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### Vocational Excellence and Centers of Vocational Excellence (CoVEs) Policy Approaches and Concepts: Revisiting Landscapes from High-Performers Vocational Education and Training (VET) Providers to Skill Ecosystems

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# Vocational Excellence and Centers of Vocational Excellence (CoVEs) Policy Approaches and Concepts: Revisiting Landscapes from High-Performers Vocational Education and Training (VET) Providers to Skill Ecosystems<sup>1</sup>

J. Manuel Galvin Arribas<sup>2</sup>

## Abstract

In the last years, Vocational Excellence concept has gained good recognition, both at policy and practitioners' levels, as necessary holistic policy approach in Vocational Education and Training (VET) to frame the concept of Centres of Vocational Excellence (CoVEs). The European Commission (EC) has contributed a lot, for example, via Erasmus plus (+) on dissemination and acknowledgement of both concepts at national, transnational and international levels. However, CoVEs concept remains partially misunderstood, whilst interpreted and/or implemented in different manners by the community of practitioners and policymakers. In this respect, current national nomenclatures on VET providers for monitoring CoVEs concept evolution matters a lot to follow up such diverse approaches and policy developments. Overall, CoVEs concept is even more associated with and implemented based on high-performer VET provider roles, while the concept might go beyond this, and encompass the broader concept of skills ecosystems. Thus, current evidence and experience inform on momentum for revisiting concepts and proposing updated definitions in Vocational Excellence and CoVEs, building on EC and European Training Foundation (ETF) experiences. This is to inspire further discussions, for example, on updating policy frameworks, evaluations and reviews of international best practices and/or on ways to feed excellence approaches at VET system level.

**Keywords:** Vocational Education and Training (VET); Vocational Excellence; Centers of Vocational Excellence (CoVEs); Skills Ecosystems; European Commission (EC); European Training Foundation (ETF).

## 1. Introduction

Vocational excellence in the European Union (EU), as a flagship policy approach, was shaped since Copenhagen Process in Vocational Education and Training (VET) was launched more than 20 years ago. From the Copenhagen Declaration (2002) to the Osnabrück Declaration (2020) the vision and ambition of the EU Member State governments, together with social partners, is having high-quality, innovative and excellent Vocational Education and Training (VET) skills systems (<sup>3</sup>).

Nowadays, the EC is inspiring European Member States (MSs), European neighbourhood and

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<sup>3</sup> See for instance: [https://www.cedefop.europa.eu/files/osnabrueck\\_declaration\\_eu2020.pdf](https://www.cedefop.europa.eu/files/osnabrueck_declaration_eu2020.pdf)

beyond, on approaching vocational excellence for ensuring high-quality skills and competences that lead to high-quality employment and career-long opportunities that meet the needs of an innovative, inclusive and sustainable economies <sup>(4)</sup>. Overall, this is to steer forward-looking VET policy reforms by integrating VET excellence, among other rationales, for tackling persistent skills mismatches, addressing sustainability (greening), digitalization and VET internationalization (Galvin Arribas, 2023) <sup>(5)</sup>.

The concept of vocational excellence focuses on a holistic, learner-centred approach (*learners and citizens at the heart*) in which Vocational Education and Training (VET) (EC DG EMPL, 2022) <sup>(6)</sup>:

- is an integral part of skills ecosystems, contributing to regional development, innovation, smart specialisation and cluster strategies, as well as to specific value chains and industrial ecosystems.
- is part of knowledge triangles (education -business-research) working closely with other education and training sectors, the scientific community, and business communities/networks.
- enables learners to acquire both vocational (job-specific) and key competences through high-quality provision that is underpinned by quality assurance; and
- builds on innovative forms of partnerships with the world of work and is supported by the continuous professional development of teaching and training staff, innovative pedagogies, learner and staff mobility and VET internationalisation strategies.

The EC (DG EMPL) from 2018 up to now and mainly via Erasmus plus (+) <sup>(7)</sup>, promotes the concept of Centres of Vocational Excellence (CoVEs) as relevant institutional approach to implement vocational excellence. Based on CoVEs role, vocational excellence means going beyond what VET would normally be expected to do (e.g VET in lifelong learning perspective), being a proactive player in skills anticipation and matching, technology diffusion, research, innovative pedagogies for co-creating new knowledge, internationalization (etc.) and using its role in regional socioeconomic development perspective (EC 2019) <sup>(8)</sup>.

