

The impact of vocational education on poverty reduction, quality assurance and mobility on regional labour markets – selected EU-funded schemes

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SUMMARY

Vocational education can serve to promote social stability and sustainable economic and social development. The European Union (EU) strategically employs a range of vocational educational schemes to attain these overriding goals. Topical points of focus are selected in line with requirements in the individual partner countries or regions. However, during scheme planning and implementation, flexible and problem-oriented approaches by which partners retain responsibility, while also having the opportunity to participate in learning processes, are of equal importance. This approach produces realistic assessments of the possible effects of interventions in the form of international cooperation. Flexible procedures and fixed-term schemes subject to limited financial input provide a vital basis for such learning processes, which improve partners' capacity to act in preparation for far-reaching political decisions with regard to innovative changes and fundamental reforms in qualification systems.

Keywords

European Training Foundation (ETF), poverty reduction, national qualification profile, migration, intervention, system theory

Introduction

The European Union (EU) and its specialist agencies provide support to the EU's neighbouring countries and a group of developing countries as they reform their vocational educational systems. The principal aim here is to improve the internal effectiveness and efficiency of the existing systems. With a view to promoting lifelong learning, transitions between general and vocational training and between the qualification system and employment must also be improved. Vocational education must be conceptualised and (in some cases) redesigned within the context of the overall educational system and the changing requirements of the labour markets.

The EU offers a number of different forms of cooperation: its involvement in budgetary financing is complemented by technical cooperation and consultation during the elaboration and introduction of relevant schemes designed to reform the vocational education system. Consulting services specifically developed to meet the needs of the individual countries initiate, *inter alia*, forms of technical cooperation which support the partners during the preparation of tender invitations for EU-funded projects. However, in terms of content, the concepts must be based on the strategic planning considerations of those responsible as regards the problems associated with the vocational qualification systems in the countries concerned, which also take sufficient account of individual national and regional conditions. The pure transfer of knowledge is just as undesirable as the external initiation of reform processes, because firstly – given the national conditions of the available qualification systems – abstract knowledge cannot be readily used, and secondly, concepts must be based upon a democratically legitimised political decision-making processes and ownership if they are to contribute to the introduction of lasting reforms.

Smaller projects ⁽¹⁾ with manageable terms and limited budgets can initiate important learning processes and support subsequent political decision-making processes: local pilot measures and associated programmes comprising visits to specialist organisations within Europe and its neighbouring countries help initiate the development of innovative and strategic alternatives for the reform of vocational

⁽¹⁾ This paper describes three such projects, which have been implemented by the European Training Foundation.

educational systems and support their ultimate implementation in the respective context – insofar as the necessary intent exists/evolves. Such European projects exist in virtually all areas of vocational education; they play a key role in the current international debate concerning the development of strategies aimed at realigning qualification systems. They include:

- Skills Development for Poverty Reduction (SDPR),
- National qualifications frameworks (NQF),
- human resources migration and development,
- Entrepreneurship Learning,
- social integration through qualification,
- recognition of skills gained through informal learning processes etc.

Manageable projects in these areas make it possible to tackle the ever-growing gulf between pure political consulting and the resultant implementation problems in subsequent projects in the field of development cooperation (DC), for example. Such small schemes are also capable of preparing possible EU follow-up projects.

Alongside these topics, which are vocational in the narrow sense, other aspects will be important in the future: labour market information systems (labour market analyses, vocational guidance and recruitment services) will play a greater role in all partner countries, and consequently also in European cooperation services. Topics range from the adaptation of statistical survey methods to European standards (e.g. to measure unemployment) to the increased orientation of national vocational guidance systems towards modern lifelong learning principles. All this will take place against the background of effective Flexicurity approaches ⁽²⁾ in the EU, which are responsible – in Denmark and Sweden, for example – for greater mobility on the labour market and the necessary willingness to be mobile (Eurofound, 2007, p. 25).

In capacity building terms, all these schemes contribute towards potential EU enlargement, and also towards regional cooperation with the EU's neighbours. This will be explained later in concrete terms, using the examples of selected projects.

⁽²⁾ Flexicurity approaches combine flexible forms of legal employment options (such as fixed term contracts) involving the advancement of the unemployed (in terms of qualification) in a manner that is both targeted and tailored in such a way as to enhance personal competence.

EU instruments

The EU's method of grouping its directly and indirectly neighbouring regions differs from the OECD's DAC criteria (Development Assistance Committee). This was principally due to geopolitical and strategic considerations in relation to future EU enlargement. The Commission defined three instruments, which are of direct relevance to working with the partner countries and which, much like the regional and sector-focussed approach in English, German and Swedish development cooperation, for example, set out clear framework conditions as regards content. In this respect, a distinction must be made between the following:

- Instrument for Development Cooperation (DCI),
- European Neighbourhood and Partnership Instrument (ENPI),
- Instrument for Pre-Accession Assistance (IPA).

Within the context of the sector-specific approach and the institutional tasks and competences, all three instruments must be applied to the needs of each partner country's vocational qualification system in a consensual and ownership-based manner. In order to achieve this, European specialist organisations/agencies must provide the consulting services required to introduce the three instruments and guarantee their effective application.

DCI supports countries in Central Asia in their human resources development strategies through the reform-based establishment of more efficient qualification systems. These countries aim to sustainably promote their economic and social development through the qualification of the skilled workers required for this purpose, and thereby establish national structures that will reduce the migration of many qualified skilled workers – in particular to Kazakhstan, Russia and Ukraine – for reasons related to labour and income, or will entirely prevent such migration in the long term. The DCI is aimed at a number of Central Asia's traditional developing countries, which are also of increasing significance in bilateral DC. When the German EU Presidency ended in June 2007, the German Foreign Minister strongly emphasised the important role of vocational education in this development process.

