

CONSOLIDATED ANNUAL ACTIVITY REPORT 2023

EUROPEAN TRAINING FOUNDATION

In pursuance of FR 2018/1046, FFR No 2019/715¹

¹ Commission Delegated Regulation (EU) 2019/715 on the framework financial regulation for the bodies set up under the TFEU and Euratom Treaty and referred to in Article 70 of Regulation (EU, Euratom) 2018/1046 of the European Parliament and of the Council (OJ L 122, 10.5.2019, p. 1).

"I am pleased to have had the opportunity to visit the European Training Foundation and engage in fruitful discussions with its staff that showcased the capacity of the agency as an international knowledge hub. We should use more its outstanding expertise..."

Nicolas Schmit, European Commissioner for Jobs and Social Rights, June 2023,
Turin

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THE ETF IN BRIEF

The European Training Foundation (ETF) was established by Council Regulation No. 1360 in 1990, [recast as No. 1339](#) in 2008. The ETF is the EU agency that supports countries outside the EU to develop their human capital, in the context of EU external relations policies. It cooperates at country and regional level in the EU Neighbourhood and Enlargement regions, and in Central Asia, and contributes to EU external policies and African Continental programmes. The ETF provides policy advice and support to 28 partner countries² and EU Delegations (EUDs) on the reform of education, training and labour market policies and systems. This contributes to social wellbeing, stability and prosperity in the countries surrounding the European Union.

The ETF produces regular monitoring reports on the status and priorities of skills policies and system performance in the countries where it is active. It also gathers thematic and country intelligence to ensure sound, evidence-based and participatory input for policy development, project and programme design, and policy evaluation. The ETF has expertise in a range of themes including the modernisation of qualifications and their comparison and referencing with the European Qualifications Framework; and the anticipation and analysis of skills gaps and skills needs through quantitative and qualitative methods. It also works on improving the relevance of skills with an emphasis on work-based learning, the engagement of enterprises in developing skills, labour mobility, key competences, policies for inclusion, quality and excellence, and professional development of teachers and trainers.

The ETF has established its reputation over almost three decades of work as a centre of expertise in these policy areas, working closely with the European Commission (EC) and the European External Action Service (EEAS), as well as the EUDs, on policy dialogue and programme support. The ETF also works closely with other EU agencies to support EU priorities, such as the Osnabrück Declaration. Central to the ETF's work is lifelong learning, which contributes to developing skills that promote the professional fulfilment of people, including their long- and short-term employability, their capacity to innovate, and to actively participate in society. Lifelong learning is identified by the UN Sustainable Development Goals and the European Consensus on Development as essential to promote sustainable growth. It is also a condition for building inclusive and stable societies, as well as peace and regularisation of migration in the EU and its wider neighbourhood.

The Governing Board of the ETF is chaired by the Director General of DG Employment (DG EMPL), and includes one representative of each Member State, three representatives of the Commission, three non-voting experts appointed by the European Parliament (EP), and three observers from the ETF partner countries.

² Albania, Algeria, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Egypt, Georgia, Israel, Jordan, Kazakhstan, Kosovo (this designation is without prejudice to positions on status, and is in line with UNSCR 1244 and the ICJ opinion of the Kosovo declaration of independence), Kyrgyzstan, Lebanon, Libya, Moldova, Montenegro, Morocco, North Macedonia, Palestine (this designation shall not be construed as recognition of a State of Palestine and is without prejudice to the individual position of the EU Member States on this issue), Serbia, Syria, Tajikistan, Tunisia, Türkiye, Turkmenistan, Ukraine and Uzbekistan. ETF activities are in line with the EU positioning in these countries. ETF support to Belarus takes place in the context of Secretariat General (SG) note of 01/03/2022, Ares (2022)1502984. Also, in the context of the aforementioned note and EU Council Decision 2022/428 amending regulation 833/2014, and subsequent acts, the ETF has ceased to support Russia, which, until further notice, is no longer considered a partner country.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This Annual Activity Report provides evidence of the successful implementation of the ETF's 2023 Annual Work Programme³, which was the third year of implementation of the ETF 2027 strategy. The ETF proved, once again, to be a mature and resilient organisation, with high preparedness and response capacity to challenges. This is due to its country and thematic intelligence, partnerships and networks, anticipatory and adaptive culture, and ability to navigate the changing geopolitical landscape.

In 2023, the ETF provided value as an asset for the EU. It has been mobilised to support EU investments in human capital, policy dialogue, financial programmes and knowledge sharing. Its analytical work leveraged policy dialogue and steered evidence-based strategies. It has accompanied partner countries in their process towards EU 'candidate country' status. Its activities delivered on the EC priorities as well as the EU objectives of Global Europe and the international dimension of the new EU Skills Agenda.

The ETF deepened its contribution and support to EC services to realise the proposal made by President von der Leyen to start the European Year of Skills in 2023. This has proved that, regardless of the challenging context, the ETF sets out to influence labour markets and the workplace, and boosts new skills sets so that everyone can make the best use of opportunities while mitigating emerging risks.

In the framework of the newly adopted EC instruments and in the spirit of the Team Europe approach, the ETF has reinforced its collaboration with EU Member States. In doing so, it supported human capital development in partner countries and engaged with international financial institutions on 'policy first' investment in human capital development (HCD).

In addition, the ETF supported countries to further reform their education, training and labour market systems to be responsive to geopolitical and socio-economic needs, be more resilient to shocks, and to move towards comprehensive, open and flexible lifelong learning systems. This promotes inclusive and evidence-based skills development, as well as lifelong learning opportunities that integrate education with employment, growth and transition policies.

These achievements took place while managing the impact of inflation without major disruption to delivery. It has also fully implemented hybrid working modalities. Furthermore, it has been able to build further flexibility into its workplan and absorb shocks such as the Russian aggression towards Ukraine, thus ensuring its relevance in responding to and supporting human capital development systems during or after conflict.

Through its activities, the ETF further ensured knowledge uptake globally. Its networks continued to grow and so did its work in partnerships. The sixth round of the Torino Process was successfully completed in all participating countries. The extra-subsidy projects demonstrated high engagement of countries, increased trust and visibility for the ETF's work, and delivered further reach and impact for EU investments. As a learning organisation, the ETF created further opportunities for its staff to reach and develop their full potential. Strategically, the ETF continues to plan ambitiously for the long-term future and impact.

³ This Consolidated Annual Activity Report has been prepared in accordance with art.13 of the ETF regulation and art.48 of the ETF FR and in the format defined by the EU Agencies Network in cooperation with the Commission.

The ETF in Ukraine

The long-standing cooperation between the ETF and Ukraine continued to support the modernisation and connectivity of education and labour market systems for economic growth and development. Since the onset of the Russian aggression, the ETF supported the reskilling and upskilling of temporarily displaced adults in Ukraine, including training providers in the EU to further develop training and assessment methodologies for micro-credentials, thus adapting professional, short learning experiences from the EU to provide high-quality vocational e-learning opportunities. The ETF also facilitated the integration of Ukrainians who left the country into the labour markets of EU countries, including by supporting learning resources aligned with advanced European trends and the recognition of qualifications and skills of Ukrainians to access learning opportunities and jobs. Additionally, the ETF assisted in the comparison between the Ukrainian National Qualifications Framework (NQF) and the European Qualifications Framework (EQF). This led to the development and implementation of a Joint Action Plan to align the NQF with the EQF, in active collaboration with the European Commission. Moreover, the ETF developed a comprehensive plan to support Ukraine's overall reconstruction efforts, maintaining close coordination with the Ukrainian authorities and the European Commission. The plan recognises the crucial role of a skilled workforce in the country's reconstruction and will further assist Ukraine in its EU enlargement endeavours. A specialised Task Force serving the European Commission and the Ukrainian authorities is in place to put the defined plan in motion.

Highlights of 2023

In 2023, evaluations carried out by external parties on the ETF's work outlined a number of ways in which it adds value to its beneficiaries. The mid-term review of the ETF 2027 strategy confirms positive progress towards the delivery of its value proposition to different stakeholders. In particular, the ETF is praised by its broader approach to HCD, as well as in relation to its anticipation and exploration of new emerging trends and topics. Partnerships and synergies have proven effective, and the ETF has demonstrated absorption capacity by successfully delivering in both its subsidy and extra-subsidy projects.

In addition, the ETF is well positioned in a shifting landscape of HCD actors, including in relation to addressing trends and weak signals towards 2040 and beyond. In a nutshell, the ETF impact-oriented theory of change and associated 2027 roadmap highlight that its value proposition and delivery is in line with both partner countries needs and EC priorities.

These findings reinforce the ETF's analytical capacity and ability to use its expertise to provide contextualised policy advice. The knowledge and evidence generated by the ETF, together with its anticipatory intelligence, are adjusted to the different needs of countries and EC services, thus adding diversity and value in its contribution to the international dimension of human capital development.

The ETF has successfully expanded its reach through implementation of extra-subsidy projects. The Service Level Agreement with DG EMPL on Centres of Vocational Excellence (CoVEs) unfolded with a needs assessment of partner countries completed and with ETF further ensuring its global visibility and positioning. Likewise, the Dialogue and Action for Resourceful Youth in Central Asia (DARYA) Contribution Agreement with DG INTPA carried out a wide consultation involving 34,000 young people, and engaged Central Asian partners into existing ETF networks, thus further systematising the use of its methods and tools.

Work also progressed with the Contribution Agreement on the African Continental Qualifications Framework (ACQFII), with an AU-wide network running and supporting country progress based on defined and agreed recommendations. A Contribution Agreement with the EU Delegation in Rwanda was also implemented to support the preparation of an action in the TVET sector in the country.

The ETF was entrusted with new agreements for implementation of extra-subsidy projects. This includes a contribution agreement with DG NEAR on supporting education reforms and skills in the Eastern Partnership region. Also, an agreement with the EU Delegation in Egypt on the implementation of an action to support the Ministry of Education and Technical Education of the Arab Republic of Egypt in assessing and strengthening its strategic vision for future developments to start in 2024.

2023 saw the beginning of the European Year of Skills. As skills is at the heart of everything the ETF does, a great deal of attention was given to strengthening both support to EC services and to communicate ETF intelligence. As such, a number of media campaigns, events, press releases, joint initiatives with EU and international partners, staff advocacy, and direct support to EC services helped ensure that the European Year of Skills is an ongoing success. These activities, together with policy advice, increased the ETF's visibility as a key player in skills development in the EU neighbouring countries.

Policy advice was delivered in the form of ETF contributions to the New Skills Agenda, mapping skills for the green transition in all partner countries, continued support to the Youth Guarantee, as well as work on talent mobility and qualifications. Relevant examples include the adoption of the Youth Guarantee implementation plan by Serbia, and the Career Counselling in Ukraine following an ETF-led study and recommendations. Also, the peer learning activities under the community of innovative educators with Scaffold, Ready and micro-credentials, triggered relevant policy discussions and implications in partner countries.

The intelligence generated on skilling up the Western Balkans agri-food sector enabled the ETF to incorporate HCD in the revised Smart Specialisation mapping methodology. Likewise, the intelligence generated via the Osnabrück monitoring, the application of the RED methodology, and the Torino Process, including the country fiches, demonstrated the value of evidence and data from ETF's monitoring and assessment. These were all used as a basis for expanding the ETF's policy advice and, in doing so, further contribute to the EU Year of Skills. The ETF networks, which have matured and expanded, were key to this process.

The ETF has expanded its strategic partnerships for smart delivery and added-value. Detailed action plans and exchange visits with Enabel and GIZ further reinforced the scaling up of ETF cooperation with EU member states as part of a Team Europe approach. In the same vein, formal partnerships were established with ADB and EBRD, and collaboration unfolded with the EIB to further enhance cooperation with IFIs. The ETF hosted the Interagency Working Group (AIG) on TVET in Turin and was nominated its chair on skills mismatch for the period 2024-2025.

Technical assistance and support for education system monitoring and assessment were delivered to a number of EUDs. Collaboration with EU agencies, both directly and via the EUAN network, continued and expanded, with the ETF leading two inter-institutional working groups on sustainable meetings under the greening network, and sustainable procurement

under the procurement network. Overall, these examples highlight that the ETF's work has been widely recognised, including in its collaboration with DGs in the Migration Package, with DG JRC on smart specialisation, with UNICEF on digital skills, with UNESCO on joint gender guidelines, and with ILO on the re-emergency package in UA.

The ETF has made significant progress in digitalisation and cybersecurity, thus anticipating the upcoming new EC regulation. The new corporate planning and monitoring system is fully functioning and enabled the ETF to increase its efficiency and flexibility. Innovations around data and AI have been discussed and tested. The agency has also implemented the EC tools ARES, EU sign, PPMT and SYSPER, and prepared to adopt MIPS in 2024.

The results of the 2023 assessment of the effectiveness of internal controls clearly show that the ETF has made significant progress with all but one principle rated as effective or highly effective. The ETF progressed well towards greater greening and sustainability reporting on its three pillars for the first time. It reconfirmed its EMAS registration and ISO 14001 certification, pioneered a handbook on social sustainability within the EU agencies, and implemented green procurement widely. It also adopted the charter and toolkit on diversity and inclusion, and implemented a broad awareness raising with staff and managers.

Its continual attention to developing strategies to attracting talent from a wider and diverse community, whilst retaining talents inhouse, also enabled the ETF to anticipate and prepare for the HR replacement wave that starts in early 2024. It has put in place measures to optimise gender and geographical balance, as well as to anticipate skills' needs to ensure institutional fitness and attractiveness.

This happened in unison with the deployment of a new career framework and efforts to ensure staff security on missions, as well as the adoption of new rules on working time and hybrid working in line with EC services. Despite the continued budget constraints caused by inflation, the ETF was able to effectively manage its expenses, introduce cost-saving measures and reprioritise without major disruptions to its work programme.

The agency's mid-term review of its strategy 2027 and its staff satisfaction survey results in 2023, combined with a foresight process to position the ETF as a key global HCD player by 2040 and beyond, triggered strategic reflections both internally and with key partners. New communication channels and internal working groups, as well as strategic conversations with top global influencers are in motion to explore potential developments that may shape the next generation. This will support an internal recalibration process that will start early in 2024.

This anticipatory culture will enable the ETF to build evidence on ways in which HCD can influence potential developments, thus addressing upcoming challenges and seizing opportunities as they materialise. At the same time, this will further build the organisation's preparedness and adaptive capacities, thus strengthening its resilience and ability to embrace uncertainties while the future unfolds.

These developments and accomplishments are reflected in the agency's Key Performance Indicators (KPIs), which demonstrate its continued relevance and ability to respond to the changing needs of the partner countries, as well as the requests coming from the European Commission and the EU Delegations (EUDs).

Implementation of ETF's annual work programme – main achievements of the year

The ETF successfully achieved 97.69% of its planned actions across its partner countries as part of its work programme. This is an impressive result, surpassing the organisation's target by more than seven points. Additionally, 83.93% of these actions were completed in a timely manner, exceeding the target by almost four points. Moreover, the ETF is proud to have implemented 100% of audit recommendations and findings under its direct control.

Key achievements during the year are highlighted below. These give an insight into the ways in which the ETF assists the Commission services and the partner countries. They are organised according to the ETF intervention logic within its 2027 strategy. It is based on three strategic objectives with a focus on skills and education and training system development in a lifelong learning perspective.

The three objectives are: skills relevance and anticipation, skills development and validation, and performance and quality of education and training policies. These are delivered under thematic areas and three core services: knowledge hub, monitoring and assessment, and policy advice. The three core services are integrated across the ETF's projects to increase the impact of its operations and generate value for stakeholders. The knowledge hub and the monitoring and assessment services shape the ETF's diagnostic and anticipation capabilities that drive innovation and serve as a sound basis for providing policy advice to both partner countries and EC services.

Finally, to align ETF operations to the objectives of the Commission and to further deliver on the SDGs, in 2023 the ETF reinforced its transversal dimensions across its activity areas: greening, digitalisation, gender and inclusion, and migration. More details on the ETF's operational achievements can be found in Section 1 and in Annex 1.

Skills relevance and anticipation

Under this strategic objective, the ETF supports partner countries to anticipate and monitor changing skills demands (including skills gaps and skills mismatch) at national, sectoral and territorial level through the generation of new evidence. Methodological support and policy advice is given for the development of modern labour market information systems, as well as inclusive and effective active labour market policies. This takes place in close collaboration with a wide spectrum of stakeholders, including social partners and employers.

The ETF also provides policy advice for the upgrading of qualifications systems and the development of qualifications relevant to new labour market and workplace realities. Particular attention is given to the comparison of national and regional qualifications frameworks to the European Qualifications Framework (EQF), and improved focus on validation, micro-credentials and the modularisation of curricula. Likewise, the ETF supports EU labour mobility and migration policies with a specific focus on the role of skills in tackling the root causes of migration, as well as in supporting talent partnerships and labour mobility.

The agency's relevance is further highlighted through the multiple references to ETF work in the Talent Mobility Package released by the Commission in late 2023, including a recognition to the Ukrainian Resource Hub, which has had more than 27,000 visitors since its launch. Other highlights in the year include the employment of ETF's future of work methodology and identification of future skills needs in different economic sectors in partner countries. This

was done using big data and led to key outlets, including a cross-country paper on future skills and a joint publication on future skills in the craft sector.

In 2023, the ETF mapped the skills for green economies in all its partner countries, providing a state of the art analysis of the status quo of inclusion of green skills in curricula and national strategies. The agency's work on green skills was presented and debated at the COP28 in Dubai, where the ETF collaborated with DG EMPL to organise several events. In addition, the EU Skills and Jobs survey was implemented in partnership with Cedefop in selected partner countries (Western Balkans and Israel), which contributed further to ETF's work in measuring skills mismatch in partner countries and opened a new area of work on skills anticipation by looking at skills needs of workers.

The Skills Lab Network grew almost twofold in only two years from its establishment, reaching 300 members and successfully launching a call for innovative proposals. Furthermore, 2023 was the third year of the ETF's Green Skills competition with 575 applications received from over 70 countries. From the public vote, 5,826 votes were received, and one winner from Lebanon for a 'zero waste' initiative was selected. The awards were handed over in Brussels by Commissioner Nicolas Schmit (DG EMPL) and Oliver Ropke, President of the European Economic and Social Committee.

The ETF continued follow up and policy guidance on Youth Guarantee (YG) in Western Balkans (WB) and policy dialogue on youth and NEETs in the Union for the Mediterranean (UfM) and Eastern Partnership (EaP) countries. YG Implementation Plans were implemented in all WB countries (except Bosnia and Herzegovina) incorporating aspects of non-formal and informal learning, and will provide orientation for IPA programming for the next years.

The ETF has also contributed to the Global Inventory of National and Regional Qualifications Frameworks, to the VNFIL inventory, to guide the design, issue and recognition of micro-credentials, to the international mapping of national qualifications agencies and mapping of qualifications recognition centres, to the open architecture and guidelines for establishing national qualifications databases, and to prototype a network of qualifications databases.

The ETF also contributed to the EC strategy in Africa through its analysis of gender, HCD, TVET and employment in agriculture in Rwanda. This was coupled with a training course on skills anticipation and matching developed and implemented in Rwanda and Laos for EUDs. In parallel, the ACQFII was born in 2023 and an AU-wide network – African Qualifications Network – was launched supporting country progress based on defined and agreed recommendations. In its first year the ACQFII already served as a global reference with countries using its guidelines to develop their NQFs. In addition, the peer learning between African countries enabled via the ACQFII have become key for motivation, ownership, capacity development, and encouragement for continental participation.

The ETF supported countries in Central Asia to explore mutual interest for cooperation on qualifications and in learning from the experience of EQF and ACQF. In doing so, peer learning activities under the DARYA project enabled countries to strengthen the regional understanding of modern qualifications and of qualifications systems by sharing latest developments, building a glossary of 'National Qualification Systems – NQS' terms, as well as by undertaking a mapping and comparison of NQFs. Ultimately, this enabled the creation of an informal community of stakeholders with interest and motivation to learn from each other and to improve capacities in the field of qualifications systems.

Skills development and validation

Under this objective, the ETF supports partner countries to promote innovation in teaching and learning for young and adult learners in formal, informal and non-formal learning environments. The ETF also promotes excellence in vocational education and training across partner countries and fosters networking opportunities for centres of excellence between partner countries and the EU. Moreover, the ETF provides support to enhance work-based learning and career guidance, as well as actions to support reskilling and upskilling strategies by cooperating closely with private sector representatives and firms in partner countries.

A key highlight of the year lies in the ETF's contribution to the ERASMUS+ project Habitable – Alliance of Centres of Excellence in Vocational Training for Sustainable Habitat – that aims to respond to the skills shortage and mismatches caused by the digital and green transition in the habitat sector. The ETF also advised the EC to open Erasmus+ career guidance or Euro-guidance scheme to more Enlargement countries. This will enable more partner countries to access Erasmus+ and the ETF to further influence future calls. Two ENE partner countries are represented in the project Habitable: Moldova and Georgia. The ENE network has expanded in 2023 and currently counts 291 registered members from 47 countries.

The Career Counselling in UA activity followed an ETF-led study and advice. In the area of internationalisation of Centres of Vocational Excellence (CoVEs) the ETF carried out an analysis of its role for the twin transition and of its contribution to research and innovation. The self-assessment tool supporting the development of CoVEs was developed in consultation with international representative bodies, and proposals for the implementation of a Quality Award to provide recognition to VET excellence have been put forward.

In 2023, new tools were launched and successfully disseminated. The launch of Scaffold was extremely successful including in high level meetings, conferences and targeted distribution. The Scaffold card deck was used as a practical tool for educators to support key competence development, which is to be rolled out in several schools. The application and testing of Ready in Israel resulted in the development of new pedagogical approaches, and in Ukraine contributed to the development of the new draft teachers' standard. In addition, peer learning included standards for curricula and teachers, including piloting Selfie. The ETF also contributed to the EU Education Summit with recommendations for the EU Education Area mid-term review, and directly supported both DG EAC and DG GROW.

The ETF analysis of the agri-food sector across the Western Balkans was transformed by research centres of Serbia and of Bosnia and Herzegovina into a joint project concept submitted for funding. At the same time, Albania requested support for policy advice in three priority domains for smart specialisation, including renewable energy and natural resources, sustainable and diversified tourism, and health and sustainable food chain. The request was incorporated into the Growth Plan for Albania. Finally, ETF inputs on human capital development were incorporated in the revised EC smart specialisation methodology.

Performance and quality of education and training policies

Under this objective, the ETF supports countries to monitor and improve the performance of their education and training systems and lifelong learning policies. This is done by using monitoring and assessment findings to provide tailored policy advice to EU interventions and investments, as well as to systemic reforms in the partner countries to increase performance.

One of the highlights of the year was the publication of the Cross-Country Monitoring Report on Education, Skills, and Employment: Trends for Development 2023. This demonstrated the value of evidence and data from the Torino Process and KIESE for both internal and external audiences, thus bringing ETF country intelligence to the fore. Furthermore, the transfer of the RED methodology to DG NEAR for monitoring the progress of candidate countries will become a key instrument for objective assessment in line with EU integration criteria.

A wide consultation in Central Asia involving 34,000 young people from the region took place under DARYA in cooperation with UNICEF. This enabled the identification of digital experiences in the region as well as to build further understanding of its needs, expectations and potential for the future. These are key for monitoring delivery on future promises and ways in which these may enable systems to move towards lifelong opportunities.

2023 was also a year that delivered increased recognition for the ETF's expertise on and acknowledgement of the role of CSOs as relevant system actors, in particular in addressing vulnerable groups so that no one is left behind in education, training and employment. In this context, the ETF also advanced in its positioning as a human capital development player in fragile settings. This was supported by an in-depth understanding of the inter-connections between resilience (and diverse fragilities), governance and human capital development.

The ETF also enabled its stakeholders to build increased awareness that public-private cooperation are needed to make lifelong learning a reality for all, and that social dialogue is key for policy making. Finally, ETF work with the QA Forum expanded from its transnational approach to engaging with countries, which led to several requests for advice, including from Georgia, Moldova, Armenia and Uzbekistan on issues such as EQAVET or QA mechanisms for VNFIL.

Key performance indicators (KPIs)

In 2023, the ETF achieved a very high level of performance in all its functional areas. This is demonstrated by the fact that for most KPIs measured in the year, the agency is above or well above target. The commitment rate was 99.85% and the timely payment rate remained high at 95%, both above the respective targets of 98% and 90%. The rate of cancellation of payment appropriations was 0.36% and the rate of outturn was 99.87%, both well above target, illustrating the fact that the measures that the ETF puts in place in response to shocks such as the Russian aggression in Ukraine and inflation were very effective in ensuring a continued and very high level of delivery of the annual work programme.

The above extends to the rate of achievement of planned activities in the 2023 work programme, which was 97.69% and the timely achievement of activities at 83.93%, well above target of 90% and 80% respectively, and proving that the ETF has effectively addressed the pandemic, geopolitical shocks, budget constraints impacting its operational work, and the conditions in the partner countries. Likewise, the rate of implementation of audit recommendations remained unaffected at a consistent high of 100% as in previous years, illustrating the commitment from the management to follow up on recommendations.

Moreover, the ETF has gradually managed to increase the overall allocation of staff to the operational job category: in 2023 it reached 77.52% compared to 74.41% in 2022, while reducing administrative support and coordination. The related indicator for administrative

support in relation to the total of staff is 14.92%, hence well below the maximum ceiling of 30%. Finally, the average vacancy rate of ETF staff in authorised posts was 0% at the end of December 2023, also well below the target level of <5%.

The comparative table of the 15 Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) is presented in Annex 1 for the mid-term perspective 2018-2023, of which 11 KPIs are used for the Director's assessment and benchmarking between agencies, and four are operational KPIs targeting the key activities of the ETF's work in the partner countries. The indicators reflect a high level of financial discipline, sound organisational management as well confirmation of the impact of ETF work in the partner countries. Conclusions drawn from audit and evaluation reports, as well as internal monitoring, also support the assessment of the maturity and stability of the agency, and its solid internal controls system.

Key conclusions on financial management and internal control

In accordance with its governance arrangements, the ETF conducts operations in compliance with the applicable laws and regulations, working in an open and transparent manner, and meeting a high level of professional and ethical standards.

To ensure the achievement of policy, management and operational objectives, the ETF has adopted a set of internal control principles and corporate performance KPIs based on international good practice. The financial regulation requires that the organisational structure and the internal control systems used for the implementation of the budget are set up in accordance with these principles.

The 2023 annual review of the internal control system and organisational performance continue to provide reasonable assurance to the ETF management as to the level of compliance with all internal controls, on the correct functioning of the systems in place and on organisational performance. The 2023 assessment provides a very positive picture both in terms of effectiveness (with only one principle requiring minor improvements) and cost efficiency in relation to 2022 (see PART III for further details).

As mentioned above, the ETF uses a set of corporate performance KPIs to track and monitor organisational performance. They include the KPIs for Directors of EU decentralised agencies and other already existing corporate performance KPIs. They show that in 2023, the ETF used the resources provided by the EU to deliver its activities in due time, at an appropriate level of quantity and quality against agreed benchmarks and targets.

The ETF also examined its functions and the delivery of its services, as well as its outputs, outcomes and impacts through systematic evaluations. Also, the ETF regularly analyses the available control results and indicators, as well as the observations and recommendations issued by the Internal Audit Service and the European Court of Auditors. These elements have been assessed to determine their impact on the management's assurance as regards the achievement of control objectives (see PARTS II, III & IV for further details).

In conclusion, the ETF's management has reasonable assurance that suitable controls are in place and working as intended, risks are being appropriately monitored and mitigated, and necessary improvements and reinforcements are being implemented. The Director, in her capacity as Authorising Officer, has signed the Declaration of Assurance.

IMPLEMENTATION OF THE ETF'S ANNUAL WORK PROGRAMME – HIGHLIGHTS AND ACHIEVEMENTS OF THE YEAR (PART I)

This section summarises the ETF's achievements for its 2023 operational activities in the third year of implementation of the 2027 strategy. It highlights the ways in which the ETF provides support to the Commission services and partner countries. It does so by combining, in different ways, the delivery of the ETF's three core services across its nine operational activities. The section also highlights the links between ETF operations with the general objectives of the von der Leyen Commission.

Contribution to the objectives of the Commission through four transversal themes

In order to align ETF operations to the objectives of the Commission, in 2023 the ETF reinforced its four transversal dimensions across its activity areas: greening, digitalisation, gender and inclusion, and migration.

The ETF ensures that attention is given to the impact of greening on employment, skills demands, qualifications and skills development to support the transition of partner countries towards greener economies and societies in full alignment with the external dimension of the [European Green Deal](#) and its accompanying [Just Transition Mechanism](#), as well as the EU global agenda.

By focusing on the impact of digitalisation on jobs, skills demands and development, as well as societal and economic dynamics, the ETF is aligned with [A Europe fit for the Digital Age](#) and the [Digital Education Action Plan 2021-2027](#). In doing so, it fosters attention on digital skills and technological developments to strengthen lifelong learning systems.

Acknowledging that the green and digital transitions are not gender neutral, the ETF ensures an increased and constant attention to gender and equality across its work in line with the [European Consensus on Development](#) and the [EU Gender Action Plan III](#). Specific attention is given to addressing structural inequalities in HCD, including in the post Covid-19 recovery period. Moreover, the ETF fosters employment and skills development policies and programmes that strives to achieve a just transition that is gender responsive.

By focusing on the role of skills in tackling the root causes of migration, in supporting talent partnerships and the talent pool initiative, in analysing the dynamics of mobility in connection to labour market trends, as well as in reinforcing labour mobility through an increased focus on recognition and validation within EU labour mobility and migration policies, the ETF's work is in line with the [European Dialogue on Skills and Migration](#), the [New Pact on Migration and Asylum](#) and the [Global Approach to Migration and Mobility](#).

Green

In 2023, highlights include the ETF's participation at the UN COP28 in Dubai in which it shared the results from its work on skills for the green transition globally. Across the ETF there has been an increased attention to its analysis of greening economies and associated skills required, both today and in the future. This is reflected in the mapping of skills for green economies implemented in all partner countries, providing a portrait of the status quo in terms of inclusion of green skills in curricula and national strategies. Furthermore, 2023 was

the third year of the ETF's Green Skills competition with 575 applications received from over 70 countries.

Peer learning and practical examples of green skills programmes in the construction and energy (efficiency) sectors were promoted by the ETF CoVEs initiative (Empowering a just transition: CoVEs driving green skills, employment and regional growth). With DG EAC, the ETF collaborated on a discussion on green competences for the EU cities and regions week using Scaffold. Finally, a new request to integrate the ETF future of work methodology in the Armenian new green education programme has been put forward by the EUD.

The ETF also provided expert input to the design of regional and country IPA sponsored programmes for Youth Guarantee deployment and other regional programmes linked to green and digital transitions, as well as continuation of Employment and Social Affairs Platform. In addition, the Erasmus+ project HABITABLE – Alliance of Centres of Excellence in Vocational Training for Sustainable Habitat – is geared towards responding to the skills shortage and mismatches caused by the digital and green transitions in the habitat sector.

Digital

The results from the EU skills and jobs survey implemented in partnership with Cedefop in selected partner countries enabled the ETF to open a new area of work on skills anticipation, with digital skills of workers being at the forefront of thematic inputs and advice to partner countries. Furthermore, two policy briefs were produced in 2023 on the ETF Digital Education Reform Framework and on the power of self-reflection in digital education.

