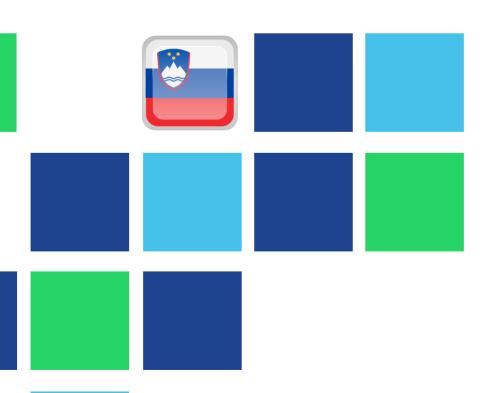


IMPLEMENTING EUROPEAN PRIORITIES IN VET

Making national VET agile, flexible, innovative, attractive, inclusive and quality assured

SLOVENIA





Implementing European priorities in VET

Making national VET agile, flexible, innovative, attractive, inclusive and quality-assured:

Slovenia



Thematic perspectives provide national overviews of specific themes in a common format and offer comparative dimension across the EU Member States, Iceland and Norway.

This thematic perspectives series complements the general information on vocational education and training (VET) policies and systems provided in VET in Europe database and the Timeline of VET policies in Europe. The themes presented in the series feature high on the European agenda.

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CHAPTER 1. Introduction

In 2020, the Education Development and Quality Office in the Ministry of Education identified the following challenge for vocational education and training (VET) in Slovenia: limited social partners' involvement, especially regarding modernising the technology and natural sciences programmes, and further development of apprenticeship. In 2022, the Office re-examined the challenges faced by VET and added the need for modernisation of VET to support green and digital transition as an additional issue (Ministry of Education, 2020 and 2022).

The 2021 National Recovery and resilience plan (NOO) adopted those challenges and embraced the reform of the education system through a multi-faceted project Modernisation of VET 2022-26 managed by the Institute of the Republic of Slovenia for VET (CPI). NOO also finances the goals and projects presented in the National implementation plan (NIP). The Modernisation project is divided into five workstreams:

- (a) competences and qualifications for the digital and green transition;
- (b) quality of planning and implementation of the upper secondary VET programmes on the provider's level;
- (c) further development of apprenticeship and connecting schools with companies;
- (d) digitally supported training places in the field of health and social care and preschool education;
- (e) renewal of higher VET programmes at EQF Level 5 (for green and digital transition).

Simultaneously, the process of methodology for the preparation of vocational standards, a basis for education programmes and national vocational qualifications, is being revised and the system of quality assurance for VET is being upgraded. The National Education Institute (ZRSŠ) is leading the update of general subjects to foster a closer connection with the professional field of each VET programme.

To facilitate the modernisation and direct the development towards a quality and sustainable education system, a draft proposal for the National programme for education 2023-33 was presented in January 2024. A wide array of regional and national level experts participated in the preparation of the document. Following six regional consultations, the final proposal of this National programme has been submitted to the Minister for education in July 2024. In relation to VET, it concerns upper secondary vocational and technical education, and the general and vocational *matura* examinations.

CHAPTER 2. Main policy developments in 2023

2.1 Agile and resilient VET, adaptive to labour market needs

With the start of the project Modernisation of VET, Slovenia is taking great steps towards overhauling the education system from the kindergarten level to higher VET education, making it more agile, resilient and adaptive to the labour market needs.

The year of 2023 began with preparing the scenarios on the future of VET in Slovenia that are based on a 2022 workshop, the Future of VET. This was followed by the founding



session of the Expert group for modernisation of VET (¹) in March 2023 to guide and monitor the project.

In the scope of the project, the basic documents, pertinent to the education programmes were analysed, and proposals for improvements of detected challenges were prepared.

First, the Guidelines for the preparation of upper-secondary VET programmes, the key national document for the preparation of the public upper secondary VET programmes, were analysed, and the Concept for the renewal of the guidelines was prepared in September 2023.

In the concept, the authors advise retaining the established principles of the upper secondary VET programmes: the modular structure, the open curriculum, the work-based learning (WBL) in companies, and a focus on learning outcomes, while emphasizing the need for:

- (a) inclusion of green and digital competences in VET curricula;
- (b) improved cooperation between schools and companies;
- (c) facilitation of adult students VET enrolment.

