



CEDEFOP INSIGHTS

Inclusion at the core of future-proof VET in Europe

Insights from national policy monitoring and analysis



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The **European Centre for the Development of Vocational Training** (Cedefop) is the European Union's reference centre for vocational education and training, skills and qualifications. We provide information, research, analyses and evidence on vocational education and training, skills and qualifications for policymaking in the EU Member States. Cedefop was originally established in 1975 by Council Regulation (EEC) No 337/75. This decision was repealed in 2019 by Regulation (EU) 2019/128 establishing Cedefop as a European Union Agency with a renewed mandate.

Europe 123, Thessaloniki (Pylaia), Greece
Postal: Cedefop service post, 570 01 Thermi, Greece
Tel. +30 2310490111, Fax +30 2310490020
Email: info@cedefop.europa.eu
www.cedefop.europa.eu

Jürgen Siebel, *Executive Director*
Tony Donohoe, *Chair of the Management Board*

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The analysis and preparation of the report were coordinated by [Irina Jemeljanova](#), Cedefop expert. The analysis and drafting was done by the VET Policies and systems team, with specific contribution of [Anthie Kyriakopoulou](#), [Eirini Monsela](#), [Inés Sancha Gonzalo](#), Cedefop experts, [Silke Gadji](#) and [Vicky Oraiopoulou](#), Cedefop Policy officers, [Anni Maleena Luoto](#), Cedefop trainee.

The Insight was peer reviewed by [Irene Psifidou](#) and [Anastasia Pouliou](#), Cedefop experts.

CHAPTER 1.

Introduction

Inclusive vocational education and training (VET) is a long-standing EU policy priority, reaffirmed by recent EU initiatives such as the Council Recommendation on VET (Council of the European Union, 2020), the Union of Skills (European Commission, 2025) and the Herning Declaration (Danish Presidency of the Council of the European Union, 2025). It aims to ensure equal access to learning opportunities across initial VET (IVET), continuing VET (CVET) and VET at higher levels, particularly for learners facing barriers to participation. These include young people at risk of early leaving and early leavers, young people not in employment, education and training (NEETs), unemployed and inactive adults, learners with disabilities or special educational needs (SEN), migrants and refugees, older adults, and others experiencing socio-economic, geographical or skills-related disadvantages. In the context of demographic challenges and the twin transition, enabling all learners to develop and use their skills is crucial for Europe's competitiveness, social cohesion and lifelong learning culture.

Cedefop has played a key role in supporting inclusive VET through research, policy analysis and practical tools. Recent research (Cedefop, 2025) points to a shift to a broader understanding of inclusion, moving beyond support for vulnerable groups towards VET systems that respond to the diverse needs of all learners, including gifted learners and high achievers. Over the past two decades, Cedefop's work has addressed issues such as early leaving from education and training, the reintegration of NEETs, and the capacity of teachers, trainers and institutions to support diverse learners. This reflects a systemic approach to inclusion, recognising that coordinated action across learners, educators, institutions and support services is key. Cedefop's toolkits (Cedefop, 2026a; Cedefop, 2026b) and databases of VET policies and systems (Cedefop & ReferNet, 2024; Cedefop & ReferNet, 2026) further support policy development and implementation.

According to the European Commission (European Commission, 2026) and Cedefop and ETF monitoring (Cedefop & ETF, 2025), Member States, Iceland and Norway have strengthened the inclusiveness, flexibility and learner-centredness of VET through a wide range of reforms aimed at making systems more inclusive, accessible, equitable, and gender-balanced. Common measures include modular and flexible learning pathways, stronger stakeholder involvement, continuing professional development (CPD) for teachers and trainers, and targeted funding mechanisms. Countries are also strengthening links between VET and labour

markets through counselling, mentoring and upskilling opportunities, while giving increasing attention to preventing early leaving, addressing gender imbalances and promoting digital inclusion (Cedefop & ETF, 2025). However, further efforts are needed to ensure equal opportunities and consistent implementation across Europe (European Commission, 2026).

A significant concern in countries' pursuit of inclusive VET is the balance between expanding access and keeping high quality educational standards. To achieve such balance and maintain a good image of VET, inclusion policies need to be implemented in close link with robust quality assurance to ensure that the drive for accessibility does not result in lowering the quality of VET programmes. As a response, the EU-27+ promote flexible learning pathways and the use of digital technologies to safeguard accessibility while ensuring all learners acquire the skills needed for work transition and personal growth.

Inclusive VET cannot be seen as a standalone policy priority, but as part of a comprehensive and coordinated approach to various aspects of VET provision. Cedefop's [Toolkit for tackling early leaving](#) identifies key intervention approaches to make VET systems more inclusive, highlighting interconnected areas (Cedefop, 2026b). To name a few, these areas are quality assurance, validation and recognition of prior learning outcomes, lifelong guidance, outreach arrangements, monitoring of VET programmes, graduate tracking, and skill forecasting and foresight (Cedefop & ReferNet, 2026). Adopting a holistic approach that integrates these dimensions, rather than pursuing a fragmented policy focus on inclusion per se, is likely to yield more effective and sustainable outcomes in achieving inclusive and accessible VET systems across Europe.

This Cedefop Insight examines the current state of play regarding inclusiveness in VET systems across the EU-27+. The analysis examines primarily policy developments reported annually in 2021-2025 by [Cedefop's ReferNet network](#) and recorded in the [Timeline of VET policies in Europe](#) (Cedefop & ReferNet, 2026); these findings are presented in Chapter 2. The Insight also draws on findings from relevant Cedefop projects. 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 (a list of policies and initiatives is provided in the Annex). Countries mentioned are therefore illustrative rather than representative. In many cases, similar approaches can be found in other countries not explicitly cited.

CHAPTER 2.

Policy responses and emerging approaches

This section reviews how the EU-27+ work to increase the VET inclusiveness and address diverse needs of learners with fewer opportunities and considers the policy developments from the [Timeline of VET policies in Europe](#) (Cedefop & ReferNet, 2026).

Across the EU-27+, efforts to strengthen the inclusiveness of VET systems have focused on six interrelated dimensions of inclusion in VET:

- (a) increasing access and participation of vulnerable groups in VET and LLL among vulnerable groups;
- (b) preventing early leaving from education and training;
- (c) removing gender imbalances in VET, and in particular science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM);
- (d) promoting digital inclusion;
- (e) improving lifelong guidance and counselling;
- (f) equipping VET teachers and trainers in responding to diverse learner needs and creating inclusive learning environments.

