GOOD GOVERNANCE FOR VET PROGRESS

GLAD network for candidate countries' contribution to the ACVT

29 June 2026, Brussels

Abstract

The **GLAD (Governance Learning, Action, Dialogues) Network** for Candidate Countries (CCs) was established in April 2025 and consists of members of the EU's **Advisory Committee on Vocational Education and Training (ACVT)** from Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Moldova, Montenegro, North Macedonia, Serbia, Türkiye, and Ukraine. The GLAD Network for candidate countries has a tripartite composition, bringing together government and social partner representatives from these eight countries. The network has identified two areas of governance that are particularly important for moving forward in vocational education and training (VET) attractiveness, excellence and inclusivity, namely: (i) institutional arrangements in the context of skills systems' governance and (ii) stronger partnerships for VET with specific attention to the context of planning and delivery of WBL. The paper presents several examples of successful solutions to outstanding policy issues in these areas in the pursuit of reforms that being the VET governance systems into greater alignment with EU accession objectives and requirements. Several conclusions are drawn along with some brief recommendations.

1. Context and priorities for cooperation in VET

The Copenhagen Process set the framework for cooperation in VET. The most recent milestones in the Process are the **Osnabrück Declaration on Vocational Education and Training (VET) 2021-2025, and the Herning Declaration 2026-2030**[1] which emphasise the importance of open coordination and cooperation across EU member states and candidate countries (CCs) towards commonly agreed objectives. The objectives relate to achieving attractive and inclusive VET and lifelong learning for all, to underpin economic competitiveness, inclusive growth and high-quality jobs. Countries give priority to all or selected objectives and elaborate National Implementation Plans with targeted measures that are time-bound to enable effective monitoring. The European Commission launched the **Union of Skills** in March 2025, a strategy that reinforces these targets for people's up- and re-skilling and wider lifelong learning. The associated 2026-2030 EU Vocational Education and Training strategy is being finalised as this report is written. These EU-level policy documents maintain that collaborative governance is crucial for advancing VET reforms and transformation. Horizontal and vertical coordination and cooperation of actors, and well-designed partnerships are key ingredients of VET reforms. Currently, a relevant these reform consists in the adoption and implementation of good quality work-based learning (WBL).

The four objectives of the Osnabrück and Herning Declarations, each accompanied by recommended actions, are as follows:

- Objective 1: Resilience and excellence through quality, inclusive, and flexible VET
- Objective 2: Establishing a lifelong learning culture – relevance of CVET and digitalisation
- Objective 3: Sustainability – a green link in VET
- Objective 4: European Education and Training Area and international dimension of VET

The GLAD initiative and network for Candidate Countries

Evidence shows that public policies deliver better results when governing institutions coordinate and cooperate with each other. This is particularly true in VET, lifelong learning and, more broadly, human capital development (HCD), which by their nature intersect social, labour market and economic policy goals thus necessitate the involvement of multiple decision-makers and stakeholders at various levels. Governance mechanisms play a role in fostering coordination and cooperation, and should therefore be designed, or adjusted, to this end.

The Governance Learning, Action and Dialogues (GLAD) initiative was established by the European Training Foundation (ETF) to promote partnership and co-responsibility among state actors and between state and non-state actors – and with that improve policy design and implementation in VET, lifelong learning and HCD. Two key principles guide GLAD: first, governance can be learned; and, second, participatory governance's capacity develops with practice and through dialogue. The GLAD method values mutual learning between countries and it focuses on exchanging knowledge as well as established and experimental practices of multi-stakeholder and multi-level governance.

The Copenhagen Process has embedded the partnership approach in the EU cooperation on VET from the onset. Over time, the governments, social partners and European associations of VET

[1] The Declarations have been co-drafted and endorsed by the Ministers in charge of vocational education and training from EU Member States, Candidate Countries, European social partners and the European Commission, and supported by European level VET providers' associations.

providers from member states, candidate countries and the European Education Area (EEA) have agreed on their declared priorities and targets for cooperation in VET.

