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1. Introduction

This VET policy brief produced by Cedefop presents a snapshot of vocational education and training policy developments in Austria 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 Austria'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](#). 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

Austria has a strong industrial base, including numerous export-oriented small- and medium-sized enterprises. The vocational education and training (VET) system is a cornerstone of national economic success, playing a pivotal role in fostering a skilled workforce to meet the evolving demands of the labour market. VET is highly regarded and in 2021 around 68.9% of all initial learners opted for a vocational programme (Eurostat, 2024); this contributed to keeping the youth unemployment rate relatively low.

The Austrian VET system is characterised by a dual approach, integrating work-based learning (WBL) within companies and formal education at vocational schools. The broad range of VET programmes is not only reflected in the various types of training and qualification levels but also in the fields of study. Emphasis is put on the acquisition of key competences including language, as well as digital and entrepreneurial skills. Continuing vocational education and training (CVET) plays a crucial role in ensuring that the workforce remains adaptable and responsive to evolving industry demands. The Austrian lifelong learning system offers many opportunities for individuals to enhance their skills and knowledge throughout their careers.

The close collaboration between education institutions and the business sector is a key feature, aligning the curriculum with labour market needs. While the [education ministry](#) oversees most school-based VET, the governance of apprenticeship is a collaborative effort involving the ministries of economy and education, social partners, and the Länder. There are several laws, ordinances and guidelines in place, which form the legal background for the implementation of dual and school-based VET and apply throughout Austria. The Vocational Training Act ([BAG](#)) regulates the operational aspects of dual vocational training, while the School Organization Act ([SchOG](#)) and School Instruction Act ([SchUG](#)) delineate the tasks and structure of schools. They regulate all areas of teaching, such as admission of learners, learners' assessment, and cooperation between teaching staff, learners and legal guardians. The trade regulations ([GewO](#)) oversee access to self-

employed practices of regulated trades, setting the foundation for quality assurance of master craftsman and qualification examinations. For further vocational training, alongside national regulations, many decisions are made at regional or institutional level.

Vocational training is a key topic in Austria, especially against the background of digitisation, the increasing need for skilled workers, demographic change and climate protection. Various measures are put in place to meet these challenges. In the current [government programme 2020-24](#), the federal government focuses on strengthening in-company apprenticeship training and expanding the range of adult education to secure the need for skilled workers, responding to developments such as the digital and green transition.

2.2 Challenges

Austria currently has the highest job vacancy rate in the EU, almost double the EU average. The shortage of skilled workers, attributed to demographic changes and the growing appeal of general education, is putting a strain on the Austrian economy (ReferNet Austria; Cedefop, 2022a). Shortage of skilled labour is particularly experienced in construction, manufacturing, tourism, the healthcare sector, engineering and information and communication technology (ICT). The last of these faces a key challenge concerning the lack of ICT specialists, which is well above the EU average and is delaying the digital transition. Skill shortages also hamper the green transition, as in 2022 shortages of workers were reported for 17 occupations that required specific skills or knowledge for the green transition (European Commission, 2023a). Participation of adults in lifelong learning is quite high, but access for the low-qualified and for adults living in rural areas remains a challenge (European Commission, 2023b).

Disadvantaged groups are less integrated in the education and labour market system. Among the long-term unemployed, less than half have completed lower secondary school and the employment rate for older workers (aged 55-64) in 2022 remained below the EU average. Additionally, the unemployment rate of people with a migration background is substantially higher than it is for natives, and their percentage of early leavers is three times higher than those of native-born. The labour market participation of persons with disabilities deteriorated in 2021 and the disability employment gap increased, exceeding the EU average. The employment rate of women in 2022 was well below the rate for men and the percentage of female part-time workers was 51%, the highest rate in the EU (European Commission, 2023a).

3. National VET policy priorities

Austria prepared a national implementation plan in 2022 to tackle both EU-level priorities and its national objectives for VET and lifelong learning. It focuses on the following six thematic categories.

