CENTRAL ASIA

REGIONAL STRATEGY PAPER 2017-20

2018 UPDATES
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A. REGIONAL AND COUNTRY CONTEXT

As the five Central Asian republics celebrate their 25th independence anniversaries, they face similar challenges as well as specific national ones. The development of national identity, reform and institution building, socio-economic development, within a regional and global context, interplay with each country’s specific context and history. This includes global energy price falls, especially for the energy-rich Kazakh, Turkmen and Uzbek economies, and the need for sustainable and resilient economic growth, including diversification and employment of relatively young populations. High levels of self-employment, including so-called “unproductive self-employment” (representing often subsistence economic activities), urban/rural/regional migration in combination with disparate regional economic development represent key dynamics for all the Central Asian states. In particular, the economic crisis in the Russian Federation led to the return of economic migrants to their home countries (Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan) and to falling remittances.

The Central Asian Education Initiative is a key pillar of the EU cooperation with Central Asia aiming at modernising education and training and raising its quality. EU supports the initiative through bilateral programmes in Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Turkmenistan and through support to the Central Asian Education Platform (CAEP) promoting regional cooperation in VET and Higher Education. The Ministers for Education and high-level officials from the EU and five Central Asian countries identified the following priorities for regional cooperation in 2015 in Riga:

- The development of qualification frameworks and standards,
- Quality assurance and accreditation, and
- Employability and education and business cooperation.

ETF will continue to provide expertise inputs to the regional policy dialogue, supported by CAEP in these priority areas.

KAZAKHSTAN

Kazakhstan is an upper middle-income country with a population of 17.5 million, with constant small population growth. Life expectancy has increased from 65.9 years in 2003 to 71.6 in 2014. Youth aged up to 14 made up 26.7% of the population in 2015.¹ Its territory of 2.7 million square km makes Kazakhstan the largest land-locked country in the world and the ninth largest country overall.

Kazakhstan sustained impressive economic growth since 2000, but a considerable slow-down is seen in recent years (1.2% in 2015), due to decreasing oil and gas and metal prices. More than 60% of GDP is generated by services, the sector in which more than half of the workforce is employed.²

The positive economic situation has had a positive impact on employment. The employment rate is high (80% for those aged 20-64 in 2014) and has remained stable over past years. Unemployment rates are

¹ World Bank, WDI database
² World Bank, WDI database
decreasing (5% in 2015 compared to 6.6% in 2009 for those aged 15+). Youth unemployment is lower than overall unemployment (4.1% in 2005 for those aged 15-24), which is a truly exceptional situation.³

Looking at the educational structure of the population, Kazakhstan is a relatively skilled country, where one third of the population has high level of education. However, if we consider the results from the international skills assessment, many 15-year-old students do not hold foundation skills (i.e. reading, mathematics and science). In 2012, almost 60% of this group in reading and around 40% in mathematics and science, scored below Level 2 on PISA scale. Yet, the results indicated improvements in comparison to 2009.⁴

VET is an important part of the education system, representing around 40% of students in upper secondary education⁵.

KYRGYZSTAN

The Kyrgyz Republic is a lower middle-income country with a population of 6 million in 2015. The country has consistent population growth of around 2%. About one third of the population is under 15 years ⁶, putting pressure on the education system and labour market.

Following economic growth from 2006 to 2009, the country has since, due to political instability, experienced an erratic economic performance. In 2013, GDP grew by 10.9%, but growth has slowed (3.5% in 2015). The economy service-dominated (57.1% of GDP in 2015 and 48.1% of employment in 2013). Around one third of workers are in the agricultural sector, which contributes 16% of GDP.⁷

The Kyrgyz labour market is characterised by an increasing working age population, limited or lacking labour demand, high under-employment, rural poverty and informal employment. Both activity and employment rates have been decreasing, reaching 72.4% and 67% in 2014 for those aged 20-64, respectively. Women are less likely to be active and employed than men. Unemployment levels (8% in 2014 for those aged 15+) have been relatively stable over the past years. Youth unemployment, those aged 15-24, is higher than the overall level of 14% in 2014. One in five young people are not in employment, education or training, suggesting difficulties in the transition from education to the labour market. This is especially present for females.⁸

Looking at education levels, most adults have medium or high levels. International skills assessment show more than 80% of 15-year-olds scored very low (less than Level 2 on the PISA scale in 2009)⁹, suggesting basic skills gaps in areas such as reading, mathematics and science.

The share of students attending vocational programmes in upper secondary education is increasing, with 37.2% in 2014 and vocational skills greatly influence employment chances.¹⁰ Youth unemployment rates are consistently lower for those with vocational skills compared to those without.

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³ Agency of statistics of the Republic of Kazakhstan
⁴ OECD
⁵ UNESCO UIS
⁶ World Bank, WDI database
⁷ World Bank, WDI database
⁸ National Statistical Committee of the Kyrgyz Republic
⁹ OECD
¹⁰ OECD
TAJIKISTAN

Tajikistan is a lower-middle income country with a population of 8.5 million in 2015. Tajikistan’s GDP fell to 4.2% in 2015 from 6.7% in 2014, largely due to the slowdown in Russia and weak global demand. Remittances (80% from Russia) fell significantly over the same period.\(^{11}\)

Half of the GDP is generated by services, followed by agriculture (27.4% in 2013). Agriculture plays an important role, employing 52.9% of workers in 2009\(^{12}\).

