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GERMANY



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1. Introduction

This VET policy brief produced by Cedefop presents a snapshot of vocational education and training policy developments in Germany between 2020 and the beginning of 2023. It presents the context and the challenges the country faces, a selection of the latest VET-related statistics, as well as the national priorities until 2030 identified in Germany's national implementation plan. This VET policy brief provides information from Cedefop monitoring and analysis on the implementation of the [Council Recommendation on VET](#) and [Osnabrück Declaration](#). It offers stakeholders a regular source of information on VET policy developments that could be used for future policy making.

2. National VET context and challenges

2.1 National VET context

Political responsibility for VET in Germany is shared between the Federation, the Federal States (*Länder*) and the social partners. In the education system, learning on the job is a traditional component and work-based learning plays an important role in most secondary and tertiary VET programmes. Apprenticeship is the main pillar of upper secondary VET and enables a smooth education-to-work transition. At post-secondary level, learners can follow programmes at EQF level 4 to 5 and at tertiary level programmes leading to vocational qualifications at EQF levels 5 to 7, which qualify them to pursue middle and top management positions in companies. The permeability and equivalence of vocational and academic education offers attractive career paths for VET graduates and secures labour market demand for skilled workers. The Federal Employment Agency is the main body for counselling and guidance.

Continuing training plays an important role in improving employability by upskilling and reskilling people in line with the labour market needs. It is characterised by a high number of training providers and a low level of State regulation.

The initiative for updating or developing new occupational profiles comes mostly from social partners, who have an important role in defining VET at various levels. At regional level, the chambers have an important role in VET, such as in examinations (Cedefop, 2020, 2021; Cedefop; BIBB, 2022).

The function, tasks and services of the relevant VET stakeholders are based on a system of rules and funding and are essentially defined by law: Germany's Vocational Training Act, Crafts Code, Upgrading Training Assistance Act, Works Constitution Act, German Social Code (SGB II and III), Skills Development Opportunities Act, Future of Work Act, school laws, higher education laws, collective agreements, Recognition Act.

Important policy reforms that took place before 2020 include:

- a) [Alliance for initial and further training](#), which aims to integrate all interested learners in a VET programme through pre-VET measures, as well as support during their training to ensure successful completion;
- b) [National skills strategy \(2019\)](#), which responds to the challenges of the digital transformation as it changes the job profiles and qualifications. The overall aim is to establish a new culture by understanding continuing VET as a lifelong need (ReferNet Germany; Cedefop, 2021a).

2.2 Challenges

The main challenges Germany has faced in 2022 include the relative unattractiveness of VET, adult participation in lifelong learning and the need for upgrading competences of teachers and trainers, especially after the COVID-19 pandemic.

In the 2020s the working age population is expected to fall by 3.7 million; demographic ageing and the increasing need for skills linked to the digital and green transitions are expected to increase the labour shortages (European Commission, 2023). Skills shortages have grown during recent years, especially for engineers and programmers, technology, crafts, logistics, science, engineering and mathematics specialists, care and health professions, and social workers. These developments increase the need for continuing upskilling and reskilling measures to tackle skills shortages and skills gaps, showing the high importance of participation in lifelong learning. For 2030, Germany has set itself the target of 65% of adults in training every year, requiring considerable improvement from 46% in 2016, in line with the data from the Adult education survey (European Commission, 2023) ⁽¹⁾.

There is also a need to improve the attractiveness of apprenticeship as well as the matching of available training places to applicants. Dual VET is an attractive model for structuring the transition from school to working life, and graduates profit from a high employment rate. However, demographic changes and the attractiveness of academic education have reduced the overall interest of young learners in dual VET, with small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) especially facing difficulties in finding apprentices. As apprenticeship graduates are often employed in the company where they did their apprenticeship, this has led also to a lack of skilled workforce, especially for SMEs (BIBB, 2023). At the beginning of the school year 2021-22, the number of vacant training places (68 868) was, for the first time, higher than the number of remaining applicants without a training place (60 400). Compared to the previous year, 9% more registered training places remained vacant. While it was easier for applicants to find a training place, companies, especially SMEs, were not able to find enough apprentices, which is a risk that the lack of skilled labour force will further increase (BMBF, 2023).

