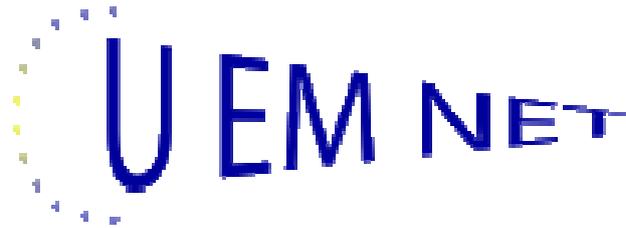




Executive Agency, Education, Audiovisual and Culture



EU.EM.NET: European systematic approach for employers' engagement to anticipate skills requirements and support quality assurance (QA) in VET

Final Report

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Executive Summary

The EU.EM.NET project was concerned with the challenges in the Tourism and Hospitality (T&H) sector that have placed new demands on the development and acquisition of the skills necessary in the sector workforce. To meet these challenges it was argued by the project application that it was imperative to improve not only the quality of skills provision, but also the co-operation between VET institutions or organisations providing learning opportunities, SMEs, social partners and other relevant bodies throughout Europe in the process of skills forecasting and improving VET quality – in which employers would have a key role to play.

The project responded to a perceived lack of engagement by employers in shaping the available education and training provision relating to the T&H sector. This was seen as a missed opportunity and can lead to a mismatch between the human resources produced by the national education systems and the human resources needed by the employers.

The EU.EM.NET project partners represent employers, vocational schools and training organisations, research centres and development organisations and together have established a consortium capable of developing and implementing the overall aim of the project, which was to create a European systematic approach for employers' engagement to anticipate skills requirements and support quality assurance in vocational education and training (VET) in the tourism and hospitality sector. The network is coordinated by Regional Development Agency Senec-Pezinok from Bratislava, Slovakia. Its membership was drawn from thirteen partners from nine countries (Austria, Bulgaria, Croatia, Luxembourg, Romania, Slovakia, the FYR Macedonia, Turkey, the United Kingdom).

The overall aim of the project was to design a European systematic approach for employer engagement (in the Tourism and Hospitality sector), in order to anticipate skills requirements and support quality assurance in VET through bringing key actors into the EU.EM.NET Network. The rationale was that the VET sector could then better respond to employers needs, thereby increasing competitiveness, which were seen as vital given current economic pressures.

In order to achieve the overarching aim, the specific project objectives were cited as:

- a) To raise awareness of the necessity of employers' engagement in the process of detection of skills anticipation requirements and improving the quality in VET;
- b) To develop a core methodology for engagement of employers in the process of anticipating skills requirements and to pilot in tourism and hospitality sector;
- c) Develop quality indicators for employers engagement with reference to the EQARFVET;
- d) To test and ensure the valorisation of the core methodology within the established network and open opportunity for the network enlargement;

- e) To elaborate countries Road Map to respond to the identified skills requirements in the sector;
- f) To establish a European network of VET actors bridging employers and educators and prepare a set of measures for its sustainability (existence beyond the project scope).

In order to achieve its objectives EU.EM.NET set out a specific work plan, which included a number of sequenced and cross-cutting stages of development through the implementation of work packages. The work began with an analysis of the 'state of play' in the Tourism and Hospitality sector in each partner country, which resulted in a synthesis report, and a set of recommendations. This then informed the development of a European core methodology along with quality indicators. The core methodology was piloted, the results analysed and the methodology was adapted.

The work packages in EU.EM.NET were as follows:

- 1) Project Management
- 2) Analysis of the State of Play
- 3) Development of a European Core Methodology and Quality Indicators
- 4) Piloting the Core Methodology
- 5) Piloting Analysis, Evaluation and Adjustment of Core Methodology
- 6) Dissemination
- 7) Exploitation, Road Map and EU.EM.NET Sustainability
- 8) Quality Assurance, Evaluation and Monitoring.

