

skillset AND MATCH

CEDEFOP'S MAGAZINE
PROMOTING
LEARNING FOR WORK

 CEDEFOP

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MAIN STORY:
DESIGNING VOCATIONAL EDUCATION
AND TRAINING'S FUTURE

MESSAGE: **MARIANNE THYSSEN**

INTERVIEWS: MARGARET REILLY,
SHAWN MENDES, ALAA ALHUSNI

MEMBER STATES: **ROMANIA**

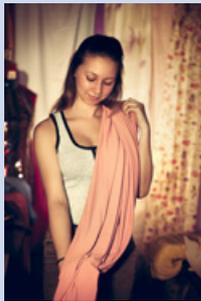
FEATURES:
EUROPEAN SKILLS INDEX
#CEDEFOPPHOTOAWARD

**CEDEFOP**

The **European Centre for the Development of Vocational Training** (Cedefop) is the European Union's reference centre for vocational education and training.

We provide information on and analyses of vocational education and training systems, policies, research and practice.

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#CedefopPhotoAward
2018 first prize winners

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Back to the future

MARA BRUGIA

CEDEFOP ACTING DIRECTOR



*Building a shared
vision for VET
beyond 2020
was central to
last year's policy
discourse*



Janus, the Roman God of gateways, had two faces, one looking to the past and one to the future. This *Skillset and match* edition mirrors this dual perspective.

Building a shared vision for vocational education and training (VET) beyond 2020 was central to last year's policy discourse. This requires understanding what has been achieved and where VET should be heading. Retrospection and foresight marked Cedefop's successful conference within the European vocational skills week, with lively debates on possible scenarios for VET's future helping enrich reflections at EU level.

Cedefop's European skills index, released last year, supports countries' future work on VET. Rather than devising new indicators, policy-makers favour improving those that already exist. Built on existing indicators, the index serves as a monitoring tool aiding qualitative analysis, cross-country comparison and policy learning.

In taking European transparency tools forward, the highest value is attributed to the European qualifications framework. As the main challenge now is to integrate qualifications obtained outside formal education into national frameworks, the Nordic countries' experience is inspiring; this is also true when it comes to recognising third-country nationals' prior learning. Occupations where labour is in short supply, such as care for the elderly, may offer job prospects; this is a sector where Cedefop expects further employment growth.

Soft skills are essential to these occupations and they are becoming hard skills in many others. As the #CedefopPhotoAward competition confirmed, VET already supports them today. At policy level, empowering VET learners through key competences is a main theme for the Romanian EU Presidency of the first half of 2019.

While reflections on the future of VET continue, we are entering uncertain waters as the policy framework is not yet defined and a new European Commission will take over later this year. Cedefop's revised Founding Regulation will bring some change. What will remain stable is our role as knowledge broker and focal point for sharing evidence, networking and supporting our stakeholders. ■

European skills index: discover how skills systems perform

“ *The index reveals where countries stand. No Member State reaches, or comes close to, 100* ”

Skill systems are an important component of country competitiveness and, in aggregate, of the European Union (EU) as a whole. Several key principles of the *European pillar of social rights* are built around a well-functioning and inclusive labour market with education, training and lifelong learning at the heart. At the same time, the *New skills agenda for Europe* lists a set of actions aimed at improving skills systems through better skills formation, greater visibility, and more informed career choices. But, until now, there was no single measure to assess and compare how well EU skills systems perform. Nor are there any easy answers to the question of how they can be made more effective. To fill this gap, Cedefop has developed the European skills index (ESI), a composite indicator measuring the effectiveness of Member States' skills systems.

DEVELOP, ACTIVATE, MATCH

Traditionally, skills systems are thought of as the means of delivering skills to a country's population. However, the role of a skills system is also to ensure a smooth transition from education to work and an appropriate skills match in the world of work. The ESI brings together three components of a skills system: skills development, skills activation and skills matching. Within these, 15 individual indicators are aggregated into a single measure.

HOW THE ESI WORKS

The indicators chosen are linked to policy issues. Within the ESI framework, higher performance can primarily be achieved through a well-balanced skills system, across development, activation and matching. Prioritising one area over another may improve certain aspects but may penalise the overall

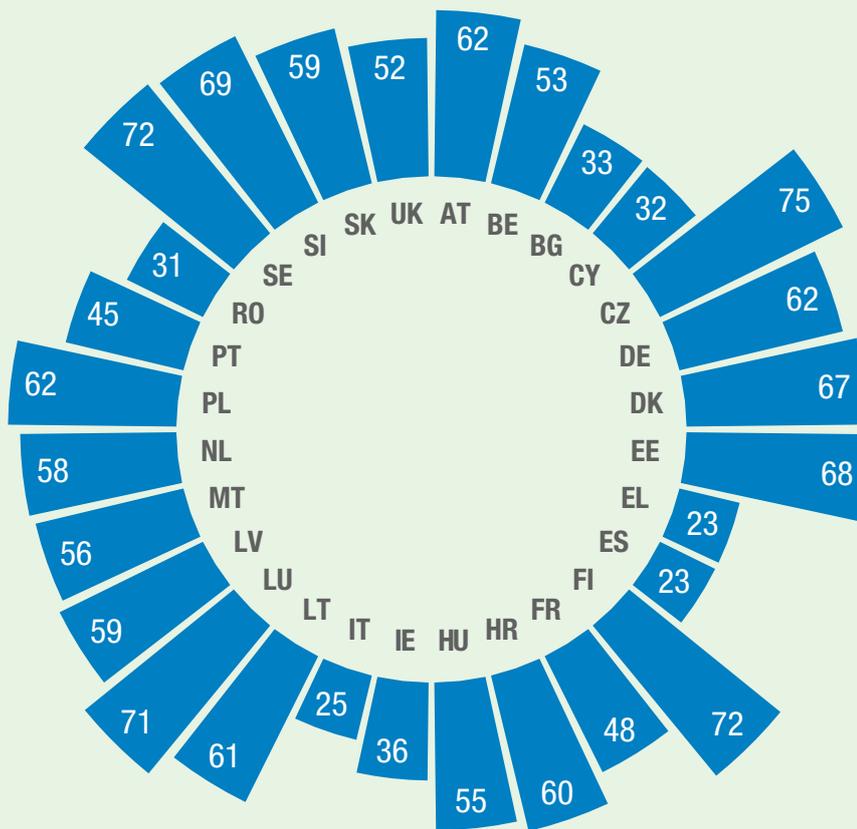
performance measurement.

