



Vocational education and training

Policy briefs 2023

POLAND



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1. Introduction

This VET policy brief produced by Cedefop presents a snapshot of vocational education and training policy developments in Poland between 2020 and the beginning of 2023. 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 Poland'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](#). It offers stakeholders a regular source of information on VET policy developments that could be used for future policy making.

2. National VET context and challenges

2.1 National VET context

Vocational training is an important pillar of education in Poland, with a three-level governance structure: national (ministries), regional (school superintendents, mainly in pedagogical supervision) and county (governing schools). The Ministry of Education and Science is in charge of secondary and higher VET, supported by other ministries responsible for specific occupations. Social partners advise policy makers on necessary changes in VET (Cedefop, 2021).

VET is mainly provided in school-based upper secondary and post-secondary programmes. Work-based learning (WBL) is compulsory for all VET-oriented programmes, usually in school workshops, continuing education or vocational training centres. However, it can also be partly or fully organised by an employer, including apprenticeship.

Polish VET is a flexible system that allows for changing pathways at any point. It is based on the classification of occupations, each consisting of one or two qualifications linked to a core curriculum. VET schools have autonomy to develop these core programmes, easily adapted to labour market needs. Vocational qualification courses allow adults to acquire qualifications. Non-formal and informal learning can be validated through external examinations.

Since September 2017, the Polish education system has been undergoing substantial restructuring. New measures were introduced in November 2018 to strengthen mechanisms involving employers in VET and systematically adapting VET to labour market needs.

2.2 Challenges

The challenges faced by vocational education and training in Poland are closely related to the current socio-economic situation, as education and training policies are intended to meet economic and labour market needs.

The pandemic revealed that Polish schools, teachers and learners, as well as society in general, were not fully prepared to meet the challenge of the new forms of education needed during that period (distance/hybrid education). Disparities in the level of digital literacy and the shortage of ICT equipment and tools were the main problems, together with the teachers' lack of technological and methodological skills. The war in Ukraine and its refugee crisis also made it necessary to provide refugees with education and support.

In the context of the green transition, labour shortages in key sectors have increased in recent years, also linked to a lack of relevant skills; this is creating bottlenecks in the transition to a net-zero economy. In 2022, labour shortages were reported as a factor that constrained production in industry (63.4% of firms) and construction (74.6% of firms) (Council of European Union, 2023).

There are still persistent gaps regarding human capital, where Poland ranks 24th, scoring below average in all the indicators covered by the digital economy and society index (DESI). Only 43% of people between 16 and 74 years have at least basic digital skills (54% in the EU) and 57% have at least basic digital content creation skills (66% in the EU). ICT specialists account for a slightly lower percentage of the workforce in Poland than the EU average (European Commission, 2022).

VET is losing ground among young people. Over the last three decades, the share of learners in VET has fallen from 78% to almost 60% and has remained stable for several years, while participation in tertiary education has increased significantly (Cedefop; Educational Research Institute, 2022). Participation in lifelong learning remains at a very low level; mechanisms are needed to coordinate lifelong learning, including VET, at the regional level.

Teachers are a key factor in successful VET systems and one of the challenges facing the education system in Poland, as in Europe, is to counteract potential staff shortages in this area. Some research shows that problems persist with recruiting and retaining teachers, mainly due to low salaries, the poor image of the teaching profession, and their deteriorating working conditions (European Commission, 2023). Nevertheless, compared to other EU countries, the situation of VET teachers in Poland in terms of the age structure is better than the European average.

3. National VET policy priorities

The national implementation plan (NIP) (named in Poland as the Vocational education and training action plan for 2022-25) presents the actions Poland will take to implement the [Council Recommendation](#) on vocational education and training for sustainable competitiveness, social justice and resilience, as well as the [Osnabrück Declaration](#) on vocational education and training as a factor in recovery and a fair transition to the digital and green economy.

The NIP's main goal is to prepare people for the modern economy by developing high-quality, relevant, effective and inclusive vocational education at all levels. This overall purpose is addressed through the following four objectives:

- a) improving the quality and relevance of qualifications;
- b) further developing human resources for VET;
- c) developing career guidance;
- d) strengthening national and international cooperation in VET.

