

CENTRES OF VOCATIONAL EXCELLENCE

**Autonomy in forging public-private partnerships
in vocational education and skills development**

Baseline Study

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PREFACE

For some years now, vocational excellence has been a key contributor to advancing policy agendas worldwide for addressing systemic reforms in vocational education and training (VET) within a lifelong learning perspective.

Overall, this refocusing of attention on vocational excellence is being driven by, among other factors, the ambitions of many VET communities/practitioners and policy-makers to raise the profile of VET in order to contribute to delivering high-level skills to match labour-market needs in the context of digitalisation and Industry 4.0, while also increasing the appeal of vocational education pathways. This focus on excellence might continue helping VET to become the education type of choice for parents, students and employer networks (parity of esteem). Refocusing on excellence is also a driver for revamping policy dialogue on the quality of training providers and thus for reforming VET networks in many countries.

Centres of vocational excellence (CoVEs) are the right institutions to achieve such objectives. CoVEs are often represented as the institutions that embody vocational excellence. However, the purpose, structure and functions of CoVEs vary greatly from one context to another. Differences and similarities are often disguised by the use of specific terminology, which may be lost in translation. CoVEs are assigned different roles in policy-making and vary in terms of level of political commitment and prioritisation of resources. Quite often, CoVEs exist in isolation, without partnerships with other educational institutions at national and international levels. Sometimes CoVEs are, fundamentally, skills providers – vocational schools or training centres – but they can be coordination or development centres or networks, instead (ETF, 2020a).

The ETF Network for Excellence (ENE) has become a core ETF project in the context of its 2020–27 strategy to support international policy debates/dialogue, delivering methodological tools and research products, and sharing best practice around the world¹. The ENE project is inspired by a European Commission-led initiative in the European Union (EU) Member States, which establishes centres of vocational excellence partnerships². Further, ENE responds to growing needs – expressed some years ago by ETF partner countries – to promote excellence and innovation as key drivers in shaping a *new role* for vocational skills to support employment and education systems in a relevant way within a lifelong learning perspective.

Through ENE, the ETF aims to apply such approaches to countries mainly outside the EU, focusing on eight selected themes, namely:

- lifelong learning in VET – from initial to continuing training and adult education – also including entrepreneurial learning;
- education-business collaboration and cooperation;
- pedagogy and professional development;
- smart specialisation – mobilising innovation, ecosystems and small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs);

¹ www.etf.europa.eu/en/projects-campaigns/projects/network-excellence

² https://eacea.ec.europa.eu/erasmus-plus/actions/centres-of-vocational-excellence_en

- Industry 4.0 and digitalisation;
- autonomy and institutional development (financing, leadership, governance);
- going green – supporting sustainable goals;
- social inclusion and excellence.

Thus, this baseline study of the autonomy of CoVES in forging public-private partnerships is a key milestone in the ENE thematic area of autonomy and institutional development (financing, leadership, governance). ENE wants the study to be used by ENE members and other CoVEs around the world to inform policies and share good practice in these areas, so that learning together can continue to be supported and the VET reform agenda regarding excellence can, perhaps, be advanced in ETF partner countries – and beyond.

In the current situation created by the Covid-19 pandemic, this baseline study is also a good example of how to cope with such challenges based on sound and effective cooperation among institutions and partners in implementing human capital development policies. The ETF is deeply grateful to all partners involved in this study for their continued support for the activities of ENE.

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Background to the study

The objective of this baseline study on the autonomy of centres of vocational excellence (CoVEs) in forging public-private partnerships (PPPs) in vocational education and training (VET) and skills development is to analyse whether and to what extent CoVEs have autonomy and how it can be linked to PPP experiences in a selected number of CoVE cases in ETF partner countries. Autonomy, in this context, is defined as the right of an education provider to self-govern and take decisions, independently and with accountability, on educational, organisational, financial, staff-related and other matters, in pursuit of activity carried out within the scope defined by the law (see Section 1.2).

The study also analyses the autonomy of CoVEs as a core operational concept and explores the different dimensions of partnership cooperation in achieving vocational excellence. In addition, it looks at how CoVEs are carrying out their autonomous role and the various core functions linked to implementing VET and skills development via PPPs.

CoVEs in six ETF partner countries (Azerbaijan, Israel, Georgia, Morocco, Tunisia and Turkey) and two EU Member States (Finland and the Netherlands) were researched for this study. The CoVEs in the ETF partner countries were selected based on geographical coverage and expression of interest in participating in this study. The two EU Member States and featured CoVEs were selected to get a picture of the situation in EU Member States. Although the scale of the study was small, the findings from front-line CoVE practitioners are nevertheless interesting.

The study reviews the main features and institutional settings of the selected CoVEs, their operations and practical experiences in PPPs. It explores the general features of CoVEs in order to gather information about their management systems and set-ups in general, the specific legislation or regulations governing PPPs, the purpose of CoVEs within local/regional/national VET systems, their duties and responsibilities, as well as their role in predicting skills demands, and sectoral development.

The CoVEs studied operate on a mostly regional level and across multiple sectors. The main subjects in which the CoVEs offer training are information and communication technology (ICT), technology and engineering. A key finding of the study is that cooperation between the education and business sectors in the form of PPPs is a key indicator of the excellence of a CoVE. Other areas in which the centres excel are pedagogy and professional development, and lifelong learning in VET, offering programmes ranging from initial VET (IVET) to continuing VET (CVET) and broader forms of liberal adult education. Only one of the countries in the study has specific legislation defining the status of CoVEs; in two others, CoVEs are covered by legislation only in certain areas; while in three countries, there is no legislation at all covering CoVEs.

Specific features of CoVEs

The CoVEs studied demonstrate several specific features of excellence in terms of private-sector cooperation. The high level of support by companies for the professional development and training of both teachers and students provides a clear path to excellence, for example, and distinguishes a CoVE from other VET organisations. Private partners support the development of students' skills in highly specialised areas, such as innovation and technological entrepreneurship, while CoVEs reciprocate by providing training to these companies' staff. The quality of VET is also considered as

a specific feature of a CoVE. Other specific features of excellence are higher-level VET programmes, such as master classes, highly specialised training, and the private sector's support in terms of improving the employability of students and employing graduates. CoVEs can also develop practical learning environments, such as business incubators, which, as well as having a financial objective, are also deeply committed to the educational aspect.

CoVEs cooperate extensively with companies to support the development of students' skills via work-based learning (WBL), including developing learning plans for students and subsequently assessing them. Some centres have a standard system for students' WBL experience in companies.

CoVEs cooperate with the private sector in various other ways in addition to WBL, including via apprenticeship programmes, master classes, exchange and mentoring programmes, student projects, offering technological solutions for companies, guidance and career counselling, and providing scholarships. CoVEs are able to provide students with opportunities for learning in authentic environments and they collaborate with the private sector in curriculum development. CoVEs also engage in international activities and professional development, offering opportunities to pilot international best practice. On the whole, CoVEs tend to be more accountable and operate similarly to private-sector companies in their day-to-day management.

Autonomy of CoVEs in forging PPPs

The CoVEs studied are, to a large extent, autonomous regarding their cooperation with private partners and companies. Only in some cases is the cooperation centrally managed to a certain extent. When asked to name specific aspects of autonomy that are most important in PPPs, the majority replied 'decision-making'. Financial aspects, curriculum development and staffing were also seen as important. Other aspects noted related to the organisation of departments and development of projects within the skills ecosystem. Some of the CoVEs studied also mentioned the presence of professionals from the private sector on, for example, the administrative and/or pedagogic board.

An overall key finding of the study is that the CoVEs can decide autonomously on the level and forms of public-private cooperation. The CoVEs exercise their autonomous role in PPPs in different ways. In the case of most of the CoVEs in the study, there is regular cooperation between the school management and the private companies. While decisions about the curriculum followed by the VET centre are made either on a national level or within the centre itself, there is an understanding that curriculum development benefits from contributions from the private sector. Joint curriculum development can happen on a national, regional or local level. All in all, private-sector involvement in the selection and content of VET programmes needs to increase to ensure the relevance and employability of graduates. There is also scope to involve the private sector in managing human resources in CoVEs. This would be beneficial to CoVEs, by providing them with a benchmark against which their management of human and other resources could be measured.

Benefits of CoVE autonomy in PPPs

The selected CoVEs see a number of benefits in public-private cooperation. Partnerships ensure that companies play a role in ensuring students' training meets those companies' needs and specifications, so that the students can potentially become their employees. CoVEs understand the private sector's evolving needs and can prepare the workforce accordingly. The added value for the companies is the possibility of upgrading their employees' skills through continuing and professional training via the CoVEs.

Partnerships also open up research and development possibilities with CoVEs. CoVEs are seen as having a role in supporting the companies with the further development of existing products and services, and in devising new ones. CoVEs support industry by providing the expertise it needs to improve productivity and management. Furthermore, joint initiatives provide opportunities for image-building and generating positive publicity.

Private partners also contribute to other aspects of CoVE work, in the form of, for example, tracer studies, graduate surveys and other surveys. Some CoVEs also perceive that VET prepares students for entrepreneurship or further studies at university or higher levels of VET. Partnerships with universities of applied sciences play an important role here, in offering paths for VET graduates.

The benefits of CoVE autonomy in PPPs relate mainly to opportunities to develop the students' skills more broadly, but innovation initiatives and the ability to actively contribute to local business ecosystems are not to be underestimated.

Selected outcomes of the study

CoVEs are already cooperating with the private sector in myriad ways and on many levels. There is, however, scope for more cooperation and involvement of the private sector in VET governance, curriculum development, minimising skills mismatches and improving quality control. It is recommended that those making decisions on policy and practice note the possibilities for further and more in-depth partnerships, which can add value on an operational level, as well as enhancing employability and innovation within the respective region.

The study confirms that the sustainability of PPPs involving CoVEs increases with long-term cooperation plans and greater integration of companies into the learning process. Reciprocity and mutual benefits are of vital importance in creating sustainable PPPs. Policy-makers should note that steering is required to support the sustainability of PPPs involving CoVEs and their autonomous position.

Covid-19 has had a major impact on the operations of CoVEs. By far, the most significant consequence has been the suspension of WBL in companies. Other major challenges have included the transition from face-to-face to distance learning, disruption to teaching due to a lack of possibilities for distance learning, a higher drop-out rate among students, and delayed assessments and graduation. As a result, the workload in VET has increased overall, leading CoVEs to believe they have an important role to play in the digital transformation of VET and in contributing to excellence in implementing digital solutions.

Despite the small scale of this study, it does reveal the potential that lies in CoVEs having sufficient operational autonomy and being involved in PPPs. The aim is to provide insights into some of the development processes and trends emerging around CoVEs and PPPs.

The overall conclusion drawn from this study is that CoVEs benefit in a number of ways from having sufficient autonomy in collaborating with private partners effectively. The involvement of CoVEs in PPPs is mainly regional in scope and the study provides insight into how CoVEs can add value to regional ecosystems. Employability of students and opportunities for job creation through entrepreneurship and innovative initiatives are among the top value-adding outcomes of PPPs. When drafting VET policy, the key opportunities within PPPs need to be supported, which will, in turn, support regional growth.

Overall, it is recommended that ETF partner countries discuss the findings of this study, so that they can influence national policy reforms and VET decentralisation both systemically and systematically, and focus on exploring the optimum balance between governance and decision-making at national, regional and local levels. The experience of CoVEs and how they are implementing their autonomous role in PPPs can provide a route map for VET policy and practice in networks for excellence in ETF partner countries.

1. INTRODUCTION

The aim of this baseline study was to analyse, based on selected case studies, the autonomous role of centres of vocational excellence (CoVEs) – how they are implementing it and how it can be linked to public-private partnership (PPP) experiences – and produce a short policy brief on the potential benefits to a CoVE of having autonomy over its own development and subsequent influence on the national VET system.

1.1 Concept of centres of vocational excellence

According to the ETF, the international community does not have a common definition of centres of VET excellence. However, based on analysis of international practices, the term CoVE mostly refers to networks of VET partnership-based institutions, which are established in different regions but reflect the national policy priorities of a given country (ETF, 2019a).

These centres normally offer high-quality VET programmes and qualifications for the development of highly-specialised professions, which may be connected to tertiary education routes, with a strong focus on technological and/or innovative, sectoral or multi-sectoral training to meet the skills needs of both companies and individuals.

The concept of CoVEs is recognised in the European Commission's vision for a European Education Area by 2025 (European Commission, 2018). Among several important initiatives and actions, the Commission has proposed to support the establishment of VET centres of excellence, which would promote an active role for VET in local and regional economic development.

According to the European Commission, CoVEs bring together a wide range of local partners, such as VET providers, employers, research centres, development agencies and employment services (among others) to develop 'skills ecosystems' that contribute to regional, economic and social development, innovation and smart specialisation strategies³.

1.2 Autonomy and public-private partnerships in vocational education and skills development

According to the ETF's work on the autonomy and accountability of vocational schools, there are several definitions of school autonomy (ETF, 2020e). Some key ones are listed below.

- 'School autonomy is defined as a school's right of self-government – encompassing the freedom to make independent decisions – on the responsibilities that have been decentralised to schools' (Neeleman, 2019, p. 34).
- 'Autonomy means giving VET schools decision-making authority over their operations, for example in relation to staffing, curricula and finances, within constraints and policies set by the relevant authorities' (Ministry of Education and Science of Ukraine/ETF, 2017, p. 10).
- 'School autonomy is a form of school management in which schools are given decision-making authority over their operations, including the hiring and firing of personnel, and the assessment of teachers and pedagogical practices. School management under autonomy may give an

³ <https://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?catId=1501&langId=en>

important role to the School Council⁴, representing the interests of parents, in budget planning and approval, as well as a voice/vote in personnel decisions. By including the School Council in school management, school autonomy fosters accountability. In its basic form, accountability is defined as the acceptance of responsibility and being answerable for one's actions' (Demas and Arcia, 2015, p. 3).

- 'The notion of *school autonomy* refers to several different aspects of school management (essentially funding and human resources). Schools may be autonomous to varying degrees regarding these aspects. They are considered to be fully autonomous, or to have a high degree of autonomy, if they are fully responsible for their decisions subject to legal constraints or the general framework of education legislation. This does not preclude consultation with other education authorities. Schools are partly autonomous if they take decisions within a set of predetermined options or require approval for decisions from their education authority' (Eurydice, 2007, p. 7).
- 'School autonomy is generally understood as a form of management in which schools are given decision-making authority over their operations. This may include decisions relating to different aspects of school management, such as funding and allocation of resources, human resources, designing curricula and assessment, quality assurance and school improvement. Schools may be autonomous to varying degrees regarding different aspects of school management' (European Commission, 2014, p. 3).

Given the diversity of country contexts and business operations in the sample of CoVES selected for this study, the following definition has been adopted as the most practical: 'The right of an education provider to self-governance involving independent and accountable decision-making on educational, organisational, financial, staff-related and other matters in pursuit of activity carried out within the scope defined by the law.'

The ETF also explored the implementation of the concept of PPPs in the area of VET and skills development. The conclusion is that, overall, PPP is a *controversial* concept and there is a variety of approaches – as well as critical views – on PPPs relating to the roles of public and private stakeholders as both operators and implementers. With regard to VET and skills development, the ETF concludes that PPPs are mechanisms for coordinating action and sharing responsibility between public and private stakeholders in VET for formulating, designing, financing, managing or sustaining engagements of common interest, with a view to producing results at the level of outcomes (impact) in addition to outputs (ETF, 2020f).

