



European Training Foundation

SINGLE PROGRAMMING DOCUMENT 2025 - 27

WORK PROGRAMME 2025



CONTENTS

PREFACE	4
LIST OF ACRONYMS	6
ETF MISSION, VISION AND VALUES	10
SECTION I – GENERAL CONTEXT	11
SECTION II – MULTI-ANNUAL PROGRAMMING 2025-27	24
1. Multi-annual work programme	24
1.1 The ETF in a changing landscape	26
1.2 The ETF’s approach to human capital development and lifelong learning	30
1.3 Delivering in partnership	33
1.4 A differentiated approach	34
1.5 ETF Networks	36
1.6 Advising EU institutions	37
1.7 ETF core services	38
1.8 Strategic goals	40
1.9 Geographic area of operation	43
1.10 ETF Intervention Logic	44
2. Human and financial resource outlook for 2025-27	45
2.1 Overview of the past and current situation	48
2.2 Resource programming for 2025-27	48
2.3 Strategy for achieving efficiency gains	53
SECTION III – ANNUAL WORK PROGRAMME 2025	55
1. Executive summary	55
2. Operational Activity Areas	57
2.1 Contextualised and anticipatory knowledge development	57
2.2 Innovative approaches to knowledge development for evidence-based policy making	59
2.3 EU external policies in the area of HCD	63
2.4 Active anticipation and shaping of demand for input to EU external policies	66
2.5 Partner countries are informed and use ETF contextualised knowledge	68
2.6 Country intelligence and facilitation of stakeholders’ engagement and system change	69

3. Horizontal Activity Areas	71
3.1 Increased organisational readiness	71
3.2 Increased reach and capacity to influence and mobilise key players	73
4. Extra-subsidy projects	76
4.1 African Continental Qualifications Framework (ACQF II)	76
4.2 Dialogue and Action for Resourceful Youth in Central Asia (DARYA)	77
4.3 International Dimension of Centres of Vocational Excellence	79
4.4 Supporting Education Reforms and Skills in the Eastern Partnership Region	80
ANNEXES	82
Annex I – ETF Organisation chart (31 December 2023)	83
Annex II – Resource allocation per activity 2025	85
Annex III – Financial resources 2025-27	87
Annex IV – Human Resources (quantitative)	92
Annex V – Human resources (qualitative)	95
Annex VI – Environment management – ETF Environmental Policy	99
Annex VII – Buildings	100
Annex VIII – Privileges and immunities	101
Annex IX – Evaluations	102
Annex X – Organisational management and internal control systems strategy	104
Annex XI – Plan for grant, contribution and service-level agreements	106
Annex XII – Strategy for cooperation with third countries and/or international organisations	107
Annex XIII – Collaboration with other EU Agencies	109
Annex XIV – Planned requests from EU services 2025	114
Annex XV – Cross-checking conditions for ETF operation in countries and regions	119

PREFACE

The European Training Foundation (ETF) uniquely integrates thematic and regional knowledge to support countries in transition to build their human capital and transform their education and training systems towards inclusive lifelong learning and enhanced employability. It offers intelligence and evidence-based policy advice to align skills development with current and future job markets, while promoting system change to meet the needs of evolving global education system requirements, geopolitical shifts and sustainable societies.

The ETF operates in the field of human capital development at country and regional levels, particularly in the EU neighbourhood, from enlargement regions to the South Mediterranean and Central Asia, while also supporting EU external policies, including African programmes. As an EU agency, its activities support EU external actions by contributing to the achievement of European Commission (EC) priorities and to the global 2030 Sustainable Development Agenda. As part of the EU Team Europe approach, the ETF works within the global human capital development community, promoting value delivery through partnerships. It engages with a wide variety of actors, including social partners, civil society, private sector and international financing institutions. ETF's analytical work contributes to stakeholder policy dialogue and guides evidence-based policy making and strategy development.

The ETF's adaptability and flexibility allow it to work effectively towards the EU objectives of Global Europe and the international dimension of the EU Skills Agenda. ETF has developed its institutional capacity to be able to quickly adjust to the changing geopolitical environment, including increasing fragility in the EU neighbourhood, as well as the thematic and geographical priorities of the new EU Commission and Parliament. With EU enlargement high on the agenda, including for ETF's long-term partners like Ukraine and Western Balkan countries, and the EU's Global Gateway initiative with its focus on skills and education, the ETF's expertise in and services of knowledge development, monitoring and assessment, and policy advice in the field of human capital development are increasingly relevant.

To deliver value in 2025 the ETF aims to:

- Support EU institutions by participating strategically in skills, education, training and employment initiatives and agenda-setting. This follows European Commission guidance to maximise impact.
- Support partner countries on their lifelong learning journey integrating education and employment policies. This promotes inclusive, anticipatory and evidence-based skills development.
- Prioritise engagement with Ukraine and its ongoing efforts for recovery and reconstruction, as well as with Enlargement and Candidate Countries supporting their process of EU accession.
- Continue to take on relevant new responsibilities through extra-subsidy projects. This expands the EU's impact, reach and influence globally, and maximises the use of ETF expertise.
- Partner with EU agencies for mutual reinforcement and efficiency gains, while expanding the ETF's anticipatory, sustainability and digital maturity.
- Focus on innovation, talent partnerships and mobility, migration and skills recognition, skills anticipation and formation, fragility and inclusion, and work in the context of global education.
- Attract and retain committed experts to deliver high-quality services. As a learning organisation, the ETF supports its staff to reach and develop their full potential while promoting wellbeing.

- Implement its strategy effectively, reviewing progress and planning ambitiously to ensure added value and impact for stakeholders, while positioning itself for the future by building its vision 2040.

In Sum: our 2025 work programme aims to equip individuals with relevant current and future skills. It promotes effective education, training and labour market systems for stability and growth. It focuses on ensuring skills relevance and anticipation, supporting skills development and validation, fostering curricular reforms and transition policies, and enhancing the quality of education and training policies. Special attention goes to the skills dimensions of the fair green and digital transitions, as well as gender, inclusion, migration, aging, equality, solidarity and inclusiveness in line with EU policies, priorities and values.

Building on the ETF's recent 30th anniversary, we are looking forward to shape the next 30 years of partnership between the EU and its neighbourhood countries and regions via skills and education. I believe this long-term historical institutional experience together with our strong evidence-basis and future-orientation will allow us to fulfil our mission and continue to add value in line with EU priorities, geopolitical shifts and global trends in human capital development.

Pilvi Torsti

LIST OF ACRONYMS

ABAC	Activity-based accounting system
ABB	Activity-based budgeting
ACQF	African Continental Qualifications Framework
ADB	Asian Development Bank
AFD	Agence Française de Développement
ALMPs	Active Labour Market Policies
AU	African Union
BC	British Council
Cedefop	European Centre for the Development of Vocational Training
CMI	Center for Mediterranean Integration
CORLEAP	Conference of Regional and Local Authorities for the Eastern Partnership
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
DCI	Development Cooperation Instrument
DG	Directorate General
DG EAC	Directorate General for Education, Youth, Sport 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 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
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
EEAS	European External Action Service
Eehub	Entrepreneurship Education Hub
EESC	European Economic and Social Committee
EISMEA	European Innovation Council and Small and Medium-sized Enterprises Executive Agency
EFSD+	European Fund for Sustainable Development Plus
EIP	Economic Investment Plan
ELA	European Labour Authority
ENABEL	Belgian Development Agency
ENE	ETF Network for Excellence
ENI	European Neighbourhood Instrument

ENP	European Neighbourhood Policy
EntreComp	Entrepreneurship Competence Framework
EPSO	European Personnel Selection Office
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
EUD	European Union Delegation
EU-OSHA	European Agency for Safety and Health at Work
Euromed	Euro-Mediterranean Partnership
EVTA	European Vocational Training Association
FTE	Full-time equivalent
GAP	Gender Action Plan
GDP	Gross domestic product
GIZ	Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (German Agency for International Cooperation)
HCD	Human capital development
ICT	Information and communications technology
IFI	International Finance Institution
ILO	International Labour Organisation
IOM	International Organisation for Migration
IPA	Instrument for Pre-accession Assistance
LuxDev	Luxembourg Development Cooperation
MISMES	Migrant Support Measures from an Employment and Skills Perspective
MTD	Medium-term deliverables
NDICI	Neighbourhood, Development and International Cooperation Instrument
NEET	Not in education, employment, or training
NQF	National qualifications framework
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
OIB	Office for Infrastructure and Logistics in Brussels
PES	Public Employment Services
PMO	Paymaster Office
PSD	Private Sector Development
QA	Quality assurance
RCC	Regional Cooperation Council
RCI	Regional Competitive Initiative
SBA	Small Business Act for Europe
SEE	South Eastern Europe
SEE2020	South East Europe 2020 Strategy
SEECCEL	South East European Centre for Entrepreneurial Learning
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
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
VET/TVET	(Technical and) vocational education and training
VNFIL	Validation of non-formal and informal learning
WBL	Work-based learning
WBPET	Western Balkans Platform on Education and Training
YEM	Youth Employment in the Mediterranean

ETF partner regions and country acronyms¹

South Eastern Europe and Türkiye	SEET
Albania	AL
Bosnia and Herzegovina	BA
Kosovo ²	XK ³
North Macedonia	MK
Montenegro	ME
Serbia	RS
Türkiye	TR

Southern and Eastern Mediterranean	SEMED
Algeria	DZ
Egypt	EG
Israel ⁴	IL
Jordan	JO
Lebanon	LB
Libya ⁵	LY
Morocco	MA
Palestine ⁶	PS
Syria ⁷	SY
Tunisia	TN

Eastern Partnership	EaP
Armenia	AM
Azerbaijan	AZ
Belarus ⁸	BY
Georgia ⁹	GE
Moldova	MD

¹ These acronyms come from the [EU's interinstitutional style guide](#).

² This designation is without prejudice to positions on status, and is in line with UNSCR 1244/1999 and the ICJ Opinion on the Kosovo declaration of independence.

³ 'XK' is a code used for practical reasons and is not an official ISO country code.

⁴ ETF support to Israel takes place in the context of EU-Israel cooperation and related guidelines on the eligibility of Israeli entities and their activities in the territories occupied by Israel since 1967 for grants, prizes and financial instruments funded by the EU from 2014 onwards.

⁵ ETF resumed cooperation with Libya in 2018. If conditions allow, the ETF will continue to support the EUD in 2024-26.

Ukraine	UA
---------	----

Central Asia	CA
Kazakhstan	KZ
Kyrgyzstan	KG
Tajikistan	TJ
Turkmenistan	TM
Uzbekistan	UZ

Cooperation in other areas	
African Union	AU

⁶ This designation shall not be construed as recognition of a State of Palestine and is without prejudice to the individual positions of the Member States on this issue.

⁷ No activities are currently envisioned in Syria.

⁸ ETF support to Belarus takes place in the context of SG note of 01/03/2022, Ares (2022)1502984. Also, in the context of the SG note aforementioned and the 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 a partner country.

⁹ ETF follows closely current state of play and the EU guidance on Georgia, and is in line with the conclusions of the European Council meeting of 27 June 2024 (EUCO 15/24, CO EUR 12, CONCL 4).

ETF MISSION, VISION AND VALUES

Mandate

The ETF's mandate is to contribute, in the context of EU external relations policies, to improving human capital development in partner countries by delivering high quality and timely support to the EU's external policies and actions, providing relevant policy advice and targeted direct technical support to partner countries to facilitate their development towards the adoption and implementation of policies supporting the improvement of education and training systems and lifelong learning.

Mission

The ETF's mission is to be a global catalyst for change and innovation in lifelong learning systems.

Vision

The ETF's vision is to achieve stability and prosperity in our partner countries through sustainable and adaptable lifelong learning systems.

Values

The ETF's core values define what the organisation does and how it works. They guide everything from interaction inside the organisation to interaction with external partners.

Acting with integrity and respect: the ETF leads by example by keeping its word and commitments in its daily work, speaking up for what is right and acting accordingly.

Striving for innovation and fostering creativity: the ETF nurtures creativity to drive innovation and explore opportunities for continuous improvement, to foster knowledge co-creation and sharing both internally and externally to become a catalyst for innovation, and to encourage staff to challenge the status quo by being curious, open and receptive to what is happening in its environment.

Committed to excellence and service orientation: the ETF puts its expertise at the service of its internal and external partners, always striving for excellence and quality. It fosters an analytical and evidence-based approach to meet internal and external customers' needs and foresee future trends. The ETF keeps itself at the leading edge of its fields of expertise, through continuous learning and training. The ETF acts and responds to change with agility and it interacts with its partners efficiently and consistently.

Being accountable: the ETF is accountable for everything it does and with all its internal and external partners. The organisation explains its decisions and stands behind them, taking responsibility for all decisions and actions. The ETF takes ownership and is proud of its work.

Working together: the ETF works together with its partners towards shared goals and objectives. It co-creates for and with its partners. The ETF acts honestly and transparently both inside and outside the organisation. It embraces differences and the diversity of perspectives and gives constructive feedback.

Section I – GENERAL CONTEXT

Policy context

The ETF works to improve the performance, access and quality of education and training systems in line with key EU recommendations and agendas, such as the [VET Recommendation](#), the [Osnabrück Declaration](#), the [European Skills Agenda](#), the [Bridge to Jobs](#) and the [Recommendations for Youth Guarantee update](#). It collaborates closely with EU Delegations (EUDs), international financial institutions (IFIs), donors, bilateral and international organisations, governmental development agencies, inter-governmental organisations, and other EU bodies to ensure that assistance and development projects are more effective. Its work contributes directly to economic growth, social cohesion and improved resilience while addressing the root causes of migration.

EU External Action Policies

In the context of the EU external action, and in alignment with the [European Commission's priorities](#), the ETF contributes to building a stronger Europe and to promoting social fairness and prosperity in the EU neighbourhood (Enlargement countries, Neighbourhood East and South) and other partner countries. It fulfils the EU's commitment to support human capital development (HCD) as a key priority in its external assistance worldwide.

The EU external action is grounded in the [EU Global Strategy](#), which places a strong emphasis on enhancing the resilience of states and societies. The [European Consensus on Development](#) further aligns EU development policy with the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, guiding the ETF's operations in developing countries.

Through the EU Consensus on Development, the EU and its Member States commit to promoting inclusive lifelong learning and equitable quality education at secondary and tertiary level, technical and vocational training, and work-based and adult learning, with special attention to education and training opportunities for girls and women. Digital literacy and skills are important tools for empowering people, especially those in marginalised situations, promoting social inclusion and facilitating their participation in democratic governance and the digital economy.

The EU's approach to external relations has since evolved via the revised [European Neighbourhood Policy](#) with the definition of more specific regional partnerships in the [Eastern Partnership \(EaP\)](#) and in the [Southern Neighbourhood](#). New partnerships later materialised with [Central Asia](#) and with [Africa](#). These developments emphasise a stronger coordination between external and internal EU policies, which are reflected in the EC multiannual financial framework (MFF) 2021-27.

More recently, the [Global Gateway](#) provided a more explicit structure for cooperation across all Team Europe initiatives (TEI), including the EU, its Member States (MS), implementing agencies, public development banks, the European Investment Bank (EIB) and the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD). Moreover, the [Neighbourhood, Development and International Cooperation Instrument \(NDICI\) – 'Global Europe'](#) brings together the different legal instruments for external cooperation into a single coherent framework to promote multilateralism and stronger partnerships.

Late geopolitical developments have led to a renewed attention to the EU's enlargement in line with the [EU Enlargement Policy](#) and its [Instrument for Pre-Accession Assistance \(IPA\) III](#), including required reforms for alignment of EU candidate and potential candidate countries with the EU acquis. In this context, the ETF actively supports the ['Geopolitical Commission'](#), contributing to initiatives that

enhance the EU's global standing and impact¹⁰ by empowering individuals through education and skills development.

Multiannual financial framework (MFF) 2021-27

The **MFF 2021-27** foresees stronger coordination between external and internal EU policies to ensure a more coherent implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, the EU Global Strategy, the European Consensus on Development, the European Neighbourhood Policy, as well as the external dimension of migration, including the Partnership Framework with third countries on migration. According to the adopted MFF¹¹, the annual allocations to the 'Neighbourhood and the World' has increased to a total amount of €98.4 billion (in 2018 prices).

Most existing financial instruments are being merged into and operationalised by the **NDICI** with a total financial envelope of €79.5 billion (in 2021 prices), of which €60.4 billion are planned for geographic programmes, including €19.3 billion for the EU Neighbourhood maintaining an adequate geographical balance, €29.2 billion for Sub-Saharan Africa, €6.4 billion for thematic programming and €3.2 billion for rapid response mechanisms. A cushion of €9.5 billion is foreseen for new needs or emerging challenges and priorities to address unforeseen circumstances, such as crisis and post-crisis situations or migratory pressure, or to promote new Union-led or international initiatives or priorities.

The allocation for **IPA III**, which supports beneficiaries on their path to fulfilling the accession criteria, is €14.1 billion (in 2021 prices). It supports Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo, Montenegro, North Macedonia, Serbia and Türkiye. Furthermore, strategic investment in infrastructure connectivity, SMEs, energy efficiency, innovation, and the digital and green economy are included via the External Action Guarantee under the NDICI – Global Europe, which also covers IPA beneficiaries. It has the capacity to guarantee investments of up to €53.4 billion worldwide (under the European Fund for Sustainable Development Plus (EFSD+)) by leveraging private capital to complement direct external cooperation grants.

The [Erasmus+](#) programme supporting education, training, youth and sport with an estimated budget of €26.2 billion, is used by ETF to expand its engagement in policy dialogue in partner countries. It places a strong focus on social inclusion and the green and digital transition, offering mobility and cooperation opportunities in VET, school and adult education, and youth, among others. Learner mobility will be prioritised in the Western Balkans under VET capacity building and other actions through the international dimension of the Erasmus+ programme. In the Western Balkans, both Serbia and North Macedonia are already associated with the programme and can participate in all actions, whereas the other four economies of the Western Balkans greatly benefit from the international dimension (with a ringfenced budget of €374 million over the 2021-2027 period).

The **Global Gateway** draws on the new financial tools in the EU MFF 2021-27, in particular the NDICI, IPA III, the digital and international aspects of the [Connecting Europe Facility](#), but also Interreg, [Investment & Jobs](#), [InvestEU](#) and [Horizon Europe](#). In particular, the European Fund for Sustainable Development+ (EFSD+), the financial arm of NDICI-Global Europe, will make available up to €135 billion for guaranteed investment in infrastructure projects between 2021 and 2027. Up to €18 billion will be made available in grant funding from the EU budget. European financial and development finance institutions have up to €145 billion in planned investment volumes. The Global Gateway is key to the ETF's work with its focus on education and research, building connectivity in the neighbourhood and delivering through Team Europe.

The new architecture for the EU's external action instruments reflects the need to focus on strategic priorities geographically – the European Enlargement and Neighbourhood, and partnership with Africa, as well as thematically – access and quality at all levels of the education systems in partner countries,

¹⁰ The ETF also takes into account the broader geopolitical EU debate, including the [EC Strategic Foresight Reports](#) on topics like resilience, open strategic autonomy and the twin transition, and the results of inter-institutional and societal engagements such as those that took place in the framework of the [Conference on the Future of Europe](#) and [ESPAS](#), as well as relevant policies such as the [European Critical Raw Materials Act](#) and the [Communication on Critical Raw Materials Resilience](#), the [Joint Communication on Defence Investment Gaps and Way Forward](#), and the [Space Programme Regulation](#), among others.

¹¹ ["Council Regulation \(EU, Euratom\) 2020/2093 of 17 December 2020 laying down the multiannual financial framework for the years 2021 to 2027"](#).

youth employability, lifelong learning, inclusion of women and decent work for all, in support of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the implementation of the European Pillar of Social Rights.

This puts new demands on the ETF in terms of its support to EU actions in the pre-accession and neighbourhood regions as well as the rest of the world, to support the external dimension of EU policies. Encouraged by the Commission opinion, the ETF is using its agility in programming to respond to new EC priorities and to pursue opportunities to work beyond current partner countries or to engage in new priority thematic areas.

EU Thematic Policies

Thematically, the ETF operations are inspired by the overall importance of human capital development in policies applying to EU Member States, such as the [European Skills Agenda](#), which is based on five building blocks calling for collective action to mobilise stakeholders and investment for lifelong skills development that lead to jobs and [Youth Employment support](#) specifically targeting young people as part of the recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic.

In addition, [the European Pillar of Social Rights](#) sets out 20 key principles and rights (among which is the right to education and the Youth Guarantee) to support fair and well-functioning labour markets and welfare systems in the EU as an element of social cohesion policy. In June 2021 the European Council welcomed the EU headline targets on jobs, skills and poverty reduction set out in the European Pillar of Social Rights Action Plan, in line with the [Porto Declaration](#), including the EU-level target of at least 60% of adults participating in learning every year by 2030. This also includes the EU proposal for individual learning accounts and micro-credentials to enable access to quality-assured learning and training opportunities, as announced in the European Skills Agenda and in the [European Education Area Communication](#).

The ETF's work is also inspired by the [Council Resolution on a strategic framework for European cooperation in education and training towards the European Education Area and beyond \(2021-2030\)](#), as well as new political developments such as the [Joint Employment Report](#), the [Council Resolution on a new European Agenda for Adult Learning 2021-2030](#), the recently presented [Skills and Talent Mobility Package](#) and the [European Degree Package](#), and [ALMA](#) in line with the European Pillar of Social Rights and the Reinforced Youth Guarantee. Another important reference is the ongoing Bologna process aimed at the establishment of a European Higher Education Area in 49 countries, including several within the ETF geographical remit.

The [European Green Deal](#)¹², and its accompanying [Just Transition Mechanism](#)¹³, foresees proactive reskilling and upskilling for the workforce to adapt to new processes in the green economy. It also covers an update of the European Skills Agenda and the Youth Guarantee, as well as the establishment of a Green Agenda for the Western Balkans. An environment, energy and climate partnership with the Eastern Partnership and the Southern Neighbourhood is also envisaged.

¹² The ETF analysis of the skills and human capital dimensions of the EU Green Deal and for the decarbonisation of partner countries' economies is in line with the EU's ['Fit for 55'](#) package, which puts forward ways in which the EU will be able to reduce its net greenhouse gas emissions by at least 55% by 2030 compared to 1990 levels and achieve climate neutrality in 2050. The ETF also builds on the [Circular Economy Action Plan](#), the [Zero Pollution Action Plan](#), the [EU Biodiversity Strategy for 2030](#), the [Farm to Fork Strategy](#), the [Communication on a new approach for a sustainable blue economy in the EU](#), and the [New European Bauhaus](#), among others.

¹³ The ETF also takes into account the [Strategy for the Rights of Persons with Disabilities 2021-2030](#), the [EU anti-racism action plan 2020-2025](#), the [EU Roma strategic framework for equality, inclusion and participation](#), the [Action plan on Integration and Inclusion 2021-2027](#), the [European Democracy Action Plan](#), among others.

Furthermore, the EU priorities on greening and digitalisation, including [A Europe fit for the Digital Age](#) and the [2030 Digital Compass: the European way for the Digital Decade](#)¹⁴, are already shaping skills demand in the EU Neighbourhood. This is particularly the case in the countries with close export ties to the EU market. The foreseeable effect is that learning and activation programmes, as well as career orientation, should encompass such demand and context changes. This should also apply to preparing graduates and workers for career changes, to guide providers to offer training programmes and qualifications that are in demand in the labour market. In this context, the [Digital Education Action Plan 2021-2027](#)¹⁵ drives innovation in teaching and learning to respond to the evolving needs of education and training systems in EU neighbouring countries.

The focus on the digital and green transition supports the [new SME Strategy](#) for a sustainable and digital Europe, and the [Green Action Plan \(GAP\) for SMEs](#), which aims at helping SMEs to take advantage of the opportunities offered by the transition to a green economy. The ETF's work on 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. 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](#) and the [New European Innovation Agenda](#).

Drawing from the [EU Gender Equality Strategy 2020-25](#), the ETF takes into account the [EU Gender Action Plan III](#), an ambitious agenda for gender equality and women's empowerment in EU external action, with a commitment that 85% of all new external action spending has gender equality and women's empowerment as a principal or significant objective.

The ETF also contributes to the [European Dialogue on Skills and Migration](#), the [New Pact on Migration and Asylum](#), the [Action Plan on Integration and Inclusion 2021-2027](#) and to the [Global Approach to Migration and Mobility](#). Facing the challenge of operating in (post)-conflict countries and fragile environments, the ETF takes into account the [Communication on Education in Emergencies and Protracted Crises](#) and the [Council conclusions on Education in Emergencies and Protracted Crisis](#).

Regional context

The ETF's geographical scope covers the neighbouring countries of the EU, including South Eastern Europe and Türkiye (SEET), Eastern Partnership (EaP), Southern and Eastern Mediterranean (SEMED) and Central Asia. Beyond these regions, the ETF is also active in other areas such as Africa and Asia¹⁶ through its partnerships and networks as well as extra-subsidy projects supporting EC services on an ad-hoc basis.

As a knowledge actor, the ETF is working in the global arena on HCD, through its networks and knowledge sharing actions. This takes place, in particular, by facilitating exchange of good practices and usage of EU methodologies and tools. Together with the ETF analysis of labour market systems and its evolution, and the monitoring and assessment of education and training systems'

¹⁴ Beyond [A Europe fit for the Digital Age](#) and the [2030 Digital Compass: the European way for the Digital Decade](#), the ETF also considers the strategy for [Shaping Europe's Digital Future](#), a [European Strategy for Data](#), [Europe's Digital Decade](#), the Commission's proposal for a [European Declaration on Digital Rights and Principles for the Digital Decade](#), among others.

¹⁵ In this regard, the ETF builds on the '[guidelines for teachers and educators on tackling disinformation and promoting digital literacy through education and training](#)' as well as the '[ethical guidelines on the use of artificial intelligence \(AI\) and data in teaching and learning for educators](#)'. Furthermore, the ETF is closely following upcoming recommendations on '[key enablers in digital education](#)' and on '[improving the provision of digital skills in education and training](#)', which are key to achieving a future-proof digital education.

¹⁶ DG EAC is the main EU representative for ASEM and education and is increasingly involving the ETF in discussions on lifelong learning and TVET.

modernisation towards lifelong learning, these are of key importance to advice and support ETF regions¹⁷.

This is especially important due to the results of ETF's latest analysis of the results stemming from its monitoring and assessment of partner countries HCD systems and policies. Likewise, the comparison between PISA results in 2018 and 2022 shows an overall performance decline in the majority of ETF partner countries¹⁸.

ETF cross-country monitoring and assessment

ETF's latest analysis of its partner countries HCD systems and policies highlight that most countries anticipate a decline in their youth population, necessitating HCD adaptations for ageing societies. Significant challenges are also posed by NEETs (individuals not in education, employment, or training), with many countries exceeding the EU27 average. Moreover, there is a rising trend of migrants in the youth population (aged 0 to 24 years old) in certain countries, accentuating the need for enhanced monitoring solutions. This is key to leverage a more learner-centric perspective, focusing on delivery to learners in diverse educational and employment settings.

An overarching trend across ETF regions is evident: many countries have made commendable strides in supporting their disadvantaged young people. Initiatives, especially those centred around vocational education and training (VET), have been pivotal in fostering access and opportunities for this demographic. Nonetheless, the aspiration for universal lifelong learning remains elusive across ETF partner countries and regions. In addition, the presence of gender disparities is a telling challenge. The skills and competences of graduates from secondary and higher education in ETF partner countries do not readily translate into employability. This is true in particular for females.

Although the labour market in most countries is dominated by 'elementary' occupations, holders of tertiary degrees are still more likely to secure a job, although often at the expense of agreeing to work in jobs that are not matched to their skillset. In fact, skill mismatches emerge as a crucial challenge in all countries across ETF regions. Finally, there are inconsistencies between the allocation of resources in education across ETF countries and regions, and the effectiveness of its use. Most countries register low scores in the quality of conditions for teaching and learning, thus struggling to adopt high-quality and innovative practices system-wide.

EU Candidate Countries

In the EU neighbourhood region, the ETF operates within the framework of the [European Neighbourhood Policy](#), which aims to build more effective partnerships between the EU and its neighbours to create a stable political, socio-economic and secure environment. The ETF also helps EU neighbouring countries to meet the conditions for candidacy and accession in accordance with the [EU Enlargement](#) process and the [Copenhagen Criteria](#).

The ETF will continue to contribute to the assessments of the Economic Reform Programmes and the Enlargement reports. Moreover, the ETF cooperates closely with EU agencies such as Eurofound, Cedefop and the European Labour Authority via specific information and monitoring tools or capacity

¹⁷ This is in line with the results and commitments of the UN Future Summit 2024. It highlights that access to quality, equitable and inclusive lifelong learning, technical, and vocational education and training, skills development and increased employment opportunities, including in emergencies, are all key to achieving the 2030 Agenda, including to end poverty, strengthen trust and social cohesion, ensure gender equality, and increase opportunities for youth and future generations. These are very much aligned with ETF's mission and service provision, as well as entwined in the EC's principles as the largest donor in education.

¹⁸ With a few exceptions, such as Moldova with a 3-point increase and Morocco with a 1-point increase in overall performance. Kazakhstan is demonstrating an improvement in average mathematics scores compared to 2018, and Israel shows a notable boost in average reading performance. Finally, science emerged as the sole subject area where student achievement notably increased among ETF partner countries, with Kazakhstan showing a significant leap with over 26 points improvement, Serbia and Türkiye also demonstrating notable enhancements, and Israel and Georgia showing modest improvements.

building actions targeted at candidate and potential candidate countries. In this regard, the ETF's experience with candidate countries in South Eastern Europe and Türkiye will be used.

ETF in Enlargement Countries

The candidate countries are a high priority for the ETF¹⁹. Its support to candidate and accession countries, as well as its input to EU neighbouring countries, covers more than just contributing to the Commission's Opinion on progress in implementing the Acquis Communautaire. It also involves following up and supporting the implementation of key priorities identified in the EC Opinion, and building capacity to cope with EU competition and market forces.

Regarding the acquis criterion, the human capital development policy areas extend beyond Chapter 26 (Education and Culture) to include the skills dimensions of other relevant policies like Chapter 19 (Social Policy and Employment), Chapter 20 (Enterprise and Industrial Policy), and Chapter 22 (Regional Policy). While the acquis under this broader range does not necessarily require transposition into national legislation, the skills dimension still needs sufficient integration and alignment with human capital development to maximise efficiency.

Moreover, in view of the recent Council decision to grant the status of candidate country to Ukraine²⁰, Moldova and Georgia, the ETF has upgraded its engagement with these countries in a differentiated approach, to support the process of accession.

Eastern Partnership

In the EU's Eastern neighbourhood, the ETF contributes to the [Eastern Partnership \(EaP\)](#) policy initiative²¹, under which the EU, its Member States and the six partner countries have committed to developing a stronger economy, governance, connectivity and society, including mobility opportunities. The ETF also considers the [Eastern Partnership policy beyond 2020 – Reinforcing Resilience – an Eastern Partnership that delivers for all](#), as well as the [new Deal for Youth](#). Together, these call on increasing the stabilisation and resilience of the EU's Eastern neighbours.

Within this framework, there is a joint commitment to deliver tangible results for citizens across the region. In support of a more results-oriented approach towards the Eastern Partnership, 20 key deliverables for 2020 have been identified with clear milestones. These are organised around the following priority areas: Economy (which includes also Education, Youth, HCD, LLL); Governance; Environment and Green Deal; Digital Transformation; and Inclusive Societies.

In this context, since 2009 the ETF has been involved and engaged in regional policy dialogue. It brings the skills development dimension through close and efficient cooperation with DG NEAR and related DGs in thematic clusters and pillars such as employment, digital, entrepreneurship, etc. In particular, since 2018 the ETF has supported the EaP monitoring of the 20 deliverables, the policy dialogue within Platform 4 (mobility and people-to-people), and expertise in the framework of the EU4Youth and EU4Digital initiatives.

The Russian aggression against Ukraine has influenced the actions undertaken by ETF activities in the region. These actions prioritise providing support to Ukraine through both an emergency plan and

¹⁹ Enlargement ought to become a key priority of the next European Commission, which makes ETF's work in the EU Neighborhood, including in terms of alignment with EU acquis and of integration with EU frameworks, of geostrategic importance for prosperity and stability, as well as democracy and reduced dependencies.

²⁰ Following the June 2022 decision of the European Council to grant candidate status to Ukraine, the Commission has started work on its enlargement report that will be adopted in the autumn. The EU Delegation is preparing the first draft of the country report. In this context, DG NEAR has requested a written contribution from the ETF on chapter 26 Education and Culture, based on data and analysis of Education and Training 2030 indicators.

²¹ 4.1.4 "Investing in People" of 18 March 2020 Joint Communication on the future of the Eastern Partnership.

a recovery proposal. The ETF will continue to offer focused assistance to Ukraine in close cooperation with the relevant authorities of the country and the European Union, following the guidelines of the [EC Ukraine Facility](#). This support aims to contribute to stability and recovery, as well as assist in the modernisation of Ukraine's education system, while also supporting the associated reforms necessary for its European Union accession process.

