

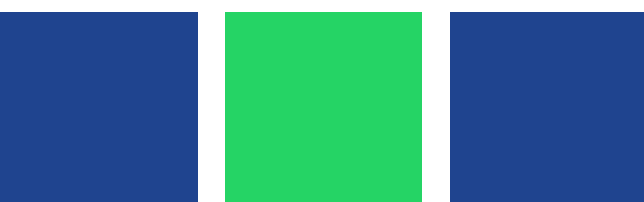
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# IMPLEMENTING EUROPEAN PRIORITIES IN VET

Making national VET agile,  
flexible, innovative, attractive,  
inclusive and quality assured

## AUSTRIA

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# **Implementing European priorities in VET**

Making national VET agile, flexible, innovative, attractive,  
inclusive and quality-assured:  
Austria

[Thematic perspectives](#) provide national overviews of specific themes in a common format and offer comparative dimension across the EU Member States, Iceland and Norway.

This thematic perspectives series complements the general information on vocational education and training (VET) policies and systems provided in [VET in Europe database](#) and the [Timeline of VET policies in Europe](#). The themes presented in the series feature high on the European agenda.

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## CHAPTER 1. Introduction

The National Implementation Plan (NIP) for Austria was developed from 2021 by the Federal Ministry of Education, Science and Research (BMBWF) and the Federal Ministry of Labour and Economy (BMAW) in close cooperation with the social partners and was published in 2022 with 30 measures (BMBWF & BMAW, 2022). In addition to other national and European basic documents, this development is based primarily on the Austrian Federal Government's Programme for the period 2020-24 as well as the Council Recommendation on vocational education and training (VET) and the Osnabrück Declaration on VET from 2020.

Based on these documents and the identification of key trends and challenges <sup>(1)</sup>, and after the consultation between the Directors General for Vocational Education and Training (DGVET) and the representatives of the Advisory Committee on Vocational Training (ACVT) in Austria, six thematic areas for structuring the NIP were set out (BMBWF & BMAW, 2022): Skills change, Green transition/sustainability, Digitalisation, Social dimension, Internationalisation, and Institutional change. In order to structure the NIP and make it transparent, each of the 30 NIP measures was – based on its main motive – assigned to one of these thematic areas and also to one of the three sub-segments of VET: dual VET, school-based VET and continuing vocational education and training (CVET). <sup>(2)</sup>

This thematic perspective summarises the key implementation steps of the NIP in 2023 and introduces the participating stakeholders. It also reflects on the implementation successes achieved so far, as well as the associated challenges, and provides a concluding outlook on the next steps.

It should be noted at the outset that a number of measures in the NIP have already been running for several years and, in terms of their implementation, it is essentially a matter of continuing and monitoring them. Since no new developments of any relevance can be reported for such measures, they are not looked at in detail here.

## CHAPTER 2. Main policy developments in 2023

This chapter presents the main developments in connection with the Austrian NIP in 2023. The measures are assigned to the six priorities of the Council Recommendations on VET. Due to the intended scope of this thematic perspective, this is only a brief overview of the respective implementation steps rather than a detailed description. It should also be noted that this report focuses on measures that are considered particularly relevant or at an advanced stage by the team of authors. This does not mean that implementation steps have not also been taken in numerous other measures contained in the NIP.

### 2.1 Agile and resilient VET, adaptive to labour market needs

In dual VET, the **training regulations are regularly updated** (i.e. existing apprenticeships are

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<sup>(1)</sup> The NIP report addresses the following six key challenges and megatrends: shortage of skilled workers; ensuring the attractiveness of VET; making non-formal qualifications visible; megatrends such as internationalisation, digitalisation and climate change; educational disadvantage, and validation of non-formally and informally acquired competences.

<sup>(2)</sup> For details on the Austrian VET system, please refer to Cedefop's VET in Europe database: <https://www.cedefop.europa.eu/en/tools/vet-in-europe/systems/austria-u3>.

adapted and new apprenticeships are created) to meet the requirements of the economy (Cedefop, & ReferNet, 2023f). The Ministry of Economy is responsible for these new regulations in co-operation with the social partners.

