



Spotlight on VET AUSTRIA

Vocational education
and training systems
in Europe

2023

VET in Austria

Austrian vocational education and training (VET) ranks high, as demonstrated by its differentiated offer and high attractiveness: around 70% of each age cohort follow a VET path at the end of compulsory education. The final year of compulsory education (year 9) and the first of upper secondary education coincide. Most school-based VET comes under the remit of the education ministry. Governance of apprenticeship is shared by the ministries of economy (company-based track) and education (school-based track), the social partners and the *Länder*. There is also a variety of VET programmes at tertiary level and for adults.

Upper secondary level

Alongside general education programmes, learners can choose from various VET options:

- different types of 1- or 2-year pre-VET (*Polytechnische Schule*, PTS, ISCED 341; *berufsbildende mittlere Schule*, BMS, ISCED 351): learners acquire general education and basic vocational skills preparing them for further school-based VET and apprenticeships;
- 3- to 4-year school-based VET (BMS, ISCED 354, EQF 4) combine general education and respective occupational competences and qualifications to perform medium-level jobs. Those who complete an add-on VET course (lasting 2 to 3 years) or take the higher education entrance exam (*Berufsreifeprüfung*, BRP) also obtain general access to higher education studies;
- 5-year school-based VET (*berufsbildende höhere Schule*, BHS, ISCED 354-554, EQF 5) offer high-quality occupation-related training while strengthening learners' general education. They lead to double qualifications for senior positions in business and general access to higher education at the same time (*Reife- und Diplomprüfung*);
- apprenticeships (ISCED 354, EQF 4) last 2 to 4 years and are offered in some 230 occupations to learners having completed compulsory education. They lead to qualifications at medium level. Graduates can progress to qualify as master craftsperson or, with relevant work experience and/or additional exams, access tertiary level training in a related field. By completing the *Berufsreifeprüfung* or an add-on VET course, they can obtain general access to higher education;
- VET programmes in the healthcare sector last 1 to 3 years and are offered at ISCED 351 and 353. Three-year nursing programmes are offered at ISCED 454 and provide access to tertiary-level training in related fields. These programmes expire at the end of 2026 and are currently being replaced by degree programmes at universities of applied sciences (FH).

