

**POLICIES FOR
SYSTEM CHANGE
AND LIFELONG
LEARNING**

**A Torino Process cross-
country digest (2018–21)**

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1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 About this report

This report provides a cross-country overview of policies and actions in support of lifelong learning in the partner countries of the European Training Foundation (ETF) in South Eastern Europe and Turkey, Central Asia, the Eastern Partnership region, and the Southern and Eastern Mediterranean.

Our analysis explores the extent to which the creation of lifelong learning opportunities is a priority in the reform agenda of the partner countries in the field of education and training, and the ways in which they are influencing the formation of that agenda. The report also discusses the efforts of authorities and stakeholders in implementing their reform plans in the wake of changing circumstances before and during the Covid-19 pandemic, and – where possible and appropriate – identifies policy gaps and lessons to be learned before providing a handful of policy recommendations in a cross-country perspective.

The report was prepared on the occasion of the 2021 international conference on ‘Building lifelong learning systems: skills for green and inclusive societies in the digital era’, and is guided by the outcomes of consultations with some 750 stakeholders who attended the event to discuss the features of effective and inclusive lifelong learning systems in a rapidly changing environment and how to build them for an increasingly diverse group of learners, without leaving anyone behind (ETF, 2021e).

1.2 About the Torino Process

The Torino Process is a biennial review of vocational education and training (VET), which has been carried out since 2010 under the coordination of the ETF. The analysis in this digest is based on information and evidence collected during the last round of the Torino Process in 2018–20, which covered 24 partner countries, and on additional rounds of evidence collection in 2020–21, as described in the next section.

The Torino Process facilitates structured self-reporting by the partner countries with the aim of collecting and interpreting primary evidence on country developments, challenges with human capital development and policy responses to these challenges which fall within the remit of the VET system. Within the limits of some obligatory methodological requirements, every round of the Torino Process has had a specific focus and priority (ETF, 2018b).

The first round in 2010 established a baseline for subsequent reporting and piloted the comprehensive analytical framework of the process. It also introduced the four principles of the Torino Process and their significance to the partner countries. The subsequent rounds in 2012 and 2014 refined the focus of reporting, deepened the capacity of countries to work with evidence, and facilitated a shift from the description of data and problems to analysis, with a view to designing options for action. The focus of the 2016 round was on evaluating progress in the implementation of countries’ plans to address the problems and meet the strategic objectives of their national VET systems, while in 2018–20, the Torino Process widened the perspective to include a broader array of issues in the field of human capital development and the contribution of VET to resolving these issues.

1.3 Evidence and methodology

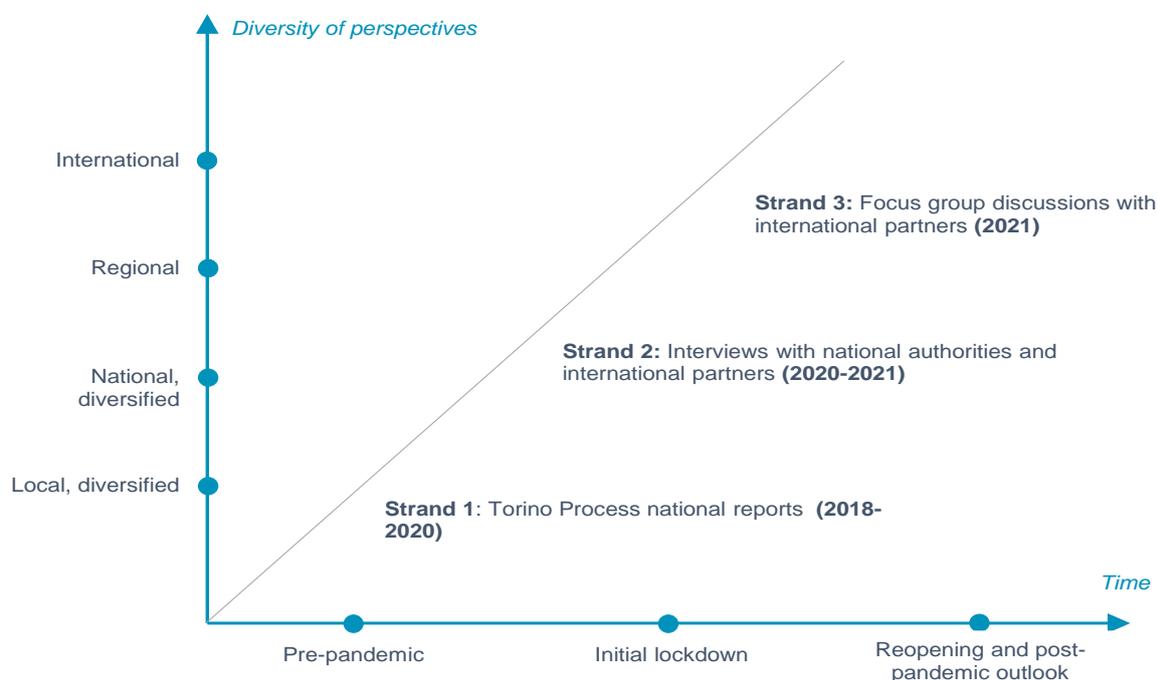
1.3.1 Sources of evidence

This report is based on evidence from several sources. As in previous editions of the digest, the primary source were the national reports from the most recent round of the Torino Process. Their comprehensive thematic coverage, availability for most partner countries, focus on documenting the stakeholder perspective in education and training, and their flexibility to accommodate country-specific questions and themes, confirmed their value as a unique repository of insights. This also includes the complex themes in focus of this digest, such as evaluating progress with the establishment of lifelong learning systems, or the relative significance of lifelong learning in the broader context of national reforms across a diversity of countries¹.

Despite the proven value of these reports as a source of information for cross-country analysis, this time around we felt that there was a need for additional effort to ensure that the monitoring and analysis of country developments was as relevant as possible for policy-makers, practitioners, and national stakeholders. The protracted duration of the Covid-19 pandemic upended many of the assumptions and projections about country developments, policy progress and system change. Although the focus of cross-country analysis is not on the pandemic itself or its impact, in these circumstances it was important to generate additional layers of evidence which captured the latest developments in a rapidly changing environment, as well as the various perspectives of an even wider selection of participants in these environments.

To obtain more reliable answers along these lines, the ETF therefore opted for a multimodal approach and carried out two additional rounds of evidence collection beyond the national reporting to include a wider selection of stakeholders and perspectives on reforms, and to collect evidence which was more recent (Figure 1.1).

Figure 1.1 Cross-country digest report 2021: evidence by source and time



¹ A full overview of the analytical framework which guided the preparation of these reports in the last round of the Torino Process can be found here: www.etf.europa.eu/en/publications-and-resources/publications/torino-process-2018-20-guidelines

The first of the supplementary modalities were semi-structured interviews which we conducted with representatives of partner countries who have been most familiar and most involved with the VET reforms (e.g. national and regional authorities' representatives and civil society representatives). The interviews took place from December 2020 to January 2021 in an online setting and covered the target of system change reforms, experiences with implementation and translation into professional practice of these reforms, lifelong learning as a policy priority, and imagining the future. The interviews collected information in a less systematic way than the national reports but addressed all topics of concern in a more "lively", detailed and integrated manner, thus giving an opportunity to understand the purpose of reforms, mechanisms of change, the major challenges and successes, and the visions for human capital development of VET in a more thorough, hands-on manner.

The second modality and source of supplementary evidence was a focus group discussion with international partners, which took place virtually in January 2021 and provided the most recent set of data. The focus group gathered 24 international experts, representatives of international organisations, such as the British council, GIZ, ILO, OECD, SDC and UNESCO to discuss along the same lines and themes as their national counterparts did during the interview campaign. The focus group discussion was organised with the aim of gaining the perspective of the donors and matching it to that of the countries.

These three sources were compiled into a repository covering the immediate pre-pandemic period (2018–20), the phase of initial lockdown and provider closures in 2020, and the time of emerging reopening and post-pandemic debate in 2020–21 (Figure 1.1).

1.3.2 Method of analysis

This digest is based on an inductive thematic analysis of 26 national Torino Process reports, 22 bilateral interviews with partner country representatives (Table 1.1) and a focus group with international partners, resulting in a total of 2 500 pages of reporting and transcripts, as well as big and administrative data for the period since 2011, which covered the VET sector and the socioeconomic context in which education and training take place.

Table 1.1 Sources of evidence: geographic coverage by type of source

| | National report | Interviews |
|------------------------|-----------------|------------|
| Albania | x | x |
| Algeria | x | no |
| Armenia | x | x |
| Azerbaijan | x | x |
| Belarus | x | x |
| Bosnia and Herzegovina | x | x |
| Egypt | x | x |
| Georgia | x | x |
| Israel | x | x |
| Jordan | x | no |
| Kazakhstan | x | x |

| | National report | Interviews |
|------------------------|-----------------|------------|
| Kosovo ² | x | x |
| Kyrgyz Republic | x | x |
| Lebanon | x | no |
| North Macedonia | x | x |
| Moldova | x | x |
| Montenegro | x | x |
| Morocco | x | x |
| Palestine ³ | x | x |
| Russia | x | x |
| Serbia | x | x |
| Tajikistan | x | x |
| Tunisia | x | no |
| Turkey | x | no |
| Ukraine | x | x |
| Uzbekistan | x | x |

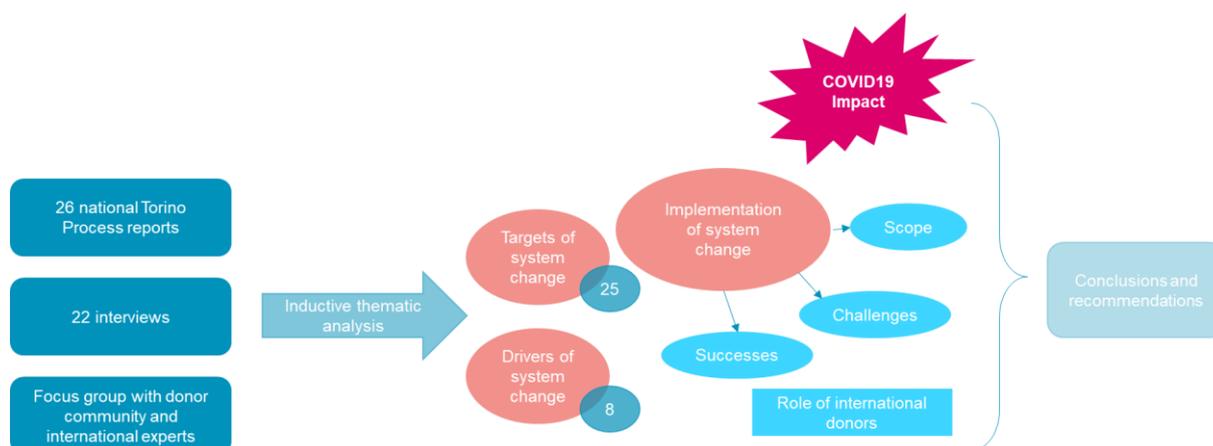
The units of analysis were segments deemed to be of relevance because they referred – directly or indirectly – to system change in VET which was (a) intentional (purposeful), and (b) ‘live’ at the moment of reporting, that is under implementation or planned for implementation.

After narrowing down the data to those of relevance in line with these two features, and after multiple rounds of inductive thematic analysis and negotiations of meaning, we developed a coding system. Its application to the reports, interviews and focus group transcript returned 5 000 segments of relevant evidence from 25 countries (Figure 1.2). The segments were targeted enough to allow for a reconstruction of the broad context of commitments to system change across countries and, for a discussion of state of affairs and progress with lifelong learning, against the backdrop of three broader questions: 1. What are the system change priorities of countries participating in the Torino Process? 2. Why are countries engaging in system change along the lines of these priorities? 3. How are they implementing these reform priorities and what progress are they making?

² This designation is without prejudice to positions on status and is in line with UNSCR 1244/1999 and the ICJ Opinion on the Kosovo Declaration of Independence – hereinafter ‘Kosovo’.

³ This designation shall not be construed as recognition of a State of Palestine and is without prejudice to the individual positions of the Member States on this issue – hereinafter ‘Palestine’.

Figure 1.2 Methodological approach and main outcomes



At the next state we disaggregated these broad questions into more specific inquiries which covered the relationship between reform priorities, including lifelong learning, e.g. whether some reforms tend to be conceived and implemented together with others; which of them lead to challenges and which to success; whether there is an association between reform targets and the likelihood of system-wide implementation; and also what role the international partners play in promoting system change.

The next step in the analytical process was the quest to corroborate the initial round of findings and update them in the light of more recent developments, as captured in the verbatim transcripts from the interviews and the focus group discussion. These two sources contained much fuller, richer descriptions of the issues we had identified, and how they may have evolved since the completion of the Torino Process reporting, which for most countries covered the period 2018–19.

In addition to detailed information about the process of change (critical points, challenges, achievements and the communication of reforms), the interviews provided crucial updates about the influence of the Covid-19 pandemic on the shape and progress of policy reforms in VET and education more broadly, while the focus groups' discussion supplied an additional layer of insight into the priorities of the donor and international expert community regarding system change and anticipated developments and priorities for the future.

This digest presents a purposeful selection of findings from this rich repository of evidence, which reveal the relative significance of lifelong learning in the process of reform and system change in the partner countries at the time of evidence collection, the strategic significance of lifelong learning as a driver of change, and the interpretation of countries with regard to lifelong learning, as well as some of the more widespread challenges concerning the implementation of policy commitments in this respect. The remaining data is publicly available for research and analysis, and will inform and guide the work of the ETF in the area of system change and lifelong learning over the coming years.

1.3.3 Limitations

Like all methodologies, that applied in preparation of this digest also has its limitations, which implies that the comparative conclusions in the report should be taken with a degree of caution. The first limitation is that the approach remains interpretative in nature. Despite careful consideration and an ample degree of intercoder agreement, the positionings, values and judgments of the research team inadvertently influence decisions about coding, which underpin the analysis presented in this report. While this is also an advantage because it provides flexibility and receptivity for different perspectives, it puts the analysts in the position of becoming analysis tools, which may lead to involuntary bias.

Another limitation is that the Torino Process reporting is based on consultations and an elaborate process of preparation of the reports, which may vary to a considerable degree between countries regarding the diversity of stakeholder participation, time available for quality assurance, as well as political sensitivities that may be present in some countries around some topics, but not in others. The same is true for the interviews and the focus group discussions, which may have been influenced by the same factors and, in addition, by time limitations at the stage of evidence collection.