The key categories used by the ETF to analyse PPP in VET and skills development are: comprehensive legislative/regulatory frameworks; available fiscal arrangements; social dialogue operational status; social partnership practices/arrangements; and the capacity of stakeholders/policy-makers to shape and implement sustainable PPP arrangements.

1.3 Objective of the baseline study

As noted above, the general objective of this study is to analyse, based on selected case studies, the autonomous role of CoVEs, how they are implementing that role and how it can be linked to PPP experiences. In this respect, autonomy is a core operational concept, and understanding the partnership dimension for achieving vocational excellence is key.

⁴ In most recurrent definitions, the term 'school council' is used. Other terms frequently used are 'school board' and 'executive council'.

The specific objectives of the study are:

- to explore the main features and institutional settings of the selected group of CoVEs, looking at their practical experiences of implementing their autonomous role and considering their various operational and conceptual dimensions;
- to analyse how CoVEs are implementing their autonomous role and various core functions linked to the implementation of PPP approaches and experiences in VET and skills development;
- to provide a comparative assessment based on outcomes and lessons learned from such CoVE practices, addressing, in particular, the benefits and added value of autonomy for VET system efficiency; and
- to identify and propose policy recommendations and further strategies for policy learning to support the contribution of CoVEs to policy development, focusing on policy options for ETF partner countries in particular.

1.4 Centres of vocational excellence selected for the study

The countries from which cases were selected for this study are:

- ETF partner countries: Azerbaijan, Georgia, Israel, Morocco, Tunisia and Turkey;
- EU Member States: Finland and the Netherlands.

At the EU level, vocational excellence is an emerging priority associated with VET. The ETF is building a network of CoVEs, called ENE. Member centres are usually nominated by national ministries in ETF partner countries. The purpose of the network will be to provide a platform for continuous exchange of practices among new and existing CoVEs at local, national or international level.

In its mapping study of CoVEs, the ETF also recognises the existence of centres of excellence that were not actually reported as such by public authorities for the purpose of that study (ETF, 2020a). In all, 13 ETF partner countries responded to the mapping study questions. Out of these countries, Azerbaijan, Georgia, Israel, Morocco, Tunisia and Turkey are of interest for the present study. Finland and the Netherlands are included as EU Member States. The CoVEs in this study were selected based on geographical coverage and expression of interest in participating in this study.

Azerbaijan adopted a law on vocational education in 2018 that provides a policy framework for the organisational, legal and economic bases of the country's VET system. The creation of centres of excellence can be linked to the country's endeavours to structure the VET system in a more sustainable manner. The future plans for the VET system are set out in the VET road map, which outlines the establishment of 10 new VET centres of excellence across the country, focusing on providing education and training for occupations that are in high demand in the labour market. The centres will have a PPP management structure, modern infrastructure and the necessary supplies and technical equipment.

In addition, significant efforts have been made to increase the autonomy of VET institutions. These include the approval by the Cabinet of Ministers, in 2019, of new statutes for VET institutions, which regulated the transition of vocational institutions to public legal entities and provided them with a higher level of freedom in relation to services provision and management of finances (ETF, 2020a). Two CoVEs in Azerbaijan participated in this study. The CoVEs interviewed are active in eight sectors, in all of which they have created a network of PPPs. The private partners involved set the standards for the required skills, and the centres follow these to prepare the specialists accordingly. The goal is also to be efficient, so the centres aim to prepare the students for work in just one rather than three

years of studies. Now that they are up and running, the CoVEs are expanding their study fields and increasing the number of partnerships with companies.

In **Georgia**, the new VET law entered into force in October 2018. The law aims to improve the quality of the VET system by establishing a flexible connection between general, vocational and higher education, eliminating the dead-end nature of VET pathways and opening up new opportunities in VET. The Ministry of Education, Science, Culture and Sport is actively engaged in developing secondary legislation, in cooperation with development partners. VET is provided by both public and private colleges. Private VET provision is quite significant, compared with many other countries. The government aims to expand the network of public VET institutions, and development partners are supporting the construction of new centres of excellence and the rehabilitation and upgrading of existing institutions.

Five CoVEs in Georgia participated in the study. The country reportedly has no law that defines centres of excellence, but the colleges are operating independently as excellence centres and have cooperation agreements with private companies. The interviews provided some insight into the centres' practice. For example, there is cooperation with companies in multiple fields and across all training programmes. The colleges are said to be able to decide themselves how the PPPs are organised. It appears that the the National Centre for Educational Quality Enhancement (NCEQE), responsible for VET quality assurance, approves vocational education programmes, but colleges can organise, independently and autonomously, skills development in dual or modular programmes, in cooperation with the companies. The centres report that they are widening their operations and study fields in VET. The interviews with the CoVEs revealed that companies are showing greater interest in cooperating with the centres in the form of PPPs to develop vocational skills.

In **Israel**, the education system has expanded significantly over the last 10 years in terms of overall budget, number of teachers and allocations per class and student. A key objective of the government concerning vocational studies is to have 48% of students enrolled in technological strands, in order to satisfy the skills needs of the labour market and the industry agenda. As a result of continued government efforts, including the implementation of a dedicated action plan for 2017–22, student enrolment in technological-vocational studies has reached an impressive 40%. The new strategic goal adopted by the Council for Higher Education is to increase internationalisation. The motivation and overall objective of the country's internationalisation policy is to increase the academic quality of the Israeli higher-education system and promote Israel as a leading study destination for international talent (Gross Yarm and Theurillat, 2020). Four CoVEs from Israel participated in the study. All four are expanding their operations. They report working in partnership with private businesses, the army and academia to improve students' skills, e.g. via technological projects and entrepreneurship events, such as hackathons. The centres say they are independent and can manage operational activities. The schools have their own ecosystem and autonomy, which allows them to adapt to the needs of their local context.

In **Morocco**, the delegated management institutes (opened by the State, with management delegated to the private sector) cover priority sectors (e.g. automobiles, aeronautics, renewable energies, textiles) and are perceived as CoVEs (ETF, 2020a). These institutes are linked to the legal framework relating to CVET, within which a body charged with the management of CVET was created, involving representatives from public administration, employers and trades unions (ETF, 2019b). Industrial VET centres are identified as examples of VET institutions that are striving for excellence and innovation, with the intention of improving the cost-efficiency of VET networks by ensuring they can deliver skills, competences and qualifications in accordance with labour-market needs (ETF, 2020a). One CoVE

from Morocco participated in the study. The centre operates in the textiles industry and covers 13 other fields of study. The centre sells continuing education and consulting services, and so has very strong ties with companies. Autonomy and an entrepreneurial spirit give the centre the agility to move forward in a pragmatic and targeted way, including by helping companies with talent sourcing, arranging jobs fairs, setting up traineeships (which are a compulsory part of studies), hiring external expertise in specific fields, etc.

In **Tunisia**, a new decree was adopted in March 2019 giving VET centres increased autonomy. Three CoVEs participated in the study. The centres report that having autonomy has facilitated their cooperation with companies, as they have been able to set up a new public-private governance, which has given flexibility to their decision-making and allowed for a participatory management process with all the public and private parties involved. The decisions made in cooperation with all partners have enabled a better response to local, regional and national socioeconomic needs. The centres also mention that autonomy has given them more flexibility to implement activities in cooperation with partners.

In **Turkey**, it is evident that significant effort is being invested in developing sectoral centres of excellence as a model for CoVEs. At the national level, the cooperation between the CoVE model and the private sector is strong, with the latter providing work placements for students based on the protocol signed with the Ministry of Education. The structure of the CoVE is unique, because it is represented by the Turkish Union of Chambers and Commodity Exchanges, which is establishing a public-private sector joint management model, in which it will coordinate 81 vocational high schools from all provinces around the country. Further to that, a Protocol Implementation Board will be created, with the aim of guiding the school administrations and the curriculum according to the needs of the relevant industries.

The purpose of establishing such a structure is two-fold: to increase financial and expert support from the private sector and to better align VET with labour-market needs (European Commission, 2019). Four CoVEs from Turkey participated in the study. The CoVEs have progressed in building partnerships with companies and, for example, a techno park. The centres have regular communication with companies and companies are included as, for example, sector representatives on school boards. The centres have the advantage of a training committee, on which professionals from industry sit and discuss the curricula. The centres organise internships for students in industry, so the benefit is mutual. The centres report that students have an opportunity to see and experience workplaces, and companies want the experience of trained students. Companies are reported to provide further support by mentoring the students.

In **the Netherlands**, following the merger of vocational schools and levels into a number of large regional training centres in the late 1990s, the government introduced centres of expertise in higher vocational education and centres of innovative craftsmanship in middle VET. Since then, various government initiatives in the country – framed within investment plans for sectors experiencing shortages (2010), higher-education funding (2012) and regional funding for VET (2014), as well as the Technology Pact (2013) – have put PPPs in VET at the heart of supporting socioeconomic and regional development reforms in the country. These initiatives have been progressively evolving – for example, into the development of the Katapult community, which is a network of VET centres. These are public-private ventures in which secondary vocational education schools (career and technical education), universities of applied sciences (community colleges), companies, governments and researchers collaborate in order to produce future-proof professionals and schooling. The Katapult Network develops partnerships in the shipping, logistics, transport and processing industries. The community has grown substantially in recent years: currently, more than 130 centres, some

4,500 companies, around 50,000 students, almost 4,000 teachers and 83 secondary vocational education schools and universities of applied sciences are participating. These institutions have a leading role in creating a culture of excellence and innovation in various countries, regions and schools (ETF, 2020a).

In the Dutch VET system, most vocational schools have been permitted to re-establish themselves with new legal structures, which have given them greater self-governance, greater financial freedom (including the authority to borrow money and dispose of assets) and the authority to hire and fire staff. The aim is to achieve improvements in VET through greater autonomy. Indeed, more autonomy is commonly seen as a pre-requisite for vocational schools to be able to act as local or regional players – for instance, to respond in a flexible manner to emerging economic and social needs, and to be on a par with other training providers. Diversity and autonomy are the key characteristics of the centres' approach; each centre creates its own niche and market value. In the legislative process associated with the most recent reforms, schools have been afforded substantial autonomy and within the process of scale enlargement, a process of merging and rationalisation of schools has occurred. Nevertheless, the Netherlands has a strong dual education system, but it is difficult to replicate in other countries owing to the significance of contextual factors.

In **Finland**, the latest VET reform, implemented in 2018, brought IVET and CVET under one legislative umbrella, introduced several elements to improve the flexibility of the system and increased cooperation between VET providers and workplaces. National qualification requirements, which are updated regularly with social partners, form the basis of VET, while VET providers decide how education is organised. The tendency in Finland is towards multi-sector VET centres. All Finnish VET centres operate under the same legislation with licence-based access to public funding (Cedefop, 2019).

The mapping study of CoVEs (European Commission, 2019) identifies the Finnish education provider Omnia, the Joint Education Authority in the Espoo Region, as an example of an individual CoVE functioning for a specific region. Omnia is a multi-sector education provider and regional development centre offering upper-secondary VET, apprenticeship training, general upper-secondary education, workshops and liberal adult education courses. Omnia cooperates with ministries, cities, chambers of commerce and entrepreneurs.

The mapping study points out that CoVE-type activities may be a requirement for VET providers and identifies Finland as an example of a country where all VET providers are required to work together with 'working life'. Close cooperation with 'working life' at national, regional and education-provider levels is a significant part of the quality assurance of VET in Finland. Working-life representatives participate in anticipating learning and education needs, and in the development of vocational qualifications. Feedback collected from working life is part of the VET funding system, providing information for developing quality, too (Ministry of Education and Culture and Finnish National Agency for Education, 2019). The Finnish National Agency for Education encourages VET centres to develop VET pedagogy with social partners. While the operating model is similar in all VET centres, some are more prone to engaging in development projects on a national level.

In conclusion, the present study focuses on gathering data from and analysing the cases of individual CoVEs in the selected countries. While it's not possible to draw far-reaching conclusions from the findings, the primary data from the CoVEs practitioners nevertheless yield some interesting findings regarding how the centres exercise their autonomy in VET and skills development.

2. METHODOLOGICAL APPROACH

Although this study is pioneering in the sense that it is the first analysis of how CoVEs are implementing their autonomous role in PPPs, it is a small-scale study of just a selected number of CoVEs in ETF partner countries and EU Member States. It is important that this is understood when it comes to interpreting its findings.

The study aims to draw findings from CoVE practitioners regarding their autonomy in PPPs and how that supports skills development and vocational excellence in the field in partner countries and EU Member States. The individual case examples provide an up-to-date picture of the operations of the selected CoVEs within their autonomous mandate. A comparative approach is therefore possible, albeit with some limitations.

The ETF partner countries involved in the study are Azerbaijan, Israel, Georgia, Morocco, Tunisia and Turkey. Finland and the Netherlands represent the EU Member States in the study. In all, 20 practitioners and 6 policy-makers participated in the survey, while 16 CoVEs and 23 stakeholders took part in interviews. Profiles of the CoVE institutions involved are presented in Annex 1.

TABLE 2.1 NUMBER OF COVES AND PARTICIPANTS INVOLVED IN THE STUDY

Country	Survey respondents		Interview participants	
	Number of CoVEs	Number of policy-makers	Number of CoVEs	Number of participants
Azerbaijan	2	2	1	1
Finland	1	1	1	2
Georgia	5	1	5	9
Israel	2	–	3	4
Morocco	1	–	1	1
Netherlands	2	–	–	–
Tunisia	3	2	1	2
Turkey	4	–	4	4
Total	20	6	16	23

The countries were selected according to the following methodological criteria:

- ETF experiences working with partner countries, EU and international partners in the area of VET excellence focusing on autonomy and PPPs (as part of the ETF's work on governance and financing arrangements);
- availability and willingness of ETF partner countries in ENE to work on shaping a cross-country partnership for creating knowledge and sharing experiences on this issue; and
- relevance of experiences and expertise on VET excellence in autonomy and PPPs, supported by policy developments in selected countries and institutions registered as CoVEs in ENE.

Overall, the ETF partner countries and EU Member States selected reflect the diversity of institutional arrangements and socioeconomic contexts in the EU neighbourhood and the importance of autonomy and PPPs within national policy frameworks.

The baseline study findings are drawn from desk research, responses to an online survey and interviews. Different data-collection methods were used to capture different dimensions of the autonomy of CoVEs in the countries studied. This working process was managed online due to Covid-19.

The desk review included studying the literature on CoVEs and analysing the country cases included in the study. For the survey, a standard questionnaire was designed (see Annex 2), based on research questions focusing on the key aspects of autonomy in relation to CoVEs in PPPs. A survey was developed (in English, Russian and French) and was made available online. The invitations to participate in the survey were sent via email.

As already mentioned, the study examined whether and to what extent CoVEs have autonomy and how it is linked to PPPs in VET. Its aims were to collect generic data on the main features and institutional settings of CoVEs in the ETF partner countries, and to explore and analyse the autonomy of CoVEs in light of their different operational and design models, general features, resources and pedagogical approaches.

The study of the general features of CoVEs aimed to gather information on the following:

- the management system and arrangements in general, the specific governing legislation or regulations regarding PPP, the purpose of CoVEs within local/regional/national VET systems, the duties and responsibilities with regard to skills development, as well as their role in it (e.g. broad role in anticipating skills);
- human and financial resources, to explore the operational and practical experiences of CoVEs in human resource management in relation to PPP and the autonomy they have – the analysis focuses on the aspects of autonomy in hiring staff, financing, organising learning environments, ties with the world of work and other key stakeholders in VET, and quality control;
- the practical implementation by CoVEs of skills development and how this relates to PPPs and autonomy – a wide range of questions is addressed, from curriculum development to practical implementation of vocational training and assessment.

