EVBB
EUROPEAN ASSOCIATION OF INSTITUTES FOR VOCATIONAL TRAINING

ERASMUS+ CONFERENCE · SUSTAINABLE AND RESILIENT CONSTRUCTION

Economic Resilience and Strategic Autonomy Through Skills

What the new European VET Strategy could mean for construction

Theodor Grassos
Secretary General, EVBB
Sofia, 21 October 2026



EVBB: connecting the whole VET ecosystem

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European Association of Institutes for Vocational Training

900+
educational institutions

86
countries represented

400+
institutions outside the EU

Network

VET providers, colleges and higher VET; 250+ partner matchmakings a year

Policy voice

Dialogue with the Commission, Cedefop, ETF, OECD and UNESCO-UNEVOC

EU projects

From CoVEs to BUILDS with Cleantech Bulgaria; Pact for Skills Tourism coordinator

VET House

Our home in Brussels, opposite the European Commission

Our mission: connect, innovate, represent and enable the VET community across Europe and beyond.

Europe's priorities need vocational skills

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Although we name them the same, they are not the same occupational profiles anymore.

Grids and renewables

Electricians, technicians, construction professionals

Housing and renovation

Construction trades, installers, site supervisors

Industry and defence

Welders, mechanics, machine operators

Digital infrastructure, Data Sites etc

Electrical and electronic trades, ICT technicians

When it comes to talent…. Construction competes with grids, industry and defence for the same people.

EU’s skills gap has become a strategic vulnerability

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Why talent shortages undermine Europe's economic sovereignty and has put us in a difficult position

1

Investment we cannot absorb

Over 30% of EU contractors could not complete all their work in 2024 because of staff shortages. Money without hands builds nothing.

2

Strategic infrastructure delayed

Corridors, grids, renovation and housing slip when the workforce is missing, costing both money and security.

3

Dependence on talent we do not train

Without our own pipeline we rely on imported labour, while South-East Europe also loses skilled workers abroad.

~60%	of EU jobs are VET-intensive
9 of 10	most widespread shortage occupations need a vocational qualification
3.6 m	workers to replace every year, 2026–2035

“In Europe we can finance our strategic infrastructure. What we cannot buy is the time it takes to train the people who build it (and find these people)."

Sources: Cedefop (2026); European Labour Authority, EURES shortage analysis (2025); ING Research based on EU business surveys (2024–25)

€22.8 billion of corridors: who will build them?

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Bulgaria–Greece–Romania Action Plan, Connecting Europe Days, 9 October 2026

25
priority projects

€22.8 bn
total value

€2.95 bn
secured of ~€16 bn rail needs

Key links

- Aegean–Black Sea link: Alexandroupoli–Burgas–Varna–Constanța
- Ruse–Giurgiu road and rail bridge, by 2032
- New Danube bridges: Silistra–Călărași, Nikopol–Turnu Măgurele
- Ruse–Giurgiu–Bucharest rail works, 2028–2030

Needed at the same time, in three countries

- Rail and track systems workers
- Bridge and civil engineering crews
- Welders and steel fixers
- Electricians and signalling technicians
- Site engineers and BIM coordinators

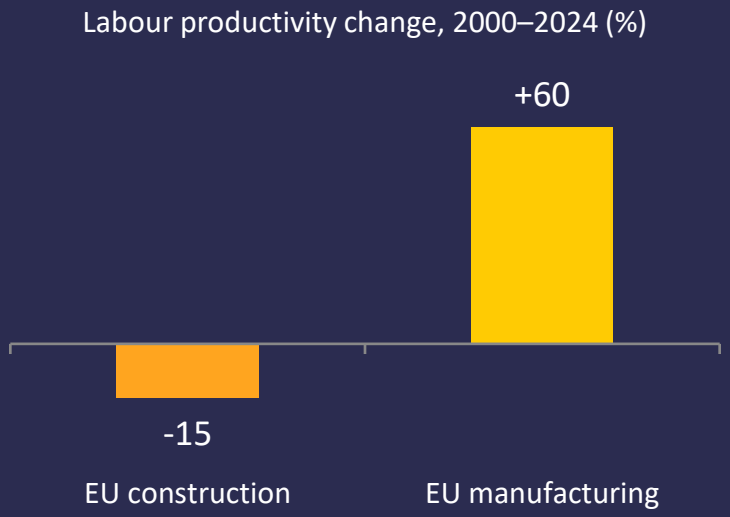
An idea we would like to put on the table for future discussion:
a cross-border skills partnership for the corridor, linking VET providers and contractors in Greece, Bulgaria and Romania.

