



CEDEFOP INSIGHTS

Policy approaches to strengthening **VET-business partnerships**

Insights from national policy monitoring and analysis



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CHAPTER 1.

Introduction

Effective vocational education and training (VET) systems rely on strong partnerships that connect them with labour market needs and broader societal objectives. Across Europe, governments increasingly recognise that successful VET depends on cooperation among a wide range of actors, including employer and employee organisations, VET providers and schools, companies, regional and local authorities, civil society organisations, and learner and parent representatives (VET-GPS Project, 2019). Within this broader governance ecosystem, cooperation between VET providers and businesses plays a particularly important role in ensuring that skills development remains relevant, responsive and aligned with evolving economic and societal needs.

However, cooperation alone is not enough. The challenge today is to move beyond ad hoc interactions towards long-term, institutionalised and strategic partnerships that support active employer engagement in VET governance, design, investment and delivery, while contributing to skill anticipation, development and lifelong learning.

The relevance of VET-business partnership is firmly embedded in EU policy priorities. The [Council Recommendation on VET](#) and the [Osnabrück Declaration](#) (2020) emphasise reinforcing VET's links with the labour market, expanding high-quality work-based learning (WBL) and apprenticeships, and strengthening employer involvement in VET governance and quality assurance. They also promote collaborative approaches through the development of Centres of Vocational Excellence (CoVEs) as drivers for skills, innovation, and regional development. More recently, the [Herning Declaration](#) (2025) underlined the need to improve the quality, innovation capacity, and attractiveness of VET, calling for a reinforced role for companies in supporting skills ecosystems. Initiatives such as the [European Alliance for Apprenticeships](#) (EAfA), the [Pact for Skills](#), and the [Union of Skills](#) (2025) further underline the role of employers in supporting upskilling and reskilling, encouraging shared commitments with companies and other relevant stakeholders to promote lifelong learning (LLL).

Cedefop's work provides a strong evidence base for understanding and strengthening VET-business partnerships. Its [research on WBL and apprenticeships](#) highlights the importance of effective governance arrangements and the role of social partners for WBL relevance and quality. Cedefop's [work on skills anticipation and matching](#) demonstrates how employer and employee organisations can contribute to aligning training provision with labour market

demand, including through coordinated governance mechanisms at national, regional, and sectoral levels. In addition, Cedefop's project [Mapping digital skills in IVET curricula](#) provides valuable insights into how VET provision can be better aligned with evolving labour market demands.

This Cedefop Insight examines how VET systems across the EU-27, Norway and Iceland (EU-27+) develop and strengthen cooperation with business to ensure their relevance, quality and responsiveness. The analysis draws on policy developments reported annually in 2021-2025 by [Cedefop's ReferNet network](#) in the EU Member States, Norway, and Iceland, as documented in the online [Timeline of VET policies in Europe](#) (Cedefop & ReferNet, 2026b). It brings together findings from relevant Cedefop projects and research to set the context and discuss trends and challenges. Selected country examples are cited to illustrate the main types of policy responses observed, without aiming to provide an exhaustive inventory of all national measures. Countries mentioned are therefore illustrative rather than representative, reflecting the availability of comparable, and sufficiently detailed information. In many cases, similar approaches can be found in other Member States not explicitly cited. Two country examples are presented in greater detail to show different approaches.

For the purposes of this Insight, VET-business partnerships are understood as sustained collaboration between VET and business building shared responsibility for the quality, relevance, and outcomes of VET. Beyond cooperation in the provision of work-based learning and apprenticeships, the Insight examines initiatives that take a more strategic, trust-based, and practice-oriented engagement to include governance, co-design, co-investment in VET.

CHAPTER 2.

Context

Rapid technological change, demographic trends and the green transition are reshaping skills demand across Europe, increasing the need for VET systems to anticipate and respond to labour market trends. Strengthening VET-business partnerships is seen as key for improving the alignment of skills supply with current and future demand. Businesses are uniquely positioned to provide first-hand knowledge of changing production processes, emerging occupations and evolving

competence requirements, making them important contributors to skills intelligence. Through structured engagement in skills forecasting, curriculum development and qualification design, employers can help ensure that VET provision remains relevant, responsive and fit for purpose in a changing labour market through mechanisms such as employer surveys, sectoral panels, and other structured forms of engagement (BusinessEurope et al., 2021; Cedefop, 2024; SMEunited, 2025).

Strong VET-business cooperation is particularly essential in rapidly evolving sectors linked to digitalisation, green technologies, and innovative services, where skills demands are often not fully defined. At regional and local levels, employer and employee organisations, together with professional associations, development bodies, and innovation hubs, act as key intermediaries by collecting and communicating labour market intelligence, emerging occupations, and innovation trends. These functions support forward-looking and green-responsive skills governance (Cedefop & UNESCO-UNEVOC, 2025).

Between 2020 and 2025, the EU-27+ countries worked on stakeholder engagement not only through formal governance and consultation mechanisms but also through informal partnerships, networks and awareness-raising initiatives ⁽¹⁾. These approaches complement each other and contribute to improving regular collaboration among stakeholders, including businesses, in the long-term (Cedefop & ETF, 2026).

Engaging small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) poses an additional challenge. Although SMEs account for most employment in the EU, financial, administrative, and capacity-related barriers often prevent them from investing in formal training and skills development (OECD, 2021). These limitations can reduce their ability to participate consistently in VET cooperation activities. In some countries, intermediary organisations such as chambers of commerce, sectoral bodies, employer associations, research institutions, and innovation centres connect VET providers with employers. These actors often perform coordination, brokerage and support functions, including the dissemination of labour market intelligence, the organisation of networks and information events, support for training provision, and knowledge transfer. Their support and activities are particularly important for SMEs (Eurofound & Cedefop, 2025).

VET-business partnership also benefits teachers, trainers, and the broader learning environment. Public-private cooperation can support continuing professional development (CPD) through industry placements, joint training,

⁽¹⁾ Belgium (Flemish and French Communities), Bulgaria, Denmark, Germany, Estonia, Spain, France, Italy, Cyprus, Latvia, Lithuania, Hungary, Netherlands, Poland, Portugal, Romania. (Cedefop & ETF, 2026).

entrepreneurship education, career guidance, and the use of business role models. These interactions improve teachers' understanding of workplace practices and strengthen trainers' pedagogical skills, contributing to more responsive and high-quality VET systems (VET-GPS Project, 2019). To increase the attractiveness of the teaching profession and address the teacher shortages that some countries face, some countries ⁽²⁾ are encouraging professionals from the labour market to enter teaching by introducing flexible career entry pathways, financial incentives, recognition schemes for skills acquired on the job and other supportive initiatives (Cedefop & ETF, 2026).

