

GUIDANCE NOTE 11

Implementing VET in post-conflict and fragile countries

Topic overview

There is no internationally uniform definition for the term ‘post-conflict’. In the so-called early warning system, countries are said to be in a post-conflict phase at least one year after a violent conflict has been ended by a cease fire or peace treaty. It is generally accepted that a post-conflict phase lasts for a maximum of 10 years after the end of violent conflict. The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) report, *States of Fragility 2015*, offers a new tool for assessing fragility which is more comprehensive than the traditional single categorisation of fragile states, and recognises the diversity of risks and vulnerabilities that lead to fragility (OECD, 2015). It identifies countries which are most vulnerable based on five dimensions of risk and vulnerability linked to fragility, and asks how likely they are to achieve the United Nations Open Working Group’s post-2015 goals and targets in those five dimensions (see Box GN11.1).

A European Commission (EC) communication on response to situations of fragility outlines that weak or failing structures and situations are responsible for broken social contracts due to the **state’s incapacity or unwillingness** to deal with its basic functions such as service delivery, management of resources and rule of law (EC, 2007).

The **Do-No-Harm approach**, developed and propagated by Mary B. Anderson in the 1990s, has been accepted as a foundation for conflict-sensitive aid and development interventions by international humanitarian and development actors. This means that the design of interventions and operative aspects in vocational education and training (VET) project implementation need to be closely analysed and monitored for

SUMMARY OF KEY ASPECTS

- To support development practitioners in designing conflict-sensitive projects in the field of education and VET, the EC has developed *Operating in situations of conflict and fragility: EU staff handbook*.
- Situations of conflict and fragility host a growing number of the world’s poor. Around 43 % of people who survive on less than USD 1.25 per day live in countries considered fragile.
- The OECD offers a tool for assessing fragility that recognises the diversity of risks and vulnerabilities that lead to fragility.
- The Do-No-Harm approach has been accepted as a foundation for conflict-sensitive aid and development interventions by international humanitarian and development actors.
- The integrated employability and life skills approach aims to strengthen a person’s cognitive, personality-related and social competences in order to facilitate appropriate dealings with other people and with the problems and stresses of everyday life.

assessment of conflict relevance, conflict risks and actual effects of the interventions. In fragile and conflict-affected countries, the provision of basic services — including education and VET opportunities — is seriously undermined, as can be seen by the Iraqi example in Box GN11.2.

Conflict-sensitive **VET provision should avoid reinforcing patterns of exclusion** and should seek to

BOX GN11.1 *States of Fragility 2015: Meeting Post-2015 Ambitions*

States of Fragility 2015 embraces a concept of fragility that includes many facets and dimensions.

- **Fragility can affect developing and high-income countries** alike.
- Reducing poverty post-2015 will require addressing fragility, in particular, **building resilient institutions**. Of all people living on less than USD 1.25 per day, 43 % live in countries considered fragile.
- **Aid to fragile environments in unequally distributed**. Afghanistan and Iraq receive the lion's share, while 10 fragile states are aid orphans: Bangladesh, Chad, The Gambia, Guinea, Madagascar, Malawi, Nepal, Niger, Sierra Leone and Togo.
- Only 1.4 % of official development assistance (ODA) to fragile states is spent on security; 3 % on justice, and 4 % on inclusive politics, although these are international priorities agreed in the New Deal endorsed in Busan in 2011; 46 % of ODA is **not aligned to peacebuilding and statebuilding goals**.
- Smarter and more **innovative use of aid in fragile environments** is needed, including financial instruments such as pooling funds, budget support and matching funds, as well as South-South or regional cooperation.

Source: OECD, 2015.

base decisions on criteria that can be defended as fair, and communicated clearly to both governments and recipient populations. Employment initiatives for young people can be an important contribution from a conflict-sensitivity perspective, potentially reducing the risk of young men in particular being drawn into violence. The provision of VET programmes is an important aspect of promoting inclusive economic growth in fragile contexts. In order to support development practitioners in designing conflict-sensitive projects in the field of VET, the EC has developed and made available an EU conflict sensitivity resource pack, which is included as Annex 2 of *Operating in situations of conflict and fragility: EU staff handbook* (EC, 2014).

