

Vocational education and training policy briefs 2024 **FINLAND**

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The report was drafted by Dmitrijs Kuļšs, Cedefop expert, and peer reviewed by Irina Jemeljanova, Cedefop expert.

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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/).

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1. Introduction

This VET policy brief (1) produced by Cedefop presents a snapshot of vocational education and training policy developments in Finland between 2020 and the end of 2024 (2). 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 Finland's national implementation plan (updated in February 2024). 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

The Ministry of Education and Culture is responsible for vocational education and training (VET) strategic planning and development. It also authorises VET provision.

VET is governed by around 10 acts and over 30 decrees, covering areas such as funding, administration, teacher qualifications, and student benefits. In addition to legislation, VET is guided by national qualification requirements and other regulations issued by the Finnish National Agency for Education (EDUFI), which defines requirements for initial, further, and specialist vocational qualifications through 160 regulations (Finland, 2024).

In Finland, 7 of 10 learners at secondary level attend VET programmes (European Commission. Directorate-General for Education, Youth, Sport & Culture, 2024). Around 80% of VET learners attend VET providers maintained by municipalities, joint municipal authorities (3) or State/municipal companies. In 2024, there were 135 VET providers in Finland, with the number declining in recent years due to encouraged mergers.

A few VET providers have Swedish or both the Finnish and Swedish languages of instruction. The Sámi Education Institute teaches in Finnish and Sámi. The remaining VET providers teach in Finnish. Based on the national qualifications requirements, VET providers decide independently on how the training is carried out, the use of learning environments and pedagogical solutions.

VET programmes are available to both young and adult learners. There are 42 initial vocational qualifications (EQF 4), 64 further (EQF 4) and 54 specialist vocational qualifications (EQF 5). Admission to IVET programmes is based on a basic education certificate; for continuing VET (CVET comprising further and specialist programme types)

⁽¹⁾ See also the previous edition: Cedefop. (2024). Vocational education and training policy briefs 2023 – Finland. Cedefop monitoring and analysis of vocational education and training policies.

⁽²⁾ Some developments include information up to mid-2025.

⁽³⁾ A joint municipal authority is a form of permanent collaboration of more than one municipality in some field of operation.

it is more flexible and takes into account work experience (Cedefop & Finnish National Agency for Education [EDUFI], 2023).

Finnish VET is competence-based and learner-oriented. A personal competence development plan is drawn up for each learner; this charts and recognises the skills previously acquired by the learner and outlines any further competences the learner needs and how they can be acquired in different learning environments. There are no final exams in VET. Once learners successfully complete their personal competence development plan, they acquire a qualification (Cedefop & EDUFI, 2023).

VET is an attractive choice for learners because of its flexibility and good job and study prospects: graduates may enrol in higher education or enter the labour market. The fact that VET is developed and delivered in close cooperation with the labour market serves as a guarantee of its quality and attractiveness (Cedefop & EDUFI, 2023).

All VET programmes include work-based learning (WBL) although the legislation does not stipulate a maximum or minimum amount. It is decided as part of the learner's personal competence development plan and implemented through an apprenticeship agreement (written fixed-term employment contract) or a training agreement. The latter does not establish an employment relationship with the training company: learners do not receive a salary, and employers do not receive training compensation (Cedefop & EDUFI, 2023).

Representatives from enterprises contribute to developing national qualification requirements through sectoral working-life committees; they also plan and organise WBL and competence tests, which they also assess (Cedefop & EDUFI, 2023).

Learner mobility in Finnish VET continues to grow, supported by the Erasmus+ programme, though overall numbers remain below pre-pandemic levels. In 2024, 4 021 learners went abroad, i.e. 8% more than in 2023, bringing the mobility rate among 16-25-year-old IVET learners to 9%, still below the EU's 12% target by 2030. By 2024, 80% of VET providers had offered mobility opportunities, reflecting strong institutional engagement (ReferNet Finland & Cedefop, 2024b; ReferNet Finland & Cedefop, 2025b).

Around a half of those applying for VET are at least 25 years old. In 2021, upper secondary VET became compulsory until age 18 in a bid to reduce early leaving from education and training (Cedefop & EDUFI, 2023).

