

# Quality Assurance for Education and Training systems in Europe

Laura Evangelista\*, Concetta Fonzo, and Marianna Forleo

National Institute for Public Policy Analysis (INAPP), Italy

## ARTICLE INFO

### Keywords:

Competence,  
VET,  
Europe,  
Labor Market,  
EQAVET

## ABSTRACT

Globalization, along with the transitions to green and digital economies, has significantly impacted educational systems, leading to a fundamental shift characterized by a new evolutionary and organizational phase. The increasing use of digital platforms in education and training has destabilized traditional European teaching models and affected the labor market, replacing outdated practices and conventional needs. As a result, updating the skills of teaching and training professionals has become critical to meet labor market demands and remain competitive in the global economy. In this context, the European Commission has strongly recommended that Member States implement national education and training policies to manage this transformation. Competence development is a strategic priority within the EU's policy agenda, and the adoption of the European Skills Agenda for Sustainable Competitiveness, Social Equity, and Resilience (2020) has set ambitious targets for skills improvement and retraining, along with a focus on quality assurance in education and vocational training (VET). Ensuring quality in VET is essential for Europe's development, serving as a critical tool to fully leverage skills for societal well-being. This article provides an overview of key European education and training policy documents, focusing on the role of the EQAVET network and the tools used to implement quality assurance in education and training at both national and international levels.

## 1. Introduction

Education and training systems are the cornerstone of societal development, as they shape individuals' knowledge, skills, and competencies, equipping them to meet the challenges of an ever-evolving world. As societies become more interconnected and globalized, education must adapt to meet the demands of technological advancement, economic change, and evolving social structures. In Europe, the need for a robust and adaptive education frameworks have been emphasized as a central component of the continent's strategy to maintain its competitiveness in the global market.

The concept of competence, as outlined in the European Recommendation for the European Qualifications Framework (EQF 2008), refers to the "*proven ability to use knowledge, skills, and personal, social, and/or methodological abilities in work or study situations and in*

\* Corresponding author's E-mail address: [levangelista@inapp.gov.it](mailto:levangelista@inapp.gov.it), <https://orcid.org/0009-0004-2901-0162>

### Cite this article as:

Evangelista, L., Fonzo, C., & Forleo, M. (2026). Quality Assurance for Education and Training systems in Europe. *European Journal of Teaching and Education*, 8(1): 1-21. <https://doi.org/10.33422/ejte.v8i1.1716>

© The Author(s). 2026 **Open Access**. This article is distributed under the terms of the [Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/), which permits unrestricted use, distribution, and redistribution in any medium, provided that the original author(s) and source are credited.



*professional and personal development*". This broad definition highlights that competencies go beyond technical knowledge, encompassing a range of abilities preparing individuals for the challenges of both the labor market and their personal growth. Developing these competencies is essential, as the rapid pace of technological innovation, environmental sustainability efforts, and the ongoing digital transformation demand that individuals possess the adaptability and versatility to thrive in a constantly changing landscape.

A central element in this process is the creation of a culture of quality in education. In 2003, the European Commission introduced the European Education Area (Smidt 2015), which was renewed in 2020 to continue the effort of integrating educational systems across Europe. The focus of this initiative is to ensure that education and training systems are aligned with labor market needs while providing equitable access to all citizens. In this context, quality assurance systems have become fundamental, enabling the continuous evaluation and improvement of educational standards across Member States. The quality of education plays a pivotal role in ensuring that individuals are well-equipped to meet the challenges of the future. The European Union's focus on improving Vocational Education and Training (VET) is particularly important in this regard. VET systems in Europe are crucial in shaping a skilled workforce that can respond to both current and future demands of the labor market.

The establishment of the European Quality Assurance Reference Framework for Vocational Education and Training (EQAVET) in 2009 was a significant step in ensuring the quality and transparency of VET systems across the European Union. This framework provides a set of principles, descriptors, and indicators for evaluating the effectiveness of vocational education and training systems, promoting continuous improvement and fostering mutual trust among member states.

As Europe moves toward a more digital and interconnected future, the need for citizens to acquire digital competencies has become more pressing. The European Union's New Digital Education Action Plan (2021-2027), launched in 2020, aims to address this gap, ensuring that education and training systems align with the needs of the digital age. This plan focuses on making education systems more inclusive, accessible, and high performing to meet the challenges of the digital era (Molina & al. 2021).

The pandemic disrupted educational systems globally, highlighting both the strengths and the weaknesses of education frameworks in responding to crises. In Europe, more than 100 million individuals were affected by the emotional, practical, and educational consequences of the pandemic, losing vital references in their lives and having to adjust to new ways of interacting, learning, and living (Crescenza & al. 2021). The sudden shift to distance learning revealed significant deficiencies in digital skills across many European countries, exposing the urgent need to invest in digital education and provide teachers, students, and institutions with the tools necessary to navigate such challenges effectively (Infante 2013).

In this context, the European Union's efforts, supported by initiatives such as the Erasmus+ program and the NextGeneration EU recovery plan, have focused on reinforcing quality in education systems and strengthening the capacity of educational institutions to address emerging challenges. These efforts aim to ensure that educational systems are not only resilient in times of crisis but also adaptable to the changing needs of the labor market, digitalization, and environmental sustainability (Dolan 2003; Butera 2021).

As part of the global push for quality assurance, the UNESCO (2017) framework for technical and vocational education and training highlights the necessity of robust quality assurance mechanisms to ensure that vocational education and training systems worldwide are aligned with evolving economic, technological, and societal needs.

## **2. Materials and Methods**

Building upon the general framework outlined in the introduction, this study aims to explore how European education and training systems have incorporated quality assurance mechanisms and skills development strategies in the context of the digital and green transitions. The overall purpose is to understand how recent European initiatives—such as EQAVET, the European Skills Agenda, and related policy frameworks—are influencing national approaches to education quality and vocational training. Three main research questions guided the study:

1. How have EU Member States implemented and adapted quality assurance frameworks in VET since 2020?
2. In what ways have these frameworks contributed to improving relevance, inclusiveness, and adaptability within education and training systems?
3. What insights can be drawn from European-level experiences to strengthen future quality assurance and competence development policies?

To address these questions, the study employed a Systematic Literature Review (SLR) complemented by desk research. This approach ensured a structured and transparent analysis of the existing literature, official reports, and European policy documents related to quality assurance in education and vocational training. The SLR method was particularly appropriate for this study because it enables a critical and integrative understanding of policy evolution across multiple contexts and institutional levels. It offers a methodical, transparent, and repeatable process for locating, assessing, and combining information from many sources. This approach allows for the integration of findings from academic research, policy papers, institutional reports, and grey literature, making it especially appropriate for analysing the development of European quality assurance policies. The SLR made sure that the analysis was thorough and methodologically sound by organizing the review process around predetermined inclusion criteria, quality rating processes, and specified search tactics. By deepening the contextual understanding of important policy initiatives—like the EQAVET Framework, the Council Recommendation on VET (2020), and the Osnabrück Declaration (2020) and Herning (2022) Declaration—desk research aided the SLR by enabling the study to triangulate insights across institutional and academic perspectives.

