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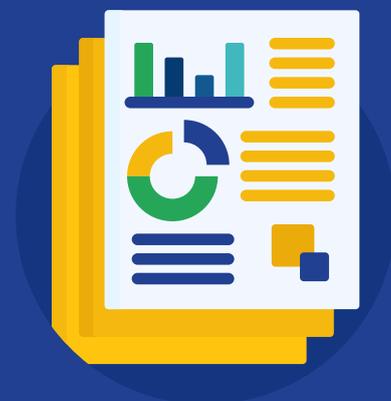
КРАЩІ НАВИЧКИ ДЛЯ СУЧАСНОЇ УКРАЇНИ

REGIONAL VET COUNCILS

ANALYSIS OF THE ACTIVITIES OF THE REGIONAL VET COUNCILS

in Vinnytsya, Poltava, Zaporizhya, Rivne, Lviv, Mykolaiv
and Chernivtsi oblasts and recommendations on the
improvement of the performance of the regional VET
councils in Ukraine

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

VET council — regional council of vocational education

MoES — Ministry of Education and Science

VET — professional (vocational) education

NGO — public organisation

EU — European Union

1. Preface

1.1 General Information

The handbook “Regional VET councils. Analysis of the activities of the regional VET councils in Vinnytsya, Poltava, Zaporizhya, Rivne, Lviv, Mykolaiv and Chernivtsi oblasts and recommendations on the improvement of the performance of the regional VET councils in Ukraine” (hereinafter referred to as “handbook”) has been prepared as part of the EU4Skills-Programme.

The programme “EU4Skills: better skills for modern Ukraine” supports the VET reform in Ukraine to improve its effectiveness as well as to improve the quality and attractiveness of vocational education and to adjust it to the needs of the labour market. The programme also aims to contribute to the update of the infrastructure and equipment in selected VET schools.

The EU and its member states Germany, Finland, Poland and Estonia fund the EU4Skills-Programme jointly. The programme operates at the national level and in seven pilot regions: Vinnytsya, Poltava, Zaporizhya, Rivne, Lviv, Mykolaiv and Chernivtsi.

The handbook is the product of the fruitful cooperation between the EU4Skills-Programme, the Ministry of Education and Science of Ukraine (MoES) and the state oblast administrations in the seven pilot regions. It will be helpful for the senior officials of the state oblast administrations, VET leaders and employers in the implementation of the VET reform in Ukraine, especially in regard to the VET decentralization.

The process of the VET decentralization in Ukraine started in 2016. Administration and funding of the VET schools was delegated from the central level to oblasts and cities of oblast significance. That decision was rather controversial, since not all cities of oblast significance had financial capacities to run their VET schools. To address this issue, the Ukrainian Government provided additional resources for funding VET schools in the cities where the share of the funds required for VET accounted for more than 20% of their budget. That step helped finish 2016 with some losses but without the total collapse of the VET system. All in all, 2016 turned out to be one of the most dramatic years for the VET system. In 2017, the management and funding powers in the VET system were transferred from the cities of oblast significance to the oblast level. They were retained only by the cities of oblast significance (oblast capitals) that had sufficient financial capacities to run their VET schools.

Starting from 2017, VET development became one of the priority areas for the Government of Ukraine. The MoES came together with employers, other ministries, experts from the Academy of Pedagogical Sciences of Ukraine, representatives of regional authorities and international experts to prepare the VET State Policy Concept “Modern Vocational Education” for the period until 2027 that was approved by resolution No. 419-r of the Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine of 12 June 2019. Chapter “Ways and Methods to Solve the Existing Issues” of

this Concept states the necessity “to establish regional VET councils serving as advisory and consulting bodies at the Council of Ministers of the Autonomous Republic of Crimea, oblast state administrations, state city administrations of Kyiv and Sevastopol to contribute to the elaboration and implementation of state regional policy in vocational education”. The Concept also stipulates the transfer of the administration and funding powers in the area of VET from the cities of oblast significance (oblast capitals) to the oblast level. This provision is also available in the draft Law of Ukraine “On Vocational Education”.

Hence, the oblasts of Ukraine received a new task in the course of decentralization: effective management of vocational education. To ensure the proper performance of the oblast administrations in handling this new task, the MoES proposed to establish councils of VET stakeholders in each oblast and in the city of Kyiv that have to operate as platforms for a comprehensive social dialogue — moderated by the oblast administrations — between regional authorities, business and education professionals aiming to elaborate, to adopt and to implement a policy for VET development at the oblast level that shall help cover the demand of the regional labour market for professionals with relevant skills and competences.

The establishment of the regional VET councils is not a purpose per se. They constitute one of the elements for the build-up of the civil society in Ukraine. The core principle in the work of the regional VET councils and in their decision-making process is the “win-win game”, which means that joint efforts of the representative of regional authorities, business and education will lead to a positive result for all parties, including the residents of the respective oblast. Proper work organisation, proper selection of members and leadership in the regional VET councils shall make them a tool for the organisation of the effective functioning of the VET system in the respective regions that shall supply the regional labour market with qualified professionals who can contribute to economic growth and prosperity.

The above points formed the context for the EU4Skills-Programme's contribution to the enhancement of the management capacity at the oblast level in developing and managing VET systems by supporting the organisation of an effective operation of the regional VET councils. The publication of the handbook aims to provide recommendations to increasing the effectiveness of the VET councils and to making them a reliable tool for ensuring the quality of vocational education and economic growth in the respective oblasts. These recommendations are based on the analysis of the activities of the regional VET councils in the seven pilot regions.

The activities of the regional VET councils were subject to analysis in the working document for discussion “Regional VET councils in Ukraine. Proposed Methodological recommendations on their organization and work” that was prepared by the European Training Foundation (ETF) and the MoES in October 2017. Selected parts of this documents were used in the handbook.

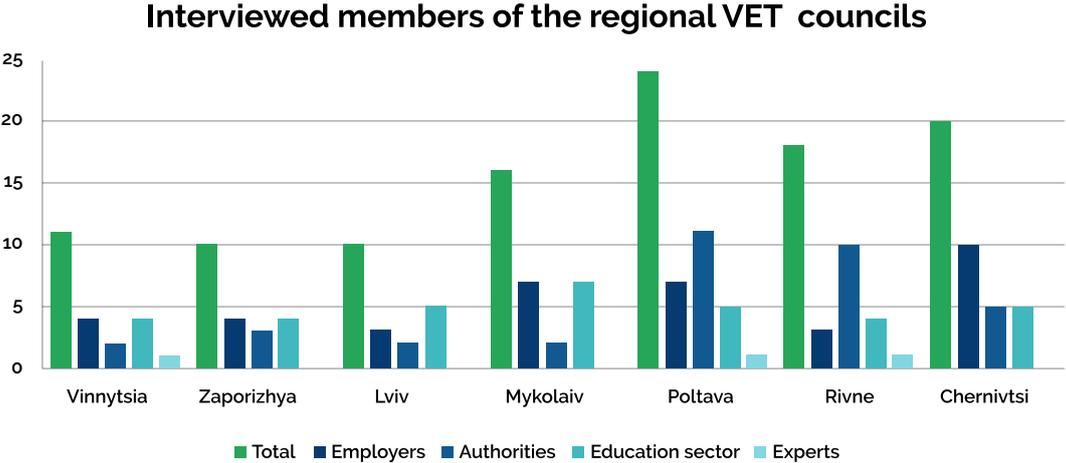
1.2 Tools for the Analysis of the VET Councils' Activities

When preparing the handbook, the expert analysed the relevant regulations related to the work of the regional VET councils in the pilot regions: resolutions of

the heads of state oblast administrations on the Rules of Procedure for the VET councils and on their line-up, protocols of the meetings of the VET councils, VET development plans for the respective oblasts.

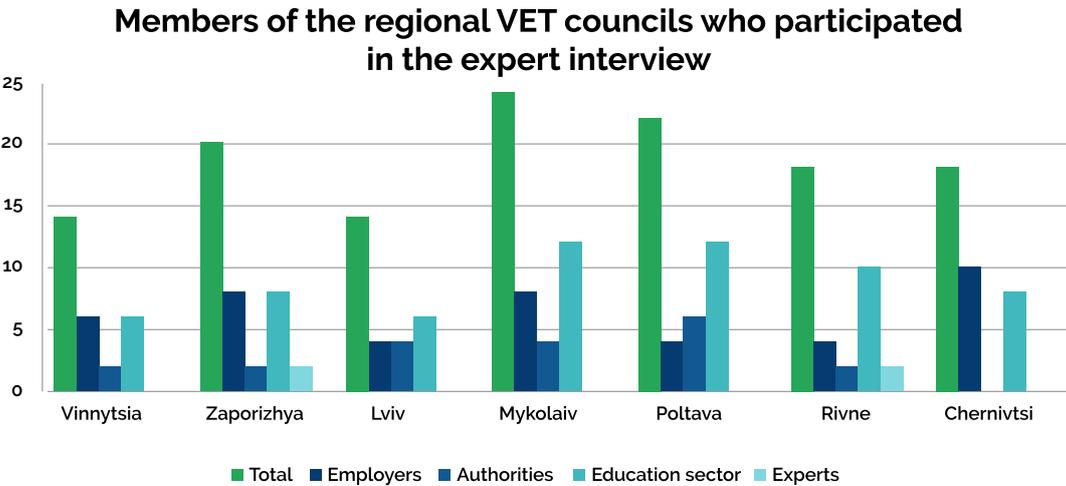
Also, the expert prepared a questionnaire for the members of the regional VET councils to clarify the work organisation of the councils and the opinions of their members on the applied personnel selection approach. An online survey was conducted in each pilot region. Diagram 1 shows the total number of council members who participated in the survey and the groups they represent.

