



## Joxe mari Elola Iraeta

Innovation in the SMEs and Internationalization of Vocational Training  
Technical advisers

## Víctor Arias Rodríguez

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# Vocational training facing a new challenge: internationalization

Basque Vocational Training gathers a certain experience in carrying out activities aimed at outside its frontiers. The Vice Ministry for Vocational Training and Lifelong Learning, through the Lifelong Learning Directorate, has been developing the postulates of the Erasmus Programme, on one hand, and the Leonardo Programme, on the other, with a notable success.

The KEI-IVAC (Basque Institute for Qualifications and Vocational Training) and the Basque Agency for the Evaluation of Competence and Quality have frequently taken part in training activities aimed at transferring their knowledge of curriculum design and the Competence Recognition System.

Likewise, several Integrated Vocational Training Centres have played a relevant role in technology transfer projects, in telecommunications, building and civil works, machine-tool, etc., with South American countries mainly.

Moreover, the creation of Tknika in 2005 and the development of the actions of the Vocational Training Basque Plan, linked to the promotion of innovation, have meant an outstanding increase of the contacts with other countries' delegations, as well as the increase of the external demand to cooperate with Basque Vocational Training.

For this reason, in accordance with the Basque Government policies through the Office for External Action, the Vice Ministry for Vocational Training and Lifelong Learning decided to open a new field: the internationalization field, in which to focus the management of external relations - especially with South America and Central America - and analyse the different possibilities, setting patterns, and coordinating the activities derived from the different commitments undertaken through agreement, partnerships, and projects with third countries.

This initiative has motivated the definition, from the knowledge we acquire in terms of internationalization, strategic goals, generic goals and actions that, in some way, express the intentions and expectations of the Vice Ministry on this issue.

We can, thus, indicate that the main aim of Vocational Training is to promote international cooperation and strategic alliances with third countries with the objective of facilitating the emergence of an active generation and the international transfer of knowledge,



technology, and innovation. In order to achieve this, a series of goals have been established:

- Exchange of good practices with other countries regarding people training and knowledge implementation in production.
- Promotion of the participation of Vocational Training centres in international networks.
- Contribution to the integration with other countries in the changes in culture, training, and promotion of technology talent and development.

These generic goals can be achieved through more specific objectives, such as the generation and transfer of:

- Management systems for Vocational Training centres,
- Innovation management systems in Vocational Training,
- Experience in the development and implementation of systems of qualification, curriculum design, syllabuses, and degrees.
- Models for the development of eLearning courses,

In face of achieving the abovementioned objectives, the actions to carry out are the following:

- Contribute to teachers' training and mastery in other Vocational Training systems.
- Offer training actions for foreign students in Basque centres.
- Exchange experts for the development of actions and projects in areas of institutional interest in the Vocational Training field.
- Promote the design and development of knowledge transfer projects in specific technology areas of different professional fields.
- Exchange successful cooperation experiences between Vocational Training centres and the business network.
- Collaborate with other countries in the joint development of innovative models of management, technology, pedagogy, and learning, based on active methodologies.
- Outline collaboration agreements of third countries with the Vice Ministry for Vocational Training and Lifelong learning.

**“The main aim of Vocational Training is to promote international cooperation and strategic alliances with third countries”**



These are some of the references which are being developed at present:

**With Georgia:** From some initial contacts between the Basque Government and the Government of the Republic of Georgia, an agreement has been reached so that Georgian students can attend mastery courses in Basque centres. At present, and for the second consecutive year, a group of 10 Georgian students are studying Management, Tourism, Commerce, and English at the IES Zubiri Manteo, in San Sebastian.

**With Argentina:** The second phase of an Exchange Programme is being developed. Agreed between the Vice Ministry of Vocational Training, the Spanish Ministry of Education, and the Secretariat of Fisheries of the Province of Chubut, the programme establishes the collaboration between the IES Mutriku and a centre in the Argentinean city of Camarones, in in the marine aquaculture field.