The Analysis of the guidelines and the relevant developed concept serve as a basis for drafting the pilot Guidelines for the preparation of the upper secondary VET programmes. These guidelines were developed as part of the project Modernisation of VET and confirmed by the Expert council for VET in March 2024. The first five renewed upper-secondary VET programmes will run first as a pilot project.

The next evaluated element of the upper secondary VET programmes was the open curriculum, a part of VET programmes that the upper secondary VET schools can adjust to suit the needs of the companies and local environment. The 2023 evaluation of the open curriculum concluded that there are significant differences in its implementation between the VET schools, mainly regarding the topics this part of the VET programme addresses. These differences still need to be addressed.

In the last renewal of the VET system (project 'Reform of upper secondary vocational education 2016-21'), Slovenia reimplemented the apprenticeship system. This system is still being evaluated, and possibilities for its implementation in technical upper secondary education, higher VET programmes and adult education are being examined in the ongoing project Modernisation of VET. The first step involves a review and analysis of the current situation, followed by the planning of future developments.

The 2023 analysis of the existing apprenticeship conducted by CPI as part of the project Modernisation of VET shows that:

(a) Young people are not sufficiently informed about the advantages of apprenticeship education, so a lot of effort is being invested in improving this issue. The primary school counsellors (2) who are the key sources of information for students transitioning from primary schools to upper secondary education are still fairly uninformed about apprenticeship.

⁽¹) The Expert group for modernisation of VET consists of representatives from relevant ministries, social partners (chambers, trade unions), public institutions, schools and universities.

⁽²) In Slovenia, primary education encompasses nine years, including what is typically considered lower secondary school.



- (b) The overall number of apprentices in individual VET schools is low, so an idea of VET school network for implementing apprenticeship should be considered and the system needs further developing e. g. regarding financing, staffing. Nevertheless, the number of apprentices is increasing.
- (c) Expanding apprenticeship also to four-year technical upper secondary programmes and higher VET levels, even to adult education is a welcome idea, but there should be appropriate solutions in place, e.g. regarding assessment.

Along with the apprenticeship system, the pedagogical-andragogical training of incompany mentors was also scrutinised in 2023 and 2024. The research indicated general satisfaction among providers and participants. Nevertheless, some suggestions and necessary updates were identified and will be considered in future revisions of the training programme.

In 2023, the experts working on the project Modernisation of VET worked intensively on modernising the key competences and their inclusion in the upper secondary and higher VET programmes at the competence, learning objectives and teaching methods level to ensure quality response to well-expressed employers needs in this field.

The project Modernisation of VET is also tasked with ensuring that digital and green competences are properly included in the updated upper secondary VET programmes. The project aims to renew 25 upper secondary VET programmes and 16 higher VET programmes till the end of 2026.

The two key activities of the project Modernisation of VET in 2023 regarding the renewal of higher VET programmes were first, a systemic analysis of the higher VET programmes, which included interviews with higher VET Institutions and key stakeholders, and second, an international comparison of national VET strategies in several EU countries to examine the challenges and approaches for addressing them. The results indicate that the design, development, and implementation of higher VET programmes in Slovenia depend on various aspects. This is partly due to the differences in sectors/fields and partly because the programmes were not prepared at the same time and are not based on the same version of the Guidelines for the preparation of Higher VET programmes.

Both analyses were used to determine the possibilities for including digital and green transition elements in the higher VET programmes. These two analyses also serve as basis for the modernisation of higher VET programmes, which includes the adoption of key competences, an open curriculum and competence-based programmes.

International comparison of higher VET clearly indicates that the Slovenian challenges on ISCED 5 level are also shared by other countries, namely about financing, access, and transferability. Inclusion of shorter courses (micro credentials) in higher VET is a hot topic in Slovenia as well.

Improving the flexibility, agility and responsiveness of the VET system depends on high-quality and timely insights into the fast changing and intense dynamics of the labour market (Institute of the RS for VET, 2023).