Diagram 1.



An expert interview was conducted in each oblast with the members of the respective VET council to check the performance of the regional VET councils, to identify the hurdles affecting the performance of the councils and to find out in what way the EU4Skills- Programme could help improve the performance of the regional VET councils. Diagram 2 shows the number of the council members who participated in the expert interviews and the groups they represent.

Diagram 2.



When analysing the documents related to the work of the regional VET councils, the expert made a hypothesis assuming that the performance of the VET councils is impacted by three factors: council leadership, line-up of the councils and their work organisation.

Council leadership: who are the key actors in preparing, organizing and conducting the meetings of the VET councils? If these actors represent the education sector only, the council performance will most probably be below expectations.

Line-up of the council: who are the members of the regional VET councils? Who of them represents employers? Each oblast has its specifics and priorities in economic development. It is important for the managers (these should not necessarily be top managers) of the leading companies of the respective oblast to be members of the VET council. What is more important: they shall be aware of the council's objectives and shall feel that their membership in the VET council can be beneficial not only for their companies, but also for the overall economic development of the region and for VET development. It makes sense to clarify how the acting line-up of the councils was established.

Work organisation of the VET councils: practical experience makes it clear that the performance of the councils improves significantly, if their members representing the authorities, employers and the education sector jointly prepare points for the agenda of the council's meetings. It takes time to organise this process, but without this it will be hard to retain strong professionals in the councils. Persons of this calibre are self-sufficient and have a lot of things to do in their core job, hence all meetings organised in a pro-forma way will be perceived as a waste of time by them. However, if it is made understood that their experience, knowledge and understanding of the processes of economic development in their home region are valued and needed, the probability of their active participation in the work of the council will increase significantly. The other aspects explored by the experts also referred to the preparation of the agenda for the meetings of the councils.

Hence, the expert interviews also had to give answers to the following questions:

- Who is the key actor in the organisation of the council's work?
- What are the principles for the formation of the council?
- How are the agenda points for the council's meeting prepared? How are the council meetings conducted?
- Are the needs of the regional labour market analysed? How is the plan of the regional order prepared? What factors influence the formation of the policy of VET development?
- What is the way to improve the performance of the VET councils?

The handbook consists of two parts. The first part is the comparative analysis of the work of the VET councils in seven pilot regions. The second part contains methodological recommendations on the improvement of their performance.

The recommendations can be discussed at the councils' meetings; they can be used to initiate new regulations, institutional standards and performance criteria. Probably, they can help make attractive proposals for cooperation at the national level as well as for cooperation with other local and international VET stakeholders.

To understand the handbook comprehensively, it makes sense to come back to the origin of the term “Regional VET Councils” in the relevant regulations.

1.3 Introduction of the Term “Regional VET Councils”

The regional VET councils were first mentioned in the draft Law of Ukraine “On Vocational Education” presented by the Government in October 2015. Their original title was “regional councils of VET stakeholders” ⁽¹⁾. The further preparation of this draft law was suspended until the adoption of the Law of Ukraine “On Education” in September 2017. However, the new Law of Ukraine “On Vocational Education” is still pending.

The current title “Regional VET Councils” was first officially mentioned in the MOES letter to oblast state administrations (April 2016) with the guidelines on the formation and the key functions of such regional institutions. Local (oblast) state administrations received a proposal to set up such entities as advisory bodies in line with the Law of Ukraine “On Local State Administrations”.

These councils were gradually set up in each oblast. Resolution of the Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine No. 994-r of 14 December 2016 on the approval of the Methodological Recommendations for the Formation of the Regional Order for Specialists and Skilled Workers states that *“The regional order is prepared by the Ministry of Education and Science of the Autonomous Republic of Crimea, education and science departments of oblast state administrations as well as state administrations of the cities of Kyiv and Sevastopol upon request of VET schools and is agreed with the **regional VET councils** and city councils based on the forecast demand for workforce in the regional labour market (hereinafter referred to as “forecast figures”) and the available funds in the budget of the Autonomous Republic of Crimea, budgets of the cities of oblast significance (oblast capitals) and the budgets of the cities of Kyiv and Sevastopol.”* In this way, the VET councils officially received an important function — approval of the regional order for specialists and skilled workers.

On 4 December 2019, the Cabinet of Ministers adopted its resolution No. 1002 “On the Approval of the Standard Rules of Procedure on the Regional VET Council”. According to this resolution, the regional VET council is the advisory and consulting body of an oblast state administration that participates in the elaboration and implementation of regional policy in the VET sector. This document was the final step in the official regulation of the work of the regional VET councils.

¹ It must be noted that based on the resolution of the Cabinet of Ministers No. 718 of 9 August 2005 the Inter-Sectoral VET Council was set up at the central level. Such councils were also set up in each oblast. Most of them conducted their meetings once a year.

2. Analysis of the Activities of the Regional VET Councils in Seven Pilot Regions

2.1 Leadership in the Regional VET Councils

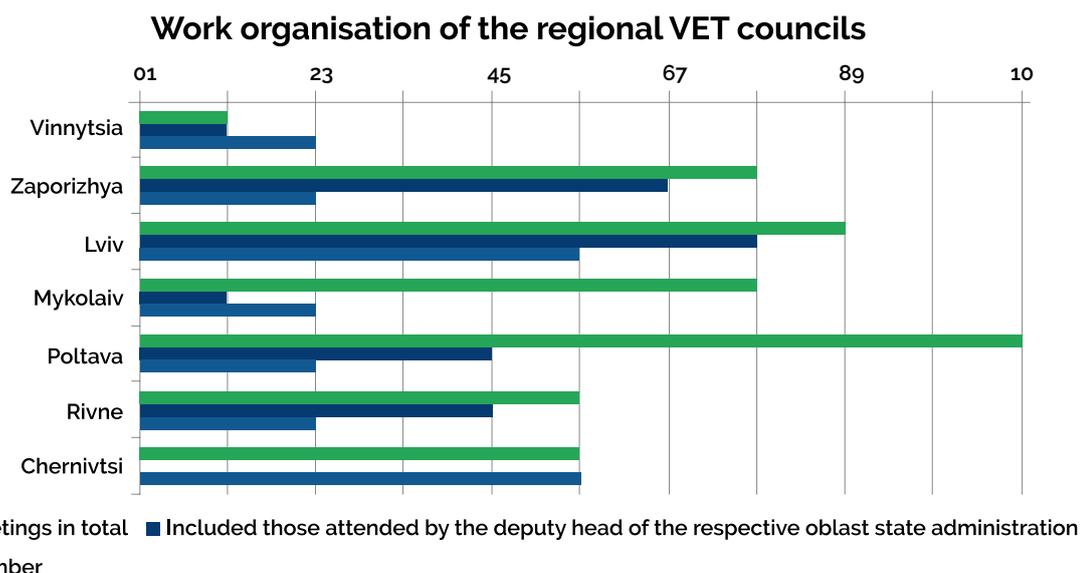
To ensure the effective performance of each regional VET council, it is important to answer the question “Who is its leader?”. The analysis of the work of the VET councils in seven pilot regions shows that all seven VET councils are led by representatives of the education sector who take over the organisation of meetings, reports and preparation of draft decisions of the councils. During the expert interviews with the VET council members in the pilot regions the respondents expressed the opinion that the perfect mode of operation of the councils required the leadership to be taken over by employers. During the expert interview in Lviv, the head of the economic policy department of the Lviv state oblast administration said that the authorities and the education sector had to act as a “service unit” for employers who enable the economic development of the region. The job of the authorities is to create favourable conditions for business development, while the job of the education sector is to supply properly trained professionals. Unfortunately, at the present stage, employers are not yet ready to take over leadership in the VET councils in any of the pilot regions.

The Standard Rules of Procedure for Regional VET Councils approved by the Government (Standard Rules of Procedure) state as follows in paragraph 10: “The chairperson of the Council is the deputy head of the local body of executive power under which the Council is set up, who coordinates issues related to the social and economic development of the region. The chairperson of the Council has two deputies: one of them is the head of the structure unit of the respective local body of executive power responsible for education, while the second deputy represents employers and is elected among the Council members in its meeting.”

The leadership data of the VET councils in seven pilot regions are shown in table 1 and on diagram 3.