- a) Skill change: ensuring alignment between vocational training programmes and industry requirements secures the labour market needs of relevant skilled workers. This involves constant collaboration between education institutions and employers to identify and integrate emerging skill demands in VET.
- b) Green transition and sustainability: the transition of our societies to an environmentally sustainable and resource-efficient, circular and climate-neutral economy has an impact on the world of work and thus on the skills requirements of employees. Green skills need to be part of vocational qualifications and teachers' skills.
- c) Digitalisation: the digital transition of the economy, has an impact on the skills requirements of employees, which requires an update of vocational qualifications as well as of teachers' skills. Embracing digital tools and platforms enhances the efficiency, accessibility, and relevance of VET programmes.
- d) Social dimension: the lack of skilled workforce is also asking for better integration of socially disadvantaged groups, such as women, older workers, the low-qualified and migrants.
- e) Internationalisation: VET needs to prepare learners for a globally interconnected world. It must incorporate international perspectives, cross-cultural competences, and collaboration with institutions and industries across borders.
- f) Institutional changes: continued efforts are needed to keep and further improve the overall attractiveness of VET, through amendments at higher level, such as the guarantee of high quality and attracting competent pedagogical staff.

A total of 30 measures announced in the NIP are assigned to these categories, as well as to three vocational training levels: school-based vocational training, dual vocational training and vocational further training.

4. Main policy developments 2020-23

4.1 Skills change

The following major measures have been implemented since 2020, to improve the alignment of skills provision in VET to the labour market needs.

The amended Vocational Training Act (BAG) came into force on 1 May 2020 and lays down first basic principles for the [development of new occupational profiles](#), based on [guidelines](#) developed in 2019. The regular review and update of existing apprenticeship profiles and the introduction of new apprenticeship programmes is a continuing process; this allows to aligning apprenticeship training with the changes regarding the skills needed on the labour market (Cedefop and ReferNet, 2023). Since 2020, several [apprenticeship occupation](#) regulations [have been updated and introduced](#). For example, the apprenticeship Event Management assistant was introduced in 2021 and the apprenticeship in mechatronics was expanded by the new module Digital manufacturing technology (2022). High importance has been placed on the integration of green and digital skills in apprenticeship programmes.

In 2021, a project to develop a [concept for anchoring transversal competences more effectively in apprenticeship training](#) started. The development is being led by two research institutions with the involvement of the social partners and the ministries. The final report [on transversal competences in practical vocational training](#) was published in 2022. The report serves as a basis for formulating transversal job profile positions in all future adaptations of existing apprenticeship training regulations and the development of new training regulations. The objective is progressively to incorporate transversal competences into all training regulations.

Supporting the priority to improve career orientation for young people aged 14, an education and career information fair L14 was organised by the chamber of labour in Wien in November 2023. For the first time it was offered as a hybrid fair, on-site and digitally ⁽¹⁾.

4.2 Green transition and sustainability

Several measures have been set up since 2020 to promote the green transition and sustainability in VET.

The [Greenovet project was launched in 2020](#) and aims to foster the development of VET excellence in green innovation. It is partly funded by the Erasmus+ programme and involves 18 partners from four European countries (AT, FIN, PT, MK). In 2022 the analysis of green skills gaps started and, in support, the Green-Tech Academy Austria ([Greta](#)) was established at the beginning of the same year. The primary goal is to foster collaboration and networking within the knowledge triangle of research, economy, and education, including also regional vocational schools (Cedefop and ReferNet, 2023).

In 2022, a [basic document on transversal competences in practical vocational training](#) (including sustainability and greening, digital skills) was developed in coordination with the social partners. It is a starting document for the formulation of transversal job profile positions, which will be anchored in all existing apprenticeship training regulations and new training regulations (Cedefop and ReferNet, 2023; ÖIBF, 2023).

The implementation phase of the Just Transition process on training and reskilling was launched in January 2023, with the publishing of the [Just transition action plan](#) from the Austrian Federal Ministry for Climate Action (BMK). It puts in place a comprehensive package of measures to integrate green competences in VET programmes, including school-based VET, apprenticeships, and continuous VET programmes, to meet the demand for skilled labour required by the green transition by 2030. Numerous stakeholders from business and VET are involved, to enable sustainable change at all levels (ReferNet Austria; Cedefop, 2023a).

Green skills were already integrated into several modernised apprenticeship profiles. The following special modules have been integrated into the [general part of electrical engineering from 1 February 2024](#): Smart Home (which includes commissioning of building systems using smart home technologies); and renewable energy and electromobility

(1) AK Wien Bildungs- und Berufsinformmesse L14: [So finden Junge ihren Bildungsweg \[AK Wien Education and Career Information Fair L14: How young people find their educational path\]](#).

