



Background paper

Introduction

The workshop is part of Cedefop's monitoring and analysis of the implementation of the EU priorities for vocational education and training (VET) as set in the Council Recommendation on VET (hereinafter, the VET Recommendation) ⁽¹⁾ and the Osnabrück Declaration (OD) ⁽²⁾ in EU-27, Norway and Iceland. The monitoring is guided by countries' National Implementation Plans (NIPs) submitted in 2022-23 that describe how the countries address the European priorities and their national objectives in VET. ReferNet annual reporting is the primary source of information and the basis for Cedefop's monitoring and analysis.

To support and enrich its analysis, in April – September 2024, Cedefop conducted national VET stakeholder interviews in the EU-27+ countries to obtain their views on the EU priorities in their countries and on specific issues identified by Cedefop's analysis in 2022-24. A total of 239 interviews took place. Representatives of ministries of education, labour and employment, national agencies for VET and other areas, employer and employee organisations, economic chambers, VET providers, public employment services, and local authorities took part. 29 ReferNet National Representatives and coordinators have been interviewed; they provided valuable insights into the national contexts and helped shape interviews in their countries. The interviewees were asked about the relevance of the EU priorities in their countries (selecting up to three), their perception of the progress made, actions that contribute most to achieving the priority, challenges of implementation and possible solutions to overcome those.

Workshop objectives

The participants, selected interviewed VET stakeholders and ReferNet members, will validate the findings of the analysis through active discussion and sharing their countries perspective. Cedefop will use the outcomes of the workshop for further analysis and monitoring.

Workshop methodology

Following Cedefop's presentation of the findings and results of the monitoring and analysis done so far, the participants will be invited to discuss those in four breakout sessions on the following EU priorities:

- (1) Agile VET, adapting to the needs of the labour market;
- (2) Flexible and inclusive VET to support lifelong learning;
- (3) Attractive VET based on modern and digitalised provision;
- (4) Innovative, excellent and quality assured VET.

⁽¹⁾ <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX%3A32020H1202%2801%29>

⁽²⁾ https://www.cedefop.europa.eu/files/osnabrueck_declaration_eu2020.pdf

Each session will start with a presentation of detailed findings on the theme. After these presentations, the participants will discuss a set of questions (see the relevant section below), share their views and experiences, and agree on key messages to be taken to the plenary session that follows. The plenary session will conclude with a panel discussion with representatives of the European Commission, ministries of education, employer and employees representatives on the progress and way forward.

Breakout session 1: Agile VET, adapting to the needs of the labour market

Almost half of national VET stakeholders as well as Refernet respondents across all 27+ countries considered the priority as one of the most relevant. The relevance and importance of VET being adaptive to the needs of the labour market is linked to skill mismatches and labour shortages that most countries experience. In addition, the digital and green transitions change sectors and occupations and that requires that VET systems provide for the emerging skill needs.

Those respondents who discussed this priority perceive that there has been a good level of progress in their countries in making their VET systems agile (half believe the progress has been significant while another half think that there has been some progress). Actions in the countries are, legislative and strategic policy developments and reforms targeting VET systems as a whole, projects and initiatives to modernise VET systems. Among the actions contributing most to achieving the priority, stakeholders refer to, first of all, updating qualifications, VET curricula and programmes, and introducing new ones, especially those related to the digital and green skills and key competences. Another group of measures is related to introducing and strengthening work-based learning (WBL), including apprenticeship, an area where some countries have seen many developments following the European support to apprenticeship. Most initiatives are implemented by ministries of education, some by regional and local players; the social partners are usually consulted with.

This is one of the priorities where the cooperation of VET with labour market stakeholders is seen as key. Some stakeholders reported that in recent years the cooperation and involvement of the social partners, companies have been strengthened. Such cooperation strengthens the link with the needs of the labour market, puts learners in closer contact with enterprises and the world of work and supports their employability.

