

SPOTLIGHT ON JOBS AND SKILLS FRANCE

2026

Introduction

Drawing on its rich country-level skills intelligence, Cedefop develops its Spotlights on jobs and skills for EU-27 Member States, Iceland and Norway. The Spotlights provide insights into the current labour market landscape, future trends, and skills anticipation in each country. The analysis is based on Cedefop's skills intelligence online tool, its skills forecast, the European Skills Index (ESI), online job advertisements, sectoral and occupational skills intelligence, and country-specific skills anticipation reports.

Recent employment developments

France's unemployment rate has consistently stayed above the EU average in recent years. While it fell from 9% in 2020 (7% in the EU) to 7% in 2023, it remained higher than the 6% EU average. Unemployment among young people (aged 15-24) dropped from 21% in 2020 to 17% in 2023. Employment growth in France outpaced EU employment growth between 2020 and 2023 (2% per year compared with 1%). In 2023, employment was spread across a wide range of sectors (Figure 1). The health and social care⁽¹⁾ (14%), wholesale and retail trade (13%), and manufacturing (11%) sectors had the largest employment shares.

In 2023, professionals made up almost one quarter (24%) of employment, making this the largest occupational group in the country. Most professionals worked in non-marketed services (40%), business services (38%), and education (20%). Sectors with a high employment share of professionals included professional services (16%), health and social care (14%), and ICT services (11%).

France's working population is predominantly male (51%) and highly or medium-qualified. In 2023, almost half of all workers held high-level qualifications, 41% were medium-qualified and only 12% were low-qualified. A sizable majority of the workforce (58%) was aged 25-49. Workers aged 50-64 accounted for almost one third of the

workforce. Those aged 15-24 made up 10% of the workforce, while the share of workers aged 65+ remained low at 2%.

In 2023, the share of young people aged 15-24 not in employment, education or training (NEET) was 10%, slightly above the EU average of 9%. The NEET rate among young women (9%) was lower than for young men (11%). This contrasts with EU average patterns, which show similar NEET rates for both genders at around 9%.

Recent skills and learning developments

A sectoral analysis of [Cedefop's online job advertisements](#) (OJAs) shows that more than half are in business services (55% compared with the EU-27 average of 51%), followed, at a distance, by manufacturing (14% compared with 15% in the EU-27) and distribution and transport (12% compared with 14% in the EU-27). The most in-demand occupations on the online job ads market are associate professionals (22% compared with the EU-27 average of 19%), elementary workers (13% compared with 10% in the EU-27) and service and sales workers (11% compared with 12% in the EU-27).

According to [Cedefop's European Skills Index](#) (ESI), France ranked 23rd out of 31 countries in 2024, dropping one place from its 22nd place in 2017. At the ESI pillar level, France ranked 26th in skills development, 22nd in skills activation, and 24th in skills matching. Its highest-ranked indicators, compared with other countries, are the share of low-wage workers (ISCED 5-8) (ranked 12th) and the rate of qualification mismatch (ranked 12th). The lowest-ranked indicators are the share of underemployed part-time workers (ranked 27th) and the pre-primary pupil-to-teacher ratio (ranked 27th). From 2017 to 2024, the largest improvements were in the share of underemployed part-time workers (falling from 6% to 4%) and the long-term unemployment rate (falling from 3% to 2%). The drop in the reading, maths and science scores of those aged 15 (from 495.7 to 478.3) and the declining share of individuals in recent training

(1) To learn more about the classification of sectors, occupations, and qualification levels discussed in this report, see [Annex 2 of Cedefop Skills forecast methodological framework \(April 2023\)](#)

(from 19% to 13%) signal a need for further policy action (Figure 2).

In 2023 31% of the population in France had above-basic digital skills, slightly exceeding the EU average of 27%. Digital skills are higher than average among the employed population (36% compared with 33% in the EU) and for 25- to 34-year-olds (43% compared with 39% in the EU).

About 18% of the employed population participated in learning in 2023, well above the EU average of 14%. Participation was higher among women than men (20% compared to 16%). Among those aged 25-49, 20% took part in learning, while the rate for those aged 50-64 was 15%.

Future employment trends

Looking ahead, employment is set to grow by 5% by 2035, remaining slightly above the EU-27 employment growth rate of 3%.

Based on [Cedefop's Skills Forecast](#) projections, employment between 2022 and 2035 is expected to grow most strongly in information and communication (23%), real estate, professional, scientific and technical activities (18%), and arts, recreation and other service activities (10%). Notable employment growth is also projected in administrative and support service activities (8%) and human health and social work activities (5%). More moderate increases in employment are expected in construction (5%) and financial and insurance activities (3%). Reflecting economic developments resulting from the green transition, employment is projected to fall sharply in mining and quarrying (29%), and electricity, gas, steam and air conditioning supply (13%).

By 2035, professionals and technicians and associate professionals are expected to make up the largest employment shares, representing 26% and 19% of the workforce respectively.

Employment is projected to grow for professionals (+19%), skilled agricultural and fishery workers (+11%), technicians and associate professionals (+7%), and plant and machine operators and assemblers (+6%). Automation and digitalisation drive the decline in jobs for clerks (-19%) and reduce employment in elementary

occupations (-7%).

