

## FOREWORD

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**T**he EU VET policy determines whole areas of the life of the European citizen. It shapes the future perspectives, opportunities, ways and means that people take into account when considering and making decisions on career choice, training, access to employment, professional development, labour market transition, and mobility (whether educational or professional, intranational or transnational). The EU VET policy affects more than 300 million EU citizens aged 15–64.

However, it is not so well known, perhaps because it was developed in forums that are not very popular with the general public and the media, and according to procedures which, although open and transparent, hardly involve a few hundreds of players across the Union. In the national space, it is also difficult to distinguish European policy from VET measures of purely national inspiration, with which it is articulated in a balance that is sometimes not so obvious. Moreover, as a whole teeming with initiatives and projects, partly intertwined with education policy and sometimes bordering on social policy, youth policy and regional policy, the EU VET policy constitutes a complex set the structuring and contours of which are not always easily discernible.

This book presents the European Union's policy in the field of vocational training. The aim is to contribute to a better understanding of how it is developed, its objectives, areas of intervention, and main achievements. The book is intended for enabling everyone to get an overall idea of this

strand of the EU policy action, identify its basics, understand its developments, and analyse its strengths, weaknesses, and prospects. And for providing food for thought.

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## MAIN ACRONYMS

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ACVT	Advisory Committee for Vocational Training
Cedefop	The European Centre for the Development of Vocational Training
CoVE	Centre of Vocational Excellence
CVET	Continuing VET
DGEAC	Directorate-General for Education, Youth, Sport and Culture
DG EMPL	Directorate-General for Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion
DGVT	Directors-General for Vocational Training
ECVET	European Credit System for VET
EQAVET	European Quality Assurance in VET
EQF	European Qualifications Framework
ETF	European Training Foundation
EU	European Union

IVET	Initial VET
NQF	National Qualifications Framework
OECD	Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development
OMC	Open Method of Coordination
VET	Vocational Education and Training

## INTRODUCTION

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Vocational education and training (VET) has the distinctive objective of providing learners with knowledge, competences, and qualifications, enabling them to be operational in the exercise of a profession. It takes place before entering working life (initial VET – IVET) or during working life (continuing VET – CVET). IVET is mainly provided at secondary, post-secondary non-tertiary, and tertiary education levels, and at induction training level for example for law, health or teaching professionals. Continuing VET is provided to people of working age in employment (employees and self-employed), unemployed, or in transition from one job to another or from inactivity to employment. Whether initial or continuing, VET can take place not only within the framework of formal education structures, but also in the context of non-formal education.

Each country has its own VET policy. In the Member States of the European Union (EU), these national policies coexist with guidelines defined for the whole of the Union at community level. These community-level guidelines are what this book focuses on.

European VET policy has evolved since its origins, both in its themes and in its methods. Nowadays, it affects both the content and modalities of VET, although more the latter than the former. The first chapter presents the main features of its development since the 1960s. Chapter 2 shows how European policy influences the content of VET. Intervention on the modalities relates more specifically to the principle of

inclusive access (Chapter 3); the conditions for acquiring competences – work-based learning (Chapter 4) and transnational mobility (Chapter 5); and the conditions for validating and recognising competences (Chapter 6). European policy also attaches major importance to the conditions that determine the quality of VET (Chapter 7).

In the views of its designers, by simultaneously coordinating action on these different strands, the EU VET policy is likely to allow for the generalisation, in the Member States, of VET systems of excellence, providing high-quality education and training, attractive to their potential users, inclusive, equitable, and responsive to social demand, and at the same time efficient and adapted to the needs of labour markets and economies, promoting lifelong learning, and capable of serving as reference models on the international scene.



## CHAPTER 1. THE EU POLICY FOR VET: ORIGINS AND DEVELOPMENT PROCESS

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The European VET policy was born in 1957, within the framework of the Treaty establishing the European Economic Community (EEC)<sup>1</sup>, signed in Rome on 25 March 1957. Article 128 of the EEC Treaty provided for the possibility of a common VET policy:

*On a proposal from the Commission and after consulting the Economic and Social Committee, the Council establishes the general principles for the implementation of a common VET policy which can contribute to the harmonious development of both national economies and the common market.*

Based on Article 128, the general principles of the European VET policy were set out in the Council Decision of 2 April 1963<sup>2</sup>. Considering the need for updating the labour force qualifications to cope with technological developments and structural changes in economies, increasing employment, and ensuring workers' free movement, the Decision spells out ten principles. Principle 2 sets "fundamental objectives" in terms of organising VET to serve the needs of economic activity, but also taking into account the interests of individuals: "*guarantee adequate*

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<sup>1</sup> CELEX:11957E/TXT

<sup>2</sup> [Council Decision 63/266/EEC of 2 April 1963](#)  
(CELEX:31963D0266)

*vocational training for all*<sup>3</sup>; "harmonious development of the personality"; "promote basic and advanced vocational training and, where appropriate, retraining, suitable for the various stages of working life"<sup>4</sup>, and "offer to every person (...) the opportunity to gain promotion or to receive instruction for a new and higher level of activity".

The general principles also provide for developing permanent systems for information and guidance or vocational advice accessible to workers throughout their working life (Third principle); the promotion of training for teachers and trainers (Seventh principle); and the setting up of conditions allowing for the mutual recognition of vocational training certifications (Eighth principle).

Against this background, the First *Joint Programme to encourage the exchange of young workers*<sup>5</sup> was put in place in 1964. The programme targeted young people aged 18 to 30 who already had basic VET background. It provided them with grants for moving to another Member State to improve their professional training and their cultural and linguistic knowledge.

At the same period was started the alignment of the national rules regarding the requirements for the entry of nationals from other Member States into regulated professions. Article 57 of the EEC Treaty provided for the possibility of adopting "*Directives aimed at the mutual*

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<sup>3</sup> 36 years before Article 14 of the [2000 EU Charter of fundamental rights](https://www.europarl.europa.eu/charter/pdf/text_en.pdf) ([https://www.europarl.europa.eu/charter/pdf/text\\_en.pdf](https://www.europarl.europa.eu/charter/pdf/text_en.pdf))

<sup>4</sup> The principle of access to continuing VET was later on further elaborated by [Council Recommendation 93/404/EEC of 30 June 1993](#) (CELEX:31993H0404)

<sup>5</sup> [Decision 64/307/EEC of 8 May 1964](#) (CELEX:41964X0307)

*recognition of diplomas, certificates and other titles*" with a view to "*facilitating access to self-employed activities and the exercise thereof*". Based on this, a process was initiated to establish the Community rules applicable to the requirements in terms of experience, qualifications, and certifications<sup>6</sup> for the settlement of nationals from other Member States in the professions of craftsmanship, commerce, industry, health, law, and in the liberal professions.

The EEC's interest in VET significantly increased as of the 1980s. In most Member States, the economic crisis resulting from the oil shocks led to a sharp rise and then a persistence in overall unemployment, long-term unemployment, and youth unemployment. VET therefore aroused major interest. In line with neo-Keynesian approaches to unemployment, and in particular analyses in terms of *insider-outsider* (Lindbeck & Snower, 1988), VET was perceived, on the one hand, as a possible factor for improving the productivity and employability of the unemployed; and on the other hand, as capable of directing to the labour market an additional supply of qualified labour, likely to exert a pressure conducive to wage moderation and competitiveness.

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<sup>6</sup> See Glossary for the use of the words *qualification* and *certification* in this book.