

Good Practice Report

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Contact information: If you want further information on the project you can either visit the project website or contact us

Website: <https://tu-dresden.de/gsw/ew/ibbd/eb/euvet-p>

Contact: Alina Praun; alina.praun@tu-dresden.de

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1 Introduction

Dealing with policy – particularly at EU levels – sounds boring, complicated and stressful. However, EU policy touches on numerous everyday topics, particularly in the field of vocational education and training (VET) e.g., mobility of individuals, recognition of foreign degrees and the support of a highly skilled workforce. However, it is often difficult to illustrate and exemplify the added value of EUVET instruments and policies when it comes to providing VET programmes in everyday life. Therefore, there is a need to bridge the gap between policy and practice.

Against this background, the project EUVET-P “Vocational Education and Training policy in the European Union” focuses on the European policy in the field of VET and its practical implementation as well as the use of associated tools at individual and organizational levels. Thereby, the project pursues the following aims:

- To explore if and if so, in which ways implementation of EU VET policy is part of VET programmes in the partner countries.
- To identify the interests and challenges of VET staff regarding EU VET policy as well as current good practices of EU VET policy.
- To jointly develop and test learning material that supports the “European idea” in VET, illustrates the core ideas and benefits of exemplary EU VET policy instruments and tools, and thus to contribute to a better understanding of the topic.
- To identify and discuss current activities related to EU VET policy as well as to initiate mutual exchange and learning on existing and envisaged material to foster EU VET policy in the programmes within the project consortium and with the target group.

The core outcome of the project are four digital learning units that support VET providers, VET staff, and VET teachers and trainers with implementing the “European idea” as well as EU VET policy strategies and tools. It thus promotes the understanding, popularity and perception of EU VET policy. Thereby, VET learners benefit indirectly from this project since VET staff becomes more familiar with EU VET policy and associated opportunities and therefore can serve as multipliers. Lastly, the project fosters the networking, mutual learning and mutual exchange of the involved project partners in four European countries, which are:

- ANDRAS from Estonia, the national association of adult educators that unites the representatives of different adult education providers in Estonia and aims at increasing the competence of adult educators.
- Dresden University of Technology/the institute of vocational education from Germany, one of Germany’s eleven universities of excellence which provides – amongst others – VET teacher education.
- Kek Axia from Greece, a private and licensed vocational training centre, with the aim to foster personal and professional development of adult learners in terms of qualification and specialization.
- AidLearn from Portugal, a certified CVET, research action and consulting company, dedicated to the design, implementation and evaluation of studies, projects and training activities, notably aimed at training of trainers.

The aim of this good practice report is to highlight good practices in the use of EUVET policy tools and instruments in the four project countries. The data basis for this report is formed by focus groups conducted in the four project countries and, where applicable, on individual interviews.

1.1 What is a Good Practice

In the context of a good practice report, it seems necessary to elaborate on the notion of good practice. Often, the terms “good practice” and “best practice” are used interchangeably (Coffield & Edward, 2009). In addition, terms such as “lessons learned” or “innovative practices” arise (Cedefop 2020). Thus, various notions exist, there is a general assumption that such terms involve a connotation or an assessment framework as well as the idea of mutual learning (Cedefop 2020). Best practice is often associated with highlighting the most successful approach in comparison to others, whereby the overall aim is aim to describe “gold standard” (Bendixen & DeGuchteneire, 2003, p. 678) but approaches that have been successful and can thus serve as an inspiration or guideline for others (Bendixen & DeGuchteneire 2003). A general definition of good practice is provided by CEDEFOP (2025), which describes good practice as “method or approach that leads to better and transferable achievements”.

Bendixsen and DeGuchteneire (2003) elaborate that “[t]he term best practice relates to successful initiatives or model projects that make an outstanding, sustainable, and innovative contribution to an issue at hand” (p. 677) and thus point out that good or best practices—they use the terms interchangeably – have the following characteristics:

- Innovation: new or creative solutions to problems.
- “Making a difference”: positive effect on the objective.
- Sustainability of the solutions
- Replicability: practices can serve as an inspiration for others.

Thus, as the terms are often used interchangeably, we refer to the term good practice within this report and mean thereby a successful implementation of EUVET tools that can serve as inspirations for other actors in the field, highlighting the idea to learn from others (Cedefop 2020). The aim is not to point out the most successful practices, but good ones that can inspire others to become (more) familiar with EUVET policy and implement associated tools and instruments.

1.2 What are policy tools and instruments

Another core notion of this project refers to “policy tools and instruments”. To *define* policy tools and instruments we refer to the following definition of Bali et al. (2021):

“Policy tools – also referred to as policy instruments, ‘governing instruments’ and the ‘tools of government’ – are the techniques of governing that help define and achieve policy goals. These different terms broadly describe the same phenomena, although they are sometimes used to refer to slightly different aspects of policy means.”

This definition is reflected in a number of policy documents as well as in the previous partners’ project experience. For example, in the Council Recommendation of 2020 “on vocational education and training (VET) for sustainable competitiveness, social fairness and resilience” the European Council states that EU member states should work towards implementing a vocational education and training policy which:

- “equips young people and adults with the knowledge, skills and competences to thrive in the evolving labour market and society, to manage the recovery and the just transitions to the green and digital economy, in times of demographic change and throughout all economic cycles,

- fosters inclusiveness and equal opportunities and contributes to achieving resilience, social fairness and prosperity for all and
- promotes European vocational education and training systems in an international context so that they are recognised as a worldwide reference for vocational learners” (Council of the European Union, 2020, p. 5)

In this context, a variety of tools and instruments were developed to support recognition between countries, facilitate lifelong learning as well as to improve learning, transparency and mobility across Europe (CEDEFOP, 2019, p. 16; Council of the European Union, 2020). Therefore, the following principles for VET were formulated: Adaptability to labour market (changes); flexibility and progression opportunities; driver for innovation and growth and preparation for digital and green transitions; promotion of equality of opportunities; underpinned by a culture of quality assurance.

Thus, policy tools and instruments in the context of the EU VET policy refer to mechanisms and resources used to implement, monitor, and evaluate policies in VET at the European level. These tools aim to ensure transparency, quality, and mobility within the VET sector across EU Member States. These are instruments that support:

1. Policy implementation: Facilitating the achievement of policy goals such as improving employability and developing skills;
2. Qualification recognition: Promoting comparability and mutual recognition of qualifications between EU countries and
3. Monitoring and evaluation: Measuring the impact of policies and the progress achieved within VET systems.

Tools and instruments can refer to e.g., the EQF, ECVET, EQUAVET or Europass which we will describe in detail below. They work synergistically to support the European Union's goals of creating a cohesive and inclusive area for education and training. Thus, EUVET tools and instruments are the techniques and methods that were/are established to reach the above stated aims in the field of VET. Transparency tools such as the EQF serve to enable comparison across member states and thus enables mobility in education and labour. Funding tools like the Erasmus+ program serve to foster European collaboration, mobility and simultaneously focuses on the content goals such as sustainability, inclusiveness and equality within education. Regarding quality, EQUAVET was established to ensure quality and common quality standards in VET.

