



ETF: HIGHLIGHTS AND INSIGHTS 2016

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FOREWORD

It is a pleasure to introduce to you this Highlights and Insights report from the ETF. The purpose of the report is to help you to quickly understand the role and contribution of this unique agency. I use the term 'unique' advisedly, because in advancing human capital development the ETF acts as a bridge between two worlds – what we are doing in Europe, and what we are doing externally – that we do not find anywhere else. The ETF provides a common language for us to translate experience and expertise so that we can learn from each other, EU member states and institutions on the one hand and partner countries on the other.

As Commissioner, my primary task is to enable stronger economic growth, which will provide more and better jobs, and ensure that the most marginalised of our societies do not get left behind. The slow but consistent recovery of the EU's economy continues. Social challenges multiply. Yet in the midst of this, our confidence in the abilities of our citizens does not waver. Harnessing their energy, adaptability, and skills is both the great opportunity and the great challenge for our vocational education and training, or VET, systems – and for the policies that enable and empower them.

VET is an essential part of the Skills Agenda for Europe. The Skills Agenda is about supporting people in work, for those who are unemployed, and for those still in education and training.

It is about improving transitions into work, whether from unemployment or from education and training. It is about increasing the availability and quality of training programmes including practical work experience, because we know that practical experience significantly improves employment outcomes. And it is about adding new digital and entrepreneurship skills for everyone.

How are we going about this? We are committed to the conclusions that the respective ministers responsible for VET from our Member States and candidate countries, along with Norway, Iceland, and Liechtenstein, identified at their meeting in Riga last year. We support efforts to engage social partners, to increase flexibility between academic and vocational pathways, and to close the paradoxical gap between the worlds of work and education that leaves employers with vacancies they can't fill while so many people – particularly the young – remain jobless. These issues are faced by us in Europe and by our partner countries around us. That's why it is so important for us to have experts and advocates, such as Cedefop and Eurofound in Europe, and the ETF which straddles the borders of Europe and its neighbours. We seek nothing less than the transformation of VET systems in the pursuit of stronger, fairer, and more open societies and economies. While this transformation might test our resources and our imaginations, the benefits will be felt globally.

Therefore, I encourage you to read this report and make use of the wealth of more detailed information that you can find on the web, both from the ETF and from the European Commission.

Thank you.

Marianne Thyssen

Commissioner for Employment, Social Affairs, Skills & Labour Mobility
European Commission





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PREFACE

to local communities who can identify and tap into innovative ways to serve their citizens. And, last but not least, it extends to the potential of each individual citizen to be entrepreneurial.

In 2016 our projects are both system-wide and system deep in their intended effects. Our unique advantage is that we are trusted as experts who have worked with partner countries for more than 20 years to create lasting change. We bring together people from different contexts who often have never sat down together in the same room before. And our cross-national perspective allows us to identify pioneering regions and territories whose efforts can serve as a template for others.

The emphasis of both the Juncker Commission and the European Parliament on employment, enterprise, and entrepreneurship for smart, sustainable, and inclusive growth, and on external solidarity beyond EU borders, puts the ETF at the heart of increased EU efforts in the partner countries. As a result, we expect rising demand for our services in 2016 and beyond. It is a challenge that all of us at the ETF are committed to meeting.

Public bodies are expected to demonstrate value for money and provide evidence of their effectiveness and efficiency, and the ETF is no exception. This report aims to reveal, in narrative form, highlights of the progress we have made over the past year in our work with partner countries, and an insight into our aims for the future.

Madlen Serban
Director
ETF



Today, we live in an increasingly globalised world. One of the aims of the EU, through its own institutions including the ETF, is to achieve what some call 'civilising globalisation'. By this I mean that Europe is more capable than any other party of ensuring equity between different regions and actors, by bolstering the values of freedom of expression and freedom of association.

We believe passionately in these values at the ETF. Our work in the field of human capital development supports partner countries to give a democratic and stable future to their citizens. Indeed, stabilisation is a key objective in the EU's neighbourhood policies and enlargement negotiations. Alongside stability, which allows people hope and prospects in their home countries, the EU also strongly believes in freedom of movement. If a citizen decides to move, then well-managed, legal migration must be an option. The skills dimension of legal migration is part of our mandate.

To contribute to these aims, we provide support along the entrepreneurial continuum in the partner countries. This continuum extends from effective policies on vocational education and training delivered by all the interested parties, through capable, resilient, and well-governed institutions,



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WHY HUMAN CAPITAL DEVELOPMENT MATTERS

Along with the rest of the world, the European Union is facing enormous societal challenges; the refugee crisis, climate change, technological upheaval, unemployment – especially among young people – and slow economic growth. As a global actor, the EU is working hard to find solutions to these challenges and in the process promote stability on its borders, create economic resilience, build civil society, and foster the ability of all individuals to take control of their lives. This is what human capital development can deliver, and effective vocational education and training (VET) systems are a crucial part of it.

We are the European Training Foundation (ETF), an EU agency established following the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989 by the European Parliament and the Council of the European Union, to provide specialist assistance to neighbouring countries

as they confronted unprecedented societal upheaval. Specifically, we work to improve VET within countries that border, or are close neighbours of, the EU's member states. We call these our partner countries. To do this, we work closely both with the countries themselves and with the EU institutions that are active in this field.

Our aim is to ensure that citizens have access to lifelong learning and can acquire the right skills to find work, and that businesses can find properly qualified people to help them grow. In pursuing these ends, we contribute to the Juncker Commission's agenda on competitiveness and growth, including combating the huge problem of youth unemployment. Our work also promotes the EU's core values of respect for human dignity, liberty, democracy, equality, the rule of law, and respect for human rights.



INSIGHT:

Europe wants to avoid a gap in prosperity, social approaches, and values between member states and their immediate neighbours, because this creates a major threat to stability on EU borders. By putting VET on the agenda for neighbours you extend the potential for stability.

Peter Greenwood,
Head of Corporate
Performance, ETF



THE BENEFITS OF BETTER VET IN PARTNER COUNTRIES

- Trained workers are more likely to find jobs in their home country, meaning they are less prone to social exclusion, poverty, and irregular migration
- Qualified workers come to Europe in a more regulated way, to fill the skills gaps created by changing demography
- Individuals acquire not only technical skills but also the 'soft' skills that are vital to employment and active citizenship. This in turn promotes social inclusion and stable, democratic states
- Partner countries become more prosperous, creating opportunities for trade and investment.



INSIGHT:

There are a number of trends that are important for our work. First, global insecurity will most likely have a bigger impact. You see it with Syria, with Libya, with Ukraine. Second, we follow the developments in the partner countries, and more and more countries are taking the leading role in the reform of their vocational education and training systems, so it is less donor-driven, and there are more of their own initiatives for policy development.

Arjen Vos,
Deputy Head of Operations, ETF



Our partner countries

We work with countries engaged in the EU’s enlargement and neighbourhood policies, as well as Central Asia:

- South Eastern Europe and Turkey (SEET)
Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Kosovo*, Montenegro, Serbia, Turkey
- Eastern Partnership (EaP)
Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, Republic of Moldova and Ukraine
- Russia
- Southern and Eastern Mediterranean (SEMED)
Algeria, Egypt, Israel, Jordan, Lebanon, Libya, Morocco, Palestine**, Syria, Tunisia
- Central Asia
Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan

While there are many examples of good practice in innovation in these countries, many still face structural challenges in their VET systems that will only be solved over the long term.

* This designation is without prejudice to positions on status, and is in line with UNSCR 1244 and the ICJ Opinion on the Kosovo declaration of independence.
** This designation shall not be construed as recognition of a State of Palestine and is without prejudice to the individual positions of the Member States on this issue.

These include:

- Limited opportunities for skills upgrading and entrepreneurship, including a lack of adult learning
- High unemployment, particularly among young people
- Significant inequality with regard to women’s employment
- Large informal economies
- Social exclusion linked to minorities, disadvantaged groups, and under-developed rural areas and regions
- Poor quality or irrelevant VET provision
- Inappropriate financing
- Limited public sector involvement
- Mismatch between supply and demand for skilled workers
- Labour market rigidity.

