



Vocational education and training

Policy briefs 2023

FRANCE



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1. Introduction

This VET policy brief produced by Cedefop presents a snapshot of vocational education and training policy developments in France 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 France'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

Efforts to decentralise vocational education and training (VET) have a long history in France, dating back to the 1980s. The autonomy of VET has evolved over the years, undergoing reforms to reach its current form. In a multifaceted vocational education system, responsibilities are shared. Initial VET (IVET) is mainly under the responsibility of the education ministry and the higher education ministry. Continuing VET (CVET) is governed mostly by the labour Ministry (Cedefop; Centre Inffo forthcoming). *France Compétences* is a national public institution responsible for the funding and regulation of vocational training and apprenticeship.

The transformation of the vocational path in the upper secondary education is an important part of the current national VET context. It started in 2018 and is based on different decrees and orders, like the [2018 decree on CAP](#) and the [2018 order on vocational baccalaureate](#). Since then, school-based VET has gradually become more personalised, responsive and attractive. It is also better linked to general education, the academic path, and labour market needs resulting from economic changes, the energy and digital transition.

Continuing VET and apprenticeship in France is shaped by major reform initiated in 2018 by the labour [law for the freedom to choose one's professional future](#). This gradually reinforces access for all to lifelong learning. The national public agency *France Compétences* was established by this law to coordinate the implementation of CVET. The 2018 labour law also broadened the definition of 'training action' to enable the inclusion of more training cases, and updated the regulations of apprenticeship schemes. It introduced compulsory quality certification for VET providers.

In the [law for a school of trust](#) of 2019, uniform and quality initial training across all territories is foreseen by supporting teacher initial training and continuing professional development. More specifically, the law launches a new approach to the way teaching is organised and offered, by supporting multidisciplinary, individual pathways and

personalised support for students. The reform of the initial training for vocational pathway teachers and the continuous development of their skills are key elements of this law.

2.2 Challenges

The main challenges France has faced in 2022 include keeping specific groups of learners in education and training, the alignment of training offer to the labour market needs, the lack of skills needed for the twin transition and the attractiveness and equality of VET.

Despite a 2022 reduced rate of early school leavers of 7.6%, a figure below the EU average 9.6%, this rate is particularly high for groups such as those with parents of lower education levels (19.1%) and those born outside France (around 12%). Even with efforts that have taken place in recent years, integrating students with disabilities remains a challenge due to insufficient support specialists and limited physical and pedagogical accessibility (European Commission, 2023a).

France has a high percentage of individuals aged 15-29 who are neither employed nor pursuing further education or training (NEET rate), which currently stands at 12%, above the 9% EU target for 2030 (Cedefop, 2023). At the same time, many job vacancies remain unfilled, while funding for training does not reach the vulnerable and least qualified (European Commission, 2023a). A former narrow legal understanding of training action, meaning that few training options were recognised as such by legislation, has also affected the attractiveness and popularity of the VET path. The 2018 law broadened the legal definition of the 'training action', taking into account new types of training, including existing work experience gained through alternative means such as 'learning by doing', with the expectation that this flexibility will draw more apprentices towards this path (France, 2022).

The lack of skills needed to respond to the digital and green transition is a barrier for maintaining a future-proof VET system. Without the successful implementation of respective measures, France could face a big skills gap in the coming years (France, 2022). Equality of opportunity and inclusiveness in vocational education continues to be an area in need of improvement, with limited participation of the low-qualified adults in training leading to qualifications (European Commission, 2023a). The systematic implementation of national education measures fighting inequalities remains crucial as the challenges of ensuring equal opportunities for young people with disabilities, addressing illiteracy and bridging gender disparities between girls and boys persist (France, 2022).

3. National VET policy priorities

As a response to the [2020 Council Recommendation on VET](#) and the [Osnabrück Declaration](#), France prepared a national implementation plan for VET, selecting the following priorities to address the above challenges:

- (a) strengthen the individualisation of training paths;
- (b) develop the right skills for the twin transition;
- (c) offer equal opportunities in VET

4. Main policy developments and progress 2020-23

4.1 Strengthen the individualisation of training paths

France has introduced several initiatives since 2020 to make VET more flexible, transparent and align it to learners' individual needs.

