

REPORT
EARLALL online workshop:
Rethinking VET and Adult Education Systems
for Long-term Resilience
(25 June 2020)



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AUTHORITIES FOR LIFELONG LEARNING



Resilient skills ecosystems
for a crisis-proof future



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Introduction

This workshop was part of a broader initiative launched by EARLALL in May 2020 to gather the experiences from EARLALL Member Regions during the COVID-19 pandemic and their plans for the future, under the title **Building Resilient Skills Ecosystems for a Crisis-proof Future**. A joint initiative by three EARLALL working groups – Mobility, Skills & Labour Market, and Guidance & Ageing Societies –, this workshop allowed identifying what the common concerns are and the areas where we can work together in the near future.

Forecasts expect the EU economy to contract by 7.5% in 2020, with an increase from 6.7% to 9% in unemployment rates. However, apart from social and economic consequences, education has been challenged in this demanding situation, and two key lessons can be learnt:

- a) Digitalisation and flexibility of skills provision have proven to be effective learning tools, also for the integration of most disadvantaged groups.
- b) Periods of low economic activities can – and must – be used as opportunities for learning.

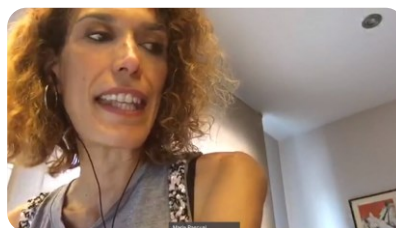
In this context, three regions introduced their challenges and plans, representing territories in North (Region Västra Götaland / Borås Municipality), Continental (Baden-Württemberg) and Southern Europe (Catalonia), and where decisions were taken at different levels of government. Their presentations were followed by the views of the European Commission and Cedefop.

The most used keywords during the workshop were *skills, upskilling, online learning, blended learning, cooperation and collaboration*.



Catalonia

Maria Pascual,
Head of Unit of International and Cooperation
Projects for VET, Department of Education,
Government of Catalonia



[Presentation available here](#)

Measures taken

- **Remote teaching and working** were the norm, and there was more need of **coordination with all training centres and their staff**. At the beginning, the key challenge was to get used to digital tools, but currently all staff masters them and are in close contact through them.
- The **end of the school year** counted on the help of the government, helping centres close the course in an empathetic way, reducing hours of subjects and creating an integrated project.
- **Erasmus+ students** who were abroad when the COVID-19 broke out were supported to come back home through the Student Affairs Departments and helped in finding an adequate means of transport to come back home to their families. This was very welcomed by students and emotionally very helpful.
- As far as possible, **events** were not cancelled, but moved to an **online modality** in order to help everyone to carry on with the education initiatives that they had in mind for this period.
- Some meetings and events that cannot be held online, mainly in relation to **international projects**, were postponed and expected to be held next year.

Identified challenges

- **Coordinating** among all the agents involved.
- Managing and allowing students who did not have the **opportunity to work online**.
- **Adapting the plan** constantly according to the central government's instructions.
- Working on new plans for the **2020-2021 school year** and to end the 2019-2020 one safely.

Crisis reaction improvement

There are concerns about keeping normality and spirits high. It is important to tell students, teachers and staff that everything is under control, that we are here and we'll be able to learn something from the pandemic.

- **Safety measures and plans**
- Giving **personal phone numbers** to VET headmasters, especially those who had students abroad, and giving them instructions as often as possible



- Plan to **boost and adapt transnational mobility for the next school year**. There is still a big interest from students and teachers in going abroad.

Good practices

- [Networks Yearly Closing Event](#)
- [International Entrepreneurship & Innovation Seminar](#)
- QCAMPUSFP
- Education Fair 2020
- Dissemination Campaign
- [New Mobility Platform & Website](#)

Q&A

- Will the changes that are currently being implemented because of COVID-19 consolidate as the usual type of training?

“VET needs to be presential in some way and teachers and students need to be at the workshops. However, **blended learning has come here to stay**. Even in terms of mobility, a virtual approach is also something that needs to be further explored, as well as advising companies and workers so they can learn to work remotely. Can you imagine working from one country at a company which is physically in another part of Europe?”



