Enabel

Evaluation report on the VET TOOLBOX 2 PROJECT

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Regional Africa

Cowater international S.A.

Final report

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Belgian development agency

enabel.be

This evaluation was carried out as part of the cooperation between Republic of the Congo, Côte d'Ivoire, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Ghana, Kenya, Malawi, Mozambique, Nigeria, Senegal, Tanzania, Uganda, and Belgium.

The report was drawn up by independent external experts.

The opinions expressed in this document represent the views of the authors and are not necessarily shared by Enabel, or the authorities of Republic of the Congo, Côte d'Ivoire, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Ghana, Kenya, Malawi, Mozambique, Nigeria, Senegal, Tanzania, and Uganda.

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Acronyms

ACB	Associação Comercial da Beira
BC	The British Council
AFD	Agence Française de Développement
AGEVEC	Académie Engins Lourds et Véhicules Commerciaux
BMZ	Bundesministerium für wirtschaftliche Zusammenarbeit und Entwicklung
CD	Country Director
CEFA	Centre d'Education, de Formation et d'Apprentissage
CEREQ	Centre for Studies and Research on Qualifications
DAC	OECD's Development Assistance Committee
DG INTPA	Directorate-General for International Partnerships
DoA	Document of Action
DRC	**Democratic Republic of the Congo**
E4D	Employment and Skills for Development in Africa
EDUKAT	Enseignement technique et à la formation professionnelle au Katanga
EF	Expertise France
EIP	External Investment Plan
EUD	European Union Delegation
EQ	Evaluation Question
GIZ	Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit GmbH
GO	General Objective (Impact)
IECD	Institut Européen de Coopération et de Développement
LuxDev	Luxembourg Development Cooperation Agency
MEAL	Monitoring, Evaluation, Accountability and Learning
MoU	Memorandum of Understanding
MTR	Mid-term Review
NDP	National Development Plan
NTF	National Training Fund
OECD	Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development
OMC	Operational Monitoring Committee
PPD	Public Private Dialogue
PPP	Public-Private Partnership
RM	Regional Manager
RAFPRO	Réseau Africain des Institutions et Fonds de Formation Professionnelle
S4R	Skills 4 Riders
SC	Steering Committee
SDG	Sustainable Development Goal
SFMQ	Service Francophone des Métiers et des Qualifications
SMEs	Small and Medium-sized Enterprises
SO	Specific Objective (Outcome)
SSA	Sub-Saharan Africa
SVTP	Shire Valley Transformation Programme
ToR	Terms of Reference
TWG	Technical Working Group
VET	Vocational Education and Training
VTI	Vocational Training Institute
WBL	Work-Based Learning

Cooperation project/programme sheet

Title of the action	Enhanced delivery of demand-driven skills development for investmentsin Africa
Code of the action	DCI-HUM/2020/417-782
Location	Multi-country (Sub-Saharan Africa)
Total Budget	EU: 15,000,000 EUR Contribution BMZ: 1,250,000 EUR Total: 16,250,000 EUR
Donor	European Union (DCI) and BMZ
Type of contract	Multi-partner Contribution Agreement (MPCA)
Partners	The British Council, Enabel, Expertise France, GIZ, LuxDev (and AFD as a silent partner)
Implementing partners	The British Council, Enabel, Expertise France, GIZ, LuxDev
Signature date	01.09.2020
Initial duration of the implementation of the action	48 months
Implementation period of the action	01.09.2020 – 31.12.2025 (initially 31.08.2024 / 31.12.2023 for GIZ); no-cost extension requested and granted until 31.12.2025 for the British Council, Enabel, Expertise France and LuxDev.
Direct enablers (key stakeholders)	European level: • Private investors benefitting from the European Fund for Sustainable Development (EFSD) facilities of the EIP or other European investment windows • Relevant EU institutions Local level: • EU Delegations (EUD) • Local, national or sector training funds
Indirect enablers	European level: • International Financial Institutions (EIB, etc.) • Chambers of Commerce or Industry (in EU member countries) Local level: • Social partners consisting of workers through trade unions, employers and government representatives • National line ministries such as Labour, Education, Economic Development & Trade, SME that shape a country's business and investment climate • Business associations and chambers of commerce which represent the wider interests of the private sector, highly affecting the public-private-dialogue and are potential partners for skills and supplier development programmes • Other donor programmes related to investment and VET
Direct beneficiaries	• Local public and private Vocational Training Centres providing (continuous) vocational training • Short-term training providers • Future and current employees of local companies (of training carried out directly by the action) • Local enterprises receiving coaching services

Ultimate beneficiaries (target group)	• Participating local enterprises benefitting from investments • Employees that undergo continuous vocational training (CVT) • VTC apprentices and interns, in sectors related to investments • Job seekers, including disadvantaged groups etc.
Sector (CAD codes)	11330 (Vocational Training)
Overall Objective (OO)	Better meeting of human capital needs of value & supply chain development and investment programmes in selected countries in sub-Sahara Africa.
Specific Objective (SO)	Enhanced delivery of demand-driven skills development and VET catering for investment needs.
Outputs	1: Enhanced national public-private dialogue on employment-orientedskills development and VET 2: Enhanced capacity for demand-driven skills development and VET 3: Stimulated knowledge exchange on lessons learned from practical experience in delivering skills development and VET in investmentcontexts

Acknowledgements

COWATER wishes to express its sincere thanks for the commitment and availability of the staff of ENABEL and all implementing agencies, particularly for facilitating access to documentation, their availability for remote interviews, and the organisation of field visits with the country teams in Malawi, Senegal, the Republic of the Congo, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, and Kenya.

COWATER also extends its gratitude to all individuals interviewed throughout the evaluation mission. Without their availability and willingness to share their views, the evaluation could not have been carried out.

Evaluation team

The team is composed of two experts with a specific role and expertise:

- Ms. **Isabelle Recotillet:** Team Leader

Isabelle Recotillet is an associate researcher with the Institute of Labour Economics and Industrial Sociology (CNRS unit), an international and independent consultant. She holds a PhD in economics. She served as Head of the CÉREQ (Centre for Studies and Research on Qualifications) School-to-work transition division, a research Centre of the French Ministries of Education and Labour, from 2011 to 2014.
Isabelle Recotillet has a long experience in analysing school-to-work transition, especially analysing the relationship between education, training and employment, using qualitative surveys as well as conducting and using statistical surveys; she oversaw the development of longitudinal French surveys on transition from school-to-work. She has also developed solid competences in monitoring and evaluation of education and training systems, as well as monitoring and evaluation of employment programmes. She has contributed to several evaluation projects aimed at measuring the impact of TVET on employment trajectories and has contributed to evaluations in African countries. She has published in academic journals and has many reviews on the following topics: transition from school-to-work; impact of lifelong learning on careers; competences and employability; plus validation and recognition of non-formal learning outcomes, etc. She has also contributed to managing international conferences on TVET, employment and public policy evaluation.

- Mr. **Julien Calmand:** Senior Expert

Julien Calmand is a consultant, manager of the consultancy agency JL, Etudes et Recherches and an associate member of the Doshisha University in Kyoto, Japan. He holds a PhD in educational sciences and worked for some 15 years for the CEREQ (Centre for Studies and Research on Qualifications) in DEEVA (Division of Entry and Evolutions in the Vocational Area). His main areas of expertise relate to the analysis of the relationship between training and employment, including the transition process from initial training to the labour market. As a specialist in higher education, innovation, and research systems at national and international level, Calmand led a study on the appropriateness of competences acquired in education and training and those required on the job of most qualified young persons. Since February 2021 and as part of the development of his consulting activities, he has broadened his scope of work interventions to cover lifelong learning, adult education, and employment policies. He has recently worked for CEDEFOP (European Centre for the Development of Professional Training) and the Brodolini Foundation, in the field of vocational and adult education.

Two Cowater staff members also provided oversight and support for this evaluation report:

- Sofia Kliukina: Project Manager
- Mr. Alexandre Naud: Quality assurance expert

1 Background and context

OVERVIEW OF VET TOOLBOX 2

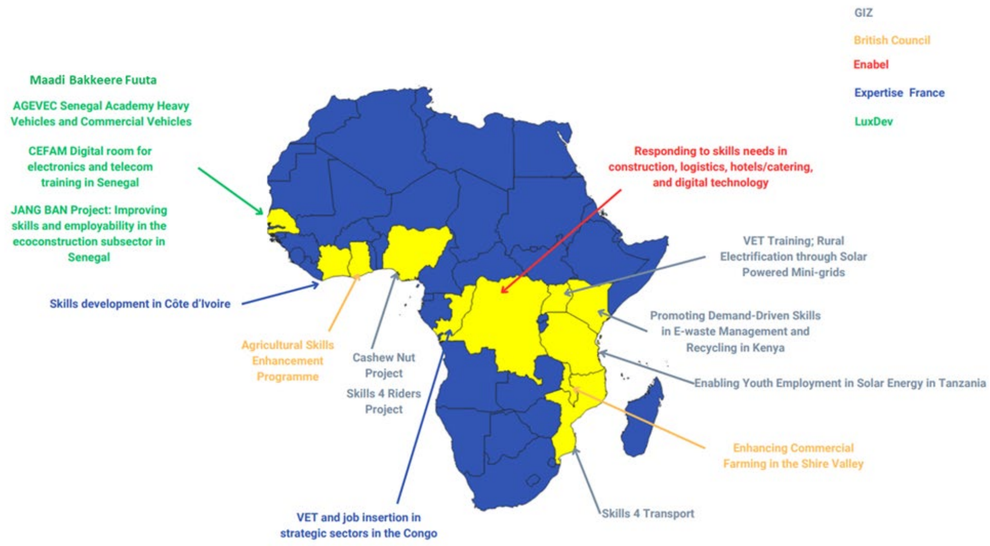
VET Toolbox 2 is a multi-partner project focused on vocational education and training (VET) and employment across Sub-Saharan Africa. Coordinated by Enabel, it brings together five development agencies – The British Council, Enabel, Expertise France, Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ) GmbH, and LuxDev – and operates in 11 countries in West, Central and East Africa.

The project aims to support more responsive and flexible skills systems, which are better aligned with labour market needs. By improving the match between training provision and economic opportunities, it helps to ensure that investments in the region translate into decent jobs and local benefits – thus contributing to sustainable social and economic development.

The project ran from 2021 to August 2023 for GIZ projects (in Kenya, Mozambique, Nigeria, Tanzania and Uganda), and continued until June 2025 for those led by the other agencies (Republic of the Congo, Côte d'Ivoire, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Ghana, Malawi, and Senegal). It is supported by a €16.25 million budget, with €15 million from the European Union and €1.25 million from the GIZ through the BMZ-funded regional project 'Employment and Skills for Development in Africa (E4D)'.

A total of 14 projects were implemented across countries with diverse sizes and economic contexts. According to the World Bank (2024), eight of the implementation countries – Republic of the Congo, Côte d'Ivoire, Ghana, Kenya, Nigeria, Senegal, and Tanzania— are classified as lower-middle-income economies; the remaining three – DRC, Malawi, Mozambique, and Uganda – are considered low-income countries.

Figure 1 – Overview of the countries and projects of VET Toolbox 2



The challenges related to employment and poverty are very significant in Sub-Saharan Africa. VET Toolbox 2 was therefore an experimental project, aimed at testing innovative mechanisms to enhance stakeholder cooperation, stimulate the creation of new training programmes, and respond to the skill needs of companies in order to support their growth, in different national contexts.

VET Toolbox 2 developed and implemented the opportunity-driven approach, which is summarised in the Theory of Change section. The direct beneficiaries of the VET Toolbox 2 include public and private vocational training centres, training providers offering short courses, as well as companies, company employees, and unemployed young people.

The years 2020 and 2021 were dedicated to identifying economic sectors, investment opportunities, and partner networks, while operational implementation began in 2022. A wide range of sectors was identified, all sharing the common feature of being linked to priority sectors under the European Investment Plan (EIP) strategy: sustainable agriculture, renewable energy, construction, transport and logistics, digital, plus hotel and catering.

Governance structure

The governance structure is tailored to a multi-partner initiative, in which each agency has responsibility for implementing the project in the countries under its mandate. Each country has been assigned to a lead agency:

- The British Council: Ghana, Malawi;
- Enabel: Democratic Republic of the Congo;
- Expertise France: Côte d'Ivoire, the Republic of the Congo;
- GIZ: Kenya, Mozambique, Nigeria, Tanzania, Uganda;
- LuxDev: Senegal.

According to the Document of Action, the following Committees were set up:

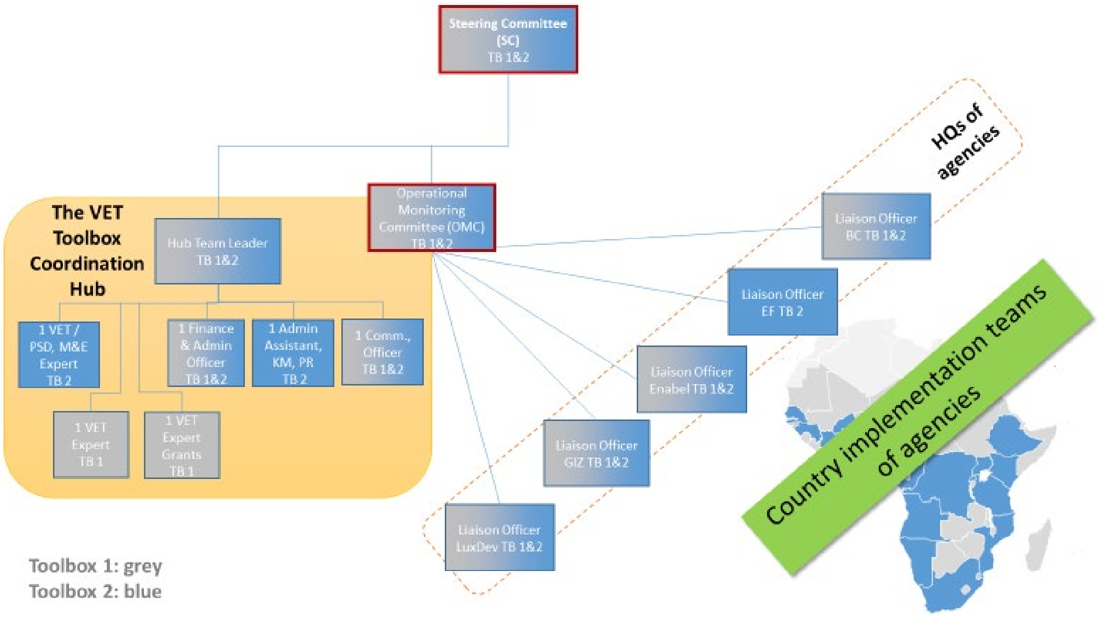
Steering Committee (SC): "*The Steering Committee for the Action will ensure the strategic overview of the intervention, oversee and validate the overall direction and policy of the project in all its components and ensure adequate coordination between all institutions involved. The SC will oversee the strategic direction of both actions*" (Document of Action). The SC is composed of representatives of DG INTPA (co-chair), BMZ and the delegated agencies (GIZ, LuxDev, the British Council, Expertise France, Enabel – co-chair). The DG INTPA will co-chair the SC together with the lead agency.

Operational Monitoring Committee (OMC): "*The OMC consists of representatives of implementing agencies (Liaison Officers, see below). The OMC will meet before each SC meeting and whenever deemed necessary to discuss operational issues and to prepare joint positions and/or proposals that will be addressed during the SC meeting*" (Document of Action).

Coordination Hub. The Hub oversees all the coordination of VET Toolbox 2. It supports the OMC by processing new interventions through eligibility checks and organising the assessment process, while also managing financial, administrative, and technical coordination tasks related to the VET Toolbox 2. Additionally, the Coordination Hub ensures consistency and compliance with the logical framework, monitors progress across various stages from opportunity mapping to learning, and provides overall monitoring and quality control. It also plays a central role in consolidating technical and financial reports, preparing Steering Committee and Partnership meetings, and maintaining communication with EU entities, to ensure alignment and responsiveness.

Liaison Officers. They act as points of contact between the Coordination Hub and the five implementing agencies, and they ensure administrative and financial links to their corresponding bilateral agencies. Additionally, they participate as members of the Operational Monitoring Committee (OMC), mobilise expertise within their agencies, and are responsible for delivering outputs according to the project's objectives. With a workload of approximately 25% to 50%, their role is essential for ensuring coherence between the Hub and the respective agencies, thus enhancing collaboration, efficiency, and information exchange across the partnership.

Figure 2 – Governance structure



Source: Document of Action, page 31.

Coordination with local stakeholders at country level

In each project country, Memorandums of Understanding (MoUs) and commitment agreements were signed with the main partners. These partners could include local or national authorities, chambers of commerce, or large companies.

Theory of Change from the Document of Action

Key assumptions of VET Toolbox 2

The VET Toolbox 2 project is built upon **key assumptions** about the structural, organisational, and practical limitations that are typically found in labour markets in Sub-Saharan African countries, as presented in the Document of Action. Understanding these underlying assumptions is essential, to ensure the intervention's relevance and effectiveness.

Lack of adequate information systems. Labour markets in the targeted countries generally have a lack of comprehensive, reliable, and up-to-date information on labour market needs, skills gaps, and employment opportunities. Employers, training providers, and policy-makers operate in silos, with minimal exchange of data or feedback mechanisms to guide training provision or policy design. This absence of robust data hampers efforts to align vocational training programmes with actual market needs, resulting in inadequate training provision and outdated curricula. In the labour market, only a limited number of productive entities are able to anticipate their employment and skills needs. Forward-looking or prospective approaches remain underdeveloped in certain countries.

Fragmented VET systems and poor integration. Training provision across many countries remains fragmented, with numerous uncoordinated providers operating without standardisation or clear guidance. Private sector and training institutions rarely collaborate, resulting in a mismatch between curricula and real-world skills requirements. National VET systems are often disconnected from local or regional needs, making it difficult to implement consistent policies or respond to specific market demands.

Insufficient exchange mechanisms between stakeholders. There is often no structured dialogue or systematic format of exchange between employers, training providers, and the public sector.

Employers are frequently not involved in the design or delivery of training programmes, which contributes to a mismatch between the skills taught and those required by industries. The lack of formal platforms for stakeholder interactions (such as sector skills councils or public-private forums) limits opportunities for collaborative problem-solving.

Low training capacity and outdated VET models. Vocational training institutions are often under-resourced and lack access to updated curricula, modern equipment, or trained instructors. Training methods are frequently outdated, focusing on theoretical knowledge rather than practical, market-relevant skills. Many training providers are unable to adapt their programmes to meet emerging needs, especially when faced with rapid technological advancements or shifts in investment priorities. Local companies also struggle to keep up, lacking the knowledge or resources to integrate their business models with international standards or to participate in global value chains.

Lack of occupational standards and certification systems. In many countries, occupational standards are low and not aligned with international benchmarks, which diminishes the employability of trainees. Certification processes are often inadequate, lacking credibility in the eyes of employers, especially foreign investors. This absence of recognised certification contributes to high retraining costs for companies and reduces the potential for local talent to be integrated into high-value sectors.

Insufficient funding mechanisms for skills development. Public funding for VET systems is often insufficient and poorly managed, with limited resources allocated to vocational training compared to general education. Private sector investment in training is also minimal, largely due to uncertainties regarding returns on investment and the absence of collaborative frameworks that would reduce risks.

High pressure and poor adaptability to large investments. External investments, particularly those involving foreign direct investment (FDI) or large-scale infrastructure projects, place immense pressure on local systems. Governments and local companies must adapt quickly to capitalise on opportunities offered by these investments – but they lack the mechanisms to do so effectively. VET institutions often do not have the capacity to rapidly scale up or adjust their training offers to meet the requirements of new industries or technologies.

