



Vocational education and training in Poland

Short description



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Please cite this publication as:

Cedefop. (2025) *Vocational education and training in Poland: short description*. Publications Office of the European Union.

[http:// data.europa.eu/doi/10.2801/2044850](http://data.europa.eu/doi/10.2801/2044850)

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Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union, 2025



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ISBN 978-92-896-3822-7

doi:10.2801/2044850

TI-01-25-002-EN-N

The **European Centre for the Development of Vocational Training** (Cedefop) is the European Union's reference centre for vocational education and training, skills and qualifications. We provide information, research, analyses and evidence on vocational education and training, skills and qualifications for policy-making in the EU Member States.

Cedefop was originally established in 1975 by Council Regulation (EEC) No 337/75. This decision was repealed in 2019 by Regulation (EU) 2019/128 establishing Cedefop as a Union Agency with a renewed mandate.

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Foreword

Poland holds the European Council presidency at the beginning of the new European Commission for 2024–29, during a crucial period of discussions on further EU cooperation and priorities for 2025–30 in the fields of education and vocational training. Goals such as improving skills training, digital literacy, flexibility, quality assurance, inclusiveness and excellence have been at the heart of European vocational education and training (VET) policy, and many of them remain among the priorities set by the Polish Presidency. Strong VET systems are crucial as Europe faces many challenges. These systems equip individuals with the skills and competences needed to succeed in a rapidly changing global context, foster competitiveness and economic growth, and promote social cohesion.

Poland's VET system reflects its rich educational history and aspirations for an active and future-ready workforce. The country's efforts to strengthen its workforce through improved skills training fit well with the EU's ongoing VET policies, as set out in Council Recommendation of 24 November 2020 and the Osnabrück Declaration. Education reforms from 2017 onwards have brought significant changes to the Polish VET system, making it more attractive, diverse and flexible, targeting a wide range of groups of different ages and social and occupational statuses. The system now provides various types of education and training for both adults and young individuals.

Collaboration with stakeholders, one of the key priorities of the European Skills Agenda, has helped Poland to modernise curricula, improve teacher training and reinforce industry partnerships. Sector skills councils and sector skills centres, similar to the centres of vocational excellence, address industry-specific needs, facilitate cooperation and develop specialised skills for students, teachers, workers and adults seeking retraining, while implementing the concept of vocational excellence in VET.

Employers are encouraged to play a more active role in VET by identifying necessary skills and qualifications, reviewing VET curricula, taking part in preparing examination tasks or participating in practical training. Poland already mandates work-based learning for all VET-oriented programmes.

The new European Commission has emphasised the importance of investing in education and training to address labour shortages and demographic challenges, a priority to be addressed during the Polish Presidency of the European Council. The Polish VET system is well positioned to contribute to this goal. By tailoring training initiatives to the needs of key sectors, Poland aims to improve its competitiveness and ensure a steady supply of skilled workers.

The digital and green transitions are greatly increasing the demand for related skills. Digital literacy and environmental sustainability are now being integrated into VET curricula in Poland. New online resources and micro-credentials in the form of open badges are some of the country's recent initiatives to improve digital skills and contribute to broader EU goals. Additionally, the implementation of Council Recommendation of 23 November 2023 on the key enabling factors for successful digital education and training and the update of the Digital education action plan, to be discussed during the Polish Presidency, reflect Poland's commitment to these issues.

Furthermore, Poland's skills intelligence mechanisms provide valuable information for making informed decisions at different levels, contributing to better-targeting VET provision to labour market needs. Graduate tracking practices also help to enrich the quality and effectiveness of career guidance.

The future of VET in Poland will also be shaped by its capacity to embrace inclusion and accessibility. The country is committed to creating a more inclusive society by providing access to

high-quality vocational education and offering lifelong learning and upskilling opportunities to all, especially for individuals with disabilities and adults seeking new career paths.

By continuing to invest in vocational education, Poland is not only preparing its workforce for the future but also contributing to the resilience and prosperity of the European Union as a whole.

This short description, drawn up in close cooperation with Cedefop's national ReferNet partner, aims to offer to a wider European public an insight into Poland's VET, its distinctive features and challenges. We hope that this publication will promote cooperation on VET among EU Member States, inform discussions on the future of VET, foster learner and teacher mobility, and be useful for policymakers, researchers, VET providers and other readers across and beyond Europe. This publication forms part of a series of publications produced by Cedefop for the EU countries holding the Presidency of the Council of the European Union ⁽¹⁾.

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⁽¹⁾ As well as this short description, the flyer *Spotlight on VET* (Cedefop, 2025) and an animated video, presenting the national VET system, are also published for each country holding the Presidency of the Council of the European Union.

Acknowledgements

This publication was produced by Cedefop, Department for VET and qualifications, under the supervision of [Loukas Zahilas](#). [Inés Sancha Gonzalo](#), Cedefop expert, was responsible for the publication.

Cedefop would like to thank Jerzy Bielecki, Anna Maliszewska and Katarzyna Matuszczak from the Educational Research Institute (Instytut Badań Edukacyjnych) for their valuable contribution to this publication.

The publication was peer-reviewed by [Irina Jemeljanova](#), Cedefop expert.

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Poland



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Area	311 928 km2 ⁽²⁾
Capital	Warsaw
System of government	Poland is a parliamentary republic with a prime minister as head of government and a president as head of state ⁽³⁾ .
Population (2023)	36 753 736 ⁽⁴⁾
Real GDP per capita (2022)	EUR 14 670 ⁽⁵⁾
Legislative power	Bicameral parliament

⁽²⁾ [Country profile: Poland.](#)

⁽³⁾ [Country profile: Poland.](#)

⁽⁴⁾ [Country facts – Poland](#) as at 1.1.2023, extracted 13.3.2024.

⁽⁵⁾ [Country facts – Poland](#), extracted 13.3.2024.

CHAPTER 1.

External factors influencing VET

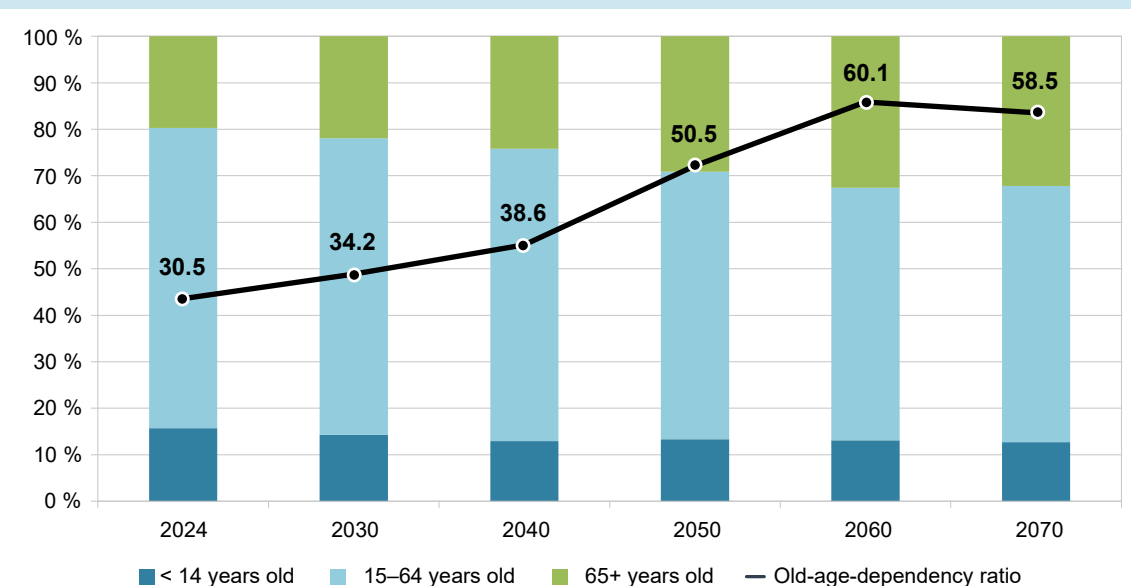


1.1. Demographics

Poland, with a population of 36 753 736, is the fifth most populous Member State of the European Union (EU) ⁽⁶⁾ and the seventh largest in terms of area. The country is divided into 16 provinces ⁽⁷⁾, largely based on the country's historical regions. Administrative authority at provincial level is shared between a government-appointed governor, an elected regional assembly and an executive elected by the regional assembly.

The population has decreased by 0.37% since 2022. Population change in recent years has been mainly driven by negative natural growth, which has remained negative since 2013. The old-age-dependency ratio is expected to increase from 30.5 in 2024 to 58.5 in 2070 ⁽⁸⁾ (Figure 1).

Figure 1. Population forecast by age group and old-age-dependency ratio, 2024–70



NB: Data for population as at 1 January.

Sources: Eurostat (tps00001 and proj_23ndbi), extracted 17.5.2024.

Poland is rather homogeneous in terms of nationality and language. According to the 2021 [national population and housing census](#), 98.84% of the population identified themselves as Polish, while 99.56% stated that they speak Polish at home. The other nationalities declared were German (144 177), Ukrainian (82 440), Belarusian (56 607) and English (54 424).

Many Ukrainians fled their country because of the outbreak of armed conflict in 2022. By March 2023, close to a million Ukrainian residents were under temporary protection in Poland, of whom over two thirds were under 20 years old (Statistics Poland, 2023a).

Demographic changes in the population have a direct impact on the number of students enrolling in education. Specifically, the population of 15- to 24-year-olds is decreasing each year. However, in the 2021/22 school year, the number of students enrolled in secondary and post-secondary vocational education and training (VET) was similar to that of the 2010/11 academic year, with a small increase in 2022/23.

⁽⁶⁾ Eurostat, 'Population on 1 January 2023 by age and sex' ([demo_pjan](#)), estimated, provisional data, extracted 24.4.2024.

⁽⁷⁾ The administrative structure is organised into three main levels: *voivodeship* (province/region); *powiat* (county/district); *gmina* (municipality/commune).

⁽⁸⁾ The old-age-dependency ratio is defined as the ratio between the number of people aged 65 and more and the number of working-age people (15- to 64-year-olds). The value is expressed per 100 people of working age (15–64).

According to the 2035 skill forecast for Poland (Cedefop, 2023a), the country's labour force will undergo significant changes due to an ageing population and increasing workforce participation rates in most age groups. The proportion of the population aged 20–44 and 60–64 is expected to decrease, whereas the proportion of those aged 45–59 and 65 and over is expected to increase. These demographic changes will affect employment and skills, as most job vacancies will arise from replacement needs. In general terms, most new job opportunities expected to be created in Poland up to 2035 will require high-level qualifications. However, the limited supply of workers with intermediate- and low-level qualifications may make it difficult to find suitable employees in the coming years.

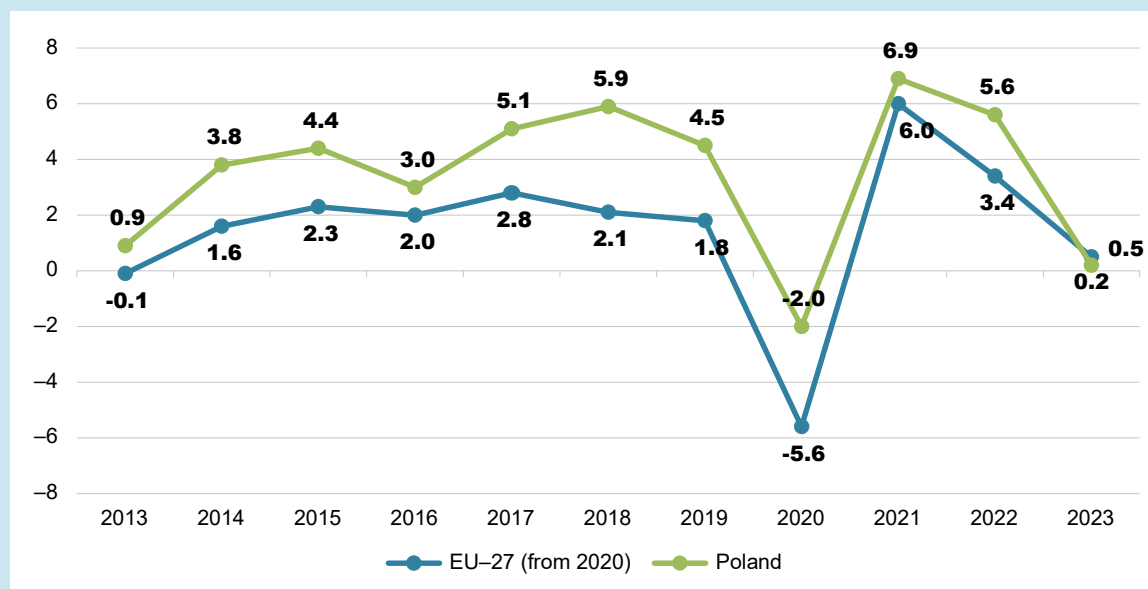
1.2. Economy and labour market indicators

Poland's economy was one of the fastest growing in the EU after the COVID-19 pandemic, thanks to robust policy support, low unemployment and continued inflows of foreign direct investment (European Commission, 2023a).

The COVID-19 pandemic had a significant impact on the Polish economy. However, the country showed resilience and recovery, experiencing a relatively minor decline in gross domestic product (GDP) compared with other EU economies. By 2021, the Polish economy had recovered strongly, surpassing pre-pandemic GDP levels. In 2023, the Polish economy grew by 0.2% (Figure 2), slightly less than projected, while economic growth was expected to accelerate to 2.7% in 2024 (European Commission, 2024a).

Russia's invasion of Ukraine has put substantial pressure on Poland's economy, leading to high inflation rates that were expected to remain among the highest in the EU in 2024, resulting in increased operating costs for businesses. Additionally, the global rise in energy prices has caused a significant deterioration in Poland's current account balance. Despite these challenges, Poland's exporters, the main engine of the Polish economy since its EU accession in 2004, have managed to increase their global market share, and foreign direct investments continue to increase (European Commission, 2023a). Moreover, Poland's political changes have eased the inflow of EU funds from the Recovery and Resilience Facility (European Commission, 2024b), which will translate into positive economic results soon.

Figure 2. Real GDP growth rate (percentage change on previous year) in Poland and the EU-27, 2013–23



NB: Provisional data for Belgium, Bulgaria, Germany, Greece, Spain, France, Croatia, Cyprus, Luxembourg, Hungary, Netherlands, Portugal, Romania.

Source: Eurostat (tec00115), extracted 15.7.2024.

1.2.1. Economic structure

In 2022, Poland had approximately 2.66 million small and medium-sized enterprises (fewer than 250 employees). Among these, 95.76% were microenterprises (fewer than 10 employees), and large companies accounted for 3 601 enterprises (0.13%) (Table 1).

Table 1. Number and share of companies ranked by number of employees, 2022

Company size	Total	Share
Total	2 668 101	100%
0–9	2 554 874	95.76%
10–19	58 878	2.21%
20–49	34 746	1.30%
50–249	16 002	0.60%
250+	3 601	0.13%

Source: Eurostat (sb_sc_oww), extracted 26.4.24.

Microenterprises contributed 28.2% to the country's GDP in 2021 and significantly impacted the labour market, accounting for 43% of the total workforce in the business sector (PARP, 2024). Their number has been increasing in recent years.

Poland's economy is diversified, with a strong service sector, robust industrial production and a smaller yet significant agricultural base.

The service sector, encompassing industries such as finance, retail, tourism, education, healthcare and information technology (IT), is the largest contributor to Poland's economy, accounting for 58.16%. The industry sector represents 28.1% of the economy. While the country is

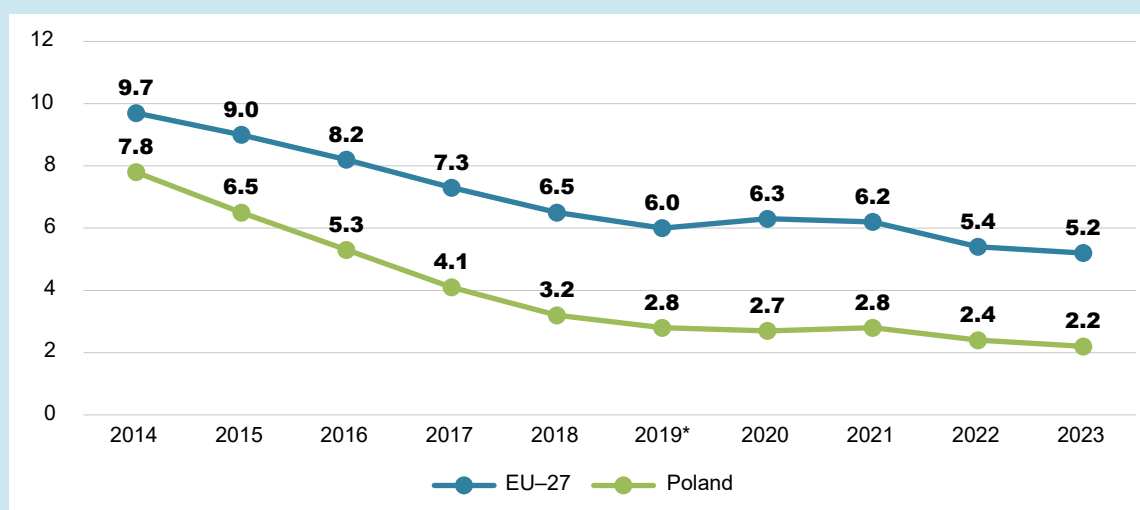
still heavily reliant on mining, other main industries include manufacturing machinery and equipment, iron and steel, chemicals, shipbuilding, food processing, and furniture and glass production. Lastly, although its contribution to GDP is small (2.84%), agriculture plays a vital role, particularly in rural employment. The key agricultural products in Poland include grain, like wheat, barley, and rye, potatoes, sugar beet, fruits and vegetables. Livestock farming, including poultry, cattle and pigs, also contributes to this sector ⁽⁹⁾.

Poland performance is ranked low in the digital economy and society index. In the 2023 edition of the index, Poland is ranked 25th of the 27 EU Member States (EU-27) for the at least basic digital skills indicator and 23rd for the above basic skills indicator. However, Poland has more enterprises investing in information and communications technology (ICT) training for their employees than the EU average (25% versus 22%) (European Commission, 2023b).

1.2.2. Employment and unemployment

The Polish labour market has been resilient following the economic downturn in 2022–23, with the unemployment rate at a record low level: 2.2% in 2023, the lowest in the EU-27, together with Czechia, and less than half of the EU-27 average. It has fallen by 5.6 percentage points (pp) over the last 10 years (Figure 3).

Figure 3. Total unemployment as a percentage of the population aged 25–74 years in Poland and the EU-27, 2014–23



NB: * Break in time series for Poland.

Source: Eurostat (une_rt_a), extracted 17.5.2024.

Poland has improved its long-term unemployment rate (0.9% in 2022 compared with 1.5% in 2017 in Poland and compared with the EU average of 2.4% in 2022), but the low labour market participation of some population groups, mainly women, and a decline in the working-age population keep limiting the labour supply. These negative phenomena are being offset to some extent by immigration, but Poland still strives to fully implement the European Pillar of Social Rights and achieve its national employment target for 2030, that is, at least 78.3% for people aged 20–64. At the same time, business surveys suggest significant skill mismatches as companies report having problems finding people with the right skills (European Commission, 2023a).

