

IMPLEMENTING THE COUNCIL OF EUROPE'S REFERENCE FRAMEWORK

Advancing Democratic Competences in Vocational Education and Training

INTRODUCTION

Vocational Education and Training (VET) equips learners with technical skills needed for the workforce – but its potential to foster democratic citizenship competences has often been overlooked. To address this, the Council of Europe developed the Reference Framework of Competences for Democratic Culture (RFCDC), a tool designed to prepare individuals for active, engaged participation in democratic society, including in the workplace. In 2022, the Council of Europe launched a dedicated initiative to support the integration of the RFCDC into VET systems. Two cornerstone publications – Guidance Document for Vocational Education and Training

(2024) and Learning Democracy in Vocational Education and Training in Europe: An Anthology (2025) – underscore the role of VET in promoting democratic citizenship. Together, they offer concrete strategies and inspirational examples for policy makers, educators, and other relevant stakeholders to embed democratic culture across VET programmes and practice.



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VET is essential for developing a skilled workforce, but it also serves as a platform for learning democratic competences, particularly as learners transition to the workplace. This dual role of VET must be fully recognised and leveraged.

50%

**OF YOUNG PEOPLE
AGED 15-19**

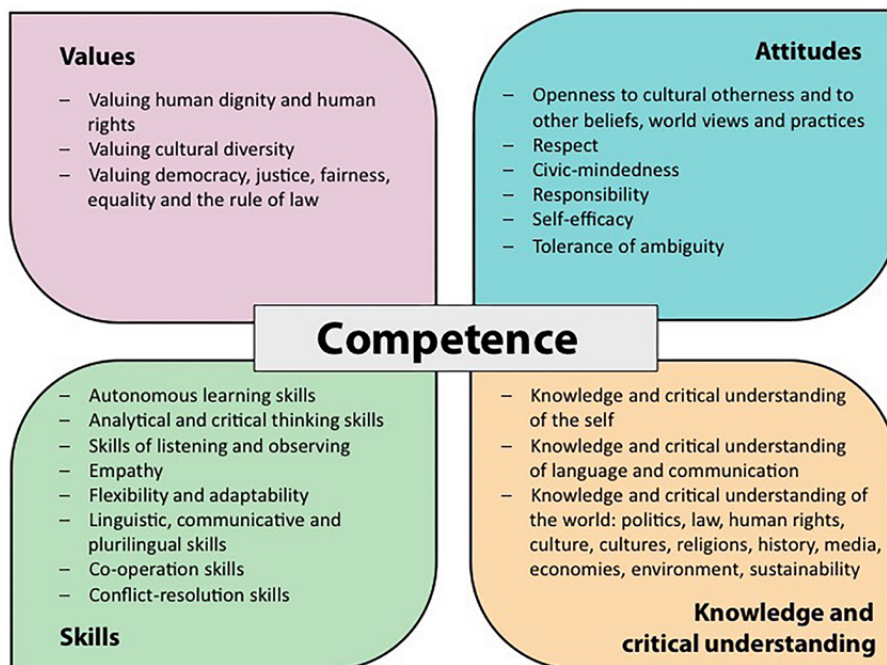
Across EU member States study at VET institutions at the upper secondary or tertiary level, although participation rates in VET programmes vary.

20

COMPETENCES

Individuals require to act as democratic and intercultural competent citizens in life and in the world of work.

Competences for Democratic Culture (CDC)



KEY MESSAGES

A new narrative of citizenship competences in VET

A new narrative is necessary to challenge the assumption that VET and citizenship education are incompatible, and to promote that CDC can be learned as learning *about, for* and *through* democracy in vocational learning contexts.

The Need for an Integrated Approach

There is a need for a holistic, multi-dimensional and systematic strategy to integrate CDC in all levels of the VET systems, based on a democratic dialogue between VET schools, training providers, employers, and social partners.

Innovative pedagogical approaches

Adopt open and flexible approaches in teaching, learning and assessing CDC in VET.



Promote Employer Engagement

As VET systems are closely tied to the labour market, collaboration with employers is crucial. Companies can play a pivotal role in the development of CDC by fostering corporate social responsibility (CSR) initiatives, promoting social dialogue, encouraging inclusive recruitment practices and the development of respectful, collaborative workplaces.



Foster Learner Participation as CDC active learning

Promote CDC as “learning by doing” through democratic practices and participatory decision-making platforms such as student councils, workplace meetings, and inclusive pedagogical methods.



Raise Awareness of the importance of CDC

Promote public awareness campaigns to highlight the importance of CDC in VET. This can help shift perceptions of VET from solely a vocational pathway to a comprehensive educational experience that nurtures active, engaged citizens.

THE WAY FORWARD FOR THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE RFCDC IN VET

01 Integrate CDC into the VET Curricula

VET curricula should integrate CDC across all subjects and in the school culture. Curriculum development is a collaborative dynamic endeavour involving practitioners and other actors working across multiple sites. This requires a shared understanding of what is meant by CDC values, attitudes, skills, knowledge, and critical understanding within VET.

