

SUPPORT TO VET REFORMS PROJECT IN UZBEKISTAN (VET4UZ)

Half-Year Activity Report: 1st December 2021 – 30th June 2022



Gabriela Damian-Timosenco, PhD
VET4UZ – Project Team Leader
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Table of Contents

1.	Basic information	4
1.	Strategic review and outlook	5
1.1.	Main results achieved in the reporting period	5
1.2.	Main steering implications for the next period	6
2.	Introduction	6
2.1.	Project background.....	6
2.2.	Evolution of the context	7
2.3.	Update of stakeholder analysis	8
3.	Outcomes, outputs and performance	9
3.1.	Outputs achieved according to YPO 2022	9
3.2.	Identification of collaboration and synergies with donor projects in VET Sector	15
4	Finances and management	16
5	Lessons learnt and reflections	17

Acronyms

ADB	Asian Development Bank
APTA	Association of Private Tourism Agencies
AoH	Association of Hoteliers of Uzbekistan
CEMETS	Centre on the Economics and Management of Education and Training Systems
CES	Chair of Education Systems
EMIS	Education Management Information System
HELVETAS	HELVETAS Swiss Intercooperation
HEMIS	Higher Education Management Information System
HO	Head Office
ICT	Information and Communication Technologies
ILMR	Institute of Labour Market Research
IPIRFT	Institute of Pedagogical Innovations, Retraining and Further Training
MHSSE	Ministry of Higher and Secondary Specialised Education
MELR	Ministry of Employment and Labour Relations
M&E	Monitoring and Evaluation
MSD	Market System Development
MTCH	Ministry of Tourism and Cultural Heritage
PCM	Project Cycle Management
PPP	Public-private partnerships
QA	Quality Assurance
SDC	Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation
SFUVET	Swiss Federal University of Vocational Education and Training
VET	Vocational Education and Training
VET4UZ	Support to VET Reforms Project
VSD	Vocational Skills Development
YPO	Yearly Plan of Operation

1. Basic information

Name of project	Support to VET Reforms Project in Uzbekistan (VET4UZ)		
Country	Uzbekistan		
SDC domain	Employment and Economic Development	Working Field	Inclusive employment of youth through VSD
Start date	Phase I: 01.12.2021	End date	Phase I: 31.12.2025
Short description	The main goal of the VET4UZ project (phase I) is to contribute to more gainful employment of Vocational Education and Training (VET) graduates through improved access to the labour market. This will be achieved through a systemic approach fostering improved coordination within the state structures as well as between the state and the economic actors and the improvement of quality of inputs (profiles, curricula, learning material, qualified teachers, infrastructure, provider management, financing) into the VET offer.		
Overall goal	VET students and graduates in Uzbekistan profit from a functional labour market-oriented education and training system, allowing them to find and retain an attractive and decent job in sectors with growth potential. Target 2026: 2000 young persons of whom at least 50% being project beneficiaries, have obtained gainful and/or additional (self-) employment due to VET4UZ interventions.		
Intermediate goal	VET graduates increase their employability through demand and labour market-oriented VET offer.		
Outcomes	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Strengthened institutional actors implement a functional regulatory framework in a coordinated manner. 2. VET actors on central level and VET providers assume their quality-assurance roles, having developed the necessary structures, processes, and instruments. 3. Teachers perform in a competence-oriented and labour-market oriented way. 4. The economic actors assume an enhanced role in the VET system, by contributing actively to the governance, definition, and implementation of VET. 		
Outputs	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1.1. VET system monitored and harmonised. 1.2. Key institutions / persons are capacitated to take a leading role. 1.3. VET coordination mechanisms and processes established. 2.1 Improved institutional capacity on QA. 2.2 Accreditation system of formal VET providers complied with (nationally) agreed standards and piloted. 3.1 Strengthened institutional capacity for initial and in-service teacher training. 3.2 Improved institutional capacity on teachers' qualification and certification systems. 4.1 More structured representation of employers in VET established 4.2 Private sector-led strategy established and capacities of employers in advocacy built. 		
Approach	The VET4UZ project applies an inclusive systems approach based on an enhanced collaboration of public and private partners at the national and regional level in managing VET with a focus on capacity building and attention for transversal themes in cooperation with relevant development partners.		
Beneficiaries	Project beneficiaries are the under- and unemployed, predominantly youth aged 15-29, and secondary school students who are attending public VET institutions. The project will make specific efforts to reach out to women and persons from disadvantaged backgrounds in these groups.		
Implementing partners	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Helvetas Swiss Intercooperation (lead) • Center on the Economics and Management of Education and Training Systems (CEMETS) from CES/ETHZ • Swiss Federal University of Vocational Education and Training (SFUVET) 		
Donor	Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC)		
Resources (phase budget)	Phase I: CHF 4,814,837		

1. Strategic review and outlook

1.1. Main results achieved in the reporting period

The inception period was used to appreciate the actual situation in a dynamic VET sector with assessments and fact - finding exercises to validate the assumptions. Year 1 of the Phase I is the starting point for project implementation and brings together partners and team members, aligning their understanding under a common framework.

