



Digital International Trainers (DIG.INT)

Result N. R5.2

Blueprint for the Internationalisation of Regional VET Systems

Work package 5

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1. The DIGITAL International Trainers 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/>

2. Introduction

The main objective of **R5.2, Blueprint for Internationalization of Regional VET Systems**, is to develop a VET Internationalization plan to encourage and guide regional authorities and VET Provider organizations to become active in accompanying the internationalization strategies of their regional stakeholders, development agencies and industrial partners, by making full use of the potential of digital technologies to support internationalization of training supply within the S3 ecosystem.

At the national level, there are frameworks for the study of globalization that form an important basis for knowledge and experience. However, the regional application of certain indicators remains problematic. Knowing that, in most OECD countries, the regional level is responsible for allocating responsibility for producing and implementing strategies for economic development, innovation and internationalization, understanding how the integration of a region into global markets from the globalization perspectives would better cover the ambition to address both human and business connections and knowledge and infrastructure connections.

At European level, the conception of VET is principally circumscribed to developing the capabilities, competencies and skills of the present and future workforce through vocational education and training for both young people and adults. Including the VET in the European research and innovation strategy, agenda and governance system is relevant to the EU in terms of growth (competitive, inclusive and sustainable), policy (regarding European harmonization and unification) and sociocultural issues (understanding of diversity and social catalysts).

In this sense, European research must aspire to supranational cooperation if it wishes to create, develop and publish a new, advanced and change-oriented body of knowledge on the VET system that breaks the current paradigm. To achieve this, it is necessary to prioritize it politically, reinforce it in EU programs and allocate it resources under cross-innovation and -fertilization schemes backed up by transparent assessment mechanisms. The internationalization of the VET system should be seen as an innovative process that plays a key role in enhancing the region and the most suitable method to it is to consider the internationalization of VET bodies as **part of the smart specialization strategies (S3) of the region**. Considering this ambition as a **strategic innovation domain (SID)**, VET internationalization can play a strong role in the profound changes that our societies are undergoing, and the demands of a truly exceptional economic climate.

To serve the specific challenges in terms of development and attractiveness of regional excellence, the principles of governance, monitoring/steering, and coordination of VET internationalization should be further specified, formalized, and, above all, operationalized in a clear understanding framework.

Even though various representations and schemas that are discussed in the literature to define the smart specialization strategies (S3) and its SIDs, guiding in the implementation of the internationalization VET remains in the grey area. The complexity and heterogeneity of the political and economic priorities delivered in **R.5.1** of the DIGI.INT project shows the importance of mastering this stage.

3. Smart Specializations strategy (S3) as a concept and an approach

The **Smart Specializations strategy (S3)** is a place-based innovation policy concept to support regional prioritization in innovative sectors, fields or technologies through the '**entrepreneurial discovery process (EDP)**', a bottom-up approach to reveal what a region does best in terms of its scientific and technological endowments (Foray, David, Hall, 2011).

Smart Specialization strategy (S3) requires regions to have a comprehensive understanding of their regional institutional contexts to identify their strongest research, innovation and entrepreneurial assets so that they can select a limited number of priorities where they can build critical mass in areas of comparative advantage (European Union, 2017).

The **current programming period of EU Cohesion Policy 2021–27** dedicates the bulk of its budget to promoting a **Smarter Europe** through the confirmation of the Smart Specialization Strategy (S3). European regions have to update their S3 and to respond to '**seven enabling conditions**' highlighting the international dimension. The seven enabling conditions are:

1. Up-to-date analysis of bottlenecks for innovation diffusion, including digitalization
2. Existence of competent regional / national institution or body, responsible for the management of the smart specialization strategy
3. Monitoring and evaluation tools to measure performance towards the objectives of the strategy
4. Effective functioning of entrepreneurial discovery process
5. Actions necessary to improve national or regional research and innovation systems
6. Actions to manage industrial transition
7. **Measures for international collaboration**

4. VET Internationalization Blueprint

4.1. The overall process of VET internationalization

The internationalization strategies of regional VET systems are driven by **the policy priorities and local economic priorities** as a **strategic innovation domain (SID)**. To get a clear understanding of these triggers, DIG.INT partners have prepared an overview of local strategies and policies developed in the project participating regions to support the internationalization of VET.

