacking, in this regard, are assessments of whether what was planned was actually carried out. This concerns an assessment of a) whether what is planned is carried out; b) whether it led to outcomes; c) how the outcomes relate to the initial plans/objectives. With regard to the latter, the relevance of interventions could benefit from clear pointers and objectives of the ETF work planned per partner country (how do specific interventions contribute to reaching objectives?). With regard to this point, a

distinction should be made between countries according to the stage of development. Each stage requires a different set of interventions related to different objectives. Countries have different needs at different stages and relate differently to the balance of power (from reactive to proactive). Three stages of development are identified, within this evaluation:

- Countries at an initial stage of development
- Countries at an intermediate stage of development
- Countries at an advanced stage of development

The interventions taking place in the partner countries maintain a certain ‘ad hoc’ character, as often a needs analysis and an intervention logic is lacking. In addition, how interventions built further on outcomes of previous interventions remains unclear. This does not, however, mean that the ETF interventions are not considered relevant to the countries – on the contrary, stakeholders in partner countries value ETF interventions to a great extent in providing the right expertise at the right time, fitting their needs.

2. Implementation of ETF interventions on NQF development/qualifications reform in the partner countries

With regard the implementation of ETF interventions on NQF development/qualifications reform in the partner countries¹, stakeholders are positive. The interventions were considered to be of high quality, and involved the right experts. This being said, the interventions sometimes tend to have an ‘ad hoc’ character (as indicated earlier). This is especially true for countries at an initial and intermediate stage of development. Other points that could be strengthened with regard to the implementation concern improving the follow-up actions after interventions take place – that is, subsequent activities linked to aspects raised by stakeholders during the interventions; and to increase the number of stakeholders involved in interventions in the partner countries. The small number of stakeholders involved makes the process in the partner countries especially susceptible to contingencies such as job change, restructuring of organisations, personal circumstances and hence reduced continuity in working on this theme. This relates as well to a general lack of a knowledge base and institutional learning to effectively develop long-term projects such as designing, developing and implementing an NQF.

3. Effectiveness and sustainability of ETF interventions on NQF development/qualifications reform in the partner countries

During the period 2010–2013, partner countries showed a considerable level of progress in qualifications related reform. The level of progress was related to the stage of development that the country was in. The countries at an initial stage of development continued the discussions on their NQF and show limited tangible progress. The countries at an intermediate stage progressed more steadily and partially reformed their VET qualification systems. Countries follow their own routes in doing so. The countries at an advanced stage of development showed the highest level of progress towards NQF implementation.

When assessed against the objectives set in the Mid-Term Perspective and the ETF annual work programmes, the interventions seem to have achieved their objectives – however, it remains difficult to provide a full assessment on this, as it concerns mostly rather intangible results. The regional projects show a differentiated picture with regard to effectiveness. In some countries they provide, as a starting point, the place for discussion and reflection on the qualification system – in others the progress achieved in the regional projects does not seem to inform the NQF development and qualifications reform.

¹ The corporate role of implementing ETF interventions was not subject to this evaluation. Hence it remains unclear how implementation proceeds within the ETF (who makes the decisions on project implementation).

4. Efficiency of ETF interventions on NQF development/qualifications reform in the partner countries

The role of ETF is seen as a capacity builder and a policy advisor, having a long-term presence in the partner countries. ETF is however not the only institution present in the partner countries to provide support. Although, there is some overlap in what ETF and donor organisations do, compared to donor organisations, the ETF achieves substantial results by means of limited finances – this being said, there is room for improvement in terms of efficiency. These improvements relate to a better understanding of what type of interventions should be implemented given the stage of development; increase already at an early stage the level of joint ownership of the NQF development; and finally, plan interventions more effectively in advance.

With regard the Qualifications Platform, users indicate that they see it predominantly as a rich, reliable, up to date library where they can find and access relevant documentation on qualifications in their country and other countries. The Qualifications Platform does not seem to lead to partnerships, knowledge exchange between users and contributing to discussions. For efficiency reasons, less emphasis could be given to the animating work on the Platform and more emphasis could be on keeping documents accessible and on putting important documents in the spotlight. There were also requests to make the platform available on more languages, for instance through automated translate functions.

5. Impact of ETF interventions on NQF development/qualifications reform in the partner countries

The situation in which ETF operates is complex due to the country specific contexts, geo-political developments, involvement of donor organisations, and the mandate of ETF in partner countries. Consequently assessing the impact of interventions will always be difficult. It is not possible for this evaluation to conclude precisely and absolutely in this area. However, when relying only on the perceptions of partner country stakeholders, they state that most of the impact of ETF interventions is on improving lifelong learning opportunities and progression routes. Again a recurring theme is the high level of satisfaction with ETF services that is indicated amongst stakeholders.

6. Added value of ETF interventions

ETF is perceived by partner country stakeholders to be ‘different’ from other donor organisations, and offers some unique added value contributions. The main added value contributions relate to: long term and continuous involvement in partner countries; sourcing appropriate and relevant expertise; and assisting relevant authorities with donor coordination.

Recommendations

On the basis of the conclusions, the following pointers for future work are developed, providing a stepping stone to the recommendations:

- *The relevance of ETF interventions could be improved by providing a country specific intervention logic in which objectives are stated, together with how specific interventions are to contribute to reaching these objectives. Also, these interventions should be better monitored in the light of the intervention logic. Furthermore, for sustainability reasons, focusing on establishing structures should be the key priority;*
- *The implementation of ETF interventions could be improved by: making explicit how interventions relate to stated country specific objectives; increasing attention towards follow-up activities (linked to previous interventions) and finally; expanding the group of stakeholders (organisations/persons) active in ETF interventions;*

- *The effectiveness of ETF interventions could be improved by taking conditions for effective interventions into account. Also, an early focus on establishing structures to progress the NQF development in the country and facilitate more effective interventions;*
- *The efficiency of ETF interventions could be improved by increasing synergy with donor organisations, linking interventions to the stage of development, and investing in joint ownership and making further use of advanced planning. Also the Qualifications Platform could focus more on its library function;*
- *The impact of ETF intervention could be improved by increasing attention to developing country specific intervention logics and improving evidence-based policy making (Torino process).*
- *The added value of ETF interventions could be improved if ETF enhances its role in donor coordination.*

This selection of recommendations aims to ensure the greatest impact and effectiveness of future ETF interventions in partner countries.

Recommendation 1: The selection of an intervention should be made following the evaluation of the context-mechanism-outcome (CMO) for a partner country, based on its stage of development, at the time of selection. These descriptive ‘stages of development’ could be complemented with clear pointers/objectives as to what should be achieved in order to progress to the following stage. Thereafter, using ETF’s extensive and sustained experience of ‘what works for whom, and in what circumstances’, appropriate mechanisms and related interventions should be selected to achieve those desired outcomes.

Recommendation 2: ETF’s role in the facilitation of more effective donor coordination and integration with the strategic plans of relevant authorities in partner countries should be reviewed, with a view to possibly strengthening this role.

Recommendation 3: Follow-up activity, after events such as seminars or conferences (from aspects raised by stakeholders, and linked to the events), should be explored or re-examined to increase the effectiveness of contribution to achievement of desired outcomes.

Recommendation 4: ETF interventions should focus more on establishing dedicated structures/frameworks for NQFs and qualifications systems to better guarantee sustainability of outcomes.

Recommendation 5: The effectiveness of particular interventions should be re-assessed at periodic intervals, to check that these interventions still achieve the desired outcomes.

Recommendation 6: The knowledge base and accessibility of knowledge in the partner countries should be improved. This concerns in-country knowledge management and further development of the Qualifications Platform.

1 Introducing the evaluation of ETF activities on NQFs and qualifications

1.1 Policy background

1.1.1 Qualifications Frameworks

The establishment of qualifications frameworks (QFs) can be regarded as a worldwide phenomenon. As of 2014, more than 140 countries around the globe are involved in some kind of development and implementation of a QF². While the national qualifications frameworks (NQFs) compare recognised qualifications within a country, transnational or regional qualifications frameworks (TQFs) compare and link qualifications systems and/or qualifications between countries. The third category of sectoral qualifications frameworks link and compare qualifications within one economic sector or subsector of the education system. Given the number of international migration rising from 214 million in 2010 to 405 million in 2050 (International Organisation on Migration (IOM)), there is no global system allowing a learner or worker to take his/her qualifications to other countries and have them recognised. QFs can facilitate this recognition.

Perhaps the best-known, but not the only TQF is the European Qualifications Framework (EQF). The EQF aims to relate different countries' national qualifications systems to a common European reference framework so that individuals and employers are able to use the EQF to better understand and compare the qualifications levels of different countries and different education and training systems. This could lead to increased labour mobility between countries, mobility between education systems and increased opportunities for lifelong learning. The underlying principle is that qualifications are described in terms of learning outcomes.³

NQFs, which are of major interest to this evaluation, can be seen as a classification tool that can enhance transparency within a country's education and training system and the country's qualifications by linking all national qualifications to each other. NQFs are also used to support reform of vocational education and training (VET) systems, for making qualifications better attuned to labour market needs and providing better pathways between different education systems (HE, VET, non-formal and informal). Finally, NQFs can be used to link to TQFs and make it possible to compare education and training systems across borders.

Frequently, NQFs are used as a tool for the reform of VET systems. They provide the framework for modernisation of curricula, often using developed occupational standards (produced in partnership with employers), to develop learning outcome based programmes that are seen to be more relevant by employers. Placing all qualifications systems in a single framework often illustrates progression and pathway routes for learners, and highlights blockages for resolution. Existing quality assurance systems can be analysed and improvements made (at the same time, minimising malpractice events). In an era of aging world populations,

² ETF, Cedefop, UNESCO (2013), Global National Qualifications Framework Inventory.

³ The use of learning outcomes is not without running institutional risks. The shift to learning outcomes masks the risk implied by weakening institutions and underestimates the learning process itself. See: Allais, S., Raffé, D., Young, M., Researching NQFs: Some conceptual issues, 2009; Grootings, P., Discussing national qualification frameworks. Facilitating policy learning in practice, in: ETF Yearbook 2007. Quality in Vocational Education and Training (Turin, European Training Foundation), 2007; Castejon, J. M., National Qualifications Frameworks: tools for relating learning and employability in North Africa and the Middle East, in: ETF Yearbook 2007: Quality in Vocational Education and Training (Turin, European Training Foundation), 2007; Chakroun, B., National Qualification Frameworks: from policy borrowing to policy learning, in: European Journal of Education, Vol. 45, No. 2, 2010, Part I, 2010.

the concepts of lifelong learning and re-training become increasingly important, together with establishing mechanisms and procedures for validating non-formal and informal learning. Comparing or referencing NQFs (frequently against the EQF, but also with other countries) facilitates easier mobility of people for employment (and often too, for their subsequent return). Therefore, in the context of the ETF partner countries, developing and implementing NQFs is not an aim in itself, but a way to improve qualifications and qualifications systems; to make them more labour market, lifelong learning and mobility oriented.⁴ Therefore NQF work needs to be tied in to this aim and not be treated as an end in itself.

1.1.2 European Training Foundation (ETF) work on qualifications

The European Training Foundation (ETF), aims to support the reforms of qualifications systems in its partner countries. As indicated, the work on qualifications is seen as a way of supporting more learning, better quality learning and more equitable distribution of learning in partner countries. The ETF initial focus covering occupational and training standards and competence based assessments has broadened (since 2005) on NQFs and improving vocational qualifications (VQs). In this, the work on VQs predates NQF activities. Since the adoption of the EQF, the ETF disseminates the experience of its implementation and supports in exploring how they can use the EQF for linking their own developing systems to those of other countries taking into account their national circumstances.

The ETF actions in qualifications are the responsibility of the Community of Practice in Qualifications (Copqual), established in 2009 within the Thematic Expertise Department (TED) to concentrate expertise in qualifications systems, and to channel this expertise more efficiently to partner countries. The Copqual operates according to an annual work plan. In this work plan the aims, activities, expected outcomes and required resources are described⁵. Besides the work plan, also project plans are drawn up⁶. The annual activity reports (AAR) report on the achievements in that year.

The team currently has seven qualifications experts, one IT support expert (for its online community the Qualifications Platform) and one project assistant. Copqual's work is divided into two main categories:

- Firstly, **desk-based work** such as studies or analyses, and the Qualifications Platform; and support to the ETF's country teams or regional projects.
- Secondly, Copqual is meeting a demand from the pfor **advice to support** their qualifications systems reforms. Copqual qualification experts work in the majority of partner countries, either nationally or via regional projects.

The ETF Mid-Term Perspective 2010–2013 indicates that the country situation is relevant for the ETF intervention strategies and the main actions are designed to fit the context of each country. In defining actions in the partner countries, the ETF respects the following principles⁷:

⁴ Qualifications frameworks can have different three objectives: 1) A communications framework takes the existing system as starting point and aims to make it more transparent; 2) A transformational framework takes a proposed future system as starting point in order to transform the existing system; 3) A reforming framework takes the existing system as starting point, but uses the framework to initiate reforms to overcome certain gaps or problems. In the ETF partner country context, the reforming function is the most common. Distinction based on: Raffe, David: Towards a dynamic model of National Qualifications Frameworks. In: Allais, Stephanie; Raffe, David; Young, Michael (eds.) Researching Qualifications Frameworks: some conceptual issues. ILO Employment Working Paper No. 44. Geneva 2009, pp. 23-42, 2009; Raffe, David, National Qualifications Frameworks: European experiences and findings in an educational and an employment perspective, Forthcoming in Büchter, K., Dehnhostel, P. and Hanf, G. (eds) Der Deutsche Qualifikationsrahmen (DQR) - Ein Konzept zur Durchlässigkeit und Chancengleichheit im Bildungssystem? Bonn: BIBB, (2012).

⁵ See work plans: Action plan of CoP Qualifications and Quality 2012; Implementation plan for the community of practice in qualifications work programme year 2013; Qualifications implementation plan – WP2014.

⁶ For instance concerning the project 'The regional dimension of qualifications in the Mediterranean'

⁷ See ETF (2009), ETF Mid-Term Perspective 2010–13, p. 13.

- Reform policies and strategies for vocational education and training should not be merely copied from other countries. They must fit a country's context and above all must be owned by their principal stakeholders.
- A fundamental ETF approach is to facilitate policy learning that encourages reflections on national and international experiences and which place a country's own context and needs at the core⁸.
- As a centre of expertise, the ETF's main resource is its staff. Analytical work, policy advice and support to the EC programming and project cycles will be carried out by ETF expert teams. These teams may be complemented on a case-by-case basis with external expertise.
- The ETF strives to strengthen mutual learning through a blend of interventions designed on country-by-country or multi-country basis.
- The ETF draws on EU developments in education and training and their links to employment, social inclusion, enterprise development and competitiveness. The ETF encourages partner countries to reflect on the developments of their systems in this light.
- The ETF cooperates with EU institutions and agencies (particularly Cedefop and Eurofound), as well as relevant international organisations in the field of human capital development to ensure complementarity, added-value and value for money. The ETF will also establish close links with the Economic and Social Committee (EESC), the Committee of the Regions and European social partner organisations to support more efficient schemes for vocational training.

The inventory of NQF developments in partner countries and other analyses shows that most are reforming their qualifications systems to improve the quality of qualifications and their relevance to the labour market and learners. Two trends are evident: a move to reform or modernise qualifications defined by learning outcomes; and the rapid and widespread emergence of NQFs. With regard the latter, many partner countries have already passed legislation formally establishing NQFs and have initiated the necessary support processes of establishing institutions, engaging stakeholders and developing standards through level descriptors. Some are advanced in implementation, placing new, outcome-based qualifications in the framework.

There is however a concern that the development and implementation of qualifications frameworks and their impact on citizens is currently too slow. That is why Copqual has been focusing its activities recently on support to countries in developing reformed qualifications and on populating the new frameworks. This is an indication of the fact that the focus on qualifications frameworks is not sufficient and efforts need to be placed on developing quality qualifications that can, if desired, be placed in a framework. In addition, from internal ETF monitoring and evaluation reports it becomes clear that initiated projects can change during the course of the project⁹; and that sometimes project plans are considered too ambitious¹⁰. Given the complex context and interrelating policy developments in the partner countries, it can be assumed that taking a flexible approach might be more effective than working along strictly defined project plans.

1.2 Aim of the evaluation

The aim of the evaluation consists in an assessment of the effectiveness and impact of the ETF work on the reform of qualifications systems in partner countries during the period 2010–2013.

⁸ Following the ownership and alignment principles of the Paris Declaration which was endorsed on 2 March 2005, as an international agreement to which over one hundred Ministers, Heads of Agencies and other Senior Officials adhered and committed their countries and organisations to continue to increase efforts in harmonisation, alignment and managing aid for results with a set of monitorable actions and indicators.

(http://www.oecd.org/document/18/0,3343,en_2649_3236398_35401554_1_1_1_1,00.html)

⁹ For instance: WP11-20-05 – The regional dimension of qualifications in the Mediterranean

¹⁰ See for instance: WP11-40-18 – Communities of practice (TED)

This includes an assessment of how far the different ETF actions in the partner countries and at regional level met the objectives in the Annual Plans 2010–2013. In the end, the evaluation should lead to useful conclusions and findings as regards relevance, efficiency, effectiveness, impact, sustainability and added value of the ETF Qualifications activities as well as recommendations on what type of interventions the ETF should focus on in the future. The following key questions are proposed in the Terms of Reference (ToR) for this study:

Key questions for the study:

1. How effective has the ETF been in developing and applying principles of qualifications systems reforms (through NQFs) and operationalising these principles in the partner countries? How did the ETF influence the qualifications systems reforms in the country?
2. To what extent has ETF effectively applied and been able to connect partner countries with international developments and experience (including the EQF) to partner countries to inform their qualifications system reforms?
3. To what extent has synergy and coordination with EU-funded and other major donor-supported (e.g. WB, GIZ) projects in the partner countries been achieved?
4. How effective has the ETF been in ensuring synergies among its actions at national, regional and corporate level?
5. How far has ETF been effective in developing the capacities of stakeholders and institutions in partner countries in their work in developing their qualifications systems/NQFs?
6. How far have the different ETF actions at national, regional and corporate level met the objectives in the Annual Plans 2010–2013?
7. How far, and in what ways, have the ETF Regional projects in SEMED and EE (CVT) contributed to the corporate and country level objectives of qualifications system development as stated in the MTP (Medium-Term Perspective) and Annual Plans 2010–2013?

Figure 1: Key evaluation questions

2 Evaluative framework, approach and methodology

2.1 Evaluation-matrix

The key questions focus on **effectiveness**¹¹ and **impact** of the ETF interventions. These two evaluation criteria should however be seen in relation to other evaluation criteria as well. Therefore, besides effectiveness and impact, also the evaluation criteria of **relevance**, **implementation**, and **efficiency** are considered.¹²

Besides the evaluation criteria, the key questions also relate to the **operational level in partner countries**. Here the focus is on whether the interventions are fit-for-purpose to support partner countries in developing qualifications/NQFs. The analyses are based on an assessment at national/regional level and even more, at the level of concrete interventions as well. Hence, the unit of analysis of this study is in the first place the ETF interventions for developing and implementing NQFs/qualifications development per ETF partner country.

By adding judgement criteria and indicators to the evaluation criteria, an evaluation matrix is composed through which the evaluation questions are operationalised. The key questions as mentioned in Section 1.2 were taken as starting point and were further operationalised given the evaluation criteria.

Criterion	Evaluation questions	Judgement criteria/indicator Experts' judgement (To a limited extent – somewhat – to a great extent) on the following criteria:
Relevance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> What are the objectives of ETF interventions, as stated in the MTP and annual project plans per country? To what extent are these objectives specific given the country context? To what extent is the set of interventions based on a need analysis and a clear line of reasoning (To what extent are ETF objectives and actions related to reform of qualifications systems consistent with partner countries' needs, priorities and policies)? How well adapted and adaptable are ETF actions to the diverse conditions in the partner countries? To what extent do the interventions build further on prior experience and expertise? To what extent have the partner countries been connected to international developments and progress in Europe (EQF) to improve their systems? What role did the ETF interventions play in this? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The ETF (set of) intervention(s) is/are relevant given the context in which it is implemented. Interventions are based on a clear line of reasoning (they are motivated on the basis of what works given the context).
Implementation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> How are decisions at operational level taken in relation to ETF work on qualifications? What does a regular intervention/project look like (aims, time, resources, involved stakeholders, etc.)? To what extent do the interventions involve multiple stakeholders? To what extent are the interventions the result of a joint approach? How are projects and interventions initiated, selected, and implemented? How do the ETF and partner countries work together in designing interventions? How do intervention proposals get developed? Who is involved? Who takes decisions? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> At operational level, the ETF is able to differentiate the implementation to the nature of the partner countries (tailored implementation).
Effectiveness / sustainability	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> To what extent did the interventions lead to the envisaged outcomes (as stated in the MTP and annual project plans)? How far have the different ETF actions at national and regional level met the objectives in the Annual Plans 2010–2013? Over the period 2010–2013, what have been the major achievements in qualifications systems reforms in the partner countries? What are the outcomes of the intervention in terms of participants, knowledge exchange, improved qualifications, developing VET systems, developing and populating NQFs, increased permeability, lifelong learning and mobility? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The ETF (set of) intervention(s) is/are effective in reaching the objectives (the line of reasoning holds). The set of interventions are adjusted to fit the specific country context in order to

¹¹ Sustainability is discussed in relation to effectiveness.

¹² NB: the evaluation criteria of complementarity and community added value are included in the impact criterion.

Criterion	Evaluation questions	Judgement criteria/indicator Experts' judgement (To a limited extent – somewhat – to a great extent) on the following criteria:
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> How effective has the ETF been in developing and applying principles of qualifications systems reforms (through NQFs) and operationalising these principles in the partner countries? How did the ETF influence the qualifications systems reforms in the country? Did the interventions lead to sustainable outcomes, extending the project/intervention duration? To what extent are both stakeholders and public in partner countries aware of positive effects brought by reformed qualification systems? To what extent do qualifications systems reforms in partner countries depend on the support provided by international donor community? How sustainable are ETF actions at national and regional level? To what extent are labour market and educational actors involved and which added value do they perceive? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> obtain the envisaged results. The yielded outcomes at partner country level is sustainable in terms of stakeholder involvement (labour market and education stakeholders), joint ownership and further interventions planned.
Efficiency	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> To what extent are the human, organisational and financial resources for reforming qualifications systems sufficient in the partner countries themselves? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The ETF (set of) intervention(s) is/are cost-effective (efficient). The same outcome cannot be reached with more cost-effective interventions.
Impact/Coherence/ Complementarity/ Community value added	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> What were the intermediate outcomes and results of the interventions (number of participants, reports published, requests for information etc.)? How far, and in what ways, have the ETF Regional projects in SEMED and EE (CVT) contributed to the country level objectives of qualifications system development as stated in the MTP and Annual Plans 2010–2013? What is the impact of the intervention on 1) NQF development; 2) reforming VET and qualification systems; 3) transparency; 4) lifelong learning possibilities; 5) mobility possibilities; permeability of education systems; 6) labour market relevance of qualifications? What are the real impacts of the qualifications systems reforms on citizens in the partner countries? What is/was the mechanism by which results were achieved (i.e. what are the most important factors which explain the success of the interventions)? Which success- and fail factors exist? How far has ETF been effective in developing the capacities of stakeholders and institutions in partner countries in their work in developing their qualifications systems/NQFs? Which other EU-funded initiatives related to the qualifications systems reforms have been implemented in the partner countries?¹³ Which initiatives related to the qualifications systems reforms have been supported by other donors in the partner countries (e.g. WB, GIZ)? To what extent did ETF contribute to the progress in qualifications systems reforms achieved in the respective countries? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The ETF (set of) intervention(s) lead(s) to the impact at national level as foreseen in the MTP 2010–2013. Also, impact is reached in relation to applying NQF principles to qualifications systems (e.g. the learning outcome approach). There is synergy between different donors and the ETF work adds community value. The ETF (set of) intervention(s) is complementary to interventions from other organisations/ institutions/ programmes. The ETF set of interventions add value, meaning that without the ETF support, the outcomes would not have been reached.

