



# Good for Youth Good for Business

European Alliance for Apprenticeships



*Social Europe*

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# Preface



**Nicolas Schmit**

European Commissioner for Jobs and Social Rights

Apprenticeships are an excellent way to help young people move from education and training into jobs. Since the launch of the European Alliance for Apprenticeships (EAfA) in 2013, almost one million training and job opportunities for young people have been mobilised. Eight years on, our engagement with the world of business through the Alliance has given an enormous boost to the supply, quality, image and mobility of apprenticeships. It involves national commitments from 37 countries as well as engagements from numerous stakeholders, such as companies, social partners, chambers, education and training providers, regional authorities, youth and parent organisations as well as research bodies.

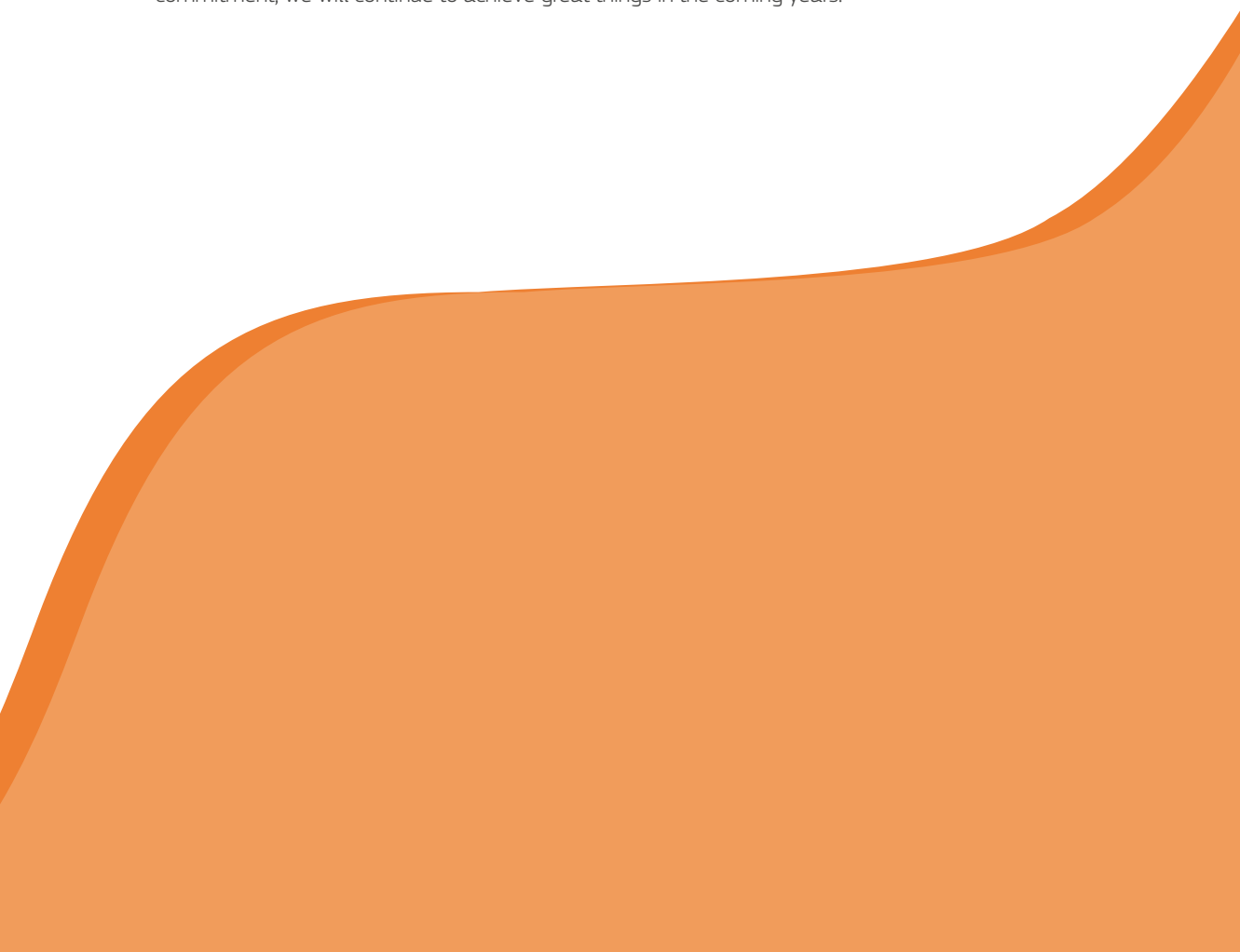
Apprenticeships teach the skills that employers actually need, while an apprentice gains the insights, practical abilities and networks for a smooth labour market entry and an active participation in society. Apprenticeships also contribute to a speedy labour market recovery. They add a skilled labour force to a wide range of sectors, enhancing the productivity and competitiveness of companies big and small across the EU.

While quality and effective apprenticeships have a vital role to play in curbing a new youth employment crisis, they have been hit particularly hard by the COVID-19 lockdowns. SMEs, in particular, have had to discontinue apprenticeships when activities were shut down, or when ensuring business survival took precedence. Countless other SMEs were never in a position to accept candidates in the first place, due to a lack of resources. Some Member States have already called upon employers to step up efforts in preserving apprenticeships.

The present Youth Employment Support (YES) Plan is embedded in the Commission's ambitious recovery strategy from the COVID-19 pandemic. It is an integral part of the Commission's social agenda of the implementation of the European Pillar of Social Rights and supports the implementation of the New Industrial Strategy. It is reinforced by the Updated Skills Agenda for Europe, including an action plan which puts skills at the center as a pathway to employability, resilience and adaptability to the digital and green transitions. In order to give a renewed boost to apprenticeships across the EU, the Commission's Youth Employment Support package also announced a renewed European Alliance for Apprenticeships. The renewed Alliance calls for new commitments for digital and green apprenticeships, focusing on the economic sectors that will be on the frontline of the transition to a climate neutral Europe.

In this brochure, you will find some of the stories behind the numbers. Young people, who, because of the European Alliance for Apprenticeships, have got their foot onto the jobs ladder and a good career, which will allow them to follow their passion. Companies who are stepping up to the mark and acting as an inspiration to others in opening up new opportunities for young people and invigorating their business with the skills that will help them to thrive.

I hope you enjoy reading about the achievements and success stories of the European Alliance for Apprenticeships. A lot has already happened, but the journey continues. With stakeholders' full commitment, we will continue to achieve great things in the coming years.



## The policy context

Since 2002, European countries and social partners have been cooperating in the field of vocational education and training through the Copenhagen Process. The 2010 Bruges Communiqué set out a vision for modern and attractive vocational education and training (VET) to be achieved by 2020. It has been followed by the Riga Conclusions, which set five key priorities to further improve VET systems for the period from 2015 until 2020:

1. Promote work-based learning in all its forms, with special attention to apprenticeships;
2. Further develop quality assurance mechanisms in VET;
3. Enhance access to VET and qualifications for all through more flexible and permeable systems;
4. Further strengthen key competences;
5. Foster professional development of VET teachers, trainers and mentors.

The Osnabrück Declaration, endorsed in November 2020, will further continue to foster progress of the VET systems by establishing new priorities for the 2020-2025 period, focusing on four main areas in line with the European Commission's priorities:

1. Resilience and excellence through quality, inclusive and flexible VET;
2. Establishing a new lifelong learning culture – relevance of C-VET and digitalisation;
3. Sustainability – A green link in VET;
4. European education and training area and international VET.

### Copenhagen process: One process - many stops

Copenhagen Declaration	Maastricht Communiqué	Helsinki Communiqué	Bordeaux Communiqué	Bruges Communiqué	Riga Communiqué	Osnabruck Communiqué
2002	2004	2006	2008	2010	2015	2020
Copenhagen 2002	Maastricht 2004	Helsinki 2006	Bordeaux 2008	Bruges 2010	Riga 2015	Osnabruck 2020
4 priorities to be pursued and 4 principles to underpin cooperation	Mandate to develop EQF and ECVET	Consolidation of process - deadline by 2010 to implement instruments and principles	First assessment of the effect of economic crisis on VET	22 short term deliverables and 11 objectives	5 medium term deliverables and transversal areas	Updated priorities in 4 areas for the period 2020-2025



## The Council Recommendation on VET

The new Council Recommendation on VET for sustainable competitiveness, social fairness and resilience, adopted in November 2020, puts forward a number of actions to make VET future-proof:

- ▶ Modernise VET in the EU, adapting it to a more digital and green economy;
- ▶ Ensure that VET is agile, adapting swiftly to labour market needs and providing quality opportunities for young people and adults alike;
- ▶ Reinforce opportunities for work-based learning and apprenticeships;
- ▶ Increase the flexibility of VET, including by encouraging modular and non-formal learning methods;
- ▶ Boost the quality assurance of VET and promote Centres of Vocational Excellence.

The Recommendation also includes three ambitious quantitative objectives to be achieved at European level by 2025:

- ▶ The share of employed graduates should be at least 82 %;
- ▶ 60 % of recent graduates from VET benefit from exposure to work-based learning;
- ▶ 8 % of learners in VET benefit from a learning mobility abroad.

## Apprenticeships in recent EU policy initiatives

**In the past years, there has been an increased emphasis on the need for high-quality apprenticeships to facilitate successful school-to-work transitions and increase the employment prospects of young people. Apprenticeships are therefore an important part of several policy initiatives.**

### **European Framework for Quality and Effective Apprenticeships (2018)**

According to the Council Recommendation, EU Member States should ensure that apprenticeship schemes are responsive to labour market needs and provide benefits to both learners and employers by building on two sets of criteria for quality and effective apprenticeships.

▶ Criteria for learning and working conditions

(1) written contract; (2) learning outcomes; (3) pedagogical support; (4) workplace component; (5) pay and/or compensation; (6) social protection; (7) work, health and safety conditions.

▶ Criteria for framework conditions

(8) regulatory framework; (9) involvement of social partners; (10) support for companies; (11) flexible pathways and mobility; (12) career guidance and awareness raising; (13) transparency; (14) quality assurance and graduate tracking.



### **Youth Employment Support: A Bridge to Jobs for the Next Generation** (2020)

The Commission communication sets out steps for averting a new youth employment crisis. To help Member States tackle this challenge, it proposes:

- ▶ A Bridge to Jobs, reinforcing the Youth Guarantee;
- ▶ Future-proofing the EU's VET policy, notably by improving the quality of continued education and apprenticeships;
- ▶ A renewed impetus for the European Alliance for Apprenticeships to ensure that apprenticeships play their part in the labour market recovery;
- ▶ Additional measures supporting youth employment, such as direct subsidies for apprentices in SMEs, placement of apprentices from insolvent companies into other companies, implementation of VET and apprenticeships reforms, as well as investments in inter-company training centres to help SMEs to provide VET and apprenticeships.

### **Adopted Council Recommendation on a Bridge to Jobs – reinforcing the Youth Guarantee** (2020)

The recommendation aims at revamping the policy framework to better support youth employability and avoid another youth employment crisis by ensuring that all young people receive a good-quality offer of employment, continued education, an apprenticeship or traineeship in the short term.

Thus, the new and improved Bridge to Jobs will:

- ▶ Cover young people aged between 15 and 29;
- ▶ Be **more inclusive**, with a wider outreach focusing especially on disadvantaged groups;
- ▶ Link in with the **needs of companies**, especially SMEs, providing the skills required – in particular those for the green and digital transitions;
- ▶ Provide **tailored counselling**, guidance and mentoring.

### **Commission report on the implementation of a European Framework for Quality and Effective Apprenticeships (EFQEA)**

Three years into implementation of the 2018 Council Recommendation on EFQEA, the Commission took stock of how the framework had been put into practice by EU Member States.

The Commission report shows that the **seven criteria on learning and working conditions are in place** in the majority of Member States, while **further progress is needed in implementing the seven criteria on framework conditions**. The report also acknowledges the fact that the framework remains a key instrument to enhance the quality and effectiveness of apprenticeships across the EU.

### **European Skills Agenda for sustainable competitiveness, social fairness and resilience (2020)**

The Commission communication puts forward 12 EU actions aimed at supporting partnerships for skills, upskilling and reskilling for jobs and empowering people to keep learning throughout their lives. It sets ambitious quantitative objectives at EU level and outlines how the EU will support investments for skills, by implementing VET and apprenticeships reforms, in particular on enhancing the digital readiness of VET institutions, including for VET teachers, apprenticeships and Centres of Vocational Excellence.

# Apprenticeships and VET facing COVID-19

In early 2020, the coronavirus pandemic seriously disrupted all forms of education and training, including VET, with work-based learning (WBL) and apprenticeships most affected.

However, the economic recovery from the COVID-19 crisis offers an opportunity to accelerate reforms in VET and strengthen its resilience. Several policy initiatives contribute to it, making sure that the EU's digital and green transitions are ingrained in the DNA of our youth employment policies, in order to boost and create youth employment (see p40).