In addition, individual and focus group interviews were conducted, based on the survey results. The follow-up interviews aimed to clarify the survey findings further. The interviews were conducted with the selected CoVEs online, in three working languages (French, English and Russian). They encompassed both policy-makers (when possible) and practitioners. A qualitative summary of interview findings is available in Annex 3.

As CoVE and VET terminology is not always clear, and different interpretations of concepts often cause problems when attempting to take a cross-country approach, a short glossary, containing definitions of key concepts and terminology, was developed and can be found at the end of this report.

3. GENERAL FEATURES OF CENTRES OF VOCATIONAL EXCELLENCE

3.1 Main features and institutional settings of CoVEs

The aim here is to explore the main features and institutional settings of a selected group of CoVEs, how they operate and their practical experiences of conducting their activities. The information on these features and settings is collected from individual case studies of CoVEs in the ETF partner countries and EU Member States and cannot be taken as representative of the reality of the countries in question.

The CoVEs included in the review operate mostly at regional level. Typically, the centres operate across multiple sectors, rather than limiting their activities to one specific sector. The main sectors in which the CoVEs in the selected countries provide training are:

- ICT, technology and engineering,
- agriculture and forestry,
- business and administration,
- health and welfare,
- humanities and the arts,
- natural sciences,
- hair and beauty services,
- hospitality, catering and tourism,
- transport services,
- logistics and maritime.

Other, more specific VET sectors covered by the CoVEs studied include manufacturing, construction, media and the visual arts, entrepreneurship, textiles and clothing, industrial management, electronics, machinery and furniture, commercial refrigeration, building electrics.

Interestingly, most of the centres studied consider that they excel at collaborating and cooperating with business. In other words, PPPs characterise *what a CoVE is and/or should be*. Other areas in which the centres excel are pedagogy and professional development, as well as lifelong learning in VET (from IVET to CVET and adult education).

The CoVES see the need arising from industry/SMEs/sector networks as the main driving force for their operation. Another driving force is each centre's own initiative to improve quality, specialisations or similar. Extra funding and resources from government were also seen as important drivers of excellence in VET. Indeed, while the centres' main area of excellence is PPPs, their main source of funding is public funding. This finding is at odds with the general understanding that such centres' financial autonomy and independence come from income generation via PPPs.

However, funding does, in some cases, come from a mixture of public and private sources. Only two countries report private funding from companies as a source, but only partly. Other income is received from students' tuition fees, income-generating activities and the centres' own revenues. It can be concluded, therefore, that public rather than private funding is the main source of income for CoVEs.

For example, according to the survey findings, there is a special annual budget for CoVEs in Azerbaijan. In Israel, a special budget is provided by the Education Network and Ministry of Education, in addition to fundraising for CoVEs. In Tunisia, there is a special operating budget and investment budget for CoVEs, to cover logistics, research and development, office and computer equipment, communication, technical assistance and training. The State covers 85% of this budget, while the remaining 15% comes from the centre's own resources. In Georgia, CoVEs are publicly funded by the government, with minor additional public funding available for the priority directions set by the Minister of Education. In Finland and Morocco, there is no additional budget or other financial arrangements specifically for CoVEs.

The CoVEs in Azerbaijan, Israel and Morocco have special duties and responsibilities and, based on key performance indicators (KPIs), they inform policy-makers. These indicators are approved by the State Agency for Vocational Education. In Israel, the KPIs include number of students and number of projects developed by students. In Morocco, student admissions, employability and turnover form the main analytical structure of KPIs. Turkey, Tunisia and Georgia report on KPIs as well. In Turkey, the KPIs include labour-force participation rates, number of collaborations with industry, number of new programmes, training efficiency, employment continuity rate, cooperation goals with other non-governmental organisations and the participation rate of women.

Regarding the important question of whether there is specific legislation defining the status of CoVEs, such legislation is in place in Azerbaijan and Turkey, according to the study participants from those countries. In Azerbaijan, a charter for CoVEs is included in VET legislation, stipulated in a decree by the Ministry of Labour and Social Protection. The Turkish Ministry of National Education defines CoVEs in specific legislation that covers curriculum, teachers, physical requirements and assessment. Israel and Morocco report that there is no specific legislation for CoVEs, while in Tunisia, they have some legislative basis. In Finland, CoVEs are an extension of the local or regional structure and VET system, and are not covered by specific legislation. In the Netherlands, some CoVEs started as a project connected to a school and are still considered as such. Some CoVEs choose to become a formal organisation; the decision is up to the individual centres.

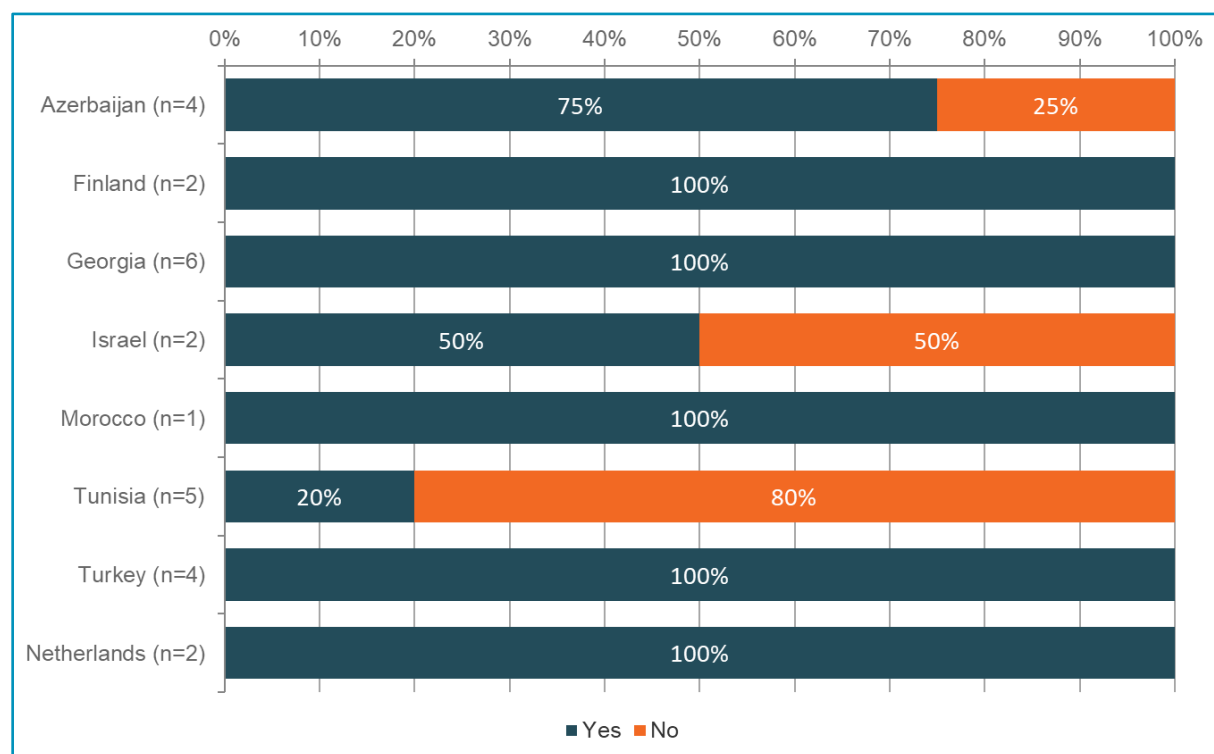
The issue of legislation is very relevant and linked to different forms of CoVE operations. Depending on the policy context in a particular country, there may be a need for legislation on certain issues, to help CoVEs in their developmental process and/or operations. Having a specific 'status' could help strengthen the pedagogic/academic, managerial and financial autonomy of CoVEs at certain levels stipulated by the legislation.

3.2 Autonomous role of CoVEs in forging public-private partnerships for vocational education and skills development

The case studies show that CoVEs are implementing and benefiting from their autonomous role in cooperating with private partners. A key finding of the survey is that CoVEs can decide autonomously on the level and forms of public-private cooperation (Figure 3.1). In some cases, the cooperation is steered centrally, to some extent.

FIGURE 3.1 EXTENT TO WHICH COVES CAN DECIDE ON THE LEVEL AND FORMS OF PPP

Can CoVEs decide on the level and forms of public-private cooperation?



Total number of respondents: 26 (practitioners and policy-makers)

The CoVES are implementing their autonomous role in PPPs in different ways. In most of the centres involved in the study, there is regular cooperation between the private companies and centre management – and, to a lesser extent, centre teachers. There is also a great deal of cooperation with companies to support work-based learning (WBL) opportunities for students, involving planning and conducting student assessments. Indeed, some centres have a *standard system* for WBL. Other activities, beyond WBL, covered by PPP arrangements include master classes, exchange programmes, projects and technological solutions devised by students for companies, companies mentoring students, career guidance, student involvement in recruitment, scholarships, teacher training and staff training.

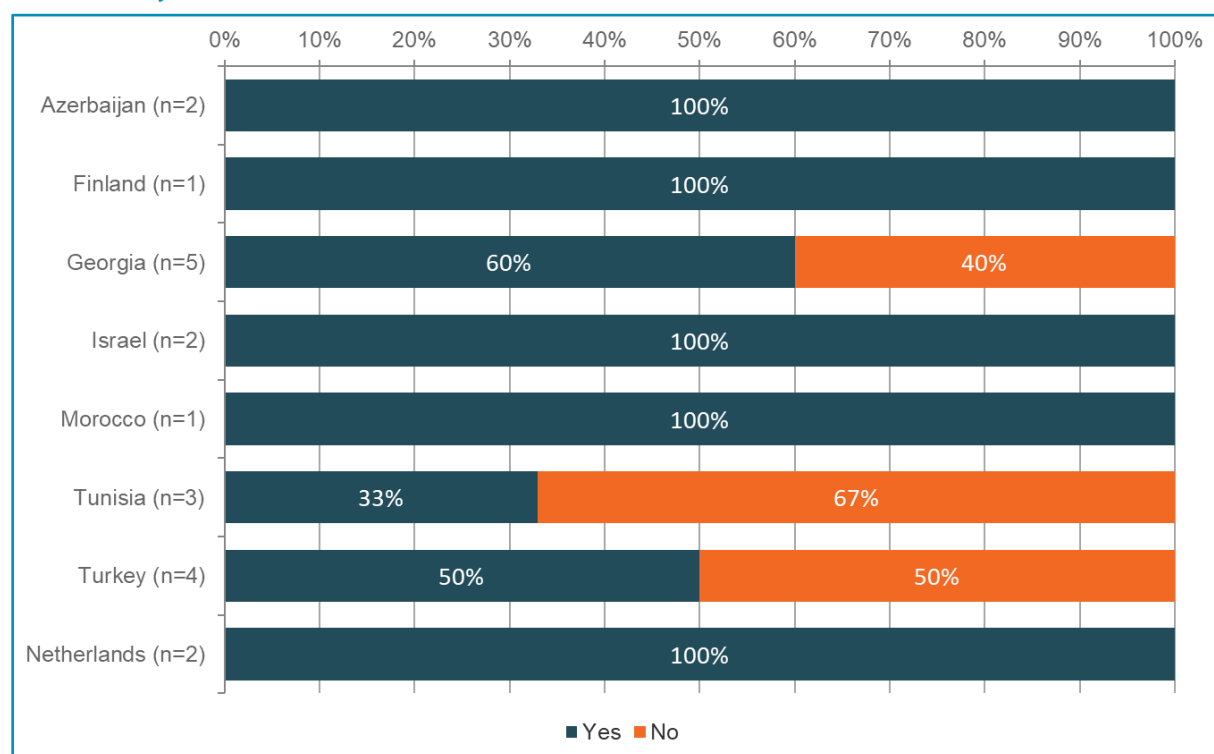
For the CoVEs, there are many specific features of excellence in private-sector cooperation, including higher-level VET (e.g. specialist training and master classes), better quality of VET, and companies' involvement in training teachers and students. Some CoVEs also regard the high number of partnerships with the private sector as a specific feature of excellence.

Excellence in private-sector cooperation can also refer to governance, i.e. the presence of industry representatives on the CoVE board of administration and pedagogic board. It is considered that the specific role of the PPP is to enhance the centres' own resources (e.g. by providing a 'real' environment in which students can learn and supporting employment opportunities for the centres' graduates). Developing students' skills in innovation and techno-entrepreneurship is regarded as a *specific feature* of CoVEs.

The different forms of cooperation between the centres and private-sector companies can be summed up as developing students' skills/WBL, providing career advice and guidance to students, curriculum development, facilitating cooperation between teachers and companies, and providing training for companies. In this regard, the CoVEs studied were asked if there are any other differences between CoVEs and other VET centres (Figure 3.2). Respondents from Azerbaijan, Israel, Finland, Morocco and the Netherlands all perceived distinct differences in comparison with other VET centres in their countries (i.e. piloting practices, international activities, networks and visitors/experts). In Morocco, the CoVEs tend to follow the accountability patterns of and operate as a private company in their daily management. In Israel, the participating centre is run as a start-up and considered as a business, but with a strong commitment to the educational aspect. In Tunisia, the CoVE integrates national and international projects as part of its activities. In Turkey, one CoVE specialises in technical sciences and works more closely with industry. In the Netherlands, CoVEs involve more partners and occupy an intermediate position, between students and industry.

FIGURE 3.2 DIFFERENCES BETWEEN COVES AND OTHER VET CENTRES

Are there any other differences between CoVEs and other VET centres?



Total number of respondents: 20 (practitioners)

3.3 Autonomy of CoVEs in decision-making

When asked to name specific aspects of autonomy that are most important in PPPs, most of the study participants said 'decision-making'. Other important aspects mentioned were finance, curricula development and staffing. Department organisation and project development in the skills ecosystem were also noted.

Regarding the autonomy of CoVEs in decision-making, identifying skills needs is mainly carried out in collaboration with the private sector and, to a lesser extent, at VET centre or national/regional level.

The VET centre strategies are drawn up mainly in the VET centres, rather than on a national or regional basis or in collaboration with the private sector. As already mentioned, VET centre budget allocation is mainly decided at national or VET centre level, and only minimally at regional level or with the private sector. Additional income generation, on the other hand, happens mainly within the VET centre and only to a small extent at national level or with the private sector.

Decision on the key performance indicators, as well as quality assurance for VET centres are set either at national or VET centre level, and to a minimum extent at regional level or in collaboration with the private sector. The same applies to VET programme accreditation.

Decisions on the following issues are made at national and VET centre level, with a certain degree of collaboration with the private sector: curricula, vocational programmes offered, development initiatives (related to the programmes offered, staff competence, etc.), student intake for programmes, and cooperation with the private sector.

3.4 Benefits to CoVEs of having autonomy in forging public-private partnerships

The CoVEs studied believe that public-private cooperation offers several benefits to the private-sector partners. One of the key benefits mentioned is the fact that companies receive trained manpower, in cases where the students go on to become employees of those companies. Through cooperation with private partners, VET institutions understand what the private sector's actual needs are and thus can prepare the workforce accordingly. Moreover, the companies then have the possibility of upgrading their employees' skills through continuing training and professional development.

CoVEs also add value in the form of research and development. The CoVEs support partner companies by helping with the further development of existing products and services and innovation of new ones. In this regard, the CoVEs support industry with the expertise it needs to improve productivity and management. The added value is backed up with collaborative studies on bringing innovation to business processes, project collaboration and product development. A relationship with a CoVE supports a company's profile, as the CoVE becomes part of the company's public relations efforts.

