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SWEDEN



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Contents

1.	Introduction.....	2
2.	National VET context and challenges	2
2.1	National VET context.....	2
2.2	Challenges	3
3.	National VET policy priorities.....	4
4.	Main policy developments and progress 2020-23.....	4
4.1	Strengthen quality and attractiveness of VET	4
4.2	Strengthen alignment of VET to the labour market needs.....	5
4.3	Education system pathways e to improve labour market integration.....	6
4.4	VET accessibility and flexibility for labour market skill demands	7
5.	Statistical information in relation to EU targets.....	8
6.	Conclusion.....	9
	References	11

1. Introduction

This VET policy brief produced by Cedefop presents a snapshot of vocational education and training policy developments in Sweden 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 Sweden'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

The Swedish government oversees the education system, setting policy frameworks for all levels. While national goals are centrally defined, their execution is decentralised. Vocational education and training (VET) is overseen by both the government and parliament. The [Education Act](#) of 2010, passed by parliament, guarantees learners' right to education and encompasses all education forms. The National Agency for Education ([Skolverket](#)) manages the public school system, while the [Swedish Agency for Higher Vocational Education](#) ensures higher VET programmes meet labour market demands. Social partners are actively involved in education, ensuring a close connection to the labour market. The [Swedish Schools Inspectorate](#) ensures equitable education, focusing on quality and safety, and monitors compliance with education law.

The [Swedish VET system](#) includes programmes at upper secondary-, post-secondary and higher levels. Upper secondary programmes lasting 3 years are offered in the form of apprenticeship or as school-based programmes. They focus on different occupational fields and are designed to meet the skills demand from the labour market. Work-based learning is compulsory in school-based VET programmes. Upper secondary apprenticeship requires tripartite individual education contracts between the student, the employer and the school. Graduates receive an upper secondary diploma giving them the possibility to access higher education. Municipal adult education at upper secondary level aims at providing adults with knowledge and skills at a level corresponding to that provided within upper secondary education. This education field plays a key role in the nationally provision of relevant competences at regional and national levels. During the [Knowledge boost initiative](#) (2014-22), the government allocated funding equivalent to over 160 000 additional study positions in municipal adult education, folk high schools, study associations, higher education, and higher vocational education (HVE) (National implementation plan: Sweden, 2023).

Since the early 21 century many asylum seekers have come to Sweden, with a peak in 2016 ⁽¹⁾. The Swedish labour market had to take targeted policy measures facilitating their integration, such as fast-track labour market training for newly arrived immigrants. In 2022, 20% of the Swedish population were born outside Sweden ⁽²⁾.

Sweden's aspirations for carbon neutrality exceed those of the EU, and it has consistently ranked as the top-performing EU Member State since 2017 (European Commission, 2022b). The country continues to lead in digital innovation, as highlighted by the European Commission's Digital Economy and Society Index (European Commission, 2022b). The [Swedish digitalisation strategy of 2017](#) guides the country's work to meet its goals and to become one of the world's leaders in the digital transformation. This strategy is complemented by others, such the [National approach to AI](#) (2019) and the data strategy (2021) (Cedefop, 2023a).

2.2 Challenges

The main challenges Sweden has faced in 2022 are linked to skills mismatch and labour shortages, educational disparities and teacher shortages.

Due to the decentralised provision of education and competition among many small providers for students, popular programmes are often prioritised. This contributes to an increased risk of skills mismatch between graduate qualifications and labour market needs (Cedefop, 2021). Labour shortages exist, mainly in sectors such as education, healthcare, social work, industry and construction, as well as information and communication technology (ICT) (European Commission, 2022b). Despite having one of the EU's highest percentages of employed ICT specialists, Sweden continues to face shortages of ICT specialists in its economy (European Commission, 2021; European Commission, 2022a). In 2022, labour shortage existed in 16 occupations that require specific skills for the green transition (European Commission, 2023b).

Educational disparities exist between students born in Sweden and in the EU and those born outside the EU, as well as between those born in cities and rural areas (European Commission, 2023b). The unemployment rates of foreign-born individuals was more than four times higher than that of the native-born individuals (Statistics Sweden, 2021).