Also, a webinar took place on AI skills in Central Asia. Moreover, a wide discussion took place with the Skills Lab Network participants looking at the impact of AI on jobs and education, both today and in the future.

Still under the Skills Lab Network, the Public Policy Research Centre of Serbia and the Centre for Development Evaluation and Social Science Research (CREDI) of Bosnia and Herzegovina applied to a project concept 'Bringing Western Balkan Agri-Food sector Out of the Sustainability and Digital Void'.

This led to a request from the Prime Minister's office of Albania to extend the project support to provide policy recommendations in three priority domains for smart specialisation: renewable energy and natural resources, sustainable and diversified tourism, and healthy and sustainable food chains. The request was incorporated into the Growth Plan for Albania.

Gender and inclusion

The ETF reviewed the gender dimension of labour market transitions, including policy changes, in partner countries. It also organised a policy learning event together with UfM and the EC, and with participation of the Spanish Presidency, focused on gender equality and persons with disabilities.

The ETF also organised a gender friendly career guidance webinar with over 170 participants and designed a project that contributed to the EUD Rwanda request for gender analysis. In addition, the ETF developed intelligence on the gender dimension of labour market transitions.

Migration

In relation to migration, a newsletter and monthly flash news were produced building on the webinar ‘Talent without borders: skills and migration strategies in Europe’. The ACQF policy document has been validated as part of the flagship initiative “Youth Mobility for Africa”, which is included in the Global Gateway Africa-Europe Investment Package. Finally, it is important to highlight the EC recognition of the ETF’s work on qualifications in the Commission Talent Mobility Package, and its collaboration with DGs in the Migration Package.

Delivering impact through three core services

In 2023, the ETF fully explored synergies between its three core services, which are the pillars at the heart of its operational activities within its 2027 strategy. These synergies enable services to feed into one another within an integrated cycle that leverages ETF service delivery and added value to countries, regions and EC services.

Knowledge hub

In the knowledge hub, the knowledge uptake methodology was piloted and is now fully in motion, thus enabling an in-depth understanding of use of ETF knowledge products, from awareness raising to impact. Knowledge sharing and engagement were strengthened both via communities of practice (COPs) and ETF networks. Requests for ETF expertise contributions grew exponentially, amounting to over 140 demands from the EC, EU member states, partner countries, and third countries from Africa, Latin America and Asia. These examples highlight that the co-creation and use of ETF knowledge enables it to fulfil its mandate through policy advice and support.

In this sense, it is relevant to bring to the fore that a variety of knowledge developments and sharing via networks as well as in collaboration with partners in 2023 were directly translated into policy advice, in particular on green skills, skills development terminology, Scaffold cards, Ready and DERF tools, as well as case studies and good practice. Internationally, knowledge outreach was reflected in higher cooperation and requests for contributions to events and workshops.

Highlights include cooperation with UNICEF for Thailand and co-hosting of a study visit for country authorities, as well as several contributions including to the Asian Development Bank 2023 Skills Forum, the ASAN+3 Forum on HRD digital transformation in Seoul, and COP28. Increased presence and engagement of stakeholders from all continents in ETF networks is a good indicator of the global outreach of the ETF and of the knowledge it produces.

Policy advice

In 2023, the ETF policy advice taxonomy was developed to enhance clarity in the policy making landscape. This is considered a cornerstone of the ETF’s structured and systemic approach and its roles in the policy informing, policy advice and policy making cycle.

Important advancements also took place in the engagement with IFIs to further expand the ETF’s policy advice and influence. To this end, the organisation of a policy event on Erasmus+ opened opportunities for the ETF to be involved in its programming. This may result in more incoming extra-subsidy projects to further expand the EC’s reach and impact.

Moreover, country teams have been officially launched in the light of tragic developments in ETF partner countries. This is especially the case due to the expansion of conflicts and fragilities, which led to a reflection on the ETF's approach to country work in fragile settings and countries in conflict, and more clarity in terms of its positioning within the HCD landscape.

Monitoring and assessment

The revamped Torino Process was successively implemented in all participating countries. This accomplishment provided valuable insights into the strengths and areas for improvement in partner countries' education systems. Also, the ETF cross-country flagship report summarising all ETF monitoring activities became more user-friendly and informative, resulting in a valuable resource for policy makers and stakeholders alike.

In fact, ETF commitment to data visualisation culminated in the creation of user-friendly dashboards and infographics that effectively communicated the Torino Process key findings. These visual tools transcended the limitations of traditional data presentations, making the findings and their implications more accessible, understandable, and actionable for a wider audience.

The expansion of the Rapid Education Diagnosis (RED) in scope and reach enabled it to move from a yearly single document to a fully-fledged regional programme in the framework of the Eastern Partnership. This initiative provided in-depth assessments of education systems in the region, thus enabling policy makers and stakeholders to identify areas for improvement and to make informed decisions.

The national reports of the Osnabruck monitoring process provided detailed insights into its implementation in partner countries. These documents served as essential tools for tracking progress, identified challenges, and facilitated knowledge exchange among stakeholders. Likewise, the country fiches were enriched with additional data from KIESE, thus providing a more comprehensive and up-to-date overview of education system characteristics in partner countries.

The ETF also moved further in both deepening understanding and identifying good practices on the critical role of civil society organisations (CSOs) in promoting lifelong learning (LLL) and fostering inclusive education systems. In this spirit, a conference was organised on CSO participation in LLL systems, bringing together experts from across Europe to discuss best practice for effective engagement.

The ETF also played a pivotal role in ensuring that the UfM monitoring framework for education is fully aligned with ETF standards and methodologies. This technical assistance contributed to the development of a robust and comprehensive tool for assessing education systems in the UfM region.

Geographical coverage and reach

Geographically, it is important to highlight that the ETF has further strengthened its work and relationship in its partner countries in the EU Neighbourhood and Enlargement regions, including: South Eastern Europe and Türkiye (SEET), Southern and Eastern Mediterranean (SEMED), Eastern Partnership (EaP) and Central Asia (CA).

In this context, the ETF operates under the EU Enlargement Policy and in particular the [Instrument for Pre-Accession Assistance](#). In the EU Neighbourhood region, the ETF operates within the framework of the [European Neighbourhood Policy](#). It also builds on the Joint Communication on a renewed partnership with the [Southern Neighbourhood](#) and its [economic and investment plan](#).

In the Eastern neighbourhood, the ETF contributes to the [Eastern Partnership \(EaP\)](#) policy initiative and takes into account [Eastern Partnership policy beyond 2020 – Reinforcing Resilience – an Eastern Partnership for resilient economies, resilient digital transformation and for more inclusive societies](#), as well as the [new Deal for Youth](#). The [new EU Strategy for Central Asia](#) is the basis for the ETF's operations in that region.

South Eastern Europe and Türkiye

In SEET, ETF engagement prioritised the Enlargement agenda and negotiations, as well as IPA financial assistance. This included regional cooperation priorities, such as the work of the Berlin process. In addition, the ETF's work addressed concomitant challenges, including those induced by the slow post-pandemic recovery, the on-going energy crisis and the impact of Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine. The emergence of the EU's Growth Plan for the Western Balkan region is also a significant development.

The ETF initiative on VET excellence and innovation enabled stronger networking among VET providers from the EU neighbourhood, including in the SEET region. The ETF also facilitated the participation of SEET countries in the European Alliance for Apprenticeships (including encouraging Kosovo and Bosnia and Herzegovina to become full members), and completed the monitoring cycle of EU VET recommendation and the Osnabruck Declaration.

Closer coordination and mutual exchanges were ensured with regional cooperation initiatives and projects. These include those implemented by the Education Reform Initiative of South Eastern Europe, the Regional Cooperation Council, the Western Balkans Chamber Investment Forum and the EU regional cooperation frameworks, such as the Danube Strategy, and the Adriatic and Ionian macroregional strategies.

Western Balkans countries continued their efforts to transpose the political commitment of Youth Guarantee adoption. Together with the EC and ILO, the ETF supported country stakeholders in the design, development and adoption of Youth Guarantee Implementation Plans. These set an ambitious reform agenda in the fields of employment, work-based learning, career guidance and qualifications, as well as cooperation with youth organisations, social partners and civil society organisations.

Linked to the Youth Guarantee and new EU Growth Plan for the Western Balkans, a new generation of EU IPA human capital development sector operational programmes is still under preparation. In this regard, the ETF provided feedback to the EC and EU delegations vis-a-vis policy gaps and priority areas.

Together with the EC, the ETF facilitated three regional workshops focused on apprenticeships and traineeships components of the Youth Guarantee, enabling the hands-on transfer of experience from several EU Member States (i.e. Portugal, France, Greece, Romania, Croatia, Austria, and Ireland).

The ETF also provided expert input to the design of regional and country IPA sponsored programmes for Youth Guarantee deployment and other regional programmes linked to green and digital transitions, as well as the continuation of Employment and Social Affairs Platform. Specific country support for ongoing IPA projects covered Bosnia and Herzegovina, North Macedonia and Türkiye.

In addition, in collaboration with UNICEF Europe and the Central Asia Office, the ETF developed research on youth expectations and perceptions regarding the quality and availability of career guidance and counselling. Close collaboration and exchanges with international and donor organisations at regional and country level, such as with GIZ and Helvetas, enabled the ETF to jointly promote the dual education and WBL agenda. Also, exchanges with ILO, UNICEF and UNDP supported the follow up of the education and employment reforms agenda, as well as the advice given to country stakeholders.

In the context of Erasmus+, the ETF carried out discussions with partners in the region focused on the development of capacity building in VET. In a nutshell, the ETF's priorities in the region centred on excellence and innovation in VET, on more attractive and efficient work-based learning and in the promotion of the youth guarantee and youth employability. All these reflect the SDGs on education and employment as well as several key principles of the European Pillar of Social Rights and the priorities of EU Skills Agenda.

Southern and Eastern Mediterranean

The SEMED region experiences challenges that persist over the years. These include the ongoing spillover effects of the COVID-19 pandemic, particularly on the economy which is slowly recovering. The difficult socio-political situation and population unrest has affected Tunisia in particular, with the continuation of the crisis in both Libya and Syria. The Hamas attack on Israel on 7 October led to an ongoing conflict, with a high death toll, as well as the resulting economic crisis in both Israel and Palestine. All cooperation activities and missions have been suspended to these countries. However, contacts at technical level have been maintained as far as possible and compatible with the daily threats in Israel and the West Bank.

The neighbouring countries, Lebanon and Jordan, as well as Egypt, have been impacted by the conflict in different ways. Lebanon has been targeted by military attacks, particularly along its border with Israel. Egypt has been negotiating the opening of borders to bring first aid, food, and water to the population in Gaza. Jordan is not impacted directly by the conflict, although the high death toll in Gaza and the increase of incidents in the West Bank, has raised deep concerns and rage amongst the Jordanian population that contains a high number of Palestinians and has resulted in daily demonstrations.

Throughout 2023, illegal migration has represented one of the highest challenges for the countries in the region as well as in the EU. The ETF received requests for support from Tunisia, Morocco, Egypt and Palestine (on hold), and signed an extra-subsidy contract with the EU Delegation in Egypt. Moreover, some difficulties have been experienced in relations with Tunisia due to a worsening of the EU-Tunisia relations in the last part of the year.

In this context of increased fragilities in the region, the ETF is contributing to priority one of the EU neighbourhood policy that includes human development. This happens through bilateral activities. For instance, the mapping of skills for the green transition was one of the

highlights in 2023 for the region. Likewise, it is important to bring to the fore the report on new forms of work and the platform economy, which contributed to deepening a reflection linked to the SDGs and the EU policy priorities for the region.

Furthermore, the ETF is part of the Team Europe Initiative on jobs through trade and investment in the southern neighbourhood. This demonstrates a great effort in bringing together the EC and EU MS investments in these areas. Another important successful cooperation is the one with the UfM, with whom the ETF jointly organises activities, including on new forms of work, UfM monitoring, greening, and women's empowerment.

Eastern Partnership

In the EaP region, in spite of conflicts and geopolitical turmoil, the ETF was able to continue its work with countries and partners uninterrupted. This is due to the longstanding presence and partnership with the countries, which reflects the confidence and recognition that the ETF has as part of the EU family.

As a result, this enabled the ETF to successfully provide advice to both the EC and to countries alike. This has especially been the case in the Enlargement process with the ETF providing comments to accession documents and liaising with both the EC and countries. In this context, the ETF advised the EC to open Erasmus career guidance or Euroguidance opportunities to more Enlargement countries.

The ETF developed the comparison of the Ukrainian NQF with the EQF with multiple consultation meetings involving Ukrainian partners, the EC and selected Member States. The comparison report produced by the ETF features prominently on the Europass portal. Ukraine is currently working on the NQF action plan developed as a result of the comparison exercise.

In addition, Ukraine is increasing cases of collaboration between local authorities and CSOs with regard to LLL. Likewise, Moldova is also actively engaging CSOs in addressing the sizeable demands stemming from the displacement of people from Ukraine. The ETF Resource Hub "Education and work information for Ukrainians and EU countries" has been widely used, and the ETF also supported the IAEVG membership of Ukraine and Kosovo.

An important highlight of the year was the ETF's contribution to the design and implementation plan of the contribution agreement with DG NEAR on supporting education reforms and skills in the Eastern Partnership region. The ETF will begin implementing this programme early in 2024, with its RED methodology at the core of the diagnosis phase.

Likewise, the ETF has also supported Georgia to design a new programme to support economic development and its green transition with an important skills component. Moreover, the ETF has worked closely with all EUDs supporting them at different phases of programming, which is an indicator of its institutionalised relationship with countries in the region. Finally, the ETF continued to disseminate and support career guidance reviews in the region.

Central Asia

In Central Asia (CA), the ETF's work is interlinked with the extra-subsidy project DARYA which has a regional outlook, thus with a focus on issues that are of interest to more than

one country in the region. Highlights for 2023 include the active participation of all five countries exceeding expectations after the consultation phase at the start of the project. This has led to the creation of the DARYA “community” engaging stakeholders beyond those that the ETF usually worked with in the region.

In 2023, active exchanges among Central Asian countries took place in all areas covered by DARYA project. A consultation involving 34,000 young people from the region enabled a further understanding of the needs, expectations and potential for the future. Peer learning with EU MS enabled a discovery journey on EU methods and tools, which so far were little known in CA. Furthermore, links have been established to a number of ETF networks where Central Asian countries had not previously participated.

Ultimately, in-depth learning has taken place thanks to online and face-to-face opportunities, thus preparing the ground for more intensive cooperation and piloting from 2024. In particular, it is relevant to highlight the high-level group meeting with Central Asian vice-ministers of education and labour, which took place in Turin at the end of 2023, consolidating achievements to date and outlining key developments for the future.

This highlights a lot of goodwill and high expectations from all partners in the region, in the EU, and across EC services, in particular DG INTPA and EU Delegations, all of which are to be nurtured and further developed in 2024 and beyond.

Africa and the African Union

In parallel to the ETF’s work in its partner countries in the EU Neighbourhood and Enlargement regions, it is also leading the implementation of the ACQF policy document, which was validated in 2023. ACQF is the largest qualifications framework globally, with a scope of 55 countries. This is a prime example of the ETF’s contribution to the EU’s relationship with Africa, which is a key priority for the Commission.

The United Nations Office of South-South Cooperation (UNOSSC) acknowledged ACQF as a case of good practice in the global 2023 publication: "Good Practices in South-South and Triangular Cooperation for Education: Transforming Education and Delivering on SDG4".

The highlight for 2023 was the launch of the AU-wide network – African Qualifications Network (AQN) – which supports country progress based on defined and agreed recommendations. In this context, in 2024 the AQN is expected to grow in capacity, be involved in the Steering Group of the ACQF Qualifications and Credentials Platform (QCP), and support reporting of progress between countries on the recommendations.

In a nutshell, main lessons learned under the ACQF project in 2023 include the fact that the ACQF has become a catalyst and a benchmark for many countries. It entails a solid combination of country-specific as well as mutual and peer learning activities, which are key for motivation, ownership, capacity development, and encouragement. Also, high level political support is important to open doors and to build on existing knowledge, expertise and experience in African countries.

The success of the ACQF project goes beyond the 12 countries directly involved, as other regional qualifications forums are motivated to work on referencing to the ACQF, including South Africa, Seychelles, Kenya and Cabo Verde. Also, countries that were not directly

involved so far use ACQF guidelines in developing their NQFs, notably the levels and descriptors.

Moreover, within the external dimension of the European Qualifications Framework (EQF), a new comparison with the NQF of the South African Development Community (SADC) was launched in 2023. In addition, 18 Sub-Saharan countries were engaged in the network of Centres of Vocational Excellence (CoVEs) in 2023.

In 2023, a contribution agreement with the EU Delegation in Rwanda was also implemented to support the preparation of an action in the country TVET sector. This entailed a training course on skills anticipation and matching developed and implemented in Rwanda and Laos for EUDs. Also, an analysis of gender, HCD, TVET and employment in agriculture was carried out in Rwanda.

The expertise provided by the ETF was then followed up with a request for an extension of the contribution agreement from the national authorities in Rwanda, due to the importance placed in the analysis produced and the very high quality ETF deliverable.

The above examples of cooperation with the African Union (AU) take place considering that the EU's relationship with Africa is a key priority for the Commission, as previously mentioned. Also, encouraged by the Commission opinion, these highlight the ETF's agility in programming "to respond to the new European Commission priorities and to pursue opportunities to work beyond current partner countries or to engage in new priority thematic areas".

In this context, the ETF looks forward to continuing to engage with Africa, to seek synergies with partners and uptake for its products to support the implementation of the wider EU-Africa strategy in line with the Joint Communication ["Towards a Comprehensive Strategy with Africa"](#) and other references such as the [Africa-EU partnership](#), the new [Africa Communication](#), the [Communication on the Africa-Europe Alliance for Sustainable Investment and Jobs](#), and the [African Continental Qualifications Framework](#).

Strategic communications

In 2023, the ETF executed five notable communication campaigns aligned with its strategic goals. These campaigns covered a range of topics including Skills for Inclusion, Skills for a Green and Digital Future, Skills for a Changing World, Skills for Educators and Learners and Skills for Growth.

The ETF experienced significant growth and engagement across various social media platforms. One example is the "MySkills4You" initiative – as series of vlogs done by Young European Ambassadors and linked to the European Year of Skills – which led to an 11% increase in followers on Instagram and high engagement on other social media platforms. Furthermore, the ETF has witnessed very significant increases in followers and engagement on LinkedIn and YouTube, showing the importance of longer form in-depth pieces as well as audiovisual content.

The expansion of media relations with EC services, the EEAS, the EUDs, and other international organisations highlights the ETF's efforts in building strategic partnerships that can help to enhance visibility. This has proved particularly successful in multiplying messages and reaching a broader, more diverse audience across different regions and

sectors. By making the most of these relationships, the ETF has been able to amplify its initiatives and insights and ensure a greater understanding and engagement with its. This collaborative approach not only strengthens the ETF's position as a thought leader but also facilitates the exchange of knowledge and best practices, contributing to the development of education and training systems globally.

The ETF has played a pivotal role in the EU Year of Skills, launching impactful initiatives that significantly boosted its engagement. These included the above mentioned "MySkills4You" initiative as well as a series of 'ideathons' that brought together different groups of stakeholders to discuss and share ideas on the future of skills development. Of the 12 "Skills Factory" podcasts published throughout the year, topics that tackled issues such as the implications of artificial intelligence on teaching, transformed narratives from school dropouts to engineers, and addressed the gender gap in education, stood out for their high audience numbers. Furthermore, an online 'live' conversation on the role of civil society in shaping national skills strategies further emphasised the ETF's commitment to inclusive and wide-reaching dialogue.

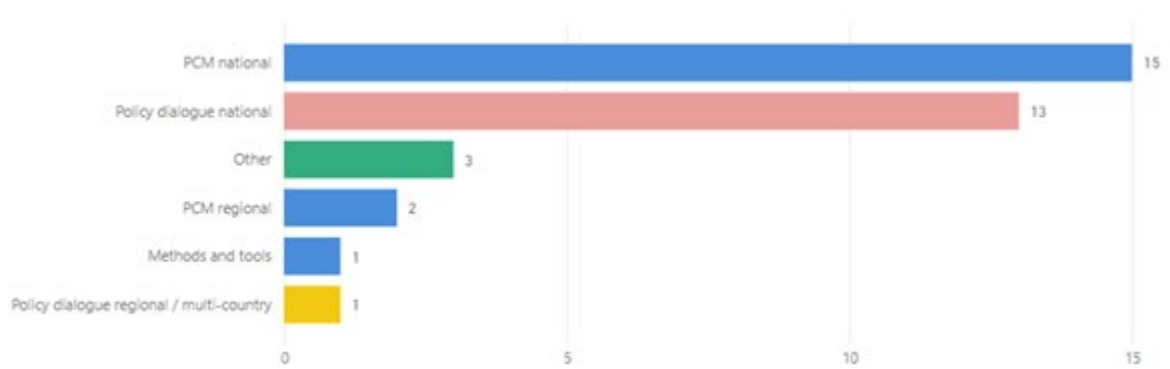
In terms of digital and online communication, the ETF made significant progress in 2023, with a notable increase in digital engagement across its platforms. The ETF's website and OpenSpace platform became hubs of information and interaction, engaging over 270,512 unique visitors and attracting 731,417 page views, a testament to the ETF's effective digital strategy. Work on user experience and user testing carried out in 2023 will lead to significant improvements to both sites in the coming years.

Additionally, the third round of the Green Skills Award attracted high interest from countries around the world and highlighted the ETF's dedication to promoting skills development for green and sustainable labour markets. This award helped to position the ETF as a leader in green skills reflecting a forward-thinking approach to addressing the challenges of our time.

EU requests in 2023

In 2023, the ETF received 35 new EU requests, of which 10 were planned and 25 unplanned. The large majority of unplanned requests consisted in provision of comments and briefings, which did not impact on the overall allocation of budget or full time equivalent of staff members. These could be completed with internal resources and with no need for additional allocation of operational budget or missions.

Distribution of EU requests by type of request



Requests in 2023 were mainly from the EU Delegations, followed by EC headquarters: 15 requests from EUDs, 9 from DG EMPL, 5 from DG NEAR, 1 from DG EAC, and 5 from other organisations.

The geographical distribution of requests shows little difference between regions, but with a high concentration of requests related to the SEET (14 requests in total). This highlights the attention and priority given to Enlargement. Other requests came from SEMED (10 requests), EaP (9 requests), and CA (1 request). Some regional requests may cover the whole region while others cover more than one single country.

In spite of the difficult context of fragility in partner countries, the protracted Covid-19 pandemic, the Russian aggression to Ukraine and the situation in Gaza, the requests in 2023 covered multiple objectives of the EU external assistance. In particular, these are related to policy dialogue and programming and project cycle management, both at regional and national levels and both with an almost equal share.

Ongoing support covers monitoring of large project interventions. The ETF expects the required input and contribution to new requests in the near future should increase. Thematic and country-based expertise remain an asset of ETF in the area of EU support. Ultimately, the ETF was involved in different stages of programme implementation, corresponding to a total EU investment of €407,7m with a direct ETF contribution to €233,4m of EU investment. In terms of direct costs for ETF, in 2022 this represented €155,282 for planned and €86,291 for unplanned EU ad-hoc requests.

Strategic objectives translated into activity areas

In a nutshell, in 2023 the ETF's operational activities developed knowledge, assessed the performance of learning systems, and provided policy advice for the EU services, the partner countries' stakeholders, and other international organisations and donors working in the partner countries in the field of human capital development. This took place in line with key EU policies and the priorities of the Commission.

Ultimately, this shows that through the combination and integration of ETF's three core services the institution has been able to service the EC and partner countries alike, while increasing its digital and green maturity. This has been materialised by delivering its three strategic objectives through its annual work programme 2023, which is operationalised through the ETF's activity areas.

In this context, this section outlines the main achievements of each activity area against the outcomes and indicators in an impact-oriented perspective, with a focus on the contributions to partner countries reforms and EU policies for 2023.

1.1 Skills demand analysis

The aim is to establish a sustained community of experts co-developing and exchanging knowledge, and conducting regular and in-depth analysis on changing skills demand in transition and developing countries. This is done to stimulate a stronger attention and investments in partner countries as regards monitoring changes in skills demand for informing and promoting education and training to fully harness lifelong learning modalities.

The Skills Lab Network grew at high speed in the second year after its launch, almost doubling from 163 researchers at the end of 2022 to 300 researchers in 2023. The Network is generating an agile platform where a stable pool of skills experts from ETF partner countries, EU member states, third countries and other international organisations regularly meet to generate information on changing skills needs building on each other's experience.

The call for innovative research proposals was a success, with more than 63 applications received, 42 being part of a successful application, and largely exceeding the targets of 10 and 4 respectively. A special attention was given to the results of the EU Skills and Jobs survey (EUSJS), implemented in partnership with Cedefop in selected partner countries (Western Balkans and Israel). The survey opens a whole new area of work on skills anticipation by looking at skills needs of workers. The results of EUSJS contributed further to ETF's work in measuring skills mismatch in partner countries.

The highlight in 2023 in relation to policy advice followed the dissemination of the EUSJS results, as Israeli national authorities requested to further investigate the findings in the country. Likewise, Palestine was interested on the results of the platform economy study and the EUD asked for a follow up project, which was designed but implementation is on hold due to the ongoing war.

In 2023, there was a strong focus on skills intelligence. This enabled a solid package of data collection tools allowing the ETF to act as an observatory on skills demands. This included online job vacancies analytics, use of big data to anticipate skills needs in different sectors of partner countries with high-level of granularity, use of foresight in specific sectors such as energy and craft, and sector studies and labour market information analysis, including new forms of work, platform work and mobility patterns.

Online job vacancy dashboards were developed and maintained for six countries. These processed millions of online vacancies, generating knowledge about employers' demand and new skills needs. These data are unique and provide information on upskilling and reskilling needs that were previously lacking in these countries.

Regarding intelligence for the green transition, a green dashboard was developed and a mapping of skills for green economies has been carried out in all partner countries. This provided information on the inclusion of green skills in curricula and national strategies. In relation to intelligence for the digital transition, unique knowledge on new forms of work and platform economy in the South Mediterranean was developed. This provided information on the profiles of platform workers, the regulations needed and associated skills requirements.

Highlights regarding ETF contribution to progress in partner countries include a reform on career guidance in Armenia based on ETF findings and policy advice. In addition, Egypt is setting up a broad LMI system and the ETF online big data dashboard is fully integrated in its national system.

Moreover, findings of the use of ETF's future of work methodology in the construction sector of Armenia were discussed with the Deputy Minister of Employment, and results are now being translated into career guidance material to be used by the national public employment service. The methodology is also being integrated in the new green education programme of Armenia financed by the EUD. Finally, the ETF has delivered technical inputs to EBRD in Jordan on the development of a skills strategy in the tourism sector.

Table 1 below summarises the main achievements and contributions to partner countries reforms and/or EU policies for 2023 under this activity area.

Table 1: skills demand analysis main achievements in 2023

Objective

Support the systematic generation and use of information on changing skills demand for the benefit of individuals, companies and economies in transition and developing countries.

Outcomes

- Analyses of skills (skills needs, skills gaps, skills mismatch) for PC and EU services on the basis of the methodologies developed through the project inform national, EU bilateral and regional policy dialogue.
- Experience, knowledge and good practice on skills identification mechanisms and tools systematically gathered and shared among a network of experts to foster a culture of skills anticipation in PCs.

Main achievements in 2023

Number of methodological instruments developed and their uptake

- Completion and dissemination of the EU Skills and Jobs Survey and launch of a dialogue on the reforms needed in the countries (Western Balkans and Israel) for upskilling and reskilling workers .
- Cross-country paper on the Future of Work (FOW) and future skills in economic sectors peer reviewed and finalised.
- Future of Work (FOW) methodology to be integrated in the new green education programme of Armenia financed by the EUD.
- Discussion with ADB in Tunisia on FOW methodology and its application in different economic sectors.
- Mapping of skills for green economies implemented in all PCs, providing status quo of inclusion of green skills in curricula and national strategies.
- Findings from green mapping discussed at country level with requests for advice from numerous countries (including Albania).
- Use of OJV dashboards in different countries (Egypt, Morocco, Ukraine, Kenya, Georgia).

Uptake (in the form of advice/EU programming/donors adoption) of findings, recommendations emerged from studies

- FOW Armenia report findings on the construction sector currently translated into career guidance material to be used by national public employment service.
- Contribution to UFM Monitoring framework based partly on ETF's findings in SEMED countries (energy reports in Tunisia, Egypt, Albania, etc).
- Support to programme identification in Egypt.
- Follow-up study agreed with EUD Palestine on new forms of work and the platform economy, following 2023 findings.
- Training on skills anticipation and matching developed and implemented in Rwanda and Laos for EUDs.
- Technical inputs and advice delivered to EBRD in Jordan on the development of a skills strategy in the tourism sector.
- Training course on skills mismatch conducted for ITC ILO, together with ILOSTAT, OECD and Cedefop.

Membership and engagement of the Skills Lab Network

- 300 researchers registered to the SkillsLab network.
- More than 63 applications to the call for innovative research proposals, 42 being successful.
- Active participation of many members to webinars and to peer-learning activities.
- Organization of a live event focusing on the impact of AI on jobs and education.
- Collaboration with Cedefop on the implementation of EUSJS.
- Collaboration with Unesco, Michelangelo Foundation, UNIDO and UFM for the elaboration of a vision for skills for craft 2050 with joint publication.
- Collaboration with UFM on new forms of work with organization of joint seminar on platform economy in SEMED
- ETF nominated chair of IAG on skills mismatch for the period 2024-2025.
- Collaboration with DG EMPL for the organization of several events at COP28 in Dubai.

2023 Highlights

- Employment of FOW methodology and identification of future skills needs in different economic sectors in partner countries, using big data, leading to key outlets including a cross-country paper on future skills and a joint publication on future skills in the craft sector.
- 300 members in the Skills Lab Network in only 2 years from its establishment.
- Success of the call for innovative research proposals.
- Contribution to the EC strategy in Africa through the work with BD and agricultural support in Rwanda.
- Collaboration with DG EMPL in the organization of several events for COP28 in Dubai.
- Skills mismatch training for ITC-ILO and with ILOSTAT, OECD and Cedefop.
- EU Skills and Jobs survey (EUSJS), implemented in partnership with Cedefop in selected partner countries (Western Balkans and Israel).

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- Success of events, webinars, newsletters and other dissemination activities, including SkillsLab event 'impact of AI on jobs and education', webinar 'talent without borders: skills and migration strategies in Europe', and webinar 'AI skills in Central Asia'.
-

This activity area contributes to [European Skills Agenda](#) Action 2 of strengthening skills intelligence as a means to achieve higher attention to and investment in skills for citizens across economic sectors and a better alignment of skills policies to demands. It also contributes to European Skills Agenda Action 6 of identifying skills that support the green and digital transitions, in line with the [European Green Deal](#) and its accompanying [Just Transition Mechanism](#), as well as [A Europe fit for the Digital Age](#) and the associated [Digital Education Action Plan 2021-27](#).

The contribution of this activity area extends to the [European Dialogue on Skills and Migration](#), the [New Pact on Migration and Asylum](#) and to the [Global Approach to Migration and Mobility](#), by covering the skills dimension of migration (labour mobility) through its support to improved skills matching, inclusion, and social fairness in line with the [European Pillar of Social Rights](#), the [Porto Declaration](#) and the [European Consensus on Development](#). In the youth dimension, ETF's contributions also reach out to the [Youth Action Plan \(YAP\) in EU external action 2022 – 2027](#), the [Reinforced Youth Guarantee](#) and the [Youth Employment Support: a Bridge to Jobs for the Next Generation](#).

