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EU agencies offer a lot of added value

MEP Anne Jensen on agencies, eastern neighbours and the ETF

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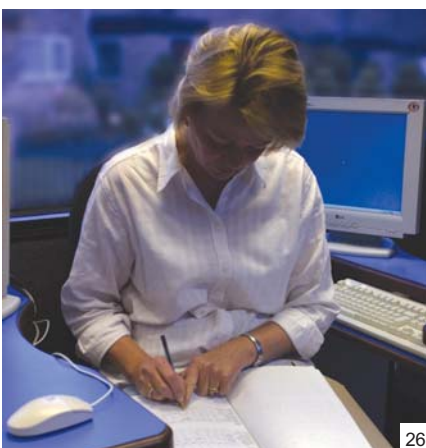
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An advantage, not an obstacle

MEP and member of the Budget Committee, Anne Jensen on agencies, eastern neighbours and the ETF

Photo: ETF/EUP-images



The EU agencies have been picked at and praised throughout their 20 plus year history, but never did a single document so neatly and rationally sum up their status and statistics as a current study by the European Parliament's Budgetary Support Unit: *Agencies, Origin of Tasks, Local Conditions and Staffing*.

Live and Learn was granted a sneak peak at the results of the Committee's zeal and an interview with a group member who is also one of the agencies' staunch supporters. Danish MEP Anne E. Jensen is a member of the Budget Committee and the Head of the Budget Section of the European Liberals.

Anne Jensen has followed the agencies for the better part of eight years now. She started out with a particular interest in employment issues. Because of her initial work on the Employment Committee she kept a close eye on what went on in Bilbao, in Thessaloniki, and in Turin. "I made a point out of trying to visit them if I was in town or en route," she says. "The first time I visited Turin was on the way to Rome," she says.

"The number of new agencies is striking. I'm not saying that this is a bad development, quite the contrary – I think decentralisation is a good thing, but some agencies are created by political consensus. They operate at an arm's length from the Commission services, but how are their seats chosen? Sometimes it seems as if a seat is chosen following simply the personal wish of one minister or another. This is not good; we need to be much more serious about this. If their location is not carefully thought through their operation can be hampered in many ways."

This, in a nutshell, was the reason for the Danish MEP and her colleagues to commence their work analysing the situation at the agencies.

Staff

"Our report is mostly a result of the engagement of the Standing Rapporteur for Agencies in the Budget Committee, Jutta Haug. She does a very good, balanced job and wanted to know all about the staffing situation in the agencies. We felt that

we didn't have the full picture and within our mandate we can commission studies. I joined in and for my part added the work on decentralisation, the seats and the roles and performance of local authorities. The key questions we asked were: Are the agencies sufficiently able to organise their tasks? Are we too rigid in our relationship with them? Can they operate flexibly enough?"

The report of the Budgetary Support Unit looks at all of these things. One of its focal point was staffing.

"There is a general assumption that the establishment of a new agency should lead to a reduction in staff in Brussels, but does this always happen? And in fact, is this indeed necessary? Sometimes they don't just take work away from Brussels, but also from the national governments. This is not typically the case in education, but in transport it certainly happened. In such cases we have to be good at demonstrating their value to the Member States."

Added value

"One of the problems agencies face is that although they often offer a lot of added value, they seem to have to spend a lot of their precious time proving it. This is a waste of management resources and a crucial issue as far as I am concerned. Their general conditions, both in terms of location and in terms of their relationship with Commission services take too much valuable time and resources from the management of the agencies and this works to their detriment. We – Parliament, Council and Commission – need to ensure that the management of our agencies can focus their work on their field of expertise. We must help them with this, do more to make it easier for them to perform their tasks, ensuring

that they are not managers of inter-institutional relationships, but of centres of excellence in their designated field of expertise.”

“I want to turn decentralisation into an advantage, not an obstacle.”

Locals

While there is no volatile ordnance in the report, it provides a very easy way to compare agency statistics and, not unimportantly, to cross-link seemingly unrelated figures. One that Anne Jensen and her group have set their eye on is the relationship between accessibility and the percentage of local staff.

“We looked at how well connected the agencies are, both to peers and the outside world. What about the supply of international schools? Airports? Jobs for spouses? What about alternative job prospects in the immediate environment? The professional environment surrounding the agency? People may be more inclined to relocate if the city they move to – with spouse and children – also offers other job prospects should the job at the agency turn out not to be exactly what they wanted.”

The sum of all these factors can be clearly read in the percentage of local staff that are hired by an agency. At the time of writing, locals made up 40% of staff at Cedefop in Thessaloniki, 38% at the ETF in Turin, 44% at the European Agency for Safety and Health at Work in Bilbao and 43% at the Community Plant Variety Office in Angers. In London in the meantime the figure was 14%. Only a handful of cities in Europe can perform like London in this respect, but there is a trend here and Anne Jensen firmly believes that these things need to be factored in.

“For our specialist agencies, we want to attract the very best in the field,

right?” she says. “Well, then these things will be important factors for the Council to take into account with the future allocation of seats for new agencies.”

“Another thing we need to be better at is following up on the Memorandum of Understanding that we sign with the Member States when new seats are allocated.”

Anne Jensen would like to find ways to ensure that they live up to what they promised. Everyone, including ministers, must understand what agencies are all about.

“Most importantly, these are not local business incubators, which is why they should not be placed in far-flung, unconnected parts of Europe. They are meant to be centres of excellence. They are intended to represent the best of the best we can muster in their highly specific field of expertise.”

Come a long way

So where do the agencies stand today? Much has happened in the

decades since the first of them were brought into existence.

“Indeed, things have improved a lot. The biggest improvement as far as I am concerned is that in Parliament there is now a growing understanding and appreciation of the work of the agencies. Mind you, their number has grown considerably too so obviously there is more focus on them. But I think that the European Parliament has become much better at using the agencies as a resource and that this has generated much goodwill.”

This increased awareness of the work of the agencies is clearly felt at the ETF, which has experienced a marked increase in interest in its work from the European Parliament, most recently in specific requests for work on the relation of education to gender issues and migration in and from our neighbouring countries.

“We’ve come a long way from the days when every new person on the budget committee would ask the same questions all over again: Aren’t



There is now a growing appreciation of the work of the agencies in the Parliament

these agencies doing the same as our people in Brussels? And specifically about the ETF, the classic: Why do we have a Cedefop and an ETF?”

“In fact, the European Training Foundation in Turin is a case study of the flexibility of agencies. After enlargement, it lost a fundamental part of its reason to exist and I will never forget the evaluation report that appeared at the time. The ETF had always said that what they were good at was vocational education and training. But then came this report and it said: ‘What these people are really good at is flexibly meeting human resources development needs and bridging gaps between education and employment.’ Now there’s an asset in the beginning of this new millennium.”

International VET

“It really leads us back to the question of why there is an ETF and a Cedefop. The work you do in Turin is totally different from the work they do in Thessaloniki. You may both operate in similar fields but your set of tasks is infinitely different. You are networking people, bridging divides, finding creative ways to use human resources development to the benefit of a host of related and very topical issues.”

“I was first told about the ETF when it was still very much Mitterand’s idea. He saw that vocational education and training was vital. At the time, all we talked about in terms of cooperation with other countries was primary education and universities. Luckily the times have changed since and

other forms of training have become recognised for the shorter term impact they can have.”

Anne Jensen used this theory while, in the early years of this decade, she was Chairwoman of the Board of Cirius, which supports the internationalisation of education and training in Denmark for the Danish education authorities. During her years at Cirius she worked on a report about the internationalisation of Danish education.

“We looked at the question whether education should be marketed or not. Even then, there was still much focus on higher education when one spoke of internationalisation but we were particularly interested in what we could do with technical education and professional education below

Photo: ITCILO/M. Montesano



The ETF is really good at flexibly meeting different cultures and bridging gaps

university level. We believed that we could offer students in vocational training some incredible extra baggage and professional expertise by exposing them to international practice too.”

Eastern neighbours

“One of the practical examples from that period was when we followed the way Danish chewing gum manufacturers Dandy [bought by Cadbury since] and the way they worked with their Russian partners whose employees they fetched from Russia and trained in Denmark. This transformed the work life of these people.”

Anne Jensen is a member of the Delegation to the EU-Russia Parliamentary Cooperation Committee and a substitute on the Delegation for Relations with Belarus. In our ties with our eastern neighbours she believes education has an important role to play too.

“It can be difficult to develop close relationships with these countries. Many issues on which we try to interact with our neighbours to the east are very sensitive and are hard to tackle by political means. Education, on the other hand, has proven to be a great way of developing ties. It’s odd, because when you think of it, education is so political too, but there you are. There is much enthusiasm for cooperation in this field and this should be exploited to build links.”

To build links or, to paraphrase an earlier quote: to flexibly meet different cultures – Anne Jensen would evidently see a role for the ETF here too.

About Anne Jensen



Anne Jensen received a master’s degree in political and economic sciences from Copenhagen University in 1978 after which she became an economist and later chief economist for the Danish Privatbanken (later Unibank). She left Unibank in 1994 to become the director of the Danish Federation of Employers. In 1996 she joined the national daily Berlingske Tidende as a chief editor. She has been a Member of the European Parliament since 1999 and was the vice-Chairwoman of its Committee on Budgets from 2002 to 2004.

“Yes, in all exchange, the cultural part is just as important as the professional part. And indeed, there the ETF can play an important role again.”

But vocational education and training are still considered a last-ditch option in many of our neighbouring countries. Would they constitute the best field to develop quality cooperation?

“It’s true that traditionally vocational education and training are low status options, but look at where we are in Denmark today. We have a clear lack of builders and other skilled labourers. Their wages have gone through the roof. And look at what that has done to the status of their professions? What is low status today may not be low status tomorrow.”

Asked for a closing remark to directly value the work of the ETF, Anne Jensen returns to her earlier argument in defence of the agencies.

“The European Training Foundation does a good job, with high effect on a limited budget. It can become more

successful with the extension of its mandate to other training segments and other countries. It can also still become better because the ETF too has to show its worth every day and this distracts from its core business. But this core business is some of the best we can give other countries in terms of things that provide for the future.”

