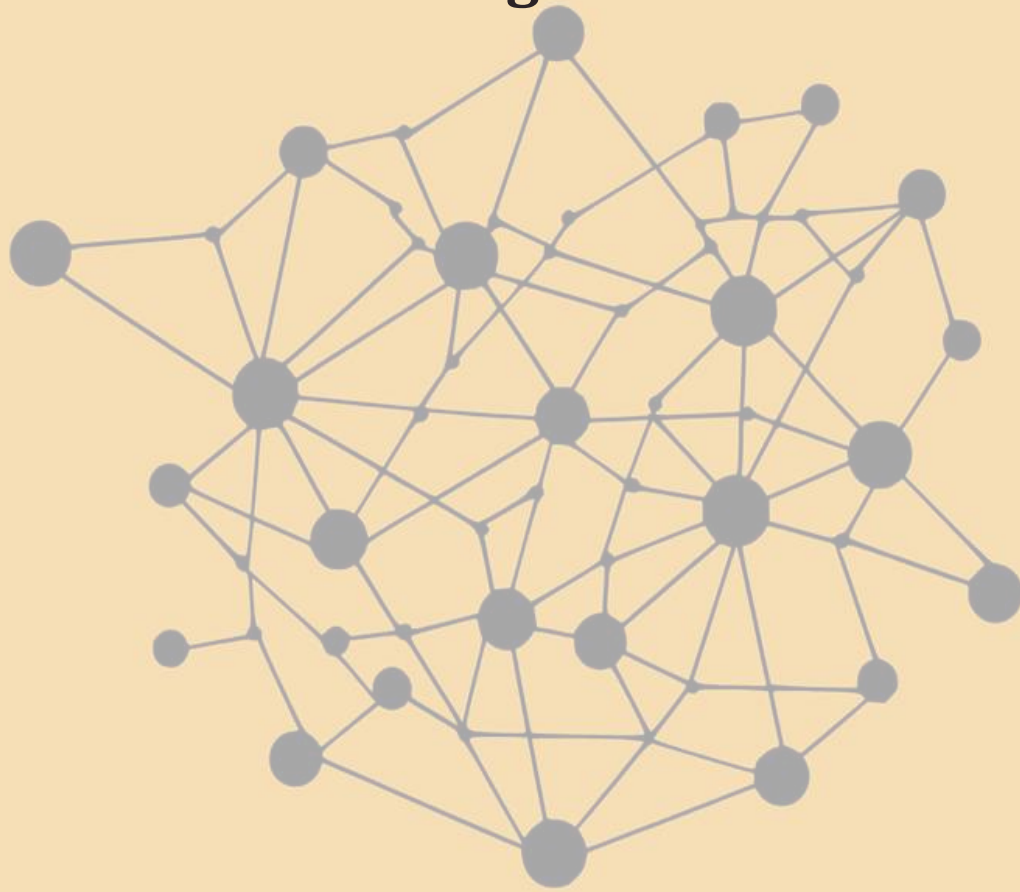


## Position Paper

### **Advancing a Stronger European Vocational Education and Training Area – The Herning Declaration**



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# Advancing a Stronger European Vocational Education and Training Area – The Herning Declaration

## *EVBB Position Paper*

July 2025

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The proposal for a **Herning Declaration**, expected to be endorsed by European ministers later in 2025, comes at a moment when vocational education and training needs a clearer role within Europe's skills and industrial ambitions. Member States are preparing to reaffirm their commitment to cooperation in VET, update shared priorities, and strengthen Europe's ability to respond to labour shortages, digitalisation, the green transition and demographic shifts.

For EVBB, this is a crucial moment. The declaration has the potential to influence European VET for years to come. If shaped correctly, it can bring clarity, stability and ambition. If left vague, it risks adding another high-level document without practical impact. This position paper sets out EVBB's expectations and recommendations *before* the declaration is formally adopted, ensuring that the voice of VET providers is present from the start.

## 1. Why a renewed political commitment is needed now

Vocational education and training has made considerable progress over the past two decades through the Copenhagen Process, the Riga conclusions, the 2020 Council Recommendation on VET and the Osnabrück Declaration. Yet despite these efforts, many challenges persist: shortages in construction, healthcare, energy and manufacturing; uneven digital readiness among providers; large numbers of adults with low qualifications; and difficulty attracting young people to vocational pathways.

The upcoming Herning Declaration offers an opportunity to address these issues with fresh energy. Importantly, it arrives at the same time as Europe is shaping the **Union of Skills**, creating a broader political climate that recognises the importance of lifelong learning, staff development, mobility and strong regional training ecosystems.

