



Vocational education and training policy briefs 2024

NORWAY



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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 Norway 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 2025 identified in the Norway's national implementation plan. This VET 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 Norwegian school system is inclusive and free of charge. All young people completing compulsory schooling have a statutory right to three years of upper secondary education. Approximately half of these students choose from 10 VET programmes, which can lead to more than 180 different trade or journeyman's certificates. Vocational programmes can be completed either fully in vocational schools or as part of a company-based apprenticeship. VET qualifications also give access to higher education after a 1-year bridging course (Cedefop & Norwegian Directorate for Higher Education and Skills, 2023b).

The adult education system in Norway has a long and well-established tradition. With the increasing importance of lifelong learning, there are now statutory rights to adult primary and secondary education and free tuition for migrants. Employers and non-governmental organisations (NGOs) can access funding to train employees with low basic skills. In 2020, a skills reform was launched, focusing on upskilling and reskilling the workforce. Validation of non-formal and informal learning is possible at all levels of education and training and can be used to acquire modules or full qualifications.

The education ministry is responsible for education and training at all levels. The regional county authorities are responsible for providing general education and vocational training, distributing the State budget for VET, and ensuring apprenticeship placements and supervision (Cedefop & Norwegian Directorate for Higher Education and Skills, 2023a). The municipalities are responsible for basic social services, including primary and lower secondary education, and have substantial autonomy in allocating resources between sectors and providing services. The social partners and relevant stakeholders are involved at all levels of VET development.

A new Education Act (*Opplæringslova*), adopted in 2023, came into force on 1 August 2024. This Act replaced the previous Education Act of 1998, incorporating a number of key reforms at all levels of education. Many of the measures planned by the government in its

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

⁽²⁾ For some developments, the information available until mid-2025 has been included.

2021–25 policy agenda (the Hurdal 2021–25 platform), also reflected in the NIP, were integrated into the new Act.

2.2 Challenges

The main challenges that Norway faced during 2020-24 include meeting the growing demand for a skilled workforce and providing employment and learning opportunities for all citizens.

The Norwegian economy is experiencing rapid changes driven by the widespread adoption of technology, an increasing focus on sustainability, and the effects of COVID-19. While Norway remains one of the most productive countries, its labour productivity growth is currently below the OECD average. Improving skills among the workforce could help stimulate productivity growth (OECD, 2024).

Statistics Norway estimated a shortage of nearly 100 000 skilled workers by 2035. Many companies have already reported that this shortage is causing them to lose business (Cedefop & Norwegian Directorate for Higher Education and Skills, 2023). The difficulties in finding skilled labour are particularly pronounced in the technical and healthcare sectors, with vacancies in occupations requiring vocational or higher education being the hardest to fill. The country's VET system also lacks a comprehensive tertiary level and offers limited progression opportunities (OECD, 2024).

Technological development and the transformation of the economy are increasing the range and complexity of the tasks expected of a skilled worker. This trend has implications for education and training programmes, progression routes, and opportunities for people to improve their skills, regardless of location. Individuals need to be able to upskill and reskill to keep up with changes in the labour market.

The number of school leavers grew during COVID-19 and has not yet recovered to pre-pandemic levels. Not all initial VET (IVET) students can secure an apprenticeship, and many fail to obtain the corresponding qualification, with significant territorial variations. In 2023, the share of young people (aged 15–29) who were not in education, training or work was 6.4%, and nearly a quarter of individuals aged 16 and above in Norway only have lower secondary education (EQF3) (Haukås, 2024).

Low adaptation of VET to the needs of increasingly diverse students (including adults) and the demands of the working world are reasons for not achieving higher completion rates.. As a result, Norway relies on adults, including migrants, to acquire a trade or journeyman's certificate and to maintain their qualifications throughout their lives to bridge the skills gaps. This means providing more education and lifelong learning opportunities for adults, which increases the demand for qualified teachers to cater for diverse student profiles in well-equipped training institutions suitable for the modern workforce.

