

EVENT REPORT

TITLE:

Cross-country workshop

SUBJECT:

Consolidation of Evidence on Active Labour Market Policies and Transition to Work, with focus on skills dimension

Turin (Italy), 24-25 May 2023

Event web page:

[Use and Consolidation of Evidence on Active Labour Market Policies and Transition to Work, with focus on skills dimension | ETF \(europa.eu\)](#)

Participating countries:

Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo¹, Montenegro, North Macedonia, Serbia, Türkiye, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Georgia, Republic of Moldova, Ukraine, Egypt, Lebanon, Jordan, Palestine², Tunisia, Israel, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Turkmenistan, Tajikistan, Uzbekistan

¹ This designation is without prejudice to positions on status, and is in line with UNSCR 1244/1999 and the ICJ Opinion on the Kosovo declaration of independence.

² This designation shall not be construed as recognition of a State of Palestine and is without prejudice to the individual position of the Member States on this issue.

Setting the scene

The European Training Foundation (ETF) organised a peer learning workshop on 24 and 25 May in Turin, on consolidation of evidence on Active Labour Market Policies (ALMPs) and Transition to Work, focusing on skills dimension.

The event gathered representatives of relevant institutions from 23 ETF Partner Countries (including 10 participants from the Eastern Partnership countries, 16 representatives of South-Eastern Europe and Türkiye region, 11 participants from Central Asia and 10 from the South-East Mediterranean region), also specialists from the EU Member States (Denmark, Sweden), Eurofound, Eurostat, Regional Cooperation Council, the Union for the Mediterranean and Economix Research & Consulting.

The workshop was used as a platform to capture latest developments in ALMPs and the transition to work, with a particular focus on skills implications. Aims of the event were to enhance the sharing of innovative solutions for evidence creation and use, facilitate regional cooperation, discuss data collection for ALMPs and mark standards for evidence-based policymaking in ETF Partner Countries. By consolidating thematic knowledge and evidence, the event sought to drive performance and innovation in policymaking, aligned with the UN Sustainable Development Goals and the European Pillar of Social Rights.

Through a combination of presentations, group work and panel discussions, participants came out with a number of conclusions that can be used for further improvement of data collection and processing, thus having sufficient evidence for shaping the ALMPs in their countries.

The suggested format for discussions provided space for facilitating exchanges within specific regional dynamics (Eastern Partnership, South-East Mediterranean, Western Balkans, and Türkiye, Central Asia), while also drawing lessons from European practices. Participants from various countries, institutions, and contexts emphasized the importance of this exchange and mutual learning. They identified individual and shared priorities and challenges within their regions and beyond, discussed best practices, and developed a mutual understanding for potential future actions. Participants expressed a desire for further learning on improving evidence collection and a willingness to continue similar practices.

Introducing key concepts / topics; Objective and aims

Back in 2020, the ETF has initiated a consolidation of its work on skills dimensions of transition to work with focus on the roles of active labour market policies and public employment services. Multiple topics are being explored: school to work transition for young graduates (i.e. Youth Guarantee-like initiatives); consolidation of upskilling and reskilling components of post-pandemic recovery and addressing the challenges of multiple crises; build up the body of policy knowledge, evidence and indicators fit to capture improvement in employability and skills sets in a lifelong learning approach.

This event is part of regular exchanges with the Public Employment Services, ministries of labour and statistical offices of the Partner Countries, fostering exchanges of experience, methodological updates including knowledge sharing with the EU Member States; its objective is to stimulate common reflection and discussion on how active labour market policies depend on sufficient evidence collection.

During the opening, ETF Director Pilvi Torsti in her welcoming speech stressed the need for accurate and comprehensive datasets - critical element in policy making on skills development and employment policies. Followed by Lena Skiöld, on behalf of Swedish Presidency of the European Union, who concluded how priorities of upholding democratic values, green transition, security are dependent on skills supply. Therefore, our common vision should be better data collection and usage, investment on services in the times of overlapping crises and focus on the relevance of services and their flexibility. ETF's Manuela Prina, Head of Unit, underlined high volatility of labour markets requiring swifter generation of intelligence on skills demand and supply as well as evidence on implementation and impact of policies targeting skills matching, employment and inclusion.