As for the benefits to CoVEs from working with private partners, the main ones cited by the study participants are skills development and the resulting increased rate of student employment, private-sector input to curriculum design and the insight it provides into business/industry and the latest developments. Private partners provide opportunities for teachers to keep in touch with industry. The private sector also familiarises teachers and trainers with fields not commonly covered in formal VET. Sharing resources (such as by using production halls during training and support for financial sustainability) were also mentioned by the participating CoVEs.

In conclusion, the benefits to CoVEs of having autonomy in PPPs revolve mainly, though not exclusively, around skills development for VET students. Overall, the benefits of PPPs are mutual for both CoVEs and private partners, and cover a number of aspects, such as human resources, research and development, public relations, project innovation.

4. SPECIFIC FEATURES OF COVE AUTONOMY

4.1 Decision-making in CoVEs regarding human and financial resources

In terms of human resources management, directors are hired and dismissed mainly at national level, while teachers and other staff are hired and dismissed mainly at VET centre level.

Salaries are set mainly at national level, while incentives and promotions for directors, teachers and other staff are decided mainly at national level *or* at VET centre level. Decisions regarding teachers' professional development are made mainly at national *and* VET centre level, while opportunities for teachers to learn in industry are decided on at all three levels – VET centre, national and private sector. As for the learning environment and associated equipment and facilities, decisions are taken mainly at VET centre level.

4.2 Decision-making in CoVEs regarding pedagogy

Decisions on the design and updating of VET curricula are still made mainly at national level. Training content is mainly designed in VET centres themselves. Decisions on how curricula are delivered, on guidance and career-counselling activities, and on the design and conduct of assessments are taken mainly in VET centres, but also, to some extent, nationally and in participation with the private sector. The design and implementation of WBL is clearly important in PPPs, so decisions are made almost equally by VET centres and the private sector, and only to a minor degree nationally. (When asked whether VET programmes include WBL, all respondents from Finland, Morocco, Tunisia, Turkey and the Netherlands confirmed that they do. Furthermore, career opportunities for students are almost equally supported by VET centres and the private sector.)

Decisions on designing and conducting training in soft skills and on conducting tracer studies are mainly made in VET centres and, to some extent, nationally or with the private sector. The same goes for designing innovative development projects.

When asked about what VET programmes prepare students for, all but one of the CoVEs said *employment*. In addition, entrepreneurship is strongly supported in Finland, Israel, Georgia, Morocco and the Netherlands. Next come further studies in VET and further studies at university.

Graduate employment is monitored mainly via tracer studies, but also via graduate and other surveys/databases. Entrepreneurship appears to be monitored via the same mechanisms, but to a lesser extent.

4.3 Role of CoVEs in innovation

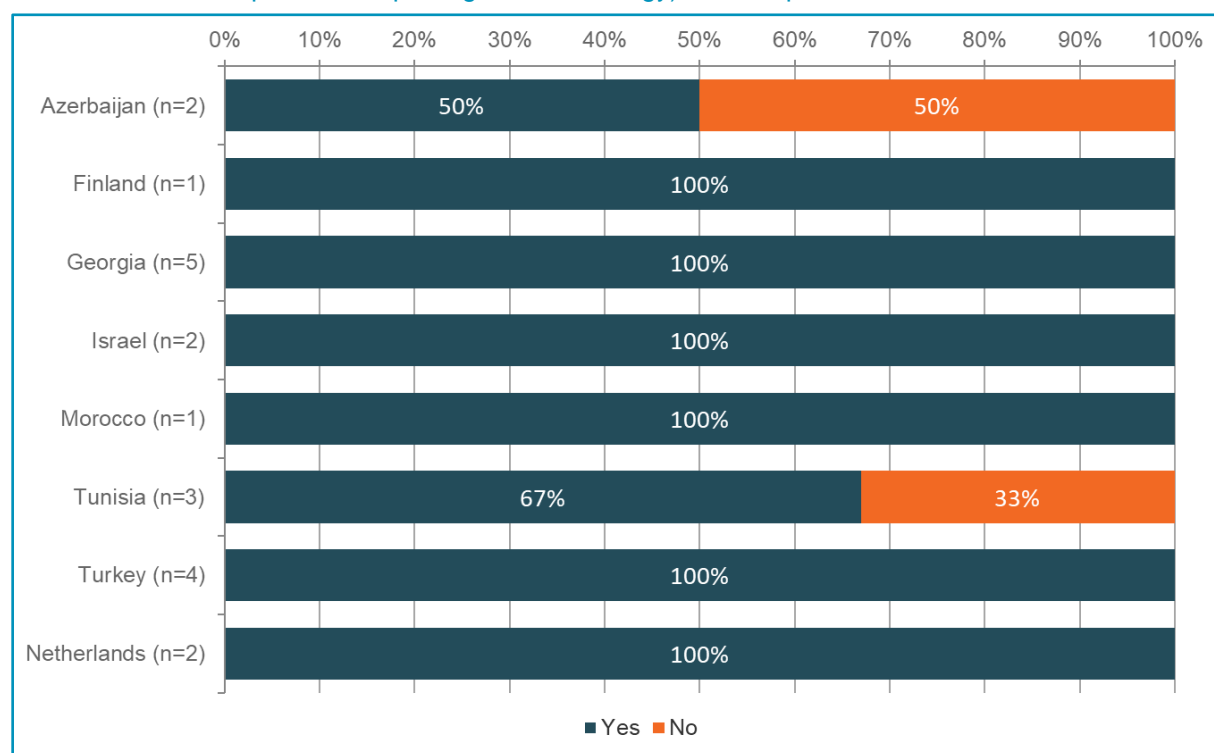
The study examined whether CoVEs could initiate innovation and development projects (such as new training practices, joint research and development, and piloting new technology) with the private sector or universities (Figure 4.1). All respondents from Morocco, Finland, the Netherlands, Georgia, Turkey and Israel said that they can, while some of the respondents from Azerbaijan and Tunisia felt that CoVEs in their countries cannot initiate innovation projects.

Examples of innovation and development projects taken from the qualitative data include:

- a sub-bachelor's degree offered in cooperation with universities, offering opportunities to expand the horizon of learning with partners such as a hospital or academic centre located in the city or region;
- a route for progressing on to higher education;
- a research and development department working closely with national and international universities;
- a career centre working consistently to prepare students for professional success and to support companies when they need to hire people;
- cooperation with universities to commission new study programmes and courses;
- curriculum development;
- developing employment projects and mentoring programmes.

FIGURE 4.1 ROLE OF COVES IN INITIATING INNOVATION AND DEVELOPMENT PROJECTS

Can your CoVE initiate innovation and development projects (such as new training practices, joint research and development, and piloting new technology) with the private sector or universities?



Total number of respondents: 20 (practitioners)

Asked whether CoVEs have a role in development and innovation in VET at a national level in their country, respondents from Turkey, Morocco and Finland all said they do. In the cases of Azerbaijan, Tunisia and Israel, at least half of the respondents agreed that they do. Some innovation projects are funded through nationally initiated development projects and networks or with EU support. One CoVE in the study has been the lead on a nationwide project to substantially reformulate programmes according to the competency-based approach. Another centre has been part of a vocational training

scheme in the tourism sector since 1958 and has contributed to the development of that sector in the form of initial and continuing training.

4.4 CoVEs and the key issue of quality assurance

The study found that quality assurance is conducted mainly according to national-level processes as part of the centres' self-evaluation processes. Feedback from the private sector and society/the local community is also taken into consideration. Good examples of quality assurance processes gathered during this study are listed below.

- **Finland:** quality assurance processes include a national quality award (based on an audit, among other things) from the Ministry of Education and the Finnish Education Evaluation Centre; a national student survey; self-evaluation by the CoVE according to the European VET quality framework; a UNEVOC peer review, an evaluation of sustainability by the OKKA Foundation; a staff survey; and private-sector feedback on the assessment of students.
- **Georgia:** to ensure the quality of vocational education, in early 2020 the existing three vocational standards were replaced with five new standards, covering college mission and strategic development; educational programmes; vocational students and activities to support them; human resources; and equipment, information and financial resources. Another important new addition to the quality management system is flexible and development-oriented assessment, including the setting up of an online platform for annual reporting on self-assessment.
- **Israel:** the quality of students' projects is ensured by presenting them to various committees for assessment.

4.5 Key opportunities and threats to the autonomy granted to CoVEs in developing public-private partnerships

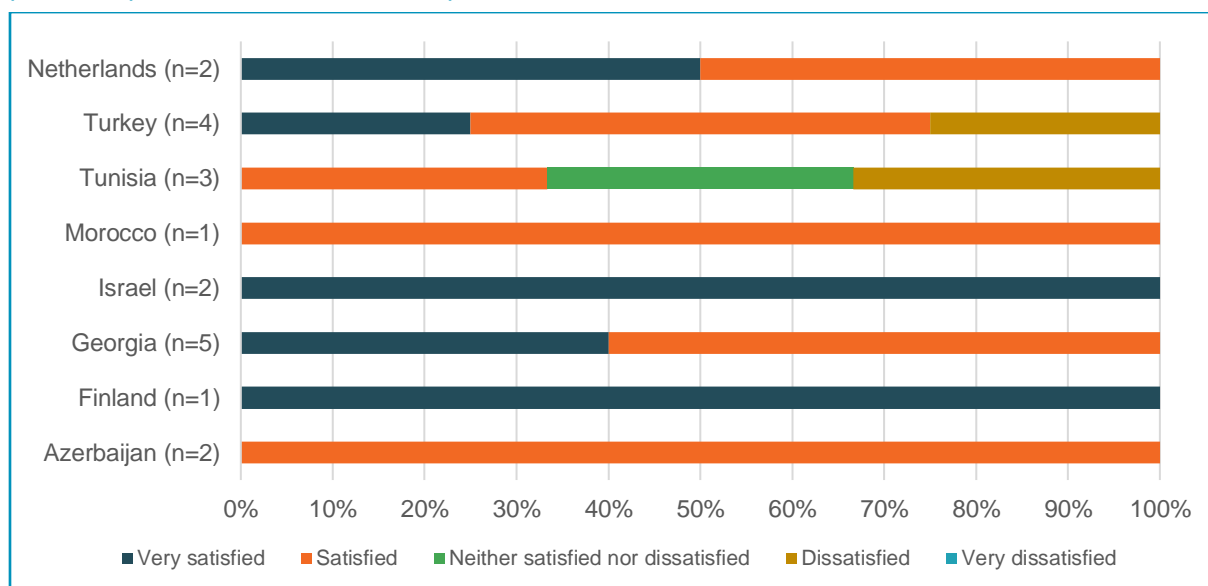
The CoVEs were asked to what extent they are satisfied with their level of autonomy in developing PPPs in VET and skills development. A distinct majority of them are very satisfied or satisfied (Figure 4.2). Only in two countries are some respondents neutral or dissatisfied with their level of autonomy.

When asked whether the centre's operating environment supports PPPs in VET and skills development, respondents from most countries said yes (Figure 4.3). The responses from just two countries – Azerbaijan and Tunisia – were less clear-cut. When asked how CoVEs would improve their operating environment, the replies included: by bringing new industry-oriented companies into the PPP network, creating a regional PPP framework, introducing strategic monitoring, creating clusters and introducing legislation in order to be able to develop PPPs.

The CoVEs also suggest that more *flexibility* in terms of the curriculum and assessment would be ideal, and that there needs to be more partnerships/collaborations/cooperation with new private-sector companies, committees of industry representatives, trainers from industry and collaborative projects. In fact, some of these suggestions are already implemented in some countries. On a global level, it can be concluded that these are the types of PPP opportunities needed by CoVEs in addition to those provided by WBL approaches.

FIGURE 4.2 HOW COVES PERCEIVE THEIR LEVEL OF AUTONOMY IN DEVELOPING PPPS

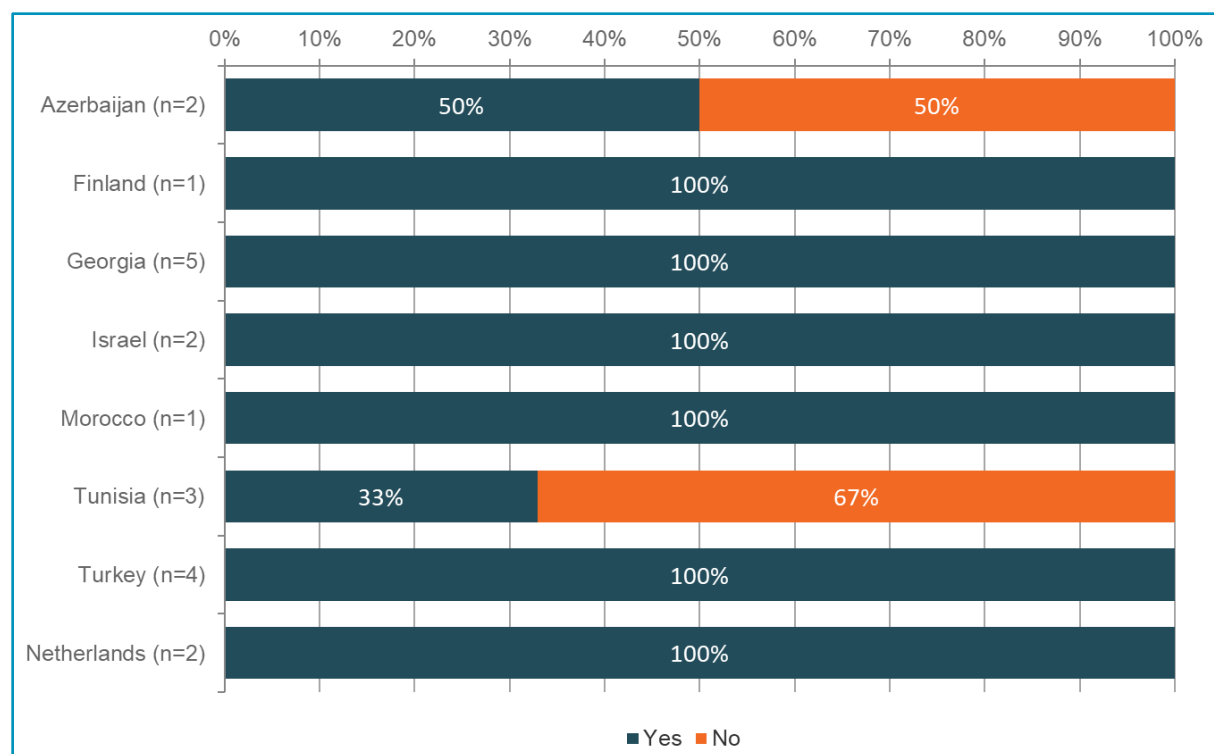
To what extent are you satisfied with your level of autonomy in developing public-private partnerships in VET and skills development?



Total number of respondents: 20 (practitioners)

FIGURE 4.3 COVE OPERATING ENVIRONMENT AND HOW IT SUPPORTS PPPS

Does the operating environment of your CoVE support public-private partnerships in VET and skills development?



