



INNOVET
LATAM

Governance Model for Inclusive VET

Compiled Report

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Towards a governance model for inclusive Vocational Education and Training

The capacity of Vocational Education and Training (VET) systems to contribute to **inclusive economic development, social cohesion, and sustainable employability** has never been more urgent or more relevant. In an era shaped by rapid technological change, digitalization, environmental transformation, and demographic shifts, societies are facing growing disparities in opportunity and access — particularly for young people, rural communities, and individuals living in vulnerable conditions.

At the same time, labor markets are undergoing significant disruption. Emerging sectors require new skillsets, while traditional jobs are vanishing or transforming. In this context, VET systems are increasingly seen as **strategic enablers of resilience, adaptability, and equity**. But for VET to fulfil this role, it must go beyond simply delivering technical knowledge or meeting the needs of a fast-moving labor market. It must also be driven by a **deep social purpose**: to empower all individuals — regardless of their background — to build a dignified, productive, and meaningful life.

It is precisely this **dual imperative** — technical relevance and social inclusion — that underpins the **INNOVET LATAM project**, co-financed by the Erasmus+ Programme of the European Commission. At its core, INNOVET LATAM seeks to create **stronger bridges between European and Latin American VET ecosystems**, through structured cooperation among eight partner organizations across Europe, Guatemala, and Venezuela. More than a platform for exchange, the project acts as a **laboratory for operational innovation**, generating concrete solutions and co-designed tools that can be implemented and adapted in diverse local contexts.

A central ambition of the project is to **position VET providers in Guatemala and Venezuela as key drivers of local development and social transformation**, especially in rural and disadvantaged areas. INNOVET LATAM does not aim to study systems from a distance, but to work **within them** — alongside practitioners, learners, and institutional actors — to improve real-world conditions. It is in this pragmatic, bottom-up spirit that the **Governance Model for Inclusive VET** has been conceived.

At the heart of this model lies a fundamental premise: that **governance is not simply about rules and procedures — it is about power, participation, and shared responsibility**. It is the glue that binds policies to practices, institutions to communities, and vision to action. Governance defines how decisions are made, whose voices are heard, how priorities are set, and how accountability is maintained. In the field of VET, it determines whether training programs are truly **inclusive, responsive, and empowering** — or whether they remain disconnected, outdated, and exclusive.

Crucially, this model adopts **inclusion** not as a technical criterion, but as a guiding principle. In too many cases, VET systems have inadvertently reproduced inequalities by serving only those already best positioned to succeed. To reverse this trend, inclusion must be integrated into every aspect of governance — from stakeholder engagement to resource allocation, from curriculum design to quality assurance mechanisms. This means recognizing and addressing the specific barriers faced by **young women, rural youth, indigenous communities, migrants, people with disabilities, the unemployed, and others whose talents and aspirations remain undervalued or unsupported**.

Inclusion, therefore, is not just about ensuring access to training opportunities. It is about **restructuring systems** so that all individuals — regardless of background, identity, or circumstance — can genuinely participate, make progress, and flourish. It is about creating

learning environments that are safe, relevant, and empowering, and labor market pathways that are **open, equitable, and future-ready**.

This governance model is a step toward that transformation. It seeks to inspire and inform VET stakeholders in Guatemala, Venezuela, and beyond by proposing a **structured framework made up of five strategic pillars**, each addressing a critical component of inclusive VET systems — from labor inclusion strategies and accreditation processes, to social support schemes, personalized accompaniment, and public–private cooperation mechanisms.

Rather than offering a one-size-fits-all solution, the model provides a flexible, adaptable structure that can be **localized, enriched, and operationalized** by the partners involved. It reflects a belief that lasting change in VET systems comes not from imported models or top-down reforms, but from **collaborative innovation, context-aware strategies, and participatory governance**.

In sum, this governance model reflects the core ambition of INNOVET LATAM: to move from theory to practice, from fragmentation to cooperation, and from exclusion to empowerment. It invites all actors — public institutions, VET providers, employers, civil society organizations, and communities — to become **co-authors of a more inclusive, responsive, and transformative VET future**.

To operationalize this vision, the governance model is structured around **five foundational pillars**, each addressing a critical dimension of inclusive VET ecosystems:

- 1. Methodologies and stakeholder maps for labor inclusion**
A strong governance system begins with a comprehensive understanding of the actors, dynamics, and relationships that shape labor inclusion. This section explores participatory mapping and collaborative engagement strategies to create interconnected VET ecosystems.
- 2. Processes and key elements of the accreditation system**
Quality assurance and recognition mechanisms must be inclusive, transparent, and context-sensitive. This section outlines how accreditation can evolve to validate diverse learning pathways, support mobility, and build trust in the system.
- 3. Regulations and empowering support schemes for VET–employment linkages**
Effective governance requires enabling policy frameworks and support schemes that bridge training with employment and welfare services. This includes mechanisms that promote accessibility, equity, and institutional cooperation.
- 4. Processes and tools for the accompaniment of people in vulnerable situations**
Beyond structural reforms, inclusion demands human-centered processes. This section focuses on personalized support systems — from needs assessment to mentoring — that empower individuals to navigate learning and labor market transitions.
- 5. Support schemes and tools to enhance dialogue between VET and enterprises**
Sustained collaboration between training providers and the world of work is essential. This final pillar details the structures, incentives, and tools that promote co-ownership, responsiveness, and opportunity creation, particularly for marginalized groups.

1. Methodologies and stakeholder maps for labor inclusion

Inclusion within Vocational Education and Training (VET) systems is far more than a policy objective — it is a **strategic imperative**. It represents a conscious, systemic response to deep-rooted inequalities that have historically limited access to opportunities for large segments of society. When effectively implemented, inclusive VET systems serve as engines for **social cohesion, community resilience, and sustainable economic growth**. They recognize that diversity is not a challenge to be managed, but a strength to be harnessed.

Labor inclusion, particularly for individuals from vulnerable backgrounds, must be envisioned as a **holistic, multi-dimensional process**. It is not enough to provide training opportunities in isolation; inclusion demands an integrated ecosystem where education, employment, and welfare services are seamlessly interconnected. In such an ecosystem, VET becomes a bridge — connecting learning pathways with meaningful work, while also embedding the necessary social supports that allow individuals to thrive.

At the heart of this vision is the understanding that **labor inclusion cannot be achieved by educational institutions alone**. It requires the **intentional, coordinated involvement of a wide and diverse range of actors**, each bringing their own expertise, resources, and perspectives. Public and private VET providers, employers, local authorities, NGOs, social enterprises, employment agencies, and learner organizations all have a vital role to play. More importantly, individuals from marginalized communities — the very people inclusion seeks to empower — must be placed **at the center of the system**, not left at its periphery.

To operationalize this approach, **methodologies for stakeholder mapping and engagement** must be built around the principles of participation, co-creation, and shared ownership. Mapping exercises should not only identify key actors but also analyze their influence, interests, capacities, and the relationships between them. Special attention must be given to recognizing hidden stakeholders — such as grassroots organizations or informal community leaders — whose contributions are often overlooked but whose insights are critical for authentic inclusion.

Innovative frameworks such as the **Quadruple Helix Model** — which fosters collaboration between academia, industry, government, and civil society — offer valuable blueprints for designing governance systems that are inclusive by design. Similarly, the **Collective Impact Framework** emphasizes the need for a common agenda, shared measurement systems, continuous communication, and mutually reinforcing activities among stakeholders, all of which are essential ingredients for successful labor inclusion strategies.

Inclusion must not be treated as an afterthought or an add-on to existing processes. It must be **embedded into the DNA of VET governance**. This requires deliberate strategies to amplify marginalized voices, democratize decision-making spaces, and institutionalize mechanisms that ensure continuous feedback, adaptation, and accountability.

In building inclusive VET ecosystems, the true measure of success will not simply be the number of stakeholders involved, but the **depth and quality of their collaboration**, and most importantly, the **real-world impact** on the lives of learners who are too often left behind.

An ecosystemic approach for labour inclusion in VET systems

Effective labor inclusion within VET systems cannot be pursued in isolation, nor can it be the responsibility of educational providers alone. An ecosystemic approach is essential — one that recognizes the complex web of interdependencies connecting education systems, labor markets, social services, and community actors.

This approach is rooted in the understanding that individuals do not transition into employment within a vacuum, but rather within environments shaped by territorial realities, social structures, and policy frameworks.

Designing interventions through an ecosystemic lens demands a comprehensive mapping of the various forces and actors that influence the pathways from training to employment, especially for those most at risk of exclusion. It requires moving beyond institutional silos and working towards coordinated, territory-sensitive solutions. Several critical factors must be taken into account:

- **Territorial context:** Whether learners are situated in urban, peri-urban, or rural areas dramatically shapes their opportunities. Formal and informal economies coexist, especially in marginalized regions, and interventions must be tailored to the specific economic and social realities of each territory.
- **Socio-economic profile of learners:** Inclusive VET governance must begin with a deep understanding of the lived experiences of its target populations. Factors such as income levels, educational attainment, gender, ethnicity, disability status, and migration history directly impact learners' ability to access and benefit from training and employment opportunities.
- **Structural barriers:** Persistent barriers such as poverty, systemic discrimination, inadequate infrastructure, digital divides, and limited access to transportation must be explicitly identified and addressed. Without confronting these foundational issues, even the most well-designed training programs risk reinforcing, rather than overcoming, inequality.

The ecosystemic approach is **deeply inspired by the principles of systems thinking**, a methodology that sees each stakeholder's role as part of a dynamic whole, rather than as an isolated entity. Within this framework, no single actor can drive sustainable change alone; solutions must be co-created, jointly owned, and continuously adapted through collaboration among multiple parties. Stakeholders are encouraged to view themselves not just as service providers or beneficiaries, but as **integral contributors to a shared mission of labor inclusion**.

In practice, this means that VET initiatives must actively **foster partnerships with employers, employment services, social support organizations, and community groups**, ensuring that learners experience a coherent, supportive journey from skills development to dignified employment. It also means that policy and program design must be participatory, involving learners and community representatives as co-designers rather than passive recipients.

Territorial and contextual mapping

Achieving genuine inclusion in VET systems requires that interventions are not designed in abstraction, but rather grounded in the **specific realities of the territories** where learners live and

work. **Territorial and contextual mapping** is therefore a critical step in the process — a means of ensuring that training and employment strategies are **responsive to real, lived conditions**, rather than relying on assumptions or generic models.

Territorial mapping recognizes that no two regions are identical. Urban areas, peri-urban zones, and rural communities each present distinct challenges and opportunities. Formal and informal economic structures coexist, and marginalized populations are not evenly distributed. As such, inclusion must be understood and constructed **locally**, through methodologies that reveal the social, economic, and cultural fabric of each territory. To be effective, territorial mapping should integrate several key elements:

- **Socio-demographic analysis:** Understanding the composition of the population — age distribution, education levels, gender balance, ethnicity, migration status, disability prevalence — provides a foundational picture of who the learners are and what systemic barriers they might face. Socio-demographic data can also help to anticipate future needs and design targeted interventions.
- **Mapping of training supply and demand:** A clear understanding of the existing VET offer is essential. This includes analysing the geographical spread of training centers, the variety of programs available, their accessibility (both physical and financial), and their alignment with labor market needs. It also requires identifying gaps — sectors or skills that are underrepresented or inaccessible to certain groups.
- **Labor market needs analysis:** Territorial mapping must include an in-depth exploration of the labor market, particularly sectors that are underserved or hold growth potential. Special attention should be paid to emerging industries, informal sectors that may offer pathways to formalization, and occupations where there is a shortage of trained workers — all seen through the lens of inclusive employment.
- **Identification of vulnerable population groups:** Mapping must explicitly identify populations at risk of exclusion, such as NEETs (young people not in employment, education, or training), women facing labor market discrimination, rural youth with limited access to infrastructure, indigenous communities, migrants, and persons with disabilities. These groups must not be treated as homogeneous; a nuanced understanding of their specific needs and aspirations is essential.

Importantly, territorial and contextual mapping should not be a **top-down, technocratic exercise**. It must be **participatory and community-driven**, involving local actors, civil society organizations, learners themselves, and other stakeholders who understand the hidden dynamics of their communities. Participatory methods — such as community workshops, focus groups, surveys, and mapping exercises — ensure that **local knowledge and experiences are recognized and valued**.

This inclusive approach to mapping not only highlights the **gaps and challenges** that need to be addressed, but also **uncovers existing strengths, informal networks, and untapped resources** that can be leveraged to support labor inclusion. Community solidarity structures, social enterprises, indigenous knowledge systems, and youth-led initiatives, for example, often operate beneath the radar of formal systems yet play a vital role in supporting learning and employability.

By embedding participatory territorial mapping into VET governance, stakeholders can design interventions that are **more targeted, more effective, and more just** — building learning pathways that are truly rooted in the aspirations, realities, and potential of every community.

Participatory and co-creation methodologies

At the heart of truly inclusive VET governance lies a transformative principle: **those most affected by exclusion must not simply be consulted — they must be empowered to co-create the solutions.** Participation and co-creation are not optional add-ons or symbolic gestures; they are foundational practices that shift power dynamics and ensure that training and labor market strategies are grounded in real needs, aspirations, and lived experiences.

Participatory and co-creation methodologies challenge traditional, top-down models of governance. Instead of treating marginalized individuals and communities as passive recipients of aid or services, these approaches position them as **active agents and co-architects** of their own inclusion journeys. This paradigm shift is essential for developing interventions that are not only more effective but also more just, sustainable, and resilient. There are several key methodologies that embody this participatory spirit:

- **Focus groups with learners and communities:** Small, facilitated discussions allow individuals — especially those from vulnerable backgrounds — to share their experiences, express their needs, and contribute ideas for change. Focus groups create safe spaces where voices that are often unheard can emerge, and where the collective intelligence of communities can be harnessed.
- **Participatory Action Research (PAR):** PAR transforms research from a process conducted *on* communities to a process conducted *with* and *by* them. In PAR, learners and community members become researchers themselves, investigating their own realities, identifying systemic barriers, and co-developing strategies for action. This methodology not only generates rich, grounded insights but also builds capacity, ownership, and empowerment among participants.
- **Collaborative design labs with employers and VET Institutions:** Design labs bring together diverse stakeholders — including employers, training providers, social organizations, and learners — to co-create solutions in a spirit of experimentation and innovation. These labs foster mutual understanding, align expectations between supply and demand sides of the labor market, and promote the joint development of curricula, internships, and employment pathways that are inclusive by design.
- **Youth-Led consultations:** Young people, especially those who have faced systemic barriers to education and employment, bring critical perspectives and creative ideas to the table. Youth-led consultations place them in leadership roles, giving them the space and authority to define the challenges they experience and propose solutions that reflect their realities and ambitions. Such consultations are powerful tools for fostering agency, boosting confidence, and building intergenerational trust.

These participatory methods are not merely tools for information gathering; they are **engines for empowerment.** By valuing and centering the knowledge of marginalized groups, participatory approaches foster a sense of ownership, dignity, and agency. They also lead to more context-sensitive, innovative, and sustainable outcomes, as solutions are deeply rooted in the experiences and aspirations of the people they aim to serve.

Ultimately, embracing participatory and co-creation methodologies **reshapes the role of VET systems:** from institutions that "serve" communities to institutions that **work alongside communities**, building pathways to inclusion not *for* learners, but *with* them — every step of the way.

Cross-sectoral collaboration tools

Labor inclusion is a complex challenge that cannot be addressed by any single sector working in isolation. Education, employment, social welfare, and civic life are deeply interconnected systems that must be **aligned and integrated** to create sustainable, inclusive pathways for learners — especially those from marginalized backgrounds. **Cross-sectoral collaboration** is therefore not just beneficial; it is essential.

In an inclusive VET governance model, **cross-sectoral collaboration** means building bridges between traditionally siloed sectors:

- **Education:** Including VET providers, schools, and universities, who are responsible for equipping learners with skills and qualifications aligned with real-world opportunities.
- **Employment:** Involving public employment services, private sector companies, employer associations, and trade unions who can open access to job opportunities, apprenticeships, and meaningful careers.
- **Social Welfare:** Engaging health services, housing support systems, child and family support agencies, and social protection institutions who can address the broader conditions that enable individuals to participate fully in learning and work.
- **Civic and Community Actors:** Mobilizing NGOs, grassroots organizations, faith groups, indigenous associations, and other community-based structures who offer critical insights, trust networks, and localized support.

Inclusion requires that these sectors **work together intentionally and systematically**, rather than relying on ad-hoc or informal collaborations. It demands **operational tools** that can formalize partnerships, define shared objectives, and create mechanisms for joint action and mutual accountability. Key tools to enable cross-sectoral collaboration include:

- **Memoranda of Understanding (MOUs):** MOUs formalize the commitment of different organizations to collaborate towards common goals. They outline the roles, responsibilities, and expectations of each partner, creating clarity and fostering trust. In an inclusive framework, MOUs can specifically address commitments to serving marginalized groups and promoting equity in outcomes.
- **Joint action plans:** These are living documents that articulate the specific activities, timelines, resources, and performance indicators that will guide cross-sectoral efforts. Joint action plans help to ensure that collaboration moves beyond intention to concrete, measurable action. They also provide a roadmap for coordinating interventions across education, employment, social services, and community spheres.
- **Inter-institutional working groups:** These are structured spaces where representatives from different sectors meet regularly to coordinate activities, troubleshoot challenges, share data, and co-design initiatives. Effective working groups are characterized by diverse representation, inclusive decision-making processes, and a commitment to centering the voices of marginalized populations.

Through these tools, cross-sectoral collaboration becomes **structured, strategic, and sustainable** — not dependent on personal relationships or temporary projects, but embedded within the operational culture of institutions.

Moreover, cross-sectoral collaboration fosters a **shared accountability structure**: no single institution is solely responsible for the success or failure of inclusion initiatives. Instead, responsibility is distributed across sectors, creating a collective commitment to **removing**

barriers, filling gaps, and building bridges that empower every learner to achieve their full potential.