2 Focus Group procedure and aims

In order to identify good practices as regards EUVET policy across partner countries, each country hosted one focus group which aimed at gathering national perspectives, needs, challenges, and experiences from VET teachers, trainers, and providers. Discussions mostly focused on the use of European policy instruments and tools in VET programmes.

In detail, the focus groups and related interviews had the following aims:

- To discuss and identify a common understanding of EUVET policy tools and instruments.
- To collect the needs, good practices and interests of the target group.
- To exchange existing and envisaged material to promote EU VET policy tools and instruments in the VET programmes.

As a result, this report summarizes the outcomes of the focus groups. It reflects on the target groups' needs and challenges related to EUVET policy implementation as well as it identifies good practices related to the current use of EUVET policy tools.

The target group of the focus groups were VET teachers and trainers as well as representatives of VET providers. Whereas teachers and trainers can share experiences of using EUVET tools in everyday work, VET representatives add an organizational perspective of the use and implementation of EUVET tools.

In each partner country, at least 5 persons representing the target group either attended the focus group or were interviewed afterwards.

The focus groups took place either in a face-to-face or in a hybrid format; they were run in the national languages and endured half a day. All focus groups were recorded to allow better documentation. In general, the conduction of the focus group

- was based on a carefully planned discussion (see below);
- was structured by open questions, to generate ideas and opinions concerning the topic of EUVET policy tools and instruments;
- was moderated by a facilitator from the project team, who also ensured that each participant felt free to share their opinions, concerns, interests etc.;
- were observed and documented by other members of the project team.

The focus groups were conducted in two rounds, with a clear structure for introducing the topic, guiding the discussion, and gathering insights from participants. Key questions were formulated for each of the two discussion rounds, which are shown in Table 1, along with the sequence of the focus groups. For the introduction, a joint presentation was used to ensure that focus groups were comparable. Furthermore, four evaluation dimensions were suggested within the consortium to ensure comparability of the evaluation.

Table 1: Focus group procedure

Focus Group Introduction
<p>Introduction</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Introduction to the project on the overall context of the focus group (objectives, procedure etc.). • Introductory presentation summarizing the key points of EUVET policy tools and instruments. This overview covered: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ The preliminary project's understanding of EUVET policy and related tools and instruments. ○ The main goals and priorities of the tools and instruments. ○ How EUVET policy tools and instruments supports VET teachers, trainers, and institutions.
Discussion round 1: Experience with EUVET tools & instruments
<p>Guiding Questions:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Which EUVET policy tools and instruments are you familiar with and/or which ones do you use in working context?

2. What teaching or learning materials do you currently use and which ones would you like to have in order to better integrate EUVET policies in your programmes?
3. In this respect, have you ever applied specific EUVET tools and instruments such as ECVET, Europass, etc.? If so, in which ways did you benefit from applying them and/or you felt their application is challenging?
4. What challenges do you face when working with European VET policy tools and instruments (e.g., EQF, validation guidelines, mobility programmes)?

Discussion round 2: needs and challenges

5. What specific needs do you or your organization have regarding the implementation of European initiatives?
6. What kind of tools & instruments or resources should be developed or provided to help you make better use of EUVET policy tools and instruments?
7. From your perspective, which VET-related challenges can be better addressed through the use of European tools? Where do you see the most practical benefits for VET?

Evaluation

Participants' satisfaction with the focus group was assessed using a qualitative procedure, whereby participants expressed an assessment of their satisfaction.

Thank You & Closing

Recapitulation of the main themes of the discussion as well as provision of information on follow-up activities and how the input will be used in the next stages of the project.

To gather more perspectives, the seven questions posed in the two discussion rounds were also used as an interview guide in several countries. To supplement the focus group results with individual interviews had the advantage of broadening the perspective of the national results: As the focus groups were conducted face-to-face and participants hesitated to participate in a hybrid setting, the supplementary interviews ensured that participants living within other parts of the countries could also participate in the sessions and have their perspectives contributed to the project. Against this background, the following sections outline the focus groups and interviews in detail.

Estonia

The Estonian focus group took place on November 27, 2024, at Tartu Vocational College. The focus group was attended by seven participants from three different schools and with different roles. Two participants, a headmaster and a teacher, were from a vocational college offering VET programmes in technology, construction, beauty, IT, business food, catering and hospitality. Another two participants were teachers from a VET centre with programmes across sectors such as technology, construction, IT, hospitality and administration. The other three participants including a headmaster, a head of studies and a project manager for adult education were members of an Educational Centre that provides VET and non-stationary general education.

Germany

The German focus group took place on November 29, 2024, with three participants. The low level of participation at the time of implementation was due to a high wave of illness leaves in Germany, which is why four supplementary interviews were used to counteract this.

Participants of the focus group were one head master of a public VET school, the head of international projects of a private VET school and a researcher in the field of EUVET from a university. In the following interviews, two participants were working for a university with VET education, including one Erasmus mobility coordinator and one project coordinator. The other two interviews were conducted with a VET Erasmus coordinator from a state office of school and education as well as the head of international projects from a public adult education centre.

Greece

The focus group meeting was held in person on Tuesday, November 5, 2024, at EKPAIDEFTIRIA KALOSKAMI-AXIA in Keratsini, Greece. Participants were invited from both, the private and the public sector, ensuring a well-balanced gender representation as well as from micro- and meso-levels, ensuring participants have experience in the management of VET organizations.

The focus group comprised five participants (two male persons, three female persons) from four organizations, ensuring a diverse and well-balanced composition. The organizations represented both the public and private sectors, with two focused on Initial Vocational Education and Training (IVET) and two on Continuing Vocational Education and Training (CVET). The group included professionals from various fields, specifically two economists, one agronomist, one dance trainer, and one computer technician. The group was staffed by the moderator and a team member, both involved in the project. The diverse expertise of participants enriched the discussion, fostering insightful exchanges and clear conclusions. The in-person format encouraged active participation, with experts providing in-depth insights and others contributing through thought-provoking questions. Participants engaged within their fields of knowledge, either by sharing examples or seeking clarification. The moderator skilfully guided the structured discussion, ensuring a seamless flow and summarizing key points after each topic.

Portugal

The Portuguese focus group session took place on November 29, 2024, in AidLearn's office. The focus group session organized by AidLearn convened a group of eight participants—three attending in person and five joining online—representing eight key entities involved in VET across Portugal. A ninth participant was unable to attend the focus group, but their written responses to the questions provided by AidLearn were included in the analysis.

The participants included technicians, consultants, researchers, VET managers, and representatives of regional bodies, reflecting a diverse array of expertise and professional backgrounds. The participating entities operate within various Portuguese regions, namely Centro-Norte, Greater Lisbon, Baixo Alentejo, and the Algarve, ensuring a comprehensive geographic and institutional representation. A hybrid focus group was chosen to accommodate participants from different regions of the country and diverse types of organizations, which posed challenges for some to attend in person. This format allowed for greater inclusivity and flexibility, enabling individuals who might otherwise face logistical or geographical barriers to contribute effectively. By leveraging a combination of in-person and virtual participation, the group could

gather a broader range of perspectives, ensuring that the discussion captured diverse viewpoints while minimizing constraints on accessibility.

3 National Results

3.1 Estonia

3.1.1 National Understanding of EUVET tools and instruments

In Estonia, the Ministry of Education and Research is implementing the Council of the European Union's recommendations on VET through a national implementation plan. The Estonian VET recommendations take a broad approach, addressing issues related to the labour market, adult education, and skills development.

