

Spotlight on VET



ESTONIA

Vocational education
and training systems
in Europe

2023

VET in Estonia

Vocational education and training (VET) in Estonia is under the jurisdiction of the Ministry of Education and Research and is crucial to ensuring a flexible and skilled workforce. Professional standards in the eight-level Estonian qualifications framework are competence-based and are the basis for VET curricula. Social partners are involved in VET policy development and implementation. They participate in national professional councils and are involved in drafting VET-related legislation, including curricula. At provider level, their representatives belong to VET institution advisory bodies.

Recognition of prior learning and work experience has improved accessibility to VET for learners from diverse education and professional backgrounds.

VET providers offer both initial and continuing programmes. Initial VET is offered at levels 2, 3, 4 and 5 of the Estonian qualifications framework (and European qualifications framework, EQF). Learners can choose between full-time studies and those where the emphasis is on self-study (referred to as 'non-stationary' studies in the national context). Full-time studies are available as school-based tracks that all include practical training in school and in enterprise, and as apprenticeship. Financial assistance is available for VET learners to guarantee equal access to education.

There are no minimum admission requirements at EQF levels 2 and 3 but learners must be at least 17 years old to enrol. Entry to level 4 studies usually requires completed basic education but there are exceptions for [ISCED 354 programmes](#) for those over age 22 without basic education.

VET programmes at ISCED level 354 are referred to nationally as upper secondary vocational education.

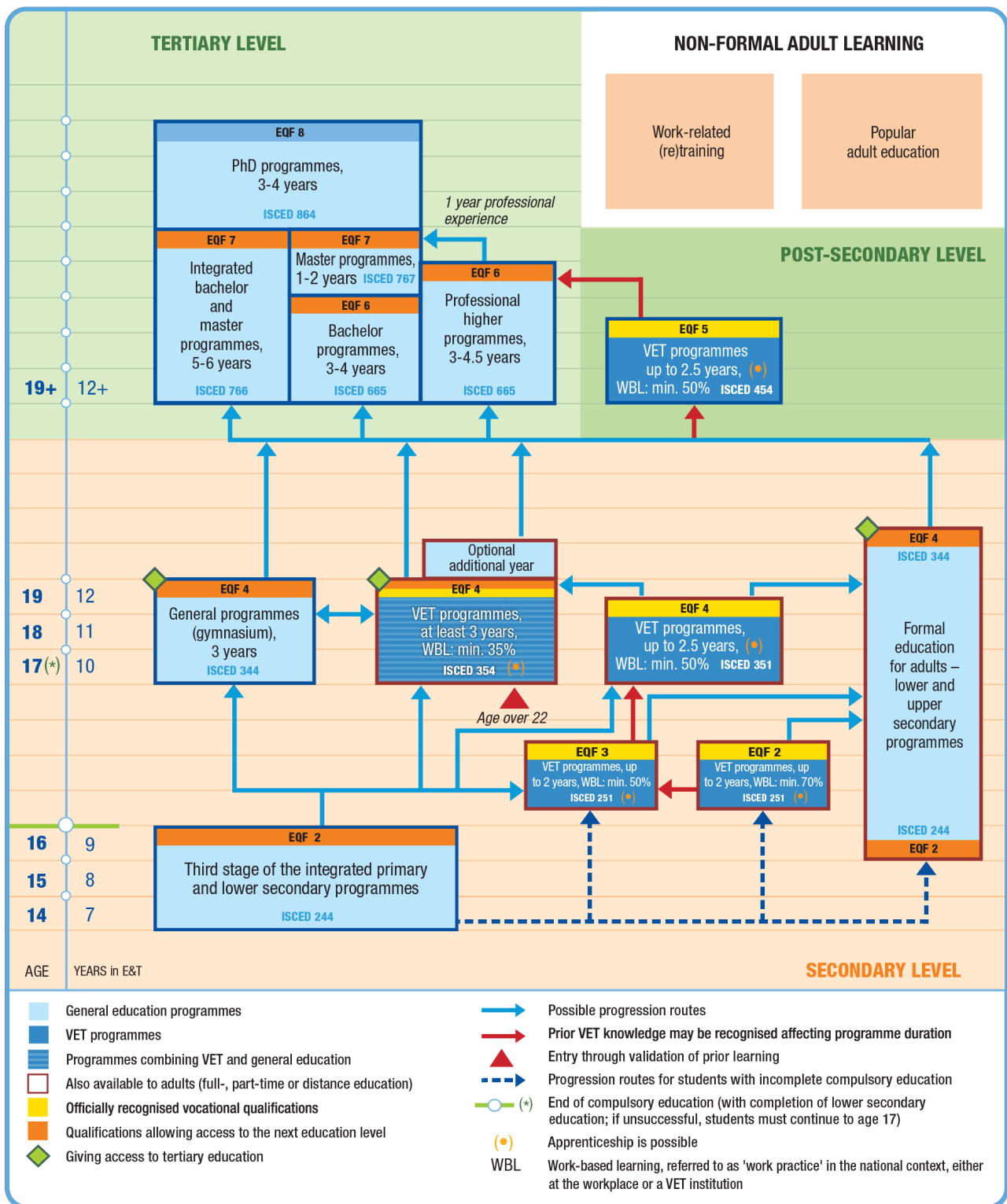
The ratio of learners in general and vocational upper secondary programmes is three to one. The qualification achieved in vocational secondary education gives access to higher education. This may require learners to pass State examinations that are compulsory for general upper secondary education graduates: an optional additional year of general education is available for upper secondary VET graduates (ISCED 354) to help prepare. Around 7% of upper secondary VET graduates continue in tertiary education. Upper secondary education gives access to EQF level 5 initial VET programmes (ISCED 454). These post-secondary programmes prepare learners for technical and associate professional occupations and further studies.

