

CONCLUSIONS OF THE ETF FOCUS GROUP MEETING

“REGIONS AND CITIES FOR VET AND SKILLS DEVELOPMENT”

27-28 FEBRUARY 2018, TURIN

Summary:

Delegates from regions and cities involved in skills and education gathered to Turin on 27-28 February 2018 to discuss the next Torino Process implementation at sub-national level, and how to expand beyond a narrow focus on vocational education and training system to skills, competitiveness and inclusion.

Partner countries are in need of evidence-based monitoring system also at sub-national level to strengthen decision-making in vocational education, training and skills development.

Following the two-day exchange, participants agreed that:

1. Flexibility of the analytical framework used for Torino Process will help to adjust to regional needs.
2. Designing strong communication networks, clearly delineating actors, using online tools where possible will reinforce national and sub-national links.
3. The biggest challenge for regions was dealing with evidence and statistics, and analysing those.

Follow-up actions by ETF:

- 1) a roadmap for action, to be taken at the beginning of the process, to clarify the needs and develop a 'soft template' for each country;
- 2) provide support and awareness to clarify the national/sub-national links;
- 3) considering the setting up of an E-platform as a repository for sub-national Torino Process; and
- 4) revision of the Analytic Framework for the sub-national level including review of region-specific indicators for Vocational Education and Training.

Overview of the discussions in detail:

Day1: 27 February 2018

The expanding role of the ETF's flagship Torino Process (TRP) at the sub-national level was the subject of a two-day focus group meeting on Regions and Cities for VET and Skills Development, in Turin February 27-28.

Delegates from 31 regions and cities from Azerbaijan, Belarus, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kazakhstan, Russia, Tajikistan, Tunisia, Ukraine and Uzbekistan attended the meeting, including representatives of regions that had already implemented sub-national TRP reports and those considering doing so.

The meeting, which was opened by ETF director Cesare Onestini, was shaped around the consideration of a number of key ideas and topics:

- The sharing of experiences, expectations and ideas.
- The reasons why countries and regions opt for a sub-national approach.
- Encouraging stakeholder involvement.
- How to support a holistic view and expand beyond a narrow focus on VET to skills, competitiveness and inclusion.
- How to identify essential evidence, find and use it.
- Lessons learned from those already engaged at the sub-national level.
- On-going reflection on how to approach the sub-national during the fifth round of TRP launching in 2019; and its positioning in a broad vision for TRP.

In opening remarks, Mr Onestini said that moving to the sub-national level meant, "making things happens, trying to translate the bigger ideas we have in the country and internationally" to the regions and "to see what it means in practice".

The ETF's Abdelaziz Jaouani, who is taking over as TRP coordinator after Manuela Prina's two years at the helm, said the regional dimension was growing fast and that ETF is carrying out a wide consultation, reflection and external evaluation to redefine the objectives and purposes of TRP at sub-national, national and cross-country levels. .

At a morning ice-breaking sessions delegates were asked to present an object that gave some insight into their personality or regional identity. Items ranged from the everyday - a laptop computer battery representing the lifeline for work and career; coffee (for those that needed a few cups just to get going in the morning), to the more creative - artisan goods including rugs from Tunisia, oil from Russia's resource-rich Tatarstan and Ukrainian *rushnik* decorative shirts.

Workshop sessions opened with a focus on: **Why do countries and regions engage in a sub-national approach?**

Representatives of larger countries - such as Russia, Ukraine, Kazakhstan and Tunisia that have much regional diversity - reflected that implementing TRP at a sub-national level aided the development and delivery of tailor-made VET policies.

Petro Korzhevskiy, deputy head of Ukraine's Rivne regional education department, observed that the country's VET decentralisation process had focused attention of regional needs, including responding to a high birth rate, considerable external migration and the need to draw skills and professional competencies profiles.

Rauza Shirgatov, head of partnership and international projects at the TVET Department, Ministry of Education and Science, Kazakhstan, said four regions had implemented TRP last year and a further 12 would join soon, noting that this facilitated dialogue among stakeholders that was not possible at the national level.

Reporting back from the **session on involving stakeholders**, Vesna Puratic, senior officer with the Ministry of Civil Affairs, Bosnia and Herzegovina, said that national and regional

encouragement to stakeholders was a key factor, though as TRP was voluntary actors could not be forced to take part. Ways to attract wide participation included running workshops, round tables, seminars, training events and promotional campaigns. In some countries, [specifically Kazakhstan] TRP was considered of such importance that its implementation was enshrined in law.

