



CHAMPIONING THE SKILLS REVOLUTION

Evidence on bridging skills gaps through vocational education and training in the green and digital transition: Cedefop highlights 2021-22

A high-profile visit to Cedefop in 2021 emphasised the crucial role of vocational education and training (VET) in the EU's post-pandemic recovery. The joint visit by European Commission Vice-President Margaritis Schinas and European Commissioner for Jobs and Social Rights Nicolas Schmit reaffirmed the significance of Cedefop's research and policy support. 'Cedefop is at the heart of European Union efforts to forge new skills and bridge the important skill gap that the pandemic has revealed' said Vice-President Schinas addressing Cedefop staff.

SCALING UP SKILLS INTELLIGENCE FOR BETTER POLICIES AND PRACTICE

Having sound information and intelligence is a prerequisite for optimising countries' investment in skills. To know which skills are required at which levels, in which areas, for whom, and how, is crucial. For this purpose, Cedefop has been stepping up its skills intelligence work.

BOX 1. SKILLS INTELLIGENCE: MUCH MORE THAN JUST INFORMATION

As a compass devised by Cedefop, skills intelligence is the outcome of an expert-driven process of identifying, analysing, synthesising and presenting quantitative and/or qualitative information to anticipate labour market and skills trends. It helps to:

- pinpoint demands in the labour market;
- assess current and future skill needs;
- address skill gaps and mismatches;
- adapt education and training policy and provision;
- provide customised education and career guidance and counselling.



Source: Cedefop.

A high-level virtual [conference](#) in 2021, followed by a series of thematic workshops, kick-started Cedefop's next generation skills intelligence activities. It provided new insights into skills intelligence in the con-

text of megatrends – digital, green, demography and others – and showed how to maximise its potential for policy. Engaging stakeholders, prior to and throughout the events, helped to identify gaps and obstacles for strengthening skills intelligence. Discussions focused on priority areas in the pursuit of making next-generation skills intelligence more contextualised, timelier and more relevant to sectors, businesses and people.

Cedefop released new and updated information for the event: new data in its real-time labour market information platform, [SkillsOVATE](#), which analyses millions of online job advertisements in all EU Member States; a set of research findings; and [hands-on information](#), authored together with EU and international organisations, on how big data can be used for skills policy.

Commissioner Schmit stressed that 'Cedefop's work is extremely important since we will need to know what skills will be necessary in various growing sectors and various regions.'

GOING GREENER RELIES ON SKILLS

Cedefop has been exploring trends towards a greener and more sustainable economy and its implications for VET for over a decade.

To illustrate the implications of the [Green Deal](#), Cedefop developed a [skills forecast scenario](#). Job growth is expected in greening sectors, such as electricity and water supply, waste management and construction, while decline will accelerate in mining and quarrying. A cascade of indirect employment effects will be felt in many sectors including services. In most others, employment is likely to be redirected towards greener production without leading to significant net employment change.

The green transition drives skills and training needs in all sectors and achieving the objectives of the Green Deal does not rely only on high-skilled workers. The scenario results identify employment

gains for almost all occupational categories, including middle-skilled ones and elementary occupations. The green transition has the potential to alleviate progressive job polarisation.

While our scenario provides a model-driven, albeit imprecise, image of a greener future, it can help shape future-oriented VET, employment and skills policies.

Cedefop's new Green Observatory, to be launched in 2022, will generate new insights by blending information from different data sources. It will draw on the Agency's real-time labour market analysis on green jobs and skills, the sectoral foresights, the skills forecast and results from several studies.

It is essential to understand how VET can help citizens and enterprises joint efforts to shape and manage the 'new green paradigm', as well as becoming greener itself. This was a clear message from the Agency's skills intelligence conference, with similar questions at the core of the Cedefop-OECD symposium on [apprenticeships for greener economies and societies](#) in 2021. Apprenticeships allow young people to acquire occupation-specific 'green' skills and more general sustainability competences; but they also cater for adults who need to move from declining sectors to new jobs.



Discussions demonstrated how apprenticeships can be best designed for emerging green occupations and changing jobs involving all stakeholders, particularly social partners and professional bodies. With their dual learning venues, apprenticeships enable faster reflection of changes in production processes and technologies in learning outcomes.

These reflections were timely in view of the [new European sustainability competence framework](#), to which Cedefop contributed, and [the envisaged Council Recommendation](#).