2. A CONTEXT OF OPPORTUNITY AND RISING DEMAND

Demand for education and training is shaped by the socioeconomic context in which providers operate and policy decisions are being taken. Over the years, the Torino Process has retained a focus on that context as a source of information about the factors which influence the policy choices of national authorities and the views and expectations of policy stakeholders. That evidence has helped the ETF develop a better understanding of how the goals and results of these policies align with the political, economic, and social realities in each partner country, and has supported the drawing of context-sensitive conclusions (ETF, 2018a).

The countries participating in the Torino Process are diverse, as are their reforms and reform trajectories. The connection between socioeconomic developments and policy decisions may therefore not always be straightforward. Nevertheless, in this round of the Torino Process the national reports offer largely concurrent descriptions of policy contexts marked by a mounting pressure for change and adaptation in response to internal and external developments, some of which are within the remit of decision-makers, practitioners, and stakeholders in the VET sector.

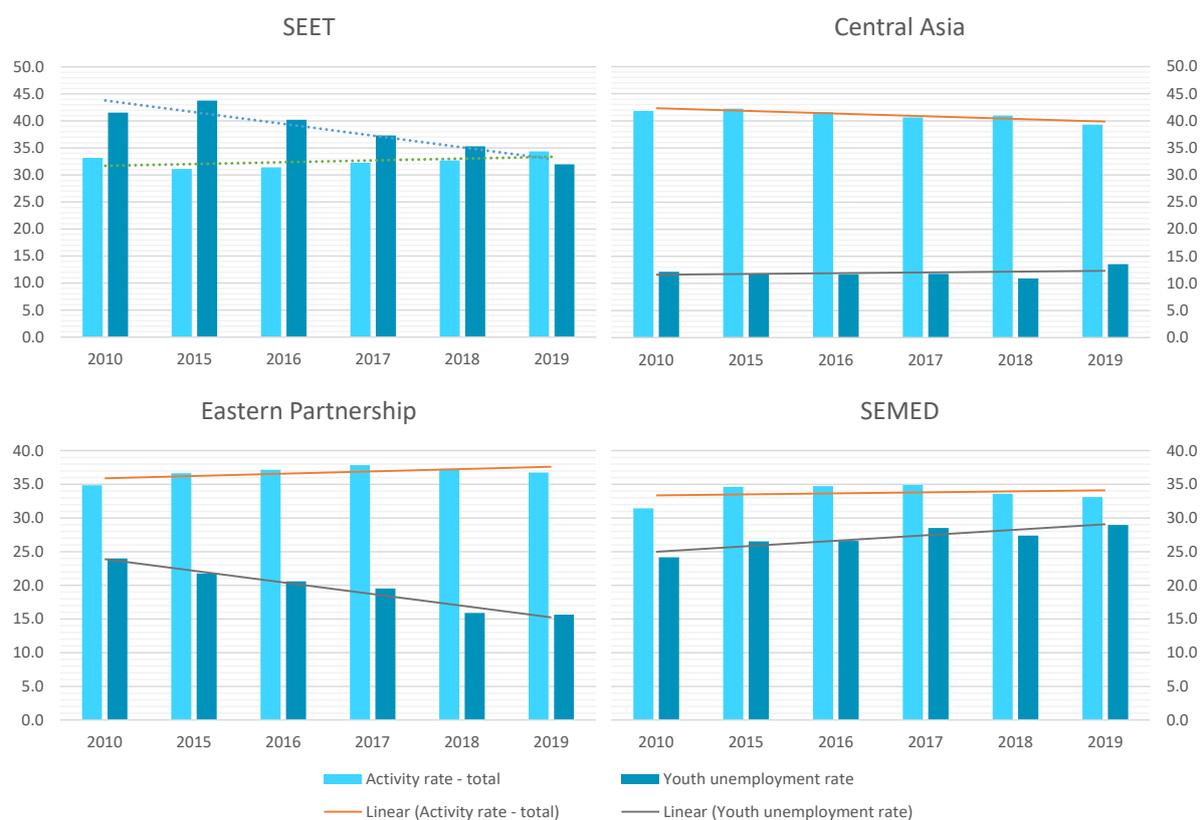
The national reports suggest that education and training in all countries is under pressure to adapt to a context which is undergoing profound changes. Some of these developments could be labelled as 'conventional' or 'legacy developments'. They can be traced back to challenges which have become a regular fixture among the factors influencing the policy environment in some countries and regions. In the Southern and Eastern Mediterranean (SEMED), for example, such factors include large youth populations, migration and refugee flows, and economic volatility which limits employment opportunities and hampers capacity for adequate investment in socioeconomic development.

The national reports also highlight drivers of change which transcend national and regional boundaries and are more forward-looking and global in nature. In addition to conventional challenges, the countries in Eastern Europe, South Eastern Europe, and Central Asia, for example, highlight the largely unpredictable impact of rapid and transformative technological advancements, exposure to new trade paradigms, risks and opportunities, the anticipated effect of emerging commitments to low-carbon production, as well as rapidly changing consumption patterns (ETF, 2019; ETF, 2021d). Overall, in all partner countries there is a shared perception that digitisation and automation in the world of work, an ongoing transition to new technologies, production processes and services, the reality created by the Covid-19 pandemic, and the global migration flows are already leading to a demand for new and largely unanticipated skills.

Aggregate data for the pre-pandemic period up until 2020 suggests that, prior to the crisis, most partner countries were doing comparatively well in addressing these and other long-term risks to employment and inclusion. Activity rates in all partner regions were relatively stable over a long period despite volatile economic environments and youth unemployment. Youth unemployment remained high in international comparison, but was in decline everywhere except in the SEMED region, and in some countries substantially so (i.e. the South Eastern Europe and Turkey (SEET) and the Eastern Partnership regions) (Figure 2.1).

Figure 2.1 Rate of youth activity and unemployment by partner region

Share of the population aged 15–24, 2010–19

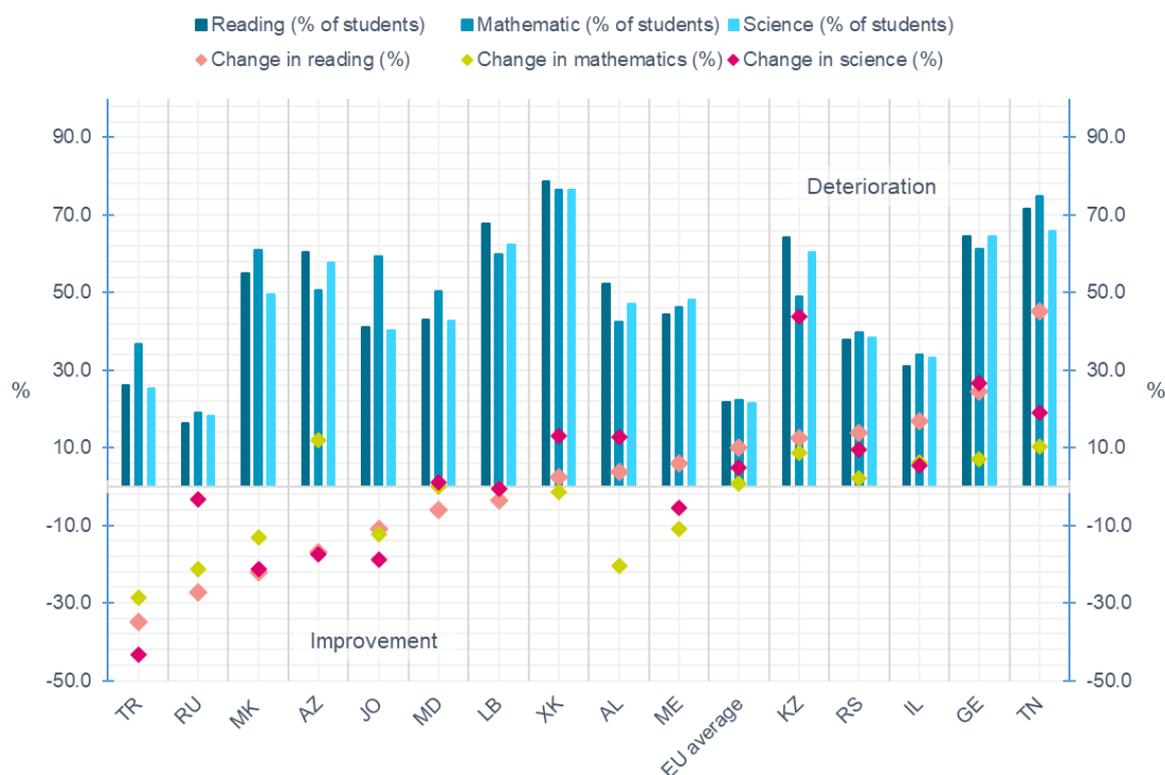


Note: data for Algeria included in the SEMED aggregate covers the age group 16–24.
Source: ETF, 2020.

To the extent that the quality of learning and training outcomes matters for explaining such trends, in most countries education and training seem to have been part of this pattern of relative improvement. Although the rate of underachievement remains high by international comparison in most partner countries, two out of three countries for which there is data managed to reduce the share of students who are functionally illiterate in key fields of competence such as reading, mathematics and science, as captured by the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) of the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD). In some countries, e.g. Turkey, Russia, and North Macedonia, the improvement was substantial (Figure 2.2).

Figure 2.2 Share of underachieving students in PISA by partner country

Percentage change between the first and last round of participation in the assessment



Source: Calculations based on data from the OECD PISA database and the ETF (2020).

In the same period since 2011, the majority of countries for which there is data (10 out of 17) also found a way to increase their public budget allocations for education and training in line with their strategic ambitions. Georgia for example allocated 44% more of its national wealth and 41% more of its government spending to schools and universities than it did in the baseline year, followed by Tajikistan, where the increase was 26% as a share of GDP and 2% as a share of public spending. In Montenegro, Turkey, Kyrgyzstan, Belarus, Azerbaijan, Tunisia and Israel, the upward trends in spending were more subdued, but still sizeable, ranging from a 7% to 2% increase as a share of GDP in Montenegro and Tunisia, respectively, and from a 11% and 2% increase as a share of government spending in Tunisia and Kyrgyzstan, respectively (ETF, 2020; World Bank, 2021).

Certainly, the past round of the Torino Process recorded a number of challenges as well. One example is the situation of young people who are not in education employment or training (NEETs) – a group that remains a policy challenge in most partner countries. In 2020, on average, every fourth young person in most countries for which there was data was classified as belonging to this group (Figure 2.3). Gender seems to be a strong predictor: the problem affects young women disproportionately often. A particularly challenging feature of this issue is that for many young people, being a NEET appears to be a matter of choice (ETF, 2021b) and not simply a consequence of circumstances. The 2020 data shows an increase of NEETs in nearly all countries.

Figure 2.3 Young people not in employment, education or training (NEETs) by country, 2016–20



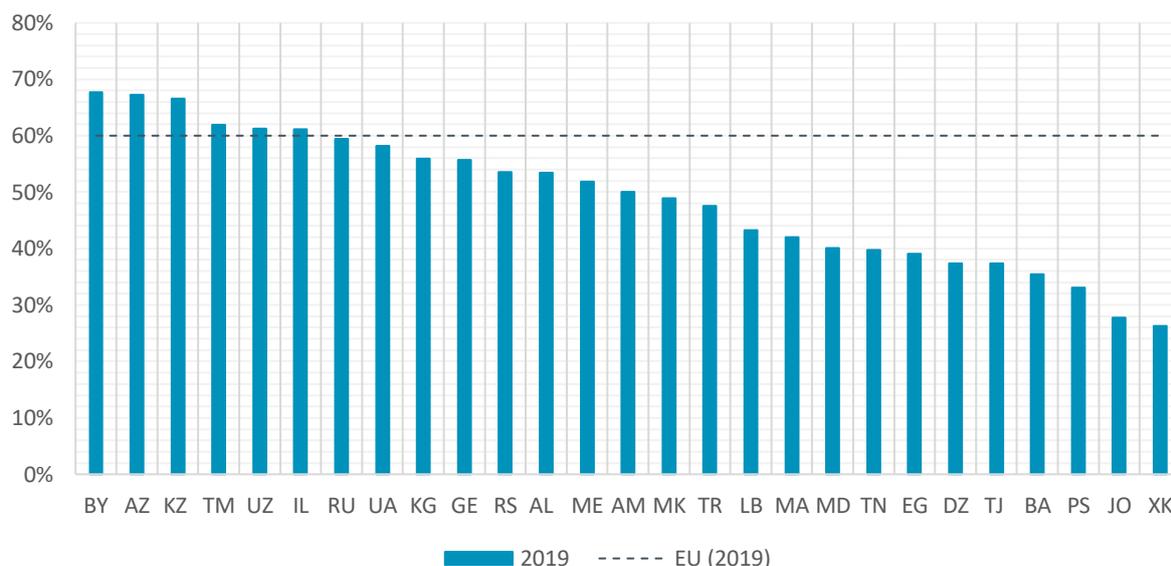
Notes: data for Armenia, Egypt, Georgia, Jordan, Kyrgyzstan, Tunisia, and Ukraine: ETF calculation based on Labour Force Survey (LFS) microdata; data for Moldova: estimated using the usual resident population. Sources: ETF, 2020; Eurostat

Skills-related problems are also affecting large swathes of the adult population, which is confronted with the combined challenge of low level and/or irrelevant education and unpredictable, rapidly evolving economic environments which require constant upskilling and reskilling. In a quarter of the 24 partner countries for which there is recent data, the share of people with no or a low level of education is well above 40%, while in another quarter it is between 16 and 20% (ETF, 2020)⁴. Where the data can be disaggregated by age group it shows that there is a link between age and attainment level: the older a person is, the more likely that they will have a low level of education or none at all.

On the other hand, those who do have more advanced educational credentials often struggle with a mismatch between the skills and knowledge they have and the skills and knowledge demanded on the labour market. In 2020, in the vast majority of partner countries only roughly half of the population of working age was in employment, and in a third of the countries that share was considerably lower. In some countries, including Algeria, Kosovo and Palestine, most women display typically less favourable labour market prospects, and only one in 10 is employed (ETF, 2021b) (Figure 2.4).

⁴ The purpose of this chapter is to reconstruct the broader policy context in the partner countries and identify developments relating to a reflection on lifelong learning as a policy option. Its purpose is not to rank partner countries by the severity of challenges. Therefore, occasionally, we present and analyse data without referring to countries by name.