One of the most important innovations has been the [individualisation of VET learning paths](#). According to relevant legislation of 2021, new legal regulations for the examination of the vocational baccalaureate have been launched to achieve more transparency and easier access to it and to facilitate individual paths to labour market and to tertiary education. Reform of the vocational high school was launched in 2022 and four working groups were created. These examine how to reduce dropouts, help students pursue higher levels of education, improve employment rates after graduation and allow institutions to offer flexible national diplomas.

Measures have been put in place to modernise the validation of prior learning. More specifically, the 2022 Law on emergency measures relating to the functioning of the labour market with a view to full employment includes simplification of administrative processes for validation of prior learning (VAE) and strengthens the support provided to candidates. The pilot project REVA 2 is a continuation of REVA 1 and is aimed at preparing the implementing decrees of this law. It focuses on specific sectors and helps beneficiaries in many ways to obtain the targeted certification quickly while working.

The national agency *France Compétences* works towards the same goals by initiating a [project](#) with the purpose of identifying equivalences between vocational qualifications awarded by different certifying bodies and the qualifications in the National Register of Vocational Qualifications (RNCP). *France Compétences* has produced a handbook that provides comprehensive information about the registration process for vocational qualifications, their competence blocks, their delivery and assessment. The handbook facilitates understanding of the different pathways for the vocational qualifications in the RNCP including through validation of prior learning.

Equally important is the launch of the broader set [France relance plan](#) (France recovery and resilience plan, PNRR) in 2020, in order to address the challenges of COVID-19 and build the France of 2030. Among other sectors, EUR 15 billion are being invested in IVET and CVET training programmes and apprenticeships, offering recruitment aids, additional training places in digital and green jobs and support for successful integration in the workplace (Cedefop, 2022). In this framework, the [1 young person, 1 solution youth plan](#), launched in 2020, includes VET measures based on its three priorities: facilitating entry into working life, offering career guidance, and supporting the young unemployed with tailored pathways for professional integration. Many of these VET measures continue to run beyond their initial 2-year timeframe.

Since 2020 high numbers of new apprenticeships have been recorded. This resulted from the [reform of the apprenticeship contract](#) based on the 2018 labour law. The reform

included simplification of the conditions (age limit, contract duration, etc.) for an apprenticeship contract, an increase in funding to apprentices and SMEs, as well as provisions to facilitate the creation of apprentice centres (CFA). In 2020, 525 600 new apprenticeship contracts were signed, 42% more than in 2019. In 2021, 733 200 new apprenticeship contracts were signed, an increase of 38% comparing to 2020. And in 2022, 835 000 apprenticeship contracts were signed, a further increase of 13.64 % (European Commission, 2023b).

As part of the plan for tackling recruitment tensions in SMEs and microenterprises, *Pôle Emploi* has, since 2022, offered new services on [training action in work situations](#) (AFEST). On the job training can now be included as an educational method, so that work can act as a training modality. *Pôle Emploi* suggests that companies use AFEST as part of their preparation for employment training. For example, company tutors should be trained in creating learning situations and be able to analyse them before they step into their role. It is essential that trainee progress is supported by pedagogically well-structured learning phases. This new form of on-the job training targets mainly long-term jobseekers in five areas: industry, retail, construction, care-giving and corporate services.

4.2 Develop the right skills for the twin transition

France is developing and updating strategies, collaborations, and the legal framework for implementing measures relevant to the digital and green transition.

The national agency *France Stratégie* and the labour ministry have been working on [identifying labour market needs related to the green and digital transition](#) in the coming decades; there is also a focus on regional needs. A related report was published in 2022. The French State and professional organisations or branches have established annual and multiannual 'agreements on the development of employment and skills' (EDEC). These agreements consist of a forecasting and an operational action plan and aim also at addressing skill needs and adapting qualifications to the demands of the labour market due to the twin transition. The [1 young person, 1 solution youth plan](#), launched in 2020, includes the creation of additional training places for upper secondary and university learners focused on the green and digital sectors.

The [Digital education strategy 2023-27](#) aims to address several challenges, emphasising national and local collaboration in pedagogical digital projects and enhancing students' digital skills, focusing on digital citizenship, critical thinking, and digital proficiency. The strategy also supports teachers with digital tools and resources and prioritises robust, secure, and eco-friendly IT tools. It comprises four main axes: strengthening digital governance, promoting digital citizenship, offering a sustainable digital ecosystem, and modernising the information system. The broader [France 2030 plan](#) is also promoting the digital and green transition in VET. More specifically, the Skills and jobs of the future call for expression of interest launched in 2023 aims to support projects that adapt the training system for young people and employees to the jobs of tomorrow.

