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**CURRENT STATE OF REFORM DEVELOPMENTS
IN CENTRAL ASIA COUNTRIES WITH REGARD
TO HIGHER EDUCATION (BOLOGNA PROCESS)
AND VOCATIONAL EDUCATION AND TRAINING
(TORINO PROCESS)**

Background Paper



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1 Introduction

1.1 Context and Objectives of the Study

This study has been elaborated in the second phase of the Central Asia Education Platform (CAEP), which is one of the main focus areas of the European Education Initiative.

This paper shall support the planned Ministerial Meeting in Astana in June 2017 by providing the Commission with a sufficient evidence-based background for discussions on the future direction of relations and cooperation in education (HE and VET) between the EU and Central Asia countries. In this context, Bologna and Torino processes play a crucial role in strengthening mutual cooperation and e.g. the alignment of quality standards in education.

The report is divided into four main sections:

This introductory section starts with an overview of the European Education Initiative for Central Asia under which the CAEP project is implemented. Following subsections explain the history and principles of the Bologna Process and Torino Process. The last subsection presents the development of the Asia-Europe Meeting fostering Bologna-compatible reforms in education.

The second chapter presents an overview of achievements in Central Asia Countries with regard to higher education (Bologna Process) and vocational education and training (Torino Process). In each country, the following analytical categories are reviewed:

- Educational policies
- Three-cycle system of higher education
- Qualifications framework
- Credit system
- Internationalisation of higher education
- Quality assurance
- Evidence-based policy making
- Labour market relevance of VET
- EU Support

The last two chapters present selected success stories and formulate recommendations for stakeholders and decision makers in Europe and Central Asia.

1.2 The European Education Initiative for Central Asia

In 2007, the European Union launched the *EU Central Asian Strategy for New Partnership* in order to support various cooperation priorities with the five Central Asia countries – Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan. The Strategy identified “higher education as a strategic sector for development cooperation”¹. The European Education Initiative (EEI) has been initiated within the framework of the Strategy, aiming at “incorporating existing European

¹ https://ec.europa.eu/europeaid/regions/central-asia/eu-support-education-and-research-cooperation-central-asia_en

programmes in the field of higher education and vocational education and training (VET), as well as developing new cooperation formats, ...”².

The main objectives of the EEI for Central Asia are twofold: (i) to reform and modernise the education systems within the CA countries in order to meet changing needs and demand of globalised world, and to increase cooperation of these countries with major international stakeholders and donors supporting educational programmes; and (ii) to support student and academic staff exchanges within all levels of education, including VET and HE, through various international and bilateral programmes³.

The EEI is trying to provide a common framework for European support to the CA education sector. The Initiative “is centered on existing initiatives, on EU support at the national and regional level, and coordination with other international donors”⁴. The Initiative helped to create closer links between Central Asia and Europe, especially the European Higher Education Area (EHEA) through various mobility and capacity development programmes and international cooperation modalities.

In order to meet its objectives in Central Asia, the EEI has had three main focus areas: (i) the development of an EU – Central Asia Education Platform; (ii) specific activities, including Bologna and Torino Process, Tempus, Erasmus Mundus, and project CAREN; (iii) information and communication actions, such as joint events and published joint materials⁵.

The Central Asia Education Platform (CAEP) is a cooperation initiative focusing on the two main components of education systems: (i) vocational education and training (VET); (ii) higher education (HE). Up to date, the CAEP has had two phases:

1. **The first phase of CAEP** started in February 2012 and ended in March 2015 as a DG DEVCO funded project. It represented the key pillar of *European Education Initiative for Central Asia* which aims at education and training sector modernization, strengthen cooperation between European Union (EU) and Central Asia (CA), improvement of inter-regional cooperation between Central Asia countries, as well as improvement of donors’ activities in the education sector. These goals have been achieved through a process of communication and exchange of experiences between the European Union and Central Asia in order to “contribute to the adaptation of education systems of Central Asian States to the needs to the globalised world”⁶. The total project budget was 1 820 450 €.
2. **The second phase of CAEP (CAEP 2)** has been launched in March 2015 and will be running until March 2018. This phase builds on results and challenges identified in its first phase. During the second phase, CAEP will continue enhancing cooperation between stakeholders from EU and CA countries, as well as between CA countries. The main goal of CAEP 2 is to strengthen education reforms in CA countries. The second phase comprises three main components: (i) dialogue forums – project will “provide technical and logistical support to the organisation of national and regional dialogue forums (conferences, meetings, workshops)”⁷; (ii) mapping and communication regarding creation of the “project database listing HE and VET projects in the region and set up under the first phase of the Platform”⁸; (iii) studies, which will “complement the dialogue forums”⁹. The project budget and the source of funding remained the same as in the first phase.

Specific activities of EEI constitute “the content and the material means that would contribute to the concrete implementation of whatever might emerge from the development of the Education

² Axynova, V. 2013. The EU Education Initiative for Central Asia five years on: lessons learnt?

³ <http://dbase.caep-project.org/project/caep-2-central-asian-education-platform-phase-2-caep-2/>

⁴ http://eeas.europa.eu/archives/docs/central_asia/docs/factsheet_education_en.pdf

⁵ Jones, P. 2010. The EU-Central Asia Education Initiative. Working Paper 09

⁶ European Union Programme for Central Asia (2013). Brief Project Description.

⁷ <http://dbase.caep-project.org/project/caep-2-central-asian-education-platform-phase-2-caep-2/>

⁸ <http://dbase.caep-project.org/project/caep-2-central-asian-education-platform-phase-2-caep-2/>

⁹ <http://dbase.caep-project.org/project/caep-2-central-asian-education-platform-phase-2-caep-2/>

Platform”¹⁰. This EEI’s focus area comprises the following activities and instruments: **(i) Tempus;** **(ii) Erasmus Mundus;** **(iii) the Bologna Process** (for more details see following sections); **(iv) the ETF’s Torino Process** (for more details see following sections); **(v) project CAREN (Central Asian Research and Education Network).**

CAREN has been launched in 2009 as a follow-up of the Virtual Silk Highway (a.k.a. Silk Project), funded by NATO. Currently, the project has four members - Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, and Turkmenistan since 2010, and Kazakhstan since 2012, more precisely, the project partners are the national Research and Education Networking Associations (RENAs). The project is coordinated by GÉANT, which “interconnects Europe’s national research and education networking (NREN) organisations with an award-winning high bandwidth, high speed and highly resilient pan-European backbone – connecting Europe’s researchers, academics, and students to each other, and linking them to over half the countries in the world”¹¹. CAREN connects national research and education network of Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, and Turkmenistan, in order to “provide high-speed broad band network to link higher education institutions in Central Asia with the EU and globally”¹². It links more than 500 000 users at 300 universities and research centres¹³. The project has currently had three phases – the first one started in 2009 and ended in 2013, the second phase started in 2013 and ended in 2015, and the third phase started in June 2016 as a CAREN3, and will run up to 2019. The project is co-funded by DG DEVCO (80 %), the rest is provided by the partners¹⁴. The allocations for each CAREN’s phase have been approx. 4.5 – 5 Mil. €.

All of the abovementioned activities (Tempus, Erasmus Mundus, Bologna Process, etc.) have been coordinated and mapped “in order to achieve complementarity and efficiency, and to focus on supporting education reform around shared priorities”¹⁵.

Information and communication activities are related to the EU’s commitment “to holding joint events with broad participation, publishing joint materials and fostering information and communication on both the Education Initiative and the opportunities available for mobility, exchange and cooperation”¹⁶.

1.3 Main Principles of the Bologna Process

In 1998, the education ministers of Germany, France, Italy and the United Kingdom signed the Sorbonne Declaration concerning the need for unified, comparable and compatible European higher education degree systems. Harmonized education systems in Europe should help to make higher education institutions more competitive and attractive, and students and job seekers to move within Europe, i.e. to make their qualification portable and applicable within various European countries¹⁷.

The Bologna Process launched in 1999 when 29 education ministers from Europe signed the Bologna Declaration. It represents a collective effort of various stakeholders from the public, private and non-profit sector to create a common European Higher Education Area (EHEA) in order to harmonize and modernize education and training systems of member countries¹⁸.

¹⁰ Jones, P. 2010. The EU-Central Asia Education Initiative. Working Paper 09

¹¹ http://www.geant.org/Networks/Pan-European_network/Pages/Home.aspx

¹² Jones, P. 2010. The EU-Central Asia Education Initiative. Working Paper 09

¹³ <http://caren.geant.org/pages/faqs.aspx>

¹⁴ https://ec.europa.eu/europeaid/regions/central-asia/eu-support-education-and-research-cooperation-central-asia_en

¹⁵ Jones, P. 2010. The EU-Central Asia Education Initiative. Working Paper 09

¹⁶ Jones, P. 2010. The EU-Central Asia Education Initiative. Working Paper 09

¹⁷ <http://www.minedu.fi/OPM/Koulutus/artikkelit/bologna/?lang=en>

¹⁸ http://ec.europa.eu/education/policy/higher-education/bologna-process_en

<http://www.ehea.info/pid34248/history.html>

Currently, there are 49 members of the Bologna Process, comprising 48 countries and the European Commission. Altogether, the member countries create the EHEA. The Bologna Process is based on voluntary principles and its activities over time built the main pillars of EHEA:

- **a common framework** which includes “Framework for Qualifications of EHEA, a common credit system (ECTS), common principles for the development of student-centered learning, the European Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance, a common Register of QA Agencies, a common approach to recognition, and a common body of methodologies and sustainable achievements produced by European HEIs”;
- **common tools** including “the ECTS Users’ Guide, the Diploma Supplement, the Lisbon Recognition Convention” (The Bologna Process revisited – The Future of the European Higher Education Area, 2015)¹⁹.

The focus of the Bologna Process can be summarized as threefold:

- **the introduction and implementation of the three-cycle system** (bachelor – master – doctorate, or as undergraduate – graduate - doctoral),
- **strengthened quality assurance**, which allows students and graduates to have confidence in the quality of higher education. It is a rigorous system of internal quality assurance, ensuring that HE curricula are able to respond to changing needs of the wider economy and help graduates to find a job²⁰.
- **easier recognition of qualifications and periods of study** within or across borders, which increases employability and raises skill levels. In other words, “to support the transparency and recognition of knowledge, skills, and competences to make it easier to study and work anywhere in Europe”²¹.

Every two or three years the member states organize the **Ministerial Conferences** aiming at assessing the progress made and discussing the new steps to be taken. In conjunction with the Ministerial Conference, the **Bologna Policy Forum (BPF)** has been organized since 2009. The BPF is for non-EHEA countries from the MENAAS countries (Middle East, North Africa, and Asia), bordering EHEA ones²². The main output of the BPF is the Bologna Policy Forum Statement²³. For more details see below.

In order to ensure the implementation of the new steps decided, the EHEA uses several support structures:

- **Bologna Follow-Up Group (BFUG)** – monitors the process and designs the work programme. BFUG consists of representatives from all member countries and it represents an executive structure of the Bologna Process;
- **BFUG Board** is an advisory committee for Secretariat and oversees the work between two meetings of the BFUG;
- **BFUG Secretariat** supports the overall follow-up work and it is provided by the country hosting the next Ministerial Conference, the current secretariat is Yerevan to Paris with the duration from 1 July 2015 to 30 June 2018.
- **Working Groups and Bologna Seminars**²⁴.

The most important outcome of the Bologna Process is the Ministerial Communiqué²⁵. In the most recent Yerevan Communiqué, ministers agreed that the Bologna reforms brought along progress in

¹⁹http://media.ehea.info/file/2015_Yerevan/71/1/Bologna_Process_Revisited_Future_of_the_EHEA_Final_613711.pdf

²⁰ http://ec.europa.eu/education/policy/higher-education/quality-relevance_en

²¹ http://ec.europa.eu/education/policy/strategic-framework/skills-qualifications_en

²² The most recent has been the 2015 Yerevan Bologna Policy Forum Statement

²³ <http://www.ehea.info/cid105279/bologna-policy-forum-yerevan-2015.html>

²⁴ <http://www.ehea.info/pid34247/how-does-the-bologna-process-work.html>

²⁵ <http://www.eua.be/policy-representation/higher-education-policies/the-european-higher-education-area-and-the-bologna-process>

education systems within the EHEA. However, “the implementation of the structural reforms is uneven and the tools are sometimes used incorrectly or in bureaucratic and superficial ways”²⁶. The renewed vision of the Bologna Process is to strengthen the trust among higher education systems within the EHEA, the recognition of students’ and graduates’ qualifications, and to support HEIs’ contribution to building inclusive societies, promoting democratic values and human rights, and providing competencies and skills required for European citizenship, innovation and employment²⁷.

Within the Central Asia region, only Kazakhstan is the Bologna Process member country, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan are implementing the BP on voluntary basis using incentive mechanisms (the BP being implemented by ad hoc groups under the supervision of the Ministry of Education)²⁸, and Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan have no specific mechanism for supporting the implementation of the Bologna Process²⁹.

Bologna Policy Forum

Organisation of the Bologna policy forum (BPF) has been recommended in 2009 by the Bologna Working Group. The BPF’ aim is to develop a policy dialogue on specific topics related to higher education, such as mobility, quality assurance, higher education reforms. It is organized back-to-back with the Ministerial Meetings for ministers responsible for higher education from non-Bologna countries. The BPF is “making full use of existing EU and UNESCO initiatives”³⁰.

The most recent BPF, jointly with the Ministerial Conference, was held in 2015 in Yerevan, Armenia. The **Bologna Policy Forum Statement** is the main outcome of the BPF and it “sets the stage for the external dimension of the Bologna Process”³¹. The last BPF Statement highlighted the need for strengthening the cooperation between the EHEA and the Middle East, North Africa, and Asia (MENAAS) countries, bordering EHEA ones, in order to make the higher education systems more responsive to the current challenges. HE reforms will focus on improvement of the quality of HE and reducing unemployment among young people, especially women. These reforms should promote the structural reforms, as well, including mobility schemes and joint programs³².