By embedding cross-sectoral collaboration tools into the governance of VET systems, we move closer to realizing an **ecosystem of inclusion** — one where education, employment, social welfare, and civic life are not separate worlds, but interconnected pathways supporting the dignity, empowerment, and socio-economic advancement of all individuals.

Stakeholder mapping for inclusive VET Governance

Inclusion within VET systems demands not only a recognition of *who* the key actors are, but a deep, strategic understanding of *how* they operate, *what* drives them, and *where* they connect.

Effective stakeholder mapping is therefore much more than the creation of a static list of names and organizations — it is a dynamic, analytical process that brings the complexity of the inclusion ecosystem into clear focus.

In a governance model focused on labor inclusion, stakeholder mapping must be approached through multiple, interconnected dimensions:

- **Roles:** First and foremost, it is crucial to understand the *functions* each actor plays within the ecosystem. What mandates or responsibilities do they carry? Are they service providers, policy makers, funders, employers, community organizers, or advocates? Knowing their formal and informal roles allows for the identification of where their activities intersect with the goals of inclusive VET governance.
- **Influence:** Not all stakeholders hold the same degree of power, resources, or authority. Some may have significant decision-making power over funding, policy, or program design, while others may wield *social influence* through trusted community relationships. Mapping the degree and type of influence each actor holds enables the identification of potential champions for inclusion, as well as obstacles that may need to be addressed.
- **Interest:** Influence alone is not enough. Effective stakeholder mapping must also assess each actor's *motivation and commitment* to advancing inclusion. Are they highly invested in promoting equity and social justice? Are they primarily focused on economic outcomes? Or are they currently disengaged but could be activated through awareness-raising efforts? Understanding stakeholder interest levels helps to design tailored engagement strategies that can align motivations with inclusive objectives.
- **Interconnection:** No stakeholder operates in isolation. Institutions and individuals are embedded within *networks of relationships* that shape their actions, perspectives, and impact. Effective mapping identifies these linkages — both formal (partnership agreements, contracts) and informal (historical collaborations, personal networks) — to reveal patterns of collaboration, conflict, and opportunity. Recognizing these interconnections allows VET governance structures to strengthen existing alliances, bridge gaps, and build cohesive coalitions for change.

This **multi-dimensional mapping** approach is essential for developing targeted, strategic engagement plans that maximize the potential of every actor within the system. It also ensures that efforts to build inclusive VET ecosystems are **systematic rather than ad-hoc, collaborative rather than fragmented, and empowering rather than prescriptive.**

In the context of inclusive governance, special attention must be given to *marginalized and grassroots actors* who may possess critical local knowledge and social capital but are often overlooked in traditional stakeholder analyses.

By consciously valuing these actors — and recognizing the power of informal networks, community resilience, and lived experience — stakeholder mapping can truly reflect the spirit of inclusion it seeks to foster.

Ultimately, effective stakeholder mapping **lays the groundwork** for building a VET system that is **responsive, interconnected, and committed to the empowerment of all learners** — especially those who have historically been left behind. A sample stakeholder map for labor inclusion could involve:

Stakeholder	Role in Labor Inclusion	Inclusion Levers
Public VET Providers	Deliver training; bridge with public policy	Curriculum adaptation, access schemes
Private VET Providers	Flexible training offers; innovation	Dual training, micro-credentials
Employers & Associations	Identify labor needs; offer placements	Inclusive hiring, mentorship
Local/Regional Authorities	Policy-making, funding	Territorial strategies, social cohesion
NGOs	Reach out to vulnerable populations	Case management, trust-building
Social Enterprises	Create inclusive job opportunities	Transitional employment
Employment Services	Match labor supply and demand	Counselling, upskilling
Learners & Community Groups	Beneficiaries and co-creators	Participatory planning, peer support

Conceptual Frameworks for Stakeholder Engagement

Building a truly inclusive VET governance model requires more than goodwill and isolated initiatives — it demands structured, strategic, and sustained collaboration across multiple sectors and levels of society. To navigate this complexity, established **conceptual frameworks for stakeholder engagement** offer valuable guidance. Two models, in particular, provide structured pathways for creating dynamic, inclusive, and impactful ecosystems: the **Quadruple Helix Model** and the **Collective Impact Framework**.

Quadruple Helix Model

The **Quadruple Helix Model** proposes that innovation and systemic change are most effective when driven by the collaboration of four major societal sectors:

- **Academia:** Universities, research centers, and VET institutions, who contribute knowledge creation, skills development, and evidence-based approaches.
- **Industry:** Private sector actors — companies, employers, industry associations — who connect education and training with the realities of the labor market and provide opportunities for work-based learning and employment.
- **Government:** Public authorities at local, regional, and national levels, responsible for setting policies, providing funding, and creating regulatory environments that enable inclusion.

- **Civil Society:** Citizens, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), social movements, and community-based organizations, who ensure that the voices of learners, workers, and marginalized groups are actively represented and prioritized.

The Quadruple Helix approach emphasizes that **inclusion cannot be the sole responsibility of VET institutions** or any single sector. Instead, it must be a **shared societal mission**, co-owned by all four sectors. By fostering multi-actor collaboration, this model promotes **co-creation, cross-pollination of ideas, and innovation**. In the context of labor inclusion, it ensures that strategies are not only technically sound but also socially legitimate, culturally sensitive, and responsive to the real needs of diverse communities.

Critically, the Quadruple Helix model recognizes that innovation and inclusion are **social processes**, not just technical outcomes. It reinforces the idea that systemic transformation happens when diverse knowledge systems — academic, practical, political, and experiential — work together toward a common goal.

Collective Impact Framework

While the Quadruple Helix highlights *who* should be involved, the **Collective Impact Framework** focuses on *how* these diverse actors can work together effectively over time.

Collective Impact offers a structured, long-term approach to solving complex social challenges — like labor inclusion — that no single organization can solve alone. It outlines five key conditions that must be met for successful, coordinated action:

- **Common agenda:** All participants must have a shared vision for change, including a common understanding of the problem and a joint approach to solving it through agreed-upon actions.
- **Shared measurement systems:** Collecting and measuring data consistently across all participants ensures that efforts remain aligned and mutually accountable, and that progress is continuously tracked and evaluated.
- **Mutually reinforcing activities:** Different stakeholders undertake specific activities at which they excel, coordinated through a common plan. Rather than duplicating efforts, organizations build on each other's strengths.
- **Continuous communication:** Trust, transparency, and regular communication are essential to maintain momentum, align strategies, and adapt to emerging challenges and opportunities.
- **Backbone support organizations:** Dedicated teams or organizations are needed to coordinate the initiative, manage day-to-day operations, facilitate collaboration, and maintain focus on the common goals.

For labor inclusion in VET, the Collective Impact Framework is particularly powerful. It acknowledges that **the complexity of structural exclusion cannot be addressed with fragmented, short-term initiatives**. It demands a **long-term, systemic, and deeply collaborative commitment** across sectors, underpinned by shared accountability and a willingness to adapt and learn collectively.

Inclusion as a value, not just a target

As we design governance models and methodologies for labor inclusion within VET systems, it is crucial to remember that **inclusion must not be treated as a mere technical goal or statistical achievement**. It must instead be embraced as a **foundational value** — a guiding principle that informs every decision, every strategy, and every interaction across the ecosystem.

Too often, inclusion efforts risk being framed as acts of charity or temporary corrective measures aimed at specific marginalized groups. However, a truly inclusive approach recognizes that **inclusion is not about charity — it is about systemic fairness**. It is about **dismantling structural barriers**, redistributing opportunities, and **creating conditions where diversity is not just accommodated but actively valued and nurtured**. Inclusion is about transforming VET systems into spaces that inherently respect and uplift every learner's potential, regardless of background, ability, or circumstance.

In practice, this requires that all stakeholders involved — from education providers to policymakers, from employers to community organizations — **embed the principles of universal design** into their systems and processes. **Universal design** means designing environments, training programs, assessment tools, and employment pathways that are **accessible and welcoming for all learners from the outset**, rather than retrofitting or adapting structures only once exclusions are noticed. It demands a proactive, anticipatory mindset that assumes diversity, rather than treating it as an exception.

Moreover, the way success is measured must evolve. Traditional evaluation metrics — such as employment rates or program completion statistics — are important but insufficient. An inclusion-centered approach asks deeper questions:

- ***Who is benefiting from these programs and policies?***
- ***Are certain groups consistently being left behind, despite overall success rates?***
- ***How equitable are the opportunities, experiences, and outcomes across different learner profiles?***

In other words, evaluation must focus not only on **quantitative outputs** but also on **qualitative equity outcomes**. It must illuminate **patterns of participation, retention, empowerment, and transformation** among historically excluded groups.

Embedding inclusion as a value means committing to a vision of VET systems as **engines of dignity, empowerment, and justice** — systems that recognize that everyone's contribution matters, and that society as a whole thrives when all its members have the tools, the access, and the support they need to succeed.

VET ecosystems can move beyond surface-level solutions and instead create **deeper, more enduring change**. Inclusion becomes not an add-on, but **the very fabric** of how education, training, and employment systems function and evolve. It ensures that **no one is merely invited to join an existing system**, but that the system itself is **reshaped to honor, reflect, and serve the diversity of society**.

Recommendation 1 – Bridging gaps: Mapping stakeholders for inclusive workforce integration



In moving from conceptual frameworks to tangible, impactful action, it is essential to ground recommendations in **practical, inclusive approaches** that are tailored to the specific needs and conditions of each territory. The following recommendations provide a roadmap for operationalizing inclusive VET governance, ensuring that every step is aligned with the core principles of fairness, collaboration, and systemic transformation.

1. Start with a shared diagnostic

Before any meaningful action can be taken, stakeholders must engage in **co-producing a shared diagnostic** of the current state of exclusion and opportunity in the territory. This diagnostic is not simply a top-down assessment, but a **collective, participatory exercise** that involves all key actors — from VET providers and employers to community organizations, local governments, and marginalized groups themselves.

A **territorial diagnosis** allows stakeholders to gain a **deep, shared understanding of the specific barriers** faced by vulnerable populations, whether these are structural, economic, or cultural. It also helps to **identify the untapped opportunities** — resources, informal networks, and existing strengths in the community — that can be harnessed to support inclusion. By engaging in this diagnostic process, stakeholders can align their efforts, set realistic and context-sensitive goals, and ensure that no one is overlooked in the design of VET strategies.

2. Create local governance hubs

To drive inclusive VET action forward, it is essential to establish **local governance hubs** — or **territorial VET inclusion committees** — that will take ownership of the implementation and monitoring of action plans. These committees act as **central coordination points** where representatives from different sectors (education, employment, welfare, civil society) can collaborate, share insights, and track progress.

Governance hubs should be **locally rooted** and ensure that all voices — particularly those of marginalized groups — are represented in decision-making processes. These hubs provide **the flexibility and responsiveness needed** to tailor VET strategies to the local context while also ensuring that **inclusive actions are scaled up across territories**. Moreover, they can be instrumental in holding stakeholders **accountable for their commitments** and ensuring that the actions taken are truly addressing the identified needs and opportunities for inclusion.

3. Embed capacity-building

A critical component of any successful inclusive VET governance model is **embedding capacity-building** across all stakeholders. Not all actors involved in inclusive VET have the same level of knowledge or experience in addressing issues of exclusion or in implementing inclusive practices. **Training, peer exchanges, and skill development programs** should therefore be integral to the implementation strategy.

Capacity-building should not be one-off events but **ongoing processes** that equip stakeholders with the knowledge, tools, and confidence to engage in inclusive action. VET staff, policymakers, employers, and community organizations all need support in understanding **how to remove barriers, adapt practices, and embed inclusivity in their everyday work**. This can be achieved through **joint training sessions, shadowing opportunities, and international exchanges**, which allow stakeholders to learn from one another's successes and challenges. The goal is to ensure that everyone involved has the **necessary expertise** to engage in meaningful, inclusive practice.

4. Use data as a dialogue tool



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Data is a powerful tool, but it must be used with care and purpose. For inclusive VET governance, it is essential to **disaggregate data** by key socio-demographic factors such as **gender, age, disability, rurality, and ethnicity**. This enables stakeholders to **identify patterns of exclusion, understand disparities**, and design strategies that are truly responsive to the diverse needs of the population.

Disaggregated data also acts as a **dialogue tool** among stakeholders, helping to keep conversations grounded in reality and focused on the experiences of marginalized groups. When data is shared transparently, it fosters **greater accountability and motivates collective action**. Additionally, **regular data collection and monitoring** can be used to track progress toward inclusion, adjust strategies when necessary, and ensure that **no group is left behind** in the implementation process.

5. Fund inclusive partnerships

Finally, the **financial and political commitment** to inclusive VET governance must be sufficient and sustained. Inclusion requires **time, trust, and tools** to be effective, and this necessitates **adequate funding and strong political support** from both local and national governments.

Funders should prioritize **inclusive partnerships** that span sectors and regions, recognizing that **long-term systemic change cannot be achieved without a strategic, cross-sectoral effort**. Financial resources must be allocated not just for immediate interventions but for **sustaining collaborative efforts**, building trust among stakeholders, and scaling inclusive practices over time. Political leaders must commit to **creating an enabling environment** that supports inclusive VET initiatives through policies, legislative frameworks, and public investment.

Funding should also be allocated with **flexibility**, allowing stakeholders to experiment with innovative approaches, adapt to local contexts, and scale up successful initiatives. **Inclusive partnerships** should be supported through **multi-year funding models**, ensuring that stakeholders have the resources and stability to implement long-term solutions that create lasting impact.

2. Processes and key elements of the accreditation system

Accreditation plays a pivotal role in ensuring the **quality and relevance** of vocational education and training (VET) systems. However, for accreditation processes to truly promote inclusion, they must move beyond **technical compliance** and become mechanisms that actively foster **accessibility, equity, and opportunities for all learners**. A robust, inclusive accreditation system provides not only the credibility and legitimacy of qualifications but also ensures that the VET system is truly **responsive to labor market needs**, accessible to vulnerable populations, and capable of nurturing the diverse talents within society.

An inclusive accreditation system must embody **flexibility, responsiveness** to evolving labor market demands, and an openness to **non-formal and informal learning pathways**, ensuring that diverse forms of learning and experience are recognized and validated. In this context, inclusive accreditation ensures that **all learners, regardless of their background, have access to the skills, recognition, and qualifications that lead to real employment opportunities**.

For accreditation to be truly inclusive, it must be grounded in several key principles that ensure its fairness, transparency, and relevance to all stakeholders, particularly marginalized groups:

- Inclusive accreditation systems must be aligned with internationally recognized standards such as the **European Qualifications Framework (EQF)** or **ISO norms**. This ensures that the training provided is **globally credible** and compatible with other education and employment systems, facilitating **mobility** and **interoperability** for learners and workers across borders.
- The recognition of prior learning (**RPL**) is a cornerstone of an inclusive accreditation system. RPL enables learners to have their **non-formal and informal learning** — including work experience, volunteer activities, and informal community engagement — formally recognized. This is especially important for **disadvantaged groups** who may not have had access to traditional formal education, allowing them to **leverage their lived experiences** and skills in the labor market.
- Accreditation procedures must be **transparent** and **fair**, with clear criteria that are **publicly accessible** and **consistently applied**. This transparency ensures that **all stakeholders**, from training providers to learners and employers, understand how the accreditation process works and are confident that it is **free from bias** and **inclusive of diverse learners**. Clear guidelines and transparent decision-making processes reduce the risk of discrimination and ensure that the system serves the needs of all, especially **vulnerable or marginalized groups**.
- To actively address disparities in VET access and outcomes, equity indicators must be incorporated into the accreditation process. These indicators should focus on ensuring that **disadvantaged groups**, such as women, rural youth, persons with disabilities, and ethnic minorities, are equally represented and supported in VET pathways. These indicators help monitor **whether marginalized groups are benefiting from VET systems** and whether the system is contributing to reducing **structural inequalities** in society.
- One of the most important aspects of inclusive accreditation is ensuring that all relevant stakeholders are represented in the **accreditation decision-making process**. This includes **VET providers, employers, learners, social partners, and civil society organizations**, particularly those that work directly with vulnerable populations. Ensuring diverse perspectives on accreditation boards helps to ensure that the criteria used for accreditation reflect the **needs, challenges, and opportunities** of a wide range of communities and sectors.

Accreditation is traditionally viewed as a process to ensure the **institutional capacity** of VET providers, such as the infrastructure, resources, and administrative systems that support quality training.

However, to ensure that VET systems are inclusive, accreditation must **move beyond institutional capacity checks** and focus on the **outcomes** of the learning experience itself. It must evaluate the **accessibility, relevance, and employability potential** of training offered, ensuring that **every learner**, regardless of background, can successfully transition into meaningful employment or entrepreneurship.

- **Learning outcomes:** Inclusive accreditation must place a strong emphasis on the **learning outcomes** achieved by learners, ensuring that these outcomes meet the needs of the labor market and enable learners to **thrive in diverse workplaces**. The outcomes should be framed not only in terms of technical skills but also in terms of **soft skills**, entrepreneurial abilities, and **social empowerment** — all of which contribute to learners' capacity to participate in the economy and society.
- **Accessibility:** An inclusive accreditation system must ensure that training programs are **accessible to all learners**. This means considering factors such as physical and digital accessibility, flexibility in delivery methods (e.g., online, hybrid, face-to-face), and support services for learners with disabilities, health challenges, or caregiving responsibilities. Accessibility must be integrated into the **design and evaluation** of accredited programs, ensuring that everyone has equal opportunities to participate and succeed.
- **Employability potential:** Finally, an inclusive accreditation system must **actively promote employability**. This means ensuring that accredited VET programs are closely aligned with the **needs of the labor market**, especially in sectors that face skills shortages or have high growth potential.