Poverty reduction gains over the last decade are at risk. Between 1999 and 2014, poverty rates fell from 80% to 31.3% but non-monetary poverty reduction is not in line. The government has set goals by 2020: to double GDP and to reduce poverty to 20%. Foreign direct investment is limited and private investment is much lower than the regional average. Agriculture offers a solid foundation for economic development. Tajikistan has a young and rapidly growing population (35% under 15 years), making improved public services in social sectors (education, health, and social protection), and job creation, imperative components of government’s Poverty Reduction Strategy (World Bank, 2015\(^{13}\)).

Employment is low (44.3% in 2009 for the age group 15-75) and female employment is much lower than males – a traditional societal view in that the role of women is seen at home. The youth unemployment rate was higher (16.7%) than overall unemployment (11.5% for the age group 15-75) in 2009.\(^{14}\)

There are limited institutional capabilities to adapt the workforce to the needs of the labour market. There is a great need for skilled specialists and local employment. In terms of education attainment, around 30% of adults have only basic education, a majority being women.\(^{15}\) Limited mobility and access to higher professional education by poorer sections of society have increased the social significance of vocational education and training (VET), however only 6% of upper secondary students, mostly males, were in VET in 2013.\(^{16}\) Substantial reforms to strengthen the economic and social contributions of the VET system is needed.

TURKMENISTAN

Turkmenistan is an upper-middle-income country with a population of 5.4 million in 2015, many of which are young.\(^{17}\) Since 1991, Turkmenistan has pursued economic reform to create a mixed-market economy. The country possesses extensive oil and gas reserves, which remain the major source of external revenue. GDP growth has been strong (11.1%, 2012), but dropped to 6.5% in 2015 due to falling energy prices. Growth is forecast at 6.5% in 2016 and 7.0% in 2017. The economy is industry driven (48.4% of GDP in 2010).\(^{18}\) Diversifying the export sector will reduce instability and create jobs. Low implementation capacity may hinder required structural reform.

\(^{11}\) World Bank, WDI database
\(^{12}\) Statistical Agency under President of the Republic of Tajikistan (Last LFS survey was implemented in 2009.)
\(^{13}\) World Bank, WDI database
\(^{14}\) Statistical Agency under President of the Republic of Tajikistan
\(^{15}\) Statistical Agency under President of the Republic of Tajikistan
\(^{16}\) UNESCO UIS
\(^{17}\) World Bank, WDI database
\(^{18}\) World Bank, WDI database
Uzbekistan

Uzbekistan is the region’s most populated country with 31.3 million inhabitants in 2015. It has a young population and continual population growth. Aspiring to become an industrialised high middle-income country by 2030, Uzbekistan continues to develop a more market-oriented economy in a bid to ensure equitable distribution of growth between regions, and maintained infrastructure and social services. Policy goals are: to accelerate job creation; increase efficiency of the business environment; develop infrastructure (energy, transport, and irrigation); enhance competitiveness of specific industries, including agro-processing, petrochemicals, and textiles; to diversify the economy, reducing dependence on commodity exports; and to improve access and quality of education, health and other social services (World Bank, 2016).

Since the mid-2000s, Uzbekistan has enjoyed robust GDP growth (8% in 2015), thanks to favorable trade terms for key export commodities like copper, gold, natural gas, cotton. In addition, the government’s macro-economic management, and limited exposure to international financial markets, protected it from the economic downturn. The service sector contributes to nearly half of the GDP and agricultural plays an important role, generating 18% of GDP in 2015. Domestically, Uzbekistan has to work to minimize vulnerability to possible external shocks affecting commodity prices and the anticipated inflow of foreign direct investment (FDI) and external loans to finance the large public investment programmes.

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19 OECD

20 World Bank, WDI database

21 World Bank, WDI database
Education and VET reform remain a national policy priority. While educational expenditure is increasing, it remains well below the EU average. The share of VET in secondary education is 7.79% (2014, Unesco Institute of Statistics). To raise the quality in VET, Kazakhstan has made important efforts to introduce work-based learning, in particular through dual approaches, and enhance the involvement of enterprises. The 2016-2019 Action Plan foresees important progress to introduce a dual education system and free VET at working profession level. Well-qualified staff working in VET institutions are seen as fundamental for successful reform, and attention is being paid to expanding their professional development.

Key developments in VET and employment policy progress since 2012 include:

- The state programme for the development of the education sector 2011-2020 adopted. Implementation is being monitored and adjusted on a regular basis.
- National qualification framework adopted. More than 150 occupational standards developed with the involvement of employers.
- Role of employers in VET considerably enhanced, with the establishment of the Chamber of Entrepreneurs in 2013 (national and regional level). The Chamber is expected to support the involvement of SMEs in VET and has been adopting professional standards.
- A roadmap for the implementation of the dual system, covering legal and institutional aspects, implemented through a pilot approach.
- A number of changes in legislation adopted in 2016, including in the labour code (introducing the notion of young specialist – a student who also holds an employment contract with a company), to allow further progress with the introduction of the dual education system.
- Strong emphasis on evidence-based policymaking. Regular participation in international surveys (PISA, PIAAC and TALIS as of 2016)
- Widening of VET provision, (2015 development) allowing persons of working profession level to obtain initial VET education free.

The ETF works closely with the Ministry of Education and Science, the Information-Analytical Centre and Kasipkor - key stakeholders in the area of VET planning, management, implementation and monitoring at national level. These organisations have, since 2014, been key counter-parts for work on the Torino Process. Representatives of VET providers, teacher training institutes and in-service training organisations from all regions are involved in regular school development related actions.

