



# Digital International Trainers (DIG.INT)

## Result N. R5.1

### *Internationalisation of Regional VET Systems*

### *Work package 5*

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## DIG.INT Digital International Trainers - The project

The general aim of the project is to support the internationalisation process of VET- at the three levels of teachers/trainers-learners, VET provider organisations and regional VET systems- by using the full potential of digital transformation opportunities, and thus increase the attractiveness of VET and its capacity to support the internationalisation process of the economic systems.

In this context, the project intends to:

- 1) develop indicators and diagnostic capacity to accompany the internationalisation process of VET systems (teacher and trainers/learners, VET providers, regional VET systems)
- 2) Jointly develop a competence framework instrumental to internationalisation of VET systems (learners, teachers and trainers, VET providers management, VET planners and innovators), and a dedicated multilingual learning platform to support the development of the identified competences for students, teachers and trainers, managers and internationalisation staff in regional development agencies and VET policy agencies.
- 3) Support VET providers and Professional HEI in building and consolidating their internationalisation plans, also making meaningful use of digital technology and virtual students exchange
- 4) Support Regional Innovation Agencies and VET policy makers to compare and develop their internationalisation plans by making VET a key player in accompanying the internationalisation of the economic system.

Further information and results can be found in the official project website <https://digintrainers.eu/>

## R5.1 - Internationalisation of Regional VET Systems

### Abstract

The Report 5.1 Internationalisation of Regional VET Systems represents an analytical document summarising the lessons learnt from the whole project and validated by the community of stakeholders and policy makers. The report opens with the general context at European level addressing Vocational Education and Training to support attractiveness and internationalization strategies for better skills and job opportunities of citizens. From the Copenhagen process to the European Education Area initiative, it is underlined the connection between VET and Smart Specialisation Strategy in the regions. There are new tools that can support mobility of students and workers provided by the Skills and Mobility Package and programmes like THAMM and Migration Partnership Facility which support collaboration also with non-EU countries. An important novelty in the last years is represented by the new EIT Label dedicated to non-degree professional VET courses realised by local providers and open to international students, so encouraging to develop new approaches to traditional VET programmes towards internationalisation. Main tools developed by the DIGINT project, like benchmarking, competence framework and guidelines, are described to highlight the contribution given to the stakeholders empowerment. A focus has been placed on the real contexts in the project partners' regions, with short reports providing general information on local economic and VET systems, challenges and strategies of VET internationalisation. Through the SWOT method, a cross-regional analysis has been developed to identify common Strengths and Weaknesses / Opportunities and Threats, and to propose some options to fully express the potential of VET internationalisation. Regional reports are linked as Annexes.

The present report is part of the Work Package 5 - Blueprint Strategies for the internationalisation of Regional VET systems. The aim is to encourage VET Provider Organisations to become active in accompanying the internationalisation strategies of their regional stakeholders, development agencies and industrial partners, by making full use of the potential of digital technologies to support internationalisation of training supply.

The specific objectives of the WP 5 are:

- To build coherence and synergy among the internationalisation strategies of VET Providers, Regional Development Agencies and Industrial clients of VET in each participating Region
- To co-design a Blueprint for strategic cooperation, that is the elaboration of a reference framework for strategic cooperation between the main stakeholders and policy makers in the VET and Work systems.

**Acronyms.** A list of acronyms used in this report and respective description are reproduced here:

- **COVE** - Centers of Vocational Excellence
- **EEA** - European Education Area
- **EIT** - European Institute of Innovation and Technology
- **EQF** - European Qualifications Framework
- **EQAVET** - European Quality Assurance in Vocational Education and Training
- **ERDF** - European Regional Development Fund (funding programme)
- **ESF** - European Social Fund
- **HEI** - Higher Education Institutions
- **JRC** - Joint Research Centre
- **STEAM** - Science Technology Engineering Art Mathematics (education approach)
- **SWOT** - Strengths Weaknesses Opportunities Threats (analysis method)
- **S3** - Smart Specialisation Strategy
- **THE** - Training and Higher Education
- **VET** - Vocational Education and Training

## The Vocational Education and Training to support the attractiveness and internationalisation strategies of local areas

The European Education Area (EEA) initiative has been established by the European Commission to help European Union Member States to work together to build more resilient and inclusive education and training systems, as Education was recognised as the foundation for personal fulfilment, employability and active, responsible citizenship. In this context, Vocational Education and Training (VET) is crucial in preparing people for work and develops citizens skills to remain employable and respond to the needs of the economy.

European cooperation on vocational education and training dates back to 2002 and the Copenhagen process. It has been further enhanced over the years, for example by the Bruges Communiqué and the Riga Conclusions. Vocational education and training has been identified as a focus area for cooperation under the European Education Area initiative for the period 2021-2030.