The national implementation plan is built on existing national, sectoral, and regional development strategies, as well as measures planned for VET, adult education, and skills policies. These measures are aligned with European priorities and recommendations while being adapted to Estonia's unique context and needs.

Within the focus group, the main topics were:

1. **Work-based learning**, whereby training is often conducted directly within companies to facilitate participation and minimize time constraints. This approach allows employees to engage in learning without significantly disrupting their work schedules. In some cases, vocational school teachers deliver lessons on-site at company premises, while in other instances, neutral training spaces are rented to accommodate multiple businesses or industry sectors.
2. **Learning mobility programmes** provide students and educators with valuable international experience, fostering cultural awareness, independence, and professional development
3. **Europass** serves as a standardized tool for documenting skills, making it easier for learners and professionals to showcase their competencies across Europe. The system promotes transparency in qualifications and helps employers understand applicants' credentials.

3.1.2 Needs and Challenges: SWOT Analysis

Workplace-based learning

Regarding workplace-based learning participants pointed out several strengths: Well-structured collaboration with employers plays a crucial role in forming learning groups where employees can enhance their qualifications while simultaneously contributing to the company's needs. For example, a targeted training programme for bakery production line operators successfully improved employees' technical skills and overall efficiency, demonstrating how tailored workplace-based learning can benefit both workers and businesses. Emphasizing the value of vocational qualifications serves as a key motivator for both employees and employers to invest in workplace-based learning. Companies that recognize the benefits of a well-trained workforce often introduce incentives, such as salary increases for employees who complete qualification-raising programmes. These financial and career progression opportunities encourage continuous professional development and help businesses retain skilled staff.

Learners are also provided with the flexibility to transition from a traditional, full-time vocational education curriculum to a workplace-based learning model. This adaptability allows individuals to gain practical experience while continuing their education, making it easier to align their learning journey with career opportunities and employer expectations. Workplace-based learning contributes to regional economic development by ensuring a steady supply of skilled labour that meets local industry needs. By fostering close cooperation between vocational schools and businesses, these programmes help create sustainable employment opportunities, drive innovation, and strengthen regional economies.

Despite its many advantages, workplace-based learning presents some weaknesses: Small and micro-enterprises often lack the financial and logistical resources to support structured training programmes. Their limited capacity to allocate time and personnel for training can make it difficult to integrate workplace learning effectively. Another key issue is the varying qualification levels of workplace mentors. While mentors play an essential role in guiding learners through their practical experience, there is often no standardized training system to prepare them for this responsibility. This can result in inconsistent training quality and learning outcomes. Additionally, some employers hesitate to engage in workplace-based learning due to concerns about employee turnover. Companies may fear that investing in training will lead to skilled employees seeking better opportunities elsewhere, reducing their willingness to participate in long-term training initiatives. The focus group discussion revealed several challenges in implementing workplace-based learning. One major issue was the need for greater flexibility in structuring training programmes to reduce the burden on companies. Participants emphasized the importance of evaluating the preparedness and pedagogical competence of workplace mentors before establishing partnerships. To support these mentors, structured training programmes should be developed to help them effectively guide learners.

Employer motivation was another concern. To encourage companies to take on apprentices and trainees, financial incentives such as tax benefits or subsidies could be introduced. Additionally, it was suggested that young learners might prefer a practical learning contract instead of committing to a full employment contract at an early stage of their education.

Nevertheless, participants saw opportunities by expanding cooperation between vocational schools and businesses, which could help enhance training quality and ensure that programmes remain relevant. By strengthening these partnerships, vocational institutions can better tailor curricula to meet industry needs and provide students with practical, job-ready skills. Developing micro-qualifications and flexible learning models presents another significant opportunity. Shorter, targeted training programmes could help workers upskill efficiently while meeting immediate labour market demands. Government policies and financial incentives, such as tax benefits or subsidies, could encourage more employers to participate in workplace-based learning. These initiatives could help address resource constraints and increase employer engagement. The introduction of structured training programmes for workplace mentors would also improve the effectiveness of workplace-based learning. Providing mentors with clear guidelines and pedagogical training would enhance the overall learning experience for employees.

One major challenge/threat facing workplace-based learning is the lack of clear qualification requirements in certain professions. Without defined skill benchmarks, the implementation of structured training programmes becomes more complex, potentially reducing their effectiveness. Competition for funding and employer participation

remains a significant barrier. Many vocational training initiatives rely on external funding, and securing consistent financial support can be challenging. Additionally, if too few employers choose to participate, the availability of workplace-based learning opportunities could be limited. A lack of awareness and targeted communication efforts may also prevent companies from recognizing the benefits of participating in vocational education initiatives. Without effective outreach, potential employer partners may not fully understand how workplace-based learning can positively impact their business and workforce.

Learning mobility

In terms of mobility programmes participants highlight that such programmes provide students and educators with valuable international experience, fostering cultural awareness, independence, and professional development. Exposure to different education systems and work environments enhances learners' adaptability and problem-solving skills. Europass and other EU recognition tools help document and validate competencies acquired during mobility programmes, increasing employability.

Nevertheless, participants encounter weaknesses, as preparing for mobility programmes requires significant time and resources, often placing a burden on both institutions and participants. Logistical challenges, such as travel arrangements and accommodation, can complicate participation. Additionally, some students may struggle with adjusting to different work and cultural environments, affecting their overall experience.

Nevertheless, opportunities are seen in hybrid mobility programmes, which combine virtual and in-person exchanges, could make international experiences more accessible. Strengthening cooperation networks with foreign vocational institutions can facilitate long-term partnerships and knowledge sharing. Simplifying administrative procedures and providing additional financial support would increase participation rates.

A threat perceived from participants was the high competition for mobility funding and placement opportunities remains a challenge. Bureaucratic obstacles and visa regulations can also hinder student and teacher participation. A lack of institutional awareness about the benefits of mobility programmes may lead to underutilization of available opportunities.

In the context of mobility programmes, the discussion highlighted the need for additional resources to support both students and teachers during the preparation phase. Participants noted that administrative procedures should be simplified to reduce bureaucratic barriers and make mobility experiences more accessible. Finding reliable international partners remained a key challenge, as schools needed to maintain long-term relationships with institutions abroad.

For students with special needs, existing support mechanisms were helpful but required further development. Ensuring equal access to mobility experiences meant creating tailored solutions that addressed the specific challenges faced by these learners. Financial literacy was also identified as an area for improvement, as many students lacked the necessary skills to manage daily allowances and expenses effectively while participating in mobility programmes.

To overcome these challenges, participants recommended strengthening collaboration between vocational schools and businesses to ensure the continuity and quality of workplace-based learning. Developing shorter, more practical training programmes that respond to labour market needs was also suggested. In terms of mobility,

expanding hybrid learning opportunities and increasing awareness of Europass and other EU tools could help improve the recognition and validation of skills gained through international experiences.

As a next step, further focus group discussions were recommended to explore specific topics in greater detail. Collecting and sharing best practices at both national and international levels would support the ongoing development of workplace-based learning and mobility programmes, ultimately making them more effective and accessible for all learners.

