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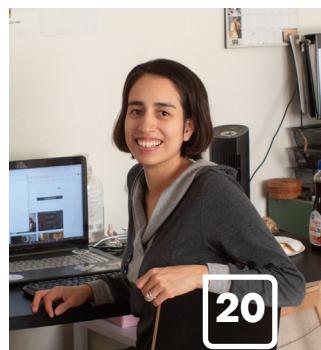
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The European Training Foundation is an EU agency that helps transition and developing countries to harness the potential of their human capital through the reform of education, training and labour market systems in the context of the EU's external relations policy. We are based in Turin, Italy, and have been operational since 1994.

ETF chief editor: Denise Loughran

PDF ISSN 2443-7433 TA-AF-20-001-EN-N

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Cover photograph: European Union

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EDITORIAL

At the end of 2020, we look back on a difficult year for education and training systems worldwide.

At the height of the pandemic, more than 90% of the world's students were locked out of school. Vocational education and training has also been hard hit, with a shortage of digital content on technical and specialist subjects, and learners missing out on much of the valuable practice-based components of their courses. And while the new school year has seen a return to face-to-face learning in most countries, the resurgence of the virus puts this fragile resumption of normality at risk.

Moreover, the economic and social challenges facing our partner countries have been brought into sharp relief by the Covid-19 crisis. Responding to these challenges, all governments are faced with choices to manage the short-term crisis response and ensure the longer-term recovery for which a focus on human capital development is a central tenet.

The European Training Foundation has tracked the response of education systems across its partner countries, the results of which are detailed in mapping reports available on the ETF website. These studies have informed the EU's debate on upskilling in response to the digital transformation, highlighting the critical role of vocational education and training, and the attention needed on gender equality and green skills.

We have been inspired by the explosion of creativity, innovation and ingenuity amongst education systems, schools, teachers and learners in response to the crisis. Distance and online learning, which was nascent and experimental in most countries, was forced rapidly into the mainstream with varying degrees of success. Novel partnerships emerged between the public, private and civic sectors and in many cases teachers and trainers have led the way, tailoring their teaching to the new environment and to the needs of their virtual learners.

Drawing on all these elements the focus of this 46th edition of *Live and Learn* can be broadly summarised in three areas. Firstly, EU policy developments on education and training and skills development including those emerging in response to the pandemic are presented. As we have seen the global pandemic had no borders and the European Union took the lead in the Coronavirus Global Response. A special contribution on this topic comes from Josep Borrell Fontelles, High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy and Vice-President of the Commission for a Stronger Europe in the World.

Secondly, we present the ETF's initiatives, Creating New Learning, and VET Centres of Excellence, by interviewing the ETF project leaders. This new interview feature of our experts allows readers to go behind the scenes at the ETF, get to know our teams and understand better the reasoning and development of our projects and activities. Additionally, there are updates from the Skills Lab initiative and feedback from a recent webinar on

'Skills for Enterprise Development' and the impact of Covid-19 as a springboard for recovery.

Thirdly, examples from partner countries on maintaining learning and skills development during lockdown and its aftermath will inspire you. Special attention is given to teachers who have been at the front line of the pandemic and the final nominees for the ETF Innovation and Skills Award from Belarus and Moldova at the European Vocational Skills Week.

Much of our work under our Strategy 2027 addresses the challenges facing human capital development in our partner countries in the post-Covid age. We will look at emerging trends in learning and at changing skills demand and consider the building blocks of lifelong learning that countries need to put in place. Skills intelligence systems, governance and financing arrangements, quality assurance mechanisms, flexible learning pathways, innovative learning methods, new partnerships and sectoral approaches will be at the top of our agenda in the months and years to come.

How today's education and training systems can evolve towards lifelong learning will be the focus of a major international conference that the ETF will organise in June 2021 entitled 'Building lifelong learning systems: skills for green and inclusive societies in the digital era'.

The new structure of the ETF that will come into effect in 2021 is designed to further strengthen our ability to develop knowledge, mutualise good practice and promote innovation on these strategic issues and deliver effectively to support positive change in our partner countries. And we will do this in close partnership with our stakeholders in the countries where we work, with the European Union and its member states and with the wider international community, to support EU external action and the Sustainable Development Goals in the human capital development field.

Cesare Onestini
ETF Director





NEWS IN BRIEF

European Commission launches two initiatives to make education and training fit for digital era

The European Commission has set out a vision of the **European Education Area** to be achieved by 2025 which was announced on 30 September 2020. The European Education Area is underpinned by six dimensions: quality, inclusion and gender equality, green and digital transitions, teachers, higher education, and a stronger Europe in the world.

Within this context a new **Digital Education Action Plan** has also been adopted which reflects lessons learned from the coronavirus crisis and aims for a high-performing digital education ecosystem with enhanced digital competences for the digital transformation. A European Digital Education Hub will be created to support these endeavours.

The EU is combatting disinformation

The European Union is working to overcome the challenges of disinformation through a multifaceted approach including projects and actions to increase media literacy, as in the Digital Education Action Plan for example, which will be updated within the coming month, and within Horizon Europe, the EU's next research and innovation framework programme.

Fighting misinformation, which is the unintentional spread of falsehoods, and disinformation, which is intentional and coordinated manipulation, creates many challenges in the era of social media and online platforms. Disinformation erodes trust in institutions and in digital and traditional media and harms our democracies by hampering the ability of citizens to take informed decisions. It impairs freedom of opinion and expression, a fundamental right enshrined in the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union.



The ETF is working together with its partner countries to develop digital skills and competence, which also means developing media literacy, an important element in being able to identify disinformation and to engage skillfully, securely and democratically in our increasingly digital world.

Moving forward on digital literacy in South Eastern Europe and Turkey

Local regional partners such as the Regional Cooperation Council and the Education Reform Initiative of South Eastern Europe shared in ETF webinars, organised within the scope of the SELFIE project in June 2020, details of their research studies in the region highlighting concerns for inclusion and equity. There is both a social and economic imperative to enhance digital literacy and this requires a comprehensive policy framework to avoid the fragmentation of efforts.



European Commission's SELFIE tool now available for work-based learning

SELFIE, the European Commission's tool for schools to self-assess their digital readiness, is now available for work-based learning. The tool has been extended to support the use of digital tools for work-based learning and is currently being piloted in Germany, France, Poland, Hungary as well as in three countries neighbouring the EU, namely Montenegro, Serbia and Turkey.

The pilot phase of SELFIE for work-based learning started with a kick-off meeting on 22 July. The tool should be operational for a full roll-out mid-2021.

ETF and UNIDO formalise partnership to promote green skills and sustainable development

The European Training Foundation and the United Nations Industrial Development Organisation signed a joint declaration at the beginning of August 2020 and held a public announcement, during the Learning and Knowledge Development Facility Forum on 6–8 October.

The aim of the partnership is to further promote green skills and sustainable development which may enable transition and developing countries to stay ahead of environmental challenges and opportunities in a fast-changing global and political landscape, reduce poverty and promote inclusive economic development.

ETF and Skillman: declaration of intent

The ETF and Skillman have signed a declaration of intent in the domain of vocational excellence, aiming at developing a network that connects industry and training providers with civil society. The cooperation will focus on centres of vocational excellence and peer learning activities.

ETF corporate conference, June 2021

The virtual conference will have a dual objective: to create a forum for a joint reflection on national and international experiences in transforming education and training systems into lifelong learning; and to confirm priorities for future cooperation in the area of human capital development against the backdrop of global developments and challenges such as the Covid-19 pandemic.





EDUCATION IN THE FRONT LINE OF THE FIGHT AGAINST COVID-19

'Countries around the world are facing profound economic and societal shocks. As a result, the European Union's response to the Covid-19 crisis is necessarily a global one.' High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy and Vice-President of the Commission for a Stronger Europe in the World Josep Borrell Fontelles shares his views on the pandemic and the European Union's response.

A crisis without borders

Coronavirus knows no borders. And neither does the economic and social impact of the global health crisis. Limitations on social interaction imposed to slow the spread of the virus have restricted economic activity worldwide, disproportionately affecting activities, such as travel, tourism, hospitality and retail, that are dependent on social contact. Education and training has been one of the hardest hit sectors. At the height of the lockdown, more than 90% of the world's students were unable to attend school. Despite the remarkable efforts and creativity of teachers, schools and education systems to keep learning going during lockdown, as many as one third of students have been entirely cut from education. And inevitably the most vulnerable have been the worst affected.

Countries around the world, including the European neighbourhood and enlargement countries where the ETF is active, are facing profound economic and societal shocks. As a result, the European Union's response to the Covid-19 crisis is necessarily a global one.