The major priorities set within the Yerevan Bologna Policy Forum are: (i) development of national qualification frameworks compatible with EHEA national frameworks; (ii) development of cooperation in quality assurance with further promotion of mutual trust in non-EHEA countries education systems and EHEA countries qualifications; (iii) improvement of the mutual recognition of qualifications by improved information, joint development, and dissemination of recognition practice; (iv) to cooperate in development and implementation of credit transfer system, respecting the ECTS³³.

1.4 Main Principles of the Torino Process

The European Training Foundation (ETF) is a European Union’s decentralized agency, helping “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”³⁴. The ETF was established in 1990 in Turin, Italy, and started to operate in 1994.

²⁶ Yerevan Communiqué, 2015

²⁷ Yerevan Communiqué, 2015

²⁸ http://eacea.ec.europa.eu/tempus/tools/documents/bologna2012_mapping_country_120508_v02.pdf

²⁹ http://eacea.ec.europa.eu/tempus/tools/documents/bologna2012_mapping_country_120508_v02.pdf

³⁰ <http://www.eua.be/policy-representation/higher-education-policies/the-european-higher-education-area-and-the-bologna-process>

³¹ <http://bologna-yerevan2015.ehea.info/pages/view/documents>

³² 2015 Yerevan Bologna Policy Forum Statement

³³ 2015 Yerevan Bologna Policy Forum Statement

³⁴ http://www.etf.europa.eu/web.nsf/pages/Who_we_are

In 2010, the ETF launched the Torino Process, the “biannual participatory analytical review of the status and progress of vocational education and training in the ETF partner countries”³⁵. Up to now, the Torino Process has been implemented in four rounds (2010, 2012, 2014, 2016) and over this period it moved from description to measuring the progress made in the VET sector in partner countries³⁶. The main results of previous rounds comprise strengthened participation of various stakeholders, communication among them, and increased transparency and accountability of partner countries. These results represent a joint commitment of the partner countries and the European Union for the human capital development and have been summarized in the Torino Conference Declaration, a document that has closed each completed round of the Torino Process³⁷.

The Torino Process has, in general, two main objectives: “(i) to acquire up to date knowledge about the policies and their results in a country; and (ii) to strengthen the ownership, participation, and evidence-base of policy making to improve the performance of policies”³⁸. The Torino Process helps to develop, implement and monitor the policies in the partner countries. It is based on four principles:

1. **ownership** of process and results (the final reports and policy development implications) by the partner country’s policy leaders and stakeholders so the Torino Process outcomes influence the national policy;
2. **broad participation** within the Torino Process by relevant stakeholders from public, private and non-profit sector in order to provide the basis for reflection and consensus among these stakeholders. This principle supports connection between policy analysis and policy implementation;
3. **a holistic approach** considering both the system elements and how they communicate, as well as how the VET system responds to the socio-economic environment in which it operates;
4. **an evidence- or knowledge-based assessment** necessary to making informed decisions about the policy development and progress measurement. This principle is important for capturing the good practices, too³⁹.

The policy monitoring on VET planning, provision and responsiveness to external demand is measured with the Torino Process’ Analytical Framework (AF) comprising a collection of questions divided into five sections: (i) vision of VET system; (ii) strategy of VET system; (iii) external efficiency (responsiveness of VET to the socio-economic needs); (iv) internal efficiency; (v) governance. The results of the AF represent the basis for evidence-based analysis of monitoring findings of the progress made in policy development. The Torino Process is a dynamic approach introducing improvements made in partner country in each cycle⁴⁰.

The most recent Torino Process 2016 – 17 “comprises the consolidation of a three-step approach to the collection and analysis of information, already implemented in previous rounds of the process”⁴¹. The first step is **consultation**, and its purpose is to gather knowledge and professional expertise of Torino Process participants. It is implemented in so-called “kick-off phase” in order to bring together stakeholders of VET sector which results in the Analytical Framework, outlined areas of progress, the updated evidence, and designed roadmap for the finalization of the report.

The second step is **peer review** aiming at the establishment of “a quality assurance mechanism based on dialogue and consultation between the ETF and the specific country. The peer review step

³⁵ http://www.etf.europa.eu/web.nsf/pages/Torino_process

³⁶ European Training Foundation, Torino Process 2016 – 17. 2016

³⁷ European Training Foundation, Torino Process 2016 – 17. 2016

³⁸ http://www.etf.europa.eu/web.nsf/pages/Torino_process

³⁹ European Training Foundation, Torino Process 2016 – 17. 2016

⁴⁰ European Training Foundation, Torino Process 2016 – 17. 2016

⁴¹ European Training Foundation, Torino Process 2016 – 17. 2016

is initiated by the country in case of self-assessment, or by the ETF in the case of ETF-supported assessment”⁴².

Finally, the third step is **validation**, concluding “the national consultation and approve the report, including the assessment of progress and the development stage in the priority areas identified through the process”⁴³. The assessment and validation criteria are provided by the ETF.

The ETF offers two modalities of implementation arrangements in order to produce the most relevant report: (i)ETF-supported assessment, suitable for countries that need stronger lead and assistance from the ETF; (ii) country-led self-assessment, suitable for countries that want to lead the process and to draft own reports. Regardless modality, the implementation of above mentioned three steps is mandatory⁴⁴.

The ETF contributes to evidence-based policy making and implementation within the Central Asia region, through policy advice and capacity building support in VET sector. The role of the Torino Process in Central Asia is to increase the quality of analysis of VET sector⁴⁵. All of the CA countries are the Torino Process partners, however, **Turkmenistan** has not participated in the Torino Process cycle. Nevertheless, the country “has followed the project internationally and regionally in order to promote its commitment to international cooperation”⁴⁶.

The priorities of the ETF in **Kazakhstan** comprise: (i) improvement of quality and attractiveness of the VET sector; (ii) strengthening the cooperation between education and business; (iii) continuous professional development of VET teachers and trainers⁴⁷.

In **Kyrgyzstan**, the ETF aims mainly at: (i) development of better understanding the economic and labour market needs, tools and methods; (ii) capacity building in the field of policy development; (iii) operationalizing the social partnership to improve the VET sector’s relevance; (iv) continuous professional development of VET teachers and trainers⁴⁸.

In **Tajikistan**, the ETF’s priorities are: (i) to increase the cooperation between education and business; (ii) improvement of the quality assurance system; (iii) to support the continuous professional development of VET teachers and trainers⁴⁹.

The ETF’s priorities in **Uzbekistan** are very similar those in other Central Asia countries: (i) to strengthen the cooperation between business and education; (ii) to promote the continuous professional development of VET teachers and trainers; (iii) to support the Torino Process implementation; (iv) to establish a National Qualification Framework⁵⁰.

1.5 The Asia-Europe Meeting

The Asia-Europe Meeting (ASEM) was established in 1996 as an informal intergovernmental process aiming at fostering political dialogue and cooperation between Asia and Europe. “ASEM address political, economic, social, cultural, and educational issues of common interest, in a spirit of mutual respect and equal partnership”⁵¹.

Currently, it has 53 partners – 30 European countries, 21 Asian countries, the European Union and the Association of Southeast Asian Nations’ (ASEAN) secretariat. The majority of the Bologna

⁴² European Training Foundation, Torino Process 2016 – 17. 2016

⁴³ European Training Foundation, Torino Process 2016 – 17. 2016

⁴⁴ European Training Foundation, Torino Process 2016-17. 2016

⁴⁵ http://www.etf.europa.eu/web.nsf/pages/Central_Asia

⁴⁶ http://www.etf.europa.eu/web.nsf/pages/Turkmenistan_EN

⁴⁷ http://www.etf.europa.eu/web.nsf/pages/Kazakhstan_EN

⁴⁸ http://www.etf.europa.eu/web.nsf/pages/Kyrgyzstan_EN

⁴⁹ http://www.etf.europa.eu/web.nsf/pages/Tajikistan_EN

⁵⁰ http://www.etf.europa.eu/web.nsf/pages/Uzbekistan_EN

⁵¹ <http://www.aseminfoboard.org/about>

Process member countries are ASEM partners. The only ASEM partner country from Central Asia is **Kazakhstan**.

The heads of state and government of the respective partner countries, the President of the European Council, the President of the European Commission, and the Secretary-General of the ASEAN are meeting every other year on **ASEM Summit**. Aside the Summits, the topics of foreign affairs, environment, transport, financial, cultural, educational, labour, employment, and economic issues are being discussed on regular **Ministerial Meetings**. ASEM “also brings together members of parliament, the business sector, civil society, academia and the media”⁵².

Within its social, cultural, and educational pillar, ASEM aims at strengthening “cultural links between Asia and Europe, in particular closer people-to-people contacts, which are indispensable for the promotion of greater awareness and understanding between the two regions”⁵³. In the education area, ASEM aims at promoting the education exchanges between Europe and Asia through Asia-Europe Higher Education Exchanges. An important institution in this pillar is the **Asia-Europe Foundation (ASEF)**, launched in 1997 and based in Singapore. It is the only permanent institution of the ASEM process. ASEF is promoting “intellectual, cultural and people-to-people exchanges between Europe and Asia”⁵⁴. ASEF is funded by voluntary contributions from ASEM partners and it is co-financing its projects with civil society partners from Asia and Europe. ASEF has implemented approximately 700 projects, mainly seminars, conferences, workshops, with more than 750 partner organisations, and more than 20 000 participants from Asia and Europe⁵⁵.

The ASEM Education Process, launched in Berlin in 2008, is aiming at strengthening cooperation in HE and VET sector within partner countries. The main objectives of ASEM Education Process are: (i) development of quality assurance and recognition; (ii) engaging business and industry in education; (iii) enhance balanced mobility; (iv) promote Lifelong Learning including VET. In order to meet these objectives, various tools have been developed: (i) developing programmes; (ii) building knowledge bases (surveys, studies); (iii) implementing initiatives in order to foster outcome-driven activities; (iv) establishing expert groups which will assist in project or policy formulation and implementation of reforms⁵⁶.

A key tool of the ASEM Education Process is the **ASEF Education Policy Programme**, which “stimulates practice-based and policy-oriented dialogues and solutions with a focus on cooperation between education, business and industry sectors, Lifelong learning, and Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) ...”⁵⁷. The outputs of this Programme are various seminars, conferences, fora, meetings, symposia (for more info click on selected programme/activity here: <http://www.asef.org/ebooks/annualreport/2015/projects-education.html>).

Another programme within ASEM Education Process is the ASEF Young Leaders Programme which “provides platforms for dialogue and solution-centred pragmatic skills-development, which also enable youth to establish networks and create direct connections with the ASEM policy-makers”⁵⁸. Outputs of this programme comprise summits, summer universities, and training (for more info click on selected programme/activity here:

<http://www.asef.org/ebooks/annualreport/2015/projects-education.html>).

Up to date, ASEM has developed two own major programmes promoting education sector in partner countries:

1. **ASEM Education Hub** launched in 1998. The main idea was that “individual universities would volunteer as centers of excellence in a particular field relevant to Asia-Europe

⁵² https://eeas.europa.eu/headquarters/headquarters-homepage/2051/asia-europe-meeting-asem_en#Summits

⁵³ <http://www.aseminfoboard.org/content/social-cultural-and-educational-pillar>

⁵⁴ <http://www.aseminfoboard.org/content/social-cultural-and-educational-pillar>

⁵⁵ <http://www.aseminfoboard.org/content/asia-europe-foundation-asef>

⁵⁶ <http://asem-education-secretariat.kemdikbud.go.id/asem-education-process/>

⁵⁷ <http://www.asef.org/ebooks/annualreport/2015/projects-education.html>

⁵⁸ <http://www.asef.org/ebooks/annualreport/2015/projects-education.html>

relations, and be ready to receive exchange students from other hub institutes for one or two semesters”⁵⁹. Currently, there is active the ASEM Education and Research Hub for Lifelong Learning (ASEM LLL Hub), established in 2005 in Copenhagen. The Hub connects more than 100 researchers in 5 research networks, senior representatives from 36 universities within its University Council, Senior Officials from 22 ministries of education, and five international organisations. The Hub works in partnership with the ASEF.

- 2. the ASEM DUO** is a fellowship-granting programme for university students and teachers of ASEM countries. It was established in 2001 and it is funded by ASEM partners. Its main purpose is to: (i) promote increased contact between students, teachers, and professors; (ii) promote regular basis exchange programs between European and Asian tertiary institutions; (iii) establish a deeper understanding between Europe and Asia⁶⁰. The main idea is to promote exchanges of a pair (two persons) between Asia and Europe. The name of DUO project indicates the country of origin of a student/teacher who will be exchanged with another student/teacher from either Europe or Asia. For instance, in DUO-Korea program, one student/teacher has to be from Korea, the other can be from any ASEM European partner country. Up to date, there are 8 ASEM DUO programs: (i) DUO-Korea; (ii) DUO-Singapore; (iii) DUO-Thailand; (iv) DUO-Sweden; (v) DUO-Belgium/Flanders; (vi) DUO-Belgium/Wallonia-Brussels; (vii) DUO-France; (viii) DUO-Denmark. The current exchanges are announced in Calls for applications by ASEM-DUO Secretariat. The duration of an exchange is usually 1 semester (4 months), however, it is not necessary that the exchange period coincides for each pair. The exchanges should be executed after August in the initial year and finished before September next one⁶¹.