Against this background, within GLAD the Network for Candidate Countries was created in 2025 with those government and social partner representatives who are ACVT members from Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Moldova, Montenegro, North Macedonia, Serbia, Türkiye and Ukraine. Their purpose is to highlight the candidate countries' innovative and positive factors that drive progress towards the Osnabrück and Herning Declarations' targets. The GLAD Network for the candidate countries offers:

- A space to discuss ongoing human capital development reforms with the perspective of the candidate countries at the core.
- The same tripartite composition as the ACVT to apply the method of dialogue between government, business associations, trade unions and CSOs.

The participants in the GLAD Network have focused on two thematic groups:

1. Institutions: Stronger institutional coordination to implement effective VET reforms.
2. Partnerships: Fostering **partnerships** to achieve high quality, inclusive and excellent VET and lifelong learning, by delivering VET programs through **work-based learning**.

The groups have decided to produce **targeted advice and proposals in the context of the EU accession**. To this end, they have shared knowledge emerging from improved practices of institutional coordination and partnerships with special attention to WBL. This paper results from the work that unfolded from Q2 2025 to Q1 2026 and is submitted to the consideration of the whole ACVT community.

In summary, the GLAD network for candidate countries has found that:

1. The context of EU accession provides CCs with the opportunity to explore their own institutional arrangements and performance, assisting them to draft and implement laws that are compatible with the EU acquis and respect the need to build on existing institutions.

2. While WBL is not new in the CCs, contemporary approaches including traineeships, internships and apprenticeships bring new elements to their VET landscape. New managing and financing mechanisms are needed to widen access to WBL, on the part of both domestic SMEs as well as large companies where much of the existing activity takes place.

3. Advancing VET, LLL, HCD systems as a whole requires country-wide changes; at the same time, new practices are often tested at the local level. Partners tend to develop new approaches more constructively at local level, where new partnerships can involve schools, companies and associations with full cooperation and support from local authorities and public agencies.

4. CCs have implemented reforms that compare favourably with those in EU member states. We would welcome opportunities for regular exchange and mutual learning, which would assist a continuing improvement in attractive, inclusive and excellent VET. In this paper we present a few of the many examples that are a reality in CCs.

2. Institutional arrangements for skills system governance

2.1 Ministerial coordination

In each candidate country, the **ministry responsible for education** sets the policy direction and prepares the laws that shape the way the education sector is designed and financed. The **ministry responsible for the labour market and employment** is involved in designing policies for upskilling and reskilling adult workers. In the context of EU accession, these ministries are also engaged in ensuring compliance with the negotiating requirements of Chapter 26 (Education and Culture) and of Chapter 19 (Social Policy and Employment). In relation to WBL and dual education, the **ministry responsible for the economy and business affairs** may also be involved.

Coordination between ministries to deliver effective WBL systems is necessary but also often challenging. Fragmented governance structures can lead to low uptake of VET programmes, as happens for example in Bosnia and Herzegovina.[2] Dispersed responsibility across ministries can lead to duplication of effort and weak policy delivery. While mechanisms for inter-ministerial coordination are in place in most CCs, their effectiveness can be undermined by a lack of a collaborative, horizontal approach to governance, resulting in relatively slow policy implementation.[3]

As a solution to this problem, some CCs have set up **arms-length VET agencies** to implement the policies determined by ministries. These agencies (or “centres”) are concerned with the practical administration of the VET sector (including negotiating partnerships with the business sector to support dual education and work-based learning) and are set up to be more or less independent of government. They are usually responsible for developing the curricula, the national qualifications framework, teacher training and quality assurance, although in some CCs more specialised agencies or ministry departments take on these functions. The agencies also deal directly with employers’ associations in the development of dual education programmes. For example, in **Albania**, the National Agency for VET and Qualifications (NAVETQ) coordinates between the Ministry of Finance and Economy (which oversees VET in Albania) and the Ministry of Education.

Box 1: Resolving Coordination Problems: Government Office or Arms-length Agency?

Difficulties with inter-ministerial coordination can sometimes be overcome by giving oversight to the Prime Minister’s Office, or some other Office of government to ensure coordination between ministries in a specific policy area (such as VET). In Serbia, for example, an **Office for Dual Education and the National Qualification Framework** has been established to ensure effective coordination between the different branches of government with regard to issues of VET governance in the area of WBL. The Office is established as a unit of government dealing with specialised functions. Situated within the institutions of government, it has been successful in developing the dual education model in Serbia. This suggests that policymakers may be able to pull policy levers more effectively through government-embedded Offices rather that in relation to the arms-length agencies which have been established in other CCs.

