

VET in Slovakia

Traditionally, vocational education and training (VET) has been a strong pillar of the Slovak education system. Despite growing interest in general education, participation in secondary VET is still among the highest in the EU. While VET programmes offering access to higher education (ISCED 354) remain attractive, the share of learners completing programmes without this option (ISCED 353) has declined sharply. The resulting low supply of skilled workers and craftsmen triggered new legislation in 2015 introducing a 'dual' type of IVET. With a growing share of social sciences and humanities graduates, labour market mismatches are also visible at tertiary level. Employers consider this risky for industry and the open export driven Slovak economy as a whole.

IVET

Initial VET (IVET) in Slovakia has traditionally been school-based, with periods of work-based learning arising from institutional contracts between secondary VET schools (SOŠ) and companies. Since 'dual' IVET was introduced in 2015/16, it has allowed companies to sign individual training contracts on in-company practical training provision before a student enters SOŠ, complemented with an institutional contract between the company and an SOŠ on provision of 'dual' VET. In contrast to the traditional dual model in German-speaking countries, learners are regular VET students and not employees.

IVET usually starts at age 15. In 2015/16, SOŠ could offer 461 and conservatories 21 approved VET programmes; 43 new programmes are being piloted. Secondary IVET programmes comprise:

- school-based four-year (rarely five-year) programmes (ISCED 354). They are mainly theory-focused and lead to a *maturita* school-leaving certificate.
- four-year (rarely five-year) programmes (ISCED 354) with extended practical training. They lead to a *maturita* school-leaving certificate and in most cases also a so-called certificate of apprenticeship, confirming the occupational area the person is qualified for; they can be also offered as 'dual' VET;
- three-year (rarely four-year) programmes (ISCED 353). They lead to a certificate of apprenticeship and can also be offered as 'dual' VET;
- two or three-year programmes (ISCED 253) for low achievers without completed lower secondary education. In individual cases a certificate of apprenticeship is awarded. These learners can also enrol in a one-year bridging programme

(ISCED 244) which gives access to upper-secondary education.

Special education schools offer similar programmes tailored to students with special needs and IVET programmes for mentally challenged students. Conservatories offer six- and eight-year VET programmes for performing arts students leading to an ISCED 5 non-university diploma and title (specialist in arts diploma, DiS art).

Post-secondary non-tertiary VET programmes comprise:

