



**THE MALTESE DECLARATION**  
of the European Association of Institutes  
for Vocational Training (EVBB) and the European  
Vocational Training Association (EVTA)





**The Maltese Declaration of the European Association of Institutes for Vocational Training (EVBB) and the European Vocational Training Association (EVTA) – Members of VET4EU2 and of VET related Working Groups of Directorate General Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion (DG EMPL) and Directorate General Education and Culture (DG EAC)**

EVBB and EVTA have closely followed the achievements related to the Copenhagen Process, particularly the global vision for VET 2020 as indicated in the Bruges Communiqué and more precisely the Riga Conclusions in which EVBB and EVTA were directly involved by presenting their positions. We welcome the initiative of DG EMPL to make VET an attractive learning option and raise its image through the European Vocational Skills Week which took place for the first time in 2016.

Many efforts have been deployed both on the European and the member states' level to foster the excellence and quality of VET, to increase its relevance for the labour market, especially through an enhanced cooperation between schools, training centres and companies and stronger ties between the social partners.

The instruments and activities developed and the policy documents published on the EU level are all such achievements which we welcome. Excellent examples are the ESCO tool presenting a common language in VET, EQF, ECVET, the CEDEFOP research papers, the ETF activities and many more.

Mobility of VET learners and teachers has been improved and more funding made available. ErasmusPro and the European Alliance for Apprenticeships are again excellent examples for promoting international mobility and thus facilitating employment.

However, notwithstanding the achievements made so far, the conditions and situations of both learning providers and VET learners and apprentices in the EU member countries still show big discrepancies and need to be addressed.

Striving for a more inclusive society and fostering social cohesion are elementary concerns for civil society actors working in the fields of initial and continuous VET, higher education and lifelong learning – throughout Europe. Education is guaranteed by Law. And education is self-evident, the essential key for a successful integration in both society and the labour market.

With their members from all over Europe and even beyond, EVBB and EVTA have identified the most visible challenges and make the following recommendations:

**Challenge 1:  
Digital Revolution and the impact on VET Staff skills**

The digital revolution has brought about substantial changes for society, the industry and particularly the community of VET providers which must teach and train their learners by state-of-the-art technologies and methods to make VET graduates comply with labour market requirements. Adjusting to fast changing IT environments, technological progress and automation systems is therefore a major concern for companies, teaching staff and learners. Of course, learning providers also need to adjust their curricula and, consequently, those of the teachers and training staff in a most flexible way.

**Recommendation:** To allow workers and employees to be up-to-date with their working context, both Governments and companies should work on legally binding regulations which would allow staff to enrol in advanced training courses according to their needs and those of the companies. A company based Continuing Training Law which would foresee funding from both public employment agencies and the companies would be the right step into this direction.



## **Challenge 2: Digitalisation and the impact on VET Learners**

VET learners throughout Europe face problems in keeping pace with the digital skills' requirements of today and tomorrow. Digitalisation requires new skills as well as adjusted labour market and sustainable social policies. Professions will vanish and others will come.

**Recommendation:** The digital divide is a fact. Governments and their agencies must assure that the most vulnerable groups of the work force are not left behind and provide for tailor-made and sufficient EU and member states' funding for learning providers. The offers of employment services must allow for digital counselling and other relevant methods which should be included in their standard measures. This is not the case in all EU countries. The digitalisation of the employment services' portfolio should include the offers for apprentices, offers for reorientation and further education, especially focused on basic digital skills, and upskilling in more advanced 4.0 needs (control, data analysis, managing and marketing networks etc).

Measures to reduce the digital divide and to provide all citizens, regardless of their condition, access to digital content, must be mainstreamed in all policies, considering local differences, while using consistent terminology.

## **Challenge 3: VET providers in the context of societal constraints**

Education is a key component of the EU 2020 strategy. Notwithstanding the fact that many EU countries have already succeeded i.e. in reducing their share of early leavers of education and training to less than 10% (see Eurostat on Europe 2020 indicators – education), Europe faces huge problems of socio-professional inclusion of a variety of people not in education, employment and training (the so-called NEETs). Those specifically concerned in addition to refugees and migrants are long-term unemployed people, particularly those of 50+ years and people with special needs or severe health problems. Data from countries such as France, Portugal, Austria has shown that people who are unemployed for more than 3 years find it more difficult to find their way back into the labour market. Those above 57 even more so. Others have reported that this group of unemployed people represents the biggest portion of registered unemployed. Education is guaranteed by law all over Europe. And education for all is self-evident and is a key to social participation.

**Recommendation:** For long-term unemployed people the primary approach is to promote job creation and employment contracts through direct payments to employers. In addition, it is important to develop a system which enables such job seekers to undergo pre- and retraining courses and to adjust themselves to the requirements of potential employers. The Youth Guarantee is a good example in this context. Why not create a job guarantee for 50+ adults all over Europe?

