POLICY LEARNING FORUM

VET as a solution to leaving education early

16 and 17 May 2017
Thessaloniki, Greece

CEDEFOP
European Centre for the Development
of Vocational Training

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A policy learning forum on **"VET as a solution to leaving education early"** will take place on 16 and 17 May 2017 at Cedefop in Thessaloniki. It will be hosted by Cedefop and involve the participation of approximately 80 European policy-makers and practitioners as well as representatives form international organisations involved in the design and implementation of measures to tackle early leaving from education and training.

1.1 Focus of the policy learning forum

This policy learning form (PLF) will focus on the contribution VET can make to reducing ELET.

Fighting early leaving from education and training (ELET) is a key element of the Europe 2020 strategy, where the positive effects of reducing ELET on employability and the fight against social exclusion are identified. The fall from 17.0% in 2002 to 11.0 % in 2015 represents steady progress towards the Europe 2020 target of less than 10% set in the strategy. Nevertheless, numbers of young people without an upper-secondary qualification remain high: more than four million in 2015. Further, the EU average hides important disparities between countries and regions. Tackling ELET remains a priority, given its cost to the individual and society as a whole.

Vocational education and training (VET) can have both a preventive and a remedial role in ELET. Preventive, in that it offers an alternative to general education, a route which does not suit all young people. Remedial, in that it has the potential to reengage young people who have already left education, offering a more practical, work-oriented route towards a qualification. Dealing with ELET requires better understanding of the phenomenon, streamlining existing initiatives and a strategic alliance between policy-makers, educators, employers, trade unions and civil society.

Cedefop recently published the study *Leaving education early: putting vocational education and training centre stage,* which will be the starting point for the work of the policy learning forum. The study findings should assist policy- and decision-makers at different levels in (further) developing ELET monitoring systems and improving VET policies to tackle early leaving from education and training.

Following this study, Cedefop also developed an online toolkit, inspired by VET practices, providing guidance, good practices and tools to help tackle ELET. The aim of the PLF is to disseminate the findings of the study and associated tools, and to secure participants' commitment to disseminate these tools at national and international levels.

Participants' feedback on the toolkit and associated evaluation tools will be used to inform the working group activities and subsequent plenary discussions, aiming to ensure that the event is relevant to all and tailored to their needs.

1.2   Aims and methodology

The aims of the policy learning forum include:

- learning from the findings of the above-mentioned Cedefop study and piloting the associated web-based toolkit;
- discussing the extent to which Member States are currently exploiting VET's potential to contribute to reducing ELET and helping to identify how to develop this further;
- enabling participants to use Cedefop's toolkit and associated evaluation tools to assess strengths and weaknesses of their policies (at national, regional or institutional level);
- identifying common strengths and weaknesses and recommending possible training needs or areas for further research in the future;
- providing an opportunity to learn from others who are working in the same field through a poster exhibition on good practices from different European countries as well as panel discussions with key international experts;
- creating a network of high-level experts working on inclusive VET policies.

A printed copy of the study and a link to the web-based toolkit will be distributed to the participants during the event.

The event will start with an introductory plenary session to present the findings of the study and the online toolkit. This will be followed by a presentation of the self-reflection tool, its completion by participants, and a discussion on this tool during the second day. On both days, there will be parallel working sessions on poster exhibitions and piloting of the toolkit.

The event will then be structured according to the three aspects of ELET:

- identification: identifying those at risk of early leaving and identifying and monitoring those who have already dropped out;
- intervention: measures to tackle early leaving; and
- evaluation: evaluating measures to identify what works and for whom.

There will be a short plenary session and a group session relating to each of these topics. Delegates will be divided into working groups, based on their profile:

- in the first session, national-level policy-makers will focus on monitoring early leavers; decision-makers and practitioners at local or institutional level will focus on identifying learners at risk of early leaving. Other professionals, mainly researchers, will choose their topic of interest;
- in the second session, participants will be asked to group according to their main area of expertise and interest: mentoring and coaching; institution-level action measures; or re-engaging, motivating and second chance measures;
- in the third session, participants will learn from good practices on undertaken policy evaluations and will develop their own evaluation, using Cedefop's evaluation plans developed for policy-makers and VET providers.

These working group sessions will be an opportunity to identify and discuss commonalities in strengths and weaknesses, and identify possible opportunities for improving the web toolkit, or areas for further research. A summary of these discussions will be presented in the plenary session.

Two panel discussions with international high-level participants will provide further insights highlighting experiences in and beyond Europe:

- in the first panel, high-level representatives from European and international institutions such as the World Bank, the OECD, the European Commission and the European Training Foundation will discuss the extent to which countries from around the world are currently exploiting VET's potential to contribute to reducing ELET and will help to identify how to develop this further;
- in the second panel, high-level representatives from European and international institutions, such as the World Bank, UNESCO, the European Commission, Eurofound and the European Agency for Special Needs and Inclusive Education, will provide insights from recent evidence on how to create and strengthen a culture of education policy evaluation in Europe (and beyond).

1.3 Issues and questions informing the work of the PLF

The following proposed issues can be used to steer the policy learning forum.

1.3.1 Identification

- At what level is identification/monitoring of early leavers from education carried out? Which organisations are responsible? Can examples of effective systems/structures be identified?
- To what extent are outreach activities carried out to re-engage early leavers? Is there evidence of their effectiveness?
- What problems are encountered in collecting data on early leavers and how have these been addressed?

1.3.2 Intervention

- To what extent is VET recognised as a way to address ELET in participating countries? Is there more to be done to raise VET's profile as a solution to ELET?
- Is any work being done to address early leaving specifically from VET? Can examples of successful practices be identified?
- Are other VET reforms taking place that could have an impact on early leaving (such as efforts to improve VET's quality/profile)?

1.3.3 Evaluation

- To what extent are ELET measures evaluated in participating countries? How robust are these evaluations?
- How can the 'soft' outcomes of ELET measures be captured in a way that can inform policy and funding decisions? Can examples of good practices be identified?
- What recommendations can be made to improve future evaluation efforts?

1.4 Participants

Around 80 participants, national, regional and local policy-makers, institutional level actors and social partners from different European countries, as well as representatives from other European and international organisations such as the World Bank, the OECD, UNESCO, the European Commission, Eurofound, the ETF, the European Agency for Special Needs and Inclusive Education, etc.