Despite the recognised benefits of cooperation, many VET systems continue to face significant structural and operational challenges (see Table 1). In many countries, VET schools continue to face challenges in updating equipment and curricula and in ensuring that teaching staff's occupational knowledge keeps pace with industry practice. This is a tension: employers often expect job-ready learners who can meet today's requirements immediately, while VET schools should also equip students with broader, future-oriented competences that are not yet fully visible in the labour market.

Table 1 summarises the main factors that influence the development and effectiveness of VET-business partnerships, highlighting both partnership-specific conditions and broader VET system characteristics that can either enable or constrain cooperation.

Table 1. **Main drivers and constraints in VET-business partnership**

Dimension		Enabling conditions	Structural barriers
Partnership-related factors	Governance	Strong involvement of businesses and their associations in shaping and governing VET systems	Weak or ineffective dialogue between businesses, public authorities, and VET providers
	Responsiveness	Cooperation approaches adapted to the needs of companies, providers, and learners	Limited consideration of the specific needs of businesses and stakeholders involved
	Financial incentives	Cost-efficient arrangements that provide clear incentives for business participation	High training and participation costs, particularly discouraging SMEs from engaging

⁽²⁾ Belgium (Flemish Community), Bulgaria, Czechia, Germany, Latvia, Luxembourg, Hungary, the Netherlands, Poland, and Slovakia. (Cedefop & ETF, 2026).

	Administrative framework	Simplified procedures that reduce the administrative burden for companies engaging in VET and its governance	Complex administrative procedures and regulatory requirements that discourage company participation
	Coordination	Sectoral alliances that foster shared understanding	Fragmented cooperation structures and limited coordination
	Intermediation	Active role of intermediary bodies, especially to facilitate SME involvement	Weak intermediary support structures and limited capacity to coordinate partnerships
System-level factors	Learning pathways and flexibility	Developing VET programmes at higher levels	Rigid education and training structures limiting flexibility and progression opportunities
	Awareness and attractiveness	Positive image of VET and strong engagement of businesses in career guidance	Limited awareness of VET opportunities and benefits; low attractiveness and reputation of VET
	Public investment and resources	Investment in modern training infrastructure, equipment, and support for CPD, including for in-company training	Insufficient public funding (e.g., investment in modern training infrastructure); exclusive focus of funding on school-based VET
	Institutional capacity	Strong institutional capacity among VET providers and availability of qualified teachers and trainers	Limited capacity and resources among VET providers
	Regulatory environment	Regulatory frameworks that support flexible and innovative WBL arrangements	Labour market regulations that restrict the development of innovative work-based learning models

Source: Authors' elaboration based on European Commission et al. (2017).

Apprenticeships and WBL remain the most widespread and mature form of VET-business cooperation and are recognised as effective mechanisms linking education with labour markets (OECD & ILO, 2017). Arrangements vary from integrated programmes supported by strong social dialogue to more informal work-based experiences. High-quality apprenticeships rely on strong collaboration between employers and training providers, combining joint curriculum design, in-company mentoring, and authentic workplace experiences (EAfA, 2025).

Beyond this established cooperation for apprenticeships, VET-business partnerships are increasingly evolving into broader, strategic collaborations. These include joint investment in high-tech equipment, shared production and research facilities, curriculum renewal, knowledge exchange, start-up support, innovation hubs, and improvements in training methods (Radkevych, 2023; Moerman, 2021).

EU-level initiatives also support these developments while extending cooperation beyond EU borders. [The ETF Network for Excellence](#) (ENE), coordinated by the European Training Foundation (ETF), brings together CoVEs and VET providers from both EU Member States and ETF partner countries ⁽³⁾ to share good practices and shape policies. The involvement of CoVEs ensures a strong link to the private sector. Within this network, ENE provides CoVE network members – and, through them, their associated business partners – opportunities to collaborate. Likewise, [Erasmus+ Key Action 2](#) supports transnational strategic partnerships, promoting collaboration among education providers, businesses, and other stakeholders to implement innovative practices (European Commission, n.d.).

Although data on VET-business cooperation remain limited, indicators of enterprise investment in skills provide insights in this regard. In 2020, 67.4 % of EU enterprises with 10 or more employees offered some form of Continuing Vocational Education and Training (CVET), ranging from 17.5 % in Romania to 96.8 % in Latvia (Eurostat, 2020).

CHAPTER 3.

Types of evolving VET-business partnership models

This section analyses how European countries are strengthening cooperation between VET and businesses, focusing on policy measures that promote structured, sustainable, and innovative forms of collaboration.

Across the EU-27+, policy responses tend to cluster around broad, recurring forms of cooperation, demonstrating that innovative VET-business partnerships

⁽³⁾ According to the [ENE atlas](#), the participating ETF partner countries are: Albania, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Egypt, Georgia, Jordan, Kazakhstan, Kosovo, Kyrgyzstan, Lebanon, Moldova, Montenegro, North Macedonia, Serbia, Tunisia, Türkiye, and Ukraine.

are increasingly embedded in VET agendas, rather than remaining isolated or short-term initiatives.

3.1. Partnerships for WBL and apprenticeships

As mentioned in the previous section, across the EU-27+, WBL and apprenticeships remain the most established and visible forms of VET-business cooperation. Recent measures promoting WBL and apprenticeships show a clear trend towards strengthening governance arrangements, ensuring better alignment between training provision and labour market needs, and introducing innovative approaches to increase business participation.

In [Austria](#) (Cedefop & ReferNet, 2026b), the 2022 Startup Apprenticeship project encourages companies and start-ups to collaborate to provide apprenticeship opportunities. By facilitating collaboration among small and innovative firms, the initiative enhances the appeal of apprenticeships and supports practical learning environments tailored to emerging sectors. Start-ups contribute innovative approaches, such as agile working methods and design thinking, without assuming the full administrative responsibilities of apprenticeship provision, while companies benefit from apprentices gaining hands-on experience in dynamic settings, making the arrangement mutually beneficial (Austrian Trade Association, 2023).