In summary, the VET system needs to be more responsive to economic and social demands, provide high quality VET, and offer a professional alternative equivalent to university.

3. National VET policy priorities

The [National implementation plan](#) (NIP) (Norway, 2022) presents Norway's actions to implement the Osnabrück Declaration on VET as a factor for recovery and a fair transition to the digital and green economy. The NIP builds on three strategic documents: the [priorities announced by the government in 2021](#) (the Hurdal platform 2021-25) (Norwegian Government, 2021); the Completion reform (Fullføringsreformen) (see 4.1); and the Skills reform. The successive agreements between the national authorities and the social partners underpin the cooperation between the parties on apprenticeships.

The overall aim of the NIP is to provide people with the vocational and academic skills necessary for employment, education and participation in society. This goal is addressed through the following three objectives:

- (a) strengthening VET by ensuring all upper secondary school students have access to apprenticeship, employment, education, and lifelong learning;
- (b) promoting lifelong learning by providing opportunities for upskilling and reskilling to close the skills gap between the labour market and workers skills;
- (c) modernising training institutions by providing them with the necessary knowledge, equipment and learning spaces to integrate practical training in all subjects.

4. Main policy developments and progress 2020-24

4.1 Strengthening VET

Several policy measures were implemented to prevent an increase in early school leaving and to provide students with opportunities to remain in education and training and gain a qualification.

The 2021 [Completion reform](#) (Cedefop & ReferNet, 2025; ReferNet Norway & Cedefop, 2023a) is one of Norway's flagship reforms. It aims to improve the content of upper secondary education so that, by 2030, nine out of ten learners complete their chosen programmes and achieve the necessary competence or certification to either enter the workforce or continue to higher education. It introduced the right to an apprenticeship, or an equivalent opportunity, regardless of place of residence, and the right to vocational requalification for adults. Both rights were included in the 2023 Education Act.

In 2023, a report presented as part of the Completion reform, explored ways to increase flexibility in the [admission rules for upper secondary education](#). It aimed to prevent students with good grades in common core subjects outpace those good in the vocational programme subjects when applying for a VET programme. Based on the report's conclusions, the Directorate for Education and Training recommended keeping the current admission rules and awaiting further information on the new curricula established in 2020 before making any changes.

The 2021 [Strategy for higher vocational education](#) aimed to strengthen higher vocational education to meet labour market demands. Among the measures outlined in this strategy was the provision for institutions to have greater autonomy in establishing their

own academic programmes, piloting a vocational centre of excellence or establishing a system for distributing new study places (ReferNet Norway & Cedefop, 2021).

In 2023-24, amendments to Act No 28 on higher vocational education were approved. These amendments allowed vocational schools to seek institutional accreditation and independently establish study programmes. They also allowed higher vocational education providers to apply for exemptions from certain regulations and clarified students' rights in line with a new Universities and Colleges Act.

In 2023, the Norwegian Agency for Quality Assurance in Education (NOKUT) published an evaluation of the 2011 National Qualifications Framework (NQF). The evaluation recommended: ensuring the appropriate level for all qualifications; allowing higher academic education at level 5 and higher vocational education at levels above level 5; and including qualifications outside the formal education system, along with recognising different forms of continuing and non-formal learning.

These recommendations contributed to the discussions on a [white paper on higher vocational education](#), published in spring 2025. This white paper⁽³⁾ outlines the government's strategy to strengthen and expand higher vocational education (fagskoleutdanning) as a key response to Norway's growing need for skilled workers in the context of a green and digital transition. It opens higher vocational education to NQF/EQF levels 6 and 7 and grants higher VET providers greater autonomy –more flexibility in managing their funds – and new powers to improve this sector operations (ReferNet Norway & Cedefop, 2025b).

Norway has a long-standing tradition of successful partnerships between public authorities, educational institutions and employers. The [Social contract for VET 2022-26](#), agreed with the social partners, aims to guarantee apprenticeship places for all qualified students. The government allocates funds to increase the number of apprenticeships, improve the quality and relevance of training and support apprentices, while counties, along with student and teacher organisations and local partners, are responsible for defining the most effective use of the funds. These include grants for local initiatives within a sector or a specific vocational qualification.