2.2 Advisory Councils

Advisory councils bring together the government, employers and trade unions and education sector stakeholders to provide policy advice, enable a structured dialogue on VET issues, and align

[2] RCC (2025). Regional Overview of Western Balkan Six Regarding the European Pillar of Social Rights. Sarajevo: Regional Cooperation Council.

[3] Vági, P. & Kasemets, K. (2017). Functioning of the centres of government in the Western Balkans. SIGMA Papers, No. 53. Paris: OECD Publishing

the VET system to the needs of the labour market. These advisory councils exist at various levels, from broad national level **Economic and Social Councils** which deal with many issues related to economic and social development of a country including education, to the more narrowly focused **VET Councils** which deal specifically with the VET sector. Several candidate countries have some form of VET Council arrangement for providing the government with detailed advice on policy developments. These advisory councils bring the principles of social dialogue and "tripartism" (which involves a strong participation of the social partners) into VET governance arrangements in the CCs.[4]

In addition to the VET Council, **sector skills councils** (SSCs) have been established in some countries to ensure that there is feedback from the employers and trade union representatives in a particular sector to VET policymakers to ensure that the education provided by the VET institutions delivers relevant skills to each sector of the economy. SSCs help to update occupational standards based on the developing needs of businesses in particular sectors of the economy and facilitate the adjustment of qualifications standards and the curricula of VET institutions.

Box 2: Sector skills councils in Serbia[5]

In Serbia, the SSCs have succeeded in completing all qualification standards for use in VET schools; however, the SSCs experience limited independence and require greater clarity of tasks and decision-making processes. At this stage, the specialised VET Councils have a greater ability to advise on skills policies and to coordinate between government, education and business stakeholders. In Serbia, the employers association (SAE) is deeply involved in VET governance through its membership of the Council for Vocational Education and Adult Education, the Socio-Economic Council of the Republic of Serbia, and the Board of the Public Employment Service (PES).

Box 3: Sector skills councils in Albania[6]

In Albania, **sector skills councils** have been established by ministerial order under a defined mandate. They enable a sector-based dialogue for skills anticipation and development and are integrated into the Albanian Qualifications Framework processes to support qualification and standards governance. Each council includes representatives of relevant line ministries, employers' organisations, trade unions' representatives, business sector experts, qualification providers and AQF experts. They hold regular quarterly meetings and engage in evidence-based discussions. Their core operating functions are to identify new qualification needs, review existing qualifications, analyse sector trends, review and validate occupational and qualification standards and recommend updates to the qualification catalogue. They improve technical quality by bringing real sector expertise, testing standards against practice, ensuring occupational relevance, detecting outdated competences and integrating emerging skills (AI, cyber, green), although skills anticipation might require additional resources.

[4] Tripartism is the system of collaboration among government, employers, and trade unions aiming to find solutions for common economic and social issues through social dialogue. Article 3.2(a) of the Reform and Growth Facility for the Western Balkans identifies the strengthening of social dialogue as a key objective (Regulation (EU) 2024/1449 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 14 May 2024 on establishing the Reform and Growth Facility for the Western Balkans).

[5] Interview, Serbian Employers' Association, December 2025.

[6] Presentation by Anisa Subashi, Confederation of Trade Unions of Albania, to GLAD Network meeting, 22nd January 2026.

2.3 Multilevel governance

Vocational education is also subject to varying models of **multilevel governance** reflecting the division of powers between the central government and local and regional authorities (LRAs). The latter include regional governments and local self-government institutions (such as municipalities). In most countries, VET is centrally organised with some competences decentralised to LRAs, but with limited fiscal decentralisation to support effective local implementation.[7] In Bosnia and Herzegovina, Moldova, North Macedonia, and Ukraine, significant powers are decentralised to regions and municipalities. For example, in **North Macedonia** the 2024 Law on Dual VET laid the basis for a network of Regional VET Centres. In **Moldova**, responsibilities for updating qualifications standards and curricula are decentralised to twelve Centres of Vocational Excellence that act as methodological reference centres in their respective sector.