In pursuit of these objectives, the ETF has significantly enhanced its portfolio related to Ukraine to address the ongoing efforts for recovery and reconstruction. Furthermore, it has developed a comprehensive strategy for further engagement with and support for Ukrainian authorities, as well as the relevant services and departments of the European Commission. The aim is to facilitate the implementation of the aforementioned Ukrainian plan. This is carried out through a dedicated ETF Ukraine Task Force.

ETF in Ukraine

The long-standing cooperation between the ETF and Ukraine continues to support the modernisation and connectivity of education and labour market systems for economic growth and development. Since the onset of the Russian war, 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 has also facilitated the integration of Ukrainians who left the country into the labour market 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 is already assisting in comparing the Ukrainian National Qualifications Framework (NQF) to the European Qualifications Framework (EQF) and supporting 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 has 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 assist Ukraine in its EU enlargement endeavours. This is done via a specialised Task Force²² serving the European Commission and the Ukrainian authorities. In this context, the ETF will continue to prioritise Ukraine as a partner country in its work programme.

With Moldova²³, Georgia²⁴ and Ukraine as EU candidate countries, the ETF will continue to prioritise support to the integration process and meeting the membership criteria in terms of human capital development, as well as in relevant working groups.

South Eastern Europe and Türkiye

In the Western Balkans and Türkiye, the ETF operates under the [EU Enlargement Policy](#), in particular the [Instrument for Pre-Accession Assistance](#). The EU [Economic and Investment Plan for the Western Balkans](#) includes human capital development and the youth guarantee, and the [Western Balkans](#)

²² ETF's task force liaises with diverse actors on the ground while delivering the Joint Action Plan, thus clarifying needs and ensuring coherence and coordination with EC services. In addition, ETF's preparatory work towards a Youth Guarantee in Ukraine entails a holistic approach connecting government ministries, businesses, NGOs and other societal stakeholders, including youth representatives. It is a systemic and contextualised intervention, like for all partner countries, linking current and future needs with evidence to ensure inclusiveness and impact. Coordination with beneficiary stakeholders, the EUD and EC services is key as actors on the ground are better able to identify and articulate needs, which feedback the process and ensure actors are all in the same page.

²³ With Moldova the ETF should align interventions with the Growth Plan recently adopted by the EC which is underpinned by a Reform and Growth Facility for 2025-2027.

²⁴ ETF follows closely current state of play and the EU guidance on Georgia, and is in line with the conclusions of the European Council meeting of 27 June 2024 (EUCO 15/24, CO EUR 12, CONCL 4).

[Agenda on Innovation, Research, Education, Culture, Youth and Sport](#) is also a solid basis for engagement as part of an agreed action plan.

The EU sets out initiatives to support connectivity and the green and digital transitions in the region. It also outlines commitments in the area of political and security cooperation, with concrete deliverables benefiting the Western Balkans, including those related to the Economic and Investment Plan, the Innovation Agenda, roaming costs, as well as Green Lanes and Transport Community Action Plans. This European perspective for the region was reaffirmed at the 2021 Brdo pri Kranju EU-Western Balkans summit hosted by the Slovenian presidency, where EU leaders adopted a declaration stating that Western Balkans leaders should align with the Reinforced Youth Guarantee approach.

The Western Balkans Agenda on Innovation, Research, Education, Culture, Youth and Sport outlines a comprehensive long-term strategy for cooperation in important fields, including inter-cultural dialogue. The objectives, priorities and tentative roadmap of key actions outlined in this agenda are critical for the Western Balkans, particularly in light of the long-term effects of the COVID-19 pandemic. In this context, it is contributing to economic development and regional cooperation by building on overall EU support for a rapid restart of the region's economy and the on-going accession process. Fostering stability, prosperity, and European perspective in the region remains a key EU priority.

Within the Western Balkans Agenda for Innovation, Research, Education, Culture, Youth and Sport, the ETF is committed to supporting the implementation of relevant actions through its work programme, including monitoring and reporting under the Osnabrück Declaration and the VET Council Recommendation, as well as digital learning for the countries involved in the EU regional dialogue or Centres of Excellence.

Moreover, the European Commission priorities, in particular the green transition, digital transformation and an economy that works for people, are crucial for relaunching and modernising the economies of the Western Balkans. These are key to create jobs and growth, thus addressing the long-standing challenges faced by young people in the region such as limited job prospects and inequality. Education, culture, youth and sport, together with research and innovation, are recognised as essential drivers to boost the region's economic development, its competitiveness and social cohesion.

In addition, the Economic and Investment Plan for the region to support the green and digital transition proposes to mobilise up to €9 billion of IPA III funding for the period 2021-27 as well as €20 billion in loans, leveraged by the new Western Balkans Guarantee facility, with the ambition to raise additional investments of up to €20 billion. Its flagship on the Youth Guarantee will support youth activation and employability in the region. This is complemented by the Council's recommendation on vocational education and training for sustainable competitiveness, social fairness and resilience, as well as the European Skills Agenda and the European Pillar of Social Rights.

The ETF will continue to cooperate with regional bodies like RCC, ERI SEE and the Western Balkans Six Chamber Investment Forum in line with existing agreements and be actively involved in the Berlin Process. Furthermore, the ETF will continue to provide comments on an annual basis and in close coordination with the EUDs concerning the draft assessments of the [Economic Reform Programmes](#), as these are a core reference for ETF engagement in the region. Furthermore, the ETF will continue to support the Youth Guarantee scheme in cooperation with the ILO.

The ETF also works closely with the Advisory Committee on Vocational Education (ACVT) and the Directorate Generals for VET (DGVET) supporting all EU candidate countries, including Türkiye which is a member of the ACVT and the DGVET, and whose institutions actively participate in all ETF thematic networks. Cooperation with Türkiye continues within the framework of the Osnabrück declaration and

ETF monitoring and assessment. Finally, the ETF will continue cooperating with Türkiye and the EUD in events under the umbrella of the European Year of Skills.

EU Neighbourhood South

Protracted conflicts in the region impact heavily on populations that suffer from forced displacement and from hosting communities leading to significant socio-economic troubles and instability. Based on this, at the end of 2020 the European Council called for a renewed and strengthened partnership with the Southern Mediterranean neighbours²⁵. This is a strategic imperative for the EU to provide a common response, join forces for economic recovery (including in the aftermath of COVID-19), and improve quality of life.

The ETF builds on the Joint Communication on a renewed partnership with the [Southern Neighbourhood](#) which emphasises human capital development, the digital and green transitions, and an [Economic Investment Plan](#) (EIP). Climate change, the digital and green transition, as well as the post COVID-19 recovery, represent opportunities to commit to a common people-centred agenda. The policy areas included in the new partnership are the following:

- **Human development, good governance and the rule of law:** renew the shared commitment to democracy, the rule of law, human rights and accountable governance;
- **Resilience, prosperity and digital transition:** support resilient, inclusive, sustainable and connected economies that create opportunities for all, especially women and young people;
- **Peace and security:** provide support to countries to address security challenges and find solutions to ongoing conflicts;
- **Migration and mobility:** jointly address the challenges of forced displacement and irregular migration and facilitate safe and legal pathways for migration and mobility;
- **Green transition – climate resilience, energy and environment:** take advantage of the potential of a low-carbon future, protect the region's natural resources and generate green growth.

Regional dialogue is complemented by the Union for the Mediterranean (UfM), an intergovernmental Euro-Mediterranean organisation which brings together the countries of the European Union and the countries of the Southern and Eastern Mediterranean. The ETF cooperates closely and in alignment with the UfM Secretariat, and is part of the task force guiding the monitoring process of the fourth Ministerial Declaration priorities on Employment and Labour (May 2022).

Furthermore, the UfM can also play a role as a platform for regional initiatives and Team Europe Initiatives, such as 'Jobs through Trade and Investment in the Southern Neighbourhood', which fosters decent job creation in the southern partner countries and an inclusive economy recovery in the region. Out of its three thematic pillars – sustainable trade and investment; vocational training/technical skills; and inclusive entrepreneurship – the ETF is linked mostly to the second pillar, including support to inclusive skills development and recognition of skills for the twin transition, in particular for youth and women.

²⁵ For the new European Commission, the new Pact for the Mediterranean ought to strengthen ETF's work in the region to transform partner countries education and training agendas to foster human development, societal cohesion, peace, stability, and both socioeconomic and sustainable development in line with the EU Green Deal, while deepening the cooperation between the EU and Southern Mediterranean Countries, thus contributing to investments, economic stability and jobs.

In the area of skills development and employability, a number of regional programmes covering HCD are EU funded. Some explicitly cover skills development or address entrepreneurship and entrepreneurial learning to foster employability. Others target social partners to strengthen their involvement in skills development and policy making. The ETF follows the regional programmes closely and interacts with them, where and when relevant.

This is the case for [Towards a Holistic Approach to Labour Migration](#) (THAMM), a regional project in the field of mobility and migration, funded under the EU emergency fund for Africa covering Egypt, Morocco and Tunisia. The ETF supports the THAMM+ project through expertise input and advice, especially to EC services and for the development of national action plans. Moreover, the SOLIFEM and SOLID II are EU funded initiatives addressing social dialogue which got underway in the last quarter of 2021.

Central Asia

The five Central Asian countries – Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan – have undertaken a profound structural transformation process moving from centrally planned to market economies. The countries vary considerably in terms of population, size, economic development and openness to the outside world, yet they also share a number of common features.

Already prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, young people in Central Asia, especially young women, faced multiple challenges to access quality skills development opportunities and subsequently to enter the labour market. As a result, many young people could at best access informal, precarious employment opportunities or had to resort to self-employment so that many had only limited prospects. Many young women have been relegated to employment in low wage sectors or inactivity, while for many young men, migration represented the only opportunity to find employment.

The policy agenda between the EU and Central Asian countries is mainly defined on a bilateral basis. In May 2019 a joint Communication was adopted on [The EU and Central Asia: New Opportunities for a Stronger Partnership](#) aiming to forge a stronger, modern and non-exclusive partnership with the countries of Central Asia so that the region develops as a sustainable, more resilient, prosperous, and closely interconnected economic and political space.

The ETF's operations in Central Asia are therefore guided by the [new EU Strategy for Central Asia](#), which includes substantial support for vocational education and training. The ETF focus is on streamlining operations, with a regional approach whenever possible, while also addressing bilateral requests. Within this context and upon request from DG INTPA, the ETF is implementing 'DARYA – Dialogue and Action for Resourceful Youth in Central Asia' through a contribution agreement with the EU Delegation in Kazakhstan.

Africa and the African Union

The EU's relationship with Africa is a key priority for the Commission. The new post-pandemic reality and the growing urgency of the climate crisis make this relationship all the more important. The EU vision of the future partnership is outlined in the [Joint Vision for 2030](#) and the 2020 Joint Communication ["Towards a Comprehensive Strategy with Africa"](#).

The ETF collaborates closely with the African Union (AU) aligning its efforts with these and other initiatives such as the [Africa-EU partnership](#) and the [Communication on the Africa-Europe Alliance for Sustainable Investment and Jobs](#). These initiatives stress the importance of technical and vocational education and training and skills development through both continental and national initiatives to support growth and job creation in strategic development areas.

Long-term strategic priorities discussed at the EU-AU Summit in February 2022 remain at the forefront of this partnership. These include innovative financing solutions for the EU-AU partnership, economic recovery, as well as the green and digital transition, all of which are even more important and urgent in the post COVID-19 world. By 2027, under the EU financing instrument NDICI – Global Europe, €29 billion is foreseen for Sub-Saharan Africa and €12.5 billion is set aside for the Southern Neighbourhood, of which a significant part will go to North Africa.

In this framework, over the past years, requests for ETF support have been on the increase and it has been active in sharing knowledge and expertise where relevant. This is in line with the [Sub-Saharan Africa Multi-Annual Indicative programme 2021-2027](#). As such, the ETF is implementing the African Continental Qualifications Framework project (ACQFII) through a contribution agreement.

In addition, on an ad-hoc basis, in close coordination with the EC and upon approval of the Governing Board, the ETF might be called on to provide specific support to the work of EUDs in the areas of its thematic competences.

Institutional context

The ETF operates within the EU family and under the remit of DG EMPL, liaising both with thematic DGs with a mandate in HCD and external relations DGs, all of which are involved in its strategic development given the ETF's unique dual thematic-geographic mandate. For instance, core geographical DGs include DG NEAR and DG INTPA, as well as the EEAS, while thematic DGs close to the ETF's core business include DG EMPL, DG EAC, DG HOME and DG JRC²⁶.

At partner country level, EUDs are key actors for the ETF and the entry point for engagement, which has been consistently high over the years. In addition, the annual European Parliament (EP) hearing together with the other EMPL agencies functions as a cornerstone to showcase the ETF's work and alignment with relevant agencies active in the field of HCD.

A result and service-oriented organisation

In its 2027 strategy, the ETF sets out to become a global reference for HCD, providing policy advice, supporting sustainable reforms of education and training systems in a lifelong learning perspective, and promoting skills for the future. Ultimately, it enables the ETF to be a global catalyst for change and innovation towards sustainable and adaptable lifelong learning systems in partner countries and regions where it operates, via anticipation, intelligence, methodologies and tools, thus contributing to increased stability and prosperity in the EU neighbourhood.

In line with its 2027 strategy, the ETF prepares its annual work programme on the basis of priorities gathered during the Structured Dialogue and bilateral meetings with EC services, the EEAS, EU EUDs and consultations with its stakeholders in partner countries, as well as partners in Team Europe and beyond. As per common practice, the ETF has a flexible approach in place to absorb unforeseen requests (as far as possible) by a continuous reprioritisation of its annual work programme during implementation.

In this context, the ETF envisages further strengthening the coordination and systematisation of its cooperation with EC services and departments as well as with other EU institutions like the European Parliament (EP) and the Council.

With regard to other EU agencies, the ETF is an active member of the EU Agencies Network. Cooperation agreements are in place with the European Centre for the Development of Vocational

²⁶ As per September 2024.

Training (Cedefop) and the European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions (Eurofound). These agreements foresee early consultation on work programme development and yearly action plans that set out further forms of exchange and, where appropriate, joint activities. Cooperation is also increasing on central services ranging from selection and joint procurement, to accounting, greening and digital and cybersecurity. To ensure synergies, the ETF Director has a seat on the Management Board of Cedefop, Eurofound, Centre de Traduction (CDT) and European Labour Authority (ELA) as an observer.

Beyond Team Europe, cooperation with countries outside the EU and international organisations is mandated in the [ETF Recast Regulation](#) to facilitate the exchange of information and experience. This takes place among international actors, including international financial institutions engaged in human capital development reform and investments on skills in partner countries, and between the EU and partner countries, and among partner countries. The ETF seeks opportunities to cooperate with entities that can advance and systematically strengthen the HCD agenda in countries and globally for increased impact and added value.

With its 2027 adaptive strategy, the ETF is further strengthening its delivery through partnerships, and it is an active member of the Inter-Agency Group led by UNESCO where key global players in the area of human capital development, skills and VET share information and cooperate actively. Tools and methodologies are developed in a range of key policy areas such as: the future of work, including digital skills; matching and anticipation of skills needs and shortages; qualifications and qualifications systems; the contribution of skills recognition for migration management; work-based learning and apprenticeship; teacher and teacher training; education information systems and key performance indicators; and entrepreneurship. These are strategically communicated, thus multiplying their reach and increasing the ETF's capacity to influence and engage the key actors in the policy cycle at national, EU and international levels.

It is against this background that the ETF fulfils its mandate to contribute, in the context of EU external relations policies and in support of the Team Europe approach, to improving human capital development by supporting countries to create inclusive and innovative lifelong learning systems. This is key to enable countries and individuals to face ever increasing interconnected global challenges while being equipped with the knowledge and skills they need to realise their full potential and live with dignity²⁷. It is also against this background that the ETF fulfils its vision to become a global reference for human capital development.

Finally, it is important to highlight that the ETF already contributes to a number of Sustainable Development Goals and will continue to do so, in particular [SDG 4](#) on quality education, to [SDG 5](#) on gender equality, to [SDG 8](#) on decent work and economic growth, as well as [SDG 9](#) on industry, innovation and infrastructure, [SDG 10](#) on reduced inequalities, and [SDG 12](#) on responsible consumption and production.

Extra-subsidy projects

In view of supporting wider EU influence and investment, building synergies within the EC family and increasing the use of the ETF operational resources and impact of its work, the ETF has begun implementing a few, clearly defined extra-subsidy projects. These projects relate to the mandate and

²⁷ This has been highlighted in the UNESCO's [Futures of Education report](#), debated at the [Transforming Education Summit](#), and further echoed both in its [Fifth Global Report on Adult Learning and Education](#) and in the [Seventh International Conference on Adult Education](#).

expertise of the ETF and could not be implemented within the limits of the subsidy²⁸. As part of these efforts and to enable a more efficient decision-making process, the ETF has applied and obtained exemption from pillar-assessment²⁹

Extra-subsidy projects enable the ETF to utilise its expertise and capacity more broadly and have a bigger impact and wider reach while delivering on the EC thematic and geographical priorities that are in line with its expertise and mandate. Moreover, they respond to policy priorities for EC services including DGs INTPA, NEAR, EMPL and EAC, among others. The ETF has a positive track record of undertaking such activities and will continue maintaining a flexible approach to EU requests, with emerging requests being evaluated on a case-by-case basis.

In the future, the ETF could consider alternative approaches to expanding the impact of its work and further leveraging its expertise. This includes exploring opportunities to collaborate with other organisations involved in HCD within EU projects and programmes, thus complementing the activities supported by the EU subsidy.

Additionally, the ETF may explore the possibility of transitioning towards results-based financing in partnership with IFIs. Notably, the ETF is examining avenues to build upon its established knowledge exchange and partnerships with IFIs, such as the EIB. This exploration will be conducted in close coordination with EC services and focus on identifying collaborative opportunities for directly implementing strategic initiatives that target ETF PCs.

Furthermore, the ETF intends to maintain an ongoing dialogue with relevant DGs regarding the provision of training to EUDs. These training sessions should support programming efforts in the field of VET and human capital development more broadly.

²⁸ To ensure that its mandate is fully respected, the ETF has investigated various contractual modalities at the disposal of the EU to engage the agencies in such additional tasks. The main challenge is to ensure that additional funds can be used to mobilise the resources needed to reach its objectives, including expertise and administrative support, adding and complementing the resources support through the subsidy. As part of these efforts and to enable an easier decision-making process, the ETF has applied and obtained exemption from pillar-assessment (December 2021).

²⁹ Exemption decision ARES(2021)7461073 dated 03/12/2021 and valid until 31/12/2023, and Ares(2024)2267445 dated 26/03/2024.

Section II – MULTI-ANNUAL PROGRAMMING 2025-27

1. Multi-annual work programme

The ETF Governing Board adopted the ETF Strategy 2027 in June 2019³⁰, paving the way for a package of services that better addresses the pressing needs that countries face to make skills provision more responsive to the changing demands of industry and the challenges of new technologies, environmental change, migration and changing skills needs.

The development of the ETF Strategy 2027 combined a thorough review of ETF past work, including the results from evaluations alongside an intensive consultation process using a Policy Delphi methodology with key ETF stakeholders. The evaluation findings and feedback from stakeholders confirmed the added value of the ETF to:

- Bring together a unique mix of expertise, innovation, in-depth analysis and policy dialogue capacity in the field of human capital development with a deep-rooted understanding of country contexts.
- Prepare thematic and system-level analyses and studies, and ensure the continuous quality of its services, through its expertise development.

The ETF Strategy 2027 is adaptive, thus enabling the ETF to be resilient and agile in adapting to a shifting geopolitical and HCD landscape. It is also anticipatory, as it enables the ETF to make sense of systemic changes and uncertainties in its environment to provide policy and decision makers with timely evidence and advice.

In this context, the 2027 strategy outlines necessary changes to expand the ETF's expertise in response to shifting trends. These include moving from a focus solely on formal schooling towards encompassing wider, lifelong learning pathways.

Additionally, the strategy calls for transitioning from isolated solutions towards more comprehensive, integrated approaches across education and training systems and related policy guidance. In this context, the aim for the ETF for the period 2021-27 is to consolidate the delivery of its services as:

- A global asset **for the EU** providing expertise on human capital development through **a diverse provision of clearly agreed services**.
- An **important resource for programming** and preparing and monitoring EU investment in human capital development.
- A **strategic partner to the EU to enhance the impact of EU funds**.
- A reference **for partner countries for sector analysis, policy advice and to develop capacities**.
- A **global knowledge hub** in the field of human capital development in transition and developing countries.

³⁰ [ETF Strategy 2027](#)

The ETF's interventions reflect the priorities of the EU with reference to HCD. Priorities for an operational direction are agreed with the ETF Governing Board and the EU services cooperating with the ETF.

It is against this background and the ETF's vision to become a global reference for HCD that it has engaged in the mid-term review of its 2027 strategy. In parallel, the ETF also initiated a long-term reflection for post-27 to support the definition of its future vision and positioning, including towards the next MFF 2028-2034 and ETF strategy period.

ETF 2027 strategy mid-term review

The aim of the mid-term review of ETF's 2021-2027 strategy period was to systematically review achievements and impacts to date to support an evidence-based definition of a roadmap that enables ETF to deliver its strategy and value proposition by 2027. The results establish positive progress towards ETF's 2027 strategy, in particular in relation to 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 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 continue expanding on strategic partnerships and engagement with new voices to deliver ETF's value proposition in line with the needs of partner countries 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. These recommendations are grounded on the ETF's defined impact-oriented theory of change, in which impacts are expressed towards overarching EU priorities, values and principles, in particular EU external action objectives, as well as the broader consensus on development goals (UN 2030 SDGs). These are clearly outlined in ETF's intervention logic (Section 1.10).

The impact-oriented theory of change outlines four value propositions or strategic goals and associated outcomes forming the backbone of ETF's 2027 strategy. These are client-oriented instead of being solely based on an offering approach as in the past. In a nutshell, these are outlined in the table below and further described both in Section 1.8 (Strategic Goals) and in Section III.

ETF strategic goals	Outcomes of ETF work
1- Global knowledge hub for human capital development	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Contextualised, demand-driven and anticipatory knowledge development, co-creation and internalisation b. Innovative perspectives in knowledge development, dissemination and sharing for increased future-oriented evidence-informed policy making
2- Asset for the EU and Member States	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> c. Timely and demand-driven contribution to EU external policies in the area of HCD d. Active anticipation and shaping of demand for contribution to implementation of EU external policies in sectors or fields that are expected to grow or become significant in the near- and long-term future

3- Support and long-term reference for partner countries	<p>e. Countries are informed and use contextualised knowledge to progress towards inclusive and sustainable LLL systems that deliver quality outcomes</p> <p>f. Leveraging country intelligence, policy uptake and the facilitation of actors' engagement and system change in partner countries</p>
4- Reference EU agency	<p>g. Increased readiness due to ability to advance institutional efficiency, agility, resilience, sustainability and digital maturity, adaptability and innovation, forward-looking capacity and ability to nurture talent and wellbeing</p> <p>h. Increased reach and capacity to influence, engage and mobilise key players via tailored messages and communication channels</p>

ETF vision 2040

The ETF initiated a full-fledged foresight process for reflecting its value proposition and positioning post-27 with the development of a vision 2040 that will enable a new strategy and an associated roadmap to be developed in alignment with the next Multiannual Financial Framework (MFF) for 2028-2034. This takes place in coordination with EC developments such as the Strategic Foresight Reports, partner DGs' horizon scanning and EU agencies' foresight efforts, as well as those of strategic partners, including key geographically-orientated stakeholders.

The goal is to build the basis for the ETF to look beyond its current multi-annual programming cycle by identifying and making sense of relevant trends, megatrends, weak signals, and potential disruptions, including in terms of their potential implications for the future of work, education and skills, as well as the ETF and its partners within a broader HCD landscape. These insights are informing a new vision and strategy articulating the ETF's unique value proposition.

These developments should ensure that the ETF remains fit for the future by continually adapting its positioning, value-added, and business model. It should also strengthen existing synergies with fellow EU Agencies and potentially enable the ETF to expand its services to partners, the EC, international donors, and broader stakeholders. Ultimately, this will enable the ETF to become more resilient, responsive, prepared and agile in adapting to uncertainties while leveraging related opportunities.

1.1 The ETF in a changing landscape

Lessons learned from the pandemic and recent geopolitical developments have enabled the ETF to become more prone to change and more adaptive, both shaping the future and embracing uncertainties as they arise to ensure its fit-for-purpose and added value.

Foresight culture

Building on ETF's evaluation of its anticipatory function, it continues to build a more conscious and corporate approach to its future orientation and positioning building on earlier work, such as its internal reflection in relation to contemporary ways of working and the new hybrid normality. Departing from the development of alternative scenarios and the discussion of their implications, the institution is co-creating the future of its working environment, including the use of its physical space and digital opportunities, as well as hybrid modes of working and managing staff. This will enable the ETF to continually increase its resilience, efficiency and agility, as well as to continue building the staff skills required to serve as an innovative and pioneering organisation in relation to new ways of working.

The ETF has also employed its future of work methodology in sectors such as energy, construction and agrifood, paying particular attention to the evolution of skills demands in connection to the green and digital transitions. The ETF will continue its future-oriented studies by expanding them to critical sectors such as transport and health in line with the Global Gateway. Also, by looking at skills dynamics in the context of value-chains involving the European Union and countries outside the EU. These developments will allow the ETF to strengthen policy advice related to skills mobility, skills investments and partnerships, following the key principles articulated within the Pact for Skills.

Moreover, the ETF is engaging in strategic reflections by employing participatory foresight methods to further advance its corporate culture. This enables a collaborative and informed understanding of the geopolitical landscape and its potential transformations in relationship to economic developments, environmental shifts, social dynamics and technological change, among other factors. This systemic and comprehensive analysis takes into account both creative thinking and empirical evidence.

In this 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. It also supports countries to further transform 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.

Increasing fragility of partner countries

Notably, the anticipatory work undertaken by ETF from the wake of its 2027 strategy implementation has highlighted that an increasingly prevalent pattern is emerging in partner countries and other developing economies, characterised by various facets of fragility. These manifestations encompass poverty, conflicts, fragility and forced displacement, and they are intricately interconnected. To effectively tackle these challenges in a unified and holistic manner, it is imperative to address their underlying causes comprehensively and proactively, ideally through anticipatory measures. This underscores the necessity of addressing root causes at all levels.

Helping fragile contexts requires support at the nexus of development, aid and peace in order to enable recovery, peace and resilience, while strengthening long-term governance, reconciliation, economic growth, and state building or the capacity for affected countries to re-build their own social contract between the state and its citizens via inclusive governance and local agency. Partnerships with civil society organisations (CSOs), local authorities and social partners facilitate the understanding of needs on the ground and the contextualization of solutions proposed.

Hence, as a learning and anticipatory organisation the ETF is streamlining its approach to working in fragile settings and in contexts of (post)-conflict and protracted crises. Also, it is further accompanying partner countries in their process towards 'candidate' EU member status and in their long-term recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic. Ultimately this is key in the wake of the new European Commission and in further strengthening the EU's role in the world using education as soft power.

Currently, the work that ETF is undertaking in Ukraine is also functioning as an opportunity to add experience in the ways of working that can further contribute to situations of fragility and recovery, thus building the required evidence for the future.

Transversal themes

As a social actor, the ETF positions itself in the skills dimension of diverse 'just' transitions. It fosters inclusive and stable societies, as well as peace and regularisation of migration in the EU and its wider neighbourhood. It does so by supporting 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. This is

done by working closely with EC services, EUDs, and international and national actors involved in labour migration related policies and governance.

Throughout its work, the ETF supports the dialogue between the EU and countries outside the Union fostering partnerships and a mutual benefit approach to migration. The ETF does so through its contribution to the international dimension of EU working groups (for example, in relation to qualifications), through the active support to the preparation of policy dialogue, capacity building input and good practice sharing. Following the recommendations approved in 2023, the ETF will agree with EC services its specific support in the context of new initiatives and actions, including by assessing resources needed for the implementation of such requests.

The ETF also ensures an increased and constant attention to gender, equality, inclusiveness and transgenerational solidarity across its work in line with the European Consensus on Development, the European Pillar of Social Rights and the EU Gender Action Plan III³¹. Regarding gender, the ETF has contributed to the development of a specific approach to the analysis of gender in the context of VET programmes and in the design of associated interventions. In partnership with UNESCO, the approach will continue to be mainstreamed across ETF operations.

Specific attention to gender is also reflected in the ETF analytical and capacity building actions. In addition, there is growing demand for good practices sharing in the field of active labour market policies, female entrepreneurship, and career guidance. The ETF will also continue to dedicate specific attention to inclusion and disabilities, in line with the [Disability Employment Package](#) and the [European Strategy on the Rights of Persons With Disabilities](#), in particular in the context of its support to modernisation of education and training provision, and for its support to active employment policies.

The ETF also contributes to more robust policy approaches to youth transition to work, including in the support for Youth Guarantee schemes in partner countries. In addition, it provides regional and country intelligence on youth employability, thus consistently addressing long standing challenges linked to youth joblessness. These follows upon the EU youth policies through knowledge development and hands-on support and advice to partner countries in the context of the Recommendations for the Youth Guarantee update, the Youth Employment support, the Reinforced Youth Guarantee and the Bridge to Jobs.

More recently, especially due to accelerated demographic change, including in terms of ageing societies and longer working life of citizens in all countries, the ETF is also looking at the impact of ageing and required adaptations of education and training systems. This understanding is key for lifelong learning and to ensure employability, such as via upskilling and reskilling as well as adult work-based learning, including to enable talent and labour mobility.

These transversal topics – green, digital, migration, gender, ageing, equality, solidarity and inclusiveness, among others – are drivers for ETF's innovation and flexibility, and serve as a sound basis for providing policy advice to both partner countries and EC services. On an annual basis these transversal themes are tackled according to ETF's identification of impact of each theme on HCD and depending on impacts prioritised for the EC and for partner countries, in line with ETF's organisational principles and both thematic and geographic expertise.

³¹ This is paramount as the EU Pillar of Social Rights is likely to be strengthened by the new European Commission with an action plan for implementation to ensure fair transitions and leave no one behind, as well as to ensure good working conditions, tackle mental health and new drivers of poverty, ensure social dialogue and collective bargaining, promote youth and citizen engagement, foster societal wellbeing, guarantee girls and women's rights as well as gender equity, and enable linkages with Erasmus+.

Examples of transversal topics addressed by ETF in its operational work

- **Skills dimension of the green transition:** by ensuring attention to the impact of greening on employment, skills demands, qualifications and skills development, and embedding the 'green' factor across its operations to support the transition towards greener economies and societies in full alignment with the external dimension of the European Green Deal, the Fit for 55 package and the EU Global Agenda. Under this dimension, support to the skills and employment dimensions of the Just Transition Mechanism is also a priority in the ETF partner countries addressing challenges brought by the green transition. The ETF also builds on the policy reviews across partner countries to increase its policy advice in this domain, in particular focusing on skills development for both youth and adults. Through its regular corporate communication campaigns, the ETF ensures targeted dissemination, engagement with stakeholders and the wider public, as well as visibility across the partner countries and beyond.
- **Skills dimension of the digital transition:** by focusing on the impact of digitalisation on jobs, skills demands and development, as well as societal and economic dynamics, the ETF explores the impact and use of Artificial Intelligence (AI) and advanced digital technologies in lifelong learning systems, including on labour market transformation, learning and development methods, as well as system level governance and performance transformation, thus contributing further to the Digital Education Action Plan and in line with the Digital Decade and the Digital Compass, as well as approved AI legislations. In partnership with international actors, the ETF ensures, through its corporate campaigns as well as outreach actions, that specific attention is paid to digital inclusion and the impact of the digital transition on jobs and employment patterns in partner countries.
- **Skills dimension of gender and inclusion:** by ensuring an increased and constant attention to gender and equality across its work in line with the European Consensus on Development and GAP III, and with specific attention to addressing structural inequalities in HCD, including those emerged in the aftermath of the pandemic. The ETF strengthened its analysis of gender-related issues through the Torino process and its thematic studies. These new data allow the ETF to strengthen its effectiveness as a policy advisor and to support EU and country investments. The ETF also contributes to the gender agenda in a global perspective and via cooperation with actors such as Eurofound (for the implementation of the e-survey on living and working conditions), UfM (as member of the Regional Dialogue Platform for Women's Empowerment, supporting the monitoring of the 2017 Cairo Declaration on strengthening women's role in society, and cooperation within the UfM Employment & Labour and Women's Empowerment regional processes), UNESCO (contribution to the gender approach within the TVET UNESCO global strategy, as well as support to shaping the global consensus on priorities in the education and training arena). Across its operations, the ETF ensures policy analysis and awareness-raising of gender specific dimensions, including by working closely with international actors and the EC through specific publications and outreach activities. Furthermore, the ETF has increased its attention to disability as part of its activities linked to innovation of teaching and learning, liaising with relevant EU actors and Erasmus+ projects, and initiating specific support to Public Employment services in partner countries. The ETF is further expanding its knowledge work, including by liaising with EC services responsible for LGBT+ policies and programmes to increase its support to the diversity of needs of learners and workers.
- **Skills dimension of migration:** by fostering inclusive and stable societies, as well as peace and regularisation of migration in the EU and its wider neighbourhood. The ETF covers the skills dimension of migration through its support to improved skills matching, inclusion, and fairness. The ETF also reinforces legal pathways for migration and the validation and recognition of skills and qualifications of third-country nationals on the EU labour market. Furthermore, it further supports 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. This is done by working closely with EC services, EUDs, and international and national actors involved in labour migration related policies and governance. The ETF also further supports the dialogue between the EU and countries outside the Union fostering partnerships and a mutual benefit approach to migration. This is done through its contribution to the international dimension of EU working groups (for example, in relation to qualifications), and through active support to the preparation of policy dialogue, capacity building input and good practice sharing. As per recommendations, the ETF agrees its specific support in the context of new initiatives and actions with EC services, including by assessing resources needed for the implementation of such requests.

