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Policy briefs 2023

LATVIA



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1. Introduction

This VET policy brief produced by Cedefop presents a snapshot of vocational education and training policy developments in Latvia 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 Latvia's 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

Initial VET (IVET) is centralised and highly regulated by the State. There are currently 54 VET schools. Most are founded and run by the State; around half are technical schools (*tehnikums*), receiving substantial resources for investment in infrastructure and equipment, with the support of EU funds. Other VET school types are a vocational secondary school, an arts education competence centre, a vocational further education centre and a college. While programmes of vocational schools usually focus on one sector (e.g. metal, sales), the technical school offer is broader and, according to law, also provides adult education and methodological support to other VET providers. Technical schools may also offer EQF level 5 programmes, which are not available in vocational schools.

The Ministry of Education and Science is the main body responsible for the VET legal framework, governance, funding and curricula. Social dialogue and strategic cooperation are arranged through the National Tripartite Sub-Council for Cooperation in VET and Employment (PINTSA). Fourteen sector expert councils ensure that VET provision is in line with labour market needs; they participate in developing sector qualification frameworks, occupational standards, qualifications requirements, VET curricula and quality assessment procedures. VET school governing bodies (conventions) contribute to the school strategic development and cooperation with the labour market (Cedefop; Ministry of Education and Science, 2022).

VET in Latvia is nationally referred to as 'vocational education'. It is offered at secondary (lower and upper) and tertiary (professional higher) education levels. Post-secondary level does not exist. Most learners study at upper secondary level. Initial VET (IVET) includes practical training (50% to 65% of curricula) at schools and enterprises, and vocational and general subjects. Most programmes allow transition to the next education level after completion.

Formal continuing VET (CVET) programmes enable adults with education/work experience to obtain a State-recognised professional qualification at EQF levels 2-4.

Programmes are usually between 480 and 1 200 hours (2 184 hours in arts) depending on the field of study. Shorter professional development education programmes do not lead to a qualification but provide the opportunity to improve professional competences (upskill). Craftsmanship (not part of apprenticeships) exists on a small scale, separate from the rest of the education system.

2.2 Challenges

The main challenges that VET in Latvia is facing include the need to modernise its content and provision, attract competent teachers and trainers, promote stakeholder collaboration, and improve the monitoring of VET quality.

VET programmes in the country do not always promptly accommodate the changing labour market and adult education needs, according to the National education strategy 2021-27 ([Izglītības attīstības pamatnostādnes 2021.-2027. gadam: Nākotnes prasmes nākotnes sabiedrībai](#)). The strategy has identified the need for more science, technology, engineering, maths (STEM) and digital skills. It also calls for more career guidance and transformation of education institutions, including VET, into the organisations that offer adult learning. Despite recent improvements, assuring the quality of VET in Latvia still lacks a systemic approach. Various education quality monitoring data are available. However, they are poorly interconnected and do not form a unified system for regular, objective, methodologically based and transparent evaluation of VET performance at provider, municipal, regional and national levels. The available data on employability of VET graduates and long-term learner performance are incomplete (Latvia, 2022; Latvia: Cabinet of Ministers, 2021).

The attractiveness and prestige of the teaching profession is low in Latvia. While VET teachers are generally committed professionals, they are often [overloaded](#) and underpaid. The statutory salary of new teachers in Latvia was below EUR 10 000 per year in 2020/21 (European Commission; EACEA; Eurydice, 2022). Most are over age 50. According to the [OECD Teaching and learning international survey](#), 2018, 38% of Latvian teachers reported that they would like to leave teaching within the next 5 years (OECD average 25%). This has negative consequences for learner performance (Latvia, 2022).

While there are well-established collaboration mechanisms among VET stakeholders, including a tripartite council (PINTSA) at national level, expert councils for all economic sectors, and VET provider conventions with representatives from public authorities, local businesses and associations, there are few targeted activities currently supporting employers in promoting relevant skill development in VET and in-company training. VET providers do not cooperate sufficiently with adult education and research institutions, and innovative enterprises to develop themselves as centres of excellence. Despite impressive IVET learner mobility abroad (11.2% in 2021, provisional estimate, see Table 1 in Section 5), international cooperation has room for development (Latvia, 2022).

