



## **OIC-VET Pilot Project**

**“Strengthening VET through Local Vocational Courses: the Experience of the Centre for Art and Vocational Training Courses of Istanbul Metropolitan Municipality”**

**8-10 June 2010, Istanbul, Turkey**

### **DRAFT REPORT**

1. The OIC-VET Pilot Project titled “Strengthening VET through Local Vocational Courses: the Experience of the Centre of Art and Vocational Training Courses of Istanbul Metropolitan Municipality” was realised jointly by the Statistical Economic and Social Research and Training Centre for Islamic Countries (SESRIC) and Centre for Art and Vocational Training Courses of the Istanbul Metropolitan Municipality during the period 8-10 June 2010, with the participation of senior experts and directors of education and training from 9 OIC Member Countries, namely Azerbaijan, Indonesia, Iran, Kuwait, Libya, Morocco, Pakistan, Syria and Yemen.

#### **A. Inauguration of the 13<sup>th</sup> İSMEK General Exhibition and Tour of the Exhibition**

2. The project was initiated with the inauguration of the 13<sup>th</sup> İSMEK General Exhibition that took place under the auspices of Mrs. Emine Erdoğan, wife of the Prime Minister of the Republic of Turkey H.E. Recep Tayyip Erdoğan on 8 June 2010 at Feshane International Fair Congress and Culture Centre in Istanbul, Republic of Turkey.
3. During the inauguration ceremony Mrs. Emine Erdoğan welcomed the representatives from OIC Member Countries and talked about the importance of global efforts to end poverty and the need for solidarity among neighbouring countries in this respect. She underlined the importance of vocational education and training in poverty reduction and alleviation, and stated that İSMEK has shown great progress in making people involved in training activities and increasing their employability, reaching to approximately 1 million trainees in the last fourteen years. Mrs. Erdoğan commended the efforts of İSMEK for organising training courses for the citizens residing in Istanbul, as well as organising this study visit for OIC Member Countries in a view to opening its experience and expertise in the field of vocational training to other brotherly countries.

4. On the same occasion Dr. Sıdıka Başçı, Acting Director General of SESRIC, welcomed the participants of this significant project and expressed SESRIC's thankfulness to İSMEK for their support provided to the participants in facilitating this important event. Dr. Başçı also mentioned that this important programme would generate benefits for the OIC Municipalities to provide better services to the citizens through close partnerships and networking among similar institutions operating in the member countries. Dr. Başçı also stated that this project is a first collaborative project among OIC Municipalities in the field of vocational training with a view to enhancing current capacity of VET in our cities and exchanging knowledge and expertise concerning local practices of vocational courses. In this respect this project is a timely decision as we believe that sharing the experiences of İSMEK will be instrumental to the success of many countries to take similar initiatives in training talented people in the areas of interest.
5. During the opening ceremony, Mr. Hüseyin Avni Mutlu, Governor of Istanbul, pointed out to the importance of İSMEK courses and expressed that they are an example of a modern and social municipality services. On the other hand, Dr. Kadir Topbaş, Mayor of Istanbul, pointed out to the remarkable achievements undertaken by İSMEK and congratulated the graduates prior to the opening of the exhibition.
6. Following the inauguration ceremony the participants of the project have made a comprehensive tour to the 13<sup>th</sup> General Exhibition during which they had the opportunity to see more closely thousands of products created by İSMEK trainees in their ateliers and workshops during the training term 2009-2010, and observe remarkable achievements that was accomplished by individuals attended the courses run by İSMEK.

## **B. Opening of the Workshop**

7. The project proceeded with a workshop where the participants have learned more on İSMEK practise, and exchanged their knowledge and experience with regard to vocational training courses undertaken by the local governments / municipalities in their respective countries.
8. At the opening Session of the Workshop, Mrs. Ferrah Şarman, Director of Human Resources and Training Department at Istanbul Metropolitan Municipality, welcomed the participants and delivered her opening statement where she underlined the importance of this project in enhancing future cooperation among OIC Member Countries in the field of vocational training, and expressed her hope that this particular event would be a good starting point for that.
9. In his statement at the opening session, Mr. Mehmet Fatih Serenli, Director of Training and Technical Cooperation Department at SESRIC welcomed the distinguished participants and expressed his pleasure to organise such a significant project among the municipalities of OIC Member Countries. In his statement, he highlighted that vocational training has become more recognized as an instrument for individuals to gain essential knowledge about their work as well as in providing professional skills for

