

WORKING TOGETHER TOWARDS ATTRACTIVE, INCLUSIVE, INNOVATIVE, AGILE AND FLEXIBLE VET

Cedefop monitors and analyses European countries' VET and lifelong learning policy and practice in support of common goals

Since the 1950s, European countries have worked towards a single common market, with actions including removing barriers to citizens' free movement. Co-operation on vocational education and training (VET), as first stipulated in the 1957 Treaty of Rome and reaffirmed in 1992 by the Maastricht Treaty, has always been part of the endeavour. It gathered momentum in 2002 with the [Copenhagen Process](#) which became a catalyst for modernising VET systems across Europe. In this context, Cedefop was entrusted in 2004 with monitoring, analysing and reporting on European countries' ⁽¹⁾ implementation of common priorities.

The most recent policy cycle started in 2020 with the first ever [Council Recommendation on VET for sustainable competitiveness, social fairness and resilience](#), and the [Osnabrück Declaration](#). While the former outlined six areas of reform, the latter set four broad priorities ⁽²⁾. In combination with other strategic documents and policies, such as the [European Social Pillar Action Plan](#), the [EU Skills Agenda](#) and the [Pact for Skills](#), they have given a fresh impetus to the Copenhagen Process and will frame the current policy cycle. Now, as countries are embarking on ambitious national plans to implement their common VET priorities up to 2030, they can proudly look back on 20 years of successful cooperation.

Making things happen

EU Member States' national implementation plans (NIPs) reflect the priorities of the VET Recommendation and the Osnabrück Declaration; Iceland and Norway chose to work on the Osnabrück priorities. All NIPs are based on broad national stakeholder consultations and set out countries' activities until 2025,

including proposals until 2028 and a further outlook to 2030. All examples in this briefing note are based on these NIPs.

To put their NIPs into practice, countries will build on recent or current reforms, national strategy papers on VET, skills, youth and research, as well as reform programmes in the framework of the [European Semester](#). Most countries rely on existing governance structures, e.g. national committees, advisory councils or working groups, to implement, monitor and report on progress towards objectives. More than two thirds of them will involve social partners in the process.

Box 1. Forthcoming

In 2023, Cedefop will launch a novel website, *Timeline of VET policies in Europe*, showcasing more than 1 000 strategies, action plans, legal acts and practical measures in VET and lifelong learning (LLL) in the participating countries. The tool will help policy-makers, analysts and practitioners to follow how national policies and practices are deployed and develop over time, from design through implementation to completion. It aims to inspire and support all those interested or involved in designing or reforming VET and LLL policies and practices.

Almost all countries will draw on European funding to finance their VET reforms:

- the [Recovery and Resilience Facility](#) to modernise their VET infrastructure and to link VET provision better to labour market demand;
- the [European Social Fund Plus](#) for reskilling and upskilling adult learners, promoting excellence in VET and supporting VET educators' professional development;
- [Erasmus+](#) to support learner and VET staff mobility, the operation of centres of vocational excellence, VET internationalisation, and participation of national organisations in relevant EU networks.

⁽¹⁾ Participating countries include all EU Member States, Iceland and Norway, referred to as EU-27+.

⁽²⁾ See [article in Cedefop's Skillset & Match magazine 01/2021](#).

Box 2. Working towards new common targets

The VET Recommendation sets quantitative goals for participating countries to be achieved collectively by 2025:

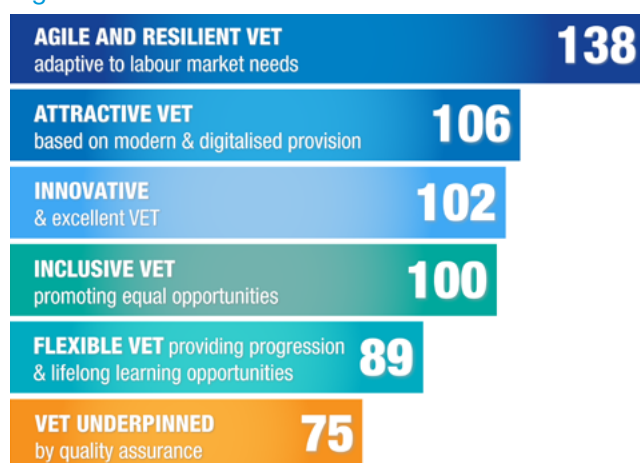
- at least 82% of VET graduates are in employment;
- a share of 60% of VET students benefit from work-based training for at least part of their studies;
- 8% of learners in VET benefit from a learning mobility opportunity abroad.

