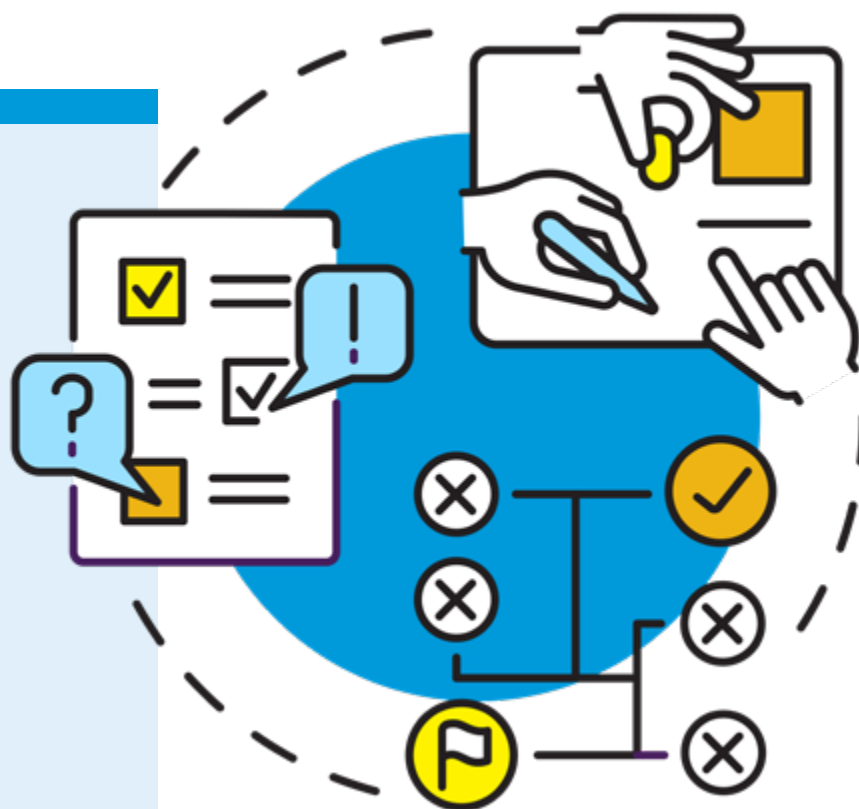




# MOVING TOWARDS COMMON POLICY GOALS AND ALIGNED PROGRESS REPORTING

Cedefop takes stock of European countries' work on **common priorities in vocational education and training**



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Building on years of joint work within the Copenhagen Process, European countries <sup>(1)</sup> have now committed to common priorities laid down in the 2020 [Council Recommendation on Vocational Education and Training \(VET\) for Sustainable Competitiveness, Social Fairness and Resilience](#) and the [Osnabrück Declaration](#) of the same year. The Recommendation marked the beginning of the current VET policy cycle at EU level. Cedefop, together with its [European network of ex-](#)

[pertise in VET \(ReferNet\)](#) and the [European Training Foundation \(ETF\)](#), has followed countries' work in progressing towards these priorities.

The priorities are long-term and broadly defined, allowing each country to develop specific activities responding to their national circumstances and needs. They aim to make VET more flexible and adaptive to labour market needs, to ensure its high quality and to provide progression routes and lifelong learning opportunities to all learners. They also aim at making VET more inclusive and attractive, fostering excellence and innovation, offering continuous training to teachers and trainers and access to state-of-the-art infrastructure to learners. This briefing note pro-

<sup>(1)</sup> The EU Member States, Iceland and Norway as well as five candidate countries (Albania, Montenegro, North Macedonia, Serbia, Turkiye), also referred to as EU-27+ in this briefing note. Cedefop monitors and analyses the EU Member States', Iceland's and Norway's National Implementation Plans, while the ETF monitors those of the candidate countries.

vides an overview of Cedefop's interim findings on what countries have achieved so far and on the areas which need further attention.

## Half-way: progress and challenges

In this Europe-wide exercise of working on common priorities, countries have, for the first time, developed [national implementation plans](#) (NIPs) serving as a reference for monitoring their progress. Each having its distinct characteristics, they have been progressing at different paces and in different areas. Many have undertaken actions to make their VET provision more agile, adaptive, innovative, and attractive, while a smaller number have opted for measures strengthening flexibility, inclusiveness and quality assurance of VET. As most of these priorities are interrelated, countries' measures often address several. For example, those supporting VET's agility, flexibility and excellence contribute to making it more attractive.

