



CEDEFOP INSIGHTS

Policy approaches to improve **VET learner** **and teacher** wellbeing



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CHAPTER 1.

Introduction

Wellbeing in education is a multidimensional concept. It encompasses physical and mental health, social belonging, emotional security, and the conditions needed for learning and professional engagement to flourish. For learners, wellbeing shapes the capacity to participate, persist, and progress in education and training. For teachers and trainers, it determines their ability to perform, remain in the profession, and support the people in their care. Beyond the individual, wellbeing in vocational education and training (VET) is connected to broader societal goals: social inclusion, human capital development, and personal fulfilment (OECD, 2026c).

VET systems have reasons to take wellbeing seriously. Their learner populations are among the most diverse in European education, including learners from disadvantaged socio-economic backgrounds, migrants, those with special educational needs, and early school leavers returning to training. This diversity is one of VET's defining strengths, enabling social inclusion and second-chance pathways, but it also places distinct demands on teachers and trainers, who must respond to wide variations in learning ability, language, cultural background, and emotional need (Cedefop, 2026c).

For teachers, the scope of professional responsibility has expanded considerably in the last decades. They are expected not only to teach technical content, but to support learner inclusion, integrate the digital and green transitions, respond to behavioural challenges, and manage administrative obligations arising from quality assurance and institutional accountability requirements (Cedefop, 2022b). Preliminary evidence from Cedefop's pilot [European Vocational Teacher Survey](#) (EVTS) signals that these cumulative pressures are taking a toll (Psifidou et al., 2026). This matters for VET system sustainability, against the backdrop of growing teacher shortages across EU Member States (Cedefop, 2026b).

The COVID-19 pandemic made these challenges more visible. Extended school closures disrupted the practical and social dimensions of VET, and intensified pre-existing stress for both learners and teachers. In several countries, the pandemic pushed the development of targeted wellbeing measures. This experience helped consolidate wellbeing as an explicit EU policy concern. Action 8 of the [Herning Declaration](#) on attractive and inclusive VET (Danish Presidency, 2025) explicitly commits signatory countries to ensuring the physical and mental wellbeing of VET learners, teachers, and trainers, a landmark step in establishing wellbeing as a standalone priority within the European VET policy framework.

Despite growing recognition, wellbeing has not always been systematically or explicitly addressed in national VET policies so far. Cedefop's analysis of EU-27, Norway and Iceland's (EU-27+) national implementation plans (NIPs) for VET shows that related measures tend to be scattered across broader themes, such as inclusion, early leaving from education and training (ELET), guidance, and quality assurance, rather than grouped under a coherent wellbeing framework (Cedefop, 2025). This fragmentation can result in uneven coverage and a lack of holistic support, particularly for teacher wellbeing, which continues to receive less explicit attention than learner wellbeing in many national policies and EU-level frameworks (European Commission, 2024a; 2024b).

This Cedefop Insight examines the current state of play regarding learner and teacher wellbeing in VET systems across EU-27+. The primary focus is on IVET, covering school-based teachers mainly, although relevant evidence from continuing vocational education and training (CVET) is drawn on where available. The analysis draws on policy developments reported annually in 2021-2025 by [Cedefop's ReferNet network](#) in EU Member States, Norway, and Iceland, as documented in the [Timeline of VET policies in Europe](#) (Cedefop & ReferNet, 2026v). It brings together findings from relevant Cedefop projects and research by European and international organisations to set the context and discuss trends and challenges. Selected country examples are cited to illustrate the main types of policy responses observed, without aiming to provide an exhaustive inventory of all national measures. Countries mentioned are therefore illustrative rather than representative, reflecting the availability of comparable, and sufficiently detailed information. In many cases, similar approaches can be found in other Member States not explicitly cited. Two country examples are presented in greater detail.

CHAPTER 2. Context

This chapter examines the available evidence on wellbeing challenges for VET learners and teachers and identifies key drivers shaping the policy landscape reviewed in Chapter 3.

2.1. [Learner wellbeing](#)

According to the [European School Education Platform](#) (European Commission, n.d.), wellbeing at school means:

- (a) active and meaningful engagement in academic and social activities;

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- (b) having positive sense of identity, ability to manage thoughts, emotions, self-esteem, self-efficacy and a sense of autonomy;
- (c) building and maintaining positive and supportive relationships with teachers and peers;
- (d) feeling safe, valued and respected;
- (e) feeling a sense of belonging to their classroom and school.

The relationship between mental wellbeing and educational performance is well established across a range of sources. Students who report feeling happy achieve significantly higher scores on standardised reading tests, typically 50 to 62 points higher on the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) scale, where the OECD average sits at approximately 490 points and a standard deviation represents roughly 100 points, making this a substantial difference (OECD, 2024). High performance in mathematics is similarly linked to stronger emotional regulation, curiosity, and persistence (OECD, 2024). Beyond cognitive outcomes, wellbeing shapes participation, persistence and the capacity to benefit from learning. Educational research more broadly confirms that positive school climate, sense of belonging, and reduced stress are associated with better academic outcomes and reduced dropout risk (Cedefop, 2022b; European Commission, 2024a; 2024b).

Recent trend data paint a concerning picture. The 2022 PISA survey found that mean performance in mathematics across participating countries, including many EU Member States, dropped by 15 points between 2018 and 2022, with reading skills declining by 10 points (OECD, 2023a). The World Health Organisation data indicate that young people today face worse mental health outcomes than previous generations, and that school environments play a significant role (European Commission, 2024b).