[Germany](#) (Cedefop & ReferNet, 2026b) provides another example of systemic cooperation. The Alliance for Initial and Further Training, renewed for 2023-2026, brings together federal and state authorities, social partners, and the Federal Employment Agency through a formal pact-based governance model. It operates both as a jointly signed agreement defining shared commitments and as a structured cooperation platform, combining high-level plenary meetings with ongoing working groups that coordinate implementation across governance levels (OECD, 2020). The Alliance has introduced a broad range of measures, including financial support for companies, training initiatives – primarily delivered by business partners, often with support from trade unions, employer organisations, and public authorities – targeting students, pupils, young people, and refugees, as well as regional events linking learners and employers. Also, the [Perfect Match](#) (Cedefop & ReferNet, 2026b) is a public-private partnership in which the industry contributes up to 40 % of the costs (co-investment case).

The Baltic Alliance for Apprenticeships (BAfA), active since 2015 and led by [Latvia](#) (Cedefop & ReferNet, 2026b), provides a structured platform for transnational cooperation on apprenticeships across Latvia, [Lithuania](#) (Cedefop & ReferNet, 2026b), and Estonia. It brings together employer confederations,

education institutions, and ministries, with businesses playing an active role in shaping and promoting apprenticeship systems. Cooperation between VET institutions' associations and business sector organisations supports the joint promotion of programmes and qualifications, helping to strengthen their visibility and relevance across the region (European Commission et al., 2017).

Similarly, in [Italy](#) (Cedefop & ReferNet, 2026b), cooperation between the Ministry of Education and employers has resulted in national agreements to strengthen apprenticeships. In 2024, a memorandum of understanding with ASSOLAVORO, the National Association of Employment Agencies, aims to promote data exchange on labour market opportunities and enhance alignment between education provision and labour market needs.

Other countries have also taken steps to integrate business more directly into VET pathways. [Slovakia](#)'s 2025 Higher Education Act (Cedefop & ReferNet, 2026b) introduces short study programmes that combine higher professional study with practical training in companies. These programmes are co-designed and co-delivered with employers to ensure graduates are ready for the workplace.

In [Spain](#) (Cedefop & ReferNet, 2026b), the Ministry of Education has strengthened WBL by promoting close collaboration with companies in the design and implementation of training plans, particularly targeting SMEs. The Alliance for Dual Training, a private state-wide network of companies and social organisations, complements public measures by promoting peer learning, quality assurance, and coordinated dual VET development. Of its 1 600 members, 810 (50.6 %) are companies and a further 220 (13.8 %) are business organisations, highlighting the scale of business engagement within the initiative (Bertelsmann Foundation, 2025).

3.2. Strategic partnerships for skills development and VET systems transformation

EU-27+ countries are increasingly developing other partnership models that extend beyond traditional frameworks. Such partnerships serve dual purposes: delivering immediate employment skills (e.g. apprenticeships, WBL as discussed in Section 3.1.) and anticipating future labour market needs (e.g. CoVEs, university consortia for digital/green transitions). Such approaches reflect a shift towards systemic, multi-actor cooperation, involving employers, VET institutions, public authorities, social partners, and intermediary organisations, pursuing broader societal goals. Policy measures focus not only on formal training arrangements, but also on sectoral and regional platforms, governance arrangements, excellence

hubs, teacher and trainer CPD, promoting VET, and partnerships for developing basic and entrepreneurship skills:

- (a) anticipating skill needs through sectoral skills councils and skills intelligence mechanisms;
- (b) participating in VET governance;
- (c) building regional partnership mechanisms;
- (d) driving innovation and knowledge transfer through CoVEs and competence/excellence hubs;
- (e) cooperating in teacher and trainer CPD;
- (f) raising the visibility and attractiveness of VET;
- (g) developing basic and transversal competences;
- (h) strengthening entrepreneurship education and entrepreneurial competences.

3.2.1. Anticipating skill needs through sectoral skills councils and skills intelligence mechanisms

Sectoral skills councils (SSCs) ⁽⁴⁾ and similar bodies play an important role in strengthening and expanding WBL and apprenticeships but also serve as formal interfaces between industry and VET providers and contribute to skill anticipation.

In [Poland](#) (Cedefop & ReferNet, 2026b), SSCs provide a platform for labour market stakeholders to propose systemic improvements and reforms in education and training. Organised around broad sectors, they support skills anticipation and foster collaboration between employers and education providers (Cedefop, 2025a).

Similar arrangements exist in [Slovakia](#) (Cedefop & ReferNet, 2026b), where sectoral councils coordinated by the Alliance of Sectoral Councils define skills requirements in each field. Employers play a central role as sectoral assignees, working closely with education authorities through structures, such as the Employer Council for VET, to ensure alignment between training provision and labour market needs (Cedefop, 2025d).

3.2.2. Participating in VET governance

Formal participation in VET governance has also emerged as a typical approach for further developing VET-business partnerships.

⁽⁴⁾ SSCs are dialogue platforms that bring together stakeholders from a specific economic sector - typically employers, trade unions, VET providers, professional associations, and public authorities - to identify current and future skills needs and translate them into occupational standards, qualifications, and training priorities (ETF, 2015).

[Denmark](#) (Cedefop & ReferNet, 2026b), for example, uses tripartite governance arrangements where employers, trade unions, and public authorities jointly shape VET programme design, training content, and funding.

In [Lithuania](#) (Cedefop & ReferNet, 2026b), the 2019 VET governance reform strengthened social partner participation: each VET school now has a council with nine members, four of whom represent employers and social partners. Businesses share responsibility with the Ministry of Education, Science and Sport for aligning programmes with labour market needs, supporting practical training, integrating modern technology, enhancing teacher development, and improving graduate employment.

[Luxembourg's](#) Skillsdësch initiative (Cedefop & ReferNet, 2026b) institutionalises continuous tripartite coordination, bringing ministries, employer organisations, professional chambers, and trade unions together to assess skills needs and define strategic priorities.

Similarly, the [Dutch Cooperation Organisation for VET and the Labour Market \(SBB\)](#) (Cedefop & ReferNet, 2026b) has been operating since 2012 at sectoral, regional, and national levels. Through its eight sectoral chambers, it acts as a formal intermediary between training institutions and companies, ensuring both the availability and the quality of VET by updating qualifications, accrediting and supporting work placement companies, and monitoring labour market developments.

