



Vocational education and training policy briefs 2024

PORTUGAL



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1. Introduction

This policy brief ⁽¹⁾ produced by Cedefop presents a snapshot of vocational education and training (VET) policy developments in Portugal 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 2025 identified in Portugal's 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

The central government has overall responsibility for VET. The education ministry is responsible for school-based programmes, the higher education ministry for tertiary education, and the labour ministry for apprenticeship programmes, continuing vocational training and the implementation of active labour market measures (Cedefop & Directorate-General of Employment and Industrial Relations [DGERT], 2023).

The Portuguese VET system is based on the 1986 Basic Law of the Education System. This law underwent a major reform in 2007, reorganising VET into a single national system of qualifications (Sistema Nacional de Qualificações [SNQ]). The legal framework regulating the modalities of VET for young people and adults was revised in several respects between 2017 and 2022, with the aim of attracting more young people to secondary education through a modernised, inclusive and high-quality offer. The underlying ambition of all these reforms was to contribute to secondary education as the minimum qualification of the population.

The Portuguese VET system offers a wide range of programmes accessible to young people and adults, based on the link between VET provision and labour market needs. Its flexibility in the type and duration of courses for adults, between different VET programmes and between general education and VET programmes, is one of its main features, together with the double certification (educational and professional) that all VET programmes grant. The VET system also attaches great importance to the process of recognition, validation and certification of competences (RVCC) as a way of accessing qualifications (Cedefop & DGERT, 2023).

Social partners are active in VET and participate in advisory and social coordination bodies (tripartite composition). They have a seat on administrations, general councils and monitoring committees of the official bodies responsible for implementing, monitoring and funding VET (Cedefop & DGERT, 2023).

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

2.2 Challenges

Portugal's main challenges during 2020-24 include the low qualification levels of the population, meeting the new skills demands created by the green and digital transitions, and addressing the new dynamics emerging after the COVID-19 pandemic and Industry 4.0.

Despite improvements over the last decades, Portugal remains the EU country with the highest percentage of individuals with low education attainment (Cedefop & DGERT, 2023), resulting in a significant skills deficit. In the European Skills Index, Portugal ranked 24th in 2024, with its weakest indicator being upper secondary attainment and above at 60.4% (ranked 31st).

Portugal faces significant challenges regarding the twin transitions. The population's level of at least basic digital skills is just above the EU average but there has been limited progress in recent years. Meanwhile, the proportion of ICT specialists in employment is lower than the EU average, with a decreasing share of women in the profession (European Commission, 2024b). Developing digital skills is crucial for equitable access to quality education and for improving the competitiveness of micro-enterprises, which dominate Portugal's traditional sectors.

The green transition is generating new employment opportunities that demand specific skills and competences, essential for ensuring a fair transition and enabling the EU to meet its 2030 renewable energy targets. This trend is increasing the demand for upskilling and reskilling programmes, even within existing professions. In Portugal, labour shortages have been identified in several occupations relevant to the green transition, such as electrical mechanics and fitters, civil engineers, and plumbers and pipe fitters (European Commission, 2024a). However, the country's low qualification levels and limited adult participation in lifelong learning hinders Portugal's capacity to seize the opportunities presented by the green transition fully.

The emergence of a new industrial era has increased the challenge of raising the skills level of the population as it affects mainly routine and less creative jobs, generally associated with low skills. It was estimated that 700 000 workers will need to change jobs or acquire new skills by 2030 (Nova School of Business and Economics, Portuguese Employer Confederation, 2019).

3. National VET policy priorities

The Portugal 2030 Strategy has been the national strategic reference framework since 2020. It sets the basis for the National recovery and resilience plan (RRP) and the National implementation plan (NIP) the country prepared in response to the [2020 Council Recommendation on VET](#) and the [Osnabrück Declaration](#); both have a timeframe until 2025. The following priorities from the NIP can be highlighted:

- (a) raising the qualification levels of the population;
- (b) increasing the quality, transparency, coherence and internationalisation of the VET system;

- (c) making VET more flexible and responsive to labour market needs, focusing on ecological, climate and digital transitions;
- (d) promoting equal opportunities and social inclusion.