The deliverables of the project – including a Final Package that is intended to assist all parties interested to use the developed methodology and summarizes the efforts in a user-friendly way. Many of the project products were translated to partners' languages, so they are available in English, Bulgarian, Croatian, German, Macedonian, Romanian, Slovak, and Turkish.

More information is available at the project website www.futureskills.eu.

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1. Project Objectives

The project responded to a perceived lack of engagement by employers in shaping the available education and training provision relating to the Tourism and Hospitality (T&H) sector. This was seen as a missed opportunity and can lead to a mismatch between the human resources produced by the national education systems and the human resources needed by the employers.

The EU.EM.NET project was concerned with the challenges in the T & H sector that have placed new demands on the development and acquisition of the skills necessary in the sector workforce. To meet these challenges it was argued by the project application that it was imperative to improve not only the quality of skills provision, but also the co-operation between VET institutions or organisations providing learning opportunities, SMEs, social partners and other relevant bodies throughout Europe in the process of skills forecasting and improving VET quality – in which employers would have a key role to play.

The EU.EM.NET project partners represent employers, vocational schools and training organisations, research centres and development organisations and together have established a consortium capable of developing and implementing the overall aim of the project, which was to create a European systematic approach for employers' engagement to anticipate skills requirements and support quality assurance in vocational education and training (VET) in the tourism and hospitality sector.

As a Development of Innovation Leonardo da Vinci Network, the project sought to address the issue of innovation in a form of a developed new European Core Methodology (ECM). This methodology was to be concerned with the effective and on-going engagement of employers in the process of anticipating skills requirements in the T&H sector including the development of quality indicators for employer engagement with reference to EQARFVET based on original learning approach & practices towards the present situation - either in relation to the existing practices at European level and identified weaknesses, needs and challenges or in relation to the content of the core methodology planned to address the needs of both end-users and policy-oriented stakeholders. In addition, the project novelty related to the nature of the network that was innovative itself in terms of model, content and perspectives to enlarge and sustain.

The overall aim of the project was to design a European systematic approach for employer engagement (in the Tourism and Hospitality sector), in order to anticipate skills requirements and support quality assurance in VET through bringing key actors into the EU.EM.NET Network. The rationale was that the VET sector could then better respond to employers needs, thereby increasing competitiveness, which were seen as vital given current economic pressures.

In order to achieve the overarching aim, the specific project objectives were cited as:

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- d. To test and ensure the valorisation of the core methodology within the established network and open opportunity for the network enlargement;
- e. To elaborate countries Road Map to respond to the identified skills requirements in the sector;
- f. To establish a European network of VET actors bridging employers and educators and prepare a set of measures for its sustainability (existence beyond the project scope).

By way of preparation to develop the EU.EM.NET project, a number of partners had carried out detailed analyses/mapping on skills for employability needed in Europe in several European countries (UK, BG, RO, SK, SI, HU, CZ, PL, HR, TR Macedonia, Albania & Serbia). The outcomes of these analyses showed that employers had both the desire and need to participate in the skills detection mechanism. The preparatory work suggested that in spite of existence of national engagement schemes in the majority of European countries, it was the case that employer engagement was often ad hoc, inefficient and lacking in professionalism and sustainability. The work reported that employers were asking for a systematic and effective tool/mechanism for ensuring their on-going, active engagement in the overall process of anticipating skills requirements in T&H and for the detection of skills anticipation requirements and specifically towards improving the quality in VET.

The VET sector seeks to meet future demands from employers in terms of the quantity and types of skills required. The question addressed by the project was how the VET sector anticipates what these future demands might be in the context of a rapidly-evolving economy. If changes in the quantity and types needed by employers can be anticipated, then the development of redundant capacity (excess people and excess capacity in teaching institutions) could be avoided. It could also be made easier for employers to find the skills they need, at the time when they need them, and in the places where they need them.

