

# Spotlight on VET **POLAND**

Vocational education  
and training systems  
in Europe

2023

## VET in Poland

Vocational education and training (VET) has three governance levels: national (ministries), regional (school superintendents, mainly for pedagogical supervision) and county (governing schools). The Ministry of National Education is responsible for secondary and higher VET, supported by other ministries (responsible for particular occupations), social partners, the Vocational School Directors Council and Regional VET coordinators. Legislation changes in 2011-15 and organisational ones in 2017-23 helped improve the VET system. VET is provided in school-based upper secondary education and post-secondary programmes. Learners can acquire vocational qualifications in:

- 3-year first stage sectoral programmes (*branżowa szkoła I stopnia*, ISCED 353) leading to a vocational qualification diploma for a single-qualification occupation (after passing State vocational examinations). Graduates can enrol in the second year of general upper secondary programmes for adults or in a second stage sectoral programme;
- 2-year second stage sectoral programmes (*branżowa szkoła II stopnia*, ISCED 354), starting in 2020/21. These develop the vocational qualifications attained in first stage sectoral programmes and lead to vocational qualification diplomas for occupations consisting of two qualifications (after passing State vocational examination in the second qualification). General education is provided on a full-time, evening or extracurricular basis. Graduates can acquire an upper secondary school leaving certificate (*matura*) providing access to tertiary education;
- 5-year vocational upper secondary programmes (*technikum*, ISCED 354) leading to a vocational qualification diploma for occupations consisting of two qualifications after passing State vocational examinations. Graduates can acquire an upper secondary school leaving certificate (*matura*) giving access to tertiary education;
- 3-year special job training programmes (*szkoła specjalna przysposabiająca do pracy*, ISCED 243) for special education needs (SEN) learners leading to a job training certificate;
- work preparation classes for SEN learners aged 15 and above already in primary school (*oddział przysposabiający do pracy*).

At the post-secondary non-tertiary level, vocational qualifications are acquired in 1-2.5- year school-based programmes (*szkoła policealna*, ISCED 453).

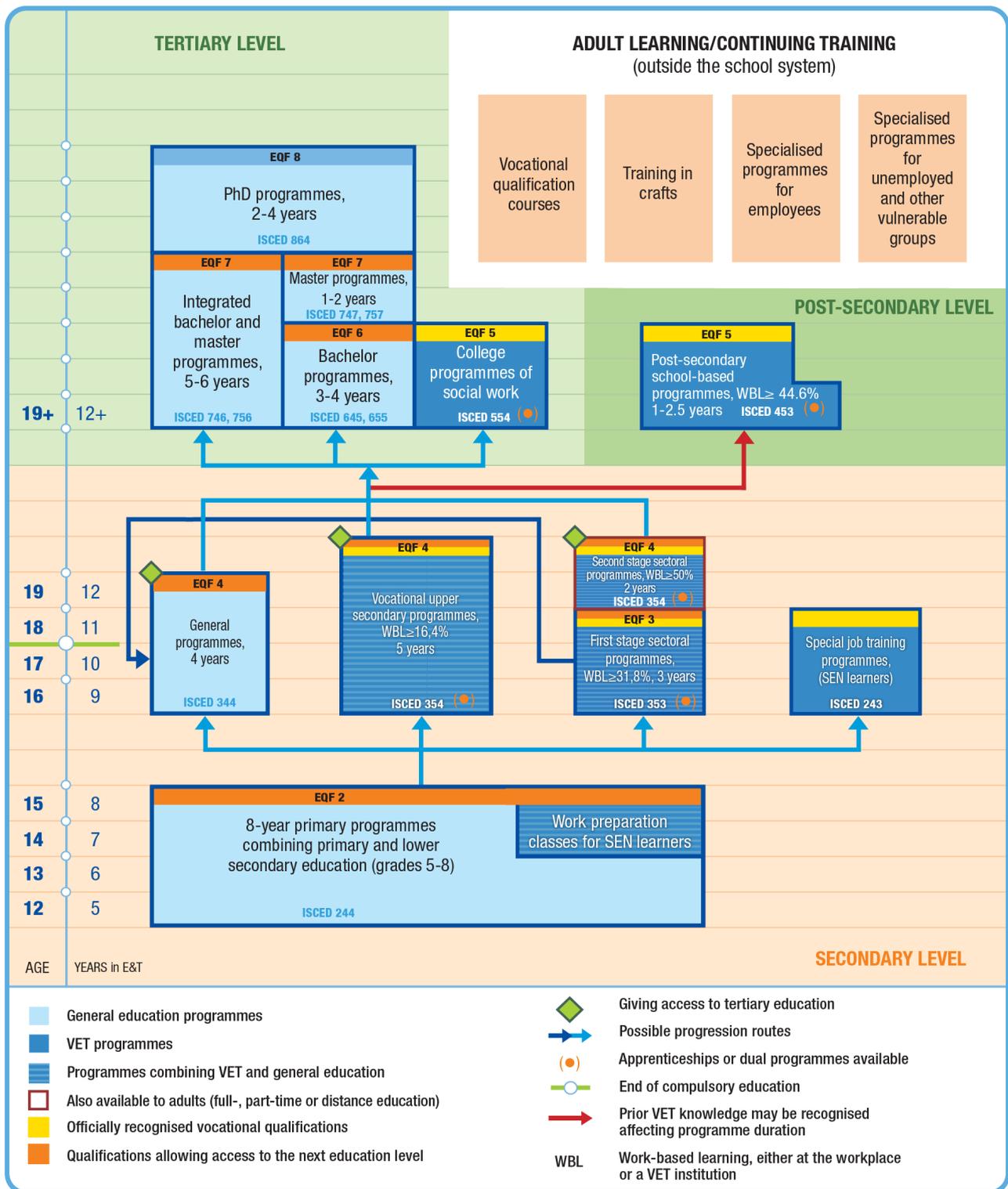
Social work college programmes (*kolegium pracowników służb społecznych*, ISCED 554) are tertiary education that combines school-based learning and in-company training, leading to an EQF 5 diploma.