Aside from above-mentioned programmes, ASEM has another four education initiatives. The first one has been launched during the third ASEM ministerial meeting in 2013 in Copenhagen, other three have been initiated during the fourth ASEM ministerial meeting in 2013 in Kuala Lumpur:

- 1. ASEM Work Placement Programme** – the programme has been launched in 2016. Its objective is to “establish, promote and sustain the mutual exchange of interns between the regions Europe and Asia on the basis of balance and mutual benefits”⁶². The programme provides opportunities for students to gain international work experience. The target group is undergraduate and Master students. Duration of internship is from two to six months full time. Participating countries are Belgium, Brunei Darussalam, Germany, Indonesia, and Thailand⁶³.
- 2. ASEM Joint Curriculum Development in Tourism and Hospitality Programme** – the objective is to “increase the number of joint study programmes (in Asian and European studies) and summer schools between Asian and European HEIs by using various programmes and funding schemes”⁶⁴. Target groups are at least three European universities in tourism education (each from a different European country) and at least three Asian universities with the same field of study (also, each from a different country), together with at least one company of the tourism industry in each region. The project launched in 2016, the duration is three to four semesters. Participating countries are Belgium, Brunei Darussalam, Germany, Lithuania, Romania and Indonesia⁶⁵.
- 3. ASEM Recognition Bridging Declaration** – the objective of the programme is to “foster cooperation and exchange of information in recognition of qualifications concerning higher education between Asian and European regions under the Framework of ASEM”⁶⁶. Target

⁵⁹ <http://www.aseminfoboard.org/content/social-cultural-and-educational-pillar>

⁶⁰ http://www.asemduo.org/sub_1/2.asp

⁶¹ http://www.asemduo.org/sub_10/1.asp

⁶² <http://asem-education-secretariat.kemdikbud.go.id/awp/>

⁶³ <http://asem-education-secretariat.kemdikbud.go.id/awp/>

⁶⁴ <http://asem-education-secretariat.kemdikbud.go.id/asem-joint-curriculum-development-programme/>

⁶⁵ <http://asem-education-secretariat.kemdikbud.go.id/asem-joint-curriculum-development-programme/>

⁶⁶ <http://asem-education-secretariat.kemdikbud.go.id/working-group-for-implementing-asem-recognition-bridging-declaration/?preview=true>

groups of the programme are national information centers in Asia and Europe. Partner countries are Australia, Austria, Belgium, Brunei Darussalam, China, Germany, Estonia, Indonesia, Japan, Latvia, Lithuania, Malaysia, Philippines, Portugal, the Republic of Korea, and the United Kingdom⁶⁷.

- 4. ASEM Interregional Credit Transfer Mechanisms and Learning Outcome Systems** – the Programme’s objective is to “foster the establishment of ASEM interregional credit transfer mechanism, and the establishment of criteria for interregional recognition of credits and learning outcomes learning outcomes”⁶⁸. The programme has been launched in 2016 at the First Expert Working Group meeting in China, and its aim was to officially establish the Expert Working Group and approve the Terms of Reference including the future agenda. Target groups are ASEM Member Countries and regional and international organisations. Participating countries are Belgium, Brunei Darussalam, China, Estonia, Indonesia, Germany, Latvia, Lithuania, Malaysia, Portugal, Romania, Thailand, United Kingdom⁶⁹.

⁶⁷ <http://asem-education-secretariat.kemdikbud.go.id/working-group-for-implementing-asem-recognition-bridging-declaration/?preview=true>

⁶⁸ <http://asem-education-secretariat.kemdikbud.go.id/asem-interregional-credit-transfer-mechanisms-and-learning-outcome-systems/>

⁶⁹ <http://asem-education-secretariat.kemdikbud.go.id/asem-interregional-credit-transfer-mechanisms-and-learning-outcome-systems/>

2 Higher Education and VET Reform Efforts

The following subsections of the report review main reform achievements in HE and VET in each Central Asia country. Based on that, the overall situation can be summarised in the following way:

Educational policies

In all five countries, key legislation fostering reforms in higher and vocational education has been adopted in 2012 – 2014. Over the past two years 2015 and 2016, the countries concentrated their efforts on practical implementation of the reforms outlined by the new laws.

Three-cycle system of higher education

All five countries have already implemented the Bologna-inspired first level of higher education in the form of Bachelor programmes as well as Masters programmes representing the second level of higher education. However, Kyrgyzstan and Turkmenistan still have a parallel second level Specialty programme. 3-years Ph.D. programmes are offered by HEIs in Kazakhstan, Tajikistan and by selected pilot HEIs in Kyrgyzstan. Postgraduate programmes are called Aspirantura in Turkmenistan and Doctor of sciences in Uzbekistan.

Qualifications framework

In all the Central Asian countries, the influence of the Soviet Tariff Qualification System that regulated the labour market and education through classifiers of occupations and qualification characteristics, state educational standards, the labour registration, and remuneration, is still noticeable. There is still a tendency to consider qualifications as a license to practice, rather than a passport to multiple careers and lifelong learning. CA countries except Turkmenistan have been engaging with the concept of a NQF based on the principles of lifelong learning and learning outcomes over many years, though to a very different extent. Kazakhstan has started implementation, Kyrgyzstan has legislated and tested aspects of the NQF, Tajikistan is conceptualising its NQF and has legislated some aspects, and Uzbekistan is amending its tariff-qualification system to integrate some features of the NQF. The differences are due to differences in economic structure and development, the institutional landscape and capacity in terms of human and financial resources and international exposure.

Credit system

Kazakh, Kyrgyz and Tajik credit systems are compatible with ECTS. Kazakhstan has started a full transition to the ECTS.

Internationalisation of higher education

Kazakhstan is a regional leader in terms of HE cooperation with the European Union and its Member States. The country benefits from a number of European capacity development and mobility programmes. Moreover, Kazakhstan has a dedicated Academic Mobility Strategy for 2012

– 2020 and two national mobility promotion schemes: the Bolashak and the Academy mobility programme. Kyrgyzstan is the only net importer of HE students in Central Asia, also actively participating in Erasmus+ and various mobility schemes offered by the EU Member States. Tajikistan and Turkmenistan do not sufficiently use the cooperation potential with European HEIs. International cooperation is dynamically growing in Uzbekistan, based on Erasmus+ and individual scholarships awarded to Uzbek students and HEI staff by Germany, France, Latvia and the other EU Member States. However, the number of foreigners who study in Uzbekistan is extremely low.

Quality assurance

Independent accreditation of education providers and programmes for Higher Education and VET has been so far introduced in Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan. Both countries are currently in the transition phase from state-based to independent systems. Quality assurance mechanisms in Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan are still based on governmental authorities.

Evidence-based policy making

Kazakhstan is the only Central Asian country which takes part in international evidence collection exercises in the field of education in a systematic manner. The country is gradually developing national experience and expertise in evidence collection and analysis, including a newly established education database. Some progress has been achieved in Kyrgyzstan, mainly through the capacity development of the VET Agency and Republican Scientific Methodological Centre. Institutionalisation of a VET tracer study mechanism is one of the achievements over the past two years. Tajikistan does not have sufficient resources for regular evidence collection and therefore relies on ad hoc evidence produced with international donor support. In the case of Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan, accessing data by the public is limited by internal rules and regulations and thus it is not clear to what extent are data available and used for policy making.

As reported by ETF, “typically more data is available at national (and regional) level also on labour market aspects than on education-related aspects. The coverage of detailed education data, particularly data referring to VET and lifelong learning, is rather poor. Data that are available are often out of date. This holds true in particular for education expenditure figures. Moreover, the collected data cover to a large extent information on access, participation, financing, but less the indicators on quality and relevance. ... The existence of data does not necessarily mean that such evidence is used. A very good example of this challenge is Kazakhstan, where plenty of evidence is being collected and available. However, there is a need to improve its use for policy analysis.”⁷⁰

Regarding the focus of data, all countries have in particular identified the lack of skills matching related data as problematic, while only Kazakhstan has identified the lack of evidence on vulnerable groups (including NEET) as a further development area⁷¹.

Labour market relevance of VET

Education policy documents of all five countries focus on labour market relevance as a “quality proof” for VET. Consequently, there is a heightened focus on the involvement of employers at all levels of education. Kazakhstan has made a significant progress in the implementation of the Germany-inspired dual approach and delegated the responsibility for occupational standards to the National Chamber of Entrepreneurs. Kyrgyzstan developed new qualification structure and competences for VET staff and took initial steps towards the dual system. Labour market in Tajikistan still suffers from limited institutional capacities of VET to adapt the workforce to its needs. Turkmenistan witnessed some progress in terms of enterprise based training provided

⁷⁰ ETF for CAEP: Evidence based policy making for better policies and better impact. Discussion note

⁷¹ Source: ETF

mainly by foreign investors. In Uzbekistan, HEIs actively support their graduates in the job search. At the same time, Uzbek business community cooperates with VET system but the skills gap remains a challenge. A new aspect introduced in the VET system is the four party contract between the student, college, employer and local authority.

EU Support

In the field of **higher education**, the focus of EU interventions in Central Asia has been threefold: (i) support to the internationalisation of HEIs⁷², (ii) capacity development of HEIs, and (iii) structural reforms of the whole HE sector. Main channels of the support to HE in CA are the current opportunities offered by Erasmus+ (and its predecessors Tempus and Erasmus Mundus) and the development cooperation projects financed from DG DEVCO.

Recently published Evaluation report⁷³ concludes that over the period 2007 – 2014 the EU ‘contributed to the reform of quality assurance systems and practice, an enhanced reflection of socio-economic demands and developments by HE providers and in state education standards, the modernisation of academic education provision (teaching, learning, assessment and study programmes) at higher education institutions which participated in EU programmes, and innovations in HE governance and management.

However, EU regional assistance had a limited and mostly indirect impact on system reform, i.e. national strategic reform design and/or decisions in HE in the CA countries. The CA countries themselves determined the overall strategic direction and scope of (aspired) convergence with EU standards in higher education. Nonetheless, the longevity of the EU programmes in CA, the critical mass of EU-funded projects and the Tempus and Erasmus programmes’ bottom up approach contributed to a changing attitude among national stakeholders, increasing support for reforms in line with EU/EHEA standards and good practice, and strengthened capacities to design such reforms.

The impact of EU support in the individual countries was limited when the application/implementation of project results required changes in the policy framework. The capacity or readiness of national systems and decision-makers to absorb, follow-up and capitalise on EU-funded initiatives at policy level was not always sufficient even where government representatives were formal partners of project consortia.

EU regional assistance was successful in inducing regional co-operation and exchange between HEIs and government representatives of the five CA countries in the course of project activities and other EU initiated regional events. Still, the primary appeal of the regional programmes for CA partners was the opportunity to cooperate with EU partners; regional cooperation was not a priority for CA countries. Regional academic networks and networking heavily relied on incentives from external donors (EU and other). Proactive communication and interaction between CA partners in the course of EU projects required sustained support and encouragement. Substantial changes in terms of regional policy dialogue, agreements or policies for enhancing HE quality and relevance of HE provision were not observed.’

The reforms of the **VET sector** in Central Asian countries are supported by the **European Training Foundation (ETF)**, a decentralised agency of the European Union based in Turin, Italy. A key tool for dialogue on the status of VET reforms across partner countries is Torino process. Between 2014 and 2016, Kazakhstan, the Kyrgyz Republic, Tajikistan, and Uzbekistan have been active participants in the 2016 process and carried out a self-assessment on development within their VET system. Beyond the Torino Process, ETF has in Kazakhstan, the Kyrgyz Republic and Tajikistan engaged VET stakeholders in a dialogue on continuing professional development (CPD) of VET staff. In Kazakhstan and Tajikistan, the ETF has also supported the work of a number of communities of

⁷² An overview of EU and EU Member States’ support to mobility in HE can be found in the Stock-taking Report on Existing Capacity Development and Mobility Programmes between the EU and Central Asia Countries published by the CAEP 2 project.

⁷³ Evaluation of EU regional support to Central Asia (2007 – 2014), Final Report Volume 1, September 2016

practice, composed mainly of VET practitioners. Kazakhstan has been involved in the ETF “skills connexion” project, which focuses on supporting work-based learning (WBL). In the Kyrgyz Republic, the ETF has in cooperation with the ADB supported the institutionalisation of a tracer study methodology for VET.

Several projects in VET sector are financed by **DG DEVCO**. The largest projects include the 17 Million EUR Support to the reform of the education sector in the Kyrgyz Republic (2013 – 2018), 15 Million EUR Quality Education Support Programme I in Tajikistan (2017 – 2020) and 4,7 Million EUR Support to the Education Sector in Turkmenistan (2016 – 2020).

The most active EU Member State in Central Asia is Germany through the **Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ)** GmbH implementing a number of large projects fostering VET reforms in Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, and Turkmenistan.

2.1 Kazakhstan⁷⁴

Key achievements in 2015 and 2016:

- The transition from the Kazakh credit transfer system to the ECTS is in progress.
- The transition from existing to the (new) independent accreditation system is in progress. 2017 is a foreseen deadline for HE, 2020 for TVET.
- Draft national law on Professional Qualifications is being discussed in the Government⁷⁵.
- Increased involvement of employers and their associations in VET governance.
- Continual development of occupational standards. As of 2016, National Chamber of Entrepreneurs became formally responsible for occupational standards.
- In 2015, a database covering all education levels (HE to be integrated as of 2017) has been established under the auspices of the Ministry of Education and Science.
- A pilot phase of PIAAC survey of adult skills has been launched in 2016.
- Roadmap for the implementation of the dual approach has been developed in 2015.
- In 2016, the dual approach has been established by the amendments of the Law on Education and the labour code.

Kazakhstan's ambitious development policies include education reforms as a priority. Major reforms in the field of higher education are associated with Kazakhstan joining the Bologna process in 2010. At the same time, stakeholders at all levels more and more understand that VET is a tool for economic development and therefore cannot be considered in isolation or as part of education policy only.

