



Vocational education and training

Policy briefs

NORWAY



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1. Introduction

This VET policy brief produced by Cedefop presents a snapshot of vocational education and training policy developments in Norway 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 2025 identified in the Norway'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

The Norwegian school system is inclusive and free of charge. All young people completing compulsory schooling have a statutory right to 3 years of upper secondary education: half choose between 10 VET programmes. Vocational programmes can be completed either fully in vocational schools or as part of a company-based apprenticeship. VET qualifications can also give access to higher education after a 1-year bridging course.

The adult education system in Norway has a long and well-established tradition. With the increasing importance of lifelong learning, there are now statutory rights to adult primary and secondary education and free tuition for immigrants. Employers and NGOs can access funding to train employees with low basic skills. In 2020, skills reform was launched, focusing on upskilling and reskilling the workforce. Validation of non-formal and informal learning is possible at all levels of education and training and can be used to acquire modules or full qualifications.

The education ministry is responsible for education and training at all levels. The regional county authorities are responsible for providing general education and vocational training, distributing the State budget for VET, and ensuring apprenticeship placements and supervision (Cedefop; Norwegian Directorate for Higher Education and Skills, 2022). The municipalities are responsible for basic social services, including primary and lower secondary education, and have substantial autonomy in allocating resources between sectors and providing services. The social partners and relevant stakeholders are involved at all levels of VET development.

Vocational education and training is regulated by the Education Act of 17 July 1998 no. 61, amended in 2022. The 2018 act and the 2019 regulations on higher vocational (EQF5), were also amended at the end of 2020. The 2021 elected government set a political agenda for the period 2021-25, which includes all levels of vocational education and training. A new education act, affecting primary and secondary education, including VET, is in preparation.

2.2 Challenges

The main challenges that Norway faced during 2020-22 include meeting the growing demand for a skilled workforce and providing employment and learning opportunities for all citizens.

The Norwegian economy is undergoing rapid changes due to the widespread adoption of technology, the growing emphasis on sustainability, and the impact of COVID-19. Statistics Norway estimates a shortage of almost 100 000 skilled workers by 2035 (Norway, 2022). Companies complain that this shortage is already causing them to lose business. Labour needs to be mobilised across different sectors and groups, and young people need to be encouraged to enter the labour market more quickly.

Technological development and the transformation of the economy are increasing the range and complexity of the tasks expected of a skilled worker. This has implications for education and training programmes, progression routes, and opportunities for people to improve their skills, regardless of their location. Individuals need to be able to upskill and reskill to keep up with changes in the labour market.

Early school leaving has been growing since 2020. Not all IVET students can secure an apprenticeship, and many fail to obtain the corresponding qualification, with significant territorial variations. Low adaptation of VET to the needs of increasingly diverse students (including adults) and the demands of the working world are reasons for this low completion rate. As a result, Norway relies on adults, including migrants, to acquire a trade or journeyman's certificate and to maintain their qualifications throughout their lives to bridge the skills gaps. This means providing more education and lifelong learning opportunities for adults, which increases the demand for qualified teachers to cater for diverse student profiles in well-equipped training institutions suitable for the modern workforce.

In summary, the VET system needs to be more responsive to economic and social demands, provide high quality vocational education and training, and serve as an equal vocational alternative to university.

3. National VET policy priorities

The National implementation plan (NIP) presents Norway's actions to implement the Osnabrück Declaration on VET as a factor for recovery and a fair transition to the digital and green economy. The NIP builds on three strategic documents: the priorities announced by the government in 2021 (the Hurdal platform 2021-25); the White paper on upper secondary education (2021-31); and the Skills reform. The successive agreements between the national authorities and the social partners underpin the cooperation between the parties on apprenticeships.

The overall aim of the NIP is to provide people with the vocational and academic skills necessary for employment, education and participation in society. This goal is addressed through the following three general objectives:

- a) strengthen VET by enabling everyone in upper secondary to qualify for apprenticeship, employment, education, and lifelong learning;
- b) promote lifelong learning by providing opportunities for upskilling and reskilling to close the skills gap between the labour market and workers;
- c) modernise training institutions by providing them with the necessary knowledge, equipment and learning spaces to integrate practical training in all subjects.