Borås Municipality / Region Västra Götaland

Tina Arekvist Lundell,
Head of Adult Education Borås

[Presentation available here](#)



Sweden has 21 regions and 290 municipalities. Borås is the second largest municipality after Gothenburg in Region Västra Götaland, which has 49 municipalities in total. The municipality is a member of Region Västra Götaland's Skills Platform and the Adult Education Network coordinated by the Swedish Association of Local Authorities and Regions.

Measures taken

- The **Swedish government** launched initiatives since the pandemic outbreak for **Higher Education (HE), Adult Education (AE), liberal AE, and upper secondary schools**. The goal was to meet the needs of training for transitions in the labour market, and to make it easier to study. On 18 March 2020, all upper secondary schools and adult education centres in Sweden were closed, and education was moved to remote and distance learning. No lessons were cancelled, but rather managed in a very different way.
- **European Social Fund (ESF) national and regional calls for funding** were used to counter the effects of the pandemic on the labour market, providing **reskilling and upskilling** opportunities to laid-off employees (e.g., digital skills). Adult Education Borås applied for national funding and during autumn they will provide reskilling programmes for **specifically targeted occupations** in areas with high demand, such as social care and health. The ESF opened extraordinary national and regional calls of proposals with very short deadlines depending on the corona situation; for example, to provide training for laid-off employees and employees in retail industries, as well as digital skills training.
- **Calls for Adult VET** (European Qualifications Framework [EQF] level 4) and **Higher Vocational Education** (EQF 5/6), offering 2-year programmes meeting labour market needs. Applications were also made to the **Swedish National Agency (NA) for Higher Vocational Education and Training (HVET)** and to provide short single-subject courses for professionals, on topics such as digital business and digital engagement.

Identified challenges

- A sudden **transition into teaching in a virtual classroom**. At Adult Education Borås, the change was made in 24 hours. Even if teachers already had digital competences, the situation was extremely different from what they expected, but



they have managed the situation in a satisfactory way. However, a problem was that some students did not have laptops or Internet access at home.

- A large number of **calls for applications with very short deadlines** were launched. This implied many funding opportunities but placed great demands in terms of human resources: employees were learning new tasks while writing proposals.

Crisis reaction improvement

- At Adult Education Borås, a **learning management system** has been in place for years. The system provides a web-based teaching and learning environment with a set of tools. It allows teachers to create and manage interaction with students in real time and includes a chat channel for communication. In the future the platform will be more used and blended learning will become a core characteristic of the sector.
- Students who do not own a laptop can borrow one. Upper secondary schools in Sweden had already provided **a laptop or an iPad** for the school year so it was a very quick transition to distance education. Very probably blended learning will be implemented in the post-COVID-19 future in this sector too.
- Transversal cooperation through **Region Västra Götaland's Skills Platform** allowed a close collaboration among the four sub-regions that integrate it, one of which being Borås. The platform gathers different sectors, including education providers, research institutions, universities, and chambers of commerce, among others, allowing peer learning, and best practice and innovation exchange.
- Västra Götaland's Public Employment Services (PES), the Department of Working Life in Borås, the Swedish Federation of Business Owners and the West Sweden Chamber of Commerce launched a **joint survey to identify the skills needs of companies** according to the situation. There was a high response rate and it has contributed shape the offer of VET courses, integrating the skills needed.

Many lessons were learnt from what in Sweden has been called an “involuntary experiment”:

- At regional level, **cross-border collaboration** has provided many new opportunities.
- At Adult Education Borås, there has been an increase of **students' attendance rates**, while keeping equivalent learning outcomes. Even if some students failed, which is to be expected, the digital environment offered new opportunities for many people.

Q&A

➔ How can we use the lessons from recent months to create more sustainable learning ecosystems?

“A sustainable learning ecosystem is green, dynamic and flexible. We think it is very important to offer different kinds of individualized learning opportunities and



we are therefore convinced of blended learning. Many students prefer real and traditional classrooms over virtual but other appreciate remote learning.”



How will we be able to organise Erasmus+ mobility exchanges for apprentices?

“The big challenge now is how to handle uncertainty and to find answers to many questions about force majeure, how to postpone activities, etc. We really need to be better prepared for the future in case of a new pandemic or another extraordinary situation. In any case, it is important to follow the practical advices and information from the European Commission, EACEA and the National Agencies. During the autumn, we will inform all the VET-students about internships abroad and hope that life will return to normal next year. Also, the opportunities that a green Erasmus and AI internships can offer need to be explored: a creative vision for the future and in line with a green and digital EU.”



