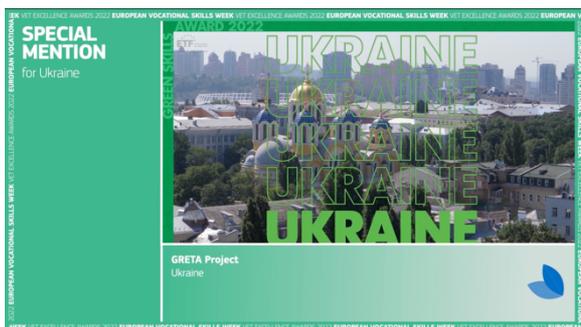




## EUROPEAN VOCATIONAL SKILLS WEEK 2022



# European Commission Conference on VET & the Green Transition and more highlights from the Week



With Ukraine foremost on their minds, EU policymakers, VET providers, students, industry leaders, and government representatives described the role of VET in helping those fleeing the war in Ukraine, and shared their insights on the other challenges and opportunities VET brings to

a greener and more inclusive world. A special mention was also made of the **GRETA project** honouring **Ukraine** during the flagship VET Excellence Awards, which took place on the first day of the EU Conference (18-19 May).

In his keynote speech to the EU Conference, **Nicolas Schmit**, EU Commissioner for Jobs and Social Rights, poignantly said that ‘when we decided to dedicate the Vocational and Education Skills Week to skills for the green economy, we could not imagine the tragic turn of events in Ukraine. Green skills are becoming even more important to the Union, and clearly VET can support the integration of people from Ukraine. What has been highlighted throughout the Week is the solidarity and hope we have for all these people’.



The Commissioner also said that the VET Excellence Awards showcased ‘the rich diversity of winners, and will inspire people and companies, trainers and students, to continue striving,’ adding that VET can become even more innovative and responsive to market needs.

‘Today is an opportunity to reflect on how VET can help people discover their talents, and to convey the sense of urgency to ensure that today and tomorrow’s workforce needs can be met,’ Commissioner Schmit noted.

**Andriana Sukova**, deputy director-general, Funds, Fair Transition and Analysis at the Directorate-General for Employment, Social Affairs, and Inclusion (DG EMPL) opened the EU conference proceedings. She emphasised that everyone’s attention was on Ukraine, while noting that ‘we owe it to all young people to take action on climate change, for a greener and more digital Europe’.

**Juergen Siebel**, head of the EU Agency **Cedefop**, on his part described the crisis as ‘*a defining moment for Europe*,’ which, having coped with the crisis of Covid, he reflected, is finding ways for VET to help millions of Ukrainian refugees coming into the EU. In addition, as an expert in the field of skills, Cedefop has researched and mapped which skills will be needed for the greening of the economy to make sure no one is left behind.

**Chiara Rioldino**, head of Unit at DG EMPL, asked the audience to ‘take a minute to think about what these words mean to you - sustainability and fairness. These are very important in your studies today, in your perspectives and studies in the future’. She highlighted how VET is ‘a standard for excellence, has the potential for inclusion, and is indeed a driver for substantiality and inclusiveness’. She also celebrated the target heard over the course of the Week of having 60% of adults participating in learning every year. ‘We are focusing on boosting dual VET and apprenticeships, but also on the green transition,’ she stressed.

**Joao Santos**, senior expert for VET at DG EMPL, expanded on the fact that 2 million VET learners have benefited from EU programmes supporting VET mobility since 1964. This number will be almost doubled in the current programming period with the strong support of Erasmus+, providing the means to reach the 8% target for learner mobility agreed in the 2020 Council recommendation on VET. Describing the



new Erasmus+ programme as ‘the key European programme supporting VET internationalisation,’ he explained that Erasmus+ not only provides opportunities for VET learners, apprentices, and staff to go on mobility experiences to any country of the world, but it also supports international collaborative partnerships like the ones fostered by the initiative on Centres of Vocational Excellence (CoVE). Speaking on the theme of excellence and internationalisation, **Georgios Zisimos**, head of the Policy Advice & EU Programming unit at the **European Training Foundation (ETF)**, told the audience that ‘if you want to excel in what you do, then you need to go beyond your national or international borders’.