The COUNCIL RECOMMENDATION of 24 November 2020 on vocational education and training (VET) for sustainable competitiveness, social fairness and resilience (2020/C 417/01) highlights VET characteristics as very important for the local social and economic ecosystems: the centred learner approach, flexibility and modularity, that can combine formal and non formal education, makes VET adaptable to the labour market and sectoral or individual upskilling or reskilling needs.

In this perspective, the VET can play an important role to support economic development and innovation at local and regional level, especially when it is developed in synergy with regional strategies, with special attention to the local Smart Specialisation Strategy (S3), aiming to foster knowledge-based growth in EU regions and countries for a smarter and more sustainable and inclusive Europe.

Smart Specialisation Strategy (S3) is adopted by the EU regions and Member States in order to identify objectives, priorities and actions for optimising investment effects in research and innovation, by concentrating resources on areas with greatest growth potential. The goal is to maximise results, boost competitiveness and provide quality employment.

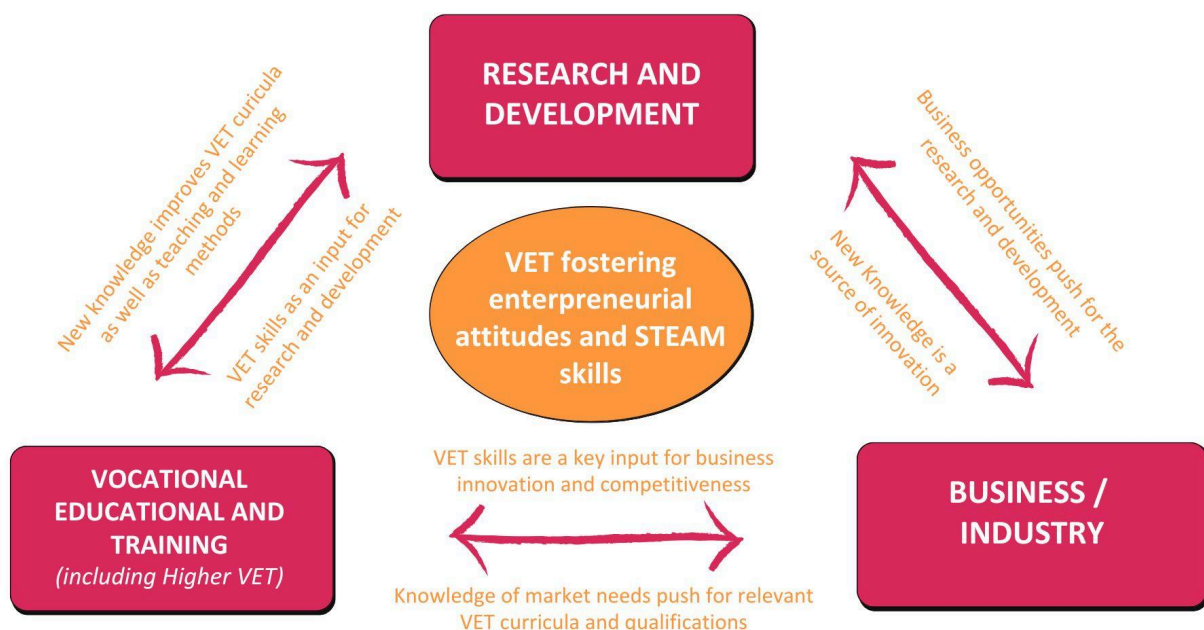
S3 Priority Areas and Strategic Specialisation Areas identified by the regions are directly connected to the EU Cohesion policy and in particular to the core of the ERDF Regional Programme funds.

Support from the ERDF under policy objective 1 (PO 1) should be based on building capacities for smart specialisation strategies, which set priorities at national or regional level, or both, to increase their competitive advantage by developing and matching research and innovation strengths with business needs and necessary skills through an entrepreneurial discovery process.

[REGULATION (EU) 2021/1058 OF THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT AND OF THE COUNCIL of 24 June 2021 on the European Regional Development Fund and on the Cohesion Fund]

In this context, the Vocation Education and Training in its different levels can play an important role in aligning with innovation demand from the regional labour markets. Connected to the S3 VET can develop “a strategic place-based approach to curriculum design, adding comparative value to the regional economy by developing programmes which build on local expertise, products and needs.” [Skills and Smart Specialisation. The role of Vocational Education and Training in Smart Specialisation Strategies, 2019, JRC]

The connection with the local ecosystem can include the strengthening of partnerships with local business, service providers and industry associations, and establishing a network of vocational education institutes, as well as enhancing the collaboration with higher education/universities.