Educational policies

The basis of the state policy in the field of education represents the Constitution of the Republic of Kazakhstan (1995)⁷⁶. The **law of the Republic of Kazakhstan About Education** "regulates social relationship in the area of education, determines general principles of state policy in this area and is directed to provide citizens' constitution right for education of the Republic of Kazakhstan and also foreign citizens and stateless citizens, permanently residing in the Republic of Kazakhstan"⁷⁷. The Law on Education has been adopted in 2007 and amended in 2015. Based on that, two State Programmes of Education Development in Kazakhstan for 2005-2010 and for 2011-2020 have been adopted.

Kazakhstan 2050 Strategy, outlined by the President Nursultan Nazarbayev in 2012, is a continuation of former Kazakhstan 2030, which was adopted in 1997. The strategic objective of Kazakhstan 2050 is to join the world's top 30 developed countries. Currently, Kazakhstan is the 51st most competitive country in the world⁷⁸. In order to reach this strategic objective, seven key directions have been given: **(i) economic policy** – Kazakhstan will define new markets, create a favourable investment climate and effective private sector economy, and develop a new system of natural resources management; **(ii) comprehensive support of entrepreneurship** – aim is to double the share of SMEs in national economy; **(iii) new principles of social policy** – aiming at ensuring social security and the well-being of Kazakh citizens through poverty and social imbalances reduction, and employment and salary policy modernization; **(iv) knowledge and**

⁷⁴ This section is mainly based on information provided by ETF

⁷⁵ Source: EC: Overview of the Higher Education System – Kazakhstan. February 2017

⁷⁶ Overview of the Higher Education System, Kazakhstan. 2017.

⁷⁷ <http://kguti.kz/en/37-english/normativnye-dokumenty/295-the-law-of-the-republic-of-kazakhstan-about-education.html?showall=1&limitstart=>

⁷⁸ <http://www.kazakhembus.com/content/kazakhstan-2050-strategy>

professional skills – aiming at higher education and VET sectors modernization in order to achieve overall strategic goal as well as increase employment; **(v) strengthening and development of Kazakhstan democracy** – aim is to promote further democratization of Kazakh society, develop new system of interaction with business sector, fight against corruption; **(vi) consistent and predictable foreign policy** – aim is to develop friendly and predictable relations with other countries, strengthen national and regional security, develop economic and trade diplomacy, promote international cooperation in cultural, education, scientific and humanitarian fields, increase legal protection of Kazakh citizens and their interests abroad; **(vii) new Kazakh patriotism** – aiming at promotion of national confidence in the future, support of progressive ideas⁷⁹.

President Nazarbayev suggested the 100 concrete steps which need to be done in order to fulfill the Kazakhstan 2050 agenda. These steps are divided into the following groups: (i) development of professional civil service; (ii) ensuring the rule of law; (iii) industrialization and economic growth; (iv) identity and unity; (v) establishing an accountable state⁸⁰. Among other issues, the third group (industrialization and economic growth) includes the steps related to the education sector. These steps include:

- “77. Training highly qualified staff in the top 10 leading colleges and 10 higher education institutions that focus on six key sectors of the economy. Sharing their experience with other educational institutions in the country.
- 78. Moving gradually towards the self-management of universities, taking into account the experience of the Nazarbayev University. Transformation of private universities into non-profit organizations in line with international practice.
- 79. Stage-by-stage transition to the use of the English language in the education system. The main aim is to increase competitiveness of students when they leave and position the educational sector as attractive for international students”⁸¹.

In 2012, the Ministry of Education and Science has released the **Academic Mobility Strategy in Kazakhstan for 2012 – 2020**. It represents “a policy document setting aims and priorities of academic and cultural internationalization of higher education in Kazakhstan through the development of tools of the Bologna Process”⁸². Its main goal, to ensure transparency in HE and achieve balanced mobility, comprises four main tasks: (i) quality assurance of external mobility; (ii) quality assurance of host conditions for foreign professors, researchers, and students in Kazakhstan; (iii) implementation of the principles of multilanguage education; (iv) expansion of direct links with overseas partner universities and international organizations⁸³.

Three-cycle system of higher education⁸⁴

The most visible structural change in HE initiated by the signature of the Bologna Declaration in 2010 has been the transition to a three-tier system of higher education.

The first level of education is the Bachelor programme lasting at least 4 years. Bachelor’s degree requires at least 129 credits in theoretical training and at least 6 credits of practice, not less than 2 credits for writing and defending a thesis and at least one credit for preparation and passing the state exam in the specialty. Depending on the specialty, the amount of credits varies from 160-180 in the Art disciplines up to 190-224 in medicine.

⁷⁹ <http://www.kazakhstanlive.com/Documents/Kazakhstan%202050%20Strategy%20summary.pdf>

⁸⁰ https://strategy2050.kz/en/page/message_text2014/

⁸¹ https://strategy2050.kz/en/page/message_text2014/

⁸² Academic Mobility Strategy in Kazakhstan for 2012 – 2020, 2012

⁸³ Academic Mobility Strategy in Kazakhstan for 2012 – 2020, 2012

⁸⁴ Source: EC: Overview of the Higher Education System – Kazakhstan. February 2017

The second level (postgraduate education) includes professional Master and scientific-pedagogical Master programmes. The duration of study in the scientific-pedagogical fields corresponds to 1.5 to 2 years, while for professional Masters is 1 year (60-120 ECTS).

The third level includes the Ph.D. programme aiming at training highly qualified scientific and pedagogical staff. Like in other countries, the duration of Ph.D. studies is 3 years (minimum 60 credits).

Autonomy of HEIs is consistently growing in terms of the content of education, diversification of funding sources, the introduction of Boards of Trustees and Supervisory Boards, reporting of rectors, etc. However, the degree of centralised decision-making is still high – HEIs must meet the standards related to the content of educational programmes, admission exams, completion of studies and the awarding procedures of academic degrees and quality assurance⁸⁵. Admission to universities is based on the UNT (Unified National Test).

Qualifications framework

Kazakhstan has adopted its NQF in 2012 and has since then started in a systematic manner to develop occupational standards with employer involvement, and translating these standards into education programmes. According to ETF, by 2016 there have been approx. 450 occupational standards developed and translated into approx. 150 educational programmes.

The approach to occupational standards development has undergone a number of revisions, showing that the National Qualifications Framework is a living system, and there are feedback loops to ensure improvements. The approach taken to the VET education standard has become gradually more flexible (last revised 2016) to provide more adaptation possibilities to providers in line with employer requirements. In 2016, important changes were introduced in terms of definitions and descriptors of qualification levels (among others an “applied bachelor level” was introduced) and on the methods for the development of sectoral frameworks.

A key development in 2016, supported by legislative changes in the education law and labour code, has been one of governance, as the National Chamber of Entrepreneurs became formally responsible for occupational standards (development, the introduction of changes/updates, approval). While previously line ministries had been in control of the sectoral frameworks, there is now a better coordination and closer link to the private sector.

The focus is still very much on developing standards and on formal education. Issues still little addressed (but expected to be under development as of 2017) are the validation of non-formal learning and the introduction of a credit system for VET. Student assessment approaches are also under revision, so as to provide a stronger role for employers in this step.

Credit system

Kazakh credit transfer system measuring the acquired knowledge is compatible with the ECTS (European Credit Transfer System). It is used by Kazakh HEIs since 2010.

The credit used in Kazakhstan corresponds to 45 hours of student workload to study the discipline in the academic period of a semester lasting 15 weeks. These hours also include the independent work of students. Each academic hour of the students in the lectures or practical classes throughout the semester is coupled with two hours of independent work of the student. Based on the above mentioned, a number of disciplines in the Kazakhstani universities at all levels of education is easily converted into ECTS credits using the conversion factor (about 1.8) rounded to the nearest whole number. At present full transition to the ECTS is in progress⁸⁶.

⁸⁵ EC: Overview of the Higher Education System – Kazakhstan. February 2017

⁸⁶ EC: Overview of the Higher Education System – Kazakhstan. February 2017

Internationalisation of higher education

Kazakhstan is a regional leader in terms of HE cooperation with the EU. Academic Mobility Strategy in Kazakhstan for 2012 – 2020 stipulates that by 2020, 20 percent of all Kazakhstani students will be mobile.

In 2014, approx. 10 000 students from around the world have decided to study in Kazakhstan, and almost 65 000 Kazakh students have studied abroad, which makes them the most mobile among Central Asia countries. The CAEP 2 stock taking report on 'Existing Capacity Development and Mobility Programmes between the EU and Central Asia Countries' identified 26 programmes and 127 individual projects supporting capacity development and mobility between the EU and Kazakhstan. Moreover, Kazakhstan funds two own powerful international scholarship programmes, namely the Bolashak and the Academic mobility programme. With regard to the bilateral cooperation with the EU Member States, the most active role is played by Germany offering Kazakhstan 6 capacity development programmes and a number of individual mobility schemes⁸⁷.

Multilingual programmes (in Kazakh, Russian and English) are currently implemented in 65 higher education institutions of Kazakhstan⁸⁸, enhancing the global competitiveness of Kazakh students.

Quality assurance

Kazakhstan in 2015 introduced independent accreditation of education providers and programmes for Higher Education and VET. This approach is expected over time to replace the existing quality related processes. In higher education, this transition is expected to be completed by 2017, in TVET by 2020⁸⁹. Currently, the two systems are operating in parallel.

Evidence-based policy making

Kazakhstan is the only Central Asian country which takes part in international evidence collection exercises in the field of education in a systematic manner. Kazakhstan has taken part in PISA since 2009 and will collect OECD Programme for the International Assessment of Adult Competencies (PIAAC) evidence in 2017 (pilot phase launched in 2016). The country is developing national experience and expertise in evidence collection and analysis not only in cooperation with international partners but also due to Ministries, including the Ministry of Education and Science, commissioning projects with evidence collection and analysis components, as an input to policy development.

At the initiative of the Ministry of Education and Science, an education database covering all education levels (higher education is expected to be integrated in 2017) has been established in 2015. This database provides valuable data, which is already actively used for education monitoring, including VET.

The Ministry of Labour has developed a number of evidence collection mechanisms to better explore short term and medium term labour market developments. A yearly employer survey is carried out in cooperation between the National Chamber of Entrepreneurs and the Ministry of Labour.

Labour market relevance of VET

Kazakhstan has made considerable progress with the introduction of the dual approach, as by 2016 about 60% of VET colleges applied the approach fully or at least its key elements. 2016 was also a year of legislative adaptations, as the dual approach was legally established by the Law on

⁸⁷ CAEP 2 stock taking report 'Existing Capacity Development and Mobility Programmes between the EU and Central Asia Countries', 2017

⁸⁸ EC: Overview of the Higher Education System – Kazakhstan. February 2017

⁸⁹ EC: Overview of the Higher Education System – Kazakhstan. February 2017

Education and the labour code, introducing inter alia the position of a young specialist – a student who holds an employment contract with a company. Furthermore, a new education standard was adopted to provide flexibility to providers working under the dual approach. A key success factor for development in Kazakhstan has been the development of the dual approach implementation roadmap (2015), under the leadership of the National Chamber of Entrepreneurs. The National Chamber plays an important role to convince enterprises to take part and support partnerships with colleges at the local level. The Chamber is developing training for in-company trainers working with VET students.

According to the recent statistics published by the Ministry of Education and Science, dual training covered 2 433 businesses, at which 27 thousand students undergo internship at 80 specialties and 160 qualifications. However, these 27 thousand students trained within the dual education represent only 5.5 % of the total number of students⁹⁰.

Kazakhstan possesses a well-developed staff development system. However, the opportunities for in-company training of VET staff that could support the introduction of the dual approach are insufficient. Kazakhstan plans to review competence requirements and training opportunities for VET college managers in the course of 2017.

EU Support

For 2014 – 2020, Kazakhstan is no longer eligible for the development cooperation under DCI (the country ranked as upper middle-income), but the implementation of bilateral programmes committed before 2014 continues. This means particularly the country's participation in DG DEVCO funded projects **Central Asia Education Platform (CAEP)** and **Central Asian Research and Education Network (CAREN)**.

In 2007 – 2013 programming period, Kazakhstan benefited from a number of structural **Tempus IV** and **Erasmus Mundus** projects that has helped to build national expertise for reforms and supported the transition towards EHEA at individual HEIs. Many of these projects finished in 2016. In 2015 and 2016 Kazakh HEIs applied for **Erasmus+** structural projects, 4 out of which have been approved.

Since 2015, ETF has implemented in Kazakhstan a 3-years project **Skills Connexion** focused on work-based learning (WBL). Key activities include mapping the WBL landscape, analysing the feasibility of WBL schemes, increasing employer's engagement, supporting policy development, reviewing, developing and testing practical implementation mechanisms and improving stakeholders' cooperation at various levels. Kazakhstan has in 2016 finalised a mapping of its WBL situation, identified possible priorities for future developments and also hosted a peer learning activity on its dual system for a number of countries involved in Skills Connexion⁹¹.

With regard to the VET sector, the most visible is the involvement of Germany, through the field work of the German development agency **Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ)**. The most recent country-specific education program was the **Support for Vocational Education and Training**, commissioned by the European Union and implemented by GIZ and GOPA. The project launched in 2010 and ended in 2013, its total budget was €3 984 046 and the beneficiary was the Ministry of Education and Science of the Republic of Kazakhstan. The objective of the project was "to promote the development of the Kazakhstan economy and stable growth of demand in the labour market, assisting in the development of the vocational education system of the country"⁹². The project aimed at supporting the development of the Sector

⁹⁰ <http://palata.kz/en/news/25681>

⁹¹ Source: ETF

⁹² <http://dbase.caep-project.org/project/support-to-vocational-education-and-training-vet-in-the-republic-of-kazakhstan/>

Qualification Framework (SQF) and providing training for policy makers, advisers, teachers, and managers in educational institutions⁹³.

