THE CHALLENGE OF POLICY IMPLEMENTATION: A COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF VOCATIONAL SCHOOL REFORMS IN ALBANIA, KOSOVO AND TURKEY

PEER LEARNING 2007

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CONTEXT OF THE EU'S EXTERNAL RELATIONS POLICY

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Ronald G. Sultana
European Training Foundation
2008

PREFACE

Between 2002 and 2005 the European Training Foundation (ETF) launched a peer review programme for South Eastern Europe. Although its main aim was to provide policy recommendations to national policymakers, it also endeavoured to contribute to capacity building and regional networking. In 2006 the ETF shifted its focus from peer review to peer learning, with the main objective being to contribute to national stakeholder capacity building through in-depth analyses and comparisons of education and training systems and policies in different countries.

In 2006 the peer learning project concentrated on the issue of financing vocational education and training (VET) in Albania, Kosovo (under UNSCR 1244) and Montenegro. Through interviews and discussions with national stakeholders and peers, four peer policymakers and four peer VET experts from Albania, the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Kosovo and Montenegro gained a deeper understanding of differences and similarities in the financing of VET in Albania, Kosovo and Montenegro.

In 2007 the project focused on the impact of VET policies on schools and school management in Albania, Kosovo and Turkey. One policymaker, one school director from a donor-supported pilot school and one from a non-pilot school were selected as peers from each country. National coordinators were appointed to coordinate self-study and preparations for the peer visits. Two peers from the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia and Montenegro were also invited. European Union (EU) VET expert, Ronald Sultana, author of this report, provided external expertise. The experts were engaged and coordinated by Agmin Italy and the team was led by two ETF staff members.

The 2007 peer team consisted of:

- Mr Ilja Paluka, Director, National VET Agency, Ministry of Education and Science, Albania
- Mrs Anila Nanaj, Deputy Director, High Technical Economics School (pilot school), Albania
- Mr Vladimir Rumano, Director General, Karl Gega Technical Construction School, Albania
- Mr Fehmi Ismaili, Permanent Secretary, Ministry of Education, Science and Technology, Kosovo
- Mr Zenel Kasumaj, Director, Decan Technical School (pilot school), Kosovo
- Mr Isa Hoxha, Director, Istog Mithat Frasheri Vocational School, Kosovo
- Mr Ibrahim Demirer, Director, Educational Research and Development, Ministry of National Education, Turkey
- Mr S. Sirri Kabadayi, Director, Eskisehir Atatürk Anatolian Vocational and Technical High School (pilot school), Turkey
- Mr Zeynel Abidin Karagöz, Director, Dikmen Industrial Vocational High School, Turkey
- Ms Ivana Petricevic, International Cooperation Unit, Ministry of Education and Science, Montenegro
- Mrs Nada Stoimenova, Advisor for Secondary Education, Ministry of Education and Science, the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia
- Mr Alqi Mustafai, Institute for Curriculum Development, Coordinator for Albania
- Mr Rame Likaj, VET Expert, Coordinator for Kosovo
- Mr Recep Altin, Deputy Director, Project Coordination Unit, Ministry of National Education, Coordinator for Turkey
- Mr Ronald Sultana, EU Expert and Director of the Euro-Mediterranean Centre for Educational Research, Malta

THE CHALLENGE OF POLICY IMPLEMENTATION: A COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF VOCATIONAL SCHOOL REFORMS IN ALBANIA, KOSOVO AND TURKEY

- Ms Margareta Nikolovska, Project Team Member and Country Manager for Albania, ETF
- Mr Arjen Vos, Project Team Leader and Country Manager for Turkey, ETF.

We are grateful to all the people we interviewed during our peer visits to Albania, Kosovo and Turkey for their patience in answering our questions and for providing us with food for thought. We are particularly grateful to our ETF colleague Sam Cavanagh for his consistent support.

We would also like to thank the team for the open, friendly, professional and intensive discussions that provided an enriching learning experience for all of us. We conclude that policies, people, places and pace are important dimensions of any policy implementation process. We understand that policy design and policy implementation are very complex processes and that policies are implemented, interpreted or adapted in different ways in line with these dimensions. We have learned that the more stakeholders – in particular, school directors and teachers – involved in the policy design phase, the easier the implementation of reforms. We firmly believe that ministries have the responsibility to steer reforms (often donor-funded) and to develop – from an early stage – strategies for mainstreaming innovative approaches that prevent inequalities between schools and teachers. We also feel that the role of school directors and teachers is systematically underrated in reforms.

This report describes the rich experiences that came out of the 2007 peer learning exercise. The ETF peer learning instrument proved to be a very powerful learning tool for peers, as sharing experiences and comparing success stories, failures and mistakes helped them to better comprehend the local contexts in which reforms are taking place and why policy initiatives seem to work better under particular circumstances. Although it may seem that this exercise led to more questions than answers, questions can also help peers in dealing with daily problems. We considered it very important to share our learning with a much broader group of interested people in the field of education, and so we held a regional conference in Istanbul on 3-4 December 2007, involving some 100 policymakers and school directors from all over South Eastern Europe.

This report – which reflects the intensive discussions of peers over a period of 10 days in Albania, Kosovo and Turkey – should, in general terms, be considered as an instrument for knowledge sharing. It will form the basis for the stakeholder discussions on policy impact on schools and school management that the ETF aims to promote in 2008 by organising dissemination meetings in Albania, Kosovo and Turkey. We hope that this report will increase the understanding of policy reform processes and that it will ultimately contribute to more efficient and effective policy implementation.

Arjen Vos and Margareta Nikolovska, ETF
March 2008

CONTENTS

1. INTRODUCTION

In 2007, the ETF organised a peer learning activity focusing on how VET schools implement reforms and policies. Such reforms and policies are often decided at the central level rather than at the regional, municipal or school level. The expectation in this top-down process is that school-level actors, and particularly principals and teachers, will transform policy intentions and goals into real outcomes. In the VET sector, such targeted outcomes typically include more effective learning environments for students and a better match between skills supply and demand.

The main goal of this peer learning experience was to understand this process of implementation. A powerful way of capturing this concern is to ask the following two related questions:

- How do reforms change schools?
- How do schools change reforms?

Other questions that guided the mission include the following: How do school-level actors and stakeholders make sense of new policies and how do they interpret them? With regard to policies that have been centrally determined, do school-level actors and stakeholders faithfully translate these into practice or do they transform them first, possibly by adapting them to suit the school environment, the school's institutional culture or the surrounding community's needs? What opportunities exist for school-based actors to develop policies? Are there cases where school-based actors subvert policies that have been decided at levels above that of the school, and, if so, how and why does this happen? Are transformations and adaptations, accommodation and resistance educationally sound or are they problematic? How, if at all, do new policies implemented in pilot schools travel to non-pilot schools? Who decides when policy has been successfully implemented and disseminated and on what grounds?

1.1 METHODOLOGY

The questions raised above and other related questions were addressed by a group of 17 peers, who used a methodology developed by the ETF and

applied in different contexts in relation to a wide range of themes. A good example was the peer learning 2006 exercise, which focused on VET financing mechanisms (Parkes, 2007). In the case of the present peer learning activity, three countries were involved, namely Albania, Kosovo and Turkey (see Annex 1 for relevant contextual information). Each country appointed a home team consisting of a policymaker, a VET expert, a school principal from a pilot VET school and one from a non-pilot VET school. In order to provide additional perspectives, two VET policymakers – one from the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia and another from Montenegro – were also invited to join the team, led by two ETF staff members and also by an EU VET expert whose tasks included preparing a concept paper on policy implementation, acting as a resource person during visits and subsequent discussion sessions, and preparing a comparative report that synthesised the learning outcomes of the mission.

PEER LEARNING OBJECTIVES

Four main goals underpinning the peer learning activity are expected to facilitate policy learning. These are:

■ improved mutual knowledge and understanding of VET systems, issues and developments;

■ promotion of networking, exchanges of experience and cooperation among VET experts, stakeholders and policymakers, leading to analyses of policy options suitable for local systems and traditions;

■ increased awareness and enhanced opportunities for learning from VET reform experiences in EU member states and candidate countries;

■ linkages between national policy reform initiatives and the Instrument for Pre-Accession Assistance (IPA) programming cycle.

The peer learning process involved four key tasks that were guided and mentored by the ETF experts: (i) the preparation of a concept paper, (ii) a self-study analysis,

(iii) visits, and (iv) the preparation of a synthesis report.

Concept paper

A concept paper outlining certain key ideas surrounding the notion of policy implementation was drawn up in the preparatory phase by the author of this report. This paper provided a synthesis of some of the main research implementation outcomes, proposed a framework to make sense of this data, and finally, suggested a list of questions (see Annex 2) that could guide both the peer visits to the three countries and the discussions based on observations made during the visits. The most relevant aspects of the concept paper were integrated in this synthesis report.

Self-study

The preparatory phase also included a self-study exercise by the teams, coordinated by the VET expert, with each team writing up case studies on two recent VET policy reforms that had had an impact at the school level. In writing up these case studies, the teams provided information on: (i) the broader context of the policy reform; (ii) the key actors involved; (iii) the process that led to the development of reform objectives; (iv) the changes in roles and new capacities required by school-level actors; and, most importantly, (v) the current state of reform implementation and the factors and issues that aid successful implementation or that obstruct reforms.

The three self-study exercises provided the peer learning team with six case studies (see Annex 3) that served to make the link between the analytic frameworks provided by the concept paper and the realities and complexities of the implementation of reforms as they unfolded in a specific geographic context. Selected examples from these case studies illustrate specific aspects of the implementation process.

Visits

The third key task in this peer learning activity involved three-day visits to Albania (10-12 September 2007), Kosovo (13-15 September 2007) and Turkey

(1-3 October 2007). Teams prepared a programme of visits to central, regional and/or district-level educational and local authority officials, as well as to a number of VET schools (formal education sector) and adult training centres (non-formal education sector). Meetings were held with social partners, and with donor and aid agencies in all three countries, with the peer team sometimes splitting up into two groups in order to be able to cover more ground. Care was taken to visit non-pilot schools as well as schools piloting the VET reforms referred to in the respective case studies. Interviews were held with key policymakers and with principals and teachers. Separate focus groups were sometimes organised with the latter to ensure more spontaneity in response to questions.

Debriefing wrap-up sessions were held at the end of each day; each peer team sub-group reported on the day's events and impressions, with a view to sharing insights and to bringing to the surface the kind of tacit knowledge that is underpinned by deeply (often unconsciously) held attitudes, beliefs and values. The ultimate aim was to develop clearer, more explicit, reflexive and nuanced thinking around the notion of implementation. The fact that team members experienced reforms from the different perspectives of policymaker, VET expert and school principal served to enrich the debate and to approach themes from different angles. As the team moved from visit to visit, the analysis of the themes assumed a more comparative nature, given that peers were able to identify similar and differing dynamics in the different contexts observed.

Synthesis report

Finally, this synthesis report represents an attempt to draw together the key conclusions from the three visits and to crystallise the learning generated by the reading, writing, reflection, visits, interviews and rich discussions that took place. It also provides a comparative analysis of some of the key themes and issues related to education policy implementation.

This report needs to be viewed within the context of both a growing interest in policy implementation research and increasingly sophisticated attempts to understand how policy unfolds when it travels across the different layers of the educational system. Key issues are the identification of the elements and conditions that potentially foster or frustrate change and the development of a more profound understanding of the ways in which policy can be designed so as to facilitate implementation. This synthesis report is part of a strategy to disseminate the peer learning outcomes that also included a conference held in Istanbul on 3-4 December 2007.

1.2 LIMITATIONS

Needless to say, the report is limited, first of all, to the geographical regions covered by the project and, secondly, to the themes chosen by each team for the case studies. Some of the case studies dealt with VET curriculum reform, and specifically with the introduction of modularised curricula. A Kosovo case study paid particular attention to the role played by teachers. A second Kosovo case study and an Albania case study both focused on initiatives to establish stronger links between VET schools and the labour market. Finally, a Turkey case study gave an account of the establishment of career progression steps for teachers. Although these case studies undoubtedly provided deep insights into the policy implementation process, it is obvious that a focus on other types of policy reforms could have raised other issues and prompted other analyses and conclusions.

GEOGRAPHIC AND CONTEXTUAL SPECIFICITY

The choice of countries determined the nature of the issues and themes that arose, thereby giving this study a particularly Balkan focus. This choice also raised an issue that is common in comparative studies, which is that of comparing like with like. All three countries have had their fair share of crises, conflicts and authoritarian

rule. Kosovo and Albania historically share a common experience of centuries of Ottoman rule, with elements of the Empire's administrative tradition and culture present in both contexts – brilliantly captured, incidentally, in Ismail Kadare's *The Palace of Dreams* (1993). However, the economic and political challenges that they face are quite different, even if sometimes overlapping. When compared to Turkey – with a surface area of 814,578 km^2 and a population of 73 million – Albania (covering 28,800 km^2) and Kosovo (10,887 km^2) are relatively small countries, with populations of just over 3 million and 2.5 million respectively. This significant difference in scale has implications for the types of challenges encountered in implementing policies.

Politically, too, Albania and Kosovo are caught up in dynamics specific to the Balkans. Furthermore, while all three countries are engaged in the process of accession to the EU, Turkey has a longer history of bringing its policies and administrative structures in line with the *acquis communautaire*, as it does with transitioning from a centrally steered to a market-oriented economy. While donors and aid agencies are present in all three countries, their involvement in VET-related areas is variable in both scope and reach, and monitoring by the international community of progress achieved in various aspects of social, political and economic matters has different purposes and intensities.

There are also important differences in employment and unemployment trends, in internal and external migration, in the nature of the labour markets, the tempo with which they are evolving, and the part played by the informal economy. In Turkey, the regulation of the labour market, the recognition and rewarding of certified skills by employers and the articulation between the education system and the labour market are all more advanced than in the other two contexts. Nonetheless, there are also some striking similarities in the VET sector, meaning that a comparative exercise is feasible. These shared characteristics, worth highlighting, are summarised in Box 1.

INSIGHTS... NOT RECIPES

Given the geographic and thematic specificity of the material, it is important to underline the fact that this synthesis report does not make any claim to comprehensiveness. Nor does it claim to be guided by the rigour normally associated with academic papers. While the shared knowledge and experiences of the members of the peer team ensured a broad and informed coverage of themes, it must be pointed out that only 20 initial VET (IVET) schools (19 of which were government-owned) and six continuing VET (CVET) centres were visited. Visits, while intense and revealing, were short in duration, rarely lasting more than two hours. The outcome is valid in its own right and possibly even of some broader interest given the dearth of studies on education policy implementation in transition and developing economies. That said, it is necessarily different from the product of exhaustive qualitative investigation, where researchers spend hundreds of hours in schools, painstakingly capturing the processes and dynamics of policy implementation in action (see, as examples of this kind of research, the work of Coburn & Stein, 2006; Hill, 2006; and Datnow, 2006). Furthermore, visits did not entail observation of class- or workshop-based instruction in the school environment – the site *par excellence* for sense-making educational reform practices. Such observation would have identified possible mismatches between teacher reports of their engagement with reforms and actual instructional practice.

For these reasons this synthesis report does not set out to be prescriptive in any way. There is also another reason why it does not aspire to be prescriptive, however. As we shall see, the present state of knowledge and research suggests that education policy implementation is a field marked by remarkable complexity and contextual specificity (Honig, 2006). Complexity and contingency are not compatible with recipes or formulas for success, and this is equally applicable irrespective of the policy in question, and where, when and by whom the policy is to be implemented.

Box 1: Shared VET characteristics and VET reform challenges in Albania, Kosovo and Turkey

- Highly centralised and regulated VET systems in terms of financial mechanisms but also when it comes to other aspects of the system, including curricula.
- Weak intra- and intersectoral communication, with policy signals and decisions failing to reach lower echelons or to reach them in a timely manner.
- Limited VET responsiveness to labour market dynamics and needs.
- Increasing interest in deconcentration of power to regional or municipal levels, and in the devolution of an increasing number of responsibilities to the school level.
- A declared policy goal to make VET more attractive and to reform its status as a second or negative choice.
- A need to improve capacities for policy analysis and to address the disparities between declaration of intentions, actual implementation and appropriate institutional settings and capacities.
- Difficulties in building vertical and horizontal partnerships with stakeholders, with weak social partner funding and co-funding of VET initiatives.
- A lack of reliable and up-to-date information about the skills needed by the economy.
- The presence of an extensive and unregulated informal labour market that employs workers without formal skill certification, thus weakening VET efforts.
- Much donor-driven innovation within pilot schools, raising questions of sustainability, ability to go to scale, and emergent inequalities between pilot and non-pilot schools.
- A tendency for VET school principals, especially in non-pilot schools, to reproduce the top-down, authoritarian, bureaucratic nature of the national system, with few schools having strong, tightly knit organisational cultures based on collaboration and with few principals specifically trained as educational leaders.
- A need for heavy investment in educational infrastructure, school buildings, workshops, learning and teaching equipment and teacher salaries.
- Low salaries for staff, leading them to invest spare capacities in after-school employment.
- A need for the modernisation of curricula, textbooks and teaching methodologies plus related teacher training and assessment of learning outcomes.
- Limited professional development opportunities for staff, which jeopardises the implementation of pedagogical reforms.

Sources: Simsek & Yildirim, 2000; Akpinar & Ercan, 2002; Parkes, 2007; and self-study reports by peer learning teams

The attempt to compare and contrast implementation challenges across different contexts has as its goal, rather, the generation of powerful if context-specific insights about the way policy signals filter through the different layers of the educational system, leading to a deeper understanding of what happens to policy intentions at the school level.

Readers, therefore, should not look for unequivocal answers to the challenges they face in their own educational communities. Rather, they should mine the report for ideas, insights and inspiration as they try to understand how policy implementation works in their own contexts. While the report will not, and cannot, provide a clear and explicit guide to practice, it can nevertheless serve as a useful learning document and as an 'object-to-think-with' (Papert, 1980). It can also help to make the process of implementation – with all its challenges, complexities and surprises – more visible and more transparent.

2. POLICY IMPLEMENTATION: THE BROADER CONTEXT

2

In the following sections we will first briefly consider what the broader international context has to tell us about education policy implementation. The remaining sections, which will focus on the different dimensions that have an impact on implementation, illustrate the dynamics involved by drawing on the case studies and on observational and interview material put together during the visits. Maintaining such a comparative approach will serve to highlight the similarities and differences in both the challenges that arise as implementation unfolds and the way these challenges are addressed. A concluding section will synthesise the key lessons learnt.