2.1. Increasing access and participation in VET and LLL for vulnerable groups

Countries have promoted inclusion in VET by implementing targeted actions to improve access and participation in VET and LLL for vulnerable groups. The scope and focus of these measures, as well as the groups they address, vary by country. Most efforts focus on providing flexible learning pathways and modularisation of VET programmes, supporting transition to employment through training and guidance, providing financial incentives, and validation and recognition of skills, particularly for newly arriving immigrants. These initiatives are often designed and implemented in coordination with social partners, other stakeholders, and the private sector (Cedefop, 2025; Cedefop & ReferNet, 2026).

Countries develop modular training and flexible learning pathways to better support learners of diverse backgrounds and abilities, enabling them to access, progress, and succeed at their own pace based on their individual needs. This is often achieved through tailored modules, microcredentials, online learning platforms, standardised framework conditions, and individualised pathways, also demonstrated in Cedefop (2025). Flexible and modular learning pathways are also helpful to employers, especially small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), as

they facilitate access to training to employees, which would otherwise be difficult to accomplish.

Norway developed a [National strategy for decentralised and flexible education at vocational schools and higher education institutions](#) (Cedefop & ReferNet, 2026) that established fully digital educational offers, and more flexible funding for students. **Portugal** has strengthened curricular flexibility, tailored guidance and certification via the [Qualifica centres](#) (Cedefop & ReferNet, 2026), and innovative measures such as [class-sharing](#) (Cedefop & ReferNet, 2026) between schools in low-density areas, thereby supporting disadvantaged youth and adults, including NEETs, in re-entering education and progressing towards qualification and labour market integration. The 2022 VET reform in **Spain** introduced a [modular structure](#) (Cedefop & ReferNet, 2026) for all qualifications. This framework offers diverse training pathways, from micro-training units to full degrees and specialised courses for VET graduates, enabling validation, certification and accumulation of training units from a lifelong perspective. **Malta** offers [tailored personal development and employability programmes](#) (Cedefop & ReferNet, 2026) targeting vulnerable 13-19-year-olds through the Prince's Trust International Achieve initiative, using flexible, modular learning to re-engage those at risk of exclusion. The activities build confidence, life skills and work readiness, adapted to each learner's needs. **Austria** has strengthened [inclusive VET pathways](#) (Cedefop & ReferNet, 2026) by improving access for disadvantaged groups, including migrants, people with disabilities, and youth with learning difficulties, through strategies focused on integrating them into apprenticeships. The 2020 Austrian [reforms](#) (Cedefop & ReferNet, 2026) introduced part-time apprenticeships for those with care responsibilities or health issues, thereby increasing flexibility and access to apprenticeship training.

Countries implemented policies and actions to facilitate vulnerable groups' transition to employment, including measures to address skill shortages.

Targeted training programmes are designed and provided to improve learner skills. **Cyprus** has implemented, in close collaboration with social partners and other relevant labour market stakeholders, a range of measures to support [integration of the unemployed and inactive into employment](#) (Cedefop & ReferNet, 2026) through targeted training activities and work placements that provide work experience in a real working environment. In **Portugal**, [Adult education and training \(EFA\) courses](#) (Cedefop & ReferNet, 2026) are developed and delivered in close cooperation with labour market actors (companies, organisations, and other entities) to ensure that training meets actual workplace needs. These courses help individuals with low qualifications (levels 1-4 of the NQF/EQF) build social, scientific, and professional skills, enabling them to earn a basic or upper

secondary school certificate. **Portugal's** Integrating for Tourism scheme delivers tailored vocational training and internships for [migrants and beneficiaries of international protection](#) (ReferNet Portugal & Cedefop, 2024) and focuses on their social and labour market inclusion. The programme combines language and cultural learning, technical tourism training, and hands-on internships in companies. Participants also receive practical support, including devices, incentives and structured guidance to sustain participation. **Poland** addresses the weak labour market situation of the learners with special education needs (SEN) by reforming their vocational preparation through the [For Life project](#) (Cedefop & ReferNet, 2026). The initiative develops functional assessments, identifies labour market needs, expands vocational options, and creates lists of suitable professions and qualifications for different disabilities. It also engages employers and social partners in shaping programme changes. **Sweden** has reformed its VET curricula to provide [adapted programmes for learners with intellectual disabilities](#) (ReferNet Sweden & Cedefop, 2025), aligning content more closely with labour market demands. The reform expands elective options and strengthens work-based learning and apprenticeship pathways tailored to these learners' needs. Individualised pathways are retained to ensure flexible support for different ability levels. Overall, the approach aims to improve transitions to employment and reduce disengagement among this disadvantaged group.

Poland and **Ireland** address training needs of prison inmates through targeted training. Ireland is strengthening rehabilitation and post-release [employment pathways for inmates](#) through education and upskilling. Measures include a pilot NQF Level 5 retrofitting qualification for green jobs, the introduction of apprenticeships, and information days on IVET and CVET opportunities held in prisons (Cedefop & ReferNet, 2026). Poland aims to improve [inmates' employability](#) (Cedefop & ReferNet, 2026) and to reduce their risk of social exclusion by offering vocational and soft skills training to help them reintegrate into society after release. The scheme targets prisoners with low qualifications or long periods out of work.

Financial support and incentives are another important way of attracting or retaining learners in VET. Most often, these incentives target learners, although some measures also support VET providers.

Denmark has strengthened access to VET for disadvantaged young people and low-qualified adults through increased investment in preparatory basic education, including [taximeter-based funding](#) and sustained financial support for introductory basic education institutions (*Forberedende Grunduddannelse*, FGU) (Cedefop & ReferNet, 2026). In addition, the [Education lift scheme](#) provides income support to unemployed adults aged over 30 years while they undertake

vocational training (Cedefop & ReferNet, 2026). Since 2020, **Germany** has [expanded financial support](#) for CVET and improved funding opportunities for companies (Cedefop & ReferNet, 2026). Recent measures include a qualification allowance for workers participating in training and the extension of scholarships to talented apprentices and skilled workers. **Hungary** has supported talented disadvantaged VET learners through a merit-based [scholarship](#) (Cedefop & ReferNet, 2026) combined with mentoring.

Financial incentives can also support participation in lifelong learning and training provision. In **Slovakia**, [financing schemes](#) (Cedefop & ReferNet, 2026) support providers offering non-formal learning opportunities to low-skilled adults in cooperation with non-governmental organisations (NGOs) (Cedefop & ReferNet, 2026). In **Spain**, the *TandEM* programme combines training with [paid work experience for young Roma](#) aged 16-29 years, supporting participants with little or no prior schooling and facilitating their transition to employment (Cedefop & ReferNet, 2026).

Cyprus has supported the labour market integration of disadvantaged groups by providing [financial incentives](#) (Cedefop & ReferNet, 2026) to enterprises to employ and train long-term unemployed individuals through individualised workplace-based training programmes, with the scheme extended until 2030 to ensure sustained impact. **Portugal** provides [training vouchers](#) (Cedefop & ReferNet, 2026) for employees and the long-term unemployed and financial incentives for companies offering apprenticeships to young people with learning difficulties, complemented by programmes addressing mental health issues, school failure and dropout.

