
AGENDA

Smart Specialisation and Regional Excellence: Strengthening Centres of Vocational Excellence

23RD 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 | Framing Smart Specialisation <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Why Smart Specialisation matters for Centres of Vocational Excellence • Linking S3 strategies to regional innovation and vocational excellence • Objectives and expected outcomes of the session for the ENE community | Susanne Nielsen, ETF Expert |
| 10:10 – 10:30 | Smart Specialisation Concept <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Introduction to Smart Specialisation strategies • S3 methodology: stakeholder involvement and identification of regional strengths • Implications for Centres of Vocational Excellence • Indicators and monitoring of S3 progress • Best practice examples | Nikola Radovanovic, ETF Expert |
| 10:30 – 10:50 | Transformative innovation concept and the (potential) role of CoVEs <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Implementation of S3 in EU Enlargement and Neighbourhood regions • Platforms and tools for S3 (Knowledge Hub, S3 Observatory, thematic groups, PRI) • Opportunities for cross-regional collaboration • Recent programmes and developments in Western Balkans, Black Sea, and Mediterranean regions | Ramojus Reimeris, JRC |
| 10:50 – 11:10 | Smart Specialisation related initiatives in the case of North Macedonia <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Building national and regional innovation ecosystems through Smart Specialisation strategies • Role of EU and donor funding (Erasmus+, Horizon, ETF-supported strategies, GIZ support) in enabling S3 implementation • Establishment of the CoVE through the GREENOVET.EU project (Erasmus+) as a practical example linking S3 to vocational excellence • Regional cooperation – practical examples from past and on-going projects and linking S3 to CoVEs | Radmil Polenakovikj, Ss. Cyril and Methodius University in Skopje, North Macedonia |
| 11:10 – 11:30 | Q&A / Discussion - Sharing experiences and challenges | |
| 11:30 – 11:45 | Closing Reflections <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lessons and practical insights from the session • What this means for the ENE network • Opportunities for peer exchange and follow-up actions | Susanne Nielsen, ETF Expert |