

Herning Declaration on attractive and inclusive Vocational Education and Training for increased competitiveness and quality jobs 2026-2030

Supported on September 12 2025



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Declaration of the Ministers in charge of vocational education and training (VET) of the Member States of the EU, the EU Candidate Countries and the EEA countries, the European social partners and the European Commission, meeting on 12 September 2025 in Herning, Denmark.

We, the **Ministers in charge of vocational education and training (VET)**,

- ✓ **reaffirm our commitment to continue to implement** the 2020 *Council Recommendation on vocational education and training for sustainable competitiveness, social fairness and resilience*, as well as the *Osnabrück Declaration on vocational education and training as an enabler of recovery and just transitions to digital, green and sustainable economies*, including the implementation of *National Implementation Plans*, and in line with the first principle of the *European Pillar of Social Rights*;
- ✓ **take stock of policy developments** that have emerged since 2020, such as the 2023 *Council Recommendation on the key enabling factors for successful digital education and training*, the 2023 *Council Recommendation on improving the provision of digital skills and competences in education and training*, the 2024 *Council Recommendation on 'Europe on the Move' – learning mobility opportunities for everyone*, the 2021 *Council Resolution on a strategic framework for European cooperation in education and training towards the European Education Area and beyond (2021-2030)*, the 2024 *Action Plan on labour and skills shortages in the EU*, as well as the legacy of the *European Year of Skills*.
- ✓ take into consideration the objectives of the **Union of Skills** and its initiatives;
- ✓ consider that a **renewed impetus is needed** to further align policy actions and reforms in VET to developments in society and the labour market, including by responding to skills shortages, and to harness the opportunities in times of demographic change and technological developments such as artificial intelligence, without pre-empting the formal reporting by the Commission to the Council on the implementation of the VET Recommendation or any future action in follow-up to such reporting;
- ✓ **stress that social dialogue and a strong partnership with social partners is crucial and welcome social partners' and all other relevant stakeholders' intention to support the implementation of the objectives and actions set out in this Declaration**, and recall that companies as learning venues are crucial to modern, inclusive and excellent VET;
- ✓ **support the cross-border European and international dimension of VET**, focusing on mobility, cooperation projects, use of common EU tools for transparency, comparability and recognition of qualifications;
- ✓ specifically **welcome the new Candidate Countries** joining the Copenhagen process by endorsing this Declaration and invite them to **consider aligning their actions with the reform principles defined in the EU acquis**;

- ✓ **value the support shown by European-level VET providers' associations and learners' organisations** by supporting the implementation of this Declaration.

Objectives

Excellent, attractive and inclusive VET is an important driver of resilient and inclusive societies and increased competitiveness at national and EU level. To address the pressing challenges within vocational education and training and to realise its full potential, it is crucial to continue the implementation of the VET Recommendation and the Osnabrück Declaration. The implementation requires continued and strengthened efforts at both the European and national levels. While the objectives of the Osnabrück Declaration remain valid beyond 2025, with this Declaration we are renewing our coordinated efforts to encompass both persistent and emerging challenges and embrace opportunities. All objectives will be addressed in line with EU-level strategies with due respect to the subsidiarity principles and in accordance with national VET circumstances.

Actions for 2026-2030

National level

1. **Enhance the attractiveness of VET and parity of esteem with** general and academic education by further improving the quality of vocational programmes at all levels, including work-based learning and apprenticeships in line with the European Framework for Quality and Effective Apprenticeships and engaging in activities such as promoting to a wide public the benefits of VET for preparing people for life and for the labour market, and VET's important role for positive labour market outcomes and quality jobs. This should be embedded in measures to combat early leaving from VET, where relevant.
2. **Encourage initiatives to attract more learners – and in the case of apprenticeships and work-based learning, more companies – to vocational programmes** in fields critical for the green and digital transition and competitiveness of the EU such as STEM and other shortage professions, including through the European Alliance for Apprenticeships and through strengthening access to quality, inclusive and effective **career guidance**.
3. **Ensure that VET aligns with the evolving needs of the labour market, through strengthening the involvement and active role of social partners and supporting the partnerships with** other relevant labour market actors, and through effective use of skills intelligence data and graduate tracking systems.
4. Emphasising the role of initial general education in developing basic and transversal skills, ensure **an appropriate level of these skills in initial VET**, including citizenship, entrepreneurship and sustainability education, for lifelong adaptability to changing labour market needs and personal development.
5. **Foster inclusiveness for all, and addressing gender inequalities and stereotypes in VET**, promoting equal access to professions for all individuals
6. **Increase participation of all adults, especially the low-skilled, in up- and reskilling measures** with a view to contribute to achieving the 2030 target of 60%, including through