In addition, this activity area promotes the [Council recommendation on vocational education and training \(VET\) for sustainable competitiveness, social fairness and resilience](#) and the [Marrakech Ministerial Declaration](#), as well as the [Bridge to Jobs](#). Regionally, it fosters the [Eastern Partnership policy beyond 2020 – Reinforcing Resilience – an Eastern Partnership that delivers for all](#), the [Economic and Investment Plan for the Western Balkans](#), the [Joint Communication on a renewed partnership with the Southern Neighbourhood](#), the [new Agenda for the Mediterranean](#) and the [Towards a comprehensive strategy with Africa](#).

Finally, this activity area contributes to [Sustainable Development \(SDG\) Goal 4](#) on quality education, [SDG 5](#) on gender equality, and to [SDG 8](#) on decent work and economic growth.

1.2 Active labour market policies and transition measures

The aim is to help partner country learners and future graduates, as well as jobseekers and workers to get a rapid sense of labour market changes, employers' demands and skills development opportunities. This is done by identifying target policies and measures that support the transition from school to work and from unemployment to employment, including via work-based learning and career guidance and counselling, in particular to youth and fragile groups, in order to achieve a fair and inclusive society.

In 2023, the ETF raised its international profile as a centre of expertise on the transition to work for young people and adults. This opened the opportunity for a potential partnership with the World Association of Public Employment Services and with ELA, as well as to strengthen cooperation with EC services and the EU PES network.

The ETF continued its follow up and policy guidance of the Youth Guarantee (YG) which is the EU flagship support to its neighbouring countries. This led to policy advice on defining and testing YG approaches in the Western Balkans (WB), as well as to policy dialogue on youth and NEET with the Union for the Mediterranean (UfM) and Eastern Partnership (EaP)

countries. ETF's contribution to the EC initiative on YG in the WB, together with ILO, resulted in the development and adoption of YG Implementation Plans in all countries (except Bosnia and Herzegovina) and orientation of IPA programming for the next years.

Together with the EC TAIEX Unit, the ETF facilitated three regional workshops on YG and work-based learning (WBL). These workshops received very good feedback on their content and usefulness for the implementation of the YG schemes, in particular for the design, implementation and monitoring of apprenticeships and traineeships. Additionally, the work in the EaP countries took into consideration the new status of Ukraine, Moldova and Georgia in relation to the EU accession agenda.

As part of consolidation of the Career Guidance systems, the ETF advised the European Commission to open Erasmus career guidance / Euro-guidance opportunities to more Enlargement countries. ETF supported PCs with advice and lobbying to ensure that more PCs would have access to the open call.

With a focus on PCs challenges and practices, ALMPs intelligence was developed on flexible working and learning patterns, the gender dimension of labour market transitions, and its effectiveness in fragile and (post)conflict contexts. Career guidance was reviewed in the PCs. The EaP and WB reviews were disseminated while the review for SEMED was launched.

The WBL country mapping exercise was launched in close connection with relevant EU quality frameworks. Jointly with Eurofound, Moldova and Georgia country fiches were elaborated on working life, documenting harmonisation and gaps with EU acquis. Statistical data were collected regarding ALMPs.

In 2023, the ETF reinforced its strong positioning as a provider of policy advice to partner countries and EC services. This was based on collected data on ALMPs, country reviews on career guidance and surveys on living, working and learning. This enabled the inclusion of state-of-the art data in the ETF country fiches. An important work was realised on the YG and specific country policy advice actions. The intelligence generated was used in expert input to EC services and EUDs for the (re)design of country and regional programmes.

With UfM, beyond ETF's contribution to woman empowerment a new area for collaboration initiated focused on persons with disabilities. Moreover, the ETF contributed to the Inter-Agency Group on WBL, supported the OECD on the Pisa questions related to VET, and initiated the preparation for the International Skills Fair – Apprenticeships, co-organised with ITC-ILO. The ETF supported the EC to deliver EU conferences on Adult Learning and the EU Year of Skills, and continued its cooperation with DVV international for organising an event on LLL in Enlargement countries.

In terms of contribution to progress in PCs, five WB countries have developed and adopted YG Implementation Plans, which reflect policy commitments in the areas of career guidance and counselling, WBL, and skills development opportunities as part of ALMP and closer alignment with EU policies. Armenia has adopted a WBL roadmap and, thanks to ETF support, is now a formal member of EAFA.

Table 2 below summarises the main achievements and contributions to partner countries reforms and/or EU policies for 2023 under this activity area.

Table 2: sustainability, inclusion and resilience through active labour market policies and the skill dimension of labour mobility main achievements in 2023

Objective

Support countries to improve Active Labour Market Policies and employment services, as well as career guidance and counselling and work-based learning to increase skills relevance, labour market inclusion of young and adults.

Outcomes

- Policy buy-in on the role and effectiveness of ALMPs and PESs in supporting adaptation to socio-economic changes, labour market inclusion of young and adults and social fairness.
- Increased collaboration and policy exchanges (peer learning) on the role of ALMPs and skills dimension in view of changing labour markets, twin transitions, and inclusiveness as well as flexibilisation of skills development approaches and matching policies and services.
- Enhanced career development support systems and services as central building blocks of lifelong learning systems.
- Strengthened work-based learning systems through peer learning networks, policy advice, policy analysis, capacity building and international cooperation.
- Consolidated approaches to youth employability and adult learning in partner country policies aimed at supporting transition to work.

Main achievements in 2023

Number of countries advised and feedback received to adapt their ALMPs and/or employment strategies, WBL, CGC policies as well as (re)design if youth employability programmes

- Advice to WB to design YG schemes and adopt YG Implementation Plans, and advice to EC for IPA planning.
- Advice to Azerbaijan, Armenia, Algeria, Moldova, Lebanon, North Macedonia on WBL, career guidance and employment policies.
- Armenia Membership in the European Alliance for Apprenticeship facilitated by ETF.
- Membership of Kosovo and Ukraine in the IAEVG facilitated by the ETF.
- Launch of a regional study on youth employability with UNICEF and ILO MENA.

Number of partner countries advised for gender responsive ALMPs, employment policies, WBL, CG and other relevant gender related transition issues

- Review of PCs gender dimension of labour market transitions including policy changes.
- Organisation of policy learning event together with UfM and EC, with Spanish Presidency participation focused on gender equality and persons with disabilities.
- Organisation of gender friendly career guidance webinar with over 170 participants.

Number of EU requests using evidence/findings from ALMPs, WBL and CGC knowledge and policy advice

- Organization of three regional seminars for Western Balkans (over 60 participants each) by EC TAIEX - ETF on Youth Guarantee and work based learning components, hosted by 3 EU Member States - based on request by EU.
- Input to EU progress assessment of Enlargement countries and other PCs and specific input to design of country and regional EU funded projects.
- EC-ETF co-organisation of the 8th European Alliance for Apprenticeship event for PCs.
- Expert input to Armenia, Azerbaijan, Jordan employment, career guidance and WBL in the framework of EU funded initiatives.
- Overall design of the project contributing to the EUD Rwanda request for gender analysis, HCD, TVET and employment in agriculture.
- Continuous updates of the EU working group on adult learning developments in the EU neighbourhood.

Policy dialogue inputs delivered to EU institutions

- Contribution to EU progress assessment and policy dialogue in the Enlargement region and other PCs.
- Advise to the EC to open Erasmus+ career guidance – Euro-guidance scheme to more Enlargement countries. The project supported PCs with advice and lobbying to ensure that more PCs would have access to the open call.
- Contribution to the UFM working group on Youth engagement in Education, Training and Employment; UfM Women's Empowerment and UfM Community of Practice on Youth Employment.
- Follow up and policy guidance on Youth Guarantee.

2023 Highlights

- ETF advised the European Commission to open Erasmus+ career guidance – Euro-guidance scheme to more Enlargement countries.
- ETF continued follow up and policy guidance on Youth Guarantee in Western Balkans and policy dialogue on youth and NEET in the Union for the Mediterranean and Eastern Partnership countries.
- Youth Guarantee Implementation Plans were implemented in all the Western Balkans countries (except Bosnia and Herzegovina) which will provide orientation of IPA programming for next years.
- Strong cooperation with DGs EMPL and NEAR, Eurofound, UNICEF, UfM, ILO, PEE Sweden.

Active Labour Market Policies are among the priorities of the ETF work, as are WBL, career guidance and adult learning in line with the [European Pillar of Social Rights](#) (EPSR) and the

[European Skills Agenda](#), including in terms of flexible learning pathways, quality of employment and access to career guidance and learning in highly flexible and transitional labour markets, quality and expansion of WBL opportunities for young and adults in the face of significant demand and technological changes.

The ETF also focuses on WBL reforms, including quality apprenticeships and traineeships, and career guidance as per the [Osnabrück Declaration](#) and [VET Recommendation](#). It analyses the role of ALMPs in promoting upskilling and reskilling contributing to the [Upskilling Pathways - New opportunities for adults](#) and the [European Council Resolution on better integrating lifelong guidance into lifelong learning strategies](#).

In promoting gender equality and women's empowerment, this activity area contributes to the [EU Action Plan on Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment in External Action 2021–2025 \(GAP III\)](#). This activity area contributes to the twin transition supporting the [European Green Deal](#) and its accompanying [Just Transition Mechanism](#), as well as [A Europe fit for the Digital Age](#) and the associated [Digital Education Action Plan 2021-27](#).

Moreover, this activity area supports the European Year of Skills and the [European Agenda for Adult learning](#). In this context, the ETF contributed to EC preparations and delivery of EU conferences and meetings related to the European Year of Skills and EU working group on Adult Learning, including updates concerning lifelong learning agenda in the EU neighbouring countries.

This activity supports the implementation of the Youth Guarantee in the Western Balkans and its promotion in other partner countries in line with the [Recommendations for the Youth Guarantee update](#), the [Youth Employment support](#), the [Reinforced Youth Guarantee](#) and the [Bridge to Jobs](#). Finally, this activity area also contributes to [Sustainable Development Goal \(SDG\) 5](#) on gender equality, [SGD 8](#) on decent work and economic growth, and [SDG 10](#) on reduced inequalities, in addition to [SDG 4](#) on quality education.

1.3 Modernisation of qualifications and establishment of qualification systems

The aim is to support inclusive skills development policies, access to lifelong learning opportunities and innovation targeting skills for the future to help partner countries to modernise their qualification systems, thus changing their focus from formal to lifelong learning education systems.

In 2023, the most notable recognition of the ETF's work is that the Commission's recent Talent Mobility Package, a key outcome of the European Year of Skills, contains several references to the ETF's work, such as to the Ukrainian Resource Hub, launched in 2022 and with more than 27,000 visitors since its launch. Furthermore, the validation of non-formal and informal learning was incorporated as instrument in the YG Implementation Plans in several WB countries (North Macedonia, Albania and Kosovo). A series of webinars were organised in the countries to share knowledge.

Contribution to country intelligence is exhaustive, up to date and backed by close collaboration with the partner institutions within the scope of thematic priorities identified by the activity area (digitalisation of NQFs, internationalisation, recognition and validation). A Global Inventory of NQFs, a VNFIL inventory, an international mapping of national

qualifications agencies, and a mapping of qualifications recognition centres were released in 2023 providing detailed intelligence.

Regarding policy advice, the ETF enjoys a high level of trust among partner countries and collaborates very closely with concerned institutions. In particular, in 2023 with Morocco, Tunisia, Moldova, North Macedonia, Palestine, Türkiye, Ukraine, Egypt and Azerbaijan. Moldova has introduced micro-credentials in its legislation and has been adapting its qualifications register in line with the recommendations included in the open architecture document.

In addition, Tunisia developed a roadmap that should lead to the adaptation of the qualifications database. Ukraine is working on the action plan as a follow up to the comparison exercise. As a result of the peer learning activity on validation, the Turkish Vocational Qualifications Authority decided to focus its work more on voluntary approaches for validation complementing their current mandatory certification approach. In Kazakhstan, translation of ESCO has started following the approach advocated by the open architecture.

Progress was also made in the operationalisation of NQFs. Among the ETF partner countries, three NQFs have reached the operational stage (Serbia, Türkiye and Montenegro). These are countries with a long-standing cooperation with ETF. Notable is the progress Türkiye has made in validation (certification) with 2.5 million of certificates issued confirming qualifications included in the Turkish NQF. The validation inventory conducted in 2022 in Azerbaijan reported a successful launch of validation operations and this year Azerbaijan reported almost 1000 certificates issued through validation. Moldova has similarly embarked on the introduction of validation of non-formal and informal learning and has already certified over 1000 beneficiaries.

Table 3 below summarises the main achievements and contributions to partner countries reforms and/or EU policies for 2023 under this activity area.

Table 3: modernisation of qualifications and establishment of qualification systems main achievements in 2023

Objective

Support countries to modernise qualifications / qualification systems for lifelong learning, employability and competitiveness.

Outcomes

- Qualification systems facilitate the validation and recognition of lifelong learning and support mobility.
- Access to qualifications is improved through linked and interoperable databases, including micro-credentials; stackable qualifications become available to support lifelong learning.
- Partner countries develop stronger links with the EQF. Groups of countries compare their systems to the EQF and make use of/adapt EU instruments for own development.

Main achievements in 2023

NQF and VNFIL inventories record progress in countries on NQF stages of development, and record trends

- Contribution to 20 country chapters and several thematic chapters of the Global Inventory of National and Regional Qualifications Frameworks 2022 published and disseminated in 2023, which is a global reference on NQF developments around the world.
- VNFIL inventory (16 national reports completed from 2021 till 2023, cross-country report in review) provides a detailed overview of the stage of development and features of the validation arrangements in the Partner Countries.
- Most of the PCs have started implementation of VNFIL with Türkiye, Kazakhstan, Moldova, Azerbaijan and Kosovo making a notable progress in scaling up.

EQF AG supports further comparison, EC requests ETF support for EQF external dimension

- Comparison of Ukrainian NQF with the EQF with Ukrainian partners, the EC and selected MS. The comparison report produced by ETF features prominently on the Europass portal.
- Comparison completed with Capo Verde.
- Comparison with the South African Development Community (SADC) launched by the Commission in 2023.
- Multiple reference to ETF in the Talent Mobility Package released by the EC on comparison exercise, the planned network of qualifications databases, the ETF Resource Hub “Education and work information for Ukrainians and EU countries”. ETF work on qualifications is included also in the legislative part of the Package.

Number of tools/practices made available and used in the context of policy exchange/programme design

- Guide to design, issue and recognise micro-credentials.
- Open architecture and guidelines for establishing national qualifications databases and the prototype of the Network of qualifications databases.
- Release of each of the publications/tools has been accompanied by a webinar.
- The Guide to design, issue and recognise micro-credentials published in 2023 is being used by two projects: ERAMSUS plus project “Beyond Europe with Micro-credentials” and by the IPA regional Programme “EU4Green”.
- The Open architecture and guidelines for establishing national qualifications databases is currently used by Moldovan Ministry of Education to adapt the Moldovan qualifications database.
- The approach presented in the Open architecture document has been discussed with stakeholders in Tunisia and Morocco.

Number of instruments/tools promoted (i.e. qualification databases, micro-credentials and validation and recognition tools) are integrated in qualification systems in countries

- Moldova has introduced micro-credentials in its legislation and has been adapting its qualifications register in line with the recommendations included in the open architecture document.
- Validation of non-formal and informal learning was incorporated as instrument in the Youth Guarantee Implementation Plans in several Western Balkan countries (North Macedonia, Albania and Kosovo).
- Tunisia developed a roadmap that should lead to the adaptation of the qualifications database.
- Ukraine is working on the NQF action plan developed as a result of the comparison exercise.
- As a result of the peer learning activity on validation, the Turkish Vocational Qualifications Authority decided to focus its work more on voluntary approaches for validation complementing their current mandatory certification approach.
- In Kazakhstan, translation of ESCO has started following the approach advocated by the Open architecture.

Qualification systems development via EU external assistance in partner countries

- EU THAMM project calls for ETF involvement in promoting EU tools, in particular regarding the qualifications databases.
- In Tunisia in the EU-funded PASE project, the work on qualifications register will be included.
- In North Macedonia validation features strongly in the design of the EU budget support programme (EU4Youth). Moreover, Twinning Project supporting further development of the Macedonian NQF has just finished its works. Following the request of EUD Skopje, content monitoring of those actions was provided.
- Azerbaijan: a package of EU actions includes components on qualifications developed by ETF experts and following the request of EUD Baku, content monitoring inputs to those actions is currently provided.
- In Turkey 2 years project TUYEP ETF on work shadowing and peer learning ended.
- In Bosnia and Herzegovina, contribution to the new EU action that includes a component on VNFIL.

2023 Highlights

- Multiple references to ETF work in the Talent Mobility Package released by the Commission.
 - Incorporation of non-formal and informal learning in the Youth Guarantee Implementation Plans in several Western Balkan countries (North Macedonia, Albania and Kosovo).
 - Success of the Ukrainian Resource Hub which had more than 27,000 visitors since its launch.
 - 10 years of collaboration with Unesco, UIL and Cedefop on the Global Inventory of NQFs.
 - Collaboration with ITC-ILO and with UNESCO UIL on e-learning courses.
 - Contribution to Global Inventory of National and Regional Qualifications Frameworks 2022.
 - Open architecture and guidelines for establishing national qualifications databases, and prototype of network of qualifications databases.
 - Guide to design, issue and recognise micro-credentials.
 - VNFIL inventory.
 - International mapping of national qualifications agencies and mapping of qualifications recognition centres.
-

In this context, it is important to highlight that this activity area builds on the [European Skills Agenda](#), the [VET Recommendation](#) and the [Osnabrück Declaration](#) in close cooperation with the EQF advisory group and the European Commission, and thus in line with the [EQF Recommendation](#) and the [Council Recommendation on the validation of non-formal and informal learning](#). It also benefits from a longstanding partnership and joint work with

Cedefop and the international community, in particular UNESCO, UIL and OECD. Moreover, the ETF increasingly supports the African Continental Qualification Framework (ACQF) as part of the EU partnership with the African Union.

Ultimately, the ETF supports the development of flexible qualifications systems and upskilling pathways, including through increased focus on micro-credentials, recognition, validation and flexibilisation, as well as the digital and international dimensions of qualifications, in line with the [Recommendation on a European approach to micro-credentials for lifelong learning and employability](#), the EC priority [A Europe fit for the Digital Age](#), the [Porto Declaration](#) and the [European Pillar of Social Rights](#), as well as inspired by the [Communication on Achieving the European Education Area by 2025](#) and the [Council Resolution on a strategic framework for European cooperation in education and training towards the European Education Area and beyond \(2021-30\)](#), and including recent political developments such as the [Joint Employment Report](#), the [Council Resolution on a new European Agenda for Adult Learning 2021-30](#), and [ALMA](#).

This activity area is also instrumental in the context of improving legal pathways of migration and the recognition of third-country nationals' competences on the EU labour market, in line with the EU new initiative on [Talent Partnerships](#) under the [New Pact on Migration and Asylum](#). This includes ETF work on Ukraine in line with the [Recommendation on recognition of Professional Qualifications](#) and the [recognition of qualifications for people fleeing Russia's invasion of Ukraine](#). Finally, this activity area also contributes to the [Sustainable Development Goal 4](#) on quality education.

1.4.a Vocational excellence provision models

The ETF's Network for Excellence (ENE) is inspired by a Commission-led initiative in the EU countries, which establishes Centres of Vocational Excellence (CoVEs) partnerships. The aim is to feed excellence and innovation as drivers for skills provision models, in particular vocational skills for employment and education systems from a lifelong learning perspective. Also, to address quality, inclusion, innovation and relevance of skills through re-thinking institutional network set-ups and transitions needed by the labour market. Differently from the other ETF networks, ENE is the network through which this activity area unfolds beyond being a means for knowledge co-creation and sharing, reach out and capacity building, as well as policy support and advice.

As a bottom-up initiative, CoVEs operate in a local given context and enables VET institutions to rapidly adapt skills provision to evolving economic and social needs, including the digital and green transitions. In this sense, it is a driver for innovation and growth. Furthermore, the ETF plays a key role in developing the international dimension of the CoVE initiative, closely linked to its mandate of strengthening relations between the EU and neighbourhood countries in the field of human capital development (improving people's skills and capabilities), which requires high quality, well governed, and innovative vocational education and training systems that are responsive to labour market needs.

In this context, ENE functions as a basis to develop an International Network of CoVEs. It brings together hundreds of organisations and CoVEs from the EU neighbourhood, Central Asia, Africa, and the EU. The network works around ten areas:

- Lifelong learning in vocational education and training;

- Social inclusion, equity and excellence;
- Pedagogy and professional development;
- Education-business collaboration and cooperation;
- Entrepreneurial Centres of Vocational Excellence;
- Industry 4.0 and digitalisation;
- Autonomy and PPPs in VET skills development;
- Going green – supporting sustainable goals;
- Smart specialisation – mobilising innovation, ecosystems and SMEs; and
- Social inclusion, equity and excellence.

This activity area has strong connections with the Service Level Agreements (SLA) 'International dimension of Centres of vocational excellence: Building Vocational Excellence through international cooperation' (SLA 1 and SLA 2).

In this context, highlights for the year include the overall expansion of ENE with an increase of 14% in total numbers in comparison to the previous year. By end 2023 ENE counted with 291 registered members (33 more than 2022) from 47 countries globally, including 16 ETF partner countries, 10 EU MS, 18 Sub-Saharan African countries, 2 from South Asia (i.e. Philippines and Bangladesh) and Switzerland.

In 2023, two major events were organised. 128 participants attended the joint on-line meeting organized with the Danube Region Strategy on 'Empowering a just transition: Coves driving Green Skills, Employment and Regional Growth'. The results of DIGI, GRETA, SISI and ENTR CoVEs were shared during the final conference of the 'International dimension of Centres of Vocational Excellence' project held in November 2023 in Turin. Key takeaways include insights in just transition policies and measures, practical examples of green skills programmes in construction and energy efficiency, priorities for greening of VET, recognition tools, strengthening coordination and leadership.

In terms of contribution to country intelligence, three reports were published on the role of CoVEs in the green and digital transitions and on good practices in applied research in VET. Moreover, a paper on Autonomy and PPP was developed and an article on networking for vocational excellence was published.

Regarding policy advice, Centres of Excellences (COEs) in Moldova are taking over a crucial role in the governance of VET education. In addition, in cooperation with OeAD, Austria's Agency for Education and Internationalisation, the ETF has been advising MoECR of Moldova to identify capacities needed by the CoVEs network in the county to deploy coordination functions.

In relation to progress in partner countries, Moldova and North Macedonia moved up legislation and the status of CoVEs. This is also the case in Armenia, where ENE inputs are well received by stakeholders to raise awareness on internationalisation of VET. There is also an increasing participation of the country in Erasmus+, which supports the country strategy to develop regional VET centres.

A key highlight of the year lies on ETF's contribution to the ERASMUS+ project Habitable – Alliance of Centres of Excellence in Vocational Training for Sustainable Habitat – that aims to respond to the skills shortage and mismatches caused by the digital and green transition in the habitat sector. Two ETF – ENE partner countries are represented: Moldova and Georgia.

It is important to mention that the promotion of quality and vocational excellence has been called for since 2002 when the parties to the Copenhagen process (i.e. the Member States, the social partners, the candidate countries, the EFTA/EEA countries and the Commission) set the overall priorities for the EU VET modernisation agenda in the following Communiqués: [Copenhagen Declaration](#), [Maastricht Communiqué](#), [Helsinki Communiqué](#), [Bordeaux Communiqué](#), [Bruges Communiqué](#), [Riga Conclusions](#) and the [Osnabrück declaration](#).

Table 4a below summarises the main achievements and contributions to partner countries reforms and/or EU policies for 2023 under this activity area.

Table 4a: vocational excellence provision models main achievements in 2023

Objective

Enhance skills provision and inspire innovation through Centres of Excellence acting as hubs, beacons or models for systemic change.

Outcomes

- Improved policy buy-in on how centres of excellence develop in different contexts and how centres of vocational excellence contribute at system level.
- Fostering collaboration around the identified excellence dimensions as part of the ETF Network for Excellence.
- Contribution to the international dimension of VET within the Erasmus+ program, international partnerships and priorities set for different regions.

Main achievements in 2023

Number of Centres of Vocational Excellence mapped in the digital registry

- 291 CoVEs in 47 countries worldwide : 16 ETF PCs, 10 EU MS, 18 from Sub-Saharan Africa, 2 from South Asia (Philippines and Bangladesh) and Switzerland.

Number of CoVEs which implemented self-assessment

- In the second cycle (2022-2023), which included three new dimensions ENTR, Career Guidance and Social inclusion, total number of CoVEs who implemented the ENE SAT was 82. Out of them 34 had already participated in the first ENESAT cycle.
- 179 CoVEs have done self-assessment in the two cycles.

Number of members in the ETF Network for Excellence by type of thematic dimension

- ENTRECoVEs: 5 COVES from ETF PC countries (1 from Georgia, 1 from Moldova, 1 from Morocco, 1 from Tunisia and 1 from Azerbaijan) have been engaged in developmental actions.
- Social Inclusion: 11 COVES being 1 from Albania, 1 from Georgia, 2 from Israel, 4 from Turkey, 1 from Moldova plus (not ETF countries), 1 from Zimbabwe and 1 from Malawi.
- Digitalisation of Teaching and Learning: 6 COVES involved in the 4 Developmental projects: 1 from Moldova, 1 from South Africa and 2 from Mozambique (under Humana Network), 1 from Georgia and 1 from Azerbaijan. 4 webinars were delivered.
- Autonomy and PPP (finalised in April 2023): 28 active COVES being 2 from Azerbaijan, 1 from Finland, 5 from Georgia, 2 from Israel, 1 from Kazakhstan, 1 from Morocco, 3 from the Netherlands, 4 from Spain, 3 from Tunisia, 4 from Turkey, 2 from Ukraine.
- GRETA Initiative: 18 CoVEs in total being 8 from Ukraine, 1 from Armenia, 1 from Georgia, 1 from Latvia, 1 from Slovenia, 3 from Türkiye, 2 from Spain, and 1 from Serbia.
- Since some CoVEs participated in several partnerships, the total number of CoVEs actively engaged in the 6 ENE partnerships was 60.
- 5 events organized : 4 online and 1 in presence in Amsterdam in September.
- Participation in online events reaches the average of 30 Centres in ENE GRETA and 37 CoVEs in DIGI- ENE.

Involvement of ENE members in the reform of the VET system in their respective countries

- There are two actions under ENE specifically focussed on countries. In these two cases CoVEs are involved in policy implementation in the countries. These are: 1) Develop an excellence model for career education and career guidance for COVES- pilot in Armenia; and 2) Strengthening leadership and coordinating role of CoVEs in skills development in respective sectors -in Moldova.

CoVEs number by type of peer learning activities

- 17 online webinars on thematic initiatives: Autonomy and PPP, GRETA, ENTR-CoVEs, DIGI, SISI and Career guidance.
- 6 Coaching sessions on ENTR CoVEs.

- 2 face-to-face events.

Number of initiatives, projects (etc.) in which ETF PCs are participating as ENE members

- 16 countries are actively engaged in ENE thematic initiatives: Albania, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Egypt, Georgia, Israel, Kazakhstan, Moldova, Montenegro, Morocco, North Macedonia, Palestinian Territories, Serbia, Tunisia, Turkey, Ukraine.

2023 Highlights

- ENE counts 291 registered members from 47 countries.
 - 128 attendees to the joint on-line meeting organised with the Danube Region Strategy on Empowering a just transition: Coves driving Green Skills, Employment and Regional Growth.
 - 90 participants to the final conference in Turin of the 'International dimension of Centres of Vocational Excellence' project. The results of DIGI, GRETA, SISI and ENTR CoVEs were shared.
-

This activity area contributes to the [EU Treaty Article 166](#), the geopolitical dimension of the [European Education Area](#) by making education part of a stronger Europe in the world, building on the [VET Recommendation](#) and the [European Pillar of Social Rights](#) (EPSR) and its principles. In this context, it is possible to pinpoint that this activity area contributes to the [Erasmus+ programme](#) and its [Key Action 2](#), in particular in the field of [Centres of Vocational Excellence](#).

Also, that the ENE approach fits within the [European Skills Agenda](#) and the [Osnabrück Declaration](#). The dimensions of excellence supports EU priorities such as the [European Green Deal](#) and [A Europe fit for the Digital Age](#) in line with the [Digital Competence Framework for Citizens](#), the [European Sustainability Competence Framework](#) and the [Entrepreneurship Competence Framework](#). In addition, in cooperation with [EU Danube strategy](#) Priority Area 9, ENE is advancing its engagement with centres of vocational excellence at regional level in the dimensions of green skills and social inclusion.

Finally, this activity area also contributes to the [Sustainable Development \(SDG\) Goal 4](#) on quality education, [SDG 5](#) on gender equality, [SDG 8](#) on decent work and economic growth, [SDG 9](#) on industry, innovation and infrastructure, [SDG 10](#) on reduced inequalities, [SDG 12](#) on responsible consumption and production, [SDG 13](#) on climate action, and [SDG 17](#) on partnerships for the goals.

1.4.b International dimension of centres of vocational excellence: building a strong international cooperation dimension on vocational excellence

The aim is to support and strengthen the international dimension of centres of Vocational Excellence. In 2023 it encompasses two Service Level Agreements (SLA) with DG EMPL, the first running [from November 2021] until November 2023 (SLA 1) and the second initiating in April 2023 [and running until April 2025] (SLA 2).

Outputs from SLA 1 have formed the basis of the design for the follow-up project SLA 2 integrating lessons learned into the roll out and implementation of a detailed assessment framework and online tool, or the international self-assessment tool for CoVEs (ISATCOVE), the quality label, three studies on the role of CoVEs in digital and green transition and in applied research, and the planned support services.

In this context, in 2023 the international self-assessment tool for CoVEs has been successfully developed with an extensive consultation with international representative bodies and CoVEs. This has been then piloted with the provision of coaching and

development of guidance material. Some improvements have been made in the light of early feedback from the pilot, but further improvements will continue to be made under SLA 2.

Likewise, the methodology, process and all supporting documentation for quality labels and award for CoVEs have been completed in 2023. In addition, the simulation of the process for 'advancing on excellence' label (AdEx) has been completed and the simulation itself has been implemented.

Following the results of the simulation and taking in consideration the feedback of the stakeholders consultation panel meeting, the feasibility study for the creation of a Quality Award on Vocational Excellence has been finalised. In SLA2, based on the recommendations of the feasibility study, a pilot will be designed to test the two labels and to explore with the EC the opportunity to better valorise these.

The three studies on the role of CoVEs in digital and green transitions and in applied research concluded that not only the digitalisation of the curriculum and the learning environment, including gamification and continuous upskilling of teachers, are important, but also the collaboration with industry and external stakeholders are key to refine digital learning programmes, organise placements and provide funding.

Moreover, the greening of the campus and of courses for professions considered "non-green" were seen as essential, as was collaboration with industry partners and seeking inspiration from across the globe. Finally, the benefits to CoVEs of applied research were equally clear, including a diversification of funding, the retention of intellectual property rights, and deepening links to external stakeholders.

