



Vocational education and training

Policy briefs 2023

DENMARK



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1. Introduction

This VET policy brief produced by Cedefop presents a snapshot of vocational education and training policy developments in Denmark between 2020 and the beginning of 2023. It presents the context and the challenges the country faces, a selection of the latest VET-related statistics, as well as the national priorities until 2030 identified in the [Danish national implementation plan](#). This VET policy brief provides information from Cedefop monitoring and analysis on the implementation of the [Council Recommendation on VET](#) and [Osnabrück Declaration](#). It offers stakeholders a regular source of information on VET policy developments that could be used for future policy making.

2. National VET context and challenges

2.1 National VET context

Danish VET is based on a tripartite governance system between the State, employers and employees. The Ministry of Education and Children manages the system. It is responsible for the implementation of the relevant legal framework, approves and accredits the VET providers and is responsible for administering VET funding. Social partners have a leading role in:

- a) curriculum development;
- b) the dual organisation of VET;
- c) monitoring the quality of VET provision.

Their leading role in the governing boards of VET providers ensures the labour market relevance of VET. The social partners also play a crucial role in funding the system through the Employers' reimbursement fund (AUB). AUB coordinates funding for both apprenticeships (IVET) and continuing training for employees.

VET in Denmark has a twofold purpose: it promotes lifelong learning and meets labour market demands. Specifically, it consists of a formal/typical VET 'component' and a parallel adult education and continuing vocational training (CVET) component. The two systems offer equivalent qualifications at various levels, enabling horizontal permeability.

VET is regulated via tripartite and other political agreements with a time span of 3-5 years. These instruments have shaped the current VET landscape and will continue to do so in the future. The tripartite/political agreements that have shaped the VET landscape before 2020 are the following.

The [2014 tripartite agreement on better and more attractive vocational education](#) was the major VET reforming instrument. This key reform, also known as the 2015 reform, which continues, has set many of the current VET priorities and consequent quantitative targets. It paved the way for the agreement on strengthened practical skills in primary school and the agreement from primary school to skilled worker, producing vocational education and training for the future. These actions took place in 2018 and contributed to the development

of practical skills in primary, secondary and upper secondary VET school programmes such as the [adult VET \(EUV\) programmes](#) for people over the age of 25 and the [combined vocational and general upper secondary education \(EUX\) programmes](#). It was also the main driver for [Knowledge centres for VET](#). Nine of these centres materialised in 2017, supporting innovation and excellence and effective labour market VET relevance.

The continuing VET landscape was formed by the 2018 [Tripartite agreement on better and more flexible continuing vocational education](#) and the Act on Active Employment Initiatives (LAB). This agreement can be regarded as the cornerstone for the upskilling and reskilling activities of the Danish population. Among its provisions were the creation of a funding pool for improving the quality of the vocational training ([AMU programmes](#)) for adults with at least 2 years work experience, and the development of higher CVET by expanding recognition for prior learning arrangements.

2.2 Challenges

The main challenges that Denmark has faced between 2020 and early 2023 include labour market shortages, especially in the healthcare sector, education attainment of those under the age of 25, and adapting VET for the green and digital transitions.

The fact that few young Danes select VET, especially IVET, contributes to persisting labour market shortages. These shortages reached peaks in 2022 and are prominent in the healthcare sector. One aspect that illustrates the problem is that, although different governments continued to focus on increasing participation in VET programmes, enrolments in IVET remain low. This is the case compared both to the national targets for IVET enrolments directly after completion of primary education, set for 2025 and 2030, and also compared to the EU average.

Another challenge for Denmark is the low completion rate of IVET students compared to the national target of 67%. The NEET rate of the age group 18-24 is another area of concern for the Danish economy and labour market. These factors combined cause concerns to the Danish companies, especially SMEs, who need qualified personnel.

Denmark has invested a lot in green innovation and in this respect is one of Europe's leaders as the [European innovation scoreboard](#) demonstrates. This 'leadership', combined with the ambitious targets set by the Danish Climate Act of 2020, present a challenge for Denmark. Denmark needs to fill demanding job positions with sufficient, qualified personnel. In this regard, skills anticipation, upskilling and reskilling the Danish population with the necessary competences for the twin – and especially for the green – transition are necessary for the country to maintain its leading role and achieve its ambitious green and climate targets.

3. National VET policy priorities

Most Danish VET priorities were already set with the 2014 agreement on Better and more attractive vocational education. The Danish national implementation plan includes priorities

for challenges, identified as early as 2014, and priorities exacerbated by the twin transition and the targets set by the Danish Climate Act of 2020.