Tertiary level

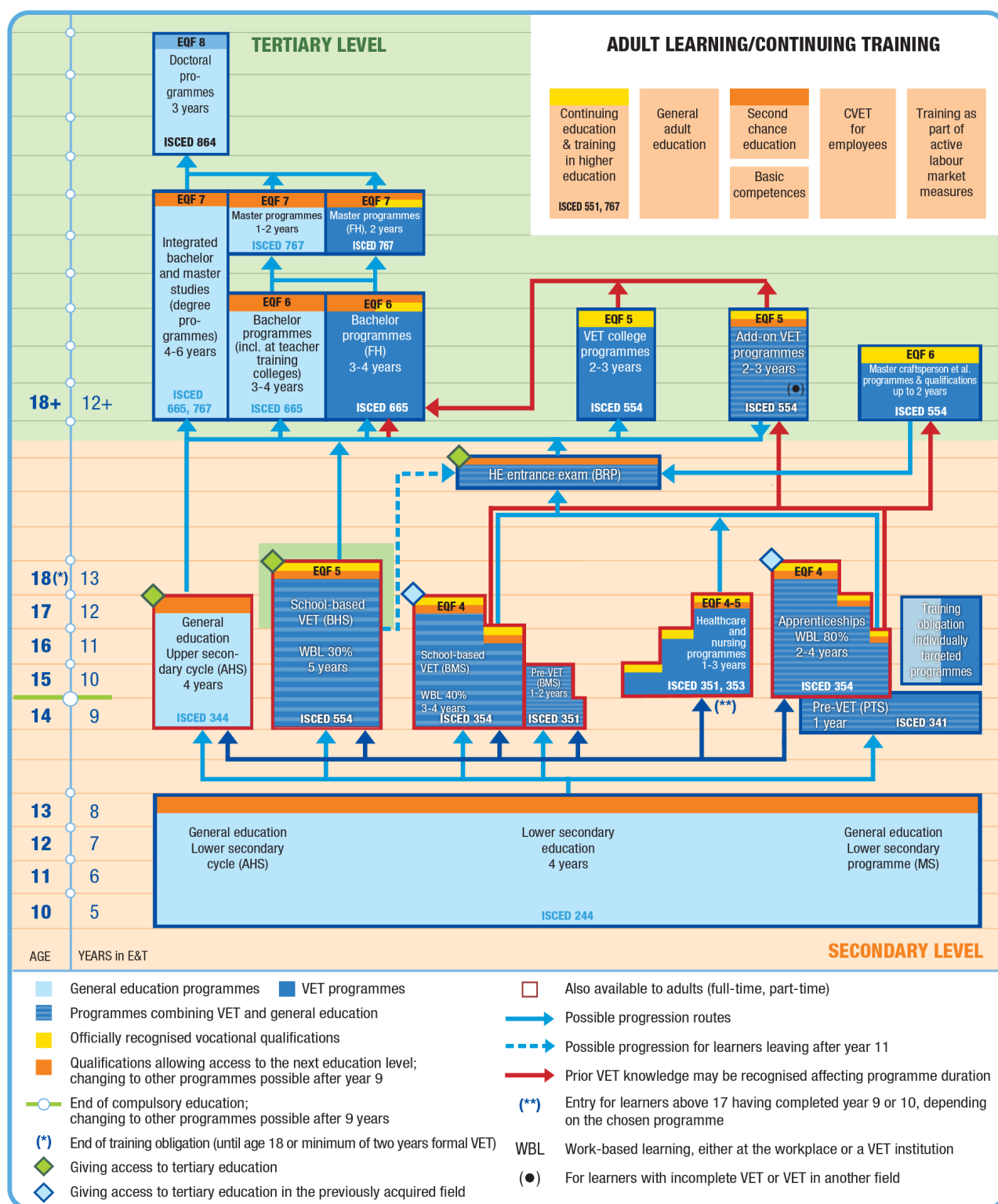
VET programmes (ISCED 554, EQF 5) last 2 to 3 years and provide high level professional training. They are available in various specialist areas and graduates attain the professional qualifications of the corresponding BHS.

Universities of applied sciences (FH) provide practice-oriented bachelor (ISCED 665, EQF 6) and master programmes (ISCED 767, EQF 7) in different fields. Some are based on the dual principle, where theory and practice in enterprises alternate. Many are open to people in employment.

Adult learning/continuing VET

Adults can acquire the same qualifications within formal education and training as those open to the young. A diverse range of institutions offers continuing training and progression opportunities to complement or upgrade people's initial qualifications. These include programmes awarding or preparing for tertiary/ post-secondary vocational qualifications, such as industrial master and master craftsperson certificates, certified accountants, or for law enforcement services. They also provide training within active labour market measures.

VET in Austria's education and training system



NB: ISCED-P 2011.

Source: Cedefop, & ibw Austria - Research & Development in VET. (2023). Vocational education and training in Europe – Austria: 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/austria-u3

Distinctive features of VET

The broad range of available VET programmes is not only reflected in the various types of training and qualification levels but also in the fields of study, which include business, engineering, tourism, fashion and agriculture. Programmes can be adapted to regional economic contexts and skill needs and allow learners to develop their strengths and talents in the best possible way.

Work-based learning is central to VET, particularly in apprenticeships where learners spend 80% of their training time in a company. School-based VET is also practice-oriented, including learning in workshops, labs, training restaurants and practice firms, complemented by mandatory work placements in companies. Project and diploma assignments as part of the final exam of the 5-year VET programme (EQF 5) are often set by companies or carried out with their collaboration.

Much attention is paid to the acquisition of key competences (including teamwork, digital and [entrepreneurial](#) skills). At least one foreign language is mandatory – in some study fields (such as tourism) up to three – and is also used as a working language at several schools. Competence-orientation is a key principle in VET.

The number of apprentices (within the dual VET-track) being trained is driven by company demand. The training is based on a training contract between the company and the apprentice and learners need to follow a respective school-based programme. Early leaving rates from education and training have been comparatively low (8.4% in 2022) and there has been a [training obligation since 2017](#): all young people must participate in mainstream school-based programmes, apprenticeships or other recognised training until the age of 18.

