# D2.6 FINAL RECOMMENDATIONS
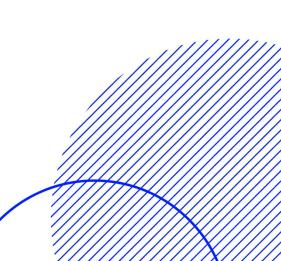# T2.4 INTERNATIONAL THEMATIC GROUPS

## BOOSTING THE REPRESENTATIVENESS OF VET PROVIDERS

Erasmus+ KA3 – Support for Policy Reform
Networks and Partnerships of Vocational Education and Training (VET) providers
Call for proposals: EACEA 37/2018

## VENHANS – VET European networking Enhancement

Project no. 609023-EPP-1-2019-1-BE-EPPKA3-VET-NETPAR

## Introduction

Vocational Education and Training systems differ across EU member states, with differences in their functioning and organization at the national, regional and local levels: the heterogeneous nature of the European VET poses a challenge for the policymakers in the definition of common agendas and objectives. In this respect, the development of intermediation, intersectional dialogue and exchanges between VET centres, VET teachers and trainers, decision makers and relevant stakeholders can play a role in the overcoming of this challenge. More specifically, issues characterizing the European VET framework have to do with, first of all, the role VET providers exercise beyond the EU bubble in contributing to policy definition and implementation: at the national, regional and local levels their representativeness is limited and must be reinforced and sustained. Joint action and dialogue and networking campaigns with VET stakeholders can contribute to the EU policy deployment both vertically and horizontally. In the second instance, the immediate and real-time access people can have to information, data and institutions gradually depleted the role of VET providers' networks as intermediate organisms. A third challenge refers to the fact that only few outcomes and deliverables produced by EU projects in VET and education perform high quality and transferability in the medium-long term: sustainability is the key allowing for their utilization after the project's life span. Last but not least, language issues exist given by national diversity across EU countries: solutions in terms if accessibility to multilingual resources and services can help building partnerships among European VET providers, embracing neighbouring countries as well.

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## **About VENHANS**

Launched in 2019 and funded by the European Commission's Erasmus+KA3 Support for Policy Reform, VENHANS - VET European Networking Enhancement – strives to overcome these challenges supporting cooperation of VET stakeholders and promoting policy dialogue from the European to the local level. Networking, capacity building and dissemination are the three action plans foreseen by the project and through which activities are implemented. Respectively, they consist of fostering a "networking attitude" among VET actors of all Europe, collecting all the processes capable of empowering VET professionals' knowledge and skills and jointly cooperating to strengthen the relationship among the umbrella networks.

VENHANS was born from the cooperation of six networks representing VET providers in Europe: EVTA (leading partner), EfVET, EUproVET, EVBB, EUCEN, EURASHE, Endurance, ENAIP NET, VDAB and AFPA. On the basis of these challenges identified above, the project specifically aims to help European VET providers' networks to:

- Increase their **representativeness** at national and regional level, expanding memberships and stimulating networking, especially between VET providers and companies, devoting particular attention to underrepresented territories in the VET policies definition.
- Enhance the **cooperation** between umbrella networks, within the VET4EU2 platform, in order to allow maximum synergies and joint efforts to sustain and support decision makers in the VET policies development in all EU member states.
- **Promote** the improvement of VET provision's quality, spreading out the concept of excellence in VET, exploiting best VET learning tools and practices, promoting the concept of benchmarking as a reference to develop strategies, adopting bottom-up approaches to valorise local contributions.

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## VENHANS and the von der Leyen Commission's priorities

Under the Action Plan "networking", the T2-4 Activity "International Thematic Expert Groups" foreseen by VENHANS aims to reinforce and support the development and implementation of VET policies thanks to the qualified presence of experts and relevant stakeholders - representing VET of all EU countries- to meetings, workgroups, conferences and development projects. The activities carried out in the framework of the VENHANS final events foresee the development of a set of policy recommendations and in-depth policy position. A set of five policy recommendations will be developed for four of the six political priorities the European Commission set in 2019. The political agenda outlined by Ursula von der Leyen at the time of her candidacy as President of the European Commission in 2019, included six key political priorities: *A stronger Europe in the world, A European Green Deal, A Europe fit for the digital age, An economy that works for people, A new push for European democracy* and *Promoting the European way of life*. Together, they defined the framework of action of the Commission for the following 5 years.

