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REPORT FROM THE COMMISSION TO THE COUNCIL

on the implementation of the Council Recommendation on vocational education and training (VET) for sustainable competitiveness, social fairness and resilience

{SWD(2026) 181 final}

1. Introduction - purpose, scope and methodology of the report

Cooperation in vocational education and training (VET) at the European level, in line with Articles 165 and 166 TFEU, has played an important role over the years. The 2020 Council Recommendation on vocational education and training for sustainable competitiveness, social fairness and resilience (hereafter: “2020 Council Recommendation on VET”) set out a vision for VET with relevant long-term reform principles. The Osnabrück Declaration, adopted in November 2020 as part of the Copenhagen process, complemented the 2020 Council Recommendation on VET with more concrete, shorter-term actions both at national and EU levels. It specifically aimed to modernise VET by ensuring its rapid adaptation to labour market needs, enhancing the flexibility of learning pathways, and preparing learners for the green and digital transitions. The 2020 Council Recommendation on VET, together with the Osnabrück Declaration, set the EU VET policy framework for the 2020-2025 period, in combination with other strategic documents and policies, such as the European Pillar of Social Rights action plan, the European skills agenda, the Digital Decade and the European Education Area (EEA).

The 2020 Council Recommendation on VET covers the following priorities:

- VET being agile in adapting to labour market changes,
- Flexibility and progression opportunities being at the core of VET,
- VET being a driver for innovation and growth that prepares learners for digital and green transition, as well as occupations in high demand,
- VET being an attractive choice based on modern and digitalised provision of training and skills,
- VET promoting equality of opportunities,
- VET being underpinned by a culture of quality assurance.

The priorities of the 2020 Council Recommendation on VET fit into a broader policy architecture linking VET to employment, economic development and competitiveness, often with a sectoral approach. The 2026 annual single market and competitiveness report¹ explicitly highlights that fostering skills development, including through vocational training, is essential to address labour shortages. Since 2020, labour and skills shortages have intensified in sectors linked to vocational training programmes such as construction, transport, healthcare, manufacturing, clean technologies and defence, making VET even more important in delivering the skills needed in the labour market. Across sectors, challenges related to skills are one of the barriers to growth identified by SMEs, and VET is key to delivering the skills that European companies need to thrive.

¹ European Commission (2026) *The 2026 Annual Single Market and Competitiveness Report*. Available at: https://single-market-economy.ec.europa.eu/publications/2026-annual-single-market-and-competitiveness-report_en

According to the EURES 2024 report on labour shortages and surpluses, nine out of ten of the main shortage occupations in the EU² require vocational qualifications. The importance of VET is therefore illustrated in several EU policies. VET programmes and apprenticeships are central to sectoral skills strategies under the Pact for Skills for fields such as manufacturing, construction, tourism, sustainable energy and the digital sectors³. Similarly, the [European Alliance for Apprenticeships \(EAfA\)](#) organises activities to support economic sectors (e.g. construction, tourism and hospitality, care/long-term care) in promoting and strengthening sectoral apprenticeship programmes.

The 2025 Union of Skills communication⁴ and the 2026 Council Recommendation on human capital in the European Union⁵ highlight that VET systems that are closely linked to labour market needs are key to addressing skills mismatches. The 2025 Clean Industrial Deal⁶ refers to the need to address skills shortages in key sectors to support the transition to a low-carbon economy. The European strategy for housing construction under the Housing package⁷, under its Action 7, aims to increase the availability of skilled workforce in construction, including by supporting partnerships between universities, VET providers, businesses, social partners and applied research institutes. The 2025 New European Bauhaus communication also announced support for apprenticeships and vocational training targeting young people⁸. The automotive, steel and metals, and chemicals action plans also highlight the importance of skills and the social dimension for securing the competitiveness of these sectors. VET also contributes to the objectives of the Net-Zero Industry Act while the Net-Zero Industry Academies⁹ help VET adapt to technological innovation and enhance competitiveness including by developing learning programmes co-designed with industry in specific sectors.

Within this policy context, this report presents the reforms and measures implemented by Member States following the adoption of the 2020 Council Recommendation on VET. This report does not aim to evaluate measures and reforms or assess their impact. Its purpose is rather to take stock of relevant measures five years following the adoption of the 2020 Council Recommendation on VET, in line with its Article 36, building on data available at national and European level and the annual monitoring carried out by the European Centre for

² Welders and flame cutters, nursing professionals, cooks, building and related electricians, plumbers and pipe fitters, heavy truck and lorry drivers, sheet metalworkers, metalworking machine tool setters and operators, butchers, fishmongers and related food preparers.