Table 1

Oblast	Is the position of the Council's chairperson in line with the Standard Rules of Procedure?	Does the Council's chairperson have a deputy representing employers?
Vinnytsya	No	No
Zaporizhyya	Yes	No
Lviv	Yes	Yes
Mykolaiv	No	No
Poltava	Yes	No
Rivne	Yes	No
Chernivtsi	No	No



As diagram 3 shows, in Chernivtsi oblast the deputy head of the state oblast administration has never attended the VET council meetings; in Mykolaiv region it happened once only, while in Poltava region the deputy head of the state oblast administration attended less than a half of the meetings. With such figures, it makes no sense to talk about the leadership of state oblast administrations in the regional VET councils.

Frequent changes of the deputy heads of state oblast administrations and department heads at state oblast administrations do not help oblast administrations to take over leadership in the VET councils either. The VET councils in Lviv and Chernivtsi oblasts changed their members four times in four years, in the other pilot regions the members of their VET councils changed once.

In three oblasts (Vinnytsya, Mykolaiv, Chernivtsi), the position of the head of the regional VET council does not meet the requirements of paragraph 10 of the Standard Rules of Procedure.

In each regional VET council, the deputy head is the head of the education unit of the respective oblast state administration, while the second deputy representing employers is not available in most oblasts. The main reason for this is that in most regions the VET councils suspended their meetings in 2020 due to the pandemic situation.

2.2 Members of the Regional VET Councils

The Standard Rules of Procedure for Regional VET Councils (paragraph 6) stipulates the following requirements to the council line-up: *“the council shall have at least 21 members representing local bodies of executive power, the Supreme Council of the Autonomous Republic of Crimea, oblast councils, city councils of Kyiv and Sevastopol, city councils of oblast capitals, oblast employment centres, city employment centres of Kyiv and Sevastopol, employers’ organisations including their sectoral (inter-sectoral) associations, trade unions including their sectoral (inter-*

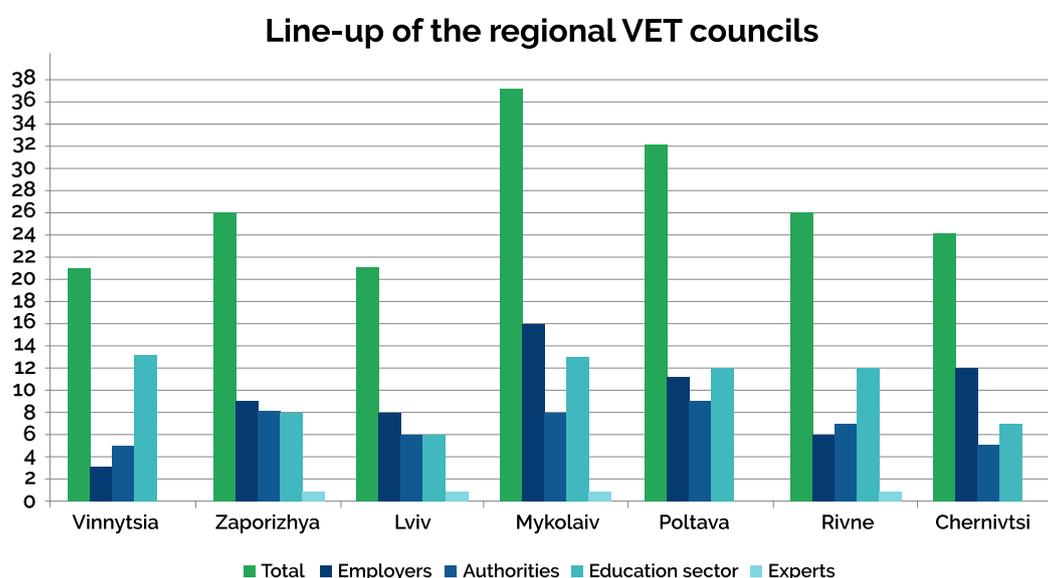
sectoral) associations, training and methodological (research and methodological) centres (offices) of vocational education, VET schools including their sectoral/civil associations”.

There are three main groups of stakeholders in VET development:

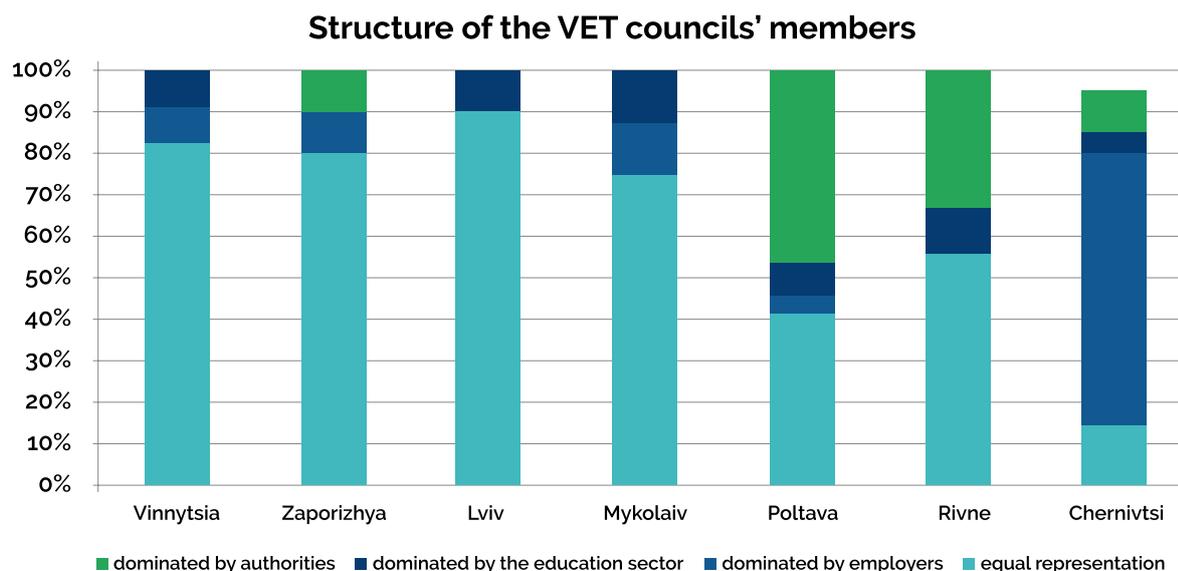
- Education professionals in the VET sector;
- Employers who hire skilled workers and specialists;
- Regional authorities responsible for the social and economic development of the respective oblast.

Diagram 4 shows the total number of VET council members in the pilot regions and the number of the members representing specific groups.

Diagram 4



With the exception of Vinnytsia and Rivne oblasts, representatives of employers keep from one third to a half of the seats in the VET councils. When asked on the required representation ratio for employers, education sector and authorities, a significant majority of the interviewed VET council members said that these groups shall be equally represented. The second most popular reply: employers shall hold the majority in the VET councils. The least popular answer: VET councils shall be dominated by representatives of the education sector (see diagram 5).



What matters in this context is not only the representation ratio for the three main groups, but also concrete persons who are members of the VET councils.

Education sector: according to the Standard Rules of Procedure, the members of the VET council are the head of the education and science unit of the respective oblast state administration, the head of the regional training and methodological centre for vocational education, principals of VET schools and heads of sectoral/civil association of VET school principals. Though not stipulated in the Standard Rules of Procedure, one of the VET council members shall be the official of the respective department who is responsible for the VET system. In each oblast, this key person is a member of the council. If it has been decided to elect a representative of the education sector as the council secretary, this person shall belong to the council. Thus, it is appropriate to have up to seven representatives of the education sector in the VET council. In the VET councils of all oblasts, the education sector is represented sufficiently, the number of education professionals in the VET councils can be reduced. The only exception is Chernivtsi oblast where VET school principals are not represented in the local the VET council at all.

Regional authorities: according to the Standard Rules of Procedure, the deputy head of the oblast state administration responsible for the social and economic development of the oblast, the heads of the councils of oblast capitals and heads of employment centres shall be members of the VET council. Deputy heads of oblast state administrations and heads of employment centres are members of the VET councils in each oblast. The situation is more complicated with the heads of the councils of oblast capitals. Deputy mayors are members of the VET councils in Lviv and Chernivtsi oblasts. Education professionals represent cities in Zaporizhya, Mykolaiv, Poltava and Rivne oblasts, while no city officials participate in the VET council in Vinnytsya oblast.

The senior officials of oblast councils are represented in the regional VET councils in a different scope. Table 2 shows if deputy chairpersons of oblast councils, heads of the education commissions and heads of the budget commissions participate in the regional VET councils.

Table 2

Oblast	Deputy head of the oblast council	Head of the education commission	Head of the budget commission
Vinnytsya	No	Yes	No
Zaporizhya	No	No	No
Lviv	Yes	No	No
Mykolaiv	No	Yes	Yes
Poltava	No	Yes	No
Rivne	No	Yes	Yes
Chernivtsi	No	No	No

It must be noted that the executive secretary of the executive committee of Zaporizhya oblast council is a member of the local VET council. The interviewed members of the VET council in Chernivtsi oblast said members of the oblast council had been among the members of the regional VET council in the previous periods but had not attended the council meetings and had been excluded.

