



CEDEFOP

European Centre for the Development
of Vocational Training



European Training Foundation

Towards EU priorities in VET

2021-25 progress: insights from monitoring and analysis

POLICY BRIEF



POLICY BACKGROUND





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The first ever [Council recommendation on vocational education and training \(VET\) for sustainable competitiveness, social fairness and resilience](#) (hereafter, the VET recommendation), along with the [Osnabrück Declaration](#), launched the current policy cycle in 2020. Combined with other strategic documents – such as the [European Social Pillar Action Plan](#), the [EU Skills Agenda](#) and the [Pact for Skills](#) – they have reinvigorated the Copenhagen Process and encouraged countries to set ambitious [national plans](#) to implement common VET priorities up to 2030.

Cedefop and the ETF have a long-term mandate and expertise in following the implementation of EU common priorities in VET, which were reaffirmed in the [Council recommendation on VET](#) priorities and the [Osnabrück Declaration](#) in 2020. Since then, they have conducted ‘integrated monitoring’, a European Commission initiative agreed upon by the Advisory Committee for Vocational Training (ACVT), covering the priorities of both documents.

This policy brief summarises evidence from Cedefop’s and ETF’s monitoring and analysis of 2021–25 policy developments ⁽¹⁾ in national implementation plans (NIPs). Since 2021, about 500 measures, policies and initiatives have been launched across the [EU-27, Norway and Iceland](#) (EU-27+), and five candidate countries (CCs) ⁽²⁾ to create agile and flexible, excellent and inclusive, attractive and quality-assured VET systems. Countries have built on ongoing reforms, national strategies for VET, skills, youth and employment, as well as reform programmes under the European Semester and Recovery and Resilience Plans.

The policy brief highlights current practices and signals future policy directions in alignment with the latest EU-level policy initiatives.

⁽¹⁾ A policy development (PD) is an action or a set of actions that policy- and decision-makers in a country take to (re) define rules, (re)organise structures, (re)shape or implement practices in VET and lifelong learning (LLL), including those supported by EU funding.

⁽²⁾ Albania, Montenegro, North Macedonia, Serbia, and Türkiye. Monitoring in Türkiye covers only two objectives of the Osnabrück Declaration.



...Countries have built on **ongoing reforms, national strategies for VET, skills, youth and employment**, as well as **reform** programme...

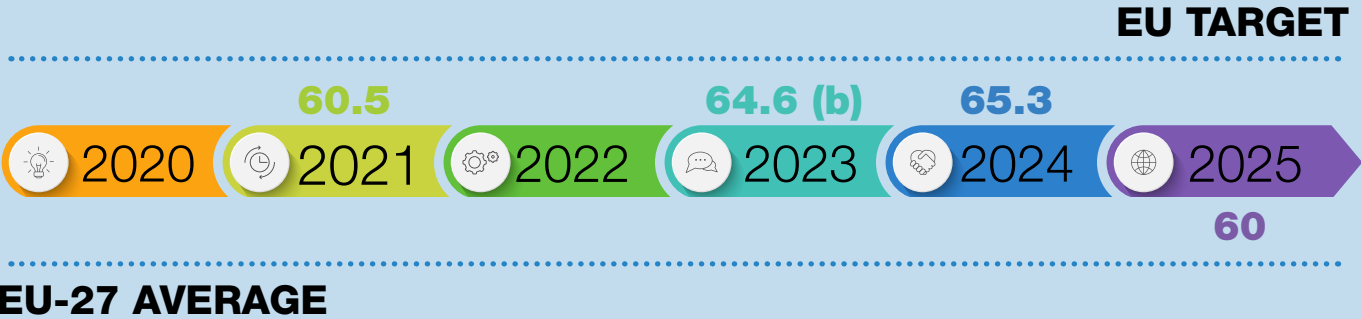


...**Cedefop** and the **ETF** have a **long-term mandate** and **expertise** in following the **implementation of EU common priorities in VET**...



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Figure 1. **VET students with work-based training for at least part of their studies (%)**



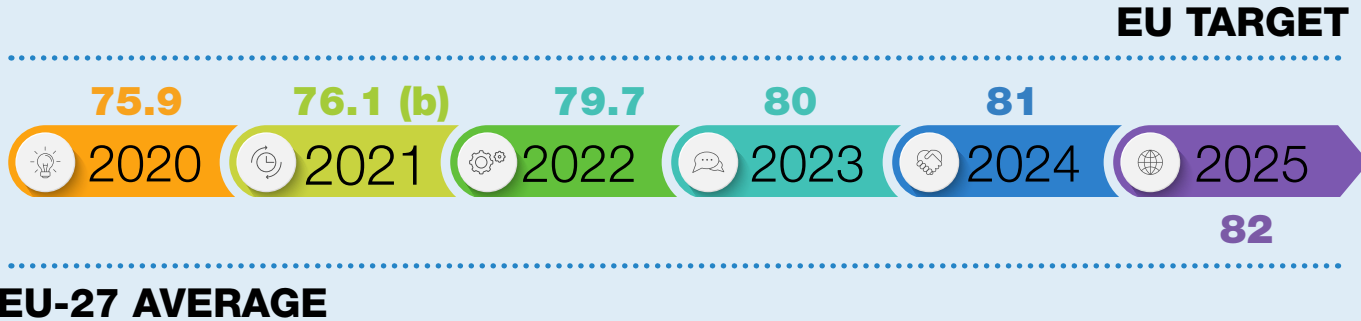
NB: (b) break in time series.
Source: Eurostat. (2025). *VET students with work-based training for at least part of their studies*. edat_ifs_9919 [accessed 5.5.2025].

Box 1. **Progress in the quantitative targets of the VET recommendation (EU-27)**

The VET recommendation set quantitative goals for participating countries to be achieved collectively by 2025.

At the EU-27 average, the share of VET learners benefiting from work-based learning (WBL) exceeded the target (Figure 1), the employment rates of VET graduates were almost reached (Figure 2), while the IVET learner mobility rate targets need more effort (see [Increasing VET's attractiveness](#)).

Figure 2. **Employment rate of VET graduates (%)**



NB: (b) break in time series.
Source: Eurostat. (2025). *Employment rate of VET graduates*. edat_ifse_24 [accessed 5.5.2025].

EVIDENCE

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Making VET agile to meet labour market challenges

Making VET flexible and expanding lifelong learning opportunities

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VET underpinned by quality assurance



NIP implementation builds on solid planning and design

After designing and planning policy measures in 2021-22, countries made steady progress in implementing their national plans throughout 2023-24, continuing strategic reforms and policy developments across all EU priorities. In 2024, the focus shifted to implementation, while previous years focused on design and planning. Some countries approved key legislation or amendments to strengthen their national VET systems (Box 2).