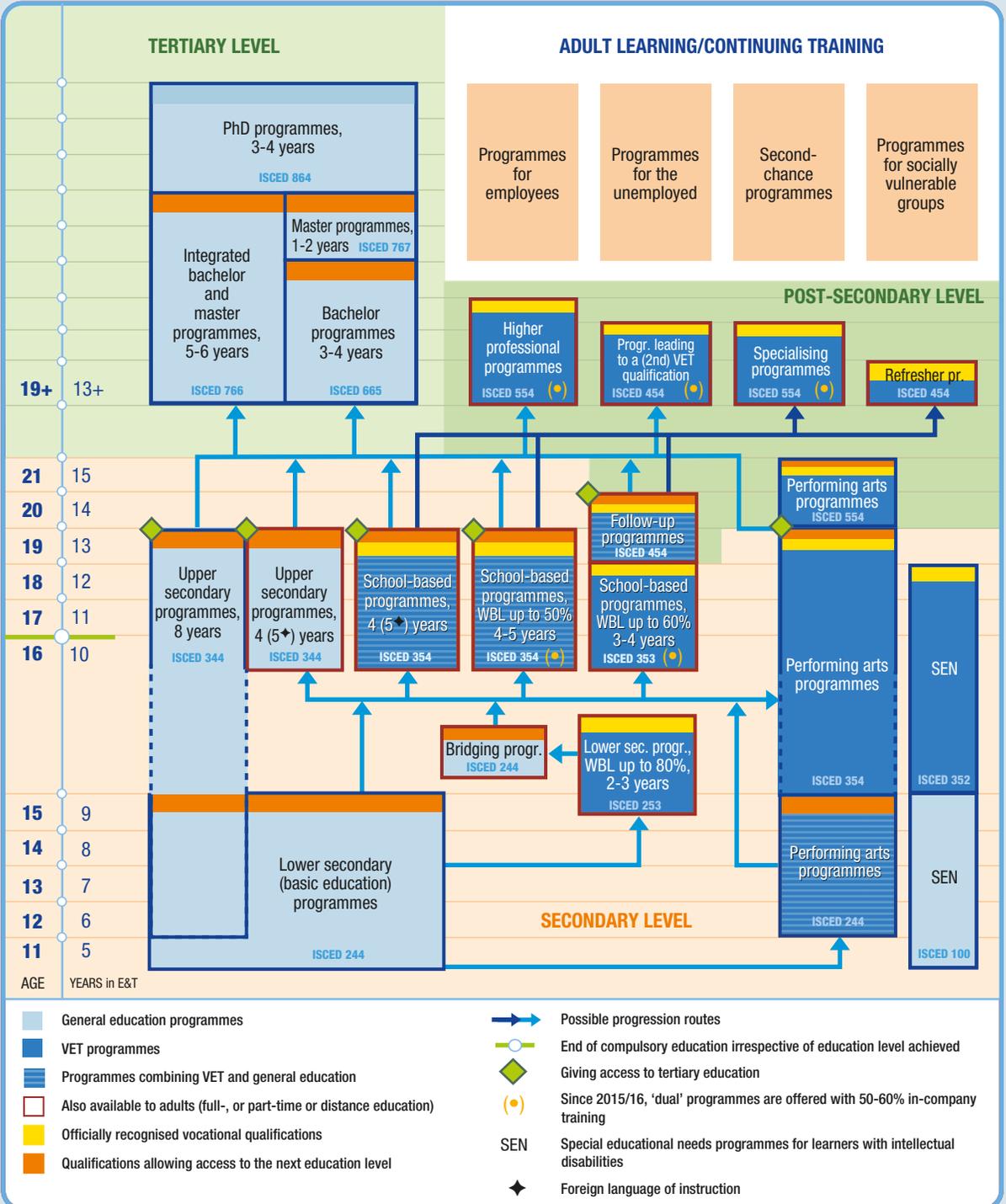
- two-year follow-up study programmes (ISCED 454) for three-year VET programme graduates (ISCED 353) leading to a *maturita* school-leaving certificate;
- refresher programmes ending with a post-*maturita* exam (minimum six months, ISCED 454);
- programmes leading to a second VET qualification ('qualifying programmes', ISCED 454, minimum two years) leading to a second *maturita* with a specific vocational component, in some cases also to a certificate of apprenticeship;
- specialising programmes (ISCED 554, minimum two years) leading to a non-university diploma and title (DiS);
- three-year higher professional programmes (ISCED 554) leading to a non-university diploma and title (DiS).

Tertiary education currently does not include universities of applied science and lacks practice-oriented bachelor programmes. The national programme for the development of education (in preparation) envisions substantial reforms in the next decade to address this.

CVET

Continuing VET (CVET) provision is semi-regulated: according to the LLL Act, all programmes for those adults without a qualification who are interested in starting a business regulated by the Trade Licensing Act must be approved by the accreditation commission affiliated to the Education Ministry. Some qualifications are regulated by sectoral authorities. The Labour Ministry regulates labour market training via its central office and local labour offices. A large part of training in and by companies and adult education *per se* is not regulated.

VET in Slovakia's education and training system



Distinctive features of VET

IVET is strongly State-regulated, predominantly school-based, combining provision of general education and developing key competences with vocational skills. A broad variety of upper secondary programmes contributes to high youth education attainment and low early leaving from education and training. In 2015, 91.3% of the population aged 20 to 24 had at least upper secondary education (compared to 82.7% in the EU-28). In the same year, only 6.9% left education or training early (compared to 11.0% in the EU-28 on average).

