

Spotlight on VET **GERMANY**

Vocational education
and training systems
in Europe

2023

VET in Germany

Vocational education and training (VET) is based on close cooperation between the State, companies and social partners. The Federal Ministry of Education and Research (BMBF) is responsible for general VET policy issues and has a coordinating role for all training occupations. The BMBF works closely with the Federal Institute for Vocational Education and Training (BIBB). BIBB conducts research, moderates the process of developing the training regulations and plays a crucial advisory role for VET policy. The Federal States (*Länder*) are in charge of the school-based part of VET. Social partner contribution is important at different levels.

Upper secondary VET

Apprenticeship programmes (dual system) are the pillar of upper secondary VET. They are mostly offered at EQF level 4 and cover 326 occupations. Programmes usually last 3 years and combine two learning venues, companies and vocational schools: the work-based learning share is approximately 75%. Enterprises bear the costs of company-based training and pay learner remuneration. Those passing the final examination carried out by the chambers are qualified as certified skilled professionals.

In parallel, upper secondary VET programmes are offered in vocational schools at EQF levels 2 to 4. These include:

- school-based VET programmes, duration 1 to 3 years, leading to a qualification e.g. in the health sector such as physiotherapist (3 years, EQF level 4);
- general education programmes with vocational orientation, duration 2 to 3 years, leading to the general higher education entrance qualification.

Young people with learning difficulties, handicap or insufficient German language skills have the possibility to attend different one-year lasting transition programmes at EQF level 1-2.

At post-secondary level, specialised programmes are offered at EQF levels 4 to 5, lasting 1 to 3 years and leading to entrance qualifications for universities.

Tertiary VET

At tertiary level, those with vocational qualifications and professional experience can acquire advanced vocational qualifications at EQF levels 5 to 7. At EQF level 6 (bachelor professional, e.g. *Meister*) the qualifications entitle graduates to exercise a trade, to hire and train apprentices, and to enrol in academic bachelor programmes. Graduates can continue at EQF level 7 (master professional). These qualifications support the acquisition of middle and top management positions in companies. Preparation courses are offered by chambers or schools.

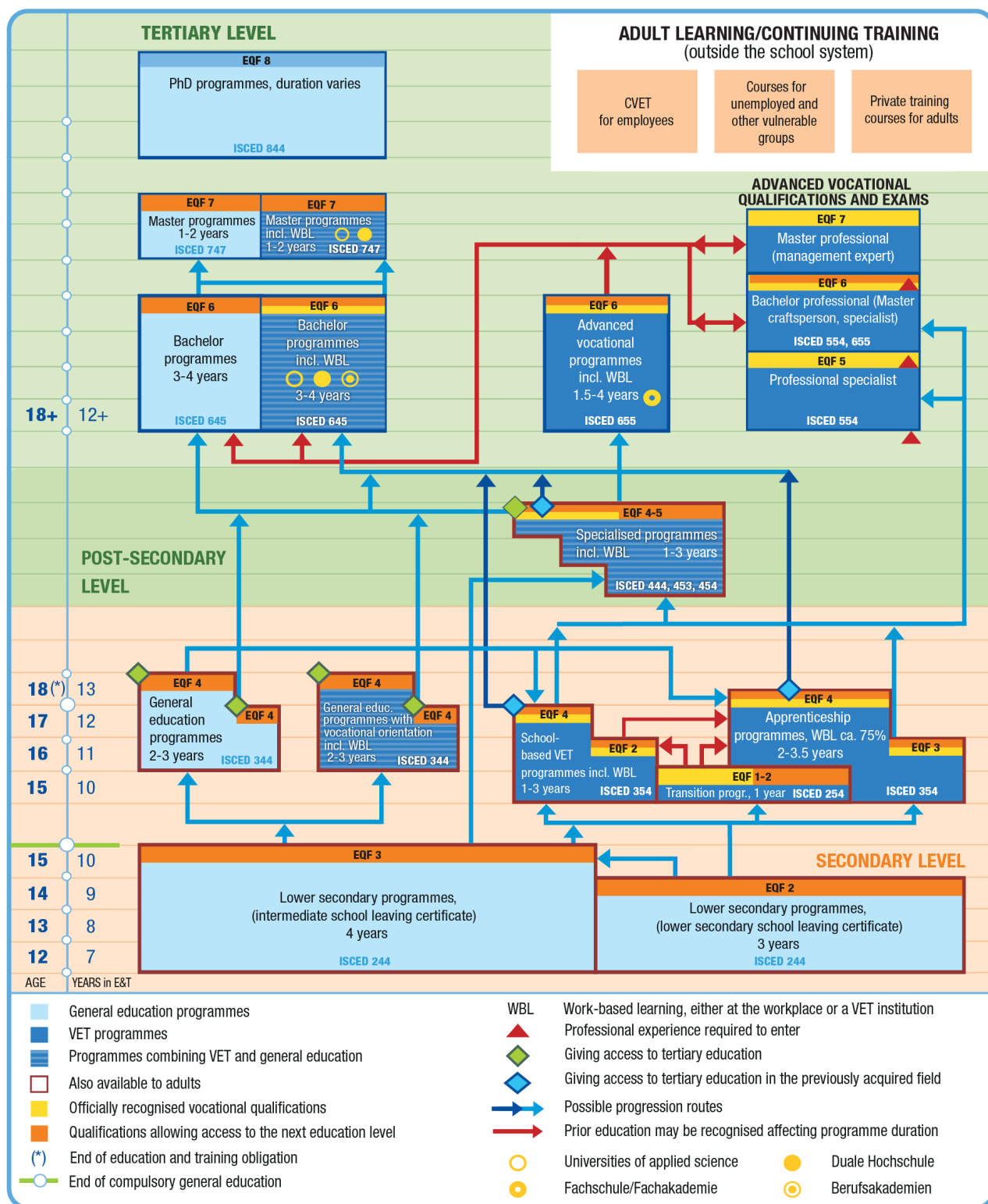
Advanced vocational programmes are offered at state regulated technical and trade schools at EQF 6, lasting 1.5 to 4 years. Entrance requirements include specific vocational qualification and work experience. They lead to an advanced qualification (such as technician, educator) and give access to the relevant field of study.

