

# Shaping learning and skills FOR EUROPE





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## A message from our Executive Director

**Europe is in the middle of a deep transition towards a more competitive, greener, more digital and resilient future. On the one hand, the technology, AI and other revolutions offer enormous new opportunities for people, companies, countries and regions. On the other, achieving economic and social ambitions while safeguarding strategic autonomy and strengthening European defence capacities is no easy feat. Finding the right responses is challenging in a world where crises, conflicts, tensions and political turmoil shape daily realities, and where labour and skills shortages frustrate progress.**

While supplying skills is crucial, the skills revolution is more than just that. We cannot take the labour market tensions, skills shortages, and recruitment difficulties at face value and always interpret them as a skill supply issue. Mismatches are about lacking skills, but also about a lack of understanding among employers about what skills they need or limited capacity to express their skills needs, and about jobs that are not attractive or that do not tap people's potential fully.

This brochure showcases some of Cedefop's key achievements in 2025.

Vocational education and training (VET) and skills have moved higher on the EU policy agenda. That process culminated in the Union of Skills and the Herning Declaration for VET, agreed in 2025. These initiatives will help to boost VET reform and to set the direction for skills policy and its implementation in the coming years.

A lot of work remains to be done. The vision of a borderless European learning space, in which learners and workers can move seamlessly, has not yet been achieved. Persistent barriers include fragmentation in education and training systems. This

limits people's ability to access, transfer and accumulate learning outcomes across different subsystems and countries, and makes it difficult for employers to get the full picture of the skills of a worker or applicant.

In 2025 Cedefop turned 50. Our golden anniversary celebrations provided a platform to revisit the policy challenges and opportunities for VET, skills and qualifications in view of the new policy cycle for 2026-2030, which we incorporated in a strategic vision paper. In parallel, we launched a strategic initiative to reinforce our unique value proposition as the leading EU Agency on VET, skills, and qualifications.

Cedefop regularly engages with the Member States and social partners. Our *Upskilling pathways* thematic reviews in France, Italy and Croatia show that engaging low-skilled and vulnerable adults in lifelong upskilling requires embedding outreach, guidance, tailored learning, and funding within coordinated local ecosystems. In 2025, Cedefop worked intensively with Estonia in the framework of a technical support instrument-funded project. The SWOT analysis completed in 2025 will be the basis for formulating a future-oriented policy roadmap for the national skills anticipation and governance system.

We thank the members of our tripartite Management Board, ReferNet, our other expert networks and the wider European VET community. If you have not done so yet, reach out and connect with us. On the way to 2030, we will work with you to tap your expertise and vision to support the EU in deepening and upscaling the skills revolution we already see everywhere around us.

Jürgen Siebel  
*Cedefop Executive Director*

# Shaping learning and skills for Europe

The anniversary tagline **'Shaping learning and skills for Europe'** became a powerful vehicle to elevate Cedefop's profile among EU institutions, Member States, social partners and the broader VET and skills ecosystem, reinforcing the Agency's value proposition in VET, skills and qualifications.



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'Cedefop has successfully kept vocational education and training, skills and learning at the forefront of the EU agenda across Member States and successive policy cycles – **a testament to its enduring relevance in shaping Europe's future**'.

**Mario Nava**

Director-General, DG Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion, European Commission

## Cedefop at 50 and the future of learning

In 2025, Cedefop celebrated 50 years of shaping learning and skills for Europe, and 30 years of its establishment in Thessaloniki, Greece. These anniversaries underscored its enduring role as *the* European Agency on vocational education and training (VET), skills and qualifications.

To celebrate and strengthen stakeholder engagement, Cedefop launched a year-long 50th anniversary campaign that raised awareness of its contribution to European VET, qualifications and skills policy, while reinforcing its standing as a forward-looking authority.

From the outset, the anniversary was conceived not merely as a retrospective, but as a strategic opportunity to refresh Cedefop's branding and positioning and an occasion for transforming institutional history into a compelling call to action.

The guiding mindset was clear: this is not just a celebration – it marks a turning point for Cedefop.