The ENPI is aimed at the EU's neighbouring countries whose accession is not on the agenda. The instrument is used by a range of countries, from the Russian Federation and Ukraine to Morocco. It is thus geared towards a number of developing countries in the MEDA/MENA region (Middle and Near East and North African

countries). In principle, however, it covers all the countries bordering the Mediterranean and also the republics in the Caucasus.

The IPA instrument contributes in particular towards the EU enlargement process and is aimed at accession candidate countries such as Turkey, Croatia and Macedonia, and at potential candidate countries in the Balkans. Cooperation based on this instrument contributes towards the modernisation of the general and vocational educational systems and towards a reform of the existing labour market information systems. However, one project also investigates the motives of migrants, their skills profiles and the resultant effects and requirements with regard to vocational qualification systems – also with a view to promoting social integration in the Balkans, a sensitive region in security policy terms.

The schemes/projects

Against the background of EU policies and the three instruments, the projects give preference to strategies that have strong ties to the EU's history, establishment and enlargement process. The principal patterns of action employed in the context of cooperation between partners comprise regional cooperation, peer learning, policy learning, political consulting and network formation. This paper will present some projects in the fields of migration, poverty reduction and take a look at contributions towards national qualification profiles. The projects were selected because – in addition to technical schemes within the vocational educational sector in the narrower sense – they highlight the significant contribution of vocational qualification processes to overriding economic and social goals (economic growth and social stability).

In this context, the directive maxim applies that countries can only achieve closer relations with or membership of the EU by independently defining national development bottlenecks and identifying appropriate solutions (ownership and personal responsibility). In this context, practical learning processes during the introduction of innovative schemes are very important. 'Policy learning' within the context of the experience gained from schemes with fixed terms and budgets is an instrument that replaces the previously standard approaches of merely transferring know-how and replicating solutions already developed by advanced countries. Systematic and dialogue-based learning within the context of well-considered

project experience can help meet national requirements for action and reform in a partner-oriented manner. Such learning processes are generally preceded by large-scale cooperation schemes (involving technical cooperation). Without such learning processes, institutional developments that constitute key criteria for reforms and for the application of and adherence to EU standards would not be possible within the scope of the IPA instrument.

For this reason, it is essential that the political elite and other relevant stakeholders are informed about innovations in education and training and also in a position/willing to implement them in an EU-compatible manner. The (further) development of human resources in preparation for institutional reforms through learning processes therefore becomes a key factor in institutional performance.

The strategies and learning processes referred to above play an important part in the three projects to be presented in this paper: only partners who are sufficiently well informed of the likely advantages and disadvantages of systemic innovations in vocational education will endeavour to implement these innovations coherently and on the basis of a proper mandate.

Skills Development for Poverty Reduction (SDPR)

Vocational mobility in Central Asia is closely related to migration. 10 % of the population of Tajikistan alone lives in neighbouring countries (Jonson, 2006) According to the Swiss Federal Office for Migration (www.bfm.admin.ch), approx. 117 million people worldwide live outside their native country, of which 17 million are refugees. The vast majority of Central Asians migrate as a result of the disastrous employment situation in their native countries, which are still unable to offer them and their families satisfactory economic and social prospects following the breakup of the Soviet Union. By contrast, even within the enlarged EU, only 5 % give transnational mobility any thought at all, and an even smaller proportion actually put their plans into action (Eurofound, 2007, p. 14 et seq.).

Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan have begun working together in the field of poverty reduction within the scope of an EU-funded project spanning several years (2006 to 2008). The project was motivated by the fact that, during the transition to a market economy, these countries require support not only in the towns, but also in their rural areas. Coupled with this, the dissolution of the Soviet-style rural production conditions based primarily on division of labour has made many former qualifications redundant.

Furthermore, the decades of political socialisation are still hindering the development of new entrepreneurial thought patterns, which are particularly essential for small agricultural producers to market and sell their own produce.

The problems associated with rural areas and their development – which is in part training-based – are once again featuring prominently in development policy debate, following years of virtually systematic neglect. In its most recent report in 2008, the World Bank referred to the relevance of rural areas in the context of poverty reduction and social stability. However, similar EU schemes have already been providing aid to rural areas in the Central Asian countries for two years, as the breakup of the Communist economic system has again afforded such areas special and sustained strategic importance as regards the stability of entire regions. Stabilising these areas can help reduce internal migration to larger towns and abroad, which is an important prerequisite for promoting regionally balanced economic and social development.

Given this situation, rural vocational college centres have an important strategic function in conveying sustainable skills. However, they require support: their skills services, which are only minimally demand-oriented and often still rooted in the former socialist context, must be adapted to the current situation. Elements that have been lacking to date include both appropriate insights and a different kind of institutional remit, which is needs-based and which has its foundations in the capacity building of these educational institutions (consulting, continuing training, promotion of participative institutional changes, etc.). The problem in rural areas has been exacerbated by both national and international migratory movements, with many households run by women because the men have moved away to take advantage of employment demand in other countries.

Migration has primarily involved the most highly qualified workers. Women in particular are thus confronted with the question of how and with what skills they can better secure their rural living in the future. This is compounded by the knowledge that the labour markets in rural areas will not be recruiting large numbers of additional regular employees in the foreseeable future.

As a result, rural projects in all three countries have a dual purpose: (female) target groups receive further training, with the aim of using their newly acquired skills in the manufacture marketable products. To achieve this, however, rehabilitation services in rural colleges are vital. Capacity building at the three rural pilot colleges in the

aforementioned countries involved and still involves services such as consulting, training local managers and teachers, peer learning among the Central Asian partners and targeted coaching during visits programmes to Europe.