In this context the priorities in the Danish NIP are the following.

- a) Increase participation in VET. More precisely, the number of primary education graduates selecting IVET programmes should be increased by 2025. Another goal is to increase apprenticeship contracts before the end of the first part of apprenticeship training. This is applicable for learners before the beginning of learning at the workplace. Focus is on increasing apprenticeships in the healthcare sector.
- b) Increase education attainment of young Danes. Denmark's overall priority is to increase education attainment, especially for those under the age of 25. More specifically it aims to increase the completion rate of IVET students by 2025, reduce by half the number of NEETs by 2030, and get the majority of young Danes that have no qualification other than primary education to obtain an upper secondary VET or general qualification by 2030.
- c) Make VET fit for the green and digital transitions. This focuses on providing opportunities to upskill and reskill its population so that they acquire the necessary skillset for the twin transition. Emphasis is placed on the development of the necessary skillset of the teaching staff and of IVET and CVET students.

4. Main policy developments and progress 2020-23

4.1 Increase participation in VET

The first national priority is to increase participation in VET and apprenticeship contracts, with particular focus on apprenticeships in the healthcare sector. The following developments took place between 2020 and 2023.

To increase the number of apprenticeship contracts the [Tripartite agreement to ensure more apprenticeships in Danish VET](#) was signed between the government and the social partners in 2020. In 2021 the parties involved negotiated on operational details; in 2022 substantial funding was secured for the implementation of the agreement and this was formally enacted with specific commitments and financial incentives for VET providers. The commitment is a quantitative target: 80% of learners should have an apprenticeship contract before the end of their basic course, the 'school-based' part before the workplace training begins. To achieve this, VET providers hired and trained personnel to act as mediators between students and companies, in 2022. The result was a rise in the number of contracts from 44% in 2020 to 65% in 2022.

The [Tripartite agreement for increasing apprentices in the health sector](#) was approved in 2020, between the government, Local Government Denmark (KL), the national association of municipalities, the national association of the Danish Regions and the largest trade union confederation in Denmark (FH). In 2021, apprentices over the age of 25 enrolled in [EUUV programmes](#) started being recruited by municipalities. Although it was initially planned to 'end' the agreement by the end of 2022, it remained operational. This

extension was deemed necessary as this project is considered a complex one, both in terms of planning and implementation specificities but also because of the high expectations related to it.

The initiative [Role models in youth guidance](#), which proved effective in motivating primary education learners to enrol into VET programmes, was renewed in 2021. The initiative's full title is *The road to vocational education and training*. VET learners act as counsellors in primary schools and promote VET attractiveness. According to data, presented in 2022, 10 000 pupils met a role model since the beginning of the implementation of this measure. The initiative received positive evaluation from teachers, parents and pupils. Instead of ending it – as originally planned in 2021 – it was agreed to improve and renew the initiative; the government has allocated nearly EUR 3.2 (DKK 21 million) for its continuation until 2027.

4.2 Increase education attainment of young Danes

This priority has three components: increasing completion rates for IVET students, reducing NEETs, and ensuring that young Danes under the age of 25 complete either VET or general upper secondary education.

In 2021, the first cohort of students graduated from Basic VET (FGU) institutions. These institutions were established specifically for keeping low-skilled, unemployed young Danes under the age of 25, in education. Municipalities play a crucial role, as they are obliged by the legal framework to cater for this age group by providing guidance and counselling. Initially, they assess whether young people belong to the target group for FGU; a training plan is also provided for the young people wishing to join FGU institutions. Municipalities cover the largest share of operational costs (65%) and are responsible for collecting and keeping data related to enrolments, drop-outs and graduations. In 2022, substantial funding was reserved for FGU institutions, up to 2023.

4.3 Make VET fit for the green and digital transitions

Adapting VET to the competence requirements arising from the EU and Danish planning in relation to the twin, specifically the green, transition, is a priority for the country. Providing up- and reskilling opportunities for acquiring relevant competences is a component of this overarching goal.

The Danish government launched the [Education efforts for green transition](#) initiative in 2021. This is a government grant of EUR 27 million (DKK 200 million), reserved to support various activities. These activities range from creating training courses and educational material covering the whole IVET and CVET spectrum, to the establishment of five committees mandated to anticipate competences needed for the green transition and sustainability. In 2022, the government focused on providing funding for teacher competence development on agriculture and food technology, construction and transport sectors and on funding VET providers to develop courses on climate adaptation and green transition for the period 2022-25.