Taking a **holistic view, moving from a narrow VET focus to skills, competitiveness and inclusion** was a common challenge, said group spokesman Lassaad Labassi, Regional VET and employment director of Tunisia's South-eastern Medenine region. At sub-national level many regions had started to explore the role of VET in relation to the economic competitiveness of the region and were also able to understand re-training or CVT aspects. What all countries still lack is data on Lifelong Learning (LLL), while the training for people with special needs and related data is only just starting to emerge as an issue, Improving cooperation between public and private sector VET providers and links with industry was also a key area.

Identifying evidence, finding it and using it, was perhaps the thorniest problem for participants, Olga Oleynikova, director of Russia's Centre for VET Studies, said in her report back. None of the countries involved in regional TRP had a culture for organising such work themselves, and it was a challenge to find and interpret data for reports, she noted. Data was often patchy at the regional level, existing only at a sector or company level and difficult to access. Data was often not harmonised with EU statistics and in some areas - LLL in Russia for example - simply did not exist. Employers, regional ministries and other bodies should be encouraged to cooperate more in the discovery and provision of data. Using data from international and national reports for regional analysis should not be ignored, she added.

Reflecting on the four sessions, Mihaylo Milovanovitch for the ETF, noted that the idea that regional level analysis could be easier than national because "people are better connected" was questionable. He recommended delegates to pick up copies of the ETF's Guide to Policy Analysis - which could be useful in helping frame approaches at the regional level.

Delegates who were already engaged in TRP at the regional and city level were pleased with progress so far, the **session on lessons learned and value added**, heard.

Fakher Zaibi, general director of the national employment and skills observatory at the Tunisia's Ministry of Vocational Training and Employment, said the country had begun working in three regions in 2016, after some initial self-assessment in 2012. The experience was a "tough but exciting one" he said. The recommendations that emerged from that initial self-assessment became the "heart of the national report" in 2016, he added: starting to lay the foundations for a new VET strategy, which was currently being implemented in 14 large projects. "That initial work was very important to devise the future strategy to better assess the first experiments with the ETF and stakeholders in public/private partnerships." Izdihar Abdennadher, the Ministry's regional director, Sfax, added that after her region introduced TRP in 2016 they had noted that their unemployment rates were just 1.3 percent, compared with 15 percent nationally.

Enze Idiatulina, a VET expert from the university of Yoshkar Ola in the republic of Mari El, Russia, said that engagement in TRP helped regional VET professionals and system managers understand that "we were not alone in this world and not the first to implement this difficult process." Engagement helped drive better inter-departmental relations in regional ministries, embedding a sense of being involved in reaching towards "international standards" in VET and labour market relations. Initiatives included establishing a programme to promote entrepreneurship to encourage students to set up their own businesses, she added.

To those about to embark on TRP at the sub-national level she said a key factor was team building: "There is nothing we cannot overcome; you must love your work and do it together. This is a unique opportunity to present in your region information that is the utmost importance for the political and economic elite."

"TRP is very intelligent, smart - you must not be afraid of inconvenient questions."

A key achievement of following TRP at a national level in Bosnia and Herzegovina was to "bring VET school enrolments closer to the EU average of 36.7 percent of tertiary entries," Zlatan Bulijko of the Federal Ministry of Education and Science said. Advisory councils for schools had been set up across most cantons and a national vision for skills and strategic planning had recently been adopted. Challenges for the future included: building a flexible VET system based on societal and individual needs, developing a national Quality Framework that included formal and informal learning and LLL. Better links between VET and the labour market were also needed.

Mykola Kuchynskyi, head of the VET department at Ukraine's Ministry of Education and Science, said that long involvement at a national level and the country's extensive experience in producing 25 regional reports last year to support and assist the country's new policy of VET decentralisation, had instructive. "One of the most important results is that today our regional stakeholders positively perceive VET; they see it as a system that will improve the regional economy. They have horizontal contacts, are motivated and goal oriented." There was a new law on VET currently going through parliament [which specifically includes provisions for devolving VET funding to the regions], programmes to create new standards and centres of excellence, text books, participation in the World Skills competition and a government drive to attract more students to VET, even though deep-seated cultural preferences for Higher Education remained.

"Ukraine is moving towards a clear European system of VET, but still we have a lot of work to do," he concluded.

Aygul Nurkina, head of the methodological office of Kostanay regional Education Department, noted that the Torino Process assessment in Kostanay region included a recommendation to make more use of the already existing cross-border collaboration with Russian institutions to explore how to work with special needs students. Cross-border cooperation is playing an important role in her region - which borders Russia. The Torino Process had also pointed out that more had to happen at regional level to provide opportunities for young migrants from other regions of Kazakhstan. Local enterprises, including the region's manufacturing and mining plants had taken up the baton and were implementing programmes that included, for example, paying VET student accommodation costs. "Engaging in TRP at the regional level has opened up a lot of opportunities for us," she added.

