

Spotlight
on VET 

NETHERLANDS

Vocational education
and training systems
in Europe

2023

VET in Netherlands

Study results and advice from school determine the type of secondary education that learners follow after leaving primary education at age 12. In 2022/23, in the third year of secondary education, 54% of students attended lower secondary pre-vocational programmes (VMBO). VMBO is the main route to upper secondary vocational education and training (VET).

Apart from lower secondary pre-VET programmes, there are also general programmes that prepare students for higher education: integrated lower and upper secondary education (HAVO) and pre-university education (VWO). Some 46% of students in the third year of secondary education took part in one of these programmes in 2022/23.

Labour-oriented practical training (*praktijkonderwijs*) is available for learners not capable of entering pre-vocational education.

Upper secondary VET. Learners aged 16 or above can enter upper secondary VET (MBO). Most publicly funded VET is provided by 41 large multi-sectoral regional training centres (ROCs). Furthermore, 16 occupational colleges provide agricultural VET programmes and programmes for other specific sectors. Three structural elements determine provision of MBO programmes:

- level: upper secondary vocational education has four levels leading to qualifications at EQF levels 1 to 4. Student admission to a level depends on the diploma obtained in prior education. Admission to level 1 programmes is limited to learners without a prior qualification at lower secondary level. It is possible to progress within upper secondary VET; the highest level (EQF 4) gives access to higher professional bachelor programmes (HBO) offered by universities of applied sciences. In 2022/23, 58% of VET students were enrolled in level 4 programmes;
- area of study: upper secondary VET programmes are available in four areas (sectors): green/agriculture, technology, economics and care/welfare;
- learning pathway: upper secondary VET offers two equivalent pathways: a school-based (BOL) and a dual (BBL). In the school-based pathway, work placements in companies make up 20% to 59% of study time. In the dual pathway (apprenticeship), students combine work-based learning (at least 60% of study time) with school-based instruction; this often involves learning at work 4 days a week and 1 day at school.

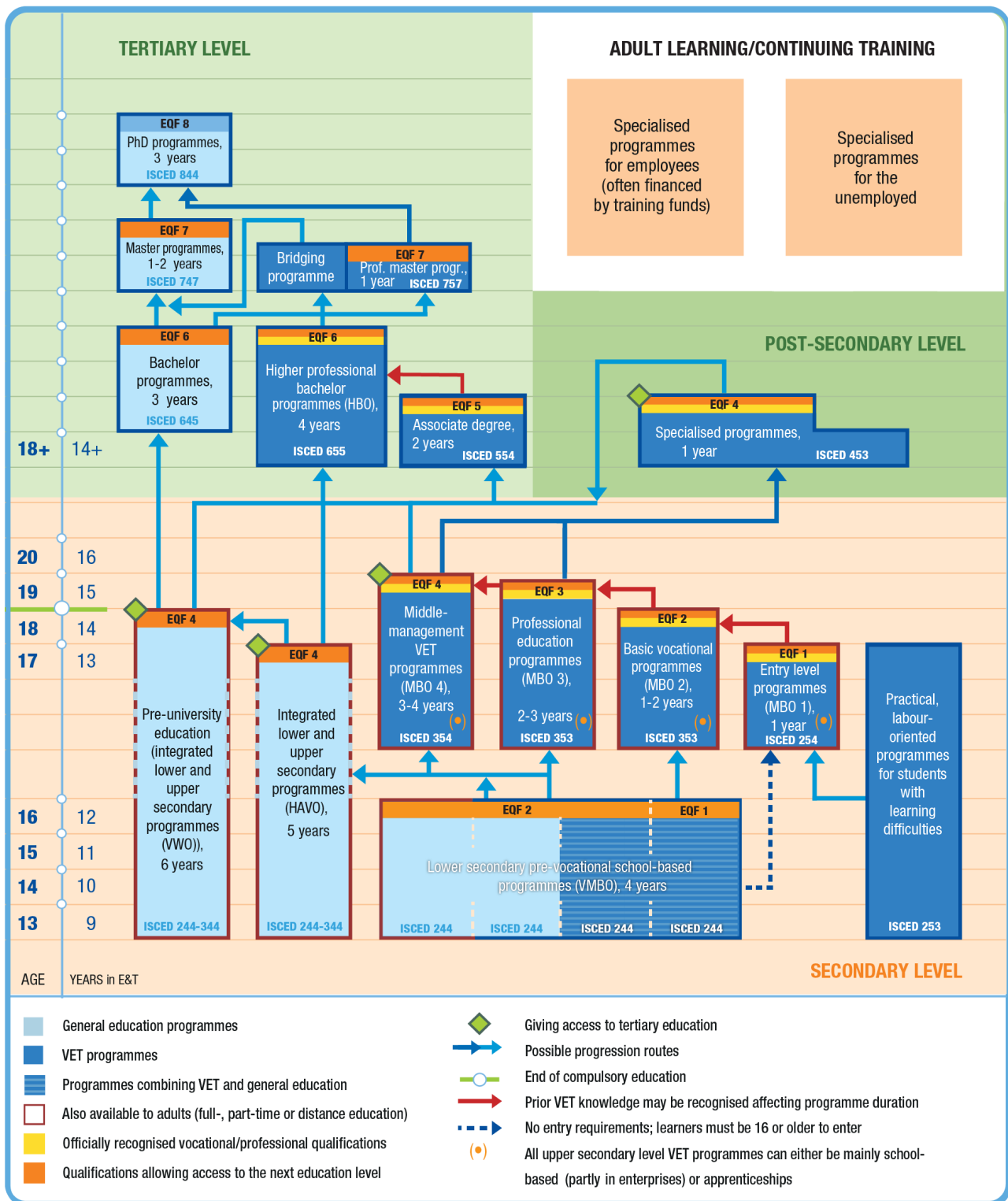
Post-secondary VET. Specialised programmes (ISCED 453/EQF level 4) are open to graduates of MBO programmes (ISCED 353/EQF level 3, ISCED354/EQF level 4). Their duration is 1 year.