Continuing VET is offered at EQF levels 4 and 5. To enrol in these formal programmes, learners need a VET qualification or relevant competences, in addition to completed upper secondary education.

Tertiary VET does not feature in Estonian legislation, though tertiary education may also comprise professional qualifications. These are accessible to all graduates of upper secondary education and post-secondary VET.

Non-formal continuing VET is part of adult learning. Its forms, duration and content vary. To support up- and reskilling of vulnerable groups (e.g. with obsolete, low-level or no qualification), VET providers and professional higher education institutions offer free courses for working adults.

VET in Estonia's education and training system



NB: ISCED-P 2011.

Source: Cedefop, & Estonian Ministry of Education and Research. (2023). Vocational education and training in Europe – Estonia: system description. In Cedefop, & ReferNet. (2024). Vocational education and training in Europe: VET in Europe database – detailed VET system descriptions [Database].

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Distinctive features of VET

Although the number of VET learners has been decreasing, the share of adult learners (age 25 and over) in initial and continuing VET has increased, reaching 38.5% of all VET learners in 2022/23. This pattern reflects demographic trends but also changing labour market needs. Since 2010, the proportion of higher educated adults entering VET has also been increasing. In both initial and continuing education, learners have the right to take study leave.

The share of practical training in VET programmes is 35% or more, depending on the type of programme. In the school-based track, it is usually divided equally between school workshops and workplace learning, featuring work and study assignments with specific objectives.

Participation in apprenticeships has increased since 2016/17 and reached 9% of VET learners in 2020/21. Following the expiration of the initial EU support, the participation decreased to 5.3% in 2022/23. The education ministry continues to invest in functioning and sustainable work-based learning system with stronger employer involvement, including the renewed ESF (European Social Fund) funding.

General secondary education has remained the more popular option among basic education graduates despite the government's efforts to increase the attractiveness of VET. Preferences in education paths vary by region and gender. The proportion of adult learners in VET is high, but in recent years, the number and share of learners up to 19 years of age have steadily increased: in 2022/23, 47.4% of learners in this age group were VET learners. The most common VET study fields are engineering, manufacturing and construction, with 50% of upper secondary vocational graduates.

VET programmes are mainly offered in Estonian. There are also programmes in English and Russian. The latter will transform into Estonian-language programmes by 2030/31.

Challenges and policy responses

The Estonian labour market has a high level of skills mismatch. Jobs and skills forecasting system OSKA was launched in 2015 to improve alignment between education and the labour market. Results are available online and are used in curriculum development, career counselling, and planning of State-funded education. Support measures are implemented to increase the supply of IT and STEM professionals into the labour market.

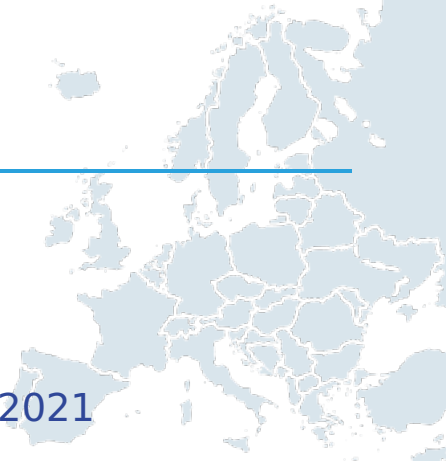
Compared with 1.2% of dropouts from general upper secondary education, the rate in the first year of vocational upper secondary education was much higher, i.e. 20.6% in 2022. There are career counselling services, vocational orientation programme at EQF level 2 and other measures to prevent early leaving from VET.

