



THE EU'S PORT OF CALL FOR VET

Supporting vocational education and training, skills and qualification policies from concept to implementation: Cedefop highlights 2020-21

2020 will be remembered as a watershed year. The pandemic's impact has moved Europe's vocational education and training (VET) and skills policy centre stage. The new EU policy in the making was designed to unleash VET's full potential and make it better suited to shape and manage the digital and green transitions to a fair economy and society; it will also help boost the recovery from Covid-19 at the same time.

HELPING TO SHAPE POLICY

Cedefop has always spearheaded developments and contributed to policy-making. In 2020 in particular this was again the case. Following consultation with Commissioner Schmit, Cedefop evidence helped inform the **renewed Skills Agenda** and the first ever **Council recommendation on VET**, as reflected in our performance indicators.

The German Presidency invited Cedefop to share its expertise in the shaping of the **Osnabrück declaration** accompanying the recommendation. This gives a new impetus to the **Copenhagen process**, the European cooperation in modernising VET since 2002. From the outset, Cedefop has informed, supported and analysed this process. Our new monitoring mandate relates to both the declaration and the recommendation.

The new EU VET and skills policy now includes a stronger focus on continuing VET (CVET), specifically in the **Pact for skills**, as advocated by Cedefop. To inform these policy-making processes, the Cedefop-ETF discussion paper, **The importance of being vocational**, set out the key challenges and opportunities for VET in the light of the pandemic's impact, future trends and the changing world of work. We made the case for a policy shift to advance CVET, which is crucial for upskilling and reskilling citizens and creating a dynamic workforce. We also stressed VET's potential as an enabler of recovery and successful transitions. This notion underpinned the debate at the high-level conference jointly hosted with the **ETF**,



Enhancing European cooperation in VET: looking back – planning ahead. Held under the auspices of the Croatian and German Presidencies, this was one milestone on the road to the Osnabrück declaration.

BOX 1. VET POLICY: LOOKING BACK – PLANNING AHEAD

VET's current and future challenges and opportunities were at the focus of this conference. It built upon the Cedefop-ETF **monitoring report of the 2015-20 cycle in European VET cooperation**, and their joint discussion paper aiming to inform the next policy-making steps.

Vice President Schinas and Commissioner Schmit stressed the value of Cedefop and ETF support in bringing about the essential skills revolution, referring to their work as 'a real goldmine to tap into'. The Education Ministers of Croatia, Germany and Greece reflected on VET's role and their initiatives to put VET into the limelight.

Key take-aways of the debate are that VET needs:

- a new vision: as an enabler for people, enterprises, economy and society, not just a remedy;
- to be transparent for more flexibility, better links to other education paths and expansion at higher level comparing and recognising qualifications within and across borders;
- highly qualified teachers and trainers;

- to be excellent and innovative to enable the green and digital transformation, bolstered by education-work partnerships and strong skills intelligence;
- a lifelong learning culture and governance systems for CVET to be the new standard path for all adults.

DESIGNING A NEW CEDEFOP STRATEGY

The stronger emphasis on CVET and the discussion paper are part of Cedefop's new strategy, also reflecting the extended remit of the Agency's 2019 recast Regulation. Like VET, Cedefop needs to take different perspectives, be agile and at the cutting edge of developments.

Supporting proactive, learner-centred and flexible VET throughout people's lives is at the core of our strategy for the years to come. This new course is based on our conviction that CVET should become the 'new normal' for all adults, supported by a skills guarantee and individual learning rights as necessary conditions to make lifelong learning a reality.

BEING RESPONSIVE TO CHANGE

Developing new ideas, embracing change and providing evidence underpin our values and strategy.

In 2020, virtually overnight our resilience, agility, creativity and ability to continue our work were put to test by the unprecedented challenge of the pandemic. Adopting digital solutions, and implementing a crisis strategy and a business continuity plan, were among the necessary steps we took to safeguard Cedefop's operations and the wellbeing of staff.

Adapting to the new normal

This also meant going virtual with planned events, including the Cedefop-Eurofound seminar *Workplace practices unlocking employee potential*, and the subsequent webinars. Aiming to create synergies and add value to their complementary areas of expertise, the two agencies have collaborated since 2019 on the European company survey. A **key survey** finding is that investment in skills development translates into superior company performance, though few companies make such investments.

From Cedefop's perspective, one of the main questions to explore further is how to shape workplaces to help staff learn and use skills to their full potential; and how social partners, HR and training practitioners can support this change.