2.1 THE FIDELITY MODEL

Early approaches to policy making and implementation were underpinned by assumptions that the process was both rational and linear. According to this view, policy élites (e.g. policymakers in education ministries) identified problems, articulated goals and devised an implementation strategy. An overriding goal and preoccupation was getting a good match between policy intent and what happened at the school level. This fidelity model was underpinned by the conviction that what mattered most in the implementation process was the individual (e.g. the principal or the teacher), that individuals naturally tend to resist change (due to a lack of capacity or of motivation), and that such individuals could be moved to faithfully implement the new policy by an appropriate mix of incentives with sanctions, training and inspection. In this model, change had to be mandated from above, and the outcomes of the process had to approximate the design blueprint as closely as possible.

2.2 POLICY AS A MESSY DO-IT-YOURSELF JOB

Decades of research into policy making and policy implementation have placed in serious doubt both the presumed rationality as well as the linearity of the process. In the first instance, we learnt that policy making is far from the scientific and rational exercise it is touted to be. With his long experience in educational policy analysis, Ball (1998, p. 126) concludes that most policies are in fact 'ramshackle, compromise, hit-and-miss affairs that are reworked, tinkered with,

nuanced and inflected through complex processes of influence, text production, dissemination and ultimately, recreation in contexts of practice'. Policy making is often complex and messy – a Do-It-Yourself job – with those responsible ending up 'borrowing and copying bits and pieces of ideas from elsewhere, drawing on and amending locally tried and tested approaches, combining theories, research trends and fashions, and not infrequently flailing around for anything at all that looks as though it might work' (Ball, 1998, p. 126). The messiness of the policy-making process is heightened by its close, often tense relationship with politics, to the extent that, as Malen (2006) notes, education policies end up embodying 'highly salient, value-laden issues that cannot be readily, fully or permanently resolved through rational deliberations or unanimous agreements. As a result, these policies tend to be adopted and implemented through political processes that reflect the relative power of contending groups more than the relative merits of policy options'. As we shall see, the policy-making field is even messier when, as in Albania and Kosovo, a region has experienced deep crises, and when, as one Kosovo interviewee noted, 'the logic of first planning and then implementing has to give way to urgent issues, like getting students into schools'. The messiness is further accentuated in an environment that is crowded by international donors and aid agencies, all of whom have their own priorities, as well as views and agendas as to what to reform in education and how.

2.3 IMPLEMENTATION AS MUTUAL ADAPTATION

A deeper understanding of how policies travel up and down the various intermediary levels between the centre and the school also leads us to understand that, in contrast to the expectations embedded in the fidelity model, variation in implementation is the rule. Furthermore, contrary to the views commonly held by policymakers, such variation and adaptability to context is a major criterion of success rather than of failure (Cuban, 1998). This conviction is underpinned by an awareness that it is the school as a whole – not isolated individuals – that needs to be seen as the unit responsible for implementation. In this

scenario, school-level actors are considered to be involved in a dynamic sense-making process: rather than passively read, they actively interpret the changes that they are expected to put into place. Schools are, moreover, increasingly seen as complex institutions embedded in an intricate web of relations that include diverse layers of authority (ministry, district, municipality) and of partners (parents, community, industry). Here, implementation unfolds as a process of mutual adaptation, with implementers trying to make sense of – and manage – the demands made by policymakers in an attempt to reconcile them with their personal and professional world views. Teachers, for instance, often have intimate knowledge of educational processes and of issues which fall outside the radar of policymakers, especially if the latter do not have teaching experience or if they have been divorced from the realities of classroom life for a long time. A case in point is Turkish teacher concerns about modular curricula, designed in such a way that one module could not be started before the previous one had been completed, and so leading to situations where quick learners had to wait for slower learners to catch up before moving on to the next part of the programme. High-ranking education policy élites are rarely aware of the complexities of learning environments in the same way teachers are, yet the distance between policymakers and policy implementers is hardly ever bridged, with policy making considered to be a high-status expert activity and policy implementation a low-status one.

2.4 KEY DIMENSIONS IN POLICY IMPLEMENTATION

The shift from the earlier input-output approach to implementation to one that is more sensitive to the way schools and school-level actors make sense of and adapt policy messages has led to increased awareness of the fact that variations in policy, people and places matter in implementation (Odden, 1991; Honig, 2006). Paying attention to the type of policy to be implemented, to the places in which the policy is to be implemented, and to the people involved in implementation (i.e. stakeholders such as non-governmental organisations (NGOs), employers, parents

and local authorities, decision makers such as managers and administrative bodies, and practitioners such as teachers, trainers and students) increases our understanding of how different aspects of policies, people and places interact and combine in particular ways to shape implementation processes and outcomes.

The material generated throughout the peer learning activity nicely illustrates these three key dimensions. It also suggests that importance should be given to a fourth dimension: pace. While this can be seen as a subset of the policy dimension, here it is considered separately for analysis purposes as it helps improve our understanding of how education policy implementation in Albania, Kosovo and Turkey is influenced both by the quantity of items in a particular cluster of reforms and by the tempo of take-up. Pace is therefore of particular relevance to transition and accession countries, where political and economic dynamics, together with the density of donor-driven initiatives and the rhythm of their project cycles, contribute to the acceleration of the reform process.

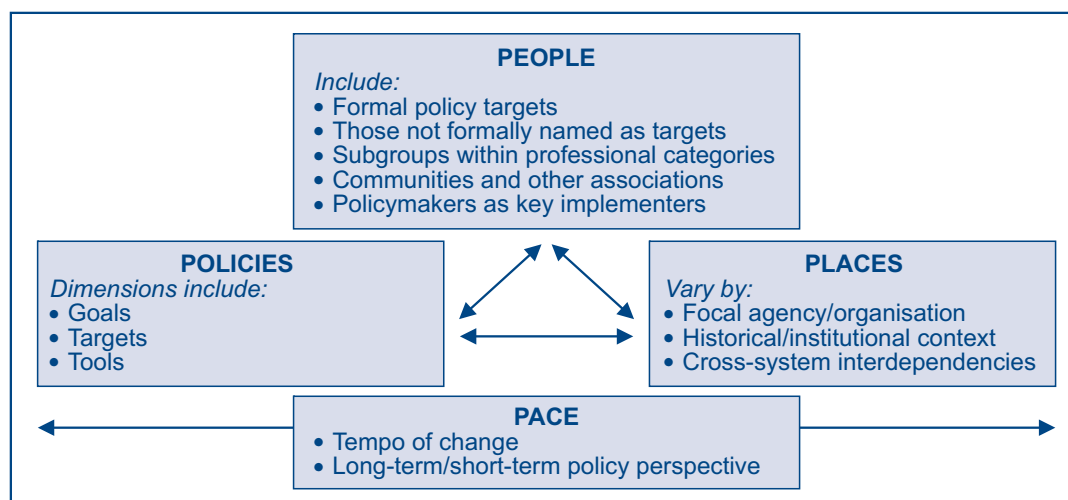## **2**.5 THE KEY DIMENSIONS AND THEIR ELEMENTS

Each of the four dimensions has an impact on the implementation process, both individually and in interaction with each other. Below we will try to unpack some of the elements in each dimension and

consider them separately, although in reality the different elements may converge. This leads to some overlap, which we tried to avoid by referring the reader to the relevant sections rather than repeating the same information in a different way. For instance, a discussion of the people dimension includes a focus on district- and municipal-level education officials. A discussion of the place dimension would normally also consider the role played by district and municipal education offices in policy implementation. In this case, cross-reference is made to the earlier discussion to avoid tedious repetition.

The unpacking of elements in the four key dimensions of policies, people, places and pace, and consideration of how these dimensions interact with each other in particular ways, helps us better understand how implementation unfolds at the school level. This understanding is heightened by illustrative examples from the case studies and from data generated during the visits. The intention is not to make judgements about the success of a country in implementing policies but to develop a more sophisticated and nuanced understanding of how the implementation process is shaped by various factors.

The four dimensions and their respective elements are summarised in Figure 1. We consider each of these dimensions – policies, people, places and pace – in turn in the next four sections.

Figure 1: Dimensions of education policy implementation

PEOPLE
Include:
• Formal policy targets
• Those not formally named as targets
• Subgroups within professional categories
• Communities and other associations
• Policymakers as key implementers

POLICIES
Dimensions include:
• Goals
• Targets
• Tools

PLACES
Vary by:
• Focal agency/organisation
• Historical/institutional context
• Cross-system interdependencies

PACE
• Tempo of change
• Long-term/short-term policy perspective

Source: Adapted from Honig, 2006, p. 14

3. THE POLICY DIMENSION OF THE IMPLEMENTATION CHALLENGE

The shaping of the implementation process depends on the nature of the policies to be put into place in terms of the goals that they aspire to achieve, the categories of actors targeted as policy implementers and the tools utilised to implement policies. Much also depends on the policy environment or context – what we will call here the policy landscape – in which goals, targets and tools come into play. Figure 2 tries to visually represent some of the elements and dynamics in the implementation process that will be explored in some detail in this section and in some of the following sections.

3.1 THE GENERAL POLICY LANDSCAPE

The overall policy context that provides the landscape for particular reforms is very important if we are to understand the implementation process. Although there are several aspects of this landscape that one could refer to, our peer learning material suggests the six items discussed below.

3.1.1 OVERALL POLICY FRAMEWORK LOGIC AND COHERENCE

The visits revealed that policy framework logic and coherence has a number of implications for the way implementation unfolds, and whether or not it does so smoothly. Kosovo, for instance, has clearly signposted three overarching objectives for all its governmental policies, education included. These are depoliticisation, decentralisation and democratisation, to be achieved within the context of four main E-priorities, namely, the economy, education, energy, and Europe. It has also developed an all-inclusive Pre-University Strategy for Education for the period 2007 to 2017. Such clarity and consistency of purpose, developed in the context of an inclusive consultation process with all stakeholders, helps articulate and cement resolve for change in all sectors, and with education staff feeling that they are contributing to an overall national objective.

Figure 2: Some dynamics in the education policy implementation process
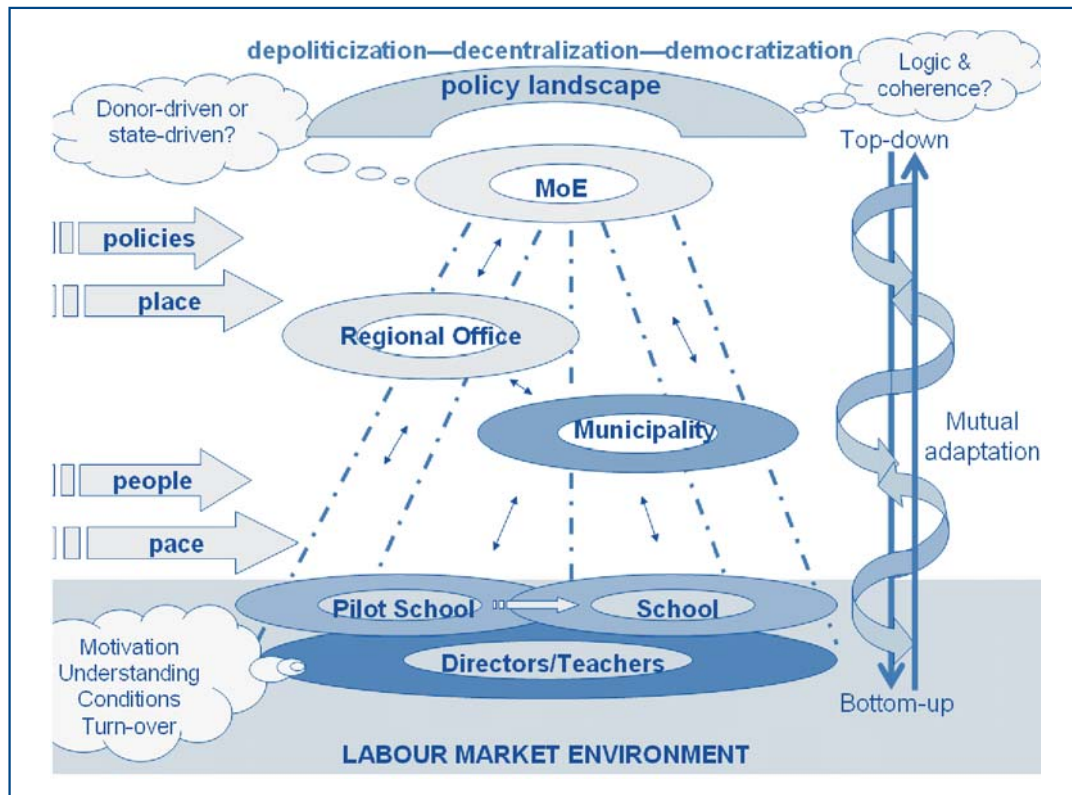
Individual educational policies are more easily understood if they make sense and connect with the broader picture, and it is more likely that school-level staff feel that what they are implementing is part of a larger set of policies that are shaping the country in specific ways. The underlying logic and coherence in the policy landscape can be articulated in both cross-sector and sector-specific ways. In Albania, for instance, there has been an attempt to achieve coherence and collaboration between the Ministry of Education and Science and the Ministry of Labour by establishing a VET Council and a National VET Agency. The Ministry of Education and Science has also adopted a sector-wide National Education Strategy for 2004 to 2015, in which VET plays a prominent role. In Turkey, the same goal is pursued through the promulgation of a Vocational Training Law and the use of EU projects such as SVET (Strengthening VET) and MVET (Modernisation of VET) as forums for pulling together many VET initiatives under one umbrella.

3.1.2 THE OVERALL ATTITUDE TOWARDS REFORM

There are many reasons why school-level staff members may decide either to cooperate enthusiastically in the reform process or to engage in obstructionism or outright resistance. An initiative might be perceived to be sensitive and responsive to the real needs, priorities and concerns of the school community; alternatively, it may be viewed as being peddled by external forces and so be judged to be distant from these needs, priorities and concerns. The balance between push and pull factors (Sultana, 2001) can determine whether a reform flies or whether it gets bogged down in passive or aggressive resistance at the point where it matters most: the school level. Albanian VET experts noted, for instance, that curriculum modularisation was perceived by many to be a foreign, donor-driven import that failed to connect to deeper concerns and to institutional cultures at the grass-roots level. In Turkey, in contrast, school communities felt that modularisation provided them with a workable solution to the challenge of organising practical components in VET

curricula. They also felt that this was a country- rather than donor-driven initiative and that it responded well to their concerns about getting a better balance between theory and practice and to their aspirations to shift from broad coverage of generic skills to a mastery of specialist skills. The result was improved student motivation and improved employment opportunities. Students and schools, moreover, had more flexibility in terms of being able to choose from a module bank in response to personal interests and to evolving opportunities in the local labour market.

Attitudes towards reform are also shaped positively or negatively if an initiative contradicts other reforms in progress or if it fails to address the educational setting in which it is to be implemented. Staff might have been exposed to a barrage of reforms and feel disoriented or alienated, particularly if they are expected to implement change without adequate training, resources or incentives. Irrespective of the reasons (and we will delve deeper into this issue when we consider the people dimension of the implementation process), the overall attitude of school-level actors towards reform matters. In Kosovo, and particularly in Turkey, staff were generally positive if not keen about the reforms generally, and specifically about the initiatives on which we focused. Various factors combined to dampen the enthusiasm of Albanian principals and teachers, particularly low salaries, significant differences between pilot and non-pilot schools, and a rather fragmented and exogenously donor-driven approach to reform. In all three countries, some of the eagerness in relation to the reform was threatened by the fact that VET schools are considered to be a second – even a negative – educational choice for students, in contrast with the status enjoyed by the general academic sector.

3.1.3 THE DRIVING FORCE BEHIND THE REFORMS

Who pushes the reforms can have an impact on the way implementation unfolds. In Albania, for instance both self-study and

field visits confirmed that many of the initiatives were donor-driven, occasionally leading to a situation in which donor priorities and agendas did not necessarily match those of the state or of the school community itself, with coordination between initiatives occasionally weak or missing. In Kosovo, the fledgling Ministry of Education, Science and Technology, established in 2002, had a stronger coordinating role when it came to donor input; thus, while intermediate layers at the regional and municipal levels were insufficiently clear about their roles – and in some cases seemed to be merely adding unnecessary layers that impeded communication – officials and schools did feel that they were implementing directives that could be traced back to the central authority. In Turkey, in contrast, although Ministry of National Education leadership in the VET sector was purposeful and decisive, the changes taking place seemed to be more school-driven, with principals enjoying a greater degree of autonomy and competence in educational leadership (as opposed to mere management), even if this discretion, by standards common across the EU, was limited.

3.1.4 THE DIRECTIONAL FLOW OF THE REFORMS

There is much research to show that the way implementation unfolds depends greatly on whether change occurs as a top-down process or as a bottom-up process that originates in the schools. Today, the dichotomy between the two approaches is no longer stark or polarised. Emerging even within traditional centralised systems are alternative centres and decentralising structures, such as those constituted by social partnerships, policy networks and corporate management. There is also a deeper understanding of the fact that some policies are better implemented in a top-down manner, while others are more likely to have staying power if they are incubated within the school environment itself. Furthermore, there is a deeper appreciation of the fact that school-based innovation is likely to be more effective when embedded in, and consistent with, a national framework. In the three

countries involved in this peer learning activity, however, a top-down policy-making style clearly prevails. The prevailing view is that the central state apparatus is responsible for decision making and for taking initiatives. Thus, despite increasing reference to decentralisation, power is still concentrated at the centre. Where elements of discretion are distributed to intermediary layers at the regional and municipal levels, the logic followed is deconcentration rather than decentralisation; in other words, sub-units of government find themselves having more responsibilities (in terms of implementing rules) but not necessarily more power (in making rules). Schools are not seen as sites of policy development but as policy implementers, and, generally speaking, school autonomy is weak. School-level actors do not shape policies nor are they invited or encouraged to do so. As a result, there is a strong perception that the state (or its representatives at the intermediary level) should solve all problems, including petty ones. Few structures are in place to facilitate vertical communication between administrative layers and to encourage bottom-up feedback. Similarly, the lack of mechanisms to facilitate communication within layers means there is limited mobilisation of opinions around particular issues with a view to influencing change. Both vertical and horizontal communication structures have an important impact on policy implementation and sustainability. All the case studies focused on during the peer learning exercise tended to be of the top-down variety, with Turkish VET schools exhibiting more of what we earlier referred to as mutual adaptation; that is, centrally set policies are modified in formal and informal ways in an effort to reconcile macro-level demands with micro-level realities. Most of the VET directors and teachers we interviewed did not expect that their views would have much impact at all in policy terms.