**With Colombia:** There is a Framework Agreement between the Department of Education, Universities, and Research and the SENA (National Service of Learning of Colombia), with the collaboration of Alecop. This agreement allows the development of agreements and joint operational plans. The first internship of 60 Colombian students in the Basque Country has recently finished. Six groups of boys and girls were received at the beginning of the year and they have come back to their country after studying different subjects in centres of Biscay and Gipuzkoa:

- Creative and international cuisine at the Hospitality School of Leioa.
- New Technologies for the maintenance of Automatic Production Systems at the Armería Eskola.
- Advanced techniques for the verification and diagnosis in Automation at the IES Elgoibar.
- Technologies for high-speed machining in Machining Production at the IMH.
- Renewable Energies (solar, thermal, photovoltaic, and wind) at the IEFPS Usurbil.
- Telecommunications at the IEFPS Bidasoa.

Facing the future, we believe that this kind of agreements can also be signed with other South American countries that, as in the case of Chile, are willing to send students to attend Vocational Training postgraduate courses in Basque centres or that are interested in knowledge transfer to their educational centres.

There are also contacts with South American countries, like Nicaragua or Panama; contacts that will, little by little, be materialized in some kind of collaboration.

**With Mexico:** there are also some signed agreements with the State of Jalisco, whose development is pending, and several contacts with the Conalep, the organization managing Advanced Vocational Training, interested in subjects related to telecommunications and renewable energies, mainly.

**With France:** As a result of the European programmes of aids for the territorial cooperation in order to promote the transfrontier cohesion and the creation of a Common Cooperation Fund between Aquitaine and the Basque Country, a Vocational Training collaboration agreement is being promoted between the Vice Ministry of Vocational training and the Chamber of Commerce of the Atlantic Pyrenees. In the beginning, it would be a small project for a deep analysis of the common needs, the concrete fields, and the real cooperation possibilities so as to define, later on, the joint operational projects.

As an assessment, it should be noted that, regarding the issue of internationalization of vocational training, many reflections can be made:

- It is a source of knowledge and enrichment for Basque Vocational Training, in the sense that collaboration means learning for our own profit and, in addition, it offers constant challenges to continue improving.
- It allows having a strategic aerial to receive what other organisations are doing in the international field.
- It contributes to disseminate and promote the image of the Basque Country as an area of knowledge, technology, and innovation in the world, which will benefit the companies with external markets.
- It can be the way to find external solutions to some problems that we have inside: lack of students and labour force in companies, for example.
- There is a potential market of external clients for Basque Vocational Training. This is an incentive to become an attraction pole, as in the case of many British educational centres, for foreign students willing to improve the training they receive in their countries of origin.

Finally, it is necessary to indicate that, regarding internationalization, the processes are very slow and complex. Many people and entities, which are usually very demanding, come into play with different rhythms and interests and it is difficult to obtain results. Nonetheless, Vocational Training in the Basque Country has a series of qualities that make it competitive and attractive abroad.



## LACASIUN strength in numbers

**Last 15th March, Luketty and Mirta Mónica finished their Winch Operator Course, together with other eight Latin American female students. Subsidized by the Migration Board of the Basque Government, the course took place in The Gunsmithing School of Eibar every Saturday with a total of a hundred hours. Both girls want to show their gratitude to the Basque Government, the Eibar Town Council, and the Gunsmithing School “for their involvement and for helping us with our integration and training.” These ten women are part of LACASIUN, association based in Eibar working towards the integration and the improvement of the quality of life of Latin women in general and, in particular, of the ones living and working in the region of Bajo Deba.**

LACASIUN (Latinas Caminemos Siempre Unidas – Latin Women, Let’s Always Walk Together) was created as an association on 17th March 2007 by 14 members. A year later, they are 45. “We contribute with information, orientate them in many issues, and try to train them,” explains Mirta Mónica, the president of the association.

Luketty Herrera Ávila is from Bolivia and she has been for three years in Deba.

She was an intern in Eibar for two years and a half. She has three children -12, 10 and 6 years old- who live in her home country, so she talks to them on the phone or the Internet. The last time she saw them was last year, and now she hopes to come back by Christmas. Now, her little leisure time is devoted to walk through the surroundings of Deba or to go to the cinema, and she always collaborates in all the activities of the association.

In her effort to try to access all the possibilities to find a job, she registered in two training courses –winch and conventional milling machine-, and it turned out right. She was chosen, together with two of her mates, to work at ZF Lemforder TVA, an automation company in Ermua. She recognises that she was afraid at the beginning but, thanks to her effort and fight, she has obtained good results. “It was an opportunity for me and when this job came to me, I went there,” she explains excitedly.