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22 K:\03-09 OPS WORK PROGRAMME 2015\09.SP Torino Process\004.Final deliverables\TRP 2014 national reports on web\TRP 2014
KYRGYZSTAN

Education and training is a central political and societal interest, with considerable budgetary resources allocated by national standards. Public expenditure on education as a share of GDP is consistently high, with 7.8% being well above OECD average. However, the budget per student is very limited given the large school-aged population. Education and all other public sectors had to face budget reductions due to austerity measures introduced in 2013.

The Education Strategy 2012-20 emphasises quality and access for all education sectors. VET quality is conceptualised in terms of labour market relevance, graduate employability and enhanced interaction with employers. Elements of access and equity are also considered. The share of VET in secondary education is on the rise - 8.9% in 2011 due to Secondary VET being a preferential route into higher education.

Key developments in VET and employment policy progress since 2012:

- Ministry of Education and Science take responsibility for VET in 2015, including VET Agency and youth policies. Employment and labour issues under Ministry for Social Development.
- National Skills Council and seven sector councils set up in 2014-15, supporting better interaction of VET with the labour market. Some sector councils developing occupational standards and improvements in VET provision.
- VET Agency developing occupational standards and competence-based learning content with employers.
- Increased awareness that appropriate tools to understand labour market needs are required. Ministry of Labour looking at staffing requirements by sector and region for 2014-2017. VET Agency has commissioned sector analysis studies. Graduate tracer methodology for all VET schools initialised (2016).
- National Accreditation Council established 2014. Independent accreditation of education providers legislated and pilot exercises in 16 Initial and Secondary VET institutions undertaken. Independent certification, with employers involvement, explored through pilot work. Experiences have been gained with short-term course graduates. Work underway to define how long-term VET course graduates could undergo employer-led certification in addition to the final exam administered by VET providers.

ETF engages in an active manner with the Ministry of Education and Science and its VET Agency. Wherever ETF actions involve the wider VET stakeholder community, the International Chamber of Commerce and a number of sectoral associations, the Association of VET college directors and the confederation of trade unions are involved.

TAJIKISTAN

In 2014, responsibility for initial VET passed to the Ministry of Labour, while management of curriculum and teacher accreditation remained with the Ministry of Education and Science. A Strategy “Improvement of the Population Living Standards in the Republic of Tajikistan 2013-2015” targeted the creation of jobs and

\[ K:03-09.OPS WORK PROGRAMME 2015/09.SP Torino Process/004.Final deliverables/TRP 2014 national reports on web/TRP 2014 \]
improvements in quality of education and employment. From 2014, the duration of IVET has been reduced from 3 to 2 years, however, with the same number of teaching hours. The Ministry of Labour has developed a Law to strengthen Adult Education. Some 28 adult training institutes provide short courses mainly for unemployed and for potential migrants. In 2014, a Methodological Centre was established to support initial VET institutions and staff. The new version of the Law on Education (July 2013) created standards for quality assurance and quality management. However, a single national procedure for evaluating the quality of education and implementing mechanisms for monitoring, internal, and external assessment still needs to be developed. Quality assurance measurements remain fragmented and differ between regions.

TURKMENISTAN

The share of VET in secondary education is 7.79 % (2014, Unesco Institute of Statistics). Turkmenistan aims at raising the bar of its education, including VET. It aspires to reach international levels and standards and is conscious of the need to develop its own know-how via the exchange of experience and practice. This is also true for developments in the labour market and economy skills; specialists are seen as vital in the development and diversification of the economy. In March 2013, the Decree “On improvement of the system of Education in Turkmenistan” was approved, including a 12-year general secondary education system.

UZBEKISTAN

Education is a high priority for Uzbekistan. The amount spent on education increased from 8.3% of GDP in 2012 to 8.6% of GDP in 2015. Students in VET colleges account for around 90% of secondary education. Unemployment is very low and graduates are given a first job guarantee.

The policy framework for VET has been consistent, major changes have tended to focus on implementation challenges rather than new policy directions. Cooperation between the Ministry of Education, Ministry of Labour and Social Security and the Chamber of Commerce and Industry has strengthened. Support to VET is moving from a focus on infrastructure development and student volume (e.g. building schools and raising the number of teachers trained) to content and quality (e.g. the relevance of curricula to the needs of the labour market and improving the quality of teacher training).

There has been an increased flexibility in the delivery of the vocational curriculum, with vocational schools adapting their vocational curriculum to meet local business and industry needs. Progress has been made in updating the curricula and in continuous professional development of teachers and trainers. A new methodological centre was established to support this.
B. EU AND OTHER DONORS SUPPORT IN VET AND SKILLS

KAZAKHSTAN

The EU and Kazakhstan completed negotiations on an Enhanced Partnership and Cooperation Agreement in October 2014, which sees education and research included among 29 key sector policy areas. As a middle-income country, Kazakhstan will no longer make use of bilateral Development Cooperation Instrument grants but will continue to take part in regional initiatives, including the Central Asian Education Platform (CAEP).

Kazakhstan receives limited donor support. The key EU donor on VET reform is GIZ, which facilitates the implementing the roadmap towards a dual system. It supports a pilot project (public-private partnership), testing the introduction of the dual system (an adaptation of the German model) in three regions (three regions, three colleges, and three professions). On the Kazakh side, the project is funded through regional budgets and enterprise inputs.

A World Bank project (33 million USD) on VET modernisation, with a focus on raising VET relevance, quality, and efficiency through an improved policy framework and institutional capacity came to an end in 2015. The World Bank launched a new project of 137 million USD (of which 100 million as loan) with the Ministry of Health and Social Development in 2016. The project supports the implementation of the National Qualification System (occupational standards, improved process, curriculum reforms, and establishing an independent qualification assessment and award system). In addition it supports the enhancement of skills for improved employment outcomes and productivity (public employment services, relevance of workforce training and implementation of a skills enhancement training programme).