Find out more:

Anne Jensen - <http://www.europarl.europa.eu/members/public/yourMep/view.do?name=jensen&partNumber=1&language=EN&id=4440>

European Parliament Committee on Budgets - http://www.europarl.europa.eu/comparl/budg/default_en.htm

EU Agencies - http://europa.eu/agencies/index_en.htm

Everyone has a right to a better life

Italian minister Emma Bonino visits the ETF



Italian European Affairs Minister, Emma Bonino, who is also responsible for relations with European agencies on Italian territory, visited the ETF. During her meetings with the Management Team and the staff of the ETF, Minister Bonino focused on the activities of the ETF, its future mandate, migration and the development of human resources.

It is the first time an Italian minister has taken a close interest in the prospects for the development of the ETF and opening up areas for closer cooperation with the agency.

The interest in and attention to the issues and objectives of the ETF shown by the Minister during her visit are the result of her considerable involvement in foreign affairs, acquired over 30 years of political activity in the field of international relations and human rights.

From training to human resources

'The ETF's focus', according to Muriel Dunbar, ETF Director, 'was in the past closely linked to vocational training, but for a number of years, whilst retaining a firm commitment to training, attention has been directed towards the broader sector of human resources. This is why we have committed ourselves to areas such as migration: by monitoring and increasing professional skills, it is possible to provide solutions even in this area'.

The objective is to help countries carry out reforms in their vocational training systems. Plans should be prepared in conjunction with the regions which require them to involve not only governmental authorities, but also the other players in the training and production systems of the countries concerned. Once the plan is in place, the partners should be left to work on their own.

In addition to providing active cooperation with partner countries, the ETF, thanks to direct relations with regional institutions, provides information on training conditions in various countries to the European Parliament and draws up reports for occasions when there are specific

debates in the European Parliament on certain areas.

The ETF's new mandate, pending the approval of the Council of the European Union, provides for a number of major changes intended to provide the ETF with greater flexibility, confirming its commitment in the sector to human resources and making it possible to intervene in countries further afield. To that end, the ETF aims to capitalise on the experience gained over the years with a view to extending it to other regions – a challenge which the Minister sees as an opportunity. 'In particular', Emma Bonino stressed, 'if the aim of the EPA (Economic Partnership Agreement) were to be changed: at that point, human resources could be a useful instrument even in regions further afield, such as those in Africa'.

'What we want', according to the Director, 'is to be certain that the money is well spent by the European delegations and produces the best effects possible in our partner countries'. For the two-year period 2006-2008, the ETF can count on EUR 1 million in funding from the Italian Government.

Migration: the new frontier of the ETF

Eva Jimeno Sicilia (the ETF's regional coordinator for the European neighbourhood countries) says 'the European Union is one of the major host areas for migration because of employment. The Treaty of Amsterdam created a common European strategy in relation to immigration and asylum policies in the Member States. In this context, the European Commission has taken an interest in raising awareness in the Member States and in their

neighbouring countries in order to identify information on the need for and the availability of professional profiles in a structured system'. The new IPA/ENPI instruments and the new Migration and Asylum programme offer migrants the possibility of improving their own vocational training in a member state and transferring it to their country of origin, speeding up the process of development.

Borhène Chakroun, the MEDA-ETE team leader, told Minister Bonino that 'with the MEDA-ETE (Education and Training for Employment in the Mediterranean Region) project, we are seeking to develop employment by increasing the quality of vocational training. The fundamental components for the success of this project have been identified: networking, entrepreneurship and e-learning'. This involves creating a permanent institutional network to compile information on the labour market system and training needs, to help the unemployed – particularly young people and women – to become independent entrepreneurs and to work on training trainers through e-learning. The countries involved in this project are Algeria, Egypt, Israel, Jordan, Lebanon, Morocco, Syria, Tunisia, Turkey, the West Bank and Gaza Strip.

The Minister was then informed about areas in which the ETF encounters most difficulties in making progress with its projects and the nature of its task in Turkey.

According to Chakroun, 'Naturally, countries react in very different ways in terms of neighbouring relations, information needs and their receptiveness to inputs from the ETF. There are countries like Algeria, from which we receive very positive

feedback, others like Morocco, where we see that progress is being made, and still others like Jordan and Tunisia, which show particular interest in e-learning’.

‘When there are good relations between states’, explains Sandra Stefani, head of the ETF’s Operations Department, ‘it is not difficult to propose training projects, whereas there are other problems, for example in Egypt, where relations are extremely complex because of the country’s weak links with its neighbouring States. As for Turkey, the impact is difficult because of its complex situation, but it is one of the ETF’s priorities’.

The Annual Forum took place on 19-20 April in Rome, where all the members of the project and the decision-makers involved in the Meda project met and the topics for discussion included the status of works and planning for the future. (See the article on the Annual Forum in this issue of Live and Learn).

‘Migration’, concluded the Director, ‘is a phenomenon which requires not only policies but also strategies. There is also a need for an analysis of training requirements in order to achieve better integration in the beneficiary countries. We have carried out a number of projects in Egypt and Morocco by analysing their potential migrants in order to see how and to what extent the level of training has an influence on migration’.

The fundamental value is to allow people to live where they wish

Minister Bonino referred to the situation of migration, claiming that in ‘countries such as Egypt, which recorded economic growth of 5.7% in 2005-2006 and population growth of 1.9%, the reality is that the people

who live in that country want to stay there. The fundamental value is to allow people to live where they prefer to live. It is a question of human rights. It is worth noting that remittances sent home by migrants are the primary source of some countries’ income, more so than tourism. Sometimes the countries themselves urge their people to go abroad. The issue of migration is a very delicate one which comes within the sphere of human rights: everyone has a right to a better life and to live in a better country. In our relations with foreign regions it is necessary to bear in mind two fundamental factors: free choice and needs’.

This is a direction in which the ETF is already moving and in which it carries out a large part of its own work.

Minister Bonino meets the staff of the ETF

After the discussion about the future of the ETF, the Minister met all the staff of the ETF, and spoke to them of the success of the International Forum of Women Entrepreneurs promoted by her, which took place in Milan on 5 and 6 March. The forum attracted the participation of 18 countries and 450 women, of whom 250 were from the Mediterranean regions, and thousands of business-to-business (B2B) meetings were held. The Minister reiterated the importance of the forum and the possibility of finding synergies with training. She said she was pleased with her day at the Centre: it had provided an opportunity to obtain a better understanding of the work it carries out and the objectives it wants to achieve. She also stressed her commitment to supporting its activities and relations with the leaders of the Italian Government.

Finally, she replied with interest to the questions raised by staff on how it would be possible to transfer into the field of training the experience gained from a discussion like that on the subject of women’s entrepreneurship, which provided excellent opportunities for establishing links between Italy and the Arab States in relation to training and the development of human resources.

According to the Minister, ‘In Milan it has been shown that there is a need to have round-table discussions on training. However, the Forum was not conceived for that purpose; it was conceived to put women entrepreneurs in contact with other women entrepreneurs. There are areas of cooperation, however. The best thing is that the ETF is taking part in the forum on women’s entrepreneurship to be held at the Eastern Fair in Bari in September. It is one of the best Italian fairs, once again devoted to B2B, but where vocational training can find a suitable space and it may be interesting to get an idea of countries’ training needs’.

As regards the topic of relations with the Arab world, a subject whose complexity Emma Bonino is well aware of, particularly in relation to Lebanon, she called for relations to be continued and for projects to be brought forward even if this did not seem the most propitious moment. According to the Minister, ‘Its time will come, as it did for the European Union, by means of a process started in the dark days of the Second World War, when nobody would have bet on a united Europe. People were not discouraged then and they began to put in place the basis for the Europe of today’.

Find out more:
Emma Bonino -
<http://www.emmabonino.it/>

Emma Bonino, born in 1948, was elected to the Chamber of Deputies a few years after graduating, where she has remained to this day, except for the period in which she was called to the European Parliament. After serving as a European Commissioner (1994-1999), she was the representative of the Italian Government at the intergovernmental conference of democratic communities in Seoul (2002) and Santiago (2005). For the European Union she has visited Ecuador (2002) and Afghanistan (2005).

She is a member of the Executive Committee of the International Crisis Group (ICG) and emeritus professor at the American University of Cairo. She has promoted numerous international campaigns, including the campaign for civil and political rights in Eastern Europe in 1987, the campaign against discrimination against women in Afghanistan in 2001 and the international campaign for the inclusion of Afghan women in their Government.



Photo: ETF/A. Ramella

Can VET institutions help to reduce poverty?

Lessons from the work of the ETF in Central Asia by Eduarda Castel-Branco, ETF

Asked about their motivation for change, one of the Central Asian pilot schools in the ETF's Skills Development for Poverty Reduction project replied: "Our image in the whole region has improved to a level never expected. We are now demanded and visible, people come from other villages and demand our training, and the local government is startled with the success. Banks believe us and we have managed to negotiate a credit line with special conditions for the small businesses of our trainees."

This reply illustrates, perhaps better than any policy statement, that the seemingly eternal problem of the low image of vocational education and training can be countered with quality and relevance for clients.

Mixed results

To improve the effectiveness of human resources development, all post-soviet Central Asian countries have started reforms of their education systems in the 1990s. One element of the education structure, vocational education and training (VET) has benefited from such reform measures but results have been mixed across the region.

At present countries like Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan have reached a peak in public commitment for VET reforms but there is still a long way to go. In 2004-2005 Tajikistan made rapid progress designing a concept and strategy to reform VET but implementation has been slower than expected, partly due to institutional weakness and instability, but also because of poor participation of the VET schools in policy development.

The demand for more productive human resources has increased but this pressure and the initiative of entrepreneurs have not yet reached a critical momentum in all countries.

Supply and demand

The region became impoverished over the last decade as a result of a rapid decline in economic output during the early years of transition. Previous market linkages were disrupted, large enterprises collapsed, underemployment increased and large numbers of employees experienced precarious changes to their livelihoods. Informal economic activity increased, partly as a response to market and policy failures. Income poverty was generally more a result of insecure, low paid jobs and social vulnerability than of real unemployment.

Evidence shows that there is labour demand but that it is not matched by supply, in part because of



Photo: ETF

Countries like Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan have reached a peak in public commitment for VET reforms

developing skills deficiencies, but also because low wages offer little incentive. For many educated job seekers it is still more rewarding to accept temporary, informal but better paid jobs than more stable but unproductive jobs in the formal economy. Large numbers of people hold multiple jobs and are forced into alternative forms of employment. To be part of the mainstream economy tends to be costly. Policies need to address this issue in a strategic way.