For VET learners, wellbeing risks are shaped by factors that are partly distinct from those in general education. The dual structure of many VET programmes, combining school-based instruction with work-based learning, requires learners to navigate transitions between institutional and workplace settings, each with different social norms, support structures, and expectations around welfare and safety.

The four driver categories affecting VET learner wellbeing presented below are analytically derived from the EU-level frameworks reviewed, in particular the Guidelines on wellbeing at school (European Commission, 2024a; 2024b) and the wellbeing dimensions embedded in the [Herning Declaration](#) (Danish Presidency, 2025), and from the patterns observed in Cedefop's monitoring of national VET policies implementation:

- (a) **Safety, belonging, and bullying, including cyberbullying**, are explicitly named as major concerns in EU-level wellbeing frameworks, with clear links to educational outcomes (European Commission, 2024b). Research confirms that victims of bullying are more likely to leave education early, and that a sense of belonging is a protective factor against disengagement and dropout (Psifidou et al., 2025). Cedefop's work on excellence and inclusion in VET highlights the close relationship between inclusive learning environments and educational quality, and underlines that belonging and inclusion are structural concerns (Cedefop, 2025). In VET, safety concerns extend to workplace settings: apprentices may be reluctant to report harassment or misconduct for fear of jeopardising their training placement or future career prospects (Kyriakopoulou, 2025). The EU's efforts to address these concerns are endorsed with several initiatives, such as the [Council Recommendation on pathways to school success](#) (Council of the European Union, 2022), and the European Commission's guidelines for supporting wellbeing and mental health in schools (European Commission, 2024a; 2024b). The EU is also prioritising the development of strategies to prevent and address hate speech and cyberbullying through various working groups, projects, and funded programmes. Despite the political commitment and progress made, there is still a long way to go to eradicate bullying and cyberbullying in Europe.
- (b) **Performance pressure and stress**, which can be intensified in VET by alternating theoretical and practical training as well as transitions into the workplace. The European Commission emphasises prevention, supportive environments and access to support services for learners with mental health needs, which reflects an underlying recognition that stress-related problems can affect learning and longer-term outcomes (European Commission, 2024a; 2024b). Cedefop also stresses the need for psychosocial support as a component of effective early leaving prevention (Cedefop, 2022a; 2026c).
- (c) **Digital overload and wellbeing in digital environments** are treated as an emerging standalone issue at the EU level. A recent JRC study has indicated that challenges such as misinformation, hate speech, and privacy breaches can affect the wellbeing of both learners and teachers (Centeno et al., 2025). Social withdrawal and isolation, heightened by increasing digital immersion and compounded during the pandemic, represent a related and growing concern, particularly in VET programmes that have expanded their digital and distance learning components (Centeno et al., 2025). Cedefop has developed policy guidelines on digital inclusion and wellbeing to support both learners and teachers (Cedefop, 2026a). The responsible and educationally sound use of generative AI tools is an increasingly relevant dimension of digital wellbeing

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in VET settings, with implications for both learner engagement and the integrity of the learning process. The OECD toolkit resource on artificial intelligence (AI) to support neurodivergent learners in VET illustrates how targeted digital tools can help address the specific learning and wellbeing needs of this group, including through more personalised and adaptive learning experiences (OECD, 2026a).

- (d) **Limited career clarity and transition stress**, especially for learners who are uncertain about occupational choices or who face difficult labour market conditions. The [Herning Declaration's](#) (Danish Presidency, 2025) emphasis on strengthening access to quality guidance and supportive environments is consistent with the idea that transitions need structured support, not just individual resilience.

European Commission's guidelines on wellbeing at school emphasise a whole-system, whole-school approach. The guidelines set out 11 recommendations, including strengthening school climate and learner participation, embedding social and emotional learning, building partnerships with families and services, preventing violence, and addressing wellbeing in the digital age (European Commission, 2024a; 2024b). Cedefop has contributed complementary tools and resources across several of these dimensions. On [psychosocial support](#) (Cedefop, 2026c) and [digital inclusion and wellbeing](#) (Cedefop, 2026a), Cedefop's intervention approaches within the [VET toolkit for tackling early leaving](#) (Cedefop, n.d.) provide practical guidance for policy makers and practitioners working with at-risk learners. On transitions and career management, two further toolkit resources are particularly relevant: one addressing [guidance as a means of supporting young people to manage their careers](#) and navigate pathways into and through VET, and one focusing on [one-to-one support through coaching and mentoring](#) as a means of sustaining engagement and facilitating successful transitions (Cedefop, n.d.). Together, these resources reflect Cedefop's broader investment in promoting inclusion in VET and lifelong guidance as a structural support for learner wellbeing and progression.

2.2. Teacher wellbeing

The availability of data specifically on VET teacher wellbeing has long been scarce, but the situation has been improving, signalling that the teacher wellbeing concerns are widespread and intensifying. Main drivers negatively impacting VET teacher wellbeing are related to workload and work intensity; growing emotional and

cognitive demands; administrative burden and reform fatigue; and digital technology demands and associated uncertainty.

Cedefop's pilot EVTS, drawing on responses from 735 IVET teachers across 23 Member States, sheds light on the situation of VET teacher wellbeing. Sixty percent of respondents report physical exhaustion and sleep disturbances. Stress-related symptoms are common: 42 % report anxiety, 39 % heart palpitations, 33 % increased blood pressure, 28 % stomach pain, and 16 % depression. Forty-two percent of IVET teachers report feeling emotionally drained often or very often (Psifidou et al., 2026) ⁽¹⁾.