Croatia is awarding vouchers for green and digital upskilling for the unemployed and the employed, as part of its [labour and employment investment priorities through 2027](#) (Cedefop & ReferNet, 2026). This initiative is supported by career guidance services designed to facilitate re-entry into learning, thus reducing financial and informational barriers to participation. **Romania** has addressed financial barriers to participation in IVET by offering [support for accommodation, meals and transport for disadvantaged learners and for those re-entering education](#) (Cedefop & ReferNet, 2026), alongside targeted income support measures such as the Euro 200 programme and expanded social scholarships. Measures include personalised school-level support plans, mentoring and remedial learning for pupils showing risk indicators. Specialised outreach services address learners facing multiple disadvantages, helping them remain in or return to education. The approach links schools, social services and community actors to ensure targeted support for those most vulnerable to early leaving. In the Netherlands, the initiative [Strengthening the position of VET students](#) (Cedefop &

ReferNet, 2026) includes VET student funds to reduce dropout rates driven by financial difficulties and provides support to specific groups, including pregnant students.

Validation and recognition of skills and prior learning help integrate individuals to education and training and employment; they have been specifically instrumental for newly arriving migrants and refugees.

In the **Netherlands**, a formal VET declaration (*MBO-verklaring*) allows early school leavers to receive [documented recognition of the learning outcomes](#), assessments, and workplace experiences they achieved, helping them validate their competences and improve their chances in the labour market (Cedefop & ReferNet, 2026). **Sweden** facilitated the [integration of newly arrived immigrants](#) (Cedefop & ReferNet, 2026) by fast, targeted pathways into occupations facing skills shortages, combining faster skills validation, recognition of foreign qualifications, vocationally oriented Swedish language training, and supplementary VET aligned with labour market needs. **Germany** has implemented measures to support asylum seekers and refugees early in their integration. The [IvAF integration programme](#) (Cedefop & ReferNet, 2026) connects participants with employers, vocational schools, and public agencies, focusing on language acquisition, skills recognition, counselling, vocational guidance, and access to training, apprenticeships, and job placements. Legislative reforms have increased financial support, expanded access to training, and provided residence security, allowing refugees to complete training and secure employment.

Finland's action plan for better [integration of immigrants in VET 2024-2027](#) (Cedefop & ReferNet, 2026) aims to assist those who have fled the war in Ukraine. As part of the action plan, the employment of displaced people was promoted by increasing work-based learning, recognising qualifications, providing supplementary training, completing certification training, and offering career coaching and online job search training in the Ukrainian language. **Norway** introduced several [digital services](#) to support the integration of displaced persons from Ukraine into the labour market (ReferNet Norway & Cedefop, 2025). The services include a rapid 'turbo evaluation' service which provides employers with a quick, non-binding assessment of foreign educational documents; a multilingual digital career guidance tool, and a foreign qualifications database designed to streamline recognition procedures. These tools aim to address a sharp rise in qualification recognition applications (by 40 % since 2022) and reduce processing times while offering clearer, more accessible support to newcomers.

2.2. Monitoring and preventing early leaving from education and training

Effective prevention of early leaving from education and training depends on the timely identification of learners at risk and the use of evidence to inform targeted support, intervention and re-engagement measures. Countries use a range of data-driven approaches to monitor and prevent early leaving, adapted to their VET systems. Between 2020 and 2025, some systems evolved from relying primarily on descriptive statistics to using early warning systems, learner tracking and graduate tracer mechanisms that directly support preventive actions such as guidance, mentoring, and programme adjustments. Several countries also strengthened data-sharing arrangements across ministries and agencies to track learners' pathways more effectively and identify risk patterns among disadvantaged groups.

Slovakia has been building an [early warning system](#) (Cedefop & ReferNet, 2026) that helps schools identify learners at risk of dropping out and respond at an earlier stage. This is done as part of the national [Lifelong learning and counselling strategy 2021-2030](#) (Cedefop & ReferNet, 2026), which also includes updating pre-vocational programmes that give low-achieving learners, especially those at risk of early leaving, more secure and recognised learning routes. **Latvia** developed a comprehensive [early warning model](#) (ReferNet Latvia & Cedefop, 2022; Cedefop & ReferNet, 2026), combining a national database covering 95 % of municipalities with individual support plans and multiprofessional cooperation to track learners at risk of early leaving and the outcomes of preventive actions over time. Combined with [individualised learning pathways](#) (Cedefop & Latvian Ministry of Education and Science, 2023), this approach helps early leavers, low-skilled individuals and those with outdated qualifications remain in, or return to, learning.

Slovenia uses a [cross-sectoral cooperation methodology](#) (Cedefop & ReferNet, 2026) to monitor early school leaving across education systems, including VET, by combining school-level data, learner follow-up and cooperation with counselling services. This enables early identification and referral to support mechanisms at local level. In **Hungary**, a dual approach combines a graduate tracking system with an early warning mechanism. A [graduate tracking system](#) (ReferNet Hungary & Cedefop, 2023) integrates administrative and survey data for more than 1.6 million VET learners, including dropouts. Complementing this, a school-level [early school leaving prediction tool](#) (ReferNet Hungary & Cedefop, 2026), embedded in the KRÉTA digital education management system, identifies upper-secondary VET learners at risk of early leaving and supports timely intervention. The system enables schools and maintainers (the organisations

responsible for running and governing schools) to activate mentoring and other support measures and has reportedly contributed to a 32% reduction since 2024 in the number of failing students through targeted support (Cedefop & ReferNet, 2026).

Other countries focus on monitoring participation, progression and completion patterns to identify learners requiring additional support and to improve institutional responses to dropout risks.

In **Ireland**, early leaving monitoring has been reinforced through [national tracking and evaluation tools](#) in further education and training (FET) (Cedefop & ReferNet, 2026), covering learner participation, progression and completion. The system focuses on learners at risk of early leaving and early leavers and supports evidence-based targeting of prevention and re-engagement measures. In **Malta**, the [Malta College of Arts, Science and Technology](#) strengthened its quality assurance and learner-tracking mechanisms between 2021 and 2025, allowing it to monitor retention, progression and completion rates across VET programmes more closely. Evidence from internal reviews is used to identify learners at risk of dropout and to guide adjustments to programme provision, learner support services and other preventive measures (Cedefop & ReferNet, 2026).

Several countries have expanded learner-tracking and monitoring systems to generate evidence on progression, completion and post-training outcomes, enabling more targeted measures to prevent disengagement and early leaving.