³ European Commission (n.d.) *Industrial ecosystems and partnerships*. Pact for Skills. Available at: https://pact-for-skills.ec.europa.eu/about/industrial-ecosystems-and-partnerships_en

⁴ European Commission (n.d.) *Union of skills*. Available at: https://commission.europa.eu/topics/competitiveness/union-skills_en

⁵ Council of the European Union (2026) *Tackling the skills shortage: Council adopts recommendation on human capital*. Available at: <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/press/press-releases/2026/03/09/tackling-the-skills-shortage-council-adopts-recommendation-on-human-capital/>

⁶ European Commission (n.d.) *Clean Industrial Deal*. Available at: https://commission.europa.eu/topics/competitiveness/clean-industrial-deal_en

⁷ European Commission (n.d.) *The European affordable housing plan*. Available at: https://housing.ec.europa.eu/european-affordable-housing-plan_en

⁸ European Commission (n.d.) *New European Bauhaus: Vision to implementation*. Available at: https://new-european-bauhaus.europa.eu/new-european-bauhaus-vision-implementation_en

⁹ European Commission (n.d.) *Industrial ecosystems: strengthening EU competitiveness through partnerships*. Available at: <https://ec.europa.eu/newsroom/growth/items/823315/en>

the Development of Vocational Training (Cedefop). Since 2020, Cedefop and the European Training Foundation (ETF) have been carrying out an integrated monitoring exercise, as proposed by the European Commission and agreed by the Advisory Committee for Vocational Training (ACVT), to cover the priorities of the 2020 Council Recommendation on VET as well as the Osnabrück Declaration. The report largely builds on this monitoring and the national implementation plans (NIPs) of Member States, which were drawn up following the adoption of the 2020 Council Recommendation on VET¹⁰. In particular, in 2022 Member States developed NIPs describing the activities they will be implementing to address the EU priorities in VET in the following years. The reporting largely builds on taking stock of these activities that have been implemented by Member States.

The report has been consolidated by the European Commission and it is informed by numerous exchanges with Member States in the ACVT and statistical evidence, in particular on the state of play of the three quantitative targets set in the 2020 Council Recommendation on VET. Several policy documents and studies have also been used to inform the report. The report also covers EU-level actions to support Member States' efforts to modernise VET systems, including data on the implementation of measures and reforms supported and funded by the EU. More details can be found in the accompanying staff working document.

This report represents an important input to inform the forthcoming European strategy for VET, as announced in the Union of Skills communication of 5 March 2025. The recently adopted Herning Declaration on attractive and inclusive vocational education and training for increased competitiveness and quality jobs 2026–2030, and the upcoming European strategy for VET will, together with the existing 2020 Council Recommendation on VET, form the new European VET policy framework in the post-2025 period.

2. State of play in achievement of the three quantitative targets

To monitor implementation progress, the 2020 Council Recommendation on VET set quantitative targets on exposure to work-based learning, employment of VET graduates and VET mobility defined as EU average values to be achieved collectively by EU Member States by 2025.

On average in the EU, according to the latest data available:

1. the share of recent VET graduates aged 20-34 benefiting from exposure to work-based learning reached **66.0% in 2025¹¹** and exceeded the **target of 60%**;
2. the share of employed graduates from VET aged 20-34 reached **80.2% in 2025¹²** and is close to the **target level of 82%**;
3. the VET mobility target rate stood at **2.1% in 2021** which was far from the **8% target value set for 2025** in the 2020 Council Recommendation on VET. The 2024 'Europe

¹⁰ All EU Member States but Czechia and Ireland have prepared their National Implementation Plan, published on the Commission website.

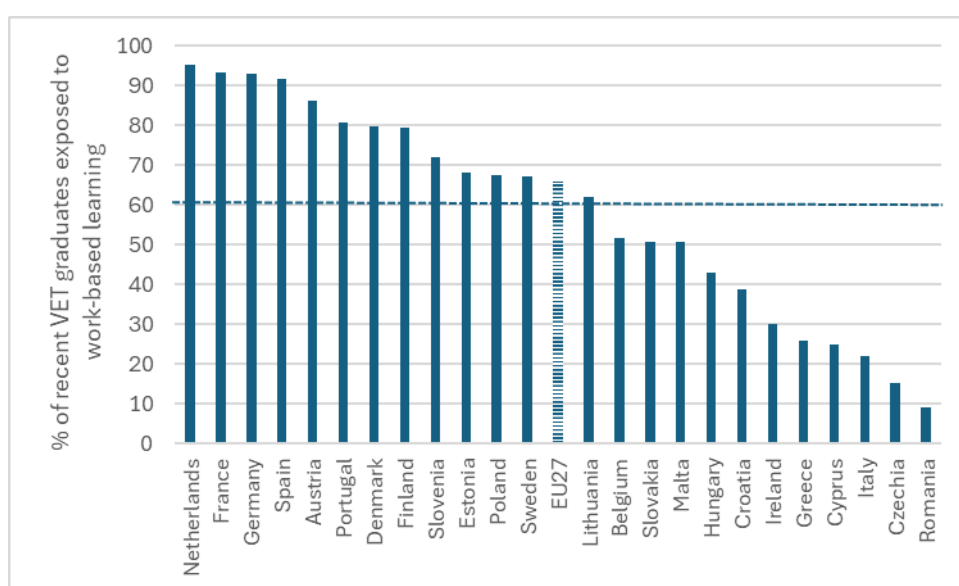
¹¹ Eurostat (EU Labour Force Survey). [Exposure of VET graduates to work-based learning \(tps00215\)](#)

