



Social partners'  
involvement in  
**dual vocational  
education  
and training  
(VET):** a comparison  
of Greece,  
Spain, Poland  
and Portugal

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# Social partners' involvement in dual vocational education and training (VET): a comparison of Greece, Spain, Poland and Portugal

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# CONTENTS

1. Introduction .....	8
1.1. European policy context.....	8
1.2. Aims, methods and structure of the report.....	10
2. Dual VET programmes under diverse institutional contexts .....	12
2.1. Defining dual VET.....	12
2.2. Dual VET programmes in Greece, Portugal, Poland and Spain.....	13
3. The role of social partners in Vocational Education and Training governance: state of the art and case selection .....	20
3.1. Industrial Relations varieties in Europe: Greece, Portugal, Poland and Spain in terms of main typologies.....	21
3.2. Varieties of VET governance models in Europe .....	24
3.2.1 VET governance typologies.....	24
3.2.2 New patterns of change within VET governance models.....	27
4. Social partner involvement in dual VET governance in Greece, Portugal, Poland and Spain .....	28
4.1. Political-strategic level.....	28
Spain .....	29
Greece .....	32
Portugal.....	33
Poland .....	36
4.2. Technical-strategic level.....	37
Spain .....	38
Greece .....	41
Portugal.....	46
Poland .....	48
4.3. Technical-operational level.....	52
Spain .....	52
Greece .....	54
Portugal.....	56
Poland .....	57
4.4. Conclusions: towards more collective skill formation models?.....	58
5. Policy recommendations .....	62
References.....	68

# Glossary

## General

Central and Eastern European countries	CEE
Continuous Vocational Education and Training (labour subsystem)	CVET
European Centre for the Development of Vocational Training	CEDEFOP
European Credit System for Vocational Education and Training	ECVET
European Framework for Quality and Effective Apprenticeships	EFQEA
European Qualifications Framework	EQF
European Union	EU
Foundation for Cooperation on VET and the Labour Market (Netherlands)	SBB
German Federal Institute for VET	BIBB
German Office for International Cooperation in VET	GOVET
Industrial Relations	IR
Initial Vocational Education and Training (educational subsystem)	IVET
Institutional Characteristics of Trade Unions, Wage Setting, State Intervention and Social Pacts	ICTWSS
National Qualifications Framework	NQF
Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development	OECD
Small and medium-sized enterprises	SME
United Kingdom	UK
Vocational Education and Training	VET

## Spain

Andalusian Confederation of Employers (President of Training Commission)	CEA
Andalusian VET Council	CAFP
Applied Economic Research Foundation	FEDEA
Basque Business Confederation	CONFEBASK
General Council on Vocational Education and Training	CGFP
General Union of Workers of Andalusia	UGT Andalusia
Micro, Small and Medium-sized Enterprises of Catalonia	PIMEC
National Catalogue of Qualifications	CNCP
National Institute for Qualifications	INCUAL
Spanish Confederation of Business Organisations (Director of Training)	CEOE
Spanish Qualifications Framework	MECU
Workers Commissions Union (Secretary General of Training)	CCOO
Workers Commissions Union of Andalusia	CCOO Andalusia

**Greece**

Apprenticeship Support Teams	OYM
Central Council for Vocational Education and Training	KSEEK
Central Scientific Committee	KEE
Manpower Employment Organisation	OAED
Greek Qualifications Framework	HQF
Institute of Educational Policy	IEP
Institutions for Vocational Training	IEK
National Coordination Body for Apprenticeships	ESOM
National Council for Education and Human Resources Development	ESEKAAD
National Institute for Labour and Human Resources	EIEAD
National Organisation for the Certification of Qualifications and Vocational Guidance	EOPPEP
National Organisation for the Certification of Qualifications and Vocational Guidance	EOPPEP
OAED Vocational Apprenticeship Schools	EPAS
Occupational Profiles	OP
Post-Secondary Apprenticeship Programme	EPAL
Regional Councils for linking VET with Labour Market	SSPAE
Social Partner for Small and Medium Enterprises	GSEVEE
Social Partner for Tourism	INSETE

**Portugal**

Confederation of Portuguese Agriculture	CAP
Confederation of Portuguese Business	CIP
Confederation of Portuguese Tourism	CTP
Final Evaluation Test	PAF
General Confederation of Portuguese Workers	CGTP
General Union of Workers	UGT
Institute for Employment and Vocational Training	IEFP
National Agency for Qualifications and Vocational Education and Training	ANQEP
National Association of VET Schools	ANESPO
National Catalogue of Qualifications	CNQ
National Commission for Apprenticeship	CNA
National System for Qualifications	SNQ
Portuguese Commerce and Services Confederation	CCP
Portuguese Qualifications Framework	QNQ
Qualification Needs Anticipation System	SANQ
Sectoral Councils for Qualifications	CSQ
Standing Committee for Social Concertation	CPCS

<b>Poland</b>
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Central Examination Board	CKE
Education Development Centre	ORE
Institute for Sustainable Technologies	ITEE
Institute of Educational Research	IBE
Institute of Labour and Social Affairs	IPiSS
Integrated Qualifications System	ZSK
Ministry of Education	MEN
Operational Program "Knowledge Education Development"	POWER
Polish Agency for Enterprise Development	PARP
Polish Craft Association	ZRP
Polish Qualifications Framework	PRK
Regional Examination Boards	OKE
Social Dialogue Council	RDS
Voivodeship Labour Market Councils	WRRP
Voivodeship Labour Offices	WUP

# 1. Introduction

The topic of dual vocational education and training (VET) – also known as apprenticeships<sup>1</sup> – has grown in relevance in recent years. Several European countries have implemented ‘dual VET systems’, broadly defined as a model that combines workplace learning in an enterprise with classroom teaching in an educational institution. This model is considered particularly pertinent in times of high youth unemployment, as it can facilitate smooth transitions to employment and/or handle the problem of skills mismatch.

However, the capacity of dual VET models to resolve social and economic challenges cannot be taken for granted. Compared to school-based VET systems, dual VET programmes are more complex because different collective actors and institutions from the education system and the labour market are involved. Dual VET systems must therefore respond to the needs and interests of different public, private and societal actors (such as state authorities, employers and trade unions) and ensure a high degree of coordination between them (Rauner et al., 2010). A lack of such coordination can disincentivise companies from offering apprenticeship places or can result in the opportunistic use of apprentices as a cheap labour workforce (Šćepanović & Martín Artiles, 2020).

These characteristics of dual VET governance have been highlighted to explain why dual VET models have been historically developed under corporatist European Industrial Relations’ (IR) models (Busemeyer & Trampusch, 2012). Although there are some variations in the countries implementing dual VET, social partners generally contribute to establishing VET strategic priorities and a continuous renewal of the system to meet new needs within the labour market (Cedefop, 2013; Emmenegger & Seitzl, 2020).

In a context where several European countries with comparatively less developed ‘IR governance’ are implementing dual VET systems, attention must be drawn to potential problems and opportunities for developing collective responses towards dual VET. This research report, which presents the main findings of the INVOLVE project, aims to contribute to these debates. It explores the role played by trade unions and employer organisations in the governance of dual VET systems under models of IR where social partners play a less institutionalised role in policymaking – namely, Spain, Greece and Portugal (‘State-centred’ model) and Poland (‘Mixed’ or ‘Transitional’ model).

## 1.1. European policy context

The ‘Copenhagen process’ (European Commission, 2002) on enhancing European cooperation in VET was launched in 2002 within the Lisbon Strategy and in response to the Barcelona mandate in November 2002. Since the launch of the Copenhagen process, the European Commission has stressed the importance of increasing cooperation in promoting VET involving the EU Member States as well as the

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 1 In current literature and European institutions publications, dual VET and apprenticeship are treated as synonymous. It is also becoming common to label these models as Apprenticeships/Dual VET. As discussed under section 2.1, this is because of the importance given to the ‘apprenticeship contract’ for classifying a scheme as dual VET. In this report we will also use both terms as synonymous. However, we will generally use the term dual VET in order to cover also those relatively new schemes which, according to international criteria (Cedefop, 2022), fall under this category for combining and alternating theoretical and in-company training in short intervals of time, but which do not regulate the relationship between students/apprentices and employers with an apprenticeship contract.



social partners.

In the context of the 2007-2013 economic crisis, dual VET or apprenticeship schemes became a key European policy priority for tackling increasing youth unemployment. The European Commission financially supported and promoted partnerships between the German and Austrian Ministries of Education and the other EU Member States, aimed at introducing dual VET schemes in countries where they did not exist or were not as effective as they should be, such as Bulgaria, Hungary, Italy, Slovakia, Spain, Romania, Poland, Portugal and Sweden (Šćepanović & Martín Artiles, 2020). One of the most significant initiatives was the Berlin Memorandum on Cooperation in Vocational Education and Training in Europe signed by Germany, Greece, Italy, Latvia, Portugal, Slovakia and Spain in 2012, and coordinated by the German Office for International Cooperation in VET (GOVET) within the German Federal Institute for VET (BIBB)<sup>2</sup>. This agreement established, as its main goal, the modernisation and implementation of education and training systems with a focus on dual or work-based education and training, particularly in order to reduce youth unemployment and improve the transition into the job market. Finally, within the agreement, the countries committed to creating a ‘peer-learning platform’ to encourage mutual learning and strengthen dual VET initiatives.

Attention must also be drawn to the European Alliance for Apprenticeships (EAfA), initiated in 2013, which unites governments and key stakeholders with the aim of strengthening the quality, supply and overall image of apprenticeships across Europe. The EAfA also aims to promote the mobility of apprentices following the European Credit System for Vocational Education and Training (ECVET)<sup>3</sup> - ECVET was created to allow learners to accumulate, transfer and use their learnings through units based on principles established in the European Qualifications Framework (EQF) and Europass.

In addition, several European initiatives have been developed with the purpose of improving the quality of VET and apprenticeship systems. In 2016, the European Commission published the European Quality Assurance Reference Framework for Vocational Education and Training (EQAVET), which is a tool based on the 2009 recommendation of the European Parliament and Council. The EQAVET is a European wide framework to support quality assurance in VET across Europe. It provides guidance on how to develop a quality assurance system and contains examples of different approaches used by the Member States.

In October 2017, the European Commission adopted a proposal for a Council Recommendation for a European Framework for Quality and Effective Apprenticeships (EFQEA), which was adopted by the European Council in March 2018 (European Commission, 2018). This initiative is linked to both: the New Skills Agenda for Europe launched in 2016 (European Commission, 2016); and the right to high-quality and inclusive education, training and lifelong learning, as defined in the European Pillar of Social Rights. According to a European Commission working document (European Commission, 2021), the EFQEA still remains a key instrument for enhancing the quality and effectiveness of apprenticeships across the EU.

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2 Further information available at: <https://www.bibb.de/en/37031.php>

3 Further information available at: <https://www.cedefop.europa.eu/en/projects/european-credit-system-vocational-education-and-training-ecvet>

According to the European Commission, which has tended to take the German model as a reference point (Šćepanović & Martín Artiles, 2020), an apprenticeship system should enable the participation of the social partners. In this sense, the New Skills Agenda for Europe stated that the social partners ‘should be involved in designing and delivering VET at all levels, as demonstrated in the “dual system” of apprenticeships’ (European Commission, 2016, p.6). The EFQEA has also explicitly asked for the social partners to be involved at cross-sectoral and sectoral levels in the ‘design, governance and implementation of dual VET schemes, in line with national IR systems and education and training practices’ (European Commission, 2021, p.12).

## 1.2. Aims, methods and structure of the report

This research report presents the key findings from the INVOLVE project. It contributes to the debates on the participation of social partners in dual VET governance under countries generally classified as state-centred, skills-formation regimes (Spain, Greece, Portugal and Poland).

The research report addresses three main research objectives:

1. Explain the main features of dual VET schemes in the selected countries.
2. Analyse the actual role played by social partners in the dual VET systems in the selected countries at different governance levels and the extent to which trade unions and employer organisations are involved on an equal footing.
3. Formulate policy recommendations supporting collective responses to dual VET systems in the selected countries.

In section 2, the report addresses research objective 1. It first conceptualises dual VET by discussing recent scientific debates on terminology taking place in a political context where a growing number of countries are implementing dual VET schemes. The section then maps, describes and compares existing VET programmes in the four countries studied which can be classified as dual VET or apprenticeship schemes based on international criteria (such as the Cedefop European database on apprenticeship schemes (Cedefop, 2022) and national definitions.

Section 3 considers research objective 2 by revising the main comparative research exploring varieties of IR and VET governance models. This section contextualises the four countries that are studied in the INVOLVE project by classifying them according to the most relevant IR and VET governance typologies. It also revises recent research challenging existing typologies and highlighting new patterns of changes within VET governance models.

Section 4 specifically addresses research objective 2. It analyses the actual role played by social partners in the dual VET systems in Spain, Greece, Portugal and Poland at three governance levels. First, the role played by social partners in law-making and contributing to national policies and strategic priorities with regard to VET. Second, their involvement in those institutions and processes focused on evaluating the VET system (such as conducting research on VET), linking the education/training system with the labour market, providing technical advice to the government, and recognising and developing training regulations and curricula. Third, the implementation of dual VET on the ground. Findings are based on desk research and fieldwork consisting of semi-structured interviews and mini

case studies, the outcomes of which were summarised in the standardised national reports written by the four partners of the INVOLVE project<sup>4</sup>.

In section 5, the report addresses research objective 3 by providing policy recommendations on how to improve the involvement of social partners in the governance of dual VET schemes. Recommendations are based desk research and fieldwork results, and on national scenarios developed by INVOLVE partners, on the basis of a scenario workshop methodology (Cedefop, 2016; Hatzilacou et al., 2007). Drawing on this methodology, several desirable visions for governance structures improving social partners' involvement in dual VET systems were discussed and agreed upon among different stakeholders (policymakers, scholars, trade unions and employer organisations/companies).

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4 Further information available at: <https://involveproject.eu/deliverables/>

## 2. Dual VET programmes under diverse institutional contexts

### 2.1. Defining dual VET

As highlighted in the introduction, dual VET, also so-called apprenticeship, has become a key European policy priority. Several EU initiatives are incentivising Member States to develop dual VET schemes in countries where they did not exist before. Given that a growing number of countries are implementing dual VET schemes under very diverse institutional contexts and educational/training traditions, the question of terminology and definitions deserves particular attention.

According to Markowitsch and Wittig (2020), the traditional concept of an apprenticeship has been modified in two main ways. First, its key pedagogical principle (the master-apprentice relationship) has been replaced by the principle of 'duality', understood as the combination of classroom teaching and in-company training. Second, a shift has been observed towards a broader and more flexible interpretation of the purpose of apprenticeships. The main feature of this shift is the reduction of the defining criteria for apprenticeships to its employment status alone. From this perspective, apprenticeship programmes are those which are based on a formal contract between an employer and a learner, where the latter has a specific status as an 'apprentice' as defined by labour law (Markowitsch & Wittig, 2020). As the next section 2.2 shows, not all the schemes classified as dual VET in the four countries studied meet this last criterion.

In search of a common terminology or conceptual framework which can support international comparisons of apprenticeships or dual VET programmes, scholars have proposed some definitions based on the main characteristics of learning provision. In this sense, Rauner and Smith (2010), have identified two basic types of 'duality' of vocational learning. First, a one phase or 'integrating' duality, where classroom teaching and learning on-the-job alternate at relatively short intervals so that an immediate systematic reflection of the work experience is possible. This type of duality is characteristic of those schemes normally classified as dual VET or apprenticeship, as it is implemented in the German or Austrian model. Second, alternating VET where relatively long phases of full-time school-based vocational education are followed by a phase, usually shorter, of on-the-job learning. This second model has been normally developed under school-based VET systems.

Other authors have distinguished dual VET from alternating of school-based VET programmes based on different criteria such as the minimum amount of training in the company, the type of qualification provided, and the contractual relationship between the apprentice and the company. For instance, Šćepanović and Martín Artiles (2020, p. 19) use the terms dual VET and apprenticeship to cover those programmes 'in which a large portion of training (50 per cent or more) takes place in companies, so that students are both employees of firms and working towards a formal qualification that is recognised by the country's educational system'.

Markowitsch and Wittig (2020) have elaborated a conceptual framework which aims to define and classify the great variety of dual VET programmes existing in EU countries instead of defining 'national VET systems'. The conceptual framework relies on the concept of training logics, defined as 'patterns

of underpinning beliefs, norms and values related to different areas and purposes of education and training' (Markowitsch & Wittig, 2020, p. 9). Based on this, four main training logics are identified. First, professional education, focused on the occupational standard and mainly driven by social partners (they define content, assess outcomes and set apprentice pay). Second, corporate training, focused on providing employees with the specific skills needed by enterprises and mainly organised by companies with financial support by state. Third, school or university education, aiming to facilitate the personal development of young people to become responsible citizens and which can include workplace learning in the context of upper-secondary or post-secondary VET schools. Last, public training schemes (Active Labour Market policies), aiming to support unemployed people in their transition to the labour market by enhancing their skills and employability. An important idea behind this framework is that no apprenticeship programme corresponds to one training logic only. Rather, they follow particular training logics to some extent while often incorporating elements from others.

Having acknowledged the complexity of defining dual VET in the current context, the following section maps, analyses and compares the main programmes identified in the four countries studied in the project.

## 2.2. Dual VET programmes in Greece, Portugal, Poland and Spain

In the four countries studied in the INVOLVE project, governments are currently implementing different VET programmes which can be classified as dual VET (also so-called apprenticeship schemes) schemes based on international criteria (Cedefop, 2022) and national definitions. In recent years, the four countries have all implemented educational and VET reforms which have modified or introduced new dual VET programmes which have strengthened in-company training with a view to addressing different structural problems (such as youth unemployment, early drop-out and skills mismatch). However, as is shown in this section, existing dual VET programmes in the four countries' studies greatly differ in several respects.

In **Greece**, two main laws were approved in 2013 (Law No 4186/2013) and 2016 (Law 4386/2016), and these laws introduced two novel dual VET programmes (so-called apprenticeship schemes): EPAL (Post-secondary Apprenticeship Class) and IEK apprenticeship schemes. Both programmes differ from traditional school-based VET provisions offered at EPAL and IEK schools, and from EPAS apprenticeship programmes which fall within the CVET system.

The EPAL apprenticeship scheme lasts nine months. It combines: a so-called 'speciality laboratory course' of a total of 203 hours, which is provided by the teaching staff of EPAL schools (under the Ministry of Education); and a 'Workplace training programme' of 156 days, organised into 28 hours per week spread over four days each week. Students accepted into the EPAL apprenticeship scheme are aged at least 18 and must have completed the upper secondary education (either vocational within EPAL schools or in the mainstream school system). The programme provides a formal apprenticeship qualification corresponding to level 5 in the National Qualifications Framework (NQF) and the European Qualifications Framework (EQF), which is evaluated and certificated by the National Organisation for the Certification of Qualifications and Vocational Guidance (EOPPEP). In the academic year 2017/2018, only 3,452 students were enrolled in this programme (2% of total VET students according to Greek Ministry of Education). The programme is however growing. The number of students enrolled has almost tripled in the second year of implementation of the scheme.

The IEK apprenticeship scheme provides an optional semester-long internship or apprenticeship which become mandatory for the students in 2015. The total duration is 960 hours, divided into 192 hours of training in IEK units and 768 hours of in-company learning. Evaluation of learning outcomes (accreditation exams) is also carried out by EOPPEP. The programme upgrades the qualifications acquired through studying at IEKs from level 4 to level 5 NQF/EQF. The apprenticeship placements of public IEKs announced for the year 2020 were 378<sup>5</sup>. Due to this, the scheme is still considered a pilot project.

Besides those recent schemes, attention must be drawn to the EPAS apprenticeship scheme, which is a continuation of previous apprenticeship schemes provided by the Manpower Employment Organisation (OAED), which is the Greek Public Employment Service, since the 1950s. It lasts for 2 school years and in-company training represents at least 50% of the total scheme duration. Differing from the two previous schemes, the EPAS apprenticeship provides a formal apprenticeship qualification corresponding to level 4 of the National Qualifications Framework (NQF) which should be developed by OAED based on existing occupational profiles. EPAS graduates can enrol in IEK or EPAL schemes to acquire a qualification at level 5 of NQF. Participation in this scheme has been steadily declining from the early 2000s to recent years: in the academic year 2000/2001, there were 18,445 students enrolled compared to 5,500 in the academic year 2019/2020. However, it still represents about 5% of total VET students (Hellenic Statistical Authority).

In the three apprenticeship schemes (EPAL, IEK and EPAS) there is an apprenticeship contract between the apprentice and the employer. Apprentices receive a pay set at 75% of the legal statutory minimum wage for unskilled workers. It can be pointed out that the three schemes are mainly based on a 'professional education' logic (Markowitsch & Wittig, 2020). As will be further discussed under section 4, they focus on occupational standards which are developed with the participation of the social partners under the coordination of technical institution (EOPPEP). Moreover, in EPAL and IEK schemes, social partners are formally involved in the evaluation committees under EOPPEP (see section 4.3).