What we do

We seek to renew the attention given to VET in partner countries, and help demonstrate the contribution it can make to sustainable economic development through lifelong learning. Our role is to help the countries develop policies that will ensure VET is effectively designed, governed, and monitored. We do not get directly involved with the delivery of education and training, but rather help countries to design and implement their policies.

Our objectives are to help our partner countries:

- Develop effective, evidence-based VET policies
- Modernise their VET provision
- Tailor their VET provision to the needs of national and international labour markets.

We will also continue to adapt our service to the specific needs and capabilities of individual countries, as required by the renewed EU Enlargement Strategy and European Neighbourhood Policy adopted in November 2015.

To find out more about our Mandate, visit www.etf.europa.eu/web.nsf/pages/Mandate



INSIGHT:

Democracy is taken for granted in Europe, but it doesn’t necessarily work like that in our neighbouring countries. When we look at the governance of VET, in many cases there is no mechanism for ensuring an inclusive and participatory approach. Social partners, the private sector, the local authorities may come together only for the family photo. If VET is going to succeed, all these different parties must collaborate and cooperate for a shared agenda. Our role is to bring them together and empower them to become reliable partners.

Madlen Serban,
Director, ETF





VET HELPS DRIVE GROWTH

VET is central to the Europe 2020 strategy, says Thomas Bender, Head of Unit, External Relations, Neighbourhood Policy, Enlargement and Instrument for Pre-accession (IPA), DG Employment, Social Affairs, Skills and Labour Mobility (DG EMPL), European Commission.

The role of VET in our Europe 2020 strategy is clearly visible, and has been reinforced by President Juncker’s decision to put VET and skills together with the employment, job creation, and social policy department in the Commission. We want to see how far VET can play a role in strengthening employment policies in the areas of skills endowment, contributing to growth and linking to our investment strategy.

President Juncker pledged to give social dialogue a fresh start in the EU, and we work in parallel with the countries of the south to strengthen industrial relations and social dialogue structures, with a view to implementing employment and VET policies there.

In the east the situation is somewhat different. Three of our eastern neighbours have association agreements and comprehensive free trade agreements with the EU. When implementing these agreements, we focus on areas where we can slowly approximate to what is required in the EU, such as health and safety at work policies.

After the Latvian Presidency of the Council of the EU, from January to June 2015, we redefined our activities and priorities on VET, for example, by exploring how to promote work-based learning as a central pillar of VET policy. Clearly, the ETF has an important role here.

Evolving priorities

Responsibility for VET used to sit within the EU Directorate General for Education and Culture (DG EAC). In 2015, this responsibility – including the ETF and Cedefop, which looks after VET within the EU – transferred to the Directorate General for Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion (DG EMPL). This move reflects a change of emphasis at the European Commission to focus on helping people find work, rather than solely on acquiring knowledge, skills, and competences.

We continually strive to make our operation more efficient and effective. At the start of 2015 we restructured our activities into seven strategic projects, to improve our focus on, and consistency within, the VET agenda in the partner countries. In doing so, we draw inspiration from EU developments. This new structure enables us to use our expertise to deliver maximum benefit to all our partners, inside the EU, in our partner countries, and beyond.

The seven strategic projects are:

- 1. Support to EU assistance in the context of EU external policies
- 2. Policy analysis and system wide progress monitoring
- 3. VET governance
- 4. VET provision and quality
- 5. Qualifications and qualification systems
- 6. Employment, skills and employability (including skills and migration)
- 7. Entrepreneurial learning and enterprise skills.

A culture of collaboration

We work with a wide range of stakeholders, providing expertise and advice, country knowledge, and experience of EU instruments. We often facilitate dialogue between parties who might otherwise not come together, such as education and industry, or central government and local communities.

In the partner countries we have strong links with representatives in the ministries of education, labour, and economy; chambers of commerce; business associations; trade unions; NGOs; civil society bodies; teacher training organisations; schools, colleges, and universities; and private-sector companies. We collaborate closely with the EU institutions, and with EU Delegations which are also working to help bring about change in the partner countries.

We enjoy fruitful cooperation with agencies such as Eurofound and Cedefop, whose work supports the EU agenda, while the ETF goes beyond EU borders and focuses on VET transformation in the partner countries, in line with EU external relations policies. Although our work is more action-oriented than Cedefop’s, we frequently contribute to their research and often use it as a valuable part of our activities. We also work with international funding organisations such as the World Bank, the European Investment Bank, and the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development; international organisations like the International Labour Organisation, UNESCO and the OECD; and individual member states. We have a track record of working with donors to help our partner countries tackle VET development holistically, rather than in a competitive or fragmented way.

Measuring our effectiveness

It is a challenge to reliably measure the effects of our work because of the many variables at play in our partner countries, and because of the length of time required for policy changes to bear fruit. However, we have developed a methodology that allows us to chart progress.

This involves a set of indicators to reveal whether the situation of VET is improving, stable, or deteriorating in individual partner countries. For six of our seven strategic projects (not including support to the EU Delegations) we have defined five policy development stages, with 1 being the lowest and 5 the highest. Stage 1 means the country has no VET policy and no provision, while stage 5 means the country has a self-directing policy cycle with capable institutions. Over time, this system will measure whether countries are making the headway they desire.

It is a standard part of our procedure to carry out periodical external evaluations to gauge levels of satisfaction among EU institutions. The process reveals considerable support for our activities, particularly in the area of governance, which cuts across all our strategic projects. Every four years the Commission also conducts its own evaluation of the ETF. The results of the 2016 evaluation are not available at the time of writing.

Some of our work is assessed by skills and employment team of DG Development and Cooperation (DG DEVCO). The evidence shows that projects are more likely to succeed with our involvement. A recent DG DEVCO study concluded that, wherever there was ETF engagement in a project, the impact achieved was greater both for the Commission and the partner country in question than would have been the case without that engagement.



INSIGHT:

The ETF has been consistently providing timely, well-structured feedback, well referenced, clear, to the point, and workable. Further it has done it in an open and transparent way, helping us in the engagement of the community of practice.

Anonymous response to
EU satisfaction survey, December 2015



THE DUAL OBJECTIVE

Given the current focus on jobs, growth, and investment, VET is vital both to the EU and to its neighbourhood countries, as João Santos, Acting Head of Unit, Vocational Education and Lifelong Learning at DG EMPL, explains.

In DG EMPL we are delivering the skills agenda in Europe, within which vocational education and training plays a very significant role. There are three main aspects of this work:

- 1. Improving the quality of skills provision, the supply side of skills
- 2. Looking at making better use of skills – transparency, recognition, elements such as the European Qualifications Framework (EQF)
- 3. Looking at the demand side, understanding future skills needs and current skills gaps.

We coordinate what we do with member states through the Copenhagen process. The ETF actively participated in identifying the top priorities at European level, and although the ETF, unlike Cedefop, is mainly looking at the partner countries, whenever we work on vocational education and training we try to build on the ETF’s expertise. The ETF also had a strong influence on the meeting we had in Riga last year of ministers responsible for VET, in which we defined the five priorities for vocational education and training in Europe for the period 2015-2020. The work that the ETF does in areas such as work-based learning, apprenticeships, quality assurance, the focus on teachers and trainers, is all very much related to what we’re doing in Europe.

The ETF is a unique agency, in the sense that it bridges these two worlds – what we are doing in Europe, and what we are doing externally. One of the ETF’s big advantages is knowing the partner countries and working at the local level with communities, with government, and with international donors and organisations. In Europe, we have the luxury of concentrating on education and training and the skills agenda. The ETF has to deal with the realities of volatility in the partner countries, and in that context it can be difficult to plan ahead. Working with DG NEAR and DG DEVCO, the ETF has the dual objective of understanding human resources and understanding EU external policies, and bringing this into a coherent whole in the countries in which they operate.

The amount of financial resources we give to the ETF are minimal. However, the expertise of ETF staff acts as leverage for the financial resources of other organisations, such as the World Bank and UNESCO. Working with them locally and providing them with technical expertise, the ETF is also able to provide a bridge with EU Delegations locally, enabling them to deliver on the ground.