It is also important to engage the senior representatives of the department of the oblast state administration responsible for the social and economic development of the respective oblast. This person is missing in the VET council of Chernivtsi oblast only.

Obviously, the head of the regional VET council, the deputy head of the oblast state administration have to organise the work of the council in the way enabling the participation of all officials of the oblast administration and the senior officials of the oblast council in the regional VET council. The deputy head of the respective state oblast administration can arrange it much better than the head of the education and science department.

Employers: according to the Standard Rules of Procedure, representatives of employers' organisations (including their sectoral (inter-sectoral) associations) shall be members of the regional VET council. Table 3 shows the results of the survey among the members of the regional VET councils who expressed their opinion on what organisations and companies should be represented in the VET councils. The table features three key priorities selected in each oblast where "1" means top priority.

Table 3

Oblast	Main regional employers' associations	Companies already cooperating with VET schools	Leading companies in the respective oblast	Companies that have received investments	Companies looking for new workers
Vinnytsya		1	2		3
Zaporizhya	2		1		3
Lviv		1	3		2
Mykolaiv	1	2	3		
Poltava	2	1	3		
Rivne	1			3	2
Chernivtsi	1	3	2		

Table 3 shows that it is important for the VET council to engage the heads of the main employers' associations, companies already cooperating with VET schools as well as the leading companies of the respective oblast.

The local employers' association and the Chamber of Commerce are active in each oblast. In Lviv oblast, the managers of the clusters are in place that represent the key sectors of the regional economy.

It is also quite understandable to engage the managers of companies that already cooperate with VET schools. Improvements are based on positive experience and its dissemination. It is also important to engage the managers of the leading companies, since they are well-known in their home regions and enjoy general respect and confidence.

2.3 Work Organisation of the Regional VET Councils

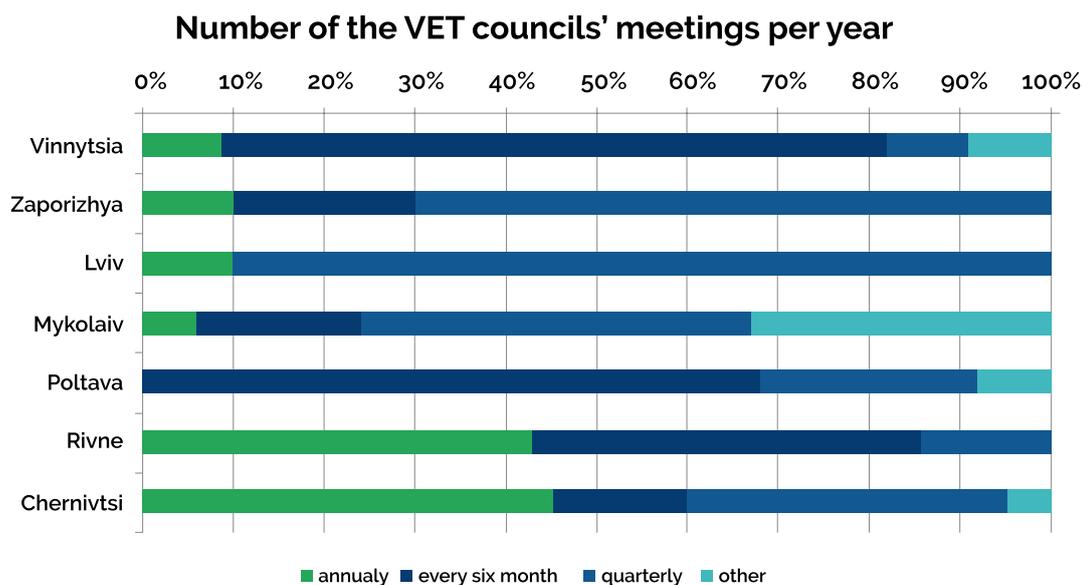
The meetings of the VET councils were subject to analysis based on the following points:

➔ A. Frequency of VET Council Meetings

Table 4 shows the number of the VET council meetings conducted in the pilot regions. One meeting took place in Vinnytsya, Poltava oblast is the leader with 10 meetings. It must be noted that according to the first Rules of Procedure on the regional VET council in Poltava oblast the VET council was to have its meetings at least twice a year, and that requirement was adhered to. Diagram 6 shows the results of the interview of VET council members concerning their opinion on the required frequency of meetings.

Table 4

Oblast	Number of conducted meetings
Vinnytsya	1
Zaporizhya	7
Lviv	8
Mykolaiv	7
Poltava	10
Rivne	5
Chernivtsi	5



Most of the interviewed VET council members think that it makes sense to conduct VET council meetings once in a quarter, while slightly fewer respondents support the idea to conduct meetings twice in a quarter. According to the Standard Rules of Procedure, meetings shall take place at least once in a quarter.

➤ B. Council's work plan

None of the pilot oblasts had the work plan for its VET council. The only exception is Poltava oblast where the adoption of the VET council's work plan for 2016 was discussed in its first meeting on 22 June 2016. In the following years, this was not subject to discussion anymore: the VET council members only prepared the agenda for each meeting. If the VET council has its meeting once a year only, the preparation of the work plan does not make any sense.

➤ C. Council's Working Groups or Committees

In the VET councils of all pilot oblasts there were no permanent committees or working groups; ad hoc working groups were set up to prepare issues on the agenda of the councils' meetings. In the first meeting of the VET council in Zaporizhya oblast on 9 June 2016, four working groups were set up responsible for the following issues: regional order, employment monitoring, vocational orientation for students, and implementation of the Torino Process. However, representatives of the working groups did not report their results in any of the following meetings of the council. The council members told in the expert interview that the VET council did not have mechanisms in place to implement the adopted decisions. This is what made the effectiveness of the VET council in Zaporizhya oblast so low.

During the expert interview, the council members agreed that it made sense to establish permanent commissions that have to fulfill the main tasks of the VET councils.

➤ D. Performance Monitoring of the Councils

Diagram 7 shows the results of the survey among the VET council members on the performance monitoring of the VET councils.

Diagram 7

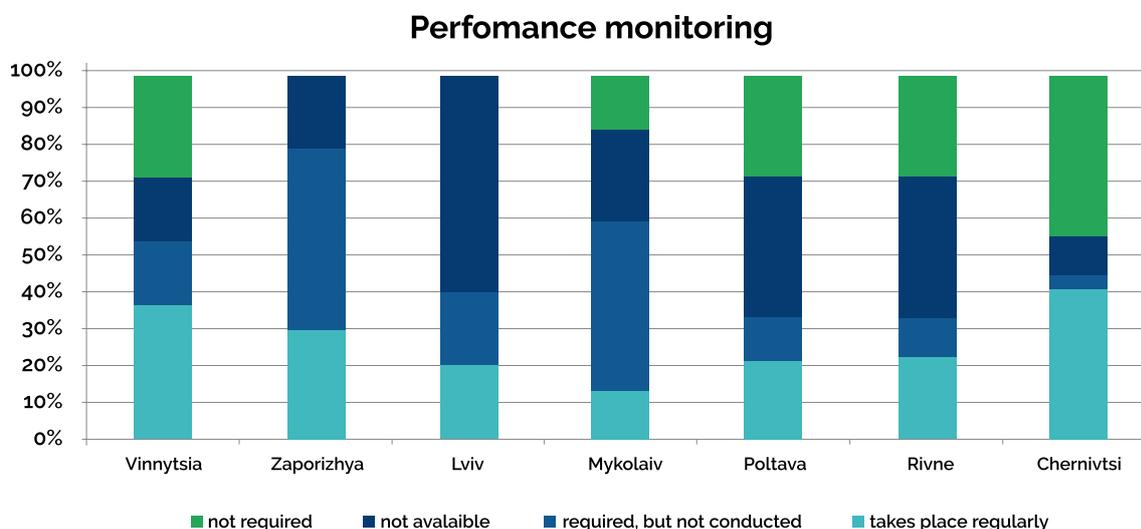


Diagram 7 shows that the performance monitoring of the regional VET councils is considered necessary but is not put into practice. The interviewed council members actually split on this: some of them think that performance monitoring is necessary, while the others think it does not make sense. Obviously, when the council has one or two meetings a year and decides on the approval of the regional VET order or its correction, performance monitoring is not relevant.

➤ E. Analysis of the Labour Market, Preparation of the Regional Order Plan

According to the resolution of the Cabinet of Ministers No. 831 of 25 October 2017, oblast state administrations are now entitled to monitor the needs of the regional labour market. In fact, this is rather a task for the economic policy department, not for the education department. The job of the teachers is to teach, while those responsible for the economic development of the respective oblast have to say which professionals and how many of them they need. That is why the head of the economic policy department, not a representative of the education and science department, has to report at the VET council meeting on the approval of the regional VET order (this is the case in Lviv oblast only).