During the COVID-19 pandemic school lockdown, the lack of access to digital devices and the lack of technical skills became more visible, especially for pedagogical staff. School heads and teachers were not adequately prepared and often did not have the technical and pedagogical skills and support system to implement distance learning (European

⁽¹⁾ The latest available data from the [Adult education survey \(AES\)](#) are from 2016.

Commission, 2021). The pandemic has led also to a further increase in inequalities in education outcomes of socially disadvantaged learners, which were especially affected by lack of devices and technical skills.

3. National VET policy priorities

In response to the [2020 Council Recommendation on VET](#) and the [Osnabrück Declaration, Germany's national implementation plan](#) focuses on five thematic priorities.

- a) Improve the integration and access to training and the labour market: relevant measures and initiatives need to be taken to secure the future need for skilled workers, through promoting VET and addressing problems when filling training places in companies.
- b) Implement a future-proof VET policy by addressing the ecological and technological transformation of the economy: continuous adaptation of qualifications is needed as well as a well-trained workforce that continuously updates its skills.
- c) Develop VET strategies for a digital education and training area: the availability of online platforms and digital infrastructure need to be increased. At macro level, the development of a digital framework to exploit the potential of digitalisation (e.g. for the application of artificial intelligence) is needed. Pedagogical staff in VET institutions should receive needs-based further training, to qualify them for their role in the networked world of work.
- d) Focus on VET excellence including higher-level VET, in response to more demanding career profiles and job descriptions: digitalisation is opening up the possibility of making VET more attractive and of establishing the equivalence of vocational and academic education in practice.
- e) Expand the European education and training area in a globalised economy: initial and continuing VET needs to become more international, by strengthening intercultural and linguistic skills, promoting cross-border mobility and activities in European and international VET cooperation programmes.

[Germany's recovery and resilience plan](#) (2021) responds to the National implementation plan and emphasises the high importance of the green and digital transition: 42% of the plan supports climate objectives and 52% will foster digital transition.

4. Main policy developments and progress 2020-23

4.1 Improve the integration and access to training and the labour market

Several measures have been implemented to counteract the pandemic-related decline in the number of training places and applicants.

The partners of the Alliance for initial and further training implemented, through the initiative Summer of VET, more than 1 500 events to promote VET from June 2021 to

November 2022. Since June 2020, the federal government funding programme ‘Securing apprenticeship placements, has financially supported small businesses that are willing to keep or even extend their training levels of apprentices.

Also, [lifelong vocational guidance for young people and adults](#) was strengthened and several measures implemented which, due to the COVID-19 pandemic, were often offered in a virtual format (e.g. [Check-U](#), [New plan](#), [Berufenavi](#)). Since 2020, the employment service has also offered vocational orientation at general education and vocational schools and, since 2021/22, at higher education institutions (BMBF, 2022). Since April 2020, the project [VerOnika](#) has offered young people the possibility to obtain insights into various training professions and courses of study (Cedefop and ReferNet, 2022a).

Several measures were taken in 2021 targeting specific groups. These include the counselling network [Queraufstieg](#), which aims to [attract university dropouts to VET](#), and the training and migration coordination office [KAUSA](#), which introduced cross-regional transfer of successful concepts and instruments to increase the VET participation of migrants and refugees (Cedefop and ReferNet, 2022b). Since 2022 the ESF Plus programme [My turn – women with migration experience are ready to get started](#), has funded projects providing longer-term, continuous and individual support for migrant women with a low level of formal qualifications.

The potential to [follow part-time vocational training was expanded](#) with the amendment of the Vocational Training Act in 2020. Since then, every trainee is allowed to complete the in-company part of the training on a part-time basis, with the consent of their training company. The amendment aims to attract new target groups such as refugees, or people who are already in gainful employment.

The first transfer projects of the [JOBSTARTER Plus](#) programme began in mid-2021, transferring successful concepts to encourage SMEs to get involved in VET to other regions or industries (BMBF, 2022; BMBF 2023). The funding programme [Passgenaue Besetzung](#) continues in 2023 to help small and medium-sized enterprises fill their training places with the right people, including integrating foreign skilled workers in their workforce.

4.2 Implement a future-proof VET policy

Various developments have taken place since 2020 to adapt and modernise competences and qualifications to the fast-changing skills required on the labour market.