Rural development and poverty reduction

In most countries of the region transition made a large share of the labour force shift to agriculture without the experience and skills to deal with farm and crops management in market conditions. Those who worked in communist agriculture had some specialist skills, but even they often lacked the versatile competences that a small farmer needs to perform. In addition, the agro-production support infrastructures of the past disappeared and the new farmers had to face the natural and production risks alone.



Photo: ETF

For many job seekers it is still preferable to accept temporary, informal but better paid jobs than stable jobs in the formal economy

The share of agriculture in GDP remained low compared with the relatively high numbers of people employed in this sector. This is a signal of low productivity and it explains why rural areas show lower unemployment but also higher income poverty as a whole.

Deprivation as a whole is generally stronger in rural areas, since these tend to lag behind in terms of social expenditure, social infrastructure and the effects of political trade-offs that favour urban and private sector development rather than investment in poorer rural economies.

Through pilot projects in villages, the ETF Skills Development for Poverty Reduction project encountered a strong demand for skills – including very basic production skills – by rural women and men in the regions involved of the three countries. Unlike many urban business people, who tend not to prioritise skills and training, these rural working people are very aware of the importance of new knowledge and skills to help them produce and sell, manage and market, prevent contamination of livestock, plan and manage a credit. Their communities continually call for more training and for better access to it. Skills are considered indispensable for improving livelihoods and household income.

Skills and knowledge

Their demand, however, is not satisfied with the skills packages that make up the formal VET curriculum at present. People in rural areas require technical, management and generic skills and knowledge – not chunks of theoretical knowledge from the basic sciences, but applied and integrated skills and knowledge that can be learned in flexible learning approaches, in line with possibilities and needs. They seek skills for

planning a new business in potato production or beekeeping, for solving a practical problem linked to the quality of conserved vegetables, for controlling the quality of dairy production by simple means, et cetera.

Each rural context with its resources and needs calls for adapted approaches for skills development. This is where the importance of local partnerships for training come into play. In such partnerships, schools, practitioners, NGOs and rural extension services participate. Their interaction can be highly effective in the smaller world of rural communities.

In the last half decade poverty reduction strategies have been adopted throughout the region to address the multiple aspects that constitute human poverty. One of these aspects is education. In the region, general education is still prioritised. Poverty reduction strategies still pay little attention to vocational education as an instrument

for empowerment of the poor. But broader access to skills and knowledge for work and for socio-economic empowerment are at the heart of sustained poverty reduction. And for this purpose, *both* general education *and* a lifelong oriented vocational training are important.

A new challenge for education systems

In this debate it is important to underline that countries of this region have inherited good education achievement indicators. Most citizens have attended basic and secondary education and large numbers have followed tertiary education as well. So, besides the focus on degradation of enrolment and equity, another challenge for human resources development policies is in the area of competences for work and, perhaps most of all, adaptability. Rather than narrow qualifications based on a more or less static technical skills mix, people need broader competences that are indispensable



Photo: ILO/M. Crozet

Rural working people are very aware of the importance of new knowledge and skills to help them produce, sell, manage and market their businesses

for performance in changing and often unpredictable work and social situations. Formal education in the region seems to remain insensitive to these new demands. The reforms need to question the focus on 'schooling' as synonymous to 'learning'. They also need to challenge the focus on qualification for forms of production that have been eroded by technological change and globalisation. Formal VET as it is now cannot respond to these challenges and as such reinforces its negative image.

Empowerment of working populations

More than a decade ago, international organisations called for a reorientation VET towards training for self-employment (ILO, 1996). They did so to support a part of the market that actually creates more jobs and provides incomes to households in developing and transition countries alike.

A recent study of FAO-UNESCO (2003) raised substantial issues for

new policy responses in education for rural development, covering various levels and forms of education and training. This study sustains that rural development requires changes in learning approaches (towards lifelong learning), but also adjustments of the role and strategies of rural educational institutions. These institutions were called to serve the needs of all who inhabit the rural space, ensure that critical knowledge and skills are imparted to students and teachers. They were also urged to shift their focus from technical skills

Skills Development for Poverty Reduction

The ETF's Skills Development for Poverty Reduction project is now experimenting and extracting lessons from its pilot projects. With different objectives and strategies, these pilots share a number of common aspects and preliminary findings.

A pick of these:

- a) Resources are being wasted (human, natural, agricultural), talents being misused or not fully used and the potential of VET schools is ignored. But this vicious circle can be reversed.
- b) VET schools can fulfil a new and more relevant role in their rural communities. They can be a focal point for skills development for the working population if they shift focus. Their new product calls for management initiative, capacity building for teachers and staff, local networking for common strategic objectives, openness to learning and the adoption of a new training approach that differs from traditional static schooling for children. This requires both significant change at VET schools and support from local and sector authorities to be sustainable.
- c) VET schools and their partnerships also have a role to play in the development of social

skills and empowerment of rural populations – in particular rural women. One of the poorest pilot schools in the ETF project is planning to take training to distant villages where women want to process agricultural products. Currently, their skills gap condemns these women to dependent work under often unbearable conditions. But to help to empower people, these VET institutions need to be empowered themselves too and this has implications for VET reform policy.

- d) Regional and local authorities need to raise the priority of human resources development in strategies and related budgets. Local development is a matter of human development and empowerment, and their strategies. Educational institutions, including agricultural universities, have a role to play in this area of analysis and planning of local development strategies. This is another non-teaching role of educational institutions that needs to be further explored.
- e) Legal frameworks in the countries involved now allow for experiments and innovative ideas in educational institutions. This headroom is rarely used by the schools. Without a well planned strategy for new roles and approaches to training most opportunities for change will be missed.



Local development is a matter of human development and empowerment

for agricultural production towards wider competences that are needed by a changing agricultural sector, the challenges of poverty reduction and environmental management.

Despite initiated reforms, the VET systems in post-soviet Central Asia have been on the whole insensitive to demands of this significant part of the newly emerged labour market: self-employment, petty business, and small farms. And employment strategies continue to ignore the informal job market that for many today offers the only available or acceptable forms of employment. Most public VET programmes continue to prepare students for waged labour, often with professional profiles that are no longer in demand and what is worse, are difficult to reorient in flexible ways.

Opportunities for adult training are still very limited, yet VET schools overlook this area and its potential in a strategic reorientation of their own role.

These are important reasons for the wider public, youngsters, employers and government players, to be dissatisfied with the poor performance of VET institutions. The argument for politicians is simple: on the whole VET is more expensive for the budget than general education, but its returns do not substantiate this difference.

VET programmes also failed to adapt to the need for skills development of rural populations, whereas this is an important niche for VET schools in these countries. As soon as a rural VET school, even without significant investments in infrastructure, opens up its services for the local community and enters into training partnerships with the development players of the territory (from NGOs

run by or for women, to business incubators and local governments) a new profile and a new role emerges that provides the missing relevance and crucial encouragement for change.

Policy implications

Findings of the pilot projects (see box) are relevant for policy development. Although the three pilot projects were planned and designed by local teams of partners, implementation showed that there were acute needs in school

capacity building. Coaching, by the ETF and by local experts, was ensured early in the project design and this work has been essential to support innovation and strategy. As such, the pilots demonstrate that innovation in training requires support to the schools. They too lack skills and competences.

Perhaps the most important lesson of the project has been that proactive positioning of VET schools counters their typical dependence on the public authorities.

The new learning paradigm in Portugal: *Novas Oportunidades*

Portugal is on a mission to qualify 20% of its entire workforce within just a few years. With a recognition, validation and certification scheme of an unprecedented scale it is setting an example for other countries. The problems these other countries face may not be exactly the same, but the Portuguese teach them one thing loud and clear: however big the challenge, with sufficient dedication a solution can be found.

To share its experiences, from 20 to 22 September the 2007 EU Presidency invited the VET Teacher Training Network in Southeast Europe away from its home region to the extreme southwest of the Iberian peninsula. The country faces a massive qualification challenge, with a large percentage of current workers in the labour market without proper qualifications. (See box: The Portuguese challenge.) They can work, of course, but they have learned to do what they do on the job and what they have learned is not officially recognised in any way. If they become unemployed they are in deep trouble.

This challenge is quite comparable to the task many countries in Southeast Europe face today. Although the percentage of secondary education graduates is much higher in Southeast Europe, many of their

qualifications are woefully out of date in a region whose burgeoning post-war labour market demands very different skills than the education system provides.

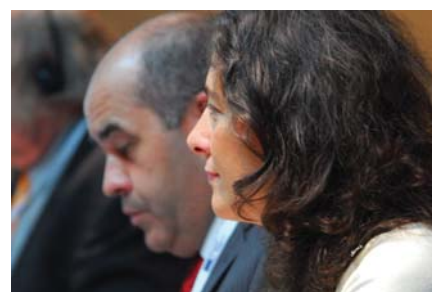
The challenge to update qualifications is also one that the Portuguese education policy makers see as an opportunity to do some catching up with the rest of the European Union.

“Much of this conference is about the new learning paradigm and the shift from teaching to learning that is being promoted around Europe today,” said ETF director Muriel Dunbar. “The Portuguese are expecting to soon face the demands of the knowledge society and they are remodelling their education and training structures to be prepared for changing needs. This is happening as we speak and therefore their experiences are a valuable source of inspiration for their colleagues in Southeast Europe.”

Community of practitioners

In its current phase of development, the VET Teacher Training Network in Southeast Europe is being transformed into a ‘community of practitioners’ that, during a three-year period, will build the contacts and capacity needed to develop systems and methodologies supporting outcome-oriented teaching, learning and assessment in Southeast Europe.

Ana Cláudia Valente of the Portuguese Research Centre on Socioeconomic Change showed the conference that also in its new capacity as a community of practitioners the VET TT network for Southeast Europe could fetch a lot of good practice in Portugal.



Ana Cláudia Valente

“We have learned that we must encourage learning networks that link innovation and competence building at sectoral and regional level,” she said. “And in that, we must be mindful to involve and take good care of our VET teachers and trainers.”

With that, outcome-oriented teaching was one of the key themes of presentation at the event, which at times seemed more a learning event than a conference. Hans Jørgen



Much of the conference focused on the shift from teaching to learning that is being promoted in Europe today

Knudsen, Chief Consultant at the Danish Institute for VET teacher training, treated the visitors to a very comprehensive overview of changes to our education environment in which a focus on teaching has gradually shifted to a bias towards learning. His theory was contrasted by Claudia Montedoro of Isfol, who carried out a recent Cedefop study on VET teachers and trainers in Europe and who said that, unfortunately, in many European countries the reality was still quite different. Such contrastingly flavoured presentations set the scene for a quite open debate.