(installation, testing and commissioning of renewable energy production and storage facilities, such as photovoltaic and wind power plants and electric vehicle charging facilities). Since 2020 [new training regulations](#) have been set up for several apprenticeship programmes (e.g. wastewater technology) and [several training experiments were transferred to a regular apprenticeship programme](#) (e.g. retail, with a focus on digital sales), after initially being a training experiment.

4.3 Digitalisation

Digitalisation has been a major topic on the political agenda for many years. Since 2020, several measures have been introduced to promote digitalisation in VET, to meet the skills needed on the labour market.

The learning platform [wise-up](#) was piloted and subsequently presented to the public in autumn 2022. Companies can use this platform to digitise their own company-specific learning content and make it accessible to their employees. In November 2022, the platform offered more than 15 000 online courses targeting companies and their employees, apprentices, job seekers and other individuals seeking self-development in various job-related competence areas through online content (Cedefop and ReferNet, 2023).

To help the digitisation of training administration, [the online service for company apprenticeship promotion \(LOS\)](#), which digitises the application and processing of apprenticeship subsidies, has been operational since 2022 (Cedefop and ReferNet, 2023).

The DigComp-Cert certification system for digital competences underwent a pilot phase and was then officially introduced in 2022. This system certifies individuals' digital competences based on the [DigComp 2.2 AT model](#) and also piloted competence levels 1-5. DigComp-Cert comprises two parts, a knowledge check (Dig-Cert, requiring an appointment at a test centre) and a proof of competence. The latter can be independently selected, with various forms and scopes (e.g., certificates, confirmation of participation, degree). Upon examination of the submitted proof of competence, DigComp-Cert certificates are issued and can be digitally shared (Cedefop and ReferNet, 2023).

The education ministry started cooperating with the university colleges of teacher education in 2022, to set up [initial and further training programmes on AI topics for teachers](#) (Cedefop and ReferNet, 2023).

4.4 Social dimension

Since 2020, the following measures have been introduced to promote social inclusion and increase equal opportunities.

The pilot phase of the [Digital pioneers project](#) concluded in September 2022, with 29 young women having completed the first year of the programme across three federal provinces (Vorarlberg, Tyrol and Upper Austria). The programme lasting a minimum of 10 months, incorporates an 8-week basic training, covering business innovation, project management, digital skills and programming. Afterwards, participants complete a paid internship of at least 8 months in a partner company or a scientific institution, in which they

focus on developing digital literacy, process and system competences (Cedefop and ReferNet, 2023).

The Austrian labour market has a high need for STEM experts, and with demand still growing it is important to motivate more young learners to finish an education in STEM. In Austria, women graduate less often from STEM programmes than men, and this percentage is below the EU average. In response, the [Join in STEM: BMBWF action plan for more STEM experts](#) was adopted in June 2023. This aims to break down gender-related STEM stereotypes and to motivate girls/women to access STEM education in school-based educational and vocational orientation; it works through STEM teachers who are boosting the confidence of girls/women in STEM subjects across all levels of education.

The [Just transition action plan for education and training](#) (2022) aims to transform society to a low-emission and resource-efficient economy, climate neutral society. This will have also an impact on the labour market asking for new qualifications, initial and further training as well as retraining to meet changed framework conditions. For example, in renewable energy and the construction industry, specialists are needed for the construction of photovoltaic systems or for thermal building renovations. The action plan specifically targets women, the unemployed, people without a school diploma, socially disadvantaged groups and people with disabilities.

4.5 Internationalisation

The following measures since 2020 aim to help internationalisation in VET.

In 2022, a process for [increased internationalisation of VET schools](#) started, coordinated by the Ministry of Education, Science and Research (BMBWF), with the Ministry of Labour and Economy (BMAW) and the social partners (Cedefop and ReferNet, 2023). In the first half year of 2023, a survey was conducted among teachers and school administrators to map the state of play. Existing internationalisation structures and processes were discussed, and challenges faced by the institutions identified. The result of the interviews will be incorporated into a report, containing recommendations for the further development of structures and instruments to support internationalisation (BMBWF and BMDW, 2022).