Baden-Württemberg

Rolf Ackermann,
Referee, Baden-Württemberg's Ministry of Culture,
Youth and Sports

Andrea Bernert-Bürkle,
Head of EU Project Unit, vhs Baden-Württemberg



[Presentation available here](#)

Measures taken

In the short term, enhanced **financial and education-related measures** were implemented, with a focus on digital equipment and the use of digital media:

- Extraordinary **regional budget** to provide students with **laptops**.
- New **teacher training courses** to promote pedagogical methods for online schooling.
- **Technical support** for staff to enable distance teaching.
- **Digital Campus Baden-Württemberg**, a tool which has been working for some years already.

Identified challenges

- **Home-schooling barriers** for students with disadvantaged financial, social and cultural backgrounds. There is a gap between disadvantaged and advantaged groups, and it is increasing. An improvement has been identified among families who are well supported.
- Dramatic increase in **unemployment for low-skilled jobs** (assistants), which is expected to decrease in the autumn-winter season (2020-2021).
- Childcare and specifically the **situation of women** were very affected by the lockdown: the lack of childcare services available, together with working from home and precarious jobs, puts many women in a higher risk of losing their jobs.

Crisis reaction improvement

The focus will be on innovative learning methods and content, by means of:

- **Investment in digital equipment** and infrastructure.
- Long-term focus on **blended learning**, combining online/individualised learning with new approaches to teaching at school.
- Improvement of **digital skills** for all groups of the society, including specific IT skills like coding.
- Support for **entrepreneurship and innovative businesses in the digital sector**, including the digitalisation of other areas of life and the green industries.
- New **“future programmes”** for further education.
- **Upskilling initiatives** and training on skills for the future.



On a larger scale, more **cooperation at European level** will be needed, working together in the education of the future as well as business development, including a more professionalised use of digital tools at all levels.

Adult education in Baden-Württemberg

The COVID-19 was a “big push” for what was already being done in terms of **innovative learning methods and content**, mainly in relation to online learning:

- **Adult education** courses (language training, non-formal vocational training, school exams, etc.) were moved to an **online environment**, thanks to Digital Campus Baden-Württemberg, as mentioned before, and the vhs cloud system.
- **“Extended learning worlds”** digitalisation strategies were further developed in adult education.
- Massive rise of **online teacher training courses** about online learning, with a 5-time increase.

In the long term, there will still be a need for **more professionalised, individualised and blended learning**, which can be met through new projects about artificial intelligence (AI) in adult education. There is a need to think also about **digital learning contents** and develop new training courses, with new upskilling options for persons in “assistant” jobs (low-skilled) so they do not lose their jobs in the aftermath of the crisis. This will be done building on existing initiatives:

- [Digital Campus Baden-Württemberg](#)
- [Portal “Fortbildung Baden-Württemberg”](#)
- [Initiative “digital@bw”](#), to support the digitalisation of the public administration and the economy in general

The BRIDGE+ project

An initiative that will help to meet these demands is the ongoing [BRIDGE+ project](#) (co-funded by the Erasmus+ programme of the European Union), coordinated by vhs Baden-Württemberg, which deals with **future skills and how they can be supported by the education and guidance sectors**. This project took off in 2018 and has been running for some years now, but it has acquired now more importance than ever. Every region will need to look at their citizens’ skills now and identify how they can be developed, especially in the context of the **new digital challenges**.

Some **outputs** of the project are already [available on its website](#):

- Report [“Existing technology for competence balancing of individuals and skills management in companies”](#)
- [“Instruments for building up regional skills development groups”](#)
- Role model of a [regional skills development strategy](#)



Two **workshops** will also take place in the near future in relation to BRIDGE+:

- ▣ **Online training** for guidance counsellors on “future skills,” to begin in September 2020.
- ▣ **Conference** on “future skills development,” to take place in Rennes (France) on 4 November 2020.



European Commission (DG EMPL)

Kjerstin Torpmann-Hagen,
Policy Officer, European Commission, DG EMPL,
VET, Apprenticeships and Adult Learning Unit

[Presentation available here](#)



First reaction to the COVID-19 outbreak

With the outbreak of COVID-19, **vocational education and training (VET) schools** were closed almost everywhere in Europe. The European Commission launched a [survey on 18 March 2020](#) with the ultimate aim of identifying the challenges and best practices that were being put in place in VET systems, and above all, to provide support to face the crisis.