Figure 2: Evaluation matrix

2.2 How to evaluate effective approaches: what works for whom in which circumstances?

Literature on supportive actions in VET reforms indicates that there is no one way that works in all situations. Finding a solution in one country for effective reform does not mean that this can be effectively replicated in another country. This makes evidence-based policy making in an international perspective particularly challenging. There is no all-encompassing answer to what

¹³ Such as: Instrument for Pre-Accession Assistance (IPA), the European Neighbourhood and Partnership Instrument (ENPI) and the Development Co-operation Instrument (DCI). These instruments put greater emphasis on supporting partner countries in the definition and implementation of strategies aligned with national policy priorities.

works in all situations.¹⁴ Besides the search for evidence-base in policy making, there are also implementation issues that intervene in other contexts. The use of interventions, such as technical assistance and capacity building, rely on the uptake or use of knowledge in order to have an impact. These interventions are not, however, deployed in a vacuum: they are used in contexts with diverse and often deeply-entrenched power dynamics and political economy features. As a result, they unfold at the interface between knowledge and power.¹⁵ This provides a number of implementation challenges. A World Bank evaluation on their interventions on VET systems in the 1990s points to a number of challenges, amongst others¹⁶: the lack of upfront planning; the lack of political commitment; and relying on external technical assistance hampers the prospects of building long-term capacity in areas where it was needed and also adversely affected program sustainability. In projects where the assistance was regarded as being successful, the nature and extent of external technical assistance was determined through a consultative process involving key stakeholders. Also, the lack of broad-based consensus and consultations contributed to a lack of ownership of project outcomes and lack of commitment in project planning and execution leading to lower likelihood of project sustainability. As there is no one way that fits all contexts, the evaluation approach on assessing effectiveness and impact of interventions needs to also take the context into account in which interventions are implemented.

As this evaluation is focused on assessing the effectiveness and impact of the ETF interventions in developing and implementing NQFs in the different ETF partner countries, the best-suited evaluation framework is the Realistic Evaluation framework developed by Pawson and Tilley (1997). Instead of asking ‘does this work’ or ‘what works’, as traditional evaluations do, realistic evaluators ask ‘what works for whom, and in what circumstances?’ This enables the evaluator to better capture the impact of the different contexts on the interventions made and to see them in conjunction with contextual factors.

Evaluation studies using the realistic evaluation framework produce **context-mechanism-outcome configurations**. This captures the linkages between the context, mechanism and outcome. There are linked questions that need to be asked about every intervention so that it can be understood in realist terms. These questions relate to¹⁷:

- **Mechanism:** what is it about an ETF measure/intervention which may lead it to have a particular outcome pattern in a given context?
- **Context:** what conditions are needed for an ETF measure/intervention to trigger mechanisms to produce particular outcome patterns in the partner countries?
- **Outcome:** what are the practical effects and impacts produced by causal mechanisms being triggered in a given context?

The following figure summarises the general evaluation approach to assess the effectiveness and impact of ETF interventions and mentions the evaluation criteria which need to be taken into account when assessing the effectiveness and impact of ETF interventions in relation to qualifications/NQF developments.

¹⁴ See McGrath, Simon, Lugg, Rosemary, (2012), Knowing and doing vocational education and training reform: Evidence, learning and the policy process, in: International Journal of Educational Development, Volume 32, Issue 5, September 2012, Pages 696–708.

¹⁵ See Jones, Harry, Jones, Nicola, Shaxson, Louise, Walker, David, (2012), Providing practical guidance for in-country programming: the value of analysing knowledge, policy and power.

¹⁶ See: Canagarajah, S., Dar, A., Nording, R. Raju, D. (2002), Effectiveness of Lending for Vocational Education and Training: Lessons from World Bank Experience.

¹⁷ See: Tilley, N. (2000), Realistic Evaluation: An Overview. Presented at the Founding Conference of the Danish Evaluation Society, September 2000

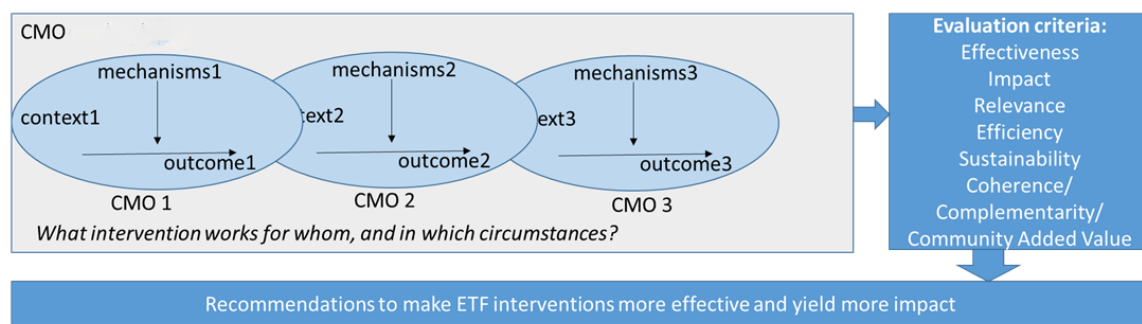


Figure 3: CMO approach

In chapters 3 to 7, we will apply this evaluative framework on the work of ETF in the field of NQF developments, qualifications reforms and support to ETF partner countries.

2.3 Methodological approach

In answering the evaluation questions as operationalised in the evaluation matrix, the evaluation employed a mixed method approach. Although most of research instruments contribute to almost all evaluation questions and sub questions as identified in the evaluation matrix, some of them address certain issues in more detail than others. The following research methods were used:

Desk research

Desk research forms an integral part of the evaluation. The evaluators analysed the documents, both ETF internal documents, studies by ETF and other organisations and country-specific documents, in order to extract information in light of the evaluation questions. In annex 4 a list is presented of the literature used.

Interviews with ETF staff

In order to better grasp the way the qualifications and NQF work is embedded in the ETF strategies and policies, a number of interviews with the ETF staff is conducted. In addition, these interviews were used to shed light on the applied mechanisms and related interventions in the countries. Interviews with management staff and members of Copqual were conducted on the 9th and 10th of September. Each interview lasted a maximum of one hour and was implemented according to a semi-structured list of questions (see annex 1: data collection formats). The people interviewed are listed in annex 3 (list of respondents).

Online survey amongst stakeholders of partner countries

The analysis of the country level interventions in the field of qualifications and NQF development is based on in-depth country studies in four countries and a detailed survey amongst stakeholders in all the ETF partner countries. Where the survey provided a broad picture of what interventions have taken place, in what context, for what purpose and with what intended outcomes; the site visits provide an in-depth understanding of the dynamics at work in a particular country that explains whether and how a set of the ETF interventions has impacted the qualifications and NQF developments. Both the survey and the in-depth country visits aimed to find what were the key determinants of success of ETF interventions at partner country level. The survey questionnaire consists of the following parts: Part 1: Background questions; Part 2: Interventions; Part 3: Outcomes and impact; Part 4: Success and fail factors and lessons for the future. The questionnaire can be found in annex 1 (data collection formats). The questionnaires (and invitation mail/reminder) is presented in English, French and Russian. Before sending out the invitations, the questionnaire was first tested among a small group of respondents.

The survey was launched after contact details were received from ETF (November 7, 2014). The total number of partner country stakeholders invited was 98. These stakeholders were carefully selected as those with whom ETF worked with in the period under review (2010–2013) and they received a link and personal code to enter the survey. After multiple reminders were sent, in total 44 partner country stakeholders responded to the invitation (as of November 23, 2014). The group of respondents has the following background characteristics (see figure 4).

1) Countries	# of respondents per country	2) Type of stakeholder	#
Armenia, Belarus, Egypt, Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Israel, Kyrgyzstan, Lebanon, Montenegro, Russia, Tajikistan, Tunisia, Turkey	1	Government (for instance Ministry of Education or alike; Ministry of Labour/Social affairs)	14
Georgia, Jordan, Moldova, Palestine	2	National authority for NQF/qualifications/QA agency	8
Azerbaijan, Libya, Ukraine	3	Social partners/employers/trade unions	5
Bosnia and Herzegovina, Morocco	4	Education providers (VET, HE, general education, private provider)	3
Kosovo	5	Other (ETF consultants)	5
Not specified	2		
		3) Involvement with ETF work	#
		Highly involved, having a (shared) responsibility in NQF developments and qualifications system reforms	15
		Involved in a number of ETF-related activities/interventions in NQF developments and qualifications system developments	13
		Involved only in a few ETF-related activities in NQF and qualifications system reforms	8
		Limited involvement in NQF developments and qualifications system reforms (know about activities, not actively participated)	5

Figure 4: Background characteristics respondents' survey under partner country stakeholders

Given the response rate of nearly 50% (which is not bad), still a substantial number of invited stakeholders did not respond to the invitation for the survey. There is a threat therefore of a biased response: only those stakeholders who appreciate the work of ETF responded. For this reason, the survey is not the only research method on which the conclusions of the study are developed. Through data triangulation (arriving at similar results by different research methods), a too strong dependency on potential biased survey outcomes is avoided.

Site visits four ETF partner countries

During the site visits the topics that were studied in depth were similar to the topics included in the survey. The difference consisted in analysing the interrelationships between the different topics to better understand what works in which circumstances. The evaluators conducted three research tasks:

1. Desk research on available documentation on the state of play, legislation, projects, conferences, and route-maps.
2. Stakeholders interviews (face to face) with national authorities; employers' representatives/social partners; education sector representatives; other stakeholders (advising bodies; donor organisations)
3. ETF country manager interview (via Skype)

The site visits were planned and organised after contact details of potential interviewees was provided by the ETF. For each of the four countries, between three and five persons were identified and contact details provided. In total 23 persons were interviewed in the four countries. The site-visits were conducted between October 19 and November 5 2014. In the interviews with stakeholders the evaluators used a checklist with questions (see annex 1 (data collection formats)). The list of interviewed persons can be found in annex 3.

Data analysis and synthesis

After the field phase, the evaluation team investigated the body of evidence gathered during the field phase and made an overall assessment in line with the evaluation questions. Data was analysed according to the evaluation matrix. As different (types of) sources of data collections were used, the assessment phase consisted of a critical triangulation of evidence found. These evaluation methods were carefully defined to deliver quantitative indicators where available, and were complemented by more qualitative findings based more on opinions and perceptions.

Through applying the judgement criteria (based on the evaluation matrix) the evaluation team interpreted the findings and formulated answers for each evaluation question. Based on the conclusions, recommendations were developed and lessons specified on how to increase effectiveness and impact of the ETF interventions in the field of qualification and NQF development in the coming years. In this, the evaluation team assessed the recommendations in the light of the ETF context and its strategy (are the recommendations feasible, realistic?).

Capacity building workshop ETF

In a capacity building workshop, December 5, 2014, the evaluation team presented the outcomes of the study and facilitated discussion with the ETF staff on organisational embedding of future work.

3 Overarching view on contexts, mechanisms and outcomes

In this chapter, overarching views are provided on contexts, mechanisms and outcomes. This chapter starts with presenting the clustering of countries (Section 3.1) and discusses the outcomes of the partner country stakeholder survey in relation to the mechanisms, outcomes and progress achieved (Section 3.2 and Section 3.3).

3.1 Context and clustering countries

A desired outcome from an ETF intervention is triggered by a relevant mechanism. The mechanism (and specific intervention) selected depends on the context of the situation in a partner country, at a given time, or stage of qualifications reform. Clearly it would be both challenging and time consuming to identify these context-mechanism-outcomes for each of the 30 ETF partner countries.

In order to gather and analyse the country information, a matrix was developed that includes the following indicators:

- Copqual is active in the country via direct support
- Level of progress achieved in reforming qualifications systems (through NQFs)
- Stage of implementation of reformed institutional structures (networks of schools, governance agencies, funding agencies, certification bodies)
- Employers are engaged at national level in policy discussions and with providers (schools/colleges) in developing curricula
- Level of progress in developing outcome-based qualifications
- Engaged with qualifications development and comparison outside the country.
- Stage of change in whether reforms have actually been translated from words into action

By analysing the countries on the basis of these indicators, country-clusters emerge which share some contextual characteristics. These clusters can be used to make reasoned cross-country comparisons on the effectiveness and impact of different ETF interventions. This information is used to cluster partner countries' contexts (see annex 2). The reason for applying a three categories approach instead of the five categories of Cedefop is first of for pragmatic reasons. As the study concerns an area where many developments take place at the same time in countries, it is difficult to apply a fine-grained categorisation. Secondly, the Cedefop categories depict qualitative differences (first, policy discussions, second design NQFs etc.), which in practice are difficult to differentiate in the country context. For these reasons, the evaluation used a quantitative categorisation in countries at initial, intermediate and advanced stage of development. The clustering of countries is presented below.

Cluster	Partner countries SEET	Partner countries SEMED	Partner countries EE	Partner countries Central Asia
Advanced stage	Croatia (now EU Member State), Kosovo, Montenegro, Turkey	-	Armenia, Georgia	
Intermediate stage	Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Serbia	Morocco, Tunisia	Azerbaijan, Moldova, Russia, Ukraine	
Initial stage	-	Egypt, Jordan, Lebanon, Palestine	Belarus, Kyrgyzstan ¹⁸	Tajikistan, Uzbekistan
No data	-	Algeria, Israel, Libya, Syria,	-	Kazakhstan ¹⁹ , Turkmenistan

Figure 5: Clustering of Partner Countries

Following consultation with the ETF, the following four countries were selected to be studied in depth: **Kosovo; Jordan; Morocco; and Ukraine**.

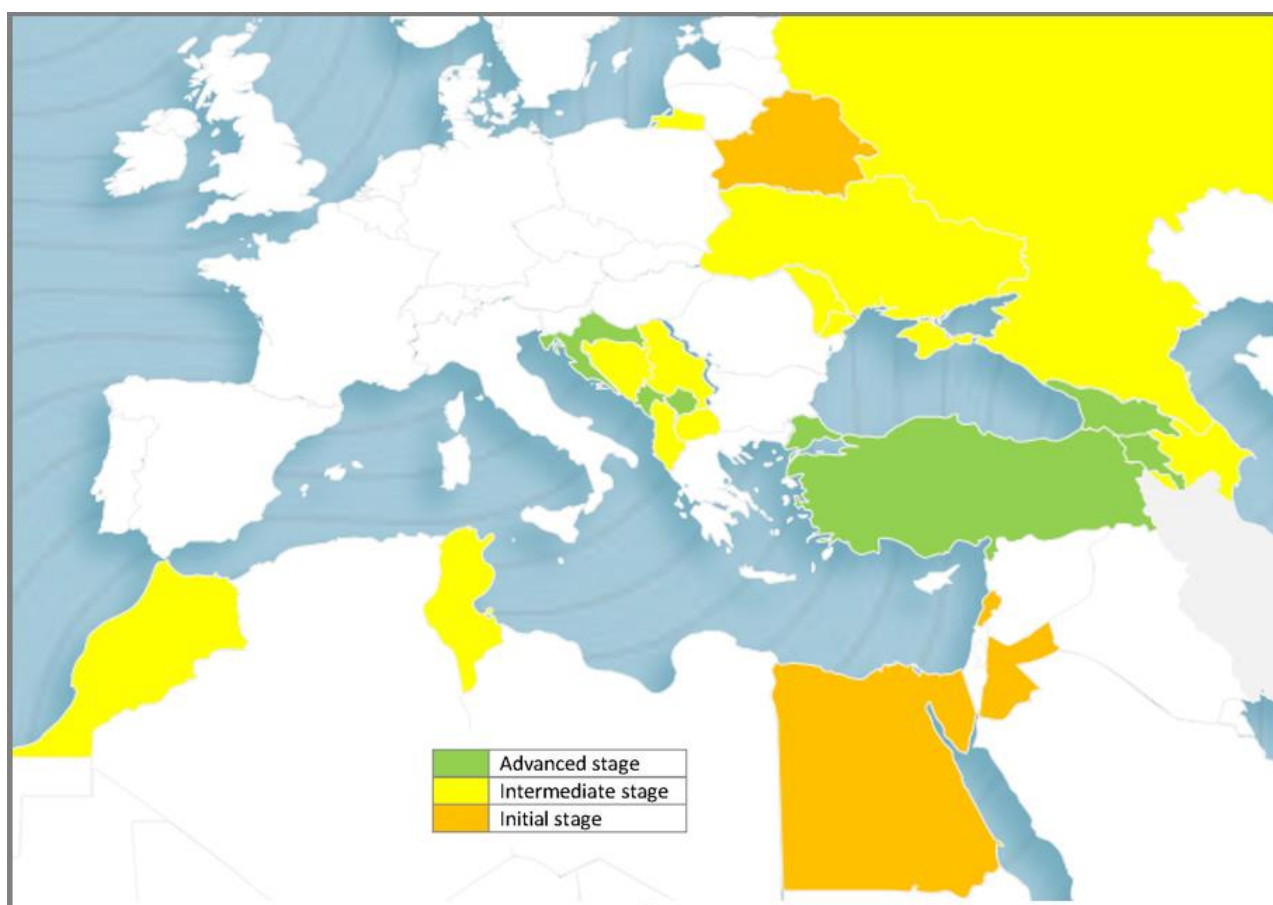


Figure 6: Mapping countries on stages of development of NQF/qualifications systems

Clearly there is a continuum of progress when a country chooses to reform its qualifications systems, and progress does not occur in discrete steps, as is perhaps implied by the three stages above. However, there is some value in comparing countries at similar stages of progress, to try to identify common contexts that pertain to each group of countries. In most cases, the requirements of partner countries will change during the reform process – in the early stages,

¹⁸ Participated in some regional activities for the EE.

¹⁹ For Kazakhstan this does not mean that there has not been any progress, on the contrary, but ETF has not worked with Kazakhstan on qualifications since 2010.

bringing relevant stakeholders together (often for the first time) using appropriate fora is critical to initiate the reform process – in the latter stages, specific procedural support (through technical expertise and documentation) may be more effective.

It is relatively easy to evaluate the context at a particular time, but more difficult to measure the change in context, as time progresses.

A clear indication of the context provides a better linkage to the related mechanism, and consequently a more effective choice of intervention for support, to achieve the desired outcome.

3.2 ETF's work in the partner countries

3.2.1 Mechanisms and interventions

In the area of NQF and qualifications development and reform, there are a number of types of actions/interventions the ETF could use to support partner countries such as: national/stakeholder-focussed conferences, specific policy papers, pilot projects (sectoral projects), providing training, transnational exchange, consulting/advising work, targeted information sharing, organising conferences (national/transnational), mobility, establishing a dedicated website (qualification platform), coordinating and funding of projects on NQF and VET systems, drafting analytical reports.

There is a difference between the concept of intervention and the concept of mechanism. The concept of intervention relates to a concrete activity/set of activities conducted in a country/region (such as organising a conference, a training, conducting analyses, drawing up reports). In the OECD report on Qualifications systems: Bridges to lifelong learning, the concept of mechanism is understood as a structural change in a qualifications system and/or a change in the conditions of a qualifications system that results in change in the extent, quality, distribution and efficiency of lifelong learning.²⁰ In this study, the concept of 'mechanism' underpins the concept of intervention as it points to a line of reasoning in which an intervention is linked to a certain outcome. The mechanism therefore describes *how* an intervention leads to a result, i.e. what is the aspect of the intervention by which results are obtained.

These mechanisms are closely related to the role the ETF plays in the countries and hence they are closely related to the ETF mission, mandate and functions ETF performs²¹. The following figure provides an overview of the core areas (related to the mandate of ETF (capacity building, organising support, information sharing and EC/donor support (left)), the associated mechanisms related to NQF and qualifications developments (middle) and the ETF interventions that can be implemented in these mechanisms (right). With regard to the mechanisms, it is indicated whether these relate to national (yellow), regional (grey), or corporate (green) level work of ETF.

²⁰ OECD, Qualifications Systems: Bridges to Lifelong Learning, 2007.

²¹ The ETF has the following functions as defined in its mandate: 1. to provide information, policy analyses and advice on human capital development issues in the partner countries; 2. to promote knowledge and analysis of skill needs in national and local labour markets; 3. to support relevant stakeholders in partner countries in building capacity in human capital development; 4. to facilitate the exchange of information and experience among donors engaged in human capital development in partner countries; 5. to support the delivery of Community assistance to partner countries in the field of human capital development; 6. to disseminate information and encourage networking and the exchange of experience and good practice between the EU and partner countries and amongst partner countries in human capital development issues; 7. to contribute, at the Commission's request, to the analysis of the overall effectiveness of training assistance to the partner countries; and 8. to undertake such other tasks as may be agreed between the Governing Board and the Commission, within the general framework of the regulation.

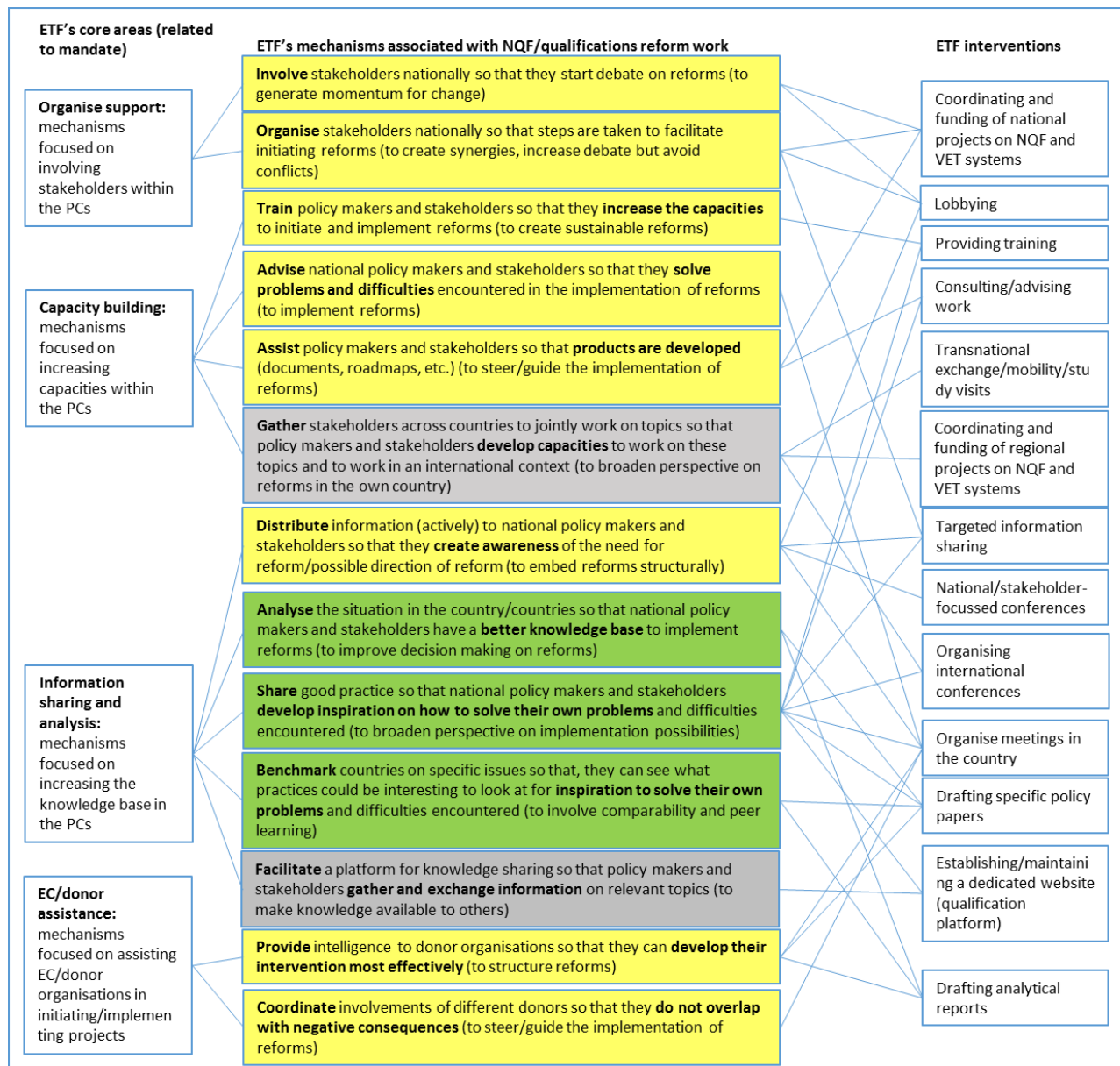


Figure 7: Overview ETF mechanisms

As is illustrated with the lines between the mechanisms and the interventions, interventions can serve different purposes once implemented with different intentions. For instance providing training can both serve increasing capacities and provide inspiration to deal with particular issues. Moreover, mechanisms can be supported by multiple types of interventions. For example, the mechanism ‘gathering stakeholders across countries to jointly work on topics so that policy makers and stakeholders develop capacities to work on these topics and to work in an international context’, can be pursued by coordinating and funding of projects on NQF and VET systems, transnational exchange/mobility/study visits, and through organising international conferences.