ALMP evidence: overview, measurement, approaches and results

ETF's initiative to investigate ALMP statistics goes back to 2015, particularly as an idea of looking at the link between ALMP evidence and skills development. The focus was on developing a comprehensive framework for data analysis and utilization of ALMPs. The project was conducted across all regional clusters of ETF Partner countries - however, instead of comparing countries, the emphasis was on understanding each country's unique context and capacities.

The outcomes identified significant diversity among countries in terms of data availability, indicator definitions, and statistical practices related to Active Labour Market Policies. Some countries showcased advanced techniques in generating and disseminating evidence, therefore, the next analytical step is to examine the relationship between ALMP statistics and labour market characteristics, specifically focusing on skill matching aspects.

Areas requiring improvement were highlighted, including the frequency of statistical production, analysis, and reporting, as well as the shortage of staff allocated for these tasks. The reliance on external projects was identified as a factor leading to fragmented datasets. To address this, it was suggested that Ministries of Labour and Public Employment Services (PES) in EU neighbouring countries should strive to develop comprehensive monitoring frameworks and collaborate with donors to align various projects targeting jobseekers under the same reporting umbrella.

Specific country representatives reflected on different policies and measures introduced towards evidence collection for ALMPs.

In **Serbia**, a recent successful development is related to establishment of national registers (population-wide and education-related), which provide administrative data to statistical office and thus allows space for evidence-based decisions. It became a ground for further establishment of Labour Market Information System - a national platform with all current data, that is available for everyone, from policymakers to employers and job seekers. Such initiative seeks to close the gap in skills mismatch and push towards a greater interoperability of data, which is also a reflection of governmental strategy on digitalization.

Unique administrative setup of **Bosnia and Herzegovina** is reflected in the regional division of PES, which are also the main source of labour market data - their structure allows only reporting of such evidence. The main challenges are the aggregation of data, harmonization of legal definitions and monitoring of data across the country, which requires advanced technical support for capacity building.

For Western Balkans countries a present challenge is outreach and providing employment services to young people, vulnerable groups of population and those with disadvantaged background.

Georgia has shared a successful practice of establishing an annual skills survey and cooperation with private and public institutions to obtain full comprehensive datasets. Next step is a macroeconomic model used for labour market forecasting, that helps to adjust assumptions on skills demand and vacancies availability.

The most recent report from **Kazakhstan** on development in new realities has greatly mentioned increased digitalization: more than half of workplaces are at high risk of being fully automated in the nearest future, which would lead to the need of upskilling or obtaining completely new skillsets. Digitalization is also reflected in structure of a labour market, with significant portion of it now being freelance jobs. At the same time, there is a shortage of experts on digital technologies, which is crucial during such transformative period.

Representative of **Kyrgyzstan** shared the priority for the nearest future of bringing together several public institutions in order to efficiently use the statistical information obtained via national survey.

The representatives of the **Kingdom of Jordan and Palestine** shared their experience in developing statistical frameworks and work on expansion of datasets pertaining to workforce, skills development, and activation programmes.

Swedish public employment office shared the experience of producing four different labour market research: national and regional market outlooks, long-term forecast to be used by the government and occupational forecasts. The diversity of such forecasting approach provides added value for jobseekers through increased quality in the information about recruitment needs and demand for various occupations, now and in the future, as well as informs employers regarding the lack or surplus of job seekers with different skills. Participants had a chance to find more about traditional forecasting method (through PES-offices) as well as new forecasting models under developments (national digital surveys, automated way of working, role-assigned teams).

Another Nordic experience, this time the monitoring system of the **Danish Agency for Labour Market and recruitment** was presented: due to a unique identifier of each citizen, there is a possibility to use large administrative datasets for statistical or research purposes, combined with survey-based data. Data on ALMPs and labour market in general is publicly available and can be used by different stakeholders, including municipalities.

