

VET MAG

THE NEXT GENERATION OF VET

Global Insights On Skills,
Youth, And Industry
Transformation Through VET

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powered by:



Creative Director:
Alfred Pallarca
alfred.pallarca@evbb.eu

Editorial Team:
Antonio Gennarelli
antonio.gennarelli@evbb.eu

Diana Nitu
diana.nitu@evbb.eu

Samir Cheriaa
samir.cheriaa@evbb.eu

Sonia Degroote
sonia.degroote@evbb.eu

Sotiria Tsalamani
sotiria.tsalamani@evbb.eu

Interns:

Amaya Gomezgil Gabriel,
Desy Mahulae, Veronica
Moscato, Yudum Kilic

Writers :

Danai Nestoridou, Dajana
Hidri, Daniele Fano, Emilie
Haquet, Kamila Wodka,
Klaudia Liszewska, Marie
Cécile Michel, Natalia
Truszkowska, Rrezart
Dema, Sara Sechi, Sinead
Matson, Zoi Moza, and
Zhyldyz Niazbekova.

CONTACT US

Snail mail: Charlemagne
28B-1000 Brussels,
Belgium
Phone: +32 2 304 00 94
Email: comms@evbb.eu

LinkedIn: EVBB
Instagram: EVBB_EU
Facebook: EVBB.EU
X (Twitter): EVBB_EU

"Because the world needs more people who can actually fix things, not just Google how to!" - Anonymous



TO VETMAG READERS


Looking for the perfect holiday read for your journey back home? We've got you covered! This holiday season, as part of our MetaVET+ operational grant, EVBB is thrilled to introduce the first-ever EVBB VET Mag. Previously known as the EVBB Almanac, this inaugural edition is your go-to source for all things Vocational Education and Training.

Inside, you'll discover a rich collection of articles showcasing groundbreaking innovations, upskilling programs, and inspiring initiatives from our members, partners, and wider community. Whether it's cutting-edge projects or best practices in VET, this magazine serves as both a celebration of our collective efforts and a hub for new ideas and inspiration. We would like to give a big thank you to all our members, partners, and community for providing us with these enriching articles and photos! We couldn't have done it without you all!

Lastly, thank you for the dedication and hard work of every single staff member at EVBB, for without every single person, the achievements of the organization would not be possible! We hope these articles bring a little spark to your holiday reading. Additionally, we hope you like some of these pictures from our team, which aim to give you a bit of behind-the-scenes insight into our hard work. We've loved putting this together and hope it inspires you to continue your vital work in VET—and in education more broadly.

Got an idea, project, photo, article, or even a poem you'd love to share with the EVBB community? We're all ears! Send your content to comms@evbb.eu or alfred.pallarca@evbb.eu, and we'll gladly consider it for the next edition.

Here's to a season filled with learning, sharing, and innovation!

A photograph of a classroom or meeting room with a warm, yellowish tint. In the foreground, a young man and woman are seated at a table, looking at a large map or document. The man is smiling and has his hands clasped. The woman is gesturing with her hand. In the background, other people are visible, including a man in a suit and glasses. A whiteboard is visible on the left side of the room.

**"TRANSVERSALITY
HAS TO BECOME A
HABIT, LIKE
BRUSHING YOUR
TEETH."**



NAVIGATING TRANSVERSAL SKILLS

Enhancing VET Teachers' Competence for Effective Teacher-Student Interactions

Written by: **Daniele Fano** | Skills Together | daniele.fano@skillstogether.com

Photos and Graphics Provided by: **Daniele Fano**

The centric role of transversal skills and competences is expressed in the 2018 EU Council Recommendation on Life-Long Learning, a milestone document. The recommendation highlights that “the definitions of the individual skills and competences overlap, interlock, and reinforce each other.” It explicitly references several 'transversal themes,' such as critical thinking, creativity, initiative, problem-solving, risk assessment, decision-making, and constructive management. These 'transversal themes' are regarded as relevant to all key competences.

The recommendation for life-long learning puts VET at center stage.

This paper focuses on what is currently known about such transversal competences, their relevance to VET teachers, and the gaps that remain to be addressed. These gaps include understanding the role of transversal competences and developing appropriate educational actions. We propose a model that combines structural descriptions of VET teachers' involvement in transversal skills, a life-cycle

context, and possible curricular implications regarding time allocation and content.

These considerations reflect the initial report and meetings of the Erasmus+ VET Compass project (KA220-VET-F5A4A712) available at <https://vetcompass.eu>.

A Lot of Information but Few Models and Logics

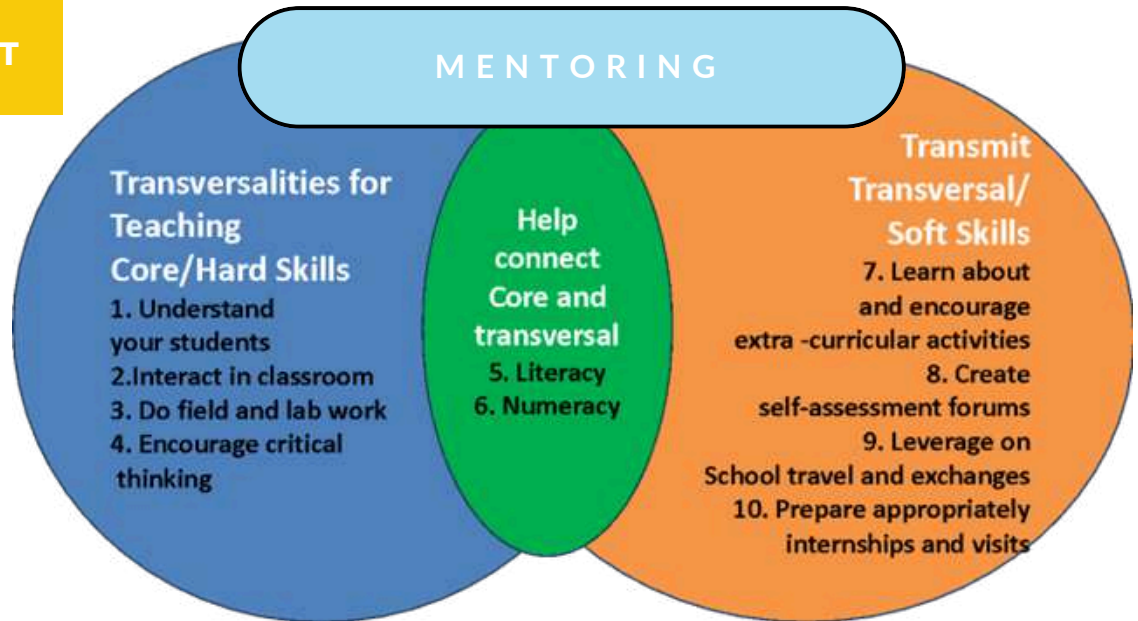
Information on transversal skills and their relationship to professions is plentiful and detailed.

ESCO (European Skills, Competences, Qualifications, and Occupations) is the European multilingual classification of skills, competences, and occupations. Code 2320.1 of ESCO describes vocational teachers' specific titles (such as career and technology teacher) and the transversal competences and skills required of them.

O*Net Online, developed by the U.S. Department of Labor, is a platform regularly updated through surveys and other sources. It provides detailed descriptions of the world of work for job seekers, workforce developers, HR

Teachers' transversal skills

The following chart summarizes the model we have developed for the initial Vetcompass Report:



professionals, students, developers, researchers, and others. It includes extensive details on the competences required of technical education teachers, including transversal ones.

However, in the current literature, there are few interpretative models and structured policy indications.

A Proposed Model: Transversal Skills for Teaching Hard Skills and Preparing for the Labor Market

When addressing the issue of teachers' transversal competences, we encounter a dual dimension:

- Transversal competences for teaching hard/core skills: Modern pedagogy emphasizes that students are not passive recipients of knowledge but must be actively involved in learning. Whether training a welder or explaining historical figures like Napoleon, teachers must engage students in acquiring new perspectives while revising prior knowledge as needed.
- Transversal competences for labor market readiness: Employers often assess a candidate's hard/core skills as a baseline requirement. However, significant focus is placed on evaluating transversal skills, such as communication, problem-solving, and teamwork. VET teachers face the challenge of ensuring students develop these skills, which are critical for success in today's labor market.
- Overlapping competences: Teachers themselves must possess and transmit transversal skills that are common to both teaching hard skills and fostering employability-related transversal competences, such as literacy and numeracy.

The key role of mentoring: time, organization, repetition for developing transversal competences in students.

You don't "teach" most transversal competences; you support students in acquiring them, using them, and finding ways of discovering and developing them. This is why the ability to be a mentor is integral to all transversal competences that characterize a teaching activity. Mentoring in various forms is necessary not only to teach hard competences but also to encourage the development of societal and work-related transversal competences in students. Extracurricular activities such as team sports, playing an instrument, doing voluntary work, etc., typically help develop social participation and integration. Additionally, a teacher's ability to promote self-assessment groups can be very useful: Do we really know how to listen? Are we good communicators? Are we empathetic? Are we problem creators or problem solvers? Teachers need to have mentoring abilities not only to be effective teachers but also to help their students discover and further develop their existing or latent transversal competences.

To support this essential mentoring role of teachers, three interlocked dimensions are necessary: time, organization, and repetition.

Time: Developing transversal competences cannot be left to occasional 15-30 minute assessments followed by recommendations. It needs to be allocated regular, appropriate time slots.

Organization: The allocation of time cannot be left to individual goodwill, chance, or a residual part of the day. If it is a priority, it must be formally recognized and organized.

Repetition: Transversality has to become a habit, like brushing your teeth. Habits are acquired through repetition. This is also true for day-to-day attitudes and dispositions: take empathetic smiling, which often immediately helps get a conversation on the right track, or always asking oneself, “Why am I doing this?” which can help engage correctly in activities.

