

POSITION PAPER

The Management of International Vocational Education and Training Networks Illustrated by the Example of Latin America



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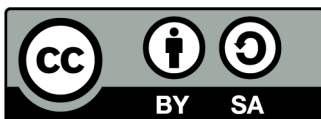
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Management Summary

This position paper provides a detailed analysis of the Vocational Education and Training (VET) networks in Latin America, highlighting key challenges and proposing adaptable solutions for improvement. Through an extensive literature review and interviews with key stakeholders, eight main challenges are identified, including the lack of a common legal framework, need for mutual recognition of qualifications, and rapid globalization with the onset of Industry 4.0. This paper underscores these as the most pressing issues.

To address these challenges, the paper suggests a roadmap not designed as a one-size-fits-all solution but as a flexible framework that can be adapted to the unique contexts of different countries and regions. Key suggestions include embracing diversity by utilizing it as a strength and a resource, defining clear roles and responsibilities for efficient network operations, enhancing transparency through effective communication, establishing close collaboration with industry stakeholders, advocating for mutual recognition of qualifications across the region, and ensuring the adaptability of the network to current and future trends.

The paper strongly recommends: 1) establishing a regional common legal framework for VET, 2) fostering mutual recognition of qualifications across countries, and 3) working closely with industry stakeholders to ensure that the VET curriculum remains relevant and adaptable to market needs. These recommendations are chiefly positioned within the areas of policy development, regional cooperation, and industry-academia collaboration.

The paper showcases various real-life examples of successful VET initiatives worldwide, offering concrete demonstrations of the suggested pathways in action. The proposed solutions demand concerted efforts from all stakeholders, including government institutions, industry partners, educational establishments, and individuals. By implementing these strategies, VET networks can situate themselves advantageously to address the future challenges of vocational education and training, thereby making substantial contributions to Latin America's socio-economic development.

This position paper comprehensively explores the VET landscape in Latin America. It offers a practical roadmap to enhance the resilience and effectiveness of VET networks in the region.

Challenges in Vocational Education and Training

The rapid pace of technological development, the introduction of Industry 4.0, and globalization have resulted in a pressing need for new skills worldwide. However, this demand has given rise to a significant shortfall of appropriately skilled workers/employees and trainers with the expertise to succeed in a transforming job market¹. This deficiency becomes a substantial barrier to regional economic growth and global competitiveness². Latin America, a vital participant in the global supply chain, has experienced an increase in its strategic significance, especially amidst the challenges provoked by the conflict in Ukraine. The political upheaval and disturbance of supply chains resulting from Russia's invasion of Ukraine have catalyzed changes in global trade dynamics. The commodities market has been particularly affected, with some analysts suggesting that spiking prices could foster faster growth rates in regions like Latin America that can step in to meet the demand.³

Despite this opportunity, Latin America grapples with a shortage of professionals trained to excel in the digital era. This lack hampers economic growth, productivity, and competitiveness. Technology evolves at an extraordinary pace, resulting in a widening gap between existing workforce skills and industry requirements⁴. This skills gap hinders not only individual employability but also the capacity of businesses, tiny and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), to effectively adapt and compete.

¹ see FELDMAN UND GIROLIMO 2021, p. 470

² see KUPER 2020, p. 126

³ see THE ECONOMIST INTELLIGENCE UNIT, p. 6

⁴ see AGUILAR-RODRÍGUEZ ET AL. 2021, p. 762



According to the expert interviews conducted for this paper, concerted efforts are required from multiple stakeholders, including governments, educational and public institutions, and businesses, to tackle these challenges effectively. They should aim to strengthen Vocational Education and Training (VET) systems, improve the quality of training programs, and promote the acquisition of relevant skills in line with the demands of the digital age.

These interviews also highlighted the need for developing comprehensive strategies, stakeholder collaboration, and effective international networks to facilitate the exchange of knowledge and best practices in VET. Experts indicated that efficient management of VET networks has the potential to address these challenges. By fostering collaborations among governments, educational and public institutions, and businesses, VET networks can facilitate the development of a workforce that is ready for the demands of the digital age.