The **R.5.1**, which compiles the regional SWOT analyses, forms the evidence base for the Blueprint, providing insights into regional systems and helping shape the proposed strategic framework. The complexity and heterogeneity of the political and economic priorities enhanced in **R.5.1** show the importance of mastering the regional internationalization scope before embarking on the development of Key Strategic orientation and impact of internationalization of VET organizations.

The **key strategic orientations and impact areas** are formulated based on expected impacts on both public strategies supporting the development of local systems and Industrial strategies as local economic environment's interest for the internationalization and competence needs. The guidelines developed in **R4.1** (Guidelines for the development of internationalization plans) provide a clear and actionable framework to aid drafting and refining the internationalization strategies of VET Providers and Higher Education Institutions. The ultimate objective of the blueprint document is to help organizations to refer their strategies to collaboration frameworks, to policy objectives and to indicators defined at the regional level.

Each expected objective is targeted via dedicated packages of actions in **the work plan**. This work plan is a detailed roadmap that describes the steps required to achieve a specific objective, defining tasks, resources, deadlines and responsibilities to achieve the internationalization objectives set out in the working plan. In a continuous improvement approach, the evaluation stage guarantees the expected effects of the internationalization of VET as an SID in smart specification strategies (S3). Figure 1 summarizes the process of the VET internationalization.

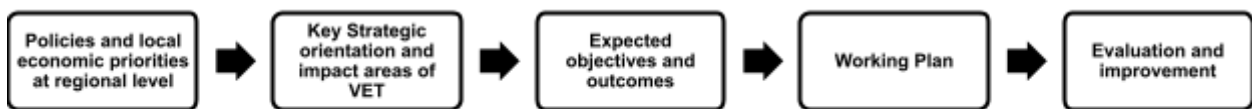


Figure 1: The overall process of VET internationalization blueprint

This strategic plan should be aligned with the training strategies and act in areas of collaboration between VET and HVET providers supporting the local internationalization strategy as part of the whole system. The question that remains is how to implement these strategies for the internationalization of VET in territories ensuring their effectiveness at regional and national level. The following paragraph introduces the blueprint developed in the DIG.INT project as a result of R5.4. This is a diagram that maps and shows the entire process of VET internationalization as described in **Erreur ! Source du renvoi introuvable.**

4.2. VET internationalization blueprint

To further develop the above VET internationalization process, the DIG.INT project proposed a conceptual map of the Blueprint based on a top down and bottom up multi-level approach. It represents a systemic and integrated vision linking regional, institutional, and operational layers of a territory. The proposed Blueprint promotes coordination between regional policies, institutional strategies, and operational quality processes, emphasizing collaboration, evidence-based planning, and long-term impact. Figure 2 draws the roadmap of the Blueprint within three main questions:

1. **What?** □ It is important to understand the regional context as a whole and in relation to public and territorial policies to clearly define the scope of VET internationalization actions.
2. **Who?** □ we need to identify all the stakeholders involved in the process of VET internationalization.

3. **How?** □ It's important to highlight and anticipate the steps guiding the implementation of the VET internationalization in a top-down and bottom-up approach, drawing the VET internationalization workflow in a continuous improvement approach, from and to governance.