¹² Eurostat (EU Labour Force Survey). [Employment rates of young persons not in education and training by educational attainment level and years since completion of highest level of education \(edat_lfse_24\)](#)

on the Move’ Council Recommendation set a new target of 12% to be reached by 2030 (including a broader set of mobility experiences), with the latest estimate at 5.3% in 2023¹³.

The level of achievement of the targets and progress over time varies significantly across countries. While the EU-level target for WBL has been reached, across Europe, countries show varied progress in expanding WBL participation (Figure 1). While countries such as the Netherlands (95.4%), France (93.2%), and Germany (93.0%) already far exceed WBL targets, others—like Romania (9.1%), Czechia (15.2%), and Italy (22.0%) — remain well below the benchmark.

Figure 1. VET graduates’ exposure to work-based learning, 2025



Source: Eurostat (EU Labour Force Survey). [Exposure of VET graduates to work-based learning \(tps00215\)](#)

Note: The countries are listed in descending order based on 2025 data. Low reliability for Germany, Spain, Poland, Malta, Hungary, Ireland, Cyprus. No data for Bulgaria, Latvia and Luxembourg.

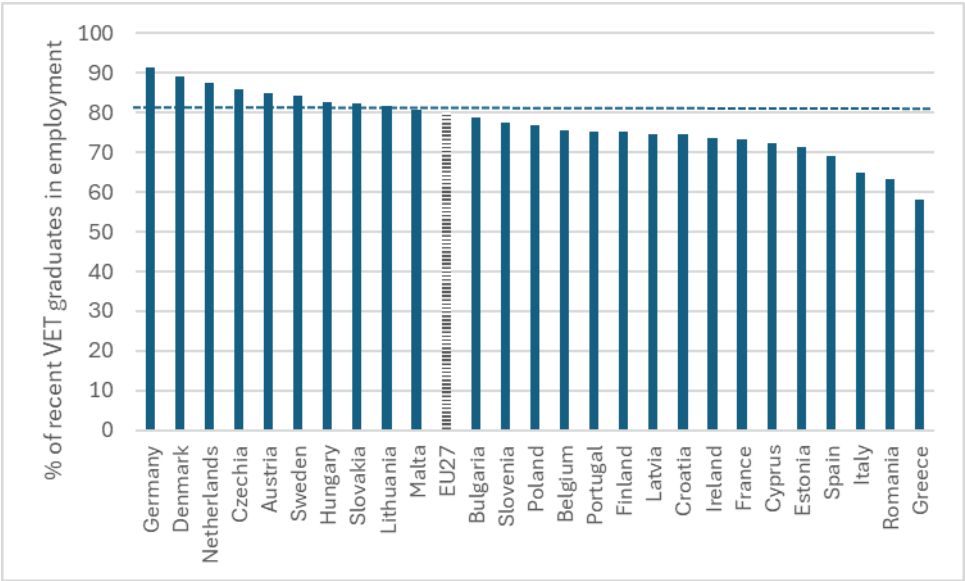
Countries have made mixed progress towards the employment rate target of VET graduates (Figure 2). Where progress has been made, this is explained by factors such as better alignment of vocational programmes with labour market needs and labour market recovery in recent years leading to vocational profiles being in high demand¹⁴, as well as demographic change. A strong increase between 2021 and 2023 (from 76.0% to 80.9%) was followed by a slight decline and stabilisation in subsequent years, reaching 80.2% in 2025. This pattern suggests that there have been specific challenges for young people, including

¹³ European Commission calculations based on data from the Erasmus+ Dashboard. Date of extraction: June 2025.

¹⁴ European Commission (2025) *Education and training monitor 2025: Comparative report*. Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union. Available at: <https://op.europa.eu/en/publication-detail/-/publication/30c1ccaa-bfdd-11f0-a612-01aa75ed71a1>

VET graduates, in entering the labour market from education in a context of a broader slowdown in overall employment growth.