Beside policy actions, several initiatives were taken to ensure continuity of the learning and teaching through this period and despite of the closing of education and training institutions all over the world.

- ▶ The European Commission launched an online survey as early as 18 March 2020 to capture the variety of initiatives that were undertaken. A vast number of online courses/learning modules were available. However they were mostly **not** VET-specific. Ready-made material with VET-specific content was less developed and there was a strong call for the Commission and national public authorities to create a database with existing resources to be shared for free around Europe.
- ▶ Cedefop published an overview on apprenticeships. Apprentices continued their training and work, in particular, in the healthcare, food, building sectors and, generally, wherever companies continued their activities as long as the health and safety measures were observed. Apprentices largely discontinued their company attendance in the sectors whose activities had been shut down: restauration, well-being, tourism.
- ▶ The Inter-agency Group (a joint initiative between EAfA, the International Labour Organization (ILO), Global Apprenticeship Network (GAN), the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), European Training Foundation (ETF), European Centre for the Development of Vocational Training (Cedefop), Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), African Development Bank, Asian Development Bank and the World Bank Group) launched a survey aimed to examine the impact of COVID-19 on **training and development** of employees, apprentices and interns in public and private enterprises and other organisations. The responses to the survey contributed to the stocktaking of good practices and innovative solutions undertaken by various enterprises and organisations to overcome the challenges as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic.

# European Alliance for Apprenticeships: Its roots and successes

The European Alliance for Apprenticeships (EaFA) was launched in 2013 to help tackle youth unemployment. It is based on a Joint Declaration by the European Commission, the Lithuanian Presidency of the EU and the European Social Partners and was supported by a Council Declaration by EU Member States in October 2013. Its members are committed to taking action to strengthen the supply, quality and image of apprenticeships as well as mobility of apprentices.



The Alliance has now been renewed to give a boost to apprenticeships across the EU, which will contribute to a stable supply of quality and effective placements for the young. It calls for new commitments for digital and green apprenticeships, focusing on the economic sectors that will be on the frontline of the transition to a climate neutral Europe. Concretely, the renewed Alliance will include:

**Committing to quality and effective apprenticeships**, and encouraging Member States and companies to do so, by fostering national apprenticeships coalitions.

**Incentivising support to SMEs** for providing a stable supply of quality and effective apprenticeships.

**Mobilising local and regional authorities** as catalysts for apprenticeships within the local business environment.

**Strengthening social dialogue** through a more active involvement of national social partner organisations.

**Engaging European sectoral social dialogue committees** in apprenticeships proactively, with a view to agree on joint sectoral pledges.

**Supporting the representation of apprentices** in Member States by relaunching the European Apprentices Network.

Apprenticeships are a priority because the combination of learning in school and training on the job gives young people the skills mix employers need. More and better apprenticeships are key to increase competences and ensure employability of young people. It is also key to ensure the competitiveness of companies in a changing world of work. In fact, 2 in 3 apprentices land a job directly after their apprenticeship. This is highly valuable, knowing that 40 % of employers say they cannot find people with the right skills. Through apprenticeships, young people can get a foothold in the labour market and businesses can recruit people with the skills they need.

### **Growing interest**

Interest in apprenticeships is growing and new members are joining the EAfA regularly. By March 2017, companies and stakeholders had made over 200 pledges. By June 2021, more than 350 stakeholders had joined the Alliance and pledged to provide over 1 031 093 apprenticeships and other training or first-job opportunities for young people. Altogether, 36 countries have made national commitments under the Alliance, including all 27 EU Member States, all 5 candidate countries and all 4 EFTA countries. Companies, social partners and education and training providers are the biggest stakeholder groups in the Alliance.

## State of play

### **Supply**

Most vocational students in Europe are in school and lack access to training in real world settings. The EAfA has helped to secure training and first job opportunities for young people. Member States have also included apprenticeships in their Youth Guarantee schemes and are improving support for apprenticeships. With EU funding, employer organisations undertook a study on the cost-effectiveness of apprenticeships, which is central to improving supply. Around two thirds of the pledges focus on the supply of apprentices.

### **Quality**

When developing apprenticeships, quality is crucial. Over 3 in 4 EAfA pledges focus on quality issues. The ET 2020 Working Group on VET has developed a report with 20 guiding principles for high-performance apprenticeships. Furthermore, the European trade unions developed a study on a 'European Quality Framework for Apprenticeships', with the Commission's support. On 15 March 2018, the Council, following the Commission's proposal of October 2017, adopted a Recommendation on a European Framework for Quality and Effective Apprenticeships. The Framework sets out 14 criteria to define quality and effective apprenticeships, ensuring both the development of job-related skills and the personal development of apprentices. It takes into account the diversity of VET systems across the EU and respects the Member States' competence in the area of VET.



## Image

Apprenticeships are too often seen as a second choice. Since 2016, the Commission has organised an annual European Vocational Skills Week, which also includes the EAfA Awards celebration for companies and apprentices, in order to improve the image of vocational training and apprenticeships. Similar events have been organised in Member States and two thirds of EAfA pledges focus on image building.

## Mobility

One third of EAfA pledges focus on cross-border mobility. Erasmus+ finances apprentice mobility and, with the introduction of ErasmusPro in 2018, aims to facilitate long-term placements in working environments in another country and provide young people with job-specific vocational skills. Since 2018, apprenticeships with a work contract have also been included in EURES – the European job mobility portal.

## Overview of stakeholders in the Alliance

Social partners	Professional bodies and networks
Research institutes/think tanks	Education and training providers
Regional and local authorities	Non-profit/youth/parent organisations
Companies and business organisations	Chambers of commerce/industry/crafts





## EaFA – Evaluation results

A monitoring survey launched by the Apprenticeship Support Services in February 2021 evaluated the achievements of the EaFA pledges, identified the key challenges to their implementation and investigated the main areas in which EaFA members require support. The survey collected 115 responses and the full report is available on the EaFA web page.

### **Progress in pledges implementation**

More than 80 % of respondents reported progress towards the supply, quality and image of apprenticeships, while the implementation of pledges focusing on the mobility of apprentices was reportedly more challenging due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Despite the challenges, at least 735 355 apprenticeship places were created by the respondent organisations in the 2019–2020 period, with an average of 11 490 places per organisation.

### **How the stakeholders see the Alliance**

The consulted members of the Alliance reported that the EaFA is either a valuable or a very valuable (89 %) multi-stakeholder platform to boost the quality, supply and image of apprenticeships as well as the mobility of apprentices. EaFA members particularly appreciate the opportunities for knowledge sharing and exchange of best practices provided by the Alliance, and the opportunities to network and interact with peers and stakeholders from other countries.

## Pledges and implementation progress

Ensuring the quality of apprenticeships is the objective of most of the pledges (233), followed by those focusing on increasing the supply of apprenticeships (194) and on improving the image of apprenticeships (191). About a third of the total pledges aimed at enhancing the mobility of apprentices (110). Pledge implementation has progressed well. At the time of the survey (first quarter of 2019), 14 % of respondents had already completed their pledge, while approximately 70 % of respondents reported major or some progress with their pledges.

### Level of progress reported in the implementation of pledges

	Major progress	Some progress	Little or no progress
<b>Supply</b>	31 %	51 %	18 %
<b>Quality</b>	33 %	52 %	15 %
<b>Image</b>	31 %	55 %	15 %
<b>Mobility</b>	20 %	33 %	47 %

### Supply of apprenticeship places

Approximately 86 % of pledges focusing on the supply of new apprenticeship places reported major or some progress. Of these, 46 % of pledges created less than 100 apprenticeship places each and 10 % of them created more than 10 000 apprenticeship places. Through the data collected by the monitoring survey, it has been estimated that the pledges monitored have created more than 212 000 learning opportunities in total in the period 2017-2018.

### Improving the quality of apprenticeships

Respondents reported that the quality of apprenticeships has been improved mostly through ad hoc training, strategic and high-level partnerships and better guidance on quality assurance practices. The adoption of the European Framework for Quality and Effective Apprenticeships was also deemed as a crucial step to boost the quality of apprenticeships. Finally, according to the respondents, the quality of apprenticeships has also improved thanks to specific monitoring and communication activities, as these provide evidence-based results and eventually enhance the visibility of apprenticeships among other stakeholders and policymakers.

### Improving the image of apprenticeships

Respondents reported that the image of apprenticeships was improved mostly through:

- ▶ participation in high-level events;
- ▶ enhanced communication;
- ▶ dissemination activities;
- ▶ modernisation of the working equipment and facilities.

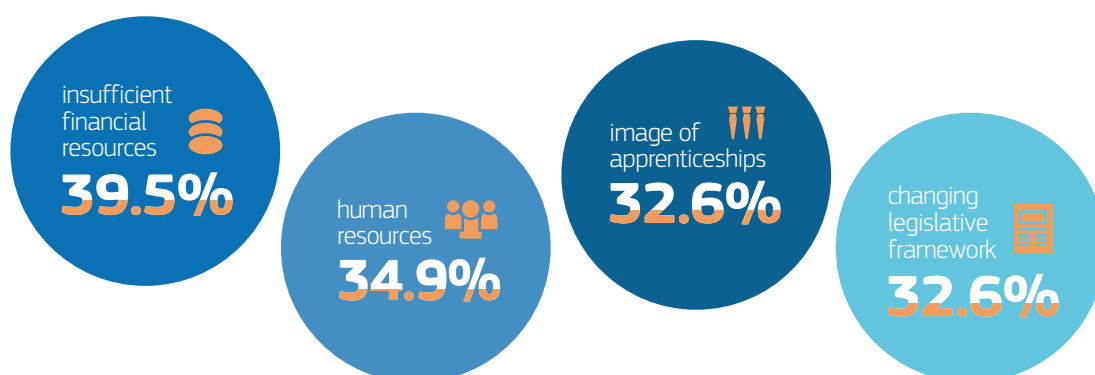
Through the submission of their pledges to the EAfA, respondents argued that it has been possible to increase the number of dissemination and communication activities undertaken by, for instance, organising conferences and high-level meetings (social dialogue, ministerial level roundtables, etc.). The opportunity to organise these types of communication activities strongly contributed to raising awareness on the topic among both key stakeholders and the general public.

### Promoting mobility of apprentices in Europe

The mobility of apprentices was promoted mainly through participation in European mobility programmes (most importantly, Erasmus+) or through the development of company-based internal mobility programmes. However, other respondents argued that the lack of funding at the national level to support the mobility of apprentices represents an important barrier for many SMEs and organisations in different Member States.

### Implementing pledges: Key challenges

The main challenges and obstacles reported by SMEs while trying to fulfil pledges included:



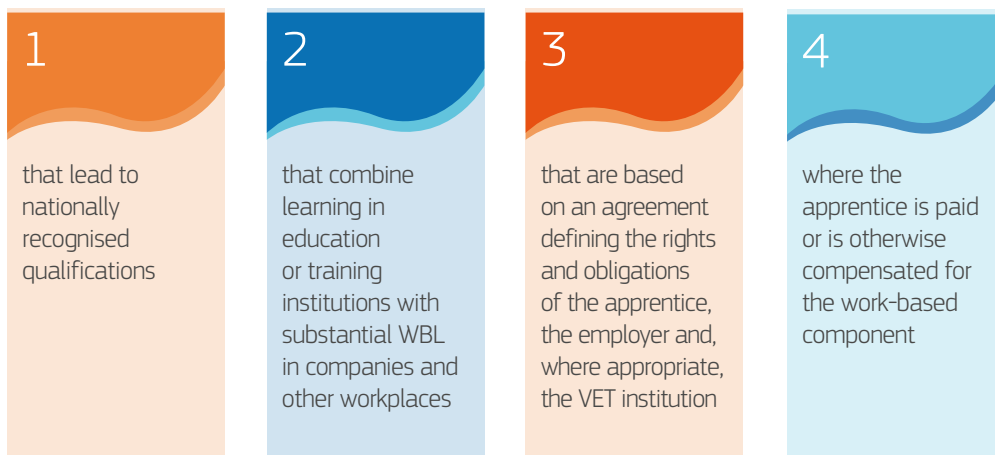
Other stakeholders reported further challenges including the lack of social dialogue and the lack of involvement of teachers and education providers in policy development and implementation in the field of apprenticeships.

# Apprenticeships – A successful form of work-based learning

Work-based learning (WBL), a key aspect of VET, is directly linked to its goal of helping learners acquire knowledge, skills and competences with direct relevance for the labour market. There are broadly three main forms of WBL:

## 1. Apprenticeships

The term apprenticeships is defined and understood differently across EU Member States. However, the Council Recommendation on a European Framework for Quality and Effective Apprenticeships defines apprenticeships as formal VET schemes:



## 2. School-based VET with on-the-job training

This second form of WBL includes on-the-job training periods in companies. These periods vary in length and typically entail shorter internships, work placements or traineeships that are incorporated as a compulsory or optional element of VET programmes leading to formal qualifications.