3. National VET policy priorities

The Latvian [national implementation plan](#) prepared in response to the [2020 Council Recommendation on VET](#) and the [Osnabrück declaration](#) sets a number of priorities until 2027 that can be grouped as below.

- (a) Further developing modern and high-quality VET. This includes high-quality, flexible and labour market-tailored IVET and CVET programmes based on modules and learning outcomes. The priority also refers to exploring VET learner performance and graduate tracking data, and introducing more flexibility to CVET for adult learning.
- (b) Equipping VET with highly qualified, competent and excellence-oriented teachers and trainers. This priority refers to creating conditions for sufficient supply and retention of competent and excellence-oriented teachers, trainers and school management. It also promotes inclusive VET through equipping teachers with competences needed to support learners at risk.
- (c) Improving relevance through VET stakeholder cooperation. This includes supporting employers, so they stimulate the relevant skills development in VET and offer quality work-based learning. The priority also refers to international cooperation and developing partnerships between VET providers, research institutions, adult education providers and businesses. The collaboration also aims at strengthening the role of VET providers as centres of excellence and innovation.

These priorities are aligned with the [national education strategy 2021-27](#) (follow-up to the 2014-20 strategy) steering the developments in education and training, including VET. The strategy is implemented through 2-year action plans. In addition to the above priorities, it includes a horizontal priority addressing promotion of green skills and digitalisation throughout VET.

4. Main policy developments and progress 2020-23

4.1 Further developing modern and high-quality VET

Latvia has been putting in place measures to offer modern and high-quality VET through modernising its content and provision.

In 2022, the [VET law](#) was amended. VET institution types have been redefined. Now, every VET provider is either a technical school (*tehnikums*), an arts education competence centre, a vocational secondary school, a vocational further education centre or a college (see Section 2.1). VET providers now also need to [define clearly their specialisation](#), specifically the leading qualification area. The amendments have also abolished the [professional competence centre status \(PIKC\)](#) for VET providers. The former competence centre status was granted to high-performing large VET providers over the past decade. To acquire this status, providers also had to offer additional services, such as validation of non-formal learning, and serve as methodological leaders in their specialisation.

In 2022, the Ministry of Education and Science endorsed the investment and development strategies for 2021-27 for all State VET providers. The strategies include [medium-term development measures for every VET provider](#). They have been shaped in consultation with the sector expert councils and local municipalities and aligned with the sector and regional development plans.

The 2022 VET law amendments further emphasised the [implementation of modules](#) in VET. Modularisation of VET programmes [started in 2017](#). They were introduced in the [VET law](#) and gradually in the [VET standard](#). By 2020, VET providers offered learners 269 modular programmes in 79 qualifications.

In 2023, the [regulation on VET and professional qualification documents](#) updated the types of certificate issued by VET. Before this change, VET programme graduates received one document – either a certificate or a diploma – depending on the level of the programme. Now, they can also receive a professional qualification certificate. Module certificates and certificates proving completion of a part of a VET programme for non-graduates have also become available. Module certificates acknowledge learner professional competences that are important in the labour market and in further studies. Since September 2023, professional qualification certificates have become available in digital format. Gradual transition to all-digital VET diplomas/certificates is also under way (ReferNet Latvia; Cedefop, 2023).

In 2022, the ESF project *The effective management of vocational education institutions and improvement of staff competence* was completed. It supported the creation of an independent system that can quickly respond to labour market demand by regularly evaluating and updating VET content in accordance with the regularly updated structure of sector qualifications. The main [project results](#) included creating qualification structures for all sectors and a substantial number of professional standards/qualification requirements (202), examinations (206) and teaching aids (29).

In 2022, the national [Career support in general and vocational education schools project](#) developed guidelines for the implementation of support for career guidance and organised regional seminars to promote their use. The project was implemented from 2016 by the State Education Development Agency, with supporting actions for a first [career guidance strategy](#) in Latvia. It has offered career consultations to VET learners (6 374 only in 2022) and training of education career counsellors. The 10th annual Career week was dedicated to getting to know and developing entrepreneurship during school, with more than 110 thousand children and young people participating, including VET learners.