Team Europe

As early as April 2020, together with President von der Leyen, I set out plans for a robust and targeted EU response to support partner countries' efforts in tackling the coronavirus pandemic. The aim was to address the immediate health crisis and mitigate

the socio-economic impact. We secured financial support amounting to more than EUR 15.6 billion from existing external action resources.

Our response is Team Europe, combining resources from the EU, its Member States and financial institutions, such as the European Investment Bank and the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development, to support partner countries and address their short-term needs, as well as the longer-term structural impacts on societies and the economy. We are also promoting a coordinated multilateral response, in partnership with the United Nations and international financial Institutions, as well as the G7 and the G20.



The Team Europe package comprises a total of EUR 3.07 billion for the European neighbourhood – EUR 2.1 billion for the South and EUR 962 million for the Eastern partner countries – as well as EUR 800 million for the Western Balkans and Turkey. In addition, it included a further EUR 1.42 billion in guarantees for Africa and the neighbourhood from the European Fund for Sustainable Development.

Next Generation EU

Looking further ahead, Next Generation EU, the European Union's Covid-19 recovery package adopted in July also has an external dimension. Together with the EU's multiannual budget package for 2021-27, a total of EUR 118.2 billion at 2018 prices is earmarked for external action, including EUR 15.5 billion under Next Generation EU.

The Neighbourhood, Development and International Cooperation Instrument (NDICI), the main instrument for EU cooperation and development with partner countries, will be increased to EUR 86 billion, of which EUR 10.5 billion will come from the Next Generation EU package.

This will reinforce our capacity to support our partners – in particular in the Western Balkans, the EU's wider Neighbourhood and Sub-Saharan Africa – in their efforts to fight and recover from the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic, in cooperation with partners such as international financial institutions, the United Nations and the World Health Organization. The External Action Guarantee and the European Fund for Sustainable Development Plus will be the key instruments in this effort.

Back to school

Getting young people back to education and training is a vital component of the post-Covid recovery. I am grateful for the efforts of the ETF in tracking the responses of education systems across its partner countries and facilitating the sharing of experience and practice and the development of innovative solutions.

I have always believed that education is the basis of equality and freedom and the best social uplifting tool. I am deeply convinced that education in times of Covid-19 is central to the future of us all, in developed, emerging and developing countries alike.

The pandemic has exposed and exacerbated deep inequalities in the access to education, quality learning and above all to the digital realm. This is true even in developed countries, where the closure of schools and universities has highlighted the persistence of the digital divide between those who can afford computers and fast Internet access and those who are reliant on smartphones or have no access at all. But obviously these inequalities are even more marked in developing and transition countries. If we fail to bridge the digital divide, the future of an entire generation is at risk.

Educating citizens

Widespread education favours the establishment of democratic societies that respect human rights, preparing people for active citizenship. It enables societies in particular to move towards the empowerment of women and girls. What has been achieved in the field of education over the last 50 years has already made a tremendous contribution to reducing gender inequalities worldwide, even if much remains to be done and not just in the developing countries.

However, all of this is in danger if education is not at the front and centre of plans to reopen economies. When children miss out on education they are at increased risk of exploitation, violence, abuse and neglect. Children from troubled families face the double burden of losing their education and losing out on the safety that school provides. And girls are at a greater risk of forced marriage and early pregnancy.

As ever, the most vulnerable are paying the heaviest price: those living in poverty or conflict, from ethnic minority groups, with disabilities, and internally displaced or refugee children. As schools remain closed, they fall deeper into deprivation and fall further behind their peers.

European Union in the lead

The European Union has been and will remain at the forefront of supporting education worldwide. It is also the leading international donor when it comes to supporting children. Through the Team Europe initiative and Next Generation EU, the EU and its Member states are supporting our external partners to fight Covid-19 and its socio-economic consequences. A significant part of that effort goes to children and schools. In our upcoming Comprehensive Strategy on the Rights of the Child and the Child Guarantee, we intend also to strengthen our support to digital education and the protection of the most vulnerable children.

In this context, the European Training Foundation plays a vital role in ensuring that the support that the EU offers to partner countries contributes to sustainable reforms of education, training and labour market systems to empower all citizens, in particular the most vulnerable, to acquire the skills they need to overcome the current challenges.

I will pay a lot of attention to make sure that all EU external policies continue to attach high priority to education and that we help ensure that all children have an equal start in life. Even in times as difficult as those of Covid-19.



HUMAN RIGHTS IN EDUCATION, EMPLOYMENT AND SOCIAL INCLUSION

The 10 December marked the signing of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights in 1948, some 72 years ago. This occasion offers an opportunity to focus on the promotion and protection of human rights worldwide, and the European Union's actions in doing so both inside and outside its borders.

Respect for human rights and dignity, together with the principles of freedom, democracy, equality and the rule of law, are values common to all EU countries and are at the heart of its relations with other countries and regions in its role as a global actor supporting the United Nations 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. This is the context in which the ETF operates, supporting the EU's external dimension and the reform of education and training, employment, and social inclusion in our partner countries.

The ETF upholds in its activities the right to education and access to vocational and continuing training seeking to ensure inclusive education, equality, non-discrimination and promotion of civic competence. In addition, the ETF's work underscores the right to freedom of expression and the right to be heard, particularly regarding the rights of young people and those experiencing disadvantage and marginalisation.

Legal and policy framework

In 2000, the European Parliament produced the Charter on Fundamental Rights, which was enhanced to Treaty level by the Treaty of Lisbon (2009). The Charter gathers rights from different sources including the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child and the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, and is consistent with the European Convention on Human Rights, an instrument of the Council of Europe.

In 2020 the new EU Action Plan on Human Rights and Democracy was adopted, which sets out an ambitious roadmap for external action for the next five years. This Action Plan aims to reinvigorate the EU's human rights and democracy work.

There are five overarching priorities:

- protecting and empowering individuals;
- building resilient, inclusive and democratic societies;
- promoting a global system for human rights and democracy;
- harnessing opportunities and addressing challenges posed by the use of new technologies;
- delivering by working together.

The Action Plan also reflects the changing global context by giving attention to new technologies and to the link between global environmental challenges and human rights. It provides the basis for the EU Global Human Rights Sanction Regime giving the EU the power to impose sanctions, with asset freezes and travel bans, on those involved in serious human rights violations and abuses.

Changing geopolitics, transition to the digital age, environmental degradation and climate change pose important challenges, but they are also opportunities to foster positive transformation towards more democratic and inclusive societies.



EU POLICY DEVELOPMENTS AND INITIATIVES IN EDUCATION, TRAINING AND SKILLS DEVELOPMENT

European Commission's President Ursula von der Leyen delivered her first State of the Union address on 16 September 2020, presenting her vision for the European Union and its pathway out of the Covid-19 crisis.

President von der Leyen called for a common plan for digital Europe with clearly defined goals for 2030, such as for connectivity, skills and digital public services announcing that the EU will invest 20% of Europe's budget on Next Generation EU on digital EU.

Part of this recovery plan includes the Digital Education Action Plan which will be an important part of supporting Member States, education and training institutions as well as citizens in their efforts to deal with digital change. It reflects lessons learned from the coronavirus crisis and aims for a high-performing digital education ecosystem with enhanced digital competences for the digital transformation. A European Digital Education Hub will be created to support these endeavours.

President von der Leyen also explained how the European Green Deal is both a recovery plan and an investment to lead us out of the crisis which will touch on all areas of our lives. The Next Generation EU recovery plan is a key component of the Green Deal; 37% of its budget is being set aside for green deal objectives.

The European Union's drive towards a sustainable and transformational recovery extends to its role as a global actor. Education and training, employment, and social inclusion are transversal issues in the European Union's external development and international assistance agenda. This is the nexus where the ETF operates supporting the EU's neighbours by sharing EU policies and practices within dedicated programmes and activities. On 30 September 2020 the European Commission set out its vision of the European Education Area to be achieved by 2025 which is underpinned by six dimensions: quality, inclusion and gender equality, green and digital transitions, teachers, higher education, and a stronger Europe in the world.

The Commission's Communication sets out the means and milestones to achieve the European Education Area by 2025 and is again supported by Europe's Recovery Plan (Next Generation EU) and the Erasmus+ programme as well as working in synergy with the European Skills Agenda, the renewed Vocational Education and Training policy and the European Research Area.

The Covid-19 pandemic has exacerbated inequalities in education in terms of access, quality and digital connectivity across the globe and even more acutely in some of the EU's neighbouring regions as highlighted in the ETF's mapping reports. In the State of the Union address targeted support was announced supporting the Western Balkans, (the Economic and Investment Plan was adopted 6 October 2020) and the Eastern Partnership as well as sub-Saharan Africa.