3.2.3. Building regional partnership mechanisms

Regional partnership mechanisms have also become common. In [Belgium \(French-speaking community\)](#) (Cedefop & ReferNet, 2026b), training and employment centres operate as sector-based public-private partnerships that strengthen coordination between social partners and VET provision within the Brussels region. These centres bring together social partners, public employment services (PES), training providers, and other relevant stakeholders to align training provision with sectoral and regional needs.

In [France](#) (Cedefop & ReferNet, 2026b), the National Network of Regional Career Guidance Services coordinates schools, businesses, and training providers to align guidance and training offers with regional economic needs (Cedefop, 2025b). Building on this framework, additional forms of cooperation have emerged that place businesses more directly at the centre of VET provision. Notably, each VET school is supported by a liaison office with local employers. These offices facilitate direct and continuous engagement between schools and companies, support the adaptation of training provision to local demand, and ensure that

employer input is systematically integrated at the institutional level (ReferNet France & Cedefop, 2025; French Ministry of National Education, 2023).

In [the Netherlands](#) (Cedefop & ReferNet, 2026b), the ‘Lifelong learning catalyst’ initiative (2022-2027) operates at national and regional levels, bringing together VET colleges, universities, companies, sectoral organisations, and other regional stakeholders. Through these public-private partnerships, actors jointly develop LLL solutions tailored to labour market needs, with businesses helping to identify skills shortages, shape flexible training pathways, and provide learning opportunities. In practice, the initiative funds collaborative projects focused on reskilling and upskilling for the green and digital transitions, while strengthening providers’ capacity to deliver demand-driven LLL (Dutch Ministry of Health, Welfare and Sport, 2025).

Similarly, [Romania](#) (Cedefop & ReferNet, 2026b) has strengthened regional cooperation by establishing 29 Regional Consortia for Dual Education. These consortia bring together universities, initial VET (IVET) schools, employers, and public authorities to manage dual education campuses and revise IVET standards. Within this framework, businesses actively contribute to curriculum development and student selection processes, provide and organise practical training opportunities, and support the system with financial and technical resources (Romanian Ministry of Education, 2022).

3.2.4. Driving innovation and knowledge transfer through CoVEs and competence/excellence hubs

CoVEs and national equivalents of excellence hubs position businesses as key partners in applied research, curriculum innovation, entrepreneurship support, and the exchange of good practices (Arribas, 2020).

The [Austrian](#) GREENOVET project (Cedefop & ReferNet, 2026b) connects 30 partners – such as VET providers, higher education institutions, companies, intermediary organisations, social partners, and ministries – from Austria, Finland, Portugal, and North Macedonia to develop CoVEs in the green technology sector, promoting innovation-oriented skills development in response to the green transition. Companies participate as core actors within regional skills ecosystems, contributing to skills intelligence, aligning training provision with labour market needs, and engaging in joint training and innovation activities (GREENOVET, n.d.).

In [Croatia](#) (Cedefop & ReferNet, 2026b), the establishment of Regional Centres of Competence since 2023 has embedded employer engagement into the operational mission of VET institutions. These centres combine curriculum co-design with a strong VET-business partnership that supports workplace learning,

research and innovation collaboration, and sector-specific networking activities that foster continuous exchange between education and industry (Brajkovic, 2025).

In [Hungary](#) (Cedefop & ReferNet, 2026b), companies take a leading role in Sectoral Training Centres (STCs) by organising and coordinating dual training, e.g. a 2023 GINOP 6.1.9 project led to the establishment of a Transport Training and Examination Centre. Complementing these structures, sectoral knowledge centres bring together businesses and higher education institutions to address strategic sectors of the economy (Eurydice, 2026; Cedefop, 2025c). Within these hubs, companies actively shape curricula, contribute specialised expertise, and engage in joint innovation and knowledge transfer activities with education providers.

[Lithuania](#) (Cedefop & ReferNet, 2026b) has similarly invested in sectoral competence centres with extended responsibilities, including the piloting of new training methods and programmes, support for the CPD of VET teachers, the training of employees and higher-education students, career education for students in general education, and supporting national learner mobility.

In [Spain](#) (Cedefop & ReferNet, 2026b), National Reference Centres connect VET providers with companies to carry out innovation projects in strategic sectors such as building and energy sustainability, renewable energy, cybersecurity, artificial intelligence, and big data. Such initiatives include piloting new training programmes, testing professional certificates, and developing innovative teaching and assessment technologies, while also ensuring strong employer involvement in skills needs analysis and sectoral dialogue.

3.2.5. Cooperating in teacher and trainer CPD

Cooperation in teacher and trainer CPD also represents an important dimension of VET-business partnership, with companies contributing to joint projects, providing industry expertise, and engaging in training activities.

In [Croatia](#) (Cedefop & ReferNet, 2026b), a new CPD model for VET teachers includes training workshops and seminars developed in collaboration with companies. These activities cover both core and elective modules, combining pedagogical training with interdisciplinary topics such as educational psychology, teaching methodology, and counselling, alongside induction programmes for new teachers (Croatian Agency for Vocational Education and Training and Adult Education, n.d.).

[Denmark](#) (Cedefop & ReferNet, 2026b) has invested in enhancing pedagogical and professional competences through guest teaching and joint projects with industry, while in [Germany](#) (Cedefop & ReferNet, 2026b) the funding programme 'Sustainability training for trainers' (NIB) (2023-2027) supports CPD for in-company trainers through multi-partner projects.

3.2.6. Raising the visibility and attractiveness of VET

Across the EU-27+, countries are also involving businesses to raise the visibility and attractiveness of VET. These initiatives show how business engagement can extend beyond training to actively promote VET pathways.

In [Austria](#) (Cedefop & ReferNet, 2026b), the 'Women Entrepreneurs Go to School' initiative connects schools with female entrepreneurs to inspire students and highlight career opportunities.

Similarly, students' skills competitions – such as those organised in [Croatia](#) (Cedefop & ReferNet, 2026b) – engage companies through sponsorship, equipment provision, and financial support, contributing to the promotion of VET.

In [Germany](#) (Cedefop & ReferNet, 2026b), the 'Apprentices as digitalisation scouts' (Digiscouts) project engages apprentices in company-based digitalisation projects, with businesses providing a real work environment and mentoring. These projects aim at enhancing skills while improving the attractiveness of dual VET in schools ⁽⁵⁾.

