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The European Training Foundation is the European Union’s centre of expertise supporting vocational education and training reforms in the context of the European Union’s external relations programmes.

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EU Commissioner Špidla: Fight discrimination with positive action

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The European Commission has set 2007 as the European Year of Equal Opportunities for All. In this interview, Vladimír Špidla, Commissioner for Employment, Social Affairs and Equal Opportunities, stresses the crucial importance of this concept and calls for everyone to take part.

Equal opportunities? Mr Špidla is a historian – he was awarded his PhD in history at Charles University in Prague – and he likes reminding us that equal opportunities is a very old concept. He explains: “It’s about the idea of soul and is supported by all major humanistic schools of thought. It is also the philosophical basis on which the European reconstruction was founded and which gave birth to the European Union.”

For Mr Špidla though, using the word “concept” doesn’t mean that equal opportunities is an abstraction - far from it. Without expecting a major upheaval, he confidently declares that the 15 million euro budget that will be given to the EU this year to fight discrimination based on race, ethnic origin, religion or belief, disability, age, sex or sexual orientation, is going to indicate both a “before” and an “after” - emphasising that efforts made over the last ten years in fighting gender discrimination have led to positive results. According to the Eurobarometer survey “Discrimination in the European Union”, published last January, it is felt to be a problem for just 40% of the population, less than figures for ethnic origin (64%), disabilities (53%), sexual orientation (50%), age (46%), religion or beliefs (44%).

Of course this survey refers to the perception of discrimination, not discrimination itself, but Mr Špidla is still optimistic: “Today, equality is an accepted value for every member state and all of them are making enormous efforts in this direction.”

This general recognition doesn’t exclude differences between nations. So, in the Czech Republic - where Mr Špidla was prime minister from 2002 to 2004 - 63% of his compatriots think that age discrimination is widespread (against an average 46% in Europe). And, despite progress made in Italy and Spain, gender discrimination still worries over 55% of the population, today.

The 27 EU member states and three other nations from the European Free Trade Association - Norway, Iceland and Liechtenstein - will be taking part in the European Year for Equal Opportunities via decentralized advertising campaigns, practical grassroots action and aid to associations. “It will be decentralised, but without establishing priorities, as all kinds of discrimination are equally important”, Mr Špidla specifies.

Raising awareness

One issue that the Year’s promoters take for granted in order to obtain meaningful results is information. In fact, the Eurobarometer survey has already stated: “Awareness of anti-discrimination legislation is still weak in the EU. Discriminating against disabilities is the only kind of discrimination that over half the population knows is legally forbidden when taking on new employees. The population at large knows little about legislation concerning age discrimination (31%) or sexual orientation discrimination (30%). Only one third of citizens (32%) know their rights should they themselves be object of discrimination or harassment.” The geographical gap in information levels is quite marked: 65% of Finnish citizens call themselves satisfied, but the percentage drops to 23% in Spain, 19% in Estonia and just 17% in Austria.

The problem of information indirectly raises the question of the Equality Bodies regulations that fight discrimination. These organisations are based in every country and their task is to help people who have been

discriminated against, make inquiries, carry out surveys and publish reports. Mr Špidla regrets, however, that “their independence is not always total.”

Whoever they are however, around 500 million EU citizens have, according to Mr Špidla, an active role to play. But how? Equal opportunities between men and women may be the best example. In a recent speech in Brussels (Promoting Gender Equality in Equal European Citizenship, January 25, 2007), Mr Špidla admitted that women “often clashed with men's reluctance to take on duties towards younger and older family members, often leaving the essential duties of unity and harmony on women's shoulders. This kind of problem, estimates Mr Špidla, is where all men have the opportunity to do something useful by taking on these duties “with the same rights as women.” Cooperating with institutions and associations, getting closer to one other, helping disabled people and taking part in cultural events are just some ways people can be involved during the Year.

As the Eurobarometer survey says, awareness exists and the psychological ground is ready. “Greatest understanding, however, is with disabled people. Almost everybody interviewed (91%) supported the idea of giving more money to remove the physical barriers that exacerbate disabled people's lives, as we can see in this document. The opinion that homosexuals are not always accepted due to their sexual orientation, is shared by 68% of EU citizens, as well as the affirmation that family responsibilities prevent women from achieving managerial positions. Two Europeans out of three (65%) estimate that different ethnic origin populations enrich their nation's culture.



2007 — European Year of Equal Opportunities for All

Humanistic approach

These figures reassure the optimism of Mr Špidla, who is an admirer of Erich Fromm, the American philosopher of German origin who wrote that “the future of the world is hidden in our hearts”. “I am convinced that a humanistic solution given to problems of social inequality and discrimination particularly concerns Europe”, he says. In his opinion, Europe also has to promote its basic values beyond its boundaries, through bilateral or multilateral agreements.

Does the current atmosphere of tension between religious groups increase the urgency for this move? Even though the perception of discrimination based on religious belief or faith is increasing (in 7 countries out of 27, most of the population thinks that this discrimination is stronger now than it was 5 years ago), with the help of statistics, Mr Špidla remembers that it is not globally the most widespread discrimination (for example 44% against 64% for discrimination based on ethnic origin).

As the concept of discrimination is evolutionary by nature and problematic news is permanently present in every category, the Year's organisers are reluctant to set priorities between discriminations. “Let's take the concept of disability. What measures shouldn't integrate with the psychologically disabled?” asks Mr Špidla. Equally, aren't older

people's needs in constant evolution and don't their rights today, apart from meeting their basic needs, include more independence and social interaction with others?

Positive action

This is why, Mr Špidla prefers focusing his attention on defining the method, which in his opinion, consists of reducing discrimination through positive action which should lead to putting the whole world on the same equal level, instead of using affirmative action by offering assets to discriminated people. For example, he says “supplying public transport services for the disabled is not an act of affirmative action, but targeted, successful and positive action”. Moreover, aware that “work and employment are the main fields where the principle of equality among people is applied” (30th January 2007 speech delivered in Berlin on the occasion of the beginning of the Year), he asks for an expansion of this principle to other spheres of civil life.

“Undoubtedly, equality among individuals and their right to social participation overcome economic and material considerations”, he declared on that occasion.

Nevertheless, it could be estimated, without a wide margin of error, that 80% of equality issues are found in the job market. It is in business and public administration that the reasons that lead to discrimination - whatever they are - tend to materialise and reveal their negative capabilities. However, the Eurobarometer survey proves that there are still many disparities on the issue. “When employment is offered, disability and age are two elements which, according to EU citizens, work mostly against candidates,” this text specifies

“around eight out of ten interviewed, in fact, estimates that, with equal skills, a person who is over 50 has less opportunity of getting a job or promotion than a person under 50, the same for a disabled person compared to one without disabilities.

Social pressure

Even though these criteria are still cited by the majority, skin colour (59%) and ethnic origin (58%) are considered less of a disadvantage”. Social pressure to improve this situation is considerable – 87% of Europeans, for example, support specific measures in favour of older or disabled people – but Mr Špidla

refers to the youth of the Employment Directive, whose compulsory transposition for member states was December 2003. Given the fact that he is keen on preserving historical monuments and that he studied history and prehistory, he knows that Rome wasn't built in a day. However, he believes the will of member states to create solid, ambitious and often innovative strategies is beyond question.

Competitiveness

As far as the future is concerned, he trusts in a Europe of diversity and hopes that the immigrant, disabled and older person, for example, will be

increasingly integrated. “A Europe of diversity in the twenty-first century has to follow an approach, which should be active and based on integration”, he made clear in his speech in Berlin, adding “we cannot afford to waste faculties, skills or experiences of any one single person, because they are the key to world European competitiveness. It's thanks to equal opportunities that we will be able to harvest the fruits of diversity, whether they come from economical, social or cultural sources.”

In this context, the fact that the European Year of Equal Opportunities for All is celebrated on the 50th anniversary of the adoption of the Treaty of Rome, 25th March 1957, is no coincidence. In this event, Mr Špidla sees the reassertion that equality for all in the eyes of the law and the right to live our lives without discrimination, are fundamental values of Europe. “Our legal framework which ensures the observance of these principles, is one of the most complete in the world and we can legitimately be very proud of it” he says.

However, in his opinion it is an illusion to believe that equality is achieved by beating recognised and understood discriminations. “Equal opportunity is more, we all know that it is not because everybody has access to education, that all students have the same opportunities of being successful”, he emphasises. There is, therefore, still a long way to go, but his wish is that the year 2007 is an accelerator and creates new dynamics.

Find out more:

European Year of Equal Opportunities for All - http://ec.europa.eu/employment_social/eyeq/index.cfm?cat_id=SPLASH



Photo: ETF/A. Ramella

€15M has been given to the EU this year to fight discrimination

Rome was not built in a day – 50 years on from the EU's founding treaty

To mark the occasion of the 50th anniversary of the Treaty of Rome, the ETF takes a look at how the EU's relations with the rest of the world have developed and where the ETF and its role in human resources development fits into this picture.



The forerunner of today's European Union was born on 25 March 1957 with the signing of the Treaty of Rome by Belgium, France, Italy, Luxembourg, the Netherlands and West Germany. The European Economic Community, as it was then known, was a child of the cold war years and embodied the will to overcome the divisions of the past and build a lasting peace through economic and political cooperation. The treaty established the European Commission and, under its impetus, the beginnings of a European external relations policy started to take shape.

The starting point was teams of European contractors sent to oversee development projects in the overseas colonies of the six founding nations. As time went by, these contractors often found themselves having to deal with matters outside their remit. By 1965, the need for more official representation was clear, but the EEC was not ready to contemplate a full diplomatic service. In the following years, around 21 technical offices were set up mainly in charge of managing development projects.



The ETF celebrated the 50th anniversary of the Treaty of Rome with a major conference on equal opportunities in education and employment

In 1975, with the signing of the first Lomé Convention between the EEC and 46 African, Caribbean and Pacific countries, these offices began to work on areas such as trade, regional integration or cultural affairs as well as adopting a more overtly political role. Between 1975 and 1978, the number of missions in ACP countries doubled to 41 and they became full delegations of the European Commission. During this time, the EEC's relations with Asia, Latin America and the Southern and Eastern Mediterranean developed and delegations were opened in Caracas, Bangkok, Delhi, to name but a few.

An historic opportunity

In 1989, Europe's attention turned much closer to home. Many at the European Commission saw the fall of the Berlin Wall as a historic opportunity to heal the divisions of the past 40 years and this called for new ways of engaging with the emerging democracies of Central and Eastern Europe. The Tempus Programme was created to provide support for reform in higher education. The European Training Foundation, originally a

brainchild of French president François Mitterrand, was intended to do the same for vocational education and training, but political wrangling delayed its launch until 1994.

