



A contribution to the European Strategy for Vocational Education and Training

Position Paper

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European Forum of
Technical and Vocational
Education and Training

Abbreviations

CEDEFOP | European Centre for the Development of Vocational Training

CGC | Career guidance and counselling

CoVEs | Centres of Vocational Excellence

CPD | Continuing Professional Development

DARYA | ETF initiative “Dialogue and action for resourceful youth in Central Asia”

DG EMPL | Directorate-General for Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion

EaFA | European Alliance for Apprenticeships

EaP | Eastern Partnership

EC | European Commission

ELET | Early school Leaving in Education and Training

ENE | ETF Network for Excellence

EQAVET | European Quality Assurance Reference Framework for Vocational Education and Training

ESF+ | European Social Fund Plus

ETF | European Training Foundation

EU | European Union

INTERREG | Funding programme for cooperation under the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF)

IntVET | Internationalization of Vocational Education and Training (VET)

ISATCOVE | International Self-Assessment Tool for Centres of Vocational Excellence

MEP | Member of the European Parliament

MFF | Multiannual Financial Framework

OECD | Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development

SLA | Service Level Agreement

TVET | Technical and Vocational Education and Training

VET | Vocational Education and Training

VETNET | European Research Network in VET

WBL | Work-Based Learning

Introduction

The European Forum of Technical and Vocational Education and Training (**EfVET**) is a non-profit organisation based in Brussels (BE), created 35 years ago with one main goal: to build a strong network of VET Providers to secure a voice across Europe in European policy making and practice arenas. Currently representing more than 450 members in around 60 countries (including Africa and Asia), EfVET has the capability of reaching out to around 2 000 VET practitioners and 2 million learners. Its key activities, which contribute to the vision of EfVET of becoming a lead contributor to the enhancement of VET in Europe, and beyond, through networking and advocacy, include:

- **Representation** at European level, with the main purpose of influencing policies and decisions directly and indirectly affecting VET systems in Europe (by taking part in the working groups set up by the European Commission and other European Agencies which work is directly related to VET, such as the Platform of European Associations of VET Providers' expert group, the VET and the Green Transition Working Group, EAfA, CEDEFOP, and ETF, to name a few);
- **Facilitation** and promotion of networking opportunities among its members, providing access to knowledge resources, exchanges, tools, projects, partnerships and initiatives (thematic teams, working groups, etc.);
- Acting as a key dissemination and **stakeholder engagement partner** in projects and initiatives carried out by both EfVET and by its members.

EfVET has a clear **mission**: enhance VET provision across all its members through active networking activities for education and training stakeholders, and to generate capacity to influence policy and advocacy for VET at European and international levels.

Being a recognised source of information from the grassroot level by all of the above-mentioned partners, stakeholders and entities, EfVET hopes that this Position Paper, developed with contributions from all of its members (including those part of the Board of EfVET and of its several Working Groups and Thematic Teams) supports the European Commission defining a European Strategy for VET that mirrors all necessary actions towards the quality, attractiveness and excellence of the Technical and Vocational Education and Training sector, for the sake of a **cohesive, strong and resilient Europe**, able to face current and future socio-economic challenges.

Executive Summary

The European Union is currently faced with **geopolitical demands** and with an urgent need to navigate slow growth, **rapid technological transformation** and an **aged workforce**. These challenges are shaping strategies such as the Union of Skills, the European Green Deal, industrial policy and digital transformation agendas as it is imperative to strengthen Europe's competitiveness while preserving its social model (as mentioned this week by President von der Leyen during her [speech](#) at the European Employment and Social Rights Forum 2026, "skills are the bridge between uncertainty and opportunity", "central to our [EU's] competitiveness", hence the EC investment in priority policies such as skills, quality jobs and social inclusion).