Ties between VET schools and the business world loosened during the early period of economic transformation in the 1990s. Since then, with new legislation, involvement of social partners in VET has been increasing in programming, curriculum design and qualification award. Since 2015, VET governance has included the following partners:

- National VET Council, the coordinating body affiliated to the government;
- eight regional VET councils responsible for regional development strategies;
- sectoral (skills) councils, responsible for setting occupational/qualification standards and providing expertise to policy makers;
- professional organisations such as chambers and employer associations identified by legislation as counterparts to education authorities with regard to the respective fields of study ('sectoral assignees');
- Employer Council for dual VET to coordinate activities.

International cooperation supports creating a new national approach to IVET. Piloting 'dual' VET in cooperation with Austria, Germany and Switzerland helped revive the work-based learning tradition and contributed to new legislation. Stronger engagement of the business world in informing VET schools about skill needs via sectoral councils, inspired by the UK model, can help IVET better adjust to a rapidly changing labour market.

Challenges and policy responses

Despite the country's relatively good recent performance on some international indicators, others call for action:

- decreasing performance in reading, mathematics and science, visible from PISA (1) and TIMSS (2), negatively affects participation in mechanical and electrical engineering VET programmes, leading to shortage of supply of technically skilled graduates in the national economy;
- lifelong learning lags, due to lacking fiscal incentives for adults. With only 3.1% of 25 to 64 year-olds participating in 2015, the country will not meet the EU 2020 benchmark.

The 2012 European Council country-specific recommendations have identified three areas for action:

- strengthening labour market relevance of education and vocational training;
- improving education of vulnerable groups, including Roma;
- ensuring labour market reintegration of adults.

They are still relevant: ESF projects have had some impact, but more time is needed to address them fully. In spite of substantial progress in reforming VET since 2008, systemic changes, including additional investments, are needed to:

- secure up-to-date equipment in VET schools to improve training quality;
- increase the attractiveness of the VET teacher and trainer profession and improve their in-service training substantially;
- strengthen VET research and labour market analysis, focusing on graduate tracking and identification of transferable skills, to improve understanding of labour market and skill needs;
- support more systematically the mobility of learners, VET staff and experts, and learn from international expertise and experiences to mainstream activities;
- bridge the worlds of learning and work by ensuring that experts with a business background can inform VET schools on emerging skill needs, particularly by reinforcing the position and role of sectoral (skills) councils;
- make the qualification system more flexible through continuous revision (linked to the work on the Slovak qualifications framework) and development of validation procedures for non-formal and informal learning.

(1) See PISA 2012 results at <http://www.oecd.org/pisa/keyfindings/pisa-2012-results-overview.pdf>

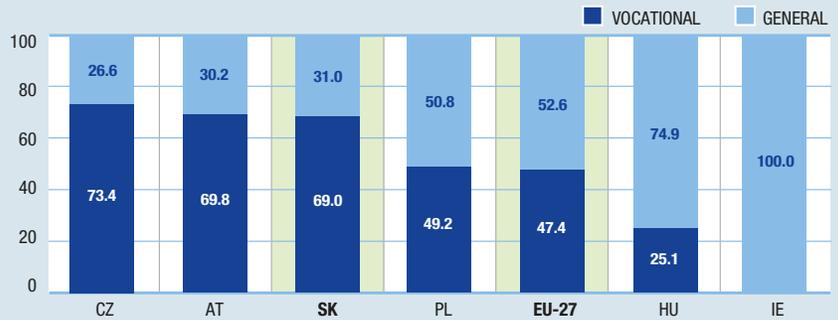
(2) Compare TIMSS 2003 and TIMSS 1995 results in mathematics at <http://www.iea.nl>



Education and training in figures

Upper secondary students (ISCED 2011 level 3) enrolled in vocational and general programmes

% of all students in upper secondary education, 2014

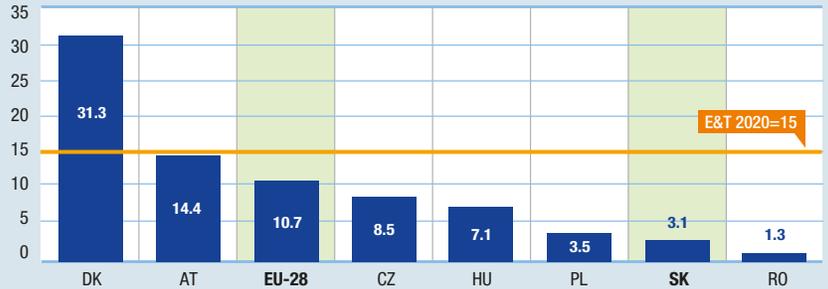


NB: 47.4% is the provisional weighted EU average for 2014 based on available country data (27 countries).