Relevant sources were identified through searches in major academic databases—Scopus, Web of Science, and ERIC—and through institutional repositories such as CEDEFOP, the European Commission, ETF, and the EUROPA Publications Office. To ensure completeness, complementary searches were also carried out in OECD iLibrary and national-level reports where available.

Search strings combined free-text keywords and controlled terms such as: (“quality assurance” OR “EQAVET” OR “VET” OR “vocational education and training”) AND (“Europe\*” OR “European Union”) AND (“policy” OR “framework” OR “implementation”).

The review focused on publications and policy documents produced between 2020 and 2025, corresponding to the most recent policy cycle launched by the 2020 Council Recommendation on VET and subsequent initiatives including the Osnabrück and Herning Declarations.

Sources were included when they met the following criteria:

- focused on European education and training systems, particularly vocational and technical education;
- addressed quality assurance frameworks, skills strategies, or policy implementation;
- were peer-reviewed or published by reputable international or European institutions;

- were written in English and published between 2020 and 2025.

Publications were excluded if they:

- dealt exclusively with non-European contexts;
- lacked methodological or policy relevance;
- consisted of opinion articles, news items, or unverified grey literature.

The selection followed the general principles of the PRISMA framework, ensuring transparency in the identification and inclusion of documents. The process has been divided in three main phases:

1. identification, through comprehensive searches across databases and repositories;
2. screening, based on title and abstract relevance;
3. eligibility, involving full-text review of materials meeting the inclusion criteria.

This multi-step process allowed for a refined selection of the most relevant academic and institutional sources while maintaining consistency with the objectives of the review.

The SRL was conducted between **January and July 2025** across Scopus, Web of Science and ERIC, complemented by institutional repositories (CEDEFOP, ETF, European Commission, Publications Office): the searches returned a total of **412 records** (Scopus=**158**; Wos= **132**, ERIC=**46**, institutional repositories =**76**) After removing **57 duplicates**, **355 records** were screened by title and abstract, leading to the exclusion of **276** non-relevant items.

A full assessment was performed on **79** publications, of which **42** met all inclusion criteria.

The final sample consisted of **42 documents**.

The selection process followed PRISMA guidelines (**PRISMA flow diagram**) and is illustrated here;

### **Identification**

Records identified through database searching (Scopus, WoS, ERIC): n= 336

Additional records through institutional repositories

(CEDEFOP, ETF, European Commission, Publications Office) :n =76

Total records identified: n= 412

Duplicates removed: n =57

Records after duplicates removed: n= 355

### **Screening**

Records screened (title and abstract): n = 355

Records excluded: n =276

Records assessed for eligibility (full text) :n =79

### **Eligibility**

Full -text articles excluded with reasons: n=37

- Not focused on QA or VET policy frameworks (n=21)
- Outside the 2020- 2025 time window (n=9)
- Non-European context (n=4)
- Insufficient methodological relevance (n=3)

## **Included**

Studies included in qualitative synthesis (SRL): n =42

Final sample :n = 42

A thematic coding scheme was developed deductively from the research questions and inductively from the reviewed documents. Codes were grouped into three macro-categories:

- (1) Adoption and adaptation of EQAVET;
- (2) Contributions to relevance, inclusion and adaptability of VET systems;
- (3) European coordination, peer review and monitoring.

Coding was conducted by the authors and cross checked through a second independent review of the coded material to ensure consistency and reduce interpretive bias.

The selected documents were examined through thematic content analysis, which allowed for the identification of recurring patterns, concepts, and relationships. The focus was given to:

- the implementation of EQAVET and the function of National Reference Points (NRPs);
- how European countries addressed challenges linked to digitalization, environmental sustainability, and post-pandemic recovery;
- the incorporation of peer review, self-assessment, and continuous improvement cycles within national frameworks;
- and the role of European coordination in supporting transparency and mutual trust among Member States.

This interpretive process made it possible to highlight common directions and distinctive national approaches, integrating theoretical, institutional, and empirical perspectives.

Through this methodological approach, the study offers a comprehensive overview of how European education and training systems have evolved in terms of quality assurance and competence development during 2020–2025. By combining a systematic review with targeted desk research, it captures both policy evolution and practical implementation, showing how European frameworks such as EQAVET, the European Skills Agenda, and correlated recommendations are shaping the transformation of education and vocational training across the EU.

## **3. Results**

The Results section of this study presents an in-depth exploration of key European initiatives and frameworks that have shaped the evolution of Vocational Education and Training systems across the continent. These results are based on a systematic analysis of the relevant European policy documents, Recommendations, and strategic Declarations that have influenced VET quality assurance, with a specific focus on their implementation and impact since their introduction. Given the evolving nature of education and training systems in the context of rapid digitalization, economic transformations, and growing social challenges, understanding these frameworks is essential for assessing the responsiveness and adaptability of vocational education and training systems in Europe.

Over the past decades, the European Union has consistently emphasized the importance of quality assurance systems to ensure that education and training programs meet the evolving needs of both learners and employers. Since 2020, Member States have implemented and adapted their quality assurance frameworks in vocational education and training, so aligning

national systems with the European quality assurance framework. This alignment has been highly effective in promoting transparency, mutual trust, and comparability across systems, while allowing sufficient flexibility for national adaptation. As a result, quality assurance now covers initial and continuing VET, work-based and digital learning, and both public and private providers, ensuring a comprehensive approach to improving education and training outcomes. Many countries have updated legislation, standards, and national quality assurance frameworks to reflect these changes, increasingly applying the quality cycle and indicators to systematically plan, implement, evaluate, and review their vocational education and training systems. In addition, peer learning has proven effective in sharing best practices, strengthening institutional capacity, and supporting continuous improvement. These measures not only help institutions maintain high standards but also foster a culture of quality that encourages innovation, responsiveness, and long-term strategic development within VET systems.

Up to date, VET plays a critical role in equipping individuals with the skills necessary to thrive in a rapidly changing labour market. Recent global and societal challenges, including the COVID-19 pandemic, the green transition, and the rising demand for digital competencies have further highlighted the need for flexible, adaptable, relevant skills. In response, the European Union has established frameworks and guidelines that support the continuous improvement of VET systems, ensuring they remain effective, inclusive, and aligned with labour-market needs. These initiatives are essential not only for maintaining the European Union's global competitiveness but also for promoting social fairness, equity, and inclusion across Member States.

European quality assurance frameworks have contributed significantly to increasing the relevance, inclusiveness, and adaptability of educational and training systems. Integrating competence development across VET, adult learning, higher education, and workplace training, with the recognition of prior learning and flexible learning pathways, has made education and training systems more responsive to technological, social, and economic changes.

In this section, we will delve into the specific outcomes of several pivotal European documents that contribute to the modernization of VET systems.

The growing interest in quality assurance has been formalized in the 2009 Recommendation of the European Parliament and Council<sup>1</sup>:

*“This Recommendation establishes a European Quality Assurance Reference Framework (...) as a reference instrument to help Member States to promote and monitor continuous improvement of their VET systems based on common European references (...). The framework should contribute to quality improvement in VET and to increased transparency of, and consistency in, VET policy developments between Member States, thereby promoting mutual trust, mobility of workers and learners, and lifelong learning”<sup>2</sup>.*

The Recommendation deals with the improvement of training systems and the promotion of a culture of quality, favoring the active participation of Member States in the European Quality Network to develop common principles and tools. In the Recommendation the designed quality reference model follows the quality assurance improvement cycle, composed of four phases, planning, implementation, evaluation and review. EQAVET's primary goal is to promote transparency and foster mutual trust between Member States, creating an environment where qualifications and educational outcomes are comparable across national borders. By

---

<sup>1</sup> European Parliament, Council of the European Union (2009).