**Paulo Azevedo**, chairman of **Sonae** underlined in his keynote speech how in the coming years and decades new technology must be rolled out, which may be ‘very daunting’ for citizens, and relayed his goal to reskill one million people by 2035. He said he believed in cooperation amongst all stakeholders, and emphasised among other things the ‘critical need to monitor supply and demand to allow stakeholders to anticipate job needs and adapt training for that cause; we can coordinate with public providers,’ he added.

Young VET learners, apprentices, entrepreneurs, and trainers from all over Europe, including Spain and Germany, also shared their experiences and views on how VET can boost the green transition. DG EMPL’s deputy head of unit, **Ana Carrero**, and **Manuela Geleng**, director for Jobs and Skills, noted how impressed they were with the youth’s dynamism and inspiring stories, and described how important transversal skills are for the green transition.

## Other highlights from the last days of the Week

### Digital Deep Dives: Can Europe cater for the skill needs of digitalising industries?

‘We need to raise more awareness that tech is not a monster, that we can use it, that it is important for the future, to make our life simpler,’ **SAP’s** Public Policy Manager **Marta Przywala** told her co-panellists and the online audience during a virtual seminar organised by **DIGITALEUROPE** - an umbrella trade association representing digitally transforming industries in Europe. Policy makers, industry leaders, and education professionals then mapped how far we are in reaching the EU’s 2030 Digital Decade targets. According to the DESI index, there is room for improvement.



On the policy side, **Jakub Kajtman**, European Commission policy officer at the **Directorate-General for Communications Networks, Content, and Technology** remarked that what is working very well ‘are the digital innovation hubs all over Europe aimed at helping companies undergo digital transformation,’ while he pointed to a recent call for interest by the Commission, which envisions training providers and universities as well as chambers of commerce building short-term training programmes for companies and SMEs. He also emphasised how important it is to ‘show kids early that coding is important – this is the basis for them to become IT specialists and engineers, and this is the basis of Coding Week as well – starting early will in the end bring more students and people in general to tech fields, while these initiatives also help bridge the gender gap’.

On his part, **Vincenzo Renda**, senior manager for Digital Transformation Policy at **DIGITALEUROPE**, pointed to how important it is for SMEs to have access to finance to get training off the ground, adding that ‘we need to upskill so that Europe can benefit, including through public and private partnerships that can design practical and effective skilling initiatives, while progress on the targets must be monitored properly’.

Jakub Kajtman also emphasised the need to share those inspiring stories. ‘That is what we try and do. We want to show the good stories from all over Europe. It could be a student or a company that says that they have trained their employees. We see so many activities happening, but we have to make them more visible so that they can inspire others. If people, as Marta said, see that tech is not a monster, then they will become willing. So please share your digital skills story on the platform,’ he said.

In the second part of the event, participants followed parallel sessions where experts presented European projects such as the European Software Skills Alliance (ESSA), Women4IT (W4IT), Blockchain Skills for Europe (CHAISE), and the AI Skills Alliance (ARISA) and took a deep dive into thematic discussions on digital skills related to artificial intelligence, blockchain, software, and women in digital.

## Erasmus+ and green jobs – Seminar

In a hybrid live and remote format, the enthusiastic and broad-reaching transnational seminar on Erasmus+ and green jobs hosted by the **National Institute for Public Policy Analysis (INAPP)**, the Erasmus+ National Agency of Italy, took a look at the changing labour market and the plethora of ways green jobs will benefit the European Green Deal and job seekers, with Erasmus+ mobility projects showing the way forward.

Moderated by **Barbara Millucci** of the Italian daily newspaper **Corriere della Sera** and following an introduction by **Ismene Tramontano** of INAPP, **Andrea Ricci** who heads the Business and Work research group at INAPP provided a detailed look at the impact of the ecological transition on the labour



market – past, present, and future. His research asked the question of whether green jobs provide better employment opportunities compared to traditional ones, with a focus on the Italian economy. Ricci also remarked that ‘Erasmus+ is demonstrating that students with new skills are opening up new job opportunities and creating their own businesses’.

