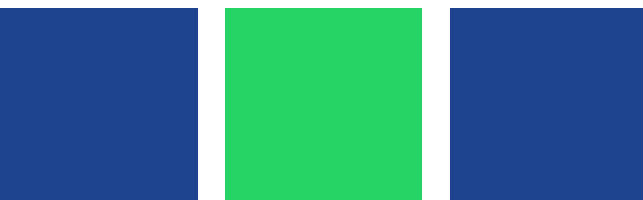
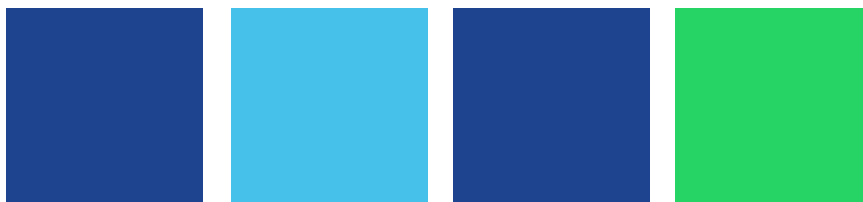

IMPLEMENTING EUROPEAN PRIORITIES IN VET

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

CYPRUS



Implementing European priorities in VET

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

Cyprus

[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.

This thematic perspective was prepared based on data/information from 2023.

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[ReferNet](#) is a network of institutions across Europe representing the 27 Member States, plus Iceland and Norway. The network provides Cedefop with information and analysis on national vocational education and training (VET). ReferNet also disseminates information on European VET and Cedefop's work to stakeholders in the EU Member States, Iceland and Norway.

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CHAPTER 1. Introduction

One of the key initiatives of the Ministry of Education, Sport and Youth (MESY), which holds overall responsibility for the development, implementation, and monitoring of educational policy regarding Vocational Education and Training (VET), is the annual action plan for 2023-24. The plan focuses, amongst others, on enhancing and upgrading VET by aligning VET programmes with the labour market (Ministry of Education, Sport and Youth, 2023a). The overarching goal for VET in 2023 is outlined in the Cyprus implementation Plan (NIP) (2023), which is aligned with the MESY strategy for 2023-25 (2022). The strategy aims to further improve and develop VET in Cyprus by establishing a Technical and Vocational Education and Training System that will be attractive, innovative, inclusive, flexible, and will equip both young learners and adults with the essential skills and knowledge required to successfully enter the labour market and enhance the overall quality of life in the country. The Cyprus NIP fully embraces the strong EU framework policy that supports these goals, through the Council Recommendation on VET of 2020 and the Osnabrück Declaration. Against this policy backdrop, distinct strategic objectives have been set within the NIP, responding to challenges identified in the context of Cyprus:

- (a) create and develop quality, inclusive and flexible VET and transform VET into an attractive educational/professional option;
- (b) establish a lifelong learning culture by providing adults with upskilling and/or reskilling opportunities that would allow them to either improve their skillset or acquire new skills that are relevant and in demand in the labour market;
- (c) create opportunities for exposure to work-based learning and mobility;
- (d) assess the demand for VET graduates in the Cypriot labour market and develop a plan to address shortages;
- (e) build and support partnerships between VET providers and industry associations and/or employers at the national level, and partnerships between MESY and international VET providers.

CHAPTER 2. Main policy developments in 2023

2.1 Agile and resilient VET, adaptive to labour market

The primary focus of the Cyprus NIP is to be aligned with the EU overarching priority to ensure that VET is flexible, resilient, and responsive to the ever-evolving demands of the labour market. Throughout 2023, a series of initiatives were undertaken to achieve this objective.

A bold endeavour directly aligned with this priority is the implementation of a MESY project titled 'Development of Technical and Vocational Education and Training'. The project has been implemented by the Department of Secondary Technical and Vocational Education and Training (STVET) since 2014 (under the programming period 2014-20) and [continues under the current programming period \(2021-27\)](#) with a budget of EUR 38 million, receiving 60% co-financing from European Social Fund+ (ESF+). The primary aim of the project is to advance and refine VET by equipping learners with the essential knowledge, skills, and competences demanded by the labour market. Specific actions include updating curricula, equipping

schools with essential resources, and keeping educators abreast of recent technological advancements.

Some of the most characteristic actions taken within the scope of the project in 2023 are the following:

- (a) purchase of and access to appropriate modern technical equipment, training materials and infrastructure through training in industries that have relevant equipment. The equipment with which the educational process was enriched in 2023 aimed at introducing and fully integrating digital technology, smart devices, smart automation and robotics;
- (b) systematic training of VET instructors on technological developments and new industrial methods and procedures, with the aim of improving the quality of teaching and their educational abilities.

