
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 concept • Implementation of Smart Specialisation in the EU E&N • Platforms and tools for implementing Smart Specialisations in the EU E&N and opportunities for cross-regional collaboration • Examples of best practices across the EU E&N 	Nikola Radovanovic, ETF Expert
10:30 – 10:50	Transformative innovation and challenge based-approaches complementary to Smart Specialisation <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Transformative innovation policies • Place-based and challenge-based approaches • Open discovery processes • Possible role of CoVEs 	Ramojus Reimeris, JRC
10:50 – 11:10	Smart Specialisation related initiatives in the case of North Macedonia <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Experiences from the implementation of Smart Specialisation in North Macedonia (Industry 4.0) • Reskilling and upskilling as an initiative within Smart Specialisation • Lessons learned and opportunities for Centres of Excellence and vocational providers 	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