02 Develop innovative assessment methods

Assessing CDC in VET is crucial for developing both technical and transversal skills that support democratic participation, social cohesion and active citizenship. Innovative assessment methods such as continuous assessments and portfolios, could be implemented. CDC assessment requires integrating formal and informal learning, balancing formative and summative assessments, and providing ongoing for assessors support and quality assurance measures.

03 Engage VET teachers in integrating CDC

Teachers in VET should be engaged in professional self-reflection on how to integrate CDC and maintain strong ties to the vocational field, to effectively support learners in their learning process.

04 Foster CDC in in-company training

Promoting CDC in-company training should take into account and build upon existing structures and resources of companies. Involving apprentices in social or environmental projects as part of the company's Corporate Social Responsibility activities provides an opportunity to shape their CDC and experience democracy in an open and transparent decision-making process.

05 Adopt a whole-school approach in the implementation of CDC in VET schools

The implementation of CDC in VET schools requires a whole-school approach rather than relying on standalone courses. This approach offers benefits like respecting time constraints of VET staff, enhancing the inclusion of learners, and providing flexibility to adapt to different learning environments and compatibility with a range of CDC practices.

06 Foster an inclusive and supportive learning environment

VET learning environments should empower learners by ensuring access to flexible, personalised learning, recognising the needs and perspectives of diverse groups. Digital technologies can support the inclusion of diverse groups, including the accessibility of resources and appropriate tools, virtual and distance learning, and social interactions.

07 Engage social partners in integrating CDC

The involvement of social partners is essential for developing CDC of VET students. Curricula and educational practices should connect learning CDC with real workplace situations. Additionally, it remains a challenge to motivate workplaces to take an interest in developing democratic and inclusive practices.

08 Promote systemic learner participation

Systemic structures of participation should be established, embedding participatory practices into the core of VET institutions and workplaces for all learners. Effective participation depends on robust collaboration among all VET stakeholders to reinforce learners' consistent understanding of their role as active citizens.



CASE EXAMPLES

As part of the development of the Council of Europe publications, member States have shared over 100 examples of policies and practices related to education for democracy in VET, some of which are outlined below:

- 01** In **Poland**, the “Freed from Theory” initiative is a competition of upper secondary education (including VET) where students work on social impact projects. Participating in this initiative, students develop CDC such as civic engagement, entrepreneurship, and cultural awareness. They are assessed on management, communication, and the social issue they have addressed.
- 02** In **Malta**, the College of Arts, Science and Technology provides industry placements for teachers to keep them abreast with current work developments. The placements are intended to be a catalyst in the building of a community of practice.
- 03** In **Türkiye**, at the company Elyaf Tekstil Bursa, CDC is promoted through approaches on participation, sustainability and social commitment. The participation of apprentices in such sustainable and social initiatives provides them with the opportunity to shape their attitudes towards responsibility, self-efficacy and civic mindedness, fostering a sense of belonging and increasing their motivation to contribute to the company’s success.
- 04** In the **Netherlands**, the Brave Space initiative highlights the importance of creating inclusive, student-driven environments within VET institutions as a foundation for effective inclusion policies. By fostering equity-based relationships and enabling learners to share experiences, the initiative shows that safe spaces empower students to engage in democratic processes, especially those who may otherwise feel excluded.
- 05** In **Denmark**, social partners play a key role in identifying and formulating learning objectives for VET through trade committees. These committees are made up of an equal number of representatives from trade unions and employers. There is one trade committee for each of the 103 VET programmes currently offered.
- 06** In **Norway**, the Acro Park is a youth-led, co-managed social and creative space within a vocational upper secondary school, where learners actively participate in decision-making, administration, and community-building activities, embodying the principle of “for youth, by youth”.

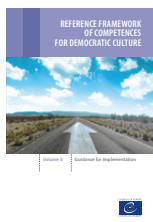
COUNCIL OF EUROPE REFERENCE DOCUMENTS



↳ VOL. 1



↳ VOL. 2



↳ VOL. 3



↳ **COUNCIL OF EUROPE · 2018**
Reference Framework of Competences for Democratic Culture



↳ **COUNCIL OF EUROPE · 2025**
Learning Democracy in Vocational Education and Training in Europe



↳ **COUNCIL OF EUROPE · 2022**
Guidance Document for Vocational Education and Training (VET)



EXPERT GROUP ON RFCDC AND VET

The Expert Group on RFCDC and VET includes representatives of the following member States and Observers to the CDEDU: Albania, Armenia, Austria, Belgium, Estonia, Georgia, Germany, Hungary, Malta, Norway, Romania, Spain, the Federation for European Education (FEDE), the Holy See, and the Lifelong Learning Platform.