In 2022, an [apprenticeship portal](#) was established to streamline communication regarding available apprenticeships and to help identify the needs of apprentices at the national level. Funding rose by 31.1% from 2022 to 2024, and the number of apprenticeship contracts rose from 78.2% in 2021 to 80.6% in 2022, and 80.5% in 2023.

The influx of migrants, especially from Ukraine, raised the need for clearer information on the recognition of foreign qualifications in Norway. The [White Paper, Integration policy - making demands and offering opportunities](#) aims to facilitate the rapid integration of new residents and help them become active members of society. It includes developing short vocational programmes as part of the introduction programme to enable individuals to enter their professions more quickly, establishing recognition systems for foreign vocational and higher education qualifications, and improving user guidance and access to information. In

(3) A White Paper is a non-binding government document presented to Parliament that outlines policy intentions and guides future legislation and public debate.

2024, the recognition scheme for foreign vocational education and training was expanded, including more subjects and countries.

Norway considers [participation in Erasmus+ and the European Education Area](#) crucial for improving education quality and relevance. For this reason, it has developed a strategy to provide learners, teachers and staff with more opportunities for intercultural learning and exchange in Europe (Norwegian Ministry of Education, 2021). Information meetings, application writing courses, experience sharing meetings, for example, are some of the activities carried out in 2024 as part of implementing this strategy.

The Norwegian Directorate for Higher Education and Skills conducted a survey of vocational schools to learn more about their international collaboration. The findings, published in 2024, revealed that while many schools are involved in these efforts, their participation is usually limited to activities like staff exchanges, joint projects, and occasional internships for students, especially among larger technical schools. The survey also highlighted some challenges, such as differences in educational systems and difficulties in finding relevant partners. These insights helped shape the White Paper on higher education (ReferNet Norway & Cedefop, 2024b), released in spring 2025.

On 24 March 2023, the Government published the [White Paper \(Meld. St. 14\(2022-2023\)\)](#), [Overview of Skills Needs in Norway](#). This document outlines the most important skills required from the workforce. To support the green transition, the government prioritises increasing the number of publicly funded student places in higher vocational education, especially in technical fields, health and sustainability. A total of 500 new publicly funded student places have been allocated for 2024 (Haukås, 2024).

This White Paper also calls for further developing the recognition scheme for foreign higher vocational education (EQF level 5). In this sense, the evaluation findings published in August 2023 highlight some limitations in the current scheme, such as the lack of common international criteria and the observation that specific vocational skills are more significant for employment than overall educational attainment (ReferNet Norway, & Cedefop, 2024a). These insights are being considered to improve the recognition scheme of foreign higher vocational education (Haukås, 2024).

The Norwegian ENIC-NARIC centre led a 2-year project to develop NARIC into a network for the recognition of vocational qualifications. The final report of the project, which concluded in December 2024, recommended gradually extending the scope of the ENIC-NARIC networks to include VET qualifications, starting with more formal sharing of information on VET systems and qualifications among the network members (ReferNet Norway & Cedefop, 2024c).

4.2 Promoting lifelong learning

Norway is taking steps towards providing flexible upskilling and reskilling options for adults to meet the demands for new skills.

The [Skills reform](#) sets the context for such measures by targeting the labour market through better link between supply and demand, the education system by offering more

flexible and work-related training for adults, and individuals by providing flexible loans and scholarships.

In 2023, the Norwegian State Loan Fund started developing a new loan solution for adults combining work and part-time study. Following the public consultation period, the Ministry of Education and Research was reviewing proposals for amendments to the Education Support Act during 2024, with changes expected to be approved in autumn 2025. The changes will make student loans available to adults studying part-time and shorter courses for the first time.