With the goal of achieving climate neutrality by 2040 and carrying out the required transformation of the economy, [green skills have become increasingly important when updating training regulations](#) (Cedefop, & ReferNet, 2023b) in recent years. The issue of sustainability and 'green skills' is therefore the focus of several NIP measures. In May 2023, the Ministry of Economy introduced new job profiles in wastewater, engineering and plastics technology, among others, as part of a reorganisation of apprenticeships. In a further reorganisation in September 2023, the existing apprenticeship in electrical engineering was comprehensively expanded to include green skills, including a separate training module in renewable energy and electromobility (BMAW, 2024). In addition, preparatory work on new apprenticeships that are relevant to the green transition was completed in 2023, with the introduction coming in 2024. These include apprenticeships in district heating technology and urban greening, with the aim of helping to combat urban overheating by greening buildings.

Beyond the individual vocational level, work was also begun during the observation period to systematically integrate the topic of [sustainability as an interdisciplinary competence in all newly regulated training regulations](#) (Cedefop, & ReferNet, 2023g). <sup>(3)</sup>

In 2023, the [Higher VET Act \(HBB-Gesetz, 2024\)](#) was finalised and submitted for review, following several years of development led by the Ministry of Economy with the involvement of numerous stakeholders (Ministry of Education, social partners, education providers). This law was enacted at the beginning of February 2024 and came into force on 1 May 2024 (Cedefop & ReferNet, 2023a). The aim of this law <sup>(4)</sup> is to introduce transparency in this previously non-transparent area of the VET system through a formally regulated segment of higher VET. Further, it aims to make the equivalence of academic higher education and non-academic higher education qualifications, which is laid down by the NQF, visible in practice (Cedefop & ReferNet, 2023a). Higher VET comprises qualifications at NQF levels 5 to 7, which are developed on the basis of initial VET primarily through practical work experience. Through the legally defined procedure for creating such qualifications, a standardised quality assurance regime and standardised qualification designations were introduced, which will lead to more 'coherence' and 'order' in higher VET. In future, people with initial training and/or professional experience who gain further and higher qualifications in their professional practice (possibly supplemented by non-formal courses and training programmes), should have the opportunity to have their knowledge, skills and competences certified – either in the form of validation or an examination.

## 2.2 Flexible VET, providing progression and lifelong learning opportunities

With [wîse up](#), the Austrian Economic Chambers have created a digital education and training

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<sup>(3)</sup> These developments refer to NIP measures 2 'Sustainability as a cross-sectional matter in all training regulations in the dual system' and 3 'New apprenticeships/new modules in the area of green skills/sustainability'.

<sup>(4)</sup> This development relates to NIP measure 27 'Establishing higher vocational education and training as a separate educational segment'.

platform that enables companies and their employees to learn digitally (Cedefop & ReferNet, 2023e). Wise up was launched in 2022 and is part of a comprehensive education offensive by the Austrian Economic Chambers and has been included in the NIP with the measure 'Creation of digital learning paths for apprentices'. While the wise up programme is generally aimed at various target groups of company employees, the NIP measure is aimed specifically at apprentices. Separate, comprehensive digital learning paths are being developed for them, which are pooled together in so-called professional channels. This digital content is intended to support dual VET both in the company and at vocational school. In 2023, wise up was connected to several large German-language learning platforms <sup>(5)</sup> to significantly expand the range of services available for apprentices. In total, ten professional channels with digital learning opportunities were published in 2023, for example for the apprenticeships in mechatronics, metal technology, electrical engineering, retail and office assistant, all of which are among the apprenticeships with the highest number of apprentices. Existing digital content such as animated videos, real image videos and web-based training courses was curated (i.e. assessed by experts for its suitability for dual VET) and pooled together into learning paths and published. In addition, content was produced for those 'blank areas' that could not yet be covered by the available digital offers and learning progress checks (e.g. quizzes) and reflection tasks were developed. <sup>(6)</sup>

The development of new curricula for VET schools and colleges, is another key measure outlined in the NIP which made significant progress in its implementation in 2023. In order to maintain the attractiveness of VET schools and colleges for students and to meet the skills requirements of the labour market, the teaching content has to be regularly adapted. In the development of the current generation of curricula, this includes in particular the integration of transversal skills as well as the topics of green skills, digitalisation, international skills and 21st century skills. With this in mind, the curricula, which provide a framework for teaching, are revised by curriculum committees. These committees are made up of experienced teachers and experts and are chaired by representatives of the Ministry of Education.

In 2023, the Ministry of Education regulated the first new curricula for VET schools and colleges, including the first technical subject areas (BMBWF, 2024). Another example is the commercial sector, where significant progress in the development of new curricula has been made. This area is a key focus of school-based VET and actors have moved particularly fast and have initiated a comprehensive reform process with significant involvement of stakeholders that serves as an example for other areas. A first draft for the revision of the curriculum of the college of business administration, a five-year VET college that leads to an upper secondary school-leaving certificate, was presented in 2023 and submitted for further discussion with stakeholders at the beginning of 2024. The aim is for the new curriculum to come into force in the 2026/27 academic year. <sup>(7)</sup>

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<sup>(5)</sup> Among others, [simple club](#) and [christiani](#), a specialist for technical teaching aids and training materials.

