

Spotlight
on VET 
BULGARIA

Vocational education
and training systems
in Europe

2023

VET in Bulgaria

The Ministry of Education and Science coordinates national policy on vocational education and training (VET). Sports and culture ministries are in charge of VET schools in the respective study fields. The VET Act defines two target groups: school-age learners and adults (16+ not in formal education and training). Young people usually enrol in VET from age 14.

VET programmes for school-age learners have a vocational and a general part; graduates acquire qualifications for both. VET programmes provided by training centres and colleges for adults do not include a general education part and lead to a VET qualification only. VET qualifications can also be acquired through validation of prior learning by passing an exam, as with regular VET learners.

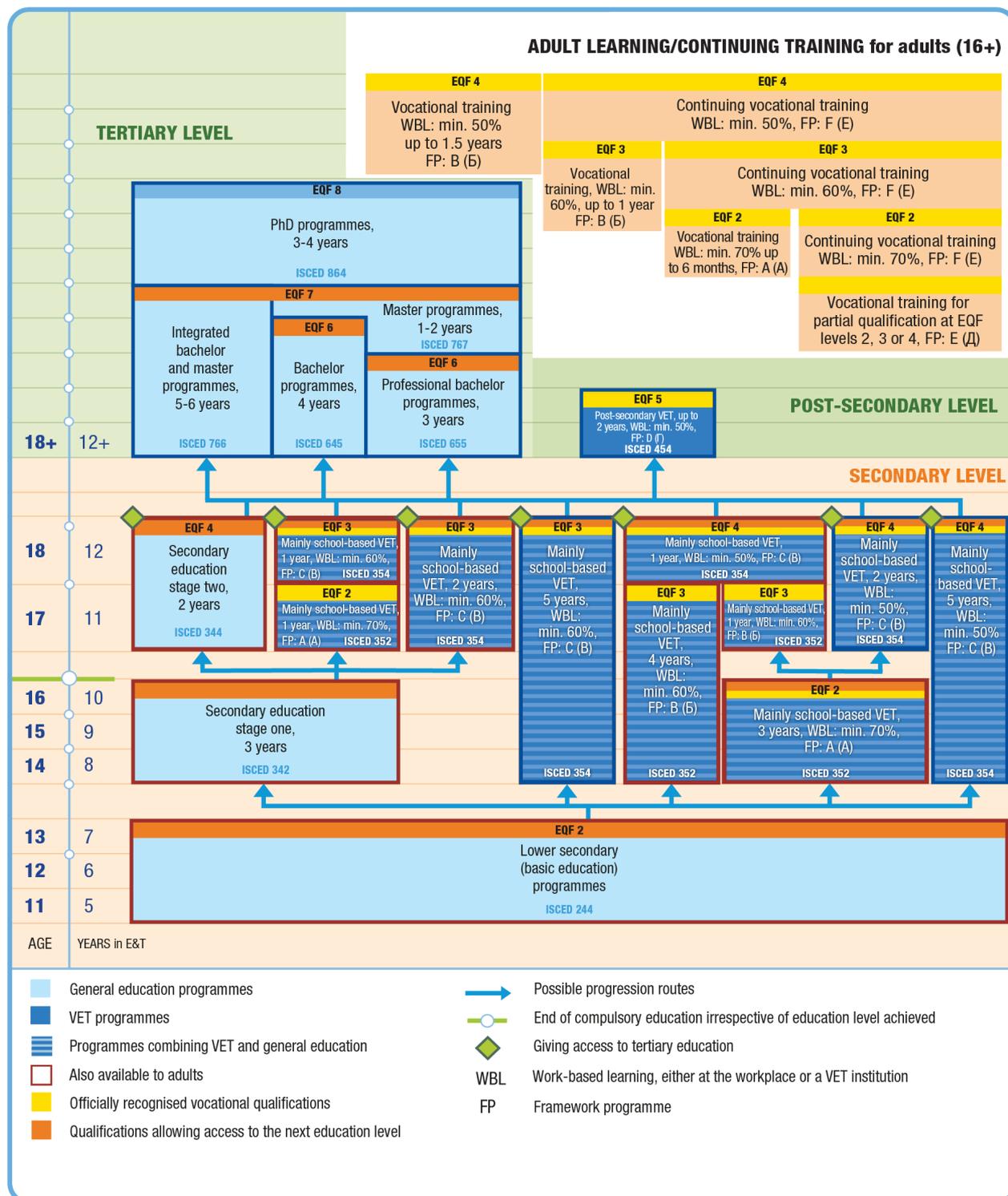
The main VET providers are the State, municipal or private schools, vocational gymnasiums, art and sports schools, VET colleges, and licensed vocational training centres. State education standards specify the content of VET qualifications. Four national VET qualification levels are referenced to the European qualifications framework. The legal framework distinguishes six types of initial and continuing VET (IVET and CVET) programme types (called 'framework programmes'), that define EQF/NQF levels, age and entry requirements, and regulate education form, content and duration.

