





involve

Involving social partners in dual VET governance: exploring the contribution of social partners in the design, renewal and implementation of dual VET

NEWSLETTER No. 3 | Available languages    

Research objectives and country coverage

INVOLVE project has two main research objectives. First, it aims to analyse the degree of social partners' integration and participation in the governance of dual VET systems. Second, it aims to develop national scenarios on how to establish integrative governance structures of dual VET systems.

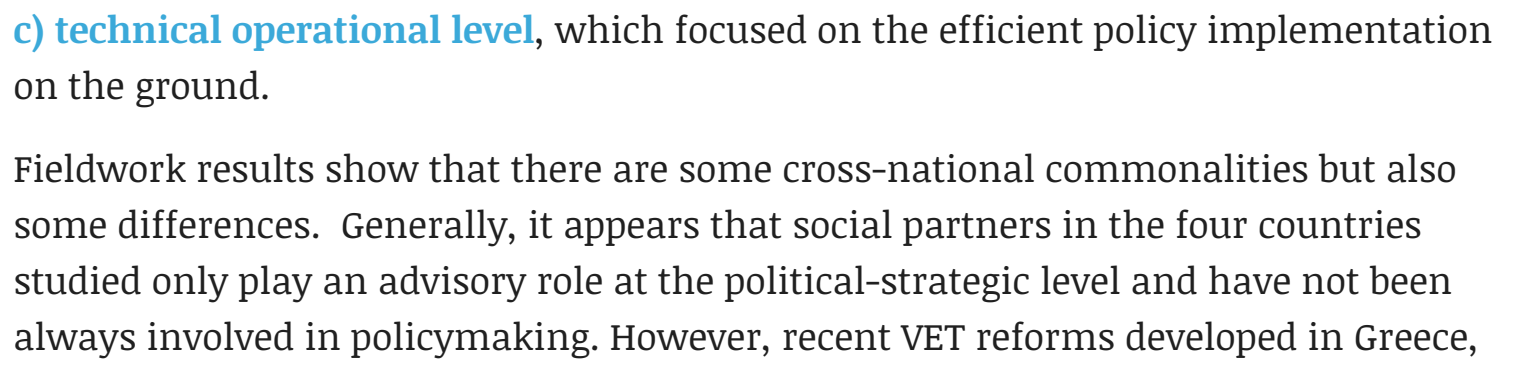
The project focuses on four countries that have recently developed projects of dual systems of VET or are attempting to strengthen, reinforce or improve dual VET systems and represent models of industrial relations where social partners play a comparatively low institutionalised role in policy making, namely Spain, Greece and Portugal (State centred' model) and Poland (Mixed' or 'Transitional' model).

Dual VET programmes identified in Greece, Portugal Poland and Spain

As was explained in the [second newsletter](#), the four countries studied in the INVOLVE project are currently implementing different VET programmes which can be classified as dual VET or apprenticeship schemes based on international criteria (e.g., Cedefop European database on apprenticeship schemes) and national definitions. However, existing dual VET programmes in the four countries studies greatly differ regarding different dimensions such as minimum amount of in-company training (which varies from 80% in some Greek programmes to only 33% in Spain) or the legal relationship between the employer and the learner (employment contract in Poland, apprenticeship contract in Greece, Portugal and Spain, internships in Spain).

Fieldwork results

From January to September 2021, the research team conducted the fieldwork in the four countries studied. Fieldwork has included, first, semi-structured interviews conducted with state/government authorities and social partners involved at different governance levels. Second, mini-case studies were conducted studding initiatives of cooperation and coordination between companies, VET schools/training centres and trade unions at company level (working committees, etc.) aiming to implement a dual VET scheme. The fieldwork results were presented in the second project scientific meeting. This [meeting](#) was organised by the Institute of Public Affairs (IPA) from Poland and was held virtually.