During the expert interviews, VET council members also had to answer the question on which data the regional order shall be prepared. The answers are presented in table 5 with a breakdown by priority levels, where 1 is the top priority level. This question was not asked in Chernivtsi oblast.

Table 5

Oblast	Regional order plan of the previous year	Data on contracts between VET schools and employers	Employment centre data	Data of the need study of the regional labour markets
Vinnytsya	3	1		2
Zaporizhyya	1	2		3
Lviv	3	1		2
Mykolaiv	2	1	3	
Poltava	3	1		2
Rivne	2	1		3

Based on the data in table 5, it can be noted that the major factors that impact the preparation of the regional order are contracts between VET schools and employers, since this is required by law. It is important that many VET council members acknowledge the importance of regional labour market studies.

The analysis of the meeting protocols of the regional VET councils shows that Lviv oblast is the only region where the VET council more or less regularly considers the results of the studies on the needs of the regional labour market. However, in Rivne oblast, contrary to other oblasts, such studies were conducted regularly and their results were reported by the experts of a local NGO at meetings attended by VET school principals and employers. At the same time, the VET council in Rivne oblast has looked into the needs studies of the regional labour market. In Zaporizhyya oblast, the VET council did discuss issues related to labour market studies, but it was only about plans to conduct them. The results of labour market studies were discussed by the VET council in Lviv oblast. At the meeting of the VET council in Poltava oblast, one of the points on the agenda was the adjustment of the number of VET graduates in vocational occupations to the needs of the regional labour market. The report on that was presented by the director of the department of Poltava state oblast administration for economic development, trade and investments.

Conducting a high-quality study of the regional labour markets is a rather complicated and costly task. Most oblasts just cannot conduct such studies, to say nothing about conducting them on a permanent basis. During the expert interview, the head of the economic policy department at Lviv state oblast administration said that for the approval of the regional VET order they used figures that were hard to compare and that the needs of the regional labour market had to be analysed every six months. It is important that these studies are high-quality and valid. However, it shall be achieved at an affordable price. It was proposed to set up an online platform containing a single database concerning the needs of employers in hiring qualified workers as well as data about VET schools offering training in the needed occupations. According to the respondents, it is also important to have a unified methodology (to be prepared by central bodies – the Ministry of Economic Development, the Ministry of Education and Science, the Ministry of Labour) for the preparation of the regional VET order in the oblasts of Ukraine.

➔ F. Policy in the Development of Vocational Training

The VET councils in each oblast discussed issues related to the development of the VET system, including the modernization of the VET network, improvement of VET in line with the needs of the economy, update of the state standards, review of the relations in the triangle education-employers-employment centres and the strategy for the build-up of a new VET-environment. All oblasts also looked into issues related to the cooperation between VET schools and companies as well as issues related to the implementation of dual education and development of public-private partnership.

The Standard Rules of Procedure for the Regional VET Councils reads as follows:
"The main tasks of the council are as follows:

- *Implementation of measures promoting the preparation and implementation of regional policy in the field of vocational training;*
- *Presentation of proposals concerning the elaboration of the development strategy for the VET sector in the respective region."*

Hence, each regional VET council shall focus on the elaboration and implementation of the regional VET policy.

3. Recommendations on the Performance Improvement of the Regional VET Councils

Section III consists of two parts. Part 1 contains general recommendations on the performance improvement of the regional VET councils in Ukraine; part 2 contains specific recommendations for each pilot region participating in the project.

3.1 General Recommendations

Paragraph 1 of the Standard Rules of Procedure for the Regional VET Councils reads as follows: "The regional VET council is an advisory and consulting body established at the Council of Ministers of the Autonomous Republic of Crimea, oblast state administrations, city state administrations of Kyiv and Sevastopol to participate in the elaboration and implementation of the regional VET policy."

Paragraph 4 of the Standard Rules of Procedure outlines the main tasks of the VET councils:

- *contributes to the elaboration and implementation of the regional VET policy;*
- *submits proposals concerning the elaboration of the VET development strategy of the respective region;*
- *initiates studies of the current status and development trends of the regional labour market;*
- *submits proposals concerning the demand forecast for skilled workers in the regional labour market;*
- *prepares proposals for the preparation of the regional VET order based on the analysis of the labour market data;*
- *approves the regional VET order for skilled workers and specialists;*
- *provides recommendations on the development of the VET network and its funding as well as on measures to ensure access to vocational education;*
- *promotes the modernization of the equipment of VET schools and implementation of modern production technologies in the education process;*
- *fosters the acquisition of domestic and international investments as well as international projects for the development of VET in the respective region;*
- *fosters cooperation between VET schools and stakeholders in the respective region;*
- *submits proposals and recommendations concerning the development of public-private partnership;*

- *promotes the implementation of dual vocational education and on-the-job training;*
- *prepares proposals concerning the implementation of training in new occupations that are in demand in the regional labour market, introduction/termination of VET programmes as well as re-training and up-skilling programmes taking into account inclusive education formats;*
- *organises events to discuss development trends in the regional labour market, exchange and dissemination of experience in the improvement of regional VET development strategies;*
- *provides recommendations on the regional policy in vocational orientation and promotion of VET as well as on creating conditions for life-long learning;*
- *submits proposals on the adoption of new regulations and amendments to valid regulations on vocational education."*

This list of the main task can be divided into four blocks:

1. VET development strategy in the respective oblast, including the optimisation of the VET network and build-up of a network of training and methodological centres;
2. Preparation of the regional VET order and research of the needs of the regional labour market;
3. Public-private partnership, including the promotion of dual education;
4. Vocational orientation and promotion of the positive image of VET.

The successful fulfilment of these tasks shall contribute to VET development, improve the VET quality and thus contribute to economic growth and to the prosperity of the residents of the respective region.

The three main groups of stakeholders in this process are regional authorities, employers and educators. This is the reason why the regional VET councils shall have members from all these groups.

Hence, the main recommendation concerning the performance improvement of the VET councils is that **oblast authorities, employers and educators should be firmly convinced that the regional VET councils can assist them in solving issues related to the social and economic development of their oblasts instead of being a formal advisory body prescribed by the government.**

Without understanding the relevance and usefulness of the regional VET councils, all other recommendations will not make any sense.

Recommendations concerning the performance improvement of the regional VET councils as well as the performance analysis of the VET councils in the seven pilot regions are considered in the context of three aspects: leadership in the council, line-up of the council and work organisation in the council.

➤ A. Recommendations Concerning Leadership in the Regional VET Councils

The main recommendation for an effective leadership in the regional VET councils is that the leading role in the organisation and work of the regional VET councils should be passed from the representatives of the education sector to the regional authorities, followed by the final transfer of leadership to employers' associations.

The steps below are required to transfer leadership to the regional authorities:

1. The regional VET councils shall be led by deputy heads of the respective state oblast administrations responsible for social and economic development (according to the Standard Rules of Procedure).
2. The chairperson of the regional VET council shall take over leadership in the full scope despite her/his high workload in her/his position at the respective oblast state administration, given that social and economic development normally belongs to the area of responsibility of the first deputy head of the oblast state administration. To become a genuine leader as the chairperson of the regional VET council, its chairperson shall:
 - consider the VET council as an important tool for improving the quality and effectiveness of VET as well as for boosting the economic and social development of the respective oblast;
 - participate directly in engaging new members for the VET council and personally invite the managers of her/his oblast's leading companies to participate in the VET council;
 - attend and chair each meeting of the council as well as support the participation of employers, senior officials of the oblast state administration and the heads of its units in the council meetings;
 - participate directly in determining the council's priorities and the council's strategy as well as present proposals concerning the work plan of the VET council for the coming year;
 - coordinate the work of the committees established by the VET councils;
 - control the execution of decisions adopted by the VET council;
 - act as the main speaker of the VET council and inform her/his oblast's hromada directly about the VET council's priorities, its decisions, their execution and achieved results;
 - fulfil the duties of the VET council's chairperson as per paragraph 11 of the Standard Rules of Procedure for the Regional VET Councils.
3. The chairperson of the regional VET council can participate in the selection of its deputy representing employers. If there is no suitable person among the heads of employers' associations (who are members of the VET

council) to take over the position of the VET council's deputy chairperson, it is recommended to engage the manager of one of the oblast's major companies for this position. However, senior officials of employers' associations of the local chamber of commerce and industry would be more suitable candidates for this position compared to the manager of a leading local company. The role of employers' associations is to provide comprehensive support to the development of entrepreneurship in general and business development for the member companies. The core task of a company manager is to maximize her/his company's profit, to improve its effectiveness and development as well as to develop and to implement the company's strategy concerning the use of human resources. Of course, all this does not release business managers from social responsibility.