The scheme consciously incorporates all the services offered by other bilateral donors, with a view to establishing networks. It is clear that training designed to consolidate rural livelihoods under market economic conditions cannot be attained solely in the classrooms of rural skills centres, but must consciously involve the entire living space and realm of experience of rural target groups (Atchoarena and Gasperini, 2003). To this end, the beneficiary target groups must acquire practice-oriented skills on cultivated land and farms, i.e. in their real environments.

National qualifications frameworks (NQF)

This scheme (running from 2005 to 2008) involves the Central Asian countries of Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan and is subject to extremely heterogeneous conditions. All these countries take the view that compatible qualifications frameworks offer major advantages both at national level and with regard to regional cooperation. On a pilot-project basis, all three countries have agreed to develop a graded qualifications system comprising building-block like modules in the economically important vocational field of tourism. The initial conditions of the individual countries differ considerably in terms of gaining access to the global economy and achieving better economic and social development. Its natural resources provide Kazakhstan in particular with an additional advantage over the other countries, while a very unfavourable start as an independent nation (due to the civil war) slowed down Tajikistan's development momentum.

The relatively fast pace of exploitation of available natural resources and the need for the country to achieve strong qualification-based economic development makes decision-makers in Kazakhstan receptive to innovation in vocational education. Vocational skills attainment is seen as an integral component of successful economic and social development in both functional and strategic terms. This includes the ambitious attempt to direct and combine vocational skills into a qualifications framework that seeks to promote vocational mobility by ensuring that skills remain comparable.

Tajikistan, which has lost a good proportion of its qualified workforce through migration, has fallen behind the other two countries in terms of developing the necessary reform momentum. After the Ministry

of Education assumed responsibility for vocational education, the requisite increases in financial and material resources failed to materialise. As a result there have been only minimal advances in the resource-intensive development of national qualifications and vocational profiles within the scope of the pilot scheme (in the vocational field of tourism) – a criticism that has recently been expressed on an increasingly frequent basis in the context of developing countries.

This trend is confirmed not only by impressions gained during periods spent in Tajikistan, but also by the results of the regular peer reviews between the countries in question. These reviews are conducted by experts who are responsible for the same areas in the countries involved. The aim of this instrument is to consciously promote specialist exchange and regional cooperation between these countries and to enhance their capacity to learn from one another. The reviews conducted to date clearly demonstrate the variation in development tempos in each country, which results from the variable and regionally fluctuating institutional performance in the partner countries.

The effects of migration

The European Commission places great importance on the migration project (running during 2006 and 2007). With a view to providing policy consulting, fundamental reasons for the migration behaviour of the EU's neighbouring countries are being researched: empirical studies relating to the (potential) migration behaviour of workers were conducted in Albania, Egypt, Moldavia and Tunisia. Field studies were conducted, based on up to 2 000 interviews per country, half with potential migrants and half with returning migrants.

A number of EU Directorates (Foreign Affairs, Enlargement, Justice etc.) require these findings in order to develop a more coherent EU immigration policy in the medium term which they can recommend to Member States. To date, Member States are approaching new EU Members and neighbouring countries as the requirements of their labour market situation dictate. At present, in view of its own employment problems, Germany is broadly refusing employment-motivated migration from Eastern Europe. In contrast, Ireland and England needed workers and thus pursued a very liberal policy. Other countries take a very selective approach. The EU has set itself the goal of combating illegal migration, aiming instead to promote legal mobility and to obtain information about migration associated

with the ageing EU population by means of secure data. In addition, migration management in cooperation with the individual partner countries must be based on verified statements. However, one fact has already become clear and is of great significance to EU-funded poverty reduction strategies with regard to the future elaboration of related rules: 'Mobility of low-skilled workers has a greater impact on poverty reduction in the sending countries than mobility of the high skilled' (OECD, 2007).

This leads back to the overriding question of the problem and causation correlations associated with migration: Is migration a question that can primarily and in the narrow sense be promoted/triggered by vocational education and qualification regulations, or are the employment policy considerations of the political elite in the target countries and people's beliefs associated with maximising their income ultimately at the root of the complex issues related to migration? At the moment, for example, Tunisia is recommending fixed term mobility for highly qualified manpower at university level, because for the foreseeable future there are insufficient employment opportunities in the country itself. In Egypt, a relatively high number of academics resulted in relatively low salaries for university graduates, who only found employment in the inflated state sector (World Bank, 2008), with the result that many are willing to migrate. Migration is a complex social phenomenon which can always be viewed from two perspectives depending on the interests involved (similarly to economic analyses): on the one hand, expenses (or disadvantages) and, on the other, income (or advantages).

New regulatory criteria in the field of vocational education such as qualifications frameworks would appear to be, *inter alia*, a reaction to migration movements, the complex social causes of which lie primarily in economic and social spheres. This is not exclusively poverty-based migration, but also includes entirely legal migration, which involves optimising personal vocational prospects within a broader economic geographical framework. In addition, such qualifications frameworks counterbalance private education providers' more commercially-driven methods of conveying skills and will therefore produce a levelling effect in Europe with regard to the large range of different products available with the same outcomes and lead to co-existence between private and public education providers.