The results at index level across Member States are shown in Figure 1. A range of 0-100 is used: the higher the score, the better the performance. The ideal performance of 100 is set close to the best result achieved by any of the EU-28 over a seven-year period based on indicator-specific criteria. The gap between the score and 100 indicates the scope for potential improvement.

HOW COUNTRIES PERFORM

It is this gap which matters for analysis, with the index revealing where countries stand. No Member State reaches, or comes close to, 100. The Czech Republic scores highest (75), followed by Finland, Sweden, and Luxembourg (above 70). Together with Slovenia, Estonia and Denmark, these countries form the top 25% with results above 67. There is scope to improve for all, even those with the best results.

FIGURE 1: ESI OVERALL SCORES



Source: Cedefop (2018 European skills index).

The ESI scores suggest three broad groups of performer. For example, the Czech Republic and Sweden belong to the first group (leaders), Austria and the UK to the second (middle achievers) and Greece and Spain the third (low achievers). Typically, Member States belonging to the first group have a well-balanced skills system and good performance across all three components. The second group mainly consists of countries that may score high on one or two components but lower on a third one (Figure 2 shows results by component).

WHAT THE SCORES SHOW

The ESI highlights where there may be common problems at EU level, calling for concerted action. At national level, it shows where a Member State stands relative to others, and

helps identify strengths and weaknesses. In doing so, it highlights areas in need of policy intervention. Shared policy learning is made possible from the extent to which some countries have found a solution to a particular issue, as reflected by a high score.

Looking deeper into the index, skills development and activation have a strong linear relationship. This comes as no surprise as a better developed pool of potential workers is expected to have a better transition to the world of work. In addition, the outcomes of skills development and activation determine the available supply of skills in the system. These two could be considered as a separate dimension – that of skills formation – more linked to structural factors. From a policy perspective, this suggests that

common policies may be able to influence these two distinct aspects of a skills system.

Skills matching is seen as a separate aspect of a skills system, determined by the interplay of demand and supply. Issues arising from skills matching would need separate attention in policy as only limited, if any, actions can have an impact on all three areas. Given the focus of most Member States on skills development, which also affects activation, skills matching is the component with the lowest scores in comparison to the other two.

COMPARING COUNTRY SCORES

The comparison of scores across the two dimensions (e.g. skills formation and skills matching) enables initial observations in which four groups can be identified. The first group consists of Member States that show good performance in both dimensions, such as Sweden and Finland. Such countries can be considered as ‘role models’ of overall skills systems and where good practices can be sought.

The second group comprises countries where skills are efficiently developed and activated but poorly matched, as in the Netherlands and the UK. The skills systems of these countries are characterised by ‘bottlenecks’ where adequate policies in developing and activating skills are constricted at

European pillar of
social rights

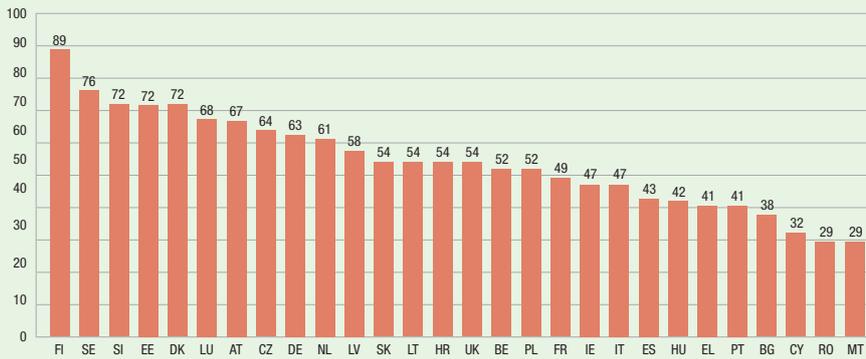


New skills agenda
for Europe

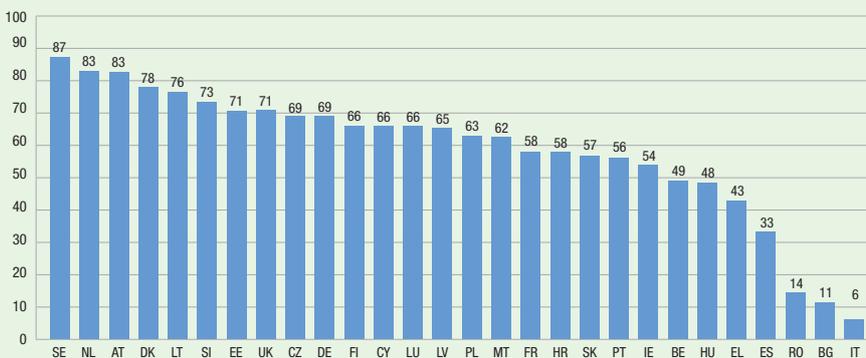


FIGURE 2: ESI COMPONENT SCORES

Skills development



Skills activation



Skills matching



Source: Cedefop (2018 European skills index).

the interaction between demand and supply. Specific policies to reduce skills mismatch would be necessary in these cases.

A third group includes countries where matching is high but development and activation score low, as with Romania and Bulgaria. These systems are rewarded by efficient labour market matching and can possibly be used as good cases of matching practices; however,

given the low scores in skills formation, they can provide a signal of ‘low skills equilibrium’, where efficient matching is an outcome of poor demand for high skills.

The final group is that of countries where scores are low in both dimensions, such as Cyprus and Portugal. This can be described as a ‘hotchpotch’ situation where better coordination is needed

THE ESI AND GREECE

A group of senior stakeholders, with Cedefop’s support, analysed Greece’s ESI scores in all areas to draw up proposals for policy intervention. Within skills activation, a good score was achieved in not leaving education and training early. While this may be partly linked to the situation in the labour market, it indicates people’s firm belief in the gains from education. Modernising some aspects of the education system is expected to benefit weaker areas. An area that needs reviewing is reading, maths and science, which was revealed as the weakest link in the country’s compulsory education score. The group considered essential actions to address the primary causes: reshaping curricula to embrace critical thinking, knowledge application and the use of new technologies; focusing more on the quality of study material; increasing teacher autonomy and introducing frequent assessment. The country performs comparatively well in high-level computer skills. This good result is attributed to post-secondary/tertiary-level programmes. Proposals were made to address the low score in vocational education and training (VET) participation: stronger focus on anticipating skill needs; involving employers in VET governance; revising VET offers; and strengthening information and guidance.