Box 4: Devolved VET institutions in Ukraine

In Ukraine, LRAs are responsible for implementing the government's education policy and ensuring the quality of education in their areas. Under the 2025 Law on Vocational Education, tripartite VET Councils are to be established in each of the twenty-four oblasts consisting of representatives of public authorities, employers and VET institutions. Their mandate is to develop proposals for optimising the regional network of VET institutions and to provide recommendations ensuring that training programmes correspond to labour market needs. This mechanism is designed to ensure that the business sector has a strong influence on regional education policy.

In contrast, in **Serbia**, it is considered that the system is rather centralised, and that the government does not pay sufficient attention to the needs of domestic SMEs which make up the largest part of the Serbian economy and are members of the Serbian Employers' Association.[8] There, the focus is directed more towards the needs of large multinational companies for whom the system of dual education has mainly been designed (see below).

3. Partnerships for the planning and delivery of WBL

Partnerships for VET exist at both the national level and the micro level of individual companies. They engage the private sector with the education sector in public-private partnerships (PPPs). Such partnerships differ in the design of their legal framework and cooperation structures, in the role of the social partners, in the degree of financial participation by different stakeholder groups, and in partners' institutional capacity to manage PPPs. Partnerships also differ in form depending upon whether they are intended for large firms (which may be multinational enterprises) or domestic small and medium sized enterprises (SMEs). Large firms may have their own in-house training capacity or the capacity to offer a dedicated mentor to provide learning experiences for the students in conformity with their VET curricula. In contrast, SMEs often lack effective training capacity, especially in small firms. To overcome this deficiency some governments have established regional training centres, COVEs, or multifunctional training centres. Interests may also differ. For example, while the education sector may seek an inclusive system that maximises access to VET, businesses may seek a more competitive system in which they can select the best candidates for

[7] Kurian, M. (2025). Implementation and challenges of multi-level governance in the Western Balkans. SIGMA Papers, No. 75, Paris: OECD Publishing.
[8] Interview, Serbian Employers' Association, December 2025.

the job. Balancing these competing interests and finding common solutions is a governance challenge.[9]

3.1 Public-private partnerships

Public-private partnerships are joint initiatives in the field of VET that combine resources from the public and private sectors based on the principles of complementarity and risk sharing.[10] They formalise a relationship between the VET provider and the partner company. They can improve the quality of provision by supplementing learning at the workplace, responsiveness to labour market requirements by involving professionals in curriculum design and assessment, and increase funding for VET providers by attracting investments from the private sector (e.g., in constructing new school buildings). A key issue in the design of PPPs is the balance of power and influence between the government, the private investor, and the VET provider organisation. PPPs usually starts due to a skill shortage challenge, and evolve over time as partners develop mutual trust. Well-structured PPPs may enable a closer alignment between training provision and labour market needs. Embedding company partners within the VET provider through a multistakeholder board of trustees or supervisory board can foster a deeper level of engagement and create a stronger sense of ownership and commitment to outcomes.

Box 5: PPPs in Türkiye

In Türkiye, an innovative governance model using PPPs has been adopted. There, **Organised Industrial Zones (OIZs)** facilitate PPPs between schools, universities and businesses, ensuring that curricula are tailored to labour market needs. Programmes include state-subsidised wages for apprentices in manufacturing and in green and digital skills. **Training Centres** within or near OIZs provide practical training to prepare students for specific trades. Vocational education contact offices in OIZs support coordination between education and industry. Students attend theoretical education for one or two days a week and receive practical training at workplaces for three or four days a week. Students in the 9th, 10th and 11th grade receive at least 30% of the minimum wage and 12th grade students get at least 50% of the minimum wage during their education. The ELMAS Programme has established in 13 Vocational and Technical Anatolian High Schools (VTAHs) located in OIZs or cooperating with OIZs in the provinces of Ankara, Bursa, Kocaeli, Tekirdağ, İzmir, İstanbul, Konya, Kayseri, Manisa, Gaziantep, Eskişehir, and Adana.[11] Industry and sector representatives can participate in the governance of vocational and technical education institutions only where such schools are sector-integrated and officially designated as project schools. At present, however, no school of this kind has been granted project school status.