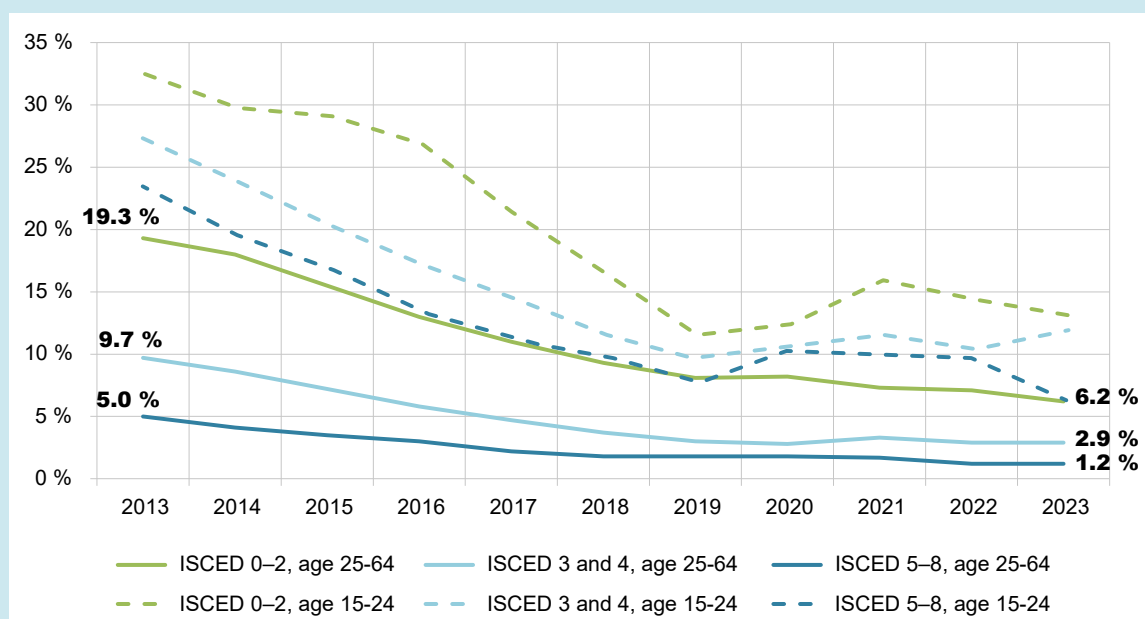
Unemployment rates did not decrease equally across all education groups from 2013 to 2023. The most significant decrease can be seen in the unemployment rate among young people

⁽⁹⁾ World Development Indicators for reference year 2022, extracted 30.5.2024.

with basic skills (International Standard Classification of Education levels 0–2 (ISCED 0–2)) and secondary education (ISCED 3 and 4) (–17.8 and –16.7 pp respectively) (Figure 4).

The level of education plays a significant role in the likelihood of being employed. However, low unemployment levels are particularly beneficial for young people, as it makes it much easier for them to find their first job and gain work experience, while employers are more willing to train young people for jobs during periods of low unemployment.

Figure 4. Unemployment rate (in age groups 15–24 and 25–64) by educational attainment level, 2013–23



NB: Data based on ISCED 2011; breaks in time series.

ISCED 0–2 = less than primary, primary and lower secondary education.

ISCED 3 and 4 = upper secondary and post-secondary non-tertiary education.

ISCED 5–8 = tertiary education. No data for the 15–24 age group in 2023.

Source: Eurostat (lfsa_urgaed), extracted 30.4.2024.

Poland's employment structure has been relatively stable in recent years. The share of the service sector in total employment has been gradually increasing each year, reaching over 63% in 2022. The employment share accounted for by the industry sector has remained steady at around 28%, while the share accounted for by the agriculture sector had fallen to 8.4% in 2022 (Table 2).

Table 2. Employment share by economic sector and gender (%), 2022

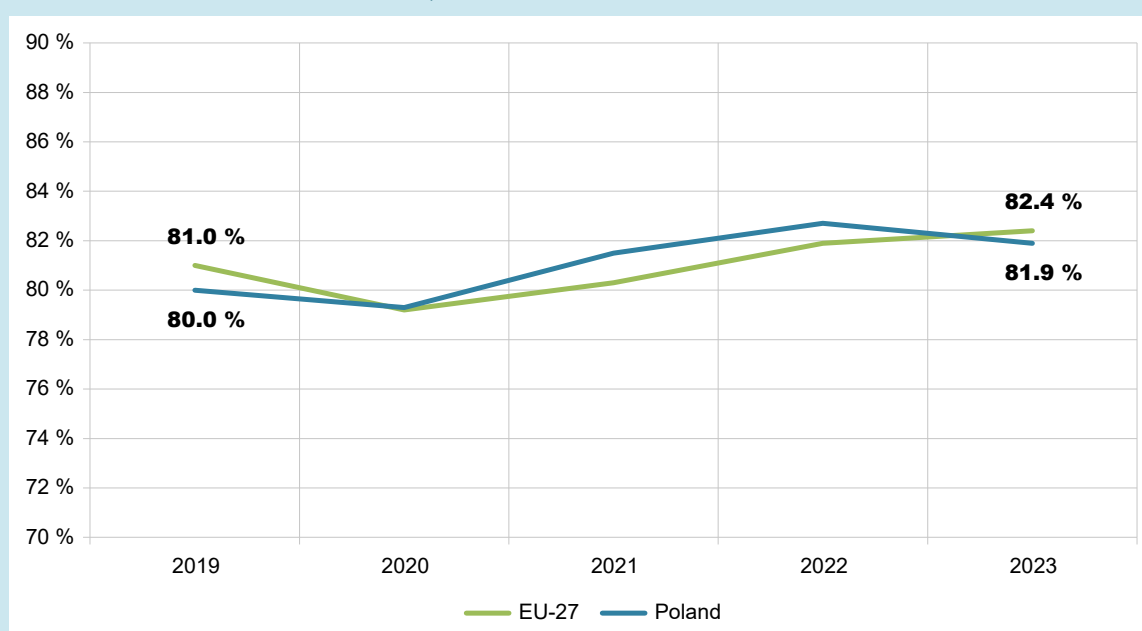
Sector	Total	Female	Male
Agriculture	8.4	7.6	9.2
Industry	28.3	16.4	38.9
Services	63	76	51.9

Source: Cedefop, & Educational Research Institute (IBE). (2023). Vocational education and training in Europe – Poland: system description. In: Cedefop, & ReferNet. (2024). *Vocational education and training in Europe: VET in Europe database – detailed VET system descriptions [Database]*.

The gender structure of the employed varies according to their age, with a predominance of men at essentially all ages; the share of women among employed individuals in the national economy amounts to 47.3% ⁽¹⁰⁾ and it is higher between the ages of 47 and 59 (Statistics Poland, 2024a). Most employed women work in the services sector, accounting for 78% of the female workforce.

The employment rate of young VET graduates (aged 20–34) saw a steady increase between 2020 and 2022, after the 2020 COVID-19 pandemic, but declined slightly to 81.9% in 2023 (Figure 5), only 0.5 pp below the EU-27 average of 82.4%.

Figure 5. Employment rate of VET graduates (20- to 34-year-olds, ISCED 3 and 4) in Poland and the EU-27, 2019–23



NB: Data based on ISCED 2011; breaks in time series.

ISCED 3 and 4 = upper secondary and post-secondary non-tertiary education – vocational.

Source: Eurostat (edat_lfse_24), extracted 30.4.2024.

The increase in employment among VET graduates between 2019 and 2023 was more significant in Poland (1.9 pp) than in the EU-27 (average 1.4 pp) (Table 3).

Table 3. Trend in total employment rate of VET graduates (aged 20–34, ISCED 3 and 4) in Poland and the EU-27, 2019–23

	2019	2021	2023	Change (pp) 2019–2023	Change (pp) 2021–2023
EU-27	81.0%	80.3%	82.4%	1.4	2.1
Poland	80.0%	81.5%	81.9%	1.9	0.4

Source: Eurostat (edat_lfse_24), extracted 30.4.2024.

⁽¹⁰⁾ Statistics Poland (2024a); data as at 31.1.2024.

The high proportion of temporary contracts continues to be a challenge for the Polish labour market, with the share still higher than the EU average (15.2% versus 13.2% in the fourth quarter (Q4) 2023 for people aged 15–64) and over one third of young people (aged 15–29) working under such contracts in Q4 2023 (38.1%) ⁽¹¹⁾.

At 13%, Poland's coverage of collective bargaining is one of the lowest in the EU. Social dialogue remains unbalanced and lacking in the quality of involvement of the social partners in consultations on legal acts (European Commission, 2023a).

Poland reported the highest number of displaced people arriving from Ukraine in the EU in 2022. By March 2023, almost 1 million residents of Ukraine were under temporary protection in Poland, of whom around two thirds were women. The Polish education system covered 8.1% of them, 85 300 people were employed and 104 400 performed work under civil law contracts (Statistics Poland, 2023a).

Furthermore, Poland has the fifth highest rate of economic activity among foreigners among the EU-27 – in 2022 this rate was 81.6% in Poland compared with the EU average of 72.5% (Ministry of Family, Labour and Social Policy, 2023a).

1.2.3. Professional regulations

The labour market tends to be deregulated in Poland. However, in some cases, access to and the practice of some occupations/professions may require specific professional qualifications.

The industrial, craft and commercial activities covered by [Directive 2005/36/EC](#) are subject to automatic recognition of qualifications based on professional experience, provided that specific conditions are met. The [European Commission Regulated Professions Database](#) lists 352 regulated professions in Poland. The rules of access to professions are determined by the ministers responsible for specific fields.

The regulated professions in Poland can be classified into two groups (Cedefop, and Educational Research Institute, 2022).

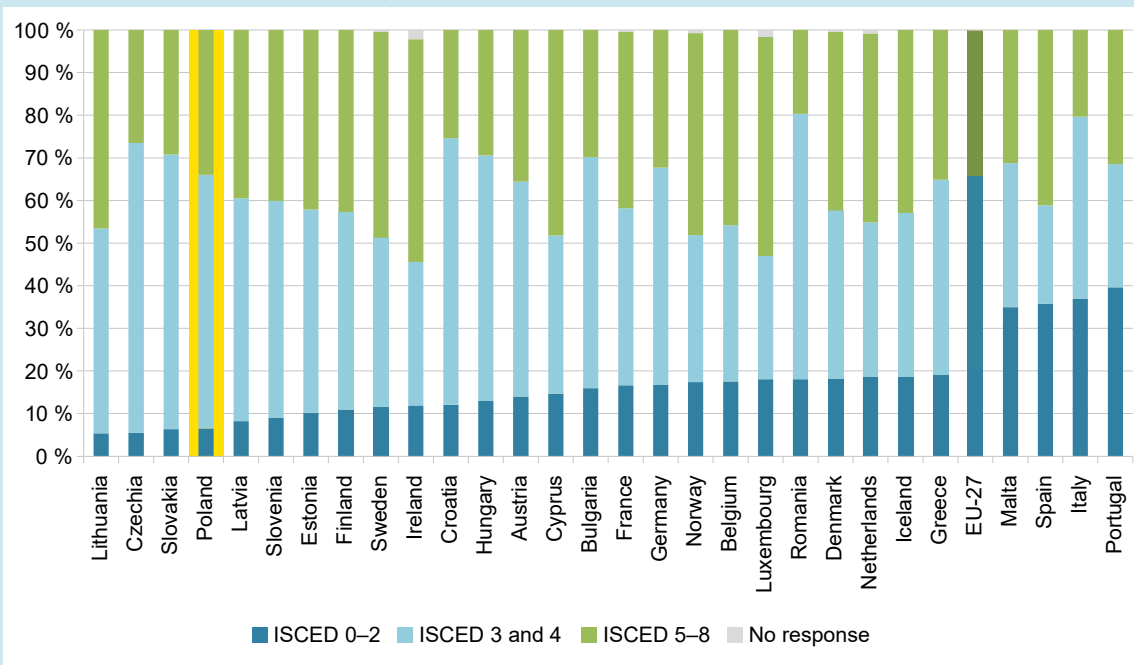
- (a) Sectoral system professions are automatically recognised in all Member States, such as lawyer, physician, pharmacist, nurse and architect.
- (b) General system professions are more numerous, and additional requirements for a given profession in a given country must be met; examples include teacher, sworn translator, tourist guide and customs agent. Access to such a regulated profession is granted by obtaining a qualification appropriate to the given profession, including a university degree or postgraduate studies; by passing special examinations, for example state examinations; and/or by registering with a professional body. Depending on the profession concerned, one, two or all three requirements may apply.

1.3. Educational attainment

Poland has demonstrated good progress in educational attainment over the past decade or so, with only 6.5% of the population aged 25–64 having low or no qualifications (ISCED 0–2), the fourth lowest among the EU-27. The share of the population with high-level qualifications (ISCED 5–8) is very close to the EU average, at 33.9% compared with 34.2% in the EU, while 59.6% have ISCED 3–4 qualifications, 14.4 pp higher than the EU-27 average (Figure 6). Since 2013, the proportion of highly qualified individuals has increased by over 12 pp. In contrast, the share of the population with medium-level qualifications has decreased by 8 pp, and the share of those with low qualifications has fallen by 4 pp.

⁽¹¹⁾ Eurostat ([LFSQ_ETPGA](#)), extracted 23.5.2024.

Figure 6. Population (aged 25–64) by highest education level attained in 2022, EU-27, Iceland and Norway



NB: Data based on ISCED 2011.

Low reliability for 'No response' in Czechia, Finland, Germany, Iceland, Latvia and Luxembourg.

ISCED 0–2 = less than primary, primary and lower secondary education.

ISCED 3 and 4 = upper secondary and post-secondary non-tertiary education.

ISCED 5–8 = tertiary education.

Source: Eurostat (lfsa_pgaed), extracted 30.4.2024.

Looking more closely at the share of students in upper secondary vocational education (ISCED 3) as a percentage of all upper secondary students, Poland's share is 5.4 pp above the EU-27 average (54.4% versus 49.9%). Since 2018, Poland's share has increased by 2.3 p.p. compared to only 0.6 p.p. in the E-27 average (Figure 9).

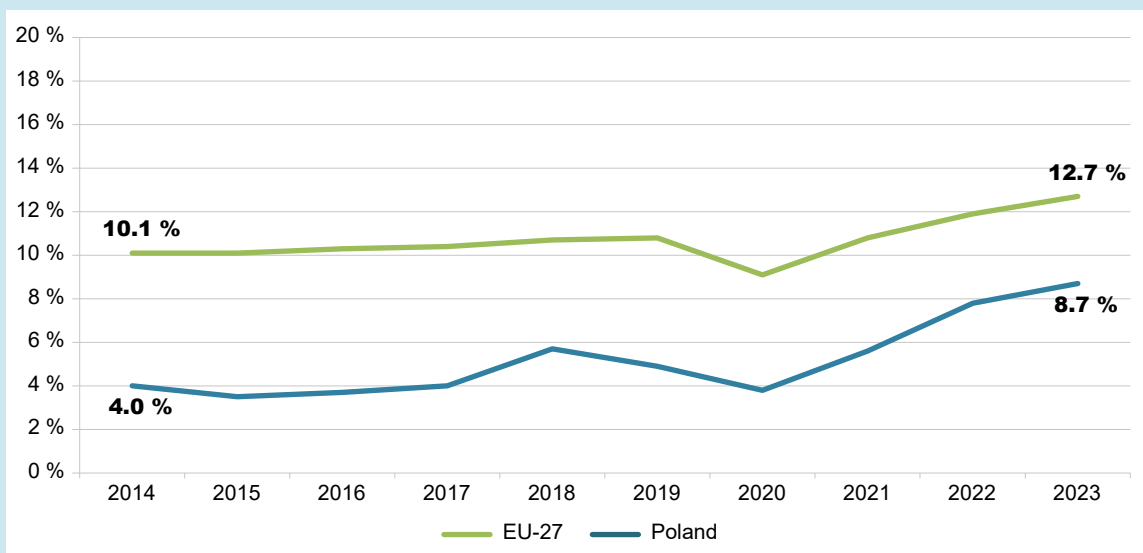
Table 4. Share of initial VET students in all upper secondary students and variation in Poland and the EU-27, 2018–22

	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	Change (pp) 2018–2022
EU-27	48.4%	48.4%	48.7%	48.7%	49.0%	0.6
Poland	52.1%	52.5%	53.1%	53.8%	54.4%	2.3

Sources: Cedefop. Key indicators on VET (online tool) and Eurostat (educ_uoe_enrs01, educ_uoe_enrs04 and educ_uoe_enrs07), extracted 17.5.2024.

Nevertheless, participation in lifelong learning in Poland is below the EU average (8.7% versus 12.7%) but is gradually increasing (Figure 7).

Figure 7. Participation in lifelong learning among people aged 25–64, in Poland and the EU-27, 2013–23



NB: Break in time series for Poland in 2018, 2019, and for EU-27 and Poland in 2021.

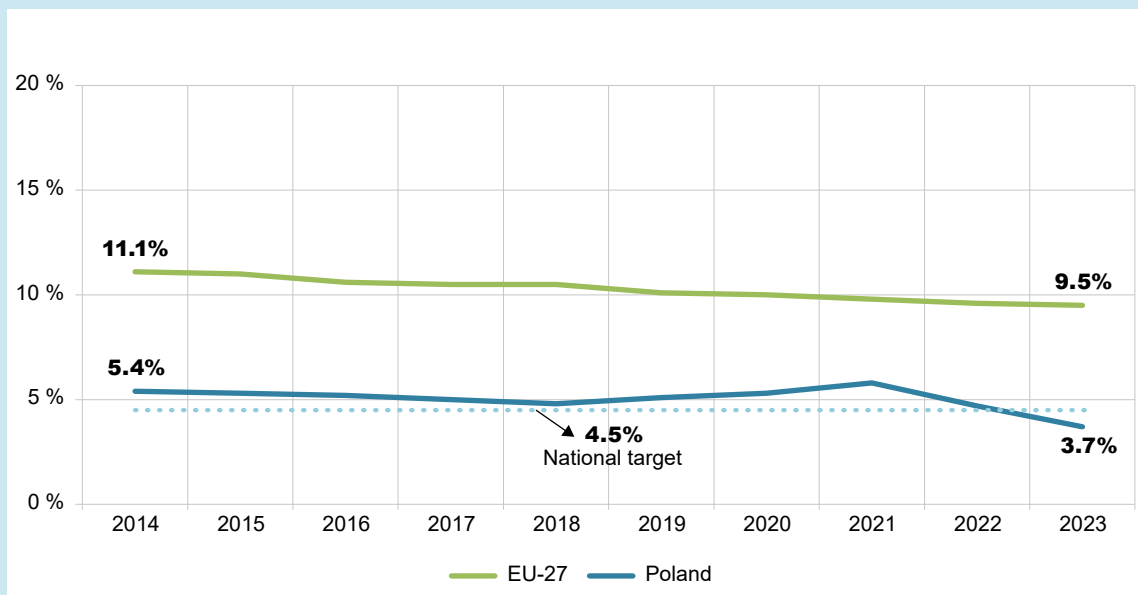
Source: Eurostat (trng_lfse_01) Extracted 30.4.2024.