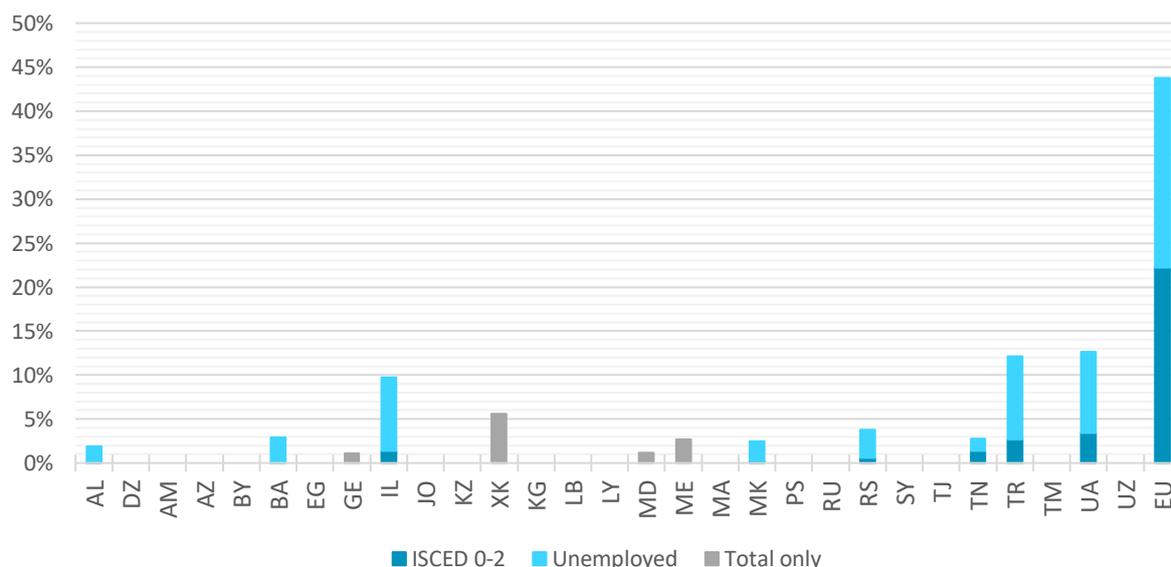
Figure 2.4 Employment rate of the population of working age (15+) – partner countries and EU average, 2019 or latest available year



Source: ETF, 2020.

Information about the extent to which people try to remedy challenges like these through learning is rather scarce, but where it is available it shows that there is ample scope for improvement and optimisation of opportunities for lifelong learning. Participation in lifelong learning remains notoriously low and its use is biased towards certain groups of people, mostly the unemployed, who make use of lifelong learning opportunities in the framework of active labour market policies, and those who already have a job and participate in internal, on-the-job training provided by their employers.

Figure 2.5 Adult participation in lifelong learning in the past 4 weeks, 2020 or latest available year (% aged 25–64)



Source: ETF, 2020.

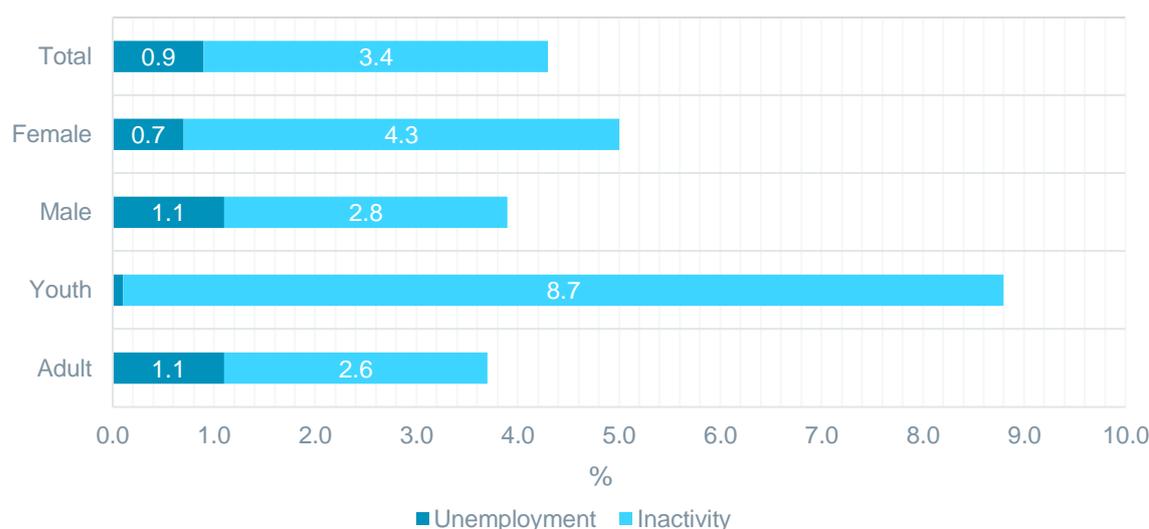
It is safe to conclude that in a substantial number of the countries which participated in the last round of the Torino Process, low educational attainment, limited relevance of education and training, and the

associated low level of employment are central problems to deal with – both because of their persistence and because of their impact on the opportunities of people to participate in the economy.

The Covid-19 pandemic has added to these issues by reinforcing long-standing structural issues and introducing a new array of challenges, many of which have a profound impact on the demand for learning and skills. As employers were closing operations or modifying their business models, economic activity in all partner countries suffered a slowdown and a substantial decline in GDP growth, with mixed signs of economic rebound emerging only recently. Industries and sectors which employ VET graduates were put under serious strain, and while the crisis may be a catalyst for transforming some industries for the better, almost all national Torino Process reports describe skills development systems that may be too slow to respond.

A recent ILO projection suggests that employment growth will be insufficient to accommodate the employment needs of a substantial share of the population of working age, and that the working hour shortfalls are and will be particularly pronounced in lower and upper middle-income economies such as those of most partner countries (ILO, 2021). In addition, the impact will be strongest on groups that were already vulnerable in terms of employment opportunities before the crisis, such as women, young people and the poor. These groups are heavily affected by employment loss already (Figure 2.6).

Figure 2.6 Breakdown of employment losses in 2020 into changes in unemployment and inactivity, by sex and age group (as a %)



Note: reference age for young people: 15–24; reference age for adults: 25+.
Source: ILO, 2020.

The mass closure of education providers during the pandemic and the transition to distance learning has routinely left out students who are disadvantaged and created disruptions that may have a lasting impact on the prospects of learners for a successful participation in the economy and society. VET systems – in partner countries and elsewhere – have been affected particularly hard due to their reliance on practical teaching and learning in work-based settings (ETF, 2021c; OECD, 2021). Today, there is a real risk of creating a generation of young people and adults who are lost to Covid-19 (UNICEF, 2020), trapped between education systems which remain notoriously slow to respond and adapt and labour markets that are rapidly changing – usually to the disadvantage of those who work in lower skilled professions and have lower-level qualifications.

3. POLICIES FOR LIFELONG LEARNING

3.1 The concept of ‘lifelong learning’ in this digest

As a growing number of learners and workers see their career choices and life prospects challenged by such developments, education systems will have to find ways of opening up and creating new pathways of learning throughout life – pathways which can accommodate the learning needs, circumstances and expectations of an unprecedented diversity and number of learners. The cross-country evidence in the previous chapter suggests that this is an imperative especially for workers in sectors at risk who may need up- and reskilling, and for young people and adults more broadly to ensure that they remain employable in a new, digital and green economy.

This paper cultivates a notion of lifelong learning that draws on this anticipatory, demand-driven perspective. It is aligned with an ETF understanding of lifelong learning as a concept which puts people and their learning needs and settings at the centre of attention. In this sense, lifelong learning refers to any learning activity undertaken throughout life for personal, social and/or professional reasons, which may take place anywhere, anytime and for any purpose of importance to an individual.

We opted for this somewhat broader understanding of lifelong learning because it reflects the heightened significance of the concept from the policy point of view in our partner countries. It presents lifelong learning as a flexible, highly adaptable and wide-reaching policy priority that can be mobilised as a narrative and course of action in response to a number of challenges, in particular challenges that can be traced back to the low or inadequate skills of diverse populations and to the changing skills demand in their environments, as discussed in the previous chapter above.

The broader concept of lifelong learning has advantages also from the methodological point of view because it allows for more tolerant interpretations at the stage of coding and analysis of evidence, which account for the diversity of contexts, formulations, aspirations and use cases that the partner countries and stakeholders describe. This translates into a two-layered approach to the identification and recording of data of relevance to lifelong learning. The first layer features segments with direct references to lifelong learning (Type 1 segments), such as the one shown in the segment (quote) below:

Quote 1

‘Lifelong learning is also an important component of the National Employment Strategy (2017–19). The political component of the said paper regarding strengthening of the education-employment relationship contains actions to encourage lifelong learning and to create open learning environments.’

The second layer features segments which do not refer to lifelong learning directly (Type 2 segments), but which describe priorities and actions that fall in the field of lifelong learning in the sense of the definitions above, specifically the provision of opportunities for learning beyond formal education and in response to challenges that may be remedied through learning opportunities for populations that are not within the remit of the formal system. Interview Quote 2 provides a typical example of a Type 2 segment:

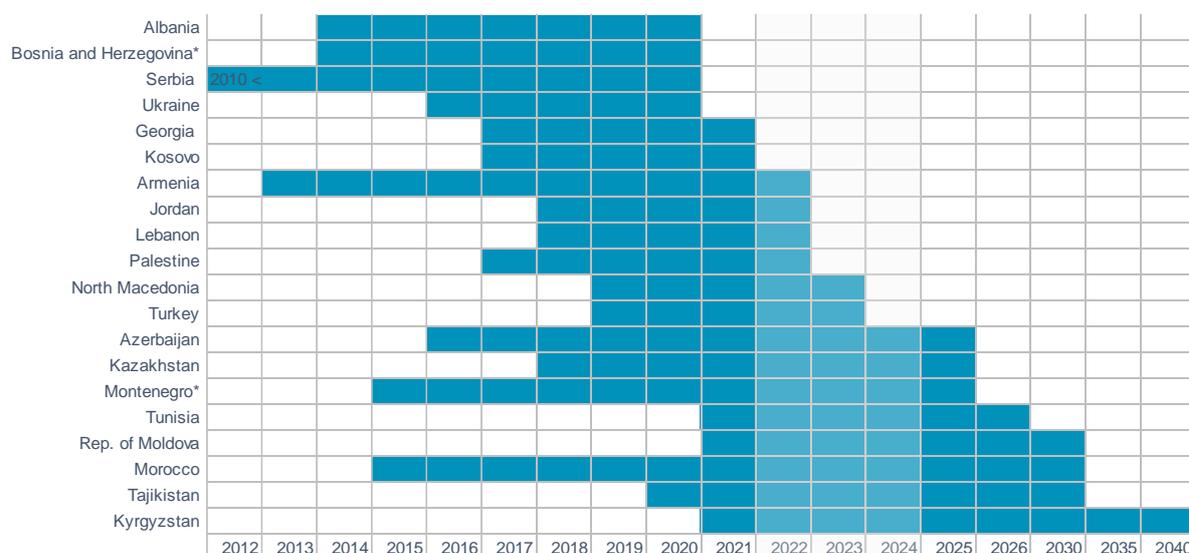
Quote 2

'[...] free education is intended for unemployed and self-employed youth, as well as people who do not have a professional education [...] persons not admitted to educational institutions looking for work, from among those in difficult life situations and members of low-income families [...]

Overall, the Torino Process show that discussions on how long-standing challenges can be tackled by creating learning opportunities for much wider segments of the population than those usually covered through the formal education system are becoming increasingly common and mainstream. More recent consultations with policy-makers, stakeholders and practitioners from the partner countries and the EU during the ETF-UNESCO conference confirm that partner countries are indeed considering how to modify the policy and incentive frameworks and practices in education and training in ways that lead to longer-term positive changes (ETF, 2021e).

Much of the evidence collected for this digest confirms that this may be an opportune moment for the continuation of this discussion in which lifelong learning is revisited as known, yet this is a newly framed narrative about the reforms that are responding to current challenges and leading to viable learning opportunities for all who need and want them. At the time of writing (2021), the strategic plans for human capital development of most partner countries were about to renew or expire or were at the stage of long-term implementation planning (Figure 3.1).

Figure 3.1 Timing of national development strategies with reference to lifelong learning in partner countries, 2021



Note: countries marked with an * had a stand-alone lifelong learning/adult education strategy.

Source: review of publicly accessible national strategies for education development and/or lifelong learning (June 2021).

At the same time, it seems that for most partner countries it is rather early in the process: in the vast majority of plans we reviewed, lifelong learning was not a stand-alone, clearly outlined strategic priority for development. The national reports furthermore suggest that most countries still rely on decades-old legacy systems of adult education and refer to them in the context of preservation and perhaps optimisation of what is already available, and less so in the context of actual change (Quote 3 describes a typical example)⁵.

⁵ The names of countries were omitted from the quotes on purpose.

Quote 3

'Here we failed again, from my point of view. We don't offer lifelong learning, it's adult education that we offer [...] But the programmes and everything, it's the same curriculum [...] Of course, for lifelong learning there are a lot of things that you have to change in programmes and curriculums, it's a different thing but it depends on the needs of the candidates, whoever is interested.' (Interview with senior official)

The imminent renewal or operationalisation of development strategies in the next 5 years is a period in which the strategic framework for lifelong learning as a policy and system change priority can be developed (in countries where it does not yet exist) or reinforced (where it is already in place). This digest is the first step in the direction of generating evidence and guidance for cooperation with interested partner countries on this matter.

3.2 The landscape of reforms in partner countries

A helpful feature of the evidence collected for this digest is that it comprises thousands of descriptions of policy responses in the form of targeted 'narratives' about the content of reform and system change in education and VET. All Torino Process reports and every single participant in the bilateral interviews and the focus group discussions provided an abundance of such substantive, thematic narratives about ongoing and/or anticipated reforms.

The analysis of these narratives allowed us to identify and distinguish common reform interventions by policy area and by solutions within each area, which the reforms are advancing. From there, we could draw cautious conclusions about the relative place and importance of each of these areas in the overall agenda for change in our partner countries and regions.

In total, several rounds of reading by a team of experts of the national reports, interviews and focus group transcripts to determine whether there are narratives concerning the content of reform and system changes and, if yes, whether there are common themes emerging in these narratives. These readings identified 15 recurring subthemes (categories) describing areas of policy response through VET, which partner countries had conceived and were implementing in an effort to resolve challenges and meet commitments in human capital development. The categories were confirmed in team consultations and negotiations of meaning (Figure 1.2) to eliminate ambiguities and redundancies, allowing us to determine what dominated the work and engagement of practitioners, stakeholders, and policy-makers in 2018–20 and then at least until 2019–21 (Table 3.1).