Source: European skills index scores for Greece: reasons behind and policy proposals. Discussion paper of working group Education and Employment, Friedrich Ebert Foundation.



The ESI is meant to act as a starting point for understanding the complexity of skills systems. Delving into such complexity is necessary in the quest for answers

for both skills formation and skills matching.

PRIORITIES FOR ACTION

Careful examination of the ESI makes it possible to highlight several issues in Member State skills systems. Although there is significant heterogeneity, the following priorities can be established:

- for skills development, Member States may take action towards providing more

opportunities for education beyond the compulsory level, fully embracing lifelong learning;

- for skills activation, Member States may take action towards increasing activity rates of the younger cohort without prejudice to increasing their educational and training level;
- for skills matching, Member States may take action towards reducing mismatch

between workforce skills and available job opportunities, ensuring that workers will be able to find jobs corresponding to their level of education and training.

The ESI has been designed as a tool for capturing Member State skills system performance. In itself, it does not provide answers: it is meant to act as a starting point in understanding the complexity of skills systems. Delving into such complexity is necessary in the quest for answers. ■

More information
on the European
skills index at Skills
Panorama



The European skills
index project at the
Cedefop website



Celebrating learner creativity



© C.Force

In its third year of existence, the #CedefopPhotoAward once again captured the imagination of vocational education and training (VET) learners in the European Union, including this time Norway and Iceland. There were three prizes for the 2018 edition. The first two teams, one from Hungary and one from Italy, won a trip to Vienna last November to be part of the European vocational skills week main celebrations and vie for the top spot. A team from Lithuania were invited to the 59th Thessaloniki International Film Festival opening night.

FIRST PRIZE: THE POWER OF THE DESIRE TO CREATE, C.FORCE TEAM, HUNGARY

The C.Force team from the CSZC Bem József Technical Secondary and Vocational School won the online vote and received their award from European Commissioner for Employment, Social Affairs, Skills and Labour Mobility Marianne Thyssen at the week's closing ceremony.

Kitti Ungvári and András Muresan told the story of a girl studying to become a tailor who saw a beautiful dress and decided to make it for herself.

'We never thought we'd be winners when we entered the competition,' András told *Skillset and match*. He and their teacher Veronika Szabóné Oláh came up with the idea for the story and asked Kitti, who studies dressmaking, to be the model.

András hopes to find a job as a camera operator or a photographer when he finishes his media technician studies. Kitty likes to make dresses for herself. She has made the skirt she was wearing at the award ceremony, and aspires to make clothes for people who think her work is 'beautiful'. Veronika was impressed from a young age by the dresses people can create with their own hands; she now finds her work as a teacher rewarding.

Watch an interview with the Hungarian winners





© ThisIsMeTeam

SECOND PRIZE: THE GREATEST SHOW, THISISME TEAM, ITALY

The winners of the second prize wanted to send out a message: 'In our school, students organised a great event on board a ship to promote our Erasmus+ projects. We wanted to showcase our talents, putting ourselves out there, singing, dancing, juggling, mixing cocktails.'

Chiara Savino, Alberto Valetta and Erika Paciaroni are all in their teens studying at the Institute of Higher Education Einstein Nebbia-Loreto.

Chiara is studying bar and service, and dreams of opening her own restaurant abroad. She took part in the event because she wanted to express herself: 'I have a talent; I can dance, and wanted to show it to the world. Working in a group with people from different cultures, different skin colour or with special needs is very important.'

Alberto, who is in tourism and hospitality, was the presenter and singer at the event, and even wrote

a song 'This is my chance'. Thanks to this experience he discovered 'my talent in singing, acting and working in a team.'

Erika, also in tourism and hospitality, likes the school 'because it can open many doors, especially with the Erasmus+ projects.' She too would like to work in another part of the world.

Their teacher, Raffaella Lodovici, loves to watch her students grow, develop self-esteem and discover that they can choose the future they want: 'That's why we organise a lot of Erasmus+ events and why we encouraged our students to take part in this competition.'

The students all agree that 'the experience in Vienna was amazing, especially the chance to meet people and speak English,' a skill they will need in their future jobs.

Watch an interview with
the Italian winners





© F-56 (Photography team)

THIRD PRIZE: CAPTURING LANDSCAPE AND LIGHT, F-56 PHOTOGRAPHY TEAM, LITHUANIA

All F-56 photography team members from the Vilnius Vocational Training Centre for Business Service Specialists are adult learners who studied in higher education before deciding to do a two-year photography course with the aim of changing careers and becoming professional photographers.

‘Studying alongside 18-year-olds, we are just as motivated as them (perhaps even more), because lifelong learning for us is a deliberate, voluntary act,’ they explain in the narrative that accompanies their photos. They spent a week trying to capture the light moving over the Neringa sandy dunes in Lithuania’s Curonian Spit.

Raminta Levandraitė-Matulevičienė, who works as a communications expert, realised that her roots are more in visual culture and, despite being ‘an introverted person’, took up the challenge of working in a team to produce a photo story for the #CedefopPhotoAward.

Photography was a hobby at first for art graduate Tim Kliukoit. He chose to change path and hasn’t regretted it. Talking about the photos, he explains that they used digital and analogue photography, and a collage technique to represent their teamwork. The experience of winning, he said, is ‘a marvellous achievement for our first year of vocational education.’

Evelina Burštein really loved being part of the experience and was impressed by their trip to Greece. She studied veterinary medicine, but, after finishing her master degree, she decided to go for her childhood dream and become a photographer.

Eglė Mekuškienė studied German literature and worked as manager of an ice arena for 10 years before turning to photography with encouragement from family and friends who saw her talent. ‘I still can’t believe we are here,’ she said at the #CedefopPhotoAward exhibition opening in Thessaloniki.

