



CEDEFOP

European Centre for the Development  
of Vocational Training



# Making learning progression a reality

Learners in the spotlight

**21 February 2024**

Virtual event

#learningoutcomes



## Session 2 – Past and present barriers to lifelong and life-wide learning

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# Main barriers to lifelong and life-wide learning at the beginning of the century (2000)

- Low opportunities for horizontal and vertical mobility across formal E&T sectors and institutions
  - Separation of curricula between VET and GE/HE; early tracking; entry restrictions from VET to GE and to HE
  - Low status/image of VET; limited HVET opportunities
  - High educational segregation and early school leaving
- Underdeveloped lifelong learning system
  - Limited possibilities for validation of non-formal and informal learning and for recognition of prior learning in the formal E&T system
  - Limited opportunities to re-enter the formal E&T system and to combine different forms of learning
- Limited recognition of qualifications acquired abroad and complex procedures
  - Recognition mainly based on bilateral agreements between countries and HEIs
  - Low international learners mobility, especially in VET

# Broad areas of change and barriers tackled in the 2000 – 2020 period

Development of a new learning ecosystem recognising the diversity of learning contexts and the variety of learning outcomes and promoting the comparability and transferability of qualifications across sectors and countries. Changes at system level also affect individual learners

## Key changes in opportunities/obstacles for individual learners (to different extent across countries):

- Increased flexibility and horizontal and vertical permeability of learning pathways in formal education and training
- Progressive openness to credits and qualifications acquired outside the formal system
- Increased portability of qualifications and learning credentials across countries, improving opportunities for international learning mobility (particularly in HE)

# Increased flexibility and permeability of learning pathways in formal education and training

- **Greater comparability of qualifications** achieved through an **increased variety of E&T pathways**
- **Improved VET status, attractiveness and opportunities to move horizontally within and between VET and GE and vertically from IVET to HVET or HE**, recognition of IVET qualifications and prior learning for access to HVET or HE, greater opportunities in HVET
- **Increasing possibility to delay tracking or change tracks in upper secondary education and training.**
- **Increasing availability of information and guidance services on E&T pathways and transition opportunities**

# Progressive openness to credits and qualifications acquired outside the formal system

- **Increased opportunities for the validation and recognition of non-formal and informal learning** for further learning
- **Improved possibilities to enter/re-enter formal E&T and to combine credits and qualifications** acquired in different learning contexts throughout life
- **Increased availability of targeted learning opportunities for early school leavers and those in need of up/reskilling:** second chance education and adult education; re/up-skilling programmes for the unemployed in ALMPs; personalisation of training arrangements; financial incentives; recognition and certification of learning for full/partial qualifications/ micro-credentials; skill audits and specific support initiatives for the low skilled, LTU, migrants and refugees

# Increased portability of qualifications and learning credentials across countries

- **Easier recognition of qualifications and credits across countries**, especially in HE and for some professional qualifications, increasingly also in VET
- **Increased financial support** to pursue a degree abroad (degree portability) or for study visits (credit portability)
- **Greater opportunities for international learners mobility**

# Main EU and national policy initiatives contributing to reduce barriers (1/2)

## Changes supported by the interaction/synergy of EU and national policy initiatives in the 5 considered thematic areas

- **Growing orientation towards learning outcomes and credit-based approaches:**
  - at national level, underpinned the development of **NQFs**, facilitated the development of common **quality assurance and of validation arrangements** for non-formal and informal learning;
  - at international level, **provided common reference points across countries** supporting transparency, comparability and the mutual recognition of qualifications.
- **Establishment of comparable and increasingly comprehensive NQFs and registers, based on learning outcomes and referenced to the EQF**, increasingly covering (full or partial) qualifications issued outside the formal E&T system.
- **Increasing use of validation arrangements and recognition of prior learning** obtained in formal, non-formal and informal contexts, leading to recognised (full/partial) qualifications and, in an increasing number of countries, to access to formal education programmes.