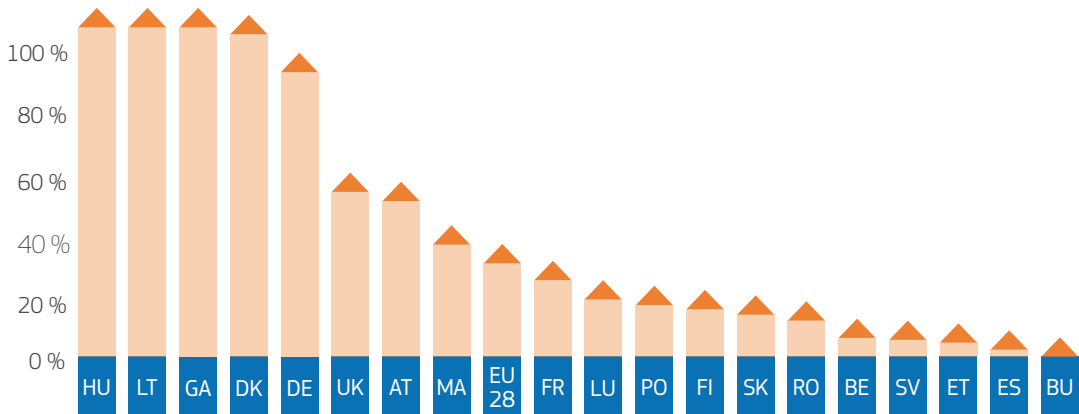
## 3. Work-based learning in schools

WBL can also be integrated in a school-based programme through on-site labs, workshops, kitchens, restaurants, junior or practice firms, simulations or real business/industry project assignments. The aim is to create 'real life' work environments, establish contacts and/or cooperation with real companies or clients, and develop entrepreneurship competences.

### Work-based learning across Member States

The combination of practical experience and theoretical learning is now well recognised as an effective approach to providing relevant skills, facilitating the application of theoretical knowledge and improving the transition of students into the labour market.

Based on available data, in only a few countries in the EU (Denmark, Germany, Hungary, Latvia and to a lesser extent Austria) the majority of VET students are enrolled in combined school and WBL programmes, providing significant, structured and curriculum-linked WBL opportunities. No combined work and school-based programmes were reported in Bulgaria, Croatia, Cyprus, Ireland, Lithuania, Portugal or Slovenia.



Source: Eurostat (UOE, 2017), online data code educ\_uoe\_enrs04, Pupils enrolled in upper secondary education by programme orientation, sex, type of institution and intensity of participation.



# Comparing apprenticeships and traineeships

Apprenticeships are not to be confused with traineeships. The table below presents a comparison of the two schemes:

	<b>Apprenticeship</b>	<b>Traineeship</b>
<b>Scope</b>	Full qualifying professional or VET profile	Complements an educational programme or individual CV
<b>Goal</b>	Professional profile/qualification	Documented practical experience
<b>Educational level</b>	Usually EQF levels 3-5	All EQF levels (pre-)vocational education, in higher education and after graduation
<b>Content</b>	Acquisition of the full set of knowledge, skills and competences of an occupation	Vocational, work or career orientation. Acquisition of some knowledge, skills and competences of an occupation/ profession
<b>On-the-job learning</b>	Equally important to coursework	Usually complementing coursework or optional extra
<b>Length</b>	Fixed, medium-long term Usually 1-4 years	Varying, short- to medium-term Usually less than one year
<b>Employment status</b>	Typically employee status	Student, trainee or volunteer
Compensation	Typically paid (amount negotiated or set by law) Apprenticeship allowance	Varying remuneration, often unpaid Unregulated financial compensation
Governance	Strongly regulated, often by both social partners and VET providers	Unregulated or partly regulated

Source: Adapted from an overview in 'Apprenticeship and Traineeship Schemes In EU 27: Key Success Factors', European Commission (2013)

# Who benefits from apprenticeships?

Apprenticeships benefit companies, learners and society as a whole. Good-quality schemes make young people more employable (60-70 % secure employment on completion). They help companies build productive workforces too, and training firms normally recoup their investment by the end of or shortly after the training period. Good apprenticeships also boost employment, reducing the need for social security and increasing social inclusion.

Companies	Learners	Society
<b>Skills</b> Mastering skills development	<b>Skills</b> Practical skills that employers look for	<b>Skills</b> Skills in line with labour market needs
<b>Recruitment</b> Targeted recruitment with lower costs	<b>Work experience</b> Valuable and practical experience to put on a CV	<b>Connecting education with work</b> Worlds of education and work connect and align
<b>Productivity</b> Apprentices also work and contribute to productivity	<b>Quicker job</b> Apprentices find jobs more quickly than their peers	<b>Youth employment</b> Easier access to labour market for young people
<b>Innovation</b> Fresh perspectives from apprentices	<b>Better paid</b> Apprentices are better paid in their first jobs	<b>Social inclusion</b> Participation in education, working life and society
<b>Reputation</b> Enhanced standing and recognition	<b>Longer contract</b> Apprentices stay longer in their first job	

“ Apprenticeships yield benefits to employers through the productive work carried out by apprentices while on the programme, as well as through long-term recruitment benefits realised by employers after the end of the apprenticeship period. ”

Source: *Striking the right balance: Costs and benefits of apprenticeship*, OECD (2017)

# Apprenticeship Support Services

The Apprenticeship Support Services were launched at the third European Vocational Skills Week in Vienna in November 2018. Their aim is to improve the quality and effectiveness of apprenticeships across the EU through tailored support to stakeholders involved in delivering apprenticeships.

The Apprenticeship Support Services are based on three pillars:

- ▶ A knowledge hub to share and access information relevant to apprenticeship design and delivery, and to simplify access to studies, evidence or statistical data relating to apprenticeships;
- ▶ A networking hub to facilitate the exchange of ideas and cooperation amongst stakeholders;
- ▶ Benchlearning (combining benchmarking with peer learning) to provide a structured process and approach to mutual learning among Member States on improving their apprenticeship systems.

While the first two pillars are open to all stakeholders of the Alliance (EU Member States, candidate countries and European Free Trade Association (EFTA) members, as well as businesses, social partners, chambers, VET providers, regions, youth representatives and think tanks), the benchlearning pillar is essentially addressed to national governments.





## The three pillars of the Apprenticeship Support Services

### Knowledge sharing

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Library of tools and resources

Online training tools

Digital inspiration (podcasts, webinars, videos...)



### Networking

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Thematic groups

Social networking

Events (launch conference, thematic workshops)

### Benchlearning

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Benchmarking

Peer learning

Expert support



## Benchlearning

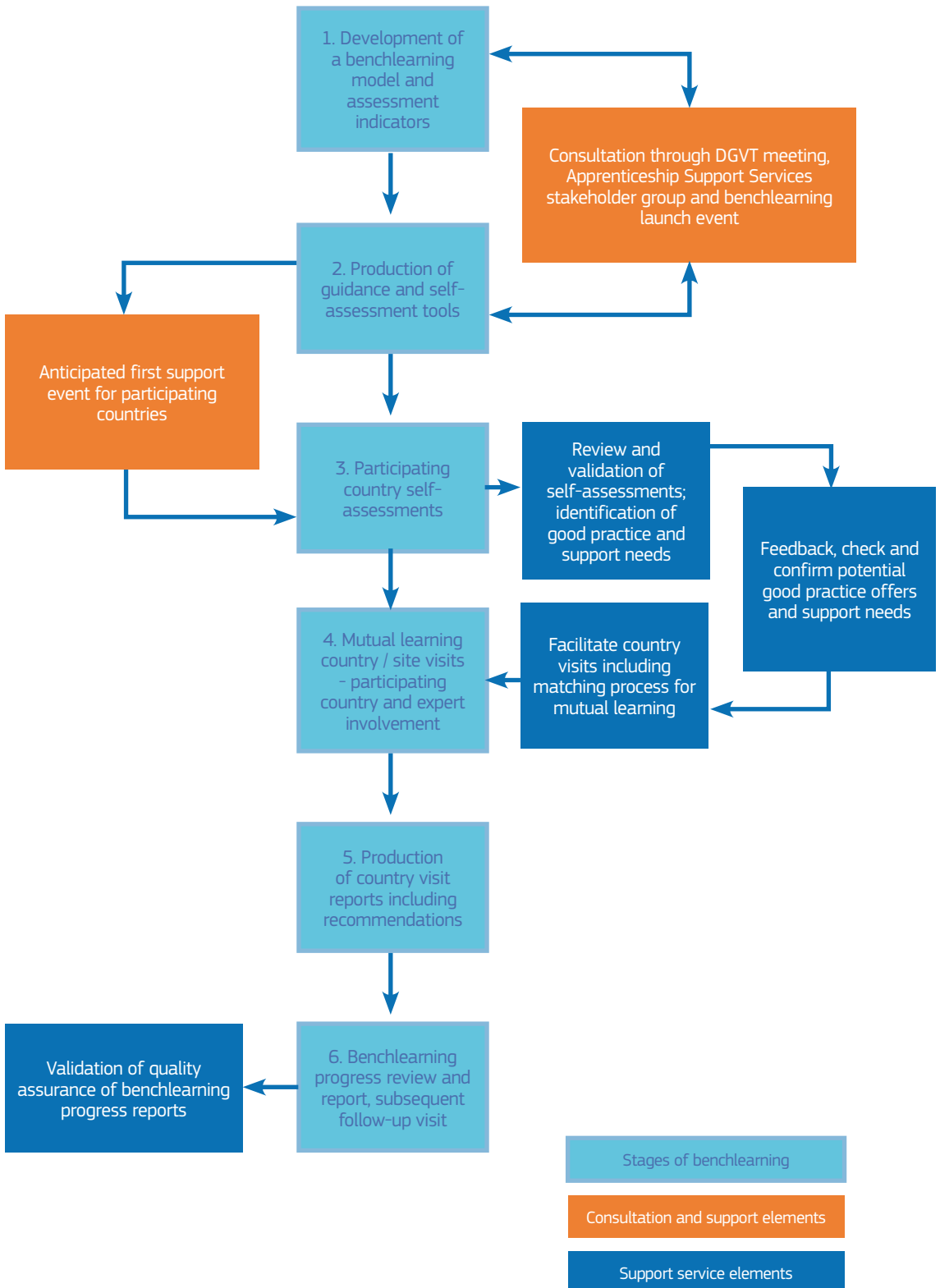
Benchlearning is a structured, systematic process combining benchmarking and mutual learning to help national governments in their drive to introduce and/or pursue apprenticeship reforms. It builds on the benchlearning experiences of the European Network of Public Employment Services. The seven criteria for working and learning conditions and the seven criteria for framework conditions set out in the Council Recommendation on a European Framework for Quality and Effective Apprenticeships are considered to be the model for the benchlearning process.

Benchlearning facilitates knowledge sharing, networking and mutual learning. It is an iterative, ongoing and developing process, and is subject to continuing development, refinement and improvement. Benchlearning acknowledges the diversity of apprenticeship systems and different stages of development across Member States, and thus provides a demand driven response to the individual needs of countries, with the involvement of stakeholders at national level.

### The benchlearning cycle

The benchlearning cycle consists of six stages:

- ▶ Stage 1 – A ‘quality and effective apprenticeships’ model and indicators is produced;
- ▶ Stage 2 – Guidance and tools for participating countries are developed;
- ▶ Stage 3 – Participating governments can complete self-assessments against the agreed indicators. Self-assessment reports are then used to identify strengths and weaknesses, as countries can not only offer guidance and support but also learn from other participating countries and experts;
- ▶ Stage 4 – The support services facilitate country visits focused on mutual learning, sharing good practice and exchanging development support and advice;
- ▶ Stage 5 – Country visit reports are drawn up, including recommendations stemming from the visit itself and self-assessment;
- ▶ Stage 6 – 12 months after the visit, and following the implementation of these recommendations, participating countries prepare a report reflecting on any developments and progress made. After another 12 months, follow-up visits focusing on change and progress as well as areas of improvement and support needs for the next benchlearning cycle can then be scheduled if necessary.



# Getting small businesses on board

Small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), including micro-enterprises, provide around two thirds of private sector employment in Europe. Yet they sometimes struggle to provide apprenticeship placements. Reasons for this include a lack of training infrastructure and personnel to supervise apprentices, as well as insufficient expertise to manage complex rules and administrative requirements.

In times of uncertainty, companies are naturally less willing to take on apprentices, particularly if they have not trained apprentices before. Employers may worry about the potential costs of offering training placements. Such placements could involve substantial investment, which may never be recouped if an apprentice leaves.

## Support measures for SMEs

The success of policy initiatives for apprenticeships and youth employability also depends largely on more SMEs being involved in providing placements. Moreover, if companies are to offer good-quality apprenticeships, they must make appropriate investments. To meet these challenges, governments are focusing on targeted support and enabling measures that boost SME provision of apprenticeships.