Broader datasets contextualise these findings. The [Teaching and Learning International Survey \(TALIS\)](#) 2018 data showed that 24 % and 22 % of lower secondary school teachers across Europe feel that their job negatively impacts their mental health and physical health, respectively. The top sources of stress identified were excessive administrative work and grading (53% and 49 % of respondents), as well as being held responsible for students' achievement (47 % of respondents) (European Commission et al., 2021). Updated TALIS 2024 data found that teaching in academically challenging settings, such as supporting complex learner needs, is also a significant burden; e.g. over half of teachers in Lithuania, Norway, Portugal, and Sweden report this as a stressor (OECD, 2025). It is important to note that the causes of teacher stress are not equally distributed across geography or socioeconomic status. The 2018 TALIS data found that in disadvantaged schools maintaining classroom discipline and adapting lessons to student needs were the greatest stressors. On the other hand, teachers in advantaged schools were most stressed by grading and addressing parent concerns (OECD, 2023b). These data indicate there is no 'one-size-fits-all' solution: instead, Member States must closely examine regional needs to develop targeted interventions.

The EVTS pilot further reveals structural drivers of dissatisfaction and strain. Only 9 % of VET teachers feel valued in their countries, and barely 13 % consider their remuneration adequate. Almost half report feeling overburdened by additional duties arising from lack of teachers. Perceived administrative overload affects 37 % of respondents, and persistent behavioural challenges in the classroom are a daily reality for 27 %. Approximately one third (34 %) consider their career progression to be slower than expected. Rather than focusing on innovative pedagogy or professional development, many report being predominantly

(1) While these findings should be treated with caution given the pilot nature of the survey and its non-representative sample, they represent the most direct available evidence on VET teachers.

occupied with administrative tasks, crisis management, and covering for absent colleagues (Psifidou et al., 2026).

Growing diversity in European classrooms is increasing the pressure on VET teachers. Evidence from the EVTS pilot shows that many IVET teachers feel they need broader and more specialised skills to support their students effectively. They need help with identifying and supporting vulnerable learners, managing misbehaviour, including bullying and sometimes violence, and responding to the different cognitive needs of learners, including those linked to neurodivergence ⁽²⁾. Teachers working with highly disadvantaged learner groups report heightened stress levels and an expressed need for psychosocial support (Kyriakopoulou, 2025; Psifidou et al., 2026). This is significant for VET, where the learner population is disproportionately drawn from vulnerable groups facing additional barriers, and where the inclusive function of the system increases the professional complexity teachers face.

Digitalisation adds pressure. Many IVET teachers identify the need to strengthen their digital competences as technologies become more integrated into VET classrooms. While AI tools are already in use among a considerable share of teachers, many feel insufficiently prepared to identify appropriate applications or to assess potential ethical risks. UNESCO's guidance on the use of generative AI in education and research is a relevant resource in this context, providing orientation on responsible integration that protects both learner outcomes and professional integrity (UNESCO, 2023). A substantial proportion of teachers also believe that intelligent systems could take over elements of teaching within a decade. A perception that, regardless of whether it materialises, reflects anxiety about the pace of technological change and the adequacy of institutional support structures (Psifidou et al., 2026).

Despite these pressures, the EVTS pilot data also point to continuing professional engagement: over one third of respondents (35%) describe their work as intellectually stimulating, and 43% report that their institution provides sufficient professional development opportunities. This suggests that supportive working conditions and access to professional development can help sustain teacher motivation even under difficult circumstances (Psifidou et al., 2026).

The analysis of job quality indices for vocational education teachers in the 2024 European Working Condition Survey data (EWCS) (Eurofound, 2024) indicates generally favourable working conditions across several dimensions. In

⁽²⁾ According to the European School Education Platform, neurodiversity recognises that variations in brain functioning, such as attention deficit/hyperactivity disorders (ADHD), autism spectrum disorders (ASD) and dyslexia, are natural and part of a mosaic of learning styles and perspectives.

particular, the physical working environment (0.83), social environment (0.79), and career prospects (0.78) are assessed positively, suggesting that teachers operate within supportive and well-structured organisational contexts. Working time quality (0.73) and earnings (0.65) are rated at moderate levels, indicating acceptable but not optimal conditions. However, work intensity (0.71) appears relatively high, pointing to the presence of considerable job demands. Notably, skills discretion (0.62) is comparatively lower, suggesting potential limitations in autonomy or the utilisation of competences. Despite the overall positive assessment of job quality, the average wellbeing score (62.1) remains moderate, indicating that favourable job resources may be partially offset by elevated work demands.

A more detailed examination of work intensity components in the [Eurofound data \(2024\)](#) reveals that job demands are not primarily driven by traditional factors such as working at high speed or tight deadlines, which are reported infrequently by most respondents. Instead, work intensity appears to stem from more qualitative and relational aspects of the job. A considerable proportion of teachers report engaging in work during their free time, indicating blurred boundaries between work and personal life. In addition, emotional demands are prominent, as reflected in the need to manage feelings, exposure to emotionally disturbing situations, and regular interaction with difficult clients or students. While most respondents report having sufficient time to complete their tasks, a notable minority experiences time pressure. Overall, these findings suggest that work intensity in vocational education is characterised less by quantitative workload and more by emotional labour and extended work availability.