In the framework of the VENHANS project, four are the key priorities chosen for the development of a set of policy recommendations:

### 1. A European Green Deal

The European Union is deeply committed to tackling global warming: it strives to reach pre-industrial levels in terms of temperature (below 2°C), on the basis of the Paris Agreement of 2015. This first political priority builds on the programme the Commission outlined in the political guidelines with the aim to make Europe the first climate-neutral continent by 2050, as also endorsed by the European Council in December 2019. More specifically, the European Green Deal strives for the preservation of the natural environment and the biodiversity of the European continent, the promotion of sustainability of food through a "farm-to-fork" strategy and implementing a brand-new circular economy action plan. Beyond these aspects, other transversal areas are embraced by this priority, such as the European industry sector and the related objective to boost its competitiveness while ensuring at the same time a just transition at all levels.[1]

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[1] https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/BRIE/2020/646148/EPRS_BRI(2020)646148_EN.pdf

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## 2. An economy that works for people

In connection with the first political priority, *An economy that works for people* strives to a fair transition for all, converging towards a green social market economy and enhancing its distinctive features enshrined in Article 3(3) of the Treaty on the European Union (TEU). Sub-objectives refer to the implementation of the European Pillar of Social Rights with a particular focus on minimum wage and binding pay transparency, fair working conditions, especially for platform workers, and unemployment benefits. Moreover, SMEs should enhance their competitiveness in the industry sector and the deepening of the economic and monetary union is crucial for supporting Member States' structural reforms in view of inclusive growth and territorial cohesion.

## 3. A Europe fit for the digital age

According to the political guidelines provided by von der Leyen, the European Union should identify and define global standards, boost investments in specific technologies, pursue data-based innovation, while safeguarding the use of data with the preservation of privacy, security, safety and ethical standards. In addition to this, reference is also made to the European Education Area, which is set to be a reality by 2025 with the aim to uptake digital skills in the education systems.

## 4. A new push for European democracy

Under the following priority, attention is devoted to interinstitutional cooperation and a more transparent and inclusive decision-making process, together with role and needs of the European citizens. To this respect, in 2019 the then candidate for the Commission Presidency addressed three main challenges: giving a stronger role to European citizens, involving them in the decision-making process through the Conference on the Future of Europe (CoFoE); strengthening the interinstitutional relationships, in particular between the European Parliament and the Commission, and enhancing the accountability of the EU decision-making.

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**Policy recommendations**

## International thematic experts group
## "The environment and the fight against climate change"

The thematic group set as a main focus **"devising a VET strategy for green skills"**, taking into consideration a context encompassing all types of education and training – formal, informal, and non-formal – in a lifelong learning and inclusive perspective. The **target groups** involved in the definition of a VET strategy for green skills are:

- VET organisations (VET trainers; VET providers who will implement the strategy; young VET learners)
- Business organisations and individual companies (in particular big polluters)
- Policy makers from the environmental, educational, economic, employment, and justice domains across local, national, and regional levels are responsible for defining the policy and legal frameworks for green skills
- Teaching staff (selecting specific topics to prioritizes in green education)
- Practitioners
- Trade Unions
- Grassroot organizations (environmental, human rights).

Moreover, five were the key **challenges identified** by the thematic group:

- If a new curriculum is to be designed, it should contain mechanisms that would allow us to update the content quickly as new upcoming challenges might arise. We should update the existing curricula.
- How to identify the professional profiles for the future and introduce them to the labour market more quickly. The difficultly to predict the professional profiles of the future and type of the green skills we need to develop for a green future.
- Define the skills set and designing flexible curriculum. Educators experiencing barriers in updating the teaching content. More focused policy makers at local and regional level as they tend to shift the focus very quickly.
- The biggest barrier has a legal dimension. A legal framework should be created so to enable change, introducing green skills in the curriculum. Legal norms regulating environmental issues.
- Policy makers should define long-term strategic goals and develop a clear vision as we are running after technology, but the technology development should be in line with green mindsets.

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### Policy recommendations:

a) Policy makers should set long-term strategies and develop clear vision about the green transition, fight against climate change and future sustainable development.   We should not run after technological developments but rather ensure that these developments are in line with the vision for building up a green sustainable future. Policy makers should meaningfully engage and maintain regular dialogues with VET actors and relevant stakeholders when developing these strategies to make sure that they respond to identified needs and tackle sectoral specific challenges.

b) Legal frameworks are crucial to activate the need for new VET green skills. Hence, it is important to adopt coherent legal frameworks on green transition that will focus on green upskilling and reskilling of the labour force.   Cooperation across different policy making levels (local, national and regional) and public policy domains (environmental, educational, economic, social, employment, and justice) should be promoted and encouraged. VET actors (i.e.  VET providers, teaching staff, VET trainers, VET learners, individual companies, and practitioners) and relevant stakeholders (i.e. businesses, trade unions, grassroots organisations) should be included on inclusive and egalitarian basis in the definition of a VET strategy for green skills and related policy and legal frameworks.

c) An effective VET system should capture and respond to the green market needs. The skills set to be incorporated across all VET levels should be adequately defined, incorporating a long-life learning perspective. Continuous vocational educational and training should be supported via concrete green policy and legal frameworks, as well as funding schemes. The VET strategy for green skills is essential in supporting the transition of workers into the sustainable green labour market and green jobs. This strategy can also effectively support job creation and retention in the transition to a green and sustainable circular economy, that will mitigate the climate change impacts in the near future.

d) Horizontal issues should be taken into account when changing the VET system. We should consider how to swiftly react to the ongoing and future changes by integrating transversals skills in the green curriculum. The skills related to sustainability and circular economy should be a priority when changing the VET system.

e) The development of green skills strategy can be an enriching opportunity to transform the VET system across all levels. Sustainability can be a key driver for changing the VET system. This is going to improve people's well-being, better the lives of workers, bring sustainable growth for all, mitigate the climate change impacts and at the same time make Europe more competitive.