In the first seven months of Phase 1 (December 2021 – June 2022), a number of project activities took place and several intermediate results have been achieved:

Project organisation (staff recruitment, M&E system, regulations, visual identity)

- Official introduction of the project to the Uzbek government and private sector stakeholders was done (December 15, 2021 and January 18, 2022).
- Helvetas Uzbekistan management team prepared all necessary internal regulations, operational manuals and standard templates, based on them oriented the local staff and passed SDC's Partner Risk Assessment procedure.
- Local legal expert identified and work on critical analysis and harmonisation of VET regulatory framework initiated (legislative acts to be addressed will be selected in line with the reform priorities).
- Local governance expert recruited and support to formulation and advocacy for the project's inputs to the new legal documents regulating VET initiated.
- The visual identity of the project defined and approved (project new name and logo, team business cards, presentation template etc.).
- Project M&E monitoring tool developed (Excel file to collect and systematize relevant data: project activities per outcome and indicator, status, expected results, products, target audience, no. of participants – disaggregated men, women, youth, socially disadvantaged, aspects of climate change, lessons learnt, challenges etc).

Stakeholder's involvement (networking, meetings, sessions)

- Facilitation of partner dialogue on ProDoc and Logframe content and terminology.
- Technical support provided for two semi-annual donor coordination meetings (February 3 and June 23, 2022).
- Networking and synergies identification with other VET projects activated.
- Outline of the training developed & coaching sessions on Quality Assurance for key partner institutions implemented.
- Working meetings on governance and quality assurance principles carried out with the MHHSE, Institute of Pedagogical Innovations, State Inspection for Quality Control in Education and ILMR.
- Working meetings with the MHSSE and Institute of Pedagogical Innovations on identification of VET staff qualification requirements that need revision.
- Introductory sessions on the VET system structure and functioning as well as the role of employers and rationale for engagement of private sector held with ILMR, MTCH, APTA, AoH and hotel managers in Zaamin.

Analysis, design and implementation (surveys, activities, decision, selection)

- Project indicators for Phase I refined to higher level of detail.
- The Yearly Operation Plan, List of Workshops for 2022 developed and approved by the MHSSE.
- Summer Institute for Reform Leaders implemented by the project partner CEMETS Reform Lab is ongoing (June – December 2022).
- CEMETS Governance Survey in Uzbekistan is ongoing.
- Training Need Analysis among VET managers and teaching staff conducted.

- Decision on the pilot sector and regions agreed with MHSSE.
- Selection of pilot VET providers for Phase I is completed.

The main implementation challenges in the reporting period were related to the fact that:

- The Intergovernmental Framework Agreement between the Swiss Confederation and the Republic of Uzbekistan has not been signed yet. The project has no legal basis to roll out its planned activities.
- Helvetas being a foreign NGO, the Ministry of Justice requires every meeting, workshop or field visit that Helvetas Uzbekistan team undertakes to be announced in written form 10 days in advance for local staff and 20 days in advance for internationals. Furthermore, a generic information letter is not enough: meeting agenda, list of the participants, presentations etc. should be attached.
- Due to less successful effects of the last wave of the VET reform (Presidential Decree no. 5812), the reform management role of the MHSSE is currently being tested and the reform is temporarily being steered by a higher authority (Deputy Prime Minister). Depending on the result, this may lead to a shift of priorities in the reform, change in modalities of work, modification of structures, revision of roles and responsibilities.

Other factors having influenced the dynamics of project implementation during the reporting period were:

- Transfer of project leadership and delay in new team leader accreditation.
- Change of the pilot sector later in the reporting period from ICT to Tourism on request from MHSSE.
- Unclear prospects for the VET provider network and profile with the current system changes (e.g. status shift for colleges into technicums is being considered as well as all-in-one VET providers – NQF level 3, 4, 5 to be trained in the same institution).

1.2. Main steering implications for the next period

Aspects to be considered and managed in the upcoming months:

- ✓ The ongoing VET reform brings continuous transformations of structures, people, ideas. Changes are happening fast, therefore a quick reaction is necessary. VET4UZ needs to stay attuned to the developments and put forward its inputs. Being an intervention on the systemic level, the project should seize the opportunity to shape the new regulatory framework and fuel in Swiss expertise, showcase the “golden standard of VET”.
- ✓ A significant challenge is the capacity of the system partners to effectively process the new learnings and information provided by the project and Swiss partners. As stakeholders have their own agenda and tight deadlines, providing additional input (e.g. capacity building) should not result in increased workload for them but rather ease to achieve their goals. This needs to be taken into consideration when planning the training events for the next months.

2. Introduction

2.1. Project background

The Support to VET Reforms Project (former SVRP, now VET4UZ) in Uzbekistan is envisioned as a long-term, twelve-year project funded by the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC) and implemented by Helvetas with the Ministry of Higher and Secondary Specialised Education (MHSSE) as key governmental partner. The project goal is that VET students and graduates in Uzbekistan profit from a functional labour market-oriented

education and training system allowing them to find and retain an attractive and decent job in sectors with growth potential. It has four major intervention areas: (i) strengthening of governance of the VET system, (ii) a comprehensive VET Quality Assurance framework, (iii) the structured provision of initial and in-service teachers' capacity building in all spheres of VET, and (iv) models to achieve meaningful and close cooperation between VET providers and economic actors in Uzbekistan.