According to Cedefop's first findings, countries' NIPs show that the common EU priorities are being addressed by all and that the available funding is used. While a European 'stamp' is noticeable in the measures countries are taking to address the common priorities, overall progress towards common ground remains modest. Also, their work on their NIPs can be disrupted, for example, by changes of government that can result in a reshuffle of public bodies, different policy priorities or delay to reforms. Hence it is important that countries' commitments to EU priorities are well known, shared, and supported by stakeholders.

## Agile and quality-assured VET

Most countries have been developing their VET standards, profiles, and programmes to meet the skill needs of modern, fast-changing economies, relying on relevant skills intelligence.

## VET adapting to new labour market needs

Significant changes have taken place in terms of all-pervasive digitalisation, including artificial intelligence, affecting jobs across the board: for example, many jobs in greening sectors, be it in agriculture, energy or waste and water management, now require fewer manual and more digital skills.

### Box 1. Spain's response to the challenges of digitalisation

The public training and employment service of Spain (Fundación Estatal para la Formación en el Empleo) launched an [online platform](#) in July 2023 providing digital training in response to high demand. While the courses are mainly designed for the self-employed and workers from the social economy, they are accessible to all citizens. Topics include electronic invoicing, cybersecurity, digital marketing, managing virtual teams, and creating digital content. Some of these courses can be taken via self-learning, others are tutored. All include continuous assessment and many issue a certificate after completion. The platform met with high interest, and several thousand participants have already completed at least one course.

Source: ReferNet [Spain/Cedefop 2023. Spain: boosting tools for upskilling and reskilling citizens in digital skills.](#)

### Box 2. Sectoral Skills Councils in Poland

To support the modernisation of its economy, Poland is putting in place sectoral skills councils which play a role in ever more industries across the country. They bring together relevant stakeholders such as VET schools, higher education institutions, labour market organisations, and social partners. Reflecting the voices of different stakeholders, the sectoral skills councils:

- aim to anticipate emerging sectoral skills needs to gear education and training provision to them;
- classify the occupations of their sectors and develop the corresponding curricula;
- develop, in cooperation with the Polish [Educational Research Institute](#), sectoral qualifications frameworks;
- are becoming a key building block of the country's skills governance system.

Source: [Timeline of VET policies in Europe \(ID No 28475\).](#)

## The components of high-quality VET

Countries have reported fewer measures related to creating a culture of quality assurance, especially in continuing VET (CVET). Typically, initiatives fostering quality assurance in VET concern initial school-based VET and comprise monitoring and evaluation activities, such as self-assessments and external evaluations of VET providers, peer reviews, and graduate tracking <sup>(?)</sup>.

Competent teachers and trainers, with their technical and interpersonal skills, are at the core of high-quality VET provision. Their continuous profes-

<sup>(?)</sup> Principles laid down in the [European Quality Assurance Reference Framework for VET \(EQAVET\)](#).

sional development is a priority for many countries. The Belgian project below (Box 3), started years ago, has set ambitious new standards for many others.

### Box 3. VET trainers' professional development in Belgium (FR)

Formaform is a public agency created in Wallonia in 2012, offering continuous training to VET trainers and guidance staff. The courses typically have a duration of a half-day to 3 days and cover a wide variety of subjects targeting the development of beneficiaries' technical, digital and soft skills.

Formaform's goal is to develop and bring together the skills of all those involved in training, guidance, skills validation, and labour market integration, helping to connect and integrate their respective activities. This innovative approach has improved service quality in all fields, teaching, guidance, and work placements.

This achievement is recognised by the Belgian government, which has assigned the development of the [Walloon qualifications framework](#) to Formaform and has designated the agency as the [EQAVET reference point](#) for the region.

Source: [Timeline of VET policies in Europe](#) (ID No 28044).

Stakeholder cooperation is also a key quality factor in VET. It plays a crucial role in holistic approaches to strategic planning, knowledge-sharing, and anticipating risks. In tripartite structures and sectoral partnerships stakeholder cooperation can support the design of policy initiatives, VET qualifications and curricula, and occupational standards and profiles. It is also central to effective CVET delivery (including in work-based settings) in combination with services such as guidance or validation of learning.