Guided by these expert insights, such a strategy will narrow the skills gap and foster mobility among professionals, thereby boosting the region's economic competitiveness. Proactive and collaborative VET network management can assist Latin America in realizing its potential as a competitive player in the global industrial and circular economy sectors, stimulating economic growth and creating superior employment opportunities for its people. This approach underlines the importance of robust, flexible VET systems in ensuring that regions can meet the challenges of a rapidly changing global economy.

Exploring the Role of VET Networks in Latin America

In the fast-paced, interconnected global landscape, the importance of *Vocational Education and Training* (VET) in promoting knowledge sharing, encouraging collaboration, and driving economic progress is increasingly acknowledged.⁵ However, there is a significant gap in exploring VET networks, a gap this position paper seeks to address.

We focus our discussion on the *German Chambers of Commerce Abroad's* (AHKs) activities in Latin America, using them as a case study to delve into the subject matter. The backdrop to the insights is the Y-Mas Project, which is led by the *Federal Ministry of Education and Research* (BMBF). The initiative aims to identify and mitigate prevalent weaknesses in regional training and ongoing education, with solutions tailored to each country's socio-economic conditions.

The project also aims to glean insights from the transition to Industry 4.0, the digital transformation revolutionizing manufacturing and related industries. This position paper seeks to underscore the importance of robust, flexible VET systems in navigating these complex transformations and preparing regions to handle the demands of a swiftly changing global economy. There is a trend of courses and programs regarding the digitalization of work and the abilities required to meet the challenges of the Industrial Revolution 4.0. We recognize the importance of cultivating soft skills such as critical thinking, leadership, planning, and creativity.

Vocational Education and Training is a crucial driver of global economic growth, assisting industries in adapting to societal shifts. It provides critical knowledge and skills to meet the demands of specific jobs or the broader labor market, which makes it vital in our ever-changing world⁶. Recognized by the European Union and United Nations, VET ensures access to high-quality technical education and promotes employment, entrepreneurship, and gender equality.

Global disruptions and demographic changes, including the COVID-19 pandemic and the conflict in Ukraine, underscore the need for a resilient, adaptable VET⁷. VET's benefits extend to combating gender disparities and helping disadvantaged young people enter the workforce, making it a key component in building a more inclusive society⁸. To remain effective, it must forge innovative

⁵ see KALEJA UND EGETENMEYER 2017, p. 64

⁶ see CEDEFOP 2014, p. 292

⁷ see CEDEFOP 2022, p. 1

⁸ see COUNCIL OF THE EUROPEAN UNION 2020, pp. 1-2

collaborations with businesses, the scientific community, and other education sectors. It should also align with society's research, education, and innovation needs while fostering internationalization and mobility.

Germany's dual VET system is a prominent model for international VET efforts, combining on-the-job learning with classroom instruction⁹. The system's success is based on the cooperation between the state, industry, and social partners, and international collaboration aim to enhance VET in partner nations. Despite various challenges, Germany continues to promote its dual system as an effective economic and foreign policy tool approved and recognized by the *German Chamber of Commerce and Industry (DIHK)*¹⁰.

In Latin America, the *German Chamber of Commerce Abroad (AHKs)* provide vocational training tailored to the requirements of both local and German companies. By establishing vocational education bodies and certification systems and promoting vocational education, AHKs contribute to building transparent structures for vocational training interventions. They showcase the advantages of the German dual vocational training model, focusing on integration, guidance, and quality assurance. In each country, the role of the AHK and the type of training vary depending on the specific context and legal framework. This phenomenon makes it difficult to manage international VET networking and achieve the expected benefits. Nevertheless, the "Ausbildung der Ausbilder" program serves as an excellent example of best practices based on common standards. This training program offers increased international mobility and exchange opportunities within the region.