Within the VET sector the sector of tourism and hospitality was considered to be European-wide one of the strongest driving forces for the economic development, in terms of older and new as well as future member states (candidate of accession countries) of the European Communities. T&H is a key sector of the European economy with some 1.8 million businesses, primarily SMEs, employing approximately 5.2 % of the total workforce (approximately 9.7 million jobs, with a significant proportion of young people); the European T&H industry generates over 5% of EU GDP, a figure which is steadily rising. It therefore represents the third largest socioeconomic activity in the EU after the trade and distribution and construction sectors. It is estimated to generate over 10 % of the EU's GDP and

provide approximately 12% of all jobs. In addition, the European Union remains the world's No 1 tourist destination, with 370 million international tourist arrivals in 2008, or 40 % of arrivals around the world. The tourism sector was seen as being capable of creating hundreds of thousands of new jobs per year (CEDEFOP, Panorama series; 115).

According to CEDEFOP, some EU countries (e.g. Sweden, UK) have well-developed and long-established national systems for the forecasting of skill needs and some other EU countries (e.g. France, Finland, Ireland) provide some examples of well-developed systems. To support the work of the Commission, CEDEFOP published in 2008 medium-term forecasts of occupational skill needs for 2015 and 2020 (CEDEFOP 2008a and 2008b).

Therefore in line with the identified needs of employers and European challenges in this area, the project focused on the development of a European Core Methodology for the engagement of employers in Europe in the process of anticipating skills requirements and establishing a European network for mutual learning and improved cooperation among the key players of T&H sector. In this respect, the project brought the issue of innovation in a form of a developed new European Core Methodology (ECM) for effective and on-going engagement of employers in the process of anticipating skills requirements in the T&H sector including the development of quality indicators for employers engagement with reference to the EQARFVET based on original learning approach & practices towards the present situation - either in relation to the existing practices at European level and identified weaknesses, needs and challenges or in relation to the content of the core methodology planned to be both, i.e. end-users and policy oriented.

The project therefore identified the target groups, and its audiences for impact, as including:

- Enterprises: SMEs for example hotels, family businesses, well-being, restaurants, employers and employers associations;
- VET providers: training institutions and development organisations offering non-formal education, VET schools, colleges and universities concerned with formal sector education;
- Policy-makers: with a focus on relevant ministries involved in the development of education & employment policies & their subordinated institutions responsible for planning VET & improving NQF in line with the EQF & EQARFVET;
- Tourism & hospitality experts: Public, VET and independent.

2. Project Approach

The project approach was build upon five horizontal and three thematic pillars which are anchored in the project content. These pillars were also part of the developed work plan in separate but inter-related work packages:

Horizontal pillars:

1. **Network management:** implementing key actions for effective network management through participation of all partners - implementation of the network meetings and events, sound financial management and maintaining the agreed timetable. The whole partnership was organised & managed on a basis of a common Intercultural Network Platform that set up all principles, system of work & collaboration between partners and other cooperating bodies, methods & procedures applicable to the partnership. It provides clear and transparent relations where every partner knows his/her role and tasks in order to ensure smooth implementation of all planned actions and build up trust among all involved parties.

2. **Dissemination, promotion and awareness-raising through direct involvement of stakeholders and online presence:** project information was delivered to stakeholders through direct involvement and consultation of target groups in the process of project implementation. Stakeholders were consulted in the process of the development of the state-of-the-art analysis, they were kept informed about the results achieved, they were invited to project events, directly participated in the testing of the products through the testing workshops, their feedback was collected through meetings and presentations in relevant externally organised events. Dedicated website www.futureskills.eu was created and will stay at the disposal of the interested parties.

3. **Exploitation:** main focus was put multiplication, i.e. project partners adopting or applying project results (focus on the core methodology and indicators) and mainstreaming, i.e. using project results. The exploitation ran in parallel with the activities for dissemination, promotion and awareness raising and ensure the use of the products in the meaning of valorisation. During the project concrete activities towards the target group were carried out so that the outputs were used by the target group in a direct and practical way and, at the same time, to provide for an "open door" for further improvements and multiplications at European level and network enlargement and strengthening.