The European Education Area and the Digital Education Action Plan have fed into the third European Education Summit, which the European Commission hosted online on 10 December, bringing ministers and key stakeholders together to discuss how to make education and training fit for the digital era. The outcomes of these discussions and future actions will inform EU decisions and actions in the field of education within both the Member States and its external action.



ENHANCING EUROPEAN COOPERATION IN VOCATIONAL EDUCATION

OUTCOMES AND ACHIEVEMENTS OF THE RIGA CYCLE 2015–20

'This is a moment we can proclaim that Europe badly needs a skills revolution', announced European Commission's Vice President Margaritis Schinas at the online event entitled 'Enhancing European cooperation in VET – Looking back planning ahead', which took place on 30 June–1 July 2020. In response, the European Commission has launched a new package of initiatives which are 'novel, ambitious, measurable and inclusive', declared Vice President Schinas.

Organised jointly by Cedefop and the ETF, the event was attended by over 190 experts, stakeholders, as well as European Commission, government and social partner representatives who joined forces to debate the role and future of vocational education and training (VET) at a time of unprecedented challenges due to the coronavirus pandemic.

Among the speakers were also the European Commissioner for Jobs and Social Rights, Nicolas Schmit; the Croatian Minister for Science and Education, Blaženka Divjak; the German Federal Minister for Education and Research, Anja Karliczek; and the Greek Minister for Education and Religious Affairs, Niki Kerameus.

'There is no good policy without good data', said Nicholas Schmit. And indeed the event was informed by results from monitoring the 2015–20 cycle of cooperation on VET – *Enhancing European cooperation in VET: outcomes of the Riga cycle, Progress in*

common priorities for 2015–20 report. The Cedefop/ETF joint report showed that considerable progress has been made by candidate countries, together with EU Member States, over the period 2015–19 to address the priority areas for VET agreed by their ministers in Riga in 2015.

The conference highlighted that current economic and societal changes – digitalisation, green deal, demographic shifts, economic uncertainty – place VET in the foreground as a flexible means of preparing people for a changing world of work. Continuing VET is critical for upskilling and reskilling EU citizens and creating a dynamic workforce, ready to respond to the economic and societal challenges ahead and allow a smooth transition to a digital and greener economy.



Cedefop Director, Jürgen Siebel, said: 'While further developing initial VET should remain an essential aim, European policy needs to strengthen continuing VET to ensure that the new job opportunities created by the transformations of the economy will outstrip job displacement. [...] Policy efforts and cooperation should continue toward a "European VET area", adopting a forward-looking perspective and ensuring attractive, inclusive and relevant initial VET systems for both learners and companies.'

Commissioner Schmit highlighted the external dimension of the Commission's action on VET. 'Our recovery efforts should also take our neighbourhood into account. Our European economies will thrive if our partners' economies thrive as well. That's what a partnership implies.'

ETF Director, Cesare Onestini, presented the situation in the ETF partner countries which 'share the same aspirations as EU Member States to put human capital development at the core of their growth and prosperity agendas'. Nevertheless, continued Onestini, the ETF mapping work shows that 'as a reaction to the pandemic crisis we see some promising responses but also challenging trends, and the need to focus further on promoting training for excellence and inclusion: a key leverage towards economic development'.

'As we look at the future of VET post Covid we have an opportunity to also step up the reforms for inclusion, excellence, attractiveness and the fight of gender stereotyping,' said Onestini. 'The pandemic has highlighted the need for inclusive approaches.'

In the closing session, European Commission's Vice President, Margaritis Schinas, said that Cedefop and the ETF's contribution to the Commission's initiatives will be crucial. 'People must be better informed of the skills that will be trending tomorrow and be geared towards targeted training,' she added.

Background

Initiated by the Copenhagen Process (2002) and followed by the EU's Bruges Communiqué (2010), the Riga Conclusions (2015) led to the commitment of the candidate countries to implement the Riga five mid-term deliverables by 2020 in the field of VET on work-based learning, quality assurance, access to VET and qualifications, and teacher development.

The joint report flags common trends across countries and aims to support their cooperation towards a common ambition for VET in the next five years. Despite differences across countries, the evidence provided in the report indicates that VET systems have moved forward to emphasise that VET can be a credible first choice.

Key points emerging from the report

- Steps have been taken to develop and expand apprenticeship and dual systems, systematise school-business cooperation, and establish wide-scale graduate tracking and training needs anticipation.
- The retraining of individuals has grown, especially those from an increasing number of vulnerable communities and awareness of identifying and the need to develop key competences has been raised. Considerable attention is now being paid to teaching in VET within efforts to boost the attractiveness of VET and strengthen teacher and trainer professional development.
- The progress achieved towards reaching the medium-term deliverables has reinforced the 2020 vision for VET.
- The ETF's information and reflections on freeing VET from many restrictions in its partner countries provides input to the international dimension of future EU policies and the framework of cooperation for the period after 2020.

The debate was also supported by the joint Cedefop/ETF discussion paper *The importance of being vocational: Challenges and opportunities for VET in the next decade* prepared to inform the next steps in VET policy making at EU level. It puts forward key challenges and opportunities for VET which have emerged from the intelligence, research and evidence collected over the years by the two agencies, each within its own remit and geographic scope. It supports the idea that in light of the future trends and the changing world of work, the emphasis of VET policy also needs to change. Reflecting discussions at the event, the discussion paper emphasises that developing initial VET should remain an essential aim, and at the same time the European policy needs to focus on advancing continuing VET to meet the economic and societal challenges of the next decade. The paper can be consulted on the ETF website.

Read more

Enhancing European cooperation in VET: outcomes of the Riga cycle: <https://bit.ly/2LLgDB1>

The importance of being vocational: challenges and opportunities for VET in the next decade: <https://bit.ly/3axfjvR>



THE OSNABRÜCK DECLARATION

The Osnabrück Declaration was agreed by EU stakeholders at a ministerial level virtual meeting on 30 November in the context of the German presidency of the European Union.

The Declaration paves the way forward for vocational education and training subsequent to the Riga conclusions of 2015. Policy actions for the period of 2021–25 are set out, which support the EU's Council Recommendation on vocational education and training for sustainable competitiveness, social fairness and resilience.

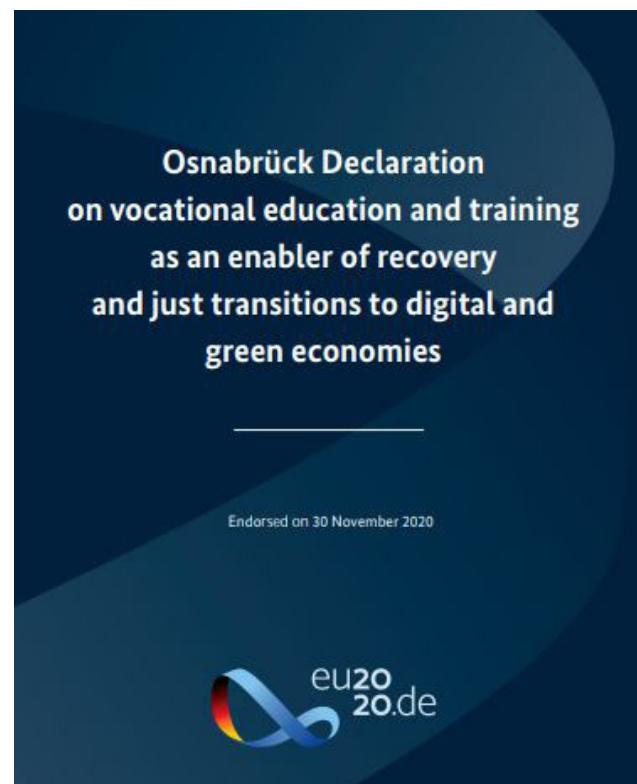
Vocational education and training is fundamental in developing the skills necessary for individuals and societies to recover from the coronavirus pandemic and to support the digital and green transitions to facilitate economic growth and innovation. Partnership with employers and trade unions is recognised as fundamental component in fulfilling the Declaration's objectives.

As with the monitoring of the Riga deliverables 2015–20, the ETF will support the implementation of actions in the Osnabrück Declaration in the EU's candidate countries working closely with its sister agency Cedefop, which will support implementation and undertake monitoring in the EU Member States. Both institutions will report annually to the EU institutions.

Main areas of the Osnabrück Declaration

The main areas of the Osnabrück Declaration are:

- resilience and excellence through quality, inclusive and flexible vocational education and training;
- establishing a new lifelong learning culture – relevance of continuing vocational education and digitalisation;
- sustainability – a green link in vocational education;
- European education and training area and international vocational education.