The key strategic aims included:

- reinforcing Cedefop's role in skills intelligence, labour market forecasting, and evidence-based support for VET and skills policies;
- reflecting on its legacy in shaping VET, while aligning with emerging priorities: digitalisation, the green transition, inclusivity, lifelong learning and a competitive Europe;
- strengthening relationships with stakeholders and the wider VET community, and among staff.



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‘Cedefop is a true pillar of every EU and Member State effort in skills development and in better aligning education with the actual needs of the labour market.

**We are here to congratulate Cedefop on the fantastic work it has done over the years’.**

**Niki Kerameus**

*Greek Minister of Labour and Social Security*



**‘Happy birthday, Cedefop!**

For 50 years, it has been a key pillar for European policy on vocational training, knowledge, and new skills. In a Europe that wants to be innovative, progressive, and competitive, new skills, lifelong learning, education, and re-training are valuable assets that we all need’.

**Eleonora Meleti**

*Member of the European Parliament*



The anniversary was supported by a dedicated portfolio of multimedia products and initiatives to position Cedefop strategically (for an overview, see [Cedefop’s 50th anniversary web page](#)), including two flagship events:

- **opening ceremony and anniversary launch**, 7 February 2025. Cedefop hosted a high-level event in Thessaloniki convening Greek authorities and stakeholders to mark, as well, its 30 years in Greece;
- **‘Shaping learning and skills for Europe’, anniversary conference**, 27 May 2025. This [50th-anniversary landmark event](#) convened over 250 stakeholders in Brussels, including representatives from EU institutions, policymakers, education and training specialists, social partners and researchers.

## A time for commitment

As Cedefop marked its 50th anniversary and the [Herning Ministerial Declaration on vocational education and training \(VET\)](#) was taking shape, the Agency published [Shaping learning and skills for Europe: a time for commitment](#) (May 2025). This strategic paper embodies Cedefop’s vision of ‘helping people continuously acquire skills and qualifications to shape their work, lives, economies and societies’ – a vision that has never been more urgent.

In an era of exponential, pervasive and uncertain change, the EU faces several interconnected imperatives such as ensuring quality jobs, boosting productivity, tackling inequality, and strengthening strategic resilience. Meeting these challenges requires ensuring that Europe’s entire workforce can continuously adapt and develop throughout their lives. Yet progress has lagged most critically in adult learning. While initial VET continues to perform relatively well, systematic skills provision for adults remains insufficient across most Member States, leaving nearly half of Europe’s adult population with outdated or inadequate skills.



To translate commitment into action, the paper *Shaping learning and skills for Europe: a time for commitment* reframes existing approaches through six mutually reinforcing dimensions:

- **VET-S:** integrating traditional VET policy and skills development into a single, coherent approach informed by robust evidence and data, supported by skills intelligence and feedback loops, and requiring cross-government and cross-sectoral coordination;
- **EU skills intelligence blueprint:** empowering countries and regions to build their own skills intelligence and governance systems to generate granular and actionable data on short-, medium- and long-term needs, and targeted national, regional, and sectoral interventions;
- **life-wide learning:** supporting and valuing learning across work, community and everyday life, alongside lifelong learning, ensuring that the learning needs and aspirations of all adults finally translate into systematic practice across Member States;
- **learning-conducive work environments:** highlighting the role of workplaces in enabling continuous learning and the use of skills, and the need for policy support to employers, workers and their representatives; recognising that better use of existing skills within organisations is as crucial as addressing skills shortages, particularly for micro and small enterprises;
- **community-based learning ecosystems:** leveraging communities to implement inclusive support and learning strategies;
- **human-centred ecosystem:** highlighting the imperative of erasing institutional barriers between education and training systems, and across education, employment, and social sectors.

Together, these concepts mark a shift from aspiration to implementation – towards a more integrated, actionable approach to shaping learning and skills in times of rapid and disruptive change. At the same time, Cedefop’s vision paper reaffirms core VET policy principles such as quality, transparency, trust, inclusiveness, governance and social dialogue and calls for building on key achievements, in particular the transformative learning outcomes approach.