<sup>2</sup> Ibidem.

implementing common quality descriptors and indicators, the framework enables countries to evaluate the effectiveness of their vocational education and training programs in a consistent manner. For example, key indicators such as the placement rate of graduates, utilization of acquired skills in the workplace, and the completion rate of VET programs are central to understanding how well these systems meet labor market demands (Cedefop 2022).

The most remarkable European legislation aimed to adopt new measures to support education and training recovery initiatives right after the pandemic, is the 2020 *Recommendation on vocational education and training for sustainable competitiveness, social fairness, and resilience*<sup>3</sup>.

This Recommendation sought to address the changing needs of the labor market, the shift towards digitalization, and the rising demand for green technologies. It underscores the role of VET as a critical driver for sustainable competitiveness, social fairness, and economic resilience. The European Council has launched this document to modernize and update the prior 2009 European Vet Recommendation to the new socio economical context and integrating it with innovative elements, so starting a new policy cycle (D'Alessio & al. 2010).<sup>4</sup>

In particular:

*“In accordance with national and Union legislation, available resources, national priorities and circumstances, including the socio-economic situation and the characteristics of national VET systems, and in close cooperation with all relevant stakeholders (...):*

- *promotes European vocational education and training systems in an international context so that they are recognized as a worldwide reference for vocational learners;*
- *deploys actions and investments for implementing this policy (...) and*
- *works towards achieving by 2025 the following EU-level objectives which are part of relevant European monitoring frameworks, including in education and training and social and employment policies:*
  - *the share of employed graduates from VET should be at least 82 %.*
  - *60% of recent graduates from VET benefit from exposure to work-based learning during their vocational education and training;*
  - *8 % of learners in VET benefit from a learning mobility abroad”*<sup>5</sup>.

The Recommendation develops the largest and most innovative intervention in modern education and training policies, promoting a VET system that is connected to labor market changes, flexible: *“meant as a driver for innovation and growth and prepares for the digital and green transitions and occupations in high demand (...), is an attractive choice based on modern and digitalized provision of training/skills (...), promotes equality of opportunities and is underpinned by a culture of quality assurance”*.<sup>6</sup> A few months after, the Council of

---

<sup>3</sup> Council of the European Union (2020a).

<sup>4</sup> It is worth mentioning that since '90 the European Union regulatory system has favored an increasingly frequent use of non-binding legal tools, defined as “soft laws”, formalized by the Lisbon strategy in 2000. The 2020 Recommendation, among other documents, does not have binding legal value, it is meant to provide indications to update VET systems in Member States according to current socio-economic changes. This governance model, mainly identified with the open coordination method, shows the effectiveness in spreading and creating new motivations and alternative ways of cooperation. It establishes a multilevel governance, whose actors are institutional and non-institutional, working to implement the European guidelines and creating widespread governance (Baroncelli & Farkas, 2008).

<sup>5</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>6</sup> Council of the European Union (2020).

Education Ministers of the European Union approved the Osnabrück Declaration<sup>7</sup>. The new political actions in the field of professional education and training provided are to integrate and point out the strategic objectives of the 2020 Recommendation as well as concretely contribute to the post-covid recovery.

The Recommendation indicated six macro areas of reform, by describing concrete actions to implement by 2025, collected in 4 macro areas:

- “*promoting resilience and excellence through quality, inclusive and flexible VET.*
- *creating a new culture of lifelong learning centered on skills training and digitalization.*
- *promoting sustainability and the green economy.*
- *developing a European and international area of vocational education and training*”<sup>8</sup>.

These priorities reflect the need for vocational education and training systems that are not only adaptable to adapt to new challenges but also capable of preparing workers for jobs in emerging sectors, such as digital technology and the green economy, ensuring that workers have access to continuous training and skills development throughout their careers. The focus on quality assurance in the Osnabrück Declaration echoes earlier efforts to ensure that VET systems are not only accessible but also of high quality.

The Declaration calls for greater emphasis on evaluating and monitoring VET programs to ensure they are meeting both the needs of learners and the labor market. This underscores the continued importance of European Tools in ensuring that education providers across Europe are held to high standards.

Member states are cooperating on long-term common priorities, and with a view to effective implementation and to track progress toward shared EU objectives, they were invited to develop their own National Implementation Plans (NIPs) to submit to the European Commission for approval and monitoring of planned actions. The priorities are long-term and broadly defined, allowing each country to develop specific activities responding to their national circumstances and needs.

National Implementation Plans (NIPs) for Vocational Education and Training serve as a reflection of the policy priorities established at the European Union level and are associated with measurable outcomes. Member States that incorporate quality assurance frameworks, strong alignment with labor market needs, principles of inclusivity, and data-driven monitoring mechanisms within their NIPs are more likely to achieve positive trajectories in performance indicators. Considering the ongoing digital and green transitions, the development of comprehensive implementation and monitoring infrastructures—underpinned by reliable empirical data—will be increasingly critical to fostering resilient, inclusive, and forward-looking VET systems across Europe.

Besides, countries have introduced few measures to promote a culture of quality assurance, particularly in Continuing vocational education and training (CVET). Most existing quality assurance initiatives focus on initial, school-based VET, involving activities such as monitoring, self-assessment, external evaluation of providers, peer reviews, and tracking graduates (Cedefop 2024). These measures often target people in need of support, such as low-skilled adults, women, early school leavers, migrants, refugees, older workers, and employees in declining sectors. In Germany, the chambers of industry and commerce are implementing the project *Chancen nutzen!* (“Use opportunities!”), aimed at low-skilled and unskilled adults

---

<sup>7</sup> Council of the European Union (2020b).

<sup>8</sup> Ibidem.

over 25. The initiative focuses on developing region-specific training modules and offering partial qualifications, enabling participants to gradually obtain a full vocational qualification. In 2022, a digital competence assessment for partial qualifications was introduced, and the project has been extended until 2026.

It's remarkable that Belgium, France, Hungary, Italy, Cyprus, Latvia, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Poland, Portugal, and Romania are currently putting in place formal mechanisms for stakeholder engagement in VET governance: involving advisory councils in decision-making processes, establishing national platforms, and strengthening the role of sectoral professional committees or expert councils (Cedefop, 2022a 2022b).

The European framework on Quality Assurance for Vocational Education and Training, established in the previous Recommendation, is now reaffirmed as the most remarkable and successful tool for the promotion and development of the quality of VET systems in Europe and the implementation of 2020 Recommendation (Cedefop, 2022, 2022 b).

Indeed, the Recommendation highlights and points out EQAVET mission and commitments at European and national level, specifying that this tool is meant to support all types of learning context and environment. The quality assurance framework promoted a set of descriptors and indicators, as common reference points for ensuring the quality of Education and Training. Furthermore, it follows the phases of the quality cycle: planning, implementation, evaluation, review as shown in Figure 1.

