



REFERNET – CEDEFOP’S EUROPEAN NETWORK OF EXPERTISE ON VET CHARTER

PREAMBLE

ReferNet is Cedefop’s European network of expertise on VET, skills and qualifications. It was set up in 2002 to meet the growing demand for comparative information about VET systems, developments, and policies. It has contributed for over two decades to European cooperation in VET (the Copenhagen process), created a platform for cooperation and networking between countries and raised the visibility of Cedefop’s work and European priorities on VET, skills and qualifications at national and regional level. It has 29 members, representing the EU Member States, Iceland, and Norway. The ReferNet partners are key institutions involved in VET, skills and qualifications in the countries they represent.

The Charter is a public document that provides a framework for the operation of the network, defines its scope and objectives, and sets the roles and responsibilities of the network members. The evaluation of the network in 2009-11 and the audit of the grant procedure in 2010 suggested the need for a Charter and the first one was agreed in 2011. Since 2006, ReferNet functions according to the principle of co-financing, whereby the financial contribution of Cedefop is based on a grant procedure. The first framework partnership agreement was signed with ReferNet partners for the years 2008 to 2011.

In 2020, a new cycle of European cooperation in VET began with the first ever Council Recommendation on VET for sustainable competitiveness, social fairness and resilience and the Osnabrück declaration on VET as an enabler of recovery and just transitions to digital and green economies. In combination with other strategic documents and policies, such as the European Pillar of Social Rights, the EU Skills agenda, the Pact for Skills, the two documents gave a new impetus to the Copenhagen process and set the stage for further EU cooperation. This new policy cycle renewed Cedefop’s mandate in monitoring and analysing countries’ efforts in addressing the common EU priorities in VET and strengthened the role of ReferNet. It calls for a strong commitment and involvement of Member States’ governments to support national ReferNet structures in providing the latest information on the implementation of the national plans for VET. Coordinated by Cedefop and in the framework of Cedefop’s work programme, ReferNet has thus developed into a strong partnership.

ARTICLE 1: MISSION, OBJECTIVES AND EXPECTATIONS

- (1) ReferNet’s mission is to support cooperation in VET, skills and qualifications between Cedefop and the Member States and associated countries, but also among Member States, to facilitate the flow of information between the EU and the individual countries and ensure mutual awareness of EU and national VET developments. ReferNet produces reliable, high-quality information and reports on VET systems and policy developments, validated by national representatives (see

Art. 4 below), thereby ensuring the availability of information on national developments and facilitating Cedefop's comparative analyses, synthetic reporting, and support to single countries.

- (2) ReferNet partners increase the visibility of VET at national level, improve the dissemination of Cedefop's outcomes and support the dissemination of VET-related information by helping overcome language and other national barriers.
- (3) ReferNet, focussing on VET-reporting, is a platform for the exchange of information, best practices, and ideas and for promoting understanding of European cooperation in VET and awareness of the different VET-related challenges in the partner countries.
- (4) ReferNet partners are expected to benefit from the exchange of information by being involved in the process of European cooperation in VET and by collaborating with Cedefop and their national authorities. Working together provides a stronger evidence base and a stronger voice for VET, skills and qualifications issues in Europe.
- (5) Ultimately, cooperation in the network is expected to have an impact on aligning research and policy development across partner countries. ReferNet partners and Cedefop are also expected to benefit from network cooperation, which may also open up possibilities for other bilateral or group collaboration beyond the scope of activities as defined in the framework partnership agreements and annual work plans. The specific competence of ReferNet partners has developed – and will continue to develop – over time.

ARTICLE 2: NATURE AND SCOPE OF REFERNET

- (1) ReferNet comprises of Cedefop and institutions representing all countries participating in Cedefop's work programme.
- (2) ReferNet is part of Cedefop's work programme and is therefore subject to decisions of Cedefop's Management Board and the budgetary authority. It is regularly evaluated to ensure that the resources allocated are used efficiently and economically, in keeping with the objectives set for the network and with the EU policy agenda and strategy of Cedefop.
- (3) Management Board members, more specifically Government representatives, are invited to support ReferNet by encouraging appropriate national organisations to participate in the call for proposals (grant procedure) and by securing the necessary funds to finance the portion of the cost not covered by Cedefop's grant. Management Board members, more specifically Government representatives also support ReferNet by ensuring that the competent national authorities nominate national representatives for ReferNet.

ARTICLE 3: MEMBERS OF REFERNET

- (1) The members of ReferNet are:

- Cedefop in its capacity as the organisation managing and coordinating the network,
 - the ReferNet partners of the grant procedure ⁽¹⁾.
 - the national representatives for ReferNet nominated by their national governments.
- (2) ReferNet activities require cooperation with a broad range of national VET stakeholders comprising research institutes, social partners' organisations as well as the Eurydice national unit, either by animating a national consortium or other appropriate working methods.

ARTICLE 4: ROLE OF THE REFERNET PARTNERS

- (1) ReferNet partners are institutions which, following Cedefop's call for proposals, have been selected to sign a framework partnership agreement (FPA) ⁽²⁾. The grant procedure is governed by the Financial Regulation of Cedefop.
- (2) The scope of activities of the ReferNet partners is determined in framework partnership agreements (FPAs), while the annual work plan, deliverables and their timing are defined in specific grant agreements (SGAs).
- (3) ReferNet partners implement annual work plans in accordance with the specific grant agreements. They are responsible for providing deliverables and final implementation reports within the deadlines and to the standards agreed.
- (4) The ReferNet national partner designate a team Coordinator who coordinate the ReferNet team at the national level and also represent the partner organisation at the annual plenary meeting of ReferNet. The cost of attendance is reimbursed by Cedefop.
- (5) The ReferNet national partner can also designate an Executive Member to support the coordinator on his/her duties and on his/her absence and represent the partner organisation.
- (6) ReferNet partners are institutions working in the field of VET, skills and qualifications. They must demonstrate competence in VET-related issues and experience of conducting policy analysis, and/or relevant research and/or evaluation of programmes and policies in VET-related fields at national level. The ReferNet partner should be an institution with a capacity to network with national and international organisations.

