



TEXTS ADOPTED

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Boosting skills in the Union - opportunities for vocational education and training in times of transition

European Parliament resolution of 21 October 2026 on boosting skills in the Union - opportunities for vocational education and training in times of transition (2026/2070(INI))

The European Parliament,

- having regard to the Herning Declaration on attractive and inclusive Vocational Education and Training for increased competitiveness and quality jobs 2026-2030, adopted by the Member States on 12 September 2025,
- having regard to the Council Recommendation of 24 November 2020 on vocational education and training (VET) for sustainable competitiveness, social fairness and resilience¹,
- having regard to the Commission communication of 5 March 2025 entitled ‘The Union of Skills’ (COM(2025)0090),
- having regard to the recommendation for a Council recommendation on human capital in the European Union, adopted by the Council on 9 March 2026,
- having regard to Regulation 2021/817 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 20 May 2021 establishing Erasmus+: the Union Programme for education and training, youth and sport and repealing Regulation (EU) No 1288/2013²,
- having regard to the European Pillar of Social Rights and in particular Principle 1 on the right to quality and inclusive education, training and lifelong learning,
- having regard to its resolution of 11 July 2023 on fostering and adapting vocational training as a tool for employees’ success and a

¹ OJ C 417, 2.12.2020, p. 1.

² OJ L 189, 28.5.2021, p. 1, ELI:
<http://data.europa.eu/eli/reg/2021/817/oj>.

building block for the EU economy in the new industry 4.0³,

- having regard to the legacy of the European Year of Skills and the need to ensure that its objectives continue to guide EU policies on education, training and labour market participation,
 - having regard to the Commission communication of 7 March 2025 entitled 'A Roadmap for Women's Rights' (COM(2025)0097),
 - having regard to the Commission Communication of 5 March 2026 entitled 'Gender Equality Strategy 2026-2030' (COM(2026)0113),
 - having regard to Rule 55 of its Rules of Procedure,
 - having regard to the report of the Committee on Employment and Social Affairs (A10-0259/2026),
- A. whereas the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union recognises education and access to vocational and continuing training as a fundamental right; whereas the UN's Sustainable Development Goals envisage equal access by 2030 for all women and men to affordable and quality technical, vocational and tertiary education and a substantial increase in the number of young people and adults who have relevant skills, including technical and vocational skills, for employment, decent jobs and entrepreneurship;
- B. whereas 34,7 % of Europeans have obtained a vocational education and training (VET) diploma; whereas 49 % of all students in the EU are enrolled in a VET programme⁴; whereas VET is regarded as less valuable than academic education in many Member States; whereas students and graduates of VET can experience social bias or reduced opportunities as a result of this perception gap; whereas this perception gap persists despite a significant structural skills gap, with 80 % of small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) reporting difficulties in finding workers with the required skills, while 22 % of employed persons with tertiary education are overqualified for their jobs, affecting women disproportionately (22,0 % compared with 20,5 % for men)⁵ and exceeding 30 % in several Member States; whereas in 2025, 11,0 % of young people aged 15 to 29 in the EU were neither in employment nor in education or training (NEET); whereas public investment per learner and direct financial aid are systematically lower for upper-secondary and post-secondary non-tertiary education – the levels where VET is concentrated – than for

³ OJ C, C/2024/3998, 17.7.2024,
ELI: <http://data.europa.eu/eli/C/2024/3998/oj>.

⁴ European Centre for the Development of Vocational Training (Cedefop), 'VET statistics and indicators'.

⁵ European Centre for the Development of Vocational Training (Cedefop), 'VET statistics and indicators'.

tertiary education across most Member States⁶;

- C. whereas the Draghi report on the future of European competitiveness⁷ warns that Europe's long-term productivity and competitiveness are constrained by structural weaknesses, including insufficient investment in skills, education, and human capital, and emphasises that closing the innovation and skills gap is essential for sustaining Europe's economic model in the face of global competition; whereas the importance of high-quality VET and in particular upskilling and reskilling plays a key role in ensuring the availability of skilled workers needed for Europe's industrial, technological and green transitions, which can only become a success if workers are provided with the necessary skills and competences;
- D. whereas the EU is experiencing a growing demand for vocational professions driven by the green and digital transition, strategic autonomy objectives, industrial reshoring, infrastructure investment and demographic change; whereas labour-market intelligence shows acute and persistent shortages in VET-intensive sectors; whereas Cedefop's skills forecast projects that, by 2035, 60 % of all job openings will require up to medium-level qualifications⁸, the level most commonly provided through VET pathways; whereas Cedefop also highlights that AI is reshaping labour demand in ways that strengthen and revitalise vocational occupations⁹;
- E. whereas VET is a key pillar of the European Education Area, the Union of Skills and the European lifelong learning ecosystem and contributes not only to critical economic and social infrastructure, labour market participation and skills development, but also to social cohesion, democratic engagement and resilience among young people; whereas VET institutions often serve as trusted and inclusive learning environments, particularly in urban and disadvantaged regions where young people may be at greater risk of social exclusion, disengagement from civic life, radicalisation or polarisation; whereas strengthening VET should therefore contribute to fostering inclusion and societal resilience across the EU by equipping people with the competences needed to think critically, adapt to change, participate fully in society and exercise active citizenship;

⁶ Scarpato, G. and Pocius, D., '[Rights and benefit gaps for vocational education and training \(VET\) learners and professionals in the EU](#)', study commissioned by the European Parliament, June 2026.