For VET providers on the ground, the need is clear. Institutions are asked to update programmes quickly, work more closely with companies, strengthen support for disadvantaged learners, keep pace with technology, and collaborate across borders. Without a coordinated political commitment at European level, progress risks becoming fragmented and inconsistent.



## 2. What EVBB expects from the Herning Declaration

As ministers prepare the declaration, EVBB hopes it will go beyond general aspirations and offer clear direction in several key areas.

First, the declaration should confirm that VET is not a secondary path but a foundation of Europe's economic and social strategy. Vocational programmes prepare workers for essential sectors and provide accessible opportunities for learners of all backgrounds. A clear endorsement from ministers will help raise the status of VET and support Member States in prioritising it.

Second, EVBB expects the declaration to strengthen cooperation between countries. VET systems differ widely across Europe, yet all face similar pressures: rapidly shifting skills needs, growing demands for flexible learning and the challenge of supporting adults who must retrain mid-career. The declaration should commit countries to working together more systematically, sharing practice, and expanding joint actions on mobility, quality, digitalisation and green skills.

Third, the declaration must acknowledge the central role of **teachers and trainers**. Too often, discussions focus on structures and qualifications while overlooking the people who deliver training. EVBB encourages ministers to include a strong commitment to staff development, exchange programmes and opportunities for trainers to spend time in companies.

Fourth, the declaration should underline the need for accessible learning pathways for everyone, including young people at risk of dropping out, adults returning to learning, migrants and refugees, and older workers facing job transitions. VET will only fulfil its mission if it offers real opportunities to people who are currently excluded from stable employment.

Finally, the declaration must recognise that regional and local actors, providers, chambers, municipalities, companies, employment services, play a decisive role in shaping training offers. A declaration that ignores these actors would overlook the reality of how learning happens.



### 3. Key themes that must be included to ensure the declaration is more than symbolic

If the Herning Declaration is to create real momentum, it needs clear priorities that can be translated into national and regional actions. EVBB highlights several themes that should be included explicitly.

One essential point is predictable investment in VET institutions. Providers cannot meet rising expectations, modern equipment, digital tools, teacher training, partnership building, without stable resources. The declaration should encourage Member States to use ESF+, Erasmus+, RRF and national budgets strategically to strengthen institutions, not only to run short-term projects.

Another important theme is **mobility for all VET learners**, not only young people in long programmes. If ministers want Europe to become a real training area, mobility needs to be feasible for adult learners, workers, part-time learners and those with family responsibilities. Virtual and hybrid mobility models should be explicitly mentioned as part of a wider approach.

The declaration should also improve **recognition and transparency of learning**, especially of modular and short-term programmes. As micro-credentials expand, learners and employers need simple, reliable systems to understand and compare learning outcomes across borders. This requires a stronger link between the declaration and the tools already available, such as the EQF and Europass.

Finally, EVBB stresses the importance of **robust governance**. If the declaration remains only an intergovernmental commitment without structured involvement of stakeholders, its impact will be limited. Provider networks, employer organisations, unions, regional authorities and learners' organisations need a recognised place in follow-up processes.

### 4. EVBB's contribution to the shaping of the declaration

Before the declaration is signed, EVBB aims to ensure that the viewpoint of VET providers is reflected. Our network represents institutions that work directly with learners, employers and communities every day. We understand the realities behind policy: the gaps, the delays, the administrative pressures, the financial constraints and the opportunities for innovation.

EVBB recommends that the Herning Declaration:

- reinforce VET as an integral part of Europe's skills and industrial strategies,
- recognise the essential role of providers as co-creators of policy,
- support flexible and inclusive learning opportunities,
- strengthen the professional development of teachers and trainers,
- and encourage Member States to cooperate closely on modernisation, mobility and quality.



We also encourage ministers to use the declaration to prepare the ground for the next **European VET policy framework for 2026–2030**, ensuring a smooth transition and avoiding policy fragmentation. The declaration should serve as the political bridge toward a more structured and ambitious cooperation format.

## 5. Looking ahead

The Herning Declaration has the potential to become a turning point for European VET, if it is shaped with clarity and commitment. EVBB welcomes the preparation of the declaration and urges ministers to adopt a text that is clear, practical and anchored in the reality of learners and providers. Europe needs strong VET systems to remain competitive, foster social inclusion and support sustainable development.

EVBB stands ready to collaborate with the Commission, Member States and regional partners to help transform the declaration's promises into everyday practice in classrooms, workshops and training centres across Europe.