In order to analyse social partners integration in dual VET governance, INVOLVE project distinguishes the three VET governance levels analysed by Emmenegger and Seitzl (2020), namely:

- a) **political-strategic**, where stakeholders make decisions on the system's long-term developments in need of political legitimisation;
- b) **technical-strategic level**, which is equally concerned with system's long-term developments but involve technical specialists as decisions rely on expert knowledge;
- c) **technical operational level**, which focused on the efficient policy implementation on the ground.

Fieldwork results show that there are some cross-national commonalities but also some differences. Generally, it appears that social partners in the four countries studied only play an advisory role at the political-strategic level and have not been always involved in policymaking. However, recent VET reforms developed in Greece, Portugal and Spain have been the result of social dialogue processes. Main differences in VET governance are identified at the technical-strategic and, even more pronounced, at the technical operational level. At these levels, research also shows that employer organisations and trade unions are not involved in an equal footing, with trade unions in some cases being less involved.



Social partners' involvement in the decision-making at the political-strategic level

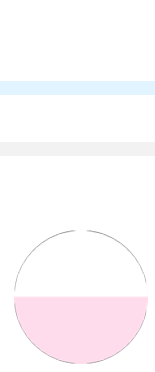
In the four countries social partners do not always participate in the decision-making at the political-strategic level. Although trade unions and employer organisations play a role at this level through their participation in different tripartite Institutions where VET policies are formally discussed, social partners regret that their involvement does not generally go beyond an advisory role. Moreover, in some cases such as **Poland**, social partners express concern about a dominant approach to policymaking on VET based on unilateral decisions or arbitrariness in taking into account the opinions of relevant social partners. In **Spain** too, social partners criticised that regulatory framework on dual VET approved in 2012 was unilaterally set up by the government. However, in **Greece, Portugal and Spain** recent VET policy reforms which are expected to have an impact on the long-term developments of VET systems have been partly agreed with the social partners.



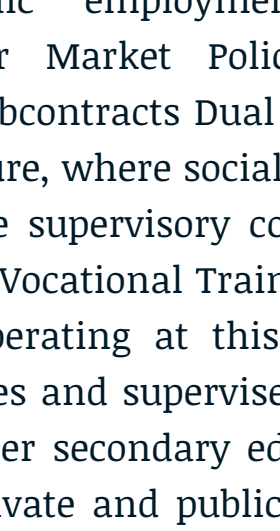
In **Greece**, the government has engaged trade unions and employer organisations in the design of the new 'National System of Vocational Education, Training and Lifelong Learning', which was enacted in December 2020, through formal and informal consultation processes. Under the new framework, the Central Council for Vocational Education and Training (KSEEEK) has become the key governance structure at national/cross-sectoral level. The mission of this body, where social partners are formally represented, is to make proposals and recommendations to the Minister of Education concerning general VET policies, including life-long-learning policies. Thus, social partners will continue having a formal advisory role. While social partners provided an overall positive assessment of this body, some concerns were raised on the extent to which it can tend to marginalize the interest on apprenticeships system, given its broader scope of competences compared to previous specialised institutions dealing exclusively with apprenticeship system (e.g., the National Coordinating Body for Apprenticeship, ESOM).



In **Spain**, legal framework for dual VET was unilaterally approved by the Spanish government in 2012. Although social partners have different views on some aspects such as the status of apprenticeships, both trade unions and employer organisations share a critical view of the general framework introduced in 2012. They criticise the territorial fragmentation of the dual VET system, with different regional models coexisting; the lack of integration of the different training systems and the absence of coordination among the various bodies having competences on VET policies; and the obstacles they face to participate in a meaningful way at different governance levels in the framework of existing institutions (e.g., General Council of Vocational Education and Training, etc.). In this context, a newly social dialogue table was set up to discuss a new law on VET which aimed to reinforce dual VET system and integrate the VET of the educational system and the VET for employment, among other objectives. The law was approved in the Spanish parliament on the 16th of December of 2021. Overall, social partners positively assess the consultation process even if the new law is not the result of a tripartite agreement. They also expect that the new law will contribute to tackle some of the existing problems and that will enhance their role in the governance at different levels. However, that assessment was expressed with some caution, considering that the law has still to be implemented and developed through complementary regulatory provisions.