The [white paper on professional studies](#), approved in 2024, addressed the high demand for skilled professionals in fields such as health, welfare, education, and engineering. The paper's proposed changes to admission rules aim to make education more flexible and practice-oriented. These include considering prior learning and work experience, as well as including modular and part-time programmes. The paper also proposed testing craft certificates as admission requirements for health studies through pilot projects, and improving information for individuals seeking approval of foreign education or vocational training.

In February 2024, the renewed Norwegian [Committee on Skill Needs](#) was announced, tasked with examining the impact of new technologies on skills requirements over the next two years. Their report, due in 2025, will explore how digitalisation affects Norway's skills needs and how to address them. The Committee includes the director of the Norwegian Directorate for Higher Education and Skills, social partners, experts, and a representative for county municipalities. The first Committee's report, in June 2022, highlighted the need for a stronger link between vocational education and the labour market.

The 2021 [White paper No-one left out](#) identified areas to reduce social exclusion and introduced a pilot programme in 2022 to encourage employers to hire individuals under the age of 30 with disabilities. Other measures were intended to offer more tailored upper secondary education, including VET, to adults outside the labour force. A May 2024 report from the Ministry of Labour and Social Inclusion found out that temporary wage supplements and hiring incentives improved employment and provided socio-economic benefits, but highlighted the need for faster implementation of these measures. While training can be costly, motivated participants can achieve significant results.

The 2021 [strategy for decentralised and flexible education in vocational schools, university colleges and universities](#) aimed to promote the upskilling and reskilling of adult learners, by creating digital education opportunities and improving the framework conditions. Key measures included increased access to flexible study opportunities nationwide, new district education programmes and more flexible funding for students. The number of students studying fully online or in a hybrid format increased by 4% between 2022 and 2023, indicating progress towards the strategy's goals.

Other schemes aiming at flexibility and improved participation are being explored. [Modularising adult training, leading to the trade or journeyman's exam](#), was piloted from 2020 to 2023 (ReferNet Norway & Cedefop, 2022) and introduced as a permanent scheme in the Education Act of 2023. As a result, from 2024, Norway has expanded its modular

VET programmes, with 13 trade or journeyman's curricula. This modular approach allows for more flexible and tailored training courses, enabling adults to gain competences and complete training they may have previously interrupted. The Directorate for Higher Education and Skills and the Directorate for Education and Training are responsible for the development of modular training.

The [modular industry programmes for continuing education](#) are short and flexible sectoral programmes designed for both young learners and adults in sectors such as industrial, construction, and healthcare. These programmes enable individuals to combine their studies with work while earning certificates or documentation of their learning outcomes. This recognition may be valuable to employers or assist in obtaining formal qualifications. Programmes can be web-based, school-based and workplace-based. Three new programmes were introduced in 2022: the waste and recycling industry; the agriculture, forestry, and horticulture industries; and industry and construction. They were selected due to the high degree of restructuring, and low participation in competence development study programmes.

The [scholarship pilot for skilled workers](#) in the age group 30-57 ended in 2023. An evaluation published in January 2024 found out that the provision of grants and personalised information significantly increased the number of skilled workers taking up training. Specifically, without incentives, only 2.5% of skilled workers chose to continue their education. However, when scholarships were combined with targeted information, this percentage rose to 3% (an increase of 20% compared to the control group). In addition, the provision of targeted information alone also had a positive effect, with 2.7% of workers opting to participate in continuing training (an increase of 9% compared to the control group).

4.3 Modernising training institutions

Well-staffed and well-equipped training institutions are essential to quality education and training for the young and adults. Norway is developing measures to ensure both, taking into account the impact of digitalisation.

The [national centre for vocational education and training](#) was officially announced in October 2024, following the recommendation of the working group formed in 2022 to assess its feasibility. The government allocated NOK 10 million (EUR 857 345.80) in the 2025 budget, with funds split between operations and initial research. The centre aims to improve VET's relevance and quality, while upper secondary education responsibilities remain with county and national authorities. Its goal is to prepare students for the evolving labour market by aligning curricula and training methods with industry needs (Cedefop & ReferNet Norway, 2025a).