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INSIDE THE ETF



Knowledge and expertise

Our experience dates back more than 20 years, and all our staff are specialists with a track record in improving, and transforming, VET policy. We not only have an overview of what is happening within the partner countries, but we also have experience of the different structures and approaches being used by EU member states, and knowledge of EU instruments and international debate. This grounding makes the advice we provide more powerful, and allows us to stimulate meaningful policy debate.

Facilitating dialogue

In some partner countries we are the only locus where the different actors within VET come together. And in many cases we facilitate dialogue in contexts where VET is atomised between many different parties. Because we have no commercial or political interests, we are seen as a neutral and trusted partner. There are numerous instances where we foster cooperation among colleagues whose countries are otherwise involved in various levels of conflict.

A long-term view

Political administrations often take a short-term view, focusing on their own prospects rather than on lasting reform. Policy making, however, is a long-term investment. We build strong coalitions within countries, going beyond political parties to involve those who will stay with the priorities for at least seven to ten years.

This approach meant that in Tunisia, for example, we were able to continue working after the Arab Spring because we had such an in-depth knowledge of the country and diverse and long-term links there. In specific circumstances where quick-fix actions are needed this was crucial to our ability to deliver actions in a timely manner.

Improving our performance

With the emphasis of the Juncker Commission on competitiveness and growth in the context of a global Europe agenda, there is likely to be increasing demand for our services in the coming years. It is therefore vital that we continue to improve our internal efficiency and effectiveness. At the start of 2015 we launched a reorganisation process entitled 'Making the ETF More Efficient', which was approved, led, and verified by the ETF Governing Board. The aim is to boost performance across a range of areas, from financial and human resource management to stakeholder relations and risk.

A resource-based perspective

Attempts at measuring an organisation's performance is often focused on outputs and outcomes, rather than inputs. However, evidence from studies in both the private and non-profit sectors has shown that specific characteristics of inputs such as an organisation's resources allow it to develop and sustain a high level of performance over time. In the case of the ETF our key resources are our people.





Tailor-made solutions

We are experienced at adapting solutions to the specific conditions within individual country settings. Our experts produce detailed country strategy papers analysing national policies and priorities, as well as EU and other donor activities, so we can identify where we can make a critical difference. We only recommend approaches that are proportionate and sustainable for the country concerned, and our actions are based on country-owned strategic areas.

Dedication

Our staff are dedicated, and passionate about their work. We act as a bridge between the EU and partner countries, with knowledge and experience flowing in both directions, and our colleagues in the partner countries know we will always do our best to help.

Support and credibility

In many partner countries people are making strenuous efforts to improve VET systems, and depend on us to provide them with support and credibility. Without us, individuals and organisations in the vanguard of VET modernisation would be much more isolated.

Four key questions are used in assessing performance from a resource-based perspective:

1. Is the resource valuable? This report can only share a small sample of the value we help our partner countries to realise, but we are committed to capturing and articulating that value
2. Is the resource rare? The depth of our expertise, the strength of our relationships, and the relevance of our experience are all rare attributes
3. Is the resource inimitable? Openness and the exchange of ideas is one of our core values. In any case, of the other agencies and donors operating in similar territory, none is able to do precisely what we do, in the places where we do it
4. Is the resource non-substitutable? No resource is 100% non-substitutable, but the fact that the average length of tenure among ETF staff is 11 years suggests that our people cannot easily be substituted.

Our efforts to improve our performance are ongoing, because with that improvement comes an increase in the tangible benefits of VET reform in our partner countries. Ultimately, this means the hope of a better life for millions of people.



INSIGHT:

We have very good cooperation with the ETF. The role it plays in supporting our partner countries to develop their vocational training capacity is essential. Firstly, because it provides those countries with the necessary competences and infrastructure for supporting their economies. And secondly because, if those people come to Europe, they will have more skills and this will help our economies.

António Silva Mendes,
Director, Youth and Sport, DG EAC,
European Commission





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THE SEVEN STRATEGIC PROJECTS

These seven projects were devised following an analysis of the ETF's mandate and EU external priorities, EU VET policies, and partner country needs. The overall portfolio is intended to create robust VET systems and policy responses in critical thematic areas.



INSIGHT:

The ETF is the only EU agency dealing with human capital outside the 28 member states. There are many things that we simply can't do from headquarters or through our delegations in the countries. We need a centre of excellence, a centre of expertise and knowledge, that can work with the stakeholders in these countries to foster and support the agenda we are setting. We are all suffering from budget reductions, but that should be seen as an impetus to work more closely together. In the areas of VET and skills you are our privileged partner, and without the ETF much less would actually be possible.

Thomas Bender,
Head of Unit, External Relations,
Neighbourhood Policy, Enlargement, and IPA
DG EMPL, European Commission



STRATEGIC PROJECT 1:
SUPPORT TO EU ASSISTANCE
IN THE CONTEXT OF EU
EXTERNAL POLICIES

Human capital development projects – including VET reform initiatives – are an important method of EU assistance to neighbouring countries. These projects usually involve both technical assistance and substantial financial investment, so it is essential they are well designed, effectively implemented, and properly monitored.

We provide advice and technical support for the EU institutions and Delegations in this area. We are specialists with a deep, twenty-year-old knowledge of the VET context in the partner countries, and experience of a wide range of methodologies. This means we can usefully complement EU expertise. Our input ensures that project design is relevant to the individual country agenda, and that implementation is effective and efficient.

In 2015 we worked with the EU to design a large number of policy and external assistance projects. During 2016 our involvement is gradually shifting towards the monitoring and evaluation of these projects. We will also continue contributing to policy development through analytical and progress reporting, and by joining policy debates.

Our priorities

Our mandate is to prioritise assistance to candidate and potential candidate countries: Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo, former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Montenegro, Serbia, and Turkey; and to neighbourhood countries prioritised by the EU such as Georgia, Moldova, Ukraine, Morocco, Jordan, Lebanon and Tunisia. We help them undertake the VET reforms that are aligning them to EU legislation and procedures.

We help countries to secure, and effectively utilise, investment from the EU by identifying gaps in their VET policies and provision, and by supporting their systemic absorption capacity – in other words, the staff and skills necessary for utilising assistance funding and implementing projects. We are constantly updating our knowledge of EU instruments so we can best advise countries on applying for funding.

HIGHLIGHT:
MEASURING OUR EFFECTIVENESS

In 2013 the ETF's Governing Board agreed to define our impact by combining the work we carry out in the partner countries with our contribution to EU external assistance. As a regular satisfaction survey among EU Delegations indicates, the ETF is perceived as a reliable contributor to their work and, in effect, we are actually helping to shape how hundreds of millions of euros are spent by the EU on VET in the partner countries.



INSIGHT:

The ETF has been a very strong partner. They have a real participatory approach that has helped us come up with a VET strategy that is agreeable to all stakeholders. Bringing European experience, and other countries' experience, into Jordan was wonderful.

Ibrahim Laafia,
First Counsellor and
Head of Operations Section,
EU Delegation Jordan



STRATEGIC PROJECT 2:
POLICY ANALYSIS AND SYSTEM WIDE PROGRESS MONITORING

A new generation of VET strategies is gaining momentum across all our partner countries. VET is being emancipated from a 'blue collar' past in which it was often viewed as the pathway of last resort, and is being reinvented as an important means of delivering the most-needed skills of today and tomorrow. However, the extent to which VET providers can meet this aspiration will depend on countries taking a transparent approach and developing evidence-based VET policies. And this in turn requires providers, learners, and employers to play their part.

We use the Torino Process to help countries move towards an evidence-based system. Inspired by the EU Copenhagen-Bruges process, we devised the Torino Process methodology as an evidence-based approach to the analysis of VET, based on country ownership and broad and open participation of stakeholders from the public and private sectors. At the heart of the Torino Process lies its biennial monitoring of policy progress, which enables partner countries to monitor progress in the implementation of VET reforms and assess necessary actions.

The Torino Process supports countries to:

- Develop a common understanding of their medium-term vision, priorities, and strategy for VET development
- Explore possible options for implementing their vision
- Produce reliable data and update their analysis regularly to monitor progress and impact
- Develop their capacity by learning from other partner countries and the EU
- Coordinate the contributions of donors to achieve agreed national priorities.

