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CYPRUS



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1. Introduction

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

The vocational education and training (VET) system of Cyprus is constantly being developed in line with identified labour market needs. The Ministry of Education, Culture, Sport and Youth has overall responsibility for developing and implementing education policy. The Ministry of Labour, Welfare and Social Insurance has overall responsibility for labour and social policy, and the Human Resource Development Authority of Cyprus (HRDA) plays an important role in adult vocational training, subsidising CVET for employees and the employed. Other ministries offer, may offer CVET but this is highly specialised and relevant to their mandate (Cedefop; Human Resource Development Authority of Cyprus, 2022).

Cyprus has a long-standing tradition of tripartite consultation (government, trade unions and employers' organisations) and social dialogue. The social partners are actively involved in VET governance, support education reforms and identify training needs.

VET is mainly public and is available at secondary and tertiary levels. Secondary VET – including evening technical schools and the apprenticeship system – and public higher (tertiary/non-university) VET are free of charge, while various adult vocational programmes are offered for a limited fee.

Financial incentives for participation in adult vocational training are provided by HRDA, a semi-government organisation under the remit of the labour minister.

Cyprus has a high level of educational attainment, with a cultural trend to favour general secondary education followed by higher education.

The main policy framework that has shaped the current IVET system up to 2020 is [the 2015-20 strategic plan for technical and vocational education and training](#). The plan shaped the [current IVET formal pathways](#) and VET specialisations, and further developed the apprenticeship system. The plan introduced the mandatory modularisation of VET programmes, and also led to the development and constant update of VET curricula. The plan has further established the alignment of VET provision with labour market

stakeholders by increasing the duration of work-based learning in school-based VET. It has also set the basis for VET graduate tracking, using the VET- employer matching platform.

2.2 Challenges

The main challenges that Cyprus has faced in 2022 include youth unemployment, labour market shortages and mismatches, and low participation of adults in education and training. There was also an increased need to modernise VET provision and meet the demands of the twin transition, with particular emphasis in digital skills and competences.

In 2022, youth unemployment was high in Cyprus: [18.6% in relation to the EU-27 average of 14.5%](#). This could be regarded as a paradox as there are job posts to fill; sectors such as the hospitality industry, trade, transport and manufacturing report persistent labour market shortages. Shortages in personnel in need of medium qualifications can be attributed to the low numbers of students choosing IVET at upper secondary level. This is a constant challenge for a country where general education is favoured in comparison to VET. More specifically, Cyprus has one of the lowest performances in the EU-27 in terms of participation of students in upper secondary VET; this stood at 17.6% in 2021, well below the EU-27 average of 48.7% (European Commission 2023).

Cyprus is characterised by low participation of adults in training compared to the EU27 average. The lack of a lifelong learning culture has been identified as an issue that relates to long-term unemployment as the adult population lacks the necessary skillset to cope with constantly changing labour market needs (European Commission, 2023).

Cyprus struggles in following up technological advancements and equipping schools with state-of-the-art equipment. Combined with identified deficiencies in basic digital skills among the adult population and the low percentage of STEM graduates, this causes concerns about the country's capacity to follow an economic model based on innovation and the generation of new knowledge (European Commission, 2023; Cedefop, 2023).

3. National VET policy priorities

The Cypriot national implementation plan (NIP) presents the actions the country will take to implement the [Council Recommendation on VET 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. It sets the following key priorities.

- a) Improve the quality and labour market relevance of VET. Cyprus aims to provide young individuals and adults with essential knowledge, skills, and competences to succeed in a dynamic job market and adapt rapidly to emerging challenges. It also plans to promote gender balance, supporting disabled students, and ensuring equal learning opportunities for all. The country has set as a specific quantitative goal to increase the participation of upper secondary education students in IVET from 15.6% in 2021 to 25% by 2026 and 30% by 2030.

- b) Increase adult participation in VET. Cyprus plans to improve the skillset of adults and help them acquire new skills in demand in the labour market. It has set a target to increase the participation rate of adults in training from 28.3% in 2022 to 61% by 2030.
- c) Support the digital transformation of VET. Cyprus aims to become one of the pioneers of the twin transition, as stipulated in its [Long-Term economy strategy](#).

4. Main policy developments and their progress between 2020 and 2023

4.1 Improve the quality and labour market relevance of VET

Cyprus has been putting measures in place to achieve its target of increasing IVET participation, especially at upper secondary level, and to improve the overall quality and relevance of VET provision.