4. **Quality assurance, monitoring and evaluation:** The role of evaluation within EU.EM.NET has been to support the quality assurance of the project by acting as an on-going mechanism for gathering feedback to inform the Quality Assurance Plan. This has been facilitated by one of the partners through a series of formative, internal evaluation exercises, which have taken the form of peer-review assessments from the partners themselves. The results of these exercises have been periodically collated in a set of reports, the findings of which have been fed back to partners throughout the lifetime of EU.EM.NET in order to inform project action planning, review and implementation. They were implemented in accordance with the project

application, which stated that the Quality Assurance Plan would focus on three interlinked elements: Process, Product, Impact - from the medium and long-term perspective. The final evaluation report concerned the last element of the above and provided a summative, impact assessment of the project. As an internal evaluation, it was based upon evidence that has been gathered, collated and analysed from the partners themselves as a peer assessment exercise.

5. Sustainability and impact: development of an enlargement and sustainability strategy for the network within a document of Exploitation Action Road Map to respond to maintain the collaboration, outline next action and also to respond to the identified issues in the sector.

Thematic pillars:

- 1. Analysis of the state of play** - national contexts in Europe: investigation on the state of play towards the employers' engagement was carried out within the 9 countries and summarised into 9 Country Reports, on the basis of them a Synthesis Report was elaborated, the good practices were identified as a reference point for the core methodology elaboration and commonly agreed recommendations were made. All the products are published on the project website for future use and for other interested parties.
- 2. Development of a Core Methodology and Quality Indicators – *EUEMNET Future Skills Workshop – A tool(box) for employers engagement in skills forecasting*** was developed. The goal of the EU.EM.NET project as well as the developed methodology is tackling the improvement of national systems of skills anticipation. To have effective skills anticipation processes to meet employer's needs in terms of quantity, quality and types of skills can be regarded as a crucial success factor to reach the above mentioned Europe 2020 goals. The methodology called "future skills workshop" aims at improving national systems of skills anticipation. One important aspect of the methodology is the integration of employers in processes of skill anticipation. In addition the project also tackles the EQARF- quality indicators for quality in VET with the focus on quality indicator No.9 "mechanisms to identify training needs in the labour market". The work of the partnership was summarized in a **handbook** that provides guidelines for a methodology implementation that can be multiplied by others and also in other sectors.
- 3. Piloting the Core Methodology** - the core methodology "future skills workshop" was tested in practical environment – testing workshop with the target groups - in each of the involved countries, the testing outcomes were summarised and accordingly with the target group feedback fine-tuned for mainstreaming. Following the recommendations of this piloting phase the methodology and its single components were adapted. In parallel the network developed a guidelines for application which contain the experiences in a user-friendly form of Case Studies.

In addition the following working principles will be part of implementation:

Teamwork in practical terms: All our experience shows that a team work approach and common team spirit among all partners lead to best results.

Meaningful action: not to rash conclusions before we have really assessed a situation. All conclusions need to be based on a truly thorough analysis of an existing situation and a discussion on why a situation/problem exists.

Solution based on consensus: a solution that works at EU-level and in the involved countries taking into consideration their specifics

Building genuine partnership and social relationships: One of the most important tasks of our Network will be, to create and maintain an atmosphere of mutual trust, understanding and confidentiality on the one hand and openness on the other. This is pre-requisite for fostering close and effective cooperation that leads to success and high quality of results and impact.

3. Project Outcomes & Results

The main result of the project is the design of European systematic approach for employers' engagement to anticipate skills requirements and support quality assurance in VET through bringing key actors into one EU.EM.NET network that will use and spread the project products beyond its implementation period..

The global objective mirrors the real needs for effective and efficient engagement of employers in the overall process of detecting of new skills needed for the future development in the sector thus for increasing its competitiveness from global point of view in the difficult crisis time. In this respect the global objective shall help for better match not only of available skills with employers' needs but first of all determining the right skills for new jobs in the T&H sector.