Under the leadership of its first director Peter de Rooij, and with around 60 staff recruited from Brussels, the ETF moved to its current home in the Villa Gualino overlooking Turin in a convoy of trucks in December 1994. ETF's current director Muriel Dunbar distinguishes between two distinct phases in the work of the ETF so far, with a third about to begin. From its creation until 2000, the organisation functioned mainly as an implementing body of the European Commission's VET projects under the Phare and Tacis programmes as well as providing technical assistance for Tempus. One of the ETF's mantras is that any VET system will only be effective if it is responsive to the needs of its labour market and ETF staff quickly saw the need for accurate information if this was to be achieved. Accordingly, much time and effort went into establishing a network of national observatories to collect and

distribute information on the evolution of the labour market. In the end, 24 were set up in Central and Eastern Europe and the countries of the former Soviet Union and Mongolia.

New approach

From 2000 until 2006, responsibility for the day-to-day running of projects increasingly passed to the Europe Aid Cooperation Office (AidCo) and the EC delegations in the field and the ETF took on a different role. The focus shifted from project management to becoming a centre of expertise – instead of doing things itself, the ETF became the one who would show other people how to do things for themselves. During this period, the ETF started to provide support for a new programme, CARDS, focusing on the Western Balkans and its geographical remit was enlarged to include the ten MEDA countries of the Eastern and Southern Mediterranean. Enlargement was the word on everyone's lips as the ETF became increasingly involved with helping the ten accession countries of Eastern Europe prepare to join the EU on 1 May 2004. This enlargement, putting an end to decades of artificial division of the European continent, is one of the biggest achievements of the EU to date and the ETF was proud to play its part.

Further changes are on the cards for the ETF over the next five years. This year is seeing the launch of new instruments for EU foreign policy in the shape of the European Neighbourhood Policy, the Instrument for Pre-Accession Assistance and the Development Cooperation and Economic Cooperation Instrument. During this time, the sector-wide approach, which gives a great deal more responsibility to partner countries for managing projects, is also being introduced. In line with this

new emphasis, the ETF will focus much more on providing countries with policy advice. "The idea is to help countries much more to help themselves. If consultants and outside organisations come in and do the project on behalf of the country, the learning experience is negligible," says Bent Sørensen, head of the ETF's external communication unit, "it is much more productive to help countries to develop themselves.

So we want to advise key people in the countries how to develop the field of human resources." Further developing this role will help consolidate the ETF's role as an international centre of expertise.

At the same time, the ETF's mandate is set to widen. The growing acceptance of the lifelong learning philosophy is slowly blurring the boundaries between the different

kinds of education. "You cannot address VET in isolation," says Muriel Dunbar. She anticipates that "our new Council Regulation will move the focus of our work from strictly VET to much broader skills development in a lifelong learning perspective." With so many new ideas and new directions, there is plenty to keep the ETF busy for the next fifty years.

Fighting discrimination in the classroom and the workplace

The ETF celebrated the Treaty of Rome's 50th birthday in style with a major conference looking at equal opportunities in education and employment. Held in Rome on 21 March, the event looked at how vocational education and training can improve the standing of disadvantaged groups in society and strengthen their position in the labour market. It was co-organised by the ETF and the Italian Ministry of Equal Opportunities. "We hope that by bringing experts from 55 countries together to share their knowledge about best practice and initiatives we can inspire people and draw attention to the challenge of fighting discrimination," says Bent Sørensen, "this issue is common to both EU and partner countries."

The conference began with welcome speeches from Anna Záborská, the European Parliament's head of the committee on women's rights and gender equality, Barbara Pollastrini, Italy's minister for equal opportunities and the ETF's Muriel Dunbar. The morning session examined which equal opportunities

policies can create a more inclusive society. The afternoon focused on the fight against discrimination in the workplace and the role schools can play in preventing discriminatory behaviour.

It is the first in a series of events taking place in Rome to mark the anniversary. On 22 - 23 March, the Committee of the Regions, a grouping of local and regional authorities from EU and accession countries, held its 69th plenary session. On 24 - 25 March, young people from all over the EU held the Youth Summit, coming together to discuss key issues for the future of the continent such as globalisation, environmental protection and what should be the economic and social models for Europe. Finally on 6 May, the ETF will hold an open day on its premises, inviting members of the public and ETF partners in Turin to meet representatives of the 28 countries in which the ETF works. The partner countries will present their culture, tourism and gastronomy while the local partners will give a presentation of their work.

Find out more:
50th anniversary of the Treaty of Rome - http://europa.eu/50/index_en.htm



Photo: ETF/A. Ramella

The conference in Rome is the first of a series of events to mark the anniversary of the Treaty of Rome

Skills to counter impoverishment – ETF Yearbook enters new territory

After two decades with a narrow focus on basic literacy and numeracy as the prime weapons in the fight against poverty, skills and skills development are enjoying renewed popularity among international donors. The recently published 2006 edition of the *ETF Yearbook* analyses this trend and its consequences for skills development and poverty reduction in impoverished transition countries.

During the 1990s, worldwide donor interest in human resources development declined at the expense of large scale structural adjustment policies. Mainly fuelled by World Bank and IMF philosophies, this became known as the Washington Consensus. The recently agreed EU Development Aid policy – already being dubbed the European Consensus – marks a turning point, better defining the skills needed in our globalised and interconnected world and firmly placing them at the heart of development agendas addressing the needs of the world's poorest.

But the ETF doesn't work with the poorest countries in the world. It

works with transition countries and regions neighbouring the EU to the south and east. So why is a changing trend in poverty alleviation of interest to the ETF?

Impoverishment

“Because,” argues Peter Grootings, one of the editors of the 2006 *Yearbook*, “it is a myth that we don't deal with extreme poverty. Poverty has increased dramatically in many transition countries since the beginning of transition. Of course, the situation in some of our partner countries in Central Asia is different from that in many countries in Africa, but mostly because the recent history of these countries is different. Not because the most vulnerable groups in these societies cannot be defined as poor by any current standards.”

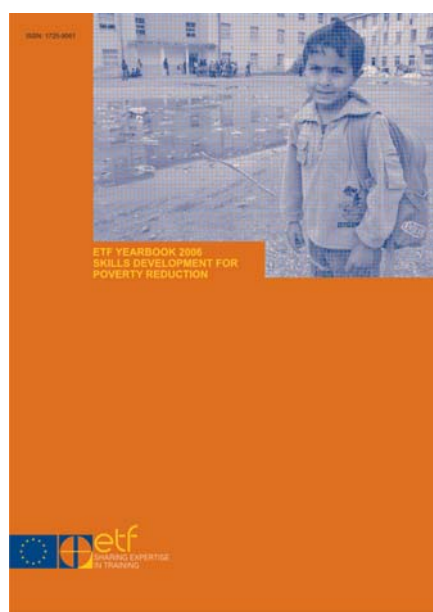
“But they are impoverished rather than simply poor. By this, we mean that individuals, families, communities and institutions have *become* poor and although this may seem a subtle difference, it is an essential one. Among impoverished people, there is a memory of times when things were much better. Poverty has not necessarily become the structural problem that it is in many developing countries. But mechanisms that make poverty a structural and intergenerational problem are

emerging and will gain the upper hand if increasing poverty is not properly addressed.”

“These countries also have strong traditions and memories are part of these traditions,” he continues. “They have memories of functioning vocational education and training systems that have also become impoverished. And interestingly, the process of impoverishment of their education and training systems had already started before the so-called transition of the early 1990s. They were already in a dire state of repair when democratic forces took over from communism in the early 1990s.”

That sounds bad from a European perspective, but not hopeless from the perspective of a developing country. After all, in most transition countries there *is* an existing infrastructure onto which reform can be built. These vocational education and training systems need to be modernised to adapt to new market conditions, but there is no need to build up systems from scratch nor does it make any sense to further destroy the existing infrastructure.

“If we want to stop these countries from sliding into structural poverty it is extremely important to use the opportunities we still have today,” says Peter Grootings.



Borrowing experience

How best to exploit these remaining opportunities is the central theme of the 2006 *Yearbook*. The editors begin their argument by stating that if skills development is to be accepted once more as a tool for poverty reduction in developing countries, it should also be accepted as such in impoverished transition countries.

The 2006 *Yearbook* looks at three different types of experience that can be of value to transition countries. First, the experience from developing countries; second, the experience from European Union member states and, third, the experience from candidate countries and recent new member states, before, during and after accession.

These three very different sources each has a useful role to play in ETF-facilitated assistance to impoverished transition countries.

“Experience from developing countries can illustrate how skills development can be used effectively to tackle poverty reduction on a large scale,” says Peter Grootings. “Experience from new EU member states can be particularly useful to demonstrate the effectiveness of different ways of addressing vulnerable groups in society. These countries can show us the effectiveness of different forms of intervention in safeguarding social inclusion and avoiding a further polarisation of wealth and influence.”

“Finally,” Peter Grootings concludes, “experience from EU member states can be particularly useful to show the evolution of reform in an industrialised setting and in general to familiarise partner countries with cutting edge developments in education and training.”

Being of such versatile origins and applications, these experiences need to be translated in order to become useful. They must be adapted to the context of transition countries with high levels of poverty.

Protection versus qualification

A review of experiences of vocational education and training reforms shows that many partner countries, and

Photo: ETF/A. Ramella





Vocational schools do not provide the kind of skills development that can help poor families escape poverty

especially those that have seen dramatic impoverishment, have been unable to revitalise their vocational education and training systems. They remain centralised, input-based and underfunded and they lack the capacity for change and innovation. This has held back their general development and is having a negative effect on the groups in society that traditionally depend most on this type of education.

According to Peter Grootings, in many countries vocational education and training schools have become the only option for children from poor families. “Better-off parents buy their children into the general and higher

education tracks,” he says, “so vocational schools have become schools for the poor.”

“At the same time, their lack of modernisation and reform means that they can offer little more than social protection, while what vulnerable groups really need is qualifications. These schools do not provide the kind of skills development that can help poor families to escape poverty.”

In the 2006 *Yearbook*, chapters on the experience of the Russian Federation and the countries of Central Asia provide ample illustrations of this trend.

Linking innovators to education

Over the past decade, international donors and charities have carried out numerous small-scale projects aimed at civil society in these countries.

Many of these projects were donor-driven, short-term, of limited scope and duration and remain – often on purpose – insulated from institutional forms of skills development, such as through vocational education and training, even though there are schools in practically every community.

On the other hand, in terms of pedagogical approach and learning contents, these projects were often very modern and innovative and did address the specific learning needs of real people.

The ETF *Yearbook* argues that, to have a more lasting impact, such projects must be better integrated with local, more formal vocational education and training.