As internationalisation is crucial in the growth and competitiveness of the industry and economic systems on the transnational and global markets, VET requires to be ready to manage the internationalisation challenge and changes that characterise the society, supporting talent attraction and circulation, including migration phenomenon from outside European borders. Quality and innovative VET can be itself an attraction factor for learners and human capital, supporting local growth in a cross-border and transnational framework.

## New tools to support skills internationalisation - The Skills and Talent Mobility Package

In 2023, the European Commission presented new initiatives in a Skills and Talent Mobility package to make the EU more attractive to talent from outside the EU, and to facilitate mobility within. To address the skills shortages the Member States are facing, the EU needs to attract skills and talent from all around the world. For this approach to be successful, the EU must be able to attract talent and retain the needed talent. Developing labour migration cooperation with third country partners can also be a mutual gain, that feeds expertise and financial support back in the economy of the country of origin.

**The EU Talent Pool.** It's a platform that aims to facilitate the recruitment of jobseekers from non-EU countries in EU-wide shortage occupations. It is an innovative measure, the first EU platform of this type, making international recruitment easier and faster, to help employers access a wider pool of skills and talent. Participation in the EU Talent Pool is voluntary for Member States, who will support the management of the platform. It will also provide information on recruitment and migration procedures in the Member States and includes strong safeguards to ensure fair recruitment and working conditions.

**The Talent Partnerships.** EU Talent Pool supports the implementation of tailor-made partnerships with non-EU countries, providing mobility for work or training. Jobseekers who have developed their skills under a Talent Partnership will receive a Talent Partnership Pass, visible to the participating employers, that certifies their qualifications. The opportunities for legal migration can be expected to disincentivise irregular migration and must go hand in hand with strengthened cooperation on readmission cooperation.

In this context, the European Commission recommends the Member States to make easier and faster recognition of qualifications gained in third countries, by simplifying and speeding up the recognition of skills and qualifications of third country nationals. These measures would modernise the EU's current recognition system and bring it closer to the system established for EU nationals that move to another Member State.

[https://year-of-skills.europa.eu/news/introduction-skills-and-talent-mobility-package-2023-12-19\\_en](https://year-of-skills.europa.eu/news/introduction-skills-and-talent-mobility-package-2023-12-19_en)

Quality migration to the EU from third countries is supported through specific programmes like THAMM Plus (Towards a Holistic Approach to Labour Migration Governance and Labour Mobility in North Africa) and Migration Partnership Facility (MPF).

**THAMM Plus Programme** is a sub-regional initiative funded by the European Union (DG MENA) and implemented by the International Labour Organization (ILO). Running from 2024 to 2027, this 48-month programme strengthens employability and facilitates regular, sustainable labour mobility pathways between Egypt, Morocco, Tunisia, and EU Member States, leading to decent work opportunities.

<https://www.ilo.org/projects-and-partnerships/projects/thamm-plus-towards-holistic-approach-labour-migration-governance-and-labour>

**Migration Partnership Facility** is a European Union (EU)-funded initiative supporting the external dimension of EU migration policy. Launched in January 2016, the MPF supports dialogue and cooperation on migration and mobility between EU Member States and priority partner countries outside the EU through four components: Grants, Technical Assistance and Support, Dialogue and Knowledge and Communication. <https://www.migrationpartnershipfacility.eu/>

## EIT LABEL of non-degree education programmes

In recent years, a new tool has been developed to support the internationalization of VET, thanks to the European Institute of Innovation and Technology (EIT) which extended its accreditation system (LABEL) for degree programmes to the non-degree education programmes. See the official [Handbook](#)

*The EIT Label is a certificate of quality that is awarded only to excellent educational programmes taking into consideration five groups of quality criteria: The EIT Overarching Learning Outcomes (EIT OLOs); Robust entrepreneurship education; Highly integrated, innovative 'learning-by-doing' curricula; Mobility, the European dimension and openness to the world; Outreach strategy and access policy.*

*In line with the EIT Strategic Innovation Agenda 2021-2027 (SIA), the ambition is to widen the scope of the EIT Label model from degree programmes to lifelong learning activities. As a result, EIT published in August 2022 the first edition of the [EIT Label Handbook for Quality system for non-degree education and training and EIT Competence Certification Model](#)*

What does VET internationalisation look like? Is it only the mobility of students and / or teachers? What kind of tools and policy can support the process? Based on the literature and practices developed some key elements that support the internationalisation of VET can be summarised as followings:

- International Training offer
- International Skills of the VET Providers' organisation
- International Networks
- International Cooperation
- International Work-based experiences
- Staff and Student Mobility

- Validation and recognition system for skills

The DIG.INT has developed a new framework of indicators, competence analysis and supporting tools to go deeper and wider, by taking into account experiences and reflection from the point of view of training providers, teachers and policy officers. In this context, the DIG.INT virtual platform plays an important role in creating and having quick access to digital tools for more opportunities.