Among the obstacles to address the priority, stakeholders mentioned the fragmentation of responsibilities and lack of coordination among those involved in governance, cultural resistance, lack of or difficult access to resources, and bureaucracy. In addition to these which are of general nature, they mentioned the fact that VET systems continue to be supply-driven rather than demand-driven, based on rigid processes of setting up and updating curricula and programmes, and difficulties of assessing the needs of the labour market. As possible solutions, some stakeholders call for making VET systems more demand-oriented and simultaneously ensuring greater autonomy to VET providers, further development of skill forecasting and facilitating cultural shift and acceptance of change.

Some country examples:

- **Spain** has been following a VET reform agenda, starting with a strategic plan of 2018 and to the [2022 legislative reform of the VET sector](#) that has been crucial for integrating the vocational training system, previously divided among different authorities, and bringing it closer to the labour market. The reform has also made [dual training](#) mandatory and provided for VET providers to be able to adapt part of their curricula to local labour market demands. As a result, the system has seen the increased enrolments, easier validation procedures, and availability of reskilling and upskilling pathways.
- **Greece**, by the VET law 4673/2020 has tried to reshape and rebrand the VET sector, [changing also the governance structure](#), the latter being very important as for the first time, participation of stakeholders, namely, the education ministry and other relevant ministries, employer and employee associations, and chambers, is possible and mandatory. The new structure allows to take proposals for new programmes and to build curricula taking into account local needs. In addition to this, the Law 4921/2022 has significantly [modernised the Greek Public Employment Service \(DYPA\)](#) to ensure a more effective response to the needs of the labour market and the fulfilment of its pivotal role in matching labour supply and demand, promoting employment, and upskilling the workforce. Moreover, the Law of 2022 updated the system of continuing professional training of the workforce to more effectively respond to the country's socio-economic needs.

Breakout session 2: Flexible and inclusive VET to support lifelong learning

Making VET flexible emerges the second most relevant priority to VET stakeholders in EU-27+ countries (101 out of 239 selected it) and to the ReferNet respondents. Most stakeholders agree that making VET flexible is strongly connected to developing strong lifelong learning (LLL) systems and culture, crucial for reskilling and upskilling of individuals and keeping their skills to match new demands, e.g. those related to digital and green transitions. In the view of many stakeholders, this priority is tightly related to the one of making VET agile and adapting to the labour market. It is also related to making VET inclusive as through flexibility VET provides all learners, especially those from vulnerable groups, with learning opportunities and pathways to match their learning needs and circumstances. Students who face difficulties in classrooms and need to quickly enter the labour market, workers in case of or at risk of a job loss, or migrants and refugees, can find their way to participate in learning. Among those respondents who discussed VET flexibility, more than a half observe some progress towards making VET more flexible. The progress seems to have been driven by developments in digitalisation and modularisation of learning, which contribute to flexible pathways and provision.

Among the actions contributing most to achieving the priority, stakeholders refer to introducing new VET pathways and curricula, learner support mechanisms from guidance to second chance learning opportunities for adults to re-enter education and training and to improving validation and recognition of learning outcomes, and financial incentives to companies and VET providers. Creating individual learning accounts are also among the

contributing actions. Micro-credentials and re-skilling and upskilling opportunities were most discussed themes under this priority.

Among the obstacles to address the priority, stakeholders mentioned the system resistance to change, insufficient coordination and fragmented governance, especially in CVET and adult learning provision, low participation and motivation of adult learners, and overall still low image of VET in some countries. As possible solutions, VET stakeholders refer to strengthening and promoting validation and recognition of prior learning, increasing cooperation of stakeholders, securing funding for re-skilling initiatives, continuing revision and update of curricula, and emphasis on modularisation and micro-credentials.