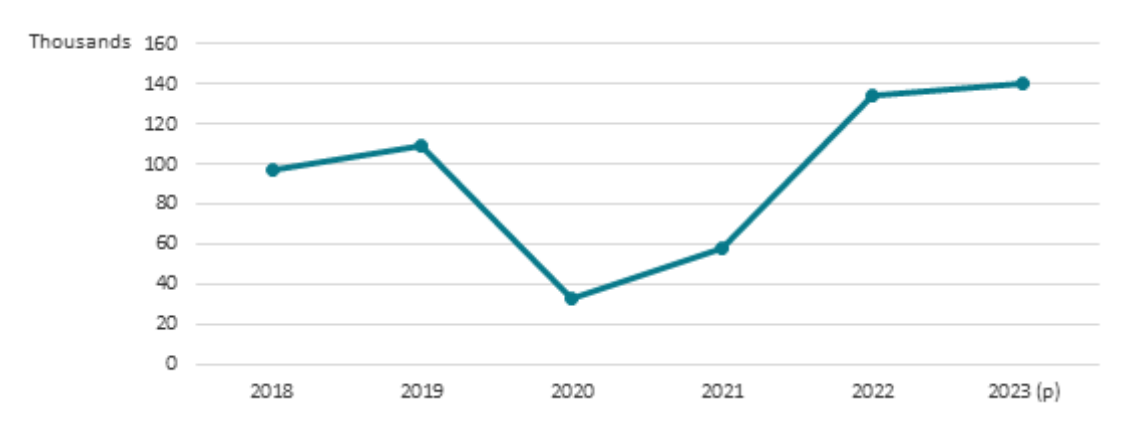
Figure 2. Employment rates of recent VET graduates, 2025



Source: Eurostat (EU Labour Force Survey). [Employment rates of young persons not in education and training by educational attainment level and years since completion of highest level of education \(edat_ifse_24\)](#) Note: The indicator captures the employment rates of 20-34-year-olds no longer in education and training, and who graduated 1-3 years previously from VET at upper secondary or post-secondary non-tertiary level. Countries shown in descending order based on the 2024 values. Low data reliability for Malta, Bulgaria, Slovenia and Cyprus No data available for Luxembourg. Definition differs for France and Spain.

Reaching the VET mobility target, in terms of mobility experiences for medium-level VET graduates remains a challenge. The mobility rate at the EU level stood at 5.3% and 140.000 mobilities in 2023 (Figure 3), a slight increase from the previous year when it stood at 5.0% and 134 000 mobilities. However, this is still far from the 12% value set for 2030 in the 2024 ‘Europe on the Move’ Council Recommendation.

Figure 3 – number of completed mobilities of VET learners, 2023



Source: European Commission calculations based on data from the Erasmus+ Dashboard. Date of extraction: June 2025. Note: data refer to the number of medium-level VET learners with mobility experiences abroad started in the reference period, reported in the Erasmus+ Dashboard. Due to the transition between the old and

new Erasmus+ programmes, 2022 and 2023 estimates are only available at EU level and include projections based on historical data; data for 2023 are provisional.

This can be partly explained by budgetary constraints at European and national levels. For example, the budget available under Erasmus+ could only cover 57% of the demand in mobility of learners and staff in 2024, representing a lower percentage compared to previous years, due to growing number of applications¹⁵. The Staff Working Document accompanying the ‘Europe on the Move’ recommendation also highlighted specific challenges that affect the willingness to go abroad, such as the young age of VET learners and psychological barriers that limit their capacity to spend time abroad. Structural impediments linked to national regulations and administrative constraints are also limiting VET mobility. Despite these challenges, the current level of demand would already allow for moving significantly towards the achievement of the VET mobility targets. Some Member States also show promising results. For example, in 2024, the overall mobility rate among 16- to 25-year-old initial VET (IVET) learners in Finland reached 9% following the launch of a new group mobility activity for VET under the Erasmus+ programme¹⁶.

3. Member States’ progress in the implementation of the Recommendation

3.1 General challenges in the implementation of reforms in VET

The analysis of the implementation of VET priorities across EU Member States reveals some cross-cutting institutional, financial, and cultural barriers that hinder the progress of VET systems. Certain cross-cutting challenges prevent or slow down the agile response to changes in the labour market. Responsibilities for VET and upskilling and reskilling are frequently spread across multiple ministries, institutions and governance levels and require strong coordination frameworks and actions. These are often not in place, and even when they are they can be inefficient. While the exact institutional setup differs by country, responsibilities for VET are shared between the Ministries of Education, the Ministries of Labour/Employment/Social Affairs and Ministries of Economy/Industry. Combined with onerous and lengthy bureaucratic processes and resistance to change, fragmented and uncoordinated work can delay reforms and innovation and limit agile responses to evolving challenges.

Skills intelligence is an important part of VET governance, however only a few countries are investing in in this area which hinders flexibility in responding to rapid change in the labour market. Development of skills intelligence systems which include also the systematic use of graduate tracking for VET policies and quality assurance (QA), require more concentrated effort¹⁷. While countries worked on establishing or developing QA frameworks and processes in line with the European Quality Assurance Reference Framework for Vocational Education

¹⁵ Data from the Erasmus+ Dashboard (November 2025).