students or civil servants. He stated that this study visit by senior experts would generate an opportunity to study more closely the success story of İSMEK as a local initiative that has become a new phenomenon in the history of municipal services and played very significant role in training citizens in Istanbul and making them develop their skills and competencies, thus increasing their employability and generating new opportunities for employment. In this regard he expressed his wish that this pilot project will not only provide us with a unique opportunity to learn from the experiences of İSMEK but pave the way for a future cooperation among the OIC municipalities in implementing other projects that may deem to provide great training and education benefits to individuals living in the OIC Member Countries.

10. Mr. Murat İlkin, Researcher at SESRIC, made a presentation on SESRIC and the OIC-VET Programme where he stated that the OIC-VET Programme creates opportunities for exchange of professionals, people in labour market and students among member countries, as well as transferring innovative educational and training methods and approaches to other countries and establishing training networks among relevant institutions operating in the field of VET, as well as the OIC Municipalities in various ways due to the variety of tasks undertaken by them.

### **C. General Presentation on İSMEK**

11. During the First Session of the Workshop, Mr. Mehmet Doğan, Director of Training at IMM made a general presentation on İSMEK. In his presentation, Mr. Doğan discussed the importance of OIC-VET Programme in human resource development and pointed out that İSMEK contributes to the OIC-VET Programme by its activities. He said that beneficiaries of İSMEK courses were at the age between 16 and above and they either received a Course Completion Certificate or Course Participation Certificate by joining İSMEK courses. In this respect, he discussed employment opportunities for trainees through their achievement İSMEK training courses. He also mentioned that trainees would get the chance to receive EU compatible certificates by pursuing İSMEK courses such as Mondrian Certificates which have been distributed for accepting credentials in the services sector to date. He talked about the availability of a youth project within the context of the Istanbul 2010 European Capital of Culture.
12. The next speaker Assoc. Prof. Yahya Fidan made a presentation titled “İSMEK as a Social Integration and Social Transformation Project” where he explained that 706 foreign people have benefitted from İSMEK courses. He said that İSMEK gives importance to providing modern locations and qualified trainers for the trainees. He underlined the social outcomes of training provided by İSMEK, and stressed upon their role in transferring social values to the next generation.
13. Mr. Güven Çalışkan, General Coordinator at İSMEK, made a presentation titled “The role of İSMEK in Vocational Training and Employment”. He mentioned that among women contribution of İSMEK courses to employment was 26 percent. He said that in cooperation with Turkey Employment Agency (İŞKUR), İSMEK aimed at increasing labour productivity in Turkey. He reckoned if there can be employment after 15 years

then great effort has been spared. He talked about the need for updating education due to technological innovations. He said that at İSMEK personal training is at the forefront.

14. Mrs. Ferrah Şarman made a presentation under the Second Session on Technical and Administrative Functioning of İSMEK. She talked about different target groups who have received training under İSMEK courses. She mentioned that it has become a priority for local administration to provide training. In this regard, she pointed out to the importance of cooperation with non-governmental organisations. She said that since 1996 the number of training centre under İSMEK has grown from 3 to 219. She also said that İSMEK served as a model for IMM as it used its own resources.