Kazakhstan is an active participant of the OECD’s competitiveness programme. Kazakhstan regularly takes part in the PISA survey and is currently preparing to implement PIAAC (survey of adult skills) as of 2016 (testing phase) as well as TALIS.

KYRGYZSTAN

Since 2013, Kyrgyzstan received EU budget support for education. The financing agreement for the 2016-2018 phase (€21 million) was signed in April 2016. Although the main focus is general education, for VET the indicators examine progress made on accreditation, guidance and the tracing of graduates. The 2019-2021 phase is currently budgeted with €30 million.

In VET, the key donors are the Asian Development Bank (ADB) and GIZ. The ADB implemented two major projects since 2010 (10 million USD grant for the first project, followed by a 10 million USD loan in combination with a 10 million USD loan). Both projects address VET school rehabilitation, standards and curriculum development, staff training, support for improved governance approaches (via sector skills councils), improvements to system monitoring tools and approaches and the setting up of a skills fund. A third project is under discussion. ETF has been actively cooperating with the ADB and a G-20 funded project since 2014, mainstreaming the tracer study methodology and supporting the capacities of sector councils. In 2015, a joint work-programme on tracer study institutionalisation was implemented with the ADB project and VET Agency. In 2016, it has been mainstreamed to all VET schools.

GIZ has been active for many years, both on VET provision and labour market information system related issues and capacity building of employment offices. The Swiss organisation, Helvetas, has been active in VET for rural areas. DVV International works in particular in the area of adult learning. Since 2014, USAID
The EU has started a number of studies on sector development needs, which could also be relevant to VET reform issues.

TAJIKISTAN

The EU has identified three priorities in its Multi-annual Indicative Programme 2014-2020 with Tajikistan: health (€62 million); education/VET (€75 million) and rural development (€110 million). ETF inputs were provided to the EU Delegation for the first €15 million EU project on education and VET reforms, focusing on teacher training. The project is in procurement. The ETF regional project is well aligned with the EU assistance, and work on Continuing Professional Development is feeding into the specification of EU actions. A Coordination Council (DCC) of some 28 members work on six clusters of initiatives, including education and human development which holds regular meetings (especially EU, GIZ, ADB, UNICEF and ETF).

The GIZ project Supporting Reform of the Technical and Vocational Education and Training System in Tajikistan (2008-2016) is concluding. The Asian Development Bank (ADB) is implementing a major VET programme. Unicef runs a pilot project on inclusive education in iVET and UNFPA on health, environment and gender in general education. DVV carries out a project on youth education in GBAO region including business training, civil education, entrepreneurial learning and education in female prisons. The Aga Khan Foundation supports VET courses at school for professional education and the University of Central Asia.

G20/ILO develops a simulation tool for VET school management and supports a skills needs survey of the Tajik labour market.

TURKMENISTAN

The number of international and bilateral organisations working with Turkmenistan in the fields of VET and skills is extremely limited. The EU is preparing two new projects for general education and VET (2016 onwards). ADB did a central and west Asia regional study: Good Jobs for Inclusive Growth in Central and West Asia and Unesco on: TVET Policy Review to Support the Development of a Responsive Education and Training System in Turkmenistan. For the UN, The School of Education – Queen’s University of Belfast, Northern Ireland, UK, carried out a 2016 audit: Proposed Laws of Education in Turkmenistan – The 2013 Law and translated to English.

UZBEKISTAN

EU development assistance concerns the rural development sector 2014-2020. A previously defined programme on VET in rural areas is expected 2016/17. There are several donors working in Uzbekistan in a variety of education areas.

The British Council supports entrepreneurial education and the development of sector skills councils, specifically in tourism. GIZ has established a series of activities related to VET and support to the Chamber of Commerce in developing business education cooperation, but follow-up support is unlikely. The Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation has commenced Phase IV of the Skills Development Project – where a training framework for two professions in the water supply sector has been adopted and specialists are being trained. The ADB is embarking on a regional study: Good Jobs for Inclusive Growth in Central and West Asia (CWA). Uzbekistan also works with regional donors such as the Japanese, particularly in management training and Korean Development (particularly in labour market training). Uzbekistan collaborates with UNDP through a public policy research body called the Centre for Economic Research.
D. ETF MID-TERM INTERVENTION STRATEGY IN THE COUNTRY

The priority of ETF’s mid-term intervention strategy 2017-2020 in Central Asia is to support the European Commission and the EU Delegations for the different phases of the EU external assistance project cycle, and regional cooperation in VET.

Taking into consideration ETF resources and the lower priority of the region on the EU agenda – the ETF will not initiate any new projects in Central Asia. Instead, it will be supporting the EC and the EUDs in the design, implementation and monitoring of EU interventions and on supporting regional cooperation, among others through providing expertise inputs to the EU Central Asia Education Platform. Central Asian countries will continue to participate in ETF corporate actions, like the Torino process, and events.

**Specific objective 1:** To enhance the effectiveness and efficiency of the EU programmes in Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and eventually in Uzbekistan through the provision of support to the EU Delegation in the operationalisation of the interventions.

Following ETF’s support to the design (identification and formulation) of EU projects in Tajikistan (Continuous Professional Development of teachers and trainers, € 15 million) and Turkmenistan (Education and VET, € 6 million and VET € 15 million), the ETF’s role will shift in 2017 to implementation support, monitoring and review, in line with EU requests, together with continued policy dialogue actions. Support to the design of new projects may be given for projects in Tajikistan and Uzbekistan up to 2020.