A number of good practices and support measures for companies and particular SMEs, both financial and non-financial, are identified in the 20 guiding principles for high-performance apprenticeships and WBL (see guidance of ET 2020 VET working group in 2015). Besides the company and SME dimension, the guidance identifies the main challenges for providers, which will be to improve governance, quality assurance, career guidance and the image of apprenticeships while engaging social partners and enhancing the image of apprenticeships.

“Crafts and SMEs are not only the backbone of the economy in Europe, they are also the main providers of apprenticeship placements. In order to remain attractive for SMEs in all Member States, apprenticeship schemes should become more cost-effective and benefit from good governance involving SME representatives. As a direct consequence of the COVID-19 outbreak, crafts and SMEs are facing new challenges with the on-the-job learning practical organisation. The majority of small enterprises had to suspend their normal activities and to organise remote work where possible. Before resuming activities, they had to follow strict occupational health and safety protocols which do not facilitate the new uptake of apprentices. Nowadays and in the near future, the main difficulties are the full application of the prevention sanitary measures adapted to each sector, the new costs related to the protection of workers from the virus, still limited activities in many sectors and last but not least the recruitment of new apprentices. All types of support to small enterprises for maintaining apprenticeship in this specific situation are more than ever a high necessity.”

**Liliane Volozinskis**, Director Social Affairs and Training Policy, SMEunited



### EU-funded projects on engaging SMEs in apprenticeships

Following a series of projects funded under Erasmus+ between 2016 and 2018 (see the thematic compendium), the EU continued to provide funding for promoting the engagement of SMEs in apprenticeships. There have been several projects over time, two examples from the 2017–2020 period are:

- ▶ **App&Teach:** This project sought to facilitate the participation of SMEs in apprenticeships through the creation of e-Learning courses on the management of apprenticeship programmes for SMEs and the development of mobile apps for in-company VET trainers to support the management and training activities involved in apprenticeship programmes.
- ▶ **INDUCE 4.0:** This project aimed to answer the needs of SMEs to prepare for the challenges and opportunities of Industry 4.0. One of the outputs of the project was a thorough WBL methodology and apprenticeships in particular through which SME employees can learn about Industry 4.0 and develop the necessary skills for the ‘factory of the future’.



For more details, see the: [thematic compendium on the SME projects](#)



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Learn. Anywhere. Anytime





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## A statement by EUROCHAMBRES



**Ben Butters,**  
CEO, EUROCHAMBRES

According to the EUROCHAMBRES Economic Survey 2021, the already large skills gaps in Europe is growing even wider. This indicates that education systems in Europe are still not structured to respond to the demands of a fast evolving, fluctuating labour market.

The provision of skills through VET, especially apprenticeships, is more likely to reflect businesses' needs and thus contribute to the economic recovery. However, engaging in apprenticeship schemes is challenging for SMEs. At the same time, the potential benefits from and contributions to apprenticeships from SMEs are considerable. This is why it is so important to ensure a framework that enables SMEs to offer apprenticeships, especially as they account for two thirds of employment across Europe.

Chambers of commerce and industry are heavily involved in the provision of apprenticeships. Every year, nearly 1.8 million people receive training qualifications via the chamber network. Chambers play a crucial role in the delivery, management and governance of apprenticeship schemes in many EU and candidate countries. Approximately 600 000 apprenticeships are managed directly by national chambers annually.

National chambers offer different types of support for SMEs and apprentices, such as data on labour demands (e.g. Excelsior by Unioncamere, Italy), assessment of skills (e.g. Entrepreneur's Skills Certificate by WKÖ, Austria) or apprenticeship guidance (e.g. Point A network by CCI France).

EUROCHAMBRES' firm belief in the socio-economic value of WBL and the need for European solutions to enable SMEs to benefit from apprenticeships have always been the basis of our EAfA pledge. This conviction is even stronger now as Europe tries to chart a path out of the crisis and towards recovery.

*EUROCHAMBRES is the association of European Chambers of Commerce & Industry, representing 1 700 regional and local Chambers and 20 million businesses in 43 countries. More than 93 % of these businesses are SMEs. Chamber member businesses employ over 120 million.*





## Support by Cedefop

The European Centre for the Development of Vocational Training (Cedefop) is the EU's agency in charge of supporting the promotion, development and implementation of the EU policies in the field of VET, as well as skills and qualifications. By working together with the Commission, the Member States and the social partners, Cedefop works to enhance and disseminate knowledge, provide evidence and services for the purpose of policymaking, including research-based conclusions, and facilitate knowledge sharing among and between its stakeholders. Cedefop fully supports the EU policy framework for VET and skills set out in 2020 with a focus on proactive, learner-centred and flexible VET throughout people's lives. Within the area of apprenticeships, Cedefop work is mainly aimed at:

- ▶ Carrying out [focused research](#) and comparative analyses to provide specific evidence on, e.g.:
  - ▶ The purposes and function of apprenticeships across the EU Member States, Iceland, Norway and the UK (findings published in 2018: [Apprenticeship schemes in European countries: a cross-nation overview](#));
  - ▶ The role and use of apprenticeship for qualifying adults through research review and analysis of policies in the EU countries and five non-EU countries (findings published in 2019: [Apprenticeship for adults. Results of an explorative study](#) and in 2020: [Briefing Note: Apprenticeships for Adults](#));
  - ▶ Financing instruments and arrangements applied in EU Members States to finance apprenticeships ([study published in 2020: Financing apprenticeships in the EU](#));
  - ▶ Factors enabling or disabling long-term international mobility of apprentices (based on a corresponding study's findings, a guiding paper for policymakers and comparative analysis) will be published in 2021, see also [the articles on this topic written by Cedefop's ReferNet network](#);
  - ▶ Areas of strength and gaps identified in EU apprenticeship schemes against criteria set in the European framework for quality and effective apprenticeships ([Cedefop's analysis and main findings](#) published in 2021);
  - ▶ Estimates on apprenticeship participation and reflections on the challenges of getting EU-wide comparable statistics ([Cedefop's paper](#) published in 2021);
  - ▶ Reflections on the identity of apprenticeship within and across EU Member States (The briefing note [Apprenticeship: a pill for every ill?](#) published in 2021);
  - ▶ Statistical evidence on WBL (including apprenticeship) graduates and how well they do in the labour market (Cedefop's study on [the role of work-based learning in VET and tertiary education](#) published in 2021);
  - ▶ Enablers and disablers of long-term, cross-border mobility of apprentices (study findings forthcoming in 2021);
  - ▶ Tips and suggestions to promote long-term, cross-border mobility of apprentices (Making it work: suggestions for policy makers at national level, forthcoming in 2021).

- ▶ Providing structured, comparable information through online databases:
  - ▶ [Cedefop European database of apprenticeship schemes](#) (2016 and 2019/20 data), providing information on apprenticeships at country and scheme levels in EU Member States, Iceland, Norway and the UK mainly based on the regulatory frameworks;
  - ▶ [Cedefop database on financing apprenticeships in the EU](#) (2016-2017 data), providing information on how apprenticeship schemes are financed in the EU Member States and the UK.
- ▶ Strengthening and expanding the knowledge on apprenticeships in Europe, through the work of [Cedefop community of apprenticeship experts](#);
- ▶ Promoting policy learning among apprenticeship stakeholders across Member States, through [Cedefop apprenticeships policy learning forums \(2017, 2018, 2020\)](#);
- ▶ Supporting apprenticeship reform in interested Member States [through in-depth country specific reviews of apprenticeship systems and schemes](#), on the basis of a robust [analytical framework](#). Reports of thematic country reviews (TCRs) are published for Lithuania and Malta (2015), Greece, Italy and Slovenia (2017-2018), Croatia and Cyprus (2019), plus French Speaking Belgium and Sweden (flash TCRs, 2019);
- ▶ Leading discussion on the future of apprenticeships in Europe and the world through joint Cedefop and OECD work (Symposium on [the next steps for apprenticeship](#), 2019, and its subsequent [publication](#), 2021, Symposium on [apprenticeship for greener economies and societies](#), 2021);
- ▶ Monitoring and analysing policy developments related to WBL and apprenticeships (one of the priorities of the 2015 Riga Conclusions, the 2020 VET recommendation and the Osnabrück declaration in the framework of the European cooperation in VET), [through cross-country analysis and individual country chapters](#);
- ▶ Sharing approaches for [analysing and evaluating the design and implementation of WBL and apprenticeship policies with the Commission and other international organisations, including through the inter-agency working group on WBL](#).



For more details, see: <https://www.cedefop.europa.eu/en/events-and-projects/projects/apprenticeships-work-based-learning>

# Support from the European Training Foundation (ETF)

The ETF aims at supporting inclusive skills development policies, access to lifelong learning opportunities and innovation, targeting skills for the future. It also supports EU institutions to design, monitor and evaluate EU human capital development assistance. The 29 ETF partner countries span the Western Balkans and Turkey, the EU neighbourhood region and Central Asia. The ETF continues to develop its own expertise and knowledge in relation to WBL and to develop methodologies, tools and guidance that support the development of WBL in different environments through partnerships with multiple actors.

## VET and work-based learning in ETF partner countries

Improving cooperation between VET systems and actors and business is crucial in raising the quality and ensuring the relevance of VET and LLL in ETF's partner countries. WBL in its various forms offers learners realistic and motivating training while employers benefit from engagement and influence with their country's formal training system. Five candidate countries, Albania, Montenegro, North Macedonia, Serbia and Turkey - are members of the EAfA.

## What does the ETF do in partner countries?

- ▶ Facilitates and supports their efforts to contribute actively to the EAfA, for example by securing pledges;
- ▶ Encourages them to exchange experience and analysis. This entails collaboration among countries in the region but also with EU Member States and businesses;
- ▶ Organises a regional EAfA seminar every year, so far in Turkey (2016), Montenegro (2017), Albania (2018), North Macedonia (2019). In 2020, the seminar took place in an online format;
- ▶ Advises them on policies and instruments to implement the Riga Medium Term Deliverables;
- ▶ Supports monitoring and analysis of countries' progress - the ETF provides expertise and tools and helps to design and implement evaluations.

**In the Eastern Partnership** region, the ETF provides support to the analysis and design of national WBL policies. Every year, it organises a regional forum on WBL, including capacity-building, knowledge-sharing sessions and field visits.

**In the Southern and Eastern Mediterranean region**, the ETF contributed to a joint study on WBL with UNESCO, (2019). This comparative and longitudinal analysis of WBL programmes covers Algeria, Egypt, Jordan, Lebanon, Morocco, Oman, Palestine, and Tunisia. The ETF produced policy reviews on Algeria, Morocco and Tunisia and contributed information, data and comments on the other ETF partner countries.

The ETF also supports the Commission in extending the EAfA to Eastern Partnership and southern and eastern Mediterranean countries.



For more details, see: [etf.europa.eu](https://etf.europa.eu)

# Youth organisations and the representation of apprentices

## European Youth Forum

The European Youth Forum is the platform representing youth organisations in Europe. It strives to empower young people to actively participate in society and to improve their own lives by representing and advocating for their rights. In the current uncertain political and social context, young people can be powerful catalysts for positive change and can contribute to innovative solutions to Europe's problems.

## OBESSU

The Organising Bureau of European School Student Unions (OBESSU) is the cooperation platform for national school student unions active in general secondary and secondary vocational education in Europe. OBESSU represents school students as stakeholders in their educational systems, and in issues concerning their lives. It empowers students to contribute to the development of democratic educational systems that promote active citizenship. Through OBESSU, students also cooperate to develop school student representative structures. These efforts include attention to apprentices and the educational dimension of their experience.

## European Apprentices Network

The European Youth Forum and OBESSU are working to ensure the rights of young people in education and the workplace. They have jointly launched a network for apprentices at European level with the support of the European Commission to make sure that the voices of young apprentices are heard in discussions on VET and apprenticeships in Europe. This network promotes quality apprenticeships that put the learner at the centre and respect the rights of young people as students and as workers. Involving young people in decisions that affect them is crucial – the European Apprentices Network (EAN) works to ensure that apprentices are represented in the set-up, design and implementation of apprenticeship programmes.

## Representation of apprentices

At national level, there is limited evidence of structures in place to represent apprentices. There is great diversity of VET systems across Europe. A recent study on the representation of apprentices commissioned by the European Commission aimed to:

- ▶ undertake a mapping of the representation of apprentices in different bodies in EU Member States, candidate countries and EFTA countries;
- ▶ draw conclusions and make recommendations on how representation could be further developed and strengthened at national level and how it could be supported at European level;
- ▶ draw conclusions and make recommendations on how the EAN could further grow to enhance its added value in the relationship between national developments and the European policy debate.

# Delivering quality and effective apprenticeships

The European social partners are committed to promoting and supporting quality and effective apprenticeships to facilitate a smooth transition from education and training to the world of work.