Table 4b below summarises the main achievements and contributions to partner countries reforms and/or EU policies for 2023 under this activity area. It is important to highlight that this activity area contributes to the same EU policies and SDGs as its twin activity area 4a.

Table 4b: international dimension of centres of vocational excellence main achievements in 2023

Objective

To support and strengthen the international dimension of Centres of Vocational Excellence.

Outcomes

- An international vocational excellence quality and development tool is created to deliver a self-assessment instrument that will help map the progress to vocational excellence, based on a maturity model.
- The feasibility of developing a quality label for vocational excellence is explored.
- Evidence to support vocational excellence for the digital and green transition is developed.
- Policy support activities and capacity building are fostered to support policy making in different contexts.

Main achievements in 2023

An international vocational excellence quality and development tool is created

- The International Self-Assessment tool for CoVEs has been successfully developed and piloted, and guidance and support material have been finalised.

The feasibility of a quality award on vocational excellence is explored

- Methodology, process and all supporting documentation for Quality Labels and Award for CoVEs have been completed, guidance material has been prepared and simulation of AdEx label has been implemented.

Evidence to support vocational excellence for the green and digital transitions is developed

- Three studies have been finalised, delivered and published. These include: i) the role of CoVEs in the digital transition; ii) the role of CoVEs in the green transition; and iii) mapping study on international best practices on the contribution of VET to applied research and innovation hubs.
-

Activities are undertaken for policy support and capacity building

- 3 meetings, trainings and events to support the consultation process and piloting of ISATCOVE, as well as simulation of the quality label have been organised.
- 1 policy and peer-learning meeting and networking for CoVEs.
- Final conference "Building a strong international cooperation on vocational excellence" took place in Turin.
- Participation of a broad range of stakeholders encompassing representatives of EU institutions, policy makers from EU member states, international organisations, VET providers associations, CoVEs, ETF PCs and beyond.

Activities are developed for communication and promotion

- Main communication channels were ETF website, Open Space and ETF pages on social media.
- Visual identity (separate logos for overall project, ISATCOVE, for the Vocational Excellence Quality Label and Award) have been created and used in the developed materials and communication.
- A series of dedicated communication actions have been implemented, including several articles such as one introducing the international self-assessment tool for CoVEs and another on the VET Excellence Forum 2023 and ENE GRETA meeting, several posts such as one on the Consultative Panel meeting, and several videos such as an introductory video about the pilot and an animation video on the ISATCOVE tool.

2023 Highlights

- International Self-Assessment tool for CoVEs (ISATCOVE).
 - Quality Labels and Award for CoVEs.
 - Analysis of role of CoVEs for the twin transition and of its contribution to research and innovation.
 - Peer learning events and final conference with over 100 diverse participants.
 - Series of articles and communication materials used with appropriate visual identity.
-

1.5 Innovative teaching and learning

The aim of this activity area through the ETF's Creating New Learning project (CNL) is to create and expand the knowledge hub in the field of human capital development in transition and developing countries, with the ETF as a central node and a reference for partner countries for sector analysis, policy advice and capacity development, as well as a resource for EU programming and monitoring. This is done by developing and using tools, guides and methodologies able to create new learning opportunities for practitioners and policy makers in different contexts, as well as through a rich repository of good practice worldwide.

In 2023, new tools were launched and successfully disseminated, leading to policy advice. The launch of Scaffold in November and its dissemination was extremely successful including in high level meetings, conferences and targeted distribution. It has been used to trigger policy discussions on the implementation of integrated learning outcomes in key competences in education and NFL. It was also used to support DG EAC in a discussion on green competences in the EU cities and regions week.

Furthermore, the application and testing of READY in Israel resulted in the development of new pedagogical approaches in teaching the key areas of the READY model. The application of READY in Ukraine contributed to the development of the new draft teachers' standard. In this context, the country competence assessment activity is progressing towards implementation. Also, the micro-credentials pilot in the Dnipro region has stimulated policy-level discussion on the use of the micro-credentials approach in skills training.

Two policy briefs were produced in 2023 on the ETF Digital Education Reform Framework and on the power of self-reflection in digital education. Country intelligence was also generated through the on-going drafting of case studies of the CNL research on innovation in PCs and the Digital Education Reform Frameworks (DERFs) pilots implemented in Algeria and Moldova. In addition, the ETF contributed to the EU Education Summit with

recommendations for the EU Education Area mid-term review, and moderated a session in the European SMEs Assembly with DG GROW on the mentor skills for SMEs at risk.

Table 5 below summarises the main achievements and contributions to partner countries reforms and/or EU policies for 2023 under this activity area.

Table 5: innovative teaching and learning main achievements in 2023

Objective

Encourage the development, implementation and dissemination of innovative teaching and learning practices for more effective and inclusive education and training systems in a lifelong learning perspective.

Outcomes

- Buy-in for policy reforms in partner countries on the role of innovation in teaching and learning in contributing to equity and quality of education and training.
- Improved capacity of countries to co-create new teaching and learning approaches by fostering collaboration through community of practitioners.
- Innovative teaching and learning practices, piloting of EU tools for digital educators serve as inspiration for policy dialogue and policy advice at local, regional, national and EU level.

Main achievements in 2023

Number of practitioners engaged in the CNL network, by country and type of interactions (exchange on findings; adoption of new processes/models)

- 6 multilingual webinars of the community of innovative educators were organized with an average attendance of 150 participants mainly from partner countries, sharing hands on knowledge and best practices for teachers and educators, on different emerging topics, including AI, green skills, digital credentials, and open education resources.
- Two practitioners who are part of the CNL research (TUN and SER) participated to the EAPRIL conference in Belfast in November 2023 presenting the results of their case studies.
- Piale activity in Jordan with DVV international.
- Collaboration with JRC across activities using SELFIE and SCAFFOLD.
- Collaboration with UNESCO TTF on tools for teachers.
- Collaboration with ILO on Ukraine micro-credentials.

Use by partner country actors of publications and other tools produced by CNL

- Publication of "The key competence lighthouse: Partnering for an entrepreneurial Tunisia".
- Scaffold deck of cards was produced and disseminated through different networks and key stakeholders (JRC, INTPA, DGGROW, DGEAC) and in several events, including the LLL platform workshop and the being entrepreneurial workshop.

2023 Highlights

- Micro-credentials pilot in Dnipro Region (UA) has kicked off the policy level discussion on the application of the micro-credentials approach in skills training.
- Application and testing of READY in Israel resulted in the development of new pedagogical approaches in teaching the key areas of the READY model.
- The Scaffold dissemination, following its launch in November 2023, was extremely successful.
- Preparation of the competence assessment activity in Ukraine.

In this context, this activity area is aligned with the [European Skills Agenda](#) and its associated instruments, notably the [VET Recommendation](#) and the [Osnabrück Declaration](#). Activities in the partner countries are also aligned with the first priority of the [Digital Education Action Plan](#) of developing a high-performing digital education ecosystem, in particular those referring to online/distance learning, SELFIE for teachers, the European Digital Competence Framework and improving digital skills provision.

Finally, this activity area also contributes to the Commission priority [A Europe fit for the Digital Age](#), the further development of the [European Education Area to support future-oriented education and training systems](#), the Council conclusions on [European teachers and trainers for the future](#), and to the [Sustainable Development Goal 4](#) on quality education.

1.6 Engaging enterprises in skills development

The aim is to support the engagement of enterprises in skills development in partner countries through actions targeting skills for transformation, competitiveness, innovation, greening and resilience, thus integrating skilling, reskilling and upskilling, as well as to identify good practice both at enterprise and policy levels to inform choices conducive to sustainability and inclusion.

In 2023, the activity delivered important achievements on agri-food in the Western Balkans. The analysis of the sector across countries in the region was transformed by the Public Policy Research Centre in Serbia and the Centre for Development Evaluation and Social Science of Bosnia and Herzegovina into a joint project concept named 'Bringing Western Balkan Agri-Food sector Out of the Sustainability and Digital Void'.

There was also a request from the Albanian authorities to provide policy recommendations in three priority domains for smart specialisation: renewable energy and natural resources, sustainable and diversified tourism, and health and sustainable food chain. The request was incorporated into the Growth Plan for Albania.

A highlight of the year rests in the collaboration with the DG JRC. This resulted in ETF inputs on human capital development being incorporated in the revised smart specialisation methodology. In addition, other 25 reports were published on country and region specificities in the agri-food sector, thus contributing to country intelligence.

The international networking event on skilling up the Western Balkans agri-food sector gathered peer learning partners from Austria, Belgium, Finland, Ireland, the Netherlands and Portugal, as well as EU institutions. The event provided a platform to share ETF research and to use it to foster a foresight reflection and undertake a policy dialogue and exchange of good practices among policy makers. In addition, it generated a public-private dialogue and insights to solve coordination failures in terms of upskilling and reskilling.

Table 6 below summarises the main achievements and contributions to partner countries reforms and/or EU policies for 2023 under this activity area.

Table 6: engaging enterprises in skills development main achievements in 2023

Objective

Provide high quality support in linking VET and SMEs for innovation, productivity-enhancing skills and quality of work.

Outcomes

- Engagement of business intermediaries and trade unions in PCs to support skills development of SMEs in the context of the twin digital and green transitions.
- Enhanced capacity of business intermediary bodies and trade unions to support implementation, scaling, and quality of skills development in enterprises.
- Strengthened links between skills development actors, including VET and higher VET, CVT and innovation actors and systems.

Main achievements in 2023

Number of business intermediaries and trade unions engaged in the network

- The project reached out to approximately 200 business intermediary bodies across the Western Balkans.

Use of good practice for policy advice and dialogue

- Peer exchange with the Chamber of Commerce of Torino on SME internationalisation.
 - Exchange on career guidance in companies with WB trade unions.
 - Exchange on the results of the study on the skills dimension of technology transfer in the Western Balkans.
-

- International networking event on skilling up the WB agri-food sector with peer learning partners from Austria, Belgium, Finland, Ireland, the Netherlands and Portugal, as well as EU institutions such as EIT Food, COSME and Enterprise Europe Network.

Number of cross-border peer learning partnerships with EU and partner countries

- Agreement with 7 EU member state institutions to establish objective-driven peer learning partnerships with WB: Peer learning partners were established with a University of Applied Science from Krems, Austria; the Provincial Technical Institute (PTI) from Kortrijk, Belgium; University of Technology LUT from Lappeenranta, Finland, ACE AgriTech Centre of Excellence from Kerry, Ireland; Wageningen University from the Netherlands, University of Warsaw from Poland, InovCluster from Castelo Branco, Portugal.
- Peer learning on potential cooperation under Erasmus+ and Horizon.
- A more informal peer exchange was initiated between the Ukrainian public procurement authority Prozorro and their Polish homologues on SME skills to facilitate access to funding.

Number of vocational schools engaged in innovation processes in the context of collaborative partnerships with SMEs

- The project has reached out to approx. 80 formal VET institutions, 70 universities providing post-secondary VET, and 200 business intermediary bodies.

2023 Highlights

- The analysis of agri-food in the WB was transformed by research centres of Serbia and of Bosnia and Herzegovina into a joint project concept submitted for funding.
 - Request from Albania to extend the project support to provide policy recommendations in three priority domains for smart specialisation.
 - ETF inputs on human capital development were incorporated in the revised smart specialisation mapping methodology.
 - 55 participants to the annual networking event on agri-food in the WB held in Skopje.
-

The activity area is designed to directly contribute to policies that guide the EU towards higher levels of competitiveness, from Cohesion policy focused on research and innovation to the New European Innovation Agenda and productivity, all in the broader context of the Single market as a driver of European competitiveness and the twin transition. Moreover, The project informs the use of IPA and, more specifically, IPARD funds. Also, the activity area concretely cooperates on common objectives with EU policy instruments such as EIT Food, COSME, and Enterprise Europe Network (EEN).

In this context, this activity area is in line with the [European Skills Agenda](#) on the need to acquire new skills and the [European Charter for Small Enterprises](#), which calls upon taking action to support and encourage small enterprises. Furthermore, the work linking VET and SMEs for innovation, productivity-enhancing skills and quality of work supports the Western Balkan economies in ensuring that their industrial ambitions consider the new circumstances following the Covid-19 crisis and in line with the [‘Small Business Act’ for Europe](#). By fostering networking within the Western Balkans, this activity area also supports the implementation of [‘A credible enlargement perspective for and enhanced EU engagement with the Western Balkans’](#), which identifies lack of job creation and a low level of innovation as key challenges.

It also supports regional industry to lead the way in transitioning to a green, digital and resilient economy, in line with the [updated European industrial strategy](#). The focus on the twin digital and green transitions supports the new [SME Strategy](#) for a sustainable and digital Europe and the [Green Action Plan \(GAP\) for SMEs](#), which aims at helping SMEs take advantage of the opportunities offered by the transition to a green economy in line with the Commission priority [European Green Deal](#). Furthermore, it also contributes to the DG RTD policy on research, science and innovation, which aims to help create growth and jobs.

Finally, this activity area also contributes to [Sustainable Development Goal \(SDG\) 4](#) on quality education, [SDG 8](#) on decent work and economic growth, [SDG 9](#) on industry, innovation and infrastructure, and [SDG 12](#) on responsible consumption and production.

1.7 Lifelong learning policies and system change

The aim is to support partner countries to design and realise system change for inclusive, open and flexible lifelong learning systems through knowledge co-creation based on policy dialogue with and mutual learning between partner countries, as well as via monitoring systems and tools that provide timely, high quality and evidence-based lifelong learning policy advice.

At its core, the activity area is primarily about delivering country intelligence and developing new methods of gathering and using such intelligence on a demand-driven basis. A key highlight in 2023 was the release of the 'Cross-Country Monitoring Report on Education, Skills, and Employment: Trends for Development 2023' demonstrating the value of evidence and data from the Torino Process and KIESE for both internal and external audiences, thus bringing to the fore ETF's country intelligence.

In a nutshell, 2023 was a year devoted to the delivery of baseline evidence and information. The consistent delivery of monitoring reports has proved of value to countries, EUDs and international partners alike, many of which are supporting ETF partner countries in meeting their obligations towards fulfilling the SDGs. In addition, in 2023 the RED methodology was transferred to DG NEAR for monitoring progress of candidate countries. This is a key instrument for objective assessment in line with EU integration criteria.

Table 7 below summarises the main achievements and contributions to partner countries reforms and/or EU policies for 2023 under this activity area.

Table 7: lifelong learning policies and system change

Objective

Provision of policy support to partner countries through monitoring, policy reviews and diagnostics, as well as thematic innovation, for the creation of effective and inclusive opportunities for lifelong learning through system change.

Outcomes

- Reliable and relevant system monitoring data, collected and analysed and disseminated.
- Hands-on policy review insights and recommendations which can guide improvement and policy implementation in the domain of lifelong learning.
- Knowledge on system change developed for policy dialogue/advice in line with lifelong learning approach.

Main achievements in 2023

Policy uptake of ETF reviews and demand for follow-up in the form of requests for thematic follow-up report and targeted support to selected partner countries in the regions covered by the LLL policy review activity

- Armenia: policy review successfully completed as planned, leading to a subsequent request for a quality assurance project in 2024.
- Similar path for Bosnia and Herzegovina.

Timely availability of evidence gathered with the help of solutions within the new monitoring framework

- Due development and implementation of a robust methodology for evidence collection and tracking system performance.
- Due production of baseline monitoring reports.

Publication and dissemination of thematic knowledge studies, and of the RED methodology, i.e., number of dissemination occasions and degree of stakeholder participation

- Release of the RED methodology.
- Dissemination of findings from thematic work on evidence, policy and practice: sharing of insights through the cross-country monitoring report and presentations at global conferences (to be further presented at CIES and ECER further extending the reach and engagement with the wider academic and professional community).

Publication and dissemination of country fiches, KIESE and of the migration fiche for Ukraine

- Production and release of country fiches as planned.
- Production and publication of cross-country monitoring report (formerly KIESE) as planned.
- Migration fiche in Ukraine postponed due to limited involvement of interested and relevant parties.

Production of five country monitoring publications for the integrated monitoring process of Osnabrück Declaration and EU Council Recommendation on VET

- Successful completion of planned activities under the Osnabrück monitoring.
- Joint presentation with Cedefop delivered at the ACVT meeting.

2023 Highlights

- Cross-Country Monitoring Report on Education, Skills, and Employment: Trends for Development 2023, among the most read publications on ETF website.
 - Publication of Albania and Morocco reports also amongst most read ETF publications.
 - Publication of analysis of PISA 2022 results.
 - Transfer of the RED methodology to DG NEAR for monitoring the progress of candidate countries.
-

The revamped Torino Process or New Monitoring Framework (NMF) provides the basis for bilateral and regional policy advice for lifelong learning system change, as well as regional policy reviews and the monitoring of the [Osnabrück Declaration](#) and [VET Recommendation](#).

In-depth analyses enable the ETF to deliver evidence-based policy advice, based on information about country experiences, contexts and implementation scenarios, which feed back into the work of monitoring and support the co-creation of knowledge, thus enabling partner countries to create effective and inclusive opportunities for lifelong learning through system change in line with the [European Pillar of Social Rights](#).

Policy advice and its associated implementation support is done on this basis and in line with EU guidance and best practices, which embed the principles of EU policies such as the [European Skills Agenda](#).

The NMF also adds value by including dimensions linked to skills for green transition, technological transformation including digitalisation as well as lessons learned from Covid-19 and recovery in alignment with EU skills agenda and VET recommendations. In doing so, it contributes to the [European Green Deal](#) and its accompanying [Just Transition Mechanism](#) as well as with [A Europe fit for the Digital Age](#).

Moreover, attention is paid to gender aspects, particularly the monitoring of women in education, training and labour markets through their participation, for instance, in STEM or entrepreneurship. Hence, its work is inspired and contributes to the [European Consensus on Development](#) and the [EU Gender Action Plan III](#).

For EC services and partner countries alike, this activity area also provides reliable and relevant country data and key performance indicators on Education, Skills and Employment (KIESE) monitoring system for policy review and analysis, as well as for monitoring system performance informed by the [Council Recommendation on Key Competences for Lifelong Learning](#). In addition, it enables partner countries to advance national implementation plans, monitoring frameworks and reporting, and the co-creation of country briefings.

The ETF also contributes to the [European Dialogue on Skills and Migration](#), the [New Pact on Migration and Asylum](#) and the [Global Approach to Migration and Mobility](#) by focusing on the role of skills in tackling the root causes of migration as well as on the need for the EU to attract new talents while ensuring win-win solutions with the countries of origin and the migrants themselves.

Finally, this activity area also contributes to the [Sustainable Development Goal \(SDG\) 4](#) on quality education, to [SDG 8](#) on decent work and economic growth and to [SDG 10](#) on reduced inequalities.

1.8 Quality assurance and governance mechanisms

The aim is to promote participatory system governance and mechanisms that foster cooperation between governmental actors, private sector and civil society actors in order to support conditions, at system level, that enable the transition from education and training to performant and modern lifelong learning oriented HCD in partner countries, which is done through policy advice that integrates governance, quality assurance and financing.

In 2023, there has been a shift towards working with countries in parallel to the transnational and mainstream work with the QA Forum. This triggered a shift towards strengthening ETF policy advice and contribution to progress in partner countries. For instance, there were several requests for advice from Georgia, Moldova, Armenia and Uzbekistan on issues such as EQAVET or QA mechanisms for VNFIL. Likewise, the Poltava region in Ukraine received policy advice on LLL policies involving civil society organisations (CSOs) at local level, and advice was also given to Albania on the re-implementation of the YG phase in three cities.

According to positive feedback from partner countries, Governance Learning Action and Dialogue (GLAD) is filling a gap in providing a space for discussion on governance issues and, in 2023, the self-initiated modality was introduced. Also, a paper on the important role of CSOs in HCD has been finalised and the ETF is raising awareness of this issue among policymakers.

Overall, engagement with CSOs has increased in 2023. This has led to a wider recognition of ETF's role and knowledge in the field, while at the same time CSOs have been more widely recognised as important system actors. As a result, social dialogue has also expanded with multiple partners onboard of policy making processes together with governments.

The activity area also contributed to country intelligence through knowledge-intensive peer visits on quality assurance, reports developed by PCs on their quality assurance, and a new CSO study in Moldova. Other contributions include the findings and recommendations on YG governance in Albania, and both the analysis of VET financing in Georgia and of non-formal learning in Moldova. In addition, a triangular analysis between resilience (and its relationship to different aspects of fragility), governance and human capital development initiated in 2023 in collaboration with DG JRC.

In terms of progress in partner countries, the quality assurance system in Georgia was modernised in 2023 based on the recommendations received from peers from other countries during the peer learning visit. Cooperation between Moldova and Georgia on the topic has also increased.

Table 8 below summarises the main achievements and contributions to partner countries reforms and/or EU policies for 2023 under this activity area.

Table 8: quality assurance and governance mechanisms main achievements in 2023

Objective

Support conditions at system level that enable the transition from education and training to performant lifelong learning.

Outcomes

- Partner countries are familiar with and apply mechanisms for participatory governance (including quality assurance and financing mechanisms) in order to move to lifelong learning systems.
- EU programmes in partner countries are informed by multi-level and multi-actor governance, quality assurance and ETF knowledge on financing.
- QA Forum members advise their respective country on quality assurance mechanisms, and selected countries implemented them.

Main achievements in 2023

The participants in the GLAD, social partnership and CSOs related actions, and QA Forum represent the diversity of lifelong learning actors

- GLAD webinars and related activities successfully involved the full range of stakeholders, namely government, social partners, and CSOs representatives.
- The QA forum involves all actors that have a role in quality assuring LLL, i.e. besides MoE also other ministries and agencies.

At least 20% of those taking part in the mutual exchange and/or policy advice actions report about implementing participatory governance mechanisms

- Albanian authorities have supported the invitation of multi-stakeholder discussions for the YG pilot phase. As a result, there is greater interest to commit to the YG implementation.
- Ukraine is increasing cases of collaboration between local authorities and CSOs regarding LLL.
- Tunisia asked the ETF to arrange a multi-stakeholder discussion on a new LLL framework (postponed to 2024).
- Moldova is actively engaging CSOs in addressing the sizeable demands of displaced people from Ukraine.
- Armenia asked the ETF to facilitate social partnership in VET (postponed to 2024).
- CSOs asked to lead a few GLAD webinars on the subject including their policy influence in the LLL/HCD sector.

Country and regional platforms – e.g., the EAfA, EOSOC Platform, Youth Guarantee bodies, UfM, etc. – informed by ETF expert input on Governance and Quality Assurance

- Solid expert input on governance issues related to the YG, including recommendations on the YG implementation plans in the WB region.
- Specific analysis followed by advice on how social partners and CSOs should be part of the YG governance in each country.
- Substantive increase of the cooperation with the EESC (the home institution of social partners and CSOs in the EU), with consequent influence of their agenda notably on skills, and with strong cooperation perspectives.
- Planning of multi-agency cooperation ETF-Eurofound-Cedefop and EESC on social dialogue in the WB, as key element in the accession process.

EU assistance and policy dialogue embed participatory and partnership-based mechanisms of governance, quality assurance, financing

- YG received substantive advice on the governance (Albania, Kosovo etc.), both on the action plans and directly to the EUDs.
- In Uzbekistan a project funded by the EU and implemented by the UNESCO has a QA component, on which ETF provided expert input and recommendations.
- The RED methodology became the core of an EU funded project in EaP valuing the role of CSOs.

EU assistance support building capacities to effectively implement participatory and partnership-based governance

- No requests received.

2023 Highlights

- Several requests for policy advice, including from Georgia, Moldova, Armenia and Uzbekistan on topics such as EQAVET or QA mechanisms for VNFIL.
- Increased recognition of ETF's expertise on and acknowledgement of the role of CSOs as system actors as well as in addressing vulnerable groups so that no one is left behind in education, training and employment.
- Inter-connections between resilience (and fragilities), governance and human capital development.
- Increased awareness that public-private cooperation are needed to make LLL a reality for all, as well as that social dialogue is key for policy making.

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- Positive feedback from partner countries regarding GLAD which is filling a gap in providing a space for discussion on governance issues.
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The approach employed draws from the [European Pillar of Social Rights](#), the [European Skills Agenda](#), the [VET Recommendation](#), the [European cooperation in education and training towards the European Education Area and beyond \(2021-30\)](#), the [European Quality Assurance Reference Framework for VET](#), the [Sectoral Blueprint for Cooperation on Skills](#), the [European Alliance for Apprenticeships](#), the [Youth Guarantee](#), the [UNESCO Marrakech Framework for Action](#) and the [Osnabrück Declaration](#).

It aligns with the [European Green Deal](#) and its accompanying [Just Transition Mechanism](#) and [Fit for 55': delivering the EU's 2030 Climate Target on the way to climate neutrality](#), as well as [A Europe fit for the Digital Age](#) and related EU recommendations on skills development. It does so by encouraging cross-fertilisation between lifelong VET and both the greening and digitalisation of the economy, and with industrial strategies that pursue sustainable competitiveness, social fairness and resilience.

Finally, it contributes to the [SDG 4](#) on quality education, to [SDG 8](#) on decent work and economic growth, to [SDG 10](#) on reduced inequalities, to [SDG 16](#) on peace, justice and strong institutions, and to [SDG 17](#) on partnerships for the goals.

1.9 DARYA – Dialogue and Action for Resourceful Youth in Central Asia

The aim is to support youth employability in the region. The project has a systemic approach and focuses on immediate and medium-term measures that support inclusive and labour market-relevant skills development opportunities for young women and men in Central Asia. The project is articulated around three thematic areas that are required to sustain robust, yet adaptable skills development systems that support youth employability, and covers activities at national and regional or multi-country level.

The three thematic areas that frame the project are: i) evidence and analysis of education and training outcomes and skills needs; ii) stakeholder-driven flexible and permeable approach to qualifications at national and regional level; and iii) flexible and inclusive teaching and learning, based on learning outcomes relevant to the labour market.

In 2023, the ETF was able to leverage its unique position to nurture regional cooperation in skills development. This has increased its visibility in the region and with partners as a valuable member of the EU family. In turn, this further enabled Darya to interact with EU bilateral support and the regional Team Europe. As a result, both ETF and EU tools and methodologies have been systemically used, beyond expanding region stakeholders' participation across the ETF networks.

Highlights include a wide consultation involving 34,000 young people from the region, which enabled further understanding the needs, expectations and potentials for the future. Also, the creation of a 'community' that facilitated active exchanges on policies and practices, as well as peer learning activities, thus engaging stakeholders from all levels across the five countries in the region. Moreover, liaison with EC services and EU MS was key to explore joint opportunities on skills development, EU programming and regional Team Europe initiatives, especially with EEAS, DG INTPA and relevant EU Delegations.

In terms of evidence for skills development, peer learning included using labour market information to anticipate skills and jobs; monitoring skills demands; measures to support better labour market transition; innovation within public employment services; digital competencies of learners and educators; self-assessment tools; among others.

As for qualifications development, peer learning included national qualifications systems in CA and in EU countries; regional cooperation on qualifications and learning from the experience of EQF and ACQF; transparency and mutual understanding of qualifications systems in CA by sharing latest developments, developing a glossary of NQS terms, and mapping and comparison of NQFs; modern qualifications, quality assurance and qualifications systems; and exchange to improve capacities in qualifications systems.

On teaching and learning, peer learning included standards for curricula and teachers, including piloting SELFIE; digital competencies for citizens, learners and educators; SCAFFOLD card deck as a practical tool for educators to support key competence development to be rolled out in several schools; awareness raising that developments on key competences have to span across education levels and also concern non-formal/informal settings; and youth consultation on digital experiences in CA in cooperation with UNICEF.

Table 9 below summarises the main achievements and contributions to partner countries reforms and/or EU policies for 2023 under Darya.

Table 9: Dialogue and Action for Resourceful Youth in Central Asia (Darya) main achievements in 2023

Objective

To contribute to post-Covid recovery in Central Asia by fostering improved employability of young people in Central Asia through inclusive and labour-market oriented skills development.

Outcomes

- Forward-looking and gender sensitive skills development and employment services enhanced through better evidence and analysis of education and training outcomes and skills needs.
- Stakeholder-driven flexible and permeable approaches to qualifications are adopted at national and regional level in order to allow equal opportunities to all.
- Increased use of flexible and inclusive teaching and learning approaches, based on learning outcomes and relevant to the labour market.
- Wider skills development for the employment stakeholder community is actively involved through jointly designed and agreed governance mechanisms, learning programmes, sharing tools and piloting of new tool.
- Increased country-led regional cooperation and peer exchange on skills development for the employment sector among Central Asian countries, EU Member States and the international development community.

Main achievements in 2023

New skills needs analysis and development of methods, tools, procedures and capabilities

- Consultation engaging 34,000 youth.
- Eleven (11) face-to-face capacity building and peer learning activities.
- Exchange on relevant policies and practices on skills anticipation and monitoring of skills demand, measures to support better labour market transition and innovation within public employment services
- Active involvement of countries in defining and launching pilot activities on skills demand monitoring and anticipation

New or updated measures or tools on qualifications developed and piloted

- Five (5) national focus groups on regional common interests and cooperation on qualifications.
- Peer learning on components of national qualifications systems in both CA and EU countries.
- Exploring interest in regional cooperation on qualifications and learning from the experience of EQF and ACQF.
- Supporting transparency and mutual understanding of qualifications systems in CA: sharing latest developments, glossary of NQS terms, mapping and comparison of NQFs.
- Strengthening regional understanding of modern qualifications and of qualifications systems.

- Creating an informal community of stakeholders with interest and motivation to learn from each other and improve capacities in the field of qualifications systems.

New or improved teaching and learning methods developed and piloted

- Participation of 5 countries in familiarisation webinars and face to face event on digital competencies for citizens, learners and educators.
- Overall interest of countries to update their standards for teachers and consider curriculum adaptations.
- Interest of 4 countries to actively pilot SELFIE.
- Introduction of SCAFFOLD card deck as a practical tool for educators to support key competence development in any education and learning setting.
- Building common understanding in most countries that developments on key competences need to span across education levels and also concern non-formal/informal settings.
- General enthusiasm to take an active role in the roll out of the SCAFFOLD card deck, with several countries ready to actively pilot SCAFFOLD in schools.
- 3 countries have already set up national working groups for SCAFFOLD.
- At least 3 countries are ready to work with SCAFFOLD in several education levels and settings, including in adult education.
- Kazakhstan will contribute own resources to the training of SCAFFOLD trainers and piloting a school based approach in 10 schools (3 general education, 7 VET colleges).
- Youth consultation on digital experiences in CA in cooperation with UNICEF and the MoE of Kazakhstan.

Strategic dialogue, cooperation and responsibilities agreed

- Active participation of all five countries.
- Creation of the Darya 'community'.
- Peer learning with MS and via ETF networks.
- Regular meetings with DG INTPA and the EU SR CA, beyond exchange with EEAS and CA EUDs.
- Involvement of EU MS in peer learning activities as well as of EBRD and ADB.
- Creation of national steering committees, which convened five times in 2023.
- Creation of a high-level group (met once in 2023), a regional steering committee (met once in 2023), and a youth focus group in cooperation with UNICEF to act as a sounding board (several online meetings in 2023).