It is worth to note a persistent imbalance in how wellbeing is framed at the policy level: many European frameworks and tools still centre learner wellbeing more visibly than teacher wellbeing. A recent example is the [European School Education Platform's self-assessment tool](#) on inclusion and wellbeing, which includes relatively limited prompts on teacher wellbeing compared with those dedicated to learners (European Commission, n.d.). This imbalance matters for VET, where learning outcomes depend heavily on staff capacity, professional confidence, and sustainable working conditions.

CHAPTER 3.

Policy responses and emerging approaches

This section describes how EU-27+ countries are supporting the wellbeing of VET learners and teachers.

3.1 Measures to improve learner wellbeing

The policy responses discussed below can be generally grouped into four areas corresponding to the four drivers identified in Section 2.1:

- (a) safety and belonging, including measures fostering inclusion and combating harassment;
- (b) stress and mental health, which consists of reforms targeting psychosocial difficulties;
- (c) digital wellbeing, including measures building digital competences in students;
- (d) career guidance, which strengthens transition pathways.

3.1.1. Safety and belonging

Most of the considered relevant policy developments fall into this category comprising measures aimed at making the learning environment, both in school and in the workplace, safe and free of bullying and harassment. [Denmark](#) (Cedefop & Refernet, 2026a) in 2022 developed a campaign educating VET students on their rights and response options after experiencing offensive actions, including bullying and sexual harassment. The campaign also includes a preventive element, raising student awareness of what constitutes unacceptable behaviour with the aim of reducing its occurrence. This is particularly relevant for apprentices, who may be reluctant to report workplace harassment for fear that it would affect their future career prospects. The measure also developed a guide for VET teachers and staff, providing advice on supporting students following an incident. [Greece](#) (Cedefop & Refernet, 2026o) has also enacted legislation establishing digital reporting platforms for reporting bullying, thereby facilitating anonymous reporting and lowering the threshold for disclosure.

Beyond addressing harassment and safety, many countries have developed measures to promote inclusive VET education, supporting learners from diverse backgrounds and fostering a sense of belonging. In line with Cedefop's work on VET excellence and inclusion for the 21st century, which highlights belonging and inclusion as structural dimensions of educational quality rather than peripheral concerns, these measures reflect a broad understanding of what makes a VET environment genuinely supportive (Cedefop, 2025). [Ireland](#) (Cedefop & Refernet,

2026p), and [Lithuania](#) (Cedefop & Refernet, 2026i) have developed measures aimed at fostering inclusive learning environments. The Irish approach is particularly broad in scope, encompassing a [Prison Education Taskforce](#) to support rehabilitation and post-release access to education, training, and apprenticeships, as well as a [Community Education Framework](#) (Cedefop & Refernet, 2026v) that strengthens local, non-formal learning environments as entry points into VET for those furthest from the system.

[Portugal](#) (Cedefop & Refernet, 2026k) has prioritised inclusive education by enacting legislation in 2019 that established a flexible learning model, under which schools may autonomously develop 25% of their curriculum, thereby better addressing specific student needs. This measure covered both general education and VET programmes. Other actions in Portugal's reform package addressed differently abled students, including the translation of textbooks into Braille, and for migrant students, including targeted entry tracks into the VET curriculum based on sociolinguistic profiles and prior educational trajectories. Portugal is among the few countries with a positive improvement trajectory across all subjects (reading, mathematics, and science) (OECD, 2023a).

A similar [Estonian](#) (Cedefop & Refernet, 2026u) measure specifically targets learners with special educational needs to (re)enter VET. Notably, it provides for a special vocational orientation programme consisting of 60 ECTS for learners with intellectual disabilities. The [Netherlands](#) (Cedefop & Refernet, 2026j) has also established strong support for learners with special educational needs in VET, legally obliging VET programmes to provide appropriate accommodations.

Finally, some measures provide financial support to strengthen inclusivity. One strand of [Finland's](#) (Cedefop & Refernet, 2026r) comprehensive VET reform programme aims to 'increase wellbeing, a sense of community, and participation' through various reform projects, including funding for individual learning paths, skill development for minority groups, and the establishment of peer support networks. [Bulgaria](#) (Cedefop & Refernet, 2026n) has had a civic competence framework in place since 2015, but in 2023 it adopted a national programme to finance activities aimed at fostering socio-emotional skills and the development of shared values among children. An OECD evaluation of one of the Bulgarian programmes, 'Success for You', aimed at secondary school students including VET participants, found that while student needs were successfully identified, the programme fell short in supporting staff to respond effectively to those identified needs (OECD, 2026b). This case illustrates the importance of considering teacher and learner wellbeing as interlinked: interventions focused solely on learners risk placing additional unaddressed burdens on staff.

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3.1.2. Stress and mental health

Many of the measures addressing student mental health and stress emerged from the COVID-19 pandemic. During this period, students experienced a loss of social contact and a reduction in classroom time and support. [Norway](#) established a working group in 2020 to address student mental health and academic performance, which included VET students at vocational colleges. The working group ultimately influenced [a package](#) (Cedefop & Refernet, 2026v) of measures that provided financial and psychological support. Student mental health organisations and telephone lines received additional funding, and additional loan opportunities were made available to help students cover costs associated with accessing support. While those measures were time-limited and wound down following the end of the pandemic, [Slovakia](#) (Cedefop & Refernet, 2026c) has continued to investigate the mental wellbeing of students. The education ministry is developing a project to systematically and longitudinally monitor students' mental health, providing an evidence base for informed policymaking.

Similarly, [Latvia](#) (Cedefop & Refernet, 2026l) has implemented a series of measures since 2017 to address early leaving from education and training. These interventions include mental health support from peers, psychologists, and other support staff, as well as individualised learning support.

