

# Vocational Education and Training (VET)

Summary of Country Information



**EUROPEAN AGENCY**  
for Special Needs and Inclusive Education



# **VOCATIONAL EDUCATION AND TRAINING**

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**European Agency for Special Needs and Inclusive Education**



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## INTRODUCTION

This document aims to provide a brief synthesis of 28 country reports regarding policies and practices in the area of vocational education and training (VET) in the field of special needs and inclusive education. It is based on information and data collected through a questionnaire that country experts completed for the Agency project 'Vocational Education and Training: Policy and Practice in the field of Special Needs Education' (2009–2013).

More than 50 country experts were involved in the project activities, from Austria, Belgium (Flemish and French speaking communities), Cyprus, the Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Iceland, Ireland, Latvia, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Malta, the Netherlands, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland and the United Kingdom (England, Wales and Northern Ireland). (Please see Annex 1 for a list of participants).

Their expertise and competence made a valuable contribution to the reflections and discussions that took place in project meetings, as well as to the development of the project methodology and the main project outcomes.

The data and information collection process began with the selection of the key areas for examination in the project, based on the recommendations of the project country experts and a select panel of experts in VET and special needs education, and in conjunction with an analysis of the available research literature (European Agency, 2012). The research topics were selected and included in a questionnaire. They were further complemented by the topics highlighted during the group discussions that took place during the 28 study visits. All participating countries completed the questionnaire-based survey. This data and information collection focused on gathering additional information relating to special educational needs in VET in line with the Cedefop country reports on VET in Europe (Cedefop, 2012). The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) country reports from the project *Pathways for Disabled Students to Tertiary Education and Employment* (OECD, 2012) were also taken into account.

All participating countries submitted responses of approximately ten pages to the questionnaire. These responses – complemented by the country information from the Cedefop and OECD sources – were compiled into a series of country reports, available from the project website: [www.european-agency.org/agency-projects/vocational-education-and-training](http://www.european-agency.org/agency-projects/vocational-education-and-training)

This document presents a summary of the information collected through the survey regarding the following seven topics:

- Legislation and policy on VET for learners with special educational needs



- Organisation and provision of VET programmes
- Population
- VET teachers, trainers and other professionals
- VET programmes and employment
- Funding
- Data.

This report is addressed to policy-makers and practitioners and provides an overview of the state of the art in Europe in relation to VET for learners with special educational needs.

The findings are presented as a summary of key issues and using some countries as exemplars of findings.

More detailed information and all project outputs are available on the Agency web area dedicated to the VET thematic project: [www.european-agency.org/agency-projects/vocational-education-and-training](http://www.european-agency.org/agency-projects/vocational-education-and-training)

The project information available includes:

- **a literature review**, providing the conceptual framework for the project and including a review of international research literature on the project themes:  
[www.european-agency.org/agency-projects/vocational-education-and-training/vet-files/access-to-the-complete-literature-review](http://www.european-agency.org/agency-projects/vocational-education-and-training/vet-files/access-to-the-complete-literature-review)
- **study visit reports**, with detailed information on the 28 VET practices analyses:  
[www.european-agency.org/agency-projects/vocational-education-and-training/country-focus](http://www.european-agency.org/agency-projects/vocational-education-and-training/country-focus)
- **a summary report**, entitled *European Patterns of Successful Practice in Vocational Education and Training* (European Agency, 2013), developed as a result of a coherent and comprehensive analysis of 28 VET practices examined during the course of the project. This report is complemented by a document that details the methodology employed in the project for analysing the study visit outcomes and for setting up the VET system model:  
[www.european-agency.org/agency-projects/vocational-education-and-training/vet-files/european-patterns-in-vet-2013-policy-and-practice-in-the-field-of-special-needs-education](http://www.european-agency.org/agency-projects/vocational-education-and-training/vet-files/european-patterns-in-vet-2013-policy-and-practice-in-the-field-of-special-needs-education)





- **country reports**, providing information on the general vocational education and training system as well as on the VET system for learners with special educational needs/disabilities in the participating countries:

[www.european-agency.org/agency-projects/vocational-education-and-training/vet-files/access-to-the-28-country-descriptions-with-regard-to-policy-on-sen-in-vet](http://www.european-agency.org/agency-projects/vocational-education-and-training/vet-files/access-to-the-28-country-descriptions-with-regard-to-policy-on-sen-in-vet)



## 1. LEGISLATION AND POLICY

Most European countries have incorporated – and are progressively working within – their own national policies in compliance with the principles of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (2006). The Convention highlights the **principles of normalisation, equal opportunities** in accessing the educational system, **non-discrimination**, and the importance of ensuring that **all learners are educated in an inclusive environment as far as possible**. Whenever this is not possible, national policies advocate that learners be ensured equal opportunities in terms of participation in and contribution to society, including independent living, financial self-sufficiency and autonomy.

In general, the main aims are still for **all learners to become as highly qualified as possible**, to **reduce the numbers of early school leavers** and to **decrease support for subsidised jobs and sheltered workplaces**. The main goal of national policies is that people with disabilities and special educational needs fully participate and are equal in all spheres of society through the implementation of practical measures. Therefore, different levels of responsibility have been developed by governments, parliaments, autonomous communities, municipalities at regional level or at local level and by schools, individual staff and learners in order to reach concrete goals within their own working situations.