In **Belgium** (the Flemish Community), a system tracks IVET graduates by linking the data from the Flemish public employment service (VDAB) with education records. As it identifies graduates who become unemployed or inactive, it [helps schools to recognise learners at higher risk of disadvantage](#) (Cedefop & ReferNet, 2026) and to adjust guidance, improve follow-up, and respond when signs of disengagement appear. In **France**, the [Inserjeunes project](#) (Cedefop & ReferNet, 2026) has provided a national monitoring tool for VET and apprenticeships, tracking learners' entry, completion and post-training outcomes. The system targets IVET learners and apprentices, using progression and insertion data to identify programmes and groups with higher dropout risks and informs corrective action.

Some monitoring systems focus on ensuring timely follow-up when learners leave education and training, supporting their re-engagement and preventing long-term disengagement.

In **Luxembourg**, [centralised monitoring systems](#) are used to identify early leavers through regular reporting and coordinated follow-up by guidance and youth services. The measure targets young people who have disengaged from education and training, ensuring that cases of early leaving are promptly detected and young

people are contacted and supported to re-engage in learning or other pathways (Cedefop & ReferNet, 2026). In **Austria**, monitoring focuses on [apprenticeship pathways and transitions](#) (ReferNet Austria & Cedefop, 2023). The [training obligation](#) until the age of 18 years (Cedefop & ReferNet, 2026) ensures that young people who leave compulsory education without a clear pathway remain in education or training. When an apprenticeship place is not available in a company, learners can undertake training in a supra-company facility, which guarantees a training spot and includes counselling, coaching and close follow-up. The system actively reaches out to young people who leave education and contacts them within four months of the dropout, supporting those at risk of becoming NEETs or disengaged.

In addition to learner-level monitoring, Germany stands out as it monitors early leaving risks at [the system level](#). Through its annual VET Report and Data Report, structural imbalances and persistent mismatches contributing to disengagement and dropout pressures are identified (ReferNet Germany & Cedefop, 2024).

2.3. Removing gender imbalances in VET

Gender equality is one of the areas that are central on the EU inclusion agenda (Lees & Pouliou, 2025). Across Europe, gender imbalances persist in VET, particularly affecting STEM-related fields, technical occupations and apprenticeships, and leadership roles where women continue to be underrepresented. Between 2020 and 2025, countries have adopted a combination of national equality frameworks, targeted support measures, awareness-raising campaigns and role-model initiatives, promoting girls' and women's participation in STEM and other non-traditional fields.

Austria stands out with a range of multi-faceted initiatives aiming to improve gender balance in VET and employment. A comprehensive funding from the Economic Chamber covers up to 100% of the costs for initiatives promoting gender balance since 2016, including apprenticeships in fields with under 30 % representation of one sex. Since 2017, the [Women entrepreneurs go to school](#) (Cedefop & ReferNet, 2026) project has used role models to inspire schoolgirls toward self-employment through female entrepreneur visits and a dedicated website with teacher/learner materials since 2017. The 2020 [Digital pioneers project](#) (Cedefop & ReferNet, 2026) trains young women in programming, digital skills, and innovation, resulting in a sharp rise in female apprenticeships.

Several countries have embedded gender equality objectives within broader national strategies, aiming to create institutional frameworks and address gender imbalances in education, training and employment.

In **Slovenia**, the [National programme for equal opportunities for women and men](#) (2023–2030) aims to reduce the gender gap in all areas of social life, especially in employment, education, health and social status (European Institute for Gender Equality, 2025). In the **Netherlands**, the government's 2023 [Green and digital jobs action plan](#) (Cedefop & ReferNet, 2026) partners with employers and schools to increase women's entry into technical fields and ICT. In **France**, since 2018 measures [have promoted equality in schools, training and work settings](#) (Cedefop & ReferNet, 2026) by establishing a role of equality representatives, staff education, parent tools, and a 2022 girls-boys equality label for cohesive action.

Some countries complement strategic frameworks with targeted programmes that provide support, training opportunities and incentives for women to enter underrepresented sectors and occupations.

Cyprus's Human Resource Development Authority launched [Entrepreneurial training programmes for women](#) (Cedefop & ReferNet, 2026) in 2023, aiming for 500 participants by 2027. **Spain** has implemented sectoral approaches. The 2025 [Women can build project](#) (Cedefop & ReferNet, 2026) by the construction labour authority improves women's access to training and qualifications in the sector. Several programmes aim to improve the digital literacy of rural women, for example, a [project 2022 organised by the national employment agency, SEPE](#) (Cedefop & ReferNet, 2026). **Sweden** introduced [curricular changes to challenge traditional gender roles](#) (Cedefop & ReferNet, 2026) in 2022.

Awareness-raising campaigns and role-model initiatives (see also the Austrian example above) are used to challenge gender stereotypes and encourage girls and women to consider a broader range of educational and career pathways.

Germany has implemented significant effort to ensure [cliché-free VET](#), with the annual career orientation event called 'Girls' Day'. Launched in 2001, it aims to broaden vocational choices of girls aged 10+ via exploration of gender-atypical fields; it is now also offered in more than 20 countries, including Austria, Belgium, Czechia, Estonia, France, Greece, Hungary, Italy, Luxembourg, Netherlands, Norway, Poland, Slovenia, and Spain (Cedefop & ReferNet, 2026). **Latvia's** 2024 [Choosing a profession without prejudice](#) project by the German-Baltic Chamber of Commerce featured a Career Day with practical activities engaging participants in hands-on experiences across traditionally gendered professions, such as girls exploring electrical engineering (ReferNet Latvia & Cedefop 2025). **Ireland's** [Fact, faces, futures](#) campaign has been showcasing female apprentices' success stories to encourage young women to consider apprenticeships, which led to a significant rise in women's registrations (Department of Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science, 2023). The **Netherlands** has addressed [internship and apprenticeship discrimination](#) (Cedefop & ReferNet, 2026) through

awareness-raising and monitoring measures, including a national campaign supporting students, education providers and companies since 2020.

Given the persistent underrepresentation of women in STEM-related education and occupations, several countries have introduced dedicated initiatives to encourage girls' and women's participation in STEM. With the specific focus on STEM in the Herning Declaration, these initiatives deserve attention.