SUPPORTING YOUTH ENTREPRENEURSHIP IN THE WESTERN BALKANS

The European Union adopted the Economic and Investment Plan for the Western Balkans on 6 October. Subject to commitments to reform in line with EU priorities, up to EUR 9 billion will be mobilised to fund investment flagships to support sustainable connectivity, human capital, competitiveness and inclusive growth, and the twin green and digital transition. Flagships include investments in the private sector to boost competitiveness and innovation of small and medium-sized companies and a Youth Guarantee.

On 16 October an event was co-organised by the European Training Foundation, the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD), and the Western Balkans 6 Chamber Investment Forum, entitled 'Youth entrepreneurship in South Eastern Europe and Turkey: a window of opportunities', which examined ways to support young entrepreneurs in the region.

Insights from the ETF's report *Unlocking youth potential in South Eastern Europe and Turkey* were shared at the event.

European Commission representatives, Youssef Tadros and Fanny Serée, highlighted the strategic importance of the new EU investment plan for the Western Balkans in promoting economic recovery and making the region an attractive investment destination. 'The EU Youth Guarantee is an important tool for promoting entrepreneurship,' they said.

Young entrepreneurs, representatives from governments, businesses and intermediary institutions at country and regional levels, international financial institutions and regional bodies contributed to the debate, which aimed at promoting cooperation between partners to identify solutions for a better transition from school to work and labour market integration of young people in the region. Topics considered included the digital and green economy, embracing circular economic opportunities, encouraging women's entrepreneurship, addressing skills shortages in smaller cities, enhancing support for investment and training, and seed funding.

Safet Gérxhaliu, Secretary General, Western Balkans 6 Chamber Investment Forum, a joint initiative of chambers of commerce and industry from Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo¹,

¹ This designation is without prejudice to positions on status, and is in line with UNSCR 1244/1999 and the ICJ Opinion on the Kosovo declaration of independence – hereinafter 'Kosovo'.

Montenegro, North Macedonia and Serbia, stressed the need for more cooperation between education and the economy in the region, and encouraged representatives from business support organisations to share their support for young entrepreneurs.

'We need to address the whole ecosystem to support young entrepreneurs, an issue we have been promoting for a long time in the region,' said Barbara Rambousek, EBRD Director.

Education and employment policies can boost the entrepreneurial mindset of young people, which together with business funding, networking, mentoring, and innovation incentives tailored to the diverse needs of young entrepreneurs can embrace the opportunities of digital and green economies to make an important contribution to growth and prosperity in the region.

Read more

Unlocking youth potential in South Eastern Europe and Turkey:
<https://bit.ly/3axfw8l>





WESTERN BALKANS PLATFORMS ON EDUCATION AND TRAINING & RESEARCH AND INNOVATION

At a ministerial meeting of the Western Balkans Platforms on Education and Training & Research and Innovation late November, key stakeholders from the European Union and Western Balkans region met under the auspices of the German Presidency of the Council of the European Union.

Mariya Gabriel, European Commissioner for Innovation, Research, Culture, Education and Youth, presented the long-term cooperation strategy of the European Union and the Western Balkans – the ‘Western Balkans Agenda on Innovation, Research, Education, Culture, Youth and Sport’ – which was discussed by the responsible ministers from Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo, Montenegro, North Macedonia and Serbia.

The Agenda supports the objectives of the 2020 Economic and Investment Plan for the Western Balkans to enhance human capital development for a knowledge-based society, innovation ecosystem and sustainable economy in the region.

‘Human capital development must be at the centre of policy decisions with targeted innovative efforts for the upskilling and reskilling of the workforce’, said ETF director, Cesare Onestini, in his keynote address. ‘Education, particularly vocational education and training, is fundamental to ensure all citizens have access to skills development opportunities as they need to adapt to a changing socioeconomic environment and labour market conditions,’ he continued.

The signing up of the Western Balkans Six to the EU digital and green agenda has heightened the level of awareness on the skills issue and its impact. The urgency of the skills supply in the Western Balkans region, as highlighted by the ETF’s Torino Process, has been exacerbated by the Covid-19 pandemic.

‘The acceleration in the shift towards digital and online solutions has been a positive factor during the pandemic but social inequalities have nevertheless been deepening due to issues of access, quality and labour market relevance of education and training,’ said Onestini. ‘Lessons must be learnt from what did not work during the pandemic,’ he added.

The pandemic created distinct problems for the organisation of practical training in vocational education, which needs overcoming to ensure young people in particular are prepared for the transition to the green and digital economy. Moreover, reforms of vocational education such as the participation of adults in continuing vocational education programmes have been delayed due to the pandemic.

‘Let’s put focus also on older workers and the need to embrace lifelong approaches to training and reskilling,’ said Onestini who concluded his presentation by highlighting the ETF’s work on fostering innovative approaches to skills development through various initiatives such as the ETF Network for Excellence, Creating New Learning and Skills Lab.

The ETF has also produced a report, *Unlocking youth potential in South Eastern Europe and Turkey*, which provides evidence to build policy responses.



SKILLS LAB

Skills demand is changing rapidly everywhere in the world. This is due to many different factors, such as technology, digitisation of economies, globalisation, demography, migration and climate change. The nature and intensity of change is not yet fully known. It differs from country to country depending on their capacity to adapt, innovate and make best use of emerging opportunities while mitigating risks.

Gathering knowledge, developing new methodological instruments and sharing experience is the focus of the ETF Skills Lab initiative launched in 2020. In 2020–21, Skills Lab will produce a series of cross-country studies on skills for the future looking at how new technologies and other drivers are changing jobs and related skills. In addition, specific focus will be given to research in Eastern Europe on the topic of the platform economy, to identify opportunities, challenges and policy implications driven by digitalisation. A network of experts from transition and developing countries and EU Member States will support this work and an advisory group involving other international partners will be created.

The Skills Lab is an ETF initiative that provides regular and in-depth analysis of changing skills demand in transition and developing countries. It will look into global trends, like the above-mentioned changes in technology, digitisation of economies, globalisation, demography and migration and will provide some tools and methodologies on how education and training can be adapted to equip the workforce with skills relevant to the labour market needs.

The Skills Lab will establish a platform to facilitate the exchange of knowledge and good practice; develop new methodological instruments and refine existing ones for creation of new evidence; and document and analyse skills needs in transition economies. The results of this analysis will help to identify the achievements and challenges of the education and training system reforms.

The Skills Lab's main beneficiaries are education, training and employment institutions, social partners, research institutions and other relevant stakeholders from EU neighbouring countries. In addition, the initiative will support and advise EU institutions, to help them conduct better informed policy dialogue with countries and plan projects and programmes based on solid evidence.

A new tool to be developed under the Skills Lab – Skills needs for Smart Specialisation – will help education and training systems to find ways to connect to the broader drive for innovation, growth and competitiveness. A specific methodology will also be developed for Big Data and the potential it provides to analyse skills needs gathered via online job portals.



Read more

SkillsLab: <https://bit.ly/3rhASXl>



CREATING NEW LEARNING

Creating New Learning is one of the key new initiatives that form the backbone of the ETF's 2021–27 strategy. The ETF is working to capture critical changes and reinforce the capacity of countries to address them by strengthening policy to practice and practice to policy links. It will do this by sharing success stories, new methodologies, tools and platforms and establishing networks of actors. The initiative will support professionals such as teachers and trainers, programme developers and system-level actors including ministry officials and agency/authority experts.

Live&Learn interviewed the project leader, Olena Bekh, who is currently focusing on 'new learning' and key competence development.

Can you explain the main objective of the ETF's Creating New Learning initiative?

Well, we've used this year to conduct an in-depth literature review and go deeply into the concept of 'new learning'. This was to prepare ourselves for full implementation starting in 2021 and we've been refining the future objective as we went along. Thus, the Creating New Learning initiative objective is 'to enable the development, implementation and dissemination of innovative thinking and learning practice for more effective education and training systems'.

Our team of 12 ETF experts has supported different innovations and different activities in the ETF's partner countries in the past. But as we all know, today's world is changing fast and the way people learn is changing too. That's why it's so important to see the broad picture and spend time analysing the literature and undertaking our own research. We've spent a lot of time as a team this year unpacking the topic of innovative teaching and learning into five thematic pillars which are all interconnected. It's very difficult to draw lines between these pillars, but we've disaggregated them artificially so that we can take a deep dive into each of them. We were looking at innovation trends and innovative practices from anywhere in the world, so if we find

examples in Brazil or in China that's fine and that can help us to determine which types of innovation and which trends are relevant to our partner countries.