In [Luxembourg](#) (ReferNet Luxembourg & Cedefop, 2025), VET promotion is supported through initiatives such as the 'Shape Your Future' campaign, implemented by the Ministry of Education, Children and Youth in close cooperation with professional chambers. The campaign uses social media, video storytelling, and interactive tools to guide young people in exploring VET career pathways, while also encouraging companies to offer apprenticeships and strengthening cooperation between businesses and training providers (ReferNet Luxembourg & Cedefop, 2025).

[Portugal](#) (Cedefop & ReferNet, 2026b), on the other hand, uses large career fairs, such as Futurália, to facilitate direct interaction between learners, employers, and training providers. These events foster business engagement by presenting training opportunities.

In [Romania](#) (Cedefop & ReferNet, 2026b), regional campaigns and workshops bring companies into schools to promote dual VET and inform students about labour market opportunities.

3.2.7. Developing basic and transversal competences

Cooperation between VET systems and the business sector increasingly focuses on the development of learners' basic skills and transversal competences. Governments, social partners, companies, and VET providers are working together to embed literacy, numeracy, digital skills and competences, communication, and problem-solving into both IVET and CVET.

⁽⁵⁾ See e.g. the [Digiscouts projects in the German Börde Region](#).

In [Austria](#) (Cedefop & ReferNet, 2026b), the Transversal Competences in Apprenticeship initiative involves social partner institutions in ensuring that transversal competences, such as digital, communication, and social skills, are included in all apprenticeship training regulations.

In [France](#) (Cedefop & ReferNet, 2026b), initiated by the French social partners, CléA certificates recognise basic skills, such as literacy, numeracy, and digital skills, required for the workplace.

[Bulgarian](#) (Cedefop & ReferNet, 2026b) annual national employment action plans provide SMEs with the opportunity to request their employees' involvement in key competence training, including mathematical, scientific, technological, engineering, and digital skills, co-financed by the state budget.

Similarly, in [Hungary](#) (Cedefop & ReferNet, 2026b), the GINOP Plus 3.2.1 project provides employers with financial support to train their employees in IT, soft skills, and languages, with training delivered either in-house or through external providers. Likewise, the [network of vocational training centres](#) (Cedefop & ReferNet, 2026b) established operational links with regional chambers and local businesses to coordinate a training structure tailored to economic needs, including the establishment of info points that provide career guidance and assessment of basic skills.

In [Portugal](#) (Cedefop & ReferNet, 2026b), the More Digital Employment 2025 scheme provides free digital training for workers and managers through partnerships between the public employment service (IEFP), social partners, and higher education institutions. The [National digital competences initiative](#) (Cedefop & ReferNet, 2026b) coordinates training and mentoring for small businesses through the 'Digital Ramp' focusing on digital literacy for women in vulnerable situations and young people with special needs.

In the [2024 Danish tripartite agreement](#) (Cedefop & ReferNet, 2026b) on better and more flexible continuing vocational education, the government, social partners, and several private companies formed an alliance specifically to ensure that more employees improve their Danish, maths, English, and IT skills. This partnership established a network in which employers exchange experiences on screening for dyslexia and motivation for upskilling.

3.2.8. Strengthening entrepreneurship education and entrepreneurial competences

Some countries have formed VET-business partnerships to support and strengthen the development of entrepreneurial skills (Cedefop, n.d.), where business plays a crucial role.

The ‘We educate the economy plan’, implemented by the [Austrian](#) Federal Economic Chamber (Cedefop & ReferNet, 2026b), features a ‘Business in schools’ strand where companies are directly involved in teaching Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM) subjects in VET schools. It also involves stakeholders in updating curricula to include a specific focus on entrepreneurship.

The [Bulgarian](#) Modernisation of VET (Cedefop & ReferNet, 2026b) project includes an activity that focuses on improving transversal and key competences of VET students, with particular emphasis on entrepreneurial skills and social entrepreneurship, with the participation of employers.

The [Spanish](#) Plan for the modernisation of VET (Cedefop & ReferNet, 2026b) incorporates training focused on creativity, innovation, and entrepreneurship into VET qualifications in collaboration with the industrial sector and includes the creation of ‘entrepreneurship classrooms’ in about 2 000 VET centres to provide support and resources for starting entrepreneurship projects. Companies mentor students, co-develop projects, and expose learners to real business challenges, fostering social, sustainable, and collaborative entrepreneurship (Spanish Ministry of Education and Vocational Training, 2021).

In [Denmark](#) (Cedefop & ReferNet, 2026b), it is a mandatory requirement that VET institutions collaborate with one or more companies that possess knowledge and experience in green entrepreneurship to get funding from the Green entrepreneurial funding pool.

In [Bulgaria](#) (Cedefop & ReferNet, 2026b), the Fair of training firms competition jointly organised by VET schools and companies awards student teams in the category ‘young entrepreneur’.

In [Hungary](#) (Cedefop & ReferNet, 2026b), the ‘Model Company’ simulation programme (GINOP-6.2.6) allows technician students to plan and run a business idea on their own initiative in response to economic needs, involving economic stakeholders.

In [Cyprus](#) (Cedefop & ReferNet, 2026b), a project management committee consisting of employer and employee organisations and SMEs was established to modernise curricula, specifically focusing on entrepreneurship skills, emotional intelligence, and soft skills.

CHAPTER 4.

Country examples

4.1. France: connecting industry and VET through a campus of excellence

4.1.1. Context and challenges

France established the [Trades and Qualifications Campuses \(*Campus des métiers et des qualifications, CMQ*\)](#) (Cedefop & ReferNet, 2026c) ⁽⁶⁾ to respond to structural transformations in the labour market driven by digitalisation, the ecological transition, and evolving production models. Rapid technological developments and the emergence of new, still-evolving occupations have placed significant pressure on traditional education and training systems, while persistent skills mismatches continue to contribute to unfilled vacancies (Cedefop & ReferNet, 2026nn).

CMQs are designed as regional ecosystems bringing together secondary VET schools, apprenticeship centres, higher education institutions, research laboratories, training providers, companies, and regional authorities within specific economic sectors. Their objective is to better align training provision with labour market needs by developing integrated training pathways, school-based education, apprenticeship contracts, and continuing training. In 2019, the [new campus d'excellence label](#) was also introduced to recognise CMQs addressing strategic socio-economic priorities and promoting innovation and excellence in VET ⁽⁷⁾.