¹⁶ Cedefop (2025) *Finland: VET learner mobility on the rise*. Available at: <https://www.cedefop.europa.eu/en/news/finland-vet-learner-mobility-rise>

¹⁷ Only BE-NL, CY, EE, FR, HR, HU, LV, MT, PL, RO, SI and SK include and report progress on measures dedicated to developing skills intelligence systems, including graduate tracking in their NIPs.

and Training (EQAVET) principles, QA in WBL and apprenticeships in IVET are still in development phase. In addition, research shows that the disparity between industry advancement and the rigidity of existing curricula acts as a significant barrier to the integration of digital and green skills in VET¹⁸.

VET systems experience persistent and evolving capacity constraints in their teaching and training workforce. This is partly explained by lower wages and perceived value of the VET teacher and trainer profession¹⁹ as well as the pressure posed by an ageing teaching population²⁰. According to Cedefop, only 1 in 2 VET teachers believe that their school supports them in taking part in continuing professional development²¹. This lack of support prevents teachers from effectively implementing new curricula, teaching new skills such as digital or green skills, and adopting innovative pedagogies, including those based on advanced technologies, such as virtual reality, or artificial intelligence (AI).

Availability and sustainability of financial resources represent another challenge. Many initiatives (such as Centres of Vocational Excellence) aimed at modernising VET and developing innovative approaches rely heavily or fully on EU funding and do not have long-term funding provision once the EU funding ends.

In the period 2021-2027, the Erasmus+ programme is allocating an indicative budget of EUR 400 million for the creation and development of Centres of Vocational Excellence (CoVEs) - a European flagship initiative to strengthen and develop VET systems in Europe - signifying a strong commitment to vocational training excellence across Europe.

Besides Erasmus+, it is estimated that during the period 2021-2027, EUR 62.2 billion together with national co-financing across EU Member States, including an EU contribution of EUR 40.4 billion from the European Social Fund Plus (ESF+), and EUR 12.1 billion from the ERDF (including Interreg), including EUR 8.6 billion of EU contributions are programmed to fund investments, infrastructure and reforms for education, training and skills policies, including VET.

Stereotypes and the persistent perception that VET is less valued in society continue to limit VET attractiveness and enrolments. To illustrate this point, the 2023 OECD Review of VET systems showed that despite the generally strong labour market outcomes of VET students, 70% of interviewees believe that VET is simply about manual work, despite the diversity of

¹⁸ Herrero, C., Arroyo Sagasta, A., Castaño Muñoz, J., Centeno, C., Coenen, J. *et al.* (2025) *Supporting the digital transformation of vocational education and training*. Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union. Available at: <https://publications.jrc.ec.europa.eu/repository/handle/JRC141881>

¹⁹ According to Cedefop's European vocational teacher survey (EVTS) pilot study, only about 9% of VET teachers feel their profession is valued. Research by the OECD (2020) *Education at a Glance 2020: OECD Indicators* also shows that VET teachers earn nearly 11% less on average than other tertiary-educated workers.

²⁰ Herrero, C., Arroyo Sagasta, A., Castaño Muñoz, J., Centeno, C., Coenen, J. *et al.* (2025) *Supporting the digital transformation of vocational education and training*. Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union. Available at: <https://publications.jrc.ec.europa.eu/repository/handle/JRC141881>

²¹ Psifidou, I., Papazoglou, M. and Pouliakas, K. (2025) [Europe's first survey for VET teachers: Listening, learning, acting](#)

jobs which VET now leads to. The Special Eurobarometer 569 on VET attractiveness (forthcoming, publication pending) also shows that while 50% of EU residents would recommend VET to a young person before entering upper secondary education, 75% agreed with the statement that in their country, general education at upper secondary level has a more positive image than IVET. Some countries worked to promote gender equality, but there is less evidence for gender inclusiveness and counteracting gender stereotypes in choosing occupations, depending on their national contexts and needs. Adult participation in continuous VET (CVET) is hindered by similar stereotypes to the ones mentioned above and limited awareness of available opportunities.

Internationalisation and mobility which hold the potential to foster innovation and increase the attractiveness of VET are growing to an extent²² but remain fragmented with underdeveloped mobility opportunities²³. Research has shown that VET graduates with foreign mobility experience report that skills acquired abroad were useful in their professional careers, supporting employability²⁴. In addition, according to Cedefop, international opportunities (including mobility) are associated with higher attractiveness of VET²⁵. Mobility of VET staff, such as teachers, trainers, and guidance professionals is less developed than that of learners. While some initiatives and projects are reported, internationalisation remains uneven and weakly embedded in national VET systems, despite its strategic importance for attractiveness and excellence as set out in the 2020 Council Recommendation on VET.

3.2 Overall assessment of progress and priority areas for the future

There has been notable progress of EU Member States toward the common priorities set by the 2020 Council Recommendation on VET and confirmed in national implementation plans. Despite the critical role of VET in addressing both inclusiveness and labour market challenges – which include labour and skills shortages, an ageing workforce, as well as ensuring fair green and digital transitions – some challenges persist. This continues to undermine the potential of VET in driving inclusive and sustainable growth and competitiveness. Another pressing issue that limits VET's contribution to economic growth are the persistent gaps in VET access and outcomes – whether in ensuring gender inclusiveness, effectively supporting vulnerable groups or expanding lifelong learning.

