



Vocational education and training policy briefs 2024

NETHERLANDS



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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 the Netherlands between 2020 and the end of 2024. 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 the Netherlands' national implementation plan. This 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

Initial vocational education and training (IVET) in the Netherlands is regulated at lower secondary (Secondary Education Act), upper secondary (Vocational education and Adult Education Act) and higher education (Higher Education and Research Act) levels. Continuing vocational education and training (CVET) is driven by the market through providers offering vocational and general courses for jobseekers, the unemployed, employees, the self-employed, and employers (Cedefop & ECBO, 2023).

Graduates from lower secondary pre-vocational programmes (VMBO) and practical labour-oriented programmes (PRO) for learners with special education needs can enter upper secondary VET (MBO). Most publicly funded upper secondary VET is delivered through 41 large multi-sectoral regional training centres (ROC), and 16 occupational colleges offering agricultural and other sector VET programmes. Together, these constitute the 57 MBO institutions that provide VET in the country (Cedefop & ECBO, 2023).

The core of the Dutch VET system is upper secondary vocational education and training, which serves both initial (IVET) and continuing (CVET) vocational education. These MBO programmes are offered through two main pathways: the school-based track (BOL) and the work-based dual track (BBL). In the school-based track, workplace learning accounts for 20% to 60% of the programme, typically through internships. In contrast, the dual track is more focused on practical experience (apprenticeships), with 60% to 80% of the learning taking place directly in the workplace. MBO schools offer two equivalent learning pathways – school-based (BOL) and dual (BBL) – leading to the same diplomas. Upper secondary VET providers are large. In academic year 2023/24, 57 public MBO schools had more than 8 000 learners each on average, including adults (MBO Raad, n.d.). During economic expansion, the dual pathway also expands (Cedefop & ECBO, 2023).

The intended learning outcomes of qualifications are defined within the national qualifications system. Occupational standards may refer to a single qualification profile or

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

to several interrelated ones. Social partners and education institutions, represented in sectoral committees, are legally responsible for developing and maintaining these standards. Once approved by the Ministry of Education, schools – in cooperation with enterprises offering work-based learning develop curricula based on the relevant qualification profiles.

The Netherlands fosters a culture of evidence-informed VET policy and practice, while actively promoting innovation. Recent initiatives include regularly providing VET schools with up-to-date regional labour market information and early school leaving data to support organisational and programme development. Research and data are increasingly used to enhance the quality and effectiveness of VET, both through the involvement of professional researchers and by encouraging teachers to engage in research activities themselves. (Cedefop & ECBO, 2023).

2.2 Challenges

The main challenges the Netherlands has faced in 2023–24 include increasing early school leaving, declining VET enrolments, persistent barriers to equal opportunities for at-risk learners, skills mismatches in the labour market, underperformance in basic skills – particularly among VMBO students – teacher shortages, and insufficient participation in VET-related lifelong learning.

Limited motivation and challenging access to education for at-risk learners are obstacles for equal opportunities. Enrolments in secondary VET education have been decreasing, partly because of demographic changes, while the number of early school leavers is increasing again after years of decline. Discrimination in the workplace remains an unresolved issue and low literacy is a further obstacle on the road to equal opportunities (Netherlands, 2024).

The increased labour market demand for unskilled personnel has made entering the job market appealing for people without qualifications, offering quick but often unsustainable job opportunities. This trend continues. In contrast, persistent labour shortages, particularly in skilled job positions, continue to exist. The limited offer of retraining opportunities in housing, care, climate and energy sectors, in which technical innovation and digitalisation play an important role, is also a challenge for VET (Ministry of Education, Culture and Science of Netherlands et al., 2023; Netherlands, 2024).