Within this national framework, the [Campus of Excellence Industry of the Future South](#) was established in the Provence-Alpes-Côte d'Azur Region by the Regional Authority, the Regional Academic Authority, and the employer organisation *Industries Méditerranée*. It operates in a region characterised by key

⁽⁶⁾ The French Ministry of Education has produced a booklet identifying good practices implemented across France within the Skills and Qualifications Campuses. For a selection of good practices, see: [Campus des métiers et des qualifications : les bonnes pratiques observées sur le territoire](#).

⁽⁷⁾ The labelling process sets minimum conditions for collaboration, including higher education (HE)/research links, company/regional links, placements, international cooperation and learner facilities, and it requires regular reviews every two to five years. This label operationalises quality assurance and creates feedback loops that support continuous improvement and better alignment with changing socio-economic needs.

strategic sectors including aeronautics, electronics, space industries, and energy transition (Campus d'Excellence Industrie du Futur Sud, n.d.).

4.1.2. What the measure does

The Industry of the Future South Campus operates as a collaborative governance and coordination platform to anticipate and respond to evolving skills needs across key industrial sectors.

The Campus coordinates consortium-level action plans associated with major industrial projects, ensuring coherence between company needs and regional and national policy priorities. Its governance model brings together founding members, stakeholder colleges that bridge education and the economy, and thematic committees focused on foresight, training and development, guidance, communication, mobility, and ecosystem coordination.

A central feature of the model is the strong involvement of companies in both governance and implementation. Businesses actively contribute to defining skills needs, particularly through *Industries Méditerranée*, and sector-specific partners (Campus d'Excellence Industrie du Futur Sud, n.d., see the [Network Effect section](#)). On this basis, the Campus co-designs training pathways aligned with sectoral requirements, supporting employability, workforce integration, and LLL opportunities.

In parallel, it plays a key role in promoting industrial careers and VET routes through awareness-raising and experiential initiatives. These include the immersive platform [Forindustrie – the Extraordinary Universe](#), which uses a gamified approach combining quizzes, videos, and virtual company visits to help users explore industrial occupations and make informed career choices. Additional actions further strengthen skills development and stakeholder engagement. Among others are the [Mixed Energy Challenge](#) that encourages female participation in technical energy occupations; innovation competitions linking students with firms, e.g. the [I-NOVGAMES competition](#), and digital open-badges schemes recognising transversal and professional skills gained through these experiences.

The overall Campus model is based on collective action and mutual benefit – by working together, companies access talent, learners access future-oriented pathways, and territories enhance their competitiveness. The overall Campus model is based on collective action and mutual benefit: by working together, companies gain access to talent, learners benefit from future-oriented pathways, and territories improve their competitiveness and attractiveness as places to invest, work, and live.

4.1.3. Scale and evidence of uptake

The Industry of the Future South Campus demonstrates a significant scale of activity and a steadily expanding ecosystem connecting VET and industry. Data coming from the 2024 Campus' activity report highlight that, in terms of reach, the Campus trains approximately 4 400 learners per year and raises awareness among more than 100 000 individuals annually, while also delivering around 50 trainer training sessions each year (Campus d'Excellence Industrie du futur – Sud, n.d.).

The governance structure reflects a broad multi-actor partnership. Academic stakeholders account for the largest share of engagement (46 %), followed by institutional actors (27 %) and companies (19 %), alongside founding members (8 %). This composition illustrates a strong education-economy interface, with businesses meaningfully embedded in the ecosystem (Campus d'Excellence Industrie du futur – Sud, n.d.).

Finally, the scale of implementation is reinforced by a wide portfolio of flagship projects and initiatives spanning industrial innovation, career guidance, and skills development. Some examples include territorial skills anticipation studies conducted in partnership with key VET and labour market stakeholders to identify labour shortages and emerging skills needs associated with major energy transition projects, as well as the development of new qualifications registered in the French National Directory of Professional Certifications (RNCP) in fields such as industrial installation and digital engineering. Through close collaboration among industrial experts, teachers, certification bodies, and academic actors, these initiatives enhance the capacity of regional VET provision to respond rapidly and effectively to evolving industrial and technological needs.

4.2. Spain: promotion of training in digital skills – *Digitalízate (Go Digital)*

4.2.1. Context and challenges

In 2019, the State Public Employment Service (SEPE) and the State Foundation for Training in Employment (Fundae) launched the [*Digitalízate*](#) (Go Digital) portal to address persistent digital skills gaps (Cedefop & ReferNet, 2026a). At that time, there was a lack of ICT professionals and low levels of digital skills among the population.

Gaps were also evident at the company level: 20 % of firms provided no digital training, and in 62 % of those that did, fewer than 40 % of employees participated (Spanish Ministry of Education and Vocational Training, 2020). Shortcomings were

particularly acute among unemployed individuals, self-employed, workers in micro enterprises (with fewer than 10 employees), and people with lower educational attainment. Meanwhile, much cutting-edge digital knowledge was concentrated within the ‘closed ecosystems’ of major technology firms and was not easily accessible to the wider public. These shortcomings limited participation in the digital economy.

Digitalízate was conceived as a rapid, cost-neutral public-private response with speed in implementation as a decisive factor – to open access to high-quality digital training and support Spain’s technological transformation, with high-tech companies providing training and training resources.

4.2.2. What the measure does

Digitalízate aggregates free digital training resources from leading technology companies and other organisations into a single public portal managed by Fundae in collaboration with SEPE. It offers over 1 500 courses for employed and unemployed workers, freelancers, and SMEs, covering cybersecurity, cloud computing, e-commerce, programming, digital marketing, and artificial intelligence (AI), among others (Cedefop & ReferNet, 2026a; Spanish State Public Employment Service, 2025). Courses range from short introductory modules to professional certificates of around 250 hours and promote both technical and transversal digital skills valued by employers. Therefore, the platform functions as an LLL instrument by supporting the upskilling and reskilling of workers in line with labour market needs.

The initiative is structured through formal collaboration agreements between public institutions and private organisations, largely framed within companies’ corporate social responsibility programmes, at no financial cost. It operates as a co-creation model: each partner appoints a representative, holds regular meetings, and continuously updates content. This structured dialogue enables anticipation of emerging skill needs, as companies signal global technological trends and priority training areas.