Europass and Skills Recognition

The strengths of Europass lies especially in its function as a standardized tool for documenting skills, making it easier for learners and professionals to showcase their competencies across Europe. The system promotes transparency in qualifications and helps employers understand applicants' credentials. Europass is accepted by educational institutions and employers, enhancing international mobility.

Despite its benefits, awareness and usage of Europass remain inconsistent across vocational institutions and employers. Some companies still prefer traditional CV formats, limiting its impact. Additionally, Europass does not always fully capture informal learning experiences.

An opportunity would be the promotion of the integration of Europass within vocational education institutions, which fosters broader adoption. Further developing digital credentialing and micro-qualification frameworks could enhance the platform's effectiveness. Increasing employer engagement through targeted awareness campaigns may strengthen its recognition in the job market.

If not regularly updated, Europass may become outdated and lose relevance. Resistance from employers unfamiliar with the system could limit its acceptance. Additionally, differing national qualification standards may pose challenges in ensuring universal recognition.

3.1.3 Good Practices

Learning mobility can be highly effective when experiences are shared. Students and teachers who participate in learning mobility often motivate others by sharing their experiences through vlogs, blogs, presentations, and seminars, spreading good practices among their peers.

Involving entrepreneurs in learning mobility initiatives enriches collaboration with businesses, fostering stronger connections between education and industry. As a result of these mobility experiences, new international curricula and learning materials have been developed through cooperation between institutions. Insufficient awareness-raising efforts may hinder the involvement of companies.

The hybrid learning mobility model, which was developed during the Covid-19 pandemic, offers greater flexibility by combining online and in-person components. For instance, shorter foreign internships can be complemented by prior virtual collaboration, creating a seamless blend of remote and on-site learning experiences.

Work-Based Learning: Effective collaboration with employers plays a crucial role in creating learning groups where employees can enhance their qualifications while simultaneously addressing the company's needs. An example of this is a training programme for bakery production line operators that not only improved employees' skills but also boosted their efficiency.

Training is often conducted directly within companies, making it more convenient for employees to participate and minimizing time costs. For example, school teachers may deliver lessons at a company's premises, or a neutral training space could be rented for such purposes.

Highlighting the value of vocational qualifications motivates both employees and employers to invest in workplace-based learning. Companies may, for instance, offer salary increases to employees who complete qualification-enhancing programmes, further incentivizing participation.

Learners are also given the opportunity to transition from traditional, full-time curricula to workplace-based learning, tailored to their needs and available opportunities.

3.2 Germany

3.2.1 National understanding of EUVET tools and instruments

Germany has a national vision for the time period 2021 – 2025 which refers to all political arenas. This vision is entitled 'Dare more progress – an alliance for freedom, justice and sustainability'. It However, for the time being and after the national elections in February 2025, it remains to be seen how the new-to-build coalition will further develop this vision.

As regards VET, the current vision points out a number of linkages with EU VET priorities and both, the national and the EU initiatives to foster Excellence in VET are an indicator for these linkages (Hippach-Schneider & Huismann, 2024, p. 4). The current national implementation plan follows six EU priority areas of the Council recommendation on VET including:

- (a) Agile and resilient VET, adaptive to labour market needs,
- (b) Flexible VET, providing progression and lifelong learning opportunities,
- (c) Innovative and excellent VET,
- (d) Attractive VET, based on modern and digitalised provision,
- (e) Inclusive VET promoting equal opportunities;
- (f) VET underpinned by quality assurance

In general, participants understood tools and instruments as a variety of methods which aim to promote the European idea in order of foster intercultural exchange and collaboration, mobility. They are regarded as a means to follow European principles in Education such as competence orientation or recognition of non-formal / informal learning. Such instruments include funding tools, transparency tools or quality tools that directly relate to fostering the European aims in VET. Though participants were familiar with or applied a variety of EUVET policy tools participants had a differing understanding of "tools and instruments". In detail, the following tools and instruments were mentioned:

- **Mobilities**, especially Erasmus+ KA1 were seen as a funding tool for learners and staff. This was regarded as intercultural learning or exchange of practices. Other institutions understood mobilities as a means for personnel capacity building or as unique selling point for learners.
- **Cooperation projects and partnerships**, especially Erasmus+ KA2. Participants mentioned two benefits. First, they see it as networking activities to

foster mobilities and second, these instruments can be incorporated in organizational development and programmes.

- **EQF & NQFs:** All participants were familiar with these instruments whereby their application spanned mentioning it on a certificate towards translating this instrument into international cooperation (e.g. by specifying learning agreements to implement digitization projects). Moreover, the EQF and NQFs can be used in co-operations to assess and compare national standards and provide a joint understanding of the partners' educational systems.
- **Europass** was mentioned by all participants. It was particularly those participants working in working in schools or working as mobility coordinator who stated that Europass is a useful tool, reflecting orientation on competencies and providing a certification of learning outcomes.
- **EQAVET** was mentioned to a lesser extent. Participants reflected it as a tool for quality assurance, e.g. in schools' programme work.

Furthermore, participants mentioned DigiComEdu, ECTS, the Diploma Supplement, the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFRL) and learning outcomes and agreements. These tools are applied in combination with other tools or were referred to by individual participants for their specific fields of activities.

In general, participants assessed EUVET tools and instruments as useful. They agreed on the need to understand the basis mechanisms of EUVET policy as a precondition to actually apply these instruments. Overall, German participants highlighted the European idea in education, intercultural learning und gaining experience abroad. Also, they emphasized the instruments' linkages with labour market mobility and freedom of movement for persons, goods and services.

3.2.2 Needs and challenges: SWOT analysis

While participants highlighted the core idea and use of the tools, they also mentioned challenges, needs and barriers when applying EUVET tools.

Mobilities

Regarding mobility for staff and learners the opportunity for intercultural learning, personnel development and viewing beyond the horizon was highlighted. Participants stated that the value of skills development is not to be measured in numbers but rather have the opportunity to learning more about Europe. In terms of staff mobility, the exchange of practices and methods was highlighted, with a focus on digital tools. Also, public VET schools are confronted with a teacher shortage thus leading to a lack of time and organisational resources as well as a lack of those persons who are responsible for and committed to realising mobilities. As regards the dual apprenticeship system, participants also felt that some companies were hesitant to send learners abroad due to three reasons. First, this may result in a temporary shortage of workers in the home company. Second, the company would be faced with a higher workload to balance the shortage. Third, companies may thus not be able to provide apprentices with the time off they need. Participants also described that learners in IVET are hardly aware of "international work" and therefore do not consider mobility as necessary. In addition, VET providers (and similar stakeholders) would need more information material to a) attract learners and staff for mobility and b) receive inspiration for practical implementation. Nevertheless, participants stressed that offering mobilities increases the attractiveness of VET (providers).

Cooperation Projects

European funding of cooperation partnerships enables collaboration across borders, with participants using the results for organisational and staff development. In addition, collaboration leads to improving institutional networking and provides synergies for organisations through further collaborations or the provision of slots for mobility. Furthermore, cooperation projects contribute to establishing a European profile and self-conception for providers. Barriers in cooperation projects referred to involving countries from outside the EU or the EEC. Participants also stressed the work volume need to apply for a project.