The last Adult Education Survey, conducted in Poland in 2022, revealed that the share of people aged 18–69 who took up any form of learning in 2022 had increased by 10.0 pp compared with 2011. However, there was a decrease in the participation of adults in formal education (of 4.4 pp) and in non-formal education (of 1.1 pp). By far the most important reason for not undertaking formal or non-formal education was the lack of such a need, as declared by 72.2% of respondents (Statistics Poland, 2024b).

Various factors, such as education level, age and labour market activity, determine the rate of participation in training. Individuals who are unemployed and have a low level of education are less likely to participate in educational activities. Older individuals not only participate in training less often but also engage less in informal learning on their own. Recent research suggests that a less formal approach to learning is associated with higher participation (Petelewicz et al., 2023).

The share of early leavers from education and training has significantly decreased over the years and is low in Poland. In 2023, it was 3.7%, which is already below the national target of no more than 4.5% and much lower than the EU-27 average of 9.5% (Figure 8).

Figure 8. Share of early leavers from education and training in Poland and the EU-27, 2014–23



NB: Share of the population aged 18–24 with at most lower secondary education and not in further education or training.

Sources: Eurostat (edat_ifse_14), extracted 30.4.2024, and European Commission, 2018 European semester: National reform programmes and stability/convergence programmes.

1.4. Employment policies influencing vocational education and training

The framework for Poland's actions in the area of employment is established by the provisions of the Act of 20 April 2004 on employment promotion and labour market institutions (*Ustawa z dnia 20 kwietnia 2004 r. o promocji zatrudnienia i instytucjach rynku pracy*) (Sejm of the Republic of Poland, 2004) and some other strategic and planning documents such as the medium-term national development strategy, that is, the *Strategy for responsible development* (SRD), the 2030 *Human capital development strategy*, the *National Training Fund guidelines* and the 2030 *Integrated skills strategy*.

The SRD presents a vision of Poland's future up to 2030 and sets the direction for public intervention in specific areas. It focuses on responsible and sustainable development, emphasising education, skills and strategic sector support. In terms of education and skills development, the following actions are prioritised:

- promoting dual vocational training to further link school learning with practical training;
- increasing the involvement of employers and employers' organisations in VET development, particularly through the co-development of core curricula;
- monitoring the labour market and changes in occupations to readjust education policies as necessary;
- developing teacher training to respond to the changing needs of industry (Industry 4.0).

SRD implementation in education includes such flagship projects as the integrated qualifications system (see Section 3.2), competence-based teaching and the school IT infrastructure.

The human capital development strategy aims to address the challenges the country faces in terms of human capital and social cohesion, making it a more attractive place to live and work.

One of its key interventions is to better align education and learning with the needs of the modern economy. As does the SRD, this strategy emphasises the role of employers and employers' organisations in VET to ensure a swift response to labour market needs. It also highlights the importance of meeting adult learners' needs by adjusting the format of vocational courses and training.

The 2023 integrated skills strategy sets out a policy for skills development in line with the idea of lifelong learning. The document was developed through close cooperation of all relevant government bodies and stakeholders, integrating national strategic documents and drawing on Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development recommendations (OECD, 2019).

Labour market reforms and investments have also been included in the [national recovery and resilience plan](#) (RRP) to ensure that the Polish labour market is more effective, friendly to employees and employers and accessible to all. The RRP comprises measures focused on six key policy areas: the green transition, digital transformation, health, economic competitiveness, sustainable transport, and policies for the next generation, such as improving the education system, enhancing the quality of public institutions and ensuring better opportunities for future generations. It is estimated that the economic impact of the NextGenerationEU fund in Poland could result in an increase in GDP of 1.1–1.8% by 2026 and create up to 105 000 additional jobs (European Commission, 2023a).

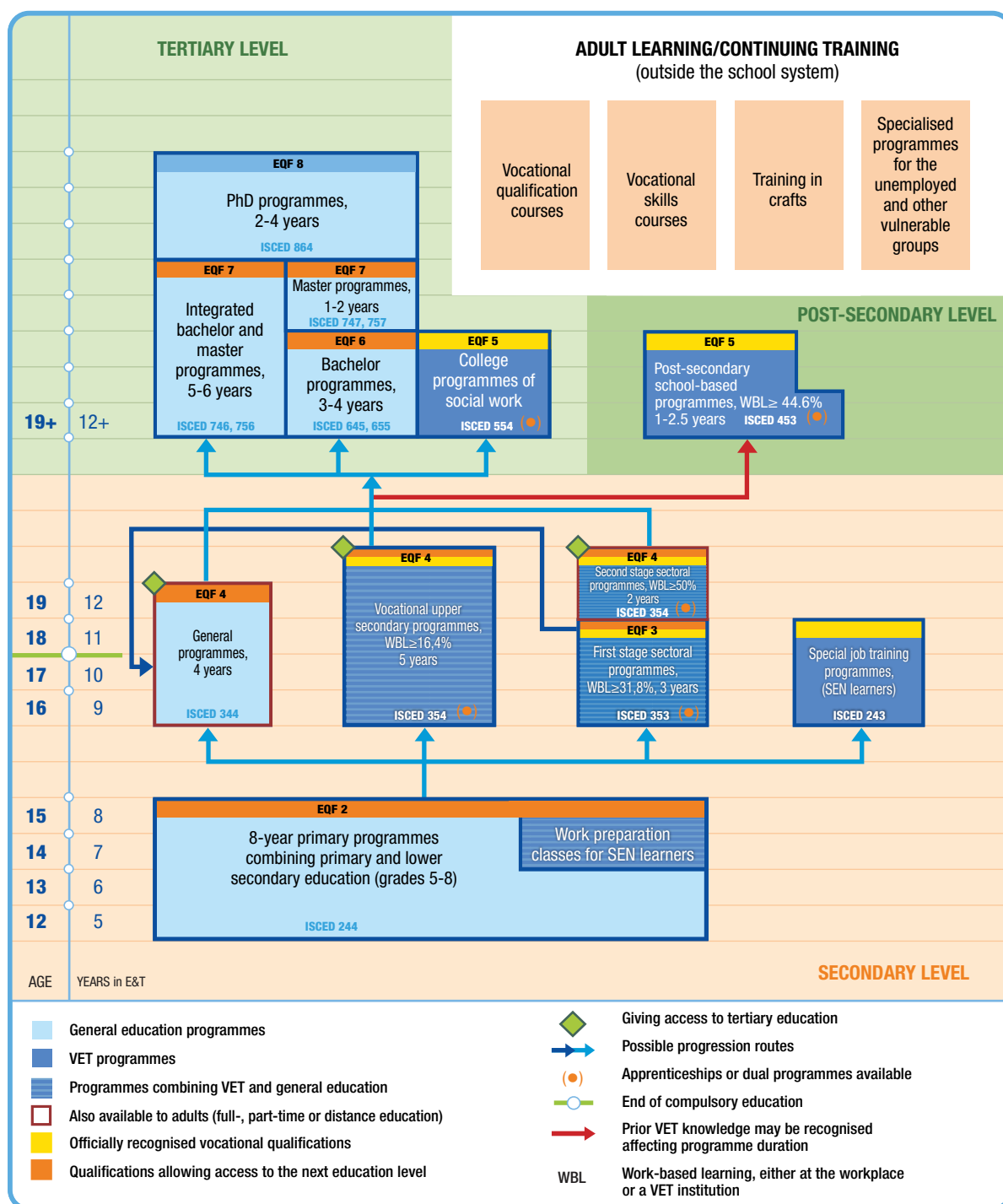
A national action plan for employment is developed annually to address the key challenges facing the labour market and to improve VET to make it more responsive to market needs (Government of Poland, 2023).

CHAPTER 2.

VET provision



Figure 9. VET in the Polish education and training system in 2022/23



Source: Cedefop & ReferNet Poland (2023).

2.1. Education and training system overview

The education system in Poland underwent a structural reform after the publication in 2016 of the Law on School Education (*Prawo oświatowe*), gradually implemented between the 2017/2018 and 2022/23 academic years. This structural transformation aimed to make the vocational education system more responsive to the needs of a modern economy. The reform replaced the previous six years of primary education plus three years of lower secondary education with eight years of primary education and extended upper secondary education from three or four years to four or five years.

Education is compulsory until the age of 18, and full-time education is compulsory until the end of primary education but not beyond the age of 18. Compulsory full-time education spans nine years, from the last year of preschool to eight years of primary education. Between the ages of 15 and 18, compulsory education can be full time or part time, both in and out of school, for example vocational qualification courses (VQCs) or vocational training for juvenile workers. Compulsory education in public institutions is free for children between the ages of 6 and 18.

Part-time compulsory education is available to young people who have completed primary education and continue their compulsory education until the age of 18. A student who has finished post-primary school before age 18 can pursue part-time compulsory education by taking courses at a higher education institution.

The Polish education and training system comprises the following levels, some of which are available to learners of all ages (Figure 9 and Table 5).

- (a) Pre-primary school is for children aged between 2.5 and 6 years old, the last year being compulsory.
- (b) Primary education, which lasts eight years (from age 7 to 15) and is divided into two parts, basic (grades I–III, ISCED 1) and lower secondary (grades IV–VIII, ISCED 2). It ends with a grade VIII examination which helps to identify the type of secondary school best suited to each child. Towards the end of this stage, there are three-year work preparation classes (*szkoła specjalna przysposabiająca do pracy*, ISCED 243) for learners with special educational needs (SEN) leading to a job training certificate.
- (c) Upper secondary education is provided in:
 - (i) four-year general secondary programmes (*liceum ogólnokształcące*) (European qualifications framework (EQF) 4, ISCED 344), in which learners who have completed their education can take the maturity examination leading to the award of a maturity certificate ⁽¹²⁾;
 - (ii) five-year vocational upper secondary programmes (*technikum*) (EQF 4, ISCED 354), in which learners can obtain a diploma after passing vocational examinations and can also obtain a maturity certificate;
 - (iii) three-year first-stage sectoral programmes (*szkoła branżowa I stopnia*) (EQF 3, ISCED 353), after which learners can choose to continue their education in second stage sectoral vocational schools or at a general upper secondary school for adults, starting from grade II;
 - (iv) two-year second-stage sectoral programmes (*szkoła branżowa II stopnia*) (EQF 4, ISCED 354), in which learners can obtain a technician's diploma after passing a vocational examination; they can also obtain a maturity certificate upon passing the corresponding examination;
 - (v) for SEN learners aged 15 and above, there are special job-training programmes

⁽¹²⁾ The maturity examination is administered to students who have completed four-year general secondary schooling, five-year vocational secondary schooling and two-year second stage sectoral vocational schooling.

(ISCED 243) after primary school.

- (d) Post-secondary school-based programmes (EQF 4, ISCED 453) can be completed in 1–2.5 years. These programmes are open to graduates of general and vocational upper secondary programmes, as well as those who have completed second-stage sectoral programmes (usually 19- to 20-year-olds).
- (e) Higher education. The Polish higher education system is based on a three-cycle structure of studies. First-cycle studies (usually lasting three or four years) are a form of education to which candidates with a secondary school-leaving certificate are admitted. They lead to a bachelor's degree, engineer's degree or equivalent. Second-cycle programmes (1.5–2 years) lead to the award of a master's degree or an equivalent degree. Completion of third-cycle studies (usually from three to four years) is equivalent to obtaining a doctoral degree.

Higher vocational education is provided in colleges of social work (*kolegium pracowników służb społecznych*) that offer three-year programmes in preparation for the occupation of social worker and organiser of social assistance as part of the school education system. Although classified as tertiary education for international comparisons (EQF 5, ISCED 554), national legislation does not recognise these programmes as higher education. A diploma confirming the completion of a college of social work programme certifies that the holder is a qualified social worker.

Table 5. Number of students in formal education in Poland in the academic year 2022/23

Stage of education	Number
In schools for children and young people	
Primary	3 122 826
Lower secondary	—
Job training	12 713
First-stage sectoral vocational	195 097
Second-stage sectoral vocational	11 375
General secondary	726 386
Vocational (***)	725 616
In schools for adults	
Primary	1 206
Lower secondary	—
Basic vocational	—
General secondary	87 434
Vocational	—

***Including technical upper secondary schools and general art schools leading to professional certification.

Source: Statistics Poland (2023d).

Students can take examinations to earn qualifications for a specific occupation ⁽¹³⁾, not only at the end of their school education but also at other points during their education or after they have already obtained a particular qualification. Once they pass an examination for a particular qualification, they receive a certificate for that qualification. After passing all the necessary

⁽¹³⁾ Some occupations require more than one qualification (see Section 3.2).

examinations for a specific occupation and completing the required education, they will receive a vocational diploma.

In parallel to general education programmes, art schools, as a division of vocational education, provide training in occupations such as musicians, visual artists, dancers, musical performers and circus performers (Section 2.5).

Schools providing education exclusively in the field of art may have a shortened training cycle, depending on the student's age and the occupation for which they are training ⁽¹⁴⁾.

Adult education and training (AET) is highly heterogeneous in Poland due to the wide range of target groups, including different age groups and social and occupational statuses. There are various forms of AET, as well as methods for validating learning outcomes (LOs), particularly those completed in non-formal and informal learning. Adult learning, continuing and out-of-school VET are available in various educational institutions and IVET schools offering (Cedefop & Educational Research Institute, 2023):

- (a) VQCs based on curricula for a qualification in a given occupation; learners can take the state vocational examination and obtain a vocational qualification certificate;
- (b) vocational skills courses (VSCs) based on the VET core curriculum, including LOs for a qualification or common LOs for all occupations;
- (c) minimum 30-hour general skills courses on communication skills, time management, teamwork, problem-solving, creativity and self-discipline, based on the general education curriculum;
- (d) theoretical courses for juvenile workers;
- (e) vocational training consisting of at least 15 hours of specialised training based on a curriculum that includes professional knowledge or skills in one of the professional fields specified in the regulations, which will be useful for practising a profession (since October 2023);
- (f) other courses designed to acquire and supplement knowledge, skills and vocational qualifications or change professional qualifications; as of 2016, the integrated qualifications register (see Section 3.2) can include curriculum-based qualifications attained by taking courses offered by training companies and non-formal education institutions.

General education and vocational programmes are regulated by the [Ministry of National Education](#) (Ministerstwo Edukacji Narodowej) (hereafter education ministry). Different regulations published at various times set the core curriculum for general education in upper secondary programmes based on the education law.

The [Act on national and ethnic minorities](#) distinguishes nine official national minorities and four national ethnic minorities in the country. The constitution guarantees these groups the freedom to preserve their own language, customs and traditions and to develop their own culture. There are special forms of support provided to learners from national and ethnic minorities:

- (a) inclusion of their national and ethnic minority language and their regional language in education activities and the provision of additional courses on their history and culture on request of the learner's parent / legal representative ⁽¹⁵⁾;
- (b) the learning of a minority language and a regional language can be conducted in schools in various ways; the number of teaching hours depends on the way it is taught;
- (c) adapting external examinations for learners of the language.

⁽¹⁴⁾ First-degree art schools do not lead to professional certification. Art schools leading to professional certification (without a general education programme) include second-degree music schools, circus arts schools, dance arts schools, post-secondary schools for the visual arts and post-secondary music schools. After completing the schooling and passing the final examination, a graduate obtains the corresponding diploma. Students can continue their art education at higher education institutions offering art studies.

⁽¹⁵⁾ Regulation of the Minister for Education of 2 February 2024 (Ministry of National Education, 2024) amending the regulation on the conditions and manner of performing tasks by kindergartens, schools and public institutions enabling maintaining the sense of national, ethnic and linguistic identity of students belonging to national and ethnic minorities and the community using a regional language.

2.2. Government-regulated initial vocational education and training provision

The initial vocational education and training (IVET) system aims to respond to the needs of a modern economy, and it is governed by the [Act of 22 December 2018 amending the Education Law, the 2016 Act on the education system and other related acts](#) (Sjem of the Republic of Poland, 2018).

The main objective of the 2018 act was to improve the quality and effectiveness of vocational education to restore its prestige. The act emphasised the involvement of employers in developing VET, especially in practical vocational training, and in aligning VET with the demands of the labour market by anticipating the need for professions and skills. This act was fully implemented by the academic year 2022/23.

The 2018 act introduced several important changes to the VET system affecting VET learners, employers, teachers and providers. These included the introduction of apprenticeships for students in upper secondary education and first-stage sectoral programmes who are not young workers. It also expanded the opportunities for VET learners to acquire additional vocational skills or qualifications beyond the core curriculum. VET students were required to pass a state vocational or journeyman's examination to graduate, and examination procedures and requirements for examiners were changed. In-service training for VET teachers became compulsory. VET schools were allowed to organise short-cycle vocational courses for adults and were required to cooperate with employers when introducing new programmes. In addition, the accreditation system for institutions providing non-formal training was modified to improve quality control. Lastly, it introduced a mechanism for forecasting labour market needs based on various data sources and the opinions of skills councils.

The current VET system comprises initial and continuing education. They can be offered as:

- (a) schools-based programmes with obligatory work-based learning (WBL) differing in scope and form and also including dual training / alternate training;
- (b) juvenile employment (apprenticeship scheme involving practical training with an employer and theoretical training in school or in out-of-school settings, based on a contract between the learner and the employer) ⁽¹⁶⁾;
- (c) out-of-school forms of VET: different types of courses based on the core curricula.

Formal VET leads to three levels of qualifications (3–5), equivalent to those in the EQF. Completing a VET programme and receiving a school leaving certificate is different from obtaining a vocational qualification. The school leaving certificate confirms that a student has completed their secondary education, and the certificate is essential for those wishing to enter the labour market directly after leaving school or to pursue further vocational training.

Learners in the formal VET system can obtain two types of documents certifying the LOs achieved.

- (a) A vocational certificate confirms that a learner has acquired specific skills and knowledge after completing a vocational training programme and passing the state vocational examination for a single qualification.
- (b) A vocational diploma indicates that the holder has acquired specific skills and knowledge that qualify them for a particular occupation. Learners can obtain a vocational diploma only by obtaining all the qualifications (vocational certificate(s)) required in an occupation and a school leaving certificate. A vocational qualification can be obtained only by passing an external state vocational examination (Section 3.2).

⁽¹⁶⁾ An additional form of student apprenticeship has been available for learners on vocational upper secondary programmes and first-stage sectoral programmes since September 2019.

In the 2022/23 school year, there were 6 800 upper secondary schools, including special schools, for young people in Poland, with a total of 1.67 million students, compared with 1.55 million in the previous school year. Approximately 43.5% of these students attended general secondary schools, with female students accounting for two thirds. The vocational upper secondary programme (*technikum*) was the most popular among VET learners, with 711 140 enrolled in 1 861 technical secondary schools. Furthermore, 11.7% of all VET students at the upper secondary level were in first stage sectoral programmes (195 097), with 32.8% female. Only 0.7% of all IVET learners are enrolled in second-stage sectoral programmes, marking the second academic year of these programmes, as they started in 2020/21 (Table 6).