In European countries, **the government's duty is to ensure an education system that is accessible to all citizens** through policies, action plans and political strategies for VET. There is often inter-departmental collaboration among education departments and economic and employment departments at national level, sharing responsibility for VET. In some cases, there is also co-operation with the departments responsible for social policy (such as welfare, health, regional development and municipalities).

These governmental institutions play an important role in **setting the framework for national goals and regulations in VET**. As a result of planned co-ordination, country procedures advocate positive outcomes linked to the evaluation of different institutional responses to meet the demand for a highly skilled, flexible and innovative workforce. When learners succeed within these processes, their contribution to social inclusion and economic success is supported.

In addition, governmental offices are responsible for validating and certifying the competences for and the provision of quality in VET. Some countries have identified that **school inspections and evaluations play an important role in ensuring equal opportunities for learners with special educational needs** and have direct implications for educational policies. All stakeholders at every educational level should be involved in evaluating both VET programmes and providers. Education



agencies perform these tasks and national and regional agencies usually share responsibility for their implementation and evaluation. In addition, there are **different institutions that work on developing the system of support** for learners with special educational needs, based on quality assurance principles and using a quality development approach linked to specific policies, regulations and recommendations. In other cases, data collection or legal evaluation conducted by institutes of research or observatories, for example, are used to further the support system.

In some countries, the **results of these evaluations** relate to **improved quality of training for head teachers and professional development for staff**. In other cases, there are participants' consultative bodies where external opinions on VET influence ministerial decisions.

In conclusion, **it is essential that VET programmes and providers undergo independent evaluations** so that public policies accurately reflect knowledge about the VET needs of learners with disabilities and special educational needs.



## 2. ORGANISATION AND PROVISION OF VET PROGRAMMES

In the majority of the participating countries, learners with special educational needs **start VET programmes during their upper-secondary education.**

In some countries, such as Hungary and the UK (Northern Ireland), programmes start at the age of 14, although in most countries learners commence VET at the age of 16. In the Netherlands, learners can also initially decide at the age of 12 whether to participate in a VET programme together with theoretical education.

In some countries, such as Luxembourg, before accessing VET programmes, learners are entitled to education-related counselling and the right to implement vocational choices from primary education. Furthermore, programmes are available that enable learners to engage in a range of vocational areas.

As regards access and vocational qualification choices, it is generally accepted that educational organisations follow external learner assessments from relevant agencies. Assessments are based on the learners' previous education and the characteristics of their disability. In some countries, such as Estonia and Sweden, it is predominantly learners and their families that choose from the various options, according to the learners' types of special educational needs and the support required during their studies.

### 2.1 VET providers and settings

VET providers' main goals are to **increase youth employment and independence and foster the ability to tackle social exclusion and disadvantages.** One strategy for achieving this is to give learners everyday skills. VET providers are also responsible for updating their own organisational structures and in some cases creating social enterprises.

In the participating countries, **different agencies, such as local authorities, non-profit organisations, the private sector,** etc., lead the VET institutions. In Belgium's French speaking community and the UK (Northern Ireland), VET is provided within the public sector and there are no private schools in the area. In other countries it is mostly local authorities or consortia of municipalities that maintain mainstream VET institutions, while the majority of specialist VET institutions are private. In other countries, disability support organisations have a main role in specialist VET institutions. In France, for example, specialist VET settings are mainly run by non-governmental organisations made up of people with disabilities or their parents.

The participating countries specified the settings in which learners with special educational needs are placed. The general situation in individual countries is to offer **provision in special units, inclusion in mainstream settings and VET in special centres.** The differences between public and private organisations in the individual



countries are particularly relevant. For example, in Slovenia, public institutions provide these three educational settings, while the private sector only offers VET in a mainstream setting.

In many countries all three options are available in full-time VET schools and colleges. Countries such as Sweden and Spain add that inclusion in mainstream VET is the most popular option and that there are specific educational-vocational programmes for pupils with learning disabilities who receive their education in mainstream settings. **The different options can also vary across regions or areas within a country.**

**Learners with severe disabilities** are usually **placed into pre-vocational programmes, workshops and sheltered employment, or in particular units in technical schools.**

**Differences** are also apparent in relation to the **various programmes**. For example, Finland reported different allocations among learners with special educational needs in the different programmes and the number of learners with special educational needs in the different regions. Within Belgium's Flemish speaking community, the majority of learners with special educational needs are in special VET settings, with only 6% in mainstream settings. In countries such as Denmark and Malta, however, more than 80% of learners with special educational needs attend mainstream VET settings.

The participating countries provided **limited information** on **upper-secondary vocational schools**. At upper levels of VET, the education of many learners with learning disabilities and with multiple disabilities is generally organised in separate settings. Examples include France and the Flemish speaking community of Belgium, where half of the learners with special educational needs enrolled in upper-secondary education follow a special VET programme. Slovenia provided statistical data regarding learners with special educational needs at upper-secondary levels, indicating that just 1.5% of these learners are in mainstream education. This data shows that only a very small group of learners with special educational needs follow mainstream VET at upper-secondary level.