Intervention areas – logical frameworks of the VET Toolbox 2 intervention

The overall intervention strategy of the VET Toolbox 2 project was designed to systematically address the identified challenges, by building on the key assumptions underlying the structure and functioning of labour markets and VET systems in Sub-Saharan Africa. Through a coherent and integrated approach, **the intervention seeks to align VET provision with concrete investment opportunities, to strengthen collaboration among stakeholders, and to foster sustainable solutions that can be scaled and replicated across diverse contexts**.

The VET Toolbox 2 project is structured around **three distinct interconnected intervention areas**, each designed to address specific gaps identified within Sub-Saharan African labour markets and VET systems (Document of Action).

The first result area focuses on enhancing dialogue between employers, government agencies, and training providers. Its main objective is to strengthen collaboration among these stakeholders, so as to improve the alignment of skills development with labour market needs. By establishing institutional forums such as roundtables, sector skills councils, and public-private partnerships, this intervention seeks to increase cooperation and create employment partnerships capable of addressing skills mismatches effectively.

The second result area addresses capacity building and training for demand-driven and inclusive skills development. This intervention aims to enhance the capacity of training providers and local companies to deliver skills that meet current and future labour market demands. Collaboration between vocational training institutes, employers, local businesses, and international investors is essential to ensure the relevance of curricula and training programmes. Co-development of training materials, mentorship programmes, and practical training opportunities are all strategies employed under this intervention. Consequently, improved training quality and greater employability are expected to result from stronger connections between VET and employment sectors.

The third result area emphasises the importance of lessons learnt and knowledge sharing, so as to promote evidence-based policy reform. This intervention seeks to use practical experiences gathered during implementation to inform policy dialogue and improve VET systems. The process involves connecting policy-makers, employers, training providers, and researchers through workshops, conferences, and publications. Using both digital and non-digital platforms ensures that knowledge exchange reaches all relevant stakeholders. Evidence-based policies, improved governance frameworks, and enhanced cooperation among stakeholders are anticipated outcomes.

Through these interconnected interventions, the VET Toolbox 2 project aspires to develop a coherent and sustainable framework for skills development across the targeted countries. The collaborative nature of these interventions is expected to foster partnerships, which will not only improve training systems but also enhance economic opportunities and social inclusion.

2 Objectives and methodology

2.1. OBJECTIVE, EXPECTED RESULTS, SCOPE, AND FINAL USERS OF THE EVALUATION

Objective and expected results

This evaluation is the final external evaluation of VET Toolbox 2. The objective assigned to this evaluation is clearly defined in the Terms of Reference (p.8):

a. Assess to what extent VET Toolbox 2 has contributed to the 3 defined objectives:
- "better meeting of human capital needs of value & supply chain development and investment programmes in selected countries in sub-Sahara Africa" (OO).
- "enhance delivery of demand-driven skills development and VET catering for investment needs" (SO).
- and achieved the targets under the three result/intervention areas, applying the defined principles of service delivery and key ingredients as defined in the Document of Action.

b. Assess the added value of the piloted opportunity-driven approach (including its diverse methodologies).
c. Assess the added value of the implementation making use of the consortium set-up.

Consequently, the evaluation will provide general conclusions regarding VET Toolbox 2, which will serve as a basis for formulating recommendations and lessons learnt. The Terms of Reference specify a particular focus on the following two aspects (p.8):
- The opportunity-driven approach, highlighting any strengths and weaknesses in the preparation, design and implementation, which have had an effect on performance, results and impact/sustainability.
- The VET Toolbox 2 set-up and design, providing useful insights for future programmes, structures and facilities.

Scope of the evaluation

The evaluation covers all 14 VET Toolbox 2 projects implemented between 2020 and 2023 (five countries) or 2024 (six countries) by the five agencies across 11 Sub-Saharan African countries. It is a cross-cutting evaluation aimed at identifying commonalities and differences between the projects in the various countries, as well as providing an analysis of the projects' governance mechanisms. This evaluation does not constitute an individual assessment of each project implemented at country level.

End-users of the evaluation

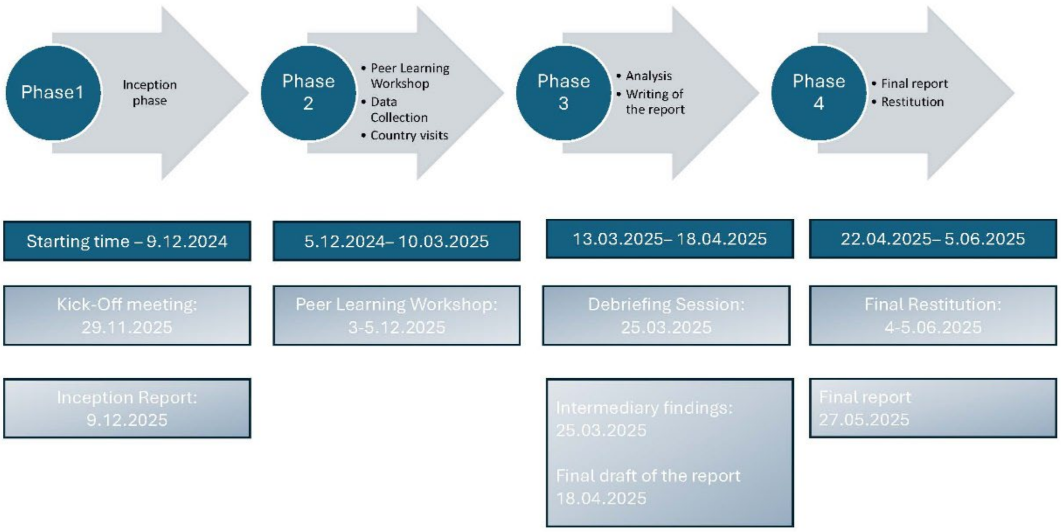
The VET Toolbox 2 project 2 evaluation is aimed at the decision-makers implementing the programme, mainly the European Union (DG INTPA), Enabel, the consortium leader, and the five agencies involved in implementing the interventions: the British Council, Enabel, Expertise France, GIZ, and LuxDev. This evaluation report provides information for stakeholders in employment and training (including local stakeholders), as well as for development actors. It contributes to the production of knowledge on the performance of an intervention in the field of vocational training and employment in Sub-Saharan Africa.

METHODOLOGY

This final evaluation is based on a qualitative methodology combining document analysis, interviews, and field visits. It was carried out in four phases (Figure 1), allowing for the following:

- Phase 1: Defining the evaluation framework and the methodology for data collection.
- Phase 2: Collecting the necessary information for the evaluation.
- Phase 3: Analysing and synthesising the materials gathered for the drafting of the evaluation report.
- Phase 4: Finalising the report based on comments and inputs received.

Figure 3 – Timeline of the evaluation



Interviews and country visits

During the inception phase, approximately 20 interviews were initially planned with representatives from DG INTPA, the Steering Committee (SC), the Operational Monitoring Committee (OMC), the Hub, and country teams. Ultimately, 27 individuals were interviewed (Table 1), using guides structured around the evaluation questions and validated in advance with the Evaluation Unit of the Evaluation Reference Group. Although these interviews were originally scheduled to take place before the country visits, scheduling constraints led to their implementation between early December 2024 and the end of February 2025.

Table 1 – Interviews

Stakeholders	Number of people interviewed
DG INTPA	2
VET Toolbox 2 Steering Committee	5
HUB	4

Liaison Officers	5
VET Toolbox 2 Country Managers	11
Total	**27**

The evaluation team, thanks to its participation in the **Peer Learning Workshop** organised by the HUB from 3 to 5 December 2024, was able to establish a direct first contact with the agencies and country teams. This helped the team to gain an early understanding of the main results, success factors, and initial avenues for recommendations – ahead of the final reports to be submitted by all teams in the second quarter of 2025.

Five country visits were organised in coordination with the Liaison Officers of each agency and the respective country managers (Table 2). Initially, the selected countries were Malawi, Mozambique, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, the Republic of the Congo, and Senegal. However, due to the security situation in Mozambique in December 2024 and the fact that the GIZ team was working remotely, it was agreed with the Internal Evaluation Unit and the HUB should select an alternative country covered by GIZ. The main challenge was to identify a team able to host the evaluation mission, given that VET Toolbox 2 had ended more than a year earlier. The country visit to Mozambique was replaced with a visit to Kenya. Lastly, the planned visit to the DRC could not take place as scheduled, also due to security concerns. The country visit to the DRC was therefore carried out remotely. Interviewees travelled to the Enabel offices in Lubumbashi, to ensure a reliable internet connection and to enable the remote interviews to take place under proper conditions.

Table 2 – Country visits

Country planned	Country visited	Time
Malawi	Malawi	20-24 January 2025
Senegal	Senegal	26-30 January 2025
Republic of the Congo	Republic of the Congo	3-7 February 2025
Mozambique	Kenya	10-14 March 2025
DRC	DRC (remote interviews only)	24-28 February 2025

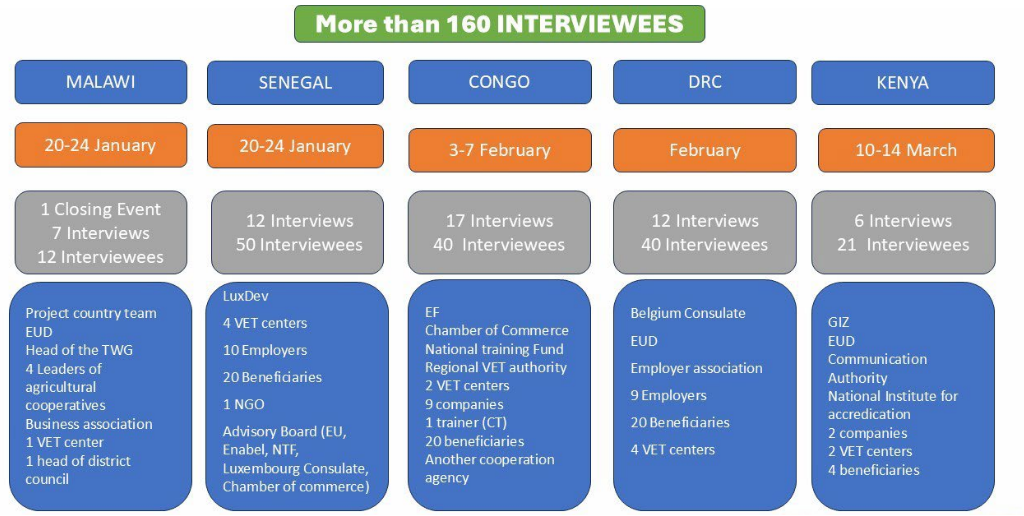
In total, the evaluation team **interviewed over 160 individuals** through one-on-one, paired, or group interviews (Figure 2). The interviews were conducted either online or on-site during the country visits.

Each field visit made it possible to consult key stakeholders beyond the agency representatives, including:

- Institutional actors;
- EU Delegation staff;
- Members of the public-private dialogue platforms (PPDs);
- Business leaders;
- Training centre directors, pedagogical coordinators, trainers, and learners;
- Young graduates.

All interviews were recorded and fully transcribed – with the consent of the interviewees – contributing to a rich and high-quality body of data for analysis. Confidentiality rules were strictly respected, and the anonymity of participants has been preserved throughout the analysis presented in this report.

Figure 4 – Overview of the country visits interviews



Analysis

The analysis is based on:

- The evaluation framework;
- The document review;
- The interviews;
- The Peer Learning Workshop 4-6 December 2024 in Brussels;
- Exchanges with the HUB and the Internal Evaluation Unit.

Limitation

A key limitation of this evaluation lies in the unavailability of the final capitalisation reports for those projects whose implementation continued in 2025. As a result, the evaluation team was not able to access the findings of the tracer studies. This limited the contribution of the evaluation to the analysis of effectiveness and impact.

The evaluation faced the challenge that some projects had been completed over a year earlier, by the time the evaluation began, while others had not yet concluded by the date the evaluation report was submitted. This resulted in varying levels of information available across the projects. However, the teams whose projects had been completed over a year earlier were able to make themselves available as needed: this allowed the evaluation team to carry out its work under favourable conditions.

While the value of an external and neutral analysis is unquestionable, the process for formulating recommendations could be designed in a more collaborative manner within the Terms of Reference. As it stands, this process is limited to a single round of written feedback. The final debriefing workshop offers little scope for revising the conclusions and recommendations.

3 Analysis and Findings

3.1 PERFORMANCE ANALYSIS

RELEVANCE	A	B	C	D

A. The VET Toolbox 2 project has proven to be highly relevant in addressing the key challenges facing vocational education and training (VET) systems in Sub-Saharan Africa, including skills mismatches, youth unemployment, and the limited involvement of the private sector. The introduction of the 'opportunity-driven' approach allowed for training to be more responsive to real economic opportunities identified at company and value-chain levels. The project introduced an innovative method of co-designing training programmes with private sector actors, while maintaining close collaboration with public authorities and national VET systems. This dual alignment helped reposition the private sector as a key player within the VET ecosystem.

Relevance was further reinforced by the strategic selection of sectors – such as renewable energy, sustainable agriculture, logistics, and digital technologies – aligned with national policies, development priorities and the European investment agenda. The project was particularly timely in contexts where existing public training systems were ill-equipped to meet companies' evolving needs.

VET Toolbox 2 also enhanced access to skills development for young people without formal education or qualifications, helping to improve their employability. However, the project was less successful in effectively addressing the specific needs of women, due to structural barriers and limited adaptation of training modalities to their circumstances.

Finally, while the project was relevant in its objectives and targeting, the lack of a longer-term training pathway for beneficiaries limited its transformative potential.

EFFECTIVENESS	A	B	C	D

B. VET Toolbox 2 achieved most of its objectives, particularly in establishing public-private dialogue (PPD) platforms and developing new training modules. These platforms facilitated the co-construction of curricula with businesses, resulting in better alignment between training provision and labour market needs. The strong interest shown in short-term, work-based training – including end-of-course internships – and its focus on emerging sectors contributed to the project's momentum.

However, the project's effectiveness was hindered by several factors: slow accreditation processes, limited institutional ownership, and short implementation timelines. Moreover, the 'opportunity-driven' approach was poorly understood by some stakeholders, leading to delays in identifying economic opportunities. The difficulty in identifying investments in the targeted sectors ultimately led to an adaptation of the Theory of Change and made it more challenging to achieve the employment-related objective.

While results varied across countries, overall targets for the number of individuals trained, centres supported, and co-developed training content were largely achieved. The involvement of the informal sector contributed significantly to the achievement of results in several cases.

Nonetheless, the inclusion of young women fell short of expectations. This was mainly due to the male-dominated nature of the targeted sectors, limited outreach, and gender-related barriers that were not sufficiently taken into account.

COHERENCE	A	B	C	D

A. The VET Toolbox 2 project demonstrated a strong degree of coherence, at both internal and external levels. Internally, the project benefited from the strategic alignment of all consortium agencies, which share a common shift towards private sector engagement and inclusive VET systems. This enabled a harmonised approach, while respecting each agency's operational specificities.

Externally, the interventions were aligned with national policies and strategies in the targeted countries, including VET reforms, employment strategies, and environmental regulations. The project was also consistent with broader European frameworks such as the EU External Investment Plan and the Global Gateway, thus supporting investment, skills development, and public-private cooperation.

Moreover, in several countries, VET Toolbox 2 built on or complemented previous or ongoing projects (e.g. EDUKAT in DRC, E4D in East Africa, and SVTP in Malawi), enhancing policy and operational synergies. However, coherence was weaker in contexts where implementing agencies lacked an established presence or prior stakeholder networks.

Overall, the intervention added value by reinforcing coordination across actors and avoiding duplication, thereby enhancing its potential for systemic impact.

SUSTAINABILITY	A	B	C	D

C. Sustainability emerged as a core challenge for VET Toolbox 2. While the project introduced relevant mechanisms – such as public-private platforms and co-developed training programmes – many of these remained heavily dependent on external funding and coordination. Short project cycles further limited institutional anchoring and national ownership.

Sustainability prospects were stronger where interventions aligned with ongoing national reforms or long-term investment initiatives. Capacity building and equipment provision in some training centres contributed to more durable improvements. However, the likelihood of long-term continuation was reduced by the lack of structured exit strategies and limited integration into national VET systems.

A key lever for sustainability, as identified in the evaluation, is the certification of training programmes. Where efforts were made to align new curricula with national qualification frameworks and to involve certification authorities from the outset, the chances of institutional uptake and long-term recognition were significantly improved. Certification enhances the credibility of training outcomes and facilitates the inclusion of programmes within public VET systems.

EFFICIENCY	A	B	C	D

B. VET Toolbox 2 delivered a substantial volume of outputs within a short timeframe, leveraging existing agency networks and shared tools. However, efficiency was affected by delays in procurement, differing procedures, and a country-based allocation of responsibilities that limited cross-agency synergies based on technical expertise. More coordinated planning, and earlier alignment of operational processes, could have enhanced overall efficiency.

IMPACT	A	B	C	D

C. The overall impact of VET Toolbox 2 was moderate. The project strengthened public-private collaboration and supported the creation of new training programmes and certifications in priority sectors, which may contribute to future improvements in VET systems. In some countries, these developments were acknowledged by institutional actors as valuable inputs for reform. However, the intended impact on employability – particularly for young people – remained limited, due to structural labour market constraints and a lack of real job opportunities.

3.2 IN-DEPTH ANALYSIS

3.2.1 RELEVANCE

Summary: VET Toolbox 2 was highly relevant in tackling key challenges in Sub-Saharan Africa's VET systems, such as skills mismatches, youth unemployment, and weak private sector involvement. Its 'opportunity-driven' approach fostered more demand-responsive training, co-designed with private sector actors and aligned with national systems. Targeting priority sectors, like renewable energy and digital technologies, further enhanced its relevance. The project improved access to training for unqualified youth, but was less effective in addressing women's specific needs. However, the absence of long-term training pathways limited its lasting impact.

Overall, the VET Toolbox 2 project has proven to be relevant across multiple strategic dimensions, the details of which are presented below.

Context and challenges

The VET Toolbox 2 project was highly relevant to the context and challenges of vocational education and training (VET) in Sub-Saharan Africa. It addressed pressing issues such as skills mismatches, youth unemployment, and weak links between training providers and the private sector. The opportunity-driven approach – though not always fully understood at first – was conceptually well aligned with the realities of emerging sectors and the need to connect training to real economic opportunities.

Alignment with the European Union's Investment Strategy in Africa

The VET Toolbox 2 project is successfully aligned with the European Union's investment strategy in Africa. In particular, the decision to support the external investment plan EIP Africa and to strengthen the private sector contributes to the objective of job creation on the continent – a foundational pillar of economic growth and a key driver of development.[1]

The Africa-Europe Alliance for Sustainable Investment and Jobs

Launched by the European Commission in September 2018, this alliance aimed to create 10 million jobs in Africa within five years and to provide 750,000 Africans with access to vocational education and training (VET). The Alliance has a comprehensive approach to labour market challenges, by simultaneously **stimulating demand** – **through increased private investment, improved business and trade environments – and strengthening supply, via human resource development, education, and training**.

Job & Growth Compacts

[1] The European Union's External Investment Plan (EIP) aimed to boost private investment in Africa and the EU's neighbouring regions. With an initial contribution of €4.1 billion, the EIP mobilised up to €44 billion to support projects in sustainable infrastructure, small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), and essential social services. In 2021, the EU launched the Global Gateway initiative, which succeeded the EIP, with a commitment of €300 billion by 2027. Africa is a key priority of this strategy, with approximately €150 billion earmarked to support the green and digital transitions, sustainable growth, health, education, and training.

