New Methodological Approaches to Review Governance and Financing Arrangements in Vocational Education and Training (VET) and Skill Systems: A Data Collection Tool (DCT) 4.0 for Facilitating Self-Assessment Processes

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Abstract

The European Training Foundation (ETF) is more than aware that effective -good multilevel- governance arrangements in Vocational Education and Training (VET)-and Skill policies-is key for having sound skills in the labour market. The ETF developed new Data Collection tool 4.0 (DCT) to implement self-assessments working with partner countries (PCs) in governance and financing arrangements involving, at least, seven different categories of policy stakeholders (e.g. governmental actors-public servants-, social partners, private actors, key experts).

This -innovative- tool contains 65 indicators for self-assessing seven governance- and financing- functions including institutional coordination mechanisms (e.g. strategic and legislative framework, management of public-private partnerships, VET providers network, evaluation, research and data analysis provision, councils/committee's system etc.). The DCT 4.0 has been piloted in 5 ETF PCs (Albania, Jordan, Kazakhstan, Moldova and Uzbekistan). The results might inform further policy development driven by governance and financing arrangements/issues in ETF PCs (or perhaps, beyond). Further, this tool for policy analysis could inspire advisory processes focusing on how to support systemic reforms and/or carry out monitoring implementation-and/or policy review-, based on different types of governance and financing arrangements.

The pilot experience developed in COVID 19 times, confirmed that online facilitation is a good way to get good results. However, the human touch factor is essential to facilitate such self-assessment in more impactful way as it could be embedded in real time into current policy dialogue strategies in the countries.

Keywords: Vocational Education and Training (VET); Multilevel Governance and Financing skill arrangements; VET & Skills public policies; Monitoring and Assessment; Policy Making.

Introduction

Effective -good multilevel- governance arrangements in Vocational Education and Training (VET)- and Skill policies- are key to support in developing and using people's skills in the labour market. The success of vocational -skill- policies strongly relies on the operations- and performance- of a wide range of stakeholders, including governmental bodies, employers, employees (their associations/unions), education and training providers, representatives of civil society organisations and local communities (etc.).

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To manage their complex interactions, effective governance needs to be multilevel and agile. Multilevel governance involves creating a set of arrangements for making binding decisions that engage a multiplicity interdependent actors (public and private) at different levels of territorial aggregation through continuous negotiation, deliberation and implementation (Schmitter, Wiener, Diez, 2018). Agile governance enables policymakers to rapidly gather input from a variety of stakeholders to design cross-cutting policy solutions (World Economic Forum, 2019).

The recent COVID-19 crisis has highlighted the importance of having an adaptable, resilient VET & skills systems supported by strong-and smart- institutional leadership based on both on smart coordination of multiple stakeholders and agile approaches to help decision-making in skill policies indeed.

The European Training Foundation (ETF) is pioneering implementation of such approaches -for a decade - working together with its partner countries (PCs) and using, for example, Torino process as key recipient to look at VET governance and financing arrangements, as well as, focusing on specific policy analysis and advice in VET governance issues[3]. The ETF also works in partnerships with other European/ international organizations (e.g. Cedefop, ILO, OECD) sharing such approaches.

In this respect, the ETF implemented a project (2016 -2018) on VET Governance inventory. This tool is based on a widely acknowledged analytical framework- data collection tool (DCT) – developed by the ETF for a baseline inventory of VET governance arrangements in its PCs[4].

Lessons learned on this project informed on the need to move forward monitoring governance and financing arrangements in more structured -and regular- basis working with ETF PCs for having more accurate indications on the quality of institutional arrangements -settings- whilst promoting policy thinking to address implementation of systemic changes.

The way forward has been implemented through facilitation of self-assessments supported by new methodological framework (so-called Data Collection Tool 4.0). Such methodological tool has been piloted involving a variety of stakeholders and policy actors. (more than 100 stakeholders)- in five ETF PCs (Albania, Jordan, Kazakhstan, Moldova and Uzbekistan).

