

GEMM FOCUS

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How can effective multi-level governance promote policy environments that improve the performance of VET systems and strengthen participatory governance and values?

This was the topic of the first regional GEMM conference which took place in Brussels from 4 to 5 March 2014. Over 85 representatives from governments, social partners and civil society of the nine participating countries (Algeria, Egypt, Israel, Jordan, Lebanon, Libya, Morocco, Palestine and Tunisia) took part. Representatives from the European Commission, international organisations and donors were also present.

The participants actively contributed to the variety of plenary sessions, panels, presentations and working groups. Discussions were organised on the mapping reports, the capacity building programme and links with the pilot projects. Country teams put forward examples of good practice that could be shared during capacity building activities to inspire other countries in the region.

The VET governance mapping reports reveal that VET is directly linked to social and economic issues and VET reform is increasingly linked to development strategies. Public VET system management is highly centralised in all the countries and is often limited to the early stage of the



GEMM conference participants meet in Brussels

policy cycle.

The nine GEMM pilot projects were all selected for their focus on employability among the target group (youth and females), improvement of governance at local level, empowerment of local actors and specific local needs. Seven projects focus on matching local skills needs, one on career guidance and one on tracking graduates.

The GEMM capacity building programme was prepared in working group sessions where objectives, expected learning outcomes and modalities for the implementation of the programme were discussed and agreed.

There is a general belief that real change and impact for the employability of youth and women will be at local level. Moreover,

the state's role should adapt to changing contexts and focus more on labour-market-led and quality-assured VET, which should be funded according to objectives and assessed outcomes. The role of the informal sector and SMEs needs to be better addressed in the discussions and in the capacity building programme.

The main aim over the next two years is to create a regional dialogue that sheds light on common issues related to VET multi-level governance and enhances mutual learning. The dialogue will be enriched by the experience of the pilot projects which in turn are inspired by the dialogue at national and regional levels.



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DEVELOPMENTS, TRENDS AND ISSUES FROM THE MAPPING AND ANALYSIS OF VET GOVERNANCE: CROSS-COUNTRY OVERVIEW

In order to better understand country specific contexts, the GEMM project analysed VET governance systems in the nine participating countries. The analysis focused on three functions: planning and management, financing and funding, and quality assurance.

PLANNING AND MANAGEMENT

It is evident that the management of VET systems is highly centralised across the region, despite the growing recognition that centralised management does not lead to effective VET systems. Across the region, a wide range of reforms and pilots have been carried out. In all countries, social partners are formally identified and engaged to some extent in dialogue usually through established councils and procedures, such as a tripartite bodies or VET councils. Dialogue is mainly at the early stage of policy formation, with little engagement in implementation, review or evaluation. Employers have their own representative bodies, but their capacity for handling VET policy and reform is still developing. In some countries trade union federations have an active role, but in most cases they are absent from VET dialogue. In countries where training levies operate, employers' organisations tend to have a more prominent role in continuing training provision. A territorial dimension to VET governance has gained ground in some countries. In two cases, prioritising reforms at the territorial level is a national policy objective, while elsewhere employment pilots and projects are established to meet local employment and training needs. However, it is difficult to develop a territorial approach that requires significant autonomy in

highly centralised systems, and one of the risks of small-scale pilots is that they are never up-scaled.

FINANCE AND FUNDING

VET finance depends mainly on national revenues, plus the self-financing contribution of private schools. Training levies are operational in some countries; revenues tend to be directed to continuing training, which is an otherwise neglected area. The fees paid by students and their families constitute a small percentage of VET financing. Between 80-90% of budget is spent on salaries, leaving little scope for innovation.

Financing and funding procedures tend to be centralised, subject to audit, but often lacking in transparency. Funding mechanisms are on a traditional, recurrent input basis. Training providers have no incentive to supplement income through sales of goods or services, or to improve efficiency, performance and outcomes. Nevertheless, some countries have made significant efforts to increase VET resources in recent years and policies are being considered to use funding as a mechanism to generate improved outcomes.

QUALITY ASSURANCE

Current quality control procedures commonly focus on inputs such as building requirements and numbers of teachers employed. Where there are multiple subsystems, different quality control procedures often apply.

Policy interest is growing in quality assurance procedures to contribute to outcomes such as systemic improvements, raising standards, making VET more responsive and improving the employability of graduates. Thus, new quality assurance agencies are being established in several countries, and the development of national qualifications frameworks is identified frequently as an umbrella for developing quality standards.

The lack of effective management and labour market information systems inhibits the development of a quality assurance approach in all the countries.



Planning and management, finance and quality assurance are key factors to employment

PILOT PROJECTS

Pilot projects constitute the second big component of GEMM. Nine proposals were selected for their focus on employability among the target group (youth and women), improvement of governance at local level, empowerment of local actors and specific local needs. Some projects are designed and implemented in cooperation with NGOs, government agencies and international organisations and some test and build on tools developed in previous projects.

Seven pilot projects deal with matching local skills needs, one with career guidance and one with tracking graduates. The focus on matching confirms the ETF's preliminary findings that although many countries in the region have developed approaches to labour market analyses, the local actors do not seem to be fully aware of these tools nor empowered to implement them. In this respect, supporting the development of local stakeholders' capacities is embedded in all projects.