Austria in June 2023 adopted the [Join in STEM action plan](#) (Cedefop & ReferNet, 2026) that addresses lower female graduation rates by challenging STEM-related stereotypes, encouraging girls' pursuit of STEM education and vocational orientation, and empowering STEM teachers to boost the confidence of girls and women in STEM subjects across all education levels. In **Belgium** (the Flemish Community), the Flemish government launched the [STEM agenda 2030](#) (Cedefop & ReferNet, 2026) in June 2021 to expand STEM courses and careers in VET and LLL, with a focus on girls' participation; supporting initiatives include stereotype-busting programmes and mentoring for women in science and engineering. In **Cyprus**, the Youth Makerspace Larnaca ⁽¹⁾ and the 'Be an Ally Foundation' ⁽²⁾ co-launched [Girls in STEAM academy](#) (Cedefop & ReferNet, 2026) in 2021 to address low female participation in STEAM fields. The BridgeSTEAM programme empowers 14-16-year-old girls through the provision of robotics/AI training, STEAM career info, and female role model connections. In **Slovenia**, the [National digital action plan 2027 \(ANDI\)](#) (Cedefop & ReferNet, 2026) aims to reduce the digital divide and encourages girls' participation in STEM.

Slovakia's [National digital skills strategy](#) (Cedefop & ReferNet, 2026) and its 2023-2026 action plan boosts girls' and women's ICT participation through school communication campaigns highlighting ICT career benefits. In **the Netherlands**, the education ministry launched the [Implementation agenda on climate & energy](#) (Cedefop & ReferNet, 2026) in October 2023, outlining 70 actions for national climate goals, including greater sectoral inclusivity like more women in engineering. In December 2023, the Action plan for green and digital jobs followed, boosting STEM enrolment via early technical exposure for the green/digital transitions, with a focus on girls.

(1) The [Youth Makerspace Larnaka](#) is a creative hub, designed for young people to explore technology, design, and innovation.

(2) The Be an Ally Foundation promotes equality, diversity, and inclusion through education and advocacy.

2.4. Embracing the digital inclusion

Digitalisation opened increased opportunities to make VET more accessible and inclusive, while also exposing inequalities in access to technology, connectivity and digital skills. The COVID-19 situation boosted the use of technology and diversified modes of learning while bringing to light serious disparities in access for disadvantaged learners. In response, countries have invested in digital infrastructure, expanded access to devices and connectivity, developed targeted support for vulnerable groups, and used digital tools to widen participation in learning.

Many countries have prioritised investment in digital infrastructure, devices and connectivity to ensure that all learners have the necessary devices to benefit from digitalisation and advanced technologies.

Belgium (the French Community) accelerated the provision of digital devices in 2020 by introducing a [1:1 model](#) (Cedefop & ReferNet, 2026), in which every upper secondary student was given their own device. In 2021, financial support and solidarity mechanisms have been offered to low-income families for device purchases. Similarly, in the Flemish Community (**Belgium**), the government in 2020 adopted the [Digital education action plan](#) (*Digisprong*) (Cedefop & ReferNet, 2026), aiming to provide every upper secondary student with their own device and to strengthen ICT infrastructure for all schools in compulsory education. In **Germany**, the [Digital pact for schools](#) programme (2019-2024), extended recently until 2030, funds the digital infrastructure of schools, and during the pandemic additional funding was allocated for the purchase of mobile devices for students who did not have them at home (Cedefop & ReferNet, 2026). **Spain** through its [#DigEdu](#) plan to reduce the digital divide among students procured more than 300 000 laptops and equipped over 240 000 classrooms with interactive digital systems (Cedefop & ReferNet, 2026). In **Italy**, as part of the [National strategy for competences/skills](#), schools have received funding to hire technical assistants to support distance learning, and vouchers for ultra-broadband connections have been offered to low-income students (Cedefop & ReferNet, 2026). **Iceland** has enhanced flexible VET delivery by expanding [digital infrastructure](#) (Cedefop & ReferNet, 2026).

Beyond infrastructure investments, several countries have introduced targeted measures to reduce digital exclusion among groups facing social, economic or geographical barriers.

In **Belgium** (the French Community), [Digital public spaces](#) (EPNs) were created. They are local facilities that provide all citizens with free or very low-cost access to computers, the internet, and digital culture, with support from a professional facilitator (Cedefop & ReferNet, 2026). The Belgian (the French

Community) [Plan Précarité](#) also includes computer loan services and support for managing devices for those affected by the digital divide. A new Digital Inclusion and Autonomy Advisor role has also been created to promote students' digital independence (Cedefop & ReferNet, 2026). In **Portugal**, the [Eu sou digital](#) programme promotes the inclusion of digitally excluded adults over the age of 45 years through a network of young volunteers and training centres (Cedefop & ReferNet, 2026) while the [Rampa digital](#) project supports the digital literacy of women and young people with disabilities in areas affected by geographic disparities (Cedefop & ReferNet, 2026). **Iceland** has established [new VET schools in remote areas](#), improving access for learners in rural regions (Cedefop & ReferNet, 2026).

Countries are using digital tools and flexible learning models to address individual learning needs and provide more accessible information and learning opportunities for people who face barriers to participation.

In **Germany**, the [Inclusion through digital media](#) initiative aims to facilitate the participation of people with disabilities in VET through digital tools (Cedefop & ReferNet, 2026). In **Spain**, an online training platform [Aulas mentor](#) is being expanded especially to small municipalities with fewer than a thousand inhabitants and to rural areas, so that adults have equal LLL opportunities through ICT-supported education (Cedefop & ReferNet, 2026). In **Norway**, the [Strategy for decentralised and flexible education](#) emphasises fully digital learning offer, enabling adults to study regardless of where they live or their life situation (Cedefop & ReferNet, 2026). In **Portugal**, the Digital Academy provides [personalised digital skill training](#) for all citizens, with a focus on disadvantaged groups such as low-skilled adults and migrants. Using self-assessment, learners receive system-generated individual training plans aligned with labour market needs. Through curated online resources learners then acquire basic digital competences at their own pace (Cedefop & ReferNet, 2026).

Digital platforms are also being used to provide learning resources, skills assessment and guidance, helping all learners navigate education and training opportunities more effectively.

In **Bulgaria**, the [Employment strategy 2021–2030](#) includes creating a unified digital platform for adult education, tailored to the needs of people with disabilities, the low-skilled, and those at risk of exclusion, such as Roma communities. The country is also establishing a network of digital clubs that provide mentoring (Cedefop & ReferNet, 2026). In **Germany**, the [INVITE innovation](#) programme is developing AI-based recommendation systems and personalised learning pathways to make it easier to find suitable continuing education (Cedefop & ReferNet, 2026). In **France**, the [PIX](#) platform is a free public service for assessing

and certifying digital skills. In addition, it is mandatory at the end of lower and upper secondary education (Cedefop & ReferNet, 2026).