In **Poland**, there are three different types of vocational schools (or programmes). First, there are the Sectoral Vocational Schools which are organised into two stages: stage I (3 years) which provides vocational education consisting of one qualification at level 3 of NQF/EQF; and stage II (2 years) which gives the possibility of training in occupations consisting of two qualifications at level 4 of NQF/EQF. Second, there are Technical Secondary Schools (5 years) which provide vocational education consisting of two qualifications. Upon completion, graduates can decide to pass the 'progression' examination enabling the take up of tertiary education. Third, there are the Post-Secondary Schools (1 to 2.5 years) which provide vocational education in occupations giving the qualification at level 4 or 5 of NQF/EQF. All the above schools are supervised by the Ministry of Education and Science and ran by local government units. Within these three types of schools, there are three main apprenticeship programmes: juvenile workers, contracts between headmaster and employer, and student internships.

The vocational preparation of juvenile workers is the main apprenticeship scheme in Poland. This programme has been functioning since the 1930s and has been modified several times in recent years. The programme originates from craft guilds and still has an important 'professional education logic' (Markowitsch & Wittig, 2020). Compared to alternating VET programmes existing in the country, appren-

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5 Further information available at: <http://www.gsae.edu.gr>

tics are formally employees under an employment contract between the juvenile worker/apprentice and the employer, and regulated by the Labour Code. Under this contract, apprentices receive a wage (from 4–6% of the national average salary) and are entitled to Social Security rights. In addition, attention must be drawn to the crucial role played by craft chambers, which supervise the learning process, and develop standards and requirements for ‘journeymen’ and master-craftsperson examinations in cooperation with the Polish Craft Association (ZRP)<sup>6</sup>. The scheme targets people aged 15–18 with lower secondary education and combines in-company training with theoretical vocational training. The most important path for implementing this duality principle entails that theoretical training is provided by so-called sectoral programmes or sectoral schools (named ‘basic vocational schools’ before 2017) within the first stage of the programme. This programme lasts three years and the minimum duration of in-company training is 60%. The school and the employer agree on the division of time per week between education at school and training at the company’s premises. The most common practice is to divide the time according to the scheme: two days at the school and three days at the company (Symela, 2016). The scheme provides qualifications at level 3 of the NQF/EQF. According to the Ministry of Education (MEN) data, juvenile employees in the 2017/2018 academic year accounted for 49.5% of all students of first-stage sectoral programmes and basic vocational schools which, at the same time, accounted for about 13% of all post-gymnasium students. According to the Polish Craft Association (ZRP) data, in the same school year, 74.6% of all juvenile workers were employed in craft companies covered by the ZRP. In overall, juvenile workers accounted 5,5% of all post-gymnasium students in the country (Cedefop (2022), 2016/17 course). According to a study of the Central Statistical Office in 2015, these juvenile workers were mainly employed in retail (16,4%), manufacturing of food, beverages and tobacco products (16,1%), construction industry (11,5%), trade and repair of motor vehicles and motor-cycles (10,8%) and accommodation and food service activities (8,9%).

In addition, two further alternative dual VET programmes are identified in Poland. First, the professional preparation at the employer’s premises on the basis of a contract for practical training, which is concluded between the school headmaster and the employer admitting students for apprenticeships. This variant of the dual system applies to all three types of vocational schools existing in the country from 2nd stage Sectoral Programmes to Postsecondary Schools. Thus, it provides qualifications at levels 4 and 5 of the NQF/EQF depending on the programme. Practical training within this variant is financed by the educational part of the core funds provided by the authorities running the school (usually local government entities). Training budgets include instructors’ salaries, and the costs of clothing, footwear and personal protective equipment required in the workplace. In turn, the employer provides students with the material conditions necessary for the practical training in the profession. Students are not financially remunerated. However, the best students can be awarded a scholarship if the terms of cooperation between the employer and the school provide for such a possibility.

Second, the student internship or apprenticeship, which is a new option introduced by the amendment to the Educational Law (approved 22 November 2018). The scheme is addressed to learners in first-stage sectoral programmes and vocational upper-secondary programmes who are not juvenile workers.

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 6 In 2015, the Act of 22 March 1989 on craftspersonship was amended. A provision was introduced which stated that vocational training in craft companies will be conducted on principles of the dual VET system and supervised by the craft chamber of which the craftsperson is a member. Noting that this law sanctioned a pre-existing solution rather than introducing a new one.



Thus, it provides qualifications at levels 3 and 4 of NQF/EQF depending on the programme. The internship is based on an individual agreement between the student or parents and the employer, and may free the student from the obligation to undergo practical training in other forms. A unique feature of this type of training is that it may form part of an extension to the school curriculum. The scope of the education content and the weekly duration of the internship is determined jointly by the school headmaster, the employer and the student. A student may receive a salary no higher than the statutory minimum wage (approximately €580 per month in 2020). The costs of remuneration are tax-deductible for the employer. Another innovative solution is that the employer can transfer funds (for example, in order to provide equipment) directly to the school without the intermediation of managing bodies (such as local government entities). Legal provisions also regulate the maximum daily duration of the internship depending on the age of the student (six hours a day for students under 16, eight hours for older students) as well as other aspects of working conditions.

In **Portugal**, apprenticeships or dual VET programmes mainly exist in the CVET system. Indeed, the only programme in Portugal identified by Cedefop as an apprenticeship or dual VET scheme is the so-called ‘apprenticeship system’, organised by the training centres of the Institute of Employment and Vocational Training (IEFP), under the Ministry of Labour. The programme was introduced in 1984 as a result of the Decree-Law 102/84 and is aimed at students who have the 9th grade without the conclusion of the secondary school (meaning 15-29 years old). The duration of the scheme ranges between 2,800 and 3,700 hours, of which 1,100 to 1,500 hours are dedicated to in-company practical training, split into three periods. Generally, the time spent in the workplace approaches 40% or more, depending on the area of education and training. The scheme provides a double certification: an education certificate (upper secondary level/12th year of schooling) and a vocational qualification (level 4 of the QNQ/EQF) upon successful completion. It also provides access to tertiary education. Compared to the original apprenticeship programmes where apprentices have the status of employees, learners under this programme fall outside labour legislation. However, there is an apprenticeship contract which needs to be signed between the learner and the school. Any student who enters the apprenticeship programme has to sign a contract of commitment. This training contract sets the amount of ‘social support’ (financial allowance) to be awarded to those apprentices eligible under the School Social Action policy. It also establishes the apprentices’ rights for personal accident insurance and identifies the training provider as the responsible party.

This so-called apprenticeship system enrolled 15% of all VET students in the academic year 2018/2019 mainly distributed in sectors Hotels and Restaurants (18,4% of total students in Apprenticeship), Construction & Repair of Motor Vehicles (12,4%), Metallurgy and Metalworking (12,3%), and Commerce (10,1%) (DGEEC, 2022). However, the programme has lost 14,907 students in the last 6 years because of the overall reduction of students in the country due to demographic issues and because it appears that students are choosing other paths, whether to level IV vocational courses, general education pathways or both. These apprenticeship schemes combine public training schemes with professional education logic. Although the social partners actively participate in defining and updating the professional qualifications, and delivering training through so-called protocol centres, the schemes are coordinated and mainly driven by the Institute for Employment and Vocational Training (IEFP), which is Portugal’s Public Employment Agency.

In the IVET system, programmes offered at lower secondary level (EQF 2 – Qualification II), upper secondary level (EQF 3 – Qualification III) and post-secondary level (EQF 4 – Qualification V) have been



labelled as ‘school-based programmes’, considering the low proportion of time devoted to training in real work environments and the status of learners as students (DGERT, 2019). In this context, the Portuguese government experimented with dual IVET programmes from 2012 to 2016, incentivised by different European initiatives and recommendations. These new programmes were introduced in lower secondary education (EQF 2) in 2012 and later, in 2013, they were extended to upper secondary education (EQF 3). One of the main characteristics of dual VET in the Portuguese education system was that it obliged schools to sign agreements with local companies for skills development mainly through simulated work experience for lower secondary education students and internships in the form of work-based training for upper secondary students. Another characteristic of this programme was the required minimum 800 hours of in-work training compared to the 400 hours minimum in other VET programmes. An evaluation of this dual VET programme was conducted by the directorate of Education in 2015 through a study which concluded that the programme was a success – not only in terms of the number of students who have attended the different courses but also in terms of the number of companies that signed the protocols with VET schools and regular (public) schools with VET programmes (Ministério da Educação e Ciência, 2015). Nevertheless, these dual IVET programmes were cancelled in 2016.

In **Spain**, there is only one specific dual IVET programme, which mainly relies on a school education logic (Markowitsch & Wittig, 2020), and has its origins in school-based IVET programmes which have enhanced the in-company training element. Dual VET was regulated in 2012 by means of the Royal-decree 1529/2012, of 8 November. This Royal-decree aimed to support the active participation of the companies in the learners’ training process and foster closer relationships between the companies and the training centres. This kind of apprenticeship programme requires that a minimum of 33% of the vocational training takes place in a company, which is a much lower percentage than that of traditional apprenticeship programmes. A new Organic Law (3/2022) has slightly modified this proportion. This new Organic Law define the distinctive features of the so-called intensive dual VET. Under this scheme, the proportion of in-company training will be higher than 35%. Under pre-existing legislation, the relationship of the learners with the company can take many forms: labour contracts (employees), training and apprenticeship contracts (regulated by labour legislation), internships and unpaid voluntary relationships. However, the new Organic Law requires a training contract – with features still to be defined – to regulate the relationship between the employer and the learner under the intensive dual VET. Collaboration between companies and training centres is articulated by means of agreements, the bases of which are regulated by the Employment Department or Education Department of the regional government. Compared to other apprenticeship programmes, another difference is that the evaluation of learning outcomes is exclusively carried out by IVET schools – companies or chambers of commerce do not play any specific role in this.

The literature highlights that state regulation in Spain does not establish a unique model of dual VET. Rather, it provides a general framework that can include different dual integrated training schemes. In this sense, it is observed that Autonomous Communities have developed different models through regional regulations (Martín Artiles et al., 2020; Sanz de Miguel, 2017). Regional variations are principally observed in the regulation of the relationship between the apprentice/intern and the company (in terms of apprenticeship contracts and grants, for example); and the minimum time required for in-company training. In relation to this latter aspect, some regions (such as the Basque Country) have increased in-company training to 40% of total training time. Dual IVET provide the same diploma and

qualification as alternating VET. They offer IVET diplomas equivalent to EQF 4 (Intermediate IVET cycle) and EQF 5 (higher level of IVET cycle).

Dual VET has experienced continuous growth in Spain in terms of centres, programmes and students since 2012. Nevertheless, dual VET still only account for a low proportion of IVET studies. In the academic year 2018–2019, only 3.1% of the students in the IVET system were on dual programmes which represented 17.9% of the total IVET programmes. Attending to the sectors, as Barrientos (2022) pointed out, even the most important ones in dual VET are those with more students in total VET, like Management and Business Administration (14,4% of total IVET and 12,1% of total dual IVET) or Sociocultural and Community Services (10,7% and 9,7%), it is worth noting that dual VET has been particularly encouraged in industrial and technological sectors like Installation and maintenance (2,7% of total IVET vs 6,7% of dual IVET), Mechanical production (2,8% vs 6,2%), Transport and Motor Vehicles Maintenance (5% vs 8,6%), Electricity and Electronics (6,4% vs 7,4%), in contrast with Health (17,1% vs 5,6%) or Aesthetics and beauty (3,4% vs 2,2%). Dual VET has also been encouraged in important sectors for the Spanish labour market like Commerce and Marketing (5,7% vs 8,5%), Hotels and Tourism (5,2% vs 8,3%) (Ministry of Education and VET, 2022).

Table 1 below illustrates the main differences between the most important dual VET or apprenticeship schemes identified in the four countries studied. As shown, those schemes greatly differ in the main dimensions commonly used to define apprenticeships. First, the minimum amount of in-company training varies from 80% in some Greek programmes to 40% in Portugal. Second, the legal relationship between the employer and the learner is formalised as an employment contract in one scheme in Poland, as an apprenticeship contract in Greece, Portugal and Spain, or as an internship in some schemes in Poland and in Spain. Third, the schemes also differ in their training logic: in Greece, Poland and to some extent Portugal, the training logic has strong elements of professional education; while in Spain, it primarily has a school logic, although elements corresponding to a professional education logic are also incorporated.

**Table 1.** Dual VET apprenticeship programmes in Greece, Poland, Portugal and Spain

	Minimum amount of training in the company	Formal relation with employer	Qualification obtained	Training logic	Share of apprentices enrolled in this scheme in relation to all VET
Greece (EPAL, IEK apprenticeship)	80%	Apprenticeship contract	Formal apprenticeship qualification connected to NQF (level 5 EQF)	Professional education	2% of vocational upper secondary and post-secondary non-tertiary education
Greece (EPAS apprenticeship)	50%	Apprenticeship contract	Formal apprenticeship qualification connected to NQF (level 4 EQF)	Professional education	Less than 5% of vocational upper secondary and post-secondary non-tertiary education
Poland (juvenile employee contract)	60%	Employment contract	Formal VET and apprenticeship qualification connected to NQF (level 3 EQF)	Professional education	5.5% of all post-gymnasium student

<b>Poland (contract between headmaster and employer)</b>	50%	The best students can be awarded a scholarship if the terms of the cooperation provide for such a possibility	Formal VET and apprenticeship qualification connected to NQF (level 4/5 EQF)	Professional education	No data available
<b>Poland (student internship)</b>	50%	Internship (salary not higher than the statutory minimum wage)	Formal VET and apprenticeship qualification connected to NQF (level 3/4 EQF)	Professional education	No data available
<b>Portugal</b>	40%	Apprenticeship contract (no employment relationship)	Double certification: education and vocational, connected to NQF (level 4 EQF)	Professional education/ public training schemes	15% of VET programmes
<b>Spain</b>	33% (35% under new Organic Law)	Internship/ apprenticeship/ employment contract	Formal qualification (VET diploma) (EQF 4/5)	School logic/ incorporating some professional education logic	3% o IVET

Source: authors' own elaboration based on national statistics and Cedefop (2022)

### 3. The role of social partners in Vocational Education and Training governance: state of the art and case selection

The term ‘governance’ refers to all mechanisms and practices that support the coordination of institutions and actors who have interdependent relationships to formulate, implement or evaluate policies (Cedefop, 2013, 2016). Governance is one of the main topics studied in European VET comparative research (Clarke et al., 2021; Markowitsch & Chan 2022). This line of research has been generally oriented towards identifying institutional and conceptual differences between countries at the cross-sectoral and sectoral levels (Clarke et al., 2021). According to Markowitsch and Chan (2022), at least four strands of research related to VET governance can be distinguished: VET related research mainly concerned with educational governance (such as mainstream schools and universities); studies on international policy transfer in VET; reviews and evaluations of VET programmes and systems; and specific research on VET systems and collective skill formation regimes. The INVOLVE project focuses on the last strand of research, which explores the role played by trade unions and employer organisations or, more broadly, ‘industrial democracy governance’ (Eurofound, 2018; Sanz de Miguel et al., 2020) in the design and implementation of dual VET or apprenticeship policies.

European institutions have highlighted the need to involve social partners in the governance of dual VET schemes at different levels. Compared to school-based VET models, dual VET are more complex systems where different collective actors and institutions must be involved to ensure coordination between the labour market and the educational system. The involvement of social partners can contribute to improving the efficiency of VET systems by favouring balanced solutions satisfying the interest of state authorities, trade unions and different types of firms. The VET systems must respond to the needs and interests of employers and trade unions to guarantee that training is aligned with employers’ needs and to support workers over a lifetime career. Involving social partners contributes to ensuring that the skillsets incorporated into vocational qualifications reflect occupational needs and that the mix of training provision reflects the demand for jobs in different types of work (OECD, 2022). It also guarantees the quality of training provision, thus avoiding opportunistic uses of apprenticeships as a semi-skilled, cheap labour force (Šćepanović & Martín Artiles, 2020).

However, the potential contribution of trade unions and employer organisations to the VET system is also shaped by the institutional framework, which differs from country to country. In some European countries, the role played by social partners in policymaking is barely institutionalised or highly politicised, and is thus dependent on the government’s will to engage with trade unions and employer organisations. Moreover, in many Central and Eastern European countries, although there are tripartite institutions dealing with VET issues, they do not oblige governments to consult or engage with social partners in the relevant processes of the VET system. The social partners’ involvement also depends on the relevant actors’ motivation to engage in negotiations, and in particular, on the availability of each actor to exchange resources (Baccaro & Galindo, 2018). Finally, the role played by the social partners in the governance of dual VET is also conditioned by the balance of power between the state authorities, trade unions and different types of firms, which also differs across European countries (Busemeyer & Trampusch, 2012; Šćepanović & Martín Artiles, 2020)

In order to understand cross-country differences in the role that social partners play in the governance of dual VET, the following section 3.1 revises the main comparative research exploring varieties of IR and classifies case countries studied in the INVOLVE project according to two of the most relevant IR typologies. Then, section 3.2 summarises the main comparative research on VET governance models, as well as research exploring new patterns of change within VET governance models. Section 3.2 also shares further information and analysis on each of the four case countries studied.

### 3.1. Industrial Relations varieties in Europe: Greece, Portugal, Poland and Spain in terms of main typologies

In the literature, cross-country differences in terms of IR patterns have been analysed through typologies (Eurofound, 2018). Generally, IR typologies are based on institutionalist approaches. Therefore, the analysis focuses on comparing institutional settings and processes which are supposed to influence actors' behaviours and outcomes.

One of the most quoted typologies was developed by Visser (2009). This typology relies on two theoretical approaches. First, it draws on the production regimes approach, also referred to as 'varieties of capitalism', which focuses on the company as the main actor in a capitalist economy and analyses the institutional setting in which companies operate with a view to coordinating their activities (Hall & Soskice, 2001). Second, it draws on the employment regimes approach which analyses variations in power resources – the relative organisational capacity of employers and employees (Gallie, 2007). Combining both approaches, and using the database on Institutional Characteristics of Trade Unions, Wage Setting, State Intervention and Social Pacts (ICTWSS), the author identifies five 'models' or 'clusters' of IR in the EU, each with a clear geographic concentration: 'organised corporatism' in Nordic countries; 'social partnership' in central-western Europe; 'state-centred' model in southern Europe, with a stronger dependence on state regulation; a 'liberal' model in north-western Europe; and a 'mixed' or 'transitional' model in central-eastern Europe.

Visser's typology and identification of five IR clusters (2009) has been confirmed in alternative typologies (Van den Berg et al., 2013) and has become a key reference for case selection in European comparative studies (Godino & Molina, 2022). However, some scholars have also expressed concerns about the classification and the presumed homogeneity of some IR types such as: the 'state-centred' in southern Europe (Meardi, 2018); and, in particular, the 'mixed or transitional' model in the central and eastern European countries, where the 'transition path' is not necessarily defined or homogeneous. In this sense, Bernaciak (2015) pointed out that treating all the central and eastern European countries (except Slovenia) under the same category obscures important cross-country variations in economic structures and institutional settings.

More recently, Eurofound (2018) elaborated an alternative typology, which was further developed by Sanz de Miguel et al. (2020). This typology explores cross-country-specific diversity in terms of industrial democracy- where industrial democracy is defined as a type of employment relationship governance based on social dialogue, collective bargaining and workers' participation at the company level. The typology consists of four empirical dimensions: associational governance; representation and participation rights at the company level; social dialogue at the company level; and trade union strength and government intervention in IR. Empirically, it relies on a combination of 'normative' indicators

(such as the degree of information provided to employees' representatives) and 'contextual' indicators (such as state intervention in collective bargaining) taken from different sources (such as ICTWSS and the European Company Survey). This typology also includes a dynamic analysis, comparing two time periods (2008–2012 and 2013–2017). With some variations, this typology confirms the three clusters of the Nordic countries, the central-western European countries, and the southern European countries. However, compared to Visser's typology (2009), the typology created by Eurofound (2018) and Sanz de Miguel et al (2020) provides a more nuanced classification of those countries which are traditionally subsumed under the liberal market and transitional economy IR clusters. Under the new typology, those countries now appear classified under three new clusters: 'voluntary company-based governance', 'market-oriented governance', and 'statutory company-based governance'.

