

## Final Report

Evaluation of Social Partner  
Development in ETF activities

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## LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

AfDB	African Development Bank
CIDA	Canadian Development Agency
COP	Community of Practice
CVT	Continuing Vocational Training
DAC	Development Assistance Committee
EC	European Commission
ETF	European Training Foundation
EU	European Union
GIZ	Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit
HCD	Human Capacity Development
ILO	International Labour Organisation
LLL	Lifelong Learning
LM	Labour Market
MTP	Mid Term Perspective
NQF	National Qualifications Framework
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
PMED	Planning Monitoring and Evaluation Department
SC	Sector Council/Sector Skills Council
SIDA	Swedish International Development Co-operation Agency
SEMED	Southern and Eastern Mediterranean
TED	Thematic Expertise Department

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UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
USAID	United States Agency for International Development
VET	Vocational Education and Training
WB	World Bank

## Executive summary

Involvement of social partners in VET policy decisions is recognised as of crucial importance where VET systems need to shift from supply to demand led in line with the needs of the labour market. ETF has been working to engage social partners in VET activities for many years and has involved them in a range of dedicated projects as well as include them in relevant activities at country and regional level. This evaluation has been commissioned to take stock of this work over the last four year period under the current ETF Mid Term Perspective (2010-2013). Using a mixed method approach involving desk research, interviews with ETF staff, field based interviews in four case study countries (Ukraine, Kyrgyz Republic, Serbia and Morocco) and a survey of social partners in the ETF Partner Countries, the evaluation revealed the following conclusions:

### **Coherence**

The status, evolution and representativeness of social partners is an increasingly fuzzy field and there are tensions between formal definitions and changing realities concerning social dialogue in partner countries (and in much of Europe). ETF's leverage and expertise is well placed to support a debate on this issue. As a first measure, internally, notions of participation should be re-assessed.

The requirement for tripartite VET policy dialogue to achieve relevant VET system reform in partner countries is not at odds with the corresponding need to ensure that social partners have the commitment and capacity to engage. Work with social partners is currently partial, fragmented and not systematic. In general participation of trade unions organisations is lower reflecting their preoccupation with worker conditions, the differing roles of informal economy and labour market regulations and the historical conditions and cultures of Unions in many partner countries, particularly CIS and Eastern Europe. The social partners who engage with ETF tend to be the same ones. Where the activity is not informed by defined tangible objectives for the social partners, their involvement tends to be as participants in the event.

Specific social partner projects or targeted actions through TED/COPs contribute substantively to VET reform but do not appear to shift operational practices on the ground towards more systemic, focused and inclusive work with social partners. We conclude that strategic mechanisms should be defined at ETF management level and suggest Policy Maturity frameworks here as well as tools for increasing social partner contribution to the Torino Process. Further, the Knowledge Management team could work more specifically on applying workshop and networking tools for SP engagement and working directly with country managers on how best to optimise events towards engaging SPs in sustainable VET reform efforts. We also suggest that in house knowledge sharing should be made systematic particularly prior to defining country implementation plans.

The satisfaction among social partners already working with ETF is high. Their demand for more ETF support is even higher. Without budget increase, it is hard to see how ETF can meet this demand and certainly, how it could extend the limited net of social partners with whom it currently engages. More can be done to encourage social partners to take the initiative themselves in defining VET agendas and bringing state actors to the table – and ETF should look

to provide support in this respect. It is not clear if ETF has developed a policy line that it can put on the table with government, as a negotiating lever for engaging Social Partners in low trust or high conflict contexts.

The Evaluation also suggests ways ETF can improve social partner organization and support on the ground through, for example, Social Partner Boards at country level, or through locally contracted agents to act as ETF 'nodes'. ETF should examine ways to seek out social partners beyond the limited group already demonstrating interest in working with ETF on VET reform and this implies providing targeted awareness raising and capacity building.

### **Complementarity/Added Value**

There is generally strong liaison with EU Delegations but with other donors, the picture is more variable. In countries with a high presence of donors, or those where VET policy is weakly defined or where government institutional capacities limit country leadership over individual donor programmes or where ETF does not participate in donor co-ordination groups, there can be a lack of comprehensive knowledge of relevant initiatives and direct co-ordination with them. In situations where state capacities to manage and co-ordinate projects are weak it means that ETF's community added value is reduced but not through the fault of ETF. In this situation ETF needs to take special care to keep fully abreast of all donor interventions both planned and underway and to work harder to ensure a niche that delivers full complementarity and added value. We would advise ETF to further assess the level of state institutional capacity to oversee and co-ordinate donor programmes either as part of its country planning or as part of the Policy Maturity matrices, or through extension of the FRAME project.

### **Relevance**

ETF is highly responsive to social partners and in general they are highly satisfied with the results of ETF interventions and practices. There is generally good coordination with other donors activities involving social partners. There are areas suggested in the survey results for adjustment, such as e.g. better investigation into specific needs and context of social partners before launching events and better selection processes of SPs.

Feedback shows that 84 % of respondents find ETF interventions relevant – indicating a general satisfaction but with a need for improving needs analysis before events are planned. The outcomes of ETF events have been applicable in national VET reform processes; capacity building has improved the organisations ability to take an active part in the VET reform process in their respective countries.

### **Effectiveness**

In order to increase the active involvement of SPs in the Torino process special focus is needed on preparing the SPs for fulfilling their roles, in particular when it comes to the active involvement of trade union representatives. Regarding the Western Balkans and Turkey region SPs ETF has made significant progress in capacity building of national organizations, which calls now for a clearer focus on regional, sectorial and local SPs. Eastern European and SEMED SPs are, with the assistance of ETF, moving into the national VET/HCD policy making, but a stronger focus is called for on the roles and functions of trade unions here as well. Successful models of engaging regional and local SPs may be copied and mainstreamed. Central Asian SPs are, with



ETF's assistance, being recognized on the national level as partakers in the VET policy making process, however more emphasis may be put on researching the needs and potentials of social partner organizations before bringing them on board.

### **Impact**

The impact of the Torino process though mostly indirect, is resulting in a better prepared Social Partner block, that through the process can learn to work together to produce common results. However, social partners are not yet fully mobilized to optimize their contribution. In the Western Balkans and Turkey the impact of ETF interventions is a refinement of the engagement of SPs in VET policy/HCD making and implementation. Often structures and legal framework are in place on paper, but the implementation of the reform still lacks. ETF helps SPs to realize their specific roles in this final stage of reform processes. In the Eastern European countries capacity building works well, particularly through the establishment of discussion platforms, cross-regional projects and the creation of a common understanding of the approach to take in the reform. Certain focus areas for improvement have been included in the body of the report. Finally, a list of requests / recommendations made by the SPs in the case study countries may be examined more closely by the ETF management.

### **Sustainability**

Feedback suggests high level of sustainability of ETF interventions in most countries, with a few exceptions in politically still unstable environments. Sustainability is in particular achieved in the areas of:

- Organisation of working groups
- Coordination and practical assistance in developing NQF
- Quality assurance system development
- New approaches to VET governance
- SP platform and networking arrangements

Areas of improvement mentioned are:

Applicability of the tripartite VET governance model across all intervention regions seem to be problematic, particular in countries that have no tradition for tripartite activities, notably Arab countries. However, as examples in Morocco show, there can be significant improvements in tripartite working where ETF supports common platforms and projects and is attentive to the inclusion of social partners from unions as well as employers organisations. It is the process focus and long term engagement that is a particular strength of ETF and works to embed sustainable reforms.

### **Efficiency**

Our evidence suggests that ETF is highly efficient overall in converting tightly restrained resources into substantial outputs and results. Clearly it could to much more with even modest increases in budget and without such increase, it is hard to see how it can meet the clear demand from Social Partners for more support in capacity building and in establishing frameworks and systems for VET reform. Our main conclusion here is that ETF's highly effective actions in Partner Countries would be hard to maintain if forthcoming cuts to the EU Neighbourhood budget are applied to ETF. Undoubtedly this would also prejudice

enhancements to work with Social Partners towards sustained, demand driven VET reforms. Our experiences in the case study countries make it clear that ETF, as a trusted agent of the EU, serves to enhance the confidence of VET actors in EU policy actions. It inadvertently serves as an important arm of EU diplomacy.

### **Methodological tools**

A key finding of the evaluation is that comprehensive mainstreaming of social partners in VET activities would benefit from a more centrally conceptualised strategy and mechanism for their involvement. We propose two methods for this. Firstly, further development of the Policy Maturity definitions to incorporate social partners systematically and under a framework of criteria and indicators for tracking results (not outputs). These need to be nuanced to the diverse political, institutional and cultural conditions governing social partner engagement and capacities to engage in the different regions and individual partner countries. Secondly we advocate a finer assessment of requirements for active social partner participation in the Torino Process.

### **Recommendations**

Based on the conclusions presented above recommendations were formulated. These can be found in chapter 5 of this report.

# 1 INTRODUCTION

## 1.1 Background and Context of the Evaluation

The modernisation of vocational education and training is high on agendas all over the world and more especially with ETF's partner countries. The key issue in the policy debate is the shift from a supply-driven to a demand-driven provision of VET and human capital development. The world of work needs to be involved in the reform processes to ensure that VET/HCD meets the immediate and long-term needs of the labour market. Social partnership and social dialogue are tools to channel messages from the labour market to the reform agenda.

ETF has worked with social partners since its inception in 1995 involving them in a range of projects and activities. Since the launch of the Torino process in 2010 and its emphasis on elicitation of evidence on VET policy, provision and priorities in partner countries, ETF has been placing more emphasis on expanding social dialogue. The Mid Term Perspective 2010-2013 (MTP) expressly identifies social partner engagement as an important aspect of achieving ETF vision and objectives. The overarching aim is to ensure that appropriate and context relevant involvement of Social Partners is mainstreamed throughout ETF's work.

ETF's increasing concern to enhance social partnership is reflected in numerous studies and policy papers over this period, for example the 2011 ETF Yearbook "*Social Partners in Vocational Education and Training*" and the ETF Position Paper, "*Social Partners in VET*". As the ETF Position Paper on the topic<sup>1</sup> makes clear, global VET policy debates increasingly recognise the central importance of Social Partners in channelling labour market messages to the reform agenda and in so doing prompt shifts in VET provision from its traditional supply driven nature to one based on present and future market demand. This implies a role in VET policy formulation, development and governance. Key areas where Social Partners can play a role are:

- involvement in policy dialogue,
- negotiating funding for training,
- skills forecasting, qualifications frameworks and standards,
- validation/certification of learning and
- guidance services.

However their inclusion in relevant consultations, institutional or legal frameworks varies across regions and countries in relation to diverse political, social and economic histories and traditions. But often effective involvement of social partners is hampered by prevailing tendencies towards centralised decision making, fragmentation or weakly established social partner associations (notably ex-socialist countries), lack of awareness of the strategic importance of engagement or trust in the process and lack of capacity to engage.

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<sup>1</sup> ETF Position Paper – Social Partners in VET (2012) authored by Petri Lempinen, ETF

The time is now ripe for ETF to examine the effect of its actions to enhance the role of Social Partners in VET and to consider how best to organise and strengthen its efforts in this area as reflected in the findings from the External Evaluation of ETF conducted in 2012<sup>2</sup> which invites ETF to further examine its role vis a vis social partners and its objectives and intentions in respect of them.

## 1.2 Objectives of the Evaluation

The objective of this interim evaluation is to assess the overall impact of ETF activities in promoting social partnership in the partner countries during the period 2010 - 2013, including an assessment of the methodologies used and the impact, relevance and effectiveness in the partner countries.

### 1.2.1 Evaluation questions

The Terms of Reference for the evaluation set out the following questions which the evaluation should address as follows:

1. How does ETF engage social partners in different projects and activities and what is the role given to them?
2. What are the success factors for ETF work with the social partners?
3. Is there evidence of improved capacity development in policy analysis and implementation within the partner countries deriving from the involvement of social partners?
4. To what extent are the human and financial resources of ETF adequate for Social Partner development activities in the partner countries?
5. What methodology and tools could further enhance involvement of social partners in VET policy making?
6. Useful conclusions and recommendations for the future shaping of Social Partner development activities.

These questions have been applied to the DAC criteria of coherence/complementarity, added value, relevance, effectiveness, efficiency, impact, sustainability and efficiency. Evaluation questions were also broken down into more detailed sub-questions. These are presented in chapter 3, table 1.

### 1.2.2 Activities

For specific details of activities undertaken, please refer to Chapter 3 and the Inception Report. All activities detailed in the Inception Report were carried out as specified.

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<sup>2</sup> External Evaluation of the European Training Foundation, A European Union Agency. Report by PPMI, commissioned by Directorate General Education and Culture. February 2012.

## 2 ETF's work with Social Partners

### 2.1 Definition of Social Partners and overview

ETF has identified social partners as the main representatives of the labour markets in the partner countries. The term social partners is applied under the ILO definition as employers and their organisations and to trade unions representing workers engaged in social dialogue and who are characterised by freedom of association, independence and representativeness.

Social partners are stakeholders in many ETF activities across regions and partner countries, for example in supporting the establishment of national qualification frameworks, which imply strong commitment from employers. Other activities that involve social partners include the establishment of Sector Councils; work on Entrepreneurial learning, mobility partnerships, skill needs assessments, VET school boards and other initiatives such as the Torino Process, which highlighted the importance of social partners in policy dialogue. Over recent years ETF has produced a number of mapping studies of social partner involvement in human capital development and VET policies. One of the studies (2008<sup>3</sup>) covered the South East Europe and Turkey. Others have covered the southern and eastern Mediterranean region including social partner mapping of partner countries participating in the 'Social Partners in VET in the Southern Mediterranean' (SEMED) project.

Under the period of study there have been two main projects which include a specific focus on social partners: 1. Social Partners in VET in the Southern Mediterranean; 2. Continuing Vocational Training in Eastern Europe. Beyond these two major projects there have been other projects which were not exclusively targeted at social partners but included key roles for social partners. These are notably the GEMM project, which is the successor to the aforementioned SEMED project and the project 'Regional Dimension of Qualifications in the Mediterranean Region'.

The following sections described the four programmes mentioned above.

### 2.2 Social Partners in VET in the Southern Mediterranean (SEMED) Project 2010-2012

The SEMED project in the Mediterranean region started in 2010, following the first round of the Torino Process. It aimed to enable and support capacity building of social partners to engage in VET policy dialogue within a lifelong learning perspective. Initially designed by ETF as a 3 year project, it finished in late 2012. The project was structured into two components: (i) mutual learning at regional level and (ii) developing and reinforcing social partnership at national level. The two components aimed at more and better policy involvement of social partners, exceeding the lifetime of the project. Results from national activities were presented and debated in regional meetings and vice versa. The Project was supported by an advisory executive committee comprised of international experts involved

<sup>3</sup> Kristensen, Niels Haderup (2008) Social partner participation in Education/Training and labour market development – A cross-country IPA report. Unpublished working paper.

in social partnership issues, and regional representatives of social partner organisations. Countries involved were Algeria, Jordan, Egypt, Lebanon Morocco, Palestine, (Syria) and Tunisia (Israel was invited to the annual regional conference). The social partners engaged in study visits (to Finland for the Maghreb countries and Morocco for the Mashrek) and the main country level activities were awareness raising, national mappings of social partners, and development of frameworks of co-operation. A key focus was on social partner capacity development to engage in VET policy dialogue and as part of this the capacity building was supported by toolkits and methodological support.

### 2.3 Continuing Vocational Training in Eastern Europe

Another regional project 'Continuing Vocational Training in Eastern Europe' with seven participating countries was launched in 2011. The CVT project resulted from the findings of the 2010 Torino Process in Eastern Europe. Key issues identified were the need for improved VET quality and closer involvement of Social Partners in developing effective mechanisms for implementing VET strategies. As CVT is the training closest to work places and labour market, the social partners and employers usually have a strong interest in it. A common challenge and priority identified by the countries is the development of action-orientated work to improve CVT. The countries participating are Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, Moldova, Russia and Ukraine. At the regional conference in Turin in 2011, stakeholders agreed to mobilise mutual learning actions but keenly aware of the need to realise concrete outcomes in terms of institutionalising structures for CVT, different roles were given to stakeholders in each of the countries and since 2012 the partners in Georgia and Armenia have been focusing on validation of non formal and formal learning, in Azerbaijan, Belarus and Ukraine, Russia and Moldova they are working on the establishment or consolidation of sector skills councils. In Moldova attention is being directed to training needs assessment in order to improve quality and relevance as well as sustainable policies. The project activities include employers and trade unions as main actors.

### 2.4 Governance for Employability in the Mediterranean Project (GEMM) 2013-2015

This project follows the SEMED project and arose through a direct request of the EU. The original idea was to develop it as a continuation of the SEMED project. However as decision making on VET systems in this region tends to be government centric with little involvement of social partners, the project seeks to improve multi level governance of VET systems and in turn increase employability of the workforce, particularly women and youth who suffer high unemployment regionally. The project is situated in the on-going reform agenda at national and sub national levels and hence intends to enhance ownership by stakeholders. Ownership is also reflected in the way the project is steered: each country has a national committee inclusive of social partners who decide on the target actions for the country. The project is working at a number of levels: regional platforms are engaging the stakeholders in learning from regional and international developments. At country level, an innovative aspect of the project is the pilot actions on the development of skills at sub national or local level. These pilots have clear objectives with a meaningful purpose for

social partners in order to achieve concrete outcomes. The results will be fed into national policy dialogue on multi level governance.

## 2.5 Regional Dimension of Qualifications Project

Although not defined as specifically targeting social partners, their active engagement is an essential element of the project design and operation. This project is focusing upon the development of qualifications frameworks in two sectors: tourism and construction and since 2011 has been operating in Tunisia, Morocco, Jordan, Egypt plus collaboration with Italy, France and Spain. It is a multi annual project and functions as a capacity building and networking initiative. In addition to the key focus upon NQF in these two sectors, it has a cross cutting focus upon governance and quality assurance. It centrally involves Social Partners who, in addition to participating in the technical teams, are part of the tripartite mode of governance.