⁷ Draghi, M. '[The future of European competitiveness](#)', September 2024.

⁸ European Centre for the Development of Vocational Training (Cedefop), '[Skills Forecast](#)'.

⁹ Cedefop, '[Reverse gear: how AI is bringing vocational occupations back](#)'.

- F. whereas equal access to VET, including upskilling and reskilling opportunities for all workers and jobseekers, plays a key role in supporting access to quality employment and career development opportunities; whereas the upcoming VET strategy should treat initial and continuous VET as equal pillars, with clear objectives and dedicated funding; whereas quality VET pathways that ensure decent working conditions, as well as access to social security systems and quality public services, will play a prominent role in improving the attractiveness of vocational professions and retaining and attracting skilled workers; whereas strengthening personal development and learning guidance from an early age and supporting equal access to information can help people to choose suitable learning pathways to quality employment opportunities;
- G. whereas learner and teacher well-being is a crucial factor for the quality, outcomes, inclusiveness and attractiveness of VET; whereas according to a 2025 Cedefop survey, only 18 % of VET teachers believe that their profession is valued and on average VET teachers receive salaries 11 % lower than those of other tertiary educated professionals¹⁰; whereas growing shortages of VET teachers and trainers threaten the future quality, inclusiveness and attractiveness of VET in Europe; whereas the attractiveness, social recognition, remuneration and working conditions of the VET teaching profession are essential for recruiting and retaining qualified teachers and trainers;
- H. whereas the EU's policy orientation since the Lisbon Strategy has placed a disproportionate emphasis on academic attainment, underestimating the strategic importance of vocational professions for the EU's industrial base and resilience; whereas recent geopolitical developments, supply-chain disruptions, the green and digital transition, social and territorial cohesion and the need to strengthen Europe's productive capacity and industrial competitiveness demonstrate the necessity of investing substantially in VET and lifelong learning across the EU;
- I. whereas persistent societal and policy biases that frame educational pathways in hierarchical terms contribute to the unattractiveness of vocational pathways and to academic drift, thereby limiting equal recognition of talents, undermining social cohesion and exacerbating critical skills shortages in vocational occupations; whereas such biases can also reinforce social and gender inequalities affecting career progression and income opportunities; whereas VET should be valued as a high-quality learning pathway in its own right, and whereas parity of esteem between vocational and academic pathways should be encouraged and supported by the Member States in policy design, learner guidance, mobility opportunities,

¹⁰ Cedefop, '[Cedefop launches the first European Vocational Teacher Survey to tackle critical VET teacher shortages](#)'.

recognition systems, investment in quality and public communication on VET;

- J. whereas the attractiveness and quality of VET depend not only on labour-market relevance, but also on teaching and training, guidance systems, inclusive access, permeability between education and training pathways, recognition of skills and qualifications and the development of basic, digital, green, civic, social and transversal competences;
- K. whereas while VET can play a key role in promoting women's economic independence, reducing gender gaps in employment and supporting equal opportunities throughout their working life, persistent gender stereotypes continue to shape educational and career choices and women remain under-represented in many VET pathways, particularly in STEM and technical fields with women representing only 15 % of graduates of mid-level VET in STEM fields in 2023; whereas VET policy should help close these gaps by promoting women's equal access, guidance and progression into sectors with strong labour demand, thereby contributing to labour market participation and fostering women's entrepreneurship, strengthening their financial independence and promoting their social inclusion; whereas the Commission's Gender Equality Strategy recognises gender-sensitive education as a key tool to combat stereotypes and promote equal opportunities for girls and women; whereas the Member States should be encouraged to share best practices for widening women's access to, and increasing their retention within, vocational education and training;
- L. whereas unnecessary administrative barriers, fragmented recognition procedures and insufficient interoperability between national systems continue to hinder the free movement of workers, particularly VET trained professionals; whereas enhanced cooperation between Member States and regional frameworks can contribute to building mutual trust, modernising recognition procedures and facilitating labour mobility for VET professionals, while maintaining high standards; whereas recognition systems should also support the validation of competences acquired through non-formal and informal learning, including volunteering and work experience;
- M. whereas the European Pillar of Social Rights sets the goal that at least 60 % of all adults should be participating in training every year by 2030; whereas the EU lags far behind on its 2030 target for adults participating in learning, hampering much needed upskilling and reskilling; whereas it can still be difficult for workers to access training as a result of work obligations and the cost of training; whereas participation in training and the use of learning entitlements remain significantly lower among vocationally educated compared to academically educated workers, thereby reinforcing

current skills inequalities; whereas skills demand and training provision do not always sufficiently align, and learning opportunities are still too often disconnected from the workplace;