PPPs are likely to achieve benefits for VET institutions and their students only if additional resources (e.g., finance, infrastructure, educational equipment, teacher training) are provided by the private partner and where the risks and benefits of the venture are equitably shared between the partners involved (the private partner is not shielded from losses due to weak performance, and teaching quality is effectively monitored by the public partner, and access to vulnerable groups or less able students is assured).

[9] Mende, C., Oswald-Egg, M. E., & Caves, K. (2025). Vocational education and training (VET) system governance: a systematic literature review. Journal of Vocational Education & Training, 77(5), 1419–1453

[10] According to a recent ETF report, “PPPs for skills development 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, 2020: 24). PPPs may be observed at nation, sectoral or school level. This definition contrasts with the traditional definition related to private participation in public sector infrastructure investments.

[11] Eurydice online outline on national reforms in vocational education and training in Türkiye.

Box 6: Supervisory Boards in Ukraine[12]

An example of a successful approach to PPPs in the CCs is provided by a recent initiative **in Ukraine**. The new Law of Ukraine "On Vocational Education" (adopted August 2025) modernises the VET system by granting institutions financial and administrative autonomy and enabling them to act as non-profit entities. The law strengthens partnerships between the VET and business sectors.[13] VET institutions engage in dual education through a PPP structure, enabling them to achieve financial and managerial autonomy. VET institutions with an average annual enrolment of over 300 students are governed through a **Supervisory Board**. The Supervisory Boards' powers include strategic planning, academic oversight, performance management and resource development. This radical model of dual education transforms the employers' role from passive partnership into active participation in VET governance so curricula can be updated in cooperation with the business partners. It enables private businesses to identify and train their future employees through certified training courses on the basis of an employment contract between learner and employer that combines the rights and responsibilities of learners with comprehensive occupational health and safety measures. Financing of VET institutions will be carried out through formula-based funding linked to performance indicators, ensuring resources flow to institutions delivering results, while they may also attract funding from other sources including by providing commercial services. By the start of 2026, over 170 VET institutions participated in dual VET programmes with more than 1,000 partner enterprises collectively engaging more than 13,000 students in dual VET programmes.

PPPs can also be established in the tertiary education sector through university-business collaboration initiatives.

Box 7: University-Business collaboration in North Macedonia[14]

In North Macedonia, two research institutes and the engineering faculty in Skopje (IECE, CEIM and Civil Engineering Faculty) have joined together to create a collaborative innovation project (CO-IN© Model) to strengthen the eco-innovation system and supporting the establishment of learning organisations. The CO-IN model supports knowledge exchange between universities and industry through collaborative PhD training programmes along with a mentoring programme and knowledge transfer in fields such as the circular economy. The approach has resulted in building an innovation ecosystem through collaboration and strategic partnerships; generated added value from education and research by creating useful knowledge; succeeded by adopting a holistic approach to solving complex, open and connected problems.

3.2 Partnerships between VET schools and large multinational companies

A key driver of economic growth in some of the CCs has been their success in attracting foreign direct investment (FDI), especially in the Western Balkans. The benefits of FDI include the transfer of technology, managerial know-how and integration into global supply chains. Multinational companies (MNCs), dissatisfied with the level and type of skills provided by VET schools have developed partnerships with VET schools in various forms of dual education. This approach was first tried in **Serbia** leading to the adoption of a Law on Dual Education in 2017, followed by similar laws in **North Macedonia** in December 2024 and **Ukraine** in 2025. **Moldova** is continuing a

[12] Presentation by Oksana Rumovska, Ministry of Education and Science of Ukraine, to GLAD Network meeting, 22nd January 2026

[13] The passage of the law unlocked €350m in funding for VET reforms and reconstruction under the Ukraine Facility. It is expected that by August 2026, 84 pieces of secondary legislation will have been passed to fully operationalise the new Law, creating a comprehensive regulatory framework.

[14] Presentation by Prof. Dr. Angelina Taneva-Veshoska, IECE, to GLAD Network meeting, 24th November 2025

gradual introduction of dual education. **Albania's** dual education model of 2024 has been piloted in ten VET schools across six regions covering seven new dual qualifications involving 203 students in 114 partner companies. From September 2025 it is expanding from 10 pilot schools to a national system.