Their teacher, Jogaile Butrimaite, let students know about the competition through social media and the four classmates were the first to respond. Jogaile is happy with the result and the ‘wonderful teamwork.’ ■

Watch an interview with the Lithuanian winners



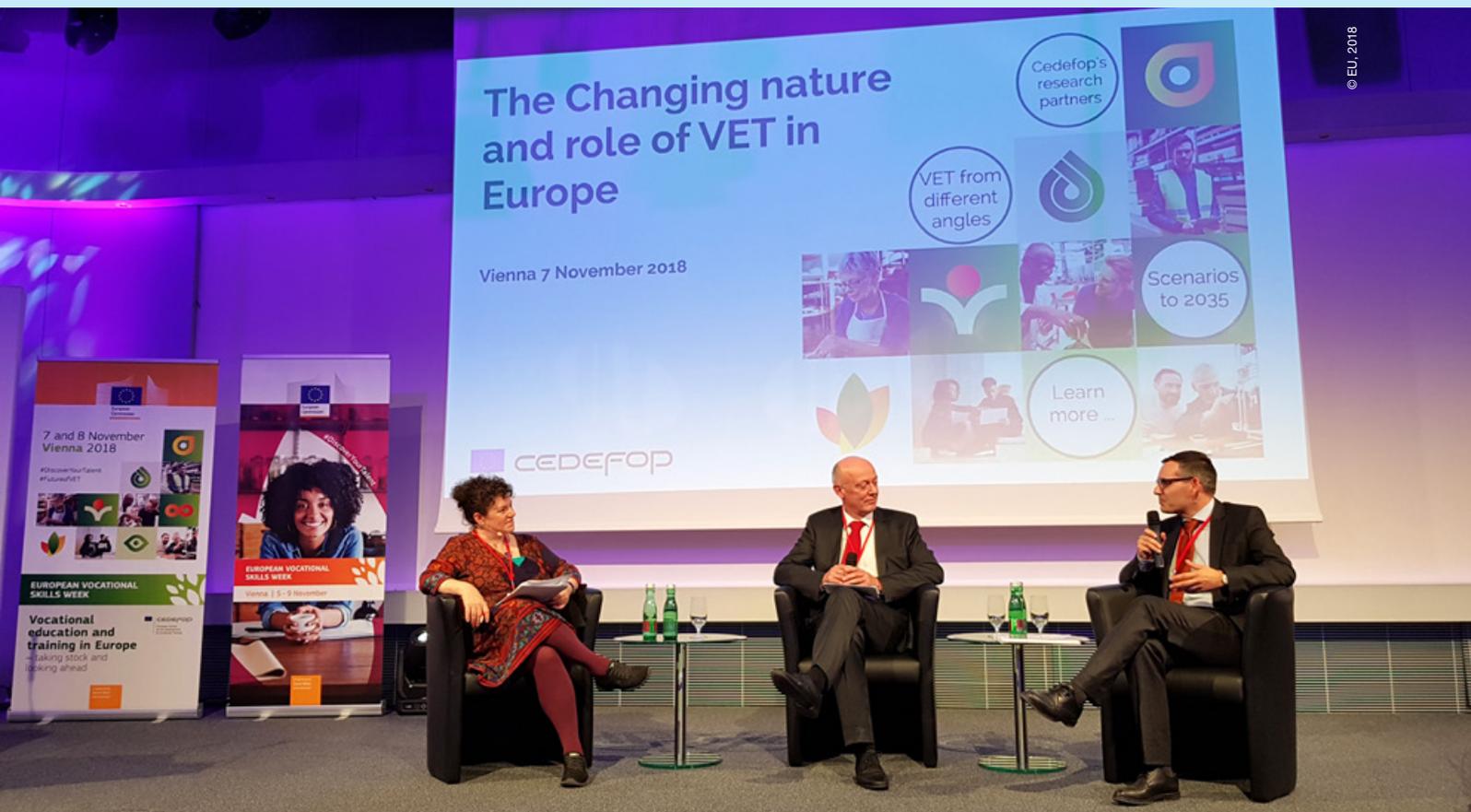
#CEDEFOPPHOTOAWARD2018

- 100 teams
- 304 VET learners
- 81 teachers
- 78 VET providers
- 18 EU Member States
- 3 winning teams from Hungary, Italy and Lithuania

DESIGNING

vocational education and training's future

EUROPEAN VOCATIONAL
SKILLS WEEK



© EU, 2018

In a world that is changing faster than ever, vocational education and training (VET) is being transformed. Cedefop has studied developments in, and prospects for, this vital option for education and labour market opportunities in a flagship three-year project. The results were presented at the centrepiece of the European vocational skills week 2018, held in November in Vienna.

The conference, organised jointly with the European Commission, attracted more than 400 people connected to VET from across Europe and beyond. Learners, policy-makers, practitioners, social partners and VET ambassadors had a chance to hear from others and give their views.

Cedefop's study on vocational education and training's changing nature and role in Europe explored, with stakeholders, the potential risks and opportunities for VET. It aims to inform EU-level reflection and country-context action.

DIFFERENT SCENARIOS

Three scenarios for VET in 2035 were discussed in Vienna. To be able to develop these scenarios, the study started with a thorough analysis of major trends and developments in the past 20 years.

Cedefop Acting Director Mara Brugia took participants through a journey in history. VET has gone in and out of fashion over time, she noted, adding that the shock of the recent economic downturn has lifted it up on the EU policy agenda and has led to a renaissance in apprenticeships.

She pointed out that initial VET now offers fewer but broader qualifications in many countries, suggesting that some VET systems may be more future-proof than others.

The Director General of DG Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion Joost Korte said that 'skills for life are the skills for jobs nowadays: creativity,



It's not only about technical skills; excellence in VET means that every single person can develop to the maximum and express their full potential

curiosity, sense of initiative. It's not only about technical skills; excellence in VET means that every single person can develop to the maximum and express their full potential.'

Introducing the scenarios, Cedefop Head of Department for VET Systems and Institutions Loukas Zahilas expressed his hope that they will be helpful tools for any strategic discussion among stakeholders and policy-makers. He also warned that 'they have a certain degree of variation and are unlikely to develop the way they are presented; nevertheless, they provide a starting point for considering a range of options around the multiple possible futures of VET.'

3 SCENARIOS FOR VET IN 2035

SCENARIO 1: Lifelong learning at the heart

This scenario broadens our understanding and conception of what is meant by VET. The emphasis is on vocationally and labour-market-oriented learning at all levels and in all institutional settings. Vocationally oriented learning will not be restricted to the institutions explicitly defined as VET providers today, but form part of an integrated lifelong learning approach.

SCENARIO 2: Occupational and professional competence at the heart

The distinctive scenario seeks to strengthen the existing and dominant conception of VET as focused on entry into occupations and professions.

SCENARIO 3: Job-oriented training at the heart

This scenario narrows the understanding and conception of VET. Its focus is on training for jobs, reskilling and upskilling for short- and medium-term labour market needs.