Vocational Education and Training is the **cornerstone of Europe's social-economic system**. It bridges education and the labour market, strengthening social cohesion and fostering regional competitiveness, while supporting learners and families through inclusive and accessible pathways to employment. And even though much was achieved since 2002 with the different EC recommendations and strategic frameworks (e.g., the Copenhagen Process, the European Education Area and, more recently, the Union of Skills and the Herning Declaration), still much needs to be done, hence the importance of having a well-supported and strong European Strategy for Vocational Education and Training (VET) that ensures the **quality, attractiveness and excellence of VET in benefit of all learners** across Europe.

As previously mentioned, EfVET has an extensive network of members comprised of knowledgeable and experienced VET Providers, who are fully aware of the most pressing challenges faced by the sector at local, regional and national levels. They were extensively consulted by EfVET and its Policy Working Group (led by EfVET Vice-President for Policy, Research and Publications) to identify concrete recommendations and potential solutions for each of the following **5 key priorities for VET**, also identified by EfVET members included in this Position Paper:

1. *Ensuring quality and labour market relevance of VET*, promoting VET systems' ability to respond effectively to fast-changing economic realities, in line with labour market needs and quality standards;
2. *VET Participation and Attractiveness*, ensuring that VET remains a critical pathway for human development and for preparing individuals for the jobs of the future;
3. *Innovation, excellence and entrepreneurship*, in line with the VET reforms proposed by the Herning Declaration, and with the vision set by the Union of Skills;
4. *VET Mobility*, a lever for internationalisation and institutional development of VET providers, and a relevant individual experience for participants;
5. *External dimension / Internationalisation of VET*, a core dimension of European VET policy, enabling institutions, learners and industries to engage with global knowledge networks and respond to cross-border labour-market needs.

Aware of the limited and non-binding competences of the EU in regulating Member States' VET systems, in accordance with the EU Treaties, the identified recommendations are assigned to two target groups: the **EU Member States** (as primary regulators of VET national policies), and the **European Commission** (in its function of supporting and supplementing the Member States' action (Art. 166 TFEU), with **targets until 2035** as the expected timeline of the Strategy.

The main purpose of this Position Paper is to **support** the EC in building its European Strategy for VET, with inputs from the grassroots level, grounded in real needs, practical experiences and local realities.

Socio-Economic & Political Context

The EU is currently facing a decisive moment, marked by **interconnected and systemic challenges** that include a declining productivity, global competitiveness pressures, a demographic crisis and structural labour shortages, green and digital transitions and accelerated digital and artificial intelligence (AI) transformation, as well as social inequalities, fragmentation and geopolitical instabilities.

Vocational Education and Training can help the EU overcoming these structural challenges, given its privileged position at the **intersection of education, industry and regional and national development, and social policy**.

VET must be recognised **not only as an education pathway, but as a critical economic and social infrastructure**, able to:

- Duly prepare a **skilled workforce** able to implement technological changes and **foster human development**, equipping learners with both technical and transversal skills, allowing them to continuously adapt to labour market changes;
- **Deploy innovation** in a wide range of socio-economic sectors (e.g., manufacturing, construction, tourism, energy and advanced services), while embedding AI, automation and cybersecurity competences across sectors, with an attention to critical thinking to navigate online environments;
- **Mitigate skills shortages** through modern WBL, adult learning pathways and recognition of prior learning;
- **Up/reskill professionals** to effectively implement climate policies, in line with the green transition requirements;
- **Promote democracy and** citizenship, as well as inclusion/inclusive growth, strengthening social stability;
- **Foster resilient industrial ecosystems** across Europe.

In sum, VET is a strategic enabler of EU competitiveness, sustainability and social stability, and strengthening VET ecosystems across Europe through the European Strategy for Vocational Education and Training is therefore not an education reform agenda — it is a core pillar of Europe's economic and geopolitical strategy.

The next sections of this Position Paper provide a description of each of the 5 key VET priorities and respective recommendations identified, to be considered by the EC for the upcoming European Strategy for VET.