Table 2 below classifies the four countries studied in the INVOLVE project based on Visser (2009) and Eurofound (2018)/Sanz de Miguel et al. (2020) typologies. As shown, both typologies have grouped Greece, Spain and Portugal under a similar cluster (polarised/state-centred and state-framed governance). A defining feature of this cluster highlighted in both typologies is related to the strong dependence on state regulation. In these countries, policies are designed and implemented without the systematic involvement of social partners – instead the involvement of social partners tends to be irregular and politicised. Thus, social dialogue is traditionally more negatively impacted by external shocks (Eurofound, 2021; Molina, 2014). These countries also share comparatively low trade union densities and low performance in social dialogue at the company level (Eurofound, 2018; Sanz de Miguel, 2020). With the new typology, Eurofound (2018) and Sanz de Miguel et al. (2020) compared two different time periods (2008–2012; vs. 2013–2017), also show a high degree of stability, except in the case of Greece. In this latter country, dynamic analysis shows a significant change when the two periods analysed are considered (2008–2012; 2013–2017). In the second period, Greece is grouped with several central and eastern countries (Bulgaria, Cyprus, Czechia, Latvia, Lithuania and Romania) under a 'voluntary company-based governance' cluster, reflecting the deterioration of industrial democracy recorded in this country during the economic and financial crisis – a period which saw a decrease in collective bargaining coverage and social dialogue.

With regards to Poland, the Visser typology places the country in a broad and residual transitional cluster named 'fragmented/state-centred' which mixes elements from the liberal model (such as a decentralised collective bargaining system and low coverage) and the state-centred model (where the state is a dominant actor in the governance of the economy). In contrast, the Eurofound typology groups Poland together with Estonia and the UK under a 'market-oriented governance model' which records the lowest score in industrial democracy performance, and is characterised by very low levels of collective bargaining coverage, rare or absent concertation, and weak social partners.

**Table 2.** Case study countries classified according to Visser (2009) and Eurofound (2018)/Sanz de Miguel et al. (2020) IR typologies

	Visser (2009)	Eurofound (2018); Sanz de Miguel et al. (2020)
Greece	Polarised/ state-centred	State-framed governance (2008-2012); voluntary company-based governance (2013-2017)
Spain	Polarised/ state-centred	State-framed governance (2008-2012; 2013-2017)
Portugal	Polarised/ state-centred	State-framed governance (2008-2012; 2013-2017)
Poland	Fragmented/ state-centred	Market-oriented governance model (2008-2012; 2013-2017)

Source: authors' own elaboration

These typologies can be criticised for neglecting sectoral variations in IR models (Bechter et al., 2012; Keune & Pedaci, 2020), underestimating cross-country convergence trends (Baccaro & Howell, 2017), and simplifying specific historical and institutional patterns of change recorded in single countries (Mearidi, 2018). Despite those weaknesses, IR typologies are still relevant heuristic tools to understand cross-country diversity (Hyman, 2018).

Moreover, IR typologies findings are particularly relevant for the findings of the INVOLVE project. They show that the main and oldest examples of dual VET systems (including Austria, Germany, the Netherlands, Denmark, etc.) have appeared in those countries where the role of social partners in the governance of employment relationships is highly institutionalised. Austria and the Netherlands represent a 'social partnership' model (Visser, 2009) or a 'corporatist-framed governance' model (Sanz de Miguel, 2020) in which social partners are involved on a regular basis in policymaking, while Denmark is representative of a 'voluntary associational governance' model based on strong traditions of associational regulation (such as high collective bargaining coverage, and high density and autonomy of social partners) (Eurofound, 2018; Sanz de Miguel et al., 2020). These countries are also 'coordinated market economies' where the modernisation and continues improvement of VET is seen by the social partners and, in particular, the employers, as a contribution to innovation in the economy and, as such, have historically recorded high rates of company-provided training (Bosh and Charest, 2008; Visser, 2009; Brunello & Wruuck, 2020). On the contrary, the four countries analysed in the INVOLVE project share institutional features which can hinder social partners involvement in dual VET:

- > Strong dependence on state regulation with irregular/politicised role of social partners in policy-making: this can result in dual VET policy-making without the systematic input from societal actors
- > Low trade unions' densities withing a semi-pluralist (Spain, Portugal) of fragmented union



landscape (Poland) featuring, in some cases (Portugal or Greece), unions' ideological divisions (Rigby & García Calavia, 2017): union ideological division can hinder tripartite social dialogue while trade unions' weakness entail more difficulties for enforcing training and working conditions

- > Low performance in social dialogue at company level (in terms of information provided, by management, influence of the employee representative in decision-making in the workplace, etc) (Eurofound, 2018; Sanz de Miguel et al., 2020): this can result in unilateral employer decisions on pay rates and general conditions or apprentices
- > Low rates of company-provided training, especially by smaller firms: literature on production regimes has highlighted that state-centred models offer less incentives to companies to invest in training (Visser, 2009). In this sense, empirical research shows that firms operating in Southern European and Central and Eastern countries are less likely than West and North European firms to invest in training. They also perceive to a lesser extent as a problem the lack of workers with the right skills (Brunello & Wruuck, 2020) and, accordingly, can have less incentives to develop collective towards training and dual VET.

Thus, the INVOLVE project contributes to debates on the extent to which state-framed or market-framed governance models are developing corporatist decision-making processes to design, update and implement dual VET policies (Eurofound, 2018; Sanz de Miguel et al., 2020; Visser, 2009).

## 3.2. Varieties of VET governance models in Europe

### 3.2.1 VET governance typologies

Most influential comparative studies on VET governance have also relied on typologies that look to understand cross-country diversity by grouping together national VET systems that share common patterns and institutions. However, governance VET typologies differ in terms of what the key dimensions address, the governance levels studied (such as macro and meso levels), the research methods and the underpinning values (Markowitsch & Chan, 2022).

One of the most significant lines of research, inspired by political economy and the theory of varieties of capitalism (Hall & Soskice, 2001), has focused on so-called 'skill formation' regimes (Busemeyer & Trampusch, 2012). The term 'skill formation' refers to policies and institutions that deal with the provision of training and human capital. Skill formation regimes reflect decisions about the role that different actors – such as the state, enterprises or trade unions – play in the provision and financing of training. Relying on the concept of skill formation regimes, Busemeyer and Trampusch (2012) have constructed a typology based on two dimensions: the level of public commitment to VET (high/low); and the degree of firms' involvement in initial training (high/low). The intersection of these two dimensions leads to the classification of four skill formation regimes: liberal, segmentalist, state-centred, and collective. In the liberal regime (such as the UK), public commitment to VET is limited and firms are rarely involved in VET. They mainly provide basic on-the-job training. The segmentalist regime countries (such as Japan) combine low public commitment with a particular type of firm involvement. In the case of Japan, companies rely on internal labour markets and lifelong employment. Therefore, most training focuses on firm-specific skills rather than occupational skills. State-centred regimes (such as France) present a strong public commitment to VET and full-time vocational schooling. However, firm



involvement is scarce because VET is integrated into the general education system. Finally, collective regimes (such as Austria, Denmark, Germany and Switzerland) combine high public commitment and high involvement of companies. These regimes are based on dual training combining school-based and work-based learning. Accordingly, employers and their associations are involved in the financing and administration of training. Moreover, intermediary organisations including trade unions play an important role in the administration of these systems (Busemeyer & Trampusch, 2012). Indeed, the underlying assumption of this approach is that apprenticeship systems are only likely to be significant within 'collective skill formation' regimes.

Another important reference point in the literature is the typology developed by Cedefop (2013). This typology relies on the concept of 'feedback mechanisms', defined as institutional procedures that allow VET systems to continuously renew themselves, and adapt to the new needs of the labour market (Cedefop, 2013). Compared to the previous approaches, its analytical focus is the meso level and it assumes that different types of 'feedback mechanisms' can coexist within a country. This typology distinguishes between four types of actors: public administration, training providers, social partners and the labour market. Reflecting different levels of interaction and differing abilities to reach compromise between actors with divergent interests, four models are defined. First, the 'liberal' model, characterised by a low degree of coordination and the market playing the most important role to regulate feedback between VET providers and the labour market. Second, the 'statist' approach, which combined strong state regulation of education with weak links between education and the labour market in terms of formal communication (such as school-based VET in Germany or Austria). Third, the 'participatory' model, which allows for the participation of social partners in the VET processes, albeit mainly in a consultative role (such as VET in France or Spain). Last, the 'coordinated' model, where social partners are the drivers of renewal processes and play an active role in its implementation (such as dual VET in Austria or Germany).

Finally, attention must be drawn to the typology elaborated by Rauner et al. (2010), which draws on the concept of 'plural governance' systems. This concept is based on the premise that, within dual VET systems, elements of the three main governance approaches that are distinguished in sociological theory – state, market and corporatist – can coexist in the same governance structure. Drawing on this concept, the authors create a typology to classify apprenticeship systems in Germany, Austria, Denmark and Switzerland on the basis of two dimensions: the coordination between different agents, ranging from complete fragmentation to centralised coordination; and the rationale of agency, understood as the logic underpinning actors' behaviour in rules and resources management, which can be input- or output-oriented. The conceptual model is strongly normative, as it conceptualises the optimal balanced scenario for dual VET governance. This scenario should include 'a high degree of coordination between the bodies involved and should combine elements of input orientation like participation and deliberation with elements of output orientation such as performance orientation, efficiency and quality assurance' (Rauner et al., 2010, p. 242).

The model is operationalised by an evaluation tool with several indicators which were assessed by country experts. The results show that Germany represents a 'fragmented input-oriented governance' model, which is characterised by a high degree of decentralisation of responsibilities combined with a management approach focused on rules and resources (such as legal norms or regulatory budgeting). Austria shows stronger, but still relatively weak coordination, and a balanced ratio of input- and output-orientated control. Denmark is described as a 'coordinated output-oriented governance' where

a high degree of coordination is combined with a management-by-objectives rationale four agency. Finally, Switzerland is the dual VET model closest to the ideal model of governance, as it combines a high degree of coordination with an equal distribution of input- and output-orientated. As highlighted by Markowitsch and Wittig (2020), this typology is particularly useful to illustrate differences between rather similar apprenticeship systems; however, it has a lower explanatory potential for analysing very different systems.

Table 3 below classifies the four countries studied in the INVOLVE project based on the three typologies discussed in this section. In terms of skill formation regimes, Greece, Spain and Portugal are generally assessed as ‘statist regimes’ (Eurofound, 2018; Martín Artiles et al., 2020). However, in the case of Spain, some publications have also identified attempts to shift towards a more collective type of skill formation regime since the regulation of a new dual VET scheme in 2012 (Antonazzo et al., 2021; Tarriffo Ruiz, 2019). Poland has also been classified as a statist regime, albeit with some elements of collective skill formation regimes considering that some apprenticeship schemes are more collectively organised, with the chambers of guilds playing a prominent role (Antonazzo et al., 2021).

The classification system based on feedback mechanism has only been applied to Spain and Poland among the four countries studied (Cedefop, 2013). Spain was classified as a participatory model, while Poland was conceptualised as closer to a statist feedback mechanism considering the lack of specific tripartite or bipartite procedures or agreements between VET stakeholders.

Regarding the typology based on the plural governance systems approach (Rauner et al., 2010), it has only been applied to Spain according to our knowledge. Sanz de Miguel (2017) used this typology to analyse the Spanish dual VET model introduced in 2012, concluding it combines a low degree of coordination with an undefined rationale of agency. This model grants autonomy to regional and local actors to implement different dual training approaches; however, it does not set up objectives or results aiming to guide the behaviour of these actors.

**Table 3.** VET governance models of case study countries according to Busemeyer & Trampusch (2012), Rauner et al. (2010) and Cedefop (2013)

Approach and scope	Analytical dimensions	Greece	Spain	Portugal	Poland
Skill formation regimes (country/ macro level)	Level of public commitment to VET (high/low)	Statist regime	Statist regime	Statist regime	Statist regime
	Degree of firms' involvement in initial training (high/low)				
Feedback mechanism (meso level)	Actors	-	Participatory model		Statist
	Level of interaction				
Governance plural systems (dual VET systems)	Coordination between different agents (from complete fragmentation to centralised coordination)	-	Uncoordinated with undefined rationale of the agency	-	Statist
	Rationale of the agency (input vs. output-oriented)				

Source: authors' elaboration

### 3.2.2 New patterns of change within VET governance models

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Evidence on complex patterns of changes in VET governance models has fuelled new lines of comparative research on country diversity and converging/diverging trends. Some of these approaches have partly challenged the skill formation regimes approach. For instance, Vossiek (2018) has found that Liberal Market Economies may also develop more collective responses to VET than expected. Vossiek's research (2018) shows that there are cross-country differences within the cluster of Liberal Market Economies with regards to the politics of VET. He shows that while the United Kingdom has taken political steps in the opposite direction of collective skills regimes, Australia and Ireland have moved closer to this regime. These diverging trajectories are explained by the differences between non-right-wing (Australia, Ireland) and right-wing (UK) governments in terms of the extent to which they have searched for consensus and collaboration between employer organisations and trade unions on VET reforms and policies. In Australia and Ireland, policies promoting cross-class collaboration in VET were closely linked to finding consensus at the IR level.

Some authors have also explored diversity within collective skills formation regimes. Emmenegger and Seitzl (2020) have compared the cases of Germany, Austria, Denmark and Switzerland. Their analysis has focused on systemic governance and, in particular, on the main cross-country differences with regard to the role played by social partners. The authors draw on the Streeck and Schmitter (1985) three-fold conceptualisation of 'governance levels'. First, the political-strategic level, where stakeholders make decisions on the system's long-term developments which need of political legitimation. Second, the technical-strategic level, which is equally concerned with system's long-term developments but involves technical specialists because decisions rely on expert knowledge. Third, the technical-operational level, which focuses on efficient policy implementation on the ground. Based on this theoretical framework, the authors observed differences in the levels at which social partners are involved in countries under collective skills formation regimes. For instance, they find that social partners do not play a key role at the political-strategic level in countries such as Austria or Denmark. Interestingly, the authors also find that social partners are generally involved on an equal footing except in the case of Switzerland, where unions are less involved. This last aspect may influence outcomes related to the working conditions of apprentices.

Drawing on these debates, the next section explores whether the four case study countries – which have been generally classified as statist collective skill formation regimes – are developing more collective responses to VET in a context where national governments have given new impetus to dual VET schemes. With this aim, it analyses and compares the role played by the social partners in the governance of dual VET systems.

## 4. Social partner involvement in dual VET governance in Greece, Portugal, Poland and Spain

Dual VET governance takes place at different levels (Cedefop, 2016). With a view to analysing social partners' roles in dual VET governance, the INVOLVE project draws on Emmenegger and Seitzl's aforementioned three governance levels (2020): political-strategic, technical-strategic level and technical-operational level.

The findings presented are based on desk research and fieldwork. Fieldwork was conducted from January to September 2021 in the four countries studied. It included, first, a total of 99 semi-structured interviews conducted with state/government authorities and social partners involved at the three governance levels distinguished. Interviews were conducted following common interview guidelines. The analysis of the interviews has been structured as a qualitative content analysis based on common dimensions and categories which draw from the literature on dual VET governance and industrial relations.

Second, mini case studies were conducted exploring cooperation and coordination initiatives between companies, VET schools/training centres, and trade unions aiming to implement a dual VET scheme. Mini-case studies followed a qualitative approach based on semi-structured interviews that were conducted with companies, training centres/VET schools and workers' representatives at company level (trade union section, work council, etc.). In total, three mini-case studies were conducted in each country.

### 4.1. Political-strategic level

The political-strategic level includes those institutions and bodies where stakeholders make decisions on the system's long-term developments which need political legitimacy. These decisions may be related to law-making, national policies and strategic priorities with regard to VET. As suggested by Emmenegger and Seitzl (2020), social partners' involvement or absence at this level can determine the type of goals pursued by the VET system. In collective skill formation regimes, Emmenegger and Seitzl (2020) have identified the Alliance for Initial and Further Education initiative (Germany, initially active for the period 2014–2018 and then extended for the period 2019–2022) and the National Summit Meeting on VET (Switzerland) as significant examples of bodies or procedures through which social partners can be involved.

No similar institutions or procedures have been found in Spain, Greece, Portugal, or Poland. Nevertheless, in the four countries studied there are tripartite bodies dealing with the regulation and the strategic priorities of the VET system. These bodies exhibit some differences in their scope, governance structures, social partners' level of involvement, and the extent to which they have been effective in producing tripartite agreements or agreeing on strategic priorities for VET policies.

## SPAIN

In Spain, two main different VET subsystems have traditionally existed, each regulated by different legislation and managed by different administrative bodies. First, the Vocational Training for Employment subsystem (CVET), managed by the Ministry of Employment. Second, the Initial Vocational Training subsystem (IVET), managed by the Ministry of education. Spain is a decentralised political system with 17 regions called 'Autonomous Communities', all of which have policy powers in educative, IVET and CVET policies. The fragmentation and decentralisation of strategic and policymaking functions mean that the VET system is regulated through a great variety of legislation, each one addressing different VET subsystems (employment and initial training) and programmes (alternating and dual VET) at both the national and regional level. Although some political attempts have been made to integrate and improve coordination between different training subsystems and between central and regional public administration, VET regulation is still highly fragmented (Martín Artilles et al., 2020; Sanz de Miguel, 2017).

Within the IVET system, where the dual VET scheme explored in the INVOLVE project takes place, social partners are involved at the political-strategic level through a tripartite institution – the General Council on Vocational Education and Training (CGFP) – the functions of which are regulated by statutory legislation. The CGFP is the consultative and institutional participation body of the public administrations and advisory body of the government in the field of VET, which was created by Law 19/1997. Recently, with Royal-decree 498/2020, the Council was attached to the Ministry of Education and VET through the General Secretariat for VET.

The CGFP has a tripartite composition, consisting of the: 'most representative' employers' organisations, 'most representative' trade unions and public administrations (General State Administration and Autonomous Communities). Therefore, it is a meeting point for the different VET systems (CVET and IVET managed respectively by the Ministries of Education and Labour) and the Autonomous Communities. Originally, its main goal was to elaborate and evaluate the National Programme of Vocational Training for the government. However, the last plan was enacted for the period 1998–2002. Beyond this, their formal functions include (Article 2, Law 19/1997):

- > Approving professional qualifications and certifications as defined by the technical body (National Institute for Qualifications – INCUAL).
- > Reporting on any matters related to vocational training that may be required by the public administrations.
- > Producing proposals and recommendations regarding VET to the public administrations.
- > Proposing actions to improve vocational guidance.
- > Evaluating and monitoring actions developed in the field of vocational training.

The CGFP may meet in Plenary and in Permanent Committee. The Plenary is the highest decision-making body of the CGFP. It is made up of all members and includes a president, a general secretary, 4 vice-presidents, 17 members representing the General State Administration, 17 members representing the Autonomous Communities, 19 members representing the employers' organisations and 19 members representing the trade union. The Permanent Committee is the management and administrative body of the CGFP, made up of a small number of members: 5 representatives from Central Government

Administration, 5 representatives from regional governments, 5 representatives from trade unions and 5 representatives from employer organisations. According to procedural rules, the Plenary must meet at least once a year while the Permanent Committee must meet once a month. Nevertheless, social partners stated during the INVOLVE fieldwork that these rules have not been fulfilled. In particular, they noted that the Plenary did not meet for 8 years (from 2010 to 2018).

Fieldwork results show that social partners share a critical view of the institution. First, social partners criticise that – in the context of a decentralised political system, with 17 Autonomous Communities, all of which have policy competencies in education, IVET and CVET policies – the CGFP is facing problems to integrate and coordinate CVET and IVET systems as well as the different training models existing at the regional level. This has become even more difficult with the creation of similar tripartite bodies at the regional level which, despite their similarities, also have differences in their governance structures and functions, and the outcomes achieved (see Box 1 below).

### **Box 1.** Social partners' involvement at the political-strategic level in the Autonomous Communities

The model of the CGFP has been replicated in the Autonomous Communities through regional VET Councils. Generally, the regional councils also limit the participation of the social partners to consultative functions by means of non-binding reports, some of which are carried out as an administrative procedure required by the regulations. For instance, this is the case for Andalusia, with the Andalusian VET Council (CAFP), created by Decree 451/1994. This is the highest consultative body for VET in this Autonomous Community. It is made up of both the Department of Labour and the Department of Education, as well as bodies such as the Andalusian Employment Service and the Andalusian Institute of Professional Qualifications, and the most representative social partners at regional level (CEA, UGT and CCOO). This tripartite body meets quarterly or half-yearly. Within the Andalusian Council, there is a specific working group for dual VET. The consultative role of the body is criticised by the social partners, who say that 'if the Department wants to draw up any regulation it wants, there is no legal obligation to contact the social partners, it only has to present a report to the Andalusian VET Council, so it is only a formality' (CEA), characterising the institution as a 'mere informative body' (CCOO Andalusia).

