

## Policy Note:

# Towards an Integrated Strategy for the Implementation of European Policies in Vocational Education and Training

With the support of the Lifelong Learning Programme of the European Union

This Policy Note is an unintended, but useful result of the project "Capacity Building for the Romanian NRP: Promoting Quality"

During the debate of the Communication Strategy of the Romanian National Reference Point, the participants at national conferences and regional seminars, representatives of all stakeholders involved in VET, reiterate some general issues regarding the overall development of the VET system in Romania.

We summarized these issues and put them into the shape of a policy note.

This Policy Note was approved by the Romanian National Reference Point (The National Group for Quality Assurance - GNAC), was published on the NRP website ([www.gnac.ro](http://www.gnac.ro)) and will be submitted to the decision making bodies.

## 1. Current situation

### 1.1. European Context

Ensuring convergence, transparency and mutual trust between vocational education and training (VET) systems across Europe has been a constant concern during the past decade at European level. Therefore, the Copenhagen Process, initiated in 2002, supports European cooperation in VET based on priorities established jointly by the Member States. Hence, several common European policies were initiated to increase mobility, transparency of qualifications and mutual trust between VET systems and providers. Among them, we mention:

- Recommendation of the European Parliament and of the Council on the establishment of the European Qualifications Framework (EQF) for lifelong learning (April 2008).
- Recommendation of the European Parliament and of the Council on the establishment of the European Credit system for Vocational Education and Training (ECVET - June 2009).
- Recommendation of the European Parliament and of the Council (June 2009) on the Establishment of a European Quality Assurance Reference Framework for Vocational Education and Training.
- Recommendation of the European Parliament and of the Council of 18 December 2006 on key competences for lifelong learning
- Europass – portfolio of documents facilitating recognition of competences and qualifications, adopted in 2004 and used extensively by millions of European citizens.
- Recognition and validation of non-formal and informal learning, identified as European priority since 2004.

All the objectives and actions of the Copenhagen process have been supported since 2005 by the European networks for quality assurance in VET: ENQA-VET (by its first and second programme), and **EQAVET** (since 2010). Within the EQAVET network, the European Commission, social partners and member states participate actively in the development of common principles, reference criteria and indicators, guidelines and tools for quality improvement in VET at national, regional and local levels.

The purpose of the **European Quality Assurance in Vocational Education and Training network – EQAVET** is to create a structured and sustainable platform for member states to exchange information and experience, engage in debate and learn from each other. The main activities of EQAVET, listed in the network work programmes for 2010–2012 and 2013–2015, (see: [www.eqavet.eu](http://www.eqavet.eu)) are designed to contribute to the improvement of quality assurance in vocational education and training across Europe. One of the key action lines aims to ensure **enhanced cooperation with the other European policies** (indicated above).

Among the priority actions identified by the Bruges Communiqué on enhanced European cooperation in vocational education and training for the period 2011–2020 (*Communiqué of the European Ministers for vocational education and training, the European social partners and the European Commission, meeting in Bruges on 7 December 2010 to review the strategic approach and the priorities of the Copenhagen process for 2011–2020*), in order to achieve the transversal objectives of the Copenhagen Process, is **enhancing communication among different stakeholder groups, focused on implementation and the added value of EU Tools (ECVET, ECTS, referencing of NQFs to EQF, quality assurance systems in line with EQAVET)**.

## 1.2. National context

Starting from the assumption the Romanian state, by virtue of signatures placed on the documents adopted as Recommendations of the European Parliament and of the Council, asserted the political commitment to adopt the European policies mentioned above, the next obvious step is their operationalisation for implementation in a coherent, unitary and consistent way. There are several strategic documents and legal provisions which provide for the implementation of these European policies. However, the consultations at European level, as well as the surveys and research in the VET sector demonstrated shortcomings such as:

- Low awareness of the European policies on vocational education and training among all stakeholders (public institutions, social partners, training providers).
- Incomplete or scarce databases on vocational education and training (including data on quality indicators).
- There is significant progress in the implementation of the European Quality Assurance Reference Framework (EQAVET) in the initial VET (provided by the school system), but less in the continuing VET.
- The development of the National Qualifications Framework (NQF) is only in the initial stages, despite Romania's commitment to have it referenced to the European Framework (EQF) in 2012.
- Notwithstanding Romania's active participation in the activities aiming at the development of the credit transfer system (ECVET), there is still a need for implementation actions, both in initial and continuing VET.
- There are developments in the recognition and validation of non-formal and informal learning in the past 5 years, but targeted mainly to continuing VET.

