



Workshop 2: VET for labour market integration and social inclusion

VET being perhaps the most heterogeneous type of education and training is best suited to reach beyond its traditional scope and audience. The provision of skills for the labour market goes hand in hand with the engagement of more people in training, (re-)skilling and upskilling. Therefore, the lifelong learning perspective demands from VET systems to accommodate at their core business types of training adults, people with disabilities and vulnerable groups. Upskilling and reskilling, lifelong guidance and validation, improving access to VET, equal opportunities, NEETs, should all be primary targets in excellent and inclusive VET systems. Progress monitoring of Riga medium-term deliverables show that Member States and Candidate Countries address the labour market integration of youth and other vulnerable groups, looking into the potential of skills development to tackle social vulnerabilities and exploring the potential of work-based learning for adults.

Over the last years, the labour market outcomes of initial VET have constantly improved. In many cases, recent VET graduates of upper secondary and post-secondary education (ISCED 3–4) have better employment rates compared to their peers who graduated from a general programme at secondary level. At the same time, VET graduates seem to enjoy better prospects to find a job matching their level or profile of studies.

Prioritisation of VET relevance in education and labour market reforms explains to a great extent the improvements in transition from school to work. Countries have invested heavily in practical and work-based learning opportunities and stronger school cooperation with companies in the design and delivery of training programmes. Also, further steps were adopted towards introducing or expanding of formal apprenticeships, internships and other forms of practical and work experience gaining schemes.

Countries' efforts to tackle early school leaving paid off and younger generations have better education attainment levels. Furthermore, VET and, in particular, work-based learning in continuing VET have potential of reducing skill shortages in the longer term by engaging skilled employees with negative learning experiences in lifelong learning. Still several groups remain exposed to school disengagement and limited career prospects such as young people from poor neighbourhoods and/or rural areas, members of ethnic minorities, disabled persons and so on. Gender dimension still plays a significant role in school enrolment and retention, particularly in VET where female and male dominated education profiles are visible. Coupled with family care pressures, this leads to different outcomes in terms of labour market participation and persistent gender divide in employment and income.

VET is not anymore about narrow occupational and technical knowledge. Countries made efforts to embed key competences in VET programmes as such skills are essential in dynamic socio-economic contexts and can boost adaptability (1). At the same time, making VET inclusive and relevant entails efficient interactions with other policy strands, particularly employment and social protection but also innovation and economic development, and a good grounding in local and regional contexts.

(1) Cedefop (forthcoming). Key competences in initial VET: digital, multilingual and literacy; Cedefop (2019). The changing nature and role of vocational education and training in Europe. Volume 7: VET from a lifelong learning perspective: continuing VET concepts, providers and participants in Europe 1995-2015. Luxembourg: Publications Office. Cedefop research paper; No 74. <http://data.europa.eu/doi/10.2801/357>; ETF (2020). Policies for human capital development: South Eastern Europe and Turkey – An ETF Torino Process Assessment. Turin. <https://www.etf.europa.eu/en/publications-and-resources/publications/policies-human-capital-development-south-eastern-europe-and>

COVID-19 pandemic has deeply impacted the European economies and labour demand in the first part of 2020. It is rather difficult to estimate when and how various countries will start recovering after the pandemic shock. Among the most exposed to joblessness in such volatile context are young graduates, low skilled and socially vulnerable groups.

Beyond the negative social toll, the COVID-19 crisis has also been an opportunity for reforms and innovation, for example in education delivery or working patterns. In addition, changes are expected in labour demand with possible reorganisations of production, shorter and European localised supply-demand chains and new/emerging sectors or sub-sectoral economic activities. This calls for measures and services fit to stimulate investments in human capital development, particularly support to re-shape career pathways through re/upskilling, career guidance and counselling and equipping graduates and workers with career management skills.

Continuing VET and its enhanced synergies with initial VET could be a potential strategic focus of post-2020 policy framework to help workers and companies in making successful transitions to new profiles/typology of products, technologies, services etc. The needs of self-employed and small and medium sized enterprises should be particularly catered for since they struggle the most in tight labour market, economic and financial conditions or when labour demand changes significantly.

The Riga cycle concludes in one of the worst socio-economic moments in recent history. Achievements and lessons from the prioritisation of Riga medium term deliverables in VET policy-making can inspire the recovery efforts and the long-term vision to make education and training fit for the future labour market and socio-economic challenges. One crucial angle is how to enhance VET's contribution to labour market and social inclusiveness.

Examples of practice

- [Dual education system in Montenegro](#), Dr Mladen Perazic (Montenegro).
- [Further education and training in Ireland](#), Mary Lyons (Ireland).

Discussion questions:

- (1) What are countries' priorities and success examples in making VET inclusive?
- (2) How can upskilling schemes reach and serve those in most need of upskilling, e.g. adults with low education attainment, low-skilled, unemployed or at risk of unemployment?
- (3) What strategies and approaches are foreseen in your countries to ensure and maintain labour market integration of youths and adults in response to the COVID-19 crisis?

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.