3.2.2 Perceptions on the role of ETF and ETF interventions by partner country stakeholders

Given these mechanisms by which ETF can support partner countries, it is interesting to see how ETF stakeholders in the partner countries review the role of ETF in their country in relation to NQF development (see figure 8).

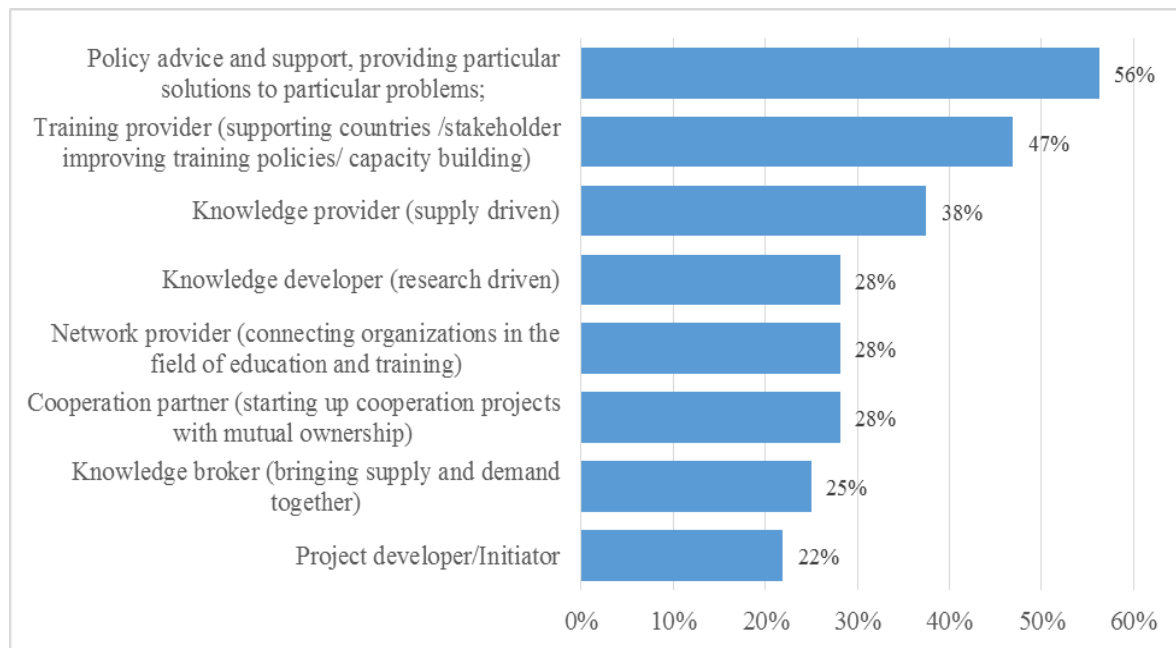


Figure 8: Characterisation of ETF's involvement in NQF developments in the partner countries²²

The stakeholders characterise the role of ETF in the first place as policy advice and support (56%). Also training provider and as organisation that provides capacity building (47%) and knowledge provider (38%) are seen as key characteristics of ETF's work. The roles of knowledge broker and project developer/initiator are mentioned less often as key characteristics of ETF. In general, ETF and stakeholders share similar ideas on the characteristics of ETF's involvement: the emphasis is on capacity building and policy advice.

In the survey, stakeholders from partner countries were involved in the following broad types of ETF work (figure 9).

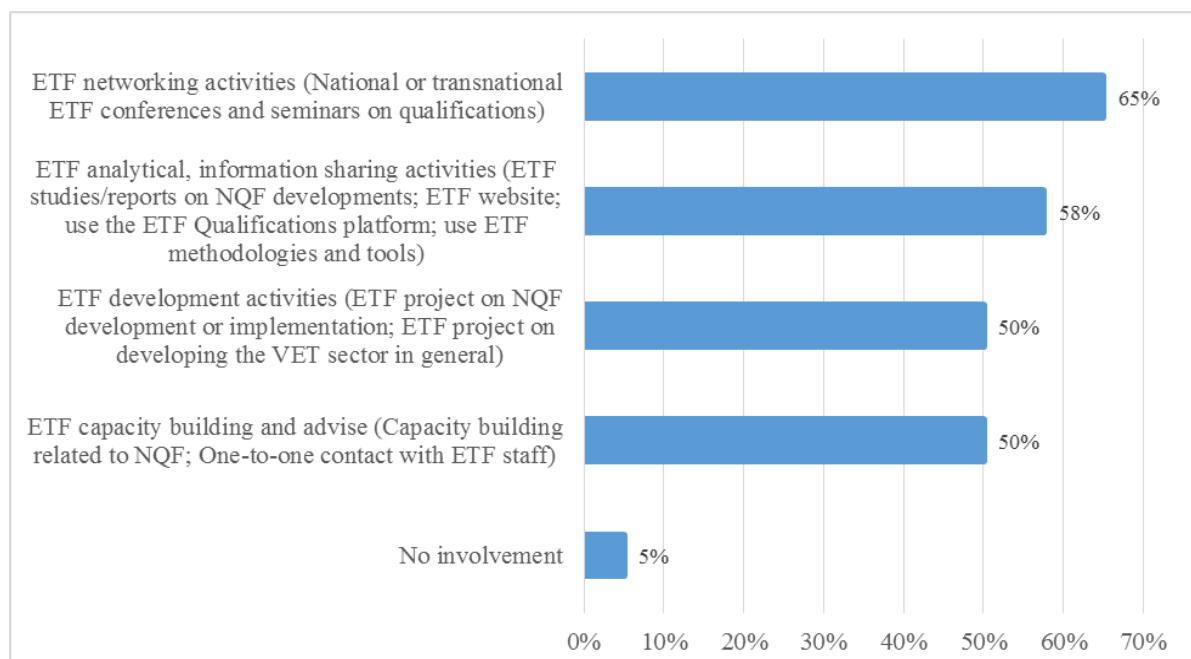


Figure 9: Indication of involvement in ETF supported activities related to the country's qualifications²³

²² Source: Survey amongst stakeholders in partner countries (N=32). Sample provided by ETF

Partner country stakeholders were also asked to select one type of ETF intervention they participated in which they considered the most important. Most of those selected concern development projects focussing on the design of NQFs (establishment of levels and level descriptors). This is especially the case for stakeholders from countries at initial stage of development. The stakeholders from countries at intermediate stage selected more often capacity building as the most important type of intervention.

This emphasis on providing information and expertise as the key role of ETF is reflected as well in the role ETF had in interventions the stakeholders found most effective (see figure 10).

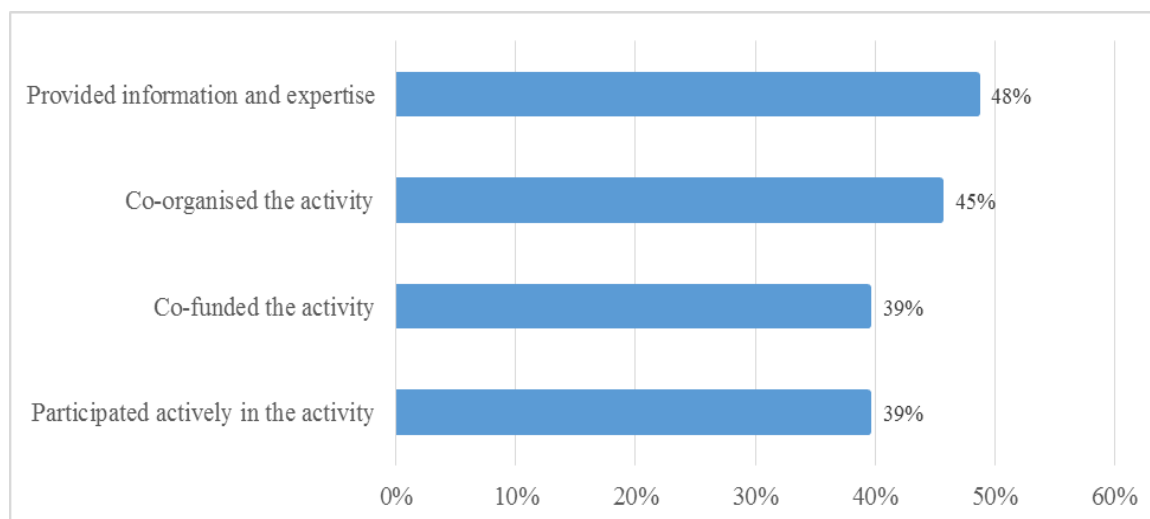


Figure 10: Indication of how ETF was involved in interventions stakeholders assessed to be most effective²⁴

In the countries at an advanced stage of development and countries at intermediate stage, more often providing information and expertise was considered the key role of ETF. In the countries at initial stage this was less the case. Also co-funding was mentioned more often in countries at an advanced stage of development than in countries at the other stages. The participation in transnational interventions (regional projects) was only selected by stakeholders in the countries at initial stage of development. The stakeholders from other country clusters selected interventions having a broad national scope or a national education scope. Also, most selected types of interventions involved a broad group of stakeholders. There are however differences between the clusters of countries. The countries at initial stage indicate a higher number of interventions focusing on a specific group of education providers, whereas the countries at advanced stage generally discussed interventions in which a broad group of national stakeholders was involved. In 15 out of 33 described interventions other donors were involved, including EC funding, development Banks and national aid organisations. More than half of the respondents indicate that they were invited by ETF to participate. The most important reasons for participating were to work together with other international stakeholders on NQF developments (cooperation); and to work together with other national stakeholders on the same issue.

When asked about the implementation of the selected ETF intervention, the following assessment was provided on a variety of topics (see figure 11).

²³ Source: Survey amongst stakeholders in partner countries (N=40). Sample provided by ETF

²⁴ Source: Survey amongst stakeholders in partner countries (N=33). Sample provided by ETF.

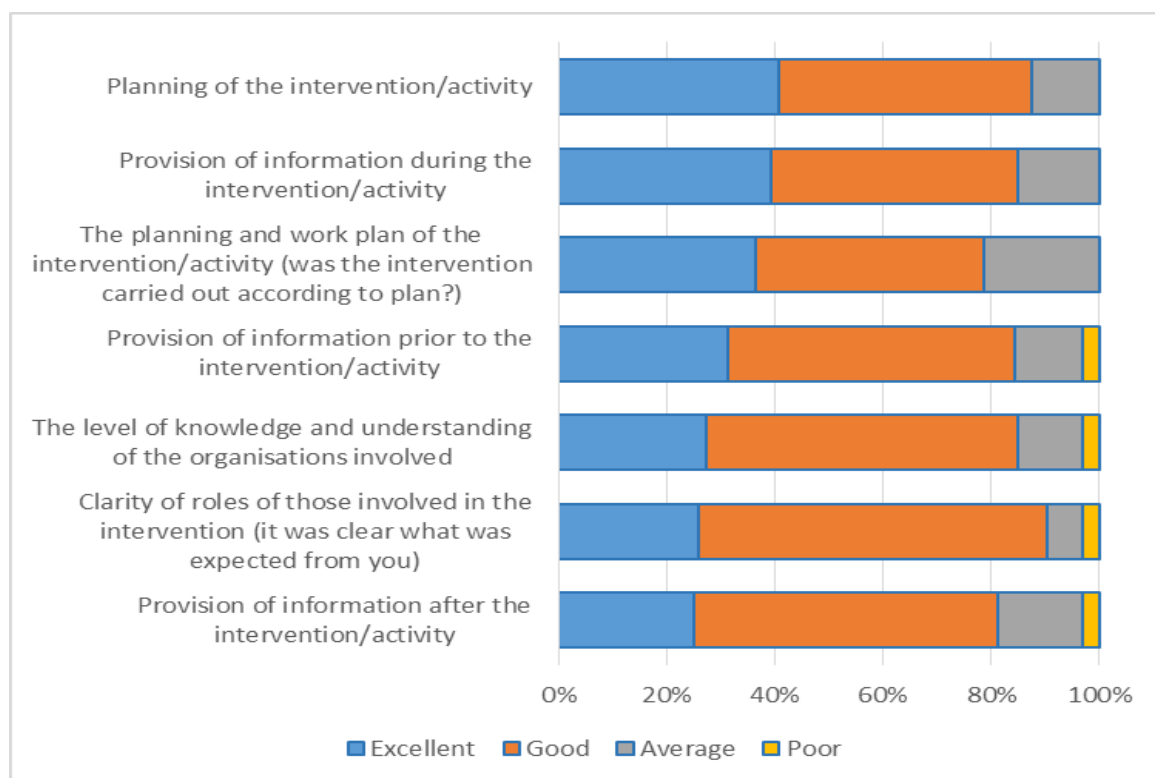


Figure 11: Assessment of the implementation of the intervention/activity²⁵

According to the survey, the stakeholders assessed the implementation as excellent and good. This concerns various aspects, such as the planning of the intervention and the provision of information during the event. A point of concern is the level of knowledge and understanding of the organisations involved; and clarity of roles of those involved in the intervention provision of information prior to the intervention and the follow-up after the intervention.

This general satisfaction with the way ETF interventions are implemented, translates as well to whether the interventions meet the expectations (see figure 12). Being that more than one-third of the respondents indicated that the expectations were only met to some extent or very little.

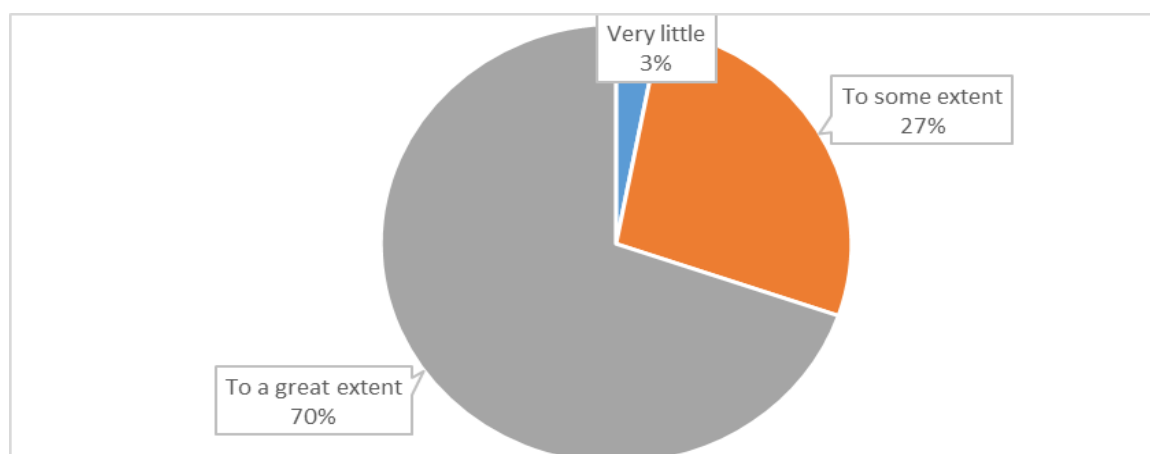


Figure 12: Assessment whether the intervention meets expectations²⁶

²⁵ Source: Survey amongst stakeholders in partner countries (N=33). Sample provided by ETF.

²⁶ Source: Survey amongst stakeholders in partner countries (N=33). Sample provided by ETF.

Reasons given why the ETF interventions met the expectations to some extent vary. It is mentioned that more communication with other countries was expected. One respondent was critical to the background knowledge and understanding of the participants which hampered the effectiveness of the intervention (conference). However, most respondents indicate that the activity they participated in provided knowledge what is an NQF, inspired stakeholders to continue to work on qualifications, provided ideas on implementation issues and it increased awareness of the importance of working on qualifications.

3.2.3 Perceptions on effectiveness of ETF interventions by partner country stakeholders

In developing NQFs and reforming VET/qualifications systems, some ETF activities are considered more effective than others. The following figure provides an overview of how stakeholders ranked the ETF activities in relation to the impact they have on NQF developments.

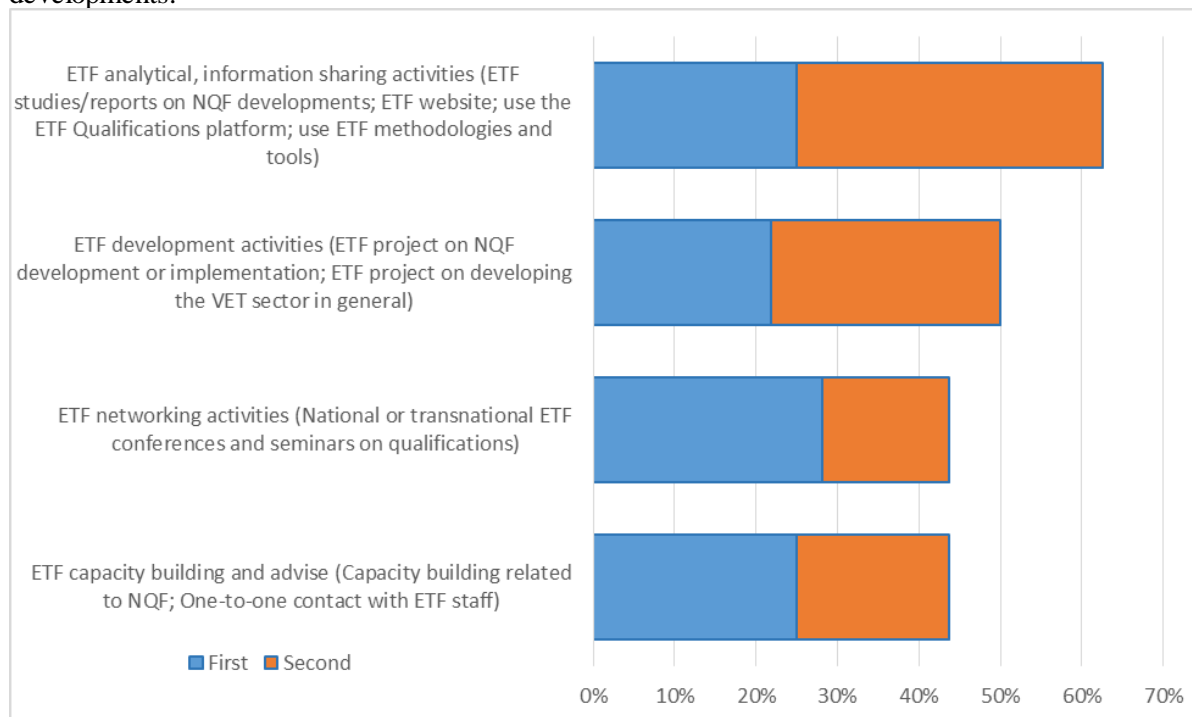


Figure 13: Ranking ETF activities from most effective to least effective with regard to NQF/qualifications developments²⁷

Figure 13 indicates the percentage of respondents that ranked an ETF activity first or second. From this a diffused picture occurs as all ETF activities are ranked first or second often, indicating that all activities are considered effective and that apparently the stakeholders do not agree which activities are considered the most effective. This being said, the survey shows that ETF's networking activities are ranked first by most respondents (28%). The analytical, information sharing activities are considered mostly ranked second (38%). The capacity building and the development activities (ETF projects on NQF developments) are ranked less often first or second. This is reinforced from the country visits where it was indicated that capacity building is often very difficult to achieve impact due to the lack of sustainable institutional embedding of the qualifications work and NQF work.

Part of the analytical information sharing work of ETF is facilitating the Qualifications Platform, an online, worldwide community for people working on qualifications. In a recent survey on knowledge management in ETF, external users were asked about the online platforms

²⁷ Source: Survey amongst stakeholders in partner countries (N=32). Sample provided by ETF.

related to ETF's Communities of Practice. In this survey also the Qualifications Platforms was assessed on a number of topics (see figure 14).

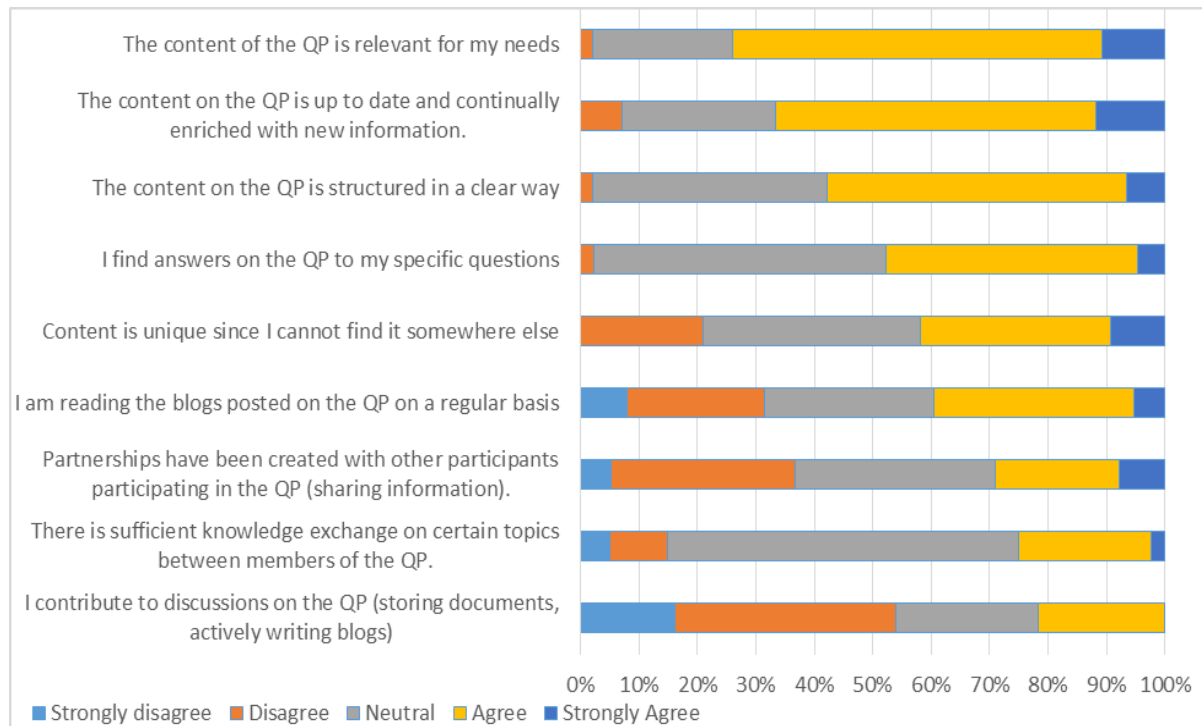


Figure 14: Users' assessment of the Qualifications Platform ²⁸

On the basis of the survey results it is concluded that the users find the Qualifications Platform, and the content relevant, structured, up to date and continually enriched. The respondents show higher agreement-rates on the more passive knowledge consumption topics and lower on more activating topics (reading blog posts, creating partnerships, exchange knowledge and contribute to discussions). The findings from the knowledge management survey are confirmed by the in-depth country interviews. Partner country stakeholders use the Qualifications Platform in the first place to access relevant documents.

²⁸ Source: Survey on knowledge management amongst external stakeholders of ETF (N=46).

The respondents were also asked to assess factors for success of ETF activities in the partner countries (figure 15).