Starting from these findings and from the "Methodology for the implementation of the European Quality Assurance Framework in Vocational Education and Training in Romania" (developed under the ESF Funded project "Improving the quality of vocational education and training through partnership networks", the beneficiary being the Romanian National Centre for TVET Development), one of the NRP Members, Romanian Agency for Quality Assurance in Pre-University Education, applied for European funding under the Lifelong Learning Programme (LLP, Leonardo da Vinci Programme, restricted call for EQAVET National Reference Points, July 2010). The project submitted, "Capacity Building for the Romanian National Reference Point: Promoting Quality – QUALVET@RO" was one of the five projects selected under this call for project proposals.

The EQAVET National Reference Point in Romania is the **National Group for Quality Assurance (GNAC)**, whose main duties are stipulated by the National Education Law no 1/2011 (Art. 355, paragraph 2). GNAC is an advisory body for inter-institutional coordination, without legal personality, operating at national level in the field of quality assurance in vocational education and training, based on the written association agreement signed by member institutions. GNAC fulfils its advisory role by information activities targeting the main stakeholders, by supporting the development and use of specific instruments, by fostering experience exchange between training providers, by communicating viewpoints and recommendations on quality assurance in vocational education and training.

The main result of the QUALVET@RO project was the GNAC Communication Strategy, as well as a website ([www.gnac.ro](http://www.gnac.ro)), several information and dissemination materials, two conferences and eight regional seminars (gathering together representatives of all stakeholders—public institutions, training providers, social partners).

The debates during these conferences and regional seminars were not limited to the communication strategy envisaged, but approached other issues related to the overall development of the national education and training system. This Policy Note is building on the conclusions of these debates.

## 2. Public Policy Recommendations

### 2.1. Summary of Recommendations

#### 2.1.1. Key recommendations at conceptual and strategic level

**a. To adopt a set of common concepts, with agreed definitions**, to be used in the documents developed by all entities involved to describe the labour market, occupations, qualifications, learning outcomes etc. This common language will be used by the general education, initial vocational education and training, continuing vocational education and training, higher education and all types of education and training, from a lifelong learning perspective.

**b. To promote representation and involvement of stakeholders**, especially of social partners (representative associations of employers and trade unions) and to foster their participation in debating vocational education and training issues. Enhanced communication and cooperation between stakeholders may be achieved by various actions, such as:

- Regulations (law or government decision) on the financial contribution of social partners in VET, by transferring 3% of the profit tax to a specialised body of the social partners, which will support the development of the VET systems and programmes.
- Harmonise all legal provisions related to VET, coming from various sectors of activity, and offering methodological support for the establishment and development of the Sector Committees.

- Ensure active, competent and responsible participation of the social partners in the structures (such as GNAC, National Coordination Point for EQF and National Communication Point for ECVET) and institutions in charge with the implementation of “European Tools” (EQF, ECVET, EQAVET etc.).
- Encourage and support participation of social partners in the development of occupational standards and vocational training standards.
- Create the necessary conditions for a real involvement of employers, especially SMEs, in approaching sensitive issues related with quality assurance: development of standards, certification, correlation with developments and trends of the wider labour market etc.
- Improve participation of social partners in reporting data on the various VET developments.
- Organise an Annual Forum on the contribution of “European Tools” to improve the link between the training provision and the labour market. This forum will include representatives of social partners at national level, of decision making bodies and of VET providers.

**c. To ensure full access to information and documents** comprising the key elements of strategies on education, in general, and vocational education and training, particularly, by:

- Improving data collection and report dissemination systems.
- Setting responsibilities, adopting procedures and operationalising the collection mechanisms for data on quality assurance in vocational education and training.
- Creating a comprehensive database - on training providers, assessment centres, structure of employed population, labour market needs at county and local level etc.
- Publication of relevant information and documents on the websites of relevant institutions.
- Development of dedicated websites (as the GNAC website – [www.gnac.ro](http://www.gnac.ro)) to inform the stakeholders.