However, in recent years, new institutions have been created in some Autonomous Communities which, in some cases, have increased the role played by the social partners at this governance level. In the case of Catalonia, Law 10/2015 created the Steering Committee of the VET and Professional Qualification System, which is the governing body for the strategic planning and evaluation of policies related to the VET and Professional Qualification system. It is a tripartite body comprising 60% Government, 20% employer organisations and 20% trade unions. Despite the fact that the regional government has the majority of votes, this institution has enabled a tripartite agreement to be reached on the regulation of dual vocational training (2019), which was later transformed into statutory legislation (Resolution EDU/2085/2020). This regulation has incorporated demands from employers and trade unions that were absent in other regional regulations, such as the figure of the 'joint tutor' to facilitate the participation of Small and Medium-sized Enterprises (SME), and the reinforcement of trade union rights to information in the case of internships agreements. In the Basque Country, the new regulation of VET approved in 2018 (Law 4/2018) has created two new institutions for the management and planning of the VET system, but which do not include social partners' representatives. Within the new model, social dialogue on the objectives and regulation of dual VET has been channelled through the VET working group set up within the new Social Dialogue Round Table (Decree 3/2019). Within this framework, the Basque VET Council has taken on a more technical role, with the main task of developing the agreements reached at the Social Dialogue Round Table.

Source: authors' own elaboration based on desk research and fieldwork

Second, trade unions and employer organisations generally agree that the CGFP is not currently a body

where social partners and government authorities can discuss and elaborate tripartite recommendations on national policies and strategic priorities. Initially, this function was done through the elaboration of the National Programme of Vocational Training. However, since 1998, no similar plans setting the priorities for the VET system have been discussed or agreed upon. Moreover, during the years following the financial crisis, the activity carried out by the CGFP was assessed as irrelevant and residual in terms of its contribution to policymaking and the identification of strategic priorities.

**The CGFP was created with the good intention of creating vocational training plans and the integration of the VET subsystems [...] Plans were not elaborated since the end of the 1990s and the integration of the different VET systems has never been achieved... The plenary of the council was not called for 8–9 years. It was not called until November 2018. (CCOO)**

**The uselessness of the CGFP was so great that it did not meet for 8 years and nothing happened, the VET in this country did not collapse. (CEOE)**

The loss of importance of the CGFP occurred in parallel with the stagnation of social dialogue in the field of VET policies during the years following the financial crisis when the right-wing political party ‘Partido Popular’ (Popular Party) was in office (2011–2018). In this period, different VET reforms were unilaterally implemented by the government without meaningful discussions within the CGFP. In 2012, the regulation to implement dual VET in Spain (Royal-decree 1529/2012) was passed without consultation with the social partners. Moreover, successive reforms on the CVET systems, which limited the governance role of social partners were also approved unilaterally by the government (for example, Royal-decree 4/2015 of 22 March 2015).

Over the last few years, this dynamic changed significantly. In 2020, the new centre-left coalition government placed VET at the ministry level and set up a new Social Dialogue Round Table for Vocational Training – outside of the CGFP. This new Round Table is composed of the Ministry of Education and VET, and the most representative employer organisations and trade unions at the national level. This Round Table was set up to discuss the needs and future of the VET system, the reform of the education law (Organic Law 3/2020) and, once it was passed, also the legal reform of the VET system (Organic Law 3/2022). In terms of the process for designing the new VET law, the social partners worked on a bipartite document between trade unions and employer organisations, and the document was subsequently presented to the government. Moreover, a total of five meetings were held with the Social Dialogue Round Table, during which the final text was agreed upon.

There was disagreement among the social partners interviewed on the extent to which the newly formed Social Dialogue Round Table has led to meaningful involvement from trade unions and employer organisations in the design of the VET law. Employer organisations seem to value this dialogue very positively; however, the trade unions (mainly CCOO) indicate that it was a consultation process rather than a joint agreement. CCOO describe the process as ‘a simulated social dialogue round table’ due to the small number of meetings that took place.

Because the interviews with the social partners were conducted before the final draft of the new VET law was available for approval, it was only possible to obtain the opinion of the social partners on the provisional draft law. Generally, it can be pointed out that the new law has addressed some of their concerns related to the lack of integration of the CVET and IVET systems. It has also addressed some



unions' claims linked to the status of apprentices, approving that all apprentices under so-called intensive dual VET will be hired under a training contract subjected to labour law and collective bargaining provisions. However, both trade unions and employer organisations were unsatisfied because of the inclusion of some issues and terminology that were not discussed in the meetings, and because of the negligible developments on better definitions for their governance roles. Regarding this aspect, the final draft law provides that social partners will be able to develop functions of promotion and assistance for dual VET schemes. It also points out that the government will favour, in particular, the participation of social partners in order to promote a network of SME and organisations for the rotation of apprentices.

## GREECE

Compared to Spain, Greece has a more centralised policy approach towards VET. Despite some policy developments aimed at fostering decentralisation, strategic and policymaking functions are highly centralised. VET and educational policy are both defined by central government, which also sets out the general policy to be followed in different policy areas.

The VET system in Greece has been subject to a great variety of legislative changes in recent years, which have modified the governance structure. Social partners have not been systematically involved in these policy reforms, particularly in the context of the different Memoranda of Understanding (MoUs) and the three adjustment programmes (2010-2018). Since the 2013 reform, the Ministry of Education, Research and Religious Affairs coordinates the entire apprenticeship and school-based VET system, in cooperation with the Ministry of Labour, Social Security and Social Solidarity (Cedefop, 2018). The ministry also cooperates with different technical bodies with competence in the different apprenticeship schemes: OAED; EOPPEP; IEP. This will be elaborated further in Section 4.2.

The most recent policy development impacting the governance system was approved in 2020 through a social dialogue process. The government engaged trade unions and employer organisations through formal and informal consultation processes in the design of the new 'National System of Vocational Education, Training and Lifelong Learning', which was enacted in December 2020 (Law No 4763/2020). The new regulation was explicitly aimed at enhancing social partners' integration in the governance of the VET systems. With this aim, it has set up the Central Council for Vocational Education and Training (KSEEEK) as the key tripartite governance structure at the national cross-sectoral level operating at the political-strategic governance. KSEEEK has replaced the previous tripartite institutions dealing with the apprenticeship system at this governance level, the so-called National Coordination Body for Apprenticeships (ESOM).

The ESOM was developed in February 2018 and was only active until 2020. It was a tripartite institution that joined together representatives from the Ministry of Labour, Social Security and Social Solidarity, the Ministry of Education and the social partners. ESOM played an advisory role. Its main purpose was to provide the Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Labour, Social Security and Social Solidarity with suggestions for improving the apprenticeship institutional framework, and for designing, implementing and evaluating apprenticeship programmes (Cedefop, 2018). According to the social partners interviewed, ESOM could have been a useful institution for discussing apprenticeship issues. However, it never had a specified procedure to involve social partners, its initiatives and discussions were not well



organised, and its meetings were not frequent (it only met four times from 2018 to 2020). Accordingly, they assess that ESOM was not effective in terms of jointly defining strategic priorities or contributing to policymaking on the apprenticeship system.

**ESOM operated in theory. If you don't involve social partners based on a specified procedure then all this is pointless. The state wants to have an effective institution in cooperation with social partners but so far all the initiatives have not been well or-**

**ganised. (OAED)**

**Actually, it didn't work a lot. We had some meetings. Those meetings were fragmented and not well organised. (GSEVEE)**

Regarding the KSEEEK, its mission is to make proposals and recommendations to the Minister of Education concerning general VET and lifelong learning policies, particularly in the context of promoting knowledge, making effective use of the human skills resources available, and linking education with the labour market and employment. Thus, compared to ESOM, it has a similar consultative role, but it has a broader policy scope, covering also CVET and lifelong learning policies. KSEEEK regulation states that it will meet four times a year at the chairperson's invitation. There can also be additional meetings whenever this is deemed necessary. Moreover, every 3 years, KSEEEK is mandated to submit the Strategic Plan for VET and Lifelong Learning to the Minister of Education. Therefore, it is expected that social partners and state authorities will be able to jointly discuss and adopt mid- and long-term strategic goals for the VET and lifelong learning systems through this plan.

Compared to ESOM, the composition of KSEEEK is also broader. In terms of state authorities, KSEEEK includes representatives from three co-responsible ministries: 2 from the Ministry of Education, 1 each from the Ministry of Labour and the Ministry of Finance, and representatives from the three technical bodies with competencies in apprenticeship (OAED, EOPPEP and IEP). As for the social partners, KSEEEK is made up of 3 representatives of employers, 3 representatives of employees, representatives of Local Administrations Unions and 1 representative of the Central Union of Chambers of Greece.

When the fieldwork was conducted, KSEEEK was just starting to function. Accordingly, the stakeholders interviewed could only provide a general assessment based on their expectations. Overall, social partners provided a positive assessment of this body. They generally agreed that the body enables social partners to be involved in drafting proposals about diverse fields relevant to apprenticeships and general VET policies (such as different dual VET/apprenticeship programmes, skills committees, and certification). They also value that the body is mandated to develop specific deliverables which can have an impact on policymaking (such as the Strategic Plan for VET and lifelong learning). However, some concerns were raised on the extent to which it can tend to marginalise the interests of the apprenticeship system, given its broader scope of competencies compared to previous specialised institutions dealing exclusively with the apprenticeship system (ESOM). Moreover, social partners also criticised that there are no specific processes and procedures when it comes to organisational matters (such as the agenda and minutes of the meetings, secretarial and administrative support) and the implementation of decisions (such as whether decisions agreed are implemented at policy level).

## PORTUGAL

Portugal shares with Greece a highly centralised approach towards VET policies. Strategic and policymaking functions in the Portuguese VET system are centralised at the national level, which means that it is the central government which defines general VET policies, curricula aspects and financing (Cedefop, 2016). Responsibility for VET policy is divided at the central government level. The Ministry of Education is responsible for school-based VET, while the Institute for Employment and Vocational Training (IEFP), under the remit of the Ministry of Labour, develops and implements active labour market policies, apprenticeship programmes and continuing VET (CVET).

In contrast with Greece and Spain, at the political-strategic level Portugal lacks a tripartite institution specialised in VET and apprenticeships. In this context, social partners have been involved in VET and apprenticeship policymaking through the Standing Committee for Social Concertation, which is the main tripartite body for social concertation at the macro level. The social partners represented in the body are: the four employers' confederations, the Confederation of Portuguese Business (CIP), the Confederation of Portuguese Tourism (CTP), the Confederation of Portuguese Agriculture (CAP) and the Portuguese Commerce and Services Confederation (CCP); as well as the two most important trade unions, the General Union of Workers (UGT) and the General Confederation of Portuguese Workers (CGTP). CPCS is the only body that formally has the legal competencies to negotiate, through social dialogue, general regulations for the VET systems, or strategic priorities regarding VET and apprenticeships. The CPCS can also organise working groups to discuss policy measures and regulations for VET, engaging alternative actors such as representatives of the Ministry of Education, VET schools' associations and technical agencies.

Social dialogue under the CPCS played a crucial role in the development of apprenticeship programmes in 1991. Within the Professional Training Policy Agreement signed in 1991, the role of social partners both as beneficiaries and providers of VET was legally defined through the Decree-Law 405/91 of 16 October. This regulation gave the social partners represented in CPCS certain formal competencies on the governance of VET regarding the definition of VET policies, the coordination of governance structures and the implementation of apprenticeship programmes developed by IEFP (see section 4.3 for further detail). CPCS has also been the main tripartite institution for involving social partners in successive VET policy reforms. However, the role of this tripartite body in VET policy making was more limited in the context of the Memoranda of Understanding (MoUs) in exchange for debt relief (2011-2014). Thus, the CPCS did not play any role in the development of the German-inspired Dual VET programme introduced in 2012 following EU recommendations.

According to the social partners, the CPCS is the main social dialogue institution enabling employer organisations and trade unions to participate in VET policymaking. However, they regret that the body only has a consultative role: *'we certainly have an active voice, however, we do not have the decision power'* (CIP). They also acknowledge that although the institution can foster social dialogue by cultivating mutual trust and facilitating the emergence of a shared diagnosis, the institution itself does not guarantee social dialogue outcomes. In this regard, it was stressed that in relation to dual VET ('apprenticeship system'), social partners agree on the general principles but still have divergent views on specific topics and these divergences clearly limit their influence on policymaking.

**Social dialogue which actually yields results requires partners on both sides to have a common underlying set of priorities and goals to negotiate from, and this is actually lacking. (UGT)**

**If we are talking only about the principles of vocational training, there is consensus; the problem is when we get down to concrete issues. (CGTP)**

The most recent social pact on VET produced under the CPCS was ‘The New Agreement for Vocational Training and Qualifications’, which was concluded in July 2021. The agreement was first discussed under a specific working group set up by the Government (Ministry of Labour), which brought together representatives from: the Ministry of Education; the social partners; regulatory/technical agencies with competencies on VET and apprenticeships, that is, IEFP and the National Agency for Qualifications and Vocational Education and Training (ANQEP); education and training experts; and the association for private VET schools. Subsequently, the draft agreement concluded under this working group was discussed and agreed upon through CPCS. The agreement was signed by all the social partners represented in this body, except one trade union (CGTP) which argued, among other factors, about their continued absence in the system’s monitoring processes and the lack of information to evaluate the system. This reflects a common feature of Portuguese social dialogue processes, which are contingent on the ideological division between the main trade union confederations and their difficulties to adopt joint positions (Rigby & García Calavia, 2018).

The ‘New Agreement for Vocational Training and Qualifications’ (2021) aims to provide a framework for the regulation and governance of the VET system, improve certification and the quality of training, and upgrade the qualification level in the apprenticeship system (it created a new higher qualification of level V within apprenticeship courses). Regarding governance, the agreement explicitly aims to improve and enhance social partners’ involvement at different governance levels. At the political-strategic level, this agreement outlined an Interministerial Commission for Coordination of the Education and Vocational Training System, which was created in December 2021. This Commission substantively involves social partners and arises from their concerns about the lack of articulation between school-based VET and apprenticeships due to the poor coordination between IEFP and ANQEP. This lack of articulation and coordination caused problems in many areas: the establishment of a clear educational framework, a range of financial matters and the linking of apprenticeships (under the responsibility of IEFP) with the National System for Qualifications (under the responsibility of ANQEP).

**There has been an allocation of funds from the Ministry of Labour to Education System- this is a struggle between these two Ministries and this war is taking funds from us. (CIP)**

**The number-one priority for the education and training system was the integration of these two systems in the LBSE 1986 as only this would resolve the division that exists between the two ministries. (UGT)**

Moreover, this ‘New Agreement’ plan the reactivation of the National Commission for Apprenticeships (CNA) which used to be the governance space where all matters related to apprenticeships were discussed and decided. This Commission was deactivated in 2007 when the National System for Qualifications (SNQ) was established. In addition, it is worth mentioning that the agreement has set up a working group integrating representatives from both the government and the social partners. This working group is mandated to prepare the timetable and action plan for implementing the agreement,

as well as being in charge of its monitoring and evaluation.

In addition, the agreement is considered a stepping stone to improved social partner participation in the governance of apprenticeship systems. The principal criticisms were expressed by the trade union CGTP on the basis of some measures being considered insufficient and inadequate. In particular, the union criticised the lack of actions aimed at improving trade unions' roles in enforcing working and training conditions of apprenticeships, as well as the lack of attention paid to collective bargaining.

Finally, it is worth mentioning that social partners can also contribute to policymaking and the definition of strategic priorities through their representation in the IEFP which, as previously noted, is the main institution in charge of designing and implementing apprenticeship schemes. At the political-strategic level, IEFP enables social partner participation through its board of directors. The IEFP board of directors brings together representatives from the most important social partners (such as those represented in the CPCS) and other government agencies with technical policy powers on apprenticeships. The IEFP's Board of Directors meets monthly, along with the IEFP's President and representatives of the social partners. On this board, they jointly discuss the number of students and courses opening and, therefore, the yearly allocation of funds for apprenticeships at the national and regional levels. Within this body, social partners can also put forward proposals and recommendations about working conditions of 'apprenticeships' or 'internships'. As the representative of the IEFP stated: *'All social partners are involved in decision-making through this board'*. Generally, social partners agree that although the IEFP is flexible and their opinions are taken into account, the effectiveness of social dialogue is limited by financial issues and the lack of good quality information about the system supporting policymaking. The 'New Agreement for Vocational Training and Qualifications' has also sought to reinforce social partners' involvement at the political-strategic level within the IEFP. In its own words, the agreement aims to *'promote the creation of a working group between the IEFP and the management centres to identify critical points and map out solutions associated with the administrative and financial dimensions of management'* (New Agreement for Vocational Training and Qualifications, p.10).

## POLAND

In Poland, strategic and policymaking functions related to VET are exclusively concentrated at the national level, as in the case of Greece and Portugal. Two main ministries have responsibilities for VET policies. First, the Ministry of Education and Science (MEN, formerly the Ministry of National Education), which shapes general educational policy, develops educational law, sets the core curriculum and supervises schools. Second, the Ministry of Family and Social Policy, which shapes labour market policies and develops labour law (including provisions concerning juvenile workers<sup>7</sup>). Local governments are mainly responsible for managing and implementing VET schemes.

VET in Poland is strongly state-regulated. The political-strategic governance level is exclusively state-driven. Social partners can only be involved in VET policymaking through the Social Dialogue Council (RDS), which is the main cross-sectoral social dialogue institution operating at the highest national

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 7 These policy powers were under former Ministry of Development, Labour and Technology, currently named Ministry of Development and Technology

level of public policymaking. As in Portugal, there is no specific tripartite institution dealing exclusively with VET policies. However, in contrast with Portugal, social partners are not formally represented in any of the public institutions responsible for designing and implementing VET and apprenticeship policies.

The RDS is composed of different working groups called Problem Teams. However, there is no Problem Team dedicated exclusively to VET educational policies. The two RDS teams with the greatest potential to debate dual VET policies are the one for Public Services, and the one for Economic Policy and Labour Market. They are both chaired by representatives of social partner organisations and composed of representatives of several ministries, undersecretaries of state, employer organisations and trade unions. The Problem Team for Public Services has competencies relevant to strategic discussions about change in the education system, while the Problem Team for Economic Policy and Labour Market has competencies in developing common positions on economic and the labour market policies. Both are involved in the discussion on including new occupations in the VET system.

The dialogue in a tripartite or bipartite formula may also take place outside the Problem Teams, through different informal and ad hoc mechanisms which could have some influence on policymaking concerning VET. This was the case of the Consultative Team for Vocational Training at the Ministry of Development and Technology. The team was composed of representatives of the Ministry and one employer organisation representing the craft guilds- it played a role in the early phase of VET reforms during 2012/2015, although it was subsequently inactive since 2016. In this case, trade unions were not involved.

Thus, the participation of social partners in Poland is non-systematic. Social partner participation is limited to the debates on the RDS framework, engaging in public consultations and commenting on draft legislation. In the view of social partners shown in the fieldwork, there is a lot of arbitrariness in the way the government decides on which debates are addressed, how and when they take place, and which of their opinions and proposals are considered. Because of this arbitrariness, trade unions and employers' organisations develop their own structured bipartite agreements which can be considered as an attempt to draw the government's attention to their perspectives and/or the need to introduce significant changes to strengthen VET and other public policy areas.

## 4.2. Technical-strategic level

The technical-strategic governance level deals with those institutions that are also involved in the VET system's long-term developments but from a technical or expert perspective (Emmenegger & Seitzl, 2020). The institutions considered at this level are those in charge of evaluating the VET system (for example, conducting research on VET), linking the education/training system with the labour market, providing technical advice to the government, and recognising and developing training regulations and curricula (Emmenegger & Seitzl, 2020). In some countries classified within collective skill formation regimes, there are significant examples of bodies/procedures through which social partners are involved at this governance level (Emmenegger & Seitzl, 2020). This is the case of the Federal Institute for Vocational Education and Training (BIBB) in Germany which is in charge of updating the directory of training occupations, developing VET curricula, conducting research on VET and its relationship with the labour market, and coordinating the regional (Länder) committees for VET. The BIBB is supervised by a tripartite round table where the social partners are represented. Another example is the Founda-

tion for Cooperation on VET and the Labour Market (SBB) in the Netherlands, which involves employer organisations, trade unions, VET providers and vocational teachers, and is responsible for advising the Ministry of Education on VET curricula relating to labour market needs.

The four countries analysed in the INVOLVE project have different institutions and procedures for managing the relationship between VET and the labour market, and for updating professional qualifications. Moreover, in the cases of Greece and Poland, there is a plurality of technical bodies which, in some cases, have overlapping roles. Only in Poland are social partners not represented in the most important bodies or processes operating at this level. In Greece, Portugal and Spain, trade unions and employer organisations are formally represented on relevant technical bodies or processes – although some concerns were raised about the quality of their involvement, the degree of participation, and to a lesser extent, the balance in the consultation process given that trade unions and employer organisations are not involved on an equal footing.