Prepared by EU Delegations, these provide country-specific analyses of job creation and value chain potential, along with strategies aligned with the Alliance's four strategic pillars. This approach was further reinforced in the 2020 Joint Communication 'Towards a Comprehensive Strategy with Africa', which emphasised sustainable trade and investment, economic integration, and improved access to quality education and skills. Finally, the EU External Investment Plan (EIP), launched in 2017, was a cornerstone of the Alliance. It aimed to leverage private investment through guarantees and blended finance. Between 2017 and 2020, €4.5 billion in EU funds were expected to mobilise up to €44 billion in private sector investments. The EIP prioritised five key areas, with which the targeted sectors of the VET Toolbox 2 projects are perfectly aligned:

- Sustainable energy and connectivity
- MSME (Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises) financing
- Sustainable agriculture and agro-industry
- Sustainable cities
- Digitalisation for development

EIP

The External Investment Plan (EIP), launched in 2017, marked a shift in the European Union's external action by mobilising investment in partner countries through guarantees, technical assistance, and policy dialogue. With a strong focus on development, the EIP aimed to stimulate private sector engagement, support sustainable infrastructure, and strengthen human capital – particularly through initiatives such as VET Toolbox 2. Although the Global Gateway was launched only in 2021, after the start of VET Toolbox 2, it is a natural continuation and scaling-up of the EIP's approach.[2]

The VET Toolbox 2 project demonstrates **strong alignment with ongoing reform processes and development strategies in the targeted countries and sectors** (see Table 1). The interventions were designed to build on national priorities and support the implementation of existing strategic frameworks.

Table 3 – National reforms, national plans and national strategies in each of the targeted countries

Country	
The Republic of Congo Sectors: forestry, industrial maintenance, eco-tourism	• National Development Plan (NDP) 2022–2026: "For a strong, diversified, and resilient economy, fostering inclusive growth and irreversible sustainable development". • Creation of the Congolese Employment Agency (ACPE) under Law No. 7-2019 of 9 April 2019, and the National Fund for Employability and Apprenticeship Support under Law No. 8-2019. • As part of the wood valorisation strategy, CEMAC countries have committed to ending the export of raw timber as of 2023. Consequently, it has become imperative for countries to prepare and develop the necessary skills. • Development of a roadmap for the promotion of eco-tourism, June 2021.
Côte d'Ivoire Sectors: construction, digital	• Development of the diagnostic and strategic orientation document entitled 'Reform of Technical Education and Vocational Training', prepared by the Ministry of Technical Education and Vocational Training (METFPA) for the period 2016–2025. • Adoption of the Law on Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) in Côte d'Ivoire. This draft law sets out the general principles for a comprehensive reform of the national system of Technical and Vocational Education and Training and Apprenticeship (TVETA).
Democratic Republic of the Congo	• National Employment and Vocational Training Policy.

[2] The Global Gateway builds on the same financial architecture – guarantees and blended finance – but expands the ambition and geostrategic scope of EU external investment. It aims to mobilise up to €300 billion by 2027 to support smart, clean and secure links in digital, energy, transport, health, education, and research. More explicitly aligned with the EU's geopolitical priorities, it positions the EU as a values-based alternative to China's Belt and Road Initiative, while reinforcing systemic transformation, regional integration and strategic autonomy in partner countries.

Sectors: construction and public works, transport and logistic, digital, hotel and catering	• Ministerial Decree establishing the operating procedures of the National Commission for the Employment of Foreign Nationals across all sectors without restriction. • Ministerial Decree setting the threshold for migrant and expatriate personnel. • Education and Training Sector Strategy 2016–2025. • Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) Specific Strategy 2016–2025. • Creation of Science and Technology Parks (STPs). • National Strategic Development Plan for the period 2019–2023, including agribusiness development and intensive industrialisation.
Ghana Sector: agriculture	• Ghana's Medium-Term National Development Policy Framework (2022-2025) concerns the promotion of agriculture as a viable business among the youth, with the intention to design and implement special programmes to build the capacity of the youth in agriculture. • Establishment of Sector Skills Bodies (SSB), of which the Agriculture Sector Skills Body was one of the first to be established in 2020. • Agriculture Sector Skills Strategy for Ghana.
Kenya Sector: e-waste	• TVET reform policies (the TVET Sector has been in a continuous process of reform since 2013 and the government stimulates more access to TVET, also with the aim to increase (self) employability). • Vision 2030: Kenya's Big 4 Agenda, targeting food security, health care, affordable housing, manufacturing. • National environment policy. • The Green Economy Strategy.
Nigeria Sectors: agriculture (cashew), transport	• Formation of a National Council on Skills involving key ministries and private sector organisations. • Development and introduction of a new Nigerian Skills Qualification Framework (NSQF). • Introduction of new Nigerian Skills Qualifications for industries built using industry-based National Occupational Standards. • Formalising the industry and other stakeholder involvement in VET through a range of mechanisms, in particular the introduction of Sector Skills Councils.
Malawi Sector: agriculture	• Malawi's Vision 2063, developed in 2020, is the over-arching plan which spells out the country's long-term development goals. One of the 3 pillars is agricultural commercialisation. • The National Job Creation Strategy (2022). • The 2013 TEVET policy under review. • The Technical, Entrepreneurial and Vocational and Educational Training Authority (TEVETA) Strategic Plan (2018-2023) intends to revitalise, modernise and harmonise the TEVET system, including in the agriculture area.
Mozambique Sector: transport and logistics	• Law of Professional Education. • Creation of the National Authority for Professional Education (ANEP) that aims at rolling out and regulating the National Framework of Professional Qualifications (NFPQ), comprising professional qualifications with competency-based curricula. • Adoption of a Labour Market Observatory. • Creation of a National Fund for Professional Education, which is a government-run training fund whereby VET institutes and companies can have access to the funds; companies are also expected to contribute to it through a tax levy.
Senegal	• Adjusted and Accelerated Priority Action Plan (PAP 2A), the second phase of the Emerging Senegal Plan (PSE), which serves as the reference framework for Senegal's economic and social policy (2019–2023) • Emergency Programme for Youth Employment and Socio-Economic Integration (2021–2023). • Three-Year Reform Programme for the Business Environment and Competitiveness, currently in its third phase (PREAC III), with support from the G20 under the Compact with Africa initiative.

Tanzania Sector: solar energy	• The Five-Year Development Plan 2021/22-2025/261 (FYDP III): strategy for economic, human capacity, and skills development. • Development Plan (ESDP) 2016/17 - 20/21. • National Skills Development Strategy (NSDS) 2016/17 - 2025/26.
Uganda Sector: solar energy	• National Development Plan III (NDP III) 2020/21-2024/25. • TVET Policy 2019: TVET Council, TVET national framework. • National Energy Policy 2021.

Source: Country Actions Plans.

EQ 3: To what extent did the opportunity-driven approach meet the needs and priorities of the beneficiaries, especially those of the private sector and young people and women?

The VET Toolbox 2 project stands out for its opportunity-driven approach to reducing skills mismatch. Instead of improving VET to align with labour market skills needs, VET Toolbox 2 projects began by identifying job opportunities shaped by investments and market trends, then developed tailor-made training programmes to meet the needs of the companies. The project fully met the expectations of the private sector in the targeted sectors and of VTIs

VET Toolbox 2 fostered a more balanced and functional relationship between employers and training institutions. This was especially relevant in contexts where mechanisms for public-private dialogue in training are weak or absent.

The project also addressed a persistent issue in many VET systems: the misalignment between training certifications and the actual competencies required in the workplace. This underlines the strategic importance of the project's emphasis on employer involvement in training design and certification processes.

One of the most notable features of VET Toolbox 2 was the **direct involvement of private sector actors** in both the selection of training areas and the design of curricula. This shift marked a deliberate departure from the traditionally state-led VET systems found in the targeted countries – systems that are often notable for inefficiencies and limited responsiveness to labour market dynamics.

The project ensured continuity and legitimacy, by working with national and local VET authorities. This approach allowed for greater alignment between training supply and market demand, while preserving institutional ownership.

The relevance of this approach can be seen in the effort to reposition private sector actors within a VET ecosystem that is traditionally structured and dominated by state-led mechanisms, which often suffer from inefficiencies and dysfunctions across the project's target countries.

The analysis highlighted the key role of certification, as a guarantee of the competencies required to perform the occupations for which individuals are being trained. Employers often report that graduates lack the skills required for available jobs. Competence certification, when co-designed with employers, is one way to address this issue. For example, as noted in the evaluation of the performance of Enabel's TVET-Employment strategy, we wrote: "*The recurring complaint from employers regarding the inability of TVET graduates to fully and effectively perform the occupations for which they were trained will only disappear once the alignment between certifications and qualifications has been achieved. Clearly, this effort will require time and, in particular, substantial social engineering – as it will necessitate the active involvement of all stakeholders, first and foremost employers. However, it is equally clear that Enabel's partner countries cannot afford to bypass such an alignment process*" (SOGEROM, 2022[3]).

[3] SOGEROM, La certification pour un surcroît d'employabilité: reconnaître les acquis d'apprentissage de l'ETFP.

Regardless of the diversity of economic and institutional contexts in which it was implemented, the project was built around **a common methodology**. This approach aimed to create sustainable mechanisms for dialogue between public and private actors in the fields of training and employment. The multi-stakeholder model proved particularly significant, as it allowed interventions to be rooted in local realities while benefiting from a shared strategic vision.

In all participating countries, project teams engaged in participatory processes with private sector stakeholders to identify companies, value chains, and skill needs: this **ensured that training curricula were aligned with global employer expectations**. VET Toolbox 2 has demonstrated its capacity to respond adequately to the needs of the various stakeholders engaged in the interventions. Employers reported that the project enabled them to address short-term recruitment challenges, by facilitating access to a pool of locally available, work-ready candidates. The analysis shows that **companies' commitment to hire young people remained relatively modest**: while some – particularly in the DRC and Senegal – initially considered permanent recruitment, most ultimately offered only internships, which are often used as a short-term response to peaks in activity.

The development of new training programmes helped address emerging skills needs and supported the integration of new occupational profiles within companies' structures. Another way for companies to meet their skills needs was by upskilling their own employees or supporting the capacity development of informal enterprises within their supply chains or networks.

In the informal sector, the example of Senegal illustrates how VET Toolbox 2 contributed to the training of master artisans in the construction industry, equipping them with the competencies required to apply sustainable production techniques throughout the value chain. A comparable example can be drawn from the Kenya e-waste project, in which self-employed individuals in the informal sector were trained to improve e-waste collection in rural areas.

VET Toolbox 2 contributed to **strengthening the capacities of vocational training centres** by supporting the development of new, labour market-relevant training curricula. To support this, both public and private training institutions were mobilised – selected for their ability to respond to the project's objectives. These institutions benefited from dedicated funding, which enabled the implementation of activities and contributed to their institutional development. This support also included the provision of equipment for both trainers and learners.

A central focus of the intervention was the upskilling of trainers. The project enhanced their knowledge and technical expertise, in line with the newly identified needs of labour market actors. Several approaches were used to achieve this: in countries such as Senegal and Kenya, capacity building involved field visits to Europe, while in others, such as the Republic of Congo, international trainers were brought in to deliver training locally. In Malawi, a mentoring partnership with Gower College (UK) helped to upskill trainers. In Kenya, the capacity building approach included also capacity building measures, delivered by international and national experts.

Institutional strengthening also encompassed improvements to the physical and pedagogical environments of training centres. This included the acquisition of new machines, training equipment for learners, and modern teaching tools – all of which contributed to a more effective learning experience.

VET Toolbox 2 addresses the skills mismatch challenge in SSA

The project's overarching objective was to reduce the persistent mismatch between training and employment. This was done by identifying workforce needs within productive units[4], developing tailored curricula to address immediate skills gaps, and fostering the acquisition of new competencies aligned with evolving job roles and organisational contexts.

[4] "Productive units should be intended as "companies"

One of VET Toolbox 2's key strengths lay in its ambition to foster greater coordination and connection among vocational training actors – an area where significant shortcomings persist across most countries targeted by the project. Despite the presence of proactive policies promoted over many years by development agencies, the links between the productive sector and vocational training remain underdeveloped. Platforms for dialogue and collaboration between the two spheres are often weakly structured or entirely absent. This gap was consistently highlighted by stakeholders, both by productive units seeking to strengthen their ties with VTIs (Vocational Training Institutes), and by training providers aiming to develop programmes that better reflect enterprise needs.

Lastly, under its opportunity-driven approach, VET Toolbox 2 seeks to **support economic sectors and value chains with high employment potential**. As outlined earlier, this aims to create direct job opportunities for vocational training graduates. At the same time, the approach seeks to foster emerging sectors – those experiencing recruitment pressures, aligned with the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), and offering strong investment potential.

The pertinence of the VET Toolbox 2 project was further underscored by its focus on emerging sectors, selected for their anticipated contribution to future employment generation. It also considered environmental concerns (e.g. sustainable construction, renewable energy, waste recycling). This strategic choice marked a departure from the more conventional focus on traditional sectors – such as crafts and personal services – where vocational training, both public and private, is already highly developed. The projects enabled unqualified youth to acquire skills recognised by companies or certified nationally (when an accreditation process was completed and a national qualification framework existed), and helped employees gain new skills necessary to support the growth of the companies in which they are employed.

VET Toolbox 2 provides a relevant and timely response to the needs of young people

Finally, VET Toolbox 2 was designed to address the significant barriers faced by young people in accessing the labour market and employment – widely recognised as a major challenge in the countries where the interventions were implemented. The project aimed to enhance employment opportunities for vocational training graduates, with a specific focus on the most vulnerable groups.

The training programmes were designed to be accessible to young people without specific entry requirements, thereby enabling those who had not completed secondary education to obtain a recognised certification.

Although designing new training actions – most of which did not previously exist or were outdated – was clearly relevant, these actions were not conceived within a broader training pathway. Interviews with beneficiaries revealed a lack of clarity on how they could acquire further skills. This suggested that VET Toolbox 2 mainly provided an entry point to training, but without integrating this into a longer-term learning trajectory for the beneficiaries.

In summary, while VET Toolbox 2 demonstrated strong contextual relevance and was responsive to private sector needs, it could have paid more attention to the diversity of beneficiary profiles – such as youth without prior training, women facing structural barriers, and small informal businesses.

3.2.2 EFFECTIVENESS

Summary: VET Toolbox 2 achieved several of its objectives, particularly in establishing public-private dialogue (PPD) platforms and developing new training modules. These platforms facilitated the co-construction of curricula with businesses, resulting in better alignment between training provision and labour market needs. The strong interest in short-term, work-based training – including end-of-course internships – and its focus on emerging sectors both contributed to the project's momentum.

However, the project's effectiveness was hindered by several factors: slow accreditation processes, limited institutional ownership, and short implementation timelines. Moreover, the 'opportunity-driven' approach was poorly understood by some stakeholders, leading to delays in identifying economic opportunities. The difficulty in identifying investments in the targeted sectors ultimately led to an adaptation of the Theory of Change and made it more challenging to achieve the employment-related objective.

While results varied across countries, overall targets for the number of individuals trained, centres supported, and co-developed training content were largely achieved. The involvement of the informal sector contributed significantly to the achievement of results, in several cases.

Nonetheless, the number of young women included fell short of expectations. This was mainly due to the male-dominated nature of the targeted sectors, limited outreach, and gender-related barriers that were not sufficiently taken into account.

This section on effectiveness assesses the extent to which the VET Toolbox 2 project has achieved its intended objectives and delivered measurable results across the different intervention countries. It considers both quantitative and qualitative evidence, while analysing key internal and external factors that have supported or constrained effectiveness. The analysis also explores how the project's design and implementation influenced outcomes for the various stakeholders and target groups.

EQ 1: To what extent did VET Toolbox 2 achieve the results and objectives? What are the supporting or inhibiting factors (external and internal)?

To answer this question, we first assessed the extent to which VET Toolbox 2 achieved its planned results, as defined in its results framework/logical framework, structured around the result areas outlined in Section 1.2. We then examined how the achievement of these results contributed to the project's overarching objectives – as set out in the Action Document – namely, "*enhancing the delivery of demand-driven skills development and vocational training aligned with investment needs*."

The analysis is primarily based on the output and outcome indicators that the agencies were required to report on, as presented in Table 2; it is further enriched by data gathered through the desk review and stakeholder interviews.

The general objective of VET Toolbox 2 is to demonstrate the feasibility of creating skills development mechanisms at local or sectoral levels: these mechanisms are flexible and closely aligned with the skills needs of companies and value chains, as well as European investment programmes.

The specific objective of VET Toolbox 2 is "*to enhance the delivery of demand-driven skills development and VET catering to investment needs*." To achieve the general objective, the project has defined three results areas (RA1-RA2-RA3[5]). If these three outcomes are achieved, both the specific and general objectives should be met.

[5] RA1: Enhanced national PPD on employment-oriented skills development and VET conducive for investments.
RA2: VET stakeholders are supported to deliver relevant training in line with investment needs.
RA3: VET reform is stimulated by capturing lessons from practical experience in delivering investment-oriented VET.

VET Toolbox 2 achieved RA1 and RA2, particularly in terms of stakeholder engagement (number of PPDs) and training development (number of training courses offered, number of people trained, number of internships) (RA1 and RA2, see Table 1).

VET Toolbox 2 partially achieved RA3 (access to employment). The analysis of Result Area 3 is addressed in the Impact criteria section of this report.

Creation or strengthening of PPDs achieved extensively and rapidly

Across all projects, public-private platforms were **easily established or reinforced**, leading to productive dialogues among VET providers, private sector actors, and public authorities. **The results have even exceeded expectations** in terms of action plans as well as the adaptation of training courses or training modules.

The PPD platforms contributed to the co-design of curricula, which often aligned with identified skill needs. Platform members, met during country visits, expressed their satisfaction with having representatives from the private sector and vocational training sector together in a single body. Usually, these stakeholders have few opportunities to meet and engage in dialogue, let alone to develop a joint action plan. The project enabled significant progress in structuring dialogue between public and private actors, notably through the **creation or strengthening of multi-stakeholder platforms** in all intervention countries. These platforms brought together representatives from companies (often organised by sector), partner training centres, and national vocational training authorities. In some cases, they were integrated into existing frameworks (e.g. the national committee on electronic waste in Kenya; regional PPD platform in DRC); in others, they were created from scratch based on emerging sectoral needs (e.g. Nigeria, in the Republic of the Congo[6]). These structures fostered mutual understanding among stakeholders and laid the foundation for functional cooperation. The **most effective arrangements appeared to be sectoral and local dialogue platforms** (e.g. Beira in Mozambique), except when the sector (or sub-sector) was already well-structured at the national level – typically due to the presence of large companies (e.g. Kenya, Tanzania, Uganda). In cases where the sub-sector was not structured by large firms, the most effective set-up was a local-level platform linking small and medium-sized enterprises with representatives from vocational training.

Public-private dialogue reached a more granular and engaged level in some cases – for instance, through the presence of a TAREA (solar energy business association) office within the Arusha Technical College. This appears to be a complementary and highly operational model of collaboration, in support of vocational training and employment development. These forms of cooperation warrant further development and in-depth analysis.

The ease of achieving the effectiveness indicator, in terms of creating public-private dialogue platforms, stemmed from the **combination of three factors**: the agencies' established presence within an ecosystem; the country teams' ability to identify key stakeholders; and the existence of local or national sectoral platforms.

The first factor relates to the agencies' embeddedness within an ecosystem. When agencies have been operating for several years within a country and specific intervention areas, particularly in vocational training, they will have developed networks comprising institutional stakeholders, vocational training centres, and sectoral associations: the agencies also typically participate in national dialogue networks relevant to their fields of intervention. This significantly facilitates the expansion of dialogue platforms, which are generally sector-specific and include business representatives. Moreover, integrating representatives from the vocational training sector – institutions at the regional level and training centres at the local level – is also made easier.

[6] In the Republic of Congo, a Ministry in charge of partnerships between public and private was set up in 2021. However, there was no formal dialogue in the targeted sectors of the intervention (Country Action Plan, Republic of the Congo, p. 13).

The second factor relates to country teams' capacity to identify key stakeholders who are crucial for successfully achieving the intended results. Project managers have been able to leverage the agency's broader resources, particularly prior knowledge and lessons learnt from previous projects, to identify these stakeholders and networks. These managers have also drawn on their own extensive experience in project management. All VET Toolbox 2 country managers were highly experienced in project management, particularly within vocational training and/or private sector projects.

