

## POSITION PAPER

# Towards a European Vocational Education and Training Strategy – *key priorities for the construction industry*

Brussels, 27/04/2026

In the Communication on the **Union of Skills**, the European Commission announced in March 2025 a European Strategy for Vocational Education and Training (VET), planned for 2026. The aim of this Strategy is to increase the attractiveness, excellence and inclusiveness of VET. This is aligned with the recently adopted **Council recommendation on human capital** where Member States are encouraged to strengthen VET and in particular to “*boost the quality and attractiveness of VET and apprenticeships, including by tackling negative perceptions*”<sup>1</sup>.

The construction sector is one of the sectors requiring vocational qualifications and facing a persistent labour and skills shortage. **FIEC therefore welcomes a European Strategy to strengthen VET.**

The construction sector is characterised by a persistent labour shortage and an ageing workforce. This underscores the need to act now to attract more young people in VET to ensure that the industry doesn't face an even stronger labour shortage in the future. In addition, the green and digital transitions mean that construction companies need new skills. The European Union is also facing a housing crisis which is creating new challenges for the sector. And to handle these transitions, among other, companies need (skilled) workers. Vocational Education and Training must therefore be able to respond to these needs and to equip workers with the relevant skills for the labour market.

**FIEC is calling for an ambitious European VET Strategy which should focus on:**

- **Attractiveness**
- **Modernisation**
- **Investments**
- **Mobility**

## Increasing the attractiveness of VET

VET is often shaped by longstanding perceptions and perceived as a **second choice** education pathway. University or similar higher-education is always presented as the best choice for students to have a good job and career opportunities which are valued in our societies. There is a need to further strengthen the public image of VET by showcasing its high-quality job opportunities, career development options and its equal value alongside higher education. As

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<sup>1</sup> [COUNCIL RECOMMENDATION on human capital in the European Union](#), 9.03.2026

highlighted in a Cedefop analysis<sup>2</sup>, VET offers the advantage to “**equip workers with capabilities that retain their value in a changing technological environment**”.

FIEC would like to see the following items in the European VET strategy:

- **Career guidance:** good career guidance should be offered to all students. Measures should also target teachers and parents, to ensure that they have all the information to support young people in this process. More should also be done to give concrete information on career opportunities through VET patterns and to promote jobs in the construction industry early in school. With the current context of labour shortage, the need of new housing, initiatives to foster renovation of existing buildings, the importance of maintenance of infrastructures and development of those still needed, the construction sector has a lot to offer **with rewarding and meaningful jobs**, and this should be reflected in the career guidance provided to young people.
- **Permeability with higher-education:** many young people don't enter the VET system because they are afraid that this would restrict their opportunities to obtain a higher-education degree. Pathway between VET and university education should be clearer and easier to access. This would help to attract more young people who may be uncertain about their course choice.
- **Communication and awareness raising campaigns:** VET still suffers from numerous stereotypes, and this is in particular the case for the construction sector. However, with the green and digital transition, new opportunities and skills are created, which could attract more young people, including more young women, into the sector. But this has to be known. Furthermore, **the growing and widespread digitalisation of professions does not appear to have a significant impact on the construction sector, as this process tends to support the actual construction work itself**, which continues to require a significant human input. This makes the sector **less susceptible to fluctuations** in the labour market and to the replacement of workers by machines, a trend that is likely to affect other manufacturing sectors to a greater extent. **FIEC is calling for national and European-wide campaigns to promote VET and fight against negative stereotypes** which are affecting the attractiveness of VET.

## Modernising VET and making it labour market relevant

The green and digital transitions are impacting the construction industry and the workforce. New skills, such as **AI and digital skills**, are more and more requested by companies. VET should be able to adapt rapidly to better align with the labour market needs that are constantly evolving. **Flexibility and reactivity** are therefore key to ensure that VET remains labour market relevant.

The **involvement of social partners** is here essential to guarantee that VET offers are compatible with companies' needs but also that the national, regional and sectoral specificities are taken into account, by strengthening also the role of the paritarian institutions where present.

Making sure that VET programmes include labour market needs will also guarantee that it remains of **high quality and attractive** for young people.

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<sup>2</sup> [Reverse gear: how AI is bringing vocational occupations back | CEDEFOP](#)

At the national level, Member States have started to look at the modernisation of VET.

