

TORINO PROCESS

SYRIA

DECEMBER 2010





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Foreword

In 2010, the European Training Foundation (ETF) in cooperation with the State Planning Commission (SPC)¹ launched a review of vocational education and training (VET) policies and systems in Syria. This biennial exercise, known as the 'Torino Process' will review and analyse the internal efficiency of Syrian VET systems and the contribution of VET policies and systems to the broader policy objectives of sustainable economic and social development. This research will be complemented by in-depth analysis of cooperation between education and business that aims to map the policies, mechanisms and processes that support (or constrain) cooperation between education (higher education [HE] and VET) and the economic world. The Torino process is being implemented in all ETF partner countries.

The ETF Syria team has worked in partnership with Syrian counterparts to collect and analyse evidence of key policy objectives, trends, constraints and challenges. Their analysis also highlights achievements and good practices to be disseminated and discussed further with a view to possible mainstreaming of policies into the VET system. The Torino analysis and reporting processes provide support for self-assessment of VET policies in Syria by the Syrian authorities. The analysis given here is based on the soundest evidence available and will be discussed with a range of different stakeholders.

Torino Process documents will provide a reliable point of reference for the ETF when the European Commission requests input for European Union (EU) external assistance programmes. The study will contribute to the 11th Five Year Plan (FYP) process by positioning VET as an important sub-sector within the education system.

The ETF is grateful for the opinions shared and insights provided by participants during the rich discussions in all meetings and would like to thank representatives of the State Planning Commission, the Vice Prime Minister for Economic Affairs, the Ministries of Education, of Higher Education, and of Labour and Social Affairs, the Arab Federation of Engineering Industries (Damascus Office), the Central Bureau of Statistics (CBS), GTZ, UNDP, the Syria Trust for Development, the Syrian Enterprise and Business Centre (SEBC) and any other institution or person who collaborated with this effort.

Executive Summary

Syria's vision for VET² and the current state of play cannot be understood without consideration of the socio-economic context. The 10th FYP (2006-2010) sets priorities and targets for the move from a planned economy towards a social market economy. The FYP focuses mainly on economic growth largely led by the private sector, the creation of social safety nets and health and education reform. The Government is committed to educational reform and efforts to reduce the mismatch between available skills and labour market skill requirements. Education planning must consider supply and demand in VET as well as general secondary and HE. The soon to be finalised 11th Five Year Plan reflects Syria's vision for the future and these issues are expected to be high on the agenda.

The Government of Syria has tried to reduce public sector influence in recent years by removing barriers to the private sector on most industries and services in order to create new dynamics for economic growth and boost these undeveloped areas (Aita, 2009). These efforts encourage Syrian enterprises and employees to be more competitive and use higher levels skills and competences. However, the size and importance of the informal sector (around 60% in 2010) renders cooperation and policy interventions difficult. The situation is further aggravated by the fact that the public sector is still the preferred employer for HE graduates (Kabbani and Kamel, 2007). Graduates have only recently started looking for jobs in the private sector in emerging fields such as ICT or banking.

The country has high youth unemployment (23.1% in 2008) with deep inequalities between urban and rural areas. The education system appears to compound this situation by failing to provide the skills and competences demanded by the labour market (Huitfeld and Kabbani,

¹ A Memorandum of Understanding to define cooperation is currently being finalised. It includes agreements with the Ministry of Education, the Ministry of Higher Education and the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs

² VET is widely known as 'Technical Vocational Education and Training' (TVET) in Syria.

2006). Enterprises appear content with the role of passive users and they need to play a more active role in getting the right skills mix from the education system. The majority of the population complete only basic education, while a small number complete HE. The qualifications acquired in school go only part of the way toward satisfying employer requirements but in most cases personal networking is more important than qualifications in securing a job. Syria faces situation where the high proportion of younger people demands significant investment in education, while ongoing growth of the labour force increases pressure on the labour market.

The government has achieved major success in expanding access to education and producing workers for the public sector. Recent socio-economic developments make reform to the VET sector essential in order to make it attractive for young people and the business sector. The major challenges lie in strengthening weak links between education and work and in improving the current social perception of VET as unattractive. The entire reform process is hampered by complex governance structures involving lengthy decision-making procedures and restrictive financing models. There are plans to establish an Independent VET Authority in the near future to take the lead role.

VET is expected to produce a highly qualified labour force able to compete on an international level (10th FYP). Laws, strategies and structures are all being developed: the new labour law stipulates cooperation between education and business and the Public Employment Services are under review. A new VET strategy is in the pipeline and proposals are in place for a wider roll-out of apprenticeship schemes and career guidance centres.

Initial VET is largely the preserve of the formal sector but many NGOs are active in encouraging entrepreneurship and offering up-skilling courses for young people. An emerging private sector is providing training courses in IT and foreign languages. There are reports of widespread company-based training for upgrading the skills of employees, but no comprehensive data is available. The Ministry of Labour and Social Policies in cooperation with UNDP and Siliatech is preparing to fulfil an observatory function on data analysis for policy-making,

A variety of programmes and assessments in education and VET have been undertaken with national funding and cooperation from the international community, including the EU, World Bank, UNDP, International Labour Organization (ILO), European Investment Bank and bilateral donors. These have involved both public and private sectors and have focused on education, the labour market and economic developments. All the interventions to date have remained at the pilot level and will require commitment and funding from stakeholders in the education and work sectors if they are to move forward. National authorities need to undertake further discussion of the details and Syria could benefit from the experience of other countries in the region and the EU in this process.

This report proposes a number of measures to further develop and improve the system on the basis of available evidence on the key challenges of VET system in a lifelong learning context (both quantitative data and qualitative information collected from the Syrian partners). The authors believe the following key issues should be considered for the next steps through policies determined by the Government:

1. Closer coordination and cooperation between the education and private sectors: in particular in working toward an Independent VET Authority to lead closer cooperation and effective implementation of VET strategy through the development of indicators, databases, analyses and other tools. Reform of governance structures and further capacity building for better coordination among institutions would be helpful and the Chambers of Commerce and industry could play a more active role.
2. Extended regular monitoring of skill needs in the labour market and improved matching of skill shortages to reduce mismatch by providing a better supply of required skills. The Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs is looking into further development of the Labour Market Information System (LMIS: including a Labour Force Survey (LFS), labour demand surveys, public employment service registers, labour market observatory) and more effective use of the output by the community of experts and policy-makers. A database for all job vacancies, jobseekers and training opportunities would be useful.
3. Continued reform of the VET system providing greater flexibility to meet changing demands in the labour market. This will present more opportunities for lifelong learning to develop and for innovations in training content and methods to encourage practical enterprise-based

training in VET schools. The Ministry of Education is currently modernising VET curricula to foster flexibility and encourage an on-going competency-based approach. Opportunities for up-skilling and continuing adult training could also be covered in the current reform effort.

4. Encouraging and creating easier access through pathways between VET and HE. The aim is to attract better-informed students who will have the benefit of career guidance and counselling, curriculum change with active private sector involvement and flexible curriculum options for more ambitious students who wish to continue in HE. These measures will increase the attractiveness of VET within the system. Examples from the European Union and countries working on National Qualification Frameworks in the region could be helpful.
5. Developing a teacher training system that is regularly updated on professional developments, providing training opportunities on technical and pedagogical issues for all teachers, possibly through the creation of a new teacher training centre. Better knowledge is needed along with greater interaction between teachers and employers.
6. Alternative sources of VET financing: establishing a National VET Fund under the umbrella of the Independent VET Authority, exploring public-private partnerships in financing through increased contributions from the private sector, tax-exemptions for company training and income-generation opportunities for VET schools through training delivery for adults, companies or use of student activities.