The third factor is external, as it is founded on the pre-existence of public-private dialogue platforms, such as those found in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. For example, the Lubumbashi Resource Centre has for several years brought together representatives from the private sector (sectoral representatives), vocational training sector, local authorities, and employment agency representatives within an established consultative framework. The project successfully leveraged this existing and dynamic framework.

Strong interest in developing new training programmes in emerging fields

One of the most concrete results of VET Toolbox 2 was the **development of co-constructed curricula with companies**, tailored to locally identified needs, and mainly elaborated through the PPDs. The projects enabled the design of targeted training programmes – sometimes non-existent beforehand (e.g. Malawi, Côte d'Ivoire), requiring major updates (e.g. Tanzania, Republic of the Congo), or existing but integrated with another programme (e.g. Kenya). To achieve the co-construction of curricula, the project enabled the creation of partnerships, a shared agreement on gaps and opportunities, as well as on the organisation of the training (duration, delivery methods, participants) and the necessary equipment.

Companies often criticise VET systems for being outdated and misaligned with actual job requirements. Through public-private dialogue mechanisms, companies were involved in defining training content aligned with their needs. Early involvement of employers helped build collaboration among stakeholders and resulted in the creation of training programmes addressing real and specific needs. While around half of the projects were two-thirds implemented by the end of 2023, 93% of the outcome related to developing action plans within the platforms had been achieved. This highlights platform members' strong interest in engaging in the creation of new certifications. In Senegal, public-private collaboration takes various forms, from joint curriculum development to more limited arrangements such as infrastructure rental. The process begins with a high-level, strategic identification of opportunities and extends down to the definition of concrete infrastructural arrangements. This is an example of the diversity of cooperation modalities that were conceived and implemented within the interventions.

The engagement of private sector stakeholders in the process of conceptualising and operationalising new certifications can be explained by **three factors**: (i) the country teams' effective identification of stakeholders, (ii) the significant demand for short training courses based on a combination of theoretical and practical teaching in emergent sectors, and (iii) the coordination mechanism implemented by the country team.

The **first factor** relates to the fact that the country teams identified the key stakeholders needed to initiate the curriculum development process, such as national certification authorities whose presence was essential from the outset to ensure successful implementation. In Malawi and DRC, the agencies sought to involve international experts in curriculum design in order to guarantee the process. In Malawi, the mentoring partnership with Gower College (UK) helped to overcome challenges encountered with national authorities in completing the certification development process. There was also expertise support from Lantra – the UK's sector skills council for land-based industries. In the Democratic Republic of the Congo, the involvement of the SFMQ enabled sectoral experts to both identify and formalise skills requirements: this contributed to the structuring of training provision in line with labour market demands.

The **second factor** enabling private sector engagement in an action plan aimed at providing solutions was the significant demand for vocational training that combines theory and practice; this training is also relatively short in duration. It should also be noted that this demand was particularly high in the sectors identified by the project, including emerging sectors for which the public vocational training system did not offer adequate training.

Finally, given the experimental nature of VET Toolbox 2, it was important for the agencies to take responsibility for coordinating the platforms and the activities related to curriculum development. This was the **third factor** that contributed to achieving the objective of developing action plans between companies and VET centres.

However, the effectiveness of these initiatives was constrained by slow accreditation processes, weak institutional ownership, and, in some cases, a lack of political will (e.g. Malawi). In Côte d'Ivoire, the process was even reversed, with training delivered before the curriculum was formally developed. Yet, institutional actors were involved from the outset, alongside private sector stakeholders. In Senegal, though, new training courses designed as part of VET Toolbox 2 aim to be integrated into the national certification framework.

Between achieved objectives, opportunity effects, and limited inclusion of women

For the projects nearing completion (6 out of 11),[7] training activities were completed throughout 2024. In some countries, training began late and concluded in December 2024 (Malawi, Republic of the Congo). Despite this, the training objectives were achieved, whether for training unemployed youth, employees in companies, or trainers. The provision of equipment, when planned within the projects, was occasionally delayed (Republic of the Congo). All training programmes developed and implemented under VET Toolbox 2 were largely financed by the project itself, even if companies contributed directly and indirectly (e.g. by hosting internships, by organising the in-company trainings under the project). Given the limited and constrained timeframe to meet the project's performance indicators (4,400 people trained), various means were employed to communicate the availability of training opportunities for young people. Both professional and personal networks were mobilised to fill training places. Field interviews reveal that, generally, unemployed youth are quite enthusiastic about the prospect of training. Here, an economic opportunity exists for these unemployed youth, because the project funds not only educational costs but also transport, food, and accommodation expenses (where necessary). **The opportunity for people to access training is a key factor in achieving results**.

The objective of involving young women in training activities was more challenging to achieve. This was mainly because the training programmes created were in fields where men are predominantly represented (e.g. tractor operation, electrical and electronic waste sorting, industrial maintenance, transport), which hinders women's participation. Awareness-raising efforts targeting women were also insufficient (considering the time constraints previously mentioned for conducting the training sessions), and economic and cultural barriers to women's participation were not sufficiently and adequately addressed (e.g. childcare, family permission, etc.). Very few specific approaches for gender or inclusiveness– or targeted measures in this field – were implemented, even if we can observe some variation. For GIZ, the share of women among all trained people was 39%. This is a positive indication that labour market barriers for women have been generally addressed.

Finally, adult participation targets for training activities were easily met. For company employees, the coverage of training costs was a decisive factor in encouraging participation. Another factor contributing to the achievement of objectives was the **inclusion of the informal sector** – which is largely predominant across all intervention countries. Master artisans and employees of the informal sector, grouped into areas of activity, received training (Kenya, Senegal).

Effective closing events: a key strength in identifying success factors and areas for improvement

[7] Ibid

When this report was being drafted, the final reports from four out of five agencies were not yet available. The following elements are largely based on the final reports from GIZ, which implemented six projects in five countries. As expected, the country teams organised closing events that brought together all stakeholders involved in VET Toolbox 2. These sessions, structured as workshops, were intended to identify the key success factors, challenges, good practices, and areas for improvement. In Malawi, where the evaluation team participated in two days of closing workshops, the inputs were substantial: they will contribute to formulating recommendations to improve both future interventions and public policies related to private sector engagement and vocational training. **The support provided by the Hub, in terms of methodological guidelines and templates, is the main factor enabling the achievement of the objective** and the production of harmonised final reports across countries, project summaries, and policy briefs. As expected, the commitment of Liaison Officers and country teams in the overall organisation of these events is important to highlight.

Table 4 – Achievement of VET Toolbox 2

Result Area	Indicator	Target	Achievement
RA1	At least 1 PPD per country of intervention in sectors relevant to EIP investments	11	11 (end 2023)
	80% of the PPDs result in an agreement/action plan between companies and VET centres	80%	93% (end 2023)
RA2	80% of the agreements have led to the development or adaptation of methods and training modules for demand-driven skills development	80%	116% (end 2023)
	45 VET providers have been supported with staff training and/or ToT and/or equipment	45	56 (end 2023)
	4,400 people trained	4,400 people trained 1,540 women trained 1,760 youth trained	Training was mainly in 2024 for the 6 projects which are ongoing.
	VET capacity-building activities	491 27% women	Not available
RA3	In all intervention countries, lessons have been distilled and presented to the wider VET community in order to increase the relevance and inclusiveness of training	11	9*
	From the lessons, 2 policy recommendations per intervention country have been derived and presented to policy-makers	22	17 (end 2023)
	The different country approaches are used to demonstrate how investments can support local benefits to other investors, country stakeholders or partners	11	5 (end 2023)

Source: VET Toolbox Annual Report, 2023
*: closing events should be organised in January and February 2025 by six of the country teams. At least four or six were organised (DRC in December 2024, Malawi in January 2025, Ghana, Côte d'Ivoire in February 2025).

EQ 4: To what extent did the opportunity-driven approach contribute to results and objectives? Were there any unexpected (positive or negative) effects the opportunity-driven approach has contributed to?

The opportunity-driven approach is inherently based on structured dialogue between the private sector and the vocational training sector, aiming to transform training provision to better meet the skills needs of the private sector. For a real opportunity-driven approach, the structured dialogue is an important condition but not sufficient. What is key is the pro-active identification of opportunities and continuous prospection of/by the private sector. This is crucial to feed into a dynamic dialogue.

This approach has led to clear results: (i) the creation of public-private dialogue platforms – which were established and functioned effectively during the project's implementation period, and (ii) the development of new curricula that addressed identified skills needs. From a general perspective, the mechanism of bringing together private sector actors and vocational training providers around a shared objective did work. In other words, **if this mechanism is effective, it is because the opportunity-driven approach enabled it**. Moreover, the opportunity-driven approach, by requiring a response tailored to skills needs, demands training programmes that are flexible, scalable, and allow for skills acquisition through practical experience: this leads to certification recognised by companies.

However, the innovative opportunity-driven approach (based on real economic opportunities rather than traditional sectoral forecasts) was only partially understood and unevenly implemented. While certain actors (large companies, those with human resources departments) were able to capitalise on this approach, most stakeholders – public and private – struggled to grasp and apply it. It also took time for most country teams to understand the paradigm shift, which affected the operationalisation of the project. This led to significant delays in the opportunity identification phase and hindered the achievement of the objective of leveraging investment opportunities from European companies. This strategy largely failed, with partial exceptions in Nigeria and Tanzania. One factor that may explain this failure is the **lack of integration of EU Consulates, which can play a role in the business environment**, in identifying and securing the commitment of large companies to the project. In the DRC, the Belgian Consulate's role as a facilitator in approaching large companies was considered. Apart from this example, it appears that this aspect was largely overlooked, even though agencies should have considered the business environment and the actors contributing to it (such as EU Consulates). Furthermore, while the EU's role was expected to be significant within the opportunity-driven approach, the overall involvement of EU Delegations (EUDs) was minimal.

Projects shifted to a more traditional needs assessment approach, based on forecasting company needs in the identified sectors. This applied to many of the projects, but not all. Nevertheless, this raises questions about the identification phase. Available documents suggest that "opportunity identification" resembled a macroeconomic forecasting exercise: identifying key economic sectors by their contribution to GDP, sector growth, job numbers (when available), and basic mapping of key actors. Sector-specific workshops helped to refine this analysis (e.g. presence of informal employment, company types, market structure, value chains, needed vs. missing skills, employment prospects). However, it proved very hard to come up with precise estimates of possible job openings in the targeted trades. This factor hinders the full implementation of the opportunity-driven approach. Within the sectoral coordination frameworks, partner companies provided insights into productive models and relevant skills – but lacked the capacity to indicate likely hiring volumes. This significantly limits the effectiveness of consultation platforms, with regard to an objective of VET Toolbox 2.

In the design of the opportunity-driven approach, alignment with European Investment Priorities was expected to lead to partnerships with large companies operating within the formal sector. These companies offer employment contracts that include insurance coverage for retirement and health care. However, given that the project did not proceed as planned, and considering that the economic landscape – particularly within the targeted sectors (emerging sectors, largely informal and unstructured) – is made up of informal sector businesses, the opportunity-driven approach could not be implemented as intended. Indeed, **this approach is challenging to apply to the fluctuating economic activity of very small informal businesses;** nevertheless, the informal sector far exceeds the formal sector in all VET Toolbox 2 intervention countries. By integrating the informal sector, the approach provided capacity building for master artisans and informal productive units, which is not aligned with the SDG 8 (target 8.8 on protection of labour rights).

EQ 5: Given the different interpretations and applications of the piloted opportunity-driven approach (including the opportunity-mapping exercise), which methodologies and practices are more/less successful and why precisely?

The implementation of the opportunity-driven approach requires identifying companies capable of determining the number of people they wish to train (training their employees) or hire, provided those individuals are trained in the skills the company needs. Overall, within the implementation of VET Toolbox 2, **this mechanism did not function effectively**. Partner companies (a few large companies and many small businesses) lacked the necessary internal structuring, and sufficient visibility over their economic activity, to accurately determine their job skills needs. This initial observation partly explains the adaptive methodologies and practices that were employed.

Partnerships with national employer associations. When projects established partnerships with national employer associations (such as the chamber of commerce CCIAM in Congo; Fédération des Entreprises du Congo – FEC - in DRC; association of companies in the renewable energy sector TAREA in Tanzania), this enabled the identification of a broad range of companies and the selection of those capable of determining their needs and committing to the process. Additionally, this approach helped to secure recognition for the certifications created among member companies of the national association. In sectors where national standards do not yet exist or take time to be established, informal certification recognised by private actors can be effective, particularly in emerging fields.

Identification of large companies and value chains. Large companies, with HR departments, have the organisational and financial resources to plan replacements, recruitment, and employee training. These companies also serve as a gateway to reach their subcontractors and suppliers integrated into their value chain. Subcontracting companies can benefit from the intervention. For example, in the E-Waste project in Kenya, electronic waste collection units – subcontracted by a larger electronic waste management company – benefited from tailored training provided by the project. This approach facilitated the spread of environmentally friendly and safe electronic waste collection practices throughout the value chain.

Local integration. The capacity-driven approach appears to be more effective when implemented at a local sectoral level. In such cases, the country team can more easily identify leading companies capable of involving other businesses in the process, through their leadership position. Working with well-established local structures makes it easier to tailor training programmes to actual needs. For example, in Malawi, training initiatives focused on agricultural cooperatives – a well-organised sector locally supported by a larger and longer-term World Bank project. Collaborating with these cooperatives enabled a rapid adaptation of training programmes to the region's specific needs, by relying on training centres (both public and private) with the potential to meet the project's requirements. This example highlights that VET Toolbox's success is based on **working with the right stakeholders**. In the training sector, the projects did not restrict themselves to public centres; and in the private sector, VET Toolbox 2 did not limit itself to the formal sector.

EQ 7: To what extent and how did the multi-agency consortium set-up add value in achieving the results and objectives? What were the challenges of the multi-agency consortium set-up?

VET Toolbox 2 is "*an innovative collaborative approach that strengthens cooperation between the European Union and Member State development organisations, as well as among these development organisations, paving the way for future Team Europe Initiatives*."[8]

The Team Europe Initiatives (TEI) approach has been developed to provide a collective European response, enhance the visibility of EU cooperation through a common branding, and improve coordination of

[8] https://vettoolbox.eu/a-propos/?lang=fr

interventions for more effective cooperation. Within the framework of VET Toolbox 2, there is indeed a clear ambition to implement a common approach and even a joint implementation, allowing each partner agency to leverage its expertise in the intervention countries. The initial choice was to implement projects within an agency/country configuration. An attempt at cross-agency collaboration within the same country (Uganda) was at this stage unsuccessful, despite its potential to introduce a new dimension of cooperation between agencies.

VET Toolbox 2 offers a new way of fostering overall coherence in international cooperation efforts, by aligning private sector engagement and vocational training around a shared framework. This approach responds to a common criticism of international cooperation – the lack of coordination among stakeholders, which undermines its effectiveness (Gabas and Vernières, 2022[2]).

Over time, each of the five agencies involved in the project has independently evolved its intervention paradigm in the fields of employment and vocational training. These shifts have proven to be convergent, which now facilitates joint work within multi-partner projects, as the agencies increasingly share common visions and approaches.

The evaluation shows that the collaborative framework of the VET Toolbox 2 project delivered better results than would have been achieved through 14 separate, uncoordinated projects. Implementing a common approach across highly diverse national contexts – whether in terms of macroeconomic dynamics, the level of structuring of vocational training systems, or the business environment – highlights that stronger coordination and adaptability are key drivers of effectiveness.

The added value of collaboration among the agencies is multi-faceted: it allows for large-scale testing of the effectiveness of a common approach to improving employment conditions for target populations; generates lessons on the performance of the approach from a project comprising multiple interventions; and fosters collective reflection to improve future interventions within a similar framework. The multi-agency approach facilitated knowledge-sharing of best practices in each country and could benefit the agencies themselves.

The **main challenge** was coordinating agencies, some of which have different implementation schedules. This can be considered a limiting factor for an intended collaborative approach. However, it does not appear to have significantly altered the implementation of VET Toolbox 2 itself. The staggered implementation timelines allowed for the transfer of best practices to teams operating on a longer schedule (GIZ vs. other agencies). To address this challenge, the project established a governance structure whose effectiveness is reflected in the successful implementation (achieving results within the short implementation timeframe).

EQ 8: To what extent did the projects support (the active) involvement of the private sector at different stages/levels/degrees?

The project strongly supports involvement of the private sector

Creating **incentives to involve the private sector is at the very core of the VET Toolbox 2 project**. It is an essential component of implementing the opportunity-driven approach. Traditionally, private sector companies may be reluctant to engage in collaboration with the public vocational training system, as they often consider it the public sector's responsibility to provide them with a skilled workforce. In response, VET Toolbox 2 designed a cooperation framework that addressed the needs of all parties involved – both companies and training centres. Without this, the project could not have operated effectively.

This is why the first step in the implementation process focused on establishing dialogue between private sector partners and vocational training stakeholders. In each country of intervention, the implementing agencies played a facilitating and mediating role in this dialogue. As previously mentioned, they built on existing, more or less formalised, sectoral dialogue structures, e.g. sectoral funds or local associations. Field investigations show that the agencies did not encounter significant difficulties in engaging the private sector in these dialogue mechanisms. Indeed, the private actors interviewed saw this as an opportunity to reflect on their skills needs, to find appropriate responses, and to strengthen their own knowledge and capacities through activities such as experience-sharing, site visits, and peer learning exchanges with European partners.

The VET Toolbox 2 project demonstrated **multiple forms of engagement by private companies** across different countries, ranging from strategic input in curriculum design to direct participation in training delivery. This engagement varied depending on national contexts, economic sectors, and the maturity of existing partnerships. However, the level and nature of private sector involvement in the project was not uniform, due to several interrelated factors.

Some sectors had i**mmediate and clearly identified skill needs**, which encouraged companies to actively participate. For example, in the forestry sector in the Republic of Congo, companies required short-term upskilling and welcomed on-site training for employees (they wouldn't have trained their workers without VET Toolbox 2 funding and support). In Côte d'Ivoire, the project targeted companies **already active in skills development**, which helped secure their commitment.[9] Capital-intensive industries (e.g. agribusiness, industrial maintenance) tend to invest more in skills development than informal or service-based sectors with high labour turnover. Conversely, in low-margin or informal sectors, companies often **lacked the financial capacity or strategic interest to invest in workforce development** without external incentives.

Countries with **structured TVET ecosystems**, active training authority, and established public-private dialogue frameworks (e.g. Ghana, Kenya, Uganda, Mozambique and Côte d'Ivoire to a lesser extent) provided more enabling environments for employer engagement.

A favourable case can be highlighted in Tanzania, where the renewable energy business association is based within the vocational training centre itself – referred to as a centre of excellence; this illustrates the strong commitment of these companies to vocational training. Where institutional coordination was weaker or institutional roles fragmented, companies were often reluctant, due to a lack of clarity about their role and the feasibility of such a process.

Larger and more formalised enterprises, including multinational companies, were more likely to engage, as they already had human resources structures. Smaller, informal firms faced more barriers to participation – including time constraints, limited staffing, and lack of familiarity with donor-funded initiatives.

Several interviewees noted that **project timing** affected company participation. Company participation was affected by the misalignment between the project implementation period and the companies' operational year. When training offers arrived too early or too late relative to company hiring cycles or investment plans, engagement was lower. Projects that aligned closely with investment windows, seasonal recruitment, or regulatory changes (e.g. in e-waste) saw higher involvement.

Companies are more likely to engage when the value proposition is clear, e.g. subsidised training, reduced recruitment costs, improved productivity. In a process that was new to most companies, it was **difficult to provide concrete examples** demonstrating gains in productivity or improvements in recruitment processes. So having companies already involved in similar projects could help to facilitate the engagement of new ones. Finally, it was reported that there was sometimes competition between agencies (agencies other than those implementing VET Toolbox 2), particularly in Côte d'Ivoire, where discrepancies in the

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[9] In Côte d'Ivoire, the country team faced significant challenges in identifying suitable partners, which contributed to delays. It was only after the failure of a structural approach that a more hands-on strategy was adopted — with notable success.

financial amounts offered to companies for hosting interns created disincentives. In such contexts, companies often act based on opportunity and comparative advantage.