Challenges and policy responses

Despite its wide recognition, VET faces several challenges:

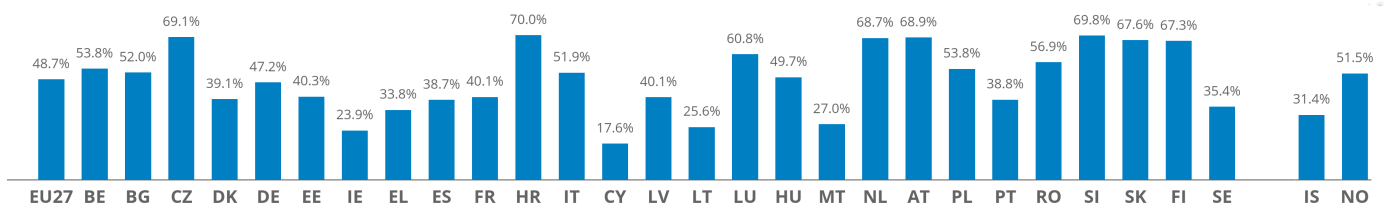
- basic skills: the latest [OECD-PISA results](#) reveal that the share of learners with low achievement in reading literacy and maths is comparatively high. Companies tend to point to young apprentices' basic skills gaps. This drives the current government's goal that no young person should leave compulsory education without having achieved basic competence levels in reading, writing and maths;
- value of non-formal training: Austria has a relatively segmented education system; permeability is limited, particularly between non-formal and formal programmes at higher levels. Public perception of formal and non-formal qualifications is not the same. The [national qualifications framework \(NQF\)](#) is expected to provide a new perspective on them, as assignment to NQF levels is based on learning outcomes, irrespective of the institutional context in which they were acquired. Since end of 2019 it has been possible to assign non-formal qualifications to NQF;
- lack of skilled workers: there is a shortage of skilled workers which is mainly attributed to demographic developments and the increased attractiveness of general education. Several measures have been introduced to attract more people to VET, such as the possibility to follow [part-time apprenticeship](#) for parents and people with health problems (from 2020).



Austria

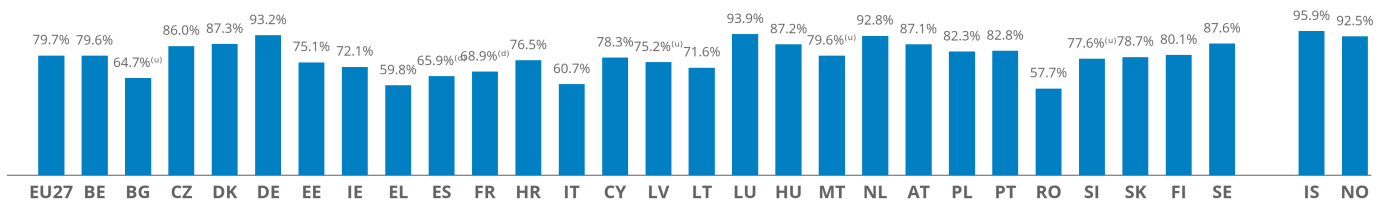
Education and training in figures

IVET students as % of all upper secondary students, 2021



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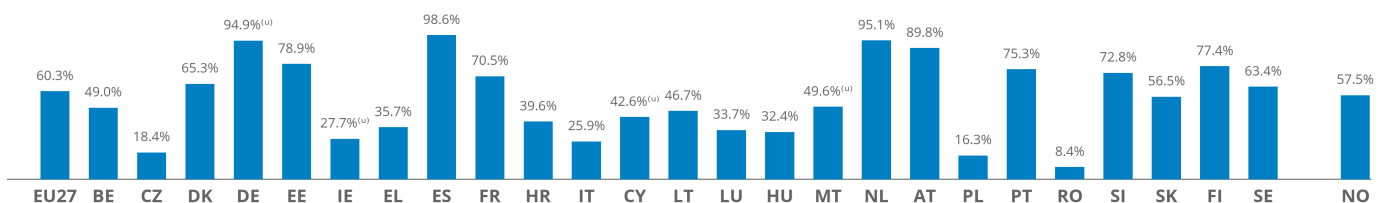
Employment rate for recent IVET graduates (20-34 year-olds) (%), 2022