Europass

Europass is described by the participants as the key tool to realize mobilities with Erasmus+. The strengths of the Europass tools (Diploma Supplement, CV etc.) are the easy access for learners and its competence orientation, which all result allow for presenting and proofing competences in a standardised and comparable way. Although Europass is characterised as easy to use, participants stated that this is not the case with learners who may have special needs. Furthermore, as Europass is not well known in Germany, learners and staff are not well familiar with the added value and strengths of Europass. Thus, participants describe Europass as a good tool which is undervalued in Germany, and a need for strengthening the added value of using Europass is stated. Last but not least, participants see an opportunity in strengthening the added value of Europass in case it is better integrated into other Erasmus+ IT platforms such as the beneficiary module or the partner search.

EQF & NQF

In general, participants found the EQF useful for facilitating cooperation between project partners from different countries. In particular, EQF can be a means to foster communication about e.g. programmes. It may thus help to better align national qualification pathways and improve the mutual understanding of education systems and qualifications. They also used EQF to distinguish between various staff categories in order to prepare staff mobility. The use of the EQF and NQFs also ensures a better comparability, evaluation and assessment of e.g. the German dual apprenticeship system in comparison to A-levels in e.g. the US or the UK. This, in turns, can be a supporting tool for recruiting international staff. A weakness of the EQF is its non-bindingness resulting in a low added value and it is perceived as a tool that is only stated on paper. Some participants believed that the German Qualifications Framework (DQR) does not adequately reflect the dual apprenticeship system, or that the positioning of CVET lacks appropriate referencing. Furthermore, some participants stated that the use of the EQF is only for comparing competences and that training providers do not compare competences, which leads to questions about the usefulness and added value of this tool.

In general, participants recognise that EUVET policy tools and instruments enable learning, working and transparency across Europe and decrease restrictions. Thus, existing tools and instruments are important to bridge policy and practice. Furthermore, participants point out that the tools and instruments are helpful to foster organizational and personnel development. Also, by fostering intercultural learning and providing access to labour and educational mobility, EUVET policy tools and instruments increase the attractiveness of VET as a relevant alternative to higher education. For providers, engaging with European VET policy, instruments and tools improves both, the European approach and their image/attractiveness as VET providers. Thereby, participants describe the challenge of understanding the background of EUVET policy tools and instruments. This is all the more relevant due a lack of easy-at-hand

information. In this context, participants felt the need to be familiar with specialised vocabulary and many abbreviations prior to actually apply the above-mentioned tools and instruments. However, the most significant challenge was the lack of time and staff resources to deal with this topic. Thus, participants wished to receive additional government-funded support structures (staff, financial resources etc.) to better address this topic. Another barrier is seen in the teacher education system: First, participants point at teachers' low mobility rates per se which refers to intra-national mobility in general and international mobility in detail. Low mobility rates stem from both, state regulations and frameworks on the one hand and individual preferences on the other hand. Second, participants wonder about the relevance of promoting teachers' mobility in times of teacher shortage. Third, participants state that in comparison to Master and Bachelor degrees, state degree programmes such as in teacher education do not include a so-called "mobility window", i.e. a term that is particularly dedicated to mobility. In general, participants describe a lack of popularity and awareness for EUVET policy in Germany. EUVET policy, tools and projects are often perceived as elitist and hard to access. Moreover, participants emphasized the necessity to understand European strategies to apply tools and instruments and emphasized the topic's complexity. Existing information material was said to be often hard to find which is why participants expressed a need for supporting and informative materials for learners and VET staff. Also, they stressed the need for networking and exchanging good practices among providers.

A general challenge for working with EUVET tools from a German perspective seems a lack of resources (time, staff). This is a general barrier for starting with the European dimension of VET as the topic is quite complicated and the added value is not immediately visible. Furthermore, participants also mentioned challenges resulting from the federal education system in Germany which results in an additional complexity layer and may hamper the mobility of VET teachers.

3.2.3 Good Practices

With regard to good practices, participants outlined several approaches to the use of EUVET tools that have been successful in practice and/or respond to specific challenges.

Multiplier systems to promote awareness

As popularity and awareness about EUVET policy is considered low by the participants, they describe multiplier systems to facilitate mobilities among VET teachers and staff. The multiplier systems involve that staff/teachers who have participated in a mobility programme or collaborated in a project are (more or less) obliged to present their experiences and insights to their colleagues afterwards. This is seen by the interviewees as a necessary follow-up, that promotes the European idea and the use of tools and simultaneously makes the results usable for the organisations.

Consortia to reduce the workload of VET schools and facilitate mobility

To promote mobilities (for learners and teachers/staff) consortia are seen as an opportunity to reduce the workload of the individual VET provider – especially in times of low resources and staff/teacher shortage. As (especially public) VET schools do not have specific staff dedicated to international activities, those schools often lack the capacity to organize mobilities. For this reason, a state office has set up a consortium: within this consortium the state office coordinates the mobilities – for learners they partner with an agency to find internships. Every year nearly 40 to 45 schools take part, although often the demand cannot be met in full, which reflects the high demand and

interest among German VET schools when barriers are lowered and organizational work is outsourced.

Europass as for mobility and recognition of experience

Europass was highlighted by the participants as a central tool for working within the EUVET field, facilitating mobility and ensuring the certification and recognition of acquired competences. Europass is utilised throughout the entire mobility process by both the sending and receiving organisation, encompassing the preparation and subsequent follow-up phases. This includes a range of documents, including learning agreements or the certification of gained competences and experiences. It was further noted by participants that learners with special needs require specific support in order to successfully utilise Europass, which is perceived to be a rather complex document. This support was frequently provided by teaching staff, who assisted learners in completing the Europass forms both before and after their period of mobility.

EQF as enabler of cross-border collaboration

EQF was particularly used in cross-border collaboration within EU-funded projects. In the development of educational offers, EQF and associated NQFs facilitate the systematization of learning programmes and qualification levels, thereby contributing to the establishment of a shared understanding of the project's objective. Consequently, EQF facilitates communication within international projects, and can also be utilized for the assessment of national standards and priorities and for the comparison of these across project countries.

3.3 Greece

In recent years, a new legal framework regulating VET has been introduced in Greece to enhance both pillars of vocational education and training. In the context of IVET, Greece introduced Law 4763/2020 in December 2020, establishing a National VET system at EQF levels 3–5. The reform aims to align skills with labour market needs, enhance education pathways, and improve employability, in line with the Osnabrück objectives for resilient and high-quality VET.

<https://refernet.eoppep.gr/?p=1062>

In the field of CVET, the Ministry of Employment introduced a law in April 2022 restructuring the Greek Public Employment Service (DYPA) and the CVET system, focusing on improving workforce skills for the digital and green economy. It introduced provisions for the "Evaluation – Quality – Certification" framework in CVET, with expanded quality control criteria for subsidized providers. The new structure is funded by the National Strategic Reference Framework (NSRF) and the Recovery Fund, with subsidized programmes available only through CVET eligible providers.

<https://www.cedefop.europa.eu/en/news/greece-2022-law-reforming-cvet-system>

The increase and upgrading of CVET centres (KEK-KDBM) after 2020 has led to more centres at universities, offering both academic and short practical programmes. Another important aspect is that the COVID-19 pandemic highlighted the need for distance learning, which ultimately improved KEKs' efficiency and reach, making them key players in lifelong learning and upskilling for both unemployed individuals and workers.