The [Start digital project](#) in **Belgium** (the French Community) has strengthened local education and training partner institutions by creating a shared platform that pools their educational resources and by providing digital pedagogical mediators to all partner institutions. These initiatives facilitate the acquisition of basic digital skills among low-skilled jobseekers and young learners (Cedefop & ReferNet, 2026). In **Spain**, the [‘Digitalízate’ programme](#) offers employees and SMEs more than 1 550 free digital training resources in cooperation with major technology companies (Cedefop & ReferNet, 2026). In **Luxembourg**, the [Digital learning hub \(DLH\)](#) provides intensive training in coding and cybersecurity to anyone over 18 years regardless of prior educational background, with courses free of charge for the unemployed (Cedefop & ReferNet, 2026).

Digital platforms complement traditional education and training provision by extending access to learning resources, digital skills development and guidance services for diverse learner groups (see also Section 2.5).

2.5. Improving lifelong guidance and counselling

Lifelong guidance has become one of the most widely used instruments for promoting inclusion in VET and lifelong learning. Countries consider guidance as a transversal support mechanism that helps individuals learn about and access learning opportunities, manage educational and labour market transitions, and overcome barriers linked to disadvantage. Between 2020 and 2025, guidance systems expanded beyond conventional educational counselling towards more personalised, holistic and digitally supported services, often combined with mentoring, financial incentives, validation and employment measures.

Slovakia’s [Lifelong learning and counselling strategy 2021–2030](#) includes measures to harmonise and modernise the lifelong guidance system, developing professional counselling within employment services, and expand support for adult civic education. These efforts have led to the creation of regional lifelong guidance centres in eight self-governing regions (Cedefop & ReferNet, 2026). **Spain** has implemented an [integrated career guidance system](#) and created vocational guidance units aimed to improve access in local and rural areas (Cedefop & ReferNet, 2026). **Poland** in its [Strategy for persons with disabilities 2021–2030](#) aims to improve accessibility and educational conditions for learners with special needs (Cedefop & ReferNet, 2026). A dedicated measure also supports [SEN learners in their transition to the labour market](#) by preparing specialists, adapting

training learning options and strengthening cooperation with employers (Cedefop & ReferNet, 2026).

Guidance also plays a key role in supporting transitions from education to employment, particularly for learners who face additional barriers to labour market integration. In these initiatives, guidance is linked to mentoring, individual action plans and transition support, shaping a more personalised approach to employability.

In 2025, **Estonia** adopted a regulation requiring VET institutions to prepare and implement individual curricula and career plans to [support SEN learners](#), this is part of a holistic support strategy that includes guidance and counselling (Cedefop & ReferNet, 2026). In **France**, a [1 young, 1 mentor](#) scheme offers tailored counselling to disadvantaged youth, provides guidance and training in emerging sectors, and creates integration pathways for the long-term unemployed. The scheme aims to increase the number of young people who benefit from mentor support (a student, a practising or retired professional) during their education pathway, in their career choices, or in the professional integration phase (Cedefop & ReferNet, 2026).

The [2021-2027 Youth guarantee plus plan](#) in **Spain** emphasises the importance of personalised counselling and individual action plans as key points for achieving not only the stable integration of young people into the labour market, but also the development of permanent training incentives to consolidate satisfactory careers and professional projects. The plan pays special attention to young people with family responsibilities, particularly women, entrepreneurs, migrants, NEETs, the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and Intersex (LGBTI) community, and individuals with disabilities (Cedefop & ReferNet, 2026). In **Luxembourg**, [projects for effective guidance](#) focus on young people at risk in their transition from school to work; guidance helps these learners manage their educational and career pathways and avoid dropout (Cedefop & ReferNet, 2026).

In many countries, guidance has evolved into broader and more holistic support mechanisms that combine educational, psychosocial, social and mental support. These approaches recognise that educational disadvantage is often linked to social, economic and personal barriers, requiring coordinated and multi-professional support.

In **Denmark**, lifelong guidance is embedded within youth support policies, with municipalities required to guide all young people under 25 years until they enter education or employment. The measure targets young people who have not completed upper secondary education and those at risk of becoming NEET. This is implemented through the [Preparatory basic education](#) (FGU) framework, which offers an alternative route back into learning and tailored support for young people

facing education or social barriers (Cedefop & ReferNet, 2026). **Estonia** runs a [holistic support approach](#) that directly targets vulnerable learners, including SEN learners, migrants and NEETs and aims to reduce exclusion and improve access to VET (Cedefop & ReferNet, 2026). **Germany** offers preparatory entry options to VET and integrated services to [young people with a migrant background](#) (Cedefop & ReferNet, 2026).

Croatia's lifelong career guidance centres sign [cooperation agreements](#) with local partners to better reach disadvantaged and hard-to-access groups. Partners include Roma associations, social welfare and public health centres, youth organisations and volunteer centres, helping identify the specific needs of vulnerable learners. The agreements lead to tailored guidance services targeting those at risk of exclusion or poor labour market integration (Cedefop & ReferNet, 2026). **Slovenia's** [measure targets 15-26-year-old NEETs](#). Through the Project Learning for Young Adults (PUM-O), participants receive support to re-enter education, develop key competences and improve employability. Additional ESF-supported programmes provide non-formal and on-the-job training for low-skilled and unemployed young people. Coordination across public services ensures tailored support (Cedefop & ReferNet, 2026). **Romania** targets high-risk learners, including those from low-income, rural, Roma and marginalised communities, through [tailored prevention, intervention and compensation programmes](#). Measures include personalised school-level support plans, mentoring and remedial learning for pupils showing risk indicators. Specialised outreach services address learners facing multiple disadvantages, helping them remain in or return to education. The approach links schools, social services and community actors to ensure targeted support for those most vulnerable to early leaving (Cedefop & ReferNet, 2026).

Digital technologies are playing a role in making guidance services more accessible, extending personalised support to learners in rural areas, adults with limited mobility, migrants and other groups that may face difficulties accessing traditional services.

In **Austria**, [digital career guidance](#) services offer easy access to services regardless of time, location, or socioeconomic background, with particular attention to multilingual communication to reach parents and young people with migrant backgrounds (Cedefop & ReferNet, 2026). In **Germany**, a nationwide [Cliché-free initiative](#) supplies schools, parents, and companies with tools for cliché-free career guidance through a dedicated website (Cedefop & ReferNet, 2026) while an ESF+ programme, [My turn: women with migration experience are ready to get started](#), offers tailored counselling, motivation, and barrier-breaking support aiming to support women (Cedefop & ReferNet, 2026).

2.6. Empowering VET teachers and trainers

Across Europe, countries equip VET teachers, trainers and other education staff to create and work in inclusive VET environments; measures include professional development to support diverse groups of learners, intercultural awareness raising, personalise learning experiences, use digital tools to support inclusion. The use of learning outcomes in VET has been transformed from traditional, subject-centred pedagogies toward learner-centred models that prioritise individualised pathways, lifelong learning, and teacher/learner autonomy (Symeonidis et al., 2025).