With that enthusiastic lead-in, Erasmus+ project leaders described the incredible journeys they have had with their learners in Erasmus+ projects in areas vital to the European Green Deal. Among the topics were hands-on sampling of life in rivers to assess the impact of pollution, ‘cultivating people’ through urban community gardens ([gardeniser.eu](http://gardeniser.eu)), renewable energy and sustainable tourism and transport.

## Building Information Modelling (BIM) and Sustainability webinar - Warnborough College Ireland (WCI) Webinar Series

The construction sector has come a long way since the days of blueprints. **Ts. Charlene Ong**, **Principal of the Malaysian Professional College of Architecture, Engineering and Construction (MTTC)**, and her colleague **Najib Mohd** gave participants a tour of the amazing things digital technology can do for the sector. Aside from saving time and money by finding potential errors before construction, perhaps the most important, according to Mr Mohd, is the ability to incorporate sustainability analysis at the design phase.

## ARISE webinar - Using digitalisation to overcome vocational exclusions for training

To bounce back from the turmoil caused by Covid, Europe’s recovery must be based on the twin green and digital transitions, and use VET skills as the oil, or driver, for these transitions, **Paul McCormack**, Innovation Manager at **Belfast Metropolitan College** and ARISE project manager noted during the insightful webinar. To this end, the EU-funded ARISE project has developed a recognition scheme of construction skills that focus on energy-efficient Building Information Modelling (BIM), which are recognised and rewarded through CERTcoins - an innovative currency of skills and learning for the construction sector. Europe and the UK must aim to provide shorter and more accessible skills pathways that factor in how workers can balance their work-life ratio with the commitment to studying and learning more, panellists agreed. McCormack noted that the key is to address what the current labour market needs are, so that VET isn’t ‘stop start,’ and make the process more dynamic, with small bite-size learning that can be recognised.

Panellists’ views converged on the idea that the learning process predominantly needs to be flexible and agile, but also needs a blended use that allows people the choice that stimulates them and engages



them, while also accelerating their learning needs. A core theme of the webinar was indeed the need to improve the core process of skills delivery to meet the challenges of on-demand learning. Learning doesn't have to take three to four years - it can be shorter - speakers concluded, while also calling for skills learning to be measurable and dynamic, and be based on a block-chain micro-credential system, such as BIMcert and ARISE toolkits.

## Building innovation in VET by Femxa – Webinar

Hosted by **Femxa**, an organisation developing various experimental training projects within the framework of European Union programmes, the event presented the successful projects currently in the development or implementation stages in the fields of educational and social innovation. The projects From Outdoors to Labour Market (FOLM), New Education Forum (NEF), Sparks, Women in Need (WIN), and Powering the Innovation in VET (PI-VET) are adopting novel technology such as AI, gamification, and digitalisation, as well as innovative methods, such as outdoor learning, to broaden the learning experience, promote digital skills and competencies, and improve employability. **Jorge Gimeno Pawloski, chairman of the Supervisory Board, Centre for Innovative Education (CIE)**, emphasised the advantages of the outdoor learning methodology, stating that it has enabled approximately 1,000 young people to enter the education, learning, and employment arenas. Great importance was placed by speakers on the promotion of the social, cultural, and professional integration of female migrants, and their empowerment with digital tools, which will allow them to increase their competencies and employment prospects.