### **2.1.2. Key recommendations at legal level:**

**a. To develop new regulations** on adult education, especially on continuing training, **based on European policies**, by:

- Finalising and adopting the National Qualifications Framework (NQF), including its referencing to the EQF.
- Completing the legal framework on quality assurance to cover the entire education and training system.
- Development/revision of occupational standards and updating the vocational training standards related to the various training programmes, according to the new National Qualifications Framework.
- Development, supported by financial incentives, of work based learning (through apprenticeship and internships in companies). For instance, a part of the funding for VET students could be allocated to pay the tutors appointed by enterprises.
- Development of a coherent competence assessment and certification system, regardless the sub-system (general education, initial vocational education and training, continuing vocational education and training, higher education, other adult education types) or how the competencies were acquired (by formal, non-formal or informal learning).
- Development of adequate standards for assessment of competences and improvement of certification activity (including participation of social partners), by supporting the assessment centres (including financially).
- Financial support for VET from public funds (national and European), especially since the economic crises has lowered the employers’ capacity to invest in their employees’ training.
- Legal provisions on financial and non-financial incentives for employers investing in their employees’ education and training.
- Stimulating lifelong learning by setting up community centres for lifelong learning.

**b. To ensure strategic and legal stability** in education and training, with deregulation on administrative and bureaucratic aspects.

**c. To design credit transfer systems and correlate them** – for instance, mutual recognition of credits between initial and continuing VET or between VET and higher education (i.e. correlating ECVET with ECTS).

**d. To establish the obligation of quality systems in vocational education and training, both at system and at provider levels.**

**e. To develop guidance and counselling mechanisms** for all actors involved in vocational education and training.

### 2.1.3. Key recommendations at institutional level:

**a. To clarify the roles of various institutions with responsibilities in the field of education and training.**

**b. To eliminate the fragmentation of decision-making in the implementation of European policies in education and training**, by creating a national / inter-ministerial committee (to monitor the activity of the national reference/contact/communication points responsible for transposing and implementing such policies at national level) and by organising common activities and events (e.g.: working groups, seminars, annual forums, etc.).

**c. To strengthen the National Qualifications Authority** and ensure all necessary conditions (legal, financial etc.) so that it can fulfil its role.

**d. To ensure provision of methodological support** by the competent authorities, for employers, training providers and assessment centres, in order to develop specific quality systems for vocational education and training.

**e. Capacity building for social partners** to implement the European policies on VET, by encouraging the creation of their own bodies of experts.

**f. To promote entrepreneurial education** in general education and higher education.

**g. To finance GNAC** through projects initiated by its members and from other sources (including by other institutions interested in the implementation of "European Tools").

**h. To extend GNAC membership and to create a GNAC Advisory/Support Committee** by involving representatives of all stakeholders (employers, employees, teachers, trainers, parents, learners, local and county public authorities, the non-governmental sector), in order to enhance its legitimacy and representativeness.

**i. To facilitate the involvement of GNAC in the activity of Sector Committees** and in the harmonisation of quality assurance systems at sub-system level (general education, initial vocational education and training, continuing vocational education and training, higher education, other types of lifelong learning)

**j. To organise an Annual Forum for Quality Assurance in Education and Training** with participation of relevant structures and bodies

### 2.2. For an integrated strategy for the implementation of European policies on vocational education and training

All these proposals converge to the idea of developing a common overall strategic framework, to include all education and training sub-systems (general education, initial vocational education and training, continuing vocational education and training, higher education, other adult education types, non-formal and informal learning) in a lifelong learning perspective. Equally essential are the **development of a long term vision** on the evolution of the vocational education and training system and adopting **implementation strategies** to ensure:

- **On strategic and conceptual level:** a common language, agreed by all stakeholders, involvement of social partners and other stakeholders in the development of this national strategic framework, as well as widening the access to consistent, reliable and useful information.
- **On legal level:** a coherent and consistent system of legal provisions to facilitate the development of the education and training systems (including adequate funding), as well as adaptation and implementation of European policies in the field. To this purpose, following the strategic guidelines adopted by the European Union, the reform the education and training system must be seen as a political priority to overcome the crisis.
- **On institutional level:** coherent and coordinated reconstruction and development of all institutions responsible for the development of education and training as a whole and of each sub-system.



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