Photo: ETF/A. Jongsma



Claudia Montedoro

During the course of the event, network participants visited training centres established under the country's current New Opportunities programme (see box: The Portuguese challenge) to gather further inspiration for their work at home. Different groups visited the Institute of Employment and Vocational Training at the Ministry of Labour and Social Solidarity, a secondary school in Lisbon where the Ministry of Education has its New Opportunities Centre, the teacher training centre António Sergio that provides in-service training to VET teachers from the eastern parts of Lisbon, and the Lisbon City Council Branch of the New Opportunities programme, which addresses the qualification of the 46% share of municipal workers who have not concluded compulsory education.

Comparing countries

Study visits are a new feature in the activities of the ETF VET Teacher and Trainer Network in Southeast Europe. They were introduced earlier this year when the group was sent to Denmark to learn about specific Scandinavian models in vocational education and training. Many of the people who were in Lisbon had also visited Denmark. They were obviously tempted to draw comparisons.

Alqi Mustafari of the Albanian National VET Agency recognised some of the Portuguese problems, but he found others quite different from the challenges he faces at home.

“What was obvious in Denmark was that their current qualifications system is the result of a hundred years of evolution,” he said. “It is part of the Danish culture. The Portuguese, just like we at home, must develop models from scratch.”

“The Portuguese are doing what we are doing: they are taking models and adapting them to respond to a pressing need. They are also doing it with the same spirit and temperament, which are quite different from the Danish. I think, in conclusion, one can say that what we learned from the Danes is models, what we can learn from the Portuguese is processes.”

Photo: ETF/A. Jongsma



Alqi Mustafari

Azra Baralija is the director of a vocational trade school in Sarajevo. Although she said she had learned a lot more from the Danish study visit because the school she worked with was more like her own, she also said Bosnia and Herzegovina could learn a lot from the example of Portugal.

“I particularly appreciated the way the Portuguese had structured their education system to accommodate changes,” she said. “This is something we need to take back to Bosnia and Herzegovina because we can use it - in a modified way of course, but still.”

There was great interest from Southeast European participants in the practical arrangements. This became particularly apparent in the questions raised after a presentation by José Alberto Leitão, Director of the Vocational Training Department at the Institute of Employment and Vocational Training. When asked why the Portuguese had decided against letting schools award the qualifications he said: “We first wanted to do this, but the task was too big. In the end we established these small dedicated centres that could accredit all sorts of other bodies to give out the qualifications. Now even local councils and trade unions can qualify people.”

One of the reasons for choosing this approach, Leitão said, was related to the psychology of adult education.

“Part of the problem is having to tell adults: ‘You were not good enough in education so now you have to go back to school to get your qualification. Many would much rather go through a trade union. In other situations we even visit them at the work place.’”

Closing the meeting on the third day, ETF expert Søren Nielsen said he had been tremendously impressed by both the Portuguese and the participation of the network.



“There is a pride in Portugal,” he said, “but also a very open and charming self-criticism. I knew of the Portuguese efforts, but I hadn’t expected it to be so good. There is so much good practice in this country and it is not all that different from what we are looking for in Southeast Europe. You who are present here also acknowledged this, if only because you went against the traditional conference culture of closing your eyes and hoping something will happen. You made it an active learning event.”

Find out more:

Novas Oportunidades - <http://www.novasoportunidades.gov.pt/>
(Portuguese only)

The Network

If education reform policies are to be sustainable, they must be initiated, owned and driven by local stakeholders. Teachers form the core of any network of local stakeholders in education, yet their involvement in reform was largely neglected in the first decade of reform in eastern Europe. Teachers and trainers have long been a point of concern for the ETF. This was, for example, prominently reflected in several of its Yearbooks. It is also one of the key motivations behind its VET Teacher and Trainer Network in Southeast Europe.

Across the Balkans and beyond to Turkey, labour market transformations have set off training reforms that deeply affect the role of VET teachers and trainers. Schools are gaining autonomy, student-centred learning is introduced, competence-based learning is gaining a foothold in the region and adult learning is becoming a big thing.

So teacher training needs close attention but mounting pressure from the labour market has

resulted in a prioritisation of curriculum reform in many countries. There is too much to do with too few funds available and teacher training reform has been put on hold for years. Although curriculum reform could have helped change the teaching practice, it too has often focused on content rather than methodology.

While all of these countries are currently designing and implementing VET reforms, they are to a large extent driven by foreign donors. They are often undertaking the same activities, not necessarily the best in the circumstances and without learning from each other.

It is in response to these challenges that in 2002 the ETF has established the VET Teacher and Trainer Network in Southeast Europe: to help people share innovation and good practice across the region. The network is made up of professionals from Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Kosovo, former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Montenegro and Serbia.

The Portuguese challenge

“Seventy per cent of the active population of Portugal have not completed upper secondary education,” said Fernando Medina, State Secretary for Employment and Professional Training, addressing teachers, trainers and policymakers from the Balkans.

“Half have not completed lower secondary education. And even today, forty per cent of youth enter the labour market without qualifications. We are facing quite a challenge!”

In the EU, Portugal is a comparatively low-skilled country. The percentage of the population with no more than lower secondary education has only declined from 80 to 75 in the last 20 years. But people work, as in any other country, and because after all Portugal is a developed country, this indicates that there is a mismatch between skills and qualifications.

To confront the enormous challenge of qualifying literally hundreds of thousands of people, the Portuguese have launched the ambitious *Novas*

Oportunidades (New Opportunities) programme. Through the programme, they aim to validate and certify the skills and competences of no less than 20% of the current labour population.

The scheme operates through a massive network of centres for recognition, validation and certification of competences (RVCC centres) throughout Portugal. There are now 270 of these centres – popularly called *Centros Novas Oportunidades* – against an originally planned 500. Although their development is slightly behind schedule, 250,000 students are now enrolled at the RVCC centres.

“The system of competence validation is something people believe in, because it recognises their actual competences, not their papers.” said State Secretary Fernando Medina at the conference in Lisbon.

His words were confirmed during the study visits to ‘New Opportunities’ centres that participants were invited to on day two of the conference.

At the Escola Marquês de Pombal in the western part of Lisbon, for example, students had laid out voluminous folders in which they told their life stories, covering everything from personal interest to professional experience. Their enthusiasm about the project left a strong mark on the visitors from Southeast Europe, many of whom said they had taken detailed notes to take home for possible use in their home countries.

Back in the plenary, Francisco Madelino, President of the Institute of Employment and Vocational Training agreed that this was a moment of great change in Portugal.

“Much of this has come about as a direct result of discussions on the European Qualification Framework, which offered the reference points for the project.”

A large part of the funding of the programme originates from the European Social Fund.



Involving ethnic groups in education

Comprehensive anti-discrimination legislation must be adopted *and* enforced if social inclusion in the Western Balkans is to become more than a token service to ethnic groups under pressure in the region. This is the top conclusion of an ETF-commissioned study into social inclusion of ethnic groups in the Western Balkans. The study's other conclusions relate to the role education and training can play in making this possible. The first findings of the study were presented to an expert meeting at the Villa Gualino, Turin on 5 and 6 November.

The study was undertaken by the Bucharest-based consultancy Promeso, whose representatives Camelia Gheorge and Adela Luminita Rogojinaru presented their findings to the expert network.

"Enforcement is particularly important where it concerns education-related legislation in this area," said Adela Luminita Rogojinaru. "Often, existing legislation amounts to little more than lip-service to external demands."

The study addresses the causes of lower educational attainment, skill gaps and poor labour market participation among vulnerable ethnic groups.

Camelia Gheorge said that preparing the study had been quite a complex task. "It was hard to even identify the weakest and some even rather invisible ethnic groups in the region," she said.

"Also, policies may be easy to identify, but actual measures taken as a result of these policies are harder to find. Including all levels of education has also been a task that had turned out to be almost as complicated as involving all intervention layers – government, civil society and donors."

Accountability

After detailing the methodology, Camelia Gheorge introduced the policy context of the theme, pointing at some key differences between European Union countries and countries in the Western Balkans. These included school segregation, educational outcomes in general, access to quality education, the availability of specific initiatives addressing vulnerable ethnic groups, and the availability of disaggregated data, specifying educational attainment by ethnic group.

Gheorge said that comprehensive anti-discrimination legislation was still largely lacking and that where it was in place, enforcement was often weak. "There is insufficient demand for accountability of public authorities in this respect," she said, "and changes to be implemented and enforced locally often lacked a local 'sense of ownership'. Educational attainment among vulnerable ethnic groups is typically low, adult education and vocational training opportunities are still insufficient and a social inclusion dimension in the existing training provision is still largely lacking."

On a more positive note, she said that there had been a region-wide boom in laws and measures on human rights and minority rights protection.

"The prospect of EU accession often greatly helps to move things. There is a growing interest in social inclusion issues and partnership between public institutions and civil society is generally increasing," she said.

Education levels

The report describes what are called 'catching factors' – measures that would help improve the situation of ethnic groups. Gheorge's colleague Adela Luminita Rogojinaru compared these catching factors to actual practice in the region.

One of her key comments was that 'something' happens between primary education (where all groups are still represented) and secondary education (where many of them have been lost).



Photo: Andrei Neculau

There is a growing interest in social inclusion and partnership between public institutions and civil society is generally increasing



Photo: centre

Different ethnic groups in the Western Balkans have very different characteristics and needs

“This,” she said, “is the area where intervention is needed. Experience from elsewhere, however, shows that multi-level intervention is much more effective than single-level intervention, so efforts must not be concentrated on secondary education alone. They must take in all levels of education.”

Rogojinaru said that second chance schooling initiatives and catch-up classes from Croatia, Kosovo, Montenegro and Serbia had proven very effective in the short-term but that their long-term effect had not yet sufficiently been proven.

The report cites examples from the EU that have helped to improve access, participation *and* retention of ethnic groups in secondary

education such as bilingual education and school desegregation, but Rogojinaru said that these could not simply be adopted in the Western Balkans.

“Vulnerable ethnic groups in the Balkans often are displaced (indigenous) groups, while in Western Europe they typically are immigrant populations,” she said. “These groups have very different characteristics and needs.”

Discussing current practice in the Western Balkans, Rogojinaru criticised typical donor intervention, saying it often displayed a lack of imagination and creativity. Projects are often recycled, topics recur, and programmes do not seem to respond flexibly to local needs.

