



# Vocational education and training policy briefs 2024

## ESTONIA



This vocational education and training (VET) policy brief was produced by the European Centre for the Development of Vocational Training (Cedefop), Department for VET and Qualifications under the supervision of [Jürgen Siebel](#), Acting Head of Department / Executive Director.

The report was drafted by [Dmitrijs Kuļšs](#), Cedefop expert, and peer reviewed by [Inés Sancha Gonzalo](#), Cedefop expert.

This report is part of Cedefop's monitoring of VET policies and systems. It is based on detailed information on VET policy implementation submitted by Cedefop's European network of expertise on VET (ReferNet) and other sources. For additional information please visit Cedefop's online tool [Timeline of VET policies in Europe](#).

Please cite this publication as:

Cedefop. (2025). *Vocational education and training policy briefs 2024 – Estonia*. National VET policy developments 2023-24.  
<https://data.europa.eu/doi/10.2801/6753011>

A great deal of additional information on the European Union is available on the internet. It can be accessed through the Europa server (<https://european-union.europa.eu/>).

Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union, 2025.



© Cedefop, 2025.

Unless otherwise noted, the reuse of this document is authorised under a Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International (CC BY 4.0) licence (<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>). This means that reuse is allowed provided appropriate credit is given and any changes made are indicated.



ISBN 978-92-896-3885-2 doi: 10.2801/6753011 TI-01-25-071-EN-N

## Contents

1.	Introduction.....	4
2.	National VET context and challenges .....	4
2.1	National VET context.....	4
2.2	Challenges .....	5
3.	National VET policy priorities.....	5
4.	Main policy developments and progress 2020-24.....	6
4.1	Diverse and accessible VET.....	6
4.2	Competent and motivated VET teachers and trainers.....	8
4.3	VET responsive to the labour market and society needs .....	8
5.	Statistical information in relation to EU targets.....	10
6.	Conclusion.....	12
	References .....	13

# 1. Introduction

*This VET policy brief <sup>(1)</sup> produced by Cedefop presents a snapshot of vocational education and training policy developments in Estonia between 2020 and the end of 2024 <sup>(2)</sup>. 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 Estonia's national implementation plan. The policy brief provides information from Cedefop monitoring and analysis on the implementation of the [Council Recommendation on VET](#) and [Osnabrück Declaration](#), and contributes to shaping new EU priorities in VET as of 2026 and informing the mid-term evaluation of the Council Recommendation on VET.*

## 2. National VET context and challenges

### 2.1 National VET context

Vocational education and training (VET) in Estonia provide free-of-charge initial and continuing training for upskilling and reskilling the young and adults. Most VET providers (30 out of 35) are State-owned and run by the Ministry of Education and Research. They have a high degree of autonomy in performing their tasks, including decisions on teaching methods and resource allocation.

VET is offered at qualification levels 2 to 5 (continuing VET at levels 4 to 5). These levels are linked to the European qualifications framework (EQF). Learning forms include school-based, work-based and self-learning (also called 'non-stationary' in the national context). A part of continuing VET is non-formal, including adult courses. Professional higher education programmes (EQF level 6) are not considered VET (Cedefop & Estonian Ministry of Education and Research, 2023).

In 2013, there was a major update of the VET regulatory framework since the late 1990s, aiming for better responsiveness to the labour market needs, better quality assurance and an outcome-based approach: the [Vocational education institutions act](#) and the [Standard of vocational education](#) were adopted. These regulate the organisation and provision of VET, and the uniform requirements for its curricula (Estonia, 2022).

The parliament (Riigikogu), the government (Eesti Vabariigi Valitsus), including the education ministry, jointly oversee the VET system at national level. The ministry's partner in developing and implementing the VET strategic objectives is the [Estonian Association for the Promotion of VET](#), representing VET providers, social partners and other VET stakeholders. Several other advisory bodies and social partner organisations participate in policy implementation. Local governments prepare and implement local education development plans and coordinate the activities of municipal education institutions. Social partner participation in VET is regulated by national legislation and partnership agreements (Cedefop & Estonian Ministry of Education and Research, 2023).