3.1.5 THE POLITICAL LANDSCAPE

Many of the implementation concerns that arose in all three peer learning activity contexts were linked to political issues.

One key issue, which has already been discussed, is the propensity for concentrating power at the centre. Other issues refer to aspects of the political culture that have an impact on the way implementation unfolds. Some are quite typical: for instance, interviewees from the education ministries in all three countries expressed their frustration at the way political rhetoric is often not followed through with concrete support for the VET sector and at how flashy policies to enhance legitimacy and re-election bids tend to take precedence over the development and implementation of comprehensive and coherent approaches to educational problems. Interviewees also pointed to the fact that the problems they faced in implementing complex reforms when ministers – seemingly insensitive to the fact that change is not a product but a process – demanded quick results.

Other aspects of political culture are more specific to the geographic contexts in which the peer learning implementation process unfolds. In Albania, part of the reason for the demotivation of school staff in regard to reforms can be traced back to the fact that some school principals and key staff at regional and municipal levels are political appointees, chosen not for their educational leadership capacities but because of their partisan allegiances to political personalities. Staff that had previously been trained as members of a reform initiative were sometimes summarily demoted or transferred; such frequent staff turnover has led to a breakdown in incremental continuity and to a rupture in the school-based social relations and social bonds that are so important when it comes to nurturing and sustaining change (Smylie & Evans, 2006). This attrition is especially detrimental to implementation when it involves principals (Useem et al., 1997). In all three countries, but especially in Albania and Kosovo, frequent changes of ministers and key personnel in ministries as a result of shifts in political fortunes has also led to continuity issues. Decisions made at the regional or municipal level have also sometimes been made for partisan gain and to curry political favour rather than in response to sound educational judgement. In Albania, for

instance, funding reserved for school building projects was given to several schools to ensure that each institution felt it had got something. This led to a situation where none of the schools received sufficient budgets to make any significant difference to the learning environment. Likewise, funding earmarked for schools were diverted to a more politically popular road-building project; when schools complained, the explanation given by district authorities was that 'roads led to schools'!

3.1.6 THE NATURE OF THE LABOUR MARKET

The fact that the way the job market works can have major implications for the viability or otherwise of reform initiatives came through very powerfully in relation to both Albania and Kosovo. Compared to Turkey, both have a preponderance of small and even micro enterprises; this led to particular difficulties when it came to implementing the directive to strengthen links between VET schools and the labour market. Most small enterprises simply do not have the resources or capacity to become active partners in training VET students (for instance, by offering supervised work and apprenticeship placements, by becoming practice firms, or by supporting mutually beneficial exchanges of key workers with VET centres). Education ministry policy leadership – generally driven by international donors whose experience of such schemes in larger countries had been positive – simply failed when it came face-to-face with the realities of the market place. Another aspect of the labour market that has had a powerful impact on VET policy implementation is the way skilled and semi-skilled labour is recruited. Employers in charge of small enterprises in certain economic sectors in Albania, for instance, prefer to recruit workers 'from the street', as we were told, rather than employ VET graduates whose salary expectations might be higher. Relatively cheap labour generates higher profits, so skills training, investment in human capital and high productivity are not a priority for Albanian 'cowboy entrepreneurs' (as one peer called

them) – a breed which is also to be found in Kosovo and Turkey, although to a somewhat lesser extent. Efforts to legitimise the need for VET certification and to implement a national qualifications framework (NQF) have consequently been hampered, given that formal certification to practice a trade is not required, that the level of unemployment among VET graduates remains high, and that students and their families are persuaded that 'who you know' matters more than 'what you know'. The unregulated nature of recruitment is further aggravated by the fact that many of the small enterprises in the country are to be found in the country's informal or underground economy, and so avoid paying both tax and insurance. Policy efforts to improve the attractiveness and status of VET are subverted by such a situation.

3.2 DIFFERENTIATION BETWEEN POLICY GOALS

The nature and extent of the challenges of implementation are also partly dependent on the goals that a particular policy, or set of policies, wants to achieve. Experience with policy implementation worldwide suggests that some education goals are more difficult to implement than others and so are likely to meet with more resistance from the school-level actors who have to put them into place. We will now consider some of the ways in which different policy goals present implementation challenges of a diverse nature and calibre, illustrating these points by drawing on examples from the case studies and visits.

3.2.1 CORE VERSUS PERIPHERAL POLICY GOALS

Goals that are at the core of the teaching and learning process (e.g. adopting student-centred pedagogies) tend to be more challenging to implement than those that are more peripheral (e.g. changing the timetable for the school year). In implementation, however, each developmental activity has a core dimension and a peripheral dimension, with the weight of each depending on several

factors within and outside the system. Some of the core processes relate to new pedagogical approaches (which often transform relationships between principals, teachers, students, parents and the wider community, including industry), new assessment practices, new curricula and new ways of organising curricular content. All six case studies contain aspects of these core changes, with some changes clearly more challenging to implement than others. In the three countries involved in this peer learning exercise, curriculum modularisation featured as a key policy goal. While all three countries implemented some aspects of this reform, the core changes demanded of teachers proved to be particularly challenging. In Albania, for instance, in many cases, staff were to all intents and purposes introducing modular curricula. However, complications arose because – as one perceptive interviewee told us – they were doing so through old mindsets. This nicely illustrates a major point: when it comes to core processes, it is easier to change the way one speaks about education than to change the way one acts and organises the teaching and learning environment. As Coburn & Stein (2006, p. 25) pointed out, drawing on cognitive learning theory, teachers understand innovation 'through the lens of their prior knowledge, beliefs and experiences; they are thus likely to be drawn towards approaches that are congruent with their prior practices, focus on surface manifestations rather than deeper pedagogical principles, and graft new approaches onto pre-existing practices without altering classroom norms and routines'. This explains why a not uncommon reaction by teachers to new ideas is 'but we are already doing that!' Understandably, the degree of difficulty in implementing change in core processes depends on the availability of a professionally supportive environment (e.g. training and mentoring). This environment is particularly effective when the school functions as a learning organisation, where the deeper meaning of a reform and its implications for practice are made sense of and co-constructed between peers.

3.2.2 SYSTEMIC VERSUS DISCRETE POLICY GOALS

Policy goals that address systemic, deep and large-scale educational improvements pose a set of implementation challenges that are different from discrete programmes that target a restricted range of issues within a limited number of (pilot) schools. In the case of peer learning in Albania, Kosovo and Turkey, the scope of the individual initiatives that were the focus of the activity was clearly bounded, even if these initiatives were linked to (and vehicled by) a broader set of VET reforms. However, while some of the initiatives were still in their piloting phase (as in the case of curricular modularisation in Albania, for instance), others had not been piloted (as in the case of the introduction of career steps for teachers in Turkey) or else had gone to scale rapidly (as with curriculum reform in Kosovo), and this demanded different degrees of engagement by the regional, municipal and school-level officers and staff, with different implementation challenges arising in each case.

An important issue to consider in this context is the set of implementation challenges that arise when a reform is not systemic or system-wide, but rather targets a limited number of elements in a school (e.g. one subject area or one class grade). In such cases, teachers find themselves having to work with different, even contradictory educational philosophies or rationales, pedagogies and assessment methods in the daily routine at school. Different educational paradigms try to co-exist together discretely, but in actual fact end up creating confusion and difficulties for teachers and students alike. Such a situation can also lead to tensions between teachers: a case in point is the fact that in Albania, Kosovo and Turkey, modular curricula have only been introduced for the practical VET components, and this, in some cases, has led to disgruntlement among general subject teachers, who feel they are missing out on professional development opportunities.

In some cases the reform element ends up spreading through an 'inkstain' or 'virus' type effect; this has happened in Albania, where modularised curricula are increasingly adopted as a way of doing things and have spread beyond the school to teacher training programmes. Here, what started off as a discrete policy goal became more systemic in nature. This too has its own implications for implementation, particularly given that each school reads and interprets the innovation in its own way and through the lens of its own understanding of the issues at stake. The fact that actors engage with reforms and aspects of reforms at different times and in different ways also creates particular sets of challenges for the management of the change process.

The balance between opting for a holistic, systemic approach or an incremental, issue-by-issue approach to reform is difficult to establish, with each decision having its tradeoffs and implications for the implementation process. An important factor that needs to be considered in relation to Albania, Kosovo and Turkey is the distance that schools and school-based actors are expected to travel in terms of the differences between previous and new educational philosophies, curricula, pedagogies and leadership styles. The range and depth of educational transformations on the agenda in Central and Eastern European countries is quite remarkable (see for instance Mitter, 2003 and Bassler, 2005). Even more remarkable are the personal and professional challenges that these changes represent for teachers: some have spent half their lives under dictatorships, others have survived unimaginable personal traumas in the recent Balkan conflicts, while others live in a context where more than a third of the population is below the poverty line and has to make do with less than two euros a day. Here too contexts matter to implementation, as do the types of demands made on implementers; tensions are developing as a consequence of the attempt to balance the urgent need for deep, systemic reform (where the danger is that education actors at all levels are overwhelmed with demands), and the need to take a more cautious, incremental approach (with the risk of having

contradictory practices within the same school site).

3.2.3 UNSETTLING VERSUS STATUS-MAINTAINING POLICY GOALS

Policy goals that end up unsettling the stable state of organisations (Handy, 1984) and the established roles and routines of key actors (such as principals and teachers) are generally more likely to meet with resistance than those that do not. Few organisations or people like to be pushed out of their comfort zones – and this is why 'innovation in public policy rarely is the consequence of radical shifts bur rather the result of incremental improvements that are incorporated into existing routines and norms' (McLaughlin, 2006, p. 227). Albania and Kosovo, for instance, found it particularly difficult to strengthen the relationships between VET schools and enterprises, given that this required social partners and school staff to adopt new roles. For the former, the initiative meant – to provide just a few examples – that they had to participate in a school board, mentor VET students during placements in companies, and take part in skills assessment of final year students. For school staff, this has meant power-sharing with entrepreneurs at the school board level and becoming more engaged in work-based learning in enterprises. Issues have arisen related to changing roles and expectations, especially when there had not been sufficient investment in capacity building or not enough incentives to scaffold motivation during the initial period. In Albania, for instance, new VET curricula require practice and theory teachers to plan instructional material together – something that they are not used to doing, given an institutional culture that reinforces an egg-carton approach, with teachers generally isolated from one another in their own classrooms. In Kosovo, VET teachers are now expected to supervise students during their placements, which means that their work is no longer solely school- or classroom-based. The traditional roles of VET principals are also being unsettled, with significant changes in the relationship with authorities, staff and social partners.

3.2.4 CHALLENGING VERSUS UPHOLDING POWER

Policy goals that touch power, in whatever form and for whatever reason, also have an impact on the implementation process. For instance, shifts in the pattern of resource distribution, leading to a change in the groups that benefit from funding or educational resources, tend to be more vigorously contested than other shifts that do not lead to an unsettling of the established balance between power groups in a community. As Nikolovska (2007, p. 102) points out, 'where educational change means gain for one stakeholder, for another stakeholder it may mean loss'.

Tensions result from any policy that attempts to shift the balance of power between any of the actors involved in education, including between the education ministry and the donor community (see Section 4.4 below), between the education ministry and administrators in the state apparatus, and between policymakers and schools (Nikolovska, 2007). Policy innovation can also bring to the fore tensions between schools and parents, between teachers (and their unions) and the education ministry, or between communities that come from different socio-economic backgrounds or geographical regions. In many instances, the policy implementation process is facilitated if there is an alignment between the different interests of the different groups.

Surprisingly, few if any elements of such tensions or conflicts were reported or observed during the peer learning activity, whereby groups of actors use strategies (e.g. define problems, control information, divert resources, deflect goals, dissipate energies, create delays, lobby, litigate, demonstrate, negotiate, obstruct, and so on) to convert their sources of power into policy influence. Teacher trade unions are not particularly strong in Albania, Kosovo or Turkey; thus, while in Turkey the teachers' association was critical of the career steps initiative (the subject of one of the Turkey case studies described in Annex 3), it did not block it.

No reference was made to any parents' associations in Albania, Kosovo or Turkey, and even if they do exist, they do not seem to be a force in the education policy field – at least not in the VET sector. The fact that VET tends to attract students from modest socio-economic backgrounds makes it less likely that their parents – with their particular social and cultural capital – will try to shape national education policies in ways that benefit their children. The lack of contestation between power groups in relation to VET also suggests that the rhetoric about the allocation of more resources to the VET sector (presumably by redistributing available budgets) is not perceived as a threat by those who send their children into the academic streams. This might very well be a tangible sign that political rhetoric has not been translated into reality.

3.3 POLICY IMPLEMENTATION TARGETS

In contrast with past practice, contemporary education policymakers are keenly aware that they cannot target just schools and school-based actors in policy designs. In order to bring about fundamental and lasting change in educational matters, targets must be included which, as Honig (2006, p. 12) puts it, 'sit throughout and beyond formal educational systems'. This is especially true of the VET school sector, which is expected to interact more closely with outside-school partners and stakeholders, particularly from industry.

The peer learning exercise revealed that the key policy targets – that is, people and organisations identified in policy designs as needing to change – were largely restricted to schools, principals and teachers. While several references were made by peers and interviewees to the fact that policy implementation was impeded by a lack of competences among social partners, at other levels in the education system and at state administration levels, none of these were seen to be a target for central policy. In other words, policy designs typically targeted school directors and teachers for change – and mobilised tools (such as

capacity building and incentives) to promote such change – but failed to target ministries (i.e. policymakers), regional or district level officials (i.e. policy intermediaries) and employers (i.e. policy partners) for similar treatment. The implication is that change (and consequently failure to change) is solely the responsibility of school-based actors. The falseness of such a view is powerfully illustrated by a case recounted by one of the interviewees: a key education ministry official, having heard about the dual system from a donor, resolved to introduce the system in the whole country… in no less than three months! Critically weak capacities at this vital level in the implementation chain, however, are not targeted, and this places impossible demands on players downstream.

Other chinks in the implementation chain were observed during the peer learning exercise. Thus, while structures at both central and regional levels have been set up in order to support VET reforms in Albania, Kosovo and Turkey, these are not necessarily considered as targets in the implementation process. In the case of the Kosovo VET Council and the Turkish National VET Committee (and its provincial chapters), roles and responsibilities remain either vague (in Kosovo) or exist largely on paper (in Turkey). In the case of Albania's National VET Agency (established in 2006) and National VET Council, expectations are wildly at odds with the human and material resources available – with the National VET Agency expected, for example, to develop standards, qualifications and framework curricula, undertake teacher training activities, external assessments, licensing and accreditation, and adapt VET legislation. Such weaknesses, which clearly have downstream implications, suggest that policy designs should attend to more than just teachers and school principals.

3.4 POLICY TOOLS

A broad range of tools can be used to promote and sustain reform in schools. Traditionally, these have included incentives and sanctions, often within the top-down, fidelity paradigm referred to earlier. An increasingly sophisticated understanding of how teachers evolve and change within the context of a community of practice (Coburn & Stein, 2006) has led to an acknowledgement of a wide range of tools that help promote change. These include capacity building, changes to systems, best practices and community partnership efforts. All of these are underpinned by a set of assumptions as to how to motivate implementers to change that are different from those of the fidelity model. The peer learning exercise helped explore a number of these different tools and generated some reflections on their respective strengths and usefulness in sustaining change.

3.4.1 INCENTIVES AND SANCTIONS

This set of tools – and incentives rather more than sanctions – was the one that was most often referred to during the peer learning exercise. Incentives can have a material value (e.g. salary bonus or supplement) or a symbolic value (e.g. increased status). The low salaries of Albanian and Kosovar teachers meant that any financial increase that made a difference to their standard of living was particularly desirable. Kosovar teachers, who are in especially dire straits, clashed with the government over low salaries at one point, but gave up on plans to strike in the knowledge that under the prevailing political and economic conditions, the government could not do much better than give a small (12%) interim across-the-board increase to all teachers. For many this was no incentive at all, and relatively decent livelihoods could only be guaranteed by taking up a second job. The interim increase was unrelated to performance, so its value as an incentive to improve teaching was even more limited. In Albania there are plans to introduce merit-based salary incentives. However, here – where much of what matters takes place, as one peer put it, 'outside of the system' – many of the financial incentives came through not from the state but from donors. Participation in donor-led initiatives often provides opportunities to teachers

and principals to not only receive training but also to be paid allowances and supplementary stipends for this training. Incentives can also include travel, the status deriving from association with multinational teams, national conferences and other platforms that give visibility to an initiative and to those involved in it. Teachers, however, tend to end up project-hopping in an effort to maintain levels of income and status and they often lose interest and motivation when donors depart the scene (Sultana, 2006).

Turkey has just introduced a more structured career progression path for teachers, and indeed one of the two reform case studies conducted by the Turkish team focused specifically on career steps. While the difference in salary between the regular teacher and the newly-created grades of expert teacher and master teacher is small, some feel that the status associated with the different grades can function as an incentive to both implement and sustain improved learning environments for students and motivate teachers to take up professional development opportunities.

Others, however, are less optimistic, and one of the Turkish case studies is a good example of how policy design and policy tools can fail to have the planned educational impact. First of all, the new categories of expert teacher and master teacher are not linked to the take-up of new responsibilities, and so a regular teacher and an expert teacher can have the same roles and responsibilities in a school. This can be a source of tensions between colleagues and affect the work environment in negative ways. Secondly, the notion of expert and master teachers promotes the assessment of teachers as individuals, rather than as members of a community of practice, thus contradicting some of the broader reforms that aim to impact on changing institutional cultures. Thirdly, teaching grades are awarded independently of classroom performance. Points are given for length of service (10%), educational level (20% for in-service training or having a master's degree), and certain activities (10% for scientific, cultural, artistic and sports-related activities), and points are

also awarded by the principal (10%), and for performance in a competitive examination (50%). Teachers with an additional master's or doctoral degree do not need to sit for the exam to be promoted to the expert or master grades, respectively. In other words, career progression is based on qualifications rather than performance in the classroom, with no guarantee that the expert and master teacher titles will be bestowed on individuals who are positive models for the profession. As one principal noted, the system may very well end up rewarding teachers who concentrate on getting additional qualifications to the detriment of their daily duties in schools, while failing to recognise those who invest their energies in doing preparatory work on behalf of their students. Fourthly, as regards the competitive exam, different pass mark thresholds have been set for teachers of different subjects, and teachers of technical design, for instance, can theoretically obtain 80%. However, since the quota for master or expert teachers for that subject is small, they are not admitted to the ranks of quality teachers, whereas colleagues with a lower overall mark who happen to teach subjects where the admission quota is higher do get admitted. Finally, VET teachers reported being demotivated by the fact that examination questions are skewed in favour of candidates with a classical academic background rather than a background in technical and vocational subjects. The issue of perceived fairness is critical in sustaining reform (Van der Vegt et al., 2001), and initiatives which are considered to be discriminatory may end up having the opposite effect to that intended, as do incentives which, in the eyes of the practitioners, have been badly conceived. Once again, micro-level realities could have easily modified macro-level policy designs had these been more participatory in nature.