Table 6. **Number of IVET schools, students and graduates in 2021–23 (as at 30 September 2023)**

Type of school (a)		Schools	Sections (c)	Students		Graduates	
				Total	Of which female	Total	Of which female
Total	a	6 678	67 424	1 547 581	48.3%	361 958	48.0%
	b	6 819	70 693	1 671 187	48.9%	—	—
Special job-training schools	a	557	3 726	12 832	39.2%	2 497	39.5%
	b	560	3 813	12 713	38.7%	—	—
First-stage sectoral vocational schools	a	1 674	10 503	207 097	31.7%	82 968	31.7%
	b	1 672	9 257	195 097	32.8%	—	—
Second-stage sectoral vocational schools	a	136	247	3 729	27.7%	907	30.9%
	b	226	585	11 375	27.8%	—	—
General secondary schools	a	2 331	25 347	652 690	62.7%	156 375	63.0%
	b	2 398	27 646	726 386	62.7%	—	—
Technical secondary schools	a	1 854	26 793	656 513	38.9%	116 694	39.2%
	b	1 861	28 603	711 140	39.0%	—	—
General art schools (b)	a	126	808	14 720	81.1%	2 517	79.8%
	b	102	789	14 476	83.4%	—	—

NB: (a) a = 2021/22 school year; b = 2022/23 school year.

(b) Leading to professional certification.

(c) Section is the basic organisational entity of a school. A school section comprises a group of pupils being educated in the same grade.

Source: Statistics Poland (2023d).

2.2.1. Lower secondary vocational education and training

Following the introduction of the 2016 education act, starting in September 2017, primary and lower secondary education were merged into a single eight-year primary education stage.

Currently, there are no VET qualification programmes at this education level. However, there are some work preparation classes (*oddział przysposabiający do pracy*) for 15-year-old and older learners who do not have the prospect of completing primary school in the normal course, usually students with moderate, severe or multiple intellectual disabilities.

These learners also receive a general education. The preparation for work may be organised in the primary school or in other organisational units, in a school providing vocational education, a continuing education institution or a vocational training centre or at the employer's, based on an agreement between the primary school and the given unit.

2.2.2. Upper secondary vocational education and training

The reformed upper secondary VET is available to learners aged 16 years old and over in the following forms.

- (a) **A three-year first-stage sectoral vocational programme (*szkoła branżowa I stopnia*) (EQF 3, ISCED 353), leading to a vocational qualification (e.g. automotive mechanic).** It includes general and vocational education in accordance with the classification of occupations of vocational education; practical vocational training can take place at school, the employer's (as juvenile employees), vocational training centres or further education institutions. After graduation and passing a vocational or journeyman's examination, the graduate receives a vocational diploma or journeyman's certificate, respectively. Graduates can continue in second-stage programmes, in the same field for which they have been trained, or in the second year of upper secondary general education for adults. Education at a special first-stage vocational school is provided for students with mild intellectual disabilities and those who are socially maladjusted and at risk of social maladjustment. Students with mild intellectual disabilities can also study at a mainstream vocational school. There are also specific first-stage art schools.
- (b) **A two-year second-stage sectoral vocational programme (*szkoła branżowa II stopnia*) (EQF 4, ISCED 354), leading to a vocational qualification (e.g. automotive technician).** It is intended for graduates of a first-stage sectoral programme who have passed the vocational examination for the first qualification in a profession taught in a second-stage sectoral school. It also allows graduates to enter higher education after passing matura examinations in three compulsory subjects and a qualification examination. This programme began to operate in 2020/21. Art students can continue their studies in second-stage art schools.
- (c) **A five-year technical upper secondary programme (*technikum*) (EQF 4, ISCED 354).** In these programmes, students are prepared for a chosen trade, learning general and vocational subjects. After successfully passing the vocational examinations and graduating from the school, the graduate is awarded the title of technician and can take up work.
- (d) **A three-year special job-training programme (ISCED 243) for SEN learners.** Such programmes are provided by secondary special job-training schools for learners with a moderate or severe intellectual disability and for learners with multiple disabilities. Completing school enables the learner to obtain a certificate confirming their preparation for employment. Further education is not envisaged (Table 7).

Table 7. Number and share of SEN students by education level, 2022/23

Type of school	Number of students	Share of total
Special job-training schools	12 713	0.8%
First stage sectoral vocational schools	195 097	11.7%
Second stage sectoral vocational schools	11 375	0.7%
General secondary schools	726 386	43.5%
Technical secondary schools	711 140	42.6%
General art schools (a)	14 476	0.9%
Total	1 671 187	100.0%

NB: (a) Leading to professional certification.

Source: Statistics Poland (2023b).

Students who have completed general secondary, technical secondary (*technikum*) and second-stage sectoral vocational education can take an external maturity examination after graduation. It allows them to obtain a secondary school leaving certificate, and possession of such a certificate is a condition for admission to higher education.

In 2022/23, the number of upper secondary technical schools and students increased compared with the previous year. The number of upper secondary technical schools increased by 0.4% to 1 861, and the number of students increased by 8.3% to 711 140. Almost two thirds of students (61.0%) were male, and 87.7% of upper secondary technical schools were public schools. In 2021/22, the highest numbers of graduates from upper secondary technical schools were in the fields of engineering and the engineering trades (22.2%), ICT (21.5%) and personal services (18.3%) (Statistics Poland, 2023b).

Art education at the secondary level is divided into two main types: first-degree and second-degree art schools. First-degree art schools provide basic art education and training for students who have completed primary education and are interested in pursuing art studies, such as visual arts (painting, sculpture, graphic design), music, theatre or dance. Students receive a general art education but not professional certification upon graduation.

Second-degree art schools offer more advanced and specialised art training to students who have completed a first-degree art school or equivalent education and wish to specialise further in their chosen field of art. Graduates, after passing a diploma examination, obtain a professional title, which can lead to professional certification and qualification in their field.

In 2022/23, there were 55 first-degree general art schools attended by 10 200 students, mostly female (61.2%). There were also 411 schools implementing only an artistic education programme, educating 53 700 students, including 63.0% female students. In the 2021/22 school year, 8 100 students, including 63.8% female students, graduated from first-degree art schools.

The second-degree general art schools leading to professional certification are a separate group of post-primary schools. In the 2022/23 school year, there were 102 such schools with 14 500 students, a 1.7% decrease on the previous school year. 83.4% of those schools' students and 79.8% of their graduates were female. In addition, 118 schools implemented only an artistic education programme for a total of 9 800 students, including 63.1% female students. There were 1 200 graduates, of which 63.2% were female.

2.2.3. Post-secondary and higher vocational and education training

Two VET pathways are available at post-secondary level for learners who have completed their general or VET-oriented secondary studies.

Post-secondary non-tertiary programmes (EQF 4, ISCED 453) are offered by post-secondary schools (*szkoła policealna*) and typically last 1–2.5 years. These programmes are purely vocational, covering all qualifications related to a specific occupation, and the proportion of WBL is determined by the school director. After finishing the programme, learners can take an examination to achieve a qualification for that occupation.

Higher VET includes a three-year college programme (EQF 5, ISCED 554) provided by any of the four public social work colleges currently offering these programmes. It combines school-based learning and in-company training, leading to a professional social worker diploma. Learners should hold a *matura* certificate. For international comparison, these programmes are classified as tertiary education but are recognised as part of the school education system (not higher education) in the national legislation.

Additionally, post-secondary school-based programmes (EQF 5) are a form of short-cycle higher education option provided by public and private non-university higher education institutions (*uczelnia zawodowa*) for at least three semesters. This programme leads to certification as a qualified specialist (if the learner holds a *matura* certificate) or as a qualified technology specialist. Qualified specialists may be admitted to first-cycle (EQF 6) or long-cycle programmes (EQF 7) as a result of validation of LOs.

Education in selected professions can take place online (distance learning) ⁽¹⁷⁾. Post-secondary education includes theoretical vocational education and practical vocational education. In addition, students undergo compulsory professional internships.

In the 2022/23 school year, there were 1 287 post-secondary schools (70 fewer schools than in the previous school year) with a total of 234 800 students enrolled (2 100 more), 71.7% of whom were female. These schools were mostly governed by private sector units (79.9%). Public schools accounted for 20.1% (Table 8) (Statistics Poland, 2023b).

Table 8. **Number of post-secondary schools, students and graduates and share of female students and graduates in 2021–23 (as at 30 September 2023)**

	2021/22	2022/23
Schools	1 357	1 287
Sections	9 813	9 932
Students	232 696	234 817
of which females	70.4%	71.7%
Graduates	58 191	—
of which females	76.7%	—

NB: Section is the basic organisational entity of a school. A school section comprises a group of students being educated at the same grade.

Source: Statistics Poland (2023d).

⁽¹⁷⁾ Distance education is available for post-secondary, higher VET, short-cycle specialist programmes (EQF 5), and VQCs and VSCs (Section 2.2.5).

2.2.4. Work-based learning in vocational education and training

WBL is a key component of VET programmes, and learners must spend time in a real work environment.

Schools have a relatively high degree of autonomy in organising practical training, which can take different forms and have different venues, depending on the school: in school workshops, continuing education centres or vocational training centres or at an employer's premises.

Practical training at an employer's premises (lasting from 4 to 12 weeks) is mandatory for learners in the vocational upper secondary programmes (*technikum*) and in the second-stage sectoral programmes (*szkoła branżowa drugiego stopnia*).

2.2.4.1. Apprenticeships

Apprenticeships are a form of practical vocational education (*praktyczna nauka zawodu*) based on an apprenticeship contract between the employer and the learner ⁽¹⁸⁾. Programmes combine practical training with theoretical learning to develop skills and competences described in the relevant curricula. The goal is to gain the necessary vocational skills for a particular profession and to apply and deepen knowledge and skills in real workplace settings.

There are two groups of occupations that can be learned through apprenticeships (Pierwieniecka & Wasilewska, 2020).

- (a) **Occupations included in the classification of occupations for VET (taught in VET schools).** Training follows the core curricula for vocational education developed by the education ministry. Apprentices must pass the state vocational examination to obtain a qualification in the given occupation.
- (b) **Occupations from outside the classification of occupations for VET – developed and taught in the craft.** Training is based on the journeyman's examination standards for specific occupations developed by the Polish Craft Association. To obtain a qualification in such an occupation, the apprentice must pass the journeyman's examination. A qualification in around 60 occupations can be attained through either the craft system or first-stage sectoral programmes, which makes them a shared responsibility of the Polish Craft Association and the education ministry. This means that there are different paths of learning available for these occupations, and learners can take either vocational examinations or journeyman's examinations.

Apprenticeships can also be organised by employers who are or are not members of craft guilds. Approximately 70–80% of employers participating in the vocational training scheme are members of craft guilds (Cedefop, 2023b).

There are several apprenticeship schemes at the secondary and post-secondary levels. One type is 'juvenile employment' for the purpose of vocational training (*przygotowanie zawodowe młodocianych pracowników*), designed for young people (aged 15 to under 18) who have completed lower secondary education or eight years of primary education. At upper secondary level, this scheme is available mostly through three-year first-stage sectoral vocational school programmes (*szkoła branżowa pierwszego stopnia*).

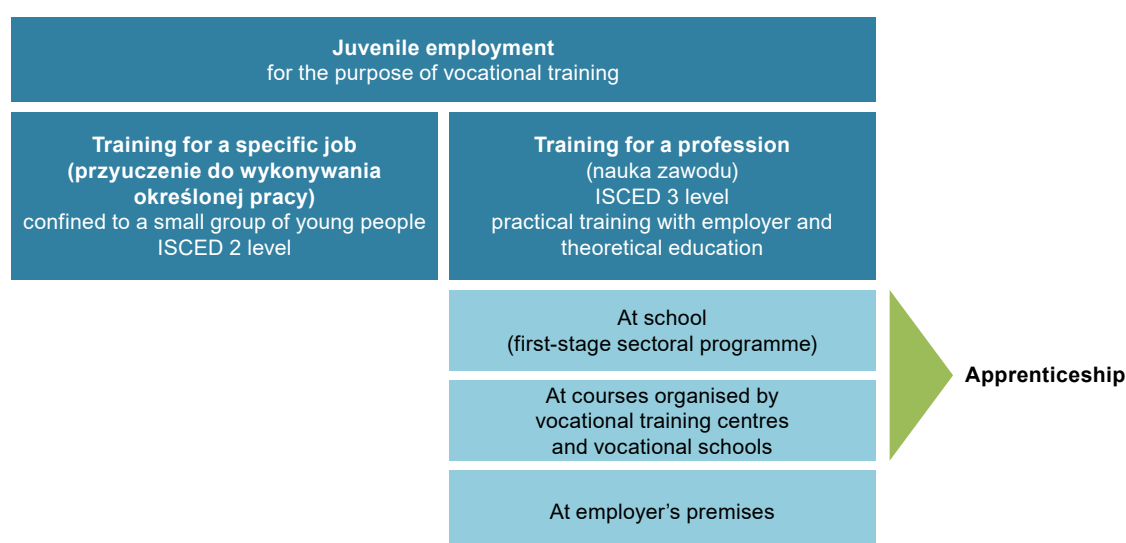
An annex to the work contract between the learner and the employer outlines the details of the training provided by both the school and the employer. The juvenile worker has the status of an employee and, during theoretical learning at school, also that of a learner. During the training period, a juvenile employee is entitled to a salary (Section 4.1), social security benefits and holiday leave. Typically, juvenile workers undergo apprenticeships in small and medium-sized enterprises, mainly in the craft sector. Juvenile employment can take various forms (Figure 10), such as training

⁽¹⁸⁾ According to the [Regulation of the Minister for National Education of 22 February 2019 on practical vocational education](#), *Journal of Laws*, 2019, item 391.

for a profession (*nauka zawodu*), which lasts up to 36 months and ends with a state vocational examination or journeyman's examination (*egzamin czeladniczy*). In the 2023/24 school year, juvenile workers represented over 56% of all the learners in the first-stage sectoral vocational schools.

An apprenticeship can also take the form of training for a specific job (*przyuczenie do wykonywania określonej pracy*), which is a rare form of apprenticeship limited to juvenile employees to prepare them for performing specific tasks in a profession, which lasts for 3–6 months ⁽¹⁹⁾ and ends with a verifying examination.

Figure 10. Juvenile employment schemes



Source: Pierwienicka & Wasilewska (2020).

Another type of practical training is the 'student apprenticeship' (*staż uczniowski*) programme, which started in September 2019. It targets students in upper secondary vocational programmes and first-stage sectoral programmes, who are not juvenile employees. It aims to prepare them for jobs as skilled workers or journeymen after they have been assessed and certified. The student apprenticeship is formalised by an employment contract between the learner and the employer. An annex details the arrangements between the school and the employer, covering all elements of the teaching programme and also selected elements related to a specific occupation that may not be included in the regular programme. Apprentices are entitled to a salary unless otherwise specified in the contract. The employer directs the apprentice to undertake theoretical training at school, which can be public or non-public, the latter established by associations, non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and craft guilds and chambers.

A third form of practical training is 'dual training', which can be arranged by schools in cooperation with employers. This involves structured alternation of learning in an education and training setting or learning in school with working at a workplace. This form of practical training could be considered an apprenticeship; however, it is based on a contract between the school and the employer, not between employer and learner. It is also possible to provide both practical and theoretical vocational preparation entirely at the employer's premises, in which case the apprentice does not attend school but may still obtain qualifications that result in a journeyman certificate. The

⁽¹⁹⁾ For juvenile participants in the [Voluntary Labour Corps](#) (*Ochotnicze Hufce Pracy*) (see Section 4.1), training lasts until they complete primary school but no longer than 22 months.

employer must ensure that those delivering the theoretical learning hold a pedagogical qualification, statutorily specified. In 2023, 1 829 apprentices in crafts were trained in this way (Table 9).

Table 9. Number of craft enterprises providing training and juvenile employees receiving vocational training in craftwork, 2023

Number of craft enterprises	Number of craft enterprises providing training	Number of juvenile employees			Theoretical training for juvenile employees	
		Vocational training	Apprenticeship	Total	School form	Non-school form
32 991	23 500	77 907	125	78 032	73 437	1 829

Source: Adapted by the author from ZAŁĄCZNIK NR 3 – zestawienie informacji oświatowych za 2023 r.

Apprenticeships and work placements are also available for school graduates. The graduate apprenticeship is designed to help learners gain experience and acquire the practical skills necessary to perform their jobs. It is based on a contract concluded between the apprentice and the employer accepting the apprenticeship. It may be completed by individuals who have completed at least grade VIII of primary school and are under 30 years of age. A contract for graduate traineeship cannot be concluded for a period longer than three months. The traineeship may be paid or unpaid (European Commission, 2023d).

Apprenticeships for adult learners to prepare them to perform a specific job are available in different formats. They are a form of support provided by the public employment services (PES) and financed by the [Labour Fund](#) dedicated to supporting the unemployed and jobseekers (Section 4.1.2). An unemployed individual undergoing adult vocational training is entitled to a scholarship amounting to 120% of their unemployment benefit. Between 2016 and 2022, apprenticeships for adult learners attracted over 1 037 620 participants (Ministry of Family, Labour and Social Policy, 2023b).

Graduate and student internship offers submitted by employers to PES can be found in the [central job offer database](#), which is also available as a smartphone app; internship offers are also published on the websites of companies and public institutions. Young people can also find an employer by themselves, who can arrange a tailor-made internship (European Commission, 2023d).

2.2.5. Other training programmes

2.2.5.1. Adult education and training

AET programmes are provided within formal and non-formal education systems.

Adults who have not completed full-time compulsory education can raise their level of education by attending schools for adults. Formal adult education programmes are approved by the head of the school or institution after consultation with its teaching council. These programmes are based on national core curricula for general and vocational education set by the education ministry and are designed to focus on LOs. The range of programmes offered in non-formal education is much larger than in formal education due to the wide diversity of institutions and adult learners.

Programmes can be delivered in public and non-public schools for adults, second-stage sectoral vocational schools, and post-secondary schools. In schools for adults, education is provided in the form of full-time education (classes are held three or four days a week) or part-time education (e.g. classes are held for two days every two weeks).

Adults can also obtain education in non-school settings, including public and non-public continuing education institutions and vocational training centres, where adults can take up upskilling and reskilling opportunities, on a full-time or part-time basis.

Each qualification required for a specific occupation can be validated individually through a vocational examination, allowing for more flexibility in obtaining and improving qualifications outside the formal education system.

Adults can earn vocational qualifications by completing training courses, such as a VQC or VSC or other training course, market qualification courses as part of the Integrated Qualifications System (IQS) or training courses offered by PES, among others.

VQCs are intended for people aged 18 or over irrespective of their level of education. They are based on the core curriculum for vocational education and cover the qualification specified in the course name. Participants receive a certificate of completion of the course and, upon passing the examination, a certificate of vocational qualification. VQCs may also be provided by entities other than schools and non-school institutions, in face-to-face or distance learning modes.

In the 2023/24 school year, 67 746 students followed VQCs of which 38% were women. The largest numbers of students were in professions connected with agriculture. 98% of the VQC learners were adults. The largest number of adult learners attended the courses at secondary-level schools and continuing education institutions (around 20% in each type), and the smallest - in post-secondary schools (9%). Most of the VQCs were provided by public institutions (68%) ⁽²⁰⁾.

VSCs are based on the core curriculum for vocational education. A course focuses on one part of LOs, identified within a given qualification, and covers the LOs corresponding to the additional vocational skills defined in the relevant school education legislation. These courses are also available in the distance learning mode.

PES play an important role in adult learning by providing direct support to the unemployed and jobseekers, offering opportunities to develop and acquire the skills that potential employers are looking for and providing various training services.