BOX GN11.2 *Current status of VET in Iraq*

One of Iraq's current main development challenges is youth unemployment, which is currently at around 18 % for ages 15–29. A large number of Iraqi youth are seeking jobs in the public sector, which has limited capacity for job creation. Instead, Iraq has to depend on the private sector as the nation's future chief employer. The events of 1991 and the recent armed conflict have led to heavy damage of infrastructure and a general dislocation of the entire education and training system. The situation has undoubtedly deteriorated further as a result of the 2003 conflict and its aftermath. The still ongoing conflict between Sunni, Shiite and Kurdish populations impedes further development of the VET system.

Empirical evidence suggests that many VET providers suffered considerably due to the war, with many dysfunctional or only functioning sporadically. A major problem of the current VET environment is its fragmentation and the uncoordinated management of each sub-system. There is no institutional framework to organise, regulate and ensure the quality of VET programmes. This often leads to duplication of efforts and ineffective use of scarce resources. In addition, the centralised decision-making structure in the VET system — coupled with generally weak management capacity at the school level — contributes to an inefficient use of resources.

VET provision is being enhanced in all public VET structures with a short-cycle Skills for Work programme, consisting of modular training in selected vocational skills that are in high demand in the labour market, in order to achieve quick impact in terms of youth employment and self-employment. Most donor organisations are working to reconstruct the infrastructure and build the capacity of the Foundation of Technical Education.

Source: UNESCO-UNEVOC, 2014.

Participation in employment-driven VET programmes is greatly desired by young people in fragile situations, because it offers the chance to work and employability — which leads to income generation. However, **employable skills must be taught alongside other subjects such as life skills**, which are equally

important for young people to conduct a proper life. The integrated employability and life skills approach aims to strengthen a person's cognitive, personality-related and social competences in order to facilitate appropriate dealings with other people and with the problems and stresses of everyday life (see Box GN11.3).

The aim is to give individuals — and particularly young people — the **opportunity to develop self-esteem and courage** so they can lead active, creative lives and overcome difficult periods. Contemporary approaches to VET stress the need to adapt and adjust training programmes to best meet the needs of the target group. In this regard, young people from post-conflict settings can be seen as a special, albeit diverse, target group. It appears that young people from any marginalised situation gain the most when VET programmes are comprehensive and include non-occupational components — such as sharing food, playing sports, working together in groups, helping those who are worse off. All of these components have been shown to contribute

to community re-integration and have been successfully incorporated into VET (UNESCO-UNEVOC, 2012).

VET programmes for ex-combatants represent a special case. Even if ex-combatants had prior technical skills before embracing military life, skills refreshment and psychological preparation are needed to support transition from combat to civilian work. For some people, the transition back to civilian life is neither fast nor easy. Military culture is strong and tends to emphasise particular values and activities. During armed conflicts, combatants frequently live in camps, constantly (even exclusively) in the company of comrades, and units are usually characterised by an extreme group cohesion that overrides individualism. Coming back into the labour market can be very threatening for people who have been away from mainstream civilian life for some years. Previous experiences may not fit or may be out of date.

A number of soft skills/life skills need to be taught to encourage ex-combatants to adapt to new environments. VET programmes have the potential to **help all members of conflict-affected communities repair the social fabric of communities** as well as repair physical infrastructure and economic activity. The focus has to be on youths, not only since young people represent such a high proportion of the population of post-conflict societies but also because they are very vulnerable due to the physical and emotional changes they experience. The findings of a tracer study conducted in 2012 in Somalia at the EU-funded project for Developing Vocational Training for the Informal Economy confirms that the project met its objective of improving employment opportunities of disadvantaged youths and providing alternative income sources through the provision of demand-driven skills training (see Box GN11.4).