In the activity planning phase explicit and measurable objectives must be defined, clarified, and agreed, in terms of tasks, procedures, policies and human resources (Allulli 2009). The second step regards the implementation of the first phase and is aimed at providing appropriate measures to achieve the goals previously defined. The evaluation phase includes both training processes and outcomes, students and staff satisfaction and performance (De Vecchi 2014; Godfrey 2020). The efficacy of this phase is due to a prior agreed definition of a clear methodology, as well as to the coherence among data and pre-determined indicators and objectives. In the last phase of review, information on the evaluation outcomes must be elaborated to prepare new action plans suited to the outcomes obtained and issues encountered, to achieve a systematic improvement (Allulli 2011).

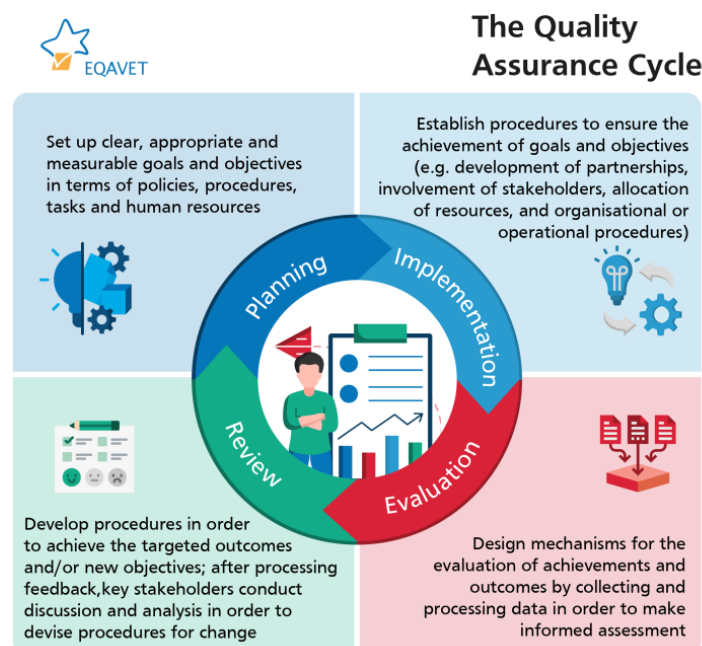


Figure 1. The Quality Assurance Cycle

Source: Retrieve from the European commission official website<sup>9</sup>

At system level, they support Member States to analyze their quality assurance systems and measure the ongoing progress, whereas at provider level help VET providers to examine their approach to quality assurance to improve their quality supply (Evangelista & Carlini 2020).

In addition, EQAVET indicates ten reference indicators to measure the quality of vocational education and training provision at system and provider level. They play a decisive role in enabling policymakers and other stakeholders to develop and effectively implement the effective implementation of the Recommendation<sup>10</sup>. In the following table are listed the indicators to measure the quality of vocational education and training provision as per European Recommendation.

Table 1. Indicators to measure the quality of VET

No.	Indicator	Definition / Main Components	Indicator Type*	Objective / Purpose
1	Relevance of QA systems for VET providers	a) % of VET providers implementing internal QA systems (legally required or voluntary) b) % of accredited VET providers	Context / Input	Promote quality culture, increase transparency, and strengthen trust between VET systems.
2	Investment in teacher/trainer training	a) % of teachers/trainers in continuous professional development b) Funding invested (including digital skills)	Input / Process	Enhance staff involvement in quality development and improve skills aligned with labor market needs.
3	Participation rate in VET programs	Number of participants by program type and individual criteria	Input / Process / Output	Assess attractiveness of VET and support access, including for disadvantaged groups.
4	Completion rate in VET programs	Number of participants completing or leaving programs by type and criteria	Process / Output / Outcome	Measure training outcomes and quality of processes; support successful completion.
5	Employment rate after VET programs	a) Employment status of participants at a given time post-training b) % of graduates employed at a certain time post-training	Outcome	Support employability and improve responsiveness of training to labor market demands.
6	Use of acquired skills at work	a) Employment outcomes post-training b) Satisfaction of participants and employers with skills acquired	Outcome (quantitative & qualitative)	Enhance employability and ensure training meets labor market needs.

<sup>9</sup> Retrieved from: [https://employment-social-affairs.ec.europa.eu/policies-and-activities/skills-and-qualifications/working-together/eqavet-european-quality-assurance-vocational-education-and-training/about-eqavet/eqavet-quality-assurance-cycle\\_en](https://employment-social-affairs.ec.europa.eu/policies-and-activities/skills-and-qualifications/working-together/eqavet-european-quality-assurance-vocational-education-and-training/about-eqavet/eqavet-quality-assurance-cycle_en)

<sup>10</sup> It's important to mention that they are used on a purely voluntary basis, taking account of their potential added value and in accordance with national legislation and practice (European Council, 2009).

No.	Indicator	Definition / Main Components	Indicator Type*	Objective / Purpose
7	Unemployment rate	Standard unemployment rate as context information	Context	Provide background information for VET policy and planning.
8	Prevalence of vulnerable groups	a) % of VET participants from disadvantaged groups (by age/gender) b) Success rate of these groups	Context	Support inclusion and equal access to VET programs.
9	Mechanisms to identify labor market training needs	a) Existence of institutional mechanisms to monitor changing labor market demands b) Evidence of their use and effectiveness	Context / Input (qualitative)	Improve VET responsiveness to labor market changes; support employability.
10	Schemes to promote VET access	a) Information on schemes at different levels b) Evidence of effectiveness	Process (qualitative)	Promote access to VET, inclusion, and guidance for potential participants.

Source: Table made by the authors

These indicators are a very flexible tool as they are part of the common framework and, at the same time, each State uses and implements them according to their legislation and policy and aims to reach their specific goals.

The 2020 Council Recommendation reaffirms the EQAVET Framework as a critical mechanism for advancing quality assurance in vocational education and training across Europe, particularly in addressing previously under-researched and insufficiently implemented dimensions. The EQAVET framework underscores the relevance of the European Peer Review methodology as a remarkable evaluative instrument to enhance the transparency, coherence, and comparability of quality assurance systems across Member States.

The 2020 Council Recommendation on VET promotes the use of Peer Review as a methodological approach to evaluation, with the objective of underscoring its distinctive features and advantages in comparison to alternative evaluation methods (European Commission 2023). Peer Review is meant as a collaborative and communicative process, designed to build a sense of community among teachers and trainers, for the well-being and development of all stakeholders and it is grounded in procedures that promote openness and transparency (Cramerotti 2019). Specifically, the European Peer Review is conceived as a voluntary mutual learning activity, involving both internal and external evaluation but it does not aim to assess all aspects of the organization under review, but rather focuses on selected most relevant quality areas (Godfrey 2020).

This methodology dissociates from traditional evaluative paradigms and top-down evaluation models, employs a team of experts who engage in reflective analysis and share their insights with the host organization (Gutknecht-Gmeiner 2007; Piazza & Rizzari 2020). The methodology has been successfully piloted and implemented at both national and European levels and is designed to be integrated with existing quality assurance systems and improvement strategies. (Gutknecht-Gmeiner 2010). This methodology supplies mutual benefits in terms of professional development and institutional learning so that evaluation is meant as a collective process of expert or peer judgment, focused on the relevance,. Its approach underscores the value of transparent, collaborative assessment, generating meaningful and actionable feedback for the VET institution or center involved.