4. Main policy developments and progress 2020-23

4.1 Strengthening VET

Several policy measures are under way to prevent an increase in early school leaving and to provide students with opportunities to remain in education and training and gain a qualification.

The 2021 [Completion reform](#) is one of Norway's flagship reforms. It aims to change the content of upper secondary education so that more people can complete education and enter the labour market. It sets the target that nine out of ten learners complete and pass upper secondary education by 2030. The reform foresees several measures to prevent secondary students dropping out school without finishing their studies. It introduces the right to an apprenticeship, or an equivalent opportunity regardless of place of residence, and the right to vocational requalification for adults.

A change in the [admission rules for upper secondary education](#) was being discussed in 2022 as part of the Completion reform; alternative rules are being explored to increase flexibility in admissions to public schools. As all subjects are weighted equally, students with good grades in common core subjects can outpace those good at the vocational programme subjects when applying for a VET programme, an undesired effect that this measure will try to address.

The 2021 [Strategy for higher vocational education](#) seeks to strengthen higher vocational education to meet labour market demands. The strategy plans to expand higher vocational education offers based on skills needs mapping and prioritisation. It would also allow tertiary vocational schools to apply for an institutional accreditation right for all subject areas, as most universities and university colleges do. It intends to stimulate the quality development of online and seminar-based programmes through competence enhancement in online pedagogy.

The new [Social contract for VET](#) 2022-26, agreed with the social partners, aims to guarantee to all qualified students apprenticeships places. The government has allocated funds to increase the number of apprenticeships, improve training and provide support to apprentices. These funds include, for example, grants for local initiatives within a sector or for a specific vocational qualification. The funding is earmarked, and it is up to the counties, together with student and teacher organisations and local partners, to define the most effective use of the funds.

An [apprenticeship portal](#) has been in place since 2022 to increase the number of apprenticeship placements. Its purpose is to simplify the communication process regarding vacant apprenticeships and identify the needs of apprentices at national level. The portal offers an overview of potential companies offering apprenticeships and suggests relevant companies to learners. It also includes functionalities for professional users like career guidance supervisors. The portal contains information on over 1.1 million companies and more than 20 000 approved apprenticeship companies.

In 2020, Norway started to evaluate its national qualifications framework ([NQF](#)), adopted in 2011. The preliminary work presented two possible structures: one with two parallel pillars for academic and vocational education and the other with a common set of level descriptions for all types of education. The outcomes of this evaluation have yet to be published.

Norway considers [participation in Erasmus+ and the European Education Area](#) crucial for improving education quality and relevance. For this reason, it has developed a strategy to provide more learners, teachers and staff with opportunities for intercultural learning and exchange in Europe (Norway: Ministry of Education, 2021).

4.2 Promoting lifelong learning

Norway is taking steps towards providing flexible upskilling and reskilling options for adults to meet the demands of new skills.

The [Skills reform](#) sets the context for these measures, targeting the labour market (better link between supply and demand), the education system (more flexible and work-related training for adults), and individuals (flexible loans and scholarships). The goal is to ensure that no-one is excluded from working due to a lack of competence, and to provide every individual with the opportunity to renew and improve their skills, enabling them to work longer.

The government of Norway is currently drafting a [white paper on professional studies](#) to ensure that the country has an adequate supply of skilled employees in areas such as health, welfare, education, and engineering, where demand is expected to be high. Meetings are being held with various stakeholders, including local and regional actors, universities and colleges, students, and labour market representatives, to identify the most pressing challenges and discuss potential solutions. The white paper is expected to be published in 2024.

