

## VET in Slovakia



Despite growing interest in general education, secondary vocational education and training (VET) remains a strong pillar of the education system. In 2020, 68% of secondary education students graduated from VET; 76% of them attended programmes entitling continuation in higher education. In 2020/21, 444 approved VET programmes could be offered by secondary schools; 25 of these were under the responsibility of the health and interior ministries. The education ministry has overall responsibility for initial VET (IVET). Secondary VET schools are, as a rule, maintained by self-governing regions and all schools including private and church-affiliated are financed equally from the State budget. 'Dual VET' has been implemented since 2015. From 2018/19, school-based and 'dual VET' are based on the same national curricula, opening the door for all secondary programmes to be offered as school-based or as 'dual VET'. Schools can offer the following IVET programmes at secondary education level:

- four-year school-based (occasionally five-year) programmes (in total 155 programmes; ISCED 354). These are mainly theory-focused and lead to a *maturita* school leaving certificate confirming level of education and VET qualifications attained;
- four-year (occasionally five-year) programmes (60 in total; ISCED 354) with extended practical training. They lead to a VET qualification, certified by a *maturita* school leaving certificate, and to a certificate of apprenticeship, provided that they include at least 1 400 hours of practice;
- three-year (occasionally four-year) programmes (112 in total; ISCED 353). These lead to a VET qualification (nationally referred to as a certificate of apprenticeship);
- two- or three-year programmes (16 in total; ISCED 253) for low achievers without completed lower secondary education. In individual cases, a certificate of apprenticeship is awarded. These learners can also enrol in a one-year bridging programme (ISCED 244), which gives access to upper secondary education.

Programmes of conservatories (20), specific art education programmes and a sports management programme are not regulated by the Act on VET, despite offering a VET qualification.

Special education schools also offer VET programmes tailored to students with special education needs.

Post-secondary non-tertiary VET programmes comprise:

- two-year follow-up study programmes (ISCED 454) for VET graduates (ISCED 353) leading to a *maturita* school leaving certificate (33);
- two-year qualifying programmes (ISCED 454) leading to a second VET qualification certified by a *maturita* and, in some cases, also to a certificate of apprenticeship (17 together with refresher programmes);
- refresher programmes (ISCED 454) with a minimum six-month duration ending with a post-*maturita* exam;
- two-year specialising programmes and three-year higher professional programmes (ISCED 554) leading to a non-university diploma and title DiS (31); some of the latter are offered as 'dual VET'.

Tertiary education currently does not include universities of applied science. Practice-oriented bachelor programmes are newly under development.

Continuing VET provision is semi-regulated: according to the Lifelong Learning Act, all programmes for adults without a relevant qualification who are interested in starting a business regulated by the Trade Licensing Act must be approved by the accreditation commission of the education ministry. Some qualifications are regulated by sectoral authorities. Many training programmes offered by companies, and adult education per se, are not regulated. The labour ministry regulates labour market training via the central and district labour offices.

### Distinctive features of VET

Combining provision of general education and developing key competences with vocational skills within a broad variety of upper secondary programmes, predominantly school-based, is a result of tradition and historical development. The characteristic pattern of the education system, featuring a high share of secondary education and a low share of tertiary, has changed dramatically since EU accession. A share of population aged 30 to 34 with ISCED 3 to 4 levels of education was 81.0% in 2004 and 50.5% in 2019, while the data for the same cohort and years for ISCED 5-8 levels were 12.9% and 40.1%.