So that was the knowledge-based part. In parallel, our aim is to boost the ambitions of educators to innovate by providing them with access to resources and tools to promote new learning in their countries. None of us has ready-made solutions to hand, but by bringing together and supporting innovative practitioners, we can achieve systemic, disruptive change in teaching and learning. What someone else does doesn't necessarily solve your own problem, but you can learn to innovate by engaging with innovators and by being able to develop your ideas together with them. So, identifying and sharing good practice, becomes a learning tool as well.

The third part of the initiative is about networks, and networks of practitioners in particular. We're aiming to build new communities and networks around the topic of innovation in education to share and create new teaching and learning approaches, practice models and tools.



CREATING NEW LEARNING



Why is this initiative important and how does it fit with the ETF overall goals?

As a team we believe that it's critical that the ETF doesn't miss this opportunity to support innovation. Also, the goal of the ETF's 2027 strategy is to become a global knowledge hub on human capital development, and any knowledge hub requires evidence-based research. Our first goal is to strengthen the knowledge base of the ETF – we like to see one of our roles as a kind of think-tank inside the ETF that can supply quality analysis and ideas for the future support to innovation in teaching and learning in the partner countries. We would like the ETF to become a point of reference and a valued contributor to the global dialogue on innovation in teaching and learning.

The research we end up with will serve not only for practitioners and other stakeholders in our partner countries, but also for ETF colleagues working there, or indeed for colleagues in the European Commission or the EU Delegations. So, the results of the applied research from next year onwards will be made accessible for country planning in the form of general analyses as well as more individualised instruments for each country to support the work of our country counterparts and ETF country coordinators, among others.

Can you explain who you are trying to influence with the initiative and what concretely do you expect to change as a result of it?

Well, we're still in the process of analysing the needs of the main target groups, but we aim to develop a community that embraces mostly practitioners. That's quite a broad group. They could be teachers or experts. They could be working in a ministry or in an education institution as a trainer or teacher or education leader.

They could even be in the informal sector. We want to reach out to policy makers at a later stage to support innovation; after all system change is dependent on them.

You can never be sure that innovation will happen. You have to work on the conditions, capacity and potential for innovation. Even the culture of innovation. We would like to nurture this in terms of how we think about education and training and non-formal and informal learning. So, we'll try and work with practitioners and help those who are already innovative to be role models, to help those who are on the way to becoming innovative to join the community. A little bit like a start-up culture. You look around, you find areas of interest and develop your capacity. We'll be working on this, but it's difficult at this stage to say how we'll make an impact, but we'll try. We have instruments for this. And we're studying how the most promising types of innovation are supported in the world.

If we manage to influence mindsets, if we manage to support communities of innovators, and if we manage to be more effective by collaborating with existing communities and networks, international and national players, that would be a measure of our success.

Read more

Creating New Learning: <https://bit.ly/2KHwNuX>





ETF NETWORK FOR EXCELLENCE

The ETF Network for Excellence initiative supports partnerships to unleash the potential of centres of vocational excellence as drivers of change within a region and a country – an important focus for the ETF. Building on its mapping, the ETF has created a network of existing centres of excellence to provide a platform for continuous exchange of practice and partnership.

Live&Learn interviewed the project leader, Georgios Zisismos.

What is the ETF Network for Excellence?

Following our research in this field, and a mapping exercise, we identified elements that are important for the development of the centres of excellence within their own context. In line with this, we designed a network of centres of excellence. It is a platform to work together with centres of excellence outside the EU.

For many people the word 'excellence' means something exclusive, rather than inclusive. So how can excellence be for everyone?

We started our work by identifying different meanings that the word excellence could have, and there is no agreement about those. Very often it is seen as an elitist approach, exclusive. Excellence is for us a process for continuous development - not developing in isolation but developing through partnerships. Therefore, centres can contribute to the excellence of the VET system, we call it transmission of excellence. Therefore, this is inclusive. We do not preach for more centres of excellence, but for the use of centres of excellence for the benefit of the VET system and therefore society as a whole.

How many centres belong to the network and from which countries?

We launched the network in February 2020. Up to now we have managed to take on board 70 centres from countries within and outside the EU – Ukraine, Belarus, Moldova, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Turkey, Serbia, Albania, North Macedonia, Israel, Tunisia, Kazakhstan, and in the EU Spain, the Netherlands, Slovenia, Italy and Finland.

How is the ETF initiative connected to the wider European initiative on centres of excellence?

The EU initiative on centres of excellence is supported by funds from Erasmus+ and other programmes that support the development of centres of excellence, as well as platforms showing great examples from advanced manufacturing, the cultural industry, social inclusion and others. The ETF initiative complements the EU initiative by extending it to our partner countries and providing financial support. By having associate members from the EU in our network we are able to create connections between all centres, both within the ETF partner countries and EU Member States.

Should we expect centres from further away to join the network one day?

We hope so. Currently we are looking into centres of excellence from Africa, and if that project goes further, we will be able to develop projects for sub Saharan Africa. Moreover, we have had expressions of interest from countries outside the EU neighbourhood, as well as from organisations working there.



What makes a centre excellent?

First, it is important to look at a centre within its own context. What is excellent in one country may not be in a different context. A centre can excel within its own boundaries. We have focused on eight dimensions:

1. the ability to work closely with enterprises, the private sector (business collaboration);
2. the capacity of the centre to provide skills also for adults, meaning having a lifelong learning approach;
3. pedagogy: a centre needs to have state-of-the-art equipment, curricula and well-trained teachers and staff;
4. autonomy, which is linked to the governing structure of the centre, which allows it to have academic and financial autonomy, for example to choose its own staff;
5. digitalisation, and the ability of the centre to follow up developments in the modern world;
6. the ability to contribute to the bigger, sustainable, agenda, so support green skills;
7. how well the centre is connected and linked to smart specialisation strategies, meaning plans that the regions develop to identify niche areas where they can develop further, but such areas need skills;
8. social inclusion: a centre of excellence needs to have societal value such as training for migrants, minority groups, and supporting graduates to be part of the society for example.

What can one centre expect from being part of this network?

In the network, we provide opportunities for three things: (1) access to partnerships, to be part of the family of excellence and work together; (2) peer learning and exchange of knowledge; and (3) development of tools that make sense for centres of excellence. We have launched a self-assessment tool that allows centres to self-assess themselves against the eight issues above.

How have the current members of the network been selected?

We apply a dual approach. We first ask the ministers responsible for VET in partner countries to endorse the network to allow centres to become members of our network. This top-down approach is important to have the ministries on board to develop the VET system and allow it to excel.

Nevertheless, flexibility is an important component of our approach; for example in countries where we had delays in receiving responses from ministries due to the difficulties created by the Covid-19 pandemic, we went for a bottom up approach: we identified centres that could be part of the network and we informed the ministries.

How can a centre join the network?

We are using different tools to communicate with networks and countries. We ask countries to visit our website and register on OpenSpace where they can request to join the network. They can then assess themselves according to the excellence criteria.

Who else is working with you on the project?

This initiative should be seen under the overall matrix transforming the ETF as an international knowledge hub. Which means we work with other projects in line with the overall approach and organisational goals in enhancing excellence within the VET system.

If you had to run a promo about the network, what would that be?

To open the topic, I would say: 'Let's excel together.'



Read more

ETF Network for Excellence: <https://bit.ly/3h8KHCm>



BOOSTING TEACHERS TO PROMOTE KEY COMPETENCES

One of the biggest challenges of distance learning during the Covid-19 crisis is to keep learners engaged. The lack of person-to-person contacts, the difficulties of communication via digital devices, the need to self-organise can become additional challenges for the learners to absorb new information and keep track of the learning process. The role of teachers has become crucial for making sure that the learners stay engaged and do not lose their motivation.

The ETF has been having conversations with teachers and education and training providers dealing with day-to-day education and training issues during the Covid-19 crisis. These conversations have been presented to our audiences through the website, Open Space virtual platform and social media channels to connect and inform policy makers and practitioners on innovative ways to deal with the challenges presented in 2020 and also to showcase how the global crisis has been seized upon to reshape education and training.

Examples include interviews with vocational teachers in Central Asia overcoming lockdown challenges in April, a thematic webinar in September on concepts underpinning formative assessment with numerous examples from ETF partner countries and EU

Member States, and the recent release of our teacher booster videos, together with the European Commission's Joint Research Centre (JRC), presenting teachers from all over the world tackling the challenges of distance learning and incorporating key competences in their teaching.

This crisis has created unprecedented circumstances that have brought teachers to the forefront of innovation. They have had to adapt their teaching styles and embrace their creativity in order to keep the learning process going. At the same time the content of the learning process has had to change, and it is much more challenging to teach soft skills or key competences online.