From January 2009 to December 2016 GIZ implemented the project **Reform of Educational Systems in Central Asia**. Partner countries of the project were Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Turkmenistan. The purpose of the project was to provide quality education to children and young people of age 6 - 18 by supporting the reform of training and reskilling of teachers. Approximately 2 000 partner countries' teachers from general schools and lecturers from pedagogical colleges have improved their professional, methodological and didactic skills thanks to this project. The new teacher training modules have been implemented by national education ministries into the national training programmes of partner countries, as well.

Currently, there is one common project for Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Tajikistan supported by GIZ - **Professional Education and Vocational Training in Central Asia**. The project launched in 2010 and will end in 2018. The main focus of the project is in agriculture and food processing sector. The objective of the project is to "make professional education in agro & food processing compliant with the needs of the developing labour markets in the region"⁹⁴. The highest priority of the project is to enhance the employability of trained professionals. Total project budget is €19.5 million.

⁹³<http://dbase.caep-project.org/project/support-to-vocational-education-and-training-vet-in-the-republic-of-kazakhstan/>

⁹⁴ <http://dbase.caep-project.org/project/professional-education-and-training-in-central-asia-/>

2.2 Kyrgyzstan⁹⁵

Key achievements in 2015 and 2016:

- NQF adopted in March 2016.
- Independent accreditation of education providers and programmes for higher education and VET is in place since September 2016.
- State education standards for bachelor's and masters on competency-based approach and ECTS have been adopted in September 2015.
- Ongoing parallel implementation of the Bologna inspired Bachelor and Master's degree with the Diploma of Specialist.
- Ongoing implementation of pilot Ph.D. programs in pilot HEIs.
- Changes in VET governance. At the end of 2015, the overall responsibility for VET has been shifted to the Ministry of Education and Science (MES). MES delegated the responsibility for initial and secondary VET to the VET Agency. At the end of 2016, the responsibility for secondary VET returned to the MES.
- Progress has been achieved in data collection and analysis. However, most of the activities are donor funded and thus their sustainability remains a challenge.
- A tracer study mechanism has been institutionalised by an Order of the Minister of Education and Science in September 2016.
- Initial steps have been taken towards implementation of a dual system.
- New qualification structure and competencies for VET staff have been developed.

Educational policies

The right to education is grounded in the **Constitution of the Kyrgyz Republic**, and the **Law on Education**. Reforms and development of the education system are based in the Decree No 201 **On Strategic Directions of the Education System Development in the Kyrgyz Republic**, released by the Government of the Kyrgyz Republic in 2012. The Decree has approved the Education Development Concept and the Education Development Strategy in the Kyrgyz Republic until 2020. These documents comprise concrete steps for the education system development⁹⁶.

The Education Development Strategy in the Kyrgyz Republic until 2020 covers three periods, the first one from 2012 to 2014, the second from 2015 to 2017, and, finally, the third one from 2018 to 2020. Its main vision is to ensure the significant improvement of the education system and to provide equal access to quality education. By the Strategy implementation, the education system in Kyrgyzstan will ensure that its citizens will: (i) have strong communication skills; (ii) be able to act independently; (iii) be able use creative and innovative approaches; (iv) share values of human rights, freedom, gender equality; (v) respect cultural, ethic and political diversity; (vi) "handle general and specialized knowledge and skills that will allow them to be successful in life and labour market"⁹⁷. The strategy is covering both the HE and VET sectors and it takes into account the main priorities of Millennium Development Goals and objectives of Education for All (UNESCO) movement.

⁹⁵ This section is mainly based on information provided by ETF

⁹⁶ Overview of the Higher Education System, Kyrgyzstan. 2017

⁹⁷ Education Development Strategy of the Kyrgyz Republic for 2012 - 2020

Three-cycle system of higher education

In 2016, Kyrgyzstan had a hybrid system of degree programmes with the two systems run in parallel: the more recent Bologna-inspired system of separate Bachelor and Master's Degrees, and the Specialty program which shall end by 2016.

In 2013, the implementation of pilot Ph.D. programmes was launched at 7 pilot HEIs. For the purpose of their implementation "Temporary State Requirements for Pilot Doctoral Programs of postgraduate professional education (Ph.D.)" were approved by the Order No 311/1 of the Ministry of Education and Science of the Kyrgyz Republic on 31 May 2013⁹⁸.

Qualifications framework

Kyrgyzstan actively cooperates with major international donors in the field of education and hosts the highest number of projects that have led to important innovations and the accumulation of considerable expertise and experience. It should be noted, however, that due to donor funding these innovations operate under special conditions and there is a risk that once donor funding ceases such conditions will be difficult to sustain. Ideally, the long-term sustainability is achieved through the translation of innovations into national legislation which actually happened for instance in the case of NQF.

Over the past decade, the development of the NQF has been supported by a number of projects financed by major international donors (EU, ADB, Soros Foundation, GIZ). However, the active involvement of the Ministry of Education and Science and other governmental bodies in the creation of National QFs started with the TEMPUS project QUADRIGA⁹⁹ - Qualification frameworks in Central Asia: bologna-based principles and regional coordination (2012 – 2014). As a result, the Kyrgyz Republic has adopted NQF by a joint order of the Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Labour in March 2016.

Credit system

New state education standards of higher professional education based on the European Qualifications Framework for higher education have been adopted on 15 September 2015. They introduced an ECTS compatible credit system (1 credit in the national system of Kyrgyzstan is equivalent to 1 ECTS credit) with the following programme requirements¹⁰⁰:

- Level 1: Bachelor programs (4 years, 240 credits);
- Level 2: Master programs (2 years, 120 credits);
- Level 3: Ph.D. programs (3 years, 180 credits);
- Training of specialists (5 years, 300 credits, medical specialists 6 years and 360 credits).

Internationalisation of higher education

In 2014, Kyrgyzstan has been a net importer of HE students, with 12 000 incoming and 6 833 outgoing students. The highest student mobility flows of Kyrgyz HEIs have been documented with Kazakhstan and the Russian Federation. According to the CAEP 2 stock taking report on 'Existing Capacity Development and Mobility Programmes between the EU and Central Asia Countries', in 2015, Kyrgyzstan was eligible to receive support from 16 out of 30 identified programmes. Capacity development projects have been co-financed solely by Erasmus+ (29 projects) and DAAD (5 projects). Individual mobility in the frame of these projects and within other individual scholarship schemes reached 113 incoming and 21 outgoing participants (Erasmus+) and 102 incoming and 24

⁹⁸ EC (February 2017): Overview of the Higher Education System. Kyrgyzstan

⁹⁹ National Qualifications Frameworks in Central Asia, Stock-taking Report, Claudio Dondi on behalf of the EC and GOPA (2016)

¹⁰⁰ EC (February 2017): Overview of the Higher Education System. Kyrgyzstan

outgoing participants (DAAD). France, UK, and Latvia awarded few more individual scholarships to Kyrgyz students.

Quality assurance

Kyrgyzstan in 2015 has introduced independent accreditation of education providers and programmes for higher education and VET. Since September 2016¹⁰¹, external assessment is conducted by independent non-profit accreditation agencies. Their activities are mainly funded through accreditation fees collected from education institutions. The recognition of an organization as accreditation agency is performed by the National Accreditation Board, a consultative-advisory body established under the Ministry of Education and Science.

Evidence-based policy making

The Kyrgyz Republic has limited resources for regular evidence collection via the National Statistical Committee. A lot of ad hoc evidence collection in the area of education and training takes place with the support of international donors. The following summary of the progress achieved in the field of evidence gathering has been provided by ETF:

- Experience has been gained since 2014 by the VET Agency and the Republican Scientific Methodological Centre (RSMC) in small scale sector analysis and functional mapping. These were then used to develop occupational standards and corresponding training programmes together with employers or validated by these. In 2015, the VET Agency was for the first time allocated state budget funding (supported by EU budget support in the education sector) for this purpose and covered these steps without donor support.
- With donor support (in particular GIZ), the VET Agency has been exploring over several years the possibility to introduce independent employer-led certification of VET students as well as short course participants. This work has led to extensive experiences and methodological developments. Large scale independent certification remains at this stage impossible, due to a lack of financial resources.
- The VET Agency together with the RSMC has also developed a proposal for the introduction of the validation of non-formal learning, which by end of 2016 was undergoing inter-ministerial consultation. Under the ADB project, there has been some experimentation of the validation of non-formal and informal learning in the sector of light industry.
- The VET Agency collects substantial administrative data, related to Initial VET. With donor support (ADB) and Education Management System for Initial VET is being developed, which should make administrative data more easily accessible.
- The Ministry of Labour has carried out a first medium terms labour market forecast, and with the support of donors (GIZ) had implemented a series of regional labour market analyses.
- In 2014 - 2016 the VET Agency has with donor support (EU, ADB) carried out small scale sector analyses which were used to define priority professions, develop professional standards and teaching content. In 2015, the Agency received for the first time state budget funding (agreed as part of the EU budget support) to implement such studies on its own.

Labour market relevance of VET

¹⁰¹ EC (February 2017): Overview of the Higher Education System. Kyrgyzstan.

VET sector in the Kyrgyz Republic witnessed significant changes in terms of its governance. At the end of 2015, the overall responsibility for VET, which had initially been shared between the Ministry of Labour (responsible for the VET Agency and initial VET) and the Ministry of Education and Science (in charge of secondary VET) was given to the Ministry of Education and Science. The VET Agency was brought under the control of the Ministry of Education and Science but was given overall responsibility for initial and secondary VET. The Ministry of Labour was disbanded and responsibility for employment and labour issues was allocated to the Ministry for Social Development. Youth policies became the responsibility of the Ministry of Education and Science. At the end of 2016, the responsibility for secondary VET returned to the Ministry of Education and Science.

The VET Agency has with the support of ETF and ADB developed and tested a VET graduate tracer study methodology which was formally approved by an Order of the Minister of Education and Science in September 2016.

The Kyrgyz Republic also has a number of good practice cases illustrating close cooperation between individual VET schools and enterprises. With the light industry sector, the VET Agency and RSMC are investigating since 2016 possibilities to introduce elements of the dual approach via a pilot as of September 2016.

With the support of the ADB, the RSMC has developed a new qualification structure and defined competencies for VET staff (undergoing approval by end 2016). For the identified competencies an assessment of VET staff was carried out 2016, in order to propose corresponding staff development opportunities as of 2017.

EU Support

Key roles in fostering educational reforms in Kyrgyzstan have been played by Asian Development Bank, the EU, and GIZ.

DG DEVCO currently finances the second phase of the **Central Asia Education Platform** promoting policy dialogue and exchange of experiences between CA and EU as well as between individual CA countries and the third phase of CAREN project. A 17 Million EUR project **Support to the reform of the education sector in the Kyrgyz Republic** aiming at capacity building of the whole education sector and enhancing its labour market relevance will be completed in 2018. In addition to that, three smaller technical assistance projects have contributed to reform efforts of the Kyrgyz Government:

- Strengthening the development of social partnership in vocational education and training in Kyrgyzstan (2011 – 2016);
- Review of the Sector Policy Support Programme in Education Sector of the Kyrgyz Republic (2013 – 2016);
- Fostering and monitoring of the education reforms in the Kyrgyz Republic (2015 – up to now).

As mentioned above, **TEMPUS** played an important role in the modernisation of higher education in Kyrgyzstan. It has become a kind of an engine of reforms and, for the past few years, TEMPUS projects have been a key tool for the implementation of measures specified in the Education Development Strategy 2020. In the 2014 – 2020 programming period, Kyrgyzstan has so far participated in two Erasmus+ structural projects that have been approved in 2016.

European Training Foundation supported the Kyrgyz Republic in launching the 2016 Torino process in a self-assessment mode, setting up working groups, provided continuous feedback to draft versions of the report and accompanied the validation process in the countries. In addition to that, ETF engaged VET stakeholders in a dialogue on continuing professional development (CPD) of VET staff, based upon the results of a survey carried out in 2015. As mentioned above, ETF in cooperation with the ADB supported the institutionalisation of a tracer study methodology for VET.

Cooperation actions covered the training of trainers, the preparation of practical guidelines, training on data analysis for policy developments and input to the draft order.

Alongside the common Kazakhstan-Kyrgyzstan-Tajikistan project Professional Education and Vocational Training in Central Asia (2010 – 2018) and the common Kazakhstan-Kyrgyzstan-Tajikistan-Turkmenistan project Reform of Educational Systems in Central Asia (2009 – 2016), **GIZ** has supported two country-specific projects in Kyrgyzstan:

- **Prospects for youth** is a project commissioned by the Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (Germany) which launched in 2015 and will end in 2018 focusing on employment opportunities for youth which represents one-third of the population.
- **Training and employment promotion** (2009 – 2013, German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development) aiming to improve the skills of adolescents and young adults to enhance their job placement through VET promotion.

2.3 Tajikistan

Key achievements in 2015 and 2016:

- On 25th January 2017, the Government of Tajikistan approved the Concept of Lifelong Education in the Republic of Tajikistan for 2017-2023 and the Action Plan on Implementation of the Concept of Lifelong Education in the Republic of Tajikistan for 2017-2023¹⁰².
- The Lower House of the Tajik Parliament adopted a new Law on Adult Education on 26 October 2016.
- The development of NQF has started in 2015.
- The first Ph.D. programmes have been launched in the academic year 2014/2015.

Educational policies

National priorities in the field of education have been formulated in the **National Strategy for Education Development of the Republic of Tajikistan till 2020** and the **Education Action Plan 2015 – 2017**. The Strategy “is aimed at renewal of the education system, so that education could implicitly perform the mission of the key resource for improving the wellbeing of the society and citizens, as well as effectively respond to economic challenges of the developing country and globalization process”¹⁰³. The strategy covers both HE and VET.