In 2022, the [Further development of technical and vocational education and training](#) project continued, funding ongoing and planned reforms under the responsibility of the Department of Secondary Technical Vocational Education and Training. This project is the continuation of the ESF project used in the previous programming period – 2014-20 – to promote [the 2015-20 strategic plan for technical and vocational education and training](#). With a budget of EUR 38 million for the programming period 2021-27, the project covers all VET pathways under the jurisdiction of the Department of Secondary Technical Vocational Education and Training. So far, the project has funded the introduction and update of study programmes in various fields. Part of the funds were also used for funding students' practical training in companies with state-of-the art facilities and equipment. Laboratory equipment and software was updated for specific specialisations ⁽¹⁾. As part of this project, the [External evaluation of the Public School of Higher Vocational Education and Training](#) institutions ⁽²⁾ began in 2022. This examines the adequacy of existing specialisations with labour market needs and the employability rates of the public schools for higher VET graduates, as well as the satisfaction of students with VET provision. One of its tasks is to produce recommendations to improve quality in higher IVET.

A registry of qualified education specialists/instructors was created in 2021 [to ensure high quality teaching in higher VET](#). The Department of Secondary Technical and Vocational Education and Training purchases the services of experienced specialists from economic fields relevant to the specialisations offered by the public schools of higher VET. These specialists should be included in the registry to be eligible to teach in public schools of higher VET. Teaching is not their only duty: they are also required to assess and evaluate higher IVET students' performance. This measure is also funded by the Further development of technical and vocational education and training project.

(1) Examples of such specialisations are design of furniture and wooden constructions and mechanical engineering.

(2) Public schools of higher VET are known as MIEEK in the national context.

In 2022, the study *Forecasts of labour demand and supply in the Cyprus economy 2022-32* was completed. This was the first ever labour supply forecast for the whole population, by gender and by education level. Key findings included labour demand for 309 occupations. The [results](#) will be used to systematise evidence policy-making in education and training and lifelong learning. The findings will also be used for the development of study programmes, both for upper secondary and for public schools of higher VET (ReferNet Cyprus;Cedefop, 2023).

4.2 Increase adult participation in VET

Cyprus has been putting in place measures for increasing the participation of adults in VET.

[The 2021-27 CY Lifelong learning strategy](#) was approved by the Council of Ministers in September 2022. The strategy identified six intervention areas:

- a) digital transformation;
- b) green transition and sustainability;
- c) inclusion and equality;
- d) validation of non-formal and informal learning;
- e) health and wellbeing;
- f) lifelong learning culture.

The strategy has also set key performance indicators (KPIs). Four strategic objectives have been defined, to allow for effective monitoring:

- a) establish the governance, monitoring, and evaluation framework;
- b) reduce youth unemployment and upskill/reskill young people and the working age population;
- c) increase the participation of adults in lifelong learning and specifically in VET;
- d) enhance the professional practice of adult educators and trainers.

[Validation arrangements](#) have gained new impetus in 2022 with the conclusion of the shared funding project Establishing a mechanism for the validation of non-formal and informal learning. Although the country had planned to establish a mechanism for the validation of non-formal and informal learning before 2020, the piloting of this project started in 2021. The validation of non-formal and informal learning in three sectors (adult education, youth and volunteerism) will be piloted. In 2022, steering documents were produced including guidelines on the validation of prior learning in evening schools (general secondary and technical/vocational) to increase the potential for interested citizens to return to education. A vocational qualification for youth workers was produced and guiding principles on volunteerism were issued to support the validation of prior learning of adults engaged in such activity.

In 2022, stakeholders consultation and debate commenced on implementation of [HRDA's actions under the Cyprus operational programme THALIA 2021-27](#). This covers two areas. Individual learning accounts (ILAs) provide credits to eligible groups of employed and unemployed individuals to acquire, via training programmes, new knowledge and skills, and/or upgrade existing abilities, through training programmes from accredited vocational training centres (VTCs). Training programmes for NEETs help them acquire key

competences and soft skills, with specific focus given to the acquisition of competences needed for the green and digital transitions.

In early 2023, a framework agreement was signed between HRDA and 22 economic bodies, such as accredited CVET providers, consortia of accredited training CVET providers, companies and universities for training programmes for the acquisition of digital skills by the unemployed. The acquisition of digital skills is one of the four components of the [Training programmes under the Cyprus Recovery and resilience plan 2021-26 \(HRDA\)](#). In 2022, the HRDA's board of directors approved the policy and procedure guides covering all four components under the project. The remaining three components are relevant to the acquisition of green skills, skills relevant to the blue economy ⁽³⁾, and the acquisition of entrepreneurial knowledge and skills with particular focus on women over the age of 55.