The objective of the project is to boost teachers' capacity to face remote learning challenges. The videos feature teachers and experts who actively promote the development of entrepreneurial and digital competences, creativity, value creation pedagogy, life skills, social and emotional learning.

This project is widely inspired by the principles of the JRC EntreComp Playbook that supports teachers to design and facilitate entrepreneurial learning. The playbook provides a selection of tools to draw a plan on how to teach entrepreneurial learning. It also describes three popular entrepreneurial methods and three pedagogical methods that can help teachers to adapt entrepreneurial learning for their classroom.

Be inspired by the great job teachers are doing by watching the videos on our website!

A CHAT WITH
KORNÉLIA LOHYNNOVA
ON COLLABORATIVE LEARNING

Hello, I'm Kornelia and I've been a teacher for 20 years.

Read more

EntreComp playbook: <https://bit.ly/3mCjFEv>

Watch the videos

Youtube playlist: <https://tinyurl.com/37b7sp8j>



MOVING BEYOND CRISIS

COVID-19 IMPACT SPRINGBOARD FOR RECOVERY

On 27 October top international experts took part in a European Training Foundation online conference to examine the skills needed to support recovery in the post-Covid pandemic, attended by 120 participants.

With contributions from the European Commission, the ETF, the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development, the International Labour Organisation and the United Nations Industrial Development Organisation among others, key issues – including the wider use of digital tools in training and labour market interventions, the importance of social inclusion and a growing recognition of the need for more diversified training and skills approaches – were put under the spotlight.

Alison Crabb, Head of Unit, Skills and Qualifications at the European Commission's DG Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion, said there was a pressing need to get more adults into training after so many job losses around the world to equip them with the skills to take advantage of new opportunities from growing innovative sectors. 'We need to see what we can do better or different to ensure people have the opportunities to build for a job,' she said, adding that the EU had made EUR 670 billion available for a post-Covid 'recovery and resilience' fund.

Susan Flocken, European Director of the European Trade Union Committee for Education, cautioned against devaluing professional skills and graduate qualifications by rushing to introduce short courses and micro-qualifications under the pressure of responding to the labour market impact of the pandemic.

The need for greater cooperation between the public and private sector in training had been highlighted during the pandemic, Biljana Radonjic Ker-Lindsay, Associate Director, the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development noted.

That point was underscored by Sangheon Lee, ILO's Director, Employment Policy Department, who said recovery was likely to be 'slow and uncertain' with young people, women, migrant workers and other vulnerable groups most at risk of long-term unemployment. More than 500,000 jobs have been lost worldwide during the pandemic, he added.

Following the plenary session, participants split into two groups for a closer examination of the policies needed for recovery, and the skills enterprises required to support sustainable, fair and resilient businesses in the future.

In the group focusing on policy, Paul Comyn, of the ILO's Skills and Employability Branch, said introducing better training policies and using online and blended learning in the future often depended on the relative wealth of countries, with the richer more likely to be able to afford innovation. 'Improved skills anticipation is needed and there needs to be more support for learners in skills and reskilling', he said. 'We need to use this opportunity to rethink our professional development strategies and the position of online and digital skills in those strategies.'

Christian Solgaard, Head of Labour Market Policy at the Danish Agency for Labour Market and Recruitment shared the experience of an EU country with very favourable labour market conditions at the beginning of 2020, which then experienced dramatic job losses, particularly low skilled jobs, which has adopted a forward-looking strategy in cooperation with social partners to invest in tomorrow's skilled labour.

Other contributors, including Dajna Sorensen, Deputy Minister of Finance and Economy, Albania and Nino Veltauri, Acting Deputy Director of Georgia's newly launched State Employment Protection Agency, Daulet Argandykov, President, Workforce Development Centre under the Ministry of Labour and Social Protection of the Population of the Republic of Kazakhstan detailed the national responses to social and employment support during the pandemic. They explained the pressure of ensuring business continuity, dealing swiftly with emerging challenges by implementing crisis management actions and, at the same time, building long-term strategies for recovery.

In a closing contribution on the essential role of public employment services in managing the post-Covid labour market,

Eamonn Davern, Senior Expert at the Fondazione Giacomo Brodolini, pointed to the need for policies aligned with appropriate resources and implemented with integrated approaches focusing on the most vulnerable.

Nand Shani, Team Leader, Employment and Social Affairs Platform in the Western Balkans, Regional Cooperation Council and Said Charna, Senior Advisor, Economic Development and Employment Division, Union for the Mediterranean focused on the regional dimension and cooperation in the Western Balkans and the Mediterranean region respectively, underlying the importance of mutual learning, exchanges and partnerships in developing new solutions helping to overcome the Covid-19 economic and labour market consequences.

Concluding, the final speaker in this group, Nina Ferencic, Senior Regional Adviser, UNICEF Regional Office for Europe and Central Asia, made a plea for policymakers to remember those economically and socially hardest hit by the pandemic: young people. ‘It is clear that young people need to be included in the entire Covid policy reaction,’ she said, noting that young people had borne the brunt of unemployment – last in first out – and were disproportionately dealing with mental health issues, fear and anxiety of what the future may bring.

The second group focused on the contribution of skills for enterprise development to support sustainable competitiveness, social fairness and resilience with presenters from the ETF partner countries – Armenia, Georgia and Jordan – and Italy.

Nikoloz Meskhishvili from the Georgian Farmer Association pointed to the opportunities which digitalisation can offer for training in the Georgian agricultural sector.

Meanwhile Gagik Makaryan, President of the Armenian Union of Employers urged caution and attention to the needs of different sectors and companies according to size in terms of selecting support measures. For Makaryan there is no doubt skills are crucial in relaunching business and stimulating innovation.

Eliana Janineh from the Jordan Restaurants Association shared an outstanding example of sectoral cooperation and the care taken to provide structure and guidance to the Association’s members in a time of crisis.

Presenting a good practice example from Italy, Raul Caruso from Assobenefit revealed the outstanding performance of ‘benefit corporations’ based on their social commitment, impact and inclusive policies and processes. ‘Trust and work with the community is key to building resilience and embrace opportunities,’ he added.

This session concluded with a presentation of Covid-19 actions and future opportunities for international collaboration and co-creation.

Riccardo Savigliano from UNIDO drew attention to the challenges of developing green skills in an inclusive manner. Gokhan Dikmener from the UNDP Istanbul underscored the role of the private sector in skills development; and Mohammed Elrazzaz from the Union for the Mediterranean highlighted the regional issues in skills development which can help in selection and implementation of appropriate skills development measures.





VET INSTITUTION AWARDS

BEST PRACTICE FROM BELARUS AND MOLDOVA

The European Vocational Skills Week always represents an important moment for the ETF. Not only because it is one of the most important events in the vocational education field at European level, but also because it is a unique opportunity for the ETF to present developments in vocational education and training (VET) in the EU neighbouring regions, which are supported by the European Union within its external action.

This year the ETF had the honour of selecting the final nominees for the award on Innovation and Skills from the EU neighbouring countries. The final ceremony took place on 13 November in Berlin via a virtual event and the prize was awarded by the public and a selected jury to the Moldovan nominee, recognising nonetheless the outstanding achievements of all finalists to the event.

Deciding who could represent the two best institutions this year was not an easy task. Institutions have been making enormous efforts to keep pace with accelerated developments brought by the Covid-19 pandemic to ensure students still get the education and training they need. What guided the ETF's decision in selecting the finalists was, amidst broader education transition, the innovative courses in the digital and green fields for teachers and professionals to upskill their competences in these specific sectors.

Digitalisation of education, including the VET sector, has become a must since the Covid-19 pandemic. Innovating and providing learners with modern and high-level training is critical to give young people a head start on their career journey. Teachers must first acquire these digital competences so that they can be passed on to their students.

What makes the finalists stand out from the crowd?

The Centre of Excellence in Construction in Moldova and the Republican Institute for Vocational Education (RIPO) in Belarus both distinguished themselves through their productive and modern use of technologies and online tools to develop new teaching methods to interact more with students and to develop new green skills.

RIPO, based in Minsk, is the only multifunctional educational institution in the Eurasia area for vocational training, adult and

teacher training. The ETF selected RIPO for the Skills Upgrading Curriculum, a course targeting teachers using production-related training to develop skills through interactive, multimedia and cloud technology for educational purposes.

The use of interactive whiteboards, multimedia tools, online documents and modern and mobile learning ensure a dynamic, active and personalised learning approach for students. Learners together with professors agree on the assessment criteria according to students' needs and project-based learning whilst also ensuring an individual learning experience.