Under the Act on the promotion of employment and labour market institutions ⁽²¹⁾ (*ustawa o promocji zatrudnienia i instytucjach rynku pracy*) training courses organised by PES ⁽²²⁾ are among the main labour market services. The labour market institutions identified in the act coordinate and implement measures in this area.

Based on a regulation introduced in 2014, the type or form of support for the unemployed can be determined on a case-by-case basis; an individual action plan is developed in line with a given 'profile' of support (one of the three available) ⁽²³⁾.

Non-formal training may be covered by ministerial departments, but there is no general regulation in this area. Activities in this area are governed by provisions on, for example, continuing education in the school system, teaching activities of higher education institutions, professional development and training supporting specific groups of people, business activities, organisations or sectoral education.

2.2.6. Special training needs

After an audit in 2018 revealing educational weaknesses in units for students with disabilities, the Council of Ministers adopted the *Accessibility Plus programme for 2018–25* (2018–25 Programme Dostępność Plus) to coordinate activities aimed at improving the quality of life of individuals with special needs. The 2021–30 *strategy for persons with disabilities* was adopted in February 2021

⁽²⁰⁾ Data delivered by the Ministry of National Education

⁽²¹⁾ Labour market institutions play a crucial role in promoting employment, addressing the impact of unemployment and facilitating the functioning of the labour market. These institutions encompass PES, Voluntary Labour Corps, non-public employment agencies, training institutions (both public and private), trade unions, employers' organisations, organisations for the unemployed, NGOs and local partnership institutions. Additionally, municipal information centres, academic career offices, school career centres and NGOs dealing with labour market issues support the activities of labour market institutions.

⁽²²⁾ PES encompass labour offices at district and provincial (*voivodeship*) level.

⁽²³⁾ Further information on adult education is available in European Commission (2023c).

to strengthen the coordination of public policies and create a coherent framework for programmes and actions for people with disabilities, including VET learners.

The Accessibility Plus programme for vocational education includes developing and implementing a financial and organisational model for individual support for students with special needs, as well as providing ongoing support for teachers to accommodate students with disabilities.

The 2021–30 strategy for persons with disabilities includes education measures such as improving access to education and augmentative and alternative communication, supporting communication specialists, providing access to communication for students with disabilities, creating partnerships between educational institutions and employers, piloting support projects for learners with disabilities and training education professionals on inclusive education.

Students with disabilities and those who are ill, who would have difficulty in accessing school or are unable to take part in school classes at all, may follow an individual learning path, based on a relevant certificate ⁽²⁴⁾. Such a certificate allows them to take home-based classes or individual classes at a school or other institution.

Outstandingly gifted pupils may follow an individual learning programme. They study a chosen subject or group of subjects under the supervision of an appointed schoolteacher or academic teacher. The school assessment system includes specific rules for the assessment of the results achieved by such pupils and for presenting them with school certificates.

Education at a special first-stage vocational school is provided for students with mild intellectual disabilities and those who are socially maladjusted and at risk of social maladjustment. Students with mild intellectual disabilities can also study at a mainstream vocational school.

2.3. Vocational education and training governance

In Poland, VET is governed at three levels: national (ministries), regional (school inspectorates, mainly for pedagogical supervision) and county (schools administration). The [education ministry](#) is responsible for conducting state policy in education, from preschool to secondary education, including VET policy at all levels. It is supported by other ministries responsible for specific professions.

The education ministry sets national regulations for the minimum number of hours students must be in school; designs the national curricula and examinations; establishes criteria for textbooks; and sets guidelines and performance ratings for school inspections. It also sets salary levels for teachers.

Poland comprises 16 provinces, almost 400 counties and over 2 400 municipalities. Most major cities function as both a county and a municipality, with each tier of government having distinct areas of responsibility:

Most public education institutions in Poland are managed by local government units (*gmina*). Counties are responsible for upper secondary schools, including vocational schools, and schools for children with special needs; the regions (*województwa*) are responsible for schools of regional and trans-regional significance, such as groups of schools or vocational schools important for the regional economy. Central government units (usually ministries) often manage vocational schools, typically vocational and fine arts schools, but also schools for prisoners.

In each region, the education authorities appoint VET coordinators, responsible for supporting cooperation between schools and employers, and for promoting activities to develop vocational guidance and counselling in the education system.

⁽²⁴⁾ A certificate issued by a psychological and pedagogical counselling centre.

The Council of Directors of Schools and Vocational Education Institutions (*Rada Dyrektorów Szkół i Placówek Szkolnictwa Branżowego*), is a new consultative body set up in May 2024 (Ministry of National Education, 2024, May 15). It comprises school directors from vocational schools representing all regions of the country and different sectors. The council's responsibilities include initiating and issuing opinions on changes in vocational education and organising and supporting information and promotional activities in VET in individual industries, particularly in the employers' environment.

The district (*powiat*) authorities are not responsible for pedagogical supervision, as this falls under the jurisdiction of the head of the regional education authorities (*kurator oświaty*). However, the relevant bodies at the district level, particularly the board and head of a district, have various powers related to appointments to management positions in schools, including organising appointment boards, and adopting local regulations concerning schools and teachers.

Employers play a significant role in shaping national policy through the Labour Market Council (*Rady Rynku Pracy*) ⁽²⁵⁾. This body is made up of individuals appointed by the labour minister, chosen from trade union organisations and representative employers' organisations as defined by the Act on the Social Dialogue Council ⁽²⁶⁾; one representative of the Joint Commission of the Government and Local Government, representing the local government; and representatives of local government bodies and science with special knowledge and the authority of the council.

However, the involvement of the social partners in VET in Poland is limited. They offer advice to policymakers on necessary changes in VET, focusing mainly on improving the quality of apprenticeships and creating WBL opportunities through practical training arrangements. To improve cooperation between schools and businesses and to reconsider practical training provisions, a VET advisory team comprising ministers and representatives of employer organisations and trade unions was established in 2015 to propose measures. It is currently uncertain what the future holds for this VET advisory team under the new administration.

In 2016, Poland launched a system of [sector skills councils](#) to anticipate industry needs, and the 2018 VET reform act increased the role and involvement of social the partners and sectoral council representatives in VET delivery. The sector skills councils (*Sektorowe Rady ds. Kompetencji*) collect information from labour market stakeholders and recommend systemic solutions and changes in education; stimulate cooperation between education providers and employers; and provide support in identifying and anticipating competence needs in each sector. These councils are made up of a variety of representative organisations in each industry and organised into broad industry sectors. A [public call](#) on the organisation and operation of the sector skills councils is ongoing. The competition, open until 25 February 2025, will cover 24 of the 34 proposed sectors.

AET in Poland is a collaborative effort involving several ministries. The ministries responsible for education and labour play a significant role in AET, while other ministries are involved in skills development and non-formal education. For example, the ministry responsible for economic development supports the development of entrepreneurial skills, and initiatives to improve the basic skills of senior citizens are supported by the senior policy ministry and the education ministry. All ministries contribute to the implementation of lifelong learning policy, which encompasses AET.

⁽²⁵⁾ Legal basis set out in the Act of 20 April 2004 on the promotion of employment and labour market institutions (*Journal of Laws, 2023, item 735 (as amended)*).

⁽²⁶⁾ The Social Dialogue Council is a forum for cooperation between the government, employers' organisations and trade unions. It gives opinions on the assumptions and drafts of legal acts concerning economic and social policy, taxes, state budget, labour market, EU structural funds, and salaries and social benefits. Sejm of the Republic of Poland (2015, July 24). *Ustawa z dnia 24 lipca 2015 r. o Radzie Dialogu Społecznego i innych instytucjach dialogu społecznego* [Act of 24 July 2015 on the Social Dialogue Council and other institutions of social dialogue]. *Journal of Laws*, 2015, item 1240.

2.4. Financing vocational education and training

The main sources of educational funding are the state budget's general subsidy for local government units, central government targeted grants, local government units' own income and foreign funds, mainly from EU funds.

Vocational schools for young people, vocational schools for adults, lifelong learning centres, and practical training institutions are mainly financed by public funds, the education subsidy from the central budget. The education subsidy is distributed among municipalities, districts and provinces using an algorithm that is modified every year based on the responsibilities assigned to the different levels of local government (basically the number of learners in each type of school) and applying different weights for specific groups of students and schools, including vocational schools.

In Poland, 8% of all funding for educational institutions is spent on general upper secondary education and 12% on vocational upper secondary education (OECD, 2023).

Since January 2018, the coefficients for vocational secondary schools have differed for four sets of categories of occupations; the distinction is based on the cost of the vocational part of the education. Additional coefficients were added for learners in post-secondary programmes who obtained a vocational qualification diploma and for participants in VQCs who passed the state vocational examination (Ministry of National Education, 2017).

Education expenditure from the state budget and local government budgets reached PLN 106 300 million in 2022 (EUR 22 692.05 million)⁽²⁷⁾, which represented 3.5% of GDP. First- and second-stage sectoral vocational schools received PLN 1 597 million (1.5%), technical secondary schools, including art schools, received PLN 7 621 million (7.3%) and post-secondary schools received PLN 839 million (0.8%) (Statistics Poland, 2023b) (Table 10).

Table 10. **Distribution of funds for education by local governments (LGs) in 2022**

	Gmina LG	LG of cities with powiat status	Powiat LG	Voivodship LG	Total
	million PLN				
Total	51 441.8	36 623.6	14 200.6	1 523.1	103 789.1
of which spent on:					
Nursery and primary schools (a)	41 561.0	19 522.0	1 505.3	179.9	62 768.2
First- and second- stage sectoral vocational schools	45.1	567.4	984.7	0.4	1 597.6
General secondary schools	342.7	4 051.7	2 782.1	50.5	7 227.0
Technical secondary schools (b)	95.6	3 388.4	4 066.6	71	7 621.6
Post-secondary schools	0.3	473.6	176.2	188.9	839.0

NB: (a) Including pre-primary sections in primary schools and other forms of pre-primary education.

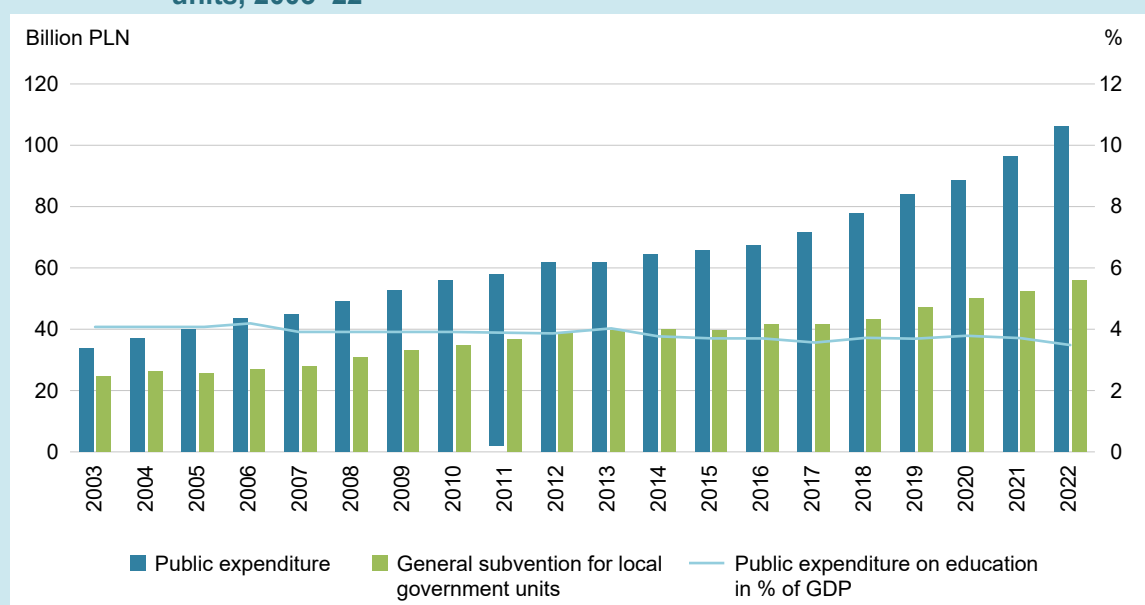
(b) Including general art schools leading to professional certification.

Source: Statistics Poland (2023b).

⁽²⁷⁾ The amount refers to public spending on education and upbringing (from the state budget and local government units). It includes educational expenses, which are transferred to the institution directly from the state budget and not by the local government (e.g. some schools run by the ministries).

A steady growth in public expenditure on and the general subsidy for education was achieved in the years from 2003 and 2022, with public expenditure accounting for a relatively stable share of GDP (Figure 11).

Figure 11. Public expenditure on education and subvention for local government units, 2003–22



Source: Statistics Poland (2023b).

The school education financing system includes public schools for adults and adult education institutions. Education in non-public schools and institutions may be co-funded by grants from the budgets of the competent local government units. Except for basic skills programmes, adult general or personal development programmes offered by public, private and non-school institutions, are not funded by the state budget. General development programmes may include postgraduate programmes and programmes run by third-age universities, open universities, community centres and NGOs. These programmes offer social or cultural development courses as well as sports activities. Official statistics for this type of programme are not available.

2.4.1. Funding of vocational education and training in the labour system

Funding for adult learning tends to focus on free formal adult education provided in public institutions. Support for non-formal adult learning through public funding is less well established, with EU funding programmes (such as the European Social Fund (ESF)) playing a key role.

The Labour Fund (*Fundusz Pracy*) is a state fund governed by the ministry responsible for labour issues; it supports continuing vocational education and training (CVET) for the unemployed or jobseekers organised by the PES. Contributions to the Labour Fund are compulsory for all employers, and the amount is determined by the Budget Act (around 2.45% of total monthly payroll). It also receives funding from the ESF.

As part of the reform of labour market institutions undertaken since 2014, the **National Training Fund** (*Krajowy Fundusz Szkoleniowy* (NTF)) was established. It forms a separate part of the Labour Fund, with 2% of the that fund allocated to the NTF since 2015 to support employers who invest money in CVET for their employees. The main objective of the NTF is to prevent job losses due to a mismatch between the skills of the workforce and the needs of a dynamic economy.

It is aimed at both employees and employers who wish to take advantage of various forms of lifelong learning. Any organisational unit, including those without a legal personality or that are a natural person, if it employs at least one employee, may apply for funding, regardless of the type of employment contract under which the employees are hired or whether they work full time or part time.

The budget for 2024 amounts to PLN 294.383 million (EUR 1 261.39 million), a 34% increase over 2023. Priorities for NTF spending in 2024, established by the Ministry of Family, Labour and Social Policy (hereafter labour ministry) in agreement with the Labour Market Council, aim to support training that addresses the following:

- (a) use of new processes, technologies and work tools in companies;
- (b) shortage of certain professionals in specific regions;
- (c) individuals returning to the labour market after caring for a child and members of large families;
- (d) improving digital skills;
- (e) automotive industry training;
- (f) individuals over 45 years of age;
- (g) employers employing foreigners;
- (h) financial management and crisis prevention in enterprises.

80% of the NTF funds are distributed to enterprises via local labour offices and can be used for skills needs assessments undertaken by firms; courses and postgraduate studies undertaken on the initiative of the employer or undertaken with their consent; examinations to obtain certificates confirming the acquisition of skills, qualifications or professional qualifications; and accident insurance in connection with education.

Training subsidies can be granted to companies employing minors for vocational or professional training. The amount of the training subsidy per minor depends on the duration of the training. The Labour Fund reimburses the employer (Section 4.2.1).

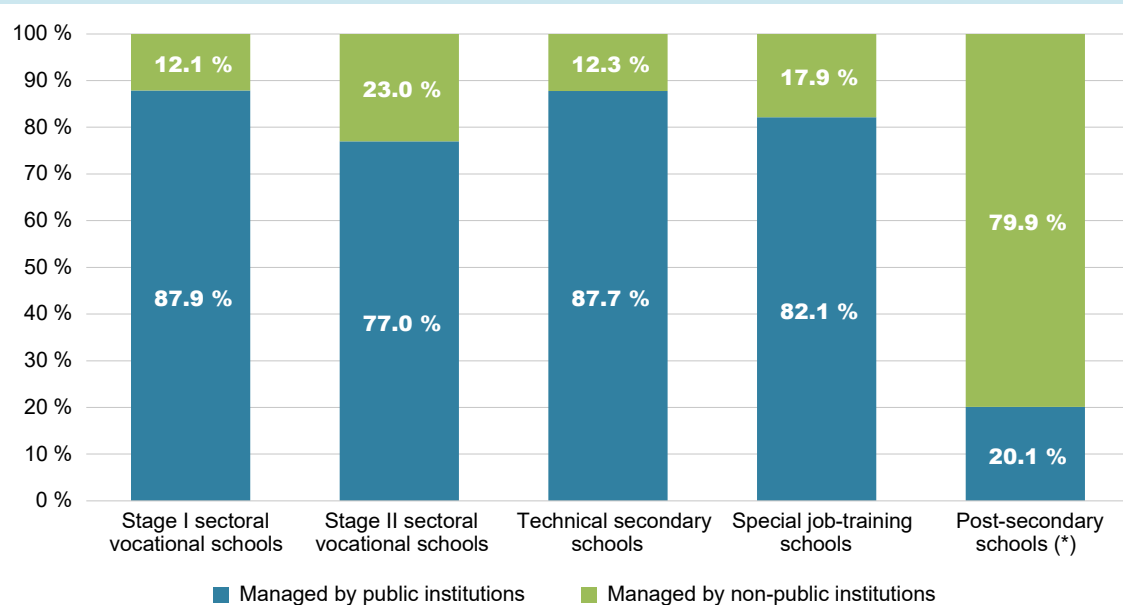
2.5. Vocational education and training providers

In general, schools and other educational institutions may have public or non-public school status.

Public schools are administered by the national authority (the competent ministry) or a local government unit. They can also be established by a special licence granted on request of a natural or legal person. They provide free education in the subjects included in the curriculum laid down by the ministry. School admissions are governed by the rules set out in the national legislation.

Non-public schools are set up and managed by natural persons or legal entities after the school has been listed in the register of non-public schools and other educational institutions, maintained by the relevant local government authority. They are allowed to charge tuition fees and admit students according to the regulations set out in their own statutes.

Figure 12. Structure of VET schools by type and managing institution in the 2022/23 school year



NB: (*) Including social work colleges.

Source: Developed by the author using data from Statistics Poland (2023b).

The share of non-public institutions increases with the level of education they provide. Figure 12 presents the structure of vocational schools by type and management institution in the 2022/23 school year.

VET providers can also be characterised by the education programmes they offer:

- four-year general secondary schools (*liceum ogólnokształcące*);
- five-year technical upper secondary schools (*technikum*), which are public schools (vast majority of schools) operated by local (county) and regional authorities, and non-public schools with public school accreditation operated by different providers (associations, companies, including commercial law companies, natural persons);
- three-year first-stage sectoral vocational schools (*szkoła branżowa I stopnia*), which are public schools (vast majority of schools) operated by local (county) authorities and associations and non-public schools with public school accreditation operated by different providers (associations, companies, including commercial law companies, natural persons);
- two-year second-stage sectoral vocational schools (*szkoła branżowa II stopnia*), which are public schools (vast majority of schools) operated by local (county) authorities and associations and non-public schools with public school accreditation operated by different providers (associations, companies, including commercial law companies, natural persons);
- SEN public schools (vast majority of schools) operated by local (county) authorities and non-public schools with public school accreditation operated by different providers (associations, foundations) at both primary and secondary levels;
- post-secondary schools (*szkoła policealna*), which are public schools operated by local and regional authorities, associations and national companies; non-public schools with public school accreditation operated by different providers (associations, foundations, companies, higher education institutions); and non-public schools without public school accreditation operated by different providers (companies – natural persons, commercial law companies);
- social work colleges (*kolegium pracowników służb społecznych*), which include public colleges operated by regional authorities and non-public colleges operated by legal persons.