VET teachers and trainers are respected professionals in the country. A career as a VET teacher is generally considered attractive. This is reflected in the high number of learners applying for VET teacher training programmes, which usually exceeds intake (Cedefop & EDUFI, 2023).

2.2 Challenges

The main challenges that Finland's VET is facing are linked to rapid demographic shifts, regional disparities, evolving labour market demands, unequal access to education, completion rate of qualifications (not all young people complete at least upper secondary qualification), partly limited data for policymaking, and underused digitalisation, according to the 2024 (updated) national implementation plan for VET (Finland, 2024).

Changing skills needs are putting pressure on VET to be able to adjust promptly to the labour market and society's needs. Digitalisation, global crises (humanitarian, pandemic), climate change, internationalisation of companies, green transition and sustainable development needs are having impact on VET. The importance of transversal key competences such as language, problem-solving and learning-to-learn is also increasing. New competence needs often emerge on the interfaces between different study fields. Thus, there is a need for VET to offer custom and flexible opportunities for updating and upgrading skills, regardless of age. This calls for a well-functioning data collection and analysis system, for which there are still gaps in Finland according to the national implementation plan (Finland, 2024).

Equality in education and training is not always a reality (Hievanen et al, 2023), with Finland exhibiting a significant gender segregation. For example, boys often choose mathematics and natural sciences as optional subjects, while girls focus more on language studies and regularly study several foreign languages. Individuals with immigrant background and special needs, and other vulnerable groups, often underperform and do not always complete VET programmes. The socio-economic background has a major impact on individual education choices (Finland, 2024).

In 2023, 15% of VET students in Finland had a mother tongue other than Finnish, Swedish, or Sámi, a steady increase from 11% in 2018. These students are more often enrolled in initial vocational qualifications than in CVET, particularly in fields like health care, catering, and cleaning services. While generally satisfied with their studies, students with a migrant background report higher rates of bullying, discrimination, and language-related challenges. In 2022/23, 9% reported harassment, compared to 5% of all students, and 13% had considered changing study paths due to discrimination. Every fifth non-native speaker cited language difficulties as a reason for considering such changes. The EDUFI highlights the need for continued focus on wellbeing, language-aware instruction, personalised support, and improved guidance, with local-level analysis encouraged to tailor effective measures (ReferNet Finland & Cedefop, 2025a).

Demographics is a challenge for upper secondary VET. By 2040, in many regions there will be 30-40% fewer learners of age 16-18 after a temporary increase in the 2020s. There will also be fewer working-age people, a large part of whom are VET learners. This requires structural changes to ensure access to VET supported by increased cooperation between education levels/types (Finland, 2024).

Although Finland scores high on digital skills, e.g. in 2023 taking second place in the EU's Digital economy and society index (DESI) for people aged 16-74 with at least basic skills, the potential of digitalisation is being insufficiently exploited in education and training, including VET. While digital platforms promoting learning have already changed VET, their potential for improving the quality and accessibility of education is still underused. More research is also needed to develop and select effective digital solutions, for example in the field of pedagogy (Finland, 2024).

3. National VET policy priorities

The Finnish national implementation plan, prepared in response to the 2020 Council recommendation on VET and the Osnabrück declaration, and updated in 2024 based on a new government programme, sets a number of priorities that can be grouped as follows.

- (a) Developing VET content to align VET provision with labour market and business needs by ensuring all students have personalised competence development plans, increasing English-language content, enhancing education in financial skills and entrepreneurship, and reinstating physical and health education as compulsory qualification subjects.
- (b) Ensuring VET efficiency and learning support through better student guidance and by enabling early identification of support needs, guaranteeing sufficient instruction in Finnish or Swedish for immigrant students, ensuring access to pedagogical support, and promoting learner overall wellbeing.
- (c) Making a better use of digitalisation in VET to enhance the digital environment in education by improving system interoperability, supporting efficient development and procurement of digital solutions, strengthening the digital capabilities of VET providers, promoting knowledge sharing, and developing innovative learning pathways, pedagogical approaches, and sustainable digital learning materials.