Some of these concern changes in the use and distribution of financial resources (No 5 and 14), while others aim at introducing novelties in the field of decision-making and steering the VET system (e.g. Nos 6, 9 and 12). There is a group of solutions that relate to monitoring performance and system results (Nos 4 and 15), and quite a few of the responses are meant to improve the chances and circumstances of learners, for example Nos 1, 10, 11 and 13, and boost the quality and relevance of VET content (Nos 1, 3 and 8).

On the face of it, none of these responses is new, but the examples of interventions within each are rich, diverse and – to some extent – also innovative. A more comprehensive version of Table 3.1 with extended descriptions and modal examples for each category can be found in Annex 1.

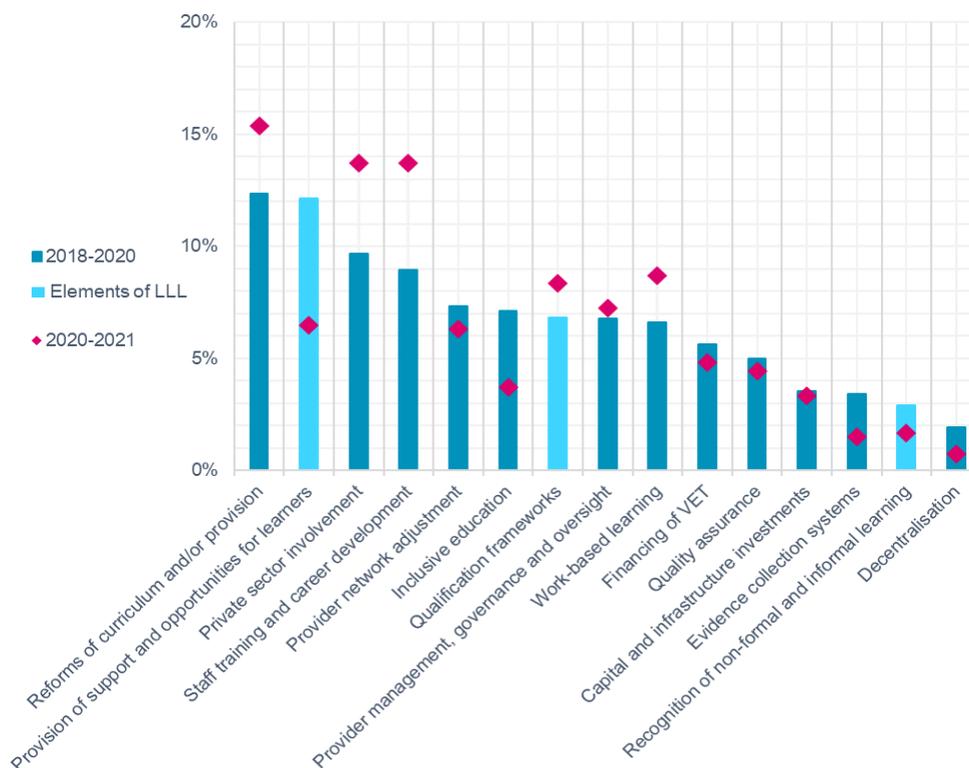
Table 3.1 Tackling problems and changing the system: overview of policy response areas

| No | Policy response area | Description of interventions |
|----|---|--|
| 1 | Qualification frameworks | Developing and implementing national qualifications frameworks |
| 2 | Work-based learning | Establishing or improving conditions for dual education; increasing the number of practical classes and apprenticeship opportunities |
| 3 | Staff training and career development | Introduction or improvement of teacher training; professional development of school principals and associates; production of learning materials for school staff; career development |
| 4 | Evidence collection systems | Setting up large-scale studies or electronic systems for collecting data on labour markets and/or education and training |
| 5 | Financing of VET | Introducing new and more efficient ways of funding and financing VET |
| 6 | Decentralisation | Devolution of decision-making powers to lower levels of governance |
| 7 | Provider network adjustments | Optimisation of the network of VET providers, including establishment of new providers (e.g. opening centres of VET excellence) |
| 8 | Reforms of curriculum and/or provision | Modernisation of learning content, including changes in the organisation of delivery (e.g. digitalisation and online learning, innovative approaches to teaching and learning) |
| 9 | Private sector involvement | Strengthening public-private partnerships in VET |
| 10 | Inclusive education | Provision of support to individuals from vulnerable and marginalised groups |
| 11 | Provision of support and opportunities for learners | Provision of financial and other support to learners, including career guidance, to promote participation and successful transition |
| 12 | Changes in VET governance and management modalities | Establishment of new or restructuring of old national or regional bodies, agencies, committees and councils |
| 13 | Recognition of non-formal and informal learning | Establishing or improving the process (policies, procedures and methodology) of recognition or validation of previous learning and competencies |
| 14 | Capital and infrastructure investments | Building or refurbishment of material infrastructure |
| 15 | Quality assurance | Introduction or improvement of systematic evaluation of educational and training provision, including changes to licensing and accreditation |

Source: Torino Process cross-country digest database.

In addition to the thematic differences outlined in [Table 3.1](#), there is also a large variance in how widespread or common these policy responses are across partner countries and regions ([Figure 3.2](#)). This is an important aspect as it may provide clues as to the relative importance of each in the overall efforts of countries towards system change and improvement.

Figure 3.2 Areas of policy response in education and VET by aggregate prevalence, 2018–20 and 2020–21



Source: Torino Process cross-country digest database.

Among the reform priorities we documented, few proved to be widespread across all the countries and regions. For example, all countries are devoted to modernising the VET curriculum and adjusting the provision of training to the labour market needs and learners’ needs. All are also working on providing support and opportunities for learners, meaning that they are striving to attract more persons to VET by providing either financial incentives or educational and counselling programmes in formal and non-formal settings. Getting the private sector ‘on board’ proved to be one of the top priorities in all countries, while investing into teachers’ and trainers’ professional development was the fourth most prevalent priority.

These top three priorities could be clearly recognised in the Torino Process reports from Montenegro, Kazakhstan and Lebanon. Lebanon, Jordan and Egypt engaged more in providing private sector involvement, compared to other countries. In Uzbekistan, Algeria and Morocco, however, optimisation of educational institutions networks and establishment of new educational providers proved to be the most relevant areas of reforms. In Kyrgyzstan, the financing of VET was a top priority, while Albania and Morocco largely focused on changes in VET governance. Many countries were also devoted to reforms in the areas of inclusive education (e.g. Montenegro and Moldova), dual education (e.g. Serbia, Egypt and Armenia) or capital and infrastructure investments (e.g. Russia).

In all partner countries, the least prevalent priority was decentralisation. More than half of the national Torino Process reports did not mention decentralisation, and the topic had limited mentions in the interviews and in references in the focus group discussion. However, it was an important policy response in Ukraine.

Reforms relating to recognition of prior and non-formal learning and those relating to setting up or improving evidence collection systems proved to be generally infrequent also. A look at the prevalence of all these reform priorities in each report showed that some countries engaged in reforms in almost all of the areas (e.g. Uzbekistan, Kazakhstan, Morocco, North Macedonia,

Montenegro, Serbia, Russia, Ukraine and Egypt), while others ‘neglected’ some reform targets (e.g. Tajikistan and Bosnia and Herzegovina).

In the context of this overview, it is important to note that all these areas of policy responses are marked in the most general of terms for the sake of brevity, but also in compliance with the intention of this digest to provide an initial overview of findings in view of stimulating and guiding subsequent analysis and reflection. This means that, within the 15 broad groups presented in [Table 3.1](#), there are further nuances and subthemes which are equally or even more significant from the policy point of view.

For example, funding and financing of VET has been traditionally an issue in many countries, and the funding and financing of non-formal learning, continuing training (upskilling and reskilling) and adult education and learning adds an additional layer of complexity to an already challenging topic. A discussion of these aspects within the group of segments we identified as dealing with financing ([Table 3.1](#)) is important as a prerequisite for any form of lifelong learning. However, ‘unpacking’ each of the 15 code groups with further subcodes and analysing them deeper would require a stand-alone, thematic and/or country-specific exploration for each, which is outside the remit of this digest.

3.3 Lifelong learning as a policy response

The snapshot we extracted from the stakeholder narratives and other data has showed us that, until 2021, none of the partner countries had reported lifelong learning as a solution (policy response) to external and internal challenges. This finding fits into the currently prevailing, broader pattern of limited strategic thinking about lifelong learning as a viable solution and a stand-alone area of policy planning.

However, there are important nuances. Experience from other countries shows that, among the many areas of policy and practice which were described as prominent in the previous section, some can be seen as the building blocks or elements of a lifelong learning (eco)system in the sense of an enabling environment for lifelong learning (London, 2011; UNESCO, 2020). This holds true for the partner countries, too. The Torino Process reports, as well as the interviews confirm that certain areas of policy response (the recognition of non-formal and informal learning in Quote 4 or career guidance in Quote 5, for example), are customarily seen as elements of broader, systemic efforts to provide learning opportunities for all in new and better, more accessible environments.

Quote 4

‘Until 2020, the project will develop assessment tools for the recognition of non-formal and informal learning, determine the stages, procedures and methodology for the recognition of lifelong learning.’

Quote 5

‘In order to promote the approach and participation of adults in lifelong learning, the Employment Agency carries out career guidance programmes in vocational schools [...]’

Participants at the 2021 Conference noted further examples of such elements, such as adult learning strategies, qualification frameworks, outcomes-based qualifications, attention to key competences, validation of prior learning, training for jobseekers, better mechanisms for inclusive governance, closer cooperation among all those involved, etc. All of these are for the sake of fostering a culture of learning at all ages, motivating all people to learn and steer their learning processes throughout life, recognising skills and ensuring that everyone has access to good quality learning opportunities as well as the means and time to participate in learning (ETF, 2021e).

Although, for the most part, the partner countries do not yet count lifelong learning as a stand-alone, viable policy area, they do devote time and resources to areas which are essential as elements of any lifelong learning system along the lines of the above. The data they generated suggests that the selection of such elements at the time of writing is still small. It included the recognition of non-formal and informal learning, certain forms of provision of support and opportunities for (adult) learners and aspects of the partner countries' work on establishing and improving their national qualification frameworks (Figure 2.3, third colour coding).

The evidence also suggests that, as a consequence of the public health crisis, in 2020–21 most of these areas – which were not among the most prominent to start with – have suffered a setback in terms of time, resources and attention as other policy areas with more imminent problems took precedence as part of the crisis responses of countries. The recognition of prior/informal and non-formal learning (RFIL) became even rarer as a point of reference, and while qualification frameworks remained relatively stable in the list of priority, support and opportunities for learners and adult learners in particular became considerably less present in the overview of key system change reforms provided by the partner countries (Figure 2.3). Overall, longer-term priorities have given way to more imminent tasks and challenges (see Box 3.1, for example), such as support for staff, involvement of the private sector in addressing the fallout of the crisis, finding solutions for work-based learning and adapting the study and training content to the new reality.

An important conclusion to be drawn from the interviews is that lifelong learning is highly fragmented in terms of policy planning and action in all partner countries. The creation of opportunities for lifelong learning has not yet been consolidated as an area in its own right, with its own specific goals, solutions and responsibilities for planning and implementation. Perhaps it is understandable that in times that call for trade-offs, such as the pandemic, areas of relevance for lifelong learning are among the first to be 'downgraded' to make space for other priorities which are more 'mainstream' in terms of vision, planning and commitments.

For the partner countries, tackling this fragmentation may be an important step towards acknowledging lifelong learning as a high-priority, practical policy solution and not only as one aspirational goal among many others. Ultimately, the aim is to add lifelong learning to the field of viable, systemic policy interventions that are seen as pragmatic, sustainable responses to internal and external challenges.

Box 3.1 Impact of Covid-19 on reform priorities: analysis of interview data from stakeholders

In all 22 interviews with senior officials from the partner countries, the interlocutors spontaneously talked about the specific ways in which their systems have dealt (and are still dealing) with the Covid-19 pandemic. All such segments in which interview counterparts referred to the pandemic were coded with a separate code 'Covid consequences'.

Analysis of co-occurrences between Covid codes and codes referring to policy areas and solutions and the Covid code showed that the pandemic had the strongest impact in education and training provision, as well as in staff training and career development. Countries focused on finding ways to organise timely remote schooling for everyone and on providing support to teachers to organise quality education in new circumstances. In fewer cases, references to the pandemic were related to work-based learning, private sector involvement and capital and infrastructure investments (in this case, almost exclusively referring to the provision of computers, tablets and the internet).

Below is a selection of typical examples of statements that were coded as relevant:

Bosnia and Herzegovina: 'In March, when they all overnight literally started distant learning, teachers had to adapt their curriculum for that occasion.'

North Macedonia: 'How to prepare the companies and schools to work together in this kind of conditions. 'It was very difficult from the beginning because we don't have experience, we don't have knowledge, we don't have technology, we don't have knowledge for online learning. Now, the situation has stabilised because we have a decision from the Ministry that all theoretical subjects should be taught online and we have been given the material to work online, but the practice and exercise has to be in the school or in the company.'

Israel: 'It's impossible to leave students out of the school and hope it will be a good situation, you have to take care of it, spiritually, psychologically and socially – there are many important things, it's not just learning. And another thing that we have not talked about before is the digital gap, so many students they have all the facilities to learn and others don't have them at home. Israel bought a lot of computers and gave them to students who didn't have a computer at home.'

4. LIFELONG LEARNING AS A JUSTIFICATION FOR REFORMS

4.1 Overview of justifications and policy aspirations

When countries embark on reforming and/or transforming their education and training systems, the assumption is that there is a good reason for that and that the change will bring about improvement. In VET – and education more broadly – a good justification can be of particular importance as changes can take a long time, are usually costly and require the trust and sustained effort of many people who may have diverging interests and perspectives. Without a proper justification, reforms may head in the wrong direction or grind to a halt (Wilson & Dobson, 2008; ETF, 2018b).

The creation of opportunities for lifelong learning may not be yet consolidated as a stand-alone area of policy action in the partner countries, but it is frequently quoted as a justification for actions in other areas. Our data shows that practitioners, decision-makers and stakeholders do refer to it when explaining what they aspire to and what they hope to achieve through various reforms.