The [modernisation of VET qualifications](#) has meant that since August 2021 all training occupations that come into force should include descriptions on [four new standards](#): the digitised working world, safety and health at the workplace, environment and sustainability, as well as company, VET, labour and tariff law (ReferNet Germany; Cedefop, 2021b). In 2021, a 3-year research project on the development of qualification and skills requirements on hydrogen technology ([H2PRO](#)) started. It examines the training occupations that are important for the implementation of the National hydrogen strategy, what additional qualification needs arise, and whether the regulatory means of the required occupations are suitable for the new work tasks and competence requirements.

In 2021 the employers' initiative for [partial qualification](#) (AGi TQ) developed the quality seal One TQ better, ensuring a nationwide standardised offer of partial qualifications (*Teilqualifizierung*, TQ) by the participating German employers' associations and business-related education institutions. The seal of approval includes a promise of quality for the graduates and their (potential) employers.

Several structural changes in the VET landscape took place to improve the innovation and competitiveness of companies. For example, [13 continuing education networks](#) were introduced from the end of 2020 until April 2021, funded through the Federal Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs. These networks support companies in adapting the skills of their employees to changing skills needs. In addition, the planning of the funding programme [Training cluster 4.0 in the Lignite Regions](#) started in 2022. From 2024 onwards the Federal Ministry for Economic Affairs and Climate Action will support sector-specific training clusters, which must consist of at least five actors, such as companies and chambers. These clusters aim to train skilled workers to ensure successful structural change in their region, while supporting the topics of innovation, sustainability, digitalisation and education (Cedefop and ReferNet, 2022c).

VET staff qualification has an important role in this process and the 2-year initiative [BBNE-transfer 2020-22](#) generated knowledge and transferred the insights of seven pilot projects in the field of [VET for sustainable development](#) to education and training professionals producing. It produced two concrete outcomes:

- a) the anthology [Vocational education and training for sustainable development](#), which presents the results of the pilot projects on sustainability-oriented vocational skills, didactic methods for promoting them, and the design of sustainable workplace learning venues;
- b) the guidelines for trainers on how to integrate the guiding idea of sustainability into VET. The guidelines describe which [competences trainees in the retail sector need](#) to be able to have a sustainability-oriented effect in their profession. In line with this, ten recommendations for the didactic and methodical design of teaching/learning processes are presented.

In 2020, the German Economic Institute set up a new website [netzwerkq40.de](#), to establish a network between VET actors and [support trainers in further developing their technical and social skills](#) to design the content and processes of dual training in a digital environment.

4.3 Develop VET strategies for a digital education and training area

Several measures have been set up since 2020 to facilitate the adaptation and modernisation of competences and qualifications, to support specifically the digital transformation of VET.

In August 2020, the [updated training regulation](#) of four IT occupations came into force, to meet the current demands of the economy. The standard occupational profile item [Digitised world of work](#), would be considered in all newly regulated dual training occupations from August 2021. This includes skills, knowledge and competences, e.g. in

privacy and data security, as well as on finding appropriate and efficient means of communication for the relevant target group and documenting results.

Several measures have also been taken since 2020 concerning the development of the digital infrastructure in VET. For example, as part of the [digital school pact](#) (2019-24) additional direct funds of EUR 500 million were agreed in mid-2020, for pupils who cannot access a mobile device at home and to support schools with online teaching content, along with a further EUR 500 million for teachers' equipment (Corona-Hilfe I, II and III). The project [Apprentices as digitalisation scouts](#) (Digiscouts) was put in place in 2020; at least two apprentices in a company, are responsible for identifying potential areas for digitalisation in their training company as part of a trainee project, while being accompanied by experienced coaches. In 2022, the project was relaunched for the entire Stuttgart region in ten companies, with additional focus on ecological sustainability ([Promoting dual VET](#)).

Since autumn 2020, several platforms targeting learners have been created, including the [ProNet Crafts](#), a virtual platform to offer digital and flexible blended learning courses for the craft sector. The education ministry is supporting the [development of a technical infrastructure for a national digital education platform](#). As a 'hub', it intends to integrate educational platforms and offers into a nationwide platform system, establish common standards, and facilitate access to education. Since April 2021 the education space [BIRD](#) (*Bildungsraum Digital*) has been under development, the first of a total of four prototypes for a [future national education platform](#).