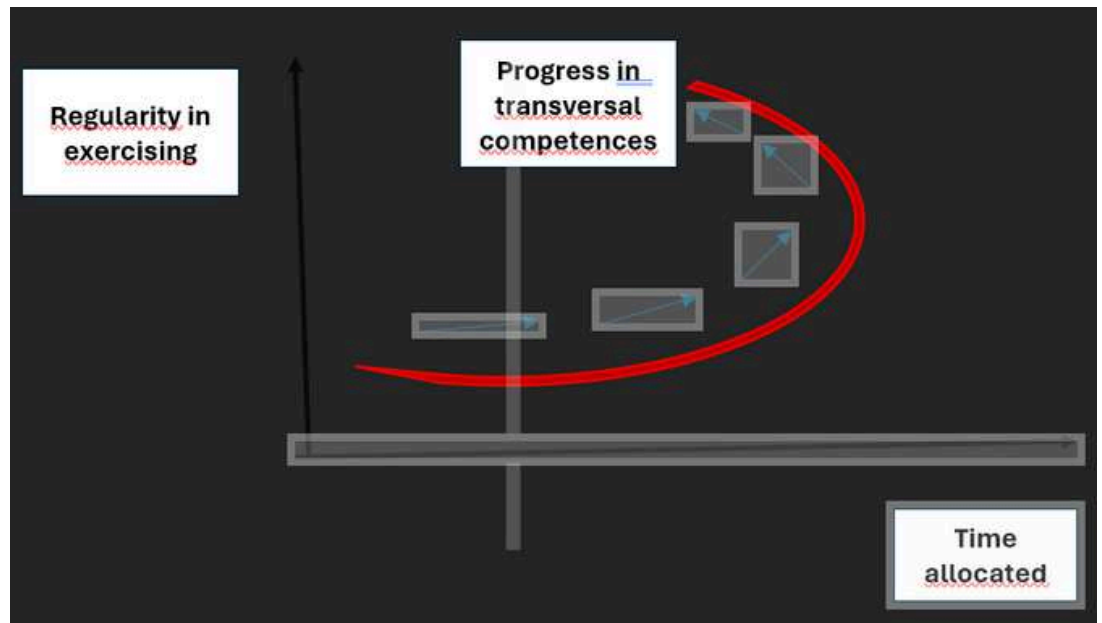
important, still appears to need more systematic focus.

If repetition, habits, and a focus on “why” are so important, lifelong training and development for transversal skills should require standard time allocation and recurrent programs. Over time, one may acquire skills but also lose them. During our life cycle, we may still acquire new

Time allocated and regularity boost transversal competences

Like for fitness, for developing transversal competences how much time one allocates and how regularity one exercises matter

Source: VetCompass



The Implications in a Life-Cycle Perspective

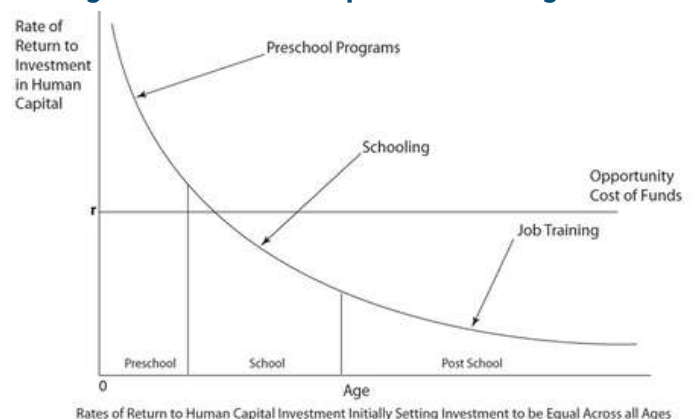
As Nobel Prize-winning economist James Heckman has emphasized, “capabilities are not invariant traits and are causally affected by parental investment and early social environments. Moreover, capabilities are not solely situationally specific. They are stable, but they evolve over the life cycle.”

The OECD Learning Compass 2030 defines “transformative competencies” as the types of knowledge, skills, attitudes, and values students need to transform society and shape the future for better lives. These competencies have been identified as the ability to create new value, reconcile tensions and dilemmas, and take responsibility.

Transversal skills are acquired very early in life, which is why teachers in kindergartens and elementary schools have such significant responsibilities. However, it is also important to cultivate these skills at all phases of education. Lifelong learning, whether at the post-secondary or post-tertiary level, though often cited as

transversal competences, though at a decreasing rate of return. However, we can do a lot to cultivate the good transversal skills we have acquired over the years, avoid losing them, and make the best use of them while continuing to improve them.

Rates of Return to Human Capital Investment Initially Setting Investment to be Equal Across All Ages



Carneiro, P., & Heckman, J. (2003). Human capital policy (NBER Working Paper No. 9495). National Bureau of Economic Research. <http://www.nber.org/papers/w9495>

Initial indications for improving transversal competences and skills through VET

As already mentioned, over the past fifty years, educational institutions and teachers have become increasingly aware of the importance of transmitting and developing transversal skills and competences. Awareness of their specificities is widely shared and encouraged in teaching practices. However, it is still difficult to trace standard time allocations in schools and curricula, as well as

systematic references to best practices and approaches.

Modeling the role and development of transversal competences appears to be in its infancy, but thanks to our Vetcompass project, we are able to gather structured insights into the logic of acquiring transversal skills.

Greater attention to the planning of transversal competences in school activities, curricula, and the training of trainers may be helpful.

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Tech-Driven VET

How AI, VR, and AR are Shaping the Future of Workforce Training

Written by: **Dajana Hidri** | hidridajana043@gmail.com

Vocational Education and Training (VET) plays a crucial role in workforce development, ensuring individuals are prepared for a wide range of careers across various sectors. In this context, the use of new technologies has begun to transform the delivery of education. Technologies such as Artificial Intelligence (AI), Virtual Reality (VR), and Augmented Reality (AR) hold the potential to revolutionize the teaching and training process. This article examines the benefits and challenges arising from the integration of these technologies and offers a guide for their effective implementation in VET institutions.

In exploring the impact of new technologies in VET, many studies have shown how technology can improve the learning experience and aid in the development of practical skills. For example, a 2022 study demonstrated that using AI for personalized learning resulted in improved student outcomes. AI-based tools can adapt to each student's needs, allowing them to progress at their own pace and facilitating continuous improvement. Virtual Reality and Augmented Reality enable students to practice in safe, controlled environments, eliminating the need for costly on-site practical opportunities. However, a significant

challenge is the digital divide, which makes it difficult for some institutions to afford these technologies, as well as disparities in technology access among students from less privileged social groups.

Methodology

This study adopts a qualitative approach to analyze the use of new technologies in VET institutions. Data were collected through interviews with institutional directors, teachers, and students, as well as through analysis of institutional reports and case studies from higher education and training institutions in various sectors. These data were used to evaluate the level of technology integration and to assess how these innovations have contributed to improving the quality of teaching and training.

Results

The results indicate that integrating new technologies has significantly improved VET, especially in practical and technical fields. The use of AI to create personalized learning platforms has provided students with more focused and individualized learning experiences. VR and AR simulations have given students the opportunity to experiment with real-life scenarios, helping them acquire skills without the challenges of physical practice. However, some institutions have encountered obstacles, including a lack of technological infrastructure, limited technical support, and difficulties in training teachers to effectively use these technologies.

Discussion

While new technologies have the potential to improve the quality and outcomes of students in VET programs, their implementation must be approached carefully and systematically. VET institutions need to invest in robust technological infrastructure, ensure continuous support and training for teachers, and develop educational content that is aligned with labor market needs. Furthermore,

overcoming resistance to change and ensuring that both teachers and students fully benefit from the opportunities provided by technology are critical to successful implementation.

In conclusion, the integration of new technologies in Vocational Education and Training institutions offers great opportunities, but also presents significant challenges. The benefits are clear, but to fully realize them, VET institutions must address logistical, financial, and cultural barriers that may arise during implementation. By improving infrastructure, offering continuous training for teachers, and overcoming resistance, institutions can create a learning environment that meets modern industry needs and prepares students for success in the labor market.

Recommendations:

1. Invest in Infrastructure: VET institutions should invest in reliable technological infrastructure, including internet access, devices, and software that support advanced learning.
2. Provide Training for Teachers: Educators should receive ongoing training in using new technologies and develop their skills to teach and lead in technologically advanced environments.
3. Encourage Collaboration with Industry: VET institutions should establish strong partnerships with industry sectors and technology companies to ensure training programs align with current market demands and innovations.
4. Promote Inclusivity and Equal Access: The use of technologies should be equitable for all students, regardless of their social, financial, or geographical background. Providing opportunities for students with special access needs is essential.

HARNESSING AI FOR SUSTAINABLE AGRICULTURE

Empowering Agricultural Workers with Digital and Green Skills for the Future

Written by: **Klaudia Liszewska** | The Polish Farm Advisory | project-officer@farm-advisory.eu



The integration of Artificial Intelligence (AI) into agriculture is a transformative development in the pursuit of sustainable farming practices and enhanced productivity. However, the successful adoption of AI technologies in the sector depends heavily on equipping workers with the necessary digital and green skills. Vocational Education and Training systems play a pivotal role in addressing this gap, offering tailored training programs to meet the unique needs of agricultural workers and entrepreneurs. This article delves into the significance of integrating AI into VET for agriculture, highlighting the challenges, opportunities, and policy implications of such initiatives. By analyzing existing literature, trends, and policy frameworks, the article provides a comprehensive exploration of how VET can empower agricultural workers to harness the potential of AI for a sustainable future.

The agricultural sector is facing mounting challenges in the 21st century. Climate change, population growth, resource depletion, and an aging workforce are among the factors putting immense pressure on the industry to modernize and adopt sustainable practices.

Simultaneously, the advent of Agriculture 4.0, characterized by digital technologies such as AI, robotics, and data analytics, offers unprecedented opportunities to address these challenges. AI has the potential to revolutionize agriculture by enabling precision farming, optimizing resource use, and enhancing resilience against environmental and economic uncertainties.