CoVEs aim to drive innovation and excellence in VET, by bringing together a wide range of local

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<sup>(4)</sup> More recently, the EC via Union for Skills (2025) strongly underpins the role of VET excellence and CoVEs. See please, <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX%3A52025DC0090>

<sup>(5)</sup> See: <https://tvvet-online.asia/21/networking-for-vocational-excellence-an-international-network-of-centres-of-vocational-excellence-coves/>

<sup>(6)</sup> [https://employment-social-affairs.ec.europa.eu/policies-and-activities/skills-and-qualifications/skills-jobs/centres-vocational-excellence\\_en](https://employment-social-affairs.ec.europa.eu/policies-and-activities/skills-and-qualifications/skills-jobs/centres-vocational-excellence_en)

<sup>(7)</sup> In first call E+ excellence (2019) 12 pilot projects were funded. See: <https://erasmus-plus.ec.europa.eu/programme-guide/part-b/key-action-2/centres-vocational-excellence>

<sup>(8)</sup> <https://op.europa.eu/en/publication-detail/-/publication/566920f4-ee2d-11e9-a32c-01aa75ed71a1/language-en>

partners such as VET providers (at both secondary and tertiary levels), employers, chambers, research centres, development agencies, employment services, and social partners (among others), to co-create skills ecosystems that contribute to regional economic and social development, innovation, and smart specialisation strategies (EC, Erasmus plus + guide, 2021) <sup>(9)</sup>.

Overall, practices and policy approaches to implement CoVEs and excellence are taking place spite there is not homogeneous understanding and acknowledgement in VET communities on excellence and/or innovation in VET. This could limit intra-national as well as international collaboration in this area, as excellence and innovation are still concepts to be better clarified and used by VET stakeholders (e.g excellence requires innovation, but not every innovation necessarily leads to excellence) (Bollinger, 2025).

## **2. CoVEs Concept Framed in Vocational Excellence Policy Approaches: Nomenclatures, Operational Scopes and Models**

### **2.1 Nomenclatures**

One of the key challenges in researching and comparing Vocational Excellence via focussing on CoVEs concept is the inconsistent terminology and/or (lack of) widely acknowledged definitions. CoVEs can be referred to under different nomenclatures, which may imply different functions and roles within their skills ecosystems. In other words, by analogy, the concept of CoVEs can be attributed to other nomenclatures in VET national policies.

For example, some CoVEs may focus on competence development, greening and/or digital technological skills for industrial/sectoral or regional socioeconomic development; whilst others on innovation and technology transfer, and others on high-level of quality assurance and institutional accreditation practices, innovative teaching and learning practices in VET (etc.).

The diversity on CoVEs conceptual approaches may also reflect the level -and methods- of governance and coordination, the sectoral and/or regional scope, and/ or the target groups and beneficiaries of their services in VET systems (etc.). As a result, this is generating diverse and heterogeneous evidence when it comes to focus on practitioner communities' developments, as this strongly refers to cultures and traditions on VET provision in each country around the world.

All this creates *ambiguities* when it comes to analyse, research and evaluate policies on VET excellence and CoVEs. Based on European Training Foundation (ETF) experience, it is possible to

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<sup>(9)</sup> <https://erasmus-plus.ec.europa.eu/programme-guide/part-b/key-action-2/partnerships-excellence>

confirm that countries around the world acknowledged Centres of Excellence (CoVEs) term and/or are referring to it via different nomenclatures (box 1) <sup>(10)</sup>.