<sup>(6)</sup> The developments of NIP measure 6 'Creation of digital learning paths for apprentices' can also be assigned to VET Recommendation on Attractive VET, based on modern and digitalised provision.

<sup>(7)</sup> This development relates to NIP measure 13 'Curriculum reform at schools of intermediate vocational education and colleges of higher vocational education' and can also be assigned to several other VET Recommendations.

## 2.3 Innovative and excellent VET

As mentioned above, the topic of the green transition is the focus of several NIP measures. Three of these mainly concern VET schools and colleges and are also closely linked to the curriculum reform described above. <sup>(8)</sup>

For some years now, it has been an explicit goal of [education policy to integrate green skills](#) more in all types of VET schools and colleges as part of curriculum reforms (Cedefop, & ReferNet, 2023b). A study published in 2023 by Public Employment Service Austria (Ziegler, Eder & Wöhl, 2023), which examined the importance of green skills and qualifications for training at colleges of higher vocational education, universities and universities of applied sciences, provided important input for curriculum committees at colleges of higher vocational education. Due to their social significance, green skills are incorporated in curricula as transversal competences across all subject areas. In many subject areas, however, green skills are also essential specialist competences, which is why they should be incorporated quickly into the curriculum at the level of specific subjects. This is being implemented as part of the curriculum reforms described above under the direction of the Ministry of Education. The first implementation steps have been taken to identify existing and missing curriculum content. In addition to the Public Employment Service Austria study mentioned above, the Ministry of Education commissioned a study focusing on the connection between green skills and construction engineering and, based on the changes in the labour market, examining the implications for the curriculum content of technical schools. This study should be completed by mid-2024. <sup>(9)</sup>

As part of the Ministry of Education's competence centre initiative, schools that are particularly committed to green skills are given financial support and presented with awards (Cedefop & ReferNet, 2023b). Due to their curricular autonomy, schools have the opportunity to set certain content priorities and, in this way, to enhance the profile of the school. Those endeavouring to teach green skills beyond the curriculum standards can apply to become a competence centre in the first call for proposals in 2024. The award includes being granted the title of 'competence centre', which can also be mentioned in the school profile, as well as a financial donation for school investments in the area of green skills. The establishment of a regional skills ecosystem, i.e. the co-operation of schools with relevant institutions in the regional setting, is a particularly welcome development. In 2023, preparatory work was started for the first call for proposals in 2024. <sup>(10)</sup>

The GREENOVET project is another NIP measure, which aims to strengthen regional cooperation between educational establishments at secondary and tertiary level in the field of 'green skills'. At the heart of this measure is the Erasmus+ project GREENOVET, in which 30 partners (18 full members and 12 associated members) from four European countries (Austria,

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<sup>(8)</sup> Specifically, these are the NIP measures 14 'Green transition in VET schools and colleges', 15 'Establishment of Austrian competence centres for the promotion of green skills in VET schools and colleges' and 16 'Strengthening regional cooperation in the area of green skills at secondary and tertiary educational establishments – GREENOVET project'.

<sup>(9)</sup> This development relates to NIP measure 14 'Green transition in VET schools and colleges', which can also be assigned to VET Recommendations Agile and resilient VET, on Flexible VET and on Attractive VET.

<sup>(10)</sup> This development relates to NIP measure 15 'Establishment of Austrian competence centres for the promotion of green skills in VET schools and colleges', which can also be assigned to VET Recommendations on Agile and resilient VET and on Attractive VET.



Finland, Portugal and North Macedonia) are involved. The first GREENOVET competition, which lasted 1 week, took place in April 2023, with five participating international teams competing to develop a solution for an environmental task. The Ministry of Education is supporting the project because the results should help to achieve the defined objective, as highlighted in the NIP, to [strengthen regional cooperation in the field of green skills](#) (Cedefop, & ReferNet, 2023b).