In 2022, 25% of adults aged 25 to 64 had no professional or vocational qualification; the objective is to reduce this share. Several measures have been introduced to encourage adults without a qualification to return to formal education.

Participation in lifelong learning increased from 6% in 2005 to 21% in 2022 and VET has been playing a role in this. The goal is to increase it to 25% by 2035. There is a focus on broadening access to non-formal education, training courses for developing key competences, and career services.

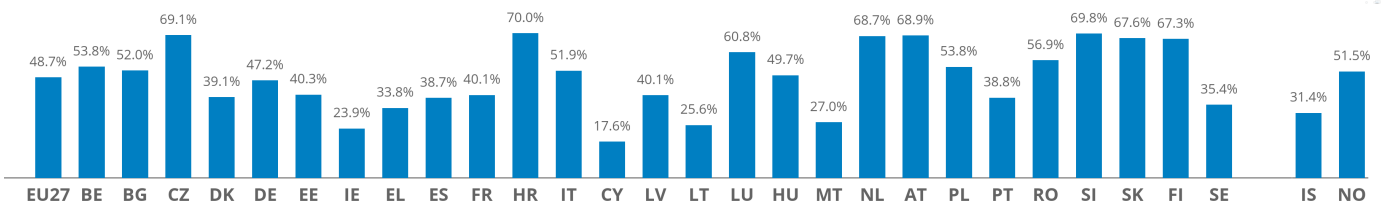


Estonia

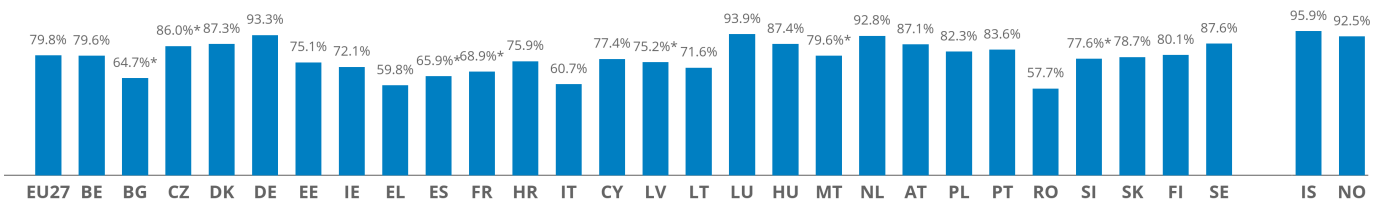


Education and training in figures

IVET students as % of all upper secondary students, 2021

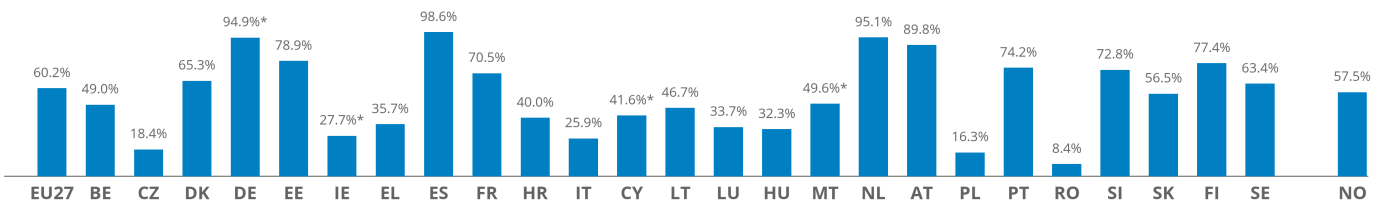


Employment rate for recent IVET graduates (20-34 year-olds) (%), 2022



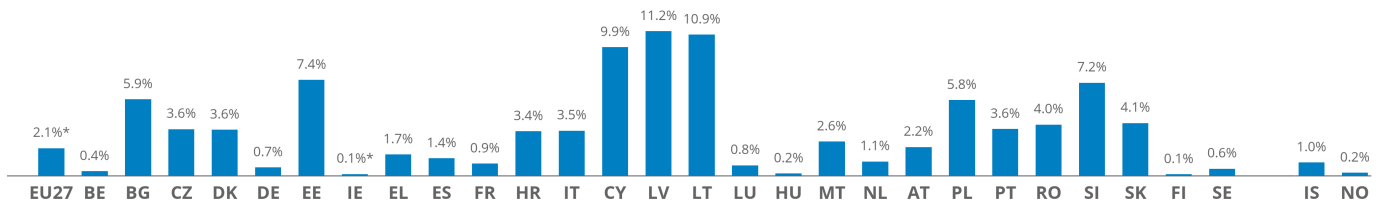
Notes: Bulgaria, Latvia, Malta and Slovenia: (u) low reliability, Czechia: (b) break in time series, Spain and France: (d) definition differs

Recent IVET graduates (20-34 year-olds) with a work-based learning experience as part of their vocational education and training (%), 2022



Notes: Germany, Ireland and Cyprus: (u) low reliability

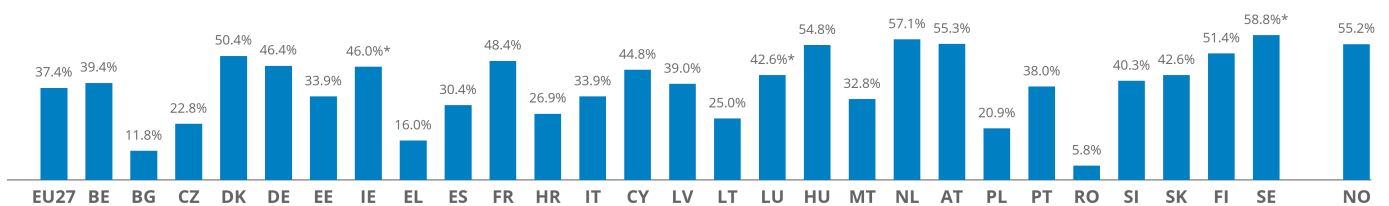
IVET learners who benefitted from a learning mobility abroad (%), 2021



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Notes: EU27: (d) definition differs (v) Cedefop estimate, Ireland: (d) definition differs, Croatia, Cyprus, Netherlands and Slovenia: (z) not applicable