None of the three countries involved in the peer learning exercise seems to give much importance to sanctions as a tool to support the policy implementation process. In Kosovo, however, veteran teachers did feel indirectly sanctioned by the fact that novices and experienced teachers received the same salary – and this appeared to indirectly signal a lack of appreciation of

seniority and service. Both Kosovo and Turkish school principals, however, highlighted their need for more autonomy and power, particularly in hiring and firing staff; the Turkish Ministry of National Education seems willing to support this initiative as long as those who lose their jobs have access to a guaranteed basic income. Some strongly felt that the principal's discretion in sanctioning uncooperative or unmotivated teachers was critical to the reform implementation process, as principals needed to be able to build reliable teams.

3.4.2 CAPACITY BUILDING

Albania, Kosovo and Turkey have invested a great deal of effort in capacity building as a tool to sustain the six reform projects focused on in the peer learning exercise. The capacity building designs of the three countries differ in what are often significant ways and help to highlight a number of important issues that are closely linked to the strategies that can reinforce or frustrate policy implementation. As noted earlier, targeting the capacity building effort at a wide range of actors at all levels of the education system matters when it comes to implementation. Gaps in training for VET school principals, for instance, is having a detrimental effect on reform in Albania. In Kosovo, the situation has been addressed to some extent thanks to the German Agency for Technical Cooperation (GTZ), which offers seven professional development modules, lasting 120 hours in total, to several VET directors. In Turkey, the fact that directors have received training for knowledge sharing between pilot and non-pilot schools may help account for a better record in dissemination of good practice. In both Albania and Kosovo, the weak capacities of staff at the ministry, district and municipal levels are proving to be an obstacle to the reform process, whether because staff are inadequately trained or because there is such high staff turnover that the training effort is dissipated. It is not untypical, for example, for inspectors or municipal education officials who are not up-to-date with curriculum modularisation reforms to transmit messages to principals and teachers that contradict those received during training.

3.4.3 SYSTEM CHANGE TOOLS

System change tools are instruments that set out to bring about change by shifting authority from one party to another. A reform tool can, for example, take the shape of granting more autonomy to school communities, thus triggering processes and dynamics that can have major implications for the implementation of change. We have already noted that in all three contexts there is a tendency for power to be concentrated in spaces other than the school site. If we look more closely at the different dimensions of school autonomy – curricular, financial, and human resource management – we can distinguish shifts in authority in a more nuanced way. In Albania and Kosovo, schools have been granted authority to adapt up to 30% of their curricula in response to the needs and realities of the local context. This contrasts with the situation in Turkey, which has one curriculum for all, with each subject having a textbook that is used throughout the country, and with schools having little or no influence on textbook content or choice of textbooks unless these are self-financed and supplementary to the nationally prescribed textbooks. On the other hand, VET modules have been written by teachers together with the sector representatives and experts, and teachers are relatively free to select appropriate modules from a module bank.

Turkish principals seem to have more autonomy when it comes to determining the vision and mission of their school – something which they do together with their school board within the overall framework of objectives defined by the Ministry of National Eduction. Compared to their counterparts in Albania and Kosovo, they also have a little more autonomy in managing finances and in generating additional income for the school, for example, offering services and products to the community which lead to substantial revolving funds that support school initiatives (although ministry-imposed procedures regulating this possibility are frustratingly bureaucratic). Even this limited degree of autonomy, however, is envied by many

interviewees in Albania and Kosovo, who feel that their hands are tied when it comes to supplementing state funding for their schools; they see that this is an absolute necessity in relation to consumables, especially after donors complete a project and move on.

Principals from all three countries expressed a strong desire for more autonomy in choosing their deputies and their staff. None of them, however, linked this specifically or overtly to the desire for authority and autonomy to engage in school development planning, where schools become the drivers of the policy development and reform process. In all three contexts, the tradition of top-down leadership leads to situations where, as one interviewee noted, the school feels it cannot make a move without the blessing of the state, even in cases where the central authority is trying to shift discretionary power to the school site.

3.4.4 BEST PRACTICES

The power of example, leading to the emulation of good practices, is a powerful tool in driving the implementation process. School-based actors, who tend to become cynical about fashionable educational approaches that surface and disappear on the policy horizon at regular intervals (often depending on which donor happens to be on the scene), need to see practical ways in which policy documents are translated into real practices that have demonstrably good outcomes for the learning process. As one reform-weary policymaker said: 'We often find ourselves trying to fix something without first checking whether it is in fact broken!' Pilot schools serve as incubators for new ideas and new practices, and in all three countries, efforts have been made to ensure that the reform process is supported by real-life examples of best practices that would encourage non-pilot schools to follow suit. In Albania, pilot schools, which have been designated 'national schools', have the responsibility to disseminate good practice – even though their role in cross-fertilisation is, in reality, quite limited. Curriculum modularisation is a case in point: the initiative has not

penetrated schools extensively, and what we find are isolated islands supported by donor projects and with poor chances of sustainability. Kosovo has fared a little better, possibly because of the closer geographical proximity of the schools and the more pervasive influence of donors. Thanks to the SVET project, Turkish schools are well linked, with adequate structures in place to transfer ideas from pilot to non-pilot schools (e.g. by training directors, distributing handbooks and disseminating standards, and through the introduction of curriculum and innovation coordinators). They also have, like Albania, twinning programmes with EU VET schools. In Turkey, however, the scope is broader: as many as 100 VET institutions have made study visits to counterparts in EU states, benefiting over 1,500 principals, teachers and students.

3.4.5 COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIP EFFORTS

Several partnerships were documented during the peer learning exercise. The attempt to build up partnerships with industry was referred to in some detail earlier on. Here, the underlying rationale is that when educators and entrepreneurs work together, the educational and reform goals of the VET institution are more likely to be reached, as the opportunities for work-based learning are improved, the curriculum becomes more responsive to labour market needs, teachers benefit from regular exposure to industrial environments, and so on. Another good example of community partnership efforts involved the use of the media by VET schools in order to implement policy directives aimed at making vocational education more attractive. Some Kosovar and Turkish municipalities working hand-in-hand with local media, have, in fact, managed to address the problem of the negative image of VET, showing how the media can be a valuable policy implementation tool. The district of Kirikkale near Ankara, for instance, reported a 15% increase in VET student enrolment after a very successful media campaign promoting the value of vocational education conducted in 2007.

4. THE PEOPLE DIMENSION OF THE IMPLEMENTATION CHALLENGE

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Policies, as we have seen, depend on a whole range of people if they are to be successfully implemented. The peer learning exercise focused on actors involved at many different layers of the educational apparatus, including officials from ministries of education, governorates and municipalities, and principals and teachers. In addition, there was sensitivity to the fact that education – and particularly VET – cannot be divorced from the surrounding environment. For this reason, representatives of labour ministries, trade unions and employer associations and key industries interacting with VET schools were also interviewed. This extended coverage generated a number of important insights regarding the manner in which different people mediate implementation. We now turn to a consideration of this issue.

4.1 KEY EDUCATION MINISTRY STAFF

In a centralised, top-down policy environment, key staff from ministries of education play a major role in determining

priorities and the direction and pace of change. Representatives from the education ministries in the three countries visited were unanimous about the priority they accorded to VET in the overall reform effort. Albania and Turkey saw the education ministry's role largely in terms of providing a regulatory framework that transmitted clear policy signals and objectives to the different educational communities in the country. Kosovo too was moving in this direction.

The declared policy prioritisation of the VET sector, however, has not always been followed through in concrete ways. In both Albania and Turkey, for instance, there is a mismatch between policy intentions and the budgetary allocation to the VET sector. In Albania and Kosovo a mismatch also arises in relation to the shortage of VET staff in ministries; the Albanian ministry is overloading the new National VET Agency with responsibilities without resourcing it adequately. Also in Albania, the policy discourse around the need to make VET more attractive and to double participation in the VET sector from 20% to 40% by 2009 is

contradicted by this year's decision regarding the *matura* examination: instead of setting different papers for students from the VET and general education streams, the same paper was set for all students in order to reduce costs. As a result, VET students were disadvantaged since they had had fewer lessons than their counterparts in such examinable components as literature. Such disconnection between policy declarations and policy action has a tremendous impact downstream and potentially leads to demotivation and disengagement.

This disconnection can occur for several reasons. For instance, government declarations about priority objectives are sometimes more linked to political considerations and strategic positioning in regard to accessing international funds than to a determined resolve to support policy implementation. As a result, actors on lower rungs of the system ladder may find themselves under pressure to put policies into practice without having the necessary resources.

Ministries too can be more or less responsive to the issues dealt with by schools when it comes to implementing policies. Here the question of vertical communication channels becomes paramount. Despite the scale of the Turkish education system, it was surprising to note the rapidity with which central authorities dealt with requests from individual VET schools when these made a strong case for launching new VET profiles and for obtaining the additional staff and resources that this required. Efficient communication networks, facilitated by internet-based links and clear procedural protocols seemed to give the Turkish principals we met the reassurance that their voice mattered and that the system was there to support them. This was less the case with Albania, where, given the smaller scale of both the territory and system, one would have expected a narrower gap between policymakers and policy implementers.

4.2 KEY LABOUR MINISTRY STAFF

Difficulties in cross-sectoral collaboration are known to plague policy implementation

processes in a whole range of countries, irrespective of the state of their economies. Typically, departments within the ministries of labour and education fail to communicate essential information to each other, leading to serious gaps that hamper integrative decision making (OECD, 2004). This leads to inefficiencies and to duplication of efforts and costs.

All three countries are in the process of developing structures that promote integrated planning between both ministries. Turkey has established a Vocational Qualifications Authority which, while coordinated by its Ministry of Labour, includes education and social partner representatives. Albania has just launched a National VET Council and National VET Agency under the leadership of the Ministry of Education and Science staff but with representation from the Ministry of Labour. The fact that education, training and labour market issues are considered in conjunction should, at least in principle, create closer linkages between IVET and CVET schools and centres. It is still early days and many challenges lie ahead; interviewees at one of the VET centres, for example, indicated that training still operates in a policy vacuum, with little interaction with, or feedback from, employment offices. Similar if not more daunting challenges are in store for Kosovo. Its newly established National VET Council faces a situation where modular curricular are recognised by the Ministry of Education and Science but not by the Ministry of Labour.

The VET sector, located as it is at the intersection between education and work, requires the development of multi-level systems of relationships, including with labour ministries. Evidence of such relationships in Albania, Kosovo and Turkey is weak and any linkages that have been established are fragile.

4.3 SOCIAL PARTNERS

The VET sector also assumes strong and regular interaction with the social partners who are another set of key players in the multi-level system of relationships referred

to above. Educators, for instance, rely on social partners for clear signals about the profile of skills required by industry, the characteristics that they would like to see in future employees, placements in companies where VET students can develop vocational skills in realistic work environments, and so on. The school communities that we encountered during the peer learning visits, while often remaining loyal to their broader educational mission to form citizens in as holistic a manner as possible, were clearly doing their best to respond to the needs of industry. Indeed, two of the six case studies specifically targeted strengthened links between VET and the labour market. Furthermore, the justification for curriculum modularisation, as described in three case studies, was precisely because this served not only to create better horizontal and vertical flows between educational and training pathways, but also because it organised skill delivery in more flexible ways, thus making training more immediately responsive to labour market needs.

The picture that emerges from the three countries, and especially from Albania and Kosovo, is that social partners are quick to criticise the education sector for being insufficiently responsive to needs but fail to support it in genuine efforts to introduce reforms that support economic development. For instance, policy intentions to ensure more effective work experience placements in companies, for both students and teachers, were often thwarted due to a lack of opportunities. Similarly, policy intentions based on having mixed representation on school boards to ensure stronger partnerships generally failed because industrialists soon lost interest and stopped attending – not least because these boards have little power in making key decisions. As one Kosovar interviewee wryly noted, social partners only persevered when there was something in it for them, such as when international donors were putting resources into projects. Despite efforts by Albania to encourage tripartite steering in regional VET centres, employer uptake of the opportunity to shape CVET was poor. All in all, therefore, it would be fair to conclude that social partner input in the VET reform

process in both Albania and Kosovo is weak, with exceptions in particular sectors such as hospitality and agriculture. Implementation easily breaks down when actors envisaged as partners at the policy design stage fail to deliver.

Some of the reasons for the lack of social partnership involvement in VET reforms can be traced back to what was said earlier about the limited capacities of small and micro enterprises, with employers keener to recruit unqualified and low-paid labour than to take on VET graduates. In many ways too, entrepreneurial class experience of a market economy is a relatively recent one. Furthermore, there is no legal framework in place in Albania and Kosovo that provides incentives to employers to accept VET students, such as, for instance, tax breaks. Employers were also depicted as being keener to see what they could gain from their involvement with schools (e.g. cheap labour from apprenticed students, identifying potential workers, etc) rather than what they could offer to the school (e.g. in terms of equipment, knowledge transfer, etc). In Albania, the attempt to link VET schools with businesses worked best in the hotel and tourism sector and in some agricultural schools, where mutual interests were satisfied.

Discussions with representatives of social partner associations generated a further important insight regarding the way policies are perceived. First of all, during interviews, national social partner leaders conceded that they have a share of the responsibility for training future workers. At the grass-roots level, however, Albanian and Kosovo educators often criticised industrialists for assuming that this responsibility lies almost exclusively with the state. There is thus a strong disparity between policy intentions, as formally articulated through employer association official documents and speeches, and the reality of how these intentions are perceived to unfold at the school level. A case in point is the declaration by a representative of an Albanian employer association concerning its support for practical training of VET students in industry; in most cases, such support is missing.

The case of Turkey is somewhat different. Despite the fact that here too there is a propensity to employ unskilled labour, leading to high unemployment rates among VET graduates, there is more of an awareness of the fact that joint effort between government and social partners is needed to ensure that the needs of the labour market are met. Turkey is home to large (often multinational) companies which have more experience of market economies. Employer associations, such as TISK (the Turkish Confederation of Employer Associations), place a great deal of emphasis on skills development. They contribute to the planning, development and evaluation of VET through representatives on vocational education committees, both at the national and – through their provincial chapters – at the district level. They are also active in national education councils and in the professional standards commission, and also in the preparatory phases of five-year development plans, which play an important role in the planning process for VET. In Turkey, there were more instances of perceived matches between official rhetoric and actual practice: interviewees, for instance, reported cases where employers were willing to both offer free training to update the technical skills of VET teachers, and to send their staff for training in VET schools. If anything, the danger in the case of Turkey is that social partners could set up their own training centres without any coordination with the formal education sector, leading to overlap and to the offer of programmes that are too narrowly focused on specific rather than general skills and thus likely to short-change students. The danger is, however, to some extent attenuated by the fact that curricula have to be approved by the Ministry of National Education.

4.4 DONORS AND AID AGENCIES

In all three countries, donors and aid agencies are very much part of the policy-making landscape, and their impact on education policy design, policy development, the choice from among policy options, and on the way implementation unfolds ranges from

significant in Turkey, to fundamental in Albania and indispensable in Kosovo. Development agencies and entities in the three contexts include the World Bank, Swisscontact, KulturKontakt Austria, GTZ and PARSH (Adult Education in Albania project). The European Commission is also present in Albania and in Kosovo through its ALBAVET and KOSVET programmes, which provide technical assistance contracted under CARDS (Community Assistance for Reconstruction, Development and Stabilisation) to implement the EU programmes. The Commission is also present through Phare (Community Aid Programme for Central and Eastern Europe) and the ETF, and, in Turkey, through SVET and MVET.

In some cases, and in all three countries but especially so in Albania, key VET reforms – including curriculum modularisation – have been initiated and driven by donors, often on a bilateral (donor-to-school) project-by-project basis rather than in an integrated, systemic manner. In the VET schools visited, the peer learning team saw several examples of how donor input had made a major and positive difference to the level of competences of principals and staff, the quality of learning environments, the development of interesting and relevant curricula, textbooks and experiential pedagogies, the resourcing of workshops with equipment, and in motivating, supporting and energising the school to transform its institutional culture and become a dynamic learning community. Ministry officials and school communities generally expressed profound gratitude towards donors, acknowledging that their interventions often made a remarkable difference in the lives of staff and students alike. Interestingly, donors were often a powerful channel for teachers and principals to voice their concerns, serving as more effective intermediaries with central authority than the administrative layers at the regional and municipal levels.

Some interviewees, however, spoke of donor 'crowding', depending on the extent to which countries fell into – or out of – favour with the international donor community. In some cases, an overarching entity, such as the Ministry of Education,

Science and Technology in Kosovo, or an umbrella project such as SVET in Turkey, brought all donors together around the same table to ensure coordination of initiatives under the guidance of a central, national policy lead. In other cases, however, donors have had free rein to pilot their own preferred projects. In Albania, this has led to a situation where pilot after pilot hits the same schools, with many schools missing out and nothing going to scale. It also led to a situation where different models (of modular curricula, for instance), underpinned by diverse rationales and philosophies, were being implemented in the same school, causing confusion and disorientation among teachers and students alike. Albanian policy leaders, in fact, noted that although the country welcomed the boom of donors and projects they brought with them (as they potentially added value to the educational system), there was a dire need to prioritise and streamline initiatives and to place them under the aegis of a coordinating body. In the Albanian case, this was the World Bank omnibus project on Equity and Excellence; a coordinating group was set up, cross-representation was ensured between different committees, and a joint position paper was drafted to ensure better synchronisation of efforts.

Such issues linked to donors have an impact on the way implementation unfolds. Indeed, donors can be as much part of the problem as they can be part of the solution. Implementation becomes very difficult when donor-introduced projects are transplanted from another country and expected to thrive in a very different economic, political and cultural environment. The problems associated with policy borrowing and policy transfers have received much attention internationally, and have increasingly become a focus of research in policy implementation studies (see Phillips & Ochs, 2003 and 2004; Steiner-Khamsi, 2004; Nielsen & Nikolovska, 2007). Some of the difficulties that Albania and Kosovo came up against in implementing curriculum modularisation (a Scottish Vocational Educational Council/Phare and GTZ export) or the dual system (largely pushed by GTZ) were traced by some

interviewees to incompatibility with local characteristics, whether of the labour market (e.g. predominantly small and micro enterprises, largely state-led economic development, an immature private sector still finding its feet after decades of totalitarianism), of employers (e.g. preference for low-skilled and low-paid labour rather than for VET graduates), of teachers (e.g. level of prior training, time for after-school work on curriculum and resource development), or of students (e.g. those from rural areas, with modest aspirations, whose main interest is to acquire some basic skills and open a shop back home).