To document the prevalent justifications for reforms and to understand the relative significance of lifelong learning among them, we expanded our coding system to include the purposes of system change as reported by the partner countries, that is their explicit reasons for change in the 15 areas of intervention described in Chapter 3. All sources had an abundance of segments conveying information about drivers of system change from the stakeholders' points of view and how these drivers related to key values and aspirational goals in education and training such as access, efficiency, labour market relevance, etc.

In addition to the promotion of lifelong learning, the analysis of data revealed seven more shared themes that describe the reform and system change aspirations of the partner countries: promotion of access and participation in VET; promotion of greening and lessening of environmental impact; better labour market relevance of VET outcomes; promotion of innovation and excellence; improvement of quality of education and training; increase in the efficiency of the provider network and its use of resources; and better working conditions for staff in the VET system. Annex 2 provides a more comprehensive overview with descriptions and modal examples.

The evidence we collected suggests that before the pandemic, lifelong learning and adult education were not among the most common reasons for change. Strategic aspirations directly aligned with country commitments to the sustainable development goals (SDGs) were the most prevalent reasons for reform: access and participation in VET; the quality of learning and training; and boosting the labour market relevance of VET programmes. Yet lifelong learning was more common than other, possibly higher anticipated and better-established justifications, such as system efficiency, innovation, or the working conditions of staff (Table 4.1).

In the pre-pandemic period, relevance, quality and access were the most dominant reasons for reform, in that exact order, for Russia, Kosovo, Georgia and Tajikistan. In Jordan, Palestine and Montenegro, on the other hand, the data revealed access and participation as being the prominent. Kazakhstan and Montenegro were particularly outspoken about the promotion of adult education and lifelong learning as reasons for reform, while Morocco emphasised better system efficiency as the justification for many of its change endeavours. With all due caution when drawing conclusions about regions, Central Asia had the highest share of reforms that were driven by the wish to improve the working conditions of staff, while this justification was only sporadic in the countries of the SEMED and Eastern Partnership regions.

Table 4.1 Reform and system change aspirations by prevalence, 2018–20 and 2020–21

| Prevalence of justifications for reform 2018–20 | | | Prevalence of justifications for reform 2020–21 | | |
|---|---|-------|---|---|-------|
| 1 | Labour market relevance | 27.9% | 1 | Better quality | 19.7% |
| 2 | Better quality | 20.1% | 2 | Labour market relevance | 17.7% |
| 3 | Better access and participation in VET | 16.0% | 3 | Promotion and support for adult education and lifelong learning | 17.2% |
| 4 | Promotion and support for adult education and lifelong learning | 12.6% | 4 | System efficiency | 16.7% |
| 5 | System efficiency | 11.7% | 5 | Better access and participation in VET | 15.8% |
| 6 | Promoting innovation and excellence | 5.9% | 6 | Working conditions for staff | 7.4% |
| 7 | Working conditions for staff | 5.2% | 7 | Promoting innovation and excellence | 5.4% |
| 8 | Greening and environmental impact | 0.7% | 8 | Greening and environmental impact | 0% |

Source: Torino Process cross-country digest database.

As discussed in the previous chapter, the pandemic influenced the reform agenda of countries (see also [Box 4.1](#)). It also had an impact on the motivation of authorities and stakeholders to engage in that agenda. The creation of opportunities for lifelong learning has become somewhat more prominent as a driver of change during the public health crisis, reinforcing in particular narratives about the provision of opportunities for lifelong learning to learners outside formal education (see [Quote 6](#), for example). In the period 2020–21, lifelong learning was the third most prevalent strategic target, while the quality of education and training became the most prominent concern.

Quote 6

'We have a lot of lifelong learning initiatives during this pandemic period. For example, people who lost their jobs were just insisting on training and so VET schools were organised and the money was allocated for those courses from the government and from the ministry to retrain people for new occupations, to retrain adult education for particular skills, which are needed in this changing world.'

It may be tempting to interpret this last finding as a testimony of strategic responsiveness in times of crisis, but, in reality, the changes we detected in the data for that period were for the most part due to a more balanced, holistic approach to communicating about the reform agenda in countries, as the crisis forced many of them to reconsider and review their priorities and rearrange their resource planning. In the process of doing that, they recalled the justifications of all of their reform plans, including those that may have started a while ago.

Box 4.1 Impact of Covid-19 on the reasons for reform and system change as captured in stakeholder interviews

When talking about the reasons for reform, most interview participants referred to the Covid-19 pandemic. It appeared that the pandemic affected all reform justifications, but most of all boosted concerns about quality of learning outcomes and the working conditions of teachers, leading to reflection of the meaning of 'quality' and the role of innovation. The pandemic showed that the quality of education and training must be a top priority for all countries. It also showed how important it is to constantly strive to support the development of teachers' competences and improve their working conditions. Finally, the requirements to quickly adjust to new circumstances and set up distant education that would be accessible to all students showed how important it is to support innovation and excellence in this respect.

Below is a selection of typical examples of statements that were coded as relevant:

Kazakhstan: 'The pandemic has shown, not just to the other countries, but to all countries, that education and health care should never be ranked last. They have to be ranked first, of course, and that's, I guess, was the lesson we learned from the pandemic.'

Montenegro: 'The Covid-19 circumstances really made us think of how to further improve infrastructure in our education system – the infrastructure that enables the utilisation of digital solutions as a technique. And, also, we really wanted to explore the possibilities when it comes to teacher training. Technologies and utilisation of digital technology is both in teacher training or training process and learning process something that will really need our attention.'

Israel 1: 'In one day we closed the school, the second day we began to learn through the internet, so the social media through platforms which we have our students before. We find out that teachers were all the time very innovative and learn all the time, they were the heroes of this time, they are still the heroes of this time, because they know how to work in different environments and they succeed in attracting students.'

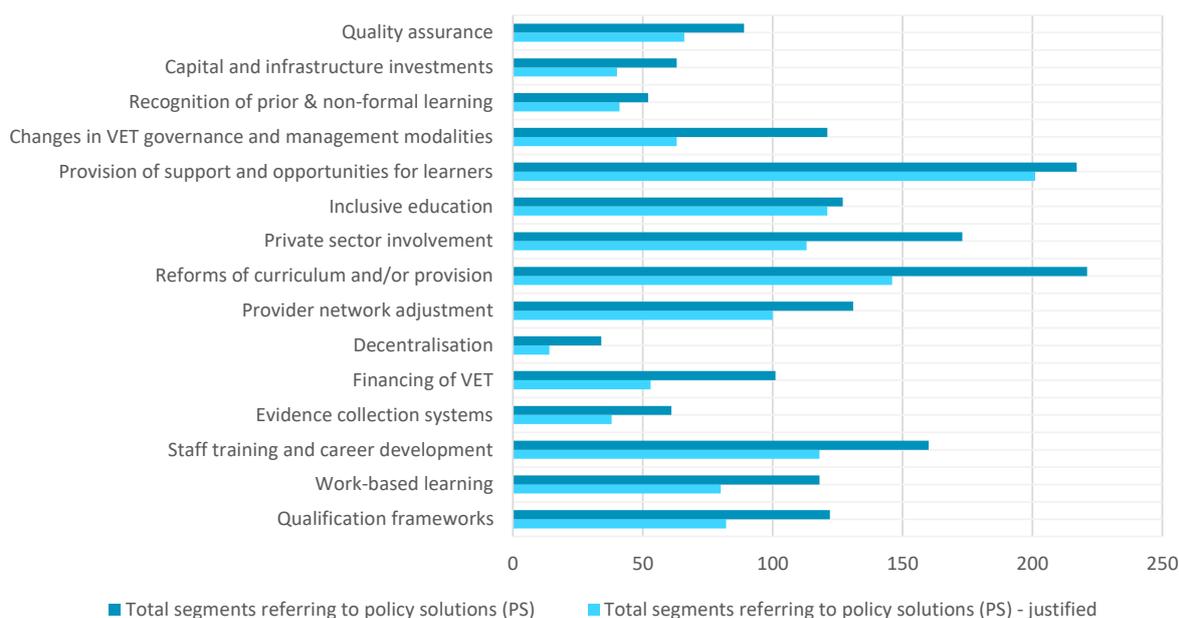
Israel 2: 'As a nation which really fosters startups, startup thinking, startup culture, there are a lot of innovations now in entrepreneur education. Corona was a miracle. In every old school, believe me – and here I'm saying the truth – in every old school there was at least one teacher who was an entrepreneur in the pandemic with the hybrid of e-learning, playing, doing and singing.'

A final note in this section is that, in the course of analysis, it became evident that in many cases reforms were not supplied with a justification, and the reasons for initiating and promoting reforms were not mentioned (Figure 4.1).

Further analysis revealed that most frequently (in almost all cases) explicitly justified reforms are those relating to inclusive education and provision of support and opportunities for learners. This could be because in these two areas there are well-developed narratives from the field of international development commitments and cooperation which can be easily 'borrowed' and replicated for national and local purposes. This is true in particular of inclusive education. Lifelong learning is part of this well-justified narrative but is also an area where translation into action for change seems to be the weakest, and where challenges abound and persist, as discussed in Chapter 5.

The countries clearly state that they invest in the provision of financial support to learners and the introduction of different types of educational and counselling activities in either formal or non-formal education settings, with particular focus on individuals in vulnerable groups, because they want to improve access and participation in VET, boost the labour market relevance of VET and promote lifelong learning. However, only half of the reforms in the areas of VET financing, decentralisation and changes in VET governance were clearly justified in the data collected (Figure 2.4).

Figure 4.1 Proportion of policy reforms and responses without any reported justification, by cumulative frequency



Source: Torino Process cross-country digest database.

4.2 Policy responses that promote lifelong learning

If lifelong learning is one of the more visible justifications for change, which of the policy responses we recorded in the previous chapter does it justify? In other words, which policy responses are supposed to create and promote opportunities for lifelong learning?

The evidence we collected shows that almost two-thirds of the countries which participated in the last round of the Torino Process have put in place reforms or have committed to reforms which, in one way or another, use lifelong learning as a justification or a long-term aspiration: by promoting opportunities for lifelong learning in the form of second chance education, an expansion of the network of providers of adult education, upskilling and reskilling programmes and second chance education opportunities, etc.

Quote 7

'Another priority is expanding participation in lifelong learning by increasing the number of adults included in second chance education, among others. [...] Certain groups, e.g. rural, people at poverty risk, [...] have a low attainment level with no prospects of getting a job. [...] The main priorities for lifelong learning include the expansion of the supply of adult education [...]; inclusion of the lower educated population (this is becoming a priority area of intervention [...]); the development of an integrated system where learning can happen in different moments and in different forms, using the national qualification framework as a reference.' (Torino Process national report)

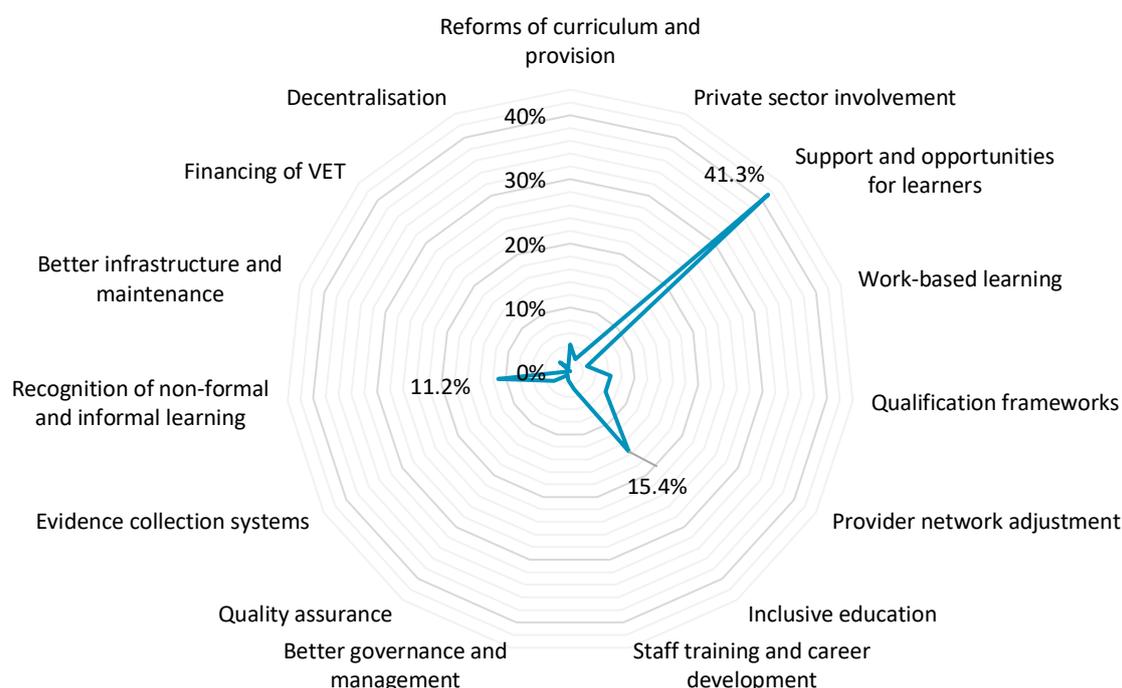
Quote 8

'Starting from the 2020/21 academic year, 147 vocational colleges and 143 technical schools will start implementing programmes based on the principle of 'Education throughout life'. Accordingly, the creation of a lifelong education system requires changes that will affect the scale, content and system of delivery of educational services.' (Torino Process national report)

All references of this type connect to one or more of the reform priority areas described in Chapter 3, although some policies are more readily associated with the creation of lifelong learning opportunities than others. The partner countries refer to lifelong learning most commonly as a justification for reforms that aim at improving support and opportunities for learners overall; boosting the inclusiveness of providers; and establishing viable mechanisms for the recognition of non-formal and informal learning – RFIL (Figure 4.2).

Common to all is that, unlike some other areas of justification which address gaps and structural demands within the formal system, such as funding or infrastructure investment, lifelong learning remains the aspiration that is most closely associated with people and their individual needs. It drives change in areas which are meant to address these needs, such as inclusive education and support for additional learning opportunities, etc. So, although lifelong learning may not be a top priority for change, it is the only priority which systematically drives reforms that are meant to benefit learners directly.

Figure 4.2 Policy responses promoting lifelong learning, by prevalence in national reporting



Source: Torino Process cross-country digest database.

The figure shows that – except for RFIL, which is a more technical area – there is a degree of misalignment between what the previous chapter determined are policy areas/responses which count as elements of a lifelong learning system and what each country may consider to be the elements of such a system. One layer of divergence is the relative significance of policy areas in terms of

mentions in reports and interviews. Here, the difference is most pronounced in the area of qualification frameworks, which are not as much the focus of attention as they could or should be considering their role in promoting lifelong learning and in inclusive education, which is much more prominent than anticipated.