The Netherlands currently faces a major societal challenge in terms of basic skills. Results from PISA 2022 confirm a marked increase in underachievement in mathematics, science, and reading, especially among pre-vocational students (VMBO) and students with a migration background. There is a limited attractiveness in the VET teacher profession and opportunities for professional development of teachers. Reasons for teacher shortages in VET also include remuneration and increasing workload. Reform of the teacher qualification system and addressing the shortage of teachers within lower secondary pre-vocational education (VMBO), and labour-oriented practical training (PRO), are also pressing issues. Difficulties in attracting and retaining teachers in schools with disadvantaged student populations persist, highlighting the need for more effective or

extended incentive measures. While research in VET is vital for its development, providers are not yet full and equal partners in research and innovation networks. This is reflected in research funding schemes and calls, which often exclude VET (European Commission, 2024a; European Commission, 2024b; Ministry of Education, Culture and Science of Netherlands et al., 2023; Netherlands, 2024).

Although participation in lifelong learning is generally high in the country compared to the EU average, those who would benefit most from lifelong learning – such as low-skilled individuals, people in temporary jobs, the long-term unemployed, and the inactive – participate less (European Commission, 2024b; Ministry of Education, Culture and Science of Netherlands et al., 2023; Netherlands, 2024).

3. National VET policy priorities

As a response to the [2020 Council Recommendation on VET](#) and the [Osnabrück Declaration](#), the Netherlands prepared a national implementation plan for VET. A first version of the plan was submitted in 2022. In 2024, the plan was updated according to the [Working together on talent agenda for VET 2023-27 \(Joint agenda for VET\)](#). The [national implementation plan](#) refers to the period 2023-27 and focuses on the following priorities to address the identified challenges:

- (a) promoting equal opportunities in VET and making it more inclusive;
- (b) strengthening links between VET and the labour market;
- (c) ensuring future-proof VET by strengthening quality, research and innovation;
- (d) improving flexibility and lifelong learning culture in VET.

These priorities have been developed in alignment with the broader [Coalition agreement 2021-25, Looking after each other, looking ahead to the future](#), which focuses on strengthening VET, and they are also linked to the 2020 published [Road map for lifelong learning](#), which outlines future challenges in lifelong learning and showcases measures tackling them (Ministry of Education, Culture and Science of Netherlands et al., 2023; Netherlands, 2024).

4. Main policy developments 2020-24

4.1 Promoting equal opportunities in VET and making it more inclusive

In 2020, the Minister for Education presented to parliament an [improvement agenda on inclusive education \(2020-2025\)](#), targeting learners with disabilities or migrant backgrounds. Developed with stakeholders, it focuses on four key areas: learner transition and parental involvement; in-school support; cooperation with care services; and guidance during internships and entry into the labour market. A 2022 progress report on the above-mentioned agenda highlighted tools such as 'MBO accessible', a one-stop-shop for support information, and the publication of a school guide for students with chronic conditions. In 2023, further progress was reported in the four key areas. Half of VET colleges had active

parental engagement policies, and cooperation with care services has strengthened. To address challenges in internship guidance for students with support needs, a targeted training programme was launched specifically for them. The 2023 Joint agenda for VET reaffirmed stakeholder commitment to inclusion and equal opportunities. Finally, in 2024, a new scheme on inclusive assessment in VET entered into force, removing barriers by allowing, for example, students with chronic illnesses to receive assessment adjustments without requiring expert certification.

Since 2020, the Minister for Education has issued a series of policy letters addressing [early leaving from education and training](#). The initial letters (2020–22) focused on strengthening apprenticeships (dual pathway), supporting integrated services for young people disconnected from education or work, and reinforcing regional measures such as early identification, parental involvement, and targeted interventions. Despite these efforts, approximately 30 000 students left upper secondary VET without obtaining a diploma in academic year 2021/22 – an increase of 5 000 compared to the previous year. The Council for Upper Secondary VET Schools (MBO Raad, n.d.) identified three main causes: mental well-being issues, poor study choices – partly due to limited orientation opportunities during the pandemic – and a tight labour market with high demand for workers and low entry barriers. Statistical data corroborate this trend: although the Netherlands had a low early school leaving rate of 5.3% in 2021, compared to the EU average of 9.7%, [dropout rates in Dutch VET have consistently been higher than in general education](#) (ReferNet Netherlands & Cedefop, 2023a). In response, the 2023 Joint agenda for VET introduced renewed commitments to address dropout rates. In March 2024, the Minister submitted an Early school leaving action plan to parliament, focusing on the above-mentioned causes and promoting stronger cooperation between schools and municipalities. Additional funding has been allocated to support implementation, with the goal of reducing the number of early school leavers to below 18 000 by 2026.