As mentioned, the Global Gateway is key to ETF's work with its focus on education and research, building connectivity in the neighbourhood and delivering through Team Europe. The ETF has analysed all partner countries' position in relation to skills for the green transition, as well as the role that knowledge, skills and competences play to enable their economies to transition towards digital, greening and inclusiveness³². These were showcased in the UN COP27 and 28, as well as in major EC events and initiatives, such as the green skills week, the VET skills week and the European Year of Skills related actions.

Strategic communication

Communication and engagement are key to delivering the ETF's mandate and helping it to navigate upcoming uncertainties. By co-developing solutions able to address current and future challenges via skills and HCD, and by tailoring messages to different stakeholder audiences and multiplying their reach, the ETF can increase its capacity to influence and engage the key actors in the policy cycle at national, EU and international levels. The ETF plays a unique role in promoting education and labour market development in partner countries. Its influence aligns the EU's broader mission to nurture stability and prosperity beyond its borders.

At the same time, through its communication the ETF ensures transparency and access to information and knowledge sharing, which are accessible to all interested citizens, practitioners and experts in the field of HCD. In an increasingly competitive and diversified environment, the ETF needs and aims to position itself effectively, highlighting its unique dual thematic and geographic position in the policy process through coherent and consistent engagement, including by diversifying channels of outreach to foster communication on its objectives, actions and impacts.

Negative priorities

As a resilient organisation the ETF is further building flexibility into its workplan and capacity to absorb shocks. A recent example has been ETF's response³³ to the Russian aggression towards Ukraine, and to ensure its relevance in responding to supporting HCD systems during or after conflict.

ETF's flexibility and anticipatory capacity works hand-in-hand with an agile planning in place to enable a quarterly review of its work programme. Together with the results of its 2027 strategy mid-term review, these processes enable the ETF to adapt continually by undergoing an impact-oriented reprioritisation and de-prioritisation. This is key for the ETF to expand its value delivery, in particular towards acting as a global asset for the EU and its MS in support of EU investments in HCD.

1.2 The ETF's approach to human capital development and lifelong learning

Human capital development

Human capital development (HCD) is the cornerstone of the ETF's work as stated in its mandate: 'to contribute, in the context of EU external relations policies, to improving human capital development'³⁴. For the ETF, the understanding of human capital development is guided by five key principles:

1. Human capital development stands not only for skills and competences, but also for the knowledge and attitudes of people. Human capital belongs to the people, to each person

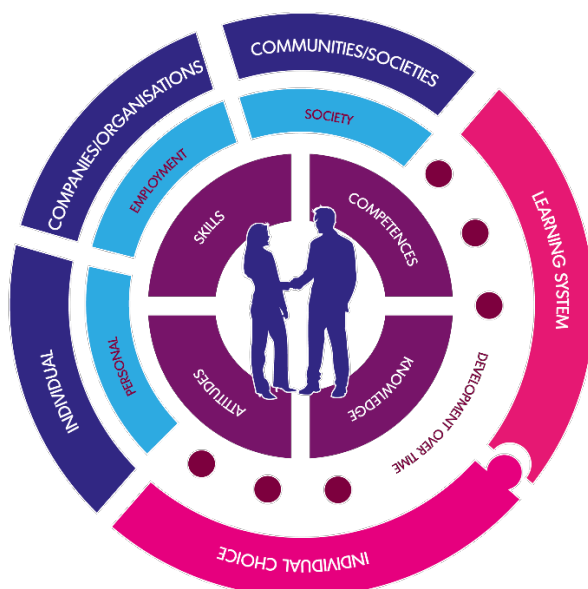
³² In doing so the ETF contributes to a wider understanding of the skills set required to leverage the twin transition in a 360-degree approach, thus placing human capital development as a force for the twin transition. It also brings to the fore the importance of the skills agenda and in building partnerships to support transitions via education and training.

³³ See regional context in Section I.

³⁴ Art.1.2 REG (EC) NO 1339/2008: human capital development shall be defined as work which contributes to the lifelong development of individuals' skills and competences through the improvement of vocational and education training systems.

individually. This means that the ETF's support to the development of human capital is meant to benefit learners first and foremost.

2. Developing the skills, competences, knowledge and attitudes of a person is not only an aim in itself, but it also realises the potential of individuals as members of society and their communities.
3. Human capital is a key factor in the promotion of prosperous, innovative and inclusive societies. Developing the skills, competences, knowledge and attitudes also benefit companies, organisations, communities and society overall.
4. HCD is a dynamic notion, which means that it has to be developed over time to ensure that people can adapt and respond to rapidly changing environments.
5. Participation in HCD should always be a matter of individual choice. However, it is the responsibility of each country to create learning systems that provide opportunities and incentives for everyone to develop themselves at any point in their lives, should they wish to.



Human capital development is the provision of support to countries for the creation of lifelong learning continuous education, training and education systems that provide opportunities and incentives for people to anticipate, develop and validate their skills, competences, knowledge, abilities and attitudes throughout their lives to realise their potential, for employment purposes, and as a contribution to prosperous, innovative and inclusive societies.

Human capital development and global education

From a global perspective, the ETF understands human capital development embedded within a vision of global education. This implies a systemic and lifelong learning perspective to education and its integration into labour markets, including VET, which enables individuals to maximise their potential and employability, as well as ability for global mobility.

This notion is key to foster a sense of global awareness, interdependence and cultural understanding that enable individuals to anticipate and address global challenges, as well as engage in a diverse and interconnected world. Also, to prepare individuals to be informed, responsible and active global citizens that can contribute positively to their communities and the world at large by acquiring skills that can be effectively used across international borders, thus transcending cultural, linguistic and geographical barriers.

Ultimately this approach is also key for shaping resilience and future-proof education systems focused on learning to learn (comprehensive education including traditional and contemporary skills that enables excellence and fulfilment), learning to live together (learning to co-exist in peace by embracing the differences with empathy), learning to do (lifelong learning in a fast changing world), and learning to be (to live a meaningful life and to do no harm thus enabling the planet to regenerate

and society to focus on sustainable economic growth)³⁵. Hence, to address global issues in localised contexts via local agency.

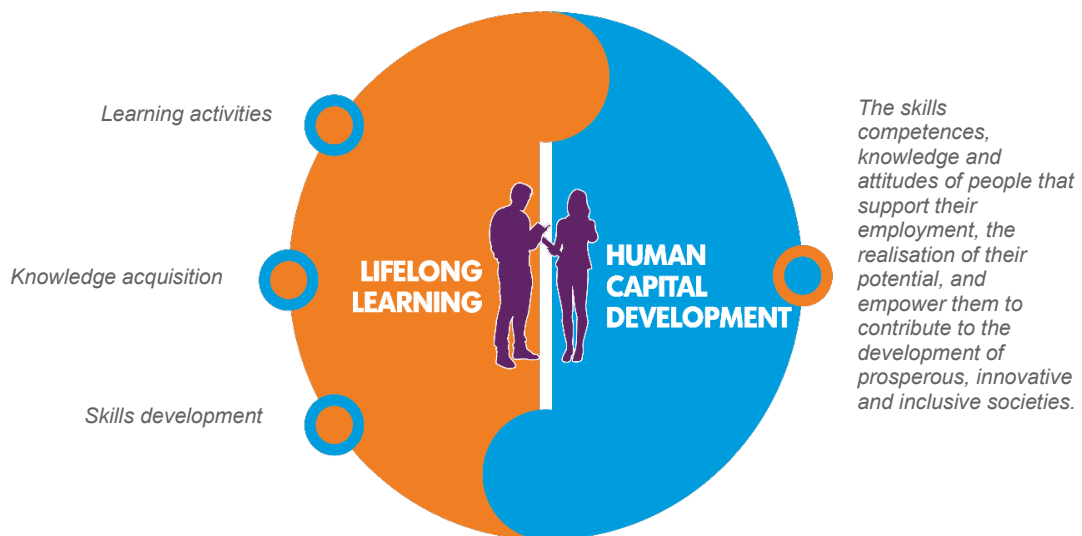
Global education and human capital development entails the provision of support to countries in a lifelong learning and systemic perspective that enable individuals to develop skills, competences, knowledge, abilities and attitudes throughout their lives to ensure continual employability, as well as to anticipate and contribute positively to their communities and the world at large via increased awareness of interdependencies and multi-cultural sensitiveness.

Human capital development through lifelong learning

For the ETF, human capital development places the learner at the centre, signalling a shift towards learning opportunities that accommodate the needs of autonomous and independent individuals who may not be bound to a single provider, fixed educational path or to a predefined learning age. Placing the learner at the centre signals a shift towards the creation of sustainable and adaptable lifelong learning systems.

The ETF approach to **lifelong learning** is to focus on all learning that 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. The key principles are:

- Learner at the centre;
- Shift of focus away from only (formal) education and training systems towards flexible and individualised learning processes, learning opportunities and learning pathways;
- Diversity of learning environments and purposes.



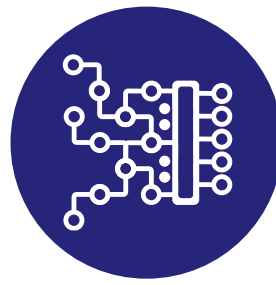
³⁵ As outlined in the 2022 Transforming Education Summit.



Learner-centred approach



Diversity of learning environments and purposes



Flexible learning pathways



Multiple providers and education paths

Lifelong learning refers to all learning activity undertaken throughout life, with the aim of improving knowledge, skills/competences and/or qualifications for personal, social and/or professional reasons.

1.3 Delivering in partnership

As outlined in its Strategy 2027, the ETF enters into partnerships and strategic alliances in order to increase the impact of its work and to ensure a higher level of coordination and coherence of EU and international investment among the most relevant actors in the field of human capital development. The aim is to:

- Support greater impact of interventions;
- Enhance efficiency gains and economies of scale;
- Increase the global visibility of the EU and the ETF in influencing policy and setting the agenda in the field of human capital development and lifelong learning.

This is done first and foremost through the consolidation of cooperation with EU services and by targeting ETF knowledge and products more accurately to align them with EU priorities. This is key to maximise the uptake of ETF expertise, sharing good practices and supporting the EU external actions under the EU Enlargement and Neighbourhood policies, the Geopolitical Commission and the global agenda for achieving the 2030 Sustainable Development Goals.

In this context, the Global Gateway is crucial to the ETF's work with a focus on education and research, building connectivity in the neighbourhood and delivering through Team Europe. Currently, the ETF is invited to provide support to different initiatives and as a consultative body in HCD, including by having an active role in steering committee of the TEI 'Jobs through Trade and Investment in the Southern Neighbourhood'. In this regard, the ETF is eager to provide further expertise input and policy advice in the preparation of Team European Initiatives where relevant.

Targeted strategic alliances and partnerships are continually identified to provide the best value to implement the ETF Strategy 2027, including:

- **EU actors and agencies:** joint work with the European University Institute (EUI) and EU agencies, including Cedefop, EIGE, EISMEA, ELA and Eurofound, will continue in areas of shared interest to ensure mutual benefit and exchange of experience between the EU and partner countries. In particular, in the framework of cooperation with Cedefop and Eurofound. Cooperation is also increasing on central services ranging from selection and joint procurement, to accounting, greening and digital and cybersecurity. In addition, a valuable source of data is represented by the official statistics collected by Eurostat, especially for Western Balkans and Türkiye, and the Neighbourhood countries.

- **EU Member States and bilateral organisations:** Cooperation with EU Members States through the Team Europe approach, its agencies (AfD, Enabel, GIZ, DVV, etc.) and other actors and multi-actor projects, such as VET toolbox, driving thematic development and implementation in countries will be essential to delivering the ETF's objectives. As such, the ETF will pay particular attention to further enhancing relevance and seeking synergies, and to pursuing opportunities to work beyond current partner countries or to engaging in new priority thematic areas.
- **International organisations and donors active** in the area of human capital development globally (such as OECD, UNDP, UNEVOC/UNESCO/UIIL, UNICEF, UNIDO, ILO/ITCILO, IOM). The ETF will continue its cooperation, expertise contribution and knowledge exchange globally, in regional settings (such as UfM and the AU), and at partner country level, within dedicated platforms and networks and with other international players active in the field of international skills investments and knowledge creation.
- **International financial institutions** investing increasingly in the area of human capital development (e.g. the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD), European Investment Bank (EIB), Asian Development Bank (ADB), African development Bank (AFDB), World Bank (WB) and European Development Finance Institutions. The ETF will strengthen its efforts for cooperation with international, development and investment banks and institutions to seek the most impactful engagement and investment in HCD. The ETF is currently engaged in discussions with EIB to capitalize its expertise and strengthen the bounds ETF-EIB in the framework of the preparation and implementation of EIB's financing operations with sovereign and non-commercial sub-sovereign counterparts in ETF partner countries in EaP and SEMED regions, primarily in the areas of social inclusion and gender. Private sector engagement, in key sectors contributing to the green and digital transitions, is also included. This will continue to be done through new instruments for policy-first investment and Team Europe in consultation with EC services, and via a differentiated approach towards the IFIs.
- **Platforms and networks** to contribute to a global HCD agenda and to enable building on and benefiting from already existing partnerships, research and knowledge platforms at regional and/or cross-country level with RCC, ERI SEE, ASEM Education platform, WB6 CIF, Danube macro regional strategy (Priority Area 9) and UNIMED.
- **Non-state actors** which are divided in five key categories: i) private companies and foundations (ETF will seek increased cooperation with actors part of EU actions such as EAFA, the Pact for Skills) ii) non-governmental organisations; iii) civil society actors active in the field of human capital development; iv) social partners (including trade unions); and v) VET providers, including associations like the EFVET, EVTA, EVBB and Skillman as important advocates for change.

More details are included in the activity area summaries and in Annexes XII and XIII.

1.4 A differentiated geographic approach

Differentiation in the context means clearly identifying the added value of the ETF's actions bearing in mind the specific country and regional context and the EU priorities as a basis for defining different packages of deliverables for partner countries and stakeholders. The ETF ensures its differentiated approach by:

- **Coherence with EU agenda and priorities.** This principle defines the macro level of differentiation, defining priorities as regards regions/countries and thematic domains of investments. This is implemented through dialogue with the EC and the ETF Governing Board and reflected in the strategic lines and the single programming document.

- Specific country needs and priorities. The ETF refines its programming lines by ensuring the consultation and engagement of partner countries in the planning and delivery of actions. This cycle takes place on an annual basis, as well as through ensuring a demand-based approach and high engagement (nominations, invitation to join activities, information to countries on studies and data collection). This ensures the highest transparency and engagement as a basis for smooth communication and implementation of actions for the highest added value.
- Stakeholders' targeting and engagement. Policy learning, including peer learning, are key dimensions of ETF's work, which requires the differentiation and targeting of stakeholders based on interest. This can be around themes/areas of work or by specific stakeholders' group needs. ETF's work is, therefore, increasingly targeting key stakeholders', through its networks, communities of practice and projects. This allows for differentiation of activities and methods of work, as well as ensuring a virtuous cycle feeding back to the programming and coherence of ETF's interventions.

Lastly, facing an increasing level of fragility in its partner countries, the ETF is also adjusting its operations to the context of (post)-conflict countries and protracted crises to ensure the relevance of its interventions and supporting the resilience of lifelong learning systems. In doing so, the ETF will continue to strengthen partnerships for a rapid, efficient, effective, systemic and innovative response, thus co-creating solutions with partners, and leveraging the EU's role in political dialogue and bilateral support by following a needs-based prioritisation. In this regard, the ETF's portfolio for Ukraine (including its comprehensive Plan for Ukraine) is prioritised in line with the country's and the EU's efforts to support a Ukraine Plan for Recovery and Reconstruction.

Principles of and requirements for geographic differentiation

- Transparency using global and ETF benchmarks and indicators for decision-making processes on country actions;
- Effectiveness through actions for higher impact, to support EU policies and country priorities;
- Complementarity with EU and EU Member State goals and existing interventions;
- Alignment with partner country development strategies, policies and stakeholders' needs;
- Maintaining the logic of partnership between the ETF and the countries and regions where it operates; and
- Maximising ETF resources and expertise, tailoring and better targeting country support actions.

Based on the above, the ways in which the ETF prioritises the delivery of products and services to partner countries has evolved in time. In general, **knowledge development and sharing** are a global function that engages not only all partner countries, but also all relevant and interested HCD actors across the world. The **monitoring and assessment** service ranges from the more general function of monitoring policies and system change in all partner countries to that of on-demand services and products, such as the Rapid Education Diagnosis (RED). **Policy advice** takes place in liaison with EC services and based both on EC and partner countries' priorities, as well as based on the feedback loops from the knowledge hub and monitoring and assessment services.

In this context, when the ETF Strategy 2027 implementation began, priority partner countries were pre-accession countries, those with EU bilateral Association Agreements, those engaged in international cooperation, and newly engaged countries and regions. Currently, half-way through the current strategy period, these have evolved and priorities include Ukraine, candidate and potential candidate countries, as well as countries with EU bilateral Association Agreements and Talent

Partnerships³⁶. Regarding newly engaged countries beyond ETF partner countries, priorities include those countries involved via extra-subsidy projects, countries engaged across ETF networks, and those stemming from ad-hoc EU requests. Ultimately, this evolution reflects the EU's strategic priorities and increased global ambitions in the field of HCD, and further underlines the importance of the differentiation logic of ETF described above.

1.5 ETF Networks

As per its mandate, the ETF is tasked with facilitating the exchange of information and experience amongst international actors involved in HCD reforms in partner countries, as well as disseminating information and encouraging networking between the EU and partner countries and between countries³⁷. International networks are a key tool for addressing the needs of stakeholders in a targeted manner. Networks foster stakeholder engagement, expertise development and expertise sharing. They are also the vehicle that prompt policy learning and enable the identification of trends in HCD.

As part of its Strategy 2027, the ETF initiated in 2021-2023 a number of networks. These represent a key method of work and stakeholders' engagement, including for the delivery of results and impacts. Furthermore, the ETF continues to invest in digital tools and products to foster online engagement with all stakeholders, in particular through its website and OpenSpace platform.

More specifically, ETF networks enable:

- Initiating dialogue and facilitating exchanges of policies, practice and experience;
- Identifying opportunities for joint methodological development and actions;
- Sharing information and expertise;
- Reaching out to stakeholder groups internationally and fostering global cooperation in areas covered under the ETF's strategy.

ETF networks target stakeholders at international, regional and country level, including but not limited to:

- Networks of individual practitioners and experts, including researchers collaborating to co-create and generate new knowledge, develop methodologies and disseminate results. Networks are accessible through the ETF knowledge platform [OpenSpace](#). The ETF's current active networks are:
 1. The SkillsLab, which focuses on skills anticipation and matching, and targets researchers and practitioners working on skills demands, skills anticipation, skills in the context of economic sectors and the twin transition;
 2. ETF Network of Excellence (ENE) targeting Centres of Vocational Excellence (CoVEs) in partner countries, EU member states as well as Africa, which stands out as a fundamental tool in delivering our work on vocational excellence
 3. The Community of Innovative Educators that focuses on innovation in teaching and learning practices, and targets teachers and trainers specifically interested in innovation of pedagogical approaches for both youth and adults, as well as in the use of new technologies within teaching and learning processes;

³⁶ The ETF will organise country specific discussions on a regular basis with DGs to better coordinate the work done on the external and internal dimensions with each Talent Partnership country and relevant agencies, with ETF to be involved for Tunisia, Morocco, and Egypt.

³⁷ [Art.2 d\) & f\) Regulation \(EC\) No 1339/2008 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 16 December 2008 establishing a European Training Foundation \(recast\).](#)

4. The Governance Learning Action Dialogue (GLAD) network, which focuses on governance arrangements for supporting lifelong learning and targets stakeholders from government, social partner organisations and civil society organisations involved in governance of lifelong learning;
5. The Skills4Enterprise Network targeting intermediary bodies as well as private sector and social partners organisations, which focuses on skills development methods and actions in the context of SMEs competitiveness, innovation and smart specialisation strategy;
6. The Network of Qualifications, validation and Recognition Authorities/Centres bringing together qualifications, validation and recognition authorities and centres with shared interests to enhance systems of skills validation and recognition across the globe;
7. The network of Public Employment Services (PESs) and relevant agencies active in the field of activation, school-to-work and within world of work transitions; and
8. The network of Torino Process coordinators focusing on system performance and dialogue building on the results of the sixth Torino process round.

1.6 Advising EU institutions

The ETF provides policy advice and expertise to the EU institutions, namely the EC services, EEAS and EUDs based on continuous interaction and consultation, as well as upon request³⁸. In this context, the ETF's main focus is to support the different phases of the EU programming cycle in partner countries.

The ETF's analytical work, which builds upon its body of evidence and anticipation is key to this. It enables the ETF to further develop synergies and complementarities with EC services to ensure the success of reforms, thus creating new opportunities to underpin the stability and prosperity of the Enlargement and European Neighbourhood regions.

To maximise influence on regional HCD policy development, it is paramount for the ETF to be involved in early stages of programming. The ETF is pro-active in all regions sharing its thematic and geographic expertise, and providing policy advice. Furthermore, the ETF remains available for implementing EU programmes in case its specific thematic HCD expertise and/or country knowledge is deemed to add value over other outsourcing options. Examples of policy advice and expertise provided include but are not limited to:

- The different phases of the EU bilateral and regional external assistance project cycle (identification, formulation, operationalisation and implementation, monitoring and evaluation, both for project and budget support modalities);
- Contributing to programming (including joint programming in a Team Europe approach) and planning;
- Contributing to/facilitating external assistance related to EU bilateral and regional policy dialogue processes;
- Reporting on the achievement of EU-led monitoring and assessment processes on education and training reforms, such as the Copenhagen Process deliverables or the ERP;
- Developing methodological tools and guides to support EU external assistance (such as the analysis of indicators for budget support, the diagnostic assessments, etc.);

³⁸ See Annex XIV for planned requests 2023.

- Delivering training sessions to address the specific contexts of partner countries and needs of the EU, especially the EUDs.

Following the enhanced cooperation of the ETF with various EU services both in terms of thematic priorities and geographic focus it can be expected that the demand for policy advice, expertise and monitoring from the ETF will increase further. The provision of these services has to be directed in a way that helps to improve synergies and complementarities with the EU and strengthen common efforts to ensure the success of reforms.

In this context, NDICIs Team Europe approach guides ETF's interactions with Member States active in partner countries, including EIB and EBRD, as well as EU bilateral organisations and other EU partners. This cooperation contributes to the EU objectives and priorities in its link to building partnerships in partner countries, notably those in the European Neighbourhood. Likewise, the EU Enlargement Policy and its Instrument for Pre-Accession Assistance (IPA) III guide ETF's support and advice in relation to candidate and potential candidate countries in terms of progressively aligning policies to the EU acquis.

More recently, the international dimension of Erasmus+ has grown in importance. Hence, the ETF is working closely with EACEA and DGs to offer policy advice for further dissemination of the calls (mainly the CoVEs and Capacity Building in VET) and their more impactful use in policy dialogue. Following the recommendation of the EC opinion on policy advice, the ETF will increase its cooperation at regional level with the Erasmus+ offices in the EUDs and with policy shapers. The aim is to engage Erasmus+ actors in policy dialogue in other regions.

Furthermore, the ETF will continue to exploit the results of Erasmus+ projects within its operations and to strengthen its policy advice service and capacity building to the EU and partner countries. The ETF is continually examining the possibility to gradually extend such events to other regions.

While the Commission will continue to streamline the types and the timing of the requests for ETF support, as per common practice, the ETF will continue to balance its resources with a flexible approach to absorb unforeseen requests (as far as possible) by a continuous reprioritisation during implementation. Addressing these ad-hoc requests, whenever possible, is an indication of the flexibility of the ETF in the implementation of its annual work programme and the priority given to the requests directly coming from the EU services, even when not initially planned.

1.7 ETF core services




The ETF Strategy 2027 outlines the following pillars that are at the core of its operational modalities.

- **Knowledge hub.** The breadth and the quality of the ETF's expertise as a global reference for education and training. The ETF accompanies countries in the transformation of their education and training systems. The ETF will make greater use of digital and online tools to engage with stakeholders, ensure wider access and distribution of knowledge, good practice and learning materials. It will continue to engage with international donors and stakeholders for knowledge exchange, expertise development and increased impact. Having concluded the pilot of the measurement of knowledge uptake in 2023, from 2024 the ETF initiated the implementation of a renewed approach to the knowledge cycle, measuring use and uptake of knowledge regularly and building on the results to continually improve its services.
- **Monitoring and assessment.** The ETF has developed a series of diagnostic and assessment methodologies that cover education systems as a whole, as well as specific policy and governance domains. The ETF will continue its work on policy learning and innovation, including developing and piloting methodologies and producing knowledge products. These

methodologies/tools will be applied/scaled up on request to support EU and third country decision making.

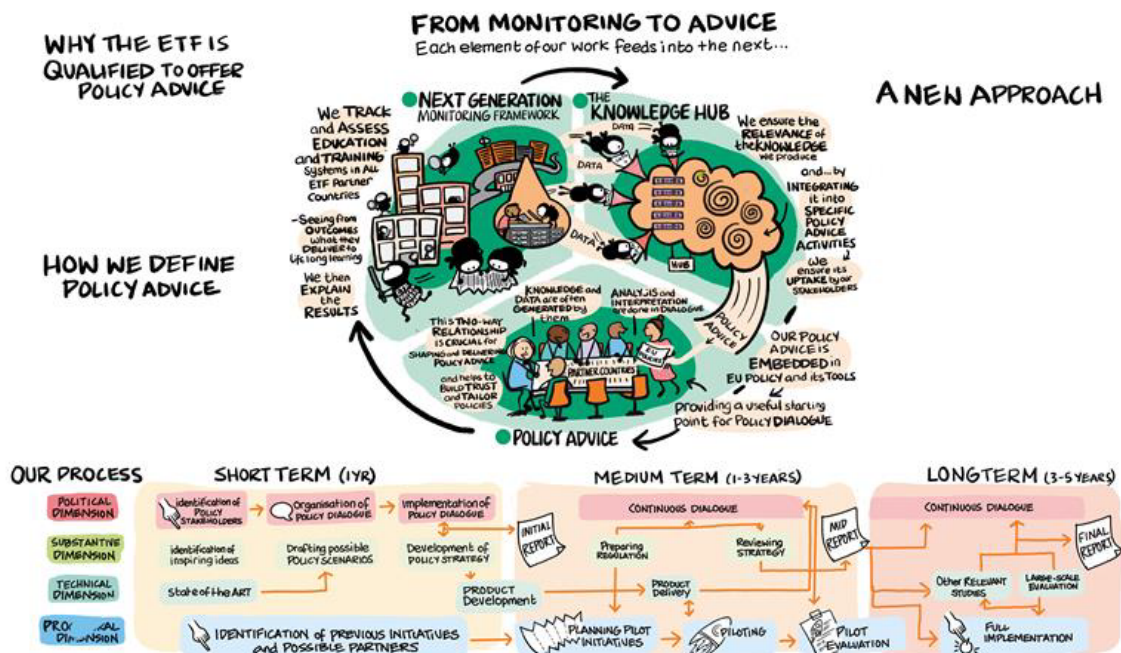
- **Policy advice and input to EU external action priorities in the area of education and training.** As a result of the increased investment in the HCD sector from the EU and other international actors, the ETF has upgraded its role in supporting the programming of EU assistance, and in the provision of policy advice to EU and partner country stakeholders. Together with key stakeholders in countries, the ETF will further increase its involvement at international (regional and multi-country) level. The ETF will also be an important actor in the delivery of EU external action priorities for regional and multi-country policy dialogue. In this direction, the ETF is exploring further the participation of partner countries in Erasmus+ to support policy dialogue and advice, and through the analysis of the findings and experience from the participation of partner countries in Erasmus+ will put forward specific interventions.

Key outputs of ETF services

 Knowledge hub	 Monitoring & assessment	 Policy advice
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Thematic networks ■ Multi-country analysis ■ Co-created models, methodological tools and guides for skills identification and development ■ Thematic studies and analyses ■ Innovative practices and approaches on education and training in a lifelong learning perspective 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Intelligence management systems ■ Datasets and statistical publications ■ HCD country and regional assessments ■ Country intelligence (snapshots, fiches, progress reports) ■ Thematic intelligence (inventories, fiches) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Tailored policy advice and guidance for EU programmes, including content monitoring of EU programmes (bilateral and regional) ■ Tailored policy advice and guidance for country reform processes, including through EU and other partners' interventions

Synergies between ETF services

The integration of the three core services aims to increase the impact of the ETF's work and generate value for stakeholders. The knowledge developed through the knowledge hub and the monitoring and assessment services shapes the ETF's diagnostic and anticipation capabilities, thus building its ability for in-depth context understanding and to drive innovation. In turn, these serve as a sound basis for providing policy advice to both partner countries (i.e. reform of education and training systems as well as participatory/inclusive governance systems) and EC programming and interventions in the wider Team Europe. The feedback received from partner countries and EC services through the ETF's policy advice service, in the form of requests, is used as input for further knowledge development and monitoring, thus closing the cycle of ETF service integration. As such, there is a delicate balance between the three core services that reinforces the notion of the project cycle with country intelligence and knowledge development maturity for analysis and use in policy advice.



Therefore, the ETF's support and contribution to EC services and partner countries stem from its analytical work based on the synergies of its core services. Knowledge creation, skills anticipation, country intelligence and monitoring progress of HCD reforms in partner countries increasingly feed into stakeholder policy dialogue and the development of evidence-based policy advice to the EC and partner countries alike. In particular, the ETF's monitoring and assessment provide country intelligence and evidence in terms of system functioning and performance, which are key to identifying priorities for investments and advice for direction and transformation. This is key to strengthening common EU efforts to ensure the success of reforms of education and training systems. The ETF is continually seeking to build synergies and complementarities with EC services and EUDs. Furthermore, through regular knowledge sharing events with DGs and EUDs, the ETF is aiming to further anticipate upcoming requests and improve the relevance of its policy advice.

1.8 Strategic goals

The ETF intervention logic for the period 2025-27 is based on four strategic goals, which express ETF's value delivery to key stakeholders, including:

- **ETF as a global knowledge hub in the field of human capital development**

The ETF works towards this goal by gathering and publishing data as well as country, thematic and methodological intelligence, and other types of knowledge contributing to the collection of new insights, its analysis, and its dissemination to different stakeholders.

The quality of ETF knowledge products, tools, methods and services enables it to be recognised as a trusted and reputable source of intelligence, actively contributing to the informational and analytical needs of its stakeholders and wider HCD players that contribute to human capital development globally. This recognition enables these actors to be informed of and to use latest ETF thematic and methodological developments, as well as country, regional, policy and anticipatory intelligence.

Contextualised knowledge is generated via co-creation, internalisation and peer learning, as well as collaboration leading to diversification of stakeholders' engagement to foster innovation and capacity in HCD policies and practices. These are key aspects for leveraging ETF's innovation capability in developing, co-creating and internalising new knowledge, while delivering its strategy 2027.

With an eye on the future, it is through the unique combination of its thematic and country-specific dual intelligence, and their alignment with EU priorities whilst also nurturing relations with external partners, that the ETF will continue to strengthen its role and visibility as a global knowledge hub for HCD. This is key to ensure that generated intelligence is used as basis for evidence-based policy making.

▪ **ETF as an asset for the EU and its Member States**

This strategic goal refers to ETF's ability to leverage its position as a reference to and influence on EC services and Member States programming and investments. This takes place, in particular, towards achieving priorities set under the enlargement and neighbourhood policies, as well as the pre-accession, neighbourhood, development and international cooperation instruments, and the Erasmus+ programme.