1. Vision and state of play in vocational education and training (VET)

The 10th FYP emphasises the role of VET in Syria's transition to a social market economy and in providing up-to-date knowledge and competences for its population. VET provision has not been able to respond satisfactorily to the new demands and requirements, indicating the need for comprehensive modernisation of the Syrian VET sector. Employers have been slow to express their needs and expectations while globalisation and technological developments have exacerbated the situation. All of the stakeholders share the view that VET relevance to employer requirements and its attractiveness in terms of the needs of individuals are closely linked to its capacity to respond to requirements in the labour market and world of work. There is general agreement that both sides must be invited to contribute in order to achieve this. The FYP prioritises these points and proposes the following measures for partnership between education and the world of work:

- Improve VET responsiveness to economic and labour market needs;
- Improve internal and external efficiency of the VET system;
- Expand and view non-formal education and training as an integrated part of the education system;
- Decentralise the system by bringing training institutions closer to the local community;
- Provide e-curricula on the basis of a modern vision of learning and skills;
- Improve teacher qualifications, and;
- Introduce systems to monitor teacher performance in order to secure quality in VET provision.

An 11th Five Year Plan is currently being finalised. This document reflects Syria's vision for the future and appears to be moving in this direction. The Government is also expected to sign the EU-Syria Association Agreement which will further support reforms in the country.

Initial VET in Syria is provided at two levels as defined in the VET Law (Law No. 47 of 1955): secondary vocational level (3 years), and post-secondary level (2 years). A total of 11 ministries provide secondary VET in 650 schools, divided into 4 main specializations: commercial,

industrial, agricultural and handicrafts (female arts). The bulk of provision (up to 90%) occurs under the Ministry of Education, coordinated by the VET Council. A total of 16 ministries are involved in the provision of post-secondary VET in 121 intermediate institutes (or technical institutes) with the Supreme Council for Intermediate Institutions as the policy-making body for post-secondary VET under the Ministry of Higher Education.

A small apprenticeship scheme also exists within the VET system, implemented at both secondary and post-secondary levels and managed by National Apprenticeship Committee in coordination with the Ministry of Education. There is a complex governance structure where the definition of roles and responsibilities for joint policy design and implementation is vague and involves some degree of overlap. Cooperation with the world of work is still in the early stages.

Continuing VET receives little attention within the formal VET system, except for some flexible short training courses of 9-months duration provided by the VET training centres in Ministries, such as the Ministry of Industry Vocational Training and Qualification Department. This mainly consists of further training for adult workers in areas of particular relevance for the economy (i.e. electronics, engineering, welding). Some private providers and NGOs also deliver short-term training for adults in sectors like IT or languages, and a limited amount of VET for social inclusion and equal opportunities is provided by NGOs like The Syria Trust for Development and UNDP Community Learning Centres.

The VET system is less attractive than non-VET education and is widely considered by Syrian society to be a second rate choice of education. This is mainly due to: (i) the system taking in many of the low achievers from the previous level of schooling, (ii) failure of the system to equip graduates with the skills and competences needed to perform well on the labour market, (iii) the provision of extremely limited access to HE (with only 3% of students allowed to continue) deterring more ambitious students from the VET option. This is reflected in the decreasing number of VET students in comparison to general secondary education. Numbers decreased from 50% in 2000 to 23% in 2009 (since 2005 it is 40% in VET), despite efforts by the State to boost the sector (Central Bureau of Statistics [CBS]). The sector also has a high level of drop out (9%-13%, Ministry of Education).

The national perspective on VET stated in the 10th FYP has translated into the implementation of policy measures within the framework of international donor programmes. The EU Modernisation of Vocational Education and Training Programme (EU MVET, 2006-2009)³, is an initiative of the European Union (EU) and the Government of the Syrian Arab Republic aimed at improving the competitiveness of Syrian enterprises and enhancing the job prospects of trainees and the unemployed. However, the ambitious goals have only actually produced the modest outcomes of a VET strategy and a proposal for a modernised and independent VET Authority. EU MVET Progress reports evaluate the programme as being of limited success due to the complexity of design and the lack of institutional readiness for implementation.

A VET Strategy has been developed by representatives of the Ministry of Education, Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs, Ministry of Industry and private sector but it is still awaiting implementation. The Strategy addresses eight areas: planning and governance; financing; LMIS; a qualification, accreditation and certification system; quality of delivery; non-formal VET; the role of the private sector and NGOs in VET, and; regional and international dimensions. The Independent VET Authority is expected to provide a formal structure that will involve social partners and enable a range of ministries and entities from the business sector to work together. The new Authority is expected to help generate government policy by providing good quality advice to help Syria move from a supply-driven to a demand-driven system. It will also improve funding support by management of a National Fund for VET. However, all the parties concerned must become actively involved if the system is to be successful.

The Labour Law adopted in April 2010 foresees cooperation between education and training institutions and employers in establishing and monitoring apprenticeships, vocational training

³ EU MVET Programme 2006-2009 (EUR 25 million Euro [EUR 21 million from the EU + EUR 4 million from the Syrian Government] under the State Planning Commission with following main beneficiaries: Ministry of Education, Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs, Ministry of Industry, Ministry of Higher Education, and Federation of Chambers). The initiative produced a proposal for a comprehensive sector strategy with the establishment of an independent National VET Authority. Also, 18 VET institutions participated in curriculum development and teacher training in selected areas such as welding, general mechanics and the production of ready-made garments. Capacity building measures were implemented for 41 companies on human resource management functions focussed on training needs analysis. Finally, a strategic plan for improving the services of labour market organisations and a labour market information system have been developed for approval by the national authorities.

centres and the certification of training. Enterprises with 50+ employees are required to allocate 1% of their wage bill to employee training. The Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs provides licences for training centres within enterprises. It is too early to see the impact of the new law.

2. External efficiency: Addressing economic and labour market needs

The three main economic challenges that shape the demand for skills include the drive towards a market economy, high youth and female unemployment, and the size of the informal economy.

The first challenge for Syria will be the economic transition from a public sector-led socialist model to a social market economy. According to the World Bank, the private sector in Syria is gradually taking the lead in economic growth. Annual real GDP growth averaged 4.2% between 2001 and 2007, compared to an average of 2.7% between 1996 and 2001. Despite declining oil production, real GDP growth recovered reached 6.6% in 2007 and the non-oil sector has taken over as the main engine of growth in recent years. Higher oil revenues throughout the region have created higher regional demand for Syrian services (especially tourism) and goods, as well as larger capital transfers and inflows. Most dynamism has been seen in the services sector. Public sector share of GDP declined from 43% in 2001 to 36% in 2006, with 42% of the fall accounted for by the extractive industries. The recent global economic crisis hit growth performance with a decline to 5.1% in 2008 and 3% in 2009.