In 2020, as part of the [Equal opportunities action plan](#), a campaign was launched to combat workplace discrimination, including in internship recruitment processes affecting applicants from different backgrounds. That same year, the education and labour ministries, together with the Council for Upper Secondary VET schools (MBO Raad, n.d.), established the Knowledge Centre for Equal Opportunities, Diversity and Inclusion (Kennispunt GDKI). The centre aimed to support MBO schools, VET teachers, learners, and apprenticeship applicants by providing information and offering e-learning training on equal opportunities in internships. However, a 2023 evaluation of the Action Plan concluded that none of the measures implemented were effective, and that some interventions inadvertently increased inequality during the transition from VET to universities of applied sciences (HBO); funding also lacked substantive allocation criteria. In August 2024, the Knowledge Centre ceased operations. The MBO Council remains committed to the themes addressed by the MBO Equal Opportunities, Diversity and Inclusion Knowledge Centre, placing particular emphasis on the theme of Equal Opportunities due to its social urgency.

In 2023, the Dutch government advanced [equal treatment for VET students](#) by improving their participation in student life, aligning financial provisions, such as loan interest rates, with those in higher education, and strengthening student councils in collaboration with the Youth Organisation for VET (JOB) and the Council for Upper Secondary VET Schools (MBO Raad, n.d.).

In 2022, the government launched an [initiative to improve mental health](#) across society, including the VET sector. The focus is on prevention, awareness-raising, and providing supportive tools across five domains: society, neighbourhood, education, workplace, and the online space. For VET, the aim remains to ensure learners are in a safe school environment. Following the pandemic's impact on over 500 000 VET learners, the National Institute for Public Health and the Environment (RIVM) published two fact sheets: one presenting research on the well-being of VET students during the COVID-19 pandemic, and another outlining approaches to monitor their mental well-being in the future. In 2023, the first MBO integrated safety monitor highlighted that while most students and staff feel safe, experiences vary by gender, age, background, or disability. A strong link was found between perceived safety and satisfaction. In 2024, an in-depth study revealed that performance pressure and stress among VET students stem mainly from multiple responsibilities in study, work, internships, and home life. The Minister acknowledged the findings and called for further analysis and action in cooperation with stakeholders.

In 2023, the Netherlands intensified efforts to combat [internship discrimination](#) (ReferNet Netherlands & Cedefop, 2024a) through the signing of the [VET Internship pact \(Stagepact MBO\)](#) by the Ministers for Education and Social Affairs and key stakeholders. The pact aims to enhance practical, work-based learning through internships and apprenticeships, ensuring valuable and safe first labour market experiences for VET learners. It addresses four main themes: improving internship supervision, [eliminating internship discrimination](#) (ReferNet Netherlands & Cedefop, 2024a), realising sufficient internship opportunities, and providing appropriate compensation (Ministry of Education, Culture and Science, 2023). A key measure under the pact is the introduction of internship matching, where students are placed in companies based on learning goals, promoting fairer opportunities. Following the signing of the pact, VET colleges started developing their individual quality agendas ⁽²⁾. By June 2024, these agendas were published online, marking the start of the implementation phase. Monitoring studies on this initiative also began, with initial results expected in November 2024.

4.2 Strengthening links between VET and the labour market

Since 2022, the EUR 25 million Skilled with skills programme has supported the development of [CompetentNL](#), a national online skills dictionary designed to describe skills as precisely as possible for employers, job seekers, and trainers. The tool aims to make skill profiles and vacancy notices more transparent, supporting at the same time also

⁽²⁾ Quality agendas (kwaliteitsagenda's) are strategic documents developed by individual VET colleges to set out how they plan to improve the quality of vocational education over a given period. These agendas are institution-specific, but align with national priorities set in frameworks like the 2023 Joint agenda for VET and the VET Internship Pact 2023-27.

training programmes design, helping to better align education with labour market needs. In 2023, the Cooperation Organisation for VET and the Labour Market (SBB) confirmed the potential of CompetentNL to improve the relevance and flexibility of qualifications and support lifelong learning. Between 2022 and 2023, pilot projects and stakeholder consultations helped refine the tool to better meet user needs. In June 2024, the Ministry of Education, Culture and Science (OCW), the Ministry of Social Affairs and Employment (SZW), and the Ministry of Economic Affairs and Climate Policy (EZK) approved the further development of the first publicly accessible version of CompetentNL.