**Expected result by 2020:** The relevance, efficiency and effectiveness of EU external assistance in the field of human capital development in Central Asia is enhanced by ETF support, and expertise in the different phases of the project cycle as requested by the EUD.

**Specific objective 2:** To support regional cooperation through a regional Torino Process network, continuous professional development (CPD) initiative and Central Asian Education Platform (CAEP)

**Torino Process**

In the context of the ETF corporate initiatives, ETF will continue involving Central Asia in the Torino Process: the system wide policy analysis and monitoring progress exercise implemented by the ETF on a periodic basis. The 2017-2020 period will cover the closure of the 2016 round and the implementation of the 5th round in 2019. The specific modalities for national implementation in 2019 will be agreed according to 2016 results and specific development of the monitoring processes in the countries. In between the two rounds, ETF will continue policy dialogue with all countries on policy analysis and system-wide progress monitoring through VET monitoring forums at regional and international levels.

Given the strong and growing commitment the Central Asian countries have shown in terms of progressing towards participative VET policy self-assessment and a more robust use of evidence, the ETF will support a regional Torino Process network. The network will serve as vehicle for the development of technical capacity for evidence-based policymaking and regional exchanges.

The regional network will support all five Central Asian countries in progressing in the application of the Torino Process principles for the 2019 round, compared to the level reached 2016.
**Expected result:** In 2019 ETF’s aim is to further increase the ownership of the countries for the Torino Process (including in Turkmenistan), to widen the involvement of stakeholders and to increase the number of self-assessments. Kazakhstan is interested to test a regional approach ahead of the next round.

**Continuous Professional Development**

The ETF has been active in Central Asia (mainly Kazakhstan, the Kyrgyz Republic and Tajikistan) in the area of VET provision since 2009 through a regional initiative, on school development for lifelong learning. The work resulted in the development and testing of training modules for VET schools. In a subsequent phase, ETF supported the setting-up of communities of practice (CoPs) around VET providers, which demonstrated how these communities could take up important VET provision issues in an independent manner. In 2015, the ETF supported a special attention among communities of the issue of continuous professional development (CPD). In each of the three core countries CoPs carried out a survey, the results used in 2015/2016 in national fora on the need to make CPDs more flexible and responsive. All elements of the school development initiative covered work at national level, but also regular regional fora with a policy dialogue component.

Since the school development initiative was launched in 2009, changes are observed in all Central Asian countries in the area of staff development. While initially national reform efforts (and consequently donor support) tended to focus on improved infrastructure and specific tools to bring improvements (new standards for some professions, new materials, training of some staff to use these), there is a growing awareness in Central Asian countries on the importance of well-trained VET staff.

The area of CPD approaches are an important complementary step to ongoing donor (including also EU) work, in which the ETF can make a valuable contribution. The CPD institutions have made steps in preparing new demand-oriented programmes and are delivering, amongst others, school management programmes, based on the school development project. Building on these changed approaches of the CPD institutions, it is vital to strengthen a widened view of responsive CPD. The engagement of schools and other stakeholders, including the private sector, would reinforce this process. Based upon the results reached in 2016 national fora, the ETF will facilitate communication between CPD related institutions and their stakeholders, in close cooperation with the Central Asian Education Platform in 2017.

**Central Asian Education Platform (CAEP)**

The ETF will continue to provide expertise inputs to the regional policy dialogue in Central Asia, as initiated through the bi-annual ministers’ conferences supported by CAEP. Ministers of Education will gather in 2017 to discuss progress of the roadmap agreed in 2015. The priorities for regional cooperation are NQF, quality assurance, employability, including CPD, VET/HE – employer cooperation and the use of evidence and data for policy monitoring. The ETF will facilitate this policy dialogue an evidence-based policy monitoring, supported by CAEP, through a series of three regional policy learning and dialogue events in 2016-2017. CAEP 2 will finish early 2018. The ETF’s approach will be refined based on the European Commission’s plan for the platform.

**Work-based learning**

Together with the Eastern Partnership countries, Kazakhstan continues to participate in the regional work-based learning (WBL) project of Skills Connexion until 2017. The project will cover peer learning and policy recommendations for strengthening of WBL mechanisms.
E. 2017 ACTION PLAN

Specific objective 1: To enhance the effectiveness and efficiency of the EU programmes in Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and eventually in Uzbekistan through the provision of support to the EU Delegation in the operationalisation of the interventions.

- ETF will provide support to the EUD in Tajikistan upon request for the monitoring of the new EU project for CPD of teachers and trainers. This will include content and methodological comments and advice on the project outputs and results.

- ETF will support the start of the 2013 AP Education and VET EU project in Turkmenistan upon request from DEVCO. The support should include 2017 content inputs to the launching event of the project once the TA team is in place, as well as content and methodological comments and advice on the project’s first outputs and results.

Specific objective 2: To support regional cooperation through a regional Torino Process network, continuous professional development (CPD) initiative and Central Asian Education Platform (CAEP)

The Torino Process regional network support phase takes place 2016/2017 in cooperation with the Central Asian Education Platform (CAEP) through a series of regional policy learning meetings on evidence-based policy making for better policies and impact. Based upon the outcome, the ETF will moderate further work via the regional network.

In 2017, support to CAEP will be:

- To support the preparation of the EU-CA Ministers of Education conference in June, which will assess progress and the in 2015 identified priorities.

