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The European Union allocates €3.75 million to support Armenia's vocational education and training reforms: advancing new education and career opportunities for youth

In April 2016 the European Union extended final assistance of €3.75 million to enhance Armenia's vocational education and training (VET) capacity. The disbursement was allocated out of €6 million (of which 5 million budget support, 1 million technical assistance), earmarked under 2012 Eastern Partnership Integration and Cooperation (EaPIC) programme. The programme aims to open up new horizons and foster job creation for youth, which will help maximise youth involvement in local development, curb labour migration to urban areas and support poverty alleviation in regions and across the country.

The outcomes of the assistance include reform implementation across the whole VET sector of the country, provision of equal access to quality VET education for youth with special needs, recognition of non-formal and informal learning and review of VET qualifications and lists of VET professions to meet the swiftly evolving labour market needs.

As of 2016, about 4,500 students at 17 pilot colleges in all regions of Armenia and Yerevan benefited from the EU-supported reforms and the number is envisaged to grow in the near future.

Commenting on the outcomes of the EU support in the VET sector, one of the programme beneficiaries, graduate of Yerevan regional state college N2 Tehmine Sahakyan said, *"The knowledge and skills I gained at the college helped me pursue higher education at Armenian State University of Economics. They largely impacted my further achievements and career. I currently work at one of Armenia's top insurance companies as a marketing expert and agent. I recommend all those, who are still undecided on their further specialisation to choose the VET sector as solid foundation for further career development."*

Director of the National Centre for Vocational Education and Training Development Tatevik Gasparyan in turn, noted, *"The VET sector unlocks a range of opportunities for youth. State educational standards aimed at capacity building for the VET qualifications, educational programs and curricula are developed to meet the current labour demands."*

Within the frames of the final phase of the programme, five VET colleges, specifically those located on the border, were rehabilitated and equipped, with two more upgraded with facilities for physically impaired students. Another essential outcome of the programme is the development of 3-year business plans and conduction of own market research at all regional colleges. Development of business plans has been hailed by college managers in terms of sustainable financial management of VET institutions.

The assistance programme incorporates international best practices and visions for innovation and enhancement of VET education aligning them with the local market needs.

EU for education in Armenia: The EU has been actively supporting educational reforms in Armenia for the past 14 years with a clear focus on VET. Shortly after Armenia joined the European Neighbourhood Policy in 2006, the Government of Armenia and the European Commission agreed to focus €30 million of 2007 and 2009 Budget Support assistance of the European Union to Armenia on further reforms in the VET sector. The overall objective has been to support sustainable development in Armenia, by boosting the quality of VET sector to align it with the needs of the labour market.

Following the 2012 review of the ENP Progress Reports, €15 million assistance was allocated to Armenia under this programme. €6 million out of the allocation was earmarked for support in the VET sector.

The main directions of reforms as defined in the VET Reforms Programme and Action Plan of 2012-2016 adopted by the Government of Armenia in July 2012 are integration of the Republic of Armenia's vocational education and training system into the European vocational education area, enhancing the VET system management efficiency, boosting reputation and prestige of VET system and development/strengthening of social partnership in the VET sector. Implementing partners of the programme are the Ministry of Education and Science, the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs, the Ministry of Economy, the Ministry of Finance and social partners.

In addition to VET-focused assistance, the EU has been steadily supporting development of higher education in Armenia. **"Empowerment of the Tertiary Level Education of the RA for European Higher Education Area Integration EHEA"** Twinning (2014-2016) aims to contribute to Armenia's full membership in the EHEA and improve the quality of higher education to the benefit of students, graduates and employers.

"Strengthening Integrity and Combating Corruption in Higher Education in Armenia" project, co-funded by the EU and Council of Europe, aims to strengthen integrity and fight corruption at higher education institutions by fostering effective implementation of the Armenian Government's Anti-Corruption Action Plan 2015-2018.

Erasmus+, the new EU programme targeting Education, Training, Youth and Sport for the period 2014-2020, brings together seven existing programmes, including Tempus and Erasmus Mundus. 21 ongoing Tempus and 5 Erasmus+ Capacity Building projects with involvement of 22 Armenian universities and 31 other organisations including enterprises, ministries and non-governmental organizations. There are also 17 ongoing Erasmus Mundus projects implemented across Armenia. Overall, around 800 students and staff of Armenian universities participated in Erasmus Mundus projects and Erasmus Mundus Joint Master Degree Programs in the period of 2004-2014.

For more information visit http://eeas.europa.eu/delegations/armenia/index_en.htm

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