In 2022, the Educating with Opportunities (Kansrijk Opleiden) taskforce was established by the Cooperation Organisation for VET and the Labour Market (SBB). It brought together representatives from education and business to revise the definition and approach of [Macro-efficiency in VET](#) – an assessment mechanism for VET providers, originally introduced in 2015 to address skills mismatches. The taskforce recommended adopting a promising training model, in which VET institutions and companies jointly train learners for sustainable careers. As part of its recommendation, the taskforce proposed five objectives to support the joint training model: improving transition pathways, information and orientation, school-business cooperation, VET infrastructure, and regional collaboration. The SBB Board began translating this advice into action, publishing the Atlas VET and labour market, a dashboard informing on current education and labour market developments. However, in 2024, labour market representatives on the SBB Board withdrew from the project, citing a lack of binding agreements, leading to the joint initiative's termination. While education representatives expressed regret, both parties agreed to discontinue collaboration. In response to declining student numbers, the minister requested targeted regional plans and allocated EUR 90 million for 2025-27 to support regional VET quality, institutional cooperation, and potential mergers.

In 2023, the Netherlands launched the 8-year [Npuls programme](#) to strengthen digital skills and modernise vocational and higher education. Funded with EUR 560 million from the National growth fund, the programme supports education institutions in becoming more agile, digitally equipped, and responsive to labour market demands. It operates through four key components: transformation hubs (focused on themes like agile education and digital learning materials), sectoral ICT infrastructure, shared knowledge exchange, and Centres for Teaching and Learning. That same year, the Digital proficiency in VET programme also began, aiming to enhance teachers' ICT skills in vocational education. In 2024, 14 institutions received grants to set up Centres for Teaching and Learning, and the Expedition AI initiative was launched to define the role of artificial intelligence in education. A national AI platform was also established.

To accelerate [climate action and address related labour market challenges](#), the Netherlands launched two complementary initiatives in 2023: the National programme for circular economy 2023-30 and the Implementation agenda for climate and energy. The Circular Economy programme sets the ambition of transitioning to a fully circular economy by 2050. The Implementation agenda, issued by the Ministry of Education, outlines strategies for embedding climate goals into education, research, and the creative

industries. In the context of VET, it focuses on four priorities: promoting sustainability in education, including new qualification development, addressing engineering and ICT skill shortages through lifelong learning and STEM outreach, facilitating the transition to sustainable educational infrastructure, and enhancing the participation of women in engineering. In parallel, the Action plan for green and digital jobs was launched to tackle labour shortages in sectors critical to green and digital transitions, such as technology, construction, energy, and ICT. In December 2023, the Minister for Economic Affairs and Climate reported initial progress to Parliament, citing successful investments, partnerships, and innovation initiatives. Towards supporting the green transition through VET research, [practorates](#) (Bremer, et al., 2024). ⁽³⁾ offer VET students the opportunity to get involved in [research projects and learn about new technologies and agricultural sector innovations](#) (ReferNet Netherlands & Cedefop, 2025).

In 2023, an evaluation of the Dutch [subsidy scheme for workplace learning](#) revealed increased employer participation and positive feedback – 28% of employers reported the subsidy motivated them to offer apprenticeships. Based on these findings, the scheme was extended through 2028 to continue supporting dual VET (BBL) provision. However, the 2025 national education budget announced a significant funding reduction, with the annual allocation decreasing from EUR 274 000 in 2024 to EUR 79 000 by 2029. These proposed cuts remain provisional, with the education ministry yet to determine how they will be implemented.