Participating entities include major technology firms such as Google, IBM, Microsoft, Cisco, and Oracle, alongside Spanish foundations and public institutions. Second-generation agreements with Google in 2022 and IBM in 2024 introduced fully funded professional certificates, with companies covering licensing and delivery costs while Fundae manages participants (Fundae, 2024).

Supported by [EU Next Generation](#) funds, *Digitalízate* has evolved into the broader *Experiencia Fundae* ecosystem, a more comprehensive digital learning environment that incorporates the original *Digitalízate* platform while expanding its offer through additional training resources, scholarship opportunities, and digital

competence assessment tools aligned with the European DigComp framework. The platform also tailors content according to user profile, distinguishing between employees, self-employed workers, companies, workers on temporary layoff schemes (ERTE), young people, and unemployed individuals.

Beyond access to content, the initiative creates mutual value: it connects companies with audiences they do not usually reach, encourages entry-level content development, strengthens public administration's innovative image, and provides a trusted, non-competitive collaboration space.

4.2.3. Scale and evidence of uptake

Since its launch, *Digitalízate* has recorded more than 9.3 million visits. Data from nine large companies show that around 80 000 individuals completed certifications via Fundae access channels, 58 % of whom are women. Around 17 000 learners obtained certificates through the Google-Fundae scholarship programme and more than 7 000 through the IBM-Fundae scholarship programme, with employment insertion rates of 36-38 %. The complementary e-learning platform has registered over 110 000 enrolments and 43 000 completed learners.

Seeing the success of this initiative, the project went a step forward and the portal *Digitalízate Plus* was launched. *Digitalízate Plus*, created thanks to the funds from the Recovery and Resilience Facility, is a training platform where anybody can access all the training Fundae offers through the different calls for proposals published every year, and the training contents from *Digitalízate*. The platform also includes new services and applications to guide people in choosing what training might be more interesting for them. It includes a user registry, and information and tools for specific groups (Cedefop & ReferNet, 2026a).

In 2024, the European Commission identified *Digitalízate* as a good practice in employer-led workforce development, ranking it among the top five initiatives evaluated and standing out as a distinctive public-private and public-public collaboration dedicated to upskilling and reskilling.

CHAPTER 5.

Conclusions and policy pointers

5.1. What the evidence shows

Innovative VET-business partnership represents a key lever for building resilient, inclusive, and future-oriented VET systems. In line with EU priorities, across the EU-27+, cooperation between education and training providers and businesses is increasingly embedded within broader skills ecosystems that connect skills development with labour market intelligence, innovation, regional development, and economic competitiveness.

Evidence shows that EU-27+ countries are increasingly moving from ad hoc and project-based cooperation towards more structured and systemic VET-business partnerships. While WBL and apprenticeships remain the most visible area, employer engagement is progressively extended beyond training delivery. Businesses are actively involved in anticipating skills needs, participating in VET governance, shaping regional skills ecosystems, contributing to Centres of Vocational Excellence and competence hubs, supporting the professional development of teachers and trainers, promoting the attractiveness of VET, and helping to develop learners' basic, transversal, and entrepreneurial competences. to sectoral and regional platforms, governance arrangements, excellence hubs, teacher and trainer CPD, and partnerships for developing basic and entrepreneurship skills.

These partnerships frequently bring together a wide range of actors, including employers, social partners, public employment services, chambers of commerce, sectoral organisations, regional and local authorities, education and training providers, higher education institutions, and research organisations. Emerging models, such as sectoral skills councils, regional consortia, CoVEs, and multi-stakeholder upskilling initiatives, demonstrate the value of shared governance arrangements, clearly defined roles and responsibilities, and sustained collaboration around common objectives.

The benefits generated by these partnerships are multidimensional and this is consistent with the evidence from the Timeline of VET policies in Europe, which shows that countries across the EU-27+ use VET-business partnerships to address a broad range of educational, economic, and social objectives (Cedefop & ETF, 2026; Cedefop & ReferNet, 2026b):

- (a) **For learners**, partnerships improve employability and access to quality jobs, facilitate smoother transitions from education to work, provide authentic

workplace learning experiences, and help learners acquire up-to-date skills and competences valued in the labour market today (ILO, 2022).

- (b) **For businesses**, partnerships help address skills shortages and mismatches, strengthen the relevance of training provision, provide opportunities to influence curriculum development, support innovation and productivity, and enhance employer attractiveness and corporate reputation (European Commission et al, 2017).
- (c) **For VET providers and systems**, partnerships contribute to more responsive and labour market-oriented curricula, strengthen links with industry, enhance the professional competences of teachers and trainers, improve access to expertise, equipment, and innovation networks, and support the overall quality, attractiveness, and responsiveness of VET provision (OECD, 2023).

Overall, the evidence indicates that successful VET-business partnerships are no longer limited to supporting training provision. Increasingly, they function as strategic mechanisms for skills anticipation, innovation, governance, and lifelong learning, helping VET systems respond more effectively to digital, green, demographic, and economic transitions.

5.2. Policy pointers

Drawing on the evidence presented in this Insight, several policy pointers emerge for designing and strengthening effective, sustainable, and mutually beneficial VET-business partnerships:

- (a) **Build strategic and mutually beneficial partnerships for skills development.** Effective cooperation requires strong strategic alignment with national and regional skills strategies, as well as with industrial, digital, and green transition priorities. Early and sustained involvement of different key stakeholders, and business in particular, in policy design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation can foster co-ownership, trust, efficient use of resources, and long-term commitment. At the same time, partnerships are more likely to sustain employer engagement if they generate visible near-term benefits for companies – such as faster recruitment, access to training solutions, shared expertise, and support for immediate skills needs – while also pursuing long-term objectives such as curriculum reform, structural change, and skills anticipation. The co-design of qualifications and curricula may strengthen mutual accountability and ensure that partnerships remain responsive to evolving labour market needs.