## 3 Evaluation Methods

### 3.1 Desk research and reconstruction of the intervention logic

The desk study and document review process involved first a review of key ETF policy documentation to establish the overall rationales and objectives of ETF work and how this translates into roles and functions of work with Social Partners. The documentation is extensive and the depth and comprehensiveness of analysis varied according to the degree it enabled the team to address the evaluation questions. Some materials were subject to a simple scanning for key concepts, indicators, policy objectives etc while others were used more substantively to inform the substantive grasp of the evaluation. One purpose of the desk review was to establish the intervention logic of Social Partner involvement and associated schema of the appropriate criteria and success factors for their involvement.

Key documents here include the Mid Term Perspective and the evaluative studies and position papers relevant to Social Partners, including documentation on the Torino Process, Thematic Expertise Development (notably Governance, Qualifications and Enterprise and Learning – Business Education Partnerships). Close study of specific papers on Social Partnership (notably the 2012 Position Paper, but also ETF Yearbook 2011 and other papers by ETF experts) provided more specific detail on the objectives and parameters of Social Partner intervention. Project documentation on the two projects that include a specific focus on Social Partners (Social Partners in South Eastern Mediterranean Region and Continuing Vocation Training in Eastern Europe) supported analysis of the specific regional and country challenges in these two regions in relation to priority actions and intended outcomes of Social Partner engagement.

Based on the desk research it was possible to reconstruct the intervention logic of the ETF's work with social partners. The intervention logic is included in Section 4.1 as part of the evaluation discussion of effectiveness.

### 3.2 Development of an evaluation grid for the data collection

The evaluation team developed an evaluation grid in advance in order to specify the informants to be met and data sources to be exploited on site as well as to define which information was to be generated by each case study. The evaluation grid was based upon the evaluation questions. The topics to be covered by the case studies were those stated in the Evaluation Criterion and Evaluation Questions described above. During the visits, the Evaluation Team met representatives from the following Key Institutions: (i) The Ministry of Education (or equivalent), notably the Head of VET (if placed under MoE), (ii) Chambers of Commerce/Industry and Trade; (iii) Employers' Associations; (iv) Trade Unions; (v) Donors (e.g. EU, WB, OECD, UNDP, USAID, GIZ, SIDA, SwissAid, CIDA, AfDB, etc.); (vi) School Director if somehow involved in the Torino Process and its outcomes; (vii) Key Employer taking part in NQF and Curriculum Development.



### 3.3 Telephone interviews

A number of telephone interviews were launched fairly soon after approval of the inception report. Target groups of the interviews were: (i) Team leaders of the SEMED project and the CVT project Eastern Europe not yet interviewed during inception phase meetings; (ii) Experts from relevant TED and the Torino Process teams; (iii) ETF country managers not yet interviewed during inception; (iv) Evaluators of the Torino process

### 3.4 Planning and carrying out Field visits/Research

Research, meetings/interviews were held with stakeholders in 4 partner countries.

Field research was conducted on projects mentioned in the TOR:

- Regional project in the SEMED region to support the capacity of social partners to play a role in VET (countries: Algeria, Egypt, Jordan, Lebanon, Morocco, Palestine, Syria). This project ran from 2010 to 2012 and is followed by the GEMM project (Governance and Employability in the Mediterranean Region) launched in January 2013. Also the project 'Regional Dimension of Qualifications' is active in Tunisia, Morocco, Jordan, Egypt and was initiated in 2010.
- Regional project 'Continuing Training in Eastern Europe' (countries: Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, Republic of Moldova, Russian Federation and Ukraine)
- Other projects of interest for the field research. Key project activities involving Social Partners include National Qualifications Frameworks, Quality, Validation of non-formal and informal learning, Torino Process, Enterprise and Learning, skills portability among others depending on country context.
- Within each project to be analysed data collection in two participating countries took place. This allowed each expert up to five days per country, including travelling. Thus, it was possible to visit different social partners in each country and gather information from different perspectives. The two experts visited four countries in total, one in the "SEMED" region, one in Central Asia and two in Eastern Europe. The countries were selected according to the greatest expected added value for the evaluation, taking into account special needs arising from the desk research or by the ETF.
- Within the countries all relevant available stakeholders were visited. In addition to social partners at national or local level, it made sense, when appropriate, to conduct interviews with the main international social partner organisations, namely International Organisation of Employers (IOE) and International Trade Union Confederation (ITUC), which have offices in the partner countries.

### 3.5 Online survey

An online survey was implemented, that targeted all social partners in the ETF member countries, who have been involved in ETF activities during 2010 to 2013. The On-line platform was provided by the ICON-INSTITUTE, the research questions were drafted by the two evaluators and uploaded onto the platform.

The aim of the online survey was twofold: a) Drawing on the key findings that emerge as a result of the desk research, interviews and country case studies, the evaluation would seek to establish their generalizability across ETF work with Social Partners and b) It enabled the team to more fully answer evaluation questions by informing them with the perspectives of the key target group of ETF interventions in the area of Social Partnership.

The questionnaire was sent online to the population of social partners (440) contained on the ETF central contacts database (excluding those social partners interviewed in the case countries). In order to be able to compare the results of different types of analysis, a standard questionnaire was used in all analyses. It is important to note here that the delivery failure rate of the email containing the link to the social partner survey was very high. It is clear that contacts details are not kept up to date on the central register and ETF staff in the field are urged to do furnish updated contact lists to the central database. This addressee problem affected the response rate. At the time of drafting this report, approximately 50 responses had been obtained. The survey results have provided useful data on social partner views on ETF's work with them. However as the respondent sample is small and from heterogeneous contexts, the results are used as useful indications supporting the other forms of findings and analysis undertaken by the evaluation. The survey was prepared in Arabic, Russian and English versions.

### 3.6 Data analysis, synthesis, and reporting

Data was analysed according to the evaluation questions and the methodology presented in table 1. In addition, the case studies revealed other information that had not been foreseen in advance. This information concerned, for instance, additional tools and methods that could further enhance involvement of social partners in VET policy making. Such and other unexpected information was considered as well.

Both key experts made a first data analysis during the field visits. This ensured that no key insights were lost due to a large time between data collection and analysis. After the field phase, the key experts investigated the whole body of evidence gathered during the field phase to make an overall assessment in light of the evaluation questions.

The evaluation questions as agreed by the reference group are set out in table below. They are organised by the DAC criteria of relevance, coherence, efficiency, impact, sustainability and ETF added value together with the principal sources of data used to address them.

**Table 1: Evaluation criteria, evaluation questions, and data sources**

Evaluation criterion	Evaluation questions	Principal sources	Data
<p><b>Coherence</b></p> <p><b>Complementarity</b></p>	<p>i) 1. How does ETF engage social partners in different projects and activities and what is the role given to them?</p> <p>2.3 How well mainstreamed are Social Partner activities in ETF interventions appropriate to their inclusion?</p> <p>ii) 1.1 Do the activities and results logically allow the MTP objectives to be achieved?</p> <p>1.2 Are there any contradictions between the different levels of objectives?</p> <p>Country policy and donor intervention level:</p> <p>1.3 Can it be said that there is no overlap between ETF interventions for SPs and other interventions in the partner country?</p> <p>Other European Community level:</p> <p>1.4 is there convergence between the objectives of the ETF intervention and other Community policies (trade, agriculture, etc.)</p>	<p>Desk research (including analytical schema)</p> <p>Desk research, case studies, survey</p> <p>Desk research, external and internal interviews</p>	
<b>ETF added value</b>	<p>6. To what extent does the ETF intervention with SPs add benefits to what would have resulted from Member States' bilateral donor interventions only in the partner country?</p> <p>With sub-questions:</p> <p>6.1 Which EU donors are active in the country with SPs?</p> <p>6.2 What type of interventions with SPs is undertaken by EU donors?</p> <p>6.3 How well does ETF complement the interventions of other EU donors?</p> <p>6.4 How well does ETF coordinate its interventions with SPs with international donors?</p>	<p>Desk research, interviews, case studies, survey</p>	
<b>Relevance</b>	<p>7.1. How well adapted and adaptable are ETF initiatives (involving Social Partners) to the diverse conditions of education and vocational training in the countries concerned?</p> <p>7.2. To what extent are the objectives of the SP intervention consistent with beneficiaries' requirements, the needs of the country, global priorities, partners' and EC policies?</p>	<p>Desk research and interviews</p> <p>Desk Research</p>	
<b>Effectiveness</b>	<p>2.1 To what extent were ETF development interventions' objectives achieved/expected to be achieved</p> <p>2.2. What are the success factors for ETF work with the social partners?</p>	<p>Interviews, case studies and survey</p>	
<b>Impact</b>	<p>3. Is there evidence of improved capacity development in policy analysis and implementation within the partner countries deriving from the involvement of social partners?</p> <p>Sub-questions:</p> <p>3.1. What are the positive primary effects produced by ETF intervention?</p> <p>3.2. Are there any negative primary effects produced by the ETF intervention?</p> <p>3.3. What are the positive secondary effects produced by ETF intervention?</p> <p>3.4. Are there any negative secondary effects produced by the ETF intervention?</p> <p>3.5. Are there any unintended consequences of ETF social partnership development?</p>	<p>Survey, interviews, desk research</p>	

Evaluation criterion	Evaluation questions	Principal sources	Data
<b>Sustainability</b>	8.1. How likely is the improved capacity development in policy analysis and implementation deriving from the involvement of social partners going to sustain in subsequent years?  8.2. How likely is it that the ETF Social Partner interventions will have long-term benefits to countries on: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Decentralised decision-making processes</li> <li>• SP's involvement in VET and HCD</li> <li>• SPs capacity and resources to deal with policy issues</li> <li>• Identification of independent SPs</li> </ul>	Survey  Interviews, survey	
<b>Efficiency</b>	4.1. To what extent are the human and financial resources of ETF adequate for Social Partner development activities in the partner countries? 4.2. To which extent have the outputs/effects been achieved with the lowest possible use of resources?	Desk research (e.g implementation plans, budgets) case studies and interviews	
<b>Conclusions and recommendations</b>	5. What methodology and tools could further enhance involvement of social partners in VET policy making? Conclusions and recommendations for the future shaping of Social Partner development activities.		

## 4 Findings and conclusions

The findings in this chapter are organised according to the evaluation criteria. The findings to each evaluation criterion are structured by the corresponding evaluation questions, which are presented in table 1 of this report.

### 4.1 Coherence

Question 1	How does ETF engage Social Partners and what role is given to them? How well mainstreamed are social partners activities in ETF interventions appropriate to their inclusion?
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#### How does ETF engage Social Partners?

Social partners report very high levels of satisfaction with the work of ETF and there is evidence of significant impact on social partner capacities in VET and in their involvement in VET policy and implementation. However, actual involvement of social partners is partial and uneven. The realities of central decision making and necessary sensitivity to political context mean that ETF tends to work through the government agenda which means that certain social partner organisations may be unwelcome and also that bilateral work with social partners is rare except for targeted initiatives or as part of a broader tripartite activity: i) as a defined ETF strategy for Social partner capacity building, for example the SEMED project. ii) training or other capacity building efforts as part of a broader objective (e.g establishing Sector Councils, assessing skills needs). Outside of these instances, work with social partners tends to be fragmented and not systematic.

In general participation of trade unions organisations is lower reflecting a number of different factors, such as their traditional preoccupation with worker conditions and the historical conditions and cultures of Unions in many partner countries, particularly CIS and Eastern Europe, the lack of a skills policy agenda in many unions, the lack of intensity and effectiveness of systematic awareness raising actions towards unions, the role of informal economy and labour market regulations in development countries.

Where the event or activity does not focus on specific concrete actions with clear rationale for social partner engagement and where there is no follow up on the social partner activities or clear intended outcomes, their role tends to rest as participants in events. Our interview data suggest that events including social partners should be planned with clearer objectives and intended outcomes for those social partners.

Although there are no clear instructions or written agreements made, in practice invitations arise as follows:

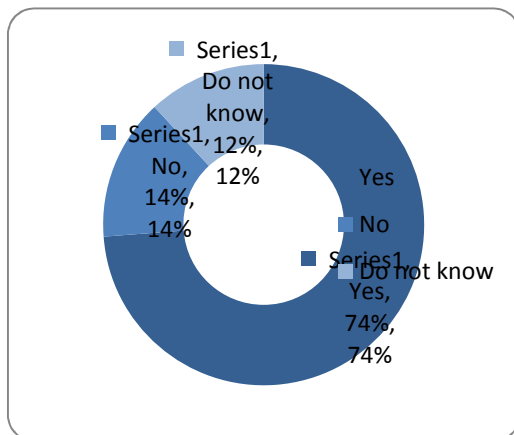
When ETF makes the selection on which SP to involve, national and international sources of information are used to identify organizations that have engagement and interest in VET reform/HRD reform/labour market reform processes and can actively contribute to the policy design and implementation of the reform processes. Often a holistic definition of SPs is applied – and not only the ILO definition.

When ETF invites through a line ministry, the ministry decides on whom to invite and whom not to invite and they tend to follow political interests. In the case of one of the Serbian employers' associations, they are only informally invited but as ETF works through the Ministry, no formal invitations arise and for this reason they were not able to participate in the Torino Process. An employers' organisation in Ukraine made a similar point: there is a strong interest in co-operating with ETF but the Ministry does not include them in ETF actions. ETF should do much more to support social partners to be initiators of VET agendas and in turn encourage them to be proactive in inviting state actors to join the table. It is not clear if ETF has developed a policy line that it can put on the table with government, as a negotiating lever for engaging Social Partners in low trust or high conflict contexts.

When ETF invites on its own it is clear from the interviews with ETF country managers and from field interviews that ETF consistently and near universally invites Social Partners to participate in all relevant events and activities.

Social Partners interviewed or surveyed report very high levels of satisfaction with ETF and its expertise. Interestingly 74% of survey respondents consider that ETF makes sufficient effort to engage all the main Social Partner organisations in their country. Only 14% say it does not.

**Chart 1. Survey response to the question: Do you consider that ETF makes sufficient effort to engage all the main Social Partner organisations in your country? (n = 42)**



These results are very positive. From most of the social partner interviews and from indications in the survey, the demand for ETF support among its present Social Partner stakeholder group is very high. However it is important to note that the survey targeted those Social Partners with whom ETF has been in contact with. It does not include others outside of ETF networks. The evaluation team encountered social partners interested in working on VET but who are not involved by ETF. In the Kyrgyz Republic for example, representatives from two unions which have not had direct

involvement with ETF were interviewed (albeit in one case briefly) and both expressed an interest in being supported by ETF to enable them to learn more about and engage with VET issues. Both were unions which are evolving from their old soviet traditions and are seeking to engage more proactively on worker training issues. New unions are also emerging here and evidence from other interviewees indicates strong new potentials for ETF to support their development of VET capacities. In Serbia and Ukraine unions and chambers of commerce equally expressed an interest in becoming part of the ETF target groups, however, they were excluded from dialogue by the national hosting organisations. In Morocco ETF works with the two main unions but there are a number of other prominent unions who are formally recognized as representative but with whom ETF has not yet formed working relations. A brief interview with a representative of a sectoral employers association with an interest in VET but which has so far had no direct contact with ETF, also indicated unmet demand for ETF support among employers organisations here. Survey open responses corroborate these findings - there

were numerous requests that ETF increase the number of social partners it works with. It is evident, therefore, that there remains a large unmet interest in support from ETF, but this will be difficult to meet under current budget constraints. It is difficult to see how this can be improved except by more direct or proxy support on the ground. Key areas as noted are: more support between meetings, more meetings, more bipartite work, network development and social partner Boards and extending the net of social partners. To be sure, there are also many social partner organisations in which VET issues are not yet within their strategic horizons. However, the case study data indicates that readiness to engage in VET appears to be on the rise and it is important for ETF to make greater efforts now to seek out new social partner interlocutors and engage in systematic awareness raising actions. This is the case. e.g. for Teachers' Unions, who are often participating in ETF events, however their role and scope of involvement could be increased.

### **What role is given to Social Partners?**

Where bilateral support to Social Partners occurs, there are instances of high positive impact on social partner capacity and engagement, for example in Kazakhstan (e.g. through social partner workshop on co-operation in VET) or enhanced VET experience sufficient to lever donor funds for new VET projects (sectoral employers association Morocco). In Morocco the main Trade Union wants to build its VET capacities and would like bipartite help from ETF. There are many countries where Social Partner organisations are weak and need targeted support for their institutional development for engaging in VET. Such capacity will be a precondition for successfully influencing government agendas under tripartite dialogue.

However, ETF staff data, documentary evidence, field interviews and preliminary survey findings, also show that there are relevant actions in all countries inclusive of Social Partners where their participation is central to achieving strategic goals and outcomes ranging from Skills Councils, formulation of qualifications frameworks or occupational standards, VET school development/school boards etc. This work has had profound benefits for VET policy and implementation, Social Partner capacities as well as impacts on broader inclusiveness of Social Partners in state led VET dialogue.

Further, ETF's consistent effort to involve Social Partners in tripartite actions with government actors over the long term, shows numerous instances of increased trust and subsequent sustained inclusion or establishment of structures of Social Partners, including Unions, in tripartite policy dialogue.

### **Specific Projects focusing upon Social Partners**

In addition to involvements in country programmes, there have been a number of specific projects targeting Social Partners over the period covered by the evaluation:

#### ***a. Continuing Vocational Training (CVT) in Eastern Europe***

The CVT project has successfully accomplished to bring to the light the debate on the need to create social partnership structures or even make some of them stronger in all Eastern European countries (e.g. Moldova, Georgia, and Ukraine). A key achievement of ETF has been, e.g. the creation of an understanding of the need for social partnership involvement in sectoral councils in Moldova, as a model for the entire region.

In line with the strong evidence based approach of ETF, the initial phases of the project involved national teams of Social Partners, state VET authorities (and in some cases VET providers) in assessing CVT in each of their countries coupled with peer learning through country visits, to provide the conditions for mutual learning and developing responsive actions appropriate to each country's context and needs. As described earlier, the main focus in Georgia and Armenia is validation of non formal and formal learning, in Azerbaijan, Belarus and Ukraine, Russia and Moldova it is sector skills councils and in Moldova there is also training needs assessment.