4.3 Ensuring future-proof VET by strengthening quality, research and innovation

The [Masterplan basic skills](#), introduced in 2022, is a comprehensive policy programme launched in response to declining performance in [Dutch, mathematics, citizenship, and digital literacy](#) (ReferNet Netherlands, & Cedefop, 2023b). In 2023, a dedicated policy letter on tackling basic skills in VET outlined a strategic approach based on three pillars: improving the quality of education and assessment, strengthening teacher competence, and introducing a robust monitoring system. Curriculum reforms and pilot projects were initiated to better align education with labour market needs, while national standards for exams and project-based learning models were introduced. To improve professionalisation of basic skills teachers in VET, the ministry committed EUR 30 million annually for professional development. Furthermore, a national network was established to enhance teaching quality. Additionally, a learning network on arithmetic in MBO was launched involving 32 educational teams across four regions, with expert support to develop tailored teaching strategies. The monitoring of students' basic skills was incorporated into the broader VET monitoring framework, including data from employers and student feedback. In 2024, the government responded to findings on teachers' diverse educational backgrounds by proposing additional qualification requirements for non-specialist teachers.

⁽³⁾ Practorates are teams focused on innovation and practice-oriented research in VET, consisting of practors and teacher-researchers. They have a strong practical foundation in a specific sector or area of educational innovation.

To boost accessibility, an extra EUR 10 million was allocated for free learning materials in Dutch and arithmetic.

In 2022, the education ministry proposed measures to strengthen [citizenship education](#) in VET, including revising its content and improving teacher training. An expert group was appointed to monitor quality and, in 2023, the group issued [20 qualification requirements](#) (ReferNet Netherlands & Cedefop, 2023b) to be assessed through school-based exams. Building on this, the Minister for Education announced plans to recalibrate these requirements and amend the Education and vocational education act (WEB) to formalise VET institutions' responsibilities in citizenship education. However, legal changes have been postponed until 2026; in the meantime, a national institutional exam on this topic is being developed. As mentioned above, an annual budget of EUR 30 million has been allocated for teacher professionalisation in basic skills, including Dutch, numeracy, digital literacy, and notably, citizenship education, and an additional EUR 10 million has been made available to provide free citizenship learning materials.

In 2022, the Work agenda Together for the best education was launched following consultations between the education ministry and key stakeholders. The agenda is structured around four main lines of action: creating an attractive teaching profession through professional development and flexible career paths; strengthening regional cooperation to tackle local staffing challenges and support research and innovation; updating the teacher qualification system by revising competence requirements and enabling new teaching routes, especially in VET and special education; and promoting a learning education system that supports continuous development and knowledge sharing. Regarding [teacher qualifications](#), in 2023 the National Working Group Qualified (LWB) proposed grouping qualifications into five broad clusters to better align with evolving vocational curricula and labour market demands. The ministry endorsed the proposal, with legislative changes scheduled to begin in 2024. Additional pilot initiatives are being implemented to modernise the qualification system, such as retraining teachers in lower secondary pre-vocational education (VMBO).

Building on the Teacher force action plan (2017) and the Sustainable working in education action plan, [teacher shortages](#) across primary, secondary, and upper secondary general and vocational education have remained a key policy priority. In 2022, was introduced, placing strong emphasis on a regional approach to address these shortages. It aims to strengthen local collaboration among stakeholders such as school boards, teacher training institutions, professional associations, and researchers. By early 2024, 29 education regions ⁽⁴⁾ were operational, each developing tailored strategies to address local shortages. These efforts are supported by the newly established Realisation unit, a central coordinating body established by the Ministry of Education. This unit provides guidance, support, and oversight for the implementation of specific initiatives. In 2024, the education regions received funding to implement a coordinated approach to key challenges.

(4) An educational region (onderwijsregio in Dutch) is a formal collaboration area where key education stakeholders work together to address shared challenges—primarily teacher shortages—in a coordinated and structured way.

According to the Trend report on the teacher labour market 2023, teacher shortages in VET are becoming more acute and subject-specific, with 43% of the 5 530 vacancies in 2022 related to teaching – mainly in Dutch, healthcare, economics, technical fields, and mathematics. Despite high levels of interest, reflected in high application numbers, and stable student enrolments, structural challenges and rising retirement rates highlight the need for more targeted recruitment and long-term workforce planning.