3.1.3. Digital wellbeing

While most NIP measures on digitalisation focus on infrastructure, equipment, and skills acquisition, a smaller but growing number address the wellbeing dimension of digital learning environments. These measures recognise that effective digital education requires not only technical competence but also attention to the psychosocial risks that digitalisation can bring, including online harassment, compromising images, digital fatigue, and the ethical challenges posed by emerging technologies such as AI.

Policy approaches to digital wellbeing vary across countries. Some embed wellbeing within broader digital competence frameworks, treating it as one dimension of digital literacy. [Austria's](#) (Cedefop & Refernet, 2026g) 8-Point plan for digital learning, launched in 2020, introduced the compulsory subject 'Basic Digital Education' (Digitale Grundbildung) in lower secondary education. The curriculum covers not only technical skills but also safe and constructive internet usage, data privacy, and digital communication, with explicit attention to enabling students to 'reflect on socio-cultural conditions and effects of new technologies'. This curricular approach ensures that all learners receive foundational education on responsible digital behaviour, though a 2024 evaluation by the Austrian Court

of Audit noted that the actual impact on learners' digital skills has not been systematically assessed.

[France's](#) (Cedefop & Refernet, 2026h) PIX platform, the national public service for assessing and certifying digital competences, explicitly includes safeguarding health, wellbeing and the environment as one of its 16 assessed competence areas, alongside protecting personal data and privacy and securing the digital environment. This approach positions digital wellbeing not as a separate concern but as an integral part of what it means to be digitally competent. The 2022 partnership between PIX and the French data protection authority to strengthen citizens' skills in protecting personal data online reinforces this integration.

Other countries have developed dedicated measures targeting specific digital risks in VET. [The Netherlands](#) (Cedefop & Refernet, 2026q) provides the most comprehensive example, with a package of measures directly addressing the spread of compromising images of students and teachers online, a problem that increased during the COVID-19 period with the shift to distance learning. Since 2021, VET colleges have received guidelines on preventing the dissemination of inappropriate images, including protocols requiring institutions to appoint a social media officer, provide lessons on image-sharing risks (typically delivered by citizenship teachers), and establish clear rules on social media use within school safety plans. The 2023 VET Integrated Safety Monitor and subsequent research on performance pressure and stress among VET students show that these measures are part of a broader policy attention to student wellbeing, with 2024 survey results indicating improvement in students' self-reported mental health. A Framework for Student Wellbeing was published in 2025, accompanied by implementation guidelines.

[Slovenia's](#) Digital Action Plan (ANDI), adopted in 2022, takes a project-based approach. The plan explicitly includes an Erasmus+ project on 'digital wellbeing' alongside initiatives on digital citizenship and computational thinking. A related project, VR4Empathy, uses virtual reality to support the development of student empathy by highlighting the socio-emotional dimensions of digital education beyond technical skills. The plan also addresses cybersecurity awareness and the creation of safe digital learning environments as part of its broader ecosystem objectives (ReferNet Slovenia & Cedefop, 2023).

More recently, digital wellbeing concerns are being integrated into policy responses to AI in education. [Belgium \(Flemish Community\)](#) (Cedefop & Refernet, 2026e) published a vision paper on the ethical use of AI in education in 2024 as part of its Digisprong digital education action plan, accompanied by a cybersecurity action plan providing schools with standards frameworks for implementing security policies. The successor strategy, Digiplan, approved in 2025, explicitly commits to

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promoting 'safe and inclusive digital learning environments, with attention to cybersecurity, prevention of cyberbullying, and responsible use of AI.'

3.1.4. Career guidance

Transition into the labour market is a period of particular vulnerability for VET learners: uncertainty about occupational choice, lack of labour market information, and the pressure of moving from a structured learning environment into employment can generate significant stress and undermine wellbeing. Career guidance measures in this category, therefore, address learner wellbeing not through direct mental health interventions, but by reducing the uncertainty and structural disorientation that can themselves become sources of sustained anxiety and disengagement.

[Slovakia](#) (Cedefop & Refernet, 2026v) has implemented a multifaceted career guidance approach, including a Regional Vocational Education Platform that connects schools with employers and counselling services. In earlier implementations of the programme, much of the counselling was done by teachers and trainers, due to a lack of specialised personnel. This burdened instructors in addition to their teaching duties, illustrating how student wellbeing can come at the expense of the teachers' wellbeing. To combat this, 2021-2023 implementations of the measure have established SPACE youth centres, which serve as single points of contact providing career and psychological counselling. This solution supports both students and teachers in improving wellbeing. [Luxembourg](#) (Cedefop & Refernet, 2026f) has also improved its career guidance structure, connecting teachers, learners, and parents through the House of Guidance platform. The platform provides information on lifelong learning, internships and apprenticeships, and labour market monitoring in Luxembourg to support informed decision-making. [Poland](#) (Cedefop & Refernet, 2026t) has specifically addressed the transition of learners with special needs into the labour market by developing targeted support for students and teachers alike, as well as identifying labour market niches for their skills.

3.2 Measures to improve teacher wellbeing

Unlike the learner-focused measures reviewed in Section 3.1, which can be grouped across the four driver categories identified in Section 2.1, NIP-related measures on teacher wellbeing are too few in the [Timeline of VET policies in Europe](#) (Cedefop, 2026v) to permit comparable thematic clustering. This itself is a significant finding: while many policy measures explicitly foreground learner wellbeing, very few specifically address teacher wellbeing as a standalone

concern. When teacher wellbeing is addressed, it is often treated as a secondary element within learner-focused initiatives or broader continuing professional development (CPD) and institutional support frameworks. Moreover, some learner wellbeing measures may indirectly increase pressure on teachers by adding reporting requirements or expanding their support responsibilities without adequate resources.