The Swedish education system suffers from teacher shortages, which are particularly high in VET. This shortage is expected to worsen in the near future and it is estimated that, by 2033, approximately 12 500 full-time VET teachers will be required. To meet this demand, enrolment in VET teacher programmes should double in the next decade (Skolverket, 2020; Cedefop, 2023a).

⁽¹⁾ Eurostat. [TPS00176](#).

⁽²⁾ Statista. [Population in Sweden from 2012 to 2022, by birthplace](#).

3. National VET policy priorities

In response to the [2020 Council Recommendation on VET](#) and the [Osnabrück Declaration](#), [Sweden's national implementation plan](#) focuses on four target areas.

Strengthen quality and attractiveness of VET: to attract more learners to VET, Sweden plans to develop flexible VET pathways and raise awareness of opportunities, especially related to the green transition. The quality of VET will be strengthened with skilled teachers, work-based learning, and rigorous inspections.

Strengthen alignment of VET to labour market needs: to address labour market mismatches and improve skills provision, customised training and employer partnerships are crucial. Meeting the demand for secondary VET graduates is vital, along with providing continuous professional development (CPD) to adapt to labour market changes. Comprehensive skills intelligence is crucial, as is collaboration between VET institutions and industry for aligning skills with market needs.

Develop additional pathways in the education system to improve integration in the labour market: this includes strategies such as vocational packages for youth and vocational orientations in higher education preparatory programmes. Improving vocational education for adults and integrating Swedish language training to enhance immigrants' access to the job market are also important.

Increase accessibility and flexibility for VET: to meet present and future skills demands better in the labour market, favourable conditions need to be ensured as well as financial support for individuals to pursue lifelong learning. Flexible learning options, guidance, validation opportunities, and supplementary education should also be available to support continuous skills development.

[Sweden's recovery and resilience plan](#) (2022) encompasses investments in education to facilitate upskilling and reskilling, with a particular emphasis on advancing the green and digital transition.

4. Main policy developments and progress 2020-23

4.1 Strengthen quality and attractiveness of VET

Several measures have been introduced since 2020 to strengthen the quality and attractiveness of VET.

The [upper secondary VET network](#) was launched as a trial initiative in Norrbotten in November 2022 and will gradually expand to 10 regions by end of 2024. Its purpose is to facilitate discussions among stakeholders working with upper secondary vocational education in all types of school regarding regional achievements, challenges and solutions within vocational education, with the goal of reaching consensus on VET related issues. Over time, the network aims to improve the quality and fairness of the education system (ReferNet Sweden; Cedefop, 2023a).

Since 2023, all VET programmes automatically incorporate necessary optional courses in Swedish and English which, after completion, enable individuals to access

higher education. In order to uphold the standard of vocational preparation, VET programmes have been expanded in terms of both credits and teaching time. Learners, however, still have the possibility to opt out of these additional courses. This change was implemented through an amendment to the Education Act by the Swedish Parliament in April 2022 (ReferNet Sweden; Cedefop, 2022a).

The professional development of VET teachers and principals was addressed in [bill 2022/23:54 on National professional programme for principals, teachers and preschool teachers; this](#) was approved in May 2023 and contains proposals to the amendment to the [Education Act \(2010:800\)](#). It suggests that the national professional development programme should consist of national standards for professional development for principals, teachers and preschool teachers, as well as a national qualification system for certified teachers and certified preschool teachers. The aim is to develop the quality of teaching, reinforce the professions and increase its attractiveness, and thereby increase educational parity for students. The amendments are proposed to enter into force in January 2025.

4.2 Strengthen alignment of VET to the labour market needs

Since 2020, Sweden has taken several measures to strengthen the alignment of VET to rapid changes in labour market needs.

At the end of 2023, the Swedish government approved a substantial budget increase for 2024 for regional initial VET for adults and for higher vocational education. The proposed 2024 budget allocates approximately EUR 119.34 million to strengthen regional adult vocational education, representing a 47% increase from the 2023 budget. Around EUR 33.73 million has been designated for higher vocational education, marking a 6% increase from 2023. These funds will create approximately 16 500 new full-year places for regional initial VET for adults, a 25% increase from 2023, and an estimated 3 000 new full-year places for higher vocational training in 2024 (ReferNet Sweden; Cedefop, 2024).