In 2022, the [Knowledge-sharing programme](#) was launched by the National Educational Research Agency (NRO) as part of the Development agenda for a strengthened knowledge infrastructure in education. It aims to enhance VET quality by promoting research-based practices among VET professionals through four pillars: an accessible online platform for educational research; practical recommendations for applying research findings; thematic national meetings; and the integration of research-based knowledge in guiding materials and events. In 2023, the programme focused on four VET-relevant themes: VET schools as evidence-informed professional learning organisations, hybrid learning environments, quality of teaching, and didactics in general education subjects. Since 2023, VET teachers have also been eligible to apply for Comenius Teaching Fellow grants – 28 were awarded in 2024, totalling EUR 1.4 million. In the same year, the Council for Upper Secondary VET Schools (MBO Raad, n.d.) joined the national Knowledge Coalition, [strengthening VET's role in research and innovation networks](#) (ReferNet Netherlands & Cedefop, 2024b).

4.4 Improving flexibility and lifelong learning culture in VET

In 2020, the Dutch government launched the [Roadmap for lifelong learning](#), integrating existing and new measures into a unified strategy built around four pillars: boosting individual participation in lifelong learning; encouraging employer investment, especially in SMEs; increasing flexibility through modular and accessible education options; and cultivating a learning culture through awareness campaigns and practical support tools. Since then, results have varied across measures. The STAP (Incentive for Improvement of Labour Market Position) budget, originally intended to support individual upskilling, was discontinued in 2023 due to misuse.

Furthermore, the [Leeroverzicht](#) platform, launched in late 2022, offers an independent and comprehensive overview of available training courses in the Netherlands and continues to improve access to lifelong learning opportunities and funding. In 2023, a Learning culture programme was introduced to strengthen lifelong learning in SMEs through awareness, facilitation, and knowledge sharing. To further enhance the role of formal education in lifelong learning, the government adopted in 2023 a seven-step agenda aimed at improving access, linking formal and informal learning, and promoting micro-credentials and dual learning. Key policy and legal decisions on this agenda will be taken by the next government, formed in 2024.

In 2024, efforts to improve the effectiveness of the LLL offer continued primarily through the Lifelong learning catalyst and the SME-focused Learning culture programme.

The [Lifelong learning catalyst project](#) (2022–27), funded with EUR 392 million, aims to align regional training with labour market needs through four building blocks: future skills mapping, transition-related training, encouraging educational institutions to offer scalable, high-quality, and accessible lifelong learning solutions that support smooth transitions, and finally fostering a learning culture. Since the start of its implementation phase in mid-2023, two application rounds have taken place. The first round in October 2023 received 43 proposals – 9 for transition-related training and 34 for institutional professionalisation. In 2024, a second round led to the selection of 36 new projects under these two building blocks. The fourth building block, focused on learning culture, is still under development, with stakeholder input gathered during the February 2024 National lifelong learning Conference (LLO Conference).

In 2020, the Ministry of Social Affairs and Employment (SZW) launched the [Learning and development incentive scheme \(SLIM-regeling\)](#) to promote lifelong learning in SMEs. The scheme allows SMEs, large companies, partnerships, and education institutions to apply for subsidies supporting activities such as skills screening, career guidance, and employee development. As of the first baseline evaluation report ⁽⁵⁾, 2 294 applications were submitted, and 765 grants awarded, out of which 673 to SMEs. In 2023 and 2024, subsidy ceilings were increased to accommodate growing demand: from EUR 17.5 to 20.5 million for partnerships, and from EUR 14.2 to 14.57 million for SMEs, with a further raise to EUR 16.13 million for the September 2024 SME call. An interim evaluation in April 2024 confirmed that implementation is on track, with most projects completed and integrated into company policies. The most adopted activity was the development of methods to stimulate employee growth, including systems for personal development discussions (i.e. structured conversations between employees and managers focusing on skills development, career goals, and training needs). Reported outcomes include more strategic approaches to learning, improved understanding of staff development needs, and stronger learning cultures within SMEs. New application rounds took place in March, June, and September 2024, with demand exceeding budgets, prompting the ministry to allocate an additional EUR 5 million for partnerships.