**BOX 1. EXAMPLES OF RELATED NOMECLATURES REFERRING TO CoVEs AT INTERNATIONAL LEVEL**

- **Australia:** Centres of Vocational Excellence (CoVEs) are designated entities and/or individual VET providers that focus on specific vocational areas and drive innovation and excellence in vocational education. They are often developed through public-private partnerships and are designed to strengthen links with industry and communities. Their focus is on greening skills, social inclusion and applied research to VET <sup>(11)</sup>.
- **Austria:** Competence centres to promote green skills. These are platforms for cooperation between vocational schools and companies, aiming to foster environmental awareness and sustainability in various sectors <sup>(12)</sup>.
- **Azerbaijan:** State (regional) vocational education centres. These are public institutions that provide vocational education and training (VET) at different levels and in various fields, serving the needs of the local/regional labour market and society <sup>(13)</sup>.
- **Bulgaria:** VET centres of excellence. These are VET providers that offer high-quality and relevant programmes, aligned with national and European qualifications frameworks and standards and supported by modern infrastructure and equipment <sup>(14)</sup>.
- **Croatia:** Regional centres of competence. These are networked VET institutions that act as hubs for innovation, excellence and lifelong learning in their regions, involving various stakeholders from the education, business and public sectors <sup>(15)</sup>.
- **Denmark:** Knowledge centres for VET. These are centres that conduct applied research and development, provide consultancy and guidance, and support the professional development of VET teachers and trainers <sup>(16)</sup>.
- **France :** Campuses of Trades and qualifications (Campus des métiers et des qualifications). These are clusters of VET providers and partners that offer integrated pathways and services in specific economic sectors, such as aerospace, tourism or health (etc.) <sup>(17)</sup>.
- **Kazakhstan:** Competence centres. These are VET providers that implement competence-based curricula and assessment, using modern equipment and technologies, and collaborating with social partners-employers- <sup>(18)</sup>.
- **Moldova:** Public institute centres of excellence (CoEs). These are high-level sectoral VET providers

<sup>(10)</sup> Further info: <https://www.etf.europa.eu/en/what-we-do/vocational-excellence-ene>

<sup>(11)</sup> <https://www.dewr.gov.au/national-skills-agreement/tafe-centres-excellence>

<sup>(12)</sup> See for instance: <https://peopleandskills.danube-region.eu/wp-content/uploads/sites/11/12th-SHC-of-PA9-2024-WG-Green-Skills-GT-in-VET.pdf>

<sup>(13)</sup> <https://sosial.gov.az/en/media/news/vocational-training-centers-are-also-being-established-in-guba-masalli-sabirabad-and-shaki>

<sup>(14)</sup> <https://www.cedefop.europa.eu/en/news/bulgaria-schools-innovation-hubs-28-vocational-schools-become-coves>

<sup>(15)</sup> <https://www.cedefop.europa.eu/en/news/croatia-regional-centres-competences-vet-reach-full-fledged-operation>

<sup>(16)</sup> <https://www.cedefop.europa.eu/en/news/denmark-knowledge-centre-strengthens-research-vet>

<sup>(17)</sup> <https://www.education.gouv.fr/les-campus-des-metiers-et-des-qualifications-5075>

<sup>(18)</sup> See for example: <https://qazinform.com/news/kazakhstan-to-open-national-competency-center-9a2874>

that offer programmes at different levels and in various fields, using innovative facilities and equipment's, and cooperating with national and international partners <sup>(19)</sup>.

- **Morocco:** The OFPPT (Vocational Training and Employment Promotion Office) has set up so-called Cities of Trades and Skills, as flagship initiative linked to excellence standards in VET. These public entities are regional training spaces, equipped with more advanced and emerging technological equipment's, labs, cutting-edge innovations (etc.), which are designed to enhance vocational excellence and addressing specific local market needs and for attracting local private investors and international players <sup>(20)</sup>.
- **North Macedonia:** Regional VET centres with vision on excellence. These are VET providers that aim to become regional VET leaders and hubs in delivering high-quality and relevant programmes, supported by modern infrastructure and equipment, and engaging with various stakeholders from the education, business and public sectors <sup>(21)</sup>.
- **Sénégal :** Sectoral Centres of Excellence for vocational training in Trades (*Centres sectoriels de formation professionnelle aux métiers*). These are public centres that provide initial and continuing VET in priority sectors, such as construction, hospitality or agriculture, following a demand-driven and competency-based approach, and involving employers and social partners in their governance and management <sup>(22)</sup>.
- **Slovenia:** Intercompany training centres. These are centres that provide practical training for VET students and apprentices, in cooperation with companies and chambers of commerce, and using modern equipment and technologies <sup>(23)</sup>.
- **Spain:** Centres of excellence. These are national network of VET providers that excel in innovation, quality and competitiveness, applied research, and cooperation with other players from the education, research and production sectors, to foster the development of human capital and the knowledge-based economy <sup>(24)</sup>.
- **Türkiye (Republic of):** Sectoral centres of excellence. This experience is strongly based on public-private partnerships to provide high-level VET in strategic sectors, such as automotive, aerospace or health, using state-of-the-art facilities and equipment, and involving employers and social partners in governance, management and funding operations <sup>(25)</sup>.