1. Ensuring the quality and labour market relevance of VET

As specified in the Union of Skills initiative, labour market relevance is key to achieving the potential of Vocational Education and training. While [SMEs point to the need for VET](#) to align to their education and training provision to the current skills needs of the labour market, 18.7% of young people in the EU reported that their skills were higher than those required in their job, stressing the need to address how education and training can provide the right balance between evolving skills needs and the educational attainment of those entering the labour market. The reform of VET called for by Mario Draghi in his [report](#) foresees strategic interventions to VET systems in the way they adapt their education and training with the ever-evolving skills needed today, both transversally and in specific sectors. In this context, the far-reaching objectives of 60% of adults taking part in lifelong learning by 2030 set in the Union of Skills might prove difficult to attain, with a weak labour market relevance of CVET institutions' training.

The following key recommendations and solutions promote VET systems' ability to respond effectively to fast-changing economic realities and align with labour market needs and quality standards.

On work-based learning:

Key Recommendations	Solutions
<p>Create a standard European WBL framework to harmonise definitions, procedures and regulations, allowing for consistent and transferable qualifications in line with national contexts.</p>	<p>Activate a collaborative task force, under the Union of Skills, including VET providers and associations, the European Commission and academics (e.g. VETNET), guided by CEDEFOP and ETF, to create a roadmap for an EU-wide WBL framework.</p> <p>Enlarge the focus of the EAfA beyond the apprenticeship scheme to several approaches and methodologies on WBL (e.g., project-based; challenge-based; simulated companies; junior companies; learning companies, among others, as also mentioned on "EfvET Working Group on WBL – Policy Recommendation (2024)").</p>

On labour market relevance:

Key Recommendations	Solutions
<p>Enhance cooperation between industry and VET providers, allowing for more relevant WBL curricula to be prepared, while strengthening VET centres' flexibility to adapt to new jobs/skills demands, especially through specific reforms of national Education and Training systems.</p>	<p>Promote, under the High-Level Skills Board, a concrete dialogue and collaboration between companies, VET providers and EU VET associations, with regular meetings to ensure updated information and exchange on developments and challenges.</p> <p>Promote, under the High-Level Skills Board, a concrete pledge by companies to support, via partnerships and sponsorships, the development of workshops laboratories. In this context, ensure the involvement of VET providers, associations and WorldSkills.</p>
<p>Usually in innovation hubs, collaboration is between companies, HEI and EdTech without VET representation. Member States must develop a stronger connection at national and transnational level between the players of the knowledge triangle (education-research-innovation). Create innovation sub-groups or hubs in collaboration with research centres, including VET providers.</p>	<p>Double the allocation of resources at EU institutional level to research current trends in skills, labour market relevance of VET, curricula, etc as part of DG RTD and the JRC scope, especially to issue annual EU-focused monitors and reports on skills mismatches and curricula relevance.</p> <p>Involve and recognise VETNET as a stakeholder to be consulted by DG EMPL and other actors involved in the implementation of the European strategy for VET.</p> <p>Consolidate, develop and extend the focus of initiatives such as the CEDEFOP project "Real-Time Labour Market Information on Skill Requirements: Setting up the EU system for online vacancy analysis" and promote national applications.</p>
<p>Support VET institutes to utilise evidence-based knowledge and be transparent on how they implement research-based data for curricula change and WBL practices.</p>	<p>Promote and put in connection existing models (e.g. Tknika in Spain, Skills Centres in Belgium; ITS in Italy), creating a regulatory framework and a European network to promote applied-research network, guided by ETF.</p>

On VET quality in Europe through cooperation and skills recognition:

Key Recommendations	Solutions at EU level
<p>Foster a higher VET quality through a systemic approach between VET schools, services and institutions, creating more effective tools to tackle early school leaving, especially in those EU Member States where such issue still affects substantial parts of society and specific demographics. Furthermore, well-being should be integrated into national VET quality assurance frameworks, since it affects early leaving from VET pathways.</p>	<p>Ensure that the European Competitiveness Fund and the European Social Fund+ introduce clear earmarking to tackle ELET and foster well-being in VET.</p> <p>Support the integration of institutional well-being indicators within European quality assurance systems, including the European Quality Assurance Reference Framework for VET (EQAVET).</p>
<p>Support the integration of AI and digital platforms for dynamic matching between non-EU VET qualifications and EU needs, setting national targets for reducing mismatches (under and overqualification) in critical sectors.</p>	<p>Develop an EU framework for the recognition of non-EU VET qualifications in strategic sectors (e.g. healthcare, construction, renewables), test it with pilots in neighbouring countries (e.g. EaP) and further develop it in cooperation with other non-EU partners.</p>
<p>Involve EU companies operating in third countries to facilitate the validation of skills acquired by workers in non-EU countries.</p>	<p>Increase investments in the Global Gateway strategy to support cooperation between EU VET providers and companies, especially in the initiatives related to Education and Research and in the Investment Hub.</p>
<p>Enhance cooperation on aligned transnational VET curricula at sectoral level.</p>	<p>Establish a VET Diploma (in line with the Union of Skills proposal) similar the European University Alliances, which bottom-up movement to promote update of curricula, international relevance and real mobility.</p> <p>In line with the proposals in the Union of Skills, push for a European recognition of a system of micro-credentials and activation of VET diplomas in areas of strategic interest. Launch dual-badge micro-credentials validated by EU authorities and non-EU partners to certify labour-relevant skills acquired outside the EU.</p> <p>Promote Peer Review methodology as a bottom-up Quality Assurance approach to increase stakeholders' engagement on measuring and improving VET providers' performance and continuous improvement attitude.</p>

2. VET Participation & Attractiveness

Across the EU, VET is a significant component of upper-secondary education. Recent data ([Eurostat \(2025\)](#)) shows that 49.1% of the upper secondary learners in the EU are enrolled in VET programmes, corresponding to roughly nine million learners. This demonstrates that VET is a central pillar of the European education system. However, according to [CEDEFOP \(2024\)](#), participation rates remain fragmented across the EU. The level of participation varies from one country to another (e.g., in countries such as Croatia or Slovenia, VET participation rates are about 70%, while in Cyprus, it is below 20%), which reflects variations in national education traditions, labour market structures, and social perceptions of vocational careers. The EU faces significant challenges that reinforce the importance of VET systems: labour shortages in technical occupations, demographic decline, rapid technological change and the green transition, all of which require a workforce equipped with practical and adaptable skills. Therefore, strengthening the participation and attractiveness of VET is essential for ensuring that the EU responds effectively to these challenges. Expanding work-based learning opportunities, improving lifelong learning systems, modernising curricula, strengthening connections between education and industry are key steps in this process. Furthermore, enhancing the prestige and visibility of vocational pathways, also in light of gender mainstreaming, by monitoring the impact of the strategy on VET male and female direct beneficiaries in different activities (apprenticeships, mobility participants, etc), can help address skills mismatches, support economic competitiveness and promote social inclusion.

The following recommendations and solutions ensure that VET remains a critical pathway for human development and for preparing individuals for the jobs of the future, supporting the long-term resilience and prosperity of European societies.

Increase quality assurance, attractiveness and flexibility of VET programmes:

Key Recommendations	Solutions
<p>Reposition VET as a pathway for sustainable working lives, social inclusion and wellbeing, especially for younger generations.</p> <p>Increase EQAVET mechanisms and implementation to help learners, families and citizens understand that VET is qualitatively equal to general education or Higher Education.</p>	<p>Update the 2020 Council Recommendation on Vocational Education and Training (VET) for sustainable competitiveness, social fairness and resilience by introducing quantitative (instead of qualitative) targets for curricula flexibility and modularity in VET, based on existing resources such as CEDEFOP’s toolkit on flexible VET systems.</p> <p>Launch one EU-funded public campaign per year (in correspondence with the new VET Skills Week initiative, as well as the EU Day of VET) to promote VET pathways and opportunities, in collaboration with national ministries and the European</p>

Key Recommendations	Solutions
	Commission's representations in the Member States.
Enhance the flexibility of adapting and updating VET curricula, with active participation of national and local authorities in curricula co-creation.	Recognition of the European Day of VET, on May 24 th , as celebrated each year since 2024 by the major VET organisations in Europe.