Countries offer a variety of programmes at this level and are obliged to offer them to all learners. Countries suggest that they still need to work in the learners' interests in order to promote their involvement in the completion of VET courses.

### ***2.1.1 VET in special settings and special programmes***

**Many countries** have learners with special educational needs **studying VET in special centres or being educated in special classes or units**. Some groups of learners with specific special educational needs follow these paths, **particularly**



**learners with intellectual or mental health disabilities**, who are further assisted through complementary workshop training and sheltered employment.

In other countries, such as Cyprus, learners with severe learning difficulties are educated in units in technical schools and attend specialist pre-vocational programmes. There are countries where learners with mild forms of disabilities are usually placed in special settings. Denmark offers boarding schools for learners with dyslexia and special programmes for learners with Asperger syndrome. In Estonia and Finland, special study groups may be organised if there are enough learners interested in the same field and if better results can be achieved when studies are conducted in a special study group.

Countries reported that some special VET institutions have been transformed into **resource centres**. This has been reported by Hungary and Malta, among others.

### ***2.1.2 VET in inclusive settings***

There is a European trend of **promoting access** to inclusive VET opportunities. Governmental departments at national and local levels initiated these opportunities on the basis of developing and implementing innovative programmes. For example, for learners who are normally excluded from VET, such as those with moderate and intellectual disabilities, this is arranged through participation in inclusive programmes with support from resource centres (Meijer, 2010; Bines and Lei, 2011). Promoting **equality of access** to the education system is generally understood as allowing **flexibility in the different stages** of the education system and providing **resources by adapting programmes to each learner's capacities**.

At local levels in many countries this involves focusing on programmes in which learners with special educational needs are **actively engaged**. These programmes give young people the opportunity to experience a range of vocational areas. They allow these young people to make informed choices, which contribute to them remaining in education and training for longer.

Some countries have national policies where an inclusive learning path for learners with disabilities is a regular option in VET. In Austria, an integrative initial vocational education and training (IVET) scheme is part of the Austrian apprenticeship training system (dual IVET system).

In many cases, national policies also promote the **professional development of teachers in meeting special educational needs and their involvement in inclusive programmes**. Countries such as the Czech Republic highlight that all VET teachers need to be able to work effectively with learners with special educational needs.

It is clear from the above that inclusive approaches are popular VET options for some countries. In these countries governments promote policies supporting an



inclusive system, allowing for **flexibility in both accessing and delivering VET with adequate human and individualised resources** (i.e. individual support plans, compensatory tools and financial support).

### **2.1.3 Attending both inclusive and special VET settings**

According to the national reports, both the mainstream and special educational institutions try to identify **unique combined, inter-institutional solutions**, and in some countries this combination has an effective response. In countries such as Finland and Hungary, learners are educated in the mainstream VET system wherever possible, they attend special needs groups, or they take part in both at the same time. Learners are offered special programmes in cases where they have severe disabilities. These consist of **special VET institutions and some mainstream VET institutions** that provide training, rehabilitation and guidance through special courses in which **both educational institutions collaborate**. Special education teachers in Germany provide support in special schools (*Förderschulen*) and in mainstream schools that cater for young people with special educational needs. They do so by providing mobile assistance, advice and co-operative instruction to other teachers in inclusive or co-operative classes. There are special vocational training schools that complement mainstream schools and often work in co-operation with them.

In Greece, there is a combined mainstream and specialised programme structure with up to 15 teaching hours per week, as determined by the country's Centres of Differential Assessment, Diagnosis and Support of Special Education Needs (KEDDY) for learners with milder special educational needs.

## **2.2 VET national curricula and adapted programmes**

In Europe the **education legislation, major reforms and general curricula are approved by each parliament and prepared by the ministries**. In order to cope with labour market demands, ministries develop national VET curricula in agreement with representatives of employees, employers and professional associations from the relevant area of activity.

**Co-operation between different departments** has increased in recent years. It is particularly relevant in the UK (Northern Ireland), with the collaborative work of the Department of Education and the Department for Employment and Learning. The aim is to ensure effective policies aimed at young people aged 14 to 19, with the intention of developing a highly skilled, flexible and innovative workforce.

In the majority of the countries, there is progressive work towards setting up **national qualification systems, including adapted vocational qualifications for learners with special educational needs**. The national systems define the structure





of levels based on the **European Qualifications Framework** (European Commission, 2013). The European Qualification Framework offers **all learners with special educational needs the possibility of access** to adult education and training courses through the **recognition gained**. It also enables access to all adult education and training based on key competences within frames of reference in order to obtain an **academic certification** (Halász and Michel, 2011). In Finland, for example, recent adjustments have also included measures in order to meet the qualification needs of adult learners (particularly those already in employment). In Austria, continuing and further education and training provisions are certified and often connected with new qualifications. In Portugal, adult education and training courses have been adjusted in such a way that short-term modular training now falls within the National Qualifications Catalogue (European Association for the Education of Adults, 2011). Iceland highlights that its government is working to draft guidelines for strategies in order to match labour market requirements to the needs of learners with special educational needs in the new curricula. These initiatives are mainly implemented in order to **collect data and inspect VET-related work at the municipality level and their links with VET schools**. Education agencies perform these tasks and national and regional agencies usually share responsibility for their implementation and evaluation.