Meanwhile, two [centres of excellence in higher vocational education](#), appointed in a pilot scheme to run from 2022 until 2027, are already implementing their work plan. The centres were selected based on their partnership with the labour market and professional environment (ReferNet Norway & Cedefop, 2023b). Their main responsibilities include developing and testing methodologies for higher vocational education, collaborating with

the labour market, promoting student engagement, and sharing results with stakeholders to improve the quality of education.

In 2023, a [strategy for digital competence and infrastructure](#) was adopted, effective until 2030. One of its aims is to provide schools with the necessary resources to implement hands-on learning methods in all subjects and to prevent inequalities in access to technology and equipment. The strategy also aims to ensure that teachers have good professional digital skills to support learning, motivation and environmentally friendly practices.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, significant differences in professional digital competence among teachers became evident; the strategy seeks to reduce these at their initial and continuous professional development. In 2024, the Directorate for Education and Training updated its webpage on digital competence, offering resources to help teachers and school leaders support student learning in this area.

5. Statistical information in relation to EU targets

Norway performs well on many indicators. The prospects for IVET graduates in Norway are very also favourable. The employment rate of recent IVET graduates (20-34 years), at 95.5%, is the highest in Europe, 15.5 percentage points above the EU-27 average of 80.0%, and 13.5 pp above the EU-27 target set for 2025 in the Council Recommendation on VET.

In 2024, 62.4% of the recent IVET graduates (20- to 34-year-olds) had had a work-based learning experience as part of their vocational education and training, a figure practically 2.9 pp lower than the EU-27 average (65.3%), but already above the 60% benchmark.

Over half (54.6%) of adults aged 25-64 had access to learning opportunities in 2022, which is 15.1 percentage points higher than the average of the EU-27 countries (39.5%), exceeding the target set in the Skills Agenda (50%).

Norway also stands out for its high proportion of adults (aged 16 to 74) with at least basic digital skills, with 81.1% displaying at least basic digital skills in 2023. This figure surpasses the 80% benchmark established for 2030 under the European Pillar of Social Rights (ESPR) Action Plan.

Nevertheless, Norway faces a challenge regarding early school leaving. This rate has increased by 3.1 percentage points since 2020, standing at 13.0% in 2024, 3.7 percentage points higher than the average in the EU-27. However, the NEET rate is relatively low (6.8%), the third lowest compared to the EU-27, and already below the EU-27 benchmark for 2030.

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

Type of indicator ⁽⁴⁾	Indicator	Last available year	NO	EU-27	Policy Document	EU target (year)
VET for developing a lifelong learning culture						
Progress	Adults (25 to 64 year-olds) with a learning experience in the last 12 months (%) [*]	2022	54.6	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	37.7	18.4	Skills Agenda	30% (2025)
Progress	Unemployed adults with a learning experience in the last 4 weeks (%)	2024	29.4	15.3	Skills Agenda	20% (2025)
Context	Employment rate for 20 to 64 year-olds (%)	2024	80.0	75.8	ESPR Action Plan	78% (2030)
Context	Early leavers from education and training (%)	2024	13.0	9.3	Council Resolution on EEA	<9% (2030)
Context	NEET rate for 15 to 29 year-olds (%)	2024	6.8	11.0	ESPR Action Plan	9% (2030)
VET for Resilience, transitions, sustainability and excellence						
Progress	Adults (16 to 74 year-olds) with at least basic digital skills (%)	2023	81.1	55.6	Skills Agenda ESPR Action Plan	70% (2025) 80% (2030)
Progress	Employment rate for recent IVET graduates (20 to 34 year-olds) (%)	2024	95.5	80.0	Council Rec on VET	82% (2025)
Progress	Recent IVET graduates (20 to 34 year-olds) with a work-based learning experience as part of their vocational education and training (%)	2024	62.4	65.3	Council Rec on VET Council Resolution on EEA	60% (2025)
Context	25 to 34 year-olds with tertiary attainment (%)	2024	56.8	44.2	Council Resolution on EEA	45% (2025)
Context	Gender employment gap (%)	2024	5.1	10.0	ESPR Action Plan	To be halved (2030)
Context	People at risk of poverty or social exclusion (1000s)	2024	863	93 333	ESPR Action Plan	15 million decrease (2030)
Context	Employed ICT specialists (1000s)	2024	159.2 ^e	10 273.6 ^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	0.2	2.1 ^{dV}	Council Rec on VET Skills Agenda	8% (2025)
Context	Average number of foreign languages learned in IVET	2023	0.2	1.2 ^d		