The [Circular of September 2020](#) set the conditions for the deployment of measures like the E3D label for sustainable development. This is a label awarded to schools, including to technological and professional secondary schools and apprentice training centres, which integrate environmental and sustainable development issues in interdisciplinary and cross-curricular teaching.

The [Climate and Resilience Law of 2021](#) refers also to vocational education [by explaining the role of skills operators \(OPCOs\)](#). OPCOs are joint sectoral bodies managed by the social partners. They are responsible for anticipating skills needs and developing training programmes and apprenticeships. Their role in this case is to inform companies about sustainable development issues and support them in related projects, mainly by analysing and identifying their skills needs.

4.3 Offer equal opportunities in VET

[Promoting equality and inclusiveness](#) has been a long-term goal for France and includes several initiatives targeting disadvantaged learners.

The [French finance law of 2021](#) created the youth engagement contract, a support programme for career planning and employment that targets mainly NEETs aged 16 to 25 and has been launched in March 2022. It is a 6 to 12 months programme with systematic job start activities, like a company internship, during which beneficiaries receive counsellor support and a monthly allowance. A further option is the open school system in upper secondary VET targeting mainly young people living in disadvantaged urban and rural areas. One example is the Summer of the pro scheme, which offers summer school courses of (re-)orientation or discovery of professions, mainly for VET learners. The networking programme [Pathways to success](#), supports career guidance projects between higher education institutions and linked secondary schools. One of the three priority target groups is VET learners in secondary education. In school year 2021-22, 14 873 VET high school students were supported through this measure.

The introduction of the equality label for girls and boys for secondary educational establishments including vocational schools in 2022, supports the prevention of inequality and exclusion. It promotes actions undertaken in pedagogical and educational fields to make equality a reality, like guides about clichés for educational staff, development of information spaces about gender equality issues, and production of digital dossiers on stereotypes.

Equality and inclusiveness are also achieved by the personal training account (CPF), a personalised account with yearly contributions from the State to promote and manage the training a worker rightfully receives throughout life. CPF allows individuals in active employment to use yearly training credits for qualifications. Since 2019, personal training accounts are credited in euros and are digitally accessible via a mobile app and an online platform for credit and training information (Cedefop 2022). The top-up of the personal training account (CPF) is targeting groups that need more support, for example workers

with disabilities or employees without an EQF level 5 diploma or a professional title (France 2022).

The implementation of the training obligation for 16 to 18-year-olds, based on the 2019 [law for a school of trust](#), is a further important measure supporting equal opportunities for all. It aims not to leave any young person without a training and support solution (Cedefop 2022).

After compulsory education at 16, VET authorities must provide training options to all young people under 18 for the school-to-work transition. Introduced in 2020/21, options include schooling, apprenticeship, training courses, civic service, and support schemes for integration.

To fight illiteracy and offer access for all to basic skills, the national agency for the fight against illiteracy (ANLCI) has developed several [innovative tools](#). [Ev@gill](#) is an assessment tool available since 2020 for evaluating illiteracy in the workplace; [EVA](#) is a new gamification tool for the identification of people in difficulty and monitoring their progress till the certification; and [DUPLEX](#) is a new scheme to tackle digital illiteracy.

5. Statistical information in relation to EU targets

Some key aspects on VET presented in Cedefop's [European VET policy dashboard](#) offer an overview of France's performance against the targets agreed at European level.

Performance on employment rate for recent IVET graduates (20-34 year-olds) has been gradually improving; since 2015 this figure has increased from 61% to 68.9% in 2022, moving towards the 82% target set by the Council Recommendation on VET by 2025.

The country performs well on work-based learning. In 2022, 70.5% of recent IVET graduates (20 to 34-year-olds) have experienced work-based learning as part of their vocational education and training. This is the 9th highest score among the EU-27 countries, significantly above the 60% target set by the Council Recommendation on VET for 2025.

Adult participation in lifelong learning has been an important target for France. The country achieved relatively high scores in 2022, a 49.2% percentage with respects to adults (25-64 years-old) having a learning experience in the last 12 months. This is a very good performance in relation to the EU average and exceeds the 47% EU target set in the Council resolution on EEA for 2025.