The implementation of projects has already started in Algeria and Palestine, Lebanon and Morocco where GEMM delivers expertise to work with local actors to better formulate their projects and draft implementation plans. This is a very important phase as local actors move from the project concept to discuss and agree on activities and roles and responsibilities - one step further in building partnerships.



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Representatives from Tunisia at the conference

LEARNING TOGETHER

The GEMM capacity building programme was defined following an intensive needs assessment based on a mapping of the SEMED countries' VET governance system, a survey of policy makers and social partners and workshops that took place during the recent GEMM conference. The needs assessment was implemented as a capacity building activity itself: national committees were heavily involved in governance mapping and the workshops in Brussels involved the capacity building programme beneficiaries in group exercises whereby needs were prioritised and learning outcomes defined by the participants themselves.

The programme has two target groups: policy makers and social partners at national level, and training providers and other local skills development stakeholders at local level, i.e. pilot project partners.

The participants are required to act as change agents by disseminating and sharing knowledge and information from the capacity building programme within their institutions and networks. Indeed, while the different learning events will be spread over a period of two years, the participants will be invited to undertake some home

assignments for sharing in their national professional contexts and in an online GEMM community involving the participating countries.

The needs assessment process defined the focus areas of the capacity building programme for policy makers and social partners, namely: aligning VET supply and labour market demand through effective labour market information systems, coherent VET governance systems with clear roles and responsibilities and a holistic quality assurance system. The pilot projects focus on local skills needs identification, matching local education and training provision with local skills needs, as well as career information, guidance and counselling based on local labour market needs.

These issues will be addressed in two regional capacity building events including all the participants, three study visits, three cross-country events as well as a customized capacity building support for each pilot project. The results of the pilot projects and participants' experience will be used as much as possible as learning material.

SOUTH MEDITERRANEAN: PILOT PROJECTS IN VET GOVERNANCE MAKE PROGRESS

Governance for Employability in the Mediterranean (GEMM), a regional project carried out by the ETF, includes pilot actions in nine countries. What these activities achieved in Jordan, Lebanon and Tunisia is presented below.

“Reforming the VET system cannot be done by governments alone,” says Abdelaziz Jaouani, team leader of the GEMM project, “it must be done in cooperation with the users of the competences.”

These end users – stakeholders in the jargon – are employers, workers, civil society, students and their families. Engaging such a diverse group is a totally new approach.

In order to make a difference, these new, more participative and transparent forms of governance must take place at several levels – national, regional and all the way down to local such as the way a single vocational school interacts with nearby businesses and the community, says Jaouani.

Together with those of Morocco and Algeria, the pilot projects of Jordan, Lebanon and Tunisia seen here have made the fastest progress so far, followed by those of Israel, Libya and Palestine. Egypt, which officially joined GEMM in March this year, is currently designing its own pilot.

LEBANON

CAREERS GUIDANCE CAN REDUCE SKILLS MISMATCH

The Lebanese project aims to help reduce the skills mismatch by setting up a career guidance office in a public VET school in a Beirut suburb.

“Companies need qualified Lebanese technicians... but students are not aware of the kind of jobs they could aspire to,” says Tina Comaty, project manager at the IECD (European Institute for

UPCOMING GEMM EVENT

STUDY VISIT TO ROMANIA
FOR TUNISIA, MOROCCO,
ALGERIA, LEBANON
14-16 OCTOBER

Cooperation and Development). Working with ministries and social partners, the project will integrate the new unit into IECD's existing network of guidance offices at four private vocational schools.

“If the Ministry of Education sees it works, it may go on to implement this in other schools,” says Comaty. The new GEMM unit will benefit around 200 students over two years.

JORDAN

APPRENTICESHIPS FOR SPARKING SOCIAL PARTNERSHIP

Only 14.1% of Jordanian women are active in the labour market compared to 61.3% of men. The employment guidance pilot will build on this by setting up an apprenticeship scheme for retail sales, comprising six months workplace and school-based training, for 30 young people in Jordan's second city Zarqa. There will be a second scheme, piloting apprenticeships for hybrid vehicle maintenance, run along similar lines.

Equally significant for Nadera Al Bakheet, director of E-TVET Council Secretariat, is the chance to try out new forms of

governance. A local committee, involving vocational schools, local employers, trade unions and NGOs, will work with national organisations to define needs, design curricula and generally run the project.

TUNISIA

POWER TO THE REGIONS

Tunisia is looking to use employment office counsellors and other regional actors to update VET, boost young people's chances of finding work and, in the process, make governance by the regions and social partners a reality instead of an empty promise.

Focusing on the south eastern governorate of the same name, during its first year the Gabès project will carry out capacity building activities to track where current VET graduates end up, identify employers' needs for skills and suggest how the education and training offer of the region could be updated to meet them.

“Before the revolution, central government decided everything,” says Jabrane Bouraoui, deputy secretary general of the General Union of VET, Employment and Immigration, “now we realise that we the social partners and young people have a big role to play if we want to see them prosper in their working lives.”

