MULTILEVEL GOVERNANCE IN EDUCATION AND TRAINING:
CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES

Brussels on 31 May and 1 June

CONFERENCE CONCLUSIONS

The ETF conference on multilevel governance brought together some 145 participants from 37 countries. Almost all ETF partner countries, excluding only Algeria and Syria, were present at the conference. Besides partner countries and EU institutions there were also a number of EU Member States and international organisations represented in the event. The event was organised by ETF in cooperation with the Committee of the Regions.

The conference aimed to answer the question: How can good multi-level governance contribute to the performance of education and training systems and policies? The thematic debate in the conference was organised in four workshops that tackled the levels of central government, regional authorities, VET institutions and schools and, finally, the cooperation with social partners and civil society.

Why multilevel governance of education and training?

The relevance of the issue of multilevel governance was highlighted by ETF partner countries in the Torino Process policy reviews that were conducted for the first time in 2010. This was also highlighted in the Torino Process declaration adopted at the end of the international conference that took place in Turin in May 2011. Twenty-nine countries participated in that event and indicated multilevel governance as one of the priorities to shape future work and policy discussion on VET policies and human capital development.

Multilevel governance can support modernisation of VET to be more responsive to various needs of economy and society. The effectiveness of education and training policies is a crucial issue for EU pre-accession and neighbouring countries given their persistent, high unemployment levels, emerging skill mismatches and territorial disparities. Education and training can contribute to employability, economic development and social cohesion. In times of economic crisis or austerity, more efficient governance will also lead to more efficient use of public funds. This was clearly stated in the conference.
The pilot study

To prepare the conference the ETF organised a six-country study to find more about the achievements and remaining challenges in the field of governance of VET. The study covered Azerbaijan, Croatia, Kazakhstan, Serbia, Tunisia and Ukraine. This study piloted a methodology for mapping, analysing, assessing and identifying future steps.

The methodology of the study was based on proposed principles of good governance:

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<tr>
<th>Principle</th>
<th>Working definition</th>
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<tr>
<td>Relevance</td>
<td>Responsiveness to needs of the economy and learners</td>
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<td>Effectiveness</td>
<td>Delivering policies timely, on the basis of clear objectives and learning from experience</td>
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<td>Subsidiarity &amp; proportionality</td>
<td>Decisions are taken at the most appropriate level;</td>
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<td>Transparency</td>
<td>Open processes and sharing of information</td>
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<tr>
<td>Accountability</td>
<td>Roles and responsibilities are clearly defined and practices comply to standards</td>
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<td>Participation</td>
<td>Inclusive approach throughout the policy chain</td>
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The grid for the mapping took into account three levels governance, which are the national and regional authorities and the level of VET providers. This is complemented with the sector approach, where businesses and social partners can deliver their messages from the economy and labour market to be taken into consideration in decision making.

Secondly the grid covered various VET policy areas which included policy planning, qualifications and curricula, teachers and trainers, management of VET providers, work-based learning, quality assurance and monitoring and finally the funding of VET.

The findings of the study revealed that although countries are starting from rather centralised governance systems, they all understand the need for more openness and involvement of different actors. So far engagement of stakeholders is more concentrated in consultative processes in the phase of policy design than in the implementation of policies.

At the conference, several countries expressed their interest to the use this methodology to analyse their governance systems.

**Findings of the conference**

Many ETF partner countries decision making is hierarchical and centralised. The policies and also curricula are in the hands of central governments. Schools are often owned, managed and run by central authorities. Some ETF partner countries have already started moving to decentralization, but in practice most of the development has been more cosmetic rather than real. Both horizontal and vertical cooperation are challenges for most of the countries.

Shared responsibilities in VET should cover both the content and methods of training as well as human resources and infrastructure for the provision of training. There is often a lack of coordination to make multilevel governance systems or horizontal cooperation with economic sectors functional. It is a challenge to identify and make use of different coordination mechanisms to be utilized in reforms of the governance by the partner countries.

Governance of VET can be supported or done by various bodies like national or sector councils but these are only tools not means. More important than structures is the work that is done through these structures. This kind of organisations need funding and technical and expertise support. Their tasks and responsibilities should be recognised in legislations.
Accountability and capacity building should be key components in the implementation of multilevel governance. Countries are at different levels so there is an on-going need to advocate for multi-level governance.

**Regions**

In multilevel governance identification of the right level of decision making is at stake. A good balance needs to be found between a facilitating of conditions and a controlling role of the state. Despite decentralization or political will to move towards decentralization the role of central government remain vitally important for the VET policymaking. This doesn’t change even if central government shares its current monopoly of decision-making.