Despite the promise of these technologies, their integration into agriculture remains uneven. Small-scale farmers, who constitute a significant portion of the global agricultural workforce, often lack access to AI tools and the skills needed to use them effectively. This is where Vocational Education and Training can serve as a bridge, providing targeted, accessible, and practical training to equip agricultural workers with the competencies required for a digitalized and sustainable agricultural industry.

The Role of AI in Agriculture

AI is reshaping agriculture in ways that were once unimaginable. From autonomous tractors to AI-driven pest and disease monitoring systems, these technologies are

enhancing productivity and reducing environmental impact. For instance, AI-powered soil monitoring tools can analyze soil health in real-time, enabling farmers to apply precise amounts of fertilizer and water, thus reducing waste and improving crop yields. Similarly, predictive analytics, fueled by machine learning algorithms, can forecast weather patterns, market demands, and potential risks, allowing farmers to make informed decisions that optimize their operations.

However, the benefits of AI are not uniformly distributed. Larger agricultural enterprises often have the resources to adopt these technologies, while small-scale farmers face significant barriers. These barriers include high upfront costs, lack of access to digital infrastructure, and insufficient technical knowledge. Without targeted interventions, this disparity risks exacerbating existing inequalities in the agricultural sector.

The Importance of VET in Addressing Skill Gaps

VET has long been recognized as a critical tool for workforce development, particularly in sectors undergoing rapid technological change. In agriculture, the need for VET programs that focus on digital skills and sustainability has never been more urgent. Research shows that tailored VET initiatives can significantly improve the adoption of new technologies, including AI, by providing workers with hands-on training and practical knowledge.

Moreover, VET programs that incorporate AI can empower workers to transition from traditional farming methods to more advanced, data-driven practices. One such example is the AI4Agri project, which aims to address these challenges by fostering skills in AI and sustainable practices. By integrating advanced technologies into VET, the initiative supports Agriculture 4.0, enabling farms to adopt precision

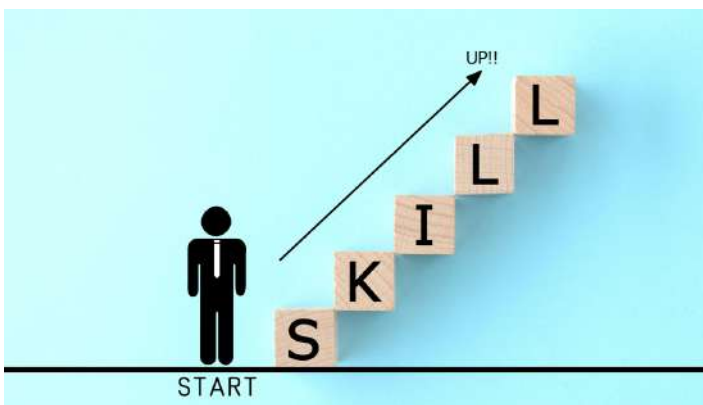


agriculture, AI-driven analytics, and climate-resilient techniques.

The European Green Deal and the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) provides a strong policy framework for integrating digital and green skills into agriculture. Both initiatives emphasize the importance of sustainable farming practices and the role of technology in achieving these goals. The European Green Deal, for instance, aims to make the EU climate-neutral by 2050, a target that requires significant reductions in greenhouse gas emissions from agriculture. AI technologies can contribute to these efforts by enabling precision farming, optimizing resource use, and enhancing climate resilience.

The successful integration of AI into VET for agriculture requires a systematic and inclusive approach. One essential step is conducting comprehensive needs assessments to identify the specific skill gaps and training requirements of agricultural workers. Surveys and interviews with stakeholders, including farmers, educators, and policymakers, can provide valuable insights into the barriers and opportunities associated with AI adoption.

Another critical aspect is the development of tailored curricula that combine theoretical knowledge with practical applications. Training modules should focus on key areas such as precision farming, data analytics, and climate-smart practices. These programs should be



designed to be accessible to a diverse range of participants, including small-scale farmers and entrepreneurs in rural areas. The integration of AI into VET can yield transformative outcomes for the agricultural sector. Studies indicate that hands-on training in AI applications can significantly enhance workers' ability to adopt and utilize these technologies effectively. For example, training programs that include simulations of AI-powered farming practices can help participants gain

practical experience in a controlled environment. Furthermore, VET programs that focus on entrepreneurship can foster innovation in agriculture. By equipping participants with the skills needed to develop AI-based solutions, these programs can support the creation of new business models and startups in the agricultural sector. This not only enhances the competitiveness of the sector but also contributes to rural development.

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BUILDING RESILIENCE IN TOURISM THROUGH VET

How Vocational Education and Training Prepares Professionals for a Dynamic and Sustainable Industry

Written by: **Danai Nestoridou** | AKMI | nestoridou@akmi-international.com

Photos Provided by: **Antonio Gennarelli**

Tourism is a vital sector for the European economy (CEDEFOP, 2020), contributing significantly to national revenue and job creation. As a dynamic field, tourism must adapt to potential crises, rapid technological advancements, and evolving consumer preferences. This has created a strong demand for skilled tourism professionals equipped with the necessary competencies. Vocational Education and Training (VET) plays a crucial role in meeting these needs by providing practical skills and contributing to the sector's sustainability and resilience.

To thrive in the tourism industry and enhance employability, individuals must be equipped with the right skills (European Commission, n.d.) to meet sector-specific demands. VET providers should carefully design and regularly update their programs and curricula to align with the industry's changing needs. Including tourism stakeholders in the program development process ensures that the knowledge and competencies taught are relevant, preparing students for successful careers. Collaboration between VET institutions and industry stakeholders also helps address skills mismatches. For instance, employers often require digital proficiency and practical experience with technological tools—skills that can be incorporated into VET programs through hands-on workshops.

In addition to skill-building, VET programs can enhance the resilience of the tourism industry by equipping students to navigate changes and potential crises. By fostering adaptability and a proactive mindset, VET helps individuals contribute to a long-term culture of resilience in the sector.

apprenticeships, which allow students to gain practical experience and apply their skills in real-world settings. During these apprenticeships, students can work alongside established tourism professionals, gaining valuable mentorship and insights.

VET also offers lifelong learning opportunities (OECD, n.d.), addressing the need for upskilling and reskilling as the tourism sector evolves. This ensures professionals stay informed about emerging trends, such as agrotourism, sustainable practices, and crisis management. For example, the COVID-19 pandemic underscored the importance of adaptability and preparedness in the tourism industry.

Despite these benefits, VET faces challenges, including its perceived attractiveness. Tailoring VET programs to industry needs and providing clear career pathways can enhance their appeal. Programs that increase employability and reduce the risk of unemployment (OECD, 2023) can change perceptions about VET, encouraging more individuals to pursue this educational route.

At the EU level, several initiatives aim to strengthen VET for the tourism sector. For example, the Pact for Skills in Tourism Industry—a flagship initiative of the European Commission—unites over 60 members from businesses, organizations, and local authorities to address skills needs, support post-COVID recovery, and promote higher qualifications in the tourism workforce. The initiative aims to upskill and reskill 60% of the workforce annually by 2030.

One key advantage of VET is its inclusion of mandatory

Other notable projects include Tour-X (CoVE), which



strengthens training providers' ability to adapt to changing needs; PacTS4ALL, which coordinates upskilling and reskilling efforts under the EU's Pact for Skills for Tourism; TOURing, which focuses on green and digital upskilling for a sustainable tourism future; and TourEdu4All, which promotes inclusive VET for vulnerable groups in Europe and Sub-Saharan Africa.

In conclusion, the tourism industry's demand for skilled professionals highlights the importance of VET in preparing a qualified, adaptable workforce. By addressing logistical and perception challenges, VET can contribute to building a resilient, sustainable tourism sector ready to meet the demands of a rapidly changing world.

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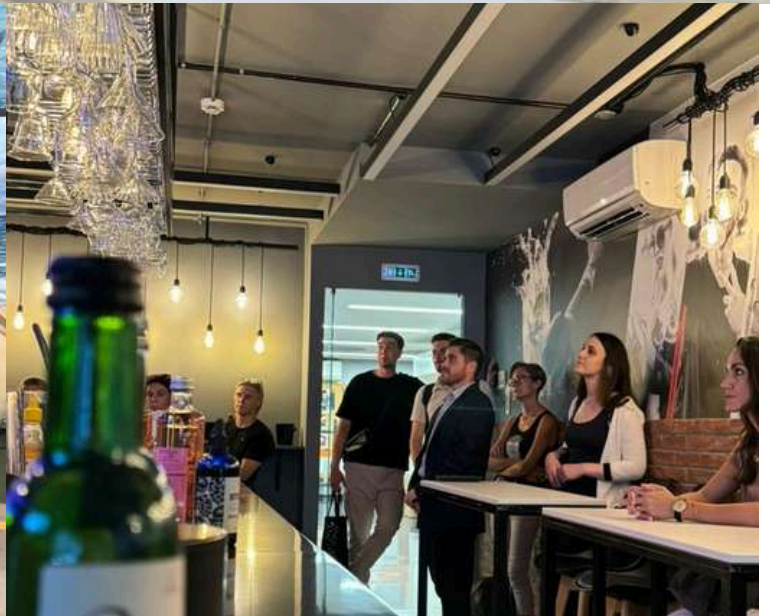
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TOURISM



TRANSFORMING FOOD AID

The Role of Vocational Education and Training in Building Sustainable Solutions

Written by: **Daria Żebrowska** | The Polish Farm Advisory | education@farm-advisory.eu

Food insecurity in Europe has risen significantly, affecting vulnerable populations in both urban and rural areas. While food aid programs provide critical support, they often face challenges such as resource limitations, inefficiency, and environmental impact. In response, integrating sustainability into food aid delivery has become a priority, aligning with the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

Vocational Education and Training (VET) offers a strategic solution by equipping food aid program staff and volunteers with the skills necessary to address these challenges. Environmentally sustainable food aid programs focus on minimizing waste, incorporating green skills, and ensuring the social inclusion of marginalized groups. This paper explores the need for sustainable VET initiatives, highlighting their potential to transform food aid delivery across Europe.