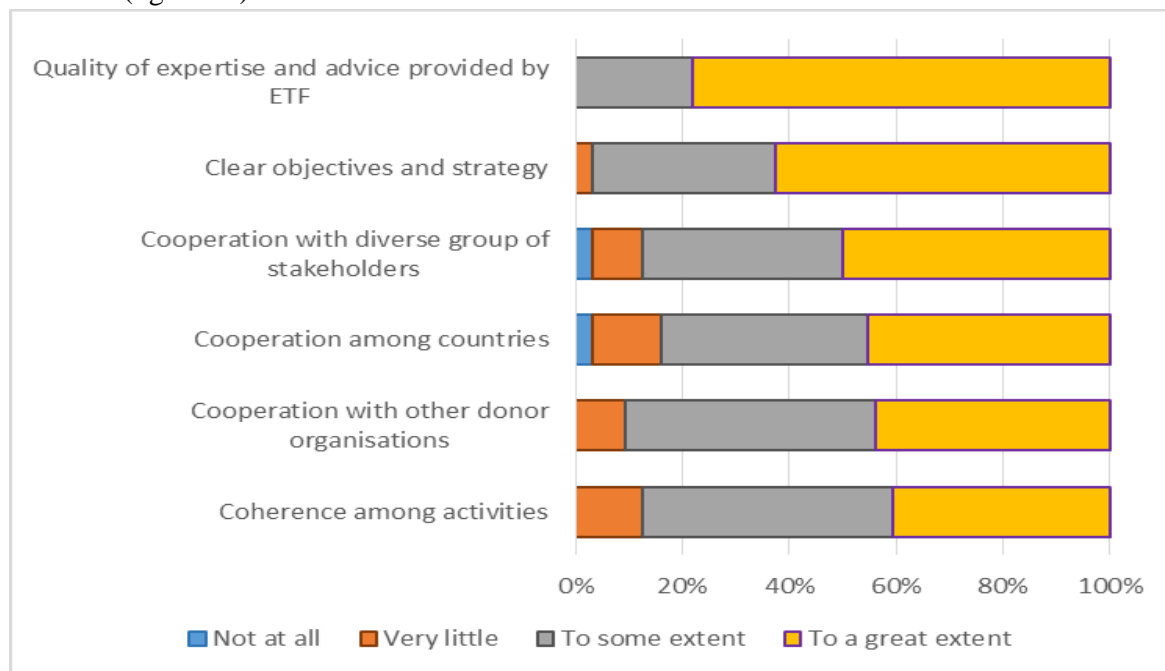


Figure 15: Factors for success of ETF activities²⁹

The factor that is by far the most important contributor to success is the quality of expertise and advice provided by ETF. Also the clarity of objectives and the strategy is assessed as being an important factor. The coherence among activities is less mentioned as an important factor. This last issue is indicated as a hampering factor. Other hampering factors concern the lack of time of the ETF NQF specialist; the lack of cooperation with donors; limited budget and short duration of projects; political situation of the country; complex current educational system of the country; and the lack of commitment at national level.

The recommendations to increase the effectiveness and impact of ETF interventions relate to these hampering factors and include: increase cooperation with donors; more focus on top level policy makers to achieve long term commitment; provide some follow-up support during the implementation period (e.g. when implementing a strategy); increase number of partners involved.

Overall, the partner country stakeholders show a high level of satisfaction with what ETF does in their countries. Although the ETF is limited in budgetary terms, the interventions are very much appreciated, fit the context, the experts are very knowledgeable both in EU policies and partner country policies and finally, the quality of the implementation of interventions is considered high.

3.2.4 Relation with other organisations and donor organisations

One of the core areas ETF works on in the partner countries is communicating, supporting and cooperating with donor organisations. There were a high number of donor organisations active in the field of qualification reform, VET and NQF development. Main donors concern the EU (IPA (Instrument for Pre-Accession Assistance), ENPI (European Neighbourhood and Partnership Instrument), EuropeAid), Development banks (World Bank, Asian Development Bank, African Development Bank) and national aid organisations (USAid, Canadian Aid,

²⁹ Source: Survey amongst stakeholders in partner countries (N=32). Sample provided by ETF.

SwissAid, The Norwegian Agency for Development Cooperation, Lux-Development, GIZ (Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit), etc.).

The ETF was not considered to be a donor organisation. The view is that ETF does not come to the countries with substantial funding, but provides support, policy advice and technical assistance. Also, the ETF supports partner countries to effectively make use of funding provided by donors. This being said, the ETF and donor organisations work on similar themes and topics. The table below provides an assessment of the overlap between the work of ETF and donor organisations.

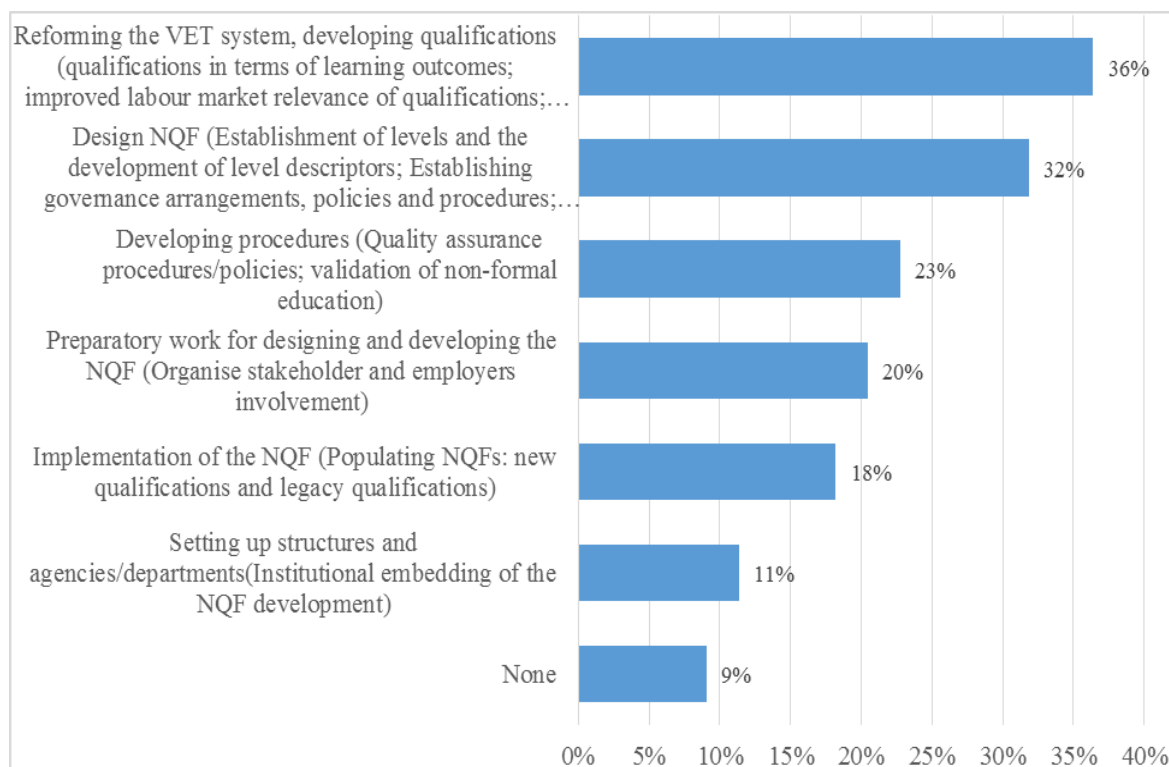


Figure 16: Themes on which work of ETF and donor organisations overlap³⁰

A limited number of respondents indicate no overlap (9%). 36% of the respondents indicate overlap on reforming the VET system and developing qualifications. Also on design of the NQF many respondents indicated overlapping actions (32%). Only 11% of the respondents mentioned that there is overlap in setting up structures and agencies related to NQFs.

The overlap was not necessarily considered negative, or dysfunctional. In fact, cooperation is in many countries needed to achieve results. The themes at which the ETF and the donor organisations work require long-term involvement and funding possibilities. Compared to the work of donor organisations, the long-term involvement of the ETF (and its staff) is very much appreciated. Where donor organisations launch one- or two year projects ('jump in and out'), the ETF is there to stay to support stakeholders in reforming their VET systems. This long-term involvement is appreciated both by partner countries' stakeholders and donor organisations. Based on interviews in the countries, the role of the ETF as 'broker' between donor organisations and partner country authorities is valued. Through their knowledge and familiarity with the partner countries' systems and structures, the ETF is able to support donor organisations to define their priorities and plan their actions. Also, the role of preparing applications for donor funding is valued by stakeholders in the partner countries. In more than one country the evaluation team observed a donor organisation implementing a process that did not align with the stakeholder's proposed systems.

³⁰ Source: Survey amongst stakeholders in partner countries (N=44). Sample of stakeholders provided by ETF.

The overlap can be negative when there are conflicting ideas about the direction of reforms. Donor organisations have their own ideas what is needed in the country. These ideas can differ, or even conflict with the EC priorities and the related ETF priorities.

3.3 Outcomes of ETF interventions

3.3.1 General progress of qualifications reform

When assessing the outcomes, first of all the focus is on the changes with regard to the development of NQFs and qualification systems. This concerns the change in the state of play of the NQF implementation of the country – for instance whether the state of play has changed since 2010 from NQF as merely a policy discussion to a policy implementation³¹. In its publication *Changing qualifications*, Cedefop (2010) identifies five stages of change that can be used to mark the extent to which reforms have actually been translated from words into action:

- 1) **policy discussions**, where discussion or debate is taking place about change, but there are as yet no clear plans for a policy or implementation;
- 2) **policy**, where the direction is set, perhaps through a law or a high level decision, but there are as yet no clear plans or strategies for implementation;
- 3) **implementation**, where the infrastructure to make change happen is in place and arrangements such as a leading organisation and funding arrangements have been decided on;
- 4) **change in practice**, where pilot schemes and full scale implementation mean that providers or other stakeholders are taking policy through to the final stage, which is full implementation;
- 5) **effect**, where the new system brings benefit to learners, stakeholders, organisations or society, and where reform or policy change can be evaluated.

Figure 17: Five stages of change (Cedefop)

According to the ETF study on vocational qualifications³² many of the partner countries that are reforming their qualifications are trying to do so through newly developed national qualifications frameworks (NQFs). In fact, at the time of writing, 27 out of the 30 ETF partner countries have NQFs at one developmental stage or other: planning, development or actual implementation. None of the partner countries have entered the stage of ‘effect’ yet.

Other NQF/qualifications-related outcomes concern whether qualifications populate the frameworks, whether interventions-triggered systems’ reforms and/or curriculum reforms lead to increased quality of the education system, increased mobility and lifelong learning possibilities for learners and workers. The figure below provides an assessment of progress achieved in the period of 2010–2013 on a number of these NQF/qualifications related policies.

³¹ See report: ETF (2014), Making better vocational qualifications, vocational qualifications system reforms in the ETF partner countries (pp. 17–18). Categories based on: Cedefop (2010) *Changing Qualifications*

³² ETF (2014), Making better vocational qualifications, vocational qualifications system reforms in the ETF partner countries, p. 5.

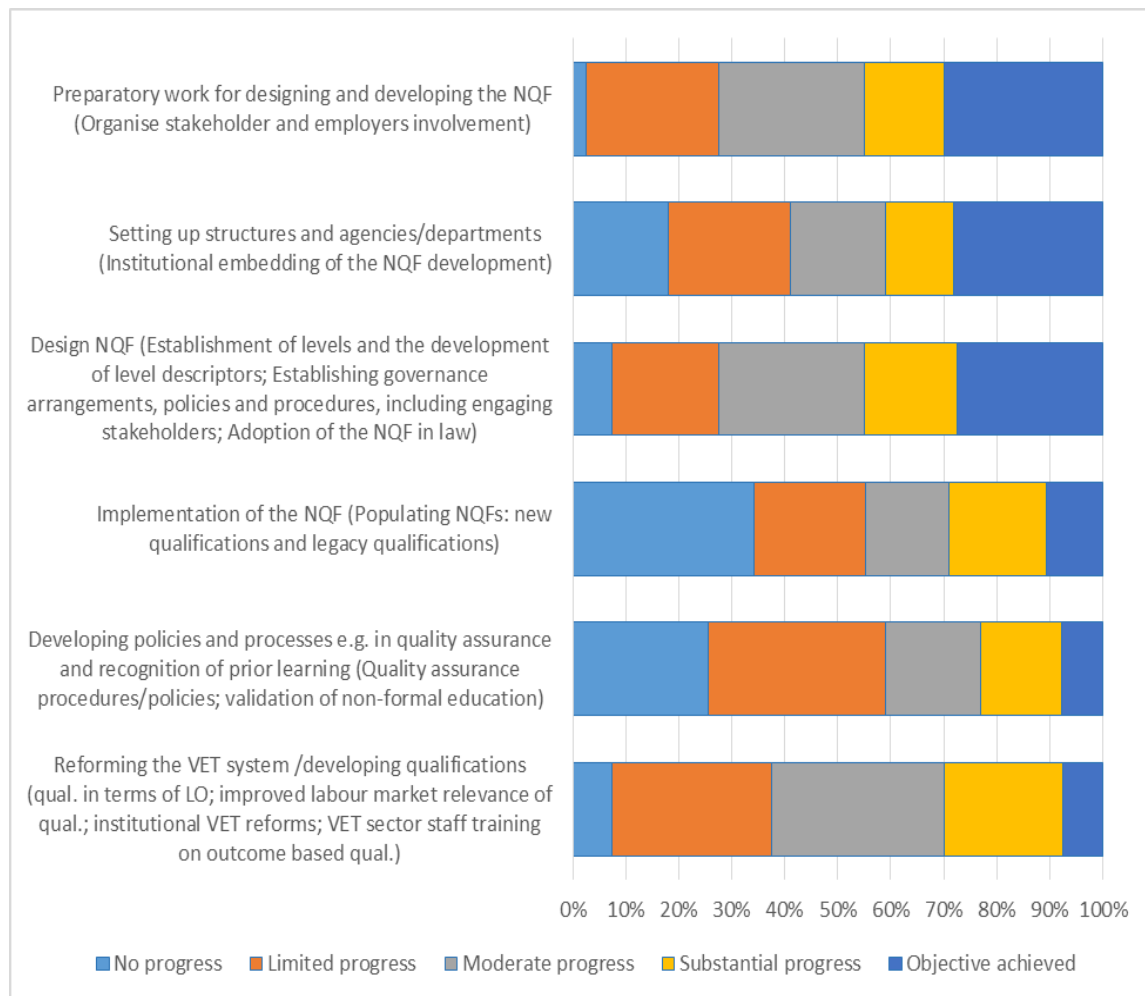


Figure 18: Progress achieved in the period 2010–2013 in relation to specific topics³³

The respondents see progress most in the area of the preparatory work for designing and developing the NQF; setting up structures and agencies related to NQF development; and designing the NQF. A large number mentioned that the objectives on these items were achieved. The progress is less pronounced in relation to implementation of the NQF; policies on quality assurance; and reforming VET systems. This is a clear indication that designing and developing an NQF at the discussion and agreement level is easier than developing and implementing it in technical terms; namely, to use the NQF as a tool to reform qualifications and VET systems. This is illustrated by the fact that for the ‘implementation NQFs’ and ‘developing policies and processes’ more often ‘no progress’ and ‘limited progress’ is mentioned.

3.3.2 Outcomes of ETF interventions

In the previous section, general progress was described. It is always difficult to attribute progress, outcomes and impact to particular interventions. This is not only true for ETF, but for each organisation trying to influence policies and practice. Therefore, also in this evaluation it remains challenging to attribute specific outcomes directly to ETF activities. Progression is the result of multiple factors related to the contextual situation, the organisational, policy structures in place, lines of authority, coordination and involvement of stakeholders and donor organisations. What can be done is to see how partner country stakeholders assess the impact of ETF work on specific policy areas related to NQF development and qualification reform (see figure 19).

³³ Source: Survey amongst stakeholders in partner countries (N=41). Sample of stakeholders provided by ETF.

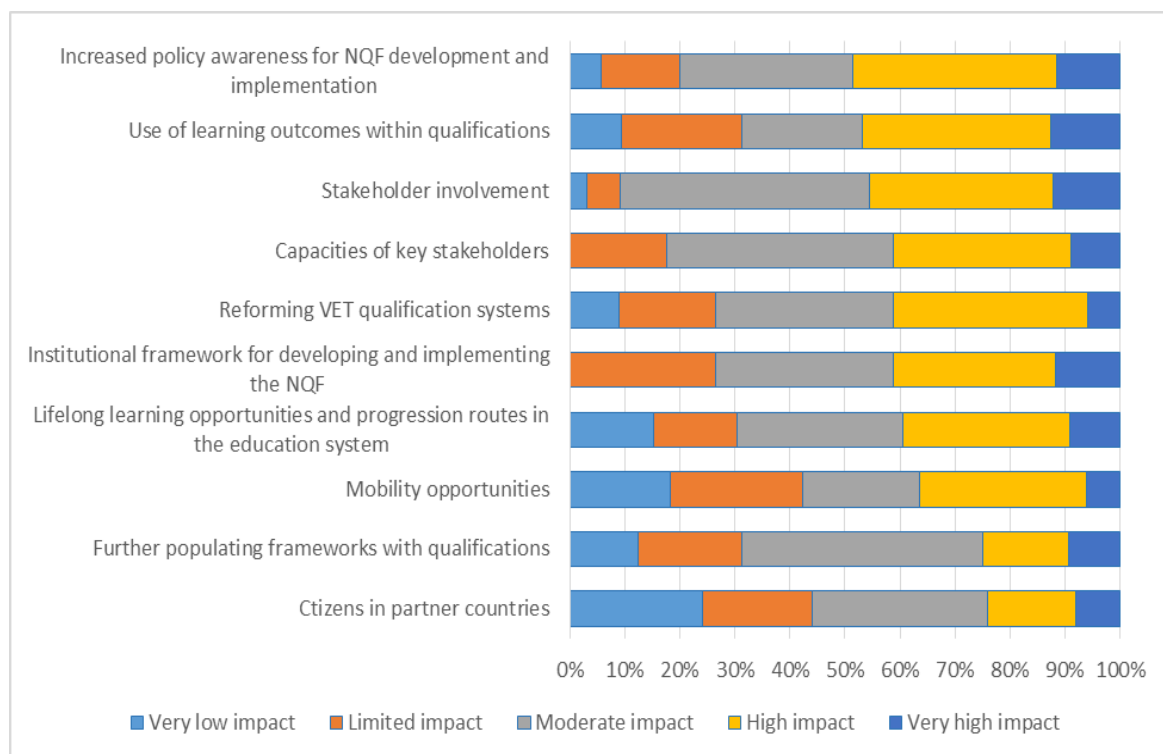


Figure 19: Assessment of impact of the overall ETF work of specific policy areas³⁴

The stakeholders state that most impact of ETF work is on increased policy awareness for NQF development and the use of learning outcomes based approaches. Also, the ETF work on stakeholder involvement and on capacities of key stakeholders; and the reform of VET qualifications system are mentioned as having a high impact level. The impact on citizens and further populating frameworks with qualifications is assumed to have a lower impact.

Another perspective is to what extent countries, under influence of the ETF interventions, are currently developed towards the **preconditions of successful NQF implementation**³⁵:

1. **Preparatory political involvement:** Does the preparatory political involvement provide a sustainable foundation or further actions to be taken in the field of NQF development and implementation?
2. **Common concern:** Has a common concern been established between stakeholders to develop and implement the NQF? Also, within a region, do countries share the importance of establishing NQFs?
3. **High level of institutionalisation:** The third condition for the successful implementation of an NQF is a high level of institutionalisation. This means that an

³⁴ Source: Survey amongst stakeholders in partner countries (N=35). Sample of stakeholders provided by ETF.

³⁵ Broek, S.D., et al (2012), State of Play of the implementation of the EQF, European Parliament report: See as well: Gornitzka, Ase, Coordinating Policies for a "Europe of Knowledge" Emerging practices of the "Open Method of Coordination" in education and research. Oslo: Centre for European Studies. Working paper No.16. March 2005, 2005; Humburg, Martin, The Open Method of Coordination and European Integration. The Example of European Educational Policy. Berlin: Jean Monnet Chair for European Integration and the Freie Universität Berlin. Working paper No.8, 2008; Newgov, Classifying and mapping OMC in different policy areas. Reference number: 02/D09. Dublin: University College Dublin, 2005; Ruiter, de, Rik, 'Variations on a Theme. Governing the Knowledge-Based Society in the EU through Methods of Open Coordination in Education and R&D'. European Integration. Vol.32. No.2: 157-173, Routledge Taylor and Francis Group, 2010; Tholoniati, Luc, 'The Career of the Open Method of Coordination: Lessons from a 'Soft' EU Instrument'. West European Politics. Vol.33. No.1: 93-117. Routledge Taylor and Francis Group, 2010; Regent, Sabrina, 'The Open method of Coordination: A New Supranational Form of Governance?'. European Law Journal. Vol.9. No.2: 190-214. Oxford: Blackwell Publishing Ltd., 2003.

organisational structure exists where people continuously work on the coordination and improvement of the NQF (and related topics). Someone (or some organisation/agency) has to take the lead in order to get the subject on everyone's agenda and to create a platform for discussion.

4. **Availability of specific objectives, benchmarks and indicators:** Another condition is the availability of objectives, benchmarks and indicators. This could be in the form of route-maps, setting deadlines.
5. **Involvement and cooperation of stakeholders:** The fifth condition, namely the involvement and cooperation of stakeholders, is of crucial importance for the success and sustainability of an NQF, as the NQF should in the end be used by employers, learners and workers.
6. **Presence of conflict between countries with incentive or reluctance to act:** A final condition is the presence of a conflict (policy directions/ideology) between countries with an incentive to act or reluctance to act. Due to a conflict of opinions, the countries with an incentive to act will try to persuade the reluctant countries to join them in developing a particular policy field. If there is no conflict, no debate will follow and few actions will be initiated. The same applies to the national level, where the more reluctant parties will have to be convinced of the importance of a potential national priority. In order to get a topic on the national agenda someone needs to be absolutely convinced of its importance and lobby for more support.

In the survey it was assessed how the countries are developed against these conditions (figure 20).

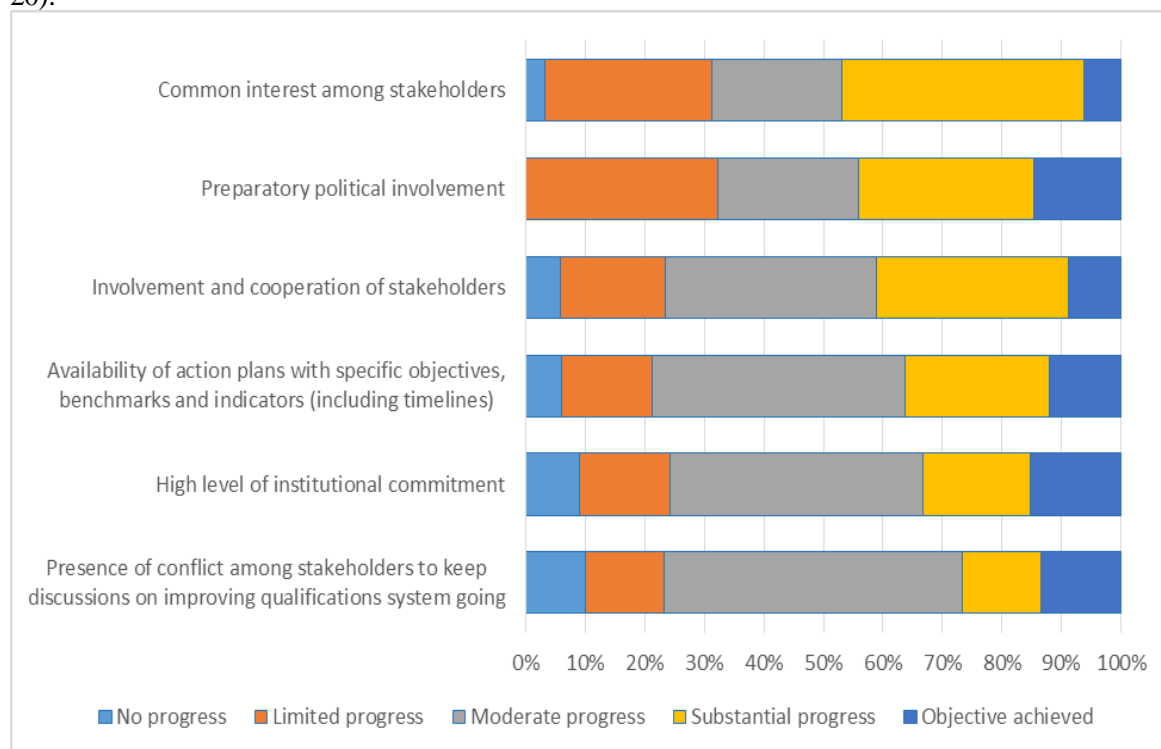


Figure 20: Assessment of ETF's contribution to the progress made differentiated by factor³⁶

The ETF's contribution is mostly felt in the common interest among stakeholder and preparatory stakeholder involvement. With regard to the involvement and cooperation of stakeholders and availability of action plans also substantial progress is made. With regard to the level of institutional commitment the contribution of ETF is less. This indicates that ETF is

³⁶ Source: Survey amongst stakeholders in partner countries (N=34). Sample provided by ETF.

considered less effective in supporting the establishment of institutional commitment – despite the lobby activities and technical assistance in this area. Establishing institutional commitment might be more dependent on contextual factors that cannot be controlled easily (for instance institutional reforms, or people changing jobs). Also, the presence of conflict between stakeholders ETF appears to be less effective. ETF activities seem to relate more to a small group of stakeholders, already well informed about the qualifications reform work. Without institutional commitment the sustainability of the work on qualifications in the countries can be under pressure.