“This has some consequences for vocational education and training schools,” says Peter Grootings. “To give their cooperation a chance of success, they need more autonomy and real opportunities for cooperating with other skills development initiatives in their environment. This will create win-win situations for everybody involved, in particular children from poor families whose learning needs can be better served by schools.”

In the 2006 *Yearbook*, the chapters on local development initiatives in the

Western Balkans and Central Asia, and on the preparations for the European Social Fund in candidate countries tackle these very issues. The final chapter puts forward a number of more practical suggestions as to how skills development can better address the learning needs of poor people.

Policy lessons

Poor families are not the only ones who can benefit from a better integration of local activities. Sharing innovation experiences locally will also provide a rich alternative experience for vocational education and training reform policy learning from the bottom up.

This obviously calls for some innovative thinking as far as the organisation and management of the vocational education and training reforms is concerned: developing and implementing reform policies in conditions of high uncertainty is best performed as a collective learning

process for all the major stakeholders, rather than as a process of copying some kind of best-practice blueprint from somewhere or someone else. Policy learning is not only about introducing effective policies, it is also about developing sustainable capacities.

In the 2006 *Yearbook*, chapters on the Sector-wide Approach and on peer review and peer learning discuss these issues in detail.

Old approaches

In their concluding chapter, the *Yearbook* editors warn that the renewed attention to skills development as a tool for poverty reduction should “not simply mean a return to old approaches” but should be firmly based on modern concepts of vocational education and training.

Although it seems an obvious thing to stress, it is stressed for good reasons because the interpretation of ‘skills development’ in the context of poverty

A greater emphasis on vocational education and training

Sipke Brouwer, director in the Directorate-General for Development, confirmed the implications of this recognition of EU policy in Africa in his editorial for the February 2006 edition of e-Courier, the online Newsletter of ACP-EU development cooperation:

“For too long donors have concentrated only on how to teach African children reading and writing skills. We need to be more ambitious, as we need to provide African youth with the skills, knowledge and ‘can-do’ values to re-create their cities

and re-build their societal belonging.

Today’s young people are the human capital of tomorrow: workers, talents, entrepreneurs and leaders. They must all be given a chance to improve their potential and become active players in the economic and social growth of the continent. Therefore the EU is going to put a greater emphasis on vocational education and training in connection with job markets. This will help turn the current brain drain into a ‘brain gain’ for the whole continent.”

Photo: ETF/A.Martin



reduction seems to differ from the interpretation of 'skills development' in current European discourse.

In the context of poverty reduction, skills development is still mainly seen as the transfer of essential behavioural skills: relatively simple manual abilities for lower qualified people. The European discourse about competence-based education and training, on the other hand, goes well beyond this narrow interpretation.

Thus, the editors of the ETF *Yearbook* conclude that the way in which EU member states have based the European Qualification Framework on a combination of knowledge, skills and personal competences should also guide policy learning for vocational education and training reforms in impoverished transition countries.

This combination of behavioural and cognitive aspects of skills development has proven to be a successful mix in the EU where it has helped to develop a more effective response to labour market needs while at the same time retaining the attractiveness of vocational education and training as an alternative to other learning routes.

It must be remembered throughout that policy change will not take place unless – in the words of the last chapter of the *Yearbook* – “those who are in a position to take policy decisions themselves are convinced that a particular policy issue is important and are broadly familiar with policy measures that can be taken to address it.”

Thus, according to Peter Grootings, the most important task now is to raise awareness on important policy

issues and to develop knowledge on effective policy measures through peer learning among policy makers.

“In the *Yearbook* we recommend using peer reviews for policy learning to achieve this,” he says. “We explain how these peer reviews differ from traditional peer reviews in that we value the process - the review itself - as much as the outcome.”

“Peer reviews can be helpful in developing this awareness and understanding in a sensitive policy domain such as skills development for poverty reduction only if they are well-organised and properly focused.”

Read the publication:

ETF Yearbook 2006 -
[http://www.etf.europa.eu/pubmgmt.nsf/\(getAttachment\)/A11E9FA13677324CC1257243003744B0/\\$File/NOTE6WFDSF.pdf](http://www.etf.europa.eu/pubmgmt.nsf/(getAttachment)/A11E9FA13677324CC1257243003744B0/$File/NOTE6WFDSF.pdf)

Photo: ILO/J. Maillard



How the labour market works in Egypt, Jordan, Lebanon, Morocco and Tunisia

Jobs are a key issue in the MEDA countries – countries which are typically home to a fast-growing, overwhelmingly young population and where a shrinking public sector has forced a growing number of people to look to the informal sector for work in recent years. Yet efforts to improve the situation are hampered by the dearth of up-to-date information. A new ETF publication, *Employment policy reforms in the MEDA region*, provides a timely analysis of how the labour market functions in five MEDA countries.

Since the launch of the Barcelona Process in 1995, a dense fabric of links and cooperation has been woven between the countries of the European Union and those of the southern and eastern Mediterranean. During these ten years, the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership has strengthened cooperation for development via the MEDA Programme, while the slow adoption of the sector-wide approach and the advent of a new European Neighbourhood Policy are providing a framework for an ever closer relationship between the two regions.

However, in spite of its vital importance for MEDA governments, the issue of employment has received little attention from the MEDA Programme. None of the high-level meetings between EU and MEDA ministers and experts over the past ten years has been specifically dedicated to employment. There seems to have been a tacit assumption that the creation of new jobs is something that will automatically follow on from economic growth, rather than something which has to be addressed in its own right. What is

more, the region suffers from a lack of accurate data on how the labour market functions in each of the countries, leaving the politicians with little information on which to base their decisions.

Filling the gap

It is in order to help fill this gap that the ETF has produced its latest report, written by Ummuhan Bardak, Henrik Huitfeldt and Jackline Wahba, focusing mainly on the labour markets of Egypt, Jordan, Lebanon, Morocco and Tunisia. The first chapter provides the reader with an overview of the main characteristics of MEDA labour markets in the form of a set of key statistics. These cover labour force participation rates and employment and unemployment rates broken down by gender, age and levels of educational attainment. It also identifies some of the main challenges and distortions. These include the low participation rates of women and non-university educated young people in the workforce and the high unemployment endured by university graduates.

Chapter two homes in on the relationship between investing in education and training and stimulating economic growth. Whereas there is generally

Photo: ETF/A.Ramella



A growing number of people in the MEDA countries are looking to the informal sector for employment

considered to be a strong link between the two, in the MEDA region this is not necessarily the case.

“..Large investments in education and training have failed to be translated into economic growth and higher employment levels,” says the report. It tracks the massive expansion that has taken place in MEDA education systems in recent years and analyses relevant criteria such as the returns on education, where people leaving the education system end up and what job opportunities are available to them. The report finds that expanding the region’s education system has not worsened its quality and that for individuals the return on education can be substantial. But malfunctions in the labour market mean individual gain does not add up to collective benefit. “MEDA economies have failed to match large investments in education with reforms in the labour market that make effective use of their pools of educated workers,” it concludes.

Labour mobility

Labour mobility and segmentation takes up the whole of chapter three. The report concludes that while most countries export labour and a few such as Jordan and Lebanon also import labour, domestic or internal mobility between trades and industries or between the private and the public sectors is limited. This it puts down to distortions in labour market policy such as the excessive role of the public sector in job creation which in Egypt, for instance, makes taking jobs outside this sector unattractive. Often the formal private sector is too small to generate jobs for a growing population while strict regulations on hiring and firing in countries such as Morocco have created rigidities. Two ways of introducing more flexibility are proposed. First, rationalisation of the public sector “as an efficient government role in the economy focuses on the provision of public

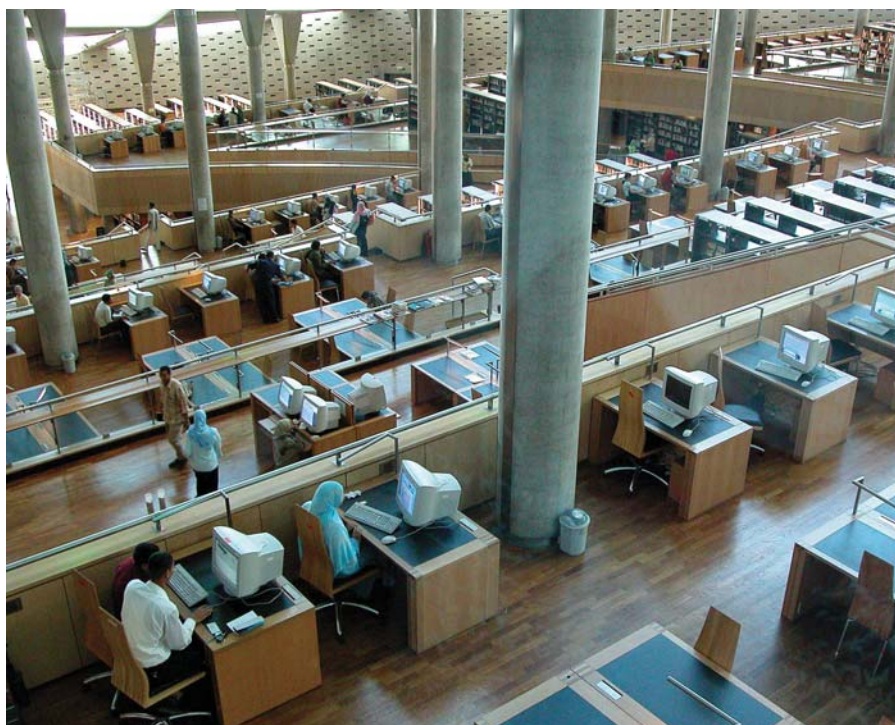
services rather than the production of goods and services.” Second, developing a more conducive business climate for the private sector which will encourage it to take a more active part in job creation.

Chapter four examines the role of institutions in employment policy in MEDA. Massive youth unemployment in the MEDA region since the early 1990s has pushed employment to the top of most governments’ agendas. But although employment is a recurring theme of official speeches and declarations, “the pressing need for labour market reform has not yet led to a comprehensive policy” according to the report. It describes the types of approach favoured by each of the five countries in recent years before turning its attention to the detail such as labour law, the role of social partners or vocational training systems. The authors conclude that the working of labour markets and limited social security systems in MEDA tend to benefit the better-off sections of the population at the expense of the poor. They round off the chapter with a plea for “a policy shift towards meeting the needs of the neediest members of society” through actions such as improved support to the unemployed from public employment services and broader access to active labour market programmes and vocational training.