COVID-19 has been a challenge, but also an **opportunity to invest more in VET**. VET and apprenticeships are key. The reaction of most actors has been positively surprising, with a very fast move to distance learning, since the lockdown has enabled opportunities for innovation and reflection on the future of European cooperation in education and training.

Eight important areas that have been impacted by the lockdown have been mapped:

- ▶ Continuity of **work-based learning and apprenticeships**, with a practical training / company disruption.
- ▶ Access to **digital technology**, with infrastructure gaps.
- ▶ **Guidance and support** for students at risk, with a dropout increase.
- ▶ **Salaries and social protection** coverage for apprentices and staff.
- ▶ Continuity of **reforms and investments**.
- ▶ Accelerating **remote learning** solutions.
- ▶ **Digital skills** and resources for teachers and trainers.
- ▶ **Job** perspectives

The supply of apprenticeships withdrew by 20-30%. The small and medium enterprises, which provide 67% of employment in Europe, have been specially hit, which is troublesome. The most impacted sectors are services, construction & production, and food.

Policy updates

The crisis has triggered a rethinking process for the events to take place in the next ten years with regard to **European policies and actions**, as well as an urgency to advance in some of them. Apprenticeships have always high on the European Commission's



agenda, and they are even higher now. European cooperation opportunities will be strengthened.

On 1 July 2020¹, the European Commission released a series of documents that will set the path for the next decade:

- ▀ [Skills Agenda to foster sustainable competitiveness, social fairness, and resilience.](#)
- ▀ [Proposal for a Council Recommendation on Vocational Education and Training](#)
- ▀ [Proposal for a Council Recommendation on "A Bridge to Jobs - Reinforcing the Youth Guarantee."](#)

The **Skills Agenda** has four key objectives, which are linked also to the [Green Deal](#), the [SME strategy for a sustainable and digital Europe](#) and the [EU Digital strategy](#):

- ▀ Boosting **digital and green skills** for the entire workforce.
- ▀ Ensuring reliable **skills forecasting**.
- ▀ Empowering workers and individuals to **upskill and reskill** (including by exploring an EU initiative on the Individual Learning Accounts).
- ▀ Building strong **public-private partnerships** to support businesses on their way out of the COVID crisis, while also encouraging the upskilling and reskilling of the workforce (supporting the [New Industrial Strategy for Europe](#)).

The **proposal for a Council Recommendation on Vocational Education and Training** will be taken off by the Education committee under the German Presidency of the Council of the EU. There are unprecedented financial programmes which were recently announced for the next seven years², with a comprehensive set of opportunities for all stakeholders to recover from the crisis.

With respect to **adult learning**, a report to the Council will be prepared by the Commission about **upskilling pathways**. Upskilling for new jobs is more urgent than ever. Digital skills are now essential, and getting people ready to get back to a learning path will be key to minimise the effects of the crisis. New priorities will be defined for adult learning in order to complement the European Education Area and guide the adult education strand of Erasmus+.

The role of apprenticeships

As mentioned before, **apprenticeships** have been heavily hit by the COVID-19 crisis. We must make sure that we do not lose apprenticeships due to the crisis, since they have proven to be an efficient tool to access the labour market (80% of apprentices move to into a job within 6 months after finishing their education). It is also important to note that 40% of Europe's employers cannot find people with the right skills to fill their vacancies, and 46% of companies indicate that vocational skills are the most important ones for future development. The [Recovery Plan](#) and [Next Generation EU programme](#)

¹ On the date when the workshop took place (25 June 2020), the documents that are mentioned below had not been published yet.

² [New European Commission's proposal for the Multiannual Financial Framework \(MFF\) 2021-2027, released in May 2020.](#)



will invest in order to support apprenticeships in the short term and promote VET in the long term.

VET students of today will be the skilled labour force of tomorrow. Some Member States have already begun taking measures. For example, Finland has established new study places for higher VET (HJET), reaching almost 5,000 new places in key sectors, such as the technical, social and healthcare ones. Furthermore, 2,000-3,000 euros premium subsidies for SMEs have been made available, plus temporary subsidies for the continuity of apprentices. In the case of Norway, a World Skills Norway campaign encouraged the participation in a hunt for apprenticeship places.