The [Green entrepreneurial funding pool for youth education, 2021-23](#) was approved for the development of knowledge on green entrepreneurship for teachers, trainers and secondary VET students in 2021. Funding for this initiative stands at EUR 1.33 million (DKK 10 million) annually for the period 2021-23. Eligible to receive funding are those providers who intend to develop courses and learning activities that promote the knowledge of teachers and trainers on green entrepreneurship and sustainability. In 2022, 15 projects were activated using the pool for the development of training courses at universities in cooperation with green entrepreneurs.

In 2022, an emergency law extended the [Tripartite agreement on better and more flexible continuing vocational education](#) for 1 year, up to 2023. This extension meant that the stability of the [Basic vocational adult education programmes \(EUV\)](#) for Danes over the age of 25 was maintained and that individual upskilling and reskilling was secured. In 2022, activities that were included in the agreement but were not completed by the planned date, continued. These activities included training for the acquisition of digital and English language training. Additional funding was set aside for 2023.

Upskilling and reskilling provisions for the unemployed were expanded via legal interventions concerning the [Regional education fund](#) in 2021. The fund ensures that career and lifelong guidance, as well as upskilling opportunities, are offered to the unemployed by their local job centre. Upskilling is offered in the form of short vocationally oriented courses within the AMU system and in cooperation with regional authorities. The 2021 update expanded the eligibility of the scheme to more target groups. These included the unemployed on benefits, young people under the age of 19 and over the age of 30 without a VET qualification, NEETs, older workers and employed people at risk of unemployment.

The evaluation of the [JOB-VEU model](#) showcased the positive results in upskilling the employed and unemployed, such as adult learners, minorities and low-skilled people, in 2021. The JOB-VEU model is a cooperative model where private companies, sectoral organisations, social partners and municipal job centres, coordinate short training courses following a four-stage procedure. The evaluation showed that 395 projects had been realised by 2021; 14 086 individuals had participated in just one of these projects, and the parties involved expressed their satisfaction, pointing out that this cooperation mode offers a great degree of training flexibility.

5. Statistical information in relation to EU targets

The prospects for IVET graduates are very promising for Denmark. The employment rate of recent IVET graduates (20 to 34-years-old) was 87.3% in 2022, 7.6 percentage points above the EU27 average and 5.3 percentage points above the target set by the Council Recommendation on VET.

Similarly, Denmark is doing well in providing work-based learning experiences to its recent IVET graduates, scoring 5.2 percentage points above the EU-27 average and above the EU27 target set in the Council Recommendation on VET.

Denmark is slowly but steadily reducing the number of early school leavers; at 10% this is one percentage point away from meeting the target set by the Council Recommendation in VET.

Denmark can be optimistic about reaching its national NEET target of 5% by 2030. 2022 data demonstrate that Denmark managed to reduce its NEET rate to 7.9%, 2.3 percentage points down on 2020. It has already met the 2030 target of less than 9% set by the European Pillar of Social Rights Action Plan and 2.8 percentage points away from its national target for 2030.

Regarding lifelong learning, in 2022, Denmark was 7.6 percentage points above the EU27 average on the indicator of adults (25-64 years old) with a learning experience in the last 12 months. With 47.1% the country is 0.1 percentage point above the target of 47% set in the Council Resolution on EEA for the Adults (25-64 year-olds) with a learning experience in the last 12 months (%).

Table 1. **European vocational education and training policy dashboard: Denmark**