In 2020, a taskforce was established within the education ministry to design a concept for the development and implementation of a graduate tracking system in VET. Consultations with VET stakeholders took place in the same year. In January 2021, the ministry prepared the report to the government (it was approved in 2022) and initiated discussions on the necessary amendments to the legislation. In 2022, the [VET law](#) tasked the government with establishing the graduate tracking system. The [government regulations](#) were amended a few months later to define the scope and coverage of VET

graduate tracking and publishing graduate tracking data. The ministry also started analysing the data in cooperation with the Central Statistics Bureau.

4.2 Equipping VET with highly-qualified, competent and excellence-oriented teachers and trainers

Several measures were undertaken for equipping VET with highly-qualified, competent and excellence-oriented teachers and trainers in Latvia, including capacity building and increased salaries.

The minimum [teacher salary was raised](#) from EUR 790 to EUR 830 per month in 2020/21. The gradual increase also continued in 2021/22 and 2022/23 but teachers considered it insufficient and went on [strike](#) in April 2023. As of September 2023, the [minimum VET teacher salary](#) was EUR 1 020 per month.

Since 2020, the ESF project [The effective management of vocational education institutions and the improvement of personnel competence](#) (launched in 2017) offered a considerable amount of [teacher professional competence development training](#) and multiplier events to support the transition to a competence-based learner-centred teaching approach in VET. Professional development courses also covered digital, online teaching and other competences. By the end of 2021, the project had 11 650 teachers and other staff, including 1 920 school leaders and administration members.

4.3 Improving relevance through VET stakeholder cooperation

National and international stakeholder cooperation continued with the aim of improving VET relevance, including on sector curricula, work-based learning and stakeholder capacity building.

In 2020, the government revised procedures used to organise and implement work-based learning, including the increasing tasks and responsibilities of [sector expert councils](#). In 2020, the education ministry also signed a contract with the Latvian Employers' Confederation to intensify the [coordination of sector expert council activities and to raise their involvement in VET policy](#). This included seminars and workshops that promoted national and EU VET priorities for improved collaboration with Latvian and international counterparts. In 2021, the contract was renewed. In the same year, the education ministry agreed with the representatives of the German Federal Ministry of Education and Science on future joint activities regarding further developments in the work of the sector expert councils in Latvia, including capacity building.

Since 2020, several projects have been implemented to [promote international cooperation in VET](#). The Erasmus+ project *Industry 4.0 challenge: Empowering metalworkers for smart factories of the future* (4CHANGE) tackled skill gaps among metalworkers in 12 partner countries. A model qualification standard was developed and the national standard in the metalworking sector was updated. The *Skills for the Baltic wood industry* project, with four partner countries, developed a modular programme in the wood industry at EQF level 5. Other international projects supported work-based learning

(ExcellWBL), application of digital tools in VET (Dig4VET) and logistics programme development (FinLat-Logic). In February 2022, the results of international collaboration were discussed at the Education Committee meeting of the Baltic Assembly in Vilnius.

5. Statistical information in relation to EU targets

While the overall employment rate in Latvia (77%) was higher than the EU27 average (74.6%) in 2022, the employment rate of recent IVET graduates (age 20-34, 75.2%) was 4.5 percentage points (pp) lower. Despite the increasing trend in IVET graduate employment since 2019, this signals that VET contribution to overall employment in the country may be lower than that of other education and training forms/types.

The share of unemployed adults with a learning experience in the past 4 weeks in 2022 (7.2%) was 6 pp lower than the EU average (13.2%). Reaching the EU target of 20% by 2025 seems unrealistic. The share for low-qualified adults with learning experience in the last 12 months in Latvia (13.6%) in 2022 was lower than the EU average (18.4%); this is also far off the 2030 EU target of 30%. The share of adult learning in Latvia in 2022 was 34.1%, 5.4 pp lower than in the EU on average.

Indicators and their progress compared to the EU targets are presented in Table 1.