2023 Highlights

- Active engagement of all five CA countries and agreement on governance system.
 - Regional cooperation and creation of Darya 'community'.
 - CA wide consultation engaging 34,000 youth.
 - Capacity building and peer learning activities.
 - Widespread and systematised use of ETF and EU tools and methodologies, including SELFIE and SCAFFOLD.
 - Cooperation with UNICEF and engagement with PCs, EC, MS, CA EUDs as well as both EBRD and ADB.
-

In this context, Darya contributes to the [European Skills Agenda](#) Actions 2 and 6, in line with the [European Green Deal](#) and its accompanying [Just Transition Mechanism](#), as well as [A Europe fit for the Digital Age](#) and the associated [Digital Education Action Plan 2021-27](#). The focus on skills needs and matching, inclusion and social fairness are line with the [European Pillar of Social Rights](#) and the [European Consensus on Development](#).

The youth dimension is in line with the [Youth Action Plan \(YAP\) in EU external action 2022 – 2027](#), the [Reinforced Youth Guarantee](#) and the [Youth Employment Support: a Bridge to Jobs for the Next Generation](#).

In relation to qualifications, Darya builds on the [VET Recommendation](#) and the [Osnabrück Declaration](#) in close cooperation with the EQF advisory group and the European Commission, and thus in line with the [EQF Recommendation](#) and the [Council Recommendation on the validation of non-formal and informal learning](#).

Regarding flexible qualifications systems and upskilling pathways, beyond the policies above mentioned, Darya is also in line with the [Recommendation on a European approach to micro-credentials for lifelong learning and employability](#), the [Porto Declaration](#), the [Communication on Achieving the European Education Area by 2025](#), the [Council Resolution on a strategic](#)

[framework for European cooperation in education and training towards the European Education Area and beyond \(2021-30\)](#), the [Joint Employment Report](#), the [Council Resolution on a new European Agenda for Adult Learning 2021-30](#), and [ALMA](#).

Moreover, Darya promotes the [Council recommendation on vocational education and training \(VET\) for sustainable competitiveness, social fairness and resilience](#) and the [Marrakech Ministerial Declaration](#). It also promotes the further development of the [European education Area to support future-oriented education and training systems](#), the Council conclusions on [European teachers and trainers for the future](#). Regionally, it fosters the [new EU Strategy for Central Asia](#) and the [EU and Central Asia: New Opportunities for a Stronger Partnership](#).

Finally, Darya also contributes to [Sustainable Development \(SDG\) Goal 4](#) on quality education, [SDG 5](#) on gender equality, and to [SDG 8](#) on decent work and economic growth.

1.10 Responding to the new EU policy and geographical priorities

The aim is to enable the ETF to retain a certain amount of flexibility to react to information needs and policy advice, as well as to ad hoc requests from EU services and other important stakeholders, in line with the Commission opinion. This includes pursuing opportunities to work beyond current partner countries or to engage in new priority thematic areas. This is key to expand the EC reach and influence while responding to relevant requests supported by the Commission and the MS, paying particular attention to the Team Europe approach.

In 2023, the work on extra-subsidy projects further expanded as the ETF was entrusted by EC services with new agreements for collaboration and contracts. This includes a contribution agreement with DG NEAR on supporting education reforms and skills in the Eastern Partnership region. Also, an agreement with the EU Delegation in Egypt on the implementation of an action to support the Ministry of Education and Technical Education of the Arab Republic of Egypt in assessing and strengthening its strategic vision for future developments.

Highlights for the year include the validation of the ACQF Policy Document at the Addis ACQF Conference. The ACQF was born as the largest qualifications framework globally, with a scope of 55 countries. An important achievement of 2023 was the launch of the AU-wide network – African Qualifications Network (AQN) – which is running and supporting country progress based on defined and agreed recommendations.

The ACQF has become a catalyst and a benchmark for many countries. Increasingly other regional qualifications forums are motivated to work on referencing to the ACQF, and several countries use ACQF guidelines in developing their NQFs. The ACQF entails a good combination of country-specific as well as both mutual and peer learning activities, which are key for motivation, ownership, capacity development, and encouragement.

Furthermore, in 2023 a contribution agreement with the EU Delegation in Rwanda was also implemented to support the preparation of an action in the country TVET sector. This entailed a training on skills anticipation and matching developed and implemented in Rwanda and Laos for EUDs. Also, an analysis of gender, HCD, TVET and employment in agriculture in Rwanda, which led to a request for an extension of the contribution agreement from the country national authorities.

Table 10 below summarises the main achievements and contributions to partner countries reforms and/or EU policies for 2023 under this activity area

Table 10: responding to new EU policy and geographical priorities main achievements in 2023

Objective

To respond to the evolving global and EU priorities in order to advance the EU agenda on skills and human capital development.

Outcomes

- EU agenda on skills and human capital development is further promoted.
- ETF responds to the needs of the European Commission and addresses EU priorities at both thematic and geographical levels.
- Partnerships are established with strategic partners and TEI is taken into account.

Main achievements in 2023

Number of EU requests outside of the geographical coverage of ETF partner countries accepted and delivered

- Delivery on ACQF and on an action for the Rwanda TVET sector.
- Regional education programme in the EaP and support to the Ministry of Education and Technical Education of the Arab Republic of Egypt.

Number of partners involved for organising global actions and debates

- 12 African Countries.
- EUDs.
- 6 workshops with CNAQ-ANEP and Min STHE, GTEC, KNQA and Min Educ / TVET PS.
- 1 training.

2023 Highlights

- African Qualifications Network (AQN).
- Global referencing to ACQF.
- Peer learning between African Countries.
- Training on skills anticipation and matching developed and implemented in Rwanda and Laos for EUDs.
- Analysis of gender, HCD, TVET and employment in agriculture in Rwanda.

In this context, the ETF has been encouraged by the Commission to use its flexibility to respond to new EU priorities including, but not limited to, those related to the [European Skills Agenda](#), the [European Green Deal](#), the [Youth Guarantee](#), the [Digital Education Action Plan](#) and [A Europe fit for the Digital Age](#), the [Erasmus+ programme](#), the [European Dialogue on Skills and Migration](#), the [New Pact on Migration and Asylum](#), the [Global Approach to Migration and Mobility](#), the [Comprehensive Strategy for Africa](#), the [Africa-EU partnership](#), the new [Africa Communication](#), the [Communication on the Africa-Europe Alliance for Sustainable Investment and Jobs](#), and the [African Continental Qualifications Framework](#).

In particular, the trainings contribute to DG INTPA's priority to use 10% of development budget eye marked for education of skills development for decent jobs. Overall, the activity area can potentially contribute to several Sustainable Development Goals, including [SDG 4](#) on quality education, to [SDG 5](#) on gender equality, to [SDG 8](#) on decent work and economic growth, to [SDG 9](#) on industry, innovation and infrastructure, to [SDG 10](#) on reduced inequalities, to [SDG 12](#) on responsible consumption and production, to [SDG 16](#) on peace, justice and strong institutions, and to [SDG 17](#) on partnerships for the goals.

MANAGEMENT (PART II)

This section explains how the ETF delivered the achievements described in the previous Section 1. It covers all elements of the Agency governance as well as human and financial resource management, including follow up actions from audits and evaluations.

2.1 Governing Board

The Governing Board is responsible for drawing up the annual estimate of expenditure and revenue as well as for adopting the annual work programme, draft establishment plan, definitive budget, annual activity report, rules of procedure and financial rules. It has the power to appoint and dismiss the director, as well as to prolong his/her term of office.

The ETF Governing Board (GB) is chaired by the Director General of DG EMPL. In 2023, one Governing Board meeting was organised in June and another in November. The Board welcomed the ETF new Director, appointed the new accounting officer ad interim and adopted 15 decisions in 2023, including: the adoption of the Consolidated Annual Activity Report 2022, Annual Accounts 2022, Annual Work Programme 2024 and Budget 2024.

In addition, DG EMPL organised and chaired two Structured Dialogue (SD) meetings between the Commission/EEAS Members and Observers in the Governing Board, and the ETF management on ETF's draft Consolidated Annual Activity Report 2022, the draft agenda of the November GB meeting, the ETF's draft Annual Work Programme 2024, the list of requests to ETF, the findings and actions addressing the IAS audit, options for ETF premises post-27, as well as an initial reflection on the mid-term review of ETF's 2027 strategy in parallel to the design of a foresight process and next generation conversations to engage key stakeholders in framing ETF's new vision 2040 and strategy post-27.

Prior to the Governing Board meeting in November, DG EMPL organised and chaired the Troika meeting to discuss the agenda of the GB meeting with the representatives of the current, former and future Presidencies, DG NEAR and the ETF.

The same applies to engagement (beyond the formal SD and GB) with core geographical DGs (e.g. DG NEAR, DG INTPA), EEAS and thematic DGs close to ETF core business (DG EMPL, DG EAC, DG HOME, DG JRC, among others). In the third year of implementation of its 2027 strategy, in 2023 the ETF has further strengthened its bilateral engagement with thematic and geographic EC services, in particular through more regular exchanges and meetings.

2.2 Major developments

In 2023, the ETF continued to accompany partner countries in their process towards 'candidate' EU member status, and to support them advance their education and training systems towards lifelong learning. Also, it has been able to build further flexibility into its workplan by absorbing shocks and adapting to geopolitical developments, including the Russian war of aggression towards Ukraine and increasing fragilities in the EU neighbourhood, thus ensuring its relevance in responding to and supporting human capital development systems during or after conflict.

The ETF supported the EC in the assessments of and reporting on candidacy status of enlargement countries. Its work in Ukraine focused on four fronts: i) reskilling and upskilling of

temporarily displaced adults in Ukraine; ii) the integration of Ukrainians who left the country into the labour market of EU countries by supporting learning opportunities and the recognition of qualifications and skills; iii) the development and implementation of a Joint Action Plan to align the NQF with the EQF; and iv) the development of a comprehensive plan to support Ukraine's overall reconstruction efforts, which recognises the crucial role of a skilled workforce and will further assist Ukraine in its EU enlargement endeavours. A specialised ETF task force serving the EC and the Ukrainian authorities is in place to put the defined plan in motion.

For the ETF, 2023 was also the third year of implementing its 2027 strategy. The strategy is organised around three strategic objectives that are translated into activity areas with a focus on skills and education and training system development in a lifelong learning perspective. These are delivered through three core services, which are the pillars at the heart of ETF's operational activities. During the year the ETF strengthened further the synergies between its three core services to enable them to feed into one another within an integrated cycle that leverages ETF service delivery to countries, regions and EC services.

The ETF implemented the mid-term review of its strategy 2027 to assess impacts to date and define a roadmap for value delivery by 2027. This review showcased relevant progress made so far and outlined actions to take and partnerships to develop to effectively deliver its 2027 strategy. It draws on 30 years of ETF experience in servicing the Commission and partner countries alike, as well as on its accumulated know-how from previous enlargement processes of the Union, which are now particularly relevant given its political priority. At the same time, the ETF initiated a foresight long-term reflection of its post-27 positioning within a changing landscape of human capital development players that will feed into a new vision 2040.

In 2023 a major development were the multiple references to ETF work in the Talent Mobility Package released by the Commission. The ETF further developed intelligence on green skills by mapping it in all partner countries as well as by analysing the role of CoVEs for the twin transition and for research and innovation, and together with DG EMPL organised several events at the COP28 in Dubai. ETF's contribution to the ERASMUS+ project Habitable should respond to the skills shortage and mismatches caused by the digital and green transition, and opening the Erasmus+ career guidance scheme to more enlargement countries will enable more partner countries to access Erasmus+ and the ETF to further influence future calls.

The adoption of the Youth Guarantee implementation plan by Serbia and the Career Counselling in UA followed an ETF-led study and advice. Several tools were launched and successfully disseminated in 2023, including Scaffold, Ready and Selfie, and ETF inputs on HCD were incorporated in the revised EC smart specialisation methodology. The publication of the ETF cross-country monitoring report demonstrated the value of evidence and ETF's data and country intelligence to both internal and external audiences. The transfer of the RED methodology to DG NEAR for monitoring the progress of candidate countries will become a key instrument for objective assessment in line with EU integration criteria. ETF's in-depth understanding of the inter-connections between resilience (and diverse fragilities), governance and human capital development will further help it to advance its positioning in fragile settings.

While implementing its work plan, in 2023 the ETF strengthened the links between its work and the priorities of the Commission through a transversal approach to migration, green, digital, and gender and inclusion in its annual work programme. The European year of skills was also a transversal theme for ETF in 2023. The Commission also asked the ETF to use its

flexibility to pursue opportunities to work beyond its current partner countries, using its expertise to support other priority thematic areas.

For the ETF, the process of expanding activities beyond partner countries is an incremental one and subject to assessment and approval of the Governing Board. This is the case because ETF resources are limited and the first priority is to ensure that it works closely with the partner countries. However, in alignment with ETF's strategy as a global knowledge player on human capital development, the ETF can and will support other wider priorities whenever feasible. Extra-subsidy projects provide the capacity to extend ETF's work to maximise the EU's reach and influence.

In 2023, the Service Level Agreement with DG EMPL on Centres of Vocational Excellence (CoVEs) and both the Dialogue and Action for Resourceful Youth in Central Asia (DARYA) and the African Continental Qualifications Framework (ACQF) in partnership with DG INTPA progressed successfully. Also, a contribution agreement with the EU Delegation in Rwanda was also effectively implemented to support the preparation of an action in the country's TVET sector. Moreover, the ETF was entrusted with a new contribution agreement with DG NEAR on supporting education reforms and skills in the Eastern Partnership region, and an agreement with the EU Delegation in Egypt to assess and strengthen its education strategic vision for future developments.

The ETF is open to be a partner in support of the Team Europe approach in the partner countries. This support can take many forms in view of supporting wider EU investments. For instance, in 2023 detailed actions plans and exchange visits with Enabel and GIZ took place. A roundtable meeting with HCD actors of Team Europe further reinforced the scaling up of ETF's cooperation with EU member states as part of a Team Europe approach. Moreover, the Agency is part of the Team Europe Initiative on jobs through trade and investment in the southern neighbourhood.

Internally, talent attraction, development and retention together with staff safety entailed key developments in 2023. This included ensuring knowledge transfer of senior staff due to retire, and increased attention to gender and geographical balance in the design of vacancies together with offering competitive advantages and expanding dissemination. Also, a new Service Level Agreement was established with EEAS coupled with staff training and tracking to ensure staff security on missions. While further expanding on diversity and inclusion the ETF also accelerated its digital and green maturity. One important development involved adjusting its procurement approach, which became greener and allowed for quicker and more flexible project implementation and management.

The ETF developed further energy efficiency gains, a sustainable commuting plan, assessed its transition to carbon neutrality, and contributed to EU agencies as a pioneer on EMAS certification. Ahead of the implementation of the EC regulation on cybersecurity, the ETF anticipated mitigation measures and staff workload, developed initiatives to upskill staff and established close cooperation with CERT-EU. In fact, the ETF is further developing its corporate anticipatory culture in its strategic development and will continue building its staff's futures literacy, as well as its institutional resilience, efficiency and agility. This will enable the ETF to become more adaptive and prepared for a changing world, further ensuring added-value while developing the skills required to continually position it as an innovative and pioneering organisation on human capital development.

2.3 Budgetary and financial management

Out of the €22,627,956 available as the EU contribution, in 2023 the ETF committed 99.85% (compared to 99.98% in 2022) paid 95.85% (compared to 97.70% in 2022) and performed six budgetary transfers (9 in 2022), therefore maintaining the excellent level of previous years.

In addition to the EU Contribution, as highlighted in Table 11 below, the ETF has received and implemented €5,865,000 through Service Level agreements and Contribution agreements:

- €60,000 – Service Level Agreement (SLA) with EU-OSHA for sharing of accounting services (started in July 2022, continuing).
- €1,425,000 – SLA with DG EMPL for Internationalisation of CoVEs2 (2023).
- €1,750,000 – Contribution Agreement (CA) with DG INTPA for ACQFII (second phase of the project on African Continental Qualification Framework), first instalment (€5m for 4years, started in 2023).
- €2,000,000 – CA with DG INTPA for DARYA (Dialogue and Action for Resourceful Youth in Central Asia), second instalment (€10m for 5 years, started in 2022).
- €180,000 – CA with DG INTPA for RWANDA-TVET (Support to the preparation of an action in the TVET sector in Rwanda), complete project cost (7 months).
- €450,000 – CA for EGYPT TVET (EU Technical Assistance to the Ministry of Education and Technical Education TE 2.0 strategy – TA4TE), first instalment (0.5m€ for 1year).

These positive results in terms of use of the budget shows the effect of the changes introduced in the organisational structure of the ETF, notably in the project management, procurement and financial services.

Table 11: Budget management

Budget	2023	2022	2021	2020	2019
Overall Budget ETF (EU Contribution) (€)	22,627,956	21,726,000	21,300,000	20,957,000	20,546,000
Additional revenue (€)	5,865,000	3,130,000	102,739		

The ETF commitment rate of 99.85% in 2023 indicates the continued upholding of high standards of budget management, planning and monitoring. In this context, Table 12 outlines commitment and payment rates by title.

Table 12: Commitment and payment rates by title

Budget 2023	Available Budget (€)	Committed (€)	%	Paid (€)	%
Title 1 - Staff	15,773,575.03	15,771,633.40	99.99%	15,488,655.04	98.19%
Title 2 - Infrastructure	2,387,475.00	2,363,076.12	98.98%	1,737,141.81	72.76%
Title 3 - Operational	4,466,905.97	4,459,907.82	99.84%	4,463,321.81	99.92%
Grand Total ⁴	22,627,956.00	22,594,617.34	99.85%	21,689,118.66	95.85%

Transfers

The 6 budgetary transfers carried out in the year have allowed the ETF to adapt to the challenges and seize the opportunities of 2023, like improved security on missions, new agencies-wide seminar on procurement, temporary staff support, and infrastructure improvements. Thanks to a dynamic, very close and constant monitoring of associated impacts on the operational funds, their impact on the delivery of the work programme has been minimised. In fact, operational funds deriving from the subvention have been increased by 3.1%. The overall amount transferred was 3.0% (compared to 4.7% in 2022).

Payment times

In 2023 the ETF continued the good trend of respect of payment times with only 42 out of 816 payments paid after the legal due date (5%). While this is an increase from 2022 (3.5%), it is justified by the higher number of payments done early in 2023 on invoices received in 2022, therefore overlapping with the end of year holidays and availability of financial systems early in the year.

Amount returned to the EU budget (or budget outturn)

The 2023 budget outturn was EUR 82,275.36 representing 0.36% of the EC contribution, in line with the last years (0.29% in 2022, 0.4% in 2021). The main reason behind the outturn is cancellation of appropriations for Title 2 (EUR 39,472 carried forward from 2022 and cancelled linked to actual costs lower than initially planned, and EUR 24,398 of appropriations in 2023 not used due mainly to decommitments too late in the year)

Carry forward and RAL 2023-24

Overall, the carry forward (Titles 1 and 2) has increased from the level of last year (5.0% compared to 2.9% of 2022-23), but continues to illustrate a positive alignment between the ETF's administrative activities and payments to its annual cycle through regular monitoring of open commitments and follow-up of payments. The RAL (reste à liquider) under Title 3 reflects an improvement from last year (31.4% compared to 44% in 2022-23). The budget implementation overview is depicted in Table 13 below.

Table 13: Budget implementation overview

Budget 2023 implementation	Title	Budget 2023	Committed in 2023 (%)	Paid in 2023 (%)	To be paid in 2024 (CF + RAL) (%)	of which:		
						Done in 2023 pending payment	To be implemented in 2024	
							Planned	Delayed
Admin (Titles 1 and 2, CF)	T1	15,773,575	99.99%	98.2%	1.8%	0.8%	1.0%	0.0%
	T2	2,387,475	98.98%	72.8%	26.2%	16.0%	10.2%	0.0%
	T1+T2	18,161,050	99.85%	94.9%	5.0%	2.8%	2.2%	0.0%
Operational (Title 3, RAL)	T3	4,466,906	99.84%	56.3%	31.4%	26.4%	3.8%	1.2%
	<i>T3 – pre-2023</i>	<i>2,147,928</i>		90.7%				
Overall ETF		22,627,956	99.85%	87.2%	13.2%	9.9%	2.9%	0.3%

Cancellation and carry overs from 2022

At the end of 2023, the cancelled carry overs amounted to €49,784, which is lower than €57,230 at the end of 2022, which is linked mainly to the conservative estimates made at the end of 2022 about the actual cost of some IT projects and cost of travel of participants to ETF events.

In order to reduce the amount of cancelled appropriations, the ETF has implemented a series of measures such as:

- Budget reallocation – out of the list of reserved activities which could receive funding should there be appropriations available, the ones which generate a reduced carry over and with the highest likelihood to be paid are preferred;
- Appropriation management – the ETF implements its Title 3 budget as differentiated appropriations thus generating "Reste à Liquider" (RAL) rather than carry forward; unpaid RAL does not lead to cancellation of appropriations provided the payment appropriations allocated for them are re-assigned to other ongoing payments;
- Re-evaluation of commitments – in the last months of the year (usually December) all open commitments are re-evaluated, so that only the amount needed is carried over;
- Risk assessment – in the case of some commitments where the incertitude is higher (missions, events, utilities), a risk assessment is made and commitments reduced so that they cover the most likely expenditure/participation, taking the conscious risk therefore that in N+1 there might be a small additional commitment.

Inter-institutional tenders and service level agreements

Synergies with other institutions (EC or agencies) on procurement has been sought with a systematic tailored opportunity assessment to all procurement needs. In 2023, the ETF was part of 38 inter-institutional contracts, had 10 service-level agreements with other EU institutions and bodies, and had 2 ETF contracts open to other agencies, both awarded in 2023.

2.4 Delegation and sub-delegation

The Director of the ETF, as Authorising Officer (AO), has delegated financial responsibility to the Heads of Department as Delegated Authorising Officers (DAOs). The Heads of Department, in turn delegate responsibility to the Heads of Units (SDAOs). This ensures that a limited number of people may act as Authorising Officer.

For expenditure in 2023, all SDAOs and DAOs signed a Declaration of Assurance to support the AO in relation to their area of delegated responsibility.

No reservations were raised by the DAOs or SDAOs in 2023.

2.5 Human resource management

In 2023, the key achievements under the four pillars of the HR 2027 strategy were:

- **Attracting and deploying:** the main focus was on the attractiveness of the institution with measures to optimise gender and geographical balance, as well as the anticipation of skills needs to ensure institutional fitness. These are included in a long-term recruitment plan and is ensured via timely selection processes and swift deployment of staff. The ETF also

improved branding and disability in selection procedures, with an analysis of what vacancies communicate to externals, the use of digital platforms to reach out to a wider and more diversified pool of potential candidates, and the accommodation of selection procedures to disabled candidates. ETF completed 10 recruitment procedures in 2023 (internal and external), including 1 reserve list. Three traineeship calls were also completed and the ETF welcomed 8 new trainees in 2023.

- **Managing and retaining:** focused mainly on engagement (from onboarding to outboarding) with the deployment of the staff engagement survey, the revised people performance management model and the career management framework. In 2023 a high turnover rate initiated due to retirement, with pre-retirement phases to manage and new recruits to be onboarded including the new Director. High priority was given to outboarding and onboarding activities of numerous colleagues. Focus on staff engagement will remain a priority in 2024 considering the decreasing result of the overall rate of staff engagement in 2023 (51% versus 56% in 2020).
- **Growing and development:** focused mainly on continuous development capacities for staff with the management of relevant tools and instruments to create an enabling environment. Efforts concentrated on the alignment of the learning and development activities with a long-term vision of skills needs, as well as on knowledge transfer from staff leaving the ETF.
- **Caring:** wellbeing became more predominant in 2023, and efforts were put on the deployment of the established framework on diversity and inclusion across all HR processes.

Several strategic HR workshops at the level of the management team provided an aligned understanding of the HR regulatory framework, as well as a space for strategic orientations in the people management processes. The implementation of the new rules on working time and hybrid working, as well as the onboarding of SYSPER, were key elements of the change management and digitalisation processes. They both have been successfully deployed and well embraced by all staff.

New learning and development intranet pages were structured by skills and disseminated to all staff. New and additional learning resources and tools were made available to staff for continuous development purposes, reinforcing a self-learning concept. Several opportunities and resources were dedicated to safety and security of staff considering the global fragile geopolitical context. The development of the diversity and inclusion action plan and the successful call for expression of interest for new confidential counsellors were also important developments in 2023.

In the area of mission management, a new travel agency contract was procured and deployed, and the preparation of the onboarding of MIPS progressed significantly with an estimated onboarding in early 2024.

In the financial and procurement resources management area, new and complex tenders and contract modalities were kicked off and managed. Final annual budgetary results and performance indicators remained very good, as highlighted in previous sections. More than 100 tenders/offers were managed in 2023 for a total of 15 tendering procedures. These were often more cumbersome tenders (in lots and cascading).

A high level of support and advice was given, both in general and in extra-subsidy projects. This resulted in the signature of new extra-subsidy projects and the production of background material for the Director intervention when meeting the Agencies under the umbrella of DG EMPL and for the GB meeting in November. Moreover, significant investments from the finance and procurement team were deployed on pre- and post-signature phases of extra-subsidy projects.

In terms of partnerships in the area of HR, finance and procurement management, 2023 showcased in-depth and genuine HR collaboration with other EU Agencies, particularly Cedefop, with several exchanges of practices and experiences, thus enriching knowledge and know-how across agencies. A highlight in 2023 was the recently developed career management framework of the ETF, which was presented to several EU agencies and raised high interest.

In addition, there was an inspiring collaboration and several exchanges with EFSA on financial management practices and tools. A successful partnership with the local authorities and the EU agencies network resulted in the organisation of a procurement workshop, which is due early in 2024 involving around 15 agencies and 100 economic operators from the local market. Also, in 2023 the ETF led within the EU agencies network the working group on green and sustainable public procurement.

Highlights for the year include the fact that all finance KPIs are above targets demonstrating the positive trends over several years. Also, the ETF participates in 38 inter-institutional tenders maintaining the good trend achieved so far.

Business Continuity Plan

In 2023 the Business Continuity Plan was tested twice during internal evacuation exercises. The plan was revised at the end of 2023, and is ready for finalisation and adoption in 2024. It will be further revisited following the adoption of the new regulations on information and cyber-security.

2.6 Strategy for efficiency gains and innovation

In 2023 the ETF continued to identify opportunities to introduce efficiency gains in its operations. This took place in line with its strategy of an integrated and holistic approach to monitoring performance. Improvement actions are identified on an annual basis through the assessment of the effectiveness of internal controls, annual performance assessments, risk assessment, audits and evaluations, and an action plan is prepared in line with the ETF's 2027 strategy.

In 2023, the ETF was able once more to increase the numbers and level of staff allocated to operational activities (Annex 3). This is strived for annually through reallocation of duties, staff mobility and training. This demonstrates that the restructuring of the ETF initiated in 2021 brought about the rebalancing of line management, thus rationalising its organisational structure to deliver core services.

Furthermore, the ETF's project management function streamlined through the Project Management Unit delivered efficiency gains in 2023 by the consistent achievement of the completion of the project plans and related deliverables, as well as the integration of the extra-

subsidy project implementation, which demonstrates that the model of delivery is adequate. New procurement methods are in place, the management toolkit is finalised, and templates and processes are revised and available.

In the area of procurement, the ETF is leading the sustainable procurement group of the EU agencies network and has published an innovative handbook on sustainable procurement. Further efficiency gains were attained due to ETF's digital maturity and the deployment of a new corporate monitoring systems. The deployment of SYSPER, ARES and PPMT together with all preparatory work for deploying MIPS in 2024, have all contributed to further efficiency gains in 2023.

Likewise, ETF's sustainability maturity also contributed to efficiency gains, including in terms of energy efficiency due to building management measures, which enabled the ETF to decrease energy consumption by 13% and gas consumption by 16%. The implemented sustainable commuting plan enabled an increase of 30% in use of car pooling system and of alternative modes of transport such as bicycle.

The above is linked to the continued compromise to maintain and improve greening standards, as per EMAS and ISO 14001 certifications, which beyond utilities also resulted into efficiency gains in materials consumption.

In the area of budget and finance, the year 2023 finished with very good results in terms of budget implementation and audit of financial transactions. Sound financial management and efficient budget management remained an important focus during the year, together with efficiency gains in financial management practices within the matrix organisation and project management model.

Cooperation with other EU agencies

A key achievement of 2023 was the strengthened collaboration between the ETF and EU agencies. The ETF continued to be very active within the EU agencies' networks and is fully committed to the goal of administrative excellence as outlined in the EU Agencies strategy. The ETF is leading two inter-institutional working groups on sustainability, notably on sustainable procurement under NAPO, and another one on sustainable meetings and events under the greening sub-network.

Furthermore, the ETF has taken the role of experienced 'mentor' agency in 2023 to support and motivate agencies through a twinning exercise on EMAS implementation. This type of collaboration leads to efficiency gains in terms of resources, it improves the quality of internal services and sets standards across all agencies in addition to fostering reflections on innovative topics for public administration.

In 2023, the ETF strengthened its cooperation with EMPL cluster agencies. The ETF continued sharing services by providing accounting services to EU-OSHA under a Service Level Agreement. With Cedefop, the ETF strengthened its bilateral cooperation with a specific track on cooperation regarding administration and central services. This included, for example, cooperation on cybersecurity, staffing and development, greening, and procurement to name but a few. Moreover, the EMPL cluster agencies implemented the joint peer review of risks. With ELA, ETF exchanges regularly (in particular around labour mobility of third country nationals) and participates as an observer in its Governing Board.

In the field of cybersecurity, the ETF joined the EUAN working group and participated in a pilot launched by ENISA on implications of the new regulation. In addition, the ETF has been leading the EU Agencies procurement working group (NAPO) on sustainable procurement, including the preparation of the handbook for agencies' use. Here, at inter-agency level the ETF also fostered the solidarity initiative and exchanges on best practices, including the preparation of a "doing business with the EU event" with all agencies being invited in early 2024. ETF has also led on two inter-agency procedures, one with CEDEFOP for evaluation services and another with EIGE for communication services.

2.7 Assessment of audit results during the reporting year

This section sets out the observations, opinions and conclusions reported by auditors, including the limited conclusion of the Internal Auditor on the state of internal control. The management measures taken in response to the audit recommendations are also included, together with an assessment of the material impact of the findings on the achievement of the internal control objectives, and therefore on management's assurance.

The information provided below confirms the trend of positive audit results and is a strong indicator of ETF performance to support the management assurance on the achievement of internal control objectives.

2.7.1 Internal Audit Service (IAS)

The Internal Audit Service (IAS) of the European Commission is the Internal Auditor of the ETF. In this capacity, in 2023 IAS launched an audit on digitalisation and internal review of processes in the ETF. The audit is expected to be finalised by May 2024.

The ETF has addressed all actions under its direct responsibility stemming from the 2022 audit on cooperation mechanisms between the ETF and EC services, pending the IAS review and formal closure. These actions have further improved the coordination and anchoring of ETF's work in wider EC external engagement perspective.

To date, the ETF has not received any critical level audit findings. The ETF does not have any open outstanding findings issued before 2021.

2.7.2 Audit of ETF provisional and final accounts

As in previous years, the audit on ETF provisional and final accounts for the financial year 2023 was outsourced under an inter-institutional framework contract. The final audit report for FY 2023 is expected to be issued in June 2024.

The audit report for 2022 accounts, finalised in June 2023, was positive and contained a clean (unqualified) audit opinion on the 2022 ETF accounts.

2.7.3 European Court of Auditors (ECA)

The European Court of Auditors (ECA) is the external auditor of the ETF.