The measures that touch teacher wellbeing are mostly aimed at dealing with emotional and cognitive demands, addressing teacher workload and improving recognition and career development.

Several countries have introduced skill-building measures to help teachers manage the growing complexity of their classrooms. [Denmark](#) (Cedefop & Refernet, 2026a), [Germany](#) (Cedefop & Refernet, 2026m), and [Poland](#) (Cedefop & Refernet, 2026t) have developed training on supporting learners with disabilities, responding to sexual harassment, and working with migrant learners. By equipping teachers with competences to handle diverse and challenging situations, these measures aim to reduce the stress associated with behavioural management and inclusion-related demands. [Austria](#) (Cedefop & Refernet, 2026v) goes further by providing coaching and counselling specifically for apprenticeship trainers, not only for apprentices, since 2015. Topics include learning difficulties, psychological stress, and conflicts with superiors and colleagues. The programme has grown significantly since the pandemic: company and trainer participation increased by 90% between 2020-2021 and 2023, suggesting strong demand for professional support among those working directly with apprentices. Recognising that behavioural challenges are a greater stressor for teachers in disadvantaged settings, [Czechia](#) (Cedefop & Refernet, 2026x) has established dedicated teacher training for 'vulnerable schools' under its national Recovery and Resilience Plan, aiming to address inequalities exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic.

Fewer measures address teacher wellbeing through CPD structures and career progression pathways. [Cyprus](#) (Cedefop & Refernet, 2026w), [Czechia](#) (Cedefop & Refernet, 2026v), and [Estonia](#) (Cedefop & Refernet, 2026d) have developed multi-strand CPD approaches. Since 2018, [Croatia](#) (Cedefop & Refernet, 2026s) has restructured its career advancement system, combining mentorship and CPD with formal recognition for exceptional achievement. By rewarding teachers for their work, the measure aims to address the low sense of professional recognition identified as a driver of dissatisfaction in Section 2.2.

CHAPTER 4.

Country examples

4.1 Denmark: embedding learner wellbeing in VET reform

4.1.1 Context and challenge

[Denmark](#) has faced persistent challenges in its VET system. Enrolment in VET programmes has been declining, and dropout rates remain high: around 40% of students leave before completing their training (Danish Ministry of Children and Education, 2025a). At the same time, demand for skilled workers is increasing due to the green transition and growing needs in healthcare and elder care. In this context, policy makers identified a pressing need to make VET more attractive, inclusive, and of higher quality (Cedefop & ReferNet, 2026a; ReferNet Denmark & Cedefop, 2025).

The safety and wellbeing of apprentices during workplace training have been identified as a gap in learner protection. A 2022 tripartite agreement between the government, trade unions, and employers had already identified trainees and apprentices as a vulnerable group requiring strengthened legal protection in harassment cases (Ius Laboris, 2022). In the past, it was often unclear whom apprentices should contact if they experienced sexual harassment, bullying, or other inappropriate treatment in the company where they did their training (Danish Ministry of Children and Education, 2024).

4.1.2 What the measure does

In May 2025, the Danish government and a broad majority of parliamentary parties adopted a comprehensive political agreement on strengthening VET, containing 31 initiatives backed by substantial investment of approximately EUR 88 million annually from 2030 ([ReferNet Denmark & Cedefop](#), 2025). The agreement explicitly integrates learner wellbeing and safety into its core objectives.

The agreement's 'reducing student dropouts' pillar includes several [measures](#) with direct relevance to learner wellbeing (Danish Ministry of Children and Education, 2025b). Schools are now required to conduct outreach visits to students identified as at risk of dropping out, with visits made by staff who know the individual student and their programme. Students who experience discrimination, harassment, or other inappropriate treatment at their workplace can more easily terminate their training agreements and transfer to school-based training, a provision previously available only in cases of sexual harassment. VET institutions

are now required to develop strategies to prevent and address discrimination, harassment, and other violations. The agreement also strengthens student participation in decision-making processes at VET schools (Danish Ministry of Children and Education, 2026).

For learners with disabilities or other challenges, the agreement introduces VET Flex (EUD Fleks), a scheme allowing students to extend the duration of their vocational programme by up to 50% under the same financial conditions as other learners. This is complemented by improved access to special educational support during workplace training (Danish Ministry of Children and Education, 2025b).

In June 2024, the Danish Agency for Education and Quality (STUK) ran an information campaign on apprentices' rights in cases of sexual harassment, bullying, or other offensive conduct. The campaign provided digital guidance materials accessible via QR codes displayed on posters at all VET schools in Denmark. The materials informed apprentices of their rights and the steps they can take if they experience inappropriate workplace treatment. The campaign was accompanied by guidance for school staff on how to handle sensitive conversations with affected students (Danish Ministry of Children and Education, 2024).

4.1.3 Scale and evidence of uptake

The 2024 information campaign on apprentices' rights rolled out to all VET schools in Denmark, ensuring national coverage. While information on apprentices' rights continues to be provided through public authorities and social partners, there is no indication that the campaign itself is still formally running.

It remains too early to assess the impact of these measures on student outcomes, such as dropout rates or reported incidents of harassment. The Danish Institute for Human Rights, in its response to the implementing legislation, welcomed the measures to promote harassment-free learning environments but noted that they primarily address conditions at schools rather than in workplace training, where a significant proportion of problems occur (Danish Institute for Human Rights, 2025).