4. Main policy developments 2020-24

4.1 Raising the qualification levels of the population

Portugal is implementing several measures to raise the qualification levels of young people and adults, with an ongoing focus on promoting programmes offering double (academic and vocational) certification to increase participation in secondary education among young people. Tailored programmes and incentives aim to improve employability and encourage further learning, particularly at the higher level. For adults, the focus remains on providing flexible training pathways that lead to recognised qualifications.

In 2021, the government, employers, and trade union confederations signed the [Agreement for professional training and qualification](#) (referred to as the VET agreement) (Cedefop & ReferNet, 2025), demonstrating their shared commitment to raising the qualification levels of the population. The VET agreement focuses on improving the quality and attractiveness of vocational education, modernising the system, and aligning it with labour market needs. It includes measures to support lifelong learning, reduce early school leaving and increase the number of individuals with upper-secondary and post-secondary qualifications, contributing to national and European education and employment goals.

Since 2022, [Professional programmes](#) have aimed to increase participation in initial and continuing training for 15 to 18-year-old basic education graduates, including NEETs and at-risk learners. They provide practical training linked to the labour market, allowing progression to post-secondary or higher education. Around 32% (127 565 students) of upper secondary students attended in the 2023/24 school year. A funding call released in 2024 provided approximately EUR 241.2 million in support of these programmes in public, private and cooperative schools in the North, Centre and Alentejo regions (classified as 'less developed regions' under the EU's Cohesion Policy for 2021-27) for the 2024/25 school year. This funding covered both operational costs and direct student support, with EUR 205 million coming from ESF+.

The [Apprenticeship](#) framework, designed for individuals aged 15-30, was modernised in 2022 to make it more adaptable to current technological and societal needs. It was expanded to include [Apprenticeship+](#) courses, which provide qualifications at EQF level 5, and introduced innovative features such as distance learning and a greater emphasis on the role of enterprises. By August 2024, 2 205 young adults had participated in the Apprenticeship+ programme, while the number of trainees involved in the Apprenticeship courses was 10 264 (ReferNet Portugal, & Cedefop, 2022).

The [Qualifica Industria programme](#) started in 2023. Managed by the Institute of Employment and Professional Training (IEFP), the programme is designed to upskill and reskill workers in small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) facing reduced turnover due to sudden market changes. It offers up to 200 hours of training per worker and covers

training and wage costs, with each company eligible for support for up to 100 workers. Certified entities deliver the training, including IEFP training centres and employer associations. By August 2024, 662 employees from the textile and clothing industry had enrolled in 24 training courses that year.

Since 2023, 226 [local projects](#) have been promoting basic-level qualifications (levels B1/B2/B3, equivalent to 4th/6th/9th years of basic education) for adults to improve the skills of low-qualified individuals. Local projects address the low participation and completion rates of previous initiatives, such as the [Qualifica programme](#). These projects offer tailored training and support to help adults achieve qualifications, optimising completion rates. This initiative involves collaboration among local networks, including employers and community organisations, to ensure a comprehensive approach to adult education. It has a budget of EUR 40 million from the national RRP, with 6 415 adults participating by August 2024.

There are over 300 Qualifica centres specialised in adult education and vocational training, helping individuals improve their qualifications and job prospects. These centres play a crucial role in the [recognition, validation and certification of competences process \(RVCC\)](#). The introduction of the Qualifica Accelerator in 2022, a measure that provides financial support for adults in the RVCC process, previously available only to those in training, has given a new impetus to the process. With the goal of achieving 100 000 RVCC certifications between 2021 and 2025, nearly two-thirds of the certifications were awarded by 2024.

[Training vouchers](#) provide direct financial support for vocational training, helping individuals obtain qualifications. This measure is intended to increase the demand for training, promote lifelong learning and make employers and employees jointly responsible for professional improvement; it also addresses unemployed people. Regardless of their work situation, each beneficiary can receive support for 2 years. The training is to be based on short-term training units provided by a certified training institution. Since its launch in 2022, nearly 67 000 individuals have benefited from this measure.

The [Youth STEAM incentive](#) and the [Adults impulse programme](#) are being developed by higher education institutions in partnership with businesses and public bodies, as part of the national RRP. The Youth STEAM initiative aims to increase the number of young people in higher education in STEAM areas by 10% by 2026. The Adults Impulse programme focuses on widening access to higher education and training for adults, such as short-term postgraduate diplomas and master's degrees in various fields of knowledge.

