

# **Briefing paper**

## **Vocational Education & Training Initiatives**

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## I. Introduction

This information note outlines the main initiatives and priorities of the EU in the field of vocational education and training (VET). Each EU country is responsible for its own education and training systems. EU policy is designed to support national action and help address common challenges, such as ageing societies, skills deficits in the workforce, technological developments and global competition. Some EU initiatives also include non-EU countries.

The European Commission states that Education and training can help to prevent and tackle poverty and social exclusion, promote mutual respect and build a foundation for an open and democratic society on which active citizenship rests. The **Education and Training 2020** strategic framework (ET 2020) facilitates cooperation among governments, and is designed to complement national action and support EU national governments through peer exchanges, mutual learning, evidence and data collection, in order to pursue reforms to further improve their results in these fields. This framework is valid until 2020 and also includes the Copenhagen Process on cooperation in the area of vocational education and training<sup>1</sup>. Within ET 2020, priority areas are identified to plan activities over work cycles of three years.

The **Europe 2020** strategy, agreed by all EU national governments, sets many targets in different fields of action and policy. The main indicators and benchmarks relating to the field of vocational education and training are the number of early leavers from education and training should be less than 10%, the number of 30 to 34-year-olds with tertiary educational attainment should be at least 40%, an average of at least 15% of adults (aged between 25 and 64) should participate in life-long learning and at least 20% of HE graduates and 6% of 18 to 34-year-olds with an initial vocational qualification should have spent some time studying or training abroad. The initiatives below should contribute to the achievement of these targets.

The content of this information note could support applications for EU projects by enabling applicants to relate their project to the EU priorities in the field. Referring to the priorities outlined in the initiatives could support actions or justify funding for services in those fields. Service providers in the field may be interested to connect to one of the many initiatives or groups active in the field of VET that are described below, for networking, information sharing or partnerships.

## II. Education and Training (ET) 2020 - New priorities for European cooperation in education and training

In 2009 the ET 2020 framework was launched and set objectives to address challenges in education and training by 2020. The value of an integrated framework covering education and training at all levels was confirmed in the stocktaking of this strategy in the report 'New priorities for European cooperation in education and training' from 2015. It stated that *today's need for flexibility and permeability between learning experiences requires policy coherence from early childhood education and schools through to higher education, vocational education and training and adult learning, thereby upholding the principle of lifelong learning.*

New priority areas and concrete issues for further work up to 2020 have been created on the basis of the stocktaking, whilst recognising differences between Member States. The Commission states that strengthening relevant and high-quality knowledge, skills and competences developed throughout lifelong

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<sup>1</sup> The Process was launched in 2002. The associated Copenhagen Declaration calls for enhancing European cooperation in VET across Europe. Priorities and strategies for the promotion of mutual trust, transparency and recognition of competences and qualifications in order to increase mobility and facilitate access to lifelong learning.

learning with a focus on learning outcomes enhances employability, innovation, active citizenship and well-being.

The report states that transparency and recognition tools are essential in facilitating mobility, employability and life-long learning. One initiative has been the development of National Quality frameworks as reference to the European Qualifications Framework (EQF). The Commission argues that effective investment in quality and efficiency of education and training systems is a source of sustainable growth as demonstrated with the Erasmus+ programme and Youth Employment Initiative.

To create a lifetime perspective for education and training, learning outcomes will be stimulated with various levels of learning and from education and training to work. VET plays a key role in developing the relevant skills needed for the work place through all forms work-based learning such as traineeships and apprenticeships.

Providing opportunities for the strengthening of initial and continuous professional development of VET teachers, trainers and mentors is essential to implementing the framework. Strong analytical evidence and progress monitoring to measure the effectiveness of the ET 2020 framework will be carried out in cooperation with other organisations.