### Box 4. Stakeholder cooperation benefiting VET governance

Belgium, France, Hungary, Italy, Cyprus, Latvia, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Poland, Portugal, and Romania are putting in place formal mechanisms for stakeholder engagement in VET governance: involving advisory councils in decision-making processes, establishing national platforms, and strengthening the role of sectoral professional committees or expert councils. Hungary aims to strengthen the involvement of SMEs in dual training by fostering cooperation between SMEs and promoting networking. Poland seeks to create partnerships for developing vocational education and the Integrated Qualifications System, and to establish industry skills centres (BCU), regional VET coordinators in regional educational authorities, the Programme Council on Competences, and a social partner forum.

Source: [Timeline of VET policies in Europe](#), Cedefop's own analysis.

To help people find the learning and working paths that suit them best, countries are improving the quality of and access to guidance services, offering them in new formats (digital, via chat, in groups) and training staff to use new tools or up-to-date labour market intelligence.

Many are continuing their efforts to strengthen work-based learning and apprenticeships that connect VET provision to labour market demand. Some are expanding apprenticeship schemes to new economic sectors, e.g. solar technologies and thermal insulation, others to CVET for adults, including at tertiary level. Such schemes are also used to reach out to low-skilled, unemployed or other vulnerable learners. Some countries offer learners and/or companies financial incentives or provide specific training to in-company trainers.

## Flexible, inclusive and attractive VET for excellence and innovation

### Flexible and inclusive VET for all

In follow-up to the European Skills Agenda, the Council Recommendation on Upskilling Pathways, and the pandemic, many countries have introduced flexible training provision to increase access to learning opportunities for diverse (including vulnerable) learner groups and to support all adults in their individual life-long learning and working careers. Measures carried out by countries often focus on target groups in need of support, such as the low-skilled, women, (those at risk of becoming) early leavers from education and training, migrants and refugees, older workers, or those working in shrinking sectors such as coal mining; they can also include outreach activities. In this context, many countries follow a three-step approach<sup>(3)</sup> comprising assessment of existing skills, their validation and recognition, and a tailored and flexible job or learning offer.

### Box 5. Flexible modular training courses in Portugal

In **Portugal**, a 2022 decree set a new legal framework for certified modular training courses (*Formação Modular Certificada*), extending them up to level 5 of the national qualifications framework (QNQ).

These courses are designed for adults aged 18 and above, employed or unemployed, who do not have qualifications that are in demand in the labour market. The measure allows for more flexibility and complemen-

<sup>(3)</sup> Set out in the Recommendation to provide access to reskilling and upskilling opportunities for all.

tarity in adult education and contributes to matching VET provision to labour market needs in terms of specialised skills at non-university level.

Source: [Timeline of VET policies in Europe \(ID No 43302\)](#).

The modularisation of VET programmes and the development of partial qualifications, microcredentials, and digital badges are part of modern and flexible VET provision responding at all levels to emerging skill needs. Provision stretches from basic upskilling to highly specialised courses at tertiary level and from half-day courses on very specific topics to years-long endeavours such as apprenticeships for adults. The routes offering flexible transitions between VET and general education or VET and higher education/training levels have also contributed to increasing the attractiveness of VET. This illustrates the interlinkages between the different themes which serve as the basis for the evaluation of NIPs.

### Box 6. Germany: Social partners work for vulnerable adults

In **Germany**, the chambers of industry and commerce have been implementing the project [Chancen nutzen!](#) (Use opportunities!). The project targets low-skilled and unskilled adults aged over 25. The emphasis was on developing training modules tailored to regional needs and, more important, the certification of partial qualifications to offer such learner groups an opportunity to acquire a full vocational qualification over time. In 2022, the chambers developed a digital competence assessment for partial qualifications. The project has been extended until 2026.

Source: [Timeline of VET policies in Europe \(ID No 28122\)](#).

## Striving for excellence in VET

Excellence and innovation in VET have many faces. Mobility opportunities are linked to partial or full recognition of skills acquired abroad and can also lead to lasting ties and offer inspiration and new insights which support a more European outlook, innovation, and even system modernisation at home. This is why most EU-27+ countries offer learners mobility opportunities, mostly in IVET, often combined with financial support and recognition of acquired skills. There are also programmes for teacher and staff mobility, for example under the Erasmus+ programme.