Strong engagement in dialogue and curriculum co-creation, but limited commitment to internships and recruitment

While companies were genuinely involved in stakeholder consultations and actively contributed to the co-creation of training curricula, field visits revealed that the hosting of interns faced several challenges. These limitations reflect a more nuanced level of engagement. For example, in Kenya, although internships were mandatory at the end of the training cycle, the sector was still young and poorly structured, and very few companies were able to host trainees. The local economy relied heavily on informal subcontractors, making it difficult to place young people. Similar challenges were reported in the Republic of Congo, where the project team had to invest significant effort to identify and mobilise potential host companies.

A second major challenge regarding internships was related to how companies perceived the role of trainees. In many cases, trainees were seen as a source of free labour, rather than as learners requiring supervision and skills development. This perception further highlights the limitations of employer commitment within the internship component of VET Toolbox 2. This highlights the need to invest in the coaching and pedagogical capacities of supervisors in companies, specifically for internship, plus the importance of a clear follow-up and monitoring during internship and transition to employment.

Finally, and perhaps the most significant limitation, companies which had actively participated in dialogue forums and co-designed training curricula ultimately **lacked the capacity to hire the young people they had helped to train**. The expected mechanism, whereby company engagement in the design process would naturally lead to recruitment, did not go to plan.

In most cases, while companies expressed strong satisfaction with the quality and relevance of the training curricula, they had **no immediate hiring needs**. As a result, in several countries, the alternative was to prepare young people for self-employment. In Tanzania, companies went a step further by contributing to the purchase of equipment, enabling these young entrepreneurs to be well-equipped and positioned as quality subcontractors. Ultimately, in some cases, instead of creating decent employment, the project contributed to fuelling the informal sector by upskilling informal units.

3.2.3 COHERENCE

Summary: VET Toolbox 2 showed strong internal coherence through alignment across the implementing agencies' strategies, all emphasising private sector engagement and inclusive VET. Externally, the project aligned well with national policies and EU investment strategies. It built on existing programmes in several countries, reinforcing synergies and coordination. However, coherence was weaker where agencies lacked prior presence or networks. Overall, the project avoided duplication and enhanced collaboration across stakeholders.

A well-developed and well-managed internal coherence fostered by a multi-agency framework

The project was designed to build strong alignment with the strategies of each agency in the consortium, particularly in the areas of vocational education and training, private sector support, and the promotion of decent employment. This strong coherence stems from a relative convergence in the agencies' strategic orientations: over the last few years, these have undergone a paradigm shift towards increased support for the private sector as a means to stimulate economic growth and job creation. Vocational training is thus positioned as a key lever to support private sector development. Across the board, all agencies have adopted strategies aimed at reducing gender-based inequalities and discrimination.

Nevertheless, the agencies adopt diverse approaches in supporting the private sector and vocational training within development programmes, with a focus on inclusion, innovation, sustainability, and multi-stakeholder collaboration.[10]

With VET Toolbox 2 and the opportunity for inter-agency collaboration, the adoption of a shared approach that aligns with each agency's strategic priorities has shaped a coherent intervention. However, this does not preclude differences in implementation modalities.

Strategic coherence within each agency, reflecting continuity with its ongoing and previous interventions

A third aspect of coherence relates to **how the project was positioned in relation to other initiatives led by the agencies in the areas of vocational education and training plus private sector support**. For each agency, VET Toolbox 2 was meant to build on and link with its ongoing or past bilateral interventions, thus helping to shift them towards a more OP-VET-oriented approach. Agencies adopted different approaches, depending on the existence of ongoing projects and the opportunity to reinforce them through a complementary component; or by building on networks of stakeholders established through previous interventions.

One counter-example is the Republic of Congo, where Expertise France did not have a local office, and therefore lacked the structured network present in other countries where the agency operates.

In the Democratic Republic of the Congo, the implementation of VET Toolbox 2 drew extensively on the EDUKAT project in the Katanga region (2013-2022),[11] both in terms of lessons learnt and the available resources and networks. VET Toolbox 2 continued the partnership initiated with the Lubumbashi resource centre to strengthen local dialogue between public and private stakeholders, and benefited from a training centre specifically designed to meet the needs of businesses.

In Kenya, Mozambique, Nigeria, Tanzania, and Uganda, the VET Toolbox 2 project was integrated into the Employment and Skills for Development in Africa (E4D) programme. E4D is a partnership made up of the German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ), the European Union and the development agencies of Korea and Norway. The engagement of the private sector through VET is at the core of E4D, just as it is in the VET Toolbox 2 project: "In order to create prospects for people in Africa over the long term, the private sector has been brought on board: over 70 international companies and local enterprises are involved in public-private partnerships, working groups and initiatives. Their support helps local suppliers to become more competitive and improve workflows, among other things. In return, the companies create jobs and training opportunities and play an active role in enhancing and expanding vocational education and training. New jobs are being created primarily in the commodities, construction and agricultural sectors and the green economy – particularly in the areas of water, waste management, energy, tourism, agriculture and forestry" (GIZ[12]).

In Senegal, where VET Toolbox 2 was implemented by LuxDev, coherence was reinforced through strong support from stakeholders involved in the bilateral cooperation portfolio. A similar model was observed in Malawi, where the project was implemented by the British Council.

Maximising external alignment for effective implementation

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[10] Strategic Document for Decent Jobs, AFD: https://www.afd.fr/fr/ressources/investir-dans-lemploi-decent, strategic document for Education and Training 2016-2020, AFD https://www.afd.fr/fr/ressources/strategie-education-formation-emploi-2016-2020, strategic document for Education and Training, GIZ https://www.bmz.de/resource/blob/246760/positionspapier-hochwertige-bildung-fuer-alle-en.pdf, Vision 2030 Enabel: https://www.enabel.be/app/uploads/2022/09/strategie_enabel_2030_versioncourte_cov_fr.pdf, annual report 2023 LuxDev: https://luxdev.lu/files/documents/RAPANN_2023_FR_spread_light.pdf, The British Council: https://www.britishcouncil.org/partner/international-development/our-expertise/education

[11] Presentation of the EDUKAT project: https://open.enabel.be/fr/COD/2044/p/appui--l-enseignement-technique-et-la-formation-professionnelle-au-katanga-edukat.html

[12] E4D Factsheet: https://www.giz.de/en/mediacenter/59759.html

The VET Toolbox 2 project can be regarded as a project that sought to **maximise its external coherence**, actively pursuing coordination whenever possible in order to enhance the effectiveness of its intervention. A clear example of this is the project implemented in Malawi by the British Council. The VET Toolbox 2 **project in Malawi was strategically aligned with the Shire Valley Transformation Programme** (SVTP),[13] a major 14-year World Bank-funded initiative focused on irrigation and agricultural transformation in the Shire Valley – a key development zone in the country. VET Toolbox 2 connected with this broader investment effort by: identifying skills needs directly related to the ongoing agricultural and irrigation investments; engaging with local agricultural cooperatives, which organise smallholder farmers to support targeted youth integration into economic activities linked to SVTP; and facilitating public-private partnerships among cooperatives, vocational training institutes (VTIs), and local authorities to design relevant technical training programmes.

However, the articulation with SVTP was not immediate: when VET Toolbox 2 was launched, SVTP was still in its preparatory phase – setting up cooperatives, validating business plans, and preparing land. This limited the short-term employment effects, though the foundations were seen as strong for longer-term impact. The VET Toolbox 2 intervention was perceived as a pilot with potential for replication, well integrated into district-level development plans, and aimed at influencing future investment-oriented skills development in the region. Moreover, the local public-private dialogue initiated by the project was considered a key mechanism for anchoring skills development around structuring investments such as SVTP.

In Kenya, **the VET Toolbox 2 project strategically aligned with the national policy on e-waste management**, particularly within the framework of the Extended Producer Responsibility (EPR) regulations. Implemented under the broader E4D (Employment and Skills for Development in Africa) programme and supported by GIZ, the project received additional EU funding in 2021 to focus on e-waste as a priority sector. The project's design responded directly to national regulatory gaps: while e-waste legislation was in place, there was no existing vocational training curriculum for electronics recycling technicians. The VET Toolbox 2 project worked closely with NITA (National Industrial Training Authority), the authority responsible for vocational qualifications, to develop a new curriculum in line with the national standards.

In the DRC, external coherence was pursued through coordination with UNIDO to establish a common regulatory framework for the implementation of company-based internships.

In the Republic of the Congo, efforts to ensure external coherence were limited, particularly with regard to the IECD (Institut Européen de Coopération et de Développement) project, which operates in the same sectors and through the same training centre – the CEFA for industrial maintenance in Pointe-Noire. Due to misaligned implementation timelines, no coordination could be established between the two initiatives. The IECD is implementing the RELIEF project in the Republic of the Congo, with co-financing from the Agence Française de Développement (AFD) and the European Union. This multi-country initiative – also deployed in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Cameroon, and the Central African Republic – aims to enhance the socio-professional integration of young people, with a particular emphasis on improving access for women. In the Republic of the Congo, the project collaborates with Unicongo, a national federation of large enterprises, to align vocational training with labour market needs. It focuses on the development of short, certified training courses, notably in industrial maintenance, to respond to identified skill gaps within key economic sectors.

3.2.4 **SUSTAINABILITY**

Summary: Sustainability was a mixed outcome for VET Toolbox 2. While some activities – particularly where aligned with national reforms or long-term investments – showed promising signs of continuity, many remained

[13] The program development objective for the Shire Valley Transformation Program (SVTP) is to improve the management and utilisation of natural resources in a sustainable way to increase agricultural productivity and commercialization for targeted households in the Shire Valley. https://documents.worldbank.org/en/publication/documents-reports/documentdetail/841151503668310233/malawi-shire-valley-transformation-program-environmental-and-social-impact-assessment-environmental-and-social-management-plan-and-pest-management-plan-executive-summary

dependent on the external contribution of local stakeholders. Certification emerged as a key lever, with stronger prospects where curricula were aligned with national frameworks and accreditation processes were initiated. However, limited institutional anchoring and the absence of clear exit strategies constrained the long-term integration of results.

EQ 2: To what extent are VET Toolbox 2 activities (e.g. public-private dialogue/partnerships, private sector involvement, VET implementation) continuing? Can the benefits be maintained?

Sustainability remains one of the primary challenges highlighted in the evaluation of VET Toolbox 2. The sustainability of the VET Toolbox 2 project is rooted in several strategies designed to ensure the continuity of activities beyond the project's formal conclusion. While the project successfully implemented valuable activities such as public-private dialogue platforms and vocational training programmes, their continuation frequently depended on substantial project funding and coordination.

However, the continuation of projects through new funding can create sustainability, as it allows for the stabilisation of project achievements and the identification of external funding mechanisms (Mozambique).

Sustainability of PPDs: pre-existing PPDs thrive while newly created ones struggle

In most countries, the public-private dialogue platforms emerged from pre-existing initiatives. These were usually sectoral, either local or national, where the project introduced a broader range of stakeholders and injected new momentum.

In some countries, the project built on **existing dialogue platforms by adapting** them to meet the specific needs of the VET initiatives. In Kenya, for instance, the project did not create a new platform but enhanced the National E-waste Steering Committee (NSC), integrating it more closely with the vocational training sector to address skills gaps related to e-waste management. In Malawi, the Public Private Skills Development Forum (PPSDF) was already established, but the project adapted it by creating a specialised subgroup focused on agriculture in the Shire Valley, addressing local skill demands in commercial farming. In the Republic of the Congo, the project built on a sectoral association to strengthen and expand it to other sectors as well as to vocational training stakeholders.

In other contexts, the project **leveraged already well-established public-private dialogue platforms**. In Mozambique, for example, the project used the Associação Comercial da Beira (ACB), a long-standing private-sector-driven PPD with consistent financial contributions, to support the Skills 4 Transport Project. This choice ensured that the initiative could benefit from existing networks and stakeholder engagement mechanisms, without the need to establish a new structure. Similarly, in Tanzania, the TAREA-led platform was already operational, providing a suitable basis for VET Toolbox 2 activities within the renewable energy sector. In Nigeria, the Skills 4 Riders Project took advantage of existing structures, potentially in collaboration with the Lagos State Employment Trust Fund (LSETF). Additionally, in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, the project utilised the Fédération des Entreprises du Congo (FEC), a platform that already brought together private sector actors to discuss vocational training needs.

By building on existing initiatives and strengthening them, the project has effectively created f**avourable conditions for the sustainability of these platforms**.

In only a few countries did the project teams have to create these dialogue frameworks from scratch. For instance, in Nigeria, the project led to the formation of the Cashew Processors and Packagers Association of Nigeria (CAPPAN). This platform, involving key cashew processing companies such as Julius Berger and led by Vertex Agro Limited, was specifically established to facilitate collaboration and address challenges within the cashew sector. Similarly, in Côte d'Ivoire, the project initiated a new PPD platform, as no similar structure had previously existed.

While the platforms operated well during the project, those that were adapted for the project's needs may not endure – if they have not anticipated their operational model and economic sustainability. PPDs supported through the project often provided participation incentives like transport allowances, which are unlikely to be sustained without continued external financial support. Pre-existing structures, such as Kenya's National E-waste Steering Committee, demonstrated greater resilience, whereas newly formed platforms faced significant uncertainty concerning governance structures and ongoing financing.

Economic sustainability of PPDs

Several economic models have been identified to ensure the financial sustainability of the platforms established under the VET Toolbox 2 project. A common approach involves securing financial contributions from private members, as demonstrated by the Associação Comercial da Beira (ACB) in Mozambique and by the PPD in the Republic of Congo. These platforms rely on firmly established financial contributions from its private members, which strengthens its capacity to function independently over the long term.

In addition to private contributions, access to sectoral or national training funds provides an essential financial resource for the platforms. This mechanism is particularly relevant in countries such as Senegal, and Tanzania, where dedicated funds are available to support vocational training initiatives. However, the availability and functionality of these funds vary significantly from one country to another. This poses challenges for platforms operating in contexts where such financial resources are either unavailable or poorly managed.

Moreover, the formalisation of platforms is considered a critical factor in enhancing their economic sustainability. By establishing clear governance structures and formal mechanisms for financial contributions, platforms can secure more reliable and predictable funding streams. However, platforms that operate as flexible mechanisms for identifying opportunities, such as those in the Republic of the Congo and Senegal, face greater sustainability challenges if follow-up funding is not ensured.[14] The lack of formalisation can leave these platforms vulnerable to interruptions in financial support, once the project ends.

Certification as a factor of sustainability

From the project's outset, the decision was made to develop training activities leading to certification recognised by the State. Although the process did not result in accreditation in most countries, this choice in project design was part of a clearly established sustainability strategy. In most cases, accreditation is still under review by national authorities, even though they were involved in the projects from the very beginning. It would have been easier and quicker to create qualifying training programmes, but such a choice would have limited the initiative's sustainability. Moreover, within a structured and effective national framework, for young people who have obtained State-recognised certification, this could represent a guarantee of employability in the labour market that will endure beyond the project itself.

In many countries, the accreditation of a certification is a lengthy process. It can sometimes take several years, so could not have been completed within the project's timeframe. However, since the national authorities responsible for accreditation were involved in the project, the process is still ongoing in the various countries. During field visits, both the country teams and national authorities expressed optimism about the successful completion of the process. For example, during consultation meetings, national authorities expressed their desire to include training in the national framework, as training was recognised as meeting a need.

[14] The formalisation of public-private platforms has emerged as a critical condition for ensuring their long-term economic sustainability. When supported by clear governance structures and formalised mechanisms for financial contributions, these platforms are more likely to secure stable and predictable funding. Conversely, platforms operating in a more flexible and opportunity-driven manner — as observed in the Republic of the Congo and Senegal — face greater risks of discontinuity once project-based funding comes to an end. In such cases, the absence of institutional anchoring and formalised financing frameworks significantly undermines their ability to sustain activities over time.

In the meantime, we have identified several cases where **the training programmes established under the project continue to be delivered**, particularly in Kenya, the Republic of the Congo, DRC, Nigeria, Mozambique. In Nigeria, training programmes developed under the Skills 4 Riders (S4R) project continue to be utilised, including e-learning modules on transversal skills such as safety, customer service, digital literacy, and financial literacy. These modules are designed for delivery riders and are adaptable for use even while they are on the road. When training programmes were developed in partnership with private training centres and supported by the project's funding, it could have been anticipated that maintaining these programmes unchanged in the future would be more challenging. Nevertheless, the example of a private training centre in Malawi demonstrates that the VET Toolbox 2 project enabled this centre to secure funding for an initial cohort of young people. Given the success of the training, they are now considering replicating it in the future. In Tanzania, the strong engagement of some companies is a factor for sustainability: TAREA (the association of companies in renewable energy) and the companies involved, such as Zola and My Soul, have committed to continue leading and pushing the accreditation process in order to finalise and continue delivering the training beyond the project's duration.

Alignment of project objectives with broader national development strategies

The alignment of project objectives with broader national development strategies has been essential in ensuring sustainability. In Tanzania, for example, renewable energy training programmes were integrated into the district development plans, ensuring that they were part of the ongoing efforts to expand access to clean energy. In Malawi, the tractor operation training was in line with the national strategy for mechanisation. In Côte d'Ivoire, the vocational training initiatives in the digital and sustainable construction sectors intend to align with the country's National Development Plan (2021-2025) and the EUD's multi-annual programming (2021-2027). This connection would ensure that the training programmes are integrated into the country's broader development agenda.

However, a critique of the sustainability of development projects – extending beyond the scope of VET Toolbox 2 – is increasingly being questioned, given declining international cooperation funding. This concern has been known for years and it was summarised in a recent publication (Ziegler et al., 2025[15]), which highlights that the dominant project-based approach in development aid relies on "temporary operational methods, tools and procedures" (p. 2). According to the authors, this approach may even weaken national institutions, despite project efforts to strengthen capacity. Capacity-building activities are often aligned with the project's own objectives rather than those of the institutions being supported. It is also not uncommon, in practice, to observe multiple donors intervening simultaneously within a single institution: this can lead to confusion (due to differing working methods across agencies) as well as a dependency on external funding.

Factors hindering sustainability

Several factors hindered sustainability efforts, notably the **short duration of the project cycle** and limited alignment with national vocational training systems. Additionally, **limited integration of inclusive and gender-sensitive practices** has further constrained sustainability. Without structural support measures to facilitate continuous participation by vulnerable groups, especially women (e.g. childcare services or flexible training schedules), vocational programmes risk perpetuating existing inequalities

The lack of anticipation and mechanisms developed to facilitate the hiring of young people in companies – where they completed their internships or apprenticeships – can also be considered a factor hindering the sustainability of the project's outcomes. The lack of incentive-based recruitment mechanisms, particularly those grounded in agency-financed pre-training, limited the potential for greater sustainability. By promoting changes in company-level practices — such as through incentive-based recruitment

[15] Rohen d'Aiglepierre, Suvi Mellavuao Bonnet, Charlotte Sedel, Marc Ziegler, 2025, 'Comment améliorer l'efficacité du financement international de l'éducation ? L'approche par les fonds communs, Questions de Développement', AFD, 87, https://www.afd.fr/fr/ressources/comment-ameliorer-lefficacite-du-financement-international-de-leducation-lapproche-par-les-fonds-communs

mechanisms — the project contributes to embedding more inclusive and skills-oriented approaches within firms. Such internal transformation increases the likelihood that results will be sustained beyond the project period, as they become part of regular business practices.