There is another, deeper layer of misalignment at the level of substance and thematic scope. With regard to lifelong learning, the declared connection between policy actions and the rationale for these actions is not always justifiable, despite statements to the opposite. For instance, in most segments which describe measures in support of opportunities for learners that are driven by an aspiration towards lifelong learning, the target is limited to initial VET and formal education more broadly.

Limitations such as this are substantial enough to bring into question the extent to which the link between policies and lifelong learning as the goal of these policies, is clear and realistic enough. They also raise an important issue: there seems to be a discrepancy between expert interpretations of what lifelong learning is about (which are based on research and internationally communicated practice and experience) and the interpretations of countries, which are based on their own practice and local needs.

This diversity of interpretations exists also between and within countries, which suggests that, despite a widespread consensus about the significance of lifelong learning, no country has yet arrived at a comprehensive and convincing answer to the question of what a lifelong learning system means for them, and what its building blocks are. This is an issue that merits attention.

5. POLICY IMPLEMENTATION PATTERNS AND CHALLENGES

As we saw, the partner countries tend to engage in a variety of reforms, some of which are complex. They are driven by aspirational reasons and, although some of the justifications for policy responses may be incomplete or missing, in most cases their purposes are clearly stated. How does this landscape of change and ambition translate into practice?

Our analysis revealed that at the level of implementation, the policy responses of countries are interconnected in clearly identifiable patterns: they go ‘hand in hand’ and complement each other, forming clusters or patterns of system change with connection within each which can be considered, described and analysed together. At the stage of evidence processing and analysis, this is expressed with the co-occurrence of codes for the different policy areas listed in [Table 3.1](#): the frequency with which some policy areas tend to appear together with other policy areas in the same segment of a report or an interview.

Figures 2.6 and 3.1 illustrate the results of such an inquiry. They serve to visualise the co-occurrence of codes as a network structure, which was produced through multidimensional scaling and shows how many segments contain two or more codes, and how often two or more codes have been assigned to a segment together. In this sense, the exploration of policy responses and justifications shows the presence of two major patterns or clusters: a substantive or conceptual cluster of reform implementation and a structural cluster of reform implementation.

5.1 Substantive cluster of reform implementation

The composition of the substantive cluster of reform implementation ([Figure 2.6](#)) shows that the implementation of change relating to staff training and career development tends to be implemented jointly with reforms of curriculum and/or provision, reforms in work-based learning and qualification frameworks, the provision of different kinds of additional support to diverse types of learners, and initiatives targeting greater private sector involvement. This means that countries tend to engage the private sector in work-based learning, defining occupational standards and qualification and creating new curricula or educational provision, which then ‘requires’ the reforms targeting school staff and trainers.

The finding that inclusive education and provision of support and opportunities for learners go together at the stage of implementation implies that inclusive values and principles are typically realised in the context of lifelong learning. Although not tightly bound to this cluster, reforms implying capital investments relate significantly to reforms of curriculum and teacher training. This means that countries tend to invest in refurbishing and equipping schools while trying to modernise the curriculum and prepare teachers to apply that curriculum accordingly.

Should one ask what drives the implementation of all these changes, the answer is clear: labour market relevance and the boosting of quality (see also [Table 4.1](#)). The partner countries, where the main priorities are to achieve and sustain high quality and relevant VET, tend to engage in complex, ‘conceptual’ changes that impact curriculum, teachers and trainers, private sector representatives and, finally, students. The code map in [Figure 5.1](#) suggests that, if all these ‘lines’ of change are coordinated well at the stage of implementation (which many of the interviews suggested is very challenging), even more ambitious, substantive reforms are likely to have a fair chance of success.

Figure 5.1 Reform and system change implementation: substantive cluster



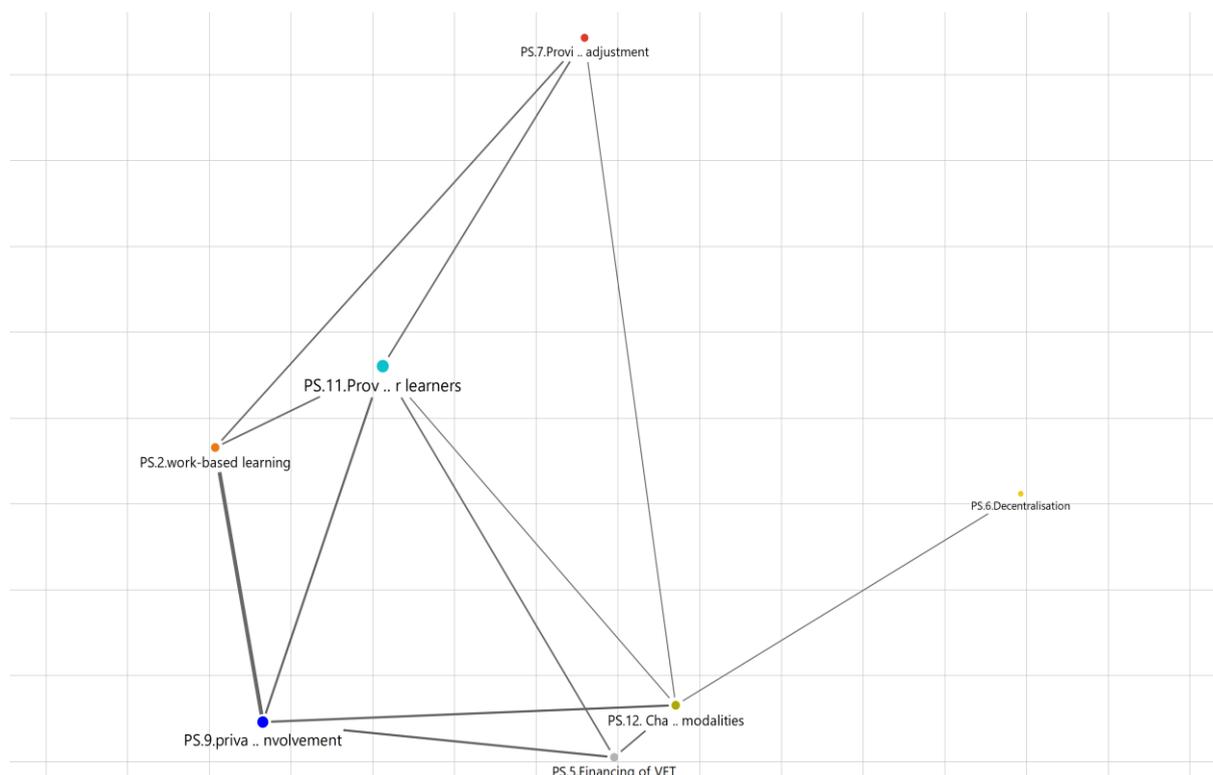
Source: Torino Process cross-country digest database.

A further observation is that improvements in the curriculum that largely stem from close cooperation of educational and training providers and the private sector relate to the reforms in inclusive education and provision of support and opportunities for learners. The finding that inclusive education and the provision of support and opportunities for learners as policy response areas appear often together implies that inclusive values and principles are typically exercised in the context of lifelong learning. Although not tightly bound to this cluster, reforms implying capital investments relate significantly to reforms of curriculum and teacher training. This means that countries tend to invest in refurbishing and equipping schools while trying to modernise the curriculum and prepare teachers to apply that curriculum accordingly.

5.2 Structural cluster of reform implementation

The second cluster or pattern of implementation includes policy responses which aim at achieving structural changes. It was constituted from seven reform priorities, suggesting that countries usually undergo reforms of financing, together with reforms relating to decentralisation and changes in VET governance and management modalities. These reforms are tightly connected to greater private sector involvement (predominantly finding opportunities to provide incentives for private companies to take part in dual education), which in turn impacts work-based learning, provision of support and opportunities for learners and provider network adjustment (Figure 5.2).

Figure 5.2 Reform and system change implementation: structural cluster



Source: Torino Process cross-country digest database.

When justified (which is not often the case, as discussed in the first part of Chapter 3), these changes are typically justified with the desire to achieve greater system efficiency. Rationalisation of the network of providers, changes in the number, structure or regional distribution of schools, the reallocation of resources and duties, and changes in the management structure are some of the typical ways in which priorities are combined at the stage of actions.

Although the provision of opportunities for learning can be achieved through both vectors of implementation⁶ – structural and substantive – it is interesting to observe that policy reform actions that are justified with a desire to promote lifelong learning are mostly located in the cluster of substantive reforms and not in at concerning structural changes. This means that lifelong learning was more readily used as a justification for reforms that do not concern any structural changes to the education and training system or its management or funding. We can only speculate about the reasons, but one may be that the task of translating lifelong learning as a goal into structural, system-wide reforms is perhaps not yet a dominant strand of policy planning in the partner countries.

There is an additional issue with the link between lifelong learning as a policy justification or goal, the description of the policy and the actions undertaken to implement the policy in support of that goal. The strength or quality of that link is rather weak, especially when compared to other, longer-standing priorities, such as boosting labour market relevance or quality of learning. ‘Weak’ in this context means that reforms in the policy areas we mentioned and lifelong learning are ‘linked’ only loosely through generic statements and interpretations, which are not likely to be precise enough to guide actions and inform improvement (e.g. Quote 9).

⁶ For example, some countries (e.g. Bosnia and Herzegovina) promote opportunities by making curricula and work-based learning more attractive and adjusted to students’ needs, while others (e.g. Kyrgyzstan) reorganise the network of providers and provide incentives for learners.

Quote 9

'We adopted the Strategy for lifelong career development 2016–2020, together with action plans for 2016, 2017 and 2018. A coordinating body to monitor the implementation of the action plan 2017/18 was established, including representatives of line ministries, employers, universities and schools. The disadvantage of the strategy is that there are no clear and measurable indicators to be achieved, but it mainly sets out activities to be implemented with the aim of improving overall conditions.'

As a likely consequence, the partner countries which report to have prioritised lifelong learning – especially during the pandemic – are also the countries which are most likely to report challenges with the implementation of actions in support of lifelong learning as an overarching reform goal. 'Challenges' in this context refer to segments that directly or indirectly indicate difficulties with reform implementation or provide examples of reforms that missed the target (Quote 10 provides a typical example).

Quote 10

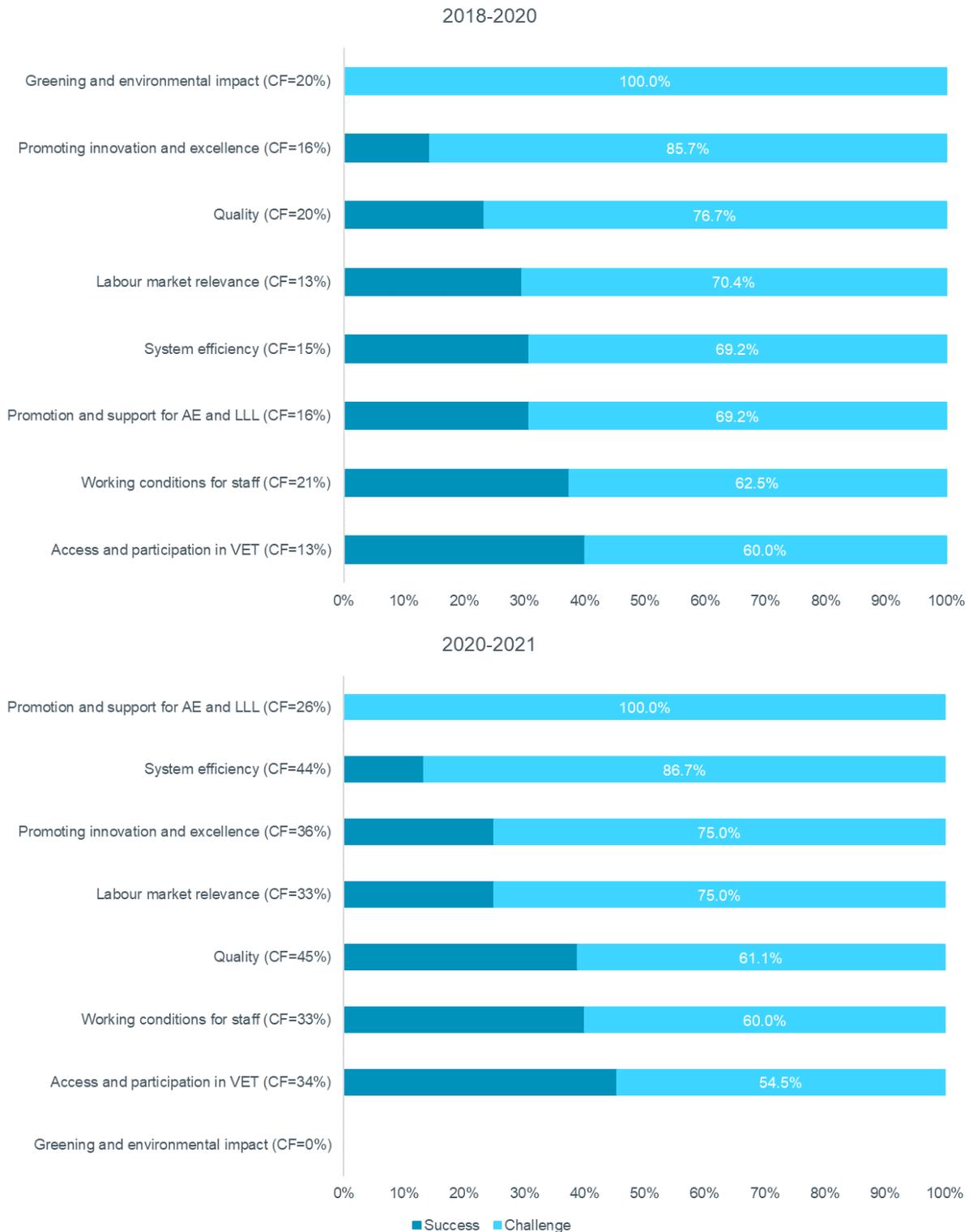
'Here we failed without any reason, to tell the truth. Because we built from the beginning maybe all around this region and beyond these centres that were supposed to offer lifelong learning and be like open centres for everyone with different levels of education, what people needed and everything. Unfortunately, they just are not better than the schools that we have, the other schools. Even though they cost a lot and have full equipment inside and everything, but the content [...] it's not different from the schools, the other schools, the ones that we call centres of competence.'

