

## VET in Croatia



Overall responsibility for vocational education and training (VET) in Croatia lies with the Ministry of Science and Education supported by the Agency for VET and Adult Education (ASOO). The agency is responsible for developing VET curricula, continuous professional development of VET teachers, skills competitions and quality assurance. Stakeholders are involved in curriculum development, sector skills councils and in the VET Council.

Initial VET is publicly financed and free of charge. All VET programmes combine professional and general competences, to varying degrees; all include work-based learning (WBL), with duration and type varying.

VET is provided at upper secondary and postsecondary levels; the entry point is completion of compulsory education at age 14 or 15.

At upper secondary level, almost 70% of learners participate in initial vocational education and training (IVET). Around two thirds of VET learners are in four-year school-based programmes, with under one third in three-year programmes. Only one upper secondary programme lasts five years, leading to a general nursing qualification.

The four-year, mostly school-based, VET programmes, with a WBL share of around 10%, lead to qualifications at CROQF level 4.2/ EQF level 4 and allow progression to tertiary education; this follows completing external *matura* exams. In 2019, around 80% of four-year and five-year programme graduates took *Matura* exams and 45% enrolled in higher education immediately on completion of secondary education.

Three-year VET programmes give access to the labour market and lead to qualifications at CROQF level 4.1/ EQF level 4; WBL share ranges from 5% and more in school-based programmes to up to 60% in apprenticeships (programmes for crafts, nationally referred to as unified model of education, JMO). Within the final exam for completion of the three-year JMO programme, learners take the apprenticeship exam. Around 10% of all IVET learners are in apprenticeships.

Only a few learners take part in two-year VET programmes, leading to qualifications, without completing upper secondary education. Graduates of two- and three-year programmes can continue their education as regular students to attain a (one level) higher qualification, which is decided by each school individually.

VET specialist development programmes (EQF 5) are foreseen but not introduced yet at post-secondary level.

Professional education and training is offered at tertiary level. Short-cycle professional undergraduate programmes last two to two-and-a-half years (120-150 ECTS points) and lead to qualifications at CROQF/EQF level 5. Three- to four-year professional undergraduate programmes lead to a professional bachelor diploma at CROQF/EQF level 6. Professional bachelors may continue their studies in university; this is decided by each higher education institution individually. Specialist graduate professional studies last one to two years and lead to a professional specialist diploma at CROQF/EQF level 7.

Adult education and training in Croatia lead to educational attainment at EQF levels 1 to 5 for learners older than 15.

Most programmes are VET-related, ranging from short training and professional development to programmes leading to qualifications equivalent to those in IVET. The education ministry's approval of programmes leading to formal certificates is necessary, with prior positive opinion from ASOO. Adult learning is typically financed by learners.

### Distinctive features of VET

VET in Croatia has two main roles. Alongside preparation for labour market entry, it enables progression to tertiary education; this is primarily through four-year VET programmes, where learners spend half of their time acquiring general competences. In 2019, around 45% of four-year VET graduates enrolled in tertiary education.

Participation in VET at upper secondary level is one of the highest in the EU (69.2% compared to the EU-28 average of 47.6% in 2018). Croatia has the lowest rate of early school leaving in the EU (3.0% in 2019, compared to the EU-28 average of 10.3%) and has already met its Europe 2020 national target of 4%.

Self-assessment at VET schools is part of the quality assurance system. Support measures are in place to advance self-assessment, including school visits, upgrades to the online tool e-Kvaliteta and feedback reports with recommendations.