Promeso’s long list of recommendations was divided into five groups: one set for setting the anti-discrimination framework, another for enforcing equal opportunities, one for spreading good practice throughout the education system, one for promoting better informed decision making, and finally one for better delivery mechanisms.



Photo: ETF

Adela Luminita Rogojinaru



Participants agreed that teachers could not be held responsible for failed social inclusion activities

Recommendations

Among the recommendations that give a clue as to how good practice can be used to improve the situation on the ground in the region was a stern warning to analyse the 'transferability potential' of good practice from elsewhere.

At the meeting in Turin, the ETF expert group provided the Romanian researchers with sound feedback, particularly on data that are needed by, but unavailable to the people who work on equal opportunities in the region.

Aleksandar Zekovic, Executive Director of the Roma Scholarship Foundation in Montenegro said that asking for disaggregate training and employment statistics in his country

was unlikely to yield anything useful: "If I ask for this information, they'll tell me that they don't have minority-specific data because Montenegro treats all citizens as equals."

His story was recognised by colleagues from throughout the region but gently dismissed by Rogojinaru, who said: "What is needed is not so much baseline data as participation data, behavioural data, added value information, social connections – in other words: qualitative data, not quantitative data."

She supported this again with examples from the EU, such as one scenario where the Dutch, after intervention measures, found that they were simply unable to reliably

measure changes in behaviour among youth in targeted immigrant communities.

A question that went through the entire conference was whether the drive for social inclusion was part of the mandate of local or of national authorities. This wasn't entirely resolved. In fact the number of possible actors was expanded at the lower end with the addition of schools and even individual teachers.

But participants also agreed that individual teachers, however important their roles, could not be held responsible for failed social inclusion initiatives anywhere. It was, the group agreed, the responsibility of the national authorities to take the lead in these processes.

ETF proposes a new regional project in Western Balkans

At the meeting in Turin, the ETF tabled a proposal for a new project that will address common regional problems related to social inclusion of ethnic groups by using good practice from within the countries and EU Member States.

The project, will cover two components, one of which is the establishment of a Western Balkan regional advisory group on social inclusion of ethnic groups through education and training. This regional advisory group will develop a regional strategy with common benchmarks for improving the access to and participation of ethnic groups in quality multicultural education and training. Following the ETF's policy learning approach, its main activities are foreseen to include the identification of common challenges and promising policy approaches, agreeing to common objectives regarding social inclusion of ethnic groups and proposing measures to promote regional policy cooperation and exchange of learning and good practice.

All this should lead to sets of recommendations and guidelines for individual countries and a common approach for monitoring the effect of launched initiatives.

A grant scheme is proposed too and this constitutes the project's second component.

The grant scheme aims to support innovative approaches towards social inclusion of ethnic groups. The regional advisory group will act as a selection committee for these grants. There will be a call for proposals each year and the key criterion for eligibility is the inclusion of partners from at least two different Western Balkan countries or ethnic groups.

Proposed projects can be:

- multi-lingual, intercultural and integrated education and training projects that aim to improve access of ethnic groups to learning opportunities and reduce their drop-out rates;
- projects that improve existing curricula and teaching materials;

- teacher training programmes that provide the knowledge and skills needed to work in multicultural learning settings;
- initiatives supporting the development of life competences related to life in multicultural societies;
- newly developed learning resource centres that can act as a bridge between policy-makers, researchers and learning institutions;
- awareness-raising projects and events.

At the meeting, the ETF's Evgenia Petkova stressed that the work should not just address the needs of the Roma. Her experience in Bulgaria, where the majority of such initiatives were exclusively targeted at the Roma, taught her that such a uniform target would backfire.

She also warned that the ETF would be looking for tangible outcomes: "We all know that we are good at writing these documents, but how can we make sure they will achieve their aims?"

For this purpose, the current expert group would be an excellent platform. In Turin, they scrutinised the plans and asked critical questions that greatly helped refine the tentative proposal.

One idea that came out of the group was to develop local capacity and raise local awareness by allowing the assessment of projects to take place in the countries themselves by contractors who would operate as technical assistance units.

Another participant commented that perhaps part of the aim of the project should be to help prospective beneficiaries draw up their proposals. This would have the added advantage that not the same in-crowd would run with all the grant opportunities again.

Concern was repeatedly expressed about the measurability of effectiveness of the project. Better mechanisms would have to be built in to ensure effective assessment afterwards. Also, a call was made for consortia of schools or even parents associations to be allowed to submit creative proposals.

Understanding change

European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions by Patrick Grabolle, Eurofound

Europe is changing rapidly and this is reflected in the field of social policy, both in the Member States and at European level. Many challenges exist: the European population is ageing and competition is increasing. To succeed in an increasingly globalised world, European countries must come up with new ways of organising work, increasing productivity, providing more and better jobs and dealing with change and restructuring. This requires knowledge and information.

The European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions (Eurofound) provides unique, relevant, European-wide data on all aspects of the working and living conditions, examples of good practice, and extensive impartial research. Established in 1975 by the European Council, it is situated in Dublin, Ireland. The Foundation was one of the first decentralised European agencies to be created. Its role is to provide scientific and technical know-how in specific fields and promote the exchange of ideas between different European partners.

Eurofound aims to support policies to make Europe 'the most competitive, knowledge-based economy in the world', to increase employment rates and the quality of employment, to stimulate innovation and entrepreneurship, while promoting social cohesion and inclusion – in short, to realise the objectives of the Lisbon strategy.

In tune with the European social policy agenda

Less than one in three workers in the EU reports having received paid training in the previous 12 months.

Across all EU countries, the most important driver of mobility is the opportunity to meet new people and discover new places.

Some two-thirds of the workforce of the European Union has their pay and conditions set, at least to some extent, by collective agreements.

These are just three examples of recent findings from Eurofound. A number of EU-wide surveys are carried out by the Foundation on a regular basis. They provide valuable information on European citizens, their work, their lives and how they feel about their present circumstances. Charting the changes over time also provides information as to the trends emerging in working and living conditions and what implications these might have. This information is provided to policymakers, employer and worker organisations, national governments and the general public, who can use it to inform the European debate and reform national and European social policies.

The European Working Conditions Survey, initiated in 1990, is carried out every five years and provides a comprehensive picture of the work situation of European citizens. The survey covers a wide range of topics including working time, work organisation, work-life balance, psycho-social factors, physical risks, and job performance and satisfaction. The fourth survey, conducted in 2005, covered around 30,000 workers in 31 countries.

Photo: Eurofound



Jorma Karpinnen, Director of Eurofound

The *European Quality of Life Survey* provides data and analysis on issues pertaining to the everyday life of European citizens, such as their employment situation, education, income levels, family life, housing, and social networks. The first survey was carried out in 2003; the second survey in 2007 covers 29 countries.

The *European Establishment Survey on Working Time* was carried out in 2004–5 for the first time and its scope included over 21,000 workplaces in 21 EU Member States. The findings comprise the views of managers and worker representatives on a range of work-related issues, such as flexible working time, part-time work, overtime and unusual working time, parental and long-term leave, and early and phased retirement.

Priority topical research and communication areas

The research topics for 2007 fall within the broader strategic research themes of Eurofound's four-year programme 2005–2008. Taking into consideration the stakeholders' interests, the EU policy agenda and the strategic direction of the Foundation, the priority research and communication areas for 2007 are:

- Effects and challenges of globalisation on structural change, company strategies, employment, work and quality of life in Europe.

- Mobility, migration and integration of migrants.
- Future trends, challenges and prospects in social partnerships: globalisation, adaptability, governance, employment development, flexicurity and employability.
- Quality of work, workplace developments: innovation, productivity, attractive workplace, working conditions and structural and quality changes in jobs.
- Diversity, equal opportunities and work–life balance.
- Demographic change, young and aging workforce, reorganisation of work over the life course.

The Foundation produces a wide range of printed publications, including a monthly newsletter, a twice-yearly magazine *Foundation Focus*, infosheets, résumés, flagship

reports and detailed analytical reports. These publications can be downloaded free of charge from the Foundation's website (<http://eurofound.europa.eu>).

Network of observatories

As part of its research base, the Foundation has at its disposal a network of European observatories gathering together information and analysis which is disseminated through the Foundation's website. The network covers the fields of industrial relations, working conditions, employment and industrial restructuring issues in the 27 Member States, as well as the candidate countries and Norway.

European Industrial Relations Observatory (EIRO)

EIRO is a web-based service that monitors industrial relations across Europe and analyses and disseminates up-to-date information

on key developments in this area. EIRO is based on a network of leading research institutes at EU and national level. Its information output includes news updates, comparative studies, annual reviews, annual updates on key issues, thematic and sectoral analyses.

www.eiro.eurofound.europa.eu

European Working Conditions Observatory (EWCO)

EWCO reports on trends and developments concerning the quality of work and employment in EU Member States and at EU level. EWCO is based on a network of national and EU-level correspondents who provide regular news updates on working conditions as well as reports on national surveys and on particular topics.

www.eurofound.europa.eu/ewco

European Restructuring Monitor (ERM)

The European Restructuring Monitor is an integral part of the European Monitoring Centre on Change (EMCC). Based on reports from financial newspapers and the business press, the Monitor provides facts and figures on restructuring activities in Europe and their employment consequences, with a breakdown by country, sector and type of restructuring.

www.emcc.eurofound.europa.eu

National Outreach Centres

The network of **National Outreach Centres** acts as a communication relay for the Foundation by disseminating research results and providing input for the Foundation's information and communication

Photo: Eurofound



The Eurofound building and grounds in Dublin



Less than one in three workers in the EU reports having received paid training in the previous 12 months

strategy at national level. The main tasks of the centres are to identify target groups, assess where and when Foundation information could feed into EU social policy issues within the national context and communicate and disseminate relevant information. There are currently 10 national outreach centres and it is planned to extend the network to cover the entire EU by 2008.

EurLife

EurLife is an interactive database on living conditions and quality of life in Europe, presenting data drawn from the Foundation's own surveys and from other published sources. Updated every second year, the data deals with the objective living conditions and subjective well-being of European citizens. It covers the 27 EU Member States and Turkey.

<http://eurofound.europa.eu/areas/qualityoflife/eurlife/index.php>

Dissecting the transition from education to work

Highlights of a new ETF publication

The ETF innovation and learning project Transition from Education to Work has developed two methodological tools (a conceptual and analytical framework and a school-leaver survey) that can be used to gain insight into the complex and dynamic process of the integration of young people into the labour market. These tools have been piloted in a set of ETF partner countries and were later fine-tuned to specific features of the school-to-work transition in EU neighbouring countries. The results of this work have now been made available in a new publication: *Transition from Education to Work*.