Source: Cedefop calculations, based on Eurostat, UOE data collection on education systems, date of extraction 22.4.2016.

Lifelong learning

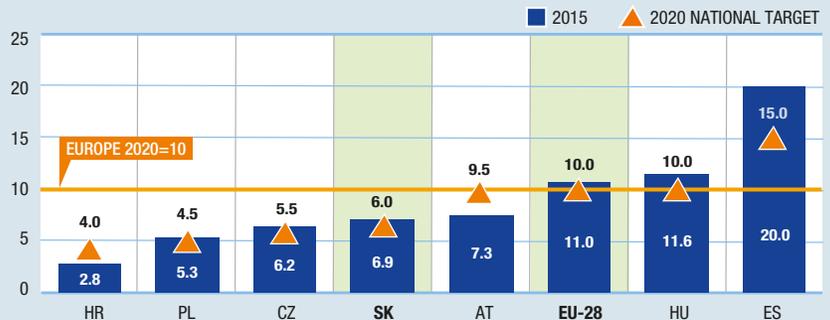
% of population aged 25 to 64 participating in education and training over the four weeks prior to the survey, 2015



Source: Eurostat labour force survey, date of extraction 16.5.2016.

Early leavers from education and training

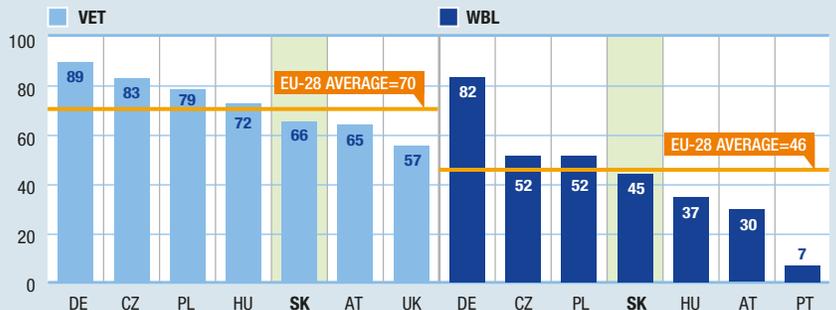
% of early leavers from education and training, 2015



NB: Break in time series in HU; low reliability in HR; definition for national target differs in SK and ES.

Source: Eurostat labour force survey, date of extraction 16.5.2016.

Share of employees (aged 24 to 65) with medium-level education (ISCED 3-4) who obtained a vocational qualification, and whose highest level of education involved some learning in a workplace (% , 2014)



NB: Results may differ from those reported in national statistics and international surveys, as the online data collection method used does not always lead to fully representative findings;

VET: survey respondents described their highest qualification as vocational;

WBL: studies involved some learning at a workplace (e.g. apprenticeships, internships, other forms of work-based learning).

Source: Cedefop European skills and jobs survey, 2014.



Further information

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www.minedu.sk	Ministry of Education, Science, Research and Sport
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www.siov.sk	State Institute of Vocational Education
www.cvtisr.sk	Slovak Centre of Scientific and Technical Information
www.statistics.sk	Statistical Office
www.refernet.sk	ReferNet Slovakia
www.saaic.sk	national Erasmus+ agency
www.radavladypvp.sk	National VET Council
www.kvalifikacie.sk	national qualifications system portal
www.potrebyvvp.sk	dual VET portal
www.ec.europa.eu/europe2020	European semester documents of EU countries
www.zbierka.sk	electronic collection of laws (in Slovak only)

This Spotlight is based on input from ReferNet Slovakia.



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Publications Office

978-92-896-2206-6



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