Food Insecurity and the Need for Sustainable Solutions

Food insecurity in Europe has worsened in recent years due to economic downturns and the COVID-19 pandemic. Studies indicate that food insecurity in some regions

increased by over 50% during the pandemic, with food banks reporting unprecedented demand (FEBA, 2020). Traditional food aid programs often lack a sustainability focus, leading to inefficiencies and negative environmental impacts, such as increased food waste and reliance on non-recyclable packaging (Loopstra et al., 2016).

Sustainability in food aid programs is essential to address these issues. By adopting environmentally friendly practices such as waste reduction, sustainable sourcing, and green logistics, food aid programs can improve their efficiency and environmental footprint. This approach aligns with the European Green Deal's objectives of reducing emissions and promoting sustainable consumption patterns (European Commission, 2019).

VET as a Catalyst for Sustainable Food Aid

Vocational Education and Training has emerged as a critical tool for building the capacity of food aid programs. VET initiatives tailored to food aid delivery focus on enhancing skills in nutrition, green practices, and program management. These programs provide participants with practical knowledge and tools, empowering them to deliver high-quality, sustainable food aid (FAO, 2021).

SUSTAINABILITY

Furthermore, VET programs foster social inclusion by engaging diverse groups, including unemployed individuals, migrants, and young people. By equipping these groups with employable skills, VET contributes to social equity while addressing labor shortages in food aid programs.

Methodology

Implementing sustainable food aid programs requires a multifaceted approach to VET. First, comprehensive needs assessments must identify the specific challenges and skill gaps faced by food aid staff and volunteers. These assessments should incorporate feedback from diverse stakeholders, including food banks, community organizations, and policymakers.

The next step involves designing a curriculum that integrates green practices with core competencies in food aid delivery. Modules on waste management, sustainable sourcing, and cultural sensitivity are critical for ensuring effective and inclusive service delivery. Additionally, interactive learning platforms, such as e-learning modules and simulation exercises, can enhance accessibility and engagement.

Policy alignment is essential to ensure the success of VET initiatives. Collaborating with national and regional governments can help secure funding and promote the integration of sustainable food aid practices into broader policy frameworks.

Results

The integration of VET into sustainable food aid programs yields tangible benefits. Research indicates that participants who complete VET programs demonstrate improved competencies in waste reduction, nutritional planning, and logistics management. For example, training programs that incorporate real-world scenarios and hands-on activities help staff and volunteers develop practical skills that enhance program efficiency.

In addition to improving operational capacity, VET initiatives foster a culture of sustainability within food aid organizations. Participants report greater awareness of environmental issues and a commitment to adopting green practices in their work. These changes contribute to the long-term sustainability of food aid programs, aligning them with the SDGs and the European Green Deal.



Challenges and Opportunities

Despite its potential, integrating VET into food aid programs faces challenges, including resource constraints and resistance to change. Small-scale organizations often lack the funding and infrastructure to implement comprehensive training programs. Addressing these challenges requires targeted policy interventions and partnerships with private sector stakeholders.

On the other hand, the opportunities presented by VET are immense. By equipping staff and volunteers with green skills, VET can transform food aid delivery, making it more efficient, inclusive, and environmentally sustainable. Moreover, the adoption of innovative technologies, such as digital platforms for training and communication, can further enhance the impact of VET programs.

Policy Implications

Policymakers play a crucial role in supporting VET for sustainable food aid. Financial incentives, such as grants and subsidies, can help organizations overcome resource barriers. Additionally, integrating sustainable food aid into national and regional development strategies can promote long-term adoption of green practices.

Environmentally sustainable food aid programs are essential for addressing the twin challenges of food insecurity and environmental degradation. Integrating VET into food aid delivery, Europe will be able to build the capacity of organizations to deliver high-quality, sustainable services while fostering social inclusion and environmental stewardship.

The success of these initiatives depends on collaboration among policymakers, educators, and food aid organizations. By prioritizing VET and aligning it with sustainability goals, Europe can lead the way in creating a more equitable and sustainable food system.

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EMPOWERING YOUTH THROUGH VOCATIONAL EDUCATION

Transforming Lives, Shaping Futures, and Building Communities

Written by: **Sara Sechi** | Don Bosco International | dbi@sdb.org

Photo provided by: **DBI, ©Misiones Salesianas**

Vocational education and training (VET) remains one of the most effective tools for promoting integral human development, preventing youth poverty, social marginalization, and exploitation, shaping active and honest citizens, and providing effective and holistic responses to current global socio-economic challenges.

With an experience of more than 170 years, the Salesians of Don Bosco continue to empower young people, especially those in need, through inclusive and quality education and training in 137 countries, with 1,845 technical schools and vocational training centers addressing more than 1,215,000 direct beneficiaries worldwide. The coordination of Salesian VET centers in the different regions is held by specific organizations, namely DB Tech Europe, DB Tech Africa, DB Tech ASEAN, DB Tech India, and DB Tech America.

Motivated by a desire to ensure young people's dignity and future, our founder, Giovanni Bosco, designed an educative proposal known as the "Preventive System," in which VET promotes youth human and professional formation, responding to the natural abilities, needs, and aspirations

of young people seeking to enter the job market and build a new life.

To achieve these goals, Don Bosco's vocational training centers offer varied proposals: training courses tailored to the needs of companies and private sector actors, career guidance and Job Service Offices (JSO), and updated upskilling and reskilling of learners, educators, and staff. The dignity of the human person is placed at the center of the formation, which becomes flexible and targeted, thus able to mitigate or eliminate the causes of the learner's vulnerability.

How? There is no social integration without a community approach and constructive dialogue with different stakeholders, including public authorities, civil society actors, and the private sector. Salesian VET centers contribute to enhancing social justice through a community-based approach: an initial assessment of the territory to understand the needs of young people and their society; the establishment of the center in predominantly vulnerable or working-class areas; close accompaniment of all learners according to specific factors



of discrimination and exclusion; a model of social formation and lifelong learning for all those involved; quality educational support while maintaining regular involvement with companies in order to guarantee fairness and inclusion of young people in the labor market; and internationalization through mobility schemes.

In VET centers that offer special programs for vulnerable groups, often former beneficiaries become educators and trainers. This good practice assures a deeper understanding and better communication with youth in need. The interpersonal relationships help learners to develop a solid value-based foundation for life, giving them models of inspiration to become future leaders for their communities.

If we consider the European dimension, we often look for disaggregated responses to the current multiple crises and challenges such as demographic decline, rapid technological development and new market demands, shortage of skilled professionals, increase in poverty, management of irregular migration, lack of citizens' trust in institutions, mental health issues, and loneliness among young people.

Don Bosco's educational system proves that we can address these challenges in a holistic, inclusive,

sustainable and community-based manner. Since vocational training is of crucial importance for every person (whether young or adult, employed or unemployed) and for the most vulnerable groups in society (including migrants and refugees, minorities, and people with different skill levels), VET is key for the future of Europe, ensuring its competitiveness without compromising its values and fundamental rights.

The cause of the discomfort of young people is most of all the loss of hope in the future, where they will be able to achieve their projects and be fully satisfied thanks to the acquired resources, tools, and skills to face personal and professional demands.

Global VET networks based on respect for human rights, such as the Salesian one, would allow a new approach to the migration phenomenon through the development of legal and safe pathways and long-lasting partnerships with third countries, ensuring fair integration and successful training proposals for people on the move. This approach would contribute to the stabilization of our societies by preventing the exploitation and trafficking of people, reducing youth unemployment, and combining the training of professionals with the new socio-economic needs.

A way of giving concrete meaning to the motto "Investing in skills means investing in people," which characterized the European Year of Skills (2023-2024), would be to rethink vocational training as an engine of human and social development, as an intelligent response to socio-economic issues that also have deeper personal implications.



FROM THE STADIUM TO EMPLOYMENT

When Sport Becomes a Gateway to Inclusion and Employment

Written by: **Emilie Haquet & Marie Cécile Michel** | 135bpm | emilie.haquet@135bmp.org

Photo Provided by: **Emilie Haquet**



How can we unlock the potential of young job seekers, school dropouts, NEETs, and vocational students while addressing the needs of businesses and training organizations? With the concept From the Stadium to Employment in Schools, France Travail, the Ligue Hauts-de-France d'Athlétisme, and 135 BPM offer an innovative and inclusive method: harnessing the power of sport to transform lives and create new opportunities.

A Concept That Breaks Down Barriers

The concept From the Stadium to Employment was created by France Travail and the Ligue Hauts-de-France d'Athlétisme, led by its president Philippe Lamblin—an ambassador for the Les Entreprises s'engagent initiative—and adapted by 135 BPM for young people with these two partners.

Since 2019, over 1,000 From the Stadium to Employment

events have been held across France. In 2024 alone, more than 500 events will take place before the end of the year. The results are remarkable: more than 60% of job seekers participating in these initiatives have secured employment or training opportunities.

This approach aims to:

- Facilitate the return to training or access to local employment.
- Break the ice by helping participants overcome the stress of job interviews.
- Highlight soft and hard skills—essential qualities in today's job market.
- Create a collective dynamic by involving educators, recruiters, and young dropouts.

A New Way of Recruiting

This unique sports job-dating day combines sport and

recruitment to help young people aged 16 to 25 find work or training while promoting mobility in Hauts-de-France. It offers an excellent opportunity to explore innovative ways of connecting recruiters and candidates in a friendly and stimulating environment.