A mid-term evaluation of both programmes in 2023 showed that the Youth STEAM initiative exceeded its target, reaching 168%, with many participants being young women aged 18-29. The Adult Impulse programme reached 76% of its target for adult skills development, with 61% of participants being women and almost half of all participants aged between 30 and 54 (Directorate-General for Higher Education, 2024). Financial execution across both programmes doubled from 2022 to 2023, growing by 37% in Youth STEAM incentive and 32% in Adults impulse (Barbosa & Moura, 2024).

Tourism, a key economic sector in Portugal, is the focus of a [sectoral initiative](#) launched in 2023 by the Ministry of Economy and Maritime Affairs. The Agenda for Tourism

Professions includes 20 measures aimed at improving qualifications, increasing the attractiveness of professions, and raising the number of professionals in the sector while ensuring steady growth (Barbosa & Moura, 2024), along with promoting entrepreneurship within the sector. One of the key elements of this agenda is the International Tourism Academy, which offers a wide range of certified training programmes tailored to young students and working professionals, combining higher education, vocational training, research and development.

4.2 VET system quality, transparency, coherence and internationalisation

Since 2021, there have been significant legal developments, introducing the obligation for QNQ/EQF levels to be mentioned on diplomas and certificates of qualifications in basic and secondary education (EQF levels 1 to 4), apprenticeships (at EQF levels 4 and 5), technological specialisation programmes (CETs - EQF level 5), adult education and training courses (EFA), and on those of qualifications awarded through an RVCC process (Cedefop, 2023). The legal framework was changed in 2022, to extend the [Modular training courses](#), the [Apprenticeship+](#) programme and the [RVCC](#) to qualification level 5 of NQF/EQF.

In 2022, the National Agency for Qualification and Vocational Education and Training (ANQEP) began a comprehensive update of the national qualifications to develop a catalogue emphasising competences and [learning outcomes](#) while supporting the professional RVCC. After completing diagnostic studies, developing the corresponding competence standards for the 21 sectors identified, and designing the qualifications, ANQEP is currently working on harmonising the competence frameworks and assessment tools across all 21 sectors.

ANQEP has developed short and medium-term training paths in areas like digital skills, green skills, and regulated professions, such as taxi driving. These courses, lasting up to 350 hours, lead to autonomous certification and contribute credits towards one or more qualifications in the National catalogue of qualifications (Catálogo Nacional de Qualificações [CNQ]). In 2023, CNQ offered 41 courses that align with sectoral and regional needs, focusing on emerging competences (Barbosa & Moura, 2024).

To promote transparency, quality, and consistency in the VET system, the Directorate General of Labour and Industrial Relations (DGERT) reviewed the certification of training entities in 2023 to streamline the certification process and improve its understanding among the public. In addition, the revision also made operators -organisations or individuals delivering training under the umbrella of a certified provider- accountable for quality assurance, incorporating ongoing monitoring and evaluation of their practices (Barbosa & Moura, 2024).

ANQEP, as the National Reference Point for EQAVET, continued implementing a [quality assurance system](#) aligned with EQAVET. As part of this effort, ANQEP awarded 78 EQAVET seals, confirming that the training practices of these operators meet the EQAVET principles and criteria (Barbosa & Moura, 2024).

In 2021, Portugal began [modernising its vocational training centres](#) with the support of the Recovery and resilience fund. The aim is to improve the quality of training and address high-tech industry needs related to the green and digital transitions. In addition to upgrading laboratories and workshops in the digital, Industry 4.0 and environmental sectors, two new centres were created in 2023: the Energy Transition Training Centre (a partnership between the IEFP, the Agency for Energy and the Portuguese Renewable Energy Association) and the Entrepreneurship Academy. In 2024, EUR 9.3 million was invested in modernising infrastructures and making them more sustainable. In 2024, new legislation expanded the Entrepreneurship Academy to include tourism, commerce, and services.

Portugal planned to invest EUR 480 million in creating 365 [specialised technological centres](#) by 2025 to improve VET technological infrastructure and align vocational courses to high-growth sectors. The Institute for the Financial Management of Education (IGeFE) is in charge of this investment. In 2023, 261 new centres were approved for IT, industry, digital and renewable energy specialisation areas, with new tenders for 31 centres launched in 2024. This action increased the supply of vocational training at levels 2, 4 and 5 of the NQF/EQF in these fields (Barbosa & Moura, 2024).