The art education system in Poland includes schools providing education at the primary and secondary (post-primary) levels. In general, there are public and non-public schools and other types of institutions, such as art schools providing only art education; art schools providing, in parallel, art education and general education (based on the same core curriculum and principles as in general schools); art institutions (i.e. art centres where learners can develop their artistic interests and talents); and residence halls, where students receive care and education while they are attending school away from their place of residence.

The state supervises both public and non-public schools to ensure the quality of education and their compliance with national legislation (Section 3.4). However, supervision is more extensive for public schools than for non-public schools. The state guarantees that educational outcomes are recognised nationwide, allowing students to transfer easily between public and non-public schools of similar status.

There has been a steady increase in the number of special job-training schools over the last 10 years. In 2022/23 there were 560 such schools, providing education to 12 700 pupils.

In the 2022/23 school year, 234 800 students (0.9% more than in the previous school year) were enrolled in 1 287 post-secondary schools countrywide (a 5.2% decrease). As reflected in Figure 12, 8 out of 10 were run by private sector entities.

Continuing education in non-public schools that do not have public school status or in other non-public institutions is essentially private. The costs of tuition are covered by learners or can be covered by the employer if an employee is undergoing training at the request of the employer.

CVET providers can seek accreditation and access public funds for training activities by meeting specific quality standards. Accreditation ensures that VET programmes align with industry needs and provide relevant skills to learners.

Based on the data in the [register of training institutions](#) (*Rejestr Instytucji Szkoleniowych*) (available only in Polish), there are currently 13 569 providers. In total, 3 826 registered institutions provide training funded by the ESF; in the previous year, 2 928 institutions provided training courses commissioned by PES, and 3 609 provided support to unemployed people after the end of a training course; 2 797 hold an accreditation certificate or a quality label (European Commission, 2023c).

2.6. Vocational education and training teachers and trainers

As of September 2022, the [Teacher's Charter](#) (Sejm of the Republic of Poland, 1982) specifies two categories of job positions in the teaching profession:

- (a) appointed teacher – awarded after three years and nine months preparation for the profession (as a beginner teacher) and after passing an examination set by an examination commission;
- (b) chartered teacher – awarded after five years and nine months of practice and after having their professional achievement accepted by a qualification commission and attending an interview.

These categories have a direct impact on a teacher's basic salary level. Teachers whose performance is outstanding may also be awarded the title of honorary school education professor.

In the 2022/23 school year, nearly 57% of teachers were chartered teachers. For first-stage sectoral schools and vocational upper secondary schools, the share of chartered teachers was 62.8%; however, in post-secondary schools, it was only 26.1% (Statistics Poland, 2023b) (Table 11).

Table 11. Number of teachers at each education level and their share by category in the 2022/23 school year

	Number	Appointed	Chartered
Total	51 2102	18.4%	56.8%
Pre-primary establishments	108 844	21.6%	29.6%
Primary schools	264 780	18.4%	63.9%
First-stage sectoral vocational schools	12 995	17.2%	62.8%
of which special	2 841	17.2%	67.1%
Second-stage sectoral vocational schools	349	11.7%	62.5%
of which special	25	20.0%	64.0%
General secondary schools	51 790	14.9%	67.9%
For young people	50 212	14.9%	68.1%
For SEN learners	744	16.9%	65.5%
For adults	833	14.5%	58.8%
Technical secondary schools	54 603	14.9%	65.8%
of which special	297	13.5%	70.0%
Post-secondary schools	2 743	11.2%	26.1%
of which special	66	22.7%	51.5%
Social work colleges	13	15.4%	69.2%
General art schools leading to professional certification	2 680	21.0%	57.6%
Art schools leading to professional certification	1 866	25.5%	55.1%
Art schools not leading to professional certification	6 461	27.2%	48.6%
Special job-training schools	4 981	17.2%	67.8%

NB: Teachers without a career advancement degree are not included.

Source: Statistics Poland (2023b).

2.6.1. Vocational education and training teachers and trainers

The following types of teaching and training professionals work in IVET (Bielecki et al., 2022):

- general subject teachers;
- theoretical vocational subject teachers;
- practical vocational training teachers;
- teachers/pedagogues providing educational support to learners;
- teachers/psychologists providing psychological support to learners, teachers and parents;
- teachers / methodological advisers providing support to teachers;
- teachers/consultants who develop teaching materials and design and deliver in-service training courses for teachers and education managers;
- in-company trainers, nationally referred to as practical vocational training instructors;
- specialist in-company trainers (various groups of practitioners providing training as their primary or an additional activity).

Teachers in VET public schools are employed on the basis of the [Teacher's Charter](#), which specifies teachers' working conditions, duties, rights, professional development requirements and salaries. In non-public schools, teachers are employed based only on labour and civil law regulations.

Qualification requirements differ by the type of teacher – general subject teachers should have at least a master's degree, whereas theoretical vocational subject teachers are required to have at least a master's or bachelor's degree, including in both cases pedagogical training. Practical vocational training teachers must have the same qualifications as those required for teachers of theoretical vocational subjects, that is, a master's degree in a craft or a diploma from a pedagogical college ⁽²⁸⁾, or upper secondary school completion examinations (*matura*) together with a vocational qualification certificate and two years of work experience. They must also have a pedagogical qualification.

There are no specific initial training programmes that prepare teachers of general or theoretical subjects to teach in IVET schools/centres. Specific qualifications required of teachers in relation to specific types of schools and institutions are defined by an education ministry regulation (Ministry of Education and Science, 2023).

In all special schools (including IVET), teachers require additional qualifications relating to the specialist nature of the school, for example teaching learners with visual impairment.

Initial education for prospective specialists in continuing education and adult education is provided by some higher education institutions as part of degree programmes in the field of teacher education and non-degree postgraduate programmes.

There are no separate or additional qualification requirements for teachers working in schools for adults or adult education institutions within the school education system.

Individuals/trainers involved in adult education in institutions run by business entities outside the school education system do not have the status of teachers, and their qualification requirements are independently laid down by the entities concerned.

2.6.2. Trainers in companies and other workplaces

IVET students' practical training can take place with an employer or on a private farm.

⁽²⁸⁾ Such colleges no longer exist.

Table 12. Detailed specification of the requirements for training professionals in companies

Pedagogical qualifications	Education	Vocational qualifications	Work experience
<p>Instructors and tutors must have one of the following pedagogical qualifications or training:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Pedagogical training for practical training instructors that has been based on a defined curriculum framework and certified by the education superintendent Pedagogical training certified by the education superintendent with at least 70 hours of psychological, pedagogical and teaching methods and 10 hours of practical teaching methods. Pedagogical training entitling the participant to become a practical training instructor acquired before 6 January, 1993 Pedagogical training for teachers 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Vocational upper secondary programme (<i>technika</i>, ISCED 354), second-stage sectoral programme (<i>branżoweszkoly II stopnia</i>, ISCED 354) or equivalent Post-secondary non-tertiary programmes (ISCED 4) General secondary programmes (<i>Licea</i>, ISCED 354) Vocational upper secondary programme (<i>technika</i>, ISCED 354), second-stage sectoral programme (<i>branżoweszkoly II stopnia</i>, ISCED 354) in an occupation different from the one being taught Post-primary vocational programmes (<i>średnie stadium zawodowe</i> ISCED 354) Tertiary programmes (<i>dypłom ukończenia studiów</i>, ISCED 6 and 7) in the occupation being taught 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Vocational qualification in the occupation to be taught or in a related occupation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 3 years
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Skilled worker (<i>tytuł robotnika wykwalifikowanego</i>) or equivalent qualification in the occupation to be taught 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 4 years
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Not applicable 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 2 years

Source: Bielecki et al. (2022).

The regulation on practical vocational training ⁽²⁹⁾ specifies the requirements that practical training instructors are obliged to fulfil, which are pedagogical qualifications, education level, professional qualifications and professional experience in the job the trainer will train. The detailed specification of the requirements of training professionals are presented in Table 12.

2.6.3. Continuing professional development of teachers and trainers

Teachers have the right to participate in all forms of continuing professional development (CPD) and must engage in CPD according to the school's needs and as they advance to higher levels. Teacher CPD is funded from local/regional budgets, and school heads are responsible for assessing teacher CPD needs and creating school CPD plans.

Since 2019, every three years VET teachers must undertake 40-hour professional training at a company active in the field in which they teach. This requirement applies to both theoretical and practical vocational training teachers. Teachers who are employed in or run companies in the field they teach in are exempt from this requirement.

There are different public teacher training institutions at the national, regional and local levels, as well as numerous non-public teacher training institutions.

The public institution involved in teachers' CPD at the national level is the Centre for Education (Ośrodek Rozwoju Edukacji), supervised by the education ministry. The activities of this centre are aimed at improving the school education system and the quality of school education in line with national school education policies. It covers both general and VET teacher CPD, developing

⁽²⁹⁾ Regulation of the Minister of National Education of 22 February 2019 on practical vocational training, *Journal of Laws*, 2019, item 391 (with further amendments)).

teacher CPD programmes and educational materials, defining CPD priorities and implementing CPD programmes. Teacher training is also provided by higher education institutions.

Another form of CPD is offered by teachers / methodological advisers, who provide direct subject-oriented and methodological assistance; support teachers in their professional development; organise conferences, seminars and workshops; and identify teachers' needs for counselling and vocational training.

CPD is also provided at the school level via internal systems of professional development, including self-development teachers' council meetings, lessons, observations and study visits. Numerous educational resources (open bases) and CPD opportunities are available through ESF co-funded initiatives.

Organisations providing adult education outside the formal school system as part of their business are free to make their own arrangements to train and develop their staff and trainers. However, these institutions can seek accreditation from the head of the regional education authority (*kurator oświaty*) ⁽³⁰⁾. and then they have to demonstrate that they maintain high standards of professional development activities for teachers, contribute to their professional growth and offer relevant training opportunities.

⁽³⁰⁾ In accordance with the Regulation of the Minister of National Education of 29 August 2019 on the accreditation of continuing education in non-school settings (*Rozporządzenie Ministra Edukacji Narodowej z dnia 29 sierpnia 2019 r. w sprawie akredytacji kształcenia ustawicznego w formach pozaszkolnych*).

CHAPTER 3.

Shaping VET qualifications



3.1. Anticipating skills needs

Skills anticipation has been going on for several years in Poland, and various institutions in the country are involved in producing data and intelligence for skills anticipation, forecasting and foresight activities.

Skills anticipation in Poland is designed to assist the PES by providing labour market data and intelligence for policymakers at the national, regional and local levels. The outcomes of skills monitoring activities are also used to inform VET institutions about the demand for skills so that they can adjust their provision. In the future, the aim is to provide jobseekers with more data to inform their employment options.

The [2018 VET reform](#) introduced a mechanism for forecasting labour market needs through annual forecasts of the demand for employees in VET occupations. The forecast draws from various data sources, including Statistics Poland, the Education Information System ⁽³¹⁾ (Section 3.4), social insurance data and opinions of skills councils. The forecast is continuously expanded with new data and research.

The [annual forecast of the demand for employees in VET occupations](#) affects VET funding. Since 2020, local governments have received increased state subsidies for schools offering programmes in occupations experiencing higher demand. Increased funding is also available for employers involved in training VET learners (juvenile employees) in those occupations.

Stakeholders involved in skills anticipation activities include employer organisations, education and VET providers and PES. At regional and local levels, data and information are shared as part of the stakeholder engagement process, with increasing exchange of methodologies and practices from the national level to regional stakeholders.

A [VET graduate tracking system](#) is in place. The system uses administrative data sources from social security administration and available educational databases. It is supported by comprehensive quantitative and qualitative studies that focus on specific aspects of VET learners and graduates. In 2023, a software programme was developed to automatically generate school reports, sectoral reports on graduates in a particular sector in a specific region and regional reports on graduates in a specific region. These reports provide detailed information on the educational and occupational status of graduates, such as lifelong learning, type of work contract, average wages and average duration of unemployment. A new project funded by the EU until 2028 will expand the VET graduate tracking system to include the monitoring of specific groups of graduates, such as SEN students, foreign students (including Ukrainian students), craft and Voluntary Labour Corps students (Bielecki et al., 2024).

Poland is ranked ninth in the 2024 edition of the [Cedefop European skills index](#) ⁽³²⁾ (Cedefop, 2024), with an overall score of 63.7. In the last seven years, Poland's overall rank has risen from 13th place in 2017. This good position is mainly due to it achieving its best performance in the skills matching pillar, where it is ranked third. Poland's strongest performances in the indicators, compared with other countries, are in upper secondary attainment (and above) (87.1%, rank fourth) and low-wage workers (ISCED 5–8) (4.12%, rank fourth). On the other hand, its weakest performances in the indicators are in high digital skills (21.3%, rank 29th) and recent training (7.6%, rank 27th).

⁽³¹⁾ Electronic database system used to collect information about schools, educational institutions, teachers and students.

⁽³²⁾ Cedefop's European skills index measures the performance of EU skills systems in three areas: development, activation and matching. A score of 100 is the highest score, indicating a perfect performance, while a score of 0 is the lowest score, indicating the worst performance.

3.2. Designing qualifications

The [Polish qualifications framework](#) was referenced to the EQF in May 2013 and came into force in 2016. It consists of eight levels that correspond to the EQF and is based on LOs. The framework includes level descriptors for different types of education and training and for sectors, which allows qualifications obtained outside formal education and training, such as sectoral qualifications, to be more easily included.

In line with modern qualification systems, the Polish legislation defines qualification as a set of LOs consisting of knowledge, skills and social competences acquired during formal and non-formal education or as a result of informal learning; the achievement of LOs must be validated and formally certified by an authorised institution through a structured and objective procedure (Ministry of Education and Science, n.d.) ⁽³³⁾.

The Polish qualifications framework is part of the IQS ([Zintegrowanym Systemie Kwalifikacji](#)), along with the Integrated Qualifications Register ([Zintegrowanego Rejestru Kwalifikacji](#)) and quality assurance and validation arrangements.

The IQS describes and records various qualifications in the publicly accessible Integrated Qualifications Register and sets standards and procedures for confirming qualifications, including quality standards. The qualifications included in the IQS can be full or partial.

Full qualifications are awarded only in formal education and certify the completion of a specific level of school education or higher education, for example a *matura* certificate at the end of general secondary education or a master's degree.

Partial qualifications refer to a coherent set of knowledge, skills and competences that can be acquired after a relatively shorter period of education. They may be obtained through formal education or alternative forms of learning and training but must always be tested and certified through an independent and standardised procedure, for example a driving licence or a certificate indicating qualification as a statutory auditor.

Since 2018, the IQS has been open to all types of qualifications; non-statutory (market) qualifications ⁽³⁴⁾ can also be included in the system. Sectoral qualifications frameworks were developed between 2015 and 2023, covering 21 sectors from primary to industrial and service activities. However, they are still in the process of being included in the IQS.

VET qualifications and their related programmes respond to the classification of vocational education occupations. Each occupation can have one or more qualifications associated with it ⁽³⁵⁾.

There are over 230 vocational education occupations, including auxiliary occupations for people with minor intellectual disabilities, whereas the classification of vocational education occupations covers over 250 qualifications.

Qualifications are assigned to 32 sectors or branches, based on specific vocational skills or the extent to which such skills are used in performing occupational tasks. One, two or even three qualifications are identified within individual occupations. Moreover, five artistic occupations are

⁽³³⁾ The term 'qualification' is defined in the School Education Act, as set out in the [Recommendation of the European Parliament and of the Council of 23 April 2008 on the establishment of the European qualifications framework for lifelong learning](#).

⁽³⁴⁾ These are not based on legislation but on labour market requirements for sets of knowledge, skills and competences necessary for a particular type of job. They are always partial qualifications and may be included in the IQS following an official process (to confirm that they are adequately described and that the validation and certification procedures meet quality requirements).

⁽³⁵⁾ For example, a photographer is considered a single-qualification occupation, with the qualification being 'Image registration, processing, and publication'. On the other hand, a photography and multimedia technician is a two-qualification occupation, with the qualifications being 'Image registration, processing, and publication' and 'Implementation of graphic and multimedia projects'. Some occupations may require more than two qualifications. For instance, a construction technician requires four qualifications.

identified but with no qualifications specified. Young and adult learners can acquire qualifications one by one throughout the education process (not only upon finishing school).

Sectoral qualification frameworks translate the IQS principles into the context of a particular industry or sector, highlighting its unique characteristics and future development. These frameworks are included in the IQS through a regulation issued by the ministry responsible for their coordination. The inclusion process is initiated by the ministry responsible for the relevant sector, either independently or in response to a request from the entity concerned.

Entities engaged in economic, labour market, education or training activities can apply for a market qualification to be included in the IQS by submitting an electronic application. They must provide a description of the qualification and pay a fee of PLN 2 000 (EUR 466). The education ministry, in close cooperation with the applicant throughout the process, reviews the application within four months ⁽³⁶⁾.

The education ministry supervises and coordinates the development of the IQS, in cooperation with the IQS stakeholder council (*Rada Interesariuszy*). The Council includes representatives of employers, trade unions, industry organisations, NGOs, educational and research institutions and training companies. Their opinions have had a significant impact on the shape of many solutions used in the IQS.

3.3. Recognition of prior learning

Currently, Poland lacks a unified system for validating LOs from non-formal and informal learning. There are different procedures in different sectors, some of which have been in place for many years, while others are new or pilot programmes. In the last decade, Poland has been working on developing a system for the validation, certification and transfer of LOs and qualifications, as well as revising and standardising the terminology to ensure consistency (European Commission, 2023d).

The Act of 22 December 2015 on the Integrated Qualifications System encourages the recognition and certification of skills and knowledge gained through practical experience-based LOs. The act covers all four stages of validation (identification, documentation, assessment and certification) and introduces a formal definition of validation as the process of assessing whether an individual who applies for a specific qualification has attained some or all the LOs required for the qualification, irrespective of how they acquired their knowledge.

With the VET system now being more open to learning in non-school settings, in particular adult education and training, effective mechanisms are being developed for the validation of LOs achieved by adults through non-formal and informal learning.

In VET, as in general education, the possibility of acquiring qualifications via validation of non-formal and informal learning is guaranteed by law. This involves taking external examinations to evaluate the professional knowledge and skills gained through work experience. Individuals can take extramural state vocational examinations conducted by regional examination boards if they are over 18 years old, have completed a lower secondary programme or an eight-year primary programme and have at least two years of learning or working in an occupation relating to the targeted qualification. Learners completing a VQC can also take the state vocational examination. After passing this examination, learners obtain the same vocational certificate as mainstream VET graduates ⁽³⁷⁾.