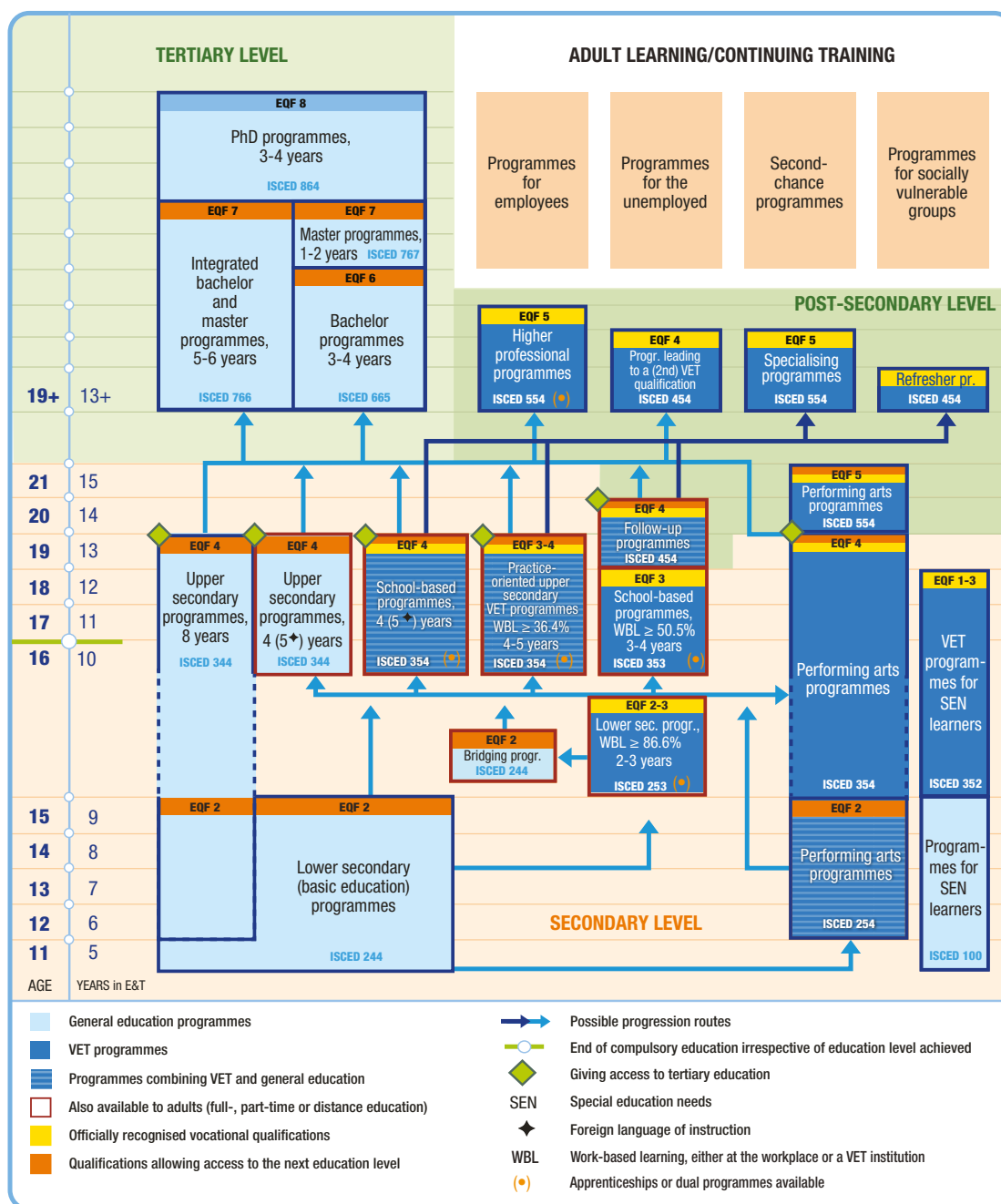
Ties between VET schools and the business world loosened during the economic transformation in the 1990s. Since 2015, specialised legislation supports the involvement of companies in the provision of 'dual VET' via direct financing from the State budget; it explicitly sets the rights and duties of professional and employer organisations regarding VET. Stronger engagement of the business world in informing VET schools about skill needs via sectoral (skills) councils should help VET adjust better to a rapidly changing labour market.

Ten-year compulsory education generally guarantees that learners should attend at least one year of upper secondary education after completing nine-year integrated primary and lower secondary general education. Despite a negative trend, this contributes to preventing early leaving from education and training. There has been a slight improvement (8.3% in 2019) but this remains over the national benchmark of 6%. The improvement can be attributed to the provision of new programmes combining completion of lower secondary general and vocational education.

### Challenges and policy responses

Deterioration compared to the past in many international indicators calls for action:

- 2018 PISA results indicate that the number of 15-year-old students who are underachievers in reading, maths or science is above the EU-27 average; this negatively affects participation in VET programmes, leading to a shortage of supply of technically skilled graduates in the labour market;
- early leaving from education and training in Eastern Slovakia has been above the EU 2020 target of 10% for a long



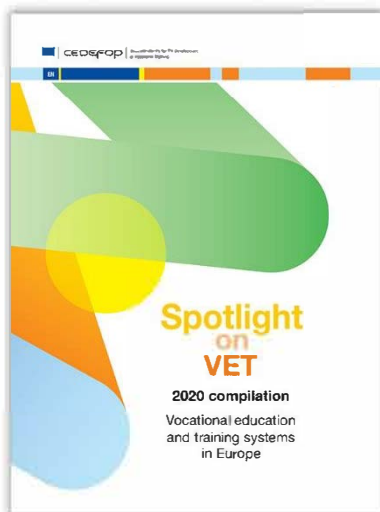
NB: ISCED-P 2011.

Source: Cedefop and ReferNet Slovakia, 2020.

- time; this indicates the need to complement formal education by alternative ways to acquiring qualifications;
- participation in lifelong learning is well below the EU-27 average (3.6% compared to 10.8% in 2019); this led to the agreement to introduce individual learning accounts in support of adult learning.

The 2020 Council country-specific recommendations have recommended strengthening digital skills and ensuring equal access to quality education. This also corresponds to difficulties encountered during the Covid-19 pandemic hampering replacement of face-to-face education by distance learning.

A shortage of equipment and digital skills particularly affected learners from disadvantaged backgrounds. It is necessary to invest in schools' technological infrastructure and provide learners with devices and access to high-speed internet services. The pandemic also confirmed the insufficient provision of digital educational content at all levels of education, particularly in VET. Well-organised repositories of open educational resources, appropriate also for individual offline learning, are urgently needed. Retraining of teachers to cope with the inevitable digital transformation of schools and with the increasingly diversified needs of individual learners is also an important challenge.



**Publication:**

Spotlight on VET – 2020 compilation:  
vocational education and training systems in Europe.

**Access the full publication at:**

<https://www.cedefop.europa.eu/en/publications-and-resources/publications/4189>

**Please cite this chapter as:**

Cedefop (2021). VET in Slovakia. In: Cedefop (2021). *Spotlight on VET – 2020 compilation: vocational education and training systems in Europe*. Luxembourg: Publications Office. pp. 64-65.  
<https://www.cedefop.europa.eu/en/publications-and-resources/publications/4189>

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