Box 8: Dual education in Serbia

Serbia is a leader among candidate countries in implementing dual education following the 2017 Law on Dual Education law, updated in 2023. The law was introduced with the assistance of the German, Austrian and Swiss development agencies. The law empowers the Chamber of Commerce to accredit participating training companies, ensuring that they provide a certified training environment, based on a contract signed between the school and the employer and the employer and the student. It allows from 20% to 80% of learning hours to occur in the work environment, giving "Strategic Investors" the legal right to shape the workforce to their specific technical needs while remaining under the state's educational umbrella. Students in dual education must be paid up to 70% of the minimum wage by the company. The current situation is that about 1,200 companies are involved in dual education and 22,000 students have participated in it since its introduction.[15] Almost a quarter of the firms participating in the dual education programme are multinational companies. Serbia has followed this up by introducing a Law on the Dual Model of Studies in Higher Education in 2019.

Large MNCs have an incentive to become further involved in dual education systems following the implementation of the global minimum profit tax requirement facilitated by the OECD. This ensures that all MNCs pay a minimum 15% profit tax wherever their operations take place. If a tax break is given to attract foreign investment, the tax difference can be charged in the home country. To offset this, MNCs can receive subsidies for training dual education students in "deficit" occupations. Measures like this have incentivised MNCs in some CCs to increase their expenditure on workforce training associated with dual education programmes and other forms of WBL opportunities for student trainees and apprentices.

Box 9: Partnership between a VET school and an MNC in Serbia[16]

In 2020 the Technical School in Ruma became involved in a project on robotics on the initiative of a teacher at the school and a local IT company. In 2025, the multinational company *Haitian Machinery Ruma d.o.o.* came to Ruma, in part because they needed professional profiles that the Technical School in Ruma offered. One of the educational profiles was adapted to the specific needs of this company. Haitian is the world's largest manufacturer of CNC plastic injection molding machines, with an annual production of over 35,000 machines. It operates nine factories in China and another nine major logistics centers worldwide. In 2025, Haitian launched production in its largest factory outside of China, located in Ruma. In cooperation with the Office for Dual Education the profile of *industrial mechanic* was accredited and adjusted to meet the company's needs. In August 2025, the company began operations and now employs around 200 people with plans to significantly increase that number in the future. The local government has been supportive and three years ago purchased 15 high-performance computers for the school and also renovated the school building.

There are some potential drawbacks, however. Students engaged in these dual VET programmes are trained in occupations that are highly specific to the needs of the multinational partner. While

[15] ETF (2025) Monitoring the VET recommendation and the Osnabrück Declaration Serbia, and presentation of the Serbian Employers' Association, GLAD online workshop 22.09.2025.

[16] Presentation by Jelena Budimčević, Serbian Employers' Association, to GLAD Network meeting, 22nd September 2025.

the students receive high-quality training in specific fields, they risk not developing transferable skills should their subsequent employment in the multinational come to an end, which may well happen if the company closes down and moves on to other countries with lower labour costs. Consequently, governments should ensure that the provision of transferable skills is built into the dual education laws and agreements, or that the training provided is supplemented by in-school training in transferable skills.

3.3 Partnerships between VET schools and domestic SMEs

Providing WBL opportunities to young learners can be a problem for SMEs, which often lack the mentoring capacity in terms of qualified trainers to provide effective in-work training to students engaged in WBL, whether in formal dual education systems or through traditional work-experience programmes. SMEs also face challenges in financing WBL activities, in paying students or in allocating resources for training activities.[17] Moreover, SMEs may be reluctant to offer training if there is a risk that their trainees are poached by rival firms. Finally, in small municipalities the lower number of companies risks limiting even further the access of a significant portion of youth from dual education opportunities."