#### **D. Opinions and Suggestions of Participants on ISMEK Model**

15. The Second Session of the Workshop also focused on the Opinions and Suggestions of Participating Countries on İSMEK Model, where the delegates furnished about their practise of local training initiatives, projects and programmes in their respective countries, and explored on the possibility of developing joint initiatives and programmes for establishing multilateral cooperation in the area of vocational training.
16. In this regard, the Moroccan delegate said that in general non-governmental organisations play an important role for achieving specific outcomes in vocational training. He also mentioned that Morocco currently undertakes local projects and programmes that tackles with poverty and unemployment in the country and that it attaches great importance to human development. He said that İSMEK could be beneficial to Morocco.
17. The Kuwaiti delegate asked whether İSMEK could provide short and/or long term training courses for their professionals upon request. In reply to his question, Mr. Doğan said that they would provide free training courses to the experts from OIC Member Countries whether for short or long period of time depending upon the formal request of any institution operating in the relevant area.
18. The Syrian delegate informed about the general situation of vocational training in Syria where she explained that those pursuing vocational training are often those who did not manage to pursue a university degree; therefore vocational training is devaluated on the eyes of the society. In this regard, she stressed the importance of collaboration in promoting VET in OIC Member Countries to serve as an alternative to education attainment in terms of providing employment opportunities. Mr. Doğan responded by saying that VET in Turkey is based on a voluntary basis and those enrolled in vocational schools can select their branches while pursuing vocational education. Mrs. Şarman mentioned that the location of İSMEK courses were also important to increase enrolment, since trainees preferred to commute easily to VET schools to save time and especially most beneficiaries are generally housewives. Furthermore, she said that all arrangements are made in accordance with demand for training.
19. The Pakistani delegate said that in her province there are more than 2700 training schools of which 50 are vocational schools; yet, the number is not satisfactory. She said

that İSMEK may introduce and initiate a similar model of its own in Pakistan. She mentioned that standardisation of certificates was essential to provide good quality training and a tool to establish cooperation among OIC Member Countries in VET.

20. The Yemeni delegate mentioned that there is a VET Ministry in Yemen. He also mentioned that his country faced with unemployment problem. He said that by 2015, they are targeting 15 to 20 percent of all students in Yemen will receive vocational training. He mentioned about available grants and scholarships in Yemen and emphasised that training and education support granted to Yemen amounted to nearly 150 million USD. He said that İSMEK may provide consultancy services to Yemen for organising training programmes to train people of Yemen. Also, he said that seminars and courses can be organised in Yemen to transfer the know-how and experience of İSMEK in the field of VET.
21. The Libyan delegate said that important steps have been taken in Libya recently to promote technical education in the country. He said that in Libya there existed technical faculties, higher schools and secondary schools. He also welcomed that İSMEK can initiate different level of courses in Libya in the field of VET. In this respect, he said that İSMEK may assume the management and training responsibility of designated training centres in Libya. He added that exchange of experiences and trainers between Libya and Turkey would enhance bilateral cooperation between two countries. He also mentioned that abolishment of visa between the two countries provided opportunities to bolster cooperation between Libya and Turkey.
22. The Irani delegate told that in Iran there was a similar institution like İSMEK under Tehran Municipality that focused training for women and children.
23. The Indonesian delegate informed about the national TVET system and said that the outcome of this pilot project should be reported to the responsive in the OIC Member Countries. He also said that it is useful to work on a standard certificate to enable countries to recognise the merits of trainees pursuing vocational education. He also expressed his willingness to collaborate with İSMEK for providing training of their master trainers.
24. After a short presentation about the situation of vocational training in his country, the Azerbaijani delegate mentioned that they are eager to cooperate with İSMEK particularly in traditional arts and crafts where training is not always available in global term.
25. With regard to the commercialisation of the products produced by trainees, Mr. Yusuf Kemal Civelek, Assistant General Coordinator at İSMEK, mentioned that İSMEK is following a new approach known as Sponsorship Management in which it cooperates with global and local firms in the marketing sector to ensure that trainees under İSMEK could sell their products at a fair price.