While in the period before the health crisis (2018–20), some 30% of references to lifelong learning were references describing successful reform actions, in 2020–21 (second graph), this share was down to zero. With regard to lifelong learning, our analysis therefore suggests that transitioning from strategic visioning to change action is a much bigger impediment to lifelong learning than the countries' commitment to it.

Administrative data confirm that the operational aspect of lifelong learning aspirations and commitments is probably a weak point as participation in lifelong learning remains disproportionately low in most partner countries. Upskilling through training remains rather limited, and adults are often unlikely to participate in further training, with negative consequences for their careers. Lifelong learning is also unevenly distributed by age, education and working status: young adults and those who are better educated enjoy more training opportunities (ETF, 2020).

Figure 5.3 Share of segments marked as a success or challenge at the stage of implementation, by reform goal, 2018–20 and 2020–21

Share of the cumulative number of segments



Source: Torino Process cross-country digest database.

6. INVOLVEMENT OF INTERNATIONAL PARTNERS

Evidence analysed in preparing this digest shows that the donor community is and remains a strong force and factor in shaping policy and strategic commitments, as well as in areas of direct relevance to lifelong learning.

6.1 Financial dependence of reforms and system change

One avenue of engagement is financial as most partner countries remain heavily reliant on external financial support.

All partner regions have experienced volatile economic growth over the past decade, and signs of economic rebound have recently started to emerge (ETF, 2021a). It is less certain to what extent and how quickly the positive trends will translate into better conditions of life and work, but that task is at the core of strategic plans for the national development of all countries in all regions. The political instability in some of them and the Covid-19 pandemic have added an additional degree of complexity and uncertainty, which in turn reinforces the reported need for change, as well as for partnerships.

Data on the impact of Covid-19 on the financing of education is still not available, but, at the time of writing, recent forecasts⁷ were suggesting that in the coming years the reform plans of the partner countries will take place in an environment of increased government spending in response to the impact of the pandemic, despite a projected decline in government revenue.

However, as other sectors (e.g. public health) are being given higher priority over education and training, investment in learning opportunities may decline (World Bank, 2020). This may lead to stronger reliance on alternative sources of funding, such as the private sector, households and donors, despite the likelihood that the spending power of these parties may also be negatively affected by the crisis.

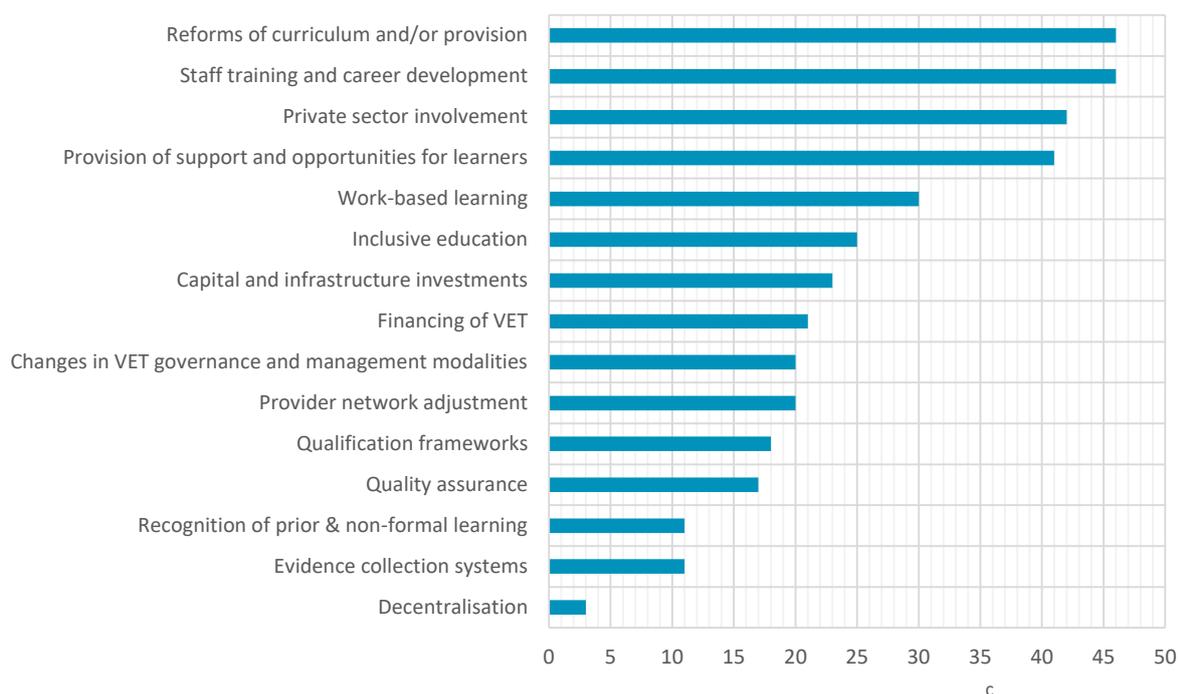
6.2 Thematic priorities and alignment

International cooperation and the international community also play a role in substantive terms by promoting change through a focus on a combination of ambitious, long-standing and new commitments which prioritise inclusion, equity, accessibility, as well as the promotion of new and better skills.

Although donors invest in all areas of reforms, some areas are much more frequently supported than others. The focus group with international partners confirmed the data harvested from the national reports, which shows that international partners invest predominantly in staff training, reforms of curriculum and educational and career guidance within schools or in a non-formal education setting. The majority of these projects encourage establishing close cooperation between educational institutions and the private sector (Figure 6.1). However, donors only occasionally deal with decentralisation, recognition of prior and non-formal learning and the establishment or improvement of evidence collection systems. This is also true for areas which may count as the building blocks of a lifelong learning system.

⁷ See, for example, World Bank (2020) and the OECD (2020).

Figure 6.1 Prevalence of donor-supported areas of policy response



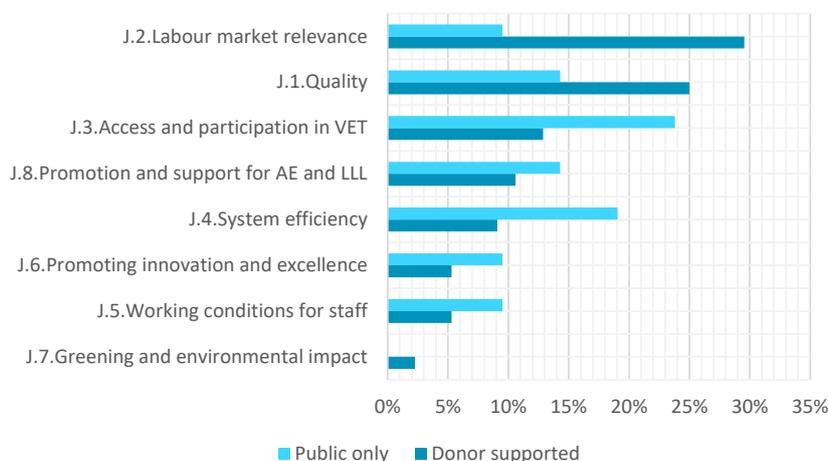
Source: Torino Process cross-country digest database.

If we compare the policy areas reported by countries and those supported by the international partners, it is clear that the national and international endeavours are aligned. In all cases, the top four priorities are curriculum; the professional development of teachers, private sector involvement; and the provision of different types of support to learners.

The same holds true if one looks at donor support from the point of view of reform justifications. Countries and international partners alike are mostly in favour of supporting actions that aspire to higher and more relevant quality of learning and training outcomes, and to education and training which is accessible to all (Figure 6.2). Donors were considerably more often in support of actions promoting labour market relevance and quality than their national counterparts, and they were the only side funding actions in education in support of greening.

Figure 6.2 Donor support and public budget support by reform justification

Share of the cumulative number segments



The data presented in [Figure 6.2](#) suggests that, from the point of view of international partnerships, the promotion of opportunities for lifelong learning is just one priority among many. Certainly, a more in-depth analysis may reveal that at least some of the donor support to other areas and justifications may in fact be contributing to the implementation of solutions which are essential for lifelong learning. This topic deserves a separate exploration with the help of the data that was collected for this digest.

6.3 Implementation experiences: lessons to be learned

Analysis of the process of implementation of donor-supported reforms showed that, despite certain challenges, such reforms proved to be generally successful. 20% of donor-supported reforms were explicitly linked with successful outcomes in the reports, while 15% of donor-supported reforms were explicitly referred to as challenging. The challenges were not related to any specific targets, but to a way of implementing reforms and reaching these targets.

One of the typical challenges refers to the lack of further elaboration of procedures and practices that would support action after the completion of project initiatives. This means that donors support the creation and adoption of new policy (e.g. laws and strategies) or bodies (e.g. councils), but not the establishment of mechanisms for implementing the policy or procedures for the effective work of these bodies or the application of the new policies. This mirrors the pattern of weak linkage between planning and implementation also with respect to lifelong learning as a priority.

Another typical example is the setting of new structural and governance arrangements in line with international best practice, in a context where the national counterparts may not have the prerogatives or capacities to induce, promote or sustain any significant changes in the usual way of doing things. Some of the interview participants referred to this situation as collecting ‘tokens’, or simply – ticking boxes in a checklist.

In some cases, different policies are not attuned because the donors are solely focused on one area, without considering other areas. In some other cases several donors are involved, but their work is not coordinated and harmonised – each donor organisation has its own agenda, culture of work and requirements, which may lead to complications and misunderstandings when proper coordination is lacking. This lack of coordination or holistic approach can impede system change, as reported by several partner countries.

These and other challenges all fall under one and the same umbrella issue – sustainability and contextualisation of action. Our analysis of data shows that, in too many cases, donor-supported reforms tend to be insufficient, fragmented, not well-harmonised and sometimes not in accordance with the contextual specificities.

Far from criticising partnerships as such, the purpose of highlighting this finding is to inform subsequent actions, which in the field of lifelong learning are particularly vulnerable to failure from the very risk factors which partner countries and donor representatives shared for the purpose of this analysis: fragmentation, lack of connection with the local context, lack of planning for the self-sustainable application of new policies and operation of new bodies, and a bias towards supporting the formal system of education and training. This topic too deserves a separate exploration on the basis of the data already collected.

7. CONCLUSIONS AND POINTERS FOR ACTION

This report established that the creation and promotion of opportunities for lifelong learning is starting an advance to the centre stage of policy discussion, as many countries look for ways to address the learning needs of large and increasingly diverse populations and commence with the consolidation of long-term plans in this respect. The national Torino Process reports and the other evidence collected in preparation of this digest show that lifelong learning is an area of aspiration for development which is most closely associated with people and their needs.

This digest was prepared as a contribution to this emerging reflection. It provides a snapshot of the current place of lifelong learning in the policy reform agenda of partner countries, with the purpose of establishing a baseline for the planning and implementation of actions in support of creating learning opportunities for all, by national stakeholders and international partners alike.

The analysis of our primary evidence showed that lifelong learning is an underdeveloped area of policy response. When it comes to addressing internal and external challenges through lifelong learning, the narratives of countries are often dominated by referrals to decades-old legacy systems of adult education and to preservation instead of change. Where they do go beyond that to refer to lifelong learning in a forward-looking manner, the link between policies and lifelong learning as the broader goal of these policies and actions is rather weak, especially when compared to other, longer-standing policy priorities.

Although ETF partner countries do not yet operationalise lifelong learning as a stand-alone area of planning and action, they do devote time and resources to other areas which are essential as the elements of building blocks of a lifelong learning system, such as recognition of prior learning or individualised support for learners.

The selection of these elements is still quite limited, and they are not necessarily well connected and coordinated yet. This is part of a broader pattern of fragmentation of lifelong learning as a policy domain, which may prevent the planning and coordination of actions and the viable division of responsibilities. Addressing this fragmentation, for instance through the development of dedicated strategies or policies, could be an important step towards acknowledging lifelong learning as a strategic yet practical policy solution, and not only as one aspirational goal among many others. It is also important as a pre-condition for addressing the system dimension of skills and learning in a lifelong learning perspective. Overall, there is a need to work on accelerating the development of a coherent strategic vision for lifelong learning which is in line with anticipated demand and country developments.

The ‘building blocks’ approach to lifelong learning, which transpired in the course of the analysis, has some merits too. For those who wish to promote and support lifelong learning as a policy priority, each of these elements of lifelong learning opens a possibility for engagement and action. Seeing lifelong learning as a selection of meaningful, interconnected policy areas can facilitate a well-informed, step-by-step approach to designing and supporting reforms in this domain (‘one building block at a time’). The selection could connect to areas in which countries are already working and/or engaging in system change instead of ‘importing’ or imposing lifelong learning as one more policy commitment.

This last point is noteworthy as it can help address some of the gaps (i.e. disconnect between national and international priorities) in the cooperation of countries with international partners, which our analysis has identified. The building blocks approach could also inform partner countries of how and what to focus on in the current situation of economic uncertainty and (post)-pandemic efforts, in which most national governments are forced to prioritise and go for trade-offs.

There could be different ways to do just that: prioritise policy areas of relevance for lifelong learning systems and work on establishing connections between these areas to avoid fragmentation. From the perspective of experience gathered through the Torino Process, monitoring system performance could be one of them. Areas selected to be monitored are assumed to be of significance for one

reason or another and so, the choices we make with respect to monitoring (for instance, areas aligned with the 'elements' of lifelong learning) have the power to influence policies and policy priorities already at the stage of agenda-setting, and not only at the end of the policy cycle.

Overall, to capitalise on this opportunity means to invest in the further exploration and consolidation of these elements based on country experiences, in view of consolidating a selection which is aligned not only with international good practice, but also with the realities in our partner countries.

This matters also when hedging against the risk factors which partner countries and donor representatives shared for the purpose of this analysis: fragmentation, disconnect with the local context, lack of planning for the self-sustainable application of new policies and operation of new bodies, as well as bias toward supporting the formal system of education and training. As already noted, this too would deserve a separate exploration on the basis of the data already collected.