To deal with this issue, some CCs have established **regional training centres**, multifunctional centres, Centres of Vocational Excellence (CoVEs) or other programmes to provide the capacity on a collective basis that individual SMEs lack. These institutions provide training in collaboration with local businesses to ensure that training is relevant to the current business needs and standards. They enable students to receive high-quality VET instruction while also carrying out WBL in local SMEs. **Serbia** has established a number of Training Centres to provide training in various sectors using modern equipment; however, the project financing they receive is uncertain, and it may sometimes be better to provide the training directly in a company.[18] The **Montenegro** Education Strategy 2025-2035 has Operational Objective 1.1.3 "…securing greater interest among SMEs for the provision of practical training". This Objective is to be secured by establishing regional centres of excellence in VET. **Moldova** established twelve Centres of Vocational Excellence each specialised in a core sector. Their refurbishment and mandate to cooperate with companies in the sector have increased their attractiveness for students and families. Vocational training centres have also been developed **in Albania** where Multifunctional Training Centres offer retraining and upskilling for adults in addition to providing initial VET courses.

SMEs also lack the **financial resources** to take on dual education students as trainees. The Montenegro Education Strategy 2025-2035 Operational Objective 1.1.3 "…securing greater interest among SMEs for the provision of practical training" This Objective is to be secured by establishing a Support Fund for Dual Education to support the employment of students following their WBL with an SME.

Box 10: Support Fund for Dual Education, Montenegro[19]

A **Fund for the Support of Dual Education** has been established as a key instrument for the development of dual education in Montenegro. The Fund allocates resources to support students, employers and instructors of practical education, creating a suitable environment for integrating students into the labour market. The Fund has a budget of €100,000 plus €20,000 from the Chamber of Commerce. The Ministry has adopted a Rulebook on the detailed conditions, amounts,

[17] European Commission (2025b) Commission Staff Working Document Serbia 2025 Report, Brussels, 4.11.2025 SWD (2025) 755 final.

[18] Interview with Serbian Employers' Association, December 2025.

[19] Presentation by Marko Vuksanović, Ministry of Education, Science and Innovation, Montenegro, to GLAD Network meeting, 17th February 2026.

methods and procedures for the allocation of funds. Individual training contracts cover travel and meal costs. There are 35 rewards for the best students of €500 each. It supports employers who take on trainees by covering the costs of trainers, mentors, and equipment costs. Most significantly, employers receive additional financial support if they employ three or more dual education students with an open-ended employment contract at the end of their training.

In the Western Balkans as a whole, the **Regional Challenge Fund**, implemented by KfW, finances partnerships for "cooperative education" (i.e., dual education) in the Western Balkans. Over three years by 2024 it had initiated 99 projects with 185 programmes enabling 528 enterprises to provide dual education places for 4,200 students per year, mobilising €2.6m in private capital alongside €44m in donor funding.

In an innovation approach to financing WBL, Albania has adopted a "quota levy" system where companies pay into a fund that finances skills training. Such a system of **training levies** was also recommended in the GLAD network presentation on VET in Montenegro, through which a percentage contribution would be levied on all employers over a certain size, in order to scale up the amount of funding available to support apprenticeships in eligible companies and their use of regional training centres for their trainees.

4. Conclusions

Overall, VET reforms have gained momentum in most of the CCs and WBL opportunities have expanded with the introduction of dual education models. Key challenges arise in relation to the design of the institutional framework and in the design of partnership arrangements for WBL between VET institutions and the business sector. Several innovative solutions have been developed in response to these challenges.

- Coordination between different **ministries** and between different levels of government can be addressed by establishing specialised government Offices that coordinate across specific policy areas. For example, Serbia has established and **Office for Dual Education** to deal with this issue.
- Another solution to the coordination problem has been to set up arms-length VET **agencies** although these sometimes experience capacity constraints, weaknesses in their ability to monitor the performance and quality of private VET providers, and issues around maintaining their independence from political pressure. Due to weaknesses observed in the functioning of some such agencies, GLAD members could reconsider the relative merits of arm-length Agencies versus inter-ministerial Offices or similar coordinating bodies within the institutions of government.
- Advisory **VET Councils** provide expert advice for the policymakers, based on the EU principles of social dialogue, involving the social partners (business, trade unions) in addition to sector experts. Successful **Sector Skills Councils** have been established in Albania, Moldova and Serbia. Employers should have a formal seat on these Councils to ensure that curricula and funding match labour market needs. Some countries report insufficient resourcing of Sector Skills Councils which reduces capacity to analyse and anticipate skills needs.