The Qualifications needs [anticipation system](#) (Sistema de Antecipação de Necessidades de Qualificações [SANQ]) is an instrument that contributes to the SNQ objectives. It establishes priorities and criteria for providing VET, indicating where it should be offered and highlighting missing qualifications in the job market. This helps to update the CNQ accordingly. In 2023, the basic diagnosis at national level, as well as in-depth regional diagnoses of qualification needs, were updated.

The [Qualification for internationalisation programme](#), launched in 2021, aims to qualify human resources in internationalisation and international trade, with a particular focus on SMEs. Training consists of a set of short-duration training units of the CNQ, with a maximum duration of 350 hours, delivered face-to-face or online, which can be complemented by 140-420 hours of work-based learning. In 2023, more than 5 000 students enrolled in this programme in the network of training centres managed by IEFP, and as of September 2024, 4 299 had enrolled.

4.3 VET flexible and responsive to labour market needs

Since 2020, a wide range of measures have been introduced to address the evolving needs of the labour market, particularly those associated with digital and green transitions. These initiatives have provided more flexible learning opportunities, including short-term, online, or blended learning options.

The [national digital competences initiative](#) (Portugal INCoDe.2030) and the [action plan for the digital transition](#) set out the priorities and measures needed to address the digital transition, also reflected in the national RRP and in the NIP.

The [More digital employment 2025 programme](#), managed by the IEFP in collaboration with other bodies, comprises several measures to offer free digital training and an assessment of digital skills (ReferNet Portugal & Cedefop, 2023b). With an investment of EUR 94 million approved in 2022, it aims to improve digital skills and employment

opportunities of workers, managers and directors of companies, social economy organisations and trainers. As of September 2024, 99 185 workers have participated in the 'More digital employment training', 1 251 workers in the 'More digital training voucher', 541 workers in the 'More digital trainers' and 106 company managers and directors in the 'More digital leaders'.

Since 2020, the [Youth + Digital programme](#) has been providing short-term training units (350 hours maximum) to registered unemployed young people (aged 18 to 35). This programme offers qualifications at EQF levels 4 or 5 in cyber-security, data analysis, programming languages, and social network management. By the end of 2023, 20 609 young people have been trained (European Commission, 2024b). As of the end of September 2024, 8 383 trainees had enrolled, with approximately 4 000 receiving certification (ReferNet Portugal & Cedefop, 2021).

The [UPskill - digital skills and jobs programme](#), a collaboration between several key institutions, offers intensive training for unemployed secondary or higher education graduates. It includes 6 months of blended learning in specific ICT areas and 3 months of on-the-job training. Designed to meet the evolving needs of the ICT sector, more than half of the target was reached by 2023, although the participant figures for 2023 were slightly down compared to the previous two rounds (European Commission, 2024b). The 2024 call focused on more specialised and advanced technical skills, such as embedded systems programming, ERP/SAGE X3, platform-specific training, cloud computing with Microsoft Azure and advanced programming courses such as Java, .NET and JavaScript with React.

Other measures included in the [Action plan for the digital transition](#) that have been implemented are the 'I'm Digital' (*Eu sou digital*) programme and the Digital skills certificate programme. 'I'm Digital' was launched in 2021 to promote the digital inclusion of adults aged 45 and over, based on a national network of young volunteers and training centres. The programme content includes creating and managing email accounts, searching online, consulting and using digital public services, and accessing services such as home banking or social networks. By the end of 2023, around 255 EUSOUDIGITAL centres were established nationwide, along with a network of 6 500 mentors and 170 public-private partnerships contributing to the digital training of over 13 000 adults.

The Digital Skills Certificate programme, starting in 2022, aims to recognise and certify the digital technology and media skills of citizens aged 18 and over, especially those who are unemployed, digitally unskilled, or classified as NEET, with a focus on promoting digital inclusion and employability. As of September 2024, 33 556 trainees were enrolled in this programme.

An evaluation report (Wastiau et al., 2024) highlights that over 80% of VET institutions have updated curricula to include digital literacy and coding, 70% of VET teachers have participated in professional development on digital skills, and participation in lifelong learning has increased significantly.

The [Portugal Digital Academy](#) was launched in March 2022 to improve the digital skills of citizens of all ages. It is a free course aggregator platform that offers multiple options to test, improve and certify digital levels. This tool also allows businesses to assess their

employees' digital skills and identify priorities for continuous training, recruitment and investment. In 2024, 2 120 free training courses were available.