Nevertheless, the approach illustrates how learner wellbeing can be embedded within broader VET reform. By combining legislative clarification (duty of care), practical tools (the information campaign), structural flexibility (VET Flex), and stronger learner voice (student participation), the Danish model addresses multiple dimensions of wellbeing, namely safety, inclusion, recognition, and support, within a single coherent policy framework.

4.2 The Netherlands: measures to improve student wellbeing

4.2.1 Context and challenge

In 2018, the Dutch National Institute on Public Health and Environment (*Rijksinstituut voor Volksgezondheid en Milieu*, RIVM) identified mental wellbeing of all young adults as a key policy priority, which was exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic. In 2022, the Annual report youth monitor from Statistics Netherlands (CBS) indicated that, compared to 2017, twice as many young people (12-24 years) said they were having mental health issues, depressive symptoms, or sleeping problems (Statistics Netherlands (CBS), 2023).

A priority focus emerged on the wellbeing of VET students. Although vocational education (MBO) students make up a significant portion of the youth population (nearly 500 000 students participated in VET in the 2024/2025 school year, a cohort comparable in size to the entire higher professional education (HBO) sector), little previous research was targeted specifically at their wellbeing (Spruijt et al., 2022; MBO Raad, 2025). A study conducted in 2022 found that VET students reported feeling unseen and unvalued by the government during the COVID-19 pandemic, and lacking support and clear guidance (Goedhart et al., 2022). These feelings, compounded with the pre-existing perception of VET as a low-prestige educational path, negatively impact students' wellbeing.

In 2021, the Kennisnet foundation, in association with the School and Safety Foundation and the MBO Council (VET Council), produced a series of guidelines for colleges to prevent and manage the spread of inappropriate images online. The guidelines included step-by-step instructions for developing and implementing a school safety plan, encouraged the appointment of a social media officer, and suggested incorporating discussions of digital safety into coursework (Cedefop and Refernet, 2026q).

4.2.2 What the measure does

In 2022, the [initiative](#) was broadened to general mental health improvement among VET students, aiming to improve monitoring of student wellbeing through collaboration and participatory research. In 2023, the VET Integrated Safety Monitor was published, examining the safety experiences of students and staff in VET. The research integrated multiple existing data streams, minimising participant burden by combining existing surveys with targeted focus groups. Results indicated that while most students and staff feel safe, notable vulnerabilities emerged for specific groups, including women, students with disabilities, and students with a migration background. Staff safety was largely

influenced by school size, with larger institutions correlating negatively with feelings of safety and job satisfaction (Cuppen et al., 2023). In 2024, the Minister for Education released a report investigating the risk factors for poor mental wellbeing among VET students. The research team collaborated closely with MBO students through a series of focus groups, ensuring their input was heard not only during data collection but also in identifying action-oriented perspectives for policy makers and school leaders. Key findings indicated that students' performance pressure and stress were attributable to the accumulation of responsibilities across work, school, and home contexts. The Ministry of Education, Culture, and Science has acknowledged the findings and called for further analysis and action in cooperation with stakeholders.

4.2.3 Scale and evidence of uptake

Following the publication of the Integrated Safety Monitor and the risk factor report, the education ministry incorporated several key findings into policy plans, emphasising joint responsibility between the government and VET institutions (E.E.W. Bruins, 2025). The MBO Work Agenda's mid-term evaluation report was published in December 2025. Notably, student wellbeing and safety is one of the most successful areas. The share of students reporting poor mental health has significantly decreased, almost by half from 2022 to 2025, from 22% to 11% (Ministerie van Onderwijs, Cultuur en Wetenschap, 2025).

In 2025, the ministry proposed a bill establishing a social safety duty of care (*zorgplicht*) for secondary education, including VET colleges. The measure is still in the legislative process (May 2026). Its implementation is anticipated for the 2027/2028 school year. The proposal contains five major legislative measures obliging schools to provide a safe learning and working environment:

- (a) registration and reporting obligation for serious safety incidents;
- (b) expansion of the mandatory reporting duty for sexual offences;
- (c) mandatory appointment of an internal and external confidential advisor;
- (d) strengthening the complaints system;
- (e) mandatory annual evaluation of existing safety policies.

Overall, the measure has contributed to placing VET learner wellbeing more firmly on the policy agenda. By including MBO students as active participants in the research process, the studies both shed light on their challenges and elevated learner voices. Furthermore, the findings have identified target areas for policy responses, such as the social safety duty of care (*zorgplicht*) bill, though it remains too early to assess the impact of these measures on student outcomes.

CHAPTER 5.

Conclusions and policy pointers

5.1 What the evidence shows

The evidence reviewed in this Insight suggests that wellbeing is becoming more visible in VET policy but remains unevenly addressed across countries and across target groups. The most consistent finding is that **learner wellbeing is more explicitly recognised in national measures than teacher wellbeing**. Across the policy approaches analysed, interventions most often focus on learner safety and belonging, mental health and stress, digital risks, or support for transitions through guidance. This reflects the main wellbeing drivers identified in the report but also shows that wellbeing measures often remain fragmented.