---

<sup>(1)</sup> See also the previous edition: Cedefop. (2024). [Vocational education and training policy briefs 2023 – Estonia](#). Cedefop monitoring and analysis of vocational education and training policies.

<sup>(2)</sup> Some developments include information up to mid-2025.

## 2.2 Challenges

The main challenges that VET in Estonia is facing include the need to improve smooth transitions between VET and other learning pathways, lack of qualified teachers and trainers, and insufficient responsiveness of VET to the needs of the labour market and society.

Several factors hinder smooth transitions between VET and other learning pathways. VET, in comparison to other learning options, is considered less attractive. The dropout rate among VET learners remains high, particularly during the first year of study. Limited available resources reduce the regional availability of VET. Collaboration between VET and general/higher education is limited, and the recognition of prior learning and work experience, which typically facilitates permeability, has not been firmly embedded in the VET system. The readiness of VET institutions to manage a multilingual and multicultural learning environment and to support learners with a mother tongue other than Estonian require attention (Estonia, 2022). In addition, participation in VET has been decreasing since 2010/11 due to the low birth rate in the second half of the 1990s (Cedefop & Estonian Ministry of Education and Research, 2023).

Despite the autonomy enjoyed by VET teachers and school leaders, the active networks supporting the exchange of knowledge and the high-quality digital infrastructure of training providers, there are also several challenges related to the teaching function. The supply of qualified teachers and support specialists is insufficient. The teaching community is ageing, and the retainment rate of new teachers is low: one in three quit their job within a year. The skills of VET teachers, trainers and principals in diversifying the learning process and environment need to be improved, as does their readiness to introduce education innovations; the potential of digital solutions is not fully exploited (Estonia, 2022).

Making VET more responsive to the needs of society and the evolving labour market also remains a challenge. The potential of work-based learning is not yet fully exploited in Estonia. Participation in apprenticeships depends on external funding, such as EU programmes, leading to a decrease in participation when there is less funding available. VET support for the development of transversal skills and competences, including digital, career and entrepreneurship, is sometimes insufficient. Career paths offered by VET are often undervalued by society. The process of updating professional qualifications and curricula in response to changes in the labour market and society is not always flexible (Estonia, 2022; Cedefop & Estonian Ministry of Education and Research, 2023).

## 3. National VET policy priorities

The Estonian [national implementation plan](#) that the country prepared in response to the [2020 Council Recommendation on VET](#) and the [Osnabrück Declaration](#), sets three main priorities (strategic goals) until 2035:

- (a) diverse and accessible VET enabling smooth transitions between education types/levels;
- (b) competent and motivated VET teachers, trainers and school management;

(c) VET responsive to the labour market and society needs (Estonia, 2022).

These priorities are aligned with the Estonian [Education strategy 2021-35](#) (follow up of the Lifelong strategy 2020) steering the developments in education and training, including VET. The strategy is implemented through four-year implementation programmes, which are updated annually. It contributes to the [Estonia 2035](#) national long-term strategy in the area of skills and labour market aiming to develop an education [and training] system that is learner-centred, flexible and forward-looking.

The national implementation plan is also linked to the [Youth sector development plan 2021-35](#), reducing early leaving from education and training and supporting transitions to labour market and validation of learning outcomes, the [Research and development, innovation and entrepreneurship strategy 2021-35](#) that strengthens cooperation between VET and universities, research institutions and enterprises, and the [Estonian language strategy 2021-35](#) (including education and training). The regional development plans also form an integral part of the national implementation plan.

## 4. Main policy developments and progress 2020-24

### 4.1 Diverse and accessible VET

Estonia has been putting in place measures to make VET diverse and accessible and to enable transitions between VET and other education and training paths.

Between 2020 and 2022, Estonia advanced several key reforms to strengthen the quality, cooperation, and inclusiveness of VET. At the core of these developments was the 2022 approval of measures to foster VET excellence and cooperation, including a review of the VET provider network alongside the general education school network, the introduction of performance-based funding, and the empowerment of centres of excellence in VET (CoVE). By 2022, two Estonian VET centres were already participating in Erasmus+ CoVEs projects, and preparations were underway for a 2023 study to map cooperation opportunities within the national VET network (Cedefop, 2024).