Cedefop briefing
note: What future for
vocational education
and training in Europe?





Cedefop Acting Director Mara Brugia speaking at the conference

DECLINING OR THRIVING VET?

Cedefop expert Jens Bjørnåvold, the project coordinator, and external research consortium leader Jörg Markowitsch presented the study findings.

Mr Bjørnåvold said that there are two competing VET narratives in Europe today. In a negative version, VET is becoming increasingly marginalised and the number of candidates attending initial vocational education and training is declining. Reflecting the perceived attractiveness of higher, academic-oriented education, the skills provided by VET seem to be less needed due to digitalisation and job polarisation. But, in the positive narrative, VET is expanding, diversifying and its higher education element is increasing.

Overall figures show that VET has been declining since 2005, but if we look at individual countries, there are positive developments in many. Countries such as Finland, Greece, Portugal, Spain and Sweden have shown remarkable growth, albeit from a low base. Countries with high shares of VET (above 70%), such as Austria and the Netherlands, were able to retain or even expand this share.

Mr Markowitsch suggested that, paradoxically, both stories are accurate, depending on individual conceptions of VET. Looking at VET as a narrow concept – as formal learning for young people only, focusing on specific occupations and middle-skilled jobs – then it is really under threat. In a broader understanding of VET, as vocationally oriented



Different people have different future visions of vocational education and training

learning, including lower and higher levels, it is thriving.

Looking ahead to 2035, Mr Bjørnåvold said that a survey carried out among 1 500 VET stakeholders confirmed some identified trends: growth in higher VET, increased work-based elements and better responsiveness will definitely intensify in the future.

Mr Markowitch stressed that different people have different future visions of vocational education and training. One group expects that in the next 15 years VET will be the standard education pathway for all, a part of lifelong learning; consequently, higher VET will be part of the higher education system. This group also sees a balance between the economic and social orientation of vocational education. Another group would also like to see VET as the standard education pathway for all, but envisages VET as a distinct educational sector in 2035, opting for a higher VET sector distinct from



EUROPEAN COMMISSIONER
FOR EMPLOYMENT, SOCIAL
AFFAIRS, SKILLS AND LABOUR
MOBILITY **MARIANNE THYSSEN**
ON THE FUTURE OF VET

I see the future of VET as providing high-quality opportunities for all to prosper in society. It should help all individuals, young or adult, to develop their full potential. It should provide a highly skilled workforce for companies to raise their productivity and competitiveness.

We need to make sure that VET systems can be flexible. They need to be able to adapt to rapid technological and social changes. We also need to continue to increase the attractiveness and excellence of VET.

That is the reason why, during my time as European Commissioner, I have put forward a set of proposals to make VET a first choice. I hope that it will become reality across Europe.

Watch the Commissioner, learners from Austria and Greece, teachers, parents and other stakeholders talk about VET's future challenges in Cedefop's video



higher education.

WHICH MODEL?

This explains the need for the different scenarios, with each of three experts making the case for each one. The pluralistic scenario was presented by research deputy team leader Andrew McCoshan. This foresees VET distinguished by its close education system links rather than as a sector: organised around qualifications with diverse target groups; numerous VET pathways operate side by side, strongly individualised; and there is an increasing variety of providers.

Philippe Grollmann, from Germany's Federal Institute for Vocational Education and Training (BIBB), described the distinctive VET model: a clearly defined sub-sector of the education and training system; organised around occupations/professions; apprenticeships are the 'gold standard' offered up to level 8; and provision is employer-led.

Cedefop expert Anastasia Pouliou outlined the 'difficult' scenario of special purpose and/or marginalised VET with key attributes: skills training

for labour market inclusion; mainly for adults in need of reskilling or upskilling or at risk of social exclusion and unemployment; no pathway in particular but emphasis on labour market (re)entry; type of provision will be short training courses with some on-the-job training.

In the discussion that followed, some participants identified their country's needs with one or the other scenario. Some said that a combination would be more realistic and others called for a single scenario to be developed.

Analysis of the conference results continued till the end of the year and the project's updated findings will be available in 2019. ■

Cedefop project: Changing nature and role of vocational education and training in Europe



From dropout to VET ambassador



MARGARET REILLY



I'm very passionate about apprenticeships because I believe third-level education is not for everybody; sometimes the better route is through apprenticeships and skill learning

BUSINESS OWNER, FORMER APPRENTICE

Margaret Reilly was the European vocational skills week 2018 ambassador for Ireland. A school dropout at 15, who became an apprentice at cabinet making, worked for various companies and set up her own a decade ago, she is now also involved in speaking to young people about the benefits of vocational education and training (VET).

'My woodwork teacher told me I was brilliant at woodwork when I was 12. I brought that with me as I went through my four years and qualified as a cabinet maker. I went on to work in different multinational companies as a cabinet maker, and I moved into areas of design and sales along that journey. I opened my own company in 2009, at the beginning of the recession. I saw an opportunity, companies were closing, and I opened up Grand Designs, for kitchens and bedrooms, in Drogheda on the east coast of Ireland. I now employ 10 staff full-time and I have another seven sub-contractors, all trades people, like electricians, plumbers, tilers and painters. I've also brought seven or eight apprentices through our company.'

Setting up a company requires more skills than an apprenticeship in cabinet making. Margaret did a business course before becoming an

entrepreneur. Her advice to young people is never give up. 'I'm very passionate about apprenticeships because I believe third-level education is not for everybody; sometimes the better route is through apprenticeships and skill learning. I say "don't take no for an answer", because I was told "no" many times by the same people and I kept going back. I used to go around and tell people I'd work for free for a month to get in the door. I felt alive when I was working in the skills. I felt like I belonged. Education academically didn't come to me until my twenties.'