BLUEPRINT FOR VET INTERNATIONALISATION - In a Systemic Approach-

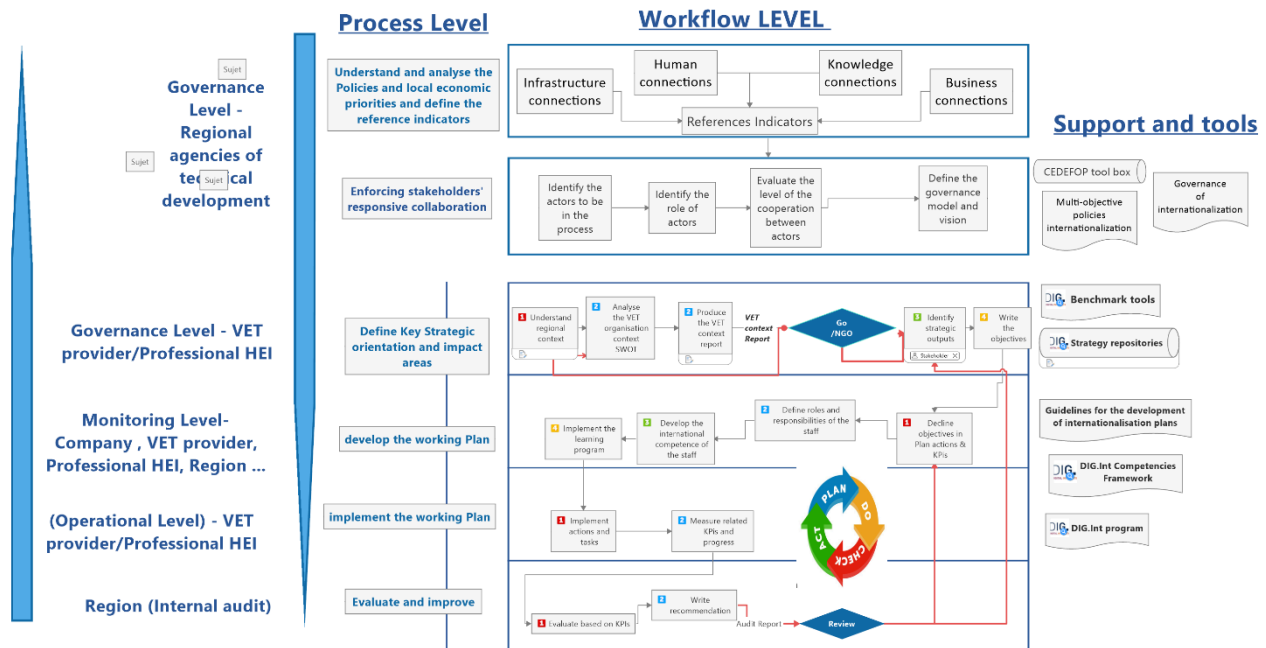


Figure 2: The VET internationalization blueprint workflow

The region analyses the policies and the local economic priorities. It defines the reference indicators investigating mainly the four connections defined above. The goal is to establish a clear governance model and a shared vision for VET internationalization at regional level based on multi-actor and multi-objective approaches established in Smart Specializations Strategy (S3) framework.

Step 1: Establish the partner Collaboration Map

Identifying stakeholders and their roles and responsibilities in the process of implementing the internationalization of VET is a very important step ensuring the clear definition of the governance bodies and their commitments. Different governance bodies can be involved as regional and territorial partners, VET providers, companies, professional HEI, and other stakeholders.

These partners can supply with the vision of internationalization; national, territorial and regional policies, national guidance; competence needs required by the labor market and innovation trends identified by studies on economic sectors relevant to the territory, the VET organization's analyses of its context and report to trigger the next step.

To support this step, the extended Quadruple Helix Collaboration model (QHC) to internationalization would help connect VET and skills development to interregional and

cross-border cooperation and VET excellence based on matching priority areas for smart specialization strategies (Figure 3). QHCs promise a more responsible integration of internationalization value and risk mitigation ([Florian Schütz et al. 2019](#)).

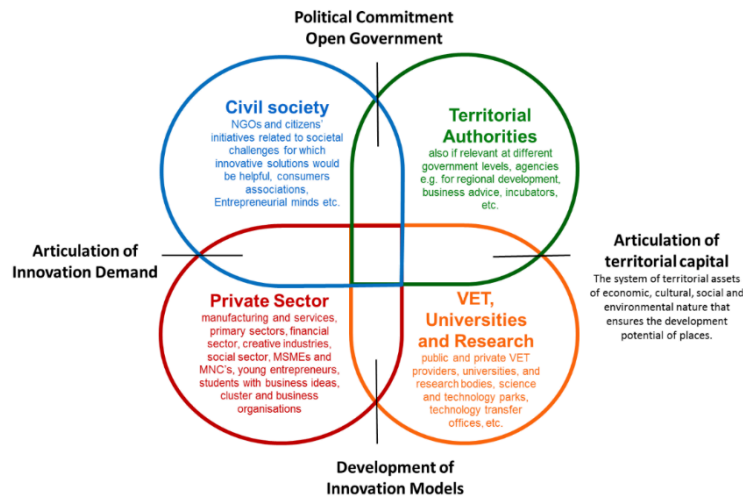


Figure 3: Quadruple Helix Collaboration Model ([Skills for Smart Specialisation \(S4S3\)](#)).

