

# READY, STEADY, GO!

## Cedefop 2022-23 activities help kickstart the European Year of Skills

Permacrisis – a new concept that says it all about what 2022 felt like for many – was chosen as the Collins Dictionary word of the year. In early 2022, when the EU was only just recovering from the pandemic, war broke out in Europe. Economic disruption and unprecedented migration followed. Moving towards energy independence, looming gas shortages and financial hardship caused by soaring prices were central policy concerns, at a time when the climate emergency became increasingly visible and intense.

In a context of crisis and accelerating megatrends, Cedefop continued to focus attention on the vocational education and training (VET), skills and employment dimensions of the twin transition. Its work helped assess the implications of current challenges for VET systems and qualifications and stimulated reflection on how policies contribute to making people fit for the future. In the run-up to the European Year of Skills and throughout, Cedefop activities have contributed, and will continue to contribute transversally, to making learning via up- and reskilling the new normal. Skills are central to tackling our challenges and shaping successful transitions. At the same time, the ‘right’ skills are short in supply. Designating 2023 the European Year of Skills will focus EU institutions’ efforts on building skills, closing gaps, and alleviating mismatches. It will also shine a spotlight on the European Agency dealing with skills: Cedefop.

### Labour market recovery meets skills upgrading

European labour markets are recovering from the pandemic and today are **more digitalised because of it**. The telework boom spilled over into recruitment practices, skills shortages led employers to expand online job advertising to reach more potential candidates, and job turnover increased because many employees used the labour market upturn to look for a better job elsewhere. **SkillsOVATE** – Cedefop’s jobs and skills trend tracking tool – showed this trend. In the first semester of 2022 the number of jobs advertised online was double what had been registered in the same period of 2019.

Of the job ads posted online between mid-2020 and mid-2022, 54% were for high-skilled science/engineering, business/administration, social/legal or ICT jobs. The manufacturing, construction, and maintenance sectors drove the recovery and expansion of the online job market. Jointly, job ads for manual, medium and low-skilled jobs are the lion’s share of its growth. Demand for manufacturing labourers, cleaners and helpers, drivers and plant operators is booming.

Long-term trends paint a somewhat different picture. A new Cedefop EU skills forecast to be released in 2023 suggests that employment will rapidly become more skills-intensive. The number of high-skilled jobs will likely rise faster than forecast earlier, surpassing medium-skilled employment in about a decade from now (Figure 1). Employment in elementary jobs remains stable. With skills upgrading dominating labour market trends in the decade ahead, the focus will need to be on expanding VET’s potential and role in helping people access more demanding jobs.

As employment is projected to be more closely aligned to supply at all skill levels than previously forecast, it appears that, at the EU aggregate level, matching is set to improve. But this will not happen by itself. The EU Green Deal ambitions incorporated in the forecast will need to be met, and realising the forecast upgrading trend will require an adequate and well-skilled workforce.

Figure 1. Future employment by qualification level: Cedefop 2020 and 2023 forecast compared



Source: Cedefop 2020 and 2023 skills forecast.

## VET for Ukrainians

The EU labour market reacted quickly to growing tensions between Ukraine and Russia. More employers started targeting online job ads at Ukrainians; after war broke out in March-May 2022, [there were almost 20 000](#), more than five times the jobs advertised online in the entire year 2020.

The EU activated the [Temporary Protection Directive](#) in March 2022 to grant Ukrainian refugees labour market and VET access. Cedefop relied on its [ReferNet VET expertise network](#) to collect information about [the challenges countries face and how they responded to them](#). Financial support, easing programme entry, including dual VET, and measures to address language difficulties helped overcome integration barriers. Approaches to support teachers and in-company trainers emerging in some countries are inspirational for others.

Being inclusive and supportive to young Ukrainians with different backgrounds, and a focus on wellbeing and mental health of learners in uncertain circumstances, appear to be overarching challenges. Overcoming them through VET and support will remain crucial for the education, labour market and social integration of the millions of young and adult refugees who have fled the war.

## VET empowers sectors and cities in the green transition

In 2022, energy efficiency and renewable energy targets and measures agreed in the EU Green Deal's 'fit for 55' package were [made more ambitious](#). Reinforcing the idea that education and training policies and programmes drive change towards a more sustainable future, the Council adopted a [Recommendation on learning for the green transition and sustainable development](#). The greening of VET, occupations, and qualifications was in the spotlight during the [2022 European vocational skills week](#) organised by the European Commission; new evidence supporting it found its way in [Cedefop's new Green Observatory](#).