A further set of key solutions have been identified in relation to partnerships for VET:

- Several innovative **public-private partnerships** have been established. For example, in Ukraine these have included company representatives in schools boards. In North Macedonia this has extended to partnerships between universities and industry through joint research degree programmes. Such arrangements could be considered by other members of the GLAD network

- In **dual education** with MNCs, students receive high quality training in specific fields related to industry-specific skills. Serbia has been a leader in this field followed by several other CCs. In Serbia, almost a quarter of participating companies are MNCs, and students are paid up to 70% of the minimum wage by the company. Fiscal support to such MNCs could be granted on condition that transferable skills are taught alongside company-specific skills.
- SMEs often lack the mentoring resource capacity to provide effective training to dual education students. To deal with this some CCs have established **regional training centres** where students receive high quality VET instruction while also carrying out WBL in local SMEs. The mediation of Chambers and regional business centres is also proving effective. These approaches could be more widely diffused.
- SMEs may also lack the **financial capacity** to provide WBL opportunities on their premises. Montenegro has set up a dedicated Fund to support dual education, also subsidising the employment of students after their training is completed. Albania has established a training levy system. These funds and levy systems could be expanded and more widely adopted.
- SMEs represent the vast majority of enterprises in CCs, hence additional instruments should be explored to expand WBL opportunities based on partnership. Examples include: web portals to display legal provisions and pre-requisites, connect enterprises, schools and students, as well as showcase successful practices. And, youth policies steering through local councils comprising public authorities, public employment services (PES), employer and trade union organisations, chambers of commerce and industry, and youth organisations that share information, build synergy and progressively create integration among a range of services addressed to young people.

5. Bibliography

ETF (2020). *Public–Private Partnerships for Skills Development: A Governance Perspective (Part I Thematic Overview)*. Turin: European Training Foundation

ETF (2021). *Albania VET Governance: Country Profile*. Turin: European Training Foundation

ETF (2022). *Country Brief: Serbia*. Integrated monitoring process of the EU Council Recommendations on VET and the Osnabruck Declaration. Turin: European Training Foundation.

ETF (2025a) *GLAD Newsletter*, July 2025

ETF (2025b) *GLAD Newsletter*, September 2025

ETF (2025c) *GLAD Newsletter*, December 2025

ETF (2025d) *Monitoring the VET recommendation and the Osnabrück Declaration Serbia*.

European Commission (2020). *Osnabrück Declaration*. EU2020DE: German Presidency of the Council of the European Union.

European Commission (2025) *Register of Commission Expert Groups and Other Similar Entitles – GROUP X01803 – Advisory Committee on Vocational Training*.

European Commission (2025) *The Union of Skills*. Brussels, 5.3.2025 COM(2025) final

European Commission (2025). *Herning Declaration*. EU2025DK: Danish Presidency of the Council of the European Union.

European Commission (2025b) *Commission Staff Working Document Serbia 2025 Report*, Brussels, 4.11.2025 SWD (2025) 755 final.

European Council (2020). *Council Recommendation of 24 November 2020 on vocational education and training (VET) for sustainable competitiveness, social fairness and resilience* (2020/C 417/01).

European Union (2024). *Regulation (EU) 2024/1449 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 14 May 2024 on establishing the Reform and Growth Facility for the Western Balkans*

EURYDICE (2025). *Country profiles on administration and governance, and national reforms in education.*

Kurian, M. (2025). “Implementation and challenges of multi-level governance in the Western Balkans”. *SIGMA Papers, No. 75*, Paris: OECD Publishing.

Mende, C., Oswald-Egg, M. E., & Caves, K. (2025). Vocational education and training (VET) system governance: a systematic literature review. *Journal of Vocational Education & Training*, 77(5), 1419–1453.

Ministry of Education, Science and Innovation (2025) *Education Reform Strategy 2025-2035* (Montenegro).

OECD (2024). *Inter-municipal co-operation in the Western Balkans*. SIGMA Papers, No. 70, Paris: OECD Publishing.

RCC (2025). Regional Overview of Western Balkan Six Regarding the European Pillar of Social Rights. Sarajevo: Regional Cooperation Council.

Vági, P. & Kasemets, K. (2017). “Functioning of the centres of government in the Western Balkans”. *SIGMA Papers, No. 53*. Paris: OECD Publishing