The basis for achieving this strategic goal is ETF's generated evidence and intelligence, in particular of latest contextualised HCD and methodological developments, as well as (multi) country intelligence for policy design and programming. Beyond its' expertise, ETF's long-term engagement with a wider ecosystem of national and international partners serves a purpose in itself. As such, ETF's contacts and networks hold a value offer, as they enable better coordination between EU investments and initiatives of (European) development partners in ETF's partner countries.

Moreover, ETF's brokering role contributes to making Team Europe a reality by bringing actors together in the HCD community, and by building partnerships in partner countries between relevant development stakeholders, national authorities and European partners. ETF's selected involvement in priority country activities, via its differentiation approach, is also considered to be a crucial aspect to sustain existing partnerships and to create new ones, as they provide a platform to meet, engage, and discuss potential avenues for future collaboration.

In addition, the agency's anticipatory capacity and flexibility to respond to as well as shape EC requests for support is key in this process, including its capacity to expand the EU's reach and impact via extra-subsidy projects aligned with its expertise and strategy 2027 value proposition. These are paramount to ensure direct contribution to key EU external policies in the area of HCD. Also, to further promote EU HCD programme components, foster policy debate and formulation, and support wider Team Europe Initiatives. Finally, it is also important to strengthen ETF's ability to contribute to design, implementation and monitoring of EU HCD programmes.

▪ **ETF as a long-term reference and support to partner countries**

The ETF works towards this goal by influencing the transformation of education and training systems in partner countries towards lifelong learning via generated evidence and intelligence, as well as peer learning and guidance. This enables countries and stakeholders to be informed on and to uptake contextualised best practices, labour market changes, skills required for jobs creation, requirements for EU and acquis alignment, and opportunities for inclusive, innovative and sustainable lifelong learning systems that deliver quality learning outcomes.

This includes supporting partner countries in improving the design, implementation, transformation (towards sustainable lifelong learning systems) and monitoring of HCD systems and associated policies. Also, the facilitation of contextualised policy learning and to accompany partner countries in their individual change process. Key in this regard is ETF's country and regional intelligence, ways in which these align to EU policies and programmes, and its ability to facilitate long-term engagement and cooperation between ecosystem stakeholders, thus increasing its sphere of influence.

Ultimately, the combination of the above leverages the use and uptake of ETF data, knowledge and intelligence to underpin evidence-based policy making in partner countries. Also, to increasingly

engage new voices in peer learning to enrich national and regional policy discussion, to identify tailored approaches to engage and support partner countries, and to innovate both in the co-creation of new contextualised knowledge and in the mechanisms used to facilitate system change.

▪ **ETF as a reference EU agency**

This strategic goal entails the ETF as a reference to and influence on the EC services and EU agencies via its ability to be efficient and agile, creative and innovative, resilient and adaptive, flexible and forward-looking, nurturing talent, wellbeing and sustainability, a broker that engages internal and external stakeholders for innovation and collaboration, and with a growing sphere of influence.

It is by further leveraging the delivery of this value proposition that the ETF strengthens its ability to deliver the other three strategic goals. Beyond the development of its institutional capacity and expertise, this strategic goal also refers to ETF's ability to strategically communicate on impacts achieved, thus tailoring its messages and communication channels and, in doing so, multiplying their reach and capacity to influence and engage key players.

Through its capacity to convene and bring partners together and to broker and mobilise internal stakeholders and key external players, the ETF leverages its ability to innovate and to increase its impact. In doing so, the ETF increases its ability to contribute to the EU's external action objectives and promote the SDGs globally while fostering quality education, lifelong learning and employment opportunities, economic growth, and peace and inclusive societies in developing countries and emerging economies.

1.9 Geographic area of operation

South Eastern Europe and Türkiye

Albania
Bosnia and Herzegovina
Kosovo³⁹
North Macedonia
Montenegro
Serbia
Türkiye

Eastern Partnership

Armenia
Azerbaijan
Belarus⁴⁰
Georgia⁴¹
Moldova
Ukraine

Southern and Eastern Mediterranean

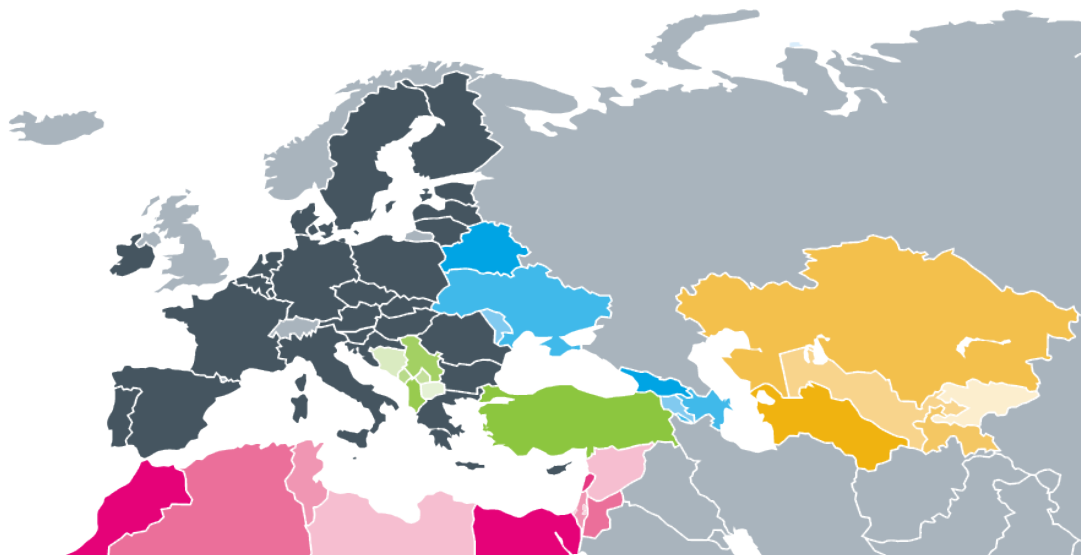
Algeria
Egypt
Israel⁴²
Jordan
Lebanon
Libya⁴³
Morocco
Palestine⁴⁴
Syria⁴⁵
Tunisia

Central Asia

Kazakhstan
Kyrgyzstan
Tajikistan
Turkmenistan
Uzbekistan

Cooperation elsewhere

African Union



³⁹ This designation is without prejudice to positions on status and is in line with UNSCR 1244/1999 and the ICJ Opinion on the Kosovo declaration of independence.

⁴⁰ ETF support to Belarus takes place in the context of SG note of 01/03/2022, Ares (2022)1502984. Also, in the context of the aforementioned SG note and the 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 a partner country.

⁴¹ ETF follows closely current state of play and the EU guidance on Georgia, and is in line with conclusions of the European Council meeting of 27 June 2024 (EUCO 15/24, CO EUR 12, CONCL 4).

⁴² ETF support to Israel takes place in the context of EU-Israel cooperation and related Guidelines on eligibility of Israeli entities and their activities in the territories occupied by Israel since 1967 for grants, prizes and financial instruments funded by the EU from 2014 onwards.

⁴³ The ETF resumed cooperation with Libya in 2018. If conditions allow, this cooperation will continue in 2025.

⁴⁴ This designation shall not be construed as recognition of a State of Palestine and is without prejudice to the individual positions of the Member States on this issue.

⁴⁵ The ETF aligns with the position adopted by the EU for EU-Syria bilateral relations [Syria | European Neighbourhood Policy And Enlargement Negotiations \(europa.eu\)](#); no activities are currently envisaged for Syria.

1.10 ETF Intervention Logic



2. Human and financial resource outlook for 2025-27

Human resources

As a centre of expertise, the ETF views its staff as a key asset and relies on its expertise and talent to fulfil its core mission. Human resource management and development is therefore key to ensuring a supporting environment to enable the successful implementation of the objectives of the ETF work programme, alignment to its strategy as well as full compliance with the regulatory framework (i.e. Staff Regulations and their implementing rules).

Significant transformation and development have taken place in the past three years to align HR management with the ETF Strategy 2027. This included the need to adjust to and benefit from a rapidly evolving working environment and inevitable changes on demographic, environmental and technological trends. The opportunities and challenges of the hybrid work modality have been part of these developments.

In line with the ETF Human Resources Strategy 2021-27 adopted in 2020, the priority areas gravitate around:

- Attracting and deploying, which refers to the strategic importance of recruitment to attract diverse talents and profiles, effective deployment and integration;
- Managing and retaining, which focuses on clarity of performance objectives, managing by results and providing professional and career opportunities for staff to continuously make use of their competences, skills and capabilities;
- Growing and developing, which embraces the different modalities of learning for professional and career development and motivation;
- Caring for people and valuing diversity, which fosters inclusion, respect for diversity and the importance of staff well-being so they can perform at their best.

Recent years focused on developing modern tools adapted for new challenges, including the pandemic (e.g. job architecture, talent profiles, learning, new ways of working). Going forward, emphasis has shifted to monitoring the implementation and evaluating the impact on the evolving organisation. Initial signs of the strategy's effects are expected for 2025, such as more efficient processes, digitalisation benefits, flexible work arrangements, enhanced team performance, and advances in participatory organic institutional development with the holistic view and focus on care and step-by-step approach.

The ETF remains committed to boosting staff engagement, effective talent management, and modernising HR. Additionally, attracting diverse talent, fostering inclusion, and promoting wellbeing will continue through embedding initiatives into the staff lifecycle.

Another priority is aligning staffing and skills to emerging demands and trends for future readiness, as per the HR strategy and the 2027 mid-term review. The ETF's workforce already encompasses broad human capital development expertise, including general education. Simultaneously attracting and retaining top talent remains an essential goal. This requires anticipating needs to inform replacement and succession strategies, and the use of diverse candidate reserve lists.

Such efforts will enable smooth transitions as senior staff retires and efficient knowledge transfers are critical. Concurrently, continuous learning plays an important role given the dynamic context. Development initiatives like staff exchanges and traineeship programs will enable experience and knowledge gains in various dimensions. Overall, these talent management policies will build and sustain balanced expertise across the ETF's mandate, both now and in the long-term.

Finance and procurement

Finance and procurement support and guidance services focus on ensuring the optimisation of the resources available. This entails maintaining a high level of budget implementation and optimised use of funds, thus enabling efficient and effective delivery of core ETF tasks. Another aspect is the focus on the long-term financial sustainability of the ETF, especially considering the increased inflationary pressure on staffing costs, energy and external service contracts.

The ETF will therefore continue to focus on budget performance, efficiency and financial sustainability, whilst ensuring a robust and compliant financial and procurement management cycle. Moreover, growing economic volatility and anticipated high inflationary pressure on the budget will necessitate dynamic, close financial monitoring. Additionally, extra-subsidy projects are projected to intensify demands on finance and procurement services for timely delivery with innovative solutions.

In the light of these factors, the ETF will:

- Enhance the efficiency and effectiveness of budget implementation using information and communication technology, completing the digitalisation of internal/external processes and deploying the new procurement and financial management systems as they are made available for use by EC services (MIPs, SUMMA, e-prior suite). In this respect, MIPs will enter a full roll out phase in 2025 following its pilot in 2024. The ETF is expected to join SUMMA in 2027, focusing on learning from other agencies in 2025. The necessary financial implications for ETF onboarding in SUMMA will be reflected in the 2026/27 agency statements;
- Increase synergies and cooperation with the EC and other EU Agencies, for instance to optimise the use of procurement instruments by sharing them with EC services and other agencies for standard procurement needs, as well as by sharing services and practices (e.g. accounting services, joint recruitments, etc);
- Mainstream the integration of sustainable responsible and green procurement;
- Mobilise additional revenue as allowed by the reformed financial regulation and in addition to the EU contribution;
- Implement efficient quality assurance measures within the ETF internal control and risk management frameworks;
- Implement measures deriving from the reform of the Financial Regulation.

Facilities, security and greening

The ETF ensures that all aspects of the building, people and information are managed in a secure, effective and efficient manner. This is key to providing the agency, its staff and visitors with an optimal, safe and cost-effective working environment, while respecting corporate and regulatory compliance. Taking lessons learnt from the recent energy crisis, saving measures have been mainstreamed. Considering expected high inflation and likely continuous instability with regard to energy prices, close monitoring of consumption and budgets will be important in the next period.

Building management will focus on the decision on the best option for ETF premises post-27 based on the 2022 pre-feasibility study, followed by exchanges with different stakeholders. This should lead to the preparation of a building project in 2025. The state of current premises and increased needs for maintenance works will continue to be an area of attention with higher expected consumption of resources. Taking into account environmental, health and safety as well as (cyber) security concerns, the ETF will:

- Step up the efforts in greening, with a revised ETF environmental policy opening a new cycle of EMAS certification. Efforts will include the implementation of the GHG protocol to align with EC standards; provision of green energy, exploring compensation schemes for missions and events; mainstreaming green procurement; and promoting sustainable commuting, all these gearing the achievement of carbon neutrality objectives as per EU commitments;
- Work towards a sustainability strategy that will bring together the pillars of environment (with the above-mentioned efforts), social and economic under one coherent umbrella, while continuing to actively cooperate with the EUAN Greening Network and the PDN sustainability reporting working group;
- Improve the maintenance and management of the building premises in close cooperation with host regional authorities and update of IT systems to take full advantage of hybrid work modalities;
- Work towards a decision on the best option for ETF premises post-27, ensuring stakeholder consultation, and considering required follow up for building project preparations for EP and Council decision and its implementation;
- Provide healthy, safe and secure on-site working conditions based on risk assessments and applicable regulations for the implementation of the hybrid work modality;
- Review the approach to security in a comprehensive manner by aligning with EU and international standards and new EU regulations, with particular attention to IT and cybersecurity, including information security and data protection⁴⁶. In this regard, the ETF has already made provisions for transitional measures that will allow it to start the implementation of the Regulation requirements with external support awaiting for a reinforced internal team to be in place. Cooperation with other agencies, notably sister agencies and ENISA, is ongoing and will be strengthened;
- Monitor implementation of the safety and security measures for staff on mission put in place in 2023/24. Cooperation with EEAS via the implementation of a new service level agreement as well as cooperation with other agencies via the implementation of the new interinstitutional framework agreement will be reinforced.

Accounting

The ETF will continue to ensure high quality annual financial statements with the aim of receiving a positive audit opinion from the European Court of Auditors (ECA). It will achieve this by maintaining and further enhancing its in-house accounting capacity with a focus on maintaining robust, compliant and auditable accounts and related documentation. The ETF will continue to provide accounting services to its sister agency EU-OSHA as a cost-efficient measure and based on the positive assessment of the service-level agreement signed in July 2022.

⁴⁶ ETF ensures compliance with the EU data protection regulation (EU) No 2018/1725 through application of a dedicated procedure which ensures for each new and/or modified data processing operation a systematic compliance check and risk screening, including assessing the need for a Data Protection Impact Assessment (DPIA) and the need for a prior check with the EDPS, which is fully documented and formally approved, and complemented with information of the data subject in a Privacy Statement. Both data protection records and privacy statements are published on ETF's website. Furthermore ETF has a dedicated procedure in place for the detection, assessment, management and reporting of personal data protection breaches. Additionally each new staff member is provided with a dedicated induction session on data protection rights and obligations. Starting in 2025, the ETF will present to the Governing Board in the annual report the various data protection aspects of the past year documenting among others: overview of updates and new data protection records and privacy statements, data protection breaches, advices provided to staff, interactions with EDPS (e.g. EDPS case files, guidance, workshops, surveys), interaction with the DPO network, advices and knowledge sharing activities in ETF, data protection audits, relevant missions and the state of play of the data protection function at the ETF.

2.1 Overview of the past and current situation

Staff population overview for 2023

Over the last few years, the ETF has gradually managed to increase the number of staff allocated to its core operational activities from around 70% in 2018 to 77% in 2023, as highlighted in the job screening exercise (see table below). The increase in the operational category is noteworthy given that natural departures took place almost exclusively amongst HCD specialists. In addition, the ETF took advantage of article 38.2 of the Financial Regulation and started to offset 'the effects of part-time work authorised by other appointments'.

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

In 2023 staffing remained stable with 86 Temporary Agents, 42 Contract Agents, and 1 Local Agent. At the end of 2023, only 2 Contract Agents positions were vacant.

Expenditure for 2023

The ETF optimised the use of its budget contribution by achieving a commitment rate of 99.85% in 2023. Due to the increased cost of staff and utilities, very careful planning and monitoring has allowed the ETF to cover this increase through savings from lower-priority administrative areas, while the operational budget has been safeguarded and implemented through an adapted set of measures (missions and face-to-face meetings and events reduced, compensated by increased on-line meetings, seminars, workshops and publications).

2.2 Resource programming for 2025-27

The resource programming for the new period has been updated and is in line with the forecast for the ETF contained in the adopted MFF for 2021-27 indicating that the mid-term financial outlook for the agency is stable in real terms⁴⁷, representing a 2% increase in nominal terms matching expected

⁴⁷ [SEC\(2020\)-250](#) – June 2020 - Statement of estimates of the European Commission.

inflation. The budget of the ETF is under Heading 2 of the general EC budget acknowledging that, while ETF activities are carried out in the Neighbourhood countries, ETF activities are part of the external projection of EU vocational education and training policies.

In the current context, with high inflation reflected in salary adaptation and utilities costs, as well as on the price increases for externally contracted services, the ETF is putting a strain on its operational budget aiming at maintaining and improving the organisation's capacity to deliver on its mandate and fulfil the ambitions of the ETF Strategy 2027.

2.2.1 Financial resources

Revenue

The 2025 budget is based on the EU contribution of €24,020,309 in both commitment and payment appropriations, composed of a contribution of €23,938,035 from the EU budget and €82,275 from the recovery of surplus related to the 2023 budget execution. In addition, the ETF is in discussion with EC services to assess whether additional EU requests for actions might require appropriate dedicated funds and additional budget resources options to implement the actions as part of their cooperation with third countries.

In the future, as already mentioned, the ETF might consider the possibility of widening its operational resources by providing remunerated services for other international actors or to move towards results-based financing with IFIs.

The Agency statement for 2025 reflects the allocated resources. Request for additional revenue to cover the costs of the preparation of a future building project for ETF premises post-2027 has not been granted and may be reflected in next years agency statements (cf. Annex III – Table 2 - detail).

Expenditure

The forecast for expenditure on Title 1 – staff expenditure, is based on the following assumptions: a cumulative salary adaptation in line with the Commission's assumptions⁴⁸ (+5,3% to be applied as from 1 July 2024, +0,6% to be applied as from 1 April 2025, and +3,7% to be applied as from 1 July 2025) and no decrease in the weighting factor. Furthermore, an upward impact on salary costs due to the automatic increase in step and the annual reclassification exercise on the one hand, a complete establishment plan and savings deriving from the retirement of senior staff replaced by more junior staff on the other hand, both affect the Title 1 forecast.

In addition, the traineeship programme re-introduced in 2021 is expected to continue over the next years. Based on these assumptions, the expectation is a net increase of 3.9% in staff expenditure compared to 2024 budget. Moreover, an increase of 2% is foreseen for the subsequent period 2026-27. Should the financial allocation prove insufficient, the ETF will attempt to implement mitigating measures within those foreseen under staffing and/or eventually transfer from the other budgetary titles based on negative priorities or postponement of actions.

The forecast for expenditure on Title 2 – infrastructure covering the regular activities is estimated at €2.3 million, an increase of 7.6% compared to 2024 initial budget. The increase is linked to the increased maintenance costs, expected higher prices of the new contract for global services (cleaning, security, maintenance), and of the new contracts for utilities. Regarding digital expenditure, the initial assumption of decreased digitalisation costs has been amended reflecting the reality of increased

⁴⁸ Budget Circular for 2025 – Agency Instructions (20 Dec 2023).

expenditure in cybersecurity, cloud and IT infrastructure and a constant need for development in systems.

The allocation to Title 2 will allow in 2025 for limited progress towards a higher digital and green transition of administrative and operational services. This will represent a risk if the budget constraints continue in the coming years.

As an agency working at the centre of the geopolitical developments affecting EU needs and in the fast-growing thematic area of human capital development and skills, the ETF is an agency working at a cruising speed attempting to offer its expertise and impact to the fullest. With staff costs expected to further increase and infrastructure costs expected to slightly decrease, the agency is capable to maintain the budget forecast for Title 3 in nominal value as compared to that of 2024, safeguarding operational activities though with little margin.

On the one hand, this shows that the ETF has been increasingly able to deliver more value for money by increasing efficiency in delivering activities. In fact, the experience of 2020-2023 linked to COVID-19 and ETF's accelerated digitalisation, as well as its overall sustainability and increased partnerships, have all enabled the ETF to re-consider the modalities used to deliver its activities. On the other hand, this also demonstrates ETF's ability to continue providing a relevant contribution to the external dimension of Human Capital Development of the EU. Within the space of the ETF subsidy, it ensures core services while also taking in and efficiently delivering extra-subsidy projects that are aligned to its mandate and planned activities.

However, it is important to highlight that the current allocation for 2025 already requires for the agency to prioritise on a continued basis to match the request to keep flexibility and ad-hoc and short-term support services to the EC. Moreover, this manoeuvring space in Title 3 is fragile, inflation is at risk and, in general, this would still mean that the annual subsidy increase is mostly absorbed by Title 1, with an unpredictable annual increase of expenses superior to the predicted 2%. As per consolidated practice, savings in Title 1 will be assigned to operational activities and, if necessary, to infrastructure improvements.

Following the mid-term review of the ETF 2027 strategy, the agency is also reviewing its prioritisation to ensure relevance and results-orientation towards impact indicators of broader EU objectives. Anticipated calibration measures for the period 2024-2027, should further support the agency to ensure the strategy fit of its operational activities in 2025.

In terms of additional funding, there are several projects ongoing or at an advanced stage of preparation:

- Service level agreement with EU-OSHA for sharing accounting services – started in July 2022 – expecting 80.000€ in 2025.
- Implementation of the DARYA project for Central Asia on behalf of DG INTPA (a yearly EUR 2 million for five years, started in 2022).
- Implementation of the second phase of the project on the Centres of Vocational Excellence (CoVEs2 – EUR 1.5 million for 2 years) through a service level agreement with DG EMPL since April 2023.
- Implementation of ACQF II with the AU (EUR 5 million for 3 years through a contribution agreement with DG INTPA since March 2023).
- Implementation of a project supporting education reforms and skills in the EaP countries (EUR 2,5 million for 32 months through a contribution agreement with DG NEAR since December 2023).

- Finalisation 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, (EUR 500,000 for 12 months through a contribution agreement with DG NEAR since February 2024).
- Implementation of a facility for gender-responsive and inclusive investments in the EU neighbourhood – Support the EIB in the preparation of EFSD+ Window 1 Investment Projects – contribution agreement in preparation with EIB for €1m across 3 years (2024-2026) – TBC.

Budget outturn and cancellation of appropriations (detailed data in table 3 Annex III)

The 2023 budget outturn is EUR 82,675.36, in line with the good results of 2022 (EUR 62,209) and an improvement from 2021 (EUR 93,864).

2.2.2 Human resources

Staff population evolution (detailed data in table 2 Annex IV)

During the period 2025-27, the ETF's total staff population will remain stable with a slight decrease of external staff. Considering the evolution of Italian legislation and its related restrictions for the use of interim workers, offsetting unplanned staff shortages is becoming very difficult. A possible solution, recommended by DG HR, is to offer short-term employment contracts to contract agents and the ETF intends to continue to do so in future.

The ETF's HCD experts are a scarce and valued resource on which the agency relies for its added value. All efforts will therefore continue to ensure that the proportion of staff allocated to operational activities remains around 75%. Between 2025 and 2027, a significant number of Temporary Agents are expected to retire. Additionally, several current AST contracts may be converted into AD positions during this period. These potential conversions⁴⁹ would primarily involve core business expert roles, for which the European Commission previously recommended recruitments at the AD5 and AD7 grade levels.

In the area of horizontal services, required job profiles are also expected to evolve in line with more complex work organisation and more demanding areas, such as those linked to information and cybersecurity. This may imply, for instance, increasing the proportion of administrators (as business specialists) versus assistants, and further exploring the possibility of shared staff with other agencies. Regarding external personnel, considering the retirement of one local agent for which the conversion into a CA FGII has not been granted, the total number is reduced by 1 from 43 (42 CA + 1 LA) to 42 (42 CA + 0 LA) in addition to potential short-term Contract Agents. Seconded National Experts are envisaged during the period 2026-27.

To deliver on additional services or new tasks, additional external staff may be financed from negotiated contributions or service-level agreements. To ensure absorption capacity of additional extra-subsidy projects and the usage of resources in the provision of expertise, strict monitoring and reliance on short term staffing contracts will be necessary.

Resource outlook over the years 2025-27

A. New tasks

The ETF has agreements in place with DG NEAR, DG EMPL, DG INTPA and EUDs to provide support in the implementation of specific projects. The ETF will maintain a level of flexibility should

⁴⁹ Any actual conversion will be budgetary neutral.

new requests for support emerge in 2025 and consider them on a single basis through a specific feasibility assessment and their approval will follow the specific process agreed with EC services. Ongoing extra-subsidy projects are outlined above in Section 2.2.1 and further detailed in Section III.

In parallel, the ETF implements specific target actions as part of EU cooperation with third countries at the request of EC services. On requests involving a financial contribution to the ETF, as well as requests coming from EC services focusing on countries beyond the ETF's partner countries, their approval will follow the specific process agreed with EC services.

The ETF will continue, upon request, to support DG INTPA and DG NEAR in the delivery of VET training courses, seminars and studies aimed at supporting the EU programming cycle. This is in line with ETF's 2027 strategy and flexible approach to deliver on its mandate and expertise, which are key for the ETF's growth and to expand the EU's reach and influence.

The ETF is holding discussions with the European Investment Bank to support the implementation of gender-responsive and inclusive investments in the EU neighbourhood.

B. Growth of existing tasks

There are many areas of potential growth that could be developed with the EU Services, Member States and international actors active in the field of HCD. As such, the ETF's strategic focus on delivering in partnership is key to finding synergies. The new NDICI and IPA III instruments and the Team Europe approach create promising opportunities, both at partner country level and in terms of knowledge creation.

Cooperation with IFIs, Member States and international organisations are also promising avenues. Specifically, the ETF will explore synergies with the European Investment Bank and DG NEAR regarding potential collaboration, as investments in skills-related operations are increasing, especially in the EU Neighbourhood region.

The ETF will remain open to identifying opportunities that provide added value to the EU priorities and the implementation of the new financing instruments. Further encouraged by the Commission opinion⁵⁰, the ETF will continue to pursue opportunities to work beyond current partner countries or to engage in new priority thematic areas to respond to relevant requests.

Complying with the requirements of the new Cybersecurity Regulation

The new Cybersecurity Regulation for EUIBAs^{51,52} came into force as of 2024. It foresees the mandatory implementation of a set of baseline cybersecurity measures by all EUIBAs, independently of their size, within 24 months from its adoption, as well as their regular review. The new Regulation increases the compliance requirements imposed on the Agencies significantly and has an important impact on the resources to be allocated to this growing task.

In terms of human resources, Agencies under the Employment cluster have made a joint proposal to share services, provided that additional resources are granted (est. 3 FTEs to be shared among the 5 EMPL agencies). The ETF will also need to rely on external support whether via CERT-EU, ENISA or consultancy firms. Furthermore, the ETF will dedicate increased financial resources complying the 10% target in the Regulation as reflected in the Agency statement.

⁵⁰ Commission opinion of 18.07.2022 on the draft Programming Document (2023-2025) of the European Training Foundation (ETF) C(2022) Ref. 2022-37.

⁵¹ Regulation of the European Parliament and of the Council laying down measures for a high common level of cybersecurity at the institutions, bodies, offices and agencies of the Union.

⁵² EUIBAs: European Union Institutions, Bodies and Agencies.

2.3 Strategy for achieving efficiency gains

The ETF continuously strives to improve its functioning through an integrated approach to monitoring performance. On an annual basis improvement actions are identified through the assessment of internal controls, annual performance assessment, risks assessment, internal/external audits and evaluations, and an action plan is prepared.

A review of the resource allocation is done annually during the planning process. For human resources the aim is to increase the numbers and level of staff allocated to operational activities through reallocation of duties, staff mobility and training. At the end of 2023, the ETF had 77% of its statutory staff allocated to core operational activities (from 70% in 2017).

Financial resource allocations and circuits are reviewed annually and areas for streamlining processes are identified. As mentioned above, any savings in Title 1 (staff costs) are mostly allocated to operational core business activities. Close monitoring of resource consumption during the year with analyses of costs allocated also allow for improved efficiency gains during implementation.

Aligned with its 2027 strategy, in 2024 the ETF instituted an organisational restructuring to redistribute line management responsibilities, streamline structures around core services and value delivery to key beneficiaries and stakeholders, expand project management capabilities, and pursue efficiency gains. The Project & Partners Unit established is revising workflows and procedures for project management, communication and mobilisation activities, including changes to the operational use of contracted services. The ETF introduced an online project management tool and automated certain processes to facilitate project implementation.

The creation of the Corporate Services and People & Talent Units will enable the organisation to build further efficiency gains. The first caters for accounting, security, missions, document management, facilities, procurement, finance and digitalisation. The latter is responsible for ETF's talent management, expertise development and people wellbeing. Together, these create further opportunities for synergies in various shared areas of the resource management sphere.

Efficiency gains has already been achieved in the financial circuits by combining the roles of financial and operational initiating agents, therefore reducing the number of actors involved in certain workflows. The same applies with the development of polyvalent functions able to deliver broader support services in the ETF purchase-to-pay cycle. On the operational side of financial management, a full review of the financial circuits has been done in the context of the restructuring and follow up of business processes is further enhanced within the Project & Partners Unit, which aims to be a service centre supporting the different operational projects.

In terms of operational activities in partner countries, the ETF strategy 2027 uses a differentiated approach to maximise impact and use of resources. In practice this means a more streamlined and targeted approach to each country taking into account the level of investment of the EU and other international actors, as well as country ownership and commitment in the areas targeted. The strategy foresees a decrease in smaller, pilot actions and a discontinuation of tasks that are resource intensive, towards actions with a higher added value and impact. The ETF also aims to seek partnerships and strategic alliances with other international actors active in human capital development in partner countries to maximise synergies, identify joint actions and share resources in the spirit of the Team Europe approach.

Through the network of EU Agencies, the ETF will continue to explore areas for cost savings through shared services, joint selection, joint procurement and cooperation on green procurement, as well as using Commission IT systems where shared infrastructure is more cost effective. Mutual learning will also continue, especially in areas related to evaluation, risks and internal controls, as well as

digitalisation and IT. In the area of services, as mentioned earlier, the ETF is sharing accounting services with EU-OSHA. Discussion is ongoing among agencies for shared services in the context of the enhanced measures to be implemented on cybersecurity, as outlined in the new EU cybersecurity regulation, with a concrete sharing proposal made jointly by the Employment cluster agencies to the EC.

Synergies and efficiency gains will continuously be sought in terms of procurement by strategising internal procurement needs and by continuing to participate in inter-institutional tenders, as well as by opening ETF contracts to other agencies where possible. Additionally, one member of the ETF management team is a member of the agencies group of investigators for administrative enquiries. In the area of selection, the ETF is moving towards joint selection wherever relevant and sharing candidate reserve lists (especially for expert profiles), provided consent is given by the candidates. The same may apply to other agencies for more generic profiles. Good practices in the area of learning and development will be maintained with the opening of learning activities organised by one agency to other EU agencies.

A digital transformation strategy was initiated in 2020 to review the internal IT infrastructure for a more integrated approach to increase the use of digital and online tools for delivering ETF services and engaging stakeholders, as well as for internal efficiency gains. In a first phase, the ETF reviewed its digital architecture, defined key principles and identified levers for change towards becoming a (more) digitally mature agency. A roadmap was then developed in 2021 and has been implemented since to strengthen organisational processes and improve the efficiency of digital products and services, with the aim of enabling the ETF to become a digitally smart and advanced organisation.

Capitalising further on the pandemic experience of shifting 100% to an online working environment, the digital transformation intends to seek further efficiency gains through the use of digital tools. As such, the ETF is implementing a new integrated project management, corporate planning and monitoring system. Interoperability with EC services is also one of the key drivers through the integration of EC systems such as SYSPER, MIPs, ARES and PPMT for staff, document and procurement processes, as well as SUMMA at a later stage for financial management processes. Hence, EC systems interoperability is continuously considered provided they are fit for purpose to the size and operations of the ETF.

The ETF is also continuously renewing its commitment to the environmental agenda. This enables it to further expand its efforts on energy efficiency, including provision of green energy, thus implementing upcoming EC guidelines for greener missions, exploring responsible compensation schemes and giving continuous attention to material and water consumption as part of its EMAS action plan.

Finally, efficiency gains will also be sought within the context of internal audits and evaluations. In particular, the audit initiated in 2023 on digitalisation as part of the IAS Strategic Internal Audit Plan 2021-23 will provide relevant insights and recommendations for the period 2025-27.