In 2023, the Netherlands continued [facilitating access to VET for adults](#) by advancing efforts to decouple elective modules from specific qualifications in VET, allowing MBO schools, often attended by both young learners and adults, to determine their offer in consultation with businesses. A legislative amendment was submitted to enable this reform, with implementation foreseen for August 2025.

In 2024, a national pilot on [microcredentials](#) was launched under the Npuls programme in collaboration with the Council for VET Schools (MBO Raad, n.d.), involving VET colleges that are accessible to both young learners and adults. The pilot aims to explore the added value of microcredentials for VET and strengthen their portability across institutions. Meanwhile, all schools were required to register programmes and certificates on the

⁽⁵⁾ The baseline evaluation report of the SLIM scheme provides initial monitoring data on the number of applications submitted and grants awarded, broken down by applicant type (SMEs, large companies, and partnerships). It serves as a reference point for assessing the scheme's uptake and effectiveness in future evaluations.

platforms RIO or EDU-DEX by summer 2024, to ensure accurate visibility on the platform [Leeroverzicht.nl](https://leeroverzicht.nl), but inconsistencies prompted calls for improved registration. Additionally, sectoral development paths were introduced to support workers and job seekers in shortage sectors such as childcare, healthcare, and green technology through clearer career progression and targeted training.

5. Statistical information in relation to EU targets

The Netherlands shows good progress towards the EU targets related to VET. The employment rate of recent IVET graduates (aged 20–34) remains consistently high. In 2024, it stood at 90.5%, slightly lower than in 2023 (91.6%) but still well above the EU-27 average of 80% and exceeding the EU target of 82% by 2025.

The proportion of recent IVET graduates with a work-based learning experience is also a strong point. In 2024, 94.3% of IVET graduates in the Netherlands had participated in work-based learning as part of their studies, a slight decrease from 2023 (94.9%), yet significantly outperforming the EU average of 65.3%, and already meeting the EU target of 60% by 2025.

Regarding adult participation in learning, the Netherlands remains among the leading countries in Europe. In 2022, 56.1% of adults aged 25–64 reported a learning experience in the previous 12 months, compared to the EU average of 39.5%, and surpassing the 2025 EU target of 47%. Some subgroups also show increasing trends. For example, the share of unemployed adults with recent learning experience rose slightly from 29.1% in 2023 to 31.4% in 2024 – a figure that is still more than double the EU-27 average of 14.1%.

Other indicators are worth noting. The NEET rate (15–29-year-olds) in the Netherlands rose slightly from 4.7% (2023) to 4.9% (2024), whereas the EU average declined over the same period (from 11.2% to 11.0%). Similarly, the share of early leavers from education and training increased from 6.2% in 2023 to 7.0% in 2024, though remaining below the EU average of 9.3%.

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

Type of indicator ⁽⁶⁾	Indicator	Last available year	NL	EU-27	Policy Document	EU target (year)
VET for developing a lifelong learning culture						
Progress	Adults (25-64 year-olds) with a learning experience in the last 12 months (%)*	2022	56.1	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	33.3	18.4	Skills Agenda	30% (2025)
Progress	Unemployed adults with a learning experience in the last 4 weeks (%)	2023	27.4	14.1	Skills Agenda	20% (2025)
Context	Employment rate for 20-64 year-olds (%)	2023	83.5	75.3	ESPR Action Plan	78% (2030)
Context	Early leavers from education and training (%)	2023	7.0	9.3	Council Resolution on EEA	<9% (2030)
Context	NEET rate for 15-29 year-olds (%)	2023	4.9	11	ESPR Action Plan	9% (2030)
VET for Resilience, transitions, sustainability and excellence						
Progress	Adults (16-74 year-olds) with at least basic digital skills (%)	2023	82.70	55.56	Skills Agenda ESPR Action Plan	70% (2025) 80% (2030)
Progress	Employment rate for recent IVET graduates (20-34 year-olds) (%)	2023	91.6	80	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 (%)	2023	94.9	64.5	Council Rec on VET Council Resolution on EEA	60% (2025)
Context	25-34 year-olds with tertiary attainment (%)	2023	54.5	43.1	Council Resolution on EEA	45% (2025)
Context	Gender employment gap (%)	2023	7.8	10.2	ESPR Action Plan	To be halved (2030)
Context	People at risk of poverty or social exclusion (1000s)	2022	2 863	95 284	ESPR Action Plan	15 million decrease (2030)
Context	Employed ICT specialists (1000s)	2023	673.7	9 789.2 ^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	1.1 ^z	2.1 ^{dV}	Council Rec on VET Skills Agenda	8% (2025)
Context	Average number of foreign languages learned in IVET	2021	0.9	1.2		

