

spotlight on VET

FRANCE

VET in France

France has a long tradition in vocational education and training (VET). Initial VET is mainly regulated by the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports and the Ministry of Higher Education, Research and Innovation. Different ministries develop nationally valid VET qualifications and certificates.

Vocational training for adults is under the remit of the Ministry of Labour, Employment and Professional Integration. The vocational training system reform (2018) restructured its governance, funding mechanisms, and apprenticeship provision to improve its attractiveness and responsiveness to the labour market.

France compétences, a four-party national public institution, implements vocational training and apprenticeship policies. It regulates financing of vocational training and apprenticeships and ensures the quality assurance mechanisms and functioning of the national qualifications system.

Initial VET (IVET)

On leaving lower secondary school, generally at age 15, students are steered towards three main upper secondary paths (*lycée*).

General and technological (ISCED 344) 3-year programmes lead to an EQF level 4 general or technological baccalaureate, providing access to tertiary education.

Vocational programmes (ISCED 354, 353) lead to a professional skills certificate (EQF level 3, CAP) in 2 years or a vocational baccalaureate (EQF level 4) in 3 years; both qualifications provide direct access to employment, and the training always includes in-company internship. Access to tertiary-level VET programmes in related fields is also possible.

Upper secondary education is governed and financed largely by the education ministry and partly by other ministries (including agriculture and industry). One-third (845 300 in 2020) of all upper secondary learners follow VET programmes.

At tertiary level, the *lycée*-based 2-year advanced technician programme leads to the higher technician certificate (EQF level 5, BTS) designed for entry into the labour market (267 400 learners in 2020). Students can also decide, on completion, to go on to a professional bachelor programme and progress to master level. Technical and vocational studies are offered by universities, technology institutes attached to universities (IUT) and other public or private higher colleges of excellence (*grandes écoles*) (1.74 million out of 2.78 million students in 2020).

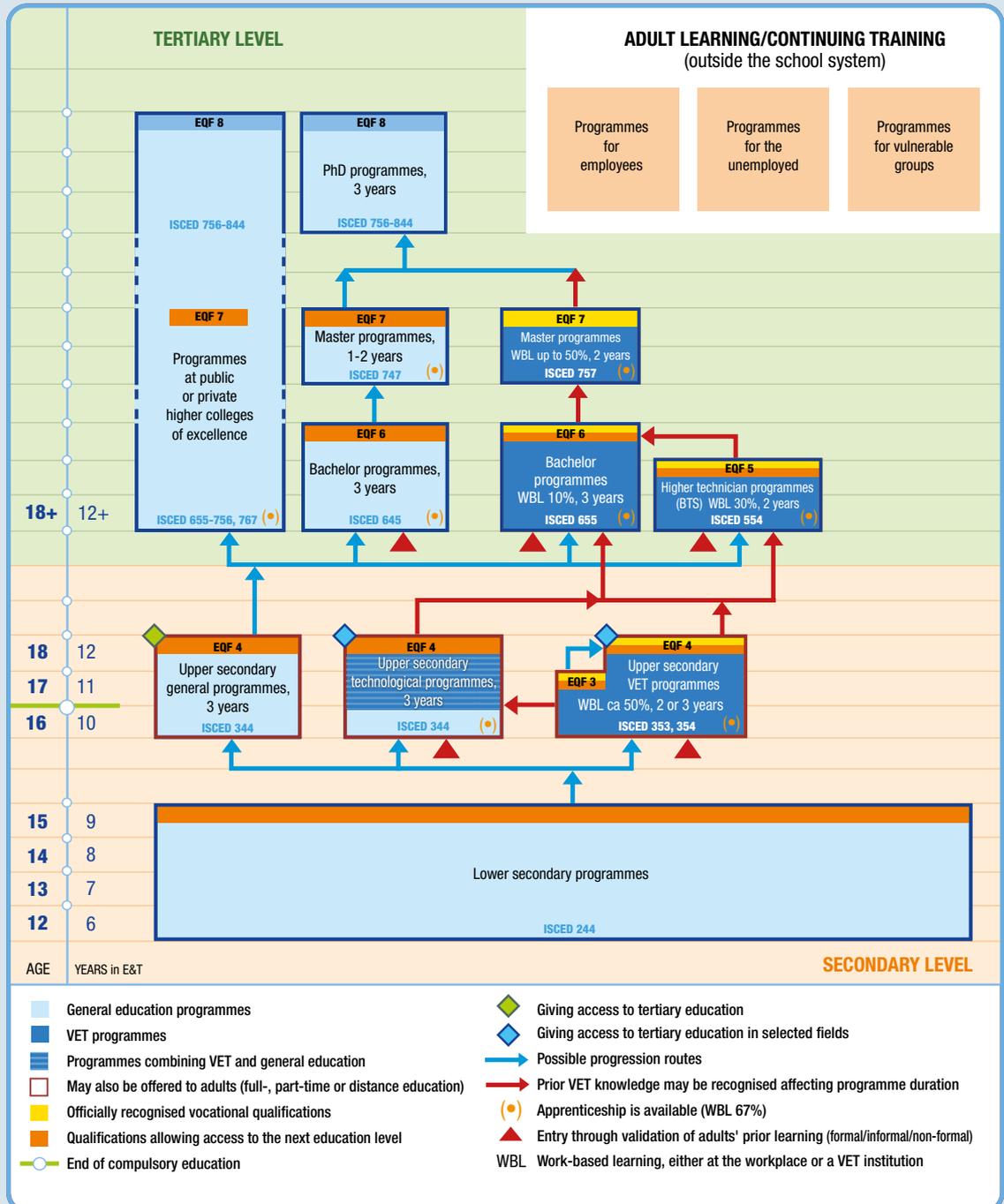
IVET learners with an apprenticeship contract (from 6 months to 3 years) are considered employees and receive a salary. The learning takes place both in the workplace and in an apprentice training centre (CFA). All State-issued certifications registered in the national register of vocational and professional qualifications can be acquired through apprenticeship.