Progress in implementation varies across EU priorities, with some advancing faster than others. Significant progress has been made in measures and actions making VET agile, flexible and innovative/excellent. Progress in NIPs implementation of measures on inclusiveness, attractiveness and quality assurance has been relatively slower, although this varies in CCs. EU priorities are interconnected, with most measures addressing several areas, e.g. achieving VET agility, flexibility and excellence contributes to making VET attractive. Some countries view making VET inclusive, attractive and quality-assured as an overarching priority and have not made distinct commitments, which may explain perceived slower progress.

In 2021-25, strong advancements were reported in modernising VET standards, curricula and programmes; enhancing workforce skills, reskilling and upskilling; strengthening lifelong guidance; embracing digitalisation and integrating technology – including AI – in VET; and reaching out and supporting vulnerable learner groups. In addition, three key trends have emerged in recent years:

- (a) strengthening links between VET providers and the labour market remains a priority;
- (b) integrating skills for the green transition and sustainability is increasingly important;
- (c) promoting the international dimension of VET is growing in the EU-27+.



...Countries made **steady progress** in **implementing** their **national plans** throughout **2023-24...**



...achieving **VET agility, flexibility and excellence** contributes to making **VET attractive...**



...In 2021-25, **strong advancements** were reported in **modernising VET standards**, curricula and programmes...



Box 2. Important legislation adopted in 2023-25 (EU-27+ and North Macedonia)

In 2023, Germany passed the [Act to promote initial and further training](#) (July 2023); [Royal Decree 659/2023](#) of 18 July reorganised the Spanish VET. Hungary introduced amendments to the VET Act and to the [Adult education Act](#), and Romania adopted the National strategy for adult training 2024-27.

In 2024, the [Higher VET Act](#) was published in Austria, while Bulgaria adopted a [law amending the existing VET Act](#). Germany passed the Vocational training validation and digitalisation Act ([BVaDiG](#)), and Greece adopted a [law to strengthen the national VET system further](#).

In North Macedonia, six important new laws were adopted from December 2024 to January 2025 allowing for implementation of many NIP measures: the Law on national qualifications framework (NQF), the Secondary Education Act, the VET and Adult Education Act. The Law on NQF provides for regular revision of the qualification standards, at least every five years. The VET Act introduced exam programmes for State VET matura for students finishing VET schools. It also regulates employer involvement in Regional VET Centres, dual education and work-based learning (WBL), career counselling, and guidance in schools.

Source: For EU countries: Cedefop, & RefeNet. (2025). [Timeline of VET policies in Europe](#) (2024 update) [Online tool]. For North Macedonia: ETF. (2025, forthcoming). *Monitoring the VET recommendation and the Osnabrück Declaration – North Macedonia 2025*.

Making VET agile to meet labour market challenges

The ability of VET to adapt swiftly to evolving labour market needs is key to ensuring attractiveness, innovation, inclusiveness, and quality assurance. The number of policy developments show that making VET agile and responsive to company skill needs has so far been a top priority.

A strong and ongoing trend in most EU-27+ and candidate countries is curriculum reform and modernisation, in line with the latest policies and evolving labour market needs. Work-based learning, including apprenticeships, continues to expand, strengthening VET's link with the labour market. Occupational standards, VET curricula and programmes are updated to integrate skills required for the digital and green transitions, key competences and transversal skills, ensuring relevant learning outcomes.

Revising and updating occupational and vocational standards and profiles, updating profession lists, and developing new qualifications often focus on evolving sectors (e.g. energy efficiency, ICT and digital, robotics) or sectors important for the national economies (e.g. tourism or social economy). These revisions rely on feedback from VET providers, sector skills councils, and social partners. Some EU-27+ countries continue their

work on establishing their skills intelligence or/and VET graduate tracking systems, with some CCs piloting them. While some already use skills intelligence and skills forecasts to shape VET, most still need to strengthen communication between skills intelligence – mostly led by labour ministries – and building VET policies – mostly the responsibility of education ministries.

In response to industry and labour market shifts, as well as EU strategic priorities, countries have been reviewing and adapting their VET curricula and programmes. While some countries regularly update curricula through legislation to align VET with industrial and economic advancements, in many others the digital and green agenda has driven these revisions. The digital transition is well underway, with significant developments in integrating both basic and advanced digital skills into curricula, and diversifying learning modes and new digital delivery formats. Compared to 2021-22, there have been more efforts towards greening VET in 2023-24, incorporating green skills into VET curricula and programmes as stand-alone subjects or cross-curricular. Some countries have been focusing on basic and transversal skills and competences that VET learners should acquire, e.g. in languages, STE(A)M, and citizenship.



...The number of **policy developments** show that **making VET agile and responsive** to company skill needs has so far been a **top priority**...



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Efforts to enhance work-based learning, including apprenticeships, have continued, building on pre-2020 work supported by the European Alliance for Apprenticeship. This includes refining legal frameworks, providing financial incentives for learners and companies, expanding apprenticeship to adult learners and higher VET/education, training in-company trainers, and appointing WBL coordinators in schools. However, the conclusion of many successful projects in the EU-27+ has raised concerns about their long-term sustainability.

Stakeholder involvement is crucial in achieving this priority. Countries continue emphasising multi-level cooperation between governments, businesses, VET providers, experts and the social partners, whose participation is stressed in most reported policy developments. Social partners play a key role in policy development and reform, curriculum development, quality assurance, funding and resource allocation, and providing career guidance. Employers contribute by identifying skill demands in revising occupational standards and VET curricula and making WBL possible. Meanwhile, trade unions in some countries advocate for learner rights, learning quality, and access and equality issues. Several countries have focused their efforts on building future-ready VET by strengthening the links between VET schools and companies.

Box 3. Modernising VET: Greece

Greece has been implementing its [2022-24 Strategic plan for vocational education and training, lifelong learning and youth](#) to reshape and rebrand its VET sector. Among other measures, [changing the governance structure](#) made stakeholder participation – i.e. the education ministry, other relevant ministries, employer and employee associations, chambers – mandatory for developing VET policies. The new structure also allows proposals for new programmes and curriculum adaptation to local needs. During 2023-24, occupational profiles and VET curricula were updated or newly created with active involvement from social partners. Several digitalisation actions took place: a digital platform to enhance e-learning provision for students and professionals; the digitalisation of the National Organisation for the Certification of Qualifications and Vocational Guidance, EOPPEP, and upgrade of its digital services.

Source: Cedefop, & ReferNet. (2025). [Timeline of VET policies in Europe](#) (2024 update) [Online tool].

Figure 3. Areas of stakeholder involvement in VET policies (EU-27+)**VET reforms and policy development**

Providing input and expertise
Participating in advisory bodies
Negotiations

**Alignment of curricula to labour market needs**

Developing and reviewing occupational standards
Designing and revising curricula
Providing WBL opportunities

**Quality assurance and evaluation**

Developing criteria and participating in evaluations
Developing feedback mechanisms
Identifying areas for improvement

**Funding and resource allocation**

Advocating specific funding allocation
Funding decisions
Providing support to programmes of interest

**Providing VET and career guidance**

Raising awareness
Advising companies, schools, learners
Supporting school to work transitions



Box 4. Preparing for the green transition: Denmark and France

In 2023, the Danish government set up the [Prepared for the future](#) reform framework covering the entire education system, from primary school to higher education. One of the measures – *Prepared for the future IV: more skilled workers for the green transition* – was launched in 2024. It aims at making VET more attractive to young people and includes significant investments in modern equipment, green teacher competences, and VET training programmes based on the latest technology, all in support of the green transition. The Danish government also invested in creating [climate VET institutions](#) that act as innovation hubs, fostering knowledge sharing across the VET system to advance sustainability and green technology goals. This initiative includes investment in modern facilities, advanced technology, and teacher training.