Invest in guidance, support and inclusion of learners and young people:

Key Recommendations	Solutions
Tackle ELET by increasing quality and funding of guidance and counselling approaches , while considering the human-centred dimension of teaching and learning, especially by allocating ESF+ resources to support socio-economically disadvantaged learners and by involving communities, families and parents in the VET ecosystem.	Dedicate specific strands of Erasmus+ Programme Key Actions to guidance and counselling activities , mentioning, recognizing and highlighting the role of mentors and tutors (beside teachers and trainers) through programmes similar to the European Innovative Teaching Award.
Allocate resources for early guidance to primary schools and lower secondary school learners (EQF1-3) to let them discover their talents and prepare them for future education and employment choices. Moreover, Member States should work to directly tackle gender stereotypes that reduce the potential of VET can have in achieving its KPIs.	Draft, together with ETF and CEDEFOP, an EU framework for guidance and counselling , in cooperation with VET4EU2 and relevant stakeholders (including employers) with a specific target of CGC agreed by the EU Council through an updated version of the 2020 Council Recommendation on Vocational Education and Training (VET) for sustainable competitiveness, social fairness and resilience.
Support VET institutions to participate and engage more learners in the design process, promote Youth Advisory Bodies and ensure funding and opportunities linked to the activation of democratic youth structures within VET institutions	Inspired by the "Dutch VET Student Advisory Board", launched by MEP Brigitte Van den Berg, create an ' EU VET learners advisory board ', gathering learners from IVET and CVET, to advise the European Commission and the European Parliament on VET policies, with the participation of VET4EU2 associations' delegates.
Provide flexibility to implement curricula or extracurricular activities that support engagement, interest and motivation of learners at risk of dropping out; set up recognition and validation mechanisms of such curricula or extracurricular activities.	Strongly invest in guidance services and tutoring systems, recognising the key role of tutors and counsellors in supporting learners, alongside teachers and trainers.

Renewed care of teachers and trainers:

Key Recommendations	Solutions
<p>Support Continuing Professional Development (CPD) of teachers and trainers, through tools such as microcredentials, and reinforce the role of mentors and tutors.</p> <p>Set national targets of job shadowing for VET trainers in companies, to update their knowledge and understanding of current developments and carry out CPD, e.g., by using funding programmes such as INTERREG.</p>	<p>Reserve a quota of the ESF+ for CPD, to promote training campus, possibly to be centrally coordinated by Agencies (e.g., ETF Winter Campus under SLA2 contract), or to be funded via tenders open only to VET organisations as coordinators.</p>
<p>Include socio-emotional learning methodologies in CPD.</p>	<p>Initiate a comparative mapping exercise under the Open Method of Coordination to: (1) identify disparities in educational support provision, (2) develop benchmark guidelines and (3) support targeted investment under the European Social Fund Plus (ESF+) (cf. contribution by Mundus on the European Strategy for VET).</p> <p>Establish a harmonised research framework to: (1) map the distribution and roles of Educational Support Professionals in VET; (2) develop shared definitions of institutional well-being capacity; (3) integrate well-being variables into future Education and Training Monitor cycles.</p>

3. Innovation, excellence & entrepreneurship

It is well known that skills shortages and mismatches constrain competitiveness and innovation, an issue that has persistently affected the EU economy since around 2015, especially with SMEs and startups that try to scale and compete globally. In its report [“The Future of European Competitiveness” \(2025\)](#), Mario Draghi identifies the need to update skills continuously through adult learning and VET reforms, which include attractiveness, quality, inclusivity and parity of esteem.