The components of the Peer Review process can be listed as follows:

- Centrality of Evaluation;
- Data Collection and Analysis.
- Final Peer Meeting ;
- Discussion and Consensus-Building.

The Peer Review may be implemented at both the provider and system levels. At the provider level, it combines self-evaluation carried out by VET institutions and external evaluation conducted by Peers (Gutknecht-Gmeiner 2012). At the system level, Peer Review is a strategic opportunity to analyze and recalibrate national or regional VET systems in response to emerging needs, ensuring the quality and relevance of vocational education and training provision (Evangelista & Fonzo 2023).

The "Peers" are experts working within the same institutional or professional contexts as those under review. They are described as *critical friends* and play a key role in fostering mutual trust among participants, institutions, and systems. Their involvement frames the evaluation process within a formative and developmental perspective, with a strong emphasis on promoting continuous quality improvement (Allulli & Tramontano 2012).

The Peer Review process typically unfolds over four distinct phases.

1. During the initial stage, the visit is planned, peers are identified and selected, and a facilitator is appointed as the internal point of contact for the review process. The VET institution or undertakes a critical self-reflection aimed at identifying strengths and areas for improvement within a specific quality domain. The outcomes of this reflection are in a self-evaluation report, shared with the peers to inform the stages of the review.
2. The second phase involves the visit of the Peers to the VET institution. During this stage, the Peers conduct interviews and talk to stakeholders, including educators, students, administrators, and external partners, to have an evidence-based assessment.
3. After the visit, the Peers write a structured draft report with their observations and analyses. This draft is shared with the host institution for discussion and validation.
4. The final phase represents a pivotal moment in the Peer Review cycle, as is the transition from evaluation to action. The institution processes the feedback of the Peer Review targeted improvements and organizational development. This phase shows the developmental nature of the methodology, as the outcomes of the review directly inform the redesign and enhancement of practices within the evaluated quality domain.

As shown in Table 2, the Peer Review affects measurable changes in several ways through indirect and context-dependent effects. Peer review alone rarely produces immediate numerical changes as it tends to produce gradual changes because it influences practices before they are reflected in measurable outcomes, and its impact is usually cumulative, enhancing processes that later lead to measurable outcomes in student achievement, skills acquisition, and institutional quality indicators. Nevertheless, this methodological tool presents limitations in its process: it requires time, coordination, and funding, and often it is allocated in an environment resistant to change so that staff and management may be skeptical or defensive, reducing the impact of recommendations.

Table 2. Peer review's measurable changes

	<b>process</b>	<b>measurable change</b>
<b>improvement of teaching and learning practices</b>	Peer reviewers observe lessons, curricula, and assessment practices, providing feedback and suggestions for improvement.	Can be tracked through student performance data, completion rates, or skills assessment results before and after the peer review cycle.
<b>enhanced quality assurance</b>	Peer review ensures VET providers adhere to standards and best practices.	Increases in compliance scores, external evaluation ratings, or accreditation outcomes can be quantified.
<b>professional development of teachers and trainers</b>	Peer review fosters reflection and sharing of effective teaching methods among staff.	Improvements in teacher assessment scores, classroom observation ratings, or participation in training programs.
<b>institutional improvement</b>	Identifies systemic issues in curriculum design, student support, or administrative processes.	Can be seen in reduced dropout rates, higher student satisfaction scores, or adoption of new programs aligned with labor market needs.
<b>stimulating continuous improvement culture</b>	Encourages ongoing evaluation and benchmarking across institutions.	Over time, this can lead to higher consistency in quality across VET providers, measurable via comparative performance metrics.

Source: Table made by the authors

The 2020 Recommendation confirms and specifies the strategic role of National Reference Points as well. They are meant to be the contact point between the European and the national level, to guarantee the impact of European initiatives on the territory and an effective dissemination of training quality. They are intended to:

- promote the application and development of the criteria, indicative descriptors, and indicators,
- support the improvement of quality assurance systems at the national level; develop a culture of quality, supporting evaluation and self-assessment,
- promote a European dimension of quality assurance (Evangelista & Fonzo 2023b).

In Italy, the National Reference Point has been established in 2006 and set in the Training Systems Structure, in Inapp (Institute of Research of Public Policy Analysis), in Rome. The guidance, information and cultural mediation goals of the Italian National Reference Point are realized through the involvement of a Steering Committee, the Board, composed by the Ministry of Labor, the Ministry of Education, the Regions and the Autonomous Provinces, the Social Partners, as well as training experts and representatives of VET providers, who undertake to support and disseminate the initiatives of the European Quality Network, starting from their institutional and associative reference network.

Until 2020 EQAVET has promoted reforms in national quality assurance systems; the new European Recommendation has significantly enhanced the focus on transparency of quality assurance arrangements. As a matter of fact, *“In order to improve mutual learning, enhance the transparency and consistency of quality assurance arrangements in the provision of vocational education and training and reinforce mutual trust between EU Member States, EU level peer reviews of quality assurance at system level should be introduced”* (European Council 2020).

The European Skills Agenda, launched in 2020, further reinforces the EU's commitment to creating a skilled and adaptable workforce. This agenda is aimed to ensure that individuals have access to lifelong learning and to the skills needed to succeed in the current labor market. With a focus on digital skills, sustainability, and resilience, the European Skills Agenda sets out a series of actions aimed at improving skills development across the EU.

The Agenda includes 12 actions, and is a collective action, calling companies, social partners and stakeholders to work together within the EU's industrial ecosystem, defines a clear strategy to ensure that skills are proper for the labor market, identifies financial means to promote skills' investment, and sets ambitious skills development and training targets to be achieved within five years. One of the most interesting aims of the Agenda is the creation of a lifelong learning system, promoting the right to lifelong learning, created through policy coordination among Member States.

In order to support the goals of the European Skills Agenda, the European Commission established "The European Year of Skills", which ran from May 2023 to May 2024, to encourage lifelong learning and boost skills development, particularly in digital and green technologies. It is aimed to address skill shortages in the EU labor market and help individuals acquire the skills needed for quality jobs. The initiative also supported the goals of the European Skills Agenda. In Italy the national coordination has been entrusted to INAPP, responsible to share good practices and work with European Commission to link the European level with the national one. Conferences, discussion forums, working groups and meetings, promoting events and awareness campaigns of upskilling and reskilling opportunities have been promoted and conducted by INAPP.

The last European Commission document implements the framework of VET, the *Herning Declaration on attractive and inclusive Vocational Education and Training for increased competitiveness and quality jobs 2026-2030*<sup>11</sup>.

The Herning Declaration (12 September 2025) renews and updates the commitments made with the previous Osnabrück Declaration and evolves the perspective goals; whilst Osnabrück declaration was apt to respond to the European post-COVID crisis, Herning Declaration introduces a set of ambitious targets to be achieved by 2030, accompanied by more detailed and concrete actions to be implemented at the national level, in line with the European Green Deal, the digital transition, and the European Pillar of Social Rights, as shown in the Table 3.