In 2022 Cedefop took a closer look at what the [European Green Deal](#) means for [cities](#), [waste management](#), [agri-food](#) and the circular economy. Social partners, sectoral associations, public authorities, and experts teamed up with Cedefop to map trends and their implications for occupations, VET and skills up to 2030. Every sector will undergo its own transformation, but there are also striking commonalities. Alongside experts with green technological expertise, professionals who implement it at scale and those who manage the green transition, engage citizens or

train companies to become part of it, will also play crucial roles (Figure 2).

VET has the potential to accelerate the green transition through its strong labour market links and increasingly flexible approaches to qualifications, e.g. via microcredentials. Greening provides VET with an opportunity to redefine professions, to market its potential to drive the green transition, and to expand further into higher VET.

Figure 2. The green transition: emerging occupations and transition accelerators

### GREEN TRANSITION ACCELERATORS

- Marketing green jobs/careers
- Trusted skills intelligence
- Strong feedback loops for agile VET
- Green apprenticeship
- Microcredentials
- Systems thinking
- Networks
- Empowered local players



### SMART/GREEN CITIES

- Green/smart city manager
- ICT professional
- Urban space specialist
- Energy professional
- Transport and mobility specialist
- Environmental protection specialist
- Citizen engagement specialist
- Construction professional



### CIRCULAR ECONOMY

- Circular product designers
- Industrial problem analysts
- Material and process engineers
- Renewable energy managers
- Industrial symbiosis facilitators
- Hydrogen specialists
- Consumer behaviour specialists
- Sustainability trainers



### WASTE MANAGEMENT

- Logistic manager, data analyst (Strategic) waste manager
- Waste valorisation professional
- Quality assurance manager
- Energy expert
- Waste sorting optimisation professional
- Circular economy plant designer
- Technical engineer (recyclable products)
- Material extraction/recycling/reuse expert
- Waste management trainer
- Repair specialist



### AGRI-FOOD

- HR specialists (large farms)
- Agronomists
- Engineers
- Data scientists
- E-commerce specialists
- Food safety experts
- GPS experts (precision agriculture)



A flagship [2022 Cedefop-OECD report](#) showcases how green apprenticeships are emerging across Europe and demonstrates their transformative potential. The power of practical learning can help apprentices become change agents in their workplace. Thanks to their double ‘identity’ as learners and employees they can relay ‘greenovation’ from learning venues to workplaces and vice versa. Scaling up green apprenticeships for adults in ‘brown’ jobs will be critical to ease transitions and to help regions become greener and cleaner <sup>(1)</sup>. Green work in 2023 will increasingly focus on the role social partners can play in preparing regions for a greener future.

## Just digital transformation means more skills and better jobs

The second European skills and jobs survey findings, presented at the [Powering the European digital transition conference](#), show why it is so important that digital and STEM skills be a top VET and skills policy priority: 52% of EU-27+ <sup>(2)</sup> adult workers need to develop their digital skills further to do their job better and [two in three workers affected by technological change have a digital skills gap](#). While artificial intelligence and advanced digital applications are often in the spotlight, many European adults would benefit from basic and mid-level digital skills upgrading as a stepping stone towards more advanced jobs (Figure 3).

Figure 3. Learning potential in digital activities (% of EU+ adult workers in 2021)

	BASIC	MEDIUM	HIGHER
Web browsing, email, social media	20%	50%	81%
Write or edit text	28%	60%	87%
Use spreadsheets	38%	74%	92%
	Use specialised software	Prepare presentations	Manage or merge databases
	Advanced spreadsheets	IT systems, hard/software	Programme or code

Source: Cedefop (2022). *Setting Europe on course to a human digital transition*.

The digital transformation should also be about giving people an opportunity to use and build on their skills: via innovative job design, by widening access to digital technology and by championing learning-con-

<sup>(1)</sup> In 2022 Cedefop took an important step in its own green transition by committing to becoming carbon neutral by 2030. The Agency’s objective is to cut greenhouse gas emissions to the lowest possible level and compensate unavoidable emissions through carbon removal activities.