Open application procedures started running in 2023 for the [Programme Green Skills and Jobs](#). This programme offers short and medium-duration online and face-to-face training opportunities to workers whose employers have been directly or indirectly affected by the increase in energy costs, and also to the unemployed. Courses focus on green hydrogen technologies and renewable energies such as solar thermal, photovoltaic and wind power. These courses align with the National energy and climate plan 2030 (PNEC 2030) and are integrated into the CNQ (ReferNet Portugal & Cedefop, 2023b).

The Confederation of Portuguese Farmers developed a [training action programme](#) in 2023 to provide training to workers, entrepreneurs and managers of SMEs in the field of agriculture, focusing on themes associated with innovation and change, such as agricultural management, efficient use of water, energy efficiency, certification of sustainable forest management and organic agriculture. 17 Associations, 503 SMEs and 520 trainees were involved in 2023.

[Modular training courses](#), approved in 2022, target adults without necessary qualifications for the labour market, particularly those who have not completed basic or upper secondary education. Flexible learning pathways allow them to earn competence units and short-term training credits toward qualifications at levels 1 to 5 in the CNQ. A regulation issued in November 2023 clarified aspects of these courses and enabled participants to complete their first cycle of basic education in the Portuguese System. In 2023, 75 996 EQF level 5 certificates were issued through modular training, with an additional 55 031 awarded by September 2024.

In January 2022, the Ministry of Labour and the National Council for the Social Economy signed an [agreement to improve vocational training and qualification in the social economy sector](#). The agreement includes the identification of training needs, the development of supportive partnerships, the improvement of professional qualifications, the promotion of innovation in the delivery of training, the strengthening of incentives for institutions and individuals to participate and the creation of a training centre for the sector. The training centre, *Centro para a Economia Social*, started in 2023 and offers training courses in areas such as elderly care and technical support for social economy entities.

4.4 Equal opportunities and social inclusion

Various measures were implemented to ensure equal opportunities for young people and adults in VET. These measures also aim to promote academic and training success while catering to the diverse needs and potential of every learner.

Portugal is reinforcing its [inclusive education approach](#) to ensure equitable learning opportunities for all students across compulsory education, including VET. In 2023, five e-books were published for VET teachers on inclusive education and universal learning along with teacher training. Student learning assessment frameworks were revised in 2023 to better accommodate diverse learning needs, particularly for students with special educational needs (Barbosa & Moura, 2024). Starting in 2024, schools can compare their

practices with established standards thanks to a monitoring system developed by the European Agency for Special Needs and Inclusive Education for Portugal.

The [21|23 Escola+ plan](#) is designed to help school students, including those in vocational programmes, recover from learning deficits resulting from the suspension of classroom activities during the COVID-19 pandemic. The plan, approved in 2021, has been re-extended for the 2023/24 school year and aims to provide schools with tools and strategies for flexible curriculum development and strengthen response capacity for inclusive learning. It also establishes a Monitoring Commission composed of key education bodies to evaluate implementation.

[Adult education and training courses \(EFA\)](#) started in 2022 to help adults with low qualifications develop the skills needed to carry out a professional activity and, at the same time, to obtain a basic education or an upper secondary education certificate. The curriculum covers key competences, technical training for a particular occupation, and on-the-job training. There were 9 712 adults certified in EFA courses at EQF level 3 in 2023 and 5 176 new trainees until September 2024.

The Portuguese [host language programme](#) has significant relevance, given the size of the migrant community in Portugal (about 7% of the total population). This programme aims to help non-native speakers, especially adult migrants, learn Portuguese and support their social, professional, and civic integration. In 2023, around 22 500 people belonging to 151 nationalities were certified. By September 2024, this number had increased to 27 082.

The [Valorizar social programme](#) is a tailor-made training programme to improve management and digital skills in the social sector, approved in 2021. Its short training units (maximum of 350 hours) are included in the CNQ. The programme strengthens residential structures and home support services for older adults, host services for people with disabilities and incapacity, children, and young people at risk, as part of the [Agreement for professional training and qualification](#). Its goal is to strengthen the quality of the response of social institutions to citizens in the medium and long term through the empowerment and qualification of their human resources.