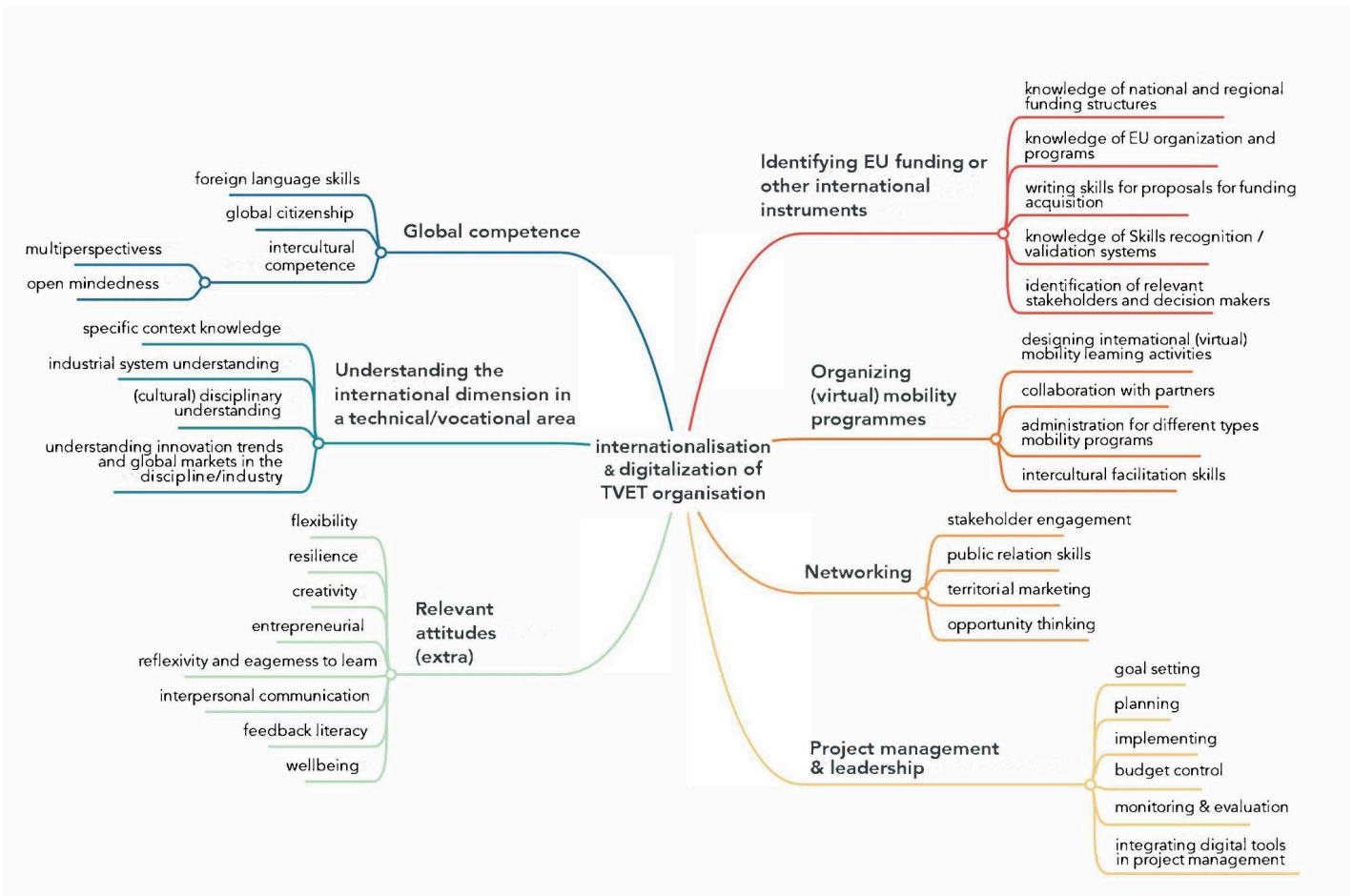
## The DIG.INT tools to support internationalisation of VET

Through the **Benchmarking digital tool**, the DIG.INT project was able to go deeper and identified a number of dimensions that characterise the internationalisation capacity of VET providers, for example the strategy developed at organisational level, agreements with other providers abroad, budget dedicated, trainers and administrative staff competences, international offer to the learners, European projects implemented, mobility abroad plans for students and staff.