VET Governance Inventory Methodology -Data Collection Tool (DTC)-4.0

Goals, target group and data collection use

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[3] For more information on ETF Torino process and governance work please check: www.etf.europa.eu.
[4] See also, ETF -Galvin Arribas and Papadakis (2019): https://www.etf.europa.eu/en/publications-and-resources/publications/governance-arrangements-vocational-education-and-training .

Considering previous background, the main goal of ETF VET governance inventory -DCT- 4.0 is facilitating (self) assessments in ETF PCs focusing on governance and financing arrangement policy issues[5]. Such objective has been strategically managed to build expertise -and awareness- across stakeholders' communities in the five countries. Thus, analytical and advisory capacities are at heart of the self- assessments in order to promote further policy dialogue- using results/findings- for focusing on dialogue around needed reforms and modalities for implementing policies.

All this has been done engaging different categories of policy stakeholders to conduct country self-assessments. At least, a minimum of 7 different type of stakeholder's has been involved/engaged:

- Key Ministry or Agency in charge of VET skills policies.
- Key Ministry participating and/or financing VET and/or Skill policy making.
- Key Employers organisation participating in VET and/or Skills policy making.
- Key representative of relevant national Trade Union organisation
- Key representative of National and/or sectoral skill councils/committees.
- Key representative of Regional and/or local departments/bodies dealing with VET and/or Skills policy development.
- Key experts on VET & Skills working on and/or with leading institutions.

Other policy actors (e.g. VET providers, civil society representatives, policy advisors etc.) might be also involved in the self- assessments. This depends on institutional arrangements linked to constellation of policy actors within country contexts.

The collected data could be used to produce VET governance country profiles and research reports delivering conclusions and policy recommendations to support moving forward policy agendas in the countries and using governance and financing arrangements as drivers for systemic reforms.

Methodological approach

The methodological approach for analysing and assessing governance and financing arrangements working with country stakeholders distinguishes seven core functions to focus on:

A. Formulation -and implementation- of overall policy framework- including strategic policy tools-.

B. Provision of legal, normative and/or regulatory framework.

C. Management of VET-& skills- provider network.

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[5] This analytical framework prepared for ETF PCs could inspire to work with other countries worldwide. The author acknowledges inputs of ETF experts (Vincent Mc Bride, Margareta Nikolovska, Stylianos Karagianis and Siria Taurelli).

D. Operationalization, alignment and coordination of financial arrangements.

E. Management of public-private partnerships for VET & Skills development

F. Monitoring, evaluation and review of VET & Skills policies. This also include Research & Development.

G. Management of Information Systems (MIS). This also includes Data and Statistical provision-

In addition, the methodical framework presented below includes a set of indicators (see section H) addressing institutional-oriented coordination mechanisms (e.g. performance of VET/ skill councils, committees, agencies; inter-ministerial cooperation etc.), whilst proposing some other indicators to self- assessing roles/functions of sub-national level levels (regional/local).

Overall, the conceptual foundations linked to main functions and thematic domains/issues in the framework, has been translated into process indicators. From a policy research perspective, these can be explained as follows:

- How different VET & skills coordination mechanisms (legislative, institutional, public-private/financial and knowledge oriented) (Galvin Arribas, 2016) are in place-or not- for making systems work in efficient and effective manner, whilst supporting relevant policy reforms.

- How strengthening dialogue, cooperation and coordination across all governmental stakeholders (ministries, agencies, public bodies, etc.) is being developed, in the policy making of VET & Skills policies within LLL perspective.

- How involvement of the right mix and balance of non-state stakeholders (social partners, NGOs, employers etc.) is effectively operating, in cooperation with public stakeholders to support VET & Skills policies for system development.

- How coordination of financing arrangements is aligned to support implementation of adequate and sustainable financial policy mechanisms (public and private) for funding VET & Skills policies and systems.

The matrix should be managed as a questionnaire. This has 65 process indicators for self- assessing effectiveness/efficiency of stakeholder's performance in the rulemaking processes. After each section, the framework also includes questions for collecting qualitative information from informants to support wrapping up scorings. The questionnaire should include a background section to classify sociodemographic data of informants.