- N. whereas it is vital for European economic prosperity to have a thriving vocationally trained population; whereas individual mobility and apprentice mobility are key drivers for quality European vocational education and for fostering personal growth, skills development and active citizenship; whereas participation rates in mobility remain lower for VET learners than for academic education students; whereas barriers include upfront costs, insufficient financial support, language obstacles, difficulties in recognising learning outcomes acquired abroad and limited employer support for apprentice mobility; whereas additional barriers, such as rising living and housing costs, might risk excluding learners from disadvantaged socio-economic backgrounds from vocational education and training mobility opportunities;
- O. whereas the Bologna Process has established comparability in the standards and transparency mechanisms for academic education qualifications; whereas the Copenhagen Process sought to increase transparency, improve quality assurance, facilitate mobility and foster mutual trust in VET across the Member States, but achieved only limited convergence due to the diversity of national VET systems and the strong embeddedness of VET within national labour market and industrial institutions;
- P. whereas apprenticeship-based and dual vocational education and training systems, which combine school-based learning with substantial work-based training in enterprises, have proven effective in supporting the transition from education to employment; whereas Member States with well-established dual VET systems have often recorded comparatively favourable youth labour market outcomes and can provide valuable examples of good practice for strengthening the Union of Skills¹¹;
- Q. whereas SMEs play a central role in apprenticeship-based vocational education and training across the EU; whereas their participation in cross-border mobility schemes can be constrained by administrative and organisational challenges, particularly where the temporary absence of apprentices places additional pressure on small businesses; whereas targeted support and simplified procedures can help increase participation in mobility opportunities for VET learners;

Recognising the value of VET in society

¹¹ Cedefop, '[The role of work-based learning in VET and tertiary education: evidence from the 2016 EU labour force survey](#)', 2021.

1. Welcomes the renewed political attention given to VET in the context of the Commission's Union of Skills initiative, the Herning Declaration within the Copenhagen Process¹², and the forthcoming European Strategy for Vocational Education and Training; highlights the importance of VET for the EU's social progress, economic prosperity and resilience, competitiveness, industrial sovereignty and human capital development, stresses the importance of promoting and valorising VET in order to improve its attractiveness as an inclusive quality pathway to education and quality employment; calls on the Commission to ensure that the upcoming VET strategy addresses the quality and relevance of VET curricula, coupled with improved promotion of VET programmes to learners, employers and the wider public so as to raise awareness of the employment and progression opportunities VET can offer;
2. Stresses that formal vocational education providers and established qualifications focusing on foundational skills should continue to form the basis of VET strategies and provision, while modular, task-specific and digital learning programmes and credentials can play an important complementary role, provided that they meet relevant and transferable quality-assurance criteria;
3. Stresses that VET should be viewed as a tool that can both support the personal development of students and workers and address labour market shortages, thereby contributing to the EU's competitiveness and prosperity, supporting innovation across all sectors and promoting quality employment and career development opportunities;
4. Stresses the need to ensure that VET students and graduates feel that their qualifications and professions are valued equally to academic education, to ensure social cohesion and inclusion, and equal opportunities in access to employment, mobility, further learning and career progression; stresses the importance of promoting vocational pathways among young people, particularly girls, and calls on the Commission and the Member States to address persistent negative perceptions surrounding the image and value of VET through early and continuous career guidance, targeted engagement with parents and families, quality paid apprenticeships, awareness-raising campaigns and long-term investment in regional skills ecosystems that strengthen the visibility and attractiveness of VET; calls on the Member States to sufficiently invest in guidance services and tutoring systems, recognising the key role of tutors and counsellors in supporting learners, alongside teachers and trainers;

¹² European Ministers of Vocational Education and Training, and the European Commission, '[The Copenhagen Declaration](#)', November 2002.

calls on the Commission to build upon Cedefop's EU reference framework for lifelong guidance in the upcoming VET strategy;