4. For the position of the VET council's secretary, a representative of the economic policy department of the state oblast administration would be a more suitable candidate than a representative of the education and science department, which is now the case in each oblast. Firstly, the economic development department directly reports to the deputy head of the state oblast administration responsible for social and economic development who is also the chairperson of the regional VET council. Secondly, neither VET school principals, nor employers report directly to the economic policy department, which makes it possible to evaluate the problems and needs of the VET sector and the regional economy in an unbiased way. In this case, the management of the regional VET council can be presented as an equilateral pyramid with the council's chairperson at the top, while employers and two departments of the state oblast administration (education and science and economic policy) are placed at the bottom. This approach would help turn the regional VET councils into a platform for a comprehensive social dialogue between the regional authorities, business (employers) and the education sector. This, in turn, would help transform the regional authorities and the education sector into "service providers" that foster individual vocational development, economic and business development and thus the prosperity of the citizens. Otherwise, representatives of the education sector would still prefer to cooperate with the companies and institutions only with which the principles of VET schools have already established a successful cooperation. In this case, it would be hard to achieve a new level of quality, synergy and performance.
5. It is important to gain support and promotion from the state oblast administration for the development of employers' associations so they can take over leadership in the regional VET councils at a certain stage in future.
6. It is important to understand the role and the position of the regional VET councils in the decision-making processes at the regional level, in order to coordinate their work with the activities of other advisory bodies and institutions responsible for social and economic development.

➔ B. Recommendations on the Line-up of the Regional VET Councils

Paragraph 7 of the Standard Rules of Procedure for the Regional VET Councils reads as follows: *"The local body of executive power under which the VET council is established shall decide on the way its members are designated. The members of the VET council are approved by the resolution of the head of the local body of executive power under which the VET council is established."*

The Standard Rules of Procedure do not contain any clear regulations on who shall be a member of the regional VET council, with the exception of several officials and the above-mentioned groups whose representatives can be members of the VET council. The number of representatives of each group eligible to be members of the VET councils is not determined either. Given that the regional VET council is a platform for a comprehensive dialogue between the regional authorities, the education sector and employers concerning the implementation of the state VET policy, employers shall have a stronger say in the VET council compared to other groups, because employers are not part of public administration.

Most of the interviewed VET councils' members in the pilot regions think that the regional authorities, education sector and employers shall have an equal number of representatives in the VET councils. Given the above, however, it is recommended that employers' representatives have at least 33% but not more than 50% of the seats.

Below are proposals concerning membership in the regional VET councils for three key groups of VET stakeholders: education sector, regional authorities and employers.

Education Sector

It is recommended to have the education sector represented in the regional VET councils by the following persons:

1. Director (head) of the education and science department of the oblast state administration;
2. Senior official directly responsible for VET;
3. Director of the oblast VET training and methodological centre;
4. Head of the oblast association of college principals;
- 5–6. Two VET school principals, whose VET schools cooperate with employers (preferable to have one VET school principal from the oblast capital and one from the oblast);
7. Employee of the education and science department, if it has been decided that a representative of the education and science department shall take over the position of the VET council secretary.

1, 3 and 4 are determined by the Standard Rules of Procedure. Without a senior official directly responsible for VET, the effective operation of the VET council is hardly possible; hence, the head of the education and science department shall be a member of the VET council in each oblast. For positions 5 to 7 or concerning other proposals, the senior members of the regional VET councils decide by themselves based on expediency reasons or their work organisation specifics.

Regional Authorities

It is recommended to have the regional authorities represented in the regional VET councils by the following persons:

1. Deputy head of the state oblast administration responsible for social and economic development;
2. Director of the economic policy (regional development) department of the state oblast administration;
3. Head or deputy head of the financial department of the state oblast administration responsible for the education sector funding;
4. Director of the oblast employment centre;
5. Deputy mayor of the oblast capital;
6. Deputy head of the oblast council;
7. Head of the permanent budget commission of the oblast council/Head of the permanent education commission of the oblast council;
8. Employee of the economic policy department, if it has been decided that a representative of the economic policy department shall take over the position of the VET council secretary.

1, 4 and 5 are determined by the Standard Rules of Procedure. Without the head of the economic policy department, the effective operation of the VET council is hardly possible; hence, it is strongly recommended to include this person in the regional VET council. It is especially relevant to engage the senior officials of the oblast council, their role in the regional VET council is crucial given the running decentralization processes. Many issues concerning the VET council activities require decisions at the level of the oblast council, the budget and the social and economic development programme of the oblast are adopted by the oblast council. Given this, the level of involvement matters as well: the leading officials of the oblast councils shall not be VET council members pro forma — they must participate actively in the work of the VET councils and their commissions.

Employers

It is recommended to have employers represented in the regional VET councils by the following persons:

1. Heads of the major employers' associations: chambers of commerce and industry, oblast units of the Employers' Federation and cluster of the key economic sectors are active in each oblast. It is important to have their representatives in the regional VET councils. If there is no employers' association in place at the oblast level, the respective state oblast administration should persuade the respective stakeholders to come together and to appoint their representatives for the regional VET council. If there are several stakeholders' associations operating at the oblast level, the state oblast administration should make efforts to have these associations consolidated their position and delegate their representatives to the VET councils;

2. Managers of companies that already cooperate with VET schools;

3. Managers of the leading companies of the oblast: it is important that the selected managers represent different sectors of the region's economy. It is recommended that employers' representatives for the regional VET council are selected at a meeting chaired by the deputy head of the oblast state administration with the participation of the director of the education and science department and the head of the VET department (unit) as well as the director of the economic policy department and the deputy chairperson of the regional VET council representing employers. If the latter has not been designated yet, it would be appropriate to invite one or two representatives of employers to take over the position of the deputy chairman of the regional VET council.

Expert community

The fourth group of persons that requires attention when determining the line-up of the regional VET council includes representatives of NGOs and think tanks who analyse the economic development of the respective region. Especially relevant for the VET council are experts in VET or experts who cooperate with VET schools. It is appropriate to include them in the VET council or at least to engage them for the commissions of the regional VET councils.

➤ C. Recommendations Concerning the Work organisation of the regional VET councils

Key principles of the work of the regional VET Councils

When building up the operation of the regional VET councils, the principles shall be strictly adhered to that are listed in the ETF working document "Regional VET Councils in Ukraine. Proposed methodological recommendations on their organisation and functioning" of October 2017. Paragraph 6 of the working document is "Good management of the regional VET council: conduct principles and procedure regulations". The document determines five principles of good management of the regional VET councils: conformity, effectiveness, subsidiarity, proportionality, and accountability²:

² Good multilevel governance for vocational education and training, European Training Foundation, 2013 [https://www.etf.europa.eu/webatt.nsf/0/5C0302B17E20986CC1257C0B0049E331/\\$file/Multilevel%20governance%20x%20VET.pdf](https://www.etf.europa.eu/webatt.nsf/0/5C0302B17E20986CC1257C0B0049E331/$file/Multilevel%20governance%20x%20VET.pdf)

“Conformity — the working principle of the regional VET council implies that all actions and decisions of the VET council and its members meet the needs of the economy, society and students. This principle is valid, if:

- the economic role of VET is backed by, for instance, the results of forecasts / comparison of the demand for skills combined with competence-based curricula;
- social justice in VET is ensured, for instance, by opening and accrediting VET programmes for the general public or by extending practices of life-long vocational training;
- the innovative role of VET is ensured through, for instance, the implementation of sustainable development skills or entrepreneurship skills and/or key competences;
- decisions and political documents adopted by the regional VET councils meet the needs of students and the labour market (for instance, implementation of more flexible approaches, combination of formal and informal sector, and implementation of result-based approaches).

Effectiveness means the timely preparation and adoption of relevant political documents in the VET sector based on clear goals, quality assurance measures, learning based on experience and expected results. This principle is valid, if:

- regular feedback confirms that the existing management systems at the regional level support VET and the implementation of reforms both at the regional and at the national level;
- support is provided in attaining the goals of regional development and a number of other regional policies;
- goals are set as a reaction to common problems and detected gaps in regional policy;
- quality assurance mechanisms are operable or are developing and contribute to the higher quality of decisions adopted by the regional VET councils;
- procedures for the development of the regional VET network are deemed effective, since they ensure a proper cost-performance ratio.

Subsidiarity and proportionality imply that the regional VET council adopts decisions concerning the VET network in the respective oblast at the most appropriate level to ensure effectiveness in the preparation and implementation of the VET policy. This principle is valid, if:

- decisions are based on the thorough analysis of the activities of VET schools at the most appropriate level;
- roles and responsibilities of stakeholders do not contradict each other and leave no gaps in the policy development.

Transparency means that the regional VET councils shall document their policies, process and activities to make them accessible and clear to employees and relevant stakeholders. This principle is valid, if:

- the preparation, implementation and verification of the agenda of the regional VET policy are designed as processes that are open to identified stakeholders;
- the political dialogue is coordinated and backed by relevant documents, reports, guiding principles etc.;
- information management systems and other data are in line with the needs of stakeholders;
- the applied registration system ensures the full coverage of all activities of the regional VET council;
- the internal structure of the registration system meets the valid legal requirements.