Inclusive VET has been selected as most relevant by less stakeholders; those who selected it emphasised that it is important to prevent exclusion for socio-economic reasons and attract learners from vulnerable backgrounds to education and training. Inclusive VET is also crucial to support learners with different learning and educational needs, some specifically referred to learners from migrant backgrounds and refugees, early leavers and NEETs (young people not in education, employment or training), learners with disability. Not only does VET provide equal education opportunities, but also strengthens employability and labour market participation. Achieving inclusive VET is closely linked with making it more flexible, adapting to the labour market and attractive. To achieve inclusive VET, stakeholders suggested increasing targeted funding, improving the coordination among ministries and other stakeholders, targeted recruitment and awareness campaigns, improved career guidance and support systems and services.

Some country examples:

- In **Bulgaria**, Strategic Framework for the Development of Education, Training, and Learning (2021-30) and a Strategic Vision for Dual Vocational Education and Training by 2030 adopted in 2023 have been guiding the VET reform in the country. In March 2024, amendments to the Law on Vocational Education and Training were adopted. These changes relate to understanding the need for VET to be more flexible and mobile, adapted to the needs of the labour market, and to provide opportunities for IVET and CVET. VET for individuals aged 16 and older will focus training on transversal and key skills needed in the labour market through training for the attainment of individual units of learning outcomes. Training institutions can now organise vocational training for the acquisition of individual units of learning outcomes. Learners can collect these units until they receive formal recognition for a qualification in a particular occupation or a related area. Additionally, these units can be transferred between different occupations within the same field of education, promoting flexibility within the qualifications framework.
- **Portugal** has been reinforcing training opportunities for adults. Changes in recent years include creating more system flexibility, revising legal frameworks to allow better permeability in different paths, and improving certification of training units. The [Qualifica programme, the recognition, validation and certification of competences process \(RVCC\)](#), the [Adults impulse programme, professional programmes \(*cursos profissionais*\)](#) and some other were put in place to tailor to the needs of adult learners and to increase their participation in initial and continuing training.
- In **Ireland**, the VET system is very open and values learning at any point of life. It also embeds transfer and progression opportunities. [The Quality and Qualifications](#)

Ireland (QQI) can provide awards as small as five credits all the way up to much more significant major awards.

- In Flanders (**Belgium**), the Flemish network of companies (VOKA) and Flanders' Chamber of Commerce and Industry launched [Talentcenters](#), with Mechelen-Kempen and Limburg as their pilot locations. Talentcenters are personalised educational centres that help students make well-informed choices about their education; they also provide a bridge between education and the workplace.

Breakout session 3: Attractive VET based on modern and digitalised provision

Making VET attractive through modern and digitalised provision is among the three most relevant priorities according to VET stakeholders in almost all countries. While the ultimate goal of reform and modernisation is to attract more learners to IVET and CVET, attractiveness is also essential to address the growing skill shortages and responding to the needs of the labour market. Most stakeholders see some progress towards achieving this priority and they also note links to making VET more flexible and innovative.

Actions that contribute most to making VET attractive, according to the stakeholders, are modernisation of VET infrastructure, providing partial qualifications and modular provision, digitalisation of provision and learning modes (blended and distance learning), mobility programmes, establishing more permeable pathways, and equipping teachers and trainers with necessary competences through continuing professional development (CPD). Attracting teachers and trainers to VET was the most discussed issue in this priority. Stakeholders from ministries and VET agencies refer to targeted promotional activities, skill competitions and international opportunities, which contribute to raising awareness about VET and its benefits. The role of the social partners and companies has been emphasised by some stakeholders. Integration of advanced technology solutions such as virtual reality (VR), extended reality (XR) and artificial intelligence (AI) to VET has not been much discussed by the stakeholders during the interviews; however, some developments in recent years have been noted.