Table 3. *Herning's Declaration's main goals*

Goals	Description
Attractivity	Make VET a positive choice for young people and adults, on a par with high school and university courses.
Inclusion	Ensure equal access and opportunities for women, migrants, people with disabilities, and the unemployed.
Skills for the Future	Promote and implement digital, green, entrepreneurial, and intercultural skills.
Collaboration	Strengthen dialogue between schools, businesses, public bodies, trade unions, and students.
Mobility and Lifelong Learning	Facilitate exchange and continuing education at the European level.
National Responsibility	Each Member State is committed to defining measurable objectives and operational strategies.

<sup>11</sup> European Commission (2024)

*Source: Table made by the authors*

Member States commit to implement VET at national level also through European funds and National recovery and resilience plans and integrate it into national education systems: with schools, universities, and technical institutes; besides they commit to strengthening dual learning (school + workplace) as well as involving businesses and students in designing training programs. The Declaration requests results monitoring through concrete, common EU-wide indicators; its vision underlines the need for evidence-based policymaking and the continuous monitoring and evaluation of progress in the VET systems.

#### **4. Discussion**

The findings of this study highlight the significant strides made by the European Union in strengthening its Vocational Education and Training systems through the implementation of quality assurance frameworks and initiatives designed to address the evolving needs of the labor market

The 2020 Council Recommendation on VET, the Osnabrück Declaration, and the European Skills Agenda reflect a coherent strategic vision designed to enhance the adaptability, inclusivity, and competitiveness of Europe's workforce. These initiatives collectively demonstrate the European commitment to fostering a robust and responsive vocational education and training ecosystem capable of supporting sustainable economic growth and social cohesion.

The 2020 Recommendation on VET has been instrumental in setting the foundation for the next phase of the education system reforms in Europe. Together with the Osnabrück Declaration it deals with strengthening European vocational education and training policies to relaunch the competitiveness of the economy, stressing on sustainability and social equity, through a green and digital evolution (European Commission 2020). Post-pandemic education cannot simply revert to pre-crisis norms, as the relational, cognitive, affective, and social dimensions of learning have been fundamentally reconfigured (Bretagna, 2020) and governments, training providers, and policymakers across Europe recognized the necessity of implementing measures to ensure the continuity and quality of learning, equipping education systems to withstand both current and future crises (Chun et al. 2021). The pandemic also highlighted the influence of socio-economic background on educational outcomes (Mandich, 1998; Bauman 2001, 2012), launching challenges that education and training systems had to face to promptly respond to the emerging demands of the labor market in the context of digital and green transition. Distance learning, for instance, has radically altered how teaching is structured and delivered, involving families and schools in a new social order and creating a different educational framework (Gramigna, 2024).

The renewed emphasis on quality assurance represents one of the most significant outcomes of post-pandemic educational reform. Quality assurance mechanisms have become integral to improving transparency, accountability, and effectiveness within VET systems. The systematic implementation of evaluation, accreditation, and certification procedures is vital for fostering a culture of continuous improvement (Magnani 2020; Eiland et al. 2020). In this regard, peer assessment mechanisms play a dual role: they not only promote institutional collaboration but also facilitate the diffusion of best practices across Member States (Morin & Corbani, 1993). By encouraging self-assessment and reflective practice, these mechanisms contribute to a deeper understanding of quality as a dynamic and context-sensitive construct, rather than a static benchmark. The focus on quality assurance is particularly significant as Europe navigates the complexity of the post-pandemic landscape (Eiland et al., 2020). The role of National

Reference Points has been crucial in translating EU-level policies into actionable strategies at the national level. They serve as key facilitators in the adaptation and implementation of quality assurance frameworks, ensuring that national systems remain aligned with European standards while considering local needs and contexts.

As emphasized in the Methodology paragraph, the work is based mainly on a systematic literature review method, and the research has been conducted by analyzing institutional sources, European recommendations and declarations, and official reports and contributions. This approach ensured a structured and transparent analysis of the existing literature, related to quality assurance in education and vocational training and has been particularly appropriate for this study because it enables a critical and integrative understanding of policy evolution across multiple contexts and institutional levels. The predominantly descriptive and interpretative perspective, oriented towards contextualizing the strategic reference framework highlights the potential that the European Commission sees in Member States and the opportunities that European Recommendations may offer for the development of vocational education and training systems.

Although relevant sources have been identified through searches in major academic databases, the lack of empirical data collected through Member States, useful for highlighting territorial differences policies and variability in the effectiveness of the measures adopted, doesn't allow a proper analysis on the actual impact of European guidelines on Member States. An evaluation of their operational impact, as well as their quantitative response to European requests, are only briefly mentioned, though they are significant and fundamental for a comprehensive analysis.

To complement the descriptive dimension of the article future extensions of the research may integrate empirical analyses, comparative studies and statistical evidence from national or regional systems, to verify the effective implementation of policies, their effectiveness in real contexts and the consistency between the regulatory framework and operational practices.

### **Limitations**

Limitations of this article concern the predominantly documentary nature of the research. As emphasized in the Methodology paragraph, the work is based mainly on a systematic literature review method, and the research has been conducted by analyzing institutional sources, European recommendations and declarations, and official reports and contributions. This approach ensured a structured and transparent analysis of the existing literature, related to quality assurance in education and vocational training and has been particularly appropriate for this study because it enables a critical and integrative understanding of policy evolution across multiple contexts and institutional levels. The predominantly descriptive and interpretative perspective, oriented towards contextualizing the strategic reference framework highlights the potential that the European Commission sees in Member States and the opportunities that European Recommendations may offer for the development of VET systems, outlining the political and methodological architecture of the main European instruments relating to quality in vocational education and training.

Although relevant sources have been identified through searches in major academic databases, the lack of empirical data collected through Member States, useful for highlighting territorial differences policies and variability in the effectiveness of the measures adopted, doesn't allow a proper analysis on the actual impact of European guidelines on Member States. An evaluation of their operational impact, as well as their quantitative response to European requests, are only briefly mentioned but are significant and fundamental for a comprehensive analysis. To complement the descriptive dimension of the article future extensions of the research may integrate empirical analyses, comparative studies and statistical evidence from national or

regional systems, to verify the effective implementation of policies, their effectiveness in real contexts and the consistency between the regulatory framework and operational practices.

## **5. Conclusion**

European tools for the implementation of VET and the quality of education and training primarily include recommendations, guidelines, reference frameworks, and cooperation programs. Their purpose is to ensure high-quality education, promote the mobility of workers and students, and create greater consistency among the education systems of different Member States. These tools have several strengths, by providing a clear and shared strategic orientation for Member States, highlighting best practices and common objectives, encouraging the exchange of experiences between countries, improving the quality of training systems and the recognition of qualifications at the European level. Each Member State develops specific national policies in accordance with its legislation but still aligns with the strategic directions set by the European Commission.

This model ensures a balance between European harmonization and national autonomy, promoting the development of VET systems while respecting local differences. However, European tools also present weaknesses: since they are not legally binding, each country can apply them in quite different ways, leading to significant differences in the quality and effectiveness of vocational education and training systems, these guidelines may lead to non-uniform applications across countries. Besides guidelines take time to be translated into national policies and may lose effectiveness if not consistently followed and delay concrete impact. Naturally, the absence of legal obligations can reduce pressure on governments to fully comply with the recommendations.