## **2.4 Attractive VET, based on modern and digitalised provision**

In a globalised society and economy, international skills and therefore the [international orientation of VET](#) are essential (Cedefop & ReferNet, 2023d). Teachers must also have the relevant skills and attitudes to teach them at school. A measure was therefore included in the NIP to promote the establishment and further development of a structure for the increased internationalisation of VET schools and colleges. <sup>(11)</sup> Transnational cooperation and the mobility of learners and teachers should become an integral part of schools of intermediate vocational education and colleges of higher vocational education. For this reason, interviews were conducted with practitioners from schools and directorates of education on behalf of the Ministry of Education and the Agency for Education and Internationalisation (OeAD) in the first half of 2023. The aim was to collect feedback on positive aspects and on challenges related to the existing structures of Erasmus+ mobilities. Towards the end of 2023, the results of the interviews were discussed with teachers, headteachers and directorates of education. The results and the recommendations derived from them were summarised in a report (Luomi-Messerer, & Tritscher-Archan, 2023) and, subsequently, should help to make the necessary structural adjustments. Recommendations include integrating mobility tasks into teachers' regular working hours, more proactive information for specific target groups and setting up central service centres in education directorates.

## **2.5 Inclusive VET promoting equal opportunities**

No relevant developments can currently be reported for the NIP measures that contribute to the achievement of this VET recommendation. The measures planned in this area are only just beginning to be implemented.

## **2.6 VET underpinned by quality assurance**

No relevant developments can be reported for the NIP measures that contribute to the achievement of this VET recommendation. Essentially, existing measures from previous years are being continued here or measures such as the curriculum reforms or the modernisation of training regulations for apprenticeships have already been reported on above.

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<sup>(11)</sup> NIP measure 20 'Establishment and further development of a structure for the increased internationalisation of VET schools and colleges'.

## CHAPTER 3. Involvement of VET stakeholders in the implementation of policy developments related to NIP

The Austrian VET system is characterised by a complex distribution of competences among various actors and therefore by the necessary cooperation between different stakeholders. In addition to several responsible ministries <sup>(12)</sup>, the federal provinces and also the social partners play an important role in the development, implementation and administration of various parts of the VET system. This is also reflected in the NIP measures and developments described above. The responsibility for implementing the measures lies with those organisations that are responsible for the respective sub-segment of VET and is therefore often spread across several stakeholders.

Overall responsibility for dual VET and therefore for the NIP measures in this sub-segment lies with the Ministry of Economy. It regulates the company-based part of apprenticeships, while the Ministry of Education is responsible for the school-based part. The apprenticeship offices of the Austrian Economic Chambers are responsible for central organisational and administrative tasks, such as handling the apprenticeship-leave examinations and subsidies for training companies. Together with the Chamber of Labour, they also check whether companies meet the requirements to be allowed to train apprentices. When developing and revising training regulations for apprenticeships, the Ministry of Economy, the Ministry of Education, the Austrian Federal Economic Chamber and the Chamber of Labour work together within the framework of the Federal Advisory Board on Apprenticeship (BBAB). On the other hand, the administration of vocational schools, including the curricula, is the responsibility of the federal provinces.

School-based VET and the associated NIP measures are (predominantly) the responsibility of the Ministry of Education. Implementation is partly carried out by the directorate of education of the respective federal state. The social partners promote cooperation between VET schools and colleges and the business community and comment on draft school laws, etc. Curricula are revised by curriculum committees, which are made up of teachers and experts from companies, social partners, civil society and other ministries and are headed by the Ministry of Education. The Ministry of Education's initiative to create competence centres (green skills) was developed with the support of the Ministry of Economy, the Austrian Federal Economic Chamber, the Chamber of Labour and Public Employment Service Austria. In addition to the Ministry of Education, several regional school and tertiary educational establishments, research institutes and the Styrian Economic Chamber are involved in the associated GREENOVET project.

The Ministry of Education and the Agency for Education and Internationalisation (OeAD) are driving forward efforts to establish mobility as a fixed component at VET schools and colleges.

CVET is supported by various institutions, such as the Ministry of Economy, the Ministry

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<sup>(12)</sup> These are primarily the Ministry of Education for school-based VET and the Ministry of Economy for dual training, but also, for example, the Ministry of Health for training in the care sector and the Ministry of Agriculture for colleges of higher vocational education for agriculture and forestry.

of Education, adult education organisations associated with the social partners, and companies. This means ultimate responsibility for the relevant NIP measures lies with various institutions. The Ministry of Economy, for example, is responsible for the law on higher VET. However, stakeholders from the secondary and tertiary education sector, CET institutions and representatives of the federal provinces, social partners and voluntary interest groups were also involved in the development process.