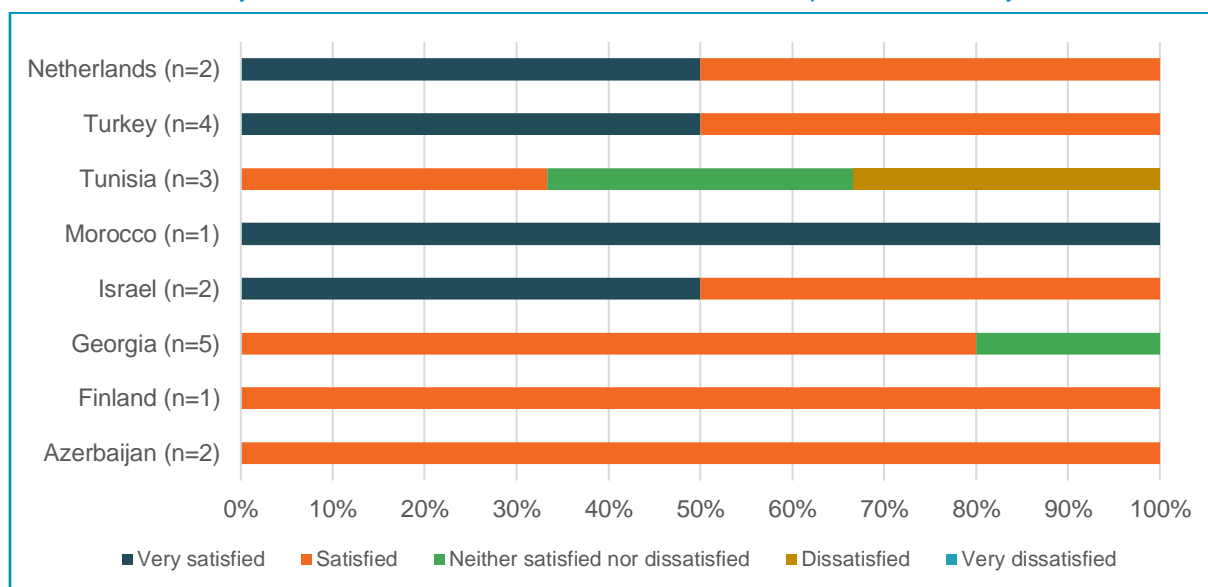
Total number of respondents: 20 (practitioners)

Regarding the extent to which the CoVEs are satisfied with the level of involvement of the private sector, the majority of the respondents said they are very satisfied or satisfied, with respondents from just two countries expressing dissatisfaction, but only partly (Figure 4.4). The CoVEs suggest increasing the involvement of private partners, e.g. by integrating companies into the educational process through the involvement of private-sector mentoring staff. The CoVEs would also welcome comprehensive feedback from the private sector on short-term-courses developed by CoVEs. This would help support the quality assurance of the CoVEs by the private sector.

The CoVEs would like to see a greater variety of cooperation arrangements, such as increasing cooperation with certain sectors (as not all sectors are involved to the same extent), to enhance the visibility of companies on campus, and involving companies more in decision-making within the VET centre. The CoVEs also suggest more incentives should be offered to encourage private-sector involvement. For example, *extra funding* should be available for company representatives, who would be responsible for coordination between VET centres and the private company itself, and, during the apprenticeship period, trainers should get paid extra, because they would be carrying out additional tasks on top of their regular duties. In addition, infrastructure should be developed and more research conducted.

FIGURE 4.4 HOW SATISFIED ARE COVES WITH PRIVATE-SECTOR INVOLVEMENT

To what extent are you satisfied with the level of involvement of the private sector in your CoVE?



Total number of respondents: 20 (practitioners)

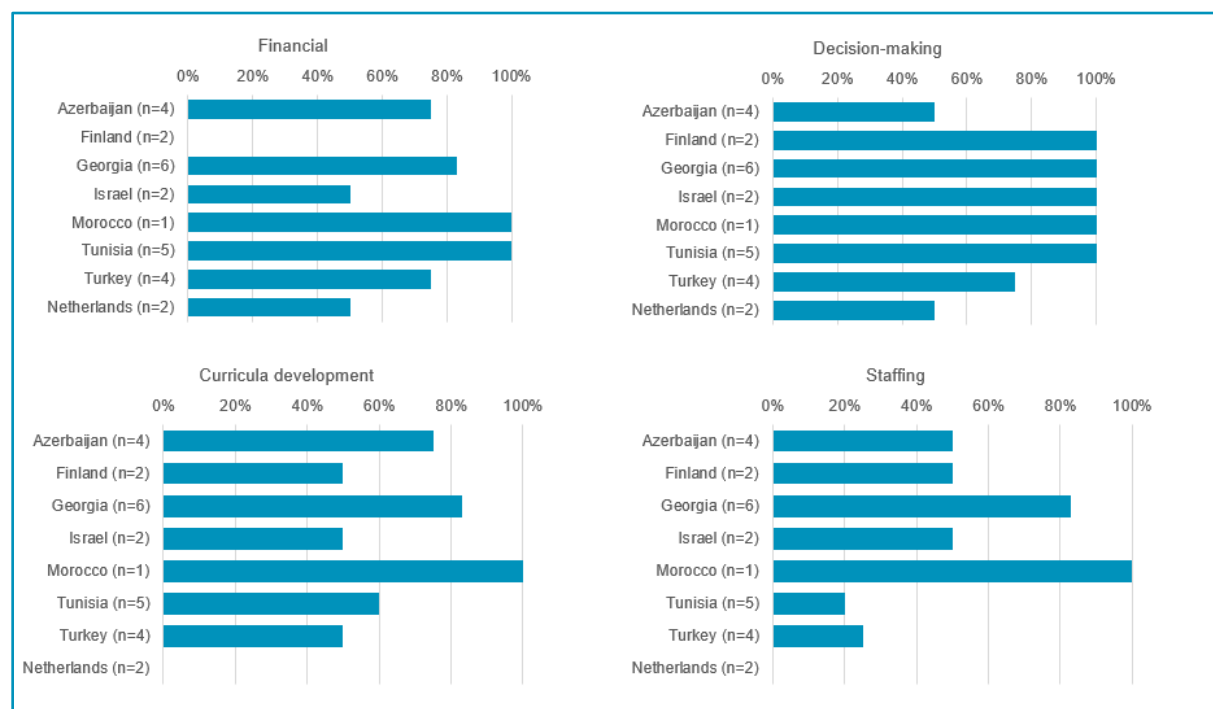
The CoVEs were also asked about the possible risks in PPPs. The majority of the respondents said they did not perceive any. Those who believe there are risks linked them to legislation – for example, lack of a legal framework establishing the roles of the partners, failure to implement legislative provisions properly, confusion in government about the legal status of CoVEs, improperly regulated procurement processes leading to delays in delivery of study materials, etc. However, the CoVEs also suggested that overly strict legislation might hinder the flexibility and autonomy of PPPs.

When asked which specific aspects of autonomy are most important in PPPs, the majority of respondents (and all of them, in five of the countries) replied 'decision-making' (Figure 4.5).

Finance, curricula development and staffing are also seen as important by respondents. Other aspects mentioned were the organisation of new departments and development of projects in the skills ecosystem.

FIGURE 4.5 IMPORTANT ASPECTS OF AUTONOMY IN PPPS

What specific aspects of autonomy are most important in PPPs?



Total number of respondents: 26 (practitioners and policy-makers)

Regarding the opportunities for CoVEs to drive policy reform within VET, the respondents in the study were more sceptical. Most of the respondents feel that CoVEs drive policy reform within VET in their country only to a 'moderate' or 'small extent'. It was noted that CoVEs should support the growing role of the private sector and enhance its influence in PPP policy reform to promote employment and the number of qualified staff. The study respondents also point out that CoVEs can contribute to PPP policy reform by serving as examples. These issues could be further explored as part of a national policy framework.

4.6 CoVEs and forging sustainable public-private partnerships

The study examined the kinds of overall measures that support sustainable PPPs in VET. Responses from CoVEs suggest that sustainability needs to be included in the targets of the strategic road map for VET, and that PPPs need to have an active role in VET development to ensure a high quality of training.

The CoVE respondents also mentioned the following measures to support sustainable partnerships:

- government support in improving business involvement in the study process;
- activities that benefit both parties (for example, dual/work-based programmes);
- a framework and specific agreement with private-sector partners;
- mutual protocols and incentives for joint working groups;
- introduction of a partnership council in the centre as a strategic decision-making entity; and
- participation of CoVEs in international projects.

For example, the CoVE in Finland reported that the idea of partnerships is very much built into the basic legislation of VET. The legislation requires and guarantees for sustainable PPPs to ensure WBL, which is a compulsory part of VET qualifications. The local decision-making process and the fairly extensive administrative and financial autonomy of VET providers ensures the sustainability of PPPs. In the qualitative data on Finland, it is reported that PPPs need to be present at all levels: the system and qualifications are built in PPPs, and the training is carried out and subsequently evaluated, quality-assured and improved in PPPs. In Finland, it is perceived that WBL and apprenticeships enable continuing learning and development among the workforces of local companies.

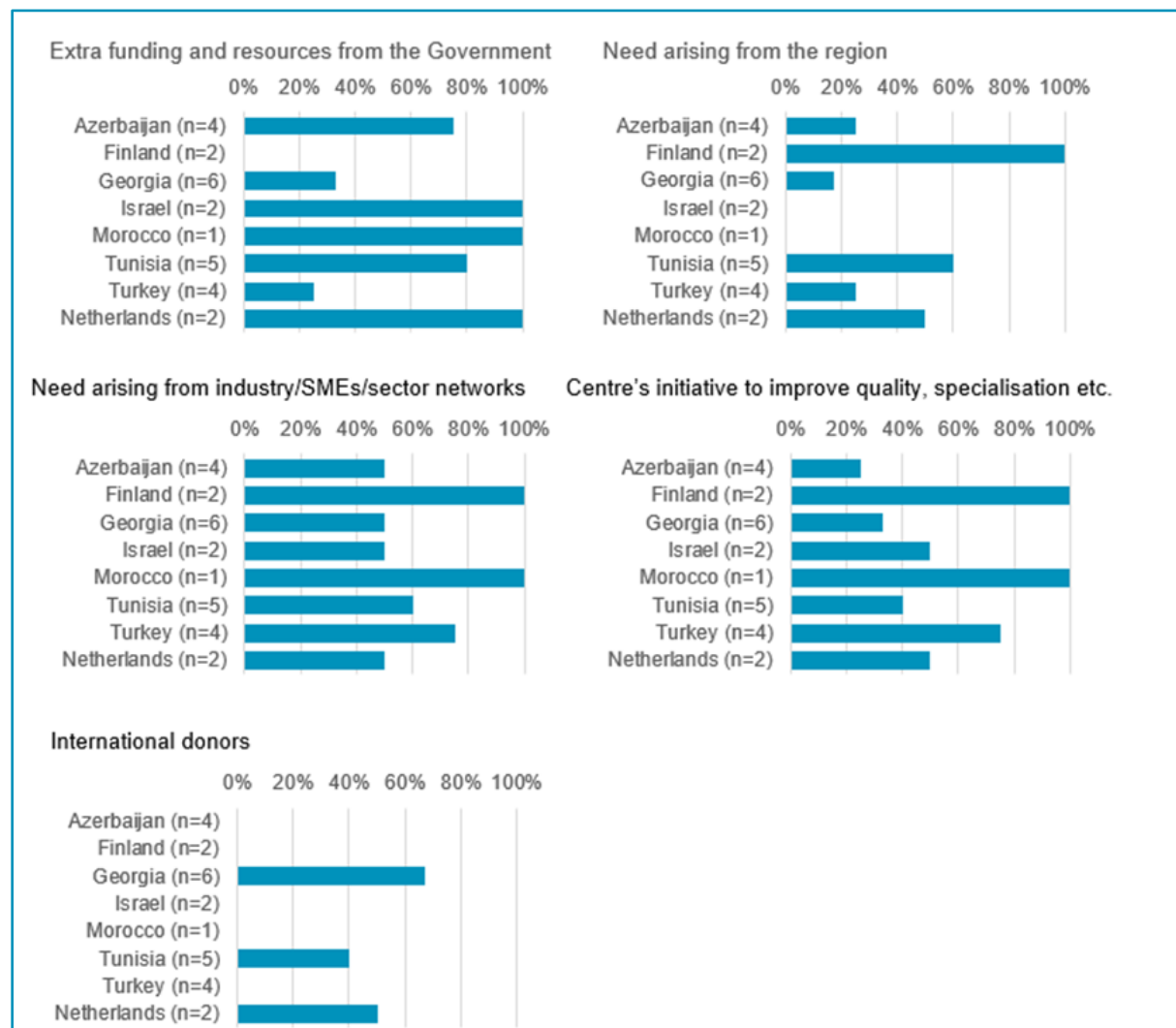
4.7 Driving forces for CoVE progressing

Experience shows that different incentives for testing new approaches are essential for VET institutions. These might help institutions – those enjoying an autonomous status in particular – to advance with other approaches. Well-performing systems around the world (such as in Finland or the Netherlands participating in this study) document such approaches.

However, ETF partner countries' CoVEs participating in this study also show several driving forces for progressing approaches. Among other reasons, the fact that they are exposed to strong expectations on their performance to inform national systems and that they are leader institutions in building local skills ecosystems in cooperation with other socioeconomic stakeholders. The main driving forces behind CoVES are summarised below (Figure 4.6).

FIGURE 4.6 DRIVING FORCES BEHIND COVES

What are the driving forces behind CoVEs in your country?



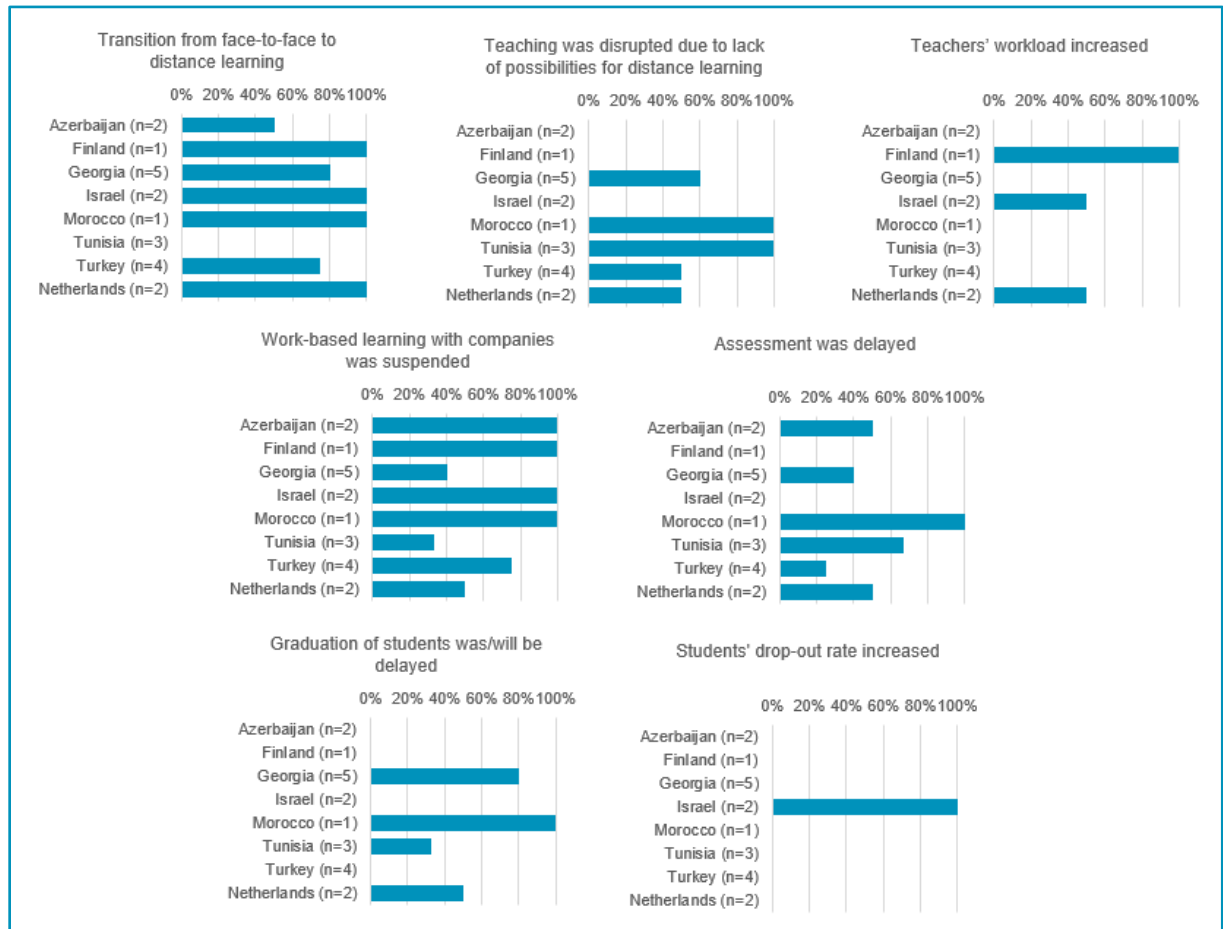
Total number of respondents: 26 (practitioners and policy-makers)

4.8 Impact of Covid-19 on CoVE operations

The study also examined the consequences of the Covid-19 pandemic on CoVE operations (Figure 4.7). By far, the most significant consequence has been the suspension of WBL in companies. In addition, distance learning replaced face-to-face learning – although the transition was not always smooth, because of a lack of facilities for learning from and/or teaching at a distance – assessments were delayed, as was graduation. The drop-out rate among students increased, as did teachers' workloads.