The transition from education to work for young people is a complex process on which economic change has had a tremendous impact. But results from recent European research show that the nature of this transition varies significantly among different countries. The length and the nature of the transition process are different in different countries and so is the level and persistency of youth unemployment. Also quite different are the types of job and contract obtained by young people. One can conclude from the existing literature that the same policy intervention is unlikely to yield the same results in different national systems.

The ETF has developed a set of tools which enable it to better analyse the transition from education to work in its partner countries and to strengthen the analytical and policy-related link between the education system on one hand and the labour market on the other.



Comparative Analysis

There are several approaches to addressing the issue of transition from education to work, but in its recent work around the partner countries, the ETF has taken as a starting point the approach developed by the EU-financed CATEWE (Comparative Analysis of Transition from Education to Work in Europe) project.

The CATEWE project aimed at describing the pathways followed by young people when moving from initial full-time education to the labour market. It also endeavoured to explain to what extent differences in the national institutional structures could account for the differences in transition patterns as well as in transition outcomes of young people in the countries being considered.

The project produced the CATEWE conceptual framework, which consists of five interrelated building blocks. Each of them covers sets of variables that capture the main characteristics of a key factor influencing the transition from education to work.

The first building block comprises variables capturing different aspects of the macro-context in which transitions occur. The second building block relates to differences in education/training systems. The third building block contains elements aimed at capturing the key characteristics of different labour market structures. The fourth building block contains variables capturing the characteristics of different interfaces linking education and training systems to the labour market. Finally, the fifth building

block relates to the characteristics of the transition itself and is meant to provide indicators that can measure the success of the transition.

One conclusion of the CATEWE project was that a sixth building block might be needed to cover the welfare system and the role of the family. It would cover other characteristics of the transition from education to work that seemed unique for some countries in Southern Europe. Given the poor quality of public welfare systems in the EU's neighbouring countries, this building block was introduced in the conceptual framework developed by the ETF.

Performance assessment

The ETF publication starts out with a description of the CATEWE conceptual framework and guidelines that were provided to draw up the country reports that formed the basis for further analysis. Country reports had to (and generally should) aim to answer three main questions in order to be able to assess the performance of the school-to-work transition system:

- In what ways do young people move through the education system and what determines their individual educational achievement?
- How do young people move from the educational system into the labour market and what determines their success at the point of entry?
- Do processes, patterns and outcomes of early labour market entry influence the careers of young people at a later stage in their life?

A second section of the publication assesses the value of the CATEWE framework for EU neighbouring countries. Taking national reports from Egypt, Serbia and Ukraine as a starting point, conclusions in three areas are drawn.

First, some limitations in the use of the conceptual framework are described. These were mainly the result of a heavy emphasis on desk research and a general lack of information, but also caused by the complexity of related issues which made it difficult for one single national expert to apply the framework in all areas of its coverage.

Secondly, although the conceptual framework was not always used to structure the national reports, most of the elements of it are covered in one form or other. Contextual information such as demographic developments and economic change seem to have an effect on the school-to-work transition. Despite the differences between the three countries covered, some interesting similarities emerge from the national reports. All three point at a clear disconnection between the educational structure and the labour market, and the implications of a large expansion of higher education.

Finally, comments on the national reports lead to a discussion on the extent to which further elaboration on the framework is needed to cater for the specific features of countries neighbouring the EU.

Inclusive employment policy

One key conclusion is that the uncertainty of (future) job creation and the difficulty to forecast labour market needs lead to a need to develop an education system that can better accommodate uncertainty and become more flexible and proactive.

The small role played by formal permanent jobs in the transition from education to work is striking. The main conclusion and policy recommendation would be the urgent need to develop an inclusive employment policy to create more and better jobs. But policy responses need to be multifaceted and support the transition into the labour market of *all* workers, including those with little opportunity in the formal labour market.

An important task is still to improve the interface between the education system and the labour market. The effect of a policy aiming to create more and better jobs might be felt only in the medium term. In the short term, action could and should be taken to prevent wasting the resources that young people bring to the labour market at this moment. Also, the effect of general policy measures may not sufficiently affect young people. Given their specific characteristics, being by definition 'outsiders' in the labour market, it seems evident that measures specifically targeted at youth during the transition period may be needed.

The publication goes on to discuss possible formats for youth transition surveys. It suggests ideal data requirements for analysis of young people's transitions and criteria by which any data collection arrangements should be judged. Conclusions are drawn in both respects and the document makes specific recommendations for the implementation of youth transition surveys in EU neighbouring countries.

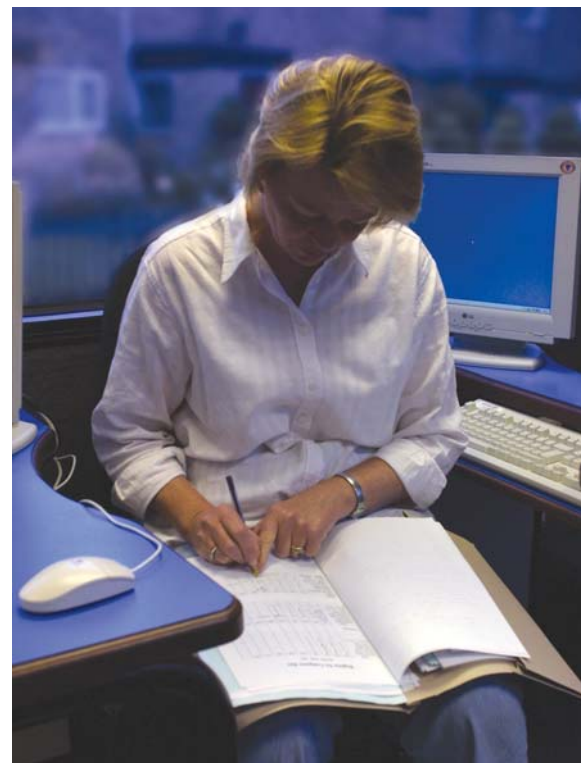
School leavers

Following such methodological discussions, some major choices were made in designing the sampling tool and the ETF school-leaver survey that was implemented in

Serbia in 2006 and in Ukraine in 2007. The target group was made up of individuals aged 15-34, who had left education for the first time in the last five years.

The questionnaire used during the survey was structured to cover the following issues:

- the situation before leaving continuous education for the first time,
- a monthly calendar of activities since leaving education,
- first employment and first significant employment after leaving education,
- the current labour market situation,
- additional education and training since leaving education,
- socio-demographic details.



The small role played by formal permanent jobs in the transition from education to work is striking

Coming to the crunch, the document then discusses the main features of the school-to-work transition using two unique datasets collected in Serbia and Ukraine following the methodology presented above. The survey data provided the authors with detailed information on the first five years of the school-to-work transition for a large set of school-leavers. Information is available for first jobs held after leaving education, for first significant jobs (at least half-time and with a duration of at least six months) and current employment at the time of the survey.

In Ukraine, the transition process is relatively fast, while it is much more gradual in Serbia. Three out of five Ukrainian school-leavers have a significant job six months after leaving education, compared with only one-third of Serbian school-leavers. The authors also observed significant differences in the quality of jobs and the use of skills attained at school between the two countries. In Serbia, young people stay unemployed longer or engage in different kinds of informal employment. In Ukraine, on the other hand, many young people are employed in formal jobs, but often in jobs where wages are low and low level qualifications are needed (regardless of the educational attainment of the individual). In Ukraine, many (women in particular) also leave the labour market soon after graduation.

Some differences between women and men were observed in both countries. Men need less time to find their first jobs than women in both Serbia and Ukraine but these differences are smaller for their first *significant* jobs. In addition, men are more often informally employed or self-employed and work more often in the private sector.

Education plays a major role in finding a job shortly after leaving education. The major findings in this respect are strikingly similar in the



Education plays a major role in finding a job shortly after leaving it

two countries. Post-secondary education graduates (including university students) do fairly well in both countries, followed by graduates from secondary vocational schools. It is particularly noteworthy that graduates from secondary general education perform very poorly in comparison with other educational categories in both countries. These differences also reverberate in the quality of the jobs, with fewer graduates from post-secondary education working informally and in jobs where they are not using their qualifications.

Survey data from Serbia and Ukraine

The survey was carried out in Serbia between 18 and 29 September 2006 and in Ukraine between 24 March and 20 May 2007. Samples in both countries covered both urban and rural areas. In the case of Serbia no interviews were conducted in Kosovo and in the case of Ukraine no interviews were conducted in the area of Chernobyl. Strategic Marketing Research (SMMRI) was recruited to create the sample in Serbia, train the interviewers, conduct the interviews, enter the data and perform a first verification of the data set. The corresponding organization doing these tasks in Ukraine was the Kiev International Institute of Sociology (KIIS).

Although great care was taken to ensure comparability between the two surveys, the questionnaires were adapted to the national contexts and after the survey in Serbia

clarifications were made to the survey conducted in Ukraine to make it easier to understand for both interviewers and respondents. The Ukrainian survey went on to serve as the starting point for the development of a World Bank survey conducted mid-2007.

The target group was made up of individuals aged 15-34, who had left education for the first time within the last five years (six in Ukraine).

The number of respondents was 1504 out of 8593 households contacted (17.5%) in Serbia and 2015 out of 25081 households contacted (8.0%) in Ukraine. Especially because this was a very long questionnaire, the actual response rates in both countries were very satisfying with more than two out of three possible respondents completing the questionnaire: 67.5% in Serbia and 68.3% in Ukraine.

It turned out to be much harder to find young people who have recently left education in Ukraine than in Serbia, despite the youth cohorts being of similar relative sizes in the two countries. One could speculate that this is due to (larger) emigration in Ukraine than in Serbia.

Find out more:

ETF report: *Transition from education to work* - http://www.etf.europa.eu/web.nsf/pages/Publications_catalogue_EN

CATEWE - <http://www.mzes.uni-mannheim.de/projekte/catewe/>

Annual Forum measures the progress of MEDA-ETE project in 2007

For the MEDA-ETE project, the Annual Forum held in Rome last April, was one of the milestones of 2007, a chance for the team at the ETF to bring together all the members of the different networks and sub-components that make up this pioneering project to reflect on the progress achieved so far and plan activities for the future.