To address labour market changes, the Ministry of Labour, Family, Social Affairs and Equal Opportunities in cooperation with the Employment Service of Slovenia created the project Labour Market Platform (Platforma trga dela). The platform is an online tool for short-



term, medium-term and long-term forecasting of the labour market needs and is expected to be fully operational by 2028. It will provide information to VET providers on professions and skills needed in the labour market.

In 2023, special focus was on developing methodology for medium- and long-term forecasting of labour market needs and preparing a medium- and long-term forecast of the most in-demand professions and competences. The first labour market needs forecast was released in 2023, the second one in February 2024.

Another forecast tool is still being created under the NOO (NRP) project: a system for monitoring the employability of VET graduates, managed by the Ministry of Education. The project aims to develop a national level tool, which will help forecasting the labour market needs related to VET. The collected employability data will help students to make career decisions, enable VET schools to adjust the open curriculum, and allow the entire VET system to renew vocational standards and VET programmes. In 2023, an expert group (3) prepared a comparative review of the tracking systems in several EU countries, including Slovenia. They determined the areas to be monitored, data to be collected and recipients of the analyses. As the data collection lacks a legal basis, they submitted a proposal to amend the Organisation and Financing of Education Act.

In addition to the project Modernisation of VET, Slovenia is also addressing the hot topic of green and digital transition with other projects like Climate goals and contents in education, and BlendVET/KIPSI.

The Climate goals and contents in education project aims to develop a holistic approach to introduce education for sustainable development in VET programmes. In 2023, the concept of education for sustainable development was defined and discussed with broader audience. The aim is to introduce a whole school approach within the education for sustainable development. The concept is also an important part for realizing the goals of the Green deal.

The BlendVET/KIPSI project (2023-24), managed by CPI with partners from Iceland, Norway and Slovenia, aimed to establish the conditions for a successful use of digital technologies in VET schools. The project promoted blended learning as a didactical approach through courses and study visits for VET teachers. Self-evaluation supported the school's strategic planning of activities to support the new approach. The project also supported schools with digital tools like H5P to develop e-learning materials with technologies like virtual reality and educational computer games. The results were presented at two conferences (one in May 2023 and one in March 2024).

A collection of good practices (Ministry of Cohesion and Regional Development, 2023a), regarding blended learning developed or tested by the project partners from Slovenia, Norway and Iceland was published in 2023. This resource is intended for teachers and schools. The project partners also prepared the evaluation results (Ministry of Cohesion and Regional Development, 2023b) of testing blended learning methods in schools. However, the legal definition of classes in Slovenia, which envisages the physical presence of students in school, remains a challenge.

⁽³) The expert group for the establishment of the monitoring project consists of representatives from the Ministry of Education, the Higher VET school association, CPI, the Association of Adult education learning centres, and VET schools.



Career centres in higher VET provide targeted services to support students in their transition to the labour market. Their role is important as they facilitate closer relationships between students and employers. However, the Higher VET strategy and the Resolution on the Adult Education Masterplan of the Republic of Slovenia for the period 2022-30 (RENPIO) aim to further develop the counselling system in higher VET education.

To this end the project 'Development of Career centres and career counselling in higher VET schools' relaunched in 2021, has made significant progress. The Association of Higher VET schools established the professional foundations for the development of a career counselling system in higher VET. The goal is making the students aware of the importance of career planning and lifelong learning (LLL). This will help them acquire additional competencies and practical knowledge for effective entry and stay into the labour market. Meetings of students with company representatives are regularly now organised.

In 2023, the activities conducted within the same framework included organizing a conference in September for career counsellors focused on motivating students to use counselling tools and updating two online classrooms for students and career counsellors. In May, a conference titled 'Challenges in Working with Students with Special Needs' was held. Additionally, two training sessions for students on career orientation and financial literacy took place, with an online session on 17 May and an in-person session on 26 May.

Another of RENPIO's aims is also to close the development gaps in lifelong learning (LLL) and adult literacy. In 2023, the Annual Adult education plan was adopted, allocating activities in the priority area of vocational training and upskilling to various ministries (ministries in the fields of education, labour, agriculture, environment, culture and justice). This ensures broad participation from different sectors in enhancing the knowledge and skills of adults.