3.3.1 National understanding of EUVET-P tools and instruments

To encourage engagement, ECVET was introduced as an example to evaluate our understanding of its usefulness, application, and evolution over time. While participants were familiar with the concept of learning unit transfer, they had no practical experience with its implementation and were unaware of its formal repeal in 2020. Moreover, they did not fully grasp how its core principles continue to shape EU policies in practice. The discussion underscored a broader lack of information and the need for greater awareness of these tools.

The participants, having experience in both IVET and CVET, offered valuable insights from various sectors. Leveraging their diverse perspectives, the group identified EQF, Europass, and EQAVET as key transparency tools for enhancing skills, qualifications, and quality improvement in VET, and agreed to focus their efforts on these frameworks. Thus, the main tools in the focus group were:

- 1) **EQF**: The EQF serves as a common reference system for recognizing and comparing qualifications, fostering transparency, trust, and mobility across the EU. By linking to National Qualifications Frameworks (NQFs), it enhances the visibility of national qualifications while supporting lifelong learning and employability.
- 2) **Europass**: Notably, it is widely used in schools with hundreds of students as a transparency tool for internal selection, particularly in ERASMUS+ KA1 projects. Europass also serves as an additional qualification for students and graduates, enhancing their profiles during job applications and interviews. At the organizational level, it has been integrated into student-focused marketing initiatives.
- 3) **EQAVET** understood as a tool that promotes and enhances quality by including licencing and accreditation standards.

3.3.2 Needs and Challenges: SWOT Analysis

It was agreed that the usefulness of the EQF-NQF is not widely known among trainees, who often overlook the qualification level their studies lead to. This is crucial, as different educational pathways can sometimes result in the same qualification level. To address this issue, the group suggested that the use/study of the tool should be taught in school career guidance programmes, so that students can make more informed decisions about their educational pathways.

One participant noted that most Vocational Education and Training (VET) diplomas do not indicate the qualification level. In Initial VET (IVET), a Diploma Supplement is issued upon programme completion, ensuring transparent recognition of graduates' qualifications, which is vital for both national and international credential validation. Another disadvantage mentioned was that non-formal and informal learning in Greece have limited recognition within the National Qualifications Framework (NQF). Training programmes offered by CVET are not automatically classified within the NQF. The group agreed that the non-recognition of vocational training programmes within the NQF hinders their connection to the labour market and international mobility. Although some programmes lead to national work permits, they are not classified within the NQF. Only specific programmes, particularly in fields such as hairdressing or private security, may be classified at NQF Levels 3 or 4 through evaluation and certification processes, aligning with the European Qualifications Framework (EQF). Finally, it was highlighted that many educators and institutions are unaware of how to utilize the EQF, underlining the need for targeted information and training to support its effective implementation.

Participants discussed the role of Europass in the labour market, highlighting its impact on competitiveness. They noted that many businesses find it insufficient, as it lacks creativity, leading to its devaluation in the private sector and a loss of credibility. To strengthen its value, participants suggested integrating Europass with other EU VET tools, such as credit systems and qualification frameworks.

Participants acknowledged that there is limited knowledge about the EQAVET framework among educators, organizations, and employers. It was a shared belief among participants that the use of EQAVET continues to be more prevalent in IVET (Initial Vocational Education and Training) compared to CVET (Continuing Vocational Education and Training). However, the gap between the two is narrowing, which is a positive development, as it demonstrates that quality assurance (QA) systems are increasingly applied to CVET. Unfortunately, this also means that the adoption of EQAVET requires significant resources and ongoing organizational support from organizations, posing challenges for smaller providers.

One participant proposed holding targeted seminars on the use of available tools, designed for trainers and organizations. Another suggested training trainers on how to navigate existing platforms, making it easier for interested individuals to find updated information.

Europass

Regarding Europass, participants highlighted the fostering of transparency and standardization in CV management, especially in the public sector. Europass strength lies in the fact that it is a widely recognized format for creating and editing CVs and other mobility documents within the EU and offers tools such as the Diploma Supplement and Mobility Pass that enhance transparency and standardization. Thus, the Europass value lies in its function as a complementary tool for certifications and skill promotion. Further opportunities regarding Europass is the strengthening of cross-border mobility for workers and students by improving its acceptance in the private sector. In addition, further digitization and integration with tools like artificial intelligence could enhance its utility. Europass can be leveraged to promote transparency and ease in professional mobility at an international level. A greater visibility through collaboration with private entities would help to achieve broader acceptance. Weaknesses in relation to Europass are especially seen in the devaluation by the private sector due to a lack of creativity; Following, its usage in the private sector is limited, with many businesses considering it insufficient or inflexible. Furthermore, participants describe limited support or guidance provided for its proper use by trainers and organizations. Threats are seen in the insufficient integration with other European tools (e.g., credit systems, qualification levels). Also, a potential misunderstanding of its value by users leads to limited adoption, which is accompanied by a lack of awareness regarding the additional documents it offers beyond the standard CV. Alternative CV creation tools offer greater flexibility and adaptability.

EQF

Regarding EQF, participants highlight it as a unified system for recognizing and comparing qualifications at the European level, which promotes transparency and mobility among EU member states. Especially its links with the NQF enhances the visibility of national qualifications. Opportunities of the EQF are seen in the improvement of international collaboration through the opportunity to harmonize curricula based on learning outcomes. Another point is the development and expansion of EQF usage in areas such as lifelong learning and adult education. Thus, the EQF gives the opportunity to strengthen trust between educational systems and the labour

market. Greece participants assessed weaknesses due to the limited application of the EQF to non-formal and informal learning in Greece, a lack of awareness and understanding among users and organizations and a non-recognition of all vocational training programmes within the NQF. Threats are seen by participants in an insufficient integration and support by national authorities, which reduces effectiveness. Furthermore, participants describe contradictions and delays in legislation and certification management as well as gaps in awareness among educators and institutions about the use of the EQF.

EQAVET

EQAVET provides a common framework for quality assurance in vocational education and training (VET) across the EU, which enhances transparency and recognition of educational programmes among member states. Participants highlighted its strength as regards the support of the continuous improvement of national vocational education systems through recommendations and quality management tools. Additionally, it promotes collaboration and networking among VET providers and policymakers and thereby also focuses on learners' perceptions and satisfaction, ensuring compliance with high-quality standards. Another advantage is, that EQAVET applies to both Initial Vocational Education and Training (IVET) and Continuing Vocational Education and Training (CVET), gradually bridging the gap between the two types of VET. Opportunities are seen in strengthening cross-border mobility of learners and professionals through the implementation of common quality standards. For further implementation, development of new tools and resources for simplification as well as EU funding and initiatives can support the integration and broader application of the framework. Furthermore, EQAVET fosters an alignment with labour market demands through programmes based on learning outcomes. Weaknesses are seen by participants in the limited awareness and knowledge of EQAVET framework among educators, organizations and employers. Furthermore, strict licensing and certification requirements may exclude providers that fail to meet the new criteria as adoption requires significant resources and continuous organizational support, posing challenges for smaller providers. The use of EQAVET continues to be more prevalent in IVET (Initial Vocational Education and Training) compared to CVET (Continuing Vocational Education and Training). However, the gap between the two is narrowing, which is a positive development as it demonstrates that quality assurance (QA) systems are increasingly applied to CVET. Threats to EQAVET are posed by competition from alternative quality assurance frameworks that may be perceived as more flexible or modern. Additionally, participants describe challenges in aligning EQAVET with other European tools, such as EQF and Europass, potentially causing user confusion. Furthermore, shifting policy priorities could reduce support for EQAVET.