The project focuses on **systemic changes** that are based on deep understanding of the system of the whole VET sector and the capacities to govern its functions and resources in a sustainable manner in the long-term. The project task is to identify and work **on the real causes of the problems, not the symptoms**. Its mission is not to support firefighting of the challenges (e.g. reviewing a lot of curricula, training a lot of teachers) but bring a paradigm shift (e.g. that VET schools recruit trainers with more practical experience than academic degrees).

At the heart of this intervention is not implementing the reform but **facilitating the process and helping the Uzbek actors to understand what works and what does not after certain changes are made**, e.g. where there are challenges (teachers survey, college directors, private sector). This includes communication between local and central level, collecting feedback, developing capacities of regional partners and disseminating information.

For this, the Swiss project works at top level with the MHSSE, across all sectors; at meso level, with regional departments and local level with pilot VET colleges, universities and employers. **Sharing with the Ministry the reality** – the challenges faced by the college directors and their experiences and lessons learnt in implementing the reform – is key in the project approach.

Furthermore, the Swiss system is recognized worldwide as one of the best VET systems. The project does not intend to copy it but **to provide access to key international experts that accompany many governments in their reform efforts** (ex. CEMETS Reform Lab) or **share best practices** (SFUVET). The challenges of Uzbekistan right now are not unique but are similar to many countries these partner institutions are working with.

2.2. Evolution of the context

The VET reform is gaining momentum in Uzbekistan. There is rising understanding about the role of VET for economic growth and poverty reduction as well as the urgent need to make VET a more attractive career option for youth.

On June 15, 2022 the President of Uzbekistan Shavkat Mirziyoyev chaired a meeting on the development of VET. The main changes announced were:

- A new Deputy Minister will be appointed in the MHSSE to oversee VET.
- The MHSSE will be responsible for management and methodological support of colleges and technicums.
- Vocational education councils chaired by khokims will be established in each region, district and city.
- The dual form of VET will be introduced in monocenters and colleges.
- In order to implement the practical part of dual VET, enterprises will set up production workshops in the spare (unused) premises of colleges and technicums. The students engaged in dual VET will receive a monthly salary.
- VET teachers will have their salaries increased.
- A new system of retraining VET teaching staff will be established.
- A number of benefits have been announced to increase engagement of the private sector in VET.

The MHSSE is presently drafting the Presidential Decree that will enact the announced changes. Working on the system level, it is in situations like this that the project needs to be

proactive, feed in ideas that are embedded in the project and provide support for their implementation.

Thus, the project recommended to:

(1) Implement elements of the Swiss dual VET model based on dialogue and coordination between social partners, creating favourable conditions for employers to ensure their active participation in VET, setting up a flexible model for training youth that allows more effective adaptation of educational programs to market changes and provides more options for career growth; organization of the dual training process, consisting of 1-2 days of theoretical classes in college, and 3-4 days of work-based training; implementation of VET with emphasis on building occupational competence and green skills development along with personal development skills such as critical thinking, decision-making, problem solving, teamwork, independent work organization, effective planning and time management.

(2) Develop a modern system of continuous professional development for teachers and masters, including traditional, independent, remote and dual (for teachers of special subjects and masters of industrial training directly at the enterprise) forms of advanced training based on diversified programs. Systematically diagnose the individual training needs of teachers and masters, considering their current level of qualification, the approved qualification requirements for teachers and masters as well as the demand of the labor market. To boost competition and stimulate further professional development, develop a remuneration mechanism in which teachers and masters with high level of knowledge and skills, who continuously improve their competence, receive higher earnings.

(3) Set up and operationalize a system of vocational guidance aimed at increasing attractiveness of VET and boosting interest and motivation of youth to choose a VET career path. The system should prepare young people to select a profession based on their potential and market demand, developing important soft skills such as communication skills, the ability to present oneself, write a CV, make presentations etc. Also, develop skills of self-exploration (discover own abilities, interests, talents), encourage free and independent self-expression, strengthen self-esteem.

Another important event for the VET reform in Uzbekistan took place on June 30, 2022 when the Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Economic Development and Poverty Reduction Mr. Jamshid Kuchkarov convened a high level meeting with the key stakeholders in VET and the main development partners. The purpose of the meeting was to reiterate the government's commitment to accelerate the VET reform and intention to invest more funds in this process as well as to consult the international organizations on the top priority actions and feasibility of the approach presented by the MHSSE (options of different training careers – for NQF levels 3, 4 & 5 in the same VET provider).

Mr. Kuchkarov has been nominated by the President as the Chairperson of the Advisory Board for the VET reform; he will personally follow up regularly on the MHSSE progress and steer implementation of the reform agenda.