Sources: European Commission, DG MOVE (9 Oct 2026); press reports on the Action Plan; Railway Pro (Oct 2026)

Technology: the productivity answer to shortages

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But only if the workforce is ready for it



- **BIM and digital twins**
- **Offsite and modular building**
- **Robotics and drones**
- **Heat pumps and energy systems**
- **Circular materials**
- **Digital building logbooks**

+20% productivity ≈ 2.5 million fewer additional workers needed

New technologies should not be seen as an extra burden on top of the shortage: they are part of the solution.

Source: ING Research, "EU vs US construction productivity" (May 2025), based on Eurostat data

What could change for construction

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Directions we expect: agile adaptable VET provision · regional ecosystems · an open European VET area

Common training content

Faster joint modules with sectoral certification, developed with industry

Pact4Skills

Stronger apprenticeships

In-company trainers, virtual and XR training, micro-credentials, adults

Cedefop / EaFA

AI and new technologies

European evidence on using AI and advanced tools safely in VET

EDIH

Excellence mainstreamed

Support to scale Centres of Vocational Excellence into national systems

BuildSkills Academy

Shared equipment

VET–business partnerships pooling training infrastructure, especially for SMEs

Key for SMEs

Do we have the funds?

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EU budget 2021–2027: still to be spent in the next couple of years

Instrument	Budget	Relevance for construction
ESF+	~€99 bn EU-wide	Main source for adult upskilling and reskilling, via national programmes
Bulgaria: Human Resources Development Programme	€1.62 bn EU (€1.93 bn total)	Adaptation of workers and enterprises; lifelong learning; 207,000+ new qualifications targeted
Erasmus+	~€26 bn (CoVEs ~€400 m)	Apprentice and staff mobility, sectoral alliances, Centres of Vocational Excellence
LIFE: BUILD UP Skills	€6 m (2025 topic)	Energy-efficiency skills for building professionals
Affordable and sustainable housing	≥ €43 bn	Creates the demand; training can be built into projects

Sources: European Commission (ESF+, Erasmus+, LIFE, Cohesion Open Data); 2026 Spring Package COM(2026) 200; VET implementation report COM(2026) 363

The next EU budget, 2028–2034

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Still under negotiation: the Council Presidency's compromise trims the Commission proposal

	Commission proposal (Jul 2025)	Irish Presidency compromise (Oct 2026)
Total	~€2 trillion	**–8% (–€141 bn), still ~30% above today**
National & Regional Partnership Plans	€865 bn, ≥14% social target	National allocations kept, no cut
Competitiveness heading	€590 bn	€515 bn (–13%)
Erasmus+	€40.8 bn	€39.1 bn (–4%)

What it means

- National plans are the most protected money: industry should help shape them now.
- EU-level competitiveness funds face cuts: partnerships matter even more.
- Some countries still want hundreds of billions more cut; a deal is targeted by end-2026.

Sources: European Commission MFF proposal (16 Jul 2025); Irish Presidency negotiating box (10 Oct 2026); Agence Europe; EUA

How can the industry fund upskilling?

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Five practical routes

Join partnerships	Pact for Skills, CoVEs and Erasmus+ alliances welcome companies and SMEs; coordinators carry most of the administration
Use national ESF+ calls	In-company training and reskilling; in Bulgaria, the Human Resources Development Programme
Send apprentices abroad	Erasmus+ mobility through accredited VET providers, almost administration-free for companies
Tap energy and transition funds	LIFE BUILD UP Skills for energy efficiency; the Just Transition Fund in coal regions
Pool resources	Shared training centres and joint sectoral training funds, as in France, Italy or Belgium



Let's continue the conversation: Europe's VET Strategy in Action · Paris, 18–20 November 2026 · www.evbb.eu

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Resilience is built by people

- The money exists, but it is fragmented and reached through partnerships.
- National plans are being written now: it is the moment to be at the table.
- A cross-border skills partnership for the corridor could be a first step and solution.
- EVBB connects EU-level skills policy with regional practice, as in BUILDS with Cleantech Bulgaria.

Join the discussion on the VET Strategy: EVBB Annual Conference, Paris, 18–20 November

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