## **E. Recommendations**

26. Having inspired by the agreement they reached in the field of VET, the representatives of OIC Member Countries participating in the study visit discussed possible cooperation areas and projects for consideration and implementation in the short and medium term and adopted the following recommendations for future cooperation and collaboration among OIC Municipalities and equivalent institutions:
  - a. The outcome of this study visit should be communicated and generalised to other OIC Member Countries for information and more concerted action, so that all municipalities and the relevant institutions operating in the field of VET utilise the knowledge and experience of İSMEK;
  - b. İSMEK and other relevant institutions in OIC Member Countries are encouraged to organise an OIC Project Based Skills Competition in order to galvanise the efforts of skilled people involved in the vocational training;
  - c. Municipalities and relevant institutions should conduct similar study visits on a regular basis, preferably annually, to discuss pertinent issues concerning vocational training and human development both for the institutions and the public, and develop tangible initiatives and projects towards providing enhanced services to the citizens;
  - d. Need to form an e-mail group of all participating OIC Member Countries for regular communications and sharing VET experiences among other countries;
  - e. Develop and share regional, national and local awareness initiatives, projects and programs about the potential benefits of vocational training in career building, income generating and human dignity, particularly for women and young people in order to increase the rate of vocational trainees and students in total enrolment;
  - f. Urge the relevant institutions in the member countries to establish an OIC level platform for developing standardisation of vocations, curriculum development and transparency of certificates for the mobilisation of internationally recognised skilled labour force to countries who have job vacancies;
  - g. Urge vocational training centres to consider establishing bureaus for strong career counselling for trainees, and sharing of available scholarships within the OIC Member Countries, as well as improving linkages between the demand and supply of the labour market, and developing centres of excellence in OIC Member Countries based upon the need of the labour market;
  - h. Prepare a comprehensive database that would contain available VET initiatives, projects and programmes being implemented in the OIC Member Countries, as well as publications on vocational training, research projects and academic works;
  - i. Organise an international workshop where the outcome of vocational trainings is evaluated, learning-based approaches are shared and new approaches in the vocational training of OIC Member Countries are discussed, ensuring the participation of all the

relevant stakeholders. Inclusion of the following sub-titles in the agenda of this workshop may be appropriate:

- Different approaches of OIC Member Countries with regard to national and international vocational competencies;
  - The impact of vocational competencies on life-long learning;
  - Increase in global competition through vocational education and training;
  - Examination of the issue of rehabilitation in vocational, social and cultural trainings;
  - Acquaintance, integration, assistance and development of cooperation among OIC Member Countries.
- j. Establish a project group under the umbrella of Monitoring and Advisory Committee of the OIC-VET Programme in order to develop and implement vocational and technical training projects;
- k. Countries should explore and initiate potential cooperation projects and programs among the Municipalities of Islamic Capitals and Cities and relevant institutions, including exchange of knowledge and expertise; transfer of innovative approaches and networking of training centres, trainers and trainees among member countries;
- l. Establish display centres or outlet at municipality level for encouraging local artisans, promoting and valuing their art;
- m. Initiate training partnership between the municipalities and SMEs in OIC Member Countries;
- n. İSMEK shall provide short and long term training courses for trainers / instructors on various topics based upon demands of OIC Member Countries, and free of charge provided that trainings are held in İSMEK training centres in Istanbul;
- o. İSMEK shall consider providing consultancy services for OIC Member Countries for their projects and programs of similar kind in order to transfer its knowhow and experience in VET; as well as technical assistance with a view to establishing similar training centres in regional, national or local level in OIC Member Countries;
- p. İSMEK shall consider opening its General Exhibition to international participants and contributors from other OIC Member Countries from next year on as an avenue for vocational training centres to exhibit their masterpieces and make them renown by the international community;
- q. İSMEK shall consider initiating a project of mobile exhibition gallery tour of selected pieces from their General Exhibition in OIC Member Countries in order to generate awareness of public about vocational training and increase consciousness for active involvement of people in vocational education and related activities.

Annex I  
Project Summary

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Programme of the Project

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Opening Statement by Dr. Sıdıka Başçı at the Inauguration Ceremony of the 13<sup>th</sup> ISMEK  
General Exhibition

Annex V  
Opening Statement by Mr. Mehmet Fatih Serenli at the Opening Session of the Workshop