Margaret became an ambassador for the European vocational skills week through 'maybe 25 referrals' and she has enjoyed it: 'It's another role, from being an apprentice, to being a business owner, to now being a speaker. I enjoy the speaking because if you can help somebody just a little bit, it's all positive. I've been doing talks in schools in the last five years and I've had students come in to the factory. They might just come in looking for a bit of advice or maybe they need a little bit of motivation or maybe they are a woman trying to get into a male industry, and I'll tell them how to do it, from my experience.' ■

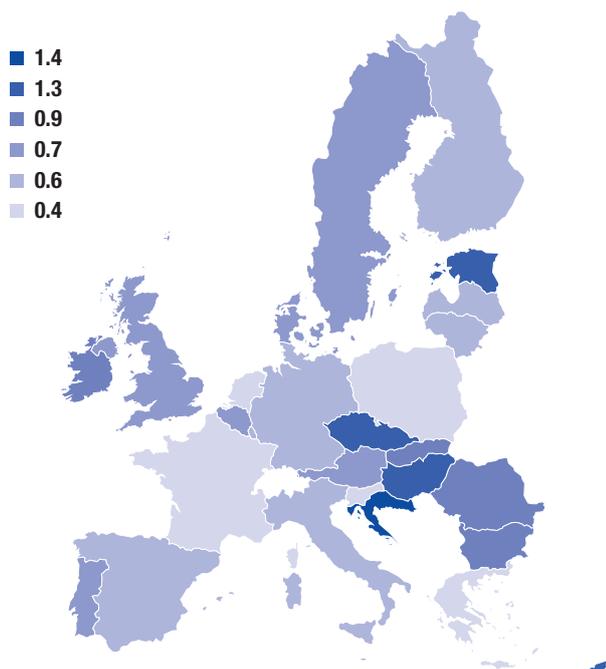
OCCUPATION
IN FOCUS:Care
workers

Skills Panorama continues its series sharing trends and challenges for selected occupations in the European labour market.

Helping children, patients and the elderly, care workers are mainly employed in health & social care or education sectors. About 8 million work in the European Union (EU), enjoying their largest employment shares in Sweden and Finland.

Their importance is expected to grow to fill a gap formed by simultaneous driving forces: as Europe ages, retirement age increases in several Member States, while women's growing participation in the labour market may decrease their availability to provide unpaid care to relatives in need.

Almost half a million of new jobs for care workers are foreseen till 2030 as a remedy. Since many current care workers will also retire, close to 5 million jobs will be vacated, creating additional job openings.

WHICH COUNTRIES WILL OFFER MORE
JOB PROSPECTS FOR CARE WORKERS
IN THE FUTURE?

NB: The figures compare the number of existing jobs and future job openings: the higher the value, the higher the prospects.



CARE WORKERS

- Almost **8 million** in the EU (2016)
- Key employment sectors: **health & social care; education**
- Best job prospects expected in the **former new Member States.**

DEMAND FOR CARE
WORKERS IN THE EU TO 2030
(ESTIMATED)

- New job openings **448 000**
- Replacements **4 925 000**

Stronger job prospects are expected in the former new EU Member States, such as in the Czech Republic, Croatia, Cyprus and Hungary, where their employment levels in this sector are still low.

As employment prospects expand, so will relevant skills needs. Currently, 20% of care workers have a low education level; by 2030 this share will fall to 4%. They will also be affected by technological change, despite being the occupation with the lowest automation risk in the EU. Additionally, as they will be working more with the elderly, relevant enabling skills – soft skills, such as communication, active listening and observation – will be crucial. ■

Learn
more
about care
workers



More on
Cedefop's
skills
forecast





In a world where economies, demographics and technology are evolving at a tremendous pace, the role of key competences in preparing vocational education and training (VET) learners for the future becomes ever more significant. Acknowledging VET's mission to nurture the key skills required in working life, Romania has put this topic high on the agenda of the country's EU Presidency in the first semester of 2019.

Initial VET needs to support smart and sustainable growth by expanding interdisciplinary learning, offering innovative provision that promotes learner creativity. It should be responsive to the new priorities presented by an evolving economic landscape in the context of the fourth industrial revolution. Crucial to this approach is the capacity to innovate, to take initiative and accept risk, as well as creative thinking and entrepreneurial skills.

Initial **VET's** 'business plan' in



Aiming to boost learners' creativity and entrepreneurial skills, Romania has organised a yearly 'business plan' competition since 2008. To take part, students have to conceive a new service or product offering, and then create a business plan aimed at convincing potential investors to finance their business.

They have the opportunity to present their ideas to a live audience of representatives from business and education. Participants receive coaching and valuable feedback from top entrepreneurs and mentors, are directly exposed to a competitive environment and, most important, get to experience what an entrepreneurial approach feels like.

Entering the business plan competition and possibly winning a prize for their business idea, alongside having full support to guide them through the process, is an extremely enriching experience for all participants.

The competition, which is coordinated by the National Centre for the Development of Vocational Education and Training (CNDIPT), has been growing consistently in terms of quantity and quality. From a limited beginning in 2008, it has now reached an impressive number of 301 teams involving 900 students and is highly valued at national level. ■



by REFERNET ROMANIA

Road to labour market for migrants and refugees in Sweden

“ *Certain sectors are doing a better job of taking on the competences from abroad* ”

Almost 30 000 people from around the world, migrants and refugees, have been applying annually in the past few years to the Swedish Council for Higher Education to have their foreign education and qualifications assessed.

This is a challenge that Shawn Mendes, Head of Unit for the assessment of foreign post-secondary and vocational education, and his team are called upon to deal with. Mr Mendes, himself an immigrant from Canada, has at his disposal colleagues from different backgrounds, including Alaa Alhusni, who moved to Sweden from Syria in 2013 and now works at the Council as credential evaluator focusing on the Middle East and North Africa countries.

Apart from the high volume of applications, Mr Mendes' team have other challenges: 'We have to verify that the documents are real, that they aren't falsified or from unserious, non-accredited education providers. We also have to try to compare properly the education, training and qualifications from the home country with the equivalent in Sweden. Finally, we link our assessment of education and qualifications to opportunities for validation of the applicant's real competences as well as opportunities for complementary education to give them a Swedish qualification.'

To deal with these issues, they have 'probably doubled' their staffing levels in the past three years.

A HELPING HAND

One of the newer recruits is Mr Alhusni who studied English/Arabic translation at the University of Damascus: 'Because of the war, I left Syria and came to Sweden. When I got permanent Swedish

residency, I started Swedish language courses and I found, through the labour office in Stockholm, a programme at Stockholm University for people who have degrees from abroad and want to go quickly to the job market. It gives a lot of intensive information about what the job market looks like in Sweden, how employers think, what they need. They sent us for trainee interviews in different sectors. I had two interviews before getting one with the Swedish Council for Higher Education. I felt that evaluation of foreign qualifications was connected to my education. I started as a trainee and after two months I signed a contract.'