The [Committee on Skill Needs](#), comprising the director of the Norwegian Directorate for Higher Education and Skills (HK-dir), representatives of social partners, experts, and one representative for county municipalities, aims to ensure an adequate labour supply; it will guide Norway's strategic decisions with reports until 2027. The first report, released in June 2022, discusses the role of higher vocational education in meeting evolving skill requirements caused by technology, demographics, and environmental factors. The report calls for higher vocational institutions to be the colleges for the world of work and strengthen the relationship between the world of work and education.

The 2021 [White paper No-one left out](#) aims to increase labour market participation, particularly among those not in employment or education. It identifies areas where further efforts are needed to prevent social exclusion and calls for better coordination between education, employment and health services. It includes a pilot programme approved in 2022 to incentivise employers to hire young people under 30s who have partially reduced work capacity due to disability. Other measures are intended to offer more adults outside working life adapted upper secondary education, including vocational education and training.

A [strategy for decentralised and flexible education in vocational schools, university colleges and universities](#) was adopted in 2021. This strategy intends to give adult learners, institutions, and, ultimately, working life greater opportunities for upskilling and reskilling through better framework conditions and through establishing fully digital educational offers. In 2022, a report on the strategy highlighted the role of local study centres in developing society at the local level. However, these centres face challenges such as unstable funding and low administrative capacity, which hinder their growth. The report recommends creating a more predictable framework for the study centres in the future.

Various formulas aiming at flexibility and improved participation are being explored. [Modularising adult training, leading to the trade or journeyman's exam](#), has been piloted from 2020 to 2023. Each subject is organised into five to seven modules, and training takes place mainly in enterprises. Completing all modules enables adults who have completed lower secondary education or equivalent, to take the trade or journeyman's exam. Evaluation of the programme was carried out and a [report](#) was published in 2022. Teachers and companies considered the training scheme positively, with emphasis on individual adaptation of training, and reported positive experiences primarily within companies. Good and close cooperation among all actors has taken place.

The [modular industry programmes for continuing education](#) are short and flexible sectoral programmes that allow combining study with work, which can be web-based, school-based and workplace-based. By 2022, 13 modular industry programmes were developed for the unemployed, young people with little work experience and graduates. A [scholarship pilot for skilled workers](#), in the age group 30-57, is running to test the impact of financial incentives on their participation in further education and training.

4.3 Modernising training institutions

Well-staffed and resourceful training institutions are essential to quality education and training for the young and adults. Norway is developing measures to ensure both, taking into account the impact of digitalisation.

A working group of relevant organisations and stakeholders was set up in 2022 to assess the feasibility of a [national centre for vocational education and training](#), what might be its potential functions, and to propose how the centre should be organised. This national centre should strengthen quality and development in VET at all levels. The group's report was expected by October 2023.

Meanwhile, two [centres of excellence in higher vocational education](#) have been appointed in a pilot scheme until 2027. The centres were selected based on their partnership with the labour market and professional environment. Their main responsibilities include developing and testing methodologies for higher vocational education, collaborating with the labour market, promoting student engagement, and sharing results with stakeholders to improve the quality of education.

In 2023, a [strategy for digital competence and infrastructure](#) was adopted, effective until 2030. One of its aims is to provide schools with the necessary resources to implement hands-on learning methods in all subjects and to prevent inequalities in access to technology and equipment. The strategy also aims to ensure that teachers have good professional digital skills to support learning, motivation and environment.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, significant differences in professional digital competence among teachers were made evident; the strategy seeks to reduce these, during both initial and continuous professional development.

5. Statistical information in relation to EU targets

Norway performs well on many indicators. The prospects for IVET graduates in Norway are also favourable. The employment rate of recent IVET graduates (20-34 years), at 92.5%, is one of the highest in Europe, 12.8 percentage points above the EU-27 average of 79.7%, and 10 p.p. above the EU-27 target set for 2025 in the Council Recommendation on VET.

Over half (54.6%) of adults aged 25-64 had access to learning opportunities in 2022, which is 15.1 percentage points higher than the average of the EU-27 countries, exceeding the target set in the Skills Agenda (50%). Further, 78.7% of adults in Norway aged 16-74 have basic digital skills, only 0.5 percentage points lower than the best-performing EU-27 country.