**ANNEX I**  
**Project Summary**

<b>Title</b>	Strengthening VET through local vocational courses: the experience of İSMEK
<b>Description</b>	Organising of a study visit for training professionals in order to fully introduce the operating system of İSMEK, thus generating awareness about local initiatives in vocational training
<b>Project Type</b>	OIC Transnational Exchange Programme for Professionals (OICTEP-P)
<b>Project Duration</b>	3 days (8-10 June 2010)
<b>Participants</b>	High level experts in the field of training, i.e. directors, chiefs or heads of training departments from the Municipalities and relevant institutions of OIC Member Countries
<b>Partners</b>	Statistical Economic and Social research and Training Centre for Islamic Countries (SESRIC) Istanbul Metropolitan Municipality Centre for Art and Vocational Training Courses (İSMEK)
<b>Summary</b>	<p>İSMEK is a common-public educational organisation supplementing formal education by aiming at enhancing a personal background of residents in Istanbul, improving their vocational and artistic knowledge, raising city culture and the experience of the life in the metropolis, helping them become an active producer instead of a passive consumer, contributing to their income generation and enhancing their employability. İSMEK provides vocational courses for those that could not acquire a profession with formal educational institutions or want to further improve their skills and competencies in their current jobs. İSMEK commenced its activities as a social fabric project in 1996. Beginning with 141 attendees in three branches in three course centres, the trainings have reached to 230.000 course takers in 123 branches in 218 course centres in 38 districts of Istanbul as of 2008-2009. Over 810.000 residents have benefited from İSMEK trainings so far. Having more trainees than the students of various universities, İSMEK has become the biggest “public university” of Turkey with the number of the trainees and courses, the diversity of the training programs and the high-class productions resulting from such programmes. Today İSMEK is recognised as a model institution both in Turkey and the world in general.</p> <p>The aim of the project is to share the experience of İSMEK with other Municipalities of Islamic Capitals and Cities. The major outcome of the project would be the establishment of strong partnerships among the similar institutions and construct a platform where they can transfer innovative training methods, share knowledge and experience, and exchange expertise through establishing a strong network of vocational training centres, trainers and trainees.</p>

## ANNEX II

### OIC-VET Pilot Project

#### “Strengthening VET through local vocational courses: the experience of ISMEK”

#### Project Programme

DAY 1 (8 June 2010 – Tuesday)

##### **Feshane Cultural Center**

- 14:00 Inauguration of 13<sup>th</sup> ISMEK General Exhibition and Tour of the Exhibition  
Opening Statements (IBB, SESRIC)
- 17:00 Acquaintance Meeting of the Representatives of the Municipalities with Mr. Kadir Topbaş, the Mayor of Istanbul Metropolitan Municipality (Sadabad Hall)
- 19:00 Dinner
- 20:00 Concert of Turkish Classical Music (Small Bedesten Hall)

DAY 2 (9 June 2010 – Wednesday)

##### **Haliç Congress Center- Balat Hall**

- 10:00 Opening of the Workshop (IBB, SESRIC and representatives of the Municipalities)
- 10:30 Session I  
General Presentation on ISMEK
- 11:15 The role of ISMEK in Vocational Training and Employment
- 11:45 ISMEK as a Social Integration and Social Transformation Project
- 12:30 Lunch
  
- 13:30 Session II  
Technical and Administrative Functioning of ISMEK
- 14:30 Opinions and Suggestions of Participating Countries on ISMEK Model
- 16:30 Visit to Miniaturk
- 19:00 Dinner (Haliç Social Facilities Center)

DAY 3 (10 June 2010 – Thursday)

- 10:00 Visit to ISMEK Training Atelier and Çukurbostan Course Centre
- 12:30 Lunch (Florya Social Facilities Center)
- 13:30 Tour of İstanbul (Topkapı Palace, Sultanahmet Mosque, Hagia Sophia, Basilica Cistern)
- 19:00 Dinner and Closing Session (Kasımpaşa Social Facilities Center)

## **ANNEX III**

### **LIST OF PARTICIPANTS**

#### **AZERBAIJAN**

Mr. Zakir Ceferov  
Head  
The Municipality of Yasamal District of Baku

#### **INDONESIA**

Mr. Yoni Utomo  
Senior Staff  
Directorate of Technical and Vocational Education  
Ministry of National Education

#### **IRAN**

Mr. Mohammad Ebrahim Tavallaei  
General Manager of Training  
Tehran Municipality

#### **KUWAIT**

Mr. Khalaf Al Mutari  
Director  
Department of Administration and Training Department  
Kuwait Municipality

#### **LIBYA**

Dr. Hadi M. Mgherbi  
Head  
Technical Colleges Department  
Ministry of Education

#### **MOROCCO**

Prof. Benaissa Tadili  
Member of Council of Rabat City  
Rabat Municipality

#### **PAKISTAN**

Ms. Farhana Iqbal  
Chairperson  
Committee for Monitoring and Improvement of CDGK Schools (CMIS)  
City District Government Karachi

