

## Proposal for a Danube Region Platform on Centres of Vocational Excellence – A regional approach to cooperating on vocational excellence

### Updated concept note – August 2021

The aim of this updated concept note is to further develop the proposal of a Danube Region Platform on Centres of Vocational Excellence (CoVEs), which will benefit from the European Training Foundation's (ETF) Network for Excellence and focus on themes that are of common relevance to the region and in line with the objectives of the Priority Area 9 "People and Skills" (PA9) of the EU Strategy for the Danube Region (EUSDR).

### Background

In the EUSDR Action Plan, adopted by the European Commission in April 2020, "promoting the establishment of 'centres of vocational excellence'" is named under Action 6 as an important goal of **PA9**. In this context, the Action Plan refers to the function of CoVEs as "catalysts for local business investment, supporting local innovation and smart specialisation strategies by ensuring supply of high quality skilled workers through flexible and timely offer of training".

ETF has launched a network of CoVEs. Members of the **ETF Network for Excellence (ENE)** are organisations meeting criteria of innovation and quality in education and training provision and are committed to improve VET provision and respond better to labour market skills demands. Typically, centres are successful vocational schools or other providers or clusters of such schools. This approach is connected to a wider EU supported initiative to promote centres of VET excellence or platforms of CoVEs. As at 14 June 2021, ENE is composed of more than 200 CoVEs from around the world, including a total of 37 CoVEs from the Danube Region: (2) CoVEs from Slovenia; (4) from the Republic of Moldova; (6) from Serbia; and (25) from Ukraine. ENE CoVES from the Danube Region cover a wide range of thematic activities that are shaping ENE thematic approaches<sup>1</sup>, as well sectoral<sup>2</sup>, multisectoral and regional approaches.

A first **proposal for establishing a Danube Region Platform on CoVEs** was prepared jointly by ETF and PA9. The draft concept note and a questionnaire to further develop the initiative were sent to PA9 Steering Group members in December 2020. Responses to the questionnaire were received by a total of 10 Danube Region countries, all of which welcomed the idea of establishing a Danube Region Platform of CoVEs.

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<sup>1</sup> ENE themes shaping excellence are: LLL (including Entrepreneurial CoVEs role), Education and business cooperation/collaboration; Pedagogy and Professional development; Autonomy and institutional development (governance, financing); Skills for Smart Specialization; Industry 4.0 & Digitalization; Going Green and sustainable Development; Social Inclusion and Equity.

<sup>2</sup> Currently, the ENE registry gathers information on sectoral approaches to excellence in the following fields: Agriculture, veterinary, forestry, fishing; Mining, metallurgy; Construction (e.g. brick laying, plumbing, roofing, carpentry) Engineering (electrical, mechanical, automobile, civil construction; Chemical (geodesy); Manufacturing, production, processing (food, textiles, leather, wood); Hospitality, tourism, catering, travel; Business, retail, law, economy, management, administration; Information technology (IT); Logistics, traffic, transportation; Health-related (including medicine), social protection; Beauty, hair, cosmetics; Craftwork, fashion, art, design, film, media and creative; General subjects, (e.g. languages and mathematics, science, social); Sciences; Others.

5 countries expressed their wish to focus on the topic of green skills<sup>3</sup>, 2 countries preferred the topic of social inclusion<sup>4</sup>, 2 countries supported both topics<sup>5</sup> and 1 country did not express any preference<sup>6</sup>. Some countries requested more information regarding the availability of funds to finance activities and the importance of not duplicating already existing activities in the ETF framework was also highlighted.

ENE is currently launching two sub-initiatives in the area of the identified thematic priorities (social inclusion and excellence in green skills). The key thematic principles of the sub-initiatives are briefly presented below (a more detailed description is provided in Annex I):

- Approaching excellence on **social inclusion and equity** should be politically framed in the context of Fundamental Rights and the European Pillar of Social Rights: Everyone in the EU has the right to good-quality and inclusive education and training. For further approaching inclusion and equity moving towards excellence, ENE will target an array of civic, social, labour and cultural functions of vocational education, and will include key competences and life skills allowing real LLL opportunities.
- ENE addressing **excellence and Going Green (GRETA project)** will focus on greening of VET and excellence in the reorientation of existing educational programs addressing green transition as well as professional development, in service courses and training to advance greening across different sectors.

## Operationalisation

On the basis of the current state of discussions between PA9 and ETF and the feedback received from PA9 Steering Group members, it is proposed to establish a Danube Region Platform on CoVEs with the following two components:

- 1.) **Policy Platform:** The Danube Region Platform will bring together officials from ministries and other public agencies/institutions responsible for VET from the EUSDR countries, and experts from the European Commission, ETF and other organisations. The idea is to provide a forum for exchange on national, regional and international experiences and best practices. The platform will be facilitated by PA9 in partnership with ETF. Information on both ENE and Danube Region developments, as well as on opportunities for cooperation and financial support, e.g. in the framework of ENE, Erasmus+ or other relevant instruments, will be shared on a regular and systematic basis. Platform meetings could be convened on an annual basis. The thematic focus will lie on the areas of social inclusion and going green. Best practice examples in the form of project presentations from CoVEs, including those that are part of ENE, will further support mutual learning and cooperation.
- 2.) **Cooperation between EUSDR CoVEs within ENE:** The Danube Region Platform will also facilitate the identification of CoVEs from EUSDR countries interested in joining ENE and in participating in the two ENE sub-initiatives on partnerships for social inclusion and going green. PA9 will assist in identifying relevant institutions and contact persons within the EUSDR countries. The participation of both ETF Partner Countries and EU Member States from the Danube Region will benefit the mutual sharing of experiences. Cooperation between CoVEs from the Danube Region in the framework of ENE avoids the duplication of activities and may provide significant added value within ENE as a good example of regional cooperation within the international approach of ENE. Possible spin-offs on the sub-initiatives on green skills and social inclusion could be considered at a later point, if a substantial number of CoVEs from the Danube Region are participating in them. Such transnational communities of EUSDR

<sup>3</sup> BG, BW/DE, ME, RO and SK.