It is clear that not all donors are sufficiently sensitive to the fact that institutional cultures shape initiatives as these are introduced. Occasionally their insensitivity is rather glaring, as when donors push packaged reform programmes for issues and topics not considered to be priorities or even relevant to a country. At other times, donors fail to give due importance to the way initiatives are read or made sense of in contexts that differ, in deeply significant ways, from the ones they are accustomed to. For instance, in Kosovo many VET schools have to operate in shifts, and in Albania teachers are generally overworked and underpaid and have to cope with unreasonable student-to-staff ratios in small, overcrowded and under-resourced classrooms and workshops.

For their part, donors often expressed frustration with the way their efforts were jeopardised by weak capacities at the ministry level (as in Albania and Kosovo), leaving them without a legitimate counterpart to work with; by the way political manoeuvring led to constant changes in key personnel, which played havoc with capacity building efforts (as in Albania, and to some extent in Kosovo and Turkey); or by the propensity to pass laws and resolutions regarding VET whose implementation is never enforced or monitored (as in Albania, where four people are expected to monitor over a hundred projects). Some donors referred to situations where, despite major donor investment in capacity building (e.g. in creating a cadre of master teachers who could train others in turn), staff at the ministry, deputy ministry or regional

governorate level opted, 'in true Balkan style', to use their own untrained staff, in order to determine who could get access to the additional funding and thus score political points.

All this can be a source of policy-related tensions (Nikolovska, 2007) between the donor/aid agency community and the local policy-making élites, especially when perceptions are in deep contradiction with one another. It was striking how, in Albania, donors portrayed themselves as being well coordinated, while regional education directors felt that the project field was 'crowded', which was both confusing and unhelpful at times. All this also raises issues about the role of the state in steering reforms and the optimal relationship that it needs to have with the international donor community.

4.5 REGIONAL AND MUNICIPAL LEADERS

Education officials at both the regional and municipal levels can play an important role in facilitating or frustrating policy implementation. The way these intermediary levels interact with reforms differs significantly in Albania, Kosovo and Turkey. In Kosovo, for instance, the roles of the regional and municipal offices seemed to be unclear, with interviewees either unaware of key aspects of VET reforms or not having a grasp of the way the reforms were unfolding in the schools under their jurisdiction. Some interviewees reported rumours that the regional education directorates would be closed down, since they added unnecessary layers between the ministry and school levels. This, however, was immediately denied by education officials, who revealed, however, that plans were afoot to transform their roles into regional inspectorates, somewhat along the lines of the Albanian inspectorates, where regional education directorates are expected to function as de-concentrated institutions responsible for monitoring the implementation of policies in schools and for defining teacher training needs. Lack of synchronisation between regional and municipal officials – sometimes marked by

downright animosity – complicates communications between schools and the ministry.

In the case of both Kosovo and Albania, regional and municipal authorities were often considered to be an obstacle to, rather than a support of, the reform effort. They were often perceived to be deeply implicated in local partisan power struggles, with educational leaders at all levels appointed on the basis of political allegiance – this to the extent that many interviewees felt that it would be best for the reform process if decision-making powers were returned to the central authority, which was less subject to the direct influence of shifting local alliances.

In Turkey, the intermediary levels were equally distant from the school contexts, and the impression given was that any linkages that existed were shaped by the exigencies of public service bureaucratic management traditions: by and large, it was up to individual schools to manage the dynamics of change, as long as the game was played according to the rules. The role of provincial governments in VET is limited mainly to profile and school planning and principal and teacher appointments in the regular VET schools (although, in contrast, principals are appointed directly by central government in Anatolian high schools). Schools are consulted when new reforms are being planned.

4.6 SCHOOL PRINCIPALS

The way principals respond to policy demands, the way they help shape and adapt new policies in relation to their schools and the community environment, and the way they promote systemic policy development in the light of their experience in schools are all deemed to be critical in the consideration of policy implementation (see Fullan, 2001). In Kosovo, for instance, interviewees noted that although initially reforms started with teachers, they came up against a brick wall when principals were not able to follow; consequently, with the help of GTZ, a comprehensive training package had also to be offered to principals.

The recognition of the key role of principals in the implementation process depends, however, on particular ways of looking at school leadership. In Albania and Kosovo, VET school principals generally appeared to be largely competent and committed individuals, although restrained by a severe lack of autonomy. In other words, the structures they worked in reinforced bureaucratic management rather than leadership. An exception was a private VET school in Kosovo where, in contrast to most of the public VET schools visited, the principal had a high degree of autonomy that enabled him both to work with his staff in developing a vision for his institution and to generate extra resources to support the implementation of that vision.

Turkish VET principals complained that they lacked power in several key areas related to their roles, including hiring and firing staff. In fact, however, they appeared to have more opportunities to exercise educational leadership than their counterparts in Albania and Kosovo. VET school principals were responsible for helping their schools articulate a vision and mission and work towards implementing educational goals identified in response to the specific needs of their student population and the surrounding community. They also seemed to have a greater awareness of the need to work closely with their staff in ways that promoted professional development and to trust them with key components of the school mission. In some cases, it was also clear that they had worked hard to mould an institutional culture that made quality an objective for all teachers to aspire to. Some of the principals we met also drew sustenance from an informal, SVET-supported network of VET directors that seems to function effectively not only in terms of knowledge and information sharing, but also in terms of circulating good practices in relation to key reforms. Whether this network survives after the SVET project is concluded is another question.

Generally speaking, similar dynamics featured some of the principals of VET pilot schools in Albania and Kosovo, indicating that project-related training opportunities had helped transform traditional headship from a bureaucratic/managerial focus on

system maintenance by strict adherence to rules and regulations. Some aspects of the reforms focused on, however, had an unexpected outcome in this regard. Albanian principals noted, for instance, that the drive to link VET schools to the labour market involved them more in activities that were clerical and managerial in nature, and that the time spent on specifically educational issues had decreased. As in other instances, implementation can bring to the surface what are referred to as *effets pervers* (i.e. unintended consequences), information on which needs to be quickly fed back into the system so that appropriate action is taken. Few things can be more detrimental to reform implementation than getting the role of the principal wrong.

4.7 TEACHERS

Teachers are sometimes referred to as street-level bureaucrats or front-line implementers – turns of phrase that attempt to capture the reality that what teachers and other local implementers ultimately do turns out to be what policy becomes. Our understanding of the work of teachers has become highly nuanced, with teachers viewed not as isolated individuals but as being firmly nested within a complex organisation that shapes perceptions, norms and behaviours. Membership in a school community helps develop specific shared ways of making sense of the policies that have to be put into practice, the views held of these policies and the changes that are required (Coburn & Stein, 2006). While some opinions heard during the peer learning visits presented teachers as naturally prone to maintaining the status quo in pursuit of their own interests, other accounts and focus group interviews with VET teachers helped to highlight the extent to which some teachers supported reforms, particularly when they were given the opportunity to participate in the formulation of reforms or at least give feedback on them. In many respects, one can be confident that much talked-about reforms are having at least some impact at the school level when teachers claim – as in one school in Peja (Kosovo) – that, compared to the past, they now make more use of project-based and student-centred

pedagogies (even if this gave rise to disciplinary problems at times), that they have a better mix between theory and practice, that they feel closer to students, that they use portfolios and other forms of formative assessment strategies, that they plan their teaching more closely with colleagues in subject-based teacher councils, and that rapport with parents has been strengthened.

Opportunities for teacher input in the reform planning process seem to be rare, however. Teachers in Albania, Kosovo and Turkey are largely seen to be consumers of policy, i.e. they are policy takers rather than policymakers. Teacher training, particularly in Albania and Kosovo, is limited and inadequate, often donor-led, and offered ad hoc in relation to specific projects. In Albania the same schools tend to be involved in multiple donor projects – becoming what the literature refers to as 'Christmas-tree schools' (Bryk et al., 1998). This naturally leads to a situation where there are highly trained teachers in 'star' schools, and demotivated and inept teachers in 'sink' schools. In Albania it has also led to a situation where different subjects are taught through diverse models of modular curricula, adding to the confusion and intensifying implementation problems – hardly the best recipe for ensuring continued teacher support for change. In the Western Balkans and in other regions where there are multiple policy players on the scene this is not an uncommon occurrence (Nikolovska, 2007).

The mobilisation of teacher support for reforms also depends on levels of motivation. We referred earlier (Section 3.1.2) to the fact that the general attitude of teachers towards change is dependent on several factors, including having a good standard of living. In Albania and Kosovo teacher incomes are below the average national salary and are so low, in fact, as to oblige school staff to take on after-school employment in a range of occupations, including menial ones. As some Kosovo interviewees noted, this lowers further the status of teachers in the community. More importantly in terms of our analysis, the need to engage in extra work leads teachers to be parsimonious in

their expenditure of energy at school, as they keep what might be referred to as spare capacity for their second job. It is not unusual in Kosovo, for instance, to hear of teachers trudging off to schools for their daytime jobs after spending all night working as security officers. This clearly has important implications for the energy and enthusiasm that can be dedicated to the challenging task of changing routines and practices and to working with new policies by moving out of established comfort zones. A shift from traditional to modular curricula, for instance, requires teachers to engage in much more preparatory work than in the past, plan for and manage student participation in the learning process, conceptualise learning in terms of sequences (each of which has to be assessed in formative ways to ensure mastery), and so on. Tired and anxious teachers will not have the energy to make such profound shifts in practice.

The siphoning off of energy to out-of-school sites also means that teacher identities are not strongly anchored in their profession; moreover, they tend not to think of themselves as members of an extended community that can influence policy. Teacher unions or associations in the three countries are fragmented, especially in Albania and Kosovo, and seem, furthermore, to focus almost exclusively on bread-and-butter issues. They have little say in shaping the educational agenda, and their voices are not taken much into account at all, leaving the policy field open to other forces. Lack of consultation with teachers in the reform process is generally detrimental to implementation: ignoring teachers leads to ignorance about the contexts and conditions in which implementation has to unfold. As a result, even when teachers are positive about change, they end up feeling unsupported when and where it matters most. Teachers interviewed in Kosovo, for instance, noted that while they were all for reform, they were being expected to implement modular curricula without being given the relevant textbooks. They were also expected to take on new curriculum development responsibilities which they had not been previously equipped and resourced to handle and for which they had insufficient time or inadequate rewards. Some

teachers were teaching as many as six to nine different curricular programmes in one year. When teacher voices are not heard at the various stages of the policy-making process, anomalies such as these are the order of the day and can spell the death knell of any innovation.

Turkish teachers earn reasonable salaries – higher, in fact, than the average national wage. They also enjoy more public status; the state honours them with a national teachers' day and, as civil servants, they are obliged to be smartly dressed (male teachers in suit and tie) and to project a serious and businesslike demeanour. They seem to be better networked, with annual meetings of subject-specific teacher councils attended by all teachers teaching the same curricular area. Despite such improvements over the situation for Albanian and Kosovar teachers, however, Turkish teachers play a similarly limited role in policy formulation.

Implementation research has increasingly tried to discriminate between different sub-groups within the same category of personnel. This is particularly important for VET schools, where implementation may be affected by differences between vocational and general subject teachers, for instance, in terms of social class, motivation, interests, values, relationship to the school, political orientation, who they formally and informally associate with at school, and so on (Sultana, 1992). In relation to the case studies in the peer learning activity, it is important to highlight the role played by a new cadre of teachers appointed in both Albanian and Turkish VET schools, with specific responsibility for strengthening links between schools and enterprises. This innovation was too recent for the peers to be able to gauge its effectiveness and impact in implementing the policy to improve links between schools and industry. However, this focused role, shared, to some extent, by career guidance officers – another role that is being developed in Turkey (see Akkok & Watts, 2003; Sultana & Watts, 2007) and to a lesser extent in Albania and Kosovo (Sweet, 2007) – can be an effective instrument in supporting implementation, even if in this case much depends on the personal networking skills of the

coordinator rather than on formal mechanisms to facilitate contacts (e.g. model contracts between schools and enterprises).

4.8 PEOPLE GAPS IN THE IMPLEMENTATION PROCESS

People gaps in implementation at all levels of the education system need to be commented here. Overlooking or ignoring a group of people or a level of operatives in the reform process can lead to serious implementation problems. Many studies, for instance, have highlighted the part that can be played by inspectors or education officers, often with a dual role of benchmarking practices and of supporting school communities to reach standards and implement the new practices required by reforms. None of the countries seemed to give much importance to this cadre, at least not with reference to VET schools and to the specific reforms focused on. The inspectors we met when we visited regional and municipal education offices, while generally well informed, did not seem to be playing any major part in the reform process. This is true of Turkey as well, despite the fact that here the inspectorate seems to be better established, with schools being visited on a more regular if ad hoc basis. All in all, it would be fair to conclude that the role of the inspectorate is weak in all three contexts, with inspectors playing a very minor role in the evaluation of implementation.

Similarly missing in the three countries were clearly defined roles for deputy principals and parents, to mention just two other potential players in the policy implementation process. While peers did meet with deputy principals in the VET schools visited, these seemed to remain largely in the shadow of the principal, reproducing at the school level the same sort of relationship with their immediate superior that exists between principals and their superiors. Parents, when referred to in the context of school boards, are considered in an instrumental fashion as a potential source for extra resources for the school rather than as true partners in improving learning environments.

5. THE PLACE DIMENSION OF THE IMPLEMENTATION CHALLENGE

5

Research tells us that place matters to implementation in several ways. As McLaughlin (2006, p. 212) notes in reference to the different layers and levels of systems that shape the character and consequence of public policies: 'Each level through which a policy must pass makes policy in a fundamental way as it translates and filters intent and regulatory language and so serves as an implementation site in its own right.' We already indirectly considered some of these levels (central authority, regional and municipal) in the previous section when discussing people. Here we will focus on distinctions in places at the local level, where differences in politics, cultures and histories can help explain why particular geographic locations and jurisdictions respond differently to policy directives.

The same is true for different institutional and organisational entities, such as pilot schools, shift schools, urban schools and so on, which also differ in their take-up of mandated policies, for instance. These

differences lead one to ask about the particular characteristics of places that explain their strong (or weak) performance in relation to policy objectives. They also remind us that while schools are expected to meet the same or similar standards, each school in fact writes its own story. In the case of the three countries focused on in this peer learning activity – and especially so with Albania and Kosovo – this variation between schools is even more pronounced given that there are no attempts to establish common standards across institutions; to quote one interviewee: 'A Grade 5 in Prishtina is not a Grade 5 elsewhere.'

5.1 PILOT AND NON-PILOT SCHOOLS

Much of the innovation in the VET sector in all three countries is taking place in pilot schools. Indeed, one of the goals of the peer learning exercise was to consider the role played by such schools in the overall

VET reform effort and to examine linkages between pilot and non-pilot schools in dissemination and going-to-scale processes. From the perspective of the peers, since pilot schools represented both the object and the subject of reform they were the key focus for the exercise.

Some of the key issues relating to pilot schools as the place where policy implementation unfolds have already been referred to. As we have seen, pilot schools converge donor resources and expertise in ways that often lead to significant capacity building for principals and teachers, the development of well-equipped educational environments, and fresh, dynamic and purposeful ways of pursuing learning. Institutional cultures can be transformed, providing real-life, home-bred models of alternative educational practice that other schools can emulate. All three countries have pilot schools to showcase. In Albania, some of these VET schools have been given a special 'national' status, and their role as exemplars of good practice in the overall reform effort has been formalised through a set of regulations that also set out the criteria that characterise these institutions. Compared to other VET schools, national-status schools enjoy more flexibility and autonomy in managing their curricula and their budget, and the principal is directly involved in selecting teaching staff. Other pilot schools in Albania, Kosovo and Turkey are either individual institutions that have bilateral relations with one or more donors or are part of a broader project implementing change in a number of schools – as is the case with SVET schools in Turkey.

The criteria used for choosing pilot schools matter to implementation, and particularly in the mainstreaming phase. A common factor that influences choice is the extent to which the school is likely to be successful in attaining results and in therefore acting as a beacon for other schools in the region. This was one of the criteria used to select schools for national status in Albania. Donor agendas also determined the choice of pilot schools: at one point, a key goal for donors was providing support for the economic development of the northern provinces of Albania, so the Ministry of

Education and Science agreed to pilot curriculum modularisation in Shkoder. Pragmatic criteria can also come into play. In Kosovo, for instance, school location was a key deciding factor, with pilot schools chosen in areas with other VET institutions in the vicinity in order to ensure that donated equipment could be shared. In Turkey, equitable geographical coverage was an important consideration when it came to choosing which institutions would become part of the SVET network. A special characteristic of this network was that schools had to bid to become pilot institutions by means of the submission of a project proposal drawn up by principals and teachers in response to a call by SVET. In the call for bids issued in 2003, as many as 950 proposals came through, all of which were rated against pre-established criteria. Such a competitive approach might be more promising in terms of ensuring sufficient motivation for sustaining change forces than approaches where the school has little if any say in becoming a pilot institution.

The difference between pilot and non-pilot schools was, in some cases, quite pronounced. This raises key issues regarding the implementation process, in terms of a level playing field for 'star' and 'sink' schools. Staff in the latter institutions tend to become deeply demotivated, with emulation giving way to invidiousness and despondency, particularly if they see (as in Albania) how donor attention and investment goes to the same small group of schools or how donors visibly and emphatically highlight the differences between pilot and non-pilot schools (sometimes – understandably – in their own interest). In other contexts – and especially in Kosovo, given its smaller number of educational institutions – most VET schools have been touched by donor projects, and so differences between them, while real, are not as stark. Not all schools are keen to act as pilot schools; some Turkish principals, for instance, were more cautious, preferring to engage with reform at a later stage once they had observed how outcomes unfolded in other schools.

The impact of piloting can be considered in vertical terms (i.e. in terms of the

durability of change over time) and in horizontal terms (i.e. in terms of the transfer of practices from pilot to non-pilot schools). In the best of cases, donors focus on capacity building in ways that ensure that a school can eventually maintain the change process without external support. Peers, however, came across a number of pilot schools that were slowly reversing back to previous practices and mindsets once donors had left the field. This was not always due to a lack of will or ability, but could, in fact, often be attributed to an administrative environment that suffocated initiative; thus, school expectations and aspirations had changed, but similar change had not taken place in the larger organisational environment in which they were nested. In Kosovo, for instance, limited autonomy left pilot schools unable to buy consumables using school-generated funds, given frustratingly complex procurement procedures.