The upcoming European Strategy for VET needs to prevent fragmentation between VET, industry and innovation, narrowing the long-lasting gap between them by setting cooperation models, preventing innovation and entrepreneurship from relying on isolated pilots, in line with the VET reforms proposed by the [Herning Declaration](#), and with the vision set by the Union of Skills of having a VET sector grounded on quality frameworks, skills portability, WBL incentives, teacher /trainer up- and reskilling, and innovation funding schemes.

The following are key recommendations and solutions proposed to support the European Strategy for VET, ensuring innovation, excellence and entrepreneurship within VET.

Centres of Vocational Excellence (CoVE):

Key Recommendations	Solutions
<p>Replicate CoVEs’ approaches and methodologies at national level, for cooperation between VET providers, research centres and businesses.</p>	<p>Promote and connect existing models (e.g., Tknika in Spain; Skills Centres, in Belgium; Higher Technical Institutes /ITS, in Italy), advocating for their systems through campaigns, and creating a European applied-research network under ETF guidance.</p> <p>Similarly to the 2021 European Parliament’s decision, propose an increase to Erasmus+ funding to CoVEs by 4 times, in order to ensure their sustainability and scalability.</p>
<p>Promote “Excellence Twinning” between EU CoVEs and non-EU centres to transfer know-how on innovation hubs, with shared metrics for excellence.</p>	<p>Financially consolidate the work done by ETF with initiatives such as IntVET, DARYA and ENE, fostering stronger participation of EU VET providers and VET associations to facilitate international knowledge-sharing and capacity building.</p>

Local and regional partnerships on VET for excellence and innovation:

Key Recommendations	Solutions
<p>Introduce the concept of Learning Hubs, inspired by the CoVE experience, to strengthen collaboration between VET centres, local ecosystems, and labour market actors. VET centres should turn into “Learning Hubs” where education connects with local communities and labour markets (i.e., create practical spaces where people connect, collaborate and build relationships) oriented to lifelong learning, capacity building and innovation.</p>	<p>Assist Member States with the introduction of “learning hubs”, building on the experience of CoVEs and existing research (e.g. OECD), to strengthen collaboration between VET institutions and local ecosystems.</p> <p>Emphasize and recommend the involvement of VET centres into the S3 activities at local level.</p>
<p>Allocate resources for fostering innovative centres with specialised training opportunities.</p>	<p>Include a 50% increase in specific earmarked funding to VET in the upcoming 2028-2034 Erasmus+ Programme, devoted to innovation and training methodologies and in line with the increasing participation of VET providers in project and partnerships.</p> <p>Strengthen the evaluation criteria for VET providers involved in EU funded projects, in order to ensure quality of proposals and projects.</p>
<p>Ensure that excellence is always intended as inclusive and co-created among all stakeholders in the VET ecosystem, in line with the “human-centric” approach promoted by Commissioner Minzatu during the European Employment and Social rights Forum 2026.</p>	<p>Defining a more inclusive concept of excellence, by using existing EU tools such as ISATCOVE, and develop an “Inclusive Excellence Label” for virtuous VET providers.</p>

4. VET Mobility

VET mobility is characterised by Erasmus+ as a lever for internationalisation and institutional development of VET providers, as well as an important individual experience for participants. According to recent data from [Erasmus+ \(2025\)](#), in 2024 there were almost 1.5 million people taking part in Erasmus+ mobility, supported by an annual programme budget of €4.7 billion, which shows not only the commitment of the EU in investing in mobility, but also its expectations in terms of competitiveness, skills and cohesion outcomes. Moreover, with its Council Recommendation “[Europe on the Move](#)” (2024), the EC aims to expand learning mobility, with targets of 12% for VET learners by 2030. However, there are still challenges to be tackled, related to investment and cost barriers for VET providers and SMEs, complex access procedures, and fragmented mobility infrastructures.

Here are some recommendations and potential solutions that will support the Strategy to successfully overcome such challenges for the benefit of the VET sector and learners’ mobility.