A From the Stadium to Employment Day: Sport, Friendliness, and Opportunities

A typical From the Stadium to Employment day follows a structured program, blending sports activities and professional networking in a welcoming, inclusive setting. A key feature is anonymity: recruiters and participants remain unidentified until the afternoon.

The morning begins with a warm welcome, including the distribution of bibs, refreshments, and a group warm-up session to help everyone feel at ease. Participants then engage in team-based sports workshops designed to showcase their interpersonal skills, such as teamwork, adherence to instructions, and adaptability. Anonymity between recruiters and potential recruits is preserved during these activities to encourage objective and equitable evaluations based on soft skills.

After a convivial group lunch, the afternoon transitions to the recruitment phase. Recruiters reveal their identities and conduct informal interviews in a relaxed setting, allowing participants to learn about the organizations present and explore the available roles and training opportunities. This unique format breaks down traditional recruitment barriers by removing CV requirements and fostering direct connections between young people and companies while showcasing individual potential and soft skills.



This well-structured, engaging format makes From the Stadium to Employment an effective and dynamic event, placing sport at the heart of inclusion and employability efforts.

A Network of Committed Partners

From the Stadium to Employment is a nationwide initiative supported by numerous national sports federations—12 to date—including the French Athletics Federation, French Basketball Federation, French Badminton Federation, and French Rugby Federation.

Major financial backing comes from the Ministry of Labor and Employment, the Ministry of Sports and Youth, the French National Sports Agency (ANS), and the Les Entreprises s'engagent network, along with regional authorities like Île-de-France, which funds over 100 events.

This collective effort extends beyond sport to address challenges in education, employment, and social inclusion. By partnering with France Travail, the 7,000 clubs in the Les Clubs Sportifs Engagés network contribute to a mission that transcends athletic boundaries. 135 BPM is working to expand this concept to a new audience: young people in education or seeking employment.

A Model for the Future

Building on its promising early successes, the From the Stadium to Employment in Schools initiative continues to grow. In 2025, several events are already planned, including:

- An event focused on sports careers at CREPS Hauts-de-France.
- A session for young people in reintegration programs at the EPIDE center in Cambrai.
- A second edition at Lycée Professionnel Henri Senez (VET High School) in Hénin-Beaumont.
- New projects in vocational high schools in Aubry, Arras, Saint-Pol-sur-Ternoise, and Bapaume.
- A session at the 135 BPM VET program in Amiens.
-

These initiatives aim to broaden the concept's reach across various audiences and professional sectors, enhancing its impact on employability and inclusion.

A Universal and Adaptable Experience

The From the Stadium to Employment model is universal. By combining anonymity, sports activities, and informal networking, it creates an environment where young people can fully showcase their potential. This format is particularly suited to addressing the challenges of regions facing high dropout or unemployment rates.

For Marie-Cécile Michel, Project Manager for Inclusion at 135 BPM, the goal is clear: "1 person, 1 solution—this is the ambition driving 135 BPM as it rolls out the From the Stadium to Employment in Schools process nationally and internationally."

Join the Movement!

In partnership with institutional, educational, and private-sector stakeholders, 135 BPM is paving the way for national and international collaborations. This concept has the potential to become a global benchmark for education, employment, and social inclusion.

If you have any questions, or wish to join the movement and organize your own From the Stadium to the Employment event, reach out to our International Relations Manager, Emilie Haquet : emilie.haquet@135bpm.org.



THE IMPACT OF THE TRAINING VOUCHER PROGRAMME

Addressing Youth Unemployment And Supporting NEETs Through Skills Development, Employability Enhancement, And Lifelong Learning Initiatives.

Written by: **Zoi Moza** | Institute of Entrepreneurship Development | zmoza@ied.eu



The Training Voucher Program in Greece is designed to provide financial support to individuals who wish to participate in training courses to gain new skills and qualifications that are in demand in the labor market. The program was first launched in 2016 as part of the country's efforts to address high youth unemployment and NEET rates. It was established with funding from the European Union, through the European Social Fund, and is implemented by the Greek Manpower Employment Organization (OAED). The duration of the training courses varies depending on the course and provider but typically ranges from a few weeks to several months. The training courses are provided by a range of certified institutions, including vocational training centers, language schools, and other educational institutions.

Since its launch, the program has undergone several modifications and adjustments to improve its effectiveness

and meet the needs of participants. For example, in 2018, it was expanded to cover a wider range of training courses and to provide additional support to individuals with disabilities or other special needs.

As of 2021, the Training Voucher Program has become a key part of the Greek government's efforts to promote lifelong learning and upskilling among the workforce. This program remains ongoing and continues to significantly contribute to the professional development of Greek employees. It is expected to continue in the coming years, subject to funding and other resources. While the exact timeframe may vary, the program is designed to be ongoing and to support individuals aiming to improve their skills and qualifications through certified training courses.

The online survey for evaluating the Training Voucher Programme in Greece comprised six sections. It began with an introduction explaining the survey's purpose and instructions, followed by a section gathering demographic data such as age, gender, education level, and employment status. The main body of the survey used Likert-scale statements to evaluate criteria like relevance, coherence, effectiveness, efficiency, sustainability, and impact, supplemented by open-ended questions for detailed feedback. Participants rated their overall satisfaction with the programme and provided personal experiences and suggestions for improvement. The survey concluded with an option for participants to leave contact information for future communication regarding the programme's outcomes.

In terms of data collection, the survey targeted a nationwide sample of men and women who had benefited from the programme. Conducted online over approximately

Action	Description	Period	Level	Budget	Target group	Total beneficiaries	No of NEETs
EGF/2014/001 EL/NUTRIART ¹	Subsidised training of 'NUTRIART' ex-employees' training voucher	2014-2016	Local EL12 EL30	€10,160,000	NEETs 15-29	508	505
EGF/2014/013 – GR Odyssefs Fokas ²	Subsidised training of 'Odyssefs Fokas' ex-employees' training voucher	2014-2017	Local EL12 EL14 EL30	€10,740,000	NEETs 15-29	1,100	500
EGF/2015/011GR/Supermarket Larissa ³	Subsidised training of 'Supermarket Larissa' ex-employees' training voucher	2017	Local EL12 EL14	€10,780,000	NEETs 15-29	1,100	543
EGF/2014/009 – GR Sprider Stores ⁴	Subsidised training of 'Sprider Stores A.E.' ex-employees' training voucher	2014-2016	Local EL12 EL30	€12,151,500	NEETs 15-29	1,311	550
9.45559/24/07/2019 ⁵	Consultancy support, training, certification and promotion in employment of unemployed young people aged 25-29 in the sector of Information and Communication Technologies	2019-2022	National	€9,038,701	NEETs 25-29	1,580	1,580
9.3849/26-06-2019 ⁶	Promoting the employment of unemployed young people aged 25 to 29 years old graduates in science, technology and	2019-2022	National	€17,537,600	NEETs 25-29	3,000	3,000

Table 1 presents some individual sub-actions of the training voucher programme that target, among other beneficiaries, NEETs.

two months (mid-March to early May 2023), it was disseminated through various channels, including local Vocational Education and Training (VET) institutions, the Institute of Entrepreneurship Development's online platforms, and social media groups discussing current voucher programs. This approach ensured a diverse and comprehensive sample, yielding 146 responses. The survey's objective was to collect beneficiary experiences and perceptions to evaluate the program's effectiveness from the perspective of those it aimed to support.

The online survey results for the Training Voucher Program revealed mixed feedback from beneficiaries.

- **Relevance:** Opinions were divided, with some finding the program useful while others felt the courses lacked specificity and alignment with individual needs.
- **Coherence:** Praised for accommodating work obligations, though concerns were raised about the mismatch with participants' educational backgrounds.

- **Effectiveness:** Highlighted by nearly half of respondents, noting benefits in skill development and continuous learning, though some were not fully satisfied.
- **Efficiency:** Received strong approval, attributed to skilled trainers and an easy application process.
- **Sustainability:** Received moderate ratings, suggesting room for improvement.
- **Impact:** Recognized for supporting professional growth and employment transitions, though gaps remained in aligning training with career goals.

Beneficiaries recommended more tailored, specialized offerings to enhance relevance and satisfaction.

The training voucher initiative

The Training Voucher Program has notable strengths and weaknesses. While it offers valuable opportunities for many participants, addressing the issues raised by

beneficiaries is essential to ensure it continues to be an effective tool for skill development and career advancement.

Proposed improvements include more targeted and modern educational content, quicker payment and simpler participation procedures, practical rather than theoretical training, and the inclusion of internships or job opportunities. Other recommendations focus on better

qualified instructors, more diverse specializations, faster audits for payments, and greater transparency. Participants also emphasized the need for improved certification processes, expanded access to VET providers, and support in finding jobs post-training.

The program holds significant potential for NEETs, offering training in skills such as digital literacy, teamwork, and problem-solving, while providing a flexible learning format

Evaluation Criterion	Strongly Agree/Agree (%)	Neutral (%)	Disagree/Strongly Disagree (%)	Average Score (out of 5)
<i>Relevance</i>	46.6%	28.5%	24.9%	3.22
Interests Alignment	52,7%	29,5%	17,8%	3,40
Personal Growth	50,0%	26,7%	23,3%	3,30
Career Enhancement	37,0%	29,5%	33,6%	2,97
<i>Coherence</i>	47.9%	25.6%	26.5%	3.23
Education Correspondence	34,9%	28,1%	37,0%	2,95
Program Synergy	43,8%	30,1%	26,0%	3,13
Non-conflict	65,1%	18,5%	16,4%	3,61
<i>Effectiveness</i>	50.5%	26.0%	23.5%	3.28
Skill Acquisition	56,2%	21,9%	21,9%	3,42
Expectation Fulfillment	54,8%	24,0%	21,2%	3,35
Development Contribution	40,4%	32,2%	27,4%	3,06
<i>Efficiency</i>	65.8%	17.6%	16.7%	3.66
Adequate Resources	56,8%	21,2%	21,9%	3,42
User-friendliness	76,7%	12,3%	11,0%	3,92
Cost-effective	63,7%	19,2%	17,1%	3,62
<i>Sustainability</i>	49.1%	24.4%	26.5%	3.23
Future Usefulness	58,2%	20,5%	21,2%	3,45
Lasting Benefits	42,5%	26,7%	30,8%	3,06
Goal Achievement	46,6%	26,0%	27,4%	3,16
<i>Impact</i>	42.7%	27.2%	30.1%	3.09
Career Improvement	42,5%	25,3%	32,2%	3,07
Personal Growth	43,2%	30,1%	26,7%	3,16
Employment Transition	42,5%	26,0%	31,5%	3,04
<i>Overall satisfaction</i>	54.8%	23.3%	21.9%	3.42

Table 2: Results of the online survey for the evaluation of the Training Voucher Initiative

that accommodates personal and social barriers. It also offers practical experience through projects and case studies, building confidence and employability. Recognized certifications further enhance NEETs' profiles in a competitive job market.