Most initiatives focus on strengthening practitioners' competences to support diverse learners more effectively and create more inclusive learning environments.

In **Poland**, the [For life project](#) has prepared teachers and careers counsellors to support students, including those with disabilities (Cedefop & ReferNet, 2026) and the [Accessible school for all](#) project trains specialist teachers to support diverse learners more effectively, including learners from families displaced from Ukraine (ReferNet Poland & Cedefop, 2024). **Lithuania** has strengthened inclusive VET provision by establishing a national ESF-funded [CPD system for vocational teachers and adult educators](#), improving their pedagogical competences and capacity to support learners with special education needs through adapted teaching methods and materials (Cedefop & ReferNet, 2026). **Estonia** plans [teacher training measures with a focus on SEN students](#) and on supporting students' mental wellbeing. It has also introduced measures to develop the competences of VET teachers, trainers and school leaders, in [education sciences](#), including training in special pedagogy and support for multilingual and multicultural classrooms (Cedefop & ReferNet, 2026). These actions help staff work more effectively with SEN learners, migrant-background learners, and other vulnerable groups.

The [Intercultural competences for trainers](#) initiative in **Germany** helps trainers work effectively with refugees and newly arrived migrants in diverse environments and facilitates networking with other actors. The initiative also provides access to online platforms that offer nationwide information and networking tools for practitioners at the school-to-training transition (Cedefop & ReferNet, 2026).

CHAPTER 3.

Conclusions and policy pointers

3.1. What the evidence shows

Inclusion has become a common objective of VET policy across the EU, with countries integrating it within broader agendas of skill development and lifelong learning, labour market participation, digitalisation and social cohesion. According to the European Commission (2026) and Cedefop (Cedefop & ETF, 2026), inclusion in VET is one of the EU priority areas where significant progress has been made, though somewhat uneven across the countries, alongside with flexibility and learner-centeredness in VET.

The Herning Declaration (Danish Presidency of the Council of the European Union, 2025) and the European Commission's report on the implementation of the Council recommendation on VET (European Commission, 2026) and ongoing Cedefop's research on excellence and inclusion (Cedefop, 2025) re-affirm that inclusion is now understood more broadly than in the past. While support to vulnerable groups remains central, national policies are extending to ensure access and progression for all learners.

First, in 2020-2025, countries have been implementing measures beyond ensuring access to learning to vulnerable groups towards more systemic approaches. The examples demonstrate that flexible pathways, validation of prior learning, modularisation of programmes, targeted support and training programmes are common for VET policies aimed at inclusion. Inclusion policies also include efforts to address persistent gender imbalances in VET and improve the participation of women in STEM-related fields and occupations.

Second, preventing early leaving from education and training remains among the most developed interventions. Countries have strengthened learner and graduate tracking, early warning systems, and targeted outreach and support, which is in line with Cedefop's work on early leaving and learner retention (Cedefop, 2026a; 2026b).

Third, lifelong guidance has become a transversal tool for inclusion. Countries have used guidance in combination with mentoring and individualised support to ensure access and re-integration of learners from vulnerable backgrounds, and to ease their transition to employment.

Fourth, digital solutions are being used increasingly to widen access to guidance services, to information about learning opportunities and to education

and training itself. Countries have invested in digital infrastructure, devices and platforms to reach learners who face geographical, social or economic barriers. The evidence suggests that digitalisation can support inclusion but does not automatically generate it, as there are risks of digital exclusion.

Finally, supporting VET teachers and trainers to work with and create inclusive environments remains a transversal area where more effort is needed. This is also in line with Cedefop's work on teacher and trainer professional development and wellbeing, which points to the importance of empowering VET professionals (Cedefop, 2022) to support individualised learning and inclusion, among other growing demands and pressures.

To conclude, inclusion has been evolving as part of VET attractiveness, quality and excellence rather than as a standalone social policy objective.

3.2. Policy pointers

Drawing on the analysis in this Insight, five policy pointers stand out for VET:

- (a) **embed inclusion as a whole-system principle in VET** rather than a standalone objective and link it to other relevant policies and systems: Countries would benefit from integrating inclusion across all elements of governance and provision. Coordinated efforts that address multiple and mutually reinforcing barriers faced by diverse groups of vulnerable learners will make approaches more effective.
- (b) **expand learner-centeredness** to increase participation in VET and LLL: This can be achieved by further modularisation of VET programmes and by establishing and expanding flexible and personalised learning pathways. Learners with fewer opportunities who face obstacles in access to and progression in learning could better overcome these if they have more opportunities to follow learning at their own pace, to accumulate learning outcomes as modules or microcredentials and to have them validated and recognised. In addition to supporting learners, these approaches make it more attractive to employers to support the learning of their employees.
- (c) **better use of existing research and practical tools:** Cedefop offers concrete recommendations and a set of key intervention approaches covering areas such as tackling early leaving, supporting the reintegration of NEETs, strengthening inclusive pedagogies, and enhancing system-level coordination. Better awareness and use of these resources by Member States could support more effective implementation, scaling up of successful measures, and the development of more coherent and inclusive VET systems.

- (d) **improve monitoring across systems to inform early intervention mechanisms:** By linking data on education, employment, and social services, countries would be able to identify risks of early leaving or limited access to VET, and to provide timely and targeted interventions.
- (e) **balance inclusion with excellence and invest in creating enabling conditions:** One of the main concerns regarding inclusion is maintaining the quality of provision and learning outcomes while expanding access to VET programmes. Achieving both excellence and inclusion requires a balanced approach (Cedefop, 2025). Excellence and quality assurance should integrate inclusion, rather than treating it as an add-on. Lifelong guidance, digital infrastructure and access, teacher and trainer capacity to work with diverse learner groups are essential enablers to address inequalities and unlock talent.

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Annex

List of VET policies and initiatives per theme

[In order of appearance in the text].