MEDA-ETE, or Education and Training for Employment, to give it its full name, aims to boost employment in ten countries of the Mediterranean region by improving the quality of education and training. Rather than reinventing the wheel, it aims to harness the expertise already present in the region and bring it into new and productive relationships across national borders. "It is a regional programme that aims to have a substantial impact at national level," says MEDA-ETE team leader Borhène Chakroun. The project is built upon a series of networks bringing together policy-makers, officials from the ministries of education and labour and social partners from the ten countries. This unusual structure not only allows people to learn about what their opposite numbers in other countries are up to and benefit from their experience, it also works to bridge the divide that can sometimes exist within countries between national ministries and organisations. The Annual Forum is the key date in the MEDA-ETE calendar and this year brought together over 100 assorted educationalists, entrepreneurship trainers, e-learning specialists, statisticians and government officials for two days of hard work and intense debate.

A major component of the project is the EuroMed Observatory Function. This network of information producers has been working since January 2006 on producing a set of regional indicators which can inform the decisions of policymakers. The indicators will highlight at a glance key features of each country's TVET system and labour market and allow for regional comparisons based on solid information for the first time. With the first round of data collection already complete, network members at the Annual Forum discussed a new tool for harmonising data collection before a second round can be completed later in the year. In order to be able to establish accurate comparisons between countries, people saw the need for a precise map of the education and training systems in each country and the MEDA-ETE team agreed to continue this exercise with data supplied by the network.

Indicators

MEDA-ETE aims to promote synergies both with other relevant initiatives in the region and between the different components of the project itself. The observatory function provides one example of how this can work. It has established a close working relationship with MEDSTAT and has been able to use MEDSTAT's work to help define the list of indicators the network will produce. Other components of the project such as the new network on apprenticeships and enterprise-based learning schemes are now keen to tap into the observatory function's expertise.

Bringing about sustainable change which will outlive the lifespan of the project is another MEDA-ETE aim. The component on career guidance provides a good example of how an idea can take root and flourish when the conditions are right. Although this year-long activity, designed to help develop career guidance policy and provision in MEDA, officially held the final meeting of the network at the Annual Forum, career guidance initiatives have taken on a life of their own in Morocco, Turkey and, particularly, Egypt.

When Egypt's national report on career guidance was presented to 40 policymakers and practitioners in January 2007, all those present signed up to join a national task force which has since drafted an action plan until spring this year. The task force is now preparing a concept paper in Arabic on career guidance and intends to design a training course for relevant civil servants and people from the private sector from around the country as well as other awareness-raising activities. The ETF is lending a hand with the design of a dedicated project on career guidance and Egypt's ministry of education has officially requested that ETF support continue until March 2008 to make sure the initiative does not lose its momentum.

For Egyptian expert in career guidance Aboubakr Badawi, the secret of success lies in promoting a strong sense of ownership in the country concerned. "In many cases, the government feels that what an

Photo: ETF/T. Cristofari



Borhène Chakroun

international donor wants to do doesn't do any harm so why not let them, but they do not see the need for it so there is no enthusiasm," he says. Badawi was determined not to let that happen this time around and used a visit by the ETF's Helmut Zelloth and expert Tony Watts to help bring the Egyptian authorities onboard. "We talked to the decisionmakers and succeeded in giving them the feeling that this is not just a study the ETF wants to conduct, it is something that will really benefit Egypt," says Badawi.

Training and advice

Another MEDA-ETE network present at the forum was the entrepreneurship trainers. This activity aims to boost the capacity of MEDA training providers to deliver quality entrepreneurship training and business start-up advice to young people. One training provider from each of the MEDA countries will learn about and implement a best practice in entrepreneurship training offered by 15 of their counterparts from the EU and MEDA. The network members came early to the forum to take part in a kind of entrepreneurship training marketplace over the preceding two days. Best practice providers were urged to sell their product as best they could while receiving institutions were encouraged to shop around and find out as much as possible about the best practices on offer before deciding which to choose.

Injaz of Lebanon chose the UK's Glean initiative as it complements the services it already provides to school students. "Today there is no provision in Lebanon for people between 20 and 40 who want to set up small businesses - only micro-credit for rural projects and the venture capitalists for huge projects," says Gilbert Doumit, training development manager at Injaz, "so we were trying



Photo: ETF/T. Cristofari

Network members participated in an entrepreneurship training marketplace before the Forum began

to find something for these kind of people. Glean is offering something extremely practical, not just a simulation but something real." With their choices now made, the paired institutions are currently working on transferring the best practice – training trainers from the MEDA institutions in the new methodology so that they put it into practice at home.

This network also sees the value of seeking synergy with other initiatives. It has hooked up with the Euromediterranean Charter for Enterprise, a checklist of ten ways of improving the business climate being promoted by the European Commission's DG Enterprise. Several national charter coordinators attended the forum, informed the network members about their activities and seized the opportunity to make contact with possible new partners. Makram Malaeb, national coordinator for Lebanon, believes there is a lot to be gained from working together. "We immediately realised that the potential of this entrepreneurship intervention goes well beyond the specific outputs and

even the MEDA-ETE project itself," he says, "if we can build momentum, then together we can make a substantial intervention at the level of entrepreneurship in general."

Spreading expertise

Last but not least, the e-learning network, comprising representatives of 10 training institutes from the MEDA countries, gathered at the Annual Forum to put the finishing touches to the one-year e-learning course for teacher trainers that was launched as a pilot in each country in May and June. Network members endorsed the final version of the course and reported on their progress selecting the 15 teacher trainers per country due to take part. Many had taken the trouble to select people from a range of organisations to ensure that the expertise gained spreads beyond their own institution. This was the case for Aïcha Ezzerbouti, director of Algeria's National Centre for Vocational Distance Learning, whose group includes teacher trainers from different institutions and regions of Algeria.



Participants returned home with new ideas to help improve the quality of education and training in their countries

Participants also discussed issues that still need tackling. In some countries, trainee participation may be held back by the lack of a fast internet connection. Some people were concerned with content issues such as how to go about finding suitable learning objects to animate the e-learning content. Eli Eisenberg, deputy director general of Israeli e-learning specialists ORT, reported that developing e-learning objects does not have to be expensive as much is already freely available via the internet. "What does call for time and resources is integrating these into your own courses," he says. Marc Durrando of the EU's e-Twinning initiative gave the group the benefit of his work connecting

students across borders through the use of ICT in schools. "I don't think that introducing these resources in education is a matter of technological advancement so much as effective teacher training," he says.

Participating in the e-learning network has the added advantage that people can learn as they go along. The immediate beneficiaries of the e-learning course – the ten MEDA training institutions - are the very same people who are involved in all aspects of designing and delivering the course. This highly participatory approach, one of the trademarks of the MEDA-ETE approach, has the advantage of promoting a strong

sense of local ownership, something which should bode well for long-term sustainability.

As the two days drew to a close, participants in this year's MEDA-ETE Annual Forum prepared to return home with a stock of new ideas, contacts and motivation to keep things moving forward and carry on improving the quality of education and training in their countries, providing more opportunities for the young people of the MEDA region, during the year ahead.

Find out more:
MEDA-ETE -
<http://www.meda-ete.net/>

Women trainers hook up at the Annual Forum

Away from the hustle and bustle of the forum, Mona Shadi, a training and microfinance expert from Egypt, took the time to meet Rania Sweiti from Jordan and exchange information on work and future plans. Both women are entrepreneurship trainers and represent two of the top ten training organisations from the MEDA region chosen to take part in the transfer of best practice as part of the project's entrepreneurship component.

Meeting for the first time at the forum, Mona and Rania found they have a lot in common. Mona combines her job as a part-time trainer with Egyptian small business support agency El Mabraba with freelance work in microfinance. "Enterprise training and microfinance counselling is an ideal mix in our part of the world," she says. Rania agrees.



Participants at the Forum got the chance to meet with many people from their region and their profession all in one place

"In Mona's work with the Mubarak-Köhl programme, she combines entrepreneurship training, microfinance support and vocational training," she says, "I will definitely be keeping in touch with Mona as she has good ideas and experience I could borrow from."

For her part, Mona was taken by the extensive network of training providers operated by Jordan's Hashemite Fund for Human Development where Rania is a senior training officer. "The fund is doing really innovative work," says Mona, "and there is certainly great value in being part of a large committed team. This is something which I miss as a freelancer."

"Apart from the nuts and bolts of training design and delivery, it's been terrific to meet really good women experts in my field here," says Mona, "although I travel quite a bit with my work, like all experts on busy contracts, I rarely get the chance to meet so many people from my region and my profession in one go. This is the value of the forum."

"While the mix of languages can be enriching, there's no beating being able to get down to detail in your own language," says Rania, as she and Mona interspersed work experiences with more personal details of their busy lives. Both women studied agricultural engineering before turning to training. "I come from a family of engineers," says Rania, "but few of us have taken the plunge to become self-employed." "Business has been part of my family for years," says Mona, "one side of the family has a market gardening business; the other has a computer and software company. I practically grew up in business." She is convinced that "you have to be an entrepreneur in order to teach it. It gives you that much more confidence and credibility."

"Networking is key to the Annual Forum but it's not easy to measure the impact," says Tony Gribben, the ETF's entrepreneurship learning specialist, "Shaking hands and exchanging business cards is one thing, quality networking is another. It involves sharing ideas, identifying opportunities and a commitment to continue dialogue and exchange beyond the forum." He adds: "we are encouraging our partners to build on the contacts made here and to use the MEDA ETE entrepreneurship learning virtual community to do just that."

The effect of ETF intervention

ETF evaluates its impact in candidate and potential candidate countries by Outi Karkainen, ETF

Partner countries appreciate the ETF's expertise in networking, its local knowledge and its corporate memory of VET reform and labour market policies in partner countries. European Commission services stress the rapid and demand-driven access to its detailed knowledge of local needs, realities and context. Both groups appreciate the ETF's long-term commitment. These are the main findings of a set of external evaluations of the work of the ETF in candidate and potential candidate countries.

Evaluation

Lessons learnt in the past are useful in the current work of the ETF. Each of the ETF partner countries has its specific context and needs but when it comes to accession-related issues some good practice can be replicated in other countries. Therefore, between 2005 and 2007 the ETF commissioned external evaluations of its activities in Bulgaria, Romania, Turkey and the FYR of Macedonia to assess the most appreciated and most effective support to these countries in the accession process and in reaching the EU standards in the field of VET and VET-related labour market issues.