The Cedefop skills forecast suggest that by 2035, highly qualified positions will account for almost two thirds of all job openings, up from 46% in 2022. Meanwhile, the share of job openings targeting low-qualified workers is set to fall sharply from 11% to 3%. These trends highlight an ongoing transition in labour market demand towards higher-skilled employment, driven by structural changes in the economy.

The upgrading trend in labour demand is accompanied by shifts in the labour force, which is expected to become increasingly highly qualified. The highly qualified labour force is projected to grow by 3% annually, above the EU average of 2%, while medium-qualified workers are expected to grow modestly, in line with EU trends. In contrast, the number of low-qualified workers is projected to fall by 8% annually, more than double the EU average of 3%. Female labour market participation is expected to grow around 1% annually, slightly faster than male participation, and both are expected to surpass the EU averages. Ageing will significantly reshape the labour force, seemingly more strongly than in the EU on average. The share of workers over 65 is foreseen to increase by 9% per year, well above the EU average of 6%, and the share of those aged 60-64 by 4% (compared with 2% in the EU-27). Although more limited (around 1%), growth is also expected to be positive across most younger groups under 35, in line with EU-27 average trends.

Future skills and learning trends

Between 2022 and 2035, France's labour market is projected to continue shifting towards higher-skilled employment. By 2035, highly skilled non-manual occupations are expected to make up over half of total employment, increasing by 12%. Skilled non-manual occupations will represent 20%, though employment is projected to fall by 9% during the forecast period. Employment in skilled manual occupations is expected to grow by 5% and will make up 20% of the workforce. Employment in elementary occupations will fall by 7%, and these occupations will make up 8%

of employment in 2035. These trends point to France's sustained orientation toward highly skilled non-manual work, alongside a moderate expansion in manual occupations.

Employment in [high-tech occupations](#) is projected to grow by 16% between 2022 and 2035, slightly above the EU-27 average of 15%. This expansion is expected to be strongest in accommodation and food (+36%), arts and recreation and other services (+32%), and finance and insurance (+32%). In contrast, employment in high-tech roles is projected to drop in mining and quarrying (-21%), administrative services (-18%), and agriculture, forestry and fishing (-11%).

At the broader economic level, employment in the overall [high-tech economy](#) is projected to grow by 11% between 2022 and 2035, in line with the EU-27 average. Growth will be driven by knowledge-intensive services (+19% in France compared with +18% at EU level). The expected employment contraction in high-technology manufacturing (-6% compared with +5% growth at EU level), signals potential innovation losses for the high-tech sector.

Expected skill shortages

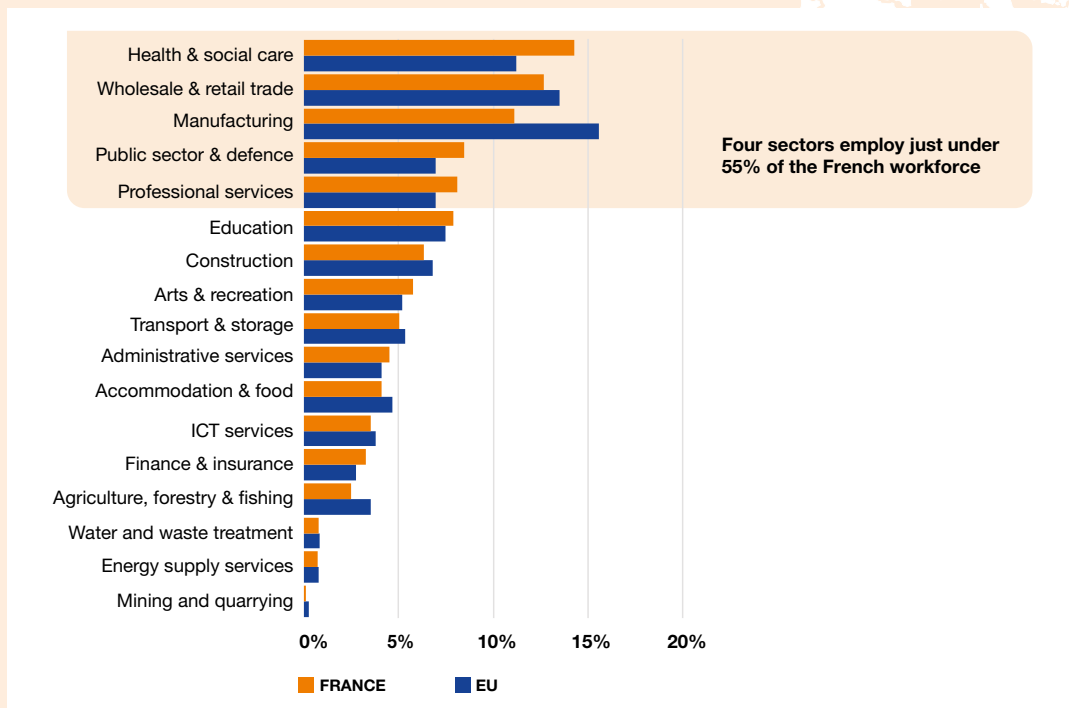
According to [Cedefop's Labour and Skills Shortage Index](#), the most acute shortages will be among skilled agricultural and fishery workers, elementary occupations, and plant and machine operators and assemblers (Figure 3). Employers will also experience substantial shortages for craft and related trades workers and professionals, indicating pressure in both low- and high-skilled labour market segments. In contrast, shortages will be relatively low for clerks, technicians and associate professionals, suggesting a relatively stable supply of people with such profiles.