In October 2023, ECA published the annual audit report for EU agencies for the financial year 2022⁵. This contains a **clean unqualified audit opinion for the ETF**, whereby ECA conclude

⁵ ECA audit report for EU agencies for the financial year 2021

that: *“in our opinion, the payments underlying the accounts for the year ended 31 December 2022 are legal and regular in all material respects”*.

In 2023 the ETF addressed the two audit findings issued in 2022 in the area of procurement, and one outstanding finding on the underlying procurement procedure for interim workers issued in 2018. The ETF has addressed the latter when launching the new framework contract, which was signed in early 2023. Regarding the procurement findings from 2022, the ETF revised and is already implementing the methodology for the assessment of economic and financial capacity.

2.8 Sustainability including greening and EMAS

The ETF approach to a more sustainable way of working has an impact on programming, planning and implementation of the ETF work programme. In 2023, the ETF moved one step further in its sustainability efforts in a systemic manner by giving equal attention to its three pillars: environmental, social and economic.

The ETF is fully committed to reducing its carbon footprint and devising new sustainable solutions in line with the EC ambition of becoming carbon neutral by 2050, as outlined in the European Green Deal. In addition, the ETF strives for a working environment where talent is nurtured and work-life balance a reality, placing attention on inclusion and diversity, as well as on gender and geographical aspects, thus fostering the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and in line with the European Pillar of Social Rights. These are also important considerations in all procurement processes performed by the ETF, which take into account the lifetime of products or services being purchased.

Environmental pillar

The ETF implements its environmental policy to achieve its strategic environmental goals (Annex 7). The ETF obtained EMAS registration and ISO certification in 2021, which have been continually renewed.

In 2023, the ETF carried out a gap analysis to assess the possible transition to GHG protocol. As an experienced partner in the EUAN EMAS twinning programme, the ETF contributed as a pioneer agency on EMAS certification and volunteered as a ‘teacher agency’ to support less experienced agencies seeking this certification. The ETF is also leading an inter-institutional working group on sustainable events under the umbrella of the EU Agencies’ Greening Network.

In addition, a draft sustainable strategy and a draft plan towards a carbon neutrality was completed. The ETF made further energy efficiency gains thanks to building management measures, thereby decreasing the consumption of electricity by 13% and decreasing gas consumption by 16%. A new electrical cabin installation that will favour the possibility to contract green electricity has been installed.

The ETF implemented its sustainable commuting plan with positive results including an increase of 30% in the use of car-pooling and alternative transport use (i.e. bicycle) to the office, thanks to installed facilities such as dedicated bike parking places and e-bike charging spots. Moreover, a new donation policy was developed, further contributing to circularity of IT and other dismissed items.



ETF has reduced by 41% its CO2 emissions from 2019 to 2023.

In 2023 the ETF achieved its goal of confirming and maintaining its EMAS registration and ISO 14001 certification.

Social pillar

The ETF strongly believes in fostering and valuing a diverse and inclusive workplace. To this end, it has adopted the “Diversity & Inclusion Charter” and the “Diversity & Inclusion Toolkit for Managers”. This enabled ETF to begin implementing an annual diversity and inclusion action plan. The ETF also continues to be an active member of the EU agencies network on diversity and inclusion and in 2023 joined the women support network.

The ETF developed a dedicated intranet page and continues to raise awareness internally on learning opportunities for staff on promoting a diverse and inclusive workplace. This includes issues such as promoting training on unconscious bias and developing indicators to carefully monitor the gender and geographical balance of staff as of 2024.

The ETF has also been actively involved in developing strategies to attracting talent from a wider community and promoting job opportunities to reach a wider and diverse audience, while remaining an equal opportunities employer. With a merit-based approach to recruitment, in the case of equal merit of two candidates, the ETF would then favour the under-represented nationality or gender.

As of April 2023, the ETF has a female Director at the helm and is proud to have a management team that includes 56% female and 44% male managers in 2023. In terms of staff wellbeing, the ETF cares for its staff with numerous social support measures in place and a zero tolerance for harassment in the workplace.

In 2023 the ETF published the handbook “[Socialising Public Procurement](#)”. It is the result from the joint work of several agencies that engaged with the objective to analyse the topic of socially responsible public procurement (SRPP) and to collect best practices to formulate ready-to-use hints and tips for different public purchases. It resulted from the working group on sustainable procurement established within the Network of Agencies Procurement Officers (NAPO), under the leadership of ETF. It is the first publication of inter-agency nature published by NAPO.

The publication followed an agreed methodology to analyse social aspects on topics such as gender responsive public procurement, working conditions, safe and healthy working environment, and small- and medium-sized enterprises. It also includes relevant reflections on the legal framework and the relation between SRPP and different aspects of sustainable procurement. This includes an analysis of the draft Financial Regulation under revision following the Green Deal, as well as a series of approaches contained in the SRPP literature.

Economic pillar

In 2023, the NAPO Working group on sustainable procurement focused on all aspects of sustainable procurement. In particular, concerning the economic aspect, the attention was on the life-cycle cost (LCC) methodology. The ETF made a presentation at the NAPO annual meeting to raise awareness on the LCC methodology importance and applicability, highlighting the existence of LCC tools developed by the EC in several group of products. This enabled the ETF to showcase the use of the LCC methodology to assess any purchase of products and furniture with attention to their whole lifecycle.

In 2023 the ETF procured limited products and services in line with a careful life-cycle costing assessment, including:

- For enterprise wired and wireless LAN infrastructure replacement with attention to the entire equipment life-cycle, aiming to for products with longer lifecycles, upgradable components and sustainable manufacturing practices, as well as to ensure responsible disposal of electronic waste (e-waste) by recycling or refurbishing old equipment.
- For sustainable meeting management services aiming to identify an operational proposal of sustainable practices to be put in place in the implementation of ETF events, based on the description of best practices already in place in the management of specific assignments, such as criteria in the selection of flights, hotels and venues, and other best practices with reference to actual cases.

The above considerations and practices have the twofold objective of achieving circular procurement while reducing the environmental impact of procured products and services. In addition, the Green Public Procurement (GPP) Policy at ETF, approved in 2020, kicked off the systematic use of GPP practices in ETF public procurements and established the need to embed consideration of the impacts of products throughout their lifecycle. Procedures are since then awarded based on considerations that go beyond the lowest price at purchase, thus including consideration of all the costs that will be incurred during the lifetime of the product, work or service.

2.9 Digital transformation and information management

In 2023, the ETF continued implementing its digital transformation strategy and roadmap (2021). The rationale is to strengthen organisational processes and improve the efficiency of digital products and services, with the aim of becoming a digitally smart and mature organisation. The ETF's digital transformation process is centred across four key pillars: IT as a digital partner, data centric projects, investment in cloud-based solutions for software and hardware, and European Commission integrations.

Digital maturity should also contribute to an improved efficiency of ETF functions and underlying processes through the application of digital solutions and upskilling ETF staff in digital skills. The progressive implementation of cloud infrastructure supported by a mature digital strategy enables a data-centric organisation and maximises the value of information produced.

Following the heightened alert status due to the continued Russian aggression towards Ukraine, the ETF has geared up its preparedness in terms of IT and cyber security since 2022. It has also worked closely with relevant EC services and in coordination with its sister

agencies in anticipation of the EC cyber security framework and guidelines for EU agencies, which was adopted by the EC at the end of 2023. This included knowledge exchange with Cedefop on a digital pipeline and a site visit to ENISA on cyber regulation.

The new EC regulation on cyber security will entail a significant additional workload for ETF, but work has been anticipated and mitigation measures are foreseen making alliances with outside actors. The early warning approach to absorbing the now approved cyber regulation has helped ETF to test possible avenues to digest the workload and anticipate mitigation measures ahead of implementation, with a various stress test exercises, awareness raising in close cooperation with CERT-EU (including site visit to Turin) and technical improvements (increasing scoring on Microsoft Defender 365 from 86% to 91% in 2023). Moreover, a resources assessment was done based on ENISA guidelines. Currently the ETF is studying possibilities of sharing services with Cedefop for cybersecurity roles for both agencies.

In addition, the ETF progressed with the digital products foreseen in 2023, including the successful landing of the ISATCOVE platform, products for operational purposes (i.e. data visualisation, data strategy and localised version of ChatGPT) and continued work on networking platform (Openspace), planning and project management system (Carmen), the integration of EC systems ARES, EU sign, PPMT and SYSPER and the decommissioning of legacy systems, to name but a few.

Innovations around data and AI have been discussed in agency wide working groups, as well as through interaction with external partners. The replacement of wired and wireless Infrastructure was also completed in 2023. Additional work was initiated to improve the hybrid connectivity of ETF's meeting rooms and a batch of new laptops and smartphones have been procured, anticipating activities planned for 2024.

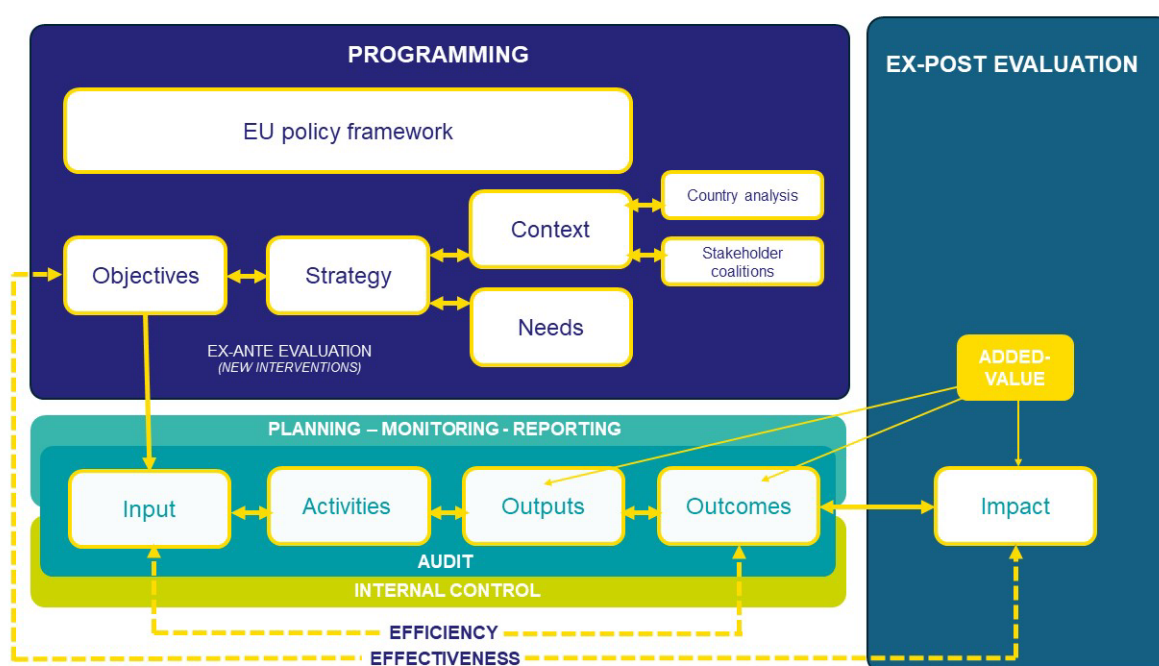
Finally, the IAS audit on digital governance was initiated in 2023 and is being followed up closely. The audit focusses the governance of the ETF approach to digital transformation, which is expected to provide recommendations to further improve the processes around the implementation of ETF's 2027 strategy.

EVALUATION (Part II B)

Evaluations in the ETF are integrated into the overall performance management system of the agency and are commissioned either by the ETF or by the European Commission. ETF evaluation practices are based on the principles of the European Commission's 'Better Regulation Guidelines and Toolkit' to:

- Capture the results of ETF interventions and evidence of impact and added value;
- Improve the ETF's long-term capacity to achieve results and impact by identifying and disseminating the lessons learned from experience;
- Identify opportunities to adapt ETF interventions according to achieved impact and country development stage (e.g. scale up ETF work and/or put in place an exit strategy).

ETF logic model



As an EU agency, the ETF is subject to a regular (4 year) evaluation by the Commission in consultation with the Governing Board of the implementation of the ETF Regulation. The Commission presents the results of the evaluation to the European Parliament, Council and European Economic and Social Committee, following which the ETF formulates an action plan to remedy any problems or implement any recommendations. Progress against the action plan is reported to the Commission and Governing Board.

The last EC evaluation was closed in 2020 and a new round was launched at the end of 2022. Together with its sister agencies, the ETF actively participated in this exercise by sharing surveys with over 2000 stakeholders and various interactions with the evaluators. The final results are expected to be published in 2024.

In addition, the ETF commissions evaluations mainly focussing on assessing the extent to which its activities have achieved planned results, their added value and impact. According to

the ETF Financial Regulation⁶, retrospective evaluations should be undertaken periodically and in sufficient time for the findings to be taken into account in ex-ante evaluations or impact assessments that support the preparation of related programme activities.

The ETF develops a multiannual rolling plan for potential evaluations. These are then considered together with inputs from previous evaluations and audits, as well as from partner countries and the EC, in the planning discussions and decision-making process annually.

Evaluations 2023

In 2023, the ETF closed one ongoing external evaluation on its operational work and commissioned another one. In addition, the mid-term review of its 2027 strategy was also finalised in 2023. To sum up, these were:

1. Evaluation of skills demand analysis and ETF's anticipatory function (commissioned in 2022, with the final report delivered in Q1 2023)

In terms of ETF's capacity to anticipate future trends and developments, across all its activity areas, this was considered as an important corporate feature that helps ETF determine its future positioning on issues, agenda-setting and knowledge development. Hence, it is understood to refer to the ETF's ability to prepare for future challenges and opportunities. Externally, the ETF's anticipatory function is judged positively. ETF was praised by its ability to transform insights and information into relevant and future-proof prioritisation of work.

The evaluation of ETF's work on skills demand analysis concluded that the Agency succeeded in integrating stakeholders in the development of concepts and usage of solid methods that can be applied in the different circumstances of all individual partner countries. Also, that its flexible approach enabled it to establish trust and solid communication with partner countries, further creating demand for impactful activities that leverages ETF's global credibility.

Moreover, the work contributed to the development of academic and expert networks, and provided important input for such communities, with ETF being considered as a valued broker of knowledge and between peers. Capacity building was also conducted successfully, and the ETF's work inspired reforms and policy change.

2. Mapping of HCD players (commissioned in Q4 2022, with final report delivered in Q3 2023)

The aim was to conduct a mapping of the current European and international players in human capital development (HCD), their value delivery and used mechanisms, including in fragile and (post-)conflict settings, to identify emerging trends and their potential implications for HCD, to identify ways in which diverse typologies of HCD players are positioned to address such trends in the future and, in doing so, to provide alternative options for the ETF and other players to seize upcoming opportunities by addressing gaps identified.

From the analysis, there seems to be a fragmented landscape and limited structures in place to coordination related to HCD and knowledge generation and sharing among HCD organisations. Furthermore, findings show that, while there are good links within the humanitarian-development-peace nexus, prioritising skills development and employment is

⁶ Financial Regulation of the European Training Foundation, Turin, 15 June 2019 (GB-19-DEC-008)

lacking. Also, working within a humanitarian context on skills development and employment is less obvious and less well developed.

The mapped trends point to a future in which working on improved HCD systems, covering education, experience and skills development and enabling conditions is essential. This brings to the fore the opportunity to foster more conducive environments for countries to improve their HCD systems. Ultimately, key leverages for the future include supporting the development of life skills, supporting refugees, and fostering job creation as well as lifelong learning and working conditions.

For the ETF, key takeaways include the potential to explore further expanding its role as a global knowledge hub and broker on HCD, fostering HCD as a key component of humanitarian action in directly improving livelihoods, and coordinating with HCD players and actors in fragile settings to shape a common global vision that enables actors to jointly design and implement systemic interventions that support developing effective HCD systems in any context.

3. Roadmap 2027 (commissioned and delivered in 2023)

The aim was to assess achievements to date mid way into the implementation of the ETF strategy 2027, in order to support the evidence-based definition of a strategic roadmap 2027. The roadmap outline strategic actions required between 2024 and 2027 to successfully deliver ETF's value proposition to its diverse stakeholders. Beyond actions necessary to deliver ETF's strategy 2027, the roadmap include impact metrics, as well as a performance monitoring process and framework.

The results establish positive progress towards ETF's 2027 strategy, in particular in relation to its broader approach to HCD, its contribution to policy dialogue, its flexibility in responding to EC requests, the quality of knowledge disseminated by the ETF, as well as in relation to its anticipation and exploration of new emerging trends and topics. Partnerships and synergies have proven effective, and ETF has demonstrated absorption capacity by successfully delivering in both its subsidy and extra-subsidy projects.

Recommendations that form the backbone of ETF's roadmap towards 2027 point to the need to reframe ETFs strategic orientation into a well-defined impact-oriented theory of change, to continue expanding on strategic partnerships and engagement with new voices to deliver ETF's value proposition in line with partner countries needs and EC priorities. This should be done while innovating mechanisms of delivery and communication to ensure transparency and reach, as well as future opportunities for engagement and ownership.

4. Vocational excellence (commissioned in Q4 2023)

The evaluation will assess the progress of the ETF Network of Excellence (ENE) to date in the context of the Vocational Excellence activity area and the results achieved, as well as areas that would deserve further efforts or developments. Based on these findings, the assignment will also assess the best way to move forward with ENE, ensuring it remains relevant and it responds to the needs of its beneficiaries in the face of rapidly changing circumstances.

ASSESSMENT OF THE EFFECTIVENESS OF INTERNAL CONTROL SYSTEMS (PART III)

The ETF uses the organisational structure and the internal control systems suited to achieving its policy and internal control objectives in accordance with associated principles and has due regard to the risks associated with the environment in which it operates.

4.1 Effectiveness of internal control systems

The assessment of the effectiveness of internal controls supports the ETF by ensuring compliancy, enabling the ETF to report on its effectiveness and by obtaining reasonable assurance that ETF control systems in place function as intended. Any potential weaknesses are addressed in the form of actions for improvement and priority areas for the year ahead.

In 2023 the methodology used to assess the internal controls was strengthened, with an internal survey and workshop. **The results are very positive and show significant progress in the effectiveness of internal controls in 2023.** They demonstrate that the controls in the ETF are effective and functioning as intended, and that the ETF is mitigating its risks.

In line with the approach of the EC, the ETF carried out a thorough cascading assessment, whereby the overall assessment is based on an assessment at the level of the components of internal control, and this in turn is based on an assessment at the level of the 17 principles. All principles were assessed as effective, with the exception of one principle, which requires only minor improvements. This is a very good result indeed when compared to 2022 (94% of internal control principles assessed as effective in 2023, compared to 65% in 2022).

The above is also sustained by a decrease in the number of deviations, for a total value of € 63,122.55, representing 0.22% of the ETF budget 2023, thus well below the ETF materiality threshold of 2%. It also represents a positive development compared to 2022, where the total value of exceptions was 0.70% of ETF budget.

Economy of controls

The ETF has designed its controls to be effective, efficient, and proportional to the risks involved. Consideration has been made to the legality and regularity of underlying transactions and the effectiveness and efficiency of controls, taking into consideration the estimated costs and level of risk involved.

Regarding the **effectiveness of controls**, in October 2023, the **European Court of Auditors (ECA) issued the ETF with a clean unqualified audit opinion for the financial year 2022**, with no comment on the annual accounts.

In terms of **efficiency and economy of controls**, the ETF estimates that the overall cost of controls in 2023 was equivalent to 4.8% of its subvention. The difference of 0.4% points compared to the previous year is due to the increased investments in cybersecurity and the overall increase of salary costs. The ETF considers the costs of controls 2023 to be proportional to the risks involved. The ETF methodology used to calculate the cost of controls (Table 14) is based on guidance from DG EMPL, considering how the ETF implements its budget in terms of payments. The methodology has been inspired by the approach of the European Commission, considering latest guidance from the EC specifically for agencies.

Table 14: Cost of controls 2023

Control System	Internal Cost Cost of Staff Time		External Costs		Total	Ratio (cost compared to annual subsidy)
AREA:	Time of ETF Staff	Total Cost of Staff Time (EUR)	Cost (EUR)	Type of External Cost	Internal + External Costs	Annual Subsidy: € 22 627 956
Financial management	4.9 FTE TOTAL	567,714			567,714	2.5%
Budget and accounting	1.4 FTE TOTAL	162,204			162,204	0.7%
External audit	0.14 FTE TOTAL	16,220	9,424	audit of ETF accounts 2023	25,644	0.1%
Coordination (strategic planning & programming, internal control)	0.65 FTE TOTAL	75,309			75,309	0.3%
Anti-fraud	0.05 FTE TOTAL	5,793			5,793	0%
Programme management	0.2 FTE TOTAL	23,172	137,675	2023 evaluations	160,847	0.7%
ICT	0.5 FTE TOTAL	57,930	25,469	CERT-EU 2023	83,399	0.4%
Grand Total	7.84 FTE Total	908,342	172,568		1,039,162	4.8%

4.2 Conclusions of assessment of internal control systems

The results of the 2023 assessment of the effectiveness of internal controls support the Director's declaration of assurance. They provide reasonable assurance that the internal control system in the ETF is present and functioning, with only minor improvements needed which have been considered in the respective 2024 ETF action plans / work plans.

4.3 Statement of the Head of Department in charge of Risk Management and Internal Control (Internal Control Coordinator)

I declare that in accordance with the Commission's communication on the internal control framework, I have reported my advice and recommendations on the overall state of internal control in the European Training Foundation in 2023 to the ETF Director. I hereby certify that the information provided in the present Consolidated Annual Activity Report and in its annexes is to the best of my knowledge, accurate, reliable, and complete⁷.

⁷ Annex 13.

MANAGEMENT ASSURANCE (PART IV)

This section reports and assesses the elements identified by management that support the assurance on the achievement of the internal control objectives. The ETF's assurance building and materiality criteria are described in Section 4 (PART III) outlining the internal control principles and indicators used to measure the performance of the control systems.

5.1 Review of the elements supporting assurance

Assurance is an objective examination of evidence for the purpose of providing an assessment of the effectiveness of risk management, control and governance processes. This examination is carried out by the ETF Internal Control Coordinator and management, who monitor the functioning of the internal control systems on a continuous basis, and by internal and external auditors. Its results are explicitly documented and reported to the Director. The reports produced are:

- Quarterly Management Reports.
- Annual Progress and Performance Report.
- Annual assessment and review of internal controls.
- Evaluation reports.

Audit reports (including the observations and the recommendations of the European Court of Auditors (ECA), of the Internal Audit Service (IAS), and of other ex-post audits. These reports result from a systematic analysis of the available evidence. This approach provides sufficient guarantees as to the completeness and reliability of the information reported and results in a complete coverage of the budget delegated to the Director of ETF.

Cost effectiveness and efficiency of controls

Based on an assessment of the most relevant key indicators and control results, the ETF has positively assessed the cost effectiveness and efficiency of controls related to financial, budget and procurement management.

Legality and regularity of the transactions

The ETF has set up internal control processes aimed to ensure the adequate management of the risks relating to the legality and regularity of the underlying transactions, taking into account the multiannual character of programmes, as well as the nature of the payments concerned.

Ex-ante control systems are in place with the definition and regular review of the financial circuits and related controls on roles and responsibilities. Segregation of duties, risk management, absence of conflict of interests, adequate audit trails and procedures are control activities integrated in the ETF control strategy. This includes a variety of checks, supervision arrangements and, where appropriate, a balance of approaches to mitigate risks, considering manual and automated controls, and preventive and detective controls.

As in previous years, in 2023 the ETF has not received any critical recommendations from audits or control bodies.

Exceptions and non-compliance events

The register of exceptions and non-compliance events is an integral building block of the ETF internal control system. The ETF has developed a robust policy and procedure on handling deviations, and 2023 marked the first full year of implementation of the policy. An internal analysis concluded that in 2023 the deviations were correctly registered, in line with the policy, and no significant weakness was identified in terms of existing controls.

Six deviations were registered centrally in 2023, including 4 exceptions (ex-ante) and 2 non-conformities (ex-post). The value of each of the two non-compliance events was under €2,000.

The total value of deviations registered in 2023 is € 63,122.55. This represents 0.22% of the ETF budget 2023⁸. The total value of exceptions is well below the ETF materiality threshold of 2%⁹. This is positive compared to 2022, where the total value of exceptions was 0.70% of ETF budget

Prevention, detection, correction and follow-up of fraud and irregularities

The ETF has an anti-fraud strategy in place for the period 2020-2027 and has developed a strong internal anti-fraud culture, underpinned by a robust ethics framework, annual action plans and targeted awareness raising initiatives.

A key achievement of 2023 is the development of a draft policy on managing and preventing conflicts of interest, due to be implemented in 2024. In addition, attention was placed on further strengthening the ETF's anti-fraud culture by focusing on the consolidation of in-house awareness aimed at preventing conflicts of interest, irregularities and fraud.

In 2023 the ETF assessed the risk of fraud within its annual corporate risk assessment. Mitigating controls were assessed as functioning, proportional and relevant. Examples of controls include the ETF guidelines on whistleblowing and a clear policy on accepting gifts. All members of procurement evaluation panels and selection assessment boards sign a declaration of absence of conflict of interest.

In 2023, all ETF managers and governing board members signed an annual declaration of absence of conflict of interest and declarations were published on the ETF website in line with the established procedure.

For transparency, a list of meetings with the ETF Director and externals was regularly updated and published on the ETF website throughout 2023. The ETF has an appointed OLAF correspondent in place as well as an ethics correspondent and deputy.

Results of internal transactional ex-post controls 2023

In 2023, the ETF implemented ex-post controls on financial transactions with a risk-based sampling of payments. The 2023 exercise was carried out by internal financial verifying agent, based on externally reviewed methodology, to provide reasonable assurance on the legality and regularity of 2023 financial transactions processed during the first semester. The outcome of the 2023 ex-post controls confirms that:

⁸ ETF Amending budget 2 of 2023

⁹ ETF policy on handling deviations (exceptions and non-compliance events) and ETF materiality criteria

1. The expenses included in the payment sample, reflecting expenditure processed red through the light workflow for low-risk transactions, were properly documented and duly authorised;
2. The control system set up surrounding the light payment workflow is well designed and operating effectively in all material respects;
3. The funds were used for their intended purpose and disbursed in accordance with the ETF regulatory framework and the principles of sound financial management;

Thanks to the redesign of the payment process implemented a few years ago with the implementation of the light payment circuit involving two actors for low-risk payments, as well as with a stricter monitoring of end date of activities with reports automatically produced for the financial circuit's actors, the rate of late payments remained within target and the time to pay below 20 days (17.7 days in 2023 vs 20 days a few years ago). Within the late payments (5% in 2023), none of them implied the payment of late interest in 2023. In a nutshell:

1. The average time-to-award is around four months for open tenders and less than one month for low and middle value negotiated procedures, thus demonstrating efficient organisation of the work involved.
2. Considering the benefits of the control strategy, namely low risk of fraud, favourable audit opinions, low reputational damage, and low number of errors, the budget related control strategy is considered effective. In 2023, developments in financial and procurement management were guided by the overall objective of increased efficiency, digitalisation of processes and assessment of risks inherent to procedures, financial transactions and systems.
3. The payment process and the centralisation of the management of finance and procurement processes proved its worth in the performance of the financial and procurement management processes.
4. The ETF implemented integrated European Commission solutions for Digital signature (ARES and EU-Sign), as well as for staff time management (SYSPER).

Results of risk management process

The ETF carried out its annual corporate risk assessment in October 2023, which resulted in the updated ETF risk register for 2024. The well-established process ensures that the ETF has controls in place to mitigate the risks which may affect the achievement of the ETF's objectives at strategic, organisational and operational levels, and that controls are comprehensive and proportional to the level of risk involved.

The results confirm the **ETF risk profile is low/medium**. The ETF's main risk areas for 2024 are external risks linked to the instability of the external environment which is of key importance considering ETF is the only Agency working solely outside the EU, and includes mission security linked to the overall instability, cyber-security and resources (fixed establishment plan and budget).

In 2023 the ETF actively participated in the risk management peer review exercise within the employment cluster of agencies. The cluster identified three common risks which reflect the ETF's key risks as indicated above. The peer review was also an opportunity to confirm that the ETF approach to risk management is effective and in line with the approach of other agencies within the cluster, and with the European Commission.

5.2 Reservations

A key building block of assurance is the ETF system of cascading declarations of assurance of (Sub) Delegated Authorising Officers and the ICC declaration to support the ETF Director's declaration of assurance. In 2023, the ETF Director has a sound basis to support her reasonable assurance that the internal control system is in place and working as intended. Risks are monitored and mitigated as appropriate, and necessary improvements and reinforcement measures are being implemented. Hence, there are no reservations for 2023.

5.3 Conclusions on assurance

The information reported in Sections 1 to 5 stem from the results of the management and auditor monitoring contained in the reports listed in Section 5.1. These reports result from a systematic analysis of the evidence available. This approach provides sufficient assurance as to the completeness and reliability of the information reported, and completely covers the budget delegated to the ETF. Based on this, **the declaration of assurance of the ETF Authorising Officer in the 2023 Annual Activity Report does not contain any reservations.**

In line with the ETF materiality criteria¹⁰ developed to support the Director in her decision as to whether a reservation should be included in the annual declaration of assurance in the context of annual activity reporting, **the ETF confirms it has no reservations to report for 2023.**

Overall conclusion

In conclusion, the ETF management has reasonable assurance that overall adequate controls are in place and working as intended. In addition, risks are being appropriately monitored and mitigated, and the necessary improvements and reinforcements are being implemented. The Director, in her capacity as Authorising Officer, has signed the Declaration of Assurance.

Declaration of assurance in cascade by (sub) delegated authorising officers

In 2023, budgetary implementation powers were delegated by the Authorising Officer through a Director's Decision¹¹ which allocated the different budgetary areas, including specific budget lines, to the delegated and Sub Delegated Authorising Officers. In line with ETF rules and procedures on the deputising mechanism and the presence of managers on the ETF premises¹², the ETF introduces a second level of back-ups for delegated authorising officers, to reduce the number of transactions to be approved by the Director and ensure transactions are dealt with by the most informed authorising officer available.

The decision is accompanied by individual delegations, signed by the Director, and the authorising officer by delegation and his/her back-up. In addition, they are also signed to confirm acceptance of the charter of the authorising officer by delegation. The cascading declaration of assurance is strengthened by an annex containing for each (S)DAO: i) budget execution rates, ii) exceptions and non-compliance events registered centrally, iii) negotiated procedures without prior notice, and iv) space for any potential issues/potential problems that may lead to a reservation in the annual activity report.

¹⁰ ETF policy on handling deviations (ETF/22/DEC/004)

¹¹ Delegation of the authorising officer for 2022 budget implementation (ETF/22/DEC/001)

¹² Rules and procedures on the deputising mechanism and presence of managers (ETF/21/DEC/003)

DECLARATION OF ASSURANCE

I, the undersigned, **Pilvi Torsti**, Director of the European Training Foundation, in my capacity as Authorising Officer, declare that the information contained in this report gives a true and fair view¹³.

I also state that I have reasonable assurance that the resources assigned to the activities described in this report have been used for their intended purpose and in accordance with the principles of sound financial management, and that the control procedures put in place give the necessary guarantees concerning the legality and regularity of the underlying transactions.

This reasonable assurance is based on my own judgement and on the information at my disposal, such as the Declaration of Assurance signed by Xavier Matheu de Cortada¹⁴, Director ad-interim of the European Training Foundation¹⁵, the results of the self-assessment, ex-post controls, the work of the Internal Audit Service and the lessons learnt from the reports of the Court of Auditors.