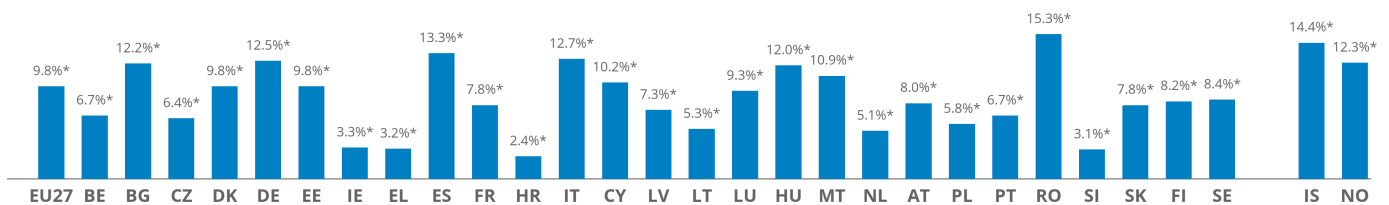
Adults (25-64 year-olds) with a learning experience in the last 12 months (%), 2016



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Notes: All values: (b) break in time series

Early leavers from education and training (%), 2021



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Notes: EU27, Belgium, Bulgaria, Czechia, Denmark, Germany, Estonia, Ireland, Greece, Spain, France, Italy, Cyprus, Latvia, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Hungary, Malta, Netherlands, Austria, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Slovakia, Finland, Sweden, Iceland and Norway: (b) break in time series, Croatia and Slovenia: (b) break in time series (u) low reliability

Source: [Cedefop's Key indicators on VET](#)



Further information

- Cedefop (2022). *Country description: Estonia*
- Cedefop and ReferNet (2023). *Timeline of VET policies: Estonia*
- European Commission (2023). *Education and training monitor: Estonia*
- Ministry of Education and Research (2023). *Vocational education and training*
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Please cite as:

Cedefop, & Estonian Ministry of Education and Research. (2023). Spotlight on VET – Estonia: Vocational education and training systems in Europe. In Cedefop, & ReferNet. (2024). *Vocational education and training in Europe: VET in Europe database – detailed VET system descriptions* [Database]. <https://www.cedefop.europa.eu/en/tools/vet-in-europe/systems/estonia-u3>

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