- The Ministry of Education and Science in **Bulgaria** is implementing a large-scale project related to the modernisation of vocational education and training, which aims to improve its quality, inclusiveness and effectiveness. The activities are implemented with a sectoral approach to work to allow a faster adaptation of VET to the dynamics of the labour market.
- In **Sweden**, an amendment to the Swedish Education Act entered into force on 1 January 2025 stipulates that the needs of the labour market must also be considered when assessing the appropriate number of training places in vocational education. There is a requirement that municipalities collaborate on the education supply to improve the matching between education and companies' needs in a region.
- In **Germany** the 2020 reform of the Vocational Training Act (BBiG) strengthened the attractiveness and accessibility of dual training by introducing a statutory minimum apprenticeship allowance and expanding opportunities for part-time vocational training. These measures, together with improved permeability between training pathways, were designed to counter skill shortages and increase participation in vocational education.
- In **Italy**, the tertiary technical education system – of which the Higher Technical Institutes (ITS Academies) form an integral part – has been overhauled and implemented with the aim of promoting, in collaboration with the university system and the business sector, employment (particularly among young people), economic development and business competitiveness, through programmes designed to train specialist professionals. As regards the construction sector, several sector-specific ITS have been established at a regional level, in collaboration with the joint sectoral training system, with the aim of providing highly specialised training in response to the business needs.
- In **Spain**, it's worth highlighting a recent development fostered by the sector, on the basis of the new law on the organisation of vocational training (*Ley Orgánica 3/2022*) that addressed the need to overhaul the vocational training model. The law stated a vocational training system in which all training is accredited and cumulative, structured along a vertical ascending pathway with different levels or grades from A to E, including “micro-trainings”/“micro-competences”. The *Real Decreto 210/2025* regulates specific aspects related to grades A, B and C in training in construction.

Member States should support the updates and modernisation of the curricula. To this end, EU funded projects such as the Blueprint are useful. Once completed, the results of these projects should be better used and spread at the national level. Implementing them at a wider scale can support the adaptation of VET to labour market needs.

The **project [Blueprint construction 2](#)** (2025-2028) works to accelerate digital innovation in construction, support the shift to a circular and greener economy with new training programmes and promote the adoption of new technologies across the sector. The **report on urgent skills needs in current occupations**<sup>3</sup> published in 2025 is a key input for the subsequent development of training modules tailored to the challenges of the sector.

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<sup>3</sup> [https://constructionblueprint2.eu/wp-content/uploads/2026/02/D4.1.-Report\\_urgent\\_Skills\\_baja.pdf](https://constructionblueprint2.eu/wp-content/uploads/2026/02/D4.1.-Report_urgent_Skills_baja.pdf)

## Fostering investments

The Draghi report mentions the need to promote and reform vocational education and training (VET), in partnership with VET providers, employers, industry associations and trade unions. This will require **investments**. As recommended by Mario Draghi, a minimum share of funding of skills policies should be dedicated towards adult learning and vocational training.

**Funding at national and European levels should be allocated for the promotion and modernisation of VET in order to tackle the labour and skills shortage.** This will be necessary for the EU's future competitiveness. Existing funding should be increased but also reconsidered, to ensure that they are effectively used.

In the next MFF, the **ESF+**, the main EU fund for investing in skills and training, should remain a **standalone programme** and the resources allocated to invest in this area should be increased. FIEC is also calling for an **increase of the budget allocated to Erasmus +** and for a dedicated budget for VET mobility within the next programming period. This programme is fundamental to increase the mobility of learners and apprentices. Furthermore, FIEC welcomes the inclusion of skills development and vocational education and training in the **European Competitiveness Fund** with the development of VET-business cooperation partnerships.

## Developing mobility of VET learners

There is a strong demand in the construction industry to **increase mobility for VET students and apprentices**.

However, the current Erasmus+ programme, even if it allows it, doesn't encourage VET students to participate in mobility programmes. Internal and European mobility benefit much more university students.

Vocational education and training (VET) is organised in different ways in the different Member States, so this is not always easy to find equivalences. For apprentices, to do an apprenticeship abroad, and for companies, to welcome an apprentice, **there are too many administrative barriers**. In a sector with a high number of SMEs, administrative processes can be difficult to manage, especially for smaller companies.

**Mobility programmes for apprentices and VET students requires therefore flexibility and simplification**, to ensure that companies and students can benefit from it.

And this is not a lack of interest from students, schools or companies. More and more, we see initiatives being developed to encourage the mobility of VET students and apprentices. In France, the **Euro App Mobility** (EAM) has been created to develop international mobility of French and European apprentices. They provide training and counselling for training centres and companies. In Denmark, the **trade committee for the Construction Education of the Wood Trade**, the national organisation responsible for the carpentry education, runs a programme that enables Danish carpentry apprentices to complete part of their training abroad.

Mobility has a lot to offer to trainees and companies. This is in particular relevant for the construction industry where workers and companies may find themselves evolving in international environments. Trainees can acquire **new soft and technical skills** which will be useful on a worksite.



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