As there were still significantly fewer apprentices than learners from general education participating in the Erasmus+ mobility programme, the study [International mobility in apprenticeship training](#) was conducted. Results were presented in 2022 and showed that apprentices, trainers and companies were unaware of the Erasmus+ offer. In 2022, the [Apprenticeship without borders](#) campaign was launched by the Agency for Education and Internationalisation (OeAD) and the Austrian Economic Chamber. The initiative promotes Erasmus+ among apprentices, with the goal of [doubling the current number of apprentice mobilities](#) of around 1 000 apprentices per year until 2027. The initiative includes the development of comprehensive information materials for apprentices, schools and companies, as well as other promotional material such as video interviews, Instagram campaign Go beyond your borders (Cedefop and ReferNet, 2023; ReferNet Austria,

Cedefop, 2023b). In September 2022, the OeAD celebrated the [Erasmus+ apprentice week](#) throughout Austria, during which many events and initiatives promoted Erasmus+ apprentice mobility.

Austria continues to participate in international competitions; in 2021 [EuroSkills took place in Graz](#) and the closing ceremony of the [WorldSkills Competition in 2022 took place in Salzburg](#).

4.6 Institutional change

Since 2020, institutional changes have taken place to improve VET attractiveness and quality.

In 2022, the Council of Ministers formally decided to [establish higher VET as a separate education segment](#) and gave the starting signal to set up a higher VET Act. The main objective is to consolidate the heterogeneous field of higher VET by defining common elements and establishing a legal basis for a common understanding; this also increases visibility and attractiveness (Cedefop and ReferNet, 2023).

A 2- to 3-year programme called Dual Academy has been set up, targeting learners who have gained the Matura qualification. The programme combines work-based learning in a company with formal education at a vocational school and includes a compulsory stay abroad aimed at fostering the development of social, digital and international skills. Following a pilot phase, this programme has been rolled out in 13 professional fields across Austria since September 2022. The spectrum ranges from technology to IT and software to banking and logistics (ReferNet Austria; Cedefop, 2022b; European Commission, 2023b).

The [amendment of the Vocational Training Act \(2020\)](#), introduced part-time apprenticeship training for parents with childcare obligations and those with health restriction. This new flexibility opens the door to [new target groups to follow an apprenticeship programme](#) (Cedefop and ReferNet, 2023).

Efforts to improve VET quality continued. In 2021 and in 2022 several [revised examination regulations for master craftsperson](#) and proof of competence examinations were issued (Cedefop and ReferNet, 2023).

In 2022, the [Startup Apprenticeship](#) pilot project was launched by the Federal Ministry of Labour and Economy (BMAW). In this project, companies with experience in providing training places for apprentices, enter into a training alliance with a startup to facilitate their entry into apprenticeship training (Cedefop and ReferNet, 2023).

5. Statistical information in relation to EU targets

VET is highly appreciated in Austrian society. In 2022, 87.1% of recent IVET graduates (20 to 34-year-olds) found a job on the labour market, which is much higher than the EU-27 average of 79.7%. A high percentage (89.8%) had a work-based learning experience as part of their VET in 2022. This is well above the EU-27 average of 60.1% and the EU target of 60% set in the Council Recommendation on VET for 2025.

The percentage of adults (age 25 to 64) with a learning experience in the last 12 months was 5.2% in 2022 (excluding guided on-the-job training). More indicators compared to the EU-27 average and EU targets are presented in the below table.

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

Type of indicator ⁽²⁾	Indicator	Last available year	AT	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	52.2	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	21.4	18.4	Skills Agenda	30% (2025)
Progress	Unemployed adults with a learning experience in the last 4 weeks (%)	2022	21.4	13.2	Skills Agenda	20% (2025)
Context	Employment rate for 20 to 64-year-olds (%)	2022	77.3	74.6	ESPR Action Plan	78% (2030)
Context	Early leavers from education and training (%)	2022	8.4	9.6	Council Resolution on EEA	<9% (2030)
Context	NEET rate for 15 to 29-year-olds (%)	2022	9.1	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	63.3	53.9	Skills Agenda	70% (2025)
					ESPR Action Plan	80% (2030)
Progress	Employment rate for recent IVET graduates (20 to 34-year-olds) (%)	2022	87.1	79.7	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 (%)	2022	89.8	60.1	Council Rec on VET Council Resolution on EEA	60% (2025)
Context	25 to 34-year-olds with tertiary attainment (%)	2022	43.1	42	Council Resolution on EEA	45% (2025)
Context	Gender employment gap (%)	2022	7.8	10.7	ESPR Action Plan	To be halved (2030)
Context	People at risk of poverty or social exclusion (1000s)	2022	1 555	95 284	ESPR Action Plan	15 million reduction (2030)
Context	Employed ICT specialists (1000s)	2022	220.6	9 370.2*	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 learning mobility abroad (%) **	2021	2.2	2.1 ^{dv}	Council Rec on VET	8% (2025)
					Skills Agenda	
Context	Average number of foreign languages learned in IVET	2021	1.2	1.2		