Similarly, in higher education, individuals can get their prior learning recognised as an alternative way of entering a study programme or being exempted from certain courses. It is possible to earn

⁽³⁶⁾ Further information is available on the [IQS website](#).

⁽³⁷⁾ Further information is available in Budzewski (2024).

up to 50% of European credit transfer and accumulation system credits through validation of non-formal and informal learning.

For non-formal qualifications included in the IQS, general arrangements for validation are a mandatory component of the description of each qualification, alongside the LOs and assessment criteria. The IQS does not impose a single model for carrying out validation; each qualification has its own requirements for validation, and each awarding body has a certain amount of freedom in deciding the exact process and in creating its own validation tools (Cedefop, 2023d).

Generally, validation processes carried out within VET and higher education are usually funded by the state budget, the Labour Fund or the State Fund for the Rehabilitation of Disabled Persons.

Most examiners authorised to validate LOs come from either the formal education system or the craft system. In the first case, they usually are vocational teachers and practical training instructors. Examiners from craft chambers are predominantly entrepreneurs and practitioners, often serving as vocational and academic teachers and practical training instructors. For other non-formal and informal learning practices, examiners are generally approved representatives of the relevant profession (Duda, 2019).

The most common validation method is through a work activity test that assesses practical skills and includes a theoretical component, written or oral. Other procedures involve using a portfolio to demonstrate achievements and competences in a particular field or acquiring letters from past employers that confirm a documented experience of a specific activity during a certain period. Depending on the competences in question, validation can also involve a probationary period.

3.3.1. Recognition of foreign vocational qualifications

Poland is taking steps to streamline and simplify procedures for [the recognition of professional qualifications attained in the EU](#), with several regulatory changes taking place in the last five years.

Three main possibilities for the recognition of a foreign qualification exist in Poland, namely:

- (a) automatically, by virtue of a national law or an international agreement;
- (b) by the regional education superintendent (*kurator oświaty*) as a result of administrative proceedings (primary and secondary education);
- (c) by the Polish National Agency for Academic Exchange (higher education).

3.4. Quality assurance

The quality assurance system consists of the internal and external systems. The internal quality assurance system comprises operational procedures implemented within the certifying institution and followed by its staff, experts, candidates, etc.

For IQS qualifications, the external quality assurance system includes external supervision by an independent expert body approved for this purpose by the education ministry. The minister responsible for the qualification certified by the institution assigns this body to the certifying institution. This supervision includes monitoring the internal quality assurance systems of the institutions, carrying out periodic assessments of their activities and verifying that the certifying institution complies with all legal requirements.

The quality of market qualifications awarded within the IQS is ensured by quality assurance of the qualification's description, validation of LOs and certification. As per the legislation, all institutions that grant qualifications included in the IQS are required to undergo ongoing internal and periodic external quality assurance, which is supervised by the responsible ministry. The certifying authorities that issue documents confirming qualification bear the responsibility for designing, implementing and enhancing the internal quality assurance system. The validation and

certification processes, the related customer service process and the functioning of all entities involved in awarding qualifications are evaluated.

In the case of market qualifications included in the IQR, quality assurance is provided by external quality assurance entities (*Podmioty Zewnętrznego Zapewniania Jakości*). The external quality assurance entity for a qualification is assigned by the relevant minister from the list of institutions selected for a given area of qualifications. There are also internal quality assurance mechanisms in institutions awarding qualifications; they are required to perform internal evaluations.

Authorisation to issue qualifications is granted by various governmental and sectoral bodies, depending on the type of institution and qualification authorised under Polish law, or by the ministry responsible for a particular qualification. These authorisations ensure that the qualifications issued by these institutions are recognised and meet the required standards.

At the VET school level, the main component of quality assurance, whether internal or external, is the system of pedagogical supervision. This system consists of two mechanisms: inspections and support, which includes various forms of assistance aimed at improving performance, such as the exchange of information, the organisation of conferences and the provision of training activities. External pedagogical supervision applies to both public and non-public schools, while non-public schools may have their own internal arrangements for pedagogical supervision.

All vocational schools are required to participate in external and internal quality assurance processes. The education ministry establishes specific topics for external inspections and specifies the number of schools undergoing an inspection for each school year in the national school education policy agenda and by the regional education authorities in detailed pedagogical supervision plans. The head of the regional education authority (*kurator oświaty*) prepares an annual report on the results of the educational supervision conducted and presents it to the minister for education.

School directors are obliged by law to design and implement an internal quality assurance system. They should do this in cooperation with their teachers and have relative freedom in how they design and implement these systems, taking into consideration the statutory aims of inspections, the national school education policy agenda, findings from pedagogical supervision in the previous year and the specific needs of the school. The findings of internal inspections are considered in external inspections.

The system of external examinations and the Education Information System are important instruments for quality assurance in Poland. All IVET learners are required to take a state vocational examination or a journeyman's examination as a condition for school graduation, which helps to strengthen the role of the external examination as a quality assurance mechanism. All examinees complete the same tasks and assignments to determine whether they have achieved the LOs outlined in the core curriculum. The examination consists of both a written and a practical component and is held at accredited examination centres, schools, training institutions or workplaces. Trained examiners, registered with regional examination boards, assess the results.

The Central Examination Board certifies, evaluates and issues vocational qualifications, while eight regional examination boards organise external examinations. The Central Examination Board also analyses the overall test and examination results and conducts research in assessment, while eight regional examination boards organise external examinations. The results of external examinations are used in both external and internal quality assurance as part of pedagogical supervision. The education ministry supervises the external examination system.

The other important element in ensuring the quality of qualifications is the Education Information System (System Informacji Oświatowej), which allows the collection and dissemination of information on the formal general and vocational education system. The system is maintained in electronic form. Every school and education institution has to submit data on topics such as learners, teachers, facilities and expenditure. Schools submit data through a web application. Information is

collected regionally and then exported by regional education authorities to the education ministry. Some of this information is available to the public. The system was set up in 2004 but has been continuously modernised.

CHAPTER 4.

Promoting VET participation



Increasing the attractiveness of and enrolment in VET and strengthening national and international cooperation in VET are at the heart of the objectives set out in the [vocational education and training action plan for 2022–25](#). Various measures and incentives have been introduced to achieve these goals. Poland hosted [national competitions and EuroSkills 2023](#) and participated in WorldSkills. It also launched a [competition](#) to select the best vocational education teachers in 2022. These events are also expected to promote cooperation between VET schools/centres and employers and improve the skills of VET teachers.

4.1. Incentives for learners

There are several types of incentives for learners to follow a programme of studies that are valid throughout the country.

Families are entitled to various benefits, partially covering the costs of raising and educating a child. Some are linked to the family's income falling below a certain threshold or to family's social problems (temporary material difficulties, for example, caused by a sudden event like the death of a parent). Other incentives benefit all learners, regardless of family income, like the [Good Start](#) or [Family 800+](#) programmes.

Schools have the authority to offer scholarships to IVET learners with good grades. Additionally, scholarships also funded by the prime minister's office, the ministry responsible for culture and national heritage and the education ministry for all school learners, including those enrolled in IVET. It should be noted that less than 1% of all VET learners receive scholarships for their academic performance annually. In addition to national initiatives, some EU-funded regional programmes also provide scholarships to boost VET participation.

Juvenile employees receive a salary. The amount of their salary ranges from EUR 124 to EUR 140 per month and cannot be less than 8% (in the first year of training), 9% (in the second year of training) and 10% (in the third year of training) of the average monthly salary in the previous quarter (Council of Ministers of the Republic of Poland, 2023). Employers also pay mandatory social insurance based on the salary paid to the juvenile employee.

Young people at risk of social exclusion and the unemployed under the age of 25 are the target group of the [Voluntary Labour Corps](#) (Ochotnicze Hufce Pracy), an organisation under the labour ministry. Available in over 700 units, the Voluntary Labour Corps programme offers young people over 15 who have not completed lower secondary education the opportunity to finish their education and acquire vocational qualifications before beginning adult life. It also caters for individuals aged 18–25, including jobseekers or those who wish to be retrained or are unemployed, school graduates and students.

The Voluntary Labour Corps provides training in 60 occupations in its own workshops or on-the-job training with an employer. All learners without an income or on a low income receive free board and lodging during their training as well as guidance and pedagogical support. Other services provided by the corps agencies are individual psychological support, group workshops on active job-seeking, vocational courses, vocational courses leading to certified qualifications, language courses, entrepreneurship courses, and assistance in finding jobs and organising traineeships offered by employers.

4.1.1. International mobility

Various programmes and institutions, including individual schools through bilateral agreements with foreign institutions, promote and support international mobility at national and regional levels.

The main mobility programme in VET is Erasmus+. Erasmus+ facilitates the movement of VET students/apprentices and teaching staff to gain international experience, including new skills or languages, for periods ranging from two weeks to one year. Furthermore, Erasmus+ enables VET institutions to build valuable partnerships with organisations and enterprises, fostering strong links with the labour market.

The 2024 Erasmus+ call saw 1 392 contracted mobility projects, an 8% increase compared with the previous call, a 25% rise in funding and the participation of 709 unique organisations. By the end of June 2024, 15 766 learners in the VET sector had already benefited from mobility projects abroad. In 2023, the number of projects was relatively similar to 2022, but there was a drop of 24.9% in the number of learners benefiting from mobility (this may change as data for 2023 are still provisional). In the 2021–23 competition years, the average duration of mobility projects was 12.8 days (Table 13).

Table 13. **Statistics for Erasmus+ international mobility projects in the VET sector, 2022–24**

VET projects contracted	2024 (a)	2023	2022	Change 2022–2023
Number of projects	1 392	1 289	1 283	+ 0.5%
Grant value (million EUR)	79.1	63.18	62.67	+ 0.8%
Number of organisations involved	709	661	638	+ 3.6%
Number of VET learners (secondary level)	15 766	21 845	29 105	– 24.9%
Number of VET staff (secondary level)	3 350	4 724	4 177	+ 13.1%

NB: (a) Data for 2023 and 2024 calls are still provisional. The numbers of learners and staff on mobility projects in 2024 reflect only the numbers until the end of June.

Source: Developed by the author using data from the Polish Erasmus+ national agency (Foundation for the Development of the Education System).

4.1.2. Incentives for continuing vocational education and training learners

The Labour Fund (Fundusz Pracy) supports various initiatives related to CVET, including apprenticeships, loans to cover training costs, training vouchers, scholarships for continuing education, or statutory training leaves for employees among others (see Table 15) ⁽³⁸⁾.

Adult vocational training financed by the Labour Fund can be organised in two forms: practical vocational training for adults, leading to a vocational examination or journeyman examination; and an apprenticeship for adults, which focuses on gaining specific vocational qualifications or skills needed for specific vocational tasks (Table 14). An unemployed individual undergoing adult vocational training is entitled to a scholarship amounting to 120% of their unemployment benefit.

⁽³⁸⁾ Further information on raising qualifications is available from the Ministry of Family, Labour and Social Policy.

Table 14. Features of the two forms of adult vocational training

Practical vocational training	Apprenticeship for adults
Lasts from 6 to 12 months	Lasts from 3 to 6 months
The curriculum considers the requirements set out in the core curriculum for vocational education or the standards of requirements that are the basis for conducting the journeyman examination.	The programme considers the standards of vocational qualifications available in databases maintained by the minister responsible for labour or the requirements in the core curriculum for vocational education.
It ends with a vocational examination conducted by the regional examination board, or a journeyman examination conducted by the craft chamber examination boards, a master craftsperson examination and a verification examination conducted by the craft chamber examination boards.	It ends with a verification examination conducted by the craft chamber examination board, a training institution entered into the register kept by the provincial labour office, or another institution authorised to conduct examinations. Apprenticeship for adults may end with a vocational examination conducted by a regional examination board if the apprenticeship programme takes into account the requirements laid down in the core curriculum for vocational education for a given occupation.
A participant in practical vocational training for adults who has passed the vocational examination or the journeyman's examination receives a vocational qualification certificate / vocational diploma or a journeyman's certificate, respectively.	An adult apprentice who has passed the examination receives a certificate recognising the skills acquired. A participant who has passed the examination receives a certificate of vocational qualification.

Source: Ministry of Family, Labour and Social Policy (2023c).

Internships and internship vouchers provide unemployed individuals with the opportunity to gain work experience and improve their job prospects. Participants receive a scholarship, as well as a certificate of completion and a statement from the employer describing the tasks performed and the practical skills acquired during the internship. The internship voucher allows unemployed individuals up to 30 years of age to be placed in a six-month internship with an employer of their choice. The employer must agree to employ the individual for an additional six months after the internship ends. The internship voucher is granted based on an individual action plan.

Training and training vouchers, financed by the PES, are intended for the unemployed and jobseekers and delivered as courses. The training usually lasts up to 6 months but – if the programme requires it – can last up to 12 months. Training for people without professional qualifications can last up to 12 months and – if required by the programme – up to 24 months. The provider must be included in the [register of training institutions](#) (Section 2.5). Unemployed individuals up to 30 years of age can benefit from a training voucher. This voucher guarantees that the unemployed person will be referred to the training opportunity of their choice and that the costs associated with the training will be covered. The local labour office issues the training voucher on request from the unemployed person. The voucher is granted and implemented based on an individual action plan and the likelihood of the unemployed person finding employment, paid work or starting a business. The PES determines the period of validity of the training voucher.

Scholarship for further education may be granted to an individual who is registered as unemployed at the district labour office and lacks professional qualifications. The scholarship is available to those who undertake further education within 12 months of the date of registration.

Co-financing of postgraduate studies enables unemployed people to deepen their knowledge and acquire new skills, thus increasing the jobseeker's chances on the labour market. The grant is available to unemployed people who are registered with the local labour office. These studies are conducted at a university, a scientific institute of the Polish Academy of Sciences, a research institute or a medical centre for postgraduate education, and they typically last for at least two years.

Examination and licence financing is available for unemployed individuals, jobseekers and those aged 45 and over and is provided by the district labour office based on individual action plans. Additionally, interest-free training loans from the Labour Fund are offered to cover training expenses for these groups. The Labour Fund also provides Polish language training for unemployed individuals and foreigners seeking employment.

Table 15. Training provided for the unemployed, jobseekers and employees aged 45 and over in 2023

Type of learner		Individuals who during the reporting period				
		Started training		Completed training	Found employment during or within three months of training	
		Total	Women			
						in absolute numbers
Total		30 193	12 312	29 607	17 647	
Of the total	Unemployed	29 460	12 017	28 881	17 594	
	Including people with disabilities	1 005	430	974	431	
	Jobseeker	707	283	704	53	
	Including	People with disabilities	198	90	180	11
		Those receiving training allowance	5	1	5	0
		Those participating in classes at the social integration centre	1	1	1	0
	Participants in training topics chosen by themselves	13 293	4 235	13 093	7 471	
	Participants in group training	14 317	7 266	14 088	8 466	
	Participants in training based on a training voucher	2 187	603	2 179	1 573	
	Participants in training based on trilateral training agreements	100	21	15	9	
	Participants in training partially funded by the Labour Fund	44	8	51	40	
	Workers and individuals engaged in other paid work aged 45 and above	362	147	367	0	

Source: Developed by the author using data from the 2023 report on registered unemployment in Poland.

In 2022, 3% of unemployed people took part in training programmes, while a year later this percentage was just over 2% (Department of Labour Market, 2024). Driving licence courses were the most popular form of training, followed by courses in ICT and computer use.

In addition to these forms of assistance available to the unemployed and jobseekers, there is a system of reimbursement of training costs for both employees and employers. The funding for this reimbursement comes from the NTF (Section 2.4.1).

All employees with any type of employment contract who take up training on the initiative of the employer or with the employer's consent are entitled to short-term paid leave for preparing for

and taking examinations, a minimum of 6 or 21 days depending on the type of examination / type of education and training ⁽³⁹⁾. These examinations must be related to the training undertaken. The employee must provide proof of participation in the required training by providing the diploma/certificate of graduation.

The employer covers 100% of employees' wages during the training leave. If agreed in the contract signed by employer and employee, the employer may also cover the cost of tuition fees, travel, accommodation and learning materials ⁽⁴⁰⁾.

No government bodies or agencies are involved in the organisation of training leave in Poland, and there are no data available on the scale of this scheme.

4.1.3. Supporting vocational education and training provider capacity

Most VET providers in Poland are funded by the government through the state budget and/or the local authorities. The allocation of these funds is designed to provide greater resources to VET centres that offer programmes for occupations that are in high demand, based on employment forecasts for vocational education occupations (Section 3.1).

As of 2020, schools providing training in the occupations listed as having special meaning for culture and national heritage have also received increased financial support. The list of such occupations was established by the education ministry in consultation with the culture and national heritage ministry and includes 21 occupations such as blacksmith, beekeeper, watchmaker and yacht and boat assembler (Minister of National Education, 2019, September 11).

Providers can benefit from additional funding from several Polish government initiatives to support the development of digital infrastructure in education, including vocational education, in public and non-public schools. One of these is [Active Blackboard](#), a national programme aimed at equipping schools with ICT infrastructure and improving the digital skills of students and teachers, which ran from 2020 to 2024. The programme offered financial support to schools and their management bodies to purchase digital equipment, software and other ICT teaching materials. The total budget for the programme was over PLN 361.5 million (EUR 84 million), of which 80% came from the state budget and the remaining 20% from the school management units. In 2024, the budget allocation was almost PLN 55 million (EUR 13 million).

Another initiative focuses on improving the use of updated content, tools and resources to support vocational training. The [Integrated Education Platform](#) provides free e-learning materials such as computer visualisations, instructional videos, 3D models of machines and equipment, simulators and electronic manuals. These materials are created by experts in line with the applicable core curriculum for general and vocational education. The platform currently contains more than 800 vocational education resources.

The [Badge+ application](#), an initiative from the education ministry and Educational Research Institute, is currently being piloted to popularise digital micro-credentials in Poland and support national and regional stakeholders. This application helps institutions to create digital badges in the open badges standard and issue them to their clients, pupils, students, employees and contractors.

The [VET graduate tracking system](#) allows monitoring of the entry of secondary school graduates into the labour market or their continued engagement in education. The various reporting levels provide valuable feedback for assessing the quality of VET providers. This information is particularly useful, as schools have a relatively high level of autonomy in the design of VET programmes based on nationally approved core curricula.

The national reference point for VET quality assurance informs and mobilises stakeholders to contribute to implementing the VET quality assurance framework. The priorities of the network

⁽³⁹⁾ Employer can agree to extend the leave according to the company's internal regulations.

⁽⁴⁰⁾ [Cedefop Financing adult learning database: Training leave Poland](#).

between 2021 and 2023 were to reinforce quality assurance for all VET sectors; to strengthen quality assurance for all forms of VET delivery, including WBL, individualised and digital learning (e-based/blended learning), and their assessment/recognition/certification; and to improve quality assurance for non-standard forms of learning outside the formal education system, like validation of non-formal and informal learning and micro-credentials.

Lastly, the Polish government, supported by the national economic recovery plan (*Krajowy plan odbudowy*), is establishing a network of 120 sectoral skills centres (*branżowe centra umiejętności*). Tenders have been launched, and 13 centres are already operational. These centres are to be state-of-the-art facilities for education, training and examination, providing a space for innovative and sustainable cooperation between companies and VET at all levels. The practical and specific training in key sectors offered by these centres will provide access to advanced technology and innovative teaching methods, enabling learners to see the direct application of their studies in the world of work.