In addition to the above, just before the end of 2023, the Department of STVET started implementing the process of upgrading its infrastructure and using digitalised services to improve communication between VET graduates through an online community platform. By the end of 2023, 70% of the contract's content had been fulfilled (Treasury – Public Procurement Directorate, 2021): Project delivery – Installation – Staff training. With the objective of bringing former students together, in order to maintain links with their school and fellow graduates, the online alumni community platform allows VET graduates to stay engaged with the Department of STVET. Through networking and professional development opportunities, graduates can participate in and benefit from career insights and advice from other alumni and career professionals. Alumni can also benefit from continuing education opportunities, career support and building stronger social networks. The Department of STVET can benefit from increased alumni connection to their programmes of study and more networking opportunities. The platform gives the opportunity to graduates to exchange messages, upload career and professional development opportunities, participate in teams and discuss topics of interest. The administrator can inform users about VET events, create polls, and other relevant actions.

Regarding Higher VET, after consultation with the stakeholders participating in the Council of the Public School of Higher VET (hereinafter – MIEEK) and taking into account the needs of the labour market, the new programme 'Foreman for Building and Technical Works' has been developed and accredited by the Cyprus Agency of Quality Assurance and Accreditation in Higher Education (CYQAA) during 2023. Also in 2023, the study programme 'Industrial and Home Automation' was upgraded and renamed to 'Electrical Installations and Automation Systems' by the CYQAA. Moreover, the study programmes 'Pastry – Bakery', 'Refrigeration and Air Conditioning Installations' and 'Computer and Communication Networks' have undergone successful re-evaluation. In 2023, applications for the institutional re-evaluation of four branches of the School were submitted to the CYQAA.

On 27 March 2023, the [Absolute Institute of Technical Education](#) (AITE) started operations, becoming the fifth branch of the Public School of Higher VET. The new School's building stands out, with its unique and pioneering architectural design, modern infrastructure, latest technology equipment and beautiful surroundings. The building was designed to provide functional space, suitably equipped workshops to meet the needs of multiple study programmes, host events, but also create a pleasant environment. AITE has the capacity to

offer educational and training programmes, with morning as well as afternoon classes. These include but are not limited to pastry – bakery, culinary arts, catering services, electrical installations and automation systems, refrigeration and air conditioning installations, automotive technician, computer and communication networks, organic horticultural crops, industrial technician, dairy technology – cheese making, design and CNC technology - woodworking industry, supply chain management and maritime studies (Ministry of Education Sport and Youth, 2023b).

Additionally, the study '[Forecasts of labour demand and supply in the Cyprus economy 2022-32](#)' was completed by the Human Resource Development Authority of Cyprus (HRDA) in December 2022, providing forecasts of both labour demand and supply in the Cyprus economy covering the period 2022-32. Labour demand forecasts were provided in economic sectors (3 broad sectors, 21 main sectors and 52 sectors) and in 309 occupations (173 high level occupations, 130 middle level occupations and 6 low level occupations), whereas the labour supply forecasts were provided for the total workforce, by gender and by education level. It was the first time that the HRDA provided forecasts for the labour supply. An online tool was developed, in 2023, for the visualisation of the results of this study. A special event was organised in March 2023, to present and further disseminate the study results. Also, during 2023, there were 16 presentations of the main findings of the study to various stakeholders, such as employment and guidance counsellors, schools and universities. In May 2023, the annual [study on the identification of employment and training needs for 2023](#) was completed, which complements and enhances the abovementioned periodic provision of employment forecasts for the economy of Cyprus for a ten-year period. The findings of these studies are utilised by policymakers for the development of strategies and policies in education, training, and lifelong learning.

2.2 Flexible VET, providing progression and lifelong learning opportunities

Upgrading the country's human resources through the continuous lifelong learning of the employed, the unemployed and the inactive, with emphasis on young, older and low-skilled persons and the long-term unemployed, is one of the HRDA's strategic objectives. In line with the VET Recommendation and its strategic objectives, the following policy developments concerning the HRDA have taken place.

In 2023, there were 2 470 participations in the HRDA's schemes targeted towards the integration of the unemployed and inactive persons into employment. Total expenditure was EUR 8 062 122. The scheme with the highest participation was the 'Scheme for the employment and training of tertiary education graduates' (1 134 participations with EUR 6 912 647 total expenditure).

Concerning [lifelong learning for the employed](#), in 2023, there were 53 984 participations in HRDA's related schemes, focused on upgrading and enriching their knowledge and skills. Total expenditure was EUR 14 804 255. The scheme with the highest participation was the 'Single-company training programmes in Cyprus' (32 987 participations with EUR 5 171 447 total expenditure).