Work-based learning (WBL) is mandatory for all VET-oriented programmes and takes place in various educational settings, industry competence centres (*branżowe centrum umiejętności*) or with employers, including apprenticeships. On-the-job training lasts 4-12 weeks, depending on the type of occupation, and is compulsory for vocational upper secondary, post-secondary and second-stage sectoral programmes.

Adult learning, continuing and out-of-school VET offer:

- vocational qualification courses based on curricula for a qualification in a given occupation; learners can take the State vocational examination and obtain a vocational qualification certificate;
- vocational skills courses based on the VET core curriculum, including learning outcomes for a qualification or common learning outcomes for all occupations;
- minimum 30-hour general skills courses based on the general education curriculum;
- theoretical courses for juvenile employees;
- vocational training - minimum 15-hours specialised training based on curriculum which includes professional knowledge or skills in one of the professional fields specified in the regulations, useful for practising a profession;
- other courses to acquire and supplement knowledge, skills and professional qualifications or the change of professional qualifications. As of 2016, the Integrated qualifications register can include curriculum-based qualifications attained in courses offered by training companies and non-formal education institutions.

# VET in Poland's education and training system



NB: ISCED-P 2011.

Source: Cedefop, & Educational Research Institute (IBE). (2023). Vocational education and training in Europe – Poland: system description. In Cedefop, & ReferNet. (2024). Vocational education and training in Europe: VET in Europe database – detailed VET system descriptions [Database]. [www.cedefop.europa.eu/en/tools/vet-in-europe/systems/poland-u3](http://www.cedefop.europa.eu/en/tools/vet-in-europe/systems/poland-u3)

## Distinctive features of VET

The key features of Polish VET are:

- flexibility, allowing changing pathways at any point;
- classification of occupations updated by various stakeholders in line with labour market needs. Each occupation consists of one to two qualifications that can be attained through IVET and CVET programmes, and is linked to a core curriculum. A vocational diploma can be issued only when all qualifications required for an occupation are obtained (via State vocational examinations) together with a school leaving certificate;
- autonomy of VET schools in developing core curriculum-based school programmes, easily modified for labour market needs;
- uniform, centrally organised external vocational examinations;
- vocational qualification courses allowing adults to attain qualifications;
- validation of non-formal and informal learning via extramural examinations;
- compulsory work-based learning;
- student apprenticeship (*staż uczniowski*) - an additional form of work-based learning available for learners of first stage sectoral programmes and vocational upper secondary programmes as of 2019;
- Polish Qualifications Framework - a reference system for qualifications awarded in Poland.