Despite many common characteristics, the region of Latin America is a region characterized by tremendous cultural and social diversity. The analysis and context will focus on four countries representing this diversity: Uruguay, Argentina, Ecuador, and Colombia.

Uruguay: Uruguay is one of the less populated countries in the region. 40% of the total population lives in Montevideo (the capital), and only 4% in rural areas. Vocational education is not sufficiently regulated, resulting in a heterogenous quality market. The VET system lacks a uniform framework

⁹ see BMBF 2019, p. 1

¹⁰ see FROMMBERGER UND BAUMANN 2020, p. 162-167

for recognizing different types of training. However, there are policy projects to recognize previous learning acquired through work and experience. These initiatives are spearheaded by the Ministry of Education and Culture (MEC) and the Council of Technical and Professional Education (CETP-UTU). During the past five years, Uruguay has seen accelerated economic growth. However, the level of education in the workplace remains unchanged. For example, in 2016, less than 10 percent of the production workers finished their vocational education (VET), and only 56 percent of the working population finished primary school. Additionally, 17 percent of the young people between 14-29 neither worked nor studied¹¹.

Argentina: Argentina has suffered one of the most significant economic crises in the past five years. Unemployment is rising and inflation is one of the highest in the region. However, Argentina possesses a strong economy in Latin America, boasting a Gross Domestic Product (GDP) of around USD 610 billion. This substantial GDP is mainly driven by the country's abundant natural resources in energy and agriculture. With a vast territory covering 2.8 million square kilometers, Argentina benefits from fertile lands, substantial gas and lithium reserves, and immense potential for renewable energy sources. In particular, it holds a prominent position as a leading food producer, thanks to its flourishing agricultural and livestock industries. There are promising prospects in various manufacturing subsectors and innovative high-tech services.

Despite Argentina's overall recovery, inflation remains a persistent challenge, rising above 100% annually as of February 2023. Such high inflation rates contribute to macroeconomic imbalances that damage the long-term sustainability of Argentina's economic growth¹².

The primary challenges identified in the aftermath of the pandemic are linked to the young people aged 14- 24 in the following dimensions: 1) quantity and quality of employment, 2) transition to the labor market, and 3) education and vocational training¹³.

Ecuador: In November 2008, during Rafael Correa's government, Congress approved Ecuador's new constitution. Notably, this constitution acknowledges and recognizes the rights of the indigenous population and the establishment of a plurinational state, legal pluralism, participatory democracy, and the right to administer ancestral territories. The fundamental principles of this constitution are rooted in the Aymara philosophy of Buen Vivir or 'Good Living' which emphasizes

¹¹ see ORGANIZACIÓN INTERNACIONAL DE TRABAJO – OIT 2020, p. 1

¹² see WORLD BANK 2023, p. 6

¹³ see ORGANIZACIÓN INTERNACIONAL DE TRABAJO – OIT 2022, p. 6

a spiritual perspective on the relationship between humankind and nature. This accomplishment stands as the most significant achievement of the indigenous political struggle in the region. Despite the nature-focused constitutional reform, the economy's ongoing dependency on oil persists¹⁴ – an extractive policy that is far from the ideals of Andean “Buen Vivir.” Nevertheless, it is advantageous that Ecuador has recognized its cultural diversity and the boundaries to change into a green economy in its constitution. Additionally, Ecuador has a normative frame of education policies, including a system to facilitate the recognition of skills and abilities acquired through work experience. The „Ley Orgánica de Educación Intercultural“ endorses the certification of ongoing education to bridge the gap between the requirements of the labor market and the abilities and skills of young workers. This, in turn, aims to improve the working conditions within companies – also, implementing different levels of education from high school until university. Finally, the law “Código Ingenios” in Ecuador offers tax benefits for companies that hire students¹⁵.