- A (A): 'second chance' IVET programmes lead to EQF level 2 qualifications at schools and training centres. The duration is 1 or 3 years for school-age learners and up to 6 months for adults;
- B (Б): IVET and CVET programmes leading to qualifications at EQF levels 3 (1 or 4 years) and 3 and 4 in adult learning (up to 1.5 years) at schools and training centres;
- C (B): mainstream IVET and CVET programmes leading to EQF level 3 and 4 qualifications at VET schools. Duration is 1 to 5 years, giving access to higher education, provided learners have passed final matriculation exams;
- D (Г): IVET and CVET programmes for adults only leading to qualifications at EQF level 5 at VET schools and colleges with a maximum duration of 2 years;
- E (Д): up to 1-year IVET and CVET programmes leading to partial qualifications at EQF levels 2 to 4 at schools and training centres;
- F (E): CVET programmes for adults (16+) leading to qualifications at EQF levels 2 to 4: full or partial, updating already acquired qualifications. The programmes are provided by schools and training centres and duration is defined by training providers.

Work-based learning (WBL) forms a substantial part (50% to 70% or more) of all VET programmes. Most is offered by schools, with the WBL share decreasing with programme level. The current legal framework for dual VET is well defined and was upgraded in 2019. Practical training in a company alternates with periods of theory in a school or another VET provider. School-age learners are trained by companies at least 2 to 3 days per week in the final grades (11 and 12). Both school-age learners and adults receive remuneration from the employer.

Social partners have decision-making and advisory roles in shaping VET through their participation in regional and national councils and their involvement in the development of State education standards and in updating the List of professions for vocational education and training (LPVET) and the Lists of State-protected specialties. They are also members of examination boards set up by VET providers.

VET in Bulgaria's education and training system



NB: ISCED-P 2011.

Source: Cedefop, & National Agency for Vocational Education and Training (NAVET). (2023). Vocational education and training in Europe – Bulgaria: 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/bulgaria-u3

Distinctive features of VET

VET is provided at secondary and post-secondary (non-tertiary) levels. There are more learners in VET compared with general education: 57.8 % of the total secondary education population in 2022. Secondary general education schools may also open VET classes by a special order of the education minister, a popular option in small towns and rural areas.

Since 2016/17, secondary education has been offered in two stages; this improves access to VET, as learners may choose their education path twice, after completing grades 7 and 10.

State education standards play a major role in shaping qualifications and curricula. They are developed by the National agency for vocational education and training (NAVET) in units of learning outcomes for all VET qualifications (EQF levels 2 to 5).

Quality assurance criteria and procedures for the validation of non-formal and informal learning have been developed since the development of the relevant legal framework in 2015. Validation procedures may be organised by all VET providers on the condition that the process concerns qualifications from LPVET.

Challenges and policy responses

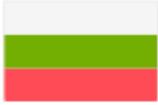
National policy priorities in vocational education and training (VET) aim at increasing the effectiveness and labour market relevance of the training provision, through inclusive and attractive learning choices for young people and adults. These objectives are being materialised through the *Modernisation of VET* programme, part of the [strategic framework in education and training for 2021-30](#), and the ongoing [Education 2021-27 programme](#). They are reaffirmed in the national implementation plan commitments taken by the country within [VET priorities agreed at European level](#).

An impact assessment study (2022) on the last VET reform identified priority areas for policy action: validation of professional competences, review of educational standards, graduate tracking, career guidance and quality assurance in VET.