Building stronger links between education, business and research, as well as the involvement of social partners and civil society will be pursued, through the Knowledge Alliances and Sector Skills Alliances under Erasmus+, Marie Skłodowska-Curie actions and the European Institute of Innovation and Technology under Horizon 2020. Engagement with stakeholders will also be stimulated through the Education, Training and Youth Forum, the European University-Business Forum, the VET-Business Forum and Thematic Fora in Member States.

ET 2020 peer learning activities, usually conducted within Working Groups, enables Member States to share similar policy challenges and work in clusters. The dissemination of good practices and lessons learned, using international evidence when relevant, will be enhanced through thematic events, policy learning exchanges and any arrangement for knowledge transfer and exchanges on what works in education. Full use will be made of the potential of the Erasmus+ programme to increase the impact of the ET 2020 tools.

The Four ET 2020 strategic objectives are making lifelong learning and mobility a reality, improving the quality and efficiency of education and training, promoting equity, social cohesion and active citizenship and enhancing creativity and innovation, including entrepreneurship, at all levels of education and training.

Among the Six Priority Areas as stated in the report:

- a) Developing relevant and high-quality knowledge, skills and competences throughout lifelong learning, focusing on learning outcomes for employability, innovation, active citizenship and well-being and other key competences such as creativity, entrepreneurship and digital competence to ensure skills reflect growing needs in the economy. Relaunching and continuing lifelong learning strategies and addressing the transition phases within education and training and high-quality guidance, including non-formal and informal learning are essential elements of policy reform. Implementing the Riga medium-term deliverables in VET (see later), while reinforcing the European Alliance for Apprenticeships will mobilise work-based learning initiatives to respond to the anticipation of skills needed in the labour market.
- b) Supporting inclusivity promotes access to quality mainstream education and training for all learners, including disadvantaged groups, such as learners with special needs, newly arrived migrants, people with a migrant background and Roma, while tackling discrimination, racism, segregation, bullying

(including cyber-bullying), violence and stereotypes. Facilitating the effective acquisition of the language(s) of instruction and employment by migrants through formal and non-formal learning strengthens inclusivity within education and training.

- c) Open and innovative education and training, including a full embrace of the digital era increases quality and relevance of the skills developed through learning. This explores the potential of innovative and active pedagogies such as inter-disciplinary teaching and collaborative methods, to enhance the development of relevant and high-level skills and competences, while fostering inclusive education, including for disadvantaged learners and learners with disabilities. These initiatives depend on fostering cooperation by stimulating the engagement of learners, teachers, trainers, school leaders and other members of educational staff, parents and the broader local community such as civil society groups, social partners and business. This increases the synergy between education, research and innovation activities, in a sustainable growth perspective to improve transition to employment. Promoting the use of ICT with a view to increasing the quality and relevance of education at all levels in response to the growing digital nature of society. Boosting availability and quality of open and digital educational resources and pedagogies at all education levels, in cooperation with European open source communities adds benefit to the education and training initiatives.
- d) Transparency and recognition of skills and qualifications will facilitate learning and labour mobility by fostering transparency, quality assurance, validation and thereby recognition of skills and/or qualifications, including those acquired through digital, online and open learning resources, as well as non-formal and informal learning. Simplifying and rationalising the transparency, documentation, validation and recognition tools that involve direct outreach to learners, workers and employers, and further implementing the EQF and NQFs will facilitate mobility and recognition of qualifications. Supporting the mobility of pupils, apprentices, students, teachers, members of educational staff and researchers will promote learning opportunities. The development of strategic partnerships and joint courses, in particular through increasing internationalisation of HE and VET, facilitates access for learners.

### **III. Education & Training 2020 Working Groups (WG)**

First established by the Commission under the Education and Training 2010 work programme in order to in order to promote constructive exchange in education and training.

Participants are representatives from Member States, Candidate and EFTA Countries and relevant EU bodies or agencies e.g. Cedefop, ETF, and Eurydice. Education and training associations and European social partners e.g. ETUC, BusinessEurope, and EFE, participate as members in the Brussels meetings and are invited relevant to topics discussed. Independent experts can be invited to make a contribution on a topical issue that is of particular importance to the work of the Working Group.