4 Countries at an initial stage of development

In this chapter the context, mechanisms and outcomes are discussed for the countries at an initial stage of development in qualification reform. It concerns the following countries: Egypt, Jordan, Lebanon, Palestine, Belarus, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Uzbekistan, Algeria, Israel, Libya, Syria, Kazakhstan, and Turkmenistan.³⁷

4.1 Context description of countries at an initial stage of development

For those countries in the early stages of the reform of qualifications systems (or those that have made limited progress), the initial requirements often relate to the need to bring different stakeholders together to debate and discuss how change can be made. Clearly the key stakeholders (including government agencies), social partners, and in the case particularly for VET qualifications, employers, need to be involved in this. Learners, as another key stakeholder are frequently omitted from this critical debate.

Planning is a critical element at this stage, and draft plans (frequently for a period of 2–6 years, and often linking to national strategic plans) need to be drafted and agreed. In addition, strategies and policies need to be established, and governance arrangements drafted.

For example in Lebanon, in 2010, a working group was established composed of the major stakeholders representing the three main sectors of education (TVET, general education and higher education). The group worked on the identification of the processes which need to be set up in order to allow for the integration of all qualifications in a national qualifications framework.

Reform or modernisation is particularly challenging in those countries with a strong centralised traditional approach to education and training. Belarus has been relying so far on traditional instruments for regulating vocational qualifications, and applying an evolutionary approach towards the creation of a national qualifications framework.

Countries in this cluster are connected to the EU through the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP) (with the exception of Kyrgyzstan). The EU works with its southern and eastern neighbours to achieve the closest possible political association and the greatest possible degree of economic integration. This goal builds on common interests and on values – democracy, the rule of law, respect for human rights, and social cohesion. From 2007 to 2013, grants worth €12 billion were given to ENP-related projects.

Level of progress achieved in reforming qualifications systems (through NQFs)

Frequently legislation does not exist to allow an NQF to assist with the reform of qualifications systems. In Egypt, from 2005 until 2008, a National Task Force prepared the concept paper for an Egyptian National Qualifications Framework. At policy level, the process of establishing the NQF has been led by the Ministry of Manpower and Migration.

For Lebanon, the Ministry of Education and Higher Education set up a working group, in 2010, composed of the major stakeholders representing the three main sectors of education (TVET, general education and higher education). The group worked on the identification of the processes which need to be set up in order to allow for the integration of all qualifications in a national qualifications framework. There is not yet a legal basis for the NQF in Tajikistan. Therefore, the Tajik working group in the tourism sector developed a policy paper in order to

³⁷ This cluster includes the partner countries for which there was insufficient data to make the assessment of the context (see annex 2), namely: Algeria, Israel, Libya, Syria, Kazakhstan, and Turkmenistan.

lay a foundation for the prospective legal basis. Likewise, in Uzbekistan, NQF development is at a conceptual and discussion stage. Before new qualifications can be developed, methodologies need to be selected and processes need to be developed to identify the occupations needed by the labour market and the necessary skill levels.

Stage of implementation of reformed institutional structures (networks of schools, governance agencies, funding agencies, certification bodies)

At institutional level, the same challenges are faced relating to embedded traditional approaches. Discussion forums in Egypt have allowed a number of priorities for overcoming the challenges facing the Egyptian education and training systems to be identified. In Kyrgyzstan, the qualifications system is currently input-based and local qualifications do not adequately capture graduates' knowledge or workers' competences. For Palestine, no significant policy actions have been taken over the last two years to address the lack of efficiency in the use of facilities. In Belarus, vocational education is being reformed and the main priorities are to increase relevance to the labour market, revise curricula and teaching materials, renovate buildings and equipment, and upgrade teachers' and trainers' skills and increase their salaries to prevent shortages.

Jordan

Jordan has an existing qualifications framework comprising of 5 levels: qualifications for semi-skilled workers, skilled workers, professionals, technicians and specialists. A concept paper for the NQF was drafted that describes the technical process by which to populate the framework's different levels, the quality assurance principles and criteria for developers and implementers of qualifications, and the policy and leadership requirements to develop the NQF system.

Regarding the reform of institutional structures, little progress has been made in achieving coordinated implementation of the reform process. However the Centre for Accreditation and Quality Assurance (CAQA) has been established within the Ministry of Labour, supported by regulation issued in 2012.

Employers have participated in the development of vocational programmes, involving a sectoral approach with six prioritised sub-sectors. Further work is planned to develop capacity and support participation in needs analysis, the development of occupational standards, assessment instruments and curricula.

In addition, Jordan has participated in a regional project (involving Egypt, Tunisia and including France, Italy and Spain), that has developed four occupational profiles in the areas of Tourism and Construction. These should lead to qualifications that are outcome based, providing exemplification of reformed qualifications.

Jordan has adopted the Unified Arab Standard Classification of Occupations 2008 (ASCO), which is compatible with the International Standard Classification of Occupations (ISCO).

Figure 21: Stage of implementation in Jordan

Employers are engaged at national level in policy discussions and with providers (schools/colleges) in developing curricula

For countries in this cluster, employers are often not effectively engaged at national level in policy discussions and with providers (schools/colleges) in developing curricula. Consequently, for example, employers in Palestine complain about the poor quality and irrelevance of training. In Belarus, where 70% of GDP is generated by large state-owned enterprises, stakeholder involvement in education policy development is rather weak. However, social partnership in education and employment development is now stated as a key priority in strategic documents. Kyrgyzstan has implemented a pilot sectoral framework as a collaborative effort, developed by EU experts and the eco-tourism industry acting together. As an industry initiative, the project has sought to engage the social partners, and promote cooperation between industry, government and the education and training system. As yet, employers in Tajikistan and Uzbekistan have limited engagement in the reform of qualifications systems, as in societies dominated by the state.

Level of progress in developing outcome-based qualifications

In Egypt, it is intended that the NQF will provide a benchmark to review and enhance standing Egyptian qualifications, and acting as reference standards when introducing new qualifications. The intention in Palestine is to develop a learning outcomes approach that is compatible with the national qualifications framework reform launched in 2012. Kyrgyzstan's sectoral framework has 8 outcomes based levels with descriptors that draw both on the EQF and those used for the Bologna Framework in higher education (the Dublin Descriptors). **Engaged with qualifications development and comparison outside the country**

Few countries in this cluster are yet engaged in comparison with qualifications systems outside the country. At this stage, the EQF is often used as a model for evolving NQFs. In practice, Belarus is the only country in Eastern Europe that is not part of the Bologna process. The exception being Egypt that has a specified activity planned for self-certification of the Egyptian NQF against the EQF.

4.2 ETF interventions in countries at an initial stage of development

The ETF annual work programmes and annual activity reports for 2010 to 2013 provide information concerning the ETF involvement in the partner countries. Specifically with regard to qualifications development, in only a limited number of countries specific ETF activities are mentioned. Often more pressing issues related to reforming the VET systems are pursued. These ETF activities are sometimes instigated by other actors, mainly the EU Delegations. For instance in Egypt in 2011, the EU Delegation in Cairo requested the ETF to carry out the identification and design for a new intervention in the field of TVET reform in Egypt, to be started in 2012. In parallel, the EU Delegation continued to request the regular (annual) assessment of the progress of the TVET reform in Egypt and the impact of the project so far. Also in Palestine (2010), upon request from the European Commission, the ETF stood ready to provide policy and technical inputs into human capital developments, particularly in the framework of the new reform strategy for technical and vocational training.

The ETF support actions in the countries relate to **awareness raising, lobbying, bringing stakeholders together and capacity building**. In Israel, ETFs role was to provide good practice examples from other countries in the field of VET. In Belarus support would be given to awareness-raising of the process of developing a Belorussian NQF (2012) – this extended in 2013 to facilitation of a dialogue between stakeholders. After awareness raising in 2011, in Uzbekistan the ETF continued in 2012 to work with national stakeholders on the development of a National Qualifications Framework. The framework focuses on vocational qualifications. The work covered three main activities: drafting of a framework design; the identification of suitable development structures and processes; and a review of progress in these areas by national stakeholders. In some countries, the role of ETF as support to make full use of other donors is mentioned, such as in Lebanon (see figure below).

Lebanon

In 2010, the ETF planned to focus on developing cross-stakeholder awareness on qualification systems and frameworks. Support focused on awareness raising, exposure to EU (including the European Qualifications Framework) and neighbouring countries on issues linked to qualification systems and frameworks. In 2011 and 2012, ETF supported programmes on NQF development funded by the Italian government.

In 2011, the ETF continued awareness-raising to build a common understanding on the main features of a NQF. The first phase of the project activities in 2010 covered the mapping of existing qualifications in Lebanon. The second phase, which started in 2011, focussed, based on the qualifications mapping, on identifying the main components of the future NQF, such as: the grid of levels and descriptors; quality assurance; and governance of the Lebanese National Qualification Framework. The third phase which started at the end of 2011 and was based on the progress achieved, covered piloting and assessing the NQF grid on one selected economic sector, through involvement of main stakeholders. At the same time the discussion on the NQF building blocks and institutional arrangements were deepened. This phase also included an enlargement of stakeholders' participation and information. This project was carried out with financial support from the Italian Government.

Also in 2013, the ETF supported Lebanon in making most out of the support from donors as the ETF planned to create a coordination mechanism with the upcoming World Bank supported project that would, among other components, ensure the full-fledged implementation of the NQF in Lebanon building on previous ETF work.

Figure 22: ETF interventions in Lebanon

A number of countries participated in the **regional project on qualifications in the Mediterranean**. In Jordan, this regional project together with national projects provided an impetus for working on qualifications frameworks. In 2013 based on requests from the social partners and CAQA (Centre for Quality Assurance and Qualifications), the ETF planned to extend the national activities of the Regional Qualifications project with a focus on the central coordination of the development of an NQF.

A reason for **interrupted ETF interventions** or policy development was the unstable situation in a number of countries. For instance in Egypt, the regime change changed priorities after which the NQF development became less of a priority.

Generally, the work on the **Torino process** seems to trigger debates in the partner countries. In Belarus the preparation of the Torino Process report 2012 raised awareness about EU evidence-based policy approaches, and hence more in-depth focus was provided related to evidence collection and used a few selected key indicators. Also in Tajikistan, as the main result of the Torino process and the education-business cooperation study carried out in 2010, the ETF started to promote entrepreneurial learning developments in the country, in order to create synergies between education and enterprise policies. Strong entrepreneurial capacity can support job creation for young people and returning migrants, putting them in the position to meet the challenge of an increasingly unpredictable economic market with an effect on local development and poverty reduction. The ETF provided capacity building opportunities to support stakeholders in the area of evidence-based policy making.

Given the ETF's work in the countries at initial stage of development the following mechanisms are most prevalent:

- **Involve** stakeholders nationally so that they start debate on reforms (to generate momentum for change)
- **Organise** stakeholders nationally so that steps are taken to facilitate initiating reforms (to create synergies, increase debate but avoid conflicts)
- **Gather** stakeholders across countries to jointly work on topics so that policy makers and stakeholders **develop capacities** to work on these topics and to work in an international context (to broaden perspective on reforms in the own country)

- **Share** good practice so that national policy makers and stakeholders **develop inspiration on how to solve their own problems** and difficulties encountered (to broaden perspective on implementation possibilities)
- **Distribute** information (actively) to national policy makers and stakeholders so that they **create awareness** of the need for reform/possible direction of reform (to embed reforms structurally)

Besides these mechanisms, ETF provides general analytical and information sharing support through the Qualifications Platform. No mention was made by stakeholders relating to the Qualifications Platform during the in-country visit to Jordan. The online survey does not flag the Qualifications Platform as an important source of information for the stakeholders in the countries at this stage.

To conclude, the focus of the mechanisms is on structuring support for reforms. The themes ETF mechanisms focus on concern general VET (institutional) reforms; occupational profiles; and, relationship education and labour market.

4.3 Progression of countries at an initial stage of development

Many countries in the initial stages of development continue to discuss and debate issues and proposed arrangements. The ability to bring key stakeholders together through conferences and seminars is in itself quite an achievement (often for the first time). Progress is often slow. For example, while Jordan established the Centre for Accreditation and Quality Assurance within the Ministry of Labour (CAQA) in 2008, its regulation to specify its mandate and internal organisation wasn't issued till 2012. Frequently development is slowed or halted due to political or social unrest, for example in the case of Egypt. In the case of Belarus, a uniquely 'traditional' country in Europe, it maintains the traditional (ex-Soviet based) system based on classification of specialities and qualifications. In Palestine the qualifications systems is fragmented in all sectors (general education, higher education, vocational education and training, and non-formal and informal learning). There is no unified governance of the education systems and a lack of coordination among public and private providers. The following outcomes were achieved in Jordan in the period 2010 to 2013 (see figure 23).

Jordan
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Establishment of an NQF (supported by ETF), and continued support for the development of the NQF • Developing ownership of the NQF and broad acceptance of the NQF as a reform agenda • Support for qualifications development in two key sectors: tourism and water • Support for the Regional project relating to the development of occupational profiles in tourism and construction • Extend support for Regional project, with a focus on the central coordination of the development of the NQF, based on requests from social partners and the CAQA

Figure 23: Specific ETF-work-related outcomes in Jordan in the period 2010–2013

Continued support will be necessary to strengthen the networks for discussion and debate, and in particular, an impetus will need to be provided to the relevant authorities (usually governmental) to drive forward the reform process. This may need to be done in coordination with other donor/EU project support.

4.4 What mechanisms work best?

Given the context, mechanism and outcomes, for the partner countries at this stage of development, the most effective mechanisms seem to be:

- **Involve** stakeholders nationally so that they start debate on reforms (to generate momentum for change)
- **Organise** stakeholders nationally so that steps are taken to facilitate initiating reforms (to create synergies, increase debate but avoid conflicts)

- **Share** good practice so that national policy makers and stakeholders **develop inspiration on how to solve their own problems** and difficulties encountered (to broaden perspective on implementation possibilities)
- **Distribute** information (actively) to national policy makers and stakeholders so that they **create awareness** of the need for reform/possible direction of reform (to embed reforms structurally)

The mechanism ‘**gather stakeholders across countries**’ that can be used by stakeholders to work on topics so that policy makers and stakeholders ‘**develop capacities**’ to work on these topics and to work in an international context, seems to be less effective for these countries, as there is insufficient basis (both institutional and human resources) to commence sustainable international cooperation, and to mainstream outcomes of projects in the national context.

Given the ETF national, regional and corporate work, the emphasis in these mechanisms is on the national level: involving and organising stakeholders, sharing and distributing good practice.

5 Countries at an intermediate stage of development

In this chapter the context, mechanisms and outcomes are discussed for the countries at an initial stage of development in qualification reform. It concerns the following countries: Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Serbia, Morocco, Tunisia, Azerbaijan, Moldova, Russia, and Ukraine.

5.1 Context description of countries at an intermediate stage of development

For those countries in the middle stages of the reform of qualifications systems, the reform has progressed beyond discussion and informing stakeholder networks. Often legislation is in place to support reform, and strategic implementation plans have been developed. Agencies (existing or new) to govern the reformed qualifications systems (and NQFs) have often been agreed, and frequently established. Countries are often in the transitional state between the design phase and the implementation phase of reform. Methodologies and procedures for operation have been agreed and documented, and are beginning to be implemented. Continued capacity building at the operational level (at both governance agencies and provider level) is required. Provision for related aspects (e.g. learner guidance, communication and dissemination of information for stakeholders (agencies, providers, employers and learners) need to be established and integrated into the reformed systems. Procedures for the challenging aspects of reform (e.g. recognition of non-formal and informal learning, progression of learners and mobility of labour) have often been agreed and documented.

Some countries in this cluster have close relationships with the EU and participate in a number of EU funding programmes associated with VET and QF developments (IPA). **Level of progress achieved in reforming qualifications systems (through NQFs)**

In Bosnia and Herzegovina, the Council of Ministers adopted the Baseline of the Qualifications Framework on 24 March 2011. This act by the Council of Minister now has the force of law. The Qualifications Framework is not just a technical tool, but should be linked with the reform and development of the education and training systems in Bosnia and Herzegovina. That is why it has been integrated in two strategic documents of the Council of Ministers: the strategy for Vocational Education and training in Bosnia and Herzegovina for the period 2007–2013 and the Strategic Directions for the development of education in Bosnia and Herzegovina with its implementation plan for 2008–2015. For example, the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia published its law on its NQF in 2013. Likewise, Serbia's law on the NQF was adopted by its parliament in 2010. In Azerbaijan the working group for the NQF, led by the Ministry of Education, has elaborated the details of a National Qualifications Framework for lifelong learning that builds on the law of education. Ukraine became the third country in the European Neighbourhood (after Tunisia and Georgia) to legislate an NQF. Some laws are developed directly in relation to NQFs while other laws developed may also impact on NQF development.

Stage of implementation of reformed institutional structures (networks of schools, governance agencies, funding agencies, certification bodies)

At institutional level, in Albania, all education and training institutions offering NQF qualifications will be subject to some form of accreditation to ensure that they meet minimum standards. Russia has recognised that there is an urgent need to establish a comprehensive system of continuing skills upskilling and recognition and validation of skills acquired outside the system of formal education and training. In Ukraine, modular training programmes are replacing the traditional approach, including new elements such as the in-house training system. In Bosnia and Herzegovina, the VET and technical schools have been involved with EU VET

projects to reform curricula and train teachers in learning outcome based, learner centred programmes of learning. APOSO has a VET department that has been actively involved in the reform process. Traditional agencies such as the Pedagogical Institutes remain unreformed. The Commission for the elaboration of the qualifications framework in Bosnia and Herzegovina developed an Action Plan for the period 2014–2020 to implement the QF.

An interesting initiative is the EU-Moroccan Association Agreement, which includes an article on the transparency of Moroccan qualifications, providing a clear policy-pointer for NQF implementation (see text box below).

Morocco

The structure and content of the Moroccan national qualifications framework was adopted by Ministers in February 2013, however it is not yet inserted in a legal framework. It faces the challenge of restructuring its vocational training system and, in particular, its qualification system in a very complex landscape. At this stage the issue of governance of the NQF remains unresolved, together with obtaining the commitment of the Unions to the process. The planning phase for the NQF took place in 2009 and 2010, the design phase in 2011 and 2012, following which testing began.

This situation is further complicated by the diversity of stakeholders and training providers, including their legal status, their differing administrative structures and the degree of autonomy they may exercise. Stakeholder involvement includes three government ministries and the National Federation of Industries (CGEM). A specific methodology and tool have been developed to place existing qualifications in the framework.

Morocco-EU Association Agreement on qualifications

Morocco signed an agreement, the 'Statut Avance' with the EU on 13 October 2008. In education and training, the agreement provides for the strengthening of cooperation in qualifications, in particular to facilitate transparency and recognition. Point 3b covers the negotiation of mutual recognition of qualifications in order to facilitate the mobility of service providers and investors. In point 3d, both sides agree to a mutual recognition of 'licences professionnelles' (vocational bachelor) in the transport trade, in particular sea and air transport.

The Association Agreement provides an impetus to continue working on the NQF.

Figure 24: NQF and 'Statut Avance' in Morocco

Employers are engaged at national level in policy discussions and with providers (schools/colleges) in developing curricula

With regard to employers, in Albania, the 2011 VET law provides for employers' increased representation in the National VET Council. In the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, there is no systematic participation from industry representatives and workers. Likewise in Azerbaijan, no real progress has been achieved in establishing stronger relations between employers and education and training providers. For Bosnia and Herzegovina, a Commission was established to develop an Action Plan for the implementation of the QF during 2014–2020. Membership included different public organisations, and social partners, and was coordinated by the Ministry of Civil Affairs. In Russia, the initiative for an NQF came from Russian employers. The employers' main purpose was to improve the quality and relevance of qualifications. Likewise in Ukraine, the Federation of Employers has been actively promoting the idea of an NQF for several years and has looked for alliances with other stakeholders to develop legislation. The involvement of employers and scientists has been a positive element in the development of national standards for specific occupations.

Level of progress in developing outcome-based qualifications

In Albania, the newly introduced curricula for VET and Higher Education, despite many innovative elements, do not depart from the traditional input and subject-based approach and the conditions in most educational institutions are such that it is difficult to work towards the achievement of agreed learning outcomes and competence levels. For Serbia, although the notion of 'learning outcomes and competences' is widely used and accepted by policymakers, experts and training providers, in reality traditional approaches still prevail. VET qualifications

have been reformed by stakeholder working groups to produce outcome based programmes in Bosnia and Herzegovina. For Azerbaijan, in Initial VET, there are outcomes-based qualifications based on occupational standards, with many associated qualifications planned/developed. In Ukraine, learning outcomes have been introduced on a pilot basis through occupational standards, and education standards for vocational and higher education. The State Employment Service has been working for several years with modular training programmes for job-seekers, using and adapting the ILO Modules of Employable Skills methodology.

Engaged with qualifications development and comparison outside the country

In this cluster, many countries indicate their intention to engage with comparison with qualifications systems outside their country, but none has yet been implemented. In Bosnia and Herzegovina, the QF is not yet sufficiently developed to consider referencing to the EQF. This procedure has been identified as part of the Commission's Action Plan for 2014–2020. The Bologna Process often seems to be the catalyst to prompt this planning process. Azerbaijan is planning self-certification as soon as its NQF is approved. It is also aspiring to link the qualifications framework with the EQF. Albania intends to link its NQF to the EQF, but no practical steps have yet been taken. For Tunisia, a theoretical exercise of referencing to the European Qualifications Framework was made by the Ministry of Vocational Training but is not recognised yet at European level. A strong motivation of the Republic of Moldova to develop an NQF is the link to the EQF and alignment with the Bologna process, in order to use the tools for quality standards of the EU and to improve mobility, and the skills validation of the many migrants of Moldova. One of the aims of the Ukrainian NQF is to connect qualifications internationally through the Qualifications Framework for the European Higher Education Area (the Bologna Framework) and the European Qualifications Framework for Lifelong Learning (EQF).

5.2 ETF interventions in countries at an intermediate stage of development

The ETF annual work programmes and annual activity reports for 2010 to 2013 provided information concerning the ETF involvement in the countries.

A number of countries in this cluster received **European support** through predominantly the IPA programme. Also in other countries, European policies and intentions steered the developments. Also the Twinning projects are mentioned that supported developments in the countries (In Ukraine, ETF activity prepared the ground for and complemented the EU financed twinning project which followed up the NQF development in the second half of 2011).

In some countries, the NQF developments started to trigger reforms and ETF provided support for this. Some countries use the **NQF as a reform agenda** and therefore the NQF is embraced by the government and stakeholders as a priority. This is for example the case in Ukraine, where from 2011 onwards, the ETF supported the government and social partners in NQF development in line with the government strategy which gave high priority for overall qualification reform and the development of NQF by 2014.

Countries go through well-defined stages of development in their NQF related work, as is the case for Morocco (see figure below). Each stage is supported by ETF activities.