Accountability means that the roles, functions and duties of the regional VET council and its members are clearly determined and the practices of the regional VET council are in line with the relevant standards. This principle is valid, if:

- VET regulation practices are in line with relevant standards, norms and procedures and are agreed by different stakeholders;
- responsibilities, roles and functions are clearly determined and respect results expected by the users and stakeholders;
- decision-makers take into account and respect the views and recommendations of different stakeholders."

One more principle that is important and has already been mentioned above is the **"win-win game"** meaning that the joint activities of the VET council members are beneficial for everyone and do not discriminate anyone.

➤ **Recommendations Concerning the Work Plan of the Regional VET Council**

According to the Standard Rules of Procedure (paragraph 21), the regular meetings of the regional VET council take place at least once in a quarter. Paragraph 17 reads as follows: *"The VET council pursues its activities according to the work plans that it shall approve."* This means that the work plan and the approximate agenda of the council's meetings shall be prepared/planned for 4 meetings per year.

It is recommended to the VET council to discuss at least one point from each block per year:

- VET development strategy in the respective oblast;
- preparation of the regional VET order and study of the needs of the regional labour markets;

- public-private partnership;
- vocational orientation and build-up of the positive image of VET.



Sample: plan of the Meetings of the Regional VET Council

Q1 (February—March)

1. Analysis of the needs of the regional labour markets (study results, if such a study was conducted).
2. Examination of proposals for the training of skilled workers in new occupations.
3. Examination of proposals concerning changes in the VET network.

Q2 (April—May)

1. Approval of the regional order for the training of skilled workers and specialists in the coming year.
2. Public-private partnership and implementation of dual education.
3. Implementation of new VET standards in the VET schools of the respective oblast.

Q3 (June—July)

1. Vocational orientation in the respective oblast.
2. Fulfilment of the VET development plan and priorities for the coming year.
3. Execution of the decisions of the VET council.

Q4 (November—December)

1. Fulfilment of the regional order for the training of skilled workers and specialists and its correction, if required.
2. Results of the tracer monitoring of the employment of VET graduates.
3. Image-making measures for the VET system and their implementation (implementation of the communication strategy of the regional VET councils).

The agenda of the VET council's meeting requires a thorough preparation. Hence, it is important to approve the annual work plan of the council so its permanent commissions or working groups can prepare materials for the meeting in a proper way. The above list of the proposed agenda points is not final. Obviously, other relevant issues will be arising that will need to be handled by the VET councils.

It must also be noted that according to paragraph 28 of the Standard Rules of Procedure it is mandatory to publish the work plan of the regional VET council.

➤ **Recommendations Concerning the Working Groups and Commissions of the Regional VET Councils**

Paragraph 5 of the Standard Rules of Procedure stipulates that the regional VET council “can — if needed — set up permanent or temporary working groups and commission for the fulfilment of its tasks”. Paragraph 28 of the Standard Rules of Procedure requires the disclosure of the list of members of the permanent or temporary working groups and commissions.

The first recommendation is to **set up permanent commissions**.

The work of the regional VET council is similar to the activities of the oblast council. Each oblast council member participates in a permanent commission dedicated to specific issues. Similar to this, it is proposed that each VET council member belongs to one of the VET council's permanent commissions. It is appropriate to set up four permanent commissions handling one of the respective areas of the VET council's responsibility respectively:

- VET development strategy in the respective oblast;
- preparation of the regional VET order;
- public-private partnership;
- vocational orientation and build-up of the positive image of VET.

The next recommendation is that **each permanent commission should include representatives of employers, the education sector and authorities. Preferably, the commissions should be chaired by representatives of different groups as well** — for instance, the head of the permanent commission responsible for the VET development strategy should be a representative of the education sector, the commission for the preparation of the regional VET order could be led by the head of the economic policy department, the commission for PPP affairs — a representative of employers, the commission for vocational orientation and build-up of the positive image of VET — the director of the oblast employment centre.

The work rules of the permanent commissions set up by the regional VET council shall be developed by the commissions and adopted at the VET council's meeting. Preferably, the meetings of the permanent commissions should take place at least once a month.

According to paragraph 5 of the Standard Rules of Procedure, the regional VET council can “*engage representatives of central and local bodies of executive power, local self-government bodies, companies, institutions and organisations of all property forms (to be agreed with their management) as well as external experts (to be requested) to handle issues that belong the council's area of responsibility*”. It makes sense to invite experts from various areas for evaluation and advisory

support concerning issues belonging to the area of responsibility of the VET council's permanent commission.

It makes sense to set up working groups based on actual needs, their number and membership rules are to be determined by the regional VET councils.

➤ **Recommendations Concerning the Performance Monitoring of the Regional VET Councils**

The regional VET council can be more effective, if its decisions and recommendations are implemented. They shall contribute to the development of VET, improve its quality and promote the social and economic development of the respective oblast.

1. It is necessary to monitor the implementation of the work plan of the regional VET council and its permanent commissions.
2. It is necessary to monitor the implementation of decisions adopted by the regional VET council: at each meeting of the council, a brief report on the implementation status of the decisions adopted in the previous meeting shall be presented; once a year, the implementation of the council's decisions shall be a separate point on the agenda of the council's meeting.
3. It is necessary to assess if the council's decisions result in the higher effectiveness of VET, improve its quality and affordability; it shall also be assessed to what extent these decisions meet the needs of employers contribute to economic development.

To follow recommendation 3, relevant criteria and indicators shall be selected to measure the effectiveness, quality and affordability of VET.

➤ **Recommendations Concerning the Communication Policy of the Regional VET Councils**

The internal communication policy of the regional VET council shall ensure that:

- all council members and all relevant stakeholders receive up-to-date and complete information about draft decisions planned for adoption by the council;
- all council members have the rights to express their opinion on draft decisions planned for adoption and to have their opinion transmitted to all other council members.

The regional VET council should develop a clear policy for external communications that determines types of information that shall be disclosed as well as the recipients of this information and conditions for its disclosure.

Activities of the regional VET council should be reported to representatives of small and medium-sized companies as well as to the managers of big companies who could approach the council to solve their issues related to the availability of skilled workers.

3.2 Recommendations to the Pilot Regions

➤ A. Recommendations to Vinnytsya oblast state administration

A.1. Change the attitude of the regional VET council and turn it into an effective advisory body of Vinnytsya oblast state administration; enhance the leading role of the oblast state administration in the regional VET council; designate the senior officials of the oblast council to become members of the regional VET council;

A.2. A representative of employers should be appointed as the deputy chairperson of the regional VET council;

A.3. Increase the number of employers' representatives in the council significantly; consider the inclusion of a representative of the Chamber of Commerce and Industry in Vinnytsya oblast in the regional VET council;

A.4. Prepare the work plan of the regional VET council for the coming year and the approximate agenda for the four meetings of the regional VET council;

A.5. Consider setting up four permanent commissions of the regional VET council according to its core tasks:

- commission for the VET development strategy in Vinnytsya oblast;
- commission for the study of the needs of the regional labour markets and for the preparation of the regional VET order;
- commission for public-private partnership;
- commission for vocational orientation and build-up of the positive image of VET.

Representatives of different stakeholder groups should be recommended to the chair the above commissions.

A.6. Consider the possibility to conduct regular monitoring studies of the needs of the regional labour markets.

➤ B. Recommendations to Zaporizhya oblast state administration

B.1. Enhance the leading role of the oblast state administration in the regional VET council; enhance the role of the economic development and trade department in the VET council's activity;

B.2. A representative of employers should be appointed as the deputy chairperson of the regional VET council;

B.3. After the local elections it is recommended to strengthen the regional VET council by engaging the senior officials of the oblast council – deputy chairperson and/or heads of the permanent oblast council commissions responsible for budget, economic development and education;

B.4. Consider the inclusion of a representative of the Chamber of Commerce and Industry in Zaporizhya oblast in the regional VET council;

B.5. Prepare the work plan of the regional VET council for the coming year and the approximate agenda for the four meetings of the regional VET council;

B.6. Consider setting up four permanent commissions of the regional VET council according to its core tasks:

- commission for the VET development strategy in Zaporizhya oblast;
- commission for the study of the needs of the regional labour markets and for the preparation of the regional VET order;
- commission for public-private partnership;
- commission for vocational orientation and build-up of the positive image of VET.

Representatives of different stakeholder groups should be recommended to the chair the above commissions;

B.7. Consider the possibility to conduct regular monitoring studies of the needs of the regional labour markets;

B.8. When preparing the plan of the regional and national VET order for the training of skilled workers and specialists, please consider not only the needs of the labour market, but also the Constitutional right of students for free-of-charge vocational education.

➔ **C. Recommendations to Lviv oblast state administration**

C.1. Enhance the leading role of the oblast state administration in the regional VET council and make efforts to make employers the leading group among the VET council members;

C.2. Return the leaders of the clusters of the key economic sectors of Lviv oblast as members of the regional VET council;

C.3. Prepare the work plan of the regional VET council for the coming year and the approximate agenda for the four meetings of the regional VET council;

C.4. Consider setting up four permanent commissions of the regional VET council according to its core tasks:

- commission for the VET development strategy in Lviv oblast;
- commission for the study of the needs of the regional labour markets and for the preparation of the regional VET order;
- commission for public-private partnership;

- commission for vocational orientation and build-up of the positive image of VET.