Estonia also introduced a national VET mobility indicator in 2021, tracking the share of graduates participating in at least two weeks of learning mobility, with VET schools submitting data to the national education system from January 2022. Legislative work also began in 2021 to introduce micro-qualifications (microcredentials) in adult education, while 2022 saw continued updates to upper secondary VET curricula to accommodate them. Inclusiveness measures were strengthened through a 30 ECTS programme for learners with special educational needs (SEN) and migrant backgrounds, including refugees from Ukraine. In 2022, amendments to the Vocational Education Institutions Act reinforced Estonian-language instruction in VET, laying out a transition plan to be completed by the 2029/30 school year, supported by new EU-funded frameworks for teacher training and content and language integrated learning (Cedefop, 2024).

In 2024, the country started implementing a major education reform that was approved in 2023: the extension of the compulsory education age from 17 to 18 years. It aims to tackle the increasing number of young people who do not continue their studies after basic

education, the high dropout rate in the first year of upper secondary vocational education, and the growing number of young people without qualifications. To include more general education content, vocational upper secondary programmes are also being extended from the current 3 years to 3.5-4 years. Set to be completed by 2026/27, the reform triggered the creation of a [joint student admission system to education and training, clarifying stakeholder responsibilities, improving career guidance, linking qualifications to further education](#), and introducing preparatory programmes for learners needing additional support (Cedefop & ReferNet, 2025; ReferNet Estonia & Cedefop, 2024a; Kukk, 2024).

At the same time, VET providers began updating existing curricula to better integrate transversal and technological competences, interdisciplinary approaches, and accommodate the extension of compulsory education. New upper secondary VET curricula were developed in response to the 2024 call by the education ministry, co-funded by the government and the European Social Fund, to develop innovative VET programmes aligned with labour market needs. VET providers responded with a high number of ambitious proposals focused on smart technology, digitalisation, sustainability, and industry collaboration, such as 'Construction and maintenance of smart house technical systems', 'Industry 5.0 digital technician', and 'Autonomous vehicle technologies specialist'. These aim to equip learners with practical, in-demand and 21st-century skills (ReferNet Estonia & Cedefop, 2024b). The revised programmes offer greater flexibility in learning pathways and specialisation, strengthening VET relevance and supporting Estonia's future workforce. All VET programmes are to be updated before the 2026/27 school year (Cedefop & ReferNet, 2025).

While the enrolment in upper secondary VET reached a ten-year high in absolute numbers in 2023/24 (Kukk, 2024), the anticipated decreasing participation in VET due to the demographic gap has led to rearranging the VET provider network: the number of State-owned VET providers has been reduced from 54 in 2002/03 to 30 in 2023/24. To increase the quality and efficiency of VET, several small providers were consolidated into regional VET centres that offer a broad array of qualifications. In 2024, the [consolidation of the VET institutions network continued with a consultation phase](#). Possible options include refocusing some VET centres, merging regional centres under single management, or reorganising them into regional education centres (Cedefop & Estonian Ministry of Education and Research, 2023).

In 2024, the [legislative process](#) to introduce micro-qualifications (microcredentials) in the [Adult education act](#) was still pending since 2021, due to the continued discussions on quality assurance mechanisms. They concern the definition of micro-qualifications, the volume of study programmes leading to microcredentials, principles of provision, and quality assurance mechanism. Nevertheless, updating the national curricula in upper secondary VET continued, enabling the introduction of micro-qualifications (Cedefop & ReferNet, 2025).

Estonia is putting forward a comprehensive approach to [supporting learners with special educational needs \(SEN\) and those with a migrant background](#). In 2024, the adoption of the regulation on support services was still pending, to follow the timetable of

another reform (extending compulsory education). The 'Choice of Profession' programme, aimed at young people not ready for further studies, such as those with special educational needs, early school leavers, NEETs, migrants, or learners lacking basic skills, has proven effective; it was expanded and integrated into broader preparatory studies (Cedefop & ReferNet, 2025).