In March 2022, the Government presented the bill [Dimensioning of upper secondary education for better skills supply](#) (2021/22:159) to the Parliament. The proposal emphasises the importance of considering [labour market needs](#) when public and independent education providers determine the programme offer and number of study places. Municipalities are required to collaborate and reach agreement with at least two other municipalities regarding the offer of upper secondary school and municipal adult education programmes they will provide to their citizens. The necessary amendments to the [Education Act](#) were done in 2023 and will come into force for upper secondary VET in 2025 (Cedefop, 2023a; National implementation plan: Sweden, 2023).

The Swedish government is exploring ways to share data digitally between education and labour market stakeholders to improve lifelong learning in line with labour market demands. This initiative prioritizes secure data sharing while respecting privacy laws. Central State agencies have been tasked with developing a unified data infrastructure for

lifelong learning and skill provision. A final report on this mission was expected at the time of drafting this VET policy brief (National implementation plan: Sweden, 2023).

4.3 Education system pathways to improve labour market integration

Since 2020, several measures have been taken to provide additional pathways in the education system, offering alternatives and increased opportunities to individuals to establish themselves on the labour market.

Education for [adults with learning disabilities became integrated in municipal adult education from 1 July 2020](#) (Cedefop and Refernet, 2023). In the same year, the Government tasked the National Agency for Education to recommend [vocational training packages tailored for adults with learning disabilities](#), aimed at facilitating their entry into the workforce. Developed in collaboration with industry partners, these packages consist of modular courses that can be gradually accumulated to achieve full qualifications. To boost flexibility, a range of general courses were introduced, adaptable to the specific needs of students or employers. Nine vocational packages covering a range of fields such as gardening and dog care were presented to the government in November 2021 (ReferNet Sweden; Cedefop, 2022). [Amendments to the Education Act and Adult Education Ordinance in 2022](#) empower the National Agency for Education to oversee the implementation of these packages nationwide, starting January 2025.

In 2021, the Government initiated a national inquiry to recommend measures aimed at increasing the number of [young people achieving their upper secondary education objectives](#), whether in upper secondary school or municipal adult education (National implementation plan: Sweden, 2023). In June 2022, the inquiry presented its proposal to [relevant authorities for consultation](#).

In the 2021 memorandum on [Piloting vocational orientations in higher education preparatory programmes](#) proposes to grant the possibility to pilot vocational orientations within higher education preparatory programmes (general upper secondary programmes), aiming to increase the attractiveness of vocational training and to offer general education learners seeking immediate employment after graduation the skills and knowledge demanded by employers. The memorandum has been in a referral round and the proposals are currently under evaluation (National implementation plan: Sweden, 2023).

In spring 2021, the Government commissioned the county administrative boards to allocate funds to projects which provide [training and education for newly arrived migrants and asylum seekers with experience of working in health care or foreign healthcare education](#) (Cedefop and ReferNet, 2023).

In February 2022, the Swedish Parliament approved the bill [Compulsory and coherent education for newly arrived immigrants](#) (prop. 2021/22:51). Effective from August 2022, municipalities are obliged to offer newly arrived immigrants with limited prior education access to the [establishment programme](#) ⁽³⁾ within municipal adult education. Participants

⁽³⁾ This is the name as used in the national implementation plan. However, on the related website provided in Swedish, it is referred to as 'introduction programme', when using google translate.

are not expected to be employed during the programme and must engage in Swedish language learning, civic orientation, and basic or upper secondary education. The aim is to prepare participants for further studies or integration into the job market, with a minimum of 23 teaching hours per week, following a curriculum set by the municipality (National implementation plan: Sweden, 2023).

4.4 VET accessibility and flexibility for labour market skill demands

Since 2020, several measures have been launched to increase accessibility and flexibility to support individuals in pursuing learning and continuous skills development.