Countries such as Latvia, Germany, Ireland and Spain, among others, have VET programmes that are certified by a statutory agency on the National Framework of Qualifications based on the European Qualification Framework. **The ministry and the statutory agency review** these VET programmes on an **on-going basis**. Skills are also taken into account when drafting vocational qualifications through the definition of occupational standards for different professions (Cedefop, 2010).

It is important to note that the countries' own **catalogues of qualifications are flexible tools that lead to a differentiation and recognition of VET by levels of competencies**. German vocational technical schools do not award full vocational qualifications; however, attendance can nevertheless be counted as formal training required to gain entry to a recognised occupation and thereby lead to the award of a general education qualification.

**Social partners** have a very important role that can frequently support the matching process between educational provision (curricula and programmes) and qualification requirements.

In most European countries, a **monitoring programme** is normally offered to all learners with special educational needs in VET before they gain access to an educational institution.





In many reports, **the head teacher or the school board** appears to play a very important role in VET organisations. They are responsible for assessing learners' special educational needs. They can apply directly, with reference to an experts' opinion, to start the procedures to recognise a learner as having special educational needs. Additionally they have an important role in establishing a learner's workplace-based education and their transition plan.

In countries such as Sweden, the head teacher or the school board can make the decision to provide teacher aid when necessary and decide on the in-service training possibilities for school staff. Other countries involve representatives from the labour sector in the VET organisations' decisions. In some other countries social partners sit on school boards consisting of at least seven people, more than half of whom must be social partners.

Reports state that **different measures are implemented at classroom level**, offering valuable flexibility in examinations and adjusting the learning environment and teaching strategies to the learners' requirements so that further pre-service training and individualised education programmes can be established.

At the **individual level**, learners with special educational needs **receive special educational assistance** (e.g. assistive technology, sign language interpreters, specially prepared learning materials, scribes or other forms of practical assistance) **to make the VET curricula accessible**. Furthermore, learners can get free accommodation and meals.

In many European countries, in addition to adapted courses, **there are special educational/VET individualised pathways** in which the curricula are more flexible and learners' specific competences are recognised. In Greece, there are flexible measures in place in order to enrol directly in the first year of lower-secondary school special education or the first year of upper-secondary school special education. Some learners may skip the preparatory year as recommended by the local KEDDY.

In relation to organisational structures, in Norway – where most learners with special educational needs complete upper-secondary school – it is stated that they have the right to special needs education and also have the right to an additional two years of upper-secondary education or training if necessary to achieve individual educational objectives. This also applies to learners who use sign language or Braille when reducing curriculum objectives. Completing a training placement instead of an apprenticeship placement or becoming an apprenticeship candidate instead of a mainstream apprentice are all possibilities. Ultimately, this involves taking a different type of competence examination instead of the ordinary professional qualification. Moreover, learners will subsequently have the



opportunity to complete their upper-secondary education and achieve either a vocational or higher education qualification. It is noted that in Norway, when learners aim to achieve a higher education or vocational qualification, but fail to pass all subjects, they often only receive a transcript of grades, with failing grades included. The document is valid to certify the competences gained.

There are also special instruments of support for learners with special educational needs through **permeable boundaries between VET programmes and opportunities for working in real jobs**. In Switzerland, learners are free to transfer from programmes specifically aimed at learners with special educational needs to programmes for learners both with and without special educational needs that eventually lead to a federal diploma.

At tertiary education level, one programme was identified in Ireland in which learners with intellectual disabilities have the opportunity to study ten modules, covering the areas of liberal arts, expressive arts, career development and vocational skills, in a third-level institution.

The goal of vocational training for learners with special educational needs and the curricula for the majority of the countries is that it should be carried out, as far as possible, **in real-life working conditions**. Furthermore, there is a special focus on learners' adaptation to the requirements of the economy and businesses and the learners' need to obtain a job after their training period.

Comparable information between countries demonstrates that **a decreasing number of learners with special educational needs are enrolled in higher levels of education**. Additional assistance is necessary in order to complete VET and to increase the number of learners that achieve higher educational levels.

### **2.3 Apprenticeship training**

Apprenticeship training is offered at **different levels of the VET system**. This is the case in Cyprus, where it is considered pre-vocational training. In Sweden and Denmark, it is an option available for learners in vocational programmes in upper-secondary schools. Other countries offer apprenticeships through the national employment services.

The important role of **different providers** is highlighted, although there are great differences between European countries.

Training is **mainly in-company with a formal contract**. However, **in special cases** related to learners with severe disabilities, the training is implemented within a **VET centre**. The main players in the process are the public employment services, which normally attempt to place a learner in a regular apprenticeship post. These organisations' vocational training assistance departments are in charge of advising,



supporting and co-ordinating young people and training enterprises before and during the training period.

Apprenticeship training follows the same subject curricula as school-based vocational education and may be initiated during the first, second or third school year. Learners who are enrolled in apprenticeship training **also qualify for basic eligibility to higher education.**

In Denmark's apprenticeship programmes, practical training in companies alternates with teaching at a vocational college. In Finland, even though education and training mostly takes place in institutions, all qualifications include at least 20 credits (approximately six months) of instruction in the workplace (on-the-job training). However, in Germany during the basic vocational training year (*Berufsgrundbildungsjahr*) at school, the Federal Employment Agency (*Bundesagentur für Arbeit*) and the federal government's special programme for entry-level qualification at the workplace provide funding for work experience placements of between six and twelve months as preparation for apprenticeships.