Accreditation should also ensure that learners are equipped with the skills and competencies that employers are looking for, while also ensuring that **vulnerable or marginalized groups** are supported in overcoming employment barriers such as discrimination, lack of professional networks, or limited access to job opportunities.

Inclusive accreditation is not just about **who gets accredited** or ensuring that accredited providers meet a certain set of standards. It also involves asking **who defines quality** in the first place. Traditionally, quality has been defined from a narrow, institutional perspective, often overlooking the needs of learners from diverse backgrounds. To be truly inclusive, **quality must be co-defined by all stakeholders**, particularly the communities that are most affected by exclusion and inequality.

Inclusion means that accreditation processes should recognize the **diverse ways of knowing, learning, and contributing** to society. It means incentivizing **innovative, inclusive practices** and recognizing the efforts of VET providers who are actively working to engage marginalized learners, break down barriers, and create **inclusive learning environments**. **Inclusive practices** should be **rewarded** through accreditation standards, encouraging institutions to prioritize equity, diversity, and social impact.

Key functions of an inclusive accreditation system

In the context of Vocational Education and Training (VET), accreditation systems are designed to ensure the **quality, relevance, and equity** of the training and education offered to learners. However, for these systems to truly serve all learners — especially those from marginalized or vulnerable backgrounds — they must evolve from merely **regulatory control mechanisms** into **dynamic, developmental tools**. These tools should **foster innovation, facilitate accessibility, and drive transformation** within the education and labor markets, promoting systemic change for greater **inclusion and opportunity**.

The primary functions of an inclusive accreditation system can be distilled into three key areas: **quality assurance, labor market relevance, and access and equity**. Each of these functions, when viewed through an inclusive lens, plays a critical role in ensuring that all learners, regardless of their socio-economic background, gender, ethnicity, or ability, have the opportunity to succeed and thrive in the labor market. Below, we explore how each of these functions contributes to a more inclusive and effective VET system.

Ensure quality and validation of pedagogical effectiveness and institutional capacity

At the heart of any accreditation system is the need to **ensure quality**. In the VET context, this involves validating both the **institutional capacity** of training providers and the **pedagogical effectiveness** of the training programs they deliver. A high-quality VET system should foster **learning environments** that are conducive to skill development, personal growth, and the preparation of learners for real-world challenges.

However, quality assurance within an inclusive accreditation system must go beyond ensuring that institutions meet traditional standards of infrastructure and academic rigor. **Inclusive quality assurance** means considering whether the training environment is **accessible** to all learners, including those with disabilities, those from rural or disadvantaged communities, and those who may have faced barriers to education in the past. It requires evaluating whether training providers offer **support services** tailored to meet the diverse needs of learners, such as **counselling, career advice, and assistive technologies**.

Furthermore, ensuring quality involves **validating the learning outcomes** that the system is designed to produce. Are learners, especially those from vulnerable groups, gaining the **skills and competencies** they need to enter the labor market successfully? Are the training methods and materials used by providers **inclusive** in terms of both content and delivery? The quality of VET should be measured not only by institutional and academic standards but also by its **impact on learners' lives** — enabling them to access meaningful employment, engage with the economy, and contribute to their communities.

Guarantee relevance and alignment with labor market needs and future skills

The second key function of an inclusive accreditation system is to **guarantee relevance**. Relevance in VET means ensuring that training programs are not only **up-to-date** and **responsive** to the current demands of the labor market but also aligned with the **future skills** that will be required in an evolving economy. This function is vital for ensuring that VET systems do not only serve

immediate needs but also anticipate future trends, ensuring that learners are equipped with **skills for the future**, not just the present.

In an inclusive context, guaranteeing relevance means ensuring that training programs address **labor market gaps** in both high-demand and underserved sectors, and that they **recognize the diversity of learners' backgrounds and aspirations**. An inclusive accreditation system must prioritize industries and sectors that are **inclusive of all learners**, including those from marginalized groups who might traditionally face discrimination or have fewer opportunities to enter certain sectors.

Equally important is ensuring that the **future skills** taught in accredited VET programs are aligned with emerging labor market trends. This involves being proactive in identifying **green skills, digital literacy, and entrepreneurial capabilities** that will be crucial in the future of work. The system must ensure that learners from diverse backgrounds are equally represented in these forward-thinking sectors, thereby **reducing inequalities** and fostering **inclusive growth**.

Promote access and equity for embedding inclusive standards to reduce systemic exclusion

The third key function of an inclusive accreditation system is to **promote access and equity**. An inclusive VET system is not just about providing access to education; it is about providing equitable access, ensuring that **all individuals**, regardless of their background or circumstances, have the opportunity to benefit from high-quality vocational education and training.

Promoting access and equity requires accreditation systems to **embed inclusive standards** that actively combat systemic exclusion. These standards should aim to reduce barriers such as **poverty, discrimination, gender bias, and lack of infrastructure** that may disproportionately affect marginalized groups. By embedding these principles into accreditation criteria, the system can ensure that training providers are not only meeting the academic and institutional standards but are also **creating inclusive environments** where **all learners** feel supported, valued, and empowered to succeed.

An inclusive accreditation system also ensures that the **diverse needs** of vulnerable groups are explicitly considered. This includes integrating principles such as **universal design**, which seeks to make learning environments accessible and effective for everyone from the outset. It also involves recognizing **prior learning**, whether formal, informal, or non-formal, to ensure that learners who may not have had access to traditional educational pathways can still receive recognition for their competencies and skills.

Furthermore, accreditation must actively promote **equity indicators** — such as gender, age, disability, and rurality — to ensure that marginalized groups are not left behind. These indicators help monitor whether the accreditation system is effectively providing access to learning opportunities and ensuring that the benefits of education and training are reaching those who need them most.

To fulfill these three functions inclusively, accreditation systems must evolve. Traditionally, accreditation has been viewed as a **control mechanism**, focused on ensuring that training providers meet a prescribed set of standards. While this is important, an inclusive system must go beyond mere compliance checks. Accreditation must become a **developmental tool** — one that fosters **innovation**, encourages **continuous improvement**, and drives **systemic transformation**.

Accreditation processes should thus **enable growth, nurture collaboration, and promote shared accountability** among all stakeholders, ensuring that **inclusive practices** are not just a box to check but are integrated into the very fabric of the VET system.

Core principles for inclusive accreditation

An inclusive accreditation system is a foundational pillar for ensuring that vocational education and training (VET) provides equal opportunities to all learners, particularly those from marginalized or underserved communities. To effectively serve diverse groups, accreditation processes must evolve to emphasize not only **quality and relevance**, but also **accessibility, equity, and fairness**. The core principles outlined below provide a roadmap for developing an accreditation system that is truly inclusive and capable of addressing the diverse needs of all learners.

Alignment with International Standards and Frameworks

To ensure that accreditation systems are robust, consistent, and aligned with global best practices, it is essential for inclusive accreditation to be anchored in internationally recognized frameworks. This alignment ensures that accredited qualifications are **portable, comparable, and respected** across different countries and regions, which is especially important for learners from vulnerable groups who may need to migrate or seek employment in different regions. These frameworks provide a structured foundation for designing national or regional accreditation systems, ensuring that they are inclusive and meet global standards for quality. Key international frameworks that guide inclusive accreditation include:

- **European Qualifications Framework (EQF):** The EQF emphasizes a **learning-outcomes-based approach** that supports cross-country comparability, ensuring that qualifications are understood across different European countries. This approach is inclusive because it focuses on what learners know and can do, rather than the formal education route they followed. It allows for the recognition of skills acquired through non-formal and informal learning, which is particularly important for learners from non-traditional education backgrounds, such as rural workers or migrants.
- **ISO 21001:** This is an international standard for **Educational Organization Management Systems**. It provides guidelines for ensuring that educational organizations (including VET providers) manage their systems in ways that are inclusive, effective, and accountable. This standard emphasizes the need for continuous improvement, which is essential for maintaining an inclusive VET system that can adapt to the diverse needs of learners.
- **UNESCO TVET Strategy:** The **UNESCO Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) Strategy** underscores the importance of inclusion and equity as core priorities for all VET systems. It advocates for approaches that ensure marginalized groups have equal access to quality training and education. Alignment with this framework ensures that accreditation systems foster inclusion by emphasizing social equity, sustainable development, and skills for decent work.

Countries can create VET systems that are both **globally recognized and locally relevant**, ensuring that inclusive principles are embedded in every step of the accreditation process.

Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL)

A truly inclusive accreditation system values all forms of learning — not just formal education but also **non-formal** and **informal learning**. **Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL)** is a crucial mechanism within an inclusive accreditation system that acknowledges the knowledge and skills learners acquire outside traditional educational settings. This recognition can be particularly valuable for **marginalized groups**, such as rural workers, women re-entering the workforce after family care, or migrants who have gained experience in informal sectors but have not had access to formal educational pathways. Key elements of an inclusive RPL system include:

- **Clear criteria and evidence templates:** The RPL process should have transparent and easily understandable criteria that learners can use to document and present their prior learning, whether from work, life experiences, or community-based training.
- **Accessible validation processes:** The RPL system should offer **accessible** methods for validation, ensuring that learners with limited resources, technological access, or formal education can still benefit from the process. This might involve offering in-person assessments or local validation centers for remote or underserved communities.
- **Guidance and mentoring support:** To ensure that RPL is not a bureaucratic burden, learners should have access to **support services** that help them navigate the process. This includes guidance on how to compile evidence, how to prepare for assessment, and how to reflect on the learning they have gained.
- **Non-discriminatory practices:** RPL processes must be inclusive by design. This means ensuring that individuals are not discriminated against based on where or how they acquired their learning. Whether through community-based workshops, family responsibilities, or informal work, all learning should be treated equally.

VET systems can provide **equitable opportunities** for individuals to gain certification and formal recognition, opening up pathways to **further education** and **employment** opportunities, while also valuing the diverse experiences of learners.

Transparent, accessible, and fair procedures

For an accreditation system to be inclusive, it is essential that all aspects of the process — from application to assessment, feedback, and renewal — are designed to be **transparent**, **accessible**, and **fair**. This means ensuring that all stakeholders, including smaller VET providers, civil society actors, and under-resourced communities, can easily understand and navigate the accreditation process. Key considerations for ensuring transparency and accessibility include:

- **Clear procedures:** The accreditation process must be clearly communicated to all stakeholders, including VET institutions, learners, and employers. This involves ensuring that the application forms, assessment criteria, and feedback mechanisms are **understandable** and **user-friendly**, particularly for those who may not have extensive experience with bureaucratic processes.
- **Digital accessibility:** While digital tools are important in modernizing accreditation systems, **alternative formats** must be provided for regions or communities with **limited internet access**. This ensures that no one is excluded due to technological barriers, particularly those in rural or remote areas.
- **Equitable support:** The accreditation system should provide **support** for under-resourced organizations or training providers, enabling them to gradually improve and build their

capacity to meet accreditation standards. This could include mentoring, training, or financial assistance for smaller or less experienced providers.

An inclusive accreditation system fosters a **sense of trust** and **engagement** among all stakeholders, empowering them to take part in the accreditation process and contribute to its success.

Inclusion of equity indicators

In addition to traditional accreditation criteria, an inclusive system must incorporate **equity indicators** to ensure that **marginalized groups** are not overlooked. Equity indicators assess how well the training system is meeting the needs of all learners, particularly those who are at risk of exclusion due to gender, disability, socio-economic status, or geographic location. Some key equity indicators to consider include:

- **Diversity of enrolled learners:** Are training programs attracting a diverse group of learners? This could include gender diversity, learners from rural areas, or individuals with disabilities. Tracking these indicators helps ensure that **equity** is prioritized in recruitment and participation.
- **Inclusive pedagogical approaches:** Are training providers using **inclusive teaching methods** that cater to a diverse learner population? This includes differentiated instruction, accessible materials, and support for learners with different learning styles and abilities.
- **Adaptation of learning environments:** Are physical and digital learning environments accessible to all learners? This could mean providing wheelchair-accessible classrooms, offering alternative formats for materials (e.g., Braille, audio), or ensuring that online learning platforms are user-friendly for those with disabilities.
- **Support services:** Are learners provided with the **necessary support** services to succeed, such as **counseling, mentoring, or mobility assistance**? This is especially important for learners facing additional barriers, such as those with disabilities or those coming from disadvantaged backgrounds.
- **Community engagement:** Are disadvantaged communities actively involved in the **design** and **outreach** of training programs? Ensuring that marginalized communities have a voice in shaping the training they receive is a vital step toward fostering **inclusivity** and **relevance**.

A practical tool that could be used to support these equity indicators is a **“traffic light” self-assessment** tool. This allows VET providers to assess their own performance on equity dimensions and identify areas for improvement, fostering a culture of continuous self-reflection and improvement.

Stakeholder participation in governance

True inclusion is not just about providing opportunities to marginalized groups; it also involves **democratizing governance** and ensuring that these groups have a voice in the decision-making processes that affect them. In the context of inclusive accreditation, this means that accreditation bodies and quality assurance boards should **actively include** representatives from **civil society, learners, employers, and underrepresented communities**. Key elements of inclusive governance in accreditation include:

- **Diversity on governance boards:** Accreditation bodies should ensure that their boards include a **balance of gender, age, ethnicity**, and **disability** representation, as well as stakeholders from diverse geographical regions (rural, urban, indigenous). This ensures that all voices are heard, and that decisions reflect the needs of a wide range of learners and stakeholders.
- **Participatory evaluation tools:** To foster shared responsibility and engagement, participatory tools such as **peer reviews**, **community scorecards**, and **stakeholder consultations** should be used. These tools allow communities, learners, and civil society actors to directly participate in the evaluation and monitoring of VET systems, helping to ensure that accreditation is responsive to the needs of all.

By embedding stakeholder participation in governance, accreditation systems can create a **shared responsibility** for inclusivity, ensuring that all actors are committed to the **success of inclusive education**.

Accreditation as a catalyst for inclusion and innovation

An inclusive accreditation system goes beyond merely ensuring compliance with quality standards; it must actively **reward innovation**, **encourage outreach to vulnerable populations**, and **support experimentation** in training delivery models that reflect the evolving needs of diverse learners. In this context, an accreditation system should be a **dynamic, supportive framework** that promotes inclusivity, adaptability, and long-term sustainability within VET systems.

The key objectives of an inclusive accreditation system should be to encourage the development of **innovative training designs** that are responsive to the needs of learners from different socio-economic, cultural, and geographic backgrounds. This approach should also help training providers enhance their capacities, especially those that are committed to inclusivity but face resource constraints.

Let's explore how these principles can be operationalized within an inclusive accreditation system:

Reward innovation in inclusive training design

Innovation in inclusive training design is critical for addressing the diverse needs of learners. Traditional training models may not always meet the requirements of marginalized groups, such as persons with disabilities, women, rural populations, or those with limited access to formal education. To foster **creativity** and **responsiveness** in designing training that is truly inclusive, accreditation systems must **reward** institutions that demonstrate **innovative solutions** to these challenges.

By recognizing and **incentivizing** creative approaches to training, the system encourages providers to explore new methodologies and pathways that better engage learners from all backgrounds. For example, this could involve:

- **Flexible learning schedules** for adult learners or those juggling family responsibilities.
- **Use of digital tools and technologies** that cater to learners in remote areas or those with limited mobility.

- **Blended learning models** that combine traditional face-to-face training with online components to enhance accessibility and allow for a personalized pace of learning.
- **Inclusive curricula** that integrate diverse perspectives, learning needs, and cultural backgrounds, ensuring that all learners feel represented and valued.

An accreditation system that **rewards innovation** helps create an ecosystem where VET providers are encouraged to adapt and evolve, ultimately offering more inclusive and relevant educational opportunities for all learners.

Encourage outreach to vulnerable populations

An inclusive accreditation system must actively **encourage outreach to vulnerable populations**, ensuring that those who are most at risk of exclusion, such as **youth from disadvantaged backgrounds, ethnic minorities, women, persons with disabilities, and refugees**, have access to quality education and training. Outreach strategies can include:

- **Targeted recruitment efforts**, such as community engagement activities, awareness campaigns, or partnerships with local organizations that serve marginalized groups.
- **Flexible entry requirements** that recognize non-traditional pathways into education, such as work experience, informal learning, or community-based skills development.
- **Financial incentives** for institutions that engage with and successfully enrol vulnerable populations, such as grants or access to subsidized resources.
- **Partnerships with NGOs and social enterprises** that specialize in serving vulnerable populations, to support the enrolment and retention of these learners.

VET systems can create opportunities for those who are often left behind, contributing to greater **social cohesion** and **economic mobility** for marginalized groups.

Facilitate experimentation with dual learning, digital delivery, and community-based provision

The modern landscape of education is rapidly evolving, driven by technological advancements, changing labor market needs, and the increasing demand for more flexible learning pathways. To stay ahead of these changes and remain inclusive, accreditation systems should actively **facilitate experimentation** with **dual learning, digital delivery, and community-based provision**.

- **Dual learning** refers to training models that combine **on-the-job experience** with classroom-based learning, allowing learners to apply their skills in real-world settings while gaining theoretical knowledge. This approach is particularly valuable for learners who may have difficulty accessing traditional educational institutions, as it integrates **practical experience** with formal training and bridges the gap between education and employment.
- **Digital delivery** offers opportunities for flexible, **remote learning**, which can be especially beneficial for individuals in rural or underserved areas who may not have easy access to VET centers. Digital tools, such as online courses, virtual workshops, and interactive platforms, can break down barriers to learning by providing accessible and cost-effective solutions.
- **Community-based provision** involves delivering education and training directly within the communities that need it most. By providing training in local contexts, VET programs can

be more relevant, accessible, and tailored to the specific needs of learners. This approach also fosters a sense of ownership and empowerment within communities, as local leaders, organizations, and stakeholders are often involved in the delivery process.