- To prepare and facilitate a series of workshops (3 planned) for the VET policy network on evidence-based policymaking, in line with the Torino Process approach, and reinforcing capacity for sound policy making in VET. The network will bring 3-5 participants per country together, representing ministries of education and of labour, statistical bureaus and expert organisations.

- To support the conference on Education and Business in spring, including organising contributions from the Communities of Practice that ETF managed in 2014-16.

- In qualifications and quality assurance, ETF’s focus is on steering CAEP to identify priority actions to assist participating countries in their domestic progress. The 2017 interventions are to coordinate with local experts and Latvian advisers to CAEP to support countries at events; and inputs to documents; and peer learning for national experts and officials. Further, the ETF will provide recommendations on CAEP priority actions.

In addition, in Kazakhstan, the Torino Process will follow up on the results of the 2016 round, in particular in the preparation of the Kazakh sub-national level regions to the Torino Process implementation, for their participation in the 2019 Torino Process. The support is provided through ETF expertise and participation to national owned events and discussions with sub-national actors.
F. 2018 UPDATES

1. Short update on key country developments in the field of VET and skills and on EU and donor cooperation

KAZAKHSTAN

VET top reform priorities in Kazakhstan have remained stable. In terms of VET provision the key areas of work remain the further development of the dual approach and the free provision of the “working profession” level VET (formerly called initial or primary VET) for those who wish to enrol. The latter aspect is expected to be activated as of the academic year 2017. VET staff (teachers and managers) development that supports the implementation of key reform aspects has received more attention since early 2017. Considerations are also under way to review the competence requirements for VET staff. Additional elements under development, that should however be seen as related to the overall priorities of the education system, are the active opening up of VET for special needs students and the gradual introduction of English as a language used for teaching.

Kazakhstan is starting to explore new ways to finance VET. As of early 2018 Kazakhstan will pilot per-capita financing in VET in three regions (Karaganda, Pavlodar and Almaty). As part of this pilot special measures/incentives will be introduced for employers/enterprises that engage in the dual approach. This is considered an important step for the sustainability of the dual approach in the long term but also as a way to support the quality of the dual approach.

The Ministry of Education and Science, continues to support the development and use of new evidence-collection approaches in order to be able to take better-informed decisions. In 2017 the Ministry has supported the piloting of a Torino Process type assessment at sub-national level for four regions. The Ministry intends to progress to the remaining 12 regions in 2018.

The developments in VET governance, which provide a strong role for employers (mostly via the National Chamber of Entrepreneurs as well as the regional chambers) in policy definition and implementation continue to evolve and consolidate. The National Chamber is not only a key player in the implementation of the “roadmap for the introduction of the dual approach” but since 2016 plays also an increasingly important role on the further development of the NQF.

Kazakhstan no longer receives EU bilateral support, but participates in DCI regional actions. In the area of education (VET and Higher education) covered by the Central Asian Education Platform (CAEP), Kazakhstan does not only take an active part in all established working groups, but in June 2017 hosted the EU-Central Asian ministerial meeting. Key developments on qualifications, CVET and active labour market measures are supported by a major World Bank project (loan).

KYRGYZSTAN

Priorities in VET reform continue to be defined by the Education Development Strategy 2012-2020, and in particular the medium-term action programme 2016-2017. Although the Ministry of Education and Science became responsible for Initial VET by end 2015, this had by mid-2017 not yet led to enhanced coordination between initial and secondary VET. At the same time the role of the VET Agency (the body in charge of IVET implementation) towards SVET also remains unclear.
With donor (ADB) support new VET qualification requirements and structures for IVET and SVET have been established and staff development opportunities reviewed. It remains however unclear to which extent the new developments are being implemented in a systematic manner.

In autumn 2016, the Skills Development Fund become operational with the support of ADB. The fund supports short training courses, both at the request of enterprises as well as for a number of specific vulnerable target groups. The fund can be expected to support developments in terms of CVET as well as in the area of accessibility of VET.

The ADB continues to be the major donor in VET in the Kyrgyz Republic. A follow-up project to the current VET II project is under preparation. GIZ is the most important EU Donor active in VET. The EU continues with its budget support for the education sector, which also has a minor VET component, focusing on the transition process of VET graduates.

**TAJIKISTAN**

The National Development Strategy 2016-2030 and mid-term development programme 2016-2020 concentrate on economic diversification, competitiveness, sustainable employment, energy supply and transport, food security, public administration and developing human resources. The second phase (2021–2025) plans growth in investments; while the third phase (2026–2030) aims to move from industrialized growth to diversified production and knowledge-based innovation.

For the period 2014-2020, the EU's development support concentrates on the sectors of health (€62 million), education (€75 million) and rural development (€110 million). In education, the EU assists in building a more integrated education system: inclusive, competence-based and quality-oriented, including vocational education training. This will re-establish the labour market system and better adapt the skills of young Tajiks. A first Technical Assistance programme of €15 million focusing on teacher training started in 2017. A wider intervention (under AAP 2016) is in the identification phase.

In September 2016, the ADB project “Strengthening Technical and Vocational Education and Training” began. The project comprises four outputs, as follows: (i) TVET system methodology modernized; (ii) physical learning facilities in selected TVET institutions upgraded; (iii) access to quality TVET programs improved; and (iv) governance and management of TVET system strengthened.

**TURKMENISTAN**

No changes are to be reported in policy direction with respect to those presented in the 2017-2020 CSP. Namely, aspirations to reach a higher middle income status by 2030, despite a degree of stagnation on the economic front. Growth has slowed in 2016 and dependency on oil and gas and related sectors persist with no major breakthroughs in International pipeline projects or customer diversification. Foreign investment remains low and restricted. The public sector remains the major player in the economy. International organisations consider Turkmenistan to be at an early stage of transition. This is reflected also in the education, and training system and labour market.