Taking into consideration the social and economic impact of the COVID-19 crisis, and that skills mismatches remain a concern in many Member States, we believe more than ever that the provision of quality and effective apprenticeships is one of the best pathways to ensure a successful transition from education to work for young people and to help enterprises address their skills needs.

The March 2018 Council Recommendation on a European Framework for Quality and Effective Apprenticeships has a strong foundation in the continuous work of the European social partners on apprenticeships. The Recommendation also reflects the Joint Opinion of the Advisory Committee on Vocational Training (ACVT) and sets the agenda for ongoing and future work at European and national level.

Notably, the criteria outlined in the Council Recommendation address a number of factors that the social partners have previously identified as being characteristic of quality and effective apprenticeships, namely:

- ▶ apprenticeship systems need to be governed with the involvement of social partners and stakeholders in a way that focuses on learning outcomes and employability;
- ▶ the majority of an apprenticeship should take place in an enterprise;
- ▶ apprentices should be paid or compensated in line with national or sectoral minimum requirements or collective agreements;
- ▶ it is necessary to ensure commitment by apprentices, matched by clear benefits including qualifications and job opportunities.

Going forward, it is important that European and national efforts are channelled towards the implementation of this recommendation. In this regard, the development of on-demand apprenticeship support services is an important step. In particular, we welcome the adaptation of the benchlearning approach to the apprenticeship context. We believe that this can help to foster the improvement of apprenticeship systems, where needed, through a combination of benchmarking and mutual learning and conducted within a peer review context. European and national social partners can make an important contribution to this process and will actively participate. It is also important that the social partners are closely associated with the evaluation of the implementation of the recommendation.



We also continue to see a role for the new European Social Fund+ in helping to provide EU financial support for the delivery of apprenticeships, particularly in view of reaching the aim whereby the majority of the training time takes place within an enterprise.

We welcome the new Erasmus+ programme to bolster the next Erasmus programme, which should actively continue to support the cross-border mobility of apprentices within Europe and enhance the attractiveness of VET and apprenticeships for young people.

The ACVT's opinion of December 2018 on the future of VET highlights the significant role that apprenticeships play in training young people, and identifies this form of training as among the top VET priorities at EU and national levels. The implementation of the new Skills Agenda and the accompanying Council Recommendation on VET, as well as the Osnabrück declaration, apprenticeships must continue to be at the heart of the VET agenda. As social partners, we remain committed to continuing our work with the EU institutions, national authorities and VET providers in order to further promote the provision of, and participation in, quality and effective apprenticeships.



**Luca Visentini**  
General Secretary  
ETUC



**Markus J. Beyrer**  
Director General  
BusinessEurope



**Valeria Ronzitti**  
Secretary General  
SGI Europe



**Véronique Willems**  
Secretary General  
SMEunited

# Engagement of European education and training providers

Groups of European VET provider associations (representing initial, continuing and higher level VET) have gathered every year since 2010 for informal meetings with the Commission. In 2015, an expert group 'Platform for European Associations of VET providers' was created and now includes six European associations, including four VET bodies and two higher education bodies.

## VET bodies

- ▶ European Forum of Technical and Vocational Education and Training (EFVET)
- ▶ EU Providers of Vocational Education and Training (EUproVET)
- ▶ European Associations of Institutes for Vocational Training (EVBB)
- ▶ European Vocational Training Association (EVTA)

## Higher education bodies

- ▶ European Association of Institutions in Higher Education (EURASHE)
- ▶ European University Continuing Education Network (EUCEN)

In 2013, the four VET bodies pledged to help increase apprenticeship take-up – both across Europe and through their national membership organisations. Members contribute to EAfA independently and in partnerships. The partners commit to ensuring stronger and better coordination between learning and business organisations.

EURASHE and EUCEN have also pledged to help to boost quality and increase the number of higher level apprenticeships.

Since 2014, the six bodies have joined forces as part of the VET4EU2 network. The organisations work together, as well as independently, to improve the quality and image of VET. Improving collaboration between VET and higher education is also a priority.

Since 2015, the six associations have been part of a Commission expert group that provides advice on VET policies from the perspective of education and training providers.

[In 2020, the associations supported the Osnabrück Declaration endorsed by ministers in charge of VET and the European social partners supporting the Osnabrück Declaration - VET4EU2.](#)



For more details, see: [Position paper on European Union policy after 2020 on Vocational and Educational Training](#)





# Business initiatives

## High quality dual training at ŠKODA Academy

ŠKODA AUTO a.s. belongs to the Volkswagen Group. The ŠKODA Academy in Czechia is responsible for the personal development of ŠKODA employees and for the development of their professional and technical skills and competences.

ŠKODA employees are involved in shaping personal development concepts and tools in line with the strategy of the academy. The ŠKODA Academy is also responsible for the technical education of students. The goal of the academy is to link social and technical competences, transfer know-how and ensure that students are ready for their practical training.

To ensure a continued supply of qualified employees, the Vocational School of Mechanical Engineering, which is part of the ŠKODA Academy, trains more than 300 young people per year. This training is delivered according to the dual training principle, combining work and learning with the aim to obtain the different vocational qualifications that the company needs.

Students at the Vocational School of Mechanical Engineering complete three- or four-year courses in technical subjects that lead to either an apprenticeship diploma or a school leaving certificate for university access. The way the technical subjects are taught and the number of places available are both geared towards the needs and requirements of the relevant specialist departments at ŠKODA. The company therefore places great importance on outstanding vocational training with a particular focus on future-oriented technologies. On successful completion, all graduates of the Vocational School of Mechanical Engineering are given the opportunity to work for the Czech car manufacturer.





At ŠKODA, high-quality training and rigorous talent development date back more than 90 years: in 1927, the ŠKODA Academy opened at the company headquarters in Mladá Boleslav. In the first year, 58 students began their training in three different specialist areas. Today, almost 1 000 students – 13 % of which are female – are enrolled in 13 full-time courses and three postgraduate programmes at the ŠKODA Academy. In more than 90 years of its existence, the school has prepared nearly 23 000 graduates for future jobs.

### **La Poste, as a member of PostEurop, values its apprentices as participants in the Altern'up competition**

Carrying strong values in terms of training and insertion of young people into employment, La Poste, France's national postal service company, pursues a dynamic policy regarding work-study students, just like many other PostEurop members. In accordance with its commitments, La Poste renewed its pledge to work-study schemes through the agreement 'A future for every postman' signed in 2015. This agreement provides for the recruitment of at least 12 000 work-study contracts for the period 2016-2018. Each year, young people are trained in a wide variety of qualifications, from professionalisation contracts to Masters' degrees. In 2018, 4 902 young people benefited from an apprenticeship or professionalisation contract.

As part of this policy, La Poste has implemented an initiative to promote the potential of young people in apprenticeships. La Poste and other major French companies (EDF Group, Air France, Sanofi, Thales, Total, Veolia and Siemens) organised the Altern'up competition in 2018 with the Innovation Foundation for Apprenticeships (FIPA).



This competition, which is open exclusively to the students in work-study schemes within these companies, promotes entrepreneurial spirit. Adult employees who are taking part in an apprenticeship or a professionalisation contract and have a business project can also take part in the competition. The competition consists of several stages of selection, first at the company level and then at the national level.

At La Poste, five files were selected to be presented in the national competition, whose jury selected a total of 30 projects for Créativ'Week. During this week, which took place from 25 to 29 June 2018, the candidates were trained in different entrepreneurship fields – such as finance, marketing, law, communication, digital and pitching – and met with entrepreneurs to share their experience.

At the end of the week, each participant had two minutes to pitch his or her business creation project. Ten of them were then selected to participate in the final, held in October.

Mathilde Martinez, a student in a work-study scheme at La Poste, was among the 12 finalists for her 'Mobile Health' project. The awards ceremony took place on November 13 at the top of the EDF tower in Paris, in the presence of representatives of all the event's partner companies. On this occasion, Mathilde, who was one of the five laureates, was awarded the Innovation Prize offered by Thales for her initiative to reinvent paramedical care in rural areas using a local bus.



# Basque Country: The key factors for VET excellence

The Basque Country was the first member to join the EAFA from a regional authority. Since 2014, the regional dimension has been reinforced and highlighted under the EU's VET agenda, with positive results with regard to the challenges at European (Smart Specialisation Strategy) and global (2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, Sustainable Development Goals, etc.) levels and agendas. The regional approach consists of an alliance with all the territorial stakeholders addressing issues such as apprenticeships, skills, specialisation strategies, future jobs, innovation and a better future for our society. More than 40 000 students (5.2 % of the total VET students in Spain in the school year 2017-2018) are enrolled in VET programmes offered in the Basque Country and more than half of VET students are in higher VET (47.7 % in the whole of Spain).

In 2018, the Basque VET Law was adopted and, in 2019, the Basque Government approved the fifth Strategic VET Plan, which is designed to transform VET and to address the challenges of the Industry 4.0 revolution. The Basque Government is strengthening the apprenticeship system in order to accelerate the VET students' skills development, connected to strategic professional sectors in the region. Today, the employability of dual VET apprentices is at 96.2 %, with a rate of female participants of 23.3 %. In 2018-2019, the total number of companies involved was 1 434.

“*The features that make the Basque Country VET system unique, such as supporting high student employability in programmes related to industrial branches, are mainly due to the use of more practical and innovative learning methodologies. The constant support from the regional authorities of teachers, tutors and heads of VET centres, the close links with companies (including SMEs) and innovation are key. The development of cutting-edge training programmes, the visibility and the promotion of their work and the potential for excellence and vanguard specialisations and skills are also central.*”

**Jorge Arevalo**, Deputy Regional Minister for Vocational Training at the Basque Government

## The Baltic Alliance for Apprenticeships

The Baltic States – Latvia, Lithuania and Estonia - continue their cooperation in VET within the Baltic Alliance for Apprenticeships (BAfA), established in Riga in 2015. The cooperation has been focused on the priorities of the Riga Conclusions. It was started through an Erasmus+ project supporting national authorities in developing WBL and apprenticeships in the Baltic States – WBL Balt project – and continued with another Baltic Erasmus+ project on training of trainers for WBL – TTT4WBL project.

Four years of cooperation has produced visible results. An increasing number of VET institutions and employers have started to offer WBL, with some of them also joining the EAfA.

Through the Erasmus+ TTT4WBL project, the Baltic countries have trained more 800 WBL trainers and tutors according to a common methodology – ‘the tandem training’ approach – where VET institutions, together with company trainers and tutors, interactively learn together and develop a common understanding on how WBL should be implemented in the best possible way. In January 2020 in a Baltic seminar in Riga the three Baltic Ministries of Education and Science agreed on a common competence profile for WBL tutor, <https://ttt4wbl-project.eu/2020/04/07/competence-profile-of-the-workplace-tutor-poster-available/>. This would contribute also to the quality of WBL student and trainer/ tutor mobility in the Baltics.

The Baltic partners have also agreed on further steps within the framework of BAfA. They have committed to continue cooperating within BAfA and contributing to the promotion of the Baltic region as the best place for studies and work.

# EARLALL: Promoting apprenticeships in the regions

The European Association of Regional and Local Authorities for Lifelong Learning (EARLALL) is an international non-profit association established in 2001 at the initiative of the Tuscany region and based in Brussels. The association is managed by its members and a board of directors, the president of which is the Basque country. In 2020, EARLALL full members included 12 regions in 8 European countries and a considerable number of partner and observer associations involved in education and lifelong learning, representing over 61 million people across Europe.

EARLALL joined the EAfA through a pledge in 2015 (renewed and reinforced in 2018), aiming to utilise its large network to promote apprenticeships across the EU and stimulate apprenticeship mobility. The pledge focuses on increasing the number of high-quality apprenticeships (supply) and the degree to which they are cross-border (mobility). EARLALL has encouraged its members to make pledges, participated in calls for proposals under Erasmus+ and actively participated in all EAfA activities.

As EARLALL's members are regional and local educational authorities, the network is active at policy level through its presence in Brussels and its interaction with the European institutions, helping the EAfA pledge to benefit from a trickle-down-effect. This has already been demonstrated by new pledges promoted by EARLALL member regions, such as the Catalan Chamber of Commerce and an Asturian VET school that chose to become EAfA members in 2016 or the pledge made by the Catalan Government Department of Education in 2017. Furthermore, regional initiatives have also the potential to be scaled-up and inspire other levels of governance and stakeholders.

The EAfA has also had a positive influence on the organisation itself. It has been beneficial to EARLALL and its members to have a platform to engage with other associations, enterprises and social partners, and this has enabled exchanges of ideas, approaches and best practices. This has occurred primarily through stakeholder meetings but also thanks to the establishment of independent relationships. Given current political and socio-economic challenges in Europe, EARLALL believes that creating strategic alliances with key stakeholders is of utmost importance and that EAfA is the right platform to provide this.



For more details, see: [www.earlall.eu](http://www.earlall.eu)



## Boosting mobility

Mobility of apprentices has emerged as an important topic, joining the EAFa's three original objectives to improve supply, quality and image. In particular, the issue of long-term mobility has been receiving increasing attention.