Source: Author (based on ETF 2025-forthcoming-)

## 2.2 VET Excellence and CoVEs: Revisiting Operational Scopes

Thus, evidence informs that VET excellence in CoVEs and/or in other used nomenclatures worldwide

<sup>(19)</sup>[https://www.researchgate.net/publication/388411117\\_ROLE\\_OF\\_CENTRES\\_OF\\_EXCELLENCE\\_IN\\_CONTINUOUS\\_PROFESSIONAL\\_DEVELOPMENT\\_FOR\\_TEACHING\\_STAFF\\_IN\\_THE\\_VOCATIONAL\\_EDUCATION\\_AND\\_TRAINING\\_SYSTEM](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/388411117_ROLE_OF_CENTRES_OF_EXCELLENCE_IN_CONTINUOUS_PROFESSIONAL_DEVELOPMENT_FOR_TEACHING_STAFF_IN_THE_VOCATIONAL_EDUCATION_AND_TRAINING_SYSTEM)

<sup>(20)</sup> <https://www.ofppt.ma/fr/actualites/cite-des-metiers-et-des-competences-de-dakhla-oued-ed-dahab-coup-denvoi-des-travaux-de>

<sup>(21)</sup> [https://www.undp.org/sites/g/files/zskgke326/files/migration/mk/Razvoen-Koncept\\_en.pdf](https://www.undp.org/sites/g/files/zskgke326/files/migration/mk/Razvoen-Koncept_en.pdf)

<sup>(22)</sup> <https://edc.org/projects/senegal-programme-de-formation-professionnelle-et-dinsertion-pfpi/>

<sup>(23)</sup> <http://konzorcij-sc.si/consortium-of-slovenian-school-centres/>

<sup>(24)</sup> <https://www.todofp.es/sobre-fp/informacion-general/centros-excelencia-fp.html>

<sup>(25)</sup> [https://www.ab.gov.tr/improving-the-quality-of-vocational-education-and-training-through-establishment-of-sectoral-centres-of-excellence\\_53209\\_en.html](https://www.ab.gov.tr/improving-the-quality-of-vocational-education-and-training-through-establishment-of-sectoral-centres-of-excellence_53209_en.html)

can be described and further defined and implemented, at least, in terms of the following scope of operational services and functions:

- Excellence in CoVEs means extended scope of their activities and services for regional socioeconomic and international strategic development (e.g to do more and better, as per deploying more sophisticated institutional functions).
- Excellence calls for revisited and improved quality assurance for addressing high quality performance on CoVEs capacity to respond and develop to meet the needs of their stakeholders and citizens in the skills ecosystems (e.g revisiting standards, benchmarks, performance indicators and other tools, policy approaches, peer-to peer- exchanges, etc.).
- Excellence for CoVEs means deploying strong leadership, and/or coordinating role in the national, sectoral or regional VET system(s), acting as a model (*good examples*), or pathfinder for guiding other VET Providers to perform successfully in skills ecosystems.
- Excellence in CoVEs relies on outstanding networking capacities, expertise, vision (etc.) of a specific VET community- to shape excellent skill ecosystems, at both local and international levels (e.g ETF ENE).
- Excellence as holistic approach to VET relies on CoVEs thematic approaches (*excellence dimensions*) for the provision of (vocational) educational services which are addressed in inclusive manner: skills for digital and green transitions, innovation, applied research, entrepreneurship, adult learning (upskilling, reskilling), career guidance and counselling, internationalization strategic services (etc.) (ETF ENE, 2021) <sup>(26)</sup>.
- Overall, excellence goes aligned with three major operational clusters for implementing CoVEs: governance and funding, cooperation and partnerships and teaching and learning (EC 2019). This opened the floor to design international self-assessment tools to support CoVEs developmental approaches and its further recognition and accreditation. For example, ISATCOVE tool (ETF) is starting to help on fulfil these gaps, including its possible use as VET excellence framework <sup>(27)</sup>. This also might help on the need for further research to establish clear, practical indicators of excellence that reflect the unique goals and outcomes of VET (Bohlinger, 2025).