Economic reform and growth, globalization, technological change and trade openness require Syrian enterprises and their employees to become more competitive, implying the reallocation of labour across economic sectors. Table 1 shows the highest share of employment is currently in services (52%), followed by agriculture (19%), industry and construction (15% each). Waged employment is dominant among workers (54%), followed by self-employment (29%), unpaid family work (9%) and being an employer (8%). The shortage of skilled labour is the number one concern of many employers and VET is being asked to provide the Syrian labour market with latest know-how (ETF/SEBC, 2010). This situation was confirmed by the recent World Bank enterprise survey results where almost 60% of Syrian enterprises identified labour skill levels as a major constraint to business in 2009⁴. Sector distribution of employment shows a constant decline in agriculture and modest increases in services, construction and manufacturing. From 2003 to 2007, for example, agricultural employment decreased from 26.2% to 19% and employment in industry and construction together increased from 24% to 29%, while employment in services rose from 50% to 52%. The increase was particularly pronounced in the storage, transport and communication sectors.

Table 1. Employment by economic sectors and by status in Syria (male, female and total)

Employment by sector (LFS 2007, %)	Male	Female	TOTAL
Agriculture	18	26	19
Industry	15	7	14
Construction	17	1	15
Services	50	65	52
Employment by status (LFS 2007, %)	Male	Female	TOTAL
Wage employment	52	69	54
Self-employment	32	10	29
Employers	9	2	8
Unpaid family workers	7	19	9

Source: Aita (2009) and CBS (2010).

⁴ Only 36% of Syrian enterprises identified skill levels as a major constraint in 2003. For more information see: <https://www.enterprisesurveys.org/CustomQuery/Country.aspx?economyid=183&year=2009&characteristic=size>.

Key labour market indicators show somewhat modest activity and employment rates in Syria⁵. Despite some variations and inconsistencies due to methodological changes and seasonality, Aita (2009) calculated an annual labour force increase of more than 300,000 new entrants, providing an average growth rate of 3%. Table 2 shows that out of a working age population of 14 million in 2008, 7 million (50%) were active in the labour market, 1.5 million of whom were female. Although the male participation rate is comparable with the international average (77.9%), the female rate is very low (21.8%). The same applies to employment rates, where the 72.7% for males and 16.9% for females add up to a total rate of 44.8% that is rather low by international standards. The share of public sector employment remained stable: 28.6% in 2008 compared to 27.2% in 2003 (CBS 2010).

Table 2. The size of labour force and employment in Syria, 2000 and 2008

Syrian citizens only		2000	2008
Total population (number, 000)	Total	16,511	21,428
Working age population (16-64, 000)	Total	10,197	14,041
Labour force (number, 000)	Total	4,838	7,014
	Male	3,935	5,491
	Female	902	1,523
Labour force participation rate, %	Total	49.3%	50.0%
	Male	80.1%	77.9%
	Female	18.4%	21.8%
Employed population (number, 000)	Total	-	4,946
	Male		4,316
	Female		630
Employment rate, %	Total	-	44.8%
	Male		72.7%
	Female		16.9%
Unemployment rate, %	Total	-	10.9%
	Female		20.9%
Youth unemployment rate, %	Total	-	22%
	Female		44%

Source: compilation of data from ILO-KILM, ETF (2009) and Aita (2009).

High youth unemployment presents a second challenge that is particularly prevalent among females (20.9% in ETF [2009]). Syria is among the countries with the highest youth unemployment rates, whereas adult unemployment rates are relatively low. In 2008, the overall unemployment rate was 10.9%, but the breakdown by age group showed youth (15–24 age group) with 22% unemployment compared to 9.7% for those aged 30 to 34 (CBS, 2010). The situation is even worse for young females as 38% of women aged 15 to 17 and 50% of women aged 20 to 24 are unemployed. Most of the unemployed are young and many have never worked; in 2008, 85% of the unemployed (93% of the women) had never worked. Unemployment rates are also higher among general secondary and tertiary education graduates (ETF/CBS, 2010).

A third challenge lies in the large degree of informality currently estimated at between 19% and 59% (Aita, 2009). CBS provides a rate of 30% to 35% for informal employment while local

⁵ All labour market data is provided by LFS surveys, but their reliability is often questioned because of the significant variations and inconsistencies in figures due largely to changes of survey methodology, seasonality, high labour force growth, high rural-to-urban migration, an on-going reduction of female participation in agriculture and the non-inclusion of resident refugees in the statistics (Palestinians, Iraqis and Kurds) (Aita, 2009). The CBS recently made many improvements to the LFS survey methodology, meaning that the LFS is currently conducted twice yearly (July-December), with a revised questionnaire (54 questions including new information on migration, informality, part-time work and women since 2009) and an enlarged sample size (30,000 households).

entrepreneurs estimate it at closer to 60%⁶. The main reasons given for informality are high taxation and a prevailing lack of trust that prevent many traditional micro and family enterprises from growing. Despite State-controlled economic liberalisation and privatisation, the formal private sector has lost jobs and most of the employment created between 2001 and 2007 in Syria was in the informal sector. This sector accounted for 41% in 2007 (42% for men and 28% for women). LFS 2007 shows that informal employment (informal private sector and family) constitutes more than 90% of agricultural employment and also has a high prevalence in transportation and construction although rates are lower in services and industry, and among women. When agriculture is excluded, informal employment is calculated to provide about 31% of male jobs and 5.8% of female jobs.

Improving the competitiveness of Syrian enterprises through higher productivity and higher levels of worker qualifications is therefore a priority that would lead to the creation of more and better jobs and enhanced employment opportunities for graduates. Indeed, the healthy socio-economic growth of societies largely depends upon the quality and effectiveness of their human capital development systems. Syrian employers, as representatives of the market and VET consumers, are asking the VET system to be more responsive. They point to the low quality of VET graduates in the light of actual job requirements (EU MVET programme 2006-2009) while VET sector representatives are asking for the private sector to contribute to labour market-oriented education.

Regular cooperation between education and business is at an initial stage

There is little dialogue between the education system and enterprise. The objectives and working methods of the two sectors differ widely, with business looking for quick gains and education for long-term results. The two sides find it difficult to trust each other and are not sufficiently convinced of the benefits of cooperation (focus group meetings for the Torino Process). The economic relevance of VET has not been expressed in a convincing enough manner to make cooperation a priority and the fact that an enabling environment has not been established only aggravates the situation. The Chambers are just starting to take up their role as intermediary services seen in many EU States. There are a few contact points where business people can seek information in schools but most companies are not aware of these, meaning they rarely seek contact with the sector. Education concerns are also reluctant to seek contact with a private sector they consider too market-oriented. Recent developments, however, show that the two sides are making some efforts to join forces.

The majority of companies in Syria are family and micro businesses with little absorption capacity for cooperation, while the traditional and unstructured labour market presents a challenge for policy intervention of any sort. Modernisation is severely hampered by the fact that most of these undertakings have low productivity and low levels of worker qualification. The abundance of available low-skilled workers further aggravates the situation. The huge informal sector does not maintain any dialogue with education and is largely excluded from the improvement equation. Where cooperation does occur it is mainly targeted on a select and elitist segment of business and their skills needs. This situation is considered a major obstacle to developing education for a competitive economy by education and business interests alike.

School to work transition is a challenge

Weak links between education and the labour market lead to difficult transition and high youth unemployment in a Syrian labour market characterised by high demographic pressure, slow labour demand and a degree of rigidity. Wages in Syria are low and do not improve much with increased educational attainment (low returns to education) (Huitfeldt and Kabbani, 2007) despite the high number of low-skilled workers with only basic education. The profile of the average school leaver has changed gradually in recent years (ETF/SEBC SKILLS Project 2008-2010)⁷ with longer schooling and higher training levels, but the youth transition process is still complicated by the number of precarious or temporary jobs, periods of unemployment, traineeships and informal apprenticeships or jobs (including time spent in military service).