| Type of indicator ⁽¹⁾ | Indicator | Last available year | DK | EU-27 | Policy Document | EU target (year) |
|---|---|---------------------|-------------------|----------------------|--|---|
| VET for developing a lifelong learning culture | | | | | | |
| Progress | Adults (25 to 64 year-olds) with a learning experience in the last 12 months (%)* | 2022 | 47.1 ^u | 39.5 | Skills Agenda Council Resolution on EEA ESPR Action Plan | 50%(2025) 47%(2025) 60% (2030) |
| Progress | Low-qualified adults with a learning experience in the last 12 months (%) | 2022 | 25.3 ^u | 18.4 | Skills Agenda | 30% (2025) |
| Progress | Unemployed adults with a learning experience in the last 4 weeks (%) | 2022 | 32.6 | 13.2 | Skills Agenda | 20% (2025) |
| Context | Employment rate for 20 to 64 year-olds (%) | 2022 | 80.1 | 74.6 | ESPR Action Plan | 78% (2030) |
| Context | Early leavers from education and training (%) | 2022 | 10 | 9.6 | Council Resolution on EEA | <9% (2030) |
| Context | NEET rate for 15 to 29 year-olds (%) | 2022 | 7.9 | 11.7 | ESPR Action Plan | 9% (2030) |
| VET for Resilience, transitions, sustainability and excellence | | | | | | |
| Progress | Adults (16 to 74 year-olds) with at least basic digital skills (%) | 2021 | 68.7 | 53.9 | Skills Agenda ESPR Action Plan | 70%(2025) 80% (2030) |
| Progress | Employment rate for recent IVET graduates (20 to 34 year-olds) (%) | 2022 | 87.3 | 79.7 | Council Rec on VET | 82% (2025) |
| Progress | Recent IVET graduates (20 to 34 year-olds) with a work-based learning experience as part of their vocational education and training (%) | 2022 | 65.3 | 60.1 | Council Rec on VET Council Resolution on EEA | 60% (2025) |
| Context | 25 to 34 year-olds with tertiary attainment (%) | 2022 | 49 | 42 | Council Resolution on EEA | 45% (2025) |
| Context | Gender employment gap (%) | 2022 | 5.4 | 10.7 | ESPR Action Plan | To be halved (2030) |
| Context | People at risk of poverty or social exclusion (1000s) | 2022 | 997 | 95 284 | ESPR Action Plan | 15 million decrease (2030) |
| Context | Employed ICT specialists (1000s) | 2022 | 170.9 | 9 370.2 ^e | 2030 Digital Compass | 20 million, with convergence between men and women (2030) |
| VET for the European Education Area | | | | | | |
| Progress | Learners in IVET who benefitted from a learning mobility abroad (%) ** | 2021 | 3.6 | 2.1 ^{dV} | Council Rec on VET Skills Agenda | 8% (2025) |
| Context | Average number of foreign languages learned in IVET | 2021 | 0.1 | 1.2 | | |

Available flags: b -break in time series, d - definition differs, e - estimated, u-low reliability, V - Cedefop estimate. Special value: - not available

* Eurostat data (Adult Education Survey, special calculation excluding guided on-the-job training)

** Provisional estimates affected by the Covid19 pandemic

Source: Cedefop. [European VET policy dashboard](#)

(1) [Definitions](#) on the type of indicators are available.

6. Conclusion

Denmark has made progress in its VET priorities of increasing participation in VET, increasing the education attainment of young Danes under the age of 25 and adapting VET for the green and digital transition.

Progress has been made in increasing participation in VET, as the number of apprenticeship contracts has increased from 44% in 2020 to 65% in 2022. This can be considered the result of the [Tripartite agreement to ensure more apprenticeships in Danish VET](#). The enrolment rate of applications to VET directly after completion of primary education has also increased, slowly but steadily, to 20% in 2022 from 18.5% in 2017. The [Tripartite agreement for increasing apprentices in the health sector](#) was extended in 2022. The country estimates that apprenticeships in the healthcare sector will rise by 2026 (Denmark, 2022), so taking further steps to address the persistent labour market shortages in the healthcare sector would allow Denmark to be able to deal with the future demand for staff in this area.

Progress has also been made in increasing education attainment, as the completion rates of IVET students has continued to increase. FGU institutions have kept young Danes under 25 years old in education and training and produced the first graduates at the end of 2021. The country has involved local authorities and has secured funding for the continuation of the FGU institutions. Further efforts to ensure students complete their education and training would allow Denmark to address the need for qualified personnel in companies, particularly in SMEs, in the future. Denmark is also making progress with its national NEET target. In 2022, the country had already reached a rate that was below the EU average and the EU target set for 2030.

Progress has been made in adapting VET for the green and digital transition. Steps have been taken to support teachers and trainers in acquiring the necessary skillset to deal with the green transition. The [Education efforts for the green transition](#) initiative and the [Green entrepreneurial funding pool for youth education, 2021-23](#), have been set up. The extension in 2022 of the [Tripartite agreement on better and more flexible continuing vocational education](#) was approved. This has legally secured the CVET system to safeguard measures to upskill and reskill the Danish population. New tripartite negotiations will follow in 2023. Active labour market policy funding and initiatives such as the [Regional education fund](#) and the [JOB-VEU model](#) were updated and – in the case of the latter – positively evaluated in 2021. Ensuring these measures remain relevant to labour market needs in the future would enable Denmark to respond to upskilling and reskilling demands.

Acronyms

| | |
|------|--|
| FGU | forberedende grunduddannelse [preparatory basic education and training] |
| NEET | Not in Employment, Education or Training |

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