In other countries, such as Luxembourg, the apprenticeship training consists of basic vocational training together with an apprenticeship contract with an employer.

The participating countries emphasise the importance of developing **formal agreements** between the VET institutions and work placement organisations. This formal contract should be flexible and offer the possibility of extensions in order to comply with the VET module requirements. It should also give the learners time to acquire the skills and competences needed to achieve a final qualification or a certificate of competency. Additionally in these cases, **a formal diploma or certificate of competency** may increase the learners' chances of obtaining paid employment in the future.

Experts have highlighted that **government grants and subsidies for training enterprises** increase the number of VET learners and enhance the chances of offering working contracts to learners with special educational needs. This procedure needs a two-way strategy and employers must comply with the provisions of employment legislation and collective agreements within the sector concerned. In some cases learners also receive travel and accommodation allowances, while the companies that train apprentices receive financial support to meet the costs arising from the learners' disabilities and their work.

Most countries consider apprenticeships as valuable experience for VET learners because they gain practical experience in real companies. Unfortunately, there is **limited information and data** concerning the number of learners who participate in apprenticeship training schemes. Furthermore, it has been highlighted that when learners are in the practical period of their training or in an apprenticeship, the aim



is to offer them a real working environment. This should be, as far as possible, adapted to their needs. At the same time, their training should be adapted to the requirements of the labour market, economy and businesses.



### 3. POPULATION: CHARACTERISTICS OF LEARNERS WITH SPECIAL EDUCATIONAL NEEDS ENROLLED IN VET

The starting point for the Agency VET project was to examine the experiences of a **broad target group**, consisting of learners with **special educational needs** aged between **14 and 25 in VET**.

The **28 country reports** defined the main characteristics of learners with special educational needs following VET.

Some countries reported that their definition of learners with special educational needs in VET is **very similar** to their concept of students with special educational needs in **general education**.

Other countries, such as Cyprus and Poland, reported that the focus group is predominately **based on the nature of learners' disabilities** (physical, sensory, intellectual or psychological). Belgium's French speaking community has developed a specific definition that encompasses all young learners with disabilities aged between 14 and 21, who are capable of school learning (excluding those with multiple disabilities) and who experience severe behavioural disorders, severe developmental disorders or severe intellectual disabilities.

Some countries have **added information to their legal definition** of learners with special educational needs published by the Agency in *Special Needs Education Country Data 2010* (European Agency, 2010). For example, Estonia and Hungary have added gifted learners.

Other countries have developed definitions that are **completely different** from those described in the Agency's 2010 report. These countries have produced lists detailing the types of disabilities of the learners who are following educational programmes within special secondary education and who wish to follow a VET programme. Some countries also specify those learners who are not eligible to participate.

Using another type of categorisation, Luxembourg describes its representation of VET learners by following the **OECD's Cross-National Category A, B and C definitions**, while simultaneously linking them with their provisions. The OECD's Cross-National Category A encompasses those learners with disabilities (intellectual, sensory, physical). Cross-National Category B includes learners with learning difficulties, whereas Cross-National Category C covers learners with certain disadvantages, including those arising from social factors (OECD, 2003a; OECD, 2003b; OECD, 2004).



Other participating countries focus on a broader definition of the target group and include learners who are receiving extra resources (**'additional support'**), implemented in the workplace and/or VET environment.

Similarly, some countries also indicate they have general support structures that respond both to learners who experience problems due to certain disabilities and/or who are in need of additional educational support because of difficult circumstances, and to students with temporary learning difficulties.

In a few countries, the definition of the focus group **relates to the qualifications learners have achieved before commencing their initial vocational training.**

Finally, some countries **do not offer a formal legal definition** of special educational needs at all – it is the learners' needs that guide the allocated support. This allows for an individualised, case-by-case judgement by relevant professionals when making decisions concerning eligibility for disability-related aid and support. In certain cases, the definitions of disability in the educational sector and other sectors differ.

The first concluding comment to be made concerns the **high degree of heterogeneity in the description** of the group of learners with special educational needs enrolled in VET.

It can also be said that a **social model of disability** (Oliver, 1983) concurs with a definition related to the characteristic of the learners' disability or based on the services offered as compensatory measures in order for these learners to be included in educational centres and working environments.



#### 4. HUMAN RESOURCES IN VET: TEACHERS, TRAINERS AND OTHER PROFESSIONALS

In the majority of countries, there is **great variation between the degrees that general subject teachers and trainers** hold in order to carry out their jobs. **Teachers** in VET are required to have **pedagogical degrees**; some countries accept undergraduate degrees and others require master's degrees. In some cases, a minimum number of years of experience plus specific educational competences are required.

**Trainers** often need to **have previously worked in industry**. In the majority of the countries, approximately three years of relevant practical experience are required in addition to specific initial and in-service training regarding special educational needs (especially for part-time teachers).