These priorities are aligned with the 2021 Education policy report, which steers the development of the entire education system in the long term, and describes the target state of education and research into the 2030s and towards the 2040, including VET. The priorities also take account of priorities of the government programme, which defines objectives and key measures for the development of VET during the government term. In June 2023, the programme of Prime Minister Petteri Orpo's government replaced the 2019 programme of Prime Minister Sanna Marin's government (Finnish Government, 2023; ReferNet Finland & Cedefop, 2023b). While the former programme focused on expanding access to education, the current one also emphasises improving the impact and efficiency of VET. Addressing inequality, demographic pressures, and underutilised digital potential remain crucial for VET.

4. Main policy developments and progress 2020-24

Due to amendments to the national implementation plan, the main focus of the developments discussed in this section is on the period between 2022 and 2024.

4.1 Developing VET content

Between 2020 and 2022, Finland introduced a series of major initiatives to strengthen the quality, equality, and labour market relevance of VET. The VET Quality Strategy 2030 was actively implemented during this period through government-funded projects: by 2022, 13 development networks involving 98 VET providers had been completed, and an interim evaluation of the three-year term was prepared. Meanwhile, the *Oikeus osata* (Right to Learn) programme (2020-22) focused on improving teaching quality, guidance, and

equality in VET. It financed 42 development projects, with the Ministry of Education and Culture allocating EUR 80 million in 2020 for additional teachers and instructors, EUR 15 million to enhance teaching quality, and a further EUR 70 million in 2022 to 115 education providers.

In 2021, the compulsory education was extended to age 18, including VET. In 2023-24, the extension of compulsory education to 18 years and the introduction of free upper secondary education for learners continued to be actively implemented and monitored. Monitoring focused on enrolment, dropout rates, student well-being, special needs support, and cost effects to assess progress towards reducing dropouts and promoting educational equality. Reports were published on support services for disabled and special needs students.

In 2022, the TUVA transition programme was launched, supporting smoother progression to upper secondary education. In 2023-24, evaluations of new student counselling practices and preparatory education programmes (TUVA) highlighted their effectiveness in supporting transitions and personalised learning, alongside identifying areas for improved coordination and resource allocation to ensure consistent implementation across providers (Cedefop & ReferNet, 2025).

In 2023, a working group on vocational qualifications completed its work, leading the EDUFI to initiate reforms aimed at increasing flexibility in further and specialist vocational qualifications, strengthening green and digital competences, and promoting the use of microcredentials. EDUFI is working to streamline qualification development by reducing the number of qualification units, speeding up the update process, and improving how competence requirements and evaluation criteria are defined. Flexibility is set to be enhanced by allowing qualifications to include units from higher education, other VET qualifications, or locally tailored content (ReferNet Finland & Cedefop, 2024a).

In 2025, the EDUFI began updating the common units in initial VET (IVET) to better respond to the evolving needs of working life and society. The revised units, coming into effect in August 2026, include updated physical and health education competences and support materials to promote active lifestyles. All IVET programmes in Finland comprise both vocational and common units, the latter aimed at strengthening general competences and readiness for further studies. Alongside this, new optional vocational units supporting green and digital transitions are being introduced across further and specialist qualifications in 2025-27. These units focus on digital skills, sustainability, and a culture of innovation. Existing optional units, such as 'Working in an international work environment', have already seen high uptake, with over 2 000 learners enhancing their language and intercultural skills, i.e. competences highly valued in today's labour market (ReferNet Finland & Cedefop, 2025c).

In 2024, the EDUFI launched a new foresight section in the Vipunen education statistics service, offering interactive reports to support education planning, career guidance, and skills forecasting. The reports cover competence needs, workforce education needs, labour market matching, and a new qualification forecast projecting graduate numbers by 2030. Users can customise visualisations and download data for use

in planning and presentations. The initiative, supported by EU Recovery and Resilience Facility funding, is part of EDUFI's effort to digitalise foresight data production. Reports are updated every two years and available in Finnish, Swedish, and English (ReferNet Finland & Cedefop, 2025d).