Ways forward

Suggesting some feasible ways forward makes up the meat of the final chapter. The evidence of the previous sections has shown that labour markets in the region are failing to fulfil their role of efficiently allocating human resources and that this is having a negative impact on economic growth. The authors provide a review of reform initiatives

Photo: ETF/A.Ramella



There has been massive expansion in MEDA country education systems in recent years

to-date, which have usually been supported by donor-funding. They then examine which factors, both positive and negative, are likely to influence the future prospects for change. MEDA governments are under a lot of pressure to tackle the social and political consequences of high unemployment. "This positive political environment helps interest groups and lobbies that support a smaller public sector and a larger private sector to push for a more comprehensive reform agenda," they note. The willingness of international donors to get involved is a second plus point, although efforts to translate isolated pilots into broader systemic change have so far produced only modest results.

Stacked up against this are a host of negative factors however. A weak institutional capacity limits the ability of public bodies to absorb donor assistance. Policy options imported from other, usually more developed, countries may have little relevance to the MEDA context. Restructuring of both the private and especially the public sector is likely to come up against resistance from people who fear they will lose out, while cultural attitudes such as the high prestige attached to white-collar public sector jobs further complicates matters. The report cites the example of Morocco - where unemployed university graduates often refuse to even consider jobs in the private sector and insist they have a right to a job in the government sector - as a symptom of this malaise. It concludes by quoting the author Tarik Yousef¹ who believes that "a new social contract based on a review of the rights and responsibilities between individuals and the state may be a necessary precondition for any comprehensive reform."



Despite the pressing need for labour market reform in the MEDA countries there is no comprehensive yet

The report will be available to download from the ETF website (www.etf.europa.eu).

1 Yousef, Tarik M (2004). Development, growth and policy reform in the Middle East and North Africa. Paper prepared for the World Bank, June 2004, Washington DC.

Photo: ETF/A.Ramella



Mediterranean countries move ahead with ETF-backed observatories



The Observatory Functions of Syria, Egypt, Jordan and Morocco have reported good progress during 2006 and have set themselves some clear targets for 2007 for promoting networks to support decision-making in human resource development. Meanwhile Algeria is preparing to build its own Observatory Function.

Training and labour market experts in a group of key European-Mediterranean Partnership (MEDA) countries are making good progress towards improving human resource decision making with the help of the European Training Foundation and an Italian government fund. The concepts of team work and sharing expertise and knowledge is central to the project.

The ETF-supported Human Resource Development Observatory Function Network (OFN) in Syria, Egypt, Jordan and Morocco all made strides towards creating effective networks to analyse VET, labour market and human resources developments to help provide decision makers with the information they need. In another of the MEDA countries, Algeria took steps towards building capacity for developing its activities in the field.

The ETF's work with OFNs, backed by a trust fund of the Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, is designed to promote capacity building to support decision making on HR issues as part of a move to help drive forward the Barcelona Process which aims to establish a Euro-Mediterranean free-trade area by 2010.

Regional leaders believe that major socio-economic benefits can be achieved through such a levelling of the trade playing field.

Focus on networks

In a series of dissemination events late last year, progress on creating the information and decision making networks essential to any improvement in labour market training and HRD development was shared with key local actors, ETF staff¹ and

1 The following ETF team is involved with the work in the target countries: Ulrike Damyanovic, team leader and country manager for Syria, Gérard Mayen, country manager for Jordan, Elena Carrero Pérez, country manager for Egypt, Ali Bellouti, country manager for Morocco and Algeria, Jens Johansen, an ETF expert on statistics, Sabina Nari and Filippo del Nino, project assistants.

other interested parties. Major products and project results were also presented to participants.

Ulrike Damyanovic, the ETF's team leader of the Observatory Function Unit, was closely involved with the work in the target countries.

"The Syrian meeting was characterised by the high rank of its attendees, including the deputy prime minister Abdallah Al-Dardari who chairs the OFN," Ms Damyanovic said.

"The high-level presence shows the Syrian government's commitment to HR reforms and investment in its people. This is a priority in the Five-Year Plan (2006-2010) which is guiding the transition from a centrally planned to a social market economy. The work of the OFN - its analysis, recommendations, institutional cooperation for well-informed decisions – will contribute to education and labour market reforms that will require new skills," she says.

Egypt has a long record of commitment to HR reforms and, following recent policy decisions, its government is giving priority to capitalising on its demographic opportunities – a young population with the potential to achieve the economic, political and social objectives of the country. These objectives include competitiveness, sustained growth, employment and combating poverty.

A measure of the importance Egyptian society attaches to these objectives can be gauged by the media response to the Cairo OFN workshop late last year, Ms Damyanovic said.

"Egypt's presentation and discussion of OFN strategies for the next five years and analysis of major labour market issues in 2006 was impressive enough to attract the attention of the Egyptian media; the meeting was filmed by Egyptian television and also resulted in a number of newspaper stories."

Milestones

The dissemination meetings were important milestones in the countries' moves towards more effective labour market analysis and HR development because they offered a chance to publicly review progress and air plans for the future.

In Syria, the OFN's major products for the year – a handbook on TVET indicators and a second one on occupational classifications - were presented and a work programme for 2007 agreed at the meeting. It was also attended by vice-industry minister, Haytham Al-Yafi, deputy education minister Fouad Al-Ghaloul and Frank Hesske, head of the EC Delegation in Syria.

The seminar was attended by a further 50 participants from VET and labour market organisations who, Ms Damyanovic says, enjoyed the opportunity to discuss with the high level attendees the role, responsibilities and outputs of the OFN.

Dr Al-Dardari's clear support for the OFN reflects the importance Syria is attaching to labour market and HR decision making. He told the meeting that the OFN plays an important role within the context of reform by supporting macro-decision making in Syria.

Dr Al-Yafi echoed the deputy prime minister's remarks and emphasised how important regional cooperation was in an area with common challenges in labour market and HR development. Syria was already cooperating with Jordan in this, he said.

OFN staff in Syria now plan to contact seminar participants to discuss implementation of the TVET handbook and classifications during 2007 and discuss further ways of

Photo: ETF/A.Ramella





cooperating. They plan to produce an analytical report on TVET with particular reference to Syria's five year plan.

Egypt's workshop presented and discussed strategy for OFN functions over the next five years, with the focus on developing HR relevant to the labour market. Two reports that will help decided HRD priorities for labour resources in 2007 will be prepared during the coming year. They are likely to reflect recent government policy decisions. These include identifying how education and training can help combat unemployment by bridging the skills gap between VET output and the needs of the labour market; moving towards a more integrated approach to HR development that emphasises lifelong learning; and better monitoring of progress in achieving a more coherent and integrated HR development strategy.

Zakaria Ragab, director of Egypt's National Centre for HRD, which is affiliated to the Investors' Association Union, said at the Cairo workshop that a unique feature of the Egyptian OFN was that public and private institutions and NGOs had formed a network and were cooperating to support HRD decision making.

"The supply and demand side come together, which allows for decisions to be based on comprehensive information, analysis and recommendations in a complex environment," Mr Ragab said.

It is an example, Ms Damyanovic says, that could usefully be shared with other countries where high level government officials and public and private institutional stakeholders are demonstrating a shared commitment to capacity building in HR development.

OFN progress in Jordan and Morocco also shows promise

Jordan's OFN is busy helping develop an overall HR strategy – something the Jordanian government has identified as a national priority – and presented a draft analytical report on TVET indicators for decision making in the Human Resource field at its dissemination event. Work will continue during 2007.

In Morocco sector statistical profiles – which are used as analytical and planning tools to monitor developments and forecast skills needs in the labour market – were produced on tourism, metallurgy and IT. 2007 will see training activities for Moroccan representatives to encourage the take-up of these new methodologies.

In Algeria, the OFN reported that capacity building for creating a OFN under the EU MEDA II programme, to be hosted by CERPEQ, is now underway. ETF has provided training to prepare staff for this new challenge.

'Learning does not stop when you finish school or university. We live in a rapidly changing world in the Information Age, and our workforce must make sure it has the general skills required by our demanding globalised environment. Also, as our society ages, it is more important than ever before that adults continue to learn new skills or refresh old knowledge throughout their lives.'

Ján Figel
European Commissioner for Education, Training,
Culture and Multilingualism

Designing Adult Learning Strategies: The Case of South-East Europe

Photo: ETF/by Evelyn Viertel



Acknowledging the importance of adult learning, the European Training Foundation has just published a paper looking at how a comprehensive and coherent adult learning policy framework can be developed, using recent data gathered from countries of South Eastern Europe. The publication aims to provide guidance not only to those countries, but also others operating in a similar context.

The quality of human and social capital is a key determinant of future economic growth, wealth creation and social progress in any country. If no action is taken to raise overall skill levels in the transition countries and territories in question, this is likely to be a major constraint on productivity and competitiveness, but also on efforts to reduce poverty. While it is self-evident that improving skills across the board will not on its own solve chronic unemployment nor reverse economic decline, investment in people's skills is a central part of integrated measures to tackle these problems.

The overall objectives of an adult learning strategy are to improve the competitiveness of the economy and the labour force by raising the average skills level of the workforce and making people more adaptable and able to accept and cope with change, and to promote the social aims of equity and participation. These are general lifelong learning aims that relate to initial education and training and adult learning. They are also in line with the general objectives of the EU's economic and lifelong learning strategies.

Good governance

In order to achieve these objectives and help overcome the difficulties in the current adult learning in South Eastern Europe, strategies will need to be based on a number of principles of good governance. These principles include a clear policy lead from government in adult learning; the sharing of responsibilities for policy and strategy formulation, action planning and implementation with the social partners and other stakeholders; the adjustment of provision in terms of learning offers, modes and settings to suit learners' needs; a shift in balance to support employee development; and a rational financing system that achieves a balance between efficiency and equality objectives.