## SPAIN

In Spain, the National Institute of Vocational Qualifications (INCUAL) is the most important institution at this level responsible for identifying skills, and for defining and updating professional qualifications. INCUAL was established in 1999 through Royal-decree 375/1999. It depends institutionally on the Ministry of Education and VET, but functionally on the CGFP, being its main technical body. INCUAL is responsible for defining, elaborating and updating the National Catalogue of Qualifications (CNCP)<sup>8</sup>. The CNCP is related to the Spanish Qualifications Framework (MECU)<sup>9</sup>, which in turn is related to the European Qualifications Framework (EQF). It is the reference point for IVET diplomas (dual VET and traditional school-based schemes) and professional certificates within the CVET system. INCUAL is also mandated to monitor qualitative and quantitative changes in the labour market by means of a Professional Observatory. Thus, there is not a specific feedback mechanism for each VET scheme but a concentrated one managed by INCUAL.

The social partners are not formally represented in INCUAL. However, they are involved in the technical processes related to the determination and updating of the qualifications, where they play an active role, as highlighted in comparative research (Cedefop, 2013, 2016). The methodology for developing the standards is quite participatory. It involves employers, trade unions, and administrations at both central and regional levels. The methodology works as follows. Professional qualifications are designed by working groups comprising experts in the professional field and in vocational training. The working groups are proposed by the CGFP, where social partners are represented (see section 4.1) and directed by the INCUAL. Trade unions and employer organisations may participate directly in the assessment of a professional qualification within a working group, or indirectly, by appointing an expert to externally assist in the definition of a qualification. The results of these technical proposals are then submitted to

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8 According to the new Organic Law on the Organisation and Integration of Vocational Training (3/2022) it is going to be named as National Catalogue of Standards of Professional Competencies.

9 According to the recent Royal-decree 272/2022, in Spain there are two qualifications frameworks: MECU which has eight levels (with sublevels) related to the eight levels of EQF, and MECES which is also related to EQF but it has only four levels referred to higher education IVET cycles and university studies.

the CGFP and finally approved by its Permanent Council. In general, the social partners' assessment of the role played by INCUAL in these processes is positive, especially the effort shown by INCUAL to work with social partners despite the limited means at their disposal. Nevertheless, the social partners have some criticisms about the processes followed, the channels for identifying experts and the language used.

Regarding the process, this is assessed as *'very bureaucratic and very slow'* (CCOO), which excessively slows down the process of validating new qualifications. However, they also comment that recent changes are taking place that *'are speeding up these validation processes [and] in this way, INCUAL's work is becoming much faster, which we value very much [...] some deficiencies we had have been eliminated'* (CEOE). In this sense, the General Secretary of VET policies highlighted that *'since 2018 they have gone from having updated 33% of the catalogue of qualifications to 85%'* (General Secretary of VET). In relation to the slowness of the updating process, the social partners indicate during the fieldwork that the regulatory part is slow due to technical procedures needed to comply with the law, which must be completed in order to approve the qualifications; however, work is being done to increase the pace of the technical aspect.

In terms of the channels for identifying technical experts who should participate in the assessment/update of the qualifications, the social partners point out that *'there is a twofold process: on the one hand, the social partners are asked for sectoral experts, on the other hand, the INCUAL goes directly to the expert and often do not select or do not identify the best expert'* (CEOE). Thus, sometimes the chosen experts in the field only specialise in certain activities relating to the qualification analysed and only a partial view is obtained.

In relation to the language used in the reports, the social partners say that sometimes too much technical metalanguage is used – *'the language of the educational world has nothing to do with the language of the company and you simply have to connect with the language of the sector you are going to address'* (CEA). This causes the reports to be poorly understood by people who work in the sector or carry out that occupation, thus making it difficult to assess the qualifications. As a result, *'the vocabulary does not help the sectoral social partners to participate'* (PIMEC). This makes it difficult for both employer organisations and trade unions to consult the sectors and ensure that the report is an accurate reflection of professional activities.

The last aspect that the social partners highlight is that there should be more resources to allocate personnel to carry out these processes of assessing qualifications and identifying experts, pointing out that *'more economic support would be necessary to be able to devote more resources to it [...] because it is an important technical and administrative work'* (CEA). This could speed up the validation of qualifications and encourage greater participation from the sector, companies and workers.

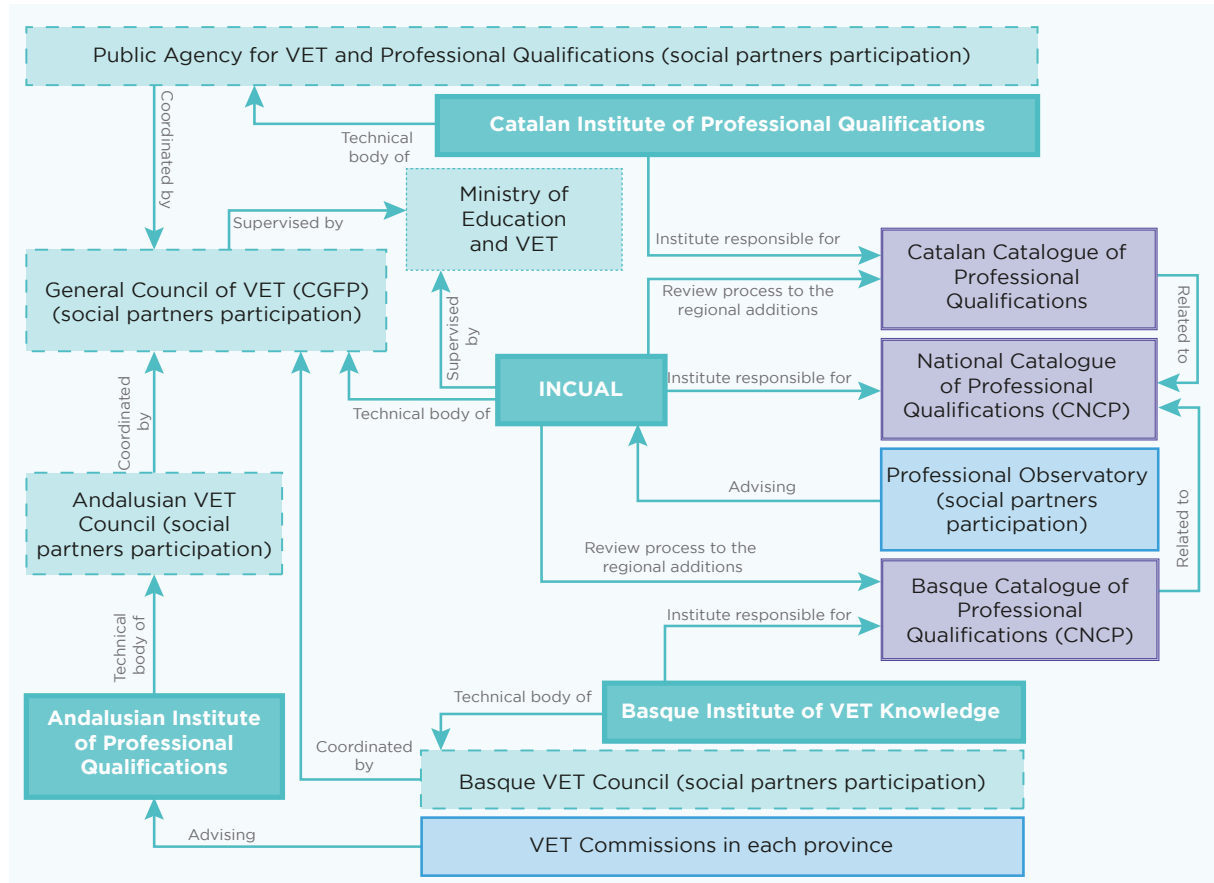
Reference should be made to the Professional Observatory, regulated by Order PCI/18/2020, which formally integrates the social partners in its governing board. The Professional Observatory, institutionally within INCUAL, is responsible for identifying new professional profiles and new training needs that lead to the development of new degrees or the updating of existing qualifications. It works in cooperation with regional and sectoral observatories. However, as a fieldwork outcome, the social partners pointed out that the Professional Observatory is not fulfilling its tasks efficiently.

At the level of the Autonomous Communities, the INCUAL model is replicated through regional insti-



tutes of qualifications with similar functions and structures albeit focused on local or regional needs (see Figure 1 below). This is the case of the three regions analysed in the Spanish fieldwork (Andalusia, Catalonia and Basque Country), which also reveals some cross-regional differences.

**Figure 1.** Spanish national and regional institutions involved in professional qualifications



Source: authors' own elaboration based on desk research and fieldwork outcomes.

Note 1: Dotted line is used for the Ministry/ies responsible for the VET system. Dashed line is used for main institutions at political-strategic level. Bold line is used for main institutions at technical-strategic level. Double line is used for catalogues or system of qualifications. Simple line is used for other advisory bodies

In the Autonomous Community of Andalusia, the Andalusian Institute of Professional Qualifications is the technical body that has similar competences than INCUAL ones. It collaborates with the VET Commission in each province and with the working group for dual VET within the Andalusian VET Council. Social partners in the fieldwork were critical on their role in this institution, pointing out that they could collaborate and give information to improve the process but their role is just consultative, and their participation is carried out on a voluntary basis because of the lack of resources.

As in Andalusia, the Catalan Institute of Qualifications and the Basque Institute of VET Knowledge are the main technical bodies mandated to identify and update regional and local qualifications in Catalonia and Basque Country. However, in these two regions, the institutes develop their own processes for creating and updating qualifications in order to define the professional specialisations that are only recognised in their territory through their own Catalogue of Qualifications. The INCUAL usually incorporates these updates and new qualifications into the National Catalogue after a review process. The Ministry of Education and VET following new professional specialisation programmes launched,



in particular, in the Basque Country, but also in Catalonia, created a new group of VET programmes called VET specialisation courses. However, as they are mainly designed in 2020 and 2021, they are still under development and only offered in some VET centres. The trade unions are very critical of this kind of training on the basis of: excessive number of work hours, less transferable work competencies; and excessive role played by companies allowing them to define the curricula according to their needs. However, employer organisations believe that these programmes are effective because they are designed to meet a significant and specific demand coming from a particular sector – which is quicker and more targeted than modifying an existing VET course

Finally, regional cases show that there is no procedure or institution dedicated to evaluating the quality and impact of VET policies at the level of the Autonomous Communities. The regional governments, through the educational inspectors, supervise the VET programmes (including the curricula, teachers and schedules) but nothing further. In Andalusia, the Andalusian VET Council is responsible for conducting quality evaluations of VET policies but, in the social partners' opinion, the process is limited to *'how many projects have been presented, how many have been approved, how many are for renewal, how many are new and little more. There is no indicator on labour insertion or employment'* (UGT Andalusia). This criticism is also pointed out by social partners in the Basque Country adding that the evaluation should be longitudinal and not only at the end of the VET course. In Catalonia, social partners agree with the new structure and the creation of the Public Agency for VET and Professional Qualifications of Catalonia, but they point out that until now *'they have had a lack of access to the data'* (PIMEC) meaning that they lack information about the impact of the changes.

## GREECE

Similar to the political-strategic level, the technical-strategic level in Greece shows a high degree of institutional instability. Several legislative reforms have frequently modified the institutional landscape in recent years. Moreover, contrary to Spain – where there is one technical body at the national level in charge of the main technical functions relevant for IVET and dual VET or apprenticeships (such as forecasting skills and defining/updating qualifications) – in Greece, there is a plurality of state bodies and institutions sharing technical responsibilities. According to Cedefop (2018), legislative reforms have not clearly defined the mandates, roles and responsibilities of the technical bodies in Greece. For example, these bodies seem to have overlapping roles. As a result, technical bodies supporting apprenticeship systems operate in a fragmented way despite several political attempts addressed at improving integration and coordination (Cedefop, 2018).

The main existing institutions at this level have tended to formally integrate the social partners in two ways. First, by social partner representatives having a place on the governing boards. Second, through advisory bodies where they have played a consultative role. Social partners have also directly participated in technical processes linked to skill forecasting and the development of occupational profiles. However, this complex and unstable institutional framework seems to hinder the meaningful and predictable participation of the social partners in several technical processes. Moreover, fieldwork shows a relative lack of trust or scepticism among trade unions and employee organisations about expected outcomes, successive reforms and the efficiency of some processes and policies in force.

As was explained in section 4.1, the most recent legislative change was introduced in 2020 (Law

4763/2020). This reform and successive political decisions have introduced significant changes at the technical-strategic level, especially in the field of VET research and skills forecasting, where some institutions were abolished, and new bodies were established. As shown in Table 4 below, four state technical institutions responsible for VET research and skills forecasting have been established and/or abolished since 2017.

**Table 4.** Technical bodies responsible for VET research and skills forecasting

Technical body	Scope/mandate	Social Partners representation	Starting date	End date
<b>National Institute for Labour and Human Resources (EIEAD)</b>	Needs-diagnosis of the labour market.	Social partners are represented in the National Coordination Committee; and are responsible for conducting field surveys supporting EIEAD work.	2011	No end date – still active. However, there is a law under consideration for the termination of its operation.
<b>National Council for Education and Human Resources Development (ESEKAAD)</b>	Analysing the relationship between education and the labour market.	Representatives from all social partners were members of ESEKAAD.	February 2017	December 2020
<b>Central Scientific Committee (KEE)</b>	Scientific research, study and verification regarding improving the quality and efficiency of VET	No	December 2020	No end date – still active.
<b>Regional Councils for linking VET with Labour Market (SSPAE)</b>	Skills forecasting aiming to link labour market and VET system	Social partners are represented on regional boards.	December 2020	No end date – still active.

Source: authors' own elaboration based on desk research and fieldwork outcomes

First, the National Institute for Labour and Human Resources (EIEAD), which operates under the remit of the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs, can be abolished. There is currently a law under consideration for the termination of EIEAD's operation. This institution is mandated to coordinate the development of labour market needs-diagnosis' methodologies and mechanisms; where needs-diagnosis aims to determine the competencies and knowledge required in professions/occupations at the national, regional and sectoral levels (Cedefop, 2018). EIEAD's current framework of mechanisms and methodologies were introduced in 2016, following external pressures from the European Commission. Although EIEAD coordinates the mechanisms from a technical perspective, there is also a National Coordination Committee consisting of representatives from the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs, the Ministry of Education and Religious Affairs, the Ministry of Finance, other technical bodies (EOPPEP and OAED) and the main social partners. Thus, trade unions and employer organisations were formally engaged in the process. EIEAD's skills forecasting approach consists of two main techniques. First, the processing and analysing of secondary data related to the professional, sectoral and educational structures of employment and skills mismatch at the national and regional levels. Second, the conducting of field surveys by the social partners and the regional governments on the basis of an agreed methodology and research framework (Cedefop, 2018). Accordingly, social partners were also closely involved in this technical process, supporting EIEAD in the identification of sectoral and regional competencies and

skills gaps. EIEAD had published reports every six months and the results of the forecasting system had informed the development of new occupational profiles and curricula. One of its main outcomes were two surveys relating to VET graduate tracking in Greece. These two surveys aimed to develop a model linking VET systems to the needs of the labour market by identifying the placement rate of IVET graduates as well as the degree of satisfaction of employers and IVET graduates (Cedefop, 2018).

Second, the National Council for Education and Human Resources Development (ESEKAAD) was founded in February 2017 as the institution responsible for analysing the relationship between education and the labour market, and for assisting the Ministry of Education with VET issues, but it was abolished in December 2020. Its competencies were assumed by the new Central Scientific Committee (KEE). The KEE offers scientific support to KSEEEK and the Ministry of Education on VET issues. It is responsible for providing scientific research, study and accreditation to improve the quality and efficiency of VET (including apprenticeships) as well as Lifelong Learning programmes. According to the social partners interviewed, the institution can contribute to the improvement of available data on apprenticeships: *'we need an apprenticeship-related institution since one of the most important problems is the lack of data'* (INSETE). However, they are very critical of its composition because social partners are not represented. In this regard, it was highlighted that most social partners operate research institutes which possess great technical expertise and, as such, could contribute to the effective operation of KEE.

Third, the Regional Councils for linking VET with Labour Market (SSPAE) were created. The SSPAE are responsible for submitting proposals and suggestions to the KSEEEK on VET-related matters – in particular, on the domains and specialisations that have to be available at the public IEK, EPAL, and EPAS schools, as well as a range of special courses. The boards operate at the regional level, with the purpose of decentralising VET's governance system. SSPAE integrate representatives from all the apprenticeship systems (EPAS, EPAL, IEK), social partners and local administration bodies.

SSPAE were about to have (or already had, depending on the region) their first meeting when the fieldwork was conducted<sup>10</sup>. Moreover, SSPAE's specialisation Act was published only in March 2022 (FEK 1324 - No. K3 / 30446). Most of the interviewees believe that SSPAE constitute a positive initiative. However, some concerns were expressed regarding its future impact on apprenticeships because of several factors (such as the lack of capacity among involved parties, the lack of frequent and consistent operations, and the imprecise definition of roles and fields of intervention).

**Based on our first meeting, I am not that sure that SSPAE will focus on apprenticeships and not on general issues related to EPAL or IEK. But this is the first impression. In general, the new framework is moving in the right direction. But this remains to be seen in practice. (GSEVEE)**

In addition to those new bodies, attention must be drawn to two key institutions responsible for defining and updating occupational profiles and IVET curricula in cooperation with the aforementioned technical bodies – the National Organisation for the Certification of Qualifications and Vocational Guidance (EOPPEP), and the Institute of Educational Policy (IEP). Both institutions were already operating

.....  
 10 At time of writing SSPAE are operating on a regular basis.

before the new regulatory framework entered into force and are still active. EOPPEP is responsible for defining and updating professional qualifications. IEP is responsible for defining and updating VET curricula within the Ministry of Education, with reference to Greek Qualifications Framework (HFQ).

**Table 5.** Technical bodies responsible for defining and updating qualifications and VET curricula

Technical body	Scope/mandate	Social Partners representation	Starting date	End date
<b>National Organisation for the Certification of Qualifications and Vocational Guidance (EOPPEP)</b>	The definition and updating of professional qualifications; certification and evaluation of qualifications (non-formal education and informal learning).	Yes, in total three representatives of social partners participate. One for employers, one for employees and one representing employees in the public sector	2011	No end date - still active
<b>Institute of Educational Policy (IEP)</b>	To provide scientific support to the Ministry of Education on issues regarding primary and secondary education, post-secondary education, the transition from secondary to higher education, teacher training, students dropping-out and early school leaving.	No	2011	No end date - still active

Source: authors' own elaboration based on desk research and fieldwork outcomes

The National Organisation for the Certification of Qualifications and Vocational Guidance (EOPPEP) is the main agency responsible for defining and updating professional qualifications. It was established in 2011 with the purpose of developing and putting into practice the HFQ, which has been the main reference point for the qualifications offered under apprenticeship schemes. Currently, EOPPEP is in charge of developing the HQF established by Law 4763/2020. HQF is also related to the EQF according to which all VET titles and qualifications can be recorded, classified and compared with each other.

EOPPEP is also the body responsible for Occupational Profiles (OP), which include the description of the tasks, job functions, and skills and competencies for each occupation (Cedefop, 2018). OP have been mainly used to accredit VET programmes (all VET programmes submitted to EOPPEP have to correspond to one OP) (Lester et al., 2018). They are also the reference point for the workplace curricular component of apprenticeship schemes (EPAL and EPAS) (Cedefop,2022; Lalioti, 2019).

EOPPEP also has a mandate to certify qualifications (non-formal education and informal learning) and evaluate and certify exams for students in post-secondary VET programmes (IEK) and EPAL apprenticeship schemes. These exams include both a theoretical and a practical element and are aimed at ensuring candidates meet the knowledge and skills described in the OP.