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<sup>(26)</sup> Holistic approach to VET is informed and implemented via ETF ENE and proposed for conducting self-assessment of CoVEs as high-level performers VET providers in ENESAT tool. For more info: <https://www.etf.europa.eu/en/what-we-do/self-assessment-centres-vocational-excellence>

<sup>(27)</sup> International self-assessment tool for CoVEs (ISATCOVE) developed by ETF on behalf of EC is nowadays key example on tools which are helping on all such approaches. Please, for further info: <https://www.etf.europa.eu/en/what-we-do/internationalising-vocational-excellence>

### 2.3 Excellence and CoVEs Concept Variations for Implementation: From High-Level Performer VET Provider to Skills Ecosystem

In the last five years (2020-2025), the CoVEs concept has shown an increased level of awareness towards its partial implementation (albeit not homogeneously) at international level. Building on current on-going experiences worldwide, CoVEs might be defined following two major conceptual *roads*:

- targeting the extended scope of standards that should deploy the mission of certain high -quality performer VET providers; and
- targeting the scope of skills ecosystems by which CoVEs might be understood in terms of their spatial/geographical remit to shape those ecosystems (at local and international levels) and based on the crucial role of such *excellent* VET providers.

These two (complementary) pathways inform on an on-going renewed role of VET providers worldwide (public, private or public-private) in its ecosystems, which could be referred to as CoVEs or just to other related nomenclatures. In turn, such renewed role of VET providers refers to CoVEs, as spatial/geographical entities formed by VET providers, employers' associations, research centres, municipalities, companies, universities stakeholders (etc.) working in multilevel partnerships at local (and transnational, international) levels <sup>(28)</sup>.

In the light of all this, and according to experience of ETF ENE (2021-2025) <sup>(29)</sup>, fourth major CoVEs models can be identified when it comes to shape its operational conceptualisation. These are:

- CoVEs as *high-quality, single-excellent*, VET training institution(s) that play a leading role in the VET network in their countries (e.g on-going model in many countries around the world).
- CoVEs as *high-quality single-excellent* VET institutions that coordinate other VET providers based on *networker and leading role* within the VET network in their countries (e.g Country Basque-Spain-, the Netherlands etc.).
- CoVEs as *cluster* made up of *several interconnected high-quality vocational education and training institutions*, or others *VET providers connected to such clusters* (e.g. at sectoral, regional/ local levels). Each of these CoVEs might play a leading and/or coordinating role at regional and/or sectoral levels (e.g. sectoral cluster in Republic of Türkiye; France; regional in North -Macedonia,

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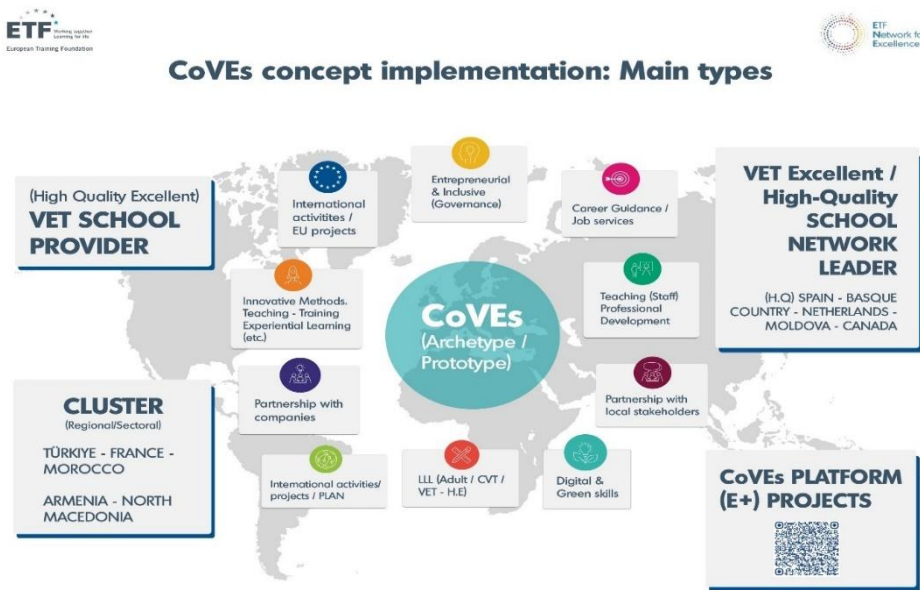
<sup>(28)</sup> In a nutshell, skills ecosystems can be defined as chain of interactions, and relationships between different stakeholders, partners and their environment for effective networking on skills development in a regional, local and/or transnational, international (spatial/geographical) context.