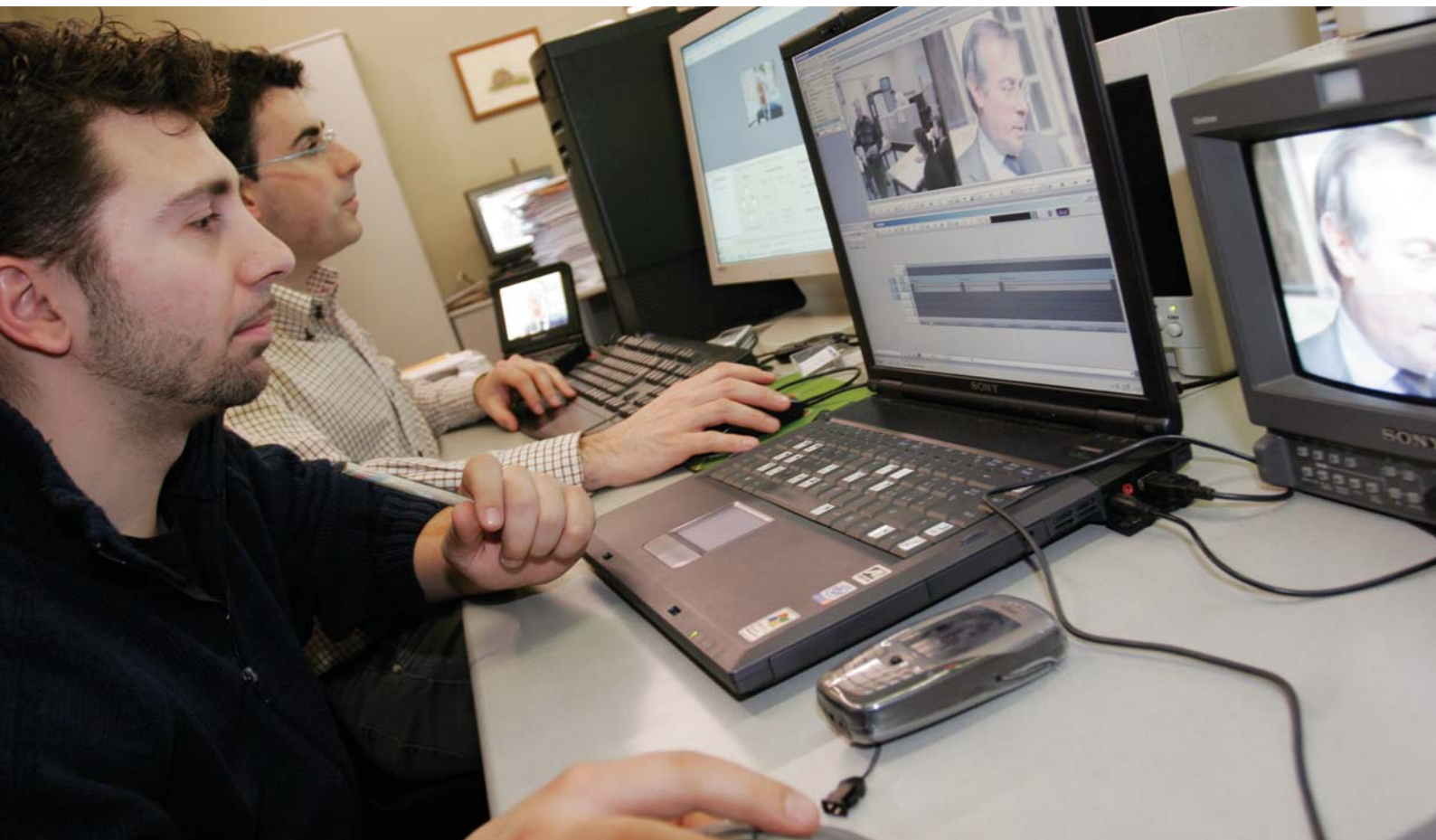
Implementing adult learning strategies, creating diverse learning opportunities for all and raising participation hinge on whether governments and stakeholders play their full part in promoting a learning culture and increasing the value of learning for enterprises and individuals. Government and employers must visibly and

concretely signal the importance of learning for economic competitiveness and individual employability.

The government needs to take the lead in developing and finding the resources for adult learning in consultation with key partners. This means that all the relevant ministries have to contribute, within their areas of responsibility, to the formulation of the strategy and its implementation, which is a long-term commitment. Determining ministerial responsibilities and departmental budget commitments to adult learning, having a shared vision, agreeing priorities and adopting an integrated approach are complex matters, but they are necessary for the coherent and comprehensive development of adult learning, the optimal use of public and private resources and mutually reinforcing actions.

Empowering stakeholders

An important catalyst for partnership working is the shift in governance away from central control to frameworks that empower



An adult learning strategy will help improve the competitiveness of the economy and the labour force

stakeholders. New coordinating structures at national and regional levels are needed. The membership of a future national council for adult learning would need to reflect the range of interests and involve all the relevant ministries, the social partners, the employment service and the (macro) regions, if relevant. Such a council could act as a useful sounding board for providing informed opinion and advice to the government on strategy proposals and action plans, and supporting their implementation. The immediate task of this partnership could be to define the adult learning strategy, the priorities in line with government guidelines and the responsibility for

delivery. The council could oversee the drafting and monitoring of National Employment Action Plans in line with the European Employment Strategy; provide general supervision of infrastructure and support structures; ensure overall planning and monitoring of national, EU and other donor interventions in partnership with the institutions in charge, as well as supervise lower-level partnerships.

Below national level, regional partnerships are important in bringing the planning and delivery of adult learning closer to where people live and work and ensuring that provision meets labour market needs more

effectively. These partnerships could identify the main learning needs of their areas through labour market assessments; assess the supply of learning opportunities and how provision might be developed; coordinate research and survey work; assure the quality of learning offers within the region; assist the employment service in its provision for unemployed people; and possibly allocate government and donor funding within the region.

Effective partnerships rely on consultation and open dialogue. They work best when there is legitimacy, mutual respect, a shared vision and common goals, and when partners

have a genuine desire to work together. In order to establish and run successful partnerships, South Eastern European countries require substantial capacity-building and support.

The strategic objectives of an adult learning strategy are achieved through a series of specific measures, each of which needs its own action plan, budget and implementation timetable. The measures must be realistic, achievable, measurable and time-bound and they must be broken down to cover the short, medium and longer term.

Basic skills problem

Key measures to implement the adult learning strategy include the improvement of basic skills among low-skilled adults and overall support to the acquisition of skills relevant for the market economy.

Responsibility for the allocation of resources and the development of appropriate measures to address the basic skills problem in South Eastern Europe clearly lies with government.

Improving basic skills and key competences is likely to be successful when learning is meaningful and relates to people's prior knowledge and competence, and when occupational skills are integrated into the curriculum. Investment would need to be made in teacher training and in developing adult-friendly learning environments and processes. Whilst ministries may prefer to work through formal public institutions, there are advantages to opening up training to a wider range of providers and consortia following a competitive bidding procedure. NGOs are closer to hard-to-reach populations. Partners need to work together to develop local services and adjust provision to meet the scale and pattern of demand. Employers can make a valuable contribution by providing information on the key competences that are likely to increase prospects for employment and, perhaps, by offering work placements. The partnership would need to monitor and evaluate the effectiveness of local skills provision.

The approach that employers should be responsible for training their own employees has not been entirely successful in ensuring a sufficient level of company training. In many EU Member States, governments have intervened to try to achieve a more efficient solution. Where financial considerations prevent companies from training, the case for providing targeted financial incentives can be made. It may be possible, for example, to provide free or subsidised assessments of training needs or of the existing stock of skills of small and medium-sized enterprises, or to fund training for workers under threat of redundancy in enterprises facing restructuring. Joint funding arrangements between employers and the employment service are also useful, for example in apprenticeship schemes. A number of EU countries have experimented with levy schemes. Financial incentives for individuals to undertake training also boost participation, although they may be difficult to administer and may not reach low-skilled people without appropriate targeting built into the framework conditions of programmes and the selection of beneficiaries.

Management development

Ensuring that the managers of leading companies are well trained and competent will lead to better business performance and higher overall training levels. Governments and their partners from the private sector can promote this by introducing high standards in business and management training, and by assisting intermediary bodies and providers that support management development. Formal management training courses should be assessed to ensure that what they



Photo: ETF/A. Ramella

The importance of basic skills among low skilled adults is just one measure to implement the adult learning strategy



It is necessary to establish networks of companies involved in management training

offer is in line with best practice in other more developed economies. In order to increase the transfer of management training expertise, existing links between institutions in different countries could be expanded. Centres for management training could be established to bring together existing providers, and to develop their provision to suit new and established companies and to meet the needs of different regional and local economic profiles. A key area of management training is flexibility and diversity of provision and quality.

A thorough understanding of a company's market position and how it could be improved is the basis of a company's business strategy and for identifying the contribution that employees can make by upgrading their skills and competence. Further capacity-building is necessary for the design of HRD strategies and the creation of learning systems.

Networks of companies involved and interested in management training could be established at an appropriate level. This action is likely to be taken forward by the economic and crafts chambers or other employers' associations and larger enterprises who might act as mentors for other companies, and in particular for small businesses. Managers would benefit from a better use of the power of trade associations, entrepreneurs' networks, standard-setting agencies, quality centres and technology networks.

Clusters in particular have the potential to enhance access to information, services, technology and specialised skills. Special programmes for managers could help them to overcome any hesitation they may

have in forming clusters and supporting their development. Clusters are geographically focused groups of related businesses and institutions. They typically include buyers and suppliers, distributors, related service firms, training organisations or others. Specialised courses could be delivered locally to train people on cluster support technology, the economic and regulatory environment and aspects related to human resource development. Some people could develop as experts in certain clusters. Small laboratories placed within a cluster could be funded and would provide local solutions to local problems. An important area of support within clusters could be the use of information and communication technologies and the development of related e-skills.

Governments, the social partners and intermediary organisations could complement the above mentioned efforts by carrying out campaigns to raise awareness amongst managers about the benefits of training and by reducing regulatory or administrative burdens affecting entrepreneurial activity and training.

The adult learning strategy must make the best use of all adult learning providers. There is currently little information on their numbers and types in each country and territory, or on the quality of their provision. Once this information is available it should

be possible to identify serious gaps in provision at different levels and in different areas, and for the regional or local partnership to encourage networking and links between providers and users. Key priorities for providers include training the trainers to ensure that learning is based on up-to-date teaching practice and updating its content to meet new labour market needs.

Challenge for adult learners

Adult learning represents a demanding and complex challenge for teachers and trainers of adults. Adult learners need to have choices and be able to influence which courses or programmes they follow. Teachers and learners both share responsibility. Adult learning supply has to be open and expanded to provide a wide range of learning offers, in diverse settings, using appropriate methodologies. It also has to make learning attractive, interesting and meaningful for adults. The environment, organisation and content of learning are important. Many adults learn best when learning conditions and relations between teacher and learners are warm and tolerant. Learners welcome a participant-centred approach. When the content of learning is based on real life or work issues related to the learners, this helps people make connections between prior knowledge and experience and new learning.

Meaningful indicators of the quality of adult learning provision include: allowing adult participants to choose courses and course content, the availability of a wide variety of adult learning opportunities, a favourable learning environment and course content based on real issues, and the existence of a system for the continuing training of adult teachers and trainers.

It is important that stakeholders in the learning system have confidence in its operations. Individuals want to know that what they have learnt is recognised, and is of high quality and of benefit to them. Employers want to know, when recruiting people, that their qualifications meet recognised national standards. It is therefore recommended that frameworks for national qualifications are developed. Assessing an individual's prior learning and experience is another aspect of accreditation that helps to improve access to learning and shape learning by providing a demonstrable base on which further learning can be built.