Enhanced sustainability would require earlier and even more strategic planning plus stronger mobilisation of domestic financial mechanisms. The absence of explicit exit strategies, co-developed with national stakeholders, hindered the sustainable integration of achievements into local systems. Similarly, the lack of efforts to create localised training ecosystems limited the potential for long-term impact. Earlier coordination and more aligned planning — even in the context of country-specific projects led by different agencies — can significantly improve efficiency by reducing duplication of efforts, streamlining resource allocation, and facilitating the sharing of tools, approaches, and lessons learned. When operational processes (e.g. needs assessments, partner mapping, or stakeholder engagement) are coordinated from the outset, agencies can identify synergies, anticipate overlaps, and harmonise timelines. This leads to time and cost savings, and allows for more coherent and complementary interventions across countries, even when each agency retains leadership within its own context.

Furthermore, the project's limited impact on structural reforms within vocational training systems also diminished its potential for systemic sustainability. The original objective was to initiate change within the system rather than to transform it outright – it was more about testing and learning for future programmes. Although innovative programmes were developed, their uptake beyond partner institutions has been minimal, though noticeable. Although several innovative programmes were developed within the project, their influence remained largely confined to the immediate circle of implementing partners. This limited diffusion can be attributed to the absence of institutional anchoring, a lack of formal recognition within national frameworks, and insufficient strategies for scaling up. As a result, promising pilot initiatives failed to trigger wider systemic change or to be adopted by other institutions, thereby restricting both the long-term sustainability and transformative impact of the project.

3.2.5 EFFICIENCY

Summary: VET Toolbox 2 delivered a substantial volume of outputs within a short timeframe, leveraging existing agency networks and shared tools. However, efficiency was affected by delays in procurement, differing procedures, and a country-based allocation of responsibilities that limited cross-agency synergies based on technical expertise. More coordinated planning and earlier alignment of operational processes could have enhanced overall efficiency.

Efficiency results for VET Toolbox 2 were mixed. The project made good use of the agencies' existing networks and expertise, allowing for swift mobilisation of stakeholders and the rapid setting up of public-private platforms. Coordination by the Hub and the use of shared tools helped to standardise practices and streamline reporting. However, delays in procurement – particularly for equipment, and administrative procedures – sometimes affected the timely delivery of activities. The short duration of the implementation period also limited flexibility and put pressure on achieving targets within tight deadlines. While resources were generally well managed, varying procedures among agencies created challenges for harmonisation.

Overall, VET Toolbox 2 delivered a significant volume of outputs within a relatively short timeframe. But efficiency could have been strengthened through more aligned planning and earlier coordination of operational processes.

A challenging implementation within a tight timeline and limited budget

The implementation period was set at 24 months for projects led by GIZ, and 36 months for those implemented by other agencies. The main challenge encountered by all country teams was the time required to develop the Country Action Plans (CAP), which was widely considered too long and caused delays particularly during the investment and opportunity identification phase. For example, we include here an extract from the report of the Côte d'Ivoire's country team to the Hub (2022): "*In Côte d'Ivoire, the* *year 2022 was marked by a renewed phase of opportunity identification and project feasibility assessment, following initial avenues explored in 2021 that did not yield results. This work led to the drafting of the Côte d'Ivoire Country Action Plan and its annexes, which were submitted to INTPA for validation in September 2022 (formal approval still pending). The recruitment of the Project Manager was delayed, with the position only starting in mid-November 2022. The project is still in its start-up phase, focused on stabilising partnerships and preparing activities*" (p.1).

In some cases, the country-level formulation phase lasted longer than the actual implementation period. However, it is important to highlight the high quality of these documents, which provided detailed national context, sector-specific challenges, investment and employment projections, identified partners, justification for intervention areas, and a comprehensive outline of planned activities.

The budget for this experimental project was modest, leaving limited room to design a fully integrated training pathway approach – such as those developed in other agency-led projects. For example, in the INTEGRA project in Guinea, a tailor-made and individualised training pathway was successfully piloted.

Towards the end of the project, extensions were granted, to allow for the complementary provision of services aimed at supporting the transition to self-employment. Initially, entrepreneurship support tools had not been considered a central component of the training programmes, even though self-employment is very common in the labour market in Africa.

EQ6: To what extent did the Hub (through coordination and advice as well as activities under Monitoring, Evaluation, Accountability and Learning (MEAL), communication and knowledge management) support the consortium in piloting the projects, mobilise expertise from partner agencies and facilitate mutual learning?

At the heart of VET Toolbox 2's governance, the Coordination Hub emerged as a central mechanism for operational coherence and learning. While it successfully facilitated reporting, monitoring, and inter-agency exchange, cross-agency collaboration remained partial, with agencies mostly operating in parallel due to country-specific agendas.

The essential contribution of the Coordination-Hub

In terms of organisation, management, and coordination, the role of the Hub was considered essential and effective. It played a key coordination and facilitation role by organising peer learning sessions, Operational Management Committee (OMC) meetings, providing deliverable templates, and developing shared reporting tools. These efforts helped harmonise practices across agencies and reinforced coherence, particularly in a context where one of the five agencies had a different implementation pace. The 11 teams interviewed reported having received support from the Hub when needed, and the overall monitoring process was considered flexible, accurate, and effective.

The management of the Hub was designed as an interface between the Steering Committee, the OMC, and the country teams. It was therefore positioned close to both the decision-making sphere and field operations. In particular, field visits carried out around the mid-point of implementation by Hub members helped to bring the coordinating agency's staff closer to the on-the-ground situation in Africa. These completed visits have provided extra value, building on coordination mechanisms in quality reports that proved extremely valuable for MEAL (Monitoring, Evaluation, Accountability, and Learning) activities (Quality Report Kenya 2022, Quality Report Mozambique 2022, Quality Report Nigeria 2022, Quality Report 2022 Tanzania, Quality Report 2022 Uganda).

The challenge of cross-agency collaboration

Despite the mechanisms put in place to encourage collaboration between agencies, it appears that the latter worked more in parallel towards a shared objective than in real partnership. Collaborative efforts were mainly reflected in the workshops organised by the Hub, notably the Peer Learning Workshops held in Senegal in 2022 and in Brussels in December 2024.

The strong alignment of VET Toolbox 2 within each agency's bilateral portfolio, or other partnership projects at country level, acted as a limiting factor for cross-agency collaboration: this alignment made the identification of synergies more difficult. One major obstacle was that each agency was individually responsible for a country project.

EQ 10: What are the key lessons learnt, challenges and recommendations from the piloted projects and the collaboration in a multi-agency consortium for future initiatives?

This evaluation question addresses the efficiency of resource use in project implementation at country level, as well as collaboration within a multi-agency framework. To avoid any repetition, the corresponding recommendations and lessons learnt will be presented in the relevant sections (5 and 6). This section focuses on the analysis and the challenges raised by this issue.

Coordination based on geographic division of countries. The implementation logic was primarily based on a division of countries between the consortium's agencies, with each agency operating autonomously within its assigned territory. While this structure enabled a clear allocation of responsibilities, it limited opportunities for resource pooling and cross-agency collaboration. Country teams only interact with those from other agencies during meetings, and these meetings tend to serve more as reporting sessions than as spaces for sharing practices. Peer Learning Workshops can be considered a notable exception, as they were effective spaces for sharing practices.

Limited leveraging of agencies' specific areas of expertise. Coordination was not structured around the technical specialisations of each agency. For instance, LuxDev could have taken the lead on private sector engagement, while GIZ might have led on curriculum development. This organisational option reduced opportunities for cross-learning and limited the optimisation of each partner's comparative advantage.

The evolving role of the Hub: from logistics to facilitation. Initially perceived as an administrative or logistical interface, the Hub gradually took on a more qualitative role in coordination and knowledge sharing (see decision of the SC in March 2023[7]). Its position evolved into one of supporting collective learning – albeit belatedly. Inter-agency exchanges were not structured from the outset, and Peer Learning Workshops only occurred later in the project cycle, reducing the potential for transferring practices across countries and agencies. Following the Results-Oriented Monitoring exercise (2022), MEAL activities evolved to include a greater emphasis on qualitative feedback, thus complementing the quantitative indicators already developed and reported to the Steering Committee. To support this, two qualitative indicators were added to the LogFrame**:**

- Change actions of organisations (e.g. investors, employers, VET centres, policy officers) (IM02)
- Tested approaches to local skills development and investments (outcome indicator) (OP15)

In order to collect the necessary information for these indicators, two new activities were introduced: peer reflection visits between the Hub and the country teams, and Support and Learning (S&L) missions to the projects. As outlined in the March 2023 note, several objectives were assigned to these Support and Learning missions: gather quality insights related to the ToC and the piloted opportunity-driven approach, identify challenges and opportunities, lessons learnt, potential key successes, and good practices (what works and why?), offer an opportunity for the Hub, the country teams and the other key stakeholders, including the private sector, to reflect on the project implementation and learnings, also for knowledge sharing and capitalisation for future initiatives applying an opportunity-driven approach, including the TEI OPVET, create a peer learning component between country teams and stakeholders, and potentially create momentum for advocacy towards policymakers and future project development (p. 4).

Coordination hindered by separate budgetary frameworks. The funding for each agency was determined in advance in the form of separate budget envelopes, which limited flexibility and the ability to implement joint or coordinated activities on the ground. Furthermore, each agency operated under different internal funding rules, resulting in misaligned implementation timelines. For example, GIZ had a shorter project cycle, making synchronisation with other consortium members more difficult.

3.2.6 IMPACT

Summary: *The overall impact of VET Toolbox 2 is moderate. The project strengthened public-private collaboration and supported the creation of new training programmes and certifications in priority sectors, which may contribute to future improvements in VET systems. In some countries, these developments were acknowledged by institutional actors as valuable inputs for reform.*

However, the intended impact on employability – particularly for young people – remained limited, due to structural labour market constraints and lack of employment.

The ambitions of a pilot project such as VET Toolbox 2 should be realistic. This is clearly stated in a note written by the MEAL experts (2022[16]): "in this context, impact at system level cannot be seen as system changes or reforming specific elements of the supply chain (i.e. models for employer engagement; improved ways of developing occupational standards; better ways of training) in an SSA country. This would be overambitious for the size of the project. Instead, impact at system level relates to inspiring or nudging (small-scale) adjustments in existing systems. Thus showing, that there are ways to work more flexibly and respond to investors' needs. In order words, VET Toolbox 2 aims to make a case that there are opportunities for investors to contribute to local benefits and inspire the VET/skills development system, demonstrating (indications of) impact on different levels".

The impact indicators are defined as:

- IM01: 3,080 people (35% women, 40% youth), found decent jobs / secured their job through up-skilling
- IM02: Change actions of organisations (investors, employers, VET centres, policy officers):
  - Investors will consider following a similar approach in future investments
  - Stakeholders in the project countries will consider following a similar approach linked to future investments

Tracer studies on employment outcomes in all project countries using a common questionnaire

To assess the impact of VET Toolbox 2 training programmes on employment access and job security, a survey guideline (Guiding Note) was developed by the Hub and shared with the country teams. Each team subsequently prepared terms of reference to recruit consultancy firms responsible for collecting data in line with the recommended methodology. This activity was carried out by independent experts in each country, with varying levels of quality in terms of indicator production and report writing – an issue that will be discussed in more detail below and addressed through specific recommendations.

The methodological guide provides standard definitions for key concepts such as employment (paid or unpaid), new job, job security ('securised job'), and decent work. Unlike traditional labour market transition metrics, the 'new job' and 'securised job' indicators combine different employment situations. For example, the 'new job' category includes both individuals who were previously unemployed before the training programme and those already employed who changed occupation or sector (see Box 1). With this definition, it is not possible to distinguish how many individuals moved from a situation of unemployment (or unpaid work) to employment (including paid jobs), even though this is a key concern in the development of vocational training initiatives.

[16] Monitoring, Evaluation, Accounting and Learning Framework, 2022, April.

The methodological guide also includes a standardised questionnaire, which the country teams were encouraged to use – while retaining the flexibility to add complementary questions as needed. Within this questionnaire, two questions are particularly key:

- Question 4: 4. What was your <u>main</u> activity immediately **before you started** with the programme at VET Centre/training provider? Multiple answers possible. [17]

[ ] Student/learner (at school or training provider or internship)
[ ] Paid employment/in work (including part-time/fulltime, informal/formal, wage-employed/self-employed/family business, or irregular work, e.g. seasonal labour)
[ ] Unpaid employment (such as volunteering or unpaid support in family business, etc.)
[ ] Caring obligations
[ ] Not in education or employment
[ ] Other, please specify

- 6. What is your **current** main activity (after you graduated from the programme at VET Centre/training provider)? Multiple answers possible.

[ ] Student/learner (at school or training provider or internship)
[ ] Paid employment/in work (including part-time/full-time, informal/formal, wage-employed/self-employed/family business, or irregular work, e.g. seasonal labour)
[ ] Unpaid employment (such as volunteering or unpaid support in family business, etc.)
[ ] Caring obligations
[ ] Not in education or employment
[ ] Other, please specify

The statistics produced by the countries, and included in the reports submitted to the Hub, generally provide the results of the responses to these questions. However, the report from the Republic of the Congo does not include the full set of responses to the question on the main situation after completing the programme.

Moreover, in none of the detailed reports made available to us (Republic of the Congo, DRC, Ghana, Malawi, Senegal) were we able to identify the cross-tabulation of questions Q4 and Q6: yet these would have enabled the construction of the following transition matrix (Table 5). Building this matrix would have allowed for the calculation of several relevant indicators to assess changes in individual situations and, consequently, to measure impact:

- Proportion of students/learners before training who were in employment after training;
- Proportion of NEETs before training who were in employment after training;
- Proportion of individuals in paid employment before training who remained in paid employment after training;
- Etc.

Table 5 – Transition matrix

Situation before training Situation after training	Student/ learner	Paid employment/ in work	Unpaid employment	Caring obligations	NEET	Other
Student/learner						
Paid employment/in work						
Unpaid employment						
Caring obligations						
NEET						
Other						

[17] Incidentally, the instruction "multiple answers possible" contradicts the aim of the question, which is to find out the person's main situation (usually the one that occupies the most time, or the one the person considers most important). In this type of question, the answer must be unique, and the modalities must be unambiguous and exclusive.

Finally, question Q6 refers to the respondent's situation at a specific point in time. On the one hand, it is not specified how long after the end of the training the surveys were conducted – although it can be inferred that it was approximately three months post-training. The methodological guide allows for follow-up surveys to be conducted either three or six months after the end of the project. On the other hand, the questionnaire does not inquire about the respondent's situation between the end of the training and the date of the survey.

By basing the indicator solely on the situation at a single point in time (T), the measurement is likely to be underestimated. This is why it is generally recommended to include additional indicators, such as the time taken to access paid employment (even if the job has ended by the time of the survey), or to record the respondent's main situation on a month-by-month basis. This would enable the calculation of indicators such as "was in paid employment at least once" or "was in decent work at least once" – indicators that are commonly used to capture the effects of training programmes. (See, in this regard, the synthesis of meta-evaluations of vocational training and support programmes by Card, Kluve, and Weber, 2018.)

Access to employment remains a major challenge

It is difficult to assess the impact of the training programmes developed under VET Toolbox 2 on access to employment. Indeed, the indicators presented in the tracer study reports refer to the proportion of individuals in employment three months after completing the training, without accounting for the fact that some participants were already employed prior to the programme. As a result, the employment outcomes may be overestimated, and the added value of the training in facilitating labour market integration remains unclear.

Nonetheless, to provide a basis for the discussion, the survey reports provided data that enabled us to identify participants' main situation before and after the training period.[18] They are reported in the following tables (tables 6 to 11 in annex) as well in two following graphs (Chart 1 and 2).

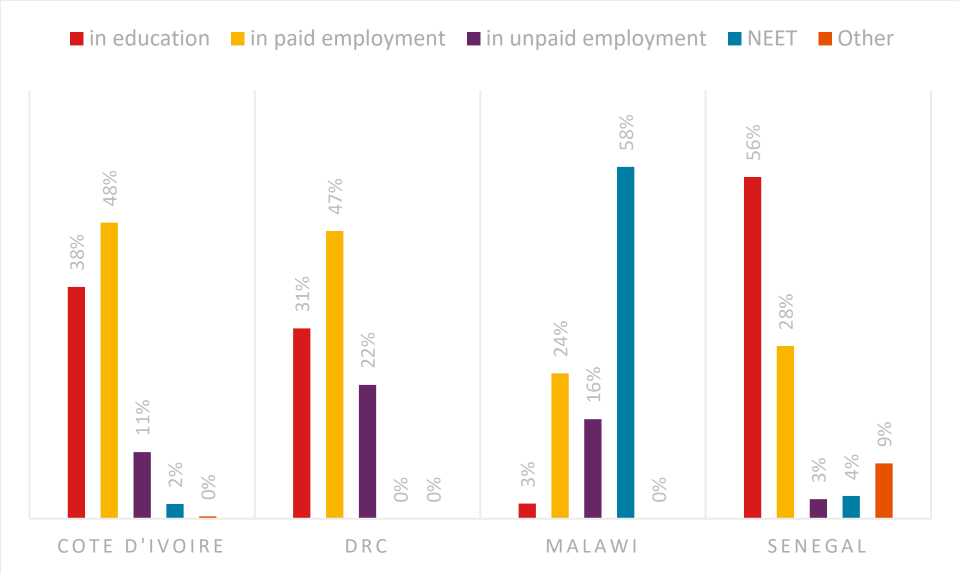
Chart 1 shows the distribution of youth across different activity statuses prior to enrolling in training programmes in Côte d'Ivoire, DRC, Malawi, and Senegal. The categories include: in education, in paid employment, in unpaid employment, NEET (Not in Education, Employment or Training), and other.

Between 31% and 69% were in paid or unpaid employment before training. For instance, in Côte d'Ivoire, 48% of the respondents were in paid employment before training, and 11% in unpaid employment. In the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), paid employment accounts for 47%, and 22% were in unpaid employment. In Malawi, the situation is markedly different. A majority (56%) of youth were NEET before training, with 24% in paid employment and 16% in unpaid employment.

Senegal stands out for having the highest share of youth in education before training (56%). Only 4% were NEET.

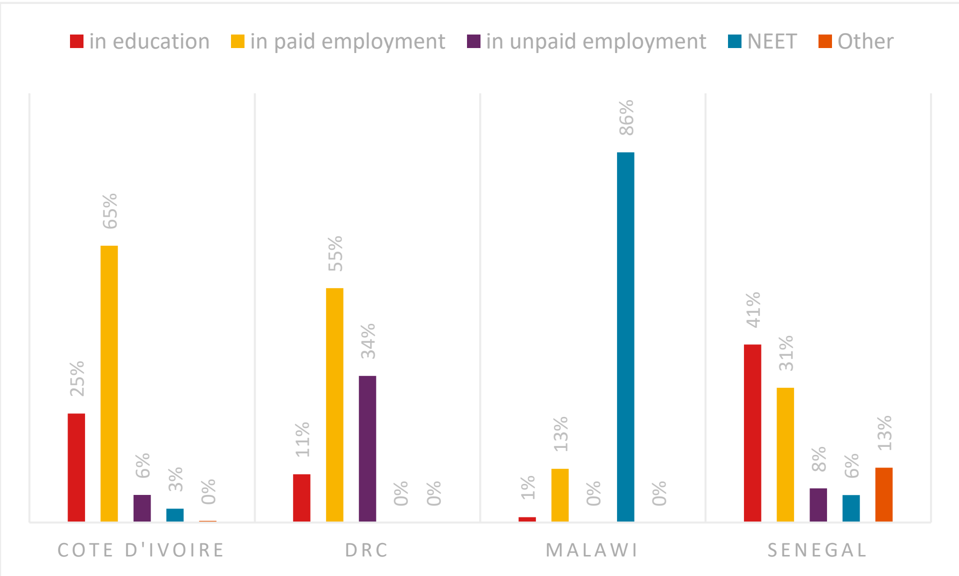
Chart 1 – Main situation of trainees before training

[18] This chart includes only the countries where the categories were comparable.