'Apprenticeships, if designed well, bring about green innovation, green mindsets and green ambassadors' according to Professor Gonon of the University of Zurich. His view of apprentices as 'greeners' fits Cedefop's vision of proactive VET that is not simply responsive but empowers learners to shape the future.

A FRESH LOOK AT LONG-TERM MOBILITY FOR APPRENTICES

While greening apprenticeships is a comparatively new theme, raising the share of apprentices in the Erasmus+ generations has been on the agenda for a long time. However, stays abroad in apprenticeships are still limited. Long-term mobility is a particular challenge for apprenticeships due to the specificities of blending education and employment.

The 2020 policy framework has re-emphasised mobility in VET as one of the priorities and raised the previously set target. With the current Erasmus+ cycle, mobility opportunities for VET learners have doubled. Against this backdrop, Cedefop conducted a study to identify obstacles to long-term apprentice mobility. It shows that there is a long way to go to create demand, among employers and apprentices and their parents. The best way forward is at sectoral level, and using short-term mobility as stepping stones for the long-term option.

The [report](#) and the accompanying [suggestions for policy-makers](#) informed the dedicated French Presidency event in the context of the 35th anniversary of the Erasmus+ programme.

FOCUSING ON MICROCREDENTIALS

Many see considerable potential in microcredentials as a tool to support up- and reskilling within the EU's recovery measures, along with their focus on a green, digital and just transition. They are considered as a new way for people to 'stack' learning in a flexible way according to their needs. This is reflected in the [2020 EU Skills Agenda](#) and [VET Recommendation](#). Given the variety of providers and formats in which microcredentials are offered, and the lack of a common definition and standards, the Commission has proposed [a common EU approach](#).



As related research in this area has mainly focused on higher, academic education, Cedefop has taken a closer look at the use of microcredentials in and for labour market-related learning. This has been the first step in a [comprehensive study](#). Interim findings were discussed at a Cedefop [conference in 2021](#), which demonstrated the global appeal of this theme and related concern.

BOX 2. MICROCREDENTIALS FOR VET AND LABOUR MARKET LEARNING

Uncertainty among VET stakeholders about the name and function of microcredentials, as well as questions of trust: these study findings kicked off the debates at Cedefop's conference in November 2021.

The event took a global perspective on microcredentials as independent building blocks in national and international skills strategies. With 240 participants from 40 countries, it was a world-spanning audience. Speakers included representatives of the European Commission, the European Students' Union, the OECD, UNESCO and the ETF. Participants agreed that microcredentials can be tools to:

- give visibility to the outcomes of short and on-demand learning experiences;
- give value to such learning, knowledge, skills and competences;
- encourage learning and motivate individuals to develop from a lifelong and life-wide perspective.

From the European perspective a 'quality seal' is seen as important to strengthen trust in such credentials.

A major aim will be to understand whether we are observing a revolution in the way learning is being valued or whether microcredentials are just a new name for something that has existed all along in different shapes and guises.

Continuing its contribution to the debate in 2022, Cedefop will examine:

- if partial qualifications and module certificates can be considered microcredentials;
- whether microcredentials need to be included in formal qualifications systems and how they (would) fit in;
- how they operate in the labour market.

Work to understand better the role of microcredentials in helping people accumulate learning across VET, sectors, industries, borders and lifespans will continue throughout 2022. It will be supported by a sounding board with members from Cedefop's tripartite Management Board. With this research, Cedefop contributes to preparations for, and subsequently, the follow-up of the [forthcoming Council Recommendation](#).

STIMULATING ADULT LEARNING SUPPORT

An advisory group of Board members also accompanies Cedefop's work to support the Commission's initiative on [individual learning accounts](#). These are one of the financial instruments for adults and enterprises to engage in training activities presented in the forthcoming update of the Agency's comprehensive online database. The interplay of financial and non-financial incentives supporting training activities in micro, small and medium-sized enterprises will be discussed in a publication to be released in 2022. Its findings will inform a policy learning event for Member States and social partners.

It takes coordinated approaches, rather than single measures, to make support policies for CVET/

adult learning more effective. Practising what it preaches, Cedefop has reinforced the links between its work on financing VET/adult learning, lifelong guidance, and validation of non-formal and informal learning. We are cooperating with the Commission to help prepare the updated guidelines on the last, which will be released in 2022, and the next European validation festival.

Working towards comprehensive lifelong guidance systems, many EU Member States have been integrating advanced skills intelligence resources. They have also been linking public employment services, enterprises and education providers to users looking for work or learning opportunities.