Among obstacles to achieving attractive VET, stakeholders mention difficulties to attract and retain highly qualified teachers and trainers, teacher ageing and retirement, low engagement of employers in providing training opportunities, especially small businesses, high costs of advanced technologies in combination with the need to train VET teacher to use those and lack of resources. In some countries despite all efforts, the perception of VET among students and their parents, and in society in general, remains low. Among the solutions, stakeholders see systematic improvement of VET teacher working conditions and professional development, and making requirements to enter teaching more flexible, more targeted and systemic communication and promotion campaigns, improved guidance.

Some country examples:

- In **France**, the VET system is designed to enhance permeability, allowing individuals with Level 3 qualifications to progress to Level 4. Qualifications are structured in [distinct blocks](#) and are earned progressively, typically comprising three or four units. This modular approach enables participants to retrain after several years and

continue with additional units. Learners can make transitions (*passerelles*) between different educational paths, facilitating their progression through ongoing learning opportunities.

- In **Spain**, the employer organisation 'Confebask' in the Basque Country has its own Vocational Training department. The organisation believes that highly trained individuals are needed to adapt to new machines, production methods, and digital tools as they are introduced. The organisation also works with the Basque Government on different VET plans.
- In Flanders (**Belgium**), the Ministry of Education adopted the so-called Action Plan extended reality (XR), aimed to provide VET schools with access to augmented reality and virtual reality (VR) tools. In this case, they are working in cooperation with sectoral partners to develop materials, finance the renting and/or borrowing of these instruments and allow teachers to develop the skills to work and teach using XR.
- In **Denmark**, significant funds have been allocated over the past two years to improve the VET sector, particularly for acquiring modern equipment and for VET teacher upskilling. The introduction of modern technology in educational settings has the potential to attract professionals to the teaching profession, as many may be eager to engage with state-of-the-art tools and resources. Some years ago, about 10 innovation centres were established, each specialising in specific technologies; this allows schools to concentrate on particular areas of expertise and fosters a more engaging environment for teachers. By creating these innovation centres, the government also aims to make careers in VET more appealing to educators.
- In **Malta**, the [Institute for Education](#) (IfE) actively uses social media platforms to share engaging videos and testimonials from former students and alumni, aiming to promote the teaching profession. The IfE lecturers regularly visit schools to discuss the benefits of a teaching career while the student affairs manager participates in educational fairs to connect with students currently in compulsory education. The IfE also has integrated key competences into the curriculum of teacher training courses. These competences are embedded across all core subjects. This holistic approach ensures that every teacher graduating from the Institute has acquired digital competence, entrepreneurship, innovative thinking, critical thinking, and the ability to learn independently. This initiative enhances professional development for teachers and contributes to making the teaching and training profession more attractive.

Breakout session 4: Innovative, excellent and quality assured VET

The priority of making **VET excellent and innovative** has been mentioned among three most relevant priorities by the least number of VET stakeholders (39 out 239), compared to the views of the ReferNet respondents where it was mentioned the third most relevant. The priority is seen relevant because innovative and excellent VET is aligned with sectoral and industry innovations and allows learners to acquire most relevant skills, including for the green and digital transitions. In addition, innovative and excellent VET contributes to competitiveness of enterprises and the advancement of national and local economies. This view is shared by ministries of education, local authorities and the social partners who also note some progress made in recent years in this area. Innovative and excellent VET is also linked to increasing its attractiveness to young people.

Among the actions contributing most to making VET innovative and excellent, stakeholders refer to introduction of new curricula going beyond traditional approaches and integrating digital and green, technological and entrepreneurship skills, integrating new technologies and teaching methodologies in VET, and cooperation with industry and establishing centres of excellence. Some stakeholders noted the investment in modernising VET schools in the last years, specifically infrastructure, buildings and equipment; companies are often involved in modernisation. The green transition has been discussed the most within the framework of this priority, with many stakeholders noting more attention to this dimension in the last years. In some countries, ministries and national VET agencies work on integrating green skills and sustainability in VET programmes and curricula through modules or courses and establishing re-skilling programmes for workers to embrace the green transition. In some countries, the green transition is in the centre of ongoing debate.

