

Survey of 97 manufacturing stakeholders shapes new EU training programme on trusted data sharing

VET4DATACOOOPERATION project confirms five-module curriculum after needs analysis survey reveals strong interest in data cooperation, but persistent gaps in legal confidence, business-case clarity and implementation know-how.



VET4DATACOOOPERATION Needs Analysis Report

Vienna, Austria – 19 October 2026. The VET4DATACOOOPERATION project has completed its Needs Analysis Report, the foundational step in developing a vocational training programme on trusted data sharing for the manufacturing sector. Based on a survey conducted between 26 January and 15 March 2026, the report's findings have directly shaped the design of the project's training modules, confirming a five-part curriculum spanning data governance, secure architecture, business models and organisational readiness.

"The findings make one thing very clear – manufacturing SMEs are willing to explore data sharing, but they need confidence that it is secure, manageable and economically worthwhile. The training modules are therefore being developed around these real concerns, with a strong focus on practical solutions, clear business value and trusted cooperation."

Dimitar Smiljanovski, Macedonian Enterprise Development Foundation (MEDF)

Survey reveals strong interest, uneven readiness

The survey reached 97 respondents across Europe, with the majority coming from four countries: Germany (27.8%), Austria (19.6%), North Macedonia (17.5%) and Slovakia (16.5%). Roughly two-thirds held senior or expert roles, including senior managers, executives and researchers, while the sample was balanced by company size: small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) accounted for 61.9% of respondents, with large companies making up the remaining 38.1%. This split highlights the differing constraints SMEs and large companies face when opening up their data.

Recognition of data cooperation as a strategic priority is high: 63.9% of respondents said their management views data cooperation as a key competitive advantage over the next three to five years. Already 44.4% reported sharing operational data with external partners, though only about half felt confident their organisation has the technical resources in place for secure exchange.

Trust and value remain key barriers

Among respondents expressing hesitation, the leading concern was fear of losing intellectual property or control over data, cited by 55.8%. This was followed by the absence of a clear business case, named by 42.9%, and unclear benefits, cited by 40.3%. Legal uncertainty and a lack of financial incentive followed, each cited by 28.6% of respondents.

Familiarity with data-sharing frameworks and Gaia-X was split: 51.5% of respondents reported at least functional knowledge, while 48.5% said they had little to no awareness.

What manufacturers want to learn

When asked to rate the importance of specific topics, respondents prioritised practical, control-oriented subjects. Data sovereignty, i.e. maintaining legal and technical control while sharing data, drew the strongest support, rated high or critical by 82.5% of respondents. Practical industrial use cases and the strategic case for data sharing followed closely, each cited by roughly 69%. On governance, the ability to manage Data Usage Agreements in legal terms was the top concern, named by 77.3% of respondents. On the business side, methods for calculating financial return before starting a project ranked highest, at 74.2%.

Of the 97 respondents, 44 provided written comments, reinforcing that legal and ownership questions, return on investment, and guidance on Gaia-X onboarding and interoperability should receive dedicated support tailored to SMEs.

From insights to training modules

The report confirmed the five-module structure the consortium had proposed, with the emphasis adjusted to reflect the survey's findings. The programme covers foundations of data sharing in manufacturing and Gaia-X; data governance, legal frameworks and Data Usage Agreements; technical architecture, secure data exchange and operational readiness; business models, ROI and value creation from data sharing; and organisational readiness, scaling and future growth.

Each module is designed to address the four questions the survey found companies consistently ask before committing to data cooperation: is it legally safe, is it technically feasible, is it worth it, and do we have the capacity to do it.

Development timeline and access

The consortium is developing the modules in English throughout 2026, with pilot testing among manufacturing stakeholders planned for early 2027. Following the pilot, content will be refined and translated. The complete five-module course, available in English, German, Slovak and Macedonian, is scheduled for public release during 2027 via the project's e-learning channels, including the EIT Manufacturing East website, the Gaia-X Academy, and the VET4DATACOOOPERATION project website.

About VET4DATACOOOPERATION

VET4DATACOOOPERATION (Training for Manufacturing Stakeholders to Foster Opportunities for Data Cooperation) is an Erasmus+ KA220-VET project that develops vocational training on trusted, sovereign data sharing for the manufacturing sector. It brings together six partners from four countries: INI-Novation (Germany), EIT Manufacturing East (Austria), the Macedonian Enterprise Development Foundation (North Macedonia), deltaDAO (Germany), the Industry Innovation Cluster (Slovakia) and Scheer IMC (Germany). The project also produces a guidebook of good practices and a Data Cooperation Insight Magazine, and makes its results openly available. Project number: 2025-1-DE02-KA220-VET-000352959.

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