



Joint CEDEFOP – ETF conference
Enhancing European Cooperation in VET – Looking back planning ahead

Concept Note

For nearly two decades, Member States, European Economic Area, Candidate countries and European social partners have been working closely on joint priorities for vocational education and training (VET). In 2020, the current policy cycle within this cooperation – known as the Copenhagen process – is coming to an end. Based on a long-term vision agreed in 2010 together with a set of shorter-term priority areas (Bruges communiqué), in 2015, they renewed their efforts to raise quality and status of VET (Riga Conclusions).

The European Commission sees future priorities in enabling VET systems to support Europe's social fairness, competitiveness and innovation, to embrace digitalisation and contribute to the Green Deal. The update of the Skills Agenda for Europe, the forthcoming Council Recommendation on VET and the European Education Area are expected to operationalise President's von der Leyen vision to bring down barriers to learning and improve access to quality education and training. The Advisory Committee on Vocational Training in its 2018 Opinion on the future of VET ⁽¹⁾ sets a vision whereby European VET systems by 2030 should aim to deliver excellent, inclusive and lifelong VET. Linked to these priorities, the German Presidency of the European Union prepares a Ministerial Conference in September 2020 in Osnabrück to reinforce the process of European cooperation in VET. In this complex landscape the joint Cedefop-ETF conference aims to support a smooth transition from the past to the future VET priorities at European level.

Looking back

The Riga Conclusions 2015 have given a new boost to VET reforms across the EU and beyond. More importantly, they reiterated the political commitment to further implement reforms embedded in national, regional and local developments and demands in line with the strategic objectives set by the Bruges communiqué and with a focus on five medium-term deliverables ⁽²⁾. Within the period 2015-2020, important EU policy initiatives have embraced the scope for high quality and attractive VET and strengthened its social role within education and training. The proclamation of the European Pillar of Social Rights in 2017 and the Skills agenda for Europe in 2016 together with initiatives like the European Alliance for Apprenticeships and the European Vocational skills Week and the work done by the relevant working groups within the EU-level education and training framework 2020 underpinned and maintained the positive momentum around VET and human capital development.

Five years later, the signs of change in VET systems are visible. The need to continue reforms in VET is also evident in the country specific recommendations related to skills development that the European Commission provides in the context of economic policy coordination (i.e. the 2019 European Semester Package). This is not surprising due to VET's strong links with the world of work and its relevance in providing labour market related skills to both young people making the transition to work and to adults throughout their working life.

As we are approaching the end of the policy cycles for cooperation in education and training – overall and for VET – and new challenges are ahead of us, the need to consolidate efforts, learn from the past and plan the future is imminent. The COVID-19 crisis has brought

(1) Available at <https://ec.europa.eu/social/BlobServlet?docId=20479&langId=en>

(2) The five medium term deliverables agreed in the Riga conclusions are: 1) work-based learning in all its forms 2) quality assurance and feedback loops to I-VET and C-VET 3) access to VET and qualifications for all through more flexible and permeable systems, notably by offering guidance and validation 4) key competences in both IVET and CVET 5) professional development of VET teachers, trainers and mentors

unprecedented disruption in many areas of activity, including education and training, and recovering from it will require changes and adjustments in strategies and policies at the EU and national levels. The European Commission has adjusted its work programme 2020 and put forward a recovery plan for Europe, keeping commitment to continue with the Green Deal and the Digital Strategy as necessary to relaunch the European economy. The European cooperation in VET will also require adjustments and refocusing some priorities but it is important to preserve the achievements gained so far to and build on them for excellent, inclusive and lifelong VET.

Cedefop and ETF analysis confirms the strong focus on work-based learning - which expands to different levels of VET - and to widening access to VET and qualifications for all including upskilling opportunities for a wide range of disadvantaged groups, especially low-qualified adults. The findings also show that among the agreed transversal principles, 'involving relevant stakeholders' has been at the core of many initiatives. Targeting excellence and innovation can still be further developed.

Findings from the reporting exercise regularly informed discussions of Directors General (DGV) and the European Commission's Advisory Committee for Vocational Training (ACVT), thus forming a corner stone for reflections on the future of VET. The final 'Riga report', a joint effort by Cedefop and ETF presents the achievements and does justice to the effort and commitment shown by the participating countries. This is yet another useful and rich source of intelligence and analysis to guide the future steps.

Planning ahead

Taking the progress made in European cooperation in VET as a starting point, this event will debate Cedefop's and ETF's overall evidence on the key challenges for VET in a forward-looking perspective. Participants will discuss issues related to:

- Excellence and attractiveness of VET;
- VET's contribution to labour market integration and social inclusion;
- The role of VET to provide skills for a carbon free economy and a new digital age;
- Transparency and permeability for stronger VET.

The conference participants will reflect on the impact of the Covid-19 crisis on many areas of human activity in general and on education and training in particular. The situation required every learner, teacher, school principal, parent to adjust, change usual routines quickly and effectively at the same time. Digital learning has become reality in one day. VET faced even more pressure as the learning is linked to the situation in the economy and the labour market. What lessons will the EU take from the crisis and how the digital momentum will be taken forward?

These reflections will help policy makers to set priorities for VET beyond 2020. It will also offer an opportunity to present the future EU level initiatives to support modernisation of VET. The conference brings together policy makers, social partners and experts from all participating countries, the European Commission and international organisations. For the Western Balkans the conference will also build on the results of the ETF Torino process assessment on human capital development carried out in 2019.

The conference is hosted under the auspices of the Croatian and the German Presidency of the European Union in cooperation with the European Commission.