TABLE 1. OVERALL PLANNING, MANAGEMENT & FINANCING of VET & SKILLS: -SELF- ASSESEMENT OF CORE FUNCTIONS		
VET & SKILLS GOVERNANCE FUNCTIONS	**INDICATORS** PLEASE, ASSES IN NEXT COLUMN YOUR DEGREE OF AGREEMENT WITH FOLLOWING INDICATORS REGARDING GOVERNANCE ARRANGEMENTS, PERFORMANCE, OPERATIONS, INSTITUTIONAL SETTINGS (etc.)	(1) Strongly Agree (2) Agree (3) Neither Agree nor Disagree (4) Disagree (5) Strongly Disagree (6) Do not know/ Not Applicable
A Formulate and implement VET & skills national policy framework (goals, strategies, plans, etc.)	▪ (A.1) *The national policy for vocational education and training (VET) -and skills- has been developed involving both state and non-state stakeholders.* ▪ (A.2) *The policy for VET combines long term objectives and short-term targets.* ▪ (A.3) *The policy can be updated to include new developments in both initial training for young people and continuing training for adults.* ▪ (A.4) *The national policy for vocational education has a multiyear perspective.* ▪ (A.5) *Cooperation and coordination between national and sub-national (regional, local) public departments and agencies are effective.* ▪ (A.6) *Cooperation between government and non-government organisations (including social partners) is transparent and effective.*	(1)…(2)…(3)...(4)…(5)...(6)

A. Qualitative Assessment by interviewee

▪ Overall, *do you think that current public administration practices allow good multi-level cooperation, flexible, agile as well as -less formal- way of managing policy processes on VET & Skill policies*? *How credible and effective are VET -and skills- strategies*? Please, outline your reasons for the scores that you provided.

Assessment of the interviewer of the questions in this section:
▪ Were the question clear to the interviewee.
▪ Were there parts of section that the interviewee did not understand.
▪ Any specific changes that you would recommend to the questions in this section.

B. Provision of legal/ regulatory/ normative framework for VET and Skills	▪ (B.1) *Legal framework for VET aims to meet the expectations of both public and private stakeholders.* ▪ (B.2) *There is a good understanding on the legal framework for VET by all stakeholders which facilitates policy implementation.* ▪ (B.3) *The legal framework responds to the needs of women.* ▪ (B.4) *The legal framework support lifelong learning (LLL), not only initial VET (I-VET).*	(1)…(2)…(3)….(4)…(5)…(6)

	▪ (B.5) *It is common practice in the country to involve VET stakeholders in the updating of regulations and norms.*	
B. Qualitative Assessment by interviewee		
▪ Overall, *do you think that the current legal framework is prepared for facing challenges of VET & Skills in XXI Century within LLL perspective*? (e.g. relevant Qualifications, Work Based Learning -WBL-, digitalization of economy and leaning processes, regulating integration of innovation & research, etc.) Please, outline your reasons for the scores that you provided. Assessment of the interviewer of the questions in this section: ▪ Were the question clear to the interviewee. ▪ Were there parts of section that the interviewee did not understand. ▪ Any specific changes that you would recommend to the questions in this section.		
C. Management of VET provider networks.	▪ (C.1) *VET providers are accessible to users, such as students, parents, and employers (etc.).* ▪ (C.2) *The network of VET providers is optimal and based on clear governance structure.* ▪ (C.3) *A Quality Assurance (Q.A) policy is in place across, both system and provider levels* ▪ (C.4) *Measuring quality –internal and external –is undertaken to support the performance of VET provider.* ▪ (C.5) *VET schools are able to make decisions on curriculum and teaching -and innovation- practices.* ▪ (C.6) *VET School financial autonomy is fair enough to support effective and efficient provider operations and partnerships with industry, employers, civil society (etc.).* ▪ (C.7) *VET schools are accountable for the decisions they make.* ▪ (C.8) *Centres of Vocational Excellence (CoVEs) exist in the country and, overall, these institutions meet stakeholder expectations.* ▪ (C.9) *Centres of Vocational Excellence (CoVEs) are partnership -based institutions (public-private, university and research, etc.), which are well resourced in terms of both financial and human capacities.*	**(1)…(2)…(3)…(4)…(5)...(6)**
C. Qualitative Assessment by interviewee		
▪ Overall, *do you think that the VET provider network functions effectively*? *Is VET network provision and composition supporting sustainable access to VET*? Please, outline your reasons for the scores that you provided above. Assessment of the interviewer of the questions in this section: ▪ Were the question clear to the interviewee. ▪ Were there parts of section that the interviewee did not understand. ▪ Any specific changes that you would recommend to the questions in this section.		