*The Benchmarking questionnaire allows a comparison among VET and Technical Higher Education Institutions concerning their internationalisation strategy and achievements. The purpose of the comparison is to stimulate peer learning and further cooperation.*

*The questionnaire is organised in a rather classic structure for Benchmarking Systems, that is the following 4 sections: 1. Organization's Strategy; 2. Resources Committed; 3. Processes and Practices; 4. Outcomes.*

*The Benchmarking questionnaire only contains questions that feed quantitative or synthetic indicators allowing comparisons among many potential users to identify relative areas of strength and improvement by submitting anonymous replies that are treated automatically. Its purpose is to stimulate mutual learning through comparisons and establishment of peer learning groups.*  
<https://digintrainers.eu/index.php/benchmark/>



Competence areas necessary for internationalisation have been analysed through desk research and brainstorming among project's partners. The **Competence Framework** is the result of the work: some areas are very specific, others belong to what is generally called "transversal competences" that are required in a multitude of jobs, but they are also relevant to the project purpose.

*The Competence Map is intended to be used at three different levels:*

- *For any individual, to check the coverage and level of proficiency on the competences that are relevant for internationalisation, to identify learning needs and plan future learning paths, to obtain recognition and certification of competences already available;*
- *For VET and HE Institutions/organisations, to check the overall availability -among all staff- of relevant competences, identify competence gaps and plan future training or recruitment initiatives to fill the relevant gaps*
- *For Regional development agencies, to identify strengths and weaknesses, in terms of competence gaps, of the regional VET/THE system, and to plan regional programmes and initiatives to strengthen the international attractiveness and internationalisation potential of the regional VET/THE system.*

*Main competence areas identified are:*

- *Project Management & Leadership*
- *Identifying EU Funding or Other International Instruments*
- *Organising (Virtual) Mobility Programmes*
- *Networking*
- *Understanding the International Dimension in a Technical/Vocational Area*
- *Global Competence*
- *Relevant Attitudes (extra)*

*The competence framework details are described in the full report.*

[https://www.innovate4future.eu/digintrainers/wp-content/uploads/2024/04/A3.3-COMPETENCE-FRAMEWORK\\_UCLCIS\\_18.12.2023.pdf](https://www.innovate4future.eu/digintrainers/wp-content/uploads/2024/04/A3.3-COMPETENCE-FRAMEWORK_UCLCIS_18.12.2023.pdf)

Another important step of the project was to develop a guide to support the development of internationalisation plans of VET providers.

Directly connected to the Benchmarking tool and Competence Framework, the **Guidelines for Internationalisation Plans** serves as a foundational document to aid partners in drafting and refining their internationalization strategies. The collective results of the benchmarking exercise, which compares organizations' current performance in a European context, should be the starting point for shaping the plan. The ultimate objective of the guidelines is to provide a clear and actionable framework for partners, helping them translate their organization's vision and mission into measurable outcomes and impact over the next four to five years.

*Some key instruction for the use of Guidelines:*

- *The guidelines are not meant to be prescriptive, but rather provide a flexible framework to guide the drafting of an internationalization plan that reflects the unique needs and ambitions of each organization.*
- *The plan should be clear, structured, and written with a view to being actively used and updated over time, rather than becoming a static document.*
- *Stakeholder engagement is crucial; regularly discussing the plan with internal and external stakeholders will help refine its objectives and ensure shared ownership of the internationalization process.*

*The full Guidelines will be publicly available on the project website soon.*

## Internationalisation of VET - The local contexts reports

To complete the picture, the DIG.INT partners have prepared an **overview of local strategies and policies to support the internationalisation of VET**, their approach to the challenge, practices and areas of improvement. On this basis, some trends and commonalities, together with cases and practices, have been identified to be further analysed in the perspective of developing a blueprint for the internationalisation of the VET. It will also provide potential inputs for synergies and collaboration among the partners.

A common methodological approach has been suggested for the local reports' preparation, anyway partners were free to develop their own report structure.

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### Regional contexts reports template

The Report R5.3 is composed by a general introduction to the topic, descriptions and analysis of each partner's context and final conclusions. As for the descriptions and analysis of partners' contexts, we share some suggestions on working steps to collect information, analyse results and share feedback from the stakeholders on VET internationalisation policies. Each partner is invited to develop its own part by following the proposed actions and template. The expected results to be included in the report will be the context description, the SWOT analysis and the strategic outputs identified together with the stakeholders.

