



**Towards a methodology for  
comparing and recognising  
VET qualifications**

**2 June 2025**  
**10.00-13.00 CET**  
Virtual event  
#VETQualifications



## **Background note**

# **Towards a methodology for comparing and recognising VET qualifications**

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### **Workshop aims**

In this expert workshop, Cedefop presents its current work and future plans for comparing and recognising VET qualifications. Building on this input, a facilitated discussion will invite participants to share their expertise and insights on key challenges and opportunities, aiming to shape together future directions for policy and practice. The primary goal of the workshop is to explore the feasibility of developing a methodology for comparing and recognising VET qualifications, with a particular focus on recognising foreign qualifications for employment and further education.

### **What to expect from the workshop**

The workshop will begin with an overview of key findings from Cedefop's [ReferNet](#) survey, offering insights into the current state of VET qualification comparison and recognition across Europe.

This will be followed by three breakout sessions, each focusing on a specific topic. To initiate discussions, two presentations per session will set the stage for deeper exploration of key issues. Participants will then engage in a facilitated discussion, guided by predefined questions designed to stimulate the exchange of ideas and experiences.

### **Breakout sessions**

1. *Approaches and criteria for comparing and recognising VET qualifications for learning and work*

### **Guiding questions**

- What methodological approaches are commonly employed when comparing and recognising VET qualifications?
  - What assessment criteria are relevant when comparing and recognising VET qualifications for different purposes?
  - How can common criteria and approaches be used for both further studies and employment purposes?
2. *Using digitalisation and transparency tools to support comparison and recognition of VET qualifications*

Guiding questions:

- What are the strengths and weaknesses of existing transparency tools for comparing and recognising VET qualifications?
- How could new digital developments support this process?
- What are the conditions and prerequisites for using AI in comparison and recognition of VET qualifications?

### 3. *Recognising foreign VET qualifications for employment purposes*

Guiding questions:

- What are the needs for comparison/recognition of the non-regulated sectors of the labour market?
- What is the significance of comparing and recognising qualifications for unregulated professions from the perspective of employers and employees?
- How is the 'skills first' approach affecting the process of recognition of VET qualifications?

A Slido poll conducted at the end of each breakout session will gather insights into future key research areas to develop a methodology for comparing and recognising VET qualifications.

Following the breakout sessions reports, the workshop will conclude with closing remarks from Cedefop, summarising the key takeaways and outline the next steps.

## **Background**

Comparing and recognising qualifications is crucial for improving labour market efficiency and promoting lifelong learning. Cedefop has a long history of working on the [comparability of VET qualifications and learning outcomes](#). Despite extensive work, challenges persist, particularly in the recognition of VET qualifications. Building on its earlier efforts, Cedefop's current focus on recognition is closely aligned with its work on methodologies for analysing and comparing learning outcomes, its activities on transparency and transferability, validation of non-formal and informal learning, and qualifications frameworks, all aiming for a comprehensive approach towards addressing these challenges.

To understand how recognition currently functions in Europe, Cedefop conducted a study drawing on data from (a) mapping and analysis of existing EU transparency tools <sup>(1)</sup>; and (b) a survey of ReferNet members in April 2024 with the participation of 27 countries. Cedefop has also carried out 22 in-depth expert interviews with key stakeholders in the recognition process, providing additional valuable insights into this topic. Table 1 summarises the study's key findings and identifies areas for future development. It includes an overview of actionable insights that can inform policymakers and researchers in their efforts to improve the comparison and recognition of VET qualifications.

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<sup>(1)</sup> These included the 2005 Professional Qualifications Directive, the 1997 Lisbon Recognition Convention, the 2018 Council Recommendation on promoting automatic mutual recognition, the 2012 Council Recommendation on the validation of non-formal and informal learning, the 2008 Recommendation on the establishment of the European Qualifications Framework, as well as Europass, ELM, and ESCO.

The findings reveal that case-by-case analysis is the predominant approach to recognising VET qualifications in Europe. The recognition process often seems inflexible, with equivalency being prioritised over accepting differences between qualifications. The comparison and recognition criteria cited in the responses can be categorised into three main groups: context-related criteria (such as legal basis, qualification system, and authenticity), quality-related criteria (including the status of awarding bodies and institutions), and qualification-related criteria (encompassing factors like titles, formal rights, duration, courses, subjects, and learning outcomes). A more in-depth discussion of these approaches and criteria will take place during **Breakout session 1**, allowing for a nuanced exploration of the complexities involved in recognising VET qualifications.

Analysis of transparency tools, together with Cedefop’s project [Transparency and transferability of learning outcomes](#), which examined the impact of these tools over a span of 20 years, reveal significant progress in promoting flexibility and permeability in learning for individuals. These tools have contributed to the establishment of mutual trust between national systems, ensuring that qualifications are described in a clear and comparable manner. Despite their effectiveness on policy level, challenges remain in terms of visibility and practical application among end-users, such as employers and citizens, which limits their full potential. The tools operate at different levels, serve different purposes, and have somewhat conflicting conceptual departure points. Their varying degrees of complexity, scope, and user engagement, limits their visibility and practical application among end-users, such as employers and citizens, restricting their full potential. Opportunities for enhancing these tools lie primarily in further digitalisation and integration, leveraging advancements in technology – such as artificial intelligence – to streamline processes and make them more efficient and accessible. The use of digitalisation and transparency tools will be discussed in **Breakout session 2**.