Another survey showed the transformation of **in-company training**, revealing that 72% of Europe's leading businesses were planning to make a more frequent use of **blended learning** in the next two years. They are planning modular contents, using simulations (including augmented reality, AR, and virtual reality, VR), and personalised pathways. The digital preparedness of workers and VET students will also be a key issue, as mentioned before.

Three flagship initiatives: CoVEs ,EAfA and EU Vocational Skills Week

The solution to this type of crisis comes from quality assurance. The Centres of Vocational Excellence (CoVEs) initiative by the European Commission will enable cooperation mechanisms across learning providers and companies, providing responsive solutions to grassroots-level challenges and allowing technology diffusion, in particular for SMEs.

On another note, the European Commission will reinforce the European Alliance for Apprenticeships (EAfA), with new commitments for digital and green apprenticeships. The EAfA currently counts on members representing Member States, regions, VET providers, chambers of commerce, civil society and businesses, among other stakeholders, in 36 countries, 332 pledges and more than 950,000 apprenticeship offers. Thanks to them, the EAfA is now seen as a model of cooperation.

Within EAfA, the Apprenticeship Support Services offer three pillars of services:

-  Knowledge-sharing.
-  Networking.
-  Benchlearning and monitoring.

A series of live discussions have been organised within the EAfA about the COVID-19 crisis response in VET, on the topics of technology, challenges and opportunities in the VET sector, and a new generation post-COVID-19.

Lastly, the European Vocational Skills Week 2020, organised in cooperation with the German Presidency of the Council of the EU, will have a hybrid format, both digital and in-person. 200 participants will take part live and a series of activities will be organised online, subject to the evolution of the COVID-19 situation in Germany and in Europe. During the Week, the European VET Excellence Awards will be conferred by the Commission and related agencies, such as Cedefop.



Cedefop's Skills Forecast

Antonio Ranieri,
Head of Unit, Cedefop

[Presentation available here](#)



The **Skills Forecast 2020**, prepared before the COVID-19 crisis started, is true in general, since possible scenarios in the labour market are foreseen, but in this time of uncertainty it might need some updates.

An updated version of the **World Economic Outlook** (June 2020) integrates the latest developments for the short term, with a -5% evolution in the global GDP (-8% for developed economies and -10% in the Euro-area). The recovery is projected to be more gradual than expected: growth in the Euro-area in 2021 is expected to be at +6%.

The **upcoming years' graphic projections** look more like a squared root rather than a V-shape situation. We are currently in a severe recession (-10%), next year there will be a slight recovery (bounce-back) and a slow growth will follow for some years up to recovery. There are nevertheless many points of uncertainty about when a full recovery will be achieved and its speed, which depend on when the situation will be fully under control. The crisis has been a shock that has hit equally all sectors.

Cedefop forecast's exercise remains valid for **long-term trends**, which also took into account a potential crisis. At the end of the projection period (2030), a **lower population participation in the EU labour market** is expected, which will change radically the situation due to **ageing population** and the need of **reskilling and upskilling policies**. Population changes will also change the ways in which **sectors** behave, not only in terms of labour market but also consumption. Growth is expected for the education, health & social work, hospitality and business services sectors, while a decline is foreseen in mining & quarrying, manufacturing, engineering, food, drinks & tobacco, and agriculture.

There is not a linear relationship between **technological change** and employment opportunities. There are sectors in which technological innovations are expected but no variations in terms of jobs will take place, such as health or education. The Green Deal targets are extremely important since certain sectors will be reinforced over others: there is not a unique way to grow.

Job polarisation is expected, with a growth of highly skilled occupations (legislators senior officials, managers, professionals and technicians), and a decrease of lower skilled ones (crafts, agricultural and fishery workers, clerks, etc.). At the same time, it is important to consider the **net employment growth** and the **need of replacement** for people who will retire.



From these data, Cedefop still considers very important to reinforce **basic/initial VET systems**, but even more relevant to promote **adult education** and the **reskilling and upskilling** of the workforce, with especial attention to the older cohorts, since there are not as many opportunities in these fields: lower-skilled people should be a focus group, but the lifelong learning perspective should be kept in mind.

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For more information, visit www.earlall.eu/resilience.

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