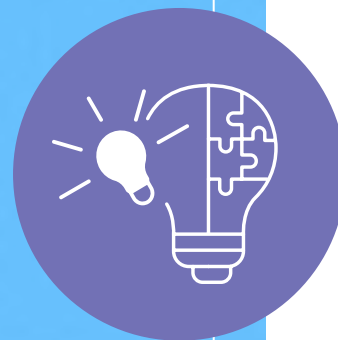
# Transparency and transferability of learning outcomes

## A 20-year journey

Education and training policies have increasingly converged towards a learning outcomes approach. Yet only moderate synergies between them limit their overall impact on lifelong learning. This finding emerges from [Cedefop's research](#), which analysed policy initiatives promoting the transparency and transferability of learning outcomes from 2000 to 2020. The research was discussed at an [online conference](#) that attracted over 750 registrations.

From the turn of the century, the emphasis on transparency and comparability of systems and qualifications has increased to support the transferability of learning outcomes across institutions, systems and countries. [Analysis of major EU-level policy developments](#) identified five interconnected policy areas, reflected at national level, that support the transparency and transferability of learning outcomes: quality assurance; credit systems; comparability (including qualifications frameworks); validation of non-formal and informal learning; and recognition of foreign qualifications. In both higher education and VET, initiatives in these policy areas have often developed in parallel. While they have been effective within their subsystems, synergies among them have varied, with different implications for permeability across education and training subsystems. For example, initiatives on quality assurance, credits and recognition tend to be more integrated in higher education.

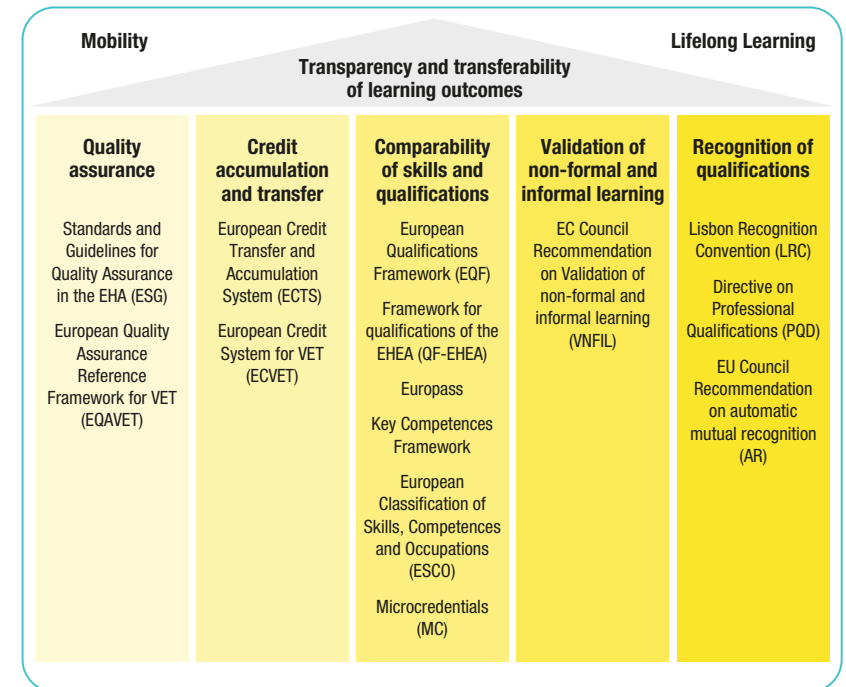
Cooperation on the [European qualifications framework \(EQF\)](#) has been particularly successful, serving as a shared, outcomes-based reference that helps policymakers and individuals interpret higher education, VET qualifications, and non-formal learning certificates. As policy developments mature beyond their initial phase, it becomes increasingly important to consider their interactions and combined impact within a broader system perspective.



## Lifelong learning in 2000 and 2020

Increased opportunities for personalisation and modularisation, diversification of available routes for learners, more flexible admission requirements and targeted measures for disadvantaged groups are some of the changes that have [improved lifelong learning opportunities for individual citizens](#). At the same time, the vision of a borderless European learning space, in which people can move seamlessly, has not yet been achieved. Persistent barriers include the fragmented nature of education and training systems that limit the ability of individuals to access, transfer and accumulate learning outcomes across different subsystems and countries.