In 2023, as part of its [vocational secondary school reform](#), the French State and the regions accelerated the development of training programmes to support young learners and meet the demands of the green transition. A call for projects under the Skills and Jobs of the Future (*Compétences et métiers d'avenir*) initiative was launched to increase participation in VET programmes tailored to high-demand sectors in the green economy, to adapt digital and technical training platforms to green sector needs, and to support teaching staff in engaging in reshaping VET to the green economy priorities. Since 2023, the *Jobs Discovery* scheme, initiated in lower secondary schools, has been promoting career awareness related to the green transition, informing potential students about emerging opportunities in this field.

Box 5. Strengthening WBL and apprenticeship: Albania

To strengthen WBL and apprenticeships in VET, Albania has developed standardised mechanisms for business-VET cooperation, including the reorganisation of VET providers and establishment of School Development Units (SDUs) in charge of curriculum development, business-school liaising, career guidance, and student tracking. The country created a manual for quality school-business cooperation, trained business liaisons and in-company mentors, and signed memorandums of understanding between companies and schools. Since 2023/24, 26 VET schools have restructured their steering boards to enhance business participation, expand WBL opportunities, and improve VET offerings.

Box 4

Source: Cedefop, & ReferNet. (2025). [Timeline of VET policies in Europe](#) (2024 update) [Online tool].

Box 5

Source: ETF. (2023). Albania. & ETF. (2025, forthcoming). *Albania*.

Making VET flexible and expanding lifelong learning opportunities

Countries have worked to make their VET systems more flexible, ensuring access, learning progression, and lifelong learning for all. Greater flexibility improves inclusiveness and attractiveness by allowing diverse learner groups to progress at their own pace throughout their careers.

Most EU-27+ countries and some CCs have continued efforts to provide re-skilling and upskilling opportunities for individuals in employment, for the unemployed and those at risk of unemployment. Lifelong learning and increasing adult participation were central to many initiatives. To support these efforts, short-term training programmes – with financial support for specific learner groups – have been introduced. Aiming to make VET more inclusive, the target groups of these measures vary by country; they include low-skilled individuals, women, older workers, employees in shrinking sectors, or refugees and individuals of migrant backgrounds.

Modular programmes have become widely adopted in many EU-27+ countries, while more countries – including some CCs, though as exceptions – are implementing microcredentials in 2025 compared to 2020, particularly in continuing VET (CVET).

Several EU-27+ countries are exploring individual learning accounts and other flexible funding mechanisms to support lifelong learning. Financial and non-financial support is provided in some countries to companies that need employee training.

Validation and recognition of learning acquired in non-formal and informal contexts is essential in allowing learners to accumulate their learning throughout their careers for their professional and personal development. Most EU-27+ countries had national strategies, action plans and legislation in place before 2020, and have continued implementation. While most countries have established arrangements for validation, challenges remain – particularly in CCs – in establishing validation systems, including low trust in qualifications acquired through validation, difficulties integrating them into NQFs, low number of beneficiaries, and funding constraints.

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...Greater **flexibility** improves **inclusiveness** and **attractiveness** by allowing diverse **learner groups** to **progress** at their own pace **throughout their careers...**



...**Modular programmes** have become widely adopted in many EU-27+ countries, while more countries...are implementing **microcredentials** in 2025...



...**Validation and recognition of learning...** is essential in allowing learners to accumulate their learning **throughout their careers...**

NATIONAL STRATEGY FOR ADULT TRAINING

Box 6. Increasing CVET flexibility: Romania

In 2023, the Romanian government approved the National Strategy for Adult training 2024-27, followed by an action plan in 2024. The strategy aims to increase the adult participation in learning and training activities in Romania; it was shaped through active collaboration with national stakeholders, employers, professional training providers, social partners, regional employment agencies, and NGOs. Among its three pillars – cooperation, personalised learning, and learning culture – the personalised learning pillar focuses on flexible learning pathways, individual learning accounts, career guidance services, and incentives for employers and training providers to expand their training offer. It also foresees the integration of green and digital skills into all occupational standards and training programmes.

Source: Cedefop, & ReferNet. (2025). *Timeline of VET policies in Europe* (2024 update) [Online tool].

Box 7. Improving validation and recognition: Norway

In 2024, the Norwegian government developed a *White paper on integration policy*. Its measures include better recognition of prior learning to enable more individuals to complete upper secondary education, especially VET, under the country's introduction programme for immigrants. Several occupations were included in the approval scheme for foreign VET qualifications. The Directorate for Education started developing a national framework for adult of prior learning recognition and planning a national study. The influx of Ukrainian refugees highlighted the need for improved information and targeted measures.

Source: Cedefop, & ReferNet. (2025). *Timeline of VET policies in Europe* (2024 update) [Online tool].



WHITE PAPER ON INTEGRATION POLICY

Making VET excellent and innovative



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Enhancing VET requires modernising physical and digital infrastructure, making VET institutions sustainable and green, and establishing Centres of vocational excellence (CoVEs). It is also linked to improving VET's quality and attractiveness.

Many governments have made significant investments to support modernisation of VET infrastructure by renovating schools, constructing new facilities, and acquiring modern equipment. VET school modernisation often includes digital infrastructure and sustainability improvements, e.g. increased energy efficiency. Countries report investing in VET digitalisation, focusing on developing digital tools and solutions for learners, teachers, and trainers. This includes the development and use of online platforms for teaching, learning materials, VET information, guidance, and teacher training. In some countries, digitalisation strategies are included in VET provider development plans. The EU's SELFIE helps teachers assess their use of digital tools and technologies in their work. Countries also invest in digital infrastructure and, particularly in the EU-27+, in the integration of augmented reality and AI at the system level.

The establishment and development of centres of vocational excellence (CoVEs), funded by both the EU and national budgets, continue to drive innovation, reform and quality at regional and local levels. Designed to bridge the gap between VET supply and demand, CoVEs foster innovative culture at local, regional and national levels. They play a crucial role by strengthening the links with higher education, meeting local employer and labour market needs, supporting local businesses in technology and green initiative, offering validation services, and providing VET programmes, including re-skilling and upskilling. Compared to 2021-22, 2023-24 has seen significant progress in some countries, with an increasing number of CoVEs becoming operational.



...**Enhancing VET** requires **modernising** physical and digital **infrastructure**, making VET **institutions sustainable** and **green**, and establishing **Centres of vocational excellence**...