A similar discussion can be held regarding the activities of National Reference Points. The deployment of the European Quality Assurance in Vocational Education and Training Framework through National Reference Points has led to a series of measurable effects. The adoption of quality-assurance cycles is one of them; indeed, almost every country investigated responded that quality assurance system at national level include the quality-cycle (plan → implement → evaluate → review)<sup>12</sup>. Besides, in relation to the indicators listed in the 2009 Recommendation, national reference points have led to an explicit national adaptation of indicators for national monitoring. Another effect may be the registered expansion of quality assurance systems to broader VET settings.

Few countries include not only initial VET but also work-based learning and increasingly continuing VET so that quality assurance is no longer confined to initial schooling. Despite their relevance in supporting policy coherence and promoting best practices, some structural limitations can be identified in their functioning. One of the most significant concerns is their institutional placement, which may occur within different types of organizations — such as research institutes, agencies, or other bodies — that lack the authority to directly shape national policymaking. Consequently, the role of national reference points is mostly indirect, with supportive or complementary actions that accompany and inform policy processes and decisions already established at the national level.

In conclusion, while significant strides have been made in enhancing the quality of vocational education and training systems across Europe, much remains to be done to ensure that these systems are fully equipped to meet the challenges of the future. The ongoing efforts to integrate digital skills and green technologies into VET programs are essential, but they must be accompanied by comprehensive policies that address equity and accessibility and quality

---

<sup>12</sup>OECD (2024).

assurance. The lessons learned from the COVID-19 pandemic provide a rare opportunity for Europe to rethink educational paradigms, moving beyond traditional classroom-based models towards systems characterized by flexibility, innovation, and social responsibility. As Europe continues to adapt to global economic shifts, technological advancements, and environmental changes, educational and training systems will continue to play a pivotal role in shaping a workforce capable not only of adapting to change but also of driving it, anchoring Europe's vision for a competitive, cohesive, and forward-looking knowledge society (Smidt 2015).

## References

- Allulli, G. (2009). *La raccomandazione europea per la garanzia di qualità dell'istruzione e della FP* [The European Recommendation for Quality Assurance in Education and Vocational Training]. Brescia: La Scuola.
- Allulli, G. (2011). La dimensione europea nei processi di qualità nei sistemi formativi [The European dimension in quality processes in training systems]. *Professionalità*, 24(1), 49–59
- Baroncelli, S., & Farkas, O. (2008). Il metodo di coordinamento aperto e le sue applicazioni al governo economico e occupazionale dell'Unione europea: Il contesto comunitario e le ricadute sull'ordinamento interno [The open method of coordination and its applications to the economic and employment governance of the European Union: The Community context and the implications for the internal legal system]. *Osservatorio sulle fonti*, (1). <https://riviste.unimi.it/index.php/Osservatoriosullefonti/article/view/OSF000049>
- Bauman, Z. (2001). The ethical challenge of globalization. *New Perspectives Quarterly*, 18(4), 60–64. <https://doi.org/10.1111/1540-5842.00037>
- Bauman, Z. (2012). *Liquid modernity*. John Wiley & Sons.
- Bertagna, G. (2020). *Reinventare la scuola: Un'agenda per cambiare il sistema di istruzione e formazione a partire dall'emergenza Covid-19* [Reinventing School: An Agenda for Transforming the Education and Training System in the Light of the Covid-19 Emergency]. Edizioni Studium.
- Butera, F. M. (2021). *Affrontare la complessità: Per governare la transizione ecologica* [Facing Complexity: To Manage the Ecological Transition]. Edizioni Ambiente
- Cedefop, & ETF. (2025). *Towards EU priorities: 2021–25 progress: Insights from monitoring and analysis* (Policy brief). Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union. <https://cedefop.europa.eu/p/9205>
- Cedefop. (2022). *Teachers and trainers in a changing world: Building up competences for inclusive, green and digitalized vocational education and training (VET): Synthesis report* (Cedefop research paper No. 86). Publications Office of the European Union. <https://data.europa.eu/doi/10.2801/53769>.
- Cedefop. (2022a). *The future of vocational education and training in Europe. Volume 1: The changing content and profile of VET: Epistemological challenges and opportunities* (Cedefop research paper No. 83). Publications Office of the European Union. <https://data.europa.eu/doi/10.2801/215705>
- Cedefop. (2022b). *The future of vocational education and training in Europe: Volume 2: Delivering IVET: Institutional diversification and/or expansion?* Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union. <https://doi.org/10.2801/780431>

- Cedefop. (2022c). *The future of vocational education and training in Europe: Volume 3: The influence of assessments on vocational learning* (Cedefop research paper No. 90). Publications Office of the European Union <https://data.europa.eu/doi/10.2801/067378>
- Cedefop. (2023). *Spain: boosting tools for upskilling and reskilling citizens in digital skills*. <https://doi.org/10.2801/957488>
- Cedefop. (2023). *The future of vocational education and training in Europe: Volume 4: Delivering lifelong learning: The changing relationship between IVET and CVET* (Cedefop Research Paper No. 91). Publications Office of the European Union. <http://data.europa.eu/doi/10.2801/726631>
- Cedefop. (2024). *Moving towards common policy goals and aligned progress reporting*. Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union. <https://data.europa.eu/doi/10.2801/5601436>
- Chun, H. K., Comyn, P., & Moreno da Fonseca, P. (2021). *Skills development in the time of COVID-19: Taking stock of the initial responses in technical and vocational education and training*. International Labour Office. <https://doi.org/10.54394/ILOS.00018>
- Council of the European Union. (2009). *Recommendation of the European Parliament and of the Council of 18 June 2009 on the establishment of a European quality assurance reference framework for vocational education and training*. Official Journal of the European Union. <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=OJ:C:2009:155:FULL>
- Council of the European Union. (2020a). *Council Recommendation of 24 November 2020 on vocational education and training (VET) for sustainable competitiveness, social fairness and resilience* (2020/C 417/01). Official Journal of the European Union. Retrieved from <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=OJ%3AC%3A2020%3A417%3AFUL>.
- Council of the European Union. (2020b). *Osnabrück Declaration on vocational education and training as an enabler of recovery and just transitions to digital and green economies*. Thessaloniki: Cedefop. Retrieved from <https://op.europa.eu/en/publication-detail/-/publication/f731da19-6d0b-11ec-9136-01aa75ed71a1>.
- Cramerotti, S. (2019). La peer review tra docenti come strumento di sviluppo professionale [Peer review among teachers as a professional development tool]. *L'integrazione scolastica e sociale*, 18(4), 350–355. <https://doi.org/10.14605/ISS1841908>.
- Crescenza, G., & Rossiello, M. C. (2021). The pandemic as a historical-pedagogical opportunity to reflect on the strategic and inclusive role of education. *Formazione & Insegnamento*, 19(1 Tome II), 447–458. [https://doi.org/10.7346/-fei-XIX-01-21\\_36](https://doi.org/10.7346/-fei-XIX-01-21_36).
- D'Alessio, S., Donnelly, V., & Watkins, A. (2010). Inclusive education across Europe: The shift from integration to inclusion. *Revista de Psicología y Educación*.
- De Vecchi, G. (2014). *Évaluer sans dévaluer* [Evaluate without devaluing]. Hachette Education.
- Dolan, S. L., Garcia, S., & Auerbach, A. (2003). Understanding and managing chaos in organizations. *International Journal of Management*, 20(1), 23–35.
- Eiland, L. S., Helmer, A. M., Kelley, K. W., & Hester, E. K. (2020). Redesigning classroom and experiential teaching peer evaluation tools to strengthen the peer review process. *New Directions for Teaching and Learning*, 2020(162), 177–185. <https://doi.org/10.1002/tl.20397>