⁶ These figures were provided in the focus group meetings held between ETF and key stakeholders in Syria on 23-27 May 2010 in Damascus in order to collect information and data for the Torino Process and Education and Business Cooperation study – see the mission reports. As mentioned before, the variations and inconsistencies of some statistical figures makes evidence-based policy making a challenge and requires careful interpretation of assessments and recommendations.

⁷ See www.sebcsyria.com for more information.

According to the ILO School-to-Work Transition Survey in Syria (Alissa, 2007), formal private employment represented only a small share of first jobs by new entrants whereas informal employment accounted for almost half of all first jobs obtained. Most young workers with no education or with only basic education were obliged to accept low-paying jobs in the private sector, mostly on an informal basis. The results of the 2009 ETF/CBS School-to-Work Transition Survey of 15 to 30 year olds provides a similar picture: young men experience a relatively smooth transition from school to work with 80% in work after 4 years, while but only 30% of women achieve this. An immense 90% of young workers starting in the private sector do not have a written contract and 94% of employed youth are still in their first job after 4 years. Key findings also reveal: high levels of high school dropout; little benefit of primary education in low-end jobs for the poorly-educated youth; strong gender differences and disadvantages for women; widespread informality in first jobs; very low labour mobility; notable regional differences; the reduced role of labour market institutions, and; persistent long-term unemployment for a quarter of all young people (ETF/CBS, 2010).

Quantitative and qualitative feedback from labour market restricted to pilot levels

Human Resource Information Systems (HRIS) provide States with data on many elements of active labour market dynamics and characteristics for both the supply and demand sides . In Syria, initial work on the observatory function was undertaken by the State Planning Commission in a pilot project with ETF support. This was followed-up through the EU MVET Programme and the Ministry of Labour Labour Market Database Project in cooperation with UNDP. The Ministry of Labour project revised the LFS survey to better capture the country context and a labour demand survey was conducted in 1,213 companies with 10+ employees in 2009 to analyse labour demand for vacancies and skill needs. Both components constituted improvements to the LMIS in Syria. The observatory function recently moved over to the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs which has developed a management and implementation plan to regularly monitor and analyse labour market developments.

The Government has also signed up to the World Bank MILES approach. This involves a comprehensive assessment that includes analysis of the macro-economic context, the investment climate, labour market environment, education and training system and social protection system, with the final results expected in the autumn of 2010. These outcomes will feed into the FYP and will provide a firm basis for policy making and monitoring.

In the bid to improve business competitiveness, the Syrian government, in partnership with the enterprise community, has also engaged in a strategic review of how businesses can improve the quality of their staff⁸. The core concern is how enterprises can systematically track their own training requirements and ensure that details such as skills needs, weaknesses and future skill requirements are regularly shared with the education and training system. A policy concept paper on entrepreneurial skills will be brought forward for inclusion in the 11th Five Year Plan. This initiative is led by the Ministry of Industry but greater engagement of the Ministries of Education and Higher Education would be welcome in order to reinforce and optimise dialogue and cooperation with the business community, and to ensure that education provision is more responsive to the evolving market economy.

The business sector is largely uninvolved in consideration of teaching methods and processes. VET curricula and training materials are subject-centred and knowledge-based with little emphasis on core competences, making them unresponsive to actual labour market requirements. VET is almost fully school-based with theoretical and practical skills taught on site (with the exception of apprenticeships) leaving little or no room for real-world experience, further reducing VET capacity to respond quickly and adequately to labour market developments and changes.

The Ministry of Education recently worked with the EU MVET Programme on a project responding to the Five Year Plan that revised 36 outdated VET curricula that did not reflect the needs and realities of the labour market. New pilot occupations to be offered include engineering maintenance and the production of ready-made garments, including core employability skills (entrepreneurial skills, team work). The revision process included a labour market review with a survey to elicit input from companies, graduates, the Ministry of Higher Education, Ministry of Labour and Social Policy and the unemployed. Meetings were also held with the national Chambers. Some of the information received was fed directly into the curricula, but a large section of the raw data could not be used immediately as in-depth analysis of the results was not

⁸ This initiative has been developed within the framework of the Euro-Med Charter for Enterprises with ETF support.

completed due to a lack of resources. At present, 150 people in the Ministry of Education are involved in the reform process. Some curriculum change is planned for next year in conjunction with teacher training and the provision of equipment. The MES will continue this work in the future.

Focus group meetings concluded that apprenticeship schemes provide the most relevant approach to labour market-oriented VET but the scheme is a small initiative involving a total of 48 schools, 180 companies and 700 graduates. The current scheme represents 0.1% of VET and mainly involves big companies. This type of undertaking provides a win-win-win situation for employers, the Ministry and students: employers get access to education offers and the future labour force (in some cases placements have helped to improve quality in companies where graduates have contributed new knowledge); the Ministry learns about labour market needs and gaps and is in a better position to provide tailor-made VET for the economy, and; students receive a type of practical training never available before that allows them to orient themselves better towards the labour market. The EU MVET Programme made an in-depth assessment of the scheme and its results, producing a proposal for revision and further roll-out of the apprenticeship scheme for implementation by the various Ministries. Feed-back from focus group meetings suggest that activities are progressing on a small scale and a further ten occupations were selected for inclusion in the apprenticeship scheme. GTZ has recently carried out a tracer-study on the apprenticeship scheme which will allow further assessments and recommendations to be completed.

Opportunities for continuing training are scarce

In Syria, VET is mainly limited to secondary and post-secondary levels with the formal education system taking a minor role in providing continuing training. The Ministry of Industry, Ministry of Agriculture and Ministry of Building and Construction offer adult training (EU MVET Programme). The Public Corporation for Employment and Enterprise Development (PCEED), established in 2006, offers training for the unemployed in its 15 offices in different regions including some Active Labour Market Policies, development of small and medium enterprises and entrepreneurship support. It mainly offers training for specific groups according to company needs such as: 'employment guaranteed courses' for a limited number of trainees through an agreement signed with a company. In order to participate in such courses an individual must be unemployed, be a minimum of 20 years old, have no social insurance and have completed 2 years of military service. However, demand for such courses is low both from employers and workers, especially as trainees are no longer eligible for public sector jobs if they register for these courses. The number of these courses and course beneficiaries are also very low in relation to the high levels of youth unemployment.

Private training provision is reported to be extensive with over 400 private training providers for languages and computer training (EU MVET Programme) and the Ministry of Education has licensed 100 private training providers since 2007. Enterprise-based training is probably the largest source of skills training, but no comprehensive data is available. An ETF/SEBC survey on businesses found that almost 80% of those who received training in the first half of 2009 came from the engineering and pharmaceutical sectors (ETF/SEBC, 2010). The greatest motivations for training are the ability to offer quality services and products and to remain in business. Trends suggest there is a booming NGO sector which seeks to provide up-scaling opportunities for young people but no inventory of existing initiatives is available for interested parties.

VET has limited capacity to address economic and labour market needs

An overall assessment of how successful the VET system has been in addressing the economic challenges and in particular ensuring the availability of skills in demand is difficult due to the limited availability of hard evidence on links, the small number of pilot initiatives and the fact that most of these were implemented too recently for any impact assessment.