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

Type of indicator ⁽¹⁾	Indicator	Last available year	FR	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	49.2 ^{bp}	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	23.6 ^{bp}	18.4	Skills Agenda	30% (2025)
Progress	Unemployed adults with a learning experience in the last 4 weeks (%)	2022	14.5	13.2	Skills Agenda	20% (2025)
Context	Employment rate for 20 to 64 year-olds (%)	2022	74 ^d	74.6	ESPR Action Plan	78% (2030)
Context	Early leavers from education and training (%)	2022	7.6	9.6	Council Resolution on EEA	<9% (2030)
Context	NEET rate for 15 to 29 year-olds (%)	2022	12	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	62	53.9	Skills Agenda ESPR Action Plan	70% (2025) 80% (2030)
Progress	Employment rate for recent IVET graduates (20 to 34 year-olds) (%)	2022	68.9 ^d	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	70.5	60.1	Council Rec on VET Council Resolution on EEA	60% (2025)
Context	25 to 34 year-olds with tertiary attainment (%)	2022	50.4	42	Council Resolution on EEA	45% (2025)
Context	Gender employment gap (%)	2022	5.8 ^d	10.7	ESPR Action Plan	To be halved (2030)
Context	People at risk of poverty or social exclusion (1000s)	2022	13 853 ^p	95 284	ESPR Action Plan	15 million decrease (2030)
Context	Employed ICT specialists (1000s)	2022	1 215.5 ^d	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	0.9	2.1 ^{dv}	Council Rec on VET Skills Agenda	8% (2025)
Context	Average number of foreign languages learned in IVET	2021	1.3	1.2		

Available flags: *b* – break in time series, *d* – definition differs, *e* – estimated, *p* – provisional, *r* – revised, *V* – Cedefop estimate.

^{*} 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

France has already taken important steps, as described in the national implementation plan, to address its national priorities in VET. These include strengthening the individualisation of training paths, developing the right skills for the twin transition and offering equal opportunities in VET.

France strengthened the individualisation and attractiveness of training paths by reforming apprenticeship, by launching a vocational high school overhaul and by streamlining access to the vocational baccalaureate examination. It also facilitated validation of prior learning (VAE) through simplification of administrative processes. The national agency *France Compétences* supported these efforts by providing relevant information through projects and handbooks, explaining VAE content and procedures. Additional aid measures, under the umbrella of the *France relance* plan, focused on career guidance, training and facilitating entry to the labour market. While several important measures have been implemented towards addressing this priority, France needs to put a stronger focus on systematic career guidance provision. This would help VET learners discover or adjust their professional way in a timely manner.

Supporting work-based learning has been also one of the main priorities of the country. Initiatives like offering new ways of on-the-job training (AFEST) aim to create new training paths in an entrepreneurial environment, intending to reduce the recruitment challenges of the labour market. The reformed apprenticeship system, simplifying and improving access to it, has contributed to an increase in apprenticeship contracts in recent years. France is also working towards addressing its labour market recruitment issues, showcasing significant progress, and surpassing the EU target for recent IVET graduates with a work-based experience as part of VET. There is need for further action in providing even more work-based learning opportunities addressing the existing labour and skills shortages (European Commission, 2023c).

Anticipating and supporting ecological and digital transitions is as an equally important priority for the French government. The country has introduced strategic documents as well as practical measures to equip its citizens with green and digital skills. The climate and resilience law of 2021, alongside the digital education strategy 2023-27, are the most important initiatives in this area. The *France relance* plan and France 2030 plan also supported initiatives in VET to bolster the twin transition. However, further action is needed to implement the measures outlined in France's NIP dedicated to preparing for the twin transition. Such steps are vital in adequately equipping the workforce with the necessary skills and addressing relevant labour market shortages. Measures specifically tailored for adults, with at least basic digital skills, would allow France to meet the relevant 2025 Skills agenda target easier.

France has implemented various measures supporting its equality and inclusiveness in VET priority. Key initiatives include the youth engagement contract and other similar schemes designed to support career guidance, (re-)orientation and training for targeted audiences, and equality between girls and boys. Also worthy of mention is the introduction of obligatory training for 16 to 18-year-olds, so that all young people acquire a qualification.

The establishment and implementation of tools addressing (digital) illiteracy has been an important initiative from ANCLI, aligning with this priority. The country's continuing efforts to address issues of equality and inclusiveness in VET can gradually ensure a safer and more accessible learning environment. Improving the adaptation of resources and methodologies for disadvantaged groups and a stronger focus for teachers training in that respect would accelerate the country's aim to offer equal opportunities in VET (European Commission, 2023c).

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