<sup>(2)</sup> The EU-27 Member States plus Norway and Iceland.

ducive job design. There are enormous opportunities to ‘digitally upgrade’ the world of work. For many workers, when given the means to up- or reskill, digitalisation can go together with more interesting and fulfilling work, expanding autonomy, improving job quality, and more learning opportunities. The first European training and learning survey by Cedefop, to be fielded in 2023, and new work on apprenticeship for just digital transitions will provide insight into how to make that happen.

## Simply more skills will not do for generation COVID

In 2022, the European Year of Youth [Cedefop teamed up with four other agencies](#) under the remit of DG Employment to make a strong case for expanding support to young people: by putting more emphasis on opening up access to work experience and job opportunities in the green and digital economy (Box 1). Measures that help create better jobs to complement and make more effective skills-supply-oriented policies are particularly urgent. Young people across the EU faced unprecedented challenges in learning and accessing a matching job when COVID-19 hit, and they suffered greatly in terms of mental health.

### Box 1. Youth first! Policies that work for young Europeans in times of uncertainty



**Youth first!**  
EMPLOYMENT, SKILLS AND SOCIAL POLICIES THAT WORK FOR YOUNG EUROPEANS IN TIMES OF UNCERTAINTY  
8 September 2022 10:00-13:00 (CEST) European Parliament/Spinelli 1E2

- Organised by Cedefop and Eurofound (lead organisers) and ETF, EU-OSHA and ELA in the European Parliament on the occasion of the European Year of Youth.
- The agencies shared their expertise on labour market and skills trends, the COVID pandemic, the Ukraine crisis, and the quality of employment and working conditions of young people in Europe.
- One of the key themes was the synergies EU agencies develop and how they complement each other: by collecting data, sharing methodological expertise, and publishing joint research.

In countries with a weaker skills formation system, lower skills-intensive employment and a less resilient

economy, the experience of the young who managed to secure a job shows that, for many, mismatch is not about lacking skills but about jobs that do not tap their potential. They are more digitally savvy, more used to remote work and learning, and more skilled in advanced digital technology. The fact that they often find themselves in less secure and lower-quality jobs, that they are often overqualified, enjoy lower job satisfaction and less employer-sponsored training, clearly puts them at a disadvantage.

**Box 2. Cedefop and ReferNet: partners in strengthening European VET for 20 years**



ReferNet is Cedefop's network of institutions which provide information on national VET systems and policies in EU Member States, Iceland and Norway.

At the ReferNet 20th anniversary event held on November 9 2022, Cedefop looked back at 20 years of successful cooperation and partnership.

*ReferNet's tremendously successful contribution so far makes the network one of Cedefop's most cherished enterprises*

—Cedefop Director Jürgen Siebel

*We are a group of Europeans sharing a vision of working for better VET*

—Cedefop Head of Department Loukas Zahilas

*The upcoming European Year of Skills will fundamentally be a year of awakening vocations and training*

—EU Commission Vice-President Margaritis Schinas

*Enabling the great transformation, education in a 'liquid' world can help people claim new freedom while safeguarding social cohesion*

—Futurist Fabienne Goux-Baudiment

## Starting the skills revolution

Cedefop used its research and joined forces with the European Economic and Social Committee to make a case for more coordinated and systemic approaches to up- and reskilling. Findings from current Cedefop upskilling pathway reviews in France and Italy revealed what such approaches are often made of: action at local level, reaching out to people most at

risk of social exclusion, and making ad hoc projects sustainable <sup>(9)</sup>.

Apprenticeship can be a powerful training pathway for low-skilled adults. Scaling it up can contribute simultaneously to upskilling, integration, twin transition and other policy objectives. For this to happen, **apprenticeship must become a real and realistic possibility for adults; more adults and companies must engage** (Figure 4).

**Figure 4. How to make the most of adult apprenticeship**

 <b>MAKING APPRENTICESHIP A POSSIBILITY FOR ADULTS</b>	 <b>ENGAGING MORE LEARNERS AND COMPANIES</b>
 Removing barriers to access to quality training provision	 Understanding the motivation of adults and companies in using apprenticeship for up- and reskilling
 Outreach and guidance to help adults understand the benefits	 Clearly identifying the real needs which apprenticeship may fill
 Motivation through non-financial incentives	 Systematically engaging trade unions and employers alongside public authorities, and collaboration between public and private employment
 Financial incentives, and targeted and individualised support to companies	
 Flexibility in the organisation and delivery of training	
 Shaping apprenticeship to the distinct characteristics of adults	

In 2022, Cedefop's work on key competences focused on entrepreneurship which underlies creativity, sustainability, resilience, and adaptability to change. It also boosts growth, innovation and competitiveness. In 2023, Cedefop will look in detail into national entrepreneurial learning ecosystems to identify methods, tools and approaches that help policy-makers, VET providers and other stakeholders make VET programmes more powerful in building entrepreneurship competence.