Day 2: 28 February, 2018

In the meeting's second day, delegates looked in more detail at how TRP at the sub-national level could be strengthened and be made even more useful. Delegates looked at five key areas: adapting the TRP analytical framework to the regional level; the link between the national and sub-national level; statistics and evidence; training and online tools: and sustainability.

Working in mixed groups - each with an ETF 'ideas harvester' delegates produced a host of ideas and suggestions under the rubric Looking to the Future. Ideas "harvested" could be of relevance for those implementing the work within partner countries and their regions and/or for ETF.

Topic 1: Focus on sustainability – ways to support sustainability from the very start of the next sub-national Torino Process round

The embeddedness of the Torino Process and an agreement of stakeholders on its role in national and sub-national VET reform were identified as important sustainability aspect. Embeddedness could be supported in numerous ways:

- Through recognition of the value of the Torino Process from the government side, together with government support and commitment to support in the future
- Through the assignment of a specific role of the Torino Process in national/sub-national VET reform
- Through the commitment of national and regional authorities to use the Torino Process methodology for the development of national and sub-national projects

- Through the commitment of national and regional authorities and stakeholders on inter-institutional cooperation
- Through endorsement of the Torino Process approach by the EU Delegation in the country and through endorsement by the donor community active in the country.

In order to become sustainable, the Torino Process at sub-national level would also require the development and availability of the necessary expertise:

- Through the institutionalisation of an observatory function (in contexts where observatories are being established/further developed as part of national and regional plans)
- The presence of well prepared Torino Process coordinators in participating regions/cities
- The setting up of sub-national working groups that involve key stakeholders from education and business
- Where possible, reaching agreement to establish regional/city working groups on a permanent/long-term basis
- The availability of training/capacity building for working group members, in particular on policy analysis and on translating recommendations into action
- The possibility to share good practices among sub-national working groups as well as overall among stakeholders from different regions.

Regional/city stakeholders could, in cooperation with national stakeholders take action on all the above aspects. In addition, participants identified a number of areas in which they see a specific role for the ETF:

- To raise awareness of the role the sub-national Torino Process can play as a driver for VET development
- To contextualise support to the specific requirements
- To contribute to capacity building of working group members, in particular on policy analysis, the formulation of recommendations and the translation of recommendations into actions,
- To reinforce communication on the role of different stakeholders in the Torino Process at sub-national level
- To contribute to the dissemination of results of the sub-national dimension and the sharing of good practice.

Topic 2: the Analytical Framework (AF)

Delegates agreed that overall the AF covers the key areas required to assess VET systems at sub-national level, though some questions relate only to the national level or require re-wording to be applicable to the sub-national level. Participants nevertheless identified a number of challenges and formulated recommendations:

- Some questions within the AF are broad and/or not so easily understood. Furthermore, there is overlap among questions in different building blocks (several examples were linked to A and E). A manual guiding sub-national Torino Process teams through the questions of the AF could be developed. Such a manual could also include examples of possible answers and possible evidence to be used
- It should be clarified to teams how to cover aspects that may be specific to their country/region (for example a specific notion of VET) or how to deal with priority policy aspects of national policy not explicitly covered/foreseen within the AF
- While questions in the AF may be clear, participants requested more guidance in terms of evidence that could be used and how to interpret possible indicators. Participants also suggested to broaden the scope of evidence to national VET specific evidence and to provide more guidance on the use of “alternative” evidence.

- Where statistical and administrative evidence is scarce or partial, more use could be made of qualitative evidence (for example focus group results). This aspect should be addressed more explicitly in the AF/guidelines
- A central “hotline” could be established, to support a consistent approach. A Q&A (Question and Answer) and FAQ (Frequently Asked Questions) repository should be established.

Topic 3: the link between the sub-National and National Torino Process

Delegates agreed that the reason for engaging in the sub-national Torino Process work had been very different from one country to another. They therefore stressed that it was extremely important at the beginning of a sub-national exercise to:

- Clarify and communicate why the exercise is being undertaken
- Who would be able to contribute to the exercise and would be asked to take part
- Which use would be made of sub-national reports in terms of possible contribution to a national report. All participants stressed that beyond the contribution to a national report, a sub-national assessment should first of all have value for the region/city involved.
- Participants agreed no standard sequencing between the sub-national and national reports should be defined. In some countries it has proven useful to prepare first sub-national reports and during a subsequent stage the national report. In other countries sub-national and national reports have been prepared in parallel. Instead participants suggested participants in a sub-national approach would benefit from guidance on:
 - How to communicate with stakeholders, engage and empower them
 - How to formalise the work
 - How to proceed in case of parallel vs subsequent sequencing
 - How to ensure that the exercise has value for the region(s) involved

Delegates also suggested that successful work at sub-national level requires a number of tools:

- A platform supporting communication between the national and regional level and among regions
- Capacity support/training
- Expert support

Topic 4: Finding and using statistics and evidence

A number of structural aspects, in relation to the availability of evidence and collection of information (labour market information, education management related information) were identified. These aspects need to be addressed in the medium term by stakeholders and authorities at sub-national or national level.