ANNEXES

Annex 1. Overview of policy response areas (policy solutions) with examples

| No | Name | Description | Examples from national reports and interviews |
|----|---------------------------------------|---|--|
| 1 | Qualification frameworks | Developing and implementing national qualifications frameworks that classify qualifications by level, based on learning outcomes; developing occupational criteria; developing vocational and occupational standards | 'At the second stage it is planned to implement National Qualification System.' |
| | | | 'Another tool that will ensure vocational and technical education and training to meet the skill demand in the labour market is the National Vocations Standards that contain the duties and procedures required for the successful execution of a profession.' |
| 2 | Work-based learning | Establishing or improving the conditions for dual education (learning that takes place in a real work environment, usually through paid or unpaid apprenticeship and on-the-job training), typically through increasing of numbers of practical classes, increasing the number of apprentices, providing financial support to apprentices, or increasing the quality and/or flexibility of education. | 'The project aims at increasing the number of apprentices in dual education and enhancing the quality of training programmes within.' |
| | | | 'The Strategy foresees developing models of organising the educational process which will allow to apply up-to-date content of practical training at the workplace.' |
| | | | 'A new Law on Secondary Education introduces so-called dual system, sets more practical classes and less vocational theoretical subjects, introduces the concept of the right to choose according to which students shall freely choose where to attend practical training...' |
| 3 | Staff training and career development | Introduction or improvement of pre-service and in-service teacher training (usually in relation to inclusive education and digital transformation); professional development of school principals and associates, as well as in-company instructors or trainers; production of learning materials for school staff; career development through adoption of classification categories or ranks that enable promotion at work, increase of salary | '1,700 teachers were trained as facilitators, offering career guidance services.' |
| | | | 'Before the Law no grading system for TVET teachers and trainers was in place that offered incentives for achieving professional development.' |
| | | | 'A system for professional and career development of teachers and professional associates has been created; all required documents (manuals, instructions and guidelines) have been drafted.' |
| 4 | Evidence collection systems | Setting up large-scale studies or electronic systems for collecting data on labour market demands and opportunities, tracking graduates (career progress, mobility); monitoring payments (scholarships, loans), teaching and students' achievements | 'Building Labour Market Information System in Ministry to inform decision-making process in TVET' |
| | | | 'Development and implementation of the National Skills Forecast System.' |
| | | | 'The country has launched a tracer system for IVET graduates.' |

| No | Name | Description | Examples from national reports and interviews |
|----|------------------------------|---|--|
| | | | 'The agency conducts the monitoring of vocational education institutions under the management of MoE. During the monitoring process Agency's representatives assesses infrastructure, logistics, teaching quality, attendance and other issues.' |
| 5 | Financing of VET | Introducing new ways of finding resources, budgeting, financing and money spending – e.g., setting up better taxation schemes, eliminating costs or providing stimulation to employers; allocating financial resources to regional administrations, schools (e.g., per-capita financing), teachers or students; mobilising donors | <p>'The Government adopted a whole range of measures to stimulate employers to provide students with places for internship.'</p> <p>'Mid-term budget planning was launched.'</p> <p>'A new type of institution has been set up in regions to consolidate local education resources and make them available to VET.'</p> <p>'Special attention will be paid to the continuing professional development of teachers from the aspect of a sustainable model of financing.'</p> <p>'The project assisted in forming the 2019 budget under the per capita funding.'</p> <p>'The policy makers are committed to multiplication of funding sources of VET.'</p> |
| 6 | Decentralisation | Transferring decision making power, responsibilities, and tasks from higher (national) to lower (regional or school) organisational levels; providing administrative and financial autonomy to lower units and levels | <p>'The implementation of decentralisation policy of the VET system governance resulted in additional forms of participation of non-state actors.'</p> <p>'The policy of 'demonopolising' the management of vocational education institutions has begun.'</p> <p>'Before it was for the Ministry to coordinate the whole system. Now, after the colleges have been attached to line ministries, the Minister doesn't do general coordination anymore.' (interview)</p> |
| 7 | Provider network adjustments | Optimisation of educational institutions network, establishment of new providers (e.g., centres of VET excellence, licenced adult education organisations, regional VET providers) | <p>'The ideas of the multifunctional VET centres are being piloted in several donor-supported programmes.'</p> <p>'The reform aims to improve the network of vocational colleges based on national and regional economic development priorities, labour market forecasts and technology innovations and trends.'</p> <p>'100 centres for advanced vocational training will be established by 2024. They will mobilise regional resources to provide career guidance and fast-track vocational training...'</p> |

| No | Name | Description | Examples from national reports and interviews |
|----|---|--|---|
| 8 | Reforms of curriculum and/or provision | Modernisation of school curriculum (e.g., introducing the content that is relevant for labour market, modular curriculum, changes in the number of apprenticeship hours), adjusting curriculum to students' needs; changes in the way the delivery is organised (digitalisation and online learning, innovative approaches to teaching and learning) | 'Development of new generation of curricula and educational environments. The academic course intensity will be reduced, the content of vocational courses will be updates.' |
| | | | 'Recently the work has begun on the use of modern non-traditional patterns of learning with improvements in the methods of VET learning...' |
| | | | 'Based on standards, SVET curricula can adapt their content to match a SVET occupation or specialisation to the required qualification or combination of qualifications and to increase the proportion of practice training.' |
| 9 | Private sector involvement | Strengthening the public-private partnership; engaging SMEs and big companies in planning of curriculum, organisation of teaching and learning, assessing needs and trends, and provision of financial support to VET; | 'Strategy aims at strengthening and structuring employer engagement in VET reform.' |
| | | | 'Establishing of sector skills councils led by the private sector and aiming at identifying sector's training needs and developing occupational standards.' |
| | | | 'Methodology associations' role is to bring together teachers, academic researchers and employer representatives and engage them in designing and improving SVET model educational programs.' |
| 10 | Inclusive education | Provision of support (financial, educational) to individuals from vulnerable and marginalised groups and disadvantaged background, such as persons with disabilities, persons from rural and poor areas, orphans and children from single-parent families, migrants, Roma and women | 'Teachers who currently work in schools providing education for hearing-impaired students but who do not know the sign language should acquire competence in this area through in-service training.' |
| | | | 'One of the important segments of professional rehabilitation are Grant Scheme. The main goals are prevention of social exclusion of persons with disabilities.' |
| | | | 'Inter-institutional support to Roma is formalised by Strategy...' |
| 11 | Provision of support and opportunities for learners | Provision of financial support to learners (e.g., scholarships or loans); introduction of different types of educational programs and activities within schools (e.g., extracurricular activities, competitions) or in the non-formal education setting (e.g., job fairs); professional orientation, career guidance and counselling; awareness raising and promotion activities | 'The Ministry of Education allocated scholarships for occupations needed on the labour market.' |
| | | | 'The Ministry of Education strategic plan within the vocational education domain identified a specific objective on increase access to VET through conducting awareness activities and vocational counselling programmes...' |
| | | | 'In order to widely disseminate experience in developing women's skills for entrepreneurial activity, it has become traditional to hold contests The best women entrepreneurs...' |

| No | Name | Description | Examples from national reports and interviews |
|----|---|---|--|
| | | | 'The Ticket to the Future career guidance project has three modules: career-oriented developmental diagnostics, practice and career guidance mentoring).' |
| 12 | Changes in VET governance and management modalities | Establishment of new or restructuring of the old national or regional bodies, agencies, committees or councils; defining or redistributing power, responsibilities and (financial and human) resources. | <p>'Minister restructured the National Council for Human Resources Development and put them in charge of developing policies and monitoring programmes for the dual system.'</p> <p>'Some of the responsibilities of the National Education Council were passed on under the responsibility of the Ministry, whereby the Council retained its advisory role.'</p> |
| 13 | Recognition of prior/informal and non-formal learning | Establishing or improving the process (policies, procedures, methodology) of recognition or validation of previous learning and competencies acquired in either formal, informal or non-formal educational context | <p>'A skills recognition service allows workers (including migrants and refugees) who have not gone through a formal VET programme to have their skills assessed and recognised and their occupations recorded in their passports and IDs.'</p> <p>'Recognition, validation and accreditation of non-formal and informal learning are foreseen in the Education Development Strategy 2020 and the Adult Education Strategy.'</p> |
| 14 | Capital and infrastructure investments | Building or refurbishment of schools, auxiliary buildings and training centres, equipping workshops, provision of computers, internet and assistive technologies | <p>'Large steps are undertaken in the field of the country digitalisation and digital transformation including permanent work on the building of ICT infrastructure in schools by supply of the modern ICT equipment and introduction of internet in all schools.'</p> <p>'30.4% of all machinery and equipment used in VET has been updated.'</p> <p>'The National Strategic Framework includes a building block on providing equipment and material to enable trainees to acquire practical education.'</p> |
| 15 | Quality assurance | Introduction or improvement of systematic evaluation of educational provision (at national, regional or school/lifelong learning provider level) to maintain or improve its quality; establishment of accreditation procedures (for educational institutions) and licensing procedures (for employees); monitoring and evaluation | <p>'The establishment of TVET Quality Assurance and Accreditation National Authority that will be responsible for developing and implementing the general framework for the quality of both pre-university and higher education technical education...'</p> <p>'Council of Ministers established the Accreditation and Quality Assurance Committee for the purpose of licensing programs and accrediting qualifications using the quality standards.'</p> <p>'Establishment of the monitoring unit inside the Ministry.'</p> |

Annex 2. Overview of reform and system change aspirations (reform justifications) with examples

| No | Name | Description | Examples from national reports and interviews |
|----|-----------------------------------|--|--|
| 1 | Promote access and participation | Strivings to improve access to all underrepresented groups; wider participation of students from general population in VET by promotion of VET and relevant information dissemination | 'Priority is ensuring vulnerable groups' access to education and training' (Moldova) |
| | | | 'Promote and establish TVET as an attractive learning opportunity from an early age and throughout the system.' (Jordan) |
| | | | 'Social policies to increase the accessibility of VET are foreseen only for vulnerable and marginalised groups. At the same time, large-scale targeted programs that can be considered as preventive and proactive actions to increase the share of the young people with technical skills have not yet been introduced.' (Ukraine) |
| | | | 'We need to promote TVET in another way and all the levels, but at the same time to convince the parents and the students to change the image of the TVET, you need to build a very modern TVET system institutions that can reply to the needs of the people where you will offer, not only 20 programs, but maybe 100 training programs.' (Palestine, interview) |
| 2 | Promote greening | Pursuit of improving VET while preserving resources and promoting greening and protection of the environment | 'The building renovation shall meet all the requirements of energy-efficiency...' (Armenia) |
| 3 | Increase labour market relevance | Strivings to improve the training so it responds better to labour market needs; fostering competences among students that will be relevant for their future job | 'Enhancing the relevance of TVET to better respond to labour market needs.' (Egypt) |
| | | | 'To train VET graduates in accordance with labour market requirements.' (Kyrgyzstan) |
| | | | 'Relevance of education should be increased, needs of the labour market and education should be harmonised.' (Serbia, interview) |
| 4 | Promote innovation and excellence | Ambition of improving VET through fostering innovation and excellence – usually through openings of the centres of excellence or techno parks, digitalisation, competitions, innovative extracurricular activities (typically in the spheres of IT or entrepreneurship), grant schemes or dissemination activities | 'The Protocol aims to facilitate the adaptation of the students to digital transformation, and to create environments where they can learn by developing robotic literacy and entrepreneurship.' (Turkey) |
| | | | 'The focus has been on giving visibility to the excellence. Many state competitions for various occupations and educational profiles are being organised.' (North Macedonia) |

| No | Name | Description | Examples from national reports and interviews |
|----|---|--|--|
| 5 | Support adult education and lifelong learning | Strivings to create a lifelong learning education system, thus allowing all citizens to achieve sustainable results, usually through promotion activities, provision of financial and/or educational and counselling support to individuals, as well as financial support to schools or municipalities | 'The Lifelong Learning Strategy Paper includes 29 measure items... It is also an important component of the National Employment Strategy.' (Turkey) |
| | | | 'Lifelong learning is also addressed within the framework of the Lebanon Crisis Response Plan 2017–20, through different interventions to create job opportunities through supporting municipalities, industrial sector, infrastructure, and micro, small, and medium enterprises.' (Lebanon) |
| | | | 'In order to promote the approach and participation of adults in lifelong learning, the Employment Agency carries out career guidance programs in vocational schools...' (Montenegro) |
| 6 | Better quality of education and training | Strivings to provide high quality education and training (teaching and learning) and a positive overall experience in schools | 'The primary objective is to provide high quality TVET' (Georgia) |
| | | | 'Education Strategic Plan anticipates a series of measures to improve the quality of teaching and learning in schools.' (Kosovo) |
| | | | 'Our goal is to fully integrate into European education area, enhance the quality of our education system and improve the standard of living of our citizens.' (Bosnia and Herzegovina, interview) |
| 7 | Raise system efficiency | Strivings to increase the efficiency of VET through rationalisation of network of providers, changes in the number, structure or regional distribution of schools, reallocation of resources and duties, and changes in the management structure | 'Ministry has started a process of rationalisation of the network of TVET providers.' (North Macedonia) |
| | | | 'The TVET Strategy 2020 development priorities include enhancing the efficacy of VET' (Moldova) |
| | | | 'In order to improve efficiency of the governance system, the Commission for the Development and Implementation of Dual Education was established...' (Serbia) |
| 8 | Improve working conditions of staff | Pursuit of better working conditions for teachers and other school staff, through provision of richer working environment, support for professional development and advancement, and increasing the salaries or providing grants; ambition to attract teachers and increase their number | 'One of the goals of the Concept for the implementation of state policy in VET system for the period up to 2027 is the introduction of incentive mechanisms for the promotion of teachers' professional activity and development.' (Ukraine) |
| | | | '2023 Education Vision paper sets out the targets of enacting a Law on Teaching Profession, improving the wages of paid teachers, shortening the periods of duty of contracted teachers taking into account the assignment, working conditions, promotions, personal rights and similar aspects related to teachers. In the scope of 2023 Education Vision policy paper, horizontal and vertical career speciality areas of teachers and administrators are expected to be restructured.' (Turkey) |

ACRONYMS

| | |
|--------|--|
| AE | Adult education |
| CF | Cumulative frequency |
| ETF | European Training Foundation |
| EU | European Union |
| GDP | Gross domestic product |
| GIZ | Deutsche Gesellschaft für internationale Zusammenarbeit |
| ILO | International Labour Organisation |
| ISCED | International Standard Classification of Education |
| LLL | Lifelong learning |
| NEETs | (Young people) not in employment, education or training |
| OECD | Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development |
| PISA | Programme for International Student Assessment |
| PS | Policy solution |
| RFIL | Recognition of non-formal and informal learning |
| SEET | South Eastern Europe and Turkey |
| SEMED | Southern and Eastern Mediterranean |
| TVET | Technical and vocational education and training |
| UNESCO | United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation |
| VET | Vocational education and training |

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The ETF launched the Torino Process in 2010 as a periodical review of vocational education and training (VET) systems in the wider context of human capital development and inclusive economic growth. While providing a quality assessment of VET policy from a lifelong learning perspective, the process builds on four key principles: ownership, participation, holistic and evidence-based analysis.



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