[Centres of vocational excellence \(CoVEs\)](#) are another face of excellence in VET. They contribute to countries' efforts to modernise their VET programmes, promote lifelong learning, and increase the attractiveness and inclusiveness of VET.

### Box 7. Making VET more attractive and inclusive through innovation

Poland is planning to create 120 [sector skills centres \(SSCs\)](#) offering non-school-based continuing education in sectors relying on the newest technologies. The [Estonian IT and engineering academies](#) are set to update their VET programmes and to upgrade their learning environments with new hardware and software to improve their IT and engineering training offer. [Germany's Excellence in VET initiative](#) provides for the creation and modernisation of competence centres to promote excellence.

Source: Links in text box.

### Box 8. Danish Knowledge Centres promoting excellence in VET

Denmark has been operating knowledge centres offering advanced CVET matched to the needs of the country's industrial sectors undergoing rapid change. They act as excellence hubs within emerging industrial ecosystems.

These centres focus on topics such as robotics and automation, welfare technology, sustainable building and building renovation, e-business, and digital services. The centres are embedded in VET colleges across the country and partner with universities, research centres and industry. Their state-of-the-art technical and technological equipment enables them to play a key role in matching VET provision to employers' skill needs.

Source: [Timeline of VET policies in Europe \(ID No 28836\)](#).

Some countries have developed VET strategies with an international dimension. This reflects the growing integration of European economies and the need for qualifications recognisable across borders. International skills competitions, such as the yearly [World Skills competitions](#), showcase competitors' outstanding achievements and have strengthened the awareness and the prestige of VET as a hands-on learning option offering plenty of opportunities to access and progress in the labour market.

## The digital and green transition

The digital transition is in full swing. In the wake of the rapid and radical digital transformation of workplaces, digital training provision has surged. This means both the new formats of training delivery and content conveyed, which covers everything from the most basic digital skills to highly specialised ones on a wide range of topics. Across Europe, digital skills are the centrepiece of upskilling and reskilling adults; they also play a key role in VET teacher and trainer, and guidance staff, professional development. Ensuring access to digital infrastructure and resources, espe-

cially for vulnerable groups and learners in remote areas, has become a priority for all countries. Many use individual learning accounts for developing digital skills, drawing on the Recovery and Resilience Fund.

### Further reading

[Virtual get together VET in action – Evidence from implementing EU priorities in national VET plans](#)

### VET Policy briefs 2023

*Thematic perspectives on implementing EU priorities in VET* (Cedefop, 2024, forthcoming)

Countries have reported less progress on the green transition, due to political and societal factors. Also, there is a lack of clarity as to what ‘green’ skills are. Few NIPs included specific measures to develop green skills.

### Box 9. Slovenia modernising and greening its VET system

The 2021-26 programme for modernising **Slovenian** VET focuses on making the system fit for the green and digital transitions and a circular economy. It is also planned to develop new qualifications and study programmes at EQF level 5. Two projects concerning climate goals and content in education and care for climate, are currently carried out. Different guidelines were drawn up for actions such as making schools sustainable (based on which participating schools devised their action plans) and for integrating skills for sustainable development into occupational standards.

Source: [Timeline of VET policies in Europe \(ID No 45054\)](#).

## Success from joint effort/commitment

The integrated monitoring of the VET Recommendation and the Osnabrück Declaration shows, at the half-way point, that despite countries’ progress on common EU priorities in VET and on taking forward their NIPs, some challenges persist. But it also shows that many countries have seized the opportunity of this common exercise to modernise their VET standards and curricula and to take a leap forward on digitalising their VET provision. Designing comprehensive CVET systems for lifelong learning, ensuring the sustainability of work-based learning and apprenticeship, and addressing the green transition in VET are some of the key areas where countries could reinforce their efforts to put plans into action. The need for competent teachers and trainers, quality assurance in VET, adequate funding, as well as sustainability of programmes and measures amid political change, all add to the implementation challenges.

Long-term coordinated efforts and stakeholder cooperation are required to sustain national reform agendas and leverage funding, especially in CVET and lifelong learning. As countries move forward and remain committed to their VET priorities, set in line with the EU agenda, this common endeavour has the potential to gain momentum, contribute to making national VET policies and systems more transparent, and eventually facilitate cross-country mobility in VET.



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