Dual study programmes are offered at EQF levels 6 to 7 by different higher education institutions. They provide a blend of academic and vocational training, in which in-company training is an important element (share of at least 40 to 50%). Enterprises bear the costs of company-based training and pay learners a wage.

Continuing VET

Continuing training is playing an increasingly important role in improving employability by upskilling and reskilling in line with the digital and ecological transition. It is characterised by a wide variety of training providers and a low degree of State regulation. State incentives are in place to increase participation in CVET.

VET in Germany's education and training system



NB: ISCED-P 2011.

Source: Cedefop, & Federal Institute for Vocational Education and Training (BIBB). (2023). Vocational education and training in Europe – Germany: 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/germany-u3

Distinctive features of VET

Germany's VET is a successful model, largely based on the dual system (apprenticeship) leading to high-quality vocational qualifications, valued on the labour market. Apprenticeship enables smooth education-to-work transitions, contributing to low youth unemployment: in 2021 this was 6.9% of those aged 15 to 24, versus 16.6% in the EU-27. Almost half of upper secondary school learners are enrolled in a VET programme; of those, about two thirds participate in apprenticeship. A growing share of apprentices has a higher education entrance qualification (29.7% of apprentices starting their training in 2021).

National standards and training regulations (curricula for in-company and school-based components) ensure the quality of the dual training programmes. Companies provide apprenticeships in accordance with the training regulations, developed by the four stakeholders (Federal and State governments, companies and trade unions). These regulations allow to agree on company training plans with apprentices and are technology open. Instruments such as additional qualifications as well as differentiation into various specialisations enable a high degree of flexibility and adaptability of the training regulations. Furthermore, regular revisions guarantee keeping pace with rapid technological and organisational changes.

Social partner contribution at different levels is important. As vocational training must respond to labour market needs, employer organisations and trade unions have a major influence on the content and form of IVET and CVET. At national level, they are represented in the BIBB board and participate in its vocational training committees. At regional level, the chambers play a crucial role in VET, such as in examinations. The initiative for updating or developing new occupational profiles comes mainly from social partners.

Challenges and policy responses

Access to training market. This priority aims at securing the next generation of skilled workers by promoting young people's interest in dual VET and addressing matching problems in training companies, e.g. through vocational orientation and inclusion. To this purpose, the [Alliance for initial and further training](#) between the main VET actors has been relaunched for 2023-26.

Excellence in VET. In response to more demanding occupational profiles, the focus is placed on talented learners and establishing the equivalence of vocational and academic education at all levels. The umbrella initiative [Excellence in VET](#) combines existing and new measures, e.g. programmes supporting inter-company training centres or innovative VET projects.