The [training programmes under the Cyprus Recovery and Resilience Plan \(RRP\) 2021-](#)

[26 \(HRDA\)](#) implemented in 2023 saw 547 participations in the scheme ‘Training programmes for the acquisition of digital skills’ with a total expenditure of EUR 37 223. For the schemes ‘Training programmes for the acquisition of knowledge and skills related to the green economy’, ‘Training programmes for the acquisition of knowledge and skills related to the blue economy’ and ‘Training programmes for the acquisition of entrepreneurial knowledge and skills’, agreements were signed with various certified vocational training centres (VTCs) for the implementation of training programmes, starting in 2024.

Finally, in 2023, preliminary actions were taken as regards the two HRDA schemes included in the [Cyprus operational programme ‘THALIA 2021-27’](#). These schemes concern ‘Individual learning accounts (ILAs)’ and ‘Training programmes for young people aged 15-29 not in education, employment, or training (NEETs) to acquire basic knowledge and skills’.

2.3 Innovative and excellent VET

The HRDA launched a digital portal ([Hermes](#)) where all entities that collaborate with the HRDA (persons, legal entities, consortiums, government bodies) must register. In 2023, 49 084 persons and 4 666 legal entities registered successfully to the portal.

2.4 Attractive VET, based on modern and digitalised provision

Given that VET in Cyprus is becoming an increasingly attractive educational option, it has become necessary to improve the capacity of VET schools, in terms of both buildings and specialisations offered. The problem of young people being discouraged from attending a VET school due to long distance from their place of residence or due to overcrowding in existing VET schools is addressed through the construction of two new, modern, and larger VET schools in two different cities (in replacement of older buildings with less capacity). The two current schools, that will be replaced, can no longer serve their educational purposes and they offer minimum flexibility in designing and offering new programmes of study. The two new upgraded schools will provide VET with the means and capacity for improvement and evolution. It is expected that they will serve many enrolled students and other professionals or adults. The schools will feature teaching rooms, labs, multipurpose halls, sports facilities, staff and management rooms.

The construction of the new VET school in Limassol, which is included in the Cyprus RRP, began on 1 March 2023, and an amount of EUR 4 million has already been spent. Regarding the second new VET school in Larnaca, it is noted that the project has been included in the Cohesion Policy Programme ‘THALIA 2021-2027’. The deadline for tender submissions was on 27 October 2023, and the bid expiration date is on 26 April 2024.

Furthermore, several actions and activities have been undertaken by the Cyprus Pedagogical Institute (CPI) to strengthen VET teachers’ digital skills: specialised seminars, executive training sessions, conferences and optional seminars. A total of 118 teachers from 14 VET schools participated in these activities.

Moreover, through the System of Vocational Qualifications ([SVQ](#)) operated by the HRDA, 618 persons were successfully assessed and received the appropriate qualification during 2023. Out of these, 559 persons obtained the ‘vocational trainer - level 5’ qualification (level 5

of the Cyprus qualifications framework and the EQF) and 59 persons obtained a qualification concerning the construction industry.

2.5 Inclusive VET promoting equal opportunities

In 2023, Cyprus proceeded to develop a new integrated student evaluation system (ISES), (Regulations of 2023 for the operation of public secondary schools (Amendment No. 2, 2023) which attempts to emphasise the benefits of employing multiple forms of assessment (concurrent assessment) and continuous feedback for teaching and learning. The aim is to address the weaknesses of the educational system in a holistic manner and based on pedagogical criteria. The ISES emphasises formative assessment, differentiating teaching based on the individual needs of each student, and early diagnosis of educational needs.

2.6 VET underpinned by quality assurance

A new external evaluation of the Public School of Higher VET – MIEEK was conducted in 2023, in order to determine the quality of the structures and programmes of study offered since its accreditation in 2017. In December 2023, the Contractor, in the context of the implementation of the contract, delivered the final report on the results of the aforementioned evaluation. This primary data research attempts to assess whether the goal of establishing and operating MIEEK, which addresses the gap identified in the transition of citizens from secondary education to the labour market, is being achieved (Ministry of Education, Sport and Youth, 2023c).

In more detail, during 2023, the assessment/evaluation report produced by the contractor focused on the following:

- (a) quality and adequacy of the facilities/infrastructure of the MIEEK branches;
- (b) satisfaction rates of students from a given academic period, examining the degree of satisfaction on matters such as the curriculum, teaching process, fees charged, and school infrastructure (laboratories, equipment, etc.);
- (c) adequacy of the teaching staff: this was determined with the distribution and completion of a questionnaire by learners, as well as the participation of MIEEK graduates, of the last five years, in a group interview.