FIGURE 4.7 CONSEQUENCES OF COVID-19 FOR COVES

What were the major consequences of Covid-19 for your CoVE?



Total number of respondents: 20 (practitioners)

5. MAIN CONCLUSIONS AND FOOD FOR THOUGHT REGARDING FUTURE PROGRESS

To recap: the aim of this study is to analyse the autonomous role of centres of vocational excellence – how they are implementing it and how it can be linked to furthering VET and skills development in public-private partnerships (PPPs). The main conclusions to be drawn from the study of the selected CoVEs are listed below.

- The features and patterns of cooperation with the private sector are similar, despite the diverse contexts in the countries involved and the different legislative and cultural histories of VET.
- Regarding autonomy, the CoVEs studied have a high degree of autonomy in deciding on the level and forms of public-private cooperation. Public-private cooperation is a distinctive feature of CoVEs and brings innovation to CoVE operations.
- CoVES benefit from their autonomous role in PPPs in different ways. The main benefit relates to skills development in VET. There is extensive cooperation with private partners to support WBL opportunities for students, with some CoVEs having developed a standardised system for WBL, including planning, processes and documentation. Other forms of cooperation to promote skills development include master classes, industry exchange programmes and student projects.
- Other ways in which CoVEs benefit from their autonomous role and cooperation in PPPs include: the provision of mentoring and career guidance for students; arrangement of recruitment events; availability of scholarships; and professional development for VET staff in specific fields.
- PPPs and the autonomous status of CoVEs within them offer a wide variety of benefits to both CoVEs and the private sector, including reciprocal upskilling of staff and cooperation on the management level, opportunities for joint curriculum development, opportunities to work on innovative projects and to conduct research and development.
- When the partners are familiar with each other's strengths and development needs, long-term cooperation becomes more targeted and relevant for all. Therefore, policy-makers need to consider what goals and key performance indicators (KPIs) should be set to really drive PPPs forward, to achieve higher quality VET and continuing skills development.

5.1 General features of autonomy in public-private partnerships and skills development

The CoVEs selected for this study operate mostly at regional level and, typically, across multiple sectors.

An interesting question is: What is driving the CoVEs into PPPs and skills development in VET? The survey results show that the driving forces in this regard are, mainly, the needs of industry or business, but also regional needs or initiatives requiring a specific level of quality or specialisation.

In some countries, additional funding and resources from the government and/or donors are available, and these are also seen as important drivers in developing VET excellence. It can be concluded that, on the one hand, the skills needs of the sectors in the external environment of the centres change dynamically and, on the other, that there is pressure within the centres themselves to ensure the quality of the VET and skills provision in line with the sectors' needs. There is, therefore, a variety of factors driving centres towards excellence (see [Figure 4.6](#)).

The study also examined what determines the excellence and specific role of CoVEs in VET. Most CoVEs in the study consider that they excel at collaborating and cooperating with business. In other words, PPPs characterise what a CoVE is or should be. Other areas in which the centres excel are VET pedagogy, professional development of teaching staff and lifelong learning in VET (from IVET to CVET and a broad spectrum of adult education). Their role within partnerships may also vary and, in some cases, companies provide joint training for the company staff, VET teachers and students in specific sectors and areas of specialisation, thus strengthening the partnership and improving the quality of future skills development.

The study assessed the perception among CoVEs of how their own operations differ from those of other VET centres. The CoVEs in the study perceive many specific features of excellence in PPP cooperation and skills development in the sectors in which they operate. Some CoVEs can provide vocational training for higher VET qualifications – for example, by arranging specialist training and master classes. In some cases, CoVEs also improve the quality of VET and skills development in partnerships with the private sector through joint development of curricula.

Training companies working in partnership with CoVES can support students in developing specific skills, in innovation and in techno-entrepreneurship. PPPs provide students at CoVEs with opportunities to learn in an *authentic* environment. CoVEs also feel that their active piloting of international best practice and involvement in national and international projects also set them apart from other VET institutions. It appears that CoVEs are not only more open to cooperation with local and regional private partners, but they also seek out international best practice in skills development.

It is important to underline the study's finding that the term 'centre of excellence' is not used in all countries. Instead, such terms as centres of competence, VET competence centres, partnership for excellence are used in local contexts. The majority of centres are active in both IVET and CVET, and they provide training in relevant skills and competences for adults in the labour market. CoVEs have been established to meet the skills development needs of industry/the labour market and to ensure a competent workforce. CoVEs are established or existing vocational school structures are upgraded and modernised based on the needs of stakeholders, e.g. employers, the state, tertiary education, research institutions.

On the key issue of specific legislation in which the status of a CoVE is defined, such legislation exists in two countries involved in the study (Azerbaijan and Turkey). In Azerbaijan, a charter for CoVEs is included in VET regulation, stipulated in a decree by the Ministry of Labour and Social Protection. The Turkish Ministry of National Education defines CoVEs in specific legislation that covers curriculum, teachers, physical requirements, and assessment. Finland, Israel and Morocco report that there is no specific legislation for CoVEs, while in Tunisia, they have some legislative basis. During the interviews with CoVEs, it was also suggested that overly strict legislation might hinder the autonomy of PPPs. It appears that for the PPPs to be at the forefront of CoVE future development, policy-makers need to look into steering and supporting progress on partnerships.

The VET providers and industry have recognised that skill needs analyses are required to ensure IVET and CVET training are aligned more closely to labour-market needs. However, not all of the countries involved in the study have the structures to conduct such analyses, so these remain rather low down on the list of CoVE activities. The study shows that skills needs analyses are mainly carried out with private-sector participation and, to a lesser extent, at VET centre or national/regional level, with all that implies for the autonomy of CoVEs and their role in decision-making. This is, however,

a complex issue that needs to be considered carefully considering the specific context of each CoVE and the policy frameworks in the respective country.

CoVEs have mechanisms for skills forecasting and adapting curricula to meet the needs of the labour market. Meanwhile, skill needs analysis is something that could be developed more strongly in PPPs. The CoVEs in the study feel that decisions about the curriculum used in VET centres could involve greater participation from the private sector. Decisions about the selection of vocational programmes offered by CoVEs are, to some extent, made in collaboration with the private sector. It can be concluded, therefore, that cooperation via PPPs opens up more possibilities for enhancing the VET programmes of CoVEs, thus creating an added value for both parties.

Initiatives relating to the programmes offered, staff competence, etc. are developed mainly at national and VET centre levels, but there is also a clear contribution from the private sector. Initiation of innovative development projects in PPPs, nationally or internationally, is another feature of CoVEs that drives excellence.

CoVE resources in PPPs

The conversion of vocational schools into CoVEs is a policy – and practical – process that is not always structured or standardised across countries, although it is driven by modern approaches to public management *governance*, which should also involve more autonomy for CoVEs (ETF, 2020a). From the outset of the study, the data demonstrate that the perception of autonomy is mainly linked to financial and decision-making aspects, and only to a lesser extent to broader aspects, e.g. autonomy in curricula development, staff employment and continuing professional development, and evaluation and monitoring. This needs to be better understood and further explored, given that the majority of the CoVEs that participated in this baseline study are operating in the absence of any legislative/regulatory framework governing their status or autonomy or PPP forms.

The study also reveals that the financial resources of CoVEs come mostly from state budgets and very rarely from private funds or PPPs. While the main feature of a CoVE is excellence in PPP, its main source of funding is public funding. For some of the CoVEs in the study, their funding comes from a mixture of public and private sources. It can be concluded, therefore, that there is some effort to generate private funding, but this is not the main source of income. It could be assessed that the main value of CoVEs is not their financial independence or ability to generate income, but rather the innovation they bring to skills development thanks to their autonomous operations.

CoVEs have special duties and responsibilities and are assessed on the basis of certain KPIs. These can include, for example, an annual list of KPIs approved by the State, number of admissions, employability of graduates, student turnover, number of collaborations with industry, number of new programmes, training efficiency, employment continuity rate, projects developed by students, etc. The study reveals that the indicators focus largely on performance regarding the rate of student admissions, new programmes, student employability and projects developed in PPPs. The KPIs guide the operations of the CoVEs and should feature more prominently in PPPs.

In terms of human resources management, decisions concerning the hiring and firing of directors are mainly made within the public sector and, to a small extent, at VET centre level or in collaboration with the private sector. On the other hand, decisions regarding the hiring and firing of teachers (and, indeed, of other, non-teaching staff) are made mainly at VET centre level and, to a small degree, at national level.

Salaries are set mainly at national level, but also at VET centre level and, to a very minor extent, at regional level and with private-sector participation. Incentives and promotions for directors, teachers and other staff are decided mainly at national or VET centre level. Decisions regarding teachers' professional development programmes are made, for the most part, at national and VET centre level, and only to a minor degree at regional level or with input from the private sector. Opportunities for teachers to learn in industry are decided at VET centre level, but also at the national level and with the private sector, and only to a very small extent regionally. Decisions about the learning environment (equipment and facilities) are mainly made at VET centre level, but also nationally and, to a small extent, regionally or with a contribution from the private sector. To conclude, human resources in CoVEs are still managed centrally. In this regard, it is noted that public-private cooperation covers human resources management only to some extent, i.e. via cooperation on the professional development of staff.

CoVEs and innovation

The study confirms that CoVEs do have opportunities to initiate innovation and development projects (such as new training practices, joint research and development, and piloting new technology) with the private sector or universities. Some innovation projects are funded through national (or EU) bodies. The CoVEs studied feel they do have a role in national-level development and innovation in VET in their country.

Sustainable CoVEs and PPPs

The study examined the measures that support sustainable PPPs in VET. The CoVEs suggest that sustainability needs to be included in the targets of the strategic road map for VET. Sustainability of CoVE PPPs is ensured through long-term initiatives, using KPIs to monitor CoVE achievements and mutually beneficial relationships.

A framework and specific models for PPPs are beneficial. Some CoVEs support the idea of legal regulation to increase promotion of CoVEs at national level. The introduction of partnership councils, mutual protocols and incentives for joint working groups are said to promote sustainability. It can be concluded that the debate on legislation is highly relevant and linked to different forms of CoVE operations, i.e. legislation may only be required for certain specific issues to help in terms of CoVE development and/or their practical operations. The debate should also address the role of CoVEs in developing national policy and supporting the operations of other VET centres in the country.

According to the study participants, it appears that CoVEs only have a small role in driving PPP policy reform within VET. It was noted that CoVEs should support the growing role of the private sector and enhance its influence in PPP policy reform, with a view to increasing employment and the number of qualified staff in key sectors. It can be concluded that CoVEs can contribute to PPP policy reform by setting an example and developing good practice to be shared.

The study also included questions on the effect of Covid-19 on CoVE operations. By far, the most significant consequence has been the large-scale suspension of WBL in companies. Other major changes include the transition from face-to-face to distance learning, and subsequent disruptions to teaching due to a lack of facilities for distance learning. The student drop-out rate has increased, and assessments and graduation have been delayed. Overall, the workload of VET teachers has increased. Consequently, CoVEs believe that they have an important role in digitalising VET.

5.2 Food for thought regarding future progress and policy development

The small number of CoVEs included in the study does not make it possible to extrapolate *robust* conclusions. This study reveals several issues to focus on, in relation to supporting research and development processes based on emerging trends, that should benefit ETF and ENE members.

By and large, this analysis proves that CoVEs benefit from autonomy in being able to collaborate effectively with private partners. CoVEs can play an important developmental role, supporting collaboration between companies and bringing them together for innovation projects. To drive this kind of development, there ought to be KPIs and incentives, and, in some cases, even legislation/regulation to clarify and support the role of CoVEs in developing and implementing innovation and good practice.

Currently, CoVEs collaborating in PPPs focus heavily on developing the skills of students through WBL. Naturally, there is value in ensuring employability and the relevance of training by involving the private sector in the training process. Indeed, employability of students and opportunities for job creation through entrepreneurship and innovative initiatives are among the top value-adding outcomes of PPPs. It is recommended that VET policy-makers recognise the significant role of CoVEs in PPPs and their positive results in supporting opportunities for VET students in terms of employment and further education.

However, there is scope for more cooperation and involvement of the private sector in VET governance, curriculum development, minimising skills mismatches and improving quality control. It is recommended that those making decisions on policy and practice note the possibilities for further and more in-depth partnerships, which can add value on an operational level, as well as enhancing employability and innovation within the region.

Reciprocity and mutual benefits are of vital importance in creating sustainable PPPs. Policy-makers need to note that guidance is required to support the sustainability of CoVEs and their autonomous role. The overall conclusion drawn from this study is that CoVEs benefit from sufficient autonomy to ensure effective collaboration with private partners. When drafting VET policy, the major opportunities within PPPs need to be recognised, supported through sufficient, yet *non-restrictive legislation* and by setting KPIs for CoVEs that include a requirement for them to share of models of good practice with other VET centres.

Overall, it is recommended that the findings of this study on the autonomy of CoVEs and PPPs be discussed by ETF partner countries to drive more systemic and systematic impact on national policy reforms and VET decentralisation, focusing on exploring the right balance between national, regional and local level governance and decision-making. The experiences of CoVEs in implementing their autonomous role in PPPs can lead the way for VET policy and practice in ETF partner countries and among ENE members.

In light of these findings, ENE will continue to support the following approach to autonomy and PPPs (in 2021 and beyond):

- using the results of this study to develop further qualitative research on the issue by involving CoVEs in cooperation with national authorities and social partners/companies to delve further into the main lessons learned (e.g. addressing legislation/regulation on CoVEs focusing on granted/enjoyed autonomy and PPP arrangements, working processes and institutional arrangements embedded into CoVE status, further informing key PPP practices);
- feeding the results of this study into other thematic areas dealt with by ENE (e.g. WBL, setting up of entrepreneurial CoVEs, transition to green/digital skills) to engage more ENE members in sharing knowledge and good practice;
- disseminating lessons learned for further networking, partnerships, and peer-to-peer learning on CoVES autonomy and PPP practices linked to VET internationalisation (e.g. partnerships to build nationwide/international policy dialogue and practices based on good governance, institutional development, funding and management, etc.);
- launching a dialogue process on labelling ENE as an incentive to support national and international debate and practice relating to the excellence of VET institutions within a lifelong learning perspective.