D. Financial arrangements (including budgeting, mobilization & allocation processes)	▪ (D.1) *The budget setting process for VET & Skills development is driven by good dialogue among key ministries.* ▪ (D.2) *Budget planning is targeted to long-term strategic goals and challenges* ▪ (D.3) *Allocation of financial resources is based on criteria following clear and transparent rules.* ▪ (D.4) *Funding mechanisms are well designed in terms of the objectives of budget.* ▪ (D.5) *Mechanism in place for mobilization of additional funding resources as required to meet needs of VET & Skills stakeholders.* ▪ (D.6) *The need for equity of outcomes is taken into account in decisions about the distribution of funding.* ▪ (D.7) *The sources of financing include both public and private sources.* ▪ (D.8) *Incentives for employer's participation are in place and adequate to support VET & Skills financing policies.* ▪ (D.9) *Employer's financial and/or fiscal incentives are effective and transparent.*	**(1)…(2)...(3)…(4)...(5)...(6)**

D. Qualitative Assessment by interviewee
▪ Overall, *do you think public VET and skills are well resourced? A*r*e fiscal resources available and coordinated for matching the current needs in terms of financing of VET & Skills systems*? Please outline your reasons for the scores that you provided above.
Assessment of the interviewer of the questions in this section:
▪ Were the question clear to the interviewee
▪ Were there parts of section that the interviewee did not understand
▪ Any specific changes that you would recommend to the questions in this section

E. Management of public–private partnerships (PPPs) for VET & Skills provision.	▪ (E.1) *PPPs in VET & Skills are supported by relevant legislation.* ▪ (E.2) *Fiscal arrangements are adequate for formation and implementation of PPPs.* ▪ (E.3) *Social Dialogue plays an effective role at national and, in concrete, sectoral levels for VET & Skills policy formation and implementation.* ▪ (E.4) *Financial and non-financial incentives motivate employer's participation in VET & Skill policy development.* ▪ (E.5) *Social Partners & Employers cooperation with VET schools is structured and effective, for instance, for having sound Work Based Learning -WBL- policies and practices.*	**(1)…(2)...(3)...(4)...(5)...(6)**

E. Qualitative Assessment by interviewee
▪ Overall, *what do you think of the potential for public private partnerships in your country*? Please outline your reasons for the scores that you provided above.
Assessment of the interviewer of the questions in this section:
▪ Were the question clear to the interviewee

	▪ Were there parts of section that the interviewee did not understand ▪ Any specific changes that you would recommend to the questions in this section	
F. Monitoring, Evaluation and Review of VET & Skills policies.	▪ (F.1) *There is a recognised- and sound- monitoring and research system.* ▪ (F.2) *Monitoring is used to support evaluations -and policy review- in the country.* ▪ (F.3) *Different type of evaluations (e.g. on different policies such as qualifications, school operations, occupations, adult learning etc.) are conducted to inform VET policy implementation.* ▪ (F.4) *Evaluation and reviews of VET & Skills policies, involve the participation of different stakeholders.* ▪ (F.5) *Research, development and innovation are used to support VET & Skills policy development.*	**(1)…(2)...(3)…(4)...(5)...(6)**

F.   Qualitative Assessment by interviewee
▪ Overall, *do you think that research, development and innovation functions support country to adapt to changes and preparing the future of VET & Skills within LLL perspective?* Please outline your reasons for the scores that you provided above.