In order to achieve the project overall objective the following **specific outcomes and results** were delivered:

- **Raised awareness** of the necessity of employers' engagement in the process of detection of skills anticipation requirements and improving the quality in VET through numerous meetings and project events including testing future skills workshops and follow-up/feedback gathering Employers Forums in 9 countries, along with stakeholders' participation to some project meetings. Many individual meetings and presentations were carried out by the partners, where the stakeholders confirmed their interest to enhance the processes for better skills for the future, to keep contact with the network and to use the products of the network in the future. On the other hand, lot of insight was gained from the contacts with stakeholders and these were incorporated into the project results, so to enable spreading the information and sharing of practice.
- **Analysis of the state-of-play** in the policies and actions aimed at enhancing the cooperation between the world of education and the world of work in the partners' countries. Comprehensive **9 Country Reports**, one **Synthesis Report**, **Good Practices Handbook** and **Set of Recommendations** were produced and published on the project website.
- **Core Methodology and Quality Indicators** for engagement of employers in the process of anticipating skills requirements and to pilot in tourism and hospitality sector with reference to the EQARF VET. The Core Methodology model for the employers engagement in the process of anticipation of skills requirements for new jobs in the sector of T&H provides concise way and procedures of how the employers could be engaged in the overall process of skills forecasting, while taking into consideration the EU best practices and outcomes from the Analysis of the state-of-play. **The Core Methodology is a flexible tool that can be implemented in various contexts.**

- **Testing of the Core Methodology** was carried out – **10 testing workshops in 9 countries** were carried out **with 118 direct participants**. During the testing the Core Methodology was brought out to the target group and with their direct involvement fine-tuned. **Lot of insight of the sector was gained and summarised in a structured way in 10 Testing reports and one Testing Synthesis Report**. Information contained in these report provides a insight on the identified barriers for employers engagement and lot of proposals for the development of the skills of the workforce and communication between VET providers, employers and policy-makers. It was a great opportunity for **valorisation** as well, since it enabled direct communication with the target group and their engagement and interest on the outcomes of the project, but also future collaboration and use of the products.
- Final Package - **handbook** created about the Core Methodology presents a **user-friendly way that is open for use by interested stakeholders**. It contains fine-tuned Core Methodology, analysis of the testing and from the testing experience stemming application guidelines in form of Case Studies.
- **Website** www.futureskill.eu where all the products are uploaded for future use. Contacts of all the partners are available there for the inquiries about the network.
- **Exploitation** work was carried out throughout the project. Towards its end, the feedback on the final product and possibilities for further cooperation were discussed in **Employers Forums meetings in all 9 countries** and the feedback gathered was provided in Employers Forum reports which are available online for future use. Also an **Exploitation Action Road Map** was prepared by the partners to gather partners opinion and **outline the collaboration of the network after the project end**.
- **European network of VET actors** bridging employers and educators and a set of measures for its sustainability (existence beyond the project scope).

The set of outcomes is aligned with the identified specific needs and problems faced by the sector when dealing with the employers' role and tasks in the process of detection of skills anticipation requirements and improving the VET quality (EQARF VET) in the sector.

The Network is open to new participants over the medium and long-term perspective to extend its perspectives through other relevant stakeholders.

4. Partnerships

The network consortium of EU.EM.NET has been established on the basis of mutual needs of the target group in T&H sector, as well as on the grounds of previous professional contacts, work and meetings held prior to the elaboration of the project proposal. It is based on the previous cooperation on project basis, professionalism, quality, specific experience, flexibility and mutual support & trust.

The partnership has a multiplayer character - both in geographical diversity and in terms of competences and profiles. To achieve the project main aim and specific objectives, the consortium includes a wide diversity of experienced partners all of them playing complementary roles. There are various organisations, which belong to the private, public, education & development sectors and, by their scope of activities & missions, they complement each other & create a solid basis for successful running of all planned activities. All partners are concerned with the T&H sector: employers' association/s, SMEs, VET providers – VET schools, development organisations, educational establishments, and cover the identified target group. Thus, the consortium reflects all the necessary stakeholders in the T&H industry in Europe & due to the fact that large part of the work programme deals with methodology development, its testing and verification, there is a special need to involve in the network the representatives of the employers' organisations and enterprises operational in the T&H sector.