In 2022, the [Use of e-learning methods in training programmes](#) subsidised by the Human Resource Development Authority of Cyprus (HRDA) continued as regular practice. This measure was initially developed in response to the physical distancing measures enforced by the COVID-19 pandemic. It was introduced in 2020, with a supplement issued by HRDA entitled *Using e-learning methods in training programmes*. In these terms, the physical presence of trainers and CVET learners is no longer mandatory and training can be delivered via e-learning modes. This new mode of functioning for CVET programmes, optional following the pandemic, is considered helpful to specific target groups, such as women or people with disability, as it assists them to continue participating in training, thus preventing drop-outs.

4.3 Support the digital transformation of VET

Cyprus has been implementing measures to digitally transform its VET provision by optimising the use of ICT tools and platforms.

The [Development and management of the alumni community platform](#) project began in 2022. This platform, when fully implemented, will provide career support, continuing education opportunities to VET graduates and a forum on topics of common interest. Interoperability with the [VET-employers' matching platform](#), active since 2020 ⁽⁴⁾, will provide companies with access to the alumni community platform. This is another measure funded by the [Further development of technical and vocational education and training](#) project.

By early 2023, 40 610 individuals, 248 vocational training providers, 329 vocational training facilities and 889 vocational trainers were registered and approved to participate in HRDA subsidised schemes using the [Digital portal for the Human Resource Development Authority of Cyprus](#). As of July 2021, all applications for the accreditation of vocational

⁽³⁾ Blue economy is the set of human activities depending on the sea and/or underpinned by land-sea interactions in the context of sustainable development. More information on [blue economy and skills](#) is available.

⁽⁴⁾ The VET employers-Matching [platform](#) [Δίκτυο Επικοινωνίας με Εργοδότες για Τεχνικά Επαγγέλματα – ΔΕΕΤΕ] is accessible.

training centres and vocational training facilities must be submitted and processed electronically, via the digital portal of the HRDA. Policy and procedure guides were prepared, to satisfy specific criteria for the accreditation of vocational training centres and vocational training facilities. The same approach was followed for the approval of vocational training centre assessors and vocational training facilities assessors. By making all steps of the procedure available through the portal, HRDA replaced the previous [System for the assessment and accreditation of training providers](#).

In 2022, the project Digital competences development for educators (DCDE) became fully operational. This project, was introduced by the Cyprus Pedagogical Institute (CPI) to meet the aims in [Enhancing VET teachers' digital competences](#). This project is offered through CPI's e-learning platform and consists of an introductory module and 10 learning modules. The 10 learning modules were designed and developed in 2020 with the cooperation of the open university of Cyprus, the European university and Frederick university. Their content is based on thematic areas that have been defined through a process of diagnosing the needs of teachers and also following European and national directions. CPI plans to run this project up to 2025 and considers it essential for VET teachers' professional development and compatible with the [country's plan on digital transformation of the education system](#).

5. Statistical information in relation to EU targets

The employment prospects for IVET graduates are promising in Cyprus. At 77.4% in 2022, Cyprus has managed to increase the relevant rate by 7.1 percentage points since 2015. Although it remains 2.3 percentage points below the EU27 average in 2022, Cyprus is on track to reach the EU27 target of 82% employability rate set by the Council Recommendation on VET by 2025.

In terms of exposure to work-based learning of recent IVET graduates, the Cyprus figure of 41.6% in 2022 is well below the EU27 average of 60.1% and 18.4 percentage points below the EU-27 target set for 2025 by the Council Recommendation on VET.

The participation of adults (25 to 64-year-olds) in training stood at 28.3% in 2022, below the EU27 average of 39.5% and also below the [EU-target of 47% for 2025 set in the Council Resolution on EEA for adults](#).

Cyprus has made significant improvement in early school leaving. At 8.1% in 2022, Cyprus is below the EU-27 average of 9.6% and below the EU-27 target of less than 9% of early school leavers by 2030. The NEET rate seems to be a persistent problem for Cyprus over the last decade. In 2022, it stood at 14.7%, 5.7 percentage points above the EU-27 target of 9% for 2030.

More indicators and their progress compared to the EU targets are presented in Table 1.