This is a crucial question, considering the massive need for upskilling and reskilling: even before the outbreak of the pandemic, Cedefop research suggested that 46% of the adult population in the EU-27, Iceland, Norway and the UK would have to update their skills or gain new ones.



Against this backdrop, and Covid-19-induced labour market disruption, the 2020 policy learning forum *Upskilling pathways: a vision for the future* discussed how to progress further in putting upskilling pathways in place and to translate Cedefop's **analytical framework** into practice. As previously, the forum was organised together with the **European Economic and Social Committee**. These forums provide a platform for countries to learn from each other, so Cedefop contributes directly to the **European social rights pillar**.

Serving emerging needs

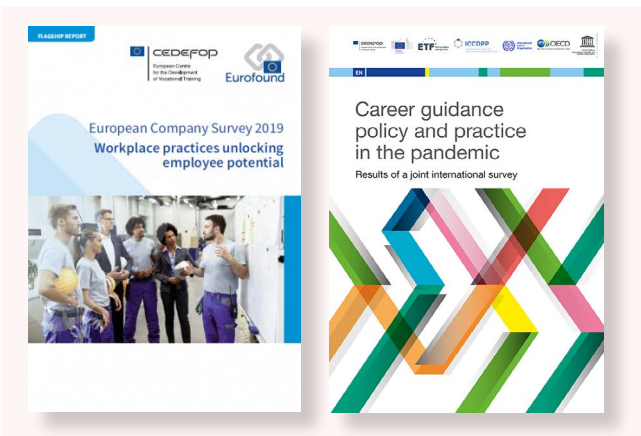
The implications of the pandemic tested our resilience and also gave us the chance to prove our agility and flexibility. Cedefop adapted its research and outputs to generate evidence on the impact of Covid-19 on the EU's labour market, workforce and VET systems.



Besides designing instant surveys, we added new perspectives to existing evidence and adjusted research in the planning stage. With our **new research, data, reflections and in-depth analyses** we aimed

to assist policy-makers and social partners as they prepare for a new reality. Involving our networks and adopting new working methods to tap the combined potential of our teams has proved valuable.

Coordinated by Cedefop, the international survey on *Career guidance policy and practice in the pandemic* examined the potential role of guidance in recovery policies. This initiative demonstrates how Cedefop's collaborative efforts with EU and international organisations can lead to increased efficiency gains for us and the support we provide to countries.



COMBINING CONTINUITY AND INNOVATION

Countries are planning their follow-up to the new EU VET and skills policy amidst the pandemic. For Cedefop it is also the first year to translate its new strategy into practice. Based on the policy framework and its own strategy, Cedefop's work programme 2021 is characterised by continuity, innovation and flexibility.

Reinforcing skills intelligence

The 2020 EU skills agenda makes a clear case for strengthening skills intelligence and making it more relevant for individuals. A high-level Cedefop event in April will contribute to taking this issue forward.

Cedefop will shape a new generation of skills intelligence, more effectively informing VET and skills policy and delivery, employment and guidance services, and people's decisions. This will include inter-institutional cooperation, notably on *Cedefop's online vacancy analysis tool*, which has attracted substantial interest from our stakeholders. Together with *Eurostat*, we will develop this tool further, to inform smart European statistics, and refine the methodology through cooperation with EU and international partners.

BOX 2. TAKING SKILLS INTELLIGENCE FORWARD

Getting the future right: towards smarter and people-centred skills intelligence, 13 April 2021

This Cedefop high-level conference will discuss how:

- to advance skills intelligence to understand better the challenges that digital, green, demographic and other megatrends pose to labour markets;
- to contextualise labour market skills intelligence better, making it more relevant and timely to support people's decisions on education and training, up- and reskilling, job transitions and career development.

Digging deeper into VET qualifications

Changes in occupations and work, more job transitions, 'borderless' learning and a need for lifelong skills development also require deeper understanding of VET qualifications. As a result of a recent study, Cedefop will propose a methodology to help compare VET qualifications across borders. The findings will be presented in a publication and discussed in a workshop with policy-makers, social partners and researchers.

To support exploratory work under the VET recommendation, Cedefop's analysis of VET content changes and combinations of technical and transversal skills will contribute to the initiative on European vocational core profiles. A new study will consider how micro-credentials are used for labour-market-oriented VET and skilling at work, examining how the learning outcomes approach can help make them transferable and stackable, to support lifelong learning.