In 2023, the continuous learning reform, launched in 2020, concluded with a final report highlighting the need for ongoing resources and investment, while the Service Centre for Continuous Learning and Employment (JOTPA, established in 2021) launched a beta version of the Skills Needs Compass and funded projects to improve workforce availability and readiness. In 2024, JOTPA became fully operational, providing funding to VET providers and advancing digital services supporting lifelong learning, career planning, and better alignment of skills with labour market demand (Cedefop & ReferNet, 2025).

As of 2025, the responsibility for organising employment services (nationally called TE) that help people find jobs, develop their skills, and support businesses in hiring employees, is set to be transferred from the central government to municipalities. This change aims to provide more localised and accessible services, better tailored to the needs of each community. Despite this shift, the central government continues to oversee the overall employment strategy and funding (Finland, 2024).

In addition to transferring TE services, the government is reforming job search support for unemployed jobseekers. Under the new customer service model, jobseekers are encouraged to seek employment independently while receiving earlier and more personalised support. To maintain their entitlement to unemployment benefits, jobseekers must apply for a specified number of job opportunities (Finland, 2024).

4.2 Ensuring VET efficiency and learning support

In 2023, Finland began reforming the operational guidance model for VET providers to improve their flexibility and ability to respond to local labour market needs. The current system, where authorisations to offer qualifications are granted individually by the Ministry of Education and Culture, has been seen as too slow and rigid. The new model will allow a selected group of around 40 VET providers to offer qualifications more independently, including in English, during a pilot period 2026-33. This reform is being developed in parallel with updates to the VET funding system (see below) to ensure consistency. A working group was appointed in 2023 to draft the new model, and a separate monitoring group was established with representatives from education providers, students, teachers and other key stakeholders. In 2024, the legislative proposals were prepared, shared for consultation, and submitted to Parliament in October. The new legislation is expected to take effect in 2025 (Cedefop & ReferNet, 2025).

In 2023, Finland also launched a reform of the VET funding system to make it simpler, more transparent, and better aligned with the changing needs of the labour market. The current system, consisting of core, performance-based, and effectiveness-based funding, has been seen as complex and labour-intensive. The reform aims to create stronger incentives for VET providers to support student completion rates, improve employment outcomes, and offer more flexible opportunities such as micro-credentials for adult

learners. A working group was appointed by the Ministry of Education and Culture in October 2023 to prepare legislative changes in parallel with the reform of VET operational guidance. A monitoring group with representatives from key stakeholders was also set up. In 2024, a draft legislation was circulated for feedback, and the government proposal was submitted to Parliament in October. The new funding model is planned to come into force in 2026 (Cedefop & ReferNet, 2025).

In 2023, the country also started improving learning support to VET students, aiming to better meet the needs of students requiring special or intensive support due to learning difficulties, disabilities, or illness. Based on findings from the Finnish Education Evaluation Centre and the 2023 government programme, the reform seeks to clarify the chain of support from early childhood to upper secondary education, strengthen cooperation among educators, and enhance the early identification of support needs. A working group representing key ministries and EDUFI was appointed in September 2023 to prepare legislative changes, supported by consultations with stakeholders and expert input. To aid implementation, EDUFI issued government grants to 63 development projects across Finland in late 2023, with additional projects funded in 2024. These projects focus on improving and expanding intensive special needs support in VET. Draft legislative changes were circulated for comments in summer 2024, and the government proposal was submitted to Parliament in October. The new legislation is planned to come into effect in 2026 (Cedefop & ReferNet, 2025).

Between 2023 and 2024, the integration of immigrants, especially Ukrainian refugees, into Finnish vocational education and the labour market was strengthened. In 2023, legislation and funding initiatives supported easier access to VET for refugees, while targeted training and competence services were offered to meet their specific needs. In 2024, the Ministry of Economic Affairs and Employment launched a comprehensive action plan to enhance employment opportunities for Ukrainians through expanded WBL, recognition of qualifications, supplementary training, and tailored career coaching. Additionally, projects like Vierko focused on improving foreign language teaching and workplace instructor training to better support immigrant students in VET (Cedefop & ReferNet, 2025).