Member States have made strong efforts to make VET systems agile and resilient in adapting to rapid labour market changes (Priority 1), but some

²² Only AT, CY, DE, DK, EE, EL, HR, LV, PT and PL report measures aimed at increasing internationalisation in their NIPs.

²³ Only AT, BE-NL, DE, DK, FR, HR, LT, LV, MT, NL and PL report measures aimed at increasing mobility of learners and staff in their NIPs.

²⁴ Fassl, A., Kirsch, M., Pachocki, M. and Zabko, O. (2020) *Tracing VET graduates with foreign mobility experience*. Warsaw: Foundation for the Development of the Education System (FRSE). Available at: <https://erasmusplusresearch.eu/research/tracing-vet-graduates-foreign-mobility-experience>

²⁵ Cedefop (n.d.) *VET mobility prospects increases VET attractiveness*. Available at: <https://www.cedefop.europa.eu/en/tools/vet-toolkit-tackling-early-leaving/resources/vet-toolkit-upskilling-pathways/best-practices/vet-mobility-prospects>

challenges remain. Progress has been made primarily by modernising VET standards, curricula and programmes to incorporate a balanced mix of vocational skills and key competences, with a particular focus on the systematic integration of digital skills. Further efforts are needed to fully align VET programmes and curricula with labour market needs, especially in view of megatrends such as increasing digitalisation and automation, as well as the transition to a net-zero economy. Efforts will continue to be important, especially in the context of increasing digitalisation and the widespread use of AI. Recent Cedefop analysis of online job advertisements across EU Member States suggests that occupations relying on physical presence, manual expertise and applied technical skills such as engineering technicians, machinery mechanics, construction trades and transport workers have seen their share of vacancies grow²⁶. This indicates that while the acquisition of digital and AI literacy skills is important to keep up with labour market change, certain VET-related professions have remained in demand even as the adoption of AI has increased.

Countries across the EU are strengthening efforts to ensure that learners acquire solid basic skills throughout VET. However, implementation remains uneven, and many learners still enter and leave VET without adequate proficiency in literacy, numeracy, science, digital and citizenship skills, including media and information literacy which are essential both for employability and active participation in society. At the same time, shortages of qualified VET teachers and trainers, particularly those able to integrate basic skills into vocational learning, constrain effective delivery. Evidence from PISA also suggests that many learners enter VET with weaker foundational skills compared to peers in general secondary education²⁷. Among countries where comparisons are possible, students in vocational programmes often perform substantially below their peers in general education programmes, sometimes due to reasons such as early tracking.

Moreover, progress remains uneven in the delivery of science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) skills. In medium-level VET, only 36.3% of all students across the EU are enrolled in STEM programmes, which is 8.7 percentage points below the proposed 2030 EU-level target of at least 45%. Within STEM fields, most VET students are concentrated in engineering, manufacturing, and construction. Information and communication technologies (ICT) represent a significant share of STEM enrolment in countries such as Portugal, Malta, Poland and Italy. Conversely, the field of natural sciences, mathematics, and statistics attracts a very small proportion of VET students across the EU.

Despite the expansion of WBL and apprenticeship opportunities, some countries report a decline or limited number of apprentices²⁸, in contrast to the previous periods where the shortage of available places was the main issue. Expanding apprenticeships to adults and to higher education has advanced, but the intake is still limited. WBL in VET is

²⁶ Cedefop (2026) *Reverse gear: how AI is bringing vocational occupations back*. Available at: <https://www.cedefop.europa.eu/en/news/reverse-gear-how-ai-bringing-vocational-occupations-back>

²⁷ OECD (2023) *Education at a glance 2023: OECD indicators*. Paris: OECD Publishing. Available at: <https://www.oecd.org/education/education-at-a-glance/>

²⁸ Countries such as DE, FR, IT, and AT in some sectors, report a decline or limited up-take of apprenticeship places. EL, HU, CZ and RO are also among the countries with slow uptake of WBL including apprenticeships.

also more widespread in certain fields of study (notably health and agriculture) than others²⁹. Policies could better address the imbalances and mismatches of work-placements demand and supply and invest in in-company trainers' professional development in pedagogy and support to learners from vulnerable groups. Another area that could be further developed is the cooperation between VET and industry. This could help increase both the uptake of apprenticeships and alignment between VET delivery and the skills needed in the labour market.