Mirta Mónica Zerpa, Mónica, came to Eibar from Argentina almost seven years ago and now she is the president of LACASIUN. Last year, she attended a 700-hours course of Machining, conventional Machine-Tools, and Numerical Control. This year, she attended the course of Conventional Milling Machine and now she is studying Development and Programming of Milling Machine-Numerical Control, both subsidized by Hobetuz. Before starting to work –something she will do very soon- Mónica combines her family tasks, her 3-years-old child, the abovementioned courses, and her work at the associa-

tion. Her child goes to school for the first year and, despite the constant coming and going, she still has time for leisure, which she divides into her family and ‘her’ Latin girls, all of them friends of hers.

As Mónica says, the association’s essential goal is to improve women’s quality of life, “although we know that it may appear a very generic goal,” she points out. Within a more specific field, the first objective of LACASIUN is training. Last year, they signed an agreement with the Gunsmithing School to receive technical training courses. Another of its main objectives is recreation, so they organise activities such as a dance group, with which they gather on Sunday to practise the different dances of each country.

They also search for the integration through the knowledge of the setting, with visits to different places in the Basque Country. And dinners, another supporting point when it comes to get integrated and live in a ‘Basque’ style. Although, as Luketty explains, “it is essential not to lose our culture and offer it to some extent. We must get integrated as women first –in fact, it is a little more difficult for us than for boys, specially in the working field.” Mónica intervenes to say that, in her opinion, it may be easier for girls to integrate socially.

Talking about personal issues, Luketty points out that what gives her strength is that people value the fact that she came from a very far country to get integrated into a different culture. “Luketty was the

first one and the one who fought the most for the association at the beginning,” Mónica says. “She was who most encouraged me and convinced me that I was not crazy.” Both encourage women who arrive at Eibar and visit the association: and, if they like it, they can become a member, “as it is usually said, there is strength in numbers,” says Mónica. “The most interesting issue is to offer women the idea to open the market,” Luketty indicates.





This year, the Armeria Eskola in Eibar has set up a number of courses aimed at immigrants. This measure serves a double purpose: face the demand of labour force in the industrial sector in the region and improve working conditions of those people, or integrate them in the labour market, as it is a sine qua non for social integration.

**- What is the origin of the idea of creating courses specifically designed for immigrants?**

- José Luis Novoa: Over the last few years, we have been working in conjunction with businessmen in Bajo Deba and found out that companies in the industrial sector, which is the most profit-generating sector, face shortage of skilled workers. On the other hand, there is a group, that of immigrants, which is resorting to us more and more often, asking for training in order to work in the region. In the face of this situation, we decided to organize courses for them, directly connected to the needs detected in the industrial sector.

**- Labour force shortage is a problem related to the present moment or do you think it will go on for a longer time?**

- J.L.N.: Right now, more than one thousand people are leaving the production sector and that tendency is going to increase in the next 16 years, at least. In turn, young people turning the legal age to start working, which is 16 years old, are a little over 500. That said, there is a considerable gap growing, which is due to lead to labour shortage: by 2010, only 6 out of every 10 job vacancies will be filled.

- Ana Isabel Vicente: According to the statistics provided by Ikuspegi, the percentage of foreigners living in Gipuzkoa is of 4.2%. Part of these people are either unemployed or working in the domestic service or the hotel business, and are rather dissatisfied with their working conditions. In order to change jobs, they would have to acquire the proper qualifications and skills.

**- And what projects have you developed exactly?**

- A.I.V.: Within this course, we have carried out our first initiatives. One of them along with Lacasium, an association of Latin-American women, which asked for a specific course oriented to the domestic service, since most of those women are live-in servants and the usual training courses are incompatible with their timetables. We set up a lathe operator course on Saturday afternoon, from November to March. Ten girls took part in it, and one of them is now working under a relatively stable contract, whereas the others have undergone different selection process. Their degree of satisfaction was very high, with an average of 9.5.



**"Immigrants resort more and more to Armeria Eskola for training."**

## Alejandro Zuazua

Head of the Lifelong Learning and Vocational Training department at Armeria Eskola (Eibar)

## José Luis Novoa

Armeria Eskola Director (Eibar)

## Ana Isabel Vicente

Prospector at Armeria Eskola (Eibar)

# Armeria Eskola, the bridge between immigrants and the industrial sector

- J.L.N.: And then there is the 'Debabarrena integra-Bat eginez' programme, which acts as the coordinator between the Armeria Eskola, the Basque Country, Debegesa (the Regional Development Agency), EPA (the Adult Education Centre in Eibar), and the town councils of Eibar and Ermua.