As a pathway to a qualification, validation should have the same high level of legitimacy as formal education. In response to this, the government bill [Validation: for skills supply and lifelong learning \(2021/22:123\)](#) presents proposals aimed at ensuring that validation in municipal adult education meets labour market needs better. In June 2022, [Parliament approved the relevant Government proposal](#) for amendments to laws concerning schools and lifelong learning; the related [validation ordinance \(2022:1549\)](#) was published at the end of 2022. The [legislative amendments concerning the national strategy for validation entered into force in January 2023](#). Municipalities are now required to provide [individuals with the opportunity to have their skills assessed or tested](#) before enrolling in municipal adult education. This initiative aims to improve opportunities for learners to pursue complementary education and to ensure that significantly more individuals can have their knowledge and skills validated throughout the country at all levels of the education system.

In March 2022, the Government unveiled the [Flexibility, adaptability and security in the labour market](#) bill, encompassing reforms to labour laws and the introduction of a support system for reskilling and upskilling. In addition, a new funding scheme for re- and upskilling was introduced in October 2022, under which employees can [pursue studies for up to 1 year while receiving at least 80% of their salary](#). Financial support is also available for self-employed individuals, with a maximum of 44 weeks of full-time study. To qualify, applicants must have been employed for at least 8 years and worked for at least 12 months during the last 2 years. The chosen study programme must improve the individual's job market prospects, in line with the prevailing labour market demands (European Commission, 2023b; Cedefop and Refernet, 2023; National implementation plan: Sweden, 2023).

In 2020, the [HVE-flex pilot project](#) (nationally also referred to as YH-flex project) started, with the goal of speeding up the acquisition of higher vocational education (HVE) qualifications at EQF levels 5 and 6 for individuals possessing substantial professional experience in a specific vocational field. The individual's previous learning is acknowledged through validation, and they only need to undertake additional studies to obtain the complete qualification. On average, learners who participated were exempt from 60% of the programme's learning outcomes through validation. In 2022, the Swedish National Agency for Higher Vocational Education (MYH) [institutionalised these HVE-flex programmes](#) as a permanent offer and undertook efforts to digitalise and integrate them into the system (Cedefop and Refernet, 2023; ReferNet Sweden; Cedefop, 2021).

In 2020, a new initiative called [HVE-courses](#) was introduced. These courses, which are shorter than HVE programmes, are offered in flexible delivery methods (on-campus, distance, or remote) and study schedules (full-time or part-time). Their objective is to reskill and upskill professionals without granting full qualifications, while also improving job prospects for groups such as migrants and refugees. Geared primarily towards professionals seeking skill renewal, advancement, or career changes, these adaptable higher VET courses evolve according to labour market demands, with a focus on fields like digitalisation, automation, and green technology. A [2022 survey](#) revealed high learner satisfaction with this innovative learning model (ReferNet Sweden; Cedefop, 2022).

Given the green transition and the development of new environmentally friendly jobs nationwide, the Government has proposed in its [budget proposal for 2022 \(2021/22:1\)](#) to allocate EUR 9.5 million for 2022 and EUR 9.5 million for 2023 to increase skills relevant to climate action. This initiative focuses on targeted investments in skills development and training to ensure that the labour force has the necessary competences (National implementation plan: Sweden, 2023).

5. Statistical information in relation to EU targets

Sweden is a frontrunner in lifelong learning; in 2022 about 66.5% of adults (25-64 years old) had a learning experience in the last 12 months, which was the highest participation rate among the EU-27 member states. The labour market prospects of VET learners are very good. In 2022, 89% of VET graduates (aged 20-34) were employed, which was above the EU average of 79.7%. The majority (67%) of recent IVET graduates aged 20-34 had work experience during their VET programme in 2022, which was above the EU average of 60.1%. Adults (16 to 74-year-olds) with at least basic digital skills account for 66.5%, much higher than the EU-27 average of 53.9% but still below the target of 70% for 2025, as set by the Skills Agenda.