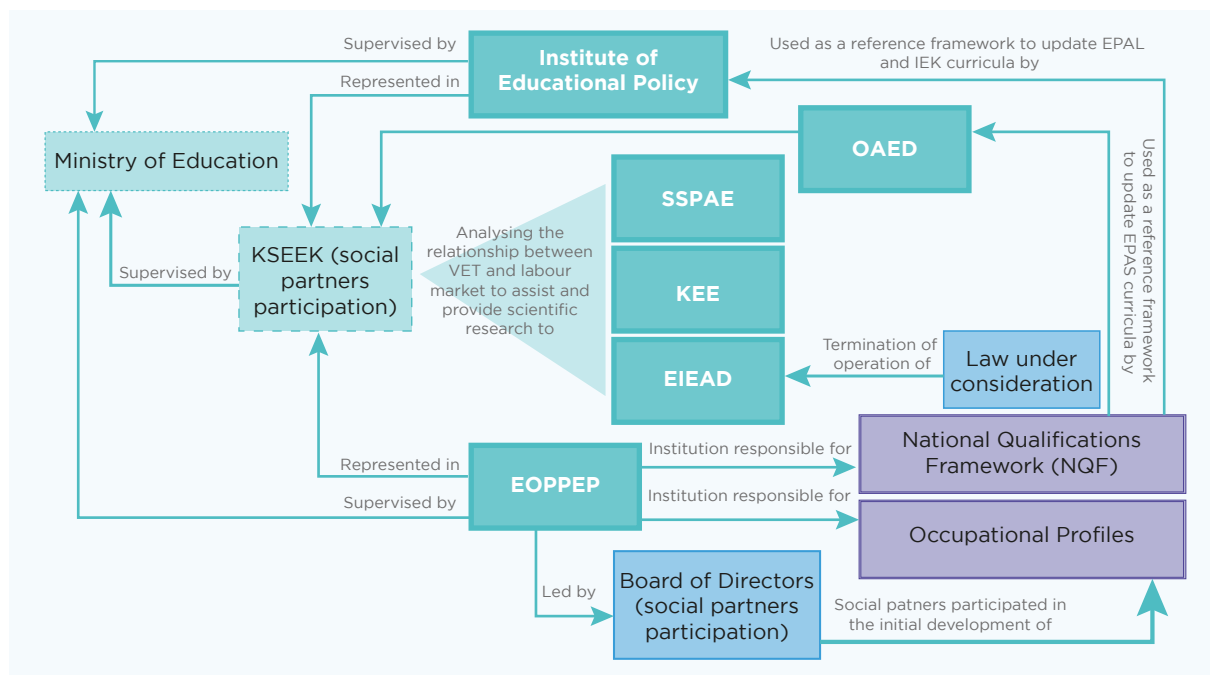
Social partners were responsible for the development of 202 initial OP and, currently, they are formally represented on the Board of Directors of EOPPEP. According to fieldwork outcomes, social partners and state representatives agree that trade unions and employer organisations have played a leading role in the development of OP under the coordination of EOPPEP. Social partners all agree that OP are key instruments for linking labour market needs and VET provisions, thus improving the labour market

responsiveness of the apprenticeship system. However, they also point out that the process for updating the OP should become leaner and faster. This is in line with previous research which highlighted the slow pace of procedures governing the evaluation and updating of OP due to the rigidity of these same procedures (Laloti, 2019).

Finally, the Institute of Educational Policy (IEP), under the remit of the Ministry of Education and Religious Affairs, was established in 2011 (Law 3966/2011). This institution mainly operates within the educational school-based IVET system. It is the main body in charge of supporting and planning educative policies. Regarding the apprenticeship system, IEP is responsible for the development of curricula for the EPAL apprenticeship schemes. Social partners are not represented or involved in this process of curricula development.

To summarise, as shown in Figure 2 below, there are five important institutions at this governance level, although one of them (EIEAD) is likely to disappear. All of them are indirectly related because they are all coordinated by KSEEEK, the main institution at the political-strategic level, and supervised by the Ministry of Education and Religious Affairs. Three of the institutions are responsible for analysing labour market needs at the national, regional and local levels, and to assist KSEEEK in planning educational and VET policy. In addition, there is the EOPPEP which is responsible for developing the OP and the HQF. Finally, IEP is responsible for updating VET curricula with reference to HQF.

**Figure 2.** Greek institutions involved at the technical-strategic level



Source: authors' own elaboration based on desk research and fieldwork outcomes  
 Note 1: Dotted line is used for the Ministry/ies responsible for the VET system. Dashed line is used for main institutions at political-strategic level. Bold line is used for main institutions at technical-strategic level. Double line is used for catalogues or system of qualifications. Simple line is used for other elements.

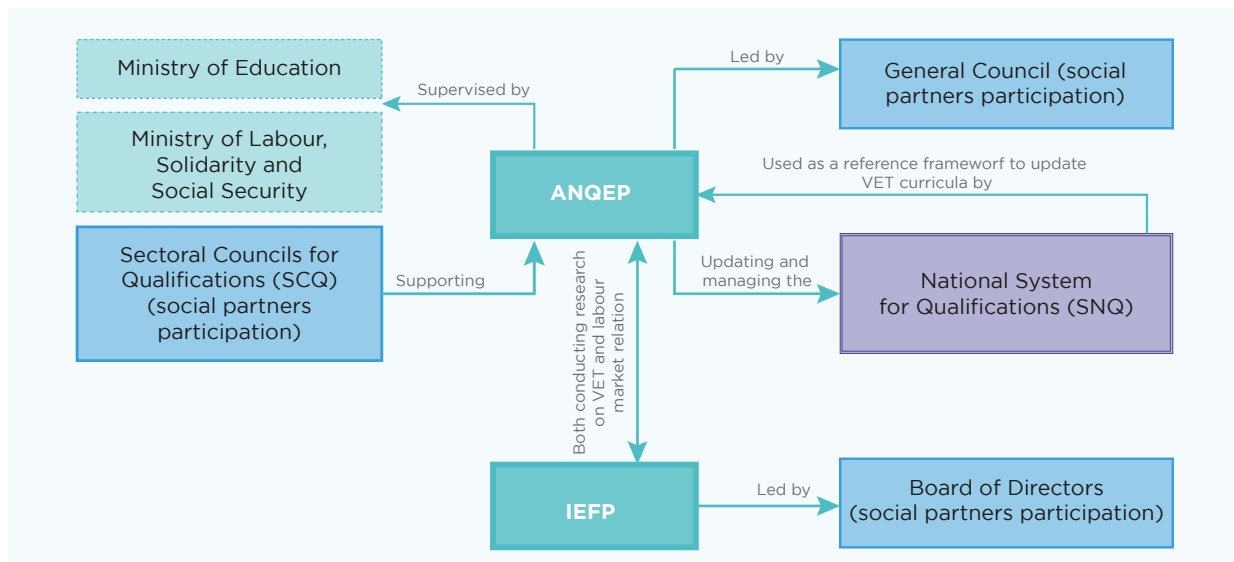
## PORTUGAL

Compared to Greece, Portugal presents a more stable and coordinated institutional framework at the technical-strategic level, with one main institution being responsible for the key technical processes relevant to the apprenticeship and IVET system. As in Greece and Spain, social partners are formally involved in the process of identifying and defining/updating professional qualifications.

In Portugal, there are two national-based technical institutions linking VET with the labour market: the IEFP, which has policy powers at the three governance levels (see section 4.1); and the National Agency for Qualifications and Vocational Education and Training (ANQEP)<sup>11</sup>. Both these two institutions provide technical advice at the political-strategic level, define and update qualifications and curricula, and conduct research and evaluation on VET. However, although IEFP is an important institution at this level because it implements apprenticeship schemes and matches job supply with demand, the most important institution at the technical-strategic level in Portugal is ANQEP, which has competencies throughout the whole VET System. Moreover, the coordination between ANQEP and IEFP has been reinforced in the New Agreement for Vocational Training and Qualifications (December 2021) through the development of a new Interministerial Commission for the Coordination of the Education and Vocational Training System (see section 4.1).

ANQEP is jointly supervised by the Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Labour, Solidarity and Social Security. Several governance bodies within ANQEP involve social partners and other government bodies. According to OECD (2020a), ANQEP is a prime example of how interministerial coordination between different government departments and stakeholders can be combined for the purpose of skills formation. However, the ANQEP's General Council has not met since the beginning of the COVID pandemic (2020), which can be interpreted as a lack of interest on the part of the government.

**Figure 3.** Portuguese national, regional and sectoral institutions involved in professional qualifications



11 It was created as the National Agency for Qualification in 2007, and in 2012 it was renamed as ANQEP.

Source: authors' own elaboration

Note 1: Dotted line is used for the Ministry/ies responsible for the VET system. Dashed line is used for main institutions at political-strategic level. Bold line is used for main institutions at technical-strategic level. Double line is used for catalogues or system of qualifications. Simple line is used for other advisory bodies.

As reflected in Figure 3 above, one of the main responsibilities of ANQEP falls under the coordination of the National System for Qualifications (SNQ), which includes the following main tools relevant to the apprenticeship system:

- > The Portuguese Qualifications Framework (QNF), which is related to the EQF and is the main reference point for the certifications offered under apprenticeship schemes (which also offer an educational certificate).
- > The National Catalogue of Qualifications (CNQ), which consists of more than 300 qualifications in 43 sectoral areas of education and training. All VET and apprenticeship diplomas need to be consistent with the qualifications defined in the CNQ (OECD, 2020a).
- > The Qualification Needs Anticipation System (SANQ), which evaluates the qualifications demanded in the labour market through different data sources (statistical data, Cedefop projections, IEFP data on job vacancies). Regional and local authorities, inter-municipal communities, VET schools, and sectoral companies located regionally or locally all participate.

ANQEP is also the institution responsible for developing core curricula of apprenticeship courses, the components of which are linked to the SNQ; and for monitoring and evaluating the VET system. However, its evaluation competency only applies to VET schools.

Social partners participate in different processes and tasks of ANQEP through their involvement in the General Council and the Sectoral Councils for Qualifications (CSQ). The General Council of ANQEP is mandated to monitor its yearly programme and to discuss its achievements. It comprises the social partners and representatives from the Ministry of Education, the Ministry of Labour, Solidarity and Social Security, the IEFP, the National Association of Professional Schools, and independent experts. According to internal rules, the General Council must meet at least twice a year. However, fieldwork research reveals that trade unions and employer organisations share a negative view on their degree of participation within this body. They are critical of the irregularity of meetings, the lack of influence of their contributions to policies and the general actions of ANQEP. According to them, meetings do not always take place throughout the year, although they should be twice yearly; and when they do occur, social partners consider that their role is limited to a purely formal participation since they only attend to sign documents already prepared by the institution without social partner involvement. As the country's largest employers' confederation (CIP) stated: *'we are represented in the ANQEP, but our role is merely advisory, and we sign what they put in front of us when it is already in the final version'*.

As far as the Sectoral Councils for Qualifications (CSQ) are concerned, they are consultative bodies with a tripartite composition that support ANQEP in updating the SNQ. Their main task is to identify the strategic and essential qualifications and needs for the different sectors of the economy as a response to the challenges of the labour market. This task is based on methodological orientations by ANQEP, which also provides administrative support (such as sending invitations, setting the agenda and chairing the meetings) and financial resources (such as hiring external experts). CSQ meet whenever it is necessary on the suggestion of professional schools, companies or sector associations, and they



propose the update or creation of qualifications to ANQEP.

Compared to the ANQEP's General Council, social partners provided a more positive assessment of their involvement in the CSQ. They share positive views on the sectoral bodies comprising CSQ, and its role as the main tripartite institution specifically focused on linking the labour market with the IVET and apprenticeship system. However, they are also critical in particular of the way it functions. As in Spain and Greece, social partners consider that the implementation process for a negotiated and approved new/updated qualification is too slow: *'there is a structural slowness in the system when adapting to the needs of the market and the workers'* (UGT). Social partners would also like to play an executive role and some trade unions were critical of the fact that the final decision on updating qualifications is made by ANQEP: *'CSQ work relatively well, but in the end ANQEP is the one who decides'* (CGTP).

In relation to the CSQ, it is worth noting that the New Agreement for Vocational Training and Qualifications (December 2021) aims to strengthen the involvement of social partners in the technical-strategic governance structures by *'reinforcing the role and dynamism of the Sectoral Councils for Qualifications (CSQ) and renewing the constitution of these structures, ensuring a more agile and strong intervention by the social partners, and a greater diversity of stakeholders from the world of work, in supporting ANQEP in updating the CNQ'* (p. 8).

Despite their involvement in the ANQEP's General Council and the CSQ, trade unions and employer organisations expressed concerns about their limited involvement in two processes led by ANQEP. First, they were critical of their lack of participation in the Qualification Needs Anticipation System (SANQ). The limited or non-existent involvement of social partners in these technical and operational system was one of the reasons because trade union CGTP did not to sign the New Agreement for Vocational Training and Qualifications. Second, trade unions and employer organisations were unsatisfied with their lack of involvement in the evaluation processes. Moreover, they were very critical of how the evaluation of the VET system is carried out, and demanded more data to plan VET policies and detect the changes needed.

## POLAND

Among the four countries analysed, Poland has the most institutions involved at this governance level. As shown in Figure 4 below, different bodies operate at the national or regional level, with the following responsibilities:

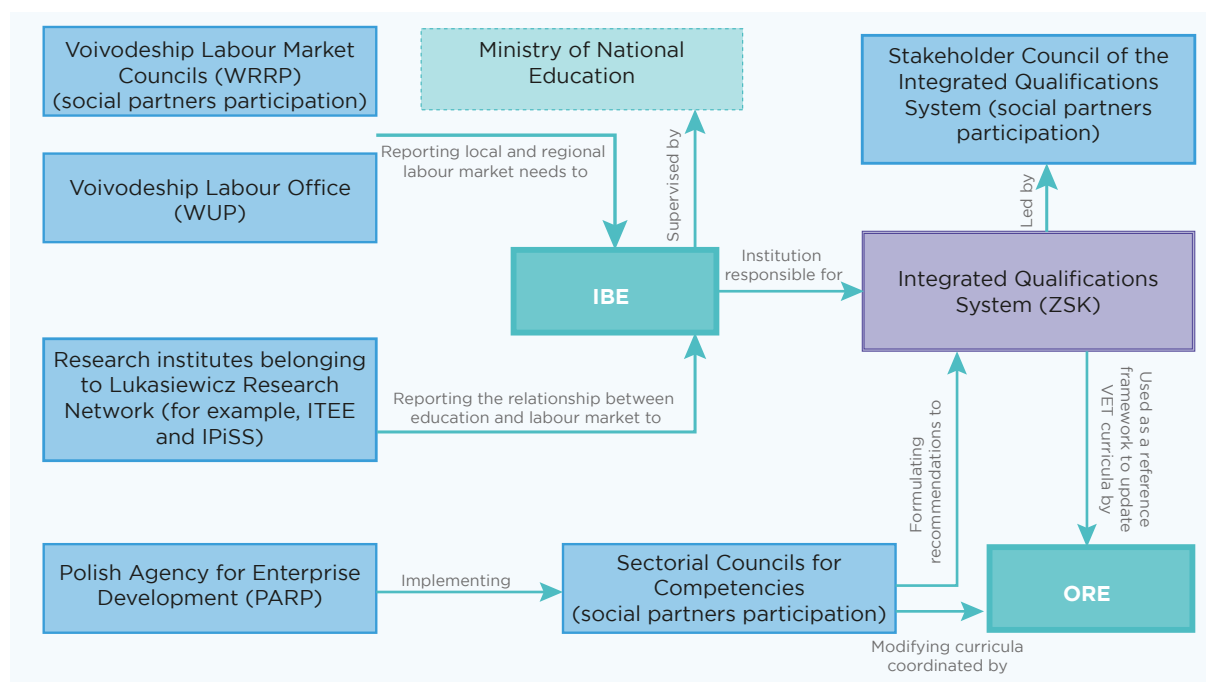
- > skills forecasting, and defining/updating Integrated Qualifications System and core curricula (Institute of Educational Research - IBE Education Development Centre - ORE).
- > studying the relationship between education and the labour market (research institutes such as the Institute for Sustainable Technologies - ITEE and the Institute of Labour and Social Affairs - IPISS).
- > identifying skills needed in labour markets at the regional/local level (Voivodeship Labour Market Councils - WRRP, Voivodeship Labour Offices - WUP).

With the exception of one regional body, these institutions are exclusively run by the state and do not engage employer organisations and trade unions in the technical tasks they carry out. However, there



are two institutions which partly integrate the social partners and other stakeholders in the process of defining qualifications and occupational profiles: the Stakeholder Council of the Integrated Qualifications System and the Sectoral Councils for Competencies. As discussed in this section, these institutions have enabled employer organisations and, to a lesser extent, trade unions to support state authorities in these technical processes. However, compared to the other countries covered in the INVOLVE project, this involvement is less institutionalised and consistent.

**Figure 4.** Polish national, regional and sectoral institutions involved in professional qualifications



Source: authors' own elaboration based on desk research and fieldwork outcomes.

Note 1: Dotted line is used for the Ministry/ies responsible for the VET system. Dashed line is used for main institutions at political-strategic level. Bold line is used for main institutions at technical-strategic level. Double line is used for catalogues or system of qualifications. Simple line is used for other advisory bodies

#### Institutions responsible for skills forecasting, and defining/updating qualifications and core curricula

Two state institutions operating at the cross-sectoral and national levels bear responsibilities for skills forecasting and defining/updating qualifications (Integrated Qualifications System) and core curricula – namely, the Institute of Educational Research (IBE) and the Education Development Centre (ORE), with substantial support of state research institutes such as ITEE. Social partners are not represented in any of these institutions and do not participate in the technical process they develop.

As reflected in Figure 4 above, the IBE is the most important institution operating at this level. The IBE is supervised by the Ministry of National Education, and is responsible for creating and updating professional qualifications. In addition to the catalogue of VET qualifications included in the ministerial regulation on core curricula, a so-called Integrated Qualifications System (ZSK) was introduced in 2016 that systematises all qualifications taught in schools of all types, as well as market qualifications awarded by non-public entities. The ZSK introduced uniform standards for the description of qualifications and levels within the Polish Qualifications Framework (PRK), which is compatible with the

European Qualification Framework. Although the assumptions of the ZSK and the Polish Qualifications Framework were developed by IBE in cooperation with other scientific and research institutions, the act on these solutions was widely consulted publicly in 2011-13. Consultation processes engaged representatives of labour offices, employer organisations (including sectoral ones) and trade unions, crafts chambers, public institutions implementing educational tasks, commercial training companies, various institutions related to the education system, associations and non-governmental organisations, research and advisory institutions as well as various ministries. In total, about 200 people representing 101 institutions participated in the meetings.

The IBE is also responsible for creating a nationwide tracking system for the graduates of various types of schools, including vocational ones. The tracking system is still in development but, according to the fieldwork results, it would be a good way to evaluate VET policies and their impact. Finally, the IBE is in charge of forecasting the demand for professional vocational education, in cooperation with public statistic bodies two national research institutions and two regional institutions. The main outcomes of this task are a list of 24 professions for which particularly high demand is forecast across the country and individual lists for each region (voivodeship). Sectoral schools receive a higher educational subsidy for training in these professions.

The Education Development Centre (ORE) is a national teacher training facility which carries out different activities aiming to improve the quality of education. ORE is also involved in coordinating the development of the core curriculum for VET programmes. This involves cooperating with various other entities, some of whom are selected through competition, in order to provide specific substantive input for each given profession.

#### Institutions studying the relationship between education and the labour market

There are several research institutes involved in studying the relationship between education and the labour market. Two relevant research institutions are the Institute for Sustainable Technologies (ITEE), under the Lukaszewicz Research Network and the Institute of Labour and Social Affairs (IPISS). Social partners are not represented in either.

The ITEE conducts both basic and applied research in the field of machine operation in industry and provides substantive input related to the specificity of the professions. It has developed the descriptions of around 1,000 occupations and participates in the co-management of the ZSK.

The IPISS is supervised by the Ministry of Family and Social Policy. It deals with labour issues and social policy, but the experts interviewed rarely mentioned this actor, even though they are involved in its Programme Committee, pointing at best to its general role of studying the functioning of the labour market.

#### Institutions identifying skills needed in labour markets are regional/local level

There are two regional institutions mandated to identify the skills needed in labour markets at the regional and local levels: the WRRP and the WUP.

The WRRP councils provide advice to local and regional employment offices on various issues related to the functioning of the regional labour market, employment situation, and the demand for profes-

sions and qualifications. They are comprised of representatives from educational authorities, trade unions and employer organisations. One of their tasks is to issue opinions on school headmasters' proposals for new professions to be taught in VET institutions (or for the cancellation of outdated professions). Those opinions are based on its analysis of the regional and local labour market needs, and the proposals applications of the school headmaster. However, there is a lack of information on its actual influence on introducing new occupations. In this sense, social partners assessed their involvement as a relatively routine procedure with limited impact.

As far as the WUP are concerned, they are institutions of public employment services at the regional level not directly related to the VET system. However, they play an important role in it because they monitor the demand for professions and qualifications based on aggregated data from local units of public employment services (Poviat Labour Offices) and regional labour market barometers or observatories. Based on this monitoring procedure, WUP reports data to IBE to influence its national and regional lists of professions. Also, they prepare an annual list of professions for which remuneration of juvenile employees may be reimbursed in a given region (voivodeship).

#### Participation of social partners in the process of defining/updating qualifications

As noted, with the exception of the WRRP, the most important technical bodies are exclusively comprised of technical staff and do not involve the social partners. Under this state-centred governance framework, attention must first be drawn to the Stakeholder Council of the Integrated Qualifications System. This body operates under the remit of the Ministry of Education and comprises representatives from social partners, local government, education, academic and professional communities, as well as public and commercial training institutions. The council is an advisory body of the Ministry of Education. It is mandated to monitor the functioning of the PRK and issue opinions on the direction and changes of the PRK.