The [innovation programme INVITE on digital platforms for CVET](#) started its implementation phase in 2021. Over 3 years, EUR 88 million will fund 35 project consortia working on the design of diverse, innovative solutions in the digital CVET area to improve the quality of training platforms and develop AI-supported training courses that make individualised learning possible.

To support [digital strategies for vocational training staff](#), several training courses have been set up for the development of digital competences. In 2020 the [MIKA seminar on the digital development of trainers](#) was piloted and, since 2021, has been offered nationwide. Digital platforms are being developed and used to provide further training for vocational training staff. The development of the digital VET platform [HubbS](#) started in autumn 2021 and a final concept was adopted in February 2022. The platform aims to support the exchange and development of teaching materials and teaching concepts, as well as communication and collaboration between teachers at vocational schools.

4.4 Focus on VET excellence including higher-level VET

Several measures which focus on VET excellence, including higher-level VET, have been introduced since 2020. In 2020 the new designations of [Bachelor Professional and Master Professional](#) were introduced for advanced vocational qualifications, to emphasise the equivalence to the qualifications of the general bachelor and master degrees (Cedefop; BIBB, 2022).

Excellence in VET in Germany has also been promoted through competitions. In 2021, the German crafts industry's proficiency contest [PLW](#) (*Pofis leisten was, experts do*

achieve something) took place. Around 3 000 VET graduates from more than 130 craft professions competed against each other to find the most skilled people for each craft, who then might continue to compete in EuroSkills ([Promoting dual VET](#)), which will take place in Düsseldorf in 2027. In addition, for the [WorldSkills competition, in 2022 Germany](#) was the venue for 9 championships for the professions and participated in competitions in 10 countries.

The InnoVET project [Shaping the future – innovations for excellent vocational training](#), funded 17 4-year projects in 2020 to develop and pilot attractive and high-quality qualification programmes for VET. These programmes respond to the needs of companies and help to train highly qualified specialists.

In 2022 the education ministry launched the [Excellence Initiative for VET](#), aiming to increase the attractiveness of dual VET for all young people. This is an umbrella brand under which selected existing initiatives will be further developed and new ones will be launched, including enhancing promotion opportunities for individuals, increasing international orientation and ensuring the offer of innovative and attractive vocational training opportunities. The initiative is part of the [Federal Government's strategy for skilled workers](#) launched in October 2022 (ReferNet Germany; Cedefop, 2023).

4.5 Expand European education and training area in a globalised economy

Several developments took place since 2020 to strengthen internationalisation of VET.

In 2021, within the framework of the project *überaus*, funded by the federal ministry of education research (BMBF), a qualification concept for on-site training for trainers was developed. This aims to improve the [intercultural competences of trainers](#) in the light of the high number of newly arrived migrants.

The [Skills experts programme](#) focuses on offering training and securing skilled workers for German companies abroad. It supports chambers of foreign trade (AHK) in 10 countries in setting up sustainable vocational training structures. In 2023 a new funding round started for the 10 AHKs. Since 2023, the focus is on setting up of basic VET structures (Ghana, Japan, Singapore and the Baltic States/Lithuania) as well as on offering more training courses with a focus on climate protection and transformation, the so-called 'green jobs' (AHK Argentina, Chile, Nigeria and South Africa).

Various measures were introduced concerning international VET cooperation programmes. Germany actively participates in the Bridging innovation and learning in TVET ([BILT](#)) project (2022-25). This aims to create a global knowledge bridge, by supporting VET providers across Europe, Africa and Asia Pacific to address current challenges in the VET system, arising from technological, social, environmental and workplace changes. In 2021 the German/Greek project [Future4VET](#) started, with a duration of 3 years. The main focus is on jointly developing innovative job profiles and training formats with regard to the megatrends of greening and digitalisation, and for the attractiveness and topicality of VET to be strengthened. The Italian/German project [ConnActions](#), aims to intensify bilateral VET cooperation between Germany and Italy at local level (e.g. city/municipality). Five model

networks between German and Italian stakeholders, such as representatives of schools, companies, chambers, associations, and trade unions, will be established. In September 2022, the BMBF published the [Cooperation VET framework announcement](#), which aims to support partner countries (including China, Ghana, Greece, India, Italy, Mexico, Portugal, South Africa and the USA) in their efforts to reform their VET systems, and German companies in their efforts to recruit and qualify skilled workers abroad.