**STEP ONE - DESK RESEARCH.** Description of local contexts in relation to the VET internationalisation, including both general information and specific issues. We suggest using the following items:

- **Introducing the local context:** *Key information on the local context - Geographic characteristics; Economic environment; Population / Employment rate; Languages; GDP per capita;*
- **Education and VET system:** *Scheme and description of education and training systems in the country/region*
- **Economic sectors - Smart Specialisation Strategy / Internationalisation policy:** *Short description of Priorities and Specialisation Areas in the country/region; Internationalisation policy supporting the economic ecosystem*
- **VET Internationalisation policy:** *Policies and tools developed in the country/region to support VET internationalisation*
- **Cases and practices:** *Short description of specific initiatives and tools developed at local level and/or at national level, having an impact at local level*

To help the collection of information, we propose some guiding questions on key aspects to be investigated:

1. Which is the link between Regional strategies and VET providers?
2. Consider the link between VET-ENTERPRISE and Region-ENTERPRISE on international initiatives – How can VET be considered an export service linked to regional activities and investment of companies abroad?
3. Link among VETs - How VET Providers cooperate /compete in their internationalisation strategies?
4. In which way VET is considered part of joint international projects of enterprises, for example of the same value-chain?

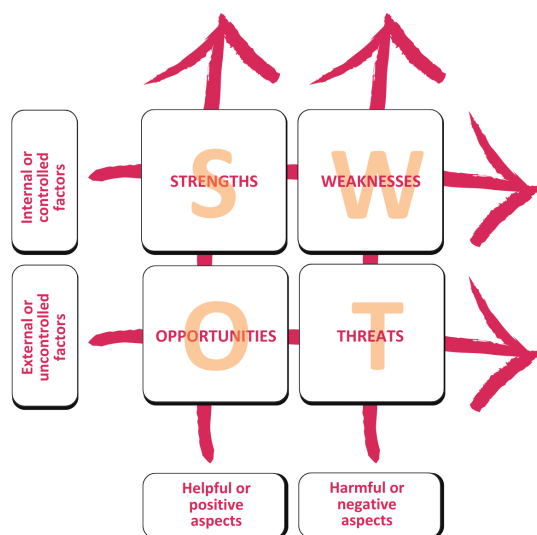
**STEP TWO - FOCUS GROUP.** Organise a meeting with stakeholders and work with the SWOT analysis.

**Key stakeholders:** make a list of stakeholders that are involved in the internationalisation of VET. Suggested participants as compulsory: policy makers, training providers, companies / company associations. Additional very welcome: experts. Other organisations: trade unions, civil society, etc.

**SWOT analysis:** use the 4 quadrants (Strengths / Weaknesses; Opportunities and Threats) to make visible the key aspects that characterize the local contexts regarding VET internationalisation policies in your context. This first analysis will help the preparation of the Focus Group.

[A useful guide to SWOT analysis](#)

### Contextualise it



A good SWOT analyses a specific situation in a specific context. Writing a purpose statement helps to keep the analysis relevant rather than generalised.

What factors are under the control / responsibility of your organisation that matter (**INTERNAL FACTORS**)? Which of them can be considered Strengths? Which can be considered Weaknesses?

What factors are NOT under the control / responsibility of your organisation but have and impact (**EXTERNAL FACTORS**)? Which of them can be considered Opportunities? Which can be considered Threats?

### Factors examples

[WP5 - Brainstorming activity - internationalization policy - SWOT](#)



## Key findings from the local reports

**Contextual elements.** Despite the different territorial extension, density of population and governance structures, the local contexts analysed have a well developed industrial and economic environment, generally higher compared to the national levels in their respective countries, addressing innovation, technologies and human factors in the economic and social cohesion across common challenges of green and digital transformation.

Regarding the economic sectors, among the common areas we can find manufacturing and advanced technologies integration, energy, smart mobility and health. Some specifics are for example the finance sector for Bucharest-Ilfov or mechanics, culture and tourism for Emilia-Romagna. The Basque Country economic system underlines the key role of technological and digital transformation affecting all sectors. The Auvergne - Rhône Alpes is characterised by a strong industrial system, going from mechanics to chemistry to pharmaceuticals. The Brainport area is a very peculiar context: it represents the collaboration among 21 municipalities of the Brabant region, where rapid decline of the core industrial sector forced the development of a new innovation policy based on the strict integration of government, education and business, which developed important high-tech industry and multicultural talents attraction. Internationalisation of companies is a cross-cutting element, transversal to economic sectors in all regions.