#### **SYRIA**

Mrs. Rafah Bredi  
Responsible of International Cooperation  
Directorate of Plans, Systems and International Cooperation  
Ministry of Local Administration

**YEMEN**

Mr. Abdrabo Ahmed Al-Tlow  
Dean of Technical Industrial Institute  
Ministry of Technical Education and Vocational Training

**İSMEK**

Mrs. Ferrah Şarman  
Director of HR and Training Department of IMM

Mr. Mehmet Doğan  
Director of Training

Mr. Güven Çalışkan  
General Coordinator

Mr. Yusuf Kemal Civelek  
Assistant General Coordinator

Ms. Betül Siyamoğlu  
Assistant General Coordinator

Mr. Hikmet Erbesler  
Assistant General Coordinator

Dr. Yahya Fidan  
Advisor to General Coordinator

Mr. Muhammet Altıntaş  
Publishing Editor

Mr. Deniz Akar  
Expert

**SESRIC**

Dr. Sıdıka Başçı  
Acting Director General

Mr. Mehmet Fatih Serenli  
Director  
Training and Technical Cooperation Department

Mr. Murat İlkin  
Researcher

## ANNEX IV

### **Opening Statement Delivered by Dr. Sıdıka Başçı, Acting Director General of SESRIC at the Inauguration Ceremony of the 13<sup>th</sup> General Exhibition of İSMEK**

**Istanbul, Republic of Turkey  
8 June 2010**

Distinguished Delegates,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I would like to begin foremost by thanking Mayor Kadir Topbaş for the kind invitation extended to us on behalf of the Istanbul Metropolitan Municipality to attend the 13<sup>th</sup> General Exhibition of the Centre for Art and Vocational Training Courses of Istanbul Metropolitan Municipality (ISMEK). We are honoured to take part in the opening ceremony of this important Exhibition which demonstrates the skills of thousands of trainees who received training in ISMEK during the whole year. Clearly, this is a very important achievement for the ISMEK and demonstrates its potential to train talented individuals working in different fields.

As you know, a very important international event is organised by SESRIC and ISMEK parallel to the General Exhibition during three days. On this significant occasion, we are very pleased to welcome the distinguished representatives of the Municipalities from different Member Countries of the Organisation of Islamic Conference (OIC) to attend the OIC-VET pilot project entitled “Strengthening Vocational Education and Training (VET) through Local Vocational Courses: the Experience of ISMEK” of which we organised jointly with ISMEK. This project brings together representatives of institutions under OIC Municipalities specialised in vocational education and training and enable them to share experience of ISMEK as well as the experience of others.

This project is a collaborative project among OIC Municipalities in the field of vocational training with a view to enhancing current capacity of VET in our cities and exchanging knowledge and expertise concerning local practices of vocational courses. In this respect, we find this project a timely decision as we believe that sharing the experiences of ISMEK will be instrumental to the success of many countries to take initiative in training talented people in the areas of interest. To this end, we are also confident that participants will gain knowledge on the essentials of training of individuals in various fields by attending in the project and therefore expect that the outcome from this project will be to enhance the social and training network among OIC Municipalities in particular. Furthermore, the project may establish long standing relationships among OIC Municipalities as it will chance to representatives of OIC Municipalities to take part in the same gathering.

I wish all the guests a fruitful day in the historic Feshane as they tour the Exhibition.

Thank you for your kind attention.

## ANNEX V

### **Opening Statement Delivered by Mr. Mehmet Fatih Serenli, Director of Training & Technical Cooperation Department of SESRIC at the Opening Session of the OIC-VET Pilot Project Workshop**

**“Strengthening VET through Local Vocational Courses: the Experience of İSMEK”**

**Istanbul, Republic of Turkey  
9 June 2010**

Distinguished Delegates,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I am honoured to address the Opening Session of the OIC-VET Pilot Project Entitled “Strengthening VET through Local Vocational Courses: the Experience of İSMEK”. At the outset, I would like to thank Istanbul Metropolitan Municipality for the excellent arrangements they have made to facilitate this project, which we have the honour to implement together with İSMEK, and I would also like to thank them for their generous hospitality.