Representatives of different stakeholder groups should be recommended to the chair the above commissions;

C.5. Consider the possibility to conduct regular monitoring studies of the needs of the regional labour markets; establish an online platform informing about demand for skilled workers among companies and micro-businesses operating in Lviv oblast;

C.6. When preparing the plan of the regional and national VET order for the training of skilled workers and specialists, please consider not only the needs of the labour market, but also the Constitutional right of students for free-of-charge vocational education.

➤ **D. Recommendations to Mykolaiv oblast state administration**

D.1. Enhance the leading role of the oblast state administration in the regional VET council: strengthen the role of the economic development and trade department in the activities of the regional VET council;

D.2. A representative of employers should be appointed as the deputy chairperson of the regional VET council;

D.3. Consider the inclusion of a representative of the Chamber of Commerce and Industry in Mykolaiv oblast in the regional VET council;

D.4. Consider the possibility to conduct regular monitoring studies of the needs of the regional labour markets;

D.5. Consider setting up four permanent commissions of the regional VET council according to its core tasks:

- commission for the VET development strategy in Mykolaiv oblast;
- commission for the study of the needs of the regional labour markets and for the preparation of the regional VET order;
- commission for public-private partnership;
- commission for vocational orientation and build-up of the positive image of VET.

Representatives of different stakeholder groups should be recommended to the chair the above commissions;

D.6. When preparing the plan of the regional and national VET order for the training of skilled workers and specialists, please consider not only the needs of the labour market, but also the Constitutional right of students for free-of-charge vocational education;

D.7. Coordinate the work of advisory councils, committees and working groups under the oblast state administration whose activities are related to the economic development of Mykolaiv region.

➤ **E. Recommendations to Poltava oblast state administration**

E.1. Enhance the leading role of the oblast state administration in the regional VET council; strengthen the role of the economic department, trade and investment department in the activities of the regional VET council;

E.2. A representative of employers should be appointed as the deputy chairperson of the regional VET council;

E.3. Increase the number of employers and reduce the number of education sector representatives in the regional VET council;

E.4. After the local elections it is recommended to strengthen the regional VET council by engaging the senior officials of the oblast council – deputy chairperson and/or heads of the permanent oblast council commissions responsible for budget, economic development and education;

E.5. Prepare the work plan of the regional VET council for the coming year and the approximate agenda for the four meetings of the regional VET council;

E.6. Consider setting up four permanent commissions of the regional VET council according to its core tasks:

- commission for the VET development strategy in Poltava oblast;
- commission for the study of the needs of the regional labour markets and for the preparation of the regional VET order;
- commission for public-private partnership;
- commission for vocational orientation and build-up of the positive image of VET.

Representatives of different stakeholder groups should be recommended to the chair the above commissions;

E.7. Consider the possibility to conduct regular monitoring studies of the needs of the regional labour markets;

E.8. When preparing the plan of the regional and national VET order for the training of skilled workers and specialists, please consider not only the needs of the labour market, but also the Constitutional right of students for free-of-charge vocational education.

➤ **F. Recommendations to Rivne oblast state administration**

F.1. Change the attitude to the regional VET council and turn it into an effective advisory body under Rivne oblast state administration; enhance the leading role of the oblast state administration in the regional VET council;

F.2. A representative of employers should be appointed as the deputy chairperson of the regional VET council;

F.3. Increase the number of employers in the regional VET council significantly;

F.4. Prepare the work plan of the regional VET council for the coming year and the approximate agenda for the four meetings of the regional VET council;

F.5. Consider setting up four permanent commissions of the regional VET council according to its core tasks:

- commission for the VET development strategy in Rivne oblast;
- commission for the study of the needs of the regional labour markets and for the preparation of the regional VET order;
- commission for public-private partnership;
- commission for vocational orientation and build-up of the positive image of VET.

Representatives of different stakeholder groups should be recommended to the chair the above commissions;

F.6. When preparing the plan of the regional and national VET order for the training of skilled workers and specialists, please consider not only the needs of the labour market, but also the Constitutional right of students for free-of-charge vocational education.

➔ **G. Recommendations to Chernivtsi oblast state administration**

G.1. Enhance the leading role of the oblast state administration in the regional VET council; engage the senior officials of the oblast council and the regional development department as VET council members;

G.2. A representative of employers should be appointed as the deputy chairperson of the regional VET council;

G.3. Consider the inclusion of a representative of the Chamber of Commerce and Industry in Chernivtsi oblast and representatives of the association of VET school principals in the regional VET council;

G.4. Prepare the work plan of the regional VET council for the coming year and the approximate agenda for the four meetings of the regional VET council;

G.5. Consider setting up four permanent commissions of the regional VET council according to its core tasks:

- commission for the VET development strategy in Chernivtsi oblast;
- commission for the study of the needs of the regional labour markets and for the preparation of the regional VET order;

- commission for public-private partnership;
- commission for vocational orientation and build-up of the positive image of VET.

Representatives of different stakeholder groups should be recommended to the chair the above commissions;

G.6. Consider the possibility to conduct regular monitoring studies of the needs of the regional labour markets;

G.7. Coordinate the work of advisory councils, committees and working groups under the oblast state administration whose activities are related to the economic development of Chernivtsi region.

➤ **H. Recommendations concerning the further project work**

H.1. Develop the rules of procedure for the council meetings and the meetings of the permanent commissions as well as procedures for the preparation and adoption of decisions;

H.2. Propose mechanisms for the implementation of the council's decisions; propose procedures for the implementation monitoring of decisions adopted in previous meetings;

H.3. Support studies of the needs of the regional labour markets;

H.4. Support the preparation and adoption of the new VET development strategy in the respective oblasts;

H.5. Support the preparation of the plan of the regional VET order for 2021-2022 based on the analysis of the respective regional strategies, the needs of the regional labour markets and the VET development strategy in the respective oblasts;

H.6. Conduct trainings for the regional VET councils' members to develop the councils' capacity to handle the identified issues in an effective manner as well as to develop capacities in performance monitoring, communication strategy and modern methods of group work;

H.7. Support the EU4Skills-Programme at the level of the central bodies of executive power and develop a unified methodology for the regional VET order in the oblasts and preferences for companies that are involved in the dual training of skilled workers or provide training equipment to VET schools;

H.8. Support the elaboration of the draft methodology for the research of the regional labour markets, discuss it with the key partners (MoES, Ministry of Finance).

4. Conclusions

The regional VET council is the result of the VET decentralisation process and one of the tools to improve the results of vocational training. However, the regional VET council is not an end in itself. It is important that it is perceived as a body playing the key role in the VET system, not as just one more institution or administrative entity.

It is recommended to include the regional VET council in the new Law of Ukraine "On Vocational Education".

The regional VET council shall be considered as one of the advisory bodies under oblast state administrations; hence, it is important to coordinate the activities of advisory councils, committees and working groups at oblast state administrations that are related to the social and economic development of the respective oblasts.

The performance of the regional VET council depends on who takes over leadership in its work organisation and decision-making processes.

It is crucial that the work of the regional VET council is not limited to meetings – the council shall work permanently. The performance of the regional VET council will get significantly better, if its members representing the authorities, employers and the education sector jointly prepare the agenda of the council's meetings. This process is hard to organise, but without this it will be very hard to retain qualified professionals in the council, first of all – the senior officials of the oblast and city councils as well as employers.

The performance analysis of the VET councils in seven pilot regions makes it clear that the first two years of their work (2016–2017) were more intensive and fruitful compared to the following years. The reason for the launch of the regional VET councils in 2016 was the transfer of the management and funding powers in the VET sector to the oblast level. This challenge – combining unexpected new responsibilities and lack of funding for the proper operation of VET schools in many cities of oblast significance – consolidated representatives of the education sector, the local authorities and employers. Within two years, a new system for the management and funding of the VET sector was established at the oblast level. Routine procedures were set up to handle issues in the VET sector. However, the new system failed to implement interesting and useful proposals adopted in the first meetings of the regional VET councils. Due to the missing mechanisms for the implementation of the councils' decisions as well as the missing implementation monitoring procedure, the meetings of the regional VET councils degraded to a mere exchange of opinions. That demotivated the managers of the leading businesses in the respective oblasts to attend the VET councils' meetings.

The approval of the regional VET order plan for the training of skilled workers and specialists was the only mandatory task of the regional VET councils as per the resolution of the Cabinet of Ministers – and that task was indeed fulfilled. In many oblasts, the meetings of the regional VET councils were limited to this important issue.

To transform the regional VET councils into a reliable tool required to improve the VET quality and to meet the needs of the regional labour markets, the councils' members need special skills and competences; thus, the training and capacity development of the VET councils' members constitutes an important aspect related to the effectiveness of the regional VET councils.