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

Available flags: d – definition differs, e – estimated, V – Cedefop estimate. Special value - not available
* Eurostat data (Adult education survey, special calculation excluding guided on-the-job training)
** Provisional estimates affected by the COVID-19 pandemic
Source: Cedefop. [European VET policy dashboard](#)

6. Conclusion

Since 2020, Austria has taken various actions to address the policy priorities outlined in the national implementation plan. Some of those measures had already started before 2020, but further development has taken place since then.

Work has taken place on the priority of aligning vocational training programmes to industry requirements, aiming to integrate transversal job profiles in all future adaptations of existing apprenticeship training regulations. A [report on transversal competences in dual training](#) was published in 2022 setting the basis for further discussion among representatives of different professions on integrating relevant transversal competences. The implementation process is to be monitored further.

Green transition/sustainability is a priority; important steps have been taken since 2020 aiming to update VET in line with the skills needs for the green transition. Green skills were integrated into several modernised apprenticeship profiles and, within the [GREENOVET](#) project, the assessment of green skills gaps in existing training programmes has taken place. Also, the establishment of the Green-Tech Academy Austria ([GRETA](#)) promotes collaboration between several actors for a green and sustainable society. The [Just transition action plan](#) (2023) introduces necessary measures to integrate green competences in VET programmes. More measures are expected to be implemented. Efforts should continue to address the skills shortages that demand specific skills for the green transition in several occupations.

Digitalisation has been a priority for many years. Since 2020, relevant measures have included the launch of the platform [wise-up](#), allowing companies to digitalise their own company-specific training. The DigComp-Cert certification system for digital competences was officially introduced, providing proof of learning outcomes allowing international and national comparability. First steps have been taken to integrate artificial intelligence (AI) into the curricula of programmes offered in upper secondary vocational schools (BHS) as well as in teacher education. Some measures are still in the initial implementation phase, such as the development of the 'digitisation pass' for secondary and higher vocational schools (BMHS), or upskilling in digital production of vocational institutions.

Some social inclusion measures are already in place, such as the coaches for apprentices and training companies to avoid dropouts. To promote the participation of woman in technical fields of VET programmes, Digital pioneers were put in place; the Join in STEM action plan also promotes female participation. Various measures are still expected on the promotion of disadvantaged groups in lifelong learning, such as the results of the survey on the motivation of disadvantaged groups to participate in education and the definition of a related strategic concept. Further efforts to counteract the educational challenges of disadvantaged groups, and so to increase the labour market qualifications and participation, would contributing to securing the need for additional skilled labour.

Several measures are already helping the promotion of participation in international skills competitions. An initiative to increase internationalisation of VET schools started in 2022 and the Apprenticeship without borders campaign was launched to promote Erasmus+ among apprentices, aiming to double the number of participating apprentices by 2027. To reach the EU target of 8% mobility among IVET learners, even at a later stage than 2025, additional efforts seem to be necessary.

Some institutional changes have been implemented since 2020, aiming to increase the attractiveness of VET. Emphasis was placed on attracting new target groups to VET, such as offering the possibility to complete the apprenticeship in reduced working hours, so allowing such learners as those with care obligation to follow VET. Changes have been introduced to attract learners with *Matura* qualification, such as the introduction of the Dual Academy programme, or the establishment of higher VET as a separate education segment. It is to be seen how these changes will influence the attractiveness of VET.

Austria has been progressing in all its national priorities. Progressing the above measures would allow the country to meet the objectives set in the NIP in line with the Council Recommendation on VET and the Osnabruck Declaration.

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