Cedefop's [European VET policy dashboard](#) monitors progress towards these targets. Its bar charts, (time) tables and maps allow policy-makers, social partners and VET professionals to follow and compare the progress of any EU Member State, Iceland and Norway over time.

Priorities in national plans

Depending on their systems and starting points, countries have chosen different priorities for their plans ⁽³⁾. This briefing note presents the different areas of reform in the same order as the VET Recommendation. The graph below reflects the relative distribution of the measures countries have assigned to each of the priorities.

Figure 1. Measures in the NIPs



Source: Cedefop.

Agile, resilient and adaptive VET

Making VET agile and resilient, and adapting provision to dynamic labour market needs is the number

⁽³⁾ At publication of this briefing note, 23 Member States and NO and IS had submitted their NIPs (BE submitted separate NIPs for Flanders and Wallonia, but is counted as one country). 'EU-27+' refers to all countries mentioned. The NIPs of CZ, IE and SE were pending at the time of publication. The plans are available [here](#).

one priority for EU-27+ countries. 18 countries ⁽⁴⁾ stated that they are or will be reviewing and modernising VET standards, curricula, programmes and training courses to align them better with labour market demand and individuals' development needs. 18 countries ⁽⁵⁾ stress the need for transversal and basic skills. 16 ⁽⁶⁾ will integrate digital skills and competences in VET standards and curricula, while 12 ⁽⁷⁾ will work towards the green transition and more sustainable VET practices.

19 EU-27+ countries ⁽⁸⁾ will reinforce work-based learning (WBL) in line with the [2018 European framework for quality and effective apprenticeships](#). Some of them will expand WBL and apprenticeship to continuing VET (CVET) to offer better reskilling and upskilling options to – employed or unemployed – adult learners and vulnerable groups. 21 EU-27+ countries ⁽⁹⁾ plan to engage a broad array of stakeholders, including social partners in VET design, governance and provision. To link VET provision more closely to labour market needs, 15 countries ⁽¹⁰⁾ plan to create or develop skills intelligence tools and graduate tracking.

In Denmark, an ambitious Climate Act (2020) calls for sufficient numbers of workers with broad qualification sets to take forward the digital and the green transition. Measures foreseen include education for going green, funds for upskilling, and CVET courses on climate adaptation, green change and green entrepreneurship. While Austria will promote adult and second-chance apprenticeship, Belgium (fr) will generally strengthen WBL in adult training and higher education. Malta will set up a committee to review the current apprenticeship arrangements with a view to expanding it to EQF level 6.

To make its labour force more competitive in sectors requiring STEM ^(*) qualifications, while strengthening work-based VET, Latvia will foster closer cooperation between VET, higher education, research and the labour market.

(*) Science, technology, engineering and maths.

⁽⁴⁾ AT, BE-fl and BE-fr, BG, DK, EE, ES, FR, GR, HU, IT, LT, MT, PL, PT, RO, SI, as well as IS and NO.

⁽⁵⁾ AT, BE-fl, DE, DK, EE, ES, FI, FR, HR, IT, LT, LU, MT, NL, PL, PT, RO, and SI.

⁽⁶⁾ AT, DE, EE, ES, FR, HU, IT, LT, LU, LV, MT, NL, PL, PT, RO and SI.

⁽⁷⁾ AT, DE, DK, EE, FR, HU, LV, MT, PL, PT, RO, and SI.

⁽⁸⁾ AT, BE-fl, BE-fr, BG, DE, DK, ES, FR, GR, HR, HU, IT, LT, LV, MT, RO, SI, SK, as well as IS and NO.