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](#).

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

6. Conclusion

Norway is progressing in aligning its VET system with the objectives set out in the Osnabrück Declaration. It has launched several initiatives to strengthen the VET system, promote lifelong learning, and modernise training institutions. These measures focus on closing the skills gap between supply and demand, increasing the number of graduates and labour market participation, and developing a highly qualified workforce, particularly by expanding/improving higher VET, to respond to digital and green transitions. Fewer dropouts, more apprenticeships and better educational pathways can provide the skilled workers needed in the future.

The recent Education Act (2023) has enacted a statutory right to an apprenticeship or equivalent training opportunity, regardless of geographic location. This directly supports the EU's goal of ensuring equal access to quality VET. Norway also introduced a right to vocational requalification for adults, aligning with the emphasis on lifelong learning and upskilling in the European Pillar of Social Rights (ESPR) action plan.

Steps have been taken to provide adults with more opportunities for upskilling and reskilling, favouring the combination of study and work, through the modularisation of various types of programmes and incentive schemes, and to ensure that everybody, including vulnerable groups, such as people with disabilities, can fully develop their careers. This expansion reflects Norway's ongoing commitment to making vocational education more accessible and adaptable to the evolving demands of the labour market.

The continuous work of the committee on skill needs and the fulfilment of all the ambitions of the Skills reform can help to bridge the existing skill gaps and positively impact the labour market, while ensuring the right to equal opportunities for all. Norway has placed high hopes on its reform of higher VET and its expansion to EQF levels 6 and 7, the full impact of which will become clearer over time.

Two new VET centres, inspired by the European Centres of Vocational Excellence model, are now operational. These centres aim to improve VET quality and increase its attractiveness. The digital competence and infrastructure strategy focuses on supporting access to technology and digital solutions so learners have access to technology used in the world of work. More practical teaching aids and flexible learning provisions can help strengthen the link with the world of work and attract more learners.

Many of these measures, some put in place before 2020, were being evaluated, while others have only recently been implemented or are still pilot schemes. The strategies and regulations provide a roadmap for an attractive, inclusive, and strong VET system, although it is the responsibility of the different authorities at the county and municipal level to ensure that these goals are met. Consultation with key stakeholders helps design effective policies that can be widely supported and ensure their implementation and progress.

Skills shortages are also affecting the education sector, and those who are currently teaching need to be well-prepared to address the diverse needs of their students, adapt to advancing technologies and societal demands, and create a more effective and responsive educational environment. Investing in initial and continuous development opportunities for teachers can greatly strengthen the quality and attractiveness of VET.

High rates of early school leavers require attention and a collaborative approach. By exploring more effective and targeted measures, the right to apprenticeships should be fully guaranteed. A revitalised VET system that includes early intervention, alternative pathways, improved opportunities in higher VET, and vocational guidance holds great promise in fostering a skilled and capable workforce that aligns with the country's needs. Engaging stakeholders in this initiative can ensure a comprehensive and inclusive strategy implementation.

Abbreviations

EQF	European qualifications framework
ESPR	European social pillar of rights
ICT	information and communications technology
IVET	initial vocational education and training
NEET	not in education, employment nor training
NGO	non-governmental organisation
NIP	national implementation plan
NOKUT	Norwegian Agency for Quality Assurance in Education
NQF	National qualifications framework
OECD	Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development
VET	vocational education and training

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