With its holistic, evidence-based, open and participative approach, the Torino Process has the potential to strengthen the culture of policy-making among partner countries. The Torino Process builds on and provides context to all our work, from support for the Small Business Act Assessment to systemic change of qualifications and qualification systems. The results provide a useful way for EU institutions to target their financial and practical assistance.



INSIGHT:

We have been working with the ETF for a long time. They are an excellent partner and very important for the development of education.

Iskra Maksimovic,
Torino Process coordinator, Serbia

Encouraging progress

In 2010 ETF staff did most of the Torino Process analysis, while in 2014 the countries themselves took ownership in 15 out of 25 cases. Stakeholder participation has risen as countries have begun to include providers, social actors, and sub-regions in their policy process.

In South Eastern Europe and Turkey, governments have adopted foresighted skills policies that articulate holistic visions for VET development. Southern and Eastern Mediterranean countries have committed to driving economic competitiveness and inclusive growth through skills and VET, and have reflected this in their strategies and action plans.

Once the 2016-17 cycle is complete, the Torino Process will next be carried out in 2019. In this way, it will provide evidence on progress made towards the 2020 strategic work perspective.

HIGHLIGHT:**PROMOTING BETTER DECISION MAKING THROUGH PRIME**

The Torino Process helps equip policymakers with the data and evidence they need to make sound decisions. To further support decision making, we have developed an ex-ante impact assessment methodology that gives countries a structured technique to weigh up different reform options. We call this PRIME, which stands for Projecting Reform Impact in Vocational Education and Training. Decisions taken as a result of the PRIME methodology are likely to be better planned, have stronger buy-in from stakeholders, and a higher chance of achieving the desired outcome.

So far, PRIME has been implemented in Jordan, Ukraine, and Montenegro, which have all given positive feedback, particularly Ukraine. In 2016 we will extend it to Serbia, Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, and Albania, where it will underpin decisions on work-based learning; and Turkey, where it will be used for the professional development of teachers.

Data alone are not enough

Data are useless if you don't have a vision for change. Countries that have no strategy for VET improvement will fail to exploit data, even if they are available. An objective for 2016 is to ensure that the development of a monitoring system goes hand in hand with vision and political commitment.

Countries also need support in interpreting information and using it effectively to bring about change. For example, a country may have five reports on the same subject by different donors, but fail to use the findings because no one knows how to translate them into action. We are providing more support towards building this capability. Finally, we are helping countries create a culture of trust. In some places, people fear that data may be used against them. We want to foster environments where people can present evidence without fear of reprisals, and work together to make things better.

Evidence-based policy making

In Georgia we facilitated a dialogue between central government and social partners, as part of the Torino Process. The aim was to discuss how partners can participate more effectively in the country's VET policymaking system. Despite initial disagreement, the two sides arrived at mutually agreed priorities and ways to track progress. This cooperation has now been embedded in the system.

When we held the third Torino Process, five sub-regions of Ukraine started to take part, which was itself a success considering the difficult situation in the country at the time. It was the first time the country had worked with an international organisation on VET reform, and it had not previously involved private sector employers to such an extent in its VET policies. In 2016, all 25 sub-regions are engaged, and the country is using PRIME to guarantee that the policy measures selected will produce the expected results. This is playing a key role in helping Ukraine move towards its goal of making VET provision more efficient, sustainable, and relevant. It is now collaborating with stakeholders to determine the best course of policy action with the aim of drafting new VET legislation.

INSIGHT:

The impact of the Torino Process is quite remarkable. Some countries are starting to run online consultations that go well beyond what we have asked for, and the level of ownership is extremely high.

Manuela Prina,
Strategic Project Leader, ETF

STRATEGIC PROJECT 3:
VET GOVERNANCE

VET reform is often unsustainable where responsibility rests solely with an individual ministry of central government. This is true all over the world, and particularly in volatile settings where politicians and even institutions frequently come and go, often with costly implications. Improvements in provision will only be sustainable if a whole network of capable and skilled bodies – from schools to businesses and trade unions – become accountable for developing policies and delivering change. These stakeholders need a solid governance framework to spell out their responsibilities and make their activities transparent to citizens.

To help partner countries develop robust governance, we begin by asking: how is governance currently functioning (or not) at the central level? This means looking at national bodies such as VET councils to see how they are structured and how they interact with the ministry of education, national qualification authorities, and so on. Next we consider how these institutions involve stakeholders, such as social partners. Finally, we analyse the interplay between the various intersections of a multi-level governance road-map: national and regional; national and sectoral; national and local. Once this process is complete, we support institutions to address weaknesses.

Developing good governance takes time and commitment. We assist partner countries to find new ways to collaborate and match resources to needs. The best concepts and methodologies are shared between countries as an effective way to inspire innovation and raise standards.

Why is good governance so important?

Good governance matters because it is the mechanism through which policies are developed and bring about actual change on the ground. If it is lacking it can mean that policy thinking never gets translated into action and results will not be achieved.

When effective governance is in place, it avoids the duplication of different bodies performing the same roles, thus saving resources. Institutions become more transparent, accountable, and consultative and have a higher absorption capacity when it comes to assistance from the EU or other donors. And local schools and providers have more autonomy, meaning they can respond swiftly to local training needs.

Conversely, when there is no proper framework, roles are not clear, power becomes centralised; institutions stagnate; citizens do not understand who makes decisions; and corruption may set in. It can also lead to a standstill in the policy cycle. Policy has to be conceived, designed, and implemented but also evaluated and assessed. If there is never any review of effectiveness, there is never any improvement.

HIGHLIGHT:
GOVERNANCE AND PARTNERSHIP

A special ETF initiative from 2013 to 2016 sought out partnerships in 10 countries that connected actors along the entrepreneurial continuum whilst demonstrating local collective action. The focus of these Entrepreneurial Communities, as we called them, ranged from angel investment to high tech education, and from hospitality industry innovation to agricultural reinvention. They drew on attributes that we characterised as visionary, connected, innovative, impactful, and smart. The Entrepreneurial Communities Initiative, informed and inspired by the European Committee of the Regions’ work on strategic drivers for sustainable growth and job creation, has completed a transition to a ‘smart territories’ approach.

Other aspects of our work on governance include helping to design a new overall VET governance structure in Albania. We contributed to draft legislation spelling out a concept of VET much closer to local needs, with more autonomous institutions and closer cooperation between employers and employees. The end result will be that VET provision is much more responsive to the needs of the labour market. And people will acquire more relevant skills, making it easier for them to find work.

Serbia is strongly committed to VET modernisation – the political will exists, and there is a convergence of effort from all stakeholders. But implementation itself is slow. We have been exploring how governance can drive change, and sharing knowledge from EU member states. This has resulted in a move to strengthen Serbia’s national VET Council, which will have more responsibility for implementing reform and harnessing the efforts of other institutions. The ultimate aim is for Serbia to implement a National Qualifications Framework (NQF) and to test a system of work-based learning. A dynamic VET Council with a single focus on delivery will help make this vision a reality.

INSIGHT:

Under a regional model, even if I am located far from the capital, I am as responsible as a minister of education for getting the best outcomes for the graduates in my region. In turn, local citizens see that schools are functioning and that public money is being well spent.

Siria Taurelli,
Strategic Project Leader, ETF

Supporting regionalisation in Tunisia
After the Arab Spring, we began working with the government in Tunisia to explore how a regionalisation of VET provision might work in the country. In the south eastern region of Médenine we encouraged local stakeholders to meet and discuss training needs, cooperation between VET providers and industry, and the involvement of bodies such as regional employment agencies. We helped them develop ways to assess labour market needs and track learners’ outcomes. We facilitated dialogue, promoted knowledge sharing (including hosting a study visit to France), and provided tools and methodology. At the end of 2015 the Médenine pilot was successfully concluded. At a national conference, the Minister of Education launched a systematic programme of regionalisation. As a result, in 2016-17 we will run a support scheme for a further eight regions, to help them follow the reform template of Médenine. Impressed by the success of this project, the EU Delegation in Tunisia joined in to provide further assistance.