Interviewees have identified the ETF-supported work in Moldova on building Sector Councils as particularly strong. Social Partnership is well established and both unions and employers organisations are active and committed. Progress has been sound. The main obstacles indicated by respondents are the need for more trust by government on the value of SCs and delegation of more tasks to Social Partners in the SCs, such as needs analysis work. Needs assessment is now being prioritised. Funding for SCs is also a problem, as it is in numerous other countries in the region.

In the other countries engagement of the Social Partners has been problematic: In Georgia it has proved difficult to get Social Partners on board and for reasons common across the region: unions are weak and focus on workers' rights, (although the main Trade Union is strong), government administration personnel change often, so reducing reform confidence and stability (although recent new state VET personnel are opening up more potential for SP's and ETF staff indicate pro-activity in building on this). Employers tend also to lobby for private sector providers and are hence not fulfilling their representative functions, and decision making is still much centralised, top down, despite a VET Council inclusive of Social Partners having been set up in 2009. Interview data indicates that ETF has an influential role as an animator and activator of inclusive structural arrangements for VET.

*"ETF will enhance the capacity of the National VET Council as first project milestone and improve interventions of social partners in Vet policy making and analysis."*

In Belarus political conditions are authoritarian with reports of civil rights abuses. High state control and soviet legacies mean that the main unions and employers are part of the state apparatus and there is no tradition of involving them in tripartite dialogue. ETF negotiation with state actors has managed to secure a broader involvement of social partners in the country project. The project is also linking in with other efforts in the country, notably work on graduate skills and Eqavet - in collaboration with Belarus Republican Institute of Vocational Education - in which indicators are being tested and assessments being conducted in VET institutions. Social Partners are involved at both the National level and in the VET school assessments. The work is supported by donors, notably the EU. The linkages across projects is pragmatic: with small resources the work in Belarus has to be optimally efficient and lever available funds. Despite problems of Social Partner status in Belarus, If more ETF resources were available for Sector Skills Council work, ETF staff interviewed believe that there is good potential to increase the number of SCs in the countries. Key actions in this respect should target organisational capacity, technical expertise and soft competencies (media, communication and lobby functions).

In Armenia the project is working effectively with only one employer association. Although Unions and Employers are involved in National VET policy and sit on the VET Council the perception of corruption and consequent lack of trust between the private and public sphere limits co-operation in the CVT project as in other initiatives of ETF here. ETF does try to bring



Social Partners and Government actors together and there have been successes notably on validation of formal and non formal learning. Social partners were also involved in definition of standards for NQF. As in many other countries in the region, VET financing is a challenging and conflictual area. In such cases of lack of trust at national level, Social Partner engagement may be more effective at sub national level with for example VET providers. However, ETF's consistent efforts to bring the parties together in tripartite fora are seen as needed for long term successful tripartite relations in VET. As observed in the 2012 external evaluation report, ETF's long term engagement with country actors and actions yields results over time. This point was echoed in Armenian respondent data.

In Ukraine too, there were difficulties in engaging social partners though this has much improved but as the government keeps social partners at 'arms length' tripartite work is problematic. Despite this ETF has successfully built upon previous ILO work on Sector Councils and work has progressed strongly. Also, ETF, in cooperation with the European Commission and other donors, has played a critical expert role in assisting the Ukrainian government and social partners in defining the key challenges of supply and demand for skills and elaborating scenarios for modernizing Ukraine's education and training system

As in Moldova, the CVT project in Azerbaijan, builds on previous work, in this case World Bank support to SCs, and ETF actions have sought to strengthen SC structures and make them more sustainable. A key difficulty however is engaging employers although trade unions are active and further targeted workshops with Social Partners could strengthen interest and capacities.

Evaluation of the Effectiveness of the CVT project in meeting its objectives is at an early stage: the project is embedded in country contexts and often associated with other projects by ETF or donors. However, it is evident from ETF staff interview data that the CVT project has been highly influential in increasing the focus of ETF on work with social partners, in particular, the need to create or strengthen social partner structures for VET engagement and in this respect, the sector skills council development has at times been groundbreaking. It is also clear that work with social partners at the sectoral level is particularly productive, as evidenced by the impressive achievement of widespread establishment of Sector Skills Councils in the project countries. The achievements are all the more noteworthy as ETF has generally been the lone initiator of developments or alone in following through earlier work funded by other donors.

The focus on concrete outcomes notably the institutionalisation of VET structures for CVT, also brings more sharply into focus the practicalities of engaging Social partners in a more results focused way than before and suggests further consideration by ETF of how to clarify strategic objectives for Social partnership and identify in house training and knowledge management resources that can support ETF teams on the ground in these respects.

Self assessment by ETF is largely positive particularly as regards the utility of the mutual learning approach. ETF staff have signaled the value of peer learning over for example, study visits, in building capacity: peer learning is seen to offer greater social partner ownership and more effective engagement in VET policy.

The project has managed to engage all 7 countries in actions and the project is making progress towards targets under its logical framework and MTP. There are signs of structural arrangements for CVT related activity including the tabled SC legal base in Moldova, a new CVT law in Ukraine and progress on a legal instrument for Lifelong Learning in Armenia. The interviewee data provides evidence that CVT project has strong enabling effects upon dialogues

and structures for sustained and tripartite CVT development. A key project strength is its rootedness in agreed agendas for development. Getting more Social Partners on board remains an issue and suggests more directed activity with them in the future to engage their commitment and build capacities.

**b. Social Partnership in the Mediterranean Region SEMED (2010/12)**

Among the ETF staff closely involved with the project, there were critical voices that saw the project as ultimately unsuccessful, essentially because it did not respond to needs identified by social partners themselves. It focused mainly on capacity building for employer and employee organisations. But governments are key players in decision making and sustainable impacts on the VET agenda are unlikely without their close co-operation. Others argued that SEMED project basically failed, because it was not requested by the institutions in the country. An important strength of ETF as an organisation is that these weaknesses were generally acknowledged and reflected upon and it is evident that ETF as a good learning organisation building on lessons learnt to improve subsequent delivery, for example, in the more targeted, needs based and governance focused actions under the GEMM project as a follow on from (the less tangibly successful) SEMED.

Specific weaknesses identified in the SEMED project include a lack of appropriate targeting of the work in Tunisia:

*“Through the project on SPs in SEMED, the focus was on training and capacity building for employers and the unions. But it was dislocated from the reforms in the country and they were not able to use the capacities they got. We also took some sectoral people. Nothing was happening in the country itself around the project – it was all about regional workshops. Work needs to be mainstreamed and not a project. They (Social Partners) need to be capacity built in the context of their jobs. For technical capacity development in terms of policy dialogue a regional project is expensive and I am not sure about it.” (ETF staff)*

However, in the **Moroccan** case, the social partners were generally very positive about the peer and policy learning as well as networking arising from the regional orientation of the project. One of the Moroccan employers’ association representatives noted that there are benefits to such projects partly through the participatory nature of them and the fact that people from different organisations and countries are working together on common tasks which can accelerate the work and its effectiveness. It also helps build better understanding of other’s contexts (in-country and regionally) and the development of a common language. Stakeholders were positive and made comments such as the following:

*“Only ETF can put in place such projects and can serve the initial expectations and beyond.” (Employers association representative)*

*“In the Torino Process and the social dialogue project in the SEMED project - these were interesting projects because they permitted and allowed exchange of information with the Middle east and so on. Social dialogue in Morocco is very advanced but needs to be strengthened”. (Trade Union representative)*

However social partners interviewed also drew attention to the need for multi party co-operation of unions, employers organisations and state actors, but at the same time have opportunities for bilateral co-operation of social partners with ETF.

Regional exchange is highly valued – a finding observed across the spectrum of ETF partner countries. ETF's peer learning approach is judged as highly effective in SEMED (and indeed, across the spectrum of ETF activity with social partners generally). Several positive statements were given e.g. regarding peer visits to regional partner countries to study specific issues of interest. The social partner capacity-building in SEMED was also found very useful by stakeholders. **The key weakness was the lack of tripartite engagement with state actors.** This point is further confirmed in a report on an ETF staff mission to Egypt, which noted that the representative of the employers' federation stressed that, as social dialogue is tripartite; government should be involved in the project because the low capacity of government to understand the importance of social partners, especially employers, hinders social dialogue. They were critical as to the impact that this ETF project could have in establishing social partnership in Egypt. Overall the views on the SEMED project are mixed and although some of the social partners clearly gained much from it – particularly those in Morocco. The indications are that the project was insufficiently targeted or a response to in-country needs, was insufficiently focused on concrete outcomes and failed to address the central political realities of VET reform: without the government on board effective action on VET is likely to be at best marginal. However, the social partner capacity building through exchange, peer learning etc, clearly had benefits for social partners interviewed. The capacity building served to increase their ability to engage in subsequent VET reform initiatives.

**c. Governance for Employability in the Mediterranean region (GEMM)**

Interviewees in both ETF and in Morocco all had positive things to say on the GEMM project. Although still in the relatively early stages of implementation, the ETF general view is that this project is much better targeted, focused and purposeful than the SEMED project. Its design reflects lessons learned: projects work best where they have concrete actions and clear intended outcomes, tripartite stakeholder involvement, high stakeholder ownership and synergies with country VET agendas. Importantly this project also addresses a common previous weakness in ETF – insufficient attention to the local/sub national level and to the different needs of urban and rural areas. The steering committee structure reinforces country ownership and is a more efficient way of directing projects than the expensive and more remote Advisory Committee concept of the SEMED Project. Social Partners are central to all aspects of the project: steering; governance mapping (validation); capacity building through study visits and targeted training of social partners and government actors following needs assessment; and finally, pilot projects in which social partners and VET providers target specific concrete innovative actions at country sub national level. In the case of Tunisia, stakeholders have taken an initiative on Human Resources Development developed in one region and are now trying it in another. The project appeals to the political agenda of the country towards delegation to regional bodies and there are high synergies in the GEMM project. The pilot was just getting going in the Tangier region of Morocco during the field visit and it was not possible to study it directly. However, the employers organisations interviewed were strongly positive about the developments.

**d. Regional Dimension of Qualifications in the Mediterranean**

Although not defined as specifically targeting social partners, their active engagement is an essential element of the project design and operation. ETF's self-assessment of the project is

positive, also corroborated by Moroccan SP stakeholders. The project is seen as relevant to supporting labour mobility for all participating countries in the two sectors of the project (construction and tourism) as well as contributing to the NQF at national level in Morocco, improving qualifications in Tourism in Tunisia and strengthening construction qualifications in Jordan. There is an on line qualifications platform which is used to different degrees by the stakeholders and most extensively in Jordan where it is used to support both national and regional exchange. The committed budget for the project was 2012 was €109,975 which reflects the high mission budget – this project is highly dependent on ETF expertise. This project is a good example of the recognition of the importance of staying with initiatives for the longer term to embed impacts, sustainability and structures for involvement of SPs. The project was initiated in 2010 formally defined in a regional conference in 2011 and though intended for a shorter term, has now been projected to 2017. This is in large part due to the advocacy of stakeholders. There have been some outstanding impacts from this project: the Moroccan main Trade Union representative talked about how the project initially involved only state ministry actors and employers but he approached ETF and the Union is now involved. The tripartite work has helped ‘soften’ the relationship between the Union and the Ministry concerned and the Union is now invited more systematically by the Ministry to join the discussion table.

The quality of expertise has been another strong feature of this project: An employers’ Association states that ETF has experts of a very high level, *“among them people involved with us who have already built the French system of certification. Also the experts they involved included a former Inspector of education. They know how to listen to us and it is up to us to do the work and show we have understood and become an entity that makes proposals and action within the institutional framework that will be put in place”*.

The Moroccan stakeholders value the influence and impact this project has had on the national qualification framework through its close focused and detailed framework development for two key sectors. The project has also served to support good co-operation with European Mediterranean countries and is paving the way for better workforce skills and skill portability.

Like the main foci of the CVT project, the Regional Dimension project is working at sectoral level and interview data points to this as a key aspect in the success of such ETF initiatives. This suggests that ETF should continue to focus and indeed strengthen its efforts with social partners at sectoral levels and continue to develop more sectoral approaches and projects.

### **How Representative are the Social Partners who are involved with ETF activities?**

Numerous ETF staff commented on the tendency of SPs to come to events with their sector interests in mind rather than as representatives of the broader group of Social Partners to which they belong. In conditions of partiality, self interest and conflict, handling work groups to broker for the common good takes skill. ETF is developing considerable expertise through knowledge management on effective management of group interests. It is not clear if this expertise is widely appreciated or if management has considered how best to apply it. A further issue for ETF in this respect is how to support capacity building of Social Partner organisations themselves where institutional frameworks and capacities to spread and internalize the work with ETF are frequently lacking and work reliant on (often changing) sole individuals. It also relates to identification of needs regarding work with Social Partners where a more structured approach to ensuring that requests to ETF relate to issues that have broad representation and not, for

example definition of say Occupational Standards of interest to one group of sector employers but not others. In some countries there are efforts to seek out Social Partner needs and develop ETF work in response but our evidence suggests that this should be more systematic.

In some countries government resistance to include the formal Social Partner organisations presents particular problems of representativeness as in the case of Tunisia where the main employers (UTICA) and Trades Unions are not partnering with Ministry. In numerous other countries – particularly in ENP countries, social partner organisations are very different in status from those in the EU, being non voluntary, or directly influenced by government or part of the state apparatus as they are in some central Asian countries. The landscape of Social Partners is changing in most of the Partner Countries. In Kyrgyz Republic, new unions are springing up alongside the traditional unions of old soviet times. They have also been fast emerging in Egypt in the wake of revolution, but remain in a kind of legal limbo, not yet having full recognition as representative organisations and hence conformity with ILO criteria. In Georgia the main Social Partner employers' interlocutor is in conflict with the government which is seeking to engage others who are technically not of formal Social Partner status, while in some other countries in the region, employers organisations are effectively government controlled, or even, in the case of Belarus subjected to pejorative treatment. Even in countries where social partners are institutionally or constitutionally engaged in tripartite labour market policy dialogue, a lack of state capacities or corruption make for very hard territory for ETF to work in. The challenges facing ETF staff on the ground are considerable and it is clear they admirably try to work round the obstacles to achieve effective social dialogue on VET. Numerous ETF country staff indicated a degree of pragmatism *'we work with what we have got'*. For others, *"If they have a strong mandate as representing their organisation, then that is ok but if not, we do not have a way to support spin offs downstream and embedding of practices. So SPs overall are a very vulnerable matter."* (ETF country manager SEMED region).

These realities reflect the difficulties and sometimes contradictions of the ETF policy in adhering to the definition of Social Partners according to the ILO criteria. There is growing awareness within ETF (and to some degree this was picked up in case countries too) of the strains in the formal model of Social Dialogue, typically invoked as the European Model in the Partner Countries. Constitutionally within the EU policy process, Social Partners are formally consulted on EU policy. Hence, it is not hard to see why clarity over definitions of Social Partnership is essential under European Commission institutional procedures. But as is well known, Union membership has very significantly declined in Europe as it has also in voluntary employers organisations, particularly in the growing service sector and SMEs who tend to exist relatively unorganised<sup>4</sup>. In Partner countries problems of large scale unemployment (notably of youth in the South Mediterranean countries), contract work, informal labour and legacies of soviet state run social partner institutions raise concerns about representativeness. The evolution of social partner organisations is different and involvement in VET policy often below their strategic horizons and concerns with basic pay, employment and working conditions are far more pressing than VET development. The issues here also relate to the different conditions of political establishment in partner countries many of which are not, or not fully, democratic and conditions of governance are also in many cases undermined by lack of public trust and/or corruption. As things stand it would be too politically challenging for ETF to attempt to change

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<sup>4</sup> Ebbinghaus B (2002) 'The changing role of Trades Unions: membership erosion, organizational reform and social partnership in Europe' *International Relations Journal* Vol 33.

ILO definitions but the continued appropriateness, relevance and inclusivity of this definition should be examined. One external interviewee, an expert knowledgeable on ETF policy and practice argues:

*“Being quite deterministic, the conclusion might insinuate a need for inventing intermediate models (or perhaps modes) of Participation which could be adapted in administrative settings where Social Capital is low (and corruption is high).”*

An ETF staff member also addressed this point:

*“ETF should broaden its discourse from social partnership and social dialogue/tripartite governance to Human Capital Development and productivity which would give more scope for involving stakeholders. Also there is a need to see how better to address rural versus urban issues”.*

ETF could also use its influence, credibility and convening power to launch a top level debate, together with Eurofound, ILO, Cedefop and other key stakeholders, on the role of Social Partners in the globalised world. The purpose would be to examine the present realities of social partnership in relation to present definitions. This could include commissioning joint research and analysis efforts, engaging Social Partners in EU and Partner Countries through on line networks and debates and seeking support (and funding) from the European Institutions. There would appear to be in any case, something of a gap in the research effort on the issue and ETF would be well placed to animate an evidence based examination.

### **How well mainstreamed are social partner activities in ETF interventions appropriate to their inclusion?**

Country managers demonstrate commitment to Social Partner engagement in line with MTP strategic framework and fully recognise the importance of Social Partners in realising relevant, demand driven VET reform. **In this somewhat narrow sense, Social Partnership is mainstreamed in ETF activities.** However, excepting specific cases where the country manager makes special efforts to approach and engage new Social Partners, the Social Partners tend to be the same ones. Yet, as noted earlier, there is a large pool of social partner organisations not yet engaged by ETF and case study data indicates an increasing readiness to get involved in VET policy. In line with its own policy rhetorics, ETF should make greater efforts to meet these needs. New social partners also offer the opportunity to bring new labour market expertise to the table and in this way increase the potential for wider system influence on VET debates. Further, regardless of subject, the social partners are always invited and this may in some cases have the drawback that not all subjects are of interest to the social partners and it's difficult to keep motivation high.