Moreover, all of the involved partners have wide contact, channels and networks – regional, national and international - which are utilised for enhancing the EU.EM.NET already during the project implementation to sustain the project results and mainstream them – use for further policy development.

In this respect the consortium consists of the following institutional categories operational in the **T&H** sector:

- a) **Employers' associations:** which are main employers representatives nationally and at European level who are directly involved in the whole implementation process to ensure high level quality of results. Through the employers' association the **Enterprises (SME) are directly involved in the whole implementation process and results achievement** – they will on one hand contribute to the development of the Core Methodology and in its piloting and verifying with their experiences in detection and anticipating skills requirements in T&H sector.
- b) **VET schools:** they are VET providers which offer curricula and training programmes in T&H and producing future labour force for the sector. They are one of the main stakeholders and will be contributing with their training programmes, skills, knowledge, competences and learning outcome definitions. They have to be in closer contact and regularly interact with the employers to match the skills needs and accordingly react to the employers' needs. With their experiences in delivering and piloting corporate training programmes in T&H and complementing formal VET they are one of key players to be part of the whole process and ensure effective cooperation with the employers.
- c) **VET development organisations** (e.g. type of development agencies) - These organisations offer short term and updating non-formal VET training

programmes aiming at acquisition of skills, knowledge and competencies by those who are employed in the sector. They will support the development with their competences in the process of anticipating skills requirements – merging employers' needs for skills, knowledge and competencies with training design and VET offers. Moreover, these development organisations are closely linked to the stakeholders especially they well know the real needs at local-regional level and are able better to understand the realities and link these realities to the EU-contexts.

- d) VET research establishments** – these types of institutions have wide expertise in international cooperation in the education area – formal and non-formal. They have proven record in conducting research & analysis, providing the path for methodologies design, sector reviews and they have numerous implemented projects all over Europe, as well as solid developed contacts and networks with the educational bodies, decision-making authorities in Europe and proven expertise in bringing together different stakeholders to work together on common objectives especially regarding VET issues and meeting future challenges in Europe.

Thus, the consortium captures the individual potentials of every partner into one common “knowledge source” and creates a unique “laboratory” for development, piloting, elaborating and exploiting the new Core Methodology aimed at achieving the LdV Networks priorities – ensure cooperation between the VET and world of work incl. exchange of information and experience and support the dissemination and implementation of common approaches, methods and tools linked to the New Skills for New Jobs initiative; cooperation between VET actors, enterprise, social partners, economic sectors and training organisations on a sector basis to improve the anticipated benefit of VET.

The partnership has undergone a partner withdrawal in the first year-and-a-half period and will experience a new partner introduction in the second one, but all the process has been handled in a very open and professional way. This proves the partnership's dedication towards the aims of the project, professionalism and flexibility. The whole partnership is confident about the future successful collaboration and feels good about working together towards the further use of the developed collaboration.

5. Plans for the Future

Maintaining the network and enlargement potential

Partners consider networking as an important part of the project. Some would like to keep the existing contacts which were developed during the project's duration as well as developing new contacts of other relevant organization which could be interested. Some partners see network enlargement at national and regional level as well, where regional possibilities take prevail, but also as an open network for all interested institutions. Partners from countries with well established methods of skill's anticipation feel that as a result of various workshops held during the project's life they have already managed to enlarge their network, but also feel that further enlargement could be seen if potential participants are offered some value out of their participation. Partners feel that our network should stay as it is, but could be supported by means of some expertise and experience, continuous dissemination, usage of personal contacts and the good collaboration between the sector and the VET. Partners agree that having schools and organizations which run some extracurricular activities included in the process would be a positive initiative. By including the above mentioned groups working with the employers, the policy making process on introducing skill anticipation could be much more effective.