Assessment of the interviewer of the questions in this section:
▪ Were the question clear to the interviewee
▪ Were there parts of section that the interviewee did not understand
▪ Any specific changes that you would recommend to the questions in this section

G. Management of Information Systems (MIS) & Statistical provision to support policy making	▪ (G.1) *Management Information Systems (MIS) are used to collect data to support planning and decision-making processes.* ▪ (G.2) *Information systems are used to improve governance decisions and reducing uncertainties, for example, for adopting policy options on using of skills for employment/labour market purposes.* ▪ (G.3) *Management Information Systems have been designed and upgraded involving different type of VET & Skills stakeholders.* ▪ (G.4) *Overall, data produced by information management systems are public accessible to VET & Skills stakeholders and citizens.*	**(1)…(2)...(3)…(4)…(5)...(6)**

G.   Qualitative Assessment by interviewee
Overall, *how far do you think that data is used in the planning and decision-making processes for VET and skills development?* Please outline your reasons for the scores that you provided above.

Assessment of the interviewer of the questions in this section:
▪ Were the question clear to the interviewee.
▪ Were there parts of section that the interviewee did not understand
▪ Any specific changes that you would recommend to the questions in this section

TABLE 2. SELF ASSESMENT OF INSTITUTIONAL COORDINATION MECHANISMS FOR VET & SKILLS POLICY MAKING

TYPE OF INSTITUTIONAL MECHANISM	INDICATOR PLEASE, ASSES IN NEXT COLUMN YOUR DEGREE OF AGREEMENT WITH FOLLOWING INDICATORS REGARDING GOVERNANCE ARRANGEMENTS, PERFORMANCE, OPERATIONS, INSTITUTIONAL SETTINGS (etc.)	(1) Strongly Agree (2) Agree (3) Neither Agree nor Disagree (4) Disagree (5) Strongly Disagree (6) Do not know/ Not Applicable
H. National VET/Skills Councils	- (H.1) *National Council (NC) for VET exists and, overall, outcomes meet stakeholder expectations.* - (H.2) *The NC composition represents key VET & Skills stakeholders at national level.* - (H.3) *The NC meets on regular and effective manner in the course of the year coordinating relevant VET & Skill policy agendas.* - (H.4) *Advice/feedback processes delivered by the NC is distributed to stakeholders in systematic and transparent way.*	(1)…(2)...(3)…(4)…(5)...(6)

A. Qualitative Assessment by interviewee
- Do you think there is scope for more capacity development actions to improve the performance of national council operations? Please outline your reasons for the scores that you provided above

Assessment of the interviewer of the questions in this section:
- Were the question clear to the interviewee
- Were there parts of section that the interviewee did not understand
- Any specific changes that you would recommend to the questions in this section

I. Sectoral VET/Skills Councils/ Committees	- (I.1) *The Sector Councils /Committees (SSCs) exist and, overall, meet stakeholder expectations.* - (I.2) *SSCs composition represents key sectoral VET & Skills stakeholders.* - (I.3) *The SCs meet on regular and effective manner in the course of the year and they have proper resources to deploy mandate.* - (I.4) *SCs sectors are the most appropriate ones to contribute on VET & Skills and economic development.* - (I.5) *SCs have sub-committees to address specific issues in different VET & Skills policy areas.* - (I.6) *The results of the SSC add value to VET and skills policy development.* - (I.7) *Advice/feedback processes delivered by the SSCs is effective and distributed to*	(1)…(2)...(3)…(4)…(5)...(6)

| | *right stakeholders.* | |

B. **Qualitative Assessment by interviewee**		

- *Do you think there is scope for more capacity development actions to improve the performance of sector councils*? Please outline your reasons for the scores that you provided above.