...Countries report **investing in VET digitalisation**, focusing on developing **digital tools** and **solutions for learners, teachers**...



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Box 8. Embracing digital and green transition: Germany, Finland and Montenegro

In Germany, a comprehensive [modernisation of the IT continuing training system](#) (IT-WBS) was introduced in November 2024. The new system sets standards and offers innovative approaches to further vocational training in the IT sector. Updated regulations improve career opportunities, offering attractive career paths to IT sector vocational training graduates, as well as lateral and side entrants.

In Finland, in 2024, the Finnish National Agency for Education (EDUFI) began developing a [monitoring system for the implementation of the national sustainability roadmap](#). It collects information on actions taken by VET providers and the realisation of sustainability efforts and competence development in VET.

In Montenegro, the Strategy for Digitalisation of the Education System 2022-27 aims at integrating digital skills into VET, prioritising students' digital competences, particularly among vulnerable groups. Standards for digital textbooks and instructional materials have been established, with nearly EUR 7 million invested in digital equipment and EdTech labs in schools, including VET schools. Special attention is given to ensuring equitable access in less developed regions in the north of the country.

Source: For Germany and Finland: Cedefop, & ReferNet. (2025). [Timeline of VET policies in Europe](#) (2024 update) [Online tool]. For Montenegro: ETF. (2023). *Montenegro*.

KNOWLEDGE CENTRES FOR VET



Box 9. Supporting VET excellence: Denmark, Ireland and candidate countries

Knowledge centres for VET have been established in Denmark in robotics and automation, welfare technology, process technology, craftsmanship and handi-crafts, craftsmanship and design, sustainable building and energy related building renovation, e-business, and data-based service development. Located in VET colleges, these centres collaborate closely with knowledge institutions, other colleges and relevant industries, with a strong focus on the green transition. A 2024 agreement secured EUR 3.6 million in annual funding from 2025 to sustain their operations, optimise and merge them.

In Ireland, the FET Colleges of the Future (CotFs) initiative is modernising further education and training (FET). Supported by capital investment, CotFs focus on high-quality facilities, FET integration, centres of excellence, and unified tertiary planning. CotFs aim to improve the perception of FET and lifelong learning in the Irish society and serve as community-based learning hubs, offering cutting-edge, quality and accessible education and training to learners, staff, employers and communities.

Many schools in ETF's Network for Excellence (ENE) are recognised as Centres of vocational excellence (CoVEs) in most candidate countries. North Macedonia has set up seven Regional VET Centres set to drive innovation, adult learning, validation of non-formal

and informal learning, and labour market collaboration. Since 2021, Türkiye has established 15 CoVEs, embedded within 14 VET schools covering 25 fields. These centres focus on professional development, work-based learning, and Industry 4.0 readiness. This initiative includes industry-owned CoVEs, fostering partnerships with social partners and sector associations, bridging the education-labour market gap.

FET COLLEGES OF THE FUTURE

Source: For Denmark & Ireland: Cedefop, & ReferNet. (2025). *Timeline of VET policies in Europe* (2024 update) [Online tool]. For candidate countries: ETF. (2023 & 2024). *North Macedonia*. & ETF. (2023 & 2024). *Türkiye*.

Increasing VET's attractiveness

Countries aim to make VET appealing to all learners by implementing measures across all EU priorities. Agile VET, built on a modern curriculum and focusing on future skills, increases its attractiveness, as does introducing flexible pathways into VET systems and institutions. Investing in flexibility and inclusiveness makes VET particularly attractive to vulnerable groups.

Efforts to improve VET's attractiveness started in 2021-22 and continued in 2023-24, with countries focusing on expanding VET to higher levels, supporting teacher and trainer development, advancing digital solutions, and improving lifelong guidance.

Teacher and trainer professional development remains one of the top priorities for all countries, and is set to advance under the [forthcoming EU teacher and trainer agenda](#). Most countries focus their action on continuing professional development (CPD) of teachers and trainers to align their skills with the digital and green agendas. Some countries are reforming their initial teacher training programmes to bring them up to date with modern teaching methods and pedagogies, and help teachers develop digital skills and digital teaching capacity.

Supporting teachers and trainers through the digital transition is central to teacher CPD in all countries. Training in digital competences and in the use of digital tools for teaching and learning is widespread, with some EU-27+ countries incorporating the use of advanced technologies. Countries continue working on developing online tools and resources to support teachers and trainers, while some promote staff mobility and internships in companies as part of CPD. Support for in-company trainers, particularly in small and medium-size enterprises (SMEs), remains an area for further development in many countries. While fewer countries report preparing teachers and trainers for the green transition, this is expected to increase, as green skills become further integrated into VET curricula and standards.

Some countries report teacher imbalances in VET schools, facing either shortages or redundancies. To address this, some EU-27+ countries have introduced measures to attract professionals from the labour market to teaching and to encourage young people to enrol in modernised teacher training programmes.

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...Investing in **flexibility and inclusiveness** makes **VET** particularly **attractive** to **vulnerable groups**...



...developing **VET programmes at EQF/NQF levels 5 and higher**...has become a trend...



...**preparing teachers and trainers for the green transition**...is **expected to increase**, as green skills become further integrated into VET curricula...

PERMEABILITY AND VET AT HIGHER LEVELS

To make VET programmes attractive, it is important to improve their permeability with other pathways, smoothen transitions between general education, VET and higher education. In some EU-27+ countries, IVET programmes are equally open to young and adult learners, and transitions between general education and VET are relatively easy. Some countries have also developed bridging programmes that allow VET graduates to enter higher education.

In the recent years, developing VET programmes at EQF/NQF levels 5 and higher (VET at higher levels) or professional programmes in higher education has become a trend, to meet the growing demand for highly skilled professionals in vocational fields. Employers increasingly value these qualifications, and labour market stakeholders play a greater role in higher-level vocational education, especially in expanding apprenticeships to higher education. However, in many countries vocational qualifications at higher levels remain outside formal systems, requiring further efforts to build equal trust to those received in formal academic settings.

Box 10. Establishing VET at higher levels: Austria, Norway and Serbia

After several years of piloting and consultations, Austria established higher VET as a separate education segment in 2024, aiming to consolidate the heterogeneous field and provide a legal framework for its recognition. The [Higher VET Act](#), adopted on 28 February 2024, came into effect on 1 May 2024, making qualifications more visible and better understood.

Norway published a *White paper on professional studies in higher education* in April 2024 with a second *White Paper on higher vocational education* expected in 2025. Key topics include internationalisation, management and financing, quality and relevance, and competence needs, to address a growing demand for skilled professionals, and to improve the quality of higher vocational studies. The Norwegian qualifications framework (NKR) is being reviewed to assess whether certain programmes should be placed higher on the NKR, aligning with the [Strategy for higher vocational education](#).