**VET systems.** Partners' contexts are of course different in terms of the VET system's structure and governance, which can be managed at national, regional or very local levels. All systems foresee EQF between 3 and 4-5, including vocational baccalaureate and post-diploma technical education and training, university courses (polytechnics and professionalisation degrees), including re-skilling and up-skilling for adults and professionals. Connection and integration between School, VET and University systems strengthen the opportunities offered to students through a variety of paths. A strong collaboration between the VET and economic systems is well established, underlining the importance of aligning the training opportunities with the evolution of the technological and economic landscape. In this perspective, it's important to highlight the connection between VET and Smart Specialization Strategy of the regions: local reports provide some examples of it, like Emilia-Romagna and Bucharest-Ilfov and Auvergne - Rhône Alpes. Interesting advanced VET examples are shown by dual learning in Flanders and post-diploma courses in Emilia-Romagna, Higher VET education courses developed at university level in Bucharest-Ilfov. Basque Country has identified a development area around a new model of smart VET centres. In the Brainport region the strong collaboration between VET and labour market is also supported by the government to develop internationalisation programmes.

**At policy governance level,** VET systems present different cases: an important role of the regional or local governance for Basque Country, Emilia-Romagna and Flanders, more nationally guided as for the Auvergne - Rhône Alpes and Bucharest-Ilfov. A specific situation is represented by the Brainport: as is the rest of the country there are not fixed curricula: VET opportunities are generally related to

the competence needs required by the labour market and innovation trends identified by studies on economic sectors relevant to the territory.

### **Synthesis of SWOT analysis provided by partners' regional reports**

#### **STRENGTHS**

**The general system.** One of the key factors recognised by partners in supporting the internationalisation of professional training is related to the capacity of the different stakeholders to collaborate and create networks. In fact, internationalisation is based on relationship, exchange, synergies and common aims and objectives: responsive collaboration among training organisations and companies, supported by associations, policies and other connected stakeholders represents a crucial factor of success. Linked to it, a strong enabler factor is represented by the economic and social environment of the regions, including geographic position: the good economic dynamics, attractiveness factors like high living standards, cultural openness and welfare services can encourage long-lasting interactions and exchanges.

**Training system.** High-quality of VET offer, strong educational infrastructures and recognition across Europe for good practices of collaboration among training institutions are all factors that enhance the quality of internationalisation projects. In some cases, the local policies facilitate training providers in identifying opportunities through dedicated services, events and analysis that support professionals.

**Training opportunities.** Internationalisation is facilitated by the capacity of hosting international students, the offer of internships in collaboration with companies, exchange projects and the role enabler actors (like associations dedicated to international opportunities, intermediate organisations supporting providers)

**Funds and Policy.** Success factors in internationalisation of VET is for sure to take part in EU dedicated programmes, like Erasmus+, and having a strategic alignment with the European and International frameworks, e.g. EQF, ECVET, etc. On the other hand, it's important to have the support of regional and national policies that can ensure continuity of resources in the framework of the general local strategy for internationalisation and attraction.

#### **WEAKNESSES**

**The general system.** Well-developed territories may show some critical sides as for the effectiveness of internationalisation of training: high costs of living compared to salaries, especially in areas where the majority of companies are SMEs, infrastructure issues, bureaucracy, working permits issues for foreigners, may represent problems. Another critical issue is the limited capacity of SMEs in providing concrete opportunities of collaboration with training providers for internationalisation projects and dual education.

**Training system.** Weaknesses at the training system level may be represented by difficulties in orienting curricula towards internationalisation, together with poor performances and outdated

professional standards that may affect the local VET system. In some cases, there is limited capacity by hosting organisations to adequately accommodate, mentor and evaluate students. Smaller VET providers may have additional difficulties. Issues have been highlighted regarding lack of recognition of certificates, difficulties in having a single language for skills and abilities, lack of transversal skills, rigidity/competition between training paths, lack of coordination among agencies. VET still suffers from stigma in the public perception and in some cases it results in limited capacity to interpret the economic needs and opportunities of the regional context.

**Training opportunities.** One of the main weakness factors shared by partners is represented by the language barrier: the poor level of English language competence both of students and companies reduces the access to opportunities of international internships, and of course local languages may represent a barrier for foreign students. Inequality distribution of resources and fragmentation of initiatives may create difficulties in accessing opportunities, especially in peripheral and rural areas. Lower performances of students may be another factor of limited access to opportunities.

**Funds and Policy.** Limited resources dedicated to the internationalization processes it's an issue, same as for the limits of the rules of ESF in the structure of regional VET courses that make it difficult to introduce internationalization elements and approach in the curricula.

## OPPORTUNITIES

**The general system.** Digital transformation represents a strong opportunity for mobility of students and adults, creating new options of connections and ways of studying and working. The phenomenon of the digital working nomads is also related to a new sensitivity towards better work-life balance and the interest to move outside the urban areas. In this context there is a growing demand for green and digital skills.