The apprenticeship system is mainly governed by the State (legislation) and the social partners (management of the CFAs). Its funding comes from the State, which exempts enterprises from employer contributions for the amount of each apprentice salary, from companies (apprenticeship tax), and sometimes from regional councils (contribution to CFA funding for land-use planning and economic development needs). A record number of 629 600 apprentices was recorded in 2020.

Continuing VET (CVET)

CVET applies to those entering the world of work or already in work, both young and adults. It aims to promote professional (re-)integration, maintaining people in work, and upskilling. The training market is open. Access and funding procedures for courses vary according to individual status: jobseekers or people in employment (private sector employees, public servants, self-employed workers). Training of jobseekers is managed by the regions, and partly by the public employment service. Employers (private or public) and the social partners are responsible for training people in employment.

VET in France's education and training system



NB: ISCED-P 2011. The French qualifications framework is not linked to European qualifications framework level 1; vocational qualifications have not been established at level 2.

Source: Cedefop and ReferNet France, 2021.

Distinctive features of VET

The State ensures the principles of equal opportunities and the right to education; public education is free of charge and secular. The social partners have an essential role in regulatory, political and financial aspects of lifelong learning programmes. They manage different bodies that fund apprenticeship and vocational training schemes for small companies, as well as the unemployment insurance system for jobseekers.

Regions have full authority over vocational training (except apprenticeship), career advice and coordinating job support policies. They develop training policies adapted to their needs, define and manage territorial public policies, and can elaborate their strategies on VET and economic developments.

Lifelong learning aims to facilitate access and secure employment for young people and adults. Companies have an obligation to contribute financially to continuing training of employees. The rate of applicable compulsory contributions is set by law, with some professional branches applying rates above the legal minimum. Any person engaged in working life is entitled to individual rights to training through the personal training account (CPF). The policy intention is to promote social progress and reduce inequalities in access to training. The system is unmediated; by activating the account online, individuals may use their credits to buy training sessions.

State-issued qualifications can be acquired in and outside the education system, in adult learning and through validation processes. Public and private providers, including social partners, may design and offer their own qualifications. However, only vocational qualifications and certificates included in the national registers (RNCP and RS) in line with the quality requirements of the national qualifications system are accessible through CPF-eligible training schemes financed by public or mutualised funds.

Challenges and policy responses

Strengthening youth initial education and training is high on the policy agenda. To support the young at risk, national and regional authorities

have a formal obligation to provide training to all young people aged 16 to 18 through schooling, apprenticeship, continuing training, civic service, or support for social and professional integration. Education policies aim at developing the socio-behavioural competences of pupils and learning-to-learn skills for academic and professional success and the professional development of teachers. In apprenticeship, the new legal framework removed barriers for longer periods abroad, facilitating European and international mobility through Erasmus+. Financial aids for companies and low-qualified young people, in place before the pandemic, have been complemented by targeted support from the 2020 youth plan; a sharp increase in apprenticeship contracts was recorded in 2020 (+31.5% compared to 2019).

Driven during the 2020 pandemic lockdown, pedagogical continuity has been ensured in initial and continuing training, and apprenticeships through digital courses. A national plan for the transformation of training in the digital era is being implemented.