- Comparability of statistics/evidence across cities / regions. Some of the indicators might be difficult to compare across regions within the same country, due to differences in the methodology of data collection
- Availability is an issue for some of the indicators, which might affect some regions more than others. In some regions the availability of indicators is higher than in others. This creates in-balances.
- Sub-national Torino Process actors have often very limited or no contacts with the “producers of data”. More and better contacts could help to improve both comparability and availability of some indicators. This is an area in which ETF could support the establishment of better contacts.

Delegates noted that a number of tools (for example the manual on the use of indicators and ETF guidelines) were already available and suggested the following improvements:

- Guidelines concerning the collection of indicators, should include concrete formulas for the calculation of each of the indicators. The manual on the use of indicators should be updated in line with each Torino Process round to reflect the current list of indicators. This is particularly important for some indicators (for example NEETs)
- Guidelines and examples concerning the interpretation and analysis of indicators are required. This is particularly the case for more complex indicators
- The analytical framework
- An on-line FAQ (Frequently Asked Questions) could be established to respond to the more technical issues, which are common to many of the regions.

On the Analytical Framework and the list of suggested/mandatory indicators delegates concluded that:

- The current list of indicators was often too broad to help in answering many of the questions within the analytical framework and on some occasions could not clearly be connected to any of the questions/possible answers.
- It would be helpful to develop a suggested list of indicators which are VET specific, covering for examples the number of providers, number of students etc.

Topic 5: Training and on-line tools

Delegates discussed on which aspects and topics working group members in charge of report preparation require training/coaching support. Delegates also shared ideas on ways to better share information.

Training:

- Face to face training is important for the core team involved in report preparation. Training should therefore be accessible/cover more persons that has often been the case in the past
- Training should be made available at the start of each new round. This is necessary because of staff turnover, but also as a way to support a shared understanding
- ETFs participation in initial training is still seen as important as so far there is limited capacity to fully take on training
- In the medium-term ETF and countries intending to work at sub-national level on a regular basis should aim at establishing a team of partner country trainers (one group also suggested a regional group). This team could over time cover the initial training for each round, as ETF will not be able to cover all trainings as the sub-national approach continues to expand rapidly

Key aspects for training:

- The questions within the AF. This aspect should also cover some introduction to thematic issues the country may not be so aware about yet as well as explanations/examples on specific questions
- Collection of evidence: what the statistical/administrative data represents, what could be alternatives in case quantitative evidence is not yet available
- The use and analysis of evidence and formulation of recommendations
- Overall quality of the report in terms of formulation and recommendations.

Beyond the availability of training delegates also stressed the importance of having a coach/expert available on call to clarify the points above, as work goes on. The key topics in which national experts had been involved in previous rounds are the same as under training.

On-line tools:

- There should be one location/repository with all key documents and support materials. Some countries and regions also consider to establish their own tool/site (already common practice for some)

- Information/materials that participants can use pre and post initial training should be made available, as time spent face to face is limited
- there was no consensus among participants as to whether it would be helpful to have one site only (for example ETF managed) with country or region sections or whether each country should establish its own site/repository as it might be important to also have key national/regional documentation available via the site/tool to make it useful.
- A Q&A and FAQ function should be established, so that as questions emerge a shared understanding can be developed
- Some delegates suggested that a site/repository should have “thematic”/”building block” sections in order to be of interest and stay “alive”
- Delegates noted that stakeholders may have different needs and interest, which should be reflected in the platform/site/repository. If businesses/enterprise representatives should be motivated to participate in the work in a systematic manner, then information should also be presented in a way which is suitable for business

An on-line tool could also be used to support contacts among regions. Contacts among practitioners (both on-line but even more face to face) were seen by all participants as important for a productive process.

Delegates also suggested that inter-regional/country exchanges should also be possible on a thematic level

Representatives of the nine countries at the meeting identified and reported the learning points they would take away from the two days.

Abdelaziz Jaouani closed the meetings and announced the Action Points the ETF team is taking on:

- i) a roadmap for action, to be taken at the beginning of the process, to clarify the needs and develop a 'soft template' for each country;
- ii) provide support and awareness to clarify the national/sub-national links;
- iii) considering the setting up of an E-platform as a repository for sub-national TRP; and
- iv) revision of the Analytic Framework for the sub-national level including review of region-specific indicators for VET.