Peer learning and exchange of best practices between teachers is encouraged to ensure a continuous collaborative environment.

The Moldovan **Centre of Excellence in Construction** is an equally impressive practice. As the name suggests, their expertise is focused on technical education in the construction industry. During the last years, they have invested in training teachers in distance learning. Digital and online learning pedagogy gives teachers the digital knowledge to help them structure the curriculum combining classical adult learning and digital learning. The course enables teachers to structure individual training assessment by adapting content with students needs and to create a digital portfolio and summative approaches. Impact assessment is based on student outcomes and the teachers' and students' feedback on their learning experience.

Both institutions provide good practice examples on improving VET through the development of teachers and students. Just one winner was selected but there is no doubt that both nominees will inspire other institutions in our partner countries to take the best from new technologies and explore new learning experiences and pedagogy.



ETF INNOVATION AND SKILLS AWARD 2020 FINALIST FROM MOLDOVA

They take the future seriously at the Centre of Excellence in Construction in Moldova's capital, Chisinau.

The 1,600 students at the centre, which offers technical education and training programmes in 10 specialist areas at ISCED levels 3, 4 and 5, are fully involved in the social and educational life of the institution, where advanced digital teaching aids – including smart TVs with internet connection and multipurpose digital classrooms – are complemented by a focus on the use of renewable energy sources, with student dormitories equipped with solar-powered hot water and other advanced energy saving devices. Classroom furniture is even made by the students themselves, as part of their practical training.

But providing a sustainable environment for the students who live, study, eat and socialise on campus is not the only remarkable thing about the centre. Investing in digital skills has long been a focus and the centre has participated in a raft of digital competence projects that include the EU's eTwinning project, a nationwide digital programme sponsored by the Liechtenstein Development Service.

To further embed digital learning – and distance learning made essential by the restrictions of the global Covid pandemic this year – the centre has developed its own tailored digital training programme for staff as part of its commitment to continuing professional development. Under the guidance of Sergiu Coceas, Head of Continuing Training, it is this programme that makes the Centre of Excellence in Construction one of two nominees for the European Training Foundation's Innovation and Skills Award as part of the European Vocational Skills Week, 9–13 November.

Sergiu designed and implemented a course to help staff at the centre shift to distance learning for construction students. The course highlights the need for teaching methodology tailored to distance learning using digital tools with a particular focus on helping students to create digital portfolios of their work and products. The course is also designed to help widen the centre's approach to lifelong learning and blended adult training.

Teachers are taught to understand how to facilitate individual and group training via digital means; designing distance learning courses; developing and directing their own training process; cooperating with other trainees and integrating new digital skills into their existing skills set.

The course – taken over two weeks by 60 teachers – involves both theory and practice (40% and 60%) and ends with a final test and self-assessment questionnaire.

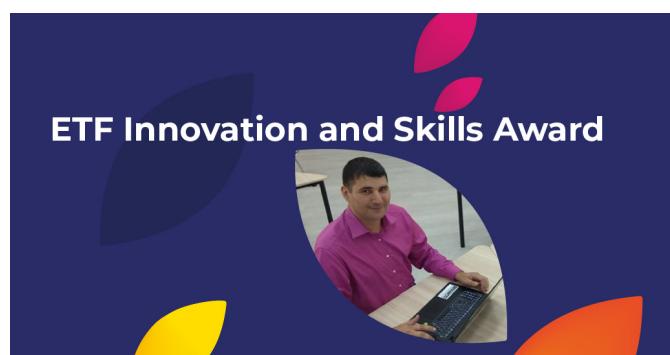
'The pandemic period has shown that increasing awareness of the attitudes of people can serve as a strong booster for efforts in strengthening new learning opportunities,' Sergiu says.

Although many of the teachers had experienced steep learning curves, having mastered the new online approach, they have found a renewed confidence, he adds.

'The impact of the course is seen in better results for students, greater confidence in teachers and visible improvements in the quality of distance studies.'

The course has overcome the challenge of using distance learning to teach practical skills by developing specific tasks for students who must develop portfolios that detail performance specifications, lists of tools, diagrams of workplace practices, lists of materials and quantities and other criteria. In this way a thorough understanding of the student's practical knowledge is obtained – and photographs of completed projects indicate quality, Sergiu says.

'I believe that distance learning will become the norm even after returning to traditional classes as it allows flexible access, repeated viewings, use by multiple teachers and efficiency: once developed, materials can be re-used and refined,' he says. 'And teachers can free up time for more individual attention to student needs.'





ETF INNOVATION AND SKILLS AWARD 2020 FINALIST FROM BELARUS

The Republican Institute for Vocational Education (RIPO) has influence and impact that reaches far beyond its network of the five top vocational training colleges and a renewable energy resource centre at Minsk's 'Volma' Eco-Technopark. From its headquarters in Karl Liebknecht Street in the Belarusian capital, RIPO is involved in its own quiet, digital revolution, fomenting change in teaching methods to meet the fast shifting demands of 21st century skills training.

Although the continuing professional development of the 4,000 staff at its network of colleges involved in teaching construction, mechanical engineering, car service, road construction, food processing and renewable energy sources, is at the heart of its mission, it also trains vocational teachers from institutions in Russia, Kazakhstan, Tajikistan, Nigeria, India and other countries.

It is this reach, and its roles – as a UNESCO-UNEVOC national centre for technical vocational education training, the Belarus national coordinator for the ETF's Torino Process (a VET policy analysis and reform tool), and national operator of the EU WorldSkills programme – that make it, as it proudly proclaims, 'the only multifunctional education institution in the Eurasian economic space'.

Its newly developed programme in skills upgrading – 'The Use of Interactive, Multimedia and Cloud Technologies in the Educational Process' – is what makes it one of the two nominees for the ETF's Innovation and Skills Award during the European Vocational Skills Week (9–13 November).

The programme, aimed at teachers, methodologists, training institutions and experts, has an approach characterised by:

- strong involvement of learners in the learning process through joint development of assessment criteria and individual learning plans based on existing skills levels;

- combined digital tools and digital teaching method training;
- competence development through project-based learning;
- peer learning within groups of learners and with more experienced practitioners online.

'Special attention is paid to the formation of practical skills in the development and the implementation of training sessions using the Internet, multimedia and cloud technologies; design and creation of online documents; organisation and implementation of professional communication using virtual software solutions,' says RIPO rector, Valery Golubovsky.

Learning outcomes from the course include ensuring teachers have a good understanding of both the opportunities and constraints offered by multimedia and cloud technologies and the use of interactive whiteboards in the classroom environment, he adds. The course enables teachers and trainers to design modern multimedia lessons based on sound digital teaching practices, to develop and implement lesson plans using internet resources, design and create online documents and a range of other digital teaching skills.

The modular design of the course and opportunities for peer learning means the training can be tailored to the needs of teachers with different digital skills levels, building on their existing knowledge and experience. 'Every teacher has the potential to master this programme,' Valery Golubovsky adds. 'Course instructors create the conditions for the realisation and improvement of the potential of each participant, and provide full support to motivated teachers.'





TORINO PROCESS IN THE EASTERN PARTNERSHIP REGION

Participants in the ETF's Eastern Partnership Torino Process fifth round¹ conference in September 2020 discussed the global pandemic crisis which has brought education and training to the top of political agendas, putting the need for flexible, adaptable labour markets in sharp focus. The two-day conference provided an opportunity to review and discuss the findings of the Torino Process national reports in Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine. Observers from Central Asia also took part.

Opening the conference, Vassilis Maragos, Head of Unit of the European Commission's DG Neighbourhood and Enlargement Negotiations, said that the Covid crisis had been 'the key unforeseen issue' of the year, forcing Torino Process participants to look at how 'human capital and human resources will address the issues raised' during the pandemic. 'The EU is ready to partner and cooperate with all the key stakeholders in the process [of education and training reform] – but the main tasks ahead are with the national stakeholders and governments,' he said.

Picking up on his comments, ETF Director Cesare Onestini, said the pandemic had accelerated processes that had already been put into motion, including widening attention to vocational training as 'part of the general challenge of raising educational standards' and a greater focus on expert assessment of national reform proposals.

Four key recommendations had been identified after analysis of the Torino Process country reports:

- support the strengthening and optimisation of VET providers;
- develop new roles for teachers and trainers;
- increase the stake of the private sector in lifelong learning;
- start monitoring and increase the capacity of lifelong learning.

'Teaching and learning has moved to being a frontline area of the response to the pandemic to upgrade the capacity of each country to meet the needs of citizens for training and retraining,' Onestini

said. 'We need to invest in them and give them the autonomy to deal with the challenges, and ensure they have the support they need in terms of structure and qualifications frameworks.'