The fact that many (developing) countries are overstretched when it comes to the design of such frameworks will be an issue that will increasingly come to the fore in European and bilateral vocational

education cooperation (BBZ). Furthermore, an unmistakable trend towards creating blueprints for European approaches is pushing fundamental questions related to vocational learning into the background (Grootings, 2007). Evident problems associated with the partner countries' vocational education systems (inadequate opportunities to apply acquired qualifications to an actual employment situation, absence of consistent and incentivising HRD strategy for teaching and training personnel, the use of traditional teaching methods and examination methods, etc.) are also eclipsed in the face of the National qualifications framework, which is clearly seen as the main problem-solver. This made it all the more important to put institutional willingness and the capacity to configure such qualifications frameworks to the test in project partnerships.

Such regulatory criteria would also offer the advantage that, if properly configured, they would facilitate assessment of the qualifications of migrants from neighbouring countries, and help resolve problems associated with the brain drain in the sending countries (which undeniably exists) by means of development and a purpose-designed returners programme. In particular, somewhat underqualified migrants, who have had a palpable impact on poverty reduction, could use their new vocational experiences and knowledge to contribute towards the transfer of knowledge and skills in the sending countries.

Initial scheme results

All the projects described above, with the exception of the scheme related to migration, are still in progress, although their terms have already been extended. The results of the two projects still running are therefore not definitive. The provisional nature of the stages completed (and even those not completed) will undoubtedly result in further project adaptations, in particular if the adjustments to the ongoing course of the project produce systemic consequences for vocational education. Such adaptations come about as a result of the interests of the partners involved; these interests are incorporated over the course of the project in question and in some cases change as a result of learning achieved throughout the process. This momentum cannot be reflected *a priori* in the planning tools of development cooperation projects, such as Logical Framework. During a scheme's preparatory phase, this approach comprises creating a matrix that

combines the project goals, associated activities, indicators and assumptions concerning the general framework.

On the basis of (interim) findings, it is not sufficient to merely discuss experiences and outcomes in partnership with the institutions involved and define any changes to strategies concerning joint action. At this point at the latest, there must also be reflection at the point of interface between interventions into other systems (Willke, 1996) concerning realistically achievable outcomes and topics arising in recent debates in relation to various aspects, including:

- vocational qualification approaches within the context of recent contributions towards poverty reduction (recent examples being DFID, 2007 and ETF, 2006). At present this goal-setting is not up-to-date in many multilateral and bilateral schemes, in spite of the fact that the MDG (Millennium Development Goals) form the basis for virtually all the development cooperation schemes and vocational education's special significance within the context of economic and social development goals (Wallenborn, 2007);
- objections that have barely been documented in literature to date but which are increasingly raised by experts in development cooperation. These concern the question as to whether complex regulatory criteria such as national qualifications frameworks do not in fact overburden many partners in less developed countries or effectively amount to a new export of systems which cannot be sustained in the medium term in many countries owing to inadequate resources.

The figures relating to transnational migration within the EU and the results of the migration project from the EU's four neighbouring countries demonstrate that work-related (circular) migration processes must be interpreted within a complex network of the causes and interests involved in the countries of origin and the host countries. The interests of the migrants on regional labour markets only gain full significance against this background, and do not necessarily correspond to the interests of the political elite in the countries in question. Instead of appraising the function of national/regional qualifications frameworks in terms of quality assurance and potential EU compatibility, some experts tend more to assess them in a rather sceptical manner, in spite of the fact that they pave the way for further migration of skilled workers to other countries requiring a boost to their workforce. 'Certifiable migration', based on qualifications frameworks, is obviously easier to manage and control in the host countries.

The political efforts of those responsible (in the Balkans, for example) are directed instead at encouraging the return of qualified skilled workers, in the interests of their own economy's needs and stability. In emerging countries such as Montenegro, labour market studies are already highlighting an increasing shortage of skilled workers at various levels in tourism, industry and health (Ministry of Health, Labour and Social Welfare, 2007). Current preparations for a national qualifications framework are thus viewed as the result of national macroeconomic calculations, rather than being in the interests of the working population, who are willing to be mobile.

Skills Development for Poverty Reduction (SDPR)

Alongside the social plight of the rural population in the countries of Central Asia, an additional matter was taken into consideration during project planning and in discussions with those responsible in the countries in question. The following question was posed with a view to implementing systemic reforms: Can rural skills centres play a meaningful role in poverty reduction through vocational qualification? This would mean making more efficient use of existing vocational educational structures in these areas than has been the case to date. Up until now, such qualification programmes have generally been implemented at local level by non-governmental organisations (NGOs), who offer a fair number of bespoke, target group-oriented qualification programmes that are tailored to local requirements. However, they create parallel structures to existing services and institutions. Furthermore, it is important to consider how the use of existing structures impacts schemes associated with Community Based Approaches and what systemic changes may need to be introduced into the vocational qualification system.

In Central Asia, a certain level of willingness to experiment is apparent in relation to systemic changes to vocational education. In Tajikistan, for example, responsibility for the vocational college centres offering initial vocational training was transferred from the Ministry of Employment to the Ministry of Education, which is already responsible for the higher vocational education skills centres. Five further centres were assigned to the Ministry of Employment for further adult training. Against this background, the current poverty reduction project is still unreservedly welcomed. It is viewed as something of an experimental phase with integrated Policy Learning content with the aim of determining a more precise functional definition of centres for initial vocational qualification in the future and possibly enabling the target group-oriented qualification of poor population groups.

Since the EU-funded programmes offered to date by colleges in the area of non-formal training content aimed at (female) adults have produced good results, these activities are being monitored very closely by those responsible at local and national level. The training programmes enabled the participants (who included many women) to make good progress in the manufacture of marketable products and thereby earn additional income. The impending peer reviews must therefore consider the possibility of making more intensive use of the infrastructure of rural vocational colleges for such community schemes in addition to their regular standard initial training services (which also require restructuring). These approaches deal with the entire environment and vocational college centres come to realise by means of an ongoing learning process that they are only one component within a local network comprising a range of other players, such as extension services, organised farmers, cattle breeders and business-promoting institutions, along with the local authorities.