The Development programme for the sustainable development and green transition of VET, launched in 2022, laid the foundation for lasting changes to ensure that VET providers actively promote a sustainable future. In 2023, the programme's flagship project Responsible and sustainable VET (VASKI, 2022-23) was concluded, involving 61 training providers who had prepared sustainability programmes, trained staff, organised events, and carried out carbon footprint assessments. Although the project ended, its outcomes continue to be applied. At the end of 2023, the Ministry of Education and Culture mandated the EDUFI to implement the national VET sustainability roadmap for 2024-27 and to support the ongoing sustainability work of VET providers. In 2024, EDUFI began developing a national monitoring system to track the implementation of the roadmap and the development of sustainability competence. This work was carried out in close cooperation with the Kartalla – på Kartan project, coordinated by SYKLI Environmental

College and funded by EDUFI. The system and its indicators are also part of the EU-funded EQAVET project, which supports quality assurance in VET through European-level cooperation (Cedefop & ReferNet, 2025).

In 2024, a working group appointed by the Ministry of Education and Culture began developing a new graduate tracking model for both vocational and general upper secondary education in Finland. The goal is to complement existing quantitative data with systematic qualitative information on students' experiences transitioning to work or further education. This aims to provide a more comprehensive understanding of the effectiveness and long-term impact of VET. The model will support faster responses to labour market changes and help improve VET quality. The group, which includes experts from the ministry, EDUFI, education providers, and student unions, is tasked with designing, piloting, and implementing the model between 2024 and 2026 (Cedefop & ReferNet, 2025).

4.3 Making a better use of digitalisation in VET

The country has continued implementing measures to make better use of digitalisation in the continuous learning of its population, including VET.

The main digitalisation project Digital service package for continuous learning was launched in 2021 by the Ministry of Education and Culture and the Ministry of Economic Affairs and Employment. It aims to build a national digital service for continuous learning by 2025 that also supports smooth transitions between education and work sectors. Up to 2023, several steering group meetings, webinars and stakeholder forums took place. These activities identified the needs of different actors and experts, promoted dialogue between stakeholders and created a common understanding of the digital service package for continuous learning under development (Cedefop & ReferNet, 2025).

In 2024, the Ministry of Education and Culture has published the architecture report outlining how the digitalisation project strategic goals have been translated into specific digital services, their structures, and required data repositories. It provides detailed architectural models and concludes with a list of new digital services to be developed, which serve as the foundation for achieving the programme's final objectives (Korkala & Vasenius, 2024).

In 2024, the Ministry of Education and Culture and the EDUFI began developing national artificial intelligence (AI) guidelines for teaching and learning across all levels of education, from early childhood to liberal adult education. This initiative supports the goals of Finland's 2023 government programme and the EU's Digital Education Action Plan, aiming to enhance digital skills and ensure effective, responsible use of AI in education. The guidelines are being co-created with education providers, scholars, and experts, and will align with international frameworks, such as UNESCO's AI competency framework for teachers. The design phase included stakeholder engagement through webinars and forums, and the first draft materials, focused on AI basics and common misconceptions, were published for feedback in late 2024 (Cedefop & ReferNet, 2025).

Statistical information in relation to EU targets

Lifelong learning is an integral part of Finland's community: every second 25 to 64-year-old adult (51.8% in 2022) participated in such learning activity in the past year. In 2024, the share of unemployed adults with learning experience in the past 4 weeks was 29.8%, which is 14.5 percentage points (pp) more than the EU average and above the 2025 EU target of 20%. Low-qualified adults also actively participate in the learning activities. The most recent available data (2022) show that every third low-qualified adult (38.1%) received training in the past year. This is more than twice as much as the EU average (18.4%) and 8.1 pp more than the 2025 EU target.

The share of early leavers from education and training (9.6%) in 2024 was above the EU average of 9.3% and the 2030 EU target of below 9%. This share has been growing since 2019 (7.3%) in Finland.