Key Recommendations	Solutions
Invest in VET at national level to allow VET providers to carry out mobility actions alongside Erasmus+ programme funding.	Dedicate specific earmarking in EU-managed social programmes (e.g. ESF+) to support inclusive mobility (e.g. for learners from socio-economically disadvantaged backgrounds).
	Increase more funding for mobility to reach at least 40% of all Erasmus+ mobility for VET .
	Strengthen the introduction of mobility as part of the VET curricula and guidelines for a more structured system to measure the impact of mobility in learners’ skills development, especially with reference to companies expectations.
Acknowledge the role of supporting organisations in mobility programmes at EU level and support their action through facilitated administrative procedures.	Establish an official accreditation system to formally recognise supporting organisations , with a label of “Accredited Supporting Organisation” displayed in the Erasmus+ and European Solidarity Corps platform’s record of organisations.
	Introducing the possibility of adding accredited supporting organisations as project partners , allowing them to act as co-beneficiaries in Erasmus+ projects. This would improve transparency and

Key Recommendations	Solutions
	hold supporting organisations accountable for their role.
	Check recommendations issued by EfVET (e.g., “Report on the Impact of Erasmus+ Programme on VET Members” (2024)).
Increase accessibility, inclusion, and sustainability of mobility programmes	Increase funding or add specific actions for inclusion purposes and for virtual and blended mobility (to overcome geographical barriers).
	Create global corridors for staff and learners , removing bureaucratic barriers to obtaining visas for non-EU countries.
	Remove the 20% cap on Erasmus+ mobility actions with non-Erasmus+ partner countries.
Simplify access to mobility funding for VET institutions, intermediary organisations and organisations active in the labour market.	Create an accessible EU database where organisations can offer mobility placements for young people and employees. Such database should include a quality selection process and ensure anonymity.

5. External dimension & Internationalisation

As global labour markets, supply chains and technologies become more interconnected, VET systems must also evolve beyond national borders. Internationalisation is therefore emerging as a core dimension of European VET policy, enabling institutions, learners and industries to engage with global knowledge networks and respond to cross-border labour-market needs.

According to [CEDEFOP](#), VET initiatives such as international mobility, partnerships with third countries, global skills ecosystems and cooperation through the Erasmus+ Programme contribute to globally promoting EU training systems, while strengthening skills development and innovation within Europe itself. The [EC reported in 2025](#) that almost 1.5 million learners, teachers, trainers and youth workers participated in Erasmus+ mobility activities in 2024, in projects involving more than 85.600 organisations across Europe and partner countries. However, cooperation remains fragmented across programmes, regions, and policy frameworks. Challenges related to lengthy administrative processes and bureaucracy, diversity of teaching and learning and accreditation persist and hinder mobility exchanges and exchanges of best practices between EU and international partners.

As such, there is a need for a strategic approach that ensures coherence between external education policy, labour-market cooperation and development partnerships, especially in the framework of the 2030 UN sustainable development agenda. The following recommendations and solutions can support such an approach in key areas.

Key Recommendations	Solutions
<p>Invest in capacity building of national authorities, agencies and VET institutions to manage internationalisation strategically, including recognition processes, coordination and policy coherence.</p>	<p>Remove the 20% cap on Erasmus+ mobility actions with non-Erasmus+ partner countries.</p>
<p>Treat VET learners and staff mobility as a core pillar of internationalisation, not as a secondary add-on and further develop Erasmus+ to serve VET better.</p>	<p>Establish an annual “Global VET Forum” with non-EU representatives, VET associations and industry to define shared priorities, in coordination with initiatives such as WorldSkills or the TVET Global Agenda.</p>
<p>Promote further peer exchanges opportunities at global level, between EU and non-EU VET schools and with companies. In Talent Partnerships and regular migration pathways, avoid "skills extraction" by adopting a more ethical and circular approach that links training in countries of origin with decent work opportunities, reinvests in local training systems, and ensures certifications recognised both in the country of origin and in the EU.</p>	<p>Leverage EU programmes and initiatives (Erasmus+, CoVEs, Skills Portability Initiative, European Digital Identity, etc.) to support sustainable, inclusive and integrated models of internationalisation at local level.</p>