Closely collaborating with its [CareersNet](#), Cedefop has been monitoring the development of these systems, particularly the broad introduction of [ICT-based services](#). Updating of systems and practices is under way. In 2021, work focused on [guidance practitioners' changing roles](#), (digital) competences, skill needs and continuous professional development. The work will result in the release of first insights into Member States' efforts in investing in career guidance for adults; and a proposal of shared minimum standards for monitoring and evaluating lifelong guidance systems and services.

These support measures matter specifically in coherent upskilling pathway policies. Reviewing approaches in [France and Italy](#) to empowering adults through upskilling pathways has been a further step in implementing the related [Council Recommendation](#). How to encourage employers to invest in inclusive skills development was one of the main questions discussed at the Agency's joint [seminar with the Slovene Presidency](#). Evidence from our research and analyses contributed to their conference and their work towards [the renewed agenda for adult learning](#).

PARTNERSHIPS FOR ADDED VALUE

Joint commitment and cooperation have underpinned the systematic approach to working on common priorities for VET initiated 20 years ago. From the outset Cedefop has contributed to this [joint effort by Member States, associated and candidate countries](#), European social partners and the Commission. Work in 2021, the first year of the new VET policy cycle, was dedicated to shaping a revamped approach suited to the new policy context and our extended mandate to monitor the [VET Council Recommendation](#) and the [Osnabrück Declaration](#), together with [ReferNet](#) and the [ETF](#).

With the national VET policy implementation plans *ante portas*, the new approach will be put to test and help define the further scope of the work. Cedefop's

evidence on policy developments will inform the Commission’s follow-up of [countries’ recovery plans](#) and its work in [overall economic coordination](#).

Pooling resources and expertise translates into more effective services, as our collaboration with [Eurostat](#) and [Eurofound](#) on skills intelligence and mismatch demonstrates. Providing effective services and relevant products also means listening to users’ needs and tapping their expertise. As in the preceding years, Cedefop will again engage with the European Commission, governments and social partners at critical junctures of its research and policy analyses. Close cooperation with ReferNet and other thematic networks, with researchers, experts and practitioners reinforces the relevance of our work.

INTERACTING WITH THE VET COMMUNITY

Conducting forward-looking research and generating up-to-date and sound evidence on VET, skills and qualifications is not enough. Results and findings need to be communicated to the VET and skills community, too.

Our [new-generation web portal](#), launched in autumn 2021, empowers users to interact with our online content in new ways to suit their needs. Thematic entry points, reflecting our strategic vision of VET, compile related data and content across Cedefop’s portfolio. This approach is supported by access points to national VET systems and statistics, which help contextualise the information. User-friendly dashboards, online tools and target-group-specific data visualisations complement the easy access to publications and events, country-specific findings, statistical overviews and indicators, and news, videos and podcasts.

CEDEFOP: AGILE AND RESILIENT

The commitment to the green agenda does not end with our core business: we also walk the talk as an organisation. Drawing on the lessons learned during the pandemic, we will opt for a mix of online, hybrid and physical events in the future. This way we will achieve two aims at once: lowering Cedefop’s pre-pandemic environmental footprint; and cutting mission and meeting expenses by about half in 2022 for the benefit of our core business. Further slimming down print publishing and investing in measures to improve energy efficiency and reduce CO2 emissions are key elements of what will become a comprehensive strategy towards achieving climate neutrality by 2030.

This also shows that Cedefop is fully committed to the EU agencies’ joint priorities to act as forerun-

ners for sustainable management and role models for administrative excellence. Further investment in new technologies to digitalise our work processes and the use of shared services with other EU agencies and institutions are key pillars of our strategy for achieving efficiency gains. As throughout the pandemic so far, Cedefop will support its staff to minimise health risk and ensure resilience and wellbeing while maintaining business continuity.

BOX 3. CEDEFOP IN FIGURES

Documents citing Cedefop work:	
EU	195 (+18%)
International organisations	125
Contributions to meetings informing policies and implementation	140
Citations in academic literature	988 (+3.5%)
Publication downloads	518 000
Satisfaction with Cedefop events	98%
Web portal visits	+23%
Social media followers:	
Facebook	16 730 (+8%)
Twitter	11 570 (+11%)
LinkedIn	5 650
Establishment plan posts filled	97%
Budget implementation	100%
Environmental indicators:	
CO2 emissions (ton)	645 (-3.22%)
Paper consumption	-58.15%

NB: preliminary figures; changes relate to 2020.

Source: Cedefop’s performance measurement system.