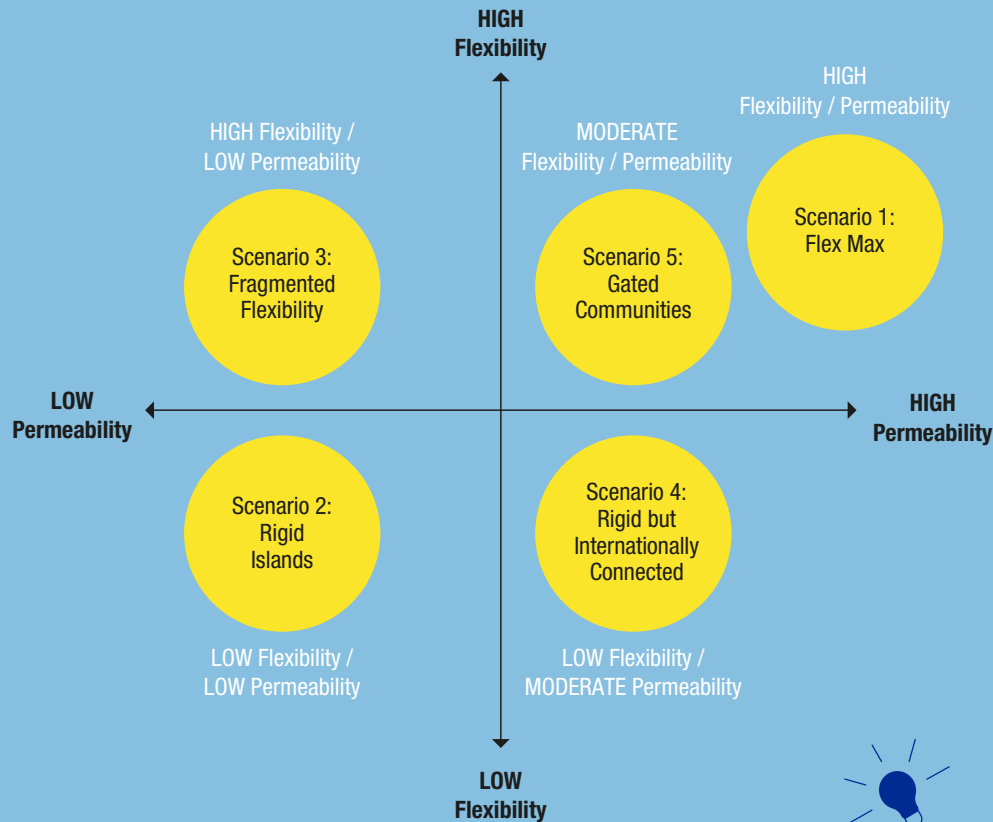
Figure 1. Transparency and transferability of learning outcomes



Source: Cedefop. (2024). [Transparency and transferability of learning outcomes: a 20-year journey: analysis of developments at European and national level](#). Cedefop research paper. Publications Office of the European Union.



Figure 2. Five alternative scenarios for 2040

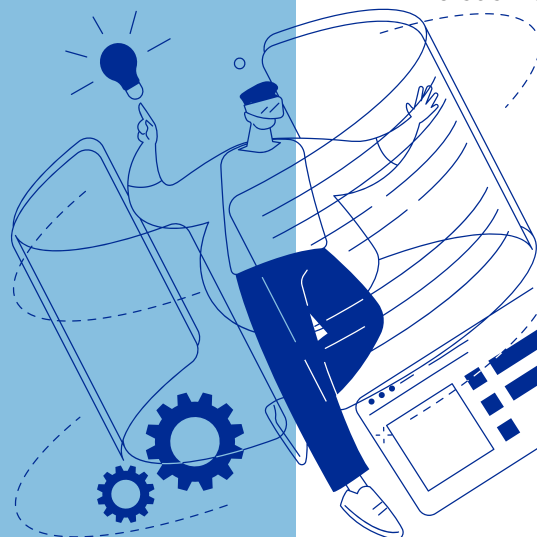


Source: Cedefop. (2026). *Shaping the future of lifelong learning: policy scenarios for 2040*. Cedefop research paper. Publications Office of the European Union.