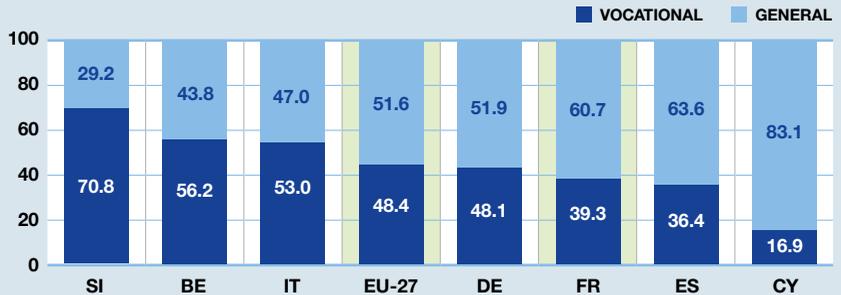
Upskilling the least qualified is a major national priority. The five-year *Investments in skills* plan (PIC) has a budget of EUR 15 million to train 1 million low-qualified young people and 1 million jobseekers by 2022. Solutions for reducing the high number (1 in 15 persons) of those lacking basic skills include local support and adequate training (ESF-funded) coordinated by the National Agency for Literacy and a digital diagnostic tool for companies. Within the retraining scheme for career transition of the labour ministry, local coordination hubs are being set up to support the capacity of businesses to retrain staff currently in insecure jobs.

Targeted measures in the national recovery and resilience plan are running till 2026 (EUR 15 million for recruitment aids, support for sustainable professional integration, 200 000 additional training places in ecological and digital transition jobs) for lifelong learning training programmes for the workforce and securing the employment of young learners, including those in higher education. Consultations with social partners have started on the future of the financial support to companies after the end of the crisis.



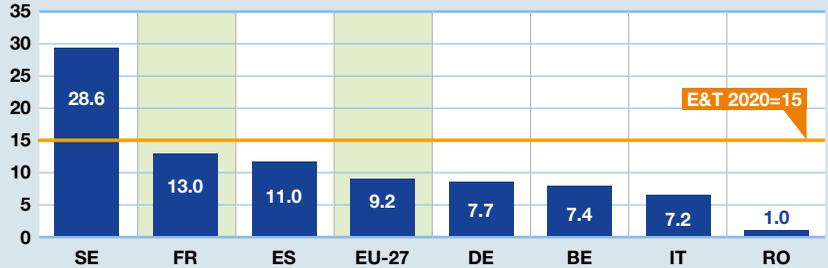
Education and training in figures

Upper secondary students (ISCED 2011 level 3) enrolled in vocational and general programmes
% of all students in upper secondary education, 2019



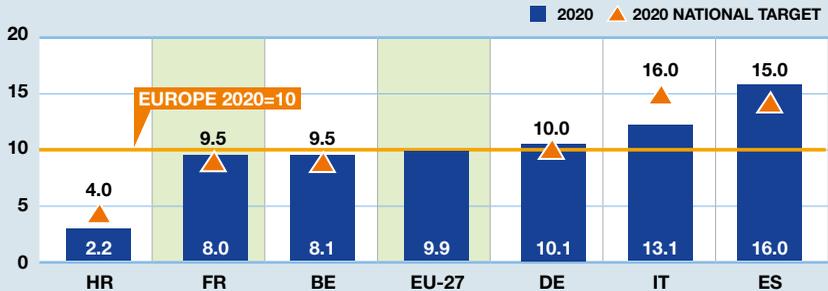
Source: Cedefop calculations, based on Eurostat, UOE data collection on education systems, date of extraction 19.10.2021.

Lifelong learning
% of population aged 25 to 64 participating in education and training over the 4 weeks prior to the survey, 2020



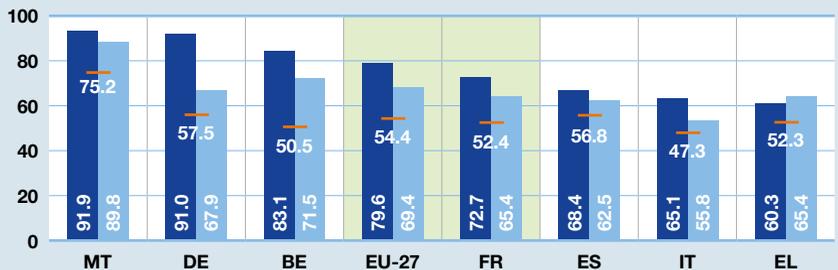
Source: Eurostat, labour force survey, date of extraction 19.10.2021.

Early leavers from education and training
% of the population aged 18 to 24 with at most lower secondary education, and who were not in further education or training during the last 4 weeks prior to the survey, 2020



NB: Break in time series: DE.
Source: Eurostat labour force survey, date of extraction 19.10.2021.

Employment rates of young graduates
% of 20 to 34 year-olds no longer in education and training, 2020



Legend:
 ■ Upper vocational secondary and post-secondary non-tertiary education (levels 3 and 4)
 ■ Upper general secondary and post-secondary non-tertiary education (levels 3 and 4)
 — Less than primary, primary and lower secondary education (levels 0-2)

Source: Eurostat, EU labour force survey, date of extraction 19.10.2021.



Further information

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This Spotlight was based on input from Centre Inffo (ReferNet France 2021).



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