5. Emphasises that VET must be inclusive and should play a key role in supporting learners with fewer opportunities or at risk of exclusion from society and the labour market and should address barriers linked to gender, disability, migration background, geography and socio-economic status; calls on the Member States to progressively close the gender gap in vocational education and career choices, particularly STEM, and to encourage a more balanced participation of women and men across vocational pathways, sectors and occupations by addressing gender stereotypes and equal access to quality training; highlights the importance of VET for persons with disabilities and stresses the need to develop strategies to provide more and better VET opportunities for them and facilitate their integration in the labour market;
6. Calls on the Member States to improve the adequacy, accessibility and fairness of financial support for VET learners; notes with concern persistent disparities in many Member States whereby learners in upper-secondary and post-secondary non-tertiary education receive lower levels of public financial support than those in tertiary education¹³; calls on the Member States, and the Commission, where appropriate and taking into account national specificities, to ensure that existing academic education support instruments and public support systems are extended to VET learners, rather than creating separate systems; emphasises that eligibility rules for student cards, financial support schemes, recognition systems and access to public sector job opportunities should be designed in an inclusive manner that does not discriminate between learners in VET and academic education;
7. Stresses the importance of vocational pathways that remain accessible after the completion of general upper-secondary education and that combine advanced educational attainment with work-based learning, thereby broadening career choices and supporting the development of highly skilled workers; further stresses that all VET qualifications and credentials should offer clear pathways for further studies or progression; emphasises that pursuing VET at upper-secondary level should not prevent individuals from continuing their studies in tertiary education institutions, including advanced VET institutions and universities;
8. Emphasises the potential of micro-credentials and modular learning opportunities to support upskilling and reskilling throughout working

¹³ Scarpatto, G. and Pocius, D., '[Rights and benefit gaps for vocational education and training \(VET\) learners and professionals in the EU](#)', study commissioned by the European Parliament, June 2026.

life and to provide flexible learning pathways for workers and employers in a rapidly changing labour market;

9. Calls for the EU institutions and the Member States to promote more respectful terminology for educational pathways based on the levels of the European Qualifications Framework (EQF) rather than on terms such as 'higher' and 'lower' education; calls on the Commission to ensure that its relevant strategies, communications, guidance and funding instruments reflect and promote the equal recognition and valuation of vocational and academic pathways; calls on the Commission to amend the EU-level target for tertiary educational attainment to more explicitly recognise the contribution of tertiary-level VET, including short-cycle and other higher-level VET programmes, and to complement the existing tertiary-attainment target with an equally ambitious EU-level target for participation in and completion of initial VET, in order to reflect the equal value of vocational and academic pathways and the Commission's intention to strengthen the status and attractiveness of VET and support access to quality jobs on the labour market or to further education;
10. Highlights the under-representation of vocationally educated individuals in political and administrative decision-making, limiting the diversity of vocational perspectives in policy design; welcomes, in this regard, Parliament's decision to open a number of Schuman traineeships to candidates holding VET qualifications; calls for the Member States and EU institutions to involve VET students and their organisations, apprentices, graduates, teachers, trainers, employers, trade unions and chambers of commerce at all levels of policymaking to ensure equal participation, and to offer quality and fairly remunerated VET apprenticeships, traineeships and jobs; calls on the Commission to complement its Scientific Advice Mechanism with a practical advice mechanism to systematically integrate the expertise of the above VET actors on practical implementation of the policy cycle;
11. Regrets that discrimination on the basis of education pathway occurs in Europe; welcomes the fact that Bulgaria, Croatia, Portugal and Slovenia already provide legal protection against such discrimination in their national legal systems; highlights the advisory opinion of the Netherlands Institute for Human Rights¹⁴ calling for the inclusion of educational attainment as a protected ground against discrimination in the provision of goods and services; calls on the Commission to assess and where necessary propose appropriate measures to ensure

14 <https://www.mensenrechten.nl/actueel/nieuws/2024/09/04/advies-college-vul-wetgeving-aan-met-bescherming-tegen-discriminatie-vanwege-opleiding>.

that discrimination on the basis of education is adequately addressed within the EU equality framework;

12. Stresses that VET can only become an attractive pathway if it leads to quality jobs; underlines that fair wages, decent working conditions, job security and opportunities for career progression are essential to attracting and retaining vocationally trained workers; regrets that remuneration levels in many vocational occupations – particularly in public services – remain insufficiently aligned with the complexity, responsibility and societal value of these roles, contributing to persistent labour shortages and reduced attractiveness of vocational pathways; calls on the Member States, in cooperation with social partners, to promote fair wages, stable employment and quality working conditions in order to strengthen recruitment, retention and the long-term sustainability of essential vocational services and professions;
13. Recognises the contribution of WorldSkills and EuroSkills in promoting VET excellence, innovation and attractiveness across Europe; encourages closer cooperation between the Commission, the Member States, regional and sectoral organisations, social partners and VET skills competition organisations in order to promote vocational excellence and support the visibility of VET; acknowledges that these competitions and their associated frameworks, such as the WorldSkills Occupational Standards, should serve as an inspiration for policymakers and the development of VET policy including skills recognition, inclusion and quality conditions for VET professionals;
14. Recalls that although the Commission communication entitled ‘The Union of Skills’ states that VET should become ‘an equally valued learning pathway as higher education’, VET continues to receive a smaller share of Erasmus+ funding, compared with academic education; insists that its budget allocation be increased to ensure that this objective is met in practice, and to support the ‘Europe on the Move’ target of 12 % learning mobility for VET learners by 2030; insists that Erasmus+ should recognise not only labour market outcomes but also personal development, intercultural learning and young people’s experience as core objectives of VET mobility; calls on the Commission to increase accessibility, inclusion, gender equality and sustainability of mobility programmes, by dedicating specific earmarking in EU-managed programmes to support inclusive Erasmus+ scholarships, talent or excellence actions and mobility for apprentices, adult learners and learners with fewer opportunities, including through support for preparatory, linguistic and accompanying support measures;
15. Calls on the Commission and the Member States to facilitate the participation of small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) in Erasmus+ mobility schemes for apprentices and VET learners by simplifying the administrative procedures, providing targeted