Countries have shown their commitment to enhancing flexibility and progression opportunities within VET (Priority 2) and increasing upskilling and reskilling opportunities, but many initiatives remain at an exploratory stage. This flexibility is being promoted by adopting learning outcome-based approaches, modularising curricula and programmes, establishing micro-credentials and partial qualifications, and increasing opportunities for the validation and recognition of learning outcomes acquired outside formal systems. Countries are diversifying modes of learning by strengthening infrastructure for digital and blended learning and exploring cutting-edge educational technologies such as virtual reality and AI. Such integration of emerging technologies into VET can effectively mitigate the gap between training provision and the evolving labour market but limitations exist such as keeping up with the quick pace of technological evolution in industry and the investment needed for equipment, among others³⁰. Measures on micro-credentials and the use of advanced technologies are still at an early stage and have not yet reached their full potential in VET. The countries that have not yet advanced in these areas would benefit from accelerating regulatory developments, piloting digital platforms that provide training content and interactive resources and promoting mutual recognition of micro-credentials across the EU³¹.

European transparency tools aim at making VET better understood by employers and other stakeholders. Among the main conclusions of the EQF evaluation in 2024 was that EQF is a well-established reference point that is widely accepted among institutions working with qualifications³². The EQF and related NQFs are key tools to make VET qualifications more transparent within and across borders in connection with their level and content. Europass, an EU tool for career management and lifelong learning, helps VET learners communicate about their qualifications and skills, including in a context of labour mobility. However, uneven

²⁹ European Commission (2025) *Education and training monitor 2025: Comparative report*. Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union. Available at: <https://op.europa.eu/en/publication-detail/-/publication/30c1ccaa-bfdd-11f0-a612-01aa75ed71a1>

³⁰ Herrero, C., Arroyo Sagasta, A., Castaño Muñoz, J., Centeno, C., Coenen, J. *et al.* (2025) *Supporting the digital transformation of vocational education and training*. Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union. Available at: <https://publications.jrc.ec.europa.eu/repository/handle/JRC141881>

³¹ Only BE-NL, DE, FI, HR, HU, LV, MT, NL, PL, PT and SK report progress on measures in their NIPs dedicated to advancing micro-credentials and partial qualifications, while only AT, BE-FR, BE-NL, BG, CY, DE, DK, ES, HU, LU, NL, PL, and PT report progress on developing digital platforms and learning resources.

³² European Commission (2024) *European Commission publishes evaluations of Europass and the European Qualifications Framework*. Available at: https://employment-social-affairs.ec.europa.eu/news/european-commission-publishes-evaluations-europass-and-european-qualifications-framework-2024-03-27_en

implementation of these instruments is hindering the transparency and understanding of qualifications and skills across the EU. Among the lessons learned from the Europass evaluation of 2024 is that the data analysis and AI in Europass could be further developed, contributing to tackling skills and labour shortages, by which VET occupations are particularly affected³³.

Adult participation rates in training remain low in many countries³⁴. While Member States are increasing their focus on lifelong learning, the participation rate stood at only 39.5% in 2022 according to the Adult Education Survey (AES) with high variability between countries. This is below the EU-level target³⁵ of at least 60% by 2030. It is important that CVET addresses the learning and development needs of all adults. Additionally, further implementation of lifelong guidance, validation of prior learning, micro-credentials and partial qualifications, together with well-designed incentives for both individuals and employers could strengthen learner participation and support. It is also crucial to monitor participation and ensure synergies and coordination between various providers.

Some progress has been observed in advancing innovation and growth and preparing learners for the digital and green transition (Priority 3). Some countries are modernising VET infrastructure by investing in both digital platforms for training and learning and physical facilities³⁶, aligning them with current industry needs. This includes investing in ICT infrastructure and modern equipment, as well as integrating advanced technologies in VET. Support for CoVEs remains limited but is expanding through the establishment of new centres or the development of existing ones, often through EU support and funding.

A recent analytical report on a selection of Erasmus+ CoVE projects, shows that these can act as structural enablers for transformation in VET, e.g. through innovation in teaching and learning, aligning VET with labour market and skills needs, strengthened cooperation between key stakeholders. To further develop the initiative and its impact, the report presents some recommendations with regards to engagement of public authorities and more involvement of learners and workers, as well as diversifying funding, tightening links to other initiatives and bodies such as the Pact for Skills and the ACVT, scaling pedagogical innovation, and balanced integration of digital and green skills across all sectors of the economy.

Member States have implemented measures to ensure that VET is an attractive choice based on modern and digitalised provision of skills (Priority 4). However, despite efforts

³³ Report from the Commission to the European Parliament and the Council on the implementation and impact of Decision (EU) 2018/646 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 18 April 2018 on a common framework for the provision of better services for skills and qualifications (Europass); Available at: [EUR-Lex - 52024DC0135 - EN - EUR-Lex](#).

³⁴ According to the latest data available from the Adult Education Survey (2022), BG, EL, RO, PL, CZ, HR, SI, LT, CY, IT, PT, LV, ES, BE, MT, ET and LU remain below the 2025 EU-level target of 47% of adults aged 25-64 having participated in learning during the past 12 months.