Stakeholders appreciate that ETF is very small, with constrained resources and limited in-country presence. ETF's capacity building and policy expertise is recognised by stakeholders as of a very high level but it can only host a given number of events with limited numbers of stakeholders and relatively small representation of Social Partners (review of the participants list of the 2012 Multi-level governance conference which concerned tripartite VET development, shows only 10% of participants were Social Partners). Some social partner respondents indicated frustration at these limitations: they want to have more ETF input – a testament to the very high value of ETF's expertise but also a reflection of the resource constraints and hence the continuity and sustainability of social partner involvement. This relates to the earlier point. One

of the Moldovan social partners surveyed commented on this issue: *“The system should (be) on the basis of publicly-private partnership. It is not enough one participation in round tables and conferences.”* Nor, in the view of other survey respondents are enough social partners invited to events and there were a number of comments to this effect, asking ETF *“to invite more social partners to the event”*.

These limitations also reduce the drive to mainstream and extend the net of Social Partner participants beyond those already involved with ETF. Another problem is that where Social Partner institutional capacities are weak, there may be only one ETF interlocutor who is called up for all matters relating to VET and hence may not consistently participate in ETF led events.

ETF staff recognise that if the government is not active in promoting VET and developing a strategy for it, ‘there is nothing to be done’ and ETF’s role is marginalised to small actions that help to build valuable capacity for the longer term, but in the short term won’t institutionalise social partner involvement in VET. ETF, however, is keenly aware that tripartite governance structures are essential for sustained VET reform. Social partners bring continuity under shifts in political priorities and changes in state interlocutors. ETF’s tripartite efforts can be key to formalising VET social dialogue: *It is providing the only platform today for any involvement of the social partners and with the continued participation of the policy makers in these interventions this offers hope.* (Employers association survey respondent, Lebanon)

#### **General issues and conclusions concerning mainstreaming of Social Partner involvement**

Country managers have full programmes and there may be a tendency to focus attention on other priorities if Social Partnership is being dealt with in a focused project. We did find some indications that this occurred. These staff also argue that specific projects like SEMED or the CVT project are very expensive, in particular the costs of regional meetings are very high (the committed budget for the CVT project was €238,617 in 2011 and €147,388 in 2102) On the other hand, social partner interviewees diversely commented on the value of mutual learning and engaging with the policy progress in VET in other countries. Regional meetings also support networking. The survey results also indicate that social partners gain high benefit from peer learning activities, mutual learning conferences and regional exchange. Clearly, actions aimed at peer learning among social partners are particularly effective. What is not so clear is if social partner work should be targeted through specific projects: there was a diversity of opinion on this issue:

*“Projects dedicated to social partners are needed. For this, experts are needed, as country managers don’t have the knowledge themselves in this particular area. The improvement of social partners’ performance is an issue for development.”*

*“They (projects specifically targeting SPs) are expensive and country managers are more likely to say, ok social partners are being handled by the project”.*

Other members of staff consider that the needed capacity building, awareness raising or mechanisms for policy decision making inclusive of Social Partners, will require that targeted projects or Communities of Practice (COPS) carry a strong brief on Social Partnership. In this view, COPS or specific social partner projects provide a common structure and strategic direction that interplay with the idiosyncrasies of the country context and needs. This allows for deploying targeted inputs and deliverables that bring SPs into focus whilst still being responsive to country and working closely with the country manager. In this way - although both the CVT

project and the GEMM projects are at too early a stage to show impacts - it is evident that there is much greater attention in these projects to operating in a 'bottom up' way to ensure that initiatives are fully grounded in stakeholder needs and agendas. Either way, without a clear centrally defined overarching strategic framework for Social Partnership engagement relevant to country context and conditions, it is hard to see how the diffuse 'mainstreaming' of Social Partners in ETF can become systematic, structured and strategic.

### **Mainstreaming to national and Local levels of work with Social Partners**

In numerous countries attention is shifting to work at the local/regional level within the country. This is occurring for various reasons but in general data suggest that such work offers the possibility of concrete, focused initiatives involving SPs where they can clearly see the importance and objectives of their contribution. In Tajikistan ETF is working with VET providers and social partners on developing VET policy and provision and the country manager reports positive outcomes. In Kyrgyz Republic, enterprises - and also in instances - social partners associations are involved in VET school Boards. In Tunisia the post revolution state agenda is to locate more self development at local level and under GEMM as noted, a human resource development initiative in one region is being applied in another. Similarly in Morocco where the GEMM pilot is focusing on the Tangier region and is viewed as very promising initiative by stakeholders interviewed. These are all positive developments but do not reflect the prevailing culture of ETF work which is government orientated and as most partner countries are highly centralised, more strategic direction would be required to shift staff work downstream. In many of the partner countries there are large differences in economic activity across regions requiring differential skills development. Local/sub national work can also have the benefit of developing social partner capacities in contexts where national level social dialogue is problematic or weak: for example in Armenia where there is lack of trust between public and private sector and corruption, or in highly controlling political environments, for example Turkmenistan, or where some capacities at national level are weak, for example Kyrgyz Republic - then work with SPs at local level can be effective, notably in supporting local enterprise involvement in VET school development (such as school Boards). With the exception of the Central Asian countries where rural and urban divides are very marked and ETF actions incorporate rural focused actions for example in the Kyrgyz Republic, we are not aware that rural/urban issues generally feature in ETF operational priorities.

### **Mainstreaming the Structuring support for increased Social Partner involvement at country level**

Work on the ground for ETF staff is constrained by resources - both funds and staff missions - which affects follow up and continuity of work with social partners. Greater in country support and steering would be facilitated by setting up a **Board of Social Partners** in partner countries. Such a Board would increase in country ownership and by being led by Social Partners may be more likely to lead to sustainable long term outcomes for activities under their direction. The central role of social partners in steering the national level GEMM projects is viewed as an important aspect of the progress reported so far under this initiative by enabling a greater sense of ownership, proactivity and purpose among social partners. As such, the GEMM project offers something of a prototype for ETF to study and feedback on the steering mechanism could inform the setting up of specific in-country social partner boards in partner countries.



Is there scope for contracting a **local agency** for example a Research consultancy organisation on the ground – to support networking, information flows and liaison with ETF? The Forum for Educational initiatives in Kyrgyz Republic, though not specifically tasked or contracted as a country ‘hub’ for ETF, is seen as the point of information on ETF work in the country and is frequently approached for information about ETF work and activities. This issue also came up in Morocco – two employers organisations referred to the desirability of having more of ETF on the ground. Information flows and access to advice can get too ‘bitty’ and people feel they do not have access to the expertise they need to answer questions that arise in between country visits or events.

ETF may use **local expertise**. For example in Tajikistan ETF worked with local experts starting 5 years ago on a Labour market review and has been ‘growing them’ so now they are an NGO commissioned by other international organisations. Another example is the successful use of local experts in the FRAME project to undertake Human Capital Analysis and to prepare national plans for human capital development. These have the effect of building in country capacity for evidence based policy. The use of local expertise also ‘makes the ETF budget go further’. They can also act as a nodal point for knowledge sharing and dissemination and networking of VET stakeholders and it is a very good way of reaching Social Partners and helping to build up their awareness and networking. It is not clear if ETF has considered its policy on this issue.

There is a need for better info sharing and **networking** in country – as well as needs analysis – keeping informed of country stakeholder needs and interests so that the planning for Country implementation can be more evidence based. When effectively established and animated, Social Partner networks bring increased co-operation and common working as well as improve information gathering and dissemination. In Tajikistan the country manager is setting up an organised network of VET stakeholders, including SPs. In contexts with low capacity for VET evidence based policy development and high turnover of stakeholders, such networks can provide information needed on the basis of strength by numbers where individuals alone may not be able to develop the needed information.

**Networking and On-line platforms.** As well as learning a lot from regional exchange, social partners see these events as good network builders. To be effective they need to be sustained and given post project/event support. This tends not to occur. Stakeholders in Morocco indicated that on line platforms such as that for qualifications are useful and do help network and information sharing. They are also expensive and ETF is asked not to regard them as sufficient in themselves as there are online access limitations in some countries and also such platform may not fulfil all needs for on-going information sharing and dialogue. The Kyrgyz network is a good start and may be worth developing formal networking structures within countries and across regions.

### **Mainstreaming through ETF internal management and sharing of in-house expertise**

The Thematic Expertise Department (TED) defines policy approaches and provides specialist knowledge on a range of thematic areas. Under TED, Communities of practice target specific themes (Employment, Entrepreneurship and Enterprise Skills, Governance, Qualifications and Quality, Social Inclusion, Sustainable Development). Social Partnership informs all of the COPS, The Governance COP has a particular focus on tripartite VET development and is a particular source of expertise, experts and knowledge for the GEMM project. The indications from the staff interviews are that COPS function well in providing expertise, tools and overarching line on

their subject areas which increases coherence of actions while enabling country managers to apply this expertise in nuanced ways appropriate to the country context. Staff clearly benefits and country programme work is strengthened in the countries and regions. However, many staff we spoke to consider that information sharing at ETF central level is insufficiently systematic. We were told of instances where country managers deliver actions related to a COP theme and use external expertise where in house expertise under the COP exists, but the COP team is not informed or sought out. Others note that there is no more formal forum for information sharing across countries and regions, although at project level for example in Match, TED experts and country managers do meet together to share and plan or some regional groups, for example the Western Balkans do come together regularly. With no dedicated meeting space, informal seminars are organised through the 'Cappucino Club' but participation is patchy and people often too busy to attend or disinclined to share their work with others. Numerous staff advocate more structured internal organisation to work planning and review. One suggestion is a forum for country managers, formally convened on an annual basis to bring internal thematic experts and country managers together in regional groupings at the preparation stage of county implementation plans. There are other means of bringing greater coherence to planning and delivery, but we strongly suggest that management addresses the need for more structured knowledge sharing.

### Conclusion regarding coherence

The status, evolution and representativeness of social partners is an increasingly fuzzy field and there are tensions between formal definitions and changing realities concerning social dialogue in partner countries (and in much of Europe). ETF's leverage and expertise is well placed to lead a debate on this issue. Meantime, internally, notions of participation should be re-assessed.

The requirement for tripartite VET policy dialogue to achieve relevant VET system reform in partner countries is not at odds with the corresponding need to ensure that social partners have the commitment and capacity to engage. Work with social partners is currently partial, fragmented and not systematic. Specific social partner projects or targeted actions through TED/COPs contribute substantively to VET reform but do not appear to shift operational practices on the ground towards more systemic, focused and inclusive work with social partners. We conclude that a strategic mechanism should be defined at ETF management level and in section 4.9 we set out suggestions for such a mechanism as part of the Policy Maturity framework. Further, the Knowledge Management team could work more specifically on applying workshop and networking tools for SP engagement and working directly with country managers on how best to optimise events towards engaging SPs in sustainable VET reform efforts?

Mainstreaming of ETF activities is constrained by resources – both funds and staff missions - which affects follow up and continuity of work with social partners. The satisfaction among social partners already working with ETF is high, but demand for more ETF support even higher. Without budget increase, it is hard to see how ETF can meet this demand and certainly, how it could extend the limited net of social partners with whom it currently engages. More can be done to encourage social partners to take the initiative themselves in defining VET agendas and bringing state actors to the table. Greater in country support and steering would be facilitated by setting up a **Board of Social Partners** in partner countries. Such a Board would increase in country ownership and as led by Social Partners, may be more likely to lead to mainstreaming long term outcomes for activities under their direction. Other options for in country support

include contracting a local agency to support networking, information flows and liaison with ETF.

## 4.2 Complementarity

Question 1 (ii)	<p>Do the activities and results logically allow the MTP objectives to be achieved?                  Are there any contradictions between the different levels of objectives?                  Can it be said that there is no overlap between ETF interventions for SPs and other interventions in the partner country?                  Is there convergence between the objectives of the ETF intervention and other Community policies (trade, agriculture, etc.)?</p>
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Complementarity is assessed in relation to ETF objectives as defined in the Mid Term Perspective (2010-2013). The diagram below presents an intervention logic governing work with social partners elaborated on the basis of the MTP. Expected achievements are defined in relation to strategy for each of the geographical regions: IPA, ENP and Central Asia. In addition the Torino Process is cross regional.

**Table 2: Diagram of overarching MTP logic that governs actions with Social Partners**

MTP 2010-2013	Cross-regional	region (South Eastern Europe and Turkey)	region (Eastern Europe and Medeteraenean)	Central Asia
MTP 2010-2013	Cross-regional	IPA region	ENP region	Central Asia
Overall objectives	Countries participate in the biennial policy reporting on Copenhagen process (Candidate countries) , Torino Process (Partner Countries)	institutions capacities developed and policy implementation supported	Provide support to the Commission and inform policy dialogue in human capital development at regional and national levels.	Employability of the workforce has been strengthened
Specific Objectives	national capacities on policy reporting has been strengthened & comparability of progress in VET reforms in partner countries and EU reached	1)Capacities of key stakeholders have been strengthened in specific HCD 2)Capacities for evaluation, design, planning and implementation of HCD policies developed 3) country intelligence and analysis to strengthen the evidence-base for policy making and implementation developed 4) regional cooperation in HCD promoted	1)capacities of public and private key stakeholders strengthened 2))intelligence on employment has been provided 3)policy dialogue on HCD has been strengthened 4)relevance of EU interventions in HCD improved 5)regional cooperation among countries in the region and sub-regions (south and west) strengthened	1)capacities of national stakeholders strengthened 2)key stakeholders have understanding on improvement of performance in VET 3)ESA CB on LM 4)EU policies and experiences disseminated and inspire VET reform
Expected results	The Torino Process reports and are	1) social partners have an overview of relevant	1) stakeholders can design, plan, implement,	1) Policy learning facilitated, peer

	<p>informed by social partner inputs/consultations. Social partners have increased technical capacity in evidenced based policy</p>	<p>policy developments                  2) Their technical capacities have been built for effective and efficient design and implementation of HCD measures                  3) analytical capacities have been developed                  4) common sharing of experience and learning taken place</p>	<p>monitor and evaluate HCD policies at different levels                  2) key levers for employment promotion identified and unemployment fight policies supported                  3) SPs have better knowledge on EU policies and their relevance &amp; cross country trends analysed and disseminated                  4) HCD intelligence strengthened, coordination and cooperation improved, pooling of local resources and expertise                  5) exchange of good examples</p>	<p>learning, good practice on governance, LLL, etc.                  2) hands-on understanding of VET reform on school level                  3) method of analysing LM needs                  4) constant dialogue with decision makers set up &amp; stakeholders/social partners aware of EU practices</p>
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### Conclusion regarding complementarity

Complementarity appears to be generally sound and the activities and results logically allow the MTP objectives to be achieved. There is generally strong liaison with EU Delegations but with other donors, the picture is more variable. In countries with a high presence of donors, or those where VET policy is weakly defined or where government institutional capacities limit country leadership over individual donor programmes or where ETF does not participate in donor co-ordination groups, there can be a lack of comprehensive knowledge of relevant initiatives and direct co-ordination with them. In the main, however, ETF makes efforts to establish co-operative links and given its strong process orientation, ETF adds high value. The Evaluation Team found no instances of obvious overlap. Nor did it find any inconsistencies with other EU policy areas, but rather in the case studies, examples of sound complementarities, for example the sectoral qualification project in Morocco is providing effective support to EU/Morocco Trade policy implementation and in the Kyrgyz Republic the VET school development initiatives in rural areas are highly complementary with Agriculture policy.

Results of the feedback from the case studies show a high degree of convergence of ETF activities in the individual countries with the European Delegations, EUROPEAID, other bilateral donors of the EU member states or EFTA countries, such as GIZ, SIDA, Helvetas, Noraid, and in some cases active involvement in the programming, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of EU funded projects, as well as attempts to coordinate interventions with the other international donors, such as ADB, USAID, WB. This seems however, to be a more difficult task. The ILO is an important ETF donor partner and numerous ETF country managers referred to co-operative links with ILO regional offices on, for example, skills development. ILO is a particularly valuable source of information for ETF on social partner status and demographics in partner countries. Relations with ILO however, are not always straightforward: the very large size of ILO can lead to communication hitches as occurred in the Kyrgyz Republic (where the local ILO office was unaware of an initiative that was relevant to ETF's work in the country, and which was being

lead by the Regional office in Moscow). More significantly, the ILO key focus is on ‘decent work’ and not specifically on social dialogue in VET: “This means” said one ETF expert, “that you have to dig deep to find the right connections. It is difficult to involve people, especially when you don’t have so much to sell”. ETF has sought to strengthen its partnership with ILO and signed an agreement with the ILO’s International Training Centre in 2013 which will guide joint work between the two. For some in ETF, however, further strengthening of co-operation would help make ETF work with SPs more efficient and of higher impact.

Many social partners are part of ETF networks, because ETF is able to link the world of work and the VET sector and help both sides to talk more to each other. ETF acts as a broker to put them together by using systematic knowledge. Example is the Governance COP. This has aroused much interest from the side of the social partners..

A more detailed analysis of each intervention region is presented in section 4.3.

### 4.3 Added Value

Question 6

To what extent does the ETF intervention with SPs add benefits to what would have resulted from Member States’ bilateral donor interventions only in the partner country?

The importance of social partners in channelling messages from the labour market into partner country policy analysis, development and delivery is clear and uncontested in all the materials collected by the team. There are other donor organisations tackling VET reforms in the Partner Countries and there are other donor organisations tackling social partner involvement in tripartite social dialogue. But ETF brings, according to responses, a unique combination of VET expertise, commitment to social partner engagement in VET and a process orientation informed by its Human Capacity Development agenda. The external evaluation report notes that:

*“ETF is ...a process driven organisation and ...also where the ETF is seen to add the greatest value....ETF adds significant value in networking, involving numerous stakeholders in the HCD process and providing knowledge and expertise. In these regards, the ETF is seen as important and unique in the support that it offers. “*

Our findings concur with this. Being small, the added value is enhanced by strong co-operation with other donors, where ETF is able to deliver specific expertise, capacity building and methodological tools which could not otherwise be made available through these others’ programmes.