In Iceland, for example, every teacher must have a master's degree in education. However, there are no specific criteria for trainers. In Greece, teachers in secondary VET are qualified teachers with extra training in special needs education (PhD or master's degree or a minimum of 400 hours' experience). Every school in Greece also provides in-service training for its staff. In Lithuania it is obligatory for all teachers (general education subject teachers and vocational teachers) to have a minimum of five days of continuing training per year.

Specific training for working with learners with special educational needs seems to be compulsory only for teachers working in special schools or with groups of learners with special educational needs. This is the case in Cyprus and the Czech Republic. However, it is not the case in countries such as Estonia, where no special qualifications are required for teaching learners with special educational needs. In Denmark, teachers and trainers working with learners with special educational needs have the option of applying for development activities within the areas of special teaching for children, youth education and other disability-related educational activities. These activities can be in the form of evaluations, research initiatives, teaching experiments and training, for example. In Ireland, the Special Education Support Service (SESS) provides training on special educational needs for teachers, whereby visiting teachers provide advice and assistance on the education of learners with a visual or hearing impairment.

In Denmark, other professionals working with learners with special educational needs include teaching assistants, mentors, learner counsellors, reading/writing specialists and advocacy specialists from the youth educational advice centres. In Finland, special needs assistants, educational guidance and school welfare officers, psychologists, doctors, guidance counsellors, various therapists, social workers, nurses, accommodation staff and other staff (for example, those involved in school transport) are provided.



In general terms, in Malta and the UK (England and Wales), guidance and learning support assistants are offered only when learners with special educational needs take part in VET programmes. Common initiatives support learners with special educational needs with professional counselling, vocational guidance and vocational orientation.

In the UK (Northern Ireland), there is a career advisor in each secondary school. In Latvia, a state agency offers professional career counselling and employment guidance through professional adequacy and job simulation tests for all people with special educational needs. Social workers in schools offer different activities. In Lithuania, VET schools employ social pedagogues in almost every school, including special pedagogues and psychologists. In the Netherlands there are mentors, job coaching and guidance services, but they are only available in certain schools. Norway offers both social-pedagogical counselling and career guidance for all students.

**Human resources are a main source of support for people with disabilities**, and it is essential to understand the role of these professionals in European countries. In the UK (Northern Ireland), there is a career advisor in each secondary school. In Latvia, a state agency offers professional career counselling and employment guidance through professional adequacy and job simulation tests for all people with special educational needs. Social workers in schools offer different activities. In Lithuania, VET schools employ social pedagogues in almost every school, including special pedagogues and psychologists.

**Extensive teams of professionals are needed** to work daily in VET institutions in order to cope with the complexities of the VET learners' needs. Initiatives generally support learners with special educational needs through professional counselling, vocational guidance and vocational orientation. Furthermore, **VET courses are regularly offered with adapted provisions and monitoring of the learners during all the different educational stages and also throughout the stages of transition.**

In conclusion, it is important that **all key stakeholders are effectively involved, including the young person in question, their parents or carers** and, in many cases, **school staff such as psychologists, tutors, teachers and educators.**





## 5. VET PROGRAMMES AND EMPLOYMENT

When developing vocational education and training curricula, it is important that education authorities take into account the **socio-economic reality and developments of their respective regions**. VET programmes should be **linked to the skills required in the local labour market**.

VET organisations in Estonia, for example, work closely with local businesses in order to make their training correspond to the market needs. Trainee-teacher-employer meetings are popular and are seen as helpful when it comes to adjusting VET programmes in order to provide learners with the required working and social skills.

In the majority of European countries, **regional level authorities** (i.e. counties, communes, municipalities and federal provinces) operate **in accordance with national frameworks**. These authorities are responsible for representing the interests of their regions with regard to policies and legislation. This is due to European laws that reaffirm the principle of **universal accessibility and support flexibility**. Furthermore, in some countries, intensified co-operation between education and employment departments (or between smaller organisational structures) at regional levels are involved in terms of vocational guidance and career planning activities. **The provision of a range of study pathways in upper-secondary schools** is based on the principle that when learners' choices are catered for, they are more motivated to take part in education. At the same time the future needs of the labour market must be taken into account.

Additionally, there is a focus on establishing **closer links between organisations and departments** in order to develop the curricula of vocational programmes and to match educational approaches and content with the skills needed in working life. This is achieved by organising and carrying out assessment of competences, collaborating in establishing the content of new qualifications, standards and curricula, and matching VET programmes with the economy's needs. In these respects, most countries offer a consultative role to each managerial team in their VET institutions.

**Regional or local authorities** normally implement the programmes in **co-operation with social partners and non-governmental organisations**.

In addition, institutions at lower levels of government play an important role in offering flexibility regarding learners' pathways. For example, in Ireland, vocational committees can approve exceptions in apprenticeship contracts. In the Netherlands there is co-operation between schools, regional governments and social partners. In this case, the exact role of the stakeholders and the extent of the co-operation differ



according to the region, as employment mediation and reintegration are the responsibility of the regional governments.

The difficulties encountered in accessing the labour market and employment are a real concern for people with a recognised disability.

In many countries the number of **unemployed young people, both with and without a disability, is problematic.**

**The majority of the countries do not have data on the transition to employment,** but it is considered an area that urgently requires improvement. **In the transition to work, the aim is to reduce dropout rates during the time between school and employment.** This can be achieved through job coaching, case management, vocational advisory services and assessments before choosing a programme, active assistance in finding employment, and advice for employers. After VET courses, learners should obtain employment with a minimum wage.