He emphasized the political will of the country to align VET to the European standards, the need for capacity development at all levels, and the plan to establish a high-level coordination structure with a supporting secretariat. Mr. Kuchkarov asked the development partners for support with mobilizing resources, mainly subject-matter experts that could make themselves available for fast and focused advice in the process of the reform.

2.3. Update of stakeholder analysis

Following the President's public speech on June 15, 2022, the Presidential Decree no. 284 on measures for improvement of MHSSE governance was issued on June 16, 2022.

According to this normative act, the new position of Deputy Minister for VET will be created and the ministry department for VET will increase its staff from 14 to 30 employees.

The new department organigram includes units for management of skills development, monitoring and evaluation of VET quality, teaching staff development, management of labour market data and organization of company internships, cooperation with employers and dual training.

The project's main partner will have more human resources designated for VET, practice a more structured approach to output-driven VET and have greater focus on strengthening capacities of the teaching staff. The new organizational layout is zooming in on cooperation with employers and dual training implementation, which is a positive shift of the paradigm.

Consequently, the project will channel more expertise and support to build capacities of the newly appointed ministry staff and help them create a vision for the new stage of reform, identify priorities and design an operational strategy.

3. Outcomes, outputs and performance

3.1. Outputs achieved according to YPO 2022

The following section reports the outcome-related outputs and performance according to the project's Logical Framework. Given that the first 7 months of Phase I – with which this report is concerned – were used mainly for finalizing Helvetas Uzbekistan registration, organizational setup, change of team leader, design and approval of the Yearly Plan of Operation, networking with partners, thematically supporting the MHSSE in the new reform agenda etc. little can be said about the effect of intervention at outcome level and on youth employment (goal).

In 2022, the project intervention is organized along the following lines of action:

- **Get feedback from the implementers of the reform to understand their challenges and capacity needs**
 - Governance Survey and definition of related plan of intervention (output 1.1)
 - VET managers and teachers training needs analysis - identify the demand (output 3.1)
 - Review existing training programs for in-service VET teachers and managers - identify the supply (output 3.1)

- **Start capacity building at different levels by the project team and Swiss partners**
 - Training 4 senior civil servants from partner institutions in the CEMETS Summer Institute under the leadership of 1 project expert (output 1.2)
 - Capacity building discussions and workshops on VET governance (output 1.2), VET coordination and dialogue (output 1.3), QA measures and practices (output 2.1), upskilling VET teachers and managers (output 3.1), raising awareness about gender, equity, social inclusion, and climate change issues (output 3.1)

- **Initiate exchange between the stakeholders to improve communication and coordination**
 - Establishment of platforms at national level (key VET agencies), regional level (regional educational departments + VET providers + employers) and sectoral level (professional associations) (output 1.3)
 - Facilitate donor coordination on technical level (output 1.3)

- **Prepare employers to participate in VET**
 - Training sessions on PPP concept (output 4.1)

- Bilateral exchanges on the VET system structure and functioning for employers in tourism sector to define an Action Plan on Engaging Private Sector Representatives in VET for 2023 (output 4.2)
 - Capacity building for professional associations in tourism sector to define their roles and responsibilities in VET (output 4.2)
- **Engage in pilot actions to show evidence**
- Identification of legal collisions and recommendations for adaptation of selected normative documents to harmonize the legal framework (output 1.1)
 - Review of quality measures implemented in Uzbek VET and familiarizing stakeholders with the quality criteria and quality assurance systems in VET (output 2.1)
 - Establishment of fundamental requirements for program accreditation as first step for VET provider accreditation (output 2.2).

In what follows, the project progress and achievements are described in detail per outcome and outputs for the reporting period.



Outcome 1: Strengthened institutional actors implement a functional regulatory framework in a coordinated manner

Output 1.1 VET system monitored and harmonized

- Implementation of Governance (GOVI) Survey in Uzbekistan by CEMETS with support from the project team is ongoing. Duration: 1.05 – 30.09. Targeted no. of participants: up to 2000. No. of participants to date: over 500. Reasons for low participation rate so far: questionnaire content is too complex, lack of interest or motivation to participate, summer vacation time etc. The data collected will be processed by CEMETS and a report will be produced. The main findings and recommendations will be shared with the Uzbek stakeholders in a webinar.
- With a view to harmonize the VET regulatory framework, the project legal expert critical analysis of 5 main normative documents regulating VET: Law on Education (2020), Presidential Order no. 5812, Presidential Decree no. 5241, Cabinet Decision on dual education no. 163, Cabinet Decision no. 466 to identify legal collisions and recommend improvements. The conclusions will be presented to the key stakeholders early autumn 2022.
- The VET governance expert and the team leader prepared several recommendations for the draft Presidential Decree on how to enhance the quality of VET, engage the private sector in training, upskill the teachers and implement dual track education following the Swiss model.