⁽⁹⁾ AT, BE-fl, BE-fr, BG, DE, DK, EE, ES, GR, HR, HU, IT, LV, LU, MT, NL, PL, PT, RO, SI, SK, and IS.

⁽¹⁰⁾ BE-fl and BE-fr, DE, DK, EE, ES, GR, HR, HU, IT, LT, LV, NL, RO, SK, and NO.

Flexible VET providing progression routes

Flexibility of, and progression in, education and training systems are quality seals of personalised and learner-centred VET provision. They enable the accumulation, transfer, validation and recognition of prior learning, including in non-formal and informal settings.

12 EU countries ⁽¹¹⁾ will further develop modular VET provision, seven ⁽¹²⁾ will focus on microcredentials, partial qualifications and digital badges, and 11 ⁽¹³⁾ will reinforce their validation and recognition schemes.

17 EU-27+ countries ⁽¹⁴⁾ plan to diversify VET learning formats (face-to-face, digital, blended) and increase the use of digital learning platforms and materials. This not only helps individualise provision but supports outreach to people with disabilities and other vulnerable groups, adult learners and learners in remote or rural areas. This focus is a result of some of the lessons learned from the pandemic.

Many countries have focused their NIPs on strengthening continuing training (CVET) and lifelong learning more generally. 22 of them ⁽¹⁵⁾ plan to reinforce their CVET provision to reskill and upskill people who are in the labour force. Measures include the development of CVET based on sectoral and individual skill needs, lifelong guidance, validation of prior learning, and promotional activities. 15 countries ⁽¹⁶⁾ want to expand financial and/or non-financial incentives for learners, providers and companies to engage in VET.

One of Portugal's strategic goals for the next decade is to increase overall educational attainment among its population by diversifying its education and training offer, strengthening validation and recognition, and providing incentives for companies and individuals.

In Luxembourg, the Adult Education Centre (*Université Populaire*) brings together three public lifelong learning players and offers in a single place a whole range of training courses, making the different training options and pathways more visible and accessible to learners.

France has laid out a set of measures to individualise training options. These include modularised VET courses organised in 'competence blocks' that facilitate, in combination with validation of prior learning, learner

progression towards full and/or new qualifications. This is enshrined in the country's Labour Code.

Belgium (fl) offers learners and companies incentives to stimulate lifelong learning: for example, the former can obtain educational leave and training vouchers to take part in training, while the latter can apply for reduced social contributions if they hire an apprentice and/or a mentor.

Italy will start a pilot scheme to introduce digital VET credentials, such as open digital badges, with a view to upscaling the innovative tools, if successful.

Innovative and excellent VET

18 EU-27+ countries ⁽¹⁷⁾ plan to create and/or support **centres of vocational excellence** to drive VET development within skill ecosystems and link it with higher education and research. Such centres build on strong local business investment and support recovery, the green and the digital transition, European and regional innovation as well as smart specialisation strategies.

15 of the EU-27+ countries ⁽¹⁸⁾ foresee measures to modernise VET school infrastructure and improve learning conditions and access to state-of-the-art facilities. 14 EU countries ⁽¹⁹⁾ plan to improve the digital equipment in VET, while five focus ⁽²⁰⁾ specifically on greening their VET providers: not only by teaching environmental and social sustainability but also by greening the operation of their physical infrastructure.

Greece will open 25 pilot vocational schools at upper secondary level and 10 vocational training institutes, while Bulgaria will create 24 centres of vocational excellence by 2025. In Poland, 120 industry skill centres will combine labour-market-relevant education and training with innovative assessment approaches, while Slovakia will develop VET excellence centres. These will act as innovative hubs combining career guidance and VET provision and ensuring close links with business (to provide labour-market-relevant quality IVET and CVET).

Spain has invested in digital VET skills since 2018. More investment is foreseen to modernise the country's VET provision. It will be earmarked for:

- further digitalising classrooms and transforming them into spaces of applied industrial technology;
- portable devices provided to poor and/or otherwise vulnerable students;
- accreditation of digital skills acquired at work.

⁽¹¹⁾ AT, DE, EE, ES, FR, HR, LT, LU, LV, PT, SI, and SK.