There seems to be a tendency of shifting more responsibilities to regional and local authorities and in particular to schools. This should be continued and supported with provision of more autonomy. The stronger role for regions isn’t only depending on central governments. Often regional authorities have a passive approach. They wait for the possible offer of government although they should build up proactive strategies. This kind of organizational behaviour can be related to existing administrative cultures and traditions.

Understanding how the deconcentration of powers supports engagement of multiple actors in VET policies and systems is an important part of multilevel governance. In this respect, building up vertical relations call for more proactive strategies and approaches from regional authorities towards central governments whilst there is a strong need to explore how to improve horizontal relations to manage VET policies and systems.

When government decides to share responsibility on VET is should also clarify the roles and responsibilities of different actors involved. This should include also those at the regional and local levels. Shared responsibilities should come with resources and funding.

There can be a competition of powers between the central and regional authorities even if the territorial dimension is more and more important due to the request of training delivery very much linked to local needs. As VET is a tool for economic development and maximisation of the human capital, lower levels of public authorities should be able to utilise it for the needs of the regional authorities.

**Partnerships**

One of the common challenges is empowerment of non-governmental actors. All actors, including levels of governance that are sharing their powers, are in need of capacity building and support to carry through multi-level governance. Professionalization of various partners is a key issue. Lack of communication and coordination among the different actors involved in VET provision is a problem.

Partnership in general demands empowerment of the (social) dialogue and organisations that participate in dialogue. The willingness of government to share power can actually increase the capacity of governments to impose policies and practises.

Involvement of different stakeholders may be a politically sensitive question. E.g. participation of social partners in VET may be enforced in national legislation but it can still be politically charged question. The challenge is then to identify the role and the format for their effective involvement. It is important that social partners understand what their role and function is in the cooperation at different levels of governance. All this demands strategies from the government to empower civil society as well social partner organisations to be more involved in VET policies and implementation and review.

Simultaneously organisational fragmentation or unstructured working methods among social partners and other stakeholders can mean that their messages are lost. The shortcomings in stakeholders’ capacities can take place at national or regional level. Often capacity of various organisations varies from one economic sector to another sector.

Cooperation demands involvement of different levels of government and stakeholders but also practical cooperation with individual enterprises and businesses. One of the conclusions was that the employers should be given a strong role in all VET partnership. Especially at the school level.

conclusions mlg
partnership can cover also different representatives of the local civic society, not only the economic actors.

Thirdly to enhance the involvement of the social partners and other stakeholders the government needs to have a vision or an initiative in which stakeholders can respond. This doesn’t mean that initiatives should be limited to government, but in highly centralised political context the change of mentality takes time. Openness for initiatives is part of transparency of policymaking processes.

Focusing on end users can help to solve the mismatch between VET and labour Markets. Redistribution of powers helps to tailor VET to needs of the different markets. Different sector initiatives contribute to matching demand and supply of VET. Anticipation of skill needs is a tool to promote implementation of multilevel governance. This is linked to development of qualifications and qualification systems to meet the needs of changing society.

At the VET school level empowerment of school managers and school boards is needed to enhance partnership at local levels. This demands more autonomy for the VET schools. In many cases it can include flexibility to adapt curricula to local or regional needs of economy. If VET is considered to be a collective issue it demands collective actions and partnership. Local businesses, social partners or communities can participate in management of schools.

**Capacity building**

Actors, in particular school managers, need capacity building to allow them to adapt to the changing environment and requirements. Needs of capacity building are not limited to lower levels of governance but they should also cover the institutions that are sharing their traditional powers. It is important to advocate for multilevel governance during the reform process at all levels involved. It is also important to create incentives for various institutions and stakeholders to be involved in modernization of governance for better provision of education and training.

**Next steps for the ETF**

Multilevel governance is a cross-cutting topic among ETF projects. Many partner countries have initiatives that are linked to multilevel governance. For ETF it is crucial to identify what kind of good and also less good practises exist and how these can be utilized in other ETF work. ETF is also supporting regional development approaches in VET in some partner countries. Secondly ETF has already cross country projects and country projects which aim to support more intensive involvement of stakeholders, especially social partners. These projects must be used to develop working methods how horizontal and vertical cooperation can be supported and empowered. A good example of this kind of projects is the 9 country project Governance for Employability that will start in SEMED region in 2013.

Dissemination and sharing the information together with networking various actors from different countries is in the heart of the ETF work. International networks facilitated by the ETF can support implementation of MLG approaches in partner countries. A key factor is to identify right set of leadership and management capacities that are needed from the VET actors.

**Summary of the conclusions**

1. Need for coordinated action among stakeholders
2. Focus on horizontal and vertical cooperation.
3. From involvement to active participation of stakeholders
4. Policy thinking on role of the state (facilitation and control).
5. Identification of clear functions and responsibilities when government powers are shared.
6. Implementation of MLG demands capacity building and accountability.
7. Autonomy of VET schools and empowerment of the school directors.