Output 1.2 Key institutions / persons are capacitated to take a leading role

- CEMETS has a strong track record on capacity development of ministries and VET reform leaders. CEMETS Summer Institute is a learning platform and Reform Lab where an international group of VET professionals is challenged to reflect their own reform process in an academic setting to deepen understanding of VET systems and their (social) engineering from point of view of different disciplines.
- The annual thematic focus defined for 2022 is Governance, an appropriate and timely topic for the MHSE to practice on its leadership role to coordinate the VET offer and initiate an institutionalized dialogue among stakeholders involved in VET. With the

support of CEMETS, that will share best practices and proven mechanisms, MHSSE and MELR will review roles and responsibilities among public and private actors, optimize the distribution of tasks, and allocate additional resources for VET provision.

- Four civil servants from the MHSSE, ILMR and a private company are the participants of the CEMETS Summer Institute 2022. The lead of the team is with the project's expert on private sector engagement.
- The team leader and Dr. Ursula Reynold (CEMETS) agreed to delay with the workshops on VET governance until the GOVI survey is finalized in order to have the right focus and better tailor the contents of the trainings. Even so, the first three exchanges on VET governance already took place with the MHSSE and Institute for Pedagogical Innovations (19.04.22), State Inspection for Quality Control in Education (15.04.22) and ILMR (25.04.22).

Output 1.3 VET coordination mechanisms and processes established

- Communication and coordination, peer sharing, public consultations require capacity building, particularly in a culture that is oriented on action with little reflection. Capacity building for VET coordination and social dialogue is a long process. During the reporting period, the preparation work for establishing the national, regional and local level coordination mechanisms has started.
- At the national level, the main project effort is channeled towards supporting the key players in VET in defining their roles and responsibilities and effectively planning the priority tasks on the reform agenda. On the regional level, raising awareness of the need to set up coordination and communication mechanisms was initiated with the local education departments and their VET providers. On the local level, the colleges visited (Namangan, Jizzakh, Urgench, Khiva, Bustanlik) for pilot selection were informed about the importance of involving local employers in the key stages of curriculum value chain.
- The project's role in donor coordination is two-fold: first, it acts as the Secretariat of the Donor Coordination Committee, chaired by the Deputy Minister of MHSSE and co-chaired by the Head of Swiss Cooperation; second, it facilitates technical coordination of VET projects by rotation as agreed with the partner projects.
- During the reporting period, the team supported the organization and minutes writing of two Donor Coordination Committee meetings on February 3 and June 23, 2022.
- In regard to technical coordination, the team leader met with the two key projects in the VET reform that have interventions – EU/UNESCO and GIZ – to identify synergies, reduce overlapping, and foster complementarity of development work on April 7, April 19, May 12, June 6, and June 29.
- The creation of a digital platform of all VET projects and their outputs/ deliverables is in the pipeline. The design and organization of content as well as the covering of costs will be with the project. The owner of the platform will be the MHSSE; the host of the platform will be Institute of Pedagogical Innovations.
- ADB has assumed the task to technically develop the EMIS and integrate it with HEMIS. Such complex platforms require considerable funds and the VET4UZ does not have budget earmarked for this activity. However, the project will share lessons learnt from the information system developed in the previous Swiss-funded project, feed in recommendations to ensure its functionality and sustainability.



Outcome 2: VET actors on central level and VET providers assume their quality assurance roles, having developed the necessary structures, processes, and instruments

Output 2.1 Improved institutional capacity on QA

- Introductory sessions on the meaning of quality were organized and the role of QA in VET was defined with the main project partners in bilateral meetings on 3rd December, 2021 with MHSSE, 10th December 10 with the IPIRFT, 6th January, 2022 with State Inspection for Quality Control, 8th February, 2022 with MELR, and 19th February 19, 2022 with ILMR. Thus, foundations were laid for constructive social dialogue on quality assurance framework and quality indicators in Uzbekistan.
- Detailed stocktaking of existing QA practices and measures, particularly existing legal base was realized (desk research and peer exchange) and areas to be improved were identified in cooperation with the main partners. This task is closely intertwined with the findings and recommendations coming from the legal expert; therefore, it will continue beyond this reporting period.
- A batch of 3-4 capacity building sessions and 1 workshop facilitated by SFUVET trainers on QA best practices, including examples from Switzerland are planned for July-September 2022.
- Based on the situation analysis and the vision-building exercise, the next step will be to draft the Guidelines on QA in close cooperation with the main VET stakeholders.

Output 2.2 Accreditation system of formal VET providers complied with (nationally) agreed standards

Work on this output has not started yet as it is meaningful to focus first on private sector involvement, internal QA procedures for VET providers, program accreditation and only after, when the key stakeholders have reached relative maturity in QA, on provider accreditation. The project will address program accreditation in 2023 and provider accreditation in 2024.



Outcome 3: Teachers perform in a competences-oriented and labor-market oriented way

Output 3.1 Strengthened institutional capacity for initial and in-service teacher training

- The questionnaire for the VET satisfaction baseline survey among current students in the pilot VET providers was developed and approved by the MHSSE as well as by the Ministry of Justice that had a skeptical and reserved attitude at first as to project's intention to closely scrutinize students' opinions about their teachers' performance.
- The fact of not having selected the pilot VET providers before the summer months, when the students are on break, made it impossible to roll out the survey in the school year 2021-2022. Therefore, it has been postponed to the beginning of the school year 2022-2023, provided there is a batch of 2nd year students to involve in the poll.
- The questionnaire for the VET managers and teachers training needs analysis (to identify the supply) has been developed and agreed with the MHSSE and the Institute of Pedagogical Innovations in May 2022.
- The survey took place in June 2022: it kicked off with 2 online orientation sessions explaining the reason for this endeavor and offering instructions on how to handle the questionnaire. The data was collected via the Kobo Toolbox, a suite of tools for data collection.