The analysis given above indicates problems in the dialogue between education and the world of work and the difficulty of bringing supply and demand side together to design a form of VET that can be responsive to the labour market. In view of the current situation, the Government should be making efforts to monitor business needs and labour market developments on the basis of systematic data collection and qualitative feed-back. The various initiatives in the field, mostly funded by donors, have not been sufficiently well coordinated. Moreover, the methodologies and approaches used in these initiatives would require endorsement from the Syrian Authorities for system-wide implementation. The Plans for new Ministry of Labour Observatory functions to monitor and analyse labour market developments may contribute to further developments in this direction.

Transition survey outcomes suggest a low 'labour market utility' of education that is demonstrated in a faster transition for the lower-educated youth (despite low quality results in terms of decent jobs) against later transition for the better-educated to better quality jobs and earnings. No convergence is seen between the two groups later on in life (ETF/CBS, 2010). The explanation of the low labour market utility of education can be viewed in two ways: either the skills taught are not required in the labour market or the jobs do not allow school leavers to build on the skills they have learned at school. Future reforms will need to ensure greater relevance of education to labour market needs and input from both sides.

Feedback from the focus groups identifies the apprenticeship scheme as the best tool for relevant VET although an evaluation by GTZ classed the outreach as limited and the sustainability as challenged. Joint curriculum development is underway but is of limited relevance. The challenge now is to reap the benefit of the lessons learned, to define a future plan of action and to move from a small number of pilot activities to system-wide roll-out. This sort of task could come under the remit of the new Independent VET Authority.

Up-skilling opportunities to increase the relevance of education are mainly available outside the formal education system although supply is fragmented and it is difficult for individuals to access the courses as they are not advertised. The promotion of existing initiatives should be encouraged.

3. External efficiency: Promoting equity and addressing social demands for education and training

The four major social drivers that shape the demand for skills are demography, urban to rural discrepancies, low educational levels in the population and immigration.

The World Development Indicators⁹ gave the population of Syria at 21.2 million in 2008, with projections for 26.5 million in 2020 (UNPD medium variant). Population growth is relatively high (2.5%) with 3.3 children per women. The fertility rate is lower than 1980 levels indicating a gradual demographic transition. Although the population growth rate is expected to decline further, the existing fertility rate will ensure positive population growth, and an even higher degree of labour force growth. The share of 0 to 14 year-olds within the population is relatively high (35%), while 61% are 15 to 64 years-old and only 3% are 65+. Respective numbers for EU-averages are 16%, 67% and 17%. The high share of the young population requires significant and sustained investment in health, education and infrastructure that presents a tough challenge for Syrian education and labour market policies.

Syria has improved its human development standards but much remains to be done. The Human Development Index for the country rose from 0.603 in 1980 to 0.742 in 2007 (UNDP, 2010), placing the country 107th out of 182 countries¹⁰. Syria fares relatively better on indicators like infant mortality (15/1000), life expectancy (74) and primary gross enrolment rate (100%); but falls down on adult literacy rate (83% total, lower for females) and GDP per capita (USD 4,800 Purchasing Power Parity [PPP]). It ranks behind Lebanon, Jordan and Tunisia but above Palestine, Egypt and Morocco. Urbanisation reached 54.2% in 2008 and rural areas have a clear disadvantage in terms of health, education and employment opportunities helps perpetuate rural-to-urban migration. Illiteracy in rural areas is twice as high as in urban areas. In terms of income inequality, Bibi and Nabli (2010) classify Syria as a country of medium living standards with low levels of inequality (Gini inequality <36). While severe poverty is limited to less than 10% of the population, nearly one-third is unable to meet basic needs, and an even larger share is vulnerable to falling into poverty in the case of an unexpected shock (World Bank, 2008).

Low education levels present a great challenge to the Syrian education system. In 2007, there was illiteracy of 17% (mostly among women and girls), 60% of all Syrians (aged 10+) had primary or lower education, 35% had secondary education (lower and upper) and only 5% had

⁹ See <http://data.worldbank.org/data-catalog/world-development-indicators/>

¹⁰ The Human Development Index (HDI) looks beyond GDP to a broader definition of well-being. The HDI provides a composite measure of three dimensions of human development: living a long and healthy life (measured by life expectancy) (Syria's relative ranking 2007: 57th), education level (measured by adult literacy and gross enrolment in education) (Syria's relative ranking 2007: 92nd and 121st, respectively) and decency of standard of living (measured by PPP income) (Syria's relative ranking 2007: 112th) (UNDP, 2010).

tertiary education (ETF, 2009)¹¹. Table 3 shows that the education levels of the employed workforce also reflect similar qualification levels: 58.9% of the employed have primary or less education, 33.4% have secondary education (lower and upper), and 7.7% have university education. Despite their very small share and number in the labour force, employed females have considerably higher education than males: 33.7% with primary or less education (62.6% for males); 49.3% with secondary education (31.1% for males); and 17% with university education (6.4% for males). These figures indicate that education is an enabling factor for females to enter the labour market, thus gender equality in education and training can contribute to better employment outcomes for the country. In this context, both university education and good quality VET could provide viable options, particularly for girls and women if the strong gender-segregation can be overcome with more labour market options for girls.

Table 3. Employed by education levels (%), LFS 2007 (Source: Aita 2009)

Education levels of employed (000)	Male	Female	TOTAL
Illiterate	7.1%	11.8%	7.7%
Read & write	11.7%	5.1%	10.8%
Primary education	43.8%	16.8%	40.4%
Complementary (second cycle of basic education)	15.4%	9.1%	14.6%
General secondary education	9.7%	11.1%	9.9%
Vocational and technical education	6.0%	29.1	8.9%
University	6.4%	17.0%	7.7%

Syria has experienced strong immigration of about 1.5 million from Iraq with only a small share of returners due to the prevailing political and economic insecurities. Official statistics cite another 460,000 resident Palestinian refugees and 250,000 non-citizen Kurds in the North-eastern region (Aita, 2009). Several hundred thousand Syrian guest workers in Lebanon were estimated to have returned after the withdrawal of Syrian troops from Lebanon in 2005. Conversely, an estimated 480,000 young Syrians have emigrated (2.5% of the population)¹² in reaction to the increased labour supply and limited employment prospects. The higher-skilled youths mostly emigrate to Gulf countries, Europe and North America in a 'brain drain' mechanism, whereas low skilled youths tend to work in Lebanon and other neighbouring countries. Finally, Syria has recently experienced inward migration of foreign workers from countries like Sri Lanka, Ethiopia and Somalia seeking domestic work, although no statistics are published on this. The migration phenomenon also requires tailor-made solutions from the VET system that do not currently exist.

Providing quality learning to all citizens

In total, there are around 5.4 million students enrolled in primary, preparatory and secondary levels in Syria. A total of 400,000 teachers are employed in a total of 21,000 institutes. The demographic trends mean the demand for education is still growing significantly and the education and training system must consider approaches to population pressure in both primary and post-primary levels. Educational expansion alone will not be sufficient as the impact of human capital on growth is also dependent on the quality of the system and the resulting quality of human capital. Although previous education policies succeeded in increasing the quantity of human capital in Syria, the World Bank (2008a) suggests only a weak relationship between investment in education and economic growth, meaning the massive investment in education did not result in major labour productivity gains. This weak growth in labour productivity over the past two decades was explained by the low quality and relevance of the education provided. Syria's results in the Trends in Mathematics and Science Study examinations (TIMSS) in 2003 and 2007 show a poor performance in comparison with the international average. Most students performed below the lowest international benchmark and only a modest number hit the intermediate benchmark in science, with even lower outcomes in mathematics¹³.