An inclusive accreditation system should encourage and **recognize experimentation** with these innovative models. Accreditation standards must allow room for adaptation and flexibility in how education is delivered, while ensuring that the core principles of **inclusivity, equity, and quality** are maintained.

Support capacity-building for providers committed to inclusion

Not all VET providers are equally equipped to implement inclusive practices. Some institutions, particularly those serving marginalized or resource-poor communities, may lack the financial or technical capacity to meet the high standards required for inclusion. To address this challenge, an inclusive accreditation system should offer **capacity-building support** for training providers who are committed to inclusive practices but face resource constraints. Support could take various forms, including:

- **Professional development** opportunities for staff to build their understanding of inclusive pedagogical practices, disability inclusion, and diversity management.
- **Financial incentives** or grants to help under-resourced providers develop inclusive infrastructures, such as accessible learning spaces, digital tools, or assistive technologies.
- **Peer learning networks** where institutions can share best practices, collaborate on inclusive initiatives, and receive mentoring from more experienced providers.
- **Access to technical assistance** or consultancy services to help providers develop inclusive curricula, adapt teaching materials, and improve their assessment practices.

The accreditation system ensures that all training providers — regardless of size or resources — can become more inclusive, ultimately strengthening the entire VET system.

Introduce “Inclusion Excellence Labels” or incentivized quality tiers

One powerful way to encourage the integration of inclusive practices is to introduce “**Inclusion Excellence Labels**” or **incentivized quality tiers** within the accreditation system. These labels or tiers would serve as **formal recognitions** of VET providers who demonstrate exceptional commitment to inclusive practices, fostering healthy competition and encouraging continuous improvement.

Providers who achieve high levels of inclusivity could be awarded a specific label or tier that is visible and recognized by stakeholders, including learners, employers, and policymakers. These labels could focus on various dimensions of inclusion, such as:

- **Gender inclusivity:** Recognizing providers who have made significant strides in engaging women in typically male-dominated fields or in promoting gender-neutral training environments.
- **Disability access:** Awarding providers who have made their facilities, materials, and learning environments fully accessible to individuals with disabilities.

- **Community engagement:** Recognizing providers who have demonstrated exceptional outreach to marginalized communities, ensuring that their training programs meet the specific needs of these groups.

These labels or tiers would not only help **identify best practices** but also act as **incentives** for other institutions to follow suit, knowing that they too can be recognized for their efforts. Furthermore, inclusion excellence labels could serve as a means for **learners** to make informed choices about where to study, directing them towards institutions that are known for their commitment to **equity** and **accessibility**.

Recommendation 2 – Building foundations: Essential processes for inclusive accreditation

Creating an inclusive accreditation system within Vocational Education and Training (VET) requires a deliberate and thoughtful process that focuses on embedding inclusivity at every stage. It is not just about ensuring that institutions meet specific standards, but also about fostering a culture that promotes diversity, equity, and access to quality education for all learners, regardless of their backgrounds. Developing such a system is a multi-phase process that calls for collaboration, capacity-building, and continuous adaptation. Here are the essential steps to developing an inclusive accreditation system:

1. Review and revise existing accreditation standards to embed inclusion indicators

The foundation of an inclusive accreditation system begins with the **review and revision of existing standards** to ensure that they **embed inclusion indicators** at every level. Traditional accreditation processes may focus primarily on institutional capacity, quality assurance, and pedagogical effectiveness, but they may overlook the social equity aspects that are crucial for inclusive education.

Inclusive accreditation standards should be **aligned with international frameworks**, such as the **European Qualifications Framework (EQF)** and **ISO 21001**, ensuring consistency and comparability across borders.

However, simply adopting international norms is not enough. Accreditation standards should also be revised to incorporate **explicit inclusion criteria**, such as:

- **Access to education:** How inclusive are the entry requirements and admission procedures for learners from diverse socio-economic backgrounds?
- **Pedagogical approaches:** Are the teaching methods flexible and adaptive to the diverse needs of learners (e.g., those with disabilities, from rural areas, or from marginalized groups)?
- **Assessment methods:** Are assessment practices designed to accommodate different learning styles and backgrounds?

By revising accreditation standards to incorporate inclusion indicators, accrediting bodies can ensure that VET providers not only meet technical standards but also make a **real commitment to diversity and equity** in their programs.

2. Develop inclusive tools and templates for providers

Once the inclusive standards are revised, the next step is to provide **inclusive tools and templates** for VET providers. These tools should be designed to guide institutions in **self-assessing** their own practices, fostering a reflective approach to inclusion. Key tools might include:

- **Self-assessment guides:** These guides allow VET providers to evaluate their existing practices in terms of inclusivity. These tools should be **user-friendly**, offering clear instructions on how to assess institutional practices and highlight areas for improvement.
- **Equity checklists:** A checklist provides a practical tool to assess the equity of the learning environment. It should cover aspects like **curriculum design, access to resources, student support services**, and the **representation of marginalized groups** in both student bodies and teaching staff.
- **Inclusive curriculum guidelines:** These guidelines help VET providers design courses that are flexible, adaptable, and inclusive of diverse learning needs. The guidelines might include strategies for **universal design for learning (UDL)**, which aims to ensure that content is accessible to all learners, including those with disabilities or other learning barriers.

These tools should be **collaboratively developed**, incorporating feedback from a range of stakeholders, including **learners, teachers, employers, and civil society organizations**. They need to be **contextualized** to different types of providers and regions (e.g., rural vs. urban settings), ensuring that they are both **accessible and relevant**.

3. Build capacity among accrediting bodies and VET providers

Developing an inclusive accreditation system requires building the **capacity of both accrediting bodies and VET providers** to understand and apply inclusive quality assurance processes. This step ensures that all stakeholders are equipped to implement inclusive practices effectively.

For **accrediting bodies**, capacity-building involves training staff to evaluate institutions based on inclusive criteria. They need to understand the **nuances of inclusion**, such as how to assess whether a curriculum is truly accessible, whether recruitment processes are non-discriminatory, and whether support services are genuinely available to marginalized groups.

For **VET providers**, capacity-building means offering training programs, resources, and support to help them implement inclusive practices in their own institutions. This can include:

- **Professional development workshops** on inclusive pedagogy, disability inclusion, and gender sensitivity.
- **Peer learning networks** where institutions can exchange best practices and collaborate on inclusion strategies.
- **Technical assistance** for VET providers that may lack the resources or knowledge to meet inclusive accreditation standards.

This capacity-building phase must be **ongoing and supportive**, fostering a **culture of continuous improvement** in VET systems, where inclusivity is seen as an evolving goal rather than a static requirement.

4. Pilot inclusive accreditation processes in diverse settings

Before rolling out a full-scale inclusive accreditation system, it is essential to **pilot the new processes** in diverse settings, such as **urban and rural areas**, and within both **formal and informal learning environments**. Piloting offers an opportunity to gather critical feedback, identify challenges, and make necessary adjustments before the system is widely implemented.

This step involves selecting a **representative sample** of VET providers, ensuring that the pilot includes a **diverse range** of settings, from well-resourced institutions in urban centers to smaller, resource-limited providers in rural or marginalized areas. Feedback from these pilots will provide valuable insights into the **practical challenges** of applying inclusive accreditation standards in different contexts. For example, rural institutions may face unique barriers to accessibility that urban centers do not, and non-formal providers may need additional support to meet the standards of formal VET institutions. Key steps in the piloting process include:

- **Detailed assessments of inclusivity** within these institutions, including how well they address the needs of vulnerable populations.
- **Regular consultations with stakeholders** — including learners, local authorities, employers, and community representatives — to gauge their experiences and gather suggestions for improvement.
- **Iterative adjustments** based on pilot feedback, ensuring that the accreditation system is **adaptable** and can respond to the diverse challenges of different contexts.

5. Establish inclusive monitoring and feedback mechanisms

Finally, to ensure the long-term success and relevance of an inclusive accreditation system, it is crucial to **establish inclusive monitoring and feedback mechanisms**. These mechanisms should allow for **periodic updates** of the accreditation process and ensure that **learner-centered evaluation** is at the heart of the system.

Monitoring should be **data-driven**, with a focus on collecting **disaggregated data** to track how different learner groups (e.g., women, persons with disabilities, ethnic minorities) are benefiting from the system. This data can include:

- **Enrollment rates** of marginalized groups.
- **Completion rates** and success stories of learners from vulnerable populations.
- **Post-graduation employment outcomes** for these groups.

Feedback mechanisms should also be **inclusive**, enabling all stakeholders — including learners, communities, employers, and VET providers — to share their perspectives on how the accreditation system is functioning. This can include:

- **Surveys and consultations** with learners, particularly those from marginalized backgrounds, to understand their experiences with the accreditation system.
- **Focus groups** with VET providers to identify areas where they need additional support or resources.
- **Feedback loops** where stakeholders are encouraged to propose improvements and solutions.

This ongoing process of feedback and adaptation ensures that the accreditation system remains **dynamic**, responsive to the changing needs of learners, and **truly inclusive** over time.

3. Regulations and empowering support schemes for VET–Employment–Welfare Linkages

Achieving meaningful labor inclusion within VET systems requires **policy coherence**—a seamless alignment between **vocational education, employment strategies, and welfare policies**. Without this alignment, the potential for creating sustainable pathways to employment and social integration for marginalized groups is severely limited. The goal is to design systems where VET does not operate in isolation but is closely intertwined with labor market dynamics and social welfare provisions.

Inclusive policy coherence ensures that vulnerable individuals, such as youth, women, migrants, persons with disabilities, and marginalized communities, are not only trained but also adequately supported in their transition to work and economic independence. This holistic, integrated approach addresses the structural barriers that limit access to education and employment for these groups. Let's explore the essential components that shape such policy coherence.

Key general references include:

1. A coherent policy framework for inclusive VET adopts holistic, life-course approaches to learning and employment.

This means recognizing that learning and work are not isolated stages, but rather interwoven throughout a person's life. Policies must support individuals through various transitions—whether they are entering the labor market for the first time, returning after a period of unemployment, or reskilling for new career opportunities due to shifts in the economy.

Life-course approaches ensure that education and employment pathways are **flexible**, adaptable, and accessible at various stages of a person's life. They should not be limited to early-career or youth-focused programs but extend to **lifelong learning** opportunities, including:

- **Re-skilling** for adults who have been displaced by technological or economic shifts.
- **Up-skilling** to help workers adapt to emerging industries or sectors.
- **Retraining** for individuals who have dropped out of the workforce and seek to reintegrate.

Such an approach ensures that individuals can continue learning and building skills in ways that match the evolving needs of the labor market and the social services that support them.

2. Regulatory frameworks that incentivize partnerships between VET and employment/welfare services

For policy coherence to truly drive inclusion, there must be a strong **regulatory framework** that facilitates active partnerships between VET institutions and **employment services** (public and private), as well as **welfare systems**. These partnerships can significantly improve the impact and accessibility of VET programs by linking them to tangible job opportunities and social support systems. **Regulatory frameworks** should focus on:

- **Joint initiatives** that bring together VET providers, employers, and welfare agencies to design training programs that directly respond to labor market needs. These programs

should also take into account the barriers marginalized individuals face, ensuring training is not only relevant but also accessible to them.

- **Collaborative job matching** between VET providers and employers that ensures that training outcomes are directly aligned with labor market demands. This could involve establishing formalized agreements or partnerships that connect **jobseekers** with potential employers upon completing vocational programs.
- **Social protection** integration, ensuring that social safety nets such as unemployment benefits, housing support, or healthcare are linked with VET programs. This helps individuals during the period when they are training and searching for employment, ensuring that they are not left vulnerable due to gaps in social protections.

This regulatory framework not only strengthens the connections between education, employment, and social welfare, but also increases **opportunities for marginalized populations** by creating pathways that reduce barriers between these sectors. It ensures a **continuum of support** for vulnerable groups from education to employment.

3. Inclusion of career guidance, job matching, and social protection as part of the VET offer

A fully inclusive VET system should not only provide training but also integrated support services, such as **career guidance**, **job matching**, and **social protection**. These services ensure that learners can effectively transition from training to the workplace, making the educational experience more meaningful and the employment outcomes more sustainable.

- **Career guidance** plays a vital role in helping individuals navigate labor market realities, assess their strengths, and identify relevant career paths. This is especially crucial for vulnerable groups who may not have access to the networks and support systems that more privileged individuals take for granted. Career services should be **personalized**, addressing the unique needs of individuals from diverse backgrounds and helping them make informed decisions about their future careers.
- **Job matching** services are essential in directly linking graduates with job opportunities. This involves not just placing individuals in available roles, but matching them with positions that align with their skills, interests, and career aspirations. By establishing partnerships with employers, VET providers can facilitate **direct recruitment pathways** that streamline the transition from training to work.
- **Social protection** must be embedded as part of the VET offering to provide support to learners during their training and job search period. This could include **stipends**, **subsidies**, or access to essential social services such as **healthcare**, **housing assistance**, and **childcare**. Ensuring that social protection is integrated into VET programs helps to reduce the risk of poverty and exclusion, making it easier for vulnerable learners to complete their education and enter the workforce.

By embedding these supportive measures into the VET framework, policymakers create a **comprehensive support system** that sustains learners beyond their formal training, leading to higher retention rates and better long-term outcomes in employment.

4. Public-private partnerships supported by policy instruments

For effective and scalable inclusion strategies, **public-private partnerships (PPPs)** must be encouraged and facilitated through policy instruments. These partnerships can be pivotal in enhancing the quality and relevance of VET offerings, as well as ensuring that training programs are **sustainably funded** and accessible to all learners. Public-private partnerships often allow for:

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- **Shared funding and resources:** Government funding can be supplemented by private sector investments to expand the scope of VET offerings, especially in areas where public investment alone is insufficient.
- **Employer involvement:** Employers can offer valuable insights into the skills and competencies required in the labor market, allowing VET providers to tailor training programs to meet industry needs. These partnerships also help **bridge the skills gap**, ensuring that graduates are ready to step into roles where they are needed most.

Policy instruments such as **tax reliefs, vouchers, or employment-linked subsidies** can incentivize private-sector involvement in VET and inclusion efforts. For example, tax incentives for companies that provide apprenticeships, internships, or on-the-job training programs can encourage greater participation in the **co-design** of VET curricula and **workplace-based learning** opportunities.

Public-private partnerships can also drive **inclusive innovation**, particularly in areas like **dual learning models**, where individuals can learn in both classroom and workplace settings, gaining practical skills while also earning a wage. The role of **policy instruments** here is to create favorable conditions that make these partnerships both viable and sustainable in the long term.

5. ILO's Recommendation 195 and the EU's Upskilling Pathways Initiative

Two important global and regional frameworks provide valuable insights into policy coherence for labor inclusion within VET systems: the **International Labour Organization (ILO) Recommendation 195** and the **European Union's Upskilling Pathways Initiative**.

- **ILO's Recommendation 195** offers guidance on the promotion of lifelong learning and vocational education systems that support **decent work** and **inclusive development**. It calls for policies that encourage collaboration between education, labor, and social protection systems, ensuring that **vocational training** is accessible to all, particularly marginalized groups. The recommendation emphasizes the need for VET to be responsive to the demands of the labor market while also addressing the broader social needs of communities.
- The **EU's Upskilling Pathways Initiative** focuses on ensuring that adults, particularly those with low skills, have the opportunity to improve their qualifications and skills throughout their lives. This initiative aligns with the idea of a **holistic, life-course approach** to education and work, ensuring that adults who are outside of the formal labor market or who have outdated skills can access **personalized learning pathways** that help them re-enter the workforce and contribute to the economy.

Both of these frameworks provide essential guidance for policymakers seeking to create **coherent, inclusive policies** that bridge the gap between education, employment, and social welfare systems. They emphasize **collaboration, equity, and lifelong learning**, which are central to creating a fully inclusive VET system that benefits all members of society.

The case for integrated VET–Employment–Welfare systems

In many regions around the world, especially in areas where **inequality, informality, and vulnerability** are pervasive—such as parts of Latin America—the separation and fragmentation between **vocational education and training (VET), employment services, and welfare policies**

creates significant barriers to inclusion. When these services operate in silos, individuals, particularly from marginalized communities, are often left without the continuous support and tailored interventions they need to transition successfully from education to employment.

Fragmentation exacerbates exclusion, particularly for those who face multiple barriers to accessing opportunities, such as women, youth, people with disabilities, migrants, or those from low-income backgrounds. These groups are often caught between different systems that do not communicate or work together, leading to gaps in support, inefficiencies, and missed opportunities. This is why **integrated systems** are increasingly recognized as the **key solution** to addressing these systemic inequalities.

An **integrated VET–Employment–Welfare system** is an approach that connects the dots between **education, training, employment, and social protection** policies, ensuring that services work in a coordinated and collaborative way to provide a seamless experience for the learner or worker. This kind of integration is not just beneficial—it is essential for overcoming the barriers that vulnerable populations face in their journey toward meaningful employment and social inclusion.

Continuity of support across learning and working life

One of the core benefits of an integrated system is the **continuity of support** it provides across a person’s learning and working life. This continuity is crucial because many individuals, particularly those from disadvantaged backgrounds, face **interruptions** or **gaps** in their education or employment journey. These interruptions could be caused by a range of factors, such as financial constraints, family responsibilities, health issues, or discrimination in the job market. Without an integrated system, individuals may fall through the cracks between education, employment, and social welfare services, leaving them without the support they need to successfully transition from one phase to the next.

In an **integrated system**, individuals benefit from ongoing support that follows them from **training** into **employment**, and even after they are employed, into career progression and job security. For example, a worker who completes a VET program may immediately have access to **job placement services** and **career guidance**, ensuring a smooth transition into the labor market. Simultaneously, if they face barriers such as family obligations or health issues, the welfare system can step in with **social protection measures**, ensuring the individual does not fall back into poverty or exclusion.

This continuity is particularly critical for **marginalized populations**, who are more likely to experience disruptions or setbacks in their career paths. With integrated support systems, learners and workers have a safety net that helps them **sustain their progress** and **overcome obstacles** that might otherwise derail their efforts.