Six Working Groups in 2014-16 were School Policy, Modernisation of Higher Education (HE), Adult Learning, VET, Transversal Skills and Digital and Online Learning. The current Vocational Education and Training Working Group, furthers policy development in the area of VET through mutual learning and the identification of good practices. The next generation of working groups will launch in January 2016 and last until June 2018.

#### **IV. Riga Conclusions (June 2015)**

The “Riga Conclusions” were agreed by the Ministers responsible for Vocational Education and Training of countries participating in the Copenhagen process<sup>2</sup>, the European Social Partners (ETUC, BUSINESSEUROPE, UEAPME, CEEP), the European Commission and supported by the European level VET providers' associations<sup>3</sup> by issuing a joint Declaration in support of the Riga Conclusions) .

The “conclusions” agreed by those listed above present the role of VET in the context of the growth and job agenda and ET 2020. The initiatives will be supported by funding opportunities under ESIF (European Structural and Investment Funds) and Erasmus+.

Policy reform should promote work-based learning in all its forms and further develop quality assurance mechanisms in VET in line with the EQAVET (see below) recommendation and, as part of quality assurance systems, by establishing continuous information and feedback loops to initial VET (I-VET) and continuing VET (C-VET) systems based on learning outcomes. Access to VET and qualifications is enhanced by offering efficient and integrated guidance services and making available validation of non-formal and informal learning. Strengthening key competences in VET curricula and providing more opportunities to acquire or develop those skills through I-VET and C-VET improves quality of learning and transition to the labour market. The implementation of high quality VET relies on systematic approaches to, and opportunities for, the initial and continuous professional development of VET teachers, trainers and mentors in both school and work-based settings.

#### **V. ERASMUS+ (2014-2020)**

The ERASMUS+ funding programme aims to improve the level of key competences and skills, with particular regard to their relevance for the labour market and their contribution to a cohesive society. It does this by *“fostering quality improvements, excellence in innovation and internationalisation at the level of education and training institutions, promoting the emergence of and raising awareness on a European lifelong learning area designed to complement policy reforms at national level, and to support the modernisation of education and training systems, enhancing the international dimension of education and training, improving the teaching and learning of languages and to promote the EU’s broad linguistic diversity and intercultural awareness”*.

Specifically in the field of VET it aims are to improve the quality of VET across Europe, providing opportunities for vocational students and staff to undertake traineeships abroad. The programme aims to help VET institutions to build strategic partnerships with other organisations and businesses and establish close links between education, training and the world of work. Erasmus+ also looks to implement the **ECVET** and the **EQAVET** systems (see last section).

These projects are funded under three Key Actions, Mobility of Individuals, Cooperation for Innovation and the exchange of good practice and Support for Policy Reform. Many EPR members have experience in running projects under Erasmus+. The EPR secretariat can provide project application advice to members, assist in partner searches and connect them to organisations with experience.

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<sup>2</sup> EU Member States, EU Candidate Countries (Albania, Montenegro, the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Serbia and Turkey), EEA countries (Iceland, Liechtenstein, Norway).

## **VI. Education & Training Monitor 2015 (12<sup>th</sup> November 2015)**

The Education and Training Monitor is an annual series aiming to capture the evolution of Europe's education and training systems by bringing together a wide array of evidence. The 2015 Monitor highlights education priorities most in need of investment and identifies policies that help improve the inclusiveness, quality and relevance of Europe's education and training systems. Its main findings are outlined below:

Modernising VET through closer ties between VET and enterprises is recognised as a prime way to ensure that VET provides skills that are relevant for the labour market. Work-based learning and apprenticeship schemes ensure the closest links between education and the world of work.