¹¹ See ETF 2009 for comparison with other countries. The figures are based on the MEDA-ETE Database collected for 2007. The calculation for Syria is for the population aged 10+ and levels of classifications differ from ISCED.

¹² See the World Bank Migration and Remittances Factbook 2008, www.worldbank.org/prospects/migrationandremittances

¹³ For comparison with other countries, see <http://timss.bc.edu/>.

Gross enrolment at secondary level is 74% (73% for girls), which is slightly lower than the regional average (including ISCED 2+3), and an even lower enrolment rate of between 17% and 20% is seen at HE level. The share of students at secondary vocational schools (ISCED 3) was 23% in 2009 (CBS) despite government objectives of 50%. General and vocational streams at secondary level are selective on the basis of grades (lower grades are allocated to vocational streams), sometimes against the wishes of pupils and parents and contrary to their field of interest or talent.

Increasing transparency and more flexible and permeable pathways

Pathways to HE are important in increasing the attractiveness of secondary VET and improving its quality. In Syria, only 3% of VET graduates currently progress on to university and become teachers of VET theory, 60% of graduates proceed to intermediate institutes and become practical VET teachers and 37% directly enter the labour market and have no further training opportunities¹⁴. During the focus group meetings all parties agreed the attractiveness of VET must be improved and VET students should be given the opportunity to continue on into HE if they wish. There have been recent discussions at Ministry and Government level of opening pathways to HE and making VET more attractive by adding other optional subjects to the curricula. More flexible VET programmes could include several selective courses for more ambitious students, allowing them to prepare for HE.

Promoting equal opportunities on the labour market

A small selection of pilot initiatives promote equal opportunities through VET including training activities offered by the Ministry of Culture, a project implemented by the Ministry of Labour (with UNDP support) and the activities of various NGOs. The Ministry of Culture in cooperation with UNESCO is providing courses for illiterate people in local Multi-purpose Community Learning Centres. Within the same framework, VET is also being provided to equip people in marginalised groups and poor communities with new skills and competencies through lifelong learning opportunities.

The Ministry of Labour worked with UNDP to address urban to rural discrepancies in 2008 with a Women Empowerment and Poverty Alleviation scheme within PCEED. This project forms part of the government FYP to alleviate poverty in rural areas by 2015 (95% State-funded). Rural women aged 18 to 30 are selected by the government to receive training and micro-credits. In 2008-2009, a total of 2,000 women benefited from the first package of training in 43 villages.

The Questscope NGO provides 'second chance training' for drop-outs in the region to help them find job opportunities and prepare for the future. Re-admission into the formal system leads to opportunities for HE, while vocational certification is followed by business start-up loans and improved employment prospects. The Fund for Integrated Rural Development of Syria provides a similar scheme for those students from rural communities who are eligible to continue their studies in the Syrian universities but who cannot pay for their studies. This scholarship programmes enables students who achieve outstanding baccalaureate results to continue their education and 63 students from 7 governorates were offered scholarships in 2006. The EU also provides some support for Iraqi and Palestinian refugees and VET forms part of these initiatives, however, this is provided mainly through UNHCR and not by the respective line ministries.

These examples show there is a very limited number of initiatives and a low number of beneficiaries for a country like Syria where the need for such training is relatively high among the population. Furthermore, there has been no analysis so far of the impact and success of these interventions. As a result, it is not clear whether such initiatives have actually promoted the social inclusion of disadvantaged groups. Finally, there seems to be no inter-ministerial communication for better exchange on demand and supply and the tailor-made design of interventions for groups such as drop-outs.

The social inclusion function of VET is difficult to assess

It is almost as difficult to assess how VET is contributing to the social inclusion of disadvantaged groups in society as it is to assess its relevance to the labour market. There is little hard evidence for review and recommendations, and only a low number of pilot initiatives have been completed, most of which were only implemented recently. However, the analysis given above and focus group discussions indicate some key findings and main challenges to address in the future. Over the past three decades, the system achieved major success in expanding access to education and catering for the younger population. This has however not been reflected in the quality and attractiveness of VET or in opening up horizontal and vertical pathways for all students.

Several pilot projects have been run to address equal opportunities on the labour market, mostly provided by NGOs in small-scale fragmented initiatives. The variety of stakeholders involved and the lack of dialogue among them makes it more difficult for target groups to learn about the offer available. This training is being provided in the non-formal education and training sector with no links made to the formal system. An inventory of these initiatives and an impact analysis would

¹⁴ Information from the Ministry of Education Focus Group.

be useful in the design of future policy interventions and plans to scale-up action from pilot projects to the widespread implementation of good practice.

4. Internal efficiency of the VET system: quality, governance and financing

The three main challenges to internal efficiency are high dropout rates, complex governance structures and the limited number of capacity- and institution-building measures for key actors in VET.

The VET system suffers from high drop-out rates that were running at 9% to 13% in 2010 according to Ministry of Education figures. Overall drop-out rates in education are reported to be over 10% (UNDP, 2005) and especially occur at the end of basic education and secondary education. High dropouts in VET are mainly due to the need for income and poor attractiveness of education due to the limited connection with industry and results of the ETF/CBS Transition Survey (2010) point in this direction. The problem is aggravated by the large size of the informal sector and the poorly developed capacity of companies to co-operate. However, some cooperation efforts continue in spite of the disorganised labour market and restricted knowledge of needs. The education and work sectors provide up-skilling for adults and there are 100 private training centres licensed by the Ministry of Education to offer further training opportunities.

Vocational students are often discouraged by an inferiority complex engendered by the view that the VET system is widely considered to cater for low achievers. Extremely high scores are needed in university entry exams, and the fact that few can achieve these levels discourages less successful students from continuing their education. Students require an average grade of 80 out of 100 for entry to an intermediate institute, while most university faculties require 90 to 95 and the faculty of medicine requires 100. When poorer students realise their grades are insufficient for continuing on to HE they can see no reason to remain within the system.

Many public institutions are engaged in the management and implementation of VET policy and programmes at national, sector and micro-levels. A total of 16 ministries are involved at secondary and post-secondary education levels with the Ministry of Education, the Ministry of Higher Education and the Ministry of Industry taking the leading roles. The VET system is highly centralised with decision-making power in the respective Ministries. The VET Council and the National Apprenticeship Committee under the Ministry of Education, and the Supreme Council for Intermediate Institutes under the Ministry of Health and Education convene regular meetings to co-ordinate and exchange information. However inter-ministerial cooperation is poor in Syria which leads to programme overlap. Social partner involvement in VET policy-making is only in the initial stages but the new modernised and Independent VET Authority comprised of public and private sector representatives is expected to provide better guidance for future developments.

There is limited provision of the institutional and capacity building measures that would allow key actors in VET to support reforms. The public and private sectors are not well prepared for their new management roles and responsibilities and many problems exist from high level officials in Ministries down to public sector companies applying lengthy administrative procedures without the use of new management tools (focus group meetings). Most of the learning on new approaches has taken place within the framework of donor programmes like the EU MVET Programme, or InWent and GTZ schemes that arrange study visits to EU countries. This type of initiative has helped build some trust among representatives of education and the world of work and understanding has been increased between colleagues from the region, many of whom need to address similar problems.