In 2022 the [Weltwalz](#) project started, offering young craftspeople the opportunity to gain experience in international cooperation in the target countries (Georgia, Rwanda, South Africa and Uganda). During their 2-4 weeks stay, they can lead projects in companies, carry out smaller training courses, support teachers in vocational training institutions and be used as ambassadors for the skilled trades.

5. Statistical information in relation to EU targets

VET is highly appreciated in the German society and recent IVET graduates (20 to 34-year-olds) have very good chances of finding a job on the labour market. Their employment rate in 2022 was at 93.3%, much higher than the EU average of 79.7% and already above the 82% EU target set in the Council Recommendation on VET for 2025. When it comes to combining training with practical experience, 94.9% of recent IVET graduates (20 to 34-year-olds) had a work-based learning experience as part of their VET in 2022. This is high compared to the EU-27 average of 60.1% and well above the 60% EU target set in the Council Recommendation on VET for 2025.

According to the latest data from 2022, 53.7% of adults (25 to 64-year-olds) had a learning experience in the previous 12 months. This was higher than the EU-27 average of 39.5% and also already above the target of 47% for 2025 set in the Council Resolution on European Education Area (EEA). This high participation rate applies also to the low-qualified adults, of whom 30% participated in a learning experience the previous 12 months, which was much higher than the EU-27 average of 18.4%. More indicators and their progress compared to the EU targets are presented in the below table.

Table 1. **European vocational education and training policy dashboard: Germany**

Type of indicator ⁽²⁾	Indicator	Last available year	DE	EU-27	Policy Document	EU target (year)
VET for developing a lifelong learning culture						
Progress	Adults (25 to 64 year-olds) with learning experience in the last 12 months (%)*	2022	53.7	39.5	Skills Agenda	50% (2025)
					Council Resolution on EEA	47% (2025)
					ESPR Action Plan	60% (2030)
Progress	Low-qualified adults with a learning experience in the last 12 months (%)	2022	30.0	18.4	Skills Agenda	30% (2025)
Progress	Unemployed adults with a learning experience in the last 4 weeks (%)	2022	10.5	13.2	Skills Agenda	20% (2025)
Context	Employment rate for 20 to 64-year-olds (%)	2022	80.7	74.6	ESPR Action Plan	78% (2030)
Context	Early leavers from education and training (%)	2022	12.2	9.6	Council Resolution on EEA	<9% (2030)
Context	NEET rate for 15 to 29-year-olds (%)	2022	8.6	11.7	ESPR Action Plan	9% (2030)
VET for Resilience, transitions, sustainability, and excellence						
Progress	Adults (16 to 74-year-olds) with at least basic digital skills (%)	2021	48.9	53.9	Skills Agenda	70% (2025)
					ESPR Action Plan	80% (2030)
Progress	Employment rate for recent IVET graduates (20 to 34-year-olds) (%)	2022	93.3	79.7	Council Rec on VET	82% (2025)
Progress	Recent IVET graduates (20 to 34-year-olds) with a work-based learning experience as part of their vocational education and training (%)	2022	94.9 ^u	60.1	Council Rec on VET	60% (2025)
					Council Resolution on EEA	
Context	25 to 34-year-olds with tertiary attainment (%)	2022	37.1	42	Council Resolution on EEA	45% (2025)
Context	Gender employment gap (%)	2022	7.8	10.7	ESPR Action Plan	To be halved (2030)
Context	People at risk of poverty or social exclusion (1000s)	2022	17 336	95 284	ESPR Action Plan	15 million decrease (2030)
Context	Employed ICT specialists (1000s)	2022	2 114	9 370.2 ^e	2030 Digital Compass	20 million, with convergence between men and women (2030)
VET for the European Education Area						
Progress	Learners in IVET who benefitted from learning mobility abroad (%) **	2021	0.7	2.1 ^{dV}	Council Rec on VET	8% (2025)
					Skills Agenda	
Context	Average number of foreign languages learned in IVET	2021	0.4	1.2		

Available flags: d - definition, e - estimated, u - low reliability, V - Cedefop estimate. Special value: not available

* Eurostat data (Adult Education Survey, special calculation excluding guided on-the-job training)

** Provisional estimates affected by the COVID19 pandemic

Source: Cedefop. [European VET policy dashboard](#)

(2) [Definitions](#) on the type of indicators are available.