In **Portugal**, social partners represented in the Permanent Commission for Social Conciliation (CPCS) concluded the "New Agreement for Vocational Training and Qualifications" on the 28th of July of 2021. One outcome of this agreement which was positively assessed by the social partners is the creation of the qualification of level V in the Apprenticeship courses, as it can contribute to improve the image and social perception of this educational path. Moreover, the agreement aims to improve the social partners' involvement in the governance of VET. To this aim, it foresees the creation of a tripartite working group which will be responsible of preparing the timetable and action plan for the implementation of the agreement. Moreover, it is contemplated that the agreement will be annually discussed and evaluated in the Standing Committee for Social Dialogue and in the Permanent Committee of Social Conciliation. Nevertheless, trade unions' demands to improve and enhance their role in enforcing training conditions of apprenticeships were excluded from the agreement.



Social partners' involvement in the technical-strategic level

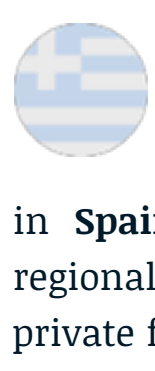
At *technical strategic* level, only in **Poland** social partners are not represented in most important bodies operating at this level. In **Greece, Portugal and Spain**, trade unions and employer organisations are formally represented on relevant technical bodies although some concerns were raised, in some cases, about the quality of their involvement.



In **Greece**, new institutions have been recently created at this level through the new 'National System of Vocational Education, Training and Lifelong Learning' bill. First, the Boards for Connection with Production and Labour Market (SSPAE), is responsible for submitting proposals and suggestion to the Central Board for Vocational Education and Training (KSEEEK) for issues of VET, and in particular, for the domains and specializations that have to be available at the public institutions for Vocational Training (IEK), Post-Secondary Apprenticeship Programme, (EPAL), OAEED Vocational Apprenticeship Schools, as well as special courses. The boards operate at regional level, with the purpose of decentralizing the governance system for VET, and integrates representatives from all the apprenticeship systems, social partners and local administration bodies. SSPAE was about to have (or already had, depending on the region) their first meeting when the fieldwork was conducted. Most of the interviews believe that SSPAE constitutes a positive initiative. However, some concerns were also expressed regarding its future impact on apprenticeships because of several factors (e.g., lack of capacity among the involved parties, non-periodical operation, not precise identification of roles and fields of intervention, etc.). In addition, the new legal framework has established the Central Scientific Committee (KEE), which is responsible for providing scientific research, study and validation for issues of improving the quality and efficiency of VET and Lifelong Learning programs. Trade unions and employer organisations acknowledged the importance of this new institution but criticised their lack of representation and participation. To this regard, it was highlighted that most social partners operate research institutes which dispose great technical expertise and, as such, could contribute to the effective operation of KEE.



In **Poland**, social partners are not represented in the Institute of Educational Research (IBE) and the Educational Development Centre (ORE), which are the most relevant institutions within this governance level. The IBE is supervised by the Ministry of National Education and conducts interdisciplinary research concerning the functioning and effectiveness of the education and training system. This body was also responsible for developing the Integrated Qualifications System. The ORE is a national teacher training institution undertaking and implementing activities to improve the quality of education in accordance with the state education policy in the field of general education and upbringing. ORE is also in charge of developing the core curricula of VET programmes, in cooperation with various entities, sometimes selected through a competition, that provide substantive input related to the specificity of a given profession. Regarding this task, fieldwork found that at least one sectoral business organisation from the transport sector, in cooperation with some other local actors, has been involved in this process, contributing to restore a qualification and occupation in the VET system and supporting the ORE in development its core curriculum. Additionally, several other social dialogue organisations in different sectors were involved at least in providing opinions on new professions and their core curricula added to the VET classification of occupations in recent years.