⁽¹²⁾ AT, DE, EE, IT, LV, MT, and PL.

⁽¹³⁾ AT, BE-fl and BE-fr, DE, DK, EE, ES, FR, HU, IT, MT, and PT.

⁽¹⁴⁾ AT, BG, DE, EE, ES, FI, GR, HR, HU, IT, LU, MT, PL, PT, SI, SK, and NO.

⁽¹⁵⁾ AT, BE-fl and BE-fr, BG, DE, DK, EE, FI, FR, HR, HU, IT, LT, LU, LV, MT, NL, PL, PT, RO, SI, SK, and NO.

⁽¹⁶⁾ AT, BE-fl, BE-fr, DE, DK, FI, FR, HR, HU, LU, LV, PT, RO, SI, SK, and NO.

⁽¹⁷⁾ AT, BE-fl, BG, DE, EE, EL, ES, FR, HR, HU, LU, LV, MT, PL, PT, RO, SK, and NO.

⁽¹⁸⁾ BE-fl and BE-fr, DE, DK, EE, ES, GR, HR, HU, IT, LT, LV, NL, RO, SK, and NO.

⁽¹⁹⁾ AT, BE-fl and BE-fr, DE, ES, FI, GR, HR, HU, LU, MT, PL, PT, RO, and SK.

⁽²⁰⁾ DK, HU, MT, PT, and SK.

Finland will further strengthen education providers' digital capacity, develop new teaching formats and materials, and digitalise learning venues.

Attractive, modern and digital VET

16 EU-27+ countries ⁽²¹⁾ will focus on improving the permeability between initial and continuing VET, general and vocational pathways, and academic and professional higher education, while 11 ⁽²²⁾ will expand VET programmes to EQF levels 5 to 8.

Teacher and trainer professional development remains a top priority. 22 EU-27+ countries ⁽²³⁾ will upgrade the initial and continuing professional development of VET school teachers and headmasters, in-company trainers and managers, as well as adult educators and guidance practitioners working both in schools and work-based settings. Countries' activities also include the design of national strategies empowering teachers and trainers to develop their technical and didactic skills and devise innovative teaching methods.

More attention is paid to VET educators' specific competence building. 12 EU countries ⁽²⁴⁾ plan to brief them on the latest pedagogies and to develop their digital competences, allowing them to make better use of digital tools and materials in their work. Four EU countries ⁽²⁵⁾ have concrete plans to prepare teachers and trainers for new tasks to support the green transition and sustainable work processes and materials ⁽²⁶⁾.

13 EU-27+ countries ⁽²⁷⁾ plan to increase learner and VET staff mobility, including virtual mobility.

17 EU-27+ countries ⁽²⁸⁾ will strengthen lifelong guidance and CVET provision at all stages of people's learning and working careers.

In Germany, the need for higher-skilled professionals in crafts and industry has triggered the expansion of VET to higher levels. The relevant [2020 Training Law](#) regulates the requirements of the 'bachelor' and 'master professional' qualifications. Implementation of such degrees continues.

⁽²¹⁾ AT, BE-fl, BG, DE, DK, EE, FI, FR, HU, IT, LV, MT, NL, PT, SK, and IS.

⁽²²⁾ AT, DE, DK, EE, HU, LV, MT, PL, RO, SK, and NO.

⁽²³⁾ AT, BE-fl and BE-fr, BG, DE, DK, EE, GR, HR, HU, IT, LT, LV, MT, NL, PL, PT, RO, SI, SK, IS, and NO.

⁽²⁴⁾ AT, BE-fr, DE, EE, ES, FI, GR, HU, LV, MT, RO, and SI.

⁽²⁵⁾ AT, DE, ES, and SI.

⁽²⁶⁾ This is a new area. More countries are expected to include 'green' activities in their NIPs in the coming years.

⁽²⁷⁾ AT, BE-fl, DE, DK, EE, FR, HR, LV, MT, PL, PT, RO, and NO.

⁽²⁸⁾ AT, BE-fl, BE-fr, DE, DK, EE, ES, FI, FR, HR, HU, IT, LU, MT, PL, PT, SK, and IS.