## Policy scenarios on lifelong learning towards 2040

Building on past trends, Cedefop has developed a set of future scenarios showing how lifelong learning can take multiple directions depending on policy priorities and trade-offs. The scenarios present futures with highly flexible, modular learning offers that provide multiple learning choices and contexts. However, high flexibility does not automatically ensure that learning outcomes are transferable. The possibility for learners to combine learning acquired in different contexts depends on the degree of permeability built into the system, the level of awareness and effective coordination between actors. Even where this is high, some learners may face difficulties in navigating complex systems. In contrast, scenarios presenting structured and stable learning offers provide predictability and reassurance, but they offer fewer options to combine or reconfigure learning. These, in turn, can be associated with varying degrees of permeability, resulting in a wide spectrum from isolated to connected system.

Cedefop is continuing its work in this area, with a growing focus on comparison and recognition of qualifications and on the role of digital credentials in supporting links between different types of learning.





# Inclusiveness



## Supporting inclusive lifelong upskilling pathways: key findings from Cedefop's thematic reviews in France, Italy and Croatia

[Cedefop's reviews](#) highlight that enabling low-skilled and vulnerable adults to engage in lifelong upskilling requires more than expanding learning opportunities. Success depends on systemic, coordinated, and people-centred approaches. Despite different institutional contexts, the reviews reveal common challenges and policy priorities.

### Reaching those most in need

Low-skilled adults rarely seek learning opportunities on their own initiative. Outreach is crucial, bringing learning to workplaces and communities. In France, 'going towards' practices rely on intermediaries and practical support to build trust and confidence. Italy's outreach is limited and uneven, mainly short-term and local, while Croatia's national campaigns increase awareness but often fail to reach rural populations and third-country nationals.

Local actors, including social partners and civil society organisations, play a central role in engagement, trust-building, and continuity. However, their impact is constrained by project-based funding and weak integration into formal governance. Job-based access also leaves many low-skilled workers unaware of opportunities, reinforcing social and territorial inequalities.

## Career guidance and tailored learning as system anchors

Career guidance helps adults navigate complex systems, identify skill needs, and sustain participation. In France, the Career Development Counselling Service (CEP) promotes autonomy and career security, but awareness is low and low-qualified adults are rarely targeted. In Italy, guidance remains fragmented and is weakly linked to skills assessment and validation, while tailored learning is episodic with limited recognition of skills. In Croatia, the voucher scheme has expanded personalised guidance through the Public Employment Service. Yet strong regional disparities persist, and inactive or low-qualified adults benefit less. Strengthening links between guidance, assessment, validation, and tailored learning is a shared priority.

## Unlocking employer engagement

Employers remain an underused lever. Administrative complexity, limited capacity, and short-term priorities hinder investment in low-skilled workers, especially in micro enterprises and SMEs. Stronger incentives, including for workplace learning, simpler procedures and clearer communication are needed to frame upskilling as an investment in productivity and workforce resilience.



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## ● ● Stable funding and coordinated governance

Fragmented, short-term funding, often reliant on EU sources, undermines continuity, quality, and long-term impact. Flexible, multiannual funding is essential: it should follow learners, support SMEs, invest in practitioners' professional capacity to address complex needs across education, employment, and social sectors, and combine EU and national resources.

Governance and evidence-based planning are equally critical. Persistent coordination gaps across national, regional, and local levels call for multi-level frameworks that clearly define roles and responsibilities and recognise local authorities, civil society, and social partners as key actors. Although successful local partnerships exist, they are rarely institutionalised. In Italy, territorial networks for lifelong learning (*Reti Territoriali*) illustrate how national frameworks can be anchored in structured local collaboration.

## Monitoring and evaluation for learning and accountability

Robust monitoring and evaluation (M&E) systems are essential to support learning and accountability. Rather than serving only as compliance tools, M&E should generate actionable evidence on what works, for whom and under what conditions. This requires moving beyond narrow employment indicators to capture inclusion, quality, skills progression, and longer-term impacts, and feeding evidence back into policy and practice.

## The way forward

Inclusive lifelong upskilling is a sustained pathway, not a one-off intervention. Embedding outreach, guidance, tailored learning and funding within coordinated local ecosystems – supported by stable financing, strong governance, and systematic evaluation – is key to enabling low-skilled and vulnerable adults to progress in learning, work, and society.

