

COUNCIL RECOMMENDATION ON VOCATIONAL EDUCATION AND TRAINING

May 2022
A Summary
EDDIE Consortium

In November 2020, the Council of the European Union published a [Council Recommendation](#) comprehensively setting out how vocational education and training (VET) can ensure sustainable competitiveness, social equity and resilience by proposing a recommendation for a specific VET policy.

Vocational education and training (VET) is schooling that aims to equip young people and adults with the knowledge, skills, and competencies required for the pursuit of a profession or, more broadly, for the labor market. It can be offered in formal and non-formal settings at all levels of the European Qualifications Framework (EQF), including the tertiary level. The objective of this EU council's recommendation is to create a genuine European learning area. Borders should not hinder high-quality and inclusive education and training and should remove obstacles to recognizing upper secondary qualifications and periods of learning abroad. The European Union seeks to foster smoother cross-border validation of VET and lifelong learning outcomes through this.

The recommendation itself builds on several initiatives developed at the European level in education, training, and qualifications.

The proposed recommendation is in line with the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union. The European Council's proposal is based on twenty-four different aspects described in the paper. These aspects highlight the importance of implementing this policy and are described below. The Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union recognizes education and access to VET as a fundamental right. At the same time, the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals envisage equal access for all women and men to affordable and quality technical, vocational, and tertiary education. The European Pillar of Social Rights defines principles to support fair and well-functioning labor markets and welfare systems. VET provides people with skills for work, personal development, and citizenship that help them adapt to and manage digital and green transformation. Effective VET policies are essential to promote a skilled, trained, and adaptable workforce and labor markets that are responsive to economic change. In the green and digital transformation, the provision of VET for both youth and adults needs to be significantly expanded and improved while increasing the attractiveness and quality of initial VET. The concept of vocational centers of excellence is piloted to become world-class centers of reference for training in specific fields, both for initial training and continuing up-skilling and re-skilling.

The Commissions Communication highlights various needs for its strategies in sustainability, social affairs, industry, digitalization, and gender equality. Pro-active up- and re-skilling are necessary to reap the benefits of the green transition. The European Agenda for Skills for Sustainable Competitiveness, Social Justice, and Resilience focuses on skills, employability, and human capital. Lifelong learning must become a reality for all so that education and training can keep pace and contribute to addressing the dual transitions. A special call is made to higher education and vocational training to provide more scientists, engineers, and technicians for the labor market, as skills play a crucial role in transitioning to a green and clean economy.

VET is essential for small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) to ensure that their workforce has the necessary skills. The availability of skilled workers or experienced managers has become an essential issue for SMEs. The lack of qualified staff is the biggest obstacle to new investment. Also, the EU Council emphasizes the importance of VET for women and men to ensure gender balance in professions traditionally dominated by men or women.

Various approaches are already in place, as VET has proven to be an effective tool to facilitate the transition into the labor market for young people at risk of exclusion through the "Youth Guarantee". The European Social Fund Plus (ESF+) aims to ensure better labor market relevance to the education and training system and equal access to lifelong learning opportunities through up- and re-skilling pathways. With Erasmus, learning in all contexts should be maintained to boost flexible learning paths allowing individuals to develop competencies necessary to face the challenges of the twenty-first century.

The goals of high-quality and flexible VET and transnational mobility remain central to the global vision for the modernization of VET. The authors note that the EQAVET framework should be integrated into this recommendation and that elements should be added to address the shortcomings of its implementation. Major concerns are the quality of learning outcomes, certification, assessment, stakeholder consultation, the role of teachers and trainers, workplace learning, and flexibility of VET. They note that the concept of ECVET points has generally not been applied and that ECVET has not led to the development of a European credit system in VET, so the authors conclude that these principles should be related to flexibility.

The Council recommends working following national and EU legislation, available resources, national priorities, and circumstances towards implementing a vocational education and training policy. These actions and investments should implement this policy according to the seven fundamental principles described below. The following targets should be achieved at the EU level by 2025: VET graduates in employment should be at least 82%, 60% of VET graduates should benefit from work-based learning during their VET, and 8% of VET learners should undertake learning mobility abroad.