Once Mr Mendes' team have established a person's qualifications and what they can do, the real challenge is to match them to the labour market. 'We're just one actor in the journey to the labour market,' he says. 'Other actors have a role to play in providing Swedish language instructions for immigrants, validation opportunities which might be through the public employment service or municipal adult education or complementary training. For example, when we get teachers from Syria with two-year post-secondary qualifications, they have a complementary programme to give them a shorter version of the higher education training for teachers in Sweden.'

Mr Mendes sees the most-in-demand professions needing such qualifications as 'teachers, nurses, elderly care workers, a huge number of healthcare occupations and IT.'

He believes vocational education and training (VET) responds well to the need to integrate migrants into the labour market: 'We have a robust delivery system for initial VET within the context of municipal



Swedish Council for Higher Education's Alaa Alhusni (left) and Shawn Mendes at Cedefop

adult education, which we've scaled up and for which we've provided a lot of funds, over EUR 1 billion in recent years. We've also scaled up the new form of higher VET. Both these responses are positive and have high proportion of immigrants in training programmes.'

THE LANGUAGE BARRIER

But is Sweden fertile ground where migrants can build a career? 'I think it could be more fertile,' admits Mr Mendes. 'Certain sectors are doing a better job of taking on competences from abroad. IT has done a better job at adjusting to the globalised market but we face more of a challenge in public sector occupations, partly because of the Swedish language requirement which is absent from some of the other sectors.'

The language issue proves a hindrance to many migrants and refugees, including Mr Alhusni: 'There are a lot of job opportunities in Sweden, but language is the main factor and then I noticed that for most jobs, even to work as a bartender, you need a degree to be allowed to work. To do these programmes, you have to speak the language, so we go back to language as the main requirement. Language courses are free for immigrants and I saw a lot of active immigrants who are fluent in Swedish. I'm a bit lazy and I'm suffering (laughing). It took me a long time to learn, but using the language daily is easier than I expected.'

We ask if immigrants understand the importance of learning the language: 'This is interesting,' he says. 'There is an emotional aspect here. Most immigrants suffer a culture shock. They had many difficulties

reaching Europe and then they are required to do something a bit difficult for them, especially the elderly. It requires psychological effort. I have friends who have master degrees in a field in Syria and when they came here they were not motivated to study. But there are many successful examples.'

Once the language barrier is overcome, are employers willing to take on people from such backgrounds? 'Yes, some employers are impressed by the short time in which these immigrants learn the language and become fluent. There is also some racism, the rise of the far-right parties. Politics affects everything.'

Mr Alhusni, by his own admission, was one of the lucky ones who escaped the war: 'I can easily talk about that. Usually, when you ask immigrants from Syria, they can't talk about it. It's a bit heavy for them, the whole trip, the different cultures, the suffering through the trip. But I was lucky. I was working for the US embassy in Damascus. I got the opportunity to travel to America using my visa, I stayed there for a month, then I came to Sweden. I left my family back in Syria. That was difficult. But in 2014, when the situation worsened, they moved to Jordan where they applied to the United Nations refugee programmes, they got accepted and went to Australia.'

He has applied for a visa to visit his family in Australia, but plans to stay in Sweden long term: 'I really like my job, I like that it's connected to what I've studied, that I can use the Arabic language, that I'm in touch with the Middle East. In the long run, I'm planning to study something in Swedish, political science or something that has to do with international organisations.' ■

A Nordic network of inspiration for qualifications

“ *The labour market structure differs and so do the education systems, sometimes requiring different solutions to common challenges* ”

The Nordic European qualifications framework (EQF) network is an informal network of experts working on the implementation of the EQF in Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway and Sweden. The experts are mainly officials in the ministries of education and the national contact points for EQF.

Their intention is to inform and inspire each other in the development of national qualifications frameworks (NQFs). Recent developments are always the first point on the agenda, followed by presentations of best practices. Apart from these two, there are few fixed rules. The network does not have a common budget or mandate beyond mutual learning.

The ideal result from these meetings is not agreement, but common understanding; this should empower the experts to make well-founded assessments and suggestions for politicians to develop shared solutions where appropriate, and alternatives where the national setting is different. The challenges are the same: ageing population, automation and digitalisation, immigration, skills gap. But the labour market structure differs and so do the education systems, sometimes requiring different solutions to common challenges.