- (b) **Institutionalise stakeholder dialogue and strengthen support structures for SMEs.** Structured platforms – such as SSC, regional consortia and centres of excellence – should ensure continuous labour market intelligence and coordinated action. Chambers and sectoral organisations play a crucial role in engaging businesses, particularly SMEs, by pooling resources, simplifying administrative procedures, and reducing regulatory complexity. Cost-efficient incentives and streamlined processes can further lower participation barriers.
- (c) **Strengthen quality assurance, transparency, and innovation-oriented for partnerships.** Clear roles and responsibilities, formal agreements, and monitoring mechanisms are essential to guarantee quality and value for all actors. Partnerships should move beyond placement-based cooperation towards innovation-driven models, including joint investments, shared facilities, and programme co-design. Such approaches enhance flexibility and support rapid adaptation to skills needs shaped by digitalisation and the green transition.
- (d) **Extend partnership models to lifelong learning and workforce development.** Integrating adult learning within partnership frameworks supports career transitions and strengthens labour market resilience. VET-business partnership should be progressively embedded in LLL systems, enabling continuous upskilling and reskilling in response to evolving skills demands. This implies closer cooperation among companies, VET providers, and PES to identify emerging skills needs, co-develop flexible training offers, and facilitate access for adult learners. This approach helps ensure that skills development becomes a continuous process throughout working life and strengthens both workforce adaptability and companies' capacity to manage structural change.

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Abbreviations

AI	artificial intelligence
CMQ	<i>Campus des métiers et des qualifications</i> [Trades and Qualifications Campus] (France)
CoVE	Centre of Vocational Excellence
CPD	continuing professional development
CVET	continuing vocational education and training
EAfA	European Alliance for Apprenticeship
ENE	ETF Network for Excellence
IVET	initial vocational education and training
LLL	lifelong learning
PES	public employment services
RNCP	<i>Répertoire National des Certifications Professionnelles</i> [National Directory of Professional Certifications] (France)
SME	small and medium-sized enterprise
SSC	sectoral skills council
STEM	science, technology, engineering and mathematics
VET	vocational education and training
WBL	work-based learning

Annex

List of VET policies and initiatives per theme

[In order of appearance in the text].

Partnerships for WBL and apprenticeships

- [Increasing attractiveness of apprenticeship training: Austria.](#)
- [Alliance for initial and further training: Germany.](#)
- [Perfect match programme for SMEs: Germany.](#)
- [Baltic Alliance for Apprenticeships: Lithuania.](#)
- [VET internationalisation and Baltic collaboration: Latvia.](#)
- [Cooperation framework with industry: Italy.](#)
- [Tertiary VET reinforcement: Slovakia.](#)
- [Promotional actions to support WBL: Spain.](#)

Anticipating skill needs through sectoral skills councils and skills intelligence mechanisms

- [Sectoral skills centres \(SSCs\): Poland.](#)
- [Sector Councils Alliance: Slovakia.](#)

Participating in VET governance

- [Tripartite agreement to ensure more apprenticeships in Danish VET: Denmark.](#)
- [Increasing the role of stakeholders in the governance of VET institutions: Lithuania.](#)
- [National skills strategy: Luxembourg.](#)
- [Partnerships between VET schools and businesses: Netherlands.](#)

Building regional partnership mechanisms

- [Brussels' training and employment centres: Belgium \(French Community\).](#)
- [Developing apprenticeship: France.](#)
- [Lifelong learning catalyst: Netherlands.](#)
- [Introducing dual IVET programmes: Romania.](#)

Driving innovation and knowledge transfer through CoVEs and competence/excellence hubs

- [Green transition in VET: Austria.](#)
- [Regional centres of competences: Croatia.](#)
- [Strengthening WBL and apprenticeship approaches: Hungary.](#)
- [Sectoral practical training centres \(SPTCs\): Lithuania.](#)
- [Promoting innovation and excellence through specific VET centres: Spain.](#)

Cooperating in teacher and trainer CPD

- [Modernising the VET teacher CPD system: Croatia.](#)
- [A substantial reinforcement of VET: Denmark.](#)
- [Qualifying trainers for the future world of VET: Germany.](#)

Raising the visibility and attractiveness of VET

- [Women entrepreneurs go to school: Austria.](#)
- [Reformed model of skills competitions: Croatia.](#)
- [Promoting dual VET: Germany.](#)
- [Promotion and dissemination initiatives of VET: Portugal.](#)
- [Incentives for companies to provide dual VET: Romania.](#)

Developing basic and transversal competences

- [Transversal competences in apprenticeship: Austria.](#)
- [CléA certificates for developing and assessing key competences of work force: France.](#)
- [National employment action plans: Bulgaria.](#)
- [Supporting Lifelong Learning \(LLL\) in the adult education and training framework: Hungary.](#)
- [The network of vocational training centres: Hungary.](#)
- [Action plan for the digital transition: Portugal.](#)
- [More digital employment 2025: Portugal.](#)
- [National digital competences initiative \(Portugal INCoDe.2030\): Portugal.](#)
- [Tripartite agreement on better and more flexible continuing vocational education: Denmark.](#)

Strengthening entrepreneurship education and entrepreneurial competences

- [We educate the economy plan: promoting innovative and excellence in VET: Austria.](#)
- [The modernisation of vocational education and training project, European Social Fund \(ESF\): Bulgaria.](#)
- [Strategic boost to VET: Spain.](#)
- [Green entrepreneurial funding pool for youth education, 2021-23: Denmark.](#)
- [Learner STEM and vocational competences competitions: Bulgaria.](#)
- [Strengthening WBL and apprenticeship approaches: Hungary.](#)
- [Addressing skills mismatch between education and labour market \(Secondary and Higher Education\): Cyprus.](#)

Policy approaches to strengthening VET-business partnerships

Insights from national policy monitoring and analysis

Strong partnerships between VET providers and businesses are essential for keeping VET relevant, high-quality, and responsive to changing labour market and societal needs.

This Cedefop Insight explores how EU Member States, Norway, and Iceland are strengthening VET-business cooperation through different policy approaches and partnership models. Drawing mainly on evidence from Cedefop's Timeline of VET policies in Europe, it identifies key trends, challenges and examples of practice. While work-based learning and apprenticeships remain the most common area of cooperation, businesses are becoming active in skills anticipation, VET governance, regional partnerships, Centres of Vocational Excellence, teacher and trainer professional development, VET promotion, and the development of basic, transversal, and entrepreneurial competences.

The findings show a shift from occasional project-based collaboration towards more structured and long-term partnerships involving multiple stakeholders. The Insight concludes with policy pointers for building effective and sustainable VET-business partnerships for skills development, lifelong learning, innovation, and competitiveness.

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