The National Programme on Socio-Economic Development 2011-2030 remains in place with Phase II covering the period 2016-2020. It includes the education sector: a) Primary, secondary, vocational and higher education establishments will be developed as the centres of education, culture, science and new technologies; b) Vocational education sector will be developed based on the needs of labour market for qualified professionals.

The EU project "Support to the Education Sector in Turkmenistan" is now operational. It is important to note that the project inception phase has been long, with a Strategic seminar in January and offices established only in February. A second and separate EU project involving VET is planned to start in early 2018. How these two projects interact is still to be determined.
UZBEKISTAN

President Karimov was succeeded by President Mirziyoev in December by a smooth and governed process promising stability. Some momentary difficulties in continuity and changes of key positions in Government and Education and Training related actors occurred. However the new administration intends to continue previous lines of development, and there are no major alterations. The 2017-2020 country strategy paper, the Central Regional Paper and the ETF annual and multiannual programmes remain valid. The aim is to progress to higher middle income status by 2030.

The newly developed State Strategy 2017-2021 (Presidential Decree February 2017) has five priority areas: 1) improvement of state and public construction (role of parliament, democratic reform and modernisation); 2) Rule of Law and Judicial system; 3) development and liberalisation of the economy; 4) development of social services; 5) ensuring security, harmony and tolerance, including a constructive foreign policy.

The decree has approved the Action Strategy 2017-2021 for these areas. These include increased international economic cooperation, improvement in education, continuous education, access to quality education services and modernisation. Each sector, including education and training is developing detailed actions. For training, the concept under development includes many changes: curricula content and duration changes, qualification frameworks, modernising professional profiles and subjects, professional development of teachers, role of ICT, entrepreneurial skills, new assessment etc.

There are no major changes in EU cooperation. The first proposals for a project on Skills Development for Employability in Rural Areas of Uzbekistan have not been agreed upon and work on a new specification started in June/July.

REGIONAL LEVEL

The second Meeting of Ministers for Education of the Member States of the European Union and of the Central Asian Countries, took place in Astana on 23 June 2017. The meeting, which was hosted by the Ministry of Education and Science of Kazakhstan, resulted in the adoption of the Astana Declaration. The Declaration confirmed the priorities identified in the Riga ministerial meeting of 2015 (qualification frameworks and standards, quality assurance and accreditation, employment and labour market needs) and stressed in addition the importance of innovative teaching methods, the contribution of education to prevent radicalisation of youth, the contribution of education in addressing gender inequalities as well as effective financing of education systems and education institutions. All priorities will be addressed via the Central Asian Education Platform (CAEP), which will be extended until March 2019.

2. Assessment of the progress towards achievement of ETF mid-term objectives and results with horizon 2020

Specific objective 1: To enhance the effectiveness and efficiency of the EU programmes in Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and eventually Uzbekistan through the provision of support to the EU Delegations and DEVCO in the operationalisation of the interventions.

For Tajikistan, the ETF has provided detailed briefings to stakeholders in the EU Project Team at the start of the programme in February 2017. For Turkmenistan, ETF has assisted the “Support to the Education Sector in Turkmenistan” project with participation in strategic seminars and by the provision of an ETF Workshop in May 2017 entitled “Policy Dialogue to Policy Implementation”. For Uzbekistan, the ETF has provided review comments on the Action Document on “Skills development in Uzbekistan” in March 2017.
Specific objective 2: To support regional cooperation through a regional Torino Process network, continuous professional development (CPD) initiative and Central Asian Education Platform (CAEP)

Torino Process

The five Central Asian countries took part in the coordinators’ meeting and sent delegations to the corporate conference in June 2017. Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan took an active part in the Torino Process 2016, with all four countries opting to produce a report using self-assessment. This is an important development in terms of ownership, as in the 2014 round only Kazakhstan had carried out a self-assessment. At the same time, the three “newcomer” countries experienced a number of challenges to produce a report corresponding to expectations in terms of evidence use and analysis.

Kazakhstan has decided to carry out a Torino Process type assessment at sub-national level. The approach is being developed and piloted in 2017 in four regions. It will be expanded to the remaining 12 regions in 2018. Kazakhstan has also included the Torino Process as a specific annual task within the Vocational Education and Training section of its National Programme for the Development of Education and Science and allocated the necessary resources to implement the process in accordance with the Torino Process principles.

The VET Agency of Kyrgyzstan has set up a small permanent Torino Process working group in July 2017, in order to support structured capacity development during 2017/2018 as a preparatory step for improved results for the 2019/2020 round.

Central Asian Education Platform (CAEP)

The ETF has developed the working approach and facilitated the work of the CAEP data collection working group. Since February 2017 the group has met three times during face-to-face regional workshops, while regional teams have in addition had regular on-line follow-up meetings with the ETF team. Though all five Central Asian countries have been invited to take part in the work, only Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan have set up national teams to join the working group in a continuous manner. Turkmenistan has taken part in the second working group meeting while Uzbekistan took part in the third meeting. The three countries that have set up National teams have taken an active part in the work and have all engaged in a small scale national project focusing on improving evidence. During the final meeting in 2017 these three countries have developed action plans on the implementation of their evidence collection strategy. ETF will continue to accompany the work via regular on-line interaction with national groups. It is expected that the three countries will present the results of their work by autumn 2018.