I confirm that I am not aware of anything not reported here which could harm the interests of the institution.

Turin, 3 June 2024

signed

Pilvi Torsti

¹³ True and fair in this context means a reliable, complete and correct view on the state of affairs in the institution.

¹⁴ Annex 14.

¹⁵ Governing Board Decision for appointing a Director *ad interim*: [GB/22/DEC/001](#)

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List of Acronyms

ABAC	Activity-based accounting system
ABB	Activity-based budgeting
ACQF	African Continental Qualifications Framework
AD	Action Document
ADB	Asian Development Bank
AFD	Agence Française de Développement
ALMPs	Active Labour Market Policies
AU	African Union
BC	British Council
BiH	Bosnia and Herzegovina
B2B	Business to business
ENABEL	Belgian Development Agency
CA	Central Asia
Cedefop	European Centre for the Development of Vocational Training
CNL	Creative New Learning
CORLEAP	Conference of Regional and Local Authorities for the Eastern Partnership
CoVEs	Centres of Vocational Excellence
CPD	Continuous Professional Development
CSOs	Civil Society Organisations
CVT/CVET	Continuing vocational training/ Continuous vocational education and training
DARYA	Dialogue and Action for Resourceful Youth in Central Asia
DCFTA	Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Area
DCI	Development Cooperation Instrument
DG	Directorate General
DG EAC	Directorate General Education and Culture
DG EMPL	Directorate General Employment, Social Affairs & Inclusion
DG GROW	Directorate General Internal Market, Industry, Entrepreneurship and SMEs
DG HOME	Directorate General Home Affairs
DG INTPA	Directorate General International Partnerships
DG JRC	Directorate General Joint Research Centre
DG NEAR	Directorate General Neighbourhood and Enlargement Negotiations
DG REGIO	Directorate General Regional and urban Policy
DG SG	Directorate General Secretariat-General
DG TRADE	Directorate General Trade
DigComp	European Digital Competence Framework
DOL	Distance and open learning
DSC	Digital Skills and Competences
DVV	Institute for International Cooperation of German Adult Education Association
EafA	European Alliance for Apprenticeships
EaP	Eastern Partnership
EBRD	European Bank for Reconstruction and Development
EC	European Commission
ECA	European Court of Auditors

EEAS	European External Action Service
EESC	European Economic and Social Committee
EFSD+	European Fund for Sustainable Development Plus
EIP	Economic Investment Plan
ELA	European Labour Authority
ENE	ETF Network for Excellence
ENI	European Neighbourhood Instrument
ENP	European Neighbourhood Policy
EntreComp	Entrepreneurship Competence Framework
EP	European Parliament
EPSO	European Personnel Selection Office
EPSR	European Pillar of Social Rights
EQARF	European Quality Assurance Reference Framework
EQAVET	European Quality Assurance in Vocational Education and Training
EQF	European Qualifications Framework
ERI SEE	Education Reform Initiative of South East Europe
ERPs	Economic Reform Programmes
ESAP	Employment and Social Affairs Platform
ET 2020	Strategic framework for European cooperation in education and training
ETF	European Training Foundation
EU	European Union
EUDs	European Union Delegations
EU-OSHA	European Agency for Safety and Health at Work
Euromed	Euro-Mediterranean Partnership
EVTA	The European Vocational Training Association
FTE	Full-time equivalent
FoW	Future of Work
GAP	Gender Action Plan
GB	Governing Board
GDP	Gross domestic product
GIM	GIM (Grow with Internal Move
GIZ	Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (German Agency for International Cooperation)
GLAD	Governance Learning Action and Dialogue
HCD	Human capital development
IAS	Internal Audit Service
ICT	Information and communications technology
IFI	International Finance Institution
ILO	International Labour Organisation
IOM	International Organisation for Migration
IPA	Instrument for Pre-accession Assistance
KH	Knowledge hub
KIESE	Key Performance Indicators on Education, Skills and Employment
KPI	Key performance indicators
LMI(S)	Labour Market Information (System)
LLL	Lifelong learning
MEPs	Members of the European Parliament
MISMES	Migrant Support Measures from an Employment and Skills Perspective

MTD	Medium-term deliverables
M&A	Monitoring and assessment
NAPO	Inter-agency Network of Procurement Officers
NDICI	Neighbourhood, Development and International Cooperation Instrument
NEET	Not in education, employment, or training
NMF	New monitoring framework
NQF	National qualifications framework
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
OIB	Office for Infrastructure and Logistics in Brussels
PA	Policy advice
PES	Public Employment Services
PMO	Paymaster Office
PPP	Public-private partnerships
PSD	Private Sector Development
QA	Quality assurance
RCC	Regional Cooperation Council
RCI	Regional Competitive Initiative
RED	Rapid Education Diagnosis
SADC	Southern African Development Community
SBA	Small Business Act for Europe
SD	Structured Dialogue
SDG	Sustainable Development Goal
SEE	South Eastern Europe
SEET	South Eastern Europe and Türkiye
SEE2020	South East Europe 2020 Strategy
SEECCL	South East European Centre for Entrepreneurial Learning
SEMED	Southern and Eastern Mediterranean
SG	Secretariat General
SLA	Service Level Agreement
SME	Small and medium-sized enterprise
SPD	Single Programming Document
SRC	Sector Reform Contract
THAMM	Towards a Holistic Approach to Migration
UfM	Union for the Mediterranean
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
VET/TVET	(Technical and) vocational education and training
VNFIL	Validation of non-formal and informal learning
WB	Western Balkans
WBL	Work-based learning
WPET	Western Balkans Platform on Education and Training
WBT	Western Balkans and Türkiye
WB6	Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo, North Macedonia, Montenegro and Serbia
WP	Work Programme
YAP	Youth Action Plan
YEM	Youth Employment in the Mediterranean
YG	Youth Guarantee

Annex 1 – Core business statistics

KPIs for ETF overall performance

Administration

KPI	Description	2023	2022	2021	2020	2019	2018	Frequency
Activities completion rate*	Rate (%) of completion of the activities of the ETF Work Programme Target >90%	97.69%	93%	95.58%	86.84%	91%	91%	Quarterly
Timely achievement of activities of WP*	Rate (%) of activities of the ETF Work Programme timely achieved in year: Target 80%	83.93%	89%	91.15%	75.94%	85%	94%	Quarterly
Timely submission of WP/SPD to EC*	The Annual WP/SPD timely submitted to the EC. Target 100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	Annually

Human resources

KPI	Description	2023	2022	2021	2020	2019	2018	Frequency
Administrative support, / operational staff ratio*	(Administrative support and coordination job type category)/(Operational job type category / Neutral job type category) Target <30%	14.92%	17.06%	15.80%	16.59%	17.19%	19%	Annually
Average vacancy rate*	% of authorised posts of the annual establishment plan which are vacant at the end of the year, including job offers sent before 31 December. Target <5%	0%	1%	0%	1%	0%	1%	Annually
Staff engagement*	Rate (%) of staff engagement from satisfaction survey within the agency. (every two years) Target >2% increase	51%	NA (Q1 2023)	-	56%	-	54%	2-3 years

Finance

KPI	Description	2023	2022	2021	2020	2019	2018	Frequency
Commitment appropriation implementation*	Rate (%) of implementation of Commitment Appropriations. Target >98%	99.85%	99.98%	99.91%	99.88%	99.96%	99.99%	Quarterly
Payment appropriations cancellation rate*	Rate (%) of cancellation of Payment Appropriations. Target <2%	0.35%	0.29%	0.44%	1.46%	1.21%	0.11%	Annually
Timely payments*	Rate (%) of payments executed within the legal/contractual deadlines. Target >90%	95%	96.4%	97.6%	94.3%	94%	93%	Quarterly
Rate of outturn*	Total payments in year N and carry-forwards to Year N+1, as a % of the total EU funding received in Year Target >96%	99.87%	99.98%	99.91%	98.79%	98.88%	99.94%	Annually
Audit recommendation implementation*	Rate (%) of external and accepted internal audit recommendations implemented within agreed deadlines. Target >90%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	Quarterly

Operational*

KPI	Description	2023	2022	2021	2020	2019	2018	Frequency
Knowledge uptake	Uptake of the developed ETF knowledge products (target 75%)	NA (biannual)	84%**	85%	NA	NA	NA	Bi-annually
Programme design	Geographic and thematic coverage of EU Requests for support to projects and programmes design (target >75%)	80%	78%	79%	NA	NA	NA	Q2 and Q4
Network level of participation	Engagement rate of active members in ETF networks (target 75%)	72.8%	73%	61%	NA	NA	NA	Q2 and Q4
Stakeholder engagement	Number and typology of stakeholders engaged in ETF activities (target >7,000/80% primary)	8,078 stakeholders engaged, 86% primary stakeholders	10,237 stakeholders engaged 84% of primary stakeholders	7,635 stakeholders engaged 75% primary stakeholders	NA	NA	NA	Annually

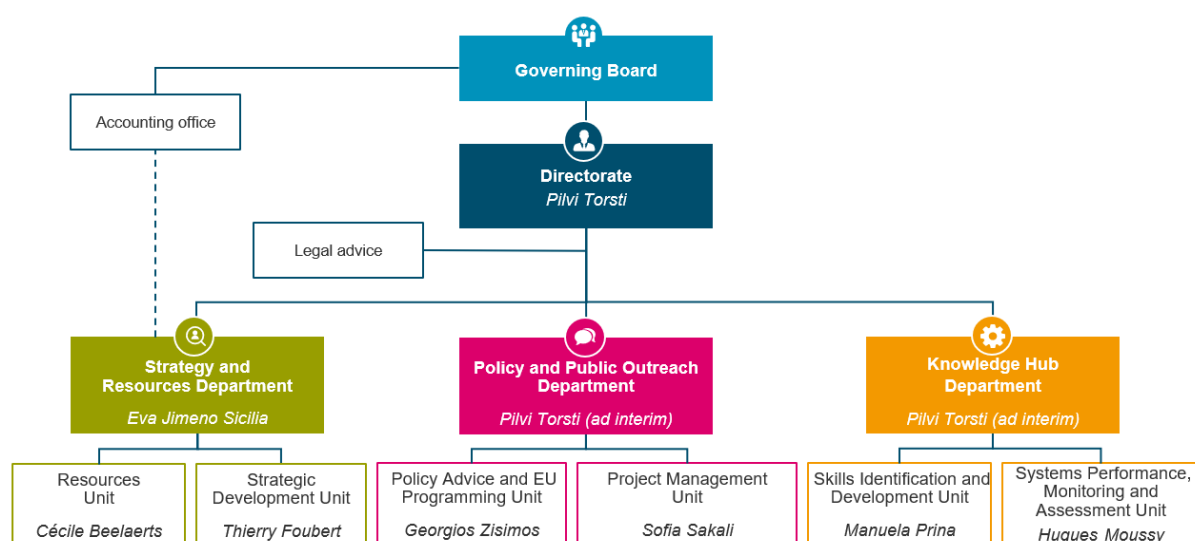
* Operational KPIs defined in 2021 and targets set in 2023 after two years of analysis. ETF continues to systematise its monitoring system and indicators in line with SMART/RACER principles. A methodology for knowledge uptake was successfully piloted.

** Pilot survey implemented in Q1/2023.

Annex 2 – Statistics on financial management

FINANCIAL MANAGEMENT	2023	2022	2021	2020	2019
Overall Budget ETF (EU Contribution)	22,627,956	21,726,208	21,300,000 CA 21,000,000 PA	20,957,000 CA 20,400,000 PA	20,546,000
Committed (C1)	22,594,617	21,722,517	21,281,233	20,930,853	20,536,844
Rate (%) of implementation of Commitment Appropriations	99.85%	99.98%	99.91%	99.88%	99.96%
Rate (%) of cancellation of Payment Appropriations	0.36%	0.29%	0.44%	1.70%	1.20%
Rate of payments executed within the legal/Contractual deadline	95.0%	96.4%	97.6%	94.3%	93.7%
Rate (%) of outturn (Total payments in year N and carry-forwards to Year N+1, as a % of the total EU funding and fee income, where applicable, received in Year N).	99.87%	99.98%	99.91%	98.55%	98.88%
Payments Executed out of year's budget (PAY C1+ PAY C8T3) / Budget	95.85%	97.70%	95.74%	95.65%	96.01%
Overall CF+RAL into N+1	12.61%	11.08%	13.71%	12.32%	9.89%
Amount CF+RAL into N+1	2,854,251	2,407,361	2,920,538	2,581,707	2,032,829
CF in N+1 – T1	1.80%	0%	1%	1%	1.1%
CF in N+1 – T2	26.22%	21%	33%	19%	22.9%
Total CF (T1&T2)	5.00%	2.9%	5.2%	3.6%	3.8%
RAL in N+1 – T3	42.62%	44%	49%	42%	29.6%
Number of Transfers	6	9	7	8	4
Transferred budget	3.0%	4.7%	7.1%	6.4%	2.7%
Lines with more than 3 transfers	7	8	11	10	4
Number of transfers in the last 2 months	3	3	3	3	3
Cost of GB meetings (2 or 3* per year)	€97,105.38	116,751.00	81,030.00	12,960.00	90,626.92
Payments made within deadline	95.00%	96.40%	97.62%	94.26%	93.74%
Total to be reimbursed to EC:	82,275.36	62,209.00	93,863.79	347,202.46	246,713.17

Annex 3 – ETF organisational structure (31/12/2023)



Annex 4 – Establishment plan and additional information on human resources

A. Statutory staff and SNE

Table 1 – Staff population and its evolution; Overview of all categories of staff

Human Resources	2023		
	Authorised Budget	Actually filled as of 31/12/2023	Occupancy Rate%
Administrators (AD)	59	59	100%
Assistants (AST)	27	27	100%
Assistants/Secretaries (AST/SC)	0	0	
ESTABLISHMENT PLAN POSTS*	86	86	100%
Contract Agents (CA)**	42	40	95.2%
Seconded National Experts (SNE)	0	0	
Local Agents	1	1	100%
TOTAL STAFF	129	127	98.4%

*As of 2018, on the basis of article 38.2 of the ETF Financial Regulation, the ETF has been using the opportunity to “offset the effects of part-time work” by 2 additional appointments (function group AD). Should all posts be filled in, the total number of TA employed would therefore be 86 +2.

** In 2021, DG HR recommended to offset long-term absences and part-time of CA with short term contracts of CA. The ETF used this option in 2023 and 1 additional short-term contract agent FG II was hired and is not included in this table. One additional contract agent is foreseen as compensation for the retirement of the local agent already in 2024 .

B. Other Staff

Structural service providers

	Actual filled as of 31/12/2023
Security	1
IT	2
Receptionist	1
Facilities support	1

Interim workers

	Actual filled as of 31/12/2023
Number	1

Table 2 – Establishment plan

Function group and grade	2023			
	Authorised Budget		Actually filled as of 31/12 *	
	Perm. posts	Temp. posts	Perm. posts	Temp. posts
AD 16				
AD 15				
AD 14		1		1
AD 13		5		2
AD 12		11		6
AD 11		10		8
AD 10		10		11
AD 9		12		9
AD 8		5		5
AD 7		4		15
AD 6				
AD 5		1		2
AD TOTAL	0	59	0	59
AST 11				
AST 10		2		2
AST 9		13		12
AST 8		6		1
AST 7		4		5
AST 6		2		3
AST 5				4
AST 4				
AST 3				
AST 2				
AST 1				
AST TOTAL	0	27	0	27
AST/SC 6				
AST/SC 5				
AST/SC 4				
AST/SC 3				
AST/SC 2				
AST/SC 1				
AST/SC TOTAL	0	0	0	0
TOTAL	0	86	0	86
GRAND TOTAL	86		86	

*As of 2018, on the basis of article 38.2 of the ETF Financial Regulation, the ETF has been using the opportunity to “offset the effects of part-time work” by 2 additional appointments (function group AD). Should all posts be filled in, the total number of TA employed would therefore be 86 + 2.

External personnel

Contract Agents

Contract agents**	Authorised 2023	Recruited as of 31/12/2023*
Function Group IV	14	13
Function Group III	24	23
Function Group II	4	4
Function Group I	0	0
TOTAL	42	40

* In 2021, DG HR recommended to offset long-term absences and part-time of CA with short term contracts of CA. The ETF used this option in 2023 and 1 additional short-term contract agent FG II was hired and is not included in this table.

** One additional contract agent is foreseen as compensation for the retirement of the local agent

Local Agents

Local agents	Authorised 2023	Recruited as of 31/12/2023
Function Group AL/N2	1	1

Seconded National Experts

Seconded National Experts	Authorised 2023	Recruited as of 31/12/2023
TOTAL	0	0

Human Resources Qualitative

Appraisal and reclassification/promotions

Table 1 – Reclassification of temporary agents/promotion of officials

Average seniority in the grade among reclassified staff							
Grades	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	Actual average over 5 years	Average over 5 years (annex I B SR)
AD05	3.8	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	3.8	2.8

AD06	0.0	0.0	0.0	3.0	0.0	3.0	2.8
AD07	2.5	2.2	2.0	2.8	0.0	2.4	2.8
AD08	2.8	2.8	3.0	4.0	0.0	2.9	3
AD09	5.9	3.2	9.7	4.0	4.0	5.7	4
AD10	5.0	2.0	4.5	4.9	4.5	4.5	4
AD11	0.0	16.2	7.5	10.5	4.5	8.6	4
AD12	0.0	0.0	0.0	7.5	0.0	7.5	6.7
AD13	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	6.7
AST1	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	3
AST2	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	3
AST3	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	3
AST4	0.0	3.5	4.3	6.5	0.0	4.6	3
AST5	5.5	0.0	4.3	0.0	4.5	4.8	4
AST6	4.5	3.5	0.0	4.5	4.0	4.1	4
AST7	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	4
AST8	0.0	4.8	3.7	0.0	4.5	4.3	4
AST9	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
AST10 (Senior assistant)	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	5
AST/SC1							4
AST/SC2							5
AST/SC3							5.9
AST/SC4							6.7
AST/SC5							8.3

Table 2 – Reclassification of contract staff

Function Group	Grade	Staff in activity at 01/01/2023 and eligible for reclassification	How many staff members were reclassified in 2023	Average number of years in grade of reclassified staff members	Average number of years in grade of reclassified staff members according to decision C(2015)9561
CA IV	17	1			Between 6 and 10 years
	16	8			Between 5 and 7 years
	15	2	1	3	Between 4 and 6 years
	14	1	1	2	Between 3 and 5 years
	13				Between 3 and 5 years
CA III	11	4	1	6	Between 6 and 10 years

	10	6	1	6	Between 5 and 7 years
	9	5	1	3.1	Between 4 and 6 years
	8				Between 3 and 5 years
CA II	6	1			Between 6 and 10 years
	5				Between 5 and 7 years
	4				Between 3 and 5 years
CA I	2				Between 6 and 10 years
	1				Between 3 and 5 years

Gender representation

		Official		Temporary		Contract and Local Agents		Grand Total	
		Staff	%	Staff	%	Staff	%	Staff	%
Female	Administrator			31	36%	11	27%	42	33%
	Assistant (AST & AST/SC)			21	24%	22	53%	43	34%
	TOTAL			52	60%	33	80%	85	67%
Male	Administrator			28	33%	2	5%	30	24%
	Assistant (AST & AST/SC)			6	7%	6	15%	12	9%
	TOTAL			34	40%	8	20%	42	33%
GRAND TOTAL				86	100%	41	100%	127	100%

Table 2 – Data regarding gender evolution over 5 years of the Middle and Senior management

	2018		2022	
	Number	%	Number	%
Female Managers	6	60%	5	56%
Male Managers	4	40%	4	44%

	2019		2023	
	Number	%	Number	%
Female Managers	6	60%	5	62%
Male Managers	4	40%	3	38%

Job screening exercise

Job Type (sub)category	2018 (%)	2022 (%)	2023 (%)
Administrative support and Coordination	19.06	17.06	14.92
Administrative support	13.3	13.18	12.59
Coordination	5.76	3.88	2.33

Operational	70.47	74.41	77.52
Top Level Operational Coordination	2.17	2.32	3.10
Programme Management & Implementation	56.28	61.24	64.34
Evaluation & Impact Assessment	3.88	2.32	2.33
General Operational	8.14	8.53	7.75
Neutral	10.47	8.53	7.56
Finance/Control	9.69	8.53	7.56
Linguistics	0.78	0.00	0.00

Geographical Balance

Explanatory figures to highlight nationalities of staff (split per Administrator/CA FG IV and Assistant /CA FG I, II, III)

Nationality	AD+FGIV		AST+FGII+FGIII+LA		Grand Total	
	Number	% of Total staff in AD + FGIV	Number	% of Total staff in AST+FGII+III+LA	Number	% of total staff
AT	4	5.6%		0.0%	4	3.1%
BE	4	5.6%	3	5.5%	7	5.5%
CY	1	1.4%		0.0%	1	0.8%
CZ	1	1.4%		0.0%	1	0.8%
DE	4	5.6%	2	3.6%	6	4.7%
DK	1	1.4%		0.0%	1	0.8%
EE		0.0%	2	3.6%	2	1.6%
ES	5	6.9%		0.0%	5	3.9%
FI	3	4.2%	1	1.8%	4	3.1%
FR	3	4.2%	1	1.8%	4	3.1%
GR	2	2.8%		0.0%	2	1.6%
IE	1	1.4%		0.0%	1	0.8%
IT	19	26.4%	36	65.5%	55	43.3%
LU		0.0%	1	1.8%	1	0.8%
LV		0.0%	1	1.8%	1	0.8%
MA	1	1.4%		0.0%	1	0.8%
MK	1	1.4%		0.0%	1	0.8%

NL	3	4.2%		0.0%	3	2.4%
PL	3	4.2%	1	1.8%	4	3.1%
PT	2	2.8%		0.0%	2	1.6%
RO	3	4.2%	3	5.5%	6	4.7%
SI		0.0%	1	1.8%	1	0.8%
AL	1	1.4%		0.0%	1	0.8%
TN	1	1.4%		0.0%	1	0.8%
TR	1	1.4%		0.0%	1	0.8%
UA	4	5.6%		0.0%	4	3.1%
UK	4	5.6%	3	5.5%	7	5.5%
Grand Total	72	100%	55	100%	127	100%

Table 2 – Evolution over 5 years of the most represented nationality in the Agency

Most represented nationality	2019		2023	
	Number	%	Number	%
IT	51	40%	56	43%

The ETF constantly receives a higher proportion of applications from its host country despite the wide publication of its vacancy notices, in particular for administrative and support positions (AST/FGII-FGIII), which explains the constant higher number of Italian nationals recruited. The ETF selection procedures are merit-based but where there are equal merits, the ETF would favour the under-represented nationalities.

Annex 5 – Human and financial resources by activity

by Strategic Objective	Staff planned	Staff actual	Budget planned (m€)	%	Budget Actual (m€)	%
Strategic Objective 1 Skills relevance and anticipation	48.9	53.55	9.1	40%	10.7	47.54%
Strategic Objective 2 Skills development and validation	44.3	42.01	7.5	33%	6.3	27.87%
Strategic Objective 3 Performance and quality of Education and Training policies	35.8	33.42	6	27%	5.6	24.59%
TOTAL	129	129	€22.6m	100.00%	€22.6m	100%

by Activity area	Staff planned	Staff actual	Budget planned (m€)	%	Budget Actual (m€)	%
Skills demand	18.9	18.63	3.5	16%	4.0	17.97%
Active labour market measures	16	20.3	2.9	13%	4.0	17.68%
Qualifications	14	14.62	2.7	12%	2.7	11.88%
Vocational Excellence	11.3	13.73	1.7	8%	1.7	7.71%
Innovative teaching and learning	16.2	14.82	3.2	14%	2.8	12.12%
Engaging enterprises in skills development	16.8	13.46	2.6	11%	1.8	8.03%
Lifelong learning policies and system change	20.1	20.81	3.7	17%	3.5	15.26%
Quality assurance and governance mechanisms	15.7	12.61	2.2	10%	2.1	9.34%
TOTAL	129	129	€22.6m	100.00%	€22.6m	100%

by Service	Staff planned	Staff actual	Budget planned (m€)	%	Budget Actual (m€)	%
Knowledge hub	61	67.5	10.7	47%	11.8	52.32%
Monitoring and assessment	16.9	29.3	3	13%	5.1	22.66%
Policy advice	51.1	32.2	8.9	40%	5.7	25.02%
TOTAL	129	129	€22.6m	100.00%	€22.6m	100.00%

By Region/Country	Staff planned	Staff actual	Budget planned (m€)	%	Budget Actual (m€)	%
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EU Candidate countries (SEET, Georgia, Moldova, Ukraine)	66.1	66.2	11.7	51.50%	12.9	56.90%
South-East Europe and Türkiye	44.5	44.5	7.7	34.00%	8.7	38.60%
Albania	6.4	7	1.1	5.00%	1.5	6.80%
Bosnia and Herzegovina	6.2	6.2	1.1	5.00%	1.5	6.60%
Kosovo	8.4	7.8	1.3	5.90%	1.3	5.60%
Montenegro	6.4	6.4	1.1	5.00%	1.1	5.00%
North Macedonia	6.4	6.4	1.1	5.00%	1.1	5.00%
Serbia	7	7	1.2	5.20%	1.2	5.30%
Türkiye	3.7	3.7	0.7	3.10%	1.0	4.30%
Southern and Eastern Mediterranean	24.3	25.8	5.5	24.40%	5.5	24.50%
Algeria	1.5	1.5	0.4	2.00%	0.6	2.80%
Egypt	3.3	4	0.6	2.80%	0.5	2.50%
Israel	3.4	3.4	1	4.60%	1.0	4.50%
Jordan	3.9	3.9	0.7	3.30%	0.6	2.60%
Lebanon	3.6	3.6	0.7	3.00%	0.5	2.20%
Libya	0	0	0	0.00%	0	0.00%
Morocco	2.9	3.5	0.6	2.80%	1.6	6.90%
Palestine	2.6	2.8	0.6	2.50%	0.6	2.70%
Tunisia	3.1	3.1	0.8	3.50%	0.1	0.30%
Eastern partnership	30.5	30.6	5.6	24.60%	5.5	24.50%
Armenia	4.5	4.5	0.9	4.00%	0.7	3.20%
Azerbaijan	4.4	4.4	0.7	3.10%	0.7	3.00%
Belarus	0	0	0	0.00%	0	0.00%
Georgia	4.9	5	0.9	4.00%	1.0	4.50%
Moldova	6	6	1.2	5.10%	1.3	6.00%
Ukraine	10.7	10.7	1.9	8.40%	1.8	7.80%
Central Asia	26.4	25.3	3.5	15.50%	2.5	10.90%
Kazakhstan	5.2	5.1	0.7	3.10%	0.5	2.30%
Kyrgyzstan	5.2	5.1	0.7	3.00%	0.5	2.20%
Tajikistan	5.3	5.1	0.7	3.10%	0.5	2.20%
Turkmenistan	5.2	4.9	0.7	3.10%	0.5	2.00%
Uzbekistan	5.5	5.1	0.7	3.20%	0.5	2.20%
Cooperation in other areas	3.8	2.8	0.3	1.50%	0.4	1.50%
TOTAL	129	129	€22.6m	100.00%	€22.6m	100.00%

Annex 6 – Contribution, grant and service level agreement. Financial framework partnerships agreement

	2023
Additional EU funding stemming from grant agreements (FFR Art.7)	-
none	-
Additional EU funding stemming from contribution agreements (FFR Art.7)	4,380,000
Darya - Dialogue and Action for Resourceful Youth in Central Asia -contribution agreement with DG INTPA for €10m across 5 years (2022-2027)	2,000,000
ACQF II - Second phase of the project on African Continental Qualification Framework – contribution agreement with DGINTPA for €5m across 4 years (2023-2026)	1,750,000
Rwanda TVET- Support to the preparation of an action in the TVET sector in Rwanda – contribution agreement with DG INTPA for €0.18m for 12 months (2023-2024)	180,000
Egypt TVET (TA4TE) - EU Technical Assistant to the Ministry of Education and Technical Education TE 2.0 strategy (TA4TE) – contribution agreement with DG NEAR for €0.5m in 2024 across 12 months (2024-2025)	450,000
Additional EU funding stemming from service level agreements (FFR Art. 43.2)	1,485,000
COVES SLA 2 - International Dimension of Centres of Vocational Excellence: Implementing international cooperation – Service level agreement with DG EMPL for €1.5m across 2 years (2023-2024)	1,425,000
Provision of accounting services to EU-OSHA	60,000
Total	5,865,000

Annex 7 – Sustainability

The ETF vision is to contribute to the Sustainable Development Goals following the EU approach¹⁶.

The ETF promotes environmental protection and sustainable development to optimise the use of resources by both reducing their use and by using renewable resources. The ETF has established an Environmental Management System, which complies with the EU Eco-Management and Audit Scheme (EMAS)¹⁷. Within the overall regulatory framework, the ETF is committed to:

1. Protecting the environment and minimizing pollution through the sustainable use of resources
2. Complying with the relevant environmental legislation, regulations and other compliance obligations
3. Creating, maintaining and continuously improving the Environmental Management System and its environmental performance
4. Ensuring awareness of environmental issues and the active participation of all staff, with a view to reducing the ETF environmental impact
5. Encouraging suppliers and external stakeholders to abide by the environmental protection principles established by the ETF

With the help of its Environmental Management System, the ETF pursues the following strategic environmental goals:

1. Shifting towards the use of renewable energy sources and reducing overall energy consumption
2. Reducing the general use of resources and materials (incl. paper, plastics, gadgets, office equipment and furniture, stationery and other supplies)
3. Reducing greenhouse/polluting gas and particulate matter emissions resulting from ETF-related travel (incl. commuting by staff, staff missions, travels of event participants and contractors)
4. Reducing water consumption
5. Reducing and effectively managing waste
6. Shifting towards more sustainable events
7. Raising awareness among staff on environmental issues

These goals are in line with the EU KPIs to help organisations to monitor, plan and improve their environmental performance. The indicators are classified as follows:

- Energy efficiency
- Material efficiency
- Water
- Waste
- Biodiversity
- Emissions

¹⁶ https://ec.europa.eu/info/strategy/international-strategies/sustainable-development-goals/eu-approach-sustainable-development-0_en

¹⁷ https://ec.europa.eu/environment/emas/index_en.htm

In addition, the ETF strives for a working environment where talent is nurtured and work-life balance a reality, placing attention on inclusion and diversity, as well as on gender and geographical aspects, thus fostering the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and in line with the European Pillar of Social Rights. The principles that guide the social pillar of sustainability at the ETF are:

- Attracting and deploying
- Managing and retaining
- Growing and development
- Caring

Finally, the environmental and social aspects of sustainability are also important drivers in all procurement processes performed by the ETF. Hence, the economic pillar of sustainability at the ETF takes into consideration the lifetime of products or services being purchased, thus putting in practice the ETF Green Public Procurement Policy approved in 2020.