The Training Voucher Program is a valuable initiative addressing youth unemployment and supporting NEETs. By fostering skill development, enhancing employability,

and promoting lifelong learning, it has made a meaningful contribution to workforce development in Greece. However, its long-term success depends on addressing identified weaknesses and ensuring it remains relevant, accessible, and impactful.

With targeted improvements, the program can serve as a model for similar initiatives across Europe, contributing to sustainable development and inclusive growth.

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BUILDING A MORE INCLUSIVE EUROPE

Empowering educators to bridge the gap between exclusion and inclusion, fostering integration, and creating equitable opportunities for all learners

Written by: **Kamila Wodka** | IDEA | youth@education-agency.eu

Modern Europe is confronted with the imperative of integrating a variety of social groups, particularly those who are marginalized, such as migrants, individuals with disabilities, the long-term unemployed, and elderly persons at risk of social isolation. The phenomenon of social exclusion affects not only individuals but also entire communities, undermining social cohesion, economic stability, and cultural advancement. In tackling these issues, educators hold a pivotal position, as their contributions can greatly facilitate the integration process. However, for educators to effectively carry out this important task, they must be equipped with the requisite skills, tools, and knowledge (An Inclusive Society for Young People: Concepts, Current Challenges, Priorities and Workable Models for Youth Policy in the Flemish Community and in Europe, n.d.). Training focused on engaging with excluded populations is crucial for understanding the unique needs of these groups, challenging stereotypes, and cultivating environments that

promote social inclusion. In the absence of such preparation, the challenges of marginalization may become more entrenched rather than alleviated.

This article examines the significance of investing in the professional development of educators as a means to foster a more inclusive Europe, emphasizing the advantages this investment offers to marginalized individuals and society at large. Additionally, we will present exemplary practices and solutions that can inspire educational and social institutions.

From Policy to Effective Implementation of Inclusiveness and Diversity

As Europe increasingly becomes home to diverse nationalities from around the globe, it is essential for vocational education and training (VET) institutions to grasp the fundamental aspects of inclusion and integration that ensure educational environments are safe and



respectful for all learners. Inclusive education transcends mere procedural elements, such as teacher training. It necessitates a transformation in core values and beliefs, alongside specific methodologies, positions, and solutions for effective implementation.

Students from refugee or migrant backgrounds often encounter challenges in adapting to new educational settings. Education and training professionals can greatly benefit from guidance and the exchange of best practices to effectively meet the learning needs of students in increasingly diverse and multilingual classrooms (Bernad-Cavero et al., 2018). In November 2020, the European Commission adopted an Action Plan on Integration and Inclusion for 2021-2027, which advocates for inclusion through a comprehensive societal approach that engages migrant and local communities, employers, civil society, and all levels of government. This Action Plan emphasizes the necessity of providing targeted support throughout all phases of integration.

The Importance of Educators in Fostering Inclusion

Educators hold a distinctive role in bridging the gap between exclusion and inclusion. In various settings, such as traditional classrooms, vocational training facilities, or community workshops, their engagement with individuals frequently influences access to opportunities. By providing educators with appropriate resources and knowledge, they can identify the specific needs of marginalized populations. Acknowledging cultural, economic, and psychological

obstacles enables educators to customize their approaches to meet individual needs.

Professional development also equips educators to recognize and confront discriminatory behaviors within their surroundings. Educators cultivate a sense of belonging as they help create inclusive educational environments that encourage respect, understanding, and collaboration, thereby empowering marginalized individuals to succeed. Inclusive education, where everyone feels accepted and supported, is the foundation for building a more equitable society. Educators with the appropriate skills can design curricula and conduct activities that engage all social groups, regardless of their background or life circumstances (Carr & Hartnett, 1996).

Europe's increasing diversity necessitates that educators develop new skills, such as working in multicultural environments and utilizing technology for remote education. Training helps them adapt to these changing conditions (Mazurkiewicz & Fischer, 2021).

Through Practice to Effectiveness

Several initiatives across Europe showcase how investment in educator development can foster inclusion. One of these is the TRANSFORM project, which promotes transformative education for inclusion and social integration. Implemented under the Erasmus+ vocational education and training program by six partners from European countries (Poland, Italy, Spain, Portugal, Greece, and Ireland), its primary aim is to assist educational institutions in evolving into inclusive environments by creating innovative pedagogical resources and methodologies for teaching and learning.



The TRANSFORM project aligns with the Action Plan on Integration and Inclusion for 2021-2027, facilitating integration and inclusion. Its transformative education approach encompasses critical pedagogy (intellectual), empathy and consciousness-raising (emotional), and action/practice (physical) (Sipos et al., 2008). Currently, the six partners are conducting storytelling workshops as part of the Storytelling for Change Campaign, providing learners with a secure environment to share their experiences and perspectives regarding integration within VET structures.

The pedagogical framework developed under the TRANSFORM project includes an innovative Integration Competence Framework for VET Educators and a Methodological Guide for Transformative Education in Europe. These tools aim to enhance the competencies of at least 180 VET professionals, fostering inclusive practices across education sectors.

In these times characterized by increasing diversity and pressing issues of social exclusion, the responsibility of

educators in fostering inclusive environments cannot be overstated. Equipping educators with the necessary skills, tools, and methodologies to address the needs of marginalized groups is paramount for promoting societal cohesion and equality.

Initiatives like the TRANSFORM project demonstrate how targeted training and innovative pedagogical approaches can transform VET institutions into inclusive spaces that celebrate diversity, understanding, and integration. Embracing transformative education is a critical step towards achieving an equitable society in Europe, where every individual, regardless of background, feels valued and empowered. Investing in educator development is not only a strategy to address marginalization but also a broader effort to build sustainable, inclusive communities that thrive on mutual respect and collaboration. The insights gained from successful initiatives like the TRANSFORM project provide a framework for educators, policymakers, and institutions to advance the principles of inclusion and diversity across the continent.





"INCLUSIVE EDUCATION, WHERE EVERYONE FEELS ACCEPTED AND SUPPORTED, IS THE FOUNDATION FOR BUILDING A MORE EQUITABLE SOCIETY."

Graphic Provided by: Kamila Wodka

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REDEFINING INCLUSIVE EDUCATION FOR EUROPE'S EDUCATORS

Empowering VET and second-level educators with innovative tools, training, and strategies to foster inclusion for all learners

Written by: **Sinead Matson** | Maynooth University | sinead.matson@mu.ie

The TUTOR project is a three-year Erasmus+ funded research project examining inclusive education in second-level and Vocational Education and Training (VET). The TUTOR team is comprised of ten partners in teacher education and civil society across Ireland, Austria, Turkey, Greece, and at the EU level. Traditionally, inclusive education has been equated with Special Education Needs (SEN). However, TUTOR takes a broader view of holistic, inclusive education as the process of addressing and responding to the diverse needs of learners in the contemporary classroom. It defines inclusive education as:

“Inclusive education is a comprehensive approach that seeks to create a learning environment where all individuals, regardless of their external characteristics, gender identities, sexual orientation, origins, socioeconomic status, or cultural background, can thrive together.” (TUTOR, 2023, p. 49)

With this in mind, the TUTOR project focuses on three target groups while applying an intersectional lens: migrant and ethnic minority groups, LGBTQI+, and socio-economic disadvantage.

The research team used a five-step process to develop a Continuous Professional Development (CPD) course for VET and second-level educators in inclusive education:

- Step one involved gathering research, policy, and best practices in each country and at the EU level. This information was compiled and analyzed, establishing a picture of the desired state of affairs.
- Step two included distributing an anonymous survey to second-level schools and VET centers across the participating countries and the EU.
- Steps three and four saw over 800 participants engage in focus groups and in-depth interviews, respectively, with educators, leadership, and advocates from several advocacy agencies. The survey, focus groups, and interviews were analyzed to determine the existing state of affairs in practice.
- The final step involved analyzing the gaps between the existing and desired states, resulting in a needs analysis report that informed the development of the CPD program.

The needs analysis report highlighted that despite robust policies at EU and national levels, there is a gap between policy and practical implementation. Challenges noted included teacher shortages, housing costs, and underrepresentation of diversity in the teaching profession. Educators and leadership expressed a need for systemic changes, including improved initial teacher education and CPD training, to address the diverse needs of students.

Participants emphasized the importance of specific terminology (language), skills, and tools. The curriculum was discussed as both a barrier and a potential enabler of inclusive education. Suggestions included revising curriculum content, textbooks, and visuals to better reflect diversity and respect all students' gender identities, cultural, ethnic, and socio-economic backgrounds, abilities, and life experiences. Additionally, the physical environment was identified as a significant factor, capable of sending messages of belonging or reinforcing hierarchies that prioritize certain groups.

The TUTOR Project Inclusive Learning Program has been tailored to stakeholder feedback and the gaps identified through the research process. It comprises:

- An introductory course,
- A specialism course on migrant and ethnic minorities,
- A specialism course on LGBTQI+, and
- A specialism course on socio-economic disadvantage.