A socio-professional mechanism to work on the personal and social problems of long-term unemployed as well as a career mechanism, working hand, in hand, would be welcome. This might also have a positive impact on job vacancies for which human resources are recruited worldwide.

As far as refugees are concerned, retraining and other measures of vocational education and training should be further encouraged and formally and non-formally acquired skills evaluated according to a homogeneous assessment system. This could be an additional approach in recruiting experts needed in quite a few EU countries.

Whatever the learning and inclusion activities are, learning providers find it more and more difficult to cope with the challenges described above. Sufficient funding for infrastructural upgrading of learning providers' workshops and classrooms as well as more expert staff is a prerequisite for assuring the



quality needed therefore.

It is critical to ensure the quality of VET programs with graduate tracking, in all member states: it is important not only that all young and adults find a job at the end of their studies but it is also critical that they find a job related with their studies, where they can progress in their personal development and find their own social and professional happiness. Graduate tracking, as a simple tool, will increase the excellence in VET and therefore the usefulness of VET for employers and the business market.

#### **Challenge 4: VET providers and youth unemployment**

In July 2017, 3,792 million young persons (under 25) were unemployed in the EU28, the lowest rate was observed in Germany (6.5 %), while the highest was recorded in Greece (44.4%) (Source: Eurostat). A tremendous frustration for those concerned and a negative impact on the economy and Government spending. Some of the reasons: a mismatch between the demands of the employers and the skills that young people have, lack of professional experience, cost of education, just to mention a few. In addition, leaving education or training without a certificate and low skills complement the picture. While the European employment strategy, particularly the Youth Guarantee and the Youth Employment Initiative, has contributed to reducing the overall youth unemployment rate in the EU, the situation in countries such as Spain, Italy, Portugal and France remains high.

**Recommendation:** With the success of the apprenticeship (dual) system in Germany, Austria and others, and its implementation in Southern and Eastern European countries, a harmonised and cohesive approach in work-based learning activities which could trigger new stimuli in other countries would be welcome. The stringent employment protection and partially dysfunctional education system in quite a few EU countries should be assessed and new measures taken that promise more effective. Learning providers play a crucial role in this context and should strive for a more holistic approach combining formal and informal prior learning with work experience and vocational skills. SMEs should be encouraged to take apprentices through financial incentives and to join the Youth Guarantee initiative.

In addition, mobility projects under the Erasmus + scheme and others should be promoted, particularly in countries with a more rigid training system which includes the Chambers, the training providers and the companies.

#### **Challenge 5: Mobility of VET learners and graduates to gain professional recognition throughout Europe**

Young and adult learners are exposed to changing education, training and working contexts. Even though graduates show excellent results, domestic markets cannot absorb them, even with a PhD in their pocket. Going abroad – even for a few months - is therefore an opportunity to explore new and innovative working environments which enrich the learners' basic and transversal skills. Even though the EU Commission has developed a series of funding opportunities through Erasmus + and others, those coming from a VET background are not always ready to spend some time abroad as a structured or non-formal learning experience. They find it difficult to leave their families and friends and prefer to stay in their regional setting. In addition, those who learn a profession within the apprenticeship system have several bureaucratic obstacles to go through. Companies and Chambers very often stick to their own regulations and find it hard to let an apprentice spend a few months or even a year abroad. Those companies, however, which have affiliates abroad might be happy to see their apprentices spend some time in that company since they might want to employ her/him once the apprenticeship is over.

**Recommendation:** The Commission – together with member country stakeholders – should deploy more efforts to promote the added values of a learning experience abroad, particularly in countries



where the “dual system” as a “work-based learning” experience is well established. Digital knowledge transfer should be adapted to the learners’ skills. NEETs should be a special target group once their basic and transversal skills have been assessed. Additional funds and expert counselling should be made available to address the motivation issue of both young people and adults – and why not 50+ people – to make them go for a learning experience abroad. A closer cooperation between the Erasmus + and the ESF agencies could help to develop new initiatives. Success stories go back until the early years of this millennium when the Franco-German Youth Office received funds from the ESF to implement 3 months of training in both Germany and France.

On the national level, round tables between the stakeholders – public employment agencies, Chambers of Industry and Commerce and those responsible for the Crafts, as well as the companies and the learning providers are important to develop a COMMON strategy and assess the failures and best practice examples so that new and coherent initiatives can be implemented.

Signed this 6th October in Malta by the Presidents of EVBB and EVTA in the presence of her Excellency Dr. Helena Dalli B(HONS), MPHIL, PHD, MP - MINISTER FOR EUROPEAN AFFAIRS AND EQUALITY.



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