In 2012, the Government has also approved the **Living Standards Improvement Strategy of Tajikistan for 2013 – 2015**, by the parliamentary resolution No 1030. The Strategy aims “to accelerate the creation of new workplaces and increase the quality of education and employment”¹⁰⁴ which reflects the state policy on education.

By the parliamentary decision No 895, the **Law on Training Specialists Based on Labour Market Needs**, has been adopted in 2012. The Law “recognizes the importance of linking VET with the requirements of the labour market and the economy as a whole and also the importance of social partnership for the improvement of VET quality”¹⁰⁵.

The Lower House of the Tajik Parliament adopted a new **Law on Adult Education** on 26 October 2016. The Law creates for the first time the possibility for individual citizens to have work skills that they have obtained in informal and non-formal settings certified by various state agencies. The Upper House of Parliament is expected to pass the Law soon. A significant contribution to this law has been provided by the Policy advice project on Adult Education promoted by the German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development, implemented by DVV.

Despite significant efforts of the Tajik Government and international donor community, the quality of education, lack of skilled workforce, low wages of teachers and a widespread corruption remain a challenge.

Three-cycle system of higher education

Tajikistan has committed to implement the principles of the Bologna Process including the Bachelor-Master-Ph.D. degree system. Currently, higher education is divided into three levels:

- First level: Bachelor studies – lasting for 4 years, carrying 240 ECTS;

¹⁰² <https://cis-legislation.com/document.fwx?rgn=94047#A4UM0SUZVR>

¹⁰³ National Strategy of Education Development of the Republic of Tajikistan till 2020, 2012

¹⁰⁴ Torino Process 2014, Tajikistan. 2015

¹⁰⁵ Torino Process 2014, Tajikistan. 2015

- Second level: Master Studies – lasting for 2 years, carrying 120 ECTS, and Master of Applied Studies – lasting for 1 year and carrying 60 ECTS, designed for students who have received specialist diplomas from their previous Bachelor studies;
- Third level: the first Ph.D. programmes in Tajikistan were launched in the academic year 2014/2015 with a minimum of 3 years of study and 120 ECTS.

In the field of medical sciences (studies of medicine, dentistry and veterinary medicine), integrated courses have a duration of 6 years and carry a minimum of 360 ECTS¹⁰⁶.

Qualifications framework

Tajikistan has in 2015 developed a concept on the NQF as well as methodological support for the development of an NQF. Both documents were in a consultation phase by end 2016. NQF development process is in the primary stage – description of qualifications.

The country's legislation concerning NQFs focuses on each specialty at all levels of professional education, which includes the qualifications standard of this specialty. The qualifications standard usually describes the qualification (as the combination of knowledge and skills) as the outcome of educational programmes. The Lists of directions and specialties for all levels of professional education were approved by the government (in 2007 for the HE and SPE, and in 2013 for the IPE)¹⁰⁷.

Credit system

Tajikistan is using an ECTS compatible credit system.

Internationalisation of higher education

Student mobility in Tajik HEIs is still relatively rare and not sufficiently promoted by HEIs. The vast majority of Tajik students studying abroad choose the Russian Federation. As concluded by the CAEP 2 stock taking report on 'Existing Capacity Development and Mobility Programmes between the EU and Central Asia Countries', the cooperation potential between Tajik and European HEIs remains unexploited. Out of 30 reviewed programmes, Tajik HEIs and individuals were eligible in 18. However, they benefitted only from 11 projects. Regarding the individual mobility, 41 incoming and 8 outgoing scholarships have been awarded by Erasmus+, another 68 incoming and 13 outgoing by DAAD, 1 by UK and 11 by Latvia

Quality assurance

The main body, which is responsible for Quality Assurance is the State Agency on Supervision in the Sphere of Education operating under the Ministry of Education and Science. External quality assurance system currently consists of three consecutive steps of licensing, attestation, and accreditation. However, all three steps are drawing on the same standards and using more or less the same procedures and actors, thus overburdening HEIs without adding value to system's improvement¹⁰⁸.

Centre for methodological support and quality monitoring of VET was set up in 2014.

¹⁰⁶ EC (February 2017): Overview of the Higher Education System. Tajikistan

¹⁰⁷ National Qualifications Frameworks in Central Asia, Stock-taking Report, Claudio Dondi on behalf of the EC and GOPA (2016)

¹⁰⁸ EC (February 2017): Overview of the Higher Education System. Tajikistan

Evidence-based policy making

Tajikistan has very limited resources for regular evidence collection. Ad hoc evidence collection in the area of education and training takes place with international donor support. No data on graduates' employability are available.

Labour market relevance of VET

A key challenge of the Tajik economy is the labour market crisis characterised by a surplus of the low skilled workforce. At the same time, there are limited institutional capabilities to adapt the workforce to the needs of the labour market and its complexity. ETF 2014 Torino process report calls for urgent action in (i) developing quality indicators and mechanisms for monitoring and assessing the quality of education and training and (ii) capacity development of VET staff.

Address of the President of the Republic of Tajikistan, Leader of the Nation, His Excellency Emomali Rahmon to the Parliament of the Republic of Tajikistan (22.12.2016)¹⁰⁹, reconfirmed the importance of educational reforms in Tajikistan:

"...Analyses show that the ministries of labor, migration and employment, education and science, executive authorities still do not pay sufficient attention to increase the number of training courses for adults, more involvement of unemployed population, especially women and youth. In this regard, heads of ministry of education and science, labour, migration and employment, industry and innovative technologies, Statistics Agency, chairmen of provinces, towns and districts should undertake effective measures to address the shortcomings and challenges in this area, pay more attention to creation of new jobs, development of folk crafts, occupational training and the operation of adult training centers and submit their reports to the Government twice a year. ... Improvement of education quality at all levels is the priority task of science and education sector staff in the current situation. ... In order to improve the quality of education at all levels, in particular at the vocational education level, we have to attach a serious attention not to quantity, but to quality and train specialists meeting the requirements of the contemporary time-being."

EU Support

Tajikistan has made structured use of the **ETF developed training modules for VET staff development**. The Communities of Practice of VET practitioners established by ETF as of 2014 continue to make active contributions in the area of employer involvement in VET, staff development, and dissemination of good practice.

Quality Education Support Programme I is the first EU support to educational sector in Tajikistan through its bilateral funds. Total EU budget allocated is 15 000 000 €. The programme starts in 2017 with the award of two service contracts on "Provision of Technical Assistance to the Government of Tajikistan in support to improved quality of education in the areas of general education and Initial Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET)". The initial period of the programme is focused on building a platform of partnership, dialogue, and understanding in the sector and to prepare for the policy reform implementation supported through the two subsequent phases. The overall objective is to contribute to the development of a modern education system, able to prepare informed, qualified and ready for work citizens. The specific objective of the project is to support efficient and effective education service delivery at secondary and initial TVET levels in order to improve learning outcomes. In the initial phase the project will provide support in following areas: "(i) a modern, viable and competence based teachers' Continuous Professional Development (CPD) system, better responding to teachers' needs and built on successful national and regional experiences. This area is developed and piloted for secondary school teachers in selected regions. (ii) a modern and viable TVET teachers' CPD system, better responding to

¹⁰⁹ <http://www.president.tj/en/node/13748>

teachers' and Lyceums managers' individual needs and built on successful national and regional good practices is developed, piloted and embedded; (iii) a National Learning Assessment System properly developed and implemented, in line with agreed quality standards and targeting selected educational stages; (iv) a strengthened planning, budgeting and monitoring (PBM) process that results in a more equitable and efficient distribution of resources and is informed by improved monitoring of NSED implementation”.

Tajikistan is also involved in the projects **Central Asia Education Platform** and **CAREN** financed by DG DEVCO.

The activities for developing the NQF have benefited from the Tempus project **QUADRIGA** (launched in 2012 in three Central Asian Republics, including Tajikistan), aiming at creating Bologna-based national qualifications frameworks in each of these countries as well as a Central Asian regional network. Under **Erasmus+**, up to now, Tajikistan has been successful only with one structural project in 2016 call.

Alongside the joint Kazakhstan-Kyrgyzstan-Tajikistan project Professional Education and Vocational Training in Central Asia (2010 – 2018) and the joint Kazakhstan-Kyrgyzstan-Tajikistan-Turkmenistan project Reform of Educational Systems in Central Asia (2009 – 2016), GIZ has recently completed the project **Supporting Reform of the Technical and Vocational Education and Training System in Tajikistan** (2008 – 2016). The project aimed at enhancing the quality of VET graduates to make them more employable and increase their chances to find a better job or setting up their own business¹¹⁰.

¹¹⁰ <https://www.giz.de/en/worldwide/15436.html>

2.4 Turkmenistan

Key achievements in 2015 and 2016:

- On June 15 2016, the Government of Turkmenistan adopted the policy to ensure quality education and learning environment.
- A new Regulation on the Credits Transfer System in the sphere of vocational HEIs was adopted on July 1 2015.
- Ongoing governmental investments into educational infrastructure.
- Progress has been achieved in the field of enterprise based training.

Educational policies

Modernisation of the education system to the level of the developed countries is a declared priority of Turkmenistan. The right to education for all citizens is based in the Constitution of Turkmenistan, adopted in 2008.

The **National Program of Social and Economic Development of Turkmenistan for the period 2011-2030** foresees the establishment of an education system comparable to developed countries and the increase of the education quality as a precondition for Turkmenistan's growth and competitiveness. In addition, the **State Program on the Development of Education for the Period 2012-2016** lays out the guidelines for the quality provision of secondary, professional, and higher education in accordance with international standards.

In 2013, the **Law on Education** has been adopted in order "to improve the regulatory framework of the Government policy in the education sector¹¹¹" followed by the **Decree on Improvement of the System of Education in Turkmenistan**¹¹².

On June 15 2016, the Government of Turkmenistan adopted the **policy to ensure quality education and learning environment**. The quality education policy was developed by the Ministry of Education with technical support from UNICEF¹¹³. The policy aligned with international standards includes five components: (i) inclusiveness of education, (ii) academic performance and compliance with child's life needs, (iii) gender equality, (iv) safe learning environment, and (v) participatory school management.

Three-cycle system of higher education

The Law of Turkmenistan of 4 May 2013 No. 391-IV on Education introduced a Bologna-inspired structure of higher education degrees:

- Bachelor degree (4 years of study);
- Master's degree (1-2 years of study);
- Specialist (5-6 years of study).

A 3-years postgraduate study programme is called Aspirantura.

Qualifications framework

No recent information available.

¹¹¹ Overview of the Higher Education System, Turkmenistan. 2017

¹¹² Turkmenistan, Overview of Vocational Education and Training and the Labour Market, 2015

¹¹³ EC (February 2017): Overview of the Higher Education System. Turkmenistan

Credit system

A new Regulation on the Credits Transfer System in the sphere of vocational HEIs has been adopted by the Decree of the Minister of Education of Turkmenistan №234 on July 1 2015¹¹⁴.

Internationalisation of higher education

Involvement of Turkmenistan in international academic mobility with the European Union and its Member States is the lowest among Central Asia countries. In 2015, Turkmen HEIs implemented only 5 Erasmus+ projects, with 14 incoming and 4 outgoing mobility participants reported. In case of German programmes, there have been identified 17 incoming and 5 outgoing participants, in Latvia it has been 4 incoming persons. The United Kingdom awarded 2 Chevening scholarships to Turkmen applicants¹¹⁵.

Quality assurance

Accreditation, certification and inspection of educational institutions are carried out by state administration under the supervision of the Cabinet of Ministers of Turkmenistan.

Over the past few years, significant attention has been paid to improving the material and technical conditions of educational institutions, which have been equipped with up-to-date computers and equipment. Modern school and university buildings in both the capital and the regions have been constructed to accommodate the growing number of students. As presented by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs¹¹⁶, 35 educational institutions, including 17 secondary schools for a total of 9 540 students, 16 kindergartens for 2 970 children, children's health centres for 300 places and Oguz Khan Engineering and Technology University were put into operation in 2016. 7 256 persons became students of higher schools, and 8 385 students were admitted to secondary vocational schools.

Evidence-based policy making

Turkmenistan has not participated in the Torino Process cycle and thus the information base on current VET development is not comparable with other four CA countries. Access to data is limited mainly to inter-ministerial coordination and communication by internal rules and regulations, which are still preventing data from being accessible to the public.

Labour market relevance of VET

As in many other countries, the issue of youth employment is becoming critical in Turkmenistan as well. According to the Ministry of Labour and Social Protection of Turkmenistan, the 2014 official data show unemployment at 5 % with a higher rate of unemployment registered for young people at around 12 %¹¹⁷.

ETF's publication 'Turkmenistan Overview of Vocational Education and Training and the Labour Market (Update 2015)' concludes that the high and rapid growth in the number of new secondary vocational schools poses a challenge in relation to the quality of provision and the relevance of the

¹¹⁴ EC (February 2017): Overview of the Higher Education System. Turkmenistan

¹¹⁵ CAEP 2 stock taking report 'Existing Capacity Development and Mobility Programmes between the EU and Central Asia Countries'

¹¹⁶ <http://www.mfa.gov.tm/en/articles/8>

¹¹⁷ ANNEX of the Commission Implementing Decision on the Annual Action Programme 2016 in favour of Turkmenistan. Action Document for Support to the vocational education reform in Turkmenistan

qualifications in terms of the skills and knowledge required by the labour market. Further serious challenges identified by ETF include:

- limited VET system's ability to provide education for specialists in the non-state sector of the economy, particularly related to entrepreneurship;
- limited capacities of the Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Labour and Social Security in monitoring and regulation of the workforce supply and demand;
- the absence of the research on the needs of the private sector to estimate the demand for professional training and retraining of personnel;
- limited lifelong learning of the workforce – due to limited absorption capacity of the higher education most of the workforce is made up of general secondary and IVET graduates that need to keep up with the pace of technological change and innovation.