⁽¹⁾ Only public and private institutions can participate in the grant procedure (not natural persons).

⁽²⁾ Only one proposal per country is selected by Cedefop.

ARTICLE 5: ROLE OF NATIONAL REPRESENTATIVES FOR REFERNET

- (1) As cooperation between Cedefop and ReferNet benefits from the support of national authorities, ReferNet national representatives are appointed to contribute to the network's activities at national level.
- (2) National representatives for ReferNet are nominated by the national governments and approved by Cedefop ⁽³⁾.
- (3) National representatives are expected to cooperate with the partner organisation and support its work.
- (4) On behalf of the national governments, national representatives validate reports and information provided by the partner organisation whenever such validation is deemed necessary. In particular, reports and data on national VET systems and policy developments need to be validated to ensure that they are in accordance with national policies and strategies. Nevertheless, validation from national representatives may not be necessary for deliverables of research nature, when indicated by Cedefop.
- (5) ReferNet national representatives should attend the annual plenary meeting of ReferNet. The cost of attendance is reimbursed by Cedefop. ReferNet national representatives may also attend the thematic and national meetings of ReferNet. Attendance of these meetings may also be eligible to the ReferNet grant following prior agreement with Cedefop.
- (6) National representatives are selected through a procedure independent of the ReferNet partner selection and on the basis of their high level of expertise in national VET, skills and qualifications. National representatives should also possess a very good knowledge and understanding of European VET and employment policies, processes, strategies and objectives and their impact on national systems and policies. Experience in comparative VET research is an additional asset. It is recommended that ReferNet national representatives are nominated in collaboration with social partners.

ARTICLE 6: ACTIVITIES, FUNDING AND MODES OF COOPERATION

- (1) ReferNet's activities should be aligned with and within the scope of European policies of cooperation in VET, skills and qualifications, and with Cedefop's work programme as adopted by Cedefop's Management Board.
- (2) Annual work plans are discussed and agreed with ReferNet members in line with the requirements referred to in point (1).
- (3) Cedefop co-finances the activities of the ReferNet partners up to 70% of the cost, within pre-determined budgetary ceilings, and it pays

⁽³⁾ The national representative cannot be a member of the national ReferNet team.

directly for the Annual Plenary Meeting, the Partnership Fora and other group meetings.

- (4) ReferNet partners co-fund at least 30% of ReferNet activities or secure co-funding from a third party.
- (5) ReferNet meets at least twice a year (Annual Plenary Meeting and Partnership Forum).
- (6) ReferNet discusses and decides on its work organisation and communication structures and on the peer learning activities it will endorse ⁽⁴⁾.
- (7) ReferNet can network and/or cooperate with other networks of similar or complementary nature inside or outside Cedefop.

ARTICLE 7: QUALITY ASSURANCE

- (1) Templates, questionnaires, and guidelines developed by Cedefop for the national contributions take into account the results of the discussions in the network and facilitate comparable, good quality contributions.
- (2) Cedefop provides feedback on deliverables to ReferNet partners focusing on quality, adequacy, and relevance. Such feedback could take the form of a global qualitative assessment of all deliverables or, whenever suitable, specific feedback on selected deliverables. ReferNet partners take account of the feedback provided and revise deliverables as necessary.
- (3) Cedefop establishes reasonable deadlines for deliverables. ReferNet partners undertake to respect the agreed deadlines.
- (4) In case ReferNet partners do not comply with agreed quality standards or miss agreed deadlines financial sanctions may apply. (5)
- (5) ReferNet partners implement adequate procedures to collect information and data and to validate reports with national VET stakeholders and national representatives, as appropriate and as required. Those procedures also ensure the quality of the deliverables in terms of comprehensiveness, reliability of content (analysis, description), correctness and precision of English and respect of layout rules provided by Cedefop.

ARTICLE 8: INTELLECTUAL PROPERTY RIGHTS AND PUBLICATION

- (1) ReferNet partners own the intellectual property rights of their contributions and may decide to publish national ReferNet contributions

⁽⁴⁾ ReferNet partners can be organised into different thematic groups based on their interest and priorities. They may be represented by a core group composed of two representatives from each thematic group.

⁽⁵⁾ Such financial sanctions shall be defined in the specific agreements between Cedefop and the grant beneficiaries

to Cedefop (deliverables) as stand-alone publications. Since they are produced in the context of ReferNet's activities, Cedefop should be informed of such publication.

- (2) ReferNet partners should consult Cedefop to be in line with guidelines for design of ReferNet publications and the use of the appropriate reference in copyright provisions (disclaimer). Published material should clearly specify the status of the document (draft/final). Draft versions may be published online but should be replaced as soon as possible by a final version.
- (3) Whenever Cedefop uses ReferNet inputs, it clearly acknowledge them as a source.
- (4) Whenever ReferNet partners publish work relating to a ReferNet activity, they acknowledge and cite Cedefop and the ReferNet activity. ReferNet publications bear the national ReferNet's logo.
- (5) The usual rules for citations apply when partners, including Cedefop, use inputs from other partners in their publications.

ARTICLE 9: AMENDMENTS AND ENTRY INTO FORCE

- (1) Once adopted, this Charter may be amended in agreement with the Management Board.
- (2) This Charter comes into force upon its adoption by Cedefop's Management Board.

Done in Thessaloniki on 6 October 2023

For Cedefop's Management Board

Mario Patuzzi

Chairperson of the Management Board