Colombia: In 1991, Colombia achieved a significant milestone by approving a new constitution that recognizes the cultural diversity of its population like Ecuador and Bolivia. There are 87 indigenous peoples who speak more than 64 languages and constitute 1 percent of the country's total inhabitants. The nation is torn by internal conflicts involving paramilitary groups, the military, and guerrilla groups. In 2016, the government of Juan Manuel Santos (2010-2018) signed a peace treaty to stop the violence and decrease social inequality. The present government under Gustavo Petro (2022-2026) represents one of the pioneering popular movements to secure electoral victory. Their “Plan de Desarrollo” reflects a remarkable ambition to foster reindustrialization and cultivate a sustainable economy. The government emphasizes the shift from extractive economics to a circular economic model in international relations.¹⁶

In Colombia, professional and vocational education is principally promoted by the SENA (*National Service of Learning – Servicio Nacional de Aprendizaje*). There is a legal framework in place to recognize the completion of courses and other training at work.

Considering the context and the problems of the region, the Y-Mas project, sponsored by the *German Federal Ministry of Education and Research (BMBF)* and coordinated by *DLR Projektträger*, is tailored to address the complex issues faced by industrial manufacturers in Latin America through a distinctive network methodology. The *German Foreign Chambers of Commerce (AHKs)*

¹⁴ see LALANDER ET AL. 2019, p. 203

¹⁵ see REPÚBLICA DEL ECUADOR 2019, p. 14

¹⁶ see REPÚBLICA DE COLOMBIA 2022, p. 22

are collaborating partners in this endeavor. They offer indispensable knowledge and networks that reinforce this network-focused strategy. Although they are not directly managing the project, their essential role as facilitators and consultants is critical to successfully realizing the Y-Mas initiative.

,VET networks‘ lack a standardized definition, but they can be considered as global frameworks that foster collaboration, shared learning, knowledge exchange, and cooperation to improve vocational education and training quality¹⁷. Within this position paper, these networks involve a range of stakeholders, with AHKs playing a key role, facilitating knowledge exchange and promoting global partnerships.

While there is a broad knowledge on Vocational Education and Training (VET) and international cooperation, there is a surprising lack of research on the effectiveness and impact of VET networks and their constituents. This position paper intends to bridge this gap by providing insight into international VET Networks. Drawing on various perspectives, this paper fosters a holistic understanding of the AHKs‘ role within the global VET framework and of the impact of their initiatives in regions such as Latin America. It aims to provide a knowledge base that will allow practical applications. Therefore, it sets the stage for an in-depth exploration of these topics to enrich the current conversation with fresh insights. The emphasis is on converting the insights gleaned from the expert interviews into practical guidance for practitioners, ensuring their efforts

¹⁷ see MEYNE AND PETERS 2022, PP. 726 – 729



Expert Insights: Unpacking the Realities of VET Network Management

in the field are guided by evidence-based strategies and an understanding of the broader context. Our quest to unlock the potential of Vocational Education and Training (VET) networks in Latin America led us to engage in insightful conversations with those at the forefront of this initiative. We sought to understand the experiences, challenges, and insights of those involved in shaping and implementing VET strategies daily, recognizing that this first-hand knowledge could significantly deepen our understanding of the current landscape.

We conducted interviews with seven representatives from the German Chambers of Commerce Abroad (AHKs) across Colombia, Ecuador, Uruguay, and Argentina. Additionally, we conducted an expert workshop and a roundtable discussion. These in-depth, candid conversations were designed to elicit the kind of granular insights that only those intimately involved in the field can provide. The diverse and esteemed group of participants all shared a focus on promoting vocational education and training in Latin America. The participants include education experts, digital learning specialists, directors of the Department of International and National Cooperation (AHKs), the director of the successful project „Alianza para la Formación“ from Medellin, Colombia, and two entrepreneurs. The first entrepreneur represents a medium-sized family company in metallurgy, while the other has founded a company specializing in software and technological supplies for industrial automation. Both companies are partners of AHK Argentina for employee training and are actively engaged in other vocational and technical training activities in the region.