INSIGHT:

The ‘smart territories’ idea is about bringing institutions and whole communities together. It’s not the same as ‘community development’, where you bring individuals together to generate ideas on what they can do to develop entrepreneurship. When you bring institutions together, vocational schools with businesses, with universities, with local authorities, and with local communities, and it is driven by high-tech developments – in IT, but also in transport, in buildings, in energy – it’s much more sophisticated than traditional community development.

Anastasia Fetsi,
Head of Operations, ETF



STRATEGIC PROJECT 4:
VET PROVISION AND QUALITY

Having coherent and sustainable policies is essential for improving VET systems. But this is, of course, only part of the picture. There is increasing demand for support with the implementation of policy, and this will have an impact on our future activity.

It is important to draw a distinction here, however. We do not get involved in the implementation of VET policies as such. Rather, we support successful implementation by helping countries assess different options and methodologies for delivering the changes they have promised. So, for example, if the policy objective is to train more teachers, we will help the country to create the institutional solutions to provide that training, in order to decide on the best mix of provision and allocate the appropriate resources. This forms a part of vital efforts to sustain the absorption capacity of individuals and of institutions dealing with transformational change, as they seek to create holistic solutions at national level.

Our priority areas are:

- Work-based learning
- Continuing professional development for teachers and trainers
- Quality assurance of teaching and training.

We are also supporting countries to provide high-quality career guidance, and make better use of digital and online learning to connect with both young people and adult learners.

What is work-based learning?

The concept of work-based learning is gaining momentum both within the EU and among partner countries. More and more employers and employers’ organisations are interested in VET quality and want to contribute to developments in their own locations. Work-based learning refers both to the training of young people about to enter the labour market, and to the training of current employees. It takes many different forms, including apprenticeships, placements, internships, and shadowing, all of which happen inside the workplace and have a strong emphasis on practice rather than theory.

So while a trainee baker may learn to make a very good loaf in college, they will also benefit from spending time in a working bakery, interacting with a team and dealing with customer orders. The advantage for individuals is that they gain a relevant mix of skills, while employers get people who can cope with the real pressures of work.

From classroom to workplace

Skills Connexion is a three-year project to develop work-based learning in the Eastern European partner countries (Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, Moldova, and Ukraine) together with Kazakhstan. During its first year, 2015, we mapped existing provision to understand the readiness of relevant actors. In 2016, informed by these results, we are looking at different strategies and carrying out feasibility checks. In 2017, we will help countries run pilot schemes and build capacity among stakeholders.

Skills Connexion brings together representatives from the worlds of education and industry. This network benefits from peer learning. For example, in January 2016 we took a group to a four-day workshop in Cardiff, Wales, to see apprenticeships in action and find out about UK government incentives. The intention is not to export a one-size-fits-all solution, but to inspire the development of bespoke systems. We are now setting up a similar project for South Eastern Europe and Turkey, where some countries have pledged to meet EU goals for apprenticeship.

Continuing professional development

We are running a three-year project focused on the continuing professional development of teachers and trainers in South Eastern Europe and Turkey. The initiative gathers insights from teachers and gets policymakers to listen to these views, so that policies meet the needs on the ground.

As part of this we are supporting demonstration projects that implement a specific strand of policy. Some are ‘top down’ and a priority for the government on a national scale. In Montenegro, for example, the Ministry of Education, the chamber of commerce, and the VET agency are coming together to arrange placements for teachers. Others are ‘bottom up’, such as in the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, where teachers have persuaded the heads of three local schools to form a federation offering continuing professional development, designed and managed by the teachers themselves. These projects give us the opportunity to share experiences across countries and showcase different ways of doing things.

Quality assurance

Modernising VET is crucial to ensuring its relevance to today’s marketplace – and demands new ways of thinking about how to safeguard VET quality. International cooperation can be a powerful tool in this regard, as it encourages people to innovate, exchange best practice, and work together to tackle common quality issues. We are fostering collaboration between partner countries, and supporting them in using European policies, expertise, instruments, and resources to strengthen their own VET quality assurance.



HIGHLIGHT

YOUNG PEOPLE UPDATE THEIR
SKILLS IN CENTRAL ASIA

When VET fails to respond to the changing needs of employers, young people can find their hard-won skills are useless.

This was the case in Kyrgyzstan, where some mechanics were still being trained to fix outdated vehicles rather than modern, and increasingly foreign-made, cars. As a result, they were failing to find work, and garages were struggling to recruit the skilled mechanics they needed. With our support the school began a system of work placements for students, as well as training the teachers themselves in new methods of vehicle maintenance. “We have the chance to assist mechanics performing real tasks on modern engines,” said one student. “This mix of learning and working is very valuable.”

This was just one project within our School Development Initiative, launched in 2015 and running in five countries in Central Asia. Similar projects are bearing fruit in Tajikistan and Kazakhstan, where trainees often end up finding permanent jobs at the companies where they did work placements. To underpin these advances, we are building a network of schools to enable head teachers to develop better curricula, launch new activities, or update their staff’s skills. Teachers working in under-resourced situations and remote locations have been inspired by the chance to forge links with the wider VET community.

To see video clips from this initiative, go to www.youtube.com/user/etfeuropa and search for ‘school development in Central Asia’.

STRATEGIC PROJECT 5:
QUALIFICATIONS AND QUALIFICATION SYSTEMS

As workers move from education into employment, between different employers and, increasingly, between countries, they need proper qualifications to demonstrate their skills. Qualifications are a vital bridge between workers and employers. They are a common language that allows candidates to prove their competence, and companies to recruit people that are capable of doing the job. Lifelong learning, where people have the chance to continue refreshing their skills throughout their whole career, must also be reflected in the types of opportunities on offer.

In many of the partner countries, however, qualifications and qualification systems are beset with problems. Transition countries are emerging from an economic system that directly maintained the link between the labour market and individuals’ skills. The legacy of this is qualifications that are not truly vocational, because they contain insufficient practical elements, and need to be redesigned in partnership with employers.

Another deficiency is that qualifications are often inflexible, meaning people find it hard to move between different jobs or career paths. The result is that companies can’t grow because they can’t find people with the right skills, and young people can’t enter the labour market. Long-term unemployment becomes entrenched. This in turn leads to social exclusion – a term covering a whole raft of problems that add to social and economic costs and impede growth.

What can be done?

It is vital that qualifications reflect the needs of the labour market. They must be transparent and independently quality assured, so that people can understand and trust them. And they must be portable and flexible, enabling individuals to steer their own career development. To achieve this, employers must play a role in qualification design. Outcomes on the ground must also be tracked – box-ticking is not enough.

Making qualifications meaningful

We have three main priorities:

- 1. Helping countries reform their qualification systems to support more lifelong learning and make people more employable. This means modernising qualifications, assuring quality and involving stakeholders – for example, using sector skills councils to channel employers’ views into the education system
- 2. Supporting candidate and potential candidate countries to implement National Qualifications Frameworks (NQFs). This is a step towards them adopting the European Qualifications Framework (EQF), a requirement of EU membership
- 3. Facilitating the dissemination of knowledge and expertise in order to underpin countries’ reforms.

Standards and validation

Qualifications often proliferate in an uncontrolled way, so countries may not even know what qualifications they have. In 2015 we helped Serbia and Albania to make an inventory of qualifications. This year we are supporting them to begin acting on this information to decide which qualifications to include in their NQFs. The qualifications that are retained will be verified as useful and relevant for

young people, adult learners, and employers. Eventually the countries will link their frameworks to the EQF so that, for example, a diploma might say: ‘Serbian NQF level 5, EQF level 5’. Having comparable standards like this will make it easier to support circular migration.

In Kosovo, we are supporting efforts to validate non-formal learning. The need arose because many Kosovars are returning home after working in the EU, yet have no documented way of proving their new-found skills. In 2015 we helped design training for assessors. In 2016 we will support them further and the country will soon have a functioning system. More people in Kosovo will gain recognition for their abilities and this will help them get jobs, boosting social reintegration and economic growth.