6. Conclusion

Since 2020, Germany has taken many actions to address the policy priorities outlined in the national implementation plan. Many of the related measures had already started before 2020, but further development took place since then. A few measures announced have yet to start implementation.

Several measures have been taken since 2020 to counteract the pandemic-related decline in the number of training places and applicants for apprenticeship programmes. Various events took place to promote VET and new online self-exploration tools were introduced, providing vocational orientation. Certain measures were put in place targeting specific groups, including university dropouts and migrant women. The possibility for all apprentices to follow vocational training, in the form of a part-time scheme since 2020, is expected to attract more learners. Until mid-June 2022 support was also provided to small and micro enterprises to provide training places. Though the number of training places could be increased, as shown by the latest available statistics for the school year 2021/22, the number of applicants further decreased. This development contributed overall to an increase in training places which could not be filled; compared to 2019, 29.6% more training places remained unoccupied (BMBF, 2023). The reduced number of applicants can be explained among others by the demographic decline in the population, as well as through an increased attractiveness of academic education, no interest in commuting, and lack of attractiveness of certain professions due to difficult working conditions. Further efforts seem to be necessary to counteract this matching problem, as well as to attract more applicants.

Several measures have been introduced since 2020 to meet the priority to implement a future-proof VET policy. These include the introduction of new standards in all current training regulations, or the definition of qualifications and skills requirements in relation to hydrogen technology (H2PRO). Continuing education networks were set up, supporting companies in updating the skills of their employees, and advanced qualifications for trainers and teaching staff were developed to integrate sustainability-related content in all VET courses. To tackle future skill shortages, it is crucial to boost the availability of adult learning and provide stronger incentives for up- and reskilling measures (European Commission, 2023).

Several developments also took place since 2020 in digital transformation and VET strategies for a digital education and training area. Various measures focused on setting up platforms providing CVET to learners and teachers and a first prototype of the future national education platform (BIRD) was established. Funds were made directly available to equip learners, VET teachers and vocational schools with the necessary digital devices during the COVID-19 pandemic. Other measures were taken to improve the quality of partial qualifications and to ensure a nationwide standardised offer. Still under preparation is the planned measure of introducing digital training support services for apprentices, including an apprentice app, digital report book, and learning management systems in vocational training centres. Germany has progressed relatively well over the last 5 years, but further progress with digital transformation in the coming years will be crucial and may

improve its position in the [Digital economy and society index \(DESI\)](#) (European Commission, 2022b).

Measures are in place to support vocational training staff qualification. However, further efforts are needed in this area to counteract the strong influence on educational outcomes of socio-economic status and migrant background, which was exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic (European Commission, 2022a). A strong emphasis needs to be placed on improving the digital and pedagogical skills of teachers (European Commission, 2023).

Actions have been taken since 2020 on the policy priority of excellence in VET/higher-level VET in response to more demanding career profiles and job descriptions. These aimed to strengthen the skill of future managers to understand and address any need for innovation in digitalisation, or to promote excellence in the crafts industry sector, as well as VET in higher education and in the STEM fields. The development of vocational programmes at higher level (EQF level 7), as indicated in the country's national implementation plan, would offer learners the possibility to acquire an equal qualification compared to higher general education programmes and thereby further increase the attractiveness of VET. At the end of 2022, the education ministry (BMBF) launched the [Excellence for VET initiative](#), which provides targeted impetus to boost the attractiveness and modernity of VET until 2026. Several measures have also been introduced to strengthen the European and international dimension of VET. A concept to improve intercultural competences for trainers was developed and various bilateral VET projects with foreign countries took place. Cooperation frameworks on VET have been agreed, with third countries aiming to support partner countries in their implementation of VET as well as supporting German companies in their efforts to recruit and qualify skilled workers abroad.

Acronyms

AHK	Chambers of foreign trade
BMBF	Federal ministry of education research
ESF	European social fund
EQF	European Qualifications Framework
NIP	national implementation plan
SME	small and medium-sized enterprises
VET	vocational education and training

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