The overall participation rate was 7151 persons (which makes 26% of all VET managers and teachers); 3670 women (51.3%) and 3467 men (48.6%); 24.5% are young VET managers and teachers (up to 30 years old).

The survey result is a detailed report on the teacher training needs analysis and list of training topics consulted with the Institute of Pedagogical Innovations.

- Review of the existing retraining programs for in-service VET managers and teachers (identify the supply) is planned for the 2nd half of 2022. This process should be based on (1) the training needs analysis results, (2) the occupational standards and updated qualifications requirements for VET managers and teachers and (3) the capacities of the Institute of Pedagogical Innovations to deliver modules / courses on the topics of interest for management and teaching staff.
- However, the big challenge is to unify the VET managers training with the Institute and VET teachers training (with the line universities) under one umbrella organization i.e. the Institute for Pedagogical Innovations, as envisaged by the Presidential Decree that is being currently drafted by MHSSE. Only then, it would make sense to review the various program contents and train the trainers.
- The capacity building by SFUVET of trainers from the Institute, VET managers and teachers from the pilot colleges in Zaamin, Bostanliq and Bukhara on dual education, situation-based learning and other effective teaching methods will take place in September and November 2022.

Output 3.2 Improved institutional capacity on teachers' qualification and certification system

Work on this output has not started yet for two reasons:

- it is more meaningful to channel efforts first into finetuning the regulatory framework, lay ground for a robust QA system and raise awareness of employers about VET and only after, design the system and contents of an up-to-date and relevant training of management and teaching staff.
- furthermore, the President of Uzbekistan in his public speech on June 15, 2022 has asked for a new 'makeover' of the upskilling and retraining system for teaching staff in VET, although the last changes to this system took place in 2021.



Outcome 4: Economic actors assume an enhanced role in the VET system by contributing actively to governance, definition, and implementation of VET

Output 4.1 More structured representation of employers in VET established

- To create good practices and success stories on employers' engagement in VET, the project needs a testing ground, a pilot sector. Following the Economic Sector Analysis conducted in 2021, the sector that scored highest was ICT. Thus, the project team visited VET providers in Namangan and Jizzakh, both regions suggested by the MHSSE. However, on MHSSE initiative, in April 2022 the pilot sector changed from ICT to tourism.

The initiative to change the pilot sector was raised by the MHSSE in the joint meeting with VET4UZ on 19th April 2022 organized at IPIRFT. During the meeting it was noted by the MHSSE that following the Presidential Decree "On Approval of the Strategy for Digital Uzbekistan – 2030" from 5th October 2020, a Roadmap was developed for further intensive ICT sector development as well as a program focusing on digital transformation of regions and industries was created. According to this Strategy, for the state to be able to monitor the actual digital transformation of the regions, a methodology for rating digital development of territories was developed to allow preliminary diagnosis of digitalization. Among the applied criteria are the use of Internet in social and educational institutions (preschool institutions, schools, clinics), introduction of educational and other types of software products, broadening the network of certified teachers in computer science as well as the number of students within the framework of One Million Programmers of Uzbekistan project to be funded

by Saudi Arabian partners, and contribution to establishment of IT Parks. Hence, the Ministry suggested not to enter the ICT sector as the government has already set its development course and identified the investors interested to join this venture.

Furthermore, the state is planning a similar development approach in the tourism and hospitality sector, for which VET4UZ could already prepare the foundation by testing the demand-driven approach and showcase good examples of dual-track training and other initiatives that could contribute to the sector growth.

- In just a few months, good working relationship has been established with the MTCH (project resource persons: Aziz Fayyozov, head of department on methodology and cooperation with NGOs and Jakhongir Matkarimov, leading specialist in education department) and advice was sought to select the regions and VET providers with the highest potential, with prospects for sustainability and not covered by other development projects. The recommendations were straightforward: Zaamin, Bustonlik, Bukhara. GIZ is present in the Fergana Valley and in Khiva whereas Samarqand colleges are getting substantial support from the “Silk Road” International University of Tourism and Cultural Heritage.
- VET providers in the three pilot regions Zaamin, Bustonlik and Bukhara were visited to explore feasibility of cooperation, meet the management and teaching staff, assess their rapport with the local employers. The results are promising, all these institutions are motivated and qualify for piloting the Swiss dual training system.
- Mapping of employers in the tourism industry in the pilot regions was undertaken; site visits and meeting with employers were conducted. So far, 3 hotel managers showed interest in piloting the dual training system in Zaamin and 2 in Bustanlik. Exploring the employer community in Bukhara follows.