organisational support and taking account of the specific challenges faced by SMEs to make it easier and more attractive for companies and SMEs to host and send international apprentices; calls for the implementation of Erasmus Without Paper and the Erasmus Student Card in the VET sector as soon as possible; calls for sufficient support and resources for VET providers to strengthen their capacity for international mobility, including through increasing the number of international mobility coordinators to guide VET learners in their mobility projects, advise VET teachers in setting up European projects and facilitate contacts between VET institutions, the private sector and learners; welcomes the Commission's ongoing efforts to facilitate cross-border mobility and skills portability, including through the forthcoming skills portability initiative and the digitalisation and simplification of administrative procedures such as the European Social Security Pass (ESSPASS), with a view to reducing unnecessary administrative burdens and facilitating mobility for learners, workers and employers across the EU;

16. Underlines the need to develop tailored support pathways for young people who are not in employment, education or training (NEETs), through guidance, tutoring and mentorship tools capable of addressing individual needs and removing barriers to access to education and vocational training pathways; calls on the Commission and the Member States to strengthen inclusion and reintegration measures, fostering the participation of NEETs in vocational education and training programmes and in lifelong learning opportunities;
17. Regrets that persistent structural and financial barriers continue to limit participation in international mobility among VET learners; calls for the establishment of a strong common European framework ensuring the automatic recognition of diplomas and learning outcomes acquired during mobility periods, internships and apprenticeships abroad in order to provide greater legal certainty for learners, VET providers, employers and competent authorities; calls, furthermore, for national and Erasmus+ mobility grants to be based on actual costs of living in host countries and to take into account the specific additional costs faced by VET students, apprentices, teachers and staff participating in mobility activities;
18. Notes the importance of strengthening collaboration between VET and academic education students, for example through joint learning environments, to improve mutual understanding, support smoother progression pathways, and foster more innovative and inclusive learning ecosystems; calls on the Commission to explore an Erasmus+ pilot for cross-sectoral international mobility projects bringing together VET and academic students; considers active student participation and representation vital for effective governance in all education institutions and regrets that VET institutions often lack proper student involvement; calls on the

Member States to ensure measures to strengthen student participation and on the Commission to support the development of a European VET student representation network;

19. Calls on the Commission and the Member States to strengthen EQF level 5 and above as a coherent and recognised tertiary-level qualification pathway in order to enhance the attractiveness of VET, support lifelong learning and address skills shortages; emphasises the need for greater consistency in its role and visibility across Member States; stresses the importance of clear progression routes, strengthened credit transfer arrangements and improved permeability between VET and non-VET, and secondary and tertiary, education systems, while also stressing that EQF levels 3 and 4 should be recognised as a valued and complete qualification level for learners wishing to enter the labour market; calls, furthermore, for tertiary vocational education institutions at EQF levels 5 and 6 to be integrated into European research and innovation ecosystems as providers of specialist technical skills;

Improving VET quality and relevance through increased investment

20. Calls on the Commission to support the Member States in investing sufficiently in VET through country-specific recommendations in the European Semester and through the effective use of EU funding instruments; recalls the successful investment, under the Just Transition Fund, in local economies through a combination of funding for skills and for small and medium-sized enterprises including social enterprises, and recommends that this example be followed under the Member States' national and regional partnership plans, as well as in just transition strategies, in order to promote VET; calls, furthermore, for investment in VET systems to pay particular attention to regions and sectors facing structural labour-market challenges such as persistent skills and labour shortages or limited access to training opportunities, including rural, remote, outermost, deindustrialised and economically disadvantaged areas and sectors of strategic industrial and societal relevance, so as to strengthen local skills ecosystems and support positive spillover effects on employment, gender equality, innovation and social and territorial cohesion;
21. Calls on the Commission to come forward with an ambitious European VET Strategy, building on the Copenhagen Process and the Herning Declaration, which strengthens the coherence and practical use of current European tools, and supports Member States and VET providers in ensuring that all VET programmes and credentials, including modular, task-specific and digital learning programmes, meet the criteria and standards defined in well-recognised quality-assurance systems; stresses, furthermore, the need for the upcoming framework to explicitly recognise gender

equality and women's empowerment as fundamental objectives of VET and to increase women's leadership in VET governance; encourages the Commission to systematically involve social partners and VET providers at an early stage in the design, implementation and governance of VET policies; calls on Cedefop to ensure that VET providers are systematically and structurally involved and consulted in the implementation of its tasks and activities; encourages the Commission to give VET provider representations a member role on the European Skills High-Level Board;