Increasing access and participation in VET and LLL for vulnerable groups

- [Strategy for decentralised and flexible education at vocational schools, university colleges and universities: Norway.](#)
- [Qualifica programme: Portugal.](#)
- [Class-sharing pilot project: Portugal.](#)
- [Strategic boost to VET: Spain.](#)
- [Training programmes for Young people at risk of being early school leavers \(ESL\) or not in education and training \(NEETs\): Malta.](#)
- [Promoting VET's social agenda and quality development: Austria.](#)
- [Increasing attractiveness of apprenticeship training: Austria.](#)
- [Integration of the unemployed and inactive into employment: Cyprus.](#)
- [Adult education and training courses: Portugal.](#)
- [Support for SEN learners in transition to the labour market: Poland.](#)
- [New Prison Education Taskforce: Education, Training and Apprenticeship Opportunities to support Rehabilitation and Post-Release Access to Employment: Ireland.](#)
- [Training for inmates: Poland.](#)
- [Political agreement on better pathways to education and jobs \(2017\): Preparatory Basic Education \(FGU\): Denmark.](#)
- [Education lift: Denmark.](#)
- [Expanding financial support for CVET and advanced vocational qualifications: Germany.](#)
- [Financial incentives for learners and apprentices: Hungary.](#)
- [National basic skills improvement initiative: Slovakia.](#)
- [Promotional actions to support WBL: Spain.](#)
- [Training programmes under the Cyprus Recovery and resilience plan 2021-26 \(HRDA\): Cyprus.](#)
- [Training voucher: Portugal.](#)
- [Strategic framework and investment priorities for labour and employment up to 2027: Croatia.](#)
- [Measures to prevent early leaving from education and training: Romania.](#)
- [Strengthening the position of VET students: Netherlands.](#)
- [Integration of newly arrived immigrants in VET and labour market: Sweden.](#)
- [Integrating migrants and refugees in VET and work: Germany.](#)

- [Integration of immigrants in VET: Finland.](#)

Monitoring and preventing early leaving from education and training

- [Preventing and reducing early leaving from education and training: Slovakia.](#)
- [Lifelong learning and counselling strategy for 2021-30: Slovakia.](#)
- [Inclusive VET for the young at risk of early leaving: Latvia.](#)
- [FET graduate tracking and data collection: Ireland.](#)
- [Monitoring and preventing early school leaving: Slovenia.](#)
- [VET graduate tracking: Belgium \(Flemish Community\).](#)
- [Monitoring VET graduates: France.](#)
- [Malta College of Arts, Science and Technology \(MCAST\) internal quality review: Malta.](#)
- [Efficient guidance provision: Luxembourg.](#)
- [Training Obligation Act – training up to the age of 18: Austria.](#)

Removing gender imbalances in VET, including in STEM programmes

- [Women entrepreneurs go to school: Austria.](#)
- [Digital pioneers - voluntary digital year for women: Austria.](#)
- [Training programmes under the Cyprus Recovery and resilience plan 2021-26 \(HRDA\): Cyprus.](#)
- [Promoting equalities and inclusiveness: France.](#)
- [Promotional actions to support WBL: Spain.](#)
- [Raising employability for ICT and the digital economy: Spain.](#)
- [Green Skills: Netherlands.](#)
- [Providing gender cliché-free vocational guidance: Germany.](#)
- [Combating discrimination in the workplace: Netherlands.](#)
- [Action plan for more STEM experts: Austria.](#)
- [STEM Agenda 2030: Belgium \(Flemish Community\).](#)
- [Digital transformation strategy: Slovakia.](#)
- [Curricular changes to impede traditional gender patterns: Sweden.](#)
- [Youth makerspace Larnaca: Cyprus.](#)
- [Digital action plan \(ANDI\): Slovenia.](#)

Embracing the digital inclusion

- [Digital strategy for education in the French Community: Belgium.](#)
- [Digital education action plan: Belgium \(Flemish Community\).](#)
- [Digital education and upskilling of VET teachers: Germany.](#)
- [Raising employability for ICT and the digital economy: Spain.](#)
- [National strategy for competences/skills: Italy.](#)
- [Digital logbook for VET learners: Iceland.](#)
- [New times in VET: Iceland.](#)

- [Start Digital project: Belgium \(French Community\).](#)
- [Precariousness plan – incentives for vocational learners in Brussels: Belgium \(French Community\).](#)
- [Action plan for the digital transition: Portugal.](#)
- [National digital competences initiative \(Portugal INCoDe.2030\): Portugal.](#)
- [Digital media and innovative technology in VET: Germany.](#)
- [Strategic boost to VET: Spain.](#)
- [Strategy for decentralised and flexible education at vocational schools, university colleges and universities: Norway.](#)
- [Portugal digital academy: Portugal.](#)
- [Employment strategy of the Republic of Bulgaria 2021-30: Bulgaria.](#)
- [Developing digital CVET area - innovation programme INVITE: Germany.](#)
- [Free online public service \(PIX\) for developing, assessing and certifying digital competences: France.](#)
- [Start Digital project: Belgium \(French Community\).](#)
- [Luxembourg: Digital Learning Hub: Luxembourg.](#)

Improving lifelong guidance and counselling

- [Lifelong learning and counselling strategy for 2021-30: Slovakia.](#)
- [Integrated career guidance system: Spain.](#)
- [Strategies supporting pupils and students with disabilities: Poland.](#)
- [Support for SEN learners in transition to the labour market: Poland.](#)
- [Supporting vulnerable target groups: Estonia.](#)
- [1 young person, 1 solution – youth plan: France.](#)
- [Efficient guidance provision: Luxembourg.](#)
- [Political agreement on better pathways to education and jobs \(2017\): Preparatory Basic Education \(FGU\): Denmark.](#)
- [Expanding vocational guidance and support from school until completion of training: Germany.](#)
- [Lifelong career guidance centres: Croatia.](#)
- [Training for the young \(NEETs\): Slovenia.](#)
- [Measures to prevent early leaving from education and training: Romania.](#)
- [Digital career guidance offers: Austria.](#)
- [Providing gender cliché-free vocational guidance: Germany.](#)
- [Integrating migrants and refugees in VET and work: Germany.](#)

Empowering VET teachers and trainers

- [Support for SEN learners in transition to the labour market: Poland.](#)
- [CPD system for VET teachers: Lithuania.](#)
- [Developing competences of teachers, trainers and heads of schools: Estonia.](#)
- [Intercultural competences for trainers: Germany.](#)

Inclusion at the core of future-proof VET in Europe

Insights from national policy monitoring and analysis

Inclusion in vocational education and training (VET) is linked to VET attractiveness, quality and excellence, rather than a standalone social policy objective. This Cedefop Insight examines how EU Member States, Norway and Iceland have strengthened inclusion in VET through policies implemented between 2021 and 2025.

The policies discussed aim to widen access and participation, prevent early leaving from education and training, address gender imbalances, promote digital inclusion, strengthen lifelong guidance, and equip VET teachers and trainers to respond to diverse learner needs.

A whole-system approach to inclusion in VET would benefit from embedding it across governance and provision, expanding flexible learner-centred pathways, strengthening the use of practical tools, improving data-driven monitoring and early intervention, and investing in the enabling conditions needed to balance inclusion with excellence and quality outcomes.

**CEDEFOP**European Centre for the Development
of Vocational Training

Europe 123, Thessaloniki (Pylaia), GREECE
Postal: Cedefop service post, 570 01 Thermi, GREECE
Tel. +30 2310490111, Fax +30 2310490020
Email: info@cedefop.europa.eu

www.cedefop.europa.eu



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