The results of the final report were presented publicly, and actions have already been planned for their further utilisation.

Moreover, through the HRDA's system for the assessment and accreditation of training providers, 39 new VTCs and 106 new vocational training facilities were accredited, contributing thus to the improvement of the quality and effectiveness of the training services provided. Also, 559 persons were successfully evaluated, obtaining the certificate for a vocational trainer.

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

In order for the implementation of the NIP to be successful, the broad and active involvement of public and private entities that are directly or horizontally connected to VET is required. It should be noted that due to the centralised nature of the education system in Cyprus, specific stakeholders are more actively involved in the NIP's implementation. More specifically, the most active stakeholders are the Department of STVET (MESY) and the HRDA.

An additional reason for the more active involvement of the two aforementioned stakeholders is the fact that to a very large extent, the NIP relies largely on co-financing actions from the European Union (RRP and ESF+) and from national sources, in projects mainly related to skills mismatch with the labour market. As far as VET is concerned, the funds are mainly managed by the Department of STVET (MESY) and the HRDA.

CHAPTER 4. Achievements of implementation

Undoubtedly, Cyprus has made progress in terms of VET, based on the EU priorities, particularly in the area of attractiveness and increasing participation in VET programmes. It is worth noting that, during the school year 2020-21, the number of students in morning secondary VET amounted to 4 860 (22% of the total upper secondary student population) (Ministry of Education, Sport and Youth, 2021) while during the school year 2021-22 the number increased to 5 216 (23% of the total upper secondary student population) (Ministry of Education, Sport and Youth, 2022). Despite the positive steps, much still needs to be done, since Cyprus, compared to the participation of students in VET in the EU (average of 52.1% in 2021), still remains at low rates (Education and Training Monitor, 2023).

However, the greatest progress has been made in the employment prospects of recent VET graduates, reaching 74.6% in 2021, which is close to the EU average of 76.4% (Education and Training Monitor, 2022). The continuous upward trend of VET in Cyprus in terms of increasing its attractiveness is largely due to the country's ability to absorb European funding and utilise it for this purpose.

CHAPTER 5. Challenges of implementation

The challenges that Cyprus still faces in VET are linked to the upgrading and continuous renewal of skills (upskilling and reskilling). At the same time, there is a rapid increase in developments in the field of digital technology, automation/robotics, various professional certifications and standards, and emerging artificial intelligence, which must be considered.

VET in Cyprus has yet to address limited exposure to workplace learning, which was 38% in 2021, compared to 60.7% in the EU (Education and Training Monitor, 2022). Additionally, a better understanding of the performance of VET graduates in the labour market is required, as it is important for assessing and improving the quality and labour market relevance of VET. Consequently, the development of a national VET graduate tracking system is essential, to provide this information to stakeholders. At the same time, VET participation in Cyprus

remains relatively low among upper secondary education students, compared to the EU average of 52.1% (Education and Training Monitor, 2023).

CHAPTER 6. Conclusions

The area in which Cyprus has made progress in recent years is the upgrading of the VET infrastructure and equipment. At the same time, VET in Cyprus has taken significant steps forward in terms of its pedagogical improvement, both in updating curricula and in continuous professional development. Additionally, forecasting demand and labour market trends in the Cypriot economy until 2032 is deemed highly significant. Simultaneously, intensifying efforts to integrate unemployed and underemployed individuals into the workforce holds equal importance.

In conclusion, the areas where Cyprus has advanced in implementing its NIP in 2023 are as follows:

- (a) enhancement of teaching environments and laboratories in VET institutions;
- (b) ensuring that educators and students are equipped with the most up-to-date technology and tools pertinent to their fields of study;
- (c) introduction of new VET programmes and fields of study;
- (d) provision of training initiatives aimed at enhancing the digital competences of both employed and unemployed individuals;
- (e) entrepreneurship training schemes tailored for the unemployed;
- (f) activities related to evaluation, assessment, and accreditation;
- (g) identification of labour market and training requirements.

In addition, according to the progress made in the NIP thus far, Cyprus has, for the first time, conducted long-term labour market forecasts based on research data, along with the digitalisation of the respective research findings. Simultaneously, based on the NIP, large-scale projects with significant budgets are being implemented for the first time, focusing on the green and digital transition within VET.

Cyprus remains focused on further enhancing VET, therefore in 2024-25 it will attempt to accomplish this by fulfilling all country's contractual obligations both towards the RRP and the 'THALIA 2021-2027' EU Programme.

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