The mobility of over 160 000 VET learners was included in projects selected for co-funding out of the 2019 and 2020 Erasmus+ calls for proposals. The new Erasmus+ programme (2021–2027), endowed with an increased budget in comparison to its predecessor, should provide even more VET learners and apprentices with learning mobility opportunities abroad.

The COVID-19 pandemic dramatically effected apprentice mobility in 2020. But in 2021, countries gradually eased or lifted their travel restrictions, and many companies started hiring apprentices again.

### ErasmusPro

Responding to the short average duration of mobility periods abroad carried out by most VET learners involved in the early years of the Erasmus+ programme (2014–2021), the Commission has supplemented VET providers with incentives to support long-term mobility (between 3 and 12 months). Among them, 'ErasmusPro' has increased the visibility of these opportunities while stressing its benefits for VET learners and apprentices. In 2020 ErasmusPro represented more than 8 % of the mobility activities for VET learners.

### Erasmus+

Duration of VET learner mobility 2014-2016:

Less than 1 month **78 %**

1-3 months **17 %**

3-6 months **4 %**

More than 6 months **1 %**

### European Parliament pilot project

At the European Parliament's request, the Commission launched two calls for proposals (in 2016 and 2017) for projects aimed at improving the long-term mobility of apprentices.

The aim was to test the viability of setting up a European framework for the long-term mobility of apprentices, helping to enhance the skills and employability of young apprentices while strengthening their sense of European citizenship. The lessons learnt from these projects will inform future mobility actions under the next Erasmus+ programme (2021–2027).

## Long-term mobility of apprentices<sup>1</sup>

Mobility is important as apprentices gain independence, new skills (particularly soft skills), and foreign language skills through international work experience. The companies involved also benefit, as cultural exchange fosters creativity, reinforces the companies' skills base and attracts international talent.

Erasmus+ is the main EU-level instrument for promoting the mobility of learners and staff. For three decades, Erasmus+ and its predecessors have had a positive impact on over 9 million Europeans. It has offered opportunities to young people, students and adults to study, train, gain experience and volunteer abroad. In the field of VET, more than 600 000 pupils have participated in the programme since 2014. The Erasmus+ (2014–2020) mid-term evaluation illustrates that more than 90 % of apprentices are satisfied with their learning mobility abroad.

On 21–22 March 2019, the European Commission and the European Parliament organised a conference on how to promote and support the long-term mobility of apprentices across Europe. It brought together more than 180 participants from various stakeholder groups, such as Erasmus+ national agencies, representatives from the European Parliament pilot project on long-term mobility for apprentices, members of the EAFA and the European Apprentices Network, other youth representatives as well as European and national policymakers. Opened by Jean Arthuis, Member of the European Parliament, and Commissioner Marianne Thyssen, the event provided an opportunity to share experiences and develop recommendations for the mobility of apprentices in Europe.

<sup>1</sup> In 2019/20, Cedefop carried out a study on this topic. Its main findings and a guiding paper for policymakers were published in 2021.

## The conference indicated a number of challenges and recommendations

### Challenges

- ⚠ No single European model of apprenticeships
- ⚠ Uncertainty about the recognition of mobility as part of the qualifications
- ⚠ Existing language barriers and online courses not suited to the needs of apprentices  
Practical insurance issues
- ⚠ Excessive paperwork
- ⚠ Companies' lack of awareness regarding sending and hosting apprentices
- ⚠ Gaps in information provided to apprentices (conditions, accommodation, regulations and models, national contact points in the host country, etc.)
- ⚠ VET seen as a second choice

### Policy recommendations

- ✔ Develop a system to recognise competences and skills acquired abroad
- ✔ Provide effective language support, tailored to apprentices' needs
- ✔ Develop a European-wide insurance scheme for apprentices
- ✔ Simplify and harmonise the administrative processes
- ✔ Invest more in communicating the benefits to companies of apprentice mobility, and develop guidance presenting the benefit of participating in mobility schemes
- ✔ Develop a checklist to ensure apprentices, schools and intermediaries are aware of all practical and legal aspects concerning their mobility scheme
- ✔ Develop a database of facilitators and VET schools
- ✔ Develop a checklist to ensure apprentices are aware of all practical and legal aspects concerning their mobility scheme

### More opportunities in the new Erasmus+ programme (2021–2027)

Looking ahead, with a budget that has almost doubled compared to the 2014–2020 programme for the EU27, the new Erasmus+ programme (2021–2027) will significantly increase cross-border mobility opportunities for VET. The historical budget increase is coupled with a new accreditation scheme, which will allow more VET providers to benefit from regular access to Erasmus+ funding. **The applicant will need to invest time and energy when applying for an Erasmus+ accreditation but, when accredited, annual budget requests will be much easier to manage.** Of course, smaller and less experienced organisations can still apply for short-term mobility projects without accreditation.

Promotion of long-term mobility opportunities (3–12 months) will continue to be a priority under the ErasmusPro mobility activity. It will be possible to complement physical mobility with virtual components to enhance learning. VET learners, including apprentices, will also have the opportunity to participate in digital opportunity traineeships (DOT), meaning learning experience abroad in a digital professional environment, to enhance their applied digital skills. Accredited organisations can now organise VET mobility anywhere in the world.

In addition, the new Erasmus+ programme supports excellence in VET with the Centres of Vocational Excellence, such transnational cooperation platforms, contributing to innovation in the VET sector in cooperation with companies and the local ecosystem. In addition to cooperation partnerships, including small-scale cooperation projects and mobility opportunities, the Centres for Vocational Excellence will help young people to acquire an initial qualification, and adults to upskill and reskill. Vocational excellence ensures high-quality skills and competences that lead to quality employment and career-long opportunities, which meet the needs of an innovative, inclusive and sustainable economy.



# Overview of EU funding opportunities for apprenticeships

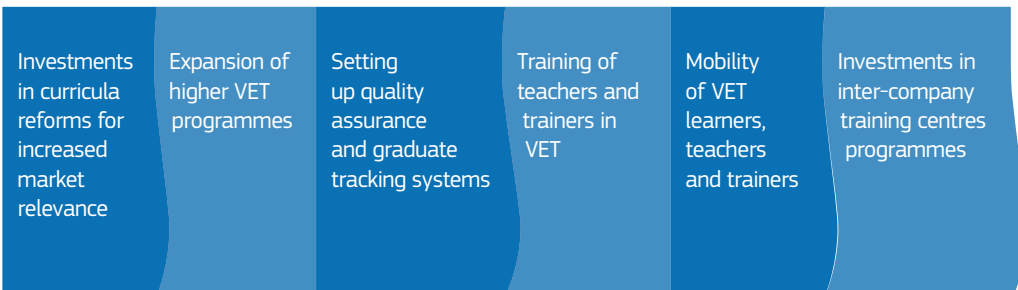
Now is the time to invest in apprenticeships and more general in skills. There is unprecedented financial support at EU level through NextGenerationEU and the future EU budget. Funding opportunities such as the Recovery and Resilience Facility, the European Social Fund, the European Regional Development Fund, the InvestEU will offer significant support to Member States to develop and strengthen their education and training systems and foster skills development.

Operations that can be supported with the Next Generation EU and the EU's long-term budget include, among others, direct subsidies for apprentices in SMEs (including remuneration, recruitment bonuses and temporary social contributions coverage) and direct subsidies for trainers' wages and/or their social contributions.

Operations that can be supported with the new EU budget (short term)



Operations that can be supported with the new EU budget (medium term)



The European Union offers significant funding through several major funds, instruments or schemes.

### Erasmus+

Erasmus+ provides funding for learning experiences abroad for VET learners, including apprentices, and for teachers and trainers. It also funds strategic partnerships involving education and training providers, social partners and companies, plus policy reform initiatives to strengthen apprenticeship schemes.



For more details, see:

Erasmus+ programme:

[ec.europa.eu/programmes/erasmus-plus/](https://ec.europa.eu/programmes/erasmus-plus/)

### The European Social Fund Plus (ESF+)

The ESF+ is the EU's main instrument for investing in people with the aim of building a more social and inclusive Europe.



For more details, see:

European Social Fund:

[ec.europa.eu/esf/main.jsp?catId=62&langId=en](https://ec.europa.eu/esf/main.jsp?catId=62&langId=en)

Moreover, the ESF+ Employment and Social Innovation (EaSI) strand will provide funding for the development of targeted mobility schemes such as 'Your first EURES Job'.



For more details, see:

Your first EURES Job:

[ec.europa.eu/social/yourfirsteuresjob](https://ec.europa.eu/social/yourfirsteuresjob)

### The European Regional and Development Fund (ERDF)

The ERDF aims to strengthen economic and social cohesion in the European Union by correcting imbalances between its regions.



For more details, see:

[ec.europa.eu/regional\\_policy/en/funding/erdf/#:~:text=%20European%20Regional%20Development%20Fund%20%201%20In,50%20%25%20in%20less%20developed%20regions.%20More%20](https://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/en/funding/erdf/#:~:text=%20European%20Regional%20Development%20Fund%20%201%20In,50%20%25%20in%20less%20developed%20regions.%20More%20)

## The Recovery and Resilience Facility (RRF)

The Recovery and Resilience Facility will make € 672.5 billion in loans and grants available to support reforms and investments undertaken by Member States. The aim is to mitigate the economic and social impact of the coronavirus pandemic and make European economies and societies more sustainable.



For more details, see:

[ec.europa.eu/info/business-economy-euro/recovery-coronavirus/recovery-and-resilience-facility\\_en](https://ec.europa.eu/info/business-economy-euro/recovery-coronavirus/recovery-and-resilience-facility_en)

## Technical support instruments (TSI)

TSIs provide Member States with technical support to strengthen their institutional and administrative capacity in designing and implementing reforms.



For more details, see:

[europarl.europa.eu/thinktank/en/document.html?reference=EPRS\\_BRI\(2020\)659332](https://europarl.europa.eu/thinktank/en/document.html?reference=EPRS_BRI(2020)659332)

## The InvestEU Programme

InvestEU builds on the successful model of the Investment Plan for Europe, the Juncker Plan. It will bring together, under one roof, the European Fund for Strategic Investments and 13 EU financial instruments currently available.



For more details, see:

[ec.europa.eu/commission/priorities/jobs-growth-and-investment/investment-plan-europe-juncker-plan/whats-next-investeu-programme-2021-2027\\_en](https://ec.europa.eu/commission/priorities/jobs-growth-and-investment/investment-plan-europe-juncker-plan/whats-next-investeu-programme-2021-2027_en)

## The European Investment Bank (EIB)

The EIB can provide support in the form of loans to the private and public sectors under the programme 'Skills and Jobs - Investing for Youth'.



For more details, see:

[www.eib.org/](https://www.eib.org/)

## Erasmus+ projects

**5 selected projects**

**EU grant awarded: € 4 624 879**

**7 selected projects**

**EU grant awarded: € 27 269 571**

Erasmus+ helped improve apprenticeship systems under Key Action 3 (KA3): Support for policy reform by:

### **Supporting national authorities for apprenticeships (Call EACEA 13/2014)**

**9 projects have been completed in 2017**

**Total budget awarded: € 2.3 million**

### **Supporting SMEs to engage in apprenticeships (Call EACEA 41/2015)**

**16 projects were funded and implemented between 2016 and 2018**

**Total budget awarded: € 8.3 million**

### **Joint VET qualifications (Call EACEA/27/2017)**

**19 projects are being funded and will be implemented between 2018 and 2020**

**Total budget awarded: € 7.3 million**

### **KA2 VET project – 2018–2021 (PL, EL, UK, ES, SK)**

**The L2CREATE project designs, tests and validates a new WBL programme in Europe's creative and cultural industries (CCIs). It recognises that the modern, creative workplace is a powerful and innovative learning environment.**

The programme also helps fund the international mobility of apprentices under KA1 and promotes partnerships between the VET sector, apprenticeship providers and other stakeholders under KA2: Cooperation for innovation and exchange of good practices.





### **‘Apprenticeship coaches for SMEs’**

Apprenticeship coaches for SMEs (AC4SME) was a large-scale European project co-funded by the European Union under the Erasmus+ programme (support for SMEs engaging in apprenticeships), bringing together chambers of commerce and industry from 12 Member States under the coordination of EUROCHAMBRES. The objective of the project was to involve a growing number of SMEs in apprenticeships. It also helped to improve the capacity of chambers to support SMEs in hosting apprentices to create a network of apprenticeship coaches for SMEs in the EU.

The results of the project were manifold and include a number of publications related to SME skills analysis, the creation of a network of apprenticeship coaches and the development of two toolboxes.

The project partners also agreed on policy recommendations to relevant stakeholders on how to address the low engagement of SMEs in apprenticeships.