ANNEXES

Annex 1. Background information on CoVEs

Name of CoVE	Baku State Industry and Innovation Vocational Education Centre
Country and region	Azerbaijan, Baku
Year of establishment	
Number of staff	
Number of students	
Main training sector(s)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Information and communication technology - Technology and engineering - Manufacturing
Main domain(s) of excellence	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Lifelong learning in VET – from IVET to CVET and adult education - Smart specialisation – mobilising innovation, ecosystems and SMEs - Industry 4.0 and digitalisation - Education-business collaboration and cooperation - Pedagogy and professional development
Forms of cooperation with private sector	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Training provision - Cooperation between teachers and companies - Curriculum development - Career advice and guidance for students - Research, development and innovation - Anticipation of skills needs

Name of CoVE	Ganja State Industrial and Technological Centre for Vocational Education
Country and region	Azerbaijan, Ganja
Year of establishment	
Number of staff	
Number of students	
Main training sector(s)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Information and communication technology - Technology and engineering
Main domain(s) of excellence	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Lifelong learning – initial VET, additional VET and adult learning
Forms of cooperation with private sector	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Student skills development/work-based learning/apprenticeships - Cooperation between teachers and companies - Curriculum development

Name of CoVE	Omnia, the Joint Education Authority in the Espoo Region
Country and region	Finland, Espoo
Year of establishment	1982
Number of staff	900
Number of students	30,000
Main training sector(s)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Business and administration - Health and welfare - Humanities and the arts - Information and communication technology - Hair and beauty services - Hospitality and catering, tourism - Technology and engineering
Main domain(s) of excellence	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Lifelong learning in VET – from IVET to CVET and adult education - Smart specialisation – mobilising innovation, ecosystems and SMEs - Industry 4.0 and digitalisation - Education-business collaboration and cooperation - Autonomy and institutional development (financing, leadership, governance) - Going green – supporting sustainable goals - Pedagogy and professional development - Social inclusion
Forms of cooperation with private sector	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Student skills development/work-based learning/apprenticeships - Cooperation between teachers and companies - Curriculum development - Career advice and guidance for students - Research, development and innovation

Name of CoVE	'Construct2' Construction College
Country and region	Georgia, Zestaponi
Year of establishment	2017
Number of staff	32
Number of students	178
Main training sector(s)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Construction
Main domain(s) of excellence	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Education-business collaboration and cooperation
Forms of cooperation with private sector	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Student skills development/work-based learning/apprenticeships - Investment in training infrastructure/materials - Governance, e.g. member on a school board - Career advice and guidance for students

Name of CoVE	LEPL College Akhali Talga
Country and region	Georgia, Adjara, Kobuleti
Year of establishment	1963
Number of staff	179 (96 teachers, 83 administration members)
Number of students	1,400
Main training sector(s)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Agriculture and forestry - Business and administration - Health and welfare - Information and communication technology - Hair and beauty services - Hospitality and catering, tourism - Transport services, transport, logistics, maritime - Technology and engineering
Main domain(s) of excellence	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Education-business collaboration and cooperation - Pedagogy and professional development - Social inclusion
Forms of cooperation with private sector	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Student skills development/work-based learning/apprenticeships - Investment in training infrastructure/materials - Training provision - Cooperation between teachers and companies - Curriculum development - Career advice and guidance for students - Research, development and innovation

Name of CoVE	LEPL Ivane Javakhishvili Tbilisi State University Media and TV Art College
Country and region	Georgia, Tbilisi
Year of establishment	2018, under its current name and legal status; 1989, under its original name
Number of staff	Number of lecturers 100 Staff 38
Number of students	119
Main training sector(s)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Media and visual art
Main domain(s) of excellence	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Lifelong learning in VET – from IVET to CVET and adult education - Education-business collaboration and cooperation - Social inclusion
Forms of cooperation with private sector	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Student skills development/work-based learning/apprenticeships - Training provision - Curriculum development - Career advice and guidance for students

Name of CoVE	LEPL College Iberia
Country and region	Georgia
Year of establishment	2006
Number of staff	120
Number of students	259 students
Main training sector(s)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Agriculture and forestry - Business and administration - Information and communication technology - Hair and beauty services - Hospitality and catering, tourism - Transport services, transport, logistics, maritime - Technology and engineering
Main domain(s) of excellence	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Lifelong learning in VET – from IVET to CVET and adult education - Education-business collaboration and cooperation
Forms of cooperation with private sector	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Student skills development/work-based learning/apprenticeships - Cooperation between teachers and companies - Curriculum development - Career advice and guidance for students - Anticipation of skills needs

Name of CoVE	LEPL College Modusi
Country and region	Georgia
Year of establishment	1999
Number of staff	
Number of students	
Main training sector(s)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Agriculture and forestry - Business and administration - Information and communication technology - Hospitality and catering, tourism - Technology and engineering
Main domain(s) of excellence	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Lifelong learning in VET – from IVET to CVET and adult education
Forms of cooperation with private sector	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Governance, e.g. member on a school board - Training provision - Career advice and guidance for students - Anticipation of skills needs

Name of CoVE	Amal Hadera Entrepreneurship Centre
Country and region	Israel, Hadera
Year of establishment	1944
Number of staff	
Number of students	
Main training sector(s)	- Entrepreneurship
Main domain(s) of excellence	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Smart specialisation – mobilising innovation, ecosystems and SMEs - Education-business collaboration and cooperation - Pedagogy and professional development
Forms of cooperation with private sector	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Cooperation between teachers and companies - Career advice and guidance for students - Anticipation of skills needs

Name of CoVE	Amal Tel Aviv Shimon Peres Entrepreneurship Centre
Country and region	Israel, Tel Aviv
Year of establishment	1946
Number of staff	
Number of students	
Main training sector(s)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Business and administration - Information and communication technology - Technology and engineering
Main domain(s) of excellence	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Smart specialisation – mobilising innovation, ecosystems and SMEs - Education-business collaboration and cooperation - Going green – supporting sustainable goals - Pedagogy and professional development
Forms of cooperation with private sector	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Training provision - Career advice and guidance for students - Anticipation of skills needs

Name of CoVE	ESITH – École supérieure des industries du textile et de l’habillement
Country and region	Morocco
Year of establishment	1996
Number of staff	107 full time + 120 part-time lecturers
Number of students	1,200
Main training sector(s)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Technology and engineering - Textiles, industrial management, logistics
Main domain(s) of excellence	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Lifelong learning in VET – from IVET to CVET and adult education - Smart specialisation – mobilising innovation, ecosystems and SMEs - Education-business collaboration and cooperation - Pedagogy and professional development
Forms of cooperation with private sector	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Student skills development/work-based learning/apprenticeships - Governance, e.g. member on a school board - Training provision - Cooperation between teachers and companies - Curriculum development - Career advice and guidance for students - Research, development and innovation

Name of CoVE	CIV Water
Country and region	The Netherlands, Friesland
Year of establishment	2014
Number of staff	
Number of students	
Main training sector(s)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Technology and engineering, water technology
Main domain(s) of excellence	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Lifelong learning in VET – from IVET to CVET and adult education - Smart specialisation – mobilising innovation, ecosystems and SMEs
Forms of cooperation with private sector	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Student skills development/work-based learning/apprenticeships - Investment in training infrastructure/materials - Training provision - Cooperation between teachers and companies - Curriculum development - Anticipation of skills needs

Name of CoVE	Da Vinci College
Country and region	The Netherlands
Year of establishment	1996
Number of staff	800
Number of students	9,000
Main training sector(s)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Business and administration - Health and welfare - Information and communication technology - Hair and beauty services - Hospitality and catering, tourism - Transport services, transport, logistics, maritime - Technology and engineering
Main domain(s) of excellence	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Smart specialisation – mobilising innovation, ecosystems and SMEs - Industry 4.0 and digitalisation - Education-business collaboration and cooperation - Autonomy and institutional development (financing, leadership, governance) - Pedagogy and professional development
Forms of cooperation with private sector	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Student skills development/work-based learning/apprenticeships - Investment in training infrastructure/materials - Training provision - Cooperation between teachers and companies - Curriculum development - Research, development and innovation - Anticipation of skills needs

Name of CoVE	Centre de formation et d'apprentissage de Bizerte (CFA Bizerte)
Country and region	Tunisia, Bizerte
Year of establishment	1962
Number of staff	92
Number of students	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - 730 trainees – alternate training (formation en alternance) and 608 apprentices – in-firm training (formation en entreprise)
Main training sector(s)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Commercial refrigeration, building electrics, electronics, clothing
Main domain(s) of excellence	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Lifelong learning in VET – from IVET to CVET and adult education - Pedagogy and professional development
Forms of cooperation with private sector	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Student skills development/work-based learning/apprenticeships - Governance, e.g. member on a school board - Cooperation between teachers and companies - Curriculum development - Career advice and guidance for students - Research, development and innovation - Anticipation of skills needs

Name of CoVE	Centre sectoriel de formation en électronique de Sakiet Ezzit Sfax
Country and region	Tunisia, Sfax and southern Tunisia
Year of establishment	1995
Number of staff	
Number of students	
Main training sector(s)	- Electronics
Main domain(s) of excellence	- Lifelong learning in VET – from IVET to CVET and adult education - Pedagogy and professional development
Forms of cooperation with private sector	- Student skills development/work-based learning/apprenticeships - Governance, e.g. member on a school board - Research, development and innovation

Name of CoVE	Institut superieur professionnel du tourisme de Sousse
Country and region	Tunisia, Sousse
Year of establishment	2004
Number of staff	
Number of students	
Main training sector(s)	- Hospitality and catering, tourism
Main domain(s) of excellence	- Pedagogy and professional development
Forms of cooperation with private sector	- Student skills development/work-based learning/apprenticeships - Training provision - Curriculum development - Anticipation of skills needs

Name of CoVE	Bursa Coşkunöz Education Foundation
Country and region	Turkey, Bursa
Year of establishment	1988
Number of staff	5 full time, 20 part time
Number of students	50 VET student, 100 grant students
Main training sector(s)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Information and communication technology - Transport services, transport, logistics, maritime - Technology and engineering
Main domain(s) of excellence	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Lifelong learning in VET – from IVET to CVET and adult education - Industry 4.0 and digitalisation - Education-business collaboration and cooperation
Forms of cooperation with private sector	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Student skills development/work-based learning/apprenticeship - Investment in training infrastructure/materials - Training provision - Cooperation between teachers and companies - Curriculum development - Career advice and guidance for students

Name of CoVE	Nevşehir Hacı Bektaş Veli University, Acıgöl Vocational High School of Technical Sciences
Country and region	Turkey, Cappadocia
Year of establishment	2018
Number of staff	4
Number of students	81
Main training sector(s)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Agriculture and forestry - Health and welfare - Natural sciences - Technology and engineering
Main domain(s) of excellence	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Education-business collaboration and cooperation
Forms of cooperation with private sector	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Student skills development/work-based learning/apprenticeships - Investment in training infrastructure/materials - Career advice and guidance for students - Research, development and innovation

Name of CoVE	Tink Technology and Humanity Colleges
Country and region	Turkey, Sancaktepe, Istanbul
Year of establishment	2017
Number of staff	
Number of students	
Main training sector(s)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Information and communication technology - Technology and engineering
Main domain(s) of excellence	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Industry 4.0 and digitalisation - Education-business collaboration and cooperation
Forms of cooperation with private sector	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Student skills development/work-based learning/apprenticeships - Investment in training infrastructure/materials - Cooperation between teachers and companies - Curriculum development - Career advice and guidance for students

Name of CoVE	Yenimahalle Şehit Mehmet Şengül VET School
Country and region	Turkey, Ankara – Yenimahalle
Year of establishment	1968
Number of staff	158
Number of students	1,492
Main training sector(s)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Information and communication technology - Technology and engineering - Electronics, machinery and furniture
Main domain(s) of excellence	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Lifelong learning in VET – from IVET to CVET and adult education - Smart specialisation – mobilising innovation, ecosystems and SMEs - Industry 4.0 and digitalisation - Education-business collaboration and cooperation - Autonomy and institutional development (financing, leadership, governance) - Going green – supporting sustainable goals - Pedagogy and professional development
Forms of cooperation with private sector	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Student skills development/work-based learning/apprenticeships - Investment in training infrastructure/materials - Training provision - Curriculum development - Career advice and guidance for students - Research, development and innovation - Anticipation of skills needs

Annex 2. Survey questionnaire

Introduction

Dear survey participant,

Thank you for taking the time to participate in this survey, which has been designed by the European Training Foundation (ETF) [Network for Excellence](http://www.etf.europa.eu/en/projects/network-excellence) (ENE). (More info: www.etf.europa.eu/en/projects/network-excellence).

The general aim of the survey is to collect the views and experiences of both policy-makers and practitioners in several ETF partner countries and EU Member States regarding the operationalisation of autonomy and public-private cooperation approaches in the management of centres of vocational excellence (CoVEs). To help you complete the survey, please use/check hyperlinks to explanations of the terminology used.

You will find that the questionnaire below touches on various issues that can be grouped into the following three sections:

- general information on CoVE management,
- overview of CoVE autonomy,
- autonomy in supporting PPPs in terms of VET and skills development.

The results will feed into the ENE work in progress and further policy discussions within the network to improve understanding of such key aspects and to help advance agendas on the role of CoVEs in ETF partner countries.

Please note that participation in this survey is anonymous. All data, including those which you provide in the section on background information, will be used exclusively for statistical purposes.

Completing the questionnaire should take you a maximum of 30 minutes. We do hope you enjoy participating.

Thank you once again for your kind support.

Identifying the respondent

Are you:
A VET policy-maker ☐
A VET practitioner answering on behalf of a CoVE ☐

What is the highest level of formal education you have completed?

- General secondary education ☐
Secondary vocational education ☐
Bachelor's degree ☐
Master's degree ☐
Other higher education degree ☐
Candidate/Doctor of Sciences ☐

How many years of work experience do you have in education/VET/skills policies?

- 0–10 years ☐
11–20 years ☐
21–30 years ☐
More than 30 years ☐

How many years of work experience do you have in positions with management responsibilities?

- None ☐
0–5 years ☐
6–10 years ☐
11–15 years ☐
More than 15 years ☐

What is your current position? (Tick whichever one of the following options best describes your main position)

- Minister/Deputy Minister ☐
Director ☐
Head of department/division ☐
Master ☐
Teacher/trainer ☐
Team leader/coordinator ☐
Expert/specialist ☐
Other (please specify) _____
-

I. General information on CoVE management

1. Please indicate the name of your centre (practitioners)

2. Please indicate the country and the region where the centre is based (practitioners)

3. At what level does your CoVE mainly operate? (practitioners)

- a. National
- b. Regional
- c. One region, sub-region, locality
- d. Industry sector
- e. Multisectoral
- f. Other? Please specify _____

4. What are the main training sectors in which your VET centre operates? (practitioners)

- a. Agriculture and forestry
- b. Business and administration
- c. Health and welfare
- d. Humanities and the arts
- e. Information and communication technologies (ICTs)
- f. Natural sciences
- g. Hair and beauty services
- h. Hospitality and catering, tourism
- i. Transport services, transport, logistics, maritime
- j. Technology and engineering
- k. Other? Please specify _____

5. In which area(s) does your VET centre excel⁵?

- a. Lifelong learning in VET – from IVET to CVET and adult education
- b. Smart specialisation – mobilising innovation⁶, ecosystems and SMEs
- c. Industry 4.0 and digitalisation
- d. Education-business collaboration and cooperation
- e. Autonomy⁷ and institutional development (financing, leadership, governance)

⁵ Vocational excellence in VET contributes to regional development, innovation and/or smart specialisation strategies *inter alia* by providing high-quality vocational skills and bringing a wide range of partners together to develop 'skills ecosystems'.