The candidate and potential candidate countries are the priority partner countries of the ETF. A considerable part of the ETF's work consists of supporting the VET and labour market reforms in these countries to work towards EU standards. The ETF worked for ten years with the ten Eastern European candidate countries that became EU Member States on 1 May 2004. Work with Romania and Bulgaria continued until the beginning of 2007, when these two countries also entered the European Union. Work is ongoing with all the current candidate and potential candidate countries.

National Observatories

It is important to develop capacity in the candidate countries to produce data, information and analysis on

which policy choices can be based. In this respect the National Observatory functions set up with the support of the ETF can be seen as a success story. The Bulgarian National Observatory managed to build a good level of expertise, its products became known and recognised and it got its unique place in VET data collection, analysis and dissemination.

Over the years, the Romanian observatory became an important centre of reference for studies and statistics. The Ministry of Education used it to conduct evaluations in the education sector and it also played a significant role in the development of the HRD strategy of the National Development Plan. Today, the government has secured the funding sources of the Observatory.

With the support of National Observatories the ETF has produced annual *VET Progress Reports* that provide input into DG Enlargement's regular reports on progress towards accession.

Another key element of supporting the candidate countries has been their familiarisation with, and gradual introduction to the work of Cedefop. Activities (conferences, seminars, etc.) organised by the ETF have provided an opportunity for candidate country representatives to participate in mutual learning initiatives and to learn more about the goals, principles, methods and activities of Cedefop. With ETF support, the

National Observatories also started submitting data following Cedefop requirements.

Country Monographs and Peer Reviews

At the request of the European Commission the ETF became involved in the preparation of a series of Country Monographs. These gave an overview of VET reform development, presented the main VET problems faced by the countries and provided realistic recommendations. The aim of the Monographs of the candidate and potential candidate countries was to place change in a wider context. They provided a baseline for assessing the progress in implementing the priorities identified in the Joint Assessment Paper (JAP) on Employment Policy which are agreed between the governments of candidate countries and the European Commission. An additional result of the project was improved inter-institutional cooperation and dialogue between the main stakeholders in the field of VET, sparked by numerous consultations in working groups and seminars.

In Romania, the *Country Monograph* provided direct input into national policy development, while evaluation interviewees in Bulgaria confirmed that their monograph is broadly used in everyday work, in particular in the definition of school strategies, the preparation of ministerial documents and the elaboration of policies.

In 2001, the ETF prepared a first set of peer reviews on the implementation of VET policy in Balkan countries, including the FYR of Macedonia. In 2003 and 2004, these were followed by peer reviews in Turkey, Romania and Bulgaria. The basic objective of the peer reviews is to promote the identification and exchange of good practice and the potential for its successful transfer to other countries. The Bulgarian Peer Review, for example, focused on continuing vocational training in a lifelong context. The results of the project fed into the National Continuing Vocational Training Strategy. The national and regional dissemination and follow-up activities of the peer reviews played an important role in networking in all four countries.

Institutional Building

In the slipstream of the earlier Special Preparatory Programme for the

European Social Funds (SPP-ESF), in 2002 the ETF started a chain of institution building projects in Bulgaria, Romania and Turkey. These were to support the ongoing reform in HRD and preparations for the ESF. The project helped the countries understand structural funds policies and implementation requirements. It also emphasised the need for inter-ministerial coordination and cooperation on ESF issues. In Bulgaria, the knowledge thus acquired by stakeholders was used in the formulation of HRD components within the National Development Plan. The activities also aimed at reinforcing the contribution of key regional players to the EU programming cycle and at improving social dialogue. In Turkey the ETF elaborated and disseminated an Employment Background Study in preparation of the Joint Assessment Paper, helped to raise the capacity for management of ESF-type measures and supported the consultation

process around the European Qualifications Framework.

In Romania the ETF was in charge of impact evaluation of the pre-ESF Phare Grant Scheme labour market programme and in Turkey of the impact evaluation of the EC Active Labour Market programme. In both cases, the work was carried out by local experts supported by a European ESF expert that provided advice and training thus ensuring local capacity building for the management and evaluation of ESF type funds. These evaluations also brought together key stakeholders for future funds from regional and national level.

Lifelong learning

Following up on the 2002 Resolution on Lifelong Learning, the ETF started a consultation process on life-long learning in the candidate countries. Consultations involved



Photo: ILO/M. Crozet

representatives from the ministries, the social partners, NGOs, professional organisations, education and training establishments, et cetera. In collaboration with the National Observatories, National reports on the Memorandum on Lifelong Learning were prepared at the request of DG Education and Culture in 2003. The work of the teams resulted in a report *Implementing Lifelong Learning strategies in Europe: presenting the situation in the Acceding Candidate Countries*.

As a result, both Romania and Bulgaria achieved very good results in institutionalising lifelong learning issues. Lifelong learning moved upwards on the priority list of governments and social partners became aware of EU initiatives in this field as well as of the importance of their role in lifelong learning reforms and actions. One of the main political achievements became the agreement between the Bulgarian government and the European Commission on the development of a strategy for adult learning. In Romania the consultation process sparked the preparation of policy papers on lifelong learning priorities and a number of education acts were revised to integrate lifelong learning priorities and principles. A national adult training body and regional adult training centres were also set up.

The impact of ETF support

There is general consensus among the stakeholders in Bulgaria that without the ETF's contribution it would have been difficult for the country to develop the necessary institutions and legislation in the field of VET and to put relevant VET issues on the political agenda. The responsible ministries and the social partners lacked expertise in this area. ETF activities helped them to develop a

political agenda in the field of VET by providing Bulgarian officials with practical advice. The ETF helped to 'translate' European strategies and standards to the Bulgarian situation.

The ETF also supported cooperation among various Bulgarian actors in the field of VET, the information situation concerning VET and the quality of a number of VET schools. Raising awareness, attracting attention of a larger audience to VET issues, capacity building and improved cooperation among stakeholders were cited as the main effects of ETF intervention. In a number of cases new institutions and initiatives were launched. Some projects had a clear political impact because they prompted or supported the elaboration of new laws and the establishment of new institutions which exist up until this day and form part of the framework for VET development.

The work of the ETF in Romania has supported the national VET reform process, priorities, EU policies and accession to the European Union.

ETF support in Romania has been effective because of the fact that ETF task managers built a long lasting partnership with key stakeholders inside the country. They acquired an in-depth knowledge of local needs, responded effectively and targeted requests from the Romanian stakeholders and the EU Delegation. The ETF acted as a link between EU policies and national developments in initial and continuing VET, streamlining developments and policies through advice, projects and continuing assistance of the country managers. The ETF covered areas that could not be supported by Phare assistance or for which the right expertise could not be found elsewhere. Romanian stakeholders and social partners, involved in ETF supported projects or activities improved their level of understanding, expertise and willingness to cooperate because of such involvement. Examples mentioned by interviewees included capacity building among sectoral committees, implementing a National Qualifications Framework and linking the labour market to VET supply.



Photo: IL/OIM, Crozet

It was noted that the establishment and maintenance of inter-institutional dialogue was very important for having reform measures endorsed by the decision makers. The ETF also played a pivotal role in experience sharing between Romania, EU member states, and acceding and candidate countries through study tours, seminars and cross-country studies. At a policy level, the ETF's efforts enabled Romanian stakeholders to better grasp the concept of VET reforms and the reasons behind them, and helped them to develop the capacity to undertake such reforms.

Stakeholder collaboration

ETF activities in Turkey were (and are) in line with the ETF's overall objective to support the development of Turkey's VET system. This includes establishing the pre-conditions for success of EU-funded programmes, in line with EU policy and the country's own strategy. ETF support to EU-funded programmes helped the further development of legislation and institutional arrangements, such as the Turkish Law on Vocational Qualification Authority. ETF interventions have furthered collaboration between stakeholders and developed a team-oriented mode of engagement. This is generally considered a good practice experience. Many interviewees appreciated the role of the ETF in providing the overall picture from an EU perspective with experiences from other countries and other useful and challenging ideas.

The impact of ETF-activities in the FYR of Macedonia was specifically assessed against the ETF's overall objective in the country: the development of the Macedonian VET system. One key indicator that this objective has been achieved is the

new VET law passed in the Macedonian Parliament in June 2005 in the context of EU-funded VET-reform activities. This can be considered as an institutionalised change supported by the ETF.

The ETF has provided the European Commission and DG Enlargement in particular, with expert support in the field of policy design and implementation in areas where the Commission itself did not have the expertise and required familiarity with the local situation. The ETF also provided DG Employment with specific information and data that is beyond the scope of official databases. The Commission services have been able to use the support provided by the ETF to review progress towards accession in the field of VET and labour market reforms. Interviewees from the Commission considered input into the regular progress reports of DG Enlargement (such as through specialist reports and the review of progress in VET reform) of good quality and very useful tools in the assessment of the overall progress. The information and analysis helped to set the general direction for the Structural Funds. In this regard, ETF activities have met their objective of developing the pre-conditions for the successful implementation of (EU-funded) programmes for VET-reform.

Partner country comments

Partner country stakeholders find that the ETF's main strengths are its expertise in networking and facilitation, its continuity of expertise, its local knowledge, its good administration skills and its corporate memory of VET reform and labour market policies in partner countries. Of equal importance is its knowledge of Commission policies and procedures.

In general, interviewees assessed that through constant contact, the ETF remains aware of changing needs, acting practically in a flexible manner, and meeting imminent and actual needs. An interviewee characterised this as a mutual learning process, whereby the current country manager is considered as an authority on the EU-context, and regarded with respect on local issues as well. Specific highlights mentioned in Turkey and the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia were the impartiality and trustworthiness of the ETF and the flexibility and continuity of ETF services beyond their 'Terms of Reference'.

Commission comments

The ETF works with Commission services in Brussels, EU Delegations and the European Agency for Reconstruction (in the case of the FYR of Macedonia). EC interviewees stressed the rapid and demand-driven access to ETF expertise. They appreciated the ETF's long-term commitment which cannot always be found with private consultants. The high quality of ETF expertise, detailed knowledge of local needs, realities and context are very much appreciated by the Commission. Generally ETF interventions are valued as authoritative expert opinions of an independent outsider.

As regards ETF support to European Commission programming, the interviewees reiterated their satisfaction with the technical input provided, the help in project design, tender selection and content monitoring, and the thematic expertise. ETF projects and activities implemented in the country are interlinked with each other and with other EU programmes. This greatly increases the efficiency of each particular intervention.

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