Significant steps were taken in 2023 to align the VET offer to labour market needs. Draft legislation was prepared in coordination with all stakeholders introducing the accumulation and transfer of units of learning outcomes in VET as an alternative to ECVET; this is expected to enable citizens engage in training to improve existing qualifications, promoting a lifelong learning culture. The National Agency for Vocational Education and Training (NAVET) finalised a comprehensive review of the [State Educational standards](#) which are used as a tool for curriculum and training programmes design; standards for [digital](#) and [green](#) skills were aligned to the EU framework.

Bulgaria is committed to develop a highly skilled teaching workforce along the key areas identified in the OECD-Bulgaria skills strategy [project](#). The latest amendments of the VET Act increased the visibility of validation procedures, the role of vocational training centres and the overall monitoring role of NAVET in qualification design and training provision.

Adult participation in training is being facilitated through pilots for using individual learning accounts and micro-credentials, run by employer associations; continuation of the testing is planned through the operational programme Human Resources Development.

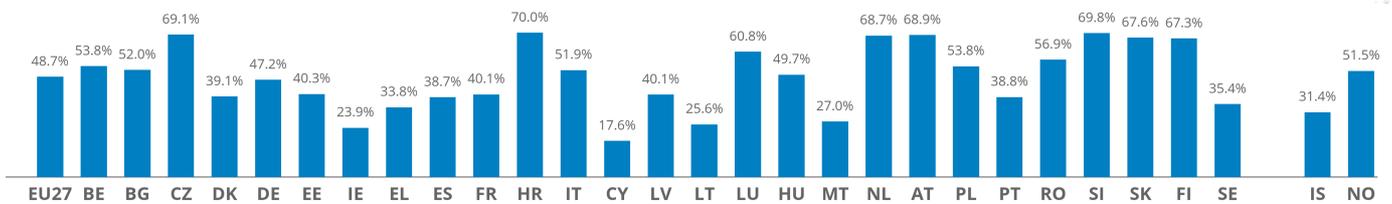


Bulgaria

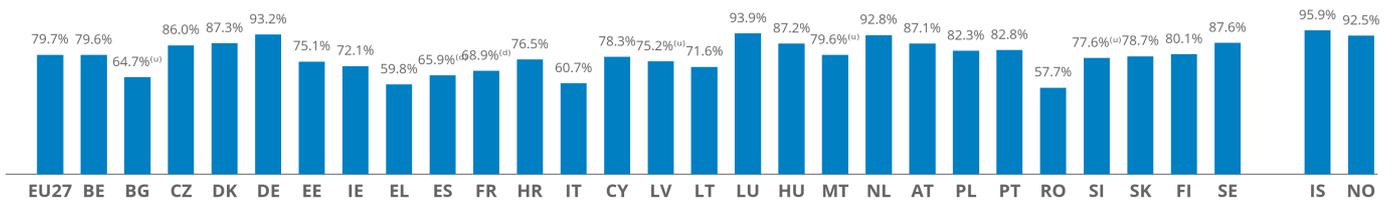


Education and training in figures

IVET students as % of all upper secondary students, 2021

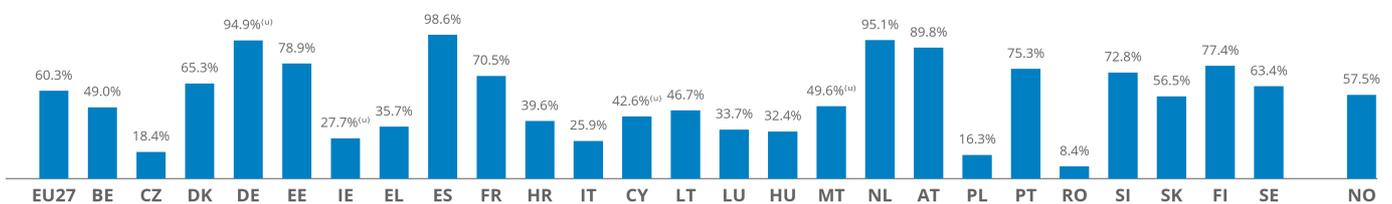


Employment rate for recent IVET graduates (20-34 year-olds) (%), 2022



