



# STARTING OVER: MASS POLITICS AND THE FUTURE OF THE LEFT

## QUALITY ASSURING EDUCATION FOR DEMOCRATIC CITIZENSHIP IN VOCATIONAL EDUCATION AND TRAINING

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28 MAY 2025, NAPLES



Co-funded by  
the European Union



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Over the past two decades in Europe **labor is no longer perceived as a means of collective empowerment** but rather as an individualistic response to economic pressure and its role as a political and social force has gradually weakened. This shift stems from a persistent inability to develop alternatives to the dominance of market-driven policies.

The increasing disengagement from political and civic life has resulted in a labor market primarily shaped by economic demands, often sidelining broader social, ethical, and democratic considerations.

As labor markets evolve and technology advances, **citizenship education must adapt to remain relevant**. In Europe, several challenges hinder **the integration of democratic citizenship education into vocational education and training (VET)**.

The EU's commitment to citizenship education is framed in the Council Recommendation of 22 May 2018 on promoting common values, inclusive education and the European cooperation in education and training.

Member States should promote 'active citizenship and ethics education as well as an open classroom climate to foster tolerant and democratic attitudes and social, citizenship and intercultural competences'.



Vocational education and training (VET) plays a crucial role in Europe in preparing individuals for the labor market. However, integrating democratic citizenship education within VET faces several systemic barriers. These include:

- **Lack of Strategic Orientation** – Many European VET systems prioritize technical and economic objectives over civic and democratic education. Without a clear strategic framework, democratic citizenship education remains fragmented and underdeveloped.
- **Limited Capacity and Competence** – There is a widespread shortage of educators and trainers with expertise in democratic education, making it difficult to embed these principles effectively in vocational training programs.
- **Resource Constraints** – Insufficient funding and institutional support further hinder the expansion of democratic education within VET curricula.

These challenges are exacerbated by shifts in the labor market and rapid socio-technological advancements, which require adaptable and forward-thinking approaches to education.



To ensure that democratic citizenship education is effectively implemented, an integrated approach is necessary. This means embedding democratic principles within various aspects of vocational training, rather than treating them as separate, supplementary subjects.

### **Democratic education must intersect with key areas such as:**

- **Ethical and Social Responsibility** – Encouraging students to reflect on the ethical implications of their work and their role as active citizens.
- Digital and Media **Literacy** – **Preparing learners to navigate digital spaces critically, identifying** misinformation and engaging constructively in democratic discourse.
- **Workplace Democracy** – Introducing concepts of participatory decision-making, workers' rights, and collective bargaining to foster democratic values in professional environments.



## EQAVET AND QUALITY ASSURANCE TO STRENGTHEN CITIZENSHIP COMPETENCIES



An important tool to ensure that democratic citizenship education is both meaningful and effective is quality assurance in VET.

The **European Quality Assurance in Vocational Education and Training (EQAVET)** is a European-wide framework designed to support quality assurance in VET across Europe. EQAVET provides a framework of common principles that may help in assessing and improving the quality of VET systems and VET provision and provides a structured approach to evaluating and improving democratic education within VET.

**EQAVET** implements the 2020 European Recommendation on vocational education and training for sustainable competitiveness, social fairness, and resilience. It is based on a quality assurance cycle and supplies a selection of descriptors and indicators applicable to quality management, at both VET system and provider levels.



## PEER LEARNING ON QUALITY ASSURANCE FOR DEMOCRATIC CITIZENSHIP IN VET (1)



In April 2024, the EQAVET Network organized a peer-learning activity focused on **“quality assurance for democratic citizenship education in VET”**. The event brought together stakeholders from various countries to share experiences and best practices in embedding democratic citizenship education within VET, around 71 participants attended the EQAVET PLA, representing more than 26 EU countries; the majority of the participants worked at a Ministry/national authority related to VET with a significant representation of participants from VET providers and research institutions.

This activity aimed to explore **how quality assurance mechanisms can support the integration of democratic values and active citizenship into VET curricula and practices**. Quality assurance frameworks should play an important role in monitoring the implementation of education for democratic citizenship, by generating evidence for continuous improvement and further development. This could help address the lack of an evidence base and appropriate impact evaluation, which currently prevent adequate self-assessment processes and resulting adaptations in design.



## PEER LEARNING ON QUALITY ASSURANCE FOR DEMOCRATIC CITIZENSHIP IN VET (2)



To implement democratic citizenship education within VET using the EQAVET framework, the quality cycle has been analysed, considering the following steps:

- 1. Planning:** Integrate democratic values and active citizenship into VET curricula and training programs. Ensure that learning outcomes reflect the development of democratic competences.
- 2. Implementation:** Deliver training programs that promote democratic engagement, critical thinking, and respect for human rights. Adopt diverse teaching methods to foster active participation.
- 3. Evaluation/Assessment:** Assess learners' understanding and application of democratic principles. Use both formative and summative assessments to gauge the effectiveness of citizenship education.
- 4. Review/Revision:** Regularly review and update curricula and teaching methods to ensure they remain relevant and effective in promoting democratic citizenship. Incorporate feedback from learners, educators, and stakeholders.

By following these steps within the EQAVET framework, VET providers can ensure that **democratic citizenship education is systematically integrated**, continuously improved, and aligned with the broader goals of sustainable competitiveness, social fairness, and resilience.



## CONCLUSION (1)



Through the PLA emerged that national policy levels often struggle to gather evidence on how democratic citizenship education is being taught at provider level.

The topic in many countries is not a curricular priority, and little has been done so far to measure the development of citizenship competence among VET learners.

At the same time, VET institutions reportedly struggles to meet nationally set standards/requirements for democratic citizenship education, as they are faced with already packed curricula that often leave little space to infuse democratic citizenship issues into the teaching and learning process.

This evident time constraint is one of the aspects where an urgent need for further exchange of good practice and examples has been identified, also to make sure that developing democratic citizenship competence does not compete with developing professional/occupation-related competences.



## CONCLUSION (2)



The PLA highlighted the diverse forms in which democratic citizenship education can be integrated into vocational education and training, through participatory initiatives and social dialogue.

There is the **need for an integrated approach to democratic citizenship** education both in the national context and institutional/organizational context.

One of the key success factors of integrated approaches is the collaboration with the wider community of the VET institution – such as companies, sector organizations or NGOs.

Such a challenge can only be tackled through strengthening the participatory mechanisms and practices at various stages of the education and training process.





# THANK YOU FOR YOUR ATTENTION

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