Higher professional education. Higher professional bachelor programmes (HBO) are open to all EQF level 4 graduates. About 30% of all MBO level 4 (middle management VET programmes) graduates in the school-based pathway enter HBO programmes. [In the 10-year period before 2022, the percentage of VET alumni that directly continues to HBO programmes, has declined.](#) On completion, a HBO diploma gives access to a professional master degree programme.

Two-year associate degree programmes (short-cycle higher education, EQF level 5) are open to all EQF level 4 graduates. Their graduates can continue to HBO programmes; the remaining study load is subject to exemptions granted by each programme.

Continuing VET. There is no institutional framework for continuing VET (CVET): provision is market-driven with many suppliers. Dual VET (the BBL pathway) can also function as CVET for adults. Social partners use sectoral funds to support CVET, aid career progression, offer arrangements for older workers, and develop Human Resource Management (HRM) policies.

VET in Netherlands's education and training system



NB: ISCED-P 2011.

Source: Cedefop, & Centre for Expertise in Vocational Education and Training (ECBO). (2023). Vocational education and training in Europe – Netherlands: system description. In Cedefop, & ReferNet. (2024). Vocational education and training in Europe: VET in Europe database – detailed VET system descriptions [Database]. www.cedefop.europa.eu/en/tools/vet-in-europe/systems/netherlands-u3

Distinctive features of VET

The heterogeneous and multifunctional nature of upper secondary VET in the Netherlands is unique. Key distinctive features are:

- [The 57 MBO schools have an average student population of 8 357 in 2022/23, providing IVET for young people and adults and general education for adults](#). MBO schools are also active in CVET, with privately funded programmes. Government-regulated VET qualifications are also offered by private providers under certain conditions;
- School-based and dual pathways in upper secondary VET lead to the same diplomas. Participation in each is influenced by the economic cycle; for instance, in periods of economic boom the number of learners in the dual pathway increases;
- The intended outcomes of qualifications are defined in the national qualifications system. Occupational standards cover one qualification profile or several interrelated ones. Social partners and education institutions represented in sectoral committees have a legal responsibility to develop and maintain these standards. Once approved by the education ministry, schools - in cooperation with enterprises providing work-based learning - develop curricula based on the qualification profiles;
- Education institutions have a relatively high degree of freedom to shape VET provision. The [Adult Education and Vocational Education Act \(WEB\)](#) only provides a broad framework outlining key elements at system level; institutions receive a lump sum for their tasks;
- The Netherlands promotes a culture of evidence-informed VET policy and practice and encourages innovation. Recent initiatives include providing VET schools regularly with up-to-date regional labour market information and early school leaving data and implementing plan-do-check-act mechanisms as a basis for organisation and programme development. Research and intelligence are increasingly used to improve VET quality and effectiveness, both by involving professional researchers and by encouraging teachers to engage in research activities.

Challenges and policy responses

The VET sector has agreed to strengthen itself to be ready for the main current challenges like unequal opportunities for at-risk learners, an uncertain economy and a labour market with major shortages in skilled workers. The [Work agenda VET 2023-2027](#), formally signed by the education ministry, the MBO council and other relevant stakeholders in February 2023, validated the shared policy aims for 2023-27.

There are three national priorities in the work agenda: promoting equal opportunities in education and training; improving the alignment between education and the labour market; and improving quality, research and innovation.