The evaluation team encountered examples of international donors focusing upon outputs and deliverables at the expense of process and in consequence failing also to consider the sustainability of programmes. There were a number of interviewees in the Kyrgyz Republic who cited instances of facility termination (and growing cynicism among beneficiaries) following the end of particular projects (one on training as part of rural poverty reduction and another related to sectoral skills). ETF is considered, by contrast, to be rightly focused on building sustainable outcomes over the longer term.

In order to fulfil its unique niche role in these contexts ETF needs to be fully informed of all relevant donor activity going on or planned for in the country. While it is true that under Aid Effectiveness principles, donors are strengthening their co-operation among themselves, it also is common to find that the weakness of state capacities limits coherent sector wide approaches, either as a result of weaknesses in central co-ordination of donor initiatives or fragmentation of responsibilities across relevant ministries and failure to co-ordinate internally. The evaluation team found instances of ministries accepting bilaterally funded projects that did not fit with their strategic plan or which duplicated other efforts. In the case of the Kyrgyz Republic, the Ministry of Labour Employment and Youth is now making concerted efforts to co-ordinate donor projects where in the past this did not happen. In these situations it means that ETF's community added value is reduced but not through the fault of ETF, rather it is the consequence of budget support to country led planning in the context where state management capacities are still emerging. In this situation ETF needs to take special care to keep fully abreast of all donor interventions both planned and underway so as to ensure full complementarity and added value. The evaluation did come across instances where knowledge was somewhat lacking. In such cases ETF needs to work harder to ensure a niche that delivers full community added value. It would be wise for ETF to further assess the level of state institutional capacity to oversee and co-ordinate donor programmes either as part of its country planning or as part of the Policy Maturity matrices, or through extension of the FRAME project.

One aspect of ETF's community added value is the internal dimension: contribution to EU policy. Delegations approached for interview during this evaluation did not unfortunately have representatives available. However, there are some indications that ETF performs well in this respect. Requests by Commission per year are around 100 per year (105 in 2012) of which approximately 40% are for policy advice. Such requests are considered as indicators of Agency added value (see Cedefop annual reports). ETF can demonstrate some powerful successes as both a handmaiden for EU policy deliberation and facilitator of co-ordinated policy and programme interventions, for example in its mobility partnerships work and Small Business Act. The migration survey and work on sectoral qualifications in Morocco has been influential in developing an EU/Morocco formal agreement. It informed DG Home's recent Mobility Partnership agreement with Morocco and although the 2011 Migration study by ETF on Morocco was delayed this clearly did not affect its influence and for interviewees in the field visit, the area of portability of skills was recognized as a key strength and valued by them.

### **Conclusion regarding added value**

As a relatively small player among other donor organisations of the Member States, ETF has accomplished the development of a unique role in combining expertise, commitment and process orientation, with a strong focus on network building in a sustainable model. Where other donors pull out when the projects are completed, ETF has a long-term focus on building capacity and platforms for social partners over a longer period of time. This has been confirmed by the latest ETF External Evaluation Report, and has been confirmed through this evaluation of social partner involvement. The evaluation team encountered examples of international donors focusing upon outputs and deliverables at the expense of process and in consequence failing also to consider the sustainability of programmes. ETF is considered, by contrast, to be rightly focused on building sustainable outcomes over the longer term. Furthermore, ETF can demonstrate some powerful successes as both a handmaiden for EU policy deliberation and

facilitator of co-ordinated policy and programme interventions, for example in its mobility partnerships work and Small Business Act.

#### 4.4 Relevance

Question 7	How well adapted and adaptable are ETF initiatives (involving Social Partners) to the diverse conditions of VET in the countries concerned? To what extent is the objective of the social partner interventions consistent with beneficiaries' requirements, the needs of the country, global priorities, partners' and EC policies?
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Overall and as described in other sections of this report, ETF interventions with Social partners are conducted with high degrees of responsiveness and acuity to the country political, economic and cultural context. ETF has to align its in-country actions on the development of capacities in VET reform with its role in mediating the implementation of relating EU policies.

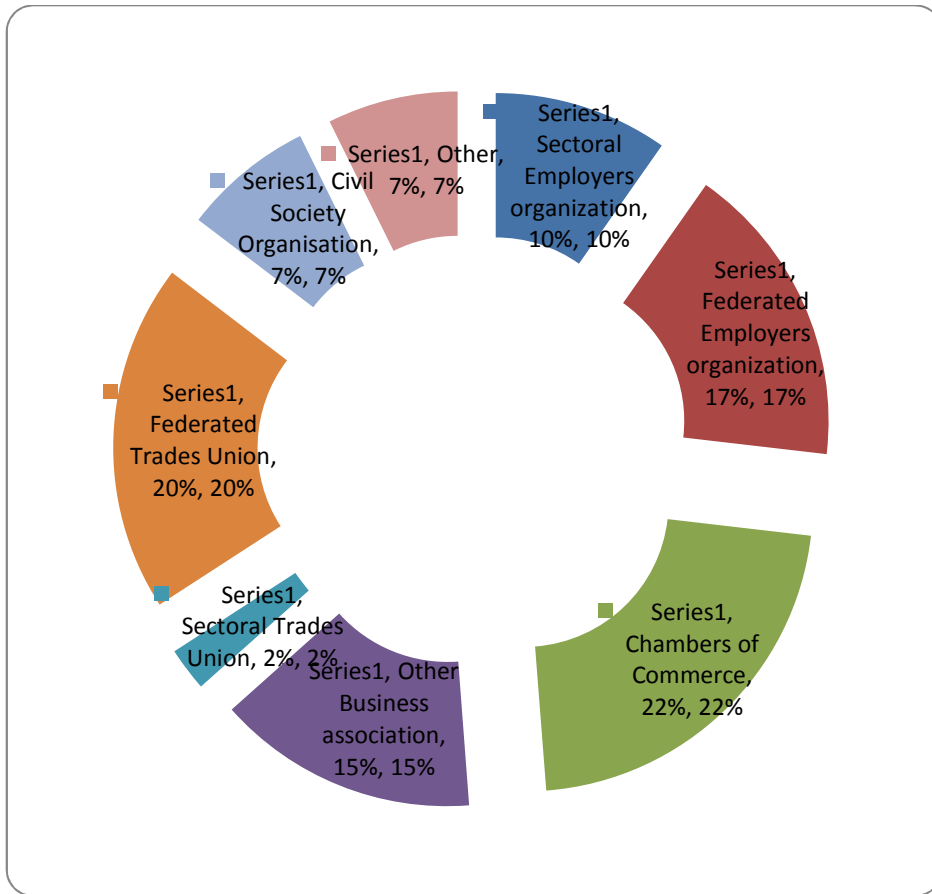
This alignment is strengthened through the Torino Process. Increasingly the Torino Process is the mechanism through which shared understandings of VET developments and priorities for action in each partner country are developed and it acts as the animating principle for co-operation with country stakeholders on specific actions required to enhance VET reform. Hence there is high relevance. More attention is now being given to work at local as well as national level though this can be further strengthened.

In cases where projects, notably GEMM, are initiated directly through the European Commission, collaborations with stakeholders ensure relevance to country needs. There are however, instances where specific activities within a broader strategic objective, are insufficiently adapted to social partner needs, for example choice of country VET reform examples for peer learning, or, the case of the SP SEMED project insufficiently addressed to social partner needs for concrete outcomes. To varying degrees, the social partner mapping studies conducted as part of the SP SEMED project, elicited Social Partners requirements and priorities for ETF activity. Systematising needs assessment across countries (even through more modest surveys) would help optimise the relevance of work with Social Partners and would likely increase their motivation and responsiveness.

The results of the Survey conducted in connection with this evaluation report show further details of how relevant ETF interventions are perceived to be across 23 ETF member countries.<sup>5</sup>

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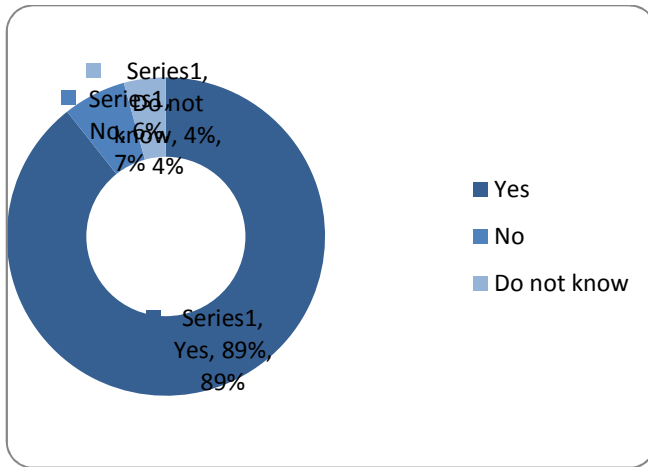
<sup>5</sup> There was not response from the following countries, either because no relevant stakeholders could be identified or because no relevant stakeholder participated in the survey: Azerbaijan, Bosnia & Herzegovina, former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Israel, Kyrgyz Republic, Syria, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan.



**Chart 2: Stakeholder groups (n=41)**

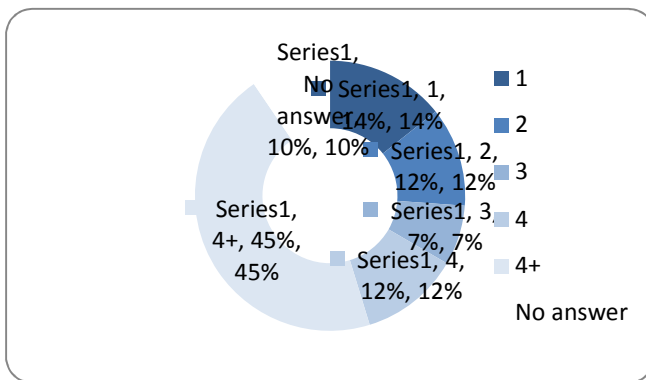
In the survey social partners from 23 ETF countries are included. 20% of replies are from Federated Trade Unions, 22% from Chambers of Commerce, 17% from Federated Employers organisations, 15% from other business organisations, 7% from Civil Society Organisations, 10% from Sectoral Employers organisations and finally 2% from Sectoral Trade Unions.





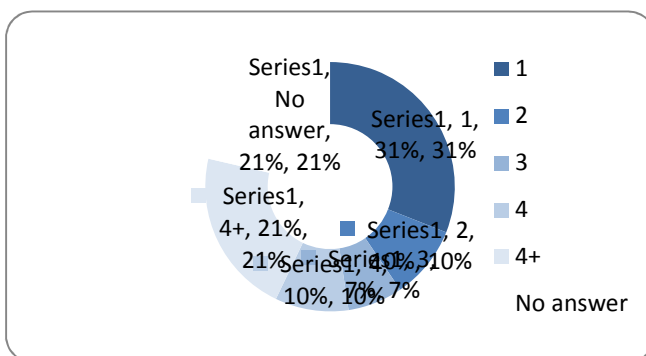
**Chart 3: Have you or representatives of your organisation participated in any meetings or events organised by ETF over the last three years? (n=47)**

89% of all respondents have participated in ETF events over the past 3 years.



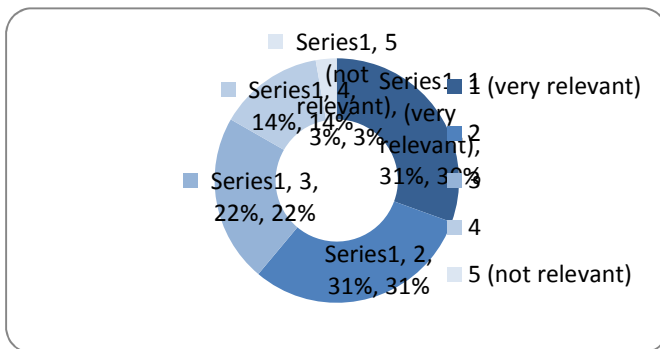
**Chart 4: how many meetings or events have you or representatives of your organisation participated in since 2010 in your country? (n=42)**

Most of them (45%) have been involved in more than 4 meetings/events with ETF in the country.



**Chart 5: how many meetings or events have you or representatives of your organisation participated in since 2010 outside your country? (n=42)**

31 % of respondents have been involved in one event outside their country

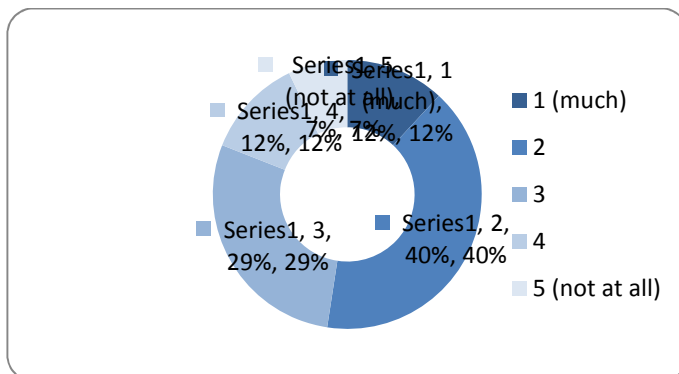


**Chart 6: How relevant are the contents of ETF events for your daily work? (n=36)**

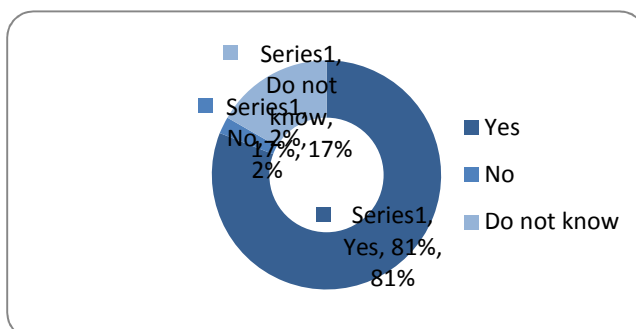
31% find the contents of the ETF events highly relevant, 31% find the events very relevant, 22% find the events relevant, whereas only 14% find the events not so relevant and 3% not relevant at all. This may be an

indication that the middle groups would like to see more relevance in the events, although they are generally satisfied.

**Chart 7: How much have your contributions within ETF projects or activities been taken into account in VET policy making in your country? (n=42)**



As for the direct applicability of the results and applied knowledge gained from the ETF events 12% of respondents conclude that their contributions within ETF projects have been much taken into account in VET policy, 40% conclude that their contributions have fairly well been taken into account, 29% estimate that their contributions have in average been considered, whereas 12% find that their contributions only to a minor degree have been considered, and 7% conclude that they were not considered at all. This is a clear indication that ETF makes a difference in the VET policy design in the 20 countries and that the rate of applied knowledge is quite high.

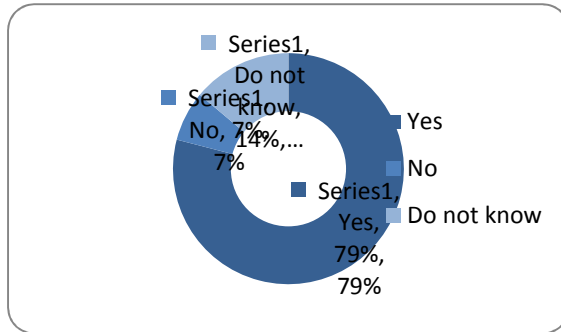


**Chart 8: ETF's work with your organisation has improved the capacity of your organisation to analyse VET policy (n=42)**

Looking at the relevance of ETF's work in VET policy analysis and VET policy implementation, there seems to be a clear difference, showing where interventions clearly are the most relevant to the social partners and the

other stakeholders participating in this survey. 81% of respondent conclude that in their organisation ETF’s work has improved their capacity to analyse VET policy

**Chart 9: ETF’s work with your organisation has improved the capacity of your organisation to implement VET policy (n=43)**



Whereas 79% state that ETF work has improved their organisation’s capacity to implement VET policy.

When looking specifically at the relevance of the Social Partners that are engaged with ETF, 77,42 % say that ETF is working with the right partners, whereas 12,90 % says that the wrong partners have been engaged, and 9,68 % don’t know if the

partners chosen are the right ones. This leads to a conclusion that supports previous feedback for the case studies on researching the partners before they are actually chosen to participate in ETF events.

**Conclusion regarding relevance**

ETF generally has a high responsiveness to social partners, taking the political, economical and cultural context into consideration. The Torino Process helps ETF to gain a more detailed understanding of the priorities for action, in order to be able to respond in a prioritized manner to the recommendations of the Torino process self-assessment of the individual country. In the feedback, however, some examples were given that pointed towards the need for better needs assessment of social partners.

The survey conducted as part of this evaluation showed interesting trends of the relevance of ETF interventions. Quite a large group gave answers in the “average” area to whether ETF interventions were relevant for them. This points again towards better investigation into the specific needs of social partners before launching events. The applicability of ETF outcomes to inform VET policy is in the “average area” again, pointing towards an increase in the specific needs of the social partners and the context they operate within. However the rate of positive indication that results can be applied is quite high compared to the 6% that couldn’t apply results.

There seems to be a slightly higher response to the relevance of ETF capacity building in VET policy analysis to the individual organisation than the relevance of VET policy implementation guidance. On the question of selecting the right partners for ETF events, most agree that the right partners have been selected, but more than 12 % think the choice was wrong. Together with feedback from the case studies, this points towards a more detailed research before selecting partner organizations.

ETF is quite good at coordinating its actions with other donors, unless large donors have different approaches that don’t coincide with the ETF – driven approach. Also, its networks of partners, established through cross-regional projects, main events and communication platforms, help to increase the mutual exchange of ideas and approaches between social partners.

## 4.5 Effectiveness

Question 2.1	To what extent were ETF development interventions’ objectives (involving Social Partners) achieved/expected to be achieved?
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### Framework for assessing effectiveness under question 2.1

According to the intervention logic that may be derived from the ET MTP 2010-2013, ETF actions involving social partners may be assessed according to the achievement of the success factors covering each geographical context. Hence, success factors for work with social partners in South Eastern Europe and Turkey are different from those applicable to Eastern Europe and South Medeteraenean countries or Central Asian countries. This introduces another layer of evaluation – the status of the country in relation to EU policy. The demands of work with social partners in the Western Balkans and Turkey are more directed to EU integration than the success criteria for Central Asian countries, where key requirements include ‘understanding’ of EU VET reform processes. The following section examines effectiveness in relation to objectives for social partners for each of the partner country regions and for the main cross regional strategy, the Torino Process.