3.3.3 Good practices

The participants provided valuable insights into their experiences and good practices through the use of EUVET tools.

In the context of the EQF, participants shared two notable examples of good practices they have implemented within their organizations.

Integrating NCF with EQF to Strengthen Student Portfolios

A collaboration with a Greek university resulted in the alignment of training programmes with the National Qualifications Framework (NQF). By integrating the

National Curriculum Framework (NCF) with the EQF, students' portfolios were enhanced, thereby increasing their employability abroad.

Applying EQF in an EU Adult Education Project

Training curricula were restructured into learning outcome-based units, aligned with the EQF. This initiative introduced a course aimed at enhancing adult educators' intercultural competencies and marked the first adoption of a learning outcomes-based approach for aligning curricula with the EQF.

Furthermore, participants shared extensive experience with **Europass** beyond its usual application. In some VET organizations, Europass is incorporated into course materials, such as the «Practical Application in the Specialty» course in IVET and career guidance counselling in CVET, to familiarize students with its use. As a transparency tool, Europass is often criticized in the private sector for lacking creativity. However, it is highly valued in the public sector for promoting transparency. Its digital format facilitates efficient processing, enabling AI-assisted comparisons that streamline recruitment and evaluation processes.

Participants also shared insights on legislative developments they have observed, particularly regarding the gradual alignment of organizations with **EQAVET** in recent years. Specifically, the licensing and accreditation standards for VET organizations have become more stringent. Licensing indicators are now used to verify that training providers meet the necessary requirements for delivering high-quality training. These indicators encompass criteria related to organization such as infrastructure, equipment, trainers' qualifications and the services provided. Additionally, quality indicators primarily focus on trainees' perceptions and satisfaction levels, ensuring that VET programme implementation by training providers aligns with quality assurance system standards. Moreover, in 2022, a restructuring of licensing requirements for CVET providers introduced new eligibility criteria for participation in co-funded programmes. This reform impacted the share of accredited providers, fostering a culture of quality improvement and enhancing transparency in training quality.

In IVET, the certification process primarily relies on educational standards, followed by assessment standards. In contrast, in CVET, occupational standards are used as frequently as educational standards in the certification process. In nearly all cases, these standards are based on learning outcomes.

3.4 Portugal

3.4.1 National Understanding of EUVET-P Tools and Instruments

Participants demonstrated a nuanced understanding of the tools and instruments associated with EUVET (European Union Vocational Education and Training) policies, reflecting both their diverse professional contexts and their direct engagement with these frameworks. Their insights highlighted not only the technical applications of these tools but also their broader implications for enhancing mobility, harmonization, and quality in education and professional training across Europe.

Participants demonstrated a comprehensive understanding of tools and instruments. The **European Qualifications Framework** (EQF) emerged as a cornerstone tool, recognized for its pivotal role in comparing qualifications both within Europe and on a global scale. Participants appreciated its utility in facilitating cross-border mobility and aligning national qualifications with European standards. Its ability to provide a structured and transparent system for educational credentials was particularly valued, as it enhanced the international recognition of qualifications and contributed to creating cohesive educational ecosystems across countries.

Participants widely acknowledged the **European Quality Assurance Reference Framework** (EQAVET) as essential for driving continuous quality improvement in vocational education and training (VET). Its standardized benchmarks were seen as vital for ensuring the effectiveness and credibility of VET programmes, with many emphasizing its role in harmonizing quality standards across regions. The framework's focus on fostering accountability and systematic evaluation processes was highlighted as a key factor in maintaining consistent educational excellence.

The relevance of the **European Credit System for Vocational Education and Training** (ECVET) was underscored in its capacity to support the transfer and recognition of learning outcomes across diverse educational systems. Participants found it particularly useful in promoting mobility and seamless transitions within professional training environments. By enabling learners to accumulate and transfer credits, ECVET was seen as a practical tool for increasing the flexibility and permeability of vocational pathways. Participants described **Europass** as an indispensable tool for standardizing the presentation of skills, qualifications, and competencies. It was praised for its effectiveness in career planning and mobility, allowing job applicants to present their credentials in a clear and comparable format. The integration of Europass with other (national) tools, such as the Qualifica Passport, further enhanced its relevance in aligning national and European objectives for professional recognition. The Qualifica Passport was recognized as an important instrument in Portugal, particularly for documenting skills and short-term training records. Its compatibility with Europass facilitated better alignment with European mobility goals, making it an effective tool for both individual career development and systemic integration within the EUVET landscape.

Electronic Platform for Adult Learning (EPAL) was noted for its role in providing valuable training materials for adult learning professionals. However, participants suggested that its content could be further tailored to meet the specific needs of VET professionals. Expanding the range and depth of resources available on the platform could significantly enhance its utility in vocational training contexts. The Erasmus+ program was lauded for its role in fostering collaboration and exchange among European educators and trainers. Participants valued the program's practical contributions, such as addressing logistical, cultural, and administrative challenges in project implementation. Additionally, Erasmus+ facilitated the sharing of experiences

and best practices, creating synergies that enriched the professional training landscape.

Participants demonstrated a comprehensive understanding of these tools and instruments, leveraging their features to address practical challenges and enhance vocational education and training. Their insights underscored the collective value of these frameworks in promoting harmonization, mobility, and quality assurance within the European educational and professional landscapes. This understanding highlights the transformative potential of EUVET tools when effectively applied to diverse professional contexts. Several participants stressed the need for tools that bridge the gap between EU frameworks and national policies. Clear and practical implementation guidelines for instruments like the European Qualifications Framework (EQF) and the European Credit System for Vocational Education and Training (ECVET) are essential to ensure their effective application. Flexible and localized tools were also proposed to adapt vocational training to specific regional or sectoral demands while maintaining alignment with EU objectives.

Participants highlighted the importance of forward-thinking tools that can address the rapid changes driven by emerging technologies and economic shifts. Resources should support the development of structured, outcome-oriented training programmes with clear pathways for learners, ensuring alignment with labour market needs to enhance employability. There was also a call for the EQF framework to evolve, incorporating dynamic and flexible professional profiles that include transferable skills and competencies such as digital literacy and emotional intelligence.

3.4.2 Challenges and Needs: SWOT Analysis

Participants also expressed challenges, strengths and needs regarding EUVET-Tool, which were summarized in a SWOT analysis.

Regarding Europass, participants pointed out strengths such as standardization and transparency, which provides a consistent format for presenting qualifications and skills, enhancing employability and mobility across EU member states. Europass is recognized as a user-Friendly for Job Applications enabling job seekers to showcase their credentials to employers in a standardized manner. Furthermore, Europass is applicable globally and can serve as a benchmark for comparing qualifications internationally, particularly in sectors with uniform requirements.