Section III – ANNUAL WORK PROGRAMME 2025

1. Executive summary

The ETF 2027 strategy presupposes a holistic approach to human capital development and lifelong learning, and is underpinned by the principles of partnership and differentiation. Four strategic goals are set in a coherent intervention logic for the period 2025-27, based on the mid-term review of the 2027 strategy and the defined impact-oriented theory of change vis-a-vis the overall geopolitical objectives of the Commission. These strategic goals reflect ETF's added-value to its customers, beneficiaries and stakeholders, and are delivered by the combination and integration of ETF's three core services and their associated mechanisms of delivery that are operationalised via ETF's activity areas.

Through the different work programmes in the period covered by the ETF Strategy 2027, the ETF has contributed to the ambitions of the [European Commission \(2019-2024\)](#), notably under the fifth priority (a stronger Europe in the world). The ETF has supported and will continue to support the EU's external engagement and in doing so, it supports its partner countries and regions to adopt lifelong learning policies to develop their human capital (second EC priority: An economy that works for people), empowering people through education and skills.

Where relevant from the skills perspective, the ETF will also continue to support the transition towards greener economies and societies (first EC priority: A European Green Deal), to advance digital transformation in education and training (third EC priority: A Europe fit for the digital age), to focus on gender and equality (second EC priority), and to ensure a specific focus on the role of skills in tackling the root causes of migration (fourth EC priority: Protecting our European way of life).

While the institution has been able to service the EC and partner countries alike, it also has focussed on upgrading internal capabilities and as such has increased its digital and green maturity. Likewise, as a centre of expertise the ETF increasingly provides opportunities for growth and fulfilment of its staff, and pays attention to institutional development. Communication and engagement are key to delivering ETF's value proposition in line with its mandate.

The variety of communication channels and networking opportunities in place enables the ETF to promote education and labour market development in partner countries based on its thematic, geographical, policy and methodological expertise, thus fostering lifelong learning education systems and nurturing stability and prosperity beyond EU's borders. It also enables the ETF to provide policy advice to EC services, thus influencing investments and programming based on its country, regional, thematic, HCD and anticipatory intelligence.

ETF actions are planned in all partner countries in line with the EU positioning⁵³. A continuous consultation process is in place to discuss the relevance of actions directly with partner countries

⁵³ ETF activities are in line with the EU positioning in the countries where it operates, which include: Albania, Algeria, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, 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. As such, it resumed cooperation with Libya in 2018 (in support to the EU Delegation) and there are no activities currently envisioned in Syria in line with the EU-Syria bilateral relations: [Syria | European Neighbourhood Policy and Enlargement Negotiations \(europa.eu\)](#). Likewise, ETF support to Belarus takes place in the context of SG note of 01/03/2022, Ares (2022)1502984. Also, in the context

based on a differentiated approach described in the previous section of this document. In 2025, the ETF will pay special attention to Ukraine and EU candidate and accession countries as part of the EC's agreed strategic focus and recognising new programming needs. The ETF will also continue to engage in new priority thematic areas and provide thematic expertise to support emerging EU priorities in work with the AU, and in other geographic regions or countries at the request of the new European Commission.

Most importantly, 2025 is the fifth year of implementation of ETF's current strategy. It marks a turning point on agency's organisation and functioning to capitalise on the results of its 2027 strategy mid-term review and definition of a future vision towards 2040 (in the making at the time of writing the SPD). In 2025, a next ETF strategy will be developed in line with the next MFF (2028-2034). This new strategy will serve as a basis for the development of a strategic roadmap in 2026, which will enable the transition between ETF's 2027 and 2034 strategies in order to deliver the value proposition articulated in its vision 2040. This long-term thinking enables the ETF to look beyond its current programming cycle in a systemic and coherent way and to engage with its partners in the EC, in PCs and globally, thus ensuring it remains fit for the future by continually adapting its positioning and business model for added value.

After the strategy 2027 mid-term review, the multiannual work plan 2025-27 is re-engineered in view of a consistent beneficiary approach and in terms of added-value to stakeholders, with a results orientation. The four strategic goals and associated activity areas for 2025 are listed below. The 2025 annual work plan is organised around six operational activity areas associated with the first three strategic goals – global knowledge hub on HCD, asset to EU and MS, and long-term reference and support to PCs – and two horizontal activity areas associated to the strategic goal of ETF 'as a reference EU agency', as per the table below.

Global Knowledge Hub on Human Capital Development	Asset to EU and Member States	Long-term Reference and Support to Partner Countries	Reference EU Agency
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Contextualised and anticipatory knowledge development Innovative approaches for evidence-based policy making 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Contribution to EU external policies in the area of HCD Active anticipation and shaping of demand for input to EU external policies 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Countries are informed and use contextualised knowledge Country intelligence and facilitation of actors' engagement and system change 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Increased organisational readiness Increased reach and capacity to influence and mobilise key players

Operational activity areas cover projects funded through the ETF subsidy to deliver ETF's value proposition associated to its strategic goals. The horizontal activity areas maximise the delivery of ETF's operational activities and its resources for impact, complementarity and outreach. Extra-subsidy projects are described next for clarity as they have their own project monitoring, reporting and evaluation requirements, and will follow the processes indicated in their respective agreements.

of this note and the 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 a partner country.

Assumptions

The proposed work programme for 2025 has been planned considering the macro level risks involved and is based on the assumptions that:

- Institutional and political priorities in individual partner countries remain committed to and engaged in HCD and socio-economic policy reform processes;
- The networks of key partner countries and stakeholders remain engaged for each of the four ETF strategic goals, including HCD actors, EC services and Team Europe, and country stakeholders;
- The ETF adapts its mode of programme delivery in the context of fragile, (post)-conflict and protracted crises (where and when relevant);
- The ETF has agile planning in place to respond in a timely and flexible way, and at a high level of quality and relevance to EC and EU Delegation requests⁵⁴;
- The ETF adapts its mode of working and programme delivery through digital and other means in response to next normal and to increase both preparedness and resilience to future shocks;
- The ETF easily adapts its organisational set up to alternative forms of financing or to absorb extra-subsidy projects in line with increased demand for ETF services and changes in nature and type of requests.

2. Operational Activity Areas

2.1 Contextualised and anticipatory knowledge development

The aim is to ensure the development of demand-driven and contextualised knowledge directly applicable to partner countries, as well as ensure anticipation as part of the support to partner countries in preparing the ground for future skills and jobs. Through its knowledge development, the ETF contributes to partner countries system reforms and twin transition.

It does so by strengthening skills intelligence, anticipation and matching methods in the partner countries. Also, by providing a solid knowledge and intelligence base on labour market trends supporting the policy advice service of the ETF. In addition, through co-creation and dissemination of tools and methods of work, the ETF fosters the uptake of good practices in the field of HCD.

Hence, this area relates to knowledge development, knowledge co-creation with partners and the internalisation of third party knowledge or its adaptation, curation and conversion into organisational tacit and explicit knowledge, thus expanding ETF's contextual knowledge-base.

Internalisation also refers to the notion that the ETF engages with several stakeholders and HCD players to learn from them, and with partner countries to listen to their knowledge needs and expectations, beyond co-creating, sharing and disseminating demand-driven and contextualised data, information, knowledge and intelligence.

Contextualised knowledge development takes place in a variety of thematic and policy areas, including but not limited to:

⁵⁴ Although the ETF has an agile planning approach in place, flexibility will depend on multiple factors including timeliness of requests, the relevance of the request to the ETF's knowledge base, availability of thematic expertise, etc.

- Future skills and skills anticipation, as well as skills demand and matching
- Labour mobility, as well as skills and qualifications recognition and validation
- Youth employability, career guidance, work-based learning, and active labour market policies
- Requirements for upskilling and reskilling, and the roles of enterprises in skills development and for a resilient workforce
- Individual pathways and lifelong learning opportunities
- Requirements for participatory governance for lifelong learning
- Requirements for inclusive and equitable access, and for system change
- Requirements for skills comparison, for qualification systems and for quality assurance
- Innovation in teaching and learning methods for both youth and adults
- Excellence in VET as well as in teaching and learning methods and opportunities

In 2025, the highlights include continuous learning with stakeholders and partners, curation and consolidation of knowledge developed and lessons learned, and dissemination of knowledge gained through the collection and interpretation of evidence, both thematically and on country context. Moreover, knowledge on the performance of education and training systems in support of lifelong learning, and the contextualisation of insights through policy reviews/analysis.

In addition, the ETF will generate new knowledge on a number of fronts, such as on new skills demand in different economic sectors, the impact of Artificial Intelligence (AI) on skills demand, job vacancy analytics, foresight and labour market information analysis, including new forms of work and mobility patterns, skills demand for the green transition, skills mismatch, and skills demand of workers.

Specific attention will be given to the use of big data and AI tools to generate labour market information across ETF partner countries: in particular, a new online platform will be developed, based on a feasibility study undertaken in 2024, to conduct labour market analysis through technology adoption, which will be named “ETF Observatory on labour market dynamics and skills intelligence 4.0”, or “Observatory 4.0” in short.

In 2025, in partnership with CEDEFOP, the ETF will launch a new wave of the ESJS (European Skills and Job Survey), which will be implemented in 2026. The ETF will continue also cooperating with Eurofound in the context of living and working conditions by implementing and supporting intelligence gathering in partner countries.

In terms of availability and quality of Work Based Learning (WBL), the ETF will consolidate country knowledge and evidence to cover all Enlargement countries. It will also encourage WBL country policy reforms through policy learning focused on common challenges and exchange with EU MS.

Following on the deliverables of the European Year of Skills and the Skills and Talent Mobility Package, the ETF will follow up on the Commission Recommendation on the recognition of qualifications of third-country nationals. Hence, in 2025 the ETF will put in place activities supporting the strengthening of availability of information about the qualifications systems of third countries, and the digitalisation of qualifications databases.

The ETF will also support the development of methodological tools supporting comparison of qualifications and linking data on qualifications based on European tools such as European Learning Model, Europass and ESCO, thus facilitating faster international recognition of qualifications.

Bringing together ETF's work on qualifications, creative teaching and learning and EU VET networks, the ETF will generate evidence and develop a thematic product on Competency Based Assessment for certification in adult learning, with a particular focus on microcredentials, validation and adult training programmes. The aim is to support the development of a quality offer for upskilling and reskilling. Moreover, the ETF will create new evidence on recognition practices with a particular focus on VET and on the quality of processes related to including non-formal qualifications on NQFs.

ETF's work on qualifications will provide analytical inputs to the Global Inventory of NQFs in continuation of a long-standing collaboration with Unesco and Cedefop. It will also continue monitoring the development of validation systems through country reports on validation of non-formal and informal learning (VNFIL). Furthermore, it will develop a regular peer learning event on VNFIL to support the operationalisation of flexible learning pathways, and will further disseminate the training package developed in 2024 on qualifications databases for targeted and on-demand policy advice.

In 2025, the ETF will also explore skills related measures for re-establishing livelihoods in situations with ongoing violence, such as Palestine, Syria and Ukraine, which have a positive relationship with any peacebuilding agenda. The development of AI and the prevalence of mobile phones enabled the ETF to expand its work on fragile settings and to countries in conflict.

Current approaches explored by the ETF emphasise the poorest members of communities that are generally the hardest hit, internally displaced persons (IDPs), ex-combatants, young people and women. In 2025 the ETF will increase its focus on fragility as well as on conflict and post-conflict skills related actions, including in the context of enterprises.

Objective 2.1: Contextualised and anticipatory knowledge development

Develop, co-create and internalise demand-driven, contextualised and anticipatory knowledge directly applicable to partner countries, thus contributing to their system reforms and twin transition.

Overall Outcome

Contextualised, demand-driven and anticipatory knowledge development, co-creation and internalisation.

Indicators ⁵⁵	Target in 2025
<ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Percentage of stakeholders that appreciated ETFs knowledge▪ Percentage of the ETF's target audience who used ETF knowledge in the past year (operational KPI)▪ Number of accepted invitations to external events and/or debates	<ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ ≥ 80%▪ ≥ 75% (annex X)▪ ≥ 100

Resources: EUR 1,831,350 (Budget: EUR 1,043,700 and FTEs: EUR 787,650)

2.2 Innovative approaches to knowledge development for evidence-based policy making

The aim is to innovate through engagement of diverse actors in knowledge co-creation leading to ownership and use of results for research and, most importantly, for policy and decision making. In this context, the ETF seeks to include a variety of diverse voices in its external engagement in order to include innovative perspectives in knowledge development, dissemination and sharing.

⁵⁵ For all strategic goals and activity areas indicators have been developed and will be piloted in 2025 for eventual finetuning of targets.

This participatory approach to knowledge co-creation is paramount to developing anticipatory intelligence and identifying innovation opportunities via the combination of different insights and evidence. Also, to creating participatory governance mechanisms.

Likewise, it is key for building ownership of results and actioning upon them, both collectively and individually. Ultimately, this leads to increased evidence-based policy and decision making in partner countries, and knowledge use or uptake by HCD players globally.

Innovating through networks and diverse participatory approaches

A number of ETF networks and projects contribute to innovative approaches to knowledge development for evidence-based policy making. The ETF SkillsLab network brings together experts in skills anticipation and matching from the EU and partner countries, as well as practitioners from relevant ministries, public sector agencies, think tanks and universities active in the domain of skills demand analysis. The SkillsLab acts as an observatory on skills intelligence by looking at labour market dynamics and skills demands in EU partner countries.

The SkillsLab network supports close cooperation between the EU and partner countries, allows for innovation and piloting of new methods of work, peer learning and exchange. Its work is done in close cooperation with Cedefop, Eurofound, Eurostat, EU bodies and social partners, including the private sector, as well as international actors, in particular the interagency group, ILO, OECD, UNIDO, UNDP, UfM and IFIs interested in skills demands analysis and foresight.

The SkillsLab contributes to the Skills Agenda⁵⁶ Action 2 of strengthening skills intelligence as a means to achieve more attention and investment in skills for citizens across economic sectors and a better alignment of skills policies to labour demands, contributing to more inclusive labour markets. It also contributes to the new Skills and Talent Mobility package, by providing accessible and up to date skills intelligence to feed education and training policies and to address labour shortages.

The ETF Network for Excellence (ENE) explores the notion of excellence and feeds excellence and innovation as drivers for vocational skills provision for employment and education systems in a lifelong learning perspective. Also, to address the quality, innovation and relevance of skills through re-thinking institutional network set-ups and transitions needed by the labour market. ENE is the bonding platform for partnerships and peer learning activities among its members.

Centres of vocational excellence (CoVEs), committed to vocational excellence, are very good cases for nurturing and expanding new innovative methods and ideas in skills provision. As such, their objective is to identify good practice at ground level in schools, training centres and school to business partnerships, in order to analyse and disseminate these through clusters across the national system. CoVEs are genuine examples of partnerships at a global level, and the co-development, sharing and transmission of excellence towards the VET systems is fundamental for change.

In this context, ENE is inspired by a Commission-led initiative in EU countries, which establishes CoVE partnerships. This approach fits within the new EU Skills Agenda as well as the Osnabrück Declaration (2020). ENE also contributes to the Erasmus+ programme in the field of VET excellence. ENE is co-creating coherent knowledge and shaping policy advice to support reforms in partner countries. The dimensions of excellence will continue supporting EU priorities such as the green and digital transition.

Diversifying, innovating and making learning practices more inclusive, combined with improving quality across formal, informal and non-formal learning environments for both youth and adults, as well as examining new roles for teachers and trainers, are all areas in demand for development across all ETF partner regions. In response, the ETF Creating New Learning network (CNL) examines the new teaching and learning trends and practices worldwide, how learning is delivered in different environments, including in the workplace, as well as in various non-formal or informal settings, or in traditional, formal schooling.

⁵⁶ Full overview including links to EU policies can be found in Section I.

In this context, the CNL supports educators and system stakeholders in the partner countries to create and use tools to innovate teaching and learning practices. It does so for both youth and adults, and across all parts of lifelong learning systems. In addition, CNL seeks to diversify learning methods and environments to create new and more flexible learning opportunities. The digital transition is a driver for change for good lifelong learning systems. Therefore, on the one hand, the ETF identifies and generates innovative tools in partnership with stakeholders, EU bodies and international organisations. On the other hand, it builds a robust repository of relevant examples showcasing innovation in teaching and learning, granting partner countries access to global good practice.

The new tools, guides and methodologies developed through CNL are used by practitioners, policy makers and social partners, including the private sector. These are used in different contexts to expand learning and create meaningful and engaging learning experiences, as well as to enhance inclusion, stakeholder cooperation and overall performance. The network community is instrumental in collecting innovative practices and supporting innovation in teaching and learning by analysing innovation trends, enablers and barriers, as well as peer learning between the EU and the ETF partner countries.

CNL is aligned with the new EU Skills Agenda and its associated instruments. Notably, it is consistent with the VET recommendation in identifying and facilitating individualised learning pathways, modularised and digitalised qualifications, and new learning environments, tools and pedagogies. CNL knowledge products aim at supporting education and training practitioners by applying participatory research instruments and using the case study method in studying what innovative practices seem to work and which practices result in better learning experiences and outcomes, identifying enablers and barriers for initiation, implementation and uptake of innovative practices.

Via the Governance Learning, Action and Dialogues (GLAD) network, the ETF promotes system governance and partnerships between governmental actors, social partners 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. This is important because policies are more effective when they are prepared and implemented in an inclusive way. The ETF provides support in the framework of existing government institutions and inter-ministerial structures, while it also sustains the move to more participatory governance modalities based on triple-helix partnerships and stronger coordination mechanisms. In formulating expert advice, the ETF sees the areas of governance, quality assurance and financing as closely interrelated.

In view of more participatory governance modalities, the ETF identifies the relevant actors that play a role in each country's lifelong learning system, and it reviews the horizontal and vertical mechanisms they have in place to cooperate⁵⁷. In doing so, it tracks the level of cooperation among these actors and advises on better interactions, partnership mechanisms and processes to foster cooperation. The ETF also encourages transnational collaboration between partner countries. It provides support in using EU policies and processes, expertise, instruments and resources to strengthen VET quality assurance and its governance and financing. This is done via the Quality Assurance Forum, for instance, by supporting partner countries in the systematic monitoring of potential improvements to allow them to progress in planning and/or in implementing policies and practices. Tools used include the ETF Transnational Forum for peer exchange and collaboration on quality assurance issues in VET.

The ETF's approach to participatory governance approaches draws from the European Pillar of Social Rights, the European Skills Agenda, the VET Recommendation, European cooperation towards a European Education Area and beyond, the Sectoral Blueprint for Cooperation on Skills, the European Alliance for Apprenticeships, the Youth Guarantee and the Osnabrück Declaration. It aligns with the overarching EU Green Deal and Digital Agenda priorities 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, as well as with industrial strategies that pursue sustainable competitiveness, social fairness and resilience.

⁵⁷ The ETF will work to better support inter-ministerial cooperation and coordination mechanisms in partner countries, in the framework of existing structures. To this end, it will provide advice notably with a focus on: i) creating a shared vision and understanding on expected policy outcomes across the ministries and agencies involved, ii) suitable attribution of roles and responsibilities depending on each country's institutional settings, and iii) identification of areas for improvement in the current flow of information sharing and in the initiating actor's role, which may impede the smooth implementation of the agreed policy.

In 2025, knowledge developed via the SkillsLab will be used as a basis for dialogue and policy advice to partner countries, input to EU institutions and EU Member States, and investments and cooperation initiatives in partner countries. Information and new tools will also be used to spread a culture of skills anticipation at global level, in particular through the engagement of network members, where more than 400 research institutions, practitioners from relevant ministries, public sector agencies and think tanks from partner countries, the EU and other countries globally meet regularly to discuss topics of common interest, exchange on anticipation tools and learn from each other. The function of ETF within such a network confirms its position of an honest broker and contributes to make ETF recognised as a trusted source of knowledge on education, training and employment.

Moreover, the SkillsLab will continue to collaborate with its longstanding partners and to coordinate the work of the Interagency Group on skills mismatch in a digitalised world. It will also lead a joint work focusing on the impact of Artificial Intelligence on the world of work and on skills demand. The ETF will continue to support the UfM in the monitoring work related to the implementation of the Ministerial Declaration on employment, as well as to offer customised support, on demand, for the development of anticipation and matching systems, and in priority sectors defined under the EU external action agenda.

Under CNL, in 2025 the ETF will stay engaged in co-creation, adaptation and the use of tools for innovate teaching and learning practices for youth and adults, suitable across all parts of lifelong learning systems. It will also support diversify and flexibility of teaching methods, in a variety of learning environments.

The new tools, guides and methodologies developed under CNL will be shared for wide use by practitioners, policy makers and social partners, including the private sector. Ultimately, these aim to expand learning and create meaningful and engaging learning experiences, to enhance inclusion, stakeholder cooperation and overall performance and innovation potential of lifelong learning systems in PCs.

Tools, guides and methodologies as well as thematic developments under CNL will focus on support to educators, provision of guidelines and tools for educators, competence-based assessment and learning outcomes development, digital transformation of education as well as supporting adult learning, including the capacity of VET providers to effectively engage with re-skilling and upskilling of young adults and adults.

As part of its work on key competences, the CNL will increase its focus on active citizenship as well as the dissemination of EU competence frameworks, through its set of tools targeting practitioners. A special focus will remain on providing emergency system support to Ukraine education and adults' reskilling and upskilling in the areas of micro-credentials, as well as new teachers standard and new system of teacher professional development using the CNL tools READY and Scaffold.

The above developments are in line with the new EU Skills Agenda and its associated instruments, aligning CNL actions with the EU's Digital Education Action Plan, the Osnabrück Declaration on vocational education and training, the European Learning Model and the Council Recommendation on key competences for lifelong learning. As such, a variety of instruments will be used to provide evidence for policy makers, from the qualitative data collected by practitioners using Scaffold, to nationally representative data sets generated by the regional implementation of SELFIE for Teachers.

In 2025, the ETF will continue its work on Centres of Vocational Excellence (COVEs) through its Network for Excellence or ENE. Reaching more than 300 COVEs, ENE will launch new sub-initiatives for network members based on co-identified needs and demands. Marking 5 years since its launch,

and following up on the external evaluation run in 2024, the network will establish its objectives for the next five years, in line with the renewed EU policies and priorities in the area of excellence.

The ENE sub-initiatives will balance between thematic, sectorial and targeted users approach. Among possibilities to be discussed with network members potential foci include the role of COVES in: adult learning, applied research and technology transfer, cooperation in priority sectors including those stemming from skills needs assessment as well as those under the talent partnerships⁵⁸ and skills shortages, and in inclusion actions. The current focus on green and digital transition needs, and internationalisation of COVEs, will both continue, as well as the cooperation with Erasmus+ projects and programs.

Furthermore, in 2025 the GLAD network will continue its focus on knowledge development and on monitoring emerging changes, such as multi-stakeholder partnerships for lifelong learning, re-shaping of governance bodies, system resilience and performance, among others. Priority will be given to regional cooperation among candidate countries, as well as on the roles of social partners and CSOs in context of social dialogue and civic dialogue on lifelong learning and HCD.

The ETF will also continue its support to partner countries prioritising governance adaptation and civil society participation, in particular in candidate countries. This will, in turn, support the uptake of new governance mechanisms adapted to lifelong learning needs, support to youth guarantees, as well as improved arrangements for adult education, upskilling and reskilling, including through legislative adaptations.

Objective 2.2: Innovative approaches to knowledge development for evidence-based policy making

Ensure a participatory approach and the inclusion of diverse voices in knowledge co-creation to foster innovative perspectives in knowledge development, dissemination and sharing, thus leading to ownership of results, knowledge uptake and use of insights and evidence for policy and decision making.

Overall Outcome

Innovative perspectives in knowledge development, dissemination and sharing for increased future-oriented evidence-informed policy making.

Indicators	Target in 2025
<ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Number of third-party knowledge products and/or services to which ETF contributes▪ Engagement rate of active members in ETF networks (operational KPI)▪ Percentage of ETF knowledge actions implemented in partnerships (co-creation)▪ Percentage of target audience who considered ETF knowledge innovative and contributing to HCD developments or to future-oriented policymaking	<ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ New indicator with target to be set after pilot in 2025▪ ≥ 75% (annex X)▪ New indicator with target to be set after pilot in 2025▪ ≥ 80%

Resources: EUR 1,394,650 (Budget: EUR 725,000 FTEs: EUR 669,650)

2.3 EU external policies in the area of HCD

The aim is to provide timely and demand-driven contributions to EU external policies in the area of HCD. This includes contribution to policy debate and formulation, as well as to the design, implementation and monitoring of HCD programme components and wider Team Europe Initiatives.

⁵⁸ The ETF will explore the interest from the DG JRC to cooperate on labour migration and skills to support Nigeria and Senegal as candidate countries for the next round of Talent Partnerships.

In doing so, the ETF positions itself to serve as an important resource for programming and preparing EU investments towards achieving priorities set under the enlargement and neighbourhood policies, as well as pre-accession, neighbourhood, development and international cooperation instruments, and the Erasmus+ programme.

The ETF also contributes to a stronger coordination between external and internal policies to ensure a more coherent implementation of the 2030 SDGs Agenda, the EU Global Strategy, the European Consensus on Development, the European Neighbourhood Policy, and the external dimension of migration, including the Partnership Framework with third countries on migration.

This broader architecture for external action instruments reflects the need to focus on strategic priorities both geographically and thematically. Geographically, these include the Western Balkans, the European Neighbourhood and Africa. Thematically, it includes access and quality at all levels of the education systems in partner countries, youth employability, lifelong learning, decent work for all, and inclusion of women, all in support of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the implementation of the European Pillar of Social Rights. For the ETF, this is expected to create new demands for its support to EU actions in the pre-accession and neighbourhood regions as well as the rest of the world, in support of the external dimension of EU policies.

In 2025, ETF's contribution will be instrumental in mitigating risks of social exclusion and achieving fair, inclusive societies. Priorities include the continuous quality delivery of assistance and support to the EU in its external relations dimensions linked to HCD (i.e. EU support function) in line with the European Pillar of Social Rights, partner countries priorities and growing inequalities and fragility risks. The ETF will also prioritise Youth Guarantee operationalisation in the EU neighbouring countries. Upscaling of Youth Guarantee schemes in close cooperation with EU funded programmes in the EaP, SEMED, CA/DARYA will take place while fostering peer exchanges with EU MS and Western Balkans.

In addition, 2025 highlights include policy learning and gradual transposition of EU policy approaches to deliver on EU strategic orientations. These include adult learning through tailored upskilling and reskilling opportunities and pathways in response to future reinforcement of EU Upskilling Pathways Recommendation. Also, quality apprenticeships and traineeships, integrated career guidance and counselling systems, future-proof active labour market policies, quality assured apprenticeships and traineeships, and work-based learning opportunities for young and adults.

In 2025 the ETF will perform an analysis of public employment services and the potential of ESCO to improve data management and matching practices, as well as interinstitutional cooperation. Also, ways to develop stronger career guidance systems in line with the Osnabrück Declaration and VET Recommendation. The ETF will also explore the diversity of NEETs in the Western Balkans for policy advice/monitoring, as well as development of a method for monitoring progress and measuring quality of NEET outreach focused on generic career management skills.

The ETF will also support the expansion of EU supported Euroguidance network to the five Enlargement countries not yet part of the network through awareness raising and advice concerning national level preparatory steps. New evidence on career guidance and counselling systems will be developed in SEMED countries. The ETF will also undertake follow up in context of regional youth policy agenda and EU supported programme for NEET. Moreover, the ETF will continue providing inputs programming and content monitoring of EU Actions in Partner Countries with a particular focus on Enlargement and Talent Partnership countries⁵⁹.

⁵⁹ The ETF will explore the interest from DG HOME to work on Talent Partnerships in Pakistan and Bangladesh, which may require extra-subsidy funds due to the fact that these countries are outside the geographical remit of the ETF.

Talent partnerships

The ETF is liaising with DG EMPL and DG HOME, in particular to ensure full use of its activities, expertise and experience in the Talent Partnership initiative. The ETF is willing to be on the ground in all EC planned meetings and interservice consultations, in particular on recognition and validation and skills intelligence, which are the areas of primary target and where the EC recommendation and communication refer most to ETF's role. Specifically, in North African countries of interest (i.e. Morocco, Tunisia and Egypt), activities include:

- Validation on non-formal and informal learning for Morocco and Tunisia, and for other countries at the request of the commission and should resources be made available.
- Support of the qualifications databases by developing a training package for establishing databases of qualifications using ELM and ESCO, as well as improving the prototype of the Network of National Databases, which will make it easier to compare qualifications between partner countries and EU MS.
- Country work will be driven by close cooperation with EU-funded projects, for Egypt with the EU4YES project and in Tunisia with the PASE project. The Tunisian national databases of qualifications is planned to use the European Learning Model and RTMC that is compatible with ESCO to facilitate comparison of qualifications.
- In Morocco the work focuses on the nomenclature of occupations and skills supported by the PIAFE project. Also, regular exchange with THAMM has already tested the EU digital credentials and certificate supplement for VET qualifications.
- In the ACQF project ([African Continental Qualifications Framework — ACQF](#)) the 3 TP countries are involved and will benefit from the enhanced transparency and comparability of skills and qualifications within the AU and with the EQF, which should result in improved mobility and lifelong learning opportunities for African youth, as well as the recognition of skills and diplomas, improved mutual trust and information-sharing between qualifications frameworks and systems on the continent.

The ETF has also in place the Skills-OVATE model for the 3 countries Tunisia, Morocco and Egypt Global Solutions Workbench (emsibg.com), which can be further developed/analysed if resources are made available. Moreover, the Talent Partnership initiative and concrete projects financed by EU funding for mobility schemes are continually shared to raise Member States' attention on the difficulty for third country nationals to have their qualifications validated. For more on recognition of qualifications, please see:

- Recognition mapping (focused on VET): [Mapping of qualifications recognition centres](#) as for recommendation ETF stands ready to cooperate with ENIC NARIC on specific actions and follow up.
- ETF prototype of network of national databases [Mapping of qualifications recognition centres](#).

In addition, making targeted use of ETF's skills intelligence (incl. country studies, big data analysis, VET studies, labour market and skills demands analytics, etc.) to plan and strengthen the capacity of recognition services, enabling the exchange of interoperable, reliable information on qualifications and skills, and ensuring that the information available to employers and employees alike is accessible and fit for purpose, could all be used to facilitate recruitment from outside the EU.

The ETF also monitors labour market and education systems of TP countries intelligence and detailed reports are available, including on specific sectors. [Torino Process reports](#) and fiches [Resources](#). The ETF is available, upon demand and resources availability to implement specific studies in priority sectors. It also runs periodic mismatch studies (next edition in 2025) [Skills mismatch measurement in ETF partner countries](#).

The ETF also proposes to leverage on the COVEs initiative and the excellence centres in the TP countries, where specific work on the international mobility could be supporting implementation of TP, and this would require specific resources. On assessment of selected third country qualifications and work on comparison of NQF with EQF is part of the Talent Partnership dialogues and supported by programmes:

- [Global qualifications inventory](#) could be digitalised for better readability (resources to be made available).
- ETF should keep working on the NQF for Morocco, Tunisia and Egypt.
- ETF is involved in THAMM with specific guidance role.

Other ETF support to Talent Partnerships include:

- Support to the setting up of a sector skills council in the field of renewable energies.
- Study "Migrant women as learners: Individual pathways and prospects in Morocco, Tunisia and Georgia", outlining skills' needs of migrant women and policy recommendations on how they can be addressed.
- ETF network of Public Employment Services is instrumental for priority sectors and professions of TP.
- Possible roundtable with private sector and social enterprises involved in skills matching and placement processes.

Under the external dimension of the European Qualifications Framework (EQF), in line with the EQF Advisory Group workplan 2024-2025, and in close coordination with DG EMPL, in 2025 the ETF will continue supporting the Enlargement countries: BIH, Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine (in accordance with their respective level of preparedness) in referencing their NQFs to EQF, thus supporting alignment of their education and skills development policies with EU acquis, and facilitating trust in their qualification systems.

In addition, building on guidelines developed in 2024 and outcomes of the PLA, the ETF will support comparison of a selected third country (or regional) framework with EQF. Also, the ETF will continue to support the Enlargement countries in linking qualifications databases⁶⁰ with the European registers (Europass).

Under ETF's work on Active Labour Market Policies (ALMP) and transition measures, main policy and action anchors in 2025 are the EU Growth Plan for the Western Balkans (and Reform Agenda at country level), new Enlargement countries and their preparation for accession. It will also focus on EU – UfM priorities for youth employment and women empowerment, EaP policy dialogue and programmes for youth employment and education, and support for Central Asia under the Darya project. These will be explored in close cooperation and co-creation with international and European partners.

Hence, in 2025 the ETF will bring Enlargement countries closer to EU principles of employment policy coordination and support policy innovation and effectiveness. Priority topics include policy effectiveness in fragile and post-conflict contexts (including specific focus on Ukraine) and sustainable financing of ALMP, and skills development in fragile contexts. Moreover, the ETF will implement a series of policy learning and advice to improve labour market outcomes for persons with disabilities, in line with EU Disability Employment Package and in response to PCs growing number of people with disabilities due to war and conflicts.