Dissemination of results

For further dissemination the final package will play an important role. All partners agree that the Core Methodology and all other deliverables created, discussed and approved during the life of the project by the partnership should be placed on partner's own websites (some have already done that), along with the current situation – products on main project's website with links to partners' websites. Partners feel that having a link to the website of local councils, information centers or consultancies would benefit the visibility of the project as well as the continuous dissemination of the Core Methodology. Partners agree that the Core Methodology should be a free product for non-profit purposes and paid for support when facilitating a workshop. Also, thinking of a way of some formal licensing of the CM which would enable us to track down who downloads it for research purposes was also suggested.

Continuation of organisation of the Future Skills Workshops

Partners feel that they, each in their own country, could organize further future skills workshops, as well as disseminate the Core Methodology in all other regional or national activity run by them. As a result in being part of the EU.EM.NET project, our UK partner along with their associates have created a model, one which is currently being worked on and hopefully successfully funded soon, which is aiming not only in the future skills anticipation but also at preparing workers to fill in the gaps in the workforce skills.

Partners would like to continue with the organization of more local workshops and to provide the Final Package to relevant T&H schools who express interest in organizing their own future skills workshop.

Promoting to other stakeholders the Core Methodology is seen as a useful tool for better employers' involvement in the field of skill anticipation. The Core Methodology has already been introduced to the participants involved in the workshop which will certainly lead to its wider dissemination and adoption among future employers and VETs.

Transfer to other sectors

Partners feel that the Core Methodology could be successfully used not only in the T&H sector but in other areas too.

All partners agree that the Methodology is very well structured tool, very flexible and comprehensive enough to serve for the skill anticipation process for sectors different from the T&H.

6. Contribution to EU policies

The establishment of a European infrastructure for the early identification of skill needs is a central element of the “New Skills for New Jobs” initiative developed by the European Commission. With the emergence of transnational challenges (demographic ageing, mobility of labour within Europe, labour migration between Europe and third countries), there is a greater awareness of the benefits of exchange of experiences, as well as a greater appetite among countries to cooperate. The policy context created by the EU, the work of the CEDEFOP's *Skillsnet* network and the activities of OECD offer great opportunities for mutual learning. The VET sector seeks to teach courses that will meet future demands from employers in terms of the quantity and types of skills required. The question is how the VET sector anticipates what these future demands might be in the context of a rapidly evolving economy. If changes in the quantity and types needed by employers can be anticipated, then we can avoid the development of redundant capacity (excess people and excess capacity in teaching institutions). We can also make it easier for employers to find the skills they need, at the time when they need them, and in the places where they need them. Within the VET sector the sector of tourism and hospitality (T&H) is without doubt European-wide one of the strongest driving forces for the economic development and this applies for older and new as well as future member states (candidate of accession countries) of the European Communities.

To meet the future demands asked by employers in terms of the quantity, quality and types of skills required in the sector of T&H and improve the quality of the VET offers for preparing qualified labour force is of common EU interest. These issues are integral part of the EU main strategic documents including 2020 Strategy. Although the last two EU enlargements (2004 & 2007) gave access to new skills and knowledge the issues of active and on-going engagement of the employers' representatives in the overall process of skills forecasting is led behind the real needs in Europe. To develop a really effective & practical tool for their regular engagement in the skills forecasting process – a methodology – it is necessary to properly identify the opportunities and ways to do this while taking into consideration the cultural specifics throughout Europe. Thus to meet the objectives set up in harmony with the detected needs and problems it is necessary to look for appropriate solution/s at European level. The partners are asking for regular forum of exchange of experience and achievements and the thematic network is the most appropriate form to do so. At the same time, the project results can be utilised as inspiration for other sectors (e.g. services, industrial sectors, etc.) and put in practice in other European countries with possible adjustments while having in mind cultural specifics. As the main products will be available not only in the national languages of the involved countries but also in English as a target language, they can be used by other stakeholders and decision-makers throughout Europe. In this respect, the partnership plans specifically oriented actions aiming at enlargement of the network and establishing widely contacts and co-operations with potential end-users of project results. Specifically, the partners have agreed to also provide, if necessary, advice and counselling to those who will show interest in using project products and approaches and who wishes to join the network and benefit from it.