Output 4.2 Private sector lead strategy established and capacities of employers in advocacy built

- Introductory sessions on the VET system structure and functioning as well as the role of employers and rationale for engagement of private sector were organized in Zaamin on June 15-16, 2022. Similar events with ILMR, MTCH, APTA, Hoteliers Association of Uzbekistan and hotel managers in Bustanlik and Bukhara are planned for August-September 2022.
- There is no Sector Skills Councils in the tourism sector, there is only a general one for all sectors, having as members the ministers of all key ministries. The EU/UNESCO project is investing currently in building capacities (training workshops, study visits) of this meta structure. Therefore, the project decided to create an exchange platform for the selected sector including the professional associations APTA and AoH as well as most active and motivated employers.



Monitoring, Capacity Building, Knowledge Management

Monitoring of project progress	Project M&E tool developed and filled in for the reporting period.
Publicity and events	For communication purposes, the abbreviation of the project title was changed from SVRP to VET4UZ, which is more catchy, an appealing name being a business necessity in the modern world, and in line with the newly-created institutions such as uztaminot, uzfood, uzmobile etc.

	<p>The visual identity of the project defined and approved (project new name and logo, team business cards, presentation template).</p> <p>The roll ups for VET4UZ, Helvetas Uzbekistan and the folders, notepads and pens design follow.</p> <p>Also, the leaflet of the project and a handy information note on the Swiss dual system are in the pipeline.</p>
Capacity development and knowledge management	<p>Online training courses on MSD, SDC VSD tool and PCM are necessary for the team members.</p> <p>Also, a study visit for peer exchange with the SDC/Helvetas project E4E in North Montenegro is being considered later in 2022.</p>
Pool of short-term experts	<p>These local short-term experts have joined the team:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Farrukh Fayziev, Legal expert 2. Komiljon Eshpulatov, VET governance expert 3. Jomalkhon Shosalimov, Teacher training expert

3.2. Identification of collaboration and synergies with donor projects in VET Sector

In the inception phase, the presentation of Helvetas to the larger donor community involved in VET has taken place at individual level to explore the possibilities for collaboration and creating synergies between different projects and seek deep understanding of each donor's engagements and objectives in the VET sector.

Several working meetings offered the chance to present the VET4UZ project, to contribute to the Swiss visibility. The project is connected to the informal donors' Telegram group to quickly update each other on the latest development taking place in the VET system in Uzbekistan. All members of the donor community are receptive for the creation of a VET development platform for regular updating, informing, and exchanging between the different initiatives. Promising perspectives on collaboration and synergies are being pursued since the beginning of Phase I.

Coordination with other development projects is prerequisite to ensure aid effectiveness. After consultation with the main active VET projects funded by ADB, EU, USAID, GIZ, and KOICA, closer synergies with three projects are being established: the EU-funded project implemented by UNESCO "Skills development for employability in rural areas of Uzbekistan", the GIZ regional project "Professional Education for Economic Growth Sectors in Central Asia" (PECA) and the GIZ country project "Support of the Reform and Modernization Process in the Vocational Education System of Uzbekistan". Governance, private sector engagement, capacity building and improvement of VET quality are domains that are addressed by all these projects and have a possibility to overlap with the VET4UZ if not well agreed with and assigned by the MHSSE.

- With EU/UNESCO project, VET4UZ has in common the set-up of QA framework and capacity building for the Sector Skills Council. For the time being, the two projects decided to share roles and responsibilities as follows: UNESCO will focus on cooperation with the State Inspection for Quality Control and their quality standards (responsible for external quality assurance: accreditation of VET providers and attestation of teaching staff), whereas VET4UZ will build capacities of MHSSE on internal quality assurance (employers involved in governance and content of VET, teacher upskilling, internal quality standards for VET providers etc.)
- GIZ regional project addresses private sector engagement with focus on the Chamber of Commerce members, whereas VET4UZ envisages working with individual employers

and professional associations in the tourism sector to enhance their participation in VET design and delivery. Furthermore, VET4UZ will join efforts with PECA on harmonization of VET regulatory framework and employer participation in shaping VET normative regulations, with consideration for dual-track education.

- GIZ country project will also focus on private sector engagement and strengthening of Sector Skills Council capacities, teacher training, and further development of a digital platform on VET hosted by the Institute of Pedagogical Innovations. VET4UZ needs to additionally discuss and specify what exactly the GIZ project plans to undertake in regard to teacher training programs and have an exchange on the informative online VET platform they plan to invest in: is it the electronic Information Management System developed by the previous Swiss project or is it new? If it is new, then coordination is needed not duplicate the VET projects digital platform VET4UZ intends to create.

4 Finances and management

The total funds budgeted for 2022 are 1.019.500 CHF. Overall depletion of the available budget reached 309.730 CHF – 30, 4%. Limited spending of the yearly budget accounts for recruitment of project experts and change in leadership, context analysis and reassessment of project role in a rather populated donor community, finalization of YPO, adaptive procedures, support to MHSSE in the new wave of VET reform.