### Findings on effectiveness

#### Category 1: Cross region

Overall Objective <sup>6</sup> :	Candidate countries participate in the biennial policy reporting on Copenhagen process and in Partner countries the Torino Process.
Specific Objective:	National capacities on policy reporting has been strengthened and comparability of progress in VET reforms in partner countries and EU reached
Results:	The Torino Process reports and are informed by social partner inputs/consultations. Social partners have increased technical capacity in evidenced based policy

The Torino Process can kick-start the process of Participation (especially in countries with no prior experience from Donor-funded projects) indicating that the Social Partners representatives could be less informed about their role in the process or at least have only minor experience with Participation. The public sector (here mainly Ministry of Labour and Ministry of Education with subordinates, e.g. single training centres) has similarly limited experience with Participation; i.e. involvement of external stakeholders in planning, qualification, certification, etc. To some extent, and depending on the countries involved, they have to “re-invent the wheel”.

The Torino Process requires involvement - and hence the Social Partners are involved. However, it is not clear that the stakeholders (public or private) have received enough training in HOW to work pro-actively and WHAT Participation actually implies.

<sup>6</sup> ETF MTP 2010-2013

The involvement is on its most limited scale rests at invitations to participate in the Process, participation in meetings, participation in Working Boards and Qualification Boards, etc., but with a limited impact on the working processes within and perhaps on the conclusions drawn from the meetings. The recent Torino Process Interim Evaluation noted that Social Partners participate but tend not to be 'actively' involved. On the other end of the scale (mainly in Balkan Countries, often pre-accession countries, which includes Turkey) the Social Partners' involvement has a far more qualitative impact on the work, the conclusions, etc. And it is in these countries we mainly **find real tri-partite bodies**.

The evaluation encountered experiences of both situations. In Central Asia especially, either high state control limits ETF proactively or in the Kyrgyz Republic the unions are in the process of evolving from soviet institutions and awareness of VET roles are in the early stages and more awareness raising is needed. They are somewhat stronger in this respect in Kazakhstan. The Employers' are typically far more involved.

The team has seen very keen regional directors of trade unions working very actively and being part of the complete internal process of single training schools, and have examples of employers who are not engaged in issues of professional training; but the general pattern is the opposite. In addition, in some countries the Employers' may have a little too much influence, which could obstruct the establishment of a socially equitable system.

There is evidence that overall the Torino Process is lifting social partners awareness of policy analysis processes and the potential benefits for being more involved. Specific capacity building for social partners would be the next step for future rounds. Although optimal involvement of social partners in the Torino Process itself has not yet been achieved, the interviews point to a strong downstream effect on ETF work with them. Torino Process clarifies the common context for action needed in each of the countries. Many of the reports also identify the need for greater social partner involvement in VET and in turn this is stimulating ETF's in country work to include social partners in priority actions identified under the TP. In this way, the Torino Process is also a powerful policy learning mechanism for ETF itself. Interviewees discussed how this effect can be seen in the focus on social partners in local and regional pilots within GEMM and in the regional governance work in Tunisia which again closely involves social partners.

In general though, as noted in the external interim evaluation, social partners have thus far not tended to be actively involved in the Torino Process itself and this should be addressed by specific measures in future rounds. This matter is discussed under the evaluation question on tools and methodologies for improving work with social partners.

*In conclusion:* The Social Partners, and in particular the Trade Unions need support to identify their roles in Participation and help in acquiring the capacities to be actively engaged. There is also scope to increase the net of social partners. With certain exceptions for example, Morocco, the farther away from pre-accession to EU, the more imminent the need would be.

Statement: *(BiH) The Torino process – strengthened the way ETF works with social partners and the way this is presented, e.g. in chapter 2, clearly shows that social partners need to be in the dialogue in VET. In BiH we managed to get them all involved, however the state level is weak. 10 social partners were involved in the process.*

*(Employers organisation Morocco) TP helps us as SPs to have the data more or less valid in terms of needs and the programmes to do. The TP is a programme that is very interesting because it is very practical - a sort of dashboard of where we are at. It also allows benchmarking with other countries – and we could make the comparison. When you see a discrepancy it allows comparisons and then to see why.*

*(ETF Country Manager Central Asia) There were considerable efforts made to involve civil society, employers and Trades Unions but it was impossible to get them together – we even tried with facilitators but they are not yet ready to gather together and put opinions together, so as to get a collective rather than individual opinion. It is a big challenge to move to group rather than self interest.*

**Category 2: South East Europe and Turkey**

The IPA provides pre-accession assistance within a unique legal framework for Candidate Countries (Croatia, Turkey, Macedonia, and Montenegro) and for Potential Candidate Countries (Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Serbia, and Kosovo - pursuant to UN Security Council Resolution 1244.

Overall Objective <sup>7</sup> :	Support institutions developed and policy implementation supported
Specific Objective:	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1) Capacities of key stakeholders have been strengthened in specific HCD areas</li> <li>2) Capacities for evaluation, design, planning and implementation of HCD policies developed</li> <li>3) Country intelligence and analysis to strengthen the evidence-base for policy making and implementation developed</li> <li>4) Regional cooperation in HCD promoted</li> </ol>
Results:	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1) Social partners have an overview of relevant policy developments</li> <li>2) Technical capacities have been built for effective and efficient design and implementation of human capital development</li> <li>3) Analytical capacities have been developed</li> <li>4) Common sharing of experience and learning has taken place</li> </ol>

The general trend (except in Turkey) is that the social partners are still weak and there is often a lack of trade union participation (except the teachers unions). There is a need for wider and more effective involvement of social partners, which is counteracted by the small budgets of the ETF activities in the countries.

There is a high involvement of stakeholders, including social partners in the VET strategy development and in the Torino process self assessment. Social partner participation in regional

<sup>7</sup> ETF MTP 2010-2013

events and in dissemination and networking events is often only from the side of the employers, trade unions are often absent. The teachers' unions are there, but often promoting their own agendas in the discussion forums.

Social partners are involved horizontally across different activities and those that show engagement, are kept onboard, as expressed in the earlier statement from BiH.

As mentioned from Croatia, the lack of a clear role of social partners in the ETF events hindered a meaningful working relationship, and again, the unions are the most difficult to engage in the reform processes. More work was recommended to assist the social partners in defining their roles in the ETF activities and in the reform process.

In the Western Balkans and Turkey there is a large concentration of donors, with whom ETF makes efforts to coordinate. In some cases, as in the example of Kosovo, this may lead to a lack of coherence in VET policy and implementation. In the case of BiH there has been some difficulty in involving SPs in the Entrepreneurial Learning process due to the large number of ETF counterparts in the country.

Most countries in the Western Balkans and Turkey have been through several years of large VET reform projects, where ETF has complemented and supported the implementation of larger EU projects, as well as coordinated closely with other European bilateral donors. There is a strong motivation in the Western Balkans and Turkey to develop their VET systems in line with EU standards and norms. ETF work on the Small Business Act (in collaboration with OECD, DG Enterprise and European Investment Bank) has been influential in raising business and entrepreneurial skills issues to the fore in each of the countries and supported regional policy learning, including social partners who have been involved in the process in most of the participating countries.

The level of advancement in NQF, occupational standards and qualifications development is high, often triggered by ETF workshops and capacity building of the social partners, and the work on establishing sector committees seem to have a positive effect and leads to further immediate dissemination in new sectors. Interviewees also report positively on regional exchange and co-operation actions

**Category 3: Eastern Europe**

Overall Objective <sup>8</sup> :	Provided support to the European Commission and inform the policy dialogue in human capital development at regional and national level
Specific Objective:	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1) capacities of public and private stakeholders strengthened</li> <li>2) Intelligence on employment has been provided</li> <li>3) Policy dialogue on human capital development</li> <li>4) Regional cooperation among countries in the region and sub-regions (south and west) strengthened</li> </ol>
Exp. Results	1) Stakeholders can design, plan, implement, monitor and evaluate HCD

<sup>8</sup> *ibid*

policies at different levels
2) Key levers for employment promotion identified and policies to counter unemployment supported
3) SPs have better knowledge on EU policies and their relevance & cross country trends analysed and disseminated
4) HCD intelligence strengthened, coordination and cooperation improved, pooling of local resources and expertise
5) Exchange of good examples

In the Eastern European countries ETF implements a series of cross-regional projects, such as, CVT, Entrepreneurial Learning, FRAME. This has had a positive effect on establishing regional cooperation between the social partners in the individual countries.

Study visits to learn more on EU policies and their relevance have had an outstanding positive effect on the receiving organisations and are powerful tools to bring social partners up to speed with current trends and practices in VET / HCD reform. As in the example from Ukraine, ETF arranged a visit to Finland. A delegation from Ukraine came to learn all levels of the system of vocational education and saw how they link between the employers, employees and the system of employment.

Capacity building at regional level for employers and trade unions focus on skills mismatches at the local level and the social partners have successfully engaged themselves in identifying training plans and skills needs, are getting involved in school boards and other networks of influence. Capacity building at sectorial level is now being more focused on the establishment of sector councils/boards. The concept of Sector Councils has successfully been implemented in Moldova and is now, as an ETF case scenario example being disseminated through study tours and the concept is being spread to other ENP countries.

ENP Region: SEMED

Overall Objective<sup>9</sup>: Provided support to the European Commission and inform the policy dialogue in human capital development at regional and national level

Specific Objective:     1) capacities of public and private stakeholders strengthened  
                                  2) Intelligence on employment has been provided  
                                  3) Policy dialogue on human capital development  
                                  4) Regional cooperation among countries in the region and sub-regions (south and west) strengthened

Exp. Results             2) Key levers for employment promotion identified and policies to counter

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<sup>9</sup> *ibid*



unemployment supported

3) SPs have better knowledge on EU policies and their relevance & cross country trends analysed and disseminated

4) coordination and cooperation improved, pooling of local resources and expertise

5) Exchange of good examples

In the South Medeteranean countries ETF implements a series of cross-regional projects, such as SEMED, Regional Dimension of Qualifications in the Mediterranean, Entrepreneurial Learning. This has had a positive effect on establishing regional cooperation between the social partners in the individual countries.

A general trend is a traditional “outsider”-role of social partners in VET governance, and ETF interventions are successfully targeting not only the social partners, but also the governing structures to assist building up tripartite structures in the VET system. In some countries, like Algeria, the unions are traditionally state-funded and not eligible under the ILO definition of Social Partner. However, ETF invites both sides. Also, often the employers’ side is not federated and the question of who represents whom may lead to confusion in the building up of new systems of governance of VET. Social partner’s role is somewhat better understood in the Magrheb countries, including Morocco. In Egypt not only the recent turmoil, but also a tradition for splitting state responsibilities for VET diversely has meant that many stakeholders are included and it’s difficult for ETF to know who can represent whom in the present picture of social partners. ETF has successfully involved also the trade unions and the Chambers of Commerce in training partnerships and in the NQF.

In spite of many efforts ETF finds it extremely difficult to involve trade unions in general in the ENP countries, especially in the North African and Middle East regions. As in an example from Lebanon Trade union’s involvement is very difficult and much politicised and can lead to tensions as e.g. in the Torino process. Trade unions are not involved in HRD, have more interest in their core business. In Lebanon, entrepreneurial spirit is strong and employers are active in HRD with support from ETF particularly Chambers and industrial and sector organisations, but little dialogue exists with the government and there are no platforms on HRD to bring together the players. ETF has a very active contact in the MoL and through contacts here has met with the general secretary of the biggest union. Despite efforts to involve them, they have never participated. Through the ILO other TUs have been identified, met with and they are kept informed. However, there is little active union engagement on VET.

In some countries, as a result of lack of trust and corruption, the climate for ETF intervention is extremely difficult and social partner representation is mainly in VET council level, but not in sector or regional /local committees yet. Also, in these countries, the pace of NQF development has been slowed down by internal problems of trust and conflicts between different groups. Here, ETF interventions concentrate on the participation in cross-regional projects.

#### Category 4: Central Asian region

Overall Objective <sup>10</sup> :	Employability of the workforce has been strengthened
Specific Objective:	<ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>1) Capacities of national stakeholders strengthened</li><li>2) Key stakeholders have understanding of performance in VET</li><li>3) Employment services received capacity building in labour market analysis</li><li>4) EU policies and experiences disseminated and inspire VET reform</li></ol>
Exp Results:	<ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>1) policy learning facilitated, peer learning, good practice on governance, LLL etc.</li><li>2) Hands-on understanding of VET reform on local level</li><li>3) Method of analysing labour market needs</li><li>4) Constant dialogue with stakeholders set up and stakeholders aware of EU practices</li></ol>

There have been some achievements during the past 3 years in VET and in social partner involvement in the Central Asian region, some which are not only attributable to ETF but to which ETF has made considerable contribution. However, ETF actions have led to state inclusion of a range of employers. Social partners, as in e.g. Kazakhstan are active in VET policy making at both national and local levels and a dual system has been introduced in VET.

Capacity building from ETF has made contributions to this achievement. In general, the former Soviet countries have inherited a system of trade union legacy, though new ones are now emerging and in future the ETF efforts will be to identify and bring the new unions into the governance system. Structures that include social partners are in place, but may not all be included into the legal framework of VET. As in this example from the Kyrgyz Republic ETF is regarded as a very small donor organisation– holding a relatively small number of events and though it does capacity building where it can do it can only involve a small number of organisations to events.

Work on social partners in some of the far Central Asian countries, like Tajikistan, are still in the making and the concept of social partners is very different from the definitions in the EU member states. Networking organisations are being set up and social partners are included to all workshops in order to establish the platform for inspiring the VET reform in the respective countries.

ETF sometimes needs to think differently on the actual target group of capacity building and in some cases, perform training needs analysis before embarking on training and capacity building measures for social partners. There is also a large turnover and these organisations are not always stable.

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<sup>10</sup> *ibid*

Social partners are quite often, as stated in part 1 of the research findings in this report, invited to events and activities without any prior analysis of their specific needs. Only in the cases where projects specifically target social partners, do we find evidence of needs analysis. This points to a general approach of supply-led capacity building, which the social partners either find relevant or not so relevant for them. From the feedback most social partner development takes place on national level, if not part of a specific regional or local capacity building programme. The feedback points also towards a closer examination of social partners' needs, to sit with them and find the real needs, before designing responses.

Feedback also shows that a long-term ETF partnership with a social partner, that includes a number of different capacity building approaches as well as technical support, puts the social partner in a position to play a qualified role in the HCD reform processes on governance level.

### **Conclusion regarding effectiveness**

In **the Torino process**, the regional differences in social partner involvement is clearly expressed in the different levels of active or passive involvement, that have been observed across the IPA, Eastern European, SEMED and Central Asian regions. The recent Torino Process Interim Evaluation noted that Social Partners participate but tend not to be 'actively' involved. In the other end of the scale (mainly in Balkan Countries, often pre-accession countries, which includes Turkey) the Social Partners' involvement has a far more qualitative impact on the work, the conclusions, etc. And it is in these countries we mainly find real tri-partite bodies. Employers' organizations are traditionally more involved than trade unions, which tend to need some support in finding their role. This calls for more focus from the side of ETF on how and for what to involve trade unions into the Torino process and more generally provide capacity building actions for social partners to support their active participation in future Torino Process rounds.

In **the South Eastern & Turkey region**, there is a high involvement of social partners in some parts of HCD / VET reform, notably in the large national reform processes, such as VET strategy development, NQF development, drafting of legal frameworks for VET and HCD, sector councils. However, their role seems to be of lesser significance on the regional and local levels, in the school boards and in the local partnership arrangements for school industry cooperation. ETF has until now put an emphasis on the national structures and on building the capacities of national social partner representatives to take on their important role in the processes. In future, stakeholders recommend ETF also to look in the direction of the regional and local reform processes and to find ways of involving the social partners in ETF activities on these levels. Also, ETF should find its own place in the patchwork of donor organizations operating in IPA countries and do, what matches its resources and capabilities, such as networking, building platforms, setting up sector councils and support school boards, etc.

In **the Southern Eastern Mediterranean** cross-national/regional projects have led to more effective involvement of social partners in ETF activities. Social partners, as traditional outsiders in the governing processes, have been supported in defining clearer roles and functions in the VET/HCD reform processes. It still remains to find ways of involving and engaging trade unions, as a general trend, and to build their capacity to play a powerful role in the reform processes. Interventions on regional and local level to involve social partners in governance and VET implementation have had successful results and should be mainstreamed across the region.

In the **Eastern European region** ETF has successfully supported the further development of regional dialogue and knowledge sharing between the countries, sector council development and capacity building, as well as building the capacity to assess HCD status and propose relevant solutions with strong involvement of the social partners. Tripartite-dialogue builds on existing frameworks, through the trade unions still play a minor role in most of the countries in the region.

In the **Central Asia region** ETF has successfully supported social partners in being recognized as having a role in VET reform processes. ETF has assisted social partners in defining their roles in the VET reform structures and building their capacities to participate in a qualified dialogue with governments on the key issues of the reform processes. Many countries are still in the making of social partner involvement in VET, and ETF should put more emphasis on researching the needs and potential of social partner organizations before inviting them to events, capacity building sessions and to VET reform discussions.

There are examples of successful support to social partner organizations over a longer period that has given the social partner a substantial role in VET governance.