In **Portugal**, two main institutions were identified at this level. First, the Institute for Employment and Vocational Training (IEFP), which is the national public employment services responsible for implementing Active Labour Market Policies. The IEFP regulates the apprenticeship system and subcontracts dual VET course training. IEFP has a tripartite management structure, where social partners are represented in the Board of Directors and in the supervisory committee. Second, the National Agency for Qualifications and Vocational Training (ANQEP), which is the most important VET institution operating at this governance level. The ANQEP supports, coordinates, regulates and supervises alternating VET (school-based VET system at lower and upper secondary education level) and the training policies for adults in both private and public VET schools. This body is also responsible for managing the National Catalogue of Qualifications, which is updated by Sectoral Councils for Qualifications (CSQ) constituted by specialists chosen by competent authorities, trade unions, employer organisations, reference companies and training providers. Social partners and other entities and stakeholders are represented in the General Council of ANQEP, whose composition was updated in 2020. The General Council meets two times a year. Overall, social partners were critical on their involvement in this body. They consider that they tend to be merely informed about documents already prepared by the government without their inputs. They see their involvement in the CSQ as more productive. However, they criticised that the updating of the National Catalogue of Qualifications is not quick and flexible enough to meet labour market needs.



In **Spain**, the National Institute of Vocational Qualifications (INCUAL) is the most important institution at this level. INCUAL is the technical body of the General Council on Vocational Education and Training (CGFP), where the social partners are represented. INCUAL is in charge of defining, elaborating and updating the National Catalogue of Qualifications. It monitors qualitative and quantitative changes in the labour market by means of a Professional Observatory that publish, on a biannual basis, "sectoral reports". In addition, the INCUAL organises and directs the working groups that design the professional qualifications. Trade unions and employer organisations are partly involved in this technical process aimed at designing the professional qualifications. They may participate directly in the assessment of a professional qualifications or indirectly, by appointing an expert to assist in the definition of qualifications. Fieldwork results show a general positive assessment on the role they play in this task. However, as found in Portugal, they expressed concern that the updating process is not quick enough to meet labour market needs. They also noted the lack of resources that the social partners currently have to support the INCUAL in this task. Similar technical bodies operate at the regional government level (Comunidades Autónomas). In some regions fieldwork showed that employer organisations played a more active role than trade unions in the process of developing qualifications.



Social partners' involvement in the technical-operational level

Fieldwork research shows that in **Poland** and **Portugal** trade unions and/or employer organisations play a formal role at *technical operational* level, participating in the delivery and evaluation of training.

In **Poland**, only employer organisations are involved at this level. This includes the guilds of crafts that belong to regional chambers of crafts, subject to an organisation representative at the national level, which is the Polish Craft Association (ZRP). Guilds, with the support of chambers of crafts, supervise craft companies that provide professional training for juvenile workers under the dual scheme of vocational training. They also provide support to these companies, promote vocational education among young people, and support students. Guilds also participate in the evaluation of training outcomes related to the specific title of journeyman or master.

In **Portugal**, employer organisations and trade unions can manage VET private centres developing apprenticeships programmes, under protocol with IEFP (protocol centres). They can also manage school-based VET schools.

In **Greece** and **Spain**, the formal role played by social partners at this governance level is less developed and it is not clearly defined in the regulation. However, in **Spain** different cooperation initiatives are developed at national and regional/local level, involving different actors such as local administrations, private foundations, training centres, trade unions, employer organisations or chamber of commerce. Besides, VET regulation in some regions such as Catalonia confers employer organisations competences to support Small and Medium Enterprises (SME) in the provision of in-company training. In addition, new VET regulation foresees to reinforce the role of intermediate organisations to support the engagement of companies in dual VET schemes.

Planning and next steps

INVOLVE project will end in May 2022

During the first half of 2022, the project team will publish the fieldwork reports, the **scenario reports** and the **comparative report**. In addition, project results will be disseminated through a final conference.

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