## Reference tools



### **SELFIE for Work-Based Learning**

This is a new module of the widely used SELFIE tool, developed by the European Commission. It helps VET institutions and companies offering apprenticeships and other forms of WBL to improve the digitalisation of their training programmes. The tool is based around four short and anonymous surveys. VET teachers, VET learners, VET school leaders and in-company trainers can all provide their input. Based on these, the tool generates a tailor-made, interactive report – a 360-degree snapshot of the training programme's strengths and weaknesses in the use of digital technology. SELFIE for Work-Based Learning is available free-of-charge in 24 EU official languages. Users can customise the tool to adapt it to their needs.



### **Apprenticeship toolbox**

Austria, Denmark, Germany, Luxembourg and Switzerland have worked together to develop a digital apprenticeship toolbox. The toolbox provides a comparative, searchable and structured overview of the five apprenticeship systems. Covering areas of apprenticeship governance and regulations, the role of social partners and companies, financing arrangements, programme and pathway design, VET standards and qualification matching, training and teaching, as well as attractiveness and excellence, the toolbox provides comprehensive resources for policy learning, experimentation and development. The Erasmus+ programme co-financed the project.



### **Work-based learning toolkit**

This toolkit was developed by the 29 Erasmus+ national agencies that formed the NetWBL – the European Thematic Network on Work-Based Learning. Searchable by theme, resource type, language, education type and target group, the NetWBL toolkit provides easy access to a wide range of resources on apprenticeship governance and management, development and delivery, assessment and recognition, evaluation and quality assurance, partnerships, as well as information and communication activities. It also provides access to a database of projects that have contributed examples and resources to the NetWBL toolkit. The NetWBL and its toolkit were co-funded by the EC's Lifelong Learning Programme.



### **ILO guide and tools for quality apprenticeships**

The 'Toolkit for Quality Apprenticeships' was published by the ILO in 2017 (Vol. 1) and 2020 (Vol. 2). It provides information, tools and examples for policymakers and practitioners to improve the quality of apprenticeship systems and programmes. The EC supports the project.

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# Apprenticeship programmes funded through the European Social Fund



## **Greece:** 'Post-Lyceum Year - Apprenticeship Class in Greece'

The new 'Post-Lyceum Year - Apprenticeship Class in Greece' programme became a reality in 2017 with the support of the ESF (currently, approximately € 40 million is allocated for implementing apprenticeships). It is based on the legal framework set by Law 4186/2013, which introduced, inter alia, a dual system by establishing the 'apprenticeship class' as a fourth optional year of study for vocational senior high school (EPAL) graduates.

The Ministry of Education launched the cornerstone of the new apprenticeship system in February 2017, following two ESF-funded pilots in 2016. The ESF supported approximately 1 100 EPAL graduates of seven areas of specialisation that were not in education, employment or training up to the age of 24.

The apprenticeship class lasts 9 months, consists of 7 hours of in-class teaching and features a workplace learning element (four days per week, 28 hours) based in public and private sector companies. Participation leads to a level 5 EQF qualification (after completing a specific accreditation procedure). The remuneration of the apprentice amounts to 75 % of the daily minimum wage (€ 17.12), and the apprentice receives the same benefits as the working force (i.e. full social security coverage).

In November-December 2017, the programme expanded and the ESF provided support to approximately 3 100 EPAL graduates as apprentices in companies in the private and public sector. A third round was launched in November-December 2018 in which the ESF supported around 3 700 additional EPAL graduate apprentices.

There is a steady increase in the number of apprentices (+231 % more than the 'school' year 2016-2017), as well as an increase in the areas of specialisation (from 6 in 2016-2017 to 21), the number of schools (49 % more than 2016-2017), and the number of apprenticeship classes (128 % more than 2016-2017). The ratio of positions between the private and public sector has also increased from 1:3 to 1:2 respectively in the latest cycle.



### France:

Following a comprehensive reform of apprenticeship governance in 2018, allowing among others social partners to have a much bigger role, apprenticeships were also given a central place in the French recovery plan 'France Relance', with significant hiring incentives on apprenticeship and 'professionalisation' contracts. As a result, France recorded more than 500 000 apprentices in 2020, which had never been achieved before.



### Belgium (Flanders):

adopted a Decree on Dual Learning (March 2018), providing a legislative framework for apprenticeships within regular fulltime secondary VET. New dual courses can also be organised in centres for part-time VET and at Syntra vzw. The reformed pre-apprenticeship system, extends its scope to dual learning. They target learners showing a strong willingness to learn at the workplace, but are unable to do so due to a lack of occupational skills. The learners obtain the skills and competences they need to start a dual course. From Sept 2022, dual learning will be rolled out to adult - and higher education. ESF-funded pilot projects to test dual learning in adult - and higher education are ongoing (2019-2022).



## Mobility portals

### **EURES – European job mobility portal**

EURES is an online platform and network of over 1 000 advisers from national public employment services (PES) that help jobseekers with finding a job in Europe. The EURES portal lists more than 3.6 million vacancies, over 866 000 CVs of registered users and 4 795 employers. This, and the support of EURES advisers, allows the service to match jobseekers with employers across Europe. Since 2018, apprenticeship and traineeship opportunities that offer a work contract have been published on the EURES portal, giving learners easy access to information on training opportunities in other European countries.



[ec.europa.eu/eures](https://ec.europa.eu/eures)

### **eTwinning**

eTwinning is a free platform and an online community for schools where European teachers and students can connect, discuss and collaborate. The platform has engaged around 925 193 teachers and 216 617 schools in over 120 968 projects. It offers eTwinning news in 28 languages; 'support kits' for project development; information on recognition of eTwinning outcomes; online search for eTwinning schools, projects and activities; and free self-assessment tools and materials for educators. Launched in 2005 as the main action of the European Commission's e-learning programme, eTwinning has since been integrated into Erasmus+. eTwinning applies the concept of 'internationalisation at home', referring to activities that enable students to gain an international experience in the classroom and online without going abroad; not as a substitute for classic mobility, but as part of the broader internationalisation of VET schools in Europe.



[etwinning.net](https://etwinning.net)



# Showcasing talent through the EAfA Awards, 2016 to 2019

Marianne Thyssen, European Commissioner for Employment, Social Affairs, Skills and Labour Mobility, presented the first ever EAfA Awards at the closing ceremony of European Vocational Skills Week on 9 December 2016. Ever since, the awards recognise outstanding achievements in the area of apprenticeships by companies and their apprentices.

<b>EAfA Award Winners 2016</b>	
Company Category	<b>Petronor, Spain</b>
Apprentice Category	<b>Megan Niven, UK (Nielsen)</b> <b>Lewis Churchill, UK (IBM Europe)</b>

<b>EAfA Award Winners 2017</b>	
Large Company Category	<b>ENEL Italia, Italy</b>
SME Category	<b>Schleiff Bauflächentechnik GmbH &amp; Co, Germany</b>
Small Company Category	<b>Drury Joinery Services, UK</b>
Apprentice Category	<b>Hannah Colston, UK</b>
Teacher Category	<b>Angeliki Filippidou, Greece</b>
Trainer Category	<b>Véronique Morelle, France</b>

<b>EAfA Award Winners 2018</b>	
Large Company Category	<b>ESB Networks DAC, Ireland</b>
Small Company Category	<b>Atelier du Pain, France</b>
Apprentice Category	<b>Domenico Calabrese, Italy</b>

<b>EAfA Award Winners 2019</b>	
Large Company Category	<b>Hidromek A.Ş., Turkey</b>
Small Company Category	<b>Strand Hotel, Tom Flavin, Ireland</b>
Apprentice Category	<b>Samuel Gilmore – Company Mark Pollock Joinery, Kilrea, Co Londonderry, Northern Ireland, UK</b>

## Key topics for future years

The modernisation of VET systems is vital as the world of work and skills is changing. The broader twin transitions towards a greener and more digital economy will require VET to adapt to ensure that VET learners acquire the skills needed while also reconfirming and strengthening the central role of VET in the lifelong learning continuum. The transition to a digital and climate-neutral economy will have a massive impact on sectors that traditionally rely on VET graduates, whether in the energy sector, the transport sector, the construction sector, or in manufacturing.

### Greening of the economy

The European Green Deal outlines the ambition for Europe to become the first climate-neutral continent with no net emissions of greenhouse gases by 2050. It entails significant structural changes, including in skill requirements, emphasizing green and digital skills as an enabler for attaining the sustainability goals of the Green Deal. Therefore, initial VET through apprenticeships that help green the economy will bring significant employment and career opportunities over the next few years. Forecasts show positive projections for job creation linked to decarbonisation processes both in industry and services that traditionally employ VET graduates.

This is reflected in the new Skills Agenda and the Pact for Skills. At this stage, no quantitative indicators on green skills exist. The Commission will develop such indicators. It will support the development of a core green skills set for the labour market to guide training across the economy with a view to creating a generation of climate, environment and health conscious professionals and green economic operators. Defining a taxonomy of skills for the green transition will allow the statistical monitoring of the greening of our professions. In addition, the reinforced alliance calls for new commitments on digital and green apprenticeships, focusing on the economic sectors that will be at the front line of the transition to a climate-neutral Europe.

Furthermore, the green transition needs to be just and has to pay special attention to those workers and regions particularly affected.

### Digitalisation and remote learning

On-going developments such as automation and digitalisation of production and services continue to reshape the labour markets. Rapid digital change coupled with the emergence of new technologies and digital skills needs are at the forefront of challenges and opportunities for the EAfA. Besides securing the quality of current pledges and encouraging new ones, the priorities of the renewed EAfA and its action plan will encompass fostering the acquisition of skills and competences for the digital transition.

In December 2020, the ET 2020 Working Group on Innovation and Digitalisation in VET has published its [report](#) with eight insights for pioneering new approaches for VET. Among them a call to embrace the benefits of digitalisation and innovation, to encourage more innovation and to further develop skills for the digital world. The 2020 European Vocational Skills Week focussed on the digital and green transition. A special emphasis was put on the tasks related to a 'Europe fit for the digital age'. Raising the provision of digital skills and reducing skills gaps is crucial to ensure social cohesion and innovation,



and critical to make Europe fairer and more sustainable. Already in 2017, a successful exchange was held between the EAfA and the previous ET 2020 VET Working Group on Teachers and Trainers on apprenticeships in the digital age. This exchange showcased pioneering examples from EAfA member companies, including Volkswagen, with its digital campus to support the integration of digitalisation in VET, and the German multinational software corporation SAP, which provides financial support and software products for the Industry 4.0 'Learning Factories'.

The economic recovery from the COVID-19 crisis offers an opportunity to accelerate reforms in VET and strengthen its resilience, notably by digitising learning offers and methods and agile adaptation to changing labour market needs. This includes paying attention to the need to ensure access to digital tools and technologies for every learner, teacher and trainer, as well as appropriate guidance measures. Digital tools such as simulators, virtual and augmented reality, as well as gamification, have the potential to increase the accessibility and efficiency of training, although they cannot fully substitute real practical work experience.

Although real practical work experience cannot be replaced, new forms of digital learning could partly compensate this approach. WBL is utilising new and existing technology to ensure that apprentices can continue to acquire the full range of skills while at home. This adaptation is likely to expand the use and experimentation of new learning methods in VET provision, such as remote learning and gamification, and shape it after the crisis is over.

The EAfA organised Live Discussions to discuss a number of VET-related challenges and prospects presented by COVID-19 and how technology is enabling new ways of WBL. Those discussions highlighted the necessity to increase investment in distance learning, to introduce and intensify blended learning methodologies, to empower staff with the right skills to deliver online training, and to put the wellbeing of apprentices and staff at the heart of the strategies for remote learning. A renewed emphasis on effective professional development for **teachers and trainers** and increasing their cooperation will be crucial.

### Apprenticeships for adults

In the context of initial education and training (IVET), apprenticeships are normally conceived as a learning opportunity for young people and are therefore often underdeveloped as a learning opportunity for adult learners. While there are some exceptions, for example in Finland, Italy, and the UK, an increased knowledge and understanding of apprenticeships as a distinctive form of learning irrespective of age is needed.

During the [European Vocational Skills Week in Helsinki](#), the meeting of the EAfA focused on apprenticeships for adults. The aim was to share experiences, identify solutions and develop recommendations on how to make apprenticeships accessible to all people at different stages of life, taking into account their specific needs and contexts.

A further European initiative working on this topic is the Pact for Skills, launched in November 2020. The Pact, first flagship action of the European Skills Agenda, serves as a shared engagement model for skills development in Europe. With it, the Commission invites public and private employers, social partners, VET providers, public administration and other relevant stakeholders to join forces and take concrete action to upskill and reskill working age people in Europe.

### **Gender equality**

The EU has made significant progress in gender equality over recent decades. Encouraging trends include the higher number of women in the labour market and their progress in securing better education and training. However, gender gaps remain, and therefore gender equality including gender balance continues to be an important topic for the EAfA.