Objective 2.3: EU external policies in the area of HCD	
Provide timely and demand-driven contributions to EU external policies in the area of HCD, including contribution to policy debate and formulation, as well as to design, implementation and monitoring of HCD programme components and wider Team Europe Initiatives.	
Overall Outcome	
Timely and demand-driven contribution to EU external policies in the area of HCD.	
Indicators	Target in 2025
<ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Percentage of stakeholders that appreciated ETFs input▪ Percentage of geographic and thematic coverage of EU requests for support to projects and programme design (operational KPI)▪ Number of accepted invitations to external events and/or debates	<ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ ≥ 80%▪ ≥ 75% (annex X)▪ ≥ 100
Resources: EUR 2,392,950 (Budget: EUR 1,269,000 and FTEs: EUR 1,123,950)	

2.4 Active anticipation and shaping of demand for input to EU external policies

The aim is to leverage ETF's ability to prioritise a forward-looking perspective, actively cultivating demand for its contributions to EU external policies in sectors or fields that are expected to grow in importance, or become significant in both the near- and long-term future. In this context, the ETF is

⁶⁰ On its work on qualifications, the ETF promotes alignment with the EU learning model to further enable comparison of databases, as well as recognition of qualifications and the validation of skills.

timely and flexibly responsive to anticipate actual requests for assistance that further enhance the strategic impact of EU actions in the HCD domain in line with identified priorities.

With rapid changes in the geopolitical landscape, the ETF retains a certain amount of flexibility to both shape and react to new information and knowledge needs, and to requests for policy advice not foreseen at the time of finalisation of the work programme, as well as to respond to ad-hoc requests from EU services and other important stakeholders. Encouraged by the EC opinion, the ETF will use its flexibility, agility and both anticipatory and absorption capacity to respond to new EC priorities and to continue pursuing opportunities to work beyond partner countries or to engage in new priority areas.

Building on ETF's thematic knowledge and expertise combined with its geographical mandate and country intelligence, the agency is able to anticipate, cultivate and respond to EU requests to provide several types of contributions to EU external policies. These include inputs to policy dialogue or to different phases of the programme cycle at country and/or regional level, ranging from the feasibility or preparatory phase to design and formulation, as well as towards implementation and evaluation.

Potential and actual demands can come from the EC services, EUDs, EEAS and other EU institutions and bodies. In this regard, continual liaison and coordination is necessary and key to anticipate needs and expectations, as well as to share both potential and actual demand with relevant EC services, in particular DG EMPL, but also DG NEAR and DG INTPA depending on their geographical coverage.

Potential and actual demands also emerge from Member States, third countries and international organisations and this is expected to further increase in line with Team Europe approach. It is important to highlight that when demands emerge and are formulated in written form, the ETF carries out an internal assessment to ensure that demands are relevant to the beneficiaries involved, are in line with EU priorities and ETF's mandate, including its strategy 2027 and associated value propositions and strategic goals, and if it can be delivered with existing or additional resources.

In 2025, the ETF will further systematise coordination with the EC to be able to capture at an early stage emerging demands and shifting geographic and thematic priorities, particularly linked to the evolving socio-geopolitical environments and related equilibrium and stability in the partner countries. At the same time, the ETF will also continuously strive to increase its capacity to respond flexibly and with high quality standards to requests and demands for assistance coming from the EU. This is a continued effort to use the results of ETF work stemming from the three core services and to provide relevant input with EU tools and methodologies, as well as for benchmarking where relevant and requested.

Objective 2.4: Active anticipation and shaping of demand for input to EU external policies

Ensure timely and flexibly responsiveness to anticipate actual requests for assistance that further enhance the strategic impact of EU external actions in the HCD domain in line with EU priorities and building on ETF's thematic and country intelligence.

Overall Outcome

Active anticipation and shaping of demand for contribution to implementation of EU external policies in sectors or fields that are expected to grow or become significant in the near- and long-term future.

Indicators	Target in 2025
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Number and typology of stakeholders' engagement in ETF activities (operational KPI) Number of accepted invitations to external events and/or debates 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ≥ 7,000 / 80% primary stakeholders (annex X) ≥ 100

Resources: EUR 829,700 (Budget: EUR 340,000 and FTEs: EUR 489,700)

2.5 Partner countries are informed and use ETF contextualised knowledge

The aim is to foster the uptake of products and services delivered by the ETF in the form of contextualised policy learning and development. This takes place in line with international best practices and the priorities of partner countries, with the overall objective of enhancing the accessibility, quality, and effectiveness of opportunities for lifelong learning. Ultimately, it entails employing appropriate mechanisms to encourage partner countries to use best practices and opportunities to advance towards inclusive, innovative, and sustainable lifelong learning systems that ensure high-quality outcomes.

In 2025, highlights include the continuous development of robust and innovative monitoring evidence and analysis of developments in partner countries. This leads to regular reporting to the benefit of a wider audience, and contextualisation of insights through demand-driven reviews of policies that influence the performance of education and training systems in support of lifelong learning.

In addition, in 2025 the ETF will continue to build up knowledge, monitor progress, and provide policy advice on career guidance, activation and skills development policies that are fit for enabling transition to employment of young and adults, and equipping workforce with the right skills in a highly changing demographic, economic and geopolitical landscape.

An analysis of women empowerment and ways to addressing occupational segregation and gender pay gap through activation and skills development measures will be developed. The resulting women empowerment and ways to addressing occupational segregation and gender pay gap through activation and skills development measures and the formulation of concrete (remedial) proposals will be used to inform ETF activities, PC policies and EU external actions.

On WBL, the ETF will continue to support PCs participation in European Alliance for Apprenticeships thus working towards expanding membership. It will also initiate an apprenticeship bench-learning process reflecting EU principles and methods, adapted to PCs context.

Tools developed will be further disseminated for uptake in PCs, including Scaffold, READY, DERF, Teacher Booster & Teacher Booster Playlists, FormA, Reflect, SELFIE and SELFIE for Teachers. In particular, the ETF will follow-up closely and support the application of Scaffold in Ukraine, DERF in Moldova and Algeria, and SELFIE for Teachers in the WB region.

In 2025, the ETF will complete the pilot project 'Skilling up Western Balkan agri-food sector: digitalising and greening' granting sustainability through uptake of the work done by regional actors actively involved. The ETF will share lessons learned on skills for smart specialisation and involvement of SMEs in the context of skills related actions.

In this context, the cross-border peer learning partnerships the ETF is supporting offers opportunities for authorities to make better use of Interreg Europe to share ideas and experience on public policy on SMEs and innovation in practice, therefore improving their support. In 2025, joint WB6 submissions with EU peer learning partners (clusters, VET, HEI and companies) from Austria, Belgium, Finland, Ireland and Portugal are planned under Erasmus+ and Horizon Europe.

In addition, Ukraine stands out under ETF's differentiation approach in external engagement. If conditions allow, the ETF will support Ukraine to achieve a comprehensive career guidance system and enhance quality online guidance services, to address the needs of (displaced) adolescents and design holistic career guidance support (e.g. covering mental health support), and to build capacity on methodological aspects.

Support to Ukraine will also be given in the design, assessment and recalibration of activation and skills development policies in a post-war context. Also, to develop capacity of employment services to support and address particular needs, to establish ‘one stop shop’ for integrated service packages for persons with disabilities, including veterans, and to empower veterans’ organisations to take a stronger role in design and delivery of specific services and programmes aimed at labour market reintegration.

Successful economic recovery in Ukraine via sustained growth, restored investor confidence and significant employment creation, requires skilled labour. Building on a mapping in the nine Western-most regions (Oblast) of Ukraine and a pilot which was implemented in 2024, in 2025 the ETF will expand its support to identifying productivity-enhancing skills needed to drive innovation and growth for recovery to further regions.

The abovementioned support will take place in synergy with EU and Ukrainian stakeholders, and in close partnership with international actors. This will also include focus on inclusion and labour mobility, both within the country and considering returning migrants, as well as taking into account the attraction of labour migrants to Ukraine to support its labour market demands in the context of reconstruction.

Objective 2.5: Partner countries are informed and use ETF contextualised knowledge

Foster the uptake of products and services delivered by the ETF thus encouraging partner countries to use best practices and opportunities to advance towards inclusive, innovative, and sustainable lifelong learning systems that ensure high-quality outcomes.

Overall Outcome

Countries are informed and use contextualised knowledge to progress towards inclusive and sustainable lifelong learning systems that deliver quality outcomes.

Indicators	Target in 2025
<ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Percentage of stakeholders that appreciated ETFs input▪ Percentage of the ETF's target audience who used ETF knowledge in the past year (operational KPI)	<ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ ≥ 80%▪ ≥ 75% (annex X)

Resources: EUR 1,705,050 (Budget: EUR 587,000 and FTEs: EUR 1,118,050)

2.6 Country intelligence and facilitation of stakeholders’ engagement and system change

The aim is to increase ETF’s influence as well as to facilitate long-term cooperation and system change by engaging ecosystem actors through exchange, in peer learning, and via coaching. This includes individuals, groups, or organisations that are involved in, affected by, or have an interest in lifelong learning or specific aspects/components thereof, thereby facilitating collaborative efforts in policy development and implementation in a partner country context or regional perspective. The wider ecosystem includes the HCD stakeholders, including governmental, social partners and non-governmental players, as well as international actors, with a particular emphasis of Team Europe actors.

The provision of timely, high quality and evidence-based lifelong learning policy advice and its associated implementation support is done in line with EU guidance and best practice. These embed the principles of EU policies such as the EU Skills Agenda, the EU Council Recommendation on VET and the Osnabrück Declaration, but also global commitments as reflected in the UNESCO Marrakech Framework for Action and the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SGDs), such as SDG 4 on quality education, SDG 8 on decent work and economic growth, and SDG 10 on reduced inequalities.

The ETF supports the transformation of education and training systems into lifelong learning systems through direct policy advice to partner countries and advice to the EU assistance and cooperation approaches. Specifically, the ETF bases such policy advice on several key actions. First, through the continuous monitoring of trends, developments and system performance regarding human capital development and lifelong learning. Second, by reviewing/assessing policies which influence that performance and developments in a lifelong learning perspective. A set of relevant indicators are collected, analysed and published to enable both quantitative and qualitative monitoring and assessment of the performance of VET systems in partner countries as per the EU recommendations related to VET system development. In this regard, the ETF relies on the EU acquis on statistics and will work closely with Eurostat on indicators for the Western Balkans.

Therefore, the monitoring of development trends will continue in 2025 through the collection of quantitative and qualitative information on a regular basis. The scope of the main source of monitoring information collection, the Torino Process Analytical Framework Level 1, covers a more specific and strategic range of aspects related to lifelong learning and the contribution of IVET and CVET to the establishment and maintenance of lifelong learning systems as per the ETF 2027 Strategy.

The assessment/review of policies (Torino Process Level 2) as well as the rapid education diagnostic (RED) will be made by using the differentiation principle, which means they will be implemented wherever it fits a need to support policy advice either for national or EU policy purposes, and depending on resources made available. These processes should build on a country's national guidance and procedures, according to ownership and alignment principles.

Building on a series of observations, in 2025 the ETF will be strengthening the use of networks as source of information and intelligence. In addition, it will seek to strengthen cooperation of network members to identify indicators and stable data sources in new fields of work in partner countries.

In terms of further developing country intelligence, in 2025 the ETF will continuously gather, consolidate, and disseminate knowledge gained through the collection and interpretation of monitoring evidence on the context and performance of education and training systems in partner countries, in support of personal development and employability of learners in a lifelong perspective. This will be based on the continuous development and innovation in monitoring the results of education and training systems in support of lifelong learning.

This includes the maintenance and further development of robust and innovative monitoring methods to gather evidence and analyse developments in partner countries, such as through KIESE, Torino Process, and Osnabruck/post Osnabruck monitoring. It also includes the regular, comprehensive yet targeted and innovative reporting on findings, with the purpose of reaching, informing, and influencing a wider audience of decision-makers, researchers, international partners, and practitioners with stakes in the improvement of education, training and the employability of learners.

In addition, in 2025 the ETF will also develop policy reviews to contextualise evidence and provide advice in support of lifelong learning. This includes the delivery, on demand, of contextualised monitoring data, which connects evidence to its policy interpretation and offers analysis of their effectiveness and impact in the domain of education and training in support of lifelong learning. The goal is to ensure that educational strategies and interventions are effectively aligned with current and emerging needs in partner countries, and that they are aligned with EU initiatives and priorities.

On qualifications, in 2025 policy advice activities to PCs will be delivered upon request in the prioritised areas of digitalisation of qualification systems, validation of non-formal and informal learning, micro-credentials and flexible learning pathways, as well as recognition of qualifications.

Under its work for excellence, the ETF will continue implementing its annual collection of intelligence from CoVEs, allowing for monitoring of evolution in all dimensions of excellence through a specific and now consolidated targeted group of stakeholders.

Finally, to further build country intelligence, foster policy uptake and facilitate both system change and stakeholder engagement, in 2025 the ETF will organise peer visits by the Quality Assurance Forum in two countries, and will deploy a Quality Assurance (QA) diagnostic tool (developed and tested in 2024) for wide uptake and usage by QA forum members, which will be further employed by other ETF policy advice activities.

Objective 2.6: Country intelligence and facilitation of stakeholders' engagement and system change

Increase ETF's influence and ability to facilitate long-term cooperation and system change by engaging ecosystem actors in peer learning, and via coaching, thus facilitating collaborative efforts in policy development and implementation.

Overall Outcome

Leveraging country intelligence, policy uptake and the facilitation of actors' engagement and system change in partner countries.

Indicators	Target in 2025
<ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Number and typology of stakeholders' engagement in ETF activities (operational KPI)▪ Number of accepted invitations to external events and/or debates▪ Uptake of ETF flagship products	<ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ 7,000 / 80% primary stakeholders (annex X)▪ ≥ 100▪ ≥ 75%

Resources: EUR 2,079,000 (Budget: EUR 722,000 and FTEs: EUR 1,357,000)

3. Horizontal Activity Areas

The horizontal activity areas are related to how the ETF delivers its operational activity areas and extra-subsidy projects, thus maximising its resources for impact, complementarity and outreach. These are key to enable the ETF to build its anticipatory capacity, agility, resilience and adaptivity, as well as to attract and retain talent.

3.1 Increased organisational readiness

The aim is to expand organisational readiness by putting in place measures and initiatives to expand institutional efficiency, agility, resilience, sustainability and digital maturity, adaptability and innovation, forward-looking capacity and ability to nurture talent and wellbeing.

In the area of institutional development, the ETF identifies projects and actions that enable the organisation to improve performance and efficiency ensuring compliance with EC regulatory requirements. The internal control monitoring framework as well as external audits and evaluations are guiding tools in this endeavour.

Furthermore, in 2025 the ETF will continue the foresight process initiated in 2023 following the mid-term review of its 2027 strategy. The aim is to help the ETF to look beyond its current multi-annual programming cycle in a systemic way to ensure it remains fit for the future. Most importantly, it should equip the ETF to embed an anticipatory culture in its strategic development and to continue building staff futures literacy following the first pilots in 2023 and in 2024.

In 2025, beyond landing on the ETF vision 2040 and developing a new strategy post-2027 (2028 – 2034 in line with the next MFF), the ETF foresight endeavour should also support the identification of skills required to position the agency as an innovative and pioneering organisation, as well as relevant

technological developments, such as AI. Ultimately, this process should enable the ETF to deepen existing institutional arrangements to liaise with Commission services, international organisations and partner countries, building on the results of the 2022 IAS audit on ETF coordination and cooperation with EC services and the 2023-2024 IAS audit on digitalisation.

In addition, the ETF will continue to implement its digital transformation process that started in 2020 with the goal of strengthening its digital maturity in line with its strategy 2027. This resulted in a Digital Transformation Strategy (2021) and a roadmap for its implementation. A set of key pillars have been identified as drivers for the transformation process, namely: 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 improved efficiency of ETF functions and underlying processes through the application of digital solutions and upskilling staff with 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. In this digitalisation journey, the ETF collaborates closely with other EU services and agencies seeking mutual reinforcement.

In 2025, the ETF will prioritise the implementation of recommendations of the 2023-2024 IAS audit on digitalisation, with a focus on an update of the strategy to encompass both digital and IT developments. The review of the digital governance framework and the strengthening of the digital change management actions will focus on the expansion of staff's digital literacy and close collaboration with other EU services and agencies seeking mutual reinforcement.

Investment in higher levels of IT and cybersecurity will be sought to further align ETF with the new EU Regulations. The ETF will ensure compliance with the deliverables foreseen in the Regulation with external support and seeking to reinforce its internal team. Moreover, the digitalisation of knowledge products and expanding engagement with different communities in its partner countries will allow for contemporary products and services meeting the requirements of the digital era.

It is paramount to highlight that, in this context, the ETF will also advance its journey towards sustainability by having a systemic approach to its green, social and economic pillars. This will build on the environmental management system set in 2020-21, as well as the EMAS and ISO 14001 certification obtained in 2021 and successfully renewed in the following years.

In 2025, the ETF will define an action plan to accompany its new environmental policy approved in 2024. This will include, among others, strengthening its governance framework with the transition to the GHG protocol, optimising business travelling and implementing green solutions for the provision of gas and electricity.

Under the economic pillar, in 2025 the ETF will mainstream green procurement, implement a lifecycle costing methodology and advance towards socially responsible procurement. Under the social pillar, the ETF will implement the diversity and inclusion Charter approved in 2023, and will develop targeted actions to expand its attractiveness.

Efficiency efforts will continue via cooperation with other EU Agencies, either through the identification of additional shared services (the ETF continues its SLA with EU-OSHA to share accounting services) or by sharing good practices. Bilateral cooperation with sister agencies and other agencies will continue based on ongoing identified needs, thus meeting requirements outlined in the external evaluation results of the DG EMPL cluster agencies. Furthermore, the roll out of SYSPER, ARES,

PPMT and internal developed systems such as CARMEN (project management and corporate reporting system) will further contribute to efficiency gains.

In the area of internal controls and external audits, the ETF will implement the Strategic Audit Plan 2025-2027 with the identified audit topics stemming from the risk analysis carried out by IAS in 2024.

Objective 3.1: Increased organisational readiness

Expand organisational readiness.

Overall Outcome

Increased readiness due to ability to advance institutional efficiency, agility, resilience, sustainability and digital maturity, adaptability and innovation, forward-looking capacity and ability to nurture talent and wellbeing.

Indicators	Target in 2025
<ul style="list-style-type: none">Compliance, efficiency and effectiveness monitored through the Directors' benchmarking KPIsETF sustainability and digital maturity monitored through EMAS and Digitalisation indicators	<ul style="list-style-type: none">See KPIs in Annex XIndicators and targets to be set after pilot in 2025

Resources: EUR 1,763,000 (Budget: EUR 170,000 and FTEs: EUR 1,593,000)

3.2 Increased reach and capacity to influence and mobilise key players

Capitalizing on ETF's 30 years of experience in building long standing relationships in an ecosystem of HCD development actors in an EU external engagement perspective, the ETF will further articulate its 'brokering' capacity around its strategic goals. It will do so by enhancing the coordination for a corporate stakeholder management, implement a priority and opportunity assessment approach for partnerships and extra subsidy projects, trace partnerships in a more centrally coordinated way, and work out towards a focus on impact and a wider growth approach when it comes to implementing extra subsidy projects. Such a coordinated approach will guide the ETF towards an impact-driven engagement with its wider ecosystem and assist its strategic positioning, while managing the ETF reputation at large.

In 2025 it will focus on:

- Analysis of the HCD landscape and revisiting ETF's partnerships towards its strategic goals and impact orientation.
- Internal development of 'brokering' capacity in view of maximising engagement within the ETF ecosystems vis-a-vis its strategic goals.
- Further develop an ETF growth approach towards maximising ETF's contribution to strategic goals and impact.

The ETF intends to align its communication to its new set of strategic goals to boost ETFs visibility and adapt its communication style to stakeholders' needs. The aim is to increase ETF's reach and capacity to influence, as well as engage and mobilise key players via tailored messages and communication channels, which are key to delivering the ETF's mandate. By tailoring messages to different audiences and multiplying their reach, the ETF will influence key actors in policy cycles at national, EU and international levels.

Building upon its 2021-27 Communication Strategy, and in accordance with core priorities, objectives and the EU and international context, ETF communication activities in 2025 will focus on five overarching themes:

- Building inclusive lifelong learning systems
- Evidence for skills development
- AI and the future of skills / future of labour markets
- Migration and skills
- Educators and teachers

In addition, the ETF will enhance internal communication channels and tools to promote engagement and alignment. The ETF plays a unique role in promoting education and labour market development in partner countries. Its influence aligns with the EU's broader mission to nurture stability and prosperity beyond its borders.

In terms of target audiences, communication will aim to engage:

- EU institutions, especially the European Commission, European Parliament and EU Delegations
- Partner country stakeholders (e.g. ministries, public authorities etc.)
- Practitioners like teachers, trainers and guidance counsellors
- Social partners including employers' organisations and trade unions
- Civil society organisations
- International organisations, such as the UN, ILO, OECD, UNESCO and IFIs
- Media
- Private sector and businesses, particularly SMEs
- Academia including universities, think tanks and research institutes

To achieve these goals, the ETF will employ a wide array of communication channels, including digital platforms, social media, audiovisual content, publications, press and media relations, the website, and the OpenSpace knowledge-sharing community:

- Strategic campaigns on priority topics to coincide with relevant EU and international events
- High-level events, speeches and presentations to convey key messages
- Targeted information products like brochures and factsheets for specific audiences
- Website and online community (OpenSpace) overhaul to improve messaging on ETF priorities and visual identity
- Social media and audio-visual products to reinforce corporate and campaign messaging
- Media outreach and engagement with journalists
- Partnerships and networks to extend the communication reach

The shift to digital communication has gained momentum in recent years, significantly expanding the volume and diversity of online and social media interactions. Innovations such as the ETF podcast series, regular live broadcasts, and the ETF's online newsletter will continue to contribute to this evolving communication landscape.

Stakeholders are a key ETF asset. The ETF builds relationships and sustains engagement with diverse stakeholders in partner countries, including government, social partners, civil society, and the private sector. The ETF also cooperates with relevant international and regional stakeholders.

The objective is to support and engage stakeholders, while positioning the ETF as a trusted partner by making expertise and knowledge accessible. This involves better tailoring communication products

towards stakeholder needs. Monitoring engagement levels and reach will enable adjustments to optimise impact.

The ETF can continue to further systematise consultation with partners to respond effectively to their needs. Communication plays a critical role in ensuring outreach and conveying key messages on ETF objectives, actions and impact.

By packaging expertise into accessible formats, developing digital platforms, conducting press outreach, and sustaining stakeholder relationships, the ETF aims to:

- Increase awareness of its unique role and knowledge in human capital development
- Highlight its convening power in bringing together diverse stakeholders
- Strengthen its brand identity around key trends in skills development, in line with the principles of social fairness and inclusion
- Showcase its impact in supporting partner countries to deal with major geopolitical and socio-economic challenges

In this context, priorities for 2025 include:

- Engagement with stakeholders and the public through a blend of state-of-the-art formats and new digital channels to ensure interaction and impact
- Communication campaigns on emerging issues such as those listed above (e.g. green skills and artificial intelligence), addressing evolving skills needs for geopolitical challenges and the role of 21st-century educators
- Build closer ties with stakeholders and integrate engaging themes such as foresight in education

The ETF will focus on communicating results and impact, while also positioning itself as a thought leader. By making communication more tangible using stories and multimedia, the ETF seeks to engage stakeholders and position itself as a trusted expertise organisation working on human capital development. An important communication focus in the way of working is the partnership approach of the ETF strategy 2027.

Objective 3.2: Increased reach and capacity to influence and mobilise key players

Increase ETF's reach and capacity to influence, engage and mobilise key players via tailored messages and communication channels.

Overall Outcome

Increased reach and capacity to influence, engage and mobilise key players via partnerships, tailored messages and communication channels.

Indicators	Target in 2025
<ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Number and typology of stakeholders' engagement in ETF activities (operational KPI)▪ Percentage of project actions implemented in partnership▪ Number of extra-subsidy activities implemented leading to increased reach	<ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ 7,000 / 80% primary stakeholders (annex X)▪ Indicator and target to be set after pilot in 2025▪ 4

Resources: EUR 878,300 (Budget: EUR 365,000 and FTEs: EUR 513,300)

4. Extra-subsidy projects

The aim is to expand the EU's reach and impact by building synergies based on the ETF's thematic and geographic dual expertise. This is key to respond to relevant requests supported by the EC and Member States, paying particular attention to the Team Europe approach.

In this context, in 2025 the ETF will have four extra-subsidy projects in place, including the African Continental Qualifications Framework (ACQF II), Darya – Dialogue and Action for Resourceful Youth in Central Asia, the International Dimension of Centres of Vocational Excellence, and a project Supporting Education Reforms and Skills in the EaP countries. Another extra-subsidy project may include an agreement with the European Investment Bank on a facility for gender-responsive and inclusive investments in the EU neighbourhood and possibly others.

4.1 African Continental Qualifications Framework (ACQF II)

The project aims to contribute to skills mobility, comparability of qualifications and recognition of qualifications. Ultimately, it will contribute to improved mobility and lifelong learning opportunities for youth, as a result of enhanced comparability and transparency of qualifications. Also, to the recognition of skills and diplomas, to improved mutual trust and to information sharing between qualification frameworks and systems in the continent.

Financed under the Neighbourhood, Development and International Cooperation Instrument (NDICI), the African Continental Qualifications Framework (ACQF) is the largest qualifications framework globally, with the ACQF II project supporting its implementation. The project builds on the ACQF digital qualifications platform, the referencing of NQFs and the ACQF, and the development of common qualifications profiles.

Innovative topics permeate the project activities and outputs, such as greening of NQFs and ACQF as well as the development of a common approach for micro-credentials. Deliverables of the project include capacity development and networking on African national qualifications frameworks at national and regional levels, support to countries for developing and implementing of NQFs and related policies, and implementation capacity of ACQF.

In 2025, priorities include:

- Qualifications and Credentials Platform (QCP): the system of databases developed for QCP and demonstrated in December 2024 will be operationalised and data on qualifications integrated in the national virtual databases, and interoperability at continental level will be enabled. Adequate training for country database administrators and technical staff will be conducted, based on the QCP Handbook.
- Support to the network of African NQFs.
- Country specific activities related to development of NQF, RPL and Credit Accumulation and Transfer Systems: continuation of activities started in 2024 with priority countries.
- Referencing to ACQF: continuation of activities started in 2024 with priority countries. Publication of completed referencing reports on ACQF website.
- Cooperation with Addis Recognition Convention, EQF and other networks: continuation of cooperation in the form of reports, technical papers, and information-sharing.

- ACQF as a game changer: peer learning activities between countries on lessons, benefits and the way forward.

Objective 4.1: African Continental Qualifications Framework (ACQF II)

Contribute to improved mobility and lifelong learning opportunities for African youth, through enhanced comparability and transparency of qualifications, recognition of skills and diplomas, improved mutual trust and information-sharing between qualifications frameworks and systems on the continent.

Overall Outcome

Improved mobility and lifelong learning opportunities for African youth via capacity development and networking, support in development and implementation of NQFs and related policies, and implementation capacity of ACQF, including in referencing of NQFs to ACQF.

Key deliverables	Indicators
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Capacity development and networking at national and regional level ▪ Development and implementation of NQFs and related policies ▪ Development of governance capacity of ACQF ▪ Establishment of digital continental qualifications and credentials platform ▪ Deployed referencing of NQFs to ACQF ▪ Implementation of RPL campaign ▪ Development of common profiles of qualifications 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Number of continental training workshops. In 2025: 2 continental webinars and 2 workshops ▪ Number of priority countries and Regional Economic Communities (REC) engaged. In 2025: 12 countries and 2 REC ▪ Development of the Qualifications and Credentials Platform: in 2025: 12 priority countries collect data in the national layer of the QCP ▪ Number of NQFs continuing referencing to ACQF. In 2025: 8 ▪ Number of countries involved in RPL campaign. In 2025: 15 ▪ Number of countries approving RPL Policy developed with ACQF-II team in 2024. In 2025: 3 ▪ Number of common profiles. In 2025: 1 methodological package completed ▪ Number of involved countries in working groups. In 2025: at least 8 countries

Extra-subsidy resources: €5 000 000 (between April 2023 and December 2026)

4.2 Dialogue and Action for Resourceful Youth in Central Asia (DARYA)

The DARYA project promotes the quality and inclusiveness of education, training and employment systems in Central Asia, as well as participatory and inclusive dialogue and cooperation mechanisms at national and regional level. Financed under the Neighbourhood, Development and International Cooperation Instrument (NDICI), the project covers activities at national and regional or multi-country level including Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan.

The five year project (June 2022- June 2027) aims to put in place measures that support inclusive and labour market relevant skills development opportunities for young people in the region. It entails a system approach, considering immediate and medium-term (five year) development requirements that support improved skills provision, including also enhanced cooperation among countries in order to support regional integration and development.

The project is articulated around three thematic areas – evidence on education and training outcomes and skills demand, qualification system development and competence-based teaching and learning – with a variety of mechanisms, including familiarisation with new topics and methods, peer learning and capacity building, piloting and upscaling or mainstreaming of new approaches and methods. A transversal working area supports inter-action and exchanges among DARYA partners within a country, as well as among countries in the sphere of the three thematic areas and via yearly dialogue at policy level involving the vice-ministers of education and labour in the DARYA High Level Group.

2025 marks the mid-term of the project with substantial pilot project results becoming available, which will enhance opportunities for peer learning among countries and will allow to explore interests of the five countries for cooperation and joint developments during the second half of DARYA. Among others 2025 will see the results and reflection and action to support the upscaling or mainstreaming of the first series of pilot actions initiated as of late 2023. These include the development and testing of graduate tracking in Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan and the updating (and testing) for an existing method in Kyrgyzstan and the development of a sector specific employer survey in Kazakhstan and a nation wide employer survey in Kyrgyzstan. In the sphere of teaching and learning, upscaling activities will focus on the use of the SCAFFOLD card deck, an innovative tool for educators to support the development of key competences for all learners, in all five Central Asian countries with a focus on integration into continuous professional development and initial teacher training.

In 2025 new pilot actions will be initiated. In alignment with the Global Gateway priority for Transport Connectivity and the development of the Trans-Caspia Transport Corridor, DARYA will support the identification of future skills needs in the transport and logistics sector in a multi-country perspective. DARYA will aim at cooperating with development partners working in this sphere, such as EBRD, in order to involve both public and private sector companies. In the sphere of qualifications, piloting actions will start on the development of multi-country occupational profiles, national qualifications as well as the validation of informal and non-formal learning. In the sphere of teaching and learning, DARYA will explore self-assessment tools as a means for education and training development.

Peer learning will continue as an integral part of DARYA in 2025, covering issues such as the monitoring of the demand for professional skills and Labour Market Information Systems, active labour market policies and youth school-to-work transition, active labour market policies for people with disabilities, improving mutual understanding and transparency of qualifications in Central Asian countries (including via Inventories of National Qualifications Frameworks in Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Uzbekistan), the use of self-assessment as a development tool for education and training, and means to make educator professional development more flexible and accessible.

Objective 4.2: Dialogue and Action for Resourceful Youth in Central Asia (DARYA)

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.

Overall Outcome

Improved employability of youth in Central Asia by fostering the quality and inclusiveness of education, training and employment systems in the region, as well as participatory and inclusive dialogue and cooperation mechanisms at national and regional levels.

Key deliverables	Indicators
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> National statistical data from national statistical offices and/or data from tracer studies, employers surveys and similar Analyses of education and training outcomes and skills needs Stakeholder-driven flexible and permeable approaches to qualifications Flexible and inclusive teaching and learning approaches Jointly designed and agreed governance mechanisms, learning programmes, sharing tools and piloting of new tools 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Number of countries with new skills needs analysis methods, tools, procedures and capabilities developed and piloted (Year 5): at least 2 countries. Number of countries with new/updated measures/tools on qualifications developed and piloted (Year 5): at least 3 countries. Number of countries with a new/improved teaching and learning methods developed and piloted (Year 5): at least 3 countries. Number of countries with dialogue mechanism agreed, including roles and responsibilities (Year 1): at least 3 countries. Number of countries with agreement on regional roadmap for strategic dialogue and cooperation (Year 5): at least 3 countries.

Extra-subsidy resources: €10 million for 60 months from mid-June 2022 to mid-June 2027

4.3 International Dimension of Centres of Vocational Excellence

The project aims to support the International Dimension of Centres of Vocational Excellence by:

- Facilitating knowledge sharing and support to VET providers in the EU, the ETF partner countries and beyond, including those interested in enhancing their vocational excellence.
- Guiding the implementation of the International Self-Assessment Tool for Centres of Vocational Excellence (ISATCOVE).
- Piloting of the Vocational Excellence Certificate to enable the recognition of vocational excellence.