Ecological and technological transformation. VET policies contribute in identifying future skills needs and developing competences and qualifications of learners and trainers in sustainability at all levels. The project *H2PRO* examines how skills requirements in apprenticeship occupations are changing along the hydrogen value chain, e.g. with sectoral analyses in production, transport, storage, industry and heat supply.

Digital education and training area. The digital transformation requires new skills for learners, VET teachers and trainers, and allows new formats for learning in vocational schools, in companies and in the CVET segment. The [National Skills Strategy \(NWS\)](#) for developing a CVET culture was renewed by all partners. One goal is to strengthen the acquisition of new skills and possible reorientation in working life in the company context through regional CVET networks.

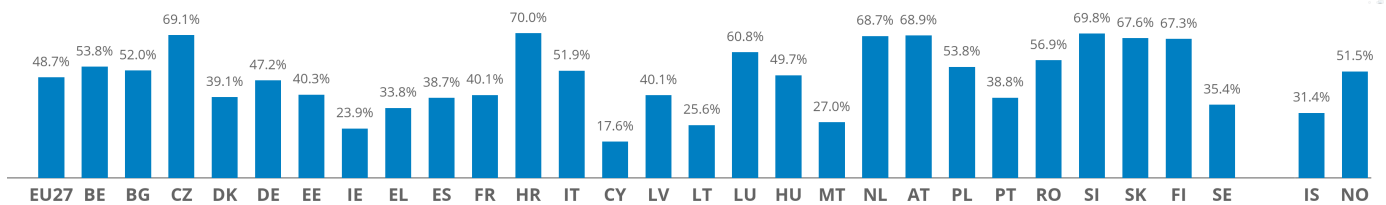
Internationalisation of VET. This priority aims at promoting international VET mobility and skills competitions, fostering VET cooperation worldwide, with a focus on the European education and training area. One portal for VET learners compiles all information on how to organise an internship abroad; another portal addresses VET institutions on how they can support international apprentice mobility.



Germany

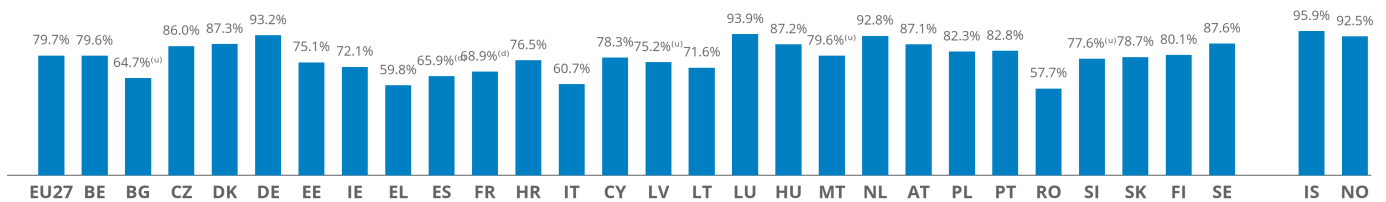
Education and training in figures

IVET students as % of all upper secondary students, 2021



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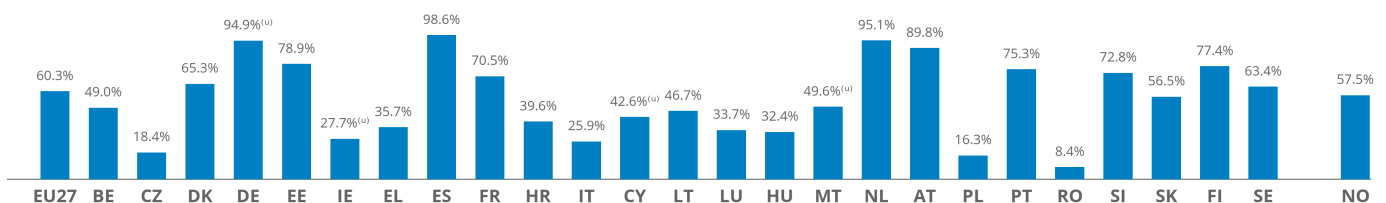
Employment rate for recent IVET graduates (20-34 year-olds) (%), 2022



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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