Nevertheless, Norway faces a challenge regarding early school leaving. This has increased by 3.3 percentage points since 2020, standing at 13.2% in 2022, 3.6 percentage points higher than the average in the EU-27. The NEET rate is relatively low (6.8%), the third lowest compared to the EU-27.

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

Type of indicator ⁽¹⁾	Indicator	Last available year	NO	EU-27	Policy Document	EU target (year)
VET for developing a lifelong learning culture						
Progress	Adults (25 to 64 year-olds) with a learning experience in the last 12 months (%)*	2022	54.6	39.5	Skills Agenda Council Resolution on EEA ESPR Action Plan	50% (2025) 47% (2025) 60% (2030)
Progress	Low-qualified adults with a learning experience in the last 12 months (%)	2022	37.7	18.4	Skills Agenda	30% (2025)
Progress	Unemployed adults with a learning experience in the last 4 weeks (%)	2022	29.3	13.2	Skills Agenda	20% (2025)
Context	Employment rate for 20 to 64 year-olds (%)	2022	80.9	74.6	ESPR Action Plan	78% (2030)
Context	Early leavers from education and training (%)	2022	13.2	9.6	Council Resolution on EEA	<9% (2030)
Context	NEET rate for 15 to 29 year-olds (%)	2022	6.8	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	78.7	53.9	Skills Agenda ESPR Action Plan	70% (2025) 80% (2030)
Progress	Employment rate for recent IVET graduates (20 to 34 year-olds) (%)	2022	92.5	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	57.5	60.1	Council Rec on VET Council Resolution on EEA	60% (2025)
Context	25 to 34 year-olds with tertiary attainment (%)	2022	55.6	42	Council Resolution on EEA	45% (2025)
Context	Gender employment gap (%)	2022	5.7	10.7	ESPR Action Plan	To be halved (2030)
Context	People at risk of poverty or social exclusion (1000s)	2022	:	95 284	ESPR Action Plan	15 million decrease (2030)
Context	Employed ICT specialists (1000s)	2022	146.4	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 a learning mobility abroad (%) **	2021	0.2	2.1 ^{dV}	Council Rec on VET Skills Agenda	8% (2025)
Context	Average number of foreign languages learned in IVET	2021	0.5	1.2		

Available flags: d - definition differs, e – estimated, 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](#)

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

6. Conclusion

Norway has launched several initiatives to address the skills gap between supply and demand, seeking better matching, and recognising the rights to complete education and to apprenticeships. These initiatives are designed to increase the number of graduates and labour market participation, mainly through offering greater flexibility and choice to students and adults, as well as providers, and by developing new management tools (especially for apprenticeship placements). The reforms also focus on developing a highly qualified workforce, particularly in higher VET, that is closely aligned with digital and green transitions. Fewer dropouts, more apprenticeships and good educational pathways will provide the skilled workers needed in the future.

Steps have been taken to provide adults with more opportunities for upskilling and reskilling, favouring the combination of study and work, through the modularisation of various types of programmes and incentive schemes, and to ensure that everybody, including vulnerable groups like people with disabilities, can fully develop their careers. The continuous work of the committee on skill needs, and the fulfilment of all the ambitions of the skills strategy, can help to bridge the existing gaps and positively impact the labour market, while ensuring the right to equal opportunities for all.

New centres of VET, some like the European CoVEs model, are still in their first stages of design and implementation. These centres aim to improve VET quality and increase its attractiveness. The strategy for digital competence and infrastructure focuses on supporting access to technology and digital solutions for learning. More practical teaching aids and flexible learning provisions can help strengthen the link with the world of work and attract more learners.

Many of these measures, put in place before 2020, are being evaluated, while others have only recently been implemented or are pilot schemes. The strategies and regulations developed provide a roadmap for an attractive, inclusive, and strong VET system, although it is the responsibility of the different authorities at the county and municipal level to ensure that these goals are met. Consultation with key stakeholders helps to design effective policies that can be widely supported and ensure their implementation and progress.

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