The [Iniciar traineeship programme](#) supports vulnerable groups, including individuals with disabilities, victims of domestic violence, refugees, former inmates, and those recovering from substance use disorders. Beginning in September 2024, the programme offers 6-month traineeships (up to 12 months for people with disabilities) to help young people and unemployed individuals with medium-level qualifications enter the labour market. Participants receive financial support, such as trainee grants, allowances and work accident insurance. This initiative aims to increase employability, ease the transition from education to work, and improve citizens' skills (ReferNet Portugal & Cedefop, 2024).

A new regulation was introduced in 2020 to facilitate [access to higher education](#) for upper-secondary VET graduates. In 2022, new legislation reserved 15% of places at tertiary education institutions for holders of secondary double certification and specialised artistic courses. Application conditions for these places were established in 2024, further improving opportunities and increasing the representation of these graduates in higher education.

Scholarships for students in higher education for the 2024/25 academic year have been funded with over EUR 129 million and an additional EUR 110 million from ESF+. These funds are primarily aimed at supporting underprivileged students attending low-demand institutions and in less-populated areas through mobility grants, as well as students with disabilities.

Portugal has a strategy to [combat youth unemployment](#), following the EU's Youth Guarantee recommendation. Measures implemented include vocational training, support for self-employment, and youth entrepreneurship to improve employability. In 2022, the Public Employment Services, with support from the ILO, intensified efforts to identify and engage unregistered unemployed and inactive youth, resulting in over 18 000 NEETs participating in VET programmes. In February 2024, a more youth-friendly platform addressed to NEETs was launched, providing more information about job opportunities, internships, and training opportunities.

In 2024, the Portuguese Institute of Sport and Youth launched the Arribar programme to support social inclusion of young people deprived of liberty. Targeting individuals aged 16 to 21 in educational centres and those aged 16 to 29 in prisons, 12-24 months into their sentences, this 36-month initiative is funded with EUR 412 million, partly from ESF+. It focuses on local interventions based on the specific needs in the North, Centre, and Alentejo regions.

5. Statistical information in relation to EU targets

Portugal's efforts to improve the educational attainment of its population are most effectively illustrated by the evolution in the early school leaving rate. Since 2015, Portugal has reduced this figure by more than half, from 13.5% to 6.6% in 2024, well below the EU target of 9% and represents the second largest decrease in the EU-27, with a reduction of 6.9 percentage points. Another good news for Portugal is the reduction of the NEETs rate, which stands at 8.7, 2.3 pp below the EU-average in this indicator in 2024 (11.0%).

The number of students in upper secondary IVET (ISCED 3) as a percentage of all upper secondary students is declining. In 2023, only 37.9% of upper secondary students were enrolled in VET, showing a decrease of 7.9 percentage points since 2013, the third largest drop in the EU-27. Despite this, the rate of learners in IVET who benefitted from learning mobility abroad stands at 3.6%, which is higher than the EU-27 average of 2.1% in 2021. Portugal ranks 10th in the EU on this indicator, but still falls short of the 8% target set in the Council Recommendation on VET.

Over the last decade, the employment rate of recent graduates from IVET programmes in Portugal has shown notable fluctuations. In 2015, the employment rate for this group was 70.3%, slightly below the EU average of 72.3%. Since then, there has been a gradual improvement over the years, with the rate peaking at 82.8% in 2022, above the EU average, and falling to 75.5% in 2024, 4.5 percentage points below the EU average. This progress may reflect the positive impact of VET reforms and the increasing alignment of VET programmes with labour market needs.

The percentage of recent IVET graduates (aged 20-34) with work-based learning experience as part of their vocational education and training is also recovering, from 76.8% in 2021 to 77.8% in 2024, 12.5 points over the EU average of 65.3%. Continued efforts to expand and strengthen work-based learning opportunities will be crucial to improving employment opportunities for young VET graduates.

With an education attainment traditionally lower than the EU average in Portugal, the rate of adult learning is also below EU average, reflecting a relatively low engagement in lifelong learning. Portugal's progress, while significant, still falls short of the EU benchmarks, highlighting the need for continued efforts to promote adult education and training.

The percentage of adults engaged in a learning experience in the past 12 months fell to 33.4% in 2022, a decrease of 4.6 points since 2016. This rate is 6.1 points lower than the European average at 39.5% and far below the target towards achieving the European Education Area (47%).