This program equips educators with the knowledge, tools, and skills needed to support diverse students. It emphasizes cultural competency, diversity in education, and practical, real-life examples, including case studies and interactive resources.

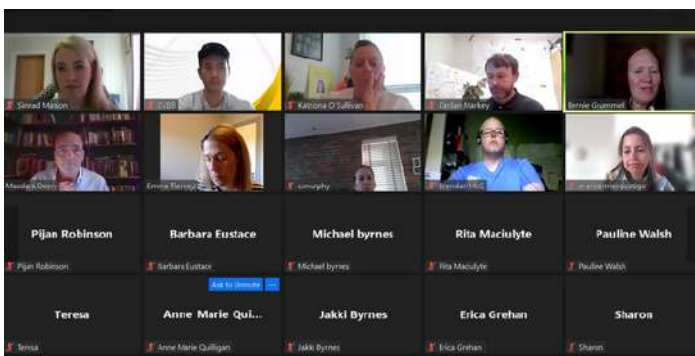
Participants in the program's inaugural cohort will also



have the opportunity to travel to Austria, Greece, Ireland, or Turkey to reflect on their learning in a different cultural context.

The TUTOR project aims to transform inclusive education in educator training and practice across Europe by enhancing educator competence, adopting more inclusive strategies, and promoting sustainable professional development. These efforts will pave the way for more inclusive educational experiences and environments for all learners across Europe.

For more information about the TUTOR project and how to get involved, visit www.tutor-project.eu.



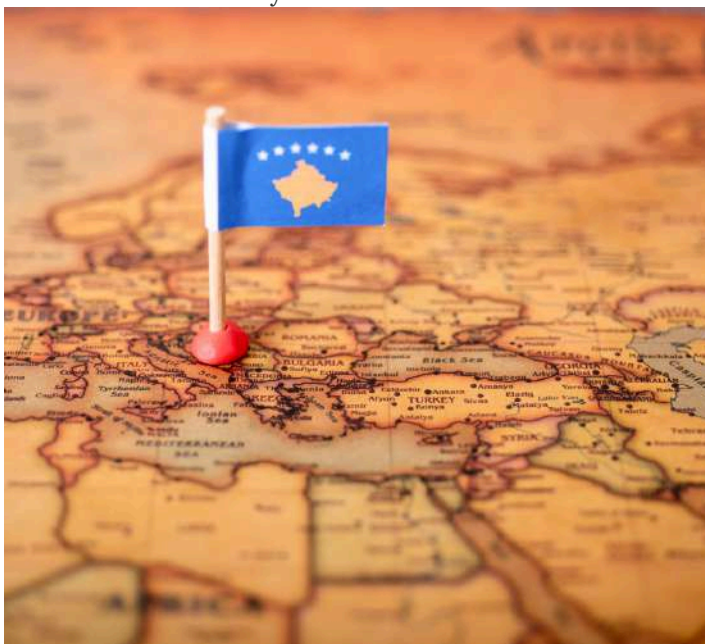


SHAPING KOSOVO'S FUTURE

The Role and Challenges of Vocational Education and Training in Economic Development

Written by: **Rrezart Dema** | Universum International College | rrezartdema@universum-ks.org

Photos Provided by: **Rrezart Dema**



In the Republic of Kosovo, Vocational Education and Training (VET) is expected to play a pivotal role in fostering economic development and societal progress. With a focus on practical skills and hands-on experience, VET equips individuals with the expertise needed to meet the demands of a rapidly evolving job market. In a region striving for sustainable growth, VET acts as a catalyst for innovation, providing a direct pathway for students to enter the workforce and contribute meaningfully to the nation's development.

Given the importance of human capital in driving economic growth, government intervention to resolve the mismatch between labor supply and demand is critical. The high percentage of teenage unemployment, which translates into wasted human resources, has significant long-term economic consequences because it can impede the economy's recovery

Many nations have prioritized Vocational Education and Training in their educational policy to alleviate the unemployment crisis. VET education aims to prepare students for a career or specialized occupation, and it is linked to the labor productivity and competitiveness of a nation (Aliu et al., 2019).

Moreover, VET aligns with the unique needs of Kosovo's economy, addressing skill shortages and enhancing the competitiveness of local industries. By promoting a skilled workforce, VET not only empowers individuals with employability but also fuels economic resilience and reduces unemployment. In essence, investing in VET education is an investment in Kosovo's future, laying the foundation for a skilled, adaptable workforce capable of navigating the challenges of the 21st century.

Methodology

This paper used the document review technique for its research purposes. It utilized multiple relevant sources from reputable governmental and non-governmental organizations to better understand the current Vocational Education and Training situation in the context of the Republic of Kosovo. In addition, various analyses and reports on the VET context in Kosovo from several European and American agencies were also included. These sources have been instrumental in shaping this paper as they provide both empirical data and analytical perspectives, which enhance the understanding of the VET situation in Kosovo.

Vocational Education and Training Development and Alignment Efforts

Vocational Training Development - The vocational education and training system in Kosovo should be understood in light of the nation's recent historical development, which has given rise to economic, social, and educational challenges. Notably, ongoing political uncertainty has contributed to persistently high levels of unemployment, low participation of women in the labor market, limited economic growth, a small private sector, and restricted foreign investment. Kosovo relies heavily on remittances from its diaspora and on donor activity and support to sustain its economy ("Quality Assurance in Vocational Education," 2020).



Aware of the potential of VET education to contribute towards economic growth and the development of the country, the Ministry of Education, Science, and Technology (MEST) in Kosovo has continuously initiated reforms in VET education with the aim of preparing the future workforce with a set of skills that align with the needs of the labor market. In recent years, the VET system has undergone many reforms concerning curriculum revisions, cooperation with industry, teacher preparation, and others. Nevertheless, the VET system in Kosovo fails to meet the needs of the current market economy, which ultimately affects students' chances for employment (Aliu et al., 2019).

Vocational Education and Training in Kosovo is regulated by Law No. 04/L-138 for Vocational Education and Training. Additionally, the VET system regulation is outlined in numerous laws and administrative instructions, which demonstrate the broad connection between VET and several institutional mechanisms involving actors such as municipalities, educational institutions, the Employment Agency of Kosovo, and several other stakeholders ("Linking VET Institutions to Businesses in Kosovo," 2019). It must be noted that this interplay between all these actors, both in a legal and practical context, demonstrates the inevitable need for well-functioning cooperation.



There have been numerous governmental programs and strategies that support the development of Vocational Education and Training. In this regard, a national program for the 2017-2021 period was adopted with the aim of impacting the rule of law, economic development and employment, Euro-Atlantic integration, and departmental development. In its Economic Reform Programme (ERP) 2021-2023, the government of the Republic of Kosovo aimed to improve education and training and its link with the labor market. Furthermore, there have been other national strategies supporting education and training, including: the National Development Strategy 2030, the National Programme for the Implementation of the Stabilisation and Association Agreement, Kosovo's Education Strategic Plan (KESP) 2017-2021, the forthcoming KESP 2022-26, and others ("National Qualifications Framework," 2023). While such efforts have been limited by governmental instability, they clearly indicate the willingness of the institutions to work on the topic of VET education.

Alignment with the Labor Market Needs

There have been continuous efforts to ensure greater alignment between the skills of youth and labor market needs. In the context of the Republic of Kosovo, such efforts have come from a variety of sources attempting to understand the current needs for alignment with the labor market. The Kosovo VET Barometer Report 2021-2022

concluded that there is a pressing need for schools to include more digital skills, improve their infrastructure, and ensure greater cooperation with industry (Dula, 2022).

Other studies confirm a similar set of issues regarding efforts to align the knowledge and skills of students with the needs of the labor market. Many young job-seekers lack the necessary skills because the VET system does not have enough cooperation with industry. VET students, therefore, do not gain enough practical experience. Additionally, VET schools face issues with their current curricula, which cannot enhance VET teaching or provide students with the skills needed by companies. The situation is exacerbated by the lack of skills among teachers (Horn & Rizvanolli, 2023).

Nevertheless, it must be noted that there are efforts from international actors such as the European Union and the United States to help the government of Kosovo in this regard. For example, the EU-co-funded ALLED2 project aims to reduce poverty "through increased labor market participation and improved employability for the population in Kosovo" by ensuring a greater link between education, training, and labor market needs ("Aligning Education and Training," 2023). Youth development and skills have also been part of USAID efforts to better meet the demands of the labor market ("Summit of Vocational Education," 2023).



Again, there is a pressing need to align the current skills of youth with the ever-increasing needs of the contemporary labor market. While VET education in Kosovo lags behind in this area, there has been an increase in awareness, which, coupled with the efforts of various actors, might result in positive changes.

Efforts towards Vocational Education Training Development

Several institutional efforts currently exist for further developing vocational education training in Kosovo. These efforts come from a variety of actors, involving both the Republic of Kosovo and international organizations and partners. Such efforts serve as an important foundation for the future development of vocational education and training in Kosovo.

In fact, there has been both technical and financial support from international donors and organizations in Kosovo, leading to the development of VET. Furthermore, VET education has expanded to include 12 new profiles, 21 new schools, and a greater presence of VET institutions across 14 municipalities in Kosovo. It must be emphasized that, in line with such efforts, the government of Kosovo plans to prepare dual education students by connecting them with the industry to provide them with practical training (“The Sixth Meeting,” 2023).

As mentioned above, international actors have also been instrumental in shaping the current landscape of VET education in Kosovo. The annual Summit of Vocational Education and Training, supported by USAID, plays an important role in shaping the future of vocational and educational training, with the ultimate goal of positively impacting Kosovo’s labor market. This summit, involving a variety of stakeholders in vocational education and training, promotes the economic development of Kosovo by emphasizing the importance of VET education (“Summit of Vocational Education,” 2023).