The main steps to draw clearly this collaboration map are (Figure 4)

1. Identifying the actors collaborating to establish the internationalization plan of VET organization
2. Defining the role of each actor and the interaction between actors
3. Establishing the governance model and the vision
4. Formulating or reformulating VET internationalization strategies and reference indicators at regional level that capture directly the international of VET (e.g. share of foreign VET students). These reference indicators are defined by the analyses conducted of the policies and the local economic priorities conducted by the region. The reference indicators investigate mainly the connections between the domains defined in. The goal is to establish a clear governance model and a shared vision for VET internationalization at regional level based on multi-actor and multi-objective approaches established in Smart Specializations Strategy (S3) framework.
5. Involving the actors into the vision.

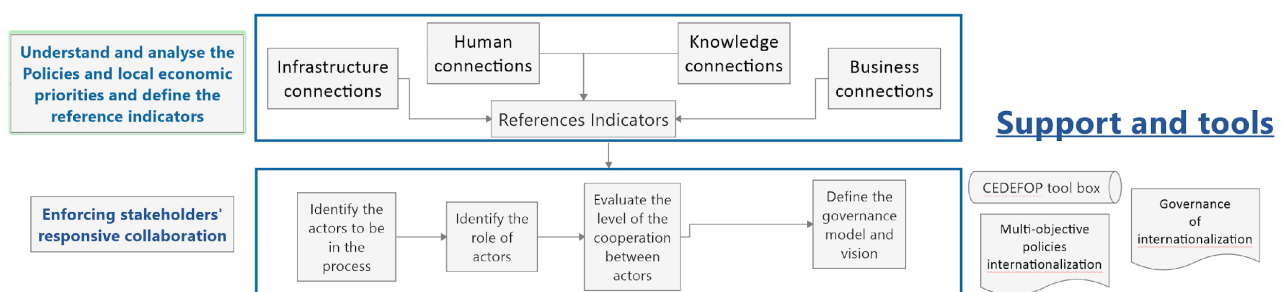


Figure 4: Collaboration Map Process (Step1).

Step 2: Setup the strategies and related objectives

For this purpose, the organization can use the Online tool for the benchmarking of internationalization (**R2.1**) developed in the DIG.INT project to get a clear understanding of their

internationalization and stimulate peer learning and further cooperation. In particular, the longer and generalized internationalization experience of Technical HEIs, which has gone through the Bologna Process for 25 years, should be used as a stimulus for VET provider institutions, which have a more limited set of European tools to support internationalization and a more limited demand from their students.

Based on the data supplied in step2, VET providers and professional HEIs should conduct a SWOT analysis of their organization and produce a report to clearly describe the maturity level of their practices regarding internationalization. This step is vital in deciding whether to embark on successful internationalization strategies.

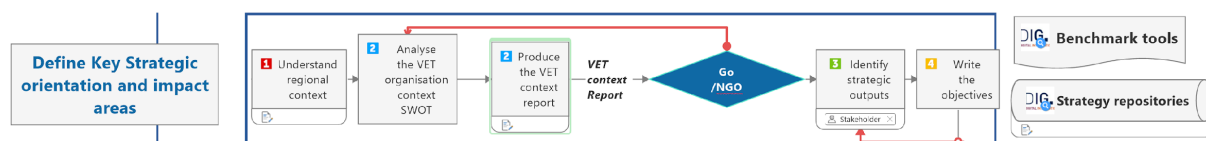


Figure 5: strategies and related objectives process (Step2).

The initiated **strategies repository in DIG.INT WP4** project set up in **A2.2** as shown in Table 1 can support the identification of the VET provider strategies and objectives. This repository material can be enriched and supplemented throughout these processes.

WP4 (the document is available at VET
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
...

Table 1: Strategies repository produced under Work Package 4, where partners had created institutional strategies

Step 3: VET internationalization PDCA¹ continuous improvement

At this step, the region and VET organization joined together to develop and monitor the working Plan in a continuous improvement approach. We describe this step in two main parts:

Step 3.1: Set up the working plan

At this step, the region and VET organization joined together to develop the working Plan by:

1. Outline the objectives in a working plan. [The Guidelines for Internationalization Plans \(R4.1\)](#) serve as a foundational document to aid partners in drafting and refining their internationalization strategies.
2. Define the roles and responsibilities at the monitoring level

¹ Plan DO Check Act

3. Define the skills and competences needed to support this working plan. The [competence framework](#) developed in DIG.INT project as **R3.1** should support this step. This 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 internationalization, to identify learning needs and plan future learning paths, to obtain recognition and certification of competences already available.
- For VET and HE Institutions/organizations, 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 internationalization potential of the regional VET/THE system.