Regarding the post-training situation (Chart 2), it is particularly useful to examine the share of trainees in paid employment. In Côte d'Ivoire, this share increased from 48% before training to 65% after, representing a 33% growth rate. In the Democratic Republic of the Congo, the proportion of those in paid employment rose from 47% to 55%, an increase of 16%. Conversely, there was an increase in the share of unpaid employment (from 22% to 32%). In Senegal, the growth was more modest, at around 11%. In Malawi, the situation is more specific due to the seasonal nature of employment: moreover, the survey was conducted before seasonal recruitment had started, which significantly affects the interpretation of the results.

Chart 2 – Main situation after training



At first glance, these results may suggest that the impact of VET on employment is significant. In reality, however, we do not know how many individuals who were unemployed before the training secured a job afterwards. Nor do we know how many of those who were already employed remained with the same employer. Without this information, it would be wrong to draw clear conclusions.

Annex 7 presents further details on the main situation of the trainees, before and after training in each country.

The impact of VET Toolbox 2 on employment is mixed.

Regarding employment indicators, the **impact of VET Toolbox 2 is mixed**. Despite the creation of short employment-oriented training (including apprenticeships and internships), youth employment rates remained low – ranging from 15% to 45% for new jobs, depending on the country and figures available (35% in Tanzania, where the project was aligned with the opportunity-driven approach through investments in two TAREA member companies). Very few young people get new jobs, of which at least one criterion meets the definition of decent work (see Box 1 definition).

We would like to point out here that it is not straightforward to identify employment indicators specifically for the youth population in the survey reports. In most cases, the results are presented for all beneficiaries combined, including both young and adult participants.

On the basis of the information available, we have not been able to summarise valuable information in a synthesis table.

Box 1 ***– Definition of the employment indicators***

Employment: 15 years or older, working formally and/or informally, wage- or self-employed or working in the family business, producing goods and/or services, generating an income (monetary and/or in-kind) through his/her work.

Decent employment: at least 20 hours a week, more than the living wage.

Secured job: the person was employed before the training, and the person is still employed after the training, and the person works in the same (or similar) occupation or sector and, there is an actual improvement of the job (higher position in the same company, better salary, etc.) as well as better professional prospects.

New job: the person is employed after the training, and the person did not have paid employment before the training (see criteria employment) or was employed in a different sector/occupation before the training.

Several factors explain this gap: the **lack of actual job opportunities** at the end of the training, the **absence of formal commitments** from companies to hire, the brevity of the training programmes (which limited the development of solid technical skills), **insufficient anticipation of labour market dynamics** in the selected sectors (e.g. lack of data on company hiring practices or SMEs activities), and a general **lack of support in the transition from training to employment**. As the intended mechanism for supporting European investments did not function – because of the lack of investment opportunities during the implementation phase, the project operated within a conventional framework where project teams attempted to identify promising employment sectors. However, the teams had little assurance that jobs would be available when the trained individuals begin seeking employment.

Additionally, young people often faced **difficulties accessing internships or apprenticeships**, which are usually the first level of employer engagement. Most placements were made possible through companies already involved in public-private platforms, while non-partner companies were more reluctant. This highlights a potential weakness in the project's ability to foster broad-based youth integration into enterprises. Furthermore, the internships offered were often unpaid, lacked adequate supervision, and varied in quality – factors which limited their real impact on participants' transition to employment (due to limited opportunities to apply skills learnt in training centres). However, internships and apprenticeship periods in companies did allow young people to obtain social protection and safety equipment.

Moreover, the projects did not develop substantial **employment support mechanisms**, beyond integrating soft skills or entrepreneurial modules into the training. Except in RDC, where local project team provided services to support trainees in their transition to the job market. There were no job placement services to facilitate transition to job – especially as public employment services in Africa are generally considered to be ineffective. A few initiatives supported employees from the informal economy (e.g. in Tanzania, companies provided equipment to trainees to become subcontractors; in Republic of the Congo, self-employment kits were distributed), but these did not reach the scale required for impact. However, it has been shown that employment access is facilitated when the entire chain is addressed, from guidance and monitoring during training to support provided several months after the completion of training (SOGEROM, 2022[19]).

In the impact indicators as developed, the employment access rate for unemployed young people has been aggregated with the employment rate of already employed workers. It appears to us that the **indicators should have been disaggregated by target population**, as the transition from unemployment to employment does not entail the same challenges or require the same support measures as securing

[19] SOGEROM, Strategic evaluation of the performance of Enabel in TVET and employment, 2022, https://www.enabel.be/app/uploads/2023/01/2022_Rapport_final_TVET_emploi_FR.pdf

employees in their jobs through skills development. The aggregation of these two sub-populations makes it difficult to interpret the overall indicators provided.

A more visible impact on stakeholders' behavioural changes

The most significant impact of VET Toolbox 2 is probably related to the support provided to dialogue platforms between the private sector, national vocational training authorities, and training centres. A clear driver of change within the organisations participating in these platforms was enabling these stakeholders to meet, get to know each other, and build joint actions.

Companies interviewed during field visits generally had a rather negative perception of vocational training provided by training centres. Thanks to the VET Toolbox project and a change in the approach to developing the skills needed by these companies, their perception is evolving positively: they are likely to be more willing to forge partnerships with vocational training centres in the future.

The vocational training centres visited during the field visits are structured in a heterogeneous manner. Those already maintaining relationships with local companies for internships have external relations resources (generally a person responsible for student follow-up and making contact with companies). However, with the VET Toolbox 2 project, the creation of new curricula allows vocational training centres to benefit from a capacity-building programme and training for trainers assigned to the new curricula. All vocational training centre directors met during the visits expressed great satisfaction with the co-creation process of curricula and training. For some, the VET Toolbox 2 project is their first experience of apprenticeship-based training, with very positive feedback. In some cases, the creation of new training programmes – or the adaptation of curricula – has strengthened ties with companies. For example, in Senegal, a training programme in maintenance for the company SMT-Volvo helps to create opportunities for capacity-building activities, thus demonstrating a positive change in companies' perception of apprenticeship and vocational training.

A methodology ill-suited to analysing the employment outcomes

The VET Toolbox 2 project aims to respond to the needs of the private sector, specifically those entities that identify and declare real employment opportunities. Within this framework, the 'opportunity-driven' approach is intended to train a qualified workforce that can meet the short- to medium-term recruitment needs of productive units. To this end, public-private partnerships have, with varying degrees of success, co-developed training programmes to enhance the employability of the workforce, particularly by equipping them with skills that are valued by the participating productive organisations. Therefore, to assess the impact of the programme, **it is essential to determine whether the beneficiaries have joined the companies** in which they were trained.

From this perspective, the available data does not allow us to ascertain whether VET Toolbox 2 beneficiaries have joined the companies that expressed concrete employment and recruitment needs. While there is some data on the recruitment of trainees within these companies (as in the case of Ghana), the other tracer studies do not provide this information. Moreover, the proposed methodology appears poorly suited to evaluating the effectiveness of VET Toolbox 2, in terms of matching the recruitment needs of the companies involved in the project and thus improving the employment situation of beneficiaries.

However, a satisfaction survey conducted among employers provided insights into how well VET Toolbox 2 addressed their recruitment and skills needs. Nevertheless, although the project aimed to increase the involvement of the private sector in developing forward-looking tools for employment and skills management, our analysis of the available studies shows that the surveys did not manage to gather input from all relevant stakeholders. In the employer surveys, reaching out to companies to obtain their responses proved difficult, which is not a good sign in terms of future engagement. In this respect, the limited timeframe and the use of external service providers to carry out the tracer studies may explain the difficulties in surveying the private sector.

Limited relevance of indicators

The methodology used in the tracer studies appears ill-suited to capturing the effects of VET Toolbox 2 on beneficiaries' integration into the labour market. In particular, the decision to assess labour market outcomes three months after training is questionable. On the one hand, given that VET Toolbox 2 aims to meet actual private sector employment needs through quick, flexible, and tailored training, it seems appropriate to determine whether trainees were swiftly recruited. On the other hand, assessing labour market integration over such a short period is inherently difficult. It would have been more useful to ask beneficiaries about their employment situation over the past three months, rather than at a fixed point three months after training. This standard indicator, which better captures the integration process in fragile economies, is widely used by most international organisations.

Analyses that could be deepened

The findings based on tracer study data are primarily descriptive in nature. The analysis relies on basic tabulations of the variables available in the data, not least because the data were not weighted to account for survey response rates. Yet, such elementary analyses are used to generate conclusions and recommendations about VET Toolbox 2 in most reports. From a methodological standpoint, these are insufficiently robust to support such conclusions. While in most countries the surveys targeted samples that were considered representative of the VET Toolbox 2 beneficiary population, more advanced statistical analyses could have been conducted. Such analyses could, for instance, explore the determinants of employment access according to individual characteristics: age, gender, prior employment status, duration of training, country, region, etc.

Given the goals of VET Toolbox 2 – addressing employment challenges through the actual recruitment needs of employers – more in-depth analyses could have been conducted on the characteristics of the companies that actually hired beneficiaries. Instead, the survey results generally focus on aggregated sectors of activity, which do not allow for a proper understanding of their recruitment processes units. Monographs could have been developed, based on employer characteristics such as company size, existence of human resource functions, active participation in dialogue mechanisms, and sectors of activity. These analyses would offer valuable insights into the recruitment processes.

3.2.7 CROSS-CUTTING ISSUES

EQ 9: To what extent and how were the target groups (women and youth) actively involved and which approaches taken by the different agencies were more effective?

The implementation of the VET Toolbox 2 project revealed **variations in how trainees were selected across countries**, depending on the level of employer involvement, the structure of national training ecosystems, and local labour market dynamics. While the opportunity-driven approach was designed to align training provision with private sector needs, the process of selecting young people often highlighted tensions between ambitions, realities and timelines. These differences reflect both strategic choices and contextual constraints.

In **Kenya**'s e-waste recycling sector, young people were selected through practical interviews conducted jointly by the training centre and GIZ. Candidates were assessed on their ability to dismantle computers and identify recyclable components. This pragmatic approach aimed to identify youth from vulnerable backgrounds with the potential to operate in an informal and emerging sector. However, in the absence of a network of formal enterprises able to host interns, self-employment became the main outcome. As apprenticeships had not yet been formally introduced, mandatory internships proved extremely difficult to arrange.

Côte d'Ivoire adopted a far more structured and proactive approach, starting with the identification of 'training-friendly' companies already engaged in upskilling their workforce. These firms then helped select young candidates based on their operational needs. This model allowed for much closer alignment between training provision and actual labour market demand. The selection process thus became a tool for strengthening the coherence between supply and demand for skills, supported by a training ecosystem where companies were active players from the outset.

In Malawi, beneficiary **selection was carried out by the technical group** composed of members from the public-private platform. Companies were directly involved in the process to enhance their level of engagement and sense of ownership.

In countries like **Ghana** and the **DRC**, selection was typically based on having a basic secondary education, without specific technical assessments or entry tests. As a result, there were several cases where trainees lacked the basic literacy and numeracy skills needed to succeed in technical training. This mismatch was noted by both training providers and private sector actors, who often expected a higher level of readiness.

These contrasting models highlight the **limitations of a one-size-fits-all strategy**. The assumption that all contexts would provide a pool of youth ready to seize "opportunities" proved overly optimistic. In many cases, pre-training support or bridging modules would have been necessary to enable young people to fully benefit from the programme. Several stakeholders recommended, for future programmes, to differentiate learning pathways based on starting levels. Some young people may need longer, more supported training cycles, while others could access shorter, targeted qualifications.

It is difficult to determine which model was the most effective. **Each model was adapted to local contexts and to the level of engagement of the partners involved**, which in itself was meant to ensure that it was the most effective approach for the given setting.

Moreover, the **selection of beneficiaries took place within a very tight timeframe**, as the development of country action plans absorbed a significant portion of the project's implementation period. As a result, the time available for selection and training was significantly reduced. It is therefore possible that the selection process did not fully meet initial expectations, and that it largely consisted of enrolling individuals who volunteered and met the minimum eligibility criteria – such as not being in employment, in the case of young people.

Across the countries covered, the training participants were generally well-educated, with most having completed upper secondary general education or even post-secondary and tertiary education. In the Democratic Republic of the Congo, 214 participants held an upper secondary general education qualification, while 180 had attended tertiary education. In Côte d'Ivoire, 41% of participants had completed secondary education and 42% had attained post-secondary or tertiary education. In Malawi, 82.5% of participants came from an upper secondary general education background. In Ghana, while only 15% had upper secondary general education, a significant 43% had completed tertiary education. These figures reflect a relatively high educational baseline among beneficiaries, which likely influenced both their training experience and post-training trajectories.

Human rights based approach

According to the Document of Action, "the action will contribute to Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 8 ('Decent Work and Economic Growth'), aiming at promoting sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment and decent work for all. Especially the sub-targets "Promote Policies to Support Job Creation and Growing Enterprises", "Promote Youth Employment, Education and Training", and "Full Employment and Decent Work with Equal Pay" will be strengthened by the action. Furthermore, the action will contribute to achieve SDG 4 'Quality education', ensuring inclusive and equitable quality education and promoting lifelong learning opportunities for all".

From the perspective of the SDGs, VET Toolbox 2 has been most effective in contributing to SDG 8, particularly in promoting youth employment and supporting policies for enterprise development. The opportunity-driven approach enabled stronger alignment between skills development and actual labour market needs, notably through the co-construction and delivery of training with private sector and VET actors, and the establishment of public–private dialogue platforms. These mechanisms helped foster more relevant training offers and, in some countries, improved linkages to employment.

The project also contributed to SDG 4 by supporting quality and inclusive education initiatives. In particular, the development of tailored training programmes, including short-term modular courses and practical learning pathways, responded to diverse learner profiles and supported lifelong learning. However, the effects on SDG targets related to decent work and equal pay were more uneven, often constrained by the broader economic and institutional contexts.

Gender-related differences were insufficiently addressed throughout the implementation of VET Toolbox 2. While the initiative aimed to contribute to inclusive economic growth and decent work for all, the limited integration of gender-sensitive approaches weakened its ability to reach this ambition fully. The absence of targeted measures to promote women's access to training and employment—such as childcare support, flexible training schedules - may have constrained the inclusiveness of the action. To better align with the principles of sustainable development and decent work, future initiatives should adopt more proactive strategies to ensure that vocational training systems respond to the specific barriers faced by women and other underrepresented groups.

4 Conclusions

Conclusion 1: An innovative approach with uneven uptake. The opportunity-driven approach introduced a relevant methodology, aiming to align vocational training with concrete economic opportunities. However, it was not equally understood across all teams and stakeholders, and this often led to a reversion to more traditional sector-based diagnostics. From the start, the opportunity-driven approach has not been sufficiently understood by all implementation partners, including within the partner agencies of the consortium. The transition from a 'demand-driven' to an 'opportunity-driven' model remains a subject of internal discussion and divergence. This may, in part, be attributed to the lack of tangible alignment with investments, as initially foreseen in the project formulation documents. The time dedicated to identifying sectors and investments was relatively long, yet it did not lead to the successful identification of actual investments.

Conclusion 2: High contextual relevance in targeted sectors. The interventions were well aligned with the needs of priority sectors, particularly emerging or underserved ones (e.g. renewable energy, sustainable construction, digital, waste management, agriculture) and in coherence with the EIP. Co-designing training with employers ensured greater alignment with local labour market realities.

Conclusion 3: High response to skills needs. By financing short, tailored training programmes, based on worked-based learning and designed to address companies' recruitment needs, and by developing these within a framework of public-private dialogue, the VET Toolbox 2 project has effectively piloted the type of intervention that a vocational training fund should support – namely, one in which the private sector is actively represented and contributes to structured dialogue with employers. VET Toolbox 2 has demonstrated what collaboration between public and private actors can achieve and finance.

Conclusion 4: Effective but fragile public-private dialogue platforms. The establishment or reinforcement of public-private dialogue platforms was one of the most visible achievements of the VET Toolbox 2. However, their sustainability remains fragile and highly dependent on external – particularly financial – support and on the legitimacy of the group leader. Pre-existing platforms such as sectoral ones proved more resilient than newly created ones.

Conclusion 5: Evidence of a persisting challenge particularly regarding young people's access to employment. Achieving a meaningful impact on young people's access to employment – and in particular, to decent work – remains a significant challenge for development initiatives, especially for young women. The support provided to companies in articulating their recruitment needs and improving their recruitment practices is an area that remains insufficiently explored. Small and medium-sized enterprises are not sufficiently equipped to establish transparent recruitment policies, human resource management systems, or forward-looking skills planning. Once the training programmes had ended, these companies were often unable to hire the young people they had helped to train. In terms of decent work, notable progress was made: apprentices and interns benefited from insurance coverage and safety equipment during their time in the workplace – although these were funded by the project. As a result, companies were made aware of these issues. However, the transition to decent employment remains a broad challenge.

Conclusion 6: Real but uneven private sector engagement. Private sector involvement was stronger in the design of training content than in the provision of internships or recruitment. Economic constraints, viewing internships as free labour, and limited job openings all contributed to this weaker engagement. Local small and medium-sized enterprises are relatively willing to engage in collaboration with vocational training actors to improve prospects for their sector as a whole (a strong collective dimension), but they are less inclined to commit on an individual level for their own benefit (a weak individual dimension).

Conclusion 7: Certification as proof of a collective business engagement. The VET Toolbox 2 project successfully developed training curricula in priority and emerging sectors, all leading to certifications currently undergoing accreditation in each of the project countries. This reflects the strength of a collective endeavour: on the one hand, producing a tool for skills recognition – a passport to employability – and on the other, demonstrating the value of a multi-agency, multi-country initiative. In the long term, it opens up the possibility of transferring these training curricula to other partner countries within different collaborative frameworks, subject to local adaptation. The certification addresses a multifaceted challenge: it recognises skills acquisition, it is designed for use beyond the life of the project – as it was created by and for local actors – and it is transferable.

Conclusion 9: A project that contributes to skills development and upskilling. The VET Toolbox 2 project targeted two distinct population groups: young people without qualifications or employment, and individuals already in employment but with low levels of qualification. Both groups benefited from training activities of varying scale and scope, with the common feature that the training was partly work-based. Training for employed individuals tended to be shorter and focused on specific technical skills, while unemployed youth followed longer programmes. However, employment indicators in some documents (e.g. the 2023 activity report) aggregated both groups, which tends to overestimate the project's effectiveness. Moreover, access to employment included self-employment and informal economic activities, which would have required more detailed documentation. It is possible that, in some cases, the project contributed more to the informal economy than to structured career paths.

Conclusion 10: A vision of training programmes with limited linkage to broader learning pathways. Within the VET Toolbox 2 project, each individual project developed one or more training programmes in the identified sector(s). The project supported the creation or update of demand-oriented training modules. Training centres also benefited from improved pedagogical tools and equipment, leaving behind a tangible foundation for further development. However, the project did not conceive the training programmes within a broader framework aimed at building a full learning pathway. Yet, the heterogeneous skill levels of learners – and the range of competency needs – require a continuum approach to training. Such an approach should go beyond the design of short courses and should include opportunities for continued skills development over time. The training interventions often operated as entry points, but without clear links to formal qualifications or further learning opportunities. This lack of pathway integration weakens the longer-term impact on employability.

Conclusion 11: Trainee selection constrained by tight timelines and lack of individual support. Beneficiary selection was affected by delays in country-level planning. In many cases, selection became a pragmatic exercise driven by availability and minimum eligibility criteria, rather than a targeted process aligned with opportunity-driven goals. However, the selection of beneficiaries is closely linked to the project's effectiveness. This could have been mitigated through individual support throughout the training pathway, but such support was not formally planned. This support was implemented unevenly by training centres, depending on their respective capacities.

Conclusion 12: An innovative multi-agency model with limited practical collaboration. The consortium model enabled context-specific implementation while ensuring strategic coherence. Nonetheless, agencies often worked in parallel rather than in true collaboration, limiting cross-learning and the pooling of resources, potentially due to a division of countries instead of competencies of each agency.

