

Supporting skills-based approaches, green and digital transitions in VET

POLICY DEVELOPMENT

PRACTICAL MEASURE/INITIATIVE

 ESTONIA

Timeline



ID number 44132

Background

Formal education, in-service training and retraining do not adequately match the development needs of society and the labour market. Few in-service training and retraining opportunities, including those for acquiring green skills, are provided to people with lower and higher levels of professional skills and education in the growth areas of smart specialisation and areas in need of priority development in society.

Vocational education and training (VET), higher education, and in-service training offers need to be updated to adapt to the rapid changes in the labour market and respond to the skills needs deriving from green and digital transitions. Updates are based on labour market monitoring and future skills forecasts, taking results from a recent special survey on knowledge and skills needed for the digital and green transition.

Objectives

To broaden workforce knowledge and skills related to the green economy, and to address skills gaps to support the green and digital transitions in VET.

The development of population's digital skills is guided by national targets set in the Education strategy 2021-35:

- (a) the share of 16 to 24-year-olds with digital skills above the basic level should increase to 90% by 2035 (2019: 76.2%)
- (b) the percentage of 16 to 74-year-olds with digital skills above the basic level should increase to 60% by 2035 (2021: 27.7%).

Description

The following measures are envisaged:

- (a) developing the principles for skills-based curriculum development in VET;
- (b) developing principles for addressing the skills needed for the green transition, including competences supporting the development of environmental awareness in VET;

- (c) a total of 2 830 people to be trained in VET, higher education and continuing education under the green transition actions in 2022-24;
- (d) a total of 2 000 people to be trained in VET, higher and continuing education as part of the digital transition actions 2022-24.

These activities supporting digital transition follow up the Digital focus programme implemented in 2016-21.

2022 Design

The Recovery and resilience facility (2022-26) supported the digital transition, including the development of VET modules, the organisation of in-service training to ensure the supply of ICT and cyber security specialists, and the creation of an in-service training programme for SMEs.

In 2022, the framework (conditions for granting support from EU structural funds) was created to develop green skills by updating the content learning and organisation of studies, by developing and providing new modules and courses in higher education and VET in fields including transportation, energy, agriculture, forestry, food processing, construction, chemical industry, and waste management.

In 2022, with the support of Erasmus+, a bottom-up initiative of experts from VET institutions was launched to find innovative approaches for the development of green skills by exercising design thinking. A series of webinars were conducted to raise awareness of green issues and support greener policy-making in VET by addressing the needs of policy-makers, leading employers and the national VET team. Regular short vision webinars called Green talks (Rohejutud), mainly on the topics of green transition in VET, were organised to address the wider audience. The expert group also developed recommendations for the implementation of the green transition in VET.

In 2022, digital transition actions 2022-24 were still under development.

2023 Implementation

In 2023, new programmes of the IT Academy and the Engineering Academy were launched to bolster VET in ICT and engineering and raise the profile of these sectors in the labour market. Such initiatives promote cooperation between the public authorities, education institutions (including VET centres), companies, and professional associations.

The IT and Engineering Academies are set to enhance and update VET programmes at EQF levels 4 and 5, modernise learning environments with technological solutions and software, and promote IT and engineering education, also aiming to increase female participation. VET centres introduced mentoring systems to decrease early dropout rates. Engineering curricula are tailored to Industry 4.0 needs, focusing on interdisciplinarity and integrated learning in product and industrial design.

Provisions were also adopted to offer additional flexible and labour-market-driven learning opportunities to facilitate businesses' digital and green transitions, supported by the EU Recovery and resilience facility. These include ICT skills training, cybersecurity, and the integration of ICT modules into vocational training curricula. Professional qualification standards and VET programmes were being updated, and continuing training programmes were being developed to equip the workforce with the knowledge and skills for the green economy.

Supported by the EU's Just Transition Fund, EUR 31 million have been allocated until 2029 for skills development to update and create new curricula at university colleges and VET centres in Ida-Viru County, focusing on technical subjects to address the region's skills shortages. Additionally, further training and retraining is being offered to workers laid off from the oil shale sector.

2024 Implementation

IT Academy and the Engineering Academy: cooperation with employers continued to refine targets and activities for the new programming period. It was decided to develop the IT and engineering curricula on the unified structure of the 4-year curricula agreed in the VET reform, while maintaining the specificities of IT and engineering curricula (stronger focus on STEM). VET centres were working on introducing mentoring systems to decrease early dropout rates.