Tailored interventions for marginalized populations

One of the fundamental principles of inclusion is **tailoring interventions** to meet the specific needs of marginalized groups. The integrated approach ensures that support services are not generic but are instead customized to address the unique challenges faced by different communities.

For instance, **youth** may need **mentorship** and **career orientation** to make informed decisions about their future, whereas **migrant workers** may require additional language support, validation of

foreign qualifications, or help in adjusting to new labor market norms. Similarly, **women re-entering the workforce** after a period of family caregiving might benefit from **upskilling programs**, **childcare services**, and **mentoring** opportunities to help them regain their confidence and skills.

An integrated system allows for **cross-sectoral collaboration**, meaning that education, employment, and welfare services can work together to identify the most pressing needs of these groups and develop targeted solutions. This **personalized support** can include:

- **Vocational training programs** designed specifically for marginalized populations, such as programs tailored to women, disabled individuals, or rural youth.
- **Social support services** that provide financial assistance, healthcare, housing, or childcare, ensuring that learners can focus on their training or work without being distracted by immediate survival needs.
- **Job placement services** that are sensitive to the particular barriers different groups face, offering additional support to overcome challenges like discrimination or skill gaps.

Integrated systems ensure that the needs of **vulnerable populations** are addressed holistically, leading to **higher success rates** in both education and employment outcomes.

Efficient use of resources through coordination

When VET, employment, and welfare services operate in isolation, resources are often wasted due to **duplication of efforts**, **misaligned goals**, and **inefficient use of public funds**. Each service might be working towards similar goals but without a coordinated approach, leading to missed opportunities for synergy. For example, a training provider may offer courses that do not align with local labor market needs, while an employment agency may be unaware of the skills being developed in these courses, resulting in a mismatch between available training and actual job opportunities.

In an **integrated system**, resources are used more effectively because services are aligned, **coordinated**, and **strategically directed** toward shared goals. By breaking down silos and promoting **cross-sector collaboration**, integrated systems can avoid the duplication of services and focus resources on the areas that need them most. For instance:

- **Training programs** can be developed in consultation with **employers** and **welfare agencies**, ensuring that learners are acquiring the skills that match current labor market demands.
- **Job placement services** can be linked with **local welfare services**, so that individuals transitioning from training to employment also receive the support they need in terms of **housing**, **healthcare**, or **childcare**.
- **Funding mechanisms** can be streamlined so that both VET providers and social services can benefit from more efficient allocation, reducing bureaucracy and making the entire process more **user-friendly** for both service providers and beneficiaries.

The **efficiency** that comes from this coordination is not only beneficial for the service providers and policy makers—it ultimately **improves outcomes** for individuals, leading to **higher employability**, **increased participation** in the labor market, and **greater overall social inclusion**.

Higher employability outcomes, especially for people with complex needs

Perhaps the most compelling reason for adopting an integrated VET–Employment–Welfare system is the **significantly improved employability outcomes** for individuals, particularly those with **complex needs**. This includes people who face multiple and intersecting barriers to entering the labor market, such as **long-term unemployment, disability, lack of formal education, discrimination, and social marginalization**.

For these individuals, a traditional, fragmented system often fails to provide the **comprehensive support** they need to secure stable employment. However, in an integrated system, the combination of **training, job placement, and social services** ensures that individuals are not left unsupported at any stage of their journey.

By integrating services, individuals can access **holistic support** that not only provides **skills development** but also ensures that they have the necessary **social protections, career guidance, and job placement services**. This integrated approach leads to:

- **Reduced risk of long-term unemployment** by equipping individuals with relevant skills, linking them directly to job opportunities, and providing ongoing support.
- **Higher retention rates** in employment, as workers who face complex needs are supported with **mentoring, follow-up services, and access to welfare programs** when required.
- **Increased social mobility**, as individuals who may have previously been excluded from the labor market are now equipped to build sustainable careers and contribute to the economy.

Integrated systems lead to **long-term inclusion**, as they provide not only the **tools** for entering the labor market but also the **social capital and support structures** that ensure lasting success.

Key regulatory elements for integration and inclusion

Inclusion within the context of Vocational Education and Training (VET), employment services, and social welfare is not merely a matter of providing support to marginalized populations — it requires a **strategic regulatory framework** that actively encourages **collaboration, alignment of incentives, and shared responsibility** across all sectors involved.

Governments play a crucial role in creating the **legal and policy structures** that facilitate such collaboration, ensuring that individuals, particularly those from vulnerable backgrounds, have access to the training and resources they need to succeed in the labor market.

Key regulatory elements must focus on **enabling cross-sector collaboration, recognizing training as a fundamental right, and aligning incentives** that foster systemic inclusion and economic empowerment for all citizens. Below, we explore the fundamental **regulatory components** necessary to ensure that integrated systems for training, employment, and welfare are inclusive, effective, and sustainable.

Frameworks supporting inter-sectoral collaboration

For integrated systems to succeed, **governments must establish enabling legislation** that mandates or incentivizes collaboration between various sectors, including **VET providers, employment services, social welfare agencies, and community-based organizations.**

Legal frameworks play a critical role in creating a **coordinated, whole-of-government approach** to labor inclusion, ensuring that services work together in a way that benefits individuals, rather than leaving them to navigate a fragmented system on their own. Such legal frameworks might include several key components:

- **National or regional strategies for lifelong learning and inclusion:** Governments should develop long-term, inclusive strategies that promote **continuous learning** and **access to training** throughout a person's life. These strategies should be aligned with broader **labor market goals** and **social protection policies** to ensure that no one is left behind, regardless of their age, background, or prior educational attainment.
- **Cross-ministerial cooperation mandates:** Inclusion requires more than one government department working in isolation. Policies should mandate collaboration between ministries that handle **education, labor, social welfare, and economic development**, ensuring that all relevant parties share the responsibility for reducing exclusion and boosting employability.
- **Joint funding mechanisms:** Collaborative funding structures, such as pooled budgets or **shared financing** between ministries, incentivize agencies to work together toward common inclusion goals. By funding joint initiatives, the government can reduce inefficiencies and ensure resources are directed where they are most needed.
- **Interoperability of data systems:** Effective collaboration between VET providers, employment agencies, and social welfare systems requires seamless data sharing. Legal frameworks should ensure that **data systems are interoperable**, with clear **privacy safeguards** in place to protect the personal information of individuals. This enables agencies to track the progress of learners, link them with job opportunities, and connect them to relevant social services.

The **International Labour Organization's (ILO) Recommendation No. 195** encourages member states to design and implement integrated frameworks that link **training, employment, and labor market transitions**. By aligning national policies with international standards, governments can ensure that their systems are inclusive, responsive, and future-proof.

Recognition of training as a social right

One of the most powerful tools for promoting inclusion is to **recognize training as a social right**. When governments treat access to education and training as an entitlement, it sends a strong message that **every individual**, regardless of their circumstances, deserves the opportunity to acquire the skills they need to succeed in the labor market.

This approach is particularly important for individuals who are **unemployed, receiving social protection**, or belong to marginalized groups such as **youth not in education, employment, or training (NEETs)**, or **persons with disabilities**. To ensure training is accessible to all, governments must ensure that:

- **Training is cost-free or subsidized:** For many people in vulnerable situations, the cost of education or vocational training can be a significant barrier. By **subsidizing** or providing **free access** to VET programs, governments ensure that financial constraints do not prevent individuals from participating in education or training. This approach helps to eliminate one of the most persistent barriers to access for marginalized populations.
- **Training counts toward eligibility for social benefits:** Participation in training should be **linked to social protection** entitlements, such as unemployment benefits or disability assistance. This connection ensures that individuals who take part in education or training are not penalized or deprived of vital social services, providing them with the financial stability they need to focus on learning and skill development.
- **Flexibility in training formats:** Not all individuals can commit to full-time, in-person training programs. Flexible learning options, such as **part-time courses**, **modular attendance**, or **digital delivery**, are essential to ensure that training is accessible to people with different schedules, responsibilities, or circumstances (e.g., care responsibilities, part-time work).

Recognizing training as a **social right** ensures that no one is excluded from the opportunity to upskill or reskill, thus **promoting social equity** and **economic mobility** for all individuals, regardless of their starting point.

Policy instruments that align incentives

In addition to creating legal frameworks and recognizing training as a right, governments must implement **policy instruments** that align the incentives of various stakeholders—especially employers, social protection systems, and individuals. These instruments can encourage collaboration between the public and private sectors, incentivize employers to participate in inclusive practices, and ensure that individuals have the resources to access training. Key policy tools include:

- **Training vouchers for individuals on unemployment or social assistance:** To reduce the barriers to participation for individuals facing financial hardship, governments can provide **training vouchers** to those receiving unemployment benefits or social assistance. These vouchers can be used to access vocational programs and training courses, ensuring that people who need it most can still improve their skills and employability.
- **Wage subsidies or hiring incentives for employers:** Employers often face challenges when hiring individuals from marginalized groups, whether due to perceptions of risk, skill gaps, or lack of awareness. **Wage subsidies** or **hiring incentives** can encourage employers to take on **VET graduates**, especially those from vulnerable populations such as long-term unemployed individuals, migrants, or people with disabilities. These incentives reduce the financial risks for employers and promote **inclusive hiring practices**.
- **Social clauses in public procurement:** Governments can include **social clauses** in their public procurement processes, requiring companies that win government contracts to commit to training and employment programs for marginalized populations. By using **public procurement** as a tool to create employment opportunities, governments can drive systemic change, ensuring that **public sector funds** are used to promote inclusive labor practices.
- **Tax credits for companies offering apprenticeships or inclusive training opportunities:** Tax relief for businesses that provide **apprenticeships**, **on-the-job training**, or **inclusive training opportunities** further incentivizes employers to invest in workforce development. This not only helps businesses develop a skilled labor force but also ensures that **more**

vulnerable groups have access to **employment pathways** through practical, hands-on learning.

These **policy tools** are designed to **shift the burden** from the individual to the system, creating a more supportive environment for inclusive practices. By **activating employers as inclusion partners**, governments ensure that **employers are not just passive recipients** of talent but active contributors to the **inclusive labor market**.

Empowering support schemes for inclusive transitions

Ensuring successful transitions from **learning to employment** is a complex and multifaceted challenge, particularly for individuals facing **vulnerability, marginalization, or complex barriers**. It's not enough to simply provide **education and training** — individuals also need **targeted support schemes** that help them **navigate the transition** from the classroom to the workforce. These support mechanisms must be **accessible, holistic, and tailored to individual needs** to ensure that no one is left behind.

Beyond the regulatory frameworks that set the stage for integration, it is essential to have **practical interventions** that empower individuals with the tools, knowledge, and confidence to succeed in the labor market. Here, we explore three critical components of **empowering support schemes: career guidance and lifelong counselling, job matching and employer engagement, and social protection compatibility**.

These schemes are vital for ensuring that the most vulnerable populations are not only prepared for employment but are also given the necessary support to **succeed and thrive** in their new roles.

Career guidance and lifelong counselling

Career guidance plays a pivotal role in ensuring that individuals — especially those who are **low-skilled, unemployed, or facing career changes** — are equipped with the right tools and information to navigate their careers. In an inclusive VET system, **career services must be accessible, inclusive, and deeply embedded** within a network of **VET institutions, employment centers, and community organizations**.

For individuals in vulnerable situations, career guidance should go far beyond providing generic advice. It must be designed as a **dynamic, supportive process** that provides **ongoing mentoring, coaching, and accompaniment** throughout the **learning and employment journey**. Tailored career services should consider:

- **Low-skilled adults:** Adults with limited formal education or work experience may struggle with the transition into more skilled roles. Career guidance for these individuals should focus on building their confidence, addressing skill gaps, and mapping out **clear pathways** that lead to sustainable, long-term employment. **Mentoring programs** could help them build networks and navigate challenges.
- **People facing career changes:** Many individuals who experience career changes — whether due to economic shifts, retrenchment, or personal circumstances — need guidance on how to pivot and **acquire new skills**. Career services can help these

individuals understand how their existing skills are transferable to new industries or roles and provide them with the confidence to make these transitions.

- **Youth without prior labor market exposure:** Youth who have no experience in the formal labor market require particular attention. Career guidance should include **job-readiness programs, internship placements, and pre-employment training** to ensure that they are prepared to meet the demands of the workplace. Additionally, **mentoring and coaching** should be provided to support them as they enter the labor market for the first time.

Vulnerable populations can receive the personalized support they need to succeed. Guidance should be **proactive** — not just offering advice but actively referring individuals to opportunities and providing continuous follow-up to track progress.

Job matching and employer engagement

Once individuals are trained and ready for employment, the next critical step is to connect them with **relevant job opportunities**. An effective support scheme must include **job matching services** that **bridge the gap** between education and employment. This includes:

- **Identification of job opportunities suited to learner profiles:** Support services should not only match individuals with job vacancies but should also ensure that those vacancies align with the individual's **skills, experience, and career aspirations**. Through **personalized job matching**, services can provide tailored opportunities that lead to more sustainable employment outcomes.
- **Job fairs, platforms, or community brokers:** To facilitate these matches, the use of **job fairs, online platforms, or community brokers** (such as local job coordinators or peer mentors) can help connect job seekers with employers. These platforms should be **inclusive**, accessible to all, and focused on ensuring that underrepresented groups have **equal access** to available job opportunities.
- **Promotion of inclusive recruitment practices:** To ensure equal opportunities, job matching services should actively promote **inclusive recruitment practices**. This includes encouraging employers to adopt **bias-free recruitment processes**, such as using **blind recruitment** techniques or **structured interviews**, and implementing **mentorship programs** or **onboarding support** for new hires from vulnerable backgrounds.

Employer engagement is key to the success of job matching services. It is essential that **employers** are involved not only in the final stage of the process (hiring) but throughout the **design** of the VET program.

Employers should have input on what skills and competencies are required in their industries, helping to ensure that training aligns with **real-world demands**. Additionally, involving employers early in the process helps foster a **shared commitment** to inclusive practices and encourages employers to see themselves as active partners in the **integration** of vulnerable populations into the workforce.

Social protection compatibility

One of the most significant barriers to participation in training and education, particularly for individuals receiving social welfare benefits, is the fear of **losing access to benefits** while pursuing training opportunities.

As such, a robust **social protection compatibility** framework must ensure that individuals do not face financial penalties when engaging in training. Key components of social protection compatibility include:

- **Non-penalizing participation:** Regulations must ensure that **participation in training programs** does not lead to the suspension or reduction of **welfare entitlements**, such as unemployment benefits or housing assistance. By protecting participants' rights, they are more likely to take part in training without fear of losing their financial security.
- **Bridging mechanisms (e.g., “Training Allowances”):** For individuals transitioning from social benefits to employment, **training allowances** can help bridge the gap by providing **financial support** during the training period. These allowances can help cover essential living costs while individuals gain the skills they need to move into employment.
- **Clear information about rights and responsibilities:** Many individuals are not fully aware of how their **social protection entitlements** are impacted by training or employment. Governments must ensure that **clear and accessible information** is provided about rights and responsibilities, explaining how participation in training can positively impact their social benefits without resulting in penalties.

In addition to direct financial support, other **indirect barriers** to participation should be addressed, such as:

- **Childcare or eldercare availability:** Lack of affordable **childcare** or **eldercare services** can prevent individuals from accessing training programs. Support schemes should include provisions for **childcare subsidies** or **eldercare assistance** to ensure that family responsibilities do not hinder access to education or training.
- **Transportation subsidies:** Individuals living in rural or underserved areas may face challenges accessing training centers or employment opportunities due to transportation barriers. **Subsidized transport** or **travel allowances** can ensure that individuals can access the necessary services without financial strain.
- **Digital inclusion:** In today's world, **internet access** and digital literacy are critical for accessing training resources and employment opportunities. Support schemes must ensure that vulnerable populations have access to **digital devices**, **internet connectivity**, and **digital literacy training** to ensure that they can fully participate in modern learning and job matching services.

Multi-stakeholder governance and public-private partnerships

Successfully integrating vocational education and training (VET), employment services, and welfare policies into an **inclusive and coherent system** cannot be achieved by any single actor operating alone. Instead, it demands a model of **joint ownership** — one that brings together a wide range of stakeholders, each contributing their unique insights, resources, and capacities.

Multi-stakeholder governance and **public-private partnerships** are therefore essential pillars for building systems that are truly responsive to the **needs of diverse learners** and **local labor markets**. This collaborative approach ensures that integration is **dynamic**, **context-sensitive**, and **sustainable**, aligning the incentives and responsibilities of all key actors toward the **shared goal of inclusion**.

Establishing multi-stakeholder platforms for co-design

At the heart of effective governance lies the creation of **multi-stakeholder platforms** — formal or informal structures where **VET institutions, employers, trade unions, welfare agencies, local governments**, and **civil society organizations** come together to **co-design strategies** for education-to-employment transitions. These platforms serve several crucial functions:

- **Strategic alignment:** By involving all relevant actors from the beginning, platforms ensure that VET offerings, employment services, and welfare supports are **aligned** and **mutually reinforcing**, rather than fragmented.
- **Shared ownership and accountability:** When strategies are co-designed, all stakeholders feel a **shared responsibility** for outcomes, increasing the likelihood of **long-term commitment** and **continuous improvement**.
- **Diverse perspectives:** Inclusion of unions, NGOs, and representatives of marginalized communities ensures that policies and programs reflect a **wide range of needs**, rather than being limited to the perspectives of dominant groups.

For these platforms to be effective, they must be **institutionalized** (e.g., through official mandates or formal agreements) and **adequately resourced**, ensuring consistent participation and meaningful engagement.