The main VET goal is **learners' inclusion in the open labour market or further education** (apprenticeship or adult education after graduation). This is achieved through labour mediation and orientation, supported employment and daily activities (the alternative to being at home or unemployed for people searching for a job). **The main players are non-governmental organisations and social partners, as well as employers** (some of whom participate in school boards), regional and local government, chambers of commerce and other civil society organisations (for example, trade committees).

With regard to regional and local governments, in many European countries their **public employment services** are responsible for disability issues in the area of the labour market and for learners receiving assistance through supported employment services.

A large number of **local programmes** are implemented utilising **European Union initial grants**. The European Social Fund, initiatives such as EQUAL and Euroguidance centres from the Lifelong Learning programme are important tools to further promote and continue positive outcomes. It is noted that European co-operation within the Leonardo da Vinci programme has had a great impact in Poland.

Support can be provided at different levels, from individual support with human and physical resources, to support for organisations in adapting their working environments or, in terms of financial resources, for hiring and following up a contract for people with disabilities.

In some countries, **priority is given to accessing job openings** for learners who require specific adaptation and accommodations. The support is vital for a person



with disabilities in gaining and maintaining their employment and is funded by municipalities, by the state or, in some countries, by both.

In the public sector in some countries, **jobs are reserved based on a variable minimum percentage (quota)**, with a number of positions designated for learners with disabilities. A 'reservation quota' means that all businesses with more than a certain number of employees are obliged to employ a minimum percentage of workers with special educational needs.

Other measures for promoting employment among learners with special educational needs include **payment of the service cost of supported employment**, exemptions from payment of pensions and disability insurance, rewards for exceeding the quota, financial aid for workers with disabilities who establish themselves as entrepreneurs, reduced social security expenses, and tax reductions for those who employ young learners with special educational needs.

Many countries have **programmes based on psycho-social assistance** to assist learners in acquiring VET qualifications and **provide support in placement and job hunting**. For example, the public employment service in Austria attempts to place young apprenticeship seekers in regular apprenticeship posts; if that is not possible it will search for training places. In Germany, learners with special educational needs receive close individualised support within the VET school and in vocational training centres from special vocational rehabilitation counsellors employed by the Federal Employment Agency.

External organisations, such as resource centres, may also implement activities for learners with special educational needs.

Other measures outside the programme include **trainee placements with follow-ups, supported employment and temporary employment**. Supported employment consists of a person accompanying the user to the workplace and helping with training, practical vocational training and physical adaptations to the work tasks.

Countries such as Norway, the Netherlands and the UK (England and Wales) offer a **transition programme with workplace-based support**. These programmes are provided for people with disabilities who are certified as having special needs and who have severe difficulties in finding or keeping a job in a regular company and therefore require close and varied follow-up from the support services. These services are available at VET schools, as in the Netherlands, or at sponsor organisations that provide a broad range of support services tailored to the individual needs of jobseekers. In Ireland and Spain, coaches and similar services are employed in order to assist learners in accessing the labour market. In Switzerland, there are counsellors within special VET programmes who act as job coaches and psychologists. In the Flemish speaking community of Belgium, the Centre for Learner



Guidance provides guidance to all learners, including those with special educational needs in the VET programmes.

The country reports clearly state that labour mediation and orientation, supported employment and daily activities are effective approaches for people searching for and eventually finding and maintaining employment. Among the strategies the participating countries highlighted, the concept of **job carving** is particularly interesting and should be investigated further. Researchers have defined this technique as ‘reassigning duties from current staff to supported employees in such a way as to maximize employee productivity and organizational efficiency’ (Nietupski and Hamre-Nietupski, 2000, p. 104). Last, but not least, employers also need to be supported and guided in order to create an optimal working environment for learners with special educational needs during their workplace training.



## 6. FUNDING: FINANCIAL SUPPORT AND/OR INCENTIVES

Financial aid in the participating countries for young learners **starts in upper-secondary vocational schools (grants only)**. In some countries, in **initial vocational education and training** there are normally **symbolic amounts** and extra resources allocated for the students.

In some countries, such as Denmark, learners with special educational needs receive a '**disability supplement**'. This means that the monetary compensation for learners with special educational needs considers their lack of ability to carry out any employment while studying.

In Finland, VET learners have the opportunity to receive **study grants and housing supplements** throughout their VET. There is a government guarantee for learners' loans for post-secondary VET learners. During upper-secondary VET, students can receive financial aid if they are in full-time study, if they have made progress in their studies and if they require financial support.

In Sweden, each school is provided with funding based on the number of pupils. The school is responsible for allocating these financial resources in such a way that all individual needs are met. Learners have free access to health services. Education officials award scholarships according to social criteria that mainly take into account the resources and expenditure of the learners and their families, assessed against a national scale.

In Latvia, learners with special educational needs who are educated in mainstream VET programmes have the opportunity to receive scholarships from the Cabinet Regulation on Scholarship. Learners in vocational classes in special schools have free school meals and accommodation.

In the Netherlands, VET is free of charge until the age of 18. Different financial support programmes are available to parents (depending on their income). From the age of 18, learners with special educational needs can receive a work and employment support grant (*Wajong*) from the Institute for Employee Benefit Schemes (UWV).