The work on the **Moroccan NQF** was carried out in four phases:

- (i) **Awareness phase:** 2007 and 2008: During this phase discussion was held on the role of qualifications and the added value of implementing an NQF in Morocco. These reflections took place within the national context, through discussions with various stakeholders and in international debates engaging other Mediterranean countries involved in the development of National Qualifications Frameworks.
- (ii) **Analytical and planning phase:** 2009 to 2010: This phase led to the design of a multi-year work plan as part of a wider action plan for the establishment of an NQF in Morocco, the set-up of working groups through the identification of a 'focal point' in each sub-system and the development of an analytical tool describing the state of play in the field of qualifications at national level (existing certification, regulations, defining validation, quality assurance and so on).
- (iii) **Design phase:** September 2011 to October 2012: In this phase four teams were established, representing the Ministries in charge of National Education, Higher Education and Vocational Training (Department of Vocational Training, Ministries in charge of Tourism, Agriculture, Fisheries and Maritime Craft) and CGEM. The teams worked together with CGEM on some sample qualifications, including the relevant occupational standards from the tourism and construction sectors and reached a consensus on a national grid of 8 levels and 6 descriptors (knowledge, skills, complexity, responsibility/autonomy, adaptability, communication).
- (iv) **Testing phase:** October 2012 – ongoing: This phase was designed to test a referencing tool to be used within the different sub-sectors in allocating qualifications to the 8-level matrix of the NQF.

Figure 25: Phased approach in Morocco

A number of countries have taken a **different route with regard to the reforming of their VET systems**. Whereas some take the NQF as the general framework for reform, others see the NQF coming into the picture at a later stage when reforms of the school system and occupational profiles have already started. For instance in Moldova, the ETF work since 2009 on occupational standards and validation of non-formal and informal learning was extended in 2010/2011 to transforming standards into qualifications in the framework of a Moldovan NQF. In the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, through EU and country expertise the ETF in 2011 supported the institutionalisation of monitoring and evaluation of VET reforms at national, municipal and school levels in cooperation with relevant ministries, agencies and other stakeholders in education and employment, with particular attention to sustainability. A regional seminar to share country experiences of creating and developing the evidence base for education and training policies was held in Skopje. This support continued in 2012 and 2013.

This related as well to the support received from ETF. In some countries, there is **no direct ETF support for NQF development, but for broader VET reforms in general**. This is the case in Albania for instance. In 2011, the ETF planned to continue to focus on capacity building activities to support the National VET Agency in the implementation of quality assurance mechanisms to improve VET provision. The ETF supported the formulation of VET teacher education/training policy, working closely with the Ministry of Education to improve teaching in secondary VET. In 2012 and 2013 the emphasis was on support to develop a VET strategy. The **type of ETF interventions** slightly differed from the first cluster of countries. In the countries which showed an intermediate progress, there was more emphasis on peer learning activities, specific institutional/agency capacity building, policy advice and guidance. Also, support through technical assistance was provided. For instance, in Morocco, ETF provided support to national authorities to develop a proposal for a national qualifications framework and to finalise a pilot exercise on the tourism sector. Policy advice and capacity development assisted in the setting up of a national qualifications framework that started in 2009. Also, ETF activities concerned development of specific methodologies. In Ukraine for instance, ETF activities focused on developing a methodology for competence based standards which empowered social partners in the standard development and approval processes. ETF activities in Ukraine concerned expert support and facilitation of development and piloting of national policies in the area of national qualifications development with particular reference to training

standards and learning outcomes; and support to cooperation, networking and peer learning between Ukraine and Russia on qualifications development. Figure 26 provides an illustrative description of the country situation and ETF interventions.

Ukraine

The ETF is well positioned in Ukraine due to a awareness raising activities since 2005. It has helped facilitate Ukraine's policy development by bringing in international best practices and expertise. The ETF and the Council for Europe has provided support for a working group (comprising representatives of the Ministry of Education and Science, Federation of Employers, education providers and student associations) to develop the technical proposals for the NQF Commission that was established in December 2010. Other activities included experts support and facilitation of the development and piloting of national policies in the area of national qualifications development with particular reference to training standards and learning outcomes.

In 2011, the ETF, in cooperation with the British Council, held a video conference relating to the establishment of sector skills councils. Support was provided to develop post-secondary VET and professionally orientated higher education pathways. In cooperation with the EU Delegation, a series of seminars were organised related to social partnerships and equal opportunities.

During 2011–2012, a study was undertaken relating to the overall qualifications system. The published report has shown that the implications of the NQF on the classifier of professions need to be further analysed, taking into account the distinctive functions of the NQF and the classifier, but also the links that should exist between both. The NQF cannot just be an additional classification instrument. The implications of the NQF for the labour market need to be understood as well as its implications internationally.

During 2013, support was provided on the implementation of the NQF in areas of linking occupational standards to national qualifications, and in building a system for the recognition of prior learning.

Figure 26: ETF interventions in Ukraine

In general, the work of ETF in this set of countries is more vaguely described due to the fact that the support is more tailored to the needs of the country. This is also related to the fact that ETF has been present in many of the countries for a long period of time, **engaged with what happened in the past and familiar with how things work** in the countries. For instance, in Ukraine, the ETF is well positioned due to the several years of its close engagement in supporting the development of effective policies for modernisation of the country's education and training system, as well as facilitating Ukraine's own policy development by bringing in international expertise and best practices.

Also in this cluster of countries, the **stability of the country** impacts the progression made. In Tunisia, the developments until 2010 were promising, but after this promising start, the topic of NQF was somehow put aside in Tunisia. The only related initiative is the Regional project on sectoral qualifications. The work programme 2010 indicates: 'With regard to vocational training system development, the ETF will support the Tunisian authorities and their partners in the new implementation phase of the national qualifications framework; special assistance will be provided for addressing the linkages with the reform of recognition and validation of prior learning, and for the monitoring and evaluation mechanism that should be set up to ensure that the national qualifications framework is a living and inclusive framework; the findings of the 2009 regional study on social partnership in the Mediterranean will nurture the reflection on how to set up a multi-stakeholder constituency around the framework's implementation. Tunisia will also participate on the regional project on qualifications where the peer exchanges and mutual learning events will support the national discussion process. Focusing on the relevance of vocational training systems to the labour market and employability, the ETF will support the national stakeholders to organise of a high-level meeting with the objective of discussing and promoting links between employability and qualifications, including tertiary level qualifications. The findings of the MEDA study on employability will serve as a basis for discussion, as well as progress at national level on the implementation of the qualifications framework as one tool to improve employability.'

Some developments have been supported **through regional projects**. For instance in Morocco, the actions on the NQF were in 2010 linked with the regional project on qualifications in the Mediterranean. From Morocco we learn that there was little cross-fertilisation between the NQF and the regional project. Also in the Eastern Partnership, developments were supported through regional approaches. The ETF in 2010 engaged Russia in regional and cross-regional activities and promoted cooperation with Ukraine on national qualification developments (including the NQF and RPL). Related to the regional projects, but also more widely applied were sectoral approaches, which focussed predominantly on the construction and tourism sectors.

Regional project: Qualifications for the Mediterranean

A seminar was held in Tunis in December 2009 which built on experience over the previous four years in introducing NQFs in Egypt, Jordan, Tunisia and Morocco and to discuss the main features of a new Regional qualifications project to start in January 2010. A regional workshop was then held in Casablanca in June 2010, and again in June 2011, and in Rome in November 2011, with representatives of the aforementioned countries, together with representatives from Italy, France and Spain to share experience and knowledge. A working group met in Torino, also in June 2010, to commence the development of occupational profiles in the tourism and constructions sectors. This was followed by a study visit to France in September 2011. Emphasis was placed on the further development of the common qualification profiles, the further development of the country profiles, the development of mapping of occupations and qualifications for both sectors.

In Amsterdam, in October 2012, delegates from the seven countries – the employers' organisations, trade unions and government agencies – met to recap the results that tried to compare and converge qualifications in tourism and construction across Mediterranean. During the event, objectives and activities for 2013 were agreed and discussed. In 2013 the project continued its work at technical level, through the use and application of the common profiles in specific pilot projects that had national, bilateral or regional character. In parallel, the links with the policy level were further developed to increasingly integrate the technical and the policy level and define the orientation of the future project partnership and governance structure.

Figure 27: Regional project: Qualifications for the Mediterranean

Within countries, over multiple years, shifts are noticeable in the way ETF provides support, as is the case in Serbia (see figure 28).

Serbia

In 2010, the ETF support was focused on vocational education and training system development. It addressed capacity building for the National Education Council on policy development with specific reference to key competencies and links between general and vocational education. It involved key vocational and adult learning institutions in **peer learning activities** on national qualification frameworks.

In 2011, the ETF support was focused on the role of social partnership in developing vocational education and training. It addressed **capacity building of the two key bodies**: the Centre for VET and Adult Education and the Council for VET and Adult Education, and provide policy advice on NQF development.

In 2012/3 the ETF planned to continue to deliver **guidance and advice** on the National Qualifications Framework.

Figure 28: Shifts in ETF support in Serbia

Also here the **Torino process** was considered important as it allowed countries to practice evidence-based policy making. This leads to a better argued selection of priorities. For instance in Russia (2011), the Torino process had identified the development of the national qualification framework, continuing training, post-secondary VET and governance as the key priorities. The first three issues were to be the subject of the regional Lifelong Learning project, to which Russia would participate. Russia has made good progress with the development of its NQF and continued synergies with Ukraine were sought in the period 2010–2013.

From evidence, it becomes clear that these countries did not start from scratch in 2010, but that preparatory work was commenced well in advance. In comparison with the first country cluster, the level of autonomy and responsibility in the countries is higher and for that reason the role of ETF changed from policy-initiator to policy-support.

All countries had prior preparatory involvement in NQF and NQF-related support. In addition, in most countries there are clear external and internal objectives. External objectives are related to EU funding programmes, EU policies, future accession and EU association policies. Internal objectives relate to better education-employment links and increasing the quality of the work force.

An important and critical factor is the multi-stakeholder approach. The impact of the implementation of an NQF is related to the extent to which all stakeholders are involved at an early start. If stakeholders are not sufficiently involved, the legitimacy of the whole exercise decreases over time.

Given the ETF's work in the countries at an intermediate stage of development a broad set of mechanisms is at work:

- **Train** policy makers and stakeholders so that they **increase the capacities** to initiate and implement reforms (to create sustainable reforms)
- **Advise** national policy makers and stakeholders so that they **solve problems and difficulties** encountered in the implementation of reforms (to implement reforms)
- **Assist** policy makers and stakeholders so that **products are developed** (documents, roadmaps, etc.) (to steer/guide the implementation of reforms)
- **Gather** stakeholders across countries to jointly work on topics so that policy makers and stakeholders **develop capacities** to work on these topics and to work in an international context (to broaden perspective on reforms in the own country)
- **Share** good practice so that national policy makers and stakeholders **develop inspiration on how to solve their own problems** and difficulties encountered (to broaden perspective on implementation possibilities)
- **Distribute** information (actively) to national policy makers and stakeholders so that they **create awareness** of the need for reform/possible direction of reform (to embed reforms structurally)
- **Provide** intelligence to donor organisations so that they can **develop their intervention most effectively** (to structure reforms)
- **Coordinate** involvements of different donors so that they **do not overlap with negative consequences** (to steer/guide the implementation of reforms)

The mechanisms on involving stakeholders and organising them, which were the core of the approach for the countries at an initial stage, remains important for the countries at an intermediate stage as the stakeholder involvement often remains precarious. Also here, ETF provides general analytical and information sharing support through the Qualifications Platform. Stakeholders interviewed during the site-visits indicated that they are aware of the Qualifications Platform and that they occasionally make use of it to learn about how other countries dealt with specific design and development issues. The use would be much more if the platform and content is provided in French as well. This was echoed in the responses from the survey as well.

To conclude, the focus of the mechanisms is coordinating the reforms and putting structures in place to do so. Themes the ETF work focuses on concern design of NQFs, institutional embedding of the NQF, establishing structures for NQF implementation and further VET reforms.

5.3 Progression of countries at an intermediate stage of development

There is a substantial number of countries in this category, each following its own route through the reform process. They tend to have similarities based on their geographical, or historical alliances. For example, the ex-soviet countries Moldova and Ukraine have difficulty dealing

with the historical classifier of occupations system. For Ukraine, although there is now an adopted NQF, there is not yet a shared understanding of the different levels among stakeholders. The vast majority of qualifications are still based on knowledge obtained, and insufficient attention is paid to learning outcomes, employability and labour market needs. The following outcomes were achieved in Ukraine and Morocco in the period 2010 to 2013 (see figure 29).

<p>Ukraine</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Engagement and support for the development of effective policies for reform of the education and training • Facilitating policy development through the provision of international best practices and expertise • Establishing networking among key stakeholders through conferences/seminars and study visits • Supporting the government and social partners in NQF development, through developing a methodology for competence based standards • Continued support for NQF development and implementation • Developing systems to link occupational standards to national qualifications, and in the recognition of prior learning
<p>Morocco</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Design of the NQF and adoption of the NQF by three Ministries • Broad acceptance of the NQF as a reform agenda. This both at the level of policy making and policy implementation. • Improved communication between Ministries and stakeholders involved, having a shared language. • Increased status of VET (acceptance of the Ministry for VET to lead the national team associated with the implementation of the NQF) • Initial steps to institutionally embed the NQF implementation and testing • Establishment of a strong group of people (both institutionally, competence-wise) to work on the NQF (result of capacity building)

Figure 29: Specific ETF-work-related outcomes in Ukraine and Morocco in the period 2010–2013

Systems seem to be fragmented, with an amalgam of parts formed from traditional systems together with some aspects from the new systems. There appears to be no coordinated strategic approach adopted to carry out the reform process.

Serbia is a participant in the same EU Education and Training 2020 process as the EU 28 Member States and so seeks to meet the same Strategic Objectives set by the EU framework. However, the wider education and training system, including VET, still requires significant reform. The education and training system in Serbia needs to be more geared to the economic development needs of the country.

Some countries, though being at the ‘end’ of the intermediate stage, still face some start-up difficulties. This especially applies to engaging the social partners and other stakeholders. This is for instance the case in Bosnia and Herzegovina, where the role of social partners was of particular focus of the ETF’s work both in relation to the formulation of the national qualifications framework and within the different vocational education and training councils (2011). Also, in 2012, the strategic dialogue with the Ministry of Civil Affairs on the implementation of the Baseline of Qualifications Framework continued. The emphasis on involving the world of work was mentioned for 2013 as well.

At the ‘end’ of the intermediate stage of development, countries should have appropriate legislation and governance arrangements in place to move towards the implementation of policies and procedures, through continued capacity building and training (among agency and provider staff) to embed, monitor and improve operational processes.

5.4 What mechanisms work best?

Given the described context, mechanisms and outcomes, for the partner countries at this stage of development, building further on what was already developed at earlier stages of development, the most effective mechanisms seem to be:

- **Train** policy makers and stakeholders so that they **increase the capacities** to initiate and implement reforms (to create sustainable reforms)
- **Advise** national policy makers and stakeholders so that they **solve problems and difficulties** encountered in the implementation of reforms (to implement reforms)
- **Assist** policy makers and stakeholders so that **products are developed** (documents, roadmaps, etc.) (to steer/guide the implementation of reforms)
- **Gather** stakeholders across countries to jointly work on topics so that policy makers and stakeholders **develop capacities** to work on these topics and to work in an international context (to broaden perspective on reforms in the own country)
- **Distribute** information (actively) to national policy makers and stakeholders so that they **create awareness** of the need for reform/possible direction of reform (to embed reforms structurally)
- **Provide** intelligence to donor organisations so that they can **develop their intervention most effectively** (to structure reforms)
- **Coordinate** involvements of different donors so that they **do not overlap with negative consequences** (to steer/guide the implementation of reforms)

It needs to be emphasised that continuous efforts need to be made on involving stakeholders and organising stakeholder support. Once involved is no guarantee that they continue to be involved in future developments.

Given the ETF national, regional and corporate work, the emphasis in these mechanisms is on the national level (train, advise, assist, distribute, provide and coordinate), but there is also room for regional level work (gather stakeholders across countries).

6 Countries at an advanced stage of development

In this chapter the context, mechanisms and outcomes are discussed for the countries at an initial stage of development in qualification reform. It concerns the following countries: Croatia (now EU Member State), Georgia, Kosovo, Montenegro, Turkey, and Armenia.

6.1 Context description of countries at an advanced stage of development

For those countries that have made substantial progress in the reform of qualifications systems, attention focusses on embedding operational procedures within governance agencies, training providers and other key stakeholders. Continued capacity building of practitioners (teachers, trainers etc.) is required and continued communication and dissemination of relevant information with other stakeholders (employers, learners and the public) is also required. Monitoring and review of adopted methodologies and procedures is often undertaken, with refinements and amendments introduced to improve effectiveness and increase efficiency (reduce costs). Insightful challenges are frequently resolved (e.g. dealing with legacy and global (CISCO type) qualifications).

Comparative studies with other countries or benchmark systems (e.g. EQF) are frequently undertaken.

Frequently, the many stakeholders involved (government agencies, providers, employers and other social partners and key stakeholders) have developed a common agenda, and work together in an integrated, cooperative and consistent manner to achieve a common aim.

The countries in this cluster have close relationships with the EU and participate in a number of EU funding programmes associated with VET and QF developments (IPA). Some countries in this cluster either joined the EU (Croatia), are candidate countries (Turkey, Montenegro) or are potential candidates (Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo). The EU Office plays the pivotal role in realising the European agenda in Kosovo with the aim to promote Kosovo's approximation to the European Union. In Armenia, the EU has been a major donor in the reform of vocational education and training since 2006 with an overall amount of around €35 million provided through not targeted budget support. The objective of the reform has been to promote better ownership and quality of the system, both in terms of content and physical infrastructure in order to make it more relevant to society and the labour market.

Level of progress achieved in reforming qualifications systems (through NQFs)

In Croatia, the CROQF was adopted by law in late 2012. In Montenegro, the National Council for Qualifications, established in May 2011 under provisions within the 2010 Law on the NQF, has overall responsibility for the national qualifications system. In Turkey, the NQF was established by law (Vocational Qualifications Authority (VQA) Law (No 5544, 2006) plus law amendment (November 2011)). In Armenia, in 2012 the Government endorsed the 'VET Reforms Programme and Action Plan 2012–2016' (ETF, Torino, 2012). A first concept paper on an NQF for VET was developed in 2008 by stakeholders from different government institutions. The NQF concept builds on recent VET reforms and focuses on the development of new qualifications, reference is made to the EQF, and a future link with general education and HE within an overarching framework is foreseen. A working group has been set up by the Ministry of Education to develop a proposal on how to implement the NQF by mid-2013. This working group is mainly driven by the Ministry of Education and the focus is on higher education. An EU-funded Twinning Project should start in March 2013 for the implementation of an NQF for higher education. The Armenian Qualifications Framework was adopted by

Decree (N° 332-N), on 31 March 2011, in accordance with Point 21 of Article N36 of the Education Law of the Republic of Armenia. (Global NQF Inventory). In other countries, in 2010/2011 the direction of reforms was not clear, causing ETF support to be more diffused among a number of important VET-related themes (see text box).

Georgia

In 2010, the VET system of Georgia was under revision. Government approved a new VET strategy based on learning outcomes and more qualification levels in the system. The new qualification systems aimed at being coherent to European standards. The new VET strategy influenced the cooperation of Georgia with the international donor community and created partly new priorities for cooperation based on home grown reform efforts. The reform needed time and priorities were discussed internally in the country.

In 2011 ETF supported improving links between curriculum reforms and occupational standards/NQF policies. As the authorities in Georgia recognised the value for the whole VET system, ETF supported the reform of the curriculum and occupational standards – country activities in 2013 planned to consolidate methodology aspects, and to provide additional support to capacity building. ETF also explored other directions, such as the link between the recognition of non-formal and informal learning, and the revised learning outcomes based VET curriculum and qualifications. The authorities initiated an information campaign on the recognition of non-formal learning, but lacked the overview of good practice and approaches developed in the EU and other countries.

Figure 30: ETF interventions on VET-related themes in Georgia

The Georgian NQF represents a compromise between existing education structures and the ongoing shift to outcomes-based approaches in the development of curricula, standards and qualifications. There is considerable tension between the aims of the NQF and the existing legislative and institutional framework.

Stage of implementation of reformed institutional structures (networks of schools, governance agencies, funding agencies, certification bodies)

For Turkey, the VET system is undergoing major reform, with EU support, and in Armenia although reforms in VET are in various stages of development, the governance and financial mechanisms remained highly centralised. The figure below provides an illustration from Kosovo on the stage of implementation of reforms.

Kosovo

Law no. 03/L-060 National Qualifications, including NQF, was adopted in November 2008. The law sets out 9 main objectives for the NQF, including that it should: provide a basis for cooperation with the EQF; promote transparency of qualifications; ensure the relevance of qualifications to employment and learning; stimulate lifelong learning; increase access to certification; provide learning pathways; establish a system for the accumulation and transfer of credit; increase the quality and relevance of education and training by stimulating the development of qualifications, based on internationally comparable standards of knowledge, skills and competences and supported by rigorous quality assurance procedures; and improve employability and learning opportunities for individuals by providing a basis for recognition and certification. The National Qualifications Authority, created in 2009, has overall responsibility for the NQF. While the NQA leads and coordinates, it shares responsibility for development and implementation of the NQF with the Ministry of Education, Science and Technology (MEST), the Kosovo Accreditation Agency for Higher Education (KAA) and the Council for VET. A new Agency for VET and adult education, called the Agency for Vocational Education and Training and Adult Education (AVETAE) began work in the spring of 2014, supported by GIZ. A law on VET contained provisions for the creation of this body. It is expected to control much of the VET sector – the relationship with the NQA, especially in quality assurance issues, will need to be clearly described to prevent confusion and overlap.

Stakeholder involvement, outside the key institutions, is developing but still quite limited. However, this situation is not unique to the NQF field or wider education and training; rather it reflects the position in society generally, where civic institutions are still developing. CVET is a tripartite (government, employers and trades unions) body designed to support the VET sector. It is intended to coordinate contributions from across the VET stakeholder community, including various ministries but in particular the social partners. Its remit includes engaging the social partners in coordinating the development of occupational standards, and initiatives to improve the quality of VET.

Qualifications are for the most part being developed on unit or modular lines, in both VET and HE (general school, compulsory education does not, however, use a modular approach). VET qualifications are developed by VET providers in accordance with criteria set by NQA. Usually this includes basis in occupational standards or some form of occupational analysis. Occupational standards are usually developed by donors such as GIZ or Swiss contact with the Chamber of Commerce, and proposed for validation to CVET. NQA then verifies these for use to develop new VET qualifications.

The Kosovo NQF has been heavily influenced in concept, structure and scope by the EQF. One of the objectives of the NQF, set out in the 2008 Law on Qualifications, is indeed to provide a basis for cooperation with the EQF. During 2013–14 Kosovo mapped its NQF to the EQF and international experts prepared a comparative report, in draft form in the spring 2014.

Figure 31: NQF developments in Kosovo

Employers are engaged at national level in policy discussions and with providers (schools/colleges) in developing curricula

In Croatia, the Councils and Working Groups are partnership advisory bodies which contribute to and comment on qualifications standards and occupational standards; they comprise representatives from education, the labour market, NGOs and trades unions. Their role is principally to ensure labour market demand and relevance in qualifications development. The Montenegrin Qualifications Council comprises representatives of the Bureau for Employment of Montenegro, the Chamber of Commerce, business alliances and trades unions. For Armenia, the National Council for VET Development (NCVD) was established as a tripartite advisory body, with equal representation (seven people) of the Government of the Republic of Armenia, from organizations representing the employers and businesses as well as trade unions. In Turkey, an emphasis has been placed on sectors skills councils to develop occupational standards and related qualifications. Finally, in Georgia, contributions to developments during 2012 built on critical feedback from employers and VET providers

Level of progress in developing outcome-based qualifications

In Montenegro, although the principles of learning outcomes have been adopted, there is much work to do to define qualifications and curricula which are based on learning outcomes. For Turkey, the Ministry of National Education has launched a curriculum reform in secondary

education (for both general and vocational and technical schools). Vocational qualifications will be learning outcomes-based. Reforms in the VET system will continue in the country specific context with the revision, development and implementation of new and learning outcome based curricula in Armenia.

