Executive Summary

The main purpose of the project “7EU VET Detailed Methodological Approach to Understanding Vocational Education and Training” is to explore in a country-comparative fashion the determinants of VET students’ school success relative to their acquired competencies, the fulfillment of their career aspirations and vocational satisfaction during learning process. In this way, the project generates a knowledge platform about the comparability, flexibility and development of VET systems across seven EU countries, and follows recent policy and educational challenges such as, for example, the learning outcomes approach.

On the basis of a large-scale survey analysis among 17.631 mainly 17- and 18-year-old VET students, the project looks at differences and similarities in seven EU countries: Austria, Germany, Greece, Latvia, Lithuania, Slovenia and the UK. In times of an economic downturn and the growing flexibilisation of knowledge recognition processes, the conclusions important for all interested in VET are accessible on the link.

The 7EU VET project conducted national based analyses in relation to survey data and policy developments: main results on the country level basis are integrated in the fila report. In the project we have also focused to an international comparison of the seven surveyed countries. The findings are grouped into six key subject areas: (a) factors related to the transition from earlier education into VET systems; (b) learning, perception and satisfaction with VET programmes; (c) school success and acquired competencies; (d) ICT; and (e) future career expectations and further education. The main project findings on the international level are the following:

The key factors affecting the transition to VET are the same in all of the surveyed countries – they are all are closely linked to the perceived belief of career development: Results indicate there is a need to increase the centrality of objective information sources related to enrolment in VET, which includes training teachers in this direction and presenting the possible effects of considering other information sources. Career guidance activities have significant room for improvement in most of the countries.

Across the countries VET students consider surprisingly limited options regarding the choice of a further occupational path: The majority of VET students, in general three out of four, did not consider any alternative in their decision related to enrolling in a VET programme.

There is a need to pay great attention to out-of-school activities; in some countries, one out of four VET students does not learn after school at all

Aptitudes for classical learning are very low in most countries: the most important learning drivers are interest in practical subjects, understanding of the learning subject and interest in the practical subject: Results clearly reveal the need to give more credits for general subjects to thereby make learning in this way more attractive.
In most countries the majority of VET students spend most of their free time with friends, on social networks and watching television but time spent reading books received little attention. In this context, the question arises as to what extent schools and teachers should promote these activities, and what position they should take towards them.

VET students undertake paid work more than one would expect: on average, around one out of five learners worked for money for at least two hours per day and this work was unrelated to their programmes: firstly, because this work is not related to their educational programme and, secondly, because there is an indication that they do this for a living.

School success importantly impacts programme perceptions, hence VET teachers should pay more attention to students with lower grades, in particular since learners appreciate and are very sensitive to teachers’ efforts.

General satisfaction with the programme depends considerably on the extent to which classes are interesting and how well teachers are prepared: we can say that making classes interesting is an important challenge when making any improvements to VET curricula and their attractiveness.

Study behaviour tactics matter more than the time invested in home work – practical learning is not well-recognised in most countries: VET students develop their own tactics for achieving good grades which are not so related to learning after school but more with proactive behavioural patterns during study programmes, higher engagements in practical learning and other ways of social learning. Students who are interested in general, classroom-based subjects, have better grades: a positive effect was found in all the countries. We found that learners do not acquire higher grades because they would like to impress their teachers.

VET students generally perceived teamwork and the ability to familiarise themselves with new tasks related to occupations as the most developed competencies of VET learners

The most important determinant of the ability to conduct independent work is school success and professional motives One can speculate that the perception of VET students of performing vocational tasks is related to the learning environment in schools only to a limited extent.

As expected, across the countries students with higher grades were more likely to report they had good generic competencies than those with lower grades: The countries should establish a clear understanding of which competencies are reflected in assessment procedures and which are not. However, the relationship considered could also be reversed, assuming that generic competencies help to explain the success of learners because they are competencies that are employed in learning as well as in work.

Information and Communication Technology: On general, students from all countries are skilled in general tasks when using a computer for writing, transferring files and copying and pasting to manage information. They are less familiar with writing computer programs and installing operating systems. As regards using internet, most of them is familiar with managing information (searching) but the least familiar with more complex tasks as creating web pages. Their attitude towards ICT in everyday is positive.

Personal motives are more important for VET learners in their future careers than salary, job security or reputation: The most important driver of a professional career for VET students is finding a job that makes them happy and having a good relationship with one’s colleagues.

For some VET learners the next step in their career is to enrol in further education Despite the large differences in the VET systems’ permeability paths, the share of learners who said they were likely to
continue in school or further education were not as large as one might assume: the results ranged from 49% in Germany to 35% in Lithuania. Females (by more than 10%) were more likely to expect to continue in all countries except Germany, where the situation is reversed.