VET teachers and trainers play a vital part in the skills revolution. Cedefop's 2022 mapping of national approaches to their initial and continuing professional development demonstrates the challenges teachers and trainers face in complex and rapidly changing societies. Teachers need to be informed and retrained to become twin transition ambassadors and change learner mindsets. Cedefop will launch the first ever European survey among teachers and trainers in 2023 or early 2024 to gauge how prepared they are for the

<sup>(9)</sup> In 2023 thematic country reviews on upskilling pathways for adults in Croatia and Spain will be launched.

challenges that lie ahead.

The skills revolution will not take off without expanding learning and career support: via guidance, validation of the skills people actually have, more targeted incentives such as individual learning accounts, and social support. In 2022, Cedefop raised awareness of effective and inclusive career guidance systems and provided space to discuss the opportunities and challenges in developing them. Cedefop engaged experts to discuss [guidance monitoring and evaluation methods and their potential for improving services](#) and jointly organised the first [Global careers month](#). The [4th Validation of prior learning \(VPL\) biennale](#) was an opportunity to discuss with a global audience experiences, information, knowledge, ideas and visions on validation as an essential part of lifelong learning and the trends driving change since Cedefop pioneered the validation concept over two decades ago.

## Shaping change and championing skills

For two decades, European countries have worked on making knowledge and skills transparent and transferable between education and training systems to facilitate free movement of citizens. In 2022, Cedefop looked back to understand how the [transferability of learning outcomes acquired in formal, non-formal and informal settings can be improved](#) going forward. The European Year of Skills 2023 will offer opportunities to discuss European and national initiatives that made a difference for learners.

The EU VET and skills policy framework, and the unprecedented funding available via the recovery and resilience facility, the European Social fund plus, Erasmus plus and other sources, are becoming change drivers. First findings from Cedefop's [VET Recommendation](#) and [Osnabrück Declaration](#) implementation monitoring show what European countries prioritise in their national implementation plans: making VET more agile, flexible and inclusive, promoting digitalisation, establishing a new lifelong learning culture, and expanding CVET. Almost equally strong priorities – yet less visible due to their transversal nature – are greening VET and strengthening its [European education and training area](#) and international dimensions.

Microcredentials [were in the spotlight](#) in 2022. These help learners build their skills portfolio 'stacking' [learning at their own pace](#) in line with changing labour market demands and individual needs. While authorities, education and training providers, and social partners acknowledge the [flexibility, portability and transferability of microcredentials](#), several challenges

must be overcome to tap their potential in up- and reskilling. These include building visibility and trust among employers and education institutions and positioning them alongside traditional qualifications and recognition systems. In 2023, Cedefop's [Future of VET](#) project will highlight the role of microcredentials in supporting employment.

Cedefop's [tools and databases](#) help monitor progress and translate ambitions into action. The [European vocational education and training \(VET\) policy dashboard](#) released in 2022 visualises progress towards agreed quantitative targets. A timeline of VET policies in Europe, to be launched in 2023, will use Cedefop's VET policy monitoring to show progress over the years and to inspire and support VET and LLL policy reforms. The value of Cedefop's tools is acknowledged, as can be seen from the 2022 [Council Recommendation on pathways to school success](#). This positions [Cedefop's VET toolkit for tackling early leaving](#), and its practical resources, as the main reference point for policy-makers and VET practitioners in Europe.

The European Year of Skills will start in 2023. Cedefop will use the year as an opportunity to champion people and their skills as the critical link between EU and national policy aims and making tangible progress towards them. In transformative times, developing and making good use of the skills of young people and adults motivates them to be the best they can be, gives them a springboard to a successful career, and has a positive bottom-line impact. Permacrisis became the new normal in 2022. The European Year of Skills 2023 will make sure that 'permaskilling' is the response.



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