Serbia continues advancing qualification standards and higher-level apprenticeships. By 2022/23, 34 dual study programmes were available at 10 institutions, involving 95 accredited companies. Currently, nearly 700 students are enrolled in 54 dual programmes. A revised methodology for higher education qualification standards has produced 250 qualification descriptions.

Source: For Austria and Norway: Cedefop, & ReferNet. (2025). [Timeline of VET policies in Europe](#) (2024 update) [Online tool]. For Serbia: ETF. (2023 & 2025 forthcoming). [Serbia](#).





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Lifelong guidance and VET promotional campaigns help inform potential learners and their families about the skills, employability and career prospects VET offers, many of which are not always fully recognised and understood.

Lifelong guidance provides individuals with information, advice, interest identification, skills assessment, and career counselling. Strengthening lifelong guidance is firmly embedded in the EU-27+ VET and lifelong learning policies, influencing a broad range of EU priorities beyond attractiveness. Lifelong guidance plays a key role in measures on reskilling and upskilling pathways and validation of prior learning, all contributing to VET flexibility. When targeting specific learner groups, it also strengthens VET inclusiveness.

Countries continue improving the quality and availability of their guidance services by expanding access to guidance services to younger students and adult learners, and increasing coordination with VET providers and employers to keep guidance practitioners' skills up to date. Public employment services are gaining importance, while digital tools and solutions – including online self-assessment tools for learners – are being developed across the EU-27+. CCs are actively developing career guidance services, aligning with the Reinforced Youth Guarantee and their National Reform Agendas for the Western Balkans Growth Plan.

Countries continue to strengthen the international dimension of VET, with learner and teacher mobility in the EU-27+ playing a crucial role in boosting the EU's competitiveness, innovation, and cohesion, as highlighted by the [Union of Skills](#).

Box 11. Digital competences for VET teachers: Cyprus

In Cyprus, strengthening VET teachers' digital competences is a key educational priority. The [Digital Competences Development for Educators \(DCDE\) programme](#), led by the Cyprus Pedagogical Institute (CPI), aims to strengthen teachers' ability to integrate digital technologies into their teaching. The programme consists of one introductory and 10 thematic modules, delivered through a blended learning approach using the CPI's eLearn platform. Running until 2026, it targets teachers and school leaders across all education levels.

Source: Cedefop, & ReferNet. (2025). *Timeline of VET policies in Europe* (2024 update) [Online tool].

Box 12. Going the extra mile in career guidance and counselling: Serbia

Although not included in Serbia's NIP, initial steps toward a career guidance and counselling system began in 2024 as part of the Youth Guarantee, supported by the ETF. Work also started on career counsellor competence standards to establish a certification system. Youth organisations are being trained for Youth Guarantee outreach, focusing on guidance, training, and education opportunities.

Source: ETF. (2025, forthcoming). *Serbia*.



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While few countries have developed VET internationalisation strategies, most EU-27+ countries have been implementing [VET learner mobility](#) projects, primarily in IVET, with some initiatives for apprentices. Key measures focus on promotional activities, learner support, rights protection, improving mobility quality, and ensuring recognition of acquired learning outcomes. Mobility offers additional possibilities for learners and workers, prompting the EU to set ambitious targets: the VET recommendation aims for 8% of learners in VET to study abroad by 2025, while the [Europe on the Move](#) Council recommendation in 2024 raised the goal to 12% by 2030. Mobility rates have been increasing in recent years but remain below these ambitious targets ([Cedefop, 2025](#)).

National and international skills competitions are seen by some EU-27+ countries as important for improving VET's image and competitiveness. Competitions such as EuroSkills and WorldSkills raise European VET's international recognition, showcase students' skills, and inspire others to pursue vocational pathways. In 2025, Denmark will host EuroSkills in Herning, promoting VET and attracting young talent. The event will also feature discussions and endorsement of new VET priorities.

Box 13. Skill competitions: Croatia, Poland and Germany

Croatia's comprehensive [reform of its competition model](#) shows its commitment to improving attractiveness and international recognition of its VET system. Poland's emphasis on employer engagement in its [national SkillsPoland competitions](#) supports efforts to connect VET to labour market needs. [Germany's participation in these competitions](#) demonstrates its commitment to enhancing VET excellence and international cooperation.

Source: Cedefop, & ReferNet. (2025). [Timeline of VET policies in Europe](#) (2024 update) [Online tool].

NATIONAL SKILLS COMPETITIONS

VET promotes equal opportunities

Ensuring inclusive VET and equal opportunities remains a priority for all countries, preventing socioeconomic exclusion and attracting learners from vulnerable backgrounds to education and training, while addressing labour shortages. Inclusive VET supports learners with diverse educational needs, such as learners from migrant backgrounds, refugees, early leavers, NEETs (young people not in education, employment or training), and learners with disabilities. It provides equal education opportunities and strengthens employability and labour market participation, closely linked with VET flexibility, labour market alignment, and attractiveness.

Providing tailored support for these groups is central to national skills and VET strategies, reforms and action plans. Key initiatives include direct outreach and financial support, lifelong guidance activities, training in key competences, and teacher training programmes to support diverse learner groups and students with special needs.

Countries define target groups based on national contexts, focusing on migrants and refugees, early leavers, the low-skilled and unemployed, or those at risk of unemployment. Some EU-27+ countries

have introduced emergency measures to integrate migrants and refugees, e.g. Ukrainian refugees, into education and the labour market, through language courses, skills assessment, validation of their qualifications and prior learning, and career guidance.

Despite a drop in the rate of early leaving from education (from 13.8% in 2010 to 9.5% in 2023), differences among countries persist, making addressing it a priority for inclusive VET. Learners at a higher risk of early leaving often face multiple disadvantages, such as health and psycho-social issues. Targeted measures include apprenticeships for flexible learning pathways, and redirecting learners to programmes with financial support.

Efforts to address gender stereotypes in VET and the labour market have increased in the EU-27+, with some countries promoting STEM-related fields and green occupations for young women, who tend to be underrepresented (only 15.5 % of STEM IVET students are female). Despite growing awareness and policy efforts, gender inequality remains a pressing issue in VET. The new [STEM Education Strategic Plan](#) (European Commission, 2025) sets new 2030 EU targets for women in STEM fields.

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...**Inclusive VET** supports **learners** with diverse educational needs, such as learners from **migrant backgrounds, refugees, early leavers, NEETs,** and learners with **disabilities**...



...VET provides equal **education opportunities** and...**closely linked** with **VET flexibility, labour market alignment,** and **attractiveness**...



...Key initiatives include **direct outreach** and **financial support, lifelong guidance** activities, **training** in key competences, and **teacher training** programmes...

Policy measures also focus on raising the skills and employability of unemployed and low-skilled individuals. Various reskilling and upskilling efforts aim to reintegrate them into the labour market, increase their employability, and mitigate the negative impact of socioeconomic disadvantages.

RAISING SKILLS AND EMPLOYABILITY OF UNEMPLOYED AND LOW-SKILLED INDIVIDUALS



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Box 14. Inclusive VET initiatives for refugees: Türkiye

Türkiye has provided comprehensive support to Turkish students and young Syrians under temporary protection through programmes offering both educational support in vocational schools and essential social integration services.