Engaged with qualifications development and comparison outside the country

Limited comparisons have been made between countries on the Balkan (for instance between Croatia, Slovenia and Bosnia and Herzegovina). For Croatia, a referencing report was sent to the EQF in 2014. Montenegro has presented a state of play report on its NQF – the first step in referencing its QF to the EQF – at the June 2014 meeting of the EQF Advisory Group. A draft referencing report for relating the Turkish NQF to the EQF is expected to be prepared in 2014. In Armenia, the NQF is not part of any regional framework, but the country is interested in using the EQF as a reference model.

6.2 ETF interventions in countries at an advanced stage of development

The ETF annual work programmes and annual activity reports for 2010 to 2013 indicate the development of the ETF involvement in the countries. As indicated, the countries are already in the implementation phase of the NQF. Many countries **initiated the implementation of the NQF at the start of the period 2010–2013**. The ETF support in general therefore was more related to implementation issues than awareness raising and lobbying (as is the case in the less advanced countries). The ETF activities concerned more policy advice and technical assistance.

An important aspect of the ETF interventions concerned **capacity building** within existing structures and newly established institutions related to the NQF implementation. This is for instance the case in Kosovo. In 2011, specific capacity building support was delivered for the Vocational Qualifications Authority to sustain the implementation of the qualifications system, on teachers' professional development with the Ministry of Education and on the involvement of social partner organisations in VET through the National Council on VET. This capacity building support continued in 2012 and 2013 in the support for the implementation of the Kosovo Education Strategic Plan (2011–2016) and the Employment Strategy. This support included policy advice and capacity building for the VET Agency, the National Qualification Authority, the VET Council and Employment Offices. Also in Turkey, the focus of the ETF support was on capacity building: the ETF in 2011 continued its support to strengthen the capacity of the Vocational Qualification Authority in implementing the qualification framework in Turkey and referencing it to the EQF. In Armenia throughout the period and in line with the strategic actions within the EU supported reform of the VET system, the ETF provided support for institutional capacity building to the National Vocational Training Council, established in 2009, with the objective of guiding the reform. Also the ETF provided support to the EU Delegation on the assessment of progress of vocational training reform.

Another important ETF action is **support to ETF partner countries to find and use constructively donor funds**. In the case of Croatia, ETF actively supported the country to use IPA funding, contributing to accession to the EU. This coordination function was visible in Kosovo and Armenia as well.

Increasing **evidence-based policy making in VET** is an important aspect in most countries. For instance, Kosovo in 2012 continued to further develop its capacities for evidence-based policy making to inform VET reforms. The Torino process is embraced as important support for policy makers in VET.

The ETF support actions are related to a selection of **NQF implementation themes and issues**, such as dealing with mature qualifications, accreditation of prior learning and quality assurance. For instance in Turkey ETF support (2013) included guidance and advice on how to assess competencies acquired outside the formal education system. This related to capacity building and policy advice to the Authorised Certification Bodies/VocTest Centres. The ETF

interventions in this cluster of countries became more and more reliant on the demands from the partner countries. The level of autonomy and authority progresses and through this, the role of ETF changed from policy developer to providing tailored policy support.

In the advanced stage countries, the mechanism shifts to ‘capacity building’ and ‘supporting national policy coordination’.

Given the ETF’s work in the countries at an advanced stage of development the following main mechanisms is at work:

- **Train** policy makers and stakeholders so that they **increase the capacities** to initiate and implement reforms (to create sustainable reforms)
- **Advise** national policy makers and stakeholders so that they **solve problems and difficulties** encountered in the implementation of reforms (to implement reforms)
- **Analyse** the situation in the country/countries so that national policy makers and stakeholders have a **better knowledge base** to implement reforms (to improve decision making on reforms)
- **Share** good practice so that national policy makers and stakeholders **develop inspiration on how to solve their own problems** and difficulties encountered (to broaden perspective on implementation possibilities)
- **Benchmark** countries on specific issues so that, they can see what practices could be interesting to look at for **inspiration to solve their own problems** and difficulties encountered (to involve comparability and peer learning)
- **Provide** intelligence to donor organisations so that they can **develop their intervention most effectively** (to structure reforms)
- **Coordinate** involvements of different donors so that they **do not overlap with negative consequences** (to steer/guide the implementation of reforms)

The emphasis in the ETF work within the mechanisms is shifted from initiating processes to facilitating processes and responding to partner countries’ requests.

To conclude, the focus of the mechanisms is on stimulating limited-supported reforms (or, self-initiated reforms) through providing comparative analysis and respond to requests for expertise. The themes the ETF work focuses shifts as well from institutional issues to implementation issues related to quality assurance, dealing with existing qualifications and accreditation of prior learning.

6.3 Progression of countries at an advanced stage of development

The countries in this cluster already were at an advanced stage of development in 2010. Many already had their NQF established in legal frameworks or were about to achieve this. Also, authorities and institutional arrangements were made in support of implementing NQFs. Furthermore, due to NQF developments, reforms of VET systems continued. The following outcomes were achieved in Kosovo in the period 2010 to 2013 (text box).

Kosovo

- Torino process – this is useful for the EC to see how countries develop
- ETF provided advice to the ECLO. They sometimes even actually wrote the position papers.
- In the establishment of the NQA, ETF provided monitoring services and individual advice.
- Capacity Building relating to levels of the NQF and transparency between national and sectoral qualifications.
- ETF was asked to give comments on the annual progress report towards EU standards.
- Capacity building of the NQA relating to teachers' professional development and the involvement of social partner organisations in VET
- Support to the NQA, through capacity building, regarding evidence-based policy making to inform VET reforms
- FRAME project (skills development and identification). ETF facilitated a workshop with the ministry of education and labour. Also the Prime Minister's office was involved.
- Contribute to the implementation of the Kosovo Education Strategic Plan (2011–2016), through policy advice and capacity building of the NQA, AVETAE, CVET and the Employment Offices (MoL)

Capacity building was especially valued (particularly within the ministries).

Figure 32: Specific ETF-work-related outcomes in Kosovo in the period 2010–2013

The Croatian Qualifications Framework was developed upon a social partnership. The particular emphasis of ETF work in 2010 was given to this social partnership and its contribution to a Croatian qualifications framework. Within this framework, the ETF supported Croatia in vocational education and training system development by advising on the design and implementation of the Croatian qualifications framework. This points to an **important distinction when discussing NQF development and implementation**, namely whether the NQF is developed with a reform agenda in mind, or whether the NQF is seen as a translation device. In the case of the latter, the design, development and implementation can go at a fast pace, but the actual impact in the end is much harder to reach. Countries, despite having an NQF, lack stakeholders support to continue further implementation and reaching impact.

The advanced level of development might therefore not do justice to practice and some 'less advanced' countries are in fact at a practical level more advanced than those countries.

Currently, some of the countries having developed and started to implement the NQF seek ways to reference their NQF to the EQF. They ask for ETF support in this as ETF is member of the EQF advisory group. Currently, this issue is challenging as there is no clarity concerning the legal mandate to reference non-EU NQFs to the EQF.

For countries in this stage of development, after the embedding of policies and procedures among stakeholders in the qualifications systems, two further aspects need to be dealt with: one relates to monitoring, reviewing and improving process, often with a view to reducing costs; the second relates to resolving the more difficult and challenging aspects of qualifications systems, particularly relating to mobility and migration of labour in an international context.

6.4 What mechanisms work best?

Given the described context, mechanisms and outcomes, for the partner countries at this stage of development, building further on what was already developed at earlier stages of development, the most effective mechanisms seem to be:

- **Analyse** the situation in the country/countries so that national policy makers and stakeholders have a **better knowledge base** to implement reforms (to improve decision making on reforms)
- **Benchmark** countries on specific issues so that, they can see what practices could be interesting to look at for **inspiration to solve their own problems** and difficulties encountered (to involve comparability and peer learning)

In addition, mechanisms providing tailored support upon request of the partner countries seem to be highly effective for countries at this stage. This concerns the following mechanisms:

- **Train** policy makers and stakeholders so that they **increase the capacities** to initiate and implement reforms (to create sustainable reforms)
- **Advise** national policy makers and stakeholders so that they **solve problems and difficulties** encountered in the implementation of reforms (to implement reforms)

Finally, the countries at this stage could contribute to the development of others by presenting their lessons learned to countries that are less developed during international conferences and study visits.

Given the ETF national, regional and corporate work, the emphasis in these mechanisms shifts from the national level to the corporate level. Besides training and advising, there is room for analysis and benchmark to stimulate qualifications reforms.

7 Linking contexts, mechanisms and outcomes (CMO)

In this chapter, after having discussed context, mechanisms, and outcomes (Chapter 4-6) per cluster of countries, the three clusters are discussed in relation to each other to assess what mechanism works (yields the desired outcome) in which context. In Section 7.1 different patterns are discussed, after which in Section 7.2 an assessment is provided of what works in which circumstance. Section 7.3 concludes with emerging themes in relation to ETF work in the ETF partner countries.

7.1 Different patterns regarding context-mechanism-outcome

As indicated in the ETF 2014 publication on vocational qualifications, ‘all partner countries have reformed, but reform has often been implemented unevenly, sporadically and sometimes chaotically. In some cases change has been boosted by **internal drivers** such as political prioritisation, economic developments and demographic pressure. In other cases, it has been boosted by **external drivers** such as international aid projects and programmes. The two interact and have resulted in a patchwork of countries that are at very different stages of developing qualifications that are appropriate to the current reality. Even within individual countries, we observe in our work uneven development of education and training systems, so that they are characterised by strengths in some areas, weaknesses in others.’³⁸ The interplay between context and mechanisms is a complex one and it remains difficult to attribute progress to specific interventions. Each country has a unique pattern of context, mechanism and outcome.

What can be seen in that the outcomes of ETF work are considerable. In all countries, increased awareness of the importance of having an NQF and increased engagement and policy developments can be mentioned. In Jordan and Morocco, the NQF is seen as a reform tool – the NQF is established (albeit not in legal frameworks) and steps are made to increase ownership and institutional embedding of the NQF. In Ukraine, progress is made in the development of the NQF and to link qualifications to occupational profiles. In Kosovo, the most advanced country of the selection of four, the NQA is established and more specific capacity building processes are set in motion (for instance on teacher competences).

Also, whether ETF interventions yield outcomes have to do with the way partner country stakeholders interact with ETF partner country stakeholders can be **cooperative**, developing projects in a joint way; **consumptive**, joining interventions initiated by the ETF; **authoritative**, self-initiating projects and seeking donor support; **rejective**, rejecting donor efforts to initiate interventions. When assessing the four countries studied in-depth on this issue, an interesting shift is noticeable: the level of country stakeholders’ authority increases with the maturity of the development. In Jordan and partially Morocco and Ukraine, the overall sentiment towards ETF is rather consumptive: the countries participate in the interventions initiated by ETF and other donor organisations. In Morocco and Ukraine, steps are taken in the period 2010–2013 to develop the own viewpoint on NQF developments and to develop their particular requests for ETF interventions. This is even further developed in Kosovo, where the NQA directs what expertise is needed to further implement the NQF and initiate reforms in the VET sector.

The countries show different patterns (see figure below). In Jordan, ETF interventions lead to awareness raising and exemplification of good practice in other countries. The Regional Project facilitates cooperation among a number of Mediterranean countries. Progress is very slow and exacerbated by regional conflicts. Through the Regional Project, serving as a foothold to

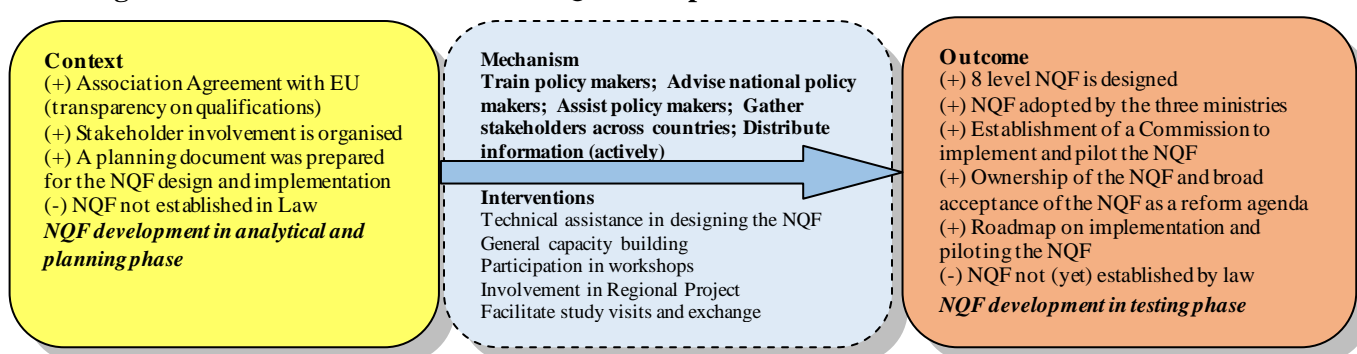
³⁸ ETF (2014), Making better vocational qualifications, vocational qualifications system reforms in the ETF partner countries, p. 17.

continue to work on qualifications in the country, ETF involves stakeholders in qualifications development and initiates first steps in reforming the VET system. In Morocco, ETF interventions led to the design of the NQF and the adoption of the NQF – however it did not lead to an institutionalised authority on NQF and the adoption in legislation. Because of this, and despite the Association Agreement, the NQF development in 2013 was in a critical phase and required a new impetus. In Ukraine, ETF interventions facilitate stakeholder cooperation and awareness raising, supported by appropriate legislation. However there is no common approach to implementation, and no strong driving force. The entrenchment of traditional systems (relating to the existing classification of occupations and delivery of learning programmes) means that progress has stagnated at the ‘theoretical’ stage. Although the ETF interventions establish stakeholder involvement, this has not led to further progress in an operational sense. In Kosovo, ETF interventions have helped develop the structure of the NQF, together with the necessary government agencies to implement the NQF. Support has been provided to the EU Office and to stakeholders to progress the reform. Evidence indicates that ETF and other donors do not always cooperate effectively in the best interests of the country.

Linking CMO for ETF interventions on NQF development 2010 to 2013 in Jordan



Linking CMO for ETF interventions on NQF development 2010 to 2013 in Morocco



Linking CMO for ETF interventions on NQF development 2010 to 2013 in Ukraine



Linking CMO for ETF interventions on NQF development 2010 to 2013 in Kosovo

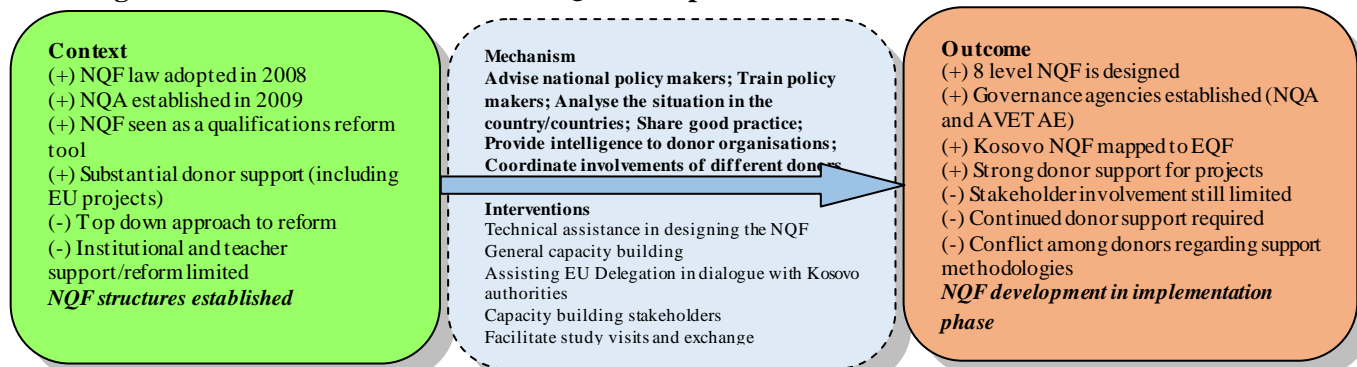


Figure 33: Linking CMO for ETF interventions on NQF development 2010 to 2013 in Morocco, Kosovo, Jordan and Ukraine

7.2 Assessment of what works in what situation

Given the assessment of the patterns in the context-mechanism-outcome linkages, the most effective mechanisms can be identified per stage of development. Figure 34 provides an overview of the interplay between stages of development, the role ETF should play and which objectives are relevant at what level of maturity. It also relates to the three levels of ETF work: national (yellow), regional (grey) and corporate (green) level.

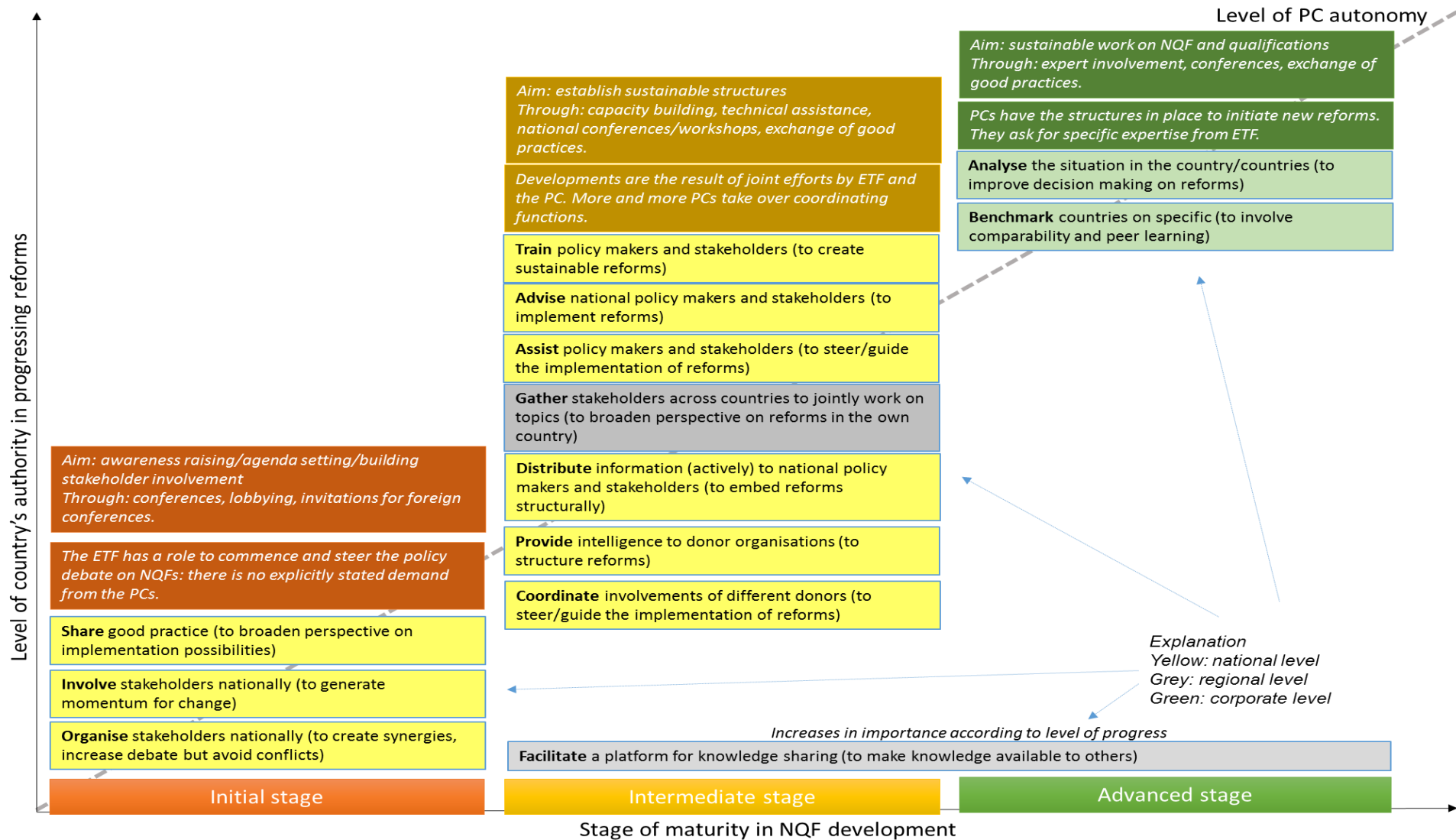


Figure 34: Overview of objectives, role of ETF and mechanisms differentiated according to stage of development

With the changing role of ETF at the different stages, the set of interventions also changes. Therefore, for each stage of development, a different intervention logic should be put in place, taking into account: firstly, key issues in supporting partner countries in their NQF development/qualifications reform; secondly, clear pointers for countries at this stage of development concern; and finally, implications for developing and planning ETF interventions.

As indicated in figure 34, facilitation of a platform for knowledge sharing (the Qualifications Platform) is an underlying mechanism that yields effect in countries at intermediate and advanced stage of development. These countries have the capacities and institutional structures to use material from other countries to develop their own ideas on design, development and implementation of qualifications reforms.

In the table below these topics are described in detail, per stage of development. This overview is developed on the basis of what is found in the country in-depth studies on what mechanisms work best (chapter 4–6), but takes the analysis one step further by inserting the implications of what should be achieved and what happens when no interventions take place.

	Countries at an initial stage of development	Countries at an intermediate stage of development	Countries at an advanced stage of development
Key issues in supporting partner countries in their NQF development/qualifications reform	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Initiating reforms and NQF developments through ETF interventions is a long-term process. Convincing partner countries to invest considerable time and efforts in NQF development should have clear benefits, also in the short term. Technical assistance on NQF design and development is best suited to when stakeholders in the partner country can themselves determine their demands and wishes with regard to the NQF In each country, a clear mandate is needed to work on the NQF Establishing sustainable structures and groups of people who both have the competences and the time devoted to work on the NQF is a 'conditio sine qua non' for further NQF development and implementation. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Stakeholder involvement remains essential for further progress in NQF related policies. If it is not sufficiently planned for, and organised at an earlier stage, the progression will be seriously hampered and can even be put on-hold. Attention should be paid to whether existing structures and procedures and profiles (occupational profiles) could fit in with NQF developments. In order to formulate own ideas, there is a clear demand for exchange of practices. This is especially the case with countries having established NQFs. Existing NQFs provide better learning material than the EQF and guiding notes to deal with practical issues in designing, developing and implementing NQFs. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Being open and reflective to review and improvement of the NQF It should be considered (at a finite time in the future) that the partner country should be able to be self-sufficient, and not be reliant on ETF support. Benchmarking against qualifications systems/NQFs in other countries
Clear pointers for countries at this stage of development concern	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Legislation needs to be drafted to support the reforms Governance arrangements need to be agreed to manage the reformed qualifications systems Networking opportunities (through conferences, seminars and meetings) need to be arranged and facilitated – involving representatives of a broad range of stakeholders (government agencies, training providers, employers – and should include learners) Awareness raising and capacity building of relevant stakeholders, involving international best practices and expertise 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Legislation in place to support reforms Organisations established (or existing organisations changed) to govern the reformed qualifications system Policies and procedures for the operation of the reformed qualifications systems agreed (by stakeholders) and documented Stakeholders trained in the implementation and delivery of reformed qualifications Employers and learners informed through relevant communication channels 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Monitor, review and improve operational procedures relating to the reformed qualifications systems Ensure and embed reliability, credibility and desire of reformed qualifications Develop and implement a process to ensure reformed qualifications continue to be relevant and meet employers needs Ensure qualifications are developed to meet new employment opportunities (for example, fibre optic cable technicians) Develop a process for comparing qualifications systems/NQFs with other

	Countries at an initial stage of development	Countries at an intermediate stage of development	Countries at an advanced stage of development
Implications for developing and planning ETF interventions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Arranging and facilitating stakeholder events • Providing exemplification of legislative documents, governance arrangements and procedures • Supporting working groups to develop 'fit-for-purpose' processes and supporting documentation, for the elements of a reformed qualifications systems • Facilitating (and coordinating with other donors) relevant expertise for capacity building stakeholders 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Arranging and facilitating stakeholder events • Supporting working groups to develop 'fit-for-purpose' procedures and supporting documentation, for the operation of a reformed qualifications systems • Facilitating (and coordinating with other donors) relevant expertise for capacity building stakeholders to manage the reformed qualifications systems • Facilitating (and coordinating with other donors) relevant expertise for capacity building stakeholders to deliver the reformed qualifications 	<p>countries</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Providing best international practice exemplification and expertise for monitoring, reviewing and improving qualifications systems • Support in embedding good practice in the management and delivery of effective qualifications systems • Capacity build stakeholders in the process of maintaining effective qualifications systems • Support relevant authorities in the process of comparing national qualifications systems/frameworks against other countries
What if the implication are not taken into account:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lack of stakeholder involvement and political embedding results in a lack of debate on NQF and qualification reform. • Without debate, the process will be deadlocked. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Without institutional embedding (including human resources and knowledge management arrangements) of the NQF and qualification reform process, it remains difficult to maintain momentum and to keep stakeholders working on the topic. • Also, capacity building is limitedly effective as it remains too dependent on individuals (who might change careers). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Without responding to partner country request, the development and implementation of NQFs and qualification reforms might focus on less important issues and might be based on wrong assumptions, leading to undesired outcomes.