The questions were designed to explore the details of their roles, the hurdles they face, their perceptions of international VET networks, and their strategies to navigate this complex terrain. We then distilled the information gathered into a cohesive narrative that will offer unique value to practitioners in the field.

As you read through this section, you will find real-world insights that paint an intricate picture of international VET cooperation, culminating in actionable recommendations that could help you to redefine your perception and motivate you to adjust your strategies.

Identified Challenges of the Region

Complexities and Idiosyncrasies of VET Networks

While the concept of VET Networks is widely appreciated, their establishment poses challenges due to the diverse interpretations of Vocational Education and Training across Latin America. Social issues, such as youth unemployment, have influenced the objectives of policies and social programs associated with vocational education and training (VET). The AHK representatives interviewed showed a tendency to promote VET as initial or vocational education of the youth population. Nevertheless, confronting the evolving landscape of new technologies and the digitization of work entails acquiring additional knowledge, prompting the need for training at various stages of one's life to acquire new abilities and skills.

Ecuador, Colombia, Argentina, and Uruguay have different needs and legal frameworks. For example, in Argentina, an AHKs' experts in vocational education pointed out: "In general, there is low interest in the potential of dual education in my country." Labor Unions that resist changing traditional work models or consider dual education as a new form of exploitation of young workers are a factor that influenced this attitude. In addition, VET or dual education is perceived as social assistance for the poor and not as a key means to promote economic development. In this regard, an industry representative interviewed affirmed that these are "central issues to consider in the network." The transparent provision of information on and dissemination of the benefits of VET to actors like the Unions are fundamental to transforming societal stereotypes or prejudice.

In Colombia, institutions like SENA play an essential role in the region as they are responsible for most of the VET programs in the country. There are different areas or courses of continuous and technical education as a profession, like the German model of Dual Education. However, it has its distinct characteristics in the definition of VET. An expert on the situation in Uruguay recommended incorporating the cultural and social differences of the people of the region into the curriculum development process. This would involve considering and addressing cultural and social inequalities within the area. This does not imply that each country devises its isolated plan but rather establishes clear, shared minimum quality standards. Furthermore, the curricula should possess a certain degree of flexibility to facilitate international recognition or the establishment of an equivalent educational framework throughout the region.

Lack of a Common Legal Framework

The lack of a unified legal framework represents a substantial hurdle. While the AHKs to standardize the German model of Dual Study, country-specific legal constraints limit this objective, impeding the development of a standardized curriculum and narrowing the AHKs' outreach. This emerges

as a recurring issue in interviews with the AHK representatives: „So, the first challenge that we encounter is that lack of legal guidelines (...) Logically, we have an endorsement from the Ministry of Labor. Logically, when we promote the opportunities that dual formation is giving young people, obviously there are no inconveniences. Still, the first impression that you can see is that the dual system is not so well positioned” (Interview 3).

During the pandemic, there has been an increasing need to change the education models or paradigms in the last two years with some governments heeding these recommendations. For example, the government of Colombia established a legal framework to certify the skills and competencies acquired at work. However, this system is currently limited to national boundaries and needs to account for the potential of international recognition.

“Colombia is migrating towards a qualification system. The national system of qualifications told the people that you can qualify by the educational life, by the formative way or through the recognition of previous learning” (Interview 5). The national qualifications system offers various pathways for individuals to attain certification – whether through formal education, structured training, or the recognition of prior learning.

An Argentinean industry expert points out that, unlike Europe, the Latin American region enjoys the linguistic advantage of a common language – Spanish (except for Brazil, where Portuguese is spoken, or Guyana, where French is spoken). However, a significant challenge remains: the lack of a unified legal framework across countries in Latin America. While the ability to communicate in a common language undoubtedly facilitates pursuing this objective, it underscores the necessity for comprehensive legal harmonization efforts

Mutual Recognition

The disparity in Vocational Education and Training across Latin American countries underscores the need for a system of mutual recognition. This would facilitate knowledge exchange and promote labor mobility across the region. However, the current legal landscapes in these countries make this a challenging task, requiring concerted efforts from policy makers, AHKs, and VET providers. In this context, VET networks could harmonize training standards and certification across different countries.