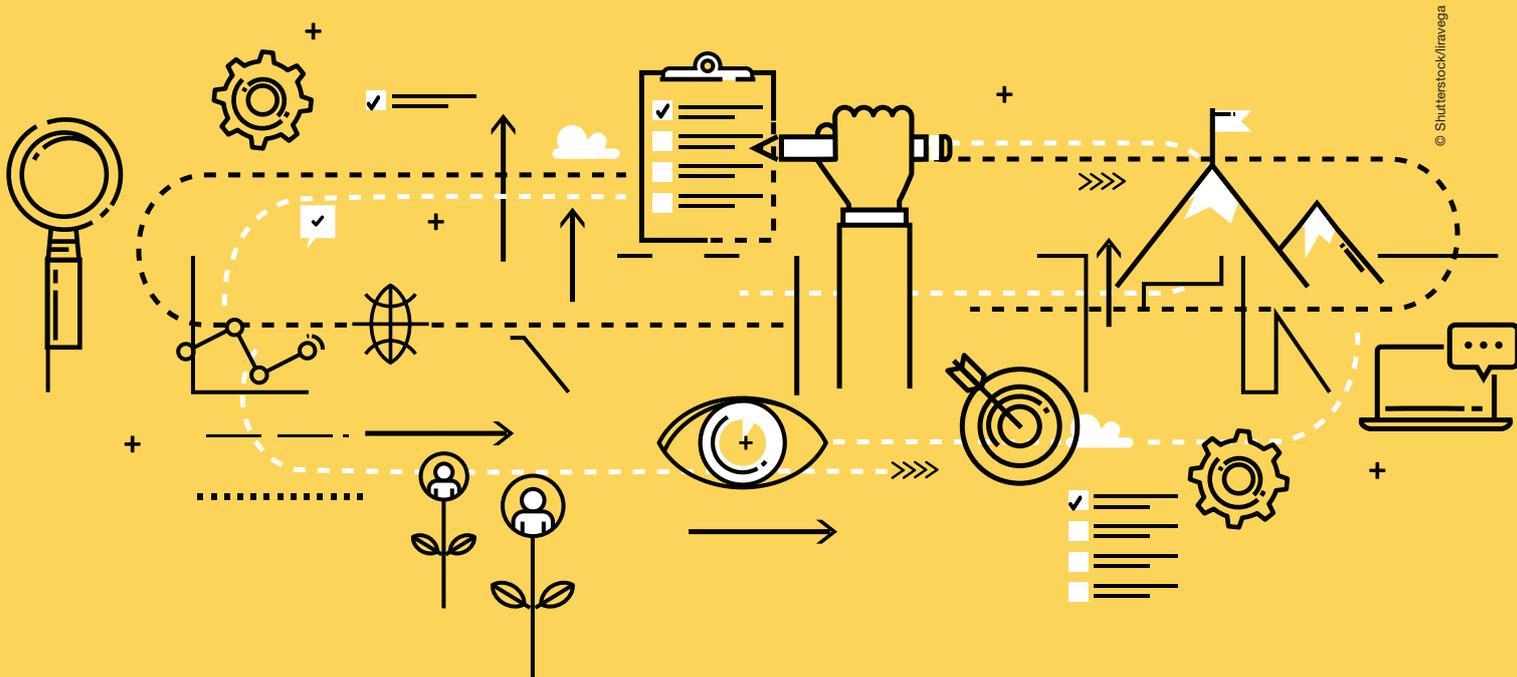
WHERE THEY STAND

All the Nordic countries have completed NQFs and the referencing process to the EQF. A main challenge

identified in 2014 was to include non-formal qualifications in the NQFs. This is still a hot topic and a frequently discussed theme in the network.

Sweden has been a front-runner and the other Nordic countries have followed their process carefully. As of January 2016, awarding bodies outside the formal education system are able to have their qualifications assessed and placed at a level within the Swedish qualifications framework (SeQF) by submitting an application to the Swedish National Agency for Higher Vocational Education. So far, six qualifications are included in the SeQF, including key account manager and Montessori educator. Denmark and Finland have just started work to include non-formal qualifications into their NQFs. Iceland and Norway are still pending.

In Denmark, the inclusion of non-formal qualifications is definitely top of the agenda, says Allan Bruun Pedersen, senior adviser in the Danish Agency for Science and Higher Education: ‘The Parliament passed new legislation on accreditation in 2017 mandating the Danish Accreditation Agency in cooperation with the relevant ministries for all levels and sectors of the Danish education system to develop principles and procedures for the inclusion of non-formal qualifications in the Danish NQF for lifelong learning. We are currently discussing the principles for inclusion, such as the description of non-formal qualifications in learning outcomes,



QUALIFICATIONS

a demand for clear certification of non-formal qualifications, relevance to the labour market or the cultural or sports sectors, minimum requirements for student population within the non-formal qualifications and more. We expect to be able to process the first applications in spring 2019. We aim to construct a more cohesive education system for all formal and non-formal qualifications and to put a spotlight on possible pathways between the education sectors and the labour market.'

No formal rights are supposed to be attached to the inclusion of non-formal qualifications but it is a means of marketing these qualifications. The purpose is also to create a better foundation for formal higher education institutions to admit and give credit transfer and open up pathways into the formal education system. Improving the employability of holders of non-formal qualifications by describing learning outcomes to employers is also seen as important.

Carita Blomqvist, from the Finnish National Agency of Education, reports on a similar process: 'The Ministry of Education and Culture in Finland appointed a working group with the mandate to prepare and coordinate the extension of the national qualifications framework to other competences and report back by the end of 2018. The working group's task was to specify the criteria determined in the current Act on the National Framework for

Qualifications and Other Competence Modules and its justifications for the competence modules to be placed in the framework. It was also responsible for charting the extensive competence modules of different administrative sectors.'

A VALUABLE NETWORK

Allan and Carita have participated in the Nordic EQF network for many years. Allan points out that the network is highly valuable: 'Nordic cooperation on qualifications frameworks has, over the years, proved to be very useful. We have been able to share experiences and good practices on the core topics evolving around qualifications frameworks such as the construction and architecture of the national frameworks, the different legal settings of the frameworks in the Nordic countries, the drafting of the referencing reports and the use of qualifications frameworks in recognition of qualifications and of prior learning. From each meeting we have taken home new ideas, inspiration and knowledge of the various approaches and use of qualifications frameworks.'

Carita adds that they have also participated in each other's referencing processes as international experts or, more informally, just as critical friends. ■

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IN FOCUS

THE CHANGING NATURE AND ROLE OF VOCATIONAL EDUCATION AND TRAINING IN EUROPE

Research papers 3, 4 and 5 in a series produced as part of the Cedefop project *The changing nature and role of vocational education and training (VET)*. Based on analysis of developments during the past two decades (1995-2015), the third report provides important insights into the responsiveness of national VET systems, notably in relation to changes in demography, technology and the economy. The aim of the fourth paper is to identify and analyse patterns and trends in enrolment in upper secondary initial vocational education and training (IVET) in Europe from 1995 to 2015. Based on comparative analysis of labour force survey data from 2014, the fifth report examines the vocational effect on labour market and education outcomes, asking whether any advantages conferred by vocational qualifications in early career would be offset by disadvantages later in life. The results indicate that VET graduates are potentially sacrificing the longer-term gains associated with further education in favour of short-term benefits.



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- Briefing note – Cedefop's European skills index: new tool for informed policy-making
- Flash thematic country review on apprenticeships: Sweden
- Making VET fit for the future
- Apprenticeship schemes in European countries: a cross-nation overview
- Handbook of ICT practices for guidance and career development

coming up



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IN FOCUS

SECOND POLICY LEARNING FORUM ON UPSKILLING PATHWAYS: A VISION FOR THE FUTURE



14-15 FEBRUARY

BRUSSELS, BELGIUM

The event is organised by Cedefop, together with the European Economic and Social Committee (EESC). Cedefop's policy learning forums (PLFs) on upskilling pathways are a series of policy learning events aimed at providing a platform for countries to come together to learn from one another and explore common challenges in upskilling adults with low levels of skills. Building on the outcomes and challenges identified in the 2018 forum, the second PLF aims to bring together stakeholders and effectively support them in implementing upskilling pathways for adults.

OTHER EVENTS

FEBRUARY	23	BRUSSELS, BELGIUM	Cedefop working lunch on the future of vocational education and training, hosted by MEP Anne Sander
MAY	7-8	BERLIN, GERMANY	3rd Validation of prior learning for education and the labour market biennale on the subject 'making policy work'
MAY	28-29	BRUSSELS, BELGIUM	Cedefop policy learning forum on preventing early school leaving through lifelong learning community centres multidisciplinary teams



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