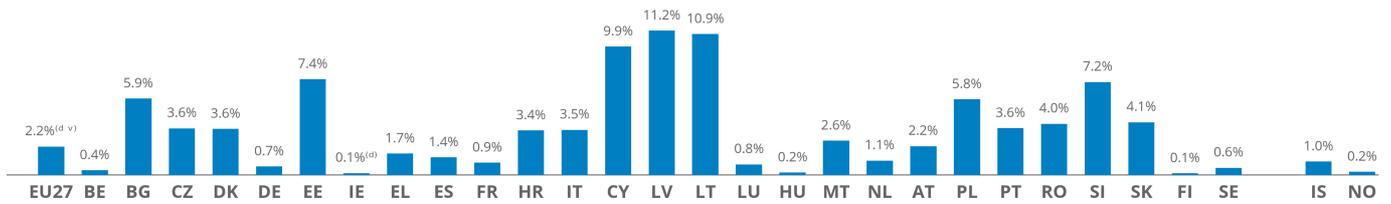
Notes: Bulgaria, Latvia, Malta and Slovenia: (u) low reliability, Czechia: (b) break in time series, Spain and France: (d) definition differs

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

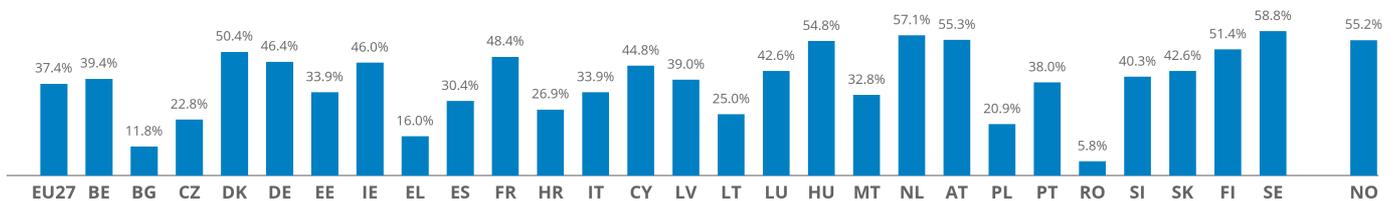
IVET learners who benefitted from a learning mobility abroad (%), 2021



CEDEFOP

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

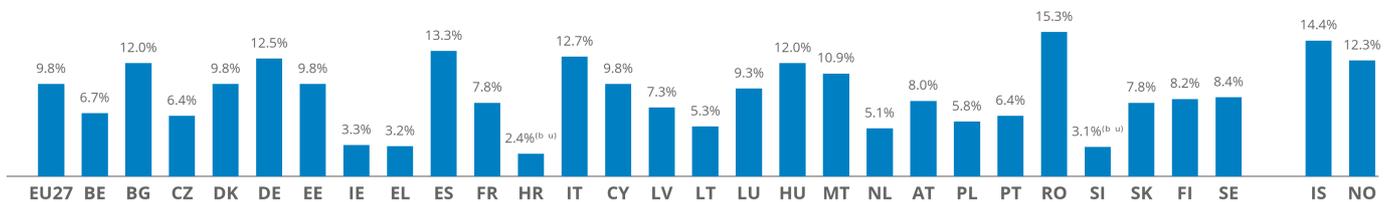
Adults (25-64 year-olds) with a learning experience in the last 12 months (%), 2016



CEDEFOP

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

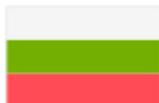
Early leavers from education and training (%), 2021



CEDEFOP

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: Bulgaria*.
- European Commission. (2023) *Education and Training Monitor: Bulgaria*.
- Eurydice. (2024). *National education systems: Bulgaria*.

www.refernet.bg	ReferNet Bulgaria
www.mon.bg	Ministry of Education and Science
www.navet.government.bg	National Agency for VET
www.mlsp.government.bg	Ministry of Labour and Social Policy
www.az.government.bg	Employment Agency
www.nsi.bg/en	National Statistical Institute
www.vet-bg.com	National VET portal

Please cite as:

Cedefop, & National Agency for Vocational Education and Training (NAVET). (2023). Spotlight on VET - Bulgaria: 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/bulgaria-u3>

© Cedefop and National Agency for Vocational Education and Training (NAVET) (ReferNet Bulgaria), 2023

Reproduction is authorised, provided the source is acknowledged.