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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

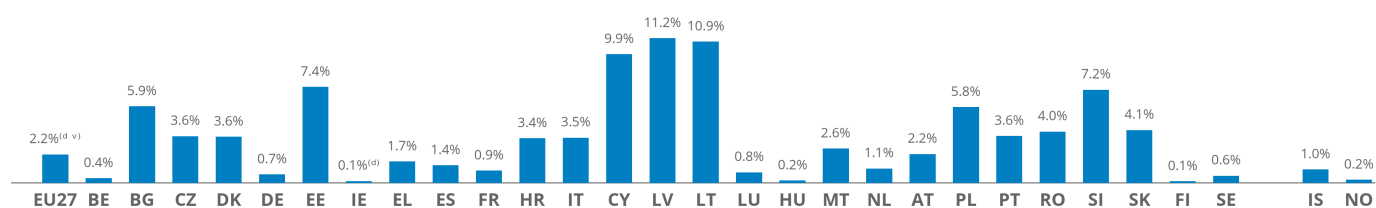
Recent IVET graduates (20-34 year-olds) with a work-based learning experience as part of their vocational education and training (%), 2022



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

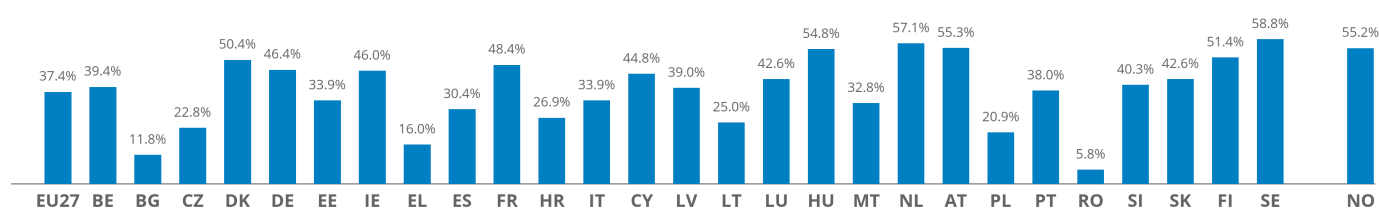
IVET learners who benefitted from a learning mobility abroad (%), 2021



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

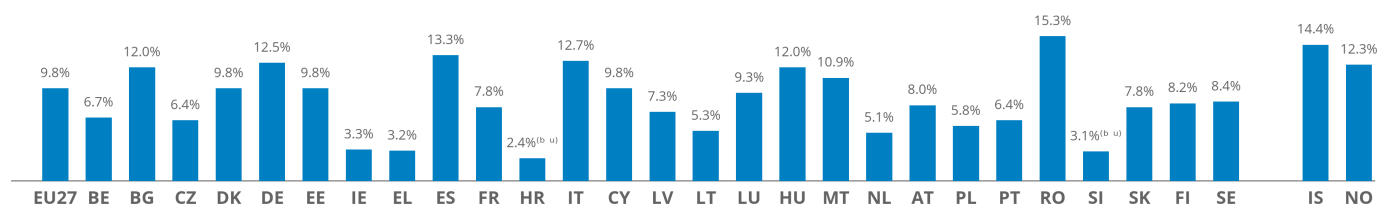
Adults (25-64 year-olds) with a learning experience in the last 12 months (%), 2016



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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

- Cedefop and ReferNet. (2023). *Timeline of VET policies: Austria*.
- European Commission. (2023). *Education and training monitor: Austria*.
- Eurydice. (2024). *National education systems: Austria*.

https://www.bmbwf.gv.at/en.html	Federal Ministry of Education, Science and Research
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https://www.bmaw.gv.at/en.html	BMAW - Federal Ministry of Labour and Economy
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https://www.refernet.at/de/	ReferNet Austria
https://www.aq.ac.at/	Agency for Quality Assurance and Accreditation
https://www.ams.at/	public employment service

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