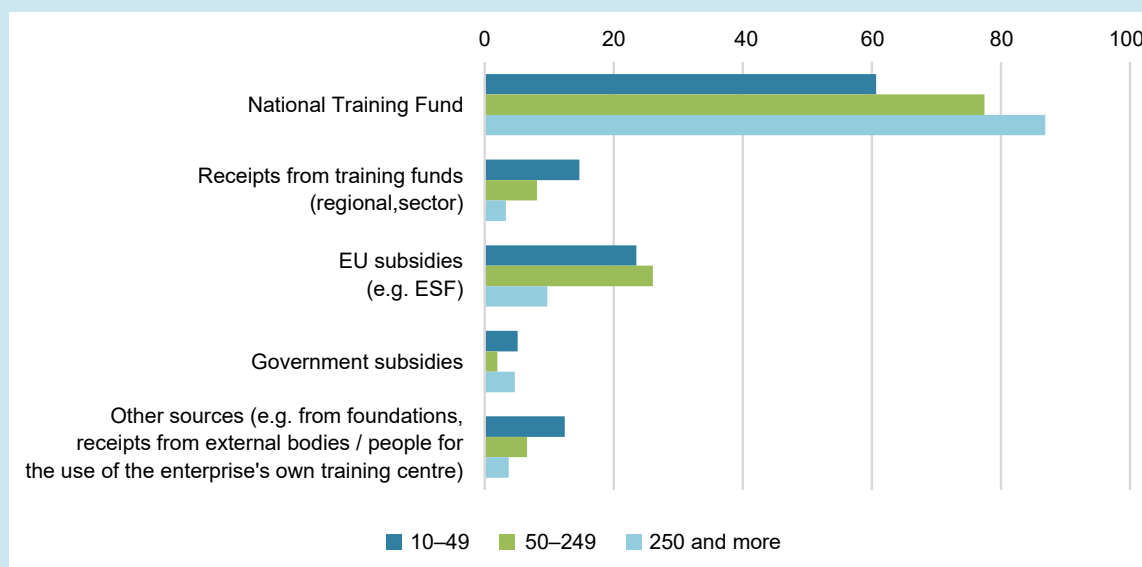
4.2. Incentives for training companies

The NTF (Section 2.4.1) supports employers who invest in employee training. By applying to a district labour office, an employer can receive funding that covers 80% of its employees' training costs. Micro-entrepreneurs can also receive a grant covering 100% of training costs.

Applications managed by the district labour offices must meet at least one of the priorities established annually by the labour ministry in agreement with the Labour Market Council.

According to the latest survey on continuing vocational training in enterprises, conducted in April 2021, 44 500 enterprises in Poland (40.9% of those surveyed) provided continuing vocational training. Among the various sources of financing, NTF subsidies were the most common, with 68.1% of enterprises benefiting from this funding, regardless of their size or type of business (Figure 13). External sources of financing covered over 3% of the course costs for entrepreneurs.

Figure 13. Sources of external funding for training by size of enterprise (number of employees) in 2020 (%)



Source: Statistics Poland (2022).

The larger the enterprise, the more likely it was to provide training and receive support from the NTF. Demand for training varied by economic activity, with the highest percentage of training (79.3%) occurring in financial services activities such as insurance, reinsurance and pension funding.

According to this survey, the costs of courses incurred by enterprises in 2020 amounted to PLN 3 355.0 million (EUR 756.48 million), which accounted for 1.0% of their labour costs. Enterprises spent an average of PLN 1 673 (EUR 376.96) per course participant per year.

The survey covered both continuing vocational training for employees and initial vocational training, which is juvenile employment for the purpose of vocational training. Only 6.3% of the total enterprises conducted initial vocational training ⁽⁴¹⁾. The main reason for offering this training was to prepare future employees to meet the company's specific needs (88.4% of enterprises).

For enterprises that did not provide training (59.1% of the total surveyed), three out of four stated that the main reason was that employees' existing skills and competences matched the enterprise's current needs.

4.2.1. Support for providing apprenticeships

Employers are responsible for covering on-the-job training costs, including apprentices' remuneration and social security costs. Employers may also cover the costs of examination fees for juvenile workers, as well as travel and subsistence costs (e.g. accommodation) for juvenile workers who attend complementary training at education and training centres away from their place of residence and work. To compensate for the costs incurred, employers may receive subsidies from the state provided they meet certain conditions. These conditions include giving the apprentice an employment contract, having the necessary pedagogical qualifications specified in the regulation on the vocational preparation of juvenile workers and declaring their intention to employ the apprentice for a minimum of six months after completing the training.

⁽⁴¹⁾ Initial vocational training participants are young people aged between 15 and 18 years employed for vocational training in a form of apprenticeship or job-specific training. This vocational training leads to formal certification with an occupational or journeyman title.

Through a grant for co-funding the costs related to vocational training (vocational preparation of juvenile workers), employers receive a fixed amount at the end of the training period, after the apprentice passes an examination. In addition, employers can apply for a grant for reimbursement of juvenile workers' wages and social security costs. Employer reimbursement can be up to only the amount set by law as the apprentice's minimum wage (Section 4.1). In 2022, PLN 381 million (EUR 81.94 million) was spent on the grant for co-funding the costs related to occupational training (vocational preparation of juvenile workers) and PLN 482 million (EUR 102.97 million) on the grant for reimbursement of young workers' wages and social insurance costs ⁽⁴²⁾.

The current co-funding system for apprenticeships does not encourage employers to participate in the dual system and take it seriously. This is due to the small amount of funding provided and to the various conditions that must be met to qualify for it. Additionally, the final subsidy for the employer, which is granted only after the apprentice successfully passes their examinations, and the reimbursement of apprentice wages and social security costs are managed by different bodies and regulated by two different ministries within the government. This complexity can make it difficult for companies and employers to navigate the system.

PES supports apprenticeships organised in companies. Apprenticeships are open to all unemployed people. In 2022, there were over 106 000 apprenticeships, with office and secretarial work being the most popular choice of occupation.

4.3. Guidance and counselling

Career guidance services in Poland are mainly provided by the education and labour ministries. These services are organised in line with the administrative structure of the education and employment system, with responsibilities divided between the national and regional levels (*powiat* and *voivodeship*). Funding for these services mostly comes from public funds and is outlined in national legislation.

The 2030 [integrated skills strategy](#) (*2030 Zintegrowana Strategia Umiejętności*) devotes particular attention to providing vocational guidance, as one of the main areas of action to be taken by many public institutions. The strategy emphasises the need to 'develop effective career guidance for children, young people and adults from all social and professional backgrounds'. This importance of career guidance is also highlighted in the 2030 human capital development strategy 2030 (*2030 Strategia Rozwoju Kapitału Ludzkiego*), which outlines key steps for its implementation. Poland's RRP includes initiatives aimed at providing career guidance and information as part of the overarching goal of supporting the development of modern vocational education, higher education and lifelong learning. One of these initiatives is the establishment of 120 [sectoral skills centres](#) (*Branżowe Centra Umiejętności*), which have as part of their mission supporting career guidance for learners and job placement for higher education students, doctoral students and graduates and promoting VET in a given sector.

Several institutions provide education and career guidance and counselling services to both young students and adults. Career guidance is offered at all levels of schooling, including vocational pre-orientation for preschool (ISCED 0), vocational orientation for grades I–VI in primary school (ISCED 1), and specific career guidance classes for grades VII–VIII in primary school (ISCED 2) and secondary schools (ISCED 3).

In the education sector, support for students in their choice of further education or vocational path is provided by schools, psychological and pedagogical counselling centres, centres of practical training / further education, vocational training institutions and academic career offices in higher

⁽⁴²⁾ Figures from data on [revenue and expenditure of the Labour Fund in 2022](#).

education establishments. The institutions of the public administration sector offering support in choosing a professional path or further education are labour offices, the Voluntary Labour Corps and social welfare centres. Career counselling services are also provided by NGOs, private career counselling centres and self-employed career counsellors, and private employment agencies.

Adults, jobseekers and people from at-risk groups are entitled to free support and guidance services provided by various PES institutions, including the district labour offices and the Voluntary Labour Corps. According to the Act of 20 April 2004 on employment promotion and labour market institutions, registered unemployed individuals have a legal entitlement to career guidance. Article 34 specifies that, if the district labour office cannot secure employment opportunities for unemployed individuals, it must at least provide other services such as career guidance.

4.3.1. Guidance in the education system

Guidance in the education system is currently regulated by the 2019 regulation on professional guidance (Ministry of National Education, 2019a). As of 1 September 2019, educational institutions, excluding art schools, have been legally required to provide careers guidance at all levels of school education.

Each school must develop a programme to implement the intra-school guidance system for each new school year. This programme should outline career guidance activities, including their details, methods, forms of implementation, time frame and the individuals responsible for carrying them out. It should also specify the entities the school collaborates with, such as parents, local institutions, employers, employers' organisations, economic self-government or other economic organisations, associations or professional self-government organisations. The regulation defines the roles of career advisers in schools and the educational topics covered at different stages. The focus is on four areas: self-discovery and personal resources; the world of work and the job market; the educational landscape and lifelong learning; and planning for personal development and making educational and career choices.

In primary and secondary schools, guidance is carried out during compulsory classes in general education and classes on the choice of education and profession conducted as part of psychological and pedagogical assistance, and also through career orientation visits (to employers' organisations, schools providing vocational education or continuing education centres and VET centres) to familiarise students with the working environment for selected occupations. In schools providing VET, this is also provided during compulsory vocational education classes.

Career guidance staff within the education system are provided with support from the [Centre for the Development of Education](#).

Public psychological and pedagogical counselling centres, including specialist counselling services, support schools in educational and career guidance activities. These centres are part of the districts' educational tasks. In addition to assisting schools, these centres offer information and training services on educational and career guidance for students, parents and teachers.

Educational and career guidance for students and adults are free of charge and are financed from public funds. In non-public institutions, career guidance services may be charge a fee.

4.3.2. Guidance in active labour market policies

The labour ministry is responsible for developing labour market policies aimed at reducing unemployment in accordance with the Act of 20 April 2004 on the promotion of employment and labour market institutions. The ministry focuses on measures to engage those who are not in the labour market.

The European employment services (EURES) network in Poland provides information and guidance to jobseekers and employers through personalised contact and counselling and also job

brokerage in the framework of European mobility. EURES network services in Poland are provided by EURES advisers and assistants from the province labour offices and job placement officers from the district labour offices, whereas coordinating the participation of the Polish PES in the EURES network and developing of the network's services remains the responsibility of the labour ministry.

The Voluntary Labour Corps has a network of 504 bodies where young people can benefit from free services such as vocational counselling and guidance, job matching services, workshops on active job searching, labour market schemes (e.g. under the Youth Guarantee initiative) and vocational training and information. The corps provides career guidance to people aged 15–25, but guidance is also available to people older than that on request.

NGOs specialising in educational and/or career guidance for selected categories of beneficiaries, such as people with disabilities, young homeless people in need of various forms of support and young people leaving orphanages or foster care, complement public sector services. Their activities are financed by public, private and EU funds.

4.4. Challenges and development opportunities

Poland faces several challenges closely related to VET, and some common to other modern economies, such as an ageing population, the impact of Industry 4.0 and the twin transitions. The COVID-19 pandemic exposed some weaknesses in the education system, as schools, teachers and students were not well equipped to adapt to the new forms of education required at the time (distance/hybrid education). In addition, the population's digital literacy is still below EU-27 standards, as reflected by Poland's low ranking in the digital economy and society index, and lifelong learning among adult learners remains low, intensifying the skills gap. The country has also been significantly affected by the armed conflict in Ukraine in that it has had to absorb a large influx of Ukrainian students migrating to Poland.

The latest results from the Organisation for International Development's programme for international student assessment show that sectoral school students perform relatively poorly in the skills assessed. For example, in those schools, the percentage of students achieving the highest skills in mathematical (levels 5 and 6) is close to zero, with only 1% reaching level 4. Furthermore, 66% of first-stage vocational school students performed below level 2. The situation is slightly better in technical schools, with 23% of students achieving the lowest and 6% the highest levels (Bulkowski et al., 2023).

Over the past decade, Poland has been working on transforming its education and training system through strategic documents, legislative reforms, programmes and projects. These measures aim to highlight the key role of skills in human life, develop a system capable of adapting to constantly changing external conditions and increase the education system's responsiveness.

The [vocational education and training action plan for 2022–25](#) builds on these measures. It outlines the actions Poland will take to implement [Council Recommendation](#) of 24 November on vocational education and training for sustainable competitiveness, social justice and resilience, and the [Osnabrück Declaration](#) on vocational education and training as an enabler of recovery and a just transition to digital and green economies.

Currently, with a very low unemployment rate and companies reporting great difficulty in recruiting staff, partly alleviated by immigrants, the country is focusing on making VET more attractive in society and attracting more students to VET programmes, expanding WBL in VET, developing flexible learning pathways and adapting qualifications to labour market needs.

To restore the prestige of VET, the [education reform of 2016](#) and the [VET reform of 2018](#), in their last implementation phases, aimed to improve its quality and effectiveness. These reforms

established flexible and clear learning pathways between primary, secondary and further education and between general education and higher education. Since then, core curricula for many professions have been updated, and new curricula have been introduced, particularly in areas related to the green and digital transitions. [National and international skills competitions](#), involving not only learners but also [teachers](#), aim to foster a positive image of VET.

A [systemic approach to vocational/career guidance](#) in schools has been designed, making career guidance classes compulsory in order to help learners make informed decisions about their future career paths. The education ministry has defined the objectives, conditions and methods for implementing and organising guidance and counselling. Other actions related to guidance are focusing on developing practitioners' skills and making effective use of EU tools such as Europass and Euroguidance. Career counselling materials for various age groups, presenting comprehensive professional information, have been developed, intended not only for specialists but also for independent use by students, their parents and adult learners.

Qualifications, core curricula and programmes need to be delivered using more attractive teaching methods and take advantage of the opportunities offered by ICT. New [e-resources](#) for VET, making them available in the public domain, or [micro-credentials](#) in the form of open badges are on their way. These measures provide students and adult learners with additional opportunities to improve their digital skills.

Teachers need to be trained and developed. [New legal provisions](#) were introduced in 2021 to expand the offer for their initial education. Other measures seek to attract specialists and motivate those already on the job, for example by [vocational teacher competitions](#). Teachers' CPD is currently [mandatory](#) and tailored to school needs, and [in-service training in enterprises](#) is also available for their development.

The [IQS](#) is being developed and further expanded to include market qualifications, with 250 such qualifications currently on the register. The IQS also allows accessibility, quality assurance and comparability as it establishes the standards and procedures for recognising qualifications.

Similarly, sector-specific qualification frameworks are being devised to identify and effectively structure the relevant skills needed in a particular sector. They aim to increase the transparency of qualifications and ensure that education and training programmes align with the job market demands.

The network of [sectoral skills centres](#), similar to the centres of vocational excellence, aims to address the specific needs of various industries. The state-of-the-art facilities have been designed to promote effective collaboration between businesses and VET institutions at all levels. They aim to develop specialised skills in relevant sectors for students, teachers, employees and adults seeking retraining in specific sectors.

With WBL now being compulsory in various VET-oriented programmes and offered to both young and adult learners, employers are being encouraged to play a more active role. This is particularly important now that upper secondary VET students in first-stage sectoral programmes are required to participate in student apprenticeships, although they are not yet of legal working age. Sector skills councils are providing a platform where stakeholders can express their competence needs. Other initiatives aim to increase employer participation in providing [practical training](#), identifying necessary skills and qualifications in the labour market, reviewing VET curricula and participating in [the examination process](#).

The [VET graduate tracking system](#) has been put in place to supply reliable data on the career paths of graduates, including all secondary school graduates. It is currently being developed further, with new features and reports designed for different levels and purposes to enable all stakeholders to find comprehensive information. This tracking system, together with annual forecasts of the

demand for workers in VET occupations, shapes the provision of VET by influencing the funding of VET institutions and directing more resources to occupations in high demand.

Monitoring secondary school graduates' careers is also a powerful tool for providing the reliable and accurate feedback necessary for planning strategic activities and assessing the quality of secondary education, particularly VET. It complements other existing mechanisms for ensuring the quality of VET and better matching education provision to labour market needs.

Poland has provided significant [support to Ukrainian learners](#). VET programmes, admission rules, examinations and recognition of former qualifications, among other issues, have had to be adapted to their particular circumstances. These support measures have been implemented alongside psychological and pedagogical support for all learners to help them overcome the challenges arising from the pandemic.

Abbreviations

AET	adult education and training
CPD	continuing professional development
CVET	continuing vocational education and training
ESF	European Social Fund
EU	European Union
EU-27	27 Member States of the EU
EURES	European employment services
GDP	gross domestic product
ICT	information and communications technology
IQS	Integrated Qualifications System
ISCED	International Standard Classification of Education
IT	information technology
IVET	initial vocational education and training
LO	learning outcome
NGO	non-governmental organisation
NTF	National Training Fund
PES	public employment services
RRP	national recovery and resilience plan
SEN	special educational needs
SRD	strategy for responsible development
VET	vocational education and training
VQC	vocational qualification course
VSC	vocational skills course
WBL	work-based learning

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- narodowej, etnicznej i językowej uczniów należących do mniejszości narodowych i etnicznych oraz społeczności posługującej się językiem regionalnym). [Regulation of the Minister of National Education of 2 February 2024 amending the regulation on the conditions and manner of performing tasks by kindergartens, schools, and public institutions enabling maintaining the sense of national, ethnic, and linguistic identity of students belonging to national and ethnic minorities and the community using a regional language]. *Journal of Laws*, 2024, item 144
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Coordination Point for Polish and European Qualifications Framework

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ESF programmes in Poland

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IQS

Labour Fund

Ministry of Family, Labour and Social Policy

Ministry of National Education

Ministry of Science and Higher Education

National Training Fund

Ochotnicze Hufce Pracy [Voluntary Labour Corps]

PARP Centrum Rozwoju Małych i Średnich Przedsiębiorstw [Centre for the Development of Small and Medium-sized Enterprises]

Public employment services

ReferNet Poland

Register of training institutions

Regulated professions database

Sectoral competence councils

Sectoral qualifications framework web information

Sector skills centres

System for monitoring the professional and educational pathways of vocational school graduates

Voluntary Labour Corps

Vocational education and training in Poland

Short description

This short description of vocational education and training (VET) in Poland provides an insight into its distinctive features and highlights developments in and challenges for the system. In Poland VET is offered at upper secondary, post-secondary and higher vocational levels for young people and adults, with different types of work-based learning schemes available during or after their studies. VET qualifications and their related programmes correspond to the classification of vocational education occupations. Each occupation can have one or more associated qualifications. The Integrated Qualifications System describes and records qualifications acquired within and outside the education system.

The arrival of refugees due to the armed conflict in Ukraine is adding to existing challenges, such as skill mismatches and shortages. The country is focusing on making VET more attractive to society and increasing the number of students enrolled in VET programmes. Measures include expanding work-based learning, developing flexible learning pathways and aligning qualifications with labour market needs.

4221 EN – TI-01-25-002-EN-N – doi:10.2801/2044850



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