The Danish knowledge base is crucial in the evidence-based policy-making and further implementation process. It involves articulating policy proposals negotiated by political parties, agreeing on new initiatives/legislations, implementing them, and evaluating their effects. Evaluation is consistently included as part of political agreements for initiatives and reforms in Denmark.

Knowledge-sharing sessions also involved representatives of several institutions, sharing insights about their work and experience of evidence collection for ALMPs.

Eurofound shared the experience of using e-surveys and brought some recent examples, including the ongoing survey on Living and Working in the EU and neighbouring countries, run together with ETF. **Eurostat** emphasized how statistical cooperation is essential to facilitate regional collaboration, support the production and dissemination of reliable and comparable statistics, and enable evidence-based decision making at both EU and national levels. Participants were also updated on the most recent developments of EU Labour Force Survey, additional modules capturing skills and job features, youth transition, workforce mobility.

Following multiple mentions of skills mismatch, experts from ETF provided participants with valuable information on measurement, determinants and policy implications of such patterns. Moreover, space for discussion was given to talk about conventional view on skills mismatch and ideas for possible alternative policy approaches. Jointly with **Cedefop**, preliminary results from the European Skills and Jobs Survey were presented, focusing mainly on the area of digitalisation and digital transition, and its impact on skills demand and skills mismatch in selected ETF Partner Countries.

An overview of recent employment patterns in Western Balkans countries was delivered by a representative from **Regional Cooperation Council**, focusing on general lack of labour force as a result of brain drain and inability to reach out to certain population groups (e.g. NEETs), as well as challenges in continuous monitoring the data. Similarly, representative of Union for the Mediterranean elaborated on their work on providing quality employment options to young people in the region and monitoring of political commitments such as the 2022 Ministerial Declaration of the UfM Ministers in charge of employment and labour. ETF shared updates concerning regional activities (EU supported) to build up evidence and capacities in the Eastern Partnership and Central Asia countries.

Countries proposals / feedback

The peer learning workshop also allowed for an interactive teamwork by geographical regions of Central Asia, Eastern Partnership, South East Europe and Türkiye, South-East Mediterranean.

The main objective of regional cluster group work was to share their context and experience for data collection for labour market, gather and discuss policy priorities, good practices and challenges related to the design and implementation of active labour market measures that address data collection and skills, as well as to highlight areas of need of further assistance or advise.

The use of group work facilitated the gathering of key insights from participants, which could be incorporated into their respective national policies. It also aided in identifying additional requirements for peer-learning activities and the exchange of practices, enabling collaboration among smaller groups of countries to develop and implement similar evidence collection models. Group work provided an enhanced platform for mutual interaction, sharing knowledge, and presenting a comprehensive overview of the situation in specific countries. The outcomes of the group work are outlined below, featuring a compilation of major concerns highlighted by participants from various geographic regions.

Western Balkans - Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo, Montenegro, North Macedonia, Serbia - and Türkiye and Israel

Working group consisting of representatives of Western Balkans, Türkiye and Israel discussed about their priorities, that are relevant both nationally and at a countries-cluster levels.

Key priorities:

- Consolidation of ALMP data systems / statistics, open data potential, and correlation of data generation, monitoring, and evaluation practices;
- Harmonised statistical data on ALMPs for all PES in the Western Balkans and further trainings;
- Statistic profiling, improve matching measures and relevant ALMPs for specific groups e.g. NEET, women, migrants;
- Governance aspects / cooperation and partnership in complex institutional contexts (multiple service providers);
- Digitalisation (services, operations, surveys, statistics) and IT infrastructure development, digital access to employment services, guidance and other measures;
- Youth Guarantee (reforms, monitoring) and introduction of new activation measures or boosting current ones (e.g. ALMM for persons with disabilities);
- Impact assessment (new or adjusted methods).

Ideas for future collaboration:

1. Multilingual classification of European Skills, Competences, and Occupations (ESCO) and role in demand - supply analyses at PES level and matching (including terminology, definitions, reference concepts, e.g. occupations vs skills);
2. Potential of Artificial Intelligence in PES/ALMP related research or operations;
3. PES reforms, skills shortages and emerging demand.