Some progress has been achieved in the field of **enterprise based training**. A training centre has been opened in 2016 in the General Electric headquarters in Ashgabat where the company trains Turkmen experts from the Governmental bodies and academia¹¹⁸. Korean company Hyundai Engineering has in May 2016 opened 'Welder Training Center' at the ethane cracker plant in Kiyarly where 400 new welders will be trained¹¹⁹. Other foreign investors in Turkmenistan provide systematic training for new and existing staff as well (e.g. Bouygues Construction opened a training centre in 2009¹²⁰, Training centre of a German company CLAAS Global Sales GmbH opened in 2012¹²¹). Training centres are supported also by the Governments of other countries, for example, the Turkmen-India Industrial Training Centre, situated at the Turkmen Architectural and Building Institute, has been upgraded and modernised with the financial Assistance from the Government of India¹²².

EU Support

EU institutions and individual Member States supported Turkmenistan's VET sector by a number of initiatives.

In October 2016 has started the implementation of a DG DEVCO funded 4.6 Million EUR project **Support to the Education Sector in Turkmenistan** aiming at further support to the Government of Turkmenistan in the creation of a modern education system in line with international educational standards. This new project is based on the results of the EU project completed at the end of 2013 that produced a VET action plan outlining steps to take in order to advance in the implementation of a systemic reform of the Turkmen VET sector. Although highly welcomed by the Ministry of Education and all relevant VET stakeholders the plan has not yet been officially endorsed by the Government¹²³. The proposed action, therefore, concentrates on further advancing in the implementation of the VET action plan covering all key aspects of VET reform: capacity building and legislative reform, planning, monitoring and financing, content revision and pilot actions, continuous teachers training and quality assurance. Implementation modality is indirect management via a contract with a German development agency GIZ that recently completed a joint Kazakhstan-Kyrgyzstan-Tajikistan-Turkmenistan project **Reform of Educational Systems in Central Asia** (2009 – 2016).

Turkmenistan also participates in the projects **Central Asia Education Platform** and **CAREN** financed by DG DEVCO.

¹¹⁸ http://www.turkmenistan.gov.tm/_eng/?id=6597

¹¹⁹ <http://www.businesskorea.co.kr/english/news/industry/14832-welder-training-center-hyundai-engineering-opens-welder-training-center>

¹²⁰ <http://blog.bouygues-construction.com/en/nos-aventures-humaines/bouygues-construction-ouvre-un-nouveau-centre-de-formation-pour-ses-compagnons/>

¹²¹ <http://www.turkmenistan.ru/en/articles/16891.html>

¹²² http://www.mea.gov.in/bilateral-documents.htm?dtl/25456/Joint_Statement_between_Turkmenistan_and_India_during_the_Prime_Ministers_visit_to_Turkmenistan

¹²³ ANNEX of the Commission Implementing Decision on the Annual Action Programme 2016 in favour of Turkmenistan. Action Document for Support to the vocational education reform in Turkmenistan

Turkmenistan has co-implemented two structural projects under TEMPUS, namely the TuCAHEA, a large-scale project aiming to build a Central Asian Higher Education Area compatible with the EHEA, and the QAMEL project focused on e-learning at HEIs. No Erasmus+ structural projects with Turkmenistan's participation have been approved in 2015 and 2016.

2.5 Uzbekistan

Key achievements in 2015 and 2016:

- Draft Lifelong Learning Strategy of Uzbekistan has been almost finalised by the end of 2016;
- NQF development started;
- Four party contracts between the student, college, employer and local authority have been introduced in 2015.
- Resolution on measures for further improvement of the system for retraining and upgrading the qualifications of management and pedagogical staff of higher educational institutions has been adopted in 2015.

Educational policies

The right to education for all country's citizens is grounded in the Constitution of the Republic of Uzbekistan. Aside from the Constitution, the legal basis in the field of education comprises: (i) the Law on Education; (ii) the Law on National Programme for Personnel Training; (iii) decrees and resolution; (iv) Education Sector Plan.

The **Law on Education** “determines the legal basis of training, education, professional training of citizens and is aimed at providing constitutional right of everyone on education”¹²⁴.

The **Law on National Programme for Personnel Training** (adopted in 1997) together with the Law on Education “laid a solid foundation for the creation of a harmonious system of continuous education of the modern type”¹²⁵.

The decrees group comprises following legal documents: (i) the Decree on measures to improve technical facilities and resources of higher education institutions, and radically improve the quality of staff training for the period of 2011-2016 (adopted in 2011); (ii) the Resolution On further improvement of the system for training and attestation of university-level research and teaching staff (adopted in 2012); (iii) the Resolution on measures for further improvement of the system for retraining and upgrading the qualifications of management and pedagogical staff of higher educational institutions (adopted in 2015)¹²⁶.

The **Education Sector Plan** was developed in 2013, and it is “built on the model of life-long education, aimed at ensuring equal opportunities and quality education for all”¹²⁷. It covers both, the VET and HE sectors. The strategic vision within the VET sector is that teachers will be “prepared for the transmission of knowledge, independent thinking and organizational skills to learners, and for the development of learners’ personalities in preparation for their contribution to society”, and within HE that graduates will be “prepared as highly qualified specialists to contribute to scientific progress, socio-economic and cultural development”¹²⁸.

Draft **Lifelong Learning Strategy of Uzbekistan** has been almost finalised by the end of 2016¹²⁹. Support has been provided by UNESCO Office in Tashkent, the UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning and the International Office of the German Adult Education Association (DVV) in Uzbekistan.

¹²⁴ <http://cis-legislation.com/document.fwx?rgn=846>

¹²⁵ <https://www.un.int/uzbekistan/news/uzbek-model-education-key-achieve-goals-sustainable-development>

¹²⁶ Overview of the Higher Education System, Uzbekistan. 2017

¹²⁷ Education Sector Plan, 2013

¹²⁸ Education Sector Plan, 2013

¹²⁹ <http://www.uil.unesco.org/lifelong-learning/recognition-validation-and-accreditation/towards-lifelong-learning-strategy>

Uzbekistan actively participates in Torino process biannual reviews. VET policy is consistently following the implementation of the National Programme for Personnel Training commenced in 1997 and the country is working towards the development of its educational system to make sure that it is comparable and competitive with internationally accepted standards. The 2014 Torino Process Report came to a conclusion that Uzbekistan's vocational education system is efficient and serves its intended objectives. Moreover, it is moving from a phase that previously focused on infrastructure development and student volume to a new focus on content and quality. One of the signs of this move has been the establishment of the methodological Centre for Secondary Specialised Vocational Education (SSVE Centre) in 2014.

Three-cycle system of higher education

Uzbekistan has a three-tier system of higher education, starting with a Bachelor level of a minimum period of study of 4 years, followed by at least 2 years of Masters level and another 3 years of postgraduate education level.

As of 2013, the two-stage postgraduate education (two scientific degrees 'Candidate of Sciences' and 'Doctor of Sciences') has been replaced by a single 3-years postgraduate degree programme 'Doctor of Sciences'.

Resolution of the Cabinet of Ministers of the Republic of Uzbekistan № 246 "On the introduction of amendments and addenda to certain decisions of the Government of the Republic of Uzbekistan to enhance effectiveness and quality of pedagogical activities" of 25 August 2015 clarified the status of Ph.D. holders who obtained their degrees abroad¹³⁰.

Qualifications framework

Currently, an NQF in the European understanding of the term is not present in Uzbekistan, however, many systems employed can serve as a basis for its development. Individual specialties and areas have their own set of standards and qualifications that are centrally regulated, but the overall NQF for all levels is still not evident¹³¹.

According to ETF, Uzbekistan has initiated the work on NQF with the involvement of different stakeholders (Chamber of Commerce, Ministry of Education and Ministry of Labour). Key questions under consideration are the involvement of employers in the development of occupational standards as well as in student assessment/certification. The draft concept for the NQF still borrows many features of the tariff qualification system.

Credit system

Uzbekistan does not have a credit system as such. Academy of sciences is in charge of recognition of professional qualifications.

Internationalisation of higher education

The CAEP 2 stock taking report on 'Existing Capacity Development and Mobility Programmes between the EU and Central Asia Countries' concludes that Uzbekistan has been demonstrating fair attempts to increase the mobility of Uzbek students across the borders. The number of incoming students has been the lowest among all Central Asia countries – only 228 students from around the world in 2013. At the same time, the number of Uzbek students studied abroad has been as high as 23 235. Like the other Central Asia countries, the first choice has been the Russian Federation with

¹³⁰ EC (February 2017): Overview of the Higher Education System. Uzbekistan

¹³¹ National Qualifications Frameworks in Central Asia, Stock-taking Report, Claudio Dondi on behalf of the EC and GOPA (2016)

10 211 Uzbek students in 2013, followed by Kazakhstan (5 588), Ukraine (2 072), Kyrgyzstan (1 219), and Germany (789).

The country benefits from 22 programmes and 55 projects funded by the European Union and selected European countries. The majority of projects (48) are funded from Erasmus+ envelope. Within these projects have been reported about 208 incoming and 77 outgoing mobility participants. From other European donors, the leading position has Germany, with 62 incoming and 15 outgoing participants. Latvia offered four mobility programmes in which have been participating 19 Uzbek students. France awarded 13 scholarships to Uzbek students, mainly through the French embassy grant programme. In 2015, UK granted 2 Chevening scholarships to Uzbek students.

Quality assurance

State Testing Centre under the Cabinet of Ministers of the Republic of Uzbekistan is authorised to undertake attestation and state accreditation of all educational establishments in Uzbekistan regardless of their corporate subordination or type of ownership¹³².

Rating of HEIs aiming to stimulate the improvement of their quality has been introduced by the Resolution of the Cabinet of Ministers of the Republic of Uzbekistan № 371 dated by December 29, 2012 'On the introduction of a system of rating assessment of higher educational establishments of the Republic'.

In case of international universities, internal quality assessments are conducted by foreign experts.

Evidence-based policy making

Access to data in Uzbekistan is restricted due to internal rules and regulations¹³³.

Labour market relevance of VET

Uzbek HEIs provide assistance in finding jobs to as many graduates as possible. They organise regular meetings and activities with the participation of potential employers, ensure participation of employers during final examination and organise job fairs jointly with local authorities. HEIs collect data on the employment of graduates and annually report them to the Ministry¹³⁴. In order to improve employment prospects for graduates, Uzbekistan has in 2015 introduced a "four-party" contract between the student, college, employer and local authority.

Overall economic development of the country is guided by successive government industrial modernization policies (2011–2015 and 2015–2019) aiming at expansion of the middle class, promotion of shared prosperity, and elimination of poverty through the creation of quality jobs for its citizens. However, 35 % of firms in a 2013 survey conducted by the World Bank reported that employee skills posed a major or very severe obstacle to growth¹³⁵. According to ADB¹³⁶, evidence shows a mismatch between the number of graduates and the number of jobs created in different fields of study. ETF¹³⁷ acknowledge the strong support for the VET system provided by the business community but stress the need to continue developing its role as an active contributor to the reform process, particularly in relation to:

¹³² EC (February 2017): Overview of the Higher Education System. Uzbekistan

¹³³ ETF: Evidence based policy making for better policies and better impact. Discussion note. 2016

¹³⁴ EC (February 2017): Overview of the Higher Education System. Uzbekistan

¹³⁵ M.I. Ajwad et al. 2014. The Skills Road: Skills for Employability in Uzbekistan. Washington, DC: World Bank.

¹³⁶ Republic of Uzbekistan: Skills Strategies for Industrial Modernization and Inclusive Growth (Financed by the Japan Fund for Poverty Reduction), ADB technical assistance report, December 2016.

¹³⁷ ETF (2015): Torino Process 2014: Uzbekistan

- matching skill requirements for emerging sectors to vocational education (teaching, learning, assessment and career guidance) in the secondary education sector;
- providing guidance and support to national and regional authorities on skill needs;
- supporting small business in the vocational education system.

EU Support

The only support to VET system in Uzbekistan provided by the EU has been the two phases of the **Central Asia Education Platform** (2012 – 2015 and 2015 – 2018) covering all five Central Asian countries.

With regard to higher education, Uzbekistan benefited from a number of **Tempus** structural projects. In 2015 and 2016 calls, Uzbek HEIs have been successful in applying for the following **Erasmus+** structural projects:

- Internationalisation and Modernisation of Education and Processes in the Higher Education of Uzbekistan;
- National Qualification Framework: Guidelines for Development and Recognition of Qualifications;
- Furthering the Quality of Doctoral Education at Higher Education Institutions in Uzbekistan;
- Paving the Way to Interregional Mobility and Ensuring Relevance, Quality, and Equity of Access.

The most recent project financed by GIZ in Uzbekistan is the **Vocational Education and Training in the Construction Sector** with duration from December 2006 to July 2015. The objective of the project was “to strengthen the quality and capacity of initial and further education in the field of building sector professions”¹³⁸. The project focused on the standards and curriculum development, capacity building and further education of teaching staff and management. The total project budget was €1 074 700.

Since 2004, the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation implements in Uzbekistan a **Skills Development Project** focusing on the development of cooperation between colleges and enterprises to create more job opportunities for students and building the capacities of colleges’ management and teachers/masters. The fourth phase of the project has started in 2015¹³⁹.

The British Council implements in Uzbekistan the **Skills for Tourism project** supporting national reforms in VET by strengthening links between education and industry, seeking to promote skills development and equip young people with the skills and competencies that employers require¹⁴⁰. In addition to that, the British Council develops the concept for the **Centre for Innovation in Foreign Language Teaching** that is being established under the University of World Languages¹⁴¹.