The ReferNet survey data also revealed that countries differentiate recognition procedures based on their purpose – whether for further study or work. Recognition for work is further categorised into regulated and non-regulated professions. While legal frameworks and established practices exist for further study and regulated professions, the services and needs concerning recognition of the non-regulated sector of the labour market remain unclear. **Breakout session 3** will addresses the (potential) need for recognition of the non-regulated part of the labour market, and explore how and whether it is influenced by the ‘skills first’ approach.

To address the challenges described earlier, it is essential to establish a common conceptual basis, and develop a fair, transparent, accurate and comprehensive methodology for comparing and recognising VET qualifications and learning outcomes. Within the context of lifelong learning and diversity of qualifications, the individual’s perspective plays a key role. Embracing diversity while accepting and valuing learning acquired in different contexts are essential starting points.

Table 1. **Actionable insights for enhancing the comparison and recognition of VET qualifications**

Themes	Challenges	Priority solutions
1. Availability of, and access to, information on qualifications, learning outcomes, and recognition procedures for individuals and other stakeholders, aiming to create a comprehensive	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Information is dispersed ('silo logic'), and not always up to date or digitally available.</li> <li>- Lack of comprehensive entry points for information on qualifications, learning outcomes</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Develop digital and comprehensive entry point for information on qualifications and credentials (all levels and types) to give individuals and other stakeholders access to relevant</li> </ul>

roadmap for comparison and recognition	<p>and recognition at national and European levels.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Information is complex, using terminology not easily understood by end users.</li> <li>- Information is inflexible, not easily adaptable to individual's specific needs before, during and after the comparison and recognition process.</li> <li>- Language barriers.</li> </ul>	<p>information on level, learning outcomes, and input.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Use standardised, short descriptions to define learning outcomes.</li> <li>- Streamline and simplify recognition processes and provide clear information on them.</li> <li>- After recognition, provide information for the individual concerning rights and next steps if qualification has not been fully recognised.</li> <li>- Information available at least in English (on top of national languages).</li> </ul>
2. Processing information on comparison and recognition, including (a) conceptual clarity, and (b) supportive digital/AI solutions to increase capacity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- EU transparency tools and legal texts, including soft law, often employ similar terms to describe different concepts. Concepts are inconsistently applied. The development of new initiatives often overlooks accumulated experience.</li> <li>- Lack of knowledge and understanding of transparency tools among stakeholders and individuals.</li> <li>- AI tools often implemented without careful consideration of the characteristics of learning and qualifications.</li> <li>- Conceptual clarification and implementation of AI language models need to go hand in hand and evolve based on accumulated experience.</li> <li>- AI solutions are applied inconsistently – developing fast in some areas and under-used in others – failing to improve capacity and quality for all individuals.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Initiate (immediate) cooperation between Member States on the use of AI language models for comparison and recognition of qualifications, building on the conceptual specifics of qualifications, competences and learning outcomes.</li> <li>- Critical look by the European Commission on existing digital transparency tools from the perspective of individual learner and employee needs. Prioritisation and/or alignment of digital tools.</li> <li>- Intensify cooperation between EU Member States to develop more comprehensive and consistent tools and practices.</li> </ul>
3. Diverse recognition practices	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Inflexibility in assessing foreign VET qualifications.</li> <li>- Recognition practises sometimes implicitly used for 'gatekeeping' and protecting sector interests (conflicting with learners' interests).</li> <li>- Use of too many criteria.</li> <li>- Learning outcomes are not fully understood by decision-makers.</li> <li>- Presentation of learning outcomes not conducive to comparison and recognition.</li> <li>- Multitude of national approaches and actors can lead to difficulties in coordinating the work, confusing individuals.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Better aligned and transparent approaches for comparison and recognition, balancing the need for gatekeeping with learners' interests.</li> <li>- European cooperation and network for exchanging information and agreeing on key criteria for recognition.</li> <li>- Improve common understanding of the critical concept of substantial difference.</li> </ul>
4. Addressing mutual trust through political cooperation and framework building, including addressing silo logic and jurisdictional disputes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Longstanding practice of focusing on individual sectors rather than considering the qualification system as a whole (at EU and national levels).</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Intensify efforts at EU and national levels to improve trust across qualifications systems, addressing all levels and types of qualifications and credentials.</li> </ul>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Insufficient information and transparency in quality assurance procedures in Member States.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- When updating existing initiatives or developing new ones, consider qualifications systems holistically, with lifelong learning as the main consideration.</li> </ul>
<p>5. Future-proofing via systematic learning from Member States, existing tools, available research and piloting, including Erasmus+</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Currently there is no coherent mechanism providing information about recognition for different purposes in Member States.</li> <li>- No systematic information available on recognition decisions and their underlying rationale at national or stakeholder levels.</li> <li>- Very limited follow-up on the impact of recognition for individuals.</li> <li>- Lack of established cooperation to support mutual learning and agree on good practice for foreign VET qualifications.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Organising mutual learning to identify good practices in the recognition of foreign VET qualifications.</li> <li>- Analysis of benefits of bilateral or regional recognition agreements and associated qualifications, as well as reasons contributing to their success.</li> <li>- Systematically gather and analyse the outcomes of research, pilot projects (for example Erasmus+) and evaluations ('looking back to look ahead').</li> </ul>