Available flags: [e: estimated, d: definition differs, V: Cedefop estimate, z – not applicable.

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

** Provisional estimates affected by the COVID-19 pandemic.

Source: Cedefop. (n.d.). [European VET policy dashboard](https://www.cedefop.europa.eu/en/tools/european-vet-policy-dashboard).

⁽⁶⁾ Definitions on the type of indicators are available at <https://www.cedefop.europa.eu/en/tools/european-vet-policy-dashboard/methodology>

6. Conclusion

The Netherlands has made good progress across all priority areas set out in its national implementation plan for VET. Initiatives implemented between 2020 and 2024 indicate sustained efforts to modernise VET, improve equity, and strengthen its responsiveness to societal and labour market needs.

On promoting equal opportunities and inclusion in VET, the Netherlands has strengthened institutional support for learners with diverse needs, enhanced parental engagement, and improved cooperation with care services. Targeted training initiatives and support tools have been introduced for students requiring additional assistance, and measures to tackle workplace discrimination have been prioritised. However, persistent challenges remain, including uneven student support and limited staff expertise (European Commission, 2024a; European Commission, 2024b). Despite renewed policy attention and funding, early leaving from VET has risen, and workplace discrimination remains inadequately addressed. Unresolved issues suggest that greater emphasis is needed on targeted interventions for at-risk learners and more consistent implementation of the inclusion measures set out in the national priorities and relevant policy frameworks.

In its efforts to strengthen links between VET and the labour market, the Netherlands introduced several initiatives to improve alignment between VET and sectoral skill demands. The development of CompetentNL, sectoral strategies for the green and digital transition, and improved internship governance are noteworthy. However, as also reflected in the 2024 country-specific recommendation, addressing sector-specific skills mismatches and underutilised labour potential remains a pressing area for improvement. The decline in basic skills is among the most significant in the EU and poses risks to labour market integration, and the country's long-term productivity and competitiveness (European Commission, 2024b). Moreover, continued efforts in governance, regional coordination, and monitoring will be essential to meet the national 2050 climate neutrality and digital competitiveness goals.

Progress has been made in ensuring high-quality, future-proof VET through research and innovation. National strategies to strengthen citizenship and basic skills, improve teacher competence, and fund professional development have laid the groundwork for system-wide improvement. VET teachers' increasing participation in knowledge-sharing initiatives and national research platforms signals its growing role in innovation networks. Despite measures, teacher shortages persist, exacerbated by low remuneration and increasing workloads, which continue to undermine the attractiveness of the profession. Although steps have been taken to improve quality in VET, students in pre-vocational secondary education (VMBO) still performed poorly in the 2022 PISA assessment, highlighting the need for continued attention and targeted support in this track (European Commission, 2024a, European Commission, 2024b).

With regard to flexibility and lifelong learning, the Netherlands has taken important steps to broaden access and participation through modular learning, microcredentials, and regional cooperation projects. Initiatives such as the Lifelong Learning Catalyst and the SLIM-regeling for SMEs have contributed to embedding a learning culture in regions and

workplaces. However, challenges persist in programme registration, visibility, and engagement among older and practically trained adults. Further emphasis on more coordinated efforts in learner guidance and accessibility will be essential to reaching underrepresented groups.

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