The country examples also highlight how difficult it is to step up from policy commitment to achieving the desired effect and, even more so, measuring it. In the Netherlands, wellbeing-related monitoring and participatory research have helped place VET learner wellbeing more firmly on the policy agenda and have informed follow-up policy action, including proposed duty-of-care measures on social safety. However, it remains too early to assess their impact on student outcomes. Likewise, the Danish case shows how learner wellbeing can be embedded in broader VET reform through measures on harassment, inclusion, flexibility, and student participation, but the available evidence still says more about policy commitment and rollout than about demonstrated effects.

A second key finding is that **teacher wellbeing remains underdeveloped as a distinct policy area, despite growing evidence on substantial pressures on VET teachers**. The Insight shows that teachers face multiple and interacting stressors, including administrative burden, the need to respond to increasingly diverse learner needs, digital demands, and staff shortages. Yet the policy responses identified tend to address these issues only indirectly. Most relevant measures focus on professional development, or support for managing difficult classroom situations. These interventions may be valuable, but they do not amount to a comprehensive approach to teacher wellbeing covering workload, organisational support, professional recognition, and access to specialised support.

Current practice is characterised by selective initiatives, stronger attention to learners than to staff, and limited evidence on outcomes. Wellbeing is now more

clearly recognised as relevant to VET quality, inclusion and attractiveness, but national approaches remain uneven.

5.2 Policy pointers

Drawing on the analysis in this Insight and the European Commission's [Guidelines on supporting wellbeing at school](#), five policy directions stand out for VET. These respond to the main gaps identified in the evidence: fragmented learner-focused measures, limited explicit attention to teacher wellbeing, weak integration across actors, and insufficient attention to digital and organisational drivers of wellbeing.

- (a) **Address teacher wellbeing explicitly in VET policy:** Teacher wellbeing should be treated as a policy objective in its own right. The analysis suggests that VET teachers face multiple pressures, including workload, administrative demands, increasingly diverse learner needs, difficult classroom situations, and staff shortages. Policy responses should therefore go beyond CPD alone and combine professional support with broader measures such as access to psychosocial support, workload management, mentoring, stronger leadership support, and financial and non-financial recognition. This should also be linked to wider challenges of teaching attractiveness, ageing, and retention.
- (b) **Adopt a whole-school, [whole-community approach](#) with clear roles for support actors:** The evidence suggests that many current measures focus on learners while relying heavily on teachers to implement them. A more sustainable approach would involve school leaders, counsellors, psychologists, social workers, guidance staff, parents, community actors and labour market partners. This approach matters for wellbeing because it helps distribute responsibility more realistically, improves early identification of problems, and reduces the expectation that teachers alone should manage mental health, social inclusion, behaviour, and transition support. In VET settings, employers and workplace supervisors are particularly relevant because learner wellbeing is also shaped by work-based learning environments.
- (c) **Invest in specialised support capacity, not only teaching capacity:** A recurring implication of the findings is that teachers cannot be expected to act simultaneously as subject experts, counsellors, psychologists, behaviour specialists, and career advisers. Member States should therefore strengthen access to specialised support staff and services for both learners and teachers. This could include counselling and mental health support, mediation and anti-bullying expertise, career guidance, and inclusion specialists. At the same time, teacher CPD should be strengthened to cover inclusive pedagogy,

Policy approaches to improve VET learner and teacher wellbeing:

classroom and behaviour management, learner wellbeing, and responding to mental health needs. CPD provision should be high-quality, practice-oriented and relevant to teachers' day-to-day challenges. Teachers should be supported and incentivised to participate through dedicated time, recognition, and career progression pathways. Such investment would not only improve support quality for learners but also reduce one of the drivers of teacher stress and burnout: the accumulation of administrative and ancillary responsibilities beyond the core teaching role.

- (d) Integrate digital wellbeing into broader wellbeing and safety strategies:** Digital wellbeing should not be treated as important in its own right. The analysis shows that bullying, harassment, discrimination, and stress increasingly extend into online spaces, while rapid digitalisation also creates new pressures for teachers. National VET strategies should therefore include digital wellbeing within broader school or institutional wellbeing policies, with clear guidance on online harassment and abuse, screen-related stress, social media use, digital literacy, and the implications of generative AI. Importantly, this should cover both learners and teachers, since digitalisation affects not only students' safety and mental health but also teachers' workload, professional demands, and exposure to online misconduct.
- (e) Address broader structural conditions that shape wellbeing:** Not only targeted support measures but also the overall organisation of teaching and learning shape learner and teacher wellbeing. Broader conditions such as curriculum pressure, time demands, access to extracurricular and creative activities, opportunities for physical activity, healthy food environments, and supportive institutional climates should be considered to improve wellbeing. In VET, this broader perspective is also relevant to workplace learning, where wellbeing can be affected by the quality of placements, supervision, inclusion, and psychosocial safety in employer settings.

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Policy approaches to improve VET learner and teacher wellbeing

VET learner and teacher wellbeing is increasingly recognised as a policy issue and key condition for quality, inclusion and sustainability in vocational education and training (VET). This Cedefop Insight examines how learner and teacher wellbeing is currently addressed by VET policies across EU Member States, Norway and Iceland, identifies challenges and drivers. Safety and belonging, mental health and stress, digital wellbeing, and school to work transitions are seen key to learner wellbeing while workload, emotional and cognitive demands and digitalisation put significant pressures on teacher wellbeing. Cedefop's European Vocational Teacher Survey (EVTS) provides important insights specifically on VET teacher wellbeing. Treating teacher wellbeing as a standalone policy objective; adopting whole community approaches; embedding digital wellbeing within broader wellbeing and safety strategies; and addressing wider structural conditions in schools and workplaces can help address the challenges in a balanced and integrated way.

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