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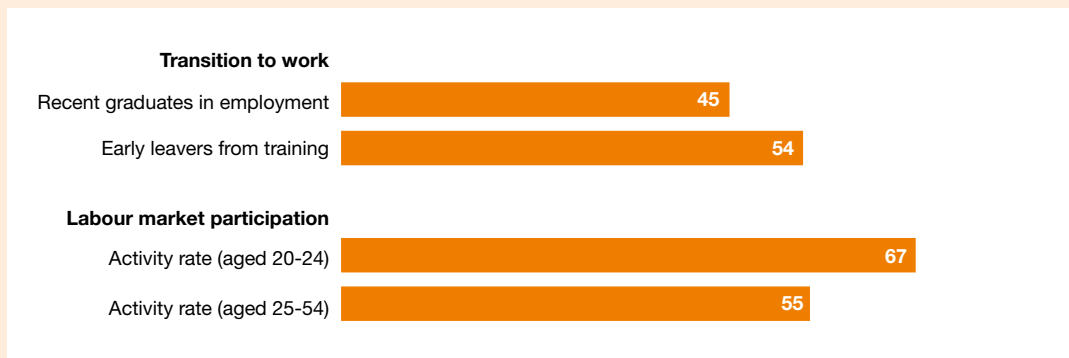
Jobs and skills in figures

Distribution of employment across sectors in France and the EU, 2023, (%)



Source: [Cedefop Skills Intelligence tool](#)

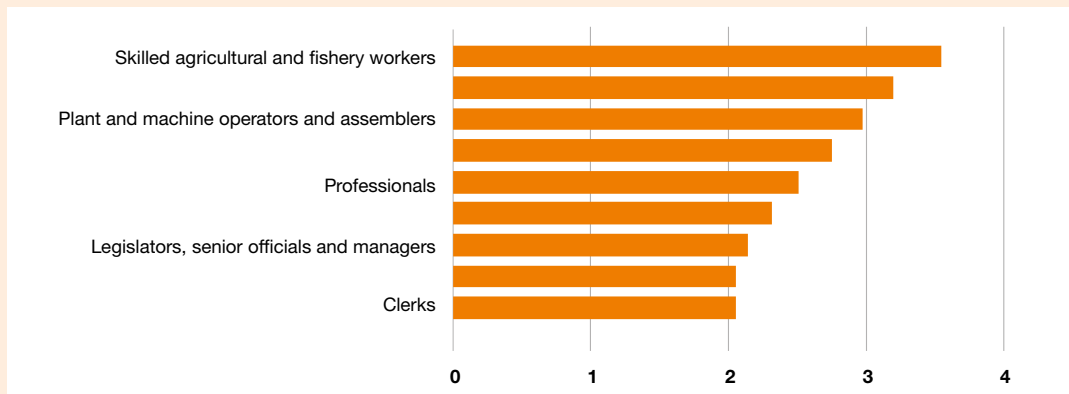
ESI skills matching pillar in France, 2024



NB: The ESI measures countries' 'distance to the ideal' performance, i.e. the highest achieved by any country over a period of seven years. The ideal performance is scaled to 100, with national scores computed and compared to that. Example: a score of 65 suggests that the country has reached 65% of the ideal performance, with 35% (100-65) room for improvement.

Source: [Cedefop ESI](#).

Cedefop Labour and Skills Shortage Index, 2022-35, France



NB: The Labour and Skills Shortage Index is the simple average of the quartiles in each of the three pillars: (1) employment growth; (2) replacement demand; (3) supply/demand imbalance (IFOD). A score of 4 indicates a higher level of shortage, and 1 no shortage. The outcome of the pillars is based on the relative evaluation in quartiles of the occupation (here for all EU-27).

Source: [Cedefop Labour and Skills Shortage Index](#).



Further information

- Cedefop. (2022). [Vocational education and training in France: short description](#). Publications Office of the European Union.
- Cedefop. (2023). [Skills anticipation in France](#). Data insights series.
- Cedefop. (2023). [Skills forecast methodological framework](#).
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- Cedefop. (2024). [Thematic country review on upskilling pathways for low-skilled adults in France: key findings of the second and third research phases and suggestions for future action](#). Cedefop research paper. Publications Office of the European Union.
- Cedefop. (2025). [Skills forecast report: France](#).

[Cedefop Skills intelligence tool](#)

[Cedefop Skills forecast](#)

[Cedefop Skills OVATE](#)

[Cedefop European Skills Index](#)

[Cedefop Labour and Skills Shortage Index](#)

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CEDEFOP

European Centre for the Development
of Vocational Training

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



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