Central Asia: Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Turkmenistan, Tajikistan, Uzbekistan

For Central Asia, representatives from 5 countries actively participated in a discussion, that smoothly shifted its focus in particular on the labour market monitoring and challenges it poses for evidence collection and further policymaking.

Key takeaways:

- Countries need regular and better evidence on occupations, skills demanded on the labour market. Many countries have a rather ad-hoc data collection, often supported by external actors/donors.
- Evidence is also missing on the transition of young people from education to work, which is especially crucial given the size of young population in the countries.
- There is a need to strengthen the knowledge and capacities in the usage of different methods for data collection and analysis. Also, given the specific contexts of the countries, more innovative methods for data collection may not be feasible (e.g. online data collection).
- There is a pressing issue of coordination and quality assurance of data collection across different institutions in the countries.

The main interest of the countries lies in the understanding of how to implement employers' survey, sectoral studies and how to analyse job vacancies.

Another aspiration for the future is the monitoring of graduates and the transition from school to work in general.

Those are also the areas where technical support will be provided through the DARYA project.

Eastern Partnership: Armenia, Azerbaijan, Georgia, Moldova, Ukraine

All representatives from 5 EaP countries took part in the discussion, sharing recent developments and priority directions from their areas of work, as well as challenges they come across while implementing specific policies or measures. The participants also shared their thoughts on priority themes for future international and regional peer-learning activities. The ETF underlined the readiness to support and provide advice on the issues of particular concern.

The discussion focused on some specific elements, including:

1. Consolidation of datasets and integration/interoperability of databases – statistical and administrative of PES;
2. Evidence creation versus evidence collection: new alternative methods, including web scraping and machine learning;
3. Combination of multiple data and evidence sources in order to analyze quick changes;
4. Adaptations to new statistical classifications according to Eurostat standards;
5. New approaches to PES work, including new automatic matching systems based on skills profiling.

Country representatives were also sharing some specific context-related developments, priorities and challenges.

Georgia:

Georgian representative from the Ministry of the Economy and Sustainable Development shared recent developments from the ground during the panel morning session. Other participants found interesting the approach to forecasting and exploration of new evidence sources, including through the ETF project implementing machine learning and automated data collection from online vacancy portals. The discussion focused on adapting tools to specific country context, as well as building new tools to properly measure skills dimension, particularly skills mismatch.

From the perspective of State Statistical office, adjustments of data to the latest census were mentioned as well as recalculation of the labour statistics. Further adaptation for reporting on youth statistics will be needed. In addition, smaller countries need to focus strongly on data quality and reliability due to smaller sample sizes, e.g. while exploring lifelong learning dimension.

Moldova:

Moldovan representatives discussed the need for some adaptations in data collection and reporting on youth in view of new obligations related to its EU candidacy. In addition, the colleagues shared some current work related to exploring and analysing the available data and evidence from different sources, as well as assessing impact of policies and interventions.

Armenia:

Armenian statistical expert referred to the new census conducted in 2020 and the need for recalculation of labour market and other social indicators. Armenian colleagues found very interesting the Georgian example and will follow with further peer-exchanges as Georgia has already completed this exercise. Sample size for reliability of indicators and reporting timelines are of particular concern.

The representative of the Unified Social Services shared some new developments aiming at designing measures targeting young people. Some of those developments are linked to the EU4Youth programme and discussions around the Youth Guarantee-type interventions.

Azerbaijan:

The colleague from Azerbaijan Public Employment Agency referred to new approaches the agency was taking, including through focusing on data generation and not only on data collection. The main shift relates also to connecting as much as

possible employment initiatives with the economic development of the country. Furthermore, a new system of client registration and profiling through skills approach was discussed. This system allows for almost automatic matching between available jobs and people's skills. The APEA clients receive a continuous follow up from employment advisers so to improve their employment integration/re-integration.