HIGHLIGHT:
QUALIFICATIONS SUPPORT LABOUR MOBILITY
IN THE MEDITERRANEAN REGION

For the past six years, we have been working with Mediterranean countries to strengthen cooperation between them in the field of qualifications. Trust in skills and qualifications between countries will help support labour mobility across the region. The project developed instruments to make assessing vocational qualifications from different countries more transparent. In June 2015, the Egyptian participants took the lead of the project with the idea of increasing the ownership, and expanding the project scope and lifespan.



Getting organised

Our partner countries are societies and economies in transition, dealing with the same global challenges as other countries, but with the added strain of political and economic upheaval. Their social institutions, employers, and citizens must all adapt to more complex economic structures with unstable, often fragmented labour markets.

Perhaps not surprisingly, then, many of their qualifications bear little relation to labour market needs. Employers are insufficiently engaged in the design, delivery, or assessment of qualifications, while ministries or education institutions are often left to develop them in isolation. Many qualifications are based on programme outlines or on hours of attendance. It is not easy, therefore, to evaluate what certificate holders can actually do. Nor is it easy to compare one region or provider’s certificates with another’s. In many places the limited range of qualifications means vocational courses are solely aimed at young people in full-time education and training. That leaves out adult jobseekers, and others looking for labour market mobility through smarter, more targeted qualifications.

The partner countries are determined to face these challenges. Most have at least begun the process of reform, including introducing learning outcomes in qualifications, developing occupational standards, and planning and implementing national qualifications frameworks. This reform will produce not only better qualifications, but greater trust in the system as whole. We are with them every step of the way, advising, facilitating, and sharing best practice. During 2016 we will also launch a major new resource on systemic reform of qualification systems.



INSIGHT:

If we want to give more value to vocational training, the first priority is to integrate it into mainstream education rather than segregating it. The second is that all the learning outcomes acquired in vocational training should be recognised automatically. This would be through a mechanism that gives you credits for vocational training units you have completed – courses, apprenticeships, and so on – and makes these count towards university. The two key words are partnership and integration.

António Silva Mendes,
Director, Youth and Sport, DG EAC, European Commission



STRATEGIC PROJECT 6:
EMPLOYMENT, SKILLS AND EMPLOYABILITY
(INCLUDING SKILLS AND MIGRATION)

This project focuses on ensuring that VET corresponds to the needs of the labour market. The problem is that the current system in many partner countries does not give graduates the chance to acquire the skills to find work immediately. One reason for this mismatch is that the business world develops quickly, while education systems take time to catch up. Another reason is that there are often poor links between the two worlds, so training institutions simply do not know what employers want. Effective career guidance and employment services are an important part of the equation here, offering specific help to individuals while contributing to wider societal and economic benefits.

Anticipation and matching

To address these problems, partner countries need to tackle two main areas. First, anticipation; monitoring current skills in the labour market and identifying future skills needs, by working closely with industry. Second, matching; helping job seekers find work, using employment services and career guidance.

To respond to these challenges, the ETF, Cedefop, and the International Labour Office (ILO) have joined forces and combined expertise and geographic coverage to develop a compendium of methodological guides on anticipation and matching of skills supply and demand. These are currently being published.

Youth unemployment is a huge problem in our partner countries, just as it is in other countries around the world. In 2016 we will continue to work with EU instruments such as the Youth Guarantee, to help transfer the knowledge and experience of member states to our partner countries.

In 2015 in South Eastern Europe and Turkey we analysed what existing tools countries had in the field of skills anticipation and matching. What we found was that there were many projects, but they were fragmented. There was also poor follow-up of results, meaning good initiatives rarely proved to be sustainable. Our findings sparked a regional dialogue through which we helped identify gaps and worked on how to address them through better governance and cooperation.

Prospects for young job seekers

The Youth Guarantee was introduced in 2013. It offers guidelines to member states for tackling youth unemployment, with a particular emphasis on NEETs (those not in employment, education, or training). Within the EU the scheme requires governments to provide young people with either a traineeship or work within four months from leaving school, and provides funds to support this.



YOUTH VOLUNTEERING SHOULD BE
PART OF THE TRAINING SOLUTION

Voluntary work helps young people acquire vocational skills and should be an integral part of VET, says António Silva Mendes, Director, Youth and Sport, DG EAC European Commission.

Everything the European Commission is doing in the area of youth work and volunteering aims to increase young people's participation in society. A secondary benefit is that they acquire 'soft' skills that can boost their employability – skills such as problem solving, adaptability, and team building. So while the main goal is to increase young people's participation in active life, in society, at the same time people participating in youth volunteering initiatives will acquire the soft skills, or life skills, that can be very instrumental in increasing their employability.

I believe we should reinforce this benefit by identifying likely learning outcomes before launching youth work or voluntary service activities. In this way, links with VET providers could be strengthened and youth activities begin to be integrated with the training system.

The ETF can play a role in this by interacting with youth activities in the partner countries. This is already beginning to happen, for example through the Young Mediterranean Leaders initiative.

While such investments may be lacking in partner countries, the concept nevertheless contains many sound principles that could be adapted to different contexts. In 2015 we began planning and identifying possible paradigms, and we are taking this to the next stage, beginning with candidate and potential candidate countries, as they are more engaged with the EU. In Serbia, for example, we are discussing with stakeholders how to tackle youth unemployment in a coordinated way. The project involves a good practice exchange with Italy, looking at examples of such schemes in action.

Managing migration and responding to the refugee crisis

Helping refugees and managing migration in a constructive and sustainable way has risen to the top of the EU agenda over the past year. Our Governing Board and the Commission have asked us to make this a priority in 2016. Migration is too often seen in isolation, as the responsibility of a single government ministry. In fact, it is an issue for which civil society, local authorities, and employers should all take a share of responsibility.

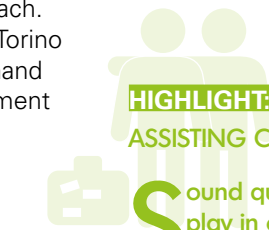
The solutions lie in coordinating migration policies with policies on human capital development, growth, and getting the many interested parties to work together. We help countries adopt just such an integrative approach. We will emphasise this requirement as part of the Torino Process in 2016, and continue to put the skills demand for migration on the EU's cooperation and development agenda.



INSIGHT:

One of the big issues we are discussing is how to validate and recognise the skills that migrants and refugees have when they arrive in Europe. If we can ensure that there is a better understanding of the skills and qualifications that are provided by the education systems in the neighbourhood countries, it would facilitate the kind of circular migration that we are trying to incentivise. We've also got to make sure that we don't deprive most of these countries of the best talent they have, because that talent will allow them to improve their situation. If the ETF plays its role in supporting these countries, and in increasing transparency of qualifications, the results will be very positive.

João Santos,
Acting Head of Unit, Vocational Education
and Lifelong Learning, DG EMPL, European Commission



HIGHLIGHT:

ASSISTING CIRCULAR MIGRATION

Sound qualification systems have an important role to play in constructively managing the skills dimension of migration. In 2016 our work will focus on developing partner countries' certification of skills to support a stage-based approach to migration – before departure, during migration, and when returning to the home country. The logic of circular migration is that if workers are equipped with decent qualifications, they will find work more swiftly abroad, and do better when they return – provided the work experience they have acquired is properly recognised.

Over the past few years we have been building a significant body of evidence relating to the planning, implementation, and evaluation of migrant support measures from an employment and skills perspective, known as MISMES. This evidence highlights the demand for effective policy measures at every stage of circular migration. Using the MISMES inventory we are beginning to advise countries on how to develop policies that have been proven to be effective. This will become the joint responsibility of our qualifications and employment teams.



Tackling the informal economy

A major issue faced by many emerging and transition economies is their dependence on informal activity. In many African countries, for example, a system of informal apprenticeships has existed for centuries. People have been taught skills in families, but have never received any formal recognition. Generally, people are forced into the informal sector because they can't find mainstream jobs and don't have any other choice. They tend to be from vulnerable groups and are often characterised as socially excluded. Workplace conditions are poor, and there are few opportunities for training, so that when workers acquire new skills these remain unrecognised.