The VET4JOB programme brought 135 337 new students, including 14 665 Syrians, into the apprenticeship system and supported 18 350 adults with vocational courses, creating paths to sustainable employment and social cohesion through 755 activities reaching over 57 000 individuals.

VET4JOB PROGRAMME

Source: ETF. (2025, forthcoming). *Türkiye*.



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Box 15. Addressing gender stereotypes: Austria and Spain

Austria has been addressing gender issues through various initiatives:

Just transition – action plan for initial and continuing education and training (2023). The measures proposed address labour market demands for skilled workers related to the green transition, while incorporating gender and diversity considerations. It focuses on girls, young women, individuals seeking retraining, unemployed people, those without school-leaving qualifications, socially disadvantaged groups and people with disabilities. It also promotes stakeholder skills on gender diversity and role model engagement.

Women entrepreneurs go to school. This project encourages female students to pursue entrepreneurial careers by connecting them with female entrepreneurs, fostering leadership beyond gender-typical professional fields.

Digital pioneers project (2023-24). Aimed at young women, this programme offers an eight-week basic training in programming, digital skills, business innovation and project management, followed by an eight-month paid internship. Participants gain practical experience through digitalisation projects, and are introduced to careers in the digital and green fields.

Spain has been making efforts to **overcome the gender gap in STEM fields**. The National Institute of Education Technologies and Teacher Training (INTEF) has been promoting STEM vocations among girls through information and female role models via the Scientix project and the ChicaSTEM website. The **STEAM Alliance for Female Talent, Girls on the Rise in Science** – a Ministry of Education, Vocational Training and Sports initiative – was developed to promote STEAM vocations to girls and young women. More than 150 companies and organisations have already joined the Alliance.

Source: Cedefop, & ReferNet. (2025). *Timeline of VET policies in Europe* (2024 update) [Online tool].

Box 16. Supporting the unemployed: Belgium (FR) and Albania

The French Community in Belgium supports unemployed individuals through various initiatives focused on skill development and labour market integration. Bruxelles Formation and FOREM provide vocational training programmes to help unemployed individuals acquire sector-specific skills: **work-oriented courses**, **language lessons in French, Dutch, and English**, and **in-company training opportunities**. Bruxelles Formation has also developed a **Precariousness plan** for trainees facing financial difficulties, offering tailor-made training pathways leading to employment.

In Albania, the Support for Continuous Learning of the Unemployed project offered tailored basic, literacy, and digital skills training. A one-year community work programme supported over 3 000 long-term unemployed individuals between 2021 and 2023 with mentoring, training vouchers, and other benefits. A 2022 decree established subsidised training via private providers, with 2023 guidelines prioritising ICT. A popular self-employment pilot in four regions offered nearly EUR 5 000 in aid, plus business training, with participation rates rising in its second year.

Source: For Belgium: Cedefop, & ReferNet. (2025). *Timeline of VET policies in Europe* (2024 update) [Online tool]. For Albania: ETF. (2023). *Albania*.

VET underpinned by quality assurance

Quality assurance remains a priority in VET, closely linked to excellence and flexibility. Most EU-27+ countries continue developing their quality assurance (QA) systems based on the European Quality Assurance Reference Framework for Vocational Education and Training (EQAVET), building on previous efforts.

Countries are establishing assessment/accreditation criteria, and developing self-assessment and external evaluation methodologies for VET providers. Efforts also focus on updating regulations, establishing new QA models, expanding QA procedures to work-based learning and qualification development, and developing QA procedures for CVET and adult learning to accommodate new providers and training programmes. While formal quality assurance of work-based components is still limited, most countries apply quality criteria when selecting companies and mentors for work-based learning and apprenticeships, with chambers or VET providers play a role.

Since 2021, EQAVET peer reviews have proved an important tool for international cooperation on quality assurance, increasing transparency in VET

QA across the EU-27+. From 2020 to 2023, 20 peer reviews took place, with 20 more planned for 2024-26, including one in a CC (Serbia). The host countries used the peer review feedback to finetune existing policies or inform upcoming policy reviews.

Peer reviews were seen as essential for improving countries' systems, deepening their understanding of other national VET systems and QA arrangements, and identifying common challenges. In some countries, peer reviews helped to improve stakeholder involvement, though challenges remain.

As part of the recently launched [Union of Skills](#) initiative, quality assurance in VET is expected to gain momentum, reinforcing high-quality education, training, and lifelong learning as the most effective ways to build skills for quality jobs and better lives.

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...Countries are...developing **self-assessment** and **external evaluation** methodologies for **VET providers**...



...**EQAVET peer reviews** have proved an important tool for **international cooperation on quality assurance**, increasing **transparency** in VET QA...



...most countries apply **quality criteria** when **selecting companies** and mentors for **work-based learning** and **apprenticeships**...



Box 17. Encompassing approach to VET QA: Montenegro

Montenegro has introduced a revised methodology to assess and improve education quality, refine evaluations, and ensure fair assessments across institutions. Developed through collaboration between vocational and general education institutions, the approach replaces separate assessments with joint evaluation teams for schools offering both vocational and general education programmes. A unified quality framework applies to all primary and secondary schools, with 13 VET-specific quality indicators aligned with the EQAVET framework to ensure comprehensive assessment. These indicators were refined through regional cooperation, harmonising quality standards.

Source: ETF. (2025, forthcoming). *Montenegro*.

Box 18. EQAVET peer reviews: Spain, Bulgaria, Lithuania

The first EQAVET peer review was hosted by the Spanish Ministry of Education and Vocational Training in 2022. The guarantee of VET's labour market relevance was the focus of the peer review in Bulgaria, with peers suggesting investing in dialogue with employers. In Lithuania, the role of teachers in VET's quality assurance system was put to review, with peers providing feedback on improvements to the Lithuanian certification system. Peer reviews support mutual learning, improved transparency and building of trust among EU Member States.

Source: Cedefop, & ReferNet. (2025). *Timeline of VET policies in Europe* (2024 update) [Online tool].



POLICY ACTION

In this section

Coordinating and sustaining policy effort and resource allocation amid political change

Strengthening stakeholder involvement from the labour market in VET and lifelong learning policies

Advancing digital and green transitions in VET

Boosting VET attractiveness and participation

Improving VET teacher and trainer competences and expertise

Expanding lifelong learning, reskilling, and upskilling opportunities





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Cedefop and the ETF's monitoring and analysis of the implementation of the European priorities in VET and lifelong learning across EU-27+ and candidate countries reveals tangible progress in implementing measures defined in their national implementation plans. Compared to 2021-22, many measures in 2023-24 have moved from design to implementation. Building on prior reforms and implementing NIPs measures, countries have advanced in aligning VET with labour market demands, tailoring individual learning pathways to attract more learners to VET, and expanding lifelong learning opportunities. Maintaining the progress made while aligning with new EU and national priorities and initiatives is essential.