4. Main policy developments 2020-23

4.1 Improving the quality and relevance of qualifications

Several amendments and regulations were introduced regarding [the classification of occupations](#), adopted in 2017. These amendments aimed to identify new vocational skills, establish new occupations, or develop new core curricula for different sectors.

After the 2019 VET reform, new opportunities opened up for the continuous adaptation of curricula, enabling schools to prepare students during compulsory education for additional vocational skills or market qualifications included in the Polish [integrated qualifications system](#) (IQS) (Ministry of Education and Science, 2022).

The IQS has been further developed to include nearly two hundred non-statutory (market) qualifications in the system, as well as new qualifications (market or regulated) in line with current and forecast skills needs, including for the green and digital economy. Several sectoral qualifications frameworks have also been developed for specific sectors, such as banking, IT, sport, tourism, telecommunications, construction, development services, fashion, public health, trade and automotive; the framework for the energy sector entered the consultation phase in 2023.

In March 2020, an amendment was approved of the Regulation on the [core curricula](#) and additional professional skills in selected occupations. In the following years, other amendments were made to this and the Regulation on the general objectives and tasks of education in vocational education professions and the classification of vocational education professions. Review of existing occupations or their core curricula, as well as identifying new qualifications, took place in areas such as construction, health, robotics, agriculture, car servicing, or water transport.

In the IQS update, Poland also considered digitisation in different areas of VET. This included expanding the [offer of multimedia materials](#) for vocational education or [digitisation of vocational examinations](#) conducted within the education system, designing multimedia tasks and animations allowing for a more complete verification of professional and key competences, and exploring the possibility of using virtual technologies and augmented reality in the future.

A tool for issuing and collecting digital credentials, the [Badge+](#) (Odznaka+) application, has been developed and implemented as a pilot since 2021. It allows institutions to create

digital badges and issue them to their clients, pupils, students, employees and contractors. It also allows individuals to collect and store these badges or share them on social media.

Between 2020 and 2023, various initiatives took place to support [stakeholder involvement in development and delivery of VET](#), to make it more responsive to labour market needs. With ESF partial funding, projects were developed to design a quality framework for work-based learning for VET students in enterprises and to develop model work-based learning programmes for technician-level occupations. By 2022, all 21 planned quality assurance principles and a verification tool for employer-provided work experience had been developed, and over 120 occupations had solutions for their workplace training. A third round of projects continued in 2023.

Other ESF jointly funded projects aimed to develop new vocational test items with employers' support to [strengthen the participation of employers in the examination process](#). All examination tasks are gradually posted on an internet platform. By the end of 2022, a total of 84 200 tasks (2 045 written tests and 2 400 practical tasks) had been prepared.

4.2 Further developing human resources for VET

A major development in 2020 was the adoption of the [Integrated skills strategy](#) (detailed part) (*Zintegrowana Strategia Umiejętności. Część szczegółowa*). This strategy focuses on developing sector-specific skills, particularly basic, transversal and professional skills for all ages, lifelong learning, skills recognition, and the use of skills in the workplace. It also promotes skills development for management and teaching staff in formal education. The national recovery and resilience plan draws on this strategy to rebuild the economy through skills development after the COVID-19 crisis. It also serves as a basis for mobilising national and European funds for skills development at national and regional levels.

The Polish government has implemented several measures to provide, prepare, and train vocational teachers. These measures build on changes introduced before 2020, which made CPD mandatory and tailored to school needs. The government also facilitated in-service training for VET teachers in enterprises.

The Act of 23 July 2021 enabled vocational colleges (*uczelnie praktyczne*) to [prepare future teachers for the teaching profession](#). Under this regulation, vocational colleges that meet the conditions set out in the regulation can use the title of practical college and train future teachers without having to sign an agreement with an authorised university.

In 2022, a [vocational teacher competition](#), covering 100 vocational fields, aimed to motivate VET teachers to achieve the best results in their work and promote a positive image of VET. The competition consisted of several categories, including promoting VET, introducing new didactic and methodological solutions, collaborating with employers and the socio-economic environment, supporting students' vocational interests, working with gifted students, and participating in continuing professional development. In March 2023, 118 winners of this competition were announced.