This extra-subsidy project is a Service-Level Agreement with DG EMPL that builds on previous ETF cooperation on the implementation of initiatives supporting the international dimension of the CoVEs initiative. It is composed of three work packages:

- CoVEs support service – mobilising partners for action;
- The self-assessment tool – assessing and guiding vocational excellence; and
- Valuing and recognising vocational excellence – the quality award.

The Internationalising Vocational Excellence project will be completed by April 2025, and the priorities in the first quarter of 2025 include:

- Finalisation of the support services, including:
 - ✓ Final guidelines and coaching materials for the implementation of ISATCOVE based on the experiences during the different implementation waves.
 - ✓ Finalisation and dissemination of the mapping of resources and networks against the ISATCOVE criteria.
 - ✓ Finalisation and dissemination of a 'cookbook' on vocational excellence.
 - ✓ Finalisation and dissemination of two knowledge packages created around priority topics.
 - ✓ A winter camp on vocational excellence to support peer learning.
 - ✓ A web portal as the entry point for information and resources on vocational excellence.
- Third wave of implementation of ISATCOVE.
- Finalisation and dissemination of the study on the ISATCOVE results.
- Finalisation of the piloting of the label with 4 centres of vocational excellence.
- Final conference (peer-learning activity).

Objective 4.3: International Dimension of Centres of Vocational Excellence

Support the International Dimension of Centres of Vocational Excellence: building a strong international cooperation.

Overall Outcome

Enhanced international cooperation within the field of Vocational Excellence via the implementation of ISATCOVE, the piloting of a Vocational Excellence Certificate, the dissemination of resources on vocational excellence, and via knowledge sharing and peer-learning events.

Key deliverables	Indicators
<ul style="list-style-type: none">Knowledge development and sharingNetworking and capacity buildingInformation and support to CoVEsEvidence and analysis of findings of the self-assessment tool to support policy advicePiloting of the Vocational Excellence Certificate	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Number of centres that participate in the implementation of ISATCOVE. In 2025: 10 centres (totalising over 80 centres throughout the project)Number of online webinars on topics related to the ISATCOVE criteria. In 2025: 2 online webinars.Number of participants at in-presence peer learning activities. In 2025: a total of 100 participants (in the Second IntVE conference and at the Winter Camp)Number of visitors on the DG EMPL website on Vocational Excellence. In 2025: app. 400 visitors per month.Pilot of the Vocational Excellence Certificate. In 2025: completion of the piloting.

Extra-subsidy resources: €1 500 000 (from 4 April 2023 until 4 April 2025)

4.4 Supporting Education Reforms and Skills in the Eastern Partnership Region

The aim of the EU programme supporting Education Reforms & Skills in the Eastern Partnership (EaP) region (the Programme) is to enhance governance and management within the education sector of the Eastern Partnership countries. This shall be done by improving the quality, equity, and relevance of education to benefit the citizens of these countries, as well as by involving EU Delegations and promoting dialogue with national authorities and stakeholders. These should ensure that the recommended reforms and actions are effectively implemented, thus contributing to positive changes in the education sector during the Programme implementation and beyond.

To attain this objective, the Programme seeks to improve governance of the EaP education systems, from pre-primary until tertiary, including VET systems and adult learning. Also, to strengthen capacities in evidence-based planning, management and performance monitoring in the education sector.

To deliver these objectives, the Programme is structured in three pillars: i) diagnoses of the national education sectors completed (maximum 5); ii) strengthened capacities of the national administrations/institutions in governance; and iii) increased training and peer learning opportunities, including financing and planning of education.

The ETF will implement activities under the three pillars in parallel ensuring complementarity, flexibility and engagement of all countries from the outset. Furthermore, the implementation process will ensure complementarity with other EU funded bilateral and regional programmes, as well as with projects implemented by development partners such as International Finance Institutions (IFIs), UN agencies and EU Member States' agencies. This approach will contribute to strengthening the capacities and policy processes of the EaP countries' education systems by combining country specific actions with those at the regional level by creating a platform for mutual learning and networking across the region.

Besides partner country stakeholders, the EU Delegations in the EaP countries will play a key role in programme implementation. The ETF will deploy its capacity and expertise to successfully implement all activities of the Programme and build further partnerships with other development partners active in supporting education sector reforms in the EaP and education administrations of the EU Member States as relevant.

In 2025, the implementation of pillar 1 will focus on completing the diagnostic assessments launched in Armenia, Moldova and Georgia. In terms of capacity development, the ETF will identify needs throughout the implementation of the RED methodology in 3 countries and in consultation with country stakeholders of Moldova, Georgia and Armenia. Azerbaijan and Ukraine will also be supported in country specific capacity building activities, which will be jointly identified with national authorities. The capacity development needs assessment will be conducted in parallel to the implementation of the diagnoses and they will leverage the insights gained and the feedback of stakeholders. Two thematic peer learning events for all countries will be organised in cooperation with the EU Member States.

Objective 4.4: Supporting Education Reforms and Skills in the Eastern Partnership Region

Enhance governance and management within the education sector of the Eastern Partnership countries.

Overall Outcome

Enhance governance and management within the education sector of the EaP countries by improving the quality, equity and relevance of education to benefit the citizens of EaP countries, as well as by involving EUDs and promoting dialogue with national authorities and stakeholders.

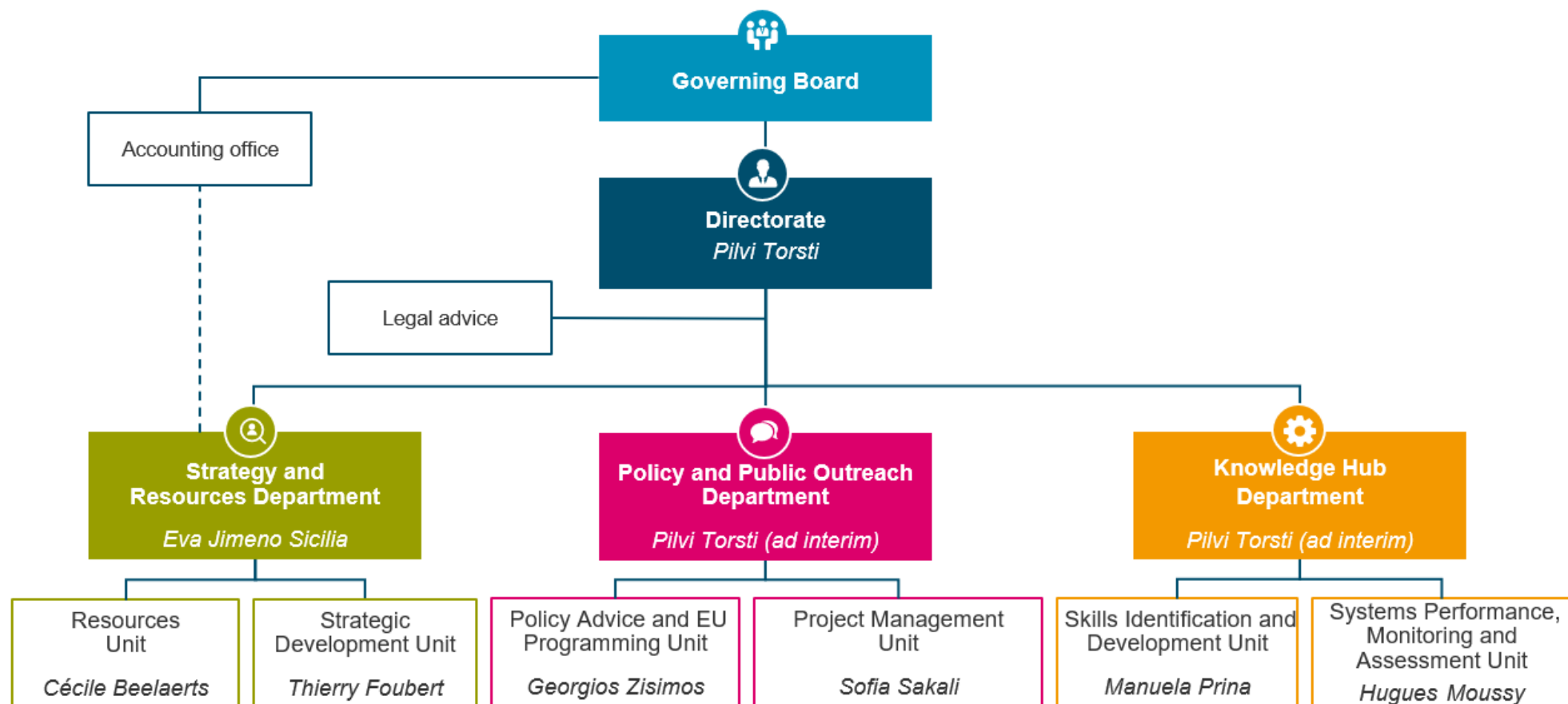
Key deliverables	Indicators
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 3 diagnostic assessments completed in Armenia, Georgia and Moldova Capacity development roadmaps for 5 countries designed Capacity development activities started in all countries Two thematic peer learning events organised for all countries 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Number of diagnostic assessments carried out. In 2025: 3 diagnostic assessments. Number of capacity development roadmaps designed. In 2025: 5 capacity development roadmaps designed. Findings and recommendations of diagnostic assessments feeding into policy design and implementation of the EaP countries. In 2025: at least 20% of findings / recommendations feeding into policy design / implementation of the EaP countries. Number of stakeholders involved in capacity development. In 2025: at least 60% of invited stakeholders involved in capacity development. Number of regional training sessions and workshops in presence & online. In 2025: at least 2 regional training sessions / workshops in presence & online organised. Number of stakeholders trained in education policy making and performance monitoring. In 2025: at least 60% of invited stakeholders trained in education policy making and performance monitoring.

Extra-subsidy resources: € 1.250.000 for 12 months from 01/2025 to 12/2025

ANNEXES

Number	Title
Annex I	Organisation chart – December 2023
Annex II	Resource allocation per activity 2025
Annex III	Financial resources 2025-27 Table 1 – Revenue Table 2 – Expenditure Table 3 – Budget outturn and cancellation of appropriations Table 4 – Global budgetary envelope for procurement
Annex IV	Human resources (quantitative) Table 1 – Staff population and its evolution; Overview of all categories of staff A. Statutory staff and SNE B. Additional external staff expected to be financed from grant, contribution or service-level agreements C. Other staff Table 2 – Multi -annual staff policy plan 2023-27 Table 3 – Recruitment forecasts 2025
Annex V	Human resources (qualitative) A. Recruitment policy B. Appraisal of performance and reclassification/promotions Table 1 – Reclassification of temporary staff/promotion of officials Table 2 – Reclassification of contract staff C. Implementing rules foreseen for adoption 2025 D. Gender balance Table 1 – Data on 31/12/2023 statutory staff (only officials, AT and AC) Table 2 – Data regarding gender evolution over 5 years of the Middle and Senior management E. Geographical balance Table 1 – Data on 31/12/2023 Table 2 – Evolution over 5 years of the most represented nationality in the Agency F. Schooling
Annex VI	Environment management
Annex VII	Buildings
Annex VIII	Privileges and immunities
Annex IX	Evaluations
Annex X	Strategy for organisational management and internal control systems
Annex XI	Plan for grant, contribution or service-level agreements
Annex XII	Strategy for cooperation with third countries and/or international organisations
Annex XIII	Collaboration with other EU Agencies
Annex XIV	Planned requests from EU services 2025
Annex XV	Cross-checking conditions for ETF operation in countries and regions

Annex I – ETF Organisation chart (31 December 2023)



Organisational structure - 31.12.2023	CA	SNE	LA	TA*	Total	Vacant posit.	TOTAL
Policy and Public Outreach Department (PUB)							
PUB core (Manager, Strat. Comm. and sup. staff)	4			3	7	1	8
Policy Advice and EU Programming Unit	1			22	23		23
Project Management Unit	13		1	6	20		20
Sub-Total PUB	18	0	1	31	50	1	51
Knowledge Hub Department (KHD)							
KHD core (Manager and sup. staff)				0	0		0
Skills Identification and Development Unit	5			15	20		20
Systems Performance, Monitoring and Assessment Unit	2			15	17	1	18
Sub-Total KHD	7	0	0	30	37	1	38
Strategy and Resources Department (SRD)							
SRD Core (Manager, Facilities and sup. staff)	1			2	3		3
Accounting					0	1	1
Strategic Development Unit	4			11	15		15
Resources Unit	8			9	17	1	18
Sub-Total SRD	13	0	0	22	35	2	37
Director's office (DIR)							
DIR Core	2			2	4		4
Legal Advice				1	1		1
Sub-Total DIR	2	0	0	3	5	0	5
Total	40	0	1	86	127	4	131
Vacant positions*	2			2	4		
Total including vacant positions	42	0	1	88	131		

*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.

Annex II – Resource allocation per activity 2025

by Strategic Goal	Staff	Budget (m€)	%
Global knowledge hub for human capital development	24.95	5.9	24.7%
Asset for the EU and Member States	27.62	6.0	25.1%
Support and long-term reference for partner countries	42.37	7.2	29.9%
Reference EU agency	36.06	4.9	20.3%
TOTAL	131	€24m	100.0%

by Activity area	Staff	Budget (m€)	%
2.1 Contextualised and anticipatory knowledge development	13.48	3.4	14.0%
2.2 Innovative approaches to knowledge development for evidence-based policy making	11.46	2.6	10.7%
2.3 EU external policies in the area of HCD	19.24	4.5	18.8%
2.4 Active anticipation and shaping of demand for input to EU external policies	8.38	1.5	6.3%
2.5 Partner countries are informed and use ETF contextualised knowledge	19.14	3.3	13.7%
2.6 Country intelligence and facilitation of stakeholders' engagement and system change	23.23	3.9	16.2%
3.1 Increased organisational readiness	27.27	3.2	13.5%
3.2 Increased reach and capacity to influence and mobilise key players	8.79	1.6	6.7%
TOTAL	131	€24m	100.0%

by Service	Staff	Budget (m€)	%
Knowledge hub	38.23	7.9	32.9%
Monitoring and assessment	25.12	5.0	21.0%
Policy advice	67.65	11.1	46.1%
TOTAL	131	€24m	100.0%

Extra-subsidy projects	ETF Contribution	External assigned revenue (€) (work for 2025)	Notes
DARYA	450 000 (FTE)	2 000 000	10m€ for 5 years, started 2023
ACQF II	210 000 (FTE)	1 750 000	5m€ for 4 years, started 2023
COVES SLA 2	179 930 (FTE)	1 500 000	1.5m€ for 2 years, started 2023
EGYPT		500 000	0.5m€/1 year starting 2024
EIB		1 000 000	1m€ for 3 years, possibly starting 2024 (still under negotiation)
EaP		1 200 000	2.5m€ for 3 years, starting 2024

By Region/Country	Staff	Budget (m€)	%
Enlargement countries	68.14	12.48	52.02%
South-East Europe and Türkiye	41.95	7.7	32.0%
Albania	6.17	1.1	4.7%
Bosnia and Herzegovina	6.55	1.2	5.0%
Kosovo	6.24	1.1	4.8%
Montenegro	6.05	1.1	4.6%
North Macedonia	5.96	1.1	4.6%
Serbia	5.75	1.1	4.4%
Türkiye	5.22	1.0	4.0%
Southern and Eastern Mediterranean	36.54	6.7	27.9%
Algeria	4.03	0.7	3.1%
Egypt	5.81	1.1	4.4%
Israel	3.17	0.6	2.4%
Jordan	4.04	0.7	3.1%
Lebanon	3.30	0.6	2.5%
Libya	3.16	0.6	2.4%
Morocco	4.60	0.8	3.5%
Palestine	3.73	0.7	2.8%
Tunisia	4.72	0.9	3.6%
Eastern partnership	34.58	6.3	26.4%
Armenia	4.95	0.9	3.8%
Azerbaijan	3.44	0.6	2.6%
Belarus	0.00	0.0	0.0%
Georgia	4.84	0.9	3.7%
Moldova	6.57	1.2	5.0%
Ukraine	14.77	2.7	11.3%
Central Asia	15.42	2.8	11.8%
Kazakhstan	3.19	0.6	2.4%
Kyrgyzstan	3.19	0.6	2.4%
Tajikistan	3.02	0.6	2.3%
Turkmenistan	3.02	0.6	2.3%
Uzbekistan	3.02	0.6	2.3%
Cooperation in other areas	2.51	0.5	2.0%
TOTAL	131	€24m	100.0%

Annex III – Financial resources 2025-27

Table 1 – Revenue

REVENUES	2024	2025
	Revenues estimated by the agency	Budget Forecast
EU contribution	23 445 108	24 020 309
Other Revenue	5 039 000	4 146 000
TOTAL REVENUES	28 484 108	28 166 309

REVENUES	General revenues						
	Executed 2023	Estimated by the agency 2024	2025		VAR 2024/2023 (%)	Envisaged 2026	Envisaged 2027
			Agency request	Budget forecast			
1 REVENUE FROM FEES AND CHARGES							
2 EU CONTRIBUTION	22 627 956	23 445 108	24 125 000	24 020 309	+2.4%	24 500 000	24 990 000
- Of which assigned revenues deriving from previous years' surpluses	93 864	62 209	82 675	82 675	+32%		
3 THIRD COUNTRIES CONTRIBUTION (incl. EEA/EFTA and candidate countries)							
- Of which EEA/EFTA (excl. Switzerland)							
- Of which candidate countries							
4 OTHER CONTRIBUTIONS							
5 ADMINISTRATIVE OPERATIONS		311 594					
- Of which interest generated by funds paid by the Commission by way of the EU contribution (FFR Art. 58)							
6 REVENUES FROM SERVICES RENDERED AGAINST PAYMENT							
7 CORRECTION OF BUDGETARY IMBALANCES							
TOTAL	22 627 956	23 820 702	24 125 000	24 020 309	+2.4%	24 500 000	24 990 000

Additional EU funding: grant, contribution and service-level agreements

REVENUES	Additional EU funding: grant, contribution and service-level agreements						
	Executed 2023	Estimated by the agency 2024	2025		VAR 2025/ 24 (%)	Envisaged 2026	Envisaged 2027
			Agency request	Budget forecast			
ADDITIONAL EU FUNDING STEMMING FROM GRANTS (FFR Art.7)							
ADDITIONAL EU FUNDING STEMMING FROM CONTRIBUTION AGREEMENTS (FFR Art.7)	4 380 000	4 900 000	4 080 000	4 080 000	-17%	3 730 000	
ADDITIONAL EU FUNDING STEMMING FROM SERVICE LEVEL AGREEMENTS (FFR Art. 43.2)	1 485 000	139 000	80 000	80 000	-52%	80 000	80 000
TOTAL	5 865 000	5 039 000	4 160 000	4 160 000	-17%	3 810 000	80 000

Table 2 – Expenditure

Expenditure	2024		2025	
	Commitment	Payment	Commitment	Payment
Title 1 - Staff expenditure	16 031 851	16 031 851	17 256 550	17 256 550
Title 2 - Infrastructure and operating expenditure	2 465 163	2 465 163	2 335 799	2 335 799
Title 3 - Operational	5 323 688	5 323 688	4 427 960	4 427 960
TOTAL SUBVENTION	23 820 702	23 820 702	24 020 309	24 020 309
Extra-subsidy	5 039 000	5 039 000	4 160 000	4 160 000
TOTAL EXPENDITURE	28 859 702	28 859 702	28 166 309	28 166 309

EXPENDITURE	Commitment appropriations						
	Executed Budget 2023	Budget 2024 (initial)	Draft Budget 2025		VAR 2025/ 2024 (%)	Envisaged 2026	Envisaged 2027
			Agency request	Budget forecast			
Title 1 - Staff expenditure	15,771,633	16,018,186	17,256,550	17,256,550	+3.6%	17,775,651	18,045,651
Salaries & allowances	15,025,971	15,251,906	16,544,000	16,544,000	+3.5%	17,084,701	17,354,701
- Of which establishment plan posts	12,076,562	12,316,591	13,267,000	13,267,000	+4.6%	13,727,701	13,866,701
- Of which external personnel	2,949,409	2,935,315	3,277,000	3,277,000	-0.9%	3,357,000	3,488,000
Staff recruitment	1,650	37,700	20,000	20,000	+122.2%	20,000	20,000
Mission expenses	82,576	90,680	81,800	81,800	+3.8%	81,800	81,800
Socio-medical infrastructure	29,390	45,000	45,000	45,000	-	45,000	45,000
Training	116,302	154,000	120,000	120,000	-24.5%	120,000	120,000
External Services	401,479	338,900	314,250	314,250	+20.0%	292,650	292,650
Receptions, events and representation	1,664	6,000	4,000	4,000	-	4,000	4,000
Social welfare	112,600	94,000	127,500	127,500	+17.5%	127,500	127,500
2 - Infrastructure and operating expenditure	2,363,076	2,465,163	2,335,799	2,335,799	+7.6%	2,275,299	2,495,299
Rental of buildings and associated costs	904,801	853,861	860,399	860,399	+11.7%	863,899	1,133,899
Information, communication technology and data processing	1,306,764	1,421,700	1,324,200	1,324,200	+6.6%	1,260,200	1,210,200
Movable property and associated costs	10,000	36,000	-	-	-100.0%	-	-
Current administrative expenditure	41,406	50,402	51,200	51,200	+6.4%	51,200	51,200
Postage / Telecommunications	3,000	3,200	-	-	-100.0%	-	-
Meeting expenses	97,105	100,000	100,000	100,000	-	100,000	100,000
Title 3 - Operational expenditure	4,459,908	5,323,688	4,427,960	4,427,960	+2.1%	4,449,050	4,449,050
Communication	404,865	523,000	375,000	375,000	-	375,000	375,000
Corporate Performance and Stakeholders	237,995	187,150	240,000	240,000	-3.2%	240,000	240,000
Operational projects	3,414,048	4,147,538	3,412,960	3,412,960	+3.0%	3,434,050	3,434,050
Operational missions	403,000	466,000	400,000	400,000	-	400,000	400,000
Total Subvention	22,594,617	23,807,037	24,125,000	24,020,309	+3.7%	24,500,000	24,990,000
Title 1 – additional (SLA EU-OSHA)	60 000	64 000	80 000	80 000	+3.2%	80 000	80 000
Title 4 – Extra subsidy	5 805 000	4 975 000	4 080 000	4 080 000	-18.0%	3 730 000	
Internationalisation of CoVeS (EMPL)	1 425 000	75 000					
Implementation of ACQF 2 (INTPA)	1 750 000	1 300 000	1 150 000	1 150 000		800 000	
DARYA (INTPA)	2 000 000	2 000 000	2 000 000	2 000 000		2 000 000	
Rwanda	180 000						
EaP		1 210 000	600 000	600 000		600 000	
Egypt		450 000	50 000	50 000			
EIB		340 000	330 000	330 000		330 000	
TOTAL	28 459 617	28 859 702	28 271 000	28,180,309	-1.5%	28,310,000	25,070,000

Table 3 - Budget outturn and cancellation of appropriations

Budget outturn	2021	2022	2023
Revenue actually received (+)	22 108 581	23 939 531	28 231 110
Payments made (-)	-20 229 869	-21 873 282	-24 824 014
Carry-over of appropriations (-)	-1 884 246	-3 070 232	-5 950 797
Cancellation of appropriations carried over (+)	72 935	57 231	49 784
Adjustment for carry-over of assigned revenue appropriations from previous year (+)	24 932	1 009 242	2 576 819
Exchange rate differences (+/-)	1 530	-280	-227
Adjustment for negative balance from previous year (-)			
TOTAL	93 863	62 210	82 675

Budget outturn

The 2023 budget outturn is EUR 82,675.36, in line with the good results of 2022 (EUR 62,209) and an improvement from 2021 (EUR 93,864).

Cancellation of commitment appropriations

Only EUR 26,340.51 commitment appropriations were cancelled at the end of 2023, out of which €19,894.62 are related to an event held at the end of the year for which the flight costs were not updated (the actual cost was less than initially planned).

Cancellation of payment appropriations for the year and payment appropriations carried over

The ETF has cancelled EUR 49,784 payment appropriations carried forward from 2022.

The main reason for cancellation of appropriations is linked to the conservative estimates made at the end of the year about the 2022 (cancelled EUR 14,511 for some IT projects) and the actual cost of the Governing Board meeting held on November 2022 (cancelled EUR 10,068). Other smaller amounts were linked to utilities and infrastructure costs.

Procurement

The global budgetary envelope reserved for procurement contracts for operational activities in 2025 in support of ETF's strategic objectives is Euros.

Table 4 Global budgetary envelope for procurement

Year	Planned	Total
2025	Procurement contracts for operational activities	8 507 960 Euros

Within this global budgetary envelope, the ETF purchases its goods and services via procurement procedures as appropriate, mostly through framework contracts (new procedures and contracts in force). As an indication, contracts for the operational activities cover studies and assessments, consultancy and research services, supply of databases and platforms, surveys, various services for project implementation, communication services, translation services, conference organiser services and organisation of virtual meetings, logistical support to projects, travel services, evaluation services.

Extra-subsidy projects include outsourcing of activities to be defined for each project.

The list of operational activities to be outsourced through new procurement procedures will be defined in the procurement plan and published on the ETF website for application by potential tenderers at the beginning of 2025.

Annex IV – Human Resources (quantitative)

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

Human Resources	2023			2024	2025	2026	2027
	Authorised Budget	Actually filled as of 31/12/2023	Occupancy Rate%	Authorised staff	Envisaged staff	Envisaged staff	Envisaged staff
Administrators (AD)	59	59	100%	63	65	65	65
Assistants (AST)	27	27	100%	23	21	21	21
Assistants/Secretaries (AST/SC)	0	0		0	0	0	0
ESTABLISHMENT PLAN POSTS*	86	86	100%	86	86	86	86
Contract Agents (CA)**	42	40	95.2%	42	42	43	43
Seconded National Experts (SNE)	0	0		2	0	0	0
Local Agents	1	1	100%	1	0	0	0
TOTAL STAFF	129	127	98.4%	131	131	131	131

*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. The total authorised number of CA remains stable in 2024 at 42. This number is expected to increase to 43 already in 2024 considering the replacement of the retired Local Agent.

Additional external staff expected to be financed from grant, contribution or service-level agreements

Human Resources	2023	2024	2025	2026
	Envisaged staff	Envisaged staff	Envisaged staff	Envisaged staff
Contract Agents (CA)	1	3	3	3
Seconded National Experts (SNE)	0	2	2	2
TOTAL	1	5	5	5

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 – Multi -annual staff policy plan 2024-27

Function group and grade	2023				2024		2025		2026		2027	
	Authorised Budget		Actually filled as of 31/12 *		Envisaged **		Envisaged **		Envisaged **		Envisaged **	
	Perm posts	Temp posts	Perm posts	Temp posts	Perm posts	Temp posts	Perm posts	Temp posts	Perm posts	Temp posts	Perm posts	Temp posts
AD 16												
AD 15												
AD 14		1		1		1		1		1		1
AD 13		5		2		3		3		3		3
AD 12		11		6		9		9		9		9
AD 11		10		8		10		10		10		10
AD 10		10		11		10		10		10		10
AD 9		12		9		12		12		12		12
AD 8		5		5		7		7		7		7
AD 7		4		15		7		9		9		9
AD 6												
AD 5		1		2		4		4		4		4
AD TOTAL	0	59	0	59	0	63	0	65	0	65	0	65
AST 11												
AST 10		2		2		2		2		2		2
AST 9		13		12		9		9		9		9
AST 8		6		1		6		5		5		5
AST 7		4		5		4		3		3		3
AST 6		2		3		2		2		2		2
AST 5				4								
AST 4												
AST 3												
AST 2												
AST 1												
AST TOTAL	0	27	0	27	0	23	0	21	0	21	0	21
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	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
TOTAL	0	86	0	86	0	86	0	86	0	86	0	86
GRAND TOTAL	86		86		86		86		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.

** We envisage to continue using the opportunity provided by art. 38.2 of the Financial Regulation in the coming years and adjust it in accordance with the evolution of part-time requests.

External personnel

Contract Agents

Contract agents**	Authorised 2023	Recruited as of 31/12/2023*	Envisaged 2024**	Envisaged 2025**	Envisaged 2026**	Envisaged 2027**
Function Group IV	14	13	14	13	14	14
Function Group III	24	23	24	24	24	24
Function Group II	4	4	5	5	5	5
Function Group I	0	0	0	0	0	0
TOTAL	42	40	43	42	43	43

* 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	Authorised 2024*	Envisaged 2025	Envisaged 2026	Envisaged 2027
Function Group AL/N2	1	1	1	0	0	0

* Early 2024, the local agent announced his retirement.

Seconded National Experts

Seconded National Experts	Authorised 2023	Recruited as of 31/12/2023	Authorised 2024	Envisaged 2025	Envisaged 2026	Envisaged 2027
TOTAL	0	0	0	2	2	2

Table 3 – Recruitment forecasts 2025 following retirement/Mobility or new requested posts (Information on the entry level for each type of posts: Indicative table)

Job title in the Agency	Type of contract		TA/Official	CA
	(Official, TA or CA)		Function group/grade of recruitment Internal (Brackets) and external (single grade) foreseen for publication*	Recruitment Function Group (I, II, III or IV)
	Due to foreseen retirement/mobility	New post requested due to additional tasks		
HCD Expert(s)	TA		TA AD6 AD8 internal TA AD7 external	
Junior HCD Expert(s)	TA		TA AD5 external	
Project management		CA		CA FG III/IV

*indication of both is required

In addition, a number of TA are reaching or will be soon reaching their pensionable age. Nevertheless, they could decide to carry on working until the maximum pensionable age of 65 years. In any case, we estimate that the ETF will have around 10 TA retiring in the next 3 years. This may result in replacing some AST positions with AD ones (at AD 5/6 or AD 7/8 entry level!).

Inter-agency mobility

Number of inter-agency mobility 2023 from and to the Agency:	1
---	---

Annex V – Human resources (qualitative)

A. Recruitment policy

Implementing rules in place

		Yes	No	If no, which other IR are in place
Engagement of CA	Model Decision C(2019)3016	X		
Engagement of TA	Model Decision C(2015)1509	X		
Middle management	Model decision C(2018)2542	X		
Type of posts	Model Decision C(2018)8800	X		

B. Appraisal and reclassification/promotions

Implementing rules in place

		Yes	No	If no, which other IR s are in place
Reclassification of TA	Model Decision C(2015)9563	X		
Reclassification of CA	Model Decision C(2015)9561	X		

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

Tables 1 and 2 above show that the ETF is moving towards the legal requirements on reclassification.

C. HR implementing rules foreseen for adoption in 2025

- Model Decision on the prevention of and fight against psychological and sexual harassment

D. Gender representation

Table 1 - Data on 31/12/2023 statutory staff (only officials, TA, CA and LA)

	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

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

E. Geographical Balance

Table 1 - Table on 31/12/2023 - statutory staff only (officials, TA, CA and LA)

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 receives constantly 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.

F. Schooling

Agreement in place with the European School(s) of

Contribution agreements signed with the EC on type I European schools	Yes		No	X
Contribution agreements signed with the EC on type II European schools	Yes		No	X
Number of service contracts in place with international schools:				

Description of any other solutions or actions in place:

Due to the absence of a European School in Turin and the fact that there are several international schools which are extremely expensive, the ETF covers up to 50% of the cost of fees above the ceiling foreseen in the Staff Regulations. This is done with the scope to support the ETF's capacity to attract and retain staff as a social support measure. The ETF has applied a similar principle for pre-school and kindergarten from school year 2021/22.

Annex VI – Environment management – ETF Environmental Policy

The ETF, as an EU agency, is committed to contribute to the EU sustainable development goals through a medium-term sustainability plan that acts on three pillars:

- Protection of diversity and inclusion.
- Application of Green Public Procurement (GPP).
- Promotion of environmental protection through its environmental management system.

This policy and related actions contributes to the commitment of the EC to be carbon neutral by 2050.

In particular, with the aim of pushing the drivers of environmental sustainability, the ETF has established in 2021 and choses to maintain an Environmental Management System which complies with the EU Eco-Management and Audit Scheme (EMAS) and ISO 14001 standard. Within the overall regulatory framework, the ETF is committed to:

- Protecting the environment and minimise pollution through a sustainable use of resources.
- Complying with the relevant environmental legislation, regulations and other compliance obligations.
- Creating, maintaining and continuously improving the Environmental Management System and its environmental performance.
- Ensuring awareness of environmental issues and the active participation of all staff, with a view to reduce the ETF environmental impact.
- 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 goal:

- To reach climate neutrality in its operations by 2030, by reducing greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions by 60% compared to 2005 (corresponding to approximately 38% compared to 2019) and compensate for remaining emissions through carbon removals.

This goal is pursued through plans and actions inspired by this policy which act on:

- Rational use of energy and material resources.
- Improvement and optimisation of business trips and events.
- Increase in Green Public Procurement (GPP).
- Increase in environmental awareness of ETF stakeholders.