Most current priority areas will remain central to national VET and lifelong learning agendas, while embracing the ambitious goals of the [Union of Skills](#) and the forthcoming EU VET strategy, aiming at making European VET more attractive, innovative and inclusive while boosting competitiveness.

While progress is ongoing, the following key areas require targeted action to transform policy intentions into sustained action by 2030 and beyond. These areas were identified based on NIP implementation and other relevant Cedefop and ETF research.



...Cedefop and the ETF's **monitoring**...reveals **tangible progress** in **implementing measures** defined in their **national implementation plans**...



...**Maintaining the progress** made while **aligning with new EU** and national **priorities** and initiatives is **essential**...



...Most current priority areas will **remain** central to **national VET and lifelong learning agendas**, while **embracing** the ambitious goals of the **Union of Skills** and the forthcoming **EU VET strategy**...

Coordinating and sustaining policy effort and resource allocation amid political change

Despite unprecedented availability of EU funding for VET reforms, countries still face resource and financial constraints. Many rely on EU financial mechanisms, such as the Recovery and Resilience Facility, Erasmus+, and the ESF+, and the Instrument for Pre-accession Assistance (IPA) for CCs. However, delays in funding availability can disrupt implementation, while uncertainty hinders policy planning. In addition, as VET modernisation projects conclude – such as those supporting centres of excellence or apprenticeships – regular operational costs must shift to national budgets and employers to ensure continuity and sustainability of the results achieved.

In this context, limited capacity for monitoring and evaluating fund usage remains a challenge. Assessing the impact of completed projects and integrating findings into VET systems often requires policy decisions or legislative provisions, which can be slow but essential. Shifts in policy priorities resulting from political changes can also affect measure and project implementation, as new governments may postpone or halt policy developments, delaying reform. Changes or restructuring in public administration can also result in unclear responsibility allocation among

ministries and agencies. It is essential for countries' commitments to be clearly communicated and upheld by all stakeholders.

To align VET better with current and future needs, and raise its attractiveness, countries must strengthen the coordination of their policy frameworks and their resource allocation mechanisms.

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...**Assessing the impact** of completed projects and **integrating** findings into **VET systems** often **requires policy decisions or legislative provisions...**



...It is **essential** for countries' commitments to be **clearly communicated** and upheld by **all stakeholders...**



...countries must **strengthen** the **coordination** of their **policy frameworks** and their **resource allocation mechanisms...**

Strengthening stakeholder involvement from the labour market in VET and lifelong learning policies

Many countries have advanced efforts to make VET systems more responsive to labour market needs, supported by dual VET, sectoral expert councils, and competence and excellence centres. However, employers continue facing difficulties in finding skilled workers, reporting skill mismatches between their demands and VET supply – a challenge that affects national competitiveness and growth.

Active involvement from labour ministries, public employment services, employer and employee organisations is essential to identifying skill needs and aligning VET qualifications, curricula and provision with evolving labour market needs. Their involvement from the early stages of shaping and implementing VET policies is crucial. Companies, including SMEs, play a vital role in providing high-quality apprenticeships, while WBL is crucial for ongoing initiatives to expand apprenticeships beyond IVET. Continuous effort and incentives, cooperation frameworks and in-company trainer support are needed to boost companies' engagement as active players in VET and lifelong learning.

Sectoral approaches have been instrumental in bringing VET and the labour market closer. Strengthening collaboration between sectoral employers and trade union representatives can help address skill shortages, particularly in sectors affected by the digital and green transitions, where companies urgently need upskilled workers and apprentices. Sectoral skill councils and partnerships are key to developing relevant VET standards, curricula and programmes.

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...stakeholder...**involvement** from the **early stages** of **shaping and implementing VET policies** is crucial...



...**Companies**, including **SMEs**, play a **vital role** in providing **high-quality apprenticeships**...



...Strengthening **collaboration** between **sectoral employers and trade union representatives** can help **address skill shortages**...

Advancing digital and green transitions in VET



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The pressure of responding to the green and digital transitions has been a major driver for VET measures to equip learners with future-proof skills. Initiatives include updating curricula, developing sustainability-relevant skills, enhancing digital competences, and investing in equipment and infrastructure. While significant progress has been made in integrating digitalisation in VET and lifelong learning, concerns remain over the relevance and quality of rapidly expanding digital and online learning. In contrast, integrating green transition skills into VET curricula and concrete sustainability actions by VET providers has lagged, though improvements have been observed. This signals a gap between policy ambitions and implementation, requiring VET systems time to address it effectively.



...The pressure of **responding to the green and digital transitions** has been a **major driver** for **VET measures** to **equip learners** with **future-proof skills**...



...**Concerns** remain over the **relevance and quality** of rapidly expanding **digital** and **online learning**...



...**integrating green transition skills** into VET curricula and...**sustainability actions** by **VET providers** has **lagged**, though **improvements** have been **observed**...

Boosting VET attractiveness and participation

Increasing the attractiveness of VET and promoting it as a conscious education and career choice has remained a strategic objective. Countries have implemented numerous measures, including improved lifelong guidance services, international mobility promotion, excellence through skills competitions, targeted marketing and communication strategies, and promotional campaigns. Attracting learners, including high achievers and adult learners, and improving public perception of VET as a future-proof option remains strong in national agendas.

Further work is needed to build on current efforts and continuously raise the value of VET and lifelong learning. This can be achieved through strengthening career guidance from an early age and throughout working life, demonstrating clear progression pathways to higher VET and higher education, and providing flexible learning opportunities and validation of prior learning. Increased targets for international mobility and investment in excellence through skills competitions can contribute, but consistent, systemic approaches to promotion are required to ensure VET is widely recognised for its quality and lifelong opportunities.

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...Increasing the **attractiveness of VET** and promoting it as a **conscious education** and **career choice** has remained a **strategic objective...**



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...consistent, **systemic approaches to promotion** are **required** to ensure VET is widely **recognised for its quality** and **lifelong opportunities...**

Improving VET teacher and trainer competences and expertise

All countries recognise teachers and trainers as key actors in providing high-quality, relevant VET. However, some struggle with teacher shortages and low motivation. Despite numerous measures for teacher and trainer CPD – including company placements, or training on digital literacy and green transition skills – the need for teachers and trainers to keep up with rapid sectoral changes remains.

Ensuring that VET teachers and trainers have the skills to teach modern curricula in fast-evolving fields, particularly digital technologies or the green economy, is an ongoing challenge requiring sustained investment, innovative approaches, flexible training solutions and high-quality digital learning materials. Expanding ‘hybrid teacher’ models that combine teaching with industry experience, strengthening teacher cooperation networks, and fostering a culture of continuous learning are crucial for the future development of VET.

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...**All countries** recognise **teachers and trainers** as **key actors** in providing **high-quality, relevant VET**...



...Ensuring that **VET teachers and trainers** have the **skills** to teach modern curricula...is... requiring **sustained investment, innovative approaches, flexible training solutions**...