In Kyrgyzstan it was possible to arrange for students on qualification courses to have access to the existing network of a regional bank for microloans. The pilot vocational college took very concrete steps to put into practice its realisation that, for the purposes of local economic promotion, it is only one component within a more complex network of agencies offering a range of services to poor population groups. The students on the informal courses were thus also systematically and very successfully trained to prepare relevant business plans as a criterion for obtaining a loan.

At systemic level, the most important interim result to date has been the fact that it is possible to combine standardised traditional vocational qualification services and flexible services designed to convey appropriate skills to the target group in traditional educational institutions, at relatively low cost in terms of continuing training measures for the college directors and teaching staff. This institutional further development of pilot vocational colleges constituted the most significant external, EU-funded contribution. It is now the task of domestic decision-makers not only to adopt a favourable attitude towards the pursuit of such activities, but also to systematically develop them in order to make rural vocational colleges as the new norm.

National qualifications framework (NQF)

This scheme does not aim to develop a coherent and all-encompassing national qualifications framework for all vocational fields. The intention

was rather to single out a vocational field (tourism) with considerable economic potential. With regard to this field, the partners:

- can be made aware not only of the advantages, but also of the significant expense associated with the development of descriptors and the classification of skills. This will enable experts in the region to better judge the considerable resources necessary to developing such regulatory criteria;
- will grasp the need for ownership and hence participation of representatives from the principal social groups in such frameworks;
- will take due account of regional coordination as a prerequisite for worker mobility.

The project could be the preparatory phase for the comprehensive introduction of a National qualifications framework covering all vocational fields. During its term, the scheme gives national experts at various functional levels of the qualifications system an idea of what the establishment of a National qualifications framework would involve for them. These jointly agreed project goals and strategies have already enabled the creation of the principal vocational profiles for the tourism sector at various qualification levels. During this development process, the individual methodical stages were again examined at a meta-level and appropriate descriptors were agreed. Each of the countries involved now has a platform where social partners can conduct an appropriate dialogue in relation to further development.

In Kazakhstan, this process also culminated in another EU scheme in 2006, which involved working together with local skilled workers to develop four other vocational fields of strategic relevance to the local economy (construction, transport, metal and food production), taking a competence-based approach to incorporate these fields into a qualifications framework. In countries such as Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan, the progress achieved in the pilot sector of tourism is expected to continue to exist independently alongside other skills training services. Both these countries have learnt that the establishment of a comprehensive qualifications framework requires greater resources than are currently available to them.

Given the actual circumstances, this cannot be seen as a poor result. The responsible vocational educational institutions are still extremely weak and understaffed. External assistance is urgently required simply to update the curricula. However, Policy Learning Processes made those responsible aware of the effort involved

in the development of qualifications frameworks. Drawing the realistic conclusion that variously designed and (partially) updated vocational educational services will continue to exist more or less heterogeneously alongside one another for the foreseeable future represents an important realisation on the part of these countries vis-à-vis their institutional capability ⁽³⁾ and the lack of coherence of their structures and institutional potential compared with those of external donors. With this in mind, the main interim result is significant: even traditional structures can be used for vocational educational innovation without incurring significant expense. Institutions can absorb these structures with relative ease and they also contribute towards poverty reduction (see the poverty reduction project).

Qualifications frameworks represent a huge expense for weaker countries in Central Asia. On the one hand they must take account of the latest technological developments; on the other, they must strike a balance between staying up to date with rapid advances in technology and meeting the related skills requirements in order to create productive processes. As a rule, such know-how is not available at local level in countries such as Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan. The partners should decide on a case-by-case basis the extent to which they commission adaptations externally or transfer responsibility for meeting these qualification requirements to the companies that are seeking the skilled workers in order to expand production. No clear trend is evident either in practice or within the context of international debate. This fact must also be communicated openly to the partners within the context of their institutional conditions.

Migration

Transfers made by migrants to their countries of origin represent an important economic factor. This was noted for the first time in Central America, where the associated statistics were recorded in detail: every year, the 'remesas' (remittances) of El Salvador nationals in the United States provide El Salvador with a positive foreign trade balance. In Albania, such funds account for 13.5 % of gross domestic product (UNDP, 2006). In 2003, transfers made by migrants totalled around 93 billion dollars, i.e. one and a half times more than official development aid (*D + C*, 2004). The basic

⁽³⁾ In Tajikistan, for example, the Ministry of Education's specialist department for the entire national vocational education system only has a workforce of 13.

findings ⁽⁴⁾ concerning the potential migrants (1) and the returning workers (2) surveyed during the study are set out below:

(1) There are initial indications that migrants today are increasingly qualified and that unqualified workers are having greater difficulty finding employment in other countries due to the fact that global technology is advancing at an ever faster pace (Bardak, 2006, p. 47). This scheme's initial findings confirm this trend: although the qualifications requested of potential migrants fall into all ISCED classifications, we are now seeing a significant accumulation and a trend towards middle and higher-end qualifications. According to the findings of the surveys, migration is not, *per se*, motivated by the desire to enhance one's qualifications in the target country.