## 4.2 Competent and motivated VET teachers and trainers

In 2024, two years after the Ministry of Education and Research designed the framework and legislation for granting support from EU structural funds, a new phase of **continuous professional development** (CPD) for VET teachers and trainers was launched. The original framework included field-related training for vocational teachers, CPD on general pedagogy and teaching methods, and development activities for VET provider management. The new phase, under the 'Succession and development of teachers' EU-funded project measure, offers both specialised vocational training and general training in pedagogy, didactics, school leadership, and team support (Cedefop & ReferNet, 2025).

To make VET teaching more appealing, the government in 2020 set a target to raise VET teachers' pay to 120% of the national average by 2026. By 2022, the average salary had risen to EUR 1 718 – an 8% increase over 2021, reaching 102% of Estonia's average pay (Cedefop, 2024). In 2023, the average **salary of VET teachers reached 117%** of the national average.

## 4.3 VET responsive to the labour market and society needs

Estonia has been implementing measures to make VET more responsive to the labour market needs and the needs of society in general.

Between 2020 and 2022, Estonia focused on strengthening its skills intelligence, green transition, and work-based learning (WBL) systems. In 2022, the government adopted a framework for EU structural fund support to further develop the professional qualifications system and jobs-and-skills forecasting. This included enhancing the jobs and skills forecasting system **OSKA** forecasting methodology with region-based analyses. That same year, Estonia also established a framework for green skills development, supporting the creation of new modules and courses in higher education and VET across sectors such as transport, energy, agriculture, construction, chemical industry, and waste management (Cedefop, 2024).

2022 also saw increased emphasis on green transition awareness through Erasmus+ supported webinars and the 'Green Talks' (Rohejutud) series, which engaged policymakers, employers, and VET providers on sustainability topics. Efforts to expand work-based learning (WBL) also advanced, with the PRÖM+ development programme prepared and piloted by the Ministry of Education and Research to strengthen WBL in initial VET, where participation had previously been dominated by adult learners (Cedefop, 2024).

The country is strengthening adult upskilling and lifelong learning by investing in offering free work-related training to over 26 000 people in 2025-26, targeting nearly 4% of its working-age population. The initiative targets adults without qualifications or with

outdated skills, employees needing green skills, including residents of Ida-Viru County transitioning to a climate-neutral economy due to the phasing out of oil shale energy production. Training delivered by VET centres, universities, and professional institutions covers a wide range of fields, including digital skills, management, construction, and social work. Basic digital literacy courses are also being introduced to support adults with limited tech experience. Commissioned based on national strategies and labour market needs, this EUR 15 million effort, funded by the EU and national sources, supports Estonia's goal of reaching 52.3% adult participation in lifelong learning by 2035 (ReferNet Estonia & Cedefop, 2025).

In 2024, Estonia launched a strategic initiative, supported by EU funds, to modernise ICT and engineering education in VET and other sectors through the IT Academy and Engineering Academy. The initiative, set to run until 2029, aims to align curricula with labour market needs, lower dropout rates, and facilitate transitions to higher education. It includes new EQF level 4 and 5 programmes, teacher training, and learner support through mentoring. Emphasis is placed on Industry 4.0, interdisciplinary learning, and increasing female participation in STEM. With a VET budget of EUR 18 million (70% EU-funded), the Ministry of Education and Research ensures alignment with national and EU priorities (ReferNet Estonia & Cedefop, 2023a).

In 2023, the country launched a major project that will merge its jobs and skills forecasting system OSKA with the professional qualifications system into a unified, flexible framework called OsKuS by 2029. Aimed at replacing the rigid, profession-based model with a skills-oriented approach, OsKuS will feature region-based forecasting, big data analytics, and improved digital tools for tracking skills, certificates, and qualifications. Traditional qualification standards will shift to dynamic skills profiles, better reflecting modern labour market needs and supporting flexible learning paths like microcredentials. The new system will serve individuals, employers, educators, and career advisors, enhancing decision-making and workforce adaptability (ReferNet Estonia & Cedefop, 2023b; Kukk, 2024).