The added value of VET is the relevance of skills and competences for the labour market and it is important to carry out part of the training outside the school environment, e.g. in a real workplace within a company, such as via apprenticeships. Other less intensive work-based learning approaches are school-based VET combined with on-the-job training elements, where these elements typically represent less than 50% of the training programme duration. Introducing more work-based learning, and particularly apprenticeships is key. Evidence suggests that initial VET facilitates the transition from education to the labour market for young people. Developing good links between VET and the labour market is essential to improve the quality and attractiveness of VET programmes.

## **VII. Other related EU initiatives**

- **European Qualification Framework for lifelong learning** (EQF, September 2006) aims to better link different national qualifications systems, acting as a translation device for employers and individuals to better understand qualifications from different EU countries, thus making it easier to work, study or hire staff abroad. ([http://ec.europa.eu/education/policy/strategic-framework/skills-qualifications\\_en.htm](http://ec.europa.eu/education/policy/strategic-framework/skills-qualifications_en.htm))
- **European Credit system for Vocational Education and Training** (ECVET, June 2009) is being developed to help the transfer and recognition of learning experiences in Europe, assessed learning outcomes of individuals who are aiming to achieve a qualification, including those outside formal training systems. ECVET should facilitate transfer, recognition and accumulation of assessed learning outcomes, which would support citizens' mobility and flexible learning pathways. ([http://ec.europa.eu/education/policy/vocational-policy/ecvet\\_en.htm](http://ec.europa.eu/education/policy/vocational-policy/ecvet_en.htm))
- The European Quality Assurance Reference Framework (EQAVET) is a reference instrument designed to help EU countries promote and monitor the continuous improvement of their vocational education and training systems on the basis of commonly agreed references. It aims to promote equity, inclusion and access for participants with disadvantaged backgrounds and fewer opportunities whenever disadvantage limits participation. ([http://ec.europa.eu/education/policy/vocational-policy/eqavet\\_en.htm](http://ec.europa.eu/education/policy/vocational-policy/eqavet_en.htm))
- **European Lifelong Guidance Policy Network (ELGPN)**  
Assist the EU Member States in moving forward European cooperation on lifelong guidance in education and the employment sectors. Between 2007-2015 The European Lifelong Guidance Policy Network, ELGPN assisted Member States (and the neighbouring countries eligible for the EU Erasmus+ Programme) and the European Commission in developing European co-operation on lifelong guidance in both the education and the employment sectors. The network was established by the Member States; the Commission supported its activities under the Erasmus+ in 2015.

Membership of the network is open to the countries eligible for assistance under the Erasmus+ Programme 2014-2020 with participating countries designating their representatives in the network. Partner (Invited when necessary) & parallel organisations include Cedefop, European Youth Forum and International Association for Vocational and Educational Guidance (IAEVG). ([www.elgpn.eu/about-us](http://www.elgpn.eu/about-us))

- ***The European Quality Charter for Mobility (December 2006)***

It constitutes the quality reference document for education and training stays abroad. By involving the stakeholders more, it aims to improve the quality and efficiency of education and training systems. (<http://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/HTML/?uri=URISERV:c11085&from=EN>)

- ***The European research overview (ERO) (2008)***

ERO aims to develop and share new thinking about European and cross-national research on VET-related topics ([www.cedefop.europa.eu/en/news-and-press/news/redesigned-pages-ero-european-research-overview](http://www.cedefop.europa.eu/en/news-and-press/news/redesigned-pages-ero-european-research-overview))

- ***Cedefop Research Arena (Cedra) (2007)***

This aims to develop and share new thinking about the links between the labour market and skills, relevant for academic researchers as well as policy makers at European and national levels. Cedra forms research partnerships and networks, which allow researchers, working on separate but related topics, to pool resources and engage in European development work. ([www.cedefop.europa.eu/en/events-and-projects/projects/cedefop-research-arena-cedra](http://www.cedefop.europa.eu/en/events-and-projects/projects/cedefop-research-arena-cedra))

- ***EfVET - European Forum of Technical and Vocational Education and Training***