Romania has underpinned all planned innovations in VET with relevant professional development options for VET teachers, trainers and other professionals. These options pertain, among others, to the latest technologies in use, to transversal, entrepreneurship and digital skills, the design of CVET programmes and new teaching formats.

Hungary plans to test a model job profile of hybrid teachers/trainers. It is being developed to bring professionals from the world of work to VET schools and equip them with pedagogical skills.

Iceland wants to increase young people's interest in VET by providing a first glimpse of vocational and technical education to primary school students and by informing parents, teachers and guidance counsellors about opportunities in vocational and technical occupations.

Norway plans to upgrade its higher VET provision through more targeted reviews and better financing, with the aim of increasing its relevance, flexibility and quality across the country. Social partners will be closely involved.

Inclusive VET offering equal opportunities

High-quality inclusive VET reaches out to vulnerable learners. The pandemic and the war in Ukraine have exacerbated challenges such as the digital divide, inequality of access to digital infrastructure, hardware and tools, and the need to integrate refugees into European countries' education systems and labour markets. This is why 23 EU-27+ countries ⁽²⁹⁾ opted to work towards inclusion and equal opportunities, for example by preventing early leaving from education and training and promoting gender equality. Target groups include people with disabilities, people in remote geographical areas, low-skilled, minorities, migrants and refugees.

Lithuania wants to improve access to VET for students from disadvantaged backgrounds by offering them formal and informal VET training opportunities and additional support, and by providing relevant training to teachers and trainers working in outreach schemes.

In the Netherlands, regional training centres (ROC) will be strengthened to offer lifelong opportunities for adults and to provide learning to newcomers to the country in accordance with the new [Civic Integration Act](#). The country will also ensure equal treatment and a safe educational environment for all students and teachers.

⁽²⁹⁾ AT, BE-fl and BE-fr, BG, DE, DK, EE, ES, FI, FR, HR, HU, IT, LT, LU, LV, MT, NL, PL, PT, RO, SI, SK, and NO.

VET underpinned by quality assurance

15 EU-27+ countries ⁽³⁰⁾ plan to develop their national quality assurance systems further, taking into account the EQAVET quality criteria and indicative descriptors applied both at system and provider level ⁽³¹⁾. National measures aim at:

- improving VET providers' (self-)evaluation,
- developing quality assurance in CVET and work-based learning; and
- strengthening quality assurance of qualifications.

Slovenia will further support VET providers to make their internal quality assurance arrangements more systematic and integrate EQAVET indicators, while at system level more involvement of stakeholders, particularly social partners, will be addressed.

Estonia will strengthen its quality assurance culture to ensure the quality of WBL and continuous training.

Ever closer cooperation on VET

The VET Recommendation and the Osnabrück Declaration have reinforced countries' commitment to cooperation in VET. Cedefop's role in the process is pivotal: its network of expertise on VET, [ReferNet](#), spanning all Member States plus Iceland and Norway, is the main source of qualitative country-specific information on the national implementation of the common European goals. Cedefop gathers this information annually in a structured way, analyses it and reports on progress to the Directors General for Vocational Education and Training and the [Advisory Committee on Vocational Education and Training](#), which celebrates its 60th anniversary this year.

In 2025, Cedefop, in cooperation with the [European Training Foundation \(ETF\)](#), will summarise in a synthesis report countries' progress on the VET Recommendation and Osnabrück Declaration priorities they have selected. There will also be contributions to the mid-term review of the Recommendation and to informing the ministerial meeting that will define the next set of priorities for the post-Osnabrück period. To be continued...



⁽³⁰⁾ AT, BE-fr, BG, EE, HR, HU, LT, LV, NL, PL, PT, RO, SI, SK, and NO.

⁽³¹⁾ In line with the VET Recommendation, many countries refer to the key role of EQAVET national reference points, e.g. for implementing peer reviews.



CEDEFOP

European Centre for the Development of Vocational Training

Briefing note – 9180 EN

Cat. No: TI-BB-23-002-EN

ISBN 978-92-896-3480-9, doi:10.2801/828344

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