22. Stresses the need to value local VET providers, which serve as a vital link between learners and the local labour market and can help to align educational needs with regional labour demand; supports EU- and national-level partnerships between employers and VET providers as well as trade unions, employment services, local and regional authorities, youth organisations, representatives of learners, apprentices, teachers, and all other educational stakeholders, in order to improve the relevance and quality of VET curricula, including through providing high-quality apprenticeship opportunities; calls for the linking of VET providers to regional industrial and technological clusters; recalls the need to ensure strengthened social dialogue, fair wages, quality working conditions and continuous professional development for teachers and trainers in VET to improve the attractiveness of the profession and address growing labour shortages and for this to be addressed in the forthcoming EU Teachers and Trainers Agenda; calls for a broadening of the possibilities for VET practitioners to combine their professional activity with providing teaching and training in a hybrid manner;
23. Underlines that Centres of Vocational Excellence (CoVEs) should be at the heart of the future development of VET systems in Europe, as key drivers of structural reform, innovation, recognition and modernisation; calls on the Commission to safeguard the budget dedicated to CoVEs in the next Erasmus+ programme and to strengthen long-term investment pathways for CoVEs and ensure that they benefit from a funding approach that matches the ambition of the European University Alliances; stresses that CoVEs bring together education providers, businesses, research institutions, regional authorities and social partners to address labour market needs, foster innovation, strengthen skills development and regional and sectoral competitiveness and support the green and digital transitions; calls for an independent evaluation of the CoVEs to assess their contribution to labour-market needs and support their further development; welcomes the growing commitment of the Member States to establish and strengthen national CoVE initiatives; notes in this regard the initiatives set up by France, the Netherlands, Spain, Italy, Denmark, Poland and Slovakia to develop or pilot national CoVE frameworks alongside their participation in the

European CoVE ecosystem and calls on other Member States to follow these examples;

24. Recognises that enterprises play a central role in vocational education and training, particularly in dual training systems, by providing work-based learning environments, transmitting up-to-date skills and competences and supporting innovation; calls on the Commission and the Member States to strengthen work-based learning and the role and visibility of enterprises as key learning venues within VET systems; calls for the EU and the Member States to address skills mismatches by strengthening cooperation between VET providers and employers, including through voluntary workplace-level skills audits and competence profiling, to identify existing skills and competences, support their formal recognition, determine where further training is needed and ensure that teaching curricula remain up to date with labour market developments;
25. Stresses the importance of supporting vocational education and training in rural, remote and economically disadvantaged regions in order to combat depopulation, strengthen local labour markets and preserve traditional skills and crafts; highlights the importance of intergenerational skills transfer in addressing labour shortages and encourages initiatives that support experienced workers in passing on their knowledge and expertise through mentoring, workplace training and apprenticeship schemes; stresses, furthermore, that SMEs are central actors in European VET systems, providing a significant share of apprenticeships, traineeships and workplace learning opportunities; recognises, however, that SMEs often face administrative, financial and organisational constraints and therefore calls for SME-friendly implementation of European VET initiatives, including reducing unnecessary administrative burdens and providing practical assistance mechanisms to facilitate their continued and expanded participation in skills development ecosystems such as CoVEs;
26. Calls for broader inclusion of VET in existing EU policies and programmes; encourages the deeper integration of VET institutions in the design and implementation of innovation policies in order to accelerate the adaptation and scaling up of innovations in the workplace; calls on the Commission to ensure active involvement of VET institutions in Horizon Europe; calls for proposals, particularly in projects at higher technology readiness levels where implementation, testing and scaling in real-world settings by VET trained professionals are critical for impact; stresses that EU investment in strategic sectors and the green and digital transitions can only deliver its full impact where workers, learners and employers have access to the skills needed to deploy, operate and scale new technologies; insists on the need to support skills investment within strategic sectors under the policy windows of the proposed European Competitiveness Fund; recalls in this regard

Article 33(2) of the Financial Regulation¹⁵, which sets out that programmes and activities should, where feasible and appropriate in accordance with the relevant sector-specific rules, be implemented to achieve their set objectives, respecting working and employment conditions under applicable national law, EU law, International Labour Organization conventions and collective agreements;