BOX GN11.3 Components of VET programmes in fragile states

- **Occupational knowledge, skills and competence geared to labour market realities.** This topic must be at the core of any VET programme.
- **Life skills.** In developing countries, VET programmes too often remain narrowly focused on the occupational part alone. Peacebuilding as well as more common skills such as problem solving, teamwork and communication can be incorporated into VET programmes.
- **Entrepreneurial skills.** Tight labour markets and economies that have been severely disrupted by conflict or disaster cannot absorb all VET graduates. Preparing people for self-employment by including basic entrepreneurial and micro-business skills is very useful.
- **Catch-up learning.** War and disaster cause significant upheaval in people's lives, and basic education is often disrupted to some extent. In such cases, VET programmes offer the opportunity for catch-up literacy, numeracy and general education.

Procedure

Development of VET projects in fragile countries faces major challenges in one way or another: the central VET actors in the partner country are either unable or unwilling to invest in VET programmes. According to a recent study on VET in fragile contexts in 12 projects (Global Public Policy Institute, 2013),

BOX GN11.4 Developing Vocational Training for the Informal Economy in Somalia (DVTIES)

The DVTIES project pilots VET programmes for youths, dropouts and illiterate adults (50 % female), integrating basic literacy with technical skills and leading to a vocational qualifications framework based on occupational skills standards and competency-based training. The programmes are offered by upgraded training centres, where VET staff have been trained on competency-based modular training approaches. The project's overall objective is to **improve the employment opportunities of disadvantaged Somali youth** across the country. Its specific objective is to strengthen the VET system and training delivery methods to foster employment promotion in three Somalian states.

The project targets three results areas: (i) expanding access to **employment-driven VET programmes**, (ii) building the **capacity of VET providers** (training administrators and instructors) and (iii) enhancing **carrier progression** and trainee competency by developing a vocational qualification framework for the three lowest levels of vocational training.

The project's primary target groups are youth, aged 16–24, comprising persons with disabilities, youth including school dropouts, unemployed school leavers, untrained internally displaced youth and returnees, ex-militia, and socially and economically excluded minorities. About 1,900 learners have been trained at an intermediate skill level, and 2,400 learners — mainly ex-militia, minorities and people with disabilities, women and youth — have been trained in literacy and numeracy under a non-formal education component.

The study findings show that the DVTIES project has given 82 % of graduates the opportunity to attain empowering skills that have helped change their lives. The nine-month training duration engaged them in more practice, making it more convenient than traditional VET programmes. However, the graduates still request to be engaged in more practical lessons. In comparing previous and current incomes, 68 % of graduates stated that their current job offered better remuneration than their previous job.

Source: Thariki and Hajji, 2012.

four lessons arise for the successful creation of a market for VET programmes in fragile countries:

- an extensive but informal **analysis of the socio-economic and state institutions** of the fragile country is central to the success of the VET project;
- VET projects are particularly effective in fragile contexts if they **pursue an integrated employability and life skills approach** (see Box GN11.3);
- the **timing and length of the VET project** must be chosen correctly;
- the systematic and **reflected selection of partners** is important to ensure the relevance and impact of VET projects in fragile contexts.

In addition, based on EU experience in development cooperation, it can be argued that mechanisms for institutionalisation should be stabilised (e.g. apprenticeship schemes, certification, etc.).

STEP 1: Roughly define project form and content

A project in support of VET programmes in fragile states will vary depending on differences in post-conflict and post-disaster situations. Generally speaking, the VET programmes have to include **core components such as technical, life, entrepreneurial and catch-up skills**. It is therefore necessary to collect information on the situation of target groups seeking employment. As a first step, the collected information allows identification of the form and content of the VET project. From this information base, analysis allows selection of options to obtain a best fit.

STEP 2: Plan implementation

The following questions might be helpful in identifying the relevant components for a project's intervention strategy.

- Which are the major key issues to **support economic foundations** in post-conflict and

fragile states for successful implementation of VET programmes?

- How will social and economic communities **recover and rebuild** in modern post-conflict environments?
- What kind of **risks** are inherent, particularly from violence and institutions, at the implementation of the VET programme?
- What kind of **alternative steps** would be conceivable should certain risks materialise?

STEP 3: Operational planning

After planning implementation, a project overview plan should be outlined in more detail and should include operational planning. Work packages should then be detailed. The following questions could be raised.