Second, social partners are also involved in the Sector Skills Councils which is a project implemented under the Operational Programme 'Knowledge Education Development' (POWER) and co-financed by the European Social Fund until August 2022. There is currently a discussion on the continuation of the project. There are 17 councils, and they are comprised of representatives from employer organisations, business associations, chambers of commerce and companies, as well as research institutes and universities. Some councils also include representatives from trade unions. The Polish Agency for Enterprise Development (PARP) initiated these councils to formulate recommendations for ministries regarding professions in given sectors, potential new sectoral occupations and recommendations for any adjustments to the core curricula under the coordination of ORE. Social partners agree on the functions and composition of these councils, but they ask the government to further take their opinion into account:

**Sectoral councils – some at least – are already starting to play the role of labour market observatories. And here is a whole set of recommendations with which the government has to do something and cannot be completely put in a drawer. (Trade Union Builders)**

Thus, in general, organisations representing businesses, including employer organisations can act in a range of ways: proposing an additional new profession to the classification of VET occupations, participating in the creation and updating of the core curriculum, and proposing new examination tasks

through different procedures and institutions. However, fieldwork results show that the actual involvement and influence of employer organisations and companies appear to be rather limited. As one of the fieldwork interviewees representing the Polish Teachers' Union said: *'you can count on the fingers of one hand the number of employers actually involved in the creation of the core curricula'*. According to some respondents, it could be because many companies are not interested in co-managing the VET system and they try to acquire qualified employees on an ad hoc basis. However, there are some successes of particular organisations that were identified during the course of the study. New occupations have been recently introduced thanks to the activity of social partners, including in the transport, metallurgy and manufacturing sectors. The role of trade unions in all the aforementioned areas is however more limited because, although they can join the process of creating or updating occupations, their opinions are not considered.

### 4.3. Technical-operational level

The last governance level analysed is the technical-operational level, which is related to the institutions that deal with efficient policy implementation on the ground (Emmenegger & Seitzl, 2020). It refers to those bodies in charge of delivering education and training, evaluating students' training outcomes, and enforcing the training and working conditions of apprentices. As mentioned in previous sections, Emmenegger and Seitzl (2020) examined collective skills formation regimes and, within those regimes, they identified significant examples of bodies/procedures for involving social partners in governance. This is the case of BIBB in Germany, which supervises the implementation of VET together with expert social partners; or the Convention of VET partners in Switzerland, with similar policy powers compared to BIBB and the participation of national and regional government and social partners.

As dual VET depends on different institutions and schemes in the four countries analysed, there are significant differences regarding the involvement of social partners at the technical-operational level. In Poland and Portugal, and to a lesser extent Greece, social partners play a formal role at this governance level; however, the regulatory framework in Spain does not clearly define the social partners' functions at this level.

## SPAIN

In Spain, social partners are not directly involved in the implementation of dual VET – they do not provide training courses and are not involved in the evaluation of the knowledge acquired by the students in the dual VET courses. Moreover, the formal role played by employer organisations and trade unions at this governance level is not clearly defined in the regulation. Only recently, the new Organic Law (3/2022) has explicitly acknowledged the role to be played by the social partners (mainly employer organisations) in supporting the participation of companies (particularly SMEs) in dual VET<sup>12</sup>. So far,

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12 According to the new Organic Law on the Organisation and Integration of Vocational Training (3/2022), the social partners will be able to develop functions for the promotion and assistance of dual VET schemes. In particular, the government will support the participation of social partners in order to promote a network of SMEs and organisations for the rotation of apprentices. Moreover, the law establishes the possibility of sharing the company tutor between two or more companies involved in the same dual VET project. This implies the creation of an 'external tutor' whose aim is to facilitate dual VET projects in SMEs. The main role of the 'external tutor' is to coordinate different dual VET placements in different companies

teachers (mainly academic tutors) have carried the main responsibility for the identification and involvement of companies in dual VET schemes – according to the academic tutors interviewed, this task entails a significant amount of work. As a consequence, teachers and tutors are forced to reduce the hours of guidance and training they devote to students. The work of searching for companies is only partly acknowledged by the public administration. In some Autonomous Communities (such as the Basque Country), the academic tutor informed us that the Department of Education provides academic tutors with some working hours for carrying out research on potential participating companies. However, it is assessed to be a low number of hours (1 hour per apprentice).

As far as works councils are concerned, they have not been entitled to information rights regarding apprenticeship training and working conditions. This is because a large proportion of dual VET programmes are carried out as internships and not employee-employer relationships with an employment contract – when VET programmes are mediated by employment contracts, companies are obliged to provide works councils with information, but in the case of internships, no information rights for works councils apply.

The lack of specific regulation or institutions supporting the participation of social partners at this level has led employer organisations and private companies – in coalition with other stakeholders including some trade unions – to develop private initiatives to support and encourage company involvement in dual VET projects (Barrientos, 2022). This is the case for the ‘Dual VET Alliance’, which was initially promoted by Bertelsmann Stiftung in Spain, which has German funding. The Dual VET Alliance started with the largest employer organisation (CEOE) and the Princess Girona Foundation, and now also involves some trade unions (such as UGT), more than 1,500 companies, some VET schools (mostly private ones) and different institutions (such as local town councils) mainly from the Autonomous Communities of Andalusia, Madrid and Catalonia.

The purpose of the Dual VET Alliance is to promote dual VET programmes by giving information and advice to companies and schools, helping them to plan dual VET projects, carrying out publicity campaigns directed at students as well as companies, facilitating collaboration between companies, and lobbying regional and state governments to modify the legislation. The Bertelsmann Stiftung and ‘Caixabank Dualiza’ also finance research on dual VET. Employer organisations and the trade union UGT positively value this initiative for having supported the implementation of dual VET in Spain. Nevertheless, the trade union CCOO has criticised the initiative for being oriented towards ‘importing’ the German dual VET model without critically considering national specificities and the historical background of VET policies in the country. Also, some financial companies, such as Caixabank, have developed specific projects aiming to foster knowledge and research on dual VET – for example, the creation of a database that brings together the main data on VET over several years and is updated

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to offer a complete training programme to an apprentice that those companies cannot offer alone because of their lack of resources or because they are only specialised in one section of the training programme. This shift could involve employer organisations in dual VET programmes developed by small companies, thus allowing these actors to play an important role in managing and reinforcing the VET system. The role of ‘external tutor’ has already been established by regulation in Catalonia in the 2015 legal reform (Law 10/2015); however, it has not yet been deeply implemented. Also, it is worth noting that companies and VET schools are considered to be ‘co-responsible’ for the training in the new Organic Law. Finally, this Organic Law states that social partners will be informed about in-company placements in the VET (dual and non-dual) system under the regional or local social dialogue framework. Thus, trade unions could be involved directly in supervising in-company training placements.

through official databases called the ‘VET Observatory’ under the project ‘Caixabank Dualiza’.

Trade unions have also developed actions aiming to support works councils in enforcing training and working conditions of apprenticeships. For instance, some trade unions (such as CCOO) have provided small training courses or modules on what dual VET is and what an apprentice should or should not do. However, trade unions argue that their actions are constrained because works councils do not receive adequate information about the apprentices, especially about the tasks they are expected to perform. Here, trade unions consider that trade union representatives of the companies *‘should be involved in the process, from the moment the project is approved until the trainee is incorporated in the workplace and they should have access to the information about the trainee’* (CCOO Andalusia).

Finally, attention must also be drawn to the role played by the companies in the dual VET schemes, which appears to be also much more limited than in skill-formation regimes, particularly concerning the selection process of apprentices and the evaluation of training outcomes. Regarding the selection process, this task is mainly carried out by the academic tutor from the VET school, who is the teacher who coordinates and supervises the in-company training. Employer organisations approached during the fieldwork argue that employers should lead the selection process. They also stress the cost of participating in the programme which, in practice, limits the opportunities for SMEs to take part (CEOE; CONFEBASK; PIMEC). On the contrary, trade unions argue that only training centres should bear responsibility for selecting students to take part in dual VET, to ensure that equal opportunities in education are respected. In relation to this, trade unions make the criticism that companies use the IVET system as a source of recruitment and training for their future workers without economically contributing to the system.

In terms of the evaluation of in-company training, it is the academic tutor from the VET school who evaluates the trainees taking into account the assessment of the company tutor. Employer organisations suggest an extension to the companies’ role: *‘there should be more connection between the company tutor and the training centre tutor [...] that the evaluation should be joint [...] or consensual’* (CEOE). Related to this, employer organisations also indicate that they should have greater recognition (for example, they should be able to establish some kind of economic remuneration) and be provided with adequate pedagogical tools to train apprentices (CEOE; CONFEBASK). In contrast, trade unions maintain that only VET schools should have responsibility for evaluating students’ training outcomes.

## GREECE

As in Spain, the formal role played by social partners at this governance level is quite limited and, for some processes, it is not clearly defined in the regulation. Trade unions and employer organisations do not deliver training and are only partly involved in evaluating apprentices’ training outcomes. Regarding the evaluation of training outcomes, Article 4 of the Common Ministerial Decision no. 26385/16-2-2017, setting up the Quality Framework for Apprenticeship, provided that social partner representatives could have a seat in the panel for the final assessment of EPAS apprenticeship schemes, managed by the OAED together with VET teachers (Cedefop, 2022). However, this provision was never integrated into the daily operation of the apprenticeship schemes. In the case of EPAL and IEK apprenticeship schemes, the certification of the qualification is carried out by EOPPEP. The social partners are formally involved in the committee responsible for the examinations inside EOPPEP.

As in Spain, teachers from apprenticeship schools instead of trade unions are the main agents responsible for enforcing the working and training conditions of apprentices. In the case of EPAS apprenticeship schemes, OAED is the agency responsible for supervising the implementation of the schemes through EPAS teachers. They also play a role in resolving potential conflicts between the companies and the apprentices, and are expected to visit the companies to ensure compliance with rules. In this case, the school has to assign a 'reference person' who is mandated to support the apprentice during their participation in the programme. Similarly, in the case of EPAL and IEK apprenticeship schemes, the teachers are also responsible for enforcement. In this case, there is the figure of the 'supervisor' (a teacher from the VET school) who is responsible for supporting the apprentice and ensuring that they receive good quality in-company training. The 'supervisor' is responsible for a group of students, the number of which differs depending on the area of specialisation. Previous research has highlighted the weakness of these enforcement mechanisms. For instance, Lalioti (2019) found, based on semi-structured interviews and round table discussions with apprentices participating in the EPAS apprenticeship scheme, that a high proportion of apprentices reported that their 'reference person' had left them unprotected in situations facing low-quality in-company training (Lalioti, 2019). However, this was not confirmed in the Greek fieldwork where social partners, state authorities and, in particular, apprentices, praised the work done by 'reference persons' and 'supervisors'. Generally, it appears that the situation may have changed in recent years, and the teachers/supervisors are more experienced and well-trained.

Also, VET schools rather than specific state bodies or employer organisations seem to play the most important role in the process of searching and engaging enterprises for apprenticeship schemes. In line with previous research (Lalioti, 2019), fieldwork findings show that the process of company selection in the different apprenticeship schemes occurs through several informal actions, mainly led by VET schools and the teachers themselves, but also resulting from personal networks (between companies and teachers or between neighbouring companies). There are also cases of companies (normally large companies) who are very interested in participating in apprenticeship schemes and look to cooperate with local VET schools. In the case of the EPAL apprenticeship schemes, fieldwork also showed that, over the last three years, the Ministry of Education has been putting a lot of effort into finding companies for the apprentices.

**We discovered the (apprenticeship) programme from other companies in our neighbourhood. Before that, we had never heard of apprenticeships before. (Small Enterprise)**

**From 2017 until today, all the effort that was made to integrate private companies in the processes of the institution was our effort - the effort of the school and the teachers. (Hellenic-German Chamber of Commerce and Industry)**

However, from 2017 to 2020, there was some institutional experimentation in Greece to deal with all the processes related to the involvement and participation of companies in apprenticeship schemes. The so-called 'Apprenticeship Support Teams' (OYM) were set up in the Quality Framework for Apprenticeships (2017). These bodies were responsible for coordinating the process of finding in-company placements, allocating in-company positions between the different VET schools, operating the registry of companies participating in apprenticeships and auditing the correct implementation of in-company training. This institution was expected to operate at the local level. They were established at OAED's



centres, and comprised EPAS and EPAL teachers. Moreover, they were expected to collaborate with representatives of local chambers of commerce, employers' and trade unions in order to reach out to local companies. However, OYMs were never actually in operation. Fieldwork shows that this failure was due to a general lack of interest, particularly from the state authorities who were responsible for their constitution. According to fieldwork outcomes, there was a general hesitation on behalf of all the involved parties regarding the functions of the OYMs. In addition, the necessary preparation for their operation never actually took place (such as institutional composition and securing resources). The functions of the OYMs have not been assumed by any of the new institutions, so there is not any specific state body responsible for the technical-operational level.

Finally, regarding the role played by the companies in the apprenticeship schemes, it appears that, in contrast with Spain, they have formal responsibilities in the evaluation of training outcomes, at least in the EPAL schemes. According to the legislation for EPAL apprenticeships, the apprentices are evaluated in the workplace by the responsible trainer for the company, based on the evaluation framework of the 'Workplace Training Programme - Apprenticeships in the workplace' (scores are made on a scale of 0-20, with a weight of 50% in the final evaluation) This evaluation should be based on several elements: the apprentices' project research, implementation and progress as summarised in the Learning Diary and defined in the Apprenticeship Agreement; skills demonstration and presentation of the projects in real or digital form; and the final examination.

## PORTUGAL

Contrary to Spain and Greece, social partners in Portugal play an active role in the policy implementation of apprenticeships on the ground. Employer organisations and trade unions can manage VET private centres that are developing apprenticeship programmes, under a protocol with IEFP (protocol centres).

However, although trade unions and employer organisations can manage VET schools, the IEFP is the main agency responsible for the coordination and implementation of the main operational tasks for the apprenticeship schemes. In the case of protocol centres depending on the IEFP, trade unions and employer organisations managing VET centres work under subcontracting mechanisms limiting their autonomy in terms of training content. These mechanisms ensure a high level of public scrutiny, particularly for financial matters (training centres are financed by IEFP): *'We have an institutional dependency from the IEFP in all matters related to training'* (Representative from sectoral training centre).

The IEFP is also in charge of monitoring the work and the training conditions of apprentices. However, because of the lack of resources and the confidence that IEFP has in the training providers, the monitoring system is mainly based on trust, and generally managed by sectoral associations and companies in their own training centres without further negotiations:

**There is a monitoring system in place, and we are outsourcing a service entrusted to us by the state, so, scrutiny applies to all funded entities with whom we have a relationship of trust, accountability and evaluation. [...] We do not have the human resources to monitor the working conditions. (IEFP)**

**The training entities are the ones that pro-**



**protect the trainees and there is no social dialogue with the worker's committees. (Representative from a training centre)**

The insufficient enforcement mechanisms were criticised by trade unions during the fieldwork (CGTP). Trade unions at the company level can also formally contribute to enforcing the work and training conditions of the apprentices. However, trade union presence at the company level is relatively low and unevenly distributed in terms of sector activity and company size. Accordingly, their role in enforcement is structurally limited.

**In companies where we have an effective union organisation, we manage to monitor the working conditions of apprentices; the problem is in companies where there is no such representation. (CGTP)**

In fact, as referenced in section 4.1, this relates to a key reason given by the CGTP for not signing the 'New Agreement for Vocational Training and Qualifications' – the non-acceptance of trade union involvement in enforcement mechanisms for the quality of in-company training conditions.

The IEFP is also responsible for searching, selecting and engaging the employers for in-company training. In terms of searching for and engaging companies, the IEFP also cooperates with employer organisations. In the case of the school-based VET system, managed by the Ministry of Education and AN-QEP, there is one organisation which supports public authorities in searching and engaging companies – namely, the association of private VET schools ANESPO (National Association of VET Schools). This organisation was created in 1991, bringing together more than 200 private VET schools that belong to different private entities, including business associations, foundations, cooperatives, municipalities and trade unions. ANESPO has established protocols with more than 20 companies to guarantee its associates the relevant internship programmes, work-context training and even training equipment (Peliz et al., 2021). It also provides support to its associates and organises training for VET teachers.

Finally, in contrast with Spain but similar to Greece, social partners and companies providing in-company training can take part in the evaluation of apprentices' training outcomes (Final Evaluation Test, PAF) through their involvement in a tripartite jury. However, this only applies to training for regulated professions (such as electricity courses). Thus, in most cases, social partners are not engaged in the tripartite juries because they should be invited and paid by the training institutions.

## POLAND

In Poland, the majority of VET institutions are managed by local government units without social partners' involvement. However, there are also several non-public sectoral vocational schools managed by private entities (such as training companies) or business organisations (such as chambers of commerce).

The VET system is mainly based on public vocational schools. As referenced in section 2.2, there are two-stage sectoral vocational schools, technical secondary schools and post-secondary schools whose governing bodies are local government units. Local government entities allocate these schools public funding from the educational part of their general budget provided by central government. The

Central Examination Board (CKE), supported by several Regional Examination Boards (OKE) covering one or several Voivodeships (regions), carries out the examination confirming vocational qualifications – which, since 2019, are gradually being replaced by a new vocational examination for graduates of vocational schools.

At the same time, there are about 40 non-public sectoral vocational schools run by craft guilds throughout the country dedicated to juvenile workers programmes. These craft guilds belong to craft chambers which in turn belong to the national Polish Craft Association (ZRP), an organisation which has representative status at the national level). The craft chambers conduct journeyman and master-crafts-person exam (level 3 NQF/EQF), meanwhile ZRP support them, develop examination standards, coordinate the cooperation of local businesses with vocational schools, and supervise craft companies that provide professional training for juvenile workers.

The ZRP also participates in lobbying for the strengthening of the dual system by financing studies and initiatives, and providing reports about the involvement of its members in apprenticeship schemes and the employment effectiveness of VET programmes. However, these reports are incomplete and currently outdated, and do not have an impact on the political-strategic or technical-strategic levels of governance.

Finally, it is worth noting that trade unions play practically no role at the technical-operational level. Their participation is limited to the so-called social labour inspection dealing with health and safety issues. This is because there are a lack of collective bargaining practices in the whole VET system – due to local government entities managing all the public VET schools without considering social partners' participation, as well as a low level of unionisation in the craft guilds involved in the non-public sectoral vocational schools. Potentially, trade unions in large companies, particularly those large companies with the participation of the state treasury and with foreign capital, may play a certain role in ensuring proper working conditions for juvenile workers. Nevertheless, fieldwork interviewed generally failed to make significant proposals to strengthen their role at this governance level. In fact, they often admitted that the leading role in ensuring the quality of training should belong to the employer organisation and that the main competencies should lie with the governing bodies of schools and employers.

#### 4.4. Conclusions: towards more collective skill formation models?

In the previous section, the report has analysed the involvement of social partners in the governance of dual VET systems in Spain, Greece, Portugal and Poland. This concluding section aims to highlight the main similarities and differences identified.

The section 4 has shown that trade unions and employer organisations are at least partly involved in the systemic governance of VET in each of the countries studied. Despite normally being classified as 'state-centre' skill formation regimes (Busemeyer and Trampusch, 2012), the four countries examined have developed some collective responses to dual VET. However, the governance levels at which social partners are involved, and the degree and institutionalisation of that involvement, differ between the four countries.

At the **political-strategic level**, it appears that the role played by social partners in dual VET policymaking is erratic and mainly limited to advisory functions. This is partly because existing social dialogue

tripartite institutions dealing with VET issues do not have an important role in policymaking or setting strategic priorities. For example, in Spain, Greece and Poland, social dialogue mainly works through informal mechanisms or ad-hoc settings which ensure a less institutionalised and regular involvement. Among our case study countries, the only exception is Portugal, where a recent social pact was partly implemented through a social dialogue institution (CPCS) – although the social pact did not get the necessary support from the main trade unions.

The limited role played by tripartite bodies in policymaking can, to some extent, be attributed to the existing regulation of the bodies. Research findings show that existing tripartite institutions are not co-decision bodies and do not have a clear statutory mandate to negotiate on VET or dual VET policymaking. As a result, governments can always unilaterally develop new regulations on dual VET, as occurred in Spain with the 2012 policy reform regulating dual VET programmes, or as is usually the case in Poland. In the latter country, social partners express concern about a dominant approach to policymaking on VET which is mainly based on unilateral decisions or arbitrary approaches to taking into account the opinions of relevant social partners. This was also the case for the reforms implemented in Portugal and Greece in the context of the Memoranda of Understanding (MoUs) programmes in exchange for debt relief, where there were only informal consultation processes outside tripartite bodies.