Norway offers financial support and incentives for learners with special educational needs. The State Educational Loan Fund does not offer any funding arrangements to cover extra expenses that learners with impairment in higher education might incur, but there are provisions to counter-balance the incentive for learners to complete their programme in the prescribed time frame.

In Switzerland, invalidity insurance pays for VET programmes for learners with special educational needs.



In Ireland, learners in both primary and post-primary schools are entitled to free school transport when available. If this transport is not available, a grant may be awarded to help with the cost of private transport.

In France, learners with special educational needs benefit from adapted teaching materials, the adaptation of VET organisations and training places and specific transport designed to facilitate their education.

In Poland, the PFRON funding programme has helped to purchase nearly 87,000 sets of computer equipment and supported more than 26,100 people in the purchase of electric wheelchairs. In 2009, it gave financial assistance to approximately 13,000 learners and supported the purchase of adapted cars to transport people with disabilities. More than 8,100 blind and visually impaired people have benefited from computer training.

In Portugal, learners with special educational needs earn a professional scholarship of up to approximately €200 per month depending on their family's income and whether the learner has already worked. Learners with special educational needs also receive a flat rate for daily meals (approximately €4 a day) and transport expenses from home to the VET centre.

Annual awards for good practice, such as in Slovenia and Portugal, are worthy of note. Portugal's is called the Award of Merit. This is an honorary award, which is a means of recognising each year those employers who excel in the professional inclusion of people with impairments and disabilities. It is also awarded to people with disabilities and impairments who have distinguished themselves in creating self-employment.

In Estonia, the cost of a VET study place for a learner with special educational needs is 2.5 times higher than the cost of an ordinary study place. In addition, the local government is responsible for providing the necessary support for VET learners with disabilities, such as, for example, special transport and sign language translators.

**Support can be provided at many different levels.** During the transition process, individual support through human and physical resources is essential. However, assistance to organisations, both in order for them to adapt their working environment to the learner's requirements, as well as to provide them with the necessary financial resources so they can hire and support people with disabilities in the long term, is fundamental. In conclusion, support is vital for a person with disabilities to gain and maintain employment.



## 7. DATA

Survey feedback contained limited VET-specific statistical data due to the **lack of comprehensive and specific statistics** on VET for learners with special educational needs. Where the information is presented, the data collected is mainly linked to mainstream secondary education with no specific information about learner adaptations.

Country feedback indicated that a high percentage of learners receive some form of **educational adaptation** in secondary education.

Countries mention a clear trend of learners with special educational needs being **increasingly involved in VET**. In countries such as France, almost half of the learners with special educational needs who are enrolled in upper-secondary education follow a VET programme.

The number of learners with special educational needs in VET differs among European countries. For example, 3.4% of VET learners in Estonia are considered to have special educational needs, compared to 9% in Finland and 5.1% in the Czech Republic.

This situation corresponds to what the OECD reported in 2003 (OECD, 2003b). The diversity in numbers depends on the total number of learners receiving disability benefits. It seems that the countries with the largest disability benefits, and where most of the learners who require these benefits have access to them, are normally the ones with the highest disability rates. The OECD analysis concluded that recognising the status of a disability, irrespective of the learners' economic and working status, is essential.

There is also a different distribution of learners with special educational needs related to different VET areas. For example, in Finland a high number of learners with special educational needs attend programmes on technology, tourism, communication, transport, catering and domestic services. Very few learners attend programmes on social care and education.

Finally, it is important to highlight that there is a large number of young people with special educational needs in the group that is defined as '**Not in Education, Employment or Training**' (NEET).





## CONCLUSIONS

The classification of learners with special educational needs in VET is highly heterogeneous and **none of the participating countries share a common definition of the concept. Further analysis in this area is recommended** and data on learners with special educational needs in VET and their transition to employment at both national and local level needs to be collected and revised in order to target services and programmes. It is particularly important to train and retain human resources with the professional background and qualifications to support all VET learners. It is also especially relevant due to the increasing number of learners with special educational needs who choose VET as their educational path.

The participating countries generally share an **intention to develop policies and practices** to cope with labour market requirements and the needs of VET students.

Only a **limited number of students** with disabilities and special educational needs are enrolled in higher educational levels and in further education related to traineeship placements. This issue requires further attention and research into the reasons behind it.

In general, the VET curricula of the participating countries followed **National Frameworks of Qualifications based on the European Qualification Framework**. This gives VET learners access to an educational umbrella of services which offers and links a variety of learning units or subjects of study by promoting flexibility and permeability. Moreover, it gives learners with special educational needs the opportunity to access VET that is adapted to the real-life working environment. This is also highly relevant, as at the end of the learning process students will have gained a certified qualification.

Although improvements are still needed in numerous areas, it is fair to highlight the **many significant achievements of several educational institutions** at different levels. In combination with VET institutions, these educational institutions have supported the transition into the local labour market of students with special educational needs. When VET learners are assigned duties that are adapted to their competencies, the resulting **productivity improvement** is noteworthy. On an organisational level, there is also a highly impressive productivity increase when companies are provided with tools in the form of human and physical resources in order to adjust the working environment to better include workers with special educational needs.





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