## Fostering cooperation in Higher Vocational Education and Training (HVET) in the EUSALP area – Webinar

Organised within the framework of the Italian Presidency of the **EU Strategy for the Alpine Region (EUSALP)**, the event aimed at initiating the debate towards a future adoption of a pact for higher vocational education and training (HVET). The technical panel was comprised of experts who emphasised the importance of cooperation in higher education for its implications in terms of inclusion, mobility, digitalisation, lifelong learning, and knowledge transfer and sharing. **Raffaele Cattaneo**, the regional minister for the **Environment and Climate of the Lombardy Region**, talked about the three pillars supporting EUSALP's policies and actions – economic growth and innovation, mobility and connectivity, and environment and energy transition – highlighting the need to introduce education and training into those pillars. The participation of EUSALP MEPs emphasised the political relevance of the debate: **Julie Thiran**, team leader for EUSALP, discussed the importance of taking action across multiple levels to encourage sustainable education and the green and digital transitions. An overarching message of the webinar was that in the post-pandemic world, it will be more important than ever to promote education



and employment. To that end, initiating effective cooperation between businesses, academia, vocational, and higher education institutions should be a key goal at regional, national, and local levels.

## Youth mobility in VET – lessons learned from the experience of the chambers of commerce

Inspired by the 2022 European Year of Youth, but also from an in-depth report on VET mobility in Austria by the Austrian Chamber of Commerce, and a panorama of VET mobility projects in France and Germany, speakers drew conclusions on policy improvements that can be applied throughout Europe to benefit both youth employability and SMEs.

‘Being ambitious for the youth means being ambitious for us,’ stressed **Ilana Cicurel**, member of the **Renew Europe Group** and of the **Committee on Culture and Education in the European Parliament**. All speakers highlighted the benefits of VET mobility for both apprentices and the labour market, and revealed the massive impact of the Covid pandemic in the process. The common concern, however – explained in detail by **Kurt Schmid**, educational researcher at the Institute for **Research on Qualifications and Training of the Austrian Economy** – is that there is still an information deficit, which deprives apprentices of opportunities and makes companies reluctant to utilise available resources. Raising awareness about the benefits of mobility programmes is the future goal, participants unanimously agreed.

## Vocational Erasmus + projects – Webinar

The **Erasmus+ programme** was created to support education, training, youth, and sport in Europe, with a strong emphasis on social inclusion, the green and digital transitions, and promoting young people’s participation in democratic life. Part of the multiday series of free webinars and workshops hosted by Warnborough College, Ireland, the webinar presented the results of some of their most successful projects under the Erasmus+ programme, including the Pro-VET, SkillNet, and the Adaptive Expertise projects.

**Dr Julian Ng**, vice-president and CEO of the **Warnborough Educational Group**, in his presentation highlighted the need to foster effective learning environments and encourage people to think about other projects that would benefit organisations or society as a whole. A key point of the presentation was the need to address the stigma attached to technical schools versus ‘prestigious’ institutions on the rationale that the former are ‘second choices’. To that end, Dr Ng stressed that we must work on changing the perception of vocational education and raise awareness in order to make it a more viable contender in the educational arena.



## Successful TVET experiences in Chile

Technical education and training, TVET, is alive and well in Chile and making an important contribution to educating vulnerable populations and providing a way out of poverty. In the two case studies presented by **Dr Tulio Barrios Bulling** and **Prof. Francisco Silva Riesco** of the **Universidad SEK (USEK)** in Santiago, TVET is providing a means – and a motive – for youth to study and graduate, often averting choices involving crime and gangs. The curricula include not only the technical skills and practice needed to enhance the students' ability to find their first jobs, but also intensive emotional support and counselling, and 21st century skills - including teamwork and communication, digital skills and even entrepreneurship for those who might want to start their own businesses. In addition to having graduation rates well above the national average, students have been placed in very prestigious apprenticeships, all of which put them on the road to success.

## Potential and challenges of inclusive green TVET mindset - Webinar

The webinar demonstrated the power of inclusivity in TVET to encourage personal growth, societal acceptance, and greater self-esteem of learners while providing an alternative way to make a living with the sustainable production of goods from recycled materials. Host **Gouhar Pirzada**, CEO at **STEP Institute of Art, Design & Management (IADM)** in Pakistan, presented a qualitative study his group conducted with 15 transgender participants during a two-month TVET training. As Pirzada explained, he faced challenges in bringing these learners into the TVET programme due to their own reluctance, compounded by the need to 'train' the conventional students to help them understand and accept these new students and the difficulties placing the transgender students in companies for apprenticeships. These challenges were overcome, and the project's resounding success includes enrolment of the first transgender full-time student, Sonia – a graduate of the two-month training – in a hair and beauty TVET programme. Through training in green and sustainable ways to convert recycled materials into products for sale, his project incorporating green skills, inclusivity, and TVET showed that 'TVET can create an entire workforce using eco-friendly techniques and practices while fostering inclusivity and cultural change'.