As part of Estonia's [professional qualifications system reform](#), the Skills Compass was launched in 2024 as a key digital tool for mapping, forecasting, and recognising skills. It features a skills tree, sector and profession descriptions, and an occupation recommendation system linking skills to labour market data. Built on professional standards, OSKA surveys, and ESCO (European skills, competences, and occupations), it serves learners, employers, jobseekers, educators, and policymakers. In parallel, preparations are underway to amend the Professions Act to support the broader reform (Cedefop & ReferNet, 2025).

[Developing WBL and practical training](#) has recently gained momentum, aiming to ensure competences that create more added value and better match with the labour market needs. The VET and higher education development programme PRÕM+ was prepared and piloted by the education ministry. It focuses on promoting WBL for young learners in initial VET as, until recently, most work-based learning participants have been adults. After a temporary decline during a roll-out phase of the new PRÕM+ programme, as of 2024,

the number of WBL placements increased again. Nearly half of WBL learners were enrolled in the health and well-being sector addressing the high labour demand in this field. By 2029 the government's intention is to attract a total of 3 000 apprentices (Cedefop & ReferNet, 2025; Cedefop & Estonian Ministry of Education and Research, 2023).

## 5. Statistical information in relation to EU targets

Estonia's efforts to make WBL more accessible in VET are already paying off. The share of recent IVET graduates (20 to 34-year-olds) with work-based learning experience as part of their vocational education and training increased from 73.5% in 2021 to 79.8% in 2024, and exceeds the EU average by almost 15 percentage points (pp) and the 2025 target by almost 20 pp.

The employment rate of 20-34-year-old recent IVET graduates was 74.7% in 2024, 5.3 pp lower than the EU average. It is lower than in 2017 (83.8%) but higher than in 2021 (70.6%).

The rate of early leavers from education and training aged 18 to 24 in Estonia increased from 8.5% in 2020 to 11% in 2024. The trend in EU is the reverse: from 9.9% in 2020 to 9.3% in 2024.

More indicators and their progress compared to the EU targets are presented in the table below.

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

Type of indicator <sup>(3)</sup>	Indicator	Last available year	EE	EU-27	Policy Document	EU target (year)
<b>VET for developing a lifelong learning culture</b>						
Progress	Adults (25-64 year-olds) with a learning experience in the last 12 months (%)*	2022	41.8	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	18.9	18.4	Skills Agenda	30% (2025)
Progress	Unemployed adults with a learning experience in the last 4 weeks (%)	2024	22.4	15.3	Skills Agenda	20% (2025)
Context	Employment rate for 20-64 year-olds (%)	2024	81.8	75.8	ESPR Action Plan	78% (2030)
Context	Early leavers from education and training (%)	2024	11	9.3	Council Resolution on EEA	<9% (2030)
Context	NEET rate for 15-29 year-olds (%)	2024	11	11.0	ESPR Action Plan	9% (2030)
<b>VET for Resilience, transitions, sustainability and excellence</b>						
Progress	Adults (16-74 year-olds) with at least basic digital skills (%)	2023	62.6	55.6	Skills Agenda ESPR Action Plan	70% (2025) 80% (2030)
Progress	Employment rate for recent IVET graduates (20-34 year-olds) (%)	2024	74.7	80.0	Council Rec on VET	82% (2025)
Progress	Recent IVET graduates (20-34 year-olds) with a work-based learning experience as part of their vocational education and training (%)	2024	79.8	65.3	Council Rec on VET Council Resolution on EEA	60% (2025)
Context	25-34 year-olds with tertiary attainment (%)	2024	42.7	44.2	Council Resolution on EEA	45% (2025)
Context	Gender employment gap (%)	2024	1.7	10.0	ESPR Action Plan	To be halved (2030)
Context	People at risk of poverty or social exclusion (1000s)	2024	302	93 333	ESPR Action Plan	15 million decrease (2030)
Context	Employed ICT specialists (1000s)	2024	50.6 <sup>e</sup>	10273.6 <sup>e</sup>	2030 Digital Compass	20 million, with convergence between men and women (2030)
<b>VET for the European Education Area</b>						
Progress	Learners in IVET who benefitted from a learning mobility abroad (%)**	2021	7.4	2.1 <sup>dv</sup>	Council Rec on VET	8% (2025)
					Skills Agenda Council Rec Europe on the Move	
Context	Average number of foreign languages learned in IVET	2023	0.9	1.2 <sup>d</sup>		

Available flags: d – definition differs, e – estimated, v – Cedefop estimate.