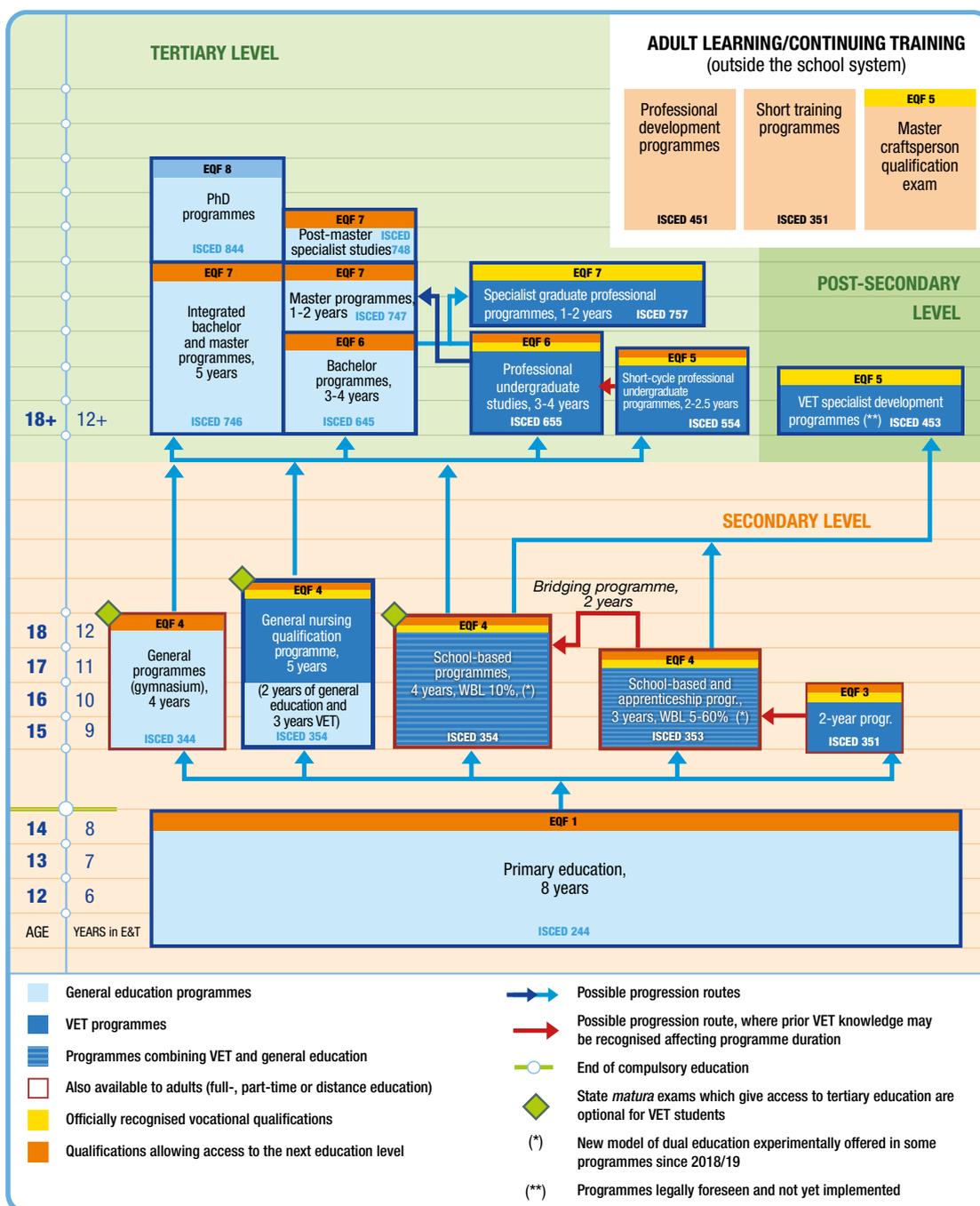
To promote excellence in VET, Croatia is establishing a network of 25 regional centres of competence. These will offer state-of-the-art technologies, teaching excellence and work-based learning, training for professionals, VET teachers and in-company mentors, as well as close cooperation with local businesses.

In 2019, the first WorldSkills Croatia competition launched a reformed model of VET student competitions with over 560 competitors in 47 disciplines and fairs. With 10 000 visitors, high visibility and stakeholder endorsement, this became the leading national event for the promotion of VET.

### Challenges and policy responses

Current priorities for VET development focus on increasing its labour market relevance, quality, attractiveness and internationalisation. Determined reform efforts are under way to address outdated curricula, skills mismatch, the quality of work-based learning and apprenticeship, as well as the public image of VET. As the flagship initiative, VET curriculum reform is oriented towards comprehensive redesign in line with labour market needs, learning outcomes, work-based learning, contemporary teaching and close support to VET providers. New VET curricula are expected to be implemented in 2022/23.

Youth unemployment has been gradually falling (16.6% in 2019 among 15 to 24 year-olds), as has the share of young people (aged 15 to 24) neither in employment nor in education and training (NEETs), to 11.8% in 2019. Youth guarantee schemes are in place to help young people get into employment, appren-



NB: ISCED-P 2011.

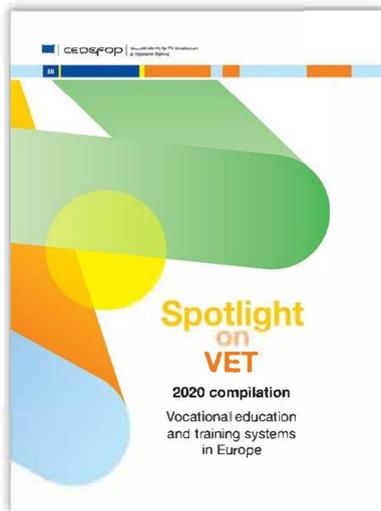
Source: Cedefop and ReferNet Croatia, 2020.

ticeship, education and training within four months of leaving school or becoming unemployed.

National demographics are reducing the number of learners, particularly in three-year IVET programmes. Those most affected are the apprenticeship programmes (JMO), losing half of their learners in the past six years. A new model of dual education was introduced as of 2018 to improve the quality of work-based learning and apprenticeships.

Participation in adult learning in 2019 was only 3.5%, positioning Croatia at the lower end of EU range despite the tax

incentives available for entrepreneurs for education and training costs, and VAT exemptions for adult education providers offering programmes approved by the education ministry. The main activities aim at promotion of lifelong learning in Croatia through awareness-raising efforts by ASOO.



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