Individual measures such as the creation of digital learning paths for apprentices (via the learning platform *wise up*) are implemented and financed under the sole responsibility of the Austrian Economic Chambers in this case. However, close cooperation with company experts is, in turn, required here to assess the learning content and to compile the content in a meaningful way so that it can be utilised in the best possible way in everyday company training.

## CHAPTER 4. Achievements of implementation

Since the publication of the NIP in 2022, numerous implementation steps have been taken in Austria and the first milestones have been achieved. However, since there has been no national monitoring of the implementation of the NIP to date, nothing can be said about the general progress made in achieving the EU priorities. This section therefore outlines the progress made in 2023 and its contribution to each priority of the VET Recommendation.

Regularly updating VET programmes, whether by adapting existing curricula and training regulations for apprenticeships or developing new apprenticeships and school-based programmes, based on research and discourse with stakeholders, helps ensure progress with most of the EU priorities, especially adaptation to changes in the labour market (VET Recommendation on agile and resilient VET, adaptive to labour market needs). The increasing inclusion of digital, transversal and green skills in initial VET programmes also prepares students for the digital and green transformation (VET Recommendation on innovative and excellent VET).

With its wide range of digital learning content, the education and training platform *wise up* helps to expand VET and make it more flexible, especially for apprentices and companies, and, in this way, supports the development of opportunities for lifelong learning (VET Recommendation on flexible VET, providing progression and lifelong learning opportunities).

The report on the status quo and recommendations for action in the area of Erasmus+ mobilities at schools of intermediate vocational education and colleges of higher vocational education has meant an important step towards ensuring internationalisation in VET. The promotion of transnational co-operation and mobility of learners and teachers will make a significant contribution to ensuring the attractiveness of VET (VET Recommendation on attractive VET, based on modern and digitalised provision).

The adoption of the law on higher VET could potentially have the greatest impact. The required knowledge and skills are acquired in professional practice, i.e. through practical work and experience-based learning (VET Recommendation on agile and resilient VET, adaptive to labour market needs). The creation of a defined procedure for qualification development, a standardised quality assurance regime (VET Recommendation on VET underpinned by quality assurance) and standardised qualification designations should lead to greater clarity and therefore understanding and appreciation. It also promotes the development of CVET

programmes (at NQF levels 5 to 7) and the expansion of continuous education pathways (VET Recommendation on attractive VET, based on modern and digitalised provision). Higher VET is intended to certify (recognise) knowledge, skills and competences already acquired in practice (VET Recommendation on flexible VET, providing progression and lifelong learning opportunities), which in turn can promote inclusion and equal opportunities (VET Recommendation on inclusive VET promoting equal opportunities).

## CHAPTER 5. Challenges of implementation

A key challenge when implementing measures to achieve the EU priorities is the complex distribution of competences and responsibilities described above. This makes it a challenge not only to assume or assign specific responsibility for implementation, but also to monitor progress. The high amount of effort required to exchange information and ensure coordination between the numerous stakeholders involved sometimes slows down the implementation processes and there is a certain risk of implementation steps being delayed if responsibilities are not fully transparent.

This also includes national monitoring of the implementation of the NIP measures, which has been lacking to date. While the ministries and social partners involved plan, implement and (partially) document the respective implementation steps that affect them in the relevant institutions and committees, so far there has not been a national overview of all developments. This means, for instance, that there is a lack of overview of the general progress made in achieving individual EU priorities. Furthermore, there is a lack of coordination regarding further steps and the prospects for implementing the measures and activities that have not yet been implemented, or these are not sufficiently transparent.

## CHAPTER 6. Conclusions

In summary, it can be said that significant progress was made in a number of NIP measures in 2023, while others are still at the beginning of implementation or have not been started. For some NIP measures, it is also the case that they continue developments that, in some cases, were started long before the NIP was established and therefore represent a continuous continuation of existing measures without any significant new emphasis.

Numerous NIP measures where relevant progress was made in 2023 focus on the topic of the green transition/sustainability. For example, green skills have been added to several school curricula and training regulations for apprenticeships and new 'green' apprenticeships have been created or prepared for introduction in 2024. In addition, VET schools and colleges that are particularly committed in this field will be given awards and financially supported in the future.

Another significant development was the adoption of the law on higher vocational education and training. It has the potential to foster greater understanding and appreciation of higher VET qualifications, the development of CVET programmes and the expansion of continuous education pathways. The coming years will show how training providers utilise this opportunity and whether workers and companies take advantage of it.

As mentioned above, a key challenge lies in the lack of national monitoring. However, this is already being planned and is due to be realised at the end of 2024/beginning of 2025.

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