On this occasion, I would like to express our sincere thanks to the representatives of OIC Member Countries who are present here for accepting our invitation and participating in this significant project. In fact, this project is the first attempt that aims at establishing a strong collaboration among similar institutions, particularly the municipalities operating in our member countries in the field of vocational training, and generating new partnerships and joint ventures in the same field to make our cities centres of lifelong learning and training for valuable skills and competencies.

Obviously, this is a golden opportunity for the delegates to study closely on the experience of İSMEK as a local initiative that has become a new phenomenon in the history of municipal services and played very significant role in training citizens in Istanbul and making them develop their skills and competencies, thus increasing their employability and generating new opportunities for employment. I think that İSMEK is a story of success in the field of VET for adults when they started with three training centres with 150 trainees fourteen years ago and reached to 218 training centres and nearly 175.000 trainees this year, which totally accounted 1 million trainees during this period. It is not only a success in terms of the number of trainees, but also as we observed yesterday during our tour in the General Exhibition it is also an extraordinary contribution to Islamic arts and handicrafts.

As you all know, nowadays, vocational training has become more recognized as an instrument for individuals to gain essential knowledge about their work as well as in providing professional skills for students or civil servants. İSMEK is a long standing institution operating under Istanbul Metropolitan Municipality with credible achievements in providing training for individuals in Istanbul. In this respect, the role undertaken by İSMEK will fulfil the aspirations of an important segment of the people living in urban areas in Turkey as it provides them with new training opportunities. Furthermore, Istanbul Metropolitan Municipality may take pride in the services of İSMEK as it addresses the economic challenges of its citizens, and also to their social and cultural needs.

We are all aware that Municipalities in general play an important role in providing citizens with good services. Thus, cooperation among them may increase the prospects of generating better services to a larger public. Therefore, this pilot project will not only provide us with a unique opportunity to learn from the experiences of ISMEK but pave the way for a future cooperation among the OIC municipalities in implementing other projects that may deem to provide great training and education benefits to individuals living in the OIC Member Countries. In this regard, the OIC-VET Programme not only serves as a platform for enhancing human resources of our member countries but also plays the role of a channel for strengthening the education and social network in the OIC communities.

As you already know that this project is realized under the framework of OIC-VET Programme, a program that was originally developed by SESRIC two years ago and launched by H.E. Abdullah Gül, the President of the Republic of Turkey and Chairman of Standing Committee for Economic and Commercial Cooperation of the Organization of the Islamic Conference (COMCEC) during the COMCEC Economic Summit held in Istanbul on 9 November 2009 with the participation of the heads of states and governments. Marked by this event, the SESRIC also launched OIC-VET Portal in order to increase awareness of the OIC-VET Program in the Member Countries and to make the process of the implementation of the OIC-VET Program more functional. Since then as the Executive Organ of the OIC-VET Programme, the SESRIC has been working towards the successful implementation of the pilot application phase of the OIC-VET programme. The outcome seems promising as new project ideas have gained support in some member countries. A good example of this is the project we are realising now.

The OIC-VET Programme creates opportunities for exchange of professionals, people in labour market and students among member countries, as well as transferring innovative educational and training methods and approaches to other countries and establishing training networks among relevant institutions operating in the field of VET.

I would like to underline that the OIC Municipalities and relevant institutions may benefit from the OIC-VET Programme in various ways due to the variety of tasks undertaken by them. However, we are proud that this project marks the first cooperation among the OIC Municipalities under the OIC-VET Programme and wish that there will be a greater number of OIC Municipalities interested in implementing similar or other new projects in the future.

I hope this study visit will be beneficial to all the participants taking part in this gathering and make a good example for initiating future projects concerning the affairs of OIC Municipalities. It is again my hope that open and inclusive dialogue will be hallmark of this study visit, and with your deliberations and recommendations its concrete outcome will provide guidance for further collaborative projects and coordinated action.

I would not like to conclude my speech before expressing my deep agony and pain for the brutal attack last week by Israeli occupation forces against the defenceless citizens participating in the "Freedom Flotilla" headed for a humanitarian mission to Gaza in support for the Palestinian people living under siege there. I wish that this illegal and inhuman siege would come to an end very soon and our fellow brothers and sisters in Gaza would enjoy freedom and basic human rights.

I wish you success during your deliberations and I wish you pleasant time during your stay in Istanbul. Thank you for your kind attention.