CVET, apprenticeships, and higher VET offers, as well as coordinated support measures to remove barriers to participation, helping to turn into reality the right of individuals to quality and inclusive education, training and lifelong learning as stated in the first principle of the European Pillar of Social Rights.

7. **Address shortages of teachers and trainers** in VET by making the profession more attractive by ensuring their professional autonomy, and by continuing to invest in their initial pedagogical qualifications and professional development and in supportive working conditions and environments, including school leadership.
8. **Strive to ensure physical and mental wellbeing** of VET learners of all ages, teachers and trainers, in line with applicable safety and health regulations, including in relation to training.
9. **Increase excellence in VET, including by expanding the Centres of Vocational Excellence (CoVEs) model**, as a motor for innovation and implementation of VET reforms and facilitate their networking.
10. **Further develop higher VET (EQF levels 5-8) programmes** to meet the demand for advanced vocational skills in the labour market and to recognise such qualifications at the same level as academic ones, using the national qualifications frameworks as reference point.
11. **Promote and facilitate inclusive mobility of learners, teachers and trainers** with a view to achieving the 2030 VET mobility target of 12% and concrete commitments to implementing the Council Recommendation *Europe on the Move* and the Annex on mobility of apprentices.
12. **Maximise the potential, reliability, and responsible use of artificial intelligence** (in line with the Artificial Intelligence Act) and of other technological advancements — such as large language models, virtual and extended reality — by equipping VET learners, teachers and trainers with the skills needed to understand the benefits and risks and effectively use AI-driven tools and immersive technologies.
13. **Ensure sufficient and sustainable investments in IVET and CVET** based on reliable EU and national level monitoring and evaluation and with support and better coordination of relevant EU financial mechanisms, and national, regional or sectoral funds for training employees.

European level

14. Continue to work with and further support **countries and social partners to implement this Declaration and promote initiatives on cooperation and knowledge-sharing and -creation between learners, teachers, VET institutions and providers** on learning methods, updating of curricula, guidelines, work-based learning, graduate tracking, higher VET and quality assurance and recognition of education and training offers by using European programmes like Erasmus+.
15. **Take stock of the reforms undertaken by countries** and come up with an ambitious new **VET strategy** and related initiatives that have been defined in the **Union of Skills**.

16. **Cooperate with European and international organisations** and networks. in particular the OECD, ILO, UNESCO, Council of Europe, Bologna Follow-up Group, World Bank, EuroSkills and WorldSkills, and other regional VET and higher VET networks in the world with a focus on promoting best practices and exchange of knowledge and experience.
17. **Call upon Cedefop and the ETF to continue supporting the Commission and countries** by monitoring and analysing the implementation of agreed actions and reporting regularly to the Advisory Committee on Vocational Training and the Directors-General for Vocational Education and Training.

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Agreed by the Ministers responsible for Vocational Education and Training of countries participating in the Copenhagen process:

- of the EU Member States (Austria, Belgium, Bulgaria, Croatia, Cyprus, Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Ireland, Italy, Latvia, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Malta, the Netherlands, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Slovenia, Slovakia, Spain, Sweden);
- of the EU Candidate Countries (Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Moldova, Montenegro, North Macedonia, Serbia, Türkiye and Ukraine);
- of the EEA countries (Iceland, Liechtenstein, Norway).

Agreed by the European Social Partners (ETUC, BusinessEurope, SMEUnited, SGI EUROPE).

Agreed by the European Commission, and

Supported by the European level VET providers' associations (EVTA, EFVET, EURASHE, EUCEN, EUpVET, EVBB), Eurochambres and the European Apprentices Network (EAN)/Organising Bureau of European School Student Unions (OBESSU) by issuing joint Declarations in support of this Declaration