⁶ Innovation is the implementation of a new or significantly improved product (good or service), or process, a new marketing method, or a new organisational method in business practices, workplace organisation or external relations (OECD).

⁷ Autonomy is the right of an education provider to self-governance involving independent and accountable decision-making in educational, organisational, financial, staff-related and other matters in pursuit of activity carried out within the scope defined by the law.

- f. Going green – supporting sustainable goals
 - g. Pedagogy and professional development
 - h. Social inclusion
6. What is the ‘driving force’ behind VET centres of excellence in your country? (practitioners and policy-makers)
- a. Extra funding and resources from the government
 - b. Need arising from the region
 - c. Need arising from industry/SMEs/sector networks
 - d. School’s own initiative to improve quality, specialisation, etc.
 - e. International donors
 - f. Other? Please specify _____
7. Where does your main funding come from? (practitioners)
- a. Public funding
 - b. Private funding from companies
 - c. Mixture of both public and private
 - d. Other? Please specify _____
8. How are decisions made regarding how funding received by the CoVE is allocated? (practitioners)
- a. Within the CoVE, i.e. at school level
 - b. By a local body
 - c. By a regional body
 - d. At central or state level
 - e. Multiple levels
 - f. Other? Please specify _____
9. Can your centre decide the level and forms of public-private cooperation? Yes/No. If no, where is the decision made and what are the limitations? (practitioners and policy-makers)
10. What is the level of formal cooperation with private-sector companies? (practitioners)
- a. Private-sector participation in school governance, e.g. presence on school board or similar
 - b. Regular cooperation between school management and companies
 - c. Regular cooperation between teachers and companies
 - d. A standard system of work-based learning (WBL) for students in companies
 - e. Comprehensive cooperation with companies to support WBL opportunities for students, including planning, working, learning and student assessments
 - f. Other? Please specify _____
11. Are there other forms of informal cooperation with private-sector companies? (practitioners)
12. What are the specific features of excellence in private-sector cooperation in the sector(s) in which your centre works? Please specify _____ (practitioners)
13. Please select the different forms of cooperation you have entered into with private-sector companies (practitioners)
- a. Student skills development/WBL/apprenticeship
 - b. Investment in training infrastructure/equipment
 - c. Governance, e.g. member on a school board

- d. Training provision
 - e. Curriculum development
 - f. Career advice and guidance for students
 - g. Research, development and innovation
 - h. Anticipation of skills needs
 - i. Continuing training/adult learning
 - j. Other? Please specify _____
14. Please explain the benefits of public-private partnership (practitioners and policy-makers)
- a. What can CoVEs provide to private partners? _____
 - b. What can CoVEs receive from private partners? _____

II. Overview of CoVE autonomy (practitioners)

15. Is there specific legislation defining the status of a CoVE? Yes/No.
Please elaborate _____ (practitioners and policy-makers)
16. Is there a special budget or other financial implications for CoVEs?
Please elaborate _____ (practitioners and policy-makers)
17. Does your CoVE and other similar centres have special duties, responsibilities and key performance indicators (KPIs)⁸ that are different from those of other VET centres? Yes/No.
If yes, please specify _____ (practitioners)
18. Does your CoVE and other similar centres have special accountability⁹ measures (such as reported KPIs related to PPPs) compared with others? Yes/No.
If yes, please specify _____ (practitioners)
19. Are there differences between CoVEs and other VET centres? Yes/No.
If yes, please specify _____ (practitioners)
20. Please indicate the level of decision-making for the following and indicate the activities in which the private sector participates

⁸ A KPI is a measurable value that demonstrates how effectively an organisation is achieving key business objectives. Organisations use KPIs at multiple levels to evaluate their success at reaching targets.

⁹ The fact or condition of being accountable; having a responsibility to report.

(practitioners)

General	National	Regional	CoVE/VET centre	Private-sector participation
Anticipation of skills needs				
VET centre strategy				
VET centre budget and allocation				
Additional income generation				
Key performance indicators for VET centre				
VET centre quality assurance ¹⁰				
VET programme accreditation				
Curriculum used in VET centre				
Vocational programmes offered by the VET centre				
Development initiatives related to the programmes offered, staff competence. etc.				
Student intake on programmes				
Cooperation with the private sector				

(practitioners)

Resource management (human and financial)	National	Regional	CoVE/VET centre	Private-sector participation
Hiring and firing of directors				
Hiring and firing of teachers				
Hiring and firing of staff				
Salary levels				
Incentives and promotions for directors, teachers and other staff				
Teachers' professional development programmes				
Opportunities for teachers to learn in industry				
Learning environment: equipment and facilities				
Other				

¹⁰ A quality assurance system aims to fulfil quality requirements in VET.

(practitioners)

Pedagogical	National	Regional	CoVE/VET centre	Private-sector participation
Curriculum design/updating				
Design of training content				
Modes of curriculum delivery				
Guidance and career-counselling activities				
Design and implementation of assessment				
Design and implementation of work-based learning				
Design of learning environment contexts ¹¹				
Design and implementation of soft-skills training ¹²				
Digital initiatives, such as e-learning, online courses, software training, etc.				
Supporting students' career opportunities				
Tracer studies ¹³				
Design of innovative development projects				

21. Can the CoVE initiate innovation and development projects (such as new training practices, joint research and development, and piloting new technology) with the private sector? Yes/No.
If yes, please specify _____ (practitioners)
22. Does the CoVE have a role in national-level development and innovation in VET? Yes/No.
If yes, please specify _____ (practitioners and policy-makers)
23. What is steering cooperation with private-sector companies? (practitioners and policy-makers)
- Legislation (if so, please specify) _____
 - Central VET policy and training requirements
 - Central extra financing
 - Centre's own initiative to generate income
 - Other (please specify) _____
24. Do all VET programmes include a WBL component? Yes/No.
If yes, please answer the following questions (practitioners and policy-makers)
- Does WBL include written contracts? Yes/No
 - Does WBL follow a standard process in the case of all students? Yes/No

¹¹ By learning environment, we mean making choices between school, workplace, digital/online, i.e. where can learning best take place?

¹² Soft skills are a combination of people skills, social skills, communication skills, character or personality traits, attitudes, career attributes, social intelligence and emotional intelligence quotients, among others, which enable people to navigate their environment, work well with others and perform well.

¹³ A tracer study or graduate survey is a survey of graduates from education institutions, which takes place sometime after graduation or the end of the training. Tracer studies commonly include questions on the transition to work, entering work, use of the skills learned, competences and current occupation.

- c. Is standardised documentation used to monitor the WBL process?
 - d. Is feedback collected on WBL from the students?
 - e. Is feedback collected on WBL from the private sector?
 - f. Is the WBL assessed? Yes/No. If yes, who participates in this assessment?
Teacher/private sector/both.
25. VET programmes prepare for: (practitioners and policy-makers)
- a. Employment
 - b. Entrepreneurship
 - c. Further studies in VET
 - d. Further studies in university
26. Employment of VET graduates is monitored via: (practitioners and policy-makers)
- a. Tracer studies
 - b. Administrative graduate surveys
 - c. Other surveys
 - d. None of the above
27. Entrepreneurship of VET graduates is monitored via: (practitioners and policy-makers)
- a. Tracer studies
 - b. Administrative graduate surveys
 - c. Other surveys
 - d. None of the above
28. How is quality assurance organised? (practitioners and policy-makers)
- a. National-level processes
 - b. CoVE-level processes
 - c. Processes and feedback from the private sector on quality performance
 - d. Processes and feedback from the local community or society on quality performance
 - e. Other, please specify _____
- Please elaborate _____

III. Autonomy in supporting PPPs in terms of VET and skills development

29. To what extent are you satisfied with the level of autonomy your centre has in developing public-private partnerships in VET and skills development? (practitioners)
- a. Very satisfied
 - b. Satisfied
 - c. Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied
 - d. Dissatisfied
 - e. Very dissatisfied
30. Does the operating environment of your CoVE support public-private partnerships in VET and skills development? Yes/No. (practitioners)
- If yes, please elaborate _____
- If no, what would you change in your operating environment?

31. To what extent are you satisfied with the level of involvement of the private sector within your CoVE? (practitioners)

- a. Very satisfied
- b. Satisfied
- c. Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied
- d. Dissatisfied
- e. Very dissatisfied

Please suggest possible improvements for involvement (practitioners)

32. Do you envisage any risks in PPPs for your CoVE? Yes/No. If yes, what is needed to manage the risks in PPPs? Please specify _____ (practitioners)

33. What kind of overall measures support sustainable public-private partnerships in VET in your country? Please specify _____ (practitioners and policy-makers)

34. In your opinion, what specific aspect of autonomy is most important in PPPs? (practitioners and policy-makers)

- a. Financial
- b. Decision-making
- c. Curricula development
- d. Staffing
- e. Other, please specify _____

35. To what extent does your centre drive PPP policy reform within VET in your country? (practitioners and policy-makers)

- a. To a small extent
- b. To some extent
- c. To a moderate extent
- d. To great extent
- e. To a very great extent

Please elaborate _____:

36. What were the major consequences of Covid-19 for your CoVE?

- a. Transition from face-to-face to distance learning
- b. Teaching was disrupted due to lack of facilities for distance learning
- c. Teachers' workload increased
- d. WBL with companies was suspended
- e. Assessment was delayed
- f. Graduation of students was/will be delayed
- g. Student drop-out rate increased
- h. Other, please specify _____

You might want to add final comments here _____

Thank you!

Annex 3. Summary of interview results

What are the main successes in cooperation with companies?

- Successful partnerships established (for instance: network of private partners in each area of study, partnerships with specialised fields, more than 3,000 cooperation agreements with public and private organisations in the region).
- On-the-job training opportunities for students, company visits.
- Opportunities for students to network with companies.
- Companies' presence in CoVE premises (for instance, a networking academy).
- Involvement of companies in school governance.
- Projects with private partners in which students can take part.
- Involving the private sector in student admission, evaluation and employment assistance.
- Working with companies to train their personnel.
- A career centre and annual job fair with companies.

How does autonomy support cooperation with companies?

- Autonomy allows flexibility in decision-making and in designing and implementing activities in cooperation with partners.
- Autonomy enables agility in acting in a pragmatic and targeted way (for example: easy to set up employment contracts with external experts).
- Autonomy makes it possible to initiate and implement joint projects with the private sector.
- Autonomy allows the CoVE to train professionals that are needed in the region's companies or in the public sector.
- Autonomy is necessary in concluding agreements with the private sector that truly benefit all parties.

What are the main challenges in relation to autonomy and cooperation with companies?

- Difficulties in finding partners.
- Limited number of companies in the region.
- Making private partners commit to a joint project.
- Autonomy needs guidance and a blueprint.
- A template for cooperation with companies is needed to clarify expectations, obligations and the process on all sides.
- It is easier to monitor students' learning in a college than in a company.
- A wider representation of industry/industries is needed in CoVE governance.
- Covid-19.

How does the autonomy of CoVEs support student skills development in companies?

- Autonomy allows the freedom to conclude agreements on work-based learning that is tailored to company needs and local needs.
- Autonomy allows CoVEs to decide independently on the variety of ways in which students can be exposed to the private sector, e.g. internships and work-based learning, work-associated training courses, company visits.

How does autonomy and cooperation with companies support vocational excellence?

- Cooperation with companies is necessary to ensure relevance of training.
- Ties with the private sector and having trainers with industry experience is important in providing quality training.
- Partnerships provide important experience that allows CoVEs to be competitive in the vocational training sector.
- Possibility of initiating projects with private (and public or other) partners, thus developing both the CoVE and students' competence.

How should CoVE autonomy be supported?

- Recognition by the authorities that autonomy is the path to excellence.
- Guidance and a blueprint.
- Development and operation plans.
- Legislation could allow choosing the training and assessment language.
- Financial stability.

What are the lessons learned from CoVE development so far?

- Feedback from companies is vitally important in training in-demand specialists.
- Partnerships increase the ability to respond to skills needs as they arise in the region's private sector.
- Autonomy is an essential factor in the development and effectiveness of management.
- Autonomy needs to be linked to transparency and measurable, relevant outcomes.
- Autonomy is about being able to respond to the immediate or future needs of our partners.

How can the experiences of CoVEs inform national policies in VET more effectively?

- Sharing experience with other CoVEs.
- Sharing resources (such as teachers).
- Explaining the impact achieved by our projects.
- International partnerships and projects.
- Annual events and a platform for sharing experiences.

LIST OF ACRONYMS

CoVE	Centre of vocational excellence
CVET	Continuing vocational education and training
ENE	ETF Network for Excellence
ETF	European Training Foundation
EU	European Union
ICT	Information and communication technology
IVET	Initial vocational education and training
KPI	Key performance indicator
OECD	Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development
PPP	Public-private partnership
SMEs	Small and medium-sized enterprises
VET	Vocational education and training
WBL	Work-based learning

GLOSSARY

Autonomy	The right of an education provider to self-governance involving independent and accountable decision-making on educational, organisational, financial, staff-related and other matters in pursuit of activity carried out within the scope defined by the law.
Accountability	The fact or condition of being accountable; having a responsibility to report.
Centre of vocational excellence (CoVE)	Vocational excellence in vocational education and training contributes to regional development, innovation and/or smart specialisation strategies <i>inter alia</i> by providing high-quality vocational skills and bringing together a wide range of local partners, such as providers of vocational education and training, employers, research centres, development agencies and employment services (among others), to develop 'skills ecosystems' (European Commission, 2020).
Innovation	Innovation is the implementation of a new or significantly improved product (good or service), or process, a new marketing method or a new organisational method in business practices, workplace organisation or external relations (OECD).
Key performance indicator (KPI)	A KPI is a measurable value that demonstrates how effectively an organisation is achieving key business objectives. Organisations use KPIs at multiple levels to evaluate their success at reaching targets.
Learning environment	Learning environment refers to the diverse physical locations, contexts and cultures in which students learn. Students may learn in a wide variety of settings and benefit from different resources, such as outside-of-school locations and outdoor environments. Learning environment refers also to educational settings and pedagogical approaches that facilitate learning, e.g. by conducting classes in relevant natural ecosystems, grouping desks in specific ways, using audio, visual and digital technologies.
Soft skills	Soft skills are a combination of people skills, social skills, communication skills, character or personality traits, attitudes, career attributes, social intelligence and emotional intelligence quotients, among others, that enable people to navigate their environment, work well with others and perform well.
Tracer study	A tracer study is a survey of graduates, which takes place after graduation or the end of the training. Tracer studies commonly include questions on study progress, the transition to work, use of skills learned and current occupation.
Public-private partnership (PPP)	A mechanism for coordinating action and sharing responsibility between public and private stakeholders in VET, with a view to initiating, designing, financing, managing or sustaining a project of common interest.
Quality assurance	A quality assurance system aims to fulfil quality requirements in vocational education and training.

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