Part 1 reached high depletion level – 91,1%. Parts 2 and 3 register moderate levels of depletion, between 45-52% of the annual budget. These costs are balanced and reflect the assistance needed from the Helvetas HO for recruitment and induction of the new team leader as well as from the Helvetas Local office for registration of Helvetas Uzbekistan and all related procedures, along with transfer of project leadership.

Most of the costs for personnel have been underspent due to later recruitment of Expert on Private Sector Engagement (joined the team on February 14, 2022) and Expert on Teacher Training (joined the team on March 14, 2022). Zero spendings can be observed in the 3b budget line “Short-term experts”, which can be explained by the fact that most of the project tasks during the reporting period were carried out by in-house experts; there were no missions of the Swiss partner institutions to Uzbekistan in the reporting period. Also, local experts on legal framework, VET governance and teacher training have been contracted but they have just initiated their work.

Similarly, for 3c budget line “Local Support” there is underspending due to later recruitment of the Admin & Finance Assistant (joined the team on April 1, 2022) and the Driver (joined the team on May 16, 2022).

On part 4 “Administered project funds”, the underspending is 99% as the public project activities and training workshops will roll out only in September 2022. Even if CEMETS Virtual Summer Institute and CEMETS Governance Survey are ongoing, the costs will be reflected in the next financial statement. The project team focused on selection of the pilot regions and VET providers, identification of private employers that would engage in dual training exercises, on implementation of the teacher training needs analysis survey. The team leader was actively involved in policy dialogue on high level and provided input to the transformations of the VET system as part of the governance component. Most of these activities incurred mainly salary costs and travel costs.

In the 4e budget line, 4,6% costs are registered that account for the communication event organized for the key project stakeholders on December 15, 2021.

5 Lessons learnt and reflections

✓ **The pressure of a rushed reform**

Major changes in the VET system are implemented in a hurry, with fast-tracked rulemakings and with little reflection on all possible consequences. Deadlines that are not realistic put pressure on the project partners and the VET4UZ project, and do not allow for a step-by-step vision-building exercise and proper capacity development. Many of the necessary steps that should ensure that good analysis informs decisions, get short-circuited.

Furthermore, the changes are designed in a “bubble”: the recommendations on the system reform are not coming from the implementers; they are not evidence-based and are not followed up by the decision-makers to collect feedback what worked and what did not.

Being a rushed reform, changes are done at high speed, as formalities; the potential of the available human resources in partner institutions is not harnessed to full extent.

The project could try to counterbalance the speed of the developments by speaking on different occasions and at all levels, primarily top level about the need for quality, organic development, participatory approach, cost-effectiveness, sustainability.

✓ **Need for adaptive management**

VET4UZ works in an environment that is unstable and in transition. Even in more stable contexts, circumstances evolve and may affect projects in unpredictable ways.

The ongoing VET reform is a ‘moving field’ that undergoes significant changes, thus delaying the project activities or calling for modification of the intervention strategy.

The instability of the reform refrains VET stakeholders to be convinced about the right action to implement and to develop a clear strategy that is needed to bring an agreed vision across the relevant ministries and limit the fragmentation of the VET system.

These shifts result in a reform tiredness amongst stakeholders because of complexity of process and continuous variations, but also attenuate Swiss experts’ capacity to formulate clear recommendations as these might become irrelevant.

For the intervention to be effective, VET4UZ project must be able to adapt in response to changes and new information. The ability to adapt requires an environment that promotes intentional learning and flexible activity design, minimizes the obstacles to modifying the intervention and creates incentives for managing adaptively.

However, the challenge is to balance correctly between the YPO and the need or request for new actions from the key stakeholders, as there is a risk not to fulfil the plan to a significant extent. To keep the project on track, it is meaningful to design the project activities along the Project Document and Logical Framework indicators. A sense of stability is healthy when dealing with the continuous reform shifts.

✓ **The role of VET4UZ needs to be clearly communicated to the stakeholders**

The MHSEE is requesting ad-hoc tasks from the project based on their urgent needs coming from the reform pressure.

However, the systemic approach applied by the project requires to adopt a facilitative role to foster local ownership and increase sustainability. VET4UZ should accompany the reform leaders and feed in know-how as needed. The project should not execute functions to be performed by the Uzbek actors but rather capacitate these institutions to do so in trying to set up and coach thematic working groups.

The coaching role often contrasts with the desired executive tasks and expectations of the stakeholders; this role needs to be reinforced and clearly communicated to the project partners.

✓ **Need for balancing between actions on systemic level and pilot activities**

When major changes are taking place at top level that directly influence the project advancement on VET governance, QA and private sector engagement, it is more meaningful to focus on temporarily working at the grass root level. That was the reason why the project embarked on thorough selection of the pilot VET providers that could be testing in the future the newly developed quality assurance standards, elements of the Swiss dual system, collaboration models with employers. Also, it was important to have them on board from the very start for the capacity development activities.

So, even though the project focuses more on the systemic level, it should have a two-fold strategy: vertical (top-down and bottom up) and horizontal (VET providers, students, employers, community), to ensure communication, coordination, and social dialogue to reach collective development.