27. Recognises the essential role of vocational occupations in safeguarding Europe's manufacturing base, energy security, transport systems, construction sector and strategic infrastructure, and emphasises VET's potential to deliver quality jobs for the green transition as well as social economy opportunities; calls on the Member States to position vocational education and training as a cornerstone of skills development, particularly for women and young people, and to leverage the next multi-annual financial framework (MFF) to finance upskilling and reskilling in strategic sustainable sectors; calls on the Commission and the Member States to strengthen cooperation in the development of VET learning environments, curricula and practices that respond to the needs arising from the ecological transformation, ensuring that topics such as the circular economy, construction and renovation of sustainable, affordable and climate-resilient housing, energy efficiency and the energy transition are adequately addressed, and that future professionals are equipped with the knowledge, skills and competences needed to drive sustainable transformation across industries and businesses;
28. Calls for further promoting effective, efficient and gender-sensitive public spending on VET, as well as complementarity and synergies of funding under the next MFF, in particular under Erasmus+, AgoraEU, the European Social Fund and other cohesion funds, in addition to the European Competitiveness Fund; calls for improved gender- disaggregated data and monitoring of VET, as well as renewed efforts to implement the EU-level VET benchmarks effectively in all the Member States;
29. Stresses that technological innovation and digitalisation, including artificial intelligence and automation, require continuous upskilling and reskilling; emphasises, in this context, the increasing importance of accessible training and basic, sustainability and digital skills for all workers for their current or alternative careers;

¹⁵ Regulation (EU, Euratom) 2018/1046 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 18 July 2018 on the financial rules applicable to the general budget of the Union, amending Regulations (EU) No 1296/2013, (EU) No 1301/2013, (EU) No 1303/2013, (EU) No 1304/2013, (EU) No 1309/2013, (EU) No 1316/2013, (EU) No 223/2014, (EU) No 283/2014, and Decision No 541/2014/EU and repealing Regulation (EU, Euratom) No 966/2012, (OJ L 193, 30.7.2018, p. 1, ELI: <http://data.europa.eu/eli/reg/2018/1046/oj>).

30. Stresses that State aid rules should support rather than constrain investment in skills, lifelong learning and workforce development, notably by expanding the possibilities under the General Block Exemption Regulation¹⁶ and related frameworks for funding training activities and skills ecosystems; stresses that VET institutions are active contributors to research and innovation, including through cooperation with companies, research organisations and sectoral organisations; calls for the GBER and related State aid frameworks to facilitate their participation in research, development and innovation activities and avoid undue limitations on public support where they carry out such activities, enabling their full contribution to skills and innovation ecosystems; stresses the importance of ensuring that female VET students and workers are fully included in the action plan for women in research, innovation and start-ups;
31. Recalls that quality jobs are essential to the attractiveness of vocational pathways and to the EU's capacity to retain skilled workers; calls on the Commission, the Member States and employers to ensure fair remuneration and quality working conditions for apprentices in VET in accordance with EU and national legislation and applicable collective agreements in order to improve the attractiveness, quality and inclusiveness of work-based learning; calls for balanced VET systems that combine workplace learning with structured educational environments, ensuring that learners benefit from both professional practice and broader educational formation; emphasises the importance of the active involvement of social partners in the design, monitoring and evaluation of apprenticeship schemes; emphasises the value of VET's hands-on, work-based learning as a source of inspiration for a meaningful component of university education;
32. Calls on the Commission and the Member States, in cooperation with social partners and VET providers, to develop comprehensive and actionable strategies to strengthen the well-being of learners, teachers and trainers across VET learning environments; in this context, stresses the importance of special education professionals, psychologists and assistants in addressing the individual needs of all VET learners; further stresses the importance of flexible and family-friendly working arrangements to improve the participation and retention of women in vocational occupations;
33. Calls on the Commission, the Member States and relevant stakeholders to promote skills-first approaches in recruitment, progression and access to services; stresses that VET graduates may

¹⁶ Commission Regulation (EU) No 651/2014 of 17 June 2014 declaring certain categories of aid compatible with the internal market in application of Articles 107 and 108 of the Treaty (OJ L 187, 26.6.2014, pp. 1, ELI: <http://data.europa.eu/eli/reg/2014/651/oj>).

face structural disadvantages due to a lower signalling value of vocational qualifications compared to academic diplomas;

Recognising the mobility of students and workers

34. Stresses the importance of qualifications, diplomas and skills recognition to ensure freedom of movement and address fair study mobility for VET students, and fair labour mobility for apprentices and workers; encourages Member States to promote the full range of opportunities offered by the Erasmus+ programme, which provides young people not only with opportunities to study abroad, but also with opportunities for apprenticeships and work placements; calls on the Commission to establish a VET diploma, in line with the Union of Skills Communication, which should include development of transnational joint VET programmes and bottom-up initiatives to promote VET internationally and increase mobility opportunities;
35. Calls for the upcoming Skills Portability Initiative to deliver a coherent EU ecosystem for qualifications, diplomas and skills recognition and mobility, ensuring interoperability between Europass, the multilingual classification of European Skills, Competences and Occupations (ESCO), national qualifications frameworks, micro-credentials and digital credentials; emphasises that this system should be transparent, citizen-friendly, digital and free of charge;
36. Notes Cedefop's findings¹⁷ on persistent fragmentation in the cross-border recognition of VET qualifications and the need for stronger cooperation mechanisms; calls on the Commission to expand the ENIC (European Network of Information Centres) and NARIC (National Academic Recognition Information Centres in the European Union) networks, by broadening their mandate and technical capacities to fully encompass VET qualifications, thereby enhancing cross-border recognition to support national authorities and VET stakeholders, improve transparency and comparability of qualifications, and facilitate the recognition and portability of VET qualifications and skills across the EU;
37. Emphasises that improved recognition and portability of vocational qualifications can not only contribute to improved labour mobility but also to lower unemployment and a better matching of skills and labour-market needs across the EU; calls on the Commission and the Member States to further simplify and accelerate the recognition of vocational qualifications across the EU and to move towards the automatic recognition of academic and professional qualifications between Member States for comparable levels of education, in order to reduce barriers to mobility and strengthen the functioning of the