Figure 35: Key issues, pointers and implications for ETF interventions

Given the difficult situations and contexts in which ETF tries to achieve desired outcomes, a number of lessons learned can be teased out of the study. These lessons apply to ETF interventions implemented in each of the three stages of development:

- **Relate interventions to both the context and to the desired outcomes, and monitor the quality and outcomes of interventions:** effective interventions are tailored to the context and have clear relation to what would be the achievable objective. Also, the quality of the interventions should be assessed in the light of the desired outcomes.
- **Ensure interventions align with national strategy:** effective interventions align with the national priorities in the related policy field. It is important to create ownership of the processes and linking to national strategies is a way to make the processes part of a broader strategic framework to which stakeholders can relate their work.
- **Place interventions in the light of establishing credible and sustainable structures to embed operational practice for reforming systems:** Having sustainable structures in place in the partner countries for working on NQFs and qualifications creates an effect where achieving outcomes energises the work to yield more outcomes. It provides the long-term perspective for support to initiate reforms not having a direct effect. ETF interventions are in long-term more effective if they are embedded in sustainable structures that have the capacity to form own ideas on their existing systems and the route to reform. The ETF principle that reforms should be 'owned' by the key stakeholders should be respected at all times. In the partner country sufficient operational capacity should be provided to work on the reforms.

- **Promote organic systems that develop qualifications that continue to meet the needs of employers:** NQFs used as reform agenda should be adaptive to changing needs and demands. For this reason, discussions among stakeholders on the objectives, forms and content should be stimulated at each stage of development. There is a threat in focusing on the design of NQFs before there are sustainable structures to organise cooperation among stakeholders. Firstly, the stakeholders might not have sufficient resources/competences available to contribute to the discussions on design; secondly, it might cause a lack of debate once the NQF is agreed upon and exclusion of stakeholders not involved from the start.

7.3 Emerging themes

This section provides a generic overview of the themes that evolved during the collection and analysis of data and information sourced from: documentation (work plans and reports etc.); meetings with ETF staff; meetings with stakeholders in four selected countries; and the online survey. The focus is on the perceptions of stakeholders in the partner countries, rather than on ‘absolute truths’.³⁹

NQF developments and VET reforms

In the context of the ETF Partner Countries VET reforms and other qualification reforms seem to take place separately from NQF development and implementation. Countries attempt to define standards for sectors, establishing uniform university entrance levels, work on quality assurance for curricula, assessment and certification.

ETF seen in a positive light

When trying to ascertain which ETF interventions didn’t work so well over the period 2010–2013, it proved difficult to elicit any negative comment. In some cases, stakeholders seemed uncertain what the relationship was between the ETF and the EU as a whole – simply that the ETF was ‘part’ of the EU, and not really seen as a distinct agency with its own mandate and mission. This may be seen as an advantage or a disadvantage, depending on the perspective. Clearly for countries like Kosovo that have a singular focus on achieving integration within the EU, this is perhaps understandable. It is perhaps unanticipated to find a similar perspective in Jordan, that doesn’t have such an ulterior aim.

Continuity

This theme arose frequently in the process of gathering feedback regarding ETF interventions during the period 2010–2013, particularly in those countries with substantial donor assistance. It was very much appreciated that ETF provided long-term and continuous support. While donor support through projects (including EU projects) is much appreciated, stakeholders were much more willing to discuss negative aspects associated with this type of support: that it takes time for project team members to ‘learn’ the ways of that particular country; that donors often have their own agenda, that is not always in agreement with national strategy; that coordination of donor support is difficult and challenging, to prevent duplication and inefficiency. This seemed to be the attribute that was most appreciated by stakeholders, in relation to the ETF.

³⁹ It is important to balance these themes/comments against the paragraph relating to the ‘Added value statement’ in ETF’s 2014 Work Programme: ‘ETF interventions are mainly at system and policy level with limited work on operationalising commonly agreed policy measures and an emphasis on monitoring them. Contrary to the role of other donors, the ETF does not bring significant amounts of funding to a country but supports EU external relations policies including development aid in the field of human capital development. This includes expertise in adapting EU approaches to human capital development to the context of the partner countries and supporting the development of home-grown solutions.’

Lack of funds

Stakeholders expressed no negative views that the ETF didn't bring 'pots of money' to the country. Clearly many stakeholders don't regard ETF's role as one to bring assistance, in terms of money.

Expertise

This emerged as a theme during the gathering of information from stakeholders. It was very much appreciated that the ETF could source appropriate expertise from the international community to bring to seminars or working groups to assist with a particular development.

Timescale of progress achieved

Some documents refer to limited progress, despite a number of interventions (including ETF's) over a period of time. Clearly there are many extenuating circumstances in ETF's partner countries, including political and social unrest, economic factors, and historical and cultural aspects. When stakeholders were asked about these matters, a typical response would be to say 'look at how long it took the countries that began this process in the 1980s and 1990s to get to where they are today'.

Interestingly, the level of progress in the period 2010–2013 relates to the stage of development. Countries at an advanced level show more progress than the countries at an intermediate level. The latter in turn advanced more in the period than the countries at initial stage. This points to the fact that progression relies on a number of important preconditions, such as:

- Mandate to work on the NQF (legal embedding)
- Dedicated staff to work on the NQF (institutional embedding)
- Accessible information on NQF (knowledge base)

ETF and donor coordination

In some ways, this theme emerged due to 'lack of comment'. When reflecting on the whole information gathering process, there was little comment made about ETF's cooperation with other donors. The EU Office in Kosovo expressed satisfaction that the ETF helped achieve the Office's aims in that country – the Federation of Employers in Ukraine referred to the joint ETF/British Council work, but very little comment was made by 'recipient' stakeholders in countries in relation to this.

8 Conclusions and recommendations

8.1 Conclusions

This evaluation has sourced data and information from a variety of sources: documents, publications and websites; ETF staff; meetings with people involved in ETF interventions during visits to four partner countries; and online survey results completed by people involved in ETF interventions in other ETF partner countries. In collating, analysing and synthesising the information collected, the evaluation team attempted to tease out emerging themes that would allow, specifically, the provision of answers to the operationalised research questions developed in relation to the evaluation criteria (evaluation matrix, Section 2.1).

The key questions focused on **effectiveness**⁴⁰ and **impact** of the ETF interventions. These two evaluation criteria need to be seen in relation to other evaluation criteria as well. Therefore, besides effectiveness and impact, there are also the evaluation criteria of **relevance, implementation and efficiency**.

8.1.1 Relevance of ETF interventions in the partner countries

The ETF has, related to its mandate, several functions, such as providing information, policy advice, supporting stakeholders, capacity building, and encouraging networking and providing analytical support. In the field of NQFs and reforming qualifications – these functions all seem to provide value to stakeholders in partner countries. In addition, stakeholders in partner countries see ETF in the first place as a training provider (capacity building) and an institution providing policy support. Interestingly, ETFs networking activities and analytical work are considered by stakeholders to be more effective in supporting partner countries in NQF and qualifications developments. Most partner countries linked up with European policy developments related to VET (mainly relating to the European Qualifications Framework).

The ETF defines key principles by which it intervenes in partner countries. These principles cover not merely replicating interventions for partner countries' specific situations, but also encouraging policy learning and reflection. These principles are considered relevant and valued by partner country stakeholders. In terms of transforming these principles into practice, more emphasis could be placed on valuing existing practices, systems and structures in the partner countries to see which of the existing elements may be used in developing NQFs and reforming qualifications systems.

The Mid-Term Perspective 2010–2013, together with the ETF annual work programmes and annual activity reports provided a view of the scope of ETF interventions in the partner countries. They, in general terms, indicated what ETF planned to do per country. What is lacking, in this regard, are assessments of whether what was planned was actually carried out. This concerns an assessment of a) whether what is planned is carried out; b) whether it led to outcomes; c) how the outcomes relate to the initial plans/objectives. With regard to the latter, the relevance of interventions could benefit from clear pointers and objectives of the ETF work planned per partner country (how do specific interventions contribute to reaching objectives?). Also the relevance of interventions could benefit from clear pointers and objectives of the ETF interventions planned per partner country. The interventions taking place in the partner countries maintain a certain 'ad hoc' character, as often a needs analysis and a intervention logic is lacking. This does not, however, mean that the ETF interventions are not considered relevant to the countries; on the contrary, partner country stakeholders value ETF interventions to a great extent in providing the right expertise at the right time, fitting their needs.

⁴⁰ Sustainability is discussed in relation to effectiveness.

With regard to the relevance of ETF interventions, an important distinction should be made between countries according to the stage of development. Each stage requires a different set of interventions related to different objectives. Countries have different needs at different stages and relate differently to the balance of power (from reactive to proactive). Three stages of development are identified, within this evaluation:

- Countries at an initial stage of development
- Countries at an intermediate stage of development
- Countries at an advanced stage of development

Due to the lack of an intervention logic, it remains unclear whether the ETF interventions are truly well adapted to the specific country context. In addition, how interventions built further on outcomes of previous interventions remains unclear.

8.1.2 Implementation of ETF interventions in the partner countries

As concluded in the ‘Making better vocational qualifications’ publication, all partner countries are reforming their vocational qualifications, but reform has often been implemented unevenly, sporadically and sometimes chaotically. Hampering factors relate to the context, such as lack of political will, institutional embedding, and stability in the country.

In the area of NQF development and qualifications reform, there is a number of types of actions/interventions that ETF could use to support partner countries such as: national/stakeholder-focussed conferences; specific policy papers; pilot projects (sectoral projects); providing training, transnational exchange; consulting/advising work; targeted information sharing; organising and facilitating conferences (national/transnational); mobility; establishing a dedicated website (qualification platform); coordinating and funding of projects on NQFs and VET systems; and drafting analytical reports.

With regard to the implementation of ETF interventions on NQF/qualification development in the partner countries⁴¹, stakeholders are positive. The interventions were considered to be of high quality, and involved the right experts. This being said, the interventions sometimes tend to have an ‘ad hoc’ character. This is especially true for countries at an initial and intermediate stage of development. Other points that could be strengthened with regard to the implementation concern improving the follow-up actions after interventions take place; and to increase the number of stakeholders involved in interventions in the partner countries.

The small number of stakeholders involved makes the process in the partner countries especially susceptible to contingencies such as job change, restructuring of organisations, personal circumstances and hence reduced continuity in working on this theme. This relates as well to a general lack of a knowledge base and institutional learning to effectively develop long-term projects such as designing, developing and implementing an NQF.

8.1.3 Effectiveness and sustainability of ETF interventions in the partner countries

During the period 2010–2013, partner countries showed a considerable level of progress in qualifications related reform. The level of progress was related to the stage of development that the country was in. The countries at an initial stage of development continued the discussions on their NQF and show limited tangible progress. The countries at an intermediate stage progressed more steadily and partially reformed their VET qualification systems. Countries follow their own routes in doing so. The countries at an advanced stage of development showed the highest level of progress towards NQF implementation.

When assessed against the objectives set in the Mid-Term Perspective and the ETF annual work programmes and annual activity reports, the interventions seem to have achieved their objectives –

⁴¹ The corporate role of implementing ETF interventions was not subject to this evaluation. Hence it remains unclear how implementation proceeds within the ETF (who decides on project implementation).

however, it remains difficult to provide a full assessment on this, as it concerns mostly rather intangible results. The regional projects show a differentiated picture with regard to effectiveness. In some countries they provide, as a starting point, the place for discussion and reflection on the qualification system – in others the progress achieved in the regional projects does not seem to inform the NQF development and qualifications reform.

In that sense, regional projects can serve different purposes; namely, as stepping stone towards NQF development; and as pilot for implementation. A second purpose requires countries to be already in an advanced stage of development, to transfer results into operational processes.

Contextual factors that increase progress are the dependency on, or association with the EU, and EU funding. Also putting structures in place to embed NQF development in a sustainable way increases the level of progression. Other implementation-related conditions for effective sustainable interventions concern the long relationship of ETF with the country, the expertise of ETF experts and the clarity of objectives and the strategy.

8.1.4 Efficiency of ETF interventions in the partner countries

The role of ETF is seen as a capacity builder and a policy advisor, having a long-term presence in the partner countries. ETF is however not the only institution present in the partner countries to provide support. Also, ETF supports partner countries to effectively make use of funding provided by donors. This role of ETF is valued by the partner country stakeholders. Although, there is overlap in what ETF and donor organisations do, compared to donor organisations, the ETF achieves substantial results by means of limited finances — this being said, there is room for improvement in terms of efficiency. These improvements relate to a better understanding of what type of interventions should be implemented given the stage of development; increase already at an early stage the level of joint ownership of the NQF development; and finally, plan interventions more effectively in advance.

With regard the Qualifications Platform, users indicate that they see it predominantly as a rich, reliable, up to date library where they can find and access relevant documentation on qualifications in their country and other countries. The Qualifications Platform does not seem to lead to partnerships, knowledge exchange between users and contributing to discussions. For efficiency reasons, less emphasis could be given to the animating work on the Platform and more emphasis could be on keeping documents accessible and on putting important documents in the spotlight. There were also requests to make the platform available on more languages, for instance through automated translate functions.

Synergies between ETF and donor organisations should be pursued even more than is already the case, with perhaps ETF adopting more of a leading or pro-active role.

8.1.5 Impact of ETF interventions in the partner countries

The situation in which ETF operates is complex due to the country specific contexts, geo-political developments, involvement of donor organisations, and the mandate of ETF in partner countries. Consequently assessing the impact of interventions will always be difficult. And it is not possible for this project to conclude precisely in this area.

Measuring progress in general remains difficult – although the Torino process is considered a step forward in increasing the evidence-base of policy making in the partner countries. The Torino process however is at this point not developed enough to effectively develop and implement ETF interventions

When relying only on the perceptions of partner country stakeholders, they state that most of the impact of ETF interventions is on improving lifelong learning opportunities and progression routes. Also, the ETF work on the reform of VET qualifications systems; the increased policy awareness for NQF development; the use of learning outcomes based approaches; and the capacities of key

stakeholders are mentioned as having a high impact level. The direct impact on citizens and further populating frameworks with qualifications is assumed to have a lower affect. The outcomes of the survey are mirrored in the four country in-depth studies.

Again a recurring theme is the high level of satisfaction with ETF services that is indicated amongst stakeholders.

8.1.6 Added value of ETF interventions in partner countries

It is clear that ETF is perceived as being ‘different’ from other organisations/donors in partner countries. Initially, it may be assumed that because ETF doesn’t bring funds (directly) into the partner countries, that this would be perceived in a negative way – this is not the case in practice. There are clear differentiating factors that have emerged during this evaluation that demonstrate particular aspects relating to the added value of ETF interventions in partner countries.

Long term and continuous involvement in partner countries

This was an aspect that was expressed in strong and repeated terms. Sometimes almost scathing reference was made to short term (say, two year) projects where stakeholders in the partner countries had to ‘capacity build’ project staff (often international experts) in relation to the context and requirements of that particular country. It is perceived that soon after, projects are completed and these ‘trained’ staff move on.

The fact that ETF has had a continuous and lengthy involvement in a partner country, and consequently is aware of its history of reform progress, is very much appreciated and valued. This aspect may be worth noting when considering making logistical changes of ETF staff (country managers and experts) involved in partner country work.

Sourcing appropriate and relevant expertise

It is perceived and appreciated that ETF has an extensive network of contacts and sources of expertise to assist stakeholders deal with specific aspects of qualifications reform, be it at the policy level or operational level. Stakeholders don’t appear to differentiate between ETF staff and ‘other’ experts sourced from the network of contacts.

Assisting relevant authorities with donor coordination

ETF may or may not consider that it has a formal role in assisting with donor coordination in partner countries. However, stakeholders seem to believe that this is a function that ETF has demonstrated some skill or effectiveness in, that can support them to achieve more effective use of funds and prevent either overlap, duplication or conflicting activity. In particular, in what may be described as a ‘small’ country (for example, Kosovo or Moldova), there are perceived challenges in negotiating with and coordinating donor support from ‘large’ international donors.

8.2 Recommendations

On the basis of the conclusions, the following pointers for future work are developed, providing a stepping stone to the recommendations:

- *The relevance of ETF interventions could be improved by providing a country specific intervention logic in which objectives are stated, together with how specific interventions are to contribute to reaching these objectives. Also, these interventions should be better monitored in the light of the intervention logic. Furthermore, for sustainability reasons, focusing on establishing structures should be the key priority;*
- *The implementation of ETF interventions could be improved by: making explicit how interventions relate to stated country specific objectives; increasing attention towards follow-up activities and finally; expanding the group of stakeholders (organisations/persons) active in ETF interventions;*

- *The effectiveness of ETF interventions could be improved by taking conditions for effective interventions into account. Also, an early focus on establishing structures to progress the NQF development in the country and facilitate more effective interventions;*
- *The efficiency of ETF interventions could be improved by increasing synergy with donor organisations, linking interventions to the stage of development, and investing in joint ownership and making further use of advanced planning. Also the Qualifications Platform could focus more on its library function;*
- *The impact of ETF intervention could be improved by increasing attention to developing country specific intervention logics and improving evidence-based policy making (Torino process).*
- *The added value of ETF interventions could be improved if ETF enhances its role in donor coordination.*

This selection of recommendations aims to ensure the greatest impact and effectiveness of future ETF interventions in partner countries.

Recommendations 1: The selection of an intervention should be made following the evaluation of the context-mechanism-outcome for a partner country, based on its stage of development, at the time of selection.

This evaluation has placed considerable emphasis on the linked process of context-mechanism-outcome. If particular interventions in a given country are being selected for a given time period, for example, for an Annual Plan, it is assumed that the desired outcomes have been identified for achievement during that time period. It is further assumed that these desired outcomes have been discussed, and agreed, with the relevant authorities in that partner country, taking into account planned activities of other donors (including EU projects, if applicable).

Following the identification of the desired outcomes, it is essential to determine the context of the reform process, and in particular, the stage of development (for instance using Cedefop's 'stages', as a tool) in that partner country. These descriptive 'stages of development' could be complemented with clear pointers/objectives as to what should be achieved in order to progress to the following stage. Thereafter, using ETF's extensive and sustained experience of 'what works for whom, and in what circumstances', appropriate mechanisms and related interventions should be selected to achieve those desired outcomes.

It may be that some ETF staff will require capacity building in the use of the CMO process, as a tool in the selection of appropriate interventions, for achieving desired outcomes.

Recommendations 2: ETF's role in the facilitation of more effective donor coordination and integration with the strategic plans of relevant authorities in partner countries should be reviewed, with a view to possibly strengthening this role.

In teasing out the unique value that ETF provides in the reform of qualifications systems in partner countries, stakeholders indicated that they especially valued ETF's long term involvement in the country that provided some stability and continuity. This is in contrast to other donors involved in relatively short term interventions, with changing HR support, and often changing agendas. It should also be noted that stakeholders presented no negative views in comparing the relatively little amount of money that ETF brings to a partner country, when compared to other donor contributions. The 'involvement mechanism' (previously described) is particularly valued, where ETF is regarded as particularly skilled in facilitating events where often disparate stakeholders gather for discussion and debate. There often emerged an underlying assumption that ETF could provide (and sometimes did) a similar facilitation role among donor support, to increase the effectiveness of that support, and help relevant authorities better achieve their strategic plans.

Recommendations 3: Follow-up activity, following events such as seminars or conferences, should be explored or re-examined to increase the effectiveness of contribution to achievement of desired outcomes.

This evaluation highlighted a repeated request from stakeholders in partner countries that follow-up activities, after seminars or conferences, would be beneficial, and would contribute to reinforcing and embedding the desired outcomes of the events. Implied comments suggested that this activity would prove very effective, and shouldn't be extremely challenging in terms of time and money. In some ways this could be considered a 'new' intervention, or at least an extension of a previously applied intervention. It would be anticipated that this proposal would be explored in further depth with stakeholders in partner countries to identify specific requirements/activities. Perhaps an event could then be selected to 'pilot' this approach, with an evaluation of the effectiveness of the approach, prior to deciding whether or not to mainstream the activity.

The emphasis on follow-up relates to the previous recommendation that an intervention (be it a conference, a training) should be seen in the light of the intervention logic for the country. Outcomes and results (tangible and intangible) should be captured and further developed in relation to the objectives stated.

Recommendation 4: ETF interventions should focus more on establishing dedicated structures/frameworks for NQFs and qualifications systems to be better guarantee sustainability of outcomes.

ETF interventions are valued by partner country stakeholders. This being said, the development/reform progress is often seen to be slow. An important factor in this is the precarious situation under which stakeholders can work on NQF development and qualifications reform. In many countries, there are a lack of structures, systems, frameworks, and funding to devote substantial time to NQF development and qualifications reform. Focussing on establishing structures (be it new ones, or existing ones) pays off at a later stage in:

- a. sustainable capacity building: the built-up of expertise and capacity is more effective in established structures.
- b. increased ownership and better knowledge management: established structures can develop ownership and long-term objectives. Also knowledge development and sharing is better assured when sustainable structures are established.
- c. increased stakeholder involvement: having a sustainable structure in place makes coordinating and supporting stakeholder involvement easier and more effective.
- d. partner countries being better equipped to develop their own version of an NQF, and to specify their requests for expertise.

Recommendations 5: The effectiveness of particular interventions should be re-assessed at periodic intervals, to check that these interventions still achieve desired outcomes.

We live in a rapidly changing global context: the internet and social media increasingly impacts both on communication processes, and how we deliver business solutions in the 21st century (consider the impact of Amazon on traditional retailing). Physical objects (libraries, books) are rapidly being replaced by their virtual counterparts (online ('Cloud') repositories, electronic documents (in a variety of forms: pdf, epub, mobi)). Cognisance of these changes must be ascertained, together with their impact on the effectiveness of 'traditional' interventions. For example, it may be that communication via blogs or the ETF's 'Qualifications Platform' becomes more effective over time.

In the context of fixed or reducing resources (for example, budgets), a simple solution to this challenge would be to reduce, say, the number of seminars held in a year in a particular partner country. This may not be an effective solution to achieve desired outcomes, over a period of time. Not only should the effectiveness of existing interventions be evaluated, over time, but also new and innovative interventions should also be explored. Likewise the effectiveness of regional interventions should be compared in a systematic and objective manner to country interventions, to assess their relative impact on desired outcomes.

For example, the global company CISCO could not have grown at the rate it did, if it hadn't replaced physical meetings of staff (from its inception) with virtual meetings (for example, video conferences).

Recommendation 6: Improve the knowledge base and accessibility and sharing of knowledge for working in the partner countries

Essential in effective and efficient implementation of interventions and supporting policy reforms related to NQF and qualifications is a solid knowledge base and accessibility and sharing of knowledge and documentation for key stakeholders in the partner countries. Many countries lack easily accessible document-sharing facilities. Also key information is sometimes captured in PowerPoint formats, brochures and other one-purpose mediums instead of reports accessible to all those involved. This causes unbalanced knowledge distribution and lack of understanding of the state of play of developments in the country. The Qualifications Platform provides a good starting point, but these instruments need to be further developed to serve as a country-specific document library. Improvements concern the accessibility of the platform and availability of the platform in languages other than English and Russian (e.g. French).