In 2023, 56.0% of adults aged 16 to 74 have basic digital skills, 0.4 percentage points higher than the EU-27 average of 55.6%. However, Portugal is making slow progress in this area. While the average improvement for the EU-27 is 1.6 percentage points between 2021 and 2023, Portugal has only seen an increase of 0.7 pp during the same period.

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

Type of indicator ⁽¹²⁾	Indicator	Last available year	PT	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	33.4	39.5	Skills Agenda	50% (2025)
					Council Resolution on EEA	47% (2025)
					ESPR Action Plan	60% (2030)
Progress	Low-qualified adults with a learning experience in the last 12 months (%)	2022	17.0	18.4	Skills Agenda	30% (2025)
Progress	Unemployed adults with a learning experience in the last 4 weeks (%)	2024	17.5	15.3	Skills Agenda	20% (2025)
Context	Employment rate for 20-64 year-olds (%)	2024	78.5	75.8	ESPR Action Plan	78% (2030)
Context	Early leavers from education and training (%)	2024	6.6	9.3	Council Resolution on EEA	<9% (2030)
Context	NEET rate for 15-29 year-olds (%)	2024	8.7	11.0	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	56.0	55.6	Skills Agenda	70% (2025)
					ESPR Action Plan	80% (2030)
Progress	Employment rate for recent IVET graduates (20-34 year-olds) (%)	2024	75.5	80.0	Council Rec on VET	82% (2025)
Progress	Recent IVET graduates (20-34 year-olds) with a work-based learning experience as part of their vocational education and training (%)	2024	77.8	65.3	Council Rec on VET	60% (2025)
					Council Resolution on EEA	
Context	25-34 year-olds with tertiary attainment (%)	2024	43.2	44.2	Council Resolution on EEA	45% (2025)
Context	Gender employment gap (%)	2024	5.7	10.0	ESPR Action Plan	To be halved (2030)
Context	People at risk of poverty or social exclusion (1000s)	2024	2 095	93 333	ESPR Action Plan	15 million decrease (2030)
Context	Employed ICT specialists (1000s)	2024	262.1	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	3.6	2.1 ^{dV}	Council Rec on VET	8% (2025)
Context	Average number of foreign languages learned in IVET	2022	0.9	1.2	Skills Agenda	

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](#).

(2) Definitions on the type of indicators is available at [European VET policy dashboard: methodological note](#).

6. Conclusion

Portugal is implementing a wide range of measures to increase the qualification levels of the population, address skills mismatches and labour shortages, and develop a VET system of greater quality, transparency and coherence. Portugal's comprehensive reform of the VET system, coupled with investments in training infrastructure, is making provision more flexible and responsive to labour market needs, engaging employers and other stakeholders, and promoting equal opportunities and inclusion. However, the effects of the ageing workforce, increasing difficulty in retaining staff and low levels of investment and digitalisation (European Commission, 2024a) must be overcome to ensure Portugal's growth.

Recent curriculum reforms, along with initiatives such as the Adult impulse programme, professional programmes, the More digital training voucher or the Portugal Digital Academy platform, have broadened the opportunities available for low-skilled adults to earn certifications and improve their digital skills. The collaborative support from local partners played a vital role in advancing these efforts.

Financial incentives, such as the Qualifica accelerator or the training voucher, are being tried to encourage upskilling. The [Qualifica programme](#), the main flagship initiative to address the persistent challenges in adult learning, has contributed to closing the skills gap in the adult population since 2016. Some sectoral approaches are key to upskilling and reskilling the workforce in strategic sectors of the economy.

However, the low participation of adults in lifelong learning needs to be counteracted with more awareness raising measures and guidance strategies to support individuals in making their choices. Similarly, there is still room for further improvement in the VET sector to ensure better employment outcomes for graduates.

Updating qualifications, expanding learning opportunities at EQF 5, offering more flexible options to earn qualifications and streamlining the certification process for providers improve the quality and transparency of VET provision and help to make it more attractive to the younger generations, who are increasingly drawn to higher education over VET. Developing the CNQ and the RVCC procedure has been a significant step in raising awareness of learning outcomes and QNQ/EQF levels among different stakeholders, particularly employers. This remains challenging, as does aligning qualifications and curricula with QNQ/EQF descriptors (Cedefop, 2023).