¹⁷ Cedefop, 'Recognition and validation of foreign VET qualifications in Europe', July 2026.

single market; welcomes the European Court of Auditors' special report on the recognition of professional qualifications in the EU and calls on the Commission and the Member States to implement its recommendations, in particular reducing deadlines for recognition through the automatic system for sectoral professions for temporary and permanent mobility;

38. Calls for the development of skills and training partnerships with non-EU countries in sectors facing persistent labour shortages, combining high-quality training opportunities with transparent recognition pathways and mutually beneficial mobility arrangements such as common EU procedural principles for the recognition of third-country nationals' qualifications, including transparent timelines, clear criteria, and the systematic use of skills-based assessments, such as practical tests and validation of prior learning where documentation is incomplete; stresses the importance of ensuring full respect for national laws and practices and applicable collective agreements and protection from any kind of violation of working conditions or social rights of such workers;
39. Calls for the development of interoperable, secure and verifiable digital credentials for qualifications and professional skills, issued by competent and recognised authorities, and easily shareable across borders, while ensuring coherence with existing EU initiatives and maintaining standards; considers the potential of AI for the modernisation of VET systems in Europe including support for curriculum innovation skills assessment and the recognition of qualifications and micro-credentials; encourages the development of EU-wide AI-enabled certification mechanisms to enhance the transparency and transferability of VET qualifications across the Member States;
40. Supports the objective of a genuine European Education Area in which the recognition of academic and vocational qualifications progressively becomes automatic, strengthening mutual trust between education systems and facilitating the mobility of skilled workers; calls on the Commission and the Member States to establish regional pilot areas for the portability of skills and qualifications, building on current cross-border cooperation frameworks such as that between the Benelux Union and its neighbouring border regions, in order to test innovative approaches to the recognition, validation and automatic portability of qualifications, skills and micro-credentials across borders; considers that successful pilot projects could generate valuable evidence, strengthen mutual trust between competent authorities and create positive spillover effects for wider implementation across the EU;

41. Regrets the fact that uptake of Common Training Frameworks under Directive 2005/36/EC¹⁸ has been limited; calls on the Commission to assess the reasons for this limited uptake and identify potential barriers and encourages the Member States and the relevant professional bodies to actively promote their development and implementation in vocational sectors, where common training requirements could support professional mobility; encourages the extension of automatic recognition regimes, particularly in sectors experiencing labour shortages or high cross-border mobility, building on successful pilot approaches in regional cooperation frameworks;
42. Emphasises the need to establish a recognition convention within the Copenhagen Process to enable EU-wide recognition of VET qualifications, based on current tools such as EQF, WorldSkills Occupational Standards and learning outcomes, to enhance cross-border comparability and labour mobility; calls on the Member States and the Commission to strengthen the use of ESCO as a common reference language for skills in non-regulated professions, enabling employers, employment services and platforms to better recognise and compare skills across borders and sectors; considers that greater coherence between the Copenhagen and Bologna processes is needed; welcomes the Commission's intention to explore the extension of the European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System (ECTS) to VET, as part of efforts to strengthen permeability between education sectors; underlines, however, that such an extension must be accompanied by robust, trust-based quality assurance mechanisms; calls for the establishment of a European network between quality assurance (QA) agencies for VET, similar to the European Quality Assurance Register for Higher Education in academic education, to enable systematic peer learning, coordination, and trust-building across QA systems;
43. Calls on the Commission and the Member States to strengthen flexible and permeable education and training systems by promoting modularity and expanding the recognition and validation of prior learning, including non-formal and informal learning, to facilitate re-entry into education and training while ensuring quality standards; encourages the availability of flexible delivery modes, including part-time, blended and online learning, to accommodate learners with caring responsibilities, employment commitments or interrupted educational pathways; calls on the Commission to encourage the Member States to promote curricula agility, flexibility and

¹⁸ Directive 2005/36/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council of 7 September 2005 on the recognition of professional qualifications (OJ L 255, 30.9.2005, p. 22, ELI: <http://data.europa.eu/eli/dir/2005/36/oj>).

modularity through concrete measures in the upcoming VET strategy;

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44. Instructs its President to forward this resolution to the Council and the Commission.