<b>Question 2.2</b>	<b>What are the success factors for the different types of Social Partner engagement?</b>
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**Success Factor 1: Being there for the long run.** As noted in the preceding sections of this document, in many of the partner countries conditions of low trust commonly arise through corruption, the exercise of political control or power interests by central decision makers and or fragile or fragmented state institutions. For their part, social partners' organisations frequently lack sufficient capacity or commitment to engage in VET dialogue. Persistence in bringing social partners and state actors to the table and creating conditions of structured dialogue, gradually allows constructive group dynamics and institutionalised tripartite dialogue to emerge. Importantly, it also facilitates the building of trust between employers and unions.:

*“At the start people don’t want to listen to each other and have suppositions of who the other is and there is lack of trust. At the first meeting they blame each other. But then after that they start understanding the concepts and understanding each other and by end of several years you see the same people working together and then they start initiating things themselves. Building compromise and so on is something we facilitate year after year. (ETF country manager)”*

Support factors for ETF to consider in its work in low trust circumstances include: a) increased ETF staff training in negotiation, group management and conflict resolutions skills. The Knowledge management team have useful resources and practices to facilitate such internal capacity building; b) a formally defined and clear policy line on inclusion of social partners (notably Trades Unions) in state level VET policy dialogues initiated by ETF. While there may be instances where such policy would require to be applied judiciously, a stated commitment to a policy line can work to standardise tripartite VET dialogue as the accepted norm.

**Success factor 2: purposeful, concrete actions with social partners.** Social Partners are invited to all relevant events as a general rule, but sometimes without careful thinking through of purpose and sustainability of social partner involvement. Well defined, targeted concrete

activities with clear rationale, follow up and specified intended outcomes are crucial. Tangible actions that 'lead somewhere' are important in providing a framework for capacity development, and also it helps sustain motivation if work builds tangible outcomes - however small to start with.

*“ For SPs the moment it becomes concrete, then you get them on board. In this project it was bottom up. You have to know where you are going. This goes together with a clear strategy. Don't involve SPs for the sake of it but with clear objectives”. (ETF expert Regional Dimension of Qualifications)*

*“Working groups that are set up with formality - this will provide the format for the future...Also they (SPs) need to see small successes which they can publicise and show to their bosses. That makes them more interested.” (ETF country manager)*

Purpose and clear objectives tend to be readily identifiable at sectoral level and the successes of the CVT and Regional Dimension of Qualifications Projects show that sectoral initiatives provide a particularly strong logic of intervention and ability to appeal to social partner interest and commitment.

Overall the data suggest that work with Social Partners should have a clearer strategic intent, from the workshop and country programming level to ETF strategy definitions at whole organisational level. We have specific suggestions on this latter point in the next section.

**Success factor 3: Capacity building for social partners.** Capacity building is critical and includes seminars, expert inputs, and training. Our evidence indicates that more training needs analysis for social partners should be conducted first and analysed for how these can best be met - Country managers are generalists and may not always have the skills required to conduct capacity building with social partners and may need tools developed in house to support them. Work with social partners can be more challenging than with government actors who are the key decision makers, have responsibilities for VET and internal knowledge. But developing social partner interest and capacities through targeted capacity building work, may be the necessary basis for their full integration into tripartite structures subsequently. Trades Unions are less involved and evidence suggests they are less comprehensively approached where they are not already demonstrably attentive to VET issues. Work with social partners takes more effort and in the context of limited resources, ETF needs to consider at country implementation planning how to prioritise time inclusive of work with social partners.

**Success factor 4: The multiple synergies of favourable policy climate, active donor involvement and funding.** These are key enablers for ETF successful work with social partners. Where funds are few, ETF is more likely to be a minor player. Social Partner involvement in VET dialogue increases openness of governance. Where governments are resistant to criticism – notably some in Central Asia, this places particular constraints on social partner involvement. While in general we found that ETF co-operation with the EU Delegation and other donors was strong, ETF should consider where its process orientation and niche work could be better integrated into the overall VET funded programmes.

**Success factor 5: High level of country interest in aligning with and learning from EU policy and VET development.** Favourable conditions in this respect are numerous in IPA but also including for example Morocco and Moldova. National qualifications frameworks are among the topic that reflect such interest and also require social partner involvement. While such conditions

make it a bit easier for ETF to make headway with social partners, we found that interest in understanding and developing VET in line with EU frameworks was general particularly where migration is a big issue, for example the Kyrgyz Republic. ETF's work on skills portability has had outstanding success, but there may still be more scope for ETF to consider how to optimise incentives for countries in addition to policy priorities emerging formally through Torino Process or SBA.

## 4.6 Impact

Question 3	Is there evidence of improved capacity development in policy analysis and implementation within the partner countries deriving from the involvement of social partners?
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The findings related to Question 3 are divided into the following key topics, as defined by the ETF 2010-2013 MTP:

- The impact of the Torino Process
- The impact of ETF work with social partners in South Eastern Europe and Turkey
- The impact of ETF work with social partners in the Southern Eastern Mediterranean countries
- The impact of ETF work with social partners in the Eastern European countries
- The impact of ETF work with social partners in the Central Asian countries

### a. The impact of the Torino process

The problem is here to prove net-impact, due to the number of Donor funded projects in most of these countries. As the WB, ADB and USAID (just to mention a few donors) work with the slightly same values of active involvement of Social Partners. Since EU, and hence ETF, focuses on the regional dimension (contrary to most of the other donors), one could have expected to see a more direct impact of the Torino Process on regional level. But this may come with time.

Knowing how donor funded projects of WB, ADB, USAID et al (including bilateral projects) work, the signs of impact of TP on Social Partners involvement comes with the genuine practical exercise both in terms of planning (monitoring the needs) and in terms of organising e.g. QA and Certification of educational systems. The Torino Process not only requires active involvement, but it also provides a template for institutional and administrative processes where involvement is crucial for the outcome; it is not just a light introduction to good practices - it actually gives the countries a task which can only be fulfilled through some degree of joint exercise with social partners. So training and capacity building is good, but the real exercise is better. The more the Social Partners are involved in real planning, certification, qualification, etc., the more they are able to identify themselves with their roles. It is learning-by-doing.

The next question is: Can we spot an Impact? The central level external partners know that their involvement is needed and we shall presume that they perfectly know the extent of their direct involvement, even though they might not be heard, they might not be actively involved,

and they might not be fully “well-dressed” for the task (the last meaning that they might not yet have deployed professionals to deal with the often very specific topics involved).

And the logic answer is: It appears that in some countries in Central Asia (Tajikistan, for instance) everything involved in Participation is still in its infancy. In Tajikistan, the complete system still operates in accordance to the well-established Russian top-down approach which leaves very limited room for any private or local initiative. In Turkey (not visited during this assessment), the employers are very integral in the decision making process, while most of the trade unions still need to be “dressed-up” . In most Balkan countries the informal networks between the different actors exist and; the system works de jure on a macro-level, and the country report may illustrate a country in perfect harmony and fully capable to deal with the requirements, but nothing appears to have changed on micro-level (not even the National Office of Statistics are actively involved). The schools are still in the dark (except from some modular schools);

It would be fair to suggest that the Torino Process exercise itself creates an impact simply due to the very obvious, well-defined and concrete tasks it involves.

#### **b. The Impact of ETF work with social partners in South Eastern Europe**

In general, the capacities for evaluation, design, planning and implementation of HCD policies have been developed. The evidence that ETF has assisted in improving the capacity of social partners to participate in VET/HCD policy development in the partner countries comes out most clearly in IPA countries that are at an advanced stage of social partnership involvement.

The study visits arranged by ETF are positively highlighted in the feedback for giving insight and specific know-how into the topics that the policy makers need to move forward in the reform process, such as APL, NQF, drafting of laws and regulations, sector council roles and responsibilities. The tri-partite governance system is, in many IPA countries still in its infancy, although the legal framework may be in place for a fully fledged implementation. As in the example of the new EU member country Croatia, social partners still face the need for a clear role in the HCD process. ETF has been active with all IPA countries for a longer period of time, and interventions are implemented according to needs identified with all stakeholders. In Serbia, eg. cooperation school-industry has a legal framework but the quota lacks the foundation to build on (resources).

Country intelligence and analysis to strengthen the evidence-base for policy making and implementation has been developed in theory, but from feedback received it seems that the practical implementation of the tools is still to be accomplished. Matching the needs with the Labour Market is an intention, but there is often no roadmap given as to how to do this. Programs, action plans, strategies are developed, but implementation is not always working. The impact is a lack of continuity in the VET reform process. A more direct dialogue from ETF with the social partners, e.g. employers association would be more beneficial, according to feedback. It is a general problem in all parts of governance. The tripartite system doesn't always work instantly as the structures are being set up, due to different problems and ETF has a position and a long-standing cooperation with the countries to be able to support social partners directly in building their capacity for country intelligence and analysis.

Common sharing of experience has successfully been promoted by ETF, as in the example from Bosnia & Herzegovina, where cooperation was established between the government and the GIZ. GIZ introduced the dual system with the social partners, as well as standards for prior learning. ETF has established good cooperation and joint activity with GIZ in peer learning and donor coordination. BiH is not so far in qualifications development, have piloted many things by a working-group approach, incorporating social partners. A first committee has been established for qualifications framework development, with 20 members, and approved at state level. This is a QF platform for sharing of experience and for developing new concepts in HCD reform.

### **c. The impact of ETF work with social partners in the Southern Eastern Mediterranean (SEMED) countries**

The ENP countries may be divided into two groups—European states with explicitly stated EU membership possibility for the long term and Mediterranean states with no such statement in the Action Plans. This division is obvious in the two groups for multilateral activities that are meant to supplement the bilateral ENP Action Plans—the Eastern Partnership and the Union for the Mediterranean. The SEM countries are: Algeria, Egypt, Israel, Jordan, Lebanon, Libya, Morocco, Palestine, Syria and Tunisia

The SEMED projects for promoting social partnership in HCD and VET target each of these sub regions of the SEM and ETF implements country specific activities in all the SEM countries (when countries are not subject to internal conflicts).

Feedback from Eastern Partnership countries suggests an overall success and good impact of ETF interventions. Capacities to design, plan, Implement, monitor and evaluate HCD policies have been strengthened, in particular in the field of setting up structures and committees. In Belarus there is a report reflecting a joint team view and whole concept of how to establish sector councils and their functionality. The social partners persuaded Ministry of Labour not to go for just 1 partner in sector but to have a broader coverage. They were successful here. This means including the 15 employers organisations

Feedback from the South Mediterranean region suggests that ETF involvement led to activation of an HRD supreme body and a proposed National Qualifications Council with SP's as a part of this though subsequent revolution has caused setbacks (Egypt). The Regional Qualifications Project has led to increased motivation, SP learning and development of strategic engagement with EU VET stakeholders in support of labour mobility (Morocco). Due to ETF the main Trades Union now invited to sit at table for VET policy discussions with government, ETF is perceived as having been the 'motor' that led to Social Partners being integrated into policy dialogue on VET and without ETF the Social Partners would have remained on the outside of state led action and ETF has also been a network animator enabling sectoral employers organisations to engage with a broader range of relevant stakeholder on VET matters. ETF has not only been responsible for bringing Social Partners more closely into policy dialogue with state actors, it has also been key in establishing better links between Employers and Trades Unions through common work on ETF projects (Morocco).

Statement from Sectoral Employers Association, Morocco :

*My wish is that our relation with ETF develops further because it is an organisation that one has great pleasure and fruitfulness to do work with.*



*We want to develop apprenticeship schemes and we would like ETF help in developing this type of apprenticeship (like in Germany). This is a little 'planted' in Morocco but only to a very little extent and it does not work properly and we need help. This needs to be rethought in depth for the enterprises on one hand and those providing training on the others. That would be a good start to bring the employers and training institutions together first, then other tools need to be put in place.*

#### **d. The impact of ETF work with social partners in the Eastern European (EE) countries**

The Eastern European countries are: Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, Moldova, Ukraine

Feedback from Eastern Partnership countries suggests an overall success and good impact of ETF interventions. Capacities to design, plan, Implement, monitor and evaluate HCD policies have been strengthened, in particular in the field of setting up structures and committees. In Belarus there is a report reflecting a joint team view and whole concept of how to establish sector councils and their functionality. The social partners persuaded Ministry of Labour not to go for just 1 partner in sector but to have a broader coverage. They were successful here. This means including the 15 employers organisations

In Ukraine ETF efforts to engage Employers (and which has included specific training for SPs) , notably their Federation has resulted in their active participation in VET dialogue. ETF has complemented ILO in promoting SP. ETF gave support to creation of SCs, other areas were validation of training – informal learning. In Moldova - ETF contributed input to work on entrepreneurial learning and in the new government strategy, skills development is now included where it was not before. The ETF work on capacity building of sector council members has led to an overall organisation of 4 economic sectors and Moldova's model of setting up sector councils has been disseminated to Central Asian ETF partner countries.

There are certain areas mentioned in the feedback where the impact may be improved further. Social partners want ETF to do more if the same level of activity is maintained, more local experts, further implementation of pilot results. E.g. to 'pilot in the metal-transport sector committees is not a big problem, because these sectors have money and can pay for their own people, but in other sectors it is a real problem to finance sector committee meetings'. The national umbrella organisations try to find budget support for the financially weak sectors.

Another idea suggested is to focus more systematically on sharing information with social partners so as not to lose them after workshops. 'After the workshops everybody goes back to their offices and tend to forget about what they learned'. So ETF could use electronic tools to keep in touch, could disseminate more information on what ETF is doing. ETF needs also tangible outcomes defined from their work with SPs. The works on business education co-operation will be more tangible and will be disseminated to the policy level. This project was also the outcome of ETF work with SPs.

The social partners have, with the support of ETF through study visits, workshops on specific themes such as NQF, quality assurance etc. better knowledge of EU policies and how these can be applied, analysing the current situation of their own country and designing appropriate solutions.

### **e. The impact of ETF work with social partners in the Central Asian countries**

In countries further away from the European model of HRD reform, the impact tends to be weaker, as the difficulties of social partners in getting recognition and influence on government policy implementation increases. Another factor that limits the capacity improvement is the limitation of resources, that doesn't allow ETF to invite all social partners to their activities.

One concern was raised that the advanced and theoretical know-how gathered in ETF is not always directly applicable in low income countries, where the concept of social partnership is underdeveloped. This calls for specific efforts to meet the conditions of the particular country, instead of simply copy and transfer experiences from e.g. IPA countries to Central Asian partner countries.

Projects dedicated to social partners are needed. For this experts are needed, as country managers don't have the knowledge themselves in this particular area. The improvement of social partners' performance is an issue for development.

The IPA impact is good among the social partners. They have access to EU funding. In Moldova as well– they are interested. But in new Central Asian countries – ETF money is often lost in other donor impact. But often people have been educated by ETF. Through this they learned to increase their scope – so there is an indirect impact. ETF social partner selection criteria are based on evidence. ETF tends to invite the same people, but this can be problematic. Trade unions have a hard time just to get recognised and they are not ready to take part in ETF activities. They were not ready to engage in social dialogue. It would be useful to carry out a network analysis – on a case-to-case basis. It's known that employers, unions and chambers are internationally organised. They have their own networks, with regional offices, which we ask and work with.ETF does a lot that is supply driven. It's always linked with SP, but comes in the form of other activities. The big message is that it would be useful to involve stakeholders, especially business side. This is the continuous message. This demands that if government accepts this, they should be organised to do this.

In the Kyrgyz Republic, given the poor economic system and employers organisation is still in their initial phase. There are a number but they seem more to represent personal interests. The one long terms partner is the international chamber of commerce and they are Kyrgyzstan wide. ETF has tried to involve others but the individuals keep changing and so there is only one really that ETF work with. ETF has quite continuously involved the confederation of TUs and that again is just one person but here it is important to note that it represents the public sector only in practice and there are alternative TUs but ETF has not yet been able to bring them in. Efforts have been made to connect the Kyrgyz SPs with Eastern Europe on Skills council issues. The other does not yet seem to be operational and don't have links and is poorly connected. So in this sense one can say it is underdeveloped. There is a confederation of TUs but they are from public sector.

### **Conclusion regarding impact**

The impact of ETF work with social partners for the Torino process is of a more indirect nature, and has not been surveyed in full yet. Although the social partners are taken into the process, in most countries they play a minor role in the actual writing of the reports, which is often given to the responsible ministry or ministries. Participatory processes have been reported, however,

more capacity building seems to be the answer to a quite inferior role in many countries that undergo the Torino Process.

Impact in IPA countries is on a different level than in other regions. Here, the legal frameworks, the structures and capacity building have most often been installed. However, the problems connected with social partner involvement lies in the implementation of the reform processes. A tri-partite system may have been set up, but the roles and responsibilities of the parties are still unclear. ETF has successfully acted in a consulting role, through study visits, supporting implementation planning. Feedback has suggested that ETF could work more directly with the social partners, and not always through the national governments, in strengthening the capacities of trade unions, employers' associations and chambers.

Impact of ETF work with social partners in the EE and SEM countries in terms of capacity building has been reported as good. In some parts of the Mediterranean area ETF is seen as the driving force that led to the integration of social partners into the social dialogue with governments that have no tradition of social dialogue. Another benefit of the ETF intervention has been a closer dialogue between the social partners, as they have now been brought together through ETF workshops, seminars, study tours etc. and a platform for dialogue has been established by ETF. The cross-regional projects for social partners are particularly mentioned as good vehicles for increasing the understanding and exchange of ideas and initiatives between social partners in several countries, thereby laying a foundation for a common understanding of the problems and ways to find solutions to HCD in the region.

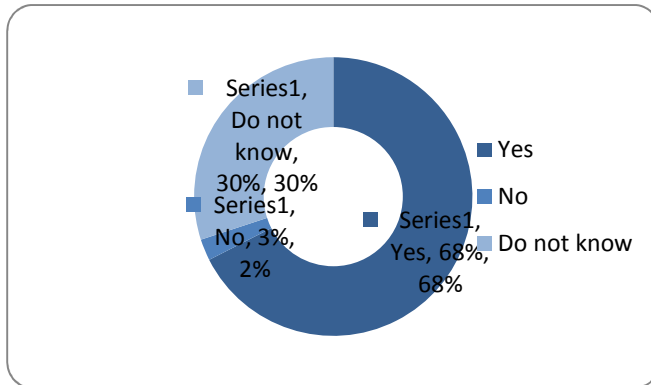
In the Central Asian countries problems exist in identifying the right social partners, in being acknowledged by the government as a social partner and in the limited resources of ETF to invite a range of different social partners to events, trainings, workshops and study visits. A critical voice made a plea for ETF to spend more time on researching potential social partners before bringing them into the communication circle, share information and make better follow up on workshops.

