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# AGENDA

## Smart Specialisation and Regional Excellence: Strengthening Centres of Vocational Excellence

23<sup>RD</sup> JUNE 2026 – 10:00-11:45 CET – ONLINE EVENT

**Registration link:** <https://us06web.zoom.us/meeting/register/1ZVcacN0Rc6h-4E3cs1KBg>

The **ETF Network for Excellence (ENE)** brings together Centres of Vocational Excellence (CoVEs) and key stakeholders committed to innovation, quality, and systemic impact in vocational education and training (VET).

**Smart Specialisation (S3)**, a policy approach developed by the **European Commission**, helps regions identify their unique strengths and focus investments where they can achieve the greatest impact. It encourages regions to:

- **Identify regional strengths and opportunities** – assess the industries, skills, and technologies with the highest potential for growth and innovation.
- **Engage stakeholders in strategic planning** – bring together education providers, businesses, research institutions, and policymakers to align priorities.
- **Focus resources for maximum impact** – target funding and programmes to sectors or activities where the region can become internationally competitive.
- **Monitor and adapt progress** – use indicators and evaluation tools to track results and refine strategies over time.

For Centres of Vocational Excellence, S3 provides a practical way **to link vocational education, innovation, and regional economic development**, ensuring that training, research, and industry needs reinforce each other. It also helps CoVEs to **secure funding, build partnerships, and strengthen their regional impact in a strategic and measurable way**.

### Focus of the Session

This session will explore:

- Introduction to Smart Specialisation strategies and methodology
- Platforms, tools, and governance approaches for S3 in EU and neighbouring regions
- Regional cooperation and practical experiences from North Macedonia
- Opportunities for cross-regional collaboration and capacity building

The objective is to inspire ENE members with practical examples and strategic reflections that can inform their own implementation of Smart Specialisation within CoVEs.

| Time          | Agenda Item   | Owner  |
|---------------|---|--|
| 10:00 - 10:10 | <b>Framing Smart Specialisation</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Why Smart Specialisation matters for Centres of Vocational Excellence</li> <li>• Linking S3 strategies to regional innovation and vocational excellence</li> <li>• Objectives and expected outcomes of the session for the ENE community</li> </ul>  | Susanne Nielsen, ETF Expert  |
| 10:10 – 10:30 | <b>Smart Specialisation Concept</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Introduction to Smart Specialisation strategies</li> <li>• S3 methodology: stakeholder involvement and identification of regional strengths</li> <li>• Implications for Centres of Vocational Excellence</li> <li>• Indicators and monitoring of S3 progress</li> <li>• Best practice examples</li> </ul>  | Nikola Radovanovic, ETF Expert   |
| 10:30 – 10:50 | <b>Technical Insights Joint Research Centre</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Implementation of S3 in EU Enlargement and Neighbourhood regions</li> <li>• Platforms and tools for S3 (Knowledge Hub, S3 Observatory, thematic groups, PRI)</li> <li>• Opportunities for cross-regional collaboration</li> <li>• Recent programmes and developments in Western Balkans, Black Sea, and Mediterranean regions</li> </ul>   | Emanuele Fabbri / Manuel Gonzalez Evangelista                                      |
| 10:50 – 11:15 | <b>Regional Cooperation and Smart Specialisation – North Macedonia Example</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Building national and regional innovation ecosystems through Smart Specialisation strategies</li> <li>• Role of EU and donor funding (Erasmus+, Horizon, ETF-supported strategies, GIZ support) in enabling S3 implementation</li> <li>• Establishment of the CoVE through the GREENOVET.EU project (Erasmus+) as a practical example linking S3 to vocational excellence</li> <li>• Regional cooperation – practical examples from past and on-going projects and linking S3 to CoVEs</li> </ul> | Radmil Polenakovikj, Ss. Cyril and Methodius University in Skopje, North Macedonia |
| 11:15 – 11:30 | <b>Q&amp;A / Discussion</b> - Sharing experiences and challenges  |  |
| 11:30 – 11:45 | <b>Closing Reflections</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Lessons and practical insights from the session</li> <li>• What this means for the ENE network</li> <li>• Opportunities for peer exchange and follow-up actions</li> </ul>  | Susanne Nielsen, ETF Expert  |