Globalization and Industry 4.0

The rapid pace of globalization and the dawn of Industry 4.0 present considerable challenges for VET networks in Latin America. The digitalization of industries and the increasingly globalized labor market require new skill and competencies. While this shift offers opportunities for innovation

and cross-border collaboration, it also poses significant challenges for VET networks to keep up to date and provide relevant training. In Latin America, the lack of skills and competencies regarding Industry 4.0 is expressed in the following excerpt from an interview with an entrepreneur associated with the AHK of Argentina; „Presently, a shortage of adequately trained educators exists, with a noticeable absence of institutions equipped to offer the necessary training. Even if such institutions do exist, they often lack instructors who possess contemporary knowledge. Typically, the available teachers are older individuals, either retired or nearing retirement, whose work experiences might have been based on outdated machinery from decades past“ (Interview 2).

This highlights the difficulties in recruiting qualified teachers who are up-to-date with the latest technologies. The entrepreneur emphasizes the need for teachers who can provide knowledge in line with current industry practices rather than relying on outdated methods and technologies. This issue creates a barrier for companies, particularly SMEs, to remain competitive and prepare their workforce for the demands of Industry 4.0.

Regional Challenges and Needs

The challenges of youth unemployment, poverty, and corruption require adaptive solutions. Each Latin American country has unique circumstances that need to be taken into account when developing and implementing VET networks. AHKs can play an important role in advising policy makers, but rigid legal frameworks and bureaucratic processes create barriers, limiting collaborative and innovative approaches to VET. In Colombia, for example, despite an institutional support system such as the SENA, it is difficult to develop new projects or policies due to unnecessary bureaucracy, according to an expert in the SENA and VET from Medellín, Colombia: “The Sena, to make a move, must consult with many centers in the country. Since it was for the whole of Colombia, we made the proposal and had to involve many centers in the country and then consult with the 117 centers in the country” (Interview 6).

On the contrary, Uruguay has a small population (approx. 3,5 million) and does not greatly impact the industry. „Uruguay’s industrial sector is relatively modest, prompting a shift towards other areas such as computer science. Consequently, significant growth has been observed in sectors like healthcare and education. (...) there is a clear trend towards increased technology adoption, including artificial intelligence, which is anticipated to drive substantial demand“ (Interview 6).

Curriculum Adaptations

In Latin America, the diverse demands of the labor market require adaptable curricula. With the youth’s perception of manual labor as being low-paid and “dirty,” there is a clear need to dismantle

this prejudice and emphasize the attractiveness of technical and operational work. As the manager and founder of the medium-sized-company from Buenos Aires said: „The manufacturing industry faces a challenge in attracting younger generations to its workforce due to a negative perception associated with it“ (Interview 3).

Navigating the COVID-19 Pandemic

The COVID-19 pandemic has dramatically disrupted traditional models of vocational education and training. While the pandemic has facilitated the shift to digital learning platforms and fostered cross-border collaboration, it has also brought considerable challenges. Many companies and training institutions had to quickly switch to remote learning, facing technological limitations and a steep learning curve in implementing effective digital pedagogies. The economic downturn has strained resources, reducing training and development capacity. In addition, the uncertainty of the post-pandemic world has made it difficult to anticipate future labor market needs, posing challenges in curriculum planning and career guidance. This development underscores the need for VET networks to foster resilience, adaptability, and lifelong learning in their programs.

Most of the VET experts interviewed mentioned the challenges posed by the pandemic. However, they also described it as an unprecedented crisis that has further encouraged the growth of digitalization in training and work-based education processes. While it is true that some components, such as the on-site operation of machinery or other technology, remain necessary for staff training, the same need led companies to think about virtual learning environments, for example using augmented reality. In addition, many of the courses that the AHKs had only offered in a face-to-face format migrated to platforms that allow them to be implemented virtually or in a blended learning setting.