³⁵ Target originating in the 2021 Council Conclusions on a new European agenda for adult learning 2021-2030. See also the European Pillar of Social Rights Action Plan.

³⁶ AT, BE-NL, BG, CY, DE, DK, EL, HU, LT, LV, PL, PT, and SI report progress on measures focused on modernising infrastructure in their NIPs.

and targeted actions across countries, the perceived lower status of VET compared to general and academic education persists as a key obstacle to increased participation in both initial and continuous VET. Supporting innovation and internationalisation can be a key driver to increase the attractiveness of VET. Strengthening the positive image of VET - and thereby improving its attractiveness can also be further supported through targeted promotion of its benefits and graduate employment prospects. This could include awareness campaigns, participation in international skills competitions, lifelong guidance and mobility opportunities.

Countries have worked to support VET teachers and trainers, but the low attractiveness of the profession continues to put VET systems under pressure. Measures taken by Member States include expanding VET programmes to higher qualification levels (EQF 5-8), improving the permeability between VET and higher education, and investing in VET teacher and trainer continuous professional development (CPD). However, available evidence suggests a lack of systemic approaches to cover the complex learning needs of teachers and trainers; this includes the systematic monitoring of their professional development in terms of content and impact on teaching practices.

Increasing the skills and competence of teachers and trainers would require systemic and multi-faceted continuous professional development, which is often uneven and does not cover all areas. To address teacher shortages and improve the image of the profession, countries could work on simplifying pathways of entry into teaching, facilitating the validation and recognition of qualifications, improving working conditions and adjusting salaries, exploring revolving doors between professional employment and teaching including the ‘blended teachers’ models that have so far not been widely explored, and providing diverse and sufficient professional development opportunities, including internships in companies and exposure to international experiences through staff mobility. The Herning Declaration also calls for attention to teacher and trainer mental well-being, a field that has not been sufficiently explored.

While progress on promoting equality of opportunities and gender-inclusive VET systems is seen as modest (Priority 5), countries are implementing targeted measures for vulnerable groups. Erasmus+ supports the development of transferable skills, such as communication, adaptability and intercultural skills through mobility of VET learners and staff, cooperation partnerships, and capacity building activities. Meanwhile, there is less evidence of progress on gender inclusiveness and counteracting gender stereotypes in choosing occupations. The lack of gender balance and the underrepresentation of women in STEM fields and in VET have significant labour market consequences such as persistent skills shortages, limited economic productivity, and reinforcing structural inequalities in employment and wages. Addressing inclusion in VET is crucial to ensure that vulnerable groups (e.g. long-term unemployed, persons with disabilities, young people not in education or training) can complete relevant and adequate training so that they are well equipped to enter the labour market, thereby increasing overall employment rates and productivity, as well as reducing poverty rates. To ensure inclusion, effective VET systems need to provide targeted

support based on learner needs, strengthen links to stable, quality jobs and expand opportunities for inclusive work-based learning.

Countries focusing on quality assurance in VET (Priority 6) have also made some progress. About half of the countries have worked on new strategies to align national quality assurance systems with the EQAVET priorities, strengthening self-assessment by VET providers (e.g. internal evaluation processes, continuous improvement and feedback loops), and improving stakeholder involvement in governance. Continuity and increased investments are key to achieve the objectives under this priority and to unlock their full potential for learners and VET systems.

Social partners are central to the governance and implementation of VET policies, contributing to policy development, curriculum design, quality assurance, funding decisions, and career guidance. There is scope to further expand their role, in full respect of social partners' autonomy, in the implementation of measures. This is particularly the case in regard to skills intelligence and identification of skill needs, provision of apprenticeships and employment opportunities for vulnerable groups, reskilling and upskilling, as well as the recognition and validation of non-formal and informal learning.

4. Conclusion

The reporting of the implementation of the 2020 Council Recommendation on VET across Member States reveals a mixed picture of progress and persistent challenges, highlighting the potential but also some weaknesses of VET in driving inclusive and sustainable development that is closely aligned with labour market needs. While many Member States have launched important reforms often leveraging EU support and funding opportunities, the pace of modernisation and progress is uneven. Gaps still exist in digitalisation including the integration of technologies such as AI, skills intelligence, WBL/apprenticeships, VET teacher and trainer capacity, and the persistently low societal perception and attractiveness of VET leading to skills mismatches. To make the most of VET's potential to support the EU's competitiveness, VET excellence and strengthened partnerships with businesses and social partners need to be promoted. Mobility opportunities for VET learners and internationalisation should also be strengthened. Another area that needs further attention is the delivery of basic skills and citizenship competence as well as STEM competences, which are crucial to foster VET graduates' employability³⁷ and to ensure alignment with labour market needs. The upcoming European Strategy for VET will pave the way to addressing all these challenges.

³⁷ Confederation of German Employers' Associations (BDA) (2025) *For our democracy – democracy education throughout all levels of education*. Available at: <https://www.arbeitgeber.de>