...Expanding ‘**hybrid teacher**’ **models**...is crucial for the **future development of VET**...

Expanding lifelong learning, reskilling, and upskilling opportunities



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As societal and labour market needs evolve, developing comprehensive, quality-assured lifelong learning systems remains a priority for many EU-27+ countries. NIPs have emphasised reskilling and upskilling pathways, guided by the European Skills Agenda, the 2016 Council recommendation on upskilling pathways, and national skills strategies. While progress has been made, increasing participation in such programmes remains a challenge. Recent upskilling and reskilling initiatives have primarily targeted low-skilled and unemployed individuals, leaving employed workers less prioritised.

For lifelong learning to be effective, adult learning – including CVET – must address the learning and development needs of all learner groups. Lifelong guidance, validation of prior learning, and incentives aligned with training provision can contribute to learner support. Ensuring equal access to upskilling and reskilling pathways for all learners, particularly for those most in need, is crucial for building inclusive, effective lifelong learning systems that benefit individuals, companies and society as a whole.



...**developing** comprehensive, **quality-assured lifelong learning systems** remains a **priority** for many EU-27+ countries...

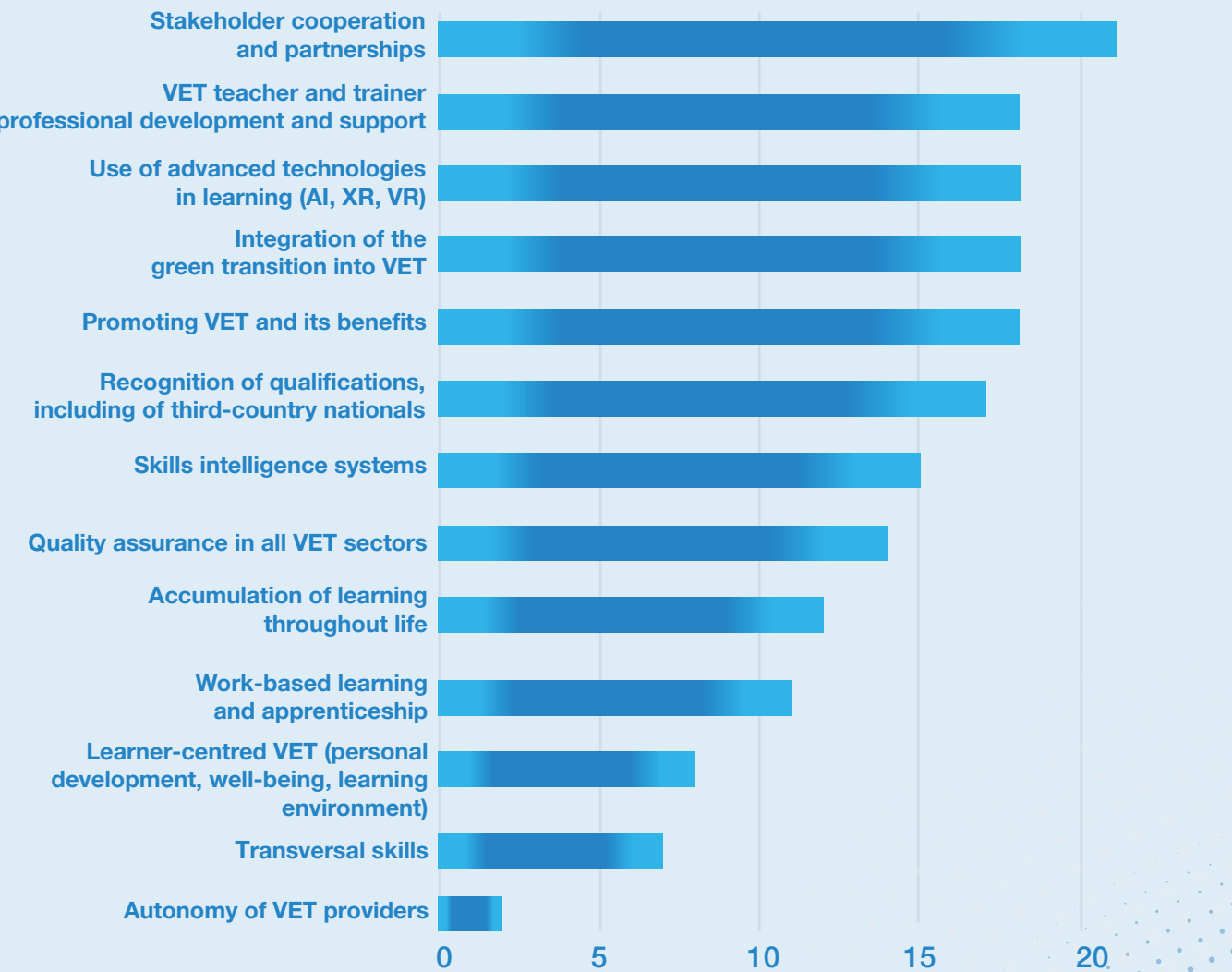


...**Lifelong guidance, validation** of prior learning, and **incentives** aligned with training provision can **contribute to learner support**...



...For **lifelong learning to be effective**, adult learning... must **address** the learning and development **needs of all** learner groups...

Figure 4. **Key themes in EU and national VET policy agendas for the coming years**



Source: Cedefop’s validation workshop, 31 October 2024.

Box 19. National VET stakeholder views on EU priorities (EU-27+)

In 2024, Cedefop conducted 239 national VET stakeholder interviews in the EU-27+ to gather insights into key EU priorities in their countries. Participants included representatives from ministries of education, labour and employment, national agencies for VET and other areas, employer and employee organisations, economic chambers, VET providers, public employment services, and local authorities.

Stakeholders identified three main priorities across all EU-27+ countries:

- improving VET agility to adapt better to labour market needs;
- ensuring VET flexibility by supporting progression pathways and lifelong learning opportunities;
- increasing VET attractiveness, based on modern and digitalised provision.

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POLICY BRIEF

Towards EU priorities in VET

2021-25 progress: insights from monitoring and analysis

This joint Cedefop-ETF policy brief provides an overview of vocational education and training (VET) policy developments from 2021 to 2025 in the EU-27, Norway, Iceland and five candidate countries (Albania, Montenegro, North Macedonia, Serbia, and Türkiye). It highlights countries' activities to advance EU priorities in making national VET systems agile, flexible, excellent, attractive, inclusive and quality-assured, with selected examples illustrating progress across EU Member States, Norway, Iceland, and candidate countries. Findings from Cedefop and ETF monitoring and analysis point to key areas requiring continued efforts in the coming years, aligned with new European priorities.

- Coordinating and sustaining policy effort and resource allocation amid political change
- Strengthening labour market involvement in VET and lifelong learning policies
- Advancing digital and green transitions in VET
- Boosting VET attractiveness and participation
- Improving VET teacher and trainer competences
- Expanding lifelong learning opportunities for all

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