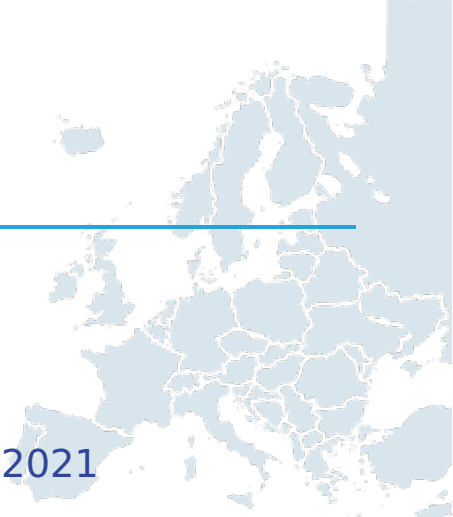
Furthermore, in the [National Implementation Plan of the Netherlands](#), the goal is added that the participation rate in lifelong learning should further increase, via both formal and informal learning.

Cooperation among the partners of the Work agenda in the region is important for achieving the three priorities, which are broken down into 12 objectives within the Work agenda for VET. The schools will work together with their regional and sectoral partners to achieve the ambitious goals of the agenda. The education ministry wants to learn together what works and what doesn't, and respond to what is happening in the Netherlands and in the world. The partners of the Work agenda for VET therefore monitor together what is being achieved with the measures.

The government is structurally investing approximately 367 million euros extra per year in ensuring quality in upper secondary VET (MBO). The budget of existing [quality agreements](#) is approximately 528 million euros per year. Both the existing budget and the extra investment will be used for the objectives in the Work agenda for MBO. In total, 0.9 billion euros per year is available for the implementation of the work agenda.

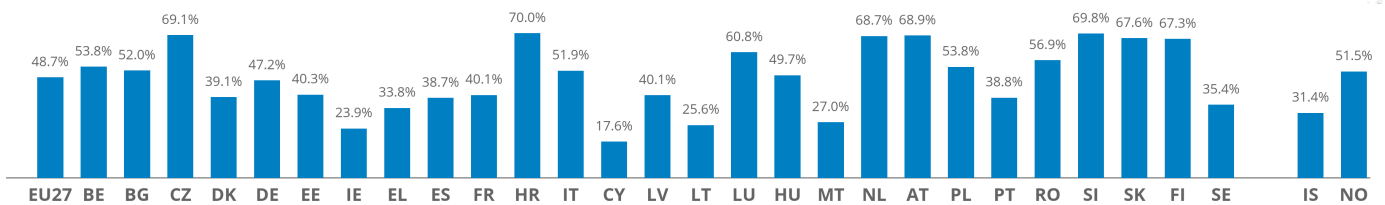


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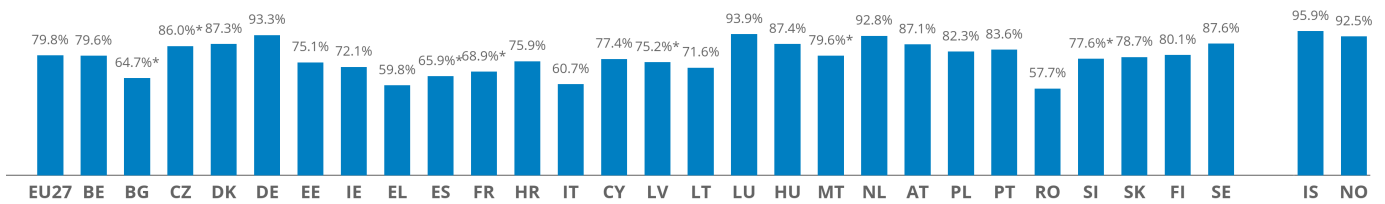