This Europe-wide professional association was created by and for providers of TVET with the aim to champion and enrich technical and vocational education and training through transnational co-operation by building a pan-European network of institutions and practitioners. ([www.efvet.org](http://www.efvet.org))

- ***Training of Trainers Network - TTnet (1998)***

This network of national networks was set up by Cedefop in 1998 as a Pan-European forum for key players and decision-makers in the training and professional development of vocational teachers and trainers. ([www.cedefop.europa.eu/en/events-and-projects/networks/training-trainers-network-ttnet](http://www.cedefop.europa.eu/en/events-and-projects/networks/training-trainers-network-ttnet))

## Web links:

EQAVET - [http://ec.europa.eu/education/policy/vocational-policy/eqavet\\_en.htm](http://ec.europa.eu/education/policy/vocational-policy/eqavet_en.htm)

Riga Conclusions 2015 - [http://ec.europa.eu/education/policy/vocational-policy/doc/2015-riga-conclusions\\_en.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/education/policy/vocational-policy/doc/2015-riga-conclusions_en.pdf)

VET4EU2 Declaration on the medium-term deliverables of the Riga Conclusions - [http://ec.europa.eu/education/policy/vocational-policy/doc/2015-riga-declaration\\_en.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/education/policy/vocational-policy/doc/2015-riga-declaration_en.pdf)

Education & Training 2020 Working Groups (WG) - [http://ec.europa.eu/education/policy/strategic-framework/expert-groups\\_en.htm](http://ec.europa.eu/education/policy/strategic-framework/expert-groups_en.htm)

Strategic framework for European cooperation in education and training ('ET 2020') <http://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/HTML?uri=CELEX:52009XG0528%2801%29&from=EN>

Joint Report - New priorities for European cooperation in education and training (Dec 2015) - <http://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/HTML?uri=CELEX:52015XG1215%2802%29&from=EN>

Strategic framework – Education & Training 2020 - [http://ec.europa.eu/education/policy/strategic-framework/index\\_en.htm](http://ec.europa.eu/education/policy/strategic-framework/index_en.htm)

Educational and Vocational Training – European Parliament Fact Sheet - [www.europarl.europa.eu/atyourservice/en/displayFtu.html?ftuld=FTU\\_5.13.3.html](http://www.europarl.europa.eu/atyourservice/en/displayFtu.html?ftuld=FTU_5.13.3.html)

Education & Training Monitor 2015 - [http://ec.europa.eu/education/library/publications/monitor15\\_en.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/education/library/publications/monitor15_en.pdf)

Education & Training Monitor 2015 Web link - [http://ec.europa.eu/education/tools/et-monitor\\_en.htm](http://ec.europa.eu/education/tools/et-monitor_en.htm)

VET Initiatives (EQAVET Summary of VET Initiatives) - <http://www.eqavet.eu/gns/policy-context/european-vet-initiatives.aspx>

Europass History - <https://europass.cedefop.europa.eu/en/about/history>

European Lifelong Guidance Policy Network (ELGPN) - <http://www.elgpn.eu/about-us>

Erasmus+ (2014-2020) – [http://ec.europa.eu/programmes/erasmus-plus/documents/erasmus-plus-programme-guide\\_en.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/programmes/erasmus-plus/documents/erasmus-plus-programme-guide_en.pdf)

Quality assurance in vocational education and training (EQAVET) - [http://ec.europa.eu/education/policy/vocational-policy/eqavet\\_en.htm](http://ec.europa.eu/education/policy/vocational-policy/eqavet_en.htm)

Establishment of a European Credit System for Vocational Education and Training (ECVET) - <http://www.ecvet-team.eu/en/system/files/documents/13/ecvet-recommendation.pdf>

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*The European Platform for Rehabilitation (EPR) is the Network of providers of rehabilitation services committed to excellence and innovation. EPR and its members contribute to a society where every person with a disability and persons in other vulnerable situations have access to the highest quality services that create equal opportunities for all and independent participation in society. More information on [www.epr.eu](http://www.epr.eu)*