<sup>(29)</sup> <https://www.etf.europa.eu/en/what-we-do/vocational-excellence-ene>

Armenia, etc.).

- CoVEs as a platform for excellence (*institutionalized ecosystem*) comprising, among others, high-quality VET providers, universities of applied sciences, employers, research centres, development agencies, employment services and local authorities, which might be also part of such a platform at transnational or international level (e.g Erasmus plus projects -Key Action 2 Partnerships for Excellence) <sup>(30)</sup>.

**Chart 1. On-going CoVEs Concept Implementation: Main Types and/or Forms**



Source: Author (in ETF 2025 -forthcoming)

### 3. VET Excellence and CoVEs: Revisiting Conceptual Approaches

The ETF ENE experience (2021-2025) working closely with EC opens the floor to propose an updated conceptual framework for both vocational excellence and CoVES.

#### 3.1 Vocational Excellence

Vocational excellence could be understood as a public and inclusive VET policy, at all levels and in a lifelong learning (LLL) perspective, which refers to delivering high-quality assured VET qualifications, skills ( both specific and transversal) and/or education and training programs, through outstanding, holistic and forward looking curricula which is implemented and underpinned by most relevant educational pedagogies and learner-centered approaches (targeting both young and adult

<sup>(30)</sup> For consulting many of these on-going CoVEs projects please review: <https://copcovets.eu/files/Forum%202024/Brochure%20Forum%20CMQ%20and%20CoVEs-web.pdf>

learners), and taught via innovative, highly recognized and rewarded teachers and trainers professionals (communities).

Vocational excellence is mainly implemented by CoVEs fully relying on multilevel governance, constructive role of public-private partnerships, multi-channel financing approaches (mostly implemented at providers level), to provide relevant skills in strategic sectoral and/or intersectoral occupations, jobs (etc.) needed in national, local/regional, and/or international labour markets and/or ecosystems. Thus, vocational excellence policies enable learners and citizens to acquire high-level skills and competences covering all types of learning needs and pathways, and targets excellent provision of skills for twin transition (digital and green), entrepreneurship (etc.), whilst fostering work-based learning (WBL), applied research and innovation activities, technology transfer processes, internationalization strategies (etc.), including available career education and guidance quality services.

## **3.2 Centers of Vocational Excellence (CoVEs)**

### **3.2.1 The European Commission (EC): CoVEs platforms, networks and skills ecosystems**

The EC determines CoVEs as local networks bringing together a wide range of partners to co-create skills ecosystems for innovation, regional development and social inclusion. They are international collaborative networks sharing expertise and know-how among partners. CoVEs are hubs for VET Excellence rapidly adapting skills provision to evolving economic and social needs including digital and green transition.

CoVEs are inclusive ensuring learner centred approach and providing opportunities for lifelong learning; innovative in teaching and learning approaches and methodologies; partnership -oriented to push strong cooperation among VET providers and social and economic actors while ensuring effective governance and financial sustainability of the skills ecosystem.

CoVEs achieve their objectives working closely with a set of local/regional partners such initial and continuing VET providers, higher education institutions including universities of applied sciences and polytechnics, research institutions, science parks, innovation agencies, companies, chambers and their associations, social partners, social enterprises, sectoral skills councils, professional/sector associations, national and regional authorities and development agencies, employment services, qualifications authorities, social inclusion and reintegration organisations.

CoVEs work in other countries through international collaborative networks; they establish a bottom-up approach to vocational excellence involving a wide range of local stakeholders enabling VET

institutions to rapidly adapt skills provision to evolving economic and social needs. They stimulate local business development and innovation, by working closely with companies (SMEs) on applied research projects, creating knowledge and innovation hubs, as well as supporting entrepreneurial initiatives of their learners (EC/DG Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion, 2022).