Although there are estimates by the World Bank of the scale of the informal economy, many governments have no idea how big the problem is. In the past, the assumption was that it would disappear as countries became more developed. But in fact this sector is growing, in part due to the financial crisis. So now the academic discourse is beginning to describe this as a long-term challenge, and more and more voices are calling for action. In 2015 we published a paper on the informal economy from the skills perspective. We are encouraging partner countries to acknowledge the problem and begin gathering data. Our goal now is to formulate our approach as an organisation, to enable a coordinated response.



INSIGHT:

To live in today's world, you need skills. They are important for employment, for employability, and for active citizenship. The ETF has a very important role in human capital development in the partner countries and should continue to do this, and working in these countries at the local level is the best way of giving them the capacity to change things and to have better lives.

João Santos,
Acting Head of Unit, Vocational Education
and Lifelong Learning, DG EMPL, European Commission



HANDS-ON HELP FOR REFUGEES

Keen to do something practical to help refugees coming to Europe, the ETF staff committee began collecting donations of food and clothing from colleagues. Anna Kahlson co-organised the effort.

We wanted to deliver the donations in person, so in December 2015, I and fellow staff member Mircea Copot, along with Mircea's daughter Maria, hired a van and drove from Turin to the transit camp at Slavonski Brod, Croatia.

Around 3,500 refugees pass through the camp each day. Most arrive by train from Serbia and go through the 'entering the EU' registration process, also receiving food, clothing, and other assistance from organisations such as the Red Cross and Caritas. We took as much as we could fit in the van. This may be a small drop in the ocean, but it is our drop.

GOVERNANCE FOR EMPLOYABILITY
IN THE MEDITERRANEAN

Governance for Employability in the Mediterranean (GEMM) is a three-year regional project funded by the EU and managed by the ETF. GEMM directly links the governance of VET with employability outcomes for graduates.

GEMM's goal is to help countries in the region improve their capability in governance and develop better connections with local labour markets. This involves matching local skills needs more closely, developing effective career guidance, and tracing the paths of VET graduates to find out whether their skills are meeting employers' requirements.

Now in its final year, GEMM has seen the exchange of policies and sharing of best practice across the region. Nine pilot projects have also been established, in conjunction with local social partners, EU delegations, NGOs and government agencies, as well as a range of other multi-lateral organisations including the ILO, the World Bank, GIZ, and the Anna Lindh Foundation.

Important evidence is emerging from these pilots, showing the positive impact of career guidance and work experience on graduates' job prospects. For example, analysis in Lebanon demonstrated that young people who receive such support fare better than their contemporaries who don't.



INSIGHT:

The ETF's contribution is essential. They accompanied us throughout the process, provided a framework, and contributed to establishing a culture of change at local level among the partners.

M'Barek Khaldouni,
GEMM Regional Coordinator, Morocco



INSIGHT:

Working with the ETF helped me to gather all the stakeholders, and to have concrete results in a simple design.

David El Chabab,
GEMM pilot project leader, Lebanon





STRATEGIC PROJECT 7: ENTREPRENEURIAL LEARNING AND ENTERPRISE SKILLS

Entrepreneurial skills are fundamental to competitiveness, and we are working to encourage partner countries to make it a feature of their VET systems. Our primary focus is to track policy progress in the three key areas contained in the Small Business Act (SBA) for Europe:

- The promotion of entrepreneurial learning
- The delivery of training for women entrepreneurs
- The skills support environment for small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs).

We monitor progress using both qualitative and quantitative measures, such as how many businesses have been established in the partner countries by young people, by women, and so on. Part of our work is getting the countries themselves to build these statistics by encouraging bodies and training providers to collect data systematically.

It has taken some time for governments to see why entrepreneurship is important in the national policy agenda. In the candidate and potential candidate countries, policymakers now view it as a key competence and have embedded it in their national strategies. It is being introduced into national curricula and teachers are being trained to deliver it.

In 2015 we helped the government of Bosnia and Herzegovina to develop a national strategy on entrepreneurial learning, the first state-wide strategy to be approved in the country. In Montenegro we are supporting the development of a national partnership to promote entrepreneurial learning, looking at the role and contribution of all the stakeholder institutions. The next step is to share such examples in order to inspire change among neighbouring countries.

Why entrepreneurial skills matter

Teaching entrepreneurship helps forge a ‘can-do’ attitude among young people. They then come into the labour market with a more creative mind-set. And they are better at problem solving, working as a team, allocating resources, and managing risk. Some go on to set up their own businesses, while others make existing companies and institutions more dynamic from within.

The second strand of our work in entrepreneurship looks at good practice in training. The problem was that all and sundry were marketing themselves as training providers, without independent verification. Donors were bringing in groups of policymakers and providers, only for partner countries to realise their own existing trainers and teachers were better. This caused us to question the whole concept of good practice, and led us to create a scorecard and system of peer review.

We have identified three important areas of good practice in training:

- Training for youth entrepreneurship, to combat mass youth unemployment and harness their potential to bring energy into the economy
- Training for women entrepreneurs, who are grossly underrepresented in starting their own businesses
- Training for SMEs in how to export to the EU. This is important because companies that export their products and services tend to be more innovative, generate greater returns for the economy and create more jobs.

Realising women’s potential

We are building advocacy groups to ensure that women’s entrepreneurship is understood not as a gender issue, but as an economic issue. There are also cultural factors to be overcome, particularly in the Southern Mediterranean region, concerning the role of women and their contribution to national economic efforts. Female entrepreneurs in these countries can be very isolated, so we are creating networks and better visibility of role models.

We also help countries understand how the entrepreneurship landscape can exclude women. For example, those with families may not be able to attend daytime training courses. Formats and content may also need adjusting, since women tend to learn better through mentoring from other women. Finally, governments must ensure women have access to finance to get their enterprises off the ground.

Exporting success

We partner national investment agencies and export agencies to raise awareness that SMEs need more training on issues such as product quality, and health and safety standards. Only then will they be able to find a European market for their goods and services.

Part of the difficulty is that many SMEs are worried about the increased workload and extra risk involved in expansion beyond the local market. We are working with chambers of commerce, ministries, small business agencies, and employers’ organisations to give firms the expertise and confidence they need. We do this by sharing examples from countries such as Lithuania, where such training has had excellent results.

Entrepreneurial learning for refugees

In 2016 we are focusing on entrepreneurial learning for refugees. Countries that have seen the largest numbers of refugees and illegal migrants are setting up entrepreneurial support systems for them within holding centres. This involves assessing their existing skills and helping them acquire new ones. While we are not yet part of this monitoring mechanism we are contributing by identifying regions and organisations that are doing good work in training refugees to set up their own businesses. Using our good practice platform, we can then share these with the wider training community.

HIGHLIGHT:

AN ENTREPRENEURSHIP STRATEGY FOR TUNISIA

Since the Arab Spring, Tunisia has had a huge problem with youth unemployment and is focusing on youth entrepreneurship as a policy response. The government did not want to borrow strategies from EU member states, but instead to build on what the country was already doing well. To do this, they used our good practice scorecard to identify excellence already within their training environment, from the public, private, and NGO sectors. Their findings formed the basis for a national charter for entrepreneurship in education and training, to be launched during Global Entrepreneurship Week in November 2016. Meanwhile vocational trainers and curriculum specialists are developing a number of entrepreneurship modules to introduce into the national curriculum. The project provides an example to share with other countries, and demonstrates that it is not always necessary to look elsewhere for inspiration if you are prepared to do a thorough audit and evaluation of current national capacities.

The European Entrepreneurship Competence Framework

Building an entrepreneurial economy requires a rethink of how the next generation is educated – from primary school right through to college and beyond. In 2015, we were part of a team of international experts mobilised by the European Commission’s Joint Research Centre (JRC) to build a European Entrepreneurship Competence Framework. The framework provides entrepreneurial learning outcomes that education authorities, schools, and training organisations can draw on to reform their curricula and support teaching and learning. It is an important tool to help build education and training systems that support competitiveness and employment.

In April 2016 the ETF organised the Second International Conference on Entrepreneurial Learning in the EU’s Eastern Partnership Region. The conference was presented with the latest developments in the Entrepreneurship Competence Framework ahead of its public launch, and in special sessions created and moderated by the ETF, policy makers from the six Eastern Partnership countries joined with international experts to extrapolate from these developments concrete actions to improve entrepreneurship training and curricula in their countries.