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

| Type of indicator ⁽¹⁾ | Indicator | Last available year | LV | 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 | 34.1 ^u | 39.5 | Skills Agenda | 50% (2025) |
| | | | | | Council Resolution on EEA | 47% (2025) |
| | | | | | ESPR Action Plan | 60% (2030) |
| Progress | Low-qualified adults with a learning experience in the last 12 months (%) | 2022 | 13.6 ^u | 18.4 | Skills Agenda | 30% (2025) |
| Progress | Unemployed adults with a learning experience in the last 4 weeks (%) | 2022 | 7.2 | 13.2 | Skills Agenda | 20% (2025) |
| Context | Employment rate for 20 to 64 year-olds (%) | 2022 | 77 | 74.6 | ESPR Action Plan | 78% (2030) |
| Context | Early leavers from education and training (%) | 2022 | 6.7 | 9.6 | Council Resolution on EEA | <9% (2030) |
| Context | NEET rate for 15 to 29 year-olds (%) | 2022 | 11.3 | 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 | 50.8 | 53.9 | Skills Agenda | 70% (2025) |
| | | | | | ESPR Action Plan | 80% (2030) |
| Progress | Employment rate for recent IVET graduates (20 to 34 year-olds) (%) | 2022 | 75.2 ^u | 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 | :u | 60.1 | Council Rec on VET | 60% (2025) |
| | | | | | Council Resolution on EEA | |
| Context | 25 to 34 year-olds with tertiary attainment (%) | 2022 | 45.9 | 42 | Council Resolution on EEA | 45% (2025) |
| Context | Gender employment gap (%) | 2022 | 3.1 | 10.7 | ESPR Action Plan | To be halved (2030) |
| Context | People at risk of poverty or social exclusion (1000s) | 2022 | 482 | 95 284 | ESPR Action Plan | 15 million decrease (2030) |
| Context | Employed ICT specialists (1000s) | 2022 | 39.2 | 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 | 11.2 | 2.1 ^{dv} | Council Rec on VET | 8% (2025) |
| | | | | | Skills Agenda | |
| Context | Average number of foreign languages learned in IVET | 2021 | 1.4 | 1.2 | | |

Available flags: b – break in time series, d – definition differs, e – estimated, V – Cedefop estimate, u – low reliability.

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

Latvia's priorities defined in the national implementation plan are being addressed through a recently adopted overarching education strategy 2021-27, including VET. While the strategy presents a variety of measures for developing VET in the country, some have already become obsolete. For example, the planned development of strategic specialisation of professional education competence centres (PIKC) will not happen; the concept of PIKC was abolished in April 2022 (Art 15. of the VET law). This indicates that the measures in the strategy are dynamic and adapt to the changing needs of society.

The major milestone in implementation of the strategy was the adoption of VET law amendments in 2022. The amendments represent the results of the comprehensive VET reform piloted over the past decade through projects and other initiatives.

Measures for further developing modern and high-quality VET included definition of VET provider types and specialisation, development vision and planning for each VET provider through their individual investment and development strategies. The measures also included modularisation of VET programmes that should significantly improve flexibility and reduce the time needed to respond to labour market skill needs by being able to update only certain modules, without a need to overhaul the entire programme. The graduation certificate system has become more flexible and digital, and a system that regularly evaluates and allows updating the VET content in line with sector qualifications frameworks was created. Other measures include promoting career guidance in VET and improving the tracking of VET graduate career paths. While development of CVET was considered important in the national implementation plan, few activities to date seem to address adult learning specifically in VET. Acquisition of STEM and digital skills also seem to require more attention.

Measures for equipping VET with highly-qualified, competent and excellence-oriented teachers and trainers have concentrated around salary increase, which took place at a moderate speed, and teacher competence development. While this is a positive development, more effort is needed to address the pressing aspect factor teacher ageing.

Promoting VET stakeholder collaboration continued at national and international levels. The measures included revised procedures for work-based learning and, linked to this, better coordination of sector expert councils in cooperation with the Latvian Employers' Confederation and foreign partners. Since 2020, several projects have also been implemented to promote international cooperation in VET. This has improved the curricula in several sectors, along with the use of digital tools, and promoted work-based learning.

Further steps in the above measures would allow the country to meet the objectives set in the National implementation plan in line with the Council recommendation on VET and the Osnabrück declaration.

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