# Main EU and national policy initiatives contributing to reduce barriers (2/2)

- **Adoption of Quality Assurance systems** based on common principles, supporting trust-building across E&T sectors and countries
- **Increasing modularisation of programmes and adoption of credit-based systems**, in HE and increasingly in VET, facilitating transitions within and between E&T sectors and the combination of formal, non-formal and informal learning
- **Measures facilitating transitions between VET and GE/HE**: introduction and bridging programmes; flexible personalised curricula; combination of VET and GE programmes; recognition of IVET qualifications and prior learning for access to HVET or HE; development/strengthening of HVET pathways; diversification of HE programmes and blurring boundaries between academic HE and HVET (vocational vs academic drift)
- Developments in the **mutual recognition of qualifications and periods of study abroad** and creation of **support bodies**. Expansion of Erasmus + to VET, GE, adult education and youth exchange programmes
- **Outreach, guidance, counselling and education initiatives targeting specific learners' groups** to prevent early school leaving, support re-entry into the E&T and participation to LLL.



# Changes in participation to education and training: some evidence from Eurostat data (EU27 averages)

- **Growth of tertiary graduates** among young adults (24-35 years): from 23.1% in 2002 to 42% in 2022 (LFS data) and of **young IVET graduates (18-24) in further education and training**: from 33% in 2015 to 38.4% in 2022 (Cedefop on LFS data). **Decline in early school leaving** among the aged 18-24 (from 16% in 2004 to 9.6% in 2022).
- **Increased adults' participation rates in formal and, especially, non formal learning**: from 7.6% in 2004 to 11.9% in 2022 (LFS data). Wide country differences, highest (above 19%) in Nordic countries, FR and NL. Strong positive cross-country correlation with availability of personalised information, guidance and validations measures.
- **Increased (although still very low) transitions into formal E&T and upskilling of low qualified and unemployed adults in the EU27** (LFS data 2004-2019), with highest levels and increases in Nordic countries:
  - Low qualified adults in formal E&T from 0.6% to 1.1%.
  - Unemployed participation to formal E&T from 2.5% to 3.7%. Participation to non-formal E&T from 4.3% to 7.5%.
- **Increased willingness among adults to participate in education and training**: share of adults who did not want to participate to education and training declined from 56.3% in 2007 to 44.9% in 2016 (AES data).
- **Increased international students mobility in HE**: EU countries' outward mobility rates of HE graduates in 2020 reached 9.1% for credit mobility and 4.3% for degree mobility. **Upward trend in VET mobility** and growing applications to Erasmus+ in VET.

# Open issues and new/ persisting challenges (1/2)

- **Uneven implementation and comprehensiveness of NQFs:** differences in description and application of learning outcomes across E&T sectors; many qualifications from outside the formal system not yet aligned with NQFs; limited involvement of labour market stakeholders; low awareness and understanding of NQF among (small) businesses and learners.
- **Persistence of different QAs frameworks and practices across sectors and countries,** limiting reliability and trust on learning opportunities and qualifications especially in VET
- **Fragmentation of validation and RPL arrangements:** high degree of autonomy of educational institutions, resulting in variety of adopted approaches, assessment methods, outcomes. **Low take up** due to lack of information, guidance and outreach of end users (especially disadvantaged groups), and complex and burdensome procedures.
- **Resistance to credit transfer/ accumulation particularly in upper secondary GE.** New challenges posed by the use of micro-credentials on quality assurance by private and public providers and alignment with existing qualifications in NQFs and EQF



# Open issues and new/ persisting challenges (2/2)

- **Persisting barriers to participation to LLL:** still limited access to formal E&T from outside and to CVET for the unemployed and inactive, high costs (for low educated and young adults), time schedule and family commitments (women), low awareness of learning needs and opportunities among the low-qualified. Increasing share of adults who could not participate or wanted participate more because of training costs, time schedule and family reasons from 21% to 24% in the EU27
- **Persisting barriers in the recognition of foreign qualifications/credits:** still low adoption of automatic recognition and complexity of national legal and administrative procedures, resulting in costly, long and burdensome procedures. Limitations to funding and funding portability contributing to inequalities in access to international student mobility opportunities
- **Persisting educational segregation and still low transition rates from VET to GE and HE reflecting and perpetuating socio-economic inequalities.** Learners progressing from IVET to HE also tend to have worse outcomes compared to those with a GE background.

# Points for discussion

- Are there any other relevant changes to be considered in learners' barriers/opportunities to lifelong learning in the considered period?
- Are there any other relevant typologies of policy initiatives to be considered in the analysis?
- Which policy initiatives were most relevant in addressing and reducing barriers to lifelong learning and in improving learning opportunities in the considered period?

# Thank you



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