Building territorial partnerships tailored to local dynamics

While national frameworks set the stage, **integration and inclusion happen locally**. **Territorial partnerships** — city, regional, or rural alliances — are critical for adapting strategies to the **specific needs of local labor markets** and **community dynamics**. Key features of successful territorial partnerships include:

- **Local labor market intelligence:** Local employers and employment services have direct insights into **sectoral demands, skill shortages, and emerging opportunities**. Territorial partnerships can harness this intelligence to **adapt training curricula, design internships, or target outreach** to underserved groups.
- **Context-sensitive solutions:** Rural areas, for example, may face different challenges (e.g., geographic isolation, digital divide) than urban centers (e.g., labor market saturation, informal employment). Territorial partnerships allow for **flexibility and customization** in policy and program implementation.
- **Community anchoring:** Partnerships that include **community-based organizations** can more effectively **build trust** with marginalized groups, helping to overcome barriers to participation such as mistrust of formal institutions or lack of awareness.

Effective territorial partnerships should be **dynamic, inclusive, and empowered to innovate**, with clear mandates and the capacity to mobilize **both public and private resources**.

Encouraging public-private innovation labs

In addition to traditional partnerships, there is an increasing need for **spaces of experimentation** where **new models of integration and inclusion** can be piloted, evaluated, and scaled.

Public-private innovation labs serve this purpose by creating environments where governments, private sector actors, VET providers, and civil society organizations collaborate to **test innovative solutions**. Innovation labs can focus on:

- **Piloting inclusive training-to-work pathways:** Developing and testing new models that combine vocational training, work experience, and social support for marginalized populations.
- **Developing technology-enabled solutions:** Using digital platforms for inclusive job matching, virtual internships, or remote career counseling services.
- **Testing incentive mechanisms:** Experimenting with different types of financial incentives for employers (e.g., subsidies, vouchers, tax credits) to promote the hiring of VET graduates from disadvantaged backgrounds.
- **Scaling best practices:** Successful pilots can be systematically evaluated and scaled across regions or sectors, accelerating systemic change.

Innovation labs should be characterized by a **culture of learning**, **risk tolerance**, and a **commitment to inclusion** as a non-negotiable design principle.

Recommendation 3 – Unlocking potential: Seamless VET-Employment Connections

For integration between vocational education (VET), employment services, and welfare policies to **truly deliver inclusion**, regulatory frameworks and support systems must be designed **holistically** — not as separate initiatives running in parallel, but as **interconnected parts** of a unified ecosystem.

This requires a deliberate set of steps to ensure that **infrastructure**, **incentives**, **coordination mechanisms**, and **human capacities** are all geared toward **removing barriers** and **empowering marginalized groups** to successfully transition into meaningful work and lifelong learning pathways.

Here's how to systematically build an **inclusive regulation and support ecosystem**:

1. Map existing linkages and gaps

Before creating new structures, it is critical to **understand the current landscape**. A comprehensive mapping exercise should be conducted at **both national and territorial levels** to:

- **Identify existing programs and services** that connect VET, employment, and welfare sectors.
- **Spot fragmentation and overlaps**, such as duplicated initiatives or areas where no service bridges exist.
- **Highlight bottlenecks** that disproportionately affect disadvantaged groups (e.g., eligibility barriers, lack of recognition between systems).
- **Document informal practices and local innovations** that could be scaled or formalized.

This diagnostic phase lays the foundation for **evidence-based coordination strategies**, ensuring that actions address real, context-specific needs rather than assumptions.

2. Establish coordination bodies or working groups

Mapping the system is only the first step — **sustained collaboration** must be institutionalized through the creation of **coordination bodies** or **inter-sectoral working groups**. These structures should:

- **Bring together representatives** from VET institutions, employment services, welfare agencies, employer organizations, trade unions, and community groups.
- Operate at **both strategic (policy) and operational (program delivery) levels**, ensuring that decisions translate into practice.
- Be **inclusive** in membership, giving voice to traditionally marginalized groups.
- Develop **joint action plans, cross-sectoral protocols, and shared service pathways**.

Ideally, these bodies are backed by **formal mandates or agreements** that outline roles, responsibilities, and mechanisms for dispute resolution, ensuring that collaboration is not based merely on goodwill but embedded into the governance architecture.

3. Design inclusive funding models

Resource allocation is a powerful lever for driving integration and inclusion. Traditional funding models often inadvertently reinforce silos or reward quantity over quality. Instead, new funding approaches should be **designed to incentivize collaboration and inclusion**. Examples include:

- **Outcome-Based Grants:** Funding is tied to meaningful outcomes, such as the sustainable employment of disadvantaged learners, rather than simply enrollment numbers.
- **Pooled Budgets:** Different ministries or agencies contribute to a common fund to support integrated initiatives.
- **Flexi-Funding for Tailored Supports:** Grants allow providers to offer personalized supports, such as childcare or transport subsidies, based on learner needs.
- **Incentives for Inclusive Employers:** Subsidies, tax credits, or public recognition for companies actively hiring VET graduates from marginalized groups.

By **aligning financial incentives with inclusive outcomes**, the system shifts from mere service provision to actively **engineering success** for all learners.

4. Develop shared monitoring and evaluation (M&E) frameworks

Integration without accountability risks drifting into tokenism. A **shared M&E framework** is essential to track progress, learn, and continuously improve. Inclusive M&E frameworks should:

- **Use common indicators** across sectors to measure effectiveness, equity, and access.
- **Include disaggregated data** (e.g., by gender, disability, rurality, migration status) to surface inequalities.
- **Measure quality, not just quantity**, for example:
 - % of VET graduates achieving sustainable employment
 - % of learners accessing supportive services
 - Satisfaction levels among disadvantaged participants
- **Promote transparency and shared learning** through regular reporting, joint evaluations, and public dissemination of findings.

This creates a **culture of continuous improvement** and ensures that systems remain responsive to changing needs.

5. **Build capacity in frontline staff**

Policies and funding models matter, but **implementation ultimately depends on people**. Frontline staff — whether they are VET tutors, employment counselors, or social workers — are the bridge between systems and individuals. Their understanding, attitudes, and skills are critical. Capacity-building efforts should focus on:

- **Training programs** on integrated approaches, cultural competence, and inclusive counseling techniques.
- **Peer exchanges** across sectors to build mutual understanding and foster joint problem-solving.
- **Tools and resources**, such as integrated service manuals, inclusive curriculum guidelines, or referral protocols.
- **Ongoing support**, through coaching, communities of practice, and knowledge-sharing platforms.

Investing in the **professional development of frontline staff** ensures that policies translate into **inclusive experiences** for every learner and jobseeker.



4. Processes and tools for accompaniment of people in vulnerable situations

Building truly **inclusive VET systems** requires going **beyond offering access to training** — it demands a commitment to **accompanying** each learner, particularly those in **vulnerable situations**, through their entire journey of growth, learning, and transition into employment.

For many vulnerable individuals, barriers are **not isolated**, but **intersecting**: economic hardship, social exclusion, trauma, disability, lack of formal education, care responsibilities, or geographic isolation. In this context, traditional, one-size-fits-all models fail.

Accompaniment is a **person-centered, relational, and empowering approach** that sees learners not just as participants but as whole individuals, deserving of **sustained support, dignity, and partnership** throughout their learning and employment pathways.

This approach requires a deliberate set of processes and tools designed to recognize and respond to complex realities. Key Processes for Effective Accompaniment includes (but are not limited to):

1. Early identification and outreach

The first step in inclusive accompaniment is **proactive engagement**. Many vulnerable individuals are **not visible** within traditional VET recruitment channels. Thus, early identification strategies should:

- **Conduct community-based outreach**, partnering with local organizations, faith groups, and social services.
- **Use accessible and trust-building communication**, ensuring that invitations to participate are culturally sensitive and jargon-free.
- **Identify hidden barriers** — such as undocumented migration status, mental health challenges, or caregiving responsibilities — that might prevent engagement.

Early outreach is not just about raising awareness — it is about **opening doors** for those who often feel excluded or invisible.

2. Use of competence-based profiling tools

Recognizing and building upon **existing strengths** is critical. Instead of focusing only on formal qualifications, accompaniment should use **competence-based profiling tools** (such as **ESCO**, the European Skills, Competences, Qualifications and Occupations framework) to:

- **Map existing skills** — whether acquired formally, informally, or non-formally.
- **Identify transferable competencies** applicable across sectors.
- **Spot learning gaps** without stigmatizing individuals.
- **Tailor learning and employment pathways** based on actual capacities and aspirations.

Profiling should be **collaborative and empowering**, helping individuals **see their own potential** rather than emphasizing deficits.

3. Development of individual action plans

Each learner's journey must be **personalized** through an **Individual Action Plan (IAP)**, co-constructed with their active participation. IAPs should:

- **Set short-, medium-, and long-term goals** in learning, personal development, and employment.
- **Outline tailored support measures**, such as language classes, life skills training, or mental health support.
- **Include flexible timelines**, recognizing that progress may not always be linear.
- **Integrate feedback mechanisms**, allowing the plan to evolve as circumstances change.

IAPs shift the focus from passive service delivery to **active co-creation**, fostering ownership and agency among learners.

4. Continuous mentoring, psychosocial support, and peer tutoring

Vulnerable learners need **ongoing accompaniment**, not just occasional check-ins. Effective support mechanisms include:

- **Mentoring relationships** with trained advisors who offer guidance, motivation, and advocacy.
- **Psychosocial support** through counselling services to address mental health needs, trauma recovery, or resilience building.
- **Peer tutoring and buddy systems**, where learners support each other, building solidarity and reducing isolation.

This ongoing, human-centered support helps learners **navigate setbacks, celebrate milestones, and build self-confidence** throughout their journey.

5. Engagement of families and communities

No individual exists in isolation. Especially for vulnerable groups, **family and community dynamics** play a major role in shaping opportunities and aspirations. Effective accompaniment models actively:

- **Involve families** in orientation sessions, celebrations of progress, and decision-making processes.
- **Partner with community organizations** to provide wraparound supports (childcare, transport, housing assistance).
- **Foster community ownership** of inclusion goals, combating stigma and building local support ecosystems.

When families and communities are part of the journey, learners benefit from **a stronger, more resilient network of encouragement and assistance**.

Defining “Accompaniment” in inclusive VET

In the context of **inclusive vocational education and training (VET)**, **accompaniment** goes far beyond traditional notions of guidance or counselling. It represents a **continuous, coordinated, and empowering form of support** that follows individuals throughout their **entire journey** — from

the initial stages of training, through job preparation, and into successful integration in the labor market.

At its heart, accompaniment is about **walking alongside the learner**, recognizing their unique strengths, challenges, aspirations, and evolving needs. It reflects a commitment not only to helping people **acquire skills**, but also to **nurturing the self-confidence, resilience, and agency** needed to sustain meaningful employment and personal growth.

Key Characteristics of Accompaniment

True accompaniment starts with **empathy** — the ability to deeply understand and relate to the learner's experiences, aspirations, and fears. Building **trust** is fundamental: many individuals in vulnerable situations have experienced institutional betrayal, exclusion, or discrimination.

Through **consistent, respectful, and non-judgmental interactions**, accompaniment professionals create safe spaces where learners feel valued and heard. Trust is **the bridge** that allows support to be effective, transformative, and lasting.

1. There is no one-size-fits-all journey in inclusive VET.

Accompaniment emphasizes the creation of **individualized learning and employment pathways**, tailored to each person's:

- Prior knowledge and experience
- Personal goals and motivations
- Life circumstances and constraints
- Strengths, aspirations, and passions

Personalized pathways honour **diversity of journeys** rather than forcing learners into rigid, pre-determined tracks. They allow for **flexibility, creativity, and responsiveness** along the way.

2. People's needs cannot be compartmentalized into neat categories like "education" or "employment."

Effective accompaniment recognizes the **whole person** and addresses **multiple dimensions** of inclusion, such as:

- Health and psychosocial well-being
- Housing stability and transportation
- Childcare and family responsibilities
- Financial and legal barriers
- Digital access and literacy

This often requires building **multi-sectoral networks** that integrate services across **education, social work, employment, health, and community development**.

Accompaniment acts as the **weaving thread** that connects these sectors into a coherent and supportive safety net.

3. In accompaniment models, the learner is not a passive recipient of services but an active agent in their own journey.

Processes are co-created, not imposed. Learners participate in:

- Setting goals
- Identifying strengths and needs
- Designing action plans
- Evaluating progress and re-adjusting strategies

This approach fosters **ownership, self-efficacy, and a sense of dignity**. Rather than being "helped," learners are **empowered** to lead their own transformation.

4. Accompaniment does not end when a course finishes or a certificate is awarded.

True accompaniment offers **continuity** throughout key transitions, including:

- Moving from training to internships or apprenticeships
- Navigating job searches and interviews
- Adjusting to new work environments
- Planning for career growth and further education

The support extends **beyond the classroom** and into the **real-world contexts** where success and resilience are tested. Continuous accompaniment **bridges the gap** between learning and sustainable livelihoods.

5. At its core, accompaniment is not only about facilitating access to technical skills.

It is about **strengthening the foundational capacities** that underpin lifelong success:

- **Self-efficacy:** The belief in one's ability to achieve goals.
- **Confidence:** The assurance to pursue opportunities and face challenges.
- **Resilience:** The capacity to recover from setbacks and persist toward aspirations.

By investing in accompaniment, VET systems become **agents of social transformation**, helping to dismantle cycles of exclusion and unlocking the potential of individuals who might otherwise be left behind.

Key Processes in Inclusive Accompaniment

In the world of inclusive vocational education and training (VET), accompaniment is not a one-off intervention — it is a **living, evolving process**. It begins before a person even enters the training system and extends long after they take their first steps into employment. **It weaves together early outreach, deep understanding of each individual**, personalized planning, and constant, caring support. Each phase is critical to building a real bridge from exclusion to empowerment.

The journey of inclusive accompaniment begins with **early identification and outreach**, reaching those who may otherwise remain invisible. Many vulnerable individuals — whether isolated by poverty, discrimination, rurality, or trauma — are not actively seeking training opportunities.

Not because they lack ambition, but because barriers have discouraged or disconnected them. Inclusive systems recognize that it is not enough to simply “open doors” and wait. Outreach must be **proactive**, going out into neighborhoods, shelters, community centers, or places of worship —



wherever people feel safe and connected. It relies on trusted intermediaries: NGOs, social workers, community leaders, or even alumni who themselves have walked similar paths. Through these bridges of trust, the message becomes clear: **VET is for you, too**. It is not a privilege reserved for the few.

Once connection is established, the next step is a **deep, empathetic needs assessment and competence profiling**. This is far from a bureaucratic formality; it is a process of discovery and recognition. Here, practitioners seek to understand the whole person — their existing skills, untapped talents, life experiences, aspirations, and the barriers they face.

Competence mapping tools like the ESCO framework can help structure this exploration, but the real art lies in **co-creating** the assessment with the individual, not imposing it upon them. It must be a respectful, culturally sensitive process, designed to affirm dignity, not expose deficits. Whether through digital tools or paper-based formats adapted for low-literacy users, the profiling process must feel accessible, human, and empowering.

From this foundation emerges the **Individual Action Plan (IAP)** — a living roadmap, crafted in partnership with the learner. More than a checklist, the IAP is a mutual commitment: **a vision for where the learner wants to go**, and a flexible, responsive plan for how to get there. It outlines not just learning objectives, but the entire ecosystem of support needed: from transport and childcare to psychosocial counselling and job placements. It identifies **key milestones**, but it also allows room for detours, revisions, and new dreams as confidence and opportunities grow. In this way, the IAP is not a static document, but a dynamic compass guiding the learner's evolving journey.

True accompaniment recognizes that no single actor can carry this process alone. **Integrated, multidisciplinary support** becomes essential. Around each learner, a network is woven: VET tutors bring pedagogical expertise; social workers address welfare and family needs; job counsellors offer pathways into employment; mental health professionals tend to emotional well-being; cultural mediators bridge linguistic or cultural gaps.

In some models, a single case manager or “navigator” acts as the central thread, coordinating these diverse supports into a seamless experience. What matters most is that learners never feel like a number passed from office to office — they experience **coherent, continuous care**.

Finally, accompaniment would not be complete without **continuous mentorship and peer support** embedded in the learning experience itself. Formal mentors — whether staff members or trained volunteers — offer steady guidance and emotional encouragement. But often, it is peer mentoring that has the greatest transformative power.

When learners are supported by others who have shared similar experiences, a different kind of hope is transmitted: a belief that “if they could do it, so can I.” Peer tutoring, buddy systems for internships, informal support groups — these simple structures create solidarity and belonging. They turn training from an isolated struggle into a collective, human journey.

Inclusive accompaniment creates not just skilled workers, but resilient individuals who can navigate life's uncertainties with agency and hope. It reminds us that education is not a transaction — it is a **relational, transformative act** of recognizing, nurturing, and walking beside another human being as they step into their future.

Tools for effective accompaniment

Accompaniment in inclusive VET is not only about human relationships — it is also about the thoughtful use of tools that empower learners, reveal hidden needs, and ensure their voices shape their journey. Tools, when designed with empathy and clarity, can become bridges to greater self-awareness, agency, and success.

One of the most powerful tools in this regard is the **Digital Portfolio or Learner Passport**. More than just a collection of certificates, a learner passport acts as a living archive of the individual's growth. It allows learners to document skills they have acquired — whether formally through courses, or informally through life experience, volunteering, or work. It provides space for self-reflection, for capturing feedback received along the way, for updating personal action plans, and for displaying tangible achievements like micro-credentials or certificates.

Crucially, it also tracks less tangible but **equally vital indicators such as job readiness, soft skills, and aspirations**. For those who may have a fragmented or non-linear educational background, this kind of personal record is a vital tool for building self-confidence and for showcasing their journey to future employers or institutions. The portfolio becomes a mirror in which learners can see — and be proud of — how far they have come.

However, technical skills and achievements are only part of the picture. Often, hidden social barriers can derail even the most motivated learner if left unaddressed. This is where **Social Needs Checklists** play a vital role. Administered with sensitivity at intake or during key checkpoints, these tools help uncover issues that might otherwise remain invisible: food insecurity, unstable housing, lack of personal documentation, exposure to violence, caregiving burdens, or gender-based constraints.