With its SVET project serving as an umbrella for several initiatives targeting 105 pilot schools, Turkey seems to have been more successful in developing an integrated approach to reform by transforming institutional cultures in ways that embed the logic of reform at the heart of the school, irrespective of the presence of donors. It also seems to have developed an effective dissemination strategy, planned for from the outset, as there seems to have been a deeper realisation that the transfer of good practice does not just happen (see Samoff et al., 2003) but needs to be fostered. Pilot schools in Turkey have even gone so far as to appoint a contact teacher to establish links with other schools, with the 25 best schools having a special responsibility for disseminating good practices. Similarly, in Kosovo, some non-pilot schools send students for practical sessions in pilot schools, since – thanks to donors – the latter have better equipped workshops. Organised and regular interaction between schools facilitates the spreading inkstain effect referred to earlier and avoids having islands (or 'silos') of innovation that are cut off from the rest of the VET school network.

5.2 PRIVATE SCHOOLS

Some implementation literature highlights the role the non-state sector can play in pushing through reforms, or at least in making change appear more attainable to state schools. Private schools can act as pilot institutions in the sense that they generally enjoy greater freedom than state schools and, as a consequence, may be in a better position to implement change. Here, the same issues as for pilot schools arise: if the private institution enjoys a wide range of privileges that ultimately make it very different from regular schools, then the latter will feel that the distance between them is too great to bridge, and once again, invidiousness or indifference may take over. In the case of one of the private VET schools visited in Kosovo, it was clear that the institution benefited from many advantages compared to state schools, even though part of its mission was to cater for students from modest socio-economic backgrounds. For example, the school could choose its principal, and the latter had a say in which teachers to recruit and what salaries to offer. As part of a religious-based international network of VET schools, it had privileged access to resources that complemented others that it obtained from donors. The principal was not tied down – like Gulliver – by hundreds of bureaucratic strings, but enjoyed a great deal of autonomy in collaboratively setting goals with staff and in developing the strategies to achieve these goals.

A critically important issue needs to be highlighted here: although this particular private institution had an impact on implementation of VET school reform, it did so in a negative way. Its ability to offer significantly higher salaries to staff – as much as three times the normal wage – meant that it could attract highly proficient teachers who had been trained in the context of donor-assisted programmes in state pilot schools. While such poaching is above board – and possibly less harmful to the education sector as a whole than industries poaching teachers trained on modern equipment provided by donors – the issue of a level playing field once again comes up. Thus, the role of private schools in assisting the state in implementing change cannot be simply taken for granted.

5.3 URBAN AND RURAL SCHOOLS

Peers also learnt that school location matters when it comes to implementing reforms. Many schools involved in the reform process are to be found in urban rather than rural areas. In addition, many of the VET reforms are based on skilling for industries that are much more likely to be found in urban areas. As a result, initiatives that set out to create closer links between VET schools and enterprises, for instance, stand more of a chance of being implemented in urban areas; consequently, issues such as student placement in firms represent particular challenges for schools in rural and remote communities. Policymakers in all three countries noted, for instance, that certain VET reforms were more easily implemented in capital and major cities; thus, Tirana, as the location of Albania's main economic belt, provided more opportunities for cooperation

between schools and industry than peripheral and remote areas which were too economically weak to implement some of the VET reforms on the Albanian agenda. Regional VET training centres also functioned well in the larger Albanian cities, but did not prove to be practicable in smaller towns. In Kosovo, VET schools seemed to have a better chance of pushing through reforms in economically dynamic Prishtina (which absorbs a third of Kosovo's population) and in another major entrepreneurial centre, Peja. The exodus from rural regions towards urban centres creates other sorts of implementation challenges for cities and their suburbs, where schools and workshops have to cope with unexpected and unplanned for increases in student numbers. Rural schools, on the other hand, face the threat of closure, have limited resources, experience nepotism and petty politics, and have increasing difficulty in attracting and keeping teachers.

6. THE PACE DIMENSION OF THE IMPLEMENTATION CHALLENGE

6

When interviewed during the peer learning exercise and asked what, in his opinion, was the biggest obstacle to implementation, an education minister said, without a moment's hesitation, 'Time!' The issue of pace, together with that of time, is indeed central to our understanding of how implementation unfolds. Thus, while this dimension can be viewed as a subset of our earlier discussion on policies and the policy landscape, it deserves to be dealt with as a distinct – though of course interrelated – dimension.

6.1 PRESSURE TO CHANGE… FAST

All three countries are under pressure from different quarters to put effective and successful human resources development (HRD) policies into place. Failure to do so will prejudice the possibility of competing in the global economy, satisfying the needs and aspirations of their citizens, and integrating in the EU and in its market. The sheer number of reforms that

are being introduced in all aspects of social, political and economic life is staggering, with schools also feeling the brunt and burden of expectations that keep increasing in number and complexity. In addition, the pace of global change, the urgent need to keep abreast of change and the ambitions and aspirations of the political élites in terms of remaining at the helm of the development process all lead to impatience with the pace and tempo of change. Thus, quick fixes and speedy results are expected in the education sector, where, moreover, it is notoriously difficult to change routines and behaviours and to transform institutional cultures. As one deputy minister noted, with some chagrin: 'Education is not like buying a car: you have the cash, you choose your car and you drive away. School change does not work like this!' Time, therefore, becomes a critical resource in educational change, with the speed with which reforms are introduced having enormous implications for the implementation process.

6.2 LONG-TERM VERSUS SHORT-TERM POLICY PERSPECTIVES

Given that so much that is happening in VET is donor-driven and project-based, change is expected to fall into step with project cycles and budgetary demands. Donor project cycles are increasingly short (typically two years) and donor organisations, moreover, are under pressure to prove to contributors that their funds have been well spent and have had a positive impact. Government-led reforms also tend to become captive to the rhythms of four-year political cycles linked to elections. They are thus under pressure to announce ambitious programmes in their first year in office and to show results to the electorate by the end of their mandate. The temptation is to go for quick-fix solutions rather than to invest in more effective, long-term and systemic change. As one interviewee noted, the rush to get things done leads to situations where 'new activities are put into place, but with old mindsets', since not enough time has been given for individuals, groups and institutions to integrate change within the core of their being or to develop new relationships between and among each other. As one Albanian interviewee noted: 'Our problem is that we still have a Soviet mindset, where all depends on central command: you cannot change structures without changing the relations between actors!' The issue that arises here is that the relatively short time-span of donor-assisted projects may lead to a preference for policies and changes that can be implemented in the short term rather than for those that allow for a longer implementation horizon. Situations of passive resistance on the part of teachers may also develop, as they continue doing what they have always done while searching for the least demanding and least painful way to appear as though their behaviours had changed.

7. IMPLICATIONS FOR PRACTICE AND CONCLUDING COMMENTS

7

This synthesis, which has attempted to crystallise key learning from a peer learning activity in Albania, Kosovo and Turkey, only confirms the extent to which Haddad (1995, p. 36) was correct in observing that 'misjudging the ease of implementation is probably the most frequent error in policy planning'. Case studies, field visits, interviews and intense discussions and reflection helped the peers become more insightful about the nature of implementation in terms of problems, processes, actors and outcomes. They also helped uncover the relationships between policies, people and places that matter to implementation, not to mention the policy consequences of time as a critical resource in educational change.

In this report we have argued that the implementation of change is marked by complexity and contingency and have also emphasised that there are dangers in adopting decontextualised implementation models. As a consequence, any advice that we can give on improving policy making and implementation cannot be simple or straightforward and can only be

situationally contingent. The implications for practice of the great store of rich learning reported in this document are negotiable according to site, context and time, and depend very much on the policies that are being implemented, the people involved in the process, the places where these people are located and the pace at which they have to work. While it would be wrong to generalise from the experiences and case studies reported here in order to come up with a general theory to account for implementation gaps (Trowler & Knight, 2002), we can nevertheless make a number of observations that are grounded in the situations and contexts described, and which readers may find helpful in considering the challenges that arise in their own situations and contexts. These observations are not, therefore, recipes or formulas for successful policy implementation; they are, rather, signposts that aim to help chart a course with a route and a destination that are necessarily unique, tentative and context-dependent. Box 2 summarises the most important of these observations. Although the above

report was organised around four dimensions of implementation learning (policies, people, places and pace), in order to facilitate analysis, the key insights are presented in Box 2 in a more integrated manner so as to emphasise the relationships that exist between the various elements outlined.

As the comparative analysis and the synthesis of learning presented above suggests, change is highly complex. This should come as no surprise, as schools are multifaceted institutions with their own rules, rhythms, values and beliefs, all of which, in turn, are themselves nested in equally complex, multi-level systems of relationships with central offices, external change agents, policy-making bodies and other entities. A heightened awareness of such complexity should not lead to paralysis. Detailed portraiture may at first overwhelm, leading to doubts as to whether such accounts can guide practice in informed, responsible and productive ways. Nonetheless, attention to the way that contexts shape implementation makes sure that we do not simply ask 'what is implementable and works', but 'what is implementable and what works for whom, where, when and why?' (Honig, 2006, p. 2).

We are pleased to share the outcomes of our peer-shared reflection and learning with the wider educational community, and if this report has, in its own modest way, attended to some of the questions raised above, then it will have served its purpose.

Box 2: Synthesis of key insights in regard to policy implementation challenges in Albania, Kosovo and Turkey

■ The views we hold on policy making are important to the way we think of the implementation challenge. It matters whether we think that policies are neutrally and rationally chosen from a range of policy options or whether we are persuaded instead that they are adopted through political processes that reflect the relative power of contending groups rather than the relative merits of the different options.

■ Context is not just background but an important and dynamic set of forces that shapes the reform process. Contexts are ephemeral, and shift and change over time. This means that there are no once-and-for-all solutions to education challenges, since even successful policy responses create new contexts which, in turn, generate new challenges. This also means that change is a process, not a product, and, as such, variation in implementation is the rule.

■ Successful acceptance and implementation of policies often depends on whether these policies are seen to be relevant to context and congruent with the overall direction of the reform process. Contradictory demands by different reform initiatives can lead to confusion and incoherence, with teachers finding themselves tugged in different directions by initiatives that are in tension with one another in relation to educational philosophies and pedagogical principles.

■ Externally-driven, macro-level policy agendas need to connect with the micro-level realities of actors, since school-based actors will attempt to reconcile demands made by policymakers with their personal and professional world views. This balance between push and pull factors can very well prove central to the implementation process. So too can pace and timing.

■ Donor-driven change, while potentially supportive, can generate processes and dynamics that are inimical to the overall reform process. Some of the issues here are the perceived relevance of donor projects, compatibility with policy frameworks, coordination of efforts with other players in the field, and sensitivity to context.

■ Policy borrowing and policy lending can be regarded as potentially supportive of educational reform only if certain conditions are fulfilled. Policy imports may fail to take root in environments where organisational cultures, people's capacities and resources differ greatly from where the innovation originated.

- Policies differ in both technical and administrative complexity. The more complex a policy, the more likely that there will be variations in the policy response, depending on such factors as readiness, capacities and resources – and the quality of support provided to implementers can make all the difference. Much complexity is related to attempts to change the core aspects of the teaching and learning process.
- Centralisation and decentralisation, as well as top-down and bottom-up reform processes, are probably better considered as a range of potential strategic resources to draw on – depending on the policy to be implemented and the context – rather than as mutually exclusive and oppositional approaches. Vertical and horizontal communication structures in the system have an important impact on policy implementation and sustainability, irrespective of the model that may seem appropriate at a particular moment in time in relation to a specific policy or set of policies.
- The more school-level actors are involved in all aspects of the change process, including policy making, the more likely it is that the policy design will be context-sensitive, and that teachers and principals understand and willingly implement change. Involving school-level actors in all stages of the policy cycle therefore has both motivational and practical implications. Many problems can be avoided because teachers and principals have expert knowledge of the contexts they inhabit.
- Negotiation, flexibility and mutual adjustment and adaptation on the part of all those involved in the policy cycle seems to support the implementation process. This challenges widely held views that policy design is an élite, thoughtful, active high-level task and that implementation is a lower level activity carried out by passive, pragmatic actors.
- Increasing the level and range of school autonomy acknowledges school-level actors as key partners in the reform process. Rather than being considered passive implementers or apathetic obstructionists, principals and teachers can commit to improving the learning environment for those in their charge. That commitment, accompanied by appropriate capacities, can lead to real change where it most matters.
- Actors actively construct their understanding of policies in communities of practice, and actively interpret policies which they read on the basis of their prior knowledge, beliefs and experience. They have the ability and the power to convert new initiatives into conventional practices unless they are persuaded that change is necessary. Policies and understanding of the meaning of policies are co-constructed by individuals and groups throughout the policy chain.
- Implementation is a multi-layered phenomenon in which each level or layer acts on the policy as it interprets its intention. The meanings that the various actors at the different layers assign to policy can differ in fundamental ways from the original intention articulated in formal policy design. Many school-level actors do not refuse, resist or retard reform policies; they simply do not understand policy intent or strategies or they understand them in ways that were not anticipated. Other actors and partners in educational reform may be unwilling or unable to take on the role assigned to them in the policy design. Implementation is likely to break down when actors envisaged as partners fail to deliver.
- Schools are typically nested in an intricate web of relations that include diverse layers of authority and of partners. Connections among these different and successively contextualised layers and partners have an impact on implementation processes and outcomes.
- What counts as successful policy implementation may differ from one set of actors to another. Politicians may be satisfied that a particular policy proves popular with parents and that all schools are faithfully implementing the blueprint policy designed. Teachers reflecting on their new practice may feel that, despite its popularity, the policy has actually diminished learning opportunities for particular groups of students.

- Organisational cultures, and not just individuals, matter. It is the school site as a whole, rather than isolated individuals, that need to be seen as the unit responsible for implementation. School culture consists of an ensemble of values, routines, patterns of behaviour, unwritten rules and expectations and other forms of being that result from social interaction in a specific context. Reforms are filtered through this web of significance and assume meaning in the process.

- Educational leaders at all levels have a critical role to play in the reform process. They can play this role more effectively if they have the required knowledge and skills to exercise such leadership. At decision-making levels, it helps to have leaders who are aware of how the change process unfolds and who are alert about the opportunities and obstacles that may arise. It also helps if such leaders are willing to consult with schools and teachers. At levels closer to the learner, inspectors, principals and deputy principals are crucial when it comes to shaping the institutional culture of schools. They can quietly but effectively create conditions in support of incremental improvements to existing routines and practices. Small changes brought about this way can have unexpected and even disproportionate effects.

- Motivation matters, especially when new policies unsettle roles and require actors and organisations to move out of comfort zones. Even when the factors that affect the behaviour of implementers lie outside the domain of direct management control, implementation is more likely to happen when there is an alignment between the needs and goals of different stakeholders. The smartest of policy designs can be torpedoed by a negative response to the question 'what's in it for me?'

- Schools piloting innovation can show how, under certain circumstances, new and more effective learning environments can be created. They can help close the gap between present educational realities and future aspirations. However, care must be taken to ensure that piloting does not become an end in itself, that pilot schools generate emulation and not invidiousness, and that structured opportunities are created to share and sustain good practices across the whole education system. A key concern is to integrate plans for mainstreaming from early on in the piloting stage.

- The number, range and tempo of reforms can have an impact on the attitude to change of school-level actors. If reforms are perceived to be overwhelming they are less likely to take root in real practices at the school level. Change interventions therefore have to be emotionally literate.

ANNEXES

ANNEX 1: BACKGROUND INFORMATION ON ALBANIA, KOSOVO AND TURKEY

ALBANIA

Profile

> Capital: Tirana
>
> Population: 3.2 million
>
> GDP per capita PPP (2004): 5,070 int'l dollars
>
> Labour force participation rate (2003): men 85.3%, women 65.7%
>
> Compulsory education: 8 years
>
> Enrolment in upper secondary (ISCED 3): 132,976
>
> Enrolment in technical/vocational programmes: 20,032
>
> Vocational training as a % of upper secondary enrolment: 15%

Socio-economic background

Albania's demographic profile is characterised by three main phenomena: significant internal and external migration, decreasing mortality rates and declining fertility rates. The 2001 census put Albania's population at 3,063 million. Based on projections from this census, the population was estimated to be 3.1 million in 2004 and is expected to increase to about 3.7 million by 2025. The population's age structure changed significantly in the past decade. The population below 15 years of age is now decreasing and the population over 65 years is growing faster than the rest of the adult population (World Bank, 2006a). Based purely on demographics, Albania remains one of the youngest countries in Europe with only 8.3% of population over the age of 65 (compared to over 17% for some EU countries) (World Bank, 2006b).

THE CHALLENGE OF POLICY IMPLEMENTATION: A COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF
VOCATIONAL SCHOOL REFORMS IN ALBANIA, KOSOVO AND TURKEY

Albanian growth since transition has been impressive. Cumulative growth since 1990 is among the highest of all the transition economies, and this is the reason why Albania's real income has recovered to pre-transition levels even though the country remains one of the poorest in Europe, with an estimated gross national income (GNI) per capita of about USD 2,510 in 2005. Except for the 1997 output shock following the collapse of a pyramid scheme, real gross domestic product (GDP) growth averaged more than 7% per year between 1994 and 2001 and about 5% per year since 2002 (INSTAT & World Bank, 2006).

High GDP growth rates have been accompanied by a massive reduction in poverty. The fraction of the population whose real per capita monthly consumption is below ALL 4,891 (2002 prices) fell from 25.4% in 2002 to 18.5% in 2005. This means that roughly 235,000 out of about 800,000 people below the poverty line in 2002 were lifted out of poverty. The extremely poor population – defined as those with difficulty meeting basic nutritional needs – decreased from about 5% to 3.5% in the same period (INSTAT & World Bank, 2006). Urban poverty has declined faster than rural poverty, with the urban poverty headcount falling from 19.5% to 11.2%, and the rural poverty headcount falling from 29.6% to 24.2% over the period. There is also evidence of regional convergence in the distribution of poverty. The benefit of remittances is reflected in a sharp decline in poverty in the mountain regions that are the origin of many internal migrants and in the numbers of unemployed poor.