Promoting CVET as a path for jobs and life

The pandemic has amplified the need for upskilling and reskilling. Increasing training offers is not enough; it takes systematic and coordinated approaches to empower low-skilled adults to engage in lifelong up- and reskilling.

In 2021, Cedefop will continue to support countries' efforts to make upskilling pathways a reality. A report with country case studies based on Cedefop's analytical framework will inform its further work with the Commission, national authorities and social partners. To provide more targeted support, Cedefop will conduct in-depth reviews of Member State approaches to upskilling pathways. This will form the basis for further policy learning activities.

The need to promote upskilling and reskilling for all calls for systematic CVET as a path for jobs and life, as pointed out in the Cedefop-ETF discussion paper.

This requires integrated approaches, comprising career guidance, validation of non-formal and informal learning, (non)financial incentives, outreach policies and other supporting measures. It includes professional development of guidance practitioners, VET teachers, trainers and mentors. Closely connecting work in these areas will reinforce the case for comprehensive and coordinated support to increase engagement in continuing training.

Going greener

Greening our economy means people acquiring adequate skills and institutions reducing their environmental footprint. These twin goals are apparent in our core business and in our institutional objectives.

Following earlier [work on green skills](#), we will add a new forecast scenario to assess how the new policies to reach European Green Deal targets are likely to affect labour markets and specific sectors. Ultimately, our data will support policy-makers, social partners and enterprises in shaping their skills strategies.

We will pool our expertise on green skills and apprenticeships, complementing the renewed European alliance for apprenticeships in the work on one of its core themes. Green skills will also be at the centre of the 2021 Cedefop-OECD symposium on apprenticeships, a platform to exchange research and policy lessons from around the globe.

Cedefop will deploy an energy efficiency strategy to minimise its own environmental impact. Indicators of our current internal environmental management system are integrated into our overall performance measurement. The new strategy will enable more detailed monitoring of our environmental footprint.

Interacting more closely with our partners

With our new interactive web portal in place, we will be able to target our information better to different user needs. Access points will allow retrieving thematic and country-based information that interlinks results and data sets from related activities across our portfolio. This approach will also underpin our interactive tools, data visualisations and databases.

The portal, and the increasing use of virtual events and communication tools, will allow closer collaboration with our stakeholders. This will also enable us to reflect better the tripartite nature of VET. For selected themes, advisory groups with Management Board members will ensure our outcomes are jointly shaped with our key stakeholders and reflect their views and needs.

Cooperation with other organisations in our core business is mutually beneficial and aids Cedefop's

efficiency and effectiveness. In 2021, our regular joint work with the ETF and Eurofound will focus on: qualifications; monitoring countries' progress in VET priorities; skill intelligence; skills development in the platform economy; and the follow-up to the European company survey, particularly the analysis of the additional enquiry on the Covid-19 impact.

Collaboration with EU agencies also benefits our performance and administrative processes. This leads to increased efficiency gains through shared services in areas such as data protection with [ENISA](#) or disaster recovery for ICT systems with [EUIPO](#).

Being well-run and efficient

As we are moving into the second year of the pandemic, the environment in which Cedefop operates remains uncertain. However, within the given budget limitations, our work plan provides for flexibility to adjust to demands that might arise from the evolving policy framework or other unpredictable developments.

Cedefop will continue to pursue its digitalisation programme to increase effectiveness and offer safe, flexible and smart working conditions to our highly qualified staff. Promoting a culture of collaboration, knowledge-sharing, learning and competence development will be at the core of our talent management. We are committed to the highest standards of ethics, integrity and compliance.

As our performance indicators demonstrate, 2020 was another successful year for Cedefop, against all odds. The 100% budget execution is just one of the proofs. Cedefop not only accomplished but also exceeded its workplan by flexibly tailoring its work to provide targeted, up-to-date and real-time evidence.

Applying state-of-the art technology, we secured high interest and increased participation in our web-based events. Participants' positive feedback confirms that using virtual and hybrid events in the future will aid our outreach to the wider VET community.

As evident from our achievements in 2020, we did not only prove our agility and flexibility in responding to socioeconomic developments and emerging challenges. We also manifested our role as a proactive central provider of intelligence for EU policies on VET, skills and qualifications. Our 2021 work programme includes activities along the value chain to support VET, skills and qualifications policies in close collaboration with the Commission, Member States, social partners and other stakeholders: Cedefop will remain an incubator of ideas and a platform for policy learning; a provider of sound research and analyses, and a valuable partner in policy implementation.

BOX 3. CEDEFOP 2020 IN FIGURES: RESILIENT AND AGILE