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

Type of indicator ⁽⁵⁾	Indicator	Last available year	CY	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	28.3	39.5	Skills Agenda Council Resolution on EEA ESPR Action Plan	50% (2025) 47% (2025) 60% (2030)
Progress	Low-qualified adults with a learning experience in the last 12 months (%)	2022	10.9	18.4	Skills Agenda	30% (2025)
Progress	Unemployed adults with a learning experience in the last 4 weeks (%)	2022	9.1	13.2	Skills Agenda	20% (2025)
Context	Employment rate for 20 -64 -year-olds (%)	2022	77.9	74.6	ESPR Action Plan	78% (2030)
Context	Early leavers from education and training (%)	2022	8.1	9.6	Council Resolution on EEA	<9% (2030)
Context	NEET rate for 15 -29- year-olds (%)	2022	14.7	11.7	ESPR Action Plan	9% (2030)
VET for Resilience, transitions, sustainability and excellence						
Progress	Adults (16 -74 -year-olds) with at least basic digital skills (%)	2021	50.2	53.9	Skills Agenda ESPR Action Plan	70% (2025) 80% (2030)
Progress	Employment rate for recent IVET graduates (20 -34- year-olds) (%)	2022	77.4	79.7	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 (%)	2022	41.6 ^u	60.1	Council Rec on VET Council Resolution on EEA	60% (2025)
Context	25- 34- year-olds with tertiary attainment (%)	2022	59.2	42	Council Resolution on EEA	45% (2025)
Context	Gender employment gap (%)	2022	12.1	10.7	ESPR Action Plan	To be halved (2030)
Context	People at risk of poverty or social exclusion (1000s)	2022	150	95 284	ESPR Action Plan	15 million decrease (2030)
Context	Employed ICT specialists (1000s)	2022	20.4	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	9.9 ^z	2.1 ^{dv}	Council Rec on VET Skills Agenda	8% (2025)
Context	Average number of foreign languages learned in IVET	2021	1.2	1.2		

Available flags: b – break in time series, d – definition differs, e – estimated, u – low reliability, V – Cedefop estimate, z- not applicable, Special value: - not available

* Eurostat data (Adult Education Survey, special calculation excluding guided on-the-job training)

** Provisional estimates affected by the Covid19 pandemic

Source: Cedefop. [European VET policy dashboard](#)

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

6. Conclusion

Cyprus is making great efforts to increase IVET participation and quality in VET, to increase the participation of adults in VET and to modernise/adapt VET, optimising the use of ICT tools and new technologies in general. The country is also implementing activities to promote the acquisition of competences needed for the twin transition, with particular focus on digital competences/skills.

Cyprus is making optimal use of European funding instruments, especially of the ESF+ the main funding source of the Department of Secondary Technical and Vocational Education and Training, to improve existing measures/types of [IVET programmes](#) and to implement a range of planned activities. [VET curricula](#) and [VET specialisations](#) are constantly being improved and are better aligned with labour market needs. Promotion and publicity campaigns that promote VET attractiveness are in place. The quality of VET provision is being strengthened through external evaluation. This would be further strengthened when a skills anticipation mechanism will systematically inform policy making in IVET and lifelong learning.

Cyprus is taking steps to increase adult participation in VET. [The 2021-27 CY Lifelong learning strategy](#), approved in 2022 includes specific objectives and an action plan which would allow for better and more effective implementation of the strategy. Accelerating the implementation of a [mechanism for the recognition of prior learning](#), especially for adult learners that have attended [evening schools](#) and for those adults who have engaged in volunteerism to have their prior learning recognised, could be beneficial for Cyprus. Recognition of prior learning could help it achieve its ambitious target to increase the participation of adults in training to 61% by 2030. Cyprus could also benefit from outreach interventions targeting specific groups, especially vulnerable groups such as women, disabled people, and NEETs, and involving them in VET.

Cyprus is digitalising its VET system by using the capacities of new technologies. Platforms that speed up and facilitate the [communication between VET graduates](#) and the labour market are being either developed or [improved](#). Individuals can now use the [dedicated HRDA platform](#) to register and be approved for participating in subsidised up- and reskilling programmes. CVET providers can have their programmes accredited in the HRDA platform. [The digital competences of VET teachers](#) are being improved, for the time being on a voluntarily basis but with plans to expand it. The country could benefit by speeding up the implementation of measures included in its [Digital skills – Cyprus national action plan 2021-25](#). More precisely, actions related to the digital transformation of VET and to the integration of modern digital media into teaching would further support the digital transformation of VET.

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