Moreover, tripartite bodies have not had clear mandates or responsibilities for the development of regular publications of research and policy reports (for example, regarding national strategies on VET) to influence the policy agenda. In the case of Spain, CGFP was initially mandated to develop and evaluate the National Programme of Vocational Training for the government. However, the last plan was enacted for 1998–2002, and CGFP did not carry out further cycles of evaluation and development to refresh strategic priorities. In Poland, working groups under RDS do not have a formal institutional role in producing strategic plans for VET or dual VET systems. This also applies to Greece and Portugal. However, in the case of Greece, some positive innovations have also been identified. The recently created KSEEEK has been mandated to submit a Strategic Plan for VET and Lifelong Learning to the Minister of Education every three years. While it is still too soon to assess how social partners actually contribute to this plan and the extent of its influence on policymaking, this new mandate may contribute to increased social partner involvement in the definition of strategic priorities and policymaking.

Despite this institutional framework, some recent VET policy reforms developed in Greece, Portugal and Spain – which are expected to have an impact on the long-term developments of VET systems – have been partially agreed upon with the social partners. However, in the case of Greece and Spain, they have not been the results of genuine tripartite agreements, while in Portugal, the recent tripartite agreement was not supported by the one of the main trade union confederation (CGTP).

At the **technical-strategic level** of governance, section 4.2 has shown that the four countries analysed have procedures to create, update and systematise professional qualifications through National Qualifications Frameworks or Systems which are related to the European Qualification Framework– these processes contribute to the renewal of dual VET systems by taking into account labour market needs at different levels (sectoral, regional, local). In all the cases, there is one technical institution leading these processes which works in cooperation with regional (Spain, Poland), sectoral (Portugal) and/or national technical bodies (Greece and Poland). Moreover, in the four countries examined, this kind of technical institution manages feedback mechanisms for the whole VET system (school-based and dual VET system).

However, in the case of Poland and Greece, a highly fragmented institutional landscape exists at this level, with several bodies having technical responsibilities in different fields (including labour market diagnosis and VET research). In the case of Greece, the institutional framework is also very unstable, having been subjected to frequent changes in recent years. In contrast, Portugal and Spain have a more unified procedure where all the proposals from different sectoral, regional and local bodies are channelled and coordinated through one technical body (ANQEP in Portugal and INCUAL in Spain), which is the sole institution in charge of the national catalogues and the national systems for qualifications.

Differences are also identified in terms of the roles played by the social partners. In Greece and Portugal, social partners are involved in the board of directors of the main institutions managing the national qualifications framework and defining occupational profiles (EOPPEP and ANQEP); however, their opinions are not systematically considered. In contrast, social partners are not formally represented in those institutions mandated to manage the National Catalogue of Qualifications or the Integrated System of Qualifications in Spain (INCUAL) and Poland (IBE). However, in the case of Spain, social partners play an active role in updating or creating qualifications through their direct participation in sectoral working groups, as well as indirectly through appointing experts to externally assist in the definition of qualifications. In Spain, social partners are also involved at the regional level through similar processes.

In Portugal and Poland, social partners are also involved in sectoral (Portugal) or regional (Poland) tripartite institutions mandated to determine labour market needs and propose new qualifications. However, these are not co-decision bodies and, as social partners have critically noted, the final decision is always taken by the government.

In addition, research findings reveal that employer organisations and trade unions are not involved on an equal footing at this governance level, with trade unions in some cases being less involved. This applies, in particular, to Poland. Similarly, in Spain, regional trade unions complained that employer organisations are playing a more active role than trade unions in the process of developing qualifications at the technical-strategic level.

The **technical-operational level** has the lowest social partner participation in the four countries examined, although the firms have an important role as training providers. This is because of the absence of a tripartite institution directly involved in facilitating cooperation between VET schools and training companies, and evaluating apprenticeship outcomes. However, there are considerable differences between the analysed countries, particularly between Poland and Portugal (where there is more social partner involvement), and Greece and Spain (where there is less social partner involvement).

In Poland there is a specific governance structure for apprenticeship schemes. The Polish Craft Association (ZRP) supervises the non-public sectoral vocational schools run by craft guilds and dedicated to juvenile worker programmes. The ZRP also organises and evaluates journeyman and master-crafts-person exams, and coordinates the cooperation of local businesses with VET schools. However, ZRP only involves employers and operates under the supervision of the public administration – trade unions have no role.

In the case of Portugal, the social partners are involved at this governance level because they manage their own VET private centres developing apprenticeship programmes, although they depend on the IEFP which defines protocols and training contents, and also finances them. Moreover, social partners are involved through the board of directors of IEFP which is a specific governance structure for

apprenticeship schemes and is responsible for identifying and engaging the employers for in-company training.

In contrast, in Greece and Spain, there is no institution or procedure managing the governance of the apprenticeship system at this level. However, there is still the need for coordinating VET schools and in-company training providers, and for finding training companies. Thus, particularly in these countries, there are two key points. First, VET school teachers involved in apprenticeship schemes have a crucial role both in a pedagogical sense and also as managers of the implementation of apprenticeship schemes on the ground, identifying and then coordinating with companies, evaluating apprentices' training outcomes and adapting, in an informal way, training contents to company needs. Second, particularly in Spain, this lack of a coordinating institution or participation of the government at this governance level has left a lot of space for the creation of private initiatives focusing on strengthening dual VET by facilitating coordination between schools and companies, and by developing dissemination campaigns. These private initiatives, although an important boost to the dual VET scheme, ultimately led to further fragmentation of the scheme, generating greater inequality between the territories and VET schools which benefit from these private initiatives and those which do not. This result is also pointed out by Barrientos (2022), who notes the significant differences between dual VET implementation in a range of Autonomous Communities due to differing levels of political will in regional governments, and the presence of these private initiatives which mainly operate in Catalonia, Madrid and Andalusia.

At the technical-operational level, it is also important to note the very limited role played the trade unions in supervising and enforcing the apprentices' working and training conditions in the four countries. In Spain and Greece, VET schools (and teachers) are responsible for finding companies and, at the same time, for monitoring the quality of training as well as eliminating those companies where working conditions are not as they should be. In both countries, dual VET schools do not use to cooperate with trade unions. Moreover, in the case of Spain, research has showed that trade unions often do not have access to even basic information, such as whether there are apprentices in a company at all, because companies are not obliged by law to inform trade unions of their intake of apprentices. In Portugal, IEFP is charge of enforcing apprenticeship training and working conditions. However, trade unions are not involved in these processes. Moreover, fieldwork show that the institution barely has resources for these tasks and, accordingly, enforcement is generally carried out by training centres. In Poland, trade unions are only mandated to deal with health and safety issues in those companies where they have presence (mainly big companies).

Having highlighted the main comparative findings regarding the involvement of social partners in the governance of dual VET systems in Spain, Greece, Portugal and Poland, the next section of the report provides some policy recommendations aiming to improve this involvement.

## 5. Policy recommendations

Under this final section, the report addresses research objective 3. It provides policy recommendations on how to improve the involvement of social partners in the governance of dual VET schemes in the four countries studied.

Policy recommendations are based on fieldwork research outcomes discussed under section 4, which has provided empirical evidence on the actual involvement of trade unions and employer organisations in dual VET governance models in Spain, Portugal, Greece and Poland (research objective 2). They also draw on national ‘visions’ developed by INVOLVE partners, based on a scenario workshop methodology in which different stakeholders (policymakers, scholars, trade unions and employer organisations/companies) discussed desirable changes in governance structures to improve social partners’ involvement in dual VET in the four countries studied. In addition, they take into consideration recent literature on the revitalisation of social dialogue institutions, identifying relevant conditions that contribute to explaining the effectiveness of national social dialogue institutions (Guardiancich & Molina, 2021).

In line with the conceptual approach followed in section 4, which drew on the concept of ‘systemic governance’, policy recommendations are formulated considering the overall dual VET system, where three key governance levels can be distinguished in the four countries studied: political-strategic, technical-strategic and technical-operational. Our departure point is that trade unions and employer organisations should be highly involved in the three levels, which are interconnected, to ensure that the governance of dual VET is designed to meet economic and social goals in a balanced way.

As highlighted in the literature, dual VET is one of the policy domains in which the interplay and tension between economic and social goals is most acute (Di Maio et al., 2019; Scepanović & Martín Artiles, 2020). On the one hand, dual VET systems are designed to meet economic goals – skills mismatching is a significant impediment to national competitiveness and dual VET systems contribute to satisfying employers’ skills demands. On the other hand, these systems are also aligned with social goals, such as equal access to quality education, the provision of transferable vocational skills and a smooth school-to-work transition for disadvantaged young people (Di Maio et al., 2019). In this regard, previous literature has stressed the challenges faced by dual VET systems to offer apprenticeship places to candidates with fewer qualifications, lower socio-economic status (Bonoli & Wilson, 2019) and/or special educational needs (Granato et al., 2015). Gender represents another factor of academic and labour exclusion under dual VET (Dämmrich et al., 2015; Mariño y Rial, 2019).

Tensions between economic and social goals within dual VET systems have been exacerbated in recent years for several reasons. In this regard, three key challenges deserve particular attention: economic crises and recessions; digitalisation; and Europeanisation of dual VET.

First, successive economic crises and recessions represent a challenge for dual VET programmes. Previous research has shown how the 2007–2013 economic crisis negatively impacted the availability of apprenticeship places offered by businesses (Alemán-Falcón, 2015; Baldi et al., 2014). The crisis also reduced public funding for VET (Ajuria et al., 2018; Alemán-Falcón, 2015). At the same time, the economic crisis and the rise in youth unemployment, which was particularly dramatic in southern European countries, led European institutions to sponsor dual VET programmes in countries where dual training

schemes did not exist or were not as effective as they should have been. More recently, the COVID-19 pandemic has had significant effects on apprenticeships. Lockdowns and mobility restriction measures hindered in-company training possibilities. The reduction in apprenticeships offer was particularly high in sectors such as hospitality and tourism, which in Spain, Greece and Portugal are particularly significant in the economy and the range of VET training programmes on offer (OECD, 2020b).

Recessions and crises can have different effects on the involvement of social partners in policymaking. Several studies highlighted the deterioration of industrial democracy in the aftermath of the financial crisis (2007–2008), particularly in central and eastern, and southern European countries, where social dialogue was comparatively less institutionalised (Cumbers et al., 2022; Eurofound, 2018; Sanz de Miguel et al., 2020). In relation to dual VET, section 4 showed that key policy reforms regulating dual VET (Spain) or developing new dual VET schemes in the years following the financial crisis (Greece and Portugal) were the result of either unilateral government decisions (Spain) or informal consultation processes without tripartite agreements (Greece and Portugal). In the context of the pandemic, some studies have shown that tripartite social dialogue increased in many countries, as governments had an interest in cooperation to integrate expertise from social partners to develop effective policies and strengthen the legitimacy of their decisions (Brandl, 2021; Eurofound, 2021). In this regard, INVOLVE research outcomes have also shown that in Greece, Portugal and Spain, recent VET policy reforms developed in the pandemic context (2020–2021) have been partially agreed upon with the social partners.

Second, digitalisation poses new challenges and raises the question of whether dual VET can adapt successfully. Digitalisation is considered the fourth industrial revolution (Valenduc & Vendramin, 2017). While there is not a general consensus on the exact definition of digitalisation (Degryse, 2016), scholars generally agree that a key defining feature of the emerging digital economy relates to the quantitative and qualitative leaps in the collection and exploitation of Big Data (Charrié & Janin, 2015; Valenduc & Vendramin, 2017). Digitalisation is also linked to new business models and employment relationships (such as digital platforms and platform work), as well as novel forms of work organisation that increase both working time and space flexibility (including virtual work and hybrid work) which sharply increased in the pandemic context (EU-OSHA, 2021). Digitalisation is also increasing the speed of technological change in an unprecedented way. Empirical evidence has been inconclusive about the relationship between technology and jobs due to the impact of several mediating factors (Valenduc & Vendramin, 2017). However, EU institutions, EU agencies and scholars generally agree that digitalisation is resulting in faster changes in skills profiles and demand for skills, and an overall high global need for digital skills to study and use in workplaces (DESI, 2021).

From an economic perspective, digitalisation requires dual VET systems to analyse how skills requirements are changing to ensure that VET provisions meet the demands for new skills, including the provision of general digital skills. From a social point of view, it is necessary to work against the existing risk of digital exclusion, and to ensure a fair and equitable digital transition. In this regard, skills indicators show significant inequalities which strongly influenced by socio-demographic factors (DESI, 2021).

Third, attention must be drawn to the Europeanisation of VET. Although the Treaties do not mandate legal powers in VET to European institutions, the EU has become a key actor alongside the national Member States. As noted in the introduction (section 1.2), several European initiatives have promoted dual VET schemes. These initiatives coexist with other European projects (such as the European Qualification Framework) which aim to persuade the Member States to adopt common policy objectives



and frameworks through soft governance mechanisms.

Even if the impact of VET Europeanisation is conditioned by national characteristics which are mediating that impact (Martín Artiles et al., 2020), the Europeanisation process has been criticised for neglecting European and national social dialogue processes, and being generally biased towards economic objectives (Clarke et al., 2021). In this context, it has been shown that in those countries where social partners' involvement is more institutionalised (such as Germany), domestic discussions on European initiatives were more internally conflicted (Emmenegger & Seitzl, 2020). Social partners' involvement in the discussion of European processes at different levels could contribute to reinforcing legitimacy and effectiveness in the implementation of EU initiatives (Eurofound, 2021, 2022).

Given these current tensions between social and economic goals in dual VET, our policy recommendations outlined under the next three headings have two aims. First, reinforcing social partners' involvement within the governance of the overall dual VET systems. Second, ensuring a mutually reinforcing pursuit of economic and social goals. In terms of recommendations, there is a particular focus on the social partners' roles within existing social dialogue and technical institutions and processes. Environmental factors which influence social dialogue (such as political will or mutual trust between social partners) (Guardiancich & Molina, 2021) are not considered in the recommendations.

#### Political-strategic level

Compared to unilateral policy intervention, social partners' involvement at the political-strategic level can positively influence the development of more balanced strategic priorities and policies – with equal recognition for the goals of employers and employees.

Desk research and fieldwork results show that social partners' involvement at this level is highly erratic. This is partly because existing social dialogue tripartite institutions dealing with VET issues do not have an important role in policymaking or setting strategic priorities. For example, in Spain, Greece and Poland, social dialogue mainly works through informal mechanisms or ad-hoc settings which ensure a less institutionalised and regular involvement. Among our case study countries, the only exception is Portugal, where a recent social pact was partly implemented through a social dialogue institution (CPCS) – although the social pact did not get the necessary support from one of the main trade unions.

In light of this evidence, we recommend reinforcing the role of social dialogue institutions through granting them the following VET policy powers:

- Providing the institutions with an effective statutory mandate to deal with VET issues that are of interest to the social partners. This statutory mandate should provide social partners with co-decision rights or, a minimum, mandatory negotiation and consultation rights on dual VET policymaking – this would also prevent government unilateral actions, including in the context of external crises. This mandate should also be extended to cover all processes linked to the Europeanisation of VET.
- Providing social partner institutions with a statutory mandate to develop regular research and policy reports to influence the policy agenda (for example, on national strategic priorities for VET). In particular, priority should be given to those trends having a more disruptive impact, such as digitalisation.



- Creating procedures to monitor and enforce the translation of tripartite institutions' opinions and recommendations into public policies on VET.
- Ensuring that trade unions and employer organisations represented in the social dialogue institutions have enough technical and personnel resources to analyse dual VET policy problems and make recommendations. This will contribute to ensuring that the institutions play an effective and constructive role in policymaking.

#### Technical-strategic level

Social partners' involvement at the technical-strategic level is also crucial for aligning economic and social goals. Employers' involvement in the identification and definition of qualifications contributes to ensuring that training provisions are aligned with actual company needs. Trade unions' involvement is also very important, as they can effectively advocate for creating quality and transferable qualifications. They are also key actors who can ensure that the needs of disadvantaged groups are considered in the process of defining and updating qualifications. They also have in-depth knowledge of labour processes and, accordingly, can contribute to ensuring that these are properly acknowledged in the qualifications frameworks. In addition, it is vital that trade unions and employer organisations are involved on an equal footing in the evaluation processes. This can positively influence the development of a balanced selection of indicators for measuring the quality of dual VET systems in terms of both efficiency (economic goals) and equity (social goals).

Desk research and fieldwork results reveal important cross-country differences at this governance level in terms of the institutional governance framework- including differences in the level of institutional fragmentation, the involvement of sectoral/regional bodies and the role played by social partners. Overall, social partners' involvement at this level is comparatively less institutionalised in Poland, where social partners are not represented within the main technical bodies; however, there are some sectoral examples where social partners (mainly employers) were involved in the definition of sectoral qualifications through relatively informal processes. In Portugal and Greece, social partners are represented in the governing boards of key technical institutions; although in Greece, the social partners were excluded from newly created technical bodies. In Spain, social partners are formally engaged in the processes of defining and updating qualifications. A common feature of the four countries examined is that social partners are barely involved in the process of evaluating the quality of dual VET. Noting that the evaluation process is assessed by the social partners interviewed in the fieldwork to be insufficiently developed. In addition, collective bargaining plays no role in the processes of defining or updating qualifications in any of the four countries.

In light of this evidence, we make the following general recommendations:

- Provide formal representation for the social partners in the governing boards of the main technical bodies, to ensure that they play a role in setting the agenda and supervising its activities.
- Reinforce the role played by trade unions and employer organisations in the processes of skills forecasting at different levels (national, regional/local, sectoral). This should be done in parallel with the development of a stable forecasting methodology which would systematically analyse the impact of digitalisation on skills development and employment.

- > Ensure a balanced involvement of trade unions and employer organisations in the processes of defining and updating qualifications, to avoid these processes being exclusively aligned to economic goals. This should be considered in all the bodies and processes operating at the national, sectoral or regional/local level. The involvement of social partners in the process of defining and updating qualifications should be routinised, defining clearly the different steps in which trade unions and employer organisations are engaged.
- > Ensure that trade unions and employer organisations have enough capacity in terms of technical knowledge, structure and staff to support state authorities in all processes related to the definition and updating of qualifications.
- > Reinforce the role to be played by collective bargaining, ensuring, in particular, that sectoral and company collective bargaining effectively regulates and recognises dual VET qualifications as they are defined in the national qualifications frameworks.
- > Reinforce social partners' involvement in the evaluation process for the quality of dual VET systems, ensuring a balanced representation of trade unions and employer organisations. In particular, trade unions and employer organisations should be highly involved in the process of defining analytical dimensions and indicators to make sure that the evaluations are addressing both the social and economic objectives which are relevant to the social partners.
- > Ensure consistency and coordination among the different institutions and feedback mechanisms for the different dual VET and general VET schemes, making sure that social partners are equally involved in all the different existing processes.

#### Technical-operational level

Finally, social partners should also be highly involved at the technical-operational level to ensure efficient policy implementation on the ground. Social partners and, in particular, employer organisations can contribute to motivating companies to participate in dual VET. They can also facilitate cooperation between VET schools and training companies, and support employers in the processes of delivering, supervising and evaluating in-company training, which can be particularly complex for SMEs who have fewer resources and capacity.

Trade unions can also contribute to engaging more companies in dual VET by negotiating apprenticeship opportunities at the company level. In this regard, there is evidence that the willingness of companies to train and provide apprenticeships has positively correlated with trade union density (ILO, 2021). They can also ensure good quality in-company training by negotiating pay rates and general conditions for apprenticeships, and enforcing training and working conditions (ILO, 2021).

Social partners' involvement at this level varies in the four countries studied, particularly in terms of the role played by trade unions and employer organisations in the provision and evaluation of training. However, one factor which is common to all four countries is the absence of a tripartite institution facilitating cooperation between VET schools and training companies, and evaluating apprenticeships outcomes – there are precedents for such tripartite institutions in some collective skill-formation regimes (Emmengger & Sitzl, 2020). Moreover, in the four case study countries, state authorities or teachers play the main role in the processes of identifying and engaging companies for apprenticeship schemes, and enforcing the training and working conditions for apprentices. Bearing this in mind, we propose:

- > Developing tripartite bodies operating at sectoral/local level, mandated to identify and engage companies in dual VET. These bodies should also be mandated to support companies with the implementation and supervision of in-company training, the evaluation of in-company training results, and articulating VET schools' demands in relation to in-company training.
- > Reinforcing the role played by collective bargaining in defining the dual VET positions on offer, and in regulating the working and training conditions for apprentices. In some cases, this should be supported by better regulatory approaches towards apprentices' contracts, ensuring that they are properly covered by social and labour rights applicable to general workers in standard employment relationships.
- > Strengthening the role played by trade unions at the company level in the process of enforcing apprentices' training and working conditions. They should have statutory information and consultation rights in relation to these processes. Sectoral trade union federations should also be involved in enforcing the working and training conditions for apprentices, particularly in the context of SMEs lacking trade union representation. Moreover, cooperation between VET schools and trade union bodies at the company level should be explicitly visioned and outlined.

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