<sup>4</sup> CZ and UA.

<sup>5</sup> AT and HR.

<sup>6</sup> MD.

CoVEs within ENE would be managed by the ETF (in cooperation with PA9) and will allow members to lead their own debates/dialogue, initiatives, as well as focus on their interests and development needs regarding excellence policies and CoVEs practices. As a potential further step, if the partnership reaches the stage of concrete elaboration, participating CoVEs could apply for Erasmus+ or other funding sources to finance project activities.

### **Next steps**

Regarding the management of future steps, PA9 and ETF ENE will continue to share information on a regular and systematic basis.

It is proposed to organize a kick-off event to launch the Danube Region Platform in the second half of 2021, preferably in autumn. The meeting will launch the exchange on a policy level and aims at strengthening the participation of EUSDR CoVEs in the ENE sub-initiatives on partnerships for social inclusion and going green. More details on the modalities of participation (online/physical, number of participants per country, etc.) will be made available in due course.

## Annex I – ENE sub-initiatives on social inclusion and going green

### Social Inclusion Partnership

#### Purpose

The overall objective will be to establish and provide developing support to Excellence in Social Inclusion Partner Countries' Platform devoted to innovation in VET sector for social inclusion.

More specifically, the project aims at sharing and consolidating the innovative practices activities and practices developed at local level by the partners in terms of inclusion, exploiting their outcomes and impacts of Inclusive Excellence.

Through this thematic and contractual support, ENE's members will establish partnerships through peer exchange/learning and more importantly co- developing models that can be replicated in different context. These partnerships will be based also on the profiles and prioritised needs of the CoVEs members. As a start the focus will be on:

- establishing Community Practice Platform, in the context of EPALE[1] as a way of collaborative working with focus on peer reviews of participating CoVEs mainly their practices and development responses in vocational and education training programmes;
- working with the interested CoVEs to identify development needs, share practices, design tools and create partnerships on existing and new practices on how to overcome exclusion/boost inclusion of young people in acquiring skills for work and life;
- learning from each other and to address their own development by co-working together;
- flagging up how the members can take forward some joint concrete actions (Action Plans) for boosting skills for inclusion and cohesion.

#### Activities

1. **Inception** – The general objective of this work is to establish a starting point of the work already done/ongoing/and or planned by participating CoVEs. (July – October 2021)
2. **Preparation and implementation of peer reviews** – The peer reviews will be organised among the established Community Practice Platform (of max 7 CoVEs) and are envisaged to be implemented in teams of 3 CoVEs jointly reviewing the other four CoVEs and vice versa. 2 months (October-November 2021).
3. **Analysis of peer review results, development of CoVE Action Plan and preparation of thematic activities** – 3 months (December 2021 –March 2022)
4. **Implementation of thematic peer learning actions** – 13 months (March 2022 – March 2023) - Based on the results of the peer review and selected recommendations reflected in the Thematic Action programme (elaborated in phase 3) the contractor will design and implement 3 thematic peer learning activities. The activities will be implemented in the format of online meetings in the 'Excellence and Social Inclusion (SI) ' peer learning partnership.
5. **Exit Strategy and closure of assignment** – 2 months – (April – May 2023)

#### Duration

The Social Inclusion Partnership project will start in July 2021 and will be implemented until June 2023.

## Going Green Partnership

### Background

Climate change and environmental derogation are global drivers of change. Along with technological change, globalization, demography and migration they have a crucial impact on changing employment and the demand for skills. In a narrow sense, green skills are the skills needed within a job or for a new job, to develop and support a sustainable and resource efficient economy.

Vocational and education training is playing a crucial role in greening of skills in different areas and sectors. The green dimension range from very technical and job-specific skills to responsible use of resources relevant across occupations and sectors. Greening the curriculum and training means adapting training disciplines to sustainability concepts and practices in the curriculum, as well as in non-formal or informal training for young people and adults in a work-based context to enable them to acquire practical skills and participate in green transitions.

### Purpose

The purpose of the **Going Green Partnership** is supporting ENE members in their greening of vocational and education training, especially in relation to:

- Reorientation of existing educational programmes addressing green transition.
- Professional development, in service courses and training to advance greening across different sectors.

The **Going Green Partnership** is planned to address the following key sectors:

- Wood working and furniture manufacturing
- Construction and energy
- Agriculture and food processing
- Advanced Manufacturing

### Activities

1. **Inception** – Final selection of participating ENE members and preparation for Kick off meeting (July – August 2021)
2. **Peer Review** – Kick off meeting and implementation of joint peer review with participating ENE members (September – October 2021)
3. **Joint planning of capacity development actions** - Analysis of results and development of joint capacity building programme (November – December 2021)
4. **Implementation of eight thematic capacity development meetings on topics**, such as ‘green curricula’ development, teachers and trainer’s professional development and work based learning (January – October 2022)

### Duration

The **Going Green Partnership** project will start in July 2021 and will be implemented until next year, November 2022.