The CAEP will be extended up to March 2019, so it is expected that the data collection working group will meet for another two face-to-face meetings in 2018. The focus of the 2018 phase will be on evidence related to the transition from education to work. In parallel, the ETF will accompany national teams in the implementation of their 2017 small scale project. It is hoped that all five Central Asian countries will join the working group in 2018 with national teams.

VET Provision: Continuous Professional Development (CPD) and Work based learning

The ETF has engaged only in a limited manner in CPD related actions in Central Asia in 2017, with a focus on the CPD survey carried out in 2016. In view of EU support in VET, which covers aspects of CPD in Tajikistan and Turkmenistan, international donor (ADB) support in this area in Kyrgyzstan as well as resource constraints at the ETF in this particular thematic area, no capacity building related actions in this field are foreseen for 2018.

Kazakhstan has, together with a number of Eastern European countries taken part in the regional “skills connexion” project (SP Provision). In the framework of the project the country has, since autumn 2015 carried out a mapping of its work-based learning approaches, taken part in peer learning activities in EU member states and hosted a peer learning visit for project participants from Moldova, Armenia and Georgia,
to show how the dual approach is being implemented in Kazakhstan. A focus group discussion with key stakeholders organised in autumn 2016 identified a number of priorities to be addressed in order to support the further implementation of the dual approach in Kazakhstan. Both the Ministry of Education and Science as well as the National Chamber of Entrepreneurs “Atameken” subsequently selected the topic of financial and non-financial incentives as means to support the engagement of stakeholders in the dual approach as an aspect to be addressed as of 2017. For the Ministry of Education this aspect is relevant in connection with the piloting of per capita funding for VET in three regions of the country, due to be initiated as of 2018. The Chamber of Entrepreneurs represents the interests of employers and holds a key role in the implementation of the “roadmap for the implementation of the dual approach in Kazakhstan. It sees incentives for employers as an important aspect for the sustainability of the dual approach and also as a possible tool to attract more small and medium enterprises to offer apprenticeships. The ETF has supported the policy dialogue and discussion on the topic through the organisation of a workshop on financial and non-financial incentives to support stakeholder engagement in the dual approach.

The further introduction of the dual approach, and the strengthening of the system represents a key policy priority in Kazakhstan. The country continues to explore means to support the quality of the dual approach and to institutionalise it in a sustainable manner.

3. 2018 Action Plan

Specific Objective 1: To enhance the relevance, effectiveness and efficiency of the EU programmes in Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and eventually Uzbekistan through the provision of support to the EU Delegations and DEVCO

For Tajikistan, ETF will provide comments in October 2017 on the draft Action Document for the “Quality in Education Support Programme Phase II”, and is available to assist in the formulation of either a traditional project or a Sector Reform Contract (budget support). Likewise, ETF is available to assist, upon request, the ongoing “Support to the Education Sector in Turkmenistan” programme and the “Skills development in Uzbekistan” programme which is currently under preparation by EU Delegation.

Specific objective 2: To support regional cooperation through a regional Torino Process network, and Central Asian Education Platform (CAEP)

Torino Process

The ETF will continue its support in the area of evidence based policy analysis and system wide progress monitoring. All countries will be invited in early 2018 to kick off preparations for the 5th Round of the Torino process, with the scope of agreeing on terms of implementation by end of 2018. The preparation phase will involve countries primarily through online consultations and capacity building activities involving appointed national coordinators and key working group members. All countries will be invited to join the kick-off meeting which will take place in Q4 of 2018 in Turin. Countries aiming at implementing the Torino process at sub-national level too will be followed by specific activities in 2018 in view of preparing regions and cities for the round of analysis. This will be done in close coordination and synergy with the CAEP activities.

In Kazakhstan, the ETF will provide support for the extension of the sub-national approach to the remaining 12 regions. In particular ETF will facilitate the shift from the centralised approach used in 2017 to an approach in which the participating regions take on a stronger role in the preparation of their assessments. In Kyrgyzstan, the VET Agency has in July 2017 set up a small permanent working group, which with the support of training provided by the ETF during 2017/2018 could take on a stronger role in the implementation of the 2019 round. In Tajikistan the successful TRP work should represent a good basis to widen stakeholder engagement for the 2019 round. In Turkmenistan the TRP approach could be a valuable input to EU Support actions/workshops and could potentially be adopted by the country in 2018/2019. In Uzbekistan the focus could lie on the strengthening of the national working group and of stakeholder engagement. Furthermore the country has expressed an interest in the sub-national assessment.
Central Asian Education Platform (CAEP)

The ETF will continue in 2018 to cooperate closely with CAEP and will in particular facilitate a second round of workshops of the CAEP data collection working group, with a focus on the topic “transition from education to work”. The approach will remain the same as the one developed by the ETF for the 2017 round and will encompass two face-to-face workshops, open to all five Central Asian countries, in combination with regular on-line meetings to support national teams. In parallel, the ETF will accompany the implementation of national small scale projects that have been initiated by the country teams of Kazakhstan, the Kyrgyz Republic and Tajikistan during the 2017 round of workshops.

In the field of **qualifications**, and also in synergy with CAEP activities, the ETF will organise two virtual seminars, comprising question and answer sessions; precise topics and agenda will be determined by pre-consultation with the country stakeholders.

**VET provision: Work based learning**

Kazakhstan will participate together with Eastern Partnership countries in the follow-up action to the **regional project ‘Skills Connexion’** aiming to strengthen work-based learning (WBL) in VET and focusing on capacity building through a modular blended learning course on WBL and a regional WBL Platform.

In 2018, the VET Provision strategic project will initiate a multi-country survey on the condition of VET staff. Based upon the interest of national authorities, participation in the survey could also be extended to a Central Asian country.