The upgrade of vocational training infrastructure and the creation of specialised technology centres for new courses related to the ecological and digital transition shows a proactive approach to meeting the industry's current and future needs while promoting quality employment opportunities. To achieve these goals, teachers play a crucial role. As the teaching workforce ages, the shortage of teachers increases. Ensuring adequate, well-trained teachers is essential for providing quality education for present and future generations (European Commission, 2024a).

The internationalisation measures implemented aim to support the growth of the national economy and encourage foreign trade. However, the increased opportunities for European and international mobility experiences foreseen in the NIP have not yet been

fully exploited. Current initiatives seem limited to participating in skills competitions and the Erasmus+ programme, primarily in higher education. As proposed in the NIP, designing and implementing a strategy and a national action plan to promote international mobility would create more learning opportunities abroad.

Strategies for digital development aim to improve the population's low levels of digital skills, often with the support of the RRP. These strategies include specific measures targeted at different groups, such as young people, vulnerable or at-risk groups, workers, managers, company directors and trainers. Nevertheless, sustained efforts will be required to meet the EU's Skills Agenda target of 70% by 2025, particularly concerning increasing enrolment in ICT studies and incentivising future ICT specialists (European Commission, 2024b).

The [Green skills and jobs programme](#) (ReferNet Portugal & Cedefop, 2023b) explicitly addresses the energy transition. Appropriate financing schemes, awareness-raising campaigns, and the development of green skills would significantly increase the effectiveness of investment efforts in energy efficiency, especially in buildings (European Commission, 2022). While the upskilling and reskilling of workers in declining and transforming sectors is increasing, stronger policy initiatives are needed to reduce the shortage of green skills and achieve the goals set by the 2022 Council Recommendation for a just transition towards climate neutrality (European Commission, 2023).

The transition to a sustainable and digital economy requires adaptation to new ways of working, such as teleworking or work developed on digital platforms, as well as the adoption of new methodologies and practices in VET; these can help to achieve sustainable production and consumption patterns and improve the energy literacy of individuals and businesses alike (Portugal, 2022).

Companies and organisations, including those in the social economy, vocational training entities and different associations, are committed to supporting VET. They focus on sector-specific, locally based initiatives that aim to qualify and requalify young people and adults entering or already in the job market, aligning with innovation and business modernisation efforts.

Policies promoting equal opportunities and social inclusion in Portugal target young people and the large proportion of adults with low qualifications who are often unemployed, migrants or from other vulnerable groups. These policies offer flexible training, allowing them to gain credits that can be accumulated towards a full qualification. They help beneficiaries to (re)enter the labour market and further develop their skills. However, these measures need to overcome the dropout rate that is usually high within these groups, particularly in adult education and continuing training. The Valorizar programme for human resources in the social sector will improve awareness and skills in a field that provides services and solutions to vulnerable groups.

Strengthening education, training and active labour market policies can help address skills gaps and labour shortages while raising productivity levels in the face of a rapidly ageing workforce. However, active labour market policies in Portugal lack the capacity to provide individualised and targeted support to young jobseekers. Increasing work

experience placements, offering local assistance to help individuals find employment, and improving the anticipation of qualification requirements can contribute to Portugal achieving its national employment target of 80% by 2030 (European Commission, 2024a).

Abbreviations

ANQEP	<i>Agência Nacional para a Qualificação e o Ensino Profissional</i> [National agency for qualification and vocational education and training]
CNQ	National catalogue of qualifications
DGERT	Directorate General of Labour and Industrial Relations
DGES	Directorate-General for Higher Education
EFA	<i>educação e formação de adultos</i> [adult education and training courses]
EQAVET	European quality assurance in vocational education and training
EQF	European qualifications framework
ESF	European social fund
ICT	information and communications technology
IGeFE	<i>Instituto de Gestão Financeira da Educação</i> [Institute of Financial Management of Education]
IVET	initial vocational education and training
NEET	young people neither in employment nor in education and training
NIP	national implementation plan
NQF	national qualifications framework
PNEC	national energy and climate plan 2030
RRP	recovery and resilience plan
RVCC	recognition, validation and certification of competences
SANQ	<i>sistema de antecipação de necessidades de qualificação</i> [qualifications needs anticipation system]
SMEs	small and medium size enterprises
SNQ	<i>sistema nacional de qualificações</i> [national qualifications system]

VET	vocational education and training
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