Education and training in figures

IVET students as % of all upper secondary students, 2021

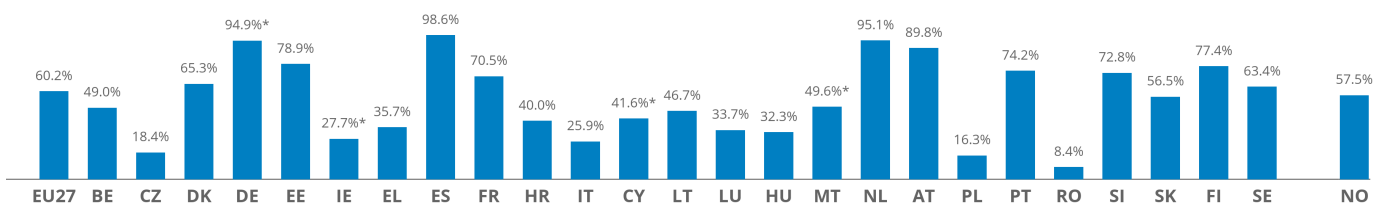


Employment rate for recent IVET graduates (20-34 year-olds) (%), 2022



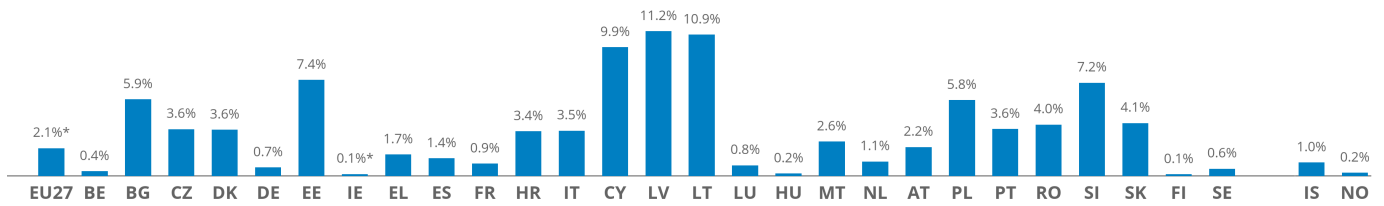
Notes: Bulgaria, Latvia, Malta and Slovenia: (u) low reliability, Czechia: (b) break in time series, Spain and France: (d) definition differs

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



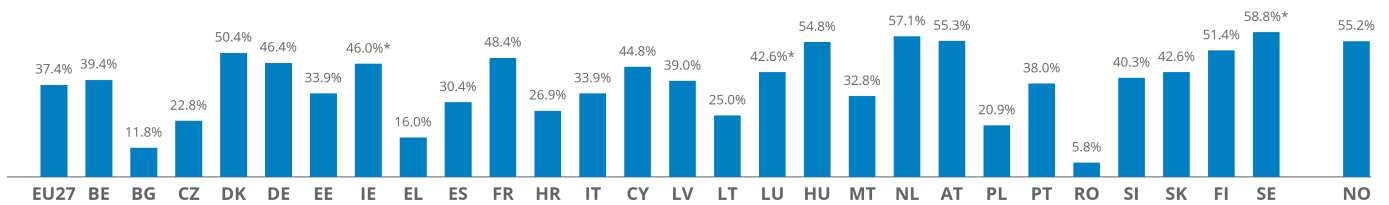
Notes: Germany, Ireland and Cyprus: (u) low reliability

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



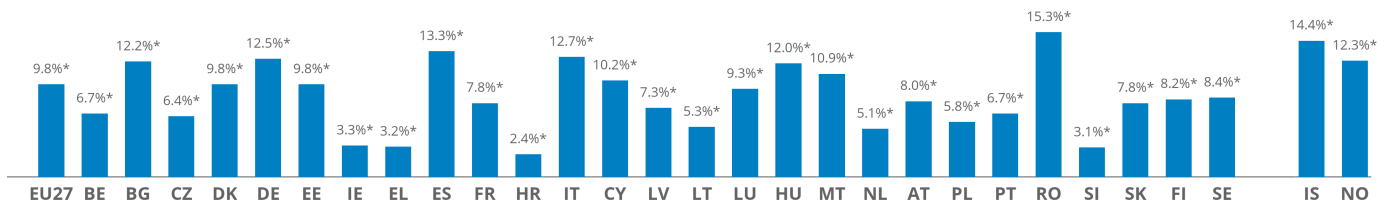
Notes: EU27: (d) definition differs (V) Cedefop estimate, Ireland: (d) definition differs, Croatia, Cyprus, Netherlands and Slovenia: (z) not applicable

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



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

Early leavers from education and training (%), 2021



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 and ReferNet (2023). *Timeline of VET policies: Netherlands*
- European Commission (2023). *Education and training monitor: Netherlands*
- Eurydice (2024). *National education systems: Netherlands*
- Ministry of Education, Culture and Science of Netherlands; Youth organisation for vocational education; Professional association of trainers in VET; MBO council; Dutch Council for training and education; Confederation of Netherlands industry and employers; Association of Dutch municipalities; Foundation for cooperation on vocational education, training and the labour market (2023) *Agenda for VET 2023-2027: Working together on talent* (Annex to the letter to the house of representatives on the Work Agenda and Internship Pact MBO)

https://refernet.nl	ReferNet Netherlands
https://www.government.nl/ministries/ministry-of-education-culture-and-science	Ministry of Education, Culture and Science
https://ecbo.nl	Centre for Expertise in Vocational Education and Training (ECBO)
https://www.mбораad.nl	Council for Upper Secondary VET Schools (MBO Raad)
https://www.government.nl/ministries/ministry-of-social-affairs-and-employment	Ministry of Social Affairs and Employment

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