Assessment of the interviewer of the questions in this section:

- Were the question clear to the interviewee
- Were there parts of section that the interviewee did not understand
- Any specific changes that you would recommend to the questions in this section

J. Regional/ Subnational VET & Skills -Authorities (e.g. Councils)	▪ (J.1) *The Regional/local level is well represented and contributes to the role of VET & Skills socioeconomic and regional development.* ▪ (J.2) *The regional / local levels participate on formation and implementation of local partnerships with employers and other key actors.* ▪ (J.3) *Overall, regional/local levels should have more responsibilities in supporting national level on VET & Skills policies.* ▪ (J.4) *Regional/ local level cooperate with VET schools and this add value to performance of VET institutions.* ▪ (J.5) *The Regional Council (RC) composition (if this exists) operates under clear governance structure.*	**(1)…(2)...(3)…(4)…(5)...(6)**

C. **Qualitative Assessment by interviewee**		

- Overall, *do you think there is a good level of delegated policies and competences to regional and/or local authorities in the country*? Please outline your reasons for the scores that you provided above

Assessment of the interviewer of the questions in this section:

- Were the question clear to the interviewee
- Were there parts of section that the interviewee did not understand
- Any specific changes that you would recommend to the questions in this section

K. National VET Agencies and/or other type of executive and supervisory bodies.	▪ (K.1) *The national agency-executive/supervisory body- on VET/Qualifications/Quality (etc.) executes national policies in transparent and accountable manner.* ▪ (K.2) *There is a recognised level of expertise and good outcomes provided by National Agency to support VET & Skills policy development/implementation, evaluation and review (etc.).* ▪ (K.3) *Overall, governing board representation in the national agency is composed by key VET & Skills stakeholders.*	**(1)…(2)...(3)…(4)…(5)...(6)**

D. **Qualitative Assessment by interviewee**		

- *Do you think there is scope for more capacity development actions to improve the performance of national agency?* Please outline your reasons for the scores that you provided above

Assessment of the interviewer of the questions in this section:

- Were the question clear to the interviewee.
- Were there parts of section that the interviewee did not understand
- Any specific changes that you would recommend to the questions in this section

L. Inter-Ministerial Working Cooperation/ Coordination	▪ (L.1) *There is effective cooperation among different Ministries involved on shaping and financing VET & Skills policies.* ▪ (L.2) *There are inter-ministerial cooperation mechanisms (e.g. governmental committees, thematic sub-committees etc.) to support VET & Skills policy dialogue and coordination.* ▪ (L.3) *VET providers and stakeholders believe there is effective cooperation between different Ministries involved in VET & Skills policies.*	**(1)…(2)...(3)…(4)…(5)...(6)**

E. Qualitative Assessment by interviewee
- Overall, *do you think there is scope for more cooperation and interaction among different ministries with responsibilities on VET & Skill policies?* Please, outline your reasons for the scores that you provided above

Assessment of the interviewer of the questions in this section
- Were the question clear to the interviewee
- Were there parts of section that the interviewee did not understand
- Any specific changes that you would recommend to the questions in this section

Conclusions

Overall, DCT 4.0 is a new tool for supporting self-assessments on VET and skills governance and financing among stakeholder's community in ETF PCs. The ETF methodology should be seeing as an innovative development which would need to be further discussed and disseminated involving countries and international community (organisations/partners, donors). Targeting participation of, at least, seven type of stakeholders is a core element for such innovative approach.

Following feedbacks received from informants on the use of the tool in 5 ETF PCs (Albania, Jordan, Kazakhstan, Moldova and Uzbekistan), the DCT 4.0 has been found extremely useful to monitor and assess gaps in governance and financing arrangements.

Policy makers, practitioners and research communities might benefit using and adapting tool to different contexts (fit for purpose). The tool might inspire further policy analysis, monitoring and dialogue (e.g. identify policy gaps, development of monitor strategic/evidence -based frameworks, challenging institutional performance/ policy roles etc.).

However, key element is to focus on data analysis options addressing different type of stakeholders. This is because highest levels of public servants (governmental actors) tend to be more optimistic self-assessing proposed indicators, whereas non -state stakeholders (e.g. social partners, employers) could hold more critical opinions on VET & Skills system – and policies- operations/governance arrangements.

Thus, facilitation processes of DCT 4.0 is crucial at this stage. In COVID 19 times, self-assessments were conducted successfully on-line. Nevertheless, on-site self-assessments (face to face bilaterally and/or focus groups) might build better ground to profit human touch as objectivity -and timely- factors, as well as to promote strategically sound policy dialogue within implementation process of the methodological tool.

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