### **3.2.2 The European Training Foundation (ETF): CoVEs network organisations, excellent VET providers and skills ecosystems**

The European Training Foundation (ETF) network for excellence (ENE) experience, feeds its conceptual approaches addressing *excellent* VET providers role and CoVEs as partnership-based network organizations to shape skill ecosystem (Galvin Arribas, 2020).

The on-going ETF experience helps to define Centres of Vocational Excellence (CoVEs) as network organisations, emphasising cooperation with other actors and its role on regional socio-economic development-. Centres of Vocational Excellence (CoVEs) could be VET Providers, groups of VET Providers and/or organisations that coordinate other VET Providers, that collaborate with economic, educational, social, and political partners and help to create local, and/or international, skills ecosystems, aiming to provide high quality VET skills as well as to contribute to regional development planning and growth. CoVEs are key institutional set-ups to inform on moving towards Vocational Excellence policies to impact VET system levels. Becoming a CoVE is a process of maturing. For example:

- At the first stage, the CoVE begins improving on what VET normally does, with close linkages to the labour market. For example, curricula and programmes are closely attuned to the needs of the labour market.
- At the second stage, the CoVE improves strategic development by playing a more active role in skill anticipation mechanisms to ensure a close match of VET to labour market needs.
- At the third, mature stage, the CoVE achieves excellence by co-creating local skills ecosystems, local innovation, and regional development (based on ETF 2025-fortcoming-).

Further, the ETF experience via its Network of Excellence (ENE) allows to define, in shorter way, CoVES as network organisations emphasising cooperation with other practitioners and policy players and its role on employment and strategic regional socio-economic development for shaping skills ecosystems. They are high-level performer vocational training institutions, and/or groups of vocational training providers (sectoral or regional *clusters*) granted by smart degree of VET school autonomy, which are appointed, recognised and/or accredited for inclusive excellence in identifying

and providing relevant and high-quality skills and competencies, both specialised technical and transversal ones.

They work very closely in partnerships with employers, research hubs, public local stakeholders, universities, including small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), to foster skills for digital and green transitions, outstanding teaching and learning methods and practices, cutting-edge innovations, technological transfers, applied research, entrepreneurship, lifelong learning (connecting VET with higher education; adult learning -upskilling, reskilling-), career guidance services and internationalization (etc.) (based on ETF 2025-fortcoming-).

#### 4. Conclusions and Policy Messages

The key conclusions and policy messages of this paper are:

- Nowadays, CoVEs are becoming central component in on-going VET system reforms and development worldwide, as many countries around the world are devising policy approaches targeting excellence in VET. The VET excellence notion is helping a lot with stronger recognition of VET role worldwide, as it is going beyond traditional VET services emphasizing its value for making available high-quality skills, research, innovation, internationalization, forging new partnership forms (etc.). This contributes to VET relevance, image and attractiveness, indeed.
- Concepts presented in this paper might be useful and helpful to further shape CoVEs concepts adapted to local contexts and discuss policy options in countries. Overall, it is needed to find a balance between roles of excellent VET providers and skills ecosystems, as both institutional recipients are core components for any definition to be workable. This might be better shaped and integrated into needed policies, as it is a lack of policy frameworks addressing excellence in VET and CoVEs policy roles worldwide.
- Such issue should be tackled, perhaps, moving from *typical* appointment of CoVEs (e.g by national and/or regional political authorities in many countries) towards accountable processes for recognition and/or accreditation of CoVEs. There is strong need on recognizing CoVEs as hubs for Vocational Excellence to support transparent and accountable policies, which should be informed by practices implemented by appointed, recognized or accredited CoVEs. Self-assessment tools (e.g ETF ISATCOVE) can play a constructive role on all this.
- When it comes to deliver CoVEs conceptual frameworks, based on the good role of excellent VET providers, it would be strongly recommended to revisit VET School Autonomy policy frameworks in many countries around the world, for example, to grant with smart degree of

autonomy VET institutions in order to enhance cooperation with employers and advancing public-private partnerships (ETF 2024).

- National and international cooperation and partnerships is a must for building evidence (e.g further research, evaluations, framework indicators etc.) and supporting monitoring conceptual approaches implementation and policy development (informed by both policy stakeholders and practitioner roles).

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