The ETF makes available the resources necessary to implement its Environmental Policy and to achieve its strategic environmental goals, defined and communicated in the environmental declaration document. The ETF commits itself to carry out all planned activities in an effective and efficient manner. The ETF defines specific performance indicators and targets, and reports annually on achievements in the ETF's Annual Activity Report.

Annex VII – Buildings

#	Building Name and type	Location	SURFACE AREA (in m ²)			RENTAL CONTRACT					Host country (grant or support)	Building present value (€)
			Office space	non-office	Total	RENT (€/year)	Duration of the contract	Type	Breakout clause Y/N	Conditions attached to the breakout clause (if applicable)		
1	Villa Gualino	Turin, Italy	2,175 m ²	3,825 m ²	6,000 m ²	1	30 years until 2027	Rent is covered by a Convention complemented by detailed service contracts			NO	N/A

The ETF current premises have a convention expiring mid 2027. In coordination with DGEMPL, ETF carried a feasibility study in 2022 to look into possible options. There are currently two options under assessment: (a) re-building an existing building provided by the Municipality within the UN Campus, (b) refurbishment the existing building in Villa Gualino.

Any option requires renovation works to match current EC standards. To match the expiry date of current premises, a decision will be needed as soon as possible. Once approved, a detailed project and tender specifications for the refurbishment works will be drawn up in 2025.

Annex VIII – Privileges and immunities

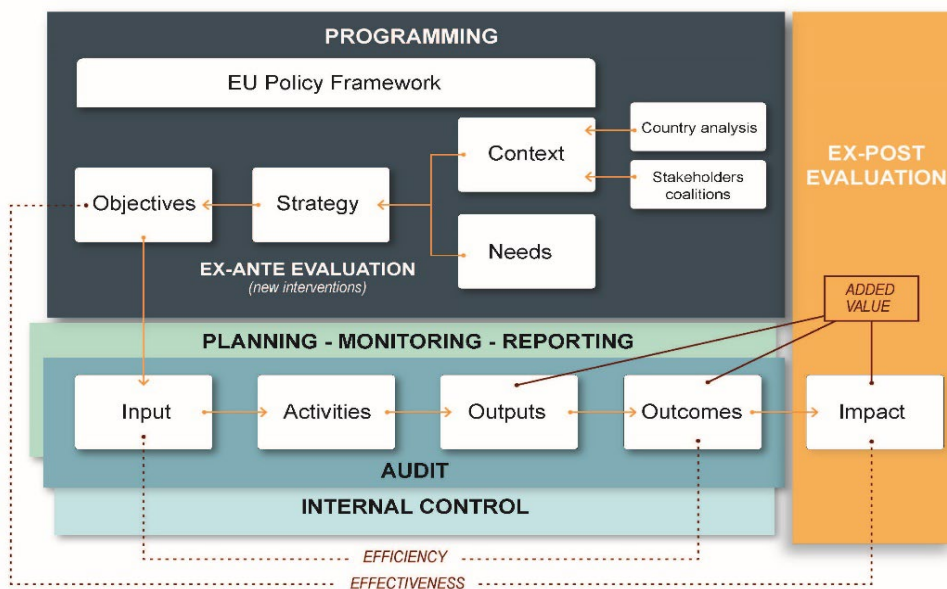
Agency privileges	Privileges granted to staff	
	Protocol of privileges and immunities / diplomatic status	Education / day care
<p>* Local premises have been provided by local authorities on the basis of a convention that provides for the following main essential points: ETF to participate in the costs of refurbishing the premises to be used, ETF to pay a symbolic rent, ETF to participate in the costs of maintenance of the building</p> <p>* General support is provided by Italy against unauthorised access or other forms of disturbances to the premises.</p> <p>*ETF is authorised to install and operate communications systems.</p> <p>* ETF official communication is not subject to any restrictions or to confidentiality breaches.</p> <p>*The Protocol of privileges and immunities is applicable to ETF.</p> <p>* ETF, its assets and funds may not be subject to administrative or legal measures of constraints.</p> <p>*Premises (including temporary premises) and buildings are inviolable, except in case of emergencies/ fire.</p> <p>* ETF, its assets and funds are exempt from taxes or direct duties, except for taxes on public services.</p> <p>* ETF is exempt from the payment of VAT for purchases of goods or service. The value of the exemption is established in the law applicable to international organisations in Italy.</p> <p>* ETF imports and exports are exempted from customs duties, taxes, prohibitions or restrictions.</p> <p>* Goods transported as hand baggage are treated as diplomatic luggage.</p> <p>* ETF vehicles are exempted from any taxes, duties or fees or from any import prohibitions/ restrictions.</p> <p>* ETF exempted from payment social security and health insurance contributions on salaries paid to staff, except for local agents.</p>	<p>*Staff immune from legal proceedings for acts performed in the exercise of their official duties.</p> <p>* Staff exempted from taxes on salaries and emoluments paid by ETF.</p> <p>* Staff, spouses and dependent members of family not subject to immigration restrictions or registration formalities for foreigners.</p> <p>* For currency exchange staff has the same privileges as officials of equal rank in the diplomatic missions.</p> <p>* Staff, spouses and dependent members of family receive assistance for repatriation in the event of international crises.</p> <p>* Staff who is neither permanently resident in Italy at the time of their appointment, nor Italian, may, duty-free and without prohibitions and restrictions, import from the country of their last residence or the country of which they are nationals, when they first take up their post, for a period of one year from their appointment for a maximum of two shipments, their own furniture and personal effects, including a vehicle bought at the conditions of that country, which will be registered in special series.</p> <p>* Staff may export, in the year following the date of cessation of their duties, without prohibitions and restrictions, their own furniture and personal effects, including vehicles.</p> <p>* The ETF Director, spouse and dependent members of family, is granted privileges and immunities, facilities and concessions granted by the Italy to members of equivalent rank in the diplomatic corps in Italy.</p> <p>* Staff, who is neither permanently resident in Italy at the time of their appointment nor Italian, may, when they first take up their post, for a period of one year from their appointment purchase a motor vehicle free from taxes and charges.</p> <p>* Italy issues a special identity card to staff, spouses and dependent members of family to prove that the holder is ETF staff and enjoys privileges and immunities.</p>	None

Annex IX – Evaluations

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. ETFs evaluation practices are based on the principles of the European Commission 'Better Regulation Guidelines and Toolkit':

- Capture the results of ETF's 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's interventions according to achieved impact and country development stage (for example to scale up ETF work and/or put in place an exit strategy).

ETF LOGIC MODEL



As an Agency of the European Commission, the ETF is subject to 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. The action plan is entered into the ETF Improvement Plan with regular report to the Commission and Governing Board.

ETF commissioned evaluations mainly focus on assessing the extent to which the ETF's activities funded by the EU Contribution have achieved planned results, their added value and impact. According to the ETF Financial Regulation⁶¹, retrospective evaluations shall 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

⁶¹ Financial Regulation of the European Training Foundation, Turin, 15 June 2019 (GB-19-DEC-008).

EC, in the planning discussions and decision-making process annually. For the period 2025-2027, the rolling plan includes three types of possible evaluations for consideration.

Individual Activity Areas

The rolling plan outlines potential priorities to be considered based either on their maturity or previous evaluations already undertaken for each activity area.

Issues transversal to two or more Activity Areas

These include issues that ETF contributes to across activity areas, such as governance and system change, or functions used in more than one activity area, such as anticipation, policy advice or monitoring and assessment.

Specific operational topics

Topics can be selected for evaluation either individually or through complementarities.

Annex X – Organisational management and internal control systems strategy

Organisational performance and development actions are identified through regular monitoring of a framework of indicators based on a core of 15 key performance indicators and the Internal Control principles to ensure efficient and effective organisational performance and proactive organisational change (see Annex VIII). This, together with a continued monitoring and evaluation of its operational delivery, performance and added value, provides the necessary evidence to ensure the quality of the work of the agency and a culture of quality enhancement and improvement.

KPIS FOR ETF OVERALL PERFORMANCE 2025 - 2027

Administration

Activities completion rate ^{62*}	Rate (%) of completion of the activities of the ETF Work Programme Target >90%
Timely achievement of activities of WP*	Rate (%) of activities of the ETF Work Program timely achieved in year: Target 80%
Timely submission of WP/SPD to EC*	The Annual WP/SPD timely submitted to the EC. Target 100%

Operational

Knowledge uptake	% of the ETF's target audience who used ETF knowledge in the past year. Target 75%
Programme design	Geographic and thematic coverage of EU Requests for support to projects and programmes design. Target >75%
Network level of participation	Engagement rate of active members in ETF networks. Target 75%
Stakeholder engagement	Number and typology of stakeholders engaged in ETF activities. Target > 7,000 stakeholders engaged, 80% primary stakeholders

Human resources

Administrative support, / operational staff ratio*	Target <30%
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%
Staff engagement*	Rate (%) of staff engagement from satisfaction survey within the agency. (every two years) Target >2% increase

Finance

Commitment appropriation implementation*	Rate (%) of implementation of Commitment Appropriations. Target >98%
Payment appropriations cancellation rate*	Rate (%) of cancellation of Payment Appropriations. Target <2%
Timely payments*	Rate (%) of payments executed within the legal/contractual deadlines. Target >90%
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%
Audit recommendation implementation*	Rate (%) of external and accepted internal audit recommendations implemented within agreed deadlines. Target >90%

* [SWD\(2015\)62](#) – Guidelines on KPI's for Directors of EU agencies.

The ETF has a robust principle-based system of internal controls in place. In November 2017 the ETF adopted a framework of 17 Internal Control Principles, in line with the Commission's revised internal control framework.

The ETF internal control framework helps the ETF to reach its objectives and sustain operational and financial performance. It provides reasonable assurance that internal controls are in place and function correctly to mitigate risks, and that any potential weaknesses are addressed in the form of corrective actions.

The ETF monitors the implementation of internal controls on a regular basis through a number of internal control indicators. A robust assessment of the effectiveness of internal controls is carried out every year, the aim of which is to provide evidence-based reasonable assurance that the internal controls are in place and are effective and that any improvement actions are identified and implemented accordingly. Furthermore, a analysis of the cost efficiency of internal controls is carried out annually following the EC methodology.

In 2025 the ETF will follow up and implement actions to address any IAS audit recommendations for improvement, following the IAS audit on digitalisation and review of internal processes in the ETF. In parallel, the ETF will implement improvement actions to address lessons learnt from the external evaluation of the ETF and agencies under the remit of DG EMPL. Furthermore, and based on the risk assessment carried out by IAS in 2024, the ETF will implement the strategic audit plan 2025-2027 with the identified audit topics.

Anti-Fraud Strategy & Culture

In line with best practices and guidance issued by OLAF, the Anti-fraud Strategy adopted in 2014 has been updated in 2019 and is reviewed and complemented by Action Plans on an annual basis.

In 2025 the ETF will continue to strengthen its anti-fraud culture by consolidating the existing measures preventing conflicts of interest, irregularities and fraud. The recently deployed module on ethics in SYSPER further accompanies the process of awareness raising in the area of staff management. In parallel, ETF remains up to date to the guidance of the DG BUDG/EDES system in the area of procurement and financial management. Finally, the ETF/OLAF Correspondent is part of the Interagency Workforce on anti-fraud measures which includes the yearly attendance of regular meetings and dedicated Academies.

Annex XI – Plan for grant, contribution and service-level agreements

The ETF participates in several ongoing EC service level agreements for services provided by other entities such as with DIGIT for IT security support, IT hosting and e-prior services, with DG BUDG for the use of ABAC, with DG HR/PMO for the provision of HR management tools and management of entitlements, with DG SG for HAN services as well as with CDT and EPSO.

Within the ETF mandate and Financial Regulation, and in addition to the EU contribution, the ETF may receive additional revenue from EC/Union bodies through **Contribution agreement or Service level agreement** and from Member states/third countries/international organisations/non-Union bodies through **bilateral cooperation agreement or bilateral agreement** for services performed.

From EC/Union bodies:

- Additional funds through **Contribution agreement** – *for actions compatible with the ETF mandate and objectives, justified by the specific expertise of the ETF, the nature of the additional tasks cannot be within the scope of the tasks already financed by the EC subsidy.*
- Funds/reimbursement through **Service level agreement** – *for provision of services*

From Member states, third countries, international organisations, non-Union bodies:

1. Financial contribution to a specific project through **bilateral cooperation agreement** – *for contribution to ETF specific projects or actions*
2. Reimbursement for services performed through **bilateral agreement** – *for provision of services*

EXTRA-SUBSIDY AGREEMENTS IN FORCE

- Contribution agreement with EU Delegation in Kazakhstan (NDICI ASIA/2022/433-483) for the implementation of the project on “Dialogue and Action for Resourceful Youth in Central Asia” (DARYA) for an overall amount of 10,000,000 € from June 2022 to June 2027;
- Service level agreement with DG EMPL (ARES(2023)2460554) for the implementation of the second phase of the project to support the international dimension of the Centres of Vocational Excellence (CoVES2) for an overall amount of 1,500,000 € from April 2023 to March 2025;
- Contribution agreement with the EU Delegation to the AU (PANAF/2023/443-218) for the implementation of the second phase of the action on African Continental Qualifications Framework (ACQF II) for an overall amount of 5,000,000 € from April 2023 to June 2027;
- Contribution agreement with DG NEAR (NDICI/2023/ 450-824) on supporting education reforms and skills in the Eastern Partnership region for an overall amount of 2,500,000 € from January 2024 to August 2026;
- Contribution agreement with the EU Delegation in Egypt (NDICI-GEO-NEAR/2023/ 452-642) on the implementation of the 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, for an overall amount of 500,000 € from February 2024 to January 2025.

EXTRA-SUBSIDY AGREEMENTS UNDER NEGOTIATION

- Contribution agreement with European Investment Bank on a facility for gender-responsive and inclusive investments in the EU neighbourhood for 1,000,000 € for 3 years with tentative start date by end of 2024 or beginning of 2025.

Annex XII – Strategy for cooperation with third countries and/or international organisations

Cooperation with third countries and international organisations in the field of Human Capital Development is explicitly stated in the mandate of the ETF⁶³ i.e. working with partner countries, other international actors, EU Agencies and social partners at European level including participation of third countries who share the EU commitment to supporting Human Capital Development in third countries.

More specifically:

1. To facilitate the exchange of information and experience among donors engaged in human capital development reform in partner countries, and
2. To disseminate information and encourage networking and the exchange of experience and good practice between the EU and partner countries and among partner countries in human capital development issues.

For the ETF there are three main reasons to enter into or establish a partnership.

1. Advance the HCD Agenda in the ETF Partner Countries

A partnership provides the means to an end in creating the potential to achieve a reach the ETF could not achieve alone. It also facilitates the opportunity to increase the dissemination of good practices and ETF proven methodologies. This extends to influencing the reform processes and the development of strategic policies.

2. Access Capacities and Resources Beyond ETF's Current Means

Working in partnership increases the potential to find new or additional resources, enhances efficiency gains and cost saving; it affords the opportunity to make savings based on the economies of scale and provides increased access to resources and capacities outside the organisation. It also enables improvements in operational efficiency (cost/benefit analysis) and creates the opportunity to unlock expertise expansion and sustain policy implementation.

3. Wider Influence

Partnerships allow the opportunity to increase the influence of the ETF and provide opportunities to further advance the Human Capital Development agenda. They enable the ETF to increase its own visibility and credibility, thus enabling a greater capacity for the first reason to partner. Creating strategic alliances will enhance the ETF's international capacities, reach and knowledge base.

In the above context, the ETF strategic approach to cooperate effectively supports the identification of those partnerships that provide the organisation the greatest value to implement the ETF strategy 2021-2027 and to become **a global asset for the EU**, a resource to be used in support to the EU investments in human capital development through **a diversified provision of clearly agreed services**:

⁶³ Regulation (EC) No 1339/2008 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 16 December 2008 establishing a European Training Foundation (recast) <http://data.europa.eu/eli/reg/2008/1339/oj>.

- as an important resource for programming and preparing EU investment in human capital development and for monitoring and evaluating the resulting actions. This applies to both individual country assistance and centrally managed regional or thematic programmes;
- a **partner to the EU to enhance the strategic impact of EU funds**. On request, the ETF could upscale selected methodologies, intelligence, diagnosis or policy advice to a wider range of countries with the support of dedicated funds in accordance with the ETF's mandate and the scope afforded by its financial regulation.

Annex XIII – Collaboration with other EU Agencies

ETF-CEDEFOP COOPERATION 2025

Topic	Collaboration
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's 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
Skills matching and anticipation/identification	<p>Concrete thematic cooperation:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Platform economy/platform work: based on the past year's exchanges with Cedefop on the new forms of employment and platform work, the knowledge sharing will continue in 2025, including participation in events, exchanges through peer learning events and technical meetings - European Skills and Jobs survey (ESJS): ETF and Cedefop exchange information and findings, and will have regular interaction. Joint publication of report on analysis of findings (publication in 2025), joint call for research proposals, and joint organization of final event to present research proposals <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 - Regular communication and exchange of ETF's recent initiatives with Cedefop, in particular regarding the skills for green transition, use of Big Data in LMI, future of skills needs in selected economic sectors, and future skills needs in craftsmanship
Effective/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 the Cedefop to support the ETF's UA Re-Emerge(ncy) activity regarding the micro credentials for VET e-learning and adults' re-skilling and upskilling in Ukraine)

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Joint activities engaging support from the ETF's Community of Innovative Educators (under CNL) <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's practical tools for policy makers and VET practitioners. From ETF's side: READY, Scaffold, Teacher Booster - Possible partnership and interest of ETF's joining the Cedefop's 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). A particular interest from ETF is on evidence on digital education. Cedefop has consulted ETF at an earlier stage of their development of a survey - Overall benefit for the ETF PCs coming from this cooperation and exchange with Cedefop <p>Key competence in VET</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Joint engagement in key competence discussions with partners (JRC, others) with a focus on citizenship competence
Vocational Excellence	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Exchange of knowledge and expertise - Participation of ETF to the advisory group of Cedefop study on 'European VET for the 21st century: the balancing of excellence and inclusion' - Exchange with Cedefop via the Consultative panel under the ETF – EC Service level agreements on tools and services developed under the international dimension of vocational excellence - Cooperation within the frame of the IAG-TVET subgroup on the future of TVET
System change 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 - Preparatory work for the 2025 joint final report and event
Cooperating through the GLAD network	<p>Collaboration on social partners and civil society for VET regular exchange of inputs based on:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Strengthening social partnerships in the context of the Youth Guarantee: exchange of practices between EU and PCs to foster LLL - Collaboration ETF-EF-Cedefop on social partnership in VET, such as shared inputs to the EESC action in the WB governance and governing bodies - Joint inputs to the WB Civil Society Forum - Collaborative governance and financing - Civil society organisations' relevant role in LLL

Knowledge sharing seminars	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Torino, June 2025 - Thessaloniki, December 2025
WBL	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Collaboration to prepare the new leaflet for the Inter Agency Working Group on WBL - Dialogue on possible joint analysis on new LFS HATWORK variable (this could for example be used in the new IAWG leaflet – see first point) - Discuss how to join forces for the purpose of the European Alliance for Apprenticeships - Explore the idea to invite some ETF Partner Countries to Cedefop Policy Learning forum on apprenticeships
Central Administration Issues	<p>Meetings:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Two knowledge sharing sessions per year, if possible with same calendar as those of core business, to take stock of the cooperation <p>Human resources:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Recruitment: explore opportunities for sharing of reserve lists; Joint recruitments; participation in selection boards, exchange of practices - Share practices on SNE rules, traineeships, unconscious bias, well-being and diversity and inclusion, job architecture and career development tools, among others - Development of the Diversity and Inclusion ambassadors project, a learning path, in collaboration with the EUAN working group on D&I - Joint training sessions on unconscious bias, diversity and inclusion, motivational drivers, among others - Joint development/exchange on IT tools for recruitment purposes, including proctored tests <p>Finance and Procurement:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Joint procurements - Exploring new developments on AI and sustainability/green procurement - Ex-post financial verification: follow up on implementation, finding ways to improve - Migration to SUMMA: synchronisation of migration plans, workflows' revision <p>Digital transformation and cybersecurity:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Cyber security approaches, impact of new regulation & technical implementation - Explore possibilities for sharing services/SLA on cybersecurity - Exchange on digital transformation strategies, data strategy & architecture - Document management (consideration for support to Cedefop adopting ARES)

ETF-EUROFOUND COOPERATION 2025

Topic	Collaboration
Regular exchange of information on surveys and their development	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - ECS: discussions regarding the preparatory work for the European Company Survey (ECS) 2027-2028 regarding application to the ETF countries - E-survey on living and working conditions: the Agencies will continue to exchange in relation to the running of the e-survey and learn from each other. They will explore possibilities of engaging with each other in the context of the Eurofound-DG NEAR agreement. This may involve exchange of expertise, review of publications, and mutual participation and organisation of events
Participation in thematic activities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Tripartite Exchange Seminars 2026: preparatory work for the implementation of a joint Tripartite Exchange Seminar in 2026 involving other EU Agencies (for example, Eurofound, Cedefop, OSHA). The seminar core theme remains tripartite social dialogue. ETF has a special interest in the Western Balkan countries and will participate fully in the preparatory work (for example, programme development, training of facilitators, selection process for participants). The project will be part of each Agency's programming document in 2025 (for preparatory work) and 2026 (for the implementation of the seminar) - Knowledge seminar in Western Balkan Countries: Co-organising an event with a view to share with policy makers in these countries research, and practices related to enabling an environment for social dialogue, quality of work and living conditions, reskilling and upskilling of workers, and promoting the green transition - Social dialogue: jointly forge stronger (informal) collaboration between relevant EU agencies (e.g. EESC, CEDEFOP) on issues related to social dialogue in candidate countries - Skills Lab Network of Experts: 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
Information and communication activities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Tripartite Exchange Seminar 2026: Tripartite Exchange Seminars (preparatory work for information and communication activities in 2026) - Knowledge seminar in Western Balkan Countries: information and communication activities - Contribution to the five-agency event in the European Parliament: in case the EP employment committee requests that it takes place in 2025
Other activities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Explore options for cooperation using the potential of shared resources in strengthening and streamlining administrative processes - Ongoing exchange of info the Agencies' performance indicator methodologies - Exchange and building on good practices in internal control and risk management (including peer review)

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Exchange on the recommendations stemming from the evaluation of the individual evaluation of each agency, and cross-cutting analysis as commissioned by DG EMPL
Development of Annual Work Programmes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Exchange of draft work programmes before their approval by the respective Management Boards. Both Agencies will refer to each other's work and cooperation where appropriate
Organisation of the annual consultation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Organisation of an annual meeting to discuss and assess progress on the above and other relevant issues

Annex XIV – Planned requests from EU services 2025

POLICY ADVICE TO EU AND PARTNER COUNTRIES

In this section, we include activities that are either aiming at provision of policy advice to partner countries in line with EU processes (such as youth guarantee in the western Balkans, inputs to growth plans or enlargement reports specific chapters, etc) or input in subcommittee meetings supporting policy dialogue between the EU and concerned partner countries.

Country	Description	Type	Budget ⁶⁴	Expertise (WD)	Requestor	Status
To be defined	Support the pilot of the comparison of NQFs in a partner country	Support in the implementation of comparison			DG EMPL	CONTINUATION
Western Balkans	Provision of support and advice to the Western Balkans countries for introducing Youth Guarantee schemes (in partnership with ILO)	Support through specific activities complementary to ILO support and other EU support	100		DG EMPL / DG NEAR	CONTINUATION
Western Balkans	Provision of input in the Growth Plans	Input in the form of comments/revisions	15			
Enlargement countries	Provision of input to specific chapters of enlargement reports	Input in the form of comments/revisions	15			
All ²	Provision of ad hoc and upon request input in the sub-committee meetings on Employment/Education/research and Association Agreements meetings	Briefing notes Participation and contribution upon request	10		DG EMPL – DG EAC - EEAS	REGULAR INPUT

⁶⁴ This will be included in the SPD for the November GB meeting once the ABB is finalised (which will be presented and discussed in the October Structured Dialogue).

MONITORING AND ASSESSMENT

In this section we indicate requests that provide, as a result, monitoring or assessment reports. These are requests that usually are repeated over time (yearly or at different intervals).

Country	Description	Type	Budget	Expertise	Requestor	Status
SEET + MR, TN, KYR, KAZ	Inventory of Validation of Non formal and informal learning	Research and analysis of VNFIL practices and models Output: inventory	TBD	TBD	DG EMPL	REGULAR (every two years)
ALL	NQF Inventory	Research and analysis of NQFs and qualification systems Output: inventory	TBD	TBD	DG EMPL, Cedefop, Unesco, UIL	REGULAR (every two years)
SEET (except BiH and KOS)	Osnabruck monitoring	Implementation of the Osnabruck monitoring in participating enlargement countries Output: country monitoring reports	TBD	60	DG EMPL	REGULAR
Southern and Eastern Mediterranean (SEMED)	Provision of expertise input in the follow up of the monitoring of the 5th UfM Ministerial Declaration on Employment and labour	Data collection and analysis Output: report	TBD	40	UfM DG EMPL	CONTINUATION

METHODOLOGICAL TOOLS AND GUIDES

Here we indicate requests where the EU requests ETF to develop specific methodological tools or guidelines (like monitoring or assessment tools).

Country	Description	Project	Budget	Expertise	Requestor	Status

Planned resources - Budget € Expertise WD

DIFFERENT PHASES OF THE EU BILATERAL AND REGIONAL EXTERNAL ASSISTANCE PROJECT CYCLE

Here we indicate requests that cover different phases of the project cycle from identification to formulation to content monitoring of implementation. The input can vary according to the request

Country	Description	Type	Budget	Expertise	Requestor	Status
Bosnia and Herzegovina	Content monitoring support to the EU Delegation on IPA projects	Provision of input to specific project outputs (technical deliverables or progress reports). The input takes usually the form of comments/revisions and advice to the EU Delegation		10	EUD	CONTINUATION
Egypt	Support to the EUD in the content monitoring of the EU funded project in the field of TVET (EU4YES)	The input consists in carrying out monitoring missions, prepare monitoring reports for the EU Delegation and specific advice on technical deliverables.		40	EUD	CONTINUATION
Georgia	Provision of support in the identification of new programme in HCD (probably Budget support) -	Input consists in identification missions, definition of main lines of content of budget support in the form				

	request on hold due to current situation in Georgia	of advice to the EU Delegation, dialogue with stakeholders				
Morocco	Support to the EUD on PIAFE project implementation in the field of qualifications and LLL. Support to mobility and migration (talent partnerships and thamm plus) through study on recognition and ad hoc support on transparency and recognition of qualifications	Input and advice to the EU Delegation on key technical deliverables.			EUD	CONTINUATION
North Macedonia	Content and methodological advice to the ongoing EU IPA II projects	Input and advice to the EU Delegation on technical deliverables and progress reports.		5	EUD	CONTINUATION
Palestine**	Support to the EUREP during implementation of the YEP project, implemented by ENABEL. ETF as observer in the Steering Committee of the project. [Depending on developments of the security situation]	Input and advice to the EUREP and Enabel directly on technical deliverables and progress reports. Contribution to specific activities upon request of EUREP.		5	EU REP	CONTINUATION
Tunisia	Provision of technical advice and input to the EUD and implementing partners in the preparation of the implementation arrangements of the project PASE	Provision of input to the EUD and implementing partners in the implementation arrangement of component 3 of the PASE project (skills development)			EUD	NEW
Southern and Eastern Europe	Contribution to the training on digitalisation for EU Delegation managed and coordinated by DG NEAR (technical expertise input in the training)	Content contribution to parts of the training sessions with focus on practical examples from partner countries on digital skills and related reforms.		5	DG NEAR	CONTINUATION

Southern and Eastern Mediterranean	Contribution to the Team Europe Initiative on Jobs through trade and investment – pillar 2 on VET and skills	Contribution and input in specific thematic discussions and events.		10	DG NEAR	CONTINUATION
Southern and Eastern Mediterranean	Contribution to the Youth Package initiative (component on Active labour market measures and youth guarantee)	Contribution to capacity building activities in areas related to youth employment, NEETs, career guidance.		10	DG NEAR	CONTINUATION
Southern and Eastern Mediterranean	Provision of input and advice in the implementation of THAMM Plus (Morocco, Tunisia and Egypt) –	the input will primarily focus on advice the preparation of labour mobility national action plans and provision of advice and content monitoring for the implementation of the action in the three countries.		30	DG NEAR	CONTINUATION

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

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

Annex XV – Cross-checking conditions for ETF operation in countries and regions

ETF's mandate outlined in the [ETF Recast Regulation](#) is to contribute, in the context of EU external relations policies, to improving human capital development, in the following countries:

- (a) the countries eligible for support under Regulation (EC) No 1085/2006 and subsequent related legal acts;
- (b) the countries eligible for support under Regulation (EC) No 1638/2006 and subsequent related legal acts;
- (c) other countries designated by decision of the Governing Board on the basis of a proposal supported by two-thirds of its members and a Commission opinion, and covered by a Community instrument or international agreement that includes an element of human capital development, and as far as available resources allow.

The countries referred to in points (a), (b) and (c) shall be designated as the 'partner countries'.

Anno 2024, with a new set of instruments in place, ETF interprets the above mentioned regulation as follows:

- (a) include the countries covered under the Instrument for Pre-Accession Assistance (IPA) III;
- (b) include the countries covered under the *Neighbourhood pillar* of the Neighbourhood, Development and International Cooperation – Global Europe (NDICI-GE);
- (c) include countries for which the check list below is included to review whether the conditions have been met as per the Regulation.

Country /Region	Policy and/or community instrument	HCD component	Availability of resources
Central Asia	1-The new EU Strategy for Central Asia 2- The Joint Communication The EU and Central Asia: New Opportunities for a Stronger Partnership ⁶⁵ aiming to forge a stronger, modern and non-exclusive partnership with the countries of Central Asia	1- To provide substantial support to vocational education and training, to foster research and innovation with a focus on skills development for youth, and to support economic modernisation, regional competitiveness and job creation 2- To support inter and intra-regional cooperation, to build capacity and to increase the quality of education, higher education and vocational education and training. To promote synergies between education systems and the labour market as well as digital education. To enable the region to develop as a sustainable, more resilient, prosperous, and closely interconnected economic and political space, including through education, employability (including of women and girls) and labour market reform	Action is mainly financed through extra-subsidy project DARYA
African Union	1- The Africa-EU partnership and the new Africa Communication ,	1- To foster an Alliance for Sustainable Investment and Jobs as part of the European Union – African Union Partnership by matching skills with the	Action is mainly financed

⁶⁵ "The EU will strengthen cooperation on vocational education and training, in collaboration with the **European Training Foundation**, to promote the employability of young people and of adults in a lifelong learning perspective, to respond to the needs of the transforming economies of Central Asia and of European investors in the region."

	<p>as well as the Communication on the Africa-Europe Alliance for Sustainable Investment and Jobs</p> <p>2- African Continental Qualifications Framework</p> <p>3- Joint Communication “Towards a Comprehensive Strategy with Africa”</p> <p>4- EU-AU Summit of February 2022</p>	<p>demands of the labour market as well as providing technical and vocational education and training and skills development both through Pan-African and national initiatives to support growth and job creation in strategic development areas</p> <p>2- As part of the multi-annual programme “AU-EU Skills for Youth Employability” the aim is to support the transformation of the continent through skills and qualifications which are strategic in the context of the demographic bulge of the continent, which some see as the ‘youth repository of the world’</p> <p>3- The aim is to working together on five key priorities in line with the SDGs, including SDG 4 (quality education), and through the provision of quality, equitable and inclusive (technical and vocational) education, training and skills to youth, and preparing them for the new opportunities of the future labour market. The five key priorities are: i) partnership for the green transition and energy access; ii) partnership for digital transformation; iii) partnership for sustainable growth and jobs; iv) partnership for peace, security and governance; and v) partnership on migration and mobility</p> <p>4- To include innovative financing solutions for the EU-AU partnership, economic recovery, as well as the twin digital and green transitions, all of which are even more important and urgent in a post COVID-19 world</p>	<p>through extra-subsidy project ACQFII</p>
Rwanda	<p>1- The Africa-EU partnership and the new Africa Communication, as well as the Communication on the Africa-Europe Alliance for Sustainable Investment and Jobs</p> <p>2- Joint Communication “Towards a Comprehensive Strategy with Africa”</p>	<p>1- The MIP for Rwanda 2021-2027 identify “Education, Skills and Decent Jobs for the Youth in the digital age” as its first priority, building on the Government of Rwanda’s strong emphasis on addressing critical gaps in human capital development in the country. Accordingly, the MIP emphasises education, skills development and vocational training, coupled with a more conducive ecosystem for young graduates, including TVET students, to pursue self-employment and entrepreneurship and a more robust Research & Innovation ecosystem. Furthermore, one of the two potential key drivers of poverty reduction and inclusive growth in Rwanda lies in the transformation of the country’s agricultural sector, where there is a significant gender gap in employment.</p>	<p>Action is upon request of EUD and conditional to extra-subsidy project funding (<i>Action expected to be closed by 2025</i>)</p>