The employment rate for recent IVET graduates (age 20 to 34, 77%) was below the EU average of 80% in 2024, still showing a decent match between VET qualifications and the labour market. A relatively high participation of VET learners in WBL supported this. In 2024, the share of recent IVET graduates (20 to 34-year-old) with a WBL experience as part of their training was 79.3%. This is 14 pp more than the EU average (65.3%).

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: Finland

Type of indicator	Indicator	Last available year	FI	EU-27	Policy Document	EU target (year)
VET for de	eveloping a lifelong learning culture					I
Progress	Adults (25-64 year-olds) with a learning experience in the last 12 months (%)*	2022	51.8	39.5	Skills Agenda Council Resolution on EEA ESPR	50% (2025) 47% (2025) 60% (2030)
Progress	Low-qualified adults with a learning experience in the last 12 months (%)(*)	2022	38.1	18.4	Action Plan Skills Agenda	30% (2025)
Progress	Unemployed adults with a learning experience in the last 4 weeks (%)	2024	29.8	15.3	Skills Agenda	20% (2025)
Context	Employment rate for 20-64 year-olds (%)	2024	77	75.8	ESPR Action Plan	78% (2030)
Context	Early leavers from education and training (%)	2024	9.6	9.3	Council Resolution on EEA	<9% (2030)
Context	NEET rate for 15-29 year-olds (%)	2024	10	11.0	ESPR Action Plan	9% (2030)
VET for Re	esilience, transitions, sustainability and e	excellence		•		
Progress	Adults (16-74 year-olds) with at least basic digital skills (%)	2023	82	55.6	Skills Agenda ESPR	70% (2025) 80% (2030)
Progress	Employment rate for recent IVET graduates (20-34 year-olds) (%)	2024	77	80.0	Action Plan 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	79.3 ^u	65.3	Council Rec on VET Council Resolution on EEA	60% (2025)
Context	25-34 year-olds with tertiary attainment (%)	2024	39.1	44.2	Council Resolution on EEA	45% (2025)
Context	Gender employment gap (%)	2024	0.7	10.0	ESPR Action Plan	To be halved (2030)
Context	People at risk of poverty or social exclusion (1000s)	2024	927	93 333	ESPR Action Plan	15 million decrease (2030)
Context	Employed ICT specialists (1000s)	2024	204	10273.6°	2030 Digital Compass	20 million, with convergence between men and women (2030)
VET for th	e European Education Area					
Progress	Learners in IVET who benefitted from a learning mobility abroad (%)**	2021	0.1	2.1 ^{dv}	Council Rec on VET Skills Agenda Council Rec	8% (2025)
Context	Average number of foreign languages learned in IVET	2023	1.8	1.2 ^d	Europe on the Move	12% (2030)

Available flags: d – definition differs, e – estimated, u – low reliability; 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. European VET policy dashboard

⁽⁴⁾ Definitions on the type of indicators are available.

6. Conclusion

The Finnish national implementation plan for VET responds to long-term challenges such as changing skill needs, demographic pressures, and digitalisation. It is aligned with the 2021 Education policy report, which outlines the development of education and research through the 2030s and toward 2040. However, the shift in government in June 2023 has led to a change in emphasis. While the previous government prioritised broadening access and inclusion, the current programme places stronger focus on improving the efficiency of VET. Addressing persistent inequalities, population ageing, and the underuse of digital potential remains central to achieving the plan's goals.

Between 2023 and 2024, Finland advanced key reforms in VET, guided by national strategies and aligned with priorities. Reforms targeted qualification flexibility, green and digital skills, and lifelong learning, supported by programmes such as Right to Learn and the Sustainable Development of VET. Tools like the Vipunen foresight service, the evolving graduate tracking model and new digital platforms are helping improve planning and skills alignment.

Efforts to improve efficiency and equity included reforms to the operational guidance and funding models for VET providers, enhanced support for students with special needs, and increased focus on sustainability and inclusion. However, many of the related legislative changes remain under parliamentary review, and their impact will depend on effective and timely implementation once adopted.

While Finland leads in digital skills, the education system has yet to fully capitalise on digitalisation. Initiatives such as the Digital Service Package for Continuous Learning and national AI guidelines show progress, but consistent application across providers is still evolving.

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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