2.2 Flexible VET, providing progression and lifelong learning

Young people in Slovenia can also improve their employment possibilities through the initiative Facilitating transition of young people to the labour market (NOO/NRP project), which supports the transition of unemployed young people to the labour market. Employers participating in this initiative are awarded subsidies to permanently employ unemployed young people under 30. By the end of 2023, 1 649 young people were included in this NOO programme, managed by the Employment service of Slovenia. The subsidy ranges from EUR 5 400 to EUR 8 820 and depends on the duration of unemployment, the level of education achieved and inclusion in additional pension insurance. The subsidised period lasts 18 months. During that time, employers must provide an experienced mentor and training or education lasting at least 30 school hours for both the young person and the mentor. Acquiring digital competences is strongly encouraged.

2.3. Innovative and excellent VET

The National Education Institute is modernising the general education curriculum. The analysis of the catalogues of general education subjects in VET (National Education Institute, 2022) concluded that the catalogues need to be updated. In 2023, the Institute prepared guidelines for working groups tasked with this modernisation over the next few years.

As part of the project Modernisation of VET, the task 'Digitally supported training places



in education, health and social care, unified guidelines for an effective school – employer cooperation' was defined for two VET fields: preschool education health and social care in 2023. Currently, supporting documentation and guidelines do exist, but the schools adapt it or use differently. Digitalising and unifying the guidelines for apprenticeship and WBL across all schools will facilitate and simplify the cooperation between employers and schools. The next step will involve developing a digital tool for school – employer cooperation to further ease the process, thereby avoiding the complications of dealing with documentation that varies from school to school.

Another project that focuses on innovativeness and excellence in VET is the Care for Climate project, which was launched as a part of the Climate Change Fund and the European Life programme in January 2022 for identifying occupational competences for sustainability. In 2023, 34 competence frameworks were designed to incorporate knowledge and skills for sustainability into vocational standards, developed in cooperation with regular sectoral groups of social partners.

2.4 Attractive VET, based on modern and digitalised provision

The BlendVET/KIPSI project piloted the blended learning in five Slovenian VET schools. The preliminary results of evaluation (data collected in 2023) are encouraging towards establishment of legislative support of distance learning in VET.

Efforts must be made to attract and promote VET to the young people to enrol into VET schools. This is the focus of a new project on promoting excellence in VET, which began in 2023, managed by CPI and financed by NOO. In its first year, the project achieved significant success, namely the participation of the Slovenian Team at EuroSkills 2023 in Gdansk, Poland. The Slovenian team competed in nine competitions and won one medal and four medallions for excellence, receiving attention from national TV, radio, newspapers, and online media.

Digital games that help children explore different career paths were added to the portal mychoice (*Mojaizbira*), the main website to promote VET for children during the transition from primary school to upper secondary level.

A traveling exhibition visiting primary schools to inspire students to choose VET was updated. The focus is on breaking gender stereotypes by highlighting women in typically maledominated professions.

When equipping students with digital competences, teachers must also be suitably trained, consequently the project Modernization of VET also envisages renewal of teacher and mentor education and training. Additionally, the AI for and by the teachers (AI4T) project was established in 2023 to help math and foreign languages teachers navigate the new landscape.

Al4T was a KA3 Erasmus+ project (from February 2021 till February 2024), coordinated by France and implemented in five countries (France, Italy, Luxembourg, Ireland and Slovenia). The project aimed at developing teacher training on artificial intelligence. 47 upper secondary VET schools were included. The project partners from Slovenia were the Ministry of Education, the University of Maribor, and the Educational research institute. In 2023, the professional training for teachers was implemented and evaluated.

Currently, there is also an ongoing 2023-2026 'Digital and Sustainable Teacher' project



(a NOO project) managed by a consortium that includes, school centres, two national institutions (CPI, and the National Examinations Centre, RIC), higher VET schools, a university, associations from the education field and a publishing company. The project's goal is to train at least 20 000 teachers in a programme that includes 11 days of digital training in addition to one day focused on the green transition and one day on financial literacy.

2.5 Inclusive VET promoting equal opportunities

In 2023, CPI conducted the second part of the evaluation on the state of inclusion in VET (the first one was in 2022), in which students were surveyed. The students expressed a slightly more critical view of the inclusivity in VET schools than presented previously by the teachers. The evaluation offers a basis for developing training programmes and self-evaluation questionnaires for VET schools.