The typical migrant is male (although the proportion of women has increased slightly) and generally falls within the age range of 18 to 24 in the four countries involved (Albania, Moldavia, Egypt and Tunisia). 98 % of potential migrants from Albania, for example, state the EU as their goal, a fact which further explains the European Commission's keen interest in the project results and recommendations. The greatest motivation factor for migrants is to improve their own standard of living, even if they already hold a relatively good qualification and a job in their native country. Almost every second person in the four sending countries (Albania 44.3 %, Moldavia 44.2 %, Egypt 47.3 % and Tunisia 63.3 %) is seriously considering migration, which demonstrates exactly what a burning issue it is for the EU. A good half of these potential migrants were unemployed, namely 54.8 %, 49.3 %, 56.8 % and 49.3 % (countries cited in the same order as above).

(2) Only 16.5 % of the returned migrants (from Albania, for example) acquired more skills during their period outside their native country (in Moldavia: 5.1 %; Egypt: 9.0 %; yet in Tunisia: 28 %), although in the case of Albania, 94.6 % were self-employed or only worked on demand. This indicates that the employment relationships involved were generally informal and in some cases precarious (Moldavia 85 %, Egypt 79.7 % and Tunisia 87.2 %).

Most of the migrants return between the ages of 35 to 40 (irrespective of their native country) and tend to have low to mid-range qualifications. In the case of Albania, they spent an average

⁽⁴⁾ All the findings of the studies conducted in the four countries are available at http://www.etf.europa.eu/web.nsf/opennews/CCAFEE00C6254AF5C12573DB003CC3C7_EN?OpenDocument –

of 5.2 years abroad. They find a new job relatively quickly following their return. Of those questioned in the survey, a total of 74.3 % were back in employment. Their main reasons for returning were related to family, or they were expelled from the host country or their residence permit expired. Few of those questioned took advantage of any returners' programmes. Those involved appear to see migration and dealing with it as their own personal problem which does not affect society. Consequently, the vast majority of returners admitted that they had only partially integrated into society, or had not integrated at all (Albania 62.1 %, Moldavia 66.2 %, Egypt 81.3 % and Tunisia 76.3 %).

A few conclusions may be drawn from the above:

- migration is primarily triggered by economic factors. An economic and political situation that promotes employment, combined with qualification programmes, is most likely to prevent migration and is more effective than all other sector policies;
- While vocational education (and its regulatory criteria) is an extremely important variable, it is only one of many variables associated with the complex economic and social phenomenon of 'migration'. This social phenomenon comes into the equation for various interest groups from very different perspectives. Therefore, as regards vocational skills, medium-term pragmatic adaptations to national or regional requirements are more likely than long-term solutions, and entry quotas can be related on a pro rata basis to certain qualification levels. Thus, a thorough comparison of the equivalence of qualifications enables better migration management;
- if there are no legal migration opportunities, then illegal employment in the target country is almost bound to increase, along with exploitative forms of work;
- improved employment opportunities, combined with associated programmes for returners, provide the greatest incentive to return;
- according to statements of those planning to leave, they are neither prepared for migration nor offered any returner programmes; they have to calculate the risks themselves, and are exposed to unpredictable social consequences;
- the question of the recognition of vocational qualifications both during migration and upon return is as yet unresolved and may not necessarily be in the interests of the sending country;
- the latter makes it extremely difficult to quantify potential surpluses

of migratory workers or possible shortages of skilled migratory workers.

The initial findings of a study entitled *Social inclusion of ethnic groups in the western Balkans through education and training*, conducted in the Balkans by the company Promeso on behalf of the EU, document the underlying causes that give rise to migration, which projects at the traditional intervention level (in vocational education or other sectors) can do little to tackle. These include:

- absence or inadequacy of rules preventing racism and discrimination in the educational system of these countries;
- resistance from companies during recruitment vis-à-vis other ethnic groups and prejudice in the workplace;
- chronic lack of resources in some Balkan States, which do not (cannot) support or adequately support marginalised groups etc.

In these circumstances, the personal needs of individuals will remain the motive force behind the migration of workers to prosperous European regions. The three reasons listed above are the result of both attitudes and experiences in relation to other social and ethnic groups acquired during socialisation, and often traumatic experiences and a disinclination to deal with the recent past in the Balkans, further entrenching these resentments.

Prospects

Poverty reduction in rural areas

In two of the schemes described, the partners require continuity beyond the originally agreed terms. These decisions were made on the basis of the institutionalised learning loops (peer reviews involving all partner countries and national seminars for experts and decision makers) within the projects. This applies to the scheme designed to reduce poverty through vocational skills in Central Asia and the extension of the scheme designed to promote the development of national qualifications frameworks. December 2008 has since been announced as the end date for these projects. The migration project will conclude with the processing of relevant data and the drafting of a final report.

To date, the qualification programmes associated with poverty reduction for rural target groups have not yet drawn any sustained systemic conclusions in the countries involved (Kazakhstan,

Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan). This means that the responsible Ministry of Education does not yet consider such skills services to be one of its core tasks and is not, therefore, arranging for such services to be established on a systematic institutional basis. This may be due to the project's duration – only three years to date – and the rationale according to which it proceeds. In the initial stages, it was important to arrange for national experts to design and implement skills programmes to meet specific needs and target groups, and to qualify the existing vocational colleges to undertake such additional tasks (capacity building). Only if programmes produce unequivocally positive results among the ultimate beneficiaries and if there is demonstrable practical benefit to additional job and income opportunities is there reason to systemically integrate such further education programmes into existing structures as an informal service. The willingness already expressed by politicians to introduce poverty reduction measures such as education/vocational education across the whole of Central Asia could be effectively implemented in this way.