Evaluation mechanisms

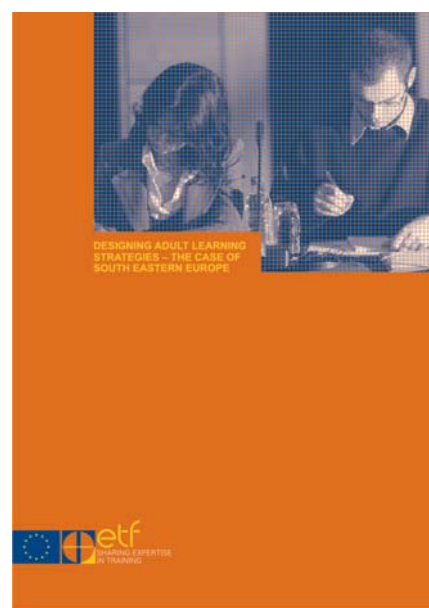
In addition, anyone undertaking formal learning will want to know whether the provider is efficient and effective in what it is supplying. Countries may have a system of accreditation or certification of providers, using national guidelines and possibly regional administration to reduce and shorten bureaucratic procedures. Accreditation systems need to ensure that private providers are financially sound, that they are not making exaggerated claims in their publicity literature, and that their pedagogy and teaching are appropriate.

With regard to monitoring and evaluation, at the national level there needs to be a mechanism for regularly reviewing the progress of the adult learning strategy as a whole. This would cover both the process – for example, national and regional partnerships – and the outputs. The latter would, for example, include tracking how many people are trained in particular skills, whether they gained a qualification (if applicable) and whether those whose training was intended to get them into work have in fact got jobs. This will help to establish whether publicly funded adult learning programmes are meeting their objectives and giving good value for money. In order for evaluation to have credibility it needs to be undertaken by an independent professional body.

As educational and employment options have become more volatile, less secure and less transparent, people potentially need more support in finding their way through the education system and into the labour market. The importance of career guidance and its contribution to policy goals in lifelong learning, labour market efficiency and social inclusion is widely acknowledged in the EU. Guidance also includes the development of an individual's career management skills through any form of education, including adult learning. What is needed in South Eastern Europe, where respective schemes are underdeveloped, is a policy and legislative framework for the provision of high-quality lifelong guidance provision for all citizens, including adults. The framework would need to specify the roles, responsibilities and mechanisms for cooperation between public education and labour market authorities at national, regional and

local levels; the infrastructure and information used; the standards of guidance delivery and the qualifications of guidance experts; and the mechanisms for including other key stakeholders, such as social partners, guidance agencies, parent, young people and consumer associations, and guidance practitioners in policy and systems development.

There is a need in the short term to develop a strategy for data collection for adult learning, labour market intelligence and future skills forecasting. The aims of the strategy would be to increase the quality and number of relevant datasets, to fill gaps and systematise mechanisms for collecting data, and to develop capacity to analyse trends and forecast future needs. Public and private training providers including NGOs could provide participation data at the time of enrolment. Companies could include training data in their annual business reports.





Financing strategies

In drawing up financing strategies, countries and territories must pursue two main objectives. The first is to ensure an adequate level of investment in adult learning, which means increasing the aggregate finance level from all sources. Incentives are needed to encourage (co)investment in learning by companies and individuals. The second aim is to ensure an equitable distribution of adult learning, which is currently biased in favour of the more advantaged members of society and larger enterprises or certain sectors. Unless societies can increase the lifelong learning participation of groups who are currently excluded or underrepresented, there is a risk of widening existing social divides. Finance is one of the crucial policy levers for balancing efficiency and equity gains, but information is essential for underpinning this balance.

The lack of adequate resources hinders the development of adult learning. In most countries expenditure on education and training is seen as a cost by individuals and employers rather than an investment for the future. The fact that value-added tax is imposed on course fees gives the wrong signal when the focus should be on encouraging people to learn. Some incentives, such as the voucher system in Serbia, can be attractive for individuals. Others, such as introducing tax incentives to encourage companies and/or individuals to invest in training, could work in some countries, but are not an option for countries where tax collection systems are weak. Creative solutions can be found to encourage companies and individuals to participate more widely in education and training. This report lists a number of incentives and financing

mechanisms available to companies or individuals that exist in other countries. Donor or other funds are likely to be available in all countries and territories: these could be pooled or redistributed to adult learning. However, South Eastern European countries need to prioritise the population groups and economic sectors that should be targeted by national programmes.

Steps that could be taken in the short term to build consensus and provide a basis for developing a comprehensive adult learning strategy and its subsequent implementation include an agreement within government of:

- a timetable for increased resources to be spent on education and learning, specifying the share to be allocated to adult learning;
- the establishment of a 'learning partnership', bringing together relevant ministries and the various stakeholders with a view to considering the priority areas for action and funding in adult learning;
- strengthening the policy capacity of the lead ministry and other relevant ministries to develop a comprehensive strategy for adult learning in consultation with key stakeholders; and,
- the development of partnerships at and below national level (e.g. allocation of funds, definition of functions, membership, objectives)

and capacity-building for ministries, the social partners and other stakeholders to enable them to engage in effective partnerships, using international experience and donor or expert assistance.

The scarcity of resources across South Eastern Europe warrants concentration on a few priority actions. These could include a policy and action plan (i) for the development of work-based learning, particularly management and entrepreneurship training for small businesses, as well as the development of special programmes to address particular skills shortages, where there is robust evidence of demand and where the training cannot be met by employers; (ii) to improve basic literacy and occupational skills including key competences; and (iii) to expand and develop active labour market measures for the registered unemployed and inactive people seeking work.

Evelyn Viertel,
Team Leader for knowledge management, and key competences and country contact person for the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia

Read the publication:

Designing adult learning strategies: the case of South Eastern Europe - [http://www.etf.europa.eu/pubmgmt.nsf/\(getAttachment\)/4F49C4BAB8F7D6CFC125727A0052CF80/\\$File/NOTE6Y6KAM.pdf](http://www.etf.europa.eu/pubmgmt.nsf/(getAttachment)/4F49C4BAB8F7D6CFC125727A0052CF80/$File/NOTE6Y6KAM.pdf)

Timing is of the essence for the Copenhagen project

In international cooperation you sometimes come across very good ideas which just happen to come along at the wrong time. Occasionally you will see initiatives which are too badly thought-out to seize the opportunities for change on offer. Rarely however do you come across a project with such impeccable timing as the Copenhagen Dissemination Project. With a small budget but a big agenda, this project has been quietly feeding into the VET reform process in countries from Romania through to Turkey over the past two years.

This project is designed to let ETF partner countries know about all the tools for VET reform that their EU counterparts are developing as part of the Copenhagen Process. Examples include Europass, the European Qualification Framework or European quality assurance measures. The project comes at a time when partner countries such as Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina and Croatia are immersed in far-reaching education reforms of their own. It aims to help this process along by encouraging policymakers to consider the Copenhagen issues and helping them learn from each other and from the experiences of their EU counterparts when it comes to tackling educational reform.

During 2005, each of the ten participating countries appointed a national co-ordinator to act as the key link between Copenhagen developments and the reform process at home. Each was allocated a budget of between €20,000 and €25,000 and was asked to choose which activities they would fund to take the Copenhagen agenda forward. The national co-ordinators also identified which of the many messages coming out of the Lisbon Agenda were most relevant to their

process of VET reform, eventually settling on the four themes of national qualification frameworks or NQF, quality assurance, social partnership and the sectoral approach to developing qualifications and career guidance.

Tailored activities

In 2006, international conferences were organised on these four themes in Belgrade, Sinaia, Zagreb and Sofia. At the same time, each country came up with a national action plan which aimed to boost the capacities of policymakers when designing VET reforms, while at the same time incorporating key messages from the Copenhagen Process. Rather than sponsoring the same activities in every country, the flexibility of the project allowed them to tailor their activities to the specific stage of VET reform each had reached. Many organised national or local dissemination events or participated in study visits to Romania, Scotland, Ireland and Denmark to brush up on a particular subject. In December 2006, a large group, including most of the co-ordinators, seven deputy ministers and five representatives of EC delegations, came to Turin to inform each other about their progress during 2006 and plan how to keep up the momentum in 2007 and beyond. "We are moving from simply disseminating the Copenhagen messages to discussing with countries what it would mean to actually implement them at home," says Karl-Axel Skjølstrup, project coordinator for the ETF.

Albania has designed a national strategy for VET reform until 2009 in which developing a national qualification framework is a high priority. As part of the CARDS project, there are currently five groups

working on different aspects of NQF and two major policy papers have recently been produced. Albania has used the Copenhagen project to increase key people's know-how on NQF by participating in several study visits. "We see this process as a useful part of the wider VET reform process in our country," says Maksim Konini, Albania's national co-ordinator, "it has definitely given our VET reforms an extra push."

It has also facilitated consultation and helped generate new input into the reform process. "As part of the Copenhagen project, we held workshops in five cities to discuss the policy papers," says Lindita Xhillari, executive director of NGO Human Development Promotion Centre. The participants included people from local education authorities, principals and teachers from VET schools and local business people. Xhillari believes that involvement from the grassroots is vital if reforms are to succeed. "Only if you have input from a broad range of people can you see if your methods and goals are realistic," she says.

Changing landscape

In Turkish VET, the landscape is changing fast. The Turkish government has recently established a new authority in charge of vocational qualifications which aims to bring more coherence to its fragmented VET system. The law that accompanies the new body is expected to pave the way for much more structured relations between the different actors in VET, giving the social partners a permanent role in developing and maintaining qualifications for the first time.

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Dissemination to be more country-focused in 2007

Dissemination of EU policies on education and training, otherwise known as the Copenhagen dissemination project, has been one of the major undertakings of the ETF's operations department during 2006. The project was sub-divided into four sub-projects aimed at candidate countries, the Western Balkans, Eastern Europe and Central Asia and the MEDA countries, with the bulk of ETF support going to the first two groups of country. After two years of intense activity, the results were presented at a closing conference in Turin on 18 - 19 December 2006.

"The results we achieved are down to the outstanding work carried out by the Copenhagen co-ordinators and their colleagues in the partner countries," says Karl-Axel Skjølstrup, project coordinator for the ETF, "the project has clearly made a big contribution to the ongoing process of reform." Over the coming year, the dissemination of EU policies on education and training will continue, but support will be more focused on specific countries in line with the new cooperation framework on policy learning adopted by the ETF for the period 2007 - 2010.

Unsurprisingly, Turkey has chosen to concentrate on social partnership and the sectoral approach as one of its priorities under the Copenhagen project. Career guidance is a second priority. Employers and unions were part of the group that drew up Turkey's national action plan, approved last September. With the help of the ETF, the group organised a symposium for 120 people on the role of vocational guidance in the Copenhagen Process in Ankara last November. During 2007, it plans to carry on capacity-building at the new qualifications body, currently busy recruiting staff, and to organise several activities for raising awareness of the EU's 2010 work programme.