Understanding these realities is essential because true educational success depends not just on classroom performance, **but on the stability of a person's entire life environment**. Identifying these needs early allows support teams to connect learners with external services — social housing agencies, food banks, legal aid, mental health counseling — that can create the conditions for learning to truly take root.

True accompaniment also means ensuring that learners are not passive recipients of support, but active participants in shaping their own experience. **Feedback and self-reflection tools** are vital to closing this loop. Learner diaries or storytelling exercises give individuals a structured way to reflect on their progress, struggles, and achievements in their own words. Periodic satisfaction surveys — carefully adapted for different literacy levels — offer another structured opportunity to capture feedback.

Anonymous feedback boxes and group dialogue sessions create safe spaces where learners can express concerns, suggest improvements, and feel that their voices matter. These simple but powerful mechanisms help humanize the learning environment and send a clear message: **you are not just a student here; you are a co-creator of this space**.

When used thoughtfully, these tools do more than gather data — they build **trust, agency, and visibility**. They transform accompaniment from a service *done to* individuals into a shared journey *walked with* them, where every achievement is seen, every barrier is addressed, and every voice is heard.

Engaging families and communities

In contexts marked by vulnerability, the path to education and employment is rarely walked alone. Family attitudes, community perceptions, and social expectations can deeply influence whether an individual even steps onto the VET pathway — and whether they stay the course. This is why inclusive accompaniment must reach beyond the walls of the training center, weaving families and communities into the fabric of the learning journey.

Engagement often begins with **family information sessions**, simple yet powerful gatherings where caregivers, siblings, or partners can hear directly about the value and possibilities that VET offers. In many cases, mistrust, fear, or misconceptions about vocational education persist, especially among families who have themselves experienced exclusion or precarious employment. By demystifying the training process, explaining future opportunities, and showcasing success stories, **these sessions help turn families from passive bystanders into active supporters of the learner's aspirations.**

Sometimes, however, more personal and targeted interventions are necessary. **Home visits**, carried out in partnership with social services, can be transformative. Meeting families in their own spaces conveys respect, reduces logistical barriers, and opens more honest conversations about challenges the learner might be facing — whether economic, emotional, or cultural. **These visits are not inspections; they are opportunities to build trust, to offer reassurance, and to co-create solutions tailored to the household's needs.**

Celebrating milestones together is another vital way to nurture these bonds. **Involving caregivers in key moments**, such as graduation ceremonies or award presentations, turns what might have been an isolated personal achievement into a **shared community triumph**. It publicly acknowledges the invisible support that families often provide — encouragement, sacrifices, quiet hope — and strengthens their emotional investment in the learner's continued success.

At the broader community level, accompaniment strategies can be reinforced by identifying and empowering **community champions** — individuals who, by their own example, embody the transformative potential of education and inclusion. These champions might be former learners, respected elders, faith leaders, or local business owners who can advocate for VET participation in authentic and culturally resonant ways. Their voices carry a **legitimacy that formal institutions often struggle to achieve.**

When families and communities are engaged not as obstacles but as **partners**, the sustainability and legitimacy of the VET journey are profoundly strengthened. The learner no longer advances alone; they are buoyed by a network of belief and support that makes success not only possible, but natural. This collective approach is not an “add-on” to accompaniment — it is one of its deepest foundations.

Recommendation 4 – Enabling transformation: Empowering and supporting vulnerable learners

At its core, accompaniment is not about delivering charity or offering handouts. True accompaniment is about **building capacity** — unlocking the potential that already exists within individuals, and giving them the tools, the confidence, and the opportunities to act on it.

When done well, accompaniment restores **agency** to those who may have been told, again and again, that they have little control over their futures. It **rebuilds confidence**, piece by piece, through the achievement of milestones that might once have seemed unreachable. It nurtures a new internal narrative — not one of dependence or deficit, but of resilience, competence, and self-worth. Over time, individuals come to see themselves not as passive recipients of support, but as **active contributors** to their communities and economies: workers, entrepreneurs, leaders, role models.

Yet the impact of accompaniment does not stop at the individual level. It also acts as a powerful catalyst for **institutional transformation**. VET providers that embrace inclusive accompaniment inevitably find themselves shifting their own cultures and practices. They become more **adaptive**, recognizing that a one-size-fits-all approach to education leaves too many behind. They grow more **learner-centered**, designing flexible pathways, modular learning, and wrap-around supports that respond to real lives, not idealized models. And they evolve into truly **socially responsive institutions**, where inclusion is not a project but a defining principle.

This dual transformation — of individuals and of institutions — is the true promise of inclusive VET systems. It is a slow, relational process, not a mechanical one. But in the end, it is what creates societies where no talent is wasted, no aspiration is dismissed, and no future is foreclosed simply because of where someone starts.

Accompaniment, at its best, is not about helping the vulnerable "catch up" to a predetermined norm. It is about **reshaping the system itself**, so that diversity is seen not as a problem to fix, but as a strength to embrace.

5. Support schemes and tools to enhance VET–enterprise dialogue

Strong collaboration between VET institutions and enterprises is not just a technical necessity — it is the backbone of an inclusive, future-ready skills ecosystem. **Without genuine, sustained dialogue between the worlds of education and work, training risks becoming disconnected from real labor market needs**, leaving learners — especially those from vulnerable backgrounds — stranded at the margins of opportunity.

Building this bridge requires more than occasional roundtables or surveys. **It calls for institutionalized, co-owned mechanisms that foster continuous, trust-based, and mutually beneficial partnerships**. For enterprises, this means gaining access to skilled, motivated talent aligned with their evolving needs. For VET providers, it means staying agile, relevant, and socially impactful. And for learners, particularly those facing systemic barriers, it means gaining pathways to dignity, employment, and empowerment.

Several tools and support schemes can anchor and animate this dialogue. One of the most transformative is **joint curriculum development**, where employers actively shape the design and updating of training programs to reflect real-world competencies and future skill demands. This partnership ensures that learning stays alive, dynamic, and market-relevant.

Work-based learning opportunities — including apprenticeships, internships, and cooperative education models — further solidify the bond between education and employment. Through these experiences, learners do not just acquire technical skills; they also build social capital, professional confidence, and critical networks that are often otherwise inaccessible to marginalized groups.

Dual training models, combining classroom instruction with structured periods of work in enterprises, provide a particularly powerful platform for inclusive transition into the labor market. These models immerse learners in professional environments early, facilitating smoother, faster, and more sustainable employment outcomes.

To encourage enterprises to participate actively — and inclusively — in these partnerships, **incentives** such as grants, tax credits, or public recognition (e.g., inclusive employer awards) can be highly effective. Additionally, **public procurement policies** that require training commitments from contractors (social clauses) can mobilize private sector participation in workforce development, particularly benefiting disadvantaged groups.

Modern technology also offers new frontiers for dialogue. **Digital platforms** can enable real-time communication, job opportunity matching, and feedback loops between VET institutions, learners, and employers. They democratize access, breaking down geographic and social barriers that traditionally limited who could benefit from employer engagement.

Ultimately, a truly inclusive VET–enterprise partnership is about much more than skills matching. It's about rewriting the rules of access, merit, and opportunity. It's about ensuring that talent is recognized wherever it lies — and that no potential remains locked away due to lack of connection, confidence, or visibility.

Structured, forward-looking cooperation between VET and enterprises, anchored in shared ownership and sustained dialogue, is not a luxury. It is the foundation for building equitable, dynamic, and prosperous societies where everyone has a fair shot at success.

Why VET–Enterprise dialogue matters especially for inclusion

The dialogue between Vocational Education and Training (VET) institutions and enterprises is not just a matter of aligning curricula with market needs; it is a transformative process that ensures education is both relevant and inclusive. **This collaboration is vital for creating pathways that empower vulnerable and marginalized groups, reducing inequalities and fostering diverse, fairer labor markets.** Let's explore why this dialogue is crucial, particularly from an inclusion perspective.

The benefits outlined above demonstrate that inclusion in vocational education is not something that can be achieved through classroom efforts alone. **Employers must be active, engaged partners, not only in ensuring that curricula reflect labor market needs but also in fostering inclusive pathways into employment.** To truly address systemic inequities and empower individuals, especially those from vulnerable backgrounds, there must be a sustained effort to integrate workplace learning, mentorship, and direct connections with employers throughout the educational journey.

For VET to be genuinely inclusive, employer engagement needs to be intentional — not sporadic or reactive. It must be a long-term commitment that is built into the structures of VET systems, not something that can be sidelined when short-term needs arise.

Moreover, this engagement needs to be empowered, with clear incentives, ongoing dialogue, and real collaboration. Only then can we ensure that all learners, regardless of background or circumstance, have an **equal opportunity to develop their skills**, gain meaningful employment, and thrive in an ever-changing labor market.

Reduces mismatch between training and labor market needs

One of the greatest challenges faced by education systems worldwide is the growing gap between what is taught in classrooms and what industries require. **Too often, learners graduate with skills that are no longer in demand or find themselves ill-prepared for the specific challenges of the workplace.** This is especially true for disadvantaged groups who, without employer engagement, may miss out on opportunities to acquire relevant, up-to-date skills.

Through strong VET–enterprise dialogue, curricula can be continuously updated to reflect the real-time demands of the labor market. **Enterprises can provide invaluable insights into emerging trends, technological innovations, and shifts in skills demand.** This ensures that learners graduate with skills that are directly applicable to the workplace, reducing the risk of unemployment and underemployment. Importantly, this type of alignment ensures that VET programs are not working in a vacuum but are purposefully oriented toward meeting the demands of industries, making education a more dynamic and responsive tool for economic participation.

Improves curriculum relevance and workplace preparedness

When VET institutions and employers collaborate on curriculum design and development, they create a curriculum that is both robust and tailored.

The involvement of employers ensures that training is not only theoretical but also practical, equipping learners with the **hands-on experience and industry-specific knowledge that employers seek**. This collaboration leads to a learning process that is both grounded in academic rigor and relevant to real-world applications.

Moreover, when enterprises are part of the curriculum development process, they can ensure that learners are prepared for the actual work environment, not just in terms of technical skills but also soft skills such as teamwork, communication, and problem-solving. **These competencies are crucial for navigating workplace dynamics, especially for marginalized groups who may face additional barriers such as social isolation or discrimination**. A curriculum co-created with the input of employers ensures that learners are more confident, capable, and ready to hit the ground running when they enter the workforce.

Enhances pathways into quality employment, especially for disadvantaged groups

For individuals from vulnerable or marginalized backgrounds — such as women, people with disabilities, migrant workers, or those from rural areas — access to stable, high-quality employment can feel like an insurmountable challenge. **Discrimination, lack of professional networks, and limited access to work placements often exacerbate their exclusion from meaningful job opportunities**. VET–enterprise collaboration addresses these barriers by providing learners with direct access to employers, mentorship, and internship opportunities.

When enterprises actively participate in the training process, they open up avenues for work-based learning, apprenticeships, and internships that provide real-world experience. **These pathways offer marginalized individuals the chance to develop on-the-job skills, expand their networks, and prove their value to employers in a tangible way**.

Employers who are involved in VET programs are more likely to recognize the potential in individuals who may otherwise have been overlooked, fostering a more inclusive hiring process. This not only improves employability but also creates a more diverse and resilient workforce that benefits everyone.

Exposes employers to diversity, building more equitable hiring cultures

Many employers, particularly those who have not traditionally engaged with diverse groups, may be unaware of the value that such diversity brings to their organizations. **VET–enterprise partnerships provide a platform for employers to engage directly with individuals from different socio-economic, cultural, and educational backgrounds**. As they interact with VET learners, employers begin to see first-hand the skills, perspectives, and capabilities that these individuals bring to the table.

This exposure is essential for building more inclusive and equitable hiring practices. Employers who witness the value of diverse talent firsthand are more likely to develop inclusive recruitment strategies, **remove unconscious biases from their hiring processes, and adopt workplace cultures that celebrate diversity**. Over time, this leads to the normalization of diversity within the workplace, not as an afterthought or a compliance measure but as a core value that enhances organizational performance and culture.

Creates co-ownership, encouraging investment in skills development

One of the most powerful outcomes of VET–enterprise dialogue is the creation of a shared sense of responsibility for skills development. When enterprises are directly involved in shaping training programs, they don't just see themselves as consumers of talent but as **active partners in nurturing the workforce of tomorrow**. This partnership creates a sense of co-ownership, where both VET institutions and enterprises work together toward the same goal: to ensure that learners are equipped with the skills, experiences, and confidence they need to thrive in the workforce.

This shared responsibility encourages enterprises to invest in the training process, not just in terms of providing input on curricula but also in the form of **funding, mentoring, and offering work placements**. It strengthens the relationship between education and the labor market, making it more sustainable and dynamic.

When businesses see the direct benefits of engaging with VET systems — such as a more qualified, skilled, and diverse pool of candidates — they are more likely to **invest in further developing these partnerships**, thus creating a continuous cycle of skills development and employment.

Key schemes and tools to foster dialogue

Fostering a strong, continuous dialogue between Vocational Education and Training (VET) systems and enterprises is key to ensuring that education meets real-world labor market needs, promotes inclusion, and provides meaningful employment opportunities.

To make this dialogue effective and inclusive, **it is crucial to implement structured schemes and tools that foster collaboration**, build trust, and create sustainable partnerships. Below are some of the most impactful schemes and tools that can help institutionalize VET–enterprise dialogue:

Joint curriculum design and validation

One of the most direct ways to ensure that VET programs align with labor market needs is through joint curriculum design and validation. **When enterprises actively participate in the creation of curricula, the training is much more likely to reflect current market demands and emerging industry trends**. This co-design process helps bridge the gap between theoretical knowledge and practical application, ensuring that learners are equipped with the specific skills employers are seeking.

The process typically involves setting up **sectoral advisory boards** or committees that include representatives from both VET institutions and enterprises. These boards regularly conduct **needs analysis** and gather **feedback loops** from employers to keep the curriculum updated and relevant.

Moreover, involving employers in **assessment design** and **certification** ensures that the training outcomes are closely tied to what is valued in the workplace, making the certification more meaningful to both learners and employers.

From an inclusive perspective, it is essential to encourage the participation of **small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), social enterprises**, and employers that are particularly open to hiring underrepresented or marginalized groups. These groups may not always be part of traditional curriculum design discussions, yet they are often the key to creating more diverse, accessible opportunities. By actively engaging such employers, VET programs can help shape a more inclusive and representative labor market.

Work-Based Learning (WBL) Schemes

Work-Based Learning (WBL) schemes, such as internships, apprenticeships, traineeships, and on-the-job learning placements, **are the most effective ways to transition learners from education to employment**. WBL is invaluable because it offers learners the opportunity to apply theoretical knowledge in real-world settings, providing a deeper understanding of job requirements and workplace dynamics.

However, for WBL to be most effective, it must be formalized, quality-assured, and integrated into learning pathways, rather than treated as optional extras or add-ons. WBL should not only be about gaining work experience; it should be an **essential part of the educational process**, contributing to the learner's competencies and skills development.

To support successful WBL placements, it's important to establish **mentoring structures** within companies. These mentors play a key role in supporting young or vulnerable interns by offering guidance, providing emotional support, and ensuring that the placement is a positive and educational experience. This also helps vulnerable groups, such as youth or people with disabilities, feel empowered and supported as they navigate the complexities of entering the workforce.

Dual training models

The dual training model combines classroom learning with structured, hands-on training in the workplace, providing learners with the best of both worlds. **This system offers deep immersion into professional environments** and equips learners with the practical, job-ready skills that employers demand.

The success of dual training models depends on having **clear legal frameworks** that outline the roles and responsibilities of both VET institutions and companies. These frameworks ensure that there is a mutual understanding of what is expected from each party. **Training agreements** with companies should be established to formalize the arrangement and ensure that both parties are committed to the learning process.

Moreover, the learning outcomes for the training should be **competence-based**, with clear standards shared between the classroom and the workplace. **Shared evaluation systems** ensure that the progress of the learner is continuously assessed both in the VET institution and in the workplace, providing a holistic view of the learner's development.

While dual systems are highly effective, they may not always be feasible in lower-middle-income countries (LMICs) due to resource constraints. In such contexts, **modular or partial dual systems** can be more adaptable and practical, offering a flexible approach that can still deliver the benefits of the model while accounting for local capacity and needs.

Incentive mechanisms for enterprises

To encourage wide participation in VET–enterprise collaborations, it is essential to provide **incentives for companies**, especially small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) that may lack the resources to support extensive training programs. Public authorities can play a pivotal role in offering **grants** or **stipends** to companies that host learners for internships or apprenticeships. Additionally, **tax deductions** for training investments can encourage companies to make a long-term commitment to skills development.

Another effective tool is **public recognition schemes** such as awards, labels, or visibility programs that celebrate companies for their contributions to training and inclusion. These schemes not only help companies feel valued but also create an environment of healthy competition, where businesses are motivated to invest more in the training of their workforce.

Moreover, **subsidies for inclusive hiring**, such as hiring youth, women, or people with disabilities, can help level the playing field and reduce discrimination in the hiring process. These incentives can encourage companies to create more inclusive and diverse workplaces, improving opportunities for marginalized groups.

Public procurement and social clauses

Public procurement is another powerful tool for fostering VET–enterprise collaboration. Governments can include **social clauses** in public contracts that incentivize companies to contribute to VET initiatives. For example, companies that hire VET graduates from disadvantaged groups or offer training opportunities to learners can receive advantages or preferential treatment when bidding for public contracts.

This approach aligns public procurement with broader social goals, **creating a market-driven incentive for companies** to invest in skills development and inclusive hiring. By attaching training and hiring obligations to public procurement, governments can ensure that enterprises are not just participants in the labor market but also active partners in building an inclusive and skilled workforce.