**Training system.** The growth of digital internationalisation through virtual exchange and online collaborations is parallel to wider opportunities to expand Erasmus+ and to foster collaboration with more international partners, by expanding networks with international companies and educational institutions, also based on strong cultural and language connections. In this context, there are a number of networks of centers of vocational excellence (COVE) that foster collaboration among the VET system and companies at local and international level, different national strategies for internationalisation of VET with non EU countries and for reducing educational inequalities help to create a positive framework for internationalisation.

**Training opportunities.** There is a growing interest in mobilities among students and the opportunity to access courses in foreign languages. In this context, more immigrants can access the VET courses thanks to multilingual programmes. Brexit effects can favour the attraction of talents out of UK

**Funds and Policy.** More funds have been provided to VET thanks to the expansion of Erasmus+, post-pandemic programmes (Next Generation EU) and mixed funds solutions. There are local strategies linked to Smart Specialisation Strategy aligned with twin transition and policy emphasis to inclusive mobility.

## THREATS

**The general system.** The economic and geopolitical crisis conditions are having bad effects in the internationalisation, with consequent damages for companies, and SMEs in particular. Generalised demographic decline and dropout rates, connected to the global competition for talent and partnerships create additional issues. Competition with Anglophone and Nordic countries is still high

**The training system.** Main challenges of the training systems is the obsolescence of skills and differentiated development of VET training plans

**Training opportunities.** Participation in Erasmus+ is complicated: strict and time-consuming may be too challenging for some providers. In some areas, there is still poor interest in international experiences. It's also linked to social perception of VET and persistent inequalities in participation

**Funds and Policy.** Worries are expressed for budget cuts in education, the dependence of the VET on external funding and delay due to bureaucratic issues.

## Final remarks

Based on the SWOT scheme we propose a short summary by taking Strengths to face Threats and Opportunities to reduce Weaknesses.

### **The general system**

Among the main threats, it is underlined the negative impact of the international economic and geopolitical crisis and demographic decline, which is affecting companies and especially SMEs. In partners' regions a success factor of internationalisation is based on the relationship, exchange, synergies among training organisations and companies, supported by associations, policies and other connected stakeholders.

- Enforcing stakeholders' responsive collaboration can be a good leverage to reduce bad effects of international crisis
- Regions can also rely on the positive social environment: high living standards, cultural openness and welfare services can be attractive factors for a new workforce, reducing the demographic decline issue.

High costs of living, infrastructure limits and bureaucracy, including limited capacity of SMEs in developing concrete collaborations with training providers, represent for some territories a challenge for internationalisation and attraction of new workforces. On the other hand, digitalisation may it, by facilitating connections from remote and improving job opportunities responding to new work-life balance needs

- Efforts should be paid at all levels to favour new internationalisation opportunities through digitalisation of training and working paths
- Territories could enforce digital infrastructures and create a new narrative for small cities and villages, where the cost of living is lower than in the main cities, to make them more attractive

### **The training system and opportunities**

Among the main challenges of the training systems there are difficulties in orienting curricula towards internationalisation, outdated professionals standards and skills, including limited capacity by hosting organisations to adequately accommodate, mentor and evaluate students. Language barriers, both for students and companies, limits opportunities

- Collaboration among training institutions with a strong role quality training experiences and practices and policies supporting training providers through dedicated services may help to face this challenge
- The changing social environment more and more multicultural due to growing mobility and immigration phenomena should stimulate new opportunities and capacity to enhance curricula and communication

The well-known limit of lack of recognition of VET certificates across Europe, due to difficulties in having a common approach in training paths, and persisting stigma in the public perception of VET

create additional barriers for effective VET internationalisation. Inequality distribution of resources and fragmentation of initiatives, especially in peripheral and rural areas presents additional challenges.

- Expanding opportunities for Erasmus+ collaborations and increase of networks like the COVE (Centers of Vocational Excellence), where VET collaborate with universities and companies can change the perception and enhance the quality of the training in internationalisation processes
- Existing and new cultural connections among countries, across and outside Europe should be valorised to facilitate new bridges that favour collaboration and practice exchange
- The role enabler actors, like associations dedicated to international opportunities, intermediate organisations supporting providers and companies, should grow to make internationalisation of VET more accessible to a larger number of students and more feasible and effective for providers and companies

### **Funds and Policy**

Funds are a serious issue for education, and especially for the VET: providers and stakeholders point cuts and bureaucracy, ESF strict rules and some difficulties in accessing the EU programmes as limiting factors in developing new curricula addressing internationalisation:

- Increasing funds, also with mixed funds solutions can help
- Peer learning and practice exchanges among local policies may support the definition of new strategies and tools
- Increase local VET strategies linked to regional Smart Specialisations with emphasis to inclusive mobility could enhance the number and quality of internationalisation opportunities also for the VET

## Annexes - DIG.INT Partners' Regional Reports

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