Annex 8 – Draft annual accounts and financial reports

Balance sheet

	2023	2022
NON-CURRENT ASSETS		
Intangible assets	675,964.58	791,306.48
Property, Plant and Equipment	573,820.00	781,705.00
Land and buildings	138,383.00	155,863.00
Plant and equipment	105,133.00	143,991.00
Computer hardware	89,859.00	141,675.00
Furniture and vehicles	125,765.00	161,390.00
Other fixtures and fittings	114,680.00	178,786.00
Tangible assets under construction		
Financial assets	0.00	0.00
Long-term receivables and recoverables	0.00	0.00
Long-term receivables and recoverables	0.00	0.00
Long-term receivables from consolidated EC entities	0.00	0.00
Pre-financing	0.00	0.00
Inventories	0.00	0.00
Financial assets		
Pre-financing	190,282.93	216,001.68
Receivables and recoverables	196,175.28	260,747.00
Current receivables from non-exchange transactions	0.00	445.51
Current receivables from exchange transactions	196,175.28	260,301.49
Cash and cash equivalents	6,595,799.80	3,081,775.68
TOTAL ASSETS	8,232,042.59	5,131,535.84
NON-CURRENT LIABILITIES	0.00	0.00
Pension and other employee benefits	0.00	0.00
Provisions for risks and liabilities	0.00	0.00
Financial liabilities	0.00	0.00
Long-term liabilities to consolidated entities	0.00	0.00
Other liabilities	0.00	0.00
CURRENT LIABILITIES	7,662,881.38	4,273,687.14
Provisions for risks and liabilities	0.00	0.00
Financial liabilities	0.00	0.00
Payables		
Current payables	412,639.71	373,168.51
Accounts payable to consolidated EU entities	4,898,625.45	2,362,106.98
Accrued charges and deferred income	2,351,616.22	1,538,411.65
TOTAL LIABILITIES	7,662,881.38	4,273,687.14
NET ASSETS	569,161.21	857,848.70
Accumulated surplus/deficit	857,848.70	1,697,940.94
Economic result of the year	-288,687.49	-840,092.24

Statement of Financial performance

	2023	2022
OPERATING REVENUE	25,990,334.25	22,767,160.12
Non-exchange revenue		
European Union Contribution	22,545,680.64	21,663,790.51
Other non-exchange revenue	3,444,653.61	1,103,369.61
Exchange revenue		
OPERATING EXPENSES	-26,491,120.30	-23,605,983.05
Operational expenses	-8,234,674.69	-6,046,569.14
Administrative expenses	-2,340,017.19	-2,002,888.20
Staff expenses	-15,378,018.71	-15,040,860.67
Fixed assets expenses	-537,271.45	-515,665.04
Other expenses	-1,100.00	0.00
Financial expenses - interest late payment	-38.26	0.00
SURPLUS/(DEFICIT) FROM OPERATING ACTIVITIES	-500,786.05	-838,822.93
Financial revenue	213,446.32	0.00
Financial expenses	-1,347.76	-1,269.31
SURPLUS/(DEFICIT) FROM ORDINARY ACTIVITIES	-288,687.49	-840,092.24
Extraordinary gains	0.00	0.00
Extraordinary losses/gains - exchange rates	0.00	0.00
SURPLUS/(DEFICIT) FROM EXTRAORDINARY ITEMS	0.00	0.00
ECONOMIC RESULT OF THE YEAR	-288,687.49	-840,092.24

Statement of changes in net assets

	Accumulated Surplus/Deficit	Economic result of the year	Net Assets (Total)
Balance as at 31 December 2022	1,697,940.94	-840,092.24	857,848.70
Changes in accounting policies	0.00	0.00	0.00
Balance as at 1 January 2023	1,697,940.94	-840,092.24	857,848.70
Allocation of the economic result of previous year	-840,092.24	840,092.24	0.00
Economic result of the year	0.00	-288,687.49	-288,687.49
Balance as at 31 December 2023	857,848.70	-288,687.49	569,161.21

Cash Flow statement

	2023	2022
Economic result of the year	-288,687.49	-840,092.24
Operating activities		
Amortisation/Depreciation	537,271.45	515,665.04
(Increase)/Decrease in receivables and recoverables	64,571.72	-63,069.65
(Increase)/Decrease in pre-financing	25,718.75	97,482.42
Increase/(Decrease) in payables	2,575,989.67	1,180,296.24
Increase/(Decrease) in accrued charges	813,204.57	541,866.91
Net cash flow from operating activities	3,728,068.67	1,432,148.72
Investing activities		
(Increase)/Decrease in intangible assets and property, plant and equipment	-209,561.55	-310,435.80
Other...	0.00	0.00
Net cash flow from investing activities	-209,561.55	-310,435.80
Net increase/(decrease) in cash and cash equivalents	3,518,507.12	1,121,712.92
Cash and cash equivalents at the beginning of the year	3,081,775.68	1,960,062.76
Cash and cash equivalents at year-end	6,595,799.80	3,081,775.68

Budget Result

	2023	2022
Revenue (a)	28,680,710.77	23,939,530.88
EC subsidy	22,627,956.00	21,726,000.00
Other subsidies	5,805,000.00	2,177,400.00
Miscellaneous revenue	247,754.77	36,130.88
Expenditure (b)	-31,224,812.11	-24,943,514.23
<i>Staff - Title I of the budget</i>		
Payments	-15,551,860.94	-14,819,622.88
Appropriations carried forward	-285,093.84	-72,908.69
<i>Administration - Title II of the budget</i>		
Payments	-1,737,141.81	-1,600,330.29
Appropriations carried forward	-625,934.31	-420,504.23
<i>Operating activities - Title III of the budget</i>		
Payments	-4,722,040.61	-5,064,713.69
Appropriations carried forward	-2,307.40	-865,434.45
<i>Operating activities - Title IV of the budget</i>		
Payments	-2,812,971.02	-388,615.32
Appropriations carried forward	-5,487,462.18	-1,711,384.68
Outturn for the financial year (a + b)	-2,544,101.34	-1,003,983.35
Appropriations carried over and cancelled	49,784.80	57,230.51
Adjustment for carry over from the previous year of appropriations available on 31 December arising from assigned revenue	2,576,819.13	1,009,242.06
Exchange rate differences	-227.23	-279.73
Balance of the outturn account for the financial year	82,275.36	62,209.49
Balance carried over from the previous financial year	62,209.49	93,863.79
Reimbursements to EC	-62,209.49	-93,863.79
Amount related to the financial year to be reimbursed to EC	82,275.36	62,209.49

Annex 9 – Delivery in partnership and cooperation with HCD actors

The ETF's cooperation with international and bilateral organisations and other actors active in HCD contributes to the fulfilment of the ETF functions as outlined in its mandate¹⁸, more specifically:

- To achieve maximum effectiveness in improving human capital development in partner countries.
- To facilitate the exchange of information and experience among actors engaged in HCD reform in partner countries.
- To disseminate information, encourage networking and exchange of experience and good practice between the EU and partner countries and among partner countries on HCD issues.

In 2023, the ETF counted 24 formal partnerships in force, including:

- EU Agencies: Cedefop, Eurofound and Osha.
- Development cooperation EU MS: Enabel.
- Regional and thematic organisation: ERI SEE, WB 6 CIF, IIAS/EGPA, CORLEAP, ARLEM, UfM, UNIMED, Huawei, IVETA, ICDE, and Skillman.
- International organisations: DVVI, ICT-ILO, IOM, UNICEF, UNIDO, UNDP, SKILLMAN.
- International Financial Institutions: ADB and EBRD.

Five new or renewed partnerships were signed in the course of the year:

- New MoU with the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD) strengthening collaboration to promote HCD and equitable access to skills, jobs and sustainable livelihoods in the EBRD and ETF partner countries.
- New MoU with the Asian Development Bank (ADB) strengthening collaboration to promote human capital development through education and training and social inclusion actions supporting countries in embracing a fair and just twin transition.
- New DoI with the DVVI to jointly develop a plan for and implement an innovative activity in adult learning and education, as well as to jointly research the learning activity using the ETF research framework.
- New framework cooperation agreement with CEDEFOP signed for the coming 3 years.

All formal partnerships have been active during the year and have contributed to ETF operations. More in general, cooperation has grown beyond formal partnerships alone and there is an increased engagement of the ETF with actors active in human capital development (HCD). Continuing the trend of the last 4 years, partnerships in 2023 became increasingly perceived as both operational and political tools to deliver, to increase ETF's impact in partner countries, to augment efficiency in terms of resources, as well as to expand the ETF's perception as a global reference for HCD. In 2023 the added value of partnerships and cooperation triggered wider influence and access to capacities and resources beyond ETF's current means.

¹⁸ Art.2 (paragraph c, d and f) of the ETF Regulation No 1339/2008.

In 2023, cooperation and exchanges happened with all groups of main ETF stakeholders:

- EU services including but not limited to DG EMPL, DG INTPA, DG NEAR, DG EAC and DG JRC.
- EU agencies, such as Cedefop, Eurofound, EIGE, ELA and EU-OSHA.
- EU Member States following Team Europe approach, including thematic and cooperation partners like Enabel and GIZ, as well as the VET toolbox.
- International Organisations such as IAG, OECD, UNEVOC/UNESCO/UIL, UNICEF, UNIDO, ILO/ITC-ILO, IOM, among others.
- International Financial Institutions including EBRD, EIB, ADB, WB and EDFIs.
- Platforms and networks like ERI SEE, RCC, Skillman, ASEM, WB6 CIF and UNIMED.

The growing cooperation with partners manifested in knowledge co-creation, peer learning and policy advice, international exchanges, networking, consolidation of existing partnerships and exploration of new ones.

Highlights of partnerships in 2023 across ETF's activity areas:

Overall highlights for 2023 include:

- Cooperation with the MS scaled up as part of a Team Europe approach and entered new modality with direct bilateral work programmes. In 2023 two exchange visits took place with ENABEL and GIZ.
- Cooperation with IFIs stepping up from dialogue to formal partnership with ADB and collaboration with EIB. New opportunities opened thanks to missions and meetings, and in the next couple of years this opening may result to more incoming extra subsidy projects.
- Strong partnership work with EUDs to provide technical assistance and support for education system monitoring and assessment activities, and with Partner Countries on tools and methodologies for M&A of LLL systems.
- ETF role recognised in the collaboration with DGs in the EC Migration Package; joint research on CG with UNICEF; joint gender guidelines with UNESCO; cooperation for re-emergency in UA with ILO.
- Active participation in 29 subnetworks of EUAN, including new networks (e.g. on AI). HR collaboration with Cedefop, and on financial management with EFSA. ETF in the lead of greening network group.
- Continued liaison with EU agencies and actors in anticipation of cyber & information security framework. Exchange visits with CEDEFOP.

Highlights per activity area are:

1. Skills demand analysis

Delivering in partnership in 2023

- The Network of Experts is the greatest example of collaboration and partnership.
 - Collaboration with Cedefop for the implementation of EUSJS.
 - Collaboration with Unesco, Michelangelo Foundation, UNIDO, UFM for the elaboration of a vision for skills for craft 2050 with joint publication.
 - Collaboration with UFM on new forms of work with joint seminar on platform economy in SEMED.
 - ETF nominated chair of IAG on skills mismatch for the period 2024-2025.
 - Collaboration with DG EMPL for the organization of several events at COP28 in Dubai.
-

2. Active Labour Market Policies

Delivering in partnership in 2023

- Strong cooperation with EC (DG EMPL and NEAR), Eurofound, UNICEF, UfM, and ILO.
 - Cooperation with Public Employment Service of Sweden continued in 2023 and resulted in three joint publications (with Eurofound and UNICEF, forthcoming 2024).
 - Referenced ETF contribution to UNICEF - ILO MENA regional report on youth, joint events with higher coverage and visibility.
 - Coherent and comprehensive policy advice to Western Balkans in context of Youth Guarantee design.
-

3. Modernisation of qualifications and establishment of qualification systems

Delivering in partnership in 2023

- Global Inventory of NQFs – this year marks 10 years of collaboration with UNESCO, UIL and Cedefop on this flagship publication.
 - Collaboration with ITC-ILO and with Unesco UIL on e-learning courses.
 - Support to Moldova and UKR and Georgia joining the EQF Advisory Group, cooperation with the Member States and DG EMPL on the comparison exercises.
 - Peer learning on validation co-hosted by the Turkish Vocational Qualifications Authority and co-financed by DG NEAR.
 - ETF is a Steering Committee member of the Commission's contract for the European Inventory on validation of non-formal and informal learning.
-

4. Vocational excellence provision models

Delivering in partnership in 2023

- The project is supporting EU core policies, for example, on digital and green transition:
<https://www.etf.europa.eu/en/what-we-do/going-green-greta>
<https://www.etf.europa.eu/en/what-we-do/digitalisation-teaching-and-learning-centres-vocational-excellence>
 - Some ENE members have been selected to inform research on twin transition (SLA 1 studies)
<https://openspace.etf.europa.eu/pages/role-coves-applied-research-and-digital-and-green-transitions>
 - Danube group (Transnational Platform) PA9 Skills & ENE are well consolidated and recognized partners working together. See for example:
<https://www.etf.europa.eu/en/news-and-events/events/empowering-just-transition-coves-driving-green-skills-employment-and>
 - ENE has been invited as keynote actor in international Conferences: South Asisa Pacific Region (UNESCO-UNEVOC -BIBB- RAVTE, etc.). See more at: <https://tvetcon.rmutt.ac.th/>
-

5. Innovative teaching and learning processes and practices

Delivering in partnership in 2023

- PIALE activity in Jordan and Palestine with DVV international.
 - Collaboration with JRC across a number of activities (SELFIE, Scaffold).
 - Collaboration with UNESCO TTF on tools for teachers.
 - Collaboration with ILO on Ukraine micro-credentials activity.
-

6. Engaging enterprises in skills development

Delivering in partnership in 2023

- The project has been coordinated e.g. with UNDP country offices in WB6 however the primary focus of the project is to generate cross-country cooperation among WB6 and with EU member states across stakeholder groups (SMEs, business intermediary organisations, VET and HE institutions, policy makers).
-

7. Lifelong learning policies and system change

Delivering in partnership in 2023

- Partner countries
 - Partner regions
-

8. Quality assurance and governance mechanisms

Delivering in partnership in 2023

- The integration in the YG in the WB regions was increased.
 - The integration with Skills Agenda content was increased.
 - Stronger common understanding with DG EMPL and DG NEAR on CSOs role in LLL.
 - New and stronger cooperation with EESC, Eurofound, Cedefop, the OECD, LLLP, the EAEA, DVV-International, EARLALLL.
 - Continued the strong existing cooperation with ITC ILO, on Quality Assurance and on sectoral approaches to skills governance.
-

Highlights of cooperation with EC DGs

DG EMPL:

- Centres of Vocational Excellence (COVEs) – Internationalising Vocational Excellence.
- Qualification systems, comparison, validation, recognition + UA needs & translation (ESCO, Europass, EU Skills-profile tool).
- European Alliance for Apprenticeships (EAFA).
- Cooperation within Union for the Mediterranean.
- ERPs and Youth Guarantee input.
- Monitoring of Osnabruck Declaration/VET Recommendations.
- Pact for Skills + Green Skills + European Year of Skills.
- Adult learning – PES cooperation.

DG NEAR:

- Campaign on the international dimension of skills.
- Thematic webinars (Migration/brain drain, ESJS, upcoming migration, digital, green skills).
- Rapid Education Sector Diagnostics.
- Support to TEI for Southern Neighbourhood (Jobs through Trade and Investment).
- Erasmus + policy dialogue in PCs – Western Balkans region.
- Building synergies with IFIs.
- Regional project on Education for Eastern Partnership.
- Migration/labour mobility.
- Supporting EU Enlargement – support to new candidate countries.

DG INTPA:

- DARYA.
- ACQF II.
- EUD in Rwanda Request.

DG EAC:

- Implementation of SELFIE for teachers (jointly with DG JRC).
- Innovation and technology transfer (with EIT).
- EC Expert Working groups 2025.
- Digital Education.
- Erasmus+ policy advice + capacity building for VET (EACEA).

DG JRC:

- Selfie, Selfie4Teachers, SelfieWBL.
- Smart Specialisation – Western Balkans Agri-food.
- Impact investment and skills – technology transfer.
- Ukraine recovery and regional development.

DG HOME:

- Talent partnerships and talent pool.
- Studies on skills dimension of migration.

EEAS/EUDs:

- EU Delegations (EUDs) is the entry point in partner country engagement.
- Input to subcommittee meetings, country team meetings for programming, planning and monitoring of cooperation.
- Support to EUD Ukraine.

Cooperation with EU agencies

The ETF actively participates in the EU Agencies Network (EUAN) for regular exchange of practices and exploring areas for joint actions or shared services.

As required by its mandate, the ETF has a cooperation agreement with Cedefop and Eurofound. An annual plan for cooperation has been established with both agencies and implemented to ensure mutual benefit and exchange of experience between the EU and partner countries. Key highlights are included below and more information is available in Annexes 10 and 11 which follow.

- Regular cooperation with EU Agencies under EMPL remit.
- Annual workplan with joint actions ETF with Cedefop and EUROFOUND.
- Structured parallel cooperation track with Cedefop, with focus on recruitment & selection, staff development & exchange, IT and cyber-security.
- Ongoing implementation of SLA with EU-OSHA on sharing accounting services.
- Operational exchanges on third country nationals plus discussion with ELA.
- Active contribution to EUAN Networks and Work Groups on governance, greening & sustainability (green public procurement, greener meetings & events and sustainability reporting), IT, Artificial Intelligence and cybersecurity, diversity and inclusion and HR issues.
- ETF leading on organisation of seminar in early 2024 for all agencies on EU public procurement, including sustainable procurement (in cooperation with Chamber of Commerce).

Annex 10 – Collaboration with Cedefop 2023

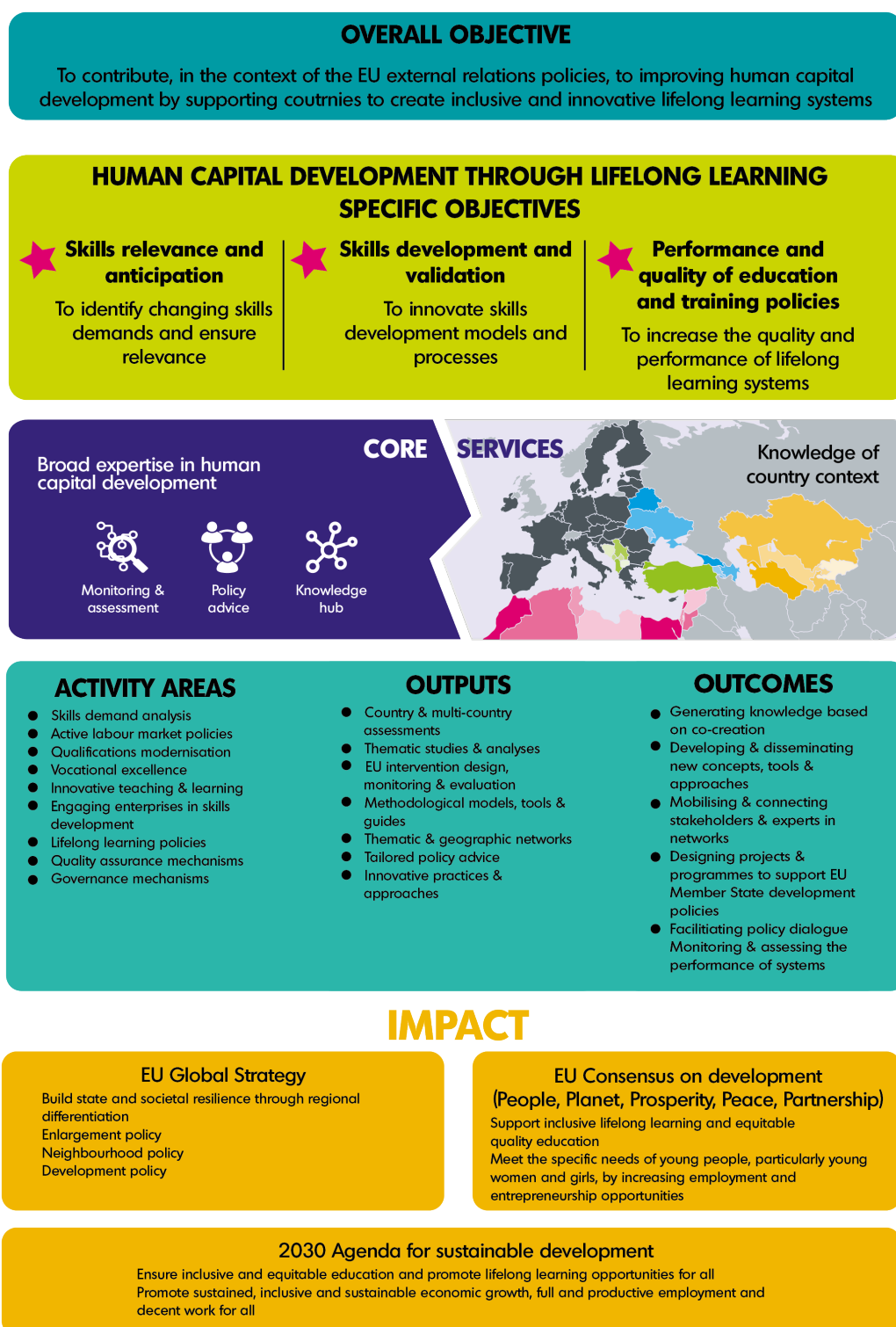
Thematic Areas	Actions	Progress
Qualifications development	<p>Shared products (publications):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Co-design, development and production (also with UNESCO) of the fifth edition of the Global NQF Inventory. <p>Joint advice to Commission:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - In the EQF, exchange of data and intelligence on qualifications systems and frameworks in the Advisory Group sub-group on EQF to NQF comparison for third countries. <p>Information-sharing, expertise exchange, peer learning:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Contribute to skills Agenda implementation in micro-credentials, individual learning accounts, interoperable databases of qualifications, common European VET profiles, upskilling pathways and international qualifications, use of ESCO and Europass in third countries. 	<p>Qualification inventory completed and published.</p> <p>Kick off of new cycle of qualification monitoring started – expected publication in 2026-27.</p> <p>Cooperation with CEDEFOP and joint analysis for qualification systems, validation (including inventory expanded to 11 partner countries) and information sharing including joint session on microcredentials with the interagency group.</p>
Skills matching and anticipation/identification	<p>Concrete thematic cooperation:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Platform economy/platform work: based on the past years exchanges with Cedefop on the new forms of employment and platform work, the knowledge sharing will continue in 2023, including participation in events, exchanges through peer learning events and technical meetings. - European Skills and Jobs survey (ESJS): ETF and Cedefop will exchange information and findings, will have regular interaction to support the development/adaptation of the survey questionnaire and preparatory work for a joint publication to be developed in 2023, where selected results from the EU and surveyed ETF PCs will be analysed. - Upskilling pathways and addressing the needs of low-skilled adults and/or at social risk - Flexibilization and individualisation of skills development approaches and novel arrangements to access and participate in (re)training via Active Labour Market Programmes (including the potential of individual learning accounts). <p>Network building and knowledge sharing:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Invitation of Cedefop's experts in the ETF's Network of Experts on new skills needs and skills anticipation. - Exchange and knowledge sharing on calls for innovative proposals from the research community, with possible cooperation on the annual event. - Regular communication and exchange of ETF's recent initiatives with Cedefop, in particular regarding the skills for green transition, the use of Big Data in LMI, future of skills needs in selected economic sectors, and future skills needs in craftsmanship. 	<p>CEDEFOP part of the SKILLSLAB network of experts.</p> <p>Participation to key meetings, expertise sharing and peer review of products.</p> <p>Implementation of the ESJS in 6 ETF countries completed. Joint analysis with CEDEFOP will lead to a publication in 2025.</p> <p>The two agencies have presented findings of the ESJ in joint webinars.</p>
Innovative teaching and learning	<p>Network-building:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Cedefop membership of ETF's expert group to steer its Creating New Learning's project (CNL), including an informal consultative group between the ETF and Cedefop to support the ETF's UA Re-Emerge(ncy) activity regarding the micro 	<p>Continuous exchange on use of common tools in innovative teaching and learning for Ukraine.</p>

	<p>credentials for VET e-learning and adults' re-skilling and upskilling in Ukraine.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Joint activities engaging support from the ETF's Community of Innovative Educators. <p>Co-development of common tools:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Sharing research tools and experiences in their use, and pooling of data, in respective projects in curricula innovation (notably Key Competences), VET teachers and trainers' professional development,; teaching, learning and assessment methods. - Dissemination and enrichment of Cedefop and ETF (READY, Scaffold, teacher booster) practical tools for policy makers and VET practitioners. - Possible partnership and interest of ETF joining the Cedefop Pan-European survey of VET teachers and trainers with regard of ETF's PCs (in the initial phase, at least in one ETF partner country) and/or connect with the ETF-JRC pilot of SELFIE for Teachers in the Western Balkans. A particular interest from ETF is regarding evidence on digital education and digitalisation of VET systems. <p>Key competence in VET:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Joint engagement in key competence discussions with partners (JRC, OECD, others). - Peer review by a Cedefop expert of the ETF's draft manuscript "The key competence lighthouse: partnering for an entrepreneurial Tunisia". 	Dissemination and exchange on Scaffold tool.
Centres of Vocational Excellence	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Exchange of knowledge and expertise. 	<p>Exchange of knowledge and expertise on vocational excellence.</p> <p>Cedefop consulted regularly on developments in vocational excellence.</p> <p>Involvement of Cedefop in the discussion for support Services of CoVEs.</p> <p>Cooperation with Cedefop on CoVEs within the Interagency focus Group on the future of VET.</p>
System changes and lifelong learning	<p>Copenhagen / Osnabruck process follow up – reporting:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Cooperation in the development and implementation of the joint monitoring framework for the policy objectives and reform priorities under the Osnabruck Declaration and the VET Recommendation. - Joint participation and presentation of findings in the ACVT/DGVT meetings. 	<p>Close cooperation with Cedefop on the analysis of progress of the Osnabruck Declaration process and the VET Recommendation.</p> <p>Joint presentation at the December 2023 ACVT.</p>
Cooperation through the GLAD network	<p>Regular Exchange of input based on:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Strengthening partnerships to foster LLL. - Governance and governing bodies. - Collaborative governance and financing. - Civil society organisations' relevant role in LLL. 	Exchanges between the two respective teams.

Knowledge sharing seminars	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Thessaloniki, June 2023. - Torino, December 2023. 	<p>Torino, June 2023</p> <p>Thessaloniki, December 2023</p> <p>Joint meeting of the management teams of the 2 organisations at the knowledge sharing events.</p>
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Annex 11 – Collaboration with Eurofound 2023

Actions	Activities	Status
Knowledge coordination/ exchange	<p>New forms of employment, including platform work:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Invitation to Eurofound to participate in the knowledge sharing seminar on platform economies and their policy implications in terms of working conditions and skills development, particularly for young workforce. - The knowledge sharing seminar could involve the participation of EC, Cedefop, ELA and other experts.. <p>Skills Lab Network of Experts:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Continuation of active participation of Eurofound in the events of the Network, including dissemination of research results and other relevant information through regular newsletter of the network. 	<p>Activity on new forms of employment postponed to 2024.</p> <p>Eurofound took part to the SkillsLAB network event in 2023, and the exchange of information is regular, including invitation to events and contribution to newsletters.</p> <p>In 2023 ETF and Eurofound cooperated in the context of the preparation of the Agencies workshop at the European Parliament focusing on skills shortages and skills intelligence. Skills, skills, skills! Skills for people, skills for competitiveness, skills for sustainability European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions (europa.eu)</p>
Implementation of surveys, exchange on data collection and joint analysis	<p>E-survey on living and working:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - After successful roll out in 2022, joint implementation of the second wave in most ETF partner countries next to EU-27 in 2023 - Publication and dissemination of results in autumn of 2023.. <p>Joint collection and sharing of evidence on working life:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Co-development of Moldova and Georgia working life profiles in 2023 and possible update of Ukraine WLCP. - Joint publication of WLCPs. 	<p>ETF and Eurofound teams jointly developed the questionnaire and completed the technical preparations for the e-survey on living and working. The survey has been implemented and results will be presented in 2024. The team is already working on the 2024 edition of the e-survey.</p> <p>WLCP final drafts developed for both countries, including comments and revisions done by ETF and Eurofound. Ongoing translation of fiches. Final manuscripts to be completed by end of June.</p>
Administration, shared services, internal control and risk management	<p>Exchange and building on good practices in internal control and risk management (including peer review) and other subject matters within the EUAN.</p> <p>Collaboration between Eurofound and ETF (including also EU-OSHA and Cedefop) to support the Commission evaluation of four DG EMPL agencies.</p>	<p>Ongoing exchange of info on the Agencies' performance indicator methodologies.</p> <p>Collaboration both via back-channel and directors throughout the Commission evaluation, with back-channel being used for formal feedback on evaluation drafts for all agencies.</p>
Development of Programming Document	<p>In consideration of the different mandates of the Agencies the joint action plan for the next year will be prepared following the exchange of draft work programmes before their approval by the respective Administrative Boards. Both agencies will refer to each other's work and cooperation where appropriate as well as in relevant strategic discussion.</p>	<p>The regular dialogue and update was implemented, including exchange of draft annual work programs, discussion on priorities and agreement on joint areas of work for the following year. The exchange among staff members is regular. In 2023 a staff short-term (one week) on the job training has been organised between the agencies and a staff member from ETF was hosted by Eurofound for learning and development purposes. The pilot has been successful and represents a good practice of cooperation between agencies</p>
Organisation of the annual consultation	<p>Organisation of annual meetings (possibly online) to discuss and assess progresses on the above and other relevant issues.</p>	<p>The meeting took place regularly for assessment of 2023 and agreement for the 2024 work ahead.</p>



Annex 13 – Statement of the Head of Unit in charge of Risk Management and Internal Control (Internal Control Coordinator)



 Ref: Ares(2024)2130648 - 21/03/2024
With qualified electronic signature(s)



Statement of the manager in charge of risk management and internal control

I declare that in accordance with the Commission's communication on the internal control framework, I have reported my advice and recommendations on the overall state of internal control in the European Training Foundation in 2023 to the ETF Director.

I hereby certify that the information provided in the present Consolidated Annual Activity Report and in its annexes is to the best of my knowledge, accurate, reliable and complete.

Qualified electronic signature by:
EVA INES JIMENO SICILIA
Date: 2024-03-18 14:33:28 +01:00

Eva Jimeno Sicilia
ETF Internal Control Coordinator
Head of Strategy and Resources Department



DECLARATION OF ASSURANCE

I, the undersigned, XAVIER MATHEU DE CORTADA, Director of the European Training Foundation ad Interim from 1 January 2023 to 16 April 2023, in my capacity as Authorising Officer for the period indicated,

- Declare that the information contained in the annual progress and performance report 2023 gives a true and fair view.
- State that I have reasonable assurance that the resources assigned to the activities described in this report have been used for their intended purpose and in accordance with the principles of sound financial management, and that the control procedures put in place give the necessary guarantees concerning the legality and regularity of the underlying transactions.

This reasonable assurance is based on my own judgement and on the information at my disposal, such as:

- The end of year declaration of assurance issued by (Sub) Delegated Authorising Officers based on the knowledge gained from daily operation and management supervision activities;
- The results of the annual review and management self-assessment of the internal control system and organisational performance;
- The results of the internal transactional ex-post exercise;
- The progress and follow-up of risk management activities;
- The results and follow up of ex-post audits and controls;
- The results of ex-post evaluations and the monitoring of ETF activities;
- The recommendations of the Internal Audit Service, the accompanying action plans and their follow-up; and
- The lessons learned from the reports of the Court of Auditors for the years prior to the year of this declaration.

I confirm that I am not aware of anything not reported here which could harm the interest of the European Training Foundation

Signed and dated

Qualified electronic signature by:
XAVIER MATHEU DE CORTADA
Date: 2024-02-28 14:33:47 +01:00

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