Poland encourages its teachers to participate in the European platform [EPALE](#), which is actively promoted by its national office. This platform offers adult educators and trainers

a variety of resources, including ideas for new teaching methods and ways to motivate adults to learn. The national office is managed by the Foundation for the Development of the Education System and holds events such as adult education fora, live chats, workshops, and online webinars on adult education topics. These events aim to improve educators' skills and foster cooperation with career counsellors and VET experts.

In 2022, [the For Life \(Za życiem\) project](#) developed a comprehensive set of didactic materials to help educators and career counsellors support SEN learners transitioning into the labour market. Additionally, schools with students with special educational needs can receive increased financial support for the [development of ICT infrastructure of schools and digital competences of learners and teachers](#) following the COVID-19 pandemic.

4.3 Developing career guidance

Starting in 2018, a [systemic approach to vocational/career guidance](#) in schools has been introduced, making career guidance classes compulsory. As part of ESF funding, the government supports developing e-resources for career guidance and a new web portal as a source of information on careers and vocational education.

In 2021, 115 materials were created and published on a new web portal, a sub-tab on the [integrated learning platform](#) (providing free educational materials for teachers, students, and parents). This portal is to be continuously updated with news on legislative changes in vocational education and guidance, conferences, training and publications. In 2022, 134 curriculum programmes for additional professional skills (*dodatkowe umiejętności zawodowe*) were finalised and disseminated, and another 59 e-resources were published.

Poland also draws on the European network of expertise [Euroguidance and the Europass](#) initiative to raise awareness of international mobility and support using the Europass service in learning mobility. This facilitates access to information on learning opportunities abroad. In 2022, the Europass-mobility on-line (EMOL) electronic system continued to support beneficiaries, with 52 124 documents approved for 24 398 individuals.

4.4 Strengthening national and international cooperation in VET

Timely and accurate information is essential in adapting VET to the ever-changing external environment. This process should be carried out in cooperation with stakeholders by using existing solutions and tools as well as new and innovative solutions.

Forecasting national and regional demand for employees in VET occupations is part of the VET reforms begun in 2018. This [annual forecast](#), constantly evolving in its approach and methodology, and has an impact on VET funding. As of 2020, local governments receive increased State subsidies for schools that offer programmes in occupations with higher demand, as well as for employers involved in training VET learners (young workers) in those occupations.

A [VET graduate tracking system](#) has been developed to provide reliable data on the career paths of graduates, including all secondary school graduates from 2021. This

tracking system can automatically generate over 5 500 reports for VET schools, with aggregated indicators on the employment, further training and wage conditions of graduates in specific occupations, economic sectors and regions. The national report of the first edition was published on the website of the Ministry of Education in the first quarter of 2022.

National and regional cooperation with employers has been a priority area of VET reform from 2019 onwards, especially for workplace training. [Strengthening employers' involvement](#) in the development of the integrated qualification system (IQS), increasing their involvement in monitoring, and improving the quality and effectiveness of VET are some of the areas of this cooperation.

The network of [sectoral skills centres](#) represents a new form of innovative and sustainable cooperation between VET, businesses and science. These centres (*branżowe centra umiejętności*) are technologically advanced education, training and examination centres for students, teachers, employees and adults who wish to retrain in a specific sector. 120 of these centres have been planned, and several tenders have been launched since 2022, with the support of the Recovery and resilience facility. The first 14 contracts were signed in July 2023.

The Ministry of Education awarded 18 projects in 2020 to support [cooperation between vocational schools and higher education institutions](#) (HEIs). By 2022, 10 projects were completed, and 8 continued in progress. Funded activities include exemplary teaching programmes, the organisation of teaching by university lecturers using vocational or higher education didactic approaches, activities familiarising students and VET teachers with the new techniques/technologies used in a given sector/occupation, or exemplary forms of professional development for VET teachers.

Cooperation at international level is promoted through various measures. A [National team of experts for vocational education and training](#) (EVET) was set up in 2021 to support the implementation of EU tools related to VET (e.g. EQAVET framework, EU basic profiles, graduate tracking, etc.). In 2022, EVET was composed of seven experts from higher education and 10 from education, nominated by the Ministry of Education and Science. That year, in cooperation with this expert group, seminars, thematic conferences, workshops, training courses, lectures, debates and study visits were organised for the beneficiaries of the Erasmus+ programme. The EVET Team website was launched, and a [selection of articles](#) touching upon different issues prepared by this group of experts was published.