In this process, the singular operational rationale (Luhmann, 2000) of systems such as Ministries of Education can become the greatest obstacle to systemic innovation. Their highly formalised set-up and procedural structures, inward-looking bureaucratic methods and highly traditional perception concerning the range of their own responsibilities and those of others prevent innovation at structural level, even in the case of informal services and beyond the typical clientele of Ministries of Education. A fundamental decision will have to be taken regarding the extent to which new tasks can be assigned to vocational colleges by ordinance and how seriously the political intent documented in the strategy papers adopted by individual countries should be taken.

In addition, only rehabilitated vocational educational institutions, which have, for example, participated in relevant advanced education programmes and coaching events, are able to design and implement such practice-oriented programmes tailored to the needs of target groups. Offering services for adults did not previously fall within these colleges' remit. The introduction and consolidation of such specific services in traditional vocational college centres within the scope of community approaches to poverty reduction (Castel Branco, 2006) must become the subject of more in depth discussion with regional and national decision-makers during the remaining phase of the project. To this end, further events will be held, which will guarantee

regional exchange, enable continued learning and bring the quality of the programmes and systemic consequences to the fore. There is still a knowledge deficit here, even within international debate: 'The best way to introduce choice in rural [education] systems within resource-constrained developing is not fully known.' (Hanushek und Wössmann, 2007).

Against this background, it is once again clear how important learning processes are over the course of a project, as a prerequisite for reforms in rural vocational education, which must additionally promote the formation of local networks, with other donors, extension services and local community development approaches.

National qualifications frameworks (NQF)

The gradual establishment of a (partial) qualifications framework in Central Asia, the course of which is variable, involves the risk of encountering a stagnant environment in some countries (DFID, 2007, p. 78). While framework rules are a very important step towards the creation of adequately functioning (qualification) systems, they can only have a limited effect on these systems' internal productive and performance-oriented momentum. They frequently govern and codify precisely those elements that are otherwise subject to the interest-driven momentum of various groups within educational and training systems.

Such dynamic developments are more typical of (broadly) company-based initial and further training systems which are constantly faced with the task of establishing a new but rule-compliant balance of different interests (production and qualification requirements) in reaction to the prevailing technology-driven production momentum. This applies not only in the case of traditional dual or cooperative approaches, but also with regard to 'learnership systems' in other regions (see Smith, 2005). Such adaptations provide the opportunity for further innovation and the ongoing reconciliation of learning processes and contents with the demands of the world of work. Experience demonstrates that within college-based vocational training services, regulations associated with established qualifications frequently fall into patterns that are resistant to innovation and gradually become disconnected from technical progress.

In future it will be essential for dialogue with the national project partners to focus more intensively on the development of qualifications frameworks from the cost/benefit aspect rather than merely in terms of aspects related to quality and innovative capacity. The EU financed

80 % of the costly qualifications frameworks in South Africa (Young, 2005, p. 29). How can smaller countries in Central Asia ever hope to raise such amounts in a sustainable manner that assures quality? Where can one find the local experts to design these complex regulatory criteria? 'How poorer countries without a significant set of formal sector employers are likely to pay for a QF without donor subvention remains unclear' (Mc Grath, 2007). Debate on the subject of the implementation of qualifications frameworks – as a contribution towards quality assurance in developing countries, *inter alia* – was always associated with a certain degree of missionary zeal. It appeared that the time had finally come to replace traditional, unsuccessful methods of cooperation in vocational education with approaches directed more towards (learning) outcomes. In the current schemes, forms of policy learning were very important, in spite of the fact that they clearly show the partners the relatively high expense associated with such regulatory criteria.

Other problems arise alongside the fact that in such qualifications frameworks focused on learning outcomes (more output than input-oriented), the possible absence of a formally structured vocational qualifications system constitutes the 'new system export'. These problems must be incorporated into the project via policy learning during debates and study periods in the countries involved and in Europe: skilled workers and multipliers are not sufficiently capable of sustaining the defined quality of the vocational qualification programmes in South Africa or elsewhere. This is an HRD dimension of which local and external donors lose sight as a result of their extensive work on national qualifications frameworks. Uniformity remains paradoxical and heterogeneous if it only exists in regulations and ordinances and cannot be sustained in a coherent manner on a day-to-day basis for a variety of different reasons (lack of competences, interest-based rejection of reforms, shortage of resources, failure to materialise, etc.). Regulations are and remain only as good as the experts who make good use of them to a greater or lesser extent on the basis of their own competences (see Hanushek and Wössman, 2007, p. 78). This maxim can be applied to the debate with decision makers in Central Asia.

In addition, studies on the introduction of national qualifications frameworks in developing countries spread anything but unbridled optimism (World Bank, 2004, p. 81). Attempts at implementation are described as 'excessively complex, too ambitious and as top-down strategies'. This is compounded by the objection that local

partners may not be in a position to both develop and adapt such complex regulatory criteria using their own resources. In this context it is thus unsurprising that more traditional ‘solutions’ are brought back into the debate: qualifications systems that rely on the skills of their well-trained teachers and trainers in the spirit of ‘trust’ or ‘decentralised culture of trust’ (Sahlberg, 2007) do not need to be defined right down to the last detail as regards processes, methods and responsibilities of examining bodies etc. Competence-based, decentralised contextual steering and the responsible, autonomous configuration of qualified teaching staff in innovative learning arrangements is more important than processes and methods within qualifications frameworks that are defined right down to the last detail, a fact that is of equal relevance to both industrialised and developing countries (see World Bank, 2008).