Azerbaijan is also very active in adapting to the international and particularly EU statistical standards integrated in 2013. For this, a specific review was conducted by Eurostat and further capacity building delivered through EaP STEP project. Additionally, Azerbaijan Statistical office is currently adapting a new classification for employment statistics.

Ukraine:

The representative of Ukrainian PES (Head of Donetsk regional office) shared with other participants a number of new measures, in view of resilience and adaptability to challenging circumstances. Generally, there has been an enormous shift to distance working and learning, thus the government is currently working on new legislative frameworks and new support measures. There is a huge emphasis on reactivating economic activity in the country, through fostering MSME developments, including newly formed start-up companies. There is a special voucher scheme in view of upskilling and reskilling to this end, e.g. on preparation and planning of business activity, which gives entitlements of approx. 600-700 EUR for training in some specific fields. In addition, a special PES support is given to provide skills to 100 priority occupations. A new specific programme to reactive economic activity in re-gained territories in on the way. It envisages support to companies and workers moving back, including by coving the salaries. A concern related to providing additional support to unemployed and inactive, including substantial psychological support was also shared during the discussions. The colleague also noticed that the registered unemployment has been decreasing pointing to either possible increase of informal economic activity of citizens or economic support to families provided by international donors. The latter should be integrated in further reflection about the EU support to the country as well.

The representative of the statistical office referred to the continues work under difficult circumstances. The news on the preparations to run the labour force survey was welcome with a huge attention.

The discussion concluded with the following elements for further follow-up, including through the ETF peer-learning seminars:

- Exploring new tools for data collection/creation and adaptation to country context,
- Using AI tools for data gathering and analysis,
- Connecting employment/skills with economic development - macroeconomic analysis, including forecasting,
- Exploring innovative support measures to specific PES target groups.

South-East Mediterranean: Lebanon, Tunisia, Jordan, Palestine

Points made throughout the discussion were mainly related to the fragility of evidence-collection processes, addressing main obstacles and links that are necessary for productive collaboration. All representatives agreed on the common patterns, typical for their countries and the region.

Eventually, discussed concerns were divided into three major groups:

Governance:

- Tendency to work in silos, with lack of cooperation between the various institutions dealing with the data collection and use;
- Vulnerability of financing, which is mostly coming from external actors and donors. This makes the data collection and related capacity building difficult to predict and plan on a regular basis;
- Huge concerns about the wage levels and funding in the public sector affecting the capacity to attract specialised workforce and evidence building activities.

Capacity:

- Knowledge and capacities in the usage of different methods for data collection and analysis;
- Limited capacity to use evidence for planning purposes;
- Concern about AI potential and tools. Ministries and PES are not equipped with the knowledge and the skills to deal with AI.

Quality:

- Vulnerability of data;
- Consolidation of datasets and integration/interoperability of databases.

Common interests for further work:

1. Models and methodologies of skills mismatch and job matching;
2. Learning from the Tunisian/ANETI model through study visits;
3. Capacity building for public sector employees on how to use data.

Key takeaways

One of the **key priorities** for all countries identified through group work is diversification of methods used for data collection and consolidation of data bases. Strong focus in South-East Mediterranean countries is on strengthening the collaboration between various stakeholders, and in Eastern European and South-East Europe and Türkiye on inclusion of vulnerable groups through ALMPs. In Central Asia, priorities range from generation of regular and better evidence on occupations and skills to improved capacities for the usage of more innovative methods for data collection and analysis.

Key challenge identified throughout the regions is the coordination of data collection via various institutions across each country. Adaptation to international and European standards (definitions, classifications, practices) emerged as priority for many participating countries. Several evidence areas should be improved, particularly measurement of labour market transitions and skills implications, including youth transition from school to work.

A list of **interests for further work** for the next period was identified, ranging from an Artificial Intelligence usage in data collection to best methods to engage institutions, social partners and other organisations for using the data. The prioritised list shows that PCs are aware of the challenges and priorities, and have great motivation to embrace novelty in evidence generation, analysis, dissemination and use for policy and programme design.