4. Implement the learning program to upskill in VET internationalization with the use of the [DIG.Int program](#) platform (**R3.2**) that supports teachers', trainers', VET staff's, and experts' competences development.

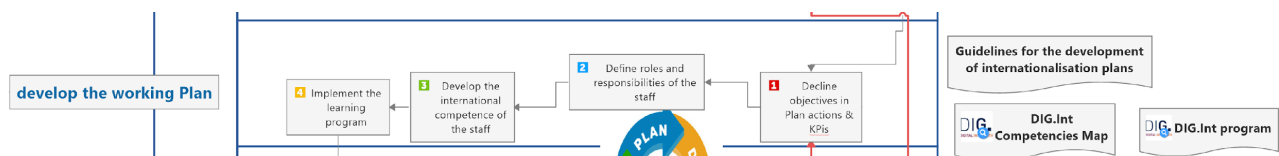


Figure 6: Working plan process (Step 3).

Step 3.2: monitoring process

The organization oversees establishing the working plan by implementing actions and tasks defined in the working plan. The region can evaluate and report the progress of the internationalization achievement based on the KPIs linked to the actions and established in the working plan.

These KPI measurements serve for the internal or external auditing activity. A report should be written to review the working plan or the regional strategies and policies in a continuous process if needed as described in Figure 7. This step is implemented in a continuous improvement process based on the PDCA approach.

In this sense, the PDCA (Plan–Do–Check–Act) cycle is proposed as a quality-assurance framework to ensure coherence between regional and organizational levels. The Regional audits and recommendations will feed back into this iterative process, allowing regular adjustments to strategies and actions.

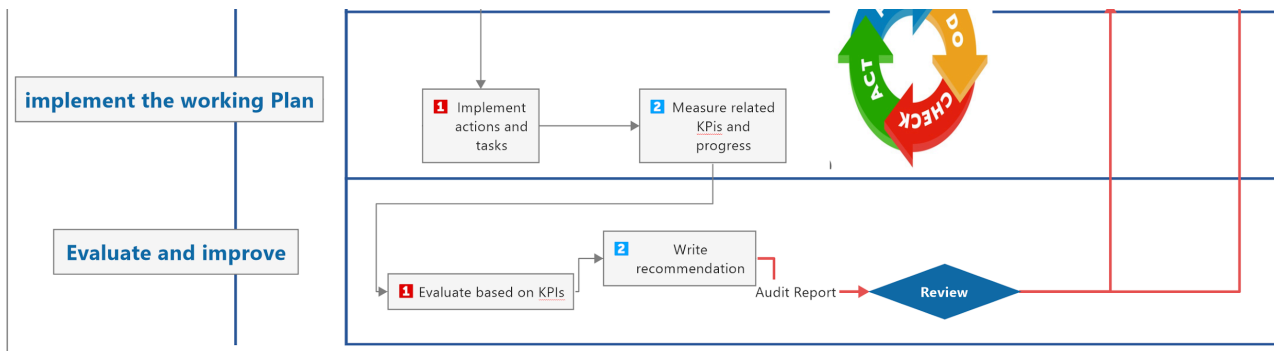


Figure 7: Monitoring VET internationalization process (Step4).

5. Conclusion

This first iteration of the Blueprint lays out 3 primary goals and actions to create momentum in addressing key opportunities and challenges facing the VET internationalization:

1. Alignment: VET internationalization strategies must be consistent with regional Smart Specialization Strategies (S3) and broader policy goals.
2. Collaboration: Internationalization is a multi-actor process, requiring coordination between regional authorities, enterprises, and VET/higher education institutions.
3. Quality and coherence: The PDCA model and existing EU tools and instruments should be used to support quality management and ensure synchronized progress at all levels.

In DIG.INT project, we developed tools and guidelines to support the VET internationalization process and can be improved and adapted to each specific context.