Different kinds of vocational [skills competitions](#) play a significant role in strengthening cooperation. Poland is to host national and EuroSkills 2023 competitions and participate in the WorldSkills event. This is expected to bring benefit from the enhanced image and attractiveness of VET that these events offer, to foster cooperation between schools/VET centres and employers, and to improve the skills of VET teachers preparing students for the competition, increasing their motivation.

5. Statistical information in relation to EU targets

Table 1. European vocational education and training policy dashboard: Poland

Type of indicator ⁽¹⁾	Indicator	Last available year	PL	EU-27	Policy Document	EU target (year)
VET for developing a lifelong learning culture						
Progress	Adults (25 to 64-year-olds) with learning experience in the last 12 months (%) [*]	2022	20.3 ^u	39.5	Skills Agenda	50% (2025)
					Council Resolution on EEA	47% (2025)
					ESPR Action Plan	60% (2030)
Progress	Low-qualified adults with learning experience in the last 12 months (%)	2022	4.8 ^u	18.4	Skills Agenda	30% (2025)
Progress	Unemployed adults with learning experience in the last 4 weeks (%)	2022	5.6	13.2	Skills Agenda	20% (2025)
Context	Employment rate for 20 to 64-year-olds (%)	2022	76.7	74.6	ESPR Action Plan	78% (2030)
Context	Early leavers from education and training (%)	2022	4.8	9.6	Council Resolution on EEA	<9% (2030)
Context	NEET rate for 15 to 29-year-olds (%)	2022	10.9	11.7	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 (%)	2021	42.9	53.9	Skills Agenda	70% (2025)
					ESPR Action Plan	80% (2030)
Progress	Employment rate for recent IVET graduates (20 to 34-year-olds) (%)	2022	82.1	79.7	Council Rec on VET	82% (2025)
Progress	Recent IVET graduates (20 to 34-year-olds) with work-based learning experience as part of their vocational education and training (%)	2022	16.4	60.1	Council Rec on VET	60% (2025)
					Council Resolution on EEA	
Context	25 to 34-year-olds with tertiary attainment (%)	2022	40.5	42	Council Resolution on EEA	45% (2025)
Context	Gender employment gap (%)	2022	12.9	10.7	ESPR Action Plan	To be halved (2030)
Context	People at risk of poverty or social exclusion (1000s)	2022	5 873	95 284	ESPR Action Plan	15 million decrease (2030)
Context	Employed ICT specialists (1000s)	2022	600.7	9 370.2 ^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	5.8	2.1 ^{dV}	Council Rec on VET	8% (2025)
Context	Average number of foreign languages learned in IVET	2021	1.8	1.2	Skills Agenda	

Available flags: d - definition differs, e – estimated, V - Cedefop estimate, u - low reliability.

^{*} Eurostat data (Adult education survey, special calculation excluding guided on-the-job training)

(¹) [Definitions](#) of the type of indicators are available.

Poland shows very positive results in terms of early school leavers and NEET rates. The percentage of students who leave education and training prematurely in 2022 was only 4.8%, well below the EU-27 average of 9.6% and slightly above the national target for 2020 of no more than 4.5%. Additionally, the NEET rate fell to 10.9% in 2022, which is below the EU27 average of 11.7%. This is a significant improvement from the peak of 16.2% recorded in 2013.

The employment rate for recent VET graduates fell in 2020 and 2021 but rose to 82.1% in 2022, meeting the VET Council Recommendation on the 82% target. However, only 16.4% of these graduates had the opportunity to gain work-based learning experience as part of their VET. This is well below the European average of 60.1%.

The percentage of adults with a learning experience in the past 12 months stands at 20.3% in 2022, a slight decrease of 0.6 percentage points since 2016. This rate is 19.2 percentage points lower than the European average (39.5%) and far below the target towards achieving the European Education Area (47%).