## Challenges and policy responses

The main challenges for VET are:

- raising the attractiveness of VET in society;
- increasing employer engagement in practical training, in identifying labour market needs for skills and qualifications, and in reviewing VET curricula;
- improving VET teachers' qualifications and competences;
- encouraging lifelong learning among adult learners;
- encouraging sustainable cooperation between VET schools and higher education institutions to transfer good practices in teaching, training and developing teachers' competences;
- ensuring high quality guidance and counselling for all age groups; providing high quality infrastructure for VET schools to ensure teaching and training in line with labour market needs;
- further developing training programmes;
- ensuring high quality psychological and pedagogical support for learners in response to post-pandemic challenges and large influx of Ukrainian students migrating to Poland due to armed conflict in Ukraine;
- continually adapting the VET system to meet the needs of the modern economy.

Since 2018, measures have been introduced to strengthen vocational education and training (VET) by involving employers and aligning VET with labour market needs. These measures include improving practical training and teacher development in enterprises, expanding work-based learning, providing annual forecasts of labour demand in VET occupations, directing more resources to occupations in high demand, ensuring quality assurance, improving accreditation of VET providers, organising vocational courses for adult learners, introducing student apprenticeships, setting up a monitoring system for graduate careers and revising VET examinations.

Several other initiatives by the education ministry address VET challenges by including non-statutory CVET qualifications in the integrated qualifications register, strengthening school guidance and counselling, developing new IVET core curricula, establishing sector skills councils, launching the national Integrated Skills Strategy, identifying significant VET professions, and developing ICT infrastructure for VET schools.