Addressing the Skills Gap

The region needs more skilled workers and trainers, a situation which is aggravated by limited resources and the persisting perception that technical work has a lower status than higher education professions. Moreover, the demand for highly skilled workers in the era of Industry 4.0 could widen the skills gap and lead to increased youth unemployment. These realities underscore the need for VET networks to anticipate future skills needs, integrate technology-based learning, and foster lifelong learning strategies.

The success of VET networks in meeting these challenges will significantly impact their ability to support economic development and social cohesion in the region.

Suggested Pathways for VET Network Management

The challenges outlined in the previous section may seem overwhelming, yet they also provide an opportunity to foster innovation, collaboration, and adaptability within the VET networks in Latin America. By understanding these challenges thoroughly, we can identify practical steps to improve the effectiveness and resilience of VET networks, better aligning them with the needs of learners, businesses, and societies.

This section proposes a number of suggestions and strategic approaches to the challenges identified. These are designed to provide a roadmap for practitioners to navigate the complexities of managing and developing VET networks in the region. These suggestions are not a one-size-fits-all solution, but rather, they provide a flexible framework that can be adapted to the unique contexts of different countries and regions. Practitioners are encouraged to adopt a collaborative and iterative approach, continuously seeking feedback, learning from experiences, and making necessary adjustments.

The following are strategic pathways to address a specific challenge, strengthen the capacity of VET networks, and ultimately contribute to the broader objectives of promoting employability, lifelong learning, and socio-economic development in Latin America.

Embrace and Leverage Diversity

Recognizing the diversity of actors within a VET Network, which includes small and medium-sized companies, multinational corporations, government institutions, and individuals, the following steps should be taken:



- I. Acknowledge and utilize diversity within the network as a strength by providing avenues for the expression of unique perspectives and resources.
- II. Implement a “Collaborative Online Platform” for continuous collaborative decision-making and sharing of best practices.

For instance, a VET network could host bi-annual “Innovation Forums” where members from various backgrounds are invited to present their unique ideas and methods relating to vocational education and training. These forums could serve as a platform where diversity is acknowledged and celebrated, fostering learning, inspiration, and collaboration.

Establishing Clear Definitions of Roles and Responsibilities

For the VET Network to function effectively, the roles and responsibilities among its participants need to be clearly defined. Therefore:

- I. Develop a structured governance model with one institution guiding processes and supporting role definition for other participants.
- II. Establish clarity in roles to streamline network operations, fostering participant accountability and commitment.

The structure of the *European Alliance for Apprenticeships (EAfA)*¹⁸ serves as a best practice example in this respect. The EAfA is a multi-stakeholder network that operates under the European Commission’s direction, which organizes meetings, defines strategic priorities, ensures coherence and synergies between members, and maintains the network’s general operation.

¹⁸ see EUROPEAN FORUM OF TECHNICAL AND VOCATIONAL EDUCATION AND TRAINING

Enhancing Transparency through Communication

Transparency is critical to building trust and maintaining commitment among network participants, which includes:

- I. Communicate the benefits and agreements of participating in the network, managing expectations realistically to avoid misunderstandings.
- II. Regularly update all participants on the network's objectives, progress, and achievements to enhance a sense of ownership, resilience, and long-term sustainability.

Successful regional initiatives such as the Pacific Alliance¹⁹ can serve as models for implementing official communication channels and maintaining regular engagement. VET networks should clearly explain the benefits of participation, the requirements, the application process, and the obligations of member countries.

Establish Close Collaboration with Industry Stakeholders

Close collaboration with industry partners is essential as it ensures that vocational education and training programs are aligned with the evolving demands of the workplace. Actions include:

- I. Regularly host meetings, workshops, and discussions with industry representatives to reflect their evolving needs in training programs.