Migration has been the predominant socio-economic fact over the past 15 years in Albania. Migratory flows have been both international and internal and both permanent and temporary. It is estimated that about 860,485 Albanians live abroad – meaning that stock of emigrants is about 27.5% of the population (Ratha & Xu, 2008). No other Central or Eastern European country has been affected so heavily by migration in such a short period of time (ETF, 2007).

Like most formerly planned economies, Albania has found the transition from guaranteed full employment to a market-based employment model a difficult one. Job creation in the private sector has been weak (World Bank, 2006c). The official unemployment rate, which was 13.8% in 2006, has decreased since 1999 by around 5 points. The downward trend has been confirmed by data for the first quarter of 2007, which recorded a further drop in the unemployment rate to 13.6% (European Commission, 2007a). Long term unemployment is high, totalling about 65% of total unemployment. The unemployment rate is higher in the north eastern part of the country, at around 25%, compared to 13% in the central and southern areas. The age group most affected by unemployment in the transition period was the group of young people aged less than 34 years old, representing about 60% of registered jobseekers. In 2006, young people aged 15-25 years old represented 24% of all registered jobseekers (Agenda Institute, 2007).

Most employment is self-employment (63%), mainly in the informal sector. A lack of demand for labour has led people to start their own income-generating activities – typically poorly paid jobs, with little added value and requiring few skills. Formal sector labour demand is limited and largely restricted to the public sector and selected private economic sectors, e.g. banking and, to a small degree, tourism and construction (Hetoja, 2006).

This situation poses major problems for the government in general and for economic policy in particular. The extent of unrecorded and undeclared activity is a key impediment to generating tax revenues from channels other than international trade. It is, furthermore, difficult to formulate and implement sectoral economic policies when estimates are subject to wide margins of error as a result of unrecorded activities. Informal employment and undeclared incomes also enhance the difficulty of targeting social policy interventions to those most in need.

Key policy issues and strategies in human resources development

The Albanian government adopted a National Strategy on Pre-university Education 2004-15 focusing on five main pillars: improved governance, improved quality of teaching and learning, improved financing of pre-university education, capacity building and HRD, and development of VET in the context of overall pre-university education. The target set for secondary VET is to increase participation from 17% to 40% of overall enrolment, and the proportion of GDP allocated for education is set to rise from 3.7% to 5%.

VET legislation was adopted in 2002, and a National VET Council with tripartite representation was established with the aim of improving polices and reform management in the VET sector. This legislation also prepared the ground for the creation of a National VET Agency in December 2006 to perform intersectoral functions not covered by other VET institutions and departments. In addition, a separate VET Strategy 2007-15 was drafted by the Ministry of Education and Science in 2007 that took into consideration the inputs from the National VET Agency (2007). This document was to be adopted by the Council of Ministers at the end of 2007. The major focus of the strategy is on improving the quality of VET and on implementing legislation for an NQF.

Overall reform of pre-university education is predicated upon a reorganised and more effective ministry focusing on its core activity of policy development and implementation and operating within the context of a decentralised education system and increased school autonomy. In July 2007 a new organisational structure was adopted in the Ministry of Education and Science, aimed at developing more strategic orientation for policy development and implementation and at building capacity and the motivation to carry actions through. In July 2007, furthermore, the Institute for Curriculum and the Institute for Teacher Training were merged into a single agency called the Institute for Teacher Training and Curricula.

An Employment and Vocational Training Strategy was adopted by the Albanian government in January 2003[1] covering the period 2003-08 and including priority actions on employment promotion and vocational training system development. This strategy was drafted by a Ministry of Labour, Social Affairs and Equal Opportunities working group including experts from the Ministry of Economy, Trade and Energy, the Bank of Albania and Tirana University Faculty of Economics. The main objective of the document was to assess the current situation and define concrete measures to be undertaken in order to improve labour market policies. It focuses on four main dimensions: the labour market and services provision, VET and HRD, entrepreneurship and job creation, and employment funding policies.

The EU Progress Report 2007 for Albania indicates that the country made some progress in the area of education, with, for example, the budget for education significantly increased in 2006. The implementation of the scheme on final and entrance exams for Albanian universities (*matura*) continues, Parliament has passed a new law on higher education which includes follow-up to the Bologna process, and a master plan for higher education covering the period until 2016 has been launched. Albania continues to work on an NQF in line with the European Qualifications Framework (EQF). The National VET Agency is responsible for VET standards, qualifications, accreditation, assessment, curricula and teacher training. An initiative for the development of post-secondary and higher VET has been launched by setting up a vocational academy at the University of Durres that takes into account the needs of the national economy by providing technical training (European Commission, 2007b). Under mid-term priorities in the European partnership document, it is clearly stated that the Albanian government should step up efforts to improve the education system (including primary education) and to create a modern VET system (European Council, 2006).

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1 Government Decree No 67, 10 January 2003.

All reform streams undertaken to date will continue to have a substantial impact, both horizontally and vertically, on current education and training reforms, as well as on reforms in the employment and labour market. Consequently, all these pose substantial challenges for policy decision making. Although progress has been achieved, further effort is required in order to implement the ambitious initiatives on the reform agenda. In this respect, the capacity of the relevant institutions needs be strengthened in order to maximise government policy outcomes. In particular, there is a need to improve policy communication between stakeholders in order to support evidence-based policy making among stakeholders in Albania and capitalise on the policy initiatives that have been taken on board. This applies to both the education and training and the employment sectors.

In the education and training sector, significant reform initiatives that require substantial efforts from national stakeholders include further development of a quality assurance system, the development of a national curriculum framework based on learning outcomes which will ensure adequate bases for output-based NQFs, and further development of a teaching and learning system which is based on innovative practices.

KOSOVO (UNDER UNSCR 1244)

Profile

Capital: Prishtina
Population: 2.47 million
GDP per capita (2006): €1,100
Unemployment rate (2006): 40%

Socio-economic background

Kosovo (as defined under UNSCR 1244), which has been under the transitional administration of the United Nations since 1999, is entering a decisive phase in its history as its final status is being decided. The basis for the deployment of the United Nations Interim Administration Mission in Kosovo (UNMIK) has been United Nations Security Council Resolution (UNSCR) 1244, which left Kosovo's future status unresolved. In 2001, a constitutional framework was agreed establishing Provisional Institutions of Self-Government (PISG), which include the President, the Assembly, and the Government of Kosovo. In November 2005, negotiations for a final settlement led by Martti Ahtisaari started in Vienna. No agreement has yet been reached by the United Nations Security Council. Kosovo declared its independence on 17 February 2008.

Demographic trends

Although birth rates are declining, the Kosovo population continues to grow faster than in neighbouring countries. The total population of Kosovo is estimated at 2.5 million and the number of habitual residents is estimated to be between 1.9 and 2.2 million inhabitants. According to the Kosovo Statistics Office, ethnic Albanians account for 88%, ethnic Serbs 7%, and other ethnic groups 5% (Bosniaks, Turks, and Roma, Ashkaelia and Egyptians). Kosovo is considered to be a middle-income country, with a Human Development Index of 0.734. The population of Kosovo lives more in rural than in urban areas in a proportion 63:37, and women represent 50% of the population (World Bank, 2001; UNDP, 2004 & 2006). The population is generally young with the 0-14 age group representing 33% of population, the 15-64 age group representing 61% of population, and with people aged 65 and older representing 5% of population[2].

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2 Statistical Office of Kosovo. Available at http://www.ks-gov.net/ESK/esk/english/english.htm

Fragile economy and persisting poverty

Even before the conflict of 1999, Kosovo suffered from isolation and lack of investment, while the conflict itself resulted in damaged infrastructures, a drop in agricultural and industrial production, and a frozen financial sector unable even to make basic payments such as wages. Since 1999, large-scale financial and technical assistance from the EU (€2.4 billion in total) and other donors has achieved substantial progress in economic reconstruction and institution building, much of this being channelled through the European Agency for Reconstruction which is currently managing aid projects worth over €1 billion from the EU CARDS programme. In 2007, the European Commission launched its successor, the IPA programme.

After an initial post-conflict acceleration in 2000, economic growth has weakened in line with declining donor resources. Kosovo's economy continues to be partly dependent on external assistance, with donor funding and remittances contributing 23% and 15%, respectively, to GDP. According to the latest International Monetary Fund estimates, real output grew by 3.8% in 2006 (0.6% in 2005). The major positive contribution to growth came from private sector non-housing investment, which accelerated at a brisk pace in the same period. In 2007, private consumption should benefit from privatisation receipts slowly finding their way back into the economy (European Commission, 2007a).

The industrial sector of the economy remains weak and the electric power supply continues to be unreliable. About 45% of the population in Kosovo is poor, with another 18% vulnerable to poverty. Future growth prospects rely on attracting foreign investment to the dilapidated industrial sectors as well as building up human capital.

The unemployment rate fell slightly from 42% in 2005 to around 40% in 2006. In the first quarter of 2007, the number of registered job seekers increased to an average of 330,000 persons, up 8,000 in comparison to the same period in 2006. However, the number of registered job seekers has been growing steadily throughout 2006 as well. The educational structure is weak and has continuously become weaker since 2000, with the most qualified persons leaving the country to work abroad. While the resulting worker remittances are an important source of income, there is a lack of qualified people at home, which adds to the difficulty of creating a dynamic entrepreneurial environment (European Commission, 2007a).

According to the National Development Plan, Kosovo's main economic sectors are mining, energy, agriculture, transport, telecommunications and the environment.

Key policy issues and strategies in human resources development

In its National Development Plan – based on the four 'E's of namely, economy, education, energy and Europe – the government has identified HRD through education as a key area to develop Kosovo's growth prospects.

The challenge for Kosovo is to further raise the importance of human capital enhancement in the overall policy agenda for socio-economic development and to ensure a well-functioning and well-steered education system that caters for the needs of both young people and adults. Broad consensus on the direction of education policies, government commitment to their implementation and the availability of sufficient resources through the mobilisation and better use of public, donor and private funds are necessary. Education reforms must address deficiencies in education and training across the whole system with measures such as:

(i) improving the quality of basic education in order to enhance access and ensure better learning outcomes for all children, but in particular for children from disadvantaged socio-economic backgrounds;

(ii) modernising the VET system by ensuring a better balance between general and vocational education at secondary level, introducing curricula that develop the competences required by the current socio-economic system and leaving educational options open;

(iii) diversifying higher education with the introduction or enhancement of post-secondary vocational education and professionally oriented university programmes and ensuring better links between universities and enterprises;

(iv) ensuring an enabling environment for the development of adult learning that provides opportunities and incentives for adults to enhance their skills and hence their adaptability and employability.

The period after 1999 saw the beginning of the first reforms to improve the situation at every education level. The Ministry of Education, Science and Technology, established in 2002, has developed a number of strategies on pre-university education and higher education.

The Pre-University Education Development Strategy for 2007-17 lays out principles and also seven strategic objectives, as follows: (i) quality and efficient governance, leadership and management of the education system; (ii) a functional quality assurance system for learning based on standards comparable to those of developed countries; (iii) inclusion, equity and respect for diversity in education; (iv) pre- and in-service teacher training and development; (v) an adequate and healthy physical environment for learning and teaching; (vi) sustainable links between education and global social and economic developments; and (vii) mobilisation of resources for education. These seven objectives are accompanied with actions, priorities set for 2002 to 2012, the designation of responsible authorities/agencies, implementation periods and budgets.

The Higher Education Development Strategy for 2005-15 sets out vision, principles and missions, and also six strategic objectives, as follows: (i) to elaborate and implement a contemporary and inclusive policy and finalise the higher education legislation; (ii) to advance management and coordination in higher education; (iii) to develop a quality assurance and accreditation system; (iv) to advance the capacity for research and scientific work; (v) to establish efficient mechanisms for the mobilisation and management of financial resources; and (vi) to develop a functional higher education infrastructure. Each objective has associated measures and indicators.

In sharp contrast to the lifelong learning objectives of the EU, the situation in the Kosovo education sector remains critical. The budget for education needs to be significantly increased in order to cope with large numbers of young people, the parallel education systems and the poor quality of teaching across Kosovo (European Commission, 2007c). Although the costs of the strategies have been measured, the funds allocated are only a seventh of what is required to meet implementation needs. Schools still have two or more teaching shifts, which hinders any attempt to develop a quality education system. Municipalities have neither adequate budgets nor qualified staff to deal with the educational responsibilities devolved to their level. Coordination between central, regional and municipal levels is inefficient. The education and training system continues to operate on a narrow basis and there is a serious shortage of mechanisms and institutions for accreditation, for setting achievement standards, and for overall quality assurance in the education sector. There are initial attempts to set up functional coordination between donors in the education sector, with requests to the World Bank and the European Commission to support this initiative.

TURKEY

Profile

Capital: Ankara
Population (2005): about 72 million
Employment rate (2003): men 67.8%, women 24.3%
GNI per capita PPP (2004): 7,680 int'l $
Compulsory education: 8 years
Enrolment in upper secondary: 46.5% (boys 50.2%, girls 42.4%)
Vocational training as a % of upper secondary enrolment: 31.4%

The key challenge for Turkey as regards HRD is represented by the demographic features of its population. Based on Turkish State Institute of Statistics projections, it is predicted that, by 2020, 40 million people will be in the 15-44 age group and 10 million in the 45-64 age group, leaving almost 70% of the population in the 15-64 working age band. This increase in the working age population represents a unique economic and social opportunity for Turkey, provided that there is substantial HRD through adequate investment in education and training. Continuation of the recent acceleration in economic growth will increase competition for skilled and highly skilled workers.

Increasing educational attainment (in particular at the primary and secondary levels) and enhancing the quality of education are the overriding education priorities. Serious investment now will pay off in the future. Consolidating, expanding and evaluating the reform initiatives already underway in the field of education, training and employment should be the main priorities for national authorities with a view to aligning Turkey's education and employment situation with EU benchmarks and trends. In particular, priorities for future investment could build on the following objectives: (i) to strengthen institutional capacities for designing and implementing policy actions and measures in HRD through effective participation of social partners and civil society organisations; (ii) to ensure economic growth through higher workforce competitiveness; (iii) to improve social cohesion for vulnerable groups and less developed regions; and (iv) to continue education and training reforms within a lifelong learning framework while improving access and quality and meeting the changing requirements of the labour market.

Socio-economic background

The macroeconomic policy and political stability achieved since the financial crisis of 2001 has contributed to a GDP increase of 7.4% in 2006 and estimated growth of 5.5% in 2007. However, economic growth is not equally spread throughout the country. It is generally acknowledged that a fall in inflation (from 70% in 2002 to 7.5% in 2007) and price stability, combined with increased productivity, private consumption, imports and private fixed capital investment, have substantially contributed to this growth.

The Turkish population is 72 million of which around 20 million are in the age cohort 0-14 years. Given the current trends in participation in employment and education, Turkey will miss out on a major opportunity unless there is substantial progress in HRD modernisation and reform.

The overall educational attainment levels of the working population are low compared to the EU25 or EU candidate countries (e.g. nearly 60% of the labour force is composed of basic education graduates or people who dropped out from basic education, the average number of years in education is 6.8 for males and 5.3 for females, etc). Problems related to access to education by gender, rural/urban and social background (such as enrolment,

dropout and graduation rates) still exist. Around 12.5% of the population – 4.7% of men
and 20.1% of women – is illiterate.

The employment rate is also low when compared to EU benchmarks, in particular for
women. Unregistered employment was 53% of the total in 2004, as a result of a growing
informal economy in Turkey. Small and medium-sized enterprises represent 60% to 77%
of total employment. Around 95% of these businesses are very small (with fewer than
10 employees) and contribute only around a quarter of added value to the economy. This
is a consequence of low productivity resulting from inadequate technology and human
capital investment. The employment rate for women decreased from 31% in the mid-1990s
to 23.8% in 2006, largely due to migration from rural to urban areas leading to a fall in the
share of female unpaid workers in agriculture.

The at-risk-of-poverty rate among the working population is 22.7%, substantially higher
than the EU average of 7%. Thus, whilst employment is the most important factor in
preventing poverty and social exclusion in EU member states, this is not the case in
Turkey because of low wages and poor working conditions.

Key policy issues and strategies in human resources development

Turkey has identified a number of priorities for its HRD operational programme.

Employment

■ To attract and retain more people in employment, particularly by increasing the
employment rate for women and decreasing unemployment among young people.
■ To increase employment of young people through the establishment of closer links
between the worlds of education and work.
■ To promote registered employment.
■ To promote a socially inclusive labour market that offers opportunities to all
disadvantaged groups in society.
■ To address regional disparities in the labour market, in education and training, and in
social exclusion, within a perspective of implementing ESF-type projects that comply
with European Employment Strategy priorities.

Education and training

■ To enhance investment in human capital by increasing the quality of education and
training and by improving the linkage between education and the labour market through
a partnership approach.
■ To promote gender equality in education and training through higher enrolment at the
primary, secondary, higher and continuing training levels (especially among girls) with a
view to developing female human resources and access to the labour market.
■ To increase the adaptability of workers and entrepreneurs, in particular by promoting
lifelong learning as a way to improve the skills of the workforce within a coherent and
comprehensive lifelong learning strategy.
■ To continue to invest in improving the quality of human resources by facilitating small
business employee access to training (in particular for low-skilled workers) and by
increasing the training capacities of social partners, NGOs, VET institutions and public
bodies.

Institution building

■ To strengthen the coordination capacities of the Ministry of Labour and Social Security
in formulating priorities for IPA financial support to HRD.

- To enhance the dialogue and capacity for policy analysis and formulation of both the Ministry of National Education and the Council of Higher Education so as to ensure that effective and efficient reforms of education and training within a lifelong learning perspective are implemented with the support of international donors.
- To improve the quality and efficiency of the Turkish Employment Organisation, especially by strengthening administrative capacity, in particular at the regional level.
- To improve the efficiency and effectiveness of existing social dialogue platforms in the definition of national priorities for HRD and, in particular, for the operations of the Vocational Qualifications Authority.
- To build up technical and administrative capacities for European Social Fund (ESF) implementation at both the central and regional levels.

ANNEX 2: QUESTIONS TO GUIDE PEER VISITS AND PEER LEARNING DISCUSSIONS

The following questions helped us to structure our observations and inputs and to remain focused during peer visits and peer learning discussions. They draw on the ideas and frameworks developed in the concept paper, as well as on shared experiences regarding educational innovation and reform. For the purposes of the peer learning discussions at the end of each day, we also identified four key questions to help reflect and focus on what was observed in the schools.