Such approaches entail delegating competence on the basis of trust and – to a greater or lesser extent – qualifications to those experts who remain primarily responsible for good quality vocational education (Cedefop, 2007), i.e. thoroughly qualified trainers and teachers. This is a fact that recent bilateral and multilateral cooperation in vocational education appears to have forgotten in view of the prevailing ‘Mainstream national qualifications framework’. It should also be noted that experts have once again started to debate and take an extremely positive view towards traditional approaches such as the English apprenticeship scheme with a view to its usability in the globalised world (see Vickerstaff, 2007) and are increasingly recommending the broader application of insight gained from positive experiences within the context of corporate-backed qualifications processes (Giule et al., 2007).

This leads to the paradox that interventions aimed at systemic improvements (such as the establishment of national qualifications frameworks) would appear to be most difficult to realise in those places where the national vocational educational systems are extremely fragile and not very coherent, i.e. places which in fact have the greatest need for external aid but which lack the basis of a certain organisational and institutional capacity on the part of the partners. A number of donors already established this fact in other regions and countries, albeit with comparably fragile structures in the responsible ministries (see World Bank, 2004).

International cooperation, which always has a somewhat artificial feel because it already works with structures it aims to establish elsewhere, will lead to a new imbalance of existing and external

resources for cooperation in less developed countries with (educational) systems that lack their own effective and efficient momentum, a circumstance that may be described as systemic imbalance. Consequently a precarious 'balance' is structurally predetermined, which results in a palpable impact on the outcomes of the cooperative scheme (of donors and recipients) in the field of vocational education. Static, low-resourced and relatively undynamic vocational (qualifications) systems also wish to be 'left in peace' (Willke, 1996). Their operational momentum does not permit unilateral and excessively resourced interventions. This applies both:

- in terms of temporary contemporaneity of the donors and recipients during (hopefully successful) joint capacity building by domestic organisations during the scheme, or;
- with respect to abruptly changing conditions when donors cease to provide resources at the end of the scheme

because once introduced, structures such as national qualifications frameworks must be updated in a targeted and competent manner. At present it would appear that work to design such frameworks in weaker countries has started with the 'roof' of the vocational educational system rather than its foundations: even in Germany a comprehensive definition of vocational education did not exist until the Vocational Educational Act in 1969, centuries after it had actually come into existence. Prior to this definitive legislative codification, there was already a great deal of practical experience, which must still be examined in order to determine the usability of certain innovations in the partner countries. With its NQF approach in Central Asia, the European scheme described here is not seeking to contribute to an apodictic and premature introduction of such systemic innovations. Its goal is the generation of national skills through learning processes in manageable schemes, on the basis of which the partners themselves must then reach a decision on the introduction of such reforms.

More efficient systems in many IPA countries or emerging countries in the Third World already have the necessary functional configuration and procedural structures which are capable, as a rule, of more efficiently utilising targeted and precisely defined contributions from donors. Paradoxically, 'strong' systems are more aware of their own weaknesses and have a cognitive range which is codified and supported internally by the organisation, encompassing functional solutions for adequately defined bottlenecks that are theoretically possible and practical but are also achievable and realisable. The

intake capacity that is specific to individual organisations is thus able to cope well with payments from donors, and must unquestionably be assessed differently in Kazakhstan than in its neighbouring partner countries of Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan.

At present there is little chance that comprehensive systemic reforms involving additional expense will be implemented in weaker partner lands. Ambitious goals bear little relation to the resources actually available to achieve a basic, modest level of sustainability after the scheme ends. Only one maxim currently applies: fundamental improvement of the quality of the existing approaches by building upon the available structures and optimising their efficiency without additional input of resources, albeit at the cost of a certain heterogeneity and divergence among vocational educational services at the same educational level. Central Asia would not, therefore, be the only region in the world to have this heterogeneity (see Wallenborn, 2000).

The existing structures can be improved with relatively little impact on expenses through, *inter alia*, further training of teachers and trainers, selective cooperation with companies, (which a view to possible systemisation), the introduction of new teaching and learning methods and the reduction in the number of vocational qualification institutions whose function leans towards the retention of young persons, but which thereby tie up resources that are needed in other qualification centres. The introduction of appropriate human resources development measures (placements for teachers within companies), the moderate implementation of new management methods for the meso-level of qualification institutions and the raising of funds from one's own resources represent other measures with relatively little outlay, which can improve the efficiency of vocational education.

Herein lies the true scope for meaningful cooperation between donors and recipients, which can be justified in terms of intervention theory by a greater probability of sustained success. The following still applies: 'The main problem lies in the fact that complex systems consisting of very many interactive components cannot, in principle, be purposefully controlled because their momentum is not linear and their development trajectories cannot therefore be pre-calculated' (Singer, 2004). Thus interventions by donors will need to adjust their sometimes excessively ambitious goals downwards.

Such views expressed in modern arguments relating to system theory are again (constructivistically) augmented by complex inter-

cultural relationships in the practice of international cooperation in vocational education, and are therefore based on a special type of 'double contingency' (Luhmann, 1984), i.e. a development logic that cannot be defined in detail in advance. Policy learning processes are therefore also events whose outcome is uncertain. Consistent development logics are not found either methodologically in flowline-shaped logical frameworks or during pragmatic cooperation, which is always subject to a certain lack of transparency concerning its defining interests. A theoretically grounded but pragmatically-oriented modesty on the part of donors and the realistic assessment of opportunities for intervention into third-party systems are likely to produce the best results, even as regards the populations of the partner countries.

In addition, a conceptually more concisely worded new modesty in relation to the possible and realistic potential for change of (qualification) systems contributes towards:

- the development of practical assessments in relation to international cooperation schemes in the face of increasing complexity and greater confusion in global society and consequently;
- the ability to counter serious critics of the relative ineffectiveness of international cooperation to date (Easterly, 2006) with more cogent arguments and positive examples.

Our partners and the populations of the countries with which we cooperate deserve this.

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