For instance, the Singapore government established the Industry Transformation Maps (ITMs)²⁰ initiative in 2016, which involves 23 industries and covers about 80% of the Singapore economy. The government and stakeholders have collectively mapped out the industry's future growth areas for each of these industries and identified the key competencies and skills required for these new growth areas.

Fostering Partnership for Mutual Recognition of Qualifications

Advocate for harmonizing VET interpretation and a common legal framework across the region. This involves:

- I. Encouraging dialogues and collaborations to achieve a common understanding of the purpose and structure of VET.
- II. Lobbying to standardize legal provisions for VET across different countries.
- III. Establishing systems for the mutual recognition of qualifications to enhance labor mobility and knowledge exchange.

¹⁹ see THE PACIFIC ALLIANCE

²⁰ see MINISTRY OF TRADE AND INDUSTRY SINGAPORE

In the European Union, vocational education and training policies are coordinated at the European level through the Copenhagen Process²¹. Inspired by this, VET networks in Latin America could collaborate with relevant ministries and industry partners to advocate the harmonization of legal provisions and quality standards for VET across the region.

Adapting to Current and Future Trends

Ensure that VET networks are flexible and adaptable, addressing both current challenges and anticipating future needs:

- I. Regularly update training programs to reflect global trends, including the impact of globalization and Industry 4.0.
- II. Embracing digital learning, a shift catalyzed by the COVID-19 pandemic, by investing in digital infrastructure, training instructors in digital pedagogy, and developing blended learning programs.
- III. Proactively address the skills gap by anticipating future needs, integrating technology-based learning, and promoting lifelong learning strategies.

For example, Brazil's National Service for Industrial Training (SENAI) has a technology foresight system that identifies future technology trends and their implications for industry and vocational training. This enables them to anticipate future skill requirements and to adapt their training programs accordingly. In addition, SENAI offers a range of online courses that support lifelong learning and make training accessible to a wider audience. This approach could serve as a model for VET networks in Latin America, emphasizing the need to anticipate future skill needs and promote lifelong learning.

This proposed roadmap is flexible, adaptable to different contexts, and encourages practitioners to adopt a collaborative and iterative approach. Feedback and continuous learning are essential components for implementing these suggestions effectively.

By following these pathways, VET networks can position themselves to better address the challenges of the future, improving vocational education and training throughout Latin America.

²¹ see EUROPEAN COMMISSION 2004

Conclusion & Call to Action

This position paper has examined the current state of Vocational Education and Training (VET) networks in Latin America, highlighted their main challenges, and proposed various practical solutions. These suggestions are not one-size-fits-all solutions, but a flexible framework that stakeholders can adapt according to their specific context. They emphasize the importance of acknowledging and leveraging diversity, defining clear roles and responsibilities, enhancing transparency through communication, fostering industry collaborations, advocating for mutual recognition of qualifications, and continuously adapting to emerging trends.

Moreover, the real-life examples presented in this paper offer concrete demonstrations of these suggestions and provide a basis for stakeholders to innovate and implement unique strategies in their respective contexts.

Although challenging, the transformation of VET networks in Latin America is urgently needed. It demands the commitment, collaboration, and concerted efforts of all stakeholders, including government institutions, industry partners, educational establishments, and individuals.

Therefore, this paper calls for:

- **Government and Policy Makers:** To advocate for legal standardization of VET and to create supportive policies that facilitate close collaboration with industry stakeholders and encourage using digital learning tools.
- **Industry Partners:** To actively develop and continually refine VET programs, ensuring they remain aligned with evolving industry demands.
- **Education Providers and VET Networks:** To embrace the diversity within the network, define clear roles and responsibilities, enhance transparency through effective communication, and continually adapt to emerging global trends.
- **Individuals and Society:** To actively participate in lifelong learning, contributing to and benefiting from a robust and responsive VET system.

Together, we can strengthen the VET networks in Latin America, fostering a culture of lifelong learning and significantly contributing to the region's socio-economic development. This is not just a call to action; it is a call for a united front to shape the future of vocational education and training in Latin America for the betterment of all. The time to act is now.

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