A wide range of non-formal learning opportunities were offered for adults to develop their skills. With the support of the ESF+ programme *VÕTI*, more than 10 300 adults with outdated skills improved their competences through 585 training courses across nearly 40 professional fields. Basic digital skills training sessions were held across Estonia.

EU Recovery and resilience facility (RRF) measure: in the first phase of the development of new green skills modules and subjects, as well as curricula for in-service training, sectoral green skills were defined, development needs were identified and new modules and curricula for in-service training (incl. micro-qualifications) were developed.

Through the RRF programme *Rohe*, 69 training courses on green skills reached around 1 400 adults. As part of the activities supporting the green transition in enterprises, a cooperation model was developed to involve higher education institutions, VET providers, and professional associations in joint curriculum development. In addition, the integration of digital skills into non-ICT curricula and the development of elective modules in higher and vocational education institutions were supported in priority fields.

Just Transition Fund measure: In Ida-Viru County, the volume of state-commissioned in-service training was increased and 124 further training and retraining courses were offered, and development of 9 vocational training curricula started, according to the needs of the region.

The Estonian VET team (special advisory body) under the Estonian Erasmus+ Agency developed policy recommendations to promote a sustainable approach to VET and continued with series of online monthly meetings called 'Rohehommik' (Green Morning) as well as series of seminars and conferences to support environmentally conscious VET. VET team launched collaboration on supporting skills-based approaches, green and digital transitions in VET with VET teams from the Baltic States, Ireland, Finland and Romania.

2025 Implementation

In 2025, a new round of State-commissioned green, digital and other skills' training began, offering more than 1 500 free courses to more than 26 000 people in 2025-2026. The courses were provided by VET and higher education institutions. The total training budget for 2025 was nearly EUR 15 million, funded through the European Social Fund, the Recovery and Resilience Facility, and the Just Transition Fund.

The training was offered to three target groups: adults without a professional qualification, without upper secondary education, or with outdated skills; the development of employees' green skills and the adoption of environmentally friendly technologies in enterprises; adults living or working in Ida-Viru County to support the region's transition to a climate-neutral economy. In addition, computer training was provided to 1 200 adults under the *VÕTI* programme.

IT Academy and the Engineering Academy: To increase students' interest in engineering study programmes, information and career days, workshops, and other events targeting school learners were organised across vocational, general, hobby, and higher education.

Bodies responsible

- Ministry of Education and Research

Target group

Learners

Learners in upper secondary, including apprentices
Young people (15-29 years old)
Adult learners

Entities providing VET

VET providers (all kinds)

Other

Higher education
institutions

Thematic categories

Governance of VET and lifelong learning

Engaging VET stakeholders and strengthening partnerships in VET

Modernising VET infrastructure

Modernising infrastructure for vocational training
Improving digital infrastructure of VET provision
Making VET institutions sustainable and green

Modernising VET offer and delivery

Modernising VET standards, curricula, programmes and training courses
Integrating green transition and sustainability in VET curricula and programmes
Integrating digital skills and competences in VET curricula and programmes

European priorities in VET

VET Recommendation

VET as a driver for innovation and growth preparing for digital and green transitions and occupations in high demand

Osnabrück Declaration

Sustainability - a green link in VET

Subsystem

IVET CVET

Further reading

[Recovery and resilience facility \(RRF\)](#)

[Green talks by Erasmus+ Agency](#)

Related policy developments

2022 Completed

Initiatives supporting adults' key competences and participation in lifelong learning (until 2022)

The activity is part of the National adult education programme. In 2017-18, nine projects were set up for equipping adults with social and learning skills, entrepreneurship competence, skills in foreign languages and Estonian for non-native speakers.

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Type of development

Practical
measure/Initiative

Subsystem

CVET

2022 Completed

Digital focus programme 2016-22

The first digital focus programme was implemented in 2016-18. By 2018, the incorporation of digital culture into education and learning activities was considered complete, but not yet systemised. The activities continued during the second programme period in 2019-22.

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Type of development

Strategy/Action
plan

Subsystem

IVET CVET

2022 Completed

Employment programmes 2017-20 and 2021-23

The Employment programme includes a package of measures for workers at risk of unemployment. The main target groups are:

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Type of development

Regulation/Legislation

Subsystem

CVET

2022 Completed

Labour market and education cooperation programme

The programme was adopted in 2015. It sets out a roadmap and offers a framework for increasing the qualification levels of the labour force, decreasing the structural labour shortage and enhancing the employability of graduates by responding better to changes in labour demand.

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Type of development

Strategy/Action
plan

Subsystem

IVET CVET

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<https://www.cedefop.europa.eu/en/tools/timeline-vet-policies-europe/search/44132>