



Workshop 1: Transparency and permeability for stronger VET

Vocational education and training (VET) in Europe is diverse and complex and it is constantly required to respond to aging societies, technological changes, globalisation, aspirations around social rights and green Europe. People need to update and upgrade their skills and develop new skills throughout their lives for successfully coping with, adapting to the evolving challenges and progress in their careers.

Permeability and transparency measures and tools provide for smooth transitions of learners in the education and training systems, to and in the labour market. The European cooperation to develop common tools and instruments has increased understanding among Member States on how their (vocational) education and training systems are organised and function.

Within the Copenhagen process, the need to improve **permeability** in VET arose to challenge VET, and particularly IVET, as a narrow pathway that is not always linked with other education paths. Despite still strong perception among some Europeans of IVET as a dead end, in recent years, VET upholds its position vis-à-vis general education, with VET graduates showing better employability and VET expanding to higher levels. Setting up new pathways and bridging routes, making admission, progression and examination rules more flexible, introducing modularisation are among measures taken to increase permeability of VET. Cedefop's data (2019) show that almost 70% of VET students are enrolled in upper secondary vocational programmes granting direct access to tertiary education; one third of 18-24-year olds VET graduates are in further education or training ⁽¹⁾.

Connecting VET with other processes such as guidance and validation of non-formal and informal learning as facilitated by the Upskilling agenda ⁽²⁾ can increase synergies and offer tailored responses. Effective career guidance and validation arrangements help citizens easier navigate identify their skills, get the outcomes of their non-formal and informal learning recognised and motivate them to up/reskill.

In a complex landscape of VET systems and qualifications, the demand for **transparency** is strong to build an understanding and trust and to ease mobility in all directions; within sectors, systems and internationally. Countries made significant progress in the shift to learning outcomes. Learning outcomes-based comprehensive national qualifications frameworks implemented across the EU improved access, progression and mobility and supported recognition of VET qualifications; and their impact is growing. In the Western Balkans and Turkey and Eastern Partnership countries, ETF notes positive progress in the design and implementation of qualification systems through introduction of NQFs. The policies on qualifications in these countries are oriented towards lifelong learning, quality and inclusion.

Key transparency instruments were never limited to VET, except for ECVET and EQAVET. EQF/NQFs and Europass are comprehensive and cross sector-oriented, addressing

⁽¹⁾ Cedefop, On the way to 2020: data for vocational education and training policies Indicator overviews, 2019 update

⁽²⁾ Council Recommendation on Upskilling Pathways, 2016

individual users and their needs. The difficulties that countries faced in developing ECVET signal that limiting a tool to a system or sector could be of limited added value for citizens.

For true transparency, individual learners and employers need to get easy access to information on the content and profile of qualifications and must be enabled to make a quick comparison of qualifications and their possible use. Recent initiative to modernise Europass aims to provide citizens with a single and clearly identifiable source of information on qualifications. The rapid changing character of qualifications (non-state, international) and the emergence of credentials in various forms indicate directions for the future work on transparency. The work needed for full implementation of the newly-established qualifications systems will continue: qualifications registers have to be filled with quality-assured qualifications and linked to support mobility; quality assurance standards and mechanisms still have to be consolidated and harmonized across different sub-systems of education and training.

VET permeability, progression and possibility for development of new skills throughout a life make VET attractive. VET systems across the EU observe less clear-cut borderlines between VET for youths and adults, initial and continuing vocational training, and countries are zooming in on CVET. This calls for more lifelong learning perspective and effective interaction between all sectors of education and training systems. Cedefop (2020) ⁽³⁾ identified the ongoing trend of refocusing of IVET on broader occupational areas and transferable competences, acknowledging that job-specific skills will inevitably change and that the ability to cope with this change is of essential importance. At the same time smaller credentials and partial qualifications are gaining importance.

Better integration and coordination between general education, IVET and CVET, more 'age neutral' approach to learning, integrating work-based learning elements in CVET can support establishing effective lifelong learning systems and boost participation that remains well below the ambition set by EU policy.

Examples of practice

- [The Austrian NQF](#), Eduard Staudecker (Austria).
- [Skills systems and reskilling opportunities for adults](#), Külli All (Estonia).

Discussion questions:

- (1) What are countries' priorities and success examples in making VET more permeable and integrated in the education and training systems?
- (2) How have the common European tools for transparency increased common understanding and trust among the systems? How will they improve supporting individuals in their learning and career pathways?
- (3) Is VET going to become age neutral? What strategies and approaches would develop and use the potential of CVET to address the needs of societies, economies and individuals?

As a result of the discussion on their topics, the participants of each workshop will propose up to **two key messages** (suggestions for action) to feed into the European cooperation in VET in the coming years.

⁽³⁾Cedefop (2020). *Vocational education and training in Europe, 1995-2035: scenarios for European vocational education and training in the 21st century*. Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union. Cedefop reference series; No 114. <http://data.europa.eu/doi/10.2801/794471>.