Policy makers and stakeholders in education and training in the EU's six Eastern Partnership countries have been urged to put a greater focus on lifelong learning as they continue with national reforms to improve human capital development.

'We also need to focus on young and older people and the needs of companies,' said ETF's senior expert Arjen Deij. 'This means that vocational education and training providers need to tailor provision to the needs of learners and companies,' he added.

The shift to online learning experienced during the Covid pandemic has demonstrated the need to look more to modular, integrated learning. 'The real world is not divided into theory and practice. It is important to mix theory and practice – skills trainers and teachers could merge into new profiles.'

Armenian delegate Armen Avagyan noted that among the key challenges revealed by the pandemic was the difficulty of making training and labour market forecasts. 'Everything starts from skills forecasts,' he said. 'The Covid-19 crisis shows that not every forecast is relevant when everything changes almost overnight; no systems are ready for this.'

More than ever greater cooperation between companies – particularly SMEs that in the Eastern Partnership region represent the biggest number of employers, if not generators of GDP – in deciding training priorities and provision is needed.

¹ Since 2010, the ETF has been reviewing countries' human capital development systems in the framework of the Torino Process. Every two years the results of the review are presented and discussed with a wide range of stakeholders from EU neighbouring countries.

And a shift to seeing education as a lifetime process – where provision meets existing and emerging needs, and non-formal, informal and prior learning are considered – is necessary to meet the challenges faced by economies of rapid digital developments and ‘green’ demands.

Speaking during a panel discussion, Lawrence Meredith, from the European Commission, said that tailoring education and training to the needs of the economy must be done within the context

of retaining strong values on social inclusion, the rule of law, and battling corruption.

‘Working together with the ETF and our partners across the Eastern Partnership region, we can really capture the skills of the future and help prepare people,’ he added.

Read more

ETF OpenSpace blog: <https://tinyurl.com/amao4dud>





PROMOTING RECONCILIATION THROUGH MOBILITY

The Regional Youth Cooperation Office (RYCO) promotes the spirit of reconciliation and cooperation between youth in the Western Balkans region through exchange programmes.

RYCO was founded by the Western Balkans six participants – Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo, Montenegro, North Macedonia and Serbia – and established as part of the Berlin Process framework for regional cooperation. Improving the perspective for young generations is one of the key components to ensure stability, sustainable development, and progress in the region.

Duro Blanuša has just started the final year of his four-year mandate as RYCO's Secretary General and he took the time to share with us his views on RYCO's work, the challenges during the Covid-19 pandemic, and some personal anecdotes which led him to this role.

What is RYCO?

RYCO is an intergovernmental organisation in the Western Balkans focused on youth mobility. Our purpose is to give opportunities to young people through mobility to learn about each other and gain transversal skills to enhance and further develop their intercultural competences and skills. It is so important for young people to have opportunities to travel and meet friends all over the Western Balkans and in Europe. We must remember that just two decades have passed since the trauma of war and divisions in our region.

Why is mobility so important for young people?

We want to transcend the narrative of our past so that we can create a common future together, also as future members of the European Union. We learnt a lot from Erasmus+, which was available fully for some countries in our region, and supported by other donors and partners, in allowing young people to go beyond borders and histories to make connections with their peers. One of our biggest inspirations is the Franco-German Youth Office, established in 1963, to bring together young people from France and Germany that were still divided after the Second World War.



Mobility can open peoples' worlds. Often, those with the most negative and conservative attitudes are those who don't have the chance to participate in mobility programmes. RYCO is trying to reach out to them.

How does RYCO complement the educational system's support to young people?

The education system is important for preparing young people for life and work, allowing them to develop critical thinking, social awareness, and other skills needed for the labour market. We need to avoid brain drain, which is one of the most burning issues in the region at the moment. We need education which is up to date and matching the needs of the labour market, but also economies that are able to absorb all these 'new arrivals'.

But it is not just about creating manpower. Civil society has an important complementary role working at various levels, helping young people to become active citizens of their respective countries. We connect with other stakeholders to inform government policies and at the same time seek to ensure that these policies reach grass roots' level.

Some youth groups are very active, but others are yet to be engaged and we work to enable these young people from rural areas and minority or marginalised groups to participate and to be heard, for example, youth organisations representing the Roma community.

How did RYCO get started?

RYCO was established within the Berlin Process, which brought together governments and civil society from the Western Balkans to work together for this region. The European Commission was one of the main supporters of RYCO from the original idea, together with the German and French governments. Pragmatic support provided through the Erasmus+ programme from the European Commission's DG for Education and Culture and follow up from the DG for Enlargement and Accession were essential to give us a solid grounding to launch our own programmes.

How has the Covid-19 emergency changed priorities and needs?

RYCO works to enable, promote and enhance youth mobility, so the outbreak has had a huge impact on our work and the daily lives of young people. There has been a lot of fear in the air, borders were immediately closed, some restrictions are still in place. We had to put on hold all our projects and grants, particularly youth exchange programmes and projects but they will be relaunched.

Even so, there has been an impact on the overall culture of mobility, a general insecurity which needs to be faced. The European Commission and Erasmus+ are looking now to virtual mobility and other methods, but it is so important that young people are physically mobile. We are now launching a new call responding to the new needs caused by the Coronavirus outbreak and trying to find the best compromise in given circumstances.

What did you learn at school that inspires you in your current role?

I have had the privilege to have good teachers who inspired me to think for myself or 'not to ask others for my own opinion'. They nurtured critical thinking within myself, my world, and my place in it. Critical thinking is necessary for the diplomacy needed to foster and contribute to regional reconciliation and its sustainability. But I am afraid that there is a lack of proper civic education in the region at the moment.

What is the ETF doing to help?

The ETF supports our role as an important contributor to stakeholder engagement and partnership. It supports a multi-stakeholder approach to human development in our region. Young people must develop skills for the labour market but first they need to feel positive about themselves and their environment and that also requires developing their self-esteem and belief in their ability to change their world and where they come from. They need to feel there are opportunities for them in the Western Balkans.

Read more

RYCO: www.rycowb.org/

REMEMBERING **HELMUT ZELLOTH,** ETF SENIOR SPECIALIST

The sudden and unexpected death of our dear colleague Helmut Zelloth in July 2020, one of our senior experts in vocational education and training policies and systems, has left the European Training Foundation bereft of a dearly loved and esteemed colleague. Helmut will be missed in the ETF, in the European Union circles where he was a regular contributor of ideas and inspiration, as well as in our partner countries. His legacy will live on and continue to inspire our work.

'Rarely in our professional career do we have the privilege to work alongside someone who brings such passion and dedication to their work, together with a natural and instinctive interest in others and a desire to make a difference,' says ETF Director Cesare Onestini, in tribute.

A graduate of Klagenfurt University for Educational Sciences in the Austrian region of Carinthia, Helmut joined the ETF in 2000 to support the enlargement effort as country coordinator for Poland and Estonia. He went on to work in Latvia, North Macedonia and Croatia.

Helmut accompanied the ETF's evolution as a centre of expertise, spearheading thematic expertise development in the areas of teaching and learning, quality assurance in vocational education, apprenticeships, work-based learning and career guidance. In these fields, he led many ETF initiatives, provided policy advice, participated in European and international networks, and contributed to international conferences and publications.

Helmut deployed his broad understanding of human capital development policy in supporting the design and implementation of major EU support programmes, most notably in Egypt and Lebanon. From 2015 to 2019, he led the ETF's strategic project on vocational education and training provision and quality assurance.

Helmut was deeply valued for his personal and professional contribution to the ETF. He served as confidential counsellor for staff experiencing difficulties and was active in mentoring more junior colleagues and supporting them in developing their expertise and self-confidence. A keen skier and mountaineer, Helmut is warmly remembered for the enthusiasm with which he shared his passion with colleagues by organising regular skiing and hiking trips in the mountains he loved so much, and where sadly he passed away.

The management and staff of the ETF convey our deepest sympathies to Helmut's wife Marketa and daughter Sissy, wider family and friends in this tragic loss.



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Skills for green and inclusive societies in the digital era**

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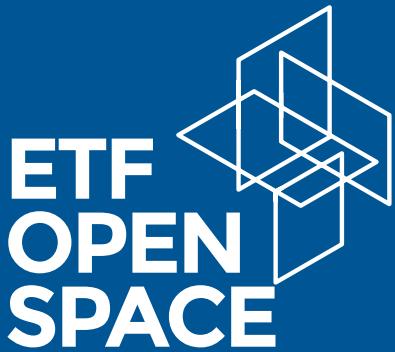
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