INSIGHT:

In our workshops in Bosnia and Herzegovina, the participants put photographs of their children and grandchildren up on the wall. The focus was: let’s see what we can do for the next generation.

Anthony Gribben,
Strategic Project Leader, ETF



With its dual focus on employability and entrepreneurship the ETF can support not only labour market needs, but also wider societal goals, says Jordi Curell, Director, Labour Mobility, DG EMPL, European Commission in a wide-ranging conversation with ETF Head of Communication Alastair Macphail.

On VET

Vocational education and training is high among the priorities of the EU, because the notion of employability is fundamental. We must make sure that our education systems, be it VET or higher education, have adapted to the new conditions of employment and of society at large. People need the right mix of in-depth knowledge of a particular field, and the ability to be flexible. This combination will help them to be fit for the new world of work, which has changed a great deal, and is changing even faster now. The fact that VET has been moved from DG Education to DG Employment means that this emphasis needs to be strongly felt in the ETF's work.

Whether we're talking about the EU or the ETF partner countries, the aim is that our education systems do not produce job seekers, but job shapers – people who are dynamic, who are active, who are non-conformists. However, you can have the best policies in VET but if there is no economic activity there's not much people can do. So it has to be part of a whole, you have to have growth, you have to have economic activity.

On migration

In so far as it's more or less a free choice migration does have a benefit, if it's properly managed. If it's targeting the right skills, and if young people in particular have the right skills, it can be a benefit for the EU, for the sending countries, and also for individuals in terms of getting a job, getting training, and bringing new skills back to their home countries. I believe this is the philosophy of the Mobility Partnerships.

On impact

If it was easy to make a direct link between what you do and changes in reality, we would have found the formula by now. What's important, with all the methodological difficulties that this entails, is to try to make the link between specific projects and their beneficiaries, and long-term changes. Share the bigger picture in terms of what you do, and link that to social impact measures. Of course the problem is to evaluate impact mathematically. But when we talk about strategic policy it's very difficult to see, when you put a euro here, what's the impact there.

On the ETF

I have to say that personally I'm most impressed. When I go to conferences and meet your colleagues in specific seminars – be it South Med, or Eastern Partnership, or bilateral dialogue with some of those countries – I'm always impressed by the level of in-depth knowledge of the situation in those countries. I think that this brings a lot to the Commission, but what is even more important than what it brings to the EU is what it brings to those countries. By having both, by mixing this bilateral approach with the multilateral approach, the ETF manages to create an important dynamic, either purely national, or multinational in terms of regional cooperation and so on.

For the future, put the emphasis on employability on the one hand and, very much linked to that, to entrepreneurship on the other. But remember, we're not developing a situation where the education world should be exclusively at the service of the labour market world, because it will not work. To sum it up, employability and entrepreneurship should be the double focus in terms of your main priorities.

To read the full interview, go to www.etf.europa.eu



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LOOKING AHEAD

A number of important current and emerging themes are having an increasing influence on our work, including:

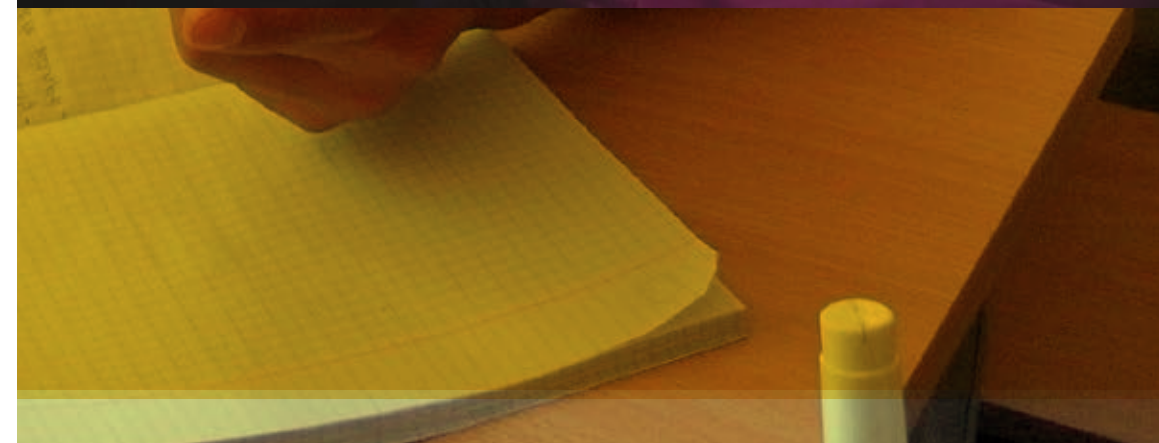
- Social innovation
- Smart territories
- Managed migration
- Decentralisation of VET systems
- Digital learning.

While technological innovation tends to grab the headlines, the potential of social innovation in relation to VET remains largely untapped. Involving some combination of new social practices, social relations, ideas, or services, social innovation includes phenomena such as crowd-sourcing, social entrepreneurship, the 'sharing economy', and other new forms of knowing, doing, or organising. For example, when groups of energy-conscious consumers generate power using solar panels and create a surplus which can be sold or shared, they occupy a new category: 'prosumers' (producer/consumers).

In VET systems there is great potential for developing innovation as an explicit objective. Innovation relies on local solutions and therefore forms part of the 'think global, act local' motto that also inspires the smart territories

work described above. In both cases, expectations are high. EU Commission President Jean-Claude Juncker's Agenda for Jobs, Growth, Fairness and Democratic Change is already delivering a new EU Programme for Employment and Social Innovation.

By insisting on a community-based approach, the agenda for both social innovation and smart territories goes beyond traditional institutions. This is a big challenge, as well as an opportunity, for education and training institutions from general secondary to higher education, as non-traditional actors arise from an emerging smart/social nexus. A similar scenario within VET systems, prompting a move towards a more community-based approach, could see the development of innovative solutions to some of the issues we are facing.



Communities must also respond to the disparate needs of migrants, refugees, and other vulnerable or socially excluded groups, contributing to the pressure to reform VET systems. This is already affecting policy decisions in our partner countries. For example, in Lebanon efforts are being made to include refugees from Syria in the education system. Turkey is also taking steps to open its education system, and is granting work permits to help integrate refugees into the labour market. These moves clearly require far-reaching changes. From the moment work permits are issued there is an interest to get access to training. There are EU programmes which offer this access, initially mostly higher education through digital means, and we want to see greater provision of VET in this format. The link with EU programmes is another reason why we work on managed migration as an integral part of the design of systems and the mobilisation of resources. After all, it will remain a challenge for many years to come.

The widespread trend to decentralise VET systems is yet another factor adding to the importance of communities as the locus of reform. However, decentralisation only works if it is backed by good multi-level governance and appropriate resources, enabling institutions and communities to play their roles effectively. Otherwise the risk is that the state will remain the only actor capable of delivering reform and, as we know only too well, the public sector is increasingly stretched. Trusting local actors to deliver, though, remains an issue. There is a self-fulfilling prophecy of failure if decentralisation is inadequately implemented, and regional and local actors are then deemed incapable of producing results.

Finally, we will be exploiting the digital revolution both to boost systemic reform and to improve our own ability to provide support. We are always striving to innovate. After all, we encourage our partners to be more creative, asking them to anticipate what might be coming up in their countries in 2018, 2019, 2020... so what about us? We must embrace the challenge too.



FIND OUT MORE

BUILDING ON 20 YEARS OF ACHIEVEMENT

The ETF was set up in 1994 and is based in Turin, Italy. It has an annual budget of €20m and employs 132 staff.

Find out more about our history in Learn More, published in 2014 to celebrate our 20th anniversary. Available at:
etf.europa.eu/web.nsf/pages/ETF_20th_anniversary

Did you know we publish a regular magazine containing news and views on education and training in the ETF partner countries and beyond?

If you're already a regular reader of Live and Learn, then do let us know what you think of it, or contact us to find out how to subscribe: COMM@etf.europa.eu





The ETF is an EU agency that helps transition and developing countries to harness the potential of their human capital through the reform of education, training and labour market systems in the context of the EU's external relations policy.

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