Figure 3. **Overarching policy take-aways**

<p><b>Reach out or miss out</b></p> <p>Low-skilled adults will not come to the system – policy must go to them.</p>	<p><b>No guidance, no pathway</b></p> <p>Upskilling starts with guidance and skills recognition.</p>
<p><b>Short-term funding, short-term impact</b></p> <p>Inclusion needs stable, long-term financing.</p>	<p><b>Skills pay off for business</b></p> <p>Upskilling low-skilled workers is an investment, not a cost.</p>
<p><b>Partnerships make pathways work</b></p> <p>Collaboration turns fragmented measures into inclusive pathways.</p>	<p><b>Strong governance drives results</b></p> <p>Clear roles, coordination and evaluation enable inclusive upskilling.</p>

Source: Cedefop, 2025.



# Ad-hoc projects/ skills intelligence and governance

Our attractiveness as  
centre of expertise

What is skills governance?

**Skills governance** is the process of involving stakeholders from the public, private and third sector, from different economic sectors and geographic units, in generating, disseminating and using skills intelligence to steer policies that aim to balance skills supply and demand, and to establish a basis for stimulating economic development via targeted investments in skills development. ● ● ●

Source: Cedefop. (2024). *Terminology of European education and training policy*, p. 615.



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Alongside skills intelligence – information on labour market trends and skill needs – Cedefop has unique expertise on skills anticipation methods and skills governance. In 2025, Cedefop put this expertise to use in a new EU-funded technical support instrument project benefitting Estonia. In the project, in collaboration with the European Commission's DG Reform, Cedefop has provided tailored technical expertise to help the Estonian authorities design and implement reforms to align workforce capabilities with market demands better.

As in many other EU Member States, skills and labour shortages challenge employers in Estonia, hampering investment, productivity, and economic growth. Export industries are particularly affected, while the shortages also hinder progress towards the green transition. Aligning labour market needs with skill supply has long been a policy priority in Estonia. The national skills anticipation system OSKA (Oskuste Arendamise Koordinaatsioonisüsteem) was established in 2015.

In 2025, work focused on mapping the state of play of the Estonian OSKA system and developing an expert-based assessment of strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats. Strengths include the structural model of stakeholder engagement, the comprehensive and evidence-based approach, and the practical use of OSKA findings for policy, in funding, and in sector and curriculum updates.

Transitioning from occupational to skills-based analysis, embedding OSKA into broader policy cycles and institutional processes, and improving the integration of data across systems are among the development opportunities identified by Estonian stakeholders. In the next stages of the project, Cedefop will combine SWOT analysis findings and good practice examples from other countries to shape a future-oriented skills governance development agenda.

## WEBSITE TRAFFIC

**+34%** visits



## SOCIAL MEDIA FOLLOWERS

**f** 19 160 (+6%)

**in** 21 070 (+38%)

**X** 13 640 (-0.1%)

**▶** 2 598 (+15%)



## PUBLICATIONS

**411 429** downloads (-0.5%)

Take-up (citations) in 2024-2025 of Cedefop's work in

**249** EU policy documents

**89** papers of int. organisations

**1 108** academic articles



## QUALITY OF CEDEFOP EVENTS

**95.5%** satisfaction rate



## CONTRIBUTIONS TO MEETINGS

that inform policies

**90** virtual **65** physical



## 57 EXTERNAL EVENTS

organised in 2025 including

**31** hybrid/physical events

**26** virtual events, including

**6** virtual get-togethers

**5 047** external attendees (+48%)



## ENVIRONMENTAL FOOTPRINT

**-13%**

Electricity consumption from the grid

**100%**

Electricity from renewable sources

Cedefop in numbers 2025



## CEDEFOP@50 anniversary

### 9 HEADLINES

**1 030**

### PAGE VIEWS

and **108 400+** total impressions on Euractiv social media for the joint Cedefop-Eurofound op-ed

**1 340+**

### UNIQUE PAGE VIEWS

of Cedefop's 50th anniversary landing page

**1 570+**

### DOWNLOADS

of Cedefop's vision paper *Shaping learning and skills for Europe*

**101** POSTS

**126 680+**

### IMPRESSIONS

on LinkedIn, Instagram, Facebook and X



Cedefop50 page





# SHAPING LEARNING AND SKILLS for Europe



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