Key Recommendations	Solutions
<p>Ensure clear national evaluation systems for granting access to internationalisation programs and projects at international level.</p>	<p>Establish annual priority calls for funding for mixed EU-non-EU project teams, assessed on relevant topics according to EU priorities.</p>
<p>-</p>	<p>Establish EU delegation offices worldwide, potentially coordinated by ETF and/or Directorate-General for International Partnerships (DG INTPA), in collaboration with VET providers associations as “Team Europe”, under the Global Gateway initiative.</p>

6. Monitoring the European Strategy for VET

In order to ensure the success of the targets and initiatives suggested above, the monitoring process of the European Strategy for VET must be centred on well-defined pillars and be participated in by relevant stakeholders. The following principles and actions will ensure that the VET strategy will be effective, sustainable and based on peer-review methodologies.

Principle 1: *The European Strategy for VET must be a **collaborative** effort, where stakeholders from the VET ecosystem participate in the monitoring and evaluation of targets related to the Strategy*

Action: The European Commission (i.e. the Directorate-General for Employment and Social Affairs) will convene yearly with VET stakeholders or ‘Copenhagen Secretariat’ – among others, VET4EU2 members, civil society, national and regional authorities and business representatives – to evaluate the progress on the Strategy, in particular towards targets in funds, participation and other key performance indicators.

Principle 2: *The Strategy must ensure **transparent and independent monitoring**, with widespread communication on the progress of specific indicators*

Action: The European Commission (i.e. the Directorate-General for Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion) will release biannual monitors and reports on the status of the Strategy, elaborated after thorough and timely consultation with the stakeholders mentioned in the Action above.

Principle 3: *The Strategy should **support the development of Member States’ VET systems** in accordance with the principle of subsidiarity*

Action: The European Commission should issue independent evaluations, training and consultancy to Member States in need of development in VET, e.g. in the form of tenders issued to corporate and international organisations with the capacity to gather, analyse and publish information independent of EU structures and agencies, and provide adequate capacity building/consultancy for Member States requiring assistance in upgrading their VET systems, their apprenticeships and all forms of work-based learning.

Conclusion

VET provides practical and relevant learning pathways (combining theoretical knowledge with hands-on experience), improves employability and professional prospects, provides career orientation to young people, tackles social inclusion, and reduces inequalities. Moreover, it strengthens labour market competitiveness, supports the twin transitions, reduces unemployment rates, and supports SMEs and regional development. These are some of the reasons why it is important to have a European Strategy for Vocational Education and Training that not only nurtures the sector but also boosts it by **increasing its visibility and attractiveness, while ensuring its excellence and added value for young people**.

As previously mentioned, this Position Paper, developed by EfvET and its Policy Working Group, provides the European Commission with contributions to build the European Strategy for VET, with grassroots-level recommendations and possible solutions coming directly from those who know and experience the sector's real needs, practical experiences, and local realities: the **VET providers**. They are the ones in constant connection with learners and their families, and make the bridge with the labour market, hence the importance of listening to their voice and expectations.

To put into practice the European Strategy for VET, two actions are imperative:

1. **There must be an increased investment from the EC**, in line with what was proposed by the Union of Skills and other key strategic frameworks, and in line with the latest statements from EC President von der Leyen. **VET must achieve parity of esteem and financing** compared to other sectors of education;
2. There must be a **change in national Governments' mindsets regarding how they perceive and nurture VET**, so that the sector can fulfil its potential and benefit learners, families, communities and economies.

As demonstrated in this paper, there is already an **array of approaches, tools and initiatives in place, which can be harnessed** to achieve the purposes of the European Strategy for VET. Yet, doing so requires **cooperation**, a clear **roadmap** and specific **indicators** that help monitor progress in VET.

EfvET will continue working with its members, with partner associations and stakeholders, and with the European Commission and its different groups towards the enhancement of VET in Europe and beyond, generating capacity to influence policy and advocacy for the benefit of the sector, young people and learners of all ages.