Some EAfA members, like the company EVN Macedonia from North Macedonia and the Italian VET provider FORMA.Azione, have demonstrated their commitment to gender balance in VET through various measures. At European level, the jury of the EAfA awards is asked to take into account a gender-balanced approach when selecting the nominees. Furthermore, one of the key priorities of the European Apprentices Network is non-discrimination, which includes combating gender stereotypes affecting the promotion and take-up of apprenticeship placements.

For more information, see: European Commission's gender equality strategy 2020-2025

### **Integration of migrants using VET systems**

Some of the EAfA members include a specific component related to the integration of migrants and refugees in their pledge. This section presents three examples of such projects.

#### *Austrian Federal Economic Chamber – WKÖ*

Around 30 000 recognised refugees or beneficiaries of subsidiary protection are registered as unemployed in Austria, 60 % of them are located in Vienna. At the same time, the number of vacant apprenticeships that cannot be filled is increasing – particularly in the federal states of Western Austria.

The WKÖ initiated the cross-regional apprenticeship services project '[b.mobile](#)' in cooperation with the Public Employment Service and the Federal Ministries of Economy and Labour. This project combines the supply and demand in the apprenticeship market all over Austria.

Young refugees are prepared in the most appropriate way for their new position (German, mathematics, practical training, intercultural competences). Refugees and companies have the opportunity to get to know each other during a one-week internship. Throughout this process, the young people are supported by an apprenticeship coach, who can provide both professional and private advice. The apprenticeship coach also provides support to the companies before and during the apprenticeship period.

#### *The Danish Construction Association – Dansk Byggeri*

The Danish pledge clearly addresses the issue of migrants. It aims to increase opportunities for refugees to enter the labour market and, in turn, provide construction companies with an increased supply of skilled labour. Tripartite initiatives have paved the way for legislation on the labour market integration of refugees and migrants, allowing for quick access to employment (within two weeks newcomers are placed in companies). Current initiatives in the construction sector focus on breaking down cultural barriers for sustainable integration as skilled workers in the companies.

#### *European Association of Regional and Local Authorities for Lifelong Learning – EARLALL*

Under the Erasmus+ strategic partnership 'New talents for companies – Developing the potentials of immigrants and refugees (TALENTS)', several European regions and cities work on local initiatives aimed at improving the job market integration of third-country nationals. Besides EARLALL, project partners also include education centres in Gothenburg (Sweden), Offenburg (Germany) and Oslo (Norway) as well as partners from Graz (Austria) and the University of Florence (Italy). The starting point of this strategic partnership was the 'Hotel Talents' project of the City of Gothenburg, which combines job-specific language learning with the acquisition of vocational skills and apprenticeships, involving schools, regional and local authorities, and companies. Project partners have developed this model and transferred it to other European regions.



For more information, see: [www.talentseuproject.com](http://www.talentseuproject.com)

# Studies and reports

## European Commission

[Study on the representation of apprentices in vocational education and training \(VET\) and other relevant bodies or networks of EU Member States, Candidate and EFTA Countries, 2019](#)

[Vocational mobility in Europe: analysing provision, take-up and impact, 2019](#)

[Teachers and Trainers Matter, How to support them in high-performance apprenticeships and work-based learning - 12 policy pointers, Report of the ET2020 Working Group, Directorate General for Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion, 2018](#)

[European Pillar of Social Rights](#), in collaboration with the European Parliament and the Council, 2017

[Teachers and trainers in work-based learning/apprenticeships, Study, Directorate General for Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion, 2017](#)

[High-performance apprenticeships & work-based learning: 20 guiding principles, 2015](#)

[Apprenticeship and Traineeship Schemes in EU 27: Key Success Factors, 2013](#)

[Return on investment of apprenticeship systems for enterprises: Evidence from cost-benefit analyses, 2013](#)

[Apprenticeship supply in the Member States of the European Union, Directorate General for Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion, 2012](#)

## Cedefop

[Enhancing European cooperation in VET: outcomes of the Riga cycle. Progress in common priorities for 2015-20. Final report \(chapter 4.1.1 All forms of work-based learning with special attention to apprenticeships\)](#)

[National policy developments in vocational education and training 2015-2019 \(chapter I All forms of worked-based learning with special attention to apprenticeships\)](#)

[Briefing note - Apprenticeship: a pill for every ill?, 2021](#)

[EFQEA implementation: a Cedefop analysis and main findings, 2021](#)

[How many apprentices are there in the EU?, 2021](#)

[The role of work-based learning in VET and tertiary education, 2021](#)

[The next steps for apprenticeship, 2021](#)

[Financing apprenticeships in the EU, 2020](#)

[Outcomes of Cedefop's 3rd policy learning forum \(PLF\) on apprenticeships, 2020](#)

[Cedefop community of apprenticeship experts - How are European countries managing apprenticeships to respond to the COVID-19 crisis?](#), 2020

[Briefing Note – Apprenticeships for Adults](#), 2020

[Apprenticeships for adults. Results of an explorative study](#), 2019

[Cedefop analytical framework for apprenticeships, version](#) 2019

[Outcomes of Cedefop’s 2nd policy learning forum \(PLF\) on apprenticeships](#), 2018

[Apprenticeship schemes in European countries: a cross-nation overview](#), 2018

[Outcomes of Cedefop’s 1st policy learning forum \(PLF\) on apprenticeships](#), 2017

[Research paper n° 53 – Governance and financing of apprenticeships](#), 2016

[Briefing note – Making apprenticeships work for small and medium enterprises](#), 2015

[Information note – Work-based learning: apprenticeships, Italy, Slovenia, Luxembourg and Greece](#), 2015

[Working document – Legal acts for VET regulating apprenticeships: Denmark, France, Germany, the Netherlands and Switzerland](#), 2015

[Cedefop – thematic country reviews : Belgium – French speaking community](#), 2019; [Cyprus](#), 2019; [Croatia](#), 2019; [Sweden](#), 2018; [Greece](#), 2018; [Slovenia](#), 2017; [Italy](#), 2017; [Lithuania](#), 2015; [Malta](#), 2015

## ETF

[European cooperation in VET: one process, many steps - Developments in vocational education and training policy 2015–17](#), Cedefop and ETF, 2018

[Reforms in vocational education and training in ETF partner countries: A cross-country digest of reform implementation and risks](#), 2018

[Work-based learning: A handbook for policy makers and social partners in ETF partner countries](#), 2018 update

[Work-based learning: Benefits and obstacles. A literature review for policy makers and social partners in ETF partner countries](#), 2013

### European Parliament

[Skills Development and Employment: Apprenticeships, Internships and Volunteering, European Parliament, 2017](#)

[Dual education: a bridge over troubled waters? Research Institutes, 2014](#)

[Success factors for the Dual VET system: Possibilities for know-how-transfer, Institut für Bildungsfragen der Wirtschaft \(ibw\), 2014](#)

### ETUC

[A European Framework for Apprenticeships, 2016](#)

### Business Europe

[A European framework for quality and effective apprenticeships - a BusinessEurope position paper, 2018](#)

[A Shared Vision for Quality and Effective Apprenticeships and Work-based Learning, Opinion of the Advisory Committee on Vocational Training \(ACVT\) addressed to the European Commission, 2016](#)

[The cost-effectiveness of apprenticeship schemes – making the business case for apprenticeships, 2016](#)

### SMEunited

[SMEunited position on Framework for Quality and Effective Apprenticeship, position paper, 2018](#)

### ILO

[Tools for Quality Apprenticeships: a Guide for Enterprises, ILO/IOE, 2019](#)

[Quality Apprenticeships: Addressing skills mismatch and youth unemployment, 2019](#)

[Measuring the costs and benefits of apprenticeship training, 2019](#)

[ILO Survey Report on the National Initiatives to Promote Quality Apprenticeships in G20 Countries, 2018](#)

[ILO toolkit for quality apprenticeships. Volume I: Guide for policy makers, 2017](#)

### **OECD Publications**

[Seven Questions about Apprenticeship: Answers from International Experience, Reviews of Vocational Education and Training](#), 2018

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# Glossary

**ACVT**

Advisory Committee on Vocational Training

**C-VET**

Continuing vocational education and training

**Cedefop**

European Centre for the Development of Vocational Training

**EAFa (or 'Alliance')**

European Alliance for Apprenticeships

**EPAL**

*From the Greek term for 'Vocational Lyceum'*

**ESF**

European Social Fund

**ET 2020**

Education and Training 2020 strategy

**ETF**

European Training Foundation

**I-VET**

Initial vocational education and training

**MFF**

Multiannual financial framework

**OBESSU**

Organising Bureau of European School Student Unions

**SMEs**

Small and medium-sized enterprises

**TCR**

Thematic country reviews

**VET**

Vocational education and training

**WBL**

Work-based learning

# Join the Alliance!

By joining the EAfA, you can become part of a community of experts from across Europe working to improve the effectiveness and quality of apprenticeships.

The EAfA is a multi-stakeholder platform that aims to promote the supply, quality and image of apprenticeships, as well as the mobility of apprentices in Europe.

The achievements of the EAfA are delivered through national and regional government commitments and voluntary pledges by EAfA stakeholders.

The European Commission, assisted by the Apprenticeship Support Services, facilitates networking, knowledge sharing and learning among EAfA members and experts.

Become an EAfA member and benefit from:

- ▶ access to state-of-the-art knowledge on apprenticeships;
- ▶ information on apprenticeship best practices in Europe;
- ▶ a Europe-wide partner search, networking and mutual learning;
- ▶ the latest news and most effective tools for quality apprenticeships!

## Your pledge

When you join the EAfA, you commit to:

- ▶ increasing the supply, quality and/or image of apprenticeships or mobility of apprentices;
- ▶ providing information on the progress of your commitment or pledge once every two years;
- ▶ sharing your experience and good practices with other EAfA members and the public;
- ▶ learning from other members and experts on how to improve the quality of apprenticeships.

## Benefits of the Alliance

### Learning

Share and learn from experiences and best practices

### Networking

European network of apprenticeship experts and peers

### Information

News, reports, meetings, workshops, events and funding

### Tools

Guidelines, practical tools and resources in one online library

### Visibility

Visibility and publicity for your work among peers and European Commission

### Training

Webinars, online training modules and live discussions

## How to join

To become an EAfA member, make a short pledge describing your planned actions on apprenticeships. These should be linked to the four objectives of the EAfA and could include: upscaling your existing apprenticeship offer (for example, by increasing supply of apprenticeship places, launching a new partnership or scheme, or providing apprenticeships in a new country); promoting the quality, awareness or attractiveness of apprenticeships; or supporting the mobility of apprentices in Europe or another activity. You should consider how the EAfA could help your work and how your pledge will contribute to the objectives of the Alliance.

## Get in touch

To find out more about the EAfA, visit our website or get in touch via social media or email.



[ec.europa.eu/apprenticeships-alliance](https://ec.europa.eu/apprenticeships-alliance)



[empl-eafa@ec.europa.eu](mailto:empl-eafa@ec.europa.eu)



[#ApprenEU](https://twitter.com/ApprenEU)



[EAfA - European Alliance for Apprenticeships](https://www.linkedin.com/company/EAfA-European-Alliance-for-Apprenticeships)



EARN & GAIN  
TRAIN & LEARN







## Getting in touch with the EU

### In person

All over the European Union there are hundreds of Europe Direct information centres. You can find the address of the centre nearest you at: [https://europa.eu/european-union/contact\\_en](https://europa.eu/european-union/contact_en)

### On the phone or by email

Europe Direct is a service that answers your questions about the European Union. You can contact this service:

- by freephone: 00 800 6 7 8 9 10 11 (certain operators may charge for these calls),
- at the following standard number: +32 22999696 or
- by email via: [https://europa.eu/european-union/contact\\_en](https://europa.eu/european-union/contact_en)

## Finding information about the EU

### Online

Information about the European Union in all the official languages of the EU is available on the Europa website at: [https://europa.eu/european-union/index\\_en](https://europa.eu/european-union/index_en)

### EU publications

You can download or order free and priced EU publications at: <https://publications.europa.eu/en/publications>. Multiple copies of free publications may be obtained by contacting Europe Direct or your local information centre (see [https://europa.eu/european-union/contact\\_en](https://europa.eu/european-union/contact_en)).

### EU law and related documents

For access to legal information from the EU, including all EU law since 1952 in all the official language versions, go to EUR-Lex at: <http://eur-lex.europa.eu>

### Open data from the EU

The EU Open Data Portal (<http://data.europa.eu/euodp/en>) provides access to datasets from the EU. Data can be downloaded and reused for free, both for commercial and non-commercial purposes.



This publication is the fourth edition of a series of brochures focused on the achievements and successes of the European Alliance for Apprenticeships (EAfA), launched in 2013. The Alliance brings together stakeholders in employment and education to address the challenges and possible answers of how to strengthen the quality, supply and image of apprenticeships in Europe. The brochure features examples of successful and inspiring apprenticeship and other work-based learning policy initiatives and projects across the EU, as well as explaining future plans to build on the work of the Alliance in the coming years.



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