Weaknesses of Europass are especially seen in its rigid format and partly fragmented access. The standardized format limits creativity, making it difficult for users to showcase unique or non-traditional skills. Furthermore, users often find it challenging to navigate Europass alongside other tools like the Qualifica Passport.

Participants did see opportunities in further integration into digital platforms, leading to a centralization of Europass its components, and other tools in a single platform could enhance accessibility and usability. Thus, introducing more flexible formats could allow users to present a broader range of skills and experiences.

Threats regarding Europass are especially seen in low engagement as limited awareness and fragmented dissemination and coordination efforts risk reducing its effectiveness and usage. There is a coordination gap, and therefore a “pilot” entity is needed to guide the usage of this tool, as implementation and certificate responsibilities vary across countries, in some they fall on universities, in others on governmental organizations, and so on, resulting in inconsistency and diminished adoption.

Participants also stated several strengths of the **European Qualifications Framework (EQF)**. First, the alignment of qualifications facilitates comparison across countries, improving understanding of education levels and skill sets and fostering an alignment to European standards. Thus, tools like EQF can help create adaptable learning experiences, enabling individuals to align their education with personal goals and career aspirations. This approach promotes autonomy, self-regulation, and responsibility, leading to more effective and sustainable learning outcomes. In addition, EQF supports cross-border academic and professional mobility by providing a unified framework. Furthermore, it offers the potential to create more transparent, accessible, and adaptable qualification profiles, fostering alignment between vocational training and labour market needs.

Regarding weaknesses, participants highlighted the technical complexity of EQF in language and technical issues, posing barriers for educators, learners, and employers with limited knowledge of the framework. Thus, EQF faces implementation challenges due to its reliance on highly detailed learning outcome descriptors that make the alignment with national qualification systems complex, labour-intensive, and inconsistent across member states.

Opportunities when using the EQF are seen in the simplification and training for staff, which could make the framework more accessible. Further promotion of the EQF as a standard for international qualifications could enhance its impact globally and promote motivation for usage alignment across member states. Participants also pointed out the opportunity to establish of a National Contact Point, dedicated to providing expert consultancy, aimed at helping institutions and trainers effectively operationalize European instruments. **Threats** are especially seen in disparities of national systems as the Variations in how countries implement and adapt EQF can lead to inconsistencies, undermining its purpose.

When thematizing ECVET, participants highlighted that credit transfer and recognition allows for the accumulation and transfer of learning outcomes, promoting lifelong learning and flexibility in career pathways. Thus, it also supports mobility by enabling recognition of credits earned in different countries or institutions.

Weaknesses are seen in the fact of limited awareness and adoption. Many educators and institutions are unfamiliar with ECVET or lack the resources to implement it effectively. Furthermore, ECVET is perceived as complex. The framework's intricacies, including its reliance on detailed learning outcomes, make it difficult for some users to adopt and integrate into existing systems.

Opportunities are seen that strengthening partnerships between institutions and countries could expand the practical application of ECVET and thereby enhance mobility initiatives.

Nevertheless, implementation of ECVET is fragmented and inconsistent across countries and training for VET staff is perceived as insufficient.

3.4.3 Good Practices

The focus group discussions highlighted several good practices related to using and adapting EU tools like Europass, EQF, and ECVET. These practices emphasize localized adaptations, effective dissemination, and user-centric approaches to maximize the tools' impact.

Localized Adaptation of Tools

Adapting EU tools to fit national and regional contexts was frequently cited as an effective practice. For example, aligning EQF descriptors with local qualifications frameworks ensures smoother integration and better usability. The tailoring of validation processes to reflect regional labour market needs improves relevance and adoption rates.

Emphasis on Lifelong Learning and Inclusion

Promoting the recognition of non-formal and informal learning through accessible validation processes strengthens lifelong learning pathways. Thus, ensuring that tools are inclusive and adaptable to different educational levels and learner demographics fosters wider participation. Simplifying technical language in tools like EQF and ECVET and providing clarity, makes them more accessible to educators and learners.

Co-Creation of Learning Materials

Collaborative workshops and co-creator labs were praised as effective methods for developing practical and user-friendly materials, which in themselves were deemed necessary and scarce. Engaging educators and stakeholders in co-creating resources fosters a sense of ownership and ensures that the materials directly address their needs. Organizing targeted training sessions helps educators and administrators build the skills necessary to implement these tools effectively.

Peer-to-Peer Knowledge Sharing

Encouraging experienced users to share best practices and lessons learned through mentoring programmes or forums promotes practical understanding has shown to be effective. For instance, showcasing how institutions have successfully implemented Europass or ECVET inspires others to adopt similar approaches.

Integration of Digital Platforms

Participants also highlighted that using centralized digital platforms would streamline access to multiple tools (e.g., combining Europass with national validation instruments) and thus, reduces fragmentation and enhances usability. This approach improves accessibility for both educators and learners, particularly in under-resourced regions.

The discussions held within AidLearn's focus groups underscore the critical importance of an integrated and adaptable approach to implementing EU VET tools such as the EQF, ECVET, and Europass. These tools play a pivotal role in promoting mobility, harmonisation, and continuous improvement in vocational education and training across Europe. However, to maximise their impact, it is essential to address identified challenges, including technical complexity, fragmented implementation, and limited awareness.

The highlighted good practices, such as local adaptation of tools, targeted dissemination campaigns, and the co-design of learning materials, demonstrate the effectiveness of a collaborative, user-centred approach. These practices emphasise the need for accessible resources, ongoing professional training, and a simplification of instruments to meet diverse stakeholder needs.

Looking forward, a strategic evolution should focus on:

- Simplifying and improving the accessibility of tools for a diverse range of users;
- Digital integration to centralise and optimise access to EU VET instruments;
- Promoting the development of emerging skills, such as digital literacy and emotional intelligence, in alignment with the evolving labour market.

Through the cohesive and innovative application of these strategies, EU VET tools can strengthen vocational education and training systems, fostering greater inclusion, employability, and mobility across Europe.

4 Conclusion

This report summarizes the outcomes of the focus groups as part of the project EUVET-P. It reflects on the target groups' needs and challenges related to EUVET policy implementation as well as it identifies good practices related to the current use of EUVET policy tools. Moreover, it is the fundament of developing the learning units as the learning units' topics derive from the focus groups discussions.

Findings from the focus groups show that focus group participants have an in-depth understanding of a variety of EU policy tools and instruments. Among those instruments that are most often mentioned are the EQF and Europass but also the credit point systems (ECVEET and ECTS) as well as the quality assurance framework EQAVET. For most participants, these tools are relevant to their everyday professional life (e.g. in terms of applying for funding or sending students abroad).

Moreover, participants could easily identify strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats there were linked to implementing and applying these tools.

Comparing and contrasting the focus groups results was done within a follow-up meeting of the partners held at TU Dresden/Germany in January 2025. As a result, it was decided that the following topics would be addressed by the learning units. These are:

- Learning unit 1 – Introduction¹ (TUD/Germany)
- Learning unit 2- Europass (Andras/Estonia)
- Learning unit 3 – EQF/NQF (AidLearn/Portugal)
- Learning unit 4 – EQAVET (Kek Axia/Greece)

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¹ This „Introduction will cover a general overview of EUVET policy, its respective tools and instruments etc.

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