The European Union has also impacted the VET situation in Kosovo. More specifically, the EU has supported vocational education and training reform by attempting to improve the quality of VET education and develop qualification sets that align with the latest developments in the labor market. The project “KSV/801 European Union Support to Vocational Education and Training, Professional Requalification, and Occupation (ESVET PRO)” has been deemed very successful in helping shape and enhance vocational education and training in Kosovo. It has put emphasis on new curricula and greater cooperation between schools and the private sector to enhance the employability of young people (“Supporting Vocational Education,” 2023).

Another relevant development for the future of vocational education and training in Kosovo, related to the role of the European Union, is the involvement of VET schools in various Erasmus+ initiatives. In fact, VET schools in Kosovo received Erasmus+ grants by winning 9 Capacity Building projects in the area of Vocational Education and Training (“Statistics,” 2022). This is a particularly relevant development as it signifies that VET institutions in Kosovo are embracing these initiatives and taking advantage of the opportunities associated with the Erasmus program.

Such efforts from Kosovar VET institutions, coupled with assistance from international actors, are important stepping stones for the future development of VET education in Kosovo. They also serve as an important indicator that the near future holds great potential for creating an environment in which VET institutions play a critical role in shaping Kosovo’s labor market

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AROUND THE WORLD

KYRGYZSTAN

REVITALIZING VET IN KYRGYZSTAN

Reforming Education to Build a Skilled Workforce for the Future

Written by: : **Zhyldyz Niazbekova** | Nomad College | niazhyldyz86@gmail.com

Photos Provided by: Zhyldyz Niazbekova

Vocational education in Kyrgyzstan has increasingly become a focal point of discussions surrounding national development, labor market integration, and economic growth. With a young population that constitutes a significant proportion of its demographic landscape, the need for effective vocational training programs is more crucial than ever. This article explores the current state of vocational colleges in Kyrgyzstan, their challenges, and the potential benefits they offer to students and the economy.

The roots of vocational education in Kyrgyzstan can be traced back to the Soviet era, when technical schools were established to meet the demands of industrialization. However, after gaining independence in 1991, the country faced significant economic challenges that affected the

educational system, including vocational training. Over the years, the transition to a market economy has necessitated a reevaluation of vocational education to align it with new economic realities.

Kyrgyzstan currently hosts numerous vocational colleges and training institutions across its regions. These colleges offer various programs focused on key sectors, including agriculture, construction, information technology, and tourism. The government, in collaboration with international organizations, has actively sought to improve the quality and accessibility of vocational education.

Despite some progress, many vocational institutions continue to struggle with outdated curricula, insufficient



funding, and a lack of modern training facilities.

A 2020 report from the National Statistics Committee revealed that a significant portion of graduates faced difficulties in finding relevant employment, largely because the skills they acquired did not meet the current demands of the labor market.

Challenges Facing Vocational Education

1. Curriculum Relevance: One of the most pressing issues is the gap between education and industry requirements. Many vocational programs are criticized for not keeping pace with technological advancements and evolving labor market trends.
2. Funding and Resources: Inadequate financial support from the government limits colleges' ability to invest in new technologies, develop practical training facilities, and hire qualified instructors. Public funding typically covers salaries and basic operational costs, leaving little for program development.
3. Societal Perception: Unfortunately, vocational education is often perceived as a less prestigious option compared to traditional academic paths. This stigma can discourage students from pursuing vocational training, thereby limiting the workforce's skill diversity.
4. Integration with Industry: There is often insufficient collaboration between vocational colleges and local industries. This lack of partnership results in a misalignment between the skills taught and those required in the job market, further contributing to the unemployment problem among graduates.

Recognizing these challenges, the Kyrgyz government, alongside various international partners, has begun implementing reforms aimed at revitalizing vocational education. Key initiatives include:

- Curriculum Modernization: Updating curricula to incorporate modern technologies and practices is essential. Collaborations with industry leaders can provide valuable insights into the skills and knowledge that are most in demand.





- **Enhanced Practical Training:** Developing partnerships with businesses for internships and on-the-job training experiences equips students with real-world skills, enhancing their employability.

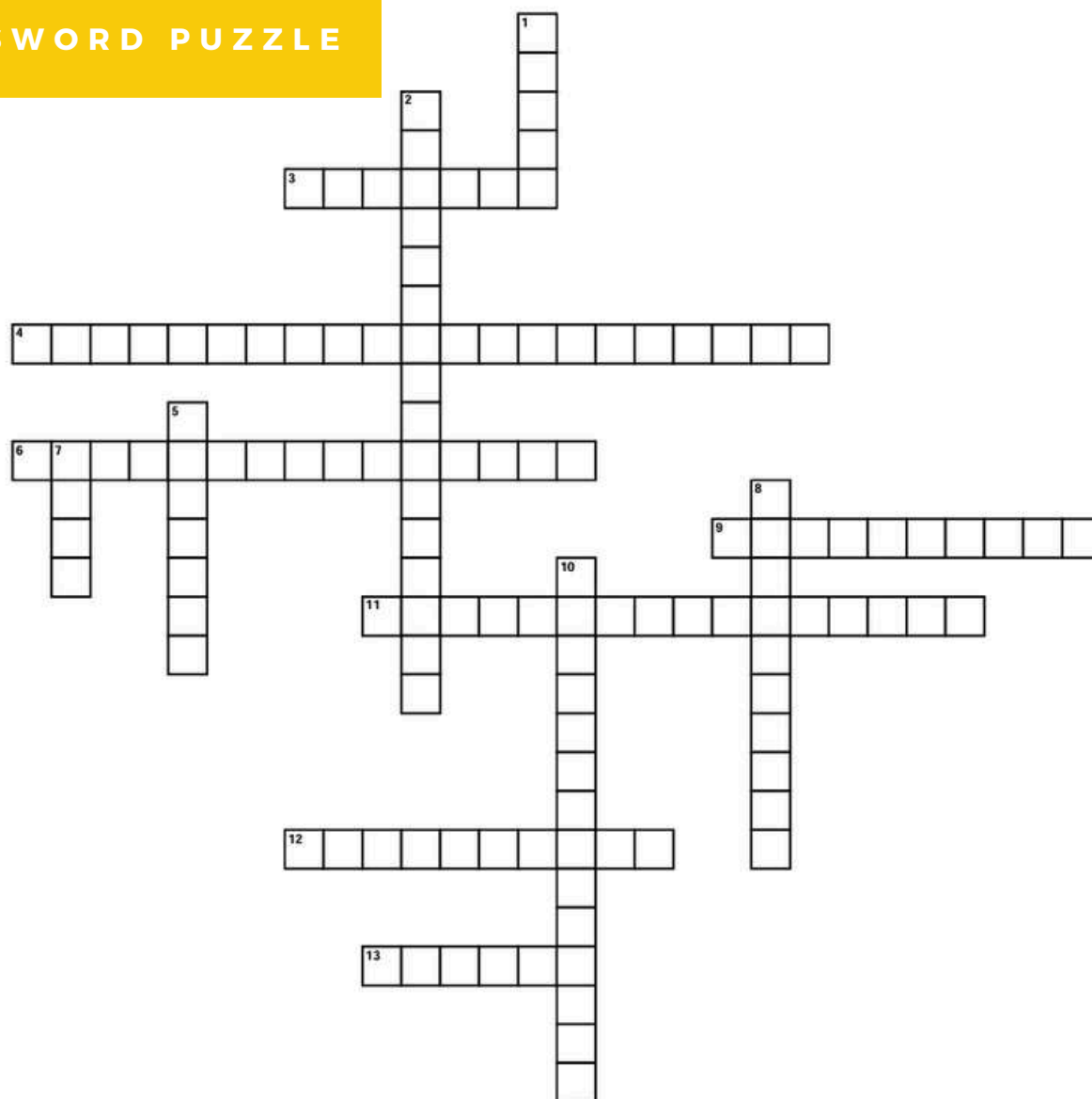
- **Awareness Campaigns:** Initiatives aimed at changing the perception of vocational education among students and parents can help attract more individuals to these programs. Highlighting the success stories of vocational graduates and their contributions to various sectors could shift societal attitudes.
- **Investment in Infrastructure:** Increasing government funding and seeking foreign investments can help vocational colleges improve their facilities, resources, and training equipment, which is critical for effective learning.



The future of vocational education in Kyrgyzstan holds significant potential if the right steps are taken. As the country continues to develop its economy and integrate into the global market, skilled labor will be in high demand. By prioritizing vocational education reform, investment, and collaboration with industry, Kyrgyzstan can transform its educational landscape, creating a workforce that is both competitive and capable of adapting to the rapidly changing economic environment.

In conclusion, vocational colleges in Kyrgyzstan stand at a crucial crossroads. With strategic reforms, they can become vital institutions not only for individual success but also for national economic development. Investing in the future of vocational education is not just an academic choice; it is a strategic imperative for the sustainable growth of Kyrgyzstan's economy.

CROSSWORD PUZZLE



Across

- [3] Audio tool used to share insights about VET trends, policies, and innovations.
- [4] Testing new policy methods to improve vocational education outcomes.
- [6] Decision-making forum for representatives from vocational education organizations.
- [9] Exchanges and internships abroad that enhance vocational learners' skills and cultural understanding.
- [11] Developing skills and resources for stronger VET systems.
- [12] Improving specific professional competencies, essential in evolving industries.
- [13] EU body working on policies related to justice, including equal opportunities in education.

Down

- [1] A major gathering hosted by three leading VET organizations in Brussels to discuss the future of education.
- [2] Small certifications in specific skills, increasingly popular in vocational training.
- [5] EU program supporting mobility and partnerships in education, especially in VET.
- [7] Organization representing a global network of vocational education institutions.
- [8] EVBB's annual week-long event inviting members and speakers to discuss different trends in VET.
- [10] Integrating technology into vocational training programs and workplaces.

V M E A T G

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