- How are the **rough work packages** to be implemented concretely?
- Which institution will be **responsible for implementation** of the VET project?
- What **resources are available** from the fragile or donor for the individual work packages?
- When should **relevant milestones** be reached?

References and further reading

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Case study: Promoting youth employment in post-conflict Sierra Leone

CONTEXT	One of the lasting impacts of the 11-year-long civil war in Sierra Leone is the disruption it brought to basic education and VET in the country. Over 60 % of Sierra Leonean adults cannot read or write, and a disproportionately high number of these are women. Very few people possess marketable skills and occupational work experience. Over 60 % of young people in Sierra Leone are unemployed or underemployed. The lack of prospects is still considered a major threat to peace and stability in Sierra Leone by the United Nations Peacebuilding Commission. Hence, to reduce youth unemployment and underemployment in Sierra Leone, the employability of young people must be improved through an integrated employability and life skills approach. After a decade of civil war and poor government funding, the situation of the VET system remains inadequate. Without needs-oriented training and practical work experience, it is difficult for young people in particular to find productive employment.
CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES	The objective of the employment promotion project is improvement of the employment and income situation for young people in rural areas of Sierra Leone. Disadvantaged youths and young adults are offered different forms of VET programmes and means for occupational qualification in a non-formal framework. The market-driven orientation of the project's VET offerings to current employment opportunities will serve to directly alleviate youth unemployment. The project has to run literacy campaigns, many involving women. The project works in three districts. In each of the three districts, the project selected two traditional administrative areas in which poverty was particularly acute and the potential for employment was high. At the political level, the project supports the Ministry of Labour and the Ministry of Agriculture in particular. The focus of project activities is on three agricultural product groups: coffee and cocoa, rice and livestock. In collaboration with national and international partners, the project team aims to further develop local agriculture — and in doing so, generate employment opportunities for young men and women.

ACTIONS TAKEN	To improve the knowledge, skills and occupational competence, and thus the employability of young people, the project works in the following areas. ● Functional literacy. Given the high rates of illiteracy, the project developed a non-formal functional literacy VET programme in Krio, the lingua franca in Sierra Leone. This is a two-year-programme that combines literacy skills with a range of life skills and employment-related issues. ● VET modules. To address the low levels of knowledge, skills and occupational competence among youth and provide them with what they need to qualify for employment, the project developed VET modules that can be combined to provide comprehensive VET qualifications. ● Basic entrepreneurial skills development. Motivated young people with an interest in starting their own businesses are encouraged to learn basic entrepreneurial skills to prepare them for self-employment. ● Capacity development. To strengthen its institutional partners, the project offers specific VET programmes to staff in its partner ministries, district officials, local business associations, implementing non-governmental organisations, as well as artisans and VET instructors. The activities focus on good agricultural practice, VET programmes and promoting small enterprises. The service providers capacitated young people for employment in agricultural operations along the value chains for coffee and cocoa, rice and livestock. The project enters into development partnerships with established companies, so public and private sectors work together on job creation. The project provides financial and professional support to business start-ups and for enterprise development. Advisory services, training and equipment for small businesses make it easier for entrepreneurs to earn a living from their businesses, and to expand them and create additional jobs.
LESSONS LEARNED	● Participation of over 10 000 cocoa farmers in VET programmes improved their prospects to develop their social and professional networks; obtain employment; and succeed in the world of work, communities and the wider society. ● Learners increased their social status and have improved their influence on the decision-making processes which affect their lives; 600 people have found employment in cocoa processing centres. ● Project learning opportunities support social equity and inclusion in development. Some 1 000 young people from 49 villages have come together with a view to using 450 hectares of wetlands for rice production. To prepare for this task, they took part in integrated employability and life skills programmes focusing on team building, organisation and sound agricultural practices. ● Effective opportunities to acquire skills by all learners, male and female, have been promoted; e.g. 1 000 small farmers, most of them women, are seeking to expand their goat-farming businesses. ● Organisations such as local trade associations have been capacitated and now support many project activities. Their employees have taken part in capacity development initiatives on increased production, financial management and administration.

Source: GIZ, n.d.