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

Type of indicator ⁽⁴⁾	Indicator	Last available year	SE	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	66.5	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	47.1	18.4	Skills Agenda	30% (2025)
Progress	Unemployed adults with a learning experience in the last 4 weeks (%)	2022	49	13.2	Skills Agenda	20% (2025)

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

Context	Employment rate for 20 to 64-year-olds (%)	2022	82.2	74.6	ESPR Action Plan	78% (2030)
Context	Early leavers from education and training (%)	2022	8.8	9.6	Council Resolution on EEA	<9% (2030)
Context	NEET rate for 15 to 29-year-olds (%)	2022	5.7	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	66.5	53.9	Skills Agenda ESPR Action Plan	70% (2025) 80% (2030)
Progress	Employment rate for recent IVET graduates (20 to 34-year-olds) (%)	2022	89	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	67	60.1	Council Rec on VET Council Resolution on EEA	60% (2025)
Context	25 to 34-year-olds with tertiary attainment (%)	2022	52.4	42	Council Resolution on EEA	45% (2025)
Context	Gender employment gap (%)	2022	5.8	10.7	ESPR Action Plan	To be halved (2030)
Context	People at risk of poverty or social exclusion (1000s)	2022	1 941	95 284	ESPR Action Plan	15 million reduction (2030)
Context	Employed ICT specialists (1000s)	2022	448	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 learning mobility abroad (%) **	2021	0.5	2.1 ^{dv}	Council Rec on VET Skills Agenda	8% (2025)
Context	Average number of foreign languages learned in IVET	2021	1	1.2		

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, Sweden has taken various actions to address the policy priorities outlined in the national implementation plan: strengthen VET quality and attractiveness, alignment to labour market needs, integration to the labour market and increasing VET flexibility. Some of those measures are in the implementation phase so it remains to be seen when expectations will be met.

Several advancements have been made on the priority of strengthening the quality and attractiveness of VET to attract more learners. The updated curricula for VET programmes includes automatic access to tertiary education. Additionally, the launch of the

first networks for upper secondary VET seeks to improve quality and equity in the education system. The implementation of a national CPD programme for VET teachers and principals will establish a standardised approach, aiming to improve the shortage of qualified VET teachers. While overall progress has been made for this priority, the full impact of these measures will become evident only in the coming years. Given the projected high increase in vocational teacher shortages (Section 2.2.) further efforts seem to be necessary to attract additional vocational teachers.

Since 2020, Sweden has taken various steps to align VET better with changing labour market demands. This includes significantly increasing in funding and training places for initial VET for adults and higher vocational education to address labour shortages. Preparatory measures for improving VET provision have begun, with education providers required to consider labour market needs when deciding on programmes starting in 2025. Efforts were made to share labour market insights with upper secondary VET organisers, aiming to support them in their choice of programme offer and number of study places, as well as concerning the establishment of an improved national skills validation strategy. Implementation of initiatives such as regional assessments of skills needs in line with the national implementation plan would contribute to improving the alignment of VET with labour market demands. The government's aim to share data digitally between education and labour market stakeholders to enhance lifelong learning in line with labour market demands, is still to come. Concerning the labour shortage in specific occupational sectors (e.g. in healthcare and ICT), more specific measures focusing on increasing the attractiveness of these occupations might be needed.

Some progress has been made since 2020 on the priority of setting up additional pathways in the education system. Vocational training packages for adults with learning disabilities were developed and presented to the government; their offer nationwide is scheduled for 2025. The national inquiry aimed at increasing the number of young people achieving their upper secondary education objectives was carried out. The memorandum *Piloting vocational orientations in higher education preparatory programmes (2021)*, provides general education learners the opportunity to acquire the skills and knowledge needed by employers. Additional funding has been allocated for the training and education of newly arrived migrants with healthcare experience. Municipalities have been mandated to provide newly arrived immigrants with access to the establishment programme, facilitating their integration into the education or labour market system.

Sweden has taken also several measures to improve accessibility and flexibility for VET since 2020. This includes the launch of [HVE-courses](#) aimed at reskilling and upskilling of professionals, including migrants and refugees. Individuals with learning disabilities became integrated in municipal adult education, and the [HVE-flex](#) programme was introduced as a permanent part of HVE to facilitate the attainment of HVE qualifications for experienced professionals. Study grants were introduced for individuals established on the labour market seeking CPD or retraining. Study grants to employees to follow CPD or retraining were introduced, aiming to strengthen their position on the labour market. Additional funds were provided to improve skills relevant to climate actions. Measures were

taken to establish a permanent national validation system, providing equivalent credentials to formal education for easier entry into the labour market. Considering the high number of migrants in Sweden, it remains to be seen in the coming years, if the positive impact of the taken measures will be sufficient.

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