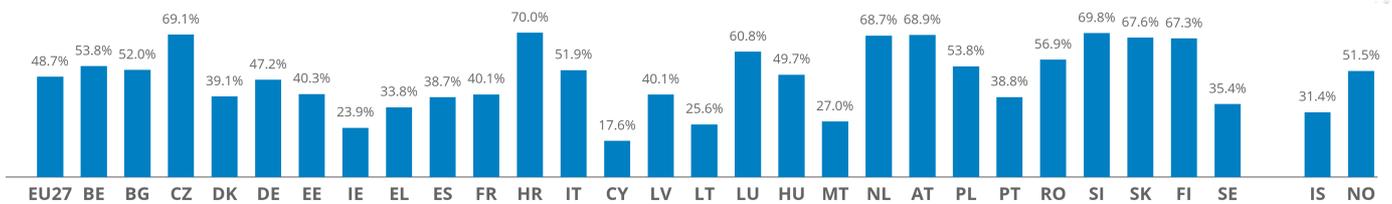


Poland



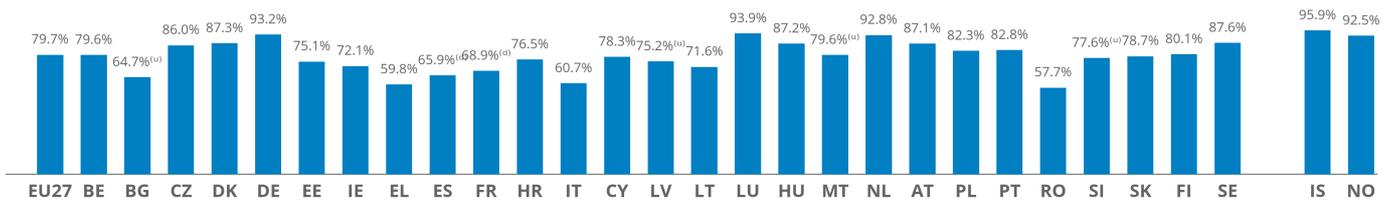
# Education and training in figures

## IVET students as % of all upper secondary students, 2021



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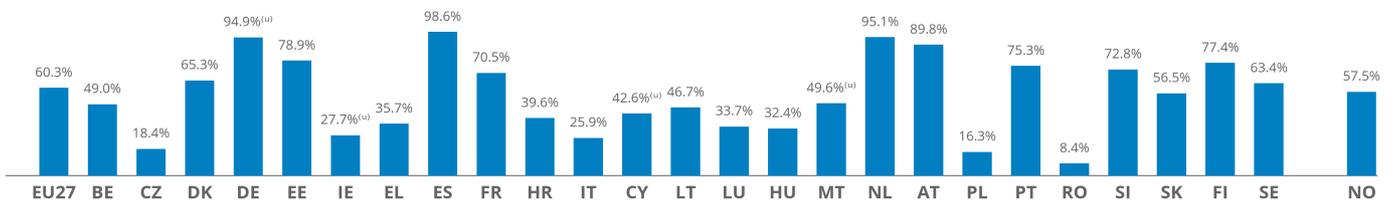
## Employment rate for recent IVET graduates (20-34 year-olds) (%), 2022



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

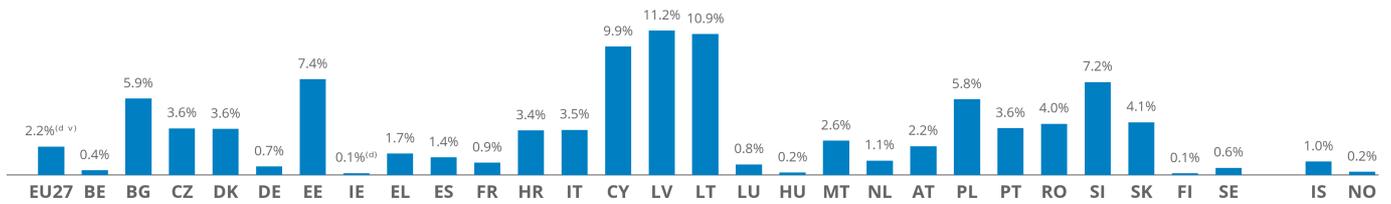
## Recent IVET graduates (20-34 year-olds) with a work-based learning experience as part of their vocational education and training (%), 2022



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

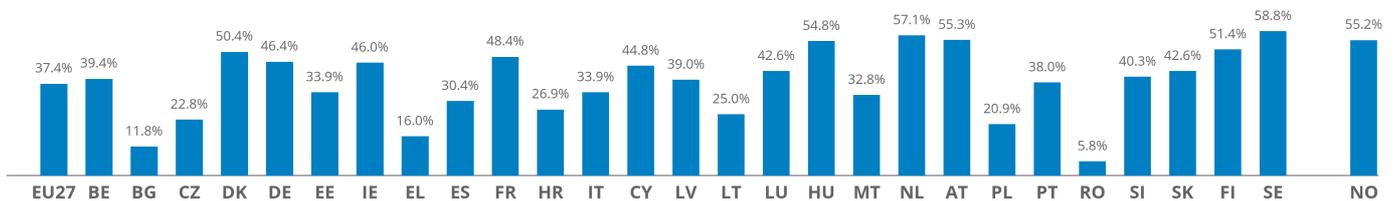
## IVET learners who benefitted from a learning mobility abroad (%), 2021



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

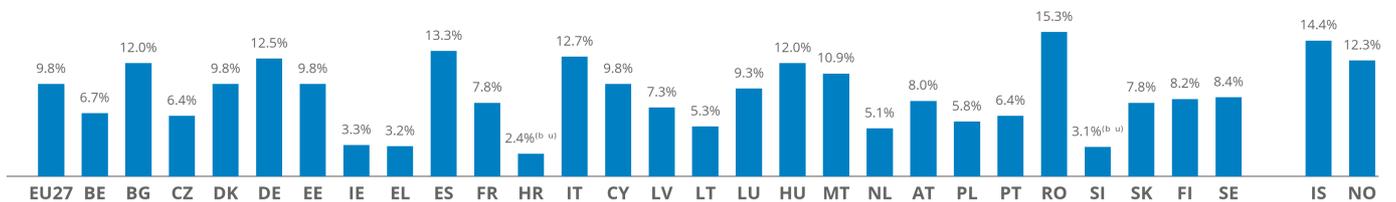
## Adults (25-64 year-olds) with a learning experience in the last 12 months (%), 2016



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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

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- Central Statistical Office. (2023). *Education in the school year 2022/23*.
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