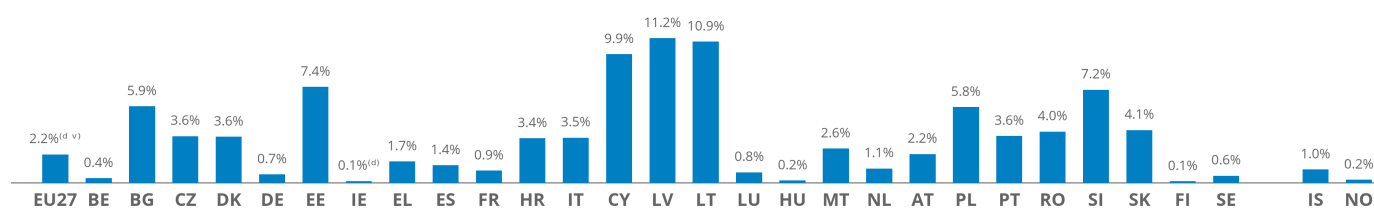
Recent IVET graduates (20-34 year-olds) with a work-based learning experience as part of their vocational education and training (%), 2022



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

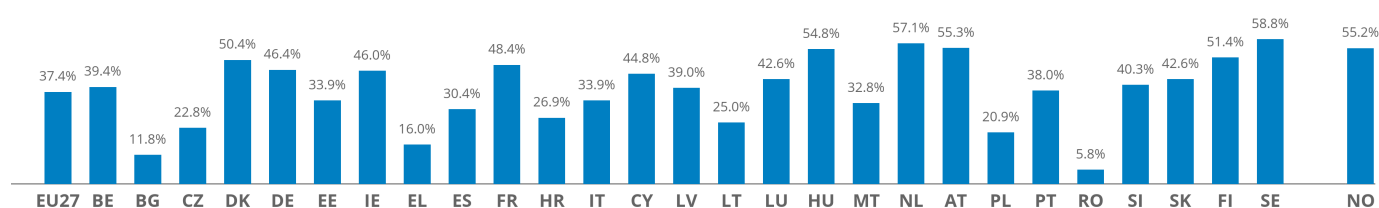
IVET learners who benefitted from a learning mobility abroad (%), 2021



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

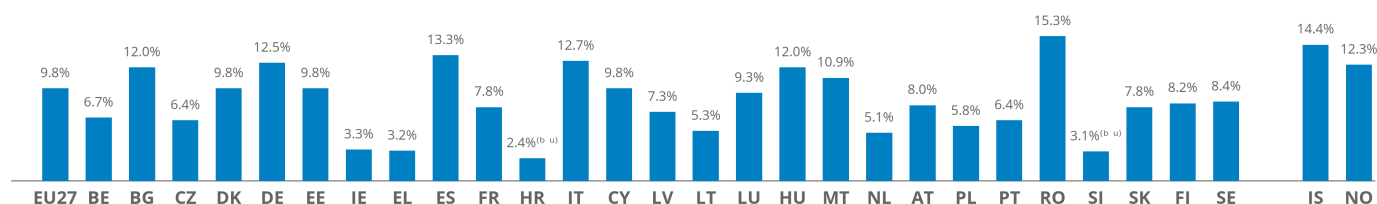
Adults (25-64 year-olds) with a learning experience in the last 12 months (%), 2016



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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

- BIBB (2023). [Datenreport 2023](#) [data report 2023]
- BMBF (2023). [Der Berufsbildungsbericht](#) [vocational training report 2023]
- Cedefop and Refernet (2023). [Timeline of VET policies: Germany](#)
- European Commission (2023). [Education and training monitor: Germany](#)
- Eurydice (2024). [National education systems: Germany](#)

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| https://www.refernet.de/de/ | ReferNet Germany |
| https://www.bibb.de/de/index.php | Federal Institute for Vocational Education and Training (BIBB) |
| https://www.bmbf.de/bmbf/de/bildung/berufliche-bildung/berufliche-bildung_node.html | Federal Ministry of Education and Research (BMBF) |
| https://www.bmwk.de/Navigation/EN/Home/home.html | Federal Ministry for Economic Affairs and Climate Action (BMWK) |
| https://www.bmas.de/EN/Home/home.html | Federal Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs (BMAS) |
| https://www.kwb-berufsbildung.de/ | German Industry Board for Vocational Education and Training (KWB) |
| https://en.dgb.de/ | German Confederation of Trade Unions (DGB) |
| https://www.arbeitsagentur.de/en | Federal Employment Agency |
| https://www.arbeitsagentur.de/en | The Standing Conference of the Ministers of Education and Cultural Affairs of the Länder of the Federal Republic of Germany (KMK) |

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