2.6 VET underpinned by quality assurance

In 2023, the representative of the national reference point (NRP) EQAVET contributed in the national debate on quality assurance as part of the preparation of the National programme of education 2023-33 led by the Ministry of Education. The programme proposes measures to foster quality culture in education and link the quality development approaches into a comprehensive national education quality system (National framework for quality assurance of Education). The proposed methodology is based on identifying and ensuring quality through self-evaluation of educational institutions and on self-evaluation and external evaluation at the system level.

CHAPTER 3. Involvement of VET stakeholders in the implementation of policy developments related to NIP

The involvement of VET stakeholders in the implementation of policy developments related to NIP follows the national regulations, ensuring their fair and adequate representation. Stakeholders from the fields of employment, work and education are systematically involved in designing solutions at both national and local levels. At the national level, those are mainly ministries, social partners (such as chambers and trade unions), and universities. At the local level, stakeholders include municipalities, VET schools, and employers. Consultative bodies and working groups for individual tasks consist of various stakeholders.

A steering group is managing the Modernisation project, ensuring that various stakeholders (ministries, public institutions from the field of education and universities etc.) collaborate to achieve the project's aims and results.

Working groups, consisting of representatives from universities, public institutions, schools, and adult education providers, have taken part in preparing the National programme of education 2023-33. Other stakeholders, such as local communities, chambers and trade unions, participate through public presentations and discussions about the draft National programme of Education 2023-33.



CHAPTER 4. Achievements of implementation

Slovenia has 65 % of young people enrolled in VET and is constantly working on improving attractiveness of VET for both students and employers.

In 2023, significant focus was placed on improving communication with employers and addressing key competences, an issue regularly emphasized by them. The preparation for updating general subjects in upper secondary VET to better align them with vocations is a successful endeavour. Two initiatives aimed at implementing labour market-oriented needs analysis are in progress. There is arguably a genuine effort focused on the priorities of the green and digital transformation connected to VET.

Among the past successes mentioned in the NIP, two successfully implemented projects for upskilling adults should be mentioned:

- (a) 'Development of programmes for upskilling in CVET 2017–22' (the PINPIU project) in the scope of which eight upskilling programmes were developed, five of them at the higher VET level and three at the upper secondary VET level.
- (b) Munera 3 Project (2018–2022), within which three programmes targeted employed individuals in need of additional training. By the end of the project, 34 158 participants had been included in various re-qualification and upskilling programmes.

CHAPTER 5. Challenges of implementation

Slovenia has not yet consolidated a VET strategy as a comprehensive field of social and political interest, due to the initial phase of preparing National programme for education 2023-33. However, the main developmental issues of VET have been recognised during this process. Constant struggle to strengthen the cooperation between employers and VET is regularly addressed in developmental projects. In 2023, the first discussions on integrating micro-credentials in VET and the NQF started, presenting a major challenge for the national education system.

There are indications that apprenticeships could be further developed if supported by a social consensus that would promote them as an attractive option for employers and students. The attractiveness of VET for learners in combination with the health of the national economy, is a strength of the Slovenian system that needs to be preserved.

Investments in VET teachers remain a challenge but they are increasing due to the need for changes in public servant payment system, a considerable generational shift, and the need to further develop teacher competences regarding digital educational tools, education for sustainable development, and problem-based learning methods.

Quality assurance of VET at the national level needs to be strengthened through the development of methodologies for data gathering and processing and the design of a more transparent quality assurance framework for the National VET system.

CHAPTER 6. Conclusions

Over the next two years, the majority of national VET experts will remain engaged in the comprehensive project Modernisation of VET (2022-26). This initiative focus on updating VET curricula to integrate key competences and advancing developments in the field of pedagogy.



It is currently the main driving force for VET development. At the upper secondary VET level, the first five VET programmes will be modernised by 2025, followed by an additional 20 upper secondary programmes and 16 higher VET programmes a year later. Digital and green competences are at the forefront of this update. It will be interesting to see how well Slovenia manages to align VET development with the needs of the labour market.

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