- European Commission, Directorate-General for Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion. (2023). *Vocational education and training and the green transition – A compendium of inspiring practices*. Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union. <https://doi.org/10.2767/183713>.
- European Commission, Directorate-General for Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion. (2024). *Vocational education and training and the green transition – A compendium of inspiring practices (2024 edition)*. Publications Office of the European Union. <https://doi.org/10.2767/2340109>
- European Commission. (2022). *Vocational education and training: Skills for today and for the future*. European Commission. Retrieved from <https://op.europa.eu/en/publication-detail/-/publication/da80dd16-af08-11ec-83e1-01aa75ed71a1/language-en>.
- European Commission. (2023b). *Education and training monitor 2023: Comparative report (Executive summary)*. Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union. <https://doi.org/10.2766/264508>
- European Commission. (2024). *Education and training monitor 2024*. Publications Office of the European Union. <https://doi.org/10.2766/40424>
- European Commission. (2024). *Education, skills and employment: Trends and developments 2024*. Turin: European Training Foundation. <https://www.etf.europa.eu>
- European Commission. (2024). *Herning Declaration on attractive and inclusive Vocational Education and Training for increased competitiveness and quality jobs 2026-2030*. European Commission. <https://education.ec.europa.eu/news/herning-declaration-attractive-and-inclusive-vet-increased-competitiveness-and-quality-jobs>
- Evangelista, L., & Fonzo, C. (2023a). La metodologia europea della peer review: Prima sperimentazione tra istituti scolastici e centri di formazione professionale [The European peer review methodology: First experiment among schools and vocational training centers]. *Rassegna CNOS*, 39(1), 117–127. [https://doi.org/10.53133/RCNS\\_39-1\\_8](https://doi.org/10.53133/RCNS_39-1_8)
- Evangelista, L., & Fonzo, C. (2023b). Self-assessment in VET and higher education: Links and further developments. *Quaderni di Comunità: Persone, Educazione e Welfare nella Società 5.0*, 3(2), 121–153. <https://doi.org/10.30687/QCPEWNS5/2023/02/006>
- Godfrey, D. (2020). From external evaluation to school self-evaluation to peer review. In D. K. Katsarou, G. K. Zarifis, & D. P. Zafiroopoulos (Eds.), *School peer review for educational improvement and accountability: Theory, practice and policy implications* (pp. 3–23). Cham: Springer. <https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-41008-3>
- Gramigna, A. (2024). Il paradigma differente: La formazione nel tempo delle emergenze [The different paradigm: Training in times of emergencies]. In T. D'Alessio & P. D'Alessio (Eds.), *Le emergenze nella formazione* (pp. 327–342). Eurilink. <https://doi.org/10.55828/9788864931327>.
- Gutknecht-Gmeiner, M. (2007). *European peer review manual for initial VET: Peer review in initial VET Leonardo da Vinci Project (AT/04/C/F/TH-82000)*. Oeibf [https://www.bibb.de/dokumente/pdf/gutknecht-gmeiner\\_peer\\_review\\_manual\\_en.pdf](https://www.bibb.de/dokumente/pdf/gutknecht-gmeiner_peer_review_manual_en.pdf)
- Gutknecht-Gmeiner, M. (2010). *Peer review impact analysis report: Analysis of 2006–2009*. EQAVET Secretariat. <https://www.eqavet.eu/wp-content/uploads/2021/08/Peer-review-impact-analysis-report-2006-2009.pdf>
- Gutknecht-Gmeiner, M. (2012). La peer review come valutazione esterna dell'istruzione e della formazione professionale: Definizione, esperienze e indicazioni per l'uso [Peer review as

- external evaluation of vocational education and training: Definition, experiences and guidelines for use]. *Scuola Democratica: Learning for Democracy*, 3(1), 172–180. <https://doi.org/10.12871/201213>.
- Herrero, C., & López Cobo, M. (2025). *Supporting the digital transformation of vocational education and training*. European Commission. <https://doi.org/10.2760/9727987>
- In A. Curaj, L. Matei, R. Pricopie, J. Salmi, & P. Scott (Eds.), *The European Higher Education Area: Between critical reflections and future policies* (pp. 625–637). Cham: Springer. [https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-15243-1\\_41](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-15243-1_41)
- Infante, M. (2013). Itaca, ovunque: La metafora della rete nella sociologia contemporanea: Dal viaggio di Ulisse alla navigazione in Internet [Ithaca, Everywhere: The Metaphor of the Network in Contemporary Sociology: From Ulysses' Journey to Internet Navigation]. *Heteroglossia: Quaderni dell'Istituto di Lingue Straniere*, 12(2), 355–389. <https://doi.org/10.13138/2037-7037/1051>
- Kelo, M. (2023). *The future of European quality assurance: Reflections on academic values*. European University Association (EUA). <https://www.eua.eu/resources/expert-voices/340-the-future-of-european-quality-assurance-reflections-on-academic-values.html>.
- Magnani, M. (2020). *Fatti non foste a viver come robot* [You were not made to live like robots]. UTET.
- Mandich, G. (1998). Analogies and metaphors of complexity: Space and social networks. *Quaderni di Sociologia*, 17, 147–165. <https://doi.org/10.4000/qds.1408>
- Molina, A., Michilli, M., & Gaudiello, I. (2021). La spinta della pandemia da Covid-19 alla scuola italiana [The Covid-19 pandemic's impact on Italian schools]. *Mondo Digitale*, 20(1), 47–80. [https://doi.org/10.4399/9788825547434\\_4](https://doi.org/10.4399/9788825547434_4)
- Morin, E., & Corbani, M. (1993). *Introduzione al pensiero complesso* [Introduction to Complex Thinking]. Sperling & Kupfer.
- OECD. (2024). *Mapping Quality Assurance Indicators for Non-formal Adult Learning* (Getting Skills Right). OECD Publishing. <https://doi.org/10.1787/1ce40dfa-en>
- Pellerey, M. (2024). Intelligenza artificiale e attività didattica e formativa. Può un robot sostituire l'insegnante o il formatore [Artificial intelligence and teaching and training. Can a robot replace a teacher or trainer]? *Rassegna CNOS*, 40(1), 33–46.
- Piazza, R., & Rizzari, S. (2020). Sviluppo delle competenze professionali e qualità della didattica universitaria: La peer review come formazione partecipata [Professional skills development and the quality of university teaching: Peer review as participatory training]. *Form@re - Open Journal per la formazione in rete*, 20(1), 62–77. <https://doi.org/10.13128/form-8271>
- Smidt, H. (2015). European quality assurance—A European Higher Education Area success story [Overview paper].
- Stöckl, A., & Struck, O. (2025). Continuous vocational education and training and new technologies: On the importance of educational level and technology in the workplace. *Journal for Labour Market Research*, 59, Article 12. <https://doi.org/10.1186/s12651-025-00398-x>
- UNESCO. (2017). *Towards quality assurance of technical and vocational education and training*. <https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000259837>