To facilitate this process, **model clauses and templates** for procurement contracts can be developed at regional or national levels, ensuring that companies are clear about the expectations and benefits of participating in such schemes.

Digital platforms and matching tools

Technology has a transformative role to play in enhancing VET–enterprise dialogue. Digital platforms can streamline cooperation, facilitate communication, and create new opportunities for

learners and employers. These platforms can serve as **matchmaking tools**, connecting VET learners with internships, apprenticeships, or full-time job opportunities. By allowing companies to post their **skills needs** and offering learners a platform to showcase their **portfolios** and **job readiness**, digital tools make it easier for both sides to find the right match.

In addition, digital platforms can support real-time feedback on curriculum relevance, enabling employers to provide input on the skills they need and the performance of VET learners. Virtual **job fairs** and **employer Q&A sessions** can help bridge geographical gaps, particularly in rural or remote areas where in-person interactions are limited.

By utilizing digital tools, VET–enterprise dialogue becomes more inclusive, more accessible, and more dynamic. These platforms allow for ongoing, flexible engagement between learners, institutions, and employers, creating new opportunities for collaboration and support.

Building sustainable dialogue structures

To ensure that the collaboration between VET systems and enterprises remains impactful, it is essential to move beyond sporadic or one-time consultations. **Sustainable dialogue structures must be embedded in the systems of governance**, industry, and education. These structures need to be recurrent, inclusive, and systematic, enabling continuous communication between stakeholders.

The core of these dialogue mechanisms is to create platforms that are not just about occasional meetings but are instead institutionalized bodies that have the power to **influence policy, curriculum, and labor market strategies**. These platforms should be designed with specific roles and mandates, ensuring that they are both effective and sustainable over the long term. Here are some key mechanisms and structures that help institutionalize this dialogue and foster an ongoing, productive exchange between VET systems and enterprises.

Sectoral skills councils with public-private membership

A key structure for fostering long-term dialogue is the creation of **Sectoral Skills Councils**, which bring together stakeholders from both the public and private sectors to collaborate on skills development. These councils are composed of industry leaders, employer representatives, VET institutions, and public authorities. Their role is to continuously assess and anticipate the skills needs of specific industries, ensuring that the VET system is in sync with labor market demands.

These councils **operate as a bridge** between VET institutions and enterprises, allowing both sectors to have an ongoing conversation about the relevance of training programs, emerging skills needs, and labor market trends. Importantly, they also play a role in aligning national and regional skills strategies, ensuring that the education system is agile and responsive to changes in the economy and technology.

One of the primary functions of a Sectoral Skills Council is to provide **advice** to policymakers, institutions, and employers on which skills are required for the future and how VET institutions can adapt to meet those needs. For inclusion, it is vital that these councils consider the needs of marginalized groups, ensuring that skills development is broad, inclusive, and accessible to all sectors of society.

Local Skills Ecosystem Platforms

At a more localized level, **Local Skills Ecosystem Platforms** play a critical role in strengthening the connection between VET institutions, enterprises, municipalities, and local communities. These platforms typically involve **chambers of commerce**, VET providers, local businesses, and municipal authorities, working together to ensure that education and training are aligned with the regional labor market's demands. They also serve as hubs for innovation, allowing the public and private sectors to collaborate on new training programs or employment initiatives.

These platforms facilitate the coordination of local training programs, ensuring that learners have access to relevant educational opportunities that directly correspond to local industry needs. Furthermore, by involving local governments and community organizations, **these platforms ensure that social inclusion and regional development are central to the dialogue**. They also encourage community-based solutions to skills gaps and unemployment, helping to create local employment opportunities that benefit residents.

VET–Enterprise liaison units within training institutions

Another effective structure for fostering ongoing dialogue is the establishment of **VET–Enterprise Liaison Units** within VET institutions themselves. These units are dedicated teams that act as intermediaries between VET institutions and enterprises, **ensuring that the collaboration is streamlined and continuous**. Their main role is to facilitate communication, ensure that training programs are up-to-date, and connect learners with internships, apprenticeships, and job opportunities.

Liaison units also play a pivotal role in ensuring that employers' voices are heard directly in the VET design process, making it easier for enterprises to influence curriculum content and structure. These units can also be tasked with organizing **industry days, job fairs**, and other activities that allow VET learners to directly interact with employers and learn about potential career paths. By being embedded within VET institutions, these liaison units ensure that collaboration is not a separate or isolated activity but an integral part of the educational process.

National skills anticipation networks

On a national scale, **National Skills Anticipation Networks** are designed to gather and analyze labor market intelligence, ensuring that the entire education system is aligned with future employment trends. These networks are typically made up of government bodies, labor market analysts, VET institutions, and employers, and they serve to anticipate future skills requirements and trends in the labor market.

By drawing on comprehensive labor market data, these networks can predict the types of skills that will be in demand in the coming years and **help shape both national and regional education and training strategies**. This foresight is crucial in helping VET institutions prepare for future challenges, ensuring that learners are equipped with the skills that will be necessary for tomorrow's jobs. It also supports **upskilling** and **reskilling** efforts, allowing institutions to be responsive to changes in industries, technologies, and job markets.

Inclusive representation

For these dialogue structures to be truly effective and inclusive, they must feature broad and diverse representation. Inclusion is not just about inviting the usual stakeholders but ensuring that all groups, especially those who are typically marginalized, **have a seat at the table**. This includes **youth voices**, who are often the primary beneficiaries of VET programs, as well as **minority-run enterprises**, which may face additional barriers in accessing skills development opportunities.

Trade unions are also crucial to include in these dialogues, as they represent the interests of workers and can offer valuable insights into the challenges faced by employees in the workplace. Additionally, **civil society organizations** and **social enterprises** should be represented, as they often have unique perspectives on social inclusion and the need for training programs that serve vulnerable groups such as people with disabilities, ethnic minorities, or those in rural areas.

By ensuring that these diverse voices are present, the dialogue structures will be more likely to generate inclusive policies and initiatives that address the needs of all members of society. This inclusivity ensures that the VET system works for everyone, not just the privileged or the most visible sectors of the labor market.

Guiding principles for inclusive enterprise engagement

For effective and sustainable engagement between VET institutions and enterprises, the **collaboration must not only focus on technical or educational outcomes but also embrace inclusivity, fairness, and mutual benefit**. This is particularly important when striving for inclusive pathways for learners from vulnerable or marginalized groups.

To ensure that enterprise collaboration contributes to genuine inclusion, there are several guiding principles that must shape the engagement strategies. These principles ensure that the dialogue goes beyond transactional relationships and **fosters lasting, meaningful partnerships** that address the needs of all stakeholders.

Equity-oriented outreach

In many cases, the most visible and active enterprises in VET collaborations are those that already have a history of engaging with educational institutions or those in urban, more developed areas. However, for inclusivity to be truly achieved, outreach must extend to companies that may not traditionally engage with VET systems but are open to inclusion. This involves intentionally reaching out to **small and medium enterprises (SMEs)**, **social enterprises**, and **informal businesses**, which may lack the resources or institutional knowledge to participate but are willing to offer opportunities.

Equity-oriented outreach means that VET institutions must actively engage and educate these businesses about the benefits of supporting vulnerable learners, including those from marginalized backgrounds. It also involves identifying and partnering with **businesses that prioritize social impact**, such as those committed to hiring individuals from diverse or disadvantaged groups. By broadening the scope of enterprise engagement, VET systems can ensure that a wide array of employers is involved, which in turn creates more opportunities for learners across the board, regardless of their background.

Reciprocity

The relationship between VET institutions and enterprises should be founded on **reciprocity** — ensuring mutual benefit for both parties. Too often, collaborations between VET systems and businesses can be viewed as one-sided, where enterprises offer work placements or training opportunities, **but do not gain tangible benefits in return**. In an inclusive approach, VET–enterprise dialogue should create an environment where both VET institutions and businesses can see the value in their partnership.

For employers, the benefits may include access to a skilled workforce that aligns with their business needs, improvements in employee retention, and even incentives like tax breaks or subsidies for providing training or inclusive hiring. On the VET side, this partnership means that the curriculum is more relevant to real-world job markets, improving the employability of learners. **Inclusive reciprocity** can also extend to businesses in terms of access to diverse talent pools, strengthening their corporate social responsibility profile, and contributing to community development.

By ensuring reciprocity, the collaboration will not feel like a charitable contribution from businesses, but rather a **strategic partnership** that benefits both sides in the long run, creating more robust and sustainable outcomes for learners and companies alike.

Transparency and monitoring

For dialogue and engagement to be successful and inclusive, **transparency** in communication and collaboration is essential. Both VET institutions and enterprises need to have clear and open discussions about expectations, roles, and responsibilities. Additionally, ongoing monitoring of outcomes is crucial to ensure that the collaboration is meeting its intended goals, particularly when it comes to inclusive VET pathways.

Key **monitoring indicators** should include **dropout rates, employment outcomes, learner satisfaction, and job placement success**. By tracking these indicators, both VET systems and enterprises can assess the quality of their collaboration and identify areas for improvement. If, for example, learners from marginalized backgrounds experience higher dropout rates or find it difficult to transition into employment, this signals the need for adjustments in the program, whether through additional support, better employer training, or more accessible pathways.

Transparency also means making these data points accessible to all partners involved, allowing both enterprises and VET institutions to see the impact of their collaboration. Moreover, it promotes accountability and builds trust, which is crucial in ensuring that both sides remain engaged and committed to the partnership.

Support to employers

A critical element of ensuring inclusive pathways for learners is providing **support to employers**. Many companies may not know how to best support learners from vulnerable or marginalized backgrounds, especially when it comes to mental health, anti-discrimination practices, or creating

inclusive workplace environments. In these instances, **training and guidance for employers** is vital to ensure that they can effectively mentor and support vulnerable learners.

For example, employers should receive **mental health awareness training**, so they can recognize the challenges faced by learners who may be dealing with trauma, stress, or social isolation. They should also be educated on **anti-discrimination policies** and **inclusive hiring practices**, ensuring that all employees, regardless of background, feel welcomed and supported. Additionally, providing **mentorship programs** or **buddy systems** can go a long way in helping learners integrate into the workplace, gain confidence, and develop professional skills.

By offering this kind of support to employers, VET institutions ensure that businesses are not only offering job opportunities but are also equipped to foster inclusive, supportive work environments that enable vulnerable learners to thrive. This makes the transition from training to employment smoother and more successful, contributing to the long-term success of the collaboration.

Flexibility and contextual adaptation

Finally, **flexibility** is key to ensuring that dialogue between VET systems and enterprises is responsive to diverse contexts. This is particularly relevant in **low- and middle-income countries (LMICs)**, where informality often dominates the labor market, and businesses may lack the resources to provide formal training or structured internships.

Flexibility means that VET–enterprise dialogue should adapt to the local business environment. In **informal economies**, for instance, enterprises may not be able to commit to large-scale apprenticeships, but they could still offer **informal, on-the-job learning** experiences that allow learners to gain practical skills in real-world settings. Similarly, **modular** or **part-time training** models can be developed to accommodate businesses that cannot afford to provide full-time, structured training.

This principle of contextual adaptation is critical because it ensures that the solutions being designed are **realistic** and **feasible** for businesses in specific regions, industries, or economic contexts. It also helps to bridge the gap between formal and informal sectors, ensuring that learners in all types of employment settings have access to the support and opportunities they need to succeed.

Recommendation 5 – From dialogue to co-design: Improved partnerships for thriving VET-Enterprise

As the landscape of work and education continues to evolve, it is increasingly clear that the traditional models of vocational education and training (VET) are **no longer sufficient to meet the needs of today’s learners, employers, and society**.

A key to addressing these evolving challenges lies in moving beyond merely involving enterprises in the VET system as passive recipients of training outcomes or employers who only “receive” trained workers. Instead, we must view enterprises as active partners, mentors, and co-creators of the VET ecosystem — collaborators who help **shape the system, its curricula, and its pathways from education to employment**.

This shift in perspective represents much more than a **technical fix**; it embodies a **cultural transformation** in how VET systems engage with employers and, by extension, how they view their



role in supporting learners, particularly those from disadvantaged or marginalized backgrounds. To truly create a VET system that is adaptive to the changing labor market and inclusive in its approach, it is essential to transform dialogue into **co-design** — where both VET institutions and enterprises work together to create the conditions for success, growth, and inclusion.

1. Fostering a new and long-term oriented Vision

Historically, the relationship between VET systems and employers has often been limited to basic exchanges: employers provide feedback on the skills they need, while VET institutions deliver training based on that feedback.

While this kind of dialogue is valuable, it is not enough to drive the level of inclusion, innovation, and adaptability required in today's rapidly changing job markets. In an inclusive VET system, the dialogue should evolve into a **co-design process**, where employers and training institutions collaboratively shape curricula, learning methodologies, and pathways into employment.

This **co-creation** approach fosters a sense of shared ownership and accountability, not only for the quality of training but also for the outcomes of learners, particularly those who face multiple barriers to employment.

For employers, this means becoming more deeply involved in the **design and delivery** of training programs — taking an active role in ensuring that training is relevant, responsive, and reflective of real-world needs. This engagement is not a one-off or reactive process but a sustained, long-term commitment to the development of a **skills ecosystem** that evolves as the labor market changes. In turn, VET institutions gain valuable insights into the practical needs of businesses, enabling them to adjust and refine their offerings to produce learners who are better prepared for the complexities of the workforce.

2. Building shared vision and interdependence

A system based on co-design also nurtures a **shared vision** — one that unites VET institutions, enterprises, and learners around a common goal of creating inclusive, meaningful, and sustainable pathways into employment. This vision should be grounded in **inclusion** — ensuring that learners, particularly those from disadvantaged or marginalized backgrounds, are not just trained for jobs but are given the opportunities, support, and confidence to succeed.

The vision also emphasizes **innovation** — encouraging both VET institutions and enterprises to think outside the box and co-create solutions that not only meet immediate skills needs but also anticipate future trends and demands in the workforce.

This shared vision requires a shift in **culture** — moving from a mindset of **separation** between education and employment to one of **interdependence**. Both systems are interconnected and mutually reinforcing, and the successful integration of training and employment hinges on this deeper level of collaboration.

For learners, this shift means they are not merely passing through a static education system but are engaging in a **dynamic, co-created learning experience that mirrors the fluidity and flexibility of the labor market itself**. They are also exposed to a wider range of opportunities and have a clearer understanding of the skills they need to succeed in the future.

3. Strengthening social cohesion



Finally, this process of co-design strengthens **social cohesion** — a critical outcome in any inclusive VET system. By fostering deeper collaboration between VET institutions and enterprises, communities, and learners, we help bridge divides, reduce inequalities, and ensure that the benefits of a robust, responsive training system are shared by all members of society.

In particular, vulnerable and marginalized groups, who may otherwise be excluded from opportunities, can benefit from pathways that recognize their potential and provide the support needed to navigate the transition into meaningful employment.

This inclusive approach not only improves outcomes for learners but also fosters a broader societal commitment to **equity, fairness, and mutual benefit**. It becomes a collective effort where businesses, educational institutions, and society at large share responsibility for the success of individuals, communities, and the economy as a whole.

Conclusion: Building an inclusive and adaptive VET system for the future

As we stand at the intersection of education, employment, and social welfare, it is clear that the path to an inclusive, adaptive, and equitable vocational education and training (VET) system is not just about policy change or structural reform. It is about **reimagining the relationship between education, work, and society** — a shift from a fragmented, linear model to an interconnected ecosystem where **collaboration** and **co-creation** take center stage.

The integration of VET, employment services, and welfare systems is not just a theoretical aspiration; it is a critical necessity. In a world where inequalities persist, where informal labor markets dominate, and where the barriers to opportunity remain disproportionately high for vulnerable groups, the call for **inclusive transitions** from education to employment cannot be ignored. We must go beyond access and move toward true **empowerment** — where learners, particularly from disadvantaged backgrounds, are not only supported but also **lifted** by a comprehensive system that surrounds them with continuous guidance, support, and opportunity.

At the heart of this transformation is **accompaniment** — a shift from transactional support to a relational, holistic, and **person-centered process**. By supporting individuals through personalized, multi-sectoral pathways that integrate education, employment, and social welfare, we build a society where **potential is recognized** rather than overlooked, where **opportunity is made accessible**, and where **agency is restored**. **Accompaniment** is not charity; it is the process of **capacity-building** — empowering individuals to see themselves as agents of change and contributors to their communities.

Yet, **accompaniment** alone is not enough. We must also ensure that the systems we create reflect the needs of the world we live in. This means transforming **VET-enterprise dialogue** into **true co-design** — where employers and training institutions share responsibility for the creation of curricula, pathways, and opportunities. By building **strong partnerships** between VET providers and enterprises, we ensure that education is not isolated from the realities of the job market. Instead, we align learning outcomes with **real-world needs**, fostering a labor market that is inclusive, resilient, and dynamic.

Inclusion, however, is not only about providing opportunities but about actively **shifting cultures**. It requires us to challenge ingrained biases, embrace diversity, and recognize the value of every learner, regardless of their background. As enterprises engage in **inclusive recruitment** and embrace **work-based learning**, they will not only improve their bottom line but also help break the cycles of exclusion that have historically marginalized certain groups from the workforce. The result will be a more **equitable and just society**, where all individuals, regardless of their background or circumstances, have the opportunity to thrive.

Ultimately, the vision for an inclusive VET system is not one of charity or mere support; it is about creating a **shared vision of opportunity, inclusion, and transformation**. By fostering a culture of **interdependence** between education, employment, and welfare systems, we can transform lives and communities. It is a vision where no one is left behind, where every learner is empowered to succeed, and where **social mobility, economic opportunity, and shared prosperity** are the cornerstones of our collective future.



This is the future we must build — one where education is a springboard for opportunity, where work is a gateway to empowerment, and where every individual, regardless of their starting point, can embark on a journey of **growth, transformation, and success.**



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