## Micro-credentials: preparing guidelines event by the European Training Foundation



**Manuela Prina**, head of the Skills Identification and Development unit at the **European Training Foundation (ETF)**, host and moderator of the event, put the webinar in context during her warm welcome: ‘sixty-four countries from around the globe have joined us, showing the importance all over the world of micro-credentials’.

Jobseekers rely on their degrees, diplomas, and certificates to demonstrate knowledge and skills in a competitive labour market. Micro-credentials (MCs) are the newest kid on the block, certifying short-term learning experiences, such as a short course or training. While these are gaining ground in the conventional education track, they are still immature in the VET market generally, and more so beyond Europe and the United States. Prina noted EU micro-credentials are one of the pillars to make lifelong learning a reality for more people, adding that they are critical to accelerating our post-COVID recovery. The interactive event hosted a lively discussion on the most important issues to VET stakeholders when it comes to standardising and certifying MCs.

**William O’Keeffe**, policy officer in the VET, Apprenticeships, and Adult Learning unit at DG EMPL, was happy to announce that discussions of the proposal for a Council Recommendation on an EU approach to micro-credentials were advancing with adoption in Council expected later in June. He noted that ‘it is not about earning degrees, but about building up relevant skills, complimenting existing systems, not replacing them...and digitalisation is a key route to transparency and portability’. On his part, **Arjen Deij**, thematic coordinator of qualifications at ETF, added that ‘we are between hype and hope – how do we know these hopes are being realised? How can we ensure the MCs are relevant, reliable, relatable, and portable?’ Deij’s colleague **Anatoli Garmash**, senior specialist in qualifications at the ETF, set up the key areas of consideration in developing guidelines, falling in two categories – developing MCs and developing the framework for their recognition – followed by a series of online, real-time survey questions by **Nadezda Solodjankina** of ETF asking the participants to rank elements of key topics, such as the most relevant areas for ensuring relevance and recognition of MCs.

## VET Institutions addressing sustainability issues, hosted by the Danish Association of VET Institutions (DEG), Webinar

Denmark is ranked second in the Global Sustainability Index, so who better to provide an overview of ways to put sustainability at the heart of VET including its curricula, training, facilities, and culture than the **Danish Association of VET Institutions (DEG)**? Following a welcome and introduction by host **Nina Olsen**, deputy director of DEG, highlighting the 72 VET schools in the European country with a little fewer than 6 million inhabitants, **Stine Sund Hald**, senior consultant at DEG and project leader for most of the sustainability projects in VET schools, explained the philosophy of inspiring innovative solutions rather than directing schools to do certain things.



A key theme was turning all the ‘problems’ in the world that can discourage young people into opportunities to make a difference. **David Rangan**, project manager of **NEXT Copenhagen**, provided an example of how the students themselves demanded sustainability training, resulting in cooperative learning between teachers and apprentices, and driving the change toward sustainable building practices – while simultaneously changing the culture in the classroom. The focus on sustainability attracted women to the predominantly male profession, who brought new and different ways of looking at the world and even resulted in teacher training in equal rights and discrimination. Rangan added, ‘we can use VET to empower students, and it gives them a sense of pride when they go out and make a difference in the world’.

**Erik Kristiansen**, head of the leadership secretariat at the **Jutland School of Craftsmanship (DJH)**, agreed. ‘It is not easy to find solutions to very complicated problems, but VET schools are part of the solution,’ he said. He presented the difficulties faced by his school – and the progress being made – to come up with a sustainability framework and metrics.