## 4.7 Sustainability

Question 8	How likely is the improved capacity development in policy analysis and implementation deriving from the involvement of social partners going to sustain in subsequent years? How likely is it that the ETF Social Partner interventions will have long-term benefits to countries?
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Findings from the survey with regard to sustainability: Chart 10 below show the replies to the questions concerning Question 8: Sustainability.

**Chart 10: Is there any evidence that the impact of ETF interventions on the involvement of social partners in VET policy making and analysis is sustainable? (n=40)**



The survey results show that 68 % of the responses from social partners in ETF countries confirms that there is evidence that ETF interventions has had an influence on their involvement in VET policy making and analysis and that this will continue in future. Only 3% responded that they see no sustainability on ETF interventions on their involvement in VET policy making and analysis. This shows that social partners mainly

regard ETF interventions as having an impact on their involvement in VET policy and analysis.

Survey respondents were asked to provide open comments on their views on the sustainability of their work with ETF. These comments provide interesting data on the issue. Social Partners cited the following as successful experiences or factors which support sustainability:

- Organization of working groups, coordination and practical assistance in the development and approval 1. methodology of professional standards; concept validation and certification of knowledge and skills acquired during life, the development of industry professional standards (2 for agriculture industry and food industry (in Moldova), in facilitating the creation of sectorial committees, training and involvement in the work to develop a national qualifications frame (do not know how precisely in Russian) and more ....)
- ETF interventions allows you to create new approaches based on experience and best practices, as a confirmation of the correctness of decisions
- It is providing the only platform today for any involvement of the social partners and with the continued participation of the policy makers in these interventions this offers hope.
- Help in developing NQF especially with creation of Euro-Med occupational profile and introducing new methodology

In countries, where tripartite governance is not yet institutionalised, such as several countries in the Central Asian region, ETF results are, according to the findings of interviews, difficult to implement in a sustainable model. Keeping everybody informed and creating an environment that facilitates consensus on the reform topics requires a lot of resources, awareness raising and involvement. The feedback suggests that ETF in such an environment should establish a more direct dialogue with each social partner, in addition to trying to bring them together with the government.

In countries where the tripartite governance model (usually) works, such as in the Western Balkans countries and Turkey, more resources are asked for to encourage the further development of the social partnership, e.g. by more support to sector committees and development of local boards and committees. Another suggestion to increase sustainability is to

more systematically share information with social partners so as not to lose them after training workshops. After the workshops 'everybody goes back to their respective offices and forgets about it'. So ETF could increasingly use electronic tools to keep in touch, disseminate more information on progress. Feedback also points to the need for more tangible outcomes defined from ETF work with SPs.

From interviews and the field visits, there were a number of comments made by ETF staff and by social partners interviews on how to enhance the sustainability of ETF's work with social partners. Their comments are as follows:

- Have a Board of SPs across the countries, which will meet and discuss with our managers what works well and what doesn't. Keep SPs more close to ETF activities. Always keep mainstreaming in mind of SP in all activities.
- Find a way how to make SP play a role in the reform process. There are deep cultural differences, and to keep the dialogue with stakeholders, NGO's and civil society. How do we maintain the dialogue- are there new means like e.g. Twittter?
- A project might give us an understanding of what to do. Social partners are all social groupings. Social partners will need to stay as a cross-cutting theme, not become a COP. Social partner groupings have a huge influence and are crucial in all discussions and work. Linking social inclusion with social partners there will be a lot of interaction with social groupings. The aim is to give social partners a meaningful influence in all that we do in VET.
- More broad involvement of SPs is needed, the VET capacity is high. Trade unions are not so much involved, but there are examples in the FRAME project, VET council, NQF activities. On the national level unions are involved, but it's more difficult on the local level.
- ETF has very small resources. Is this the main problem? What can it do in practice? If there is only a small resource we can expect only informational support and transfer of experience. ETF could arrange experience sharing among our region. There are 5 countries in our regions and starting positions should be equal. But some are more advanced and some less. Because ETF has a project with all countries it would be useful for us to have some regional activities to have participation with all 5 countries. And from practical experience of Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan we could learn much but there is less to learn from Macedonia which is not of so much relevance to us. But in Kazakhstan on jobs and outcomes, they are more advanced because they have already built the organisational structures. The Prime Minister through the government has co—ordinated the process. Given our history, without a centralised approach things will not happen. Things need to be made from the top. Who can become and initiator is not clear.
- ETF is too small to make a difference? But since ETF has huge information – not just Europe and high expertise here for us but its knowledge extends widely even in Africa: We need their experience, their organisational experience, how to arrange this, who should be gathered at one table and who should be given certain tasks. It works in Kazakhstan – there the Prime Minister is chair of the vocational council. Head of the public administration is responsible. And he collects together himself the entrepreneurs, chambers of commerce and so on and it is a comprehensive approach. They think vocational schools should be well equipped and have good curricula. But that is not enough and they follow up. We too need a cycle, a closed cycle from the very beginning to the end. There was a situation in our

modern history, where the system of VET produced loads of graduates but they go into agriculture because there is no link with business. They spend government funds and the graduates remain unemployed and even if they find jobs the employers are not happy with their qualifications. Maybe in some countries, democracy works, but here we need strict links, otherwise we fail.

- ETF should continue work with developing sectoral boards and workshops on how they could work more effectively. Maybe to train some trainers who could conduct the training for unemployed? Also to conduct training for graduates of VET schools telling them what they will face in the workplace. Maybe make an evaluation of the labour market in Kyrgyz (general market) and maybe nominate some sectors for pilot projects. For our sector, we need people who could evaluate the level of skills. We need trained people to evaluate the quality of VET schools graduates. ETF role here might be to arrange regional roundtables or conference and to invite government officials in order to show positive experience and the tool that supports the development of that experience.
- All social partners and implementing partners, make their action plans and they co-ordinate those plans and in the future would like to have the situation that if the project continues, they would like to make joint action plans with them. Because when they plan something with them if they worked jointly they would have better achievements. Social partners need to plan together. They have many partners like GIZ, ILO migration organisation and with all partners they make action plans for the next or coming years and they want ETF to involve them in their action plans and make them aware of their actions. The ETF country manager comes for the workshops and corresponds by email if there are any questions.

### Conclusion regarding sustainability

A majority of the respondents in the survey give positive feedback on the sustainability of ETF interventions. This is backed up by the majority of the case studies (all except Serbia where the dialogue between government and SPs is still in the making). Comments to the surveys show what particularly works well, i.e. the organisation of working groups, coordination and practical assistance in developing the parts of the national qualifications framework and quality assurance systems in VET, creating new approaches in VET governance, providing the SPs with a platform. These seem to be the key areas where ETF interventions have helped to set up sustainable solutions.

Several suggestions have been proposed by the interview respondents as to which measures may enhance the sustainability of ETF interventions. A particular focus point is the applicability of the tripartite VET governance model, which seems to have some geographical constraints.

## 4.8 Efficiency

Question 4	To what extent are the human and financial resources of ETF adequate for Social Partner development activities in the partner countries? To which extent have the outputs/effects been achieved with the lowest possible use of resources?
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In general, resources are allocated in line with strategic concerns that in turn are linked with EU Neighbourhood policy. A number of planning and negotiation sessions normally take place with

individual stakeholders and beneficiaries, or focus groups before the final recommendation is taken to the ETF management for budgeting planning. According to feedback from country managers the budget may increase or decrease according to the success in bringing the social partners to the same table. Budget allocations are shown below.

**Table 3: Budget per country by percentage of overall ETF operational budget**

Country	Population – millions	Budget 2012 €million	Percentage of ETF budget
Albania	3.2	0.544	2.7%
BiH	3.8	0.699	3.5%
Croatia	4.5	0.669	3.3%
Kosovo	1.8	0.852	4.2%
FYROM	2.0	0.682	3.4%
Montenegro	0.65	0.581	2.9%
Serbia	7.3	0.756	3.8%
Turkey	79.7	0.793	3.9%
Algeria	37.9	0.381	1.9%
Egypt	83.7	0.971	4.8%
Israel	7.6	0.455	2.2%
Jordan	6.5	0.733	3.6%
Lebanon	4.1	0.693	3.4%
Morocco	33.3	1.145	5.7%
Palestine	4.3	0.807	4%
Tunisia	10.7	1.145	5.7%
Armenia	3.0	0.659	3.3%
Azerbaijan	9.5	0.490	2.4%
Belarus	9.6	0.523	2.6%
Georgia	4.7	0.81	4%
Moldova	3.5	0.856	4.2%
Russia	143.5	0.451	2,2%
Ukraine	45.5	1.006	5%
Kazakhstan	17.5	0.722	4%
Kyrgyz Rep.	5.4	0.796	4%
Tajikistan	7.7	0.728	3.6%
Turkmenistan	5	0.358	1.8%
Uzbekistan	28.4	0.358	2.9%

So in the case of Belarus, it is a lower priority country and resources more limited. ETF actions, though small here, are very well targeted and evidence indicates efficiency is high. Azerbaijan is allocated less budget than Belarus and evaluation evidence indicates that sustainability of ETF work will be fragile without reinforced support to social partner involvement in building stable institutional structures for VET. However, without access to the decision making process, it is not possible to compare these allocations and gauge overall efficiency. In some cases budgets based on EU policy prioritisation can obstruct effectiveness as in Russia where the country manager is faced with actions for development of VET schools, all 7000 of them. In other cases policy priorities can result in ETF efforts that have little efficiency, notably Algeria where the conditions for ETF engagement are restrictive as the authorities are averse to EU intervention. ETF still provides one half time country manager working within EU programmed activities related to VET but faces continuous obstacles and difficulties in co-operation with the government actors. Interestingly, an Algerian employers association representative provided comments in the survey on ETF actions in the country and how to improve them. He underlined

the crucial importance of improving VET to meet the challenges of skills gaps, youth and female unemployment and the demand for support of ETF among social partners in contrast to their limited presence. Is this a case where ETF encouragement to Social Partners to initiate VET actions under existing tripartite institutional frameworks could lever influence on government openness to ETF support?

As resources are limited, alternative financing for activities outside the scope of ETF, is sought, e.g. by country managers attending joint donor coordination meetings with other European donors or international donor organisations. ETF is very alive to finding the best ways of maximising limited resources and seeks to capitalise on big EU funded projects by applying its expertise highly selectively in a ‘fine tuning’ approach, offering for example capacity building or training to enable Social Partners to engage in the larger funded programme. This enables cutting back on overall resource allocation in these cases and applying funds to other initiatives (eg. Entrepreneurial Learning).

### Conclusion regarding efficiency

Our evidence suggests that ETF is highly efficient overall in converting tightly restrained resources into substantial outputs and results. Clearly it could to much more with even modest increases in budget and without such increase; it is hard to see how it can meet the clear demand from Social Partners for more support in capacity building and in establishing frameworks and systems for VET reform. Our main conclusion here is that ETF’s highly effective actions in Partner Countries would be hard to maintain if forthcoming cuts to the EU Neighbourhood budget are applied to ETF. Undoubtedly this would also prejudice enhancements to work with Social Partners towards sustained, demand driven VET reforms. Our experiences in the case study countries make it clear that ETF, as a trusted agent of the EU, serves to enhance the confidence of VET actors in EU policy actions. It inadvertently serves as an important arm of EU diplomacy.

## 4.9 Methodological tools

Question 5	What methodology and tools could further enhance involvement of social partners in VET policy making?
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A key finding of the evaluation is that mainstreaming of social partners in VET activities would benefit from a more centrally conceptualised strategy and mechanism for their involvement. We propose two methods for this. Firstly, further development of the Policy Maturity definitions to incorporate social partners systematically and under a framework of criteria and indicators. These need to be nuanced to the diverse political, institutional and cultural conditions governing social partner engagement and capacities to engage in the different regions and individual partner countries. Secondly we advocate a finer assessment of requirements for active social partner participation in the Torino Process.

### a. Developing a strategic framework for Social Partnership under the Policy Maturity matrices

The stages and levels of Social Partner engagement should be defined as a specific policy maturity theme. Key parameters for the engagement of social partners concern for example: status of existing legal and institutional frameworks for tripartite dialogue, including level of



implementation of such dialogue; level of government support for social partner inclusion in VET policy dialogue, level of government commitment to VET policy reform, level of readiness of social partners – their degree of prioritisation of VET, their institutional capacities, their institutional condition and evolution (for example degree of independence from government, modes of engagement in social dialogue, representativeness). The state level readiness and governance issues are already elaborated in the Policy maturity matrices but have not yet been juxtaposed and extended in relation to Social Partnership. Neither does it appear to us that local versus national and urban versus rural VET conditions nor have requirements been assessed and included in parameters informing actions. The social partner maturity indices can be defined in levels according to these parameters (and others) as suggested above. They should also specify the types of activity and involvement appropriate to each level. Further, the matrices should include results indicators in coherence with the MTP objectives for each partner region. Country managers could be involved in working up these tools and subsequently they should be trained on their application. We appreciate that policy maturity work is still in progress in ETF, but what so far appears not to be included are mechanisms to track and follow up progress towards results. A results based framework with requirements for ETF staff to assess progress and define follow up actions in response, could be developed. However, in relation to monitoring and follow up, we would advocate a participative approach that it is not overly directed at PMED level. Systematised mainstreaming of social partners will need to keep country managers on board so that they are motivated to take ownership of the SP policy maturity framework in their own contexts. Hence, it is important that country based actions retain some flexibility and that country managers, the experts on the terrain, have a strong input into the development and application of the social partner matrices.

#### **b. Methods to support increased active participation of Social Partners in the Torino Process**

As noted in the body of this report, the nature of involvement of social partners in the Torino Process has been variable but generally less than optimal. This confirms the findings of the Torino Process Interim Evaluation and our subsequent discussions with the Torino Process evaluators. In the IPA region there has been greater proactive involvement and in other regions the tendency has been towards less active engagement and which takes the form of simple participation in events and meetings. We suggest the following:

1. Social partners understand the labour market better than their government counterparts and have information on skill needs, mismatches and key obstacles to effective, relevant VET provision. Where they can willingly contribute such information, this should be solicited. However, they should be proactively engaged to validate findings and justify measures proposed by other stakeholders including proposals, planning, prioritisation, target setting and identification of indicators. In order to contribute in this way, ETF will need to identify their existing capacities and provide training where necessary.
2. Consultation on the preparation of the Torino Process report inputs to offer validation of findings, proposals, actions etc.
3. Formal inclusion in the decisions to approve of the report, in particular agreement over the actions proposed.
4. Inclusion in monitoring and evaluation of progress under the Torino Process.

## 5 Recommendations

### Social Partner Definition

1. Formal ILO definition of Social partnership is often times in tension with the realities of social partner organisation and degree of democracy in partner countries. Consider widening the notion of participation to allow for a formalisation of a more inclusive approach to the involvement of employers organisations and Trade Unions in ETF's work. In addition consider launching an evidence based analysis and debate on the conditions of social partnership in partner countries and the implications for recasting definitions. ETF could lead this analysis in collaboration with ILO, Eurofound, European Commission and other relevant stakeholders.

### Mechanisms for Engagement

2. Mainstream social partners involvement in a systematic way through developing strategic frameworks for their engagement. Both the policy maturity matrices and the methods for the Torino process could be elaborated and made more precise to ensure that mechanisms for social partner engagement are defined and applied systemically.
3. Knowledge sharing in house and incorporation of TED expertise related to social partner work should be enhanced. One suggestion is a forum for country managers, formally convened on an annual basis to bring internal thematic experts and country managers together in regional groupings at the preparation stage of county implementation plans. The Knowledge Management team could work more specifically on applying workshop and networking tools for SP engagement and working directly with country managers on how best to optimise events towards engaging SPs in sustainable VET reform efforts.
4. ETF should examine ways to seek out social partners beyond those already demonstrating a willingness to work with ETF on VET reform, particularly Trade Unions. This implies a strong drive by ETF to provide targeted awareness raising and capacity building. In terms of capacity building, ETF's peer learning activities have been welcomed as particularly effective and ETF should continue to enhance its peer learning initiatives.
5. More can be done to encourage social partners to take the initiative themselves in defining VET agendas and bringing state actors to the table – and ETF should look to provide support in this respect. Consider developing a policy line that it can put on the table with government, as a negotiating lever for engaging Social Partners in low trust or high conflict contexts.
6. Events including social partners should in future be planned with clearer objectives, intended outcomes and follow up for those social partners. The relevance of events could be further increased by conducting needs analysis before events are planned.
7. An active role of SPs in the Torino Process requires an adequate preparation. In this regard especially in the Western Balkans and Turkey ETF has made significant progress in capacity building of national organizations, which calls now for a clearer focus on regional, sectorial and local SPs. Successful models of engaging regional and local SPs should be copied and mainstreamed, especially regarding trade unions. Before bringing more social partner

organisations on board it is advisable to put more emphasis on researching their needs and potentials.

### **Social Partner Organisation and Support**

8. The satisfaction among social partners already working with ETF is high. The demand for more ETF support even higher. Improve social partner organisation and support on the ground through for example, Social Partner Boards at country level, or through a locally contracted agency to act as ETF 'nodes' on the ground to support networking, information flows, liaison with stakeholders and organisation of activities. In addition or along with establishing a local representation ETF could involve local experts more widely in their reviews, thereby strengthening local research capacities.
9. Work with sectoral social partners has shown some outstanding successes – notably Sector Skills Councils actions and the sectoral qualifications projects. ETF is encouraged to continue and further strengthen its focus upon social partner roles and approaches at sectoral levels.

### **Complementarity**

10. In countries where government institutional capacity to manage and co-ordinate donor support is weak ETF needs to take special care to keep fully abreast of all donor interventions both planned and underway so as to ensure full complementarity and added value. We would advise ETF to further assess the level of state institutional capacity to oversee and co-ordinate donor programmes either as part of its country planning or as part of the Policy Maturity matrices, or through extension of the FRAME project.