Modernising assessment and quality assurance systems

The FYP defines quality VET in relation to its responsiveness to labour market needs and the economic and social well being of citizens. Whether this is actually happening is not measured on a regular basis, meaning that a quality assurance system is not in place. However, results do show the development of some cooperation between education and business. The Government recently launched a series of surveys and studies to provide a picture of the state of play. These include the ETF/CBS school-to-work transition survey which looks into the relevance of VET for the labour market and the employability of graduates, and the World Bank returns to education study which will include performance measurements of VET. The Ministry of Education has also

carried out a preliminary labour market needs analysis for curriculum reform and assessments at provider, system and policy level were made in preparation for donor interventions like the EU MVET Programme and the 2010 EU Programmes.

In Syria and the rest of the region, the quality of training is commonly measured through end-of-programme testing and the issuing of certificates (EU MVET Programme). In most cases testing is biased towards knowledge and does not cover practical skills and competences. During focus group meetings, the Ministry of Education reported that a recently established quality control body consisting of members from the public and business sectors has started work on quality standards and indicators, although the real impact remains to be seen.

Improving teacher qualifications

One advantage of the system is that most of the teachers in Syria are young, but their skills and competences are not always up-dated. They have the lowest salaries of all civil servants and are poorly motivated. They work less than 600 hours per year – the lowest number of teaching hours per year in the region (World Bank, 2008) and most of them have second jobs to boost their income. Although some of the second jobs appear also to be in teaching, which is not a bad thing in itself, this extra work appears to exhaust and de-motivate the staff with knock-on effects on training efficiency.

VET is complex, because industry develops quickly and needs constant improvements. Teachers and trainers do not receive regular up-dating of their technical and pedagogical skills and there is no mandatory training for teachers. Focus group meetings stressed that VET trainers lack the qualifications and skills required to prepare students adequately for the labour market. The EU MVET Programme trained 400 teachers in pedagogical and technical skills, but the majority of TVET trainers had no real life experience in their field of specialisation in labour market conditions (EU MVET Programme).

An agreement has been made between the Ministry of Education and the Syrian Virtual University to provide teacher training to around 2,000 teachers annually, including VET and general secondary education. The training provides an up-date on pedagogical skills but does not include training on occupation-specific competences. The Ministry runs competitions and chooses teachers for training as a kind of bonus. Teachers, however, show little interest in further training as their low salaries provide them with no motivation. Teacher training must be made a priority by the Government.

Modernising governance structures

Both the public and private sectors have a recognised role in VET and the ETF Apprenticeship Programme (2000) was the first to stimulate a structured partnership between education and social partners. Most of the social partners represented big company interests, as most were company owners. The State Planning Commission and other Ministries like the Ministry of Education, the Ministry of Industry and social partners first joined forces for VET policy design under the EU MVET Programme and this was considered a challenging exercise by all parties involved. The direct outcome of these efforts can be seen in the Government approval of the proposal for an Independent VET Authority.

The Independent VET Authority (composed of all ministries involved in VET) is expected to replace the existing VET Council under the Ministry of Education and the National Apprenticeship Committee (composed of ministries and social partners) and ensure links with the Supreme Council of Intermediate Institutes and other relevant Committees. To ensure its independence, it is expected to be positioned at a higher level within the government hierarchy (e.g. under the Prime Minister's office) and function as the government's key policy and strategic advisory body, operating across all Ministries that have responsibility for VET and ensuring the active involvement of social partners. In order to take up its role in policy development, the Council would need tools such as indicators, databases, analyses and the active cooperation of all parties. Discussions during Focus Group meetings, however, suggest that there is limited inter-ministerial commitment to the entity. A substantial challenge remains in establishing mutual trust and confidence between the various ministries and the world of work and in agreeing on shared values, goals, roles and commitments.

The career guidance centres are a new structure that has emerged in recent years, with one established by the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs (with UNDP support) in Damascus 18 months ago and another career management centre in Damascus University. The management and implementation plans are ready for implementation to start in due course. A Tempus project currently underway will create career guidance centres at all six public universities. The topic of

career guidance was included in the EU MVET programme and training on the issue was provided to employees of labour offices and career counsellors in the 18 pilot VET schools. Teachers in VET schools provide some kind of career guidance to their students on an individual basis. The NGO sector also provides career guidance services, through elements like the FIRDOS business clinic program. The development of comprehensive career guidance and counselling services is high on the Government agenda and Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs and Ministry of Education has are preparing a proposal for career guidance.

Decentralisation of planning and management is another task that runs alongside ensuring multi-stakeholder involvement in VET. The Syrian VET system is highly centralised with decision-making power at the level of the respective ministries while the education departments in the 7 Governorates support VET implementation in schools. The individual institutions administer the decisions that come from above with little room for autonomy. Decentralisation initiatives have been encouraged under the EU MVET programme including initiatives to establish school boards in pilot schools and management training for school directors. The sustainability and outreach of these elements are, however, questionable.

Financing mechanisms

Since 2000, there has been massive investment in the education sector at 4.7% of GDP (WB, 2008, p. 9) in efforts to improve efficiency and quality. VET in Syria is mainly financed by the State, but a law for private schools on private sector investments in education was recently passed. Annual budgets at the national level are generally developed from input information derived on the basis of the previous years' activities, such as the number of students, recruitment budgets and investments. In recent years VET funding has been falling (75% is spent on HE) such that it forms an obstacle to quality VET. Salaries comprise more than 95% of the education budget (WB, 2008, p.43). VET funding suffers from a number of weaknesses and shortcomings and the results of the cost-effectiveness study do not look good. There is little money for staff capacity building or the up-grading of equipment. Focus group discussions suggest that the present financial management system is too complex and fragmented with 16 ministries involved.

Vocational schools in Syria are permitted to generate financial resources. They can earn profits from students' activities or from delivering training to companies but the opening is only used for limited applications such as IT courses for adults or first aid courses. VET institutions offer training for nine months (165 days) of the year, between eight in the morning and two in the afternoon. Outside of these hours the training staff, equipment and facilities are not used.

The private sector has been contributing to funding apprenticeships since 2000, largely by providing placements for students to train up on practical skills. There have only been a small number of placements and most have been in bigger firms in a way that limits the scope of the initiative. Companies have contributed to a cash fund for apprenticeship and most of the money has been paid to teachers as incentives to support their very low income and increase their motivation. Companies have recently lost interest in continuing their financial contributions, as no information has been provided on how the budget has been spent.

The EU MVET Programme has investigated new funding mechanisms including proposals to the Government on public-private funding and training funds. They have suggested ideas such as: a National VET Fund under the umbrella of the Independent VET Authority; enhancing the self-financing capabilities of VET institutions, and; linking funding to performance standards and efficiency criteria. These were approved by the Government in 2010 within the overall VET Strategy package but implementation has not yet started. The new Labour Law of April 2010 also stipulates a tax reduction for companies that provide training placements or that set up their own training centres. Enterprises with 50+ employees are required to allocate 1% of the total wage bill to the training of employees, but the real impact of the law must be monitored.