Background

- What is the reform focusing on?
- How is the reform linked to other aspects of change in the surrounding environment?
- How is the reform linked to the broader political process? (e.g. Has a ministerial speech been translated into a new policy? Does the reform interphase with political cycles?)
- How and how often does the minister communicate with schools in relation to the reform and how often with regard to routine issues?
- What changes is the reform aiming to achieve?
- At what level are these changes to become visible?
- What events or situations have triggered the reform?
- Who is perceived to be responsible for the reform? Who are the key policy entrepreneurs, and what are the key policy networks behind the reform?
- Is the reform informed and backed up by research?
- What is the nature and extent of the involvement of principals and staff in designing and planning reform?
- What budgets/resources have been specifically earmarked to implement reform?

Impact at school level

- Who is the reform having an impact on?
- How is the identity of the school being challenged by the reform?
- How have the definitions of a 'good' school changed due to the reform?
- How is the relationship of the school with its environment being reshaped?
- Which new partners and stakeholders are making their presence felt at the school and how?
- How are the organisational features of the school being changed?
- Which new organisational units have had to be established (e.g. school board, etc)?
- How has the reform affected the balance of time spent at school/in industry?
- What impact is the reform having on the institutional culture of the school?
- Is there a marked shift towards professional rather than bureaucratic leadership?
- How has the reform modified relationships between different staff categories? Has it created new tiers of staff?

- How has reform redefined the role of the principal, the teacher and the inspector?
- How much room for manoeuvre does the principal have in terms of liaising with minister(s), board(s) and parents?
- What new powers have been gained by the school (e.g. choice of textbooks, etc)?
- Has the reform shifted dynamics between staff, in terms of status, power and influence?
- Have there been changes in levels of teacher collegiality due to the reform?
- What impact is the reform having on teaching methods, curricula and assessment?
- Is there evidence that there is more (or less) use of approaches such as experiential learning, group work, project-based work, formative and continuous assessment, work-based learning, problem-solving approaches, etc?
- Are new sets of values and competences being promoted and rewarded in the school (e.g. team work, creativity, entrepreneurship, flexibility, autonomous self-directed study skills, etc)?
- Has the reform had an impact on relationships between teachers and learners?
- Has the reform impacted on learner behaviour (e.g. increase/decrease in disciplinary problems, in absenteeism, or in fulfilment of homework, etc)?
- What are the implications of the reform on the organisation of the time of the principal, the teachers and the students?
- Are new demands being made on the teacher in terms of investment of effort in after-school hours, developing curricula, preparing lessons, changing pedagogical approaches, assessing students, etc?
- Has the reform created new incentive systems? Which? How effective are they?
- What new professional development opportunities has the reform brought?
- What kind of resources (e.g. curricula, teaching aids, etc) has the reform generated?
- What unintended consequences are the reforms having in the school? How can these be explained?

Reactions to the reform

- What kinds of general reactions has the reform generated?
- What is perceived to be at stake if the reform succeeds or if it fails?
- Are there patterns in the differences in reactions to the reform (e.g. based on age, rank, gender, whether teachers teach vocational or general subjects, etc)?
- How do the principal and staff talk about the reform? Do they have the same understanding of the reform? Do they use the same language when referring to reform?
- Do staff members feel that the reforms have created fairness issues (e.g. in regard to promotion, to access to professional development, etc)?
- Is the general perception that the reform has added burdens to staff, and that the support to carry these burdens has not significantly increased?
- Are there aspects of the reform that are more acceptable than others? Which? Why?
- What elements of the reform account for its acceptance by the school?
- What elements of the reform account for resistance?
- Are there aspects of the reform which are incongruent with the rest of the educational processes and practices in the school? What effects are these contradictions having?
- Are there any factors external to the school that account for the reactions to the reform (e.g. pressures from the municipal VET board, interests of social partners, etc)?
- Has the school in which the reform is being piloted gained in status and visibility due to its involvement in the new policies? What impact is this having on staff in the pilot school, and on staff in the non-pilot school?
- Has this visibility attracted political attention, and if so, what has been the effect of this (e.g. more autonomy, more intrusion, more resources, etc)?
- How has the community (e.g. parents, social partners, etc) reacted to the reform?
- What opportunities and obstacles are there in taking the innovation to scale?

Key questions to guide reflection after peer learning visits

1. To what extent have the reforms changed the pilot and non-pilot schools?
2. To what extent have the schools changed the intended reforms?
3. What are the different perceptions of the reform, on the part of the policymaker on the one hand, and on the part of the principals and staff on the other hand?
4. How do the different levels of autonomy at the school site impact on the policy implementation process?

ANNEX 3: SUMMARY OF CASE STUDIES

The following are summaries of the detailed self-studies provided by the teams. They are meant to provide some basic background information as well as describe the key elements in the initiatives focused on. This is meant to help the reader better situate the reference to case studies made in the report, where the focus is on using the material presented by the teams to illustrate specific issues regarding the dynamics of policy implementation. The full text of the six case studies – two each for Albania, Kosovo and Turkey – can be obtained from the ETF on request.

ALBANIA CASE STUDIES

Establishing links between VET schools and the labour market

Background, rationale and goals

- Links between VET schools and enterprises are weak and sporadic rather than structured.
- There is a passive attitude by employers in relation to VET skills development and the employer's potential role in investing in the sector.
- There is a need to improve the practical component in initial VET by improving workshops in schools and by increasing work-based learning in enterprises.
- There is a need for VET schools to generate supplementary funding through providing products and services.
- Links with industry are high on the agenda of both government and the international donor community.

Key elements of the initiative

- With the establishment of school boards which include representatives from the business sector, some opportunities have been created for students to engage in workplace learning in enterprises. This varies from school to school, due to the fact that there is not a proper legislative framework supportive enough for school principals, whose role is changing from a pedagogy-oriented to more business-oriented role.
- Although there are some initiatives where employers are involved in the assessment of the practical VET student skills, mostly through VET final examinations, most assessment is based on international donor initiatives, and for now there is no clear VET policy on this issue.
- There has been some provision of opportunities for teachers to receive refresher courses in their specialisation in companies.
- Even when enterprises and schools exchange information on a regular basis to improve the match between demand and supply of skills, in general, these are merely sporadic good examples, and a comprehensive career guidance system is missing in Albania.
- Some provision in legislation exists, so that VET schools can offer products and services to the community according to their vocational profile, in order to generate

supplementary funding that can be used to improve the learning environment. In many cases companies see this as competition to their own business. To develop different approaches to this concept of offering products and services to the community, private enterprises are supported so that training centres for students are established within enterprises which lead to the development of the concept of the training firm with the help of international donors.

■ All initiatives are formalised through the articulation of regulations and contracts, in order to ensure correct procedures and to facilitate mainstreaming after the initial piloting phase.

Modularisation of VET curricula

Background, rationale and goals

■ While VET was an important component of the educational system in Albania in the past, the curriculum proved to be inadequate given the demands arising from changes in the labour market, particularly since it was subject- rather than competence-based.

■ The notion of curricular modularisation was introduced as part of the Phare programme rather than generated internally by Albanian policymakers.

■ During the VET reform some of the coherence around the initiative was lost due to other interventions in the VET field in Albania, which introduced variations on the theme of modularisation.

■ The impression is that government commitment to modularisation remains high because it facilitates vertical and horizontal mobility between different training levels and routes and leads to increased flexibility in VET's response to skill needs in local labour markets.

■ Modularisation has generated several opportunities for training in modern teaching and assessment methods, but it has also generated possibilities for new ways of teacher preparation for teaching and learning to take place in the classroom.

Key elements of the initiative

■ Modularisation led to a revision of some of the VET curricula, with hundreds of syllabi reviewed and developed. While initially the focus was on curricular content (e.g. the introduction of new subjects, or increasing the time allocated to the practical component), modularisation targeted a new approach to content, teaching methods and student assessment.

■ The initiative initially targeted agricultural schools, but is now being considered for and expanded to other sectors. Modularisation, however, still has the status of a pilot project, despite a history now stretching back over a decade. Nevertheless, the notion of modularisation is a well-known concept in the Albanian educational field, and features in all recent VET reform strategic documents.

■ Modularisation introduced new concepts and practices in the VET field in Albania and, possibly more than any other reform, has had important implications for the role of the teacher and the teaching/learning process. The new educational elements introduced by the initiative include modules, units, learning outcomes, instruments of assessment, performance criteria, criterion-referenced assessment, etc. Such practices have helped teachers and instructors to be more proactive and autonomous in developing instructional plans in response to local educational and labour market realities. It has also required teachers to work together in teams, challenging established routines and pushing people out of comfort zones.

■ Educational practice has also been influenced through the introduction of protocols which have had an impact on curricular structure, content and methodology in several different areas. Among these one could mention module descriptors, modular programmes, internal and external verification, accreditation of qualifications, etc.

KOSOVO CASE STUDIES

Improving relations between education and the labour market

Background, rationale and goals

■ Kosovo's VET schools suffer from particular difficulties, which are mainly the result of the conflicts that have marked the past decade. Most VET schools have limited capacity to cater for VET instruction, with teaching largely classroom-based and with few if any training facilities available. In many cases too, there is a lack of laboratories, workshops, equipment, machinery and tools.

■ Pre-1989 linkages with enterprises have broken down due to swift and sudden changes in the labour market. In many cases, VET students do not have access to work placements to practice skills learnt in schools. VET schools tend not to be responsive to the changing labour market, with curricula being carried over from year to year without any VET planning to see which competences are most in demand. As a result, the links between education and the labour market are tenuous at best, with the major of VET programmes irrelevant to the imperative of economic development. In sum, VET graduates do not have the skills profiles required by the economy.

■ The role of the international donor community has been important. Several donor activities have focused on curriculum development and on providing opportunities for teacher training, particularly in relation to practical skills improvement of students as an important component of the curriculum.

Key elements of the initiative

■ With the help of the international donor community, teachers are being trained in the competences needed to deliver the practical components of the VET curriculum. In addition, the necessary training has been provided so that the practical part of the curriculum can be organised in enterprises.

■ Subject-related working groups have been set up within and between related ministries and with the help of social partners in order to make sure that curricula are developed in relation to the needs of the economy.

■ Mutually beneficial exchanges between teachers and highly skilled workers in enterprises have been organised. Instructors and master trainers from industry have been invited to teach practical skills to students in VET schools, while in some cases, VET teachers have provided training programmes to companies.

■ School boards now include representatives from the business community, in order to ensure a better flow of information between the education and labour market sectors. In addition, VET schools have appointed a teacher with special responsibilities to coordinate links with enterprises, while the practical part of the final examination that VET students have to sit is conducted in enterprises.

■ The basis for the development of a reliable labour market information system has been established so as to ensure a timely and effective response by VET schools to the skills profiles required by the Kosovo economy. This has been done in close cooperation with chambers of commerce, employment offices, and schools and training centres.

■ Enterprises are generally open to the idea of having closer links with VET schools. However, there is a need to develop the overall regulatory context that would facilitate such linkages, such as insurance for students and the provision of incentives for employers who have to reorganise the work environment to make it more appropriate to receive young trainees. This is especially challenging for micro-enterprises.

Modularisation of VET curricula and the role of teachers

Background, rationale and goals

■ The VET curricula, most of which were developed in the early 1990s, can be characterised as overloaded (subject coverage predominates over mastery), insufficiently flexible to address changing labour market needs, and articulated mainly as syllabi without the input of social partners. Most curricula comprise simple lists of topics with the number of teaching hours to be dedicated to each topic, and with no articulation of targeted learning outcomes.

■ VET programmes are insufficiently supported by the resources normally associated with VET, such as equipment and consumables. As a result, VET has a poor image with both the public and employers, with few exceptions (such as the economics and medicine clusters). There is no structured process in place in order to address these weaknesses on the basis of a systematic review and a comprehensive VET policy.

■ VET teachers almost all hold, in line with Kosovo legislation, higher education degrees and so have a strong academic orientation but limited experience and skills in practical training, pedagogy, and curriculum development. VET teacher motivation tends to be low, both due to the lack of resources and support available in schools, and to the fact that no teacher incentive scheme exists in Kosovo. Contributing to this demotivation is the fact that student numbers in some VET clusters are declining, given that VET is perceived as a negative choice for most students.

■ Ministry of Education, Science and Technology commitment to revising curricula as a guarantee of qualitative improvement in the VET offer was supported by several international donors, with a decision to rework a number of VET profiles in modular format, particularly in relation to the practical component of each profile. A variety of modularisation models were introduced by different donors, leading to some confusion, particularly when foreign practices were imported without sufficient attention being paid to adapting these to local circumstances. It is also important to bear in mind that once the donors withdraw, the country will need to obtain resources elsewhere to fund modular curricula. Modularisation has now been better defined, and has acquired credibility as an effective strategy to standardise learning outcomes in both formal education programmes and in short job-oriented training courses.

Key elements of the initiative

■ The decision to adopt modular curricula based on learning outcomes was followed up by stakeholder involvement at all levels in order to ensure commitment by all partners, including teachers. Different working groups developed competence-based curriculum frameworks for each profile on the basis of similar criteria, articulating them in ways that supported delivery both in the final secondary education grades and through short modular training courses for adults.

■ Curriculum implementation handbooks and a series of learning resource books in pilot profiles were developed to support teachers and trainers and to ensure effective implementation. Modularisation introduced new practices in schools through such concepts as module descriptors, credits, learning outcomes, assessment procedures, assessment instruments, performance criteria, etc. Credit accumulation and transfer systems are also being implemented with a view to ensuring equivalence between certificates issued by schools and training centres and to facilitate the transfer of credits between formal and non-formal VET provision.

■ Most VET teachers, including those teaching general subjects in VET schools and trainers in vocational training centres for adults, have now taken courses in order to develop a good understanding of the importance of modular curricula in pedagogical practice, of curriculum development in response to skill needs analyses, and of alternative ways for teaching and assessment in modular-based programmes. While key developments are restricted to pilot schools, there are strong linkages between pilot and non-pilot institutions, which is facilitating the sharing of good practices.

TURKEY CASE STUDIES

Modularisation of VET curricula

Background, rationale and goals

- Several aspects of the VET system in Turkey were considered to require attention, including the inability of the VET sector to produce skills profiles required by industry, the lack of flexibility in training provision leading to serious delays in matching skills training to labour market needs, the unavailability of modern instruments to assess acquired competences, and obstacles to the transfer of training and competences between the formal and non-formal VET sectors.
- Curricular modularisation was seen by most stakeholders as providing an appropriate combination of strategies and instruments by means of which the challenges of the Turkish VET system could be addressed. While international agencies and donors provided a broad platform of expertise, Turkish partners identified closely with the modularisation project and exhibited a high sense of commitment, seeing the project as an effective route to establishing higher standards and flexibility in VET.
- In contrast to previous curricular approaches, modularisation offered a flexible, open, economic, and practical solution that allowed greater opportunities for credit accumulation and transfer. In addition, curricular development was based on consultation with social partners and on careful analysis of labour market needs. The flexibility in-built into modules allowed for swift adaptation of content to the changing skills profiles required by the economy.
- Modularisation also supported student choices of training pathways, given that they first had a general orientation to occupations, on the basis of which they could then opt for a particular family of vocations. Such choices were more flexible given the possibility of credit transfers between pathways.
- A further element of flexibility afforded by modularisation concerned workers who needed additional modules in order to change their occupation.

Key elements of the initiative

- Much attention was given to setting up appropriate structures for the development of modular curricula. These included a National Curriculum Development Working Group, with broad representation from relevant ministries and social partners. Piloting was also structured in ways that rewarded VET schools that proposed viable and sustainable projects.
- Modular curricula were based on actual job analyses rather than on curricula adopted or adapted wholesale from other countries. Training standards were prepared in close collaboration with the employment agency to ensure they reflected and responded to changing labour market needs. Framework curricula were then prepared, with qualification frameworks and education programmes established for a number of major fields. Pilot institutions were chosen in order to implement the new curricula, with feedback inputted in the whole process and leading to programme revisions and wholesale dissemination.
- Modularisation facilitated the grouping of similar VET profiles under broad vocational families, enabling the development of module banks, elements of which could be shared between different courses and training pathways.
- Stakeholder involvement in all aspects of the modularisation project was strong, both on the part of ministries at the central and provincial levels, and on the part of the private sector, employer and employee organisations, trade unions and NGOs.

Career steps in the teaching profession

Background, rationale and goals

■ The introduction of career steps in teaching was made in response to concerns about the status of the profession in Turkey. Among the key issues here were the facts that it was becoming increasingly difficult to attract appropriate people to the profession, and that teachers exhibited a lack of motivation for their work. In addition, no distinction was made between those teachers who were motivated and gifted and those who were not, with teacher assessment and accountability mechanisms being either weak or absent.

■ The notion of career steps was introduced by the Ministry of National Education, and while initially it met with some resistance on the part of teacher unions and some teacher training faculties, it has now been implemented, resulting in the creation of thousands of vacancies for expert and master teachers.

Key elements of the initiative

■ Two major cadres of teachers have been created: expert teachers and master teachers. Regular teachers can access these grades by accumulating points which can be obtained through experience and performance in teaching, by participating in in-service training and related activities, by taking a competitive examination or by obtaining a master's degree (in the case of expert teachers) or a doctoral degree (in the case of master teachers) in their field or in the educational sciences field.

■ A number of issues have been raised by teachers in relation to the initiative. Among these is the fact that the difference in salary scales is rather small, and that the examination tends to be skewed towards general subject teachers, with VET-related questions not being included in the examination questions. On the other hand, there does seem to have been an increase in teacher participation in in-service training programmes, and there are hopes that the scheme will lead to improved motivation and make the teaching profession more attractive.

ACRONYMS

ALBAVET	Albanian VET project
ALL	Albanian lek
CARDS	Community Assistance for Reconstruction, Development and Stabilisation (Community programme to assist the Western Balkan countries)
CVET	continuing vocational education and training
EQF	European Qualifications Framework
ESF	European Social Fund
ETF	European Training Foundation
EU	European Union
GDP	gross domestic product
GNI	gross national income
GTZ	Gesellschaft für Technische Zusammenarbeit (German Agency for Technical Cooperation)
HRD	human resources development
IPA	Instrument for Pre-Accession Assistance
ISCED	International Standard Classification of Education
IVET	initial vocational education and training
KOSVET	Kosovo VET project
MVET	Modernisation of VET (an EU VET project in Turkey)
NGO	non-governmental organisation
NQF	national qualifications framework
OECD	Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development
Phare	Community aid programme for Central and East European countries (the EU's main financial instrument for accession of the Central and Eastern European countries)
PPP	purchasing power parity
SVET	Strengthening VET (an EU VET project in Turkey)
UNSCR	United Nations Security Council Resolution
USD	US dollar
VET	vocational education and training

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