Among the obstacles to address the priority, stakeholders mentioned financial constraints, difficulties of upgrading infrastructure, capacity of VET providers and disparities between regions, the complexity of the green agenda with related labour shortages and effect on some regions and sectors. To address the obstacles, stakeholders refer to the use of the EU funding to keep VET facilities, infrastructure, and equipment up-to-date, and to the need to give VET providers more flexibility to adjust their curricula to the emerging needs.

Quality assurance has also been selected by less respondents, which might be related to the work that countries have already done within the EQAVET; noteworthy, it has been mostly discussed by the stakeholders most involved in quality assurance in their countries. They also considered that quality assurance is important for achieving other priorities.

Actions contributing to quality assurance are renewing and developing evaluation models, designing and implementing standardised exams, including with the new technologies, establishing frameworks of external and internal evaluation, extending quality assurance practices to WBL and apprenticeships. Developing skills forecasting systems and graduate tracking tools have been among the measures to ensure the VET quality in the last years by increasing its relevance and also to making it more adaptable to the labour market needs. These have been referred to by some stakeholders and they are implemented by ministries of labour or employment and public employment services and often involve the labour market stakeholders.

Among obstacles to setting up quality assurance are resistance to change, lack of quality culture, fragmented regulations and their frequent change, application of QA in specific segments of VET, e.g. only in IVET, and resource constraints. To address those, stakeholders suggest expanding the QA system coverage, enhancing support and cooperation of stakeholders, improving the existing mechanisms through improved regulation and guidelines, streamlining data structures and exchange among responsible bodies.

Some country examples:

- In **Germany**, there has been a significant [federal initiative aimed at modernising VET infrastructure](#), particularly in the realm of digitalisation. This initiative, known as the Digital Pact for Schools, was designed to enhance the use of digital opportunities within educational institutions. It comprised substantial investments totalling €6.5 billion, which enabled schools to upgrade their IT infrastructure, including networks and teaching tools like digital whiteboards. Many institutions also allocated part of this funding to ensure that all teachers were equipped with laptops. Germany has been implementing other initiatives aimed to support excellence, under the umbrella initiative [Excellence in VET](#), measures such as [InnoVET](#), [InnoVET PLUS](#) programmes, [the dual – VET with system](#) campaign, a new funding programme for innovative and excellent inter-company training [INex-ÜBA](#), or the [BM=x³ project](#), a decentralised supra-regional vocational training academy for the high-technology sector with micro- and nanotechnology occupations, have been evolving.
- In **Estonia**, the Public Employment Service introduced a new methodology to ensure that public funds are used effectively by targeting training in areas with existing and anticipated labour market shortages. The methodology incorporates research results, which include qualitative and quantitative assessments of sectoral needs for labour and skills. The [OSKA programme](#) forecasts future workplace needs and ensures that all state-funded learning, including those paid by state or European funds, aligns with these forecasts, ensuring, therefore, that the training provided is always relevant and beneficial.
- In **Hungary**, the Ministry of Culture and Innovation created the [Certified Technician Training](#), a five-year IVET programme that also includes additional content and extracurricular activities provided by universities and/or higher education institutions. Programmes and contents are decided by universities in cooperation with the VET school. When pupils receive this qualification, they earn extra credits to enter universities in their given sector: this makes the pathway to higher education smoother and more flexible, contributing to upward convergence.

Guiding questions for all breakout sessions:

- (1) Please comment on the findings and country examples presented. Are there similar policies and approaches in your country? Which of the findings are most relevant to your country?
- (2) Which specific challenges do you see for the implementation of the priority? Which suggested solutions do you see as most relevant to your country?
- (3) To what extent and how has the national implementation plan influenced VET in your countries as regards the priority discussed? Looking forward, which issues will remain or be given more attention in the coming years (up to 2030 or beyond) in your country?