Although active social partnership is relatively new to Turkey, trade unionist Osman Yildiz does see progress being made. He believes that governments have to change their attitudes to the involvement of NGOs and civil society in social dialogue if it is to become more than just token involvement. "There are

several dimensions to social dialogue – personal relations, institutional relations, the legal framework," he says, "it takes a lot of ingredients to create a space where different people can harness their energy towards the same goal." Participating in Copenhagen activities such as study visits together has been one way of cementing those relationships, says Yildiz. As one example of this new working relationship, at the Turin meeting in December, the members of Turkish delegation decided together to offer to host the next meeting of national co-ordinators.

Building consensus

Bosnia and Herzegovina is keen to integrate its Copenhagen activities into the wider reforms currently underway. Its national action plan was developed in consultation with stakeholders, but also with personnel from the EU's CARDS and VET II programmes. This ambitious plan, which aims to create a comprehensive strategy for human resources is being laid out within the Instrument for Pre-Accession

timeframe of 2007 – 2013. Building a Bosnian national qualification framework will form the cornerstone of this strategy which involves setting up an NQF authority by 2009 and linking this to the European Qualification Framework. "Maybe we are being too ambitious," says Suad Muhibic, trade unionist and Bosnian national co-ordinator, "but we can but try."

For Muhibic, the main benefit of the Copenhagen project so far has been its usefulness for building a consensus between the different actors. "It is much easier to work together and generate ideas now," he says, "in the future we expect to reach a much more precise analysis of the situation." Pushing for a consensus is not just idle talk in Bosnia and Herzegovina; with a total of 13 different education ministries, the country currently has the most complicated political structure in the world.

It is hoped that by bringing all qualifications under a single structure, an NQF will increase the mobility of students and workers, not just abroad, but also within the country itself. Currently qualifications from one canton may not be recognised in the next. Bosnians also hope that working on areas such as NQF could act to draw the education ministries closer together. "I believe ministers will understand that if we don't join in, we will lag behind our neighbours and this could make it very difficult for us to join the EU," says Pero Zelenika, deputy minister of education in West Herzegovina Canton, "we are quite stubborn people and are doing something in spite of everything so we don't want to be the last ones to join."

Montenegro first considered the benefits of NQF in 2004 and this has since become a firm priority. Building on earlier work under CARDS, a national commission began work on

Photo: ETF/A. Ramella



Grassroots involvement is vital if VET reforms are to succeed in South-Eastern Europe

building a Montenegrin NQF in early 2006, while a parallel TEMPUS project is currently focusing on an NQF for higher education. As part of their Copenhagen activities, the group has organised a seminar for members of the NQF commission and joined in a study visit to Denmark last December. Four workshops held during 2006 have produced a draft blueprint for the NQF which is currently being presented to a wider group of stakeholders.

Slow growth

Ivana Petričević, Montenegrin national coordinator, believes NQF will be slow to grow and may have no real end in sight. "I don't expect we can sort things out and have them functioning in just a couple of years," she says, "we have done a lot of work on VET, higher education is next, but then we will have to go inside each sector such as civil engineering or construction, look at the reference levels and try and see where they fit and how they link to the rest of the system." Integrating informal and non-formal learning will be a second challenge. "The specialists in each sector will really have to sit down and think where this specific qualification or reference level could be recognised in the formal system or what non-formal learning would have to be assessed to provide an equivalent," she says.

For Petričević, the Copenhagen dissemination project has been above all a case of very good timing. It came at a time when a lot of change was underway in Montenegro's education system and several major projects were about to end. "Montenegro is a small country with a very limited number of key people," she says, "we were worried that we could lose our momentum." The government and its partners had



No limits to the Copenhagen messages

The main beneficiaries of the Copenhagen project are Bulgaria, Romania, Montenegro, Turkey, Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Kosovo, Macedonia and Serbia. Nevertheless, others are also interested in the Copenhagen agenda. Delegates from Armenia, Azerbaijan, Georgia, Russian Federation and Ukraine attended the Turin meeting in December 2006 and a series of Copenhagen dissemination events were held in Moscow, Kiev and Tbilisi last autumn. Key people involved in MEDA projects from Syria, Tunisia, Egypt and Morocco took part in a study visit to Romania in May 2006.

Ukraine is beginning to plan for its own national qualification framework and Timofiy Desyatov, director of vocational education at the Ukrainian Ministry of Education and Science, believes it will be of great benefit to his system. "We do hope we will be able to increase transparency and a level of competences that will allow us to reach a balance between supply and demand for labour," he says.

Find out more:

Copenhagen Process - http://ec.europa.eu/education/copenhagen/index_en.html

already identified the need for an NQF and had set up the commission to work on it and saw the Copenhagen project as a natural continuation for supporting capacity

building. "It is only rarely that you get a situation where everything matches – the needs, the timing, the resources – fortunately this was really the case with this project," says Petricevic.

Policy learning for sustainable VET reform

by Peter Grootings

European Training Foundation

Multilateral and bilateral donor agencies increasingly issue declarations about the need to contextualise knowledge and secure ownership of development policies by involving local policymakers and other stakeholders in policy formulation and implementation. Yet, policy transfer through imposing or copying (selective knowledge about) policies and models taken from other contexts still dominates the day-to-day operational practices of the donor community. Knowledge as provided by the donors continues to be considered the only relevant kind of knowledge (King 1993 and 2005; King & McGrath 2004; Ellerman 2005).

Accordingly, development or reform is normally seen as a process of social engineering that will be successful if properly managed technically and with the right implementation capacities. In reality, as we know, most reform projects are short-lived because they do not fit in context and there is no local ownership. Reforms hardly ever develop the way they were planned and are usually not sustainable. On the contrary, they tend to come and go with the donors and their agencies.

One reason for the gap between declaration and actual behaviour is a particular understanding, often only implicit, of why and how people learn and develop new knowledge and expertise (Hager 2004). Many development agencies and their staff rely on traditional approaches to learning. They think and act as



Photo: ETF/A.Ramella

classical school teachers who have the right knowledge and know best what has to be done. Their knowledge just needs to be transferred to partners who don't have this knowledge yet and they should implement measures that are presented to them as best practice. Local policymakers and local stakeholders are regarded as passive knowledge and instruction receivers who do not possess enough relevant prior knowledge and experience. They are in the true behaviourist tradition treated like students in old fashioned - vocational – schools, carrots and sticks included.

New – constructivist - learning theories, instead, argue that learners are more successful in acquiring, digesting, applying and retrieving new knowledge when they have been actively engaged in these processes

(Simons, van der Linden & Duffy 2000). Facilitating active policy learning rather than policy transfer may therefore have better chances to contribute to sustainable reformed systems.¹

Facilitating policy learning

There are many similarities between the current international discussions about new learning, the new professionalisation of teachers and our own view about the role of international policy advisers. Educationalists are discussing the need for teachers and trainers to shift from being transmitters of expert knowledge and skills to students - who are largely considered to be passive receivers of information - towards becoming facilitators of learning processes of persons who want to become competent

1 Others would argue that good governance, participation of civic society, fight against corruption and sound legal frameworks are more important. This paper will simply pay attention to the learning aspects which have been neglected so far. The black box approach to learning has become a surprising characteristic of many educational reform projects but is also apparent in other policy reform domains.

themselves. Much of the new learning debate is about how to develop abilities to cope with situations of uncertainty instead of applying standardised rules and procedures. If “ownership” is about national stakeholders having – and being willing – to learn new policies then international advisers should take proper notice of these discussions. After all, the new learning paradigm is firmly based on new insights about how people learn and about how more experienced ‘experts’ can help them to become competent (Schön 1983).

A policy-learning approach may therefore also be the appropriate response to some of the key challenges related to the VET reform process in transition countries.² Policymakers and other key stakeholders should be enabled to learn to develop and implement their own policies. But in practice there are considerable obstacles for facilitating policy learning. These stem mainly from the many tensions between “what” and “how” in the relationship between experts and novices. Several of these obstacles are known from the search for operational approaches to make active learning work in classical education settings.³ However, others are particular to the field of reform policy development.

Understanding the context

Understanding of context-boundedness or institutional fit is not easy and it is a challenge that both local policymakers and international advisers share. While donors usually do not have a good

understanding of local context (often they even do not speak the language), it can also not simply be assumed that local policymakers understand the characteristics and challenges of their own VET system. It is difficult to question what has always been normal and the rule. Often, local knowledge production is not well developed or – as is the case in transition countries -impoverished.

Moreover, international consultants do not always understand that the advice they provide is perhaps firmly rooted in the institutional context that they come from themselves and they are often not well informed about policies and systems from other countries. How can local policymakers assess the fitness of what is sold to them as the latest international trend? How can international advisers properly assess prior knowledge and develop

contextualisation of new knowledge? Policymakers are also under stress to come up quickly with solutions. Their political mandate does not leave them much time. Advisers are bound by the financial and time resources that the donors have reserved for their projects.

Ownership

Also the ownership issue raises problems when this is restricted to a few cooperative national policymakers and – simply because of the design of the donor project – leaves out the vast majority of teachers and trainers in schools. We know very well that national education reforms cannot be completely developed at the central level given the diversity of local conditions and the specific knowledge that can only be developed locally. There is a vast



A policy learning approach may be the appropriate response to some key VET challenges

- 2 The policy learning approach has been formally endorsed by the ETF Advisory Forum (AF) conference in 2003 and reinforced by the AF conference in June 2006. See formal Statements on www.etf.europa.eu More detailed discussions and analyses can be found in the ETF Yearbooks 2004, 2005 and 2006. See Grootings 2004; Grootings and Nielsen 2005 and Grootings and Nielsen 2006.
- 3 The key issue remains how a learning situation can be established where the expert acts as a learning process facilitator and the novice can be stimulated to actively engage in learning.



Photo: ETF/A.Ramella

Policy learning needs to take place at all levels of the education system

reform space that can only be filled by stakeholders at the community and school level. Policy learning needs to take place at all levels of the system. But who needs to learn what?

The basic assumption underlying the concept of policy learning is not so much that policies can be learned but that actual policies are always learned policies. But learning is not simply the transfer of expert knowledge or behaviour from one person to another but rather the acquisition of understanding and competence through participation in learning processes. Moreover, as mentioned before, policymakers are not only policy learners. They also have to act, and acting on the political scene, especially in environments that are undergoing radical change such as in transition countries, not always leaves a lot of space and time for careful and gradual learning.

On the other hand, policymakers engaged in systemic reforms are in need of new knowledge which very often contradicts with established knowledge and routines. For policymakers therefore, because they are under pressure to act, learning is more than merely a cognitive process: learning is practice. Their learning is situated learning as it is an integral and inseparable aspect of their social practice.⁴ How can the policy making process be organised as a policy learning process?