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### International Thematic Experts Group
### "Digital transition"

The thematic group set as a main focus *the acceleration of e-learning effectiveness*, embedding as well *quality* and *inclusive e-learning*. The target groups identified are the most commonly involved in VET contexts:

- students' families
- learners
- apprentices
- teachers and trainers.

### Policy Recommendations

1) Give VET providers/ VET centres room to **provide households with devices essential for e-learning.** Moreover, action must be taken at two levels: firstly, **accessibility of households must be enhanced** (connectivity etc) in the field of VET and beyond. Secondly, **VET digital environments must be adapted to become mobile-friendly**. When providers design an e-learning environment, they must make sure they are digital-friendly.

2) **Special communication programs must be implemented for families** (teacher-parents communication) **in order for them to better understand the purpose of online learning. Families must be informed, also about curricula**.
   Once infrastructure is implemented, the next step is to involve and **convince learners' families that e-learning and blended learning are as valid as the traditional system**. **We need to include families bringing them on board in the learning community.**

3) Define a set of guidelines to accredit some companies to apprenticeships and involve companies in the design of school curricula and learning paths, both **complemented by adaptive technologies for this purpose**.

4) Train teachers so that they will dispose of the **know-how to engage with students, in particular students with special needs**. For instance, investing in peer-to-peer **training for teachers** (teacher-to-teacher training), **providing learners with supporting devices designed for specific needs** (accessibility tools, e-learning tools for blind/deaf people and/or students with Specific Learning Disorders).

5) Developing and testing different classrooms according to different soft skills through cooperative **learning**. For example, group sessions aimed at the development of soft skills by doing.

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## International Thematic Experts Group

### "Participation in Democratic Life"

The thematic group set as a main focus *increasing the impact of exchange opportunities.* The target groups involved in the definition of a VET strategy for the participation in democratic life are:

- iVET students &amp; families
- Unemployed adults in training
- VET providers (all staff – educators, administration)
- Regional, national, EU policy makers + NGOs
- Social partners (business and trade unions)

Moreover, the challenges identified accordingly to the target groups regard:

- For iVET students and families, the lack of awareness of opportunities together with the economical burden and shortage of financial resources of households. With respect to students with disabilities, infrastructural challenges and the need for additional assistance play a role.
- Unemployed adults in training not only do tend to face the same challenges as iVET students and families, but they also lack flexibility, adaptability and propension to change accompanied by a sense of demotivation.
- VET providers need dedicated personnel (incoming and outgoing) which often tend to lack due to the absence of skilled people to cover specific roles, unavailable teachers' training and lack of financial resources.
- Regional, national, EU policy makers and NGOs often lack accreditation for internationalisation pathways at national levels and of awareness of the VET realities.
- Social partners face low engagement of employers.

### Policy Recommendations

1) **Improve the awareness** of all the involved target groups **on the existence of exchange opportunities**, including the personal benefits for beneficiaries – lack of motivation, self-esteem, soft skills, language barriers. How? Through **info days**, **communication campaigns**, **dissemination activities.**
2) **Improve the preparation of the target groups** involved in the offer of exchange opportunities through **training**, **inclusive institutional vision**, **dedicated personnel**, alleviating the burden of bureaucracy, and infrastructure.
3) **Foster the update of curricula** in order to allow the conditions for the realization of exchange opportunities; harmonization to also respond to the needs of the labour market.
4) **Promote** and **improve tools** to allow better matching for partners and beneficiaries.

### International Thematic Experts Group

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### "Social inclusion and diversity"

The thematic group set as a main focus ***unlocking migrants' skills through VET***. The main target group involved in the definition of a VET strategy for social inclusion and diversity includes **job seekers**, women in particular.

### Policy Recommendations

1. **Help companies and enterprises** to better integrate migrants, **implementing a welfare program** specifically tailored for them.
2. **Improve the training of mediators** in order to facilitate the integration (training for trainers).
3. **Speed up the process of certificate/diploma recognition** (also informal and non-formal) in order to facilitate migrants' entrance in the labour market.
4. Encourage the **creation of networks of organisations** (associations of migrants, trade associations, companies etc.) **for better matching the demand and the supply of workforce in the labour market**.
5. **Implement pre-departures activities** with national agreements for Countries in order **to regulate the migration flow**.

ENAIP NET

EVTA
European Vocational Training Association

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