**- What groups of people is the 'Debabarrena integra-Bat eginez' programme aimed at?**

- J.L.N.: Among the group of immigrants, there is a number of people who do not even have the basic language skills, which means that they're doomed to isolation and to "living in ghettos". Some of them get the basic income, being in a sort of vicious circle; they think, "this aid guarantees me whatever basic means of subsistence and so I can remain here until I regularize my situation." What we have to do is integrate them in a training process so that, when they get their residence permit, they are able to find a job and be socially profitable for the region. Our aim here is to integrate them professionally as a means for social integration.

**- What is the role of each institution?**

- A.I.V.: Immigrants usually go to the Town Hall to register and, once at the social services, they will be oriented to Spanish courses or straight to Vocational Training. EPA is in charge of the language teaching, while we are responsible for devising courses that meet the needs of the sector according to indicators provided by companies and Debegesa.

**- Where does this programme stand in this moment?**

- J.L.N.: Eleven people took part in the Spanish lessons and, last 7th April, we have already started the second phase, with a course of lathe operator, milling machine, and course. Teachers' assessment so far has been extraordinary because these students are extremely motivated.

**- What has been the local companies' reaction to these initiatives?**

- J.L.N.: They are very open to hire this kind of people because they need them. Before implementing these training courses, we presented the project to the companies and they accepted it very well from the start. We intend to repeat the experience, but first we have to close the cycle and make an assessment.



## “Strong support from government, industry, public institutions and labour organisations is crucial”

**Hans F.  
van Aalst**

Past President European Forum of Vocational Education and Training (EFVET) The Netherlands

**- You've got a large experience as president of EFVET in analyzing different strategies in Vocational Training Institutions. Can you explain us if there has been an evolution in the VET institutions during the last 15 years in Europe?**

- Larger scale of institutions
- Professional management
- Connection of VET and work
- Minimum qualification and/or work for all; including older workers, unemployed and unemployed youngsters
- ICT as part of working and learning environment.
- Ensure that people take responsibility for their own learning.
- “Competency based” learning

**- From your point of view, are the governments aware of the importance of the Vocational Education and Training in the future of the economical and social development of the different countries?**

- Most Governments are beginning to understand the importance of VET for social and economic development. However, traditional educational policies as they have been so successful in the 19th and first part of the 20th centuries are still dominant. Educational policies for VET demand different conceptual and operational frameworks.

**- How do you see the cooperation between VET institutions and labour market organisations in Europe in general?**

- General frameworks on the national/regional level are needed as well as agreed commitment to learning in the workplace and schooling of teachers. However, the real work has to be done on the local/regional level between VET institutions and companies/institutions (including public institutions)

**- We can read in a lot of documents that the European framework for VET is necessary. What do you think about it?**

- Not so many youngsters will be so mobile as is intended. However, for the status of VET, it is crucial that qualifications can be related to an European framework. And youngsters are often quite proud about this. The danger is that the European framework is going to be “translated” downwards to local, regional or national qualifications. This is not the right way of doing things. Qualifications should be developed and agreed upon on the regional level and then related to the European framework.

**- In most of the developed countries we are affording a structural problem. In a few years, a generation of workers will retire and maybe the new generation will not be able to replace the vacancies. Which could be the solutions?**

- Solutions include a dedicated and firm mix of:

1. Replacement strategies:

- a. Immigration.
- b. Increase participation of people which are currently inactive in the labour market – unemployed youngsters, unemployed elderly, women
- c. Increase working hours and retirement at a later age
- d. Shorten the time that youngsters spend in initial (general) education (and use the freed money for Life Long Learning arrangements)

2. Innovation of industries, services and government (probably the most sustainable, but will take time)

3. Upgrade the role, status and operation of VET

**- We know that you have been more than once in the Basque Country. Which is your impression about the Vocational Training in the Basque Country?**

- There are notable differences between institutions. Some are excellent. I would welcome further cooperation between public and private institutions and further develop the common framework for VET in the the Basque country. All institutions, including the ones that are really good now will face the need for transformations to meet the changing context. Strong support from government, industry, public institutions and labour organisations is crucial.