Policymakers in transition countries can be regarded as highly motivated novice learners and policy learning can be facilitated by letting them participate in relevant communities of practice. Such communities of practice could be created by bringing together policymakers from different countries that have gone through or are undergoing reforms of their education systems. International and local policy analysts, researchers, advisers and other practitioners could be part of such communities as well.

However, policymakers in transition countries may be seen as “novices” in terms of knowledge and expertise concerning the development of modern educational systems in market economies but they are also “experts” as far as their own country context is concerned. Similarly, international policy advisers may perhaps be the “experts” with respect to educational policymaking in developed economies but they are often “novices” in terms of knowledge about the particular context of the partner country. Neither local stakeholders nor international advisers really exactly know what “fits” with regard to modern education policy in a partner country’s context.

The community of practice concept therefore needs to be further developed to properly take into account these differences in learning experience and high levels of

uncertainty. Since old and new knowledge relate to different contexts there are different peripheries and centres and even those who are closer to the centre remain learners themselves.

Policy learning through knowledge sharing

Reforming education and training systems in transition countries implies combining old and new knowledge in changing contexts for both local stakeholders and international advisers. Policy learning is not just about learning the policies that other countries have developed but rather about learning which policies can be developed locally by reflecting on the relevance of other countries’ policies for the situation at home. Policy learning in this sense can only happen when there is information and knowledge available and shared. The principal role of donors therefore would be to enable a reform policy learning process by providing access to such information and experience and by facilitating a critical reflection on their relevance. However, donors and their staff cannot do their learning facilitation role well if they don’t recognise that they themselves are also learners in the same policy learning process.

VET reform policy development seen as VET policy learning would have to use knowledge sharing to enable decision makers from partner countries to learn from – and not simply about – VET reform experiences from elsewhere for the formulation and the implementation of their own reform objectives. Knowledge sharing would also

4 Lave and Wenger (1990) argue that all learning is situated learning and more particularly “legitimate peripheral participation in communities of practice”. Novice learners learn best when they are engaged in a community of more expert learners; during the learning process they become more competent themselves and move from the margin to the centre. See also Wenger 1998.

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enable donors and international advisers to better understand the institutional context and history of the partner country. For them, in becoming familiar with local knowledge it will also be easier to appreciate and value the expertise that partners bring into the reform process.

Thus, international donors and their policy advisers would have to take a role similar to the one a modern teacher is supposed to play: not that of the expert who knows it all and simply passes on existing knowledge but the one that recognises problems, does not know the solutions yet, organises and guides knowledge sharing and in so doing develops new knowledge for all involved in the learning process. Policy learning therefore can only happen in partnership.

Policy learning is sharing experience from the past to develop knowledge for the future. It is also about sharing knowledge from abroad and knowledge that is locally produced. It is therefore about developing new knowledge. Policy learning contributes not only to creating more coherent system-wide reforms that fit but also facilitates system-deep reforms of VET systems as it enables all stakeholders to learn new roles and develop new working routines. It will be a challenging task to develop concrete approaches that can make policy learning which is based on principles of active learning theory work in practice.⁵

Further research and practice should reflect the new paradigm of socially organised learning processes. The

setting up of research projects run by external education/VET scientists will not in itself be of sufficient help in the dynamic processes of transition if based on a linear thinking about theory and practice. Participative and action-based research will need to receive more attention.

Obviously, even if policy learning takes place, this will not guarantee that new learning will lead to new policies and political action. Policy learning by policymakers is a necessary part of the policy process but by far not sufficient on its own to produce policy changes. Other,

collective and institutional factors are also at stake. Policy change remains after all a political process.

However there will not be any policy change, unless those who are in a position to take and realise policy decisions themselves are convinced that a particular policy issue is important and are broadly familiar with policy measures that can be taken to address them.

Peter Grootings,
ETF team leader
for National Qualification Frameworks
in Central Asia

⁵ ETF has launched several multi year projects that have been designed to further develop the policy learning approach. These projects deal amongst others with teacher training reform in the Western Balkan region, with the lessons that can be learned from the international debate on National Qualification Frameworks for the CIS countries, and with the implications of the Skills development for poverty reduction discussion for the countries of Central Asia. Information on these projects is available on the ETF website at www.etf.europa.eu



Women and Employment

by Milena Corradini



The situation of women in Turkey has, in recent years, been the focus of increased attention. In this article, Live & Learn looks at the current situation regarding gender equality within a European context.

European Union member states have a long history of promoting gender equality since the Treaty of Rome in 1957. The current EU Treaty of Amsterdam enshrines the principle of equal opportunities and treatment of men and women in employment and occupation.

The EU Council meeting in 2000 in Lisbon adopted the “Lisbon strategy” to make the EU the “most competitive and dynamic knowledge based economy in the world, capable of sustainable growth with more and better jobs and greater social cohesion” by 2010, through:

- promotion of employability and reduction of skills gaps,
- promotion of lifelong learning (with the involvement of all relevant stakeholders)
- fostering enterprise and entrepreneurship, innovation and skills for the information society.

To closely monitor progress in achieving the Lisbon objectives, quantitative indicators were identified. These included employment rate targets and other benchmarks to measure the average performance of EU education and training systems,

such as early school leaving rates, levels of educational attainment, and participation in lifelong learning. Two benchmarks refer specifically to gender, namely by 2010 to increase:

- the employment rate for women from 51% to an average of more than 60%;
- the total number of graduates in mathematics, sciences and technology by at least 15% while decreasing the gender imbalance in graduates in these subjects.

As regards women in education, recent figures show remarkable progress in the EU. In general, female university graduates outnumber male. In 2003, 58% of graduates were women. Men’s performance at secondary school level, including school drop-out rate, is becoming a serious problem in some EU member states with the result that specific gender biased measures had to be undertaken to counteract the situation. Women represent 41% of PhD graduates, however, in 2002 86% of full time academic staff in the research field were men. More women than men participate in adult education and training (lifelong learning) in 21 EU MS.



Photo: ILO/P. Deloche

Increased employment rates

In 2006 in the EU, the average employment rate for women reached 56.3% and continues to increase for all age groups, in particular, older women, but the pay gap remains a problem. In the EU it is estimated that men earn 15% more than women for the same job. Because of this, the risk of poverty is higher for women.

The share of female employees working part-time was 30.5% in 2004. The corresponding figure for men was 6.6%. EU Member States are invited to introduce measures to facilitate flexible working arrangements to help reconcile the private life with the professional life. However, the reality is women more than men make use of such arrangements creating a gender imbalance which has a negative impact on women's position in the workplace and on their economic situation.

There is a widespread consensus in the EU that women and men follow traditional education and training paths, which very often place women in less valued and less well paid professions. Education also contributes to continuing gender stereotypes in society and in careers.

Lack of uniformity

The most striking issue related to gender equality and the situation of

women in Turkey is the lack of uniformity across society. There is a sharp contrast between the lifestyles and interpersonal relations of educated, urban, professional women, who enjoy the rights to be found in any Western industrial society, and their counterparts in the rural, poorly educated population in the north, east and south-east of the country, and among the recent rural migrants that populate large cities.

Data show the employment rate of women in Turkey (25.7%) to be far below the EU average of 53.6%. Further, it has fallen in recent years as a consequence of migration from rural areas. Women's share of employment in agriculture is 58% compared with 24% for men while 28% of women employed in agriculture are unpaid family workers. The pay gap in 2002 was in line with EU trends of around 15% for people employed in urban areas.

The adult population illiteracy rate decreased at a faster pace for men than for women - 28.5% of women are illiterate in Turkey. Enrolment in basic education in 2004 was 92% for boys and 90% for girls. Gender disparity continues to be particularly high in east and south-east Turkey; however the situation continues to improve in particular thanks to the increasing concern of national authorities, international donor organisations and civil society.

At secondary school level, there is a general trend in Turkey to enrol in general secondary schools to have a better chance of admission to university. Vocational education for girls remains based on traditional stereotypes related to women's role in the family and society. These courses do not prepare girls for the needs of the labour market and working life.

Female participation in higher education is less problematic than at other levels. This indicates the presence of social, structural and institutional mechanisms that represent a barrier at lower and medium levels of education, but not at higher level.

Education centres

A study carried out under the EU programme for support for basic education by Karadeniz University to assess the effectiveness of public education centres (PEC), gives food for thought on gender participation in vocational education and training activities. 20 PECs were selected in 9 provinces spread all over the country and involved in field research. The results highlight that:

- all principals but one is male. The justification is that management of a PEC is very demanding in terms of working hours and therefore not suitable to women who have to combine professional and private life. Of the total number of teachers interviewed 7 were males and 40 females. Management ranks are dominated by men, while women teachers constitute the majority.
- 666 students of the PECs were also interviewed, with the largest number in Istanbul and the lowest in Van. Those in Van apparently, had difficulties in filling in the



Photo: ETF/A.Ramella

questionnaire. The sample of students was made up of 93% women and 64% of them in the age cohort 10-29 years.

- 38% of women interviewed attended courses in ready-made clothing, embroidery and hairdressing followed by computer and English courses. The rest enrolled in a very fragmented list of subjects like handicrafts, childcare, aesthetics, etc.

Some studies by ISKUR (the Turkish employment agency) show that companies are not in favour of employing women, even in suitable occupations. Many different reasons are given, including family attitudes, lack of flexibility in working time and physical strength. At the same time ISKUR carried out active employment measures through EU support and 50% of participants were women.



Photo: ETF

Studies in Turkey show that companies are not in favour of employing women even in suitable occupations

Conclusions

- There is increasing awareness in Turkey of the restrictive conditions placed on women by the the family and society in general and the negative impact this has on their labour market participation. This is largely due to the active involvement of many civil society organisations.
- There is growing conviction among women that work empowers them and gives them dignity and a sense of freedom. Therefore, demand for work by women is rapidly increasing.
- There is an urgent need to reform the supply of vocational education and training from a

gender-sensitive perspective to make initial and continuing vocational training responsive to modern society and the changing needs of the labour market. Female students should get a fair chance of being employed with more relevant vocational training.

- The business world in Turkey is still male dominated and therefore not promoting participation by women in the labour market. There is a need to start changing the mentality through media campaigns, information, training, etc.

TISK (Turkish Confederation of Employer Associations) as a leading

social partner organisation, is willing to continue to contribute. It has a specific role to play regarding the business world. Certain programmes and campaigns can be launched to change the attitudes of employers biased towards males in their recruitment strategies and to support higher female participation in labour market-related training programmes.

Find out more:
ISKUR - <http://www.iskur.gov.tr/>
(in Turkish only)

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