Increasing the internal efficiency of VET requires the commitment and cooperation of all stakeholders

The Ministry of Education plans to establish a teacher training system for a regular updates on professional developments. This would provide training opportunities for all teachers on technical and pedagogical issues alongside better knowledge and greater opportunities for interaction between teachers and employers. This would largely occur through exchange initiatives, where teachers would spend some time in companies and employers in schools in order to update and provide knowledge. The Ministry has drawn up a proposal for the establishment of a 'human resource development centre', but this will require additional funding.

Proposals are on the table for reforms to governance structures that now require inter-ministerial commitment and review in order to ensure their feasibility. Particular attention is required for the establishment of the Independent VET Authority that will bring the supply and demand sides closer together. The more active role foreseen for the Chambers of Commerce and Industry will allow for better sharing of knowledge and information on skills needs and gaps.

Alternative sources of VET funding must be actively encouraged. This could be a task for the proposed National VET Fund that calls for higher contributions from the private sector, but greater transparency on the public use of funds must be ensured for all stakeholders, particularly the main contributors in the business world. Other proposed sources of funding are: tax-exemptions for company training; income-generating VET schools providing training delivery for adults and companies; or the use of student activities. All these recommendations require strong capacity building measures for all the stakeholders involved in order to make the reforms possible. Lessons learned from donor-funded pilot training initiatives can help in defining new initiatives and up-scaling good practice.

5. Innovation, partnership and entrepreneurship

Syria seeks to promote innovation in VET in lifelong learning context. A number of areas demonstrate innovation and good practice. For example, national authorities and the private sector are making joint efforts to promote entrepreneurship learning in VET and HE and entrepreneurial skills development is witnessing particular policy interest in the country.

The Syrian authorities have taken an important step in the development of entrepreneurship by training and supporting budding entrepreneurs to start and improve their own businesses. In 2008, PCEED launched a significant drive to promote business start-up skills applying 'learning by doing' pedagogical methods drawn from a methodology enshrined within the Competency Based Economies through the Formation of Enterprise¹⁵. However, the number of beneficiaries is still very limited.

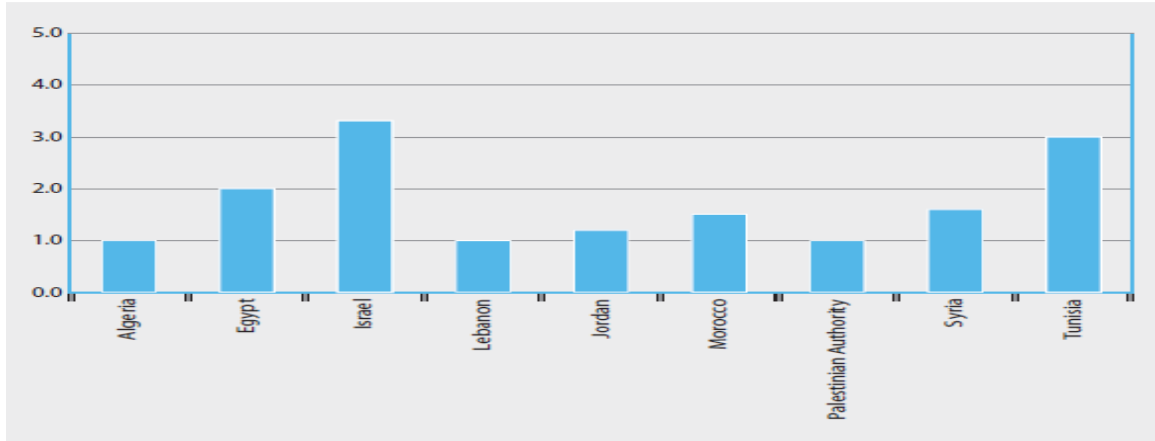
Syria is also fully involved in implementation of the Euro-Mediterranean Charter for Enterprise¹⁶. The assessment exercise led by the European Commission in collaboration with ETF has identified limited development on entrepreneurial learning with respect to both policy and delivery. The Charter includes indicators for entrepreneurial learning that encourage the mainstreaming of entrepreneurship education through compulsory education (see Graph 1). This will require a thorough reflection on the policy options by all stakeholders, including a clear identification of implications for curriculum adjustment, teacher training and school management. The assessment already identified a commitment by the education authorities, State Planning Commission and employers to strategically reflect on how lifelong entrepreneurship learning could be more systematically developed. The decisive steps remain with the education authorities to see this through.

¹⁵ CEFE: Competency based Economies through Formation of Enterprise: <http://www.cefe.net/en/content/introduction-cefe?q=>

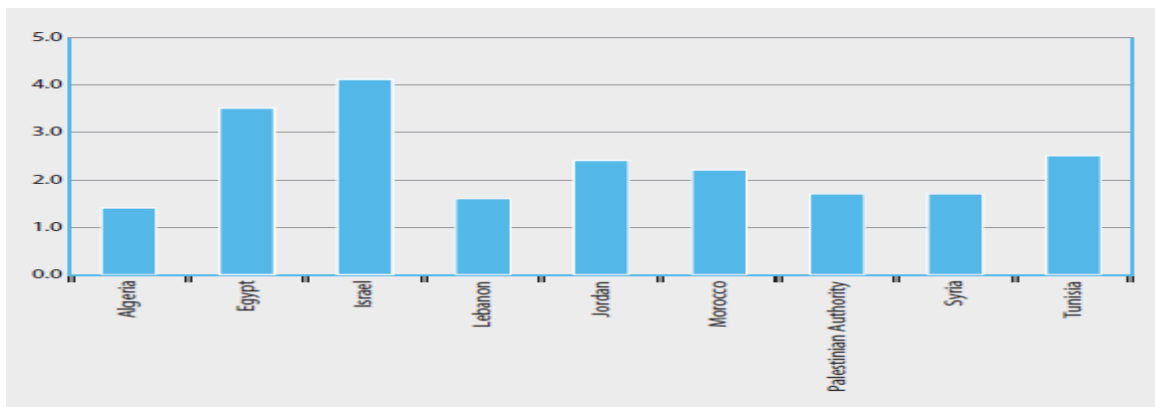
¹⁶ http://ec.europa.eu/enterprise/policies/international/files/2008_report_charter_en.pdf.

Graph 1. Entrepreneurial learning and entrepreneurship skills development in the region

Dimension 2: Education and Training for Entrepreneurship



Dimension 3: Improved Skills



One notable innovative development has been the integration of practice from the area of non-formal entrepreneurial learning into formal education. A module from the SHABAB Project to boost entrepreneurship among young people has been adopted as an official part of the Syrian school curriculum and is delivered in general secondary schools, vocational schools and higher education establishments. Students get acquainted with the world of work and awareness of the world of work is stimulated in 10th and 11th grade. Entrepreneurs come into schools to provide first hand information on labour market realities. Similarly, the SEBC/ETF SKILLS Business Training Programme works with graduates from secondary education and HE aged 19 to 25 Years-old. These initiatives are, however, not subject to quality controls, they are still in the pilot phase and only have a limited number of beneficiaries.

The outlook is positive as a culture of innovation is now beginning to emerge with examples of innovative good practice already available. For Syria to move forward and close the education-economy gap, cross-ministerial dialogue and joint policy perspectives need to be reinforced with profiling of examples of good practice in the areas of market-driven enterprise skills and entrepreneurial learning. The eleventh FYP could provide a good policy basis for addressing the education-economy nexus.

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