- 1.) VET should equip young people and adults with the knowledge, skills, and competencies they need to succeed in the evolving labor market and society, to manage the recovery and transition to the green and digital economy in times of demographic change across business cycles. It should promote inclusiveness and equal opportunities and contribute to achieving resilience, social justice, and prosperity for all. At the same time, it should encourage European VET systems in the international context to be recognized as a global reference.
- 2.) VET is agile in adapting to labor market changes and offers a balanced mix of vocational and technical skills aligned to all economic cycles, evolving jobs, work practices, and critical competencies. VET programs at all levels include work-based learning components and are regularly updated. VET providers have appropriate autonomy, flexibility, support, and funding to adapt their training offer.
- 3.) Flexibility and progression opportunities are at the core of VET. VET puts the learner at the center, provides access to face-to-face and digital or blended learning, flexible and modular pathways, and is designed to be adaptable. VET programs are based on modules or units of learning outcomes with validation mechanisms in place with the primary aim of achieving a full qualification in the initial VET.
- 4.) VET is a driver for innovation and growth and prepares for the digital and green transitions and occupations in high demand. It becomes resilient by being part of economic, industrial, and innovation strategies, including those linked to recovery, green and digital transformation. Centers of vocational excellence function as catalysts for local business investment. VET institutions have access to state-of-the-art infrastructure and digitalization strategies.
- 5.) VET is an attractive choice based on a modern and digitalized provision of training/skills. Initial and continuing VET are part of lifelong learning and are further developed at higher EQF levels to meet the growing demand for higher vocational qualifications. VET programs consist of an appropriate mix of open, digital, and participatory learning environments. Teachers, trainers, and other staff in VET undertake initial and continuing professional development. Internationalization strategies support a strategic approach to international cooperation in VET. Opportunities for learning mobility of vocational learners and staff are in place. Straightforward and user-friendly information on learning, career, and validation

opportunities in the entire EU is ensured through high-quality lifelong learning and career guidance services, making full use of digital services.

- 6.) VET promotes equality of opportunities, as VET programs are inclusive and accessible to vulnerable groups through digital learning platforms. They promote gender balance through targeted measures while preventing early drop-out from education and training with flexible training formats and supporting the transition from school to work.
- 7.) The final principle is that VET is underpinned by a culture of quality assurance, using the European Quality Assurance Reference Framework (EQAVET Framework). It is based on a set of indicative descriptors and common reference indicators for quality assurance in VET, applied at both system and provider levels. A Quality Assurance National Reference Point for VET continues to bring together all relevant stakeholders to take concrete initiatives to implement and further develop the EQAVET Framework. It should support self-evaluation as a complementary and effective means of quality assurance to enable the measurement of success and the identification of areas for improvement. It, thus, enhances transparency and the coherence of quality assurance activities and strengthens trust between the member states.

The Council recommends implementing these policy elements together with the social partners and other relevant stakeholders at a national level. In doing so, member states should support sustainable partnerships for VET governance in line with the national context and public-private associations. They should make the best use of the European Union's transparency instruments, funds, and tools to support VET reforms and investments. The implementation of this recommendation at a national level should be done within 18 months and monitored.

The Commission supports member states' VET policy implementation activities by ensuring effective governance through the tripartite Advisory Committee on Vocational Education and Training. Furthermore, it seeks to ensure that the EU policy for VET fully reflects the EU Recovery Plan, the European Green Deal, the New Industrial Strategy for Europe, and the SME Strategy for a sustainable and digital Europe. Additionally, the Commission oversees the VET policies are a consistent and coherent part of the European Skills Agenda for sustainable competitiveness, social fairness, and resilience, the Digital Education Action Plan, the overall European cooperation framework for education and training, and the European Education Area. Further support is provided for structural reforms on apprenticeships through the apprenticeship support service and a new boost to the European Alliance for Apprenticeships in synergy with the Youth Guarantee. Support is also given to exploring the concept and use of micro-credit, including in VET, as proposed in the European Skills Agenda. The aim of progressively establishing and developing European Platforms of Centers of Vocational Excellence and exploring European Vocational Core Profiles will be supported as part of and complementary to the Europass platform. The Commission will support the qualitative and effective digitization of VET provision by promoting European competence frameworks and self-assessment tools and exploring the feasibility of an EU-wide survey for VET schools. In addition, the European Alliance for Apprenticeships and the Digital Skills and Jobs Coalitions will be strengthened. European VET systems are promoted in the international context to be recognized as a global reference for VET students in cooperation with international organizations. The Member states' implementation of this recommendation will be supported by strengthening the capacity of VET institutions and by supporting VET research at the national and EU level through funding from relevant Union funds and programs. Qualitative and quantitative monitoring in line with the common objectives set out in this recommendation will be ensured.