Levels of digital skills remain low compared to the EU average, with only 42.9% of people aged between 16 and 74 having at least basic digital skills (EU 53.9%) and 21% having above basic digital skills. ICT specialists and female ICT specialists account for a lower percentage of the workforce in Poland compared with the EU average. ICT graduates currently account for 3.7% of all graduates in Poland (European Commission, 2022).

6. Conclusion

Poland's national implementation plan (NIP) identified four main priorities for developing high-quality, relevant, effective, and inclusive vocational education at all levels, aiming to prepare people for the modern economy. The NIP focuses on improving the quality and relevance of qualifications, further developing human resources for VET, developing career guidance, and strengthening cooperation in VET at national and international levels. The implementation measures of the NIP build upon previous policies, so some measures are more advanced than others.

To improve qualification relevance and quality, the integrated qualification system (IQS) has been expanded to include market and new qualifications, in line with current and forecast skills demands and the transition to the green and digital economy. IQS is supported by a new classification of occupations and the development of respective core curricula, which VET schools can flexibly adapt to meet labour market needs.

Developing sector-specific qualification frameworks contributes to more employer participation in vocational education and training, ultimately leading to better quality VET provision. Recent changes in practical training and in other areas of employer involvement, such as identifying the skill needs or designing tasks for assessing VET students, are also helping to improve the quality of VET provision, better aligned to labour market demands.

In addition to considering digital literacy in curricula, other measures are also reinforcing digital skills, such as developing digital micro-credentials or expanding e-resources for different purposes (VET exams, career guidance, SEN learners). VET programmes can complement green and digital skills, but more efforts will be needed to keep up with digitalisation. These efforts can also help face challenges in terms of quality and inclusiveness. The same applies to the ecological transition, where more actions would be needed, especially in a country with high carbon dependency.

There is still a need to ensure sufficient support specialists, new cooperation models and teacher education focusing on quality and equity improvements. Regulatory changes have been made to improve the development of human resources for VET. This includes supporting teacher CPD and increasing participation. A competition to select the best VET teachers is being tested in 2022 to promote a positive image of these professionals. Nevertheless, more structural reforms will be required, particularly on initial teacher training, in addition to promoting the use of EU tools and services (EPALE, Euroguidance, Europass); this will help prevent staff shortages and equip teachers with the right skills, especially concerning digitalisation.

The systemic approach to career guidance and the development of e-resources for guidance practitioners are well-targeted measures to increase the attractiveness and enrolment in VET. Similarly, improving digital and labour market skills through adult learning can also help achieve this goal. However, in addition to skills competitions and support from European instruments, Poland would benefit from more comprehensive policy measures to meet the country's long-term goals. Providing methodological and organisational support for guidance and improving the quality assessment of school performance in this area could lead to more significant results.

Annual forecasting of the most in-demand occupations and tracking VET graduates are important steps towards providing skills intelligence and guiding policy-making. Collaborating with key stakeholders, such as employers and higher education institutions, makes the VET system more responsive to labour market needs. Once operational, the sectoral skills centres aim to do the same for their specific sectors and facilitate the participation of some groups with limited access to the labour market. However, less than 10% of these centres had started implementation by 2023.

Reforms to improve coordination in different areas of education and training (at regional and national levels) should ensure that employers have access to skilled workers and increase participation in adult learning, reducing skills shortages and promoting labour market inclusion. Upskilling and reskilling need to be easily accessible specially to individuals and the sectors and regions most affected by the green transition, where bottlenecks are more likely to occur. (Council of the European Union, 2023).

Despite efforts to improve vocational education and training (VET) in Poland, there is still a significant gap between Polish graduates and their counterparts in the EU when it comes to practical training experience. Well-targeted and comprehensive policy actions will be needed to ensure Poland's long-term growth and resilience.

Acronyms

CPD	continuing professional development
DESI	Digital economy and society index
EPALE	Electronic platform for adult learning in Europe
EVET	National team of experts for vocational education and training
EQAVET	European quality assurance in vocational education and training reference framework
ESI	European skills index
HEIs	higher education institutions
ICT	information and communications technology
IQS	Integrated qualification system
NIP	national implementation plan
NRP	national reference point
SEN	special educational needs
VET	vocational education and training
WBL	work-based learning

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