Conclusion 13: Strong support from the Hub in coordination and MEAL. The Hub played a central role in project management, inter-agency coordination, and the development of shared tools. S&L missions by the Hub helped align strategic steering with operational realities on the ground, thus achieving a more qualitative insight and completing the quantitative indicators.

Conclusion 14: A project that is both relevant and coherent. Significant efforts were made to ensure both external and internal coherence. The VET Toolbox 2 piloted projects that were aimed to align with European strategies as well as national policies and strategies related to education, employment, and economic development in each of the 11 countries. Each agency drew on its own expertise, stakeholder networks, and past or ongoing projects to establish strong internal coherence and enhance the project's success.

Conclusion 15: Fragile sustainability despite efforts to embed actions. Some results show potential for sustainability, such as certifications and alignment with national strategies. However, accreditation, institutional anchoring, and domestic funding remain critical challenges for long-term impact. Furthermore, while local public-private dialogue platforms have shown promise in aligning training provision with labour market needs, their long-term sustainability remains fragile in the absence of a robust governance model and stable funding mechanisms.

Conclusion 16: Improving tracer study design and data use for better impact measurement

The MEAL system established under VET Toolbox 2 provided a useful framework for data collection and monitoring across diverse national contexts. The integration of tracer studies and employer surveys reflected a clear intention to generate evidence on project outcomes. However, certain methodological aspects limited the ability of the system to fully capture the specific objectives of the opportunity-driven approach. In particular, indicators focused on beneficiaries' employment status at a fixed point (e.g. three months post-training), which may not reflect the complexity and variability of integration trajectories in fragile labour markets. In several cases, baseline data was lacking, and comparisons between pre- and post-training situations were not systematically made. Moreover, due to the absence of targeted follow-up and the nature of the questions asked, it remains unclear how many young people were ultimately recruited by the host companies that had initially expressed employment needs. The analytical treatment of data remained mostly descriptive, without adjustment for survey response rates: this may affect the robustness of findings. Contacting companies to collect their views also proved challenging in some countries, raising questions about the level of private sector engagement. Nevertheless, the MEAL system laid the groundwork for more systematic data tracking. The system also highlighted areas where further refinement – in terms of both indicators and stakeholder participation – could enhance the programme's learning and accountability mechanisms.

5 Recommendations

The recommendations were developed using a detailed template provided by Enabel. They were drafted by the evaluation team and presented and discussed during the final VET Toolbox workshop held in Brussels on 4–5 June 2025. The final evaluation report takes into account the feedback gathered during this workshop.

Recommendation 1	Related conclusion(s)	Targeted actor(s)	Level	Priority	Type
Structure inter-agency coordination around their recognised areas of expertise (curriculum development, insertion, decent work, entrepreneurship, etc.) rather than around countries. This approach should promote greater coherence and a stronger capitalisation of the consortium's internal expertise.	12	European Commission Agencies	3 AND 4	Medium/long term	Strategic

Historically, agencies have organised their operations primarily around geographic mandates, resulting in potential overlaps, knowledge fragmentation, and limited internal knowledge capitalisation. Shifting towards expertise-driven coordination offers significant advantages, notably improved alignment of activities, and optimised resource allocation. Expertise-driven coordination relies on clear responsibilities and roles for each partner and for each entity of the governance. This targeted approach allows agencies to specialise further in their strengths, thus facilitating deeper technical insights, and fostering a more robust internal knowledge base. However, careful attention must be given to establishing clear communication channels, clearly defined roles, and collaborative planning processes to mitigate risks associated with operational silos. Concretely, implementing structured communities of practice that are focused on key thematic areas can ensure continuous knowledge exchange and capacity-building. Each agency responsible for specific project activities would organise regular expertise-sharing meetings, inviting representatives from other agencies to share insights, experiences, and best practices. Joint training sessions and workshops can further foster collaboration and build trust among team members. Regular inter-agency expertise-sharing meetings, joint training sessions, and workshops can foster collaboration and trust among team members. These would be crucial steps towards achieving greater coherence, efficiency, and impactful outcomes. Nevertheless, the geographic component should be also considered and combined, in light of the fact that the presence of the agencies has been proven to be an advantage.

Recommendation 2	Related conclusion(s)	Targeted actor(s)	Level	Priority	Type
Revise the opportunity-driven approach in light of the lessons learnt from VET Toolbox 2, by making it more explicit and operational, and by establishing stronger linkages with national vocational training funds, centres of excellence, or	1 3 4 5	European Commission Agencies	1 AND 2 AND 4	Medium term	Strategic

enterprise-based training centres.					

Drawing from the lessons learnt during the implementation of VET Toolbox 2, it is recommended that the opportunity-driven approach should be refined, by making it more explicit and operational. The approach should therefore explicitly articulate operational guidelines with clearly defined selection criteria for identifying and pursuing opportunities. This recommendation also relies on intensified, systematic collection of information on companies' recruitment needs, so as to ensure that interventions remain closely aligned with labour-market demand. Moreover, the approach should be better explained through practical examples, drawing for instance on countries where public schemes successfully operate on similar principles. By highlighting such examples, agency teams could better communicate to companies and increase their engagement. Furthermore, to enhance the impact and sustainability of this approach, stronger connections must be forged in parallel with vocational training funds, centres of excellence, and enterprise-based training centres. Stronger coordination and collaboration with training funds should also be encouraged, for instance through the RAFPRO network (Réseau Africain des Institutions et Fonds de Formation Professionnelle).

Recommendation 3	**Related conclusion(s)**	**Targeted actor(s)**	**Level**	**Priority**	**Type**
Pilot the creation of enterprise-based training centres in targeted sectors where current vocational training systems are lacking or insufficient, in order to support upskilling of employees, skills acquisition for jobseekers, and to stimulate greater private sector engagement.	15 10 6 3	Agencies	1 AND 2 AND 4	Long term	Strategic

The guiding idea is to pool training resources. This can be done by establishing enterprise-based training centres, supported by groups of companies operating within the same sector or sub-sector and pursuing shared objectives. In response to persistent skills gaps across several strategic industries, we recommend piloting the creation of such centres in targeted sectors where existing vocational provision is weak or fragmented. National TVET systems have historically struggled to keep pace with rapidly evolving technological requirements, forcing firms to rely on costly in-house solutions or informal learning pathways. By situating structured training facilities directly inside – or in close partnership with – leading firms, the consortium can leverage workplace realities to deliver demand-driven upskilling for employees and hands-on skills acquisition for jobseekers, while deepening private-sector engagement in national skills ecosystems. Expected benefits could be co-funding mechanisms (matching grants, etc.) that share costs between public actors and enterprises, thereby strengthening financial sustainability. This could foster innovation diffusion, through host firms that become hubs for disseminating advanced practices to their suppliers and SMEs in the value chain. Our practical proposals for action include: conduct a sector-mapping study to identify lead firms willing to host such a centre; negotiate memoranda of understanding to outline roles, cost-sharing and intellectual-property clauses between host companies, public TVET agencies and the consortium; design modular, competency-based curricula co-developed by company technicians and TVET pedagogical experts; include cross-cutting skills such as digital literacy and occupational safety; mobilise national vocational training funds or allocate project resources to provide start-up grants for equipment, training of the trainer; or organise study visits to Europe to familiarise stakeholders with innovative training models.

Recommendation 4	Related conclusion(s)	Targeted actor(s)	Level	Priority	Type
Continue building the capacity of private sector companies to strengthen their engagement in skills development and improvement. By providing greater support to small and medium-sized enterprises in developing their HR policies, anticipation capacity, and recruitment practices, their hiring potential could be significantly enhanced.	5 6	Agencies	1 AND 2	Medium term	Strategic

Small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) often lack formal HR systems, workforce-planning tools, and structured recruitment processes. As a result, their ability to anticipate skills needs, attract suitable candidates and invest in continuous learning is limited – hampering productivity and constraining job creation. Support to integrated approaches – that includes both upskilling of employees already in post and pre-employment training for future recruits in the same company – could ensure a seamless talent pipeline for growing businesses. Targeted support will help SMEs define job profiles, streamline recruitment channels and adopt competency-based selection, thus increasing both the quantity and quality of hires. Strengthening anticipation capacities would enable firms to align training investments with emerging technological and market trends. Concrete actions could include: carry out human resources audits in some SMEs to identify gaps in policies, forecasting methods and recruitment practices, distinguishing between employees' needs and future workforce requirements; develop an SME HR Toolkit (guidelines, sample job descriptions, competency frameworks, etc.); facilitate peer-learning workshops where SME managers exchange experiences and jointly solve HR challenges, and connect these circles to PPDs; or introduce skills-anticipation workshops to help SMEs forecast future competence needs.

Recommendation 5	Related conclusion(s)	Targeted actor(s)	Level	Priority	Type
Continue and strengthen interventions in the field of vocational training that are based on real work-based learning and skills certification, with a stronger focus on supporting girls' access, participation, and success. This type of intervention has demonstrated its positive impact on youth employability and has encouraged stronger engagement from private sector companies.	3 7	Agencies	1	Short term	Strategic

Building on VET Toolbox 2, the project should continue – and intensify – its support for vocational training models that combine real work-based learning (WBL) with recognised skills certification. Some points should be carefully considered: quality assurance by developing guidelines on training plans, trainer qualifications, and assessment procedures to safeguard learning quality at the workplace; certification alignment to the national qualification framework; and balanced cost-sharing to encourage firms to host learners while avoiding market distortions.

Gender-responsive design should be reinforced, by promoting role-model campaigns to attract young women into non-traditional trades, supporting career guidance tailored to girls, and addressing structural barriers to participation such as childcare or mobility constraints. More targeted outreach and support mechanisms are needed to increase enrolment and retention of girls, particularly in male-dominated sectors. This could include scholarships, gender-sensitive mentoring, and partnerships with women's associations or community leaders.

Actions to develop in the future could include creating a WBL guideline which could be disseminated through employer federations; or launching mentor-training courses leading to a micro-credential for company supervisors.

Recommendation 6	**Related conclusion(s)**	**Targeted actor(s)**	**Level**	**Priority**	**Type**
Design individualised and modular training programmes that are adapted to beneficiaries' entry levels and allow for progression along a training pathway. This would support a more holistic approach to training, leading to greater inclusion and enhanced employability.	10	Agencies	1	Short term OR	Operational

VET Toolbox 2 has demonstrated that modular training offers clear added-value. It is therefore recommended that more advanced forms of modular training be tried: this would provide learners with maximum flexibility to assemble, pace and update their skills portfolio. It would be useful to consider moving beyond the notion of a single, stand-alone course by designing coherent 'training pathways' that allow learners to stack modules and gain progressively higher credentials. Modular pathways also accommodate learners with varying education levels, enabling low-skilled youth, women returning to the labour market, and workers in transition to enter and progress in training at their own pace. This approach would be particularly relevant for young women, who may face intermittent educational trajectories due to early pregnancy, family responsibilities, or limited mobility. Flexible and modular systems can help to reduce gender inequalities, by making training more accessible and adaptable to their needs.

A modular approach would be more efficient, since individual learning plans prevent time and resources being spent on content that learners have already mastered, thus shortening completion times and reducing costs. This requires the use of tools to evaluate prior learning and to identify skills gaps. A modular approach could be combined with recognition of prior learning. Fostering a modular approach would require support to be provided through guidance and mentoring, by training counsellors to help learners to choose modules, and stay on course.

Recommendation 7	**Related conclusion(s)**	**Targeted actor(s)**	**Level**	**Priority**	**Type**
Add, in the Terms of Reference for external evaluations, the organisation of a collaborative workshop to discuss findings and recommendations, allowing for constructive input prior to the submission of the final evaluation report.		ENABEL	3	Medium term	Operational

To maximise learning and ownership, we recommend that a collaborative workshop – to be built into the Terms of Reference – should be included in the external evaluation that forms part of a wider co-construction process. This workshop could include the presentation, discussion and refinement of preliminary findings and recommendations. If organised before the final report is submitted, this workshop should lead to more extensive utilisation of those findings and recommendations: as recommendations are co-created, stakeholders are more likely to act on them. It would also be valuable to develop a workshop guidance note outlining objectives, participant selection, agenda samples and facilitation tools: and to design a pilot in future mid-term evaluations, with the collection of participant feedback to refine the methodology.

Recommendation 8	Related conclusion(s)	Targeted actor(s)	Level	Priority	Type
Support the development of regulatory frameworks for hosting interns in companies, in order to facilitate the expansion of work-based training for young people and contribute to strengthening VET	6	Agencies	1 AND 2	Medium term	Operational

While internships are a proven gateway into the labour market, many SSA countries still lack clear, enforceable regulations governing the hosting of interns in companies. The absence of a framework can lead to inconsistent learning experiences, limited protection for young people, and reluctance among firms unsure of their obligations. We therefore recommend supporting governments, employers' organisations and social partners to design and implement comprehensive regulatory frameworks that make it easier – and safer – for companies to offer quality, work-based training placements. In the future, some targeted actions could include: conduct a regulatory gap analysis comparing current national provisions with international good practice (e.g. EU Quality Framework for Traineeships); facilitate multi-stakeholder drafting workshops that bring together ministries and employer associations to co-develop internship guidelines; draft a model internship contract template covering learning objectives, supervision arrangements, and insurance; and develop guidelines for companies on how to design, implement and evaluate internship programmes.

Recommendation 9	Related conclusion(s)	Targeted actor(s)	Level	Priority	Type
Strengthen the MEAL system by developing more robust and tailored methodologies to assess programme outcomes. Improvements are needed on three levels: Survey tools should be enhanced to collect more precise information on the beneficiaries and their companies. Data processing and indicator selection should be reinforced to better capture the actual effects of training. Indicator harmonisation across countries should be strengthened to ensure	16	Agencies	1 AND 2	Short term	Strategic

better comparability of results.					

Survey tools should be enhanced to collect more precise information on the beneficiary's situation before training, their host company during internships or apprenticeships, the nature of supervision provided, and their post-training status. Data processing and indicator selection should be reinforced to better capture the actual effects of training, moving beyond descriptive statistics to more outcome-oriented measures. Indicator harmonisation across countries should be strengthened to ensure better comparability of results and enable consolidated programme-level analysis, including the pre-definition of templates for expected results to guide data reporting and interpretation.

Recommendation 10	**Related conclusion(s)**	**Targeted actor(s)**	**Level**	**Priority**	**Type**
Better coordination is needed between VET programme teams and EU Delegations or Member State representations in partner countries. Leveraging existing programmes that support business climate reform would strengthen the relevance of skills development initiatives. Aligning more closely with these actors would enhance the strategic use of the opportunity-driven approach and foster more sustainable interventions.	1 5 6	Agencies	1 AND 2 AND 3	Short term	Strategic

Coordination should be enhanced between programme formulation and implementation teams and the EU Delegations and Member State representations (e.g. embassies, consulates) in partner countries. While the opportunity-driven approach of VET Toolbox 2 provides a promising framework to align skills development with real private sector demand, its potential remains underexploited in the absence of systematic articulation with broader economic development and business climate programmes. In several countries, complementary EU or bilateral initiatives exist to support investment promotion, SME development, and regulatory simplification – yet links with skills development programmes remain ad hoc or marginal. A closer involvement of EU Delegations and consular actors would allow for more strategic alignment, facilitate synergies across instruments (e.g. blending, policy dialogue, business platforms), and promote co-construction of training solutions with productive sectors. This would help to anchor opportunity-driven training initiatives in a broader structural transformation agenda, as well as to increase the relevance and sustainability of the interventions.

6 Lessons learnt

The value of a contextualised and sector-specific approach

The VET Toolbox 2 project demonstrated that a contextualised approach – grounded in the local context and the specific needs of economic sectors – can generate relevant and effective solutions for vocational training. Thanks to flexible implementation, while maintaining a common overarching approach, it was possible to adapt interventions to highly diverse economic and institutional contexts.

A contextualised approach like this requires key stakeholders to be brought together, including representatives from economic sectors or sub-sectors, vocational training actors, and institutional stakeholders. The first essential step to operationalise this approach is establishing a local and sectoral dialogue framework. The benefits are diverse: mutual understanding among stakeholders, convergence towards joint action, consideration of local and/or sector-specific constraints, and integration within a given territory.

The consolidation of local, sectoral public-private dialogue platforms provides a foundation for broader local coordination frameworks. A bottom-up approach appears to be more effective in encouraging the engagement of businesses – including smaller enterprises – in support of local economic development.

Early involvement of the private sector is a strategic lever, but requires support

Private sector engagement in the co-development of training curricula proved successful across all countries, demonstrating both the relevance and effectiveness of the intervention. The role of implementing agencies in facilitating and mediating this engagement is essential, but this should gradually give way to ownership by local actors in order to create conditions for sustainability. Otherwise, there is a risk that engagement will remain limited to isolated partner involvement, aimed solely at meeting project-specific objectives.

One key lesson is that engaging the private sector requires close support, clear incentives, and the identification of appropriate stakeholders – large enterprises, business federations, and organised SMEs. In contexts where companies lack economic structuring or internal HR capacity, sustained engagement proved more difficult. This suggests that successful interventions are more likely when embedded in a broader structural and systemic approach, rooted in local economic value chains.

The 'opportunity-driven' approach requires a more operational framework
While conceptually innovative, this approach was unevenly understood and applied. Its potential is strong when supported by in-depth value chain analysis and structured economic partnerships. However, its operational implementation suffers when it remains overly theoretical or disconnected from practical employment and investment data. In the absence of reliable information on skills needs and recruitment plans – as few countries have labour market observatories tracking employment trends – country teams spent significant time identifying sectors and investment opportunities, but without being able to effectively link sector studies to actual company hiring.

This opportunity-driven approach requires reliance on practical cases and clear demonstrations of tangible benefits for companies. It also demands strong flexibility from training centres, which must adapt to the evolving needs of businesses. Without proper coordination, the approach risks serving only a limited number of trainees and potential hires. The operational framework of VET Toolbox 2 may have lacked stronger incentive-based contractual mechanisms, which can secure genuine private sector commitments to recruitment. Mechanisms like these could have taken the form of targeted, tailored training periods leading to confirmed recruitment, rather than training initiatives based on hypothetical employment prospects.

Integrating the informal sector and young women requires targeted efforts
The inclusion objective, particularly for young women, proved challenging in the male-dominated sectors targeted by VET Toolbox 2 (with the exception of the eco-tourism sector and the Bags and Sacs cie in the mining sector in DRC, where female participation was high). Specific outreach efforts, adapted logistical conditions, and a more diversified training offer are needed to improve inclusion. These are only starting points, as a wide range of additional inclusion actions could be considered.

Likewise, integrating the informal sector requires tailor-made approaches and gradual recognition of acquired skills. One paradox highlighted in the evaluation of VET Toolbox 2 is the prominent role that informal activities played in implementation – despite the initial design being based on attracting large formal sector investments. However, large companies often rely on informal activities within their value chains, particularly in rural areas and sectors such as agriculture.

As informal sector actors are less structured, dedicated methodologies are needed – as seen in VET Toolbox 1 with the recognition of informal learning. Had this component been included in VET Toolbox 2, it could have yielded positive results in beneficiary selection, assessment of prior learning, and skills development tailored to the needs of informal sector players.

Supporting the private sector does not preclude institutional support, which remains a key success factor

Institutional support is essential for the certification and appropriation of actions, ensuring that future reforms of vocational training systems can develop. The early involvement of national authorities in the design and accreditation of training programmes strengthens both their recognition and their integration into existing systems. Where such coordination was weak or delayed, certification processes were significantly slowed down.

The public-private dialogue platforms established through the project facilitated improved coordination between public and private actors. Their short-term impact – particularly in the design of training curricula – was tangible. However, their sustainability beyond the life of the project strongly depends on institutional anchoring, access to dedicated funding, and the ability to deliver visible results.

A strategic lever for transforming training systems is the combined involvement of the private sector and national vocational training authorities. This requires action on both fronts: engagement with the private sector, plus technical and material support to the public vocational training sector. With only a few exceptions, this sector remains significantly under-resourced within the broader education sector.