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

\*\* Provisional estimates affected by the Covid19 pandemic

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

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

## 6. Conclusion

Estonia's priorities defined in the national implementation plan are being addressed through the overarching education and training strategy lasting to 2035, including VET. The strategy has a clear focus and well-defined indicators. The priorities are in line with the EU priorities in VET. At the same time, many measures of the strategy are still in the initial implementation stage.

Estonia is actively enhancing the accessibility and diversity of VET by extending compulsory education to age 18, expanding the duration of upper secondary VET programmes and integrating more general education content in these programmes. Efforts such as a joint admission system, improved career guidance, and preparatory programmes for learners needing extra support help smooth transitions and reduce dropouts. Updating curricula to include transversal, technological, and interdisciplinary skills aligned with labour market needs further strengthens VET relevance.

The priority of attracting competent and motivated teachers is being addressed through support for competences development, including digital ones. The launch of a new phase of continuous professional development (CPD) for VET teachers and trainers marks progress, combining specialised vocational training with general pedagogy, leadership, and team support. This comprehensive approach aims to enhance teaching quality and leadership capacity within VET institutions. Future policy could build on this by ensuring sustained funding, expanding mentoring and peer collaboration opportunities, and introducing incentives to attract and retain skilled teachers, particularly in emerging technology fields.

Estonia's targeted upskilling initiatives for adults, strategic modernisation of ICT and engineering education, and integration of forecasting with qualifications systems demonstrate a strong commitment to aligning VET with labour market and societal demands. The launch of OsKuS and Skills Compass will enable a more flexible, skills-based approach to qualifications, supporting lifelong learning and workforce adaptability. Work-based learning is also gaining momentum, particularly in sectors with labour shortages. To further strengthen responsiveness, policies could focus on expanding WBL opportunities across all sectors, enhancing digital literacy for all learners, and ensuring timely data feedback loops between employers, educators, and policymakers to quickly adapt curricula to emerging trends.

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.

## References

[accessed 15.7.2025]

- Cedefop. (2024). [Vocational education and training policy briefs 2023 – Estonia](#). Cedefop monitoring and analysis of vocational education and training policies.
- Cedefop, & Estonian Ministry of Education and Research. (2023). [Vocational education and training in Europe – Estonia: system description](#). In Cedefop, & ReferNet. (2024). [Vocational education and training in Europe: VET in Europe database – detailed VET system descriptions](#) [Database].
- Cedefop, & ReferNet. (2025). [Timeline of VET policies in Europe \(2024 update\)](#) [Online tool].
- Estonia. (2022). [National implementation plan on VET: Estonia](#).
- Kukk, I. (2024). [Implementing European priorities in VET: making national VET agile, flexible, innovative, attractive, inclusive and quality-assured: Estonia](#). Cedefop ReferNet thematic perspectives.
- ReferNet Estonia, & Cedefop. (2023a, April 24). [Estonia: better ICT and engineering skills in VET by 2029](#). *National news on VET*.
- ReferNet Estonia, & Cedefop. (2023b, May 22). [Estonia: skills and professional qualifications system reform](#). *National news on VET*.
- ReferNet Estonia, & Cedefop. (2024a, July 15). [Estonia: boosting VET with extended compulsory education](#). *National news on VET*.
- ReferNet Estonia, & Cedefop. (2024b, October 29). [Estonia: call for innovative VET curricula to meet future workforce needs](#). *National news on VET*.
- ReferNet Estonia, & Cedefop. (2025, July 10). [Estonia expands free adult training to boost skills renewal and labour market participation](#). *National news on VET*.