¹³⁸ <http://dbase.caep-project.org/project/vocational-education-and-training-in-the-construction-sector/>

¹³⁹ <https://www.eda.admin.ch/countries/uzbekistan/en/home/news/news.html/content/countries/uzbekistan/en/meta/news/2015/june/uzbek-swiss-bilateral-agreement-on-skills-development-project-is0>

¹⁴⁰ <https://www.britishcouncil.uz/en/programmes/education-society/skills-for-tourism>

¹⁴¹ <https://www.britishcouncil.uz/en/programmes/education-society/pedagogical-innovation-centre>

3 Success Stories

Adoption of NQF in Kyrgyzstan

Over the past decade, the development of the NQF in Kyrgyzstan has been supported by a number of projects financed by major international donors (EU, ADB, Soros Foundation, GIZ). However, the active involvement of the Ministry of Education and Science and other governmental bodies in the creation of National QFs started with the TEMPUS project QUADRIGA - Qualification frameworks in Central Asia: bologna-based principles and regional coordination (2012 – 2014). As a result, the Kyrgyz Republic has adopted NQF by a joint order of the Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Labour in March 2016.

Education System Reforms in the Countries of Central Asia: Focus on Quality and Innovation (GIZ project)¹⁴² – Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan

The project was implemented in Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Turkmenistan during the period 2009 – 2016. The purpose of this programme was to support efforts of involved countries and their education ministries to improve the quality of their education system, to introduce necessary reforms and to monitor their impact. The target group represented children and young people from age 6 to 18 who struggled with a lack of quality education. The programme was focused on retraining and reskilling teachers teaching applied subjects such as technology, biology, chemistry, physics, mathematics, as well as those providing elementary school teaching. An additional purpose was to support the regional exchange of experiences and process of collaborative learning within the CA region.

Since 2009, more than 2 000 teachers of secondary schools and educational colleges have gained new professional and methodical-didactic knowledge. They also started using new methods of teaching, oriented towards practical experiences through experiments done by the students. This has led to increased motivation on both sides – among students and among teachers. The education ministries of involved CA countries have successfully integrated these new methods into the curricula for building programs for teachers. A significant number of teachers who undergone these training programs became trainers and currently train their colleagues.

German-style dual training system in Kazakhstan¹⁴³

In 2012, following the meeting between the President of Kazakhstan and German Federal Chancellor, there has been announced an initiative to implement the principles of the German dual vocational education system in Kazakhstan. The project has been launched in 2014, under an agreement between the Kazakh Ministry of Education and Science, the Kazakhstan Chamber of Industry, and the German Society for International Cooperation (GIZ). The dual education represents a combination of theoretical training at professional colleges with practical training at companies or business. The practical training often represents half time of the study time.

By 2016, approx. 60% of VET colleges used the dual training system. 2016 was also the year of legislative amendments, as the dual approach was legally established by the law on education and the labour code, introducing inter alia the position of a young specialist – a student who holds an

¹⁴² <https://www.giz.de/en/worldwide/14383.html>

¹⁴³ <http://www.heidelbergcement.com/en/dual-training-system-kazakhstan>

employment contract with a company. Furthermore, a new education standard was adopted to provide flexibility to providers working under the dual approach. A key success factor for developments in Kazakhstan has been the development of the roadmap for the implementation of the dual approach (2015), under the leadership of the National Chamber of Entrepreneurs. The National Chamber plays an important role

VET graduate tracer mechanism in Kyrgyzstan

Kyrgyz VET Agency has with the support of ETF and ADB developed and tested a VET graduate tracer methodology which was formally approved by an Order of the Minister of Education and Science in September 2016. ETF supported the development of practical guidelines, a platform for data collection, questionnaire in Kyrgyz and Russian and training of new VET providers. In line with the Order, 50% of graduates shall participate in the tracer survey. Already at the time when the Order was approved, a significant number of VET providers were taking part.

Tajik Law on Adult Education

The Lower House of the Tajik Parliament adopted a new Law on Adult Education on 26 October 2016. The Law creates for the first time the possibility for individual citizens to have work skills that they have obtained in informal and non-formal settings certified by various state agencies. Significant contribution to this law has been provided by the Policy advice project on Adult Education promoted by the German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development, implemented by DVV.

New education policy in Turkmenistan

On June 15, 2016, the Government of Turkmenistan adopted the policy to ensure quality education and learning environment. The quality education policy was developed by the Ministry of Education with technical support from UNICEF. The policy aligned with international standards includes five components: (i) inclusiveness of education, (ii) academic performance and compliance with child's life needs, (iii) gender equality, (iv) safe learning environment, and (v) participatory school management.

Central Asia Education Platform 1, 2

This DG DEVCO sponsored project aims to enhance both cooperation between the European Union and Central Asia, and also regional cooperation between the countries of Central Asia, in order to strengthen education reforms in the region. It also enables better co-ordination of donors' actions in the education sector while enhancing ownership by Central Asian countries. Various activities of the project contributed to education reforms in Central Asia, for example:

- In Uzbekistan, CAEP has provided expertise for an appraisal of the Education Sector Plan in Uzbekistan, which was well received by the state authorities and the donor community.
- In Kyrgyzstan, the Project supported a one-day Tempus Seminar on Human Resource Management in Public Higher Education Institutions in Kyrgyzstan, in Bishkek on 24 October 2013. In total 40 participants representing officials and representatives of the Kyrgyz Ministry of Education, HEIs and national HEREs participated. As a result of the seminar, and under the guidance of the HEREs, the participants developed a set of recommendations for developing a National Strategy and Human Resource Development Support for HEIs in Kyrgyzstan.
- The project contributed to more intense bilateral cooperation between Poland, Latvia and CA countries, particularly Kyrgyzstan, Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan.

- As a contribution to evidence-based policy making, CAEP developed a database of education projects implemented in Central Asia by various donors.

4 Recommendations

Evaluation of the EU regional-level support to Central Asia (2007 – 2014) published in September 2016 formulated several conclusions that should be taken into account when formulating future development cooperation in the field of education:

- EU regional strategic documents and programmes did not fully reflect the growing linkages between CA and the rest of Asia.
- Interest in regional co-operation in CA is limited and the evaluation found a strong preference for national programmes over regional ones, and within regional programmes a preference for national rather than regional-level activities.
- Most activities at the regional/interstate level, such as networking, remained largely driven by EU and the implementing international organisations.
- The interest in co-operation with, and learning from, EU was much higher than within the CA region. There is a general acknowledgement that the EU is more advanced than CA and applies international best practice across a wide range of themes. For example, in the higher education sector, the primary appeal of EU's regional support was the opportunity to cooperate with EU partners. This is reflected in the aspirations of all CA countries to align with certain EU standards.
- Significant limitation of service contracts aimed at supporting the EU-CA dialogues (such as the CAEP project) was that they focused exclusively on facilitating dialogue and raising awareness without a direct link to tangible implementation activities, and were thus not perceived to provide any real benefits, so in turn the interest in engaging was limited.

Based on the above conclusions, the evaluation provides following recommendations for the future design of the EU – CA cooperation:

- If feasible and appropriate vis-à-vis EU's political priorities, include (by 2020) CA in the strategy and programmes of the Asia Region instead of having CA as a separate region – but at the same time maintain the possibility of having programmes and dialogue with a CA-specific focus (as EU is also doing in other sub-regions), as well as opportunities to learn from EU MS (especially those in Eastern Europe) and ENPI East countries.
- Enhance the focus of EU assistance on the specific context and capacities of CA in supra-regional education programmes, avoid over-ambition, ensure approaches are realistic, and secure involvement and commitment of decision makers.

The first recommendation could be implemented inter alia by linking the European Education Initiative with the Bologna Policy Forum and the Asia-Europe Meeting. All three fora have similar education-related visions and values so that it is worth exploiting their potential synergies.

With regard to the content of the Bologna-inspired HE reforms, guidance has been provided by the **Statement of the Fourth Bologna Policy Forum** held in Yerevan, 14 – 15 May 2015. Key priorities for non-EHEA countries include:

- Developing NQFs, including developing methodologies to establish compatibility with EHEA qualification frameworks.
- Developing cooperation in quality assurance and encouraging quality assurance agencies from participating countries to work towards inclusion in the European Quality Assurance Register (EQAR).
- Improving the mutual recognition of qualifications, through improved information, the joint development and dissemination of recognition practice and methodology.
- Cooperating in developing and implementing credit transfer system, taking due account of ECTS and its recently revised Users' Guide.

Kazakhstan, the only EHEA member from Central Asia, follows the priorities set by Yerevan Communiqué (14 – 15 May 2015):

- Enhancing the quality and relevance of learning and teaching;
- Fostering the employability of graduates throughout their working lives;
- Making our systems more inclusive;
- Implementing agreed structural reforms.

The **European Training Foundation** formulated the following challenges that should be addressed by the CA countries in the following years:

Challenges related to NQF implementation:

Involvement of the World of Work

The concept of employer involvement in professional standard development tends to be considered as the first and also most important step. Priority tends to be given to the production of many occupational standards, rather than to progress from a limited number of professional standards to corresponding, outcome based education content/provision and (employer supported) student assessment.

Ensuring that changes reach end users

As a result, new occupational standards are not immediately translated into new programmes and new approaches to assessment. The impact is therefore not really visible for providers and for end users (employers and individuals). Those countries, which have progressed to education content (Kazakhstan, the Kyrgyz Republic), have not yet progressed to the monitoring and evaluation of the final outcome of their new approach.

Getting organised for systemic implementation

The NQF approach is a complex one, with many components, which are closely inter-linked. It requires the cooperation of different actors and stakeholders and overcoming working in silos. For structured work on this long-term venture, it is advisable for countries to have an agreed strategy for the new qualification system, that explains the objectives and the key concepts and to agree a roadmap among the actors and stakeholders, which outlines the sequencing of priorities and supports a holistic view/avoids fragmentation. It requires coordination and extensive communication to reach actors and stakeholders, and to keep people informed on the progress. In its Toolkit on organising qualification systems ETF points at four key elements for success: empowering legislation, active stakeholder engagement, service oriented institutions and quality assurance rather than control.

Beyond those directly involved in initial NQF developments, it is important to consider that systematic change implies the active understanding of the concepts by the VET community at large.

This requires a major well structured capacity building effort (to support sufficient expertise) and a well developed information campaign, targeting different audiences (employers and in-company trainers, expert community, VET provider managers and teachers, students).

Make better use of existing experiences

The Central Asian countries are relatively isolated from developments in EU and the partner countries in South-East and eastern Europe. At EU level a number of NQF related tools/approaches have been developed (for example ECVET, the credit system for vocational education based on learning outcomes, guidelines for validation of non-formal learning, and quality assurance approaches) and practical experience gained by EU member states in their application. ETF has established as well a virtual community for experts and practitioners in English and Russian that provides access to experiences from different countries. It would be highly relevant for Central Asian VET stakeholders to be able to familiarise themselves with these tools and with the practical experience of their application in different contexts. Standard development is a priority in many countries, that due to lack of resources and capacities advances often rather slowly. While standards developed for other contexts should not be copied, information about them can help national development processes.

Challenges related to evidence-based policy making and data collection:

With the exception of Kazakhstan most Central Asian countries have been little exposed to defining evidence collection approaches in relation to evidence-based policy making. Where new evidence collection is initiated, this happens mostly with donor involvement, so that national capacity remains insufficiently developed. At the same time, evidence collection and analysis approaches supported by donors consider sustainability, so the capacity of the country to sustain a given approach with its own human and financial resources.

The limited experience with evidence collection approaches also means that so far monitoring, where it exists, focuses mostly on inputs but hardly ever on processes, outputs or outcomes.

Developing evidence-based policy making skills and capacities among education authorities in all five CA countries is a challenge that could be eventually supported by future development cooperation with the EU.

Challenges related to quality assurance and accreditation:

The new independent accreditation introduced in Kazakhstan and the Kyrgyz Republic have to a great extent been influenced by Higher Education developments and thus to institutions that have little in common with VET providers (size, level of autonomy, level of regulation). Though in the Kyrgyz Republic the approach was introduced with donor support (GIZ) and covered also considerable staff training components, it remains unclear in both countries how education providers should cover the cost of the procedure.

At the same time, limited attention has been paid to alternative/complementary quality assurance procedures. Some key issues for VET provision, such as for example teacher and trainer/master training and the use key competences, have not yet been formally addressed in any of the countries. The existing formal quality assurance mechanisms are mostly input focused.

EQAVET principles, and their application by different types of VET providers and in different EU member states could be of considerable interest to Central Asian countries.

Challenges related to cooperation between VET and employers to promote employability

Education Ministries but also Ministries of Labour stress that employers have limited interest and capacity to cooperate with VET. So far only Kazakhstan has a strong and well resourced employer organisation, as membership in the Chamber of Entrepreneurs is mandatory for enterprises. It also

has a number of independent sectoral organisations, that are working in an active manner with VET. In the other countries participation in sector or employer organisations is voluntary. Typically, these organisations have only very limited resources and are only able to cooperate with VET in case of donor involvement and support.

Responsive and flexible staff development, which empowers VET staff to actively engage with enterprises remains a challenge in all four countries. Especially the Kyrgyz Republic and Tajikistan face important financial limitations. All four countries have to some extent maintained a rigid (Soviet) approach to staff development (training every 5 years and of a pre-defined duration) which no longer fits the requirements of more frequent adaptations and change. All countries do however also have cases of good practice, which could be shared with other Central Asian countries. Exchanges on staff development practices with EU countries would also be of interest.

An aspect which has received limited attention by Ministries of Education/VET authorities has been the capacity of VET provider staff to actively engage with enterprises/employers.